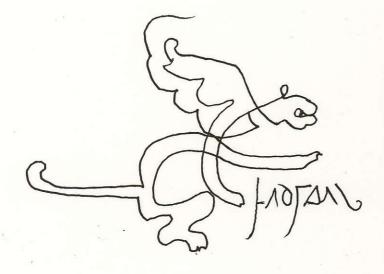# TEONAHT-- Sally Caves

The language of the *Teonim* of *Teon,* sometimes *Teonea* (from *Teon* + *hea,* "country, land"), a region that surfaces and submerges most often within the Black Sea, sometimes the Caspian. It is surmised that the Teonim are perhaps from the Caucasus, or--given their vanishing propensities, their scant but bizarre appearances in our history--from somewhere else entirely. Some etymologists surmise that the very name *Teon* may be related to its common verb *teoned,* "to run, flee"--describing a place of refuge, a place to run to; or a place that is itself in flight. The winged, rampant (or should I say *volant*) feline is its favorite mascot.

HERE ARE ITS MAIN GRAMMATICAL FEATURES:

* A formal language for written and declaimed use. Informal Teonaht has many dialectical features, abbreviations, truncations, and idioms, but I have not yet started recording these. The language I've presented here is "received standard." What you would find in a newspaper.

* NOT an auxiliary language like Esperanto; not an "ideal" language; not a language that corrects the errors of other languages, or makes reparations in the area of gender or class, or which attempts to smooth out spelling conventions; it is not a "logical" language; it is not devoted to making its grammar easy or clear or commonsensical, although it does have certain efficiencies. While it evolved pretty much on its own, it shows clear influence by Latin, German, Spanish, Welsh, Old Norse, Old Irish, Old English, Hebrew, Sumerian, and, yes, modern English--one of the strangest of the existing natural languages.

* NOT a finished language; not a *static* language. While its basic structure has been set for years, now, it is always in a state of flux, like a real language--only with an evolution that has been sped up.

* Putatively Indo-European. There are many Indo-European words in its lexicon, probably borrowed, and its structure follows some typical IE patterns described below; but there are also a vast number of unattested words and grammatical developments that are unique to Teonaht:

> *ykwa,* horse (borrowed from L.?) *Madryast* "Goddess of Mothers"
> *derem,* "do" (IE *dhe); ksyksö, "six" (IE *s[w]eks); *merimek,* "sea"; *y,* "I"

but:

> *glehd,* "blood"; *takrem,* "earth"; *griht,* "war"; *dendr,* "egg"; *fanttear,* "dance"
> *Fölyavod,* "God of Moths." *Tsöscy,* "Goddess of Lost Things" etc.

* Largely morphologically accusative. Like most other IE languages, Teonaht makes a clear distinction between the nominative and the accusative/dative, i.e., between the subject, whether agent or participant, and the object and oblique objects, especially in the dual case system of its pronouns.

* A "Split Nominative" with some active tendencies. Teonaht distinguishes between two types of nominative, which I am here designating as "agent" (A) and "experiencer," (E); the symbol that Dixon and other linguists use to designate "experiencer" or "participant" is (S), but since this universally represents the intransitive subject, I've chosen (E) instead, since experiencers are often transitive subjects as well as intransitive: the agent (A) and the "experiencer" or non-agent (E) express volition and non-volition respectively (rather than transitivity and non-transitivity). In other words, the subject that shows volitional, agentive action is marked differently from the subject that shows little volition and agency, but rather experience or "quality"--a semantic feature that requires marking in its verbs, its fronted tense particles, and its articles, but NOT its normal pronouns. Thus Teonaht can identify subjects of volitional intransitives as agents-- "the man (A) walks"--and subjects of non-volitional transitives as participants-- "the girl (E) heard the sound". I have also invented my own terminology for the categorization of these verbs: **vt** for "volitional transitive"; **vi** for "volitional intransitive" (sometimes called the "unergative"); **ni** for "nonvolitional intransitive"; **nt** for "nonvolitional transitive"; and **av** for "ambivolitional"--a verb that can change its valency as either volitional or non-volitional, transitive or intransitive. Teonaht does not normally allow the patient to function in the participant role (as in ergative languages), which is why I am tentatively calling it an active accusative language with a split-nominative. There is only one instance which violates this rule: the "medio-passive" (or "subject-patient construct) in which the "subject" of the verb in the middle voice gets objective (or patientive) marking. This may be a holdover from an old ergative system, or a borrowing, or an over correction. * While there is a verb "be" (parem), Teonaht tends to be zero-copula:. *Hdand lo.* "A doctor he." *Pamys ly* "Sick she." Preterite and future tenses, along with aspects, can be expressed by prefixing particles to the pronoun: *Hdand elo.* "A doctor past-he." *Pamys uar-ly.* "Sick completed-she." Teonaht likes to provide something akin to an evidence clause after these assertions: Pamys uar-ly ouan-ry: "she is sick, I hear." This is considered polite, but it's often left out, considered effeminate or subservient.

* OSV in Standard Received, more often SOV in spoken diction. An "object-initial" language is the rarest of language types. Teonaht is strict about the subject's position, especially if a pronoun, in preceding the verb, but it typically heads the sentence with the object, a feature that may have been enforced literarily.

> *Il kyam edder uarly vergo.* "The book to-him completed-she give."
>
> (She gave him the book)
>
> *Euil merimek elry euan.* 'To-the sea past-I go."
>
> (I went to the sea)

It often exhibits the more common SOV structure by putting the nominative first when focussed, but then "echoing" it with the subject pronoun before the verb. The verb is always final in main clauses.

> *Le' ykwa celyil verinyn elai teo.* "Volitional agent-the horse into-the park past-it run."
>
> (The horse galloped into the park)

* In subordinate clauses, the syntax is reversed, and becomes VSO, with a relative pronoun:

> Il betö elry ke ytonak-el ihai il mabbamba.
>
> "P-the boy past-I see kick-past A-who the P-ball.
>
> (I saw the boy who kicked the ball)

Here is where we see the copula emerge:

> Il betö elry ke nelhai pamuis.
>
> The boy past-I see was-who sick.
>
> (I saw the boy who was sick)

Teonaht, like Welsh, can imbed a subordinate clause:

> Il gwenda elo ravvö böv la epan.
>
> The girl past-he love blue her eyes

Or:

> Il gwenda böv la epan elo ravvö.
>
> The girl blue her eyes past-he love.
>
> (He loved the girl whose eyes were blue)

* Teonaht is largely analytic: as in English, the majority of nouns, with the exception of the *Nenddeylyt* nouns which show patient marking, have little or no case inflection, but the pronouns do. Nenddeylyt nouns have several classes, most of which suffix an object particle to express the patient (Agent: *pavar,* patient: *pavarb;* "clam"), but the one I'm most fond of is Class V nouns, where the form changes considerably in the patient case: A: *hlabbyr* (rumor, saliva), P: *hlambis;* A: *hsyr* (wheel), P: *hsinis;* A. *yr* (foreign language), P: *inis;* and by extension, the borrowing A: *byr* (beer), P. *binis*. * It is both head initial AND final. Adjectives generally follow the noun whereas prepositions precede it, a development you find in Latin and French (originally SOV like most IE languages). Teonaht pays very little attention to the Greenburgian rules about placement of adjectives and postpositions in OV languages. There is quite a bit of option whether you precede or follow the noun with plural and possessive articles and conjunctions. You can say either *hman uo deygrin*, "bread and butter," or *hman deygrinjo*, "bread butter and." A lot of syntactic decisions in Teonaht are made on the basis of rhythm and rhetoric. Its speakers care what "sounds good."

* It exhibits what I call "The Law of Detachability," which allows clitics to do what I describe above with the pronouns: this is probably Teonaht's most distinctive feature, enabling suffixes to "detach" from the end of words and "prefix" to the beginning of those or other words. This capacity is most noticeable in the formation of tense marking as we've seen above: in main clauses, Teonaht prefers to remove the tense and aspect suffixes and prefix them to the preceding pronoun: *y ennyvel*, "I ate" becomes *elry ennyve*. Gerald Koenig of the New Generation Language Project was impressed enough with this feature that he asked me if he could borrow it for NGL.

* The above rule applies as well to nouns: plural and possessive suffixes often detach and prefix the noun, but a distinct feature is that they reverse their phonemes: so zoyzod-in, "stews," becomes nizzoyzod; flanis-id, "of wool," becomes difflanis. Nenddeylyt nouns: perös, "songs," becomes sipperö. In orthography, the initial "s" suffixes the possessive: las perö, "her songs."

* It may help to examine the terminology supplied by older Teonaht grammarians: there is always one term for the object (and it changes from grammarian to grammarian), but two terms for the subject *Euab*, or "self": *Pelme*, or "mind/intention," and *Eskkoat*, or "shadow," "silhouette." It is as if the Agent is seen as the thinking, intending subject and the Participant as the shadow of the self, perhaps even not the self. Inanimate things can govern transitive verbs, but they are usually marked as Participants. "Object" is usually termed *Ouar*, "other," and very often *Tsorel*, the archaic word for "city" (sometimes *Mûndya* or *Nirhhterli*, "world"). It is entirely typical of the early Teonaht grammarians to name the parts of speech after the parts of an inhabitable structure, for they saw language to be a means of moving through space, categorizing it, living in it, making it coherent.

PHONOLOGY:

The Teonaht alphabet consists of thirty-five characters and digraphs classified according to vowels and diphthongs, stops, fricatives, affricates, nasals, liquids, and glides. Following is a table of letters, given names recited by schoolchildren. There are two ways to write Teonaht: one way, impossible to represent here except by a pasted in image, is the script used by many conservative Teonim called *Le Renuon Teonaht*; the other way is the romanized alphabet (a site of controversy among its people) because it is convenient for emailing, webbing, and printing.

Note that our clusters "th" and "sh" must stand in for a single character in Teonaht, and in the Roman version are reversed: "ht," "hs"; likewise, "hd," "hk," and "hg."

Vowels:

ai [ai] as in pipe,

      AIUAV, "riverbed." ['aijab]

i [I] as in pip, except when it terminates

      a word, then it's a schwa [ə]

      IMRAL, "soul" ['Imral]

y [i] as in peep

      YWEM, "thing" ['iwƐm]

e [e] as in papal, only more tense.

      In syllables ending with a

      consonant it has the allophone [Ɛ]

      EUAB ['ejab]

u/a [ʌ] as in pup; initial "u" followed by a

      consonant has this sound; final "a"

      has this sound.

      ULVA, "hinge" ['ʌlvʌ]

a [a] or [Ɔ] as in pop or pauper depending on

      dialect.

      ATWA ['atwʌ]

o [o] as in pope, often with diphthonging

      OTMA, "demon" ['otmʌ]

ö [u] as in poop, only more tense.

      ÖNDE ['unde]

Stops:

p [p] as in pope

      PRONEP, "spear" ['pronƐp]

Teonaht Script: Cursive

ainav, imval, ywem, euab, uva, atwa, otma, önde, pronep, bövöb, taito, dyron, kraiko, gyvahd, fylim, vawem, htindro, hdavo, sebro, zoyzod, hehvat, hgoa, tselte, dzadv, celnar, djilng, navhok, menwa, ngavhk, vrydo, litvan, wendro, hea, hgoa

b [b] as in bib

       BÖVÖB, "bluebell" ['buvub]

t [t] as in tote

       TAITO, "laugh" ['taito]

d [d] as in deed

       DYRON, "black" ['diron]

k [k] as in cake

       KRAIKO, "cessation" ['kraiko]

g [g] as in agog

       GYVAHD, "shovel" ['gyvað]

Fricatives:

f [f] as in fluff

       FYLIM, "female virgin" ['filɪm]

v [v] as in verve

       VAWEM, "nothing" ['vɔwɛm]

ht [θ] as in thin

       HTINDRO, "song" ['θɪndro]

hd [ð] as in then

       HDARO, "question" ['ðaro]

s [s] as in cease; in certain cases where a word ends in -is (adjectival ending) it has the

       allophone [ʃ]: myeebis [mi'ɛbɪʃ], "red-colored"

       SEBRO, "buckle" ['sebro]

z [z] as in zenith

       ZOYZOD, "stew" ['zoizod]

hs [ʃ] as in shush

       HSEHSAT, "porch" ['ʃeʃat]

j [ž] as in azure

       JORYO, "jewel" ['žorio]

h [h] or [x] is in Bach

       HEA, "country, nation" ['xeʌ]

hg [ ] as in German Rathaus

       HGOA, "wild" [?oa]

Affricates:

ts [ts] as in tsetse fly

       TSELTE, "day" ['tsɛlte]

dz [dz] as in God's

        DZADR, "sulpher" ['dzadər]

c [tʃ] as in church

        CELNAR, "snail" ['tʃƐlnar]

dj [dž] as in judge

        DJILNY, "penny" [džIlni]

Nasals:

m [m] as in mum

        MEMWA, "water" ['mƐmwʌ]

n [n] as in nun

        NARNOK, "form" ['narnok]

ng [ŋ] as in singer, longing (not finger, linger)

        NGARIK, "throat" ['ŋarIk]

Liquids and Glides:

w [w] as in wow

        WYDO, "truth" ['wido]

l [l] as in lull, but final "l" is not darkened.

        LILUAN, "meadow" ['lIljan]

u [j] when it is followed by a vowel, or intervocalic.

        UENDRO, "deed" []jƐndro]

r [ ] best described as a retroflex flap, sometimes trilled.

        RENUO, "letter" ['rƐnjo]

SYLLABIFICATION:

Syllables begin with a consonant and end with a vowel: *mi-ni-ka* ("small"). When two consonants that are not a cluster come together, the division is made between them: nem-ta ("cloud"). When more than two consonants come together, then the division is made after the first consonant: *uen-dro* ("deed"). Doubled letters are typographical, and used to indicate unorthodox stress. Exceptions are when the digraphs in Roman letters end a syllable beginning with t, d, s, z, and so forth: leht-tel ("fiery").

STRESS:

Two and three syllable words are normally stressed on the first syllable: orwem ("gold"), nykanel ("mouse"). Irregular stress is indicated with a doubling of the initial consonant in a syllable, or a doubling of the vowel: py-ttela ("flower"): [pi 'telʌ]. Rule of thumb: four syllable words are normally stressed on the second syllable--Teonaht prefers pen-penultimate stress: Sagresinyst (goddess of medicine): [sa 'grƐsInist]. The same with five syllable words: Erahenahil (paradise): [era 'hƐnahIl].