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A NOTE ON THE ΘΗΛΕΑ ΝΟΥΣΟΣ OF THE SKYTHIANS.

IN a note on the Argive festival of the Hybristika I mentioned the diviners of Skythia as examples of that strange phenomenon familiar among many savage peoples, the magician who dresses as a woman.¹ As the *θήλεα νοῦσος* has been somewhat of a *crux* to Herodotean scholars, I may perhaps be allowed to develop the point a little more at length.

It has usually been suggested that the *θήλεα νοῦσος* must be explained either as a vice, or as a bodily disease, or as a mental affliction.² None of these theories, however, accounts for all the features of the evidence which we possess, and can only be tortured into conformity by the Procrustean ingenuity of the scholar. Those, for example, who explain the *θήλεα νοῦσος* as a vice, have further to show why those who are afflicted with it form a definite class, why they are connected especially with Askalon, and why they are magicians.

A fourth explanation has been suggested by Professor Myres.³ He argues that the appearance of beardless races in the Nearer East impressed Greek imagination, and has left its traces in the traditions of the Amazons. He supposes that in Askalon there survived in the 5th century the descendants of certain beardless raiders from the North East, and that Herodotos, observing in Skythia a hairless Mongol element in the population, naturally connected it with a similar physical type which he knew to exist in Askalon. The old theory that beardlessness implies femininity accounts for the other characteristics with which the Skythians are credited, and explains the name *θήλεα νοῦσος*.

¹ *B.S.A.* xvi. p. 214.

² See Macan's note on Herodotos, iv. 67.

³ *Anthropology and the Classics*, pp. 137 foll.

I confess that even the theory about the Amazons seems to me possible rather than probable. But even admitting the claim that the Amazon stories have their origin in travellers' tales about a comparatively hairless physical type of invader from the North East, there are serious flaws in the argument by which Professor Myres endeavours to explain the story of the *θήλεα νοῦσος* as having its origin in the same historical fact. The point which strikes the critic at once is that in Professor Myres' account the emphasis is laid on the beardlessness of the Skythians; the other characteristics of these *ἀνδρόγυννοι*, their impotence, their feminine costume, and so on, he calls 'reputed concomitants' of beardlessness. The curious feature of the Greek accounts when placed beside that of Professor Myres is this, that not one of them so much as mentions whether those who suffered from *θήλεα νοῦσος*, had beards or not; not a word is said about this beardlessness which, we are asked to believe, so forcibly impressed Greek imagination. Professor Myres in fact discredits the importance of the characteristics which our authorities *did* notice as 'reputed concomitants' of a feature which they do not mention, but which, he assures us, really impressed them much more and was the cause of their imagining vain things.

Again, it has always been the difficulty of those who have offered explanations of the story of the *θήλεα νοῦσος* to account for the connection of the Skythians with Askalon. Professor Myres insidiously suggests that there were actually beardless descendants of Skythian raiders in the 5th century. But Herodotos does not even imply it. I am tempted to believe that there may have been an obvious reason why Hippokrates 'does not make use of the crucial instance of the beardless Scythians at Askalon, to test his conclusion that beardlessness and the like are the effect of climate,' *viz.* that there were no Skythians at Askalon.

Finally, the theory that the *Ἐνάρπες* were a *tribe* of hairless Mongols does not square with Greek tradition, in which they figure as a *profession* or *class*.

What are the characteristics ascribed to the *Ἐνάρπες* by our authorities? They suffer from sexual impotence; they dress in women's clothes; they are called *Ἐνάρπες* and are said to suffer from *θήλεα νοῦσος*, the result of a curse; they are diviners; they are called kings; they are connected by legend with Askalon. Hippokrates describes them in the following terms: *ἐτι τε πρὸς τοῦτοισιν εὐνουχίαι γίγνονται οἱ πλείστοι ἐν Σκύθησι καὶ*

γυναικεῖα ἐργάζονται καὶ ὡς αἱ γυναῖκες διαλέγονται ὁμοίως· καλεῦνται τε οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἀνανδρεῖς. οἱ μὲν οὖν ἐπιχώριοι τὴν αἰτὴν προστιθέασι θεῷ καὶ σέβονται τούτους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ προσκυνέουσι, δεδοκότες περὶ ἐωυτῶν ἕκαστου νομίσαντές τι ἡμαρτηκέναι τῷ θεῷ ὃν ἐπαιτιῶνται ἐνδύονται στολὴν γυναικεῖν καταγνόντες ἐωυτῶν ἀνανδρεῖν· γυναικίζουσὶ τε καὶ ἐργάζονται μετὰ τῶν γυναικῶν ἃ καὶ ἐκείναι.

The reason that Hippokrates alleges for their sanctity is not convincing: the main facts, however, which he gives are not without parallels which may suggest a different answer. Throughout the tribes of North America, in India, in Africa, in North-Eastern Asia, and among many savage peoples, examples are to hand of diviners or *shamans* who become women, dress as women, and do women's work. Dr. Frazer has collected a host of witnesses.² Among the Chukchi, the nomads of North-Eastern Siberia, the matter is carried so far that the transformed person is even said to marry and perform the duties of a housewife.³ Sometimes these men in women's clothes are servants of a goddess.⁴ In some cases they are born eunuchs or hermaphrodites,⁵ in some they are not even emasculate.⁶ I will here quote but one description. 'In the Pelew Islands it often happens that a goddess chooses a man not a woman for her minister and inspired mouthpiece. When that is so, the favoured man is thenceforth regarded and treated as a woman. He wears female attire, he carries gold on his

¹ Hippokrates, περὶ ἀέρων, 22. The other passages which give the information stated are the following: οἱ δὲ ἐπεῖτε ἀναχωρόντες ὀπίσω ἐγένοντο τῆς Συρίας ἐν Ἀσκάλωνι πόλει, τῶν πλεόνων Σκυθῶν παρελθόντων ἀσινέων, ὀλίγοι τινὲς αὐτῶν ὑπολειφθέντες ἐσύλησαν τῆς οὐρανίης Ἀφροδίτης τὸ ἱρόν. τοῖσι δὲ τῶν Σκυθῶν συλήσασι τὸ ἱρόν τὸ ἐν Ἀσκάλωνι, καὶ τοῖσι τούτων αἰεὶ ἐκγόνοισι ἐνέσκηψε ὁ θεὸς θήλεα νοῦσον· ὥστε ἅμα λέγουσὶ τε οἱ Σκύθαι διὰ τοῦτο σφέας νοσέειν, καὶ ὁρᾷν παρ' ἐωυτοῖσι τοὺς ἀπικνεομένους ἐς τὴν Σκυθικὴν χώραν ὡς διακέαται τοὺς καλέουσι Ἐνάρεας οἱ Σκύθαι (Herodotos, i. 105). οἱ δὲ Ἐνάρεες οἱ ἀνδρόγυνοι τὴν Ἀφροδίτην σφίσι λέγουσι μαντικὴν δοῦναι· φιλύρης <δ> ἂν φλοιῷ μαντεύονται. ἐπεὰν τὴν φιλύρην τρίχα σχίσῃ, διαπλέκων ἐν τοῖσι δακτύλοις τοῖσι ἐωυτοῦ καὶ διαλύων χρᾶ (Herodotos, iv. 67). ἄλλ' εἴ τις πρὸς ἃς οἱ πολλοὶ δύνανται ἀντέχειν, τούτων ἡττάται καὶ μὴ δύναται ἀντιτείνειν, μὴ διὰ φύσιν τοῦ γένους ἢ διὰ νόσον, οἷον ἐν τοῖς Σκυθῶν βασιλεῦσιν ἢ μαλακία διὰ τὸ γένος, καὶ ὡς τὸ θῆλυ πρὸς τὸ ἄρρεν διέστηκεν (Aristotle, *Eth. Nik.* vii. 7).

² Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, and Osiris*, Appendix IV. pp. 430 foll.; cf. Kroeber, *The Arapaho*, *Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History*, xviii. p. 19.

³ Bogoras, *The Chukchi of North-Eastern Asia*, *American Anthropologist*, N.S. iii. p. 98. He adds: 'Such full transformations are not numerous. In a tribe of 2000 men I heard of only five cases.'

⁴ E.g. the Sauts of North America or the devotees of the Indian goddess Huligamma. Frazer, *op. cit.* pp. 430, 225.

⁵ Frazer, *op. cit.* p. 225.

⁶ Bogoras, *loc. cit.*: 'Instances of partial transformation, whereby the men, assuming female clothing and speech, can still have a wife and beget children are more numerous' (among the Chukchi).

neck, he labours like a woman in the taro fields, and he plays his new part so well that he earns the hearty contempt of his fellows. This pretended change of sex under the inspiration of a female spirit perhaps explains a custom widely spread among savages in accordance with which some men dress as women and act as women through life. These unsexed creatures often, perhaps generally, profess the arts of sorcery and healing, they communicate with spirits and are regarded sometimes with awe and sometimes with contempt, as beings of a higher or lower order than common folk.¹

The existence therefore in semi-civilised society, of a class of persons with magical or divinatory powers, who wear female garments and do the work of women is not an unique phenomenon. So far as it goes the description of the *Ἐνάργες* quoted from Hippokrates might be applied to any of these savage analogues who are also, like Herodotos' *ἀνδρόγυννοι*, magicians or diviners.

It remains to ask why they are connected with Askalon. The answer is not difficult. Askalon was the seat of the worship of the goddess Derketo, Atargatis, Attar, or Astarte.² Herodotos notices the connection of this cult with that at Paphos.³ The goddesses whose seats were at Babylon or Aphaka belong to the same order, and the goddess of Hierapolis, Bambyke was considered by some to be this same Derketo.⁴ At Askalon then is one of the most revered of the cults connected with the Asiatic Mother Goddess, whose rites throughout Asia Minor are remarkable for the practice of the sacred marriage, the worship of bisexual divinities, the consecration to the deity of eunuch votaries who dress in women's clothes. The great Artemis of Ephesus and the Syrian goddess of Hierapolis were served by votaries who at the annual festival of the goddess sacrificed their manhood and for the rest of their life wore female attire and female ornaments.⁵ Now, could the Greek naturally apply to these emasculate or emasculated priests the phrase *θήλεα νοῦσος*? A statement of Eusebius appears to settle the matter. Speaking of the eunuch priests of the Asiatic goddess at Aphaka he says: '*Γύνιδες γοῦν τινὲς ἄνδρες τὸ σεμνὸν τῆς φύσεως ἀπαρνησάμενοι θηλεία νόσῳ τὴν δαίμονα ἰλεοῦντο.*'⁶

¹ Frazer, *op. cit.* p. 428.

² Frazer, *op. cit.* p. 30.

³ Herodotos, i. 105.

⁴ Lucian, *de dea Syria*, 14.

⁵ Frazer, *op. cit.* p. 225; Lucian, *de dea Syria*, 27.

⁶ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, iii, 55, quoted Frazer, *op. cit.* p. 64.

What I would suggest is that among the Skythians some Black Sea traveller, perhaps himself from Asia Minor, observed a class of magicians dressed in female attire, who naturally reminded him of the eunuch votaries of the Asiatic cults. Now one of the chief interests of the ancient traveller as of the modern, lay in observing and theorising about the various religions with which he came in contact. Herodotos' Egyptian theories are witness to the wild and ready speculation as to religious origins and derivations which was popular in the fifth century B.C. In trying to account for the similarity between the *shamans*, who dress as women, and the eunuch votaries of the Anatolian and Syrian cults, the legend that Askalon had once been sacked by Skythian raiders, will naturally at once occur to our traveller as the connecting link. And hence we get the story of the curse of Aphrodite on the Skythians, who sacked her temple at Askalon, given as the explanation of the fact that among a people, whom Herodotos quite wrongly believes to be the descendants of the invaders of Asia, certain religious functionaries wear women's clothes and are *ἀνδρόγυννοι*.

It may be objected that the story speaks of the Skythian woman-clad priests as smitten by a curse, and Aristotle speaks of their *μαλακία διὰ τὸ γένος*. In answer we may refer to the savage parallels furnished by Dr. Frazer and 'the unfortunate destiny' which the Sauk *ἀνδρόγυννοι* 'cannot avoid,' or 'the mingled contempt and awe' with which savage society customarily regards these persons as 'of a higher or lower order than common folk.'

It remains to inquire whether the Skythian *Ἐνάπες* really did belong to the worship of a goddess of fertility and can be classed with the priests of Kybele and Attis. Now the ethnology and geography of Skythia as we get it in Herodotos is so vague, confused, and indeterminate that it is impossible to be at all positive on the point. There is a certain amount of evidence which falls in with the general position of Dr. Frazer. In his description of the Skythian religion, Herodotos lays some stress on the marital relation of a pair of deities, whom he calls Zeus and Hera, and applauds the piety which gave to the husband of Earth the title of *Papaïos*.¹ We may remember that the god and goddess of Hierapolis are called by Lucian Zeus and Hera,² while not only was Attis identified by the Bithynians with the Greek god Zeus, but his very name, according to

¹ Herodotos, iv. 59.

² Lucian, *de dea Syria*, 31.

the etymologists, is but a variant of his other title of Papas or Father.¹ Further, the chief of the divinities in Skythia as in Asia Minor, is a goddess, whom Herodotos calls Histia, and whose native name is Tabiti.² Again, the fact that Aristotle calls the Ἐνάρπες βασιλεῖς might seem to support Dr. Frazer's theories about the king-god and his marriage with the goddess. But were these diviners kings? It is a point to which we will return.

I confess that my attitude towards the wide application of the main theory worked out in *Adonis*, *Attis*, and *Osiris* is one of considerable scepticism, and certainly it would not be true to say that all the savage instances of these ἀνδρόγυννοι can safely be interpreted on the hypothesis of a fertility motive. In the first place it is by no means invariably a goddess or a specifically female spirit who is the cause of the transformation of the *shaman* into a woman. And again, even in an instance of assimilating the servant to the deity, it is hard to find any trace of the divine lover *motiv* in the converse example of the Pythia who delivered the oracles of Mukasa, the deity of the Victoria Nyanza lake, and assumed when she prophesied, a masculine style of dress.³ In the specific case of Asia Minor it is difficult to deny a fertility motive and it may be that 'these feminine deities required to receive from their male ministers who personated the divine lovers, the means of discharging their beneficent functions: they had themselves to be impregnated by the lifegiving energy before they could transmit it.' At a certain stage of civilisation indeed and under certain conditions of environment, most rituals connected with sexual relations become interpreted as propagating fertility. Whether that was the motive which originally inspired their creation seems to me in many cases doubtful. Certainly in many of the instances of savage parallels to the Ἐνάρπες there is no trace of a fertility element, and the question arises whether we are to group the Skythian diviners with the priests of the Mother Goddess, or with the *shamans* of the Chukchi. The answer depends largely, I think, on the view taken of their state of culture and of the conditions of the society of which they were members.

Now Aristotle calls the Skythians, who suffered from θήλεα νοῦσος, βασιλεῖς. None of our other authorities speaks of them as kings of the Skythians. Indeed only a person imperfectly acquainted with the size

¹ Frazer, *op. cit.* pp. 235-236.

² Herodotos, iv. 59.

³ Frazer, *op. cit.* p. 431.

and multiple ethnology of the tract called Skythia could speak other than loosely of a king of the Skythians at all.¹ Hippokrates tells us that the rich are more subject to the disease than the poor. *τοῦτο δὲ πάσχοισι Σκυθέων οἱ πλούσιοι, οὐχ οἱ κάκιστοι, ἀλλ' οἱ εὐγενέστατοι καὶ ἰσχὺν πλείστην κεκτημένοι, διὰ τὴν ἵππασίην· οἱ δὲ πένητες ἦσσαν. οὐ γὰρ ἵππάζονται.*² One feature strikes the reader at once. This distinction between rich and poor is Greek and does not apply to nomads, all of whom necessarily have horses.

But Aristotle's kings and Hippokrates' aristocracy are perhaps explicable if we may suppose that these authors are looking at facts distorted through Greek spectacles. The *βασιλεῖς* and the *πλούσιοι* are, I believe, none other than Herodotos' Royal Skythians. Of these he says : *πέρην δὲ τοῦ Γέρρου ταῦτα δὴ τὰ καλούμενα βασιλῆα ἐστὶ καὶ Σκύθαι οἱ ἄριστοί τε καὶ πλείστοι καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους νομίζοντες Σκύθας δούλους σφετέρους εἶναι.*³ Strabo perhaps more accurately defines their relations to the other tribes, *οἱ οὖν νομάδες πολεμισταὶ μᾶλλον εἰσὶν ἢ ληστρικοί, πολεμοῦσι δὲ ὑπὲρ τῶν φόρων. ἐπιτρέψαντες γὰρ ἔχειν τὴν γῆν τοῖς ἐθέλουσι γεωργεῖν ἀντὶ ταύτης ἀγαπῶσι φόρους λαμβάνοντες τοὺς συντεταγμένους μετρίους τινάς, οὐκ ἐς περιουσίαν ἀλλ' εἰς τὰ ἐφήμερα καὶ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα τοῦ βίου· μὴ διδόντων δὲ αὐτοῖς πολεμοῦσιν.*⁴ Now it is *prima facie* probable that it is to these warrior Royal Skythians that the legends of the great invasion of Asia would attach themselves, and that it is in the aetiological legends of the origin of their diviners that the sack of Askalon figures. When Hippokrates remarks that impotence is more prevalent among the aristocracy of Skythia because they ride, is it not possible that he is thinking loosely of Skythia in terms of the Greek city state? It is the easiest thing in the world for the historian to think, if we may so express it, in the wrong dimensions. How hard it is to remember in studying Greek history the relatively small territorial area covered by the great city states! So Hippokrates, thinking roughly of Skythia as a whole, thinks of these blackmailers, 'who consider the other Skythians their slaves,' as an aristocracy, and confuses a race of horsemen with a class of horse-owners. The *πένητες* and *κάκιστοι* who do not ride will, on this hypothesis, be the *ἀροτῆρες* and *γεωργοί*⁵ over whom the nomad

¹ Herodotos, iv. 68, speaks of *βασιλεὺς δὲ Σκυθέων*, apparently meaning chief of the Royal Skythians.

² Hippokrates, *loc. cit.*

³ Herodotos, iv. 20.

⁴ Strabo, 311.

⁵ Herodotos, iv. 17-18.

horsemen tyrannise in the manner hinted at by Herodotos and described by Strabo. If this view is correct, the savage state of culture of this nomad race, which is indicated by their practices as narrated by Herodotos, leads us to suppose that the Ἐνάρες are closer akin to the savage parallels than to the priests of Kybele, and the fact that they belong definitely to the nomad tribes and not to the corn-growers makes it probable that no fertility motive can be safely assigned as the basis of the strange custom.

In justice to Hippokrates it should perhaps be added that among the savage examples of emasculate *shamans* masquerading as women there are many cases of naturally impotent people being devoted to this service. There is no reason to question the statement of Hippokrates that the Skythian race displayed a physical tendency towards impotence.

W. R. HALLIDAY.