Iphigeneia and Iphianassa

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For example:

In the Iliad, when Agamemnon makes an offer of compensation to Achilles for having insulted him, one part of the offer is that Achilles may choose as his wife one of the three daughters of Agamemnon, who are named at I.09.145 and I.09.287 as Khrūsóthem, Lāodíkē, and Êphiánassa (Χρυσόθεμις καὶ Λαοδίκη καὶ Ἰφιάνασσα). In Athenian tragedy, by contrast, the third of these daughters is named Êphigénæia (Iphigénæia). It has been persuasively argued by Thomas G. Palaima (most recently, 2016:142; also 2006:58–62) that these two names Êphiánassa and Êphigénæia convey parallel ideas of kingship. While the first part of both names, Êphi-, refers to the ‘force’ of the king’s power (Greek is ‘force’; the Latin cognate is vis ‘force’), the second parts -(w)ánassa and -(g)éneia, refer to the idea of kingship itself, as conveyed by the roots *wanak(t)- and *gen- respectively. Palaima argues that the first of these roots, attested in the Homeric (and Mycenaean) noun (w)anax, meaning ‘king’, is non-Indo-European in origin, as distinct from the clearly Indo-European origin of the second root *gen-, which is attested in the English noun king and in its German cognate König. In what follows, I leave aside the debate about the etymology of the root *wanak(t)- and concentrate instead on the meaning of the root *gen- in the sense of conveying the power of a king to generate, as it were, the fertility of the people he rules. As we will see, such a meaning can be reconstructed on the basis of various pieces of comparative evidence to be found in a variety of Indo-European languages.

I analyzed the comparative evidence in a study that centered on the semantic linking of kingship with the idea of begetting (Nagy 1974, redone in Nagy 1990). In that study, I already linked the meaning of the Indo-European root *genh₁-, which has the general sense of ‘generate’, with the meaning of ‘king’ as...
In the same study (Nagy 1990:172–173), I argued that the Hittite noun ḫaššu-, meaning ‘king’, was derived from the Hittite verb ḫaš-, meaning ‘beget’. We are dealing here with a different root, not with *genh₁-, but we can see a parallel semantic relationship: just as the Germanic noun *kuningaz meaning ‘king’ is derived from a Germanic root kun– which in turn is derived from the Indo-European root *genh₁– meaning ‘generate’, so also the Hittite noun ḫaššu– is derived from the Hittite verb ḫaš- meaning ‘beget’ (see also Palaima 1995, 2006).

But the question remains: is the Hittite noun ḫaššu– ‘king’ to be interpreted as ‘one who begets’ or ‘one who is begotten’? To paraphrase in Latin: is the king a genitor or a genius?

In search of an answer, I return to the study I already cited (Nagy 1990:172–173), where I argue that the Hittite noun ḫaššu– had a more basic meaning: ‘kindle, light a fire, light up’, and that this meaning leads to another noun-derivative in Hittite, which is ḫašša-, meaning ‘fireplace, hearth’. By analyzing the meanings of all three forms— ḫaš- as ‘kindle’, ḫašša- as ‘fireplace’, and ḫaššu– as ‘king’—I can argue that the king is someone who is kindled in the fireplace.

What follows is a revised and epitomized version of what I argue in the study I already cited (Nagy 1990:172–174). I begin with an Italic myth concerning ritual fire. The protagonist of the myth is the Roman king Servius Tullius, whom Georges Dumézil (1943) has singled out as representing the features of the ideal king from the standpoint of patterns in Indo-European mythmaking:

non praeteribo et unum foci exemplum Romanis litteris clarum: Tarquinio Prisco regnante tradunt repente in foco eius comparuisse genitale e cinere masculi sexus eamque, quae insederat ibi, Tanaquis reginae ancilam Oxresiam captam consurrexiessse graudam; ita Seruim Tullium natum, qui regno successit; inde et in regia cubanti ei puero caput arsisse, creditumque Laris familiaris filium; ob id Compitalia Iudos Laribus primum instituisse.

I will not pass over a famous example of the fireplace [focus] in Roman literature. In the reign of Tarquinus Priscus, they say that there suddenly appeared in his fireplace [focus] a genital organ of male sex out of the ashes, and that it impregnated Oxresia, who had sat there. She was an enslaved handmaiden of Queen Tanaquil. Thus was Servius Tullius born, and he succeeded to the kingship. When he was a boy sleeping in the palace, his head caught on fire, and he was believed to be the son of the Lār familiāris. For this reason he was the first to institute the Compitalia Games for the Lārēs.

Pliny Natural History 36.204

This version can be supplemented with another:

namque pater Tulli Vulcanus, Oxresia mater | praesignis facie Corneliana fuit.
hanc secum Tanaquil sacris de more peractis | iussit in ornatum fundere una focum.
hic inter cineres obsceni forma uirilis | aut fuit aut uisa est, sed fuit illa magis.
iussa foco captua sedet. conceptus ab illa | Seruus a caelo semina gentis habet.
signa dedit genitor tunc cum caput igne corusco | contigit, inque comis flameus arsit apex.

For the father of Tullius was Vulcan, and Oxresia of Cornelium, distinguished in beauty, was his mother.

When the sacred rites were enacted, according to tradition, Tanaquil ordered her to pour wine into the ornate fireplace [focus]. At this point, among the ashes, there was, or seemed to be, the male form of something indecent. More likely there was one. Ordered to do so, the slave girl sat at the fireplace [focus]. Conceived by her, Servius has the seeds of his lineage [gēns] from the sky.

His father gave a sign, at the time when he touched his head with flashing fire, and a flame lit up in his hair.

Ovid Fasti 6.625-634

In this remarkable passage the preoccupation of the myth with a ritual context is especially clear. There is also a lengthy account of the same myth in Dionysius of Halicarnassus Roman Antiquities 4.2.1–4. Romulus and Remus themselves were begotten likewise, according to a myth recorded by Plutarch (Romulus 2.4–8). The same goes for Caeculus, founder of Praeneste and ancestor of the distinguished gēns Caecilia (Servius on Virgil Aeneid 7.678). [Further references, with bibliography, in Nagy 1990:173.]

On the basis of these Italic comparanda, I am ready to argue that the generic king is a genius, as distinct from a genitor. The king is begotten by being kindled. For the semantics, we may compare the example of the English verb kindle itself, which had previously meant ‘beget’ (Middle English) and then came to mean ‘set on fire’; another example is Old Norse kveikja ‘beget, kindle’ (the noun kveika means ‘fuel’).

In closing, I return to Agamemnon’s daughter. But, this time, the daughter is not Iphigenia. It is Chrysothemis (Khrūsōthemis), and she is conversing with yet another daughter of Agamemnon, Electra.
The conversation between the sisters takes place in the Electra of Sophocles, and it is about a bad dream that was reportedly dreamed by their mother, Clytemnestra (417–423). The bad dream of the mother is good news for the daughters, because it vindicates the kingship of their father, Agamemnon. And such good news would be a vindication of the very name of that other daughter of the king, Iphigenia. In Clytemnestra’s bad dream, as reported by the daughter, the queen experiences a vision: Agamemnon has come back from the dead to the realm of light (417–419; ἓς φῶς, 419). The king seizes the scepter (σκῆπτρον, 420) that had once been wielded by him, but which is now held by the usurper Aegisthus (420–421), and he places it firmly into the royal hearth, the hestia (ιὴς τῆς Αιγίσθους | ἑς τῆς 419–420). From the hearth, there then grows out of the scepter a shoot so vigorous that it covers with its shade all the kingdom of Mycena (421–423).

This vision implies, I think, that the Mycenaean king can after all be a genitor as well as a genitus, in the sense of continuing the paternal lineage by way of the royal hearth. The hearth in this Mycenaean vision is a focus for reveries about a father’s generating of a son without the exogamous intermediacy of a female outsider. The female insider, the ultimate genitrix, is in such reveries the hearth itself, and from it emanates the essence of royal authority (Nagy 1990:174).

**Afterword**

In Nagy 2015 §30, I argue that the Hittite word hašša– ‘fireplace, hearth’ was borrowed into Greek as Assos (‘Asos), which was the name of a city described by Strabo as exceptionally well-fortified and situated on steep rocky heights overlooking the sea in the Aeolic region of the Troad (13.1.51 C606, 13.1.57–58 C610, 15.3.22 C735; see also Pausanias 6.4.9).

What follows is a related point of interest concerning a city that is named after a king’s fireplace or hearth. In the scholia for Dionysius Periegetes, Orbis descripto 850, it is said that Mopsos founded a city in Cilicia, and that this city was called Mopsou hestia ‘the hearth of Mopsos’ (κοίνων ἑκτὶς Ἑς Μόψου ἑκτίαν καλουμένην); see also Herodian 3.2.864.1 ed. Lentz. The Greek form Mopsos (Mōpos) corresponds to the Hittite/Luvian royal name Mukšuš, by way of Phoenician, as we see in a Phoenician/Luvian bilingual inscription that describes, in Phoenician, the eighth-century king Urikkī as a descendant of mš; then, in Luvian, he is described as a descendant of mukšuš. For the relevant references, see Nagy 2015 §30.

**Bibliography**


**Tags: etymology, Iphianassa, Iphigenia**

2 Responses to Iphigenia and Iphianassa

**John Esposito** January 12, 2017 at 9:38 pm (Edit)

Then, literarily (or perhaps simply mythically): Iphianassa is the more appropriate daughter to offer in (condescending) concession to Achilles, basileus abused by the (superior) wanax, while Iphigenia is the more appropriate daughter to offer (lineage-damagingly) to Artemis, in 'flagrant' abuse of the begetter's force (and perhaps with sacrifice as an extinguishing reversal of the royal offspring's kindling).