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Midas as Mule: Anatolia in Greek Myth and Phrygian Kingship

Ritual and literature form the most common arena for exploring Greek and Near Eastern interconnections. For those seeking close correspondences, methodological criteria demand the convergence of textual and visual evidence, as well as plausible contact over time. In exploring the cult image of Artemis Ephesia, I proposed probable influences from second-millennium Anatolia on her unusual costume (in *Potnia: Aegaeum* 22, 2001), where Mycenaean and Hittite texts fertilize later Greek traditions within a framework of contact with continuity. However, historical traditions share a capacity for foreign attributes, even in Greek art and legend. This paper focuses on King Midas of Phrygia, whose wealth was as famous as his failure to enjoy it. His image in Greek art wears the ears of an ass or donkey, with a colorful story (Ovid, Persius) to explain them: Apollo punished Midas for siding with Marsyas in a flute contest. But these stories post-date his animal ears in Greek vase painting, where they merely indicate his identity and royal status, not his arrogance and insult to the gods as explained later (Roscalla 1996).

Recently, Hawkins and Morpurgo Davies (*Mír Curad* 1998, *AnatSt* 1998) republished a famous silver seal in the Walters Art Museum with a bilingual inscription, naming King Tarkasnawa (Greek Tarkondemos) of Mira, in both Hittite cuneiform and Luwian hieroglyphs. Two hieroglyphic signs (Laroche #100, 101) abbreviate the ears of a mule or donkey, here a visual pun on the Luwian name, "*TARKASNA-wa*," a zoophoric name involving donkeys or mules (common in Anatolian onomastics). Some impression of this Bronze Age royal attribute must have been retained by Phrygian kings, just as they maintained Mycenaean titles of kingship: an historical Midas is addressed as "*wanax*" and "*lawagetas*" on the rock facade at Midas City, titles active at Pylos for separate functionaries which apparently survived Mycenaean palatial culture.

How did such translations and migrations of signs and words transpire? If King Midas acquired donkey's ears in Greek art and myth, sign and word traveled in Greek circles: both were visible in the relief at Karabel near Smyrna (associated by Herodotus with Sesostris of Egypt: 2.106). An Anatolian source for his ears adds itself to his other native trappings, such as his name and the ritual origin of the legend of the Gordian knot (Burke *GRBS* 42:3, 2001). They encourage a closer look at the Anatolian legacy of Greek traditions. Contact between speakers of Mycenaean Greek and Anatolian languages in Bronze Age Asia Minor may have been the first stage of an intellectual exchange whose full harvest eventually enriched Greek myths about "barbarians."