

Lydian Sources on Achaemenid Sardis

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The Lydian language belongs to the Anatolian group of the Indo-European languages, is recorded in an alphabetic script related to that of Greek, and was presumably first committed to writing at the time of the independent Lydian Kingdom ruled by the Mermnad dynasty (ca. 680-547 BCE). Nevertheless, the majority of Lydian inscriptions date back to the subsequent Achaemenid period. Of particular historical interest are the texts found in the precinct of Artemis of Sardis, some of which represent legal agreements bearing witness to the local religious life under the Persian rule. The content of these documents is still poorly known to the scholars of the Achaemenid Empire, largely because the Lydian language is still considered by many as imperfectly understood. Yet, the recent progress in its interpretation, reached within the framework of the eDiAna project (<http://www.dwaks.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/dev/project.php>) was conducive to a better understanding of a number of texts. One illustration of this progress is the recent treatment of the inscription LW 22 as the agreement between the Mermnad clan and the population of Sardis reserving to the Mermnads certain rights and obligations in religious administration even after their political demise (Yakubovich 2017).

The purpose of this presentation addressing two other Lydian texts found in the same precinct, namely LW 23 and LW 24, from the viewpoint of their relevance to the field of Achaemenid Studies. The preliminary translation of these two mutually related inscriptions is provided in Dusinberre 2003: 230-231, cf. also the more recent summary in Cahill 2019: 25-26. It seems to be a matter of general consensus that they refer to property or financial transactions between a certain Mitridašta, son of Mitrata, and the temple officials. According to the hypothesis of Payne and Wintjes 2016: 100, it is to be interpreted in the context of banking services offered by the temple in Sardis. One fact that seems to have been insufficiently appreciated in this discussion is that Mitridašta calls himself a priest, while both his name and that of his father are theophoric and specifically refer to the Iranian god Mithra (for its recent persuasive etymology, see Oreshko 2019: 218). It seems hardly believable that an indigenous acolyte of local or Greek deities would carry a Mithraic name in Achaemenid Sardis. Therefore, one must insist on the identity of Mitridašta as an Iranian priest, a *maguš*, which, however, imposes serious limitations upon the nature of his interaction with local temple officials. My presentation is based on the close philological study of LW 23 - 24 and strives to demonstrate that the transactions described in these texts are compatible with the status of Mitridašta as a supervising authority placed above the local priests. A salient parallel for a high-ranking

Iranian participating in the cult of non-Iranian gods in the same region is the dedication of a statue of Zeus by a certain Droaphernes, hyparch of Lydia (Bouزيد-Adler 2014: 17-20).

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