

37) A new reading of Lydian *laqrisa* as “words” or “inscriptions” (?) —Though usually translated as “wall” or, alternatively, as “dromos, covered passage” or “funerary couches, loculi”, the exact meaning of Lydian *laqrisa* remains uncertain. Gusmani, in his “Lydisches Wörterbuch”, describes it as (an unspecified) part of a tomb’s architecture. *Laqrisa* (or *laqrisa-k*, *laqrisa-k-in*, *laqris-k*, *laqrisav* and *laqirisav*) is attested 12 times, exclusively in inscriptions on funerary stelae from Sardis. These texts typically name the owner of the tomb (and his ancestry), and continue with a list of the tomb’s architectural features, followed by a curse formula warning the passer-by to damage neither the tomb nor its architectural adornments (such as *mrud* “stela” and *laqrisa*). The translation of *laqrisa* as “wall” is based on the Aramaic – Lydian bilingual text from that same site, but (as has been pointed out by Gusmani and others) this translation depends on the doubtful connection between *rdht* (or *drht*) in the Aramaic part of the text and the, only sporadically attested, Arabic *rudha* meaning “door, wall”. Even if one accepts that Aramaic *rdht* may relate to Arabic *rudha*, it remains difficult to imagine why the Lydians would have wanted to add “wall” (or, rather “walls”, for *laqrisa* is a plural)¹ to the list of funerary implements, as *vana* already refers to the (interior of the) tomb (and thus, also to its walls). The same problem applies to the identification of *laqrisa* as “funerary couches” or “loculi”; these are part of the tomb’s interior, and would have been invisible (and, presuming that the tombs were normally closed after an interment, inaccessible) from outside the tomb.² Moreover, the sequence of words on most stelae (*laqrisa* is always listed after *vana* (tomb), *mrud* (stela), or *antola* (grave stela), but always before *qela* (the plot of land)), seems to reference the funerary architectural features in decreasing importance, i.e. the features are described as if moving from the tomb itself outwards, towards the approaching visitor.

The other possibility, to translate *laqrisa* as “dromos” or “covered passage” is based on the elimination of other potential translations. The funerary elements as listed

¹ Cf. Carruba 1960; Woudhuizen 2005, 125.

² An additional problem with the translation of *laqrisa* – “loculi, funerary couches” is that *laqrisa* is found together with *karolaš* (in Gusmani’s text 2). Since *karoli* (*karolaš* as an accusative plural) has been tentatively translated as “loculo, piccolo urna” by Carruba (1960, 54), it seems unlikely that *laqrisa* should have meant essentially the same.

Gusmani's text 7 (the only Lydian funerary text found *in situ*)³, can be set against the local archaeological remains. Since the tomb itself is named in the text (as *vana*) and *qela* is known to denote the plot of land on which the tomb is built, *laqrisa*, the only unidentified word in the text, must refer to one of the remaining unnamed architectural features at the site. These include the "dromos" and the stele bearing the inscription. Since the Lydian word for stele is known (*mrud* for stele and *antola* in the specifically funerary context) and elsewhere occurs in combination with *laqrisa*, "dromos" seems to be the only remaining possibility. It is difficult to see, however, how the plural *laqrisa* can refer to the single passageway at the site.

With so much uncertainty surrounding the various possible translations for *laqrisa*, it seems reasonable to review the available evidence. It is clear that *laqrisa* must refer to one of the architectural features of various Lydian rock cut tombs. It cannot mean "tomb" or "stele" since these words have already been identified and are found in combination with *laqrisa* in various texts. Since *laqrisa* is a plural, it seems reasonable to look for elements in Lydian tombs that can be found more than once at each site. In addition, if the order of architectural elements, as listed in the various Lydian grave texts, is anything to go by, then we should probably look at something that can be found in front of the tomb, and not inside it. Finally, it should be something that was considered to be important enough to be included in the (more or less standard) curse formulae (as *laqrisa* is found in at least six inscriptions), and prone to damage or alteration (such as the tomb and the stelae).

With these factors in mind, I suggest that *laqrisa* means something equating to "words" or "inscriptions". We have seen that *laqrisa* is part of a tomb's architecture, and likely to be found on the outside of the tomb, in close association with the *mrud* or *antola*. Since it is a plural, there should be several *laqrisa* at each tomb. Butler believed that, originally, each chamber-tomb had two stelae at its entrance, and we could think of two (possibly identical) inscriptions flanking the entrance of the tomb. We could also content ourselves with the more generic translation "words". That the inscription itself would be included in a curse formula should not come as a surprise. This practice is paralleled on Neo-Hittite stelae,⁴ and is also common in contemporary Aramaic inscriptions from the satrapal centre of Dascylion.⁵

It must be stressed that the new interpretation of *laqrisa* as proposed in the lines above, remains speculative, in the sense that this reading is based primarily on a comparison between the archaeological assemblages of the various Lydian tombs and the inscriptions associated with these tombs, and the apparent close connection in the texts

³ Gusmani 1964, 253 (with reference to Buckler 1924).

⁴ Cf. McMahon 2002, 129-130; with ref. to Hawkins 1988, 190.

⁵ Hanfmann 1983, 65.

between *laqrisa* and *mrud*. One possible objection against this new reading is that a Lydian word for “inscription”, *sadmes*, has already been identified. However, this word is attested in only two texts (Gusmani’s 10 and 26) and is not found in combination with *laqrisa*, which leaves room for the possibility that we may be dealing with two words with the same, or a very similar, meaning. Moreover, the identification of *sadmes* as “inscription” seems to be based on essentially the same argument as I have proposed for *laqrisa*: its apparent close connection in the texts with *mrud*. It is not impossible that Lydian possessed two (or perhaps more) words for “inscription”, as we know of at least two words for “stele”, *mrud* and *antola*.⁶ As an archaeologist (and not a linguist), I do not feel qualified to discuss possible etymological arguments (or the lack thereof) for the identification of *laqrisa* as “words” or “inscriptions”: I can only hope that this brief contribution will stimulate further discussion on and new insights in the fascinating vocabulary of the Lydian funerary texts.

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⁶ As is the case with *mrud* (specifically meant to designate a grave stele) and *antola* (stele, generic use), there may well have been a difference in ‘connotation’ between *sadmes* and *laqrisa*, since *sadmes* appears to have had a specifically funerary connotation, as “grave sign / marker” (compare to Greek “sema”, cf. Heubeck 1983). The same applies to a similar word, *katof-*, which is usually translated more specifically as “Urkunde”. *Katof-* is only attested once (in Gusmani’s text 11), and is not found in combination with *laqrisa*.