

## KING MIDAS IN SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA

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King Midas of Phrygia entered modern consciousness by means of Greek mythology, which presented an image of a fabulously wealthy, greedy and rather stupid Oriental monarch. He is remembered primarily for his “golden touch,” as well as the ass’s ears with which Apollo punished him. However, since the discovery of the Assyrian documents of King Sargon II, the identification of King Mita of Mushki with the Midas in the Greek literary sources has been accepted (Winckler 1898). Thus, the identification of the Mushki with the Phrygians was established, although there are still scholars who do not accept it (e.g., Laminger-Pascher 1989, 24). The historical claim of King Midas became even stronger when his name was found in Old Phrygian inscriptions (Brixhe and Lejeune 1984, M-01a). Progress in the archaeological study of Phrygia in particular and of Anatolia in general have confirmed the political might of the Phrygian kingdom and its influence over both the East Greek world and its Anatolian neighbors. Exactly how the historical Midas took on legendary and mythological character in Greek literature and how much Phrygian reality is reflected in the Greek texts are questions that remain open.

Although the Mushki are mentioned earlier, the most informative group of Near Eastern texts on King Mita/Midas is the royal inscriptions and letters of Sargon II. This corpus sheds light on the political situation in southeastern Anatolia at the end of the eighth century BC and reveals that King Mita of Mushki was a mighty adversary of Assyria who endlessly organized anti-Assyrian coalitions with other rulers of the smaller kingdoms of Tabal, Tyana, Que and Carchemish, only finally to become an ally of Assyria.

The historical geography of southeastern Anatolia is very difficult to restore according to the Assyrian texts and the Luwian inscriptions discovered there. The exact location and the boundaries of the numerous small kingdoms, or city-states, are yet to be defined. Tabal was the name by which the Assyrians referred to the southeastern corner of the Anatolian plateau (Hawkins 2000b, 425). Sargon II’s texts provide secure evidence for the intense political activity of Mita in the region for about a decade, from 718 to 709 BC.

The first possible reference to a conspiracy pitting Mita against Assyria appears in 718 BC. Sargon II had removed Kiakki of Sinuhtu (one of the Tabalian kingdoms) from the throne, because of his anti-Assyrian activity together with Mita (in the fragmentary Nimrud cylinders; Gadd 1954, 180; Lafranchi 1988, 61; Hawkins 2000b, 427). He gave his city to Kurtî of Atuna (Tunna?; Fuchs 1993, Ann. 70–71). In turn Kurtî, or Gurdî, after flirting with Mita and after being frightened by the fate of Ambaris, was forced to submit to Assyria.<sup>1</sup>

In 717 BC, Pisiris of Carchemish was also accused of disloyalty to the Assyrian king and of allying himself with Mita (Fuchs 1993, Ann. 72–76; Gadd 1954, 179; Hawkins 2000a, 76). In 715 BC Sargon claimed that he took over fortresses in Que that had previously been conquered by the king of the Mushki (Fuchs 1993, Ann. 199–20, 125–26; Hawkins 2000a, 42). Sometime before 718 BC, Sargon set Ambaris, “the Tabalian,” on the throne and gave him his daughter and the land of Hilakku as a dowry (Fuchs 1993, Ann. 194–198; Prunk

29–30; Hawkins 2000b, 427). But, accused of conspiring with Mita, the Urartian king Rusa and the Tabalian kings, he was deprived of his throne in 713 BC (Fuchs 1993, Ann. 198–200; Hawkins 2000b, 428). Probably at that same time Sargon turned Bit-Burutas (Tabal) and Hilakku into an Assyrian province (Hawkins 2000b, 427). The same accusations were made against Tarhunazi of Melid in 711 BC and provoked the Assyrian intrusion into the country (Fuchs 1993, Ann. 204–210; Hawkins 1993–97a, 38; 2000a, 285).

Finally, the letter of Sargon to the governor of Que, discovered in Nimrud, informs us that Mita had intercepted an embassy that Urik of Que had sent to Urartu and handed it over to the Assyrians, declaring his friendship (Parpola 1987, no. 1). Sargon instructs his governor to return Phrygian subjects held by the Assyrians, probably from a previous political and military encounter between both countries. The very favorable answer of the Assyrian king, showing readiness to accept the Phrygian as a friendly ruler, shows the political and strategic importance of this alliance. The letter was initially dated to 738 BC, to the time of Tiglath-pileser III, then to 710/709 BC (Saggs 1958, 202–5; Postgate 1973, 33; Mellink 1979, 250; 1991, 622; Hawkins 1993–1997b, 272). Recently, Lafranchi has dated it to 715 BC, placing Urik's envoys to Urartu, the Assyrian attack against Mita in Que, Mita's forwarding the envoys to Assyria, and the writing of the letter all at around the same time (Lafranchi 1988). However, most scholars agree that the date of this letter is 710/709 BC. Thus, for a decade, Mita's political partners ranged from Melid to Que.<sup>2</sup>

One of the possible implications of Sargon's good disposition towards Mita in 710/709 BC, as already noted by others, was his intention to control the kings of Tabal through the Phrygian ruler (Hawkins 2000a, 42). This demonstrates Mita's close relations with, and the influence he wielded over, Tabal and Tyana. The Phrygian presence in the east was probably earlier than the above-mentioned events, at least in the first half of the eighth century BC, as shown by the inscription of Yariris of Carchemish and the one from Til-Barsip, which speak of the Mushki (Hawkins 2000a, KARKAMIS A6, 126; Thureau-Dangin and Dunand 1936, 149).

The Near Eastern texts suggest that Mita had the closest political relations with the Tabalian rulers. Some scholars even propose a common Phrygian-Tabalian kingdom, which Sargon had to deal with, or a Phrygian protectorate in the border area between Tabal and Tuwana (Börker-Klähn 2003, 85).

More than twenty years ago, Diakonoff suggested that *Kurtî/Gurdî* can be identified with the legendary Phrygian ruler Gordias, known from the Greek texts as King Midas's father.<sup>3</sup> Scholars continue to debate the possible identification of *Kurtî/Gurdî* from the Assyrian texts with Kurtis from Hieroglyphic Luwian inscriptions and the relation/identification between the several individuals attested under the name of *Gurdî* (Aro-Valjus 1999, 431–32). *Kurtî* of Atuna/Tuna received the house of Sinuhtu after Kiakki's removal, only to become disloyal to Assyria himself. A certain *Gurdî* concluded a vassal treaty with Sargon II. *Gurdî*, "the Kulummean," is known from Sargon's Eponymous Chronicle in 705 BC and *Gurdî* of Til-Garimu in the time of Sennacherib (695 BC; Aro-Valjus 1999, 431). *Gurdî/Kurtî* was most probably the same person as Kurtis of Atuna, who left his name in the Hieroglyphic Luwian inscription from Bohça and on the Kululu lead strips (Fuchs 2000, 642). J. D. Hawkins considers this identification very probable but has some doubts about the locations of Atuna/Tuna (and Tyana; Hawkins 1979, 166; 2000b, 431–32; Hawkins and Morpurgo-Davies 1979, 390; accepted also by Fuchs 2000, 642, contra Aro 1998, 142–43; Aro-Valjus 1999, 431).

The inscriptions from Bohça give the name of Kurtis's father, Ashwis(is),<sup>4</sup> whom Diakonoff suggests is Askanios, one of the Phrygian chieftains in the *Iliad*.<sup>5</sup> Linguistically *Kurtî/Gurdî/Kurtis* is not impossible, but we simply do not have enough evidence to be certain. Could a Phrygian ally from Atuna be turned into a member of the dynasty by the Greek mythographers, while his father becomes another Phrygian epic hero? In the present state of the data one can only hypothesize that the Greeks were aware of the close political and cultural relations between the Phrygians and the kingdoms in southeastern Anatolia.

The above-mentioned written evidence has been referred to, but usually very briefly, in general entries about the Mushki/Phrygians, or in attempts to interpret certain archaeological finds. While considering

the finds from the tumuli at Bayındır in Lycia, the political situation of the late-eighth century in southeastern Anatolia has often been brought up (most recently by Börker-Klähn 2003). However, Lycia is further west from the area in question and, more importantly, this spectacular discovery has not yet been published properly.

Phrygian political involvement in southeastern Anatolia has often been discussed in relation to Warpalawa, king of Atuna, the best-attested Tabalian king. He is estimated to have reigned at minimum between 738–710 BC (Hawkins 2000b, 432). He was not a Phrygian vassal or client state (as suggested by Berges 1998, 187), but was a Phrygian ally and a strong ruler in his own right, as his inscriptions demonstrate.<sup>6</sup> It has long been proposed that Warpalawa is wearing a Phrygian fibula and possibly a Phrygian garment on his rock-cut relief at Ivriz.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, there is an almost exact parallel of Warpalawa's fibula in a piece found in the so-called "Midas Mound" at Gordion.<sup>8</sup> Most scholars interpret it as a royal gift by Mita to his ally.<sup>9</sup> In view of the political and cultural context, one can also make the case for the adoption of a status symbol.

The archaeological record of Tyana and Tabal has also occasionally been quoted. Many scholars have noted the Phrygian affinities of the pottery discovered in Porsuk.<sup>10</sup> The numerous tumuli, unfortunately unexcavated and many of them looted, are also worth noting (Aro 1998, 243; Berges 1998, 186). A tomb near Kaynarca yielded a bronze belt and bronze vessels comparable to the inventory of the Gordion tombs (Akkaya 1991). They attest to a Phrygian tradition, regardless of whether they are interpreted as belonging to members of Tyana royal family, as some do (Akkaya 1991, 27; Berges 1998, 187), or to Phrygians.

There are also Old Phrygian inscriptions discovered in Tyana, the so-called Black Stones (basalt slabs), which might be among the earliest ones.<sup>11</sup> Although the texts are fragmentary, Midas's name is distinguished in one of them.<sup>12</sup> Most scholars agree that it is the great Midas who is mentioned. One of the suggestions about the nature of the monument is a historical text, commemorating the alliance with Warpalawa (Dupré 1983, 110). M. Mellink claims that these might be the Phrygian equivalent of Warpalawa's stele from Bor (1991, 626). A kenotaph or a "tomb-like" monument (Sams 1995, 1157) seems to me less probable, while a public text after the model of the Assyrian royal inscriptions (Brixhe 1991, 45–46; 2004, 103) is hardly possible in view with the current Phrygian epigraphic data.

A variant of a title, known from two rock-cut inscriptions from "Midas City" (*memevais - memeuis*; Brixhe and Lejeune 1984, M-01b and M-02), is mentioned in the same Tyana stone, where Midas's name is detected. Variants of the peculiar Phrygian sign † are used next to the normal form both in the above-mentioned inscriptions from "Midas City" and on the Tyana stones. It might be worth noting that the name of the dedicator of the two texts from "Midas City," is accompanied by other titles, besides *memevais*. *K† iyanaveyos/k† ianaveyos*, occurring in both texts, is considered either as a title, or as an ethnonym (Brixhe and Lejeune 1984, 10). It has been suggested this word be interpreted as "of Tyana."<sup>13</sup>

It is very unlikely that these are political or historical texts comparable to the Near Eastern and Neo-Hittite traditions, as most of the Old Phrygian inscriptions are dedicatory. So, if we assume that this is some kind of royal representation or claim of political domination by the Phrygian king, this would have rather been done through a dedication or religious type of message. On the other hand, inscribing a stele was not so often the Phrygian practice. Besides the rock-cut inscriptions and the numerous sherd graffiti, we have few texts carved on stone slabs.<sup>14</sup> The most plausible reconstruction of the monument(s) from Tyana<sup>15</sup> makes it very similar to the stelae known from Tabal. They have rounded tops and usually are inscribed on all sides, just like the Tyana "Black Stones." Recently, J. Börker-Klähn has been concerned with a relief from Gökbez. Two such stelae, attached together, are represented on the background of the relief (Börker-Klähn 2004, Abb. 27). One cannot help but compare them with the Phrygian rock-carved "double idols" (Haspels 1971, fig. 36). Could these round-topped stelae from Tyana and Tabal have influenced Phrygian "idols"?

Mellink has drawn attention to the representation on a second, smaller relief from İvriz (Bier 1976, Abb. 5): A man in a long garment, followed by another person who carries a sacrificial animal, probably a servant, heads to a platform cut into the rock (Mellink 1979, 252; cf. Börker-Klähn 2000, 39, 62; 2004, 173–74). There are a few steps and a rectangular opening, interpreted as a libation basin. This setting conforms very well with the Phrygian megalithic rituality related to the Mother-Goddess worship.<sup>16</sup>

I will not enter here into the discussion of the relationship between Kubaba and Kybele (for which see Roller 1999, 44–53 and Munn in this volume). However, one cannot miss the fact that the rulers of the Neo-Hittite kingdoms were also closely associated with goddess worship. The kings of Carchemish were her dear servants; they were responsible for the restoration of her image(s), shrines, and temples (see “set” and “reseated Kubaba” in the Luwian Hieroglyphic inscriptions from Carchemish; Hawkins 1981).

Although of a later date, another “black stone” is worth mentioning. Not far from the area under discussion, in Cappadocia, a basalt slab was discovered, inscribed this time in Aramaic. It is dated to the fifth to fourth centuries BC and mentions “Kubaba from PWSD/R which is in Kastabalay.” This is probably a city or place sacred to the goddess, whose name possibly relates to the Anatolian toponym Piwassura, derived from *Pirwa* and corresponding to Artemis’s epithet *Peraisia* in a passage in Strabo (Strabo, *Geog.*, 12.2.7; Iamblichus, *De Myst.*, 3.5; Dupont-Sommer 1964, 13). Strabo speaks about the priestesses of Artemis *Peraisia* in Kastabala “who walk with naked feet over hot ambers without pain.” The survivals of this ritual practice have been observed by ethnographers in modern Bulgarian and northern Greek villages and have long been discussed in the literature (Robert 1964, 50–64; A. Fol 1998, 58–59; V. Fol 2000, 187–92).

The combined data of the monuments demonstrate that the Phrygian involvement in southeastern Anatolia was not so short-lived or occasional as initially assumed. The closer examination of the written sources suggest that the Phrygians under King Midas played a paramount role in the area, probably for a couple of decades in the eighth century BC, while their presence might have been much longer. The first quarter of the seventh century BC saw the Mushki again in the area, probably allied with the Cimmerians (Starr 1990, no. 1; Aro 1998, 151–53; Börker-Klähn 2004). Neither the “Black Stones” from Tyana, nor the tombs at Bayındır, Lycia, look isolated anymore. We would not be able to estimate securely what kind of Phrygian population there was in southeastern Anatolia, but the evidence of the cultural interactions can not be assigned only to isolated contacts, garrisons or diplomats.<sup>17</sup> Here is the spot where most probably the Phrygians were in touch with the ancient Near Eastern cultural heritage and experienced the influence of the Neo-Hittite/North Syrian world. Here, another stele of Warpalawa from İvriz is worth mentioning: it contains a bilingual Luwian-Phoenician text, the latter of which is still unpublished (Dinçol 1994, 117–28). Thus, one of king Mita’s allies was setting up his stele written in Phoenician as well. Phoenician and Aramaic inscriptions of the ninth to seventh centuries were found in southeastern Anatolia, in a well-attested Luwian-speaking area. Perhaps some traditional views on the Phrygian adoption of the Semitic script should be reconsidered or modified, especially in light of the new dates for the Gordion destruction level (Brixhe 2002, 25–28; DeVries et al. 2003).

Thus, Phrygians played a significant role in the cultural interactions between the East and the West. These interactions occurred in a zone that exhibits distinguishable typological parallels in kingship, cult practice and rituality, which ran from the Balkans through the Phrygian Highlands and is echoed in southeastern Anatolia. At the same time, echoes from the Neo-Hittite world were heard in, and absorbed by, “western” Phrygia.

## NOTES

- 1 In 713 BC or shortly after (ARAB II § 214; Hawkins 2000b, 428)
- 2 Even if Lafranchi’s arguments are accepted for a shorter period of Phrygian domination in Que, Sargon’s letter is quite eloquent about Mita’s role in the political events in southeastern Anatolia. Besides, as noted above, Kiakki’s conspiracy with Mita, dated before 718 BC, is evidence for an earlier Phrygian involvement in the area.
- 3 Diakonov (1981, 51), Diakonoff and Neroznak (1985, XIII). Röhl’s suggestion for a Lycian name (1957–1971, 703) can hardly be accepted.
- 4 Hawkins (2000b, 431, 479), who is more inclined to compare the name with that of Ušhitti; according to C. Melchert (personal communication) the name should be read As(a)ku(a)sis.
- 5 *Il.* 2.862; Diakonov (1981, 57). He argues that Kurtis’s elaborated title “the king heard of by the west and the east” is foreign to the local tradition.
- 6 See Aro’s interpretation of Urballa’s appearance in Sargon II’s letter to his governor of Que (Aro 1998, 138).
- 7 Muscarella (1967a, 83–84; 1967b, 19–20; 1988, 422, note 5); Boehmer (1973, 151–52); Berges (1998, 185–86, n. 27); Börker-Klähn (2004, 168). It is debatable whether the entire garment and the belt represented on the relief matches the Phrygian finds as Boehmer and Berges assume.
- 8 Type XII.9 according to Blinckenberg’s classification (Young 1981 MM187A, 160, pl. 76. F). Aro argues for a Tabalian origin of Warpalawa’s fibula (1998, 221).
- 9 Boehmer (1973, 156); Dupré (1983, 110). Other explanation have been offered; for example, the fibula could have been imported, or the result of diplomatic marriage.
- 10 The first period of Porsuk level III was compared to Gordion pre-destruction and destruction levels (Dupré 1983, 111; Sams 1994, 53–54, 155), the latter being recently dated a century earlier, i.e., ca. 800 BC (see also Mellink 1979, 254; Börker-Klähn 2003, 75).
- 11 Brixhe and Lejeune (1984, T-01-03); Brixhe (1991; 2004, 94–103); Vassileva (1992).
- 12 Brixhe and Lejeune (1984, T-02b, 264–66): *tumida* is yet unclear, but *mida* in the fourth line could be Midas.
- 13 Orel (1997, 13) with the earlier bibliography. Although rejected by Brixhe and Lejeune (1984, 257), this hypothesis is worth further exploration.
- 14 There are several stone inscriptions from Gordion (G-01, G-02), some of them on small stone pieces (G-03-09); there is a Graeco-Persian stele from Bithynia (B-02). It seems that the number of inscribed bigger stone slabs or stelae is larger in the eastern areas of the spread of Phrygian script: C-01, P-02, -03, -04. The ones from Pteria (near Boğazköy) are fragments of parallelepiped stone blocks.
- 15 Mellink (1979, fig. 1d). Although very similar, the three pieces of stone slabs from Tyana belonged most probably to three different monuments of the same type (Brixhe 1991, 41; 2004, 103).
- 16 Thus the interpretation of the opening as meant for the erection of a stele, suggested by Mellink, seems less probable.
- 17 Brixhe argues that there was no Phrygian-speaking population in Tyana (Brixhe 1991, 45).

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