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Reviving the Reading of an Old Phrygian Seal¹

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Abstract. A recent revision of an inscribed Old-Phrygian stamp seal of the Borowski Collection is nullified by new photographic documentation.

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Some forty years ago Roberto Gusmani and I published an inscribed Old Phrygian pyramidal stamp seal of white chalcedony belonging to the Elie Borowski collection.²

After a careful scrutiny of the inscription – we had the original piece at our disposal –, our decoding of the text was, unhesitatingly,

pserkeyoyatas

which we divided into *pserkeyoy atas*.

The second member clearly reflects the widespread Anatolian *Lallname*³ in the sigmatic Nominative, while the initial element was interpreted either as an adesinential Optative – so that the whole text *might* mean ‘*valeat (?)*⁴ *Atas*’ (Gusmani, Poetto 1981: 66) –, or as the Dative Sg. of a P(ersonal) N(ame), in which case the sense should be ‘*Atas* to *Pserkeyo*’ (Gusmani, Poetto 1981: 66 n. 16), with the assumption that we were dealing with “un dat[ivo] ‘genitivale’: *A. (figlio) a = di P.*”

However, such a rendering of the initial constituent did not remain without dissent:⁵ the first to cast doubts – albeit in a decent way – were

¹ For useful interventions I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer.

² Gusmani, Poetto 1981, reproduced here Pl. I.1a and 1b (impression). Presently the object is part of Jonathan Rosen’s private collection (New York): see Obrador-Cursach 2018b: 666 with n. 7.

³ Gusmani, Poetto 1981: 65; Orel 1997: 417 ad ate-; Brixhe 2013: 58; Oreshko 2021: 290-291 (also on the variants) and, primarily, Zgusta 1966: 105-108.

⁴ Or the like, at any rate an auspicious phrase.

⁵ Yet acknowledged by Orel 1997: 455 (with the following commentary: “Derived from

Brixhe, Lejeune 1984: 271 ad 1: “La perte d’un éclat de la pierre a endommagé le sommet de la lettre; les éditeurs donnent *r* [recte: *r*] sans hesitation (bien qu’on puisse songer aussi à *u* ?).”⁶

This incertitude was heeded by Lubotsky 1994 in *TITUS* ad Dd-101 (“*pserʔkeyoyatas*”), but the most recent position in such a direction, with apparent proclivity to rehabilitate a reading “*pseukeoy*”, was repeatedly advanced, although in a somewhat inconsistent and misleading perspective, by Obrador Cursach in 2018a, 2018b, 2019 and 2020: “Malauradament, un cop en la part superior de la inscripció fa que sigui difícil saber si hem de llegir el primer mot [...] com *pserʔkeyoy* o *pseuʔkeyoy*” (2018b: 666), “The current reading of the text is: *pserʔkeyoy atas* or *pseuʔkeyoy atas*” (2019: 205 n. 3), but with decided propensity for “*pseukeoy*” in 2018a: 273 “***pserkeyoy*** see *pseukeoy*”, with the subsequent annotation (2020: 338 s.v. “*pserkeyoy*”): “sg.dat. *pserkeyoy* or *pseukeoy* [...]” Read on a stamp seal before a clear PN in sg.nom: *pseuʔkeyoy atas*. Although the reading of the fourth letter is not at all clear because of a dent (but given the shape of the end of the strokes a ***u* can be preferred** [boldface mine⁸] [...], perhaps related somehow to *pseik-* [!]. Since no parallel can be found, a very attractive possibility suggested by Pisani (1982) is to consider *pserkeyoy*⁹ a PN borrowed from Gr. Σπερχειός, a PN found in Roman Caria [...] (= 2018a: 273).¹⁰

Nonetheless, an unpublished image of this document (Pl. I.2a and 2b [enlarged]) taken from my photographic dossier, appears to be crucial thereon: the script incontestably shows

*pserkeyoy*¹¹ atas

Our original reading is thus vindicated; both exegeses of *pserkeyoy* – Optative or anthroponym – are likewise defensible, depending on the present context; a conclusive result could only be offered by a textual framework beyond debate.

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pserk- [“A name of a god somehow connected with lions. The stem is preserved in Pisid Ψερκιοκωμητης”, p. 454],” yet duly criticized by Obrador Cursach 2018a: 273 and 2020: 337; the correct rendition is *pseik-*: see Brixhe, Lejeune 1984: (42-)43 ad W-02, Pl. XXI.1); Pisani 1982; Boardman 1998: 3a with Pl. I.2 (photograph of the impression reproducing that in Gusmani, Poetto 1981: Pl. I.[4]); Bernheimer 2007: 51b ad GP-1.

⁶ What presented in Diakonoff, Neroznak 1985: 75 ad A90: “x *SERKEJoJATAS*” and the remark (n. 1): “The publishers read *P*; dubious” concerning the initial letter, deserve no consideration.

⁷ But with the inversion “*pseukeoy* or *pserkeyoy*” a few lines above (p. 337 s.v. *pseika*³).

⁸ Envisaged already in Obrador Cursach 2018b: 666: “Només ho seria si s’acceptés que per un error el gravador de W-02 s’oblidà del traç oblic d’una prestesa <u> *pseuk..*?, i que en Dd 102 [recte: 101] la lectura vàlida és *pseuʔkeyoy*,” though here in connection with the improper link with *pseik*² in W-02 by Orel 1997: 41.

⁹ Understood by Pisani as a genit. in *-o-syo to be compared with the Armenian Genitive Sg. in -oy (as in *getoy* < *get* ‘river’). This explanation is recognized by Witczak 1991-1992: 159 (“Addition”), with the integration that “*pserkeyoy* stands for **pserkeyoyo* with an [sic!] usual elision of the final vowel -o before initial a- of the Phrygian man’s name Atas.”

¹⁰ Strictly speaking, Pisani did not assert that *pserkeyo-* is a PN borrowed from Gk. Σπερχειός as indicated by Obrador-Cursach 2020: 338, but that “possa essere la stessa cosa che Σπερχειός, secondo il Pape-Benseler nome di fiume in Tessaglia, località della Doride e antroponimo, probabilmente di origine pre-greca.”

¹¹ Validated, incidentally, also by the excellent photograph GP-1a in Bernheimer 2007: 52.

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Pl. I



1a



1b



2a



2b