

# A Historical Grammar of Phrygian

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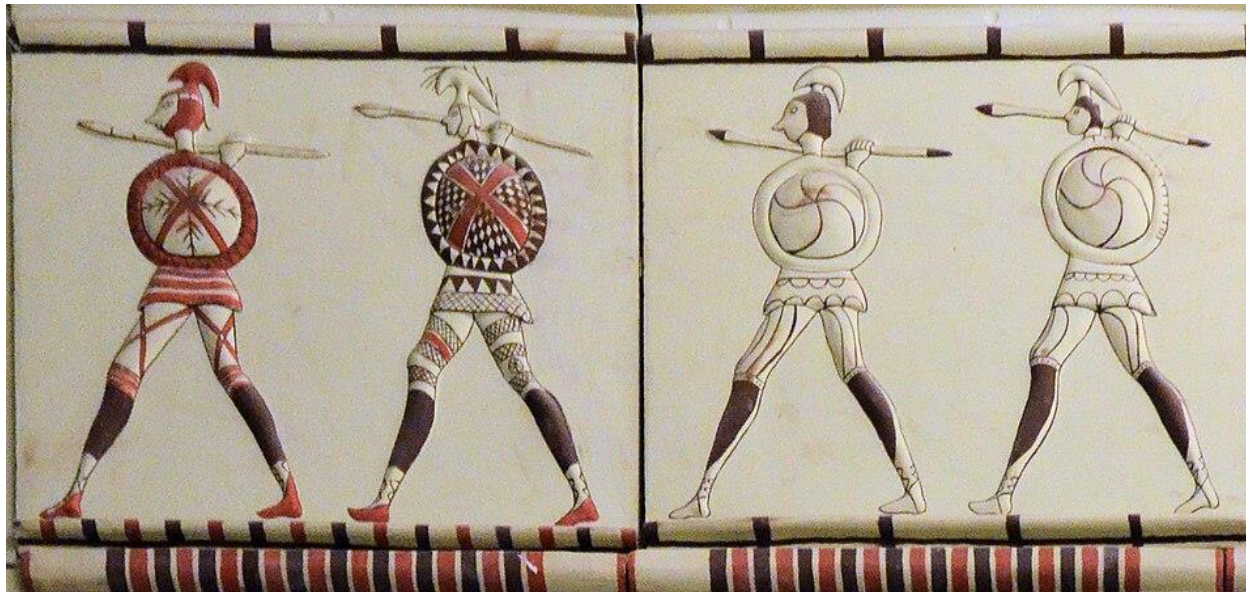


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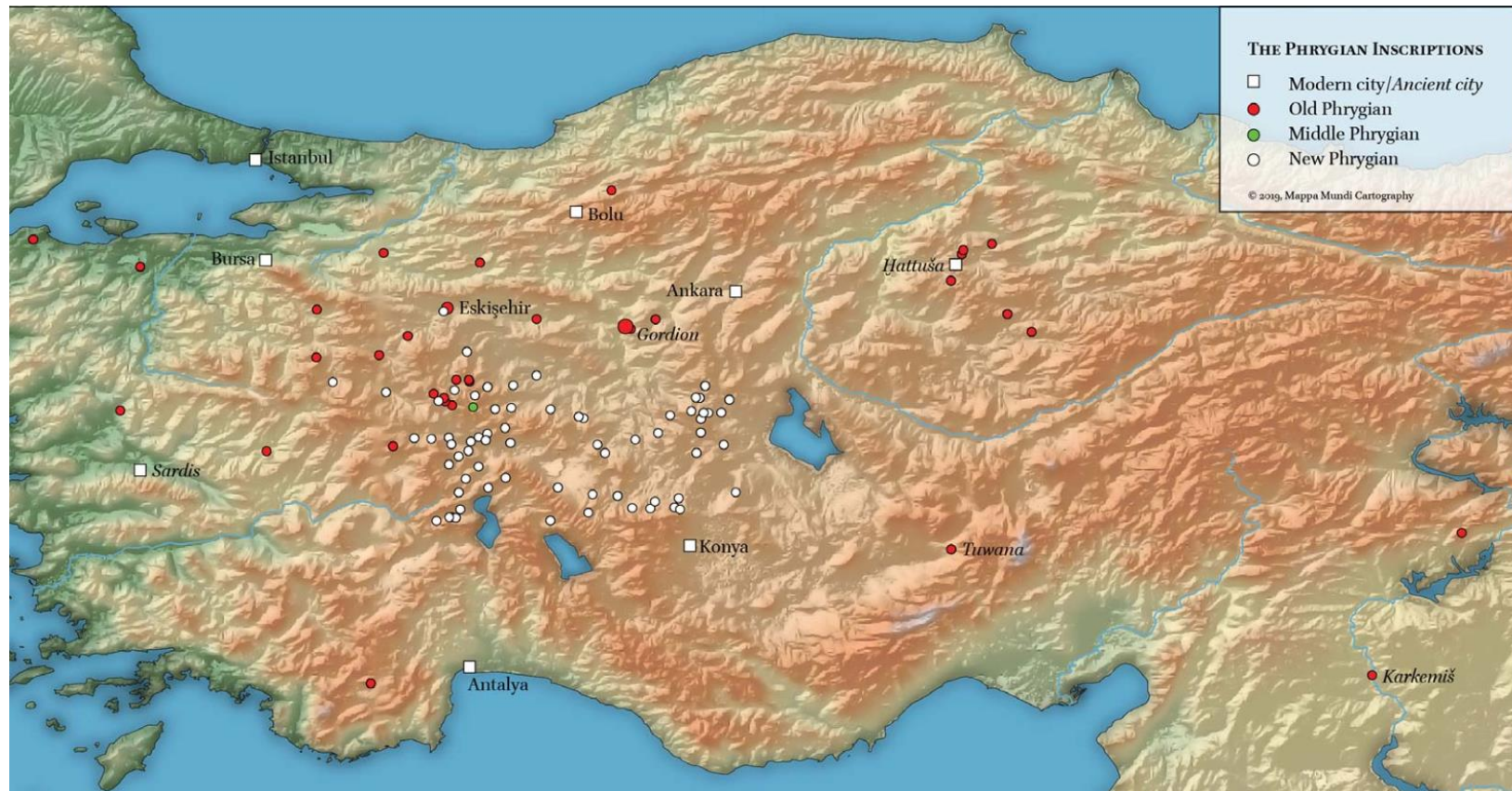
# The Phrygians

- Lived in central Anatolia, modern day Turkey, from about 1000 BCE to 500 CE.
- A powerful kingdom in the 8th and 7th century BCE
  - most important city: Gordion.
- Later came under the control of various other states, among them the Persian Achaemenid empire, the empire of Alexander the Great, and finally the Roman republic and empire.



# The Phrygian language

- Attested in two stages: Old Phrygian (8th to 4th century BCE) and New Phrygian (1st to 3rd century CE).
- A total of about 500 inscriptions, most of them fragmentary.



# The Midas monument

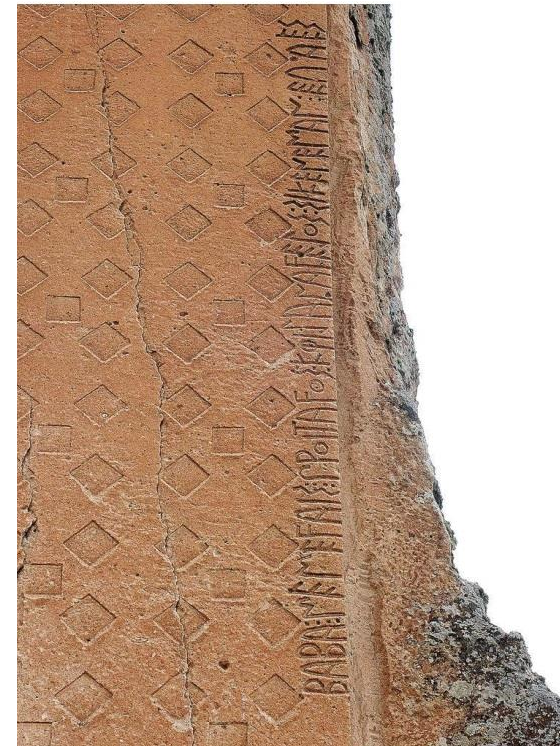


# Old Phrygian inscriptions °M-01a and °M-01b



*ates* : *arkiaevais* : *akenanogavos* : *midai* :  
*lavagtaei* : *vanaktei* : *edaes*

"Ates, son of Arkias, the *akenanogavos*, placed (it) for Midas, commander and lord."



*baba* : *memevais* : *proitavos* : *kΦiyanaveyos* :  
*sikeneman* : *edaes*

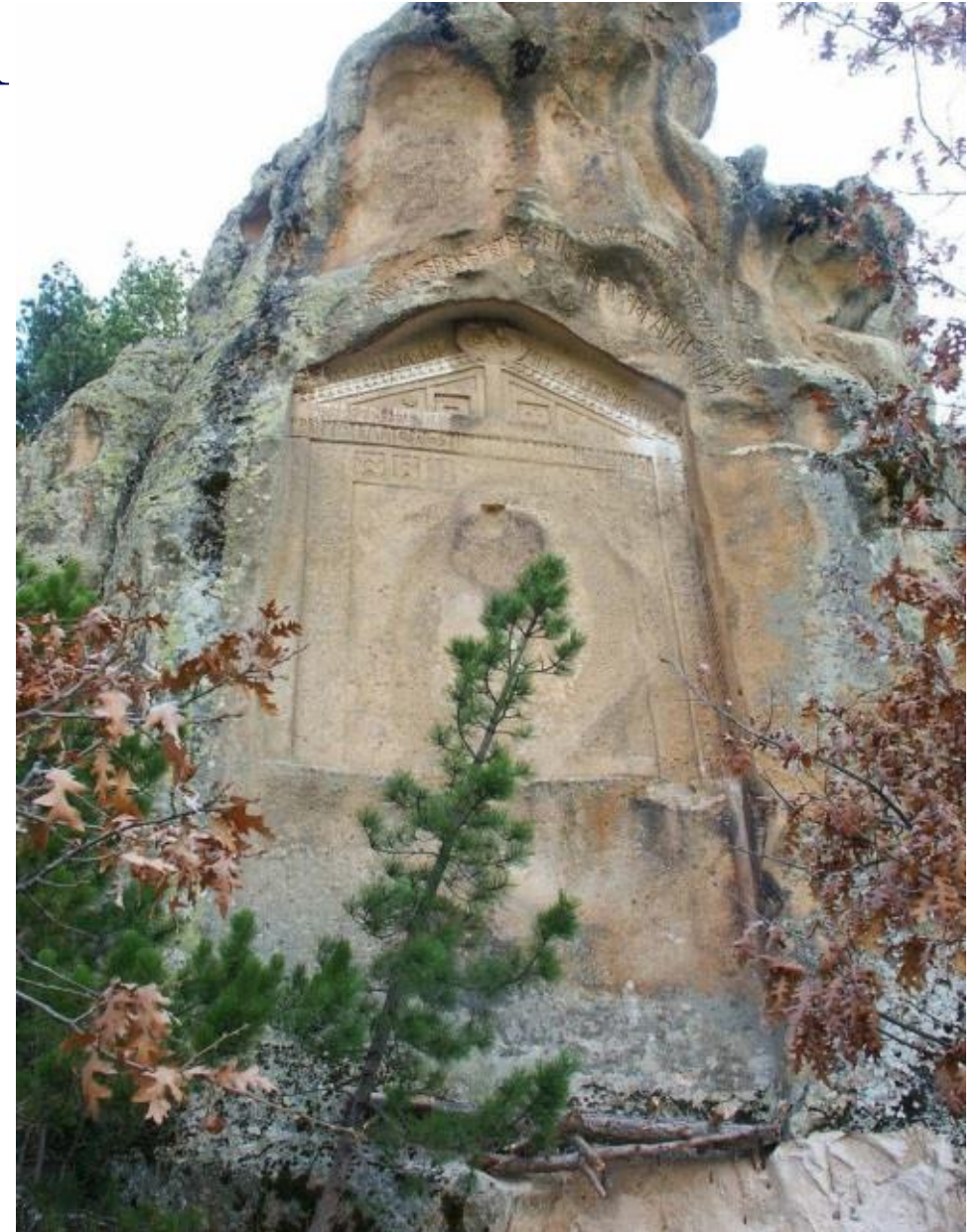
"Baba, son of Meme, *proitavos* and *kdziyanaveyos*, placed this niche."

# Old Phrygian inscription °W-01

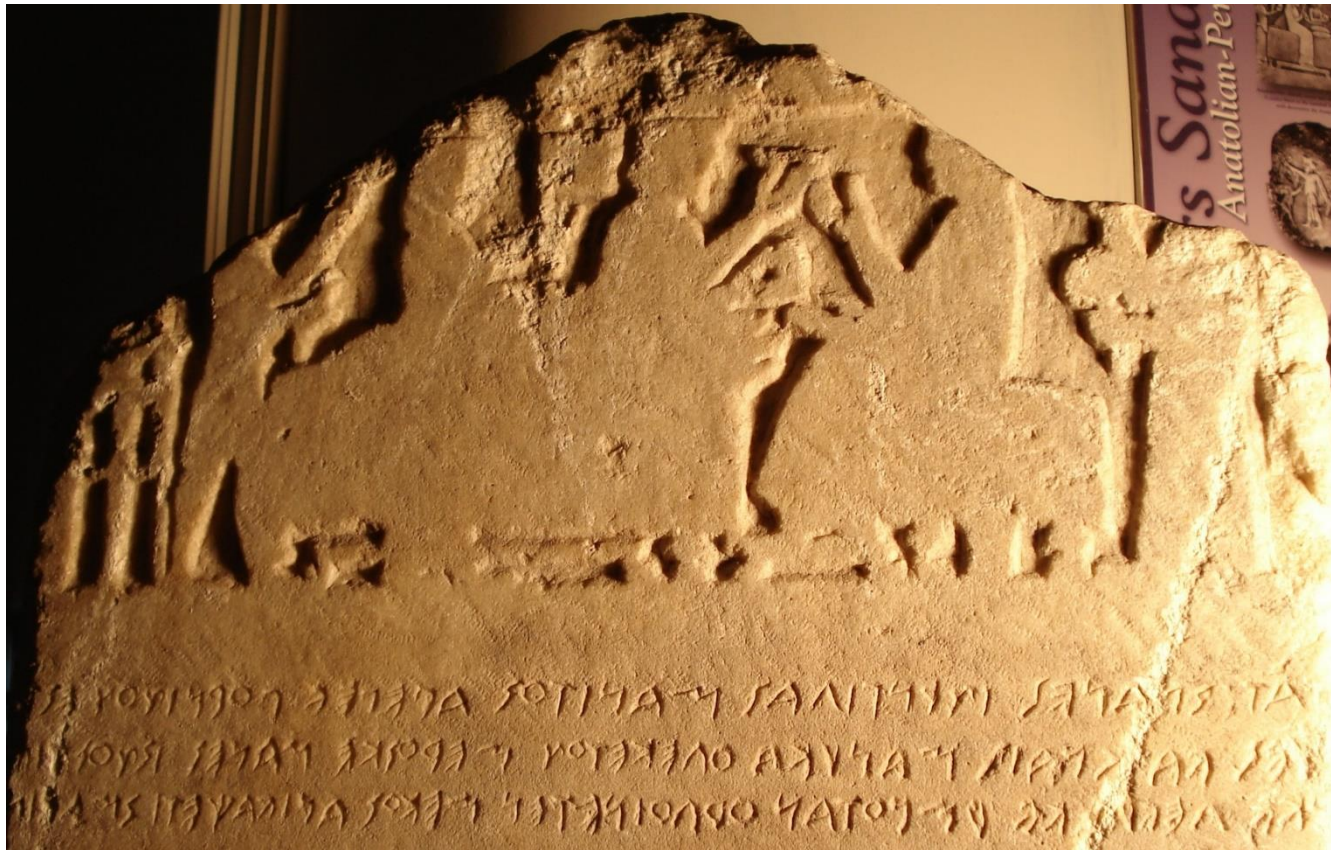


*bonok akenanogavos materan areyastin vrekun tedatoy*

"Bonok, the *akenanogavos*, had Mother *Areyastis* placed as a monument."



# Old Phrygian inscription °B-07



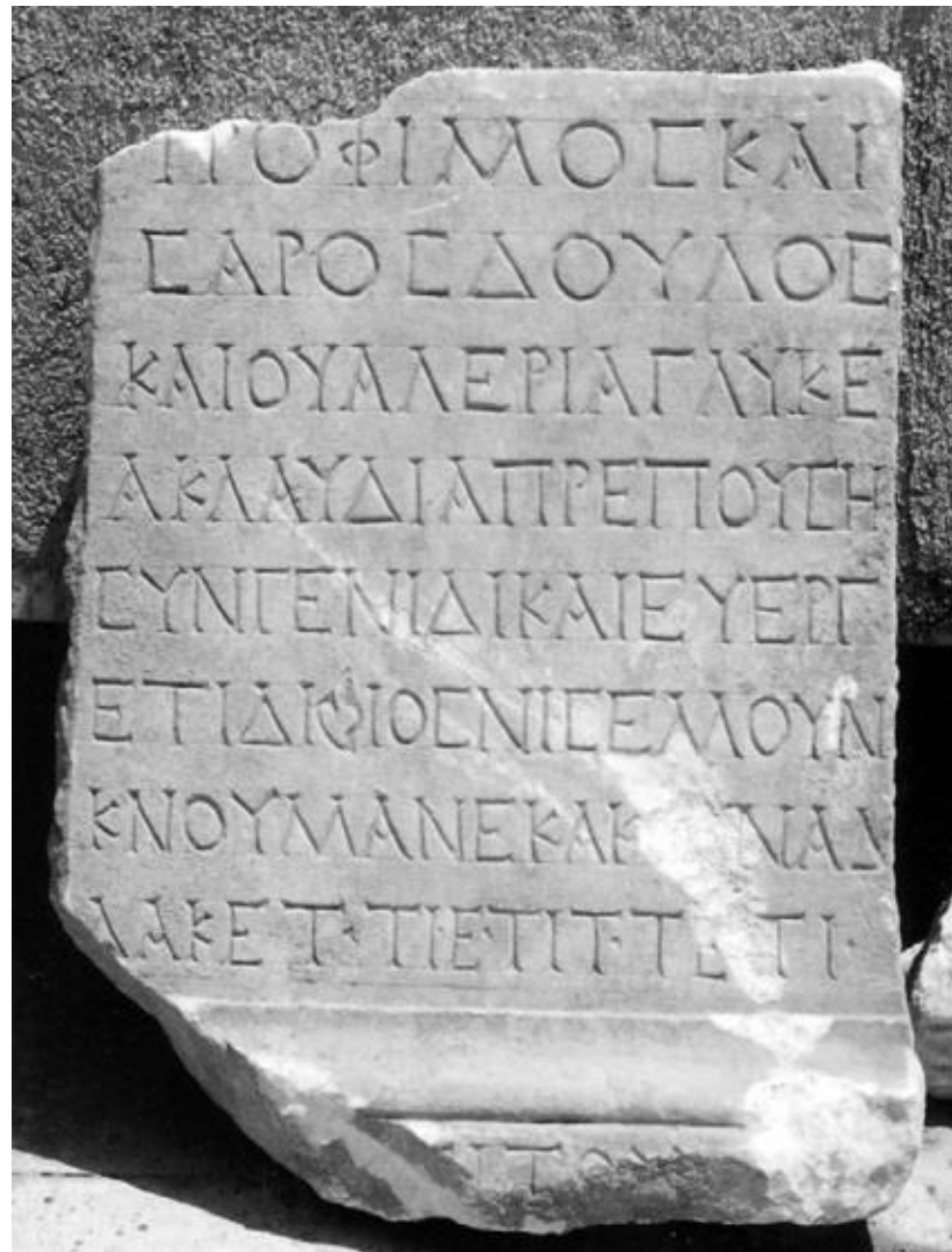
*tat : manes iyungidas manitos [...] estaes va knays manuka odeketoy meros ke manes*

"Attention! Manes, son of Iyung, grandson of Manit, erected (this stele), his wife Manuka had it made, and the son Manes (too)."

# New Phrygian inscription °126<sup>W</sup>

*ios ni semoun knoumane kakoun addaket,  
tie titteti[kmenos e]itou*

"Whoever does a bad thing to this grave, may he  
become condemned by the god Ti-."



# New Phrygian inscription °128<sup>C</sup>

*ios ni semoun knoumane kakoun addaket,  
me ddeo me zemelos titetikmenos eitou  
as batan orouenan ke*

"Whoever does a bad thing to this grave, may he  
become condemned among gods and men by Bas  
and the Father."



# New Phrygian inscription °129<sup>W</sup>

*ios ni sa matere kakon abberetoi aini seroa,  
tos ni me zemelos [...]*

"Whoever causes a bad thing to be brought to this  
mother or to Serva, he among men [...]"



# Deciphering Phrygian: The etymological method

- Phrygian is an Indo-European language; compare these examples:
  - Phrygian *matar*, Greek *mētēr*, Sanskrit *mātā* 'mother';
  - Phrygian *bere-*, Greek *phere-*, Sanskrit *bhara-* 'to bear';
  - Phrygian *ios*, Greek *hos*, Sanskrit *yas* 'he, who';
  - Phrygian *-os*, Greek *-os*, Sanskrit *-as* '(nominative singular grammatical ending)';
  - Phrygian *-toi*, Greek *-tai*, Sanskrit *-te* '(3rd person singular grammatical ending)'.
  
- An example: what is Phrygian *da-*?
  - Step 1: Phrygian *a* sometimes corresponds to Greek *ē* and Sanskrit *ā*;
  - Step 2: Phrygian *b* corresponds to Greek *ph* and Sanskrit *bh*, so we would expect Phrygian *d* to correspond to Greek *th* and Sanskrit *dh*;
  - Conclusion: Phrygian *da-* should correspond to Greek *thē-* and Sanskrit *dhā-*, both meaning 'to put, place'.
  - Testing: does it make sense? Yes. Recall °M-01b *baba* [...] *sikeneman edaes* "Baba X-ed this niche" (X = placed).

# Deciphering Phrygian: The combinatorial method

- Comparing similar constructions or sequences.
- °61<sup>SE</sup> *ios* semoun tou knoumanei *kakoun addaket* "whoever does a bad thing to this very grave"
- °82<sup>C</sup> *ios* sa tou manka *kakoun addaket* "whoever does a bad thing X";
- Conclusion: X must mean something similar to "to this very grave";
  - *semoun* and *sa* likely have the same function; they are both forms of the demonstrative pronoun "this";
  - the ending *-a* of *manka* must correspond to the ending *-ei* of *knoumanei*, which is the dative ending;
  - *tou* is used for emphasis and is identical in both;
  - *manka* must refer to some part of the grave. Etymologically, *manka* is likely related to Greek *masso* 'to handle, work with one's hands, knead'. *manka* can then mean "a thing that was handled", most likely "stele".
- Testing: does it make sense? Yes. "Whoever does a bad thing to this very stele."
- °124<sup>C</sup> *ios sa tou sorou kake addaket* "whoever does badly to this *sorou*" (→ *soro-* is a part of the grave complex)
- °67<sup>SE</sup> *ios sa ti skeledriai kakoun daket* "whoever does a bad thing to this *skeledriai*" (→ *skeledria-* is a part of the grave complex)

# Results of Research

- Phrygian is most closely related to Greek.
- New interpretations of inscriptions;
  - for example: °31<sup>s</sup> *as semoun knouman adithrerak kseuneoi adikes, eian [...] mankan, ian estaes bratere* "For Xeune, Adithrerak came to this grave, which [...] stele, which he erected for the brother."
- A coherent grammar of Phrygian that explains all currently understandable forms.



# Thank you for your attention.

Available on: [www.aljosasorgo.si](http://www.aljosasorgo.si)

Sources:

Šorgo, Aljoša. 2026. A Historical Grammar of Phrygian. PhD dissertation.

Obrador-Cursach, Bartomeu. 2020. The Phrygian Language. Leiden, Boston: Brill.



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