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A misidentified Old Phrygian parietal graffito from Salihler

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Abstract: This paper revisits a previously published graffito read among other Greek inscriptions on rock near Salihler, reinterpreting it as an Old Phrygian text that features an anthroponymic sequence. While one of the names, *urakas*, has been documented previously in Gordion, *aYiyas* is entirely new to the Phrygian corpus. Notably, this identification provides a new instance of the much-debated Phrygian letter no. 22.

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Sometimes, what one is searching for appears unexpectedly. This happened to me several months ago when Diether Schürr, to whom I am very grateful for his generosity, emailed me about a possible Old Phrygian inscription published as an ancient Turkish text. After examining the attached photograph and drawing, I realized he was entirely correct in his assessment: contrary to the initial editor's opinion, he had identified a previously unrecognized small Phrygian text engraved on a rock among other, later Greek inscriptions, which were also misread.

This Old Phrygian inscription was first published by Cengiz Saltaoğlu (2018, 812–819). It is engraved on a rock alongside other inscriptions and doodles, including depictions of three horned mammals, possibly bovids or deer. The rock is located near Salihler, an area within the municipality and district of Güdül in Ankara Province. This region was part of the Phrygian cultural territory and indeed lies within the Old Phrygian epigraphic area. For instance, to the north, near Birinciaşar village in Bolu Province, one inscription (B-02) was found engraved on a Greco-Persian style funerary stele, although it is too badly eroded to be read.

Initially, the inscription was thought to be written in an occidental Turkish script. However, as we shall see, its Phrygian nature is unquestionable. Despite the necessity of an autopsy to gather as much information as possible, the read-

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ings from the provided photo are also clear. The inscription consists of twelve letters with a distinct interpretation:

aYiyas urakas ←

In the drawing of the text presented by Saltaoğlu, a sign resembling a stylized Latin ⟨x⟩ appears between ⟨a⟩ and ⟨k⟩ in the second name. However, this supposed letter does not genuinely exist; it is merely a set of lines scratched onto the text. These lines are shallower than the graphemes, do not adhere to the spacing between the letters of the inscription, and continue below the text. There are sufficient reasons to dismiss this alleged letter, which is not known elsewhere.



Fig. 1: New drawing of the graffito from Salihler based on the photograph published by Saltaoğlu (2018, 812).

Moreover, the presence of ⟨y⟩ (the Phrygian yod, the fourth letter of the inscription) explicitly connects the text with Phrygian writing practices in use up to the 6th century BCE. There is no instance of this letter before this period (cf. Lejeune 1969, 30–38; Obrador-Cursach 2020, 32–33). Therefore, the presence of this letter not only confirms the Phrygian origin of the inscription but also provides a *terminus post quem* for its engraving on the rock.

Another relevant feature of the script in this text is the second letter, Y, which resembles the Greek psi (Ψ), identified as Phrygian “rare” letter no. 22 (which I will discuss later). The other letters are shared with scripts used in Anatolia (including Greek, Lydian, and Lycian), but they exhibit shapes commonly associated with the Phrygian script. Among these, the five-stroked zigzag ⟨s⟩ (cf. M-01b) and the ⟨a⟩ with a diagonal central stroke are perhaps the most characteristic. Notably, the text is clearly written sinistrorsally: unlike the Greek alphabet, the Phrygian script never established a fixed writing direction, and a blank space distinctly separates the two words of the text.

To conclude this graphical analysis, it must be noted that the same letter ʸ can clearly be read once and possibly twice within the graffiti complex above the main inscription. However, deciphering these from the provided photograph is nearly impossible, and a direct examination is needed to ascertain whether the rock wall indeed bears a second or third graffito in Phrygian.

If the script and the area where it has been found align with the Phrygian alphabet, the same can be said of its contents. Due to the blank space, the identification of two words is explicit. The second word, *Urakas*, is also found in a graffito on a potsherd from Gordion: *uraka*[---] (G-292). Tentatively considered a personal name in previous works (Brixhe 2002, 53, followed by Obrador-Cursach 2020, 373), this new occurrence reinforces this interpretation, although no parallels have been found in Anatolia. The ultimate origin of this name remains unknown, but there are other personal names with a possible suffix *-kas* in the Phrygian corpus: Μῖδακας (11.2), likely deriving from Midas (M-01d I, G-137, HP-102, etc.). The other two names in Phrygian texts with a similar ending sequence are somehow connected with Old Iranian: *Asakas* (G-150c) and *Manuka* (B-07; see Obrador-Cursach 2020, 150–151). In fact, *Urakas* could also have an Iranian origin, perhaps related to **vr̥ka-* meaning ‘wolf’ (PIE **wĺkʷos*), as in the city of *Varkāna* (Middle Persian *Gurgān*, rendered in Greek as Ὑρκανία). However, the Iranian interpretation seems to contradict the quoted parallel G-292, found in a pit in the middle of Building I:2 and dated to the 8th or 7th century BC, centuries before the arrival of the Persians in Phrygia (Brixhe 2002, 52). Although the Iranian interpretation would be appealing linguistically, it must be rejected due to historical reasons.

More problematic (but interesting) is the first name *aʸiyas*. It is not attested in the known Phrygian corpus so far. However, depending on the interpretation of the discussed letter ʸ, some parallels can be found in other Anatolian corpora. Traditionally, it has been interpreted as a kind of double sound ⟨ks⟩ or something related to a sibilant (see, recently, Oreshko 2022, 146–159), due to the substitution of ʸ by ⟨s⟩ in G-145 and the suggested identification between two verbal forms containing the letter ʸ (*daʸet* W-01b and *anivaʸeti* B-07) and other forms containing ⟨s⟩ (cf. New Phrygian ττοσσειτι and δεδασσιννι). In that case, parallels for this personal name are missing, but this is not unusual in the Old Phrygian stock. Any comparison with the Greek names Ἀξίος (m.), Ἀξία (f.) and Ἀσία (m.), Ἀσία (f.) would be problematic, also due to the exact lack of parallels in Phrygian for the masculine (they seem to be a latter Greek borrowing in Anatolia).

Alternatively, if the letter is taken as a variant of ⟨k⟩, it can be traced back to the name ^mAkiya. According to LAMAN, it can be found in the Hittite texty BoHa 19.2, BoHa 22.134, KBo 28.111 obv. 11' and, fragmentarily, in KBo 5.7 obv. 24 (as Akiy[aʷ(-)]). Anatolian names, especially Luwian, in Phrygian are not unknown:

see, for example, Hieroglyphic Luwian *Tuwattis* (e.g. Malatya 6) > *Tuvatis* (G-133) and *Kuliya* (Suratkaya graffito no. 5) > *Ḳūliyas* (G-127, also in G-101). There are also examples of names found both in Hittite texts and Old Phrygian: that is the case of ^m*Urawanni* (originally a clear Luwian ethnic name) rendered in Phrygian as *Urunis* (G-346).

If we accept this interpretative possibility, a problem arises: why is *Y*, with an original value of /k/, used in the same inscription where ⟨k⟩ is also found? This problem was addressed before and I suggested that they were two forms of the same letter, as happens, for example, with the polymorphism of ⟨s⟩ in M-01a (Obrador-Cursach 2020, 38–49). However, this new testimony reinforces that the sign is found with the front vowels /e/ and /i/, and with /u/ in the case of the Old Persian name rendered as *YuvaYaros* (G-115, see also *Yuv* in G-224c). Given that an etymology **k* for the sound noted by *Y* can be assumed for the clearest instances (Obrador-Cursach 2020, 38–49), a palatal allophone of /k/ ([kʲ], [ts], or [tʃ]) can still be considered (*pace* Oreshko 2022, 146–159).

Another point to be discussed is the morphology of the two personal names. Both belong to the *a*-stem inflection, as is usual in Phrygian onomastics. But what about their case? In Old Phrygian there are masculine personal names in the nominative ending *-as* such as *Atas* (G-128 and Dd-101), *Atatas* (M-01c and HP-01) or *Midas* (M-01d I, G-137 and HP-102), but they coexist with asigmatic ending in nominative, such as *Ata* (G-107, G-118), *Baba* (M-01b and G-121), Μιτραφᾶτα (1.1), etc. In the light of the parallels Dd-101 *Pserkeyoy Atas* ‘Atas (son) of Pserkeyos’ (Dd-101) and Dd-102 *Surgastoy Inas* ‘Inas (son) of Surgastos’, one can assume a sequence of a name and a patronymic. That is *aYiyas urakas* could mean ‘AYiyas (son) of Urakas’ or, even, ‘Urakas (son) of AYiyas’. This assumes that the masculine *a*-stem genitive ending (*-as*) is identical to that one of the feminine (cf. New Phrygian Ουενᾶουιας 6.1, the clearest example). Then, contrary to the *a*-stem feminine nouns and names (with a nominative in *-a*, cf. *Kubeleya* B-01, *Kubileya* W-04, μᾶνκα MPhr-01, etc.), the masculine nominatives in *-as* seem to be identical to their genitive (see as possible alternatives, but problematic, endings in Obrador-Cursach 2020, 77, with references). Future findings may confirm or dismiss this later point.

Regardless of the discussion about the letter no. 22 and the morphological details of the two names, the Phrygian origin of this graffito is beyond doubt, according to the commonly adopted criteria (Obrador-Cursach 2020, 4). First, the script is clearly the Phrygian alphabet: the letter ⟨y⟩ excludes any Greek or Anatolian alphabet. Second, the features of the linguistic material it contains are consistent with our knowledge: we have a new name followed by a possible patronymic previously found in Gordion (G-292). Third, its context is chronologically defensible as Phrygian: despite the lack of any archaeological detail, the use of

⟨y⟩ fixes a dating between the *terminus post quem* in the 6th century (when the letter was introduced in the Phrygian alphabet) and the substitution of this script in favor of Greek in the 4th century BCE. Moreover, the territory where this graffito was found fits within the Old Phrygian epigraphic area (as mentioned above), despite its northern location. Finally, there are other examples of Phrygian graffiti scratched on unworked rocks (M-07, M-08, M-11, W-08, W-09, W-10 and W-13).

In conclusion, this new graffito, which should be labeled as C-104, opens a new site for the Phrygian epigraphic corpus, provides a new attestation for a previously poorly attested personal name, introduces a completely new name, and offers a new example of the problematic letter no. 22 (independently of its interpretation). Therefore, this new graffito, despite its prior misinterpretation and the need for an autopsy, is a highly welcomed addition to the Old Phrygian corpus and Phrygian onomastics.

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