

Article

The theonym RA in Carian inscriptions in Abydos

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Abstract: The paper examines a number of Carian inscriptions found in the Temple of Abydos. It is shown that they contain the theonym *RA*, a feature that has been overlooked so far and has some bearing on the issue of deciphering and reading Carian.

Keywords: Carian, Decipherment, Alphabet.

1. Introduction

The Carian language remains to a large extent a pocket of residual shadow in the ancient eastern Mediterranean world. Paradoxically Caria itself has not revealed much about Carian and even less that can be easily used to investigate or understand Carian. Most of what is known of Carian has been found either in Egypt, thanks to numerous mercenaries who lived there around the middle of the first millennium BCE, or in Greek texts. About 170 Carian inscriptions have been found in Egypt and published, as noted in Adiego (2007:17), and more are known to exist but have not been published yet. The present paper focuses on the graffiti found in the temple of Abydos.

On the whole, the assignment of these inscriptions to Carian relies mainly on two features:

- (1) They are poorly understood, and usually left untranslated,
- (2) They are written in a set of alphabets sharing a number of graphic peculiarities, that cannot be found elsewhere.

Attempts at reading Carian since the 19th century can be assigned to two major approaches: the first and most ancient one assumes phonetic values similar to those of Greco-Phoenician letters, the other assumes a discontinuity between Carian and other alphabetic practices. Lately, in the last two decades, claims have been made about a definitive decipherment of Carian. On that basis Carian is held to be an Indo-European language with potentially close affinities with the Anatolian branch. This decipherment is described and promoted by Adiego (2007) and results from the joined endeavors of several scholars. It belongs to the second class of decipherments and has been gradually accepted by a number of reputable Indo-Europeanists, among whom Melchert could be mentioned. So it would seem that the issue of deciphering Carian is settled and that there is no point in trying to assess whether this definitive decipherment is correct or not, or whether some emendations are necessary.

The paper examines the rather numerous instances of the theonym *Ra* in the Carian corpus of Abydos. The religious and cultic activities in Abydos were originally dedicated to Osiris but the theonym that can be identified is that of *Ra*, not that of Osiris, following the gradual association of both gods as is written in the tomb of Sety I: “Ra rests in Osiris, and Osiris rests in Ra”. As is well-known the transliteration *Ra* of Egyptian hieroglyphs only involves consonants, namely *[r^h]. Vowels are known from names of Pharaohs written in cuneiform <ri-a>, so the theonym was either *[r^h] or *[ri^ha] in consonantal or complete rendering. This point is relevant for the present survey of Carian inscriptions as a defective and consonantal transcription of *RA* will not read the same as a fully alphabetic **Ri^ha*.

2. *Historiographical background*

Adiego (2007:166-204) who claims to have definitively deciphered Carian divides the history of Carian studies into three periods or approaches:

- (1) the semi-syllabic approach, from 1887 to 1949,
- (2) the Greco-Phoenician alphabetic approach,
- (3) the Egyptian approach, since 1972.

The first work on Carian is due to Archibald H. Sayce in 1887. Sayce made the assumption that the Carian alphabet must share values with the Greek one. Adiego (2007:170) assesses Sayce's contribution as follows: "the failure of his decipherment and the dilettantism of many of his proposals", which sounds severe. After Sayce, Ferdinand Bork tackled the field, which led to what is called the semi-syllabic approach. The Carian alphabet was supposed to be a mixed system with alphabetic and syllabic signs. Bork's system was retained by Friedrich who nevertheless tried to simplify it and make more sense out of Bork's draft. The comments of Adiego (2007:172) about Bork's are equally severe: "His analyses are totally arbitrary. Similarly, the meanings he attributes to the words are capricious." or "Needless to say, all these speculations, based on an invalid decipherment and a nonexistent linguistic family, have been superseded." Diakonov (1971:20) likewise states that Bork's grammatical analyzes are only interesting for the historical study of science. It took decades until the 1950s to get rid of the semi-syllabic approach construed by Bork.

In 1949 a very long inscription was found in Kaunos and with fewer than 30 signs. It showed that Carian was certainly written in a strictly alphabetic system. In the following years most of the known inscriptions were collected and published, a necessary prerequisite for progress. The next linguist who tried to decipher Carian was Shevoroshkin. He made it clear that Carian was indeed alphabetically written but he made no significant advances in the understanding of Carian in more than thirty years of investigation. Other unlucky contributors were O. Masson, Y. Otpushchikov, P. Meriggi and R. Gusmani. In 1972, K. Zauzich, an Egyptologist started to investigate bilingual texts in Carian and Egyptian. This method opened the third period of decipherment and was further developed by T. Kowalski in 1972 and then by J. Ray, D. Schürr and I. Adiego, ultimately leading to what Adiego calls the definitive decipherment of Carian. Generally speaking a major and conspicuous feature of Adiego's decipherment is that Carian letters would appear to have phonetic values completely different from the usual Greco-Phoenician alphabet: the *metacharacterismos* of Carian.

3. *The so-called Egyptian method*

The principle of the 'Egyptian method' is to compare the Carian inscriptions and their Egyptian counterparts and to look for equivalents of the Person names which are cited in the Egyptian texts of these bilinguals or quasi-bilinguals. In theory this method should lead to a secure and objective identification of the phonetic values of Carian letters. An example will show how the method is applied. The following inscription is in Adiego (2007:40):

ΘΒΜFAΘ ΘΒΑΥΑΤ ΥΟΝΑΤ
Memphis 7 (Cf. Masson-Yoyotte 1956)

The original inscription is written from right to left on a funerary stela. But for the sake of clarity it will be handled written from left to right. Adiego reads the texts as being TANOY <tamou> TAYAEΘ <tanaiś> ΘAFMEO <qarsio> and makes this comment: "The stela provides an Egyptian inscription that also mentions the dead man *T3j-ḥp-jm-w* son of T3[...]. The correspondence to the Carian text is evident: *tamou*, son of *tanai*." This interpretation needs to be discussed as (at least) one alternative is possible.

The interpretation retained by Adiego has it that N in TANOY is [m] while M in ΘAFMEO is [s]. A direct reading following Greco-Phoenician alphabets would suggest that N is [n] while M

is [m]. For example it would seem that $\Theta AF^M \Theta O$ is not <qarsio> but either <t^(h)aFmeo> in the Greek way, with theta as initial, or <t^ʔwmh^s> in the Semitic way. In all cases the word that contains an obvious M [m] is the last. In addition the Egyptian name has apparently at least three syllables <T3jhpj-mw> while Adiego's reading of TANOY <tamou> has only two. This issue is not addressed and is in fact a major stumbling-block. The Egyptian counterpart provides the name *T3j-hp-jm-w*. This word is apparently given with vocalic indications in Egyptian and should logically have at least three syllables starting with stops <T-p-m->. In addition it cannot be excluded that this name has four syllables instead of three <T-h-p-m->. Adiego proposes that the first word TANOY <tamou> is the same as Egyptian *T3j-hp-jm-w* but that seems hard to believe: how come the syllable -pv- has disappeared altogether in *tamou* and <N> stands for <m> instead of <n>? The word that seems to contain a <m> is the last one so the consonantal skeleton <T-h-p-m-> is to be compared with $\Theta AF^M (\Theta O)$. It would therefore appear that the Egyptian name is written in Carian alphabet with four consonants <t^ʔ-w-m-(h^s)>. The structural coincidence between the four consonants *Thpm* and the four consonants <t^ʔFm> is much better than with TANOY <tamou> with a full syllable missing and maybe even two syllables missing. The end of the word <h^s> are possibly grammatical markers added to the stem <t^ʔ-F-m->.

On the whole the conclusion is that the identification proposed by Adiego (2007:40) is not as evident as he would have it and that the expected person name is not the first word but may be the last one. A conspicuous feature of the definitive decipherment of Carian is that the most obvious readings always seem to be false. For example Karlsson-Henry (2008) recently published a graffito on a plate found in Labraunda. The inscription reads:



Karlsson-Henry (2008:172-3) propose to read this as standing for *bziom* in the standard decipherment:

Therefore, we clearly have in Labraunda a *bz-iom*. The only problem with this new name is the difficulty to find parallel forms of *bz-* in the Carian onomastic lists of Greek sources. The graffito is nonetheless – and without a doubt – written in “canonical” Carian. This text should then be recorded as Carian Labraunda 1 (C.La 1).

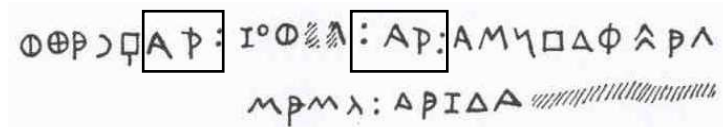
But why should it not just be read more straightforwardly as being <L B R O N> that is to say with vowels *Labra^un*, in coherence with the very place where this artefact was found? It would seem that the definitive decipherment makes the obvious look false. This example clearly shows that the Carian alphabet is purely consonantal and does not indicate vowels: the city name *Labra^un* is written <L B R O N>, that is to say [lbr^un] with no vowels. This feature will be confirmed by the theonym *Ra*.

4. The theonym *Ra* in Abydos inscriptions

The next point is that several inscriptions in Abydos contain the name of the god *Ra* but this situation has remained unnoticed so far. As mentioned before the theonym *Ra* was actually pronounced *[ri^ʔa] as cuneiform renditions show but in a purely consonantal way it is written with only two consonants. For example:

: Ap:

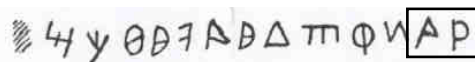
In this inscription the two letters <R A> with value *[rʔ] are separated by dots <:> from the rest. It can be noted that these two letters <R A> always appear either at the beginning of the inscription or after a word separator in Abydos. They never stand in the middle of a string of letters. The full inscription, to be read from right to left, contains two instances of the name of the god *Ra* *[riʔa] on the first line.



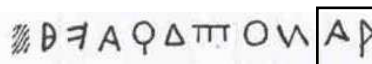
Abydos 32 (Friedrich 1932 Nr 25)

Adiego (2007:91) disregards the second word-separator in order to read what he calls a “well-known Carian name”. This disregard is clearly unacceptable in its principle. And what is worse this cleanly separated word is the theonym *Ra* *[r(i)ʔa]. After all it is little wonder that visitors or pilgrims in the temple of Abydos wrote the name of the God *Ra* on the walls.

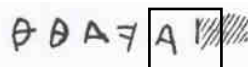
The following inscriptions also contain the theonym *Ra*:



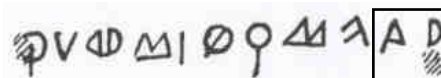
Abydos 5 (Friedrich 1932 Nr 3b)



Abydos 6 (Friedrich 1932 Nr 3c)



Abydos 25 (Friedrich 1932 Nr 18)



Abydos 35 (Friedrich 1932 Nr 27)

These inscriptions are certainly some kind of prayer or invocation to the god *Ra* himself.

5. Conclusions or perspectives

Judging from the theonym *Ra* in Abydos inscriptions and the plate in Labraunda bearing the city name <lbron>, and not the impossible <bziom>, the conclusion is fairly clear: there is something wrong with the “definitive” decipherment of Carian. The system of transcription proposed in Adiego (2007:21) is thoroughly inadequate. It conflicts with the most obvious and natural readings of the letters and words. On the whole it appears that the Carian alphabet is similar in its values to the Greco-Phoenician alphabet. The so-called ‘Egyptian method’ shows that Carian is written in a consonantal alphabet that does not indicate vowels, as is traditionally the case in (ancient) Semitic languages

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