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Title: Honour, Dishonour and Homicides in Britain, Namibia and Turkey : Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Year: 2017

Version:

Please cite the original version:

Sarkamo, V., Eshareturi, C., Koc, G., & Miettinen, K. (2017). Honour, Dishonour and Homicides in Britain, Namibia and Turkey : Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. In M. Husso, T. Virkki, M. Notko, H. Hirvonen, & J. Eilola (Eds.), *Interpersonal Violence : Differences and Connections* (pp. 69-81). Routledge. Routledge Advances in Sociology.

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Honour, Dishonour and Homicides in Britain, Namibia and Turkey. Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Ville Sarkamo, Cyril Eshareturi, Günes Koc & Kari Miettinen

Introduction

Whilst there is an ongoing debate in various countries about the role of honour-based violence in society, it is important to note that there are historical and cultural precedents to honour and violence (Pitt-Rivers, 1966; Henderson, 1994; Frevert, 1995; Blok, 2001; Peltonen, 2003; Liliequist, 2009). This chapter adopting a present and historical approach explores honour-related violence in Britain and Turkey from the perspective of legislation and administrative processes. In addition, this chapter explores honour related violence by situating it in the historical context of honour-based homicides in early 20th century Ovamboland, located in present-day Namibia and to the culture of duelling, which existed in various European countries between the 17th and early 20th centuries. We have used honour broadly in the context of associated violence to explore how government interventions can mitigate against honour based violence and the lessons to be learnt by practice and policy from a situated exploration of Turkey, Britain and Ovomboland in present day Namibia.

Honour is a universal concept but practices of honour-related violence vary significantly between different cultures and times. Certain forms of violence committed in the name of honour are culturally determined and acceptable in certain communities as the cultural norm (Gill & Brah, 2014). Honour is a construct created by a society or a group regarding the worth

of its individual members. It is also a social currency through which individuals value and understand their worth (Henderson, 1994; Eshareturi et al., 2014). However, this view is dependent on societal or community validation and cannot be arrived at in isolation (Henderson, 1994). Honour also prescribes how an individual is to be treated within a group or society. In this context, it is important to also view honour as determining how individuals are treated within a group or society, consequently leading to their admission into, or exclusion from the group (Henderson, 1994). It is important to note that honour is not passive and the code of honour requires activity on the part of an individual. Accordingly, individuals concerned with honour in order to maintain their status in the community must repeatedly perform actions which are deemed honourable in the context of their particular society (Sarkamo, 2011; 2014). Honour is also related to warrior values. Within the warrior cultures of various cultural spheres, showing bravery in battle and killing one's enemy in battle is seen as an honourable act (Sarkamo, 2011).

Honour as a code on the one hand is also associated with patriarchal systems as witnessed in Turkey and matrilineal systems as exhibited by the Ovambo's. On the other hand, honour is also a gendered code situated in the context of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Hallenberg, 2013). It is an active system of dominance by male members from the top of societal hierarchy over other males, women and children. Situated in this context is the interpretation of gender and body in the context of honour (Liliequist, 2009). Accordingly, the honour of women is sexualized and chastity is deemed a virtue which the male members of society must protect. Individuals breaking this code are ostracized and punished by members of their community (Liliequist, 2009). Minorities and subcultures are often seen as the cultural "other", often interpreting honour through culture and sometimes religion (Frick, 2014). Their acts of honour related violence are easily seen as non-rational by mainstream

society on the one hand, yet, on the other hand, to their communities, violent acts in the interests of honour are easily considered natural and inevitable (Gill, 2006).

This sets the stage for the debate on the role of values in encouraging the perpetrating of honour-based violence. Indeed, this begs the following questions: whose and what kind of values should be maintained and strengthened within society? Are some groups and societies more tolerant towards certain forms of honour-based violence than others? Should honour-based violence be distinguished from other forms of violence such as domestic violence? How should we ensure that interventions oriented towards tackling honour-related violence do not further entrench stereotypes associated with ethnic minority groups which could potentially lead to discrimination?

This chapter presents an example of the historical and societal roots of honour-related violence. **Firstly**, it deconstructs the core bases of honour and its role within human society through an exploration of honourable and dishonourable “man killings” in Ovambo kin groups in the early 20th century, which helps us to understand the present issues of honour-based violence. It explores the role of honour and its close connection to masculinity and the use of lethal violence within a kin society. **Secondly**, the chapter analyses femicides in Turkey in the context of the political discourse of the Women’s Movement in Turkey. An example from present-day Turkey highlights the much debated and problematic relation between the legislation and the existing concepts of honour. **Thirdly**, the chapter goes further to the administrative practices which deal with issues of honour-related violence in present-day Britain by exploring the state of affairs in Britain in which honour-based violence is unthinkingly associated with domestic violence. Honour violence is understood as “normal”

domestic violence because the special nature of the phenomenon is not apparent and it is not understood. The impression is that honour violence is “mere” domestic violence in spite of the circumstances leading to its perpetration. **Finally**, this will all be compared to the historical example of the European culture of duelling.¹

Homicide and manly honour in Ovambo culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

UN statistics show that in 2012 the intentional homicide rate in Namibia was more than 17 times higher than in Britain, more than ten times higher than in Finland and approximately four times higher than in Turkey. (UNODC, 2012) Judging by newspaper reports², the great majority of perpetrators are men. Such a high homicide rate can apparently be partly explained by the socio-economic realities of Namibia. But could the tendency to resort to violence have cultural roots? Throughout history, what have the attitudes of Namibia’s largest ethnic group, the Ovambo, been towards homicide?

Modern north-central Namibia was previously known as Ovamboland. It was inhabited by the Ovambo people, who shared a common language and cultural heritage. Politically, however, Ovamboland was divided into several small independent kingdoms which, particularly in the late 19th century, were constantly at war with each other. The most important social structures inside Ovambo kingdoms were matrilineal kin groups (clans). These kin groups were at the top of the communal hierarchy and were collectively responsible for addressing the wrongdoings of their individual members (Estermann, 1976; McKittrick, 2002; Miettinen, 2005).

The question at the heart of the interaction between the concept of masculine honour and homicide in Ovambo culture is: when was the killing of another person (by a man) regarded as honourable and when was it regarded as dishonourable according to Ovambo social rules? The emphasis on males is informed by the fact that Ovambo women seldom killed in the name of honour and predominantly killings attributed to these women revolved around cases of infanticide (McKittrick, 1999). As regards honour killings by Ovambo men, three different categories can be identified: 1) killing an enemy in war, 2) killing a member of one's own community but not of one's own kin, and 3) killing a member of one's own kin group.

The first category is easily identifiable; killing an "enemy" when attacking another kingdom was deemed honourable by the Ovambo (providing that the victim was not defenceless). When a "successful" warrior, i.e. killer, returned home from war, he was greeted with much rejoicing and respect by his kin. However, for a few days there was also a darker side to his status; as a killer he was regarded as bloodthirsty and, as such, a danger to his own kin. By reason of his bloodlust, he was temporarily isolated from his kin for a few days until he was purged of it by a healer. Following this cleansing, he, as a "man killer" became a respected member of his kin and community. Thus, by killing an "outsider", a man could elevate his status and be regarded as a senior member of his community. Indeed, the more men such an individual killed, the higher the killer's status³(Loeb, 1962; Estermann, 1976).

Ovambo men fought often, because readiness to resort to violence in conflict situations was regarded as an important aspect of masculinity. Readiness to resort to violence was thus honourable, but sometimes fights went wrong and people accidentally died. Such

unpremeditated killings were usually regarded as dishonourable because they ‘polluted the land’. Furthermore, it is important to note that even in cases where such killings were deemed to not be dishonourable, they were nevertheless unacceptable. Thus, if a man killed a member of another kin group, his kin group was liable to pay compensation to the victim’s kin for the loss of an important member. Normal compensation for killing an adult man was ten head of cattle, which was approximately half of the cattle of a wealthy household. If compensation was not paid, the victim’s kin had the right to blood vengeance⁴(Auala,1978; Loeb, 1962; Siiskonen, 1990; Tönjes, 1996). However, it should be noted that blood vengeance seem to have been rare in Ovamboland – at least in the 20th century (e.g. Loeb, 1962; Tönjes, 1996). Finally, regarding the killing of a member of one’s own kin, the evidence is limited. However, the killing of one’s sibling was something that was totally disgraceful⁵. We can therefore assume that killing any other member of one’s kin was dishonourable, because such an act was utterly senseless and unnecessarily weakened the kin group.

The reading of femicide as “honour” murder in the political discourse of the women’s movement in Turkey

The murders referred to as “honour murders” in Turkey constitute a peculiar discourse requiring evaluation and discussion among the discourses of the women’s movement, the state institutions, and the hegemonic power in general. Such discourses simultaneously involve ongoing debates within civil society. As civil society is heterogeneous it is possible to identify different reflections of an honour discourse among the different segments of society. All these debates moreover constitute a political arena of struggle. Within such political controversy, the feminist movement of Turkey aims at reconstructing the conception of “honour” as a political discourse. Here, the political meaning attributed to the conception of “honour” is, in fact, related to deciphering this concept as a political condition *par excellence*.

In this respect, the feminist movement of Turkey claims that the distinction between “honour” (*namus*) and “custom” (*töre*) murders made by the law and the state institutions, including the judiciary and the police, reproduces the “institutional, symbolic and epistemic violence over women” (Sauer, 2002, p.81–107; Schröttle, 1999, p.18–40; Demirler & Gümüş, 2004, p.15). Therefore, it is beneficial to examine the difference between honour and custom murders, as was done by the feminist movement of Turkey.

First and foremost, it is necessary to examine the conceptualization of custom murders in Turkey and the corresponding conceptualization in the law through a historical perspective. In the Turkish Penal Code, of 1 March 1926, a reduction of sentence was prescribed for “Honour and Custom Murders”. Referring to issues of culture and tradition, the law condoned such a reduction of sentences. In this article of the penal code, according to the amendment of 1 April 2005, the reduction of the sentence for “honour and custom murders” was included in the legal definition of arranged murder by using only the concept of “custom murders”, included in the category of arranged murders investigated by family councils, which are to be punished with more severe sentences.

In this respect, the women’s movement of Turkey has struggled not only for the abolition of reductions under the law of sentences for honour and custom murders through lobbying and pressure groups, but also called for the removal of the concept of “honour” from the language of the law itself. Regarding the reason for such persistence over the concept of honour, it is critically asserted that murders committed for reasons of “honour” cannot always be left to the decisions of family councils, and thus cannot be demonstrated to be arranged murders to qualify for inclusion in the category of “aggravated penalty” (*ağırlaştırılmış*) which carries a

harsher punishment. In the criminal law, the reduction of sentence, as was blatantly observed in practices of legal processes, cannot be forestalled, but rather encouraged (Eyüboğlu, 2009, p.10–12).

Thus, the feminist critique of the law and the legal practices expresses the concept of honour as a concept of political struggle, as the very reason for dominant masculinities resorting to violence against women. When the legal equivalent of the reduction of “unjust incitement” (*haksız tahrik*), which means offering unjust provocation, and its use in legal practice are examined, it is possible to discern the legal mentality that reconstructs the “unjust incitement” as a “reduction of masculinity” (*erkeklik indirimi*), maleness reduction (Feminist Politika, 2010, p.41), as was asserted by the feminist movement of Turkey (Karakus, 2011, p.18–20; Kaya, 2010, p.22–23).

In this respect, the motives reported by men who committed femicide – from failure to provide “marital rights”, including their sexual “obligations”, to the so-called “jealousy murders” emanating from extreme jealousy and men’s fear of being abandoned when it is the woman who ends the relationship, or seeks to divorce the man – are acknowledged in law as “unjust incitement” and thus fulfilling the conditions for a reduction of sentence (Eyüboğlu, 2009, p.10–12; Hacivelioglu, 2010, p.26–28). Indeed, the “reduction of masculinity” due to “unjust incitement” in the law points to a specific dimension of violence that is deemed “institutionalized violence” by the women’s movement (Feminist Politika, 2012, p. 26–29). The institutional “toleration” and the legal reduction of sentence for femicide reveal the existence of a masculine pact at both institutional and symbolic levels (Hacivelioglu, 2010, p. 26–28; Kaya, 2010, p. 22–23).

In this context, the concept of honour is explained by the feminist movement of Turkey as a common denominator of masculinity unifying men and masculinities across the different habitus and classes of Turkey and proposing a continuity between the “urban” and “rural”, “tradition” and “modern”, between “big family” and “tribalism” and “nuclear family” and “individuality”, between “East” and “West” and as well as between “Orient” and “Occident” (Sirman, 2010, p.28–30).

The feminist movement that aimed at integrating the concept of “honour” seen as the mortar of patriarchy into the scope of “aggravated penalty” for the punishment of femicide claims that the legal definition and scope of “custom murders” is insufficient and inadequate by producing a culturalist discourse. It restricts femicide committed as a reflection of “masculine honour” to “Eastern” males and “Kurdish traditions” (Özvaris & Baytok, 2010, p.42–44). Thus, the legal conception of “custom murders” veils the true sources of honour murders and femicide by othering the Kurds. By reproducing the dualities of “Turk” vs. “Kurd”, “civil” vs. “barbaric”, “urban” vs. “rural”, “educated” vs. “uneducated” and so forth, it is also asserted that the concept of “custom murder” is maintained not only by the Kemalist tradition of Enlightenment and its dichotomous stance emanating from such foundational dualities, but also by the ongoing hegemonic discourses of the Islamist conservative, the Justice and Development Party (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), (a similar interpretation is also made by Sirman, 2010, p.28–30). Indeed, the amendment in the law on “honour” and “custom” murders was realized after the AKP came to power in 2002.

In this context, the feminist movement of Turkey transforms both the legal and political conceptions of “honour” and “custom” murders as the discursive side of an ongoing political

war and reconstructs hegemonic masculinity as a critique of institutional masculinity. Thus custom murders are criticized as symbolic and epistemic violence, while femicide is demanded to be included into the legal category of “aggravated penalty” within the conception of “honour murders”. By asserting that the motive of honour unifying different masculinities plays a fundamental role in the reconstruction of hegemonic masculinity by males deriving from different habitus, feminists argue that the concept of “honour” constitutes a common motive behind the reproduction of institutional, symbolic and direct violence. Thus, the feminist movement of Turkey claims that the phenomenon of “honour” lies at the centre of masculine violence leading to femicide by playing a fundamental role in the reconstruction of hegemonic masculinities, and that femicide is, in fact, equivalent to honour murder. Therefore, the conception of “honour murders” in Turkey is being reconstructed as a discursive political concept within the political struggles of the women’s movement itself.

Policy construction of honour-based violence in Britain

Honour-based violence is a perennial historical issue which commonly occurs in ethnic minority communities in Britain (Dickson, 2014). It is perceived to have occurred when a person is punished by their family and/or the wider community for actually or allegedly challenging what the family and/or community understands as the correct code of conduct (Brandon & Hafez, 2008; Elakkary et al., 2014). In Britain, although boys and men are often victims of honour-based violence, it is gender biased in that it is a patriarchal ideology of oppression (Feldman, 2010; Gill, 2013; Payton, 2014).

It is constructed predominantly through dualistic notions of “female shame” and “male honour”, where masculinity is largely constructed in terms of female chastity (Goksel, 2006; Reddy, 2008; Gill, Begikhani & Hague, 2012). In recent years, practitioners in the field have

stated that the incidence of honour-based violence in Britain is increasing with the growing number of women seeking help due to honour crimes indicative of a rapid significant upsurge (Dustin & Phillips, 2008; Gill, 2013). Commenting on the incidence of honour-based violence in Britain, the government acknowledges that empirical data for Britain is almost non-existent (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Report – HACR, 2008), as a consequence of non-reporting, misunderstandings by criminal justice officers, differential categorisation, and the policy of maintaining a peaceful multicultural society (Brandon & Hafez, 2008).

Although the government concedes that about 12 honour killings occur each year in Britain (HACR, 2008), this figure underestimates the magnitude of the problem. Even more worrying is that, despite its topical and persistent nature, honour-based violence has consistently been sidelined from the mainstream political discourse and instead, situated within the context of domestic violence and its accompanying frameworks (HACR, 2008; Payton, 2014; Eshareturi et al., 2015), thus favouring a gender-sensitive approach whilst conveniently omitting the issues of culture and heritage (Eshareturi, et al., 2015). The question herein is why. Although it is noted that honour-based violence is ultimately connected to the patriarchal organisation of the family rather than to any specific culture (Gill & Brah, 2014), in rationalising this approach, it is important to note that although the government's inability to adequately address cultural integration is not exactly reassuring, doing so may encourage a false contradiction between minority and mainstream communities, with crimes in the former explained by reference to "culture", and those in the latter understood as individual deviation (Sundari, 2008; Frick, 2014).

Potentially, this could evolve into a situation in which perpetrators as much as victims are grouped as the same and governed according to the understood laws of their culture (Gill, 2006). Even more, associating issues of culture and heritage with honour-based violence appears to be politically counterproductive as it lays the government open to accusations of racism (Yurdakul & Korteweg, 2013). Faced with this dilemma, it is understandable that the government has chosen to acknowledge the issue of honour-based violence within the sphere of domestic violence and violence against women and not as an issue of culture. Yet there is the suspicion that policymakers in Britain have used this context as a pretext for the non-provision of honour-based violence-specific services, thus resulting in a situation that has unwittingly prevented honour-based violence from being identified as an issue in its own right rather than as domestic violence. Paradoxically, the government acknowledges that where honour-based violence can be differentiated from the wider category of violence against women, recognising its specificity may save lives (HACR, 2008). Yet there is no policy to implement such intentions. Indeed, the most recent and comprehensive policy document on honour-based violence in Britain identifies honour-based violence as different from domestic violence yet advocates that it be tackled in the context of domestic violence service provision (HACR, 2008).

It is argued here that the response of the British government to honour-based violence has lacked strong conviction and posited that honour-based violence in Britain can only be tackled through policy-based targeted interventions which recognises honour-based violence as distinct from domestic violence and several other forms of violence against women.

However, any such policy must balance its potential success against any potential damage that such a policy may cause to wider community cohesion. Such a policy should consequently not be so overly aggressive as to perpetuate the racialization of violence against women,

which could fuel distrust of the government and consolidate determination to defend traditional values which support honour-based violence. Accordingly, it is important that policymakers in Britain recognise that a balanced approach which recognises the cultural dynamic of honour-based violence but does not perpetuate stereotypes is necessary (Gill & Brah, 2014).

Consequently, any policy oriented towards tackling honour-based violence in Britain must be arrived at through a joint process which is inclusive of both survivors and members of the communities concerned. Furthermore, recognition and analysis of the key role of patriarchy, and the fact that it is issues concerning gender roles that are the point at which minority and majority rights are often perceived to conflict will be useful. Accordingly, policymakers need to be careful of painting a picture of cultural differences that might perpetuate cultural stereotypes and must also be responsive to the diversity of women's lives. Thus diversity within ethnic, religious and cultural groups must be acknowledged, including diversity on the basis of gender and the meaning of multiculturalism under a patriarchal construct. This will help challenge honour-based violence stereotypes in Britain and improve relations between minority and mainstream community in the long run.

Discussion

We posit that honour is a concept which is entrenched in culture on the one hand and not adequately catered for in legislative practices and the justice system on the other. Further, we maintain that honour-related violence is a phenomenon which merits attention in the administrative actions and practices of authorities. In positing how the phenomenon of honour-based violence should be recognised and addressed, firstly, we maintain that

practitioners who provide services for victims of honour-related violence be educated on the basic nature of honour and the relationship between the code of honour and the patriarchal power structures on which honour-related violence is based. There are hegemonic cultural views of honour but also alternative and separate honour groups within societies, such as sub-cultures and ethnic minorities. Whilst we concede that there are no strict borders between the various codes of honour and that there is an ongoing interplay and a conflict between these notions of honour, we posit that it is important to understand the diversity of gender roles and the individual rights within the social and ethnic groups predominantly affected by honour-related violence.

Similarly, practitioners must understand the difference between honour-based violence and domestic violence. This understanding includes recognition of the fact that the difference between honour-based violence and domestic violence is embedded in the motive for which honour-related violence is perpetrated. Whilst the motive in domestic violence is often of a personal nature, in honour-related violence the motive for violence is enshrined in the protection or acquiring of honour. Consequently, perpetrators of honour-related violence commit their acts of violence out of a misguided belief in personal or communal responsibilities.

Comparison of these considerations of honour-based masculine violence in the current context of Turkey and in the ethnic minority context of Britain reveal some similarities, and also some obvious differences, from the historical Ovambo case. The similarity is the idea of a correct code of conduct. If someone breaks that code, thus questioning a man's masculine honour, the ensuing conflict may lead to lethal violence. The difference is gender and the associated power roles in a matrilineal society. The (pre)colonial Ovambo's were matrilineal,

and therefore, wives/daughters could always count on support from their matrilineal kin against their husbands/fathers in extreme situations. Thus, in situations where a man defends his masculine honour through acts of violence against his wife, his acts would result in his female family members being held to account for his actions by his wife's relatives. This underpins why honour-based masculine violence in (pre)colonial Ovamboland seem to be predominantly perpetrated between men. Judging by the more than 30 well documented cases of lethal violence in Ovamboland from the 1880s to the 1940s that have been gathered, it is safe to posit that honour related violence in Ovamboland predominantly occurred between men.

This chapter demonstrates a convergence between the code of honour and the code of law, often manifest in the response of the justice system to honour-related crimes. Whilst there are similarities in the construction of honour-related violence across cultures, as seen in present-day Britain, Turkey and the culture of early 20th century Ovamboland, the legislation and legal practices which govern the persecution of this form of violence differ across cultures. In Turkey, the penal code recognises honour as grounds for mitigation in cases where women have been murdered in the name of honour. In Britain, the government maintains that where honour-based violence can be differentiated from the wider category of violence against women, recognising its specificity may save lives. Yet the policy to implement such intention is non-existent. Indeed, the most recent and comprehensive policy document on honour-based violence in Britain identifies it as distinct from domestic violence, but counterintuitively advocates that it be tackled in the context of domestic violence service provision (HACR, 2008). By contrast, in Ovambo culture, killing in the name of honour is constructed in terms of warfare and in this context it is a practice which is advocated for and actively encouraged.

Whilst we have argued and shown that judicial practices vary significantly between nations and cultures, we maintain that legislative intervention can prevent the perpetration of honour-related violence. We argue that there is a historic precedent for this which is informed by the complete eradication of duelling across Europe. Historically there was a persistent culture of honour-related violence in the European context made manifest through duelling. Between the 17th and early 20th centuries, duelling in Europe epitomised the western construction of this type of violence. Like present manifestations of honour-based violence, there was a visual and present culture of violence within the societies in which these duels were fought which was usually considered avoidable. Nonetheless, the attitude of the judiciary to condoning honour-related violence across Europe was utterly different. For instance, in Sweden duelling was banned by law as early as in the 17th century, while in Prussia duels were long seen as culturally unacceptable and epitomised by the existence of courts of honour which were courts designed to resolve affairs of honour in a legal way (cf. Frevert, 1995; Collstedt, 2007; Sarkamo 2011).

The approach of jurisprudence and judicial practices as to whether or not to condone duelling had a significant affect on the numbers of duels fought in different countries. Could a legislative intervention similar to that enacted in Sweden prevent honour-based violence? We posit that while the notion of honour seems to be “natural” and evident and enshrined in culture, we argue that for honour-based violence to be tackled effectively, a change must be brought about in legislative practices which accommodate “honour” as a justification for honour-related crimes.

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²Miettinen is an expert on homicides as an historical phenomenon in present-day Namibia, but by reading
quality newspapers he ventures to state that killing for manly honour has not died away in present Namibia.

³See ELC no. 5; ELC no. 18; ELC no. 31; ELC no. 71; ELC no. 127; ELC no. 151; ELC no. 205; ELC no. 254;
ELC no. 387; ELC no. 395; ELC no. 483; ELC no. 499; ELC no. 737; ELC no. 1082. All in 9:7, AHC, PAJ.

⁴See e.g. ELC no. 34; ELC no. 64; ELC no. 106; ELC no. 249; ELC no. 366; ELC no. 623; ELC no. 637; ELC
no. 869; ELC 1390. All in 9:7, AHC, PAJ; C.H.L. Hahn: Ukuanyama homicide (manuscript, early 1920s), p.39,
2/38, A450, NAN.

⁵ELC no. 624; ELC no. 776. 9:7, AHC, PAJ).