

THE INSCRIBED THRACIAN AND PHRYGIAN PHIALAE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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The 1986 discovery of the Rogozen treasure gave a fresh impetus to the discussions on the inscribed Thracian vessels of precious metals in Bulgarian historiography.¹ The interpretation of the inscriptions is an important element in the discussion of the various hypotheses about the function of the treasure and owners of the vessels. Ever since the first discoveries of inscribed phialae in Bulgaria, the name in the genitive was considered to be that of the owner of the vessel.² It was rather the rest of the text and the exact identity of the owner that caused problems.³ The Rogozen finds improve the case for the identification of the owners with well-known Odrysian kings—Kotys I (383-359 BC), Kersebleptes (359-341 BC) and Satokos, the son of Sitalkes.⁴

Most recent research places the Rogozen treasure in a wide Eastern Mediterranean context,⁵ attracting attention to some more parallels. The formal and stylistic analogy of the Thracian and Persian phialae has long been observed.⁶ In terms of form and decoration, as well as for its use as a royal gift, the phiale originates from a Syrian and Assyrian context.⁷ The practice of inscribing the phialae can also be traced back to ancient Eastern traditions. Hence, future comparative research of the inscriptions on Assyrian, Urartian, Phrygian, Persian and Thracian phialae might provide some useful information.

We will concentrate here on the comparisons between Thracian and Phrygian phialae. The corpus of ancient Phrygian inscriptions by Brixhe and Lejeune exemplifies very well the hypothetical nature of the reading of the Phrygian texts, which hardly allows for a reliable interpretation or faithful translation.⁸ On the other hand, similarities between Thrace

¹ Fol 1988: 195-205; Fol 1989: 7-11.

² Filow 1930: 291-294.

³ Alexandrescu 1986: 158.

⁴ Fol 1989: 7.

⁵ Marazov 1989: 90-137.

⁶ Venedikov 1972: 1.

⁷ Smith 1986.

⁸ Brixhe & Lejeune 1984.

and Phrygia on the level of political organization and in ideology possibly provide a comparative context. The material to be compared is, of course, not synchronous because the historical developments had a different pace in each of the two countries. If, however, similar features and insignia of royal power are found, the inscriptions may very well turn out to be related formulae and this idea could help us out with the interpretation of the as yet undeciphered inscriptions.

The inscriptions selected for comparison are the following:

Uratian ⁹	1a.	<i>"Me-nu-a-i-ni-i ù-ri-iš-ḥu-ši-ni</i> gen. gen. "Menua's of the armoury/the fortress"
	1b.	<i>"Ar-gi-iš-ti-ni ù-ri-iš-ḥu-ši-ni</i> gen. "Argishti's of the armoury/the fortress"
	2.	<i>NIG.GA "SAR-du-ri-e-i</i> gen. "Sarduri's property"
	3.	<i>"Ru-sa-a-ni ÂLU TUR-gi</i> gen. "Roussa's town small"
Phrygian ¹⁰	1.	<i>siṭidosakor</i> <i>siṭidos akor siṭido sakor</i> nom./gen. nom./med.-pass.
Persian ¹¹	1.	<i>Χΰyāršāha : Χΰyā : viθigā: kartam</i> gen. gen. loc. acc. partic./med. 3. sg. "Xerxes' the king's in the house made/was made"
Thracian ¹²	1.	<i>Κοτυος ἐξ Βεο/Αργισκης/Απρο/Γειστων</i> gen. gen. "Kotys' of Beos/Argiske/Apros/Geistoi"
	2.	<i>Κοτυος ἐγ Βεο. Δισλοιας ἐποίησε</i> gen. gen. nom. aor. 3. sg. "Kotys' of Beos. Disloias made"
	3.	<i>Τηρης Αματοκου ιη παδρυ</i> nom. gen. (numeral) "Teres (son) of Amatokos'

⁹ Piotrovskij 1952: nos. 1, 2, 5, 8.

¹⁰ Brixhe & Lejeune 1984: no. G-105.

¹¹ Kent 1950: XH, 113; 153.

¹² Filow 1930: 291; Mihailov 1989: 47-48. Two more parallels can be added to

The argument in favour of the view that, owing to the lack of a title, the names are to be considered as those of ordinary craftsmen was discarded almost automatically soon after the discovery of the Rogozen inscriptions. As demonstrated by the cited examples, the royal title appears only in the Persian inscription. To a certain extent this could be explained by the way in which Darius introduced the script¹³ and by the preoccupation with formal representation in the Persian royal code. Thus even an elaborate formulaic title typical of monumental stone inscriptions is to be found on gold plates or vessels.¹⁴ In the other countries the nature of the inscriptions on metal vessels and on stone monuments is entirely different, yet there is absolutely no doubt that some of the bronze phialae from Karmir-Blur are inscribed with the names of the Urartian kings. All royal names are in the possessive genitive, i.e. the owners of the vessels are thus marked. In the Urartian examples the ideogram NIG.GA "property" is often used in front of the royal name. It may be that the notions of "armoury/fortress" and "house" in the genitive possessive from the Urartian and Persian inscriptions correspond to the combination of $\epsilon\xi$ with a toponym in the genitive from the Thracian ones. If G. Mihailov can only surmise that by the latter formula "the owner has emphasized that the settlement from which the object originated belonged to him",¹⁵ this is certainly the case for the Urartian and Persian equivalents. Even though in the Urartian examples there are no toponyms, it is clear that the vessels originally stemmed from some other locality than the place where they were found, Teishabaini. The latter citadel did not yet exist in the time of the reign of the kings mentioned in the inscriptions. Piotrovskij's claim that the bronze objects have later been transported to the new administrative centre in Karmir-Blur is hardly the only possible solution to the problem.¹⁶ As noted before, in contrast to the Thracian vessels, the names of the towns from which the vessels originate are not specified here, but it is nonetheless clear that they came from different places—residential fortresses of the Urartian kings. This point of view is indirectly strengthened by the fact that the town of Irpuni is mentioned on a bronze shield also from Karmir-Blur, though the latter object is dedicated to the god Haldi and therefore it is different from the vessels under discussion. The addition of "small town" in one of the inscriptions on the phialae presents a similar case.

types 1 and 2: (1) $\Xi\epsilon\beta\alpha\nu\omicron\kappa\omicron\nu$. $\tau\alpha\rho\upsilon\lambda\alpha\varsigma$ $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\omicron\iota\epsilon\iota$ on a vessel found in Southern Russia, and (2) $\text{Ἄστιούνειος Ἀναξαγοραίοι ἐξ Λαρίσας}$ on the famous krater from Derveni, see Mihailov 1989: 54, 56.

¹³ Koch 1988: 25-38.

¹⁴ Kent 1950: A¹H, A²Hc, 153-155.

¹⁵ Mihailov 1989: 50.

¹⁶ Piotrovskij 1952: 9-10.

The comparisons prove that the vessels are royal possessions and that they may serve as markers of the extent of the king's realm.

The analysis of the epigraphic evidence and of the cultural and historical environment could facilitate the research of the inscriptions on the Phrygian phialae, the deciphering of which, for the time being, is still uncertain. This holds good in particular for the longer inscription G-105—*siidos akor*. For lack of a word divider, this legend can be read either as *siidos akor* or as *siido sakor*. In terms of grammar, in both cases the first word could be a name or a common noun in the nominative, or more probably, genitive, and the second a name or a common noun again in the nominative, or a medio-passive verb form.¹⁷ In the light of the parallels the verb "to make" should be expected. From a morphological or etymological viewpoint, however, no such meaning can be reasonably assigned to *akor* or *sakor*, and hence it is more probable that we are dealing with a name or common noun. If both words are names in the genitive and nominative, respectively, then there are several possible interpretations suggested by the parallels: "Sidido's (made by) Sakor", in which case the indication of the town and the verb "to make" are omitted. On the analogy of the Urartian versions, one might also assume that *akor* or *sakor* renders the name of a town or the very word "town" itself: "Sidido's of the town/fortress". Typologically the second word would correspond to $\epsilon\acute{\xi}$ *Βεο* in the Thracian examples. In principle, an interpretation in line with *Τηρης Αματοκου* would be possible as well, but note that in this case the order of the elements must be reversed. From a comparative point of view, the reading suggested first seems most acceptable.

The meaning of *Δισλοιας* on the Rogozen vessel is still disputed. Some scholars are convinced that it is the name of a silversmith working in a royal residence,¹⁸ whereas others consider it to be the name of the magistrate of the town who offered the object to Kotys, i.e. that he "made" the present.¹⁹ In the latter instance, the argument goes that the social status of a goldsmith in ancient societies was quite low and his name is not likely to appear on objects of precious metals. Yet, on a mytho-ritual level the making of an object—especially in gold—is a repetition of the cosmogonic act and hence the creators could be raised to the level of king or shaman.²⁰ As far as Phrygia and the ancient Near East are concerned, the status of craftsmen compares to that of scribes, who were self-conscious enough to insert their names in the colophon of

¹⁷ Brixhe & Lejeune 1984: 100.

¹⁸ Fol 1988: 196.

¹⁹ Marazov 1989: 134.

²⁰ Marazov 1985: 32.

the tablets. Scribes, goldsmiths and “keepers of the monuments”²¹ were all entrusted with important ideological tasks and were probably part of the aristocratic elite. Note furthermore that in both Thrace and Phrygia toreutic workshops were connected with the royal residences.

It is clear, however, that for the time being the interpretation of the Phrygian inscription as proposed here will remain purely hypothetical. Bayun and Orel present the translation “to achieve his goal Sakor”,²² which is linguistically accurate but lacks confirmation from a cultural and historical perspective. Moreover, since the inscription constitutes an isolated case without further parallels in Phrygian itself, one should best stick to the reservations expressed by Brixhe and Lejeune. If, however, the considerations presented here are valid, then *Sakor* may be assumed to be a royal name. On the other hand, it must be admitted that it does seem strange that not a single object bears the name of king Midas, although the latter has been mentioned in Assyrian and ancient Greek sources, his name has occurred in monumental Phrygian inscriptions and the MM mound near Gordion has been identified as his burial. Bearing in mind the historical and political context of the Thracian phialae—they all bear the names of Odrysian rulers and yet were all found beyond Odrysian territory—, *Sakor* is probably to be identified as a neighbouring allied chief. It is by no means implausible to postulate the existence of another Phrygian dynasty, different from the one at Gordion. For Thrace it is clear that the vessels bear the names of the most powerful kings. On the basis of this analogy, then, we should surmise that in the late 8th century BC, *Sakor* was more powerful than, or at least as powerful as, king Midas—a fact that cannot be supported by other sources.

The evidence discussed here suggests that the similarity of a cultural and historical background for the metal phialae in the Balkan-Anatolian region, more specifically their function as royal insignia and political gifts, allow for certain linguistic comparisons. These linguistic parallels can be a valuable aid for the interpretation of the Phrygian texts and possible future discoveries from Thrace. For the time being, however, it may suffice to note that the comparative approach favours the most current views on the inscriptions of the Rogozen treasure.

²¹ Old Phrygian *akenanogavos*, see Brixhe & Lejeune 1984: M-01a, M-04, W-01a; cf. Bayun & Orel 1988: 175.

²² Bayun & Orel 1988: 193.

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