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## Three New Inscriptions from Phaselis: An Imperial Dedication, an Honorific Inscription for Aurelia Apphia, and Christian Dipinto

### *Phaselis'ten Üç Yeni Yazıt: Bir İmparator İthafı, Aurelia Apphia için Onur Yazıtı ve Bir Hristiyan Dipinto'su*

Murat ARSLAN\* Nihal TÜNER ÖNEN\*\*

**Abstract:** This study presents three inscriptions from Phaselis. The first, a fragmentary limestone statue base discovered west of Hadrianus's Gate during the 2017 excavation season, is tentatively attributed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius. Although the imperial titulature is only partially preserved, paleographic analysis points to similarities to a securely dated dedication to Lucius Verus discovered in proximate context, suggesting a possible attribution to the period of joint rule (166-169 CE). The second inscription, documented in 2012 near the acropolis gateway, preserves two chronologically distinct epigraphic phases. Phase A comprises an original eighteen-line carved honorific text for Aurelia Apphia, a member of the Phaselite civic elite who served as priestess of the Roman Imperial Cult and endowed the Palladeios Agon and associated prize competition (themis). The dedicator is restored as Apion, whose precise relationship to Apphia remains uncertain. Phase B consists of painted inscription (dipinto) preserved in five lines executed over plaster and fresco decoration, identified as a biblical citation from the Gospel of John (1:1, 1:3), reflecting Christian appropriation during Late Antiquity. The monument's tertiary incorporation into the acropolis fortification walls attests to profound urban transformations at Phaselis during the Late Antique Period, providing critical evidence for civic benefaction, religious change, and spatial reconfiguration.

**Keywords:** Phaselis, Marcus Aurelius, Dedictory/Honorific Inscriptions, *Dipinto*

**Öz:** Bu çalışma Phaselis'ten üç yazıt sunmaktadır. Birincisi, 2017 kazı sezonunda Hadrianus Kapısı'nın batısında keşfedilen parçalı kireçtaşı heykel kaidesidir ve imparator Marcus Aurelius'a ihtiyatlı bir şekilde atfedilmektedir. İmparatorluk unvanı yalnızca kısmen korunmuş olsa da, paleografik analiz, yakın bağlamda keşfedilen ve kesin olarak tarihlenen bir Lucius Verus adıyla benzerlikler içermekte ve yazıtın imparatorların ortak hükümdarlık dönemine (MS 166-169) ait olabileceğini göstermektedir. 2012 yılında akropolis kapısı yakınında belgelenen ikinci yazıt, kronolojik olarak farklı iki epigrafik evre içermektedir. Evre A, Roma İmparatorluk Kültü rahibesi olarak görev yapmış ve Palladeios Agon'u ile ilişkili ödüllü yarışmayı (themis) başlatmış olan Phaselisli sivil seçkinlerden Aurelia Apphia için yazılmış orijinal on sekiz satırlık onurlandırma metnini içermektedir. Adayan kişi, Apphia ile kesin ilişkisi belirsiz olan Apion olarak restore edilmiştir. Evre B, sıva ve fresko dekorasyonu üzerine uygulanmış ve beş satırı korunmuş boyalı bir yazıttan (dipinto) oluşmakta ve Yuhanna İncili'nden (1:1, 1:3) bir alıntı olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu durum Geç Antikçağ'da Hristiyan temellükünü yansıtmaktadır. Anıtın akropolis tahkimat duvarlarına üçüncül olarak dahil edilmesi, Phaselis'te Geç Antikçağ'da yaşanan derin kentsel dönüşümlere tanıklık etmekte ve sivil bağış, dinsel değişim ve mekânsal yeniden yapılanma için kritik kanıt sağlamaktadır.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Phaselis, Marcus Aurelius, İthaf/Onurlandırma Yazıtları, *Dipinto*

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### 1. Dedicatory Inscription to Emperor Marcus Aurelius (?)

The inscription was found during systematic excavations conducted in the 2017 season, within the scope of clearance operations and architectural documentation works at Hadrianus's Gate. The discovery was made in a building complex located immediately west of the monumental structure. The artifact constitutes a fragmentary statue base fashioned from fine-grained limestone of superior quality. Stratigraphic evidence and architectural contextualization demonstrate that the block had undergone secondary use as spolia, integrated into one of the commercial structures (*tabernae*) constructed during the Late Antique Period along the western frontage of the gate. The extant portions of the base preserve diagnostic elements indicating an original architectural configuration comprising an upper moulded cornice and a pediment-form crowning element embellished with corner acroteria.

Dimensions: H.: 0.31 m; W.: 0.45 m; D.: 0.32 m; Lh.: 0.04 m.

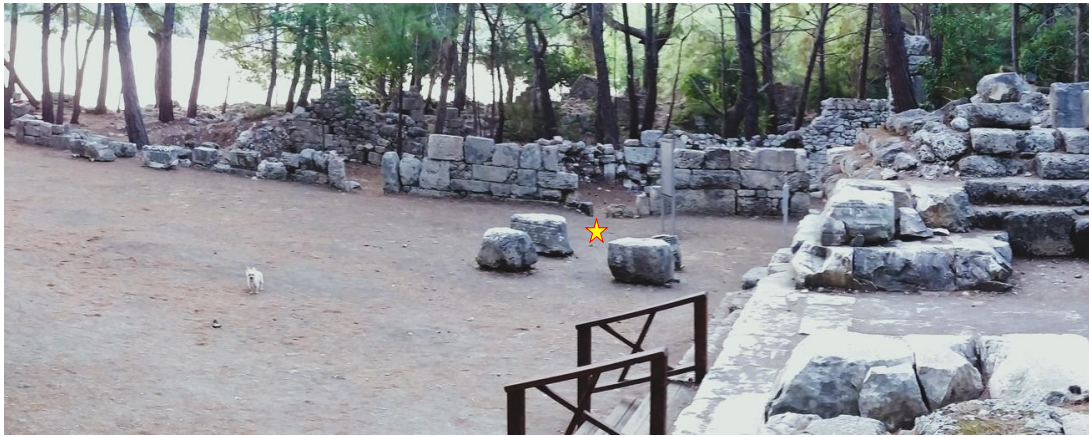


Fig. 1. Findspot of the Inscribed Dedicatory Base west of Hadrianus's Gate

Αὐτοκράτορι  
 Καίσαρι Μάρκῳ  
 3 [Α]ὐρηλίῳ Ἀ[ντω]-  
 [ν]εῖνῳ -----  
 (Dedicated to) Emperor Caesar Marcus  
 Aurelius Antoninus ...



Fig. 2. Inscription to Emperor Marcus Aurelius (?)

The inscription preserves the upper four lines of a statue base and records an imperial dedication, though the precise identification of the honored emperor remains uncertain. The incorporation of the nomen *Aurelius* into the imperial titulature as a dynastic appellative commenced with the accession of Marcus Aurelius in 161 CE and continued until the early fourth century, during which period the name formed a constituent element of the official nomenclature of virtually all Roman emperors. Three emperors bore the combination of the

praenomen *Marcus*, the nomen gentilicium *Aurelius*, and the cognomen *Antoninus*: Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180 CE), Caracalla (r. 211–217 CE), and Elagabalus (r. 218–222 CE)<sup>1</sup>. The epigraphic corpus of Phaselis has yielded no securely attested dedications to either Marcus Aurelius or Elagabalus to date<sup>2</sup>. Inscriptions commemorating Elagabalus characteristically display evidence of systematic erasure resulting from the *damnatio memoriae* enacted following his assassination and the Senate's subsequent condemnation<sup>3</sup>. The present inscription exhibits no traces of deliberate effacement or *rasura*. Conversely, the extant dedication from Phaselis honoring Caracalla explicitly incorporates the cognomen *Severus*, which he assumed upon his father Septimius Severus's death in 211 CE<sup>4</sup>.

Inscriptions honoring Marcus Aurelius and Caracalla frequently present challenges in attribution, as both emperors shared substantially overlapping elements within their official titulature<sup>5</sup>. Analogous interpretative difficulties have been documented in the epigraphic material from Lycia, where the absence of distinctive *cognomina* or specific honorific epithets complicates secure identification<sup>6</sup>. In the present instance, however, paleographic analysis provides critical evidence for attribution. The letter forms, characterized by pronounced apices, serifs with consistent angular terminations, and characteristic alpha with broken crossbar, exhibit striking affinities with those of a dedication to Lucius Verus recovered in 2012 from the same architectural complex<sup>7</sup>. The paleographic concordance between the two inscriptions extends to such

<sup>1</sup> Kienast *et al.* 2017, 131, 156, 165.

<sup>2</sup> Inscriptions from the city attesting to the emperors Vespasianus (*TAM* II 1188), Domitianus (*TAM* II 1186), Traianus (*TAM* II 1189; Blackmann 1981 145–146, no. 3; cf. Tüner Önen 2016, 976–978), Hadrianus (*SEG* XXXI 1299; *TAM* II 1191–1195), Antoninus Pius (*TAM* II 1196–1197), Lucius Verus (Tüner Önen 2016, 973–974 (= *SEG* LXVI 1769 = *AE* [2016] 1698) and Caracalla (*TAM* II 1198) are known to date. A fragmented inscription honouring the *Dominatores Totius Orbis* (rulers of the entire world) is thought to refer to Gratianus, Valentinianus II and Theodosius (*TAM* II 1199; cf. Tüner Önen 2008, 324 no. 21).

<sup>3</sup> Elagabalus was assassinated by the Praetorian Guard in 222 CE. Immediately after his death, the Roman Senate enacted a systematic program of *damnatio memoriae* against his memory. Cf. Kienast *et al.* 2017, 165. In a dedication inscription from Attaleia, the emperor's name has been erased. *SEG* XVII 616: Θερῶ Ἡλίῳ | [[Ἐλεγαβάλῳ]] | ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ σύνπας ὁ δῆμος. For other erased inscriptions, see also Mitchell 2003, 144; *SEG* LVII 625–626.

<sup>4</sup> *TAM* II 1198: Αὐτοκράτορα | Καίσαρα | Μάρκον Αὐρήλιον Σεῦήρον | Ἀντωνῖνον | Εὐσεβῆ Εὐτυχεῖ Σεβαστὸν ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος. For the cognomen *Severus*, see Kienast *et al.* 2017, 156.

<sup>5</sup> It is certain that the inscription on a statue base recovered from Olympos belongs to Marcus Aurelius (*TAM* II 943: Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα Μάρκον Αὐρήλιον Ἀντωνῖνον | Σεβαστὸν Ἀρμενιτικὸν Μηδικὸν Παρθικὸν Γερμανικὸν | Ὀλυμπιῶν ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος | ἐγ δωρεᾶς Πανταγᾶθου δῖς. A further inscription recovered from Patara can be securely attributed to Marcus Aurelius on the basis of its *in situ* placement within the architectural context of the monument, which provides unambiguous chronological and historical evidence for identification (*TAM* II 419 E–F: [Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα] | [Μάρκον Αὐρήλιον] | Ἀντωνῖνον Σεβαστὸν, | τὸν σωτήρα καὶ εὐεργέτην | παντὸς γένους καὶ οἴκου | τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ, Τιβέριος | Κλαύδιος· Φλαουιανὸς Τίτιανός. An inscription from Kadyanda is similarly attributed to Caracalla on the basis of contextual and paleographic criteria (*TAM* II 657: Αὐτοκράτορα Καίσαρα | Μάρκον Αὐρήλιον | Ἀντωνῖνον Σεβαστὸν | Γερμανικὸν Παρθικὸν | Μέγιστον | — — — — —)). For the order in which the emperor's titles were acquired, see Mastino 1975, 49.

<sup>6</sup> For the inscriptions from Ksanthos, cf. Balland 1981, 75 no. 33, 77 no. 35. E. Kalinka likewise associated two inscriptions that carry only the same titulature, without additional titles, with Caracalla. These are the inscription from Nysa (*TAM* II 738: Αὐτοκράτορα | Καίσαρα Μάρκον Αὐρήλιο[v] | Ἀντωνῖνο[v] | Σεβαστὸν | Νεισέων [ῆ] | [β]ουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος) and the inscription from Korydalla (*TAM* II 936: Αὐτοκράτορα· Καίσαρα· Μάρκον Αὐρήλιον Ἀντωνῖνον | Σεβαστὸν | Κορυδαλλέων ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος).

<sup>7</sup> Immediately adjacent to a Late Antique fortification wall flanking the modern pedestrian path that connects



diagnostic details as letter proportions, interlinear spacing, and the execution of specific letter forms (*alpha*, *omega*, *epsilon*, *sigma*), strongly suggesting that both texts were incised by the same lapicide or workshop<sup>8</sup>. On the basis of this paleographic correlation, combined with the secure dating of the Lucius Verus inscription to the period of his joint rule with Marcus Aurelius (161–169 CE), it is probable that the present dedication was commissioned contemporaneously, most likely between 166 CE –when Verus returned from the Parthian campaign– and 169 CE, the year of his death. The inscription may therefore be tentatively attributed to Marcus Aurelius during the period of the *condominium* with Lucius Verus<sup>9</sup>.

## 2. Reused Honorific Base Bearing Two Chronologically Distinct Inscriptions

The block was identified during the 2012 Phaselis’ survey in secondary deposition, positioned in inverted orientation at the summit of the ascending stairway connecting the southwestern sector of the theatre to the acropolis, immediately adjacent to the acropolis gateway. The limestone base, exhibiting fractures at both superior and inferior extremities and preserving a profiled moulding, demonstrates clear evidence of multiple phases of reuse. The principal inscribed face had undergone deliberate surface preparation through the application of a lime plaster layer (*intonaco*), over which a polychrome decorative border was subsequently executed in fresco technique. Within this painted frame, a inscription was added in a secondary epigraphic phase. The stratigraphic and architectural context suggests that the block was transported to its findspot during a tertiary phase of utilization, likely incorporated as structural fill or reinforcement material (*emplekton*) within the Late Antique refurbishment of the acropolis fortification circuit.



Fig. 3. Findspot of the Inscribed Honorific Base in front of the Acropolis Entrance Gate

### 2A. Primary Epigraphic Phase: Honorific Inscription for Aurelia Appia

The upper five lines of the inscribed limestone base, together with fragmentary letter traces preserved along both lateral edges where the overlying plaster has eroded, indicate that the original inscription comprised eighteen lines. The letterforms exhibit skilled execution with

Hadrianus’s Gate to the South Harbor.

<sup>8</sup> Tüner Önen 2016, 974.

<sup>9</sup> For the dating of the inscription relating to Lucius Verus, see Tüner Önen 2016, 876.

consistent ductus. Lines 2, 3, 4, 11, and 15 display systematic use of double and triple ligatures (*nexus litterarum*) [see, transliteration], a technique that accommodates between fifteen and nineteen characters per line. This epigraphic practice has been taken into consideration in proposing textual restorations for those portions currently concealed beneath the plaster layer. Line 5 exhibits a space-saving device wherein the final two letters, omicron and ny, are inscribed as an enclosed ligature. At the termination of line 7, alpha appears in reduced module, as does omicron at the end of line 11, both instances reflecting the stonecutter's adaptation to constrained linear space (*litterae minutae*).

Dimensions: H.: 1.30 m; W.: 0.50 m; D.: 0.32 m; Lh.: 0.03 m.

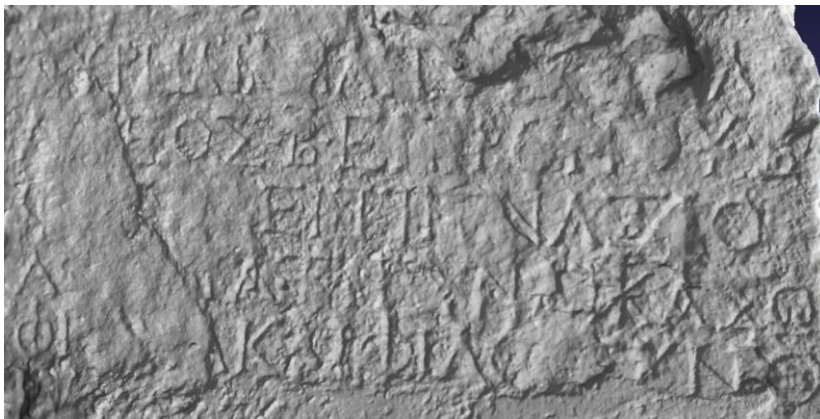


Fig. 4a. Lines 1-5

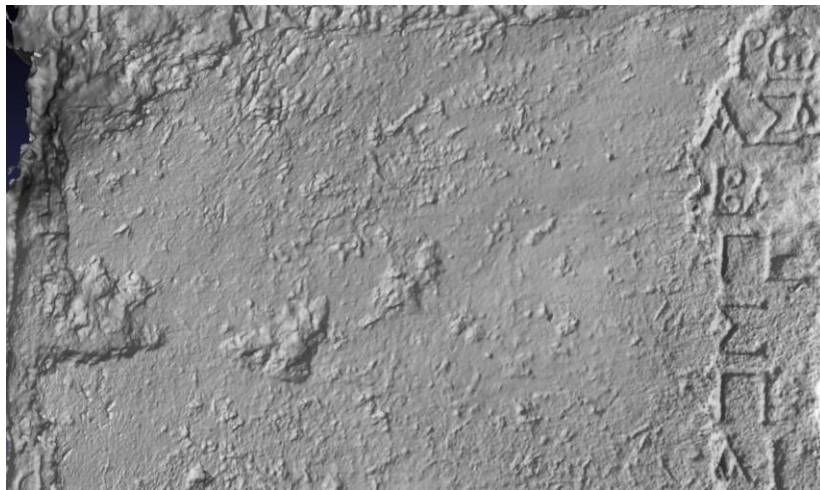


Fig. 4c. Lines 6-13



Fig. 4b. Lines 14-18





Fig. 5. Honorific Inscription for Aurelia Apphia

*Aurelia Apphia of Phaselis, daughter of Kolalemis son of Kolalemis, great-granddaughter of Enbromos son of Enbromos, prudent, fond of children and devoted to her husband, a woman worthy of praise, foremost lady of the city, who served piously as priestess of the imperial cult, a benefactress of the fatherland, ....., and for her goodwill, (was honored by) Aurelius Apion, son of .....*

Lines 1-2:

The opening lines establish the filiation of the honorand. Aurelia Apphia is securely attested in the epigraphic record of Phaselis through two previously published agonistic inscriptions<sup>10</sup>, which document her role as civic benefactor (*euergetis*). Specifically, Apphia endowed the

Ἀὐρηλίαν Ἀπ[φία]ν [Κο]λ[α]-  
 λ[ήμ]εος · β' Ἐνβρόμου · β'  
 Φ[α]σηλεῖτιν τὴν ἀξιο-  
 4 λ[ογω]τάτην γυναῖκα σώ-  
 φρον]α καὶ φιλό[τ]εκνον  
 κα[ὶ] φίλανδρον καὶ π[ρ]ώ-  
 [την τῆς πολεως, ἱερ]ασα-  
 8 μ[ένην τῶν θεῶν Σε]βας-  
 τ[ῶν εὐσεβῶς, τὴν εὐερ]γέ-  
 τ[ιν τῆς πατρίδος],<sup>v</sup>  
 Λ ..... ΠΟ  
 12 ..... κ]αὶ  
 Φ. .... τετε]ιμη-  
 μ[ένην, Αὐρήλιος Ἀ]πί-  
 ων ..... τ]ῆν  
 16 γλ[υκυτάτην .....  
 φι[λοστοργίας καὶ εὐ]-  
 νο[ίας ἔνεκεν].

<sup>10</sup> TAM II 1206: Αὐρ(ήλιος) Πτολεμαῖος ὁ καὶ Ἰ Ζωσιμᾶς, υἱὸς Αὐρ(ηλίου) Ἀρτεμιδώρου Πτολεμαίου, Φασηλεῖτης, νεικήσας πα[ρ]ιδὼν πάλιν ἐνδόξως ἀγῶνος Παλλαδείου πρώτως ἀχθέντος, οὗ ἔδωρήσατο τῇ πόλει ἡ ἀξιολογωτάτη Αὐρηλία Ἀφφία Κ[ο]λλαλήμεος δις Ἐμβρόμου δις, Φασηλεῖτις, ἡ ἄπτωτος ἀμεσολάβητος; Adak *et al.* 2005, 9 no. 6: [Αὐρ.] Κούγας Ὀνιάλλεος ἡ [τοῦ κα]ὶ Πονεσέλου Κολα[λήμ]εος Φασηλεῖτις ἡ [νε]ικήσας ἐνδόξως ἀν[δρῶν πάλιν τ]ὸν ἀγῶ[να Παλλαδείου] θέμιδος, ἡ [ἣς κατέλιπεν] ἡ ἀξιολο[γωτάτη γυν]ῆ Αὐρ. vac. ἡ [Ἀφφία Κολαλήμ]εος δις Ἐμ[βρόμου δις Φασ]ηλεῖτις, ἡ [λαβῶν ἄθλον τοῦ]ς ἀνδρί[αντας]. vac.

Palladeios Agon (Ἀγὼν Παλλάδειος) and an associated prize competition (*themis*) featuring a monetary award (*thema*, θέμα)<sup>11</sup>. From the inscriptions documented in the city, it is understood that these competitions were organized particularly in the discipline of wrestling (*pale*, πάλη) and included categories for both boys (*paides*, παῖδες) and adult men (*andres*, ἄνδρες). The adult category is distinguished by the provision of a cash prize to the victor, a feature indicating a *thematikos agōn* rather than a purely honorific *stephanitic* competition. A comparable endowment is attested through the Themis Agon (Ἀγὼν Θέμις), established by testamentary bequest (*diathēkē*) of Eukratidas, a member of the municipal elite<sup>12</sup>. The pattern of agonistic *euergetism* among Phaselite notables reflects broader competitive dynamics within civic benefaction during the Roman Imperial Period.

In the present inscription, the honorand's name is epigraphically attested as Ἀπ[φία], whereas in the earlier agonistic foundation text (*TAM* II 1206), she is recorded as Ἀφφία. The orthographic variant in the second agonistic inscription has been restored in conformity with the *TAM* attestation. The alternation between geminate phi (φφ) and pi-phi (πφ) likely reflects regional phonetic variation or scribal idiosyncrasy rather than distinct individuals, as filiation and context confirm identity. In both previously published inscriptions, Apphia bears the honorific epithet ἀξιολογώτατη ("most distinguished"), a superlative formulaic designation unambiguously identifying her membership within the civic aristocracy (*hoi prōtoi*). Her patronymic and grandfather's name, Kolalemis (Κολαλεμῖς), represents a rare onomastic element documented exclusively within the civic territory (*khōra*) of Phaselis (*LGPN* V.b, s.v.)<sup>13</sup>, suggesting a family (*genos*) of longstanding local prominence. The ancestral name Enbromos/Embromos (Ἐνβρομος/Ἐμβρομος) is identifiable as an indigenous Lycian anthroponym attested throughout the regional onomastic corpus (*LGPN* V.b, s.v.)<sup>14</sup>.

Lines 7-9:

The fragmentary letter sequences preserved in these lines admit the restoration ἱερ]ασα[μ]ένην τῶν θεῶν Σε]βαστ[ῶν εὐσεβῶς, indicating that Apphia discharged the office of priestess of the Imperial Cult (ἱέρεια τῶν θεῶν Σεβαστῶν) with piety (εὐσεβῶς). This priesthood constituted one of the most prestigious liturgical offices accessible to elite women in the cities of Asia Minor during the Imperial period, conferring elevated social status, ceremonial prominence, and direct association with the apparatus of imperial worship. The adverbial qualification εὐσεβῶς represents a conventional honorific topos emphasizing the honorand's exemplary discharge of sacerdotal duties.

A parallel attestation is furnished by a honorific inscription from Phaselis documenting Aurelia Bettia, another member of the local aristocracy, who likewise held this sacerdotal office<sup>15</sup>. The recurrence of the *nomen gentilicium* Aurelia among priestesses of the Roman

<sup>11</sup> The Palladeios agon derives its name from Pallas, an epithet of Athena, the principal goddess of the city. Cf. Adak *et al.* 2005, 9. For the cult of Athena in Phaselis, see Tüner Önen & Yılmaz 2015, 122-125.

<sup>12</sup> *TAM* II 1207.

<sup>13</sup> For this name, see also Gürel *et al.* 2019, 420.

<sup>14</sup> For both names, see Tüner Önen 2015b, 44, 50.

<sup>15</sup> *TAM* II 1204.



Imperial Cult may suggest familial or patronage networks linking these women to families enfranchised under the *Constitutio Antoniniana* (212 CE). The prominence of elite women in this priesthood reflects broader patterns in Asia Minor, where female holders of high-profile religious offices combined sacerdotal functions with civic benefaction (*evergetism*) to enhance familial prestige and demonstrate loyalty to the imperial *domus*.

Lines 11–13:

Between these lines, one would expect references to the agon and the themis that Apphia endowed for the city. Such enumerations typically employ participial constructions articulating the benefactor's donations prior to the formal honorific resolution.

Lines 14–15:

These lines are expected to have identified the dedicator responsible for erecting the monument. The letter sequence ΠΙ preserved at the terminus of line 14, the securely legible Ω at the opening of line 15, and a fragmentary letter trace consistent with Ny – identifiable through the surviving left vertical *hasta* and the upper portion of the diagonal stroke – admit the restoration Ἀπίων with a high degree of paleographic probability<sup>16</sup>. This reconstruction is corroborated by onomastic evidence: the name Apion (Ἀπίων) is epigraphically attested in neighboring Lycian cities, specifically at Trebenna and Olympos (*LGPV.b*, 38 s.v. Ἀπίων), confirming its currency within the regional anthroponymic repertoire.

Line 16:

This line is expected to have contained a relational formula specifying Apphia's kinship to the dedicator Apion, with the kinship designation appearing in the accusative case. The identity of Apion and the precise nature of his relationship to Apphia remain uncertain, though the dedication of her honor suggests several possibilities: he may have been her husband, a kinsman (*syngenēs*), a civic magistrate acting in an official capacity, or a member of her patronage network (*philoi*) bound to her household (*oikos*) through ties of reciprocal obligation.

Lines 17–18:

For the proposed restoration of these lines, cf. Balland 1981, no. 81.

## 2B. Secondary Epigraphic Phase: Painted Inscription (*dipinto*) Superimposed on Plastered and Frescoed Surface

Following the deliberate concealment of the original carved honorific inscription through the application of a lime plaster layer (*intonaco*), the prepared surface was decorated with fresco painting. Within the frescoed area, a rectangular bordered panel (*tabula ansata*) was executed, delimited by painted borders on the lateral edges. A painted inscription (*dipinto*)

<sup>16</sup> Although it is written out explicitly in the first line, the possibility that Aurelius is used here in an abbreviated form should also be taken into account; accordingly, names ending in -πίων – such as Σεραπίων/Σαραπίων (previously attested in the city: Tüner Önen 2015a, 34 no. 6), or Παπίων, Ἀσχαπίων ... *etc.* should be borne in mind, albeit as less likely alternatives. Cf. [https://search.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/browse.html?field=names&sort=nymRef&query=\\*apiwn](https://search.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/browse.html?field=names&sort=nymRef&query=*apiwn)

was subsequently applied within this framed field. Both the fresco decoration and the painted letterforms have suffered severe degradation due to weathering and surface erosion, rendering any figural or ornamental motifs indiscernible in their present state of preservation.

Dimensions of the inscribed panel: H.: 0.42 m; W.: 0.25 m; Lh.: 0.035–0.04 m.



Fig. 6. Secondary Epigraphic Phase of Aurelia Apphia's Honorific Inscription: (dipinto)

[ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος],  
 02 [καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν]  
 πρὸς τὸν θεόν[ν]  
 2 κ[αὶ θεὸς ἦ]ν  
 [ὁ] λ[όγος].  
 4 [πά]ντα  
 [δι' αὐτ]οῦ  
 6 [ἐγένετο],  
 [καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ]  
 8 [ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν]  
 [ὃ γέγονεν].

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him not one thing came into being.*

The fresco decoration and superimposed painted inscription (*dipinto*) constitute a secondary phase of reuse (*spolia*), datable on paleographic and archaeological grounds to no earlier than the fifth century CE<sup>17</sup>. The fragmentary painted letterforms, though severely degraded, admit reconstruction as a scriptural citation from the prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1: and 1:3)<sup>18</sup>. This identification, if correct, indicates the monument's appropriation for Christian devotional or apotropaic purposes during the Late Antique Christianization of urban space. The transformation of a statue base originally dedicated to a priestess of the Roman Imperial Cult into a bearer of Johannine theology exemplifies the widespread Late Antique practice of re-signifying pagan civic monuments within a Christian symbolic framework, paralleled at numerous sites across Asia Minor<sup>19</sup>.

The urban topography of Phaselis underwent profound transformation during the Late

<sup>17</sup> No ecclesiastical structures securely dated earlier than the fifth century CE have been identified at Phaselis, providing archaeological support for this *terminus post quem*.

<sup>18</sup> For the omission of John 1:2 in citations that combine John 1:1 and 1:3, cf. Evans 2024, 202.

<sup>19</sup> The Christian appropriation and epigraphic reuse of earlier pagan monuments constitutes a widespread phenomenon across Late Antique Asia Minor, attested at numerous sites including Ephesos, Aphrodisias, and Sagalassos, where honorific statue bases were commonly reused as supports for crosses, biblical citations, or martyrial commemorations. Cf. *I.Ephesos* VII. 2. 4337 (John 1:1 painted on column).

Antique and Eastern Roman Empire Periods<sup>20</sup>, a process that is directly relevant to the secondary and tertiary reuse of the monument. The block's findspot –at the terminus of the ascending stairway south of the theatre, immediately adjacent to the acropolis gateway– cannot plausibly represent its functional context during the phase when it bore the frescoed Christian inscription (*dipinto*). Rather, the location reflects a tertiary phase of utilization, wherein the block was incorporated as structural fill or reinforcement material (*emplekton*) within the Late Antique refurbishment of the acropolis fortification circuit. The original architectural setting of the frescoed monument during its secondary Christian phase remains unknown, though stratigraphic and topographic considerations strongly suggest that the block was transported to its findspot from elsewhere within the acropolis precinct. The scriptural content of the painted inscription –comprising citations from the Johannine prologue– indicates that the monument functioned within an ecclesiastical context, most probably as an architectural spolia element integrated into a church interior (e.g., as a chancel screen post, altar support, or wall revetment). Four church buildings have been archaeologically identified on the Phaselis acropolis to date. However, the absence of secure provenance and diagnostic architectural features precludes definitive association of the frescoed block with any specific basilica at present<sup>21</sup>. Further archaeological investigation of the acropolis churches, combined with systematic documentation of architectural spolia, may eventually permit more precise localization.

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<sup>20</sup> Mergen 2018, 147–159.

<sup>21</sup> For the church buildings on the acropolis of Phaselis, see Mergen & Bilgin 2016, 123–132; Mergen 2017, 163–173; 2018, 147–159.

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\* Abbreviations of epigraphical editions and reference works follow the "Liste des abréviations des éditions et ouvrages de référence pour l'épigraphie grecque alphabétique (GrEpiAbbr – Version 03, Septembre 2024)" developed by the *Association Internationale d'Épigraphie Grecque et Latine*.