HESPERIA

The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens

Volume 83
2014

HESPERIA

MAKING SENSE OF NONSENSE INSCRIPTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH AMAZONS AND SCYTHIANS ON ATHENIAN VASES

ABSTRACT

More than 1,500 "nonsense" inscriptions appear on ancient Athenian vases. We ask whether some of those inscriptions associated with depictions of Scythians and Amazons might represent meaningful sounds in foreign languages spoken in the Black Sea and Caucasus region. Analysis of the linguistic patterns of nonsense inscriptions on 12 vases of the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods reveals that some can be interpreted as names and other words in ancient forms of Iranian, Abkhazian, Circassian, Ubykh, and Georgian. These inscriptions constitute the earliest written evidence for Caucasian languages, and shed light on questions of Greco-Scythian relations, ethnicity, literacy, bilingualism, and iconography.

Greek inscriptions, used as signatures or labels for figures, are familiar features of ancient Athenian vase paintings.[1] Equally familiar are depictions of non-Greek figures, such as those traditionally identified as "Scythians." Is it possible that some foreign names or words with roots in ancient Iranian, Abkhazian, Circassian, or other languages of the Black Sea and Caucasus region (part of ancient "Scythia") were transliterated into Greek script on Attic vases? This article focuses on a group of puzzling inscriptions, commonly described as "nonsense" inscriptions, which consist of non-Greek names and strings of Greek letters that do not match known Greek words. More than 1,500 nonsense inscriptions (about one-third of all known Attic

vase inscriptions) have been catalogued, yet they are little studied. Several categories can be defined: Henry Immerwahr identifies "mock and near-sense inscriptions, meaningless inscriptions, imitation inscriptions or letters, and blots or dots."[2] It seems worth asking whether some foreign names and non-Greek words might have been inscribed on Athenian vases as well. As far as we know, however, no one has yet undertaken a systematic linguistic investigation of "meaningless" vase inscriptions accompanying depictions of foreign figures.[3]

In this preliminary study, we look at a set of vases of the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods (ca. 550–450 B.C.) that have cryptic strings of letters or foreign-sounding words associated with depictions of Scythians and Amazons.[4] "Scythian," a fluid term even in antiquity, does not describe a single ethnic group but is a conventional collective term for the extensive network of loosely connected, culturally similar peoples of the vast territory of "Scythia," which stretched from the Black Sea and Caucasus region to Central Asia.[5] These diverse, nomadic men and women of Eurasia did not refer to themselves as Scythians, of course; the name was used by the Greeks to refer to many culturally related tribes, each of which (as Greek writers acknowledged) had their own ethnonyms, customs, histories, and dialects.[6] In relation to the vases studied here, we use the term "Scythian" to refer to male archers wearing distinctive Eastern ("Oriental") attire: a quiver; a soft or pointed cap with or without lappets; a belted, patterned tunic and/or leggings; and/or soft, cuffed boots. Amazons are female warriors of Greek myth inspired by the lifestyles of nomadic Scythians, and in Athenian vase painting they are often similarly attired.[7]

We ask whether some of the nonsense inscriptions associated with these figures might be instances of glottographic writing. Were some vase painters attempting to render phonetically in the Greek alphabet the sounds of words in a language they heard spoken but perhaps did not

2. Thousands of inscribed vases are catalogued in Immerwahr's Corpus of Attic Vase Inscriptions (CAVI), now integrated, updated, and expanded by Rudolf Wachter in the Attic Vase Inscriptions (AVI) project (www.avi .unibas.ch). For types of nonsense, see Immerwahr 1990, p. 44; 2006; 2007, pp. 153, 155, 160, 163–164, 167–170, 174; Wachter 2001, pp. 153–154; Pappas 2012. For the vases discussed here, we provide, where available, references to *ABV, ARV*[2], *Paralipomena,* and Beazley, *Addenda*[2] (*Add.*[2]), as well as numbers in AVI and in the Beazley Archive Database (BAD) (www.beazley.ox .ac.uk/pottery).

3. Art historian Karl Lehmann-Hartleben (1894–1960) once expressed the opinion that some nonsense inscriptions were foreign languages, but he did not publish on the topic (H. Immerwahr, pers. comm.). For

non-Attic inscriptions on Athenian vases, see, e.g., the Sikyonian inscription on a dinos by Exekias (Rome, Villa Giulia 50.599; *ABV* 146.20, 686; *Add.*[2] 61; BAD 310402; AVI 7202). Baurain-Rebillard (1998, pp. 75–84) suggests that inscriptions on an Attic vase by Sophilos found in Pharsalos represent the Thessalian dialect (Athens, National Archaeological Museum 15.499; *ABV* 39.16, 682; *Paralipomena* 18; *Add.*[2] 10; BAD 305075; AVI 097). For instances of Etruscan and Egyptian on vases, see Gill 1987; Bresson 2000.

4. One can retrieve more than 1,500 records of nonsense inscriptions, as well as more than 200 vases depicting Amazons and about 40 depicting male Scythians and archers in elements of "Eastern" garb, from Wachter's AVI database (see n. 2, above) by searching for the words "nonsense," "Amazon," "Scythian," "Oriental," and "Persian."

5. Hdt. 4.1–142, esp. 4.21, 4.47–57; Rolle 1989; Braund 2005; Ivantchik 2006; Tsetskhladze 2008.

6. Strabo 7.3.7–9, 11.6.2–11.11.8 [C300–303, 507–520]. Herodotos (4.5–6) preserves a myth of common descent that suggests that some Scythians of the northern Black Sea area identified themselves as something like an ethnic group.

7. On Scythian attire, see Shapiro 1983; Gleba 2008. Many of these Scythian costume elements (individually and in combination) are also used by Attic vase painters in depictions of Persians. Often it is difficult to identify such figures as anything other than "Oriental"; for a brief overview of the complexities, see Raeck 1981, p. 102; Sparkes 1997, pp. 137–139, 142–144. Ivantchik (2006, p. 218) maintains that Amazons "of course have nothing to do with Scythians."

understand? Are some foreign-sounding names on vases meaningful in non-Greek tongues? The answers to these questions should be of interest to classicists, ancient historians, art historians, scholars of vase painting, epigraphers, and linguists. They are also relevant to the question of whether distinctive Scythian-style costumes depicted on vases indicate the ethnicity, in a broad sense, of the wearers.

Textual and archaeological evidence points to an "extremely close but uneasy" relationship between Greeks and Scythians in the 6th and 5th centuries b.c., followed by a period of "intense mutual integration and trade" in the 4th century b.c.[8] The various tribes of "Scythia" (the inclusive term used by the Greeks for the lands stretching from the northern Black Sea and Caucasus region to the Caspian Sea and beyond) aroused interest and curiosity among classical Greeks. Literary and artistic evidence demonstrates that a rich imaginary realm was created for the legendary Amazons, who were strongly associated with Scythian culture.[9] Male archers in Scythian costume and Amazons began to appear on Athenian vase paintings by about 570 b.c. Male archers in Scythian costume faded from favor by the time of the Persian invasions in the early 5th century b.c., but Amazons in "Oriental" costume remained extremely popular in vase paintings well into the 4th century b.c.[10]

GREEKS AND SCYTHIANS: MYTH, HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND ART

It is reasonable to assume that at least some Scythian individuals were on occasion present in 6th-century Athens, and that Greeks, especially those with ties to Black Sea colonies and trade, were aware of Scythians during the period in which the vases under consideration were made.[11] Notably, in Greek written sources (e.g., Hdt. 1.215, 7.64), Scythians are "identified by and with their clothing" (pointed hats, trousers) and weaponry (bows).[12] Scythians are depicted in elements of this attire in Persian and Scythian iconography as well.[13] Moreover, the distinctive hats (soft with flaps or pointed), tunics and trousers with zigzag patterns, boots, and quivers worn by Scythians and Amazons in vase paintings match the headgear, clothing, patterned textiles, and other artifacts discovered in Scythian graves of armed men and women of the 6th to 3rd centuries b.c.[14]

8. Moreno 2007, p 146.

9. For Scythian-Greek relations from the 6th to 4th centuries b.c., see Braund 2005, 2011; Moreno 2007, pp. 144–208. Amazons were associated with Scythians by many Greek and Roman writers, from Herodotos to Orosius; see, e.g., Shapiro 1983.

10. On Scythians, Amazons, and foreigners in vase paintings, see Vos 1963; Raeck 1981, pp. 10–66; Lissarrague 1990; Cohen 2000, 2012;

Barringer 2004. For Amazons associated with Persians in the 5th century b.c., see Castriota 1992, pp. 44–103.

11. See, for example, Braund and Tsetskhladze 1989; Rolle 1989, p. 129; Baughman 2003; Braund 2005.

12. Gleba 2008, p. 14.

13. Gleba 2008, pp. 17–19. See also Lubotsky 2002, p. 189.

14. Rolle 1989, pp. 41, 47, 58, 60–61, 82, 95–98; Gleba 2008, pp. 25–27; Mayor 2014, pp. 109, 199–208.

In recent decades, scholars of vase painting have proposed alternative approaches to comprehending the appearance of these figures. Rather than focusing on the elements of their clothing as possible markers of ethnic identity, the figures in Scythian garb are now studied in the context of the scenes in which they occur as well as the figures that they accompany. The Structuralist school of iconographic interpretation, in particular, puts a strong emphasis on the interpretation of Scythians and Amazons not as elements of Athenian historical reality, but as representatives of the "Other," or as generic markers of myth or epic.[15] Lissarrague, for example, maintains that Scythians stand for "outsiders" in Greek art. He also suggests that some nonsense inscriptions somehow functioned to jog the viewer's memory of a mythic story.[16] Building on Lissarrague's structuralist approach, and on an idea first advanced by Plassart in 1913, Ivantchik holds that the Scythian attire of male archers on vases, even those with non-Greek facial features and/or Scythian name labels, is not a marker of foreign ethnicity, but rather an artistic convention to indicate low-status Greek archers.[17] If, however, some vase inscriptions associated with male and female archers in Scythian costume can be deciphered as genuine Scythian words or names, as we argue here, then it seems plausible that foreign ethnicity was implied at least in some cases.[18]

More than 130 names for Amazons are known from ancient Greek literature and art, and the majority—about 70—are known only from their occurrence as labels on Greek pottery.[19] It has been argued that "all the known names of Amazons, including those that have survived on vases, are Greek."[20] While names assigned to Amazons in literary sources are etymologically Greek, the purely Greek character of Amazon names on vases is questionable. Some names, such as Andromache, Hippolyte, and Antiope, are familiar from ancient Greek literature. But the term "Amazon" itself was not originally a Greek word, and several of the Amazon names found on vases, such as Skyleia, Oigme, Gugamis, and Barkida (discussed below), are non-Greek as well. Likewise, some names attached to males in Scythian attire, such as Skythes and Kimerios, seem to allude to non-Greek ethnicity.[21]

The Greeks made contact with the Scythians in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C., and by the 6th century B.C., many Greek colonies had been established around the northern Black Sea coast (Fig. 1). Again, it is important to keep in mind that the Greeks thought of all of the diverse tribes of the northern Black Sea, Caucasus, and steppe regions as "Scythians," much as modern Europeans applied the term "Indians" to all

15. On the Scythians as "Other," with no relationship to the historical presence of Scythians in Athens, see Lissarrague 1990; 2001, pp. 30, 84; 2002; Barringer 2004, p. 13; Osborne 2004; Ivantchik 2006; Shapiro 2009.

16. Lissarrague 1990; 2001, p. 84.

17. Plassart 1913, pp. 172–175, cited in Ivantchik 2006, p. 200, n. 9. Both Ivantchik (2006, pp. 218–219) and Shapiro (2009, p. 335) specifically exclude Amazons from their arguments against

ethnic meanings of Scythian attire on vases. For a recent critique of Ivantchik's argument, see Cohen 2012, pp. 469–475, on non-Greeks in Greek art.

18. Tsetskhladze (2008) surveys the obstacles surrounding the attempt to determine ethnicity from proper names in antiquity.

19. More than a thousand images of Amazons on Greek vases are listed in Bothmer 1957; see also the "Index of Inscribed Names of Amazons," p. 234.

For a comprehensive list of Amazon names, see *LIMC* I, 1981, p. 653, s.v. Amazones (P. Devambez and A. Kauffmann-Samaras). See now also Mayor 2014, pp. 237–242, 431–437.

20. Ivantchik 2006, p. 218.

21. On the word "Amazon," see p. 455, below, and Blok 1995, pp. 21–37, 156–171; Mayor 2014, pp. 21–25, 85–88, On ethnicity and names, see Ivantchik 2006, pp. 218, 222; Tsetskhladze 2008.

Figure 1. Map of Greek colonies around the Black Sea, ca. 550 B.C.
M. Angel

22. On sources of slaves in Athens, see Braund and Tsetskhladze 1989; Tsetskhladze 2008; Braund 2011.

23. Circe: Arans and Shea 1994. Apsyrtos (Absyrtos): Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.241; the Abasgoi (Circassian /abeʒ-gʷə-y/, Abadz(a)-zone/area-ones.of, "the ones from the Abadza area") lived north of a people known as the Apsilai in the mountainous coastal region north of Colchis. *Apsurtas* means "Abkhazian," derived from the ethnonym /apswa/ meaning "people." See Olson 1994, pp. 6–7; Colarusso 2002, p. 131.

24. Willi 2003, pp. 223–224 and nn. 82–83. The Anacharsis story as it has come down to us combines legend and history, so there is no way to determine which details were folklore and which were based in fact; see Kindstrand 1981. For the apocryphal letters attributed to Anacharsis, ca. 3rd century B.C., see Malherbe 1977.

New World tribes and used "Africans" as a collective noun. Greek interactions with various tribes of Scythians along the coast of the Black Sea and further inland resulted in exchanges of goods, folklore, people, and languages. Many of the household and public slaves in Athens came from the lands around the Black Sea.[22] Foreign words, names, and oral traditions entered Greek culture through contacts among traders, sailors, travelers, slaves, and colonists. Some non-Greek names from the Black Sea region are preserved in Greek mythology: examples include Circe, "the Circassian"; Medea of Colchis (now Georgia or the Abkhazian coast), whose name is probably Iranian; and Medea's brother Apsyrtos, which is an Abkhazian name.[23] The Greek trading colony Dioskurias (modern Sukhum, Abkhazia) was established in the mid-6th century B.C. on the Black Sea between Colchis and the Taman peninsula; this was just one of many early Greek outposts where various Scythian dialects could be heard.

Literary evidence shows that Scythians and their neighbors, though exotic, were not unheard-of in Greece. A number of sources (e.g., Hdt. 4.76–80; Plut. *Sol.* 5; Diog. Laert. 1.101–105) report that a Scythian-Greek sage named Anacharsis, from the northern Black Sea region, visited Athens in the early 6th century B.C. and became a friend of the Athenian lawgiver Solon. Anacharsis, son of Gnurus, was the brother of a Scythian chieftain named Caduides ("Offspring of Battle" in Middle Iranian). According to tradition, his mother was Greek, and he understood both the Scythian and Greek languages. Anacharsis was said to have spoken a broken form of Greek among the Athenians, just as the Athenians spoke a broken language among the Scythians.[24] Foreign tongues were also heard in Athens when envoys from Persia and other lands visited Greece. Herodotos (6.34), for example, describes Miltiades, son of Kypselos, welcoming to Athens a party of foreign-garbed chiefs of the Dolonkoi, Thracians

from the Chersonese (Gallipoli peninsula) who traveled to Delphi and then marched along the Sacred Way to Athens in the mid-6th century; he also tells of a group of Scythian envoys who stayed in Sparta as guests of Kleomenes (ca. 520–489 B.C.; Hdt. 6.84).[25]

In 546–510 B.C., the Peisistratid tyrants of Athens employed a few thousand non-Greek horsemen, soldiers, and personal retainers from Thrace. Eastern Thrace was Scythian-influenced, and perhaps some Scythians were among the mercenaries. These barbarian troops are sometimes identified as archers, but the exact details and numbers are hazy.[26] Beginning in about 530 B.C., a number of vase paintings show Scythian-attired archers serving as personal attendants/companions in the immediate entourage of Greek hoplites. Two Athenian orators, Andokides (3.5) and Aischines (2.173), report that sometime after the battle of Salamis (480 B.C.) the Athenians acquired 300 Scythian archers as public slaves who served as soldiers and police in Athens.[27] These specific groups of Thracians and Scythians are not attested in literature until ca. 476 B.C., and their presence, if anything, corresponds to a falling off of male Scythian-dressed figures in vase painting. But it seems safe to assume that some Iranian-influenced dialects and other western Caucasian languages were heard in the Athenian Agora and in ports and emporia by the late 6th and early 5th centuries B.C. By the mid-5th century, Scythians began to appear as characters in Greek comedy, mocked for their rustic ways and harsh accents.[28]

The ethnicity and dialects of foreigners "from Scythia" seen and heard in Attica would have been mixed. Relationships with a variety of Scythians and their neighbors are evident in non-Greek names for Greeks in ancient literary sources. Some of these names reflect mixed ancestry, while others indicate non-kin relationships with foreigners via strong social bonds of friendship, guest-hospitality *(xenia),* foster parentage, education, trade exchange, alliances, or other mutual ties. In either case, such names were not random but referred to non-Greek ethnicity.[29] Intermarriage, often based on trade alliances, occurred between Greek and Scythian men and women in Athens and in Black Sea colonies. For example, the Scythian king Skyles (b. late 6th century B.C.) had a Greek-speaking mother and took a Greek wife in the Greek colony of Borysthenes, near Olbia on the Dnieper (Hdt. 4.78–80). The mother of Themistokles (b. 524 B.C.) was said to be a Thracian named Abrotonon (formed on a root loaned into Abkhaz and Abaza as /abra/,

25. On Persian speakers in Athens, see West 1968. For an interesting theory connecting Scythian-dressed figures in art with Miltiades, see Shapiro 2009, pp. 336–340. See Hdt. 4.108–109 for the Geloni, Greek colonists (ca. 6th century B.C.) who settled in the lands of the nomadic Budini and spoke a hybrid half-Greek, half-Scythian language. Notably, the city of Soloi in Cilicia issued coins featuring Amazons; its residents were said to speak a corrupt form of Greek (Diog. Laert. 1.51).

26. On the question of foreign Peisistratid mercenaries, see Lavelle 2005, esp. pp. 140–141, 300, n. 89. For the relationship between Scythia and Thrace, see Thuc. 2.96–98.

27. According to a tradition preserved in the *Suda,* s.v. τοξόται, ca. 1,000 Scythian public slaves served as a police force in Athens, camping out in the Agora, then moving to the Areopagus; see also Schol. Ar. *Lys.* 184; Baughman 2003; Vlassopoulos 2013, pp. 88–90. Names of "barbarian" archers appear in Athenian casualty lists of the 5th century B.C.: e.g., *IG* I³ 1172, line 35; 1180, lines 26–27;

1190, lines 136–137; 1192, line 153. (We thank Ann Patnaude for these examples.) See also Bradeen 1969, 149–151.

28. For Scythian-Greek contact in general, and Thracians and Scythians in Athens in particular, see Miller 1997, pp. 81–84; Braund 2005, 2011; Hall 2006, pp. 231–235; Shapiro 2009. For Scythians in Greek comedy, see, e.g., Ar. *Lys.* 184, 451, 455 (with many additional examples in other plays).

29. For onomastics, see Herman 1990, as well as the etymologies for individual names in *LGPN.*

"sky").[30] The father of the Athenian historian Thucydides (b. 460 B.C.) had a Thracian name, Oloros, "Glorious."[31] Kleoboule (b. ca. 405 B.C.), the mother of the Athenian orator Demosthenes, was half-Scythian; her father Gylon (Demosthenes' grandfather, a citizen of Athens) had married a rich Scythian woman while he was in exile in the Bosporos.[32] The names of foreign slaves often indicated their origins, which might have been either their actual or supposed region of birth or else their place of purchase, since slaves were often kidnapped and transported to different port cities. Thratta or Thrassa (Thracian female), Thrax (Thracian male), and Syra (Syrian female), for example, are standard names of slaves in Athenian comedies. Examples of other Greeks with foreign names include Lygdamis (after the 7th-century B.C. Kimmerian leader, whose name meant "White/Shining Person," as in Irish *lug(h),* "white, shining," English *light,* Alanix ruxš- or roxš-, "white, western"), Kroisos (Lydian), Libys and Battos (Libyan), Lyxes (Carian), and Skythes (Scythian). Foreign names among Greeks could imply kinship, friendship, or other relationships; the point here is that they indicate contact and familiarity with Eastern peoples.

The Scythian sage Anacharsis was credited with introducing the potter's wheel to Greece, and several foreign-sounding names are known from the Athenian Potters' Quarter.[33] Whether we can always discern ethnicity from names alone remains debatable, as, for example, with the potter named Amasis (a Hellenized form of the Egyptian *Ah-mesu* or *Ah-mose,* moon-offspring, "Child of the Moon"), who was active ca. 550–510 B.C.[34] However, some names clearly suggest a relationship of some sort to cultures and peoples beyond Greece, and particularly so when the name is an *ethnikon.* The name of the potter Kholkos, a contemporary of Amasis, suggests a connection with Colchis, and he signed an oinochoe attributed to Lydos, "the Lydian."[35] Although the social class of this Lydos is unknown, another later vase painter signed himself "Lydos the slave."[36] At least one, and possibly two, vase painters named Skythes worked in Athens ca. 520–510 B.C., while the name Brygos, who signed as potter on Attic vases of the early 5th century B.C., may be a non-Attic form of Phrygos, "the Phrygian," or it may indicate the Brugi (Brygi, Bryges, Phryges, Brigians) who migrated from Thrace to western Anatolia.[37] At around the same date (ca. 480 B.C.), the signatures of Syriskos/Pistoxenos, "Little Syrian/Trustworthy Foreigner," offer compelling examples of a foreigner in the Potters' Quarter of Athens.[38]

30. Plutarch (*Them.* 1.1–2) says that Themistokles' mother Abrotonon was Thracian, but notes that other sources gave her name as Euterpe and her origin as Carian.

31. Oloros appears to be Proto-Indo-European (PIE) **Oel-r-, *Ol-ro,* the latter in Norse *ull-r,* "Glorious."

32. Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 172.

33. On Anacharsis and the potter's wheel, see Diog. Laert. 1.105; Plin. *HN* 7.198.

34. Boardman 1987; Tsetskhladze 2008, p. 312.

35. Berlin, Antikensammlung

F 1732 (*ABV* 110.37, 685; *Paralipomena* 44, 48; *Add.*² 30; BAD 310183; AVI 2219). On the connection of Kholkos with Colchis, see Braund and Tsetskhladze 1989, p. 121.

36. Rome, Villa Giulia 84466 (*Add.*² 400; BAD 6247; AVI 7257), a black-figure kyathos with a much-debated signature. Neumann (in an appendix to Canciani 1978, pp. 21–22) suggests that the final word of the inscription be translated as "from Myrina." Another Lydos, "Lydos the Scythian," is mentioned by Aristotle as the inventor of smelting (Plin. *HN* 7.197).

37. For the vase painter(s) named Skythes, see *ARV*², pp. 82–83; Schulz 2001. It could be argued that he or they were slaves from Scythia. Discussing a red-figure cup attributed to Skythes (Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 83.AE.247: BAD 28761; AVI 4965), Saunders (2012, p. 11, n. 25, with further references) takes Skythes as Athenian. On Brygos, see Cambitoglou 1968, pp. 7, 11.

38. On the Syriskos/Pistoxenos Painter, and foreign potters and painters in general, see Pevnick 2010.

LANGUAGE CONSCIOUSNESS

The concept of language consciousness in classical antiquity is highly relevant to this study of nonsense vase inscriptions associated with foreign figures. Evidence suggests that many Greek citizens and residents, playwrights and audiences, and artisans and consumers were aware of and participated in a polyglot culture. For example, two of the inscriptions on the famous Arkesilas cup, a Lakonian black-figure cup of ca. 560 B.C. decorated with an Egyptian scene, are believed to be transliterated from Egyptian to Greek.[39] Other examples of foreign-language awareness include Archaic Greek faience vessels produced by Greek artisans but displaying Egyptian cartouches, suggesting a kind of multilingualism on the part of the craftsman or the consumer.[40]

The reproduction of foreign languages in Greek or non-Greek forms of writing was not unknown in classical Greece. One of the earliest instances is recorded by Herodotos (8.133–135), who tells the story of a Greek oracle at Thebes who unexpectedly prophesized in a barbarian tongue. The words were recognized as Carian by a man who was present, and he wrote the prophecy down on a tablet. Herodotos (5.58–61) also describes firsthand three lengthy inscriptions in ancient Kadmeian (Phoenician) letters displayed on tripods in the sanctuary of Apollo at Thebes. A body of literary evidence from Greek poetry and drama demonstrates efforts to imitate with fidelity the sounds and even the vocabulary of foreign languages, including that of Persians and Scythians.[41] Herodotos (4.87) reports that in the 6th century B.C., Darius I of Persia set up two pillars at the Bosporos, one inscribed in Greek and the other in Assyrian, naming all the nations serving in his army. Yet another story told by Herodotos (1.73–74) shows that the Scythians taught other ethnic groups their native tongue at an early date. In the early 6th century B.C. a group of Scythian nomads were welcomed to live in the Median capital, Ekbatana, by King Cyaxares (ca. 595–591 B.C.), where their duties were to hunt and teach Persian-speaking aristocratic youth the Scythian language. After 590 B.C., the Scythians relocated to Sardis, under the auspices of Alyattes, where they presumably continued to teach their language.

It is also significant that the names of tribes and places in several languages of ancient Scythia are preserved in classical Greek and Latin texts. In his ethnographic descriptions, Herodotos commented knowledgeably about the multitude of dialects spoken in Scythia and in the Caucasus, regions of incredible linguistic diversity. Relying on native informants and many translators, Herodotos recorded several authentic ancient Iranian and North Caucasian ethnonyms and toponyms. Examples of Scythian terms that entered the Greek and Latin languages include Arimaspi (Iranian, "owners of wild horses"); Tabiti (the hearth goddess, PIE for "heat"); Aspurgiani (Georgianized Mingrelian name with the Iranian root *asp,* "horse"); Maeotis (Circassian /mə-wə+t'e/, not-valence+dam.up, "[lake] not able to be dammed up," referring to the width of the Kerch Strait linking the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea); Colchis (proto-Circassian /q°əλḥe/, "mountains, montane region"); Sarmatae (Ossetian, "free men"); Massagetae (Iranian, *mass-ag-ket-tai, great-adjective-clan-collective, "they of the great clan");

39. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des médailles De Ridder 189. See Stibbe 1972, pp. 30, 115–117, 279, no. 194, pls. 61–62; Bresson 2000.

40. Language consciousness as evidenced in mixed sense and nonsense inscriptions, such as the Greek faience vessels, is the topic of Ann Patnaude's forthcoming dissertation (University of Chicago).

41. See Bacon 1961, p. 81, for Sophocles' knowledge of the Kadmeian alphabet, and p. 39, for familiarity with Persian customs, names, and sounds in Aeschylus; for Aristophanes, see West 1968. See also Long 1986 and Hall 2006, pp. 227–230, for more theatrical examples. For Greek awareness of barbarian languages in the *Iliad* and Xenophon's *Anabasis* (4.8.4–7), see Davies 2002, esp. pp. 165–167. For more bibliography on foreign languages in classical antiquity, see Werner 1992.

Issedones (Iranian, /isse-don-/, "people of the icy river"); *sagaris* (pointed battle-ax); and *aschu* (wild cherry juice, *atschi* in modern Kazakhstan).[42] The geographer Strabo, a native of Pontos writing in the 1st century B.C., also preserves several local names from ancient Caucasian languages: the name of the Gargareans of Colchis (11.5.1 [C504]), for example, is derived from the ancient Georgian word *gargar,* "apricot." (Apricots are believed to have originated in the Caucasus and been introduced to Greece by Alexander the Great.)

Herodotos and other writers associated the Amazons with Scythian tribes. Herodotos (4.110) reports that one Scythian name for the Amazons was *oiorpata,* which he translated as "Man-killers," but which probably meant something along the lines of "Rulers/Preeminent Warriors."[43] The term *amazon* itself was not originally a Greek word, although specious etymologies were invented in antiquity based on similarities to sounds in Greek.[44] Some modern scholars have proposed an ancient Iranian origin of *amazon* from *ha-mazon,* "warriors." The Hellenized term *amazones* may have had multiple sources from related Eurasian languages. One likely source was Circassian /a-mez-a-ne/, the-forest (or moon)-intimate .prefix-mother, "The Forest Mother." Amezan was the name of a heroic horsewoman-warrior-queen of the Nart sagas, oral traditions that combine ancient Indo-European myths and North Caucasian folklore. The Circassian form is pronounced [amezan], with a long final *a*.[45] The word probably entered the Greek language, along with stories about fighting women of the East, through the Black Sea trading ports where ancient Caucasian, Iranian, and other languages were spoken. The timing is appropriate: women warriors first appear in Greek art in the 8th century B.C., the period of early Greek colonization in the region, and the first mention of Amazons in Greek literature is in the *Iliad* (3.189, 6.186).

The non-Greek origins of the word *amazon,* together with the other foreign words and names preserved by Herodotos and other writers, raise an intriguing possibility. Did some of the names assigned by Greek writers and artists to individual Amazons also originate in the languages spoken by people of the Caucasus, the Black Sea region, and Scythia? As noted above, many names assigned to Amazons in literature are etymologically Greek.

42. Hdt. 1.215; 3.116; 4.5, 13, 22, 27, 57–59, 62, 70; 5.4; 7.64. On Herodotos's ethnographic descriptions and translations of barbarian languages, see Munson 2005. Herodotos (4.27.1) mistranslates *arimaspi* as "one-eyed," claiming that in the Scythian tongue *arima* meant "one" and *spou* meant "eye": see Minns 1913, p. 39; Strassler 2007, pp. 291–292, 307. For these and other translations, see Colarusso 2010. On Black Sea and Caucasian peoples and languages, see Olson 1994, s.v.; *Barrington Atlas,* Map 87, Map-by-Map Directory, pp. 1226–1227 (D. Braund). On the ancient Iranian sources for the names "Scythian," "Sogdian," and

"Saka," see Szemerényi 1980. (We thank Michael Heaney for this reference.)

43. *Oior-pata* was the Skolotai (Scythian) word for "ruler" (perhaps the preeminent "man-killer"). Although some scholars speculate that *oior* derives from **wiro* or **vir,* it is more likely to be an Armenian-like development of Indo-European **potis → oyi,* with a reassignment to the *r*-stems. *Pata* would then be a resumptive element designed to explain the first element, and would reflect an Iranian development of the same root.

44. The most popular Greek folk etymology was *a-mazos,* "without a

breast," because *mazos* sounded to Greek ears a bit like *mastos*. This false etymology gave rise to the erroneous idea that the women warriors must be one-breasted. For other Amazon etymologies, ancient and modern, see Blok 1995, pp. 21–37.

45. See Colarusso 2002, pp. 129–131, Nart saga 26. The name "Nart" itself is a Middle Iranian (and Ossetian) word derived from Indo-Iranian **(H)nr-tama,* manly-superlative, as in Vedic Sanskrit *Indrā-nrtama,* "Indra most Manly," with cognates such as Irish *nert,* "brave," Latin *Nero,* Greek *an(d)ros,* and ultimately PIE **An(e)r-temo-.*

It is possible, but not provable, that some of these names were originally foreign and "loan translated" into Greek as calques. In other cases, non- or pre-Greek names might have been "rationalized," that is, interpreted as if they were derived from Greek roots, as in the folk etymology of *amazon* itself. Many Greek names of Amazons contain the elements *ippe* or *hipp* (horse), reflecting a love of riding and equestrian skills; examples include Xanthippe, "Palomino," and Hipponike, "Horse Victory." Others describe warlike traits, such as Andromache, "Manly Fighter," or suggest character or virtue, such as Thraso, "Confidence," and Areto, "Excellence." Still others are feminine versions of male names, such as Glauke and Alexandre.

BARBARIAN NAMES IN GREEK ON ANCIENT ARTIFACTS

Since the Hellenized word *amazones* appears to have a Caucasian-Iranian source, and in ancient Greek thought Amazons were understood to be somehow related to Scythians, it seems reasonable to ask whether any of the strange-sounding nonsense inscriptions associated with Amazons and Scythians on Greek vases could have been intended to represent genuine non-Greek words from the Caucasus and neighboring regions. Such speculation is supported by relatively straightforward and unproblematic examples of the names of Scythians, Amazons, and other barbarians derived from foreign languages and written in Greek on ancient artifacts.

The earliest objects inscribed with non-Greek names written in Greek letters are two vases by the Athenian vase painter Kleitias (second quarter of the 6th century B.C.). Since no specific ethnicity is implied by Scythian-style attire, one cannot tell which of the many Scythian and related tribes is represented by the generic Eastern attire depicted on the vases, but these two examples challenge the theory that Scythian attire and names have nothing to do with non-Greek ethnicity. The famous black-figure François Vase (ca. 570 B.C.), signed by Kleitias, bears the earliest images of Scythian archers in Greek vase painting. This large volute krater depicts more than 200 humans, gods, and animals, many with identifying inscriptions. In the scene of the Kalydonian boar hunt, three archers wearing pointed Scythian-style caps attack the boar along with Atalanta and the other Greek heroes.[46] The names of these archers are Toxamis, Euthymachos, and Kimerios. Toxamis appears to be a hybrid name with the Greek root τοξ-, "arrow" and a Persian suffix.[47] Euthymachos means "Good (i.e., Fair or Straight) Fighter" in Greek. Although one must be cautious about assuming ethnic origins from Hellenized foreign names, the name Kimerios would

46. Florence, National Archaeological Museum 4209 (*ABV* 76.1, 682; *Paralipomena* 29; *Add.²* 21; BAD 300000; AVI 3576). On the Scythian archers, see Minns 1913, p. 53; Blok 1995, pp. 26–30, 217–219, 413; Shapiro 2009, p. 330.

47. Toxamis is similar to Taxakis and Toxaris, which are names given to Scythians and Amazons in ancient literature and vase paintings: Barringer 2004, pp. 15–17. Torelli (2007, pp. 85–115) reads the name as Toxaris, noting the similarly named Scythian in

Lucian's *Toxaris,* but careful examination of the vase shows that Toxamis is definitely the correct reading. Cf. Gugamis in Case 6 below, and Bothmer 1957, pp. 194–195: "Gygamis . . . may also be compared with Toxamis on the François vase."

appear to identify the Scythian-attired archer as a Kimmerian, a member of the Scythian tribe that invaded Asia Minor in the 7th century B.C.[48]

Fragments of a roughly contemporaneous black-figure skyphos (570–560 B.C.), also attributed to Kleitias, depict an Amazonomachy. The names inscribed next to the Amazons are Iph[- - -], [- - -]epuleia, and Skuleiei (Skyleia?).[49] The third name is of Scythian origin, a feminine form of Skyles, the name of the historical Scythian king (ca. 500 B.C.) who learned Greek and took up Greek ways.[50] A heavy gold signet ring with the Greek inscription ΣΚΥΛΕΩ (property of Skyles) was found near Istria, on the west coast of the Black Sea, his mother's home, and coins bearing his name have been found at Nikonion, his likely burial site.[51]

A little later than the two vases by Kleitias, a black-figure neck amphora (unattributed, ca. 550–500 B.C.) shows a fallen bearded archer in Scythian garb lying at the feet of two dueling Greek warriors.[52] Inscriptions in Greek identify the duelers as Hector and Diomedes, while the archer is labeled Skythes, "the Scythian." Whether this label indicates the archer's name or origin, it appears to allude to ethnicity.[53]

Examples dating to the Classical period include the base of a 5th-century Athenian cup from Kerch, where the Iranian name of the Scythian owner, Akhaxis, is spelled out in Greek letters.[54] The famous Persian hunting scene on a squat lekythos signed by Xenophantos the Athenian (ca. 390–380 B.C.), also found in Kerch (Pantikapaion), is inscribed with the Hellenized names of historical Persians: Dareios (from Old Persian "holding firm the good"), Kuros (from Old Persian "sun"), Abrokomos (Iranian root abro, "sky"), Atramis (Iranian root atar, "fire"?), and Seisames.[55] A ring of the 4th century found in a Colchian warrior's grave at Vani in Georgia is inscribed in Greek with the non-Greek name Dedatos.[56]

An inscription on a silver bowl excavated from a Sarmatian grave of the 1st century A.D. offers a late example: the rim of the bowl is inscribed with Greek letters spelling the names of the Sarmatian owner, Artheouazes (Iranian, "pious") and the silversmith, Ampsalakos.[57] Two names recorded

48. The ethnonym Kimmerian, "homesteader," can be traced back to PIE *(t)k(e)ym-, "home" (the source of Germanic heim, etc.): see Colarusso 2010. It has been suggested by Wachter (1991, pp. 93–95) that in an early, lost version of the myth Scythians took part in the Kalydonian boar hunt. Ivantchik (2006, pp. 210–224) argues that the names of the archers describe weapons (specifically, the bow) and that Kimerios was a common Greek personal name with no ethnic meaning.

49. Athens, National Archaeological Museum, Acr. i, 597, f–h (ABV 77.4; BAD 300727; AVI 969). See Bothmer 1957, pp. 23–24, pl. 19, where the first two names are restored as Iphito and Telepyleia.

50. Hdt. 4.78–80. Ivantchik (2006, pp. 218–219) relates the name Skyleia instead to Greek skylax (puppy, young animal).

51. On the ring (now in the Bucharest Archaeological Museum), see Dubois 1996, p. 12. The letter forms suggest a date near the end of the 6th or early 5th century B.C. For the ring and the coins, see Vlassopoulos 2013, pp. 114–115, fig. 13; Strassler 2007, pp. 313–315, fig. 4:78.

52. Angers, Musée Pince 284.10 (BAD 15591; AVI 159); see Lissarrague 1990, pp. 110–111, fig. 61.

53. Contra Ivantchik (2006, pp. 221–224), who concludes that the name does "not indicate in any way the ethnicity" of the archer.

54. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1885.495 (BAD 9009576; AVI 5924).

55. St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum St 1790 (ARV² 1407.1; Paralipomena 488; BAD 217907; AVI 7419). See Immerwahr's comments in AVI; Cohen 2006, pp. 140–142. Ktesias (Phot. Bibl. 72.42b = FGrH 688 F15; Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010, pp. 194, 196) and Plutarch (Artax. 1.3) explain that Cyrus means "sun" in Persian, but there is no reason to assume that ordinary Greeks were generally aware of the etymology of other Hellenized barbarian names.

56. Vani, grave 9: Chi 2008, pp. 87, 165–166, 169, pl. 31:b.

57. Braund 1994.

in Greek inscriptions of A.D. 225 and 244 found at Tanais, on the Sea of Azov at the mouth of the Don, share the Sarmatian-Ossetian root for "having many arrows."[58]

Many of these artifacts—the vase showing a fallen Scythian archer labeled "the Scythian," the silver bowl with Scythian ethnic names in Greek, the Scythian-attired archer named Kimerios on the François Vase, the vase fragment with the Scythian name Skyleia for an Amazon—were made during a period of lively contact between Greeks and Scythians and at the beginning of the great popularity of Amazon and Scythian figures in Greek art.

NONSENSE INSCRIPTIONS

We turn now to two examples of more puzzling nonsense inscriptions accompanying representations of Scythians and Amazons on vases. A fragmentary black-figure olpe in the Getty Museum collection (attributed to the Leagros Group, 525–510 B.C.) shows a pair of Amazons, one turning back to the other, who gestures (Fig. 2).[59] Strings of letters next to their heads, OHE(Y)N and KE(Y)N, appear to be meaningless words. The Leagros Group vases are notorious for nonsense inscriptions, but a few contain recognizable Greek names and words. Immerwahr has speculated that the words on this pitcher could "represent" the names of the Amazons.[60] Another possibility, which we discuss below (Case 7), is that the words represent the women's conversation.

On a red-figure amphora signed by the painter Euthymides (510–500 B.C.) a pair of archers in elements of Scythian attire flank a young Greek hoplite (Fig. 3).[61] The Greek putting on his armor is labeled Thorykion, "Breastplate" in Greek. The Scythian archer on the right is named Euthybolos, "Straight-Shooter" in Greek.[62] But the other archer's name, ΧΥΧΟΣΠΙ, Khukhospi, is unintelligible. This is an example of a non-Greek word that appears alongside Greek words on the same vase, indicating that the vase painter was literate (or at least able to copy texts).[63] But why would an artist who knew Greek write a meaningless string of Greek letters? We discuss this inscription in greater detail below (Case 1).

58. *CIRB* 1279, lines 25–26; 1287, line 24; see Ivantchik 2006, p. 217, for the names deriving from Iranian *druna* (bow), surviving in Ossetian as *ærdun,* Saka *durna,* Sogdian *dron,* etc.

59. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection 86.AE.130 (BAD 41928; AVI 4995).

60. Immerwahr in AVI 4995. On the frequency of nonsense inscriptions in the Leagros Group, see Immerwahr 2006, p. 147. For Leagros Group vases with recognizable Greek inscriptions, see, e.g., Berlin, Antikensammlung F 1904 (*ABV* 364.54, 356; *Add.²* 97;

BAD 302049; AVI 2262), F1961 (*ABV* 379.273; BAD 302354; AVI 2268).

61. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2308, from Vulci (*ARV²* 26.2, 1620; *Add.²* 156; BAD 200161; AVI 5259).

62. Another Scythian archer is labeled Euthybolos on a contemporary kylix attributed to the Ambrosios Painter (Florence, National Archaeological Museum 73127: *ARV²* 173.4, 1631; BAD 201568; AVI 3588). A Scythian archer labeled Eubolos, "Fine-Shooter," appears on a red-figure kylix attributed to Oltos (Basel, Antikenmuseum BS 459: *Paralipomena* 327.50bis;

BAD 352420; AVI 1991); another archer by the same artist is labeled Eubolos, in either case, perhaps Paris with a punning epithet? (Munich, Antikensammlungen 2593: *Paralipomena* 327.125ter; BAD 352421; AVI 5304).

63. See the commentary by Immerwahr in AVI 5259; see also Lissarrague 1990, pp. 49, 110, fig. 18. Pappas (2012) takes an aesthetic approach to mixed sense and nonsense in symposium contexts; see, e.g., another vase by Euthymides (Munich, Antikensammlungen 2307: *ARV²* 26.1, 1620; *Paralipomena* 323; *Add.²* 156; BAD 200160; AVI 5258).

Figure 2 *(left)*. **Athenian black-figure olpe attributed to the Leagros Group, showing two Amazons with a dog, 525–510 B.C. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection 86.AE.130.** Courtesy J. Paul Getty Museum

Figure 3 *(right)*. **Athenian red-figure amphora, type A, signed by Euthymides, showing a hoplite accompanied by two archers in Scythian costume, 510–500 B.C. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2308.** Photo R. Kühling; courtesy Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek München

Nonsense inscriptions on vases have often been dismissed as the result of illiteracy or boredom, but a mixture of sense and nonsense on a single vase is a more complex matter. Immerwahr has written extensively about literacy on Greek vases. Among the explanations he suggests for unintelligible words are jokes, visual or acoustic illusions, meaningless decoration, copyists' misspellings, deliberate or careless imitations of actual writing, attempts to give an appearance of literacy, and outright illiteracy.[64] He also points out, however, that literate vase painters sometimes inscribed unknown words: his study published in 2010 lists vases that have a single misspelled name alongside clearly intelligible names.[65] As Immerwahr and others have remarked, in antiquity writing could have other purposes besides conveying meaning through words. Vase inscriptions, both sense and nonsense, were addressed to an audience; the words were not only read and sounded out, but they stimulated discussion among the viewers, in addition to serving as another element in the decoration of the vessel.[66]

64. Immerwahr 1990; 2006; 2007; 2010, p. 118. For nonsense labels related to Amazons, see Immerwahr 2006, pp. 161, 165–166, 168, nos. 3816, 5121, 5287, 6269; cf. Snodgrass 2000, pp. 29–30.

65. Immerwahr 2010, pp. 119–121.
66. On orality and literacy in early Greek art, see Hurwit 1990. See Osborne and Pappas 2007, esp. pp. 142, 153, for performative functions of nonsense inscriptions. Pappas (2012)

suggests that combined sense and nonsense inscriptions on sympotic vases constituted a kind of aesthetic communication intended to present the audience with an intellectual challenge.

Despite the notion that the term *barbaros* derives from the way in which Greeks referred to non-Greek languages, examples of foreigners uttering "nonsense" seem to be rather rare in Greek vase painting. Inscriptions representing repetitive sounds can be found on many vases, irrespective of the ethnicity of those depicted, and in some cases (e.g., the Tyrrhenian group) they may in fact have more to do with the literacy of the painters. Steiner has argued that nonsense words with "harsh 'ch' sounds" next to images of Scythians and Amazons on vases were intended as parodies, meant to insult barbarians and mock their foreign accents, evoking the sounds of "throat-clearing or retching."[67] Moreover, it is worth noting that repeated *ch* and *kh* sounds are in fact very common in Caucasian dialects. The *kh* sound, represented by Greek chi, occurs in many Scythian proper names recorded by Herodotos, and it is a feature in ancient Greek comedies mocking Scythians.[68] Early European travelers in the Caucasus remarked that the local languages sounded very guttural and contained "a great number of hissing and harsh lingual-palatic [sic] consonants, which render pronunciation almost impossible for a stranger."[69] Modern linguists describe the diverse dialects as sounding "mellifluous," "percussive," "hissing," "throaty," and "gargled."[70]

As Steiner demonstrates, many inscriptions on Greek vases contain sophisticated auditory effects, rhymes, puns, and wordplay, and were intended to be read out loud. The act of sounding out the letters in a transcription of an outlandish language could have had a humorous effect on a Greek audience. Some of the nonsense inscriptions associated with figures in Scythian attire might simulate the sounds of foreign languages in nonsensical "double-talk," but, as we propose here, they might also represent attempts to reproduce genuine words or phrases in a foreign language.[71]

One way of making sense of some nonsense inscriptions and non-Greek names associated with figures of Scythians and Amazons on Greek vases is to investigate whether any of the phonemes represent, capture, or

67. Steiner 2007, pp. 75, 205–206, 292, n. 69.

68. On the humor of pidgin and non-Athenian Greek in the theater, see Colvin 2000; Hall 2006, p. 230; Kidd 2014, p. 136, n. 64. The rendering of various guttural fricatives in Caucasian languages by Greek chi may have been a mere convention, but it might also have reflected an early shift of chi to a fricative or at least to having a fricative allophone. That the shift of chi might have antedated the corresponding shifts of theta and phi would be phonetically natural, because a velar closure for a stop would have limited the airflow more than those for either a dental or a labial, and would thus have tended to shift more readily from simple occlusion over to frication.

69. Klaproth 1814, p. 321.

70. Colarusso 2002, p. 4. To hear poetry recited in a modern Circassian dialect, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBEC-9P8-7I (accessed July 2014).

71. Baurain-Rebillard (1998, pp. 76, 86–87, 91–92, 94–97, 101) suggests that some vases destined for Etruria were decorated with "mock" inscriptions intended to mimic the sounds of Etruscan; see n. 138, below. On "foreigner talk" in the comedies of Aristophanes, see Willi 2003, pp. 202–224 (a detailed phonological and linguistic analysis of actors imitating Scythian accents and broken Greek); cf. West 1968, p. 6 ("gibberish made from Persian noises"); Hall 2006, p. 229 ("gibberish made from foreign language noises"). On nonsense in Greek comedy, see Kidd 2014, esp. pp. 5, 136–137. The American comedian Sid Caesar (1922–2014) was a modern master of double-talk mimicking the sounds and cadences of foreign languages. As he describes in his memoirs, he perfected his technique as a boy in multiethnic Yonkers, New York, where he grew up hearing many foreign languages and immigrant accents. His ability to create fluid streams of convincing but nonsensical versions of languages he heard spoken but did not speak himself was achieved by mixing stereotyped distinctive sounds and inflections with a few genuine words (Caesar 2005, pp. 15–18, 216; examples can be heard at http://www.pri.org/stories/2014-02-13/remembering-sid-caesar-master-double-talk (accessed July 2014). The double-talk effect seems akin to some examples of "foreigner talk" in Greek comedies and inscriptions.

approximate the sounds of Saka-like Scythian, Indo-Aryan, Sarmatian, Circassian, Abkhazian, Ubykh, and other languages spoken in the area broadly known to the ancient Greeks as Scythia. To test this hypothesis, we analyzed a sample of "nonsensical" inscriptions and non-Greek names to see whether the sounds might reasonably be interpreted as words or names drawn from dialects spoken today by people of the Black Sea and Caucasus region. In the following sections we explain the historical linguistics of these diverse languages and the methodology behind the choice of examples and the analysis.

LANGUAGES OF THE BLACK SEA AND CAUCASUS REGION

Classical scholars tend to assume that "Scythian" was a unitary language and that all the "Scythians" encountered by the Greeks spoke dialects influenced by Northeast Iranian.[72] This is true of some, but not all, of the peoples who inhabited the large territory that the Greeks called Scythia.[73] The region is a cauldron of many different linguistic families, and the examples presented in this study reflect that diversity. Many of the tribes included under the Scythian umbrella in the northwestern Black Sea area probably spoke ancient forms of Caucasian dialects in use today (Figs. 4, 5).

Circassian and Georgian are members of non-Indo-European language families, Northwest Caucasian and South Caucasian, respectively. Circassian is divided into West Circassian or Adyghey and East Circassian or Kabardian. Ubykh and Abkhaz-Abaza are its sisters. Georgian belongs to the South Caucasian family, which also contains Svan, Mingrelian, and Laz (spoken around Trabzon, Pontus, where speakers of Romeyka, which preserves elements of ancient Greek, have recently been discovered). The Northeast Caucasian family, of which the best known member is Chechen, contains about 30 languages. Written evidence for the ancient forms of these languages is very rare: apart from Old Georgian, the only Caucasian language actually attested in antiquity consists of fragments of Alwanian (Caucasian Albanian), which is an early form of Udi, a deviant Northeast Caucasian language.[74]

Some languages change over time much faster than others. English, for example, has changed enormously during the past 1,000 years. Historical linguists believe that, with very few exceptions, Circassian and other West Caucasian languages have changed little over the past 2,000 years. Without written texts, dating a language is an inexact science. Ancient Greek alphabetic writing appeared by the 8th century B.C., and Georgian texts date back to the early 5th century A.D., but most of the languages spoken in the mountains, forests, and steppes had no alphabet until modern times, so all communication in antiquity was oral.[75] Tracing the movements of ethnic groups in this region over time is another problematic factor. Some, such as Turkic speakers, are relatively recent arrivals in western Eurasia; others have resided in the region for millennia. Circassians, for example, seem to have migrated at an early date from the south to the coastal area of the northeastern Black Sea, and later moved inland. Abkhazians are thought

72. See, e.g., Willi 2003, p. 203, n. 20: "As long as there is no evidence to the contrary, we may safely assume that the Athenian 'Scythians' were really . . . Iranian-speaking Scythians north of the Black Sea"; Hall 2006, p. 229: "Scythian was an Indo-Iranian language akin to Persian." Cf. Lubotsky 2002, p. 190: "We cannot even determine with any degree of certainty whether [Scythian] was a single language."

73. The Scythians who taught their language to the Persians (Hdt. 1.73–74, discussed above) clearly did not share the same Iranian dialect.

74. Colarusso 2009. For a map of the distribution of these languages today, see http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caucasic_languages.svg (accessed July 2014). The ancient language groups were probably geographically more extensive, and the locations of peoples have shifted since antiquity, especially in this region of nomads and clan conflicts; see Olson 1994 on individual ethnic groups.

75. Adygheys, Chechens, Tabasarans, and Balkars, for example, acquired written languages only in the early 20th century.

Figure 4. Simplified map of North Caucasian language groups spoken today. M. Angel

Figure 5. Map of Caucasian peoples and districts, end of the 18th century. M. Angel

to have moved north to the eastern Black Sea region after the Hittites displaced the Hatti, ca. 2000–1700 B.C.[76]

The reconstruction of earlier stages of a language, in the absence of texts, is necessarily hypothetical. In the case of Northwest Caucasian languages, however, we think it reasonable to assume that sound patterns in antiquity were roughly similar to those found today. This reasoning is based on the following five factors, which should be kept in mind when assessing the linguistic analyses presented in this study.

The first factor is the amount of cognate vocabulary shared between sister languages. Linguists can compare the relative frequency of such cognates to determine the degree of divergence and isolation, but even so there is no biological or molecular clock that allows for absolute dating. Scholars who study Caucasian languages believe that Circassian, for instance, diverged from Abkhaz at least 3,000 years ago, because only about 15% of their vocabularies are cognate.[77]

Second, despite the low percentage of cognates among the languages, all branches of Northwest Caucasian show strong grammatical parallels, such as the polypersonal verb, extensive nominal compounding, and ergativity. Such strong parallels have arisen because these languages, although they have differentiated phonologically, have not dispersed, but rather have remained adjacent throughout their histories. This has led to the formation of an "areal" zone—a linguistic zone where the languages all share common features, regardless of the degree of genetic relatedness. Such zones are thought to be old and to minimize divergence among the languages within them.[78]

Third, the polypersonal verb found in this family of languages is unique in the Caucasus. Although Georgian shows some object as well as subject inflection, its verb pales by comparison. Only the Northwest Caucasian languages inflect their verbs for every noun in the sentence, as well as to convey a host of other information. This chain of personal "indices" is reminiscent of an old feature found in PIE, the so-called clitic chain, which is a series of pronoun-like elements, along with some geometric suffixes, that forms a self-standing string in Hittite, Homeric Greek, Vedic, and modern Serbo-Croatian. The polypersonal verb and the clitic chain may be seen as independent retentions of an old and distinctive grammatical pattern shared by PIE and the Northwest Caucasian languages, whether through an old areal bond or even a remote genetic link. This odd feature of the Northwest Caucasian verb suggests a strong tendency toward morphological conservatism.[79]

Fourth, in spite of their general conservativism, these languages have by no means been totally static over the past two-and-a-half millennia. Kabardian (East Circassian) and Abaza are generally assumed to have emerged as distinct languages within the past 800 years or so, if we use political history as a guide. They have innovated phonetically to some extent, but chiefly in terms of their verbal suffixes, a pattern suggested for the family as a whole by the forms found in the "Scythian" inscriptions discussed in the following case studies. The glosses proposed for these inscriptions are in many cases deviant from modern forms, particularly with regard to suffixes, and even in the occasional personal index. These forms indicate

76. On the mapping of ancient language groups and tribes, see Olson 1994; Braund 2005; Anthony 2007, pp. 3–101; Colarusso 2010; and the map-by-map directory in the *Barrington Atlas*. See also Lubotsky 2002.

77. Colarusso 1994c.

78. On areal zones, see Campbell and Mixco 2007, p. 16.

79. On the polypersonal verb and clitic chain, see Colarusso 1992, pp. 74–117; 1994b; 1994c; 1997; 2003; 2006, pp. 27–38.

a degree of change commensurate with what one might expect over 2,500 years from a generally conservative language group.

Finally, the Northwest Caucasian languages exhibit complexity at every grammatical level, but in their phonetics they are positively exuberant, most of them making use of every theoretical point of articulation with numerous modifications, such as palatalization, rounding, and pharyngealization.[80] The Greek alphabet was simply not adequate for the task of representing a typical Northwest Caucasian phonological inventory. As a result, the following analyses often take liberties with the interpretation of specific Greek letters, such as chi. Deviations from present-day phonetics are to some extent obscured by the Greek spellings.

Even literate Greek vase painters sometimes experienced difficulty in accurately transcribing what they heard spoken.[81] A Greek speaker hearing Caucasian words and trying to replicate the alien sounds with Greek letters would produce words that appear bizarre by Greek standards, perhaps like those classified as "nonsense" by modern scholars. Circassian dialects, for example, have only two or three vowels, which are colored by the surrounding clusters of consonants. Consonants in this family of languages can number from 48 to as many as 81. Circassian phonetics diverge so sharply from Indo-European phonetics that efforts by Indo-European speakers, including ancient Greeks, to reproduce the language in written form can produce very odd results.

"Nonsense" words containing as many as four *kh(g)* sounds, for example, are worth examining, because consonant strings like this actually do occur in the Northwest Caucasian language family.[82] Circassian has seven phonemic *kh*-like sounds; Ubykh has 12. Abkhazian is especially complex, with weird clusters and doubled consonants and a plethora of homonyms. Such strange "guttural" consonants might well inspire a Greek speaker to write down a string of harsh *kh(g)* sounds and consonants, producing words that would look and sound like gibberish in Greek. As Steiner has noted, the repetition of a string of these sounds in a vase inscription could well have been intended as a parody of foreign speech.[83] Hearing them pronounced aloud would give one the impression of hearing the peculiar language spoken by Scythians. The distinctive harsh *kh* sound in particular appears in the linguistic caricature of the Scythian policeman in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* (411 B.C.). This play contains the most extensive example of "barbarized Greek speech" to survive in Greek literature. In one scene (lines 1200–1201), the Scythian is unable to pronounce the sibilant in the Greek name Artemisia. Instead, he pronounces it Ar-ta-mooks-ee-a.[84] This pronunciation suggests Iranian phonology, where [h], rendered by Greek <chi>, was a variant of /s/ between vowels. An Iranian speaker could not have said [s] in this position without lapsing out of the phonotactics (sound patterns) of his native language. Other linguistic elements of the Scythian's

80. Colarusso 1994a.

81. Immerwahr 2007, pp. 156, 158, 198. We thank Caspar Meyer for reminding us that we are not certain how ancient Greek was pronounced.

82. For examples of such words, see Case 12, below.

83. See n. 67, above.

84. See Colvin 2000, pp. 295–298; Willi 2003, pp. 198–225; Hall 2006, pp. 225–254; Kidd 2014, pp. 618–622. See also Kretschmer 1894, pp. 81, 85, 169, 185; Immerwahr 2007, p. 165, n. 34.

imitation "foreign talk" include the lack of aspirates at the beginning of words and the confusion of *r* and *l*. It would be an interesting project to analyze the linguistics of Aristophanes' Scythian-accented Greek in terms of ancient Iranian and Caucasian phonotactics.

METHODOLOGY

The case studies on the following pages present evidence that some nonsense inscriptions on Greek vases represent foreign words with distinct phoneme patterns and with meanings that are relevant to the context of the images they accompany. Our approach is to analyze cryptic inscriptions linguistically, seeking plausible candidate-roots from among the languages of the Black Sea and Caucasus region.

When we began this project, Wachter cautioned that so far no one has convincingly interpreted nonsense inscriptions as "texts in a foreign language." But he also acknowledged that in the "rare cases" when meaningful and apparently meaningless labels appear together on the same vase, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the unfamiliar words had a meaning that we do not yet understand.[85] About 140 Attic vases combine sense and nonsense inscriptions. Following Wachter's advice, we decided to focus on vases depicting Scythians and/or Amazons that contain non-Greek inscriptions along with recognizable Greek names or words, thus demonstrating the vase painter's functional literacy.[86] The exceptions are fragmentary vases (Cases 6, 7, and 11), but the painters of these vases are known to have produced literate inscriptions elsewhere.

Mayor and Saunders selected about 20 vases depicting Scythians and Amazons accompanied by nonsense inscriptions for Colarusso to analyze. Colarusso is a comparative historical linguist, trained in phonetics and phonology, specializing in Northwest Caucasian (Circassian, Abkhazian, and Ubykh), Ossetic, Old Georgian, Ancient Greek, Iranian, and other languages. He is one of the first linguists to reconstruct Proto-Northwest Caucasian and has also had firsthand experience with the typical spelling variants of illiterate and semiliterate speakers of Caucasian languages. Mayor and Saunders transmitted the inscriptions in Greek letters from the vases to Colarusso in batches of three or four, and asked him whether the sound patterns matched those of any known language forms. This was essentially a blind experiment. At this point in our collaboration, Colarusso knew only that the project involved strange words inscribed on ancient Greek vases that showed people in Scythian costume, but he was not shown photos of the vases until the end of the project.

The interpretation of names can be difficult, because names typically lack semantics or, if they are names from an unknown language, they are semantically opaque.[87] The interpretation of many of the Scythian and Amazon names in the following case studies, however, is possible because of a peculiarity of traditional naming practices among peoples who speak the languages of the Northwest Caucasian family. In ancient Greek onomastics, personal names often reflect ancestry, qualities, or parental aspirations. By contrast, in Caucasian, steppe, and other nomadic warrior

85. R. Wachter, pers. comm.

86. See Immerwahr 2006, p. 138; 2010, p. 118. On "linguistic otherness," see Hall 2006, esp. p. 228, n. 16, on a modern attempt to decipher "gibberish" in the "Charition mime" (a parody of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*, which is set in India) as a South Indian dialect. Jubier Galinier (1998) and Oakley (2005, pp. 14, 16) suggest that combining meaningful and pseudo-inscriptions was a deliberate strategy of the Sappho Painter; cf. Pappas 2012, pp. 77–79, on Euthymides.

87. On the need for caution in the interpretation of ethnic-sounding Greek names, see Braund and Tsetskhladze 1989, pp. 120–124; Tsetskhladze 2008, pp. 311–312.

cultures around the world, "war-names" or nicknames based on appearance, one-time experiences, battle skills, personality, favored weapons, and the like were (and still are) common. Traditionally, Circassians, Ubykhs, and Abkhaz (including the Abazas of late emergence) have two sets of names, a private one and a public one. The public one is a nickname or descriptive appellation based on a character trait or an incident in an individual's childhood. So, for example, one family might have the public name "God-let (you)-live" (= "Thank You") because a founder was known for habitual politeness. Examples of modern Caucasian nicknames for individuals include "Corpse-cause-die," meaning something like the English phrase "beating a dead horse," denoting extreme stubbornness as a character trait; "Dogshit," commemorating a childhood accident in which one stepped in dog feces; and "Stuck in the Oven," for someone who as a child crawled into a cold oven and was trapped. Several of the Greek names applied to ancient Amazons in art and literature seem to reflect this nicknaming habit (e.g., Marpesia, "The Snatcher"; Pisto, "Trustworthy"; Aspidocharme, "Shield Battle"; Aina, "Swift"; Toxophile, "Loves Arrows"). Many of the Scythian and Amazon onomastics discussed in our case studies appear to follow the same custom, with themes appropriate for nomadic warriors.

Some of the "nonsense" words on the 20 or so vases that Colarusso considered remain undeciphered. These may be mere nonsense, or they may reflect languages still unknown (at least unknown to Colarusso). But inscriptions on 12 of the vases turned out to be meaningful in Iranian or Indo-Aryan and in the archaic forms of several Caucasian languages. Remarkably, the meaningful words often show, in addition to the aforementioned custom of descriptive naming, the staggering clusters of consonants and wealth of "gutturals" found in these languages (voiceless and voiced palatals, velars, uvulars, and pharyngeals, all with plain and rounded variants, and in Ubykh and Abkhaz also palatalized and pharyngealized uvulars). Thus the interpretations of the Greek nonsense words as Northwest Caucasian forms receive support both phonologically and semantically.

Encouraged by these results, Mayor and Saunders asked Colarusso to consider a nonsense inscription associated with a Scythian theatrical character depicted on a well-known South Italian vase in New York. Again, Colarusso was not shown photographs of the vase until after the analysis. A discussion of this vase, which produced some of the most dramatic results of the project, will, we hope, show the potential of our research method and encourage confidence in the interpretations we propose, while at the same time suggesting the kinds of further questions such interpretations can raise.

THE NEW YORK GOOSE PLAY VASE

A significant scrap of ancient "foreign talk" in the context of theatrical comedy appears on a red-figure calyx krater known as the New York Goose Play Vase, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.[88] Attributed to the Tarporley Painter, it was produced not in Athens, but in south Italy, in the years around 400 B.C. (Fig. 6). The krater is extraordinary as the only surviving vase painting to transcribe theatrical dialogue on stage. It depicts three masked actors in a scene from a play. An old man poses on tiptoe with

88. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 24.97.104 (Trendall and Cambitoglou 1978, p. 46, no. 7). See Hall 2006, pp. 227–228, n. 13; Csapo 2010, pp. 45–49, fig. 2:1; Kidd 2014, pp. 136–137, n. 63. We thank Mary Louise Hart for suggesting that we study this vase.

Figure 6. Apulian calyx krater attributed to the Tarporley Painter, known as the New York Goose Play Vase, ca. 400 B.C. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 24.97.104. Photo © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

his hands above his head, about to be flogged by an authoritative young man in an "ugly" mask holding a stick, identified by scholars as one of the Scythian policemen of Athens. On the right, an old woman gestures toward them; beside her are a dead goose and two kids in a basket. It is generally assumed by scholars that the old man has stolen the objects on the right and that he is about to be punished by the policeman on the left.[89]

All three actors speak lines of dialogue, shown issuing from their mouths.[90] The old man says, in Attic Greek, "I am strung up [for a beating]." A typical legalistic phrase, also in Attic Greek, issues from the old woman's mouth: "I hand him over." But the actor brandishing the stick utters a "nonsense" word: NOPAPETTEBΛO, *noraretteblo*. His utterance has been variously interpreted as "pidgin Greek," a "foreign language," "noises that sound like a foreign language," or even "the words of a magic spell."[91] Remarkably, however, the phonotactics of this word are recognizable as the sound patterns of an ancient form of Circassian. Speaking in his native tongue, the barbarian character is saying something like "This sneak thief steals from them over there."

89. The "Goose Play" is apparently illustrated in another vase painting as well, on an Apulian krater of ca. 370 B.C. (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 69.951); see Taplin 1993, p. 32.

90. On such "bubble" inscriptions, see Snodgrass 2000, p. 24.

91. These interpretations are quoted by Colvin 2000, p. 295 (citing Beazley 1952). Most read the inscription as *noraretteblo,* but the beta is damaged and could be a rho, *noraretterlo.* Taplin (1993, pp. 30–31, n. 3, pl. 10:2) suggests a misspelling of NEBΛAPETOI, an obscure Greek word for "to have it away."

Linguistic Analysis

The sequence of <r>s in *noraretteblo* identifies this form as a Circassian verb. In Circassian an /r/ is intercalated between two /y/s, the /y/s then usually dropping under most conditions.[92] The Greek transliteration even attempts to render the geminate quality of the Circassian unaspirated voiceless stops (which are contrasted with voiceless aspirated, voiced, and ejective counterparts). The Circassian form is /ø-ne-y-y-he-y-e-t-e-bλe-w/, it/them-thither-flat.place-3-plural-3-present-steal-direction-pass.by-predicative, meaning "He stole it/them from them over there in their yard (or barn)," with a sense of stealth. The "thither" preverb, /-ne-/, can still be found, but is marginally productive. It once contrasted with a preverb /-qe-/ for actions within a horizon of interest of the speaker. The suffix /-bλe-/, "pass by," is now absent from this position.[93] But it can still form "compound" verbs, as in /bλe-pλə-č'ʸə/, pass.by-look-exit, "to see something while peering around an obstacle (such as a tree trunk)." The preverb /-y-/ is multiply homonymous, meaning "flat area," "large enclosure or building." The present verb "to steal," /təɣ°e/, is built on a back formation of the word for "thief," /təɣ°eź/, itself a clear deverbal noun based on an old root */-t-/, no longer attested. For Circassian that is 2,500 years old one would expect such variation as this form exhibits. One would also expect to find unaspirated voiceless sounds throughout the group at that stage. The doubling <ττ> also suggests an effort to render the unaspirated /t/ of Circassian, since today these sounds are tense and somewhat prolonged. One scholar resorts to doubled consonants to represent them, using single ones for the aspirates.[94] Of course tau itself was unaspirated in Greek.

This has to be Circassian, since neither Abkhaz nor Ubykh show the r-intercalation noted above. The <o> of the first syllable remains unexplained. It might represent an "emotomorph," a morpheme expressing the speaker's feelings. In this case, it could be a Circassian cognate of an incredulity emotomorph, /-awə́-/, pronounced [owú], still preserved in Bzyb Abkhaz, as in /d-awə́-šʸt-na-x-wa-z/, him-incredulity-upwards-it-lift-aspect-past.participle, "how could that one hold him (up)?!"[95] Taking the Circassian cognate as */-ew-/ (with a pronunciation [ō]), meaning "surely, indeed," the "early" Circassian form would then be /ø-ne-ew-y-y-he-y-e-t-e-bλe-w/, it/them-thither-surely-flat.place-3-plural-3-present-steal-direction-pass.by-predicative, "indeed he is the one who snuck around and stole it/them-from.them-over there in their yard (or barn)," with /-ne-ew-/ → [nō], yielding [nōrārēteblō], as usual in Circassian. The suffix /-bλe-/ gives a sense that the theft involved sneaking around buildings or other obstacles.

This translation of a nonsense inscription on an ancient Greek vase, emerging from obscurity after more than 2,000 years, builds confidence in our approach: a meaningless phrase associated with a Scythian figure is now shown to be meaningful within its pictorial context. Furthermore, its occurrence in a dramatic scene has a bearing on our study of the inscriptions on Athenian vases, since it vividly highlights the issue of audience and the degree to which Greek spectators could be expected to understand such speech. Given that the other two inscriptions on the New York Goose Play vase are in good Attic Greek, it is plausible that this foreign phrase

92. Colarusso 1992, p. 39; 2006, p. 20.
93. Smeets 1984, p. 276.
94. Paris 1974.
95. Colarusso 2002, pp. 536, 541.

was uttered on the Athenian stage. Some of those in the theater may have understood it; others may have perceived it simply as foreign. The word is multivalent, for even if it were not understood literally, it nonetheless connotes foreignness (and, in this case, had comic potential if those on stage did not understand it either). That this scene occurs on an Apulian vase raises additional questions about the ancient theater and south Italy, such as what it can tell us about the transmission of performances beyond Athens, and whether the audience in Apulia might have recognized the phrase as pertinent to the Scythian policeman's identity.

CASE STUDIES

We present here the results of our attempt to determine whether a significant number of plausible foreign names or words with appropriate meanings can be recovered from an admittedly small sample of nonsense inscriptions associated with foreign figures on 12 Athenian vases of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., when Scythians and Amazons were extremely popular subjects for Greek artists. Many of the letter strings on these and other vases that we considered still defy interpretation: these may be truly nonsensical, or attempts to represent unknown languages, or stereotyped "double-talk"; or they may be efforts to convey foreign captions, snippets of song, conversation, musical notes, exclamations, or evocative sounds that are irretrievable today. Imagine archaeologists and linguists two millennia hence attempting to decode 20th-century exclamations and sound effects such as "Pfft" or "Pow," or the modern convention of substituting random symbols (grawlixes) such as #$%&! to stand for profanity.

Because we are working with inscriptions that may represent words from unwritten foreign languages transliterated into Greek letters by vase painters more than 2,000 years ago, our conclusions cannot be verified scientifically. We can only offer plausible interpretations and impressionistic guesses. Given the multiplicity of languages to be considered and the brevity of single or incomplete nonsense words, there is always the risk of false positive results. We are well aware of the proverbial "infinite monkeys typing" theorem, a probability problem that extends back to ancient Greek atomists and prompted the scorn of Cicero (*Nat. D.* 2.93). Might a vast number of vase painters inscribing a great many random strings of letters accidentally produce a group of letters that formed a real word in a foreign language? Yet vases depicting Scythian or Amazon archers accompanied by inscriptions that can be translated as words descriptive of the scene or names appropriate for warriors suggest intentionality. Nevertheless, our concern for the probability problem led us to undertake a second round of analyses using inscriptions from vases *without* depictions of Scythians or Amazons (see pp. 485–487, below).

Of the inscriptions that we analyzed, a majority of those associated with Scythians and Amazons produced suggestive results. We believe that Cases 1–6 are the strongest examples; Case 7 suggests foreign conversation; Cases 8–12 are more speculative. A technical commentary with a full discussion of linguistic forms is provided in each case.[96]

96. Dictionaries and other technical works on Caucasian languages used in these analyses are listed in the Appendix; they are not always individually cited in the notes.

Case 1

On a red-figure amphora by Euthymides (510–500 B.C.), described above, the non-Greek name ΧΥΧΟΣΠΙ, Khukhospi, appears next to a Scythian archer whose companions have the Greek names Euthybolos and Thorykion (Fig. 3).[97] If the second part of the name, *ospi,* had been written *aspa* instead, one might see a link to *asp*, Scythian-Iranian "horse," or Greek *aspis,* "shield."[98] But we suggest that the phonetics of Khukhospi may instead indicate an ancient form of Abkhazian. If so, then Khukhospi would mean "Enthusiastic Shouter" or "Battle-Cry," an appropriate nickname for a warrior.

Linguistic Analysis

A possible Abkhazian source behind Khukhospi is /ħ°əħ°a-c-b(a)-əy/, shout-hot/fervent-name.suffix-emphatic. The concept "hot," in the sense of fervent, is expressed in modern Abkhaz as /á-ca/, (/ca/ = [tsa], Circassian /sa/), so this may well be what the <s> represents. The <p> is a variant, then, of the naming suffix /-ba/, which devoices after voiceless consonants. The only part of the compound not seen in Abkhazian today is the emphatic /-y/, though an emphatic /-gʸəy/ still exists in Abaza and Ubykh. Because we are working with ancient stages of all of these languages, we should expect to find cognates that have since been lost. It is noteworthy that the Greek vocalization of this form with <υ> and <o> supports the vertical vowel system phonotactics of Abkhazian, and of all the languages in this family. The two or three vowels assimilate in rounding (and in other articulatory details) to surrounding consonants, in this case to rounding of the hypothesized pharyngeal. One might suggest a Proto-Abkhaz-Abaza form */x̌°əx̌°a-c-b(a)-y/ with uvular fricatives, from which many of the pharyngeals have arisen, but we see this root as derived from Proto-Northwest Caucasian /(w-)qʼa-/, "to say," whence Abkhazian and Abaza /ħ°a-rá/, "to say," /ħ°ħ°a-rá/, "to hold a conversation," Ubykh /qʼa-n/, "to speak," West Circassian /ʔˠə-n/, "to say," Kabardian /-ž-ʔə-n/, "to speak (back) to someone." Hence we believe that pharyngeal fricatives lie behind the name. Such an interpretation also helps to date this shift within Abkhaz as an old one.[99]

97. On the vase, see n. 61, above. The Greek names of the two other warriors are appropriate: Euthybolos carries a bow and Thorykion puts on his armor. Several unexplained letters, ΜΑΕ[. . . .]Γ[.], also appear alongside this archer; Immerwahr (AVI 5259) suggests that this could be the beginning of a name or spoken word. See also Euthymides' volute krater from Morgantina (Aidone, Museo archeologico 58.2382: *ARV*² 8.10, 1620; *Add.*² 156; BAD 200145; AVI 5121); there, in an Amazonomachy where Herakles and Andromache are named, Immerwahr reads ΧΑΣΑ, Khasa, for a fallen Amazon (Neils 1995, p. 433, reads ΧΑΡΑ) and terms this nonsense. However, in Circassian, Khasa means

something like "One Who Heads a Council" (Circassian /x̂ə-ə-s-ə-(ɣə)/, among.group-in-sit-in(-past), "council," meaning someone who headed a council(?), where /-ə-ə-/ yields /-a-/, and with /-ə-ɣ(ə)/ yielding /-a/ in contemporary eastern dialects, such as Kabardian /ə-ə-/ → /a/). These examples suggest that Euthymides tended to use *kh* consonant clusters in the context of Scythian and Amazon figures. (Our thanks to Alexandra Pappas for this insight.) Euthymides often combines sense and nonsense inscriptions; see Immerwahr 2006, pp. 149–150. Pappas (2012, pp. 77–79) discusses another example (Munich, Antikensammlungen 2307: *ARV*² 26.1, 1620;

Paralipomena 323; *Add.*² 156; BAD 200160; AVI 5258), an amphora by the same painter with a sympotic scene in which one Greek-sounding nonsense word appears alongside several meaningful Greek inscriptions.

98. Khukhospi is the reading of Immerwahr (1990, p. 65; 2006, pp. 150, 166, no. 5259) and Steiner (2007, pp. 205–206). Ivantchik (2006, pp. 211, 214) reads "Chalchaspis" (Copper-shield), following Kretschmer (1894) and Neumann (1977, pp. 38–39). A possible link to the Scythian-Iranian *asp* root has been suggested by Henry Immerwahr and Christopher Beckwith (both pers. comm.).

99. Colarusso 1994c.

Figure 7. Athenian red-figure cup attributed to Oltos, showing Amazons running and on horseback, 525–500 B.C. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection 79.AE.16. Courtesy J. Paul Getty Museum

Case 2

A fragmentary red-figure cup attributed to Oltos (525–500 B.C.) shows Herakles and Hermes labeled in Greek on one side, while on the other side several clusters of letters around a group of Amazons running and riding into battle appear to be nonsense (Fig. 7).[100] Oltos is a highly unusual name in Athens, suggesting that he may not have been a native. He often combined sense, "nonsense," and misspellings (such as those of the name of his potter companion, Pamphaios) on his vases, but he was perfectly capable of writing coherent Amazon names.[101] On this cup, the letters around the Amazons could be intended to give the impression of a rushing onslaught of Amazons. The longest complete string of letters, ΠΚΠΥΠΗΣ, Pkpupes, looks impossible to pronounce, but it is linguistically promising: it fits the wild consonant clusters of Circassian. If the sequence was a deliberate attempt to reproduce ancient Circassian, then the linguistic elements are in the correct order to mean "Worthy of Armor," an appropriate name for an Amazon.

Linguistic Analysis

Only a few languages have consonant clusters like that seen in Pkpupes. Outside of Circassian, one would have to go to the Kamchadal (Itelmen) natives of the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia, or to the Salishan languages

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100. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 79.AE.16 (BAD 10099; AVI 4923); see also Immerwahr 2006, p. 164, no. 4923. The other incomplete words on this vase exhibit telltale *kh* sounds; perhaps they represent the cries of the riding Amazons, or exclamations intended to sound like Amazon language.

101. See Immerwahr 2006, p. 150, n. 46. Examples include Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 79.AE.127 (BAD 13715; AVI 4938); Berlin, Antikensammlung F2263 (*ARV*² 62.85, 1622; *Add.*² 165; BAD 200521; AVI 2312); London, British Museum E18 (*ARV*² 62.86, 1700; *Paralipomena* 327; *Add.*² 165; BAD 200522; AVI 4433). Another cup by Oltos (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1927.4065; *ARV*² 62.77; *Paralipomena* 327; *Add.*² 165; BAD 200513; AVI 5960), also has nonsense on a scene with Amazons on horseback, but none of the chains of letters look promising. (Saunders is grateful to Anja Ulbrich for allowing him to study this vase.)

of British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest, to find similar consonant clusters. In Circassian the meaning is something like /pq-p'ʔˤʷə-pəs/ or /pq-p'ʔˤʷə-pšˠ/, body(body's frame)-covered/sheathed-worthy, "Worthy Armor," or, less likely, body(body's frame)-covered/sheathed-noble (prince[ss]), "Noble with Sheathed (Armored?) Body." We feel confident that the vase painter was making a valiant effort to render in Greek letters the Circassian form /pq-p'ʔˤʷə- . . ./, body-cover-, because even the order of the elements is correct, with the first root lacking any vowel. Nowadays [pshi], "prince(ss)," would be used as a title at the front of a name, but the older practice apparently was to place such titles at the end. Evidence suggests that /pšˠə/ was used for males and /gˤašˠe/ for females, but the latter also seems a late development. Still, there is no grammatical gender in Circassian, and /pšˠə/ might have a history much like that of Germanic *magdaz,* German *Magder,* English *maid,* which was originally used to denote a servant of either gender. (If the letter H represents an aspirate [h], then the third element of Pkpupes might be /-pḣəṡ/, "woman," without rounding; compare usual Abkhazian /pḣˤəṡ/, but note Shapsegh Circassian /px̌ə/, "daughter," also without rounding, as opposed to the more usual Circassian /px̌ˤə/.)

Case 3

A red-figure hydria signed by Hypsis (510–500 B.C.) shows three Amazons preparing for battle (Fig. 8).[102] The one on the left, holding a spear and helmet, is labeled with the Greek name Andromache. Her comrade on the right is named Hyphopyle, perhaps a misspelling of a Greek name. Between them, an Amazon blowing a trumpet has two inscriptions: her name Antiopea and a "meaningless" word, ΧΕΥΧΕ, *kheukhe.* This could represent the sound of the trumpet.[103] On the other hand, the sounds match Circassian forms for "One of the Heroes/Heroines." Might this be a foreign term of praise associated with Antiopea, analogous to the common Greek vase inscription *kalos,* which appears next to a male charioteer on the shoulder of the same hydria?

Linguistic Analysis

Kheukhe would be Circassian for /x̂e+x̌ˤ-e/, among.group+hero-in, "(One from) among the heroes," assuming no gender distinction, since Circassian has none and shows no traces of having ever had one. (We use <+> to mark derivational boundaries and <-> to mark inflectional ones.) Note that this root also occurs in Case 12.

102. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2423, from Vulci (*ARV*² 30.1, 1628; *Add.*² 156; BAD 200170; AVI 5287); see Immerwahr 2006, pp. 142, 166, no. 5287.

103. We thank Alexandra Pappas for this suggestion. Possible musical note inscriptions have been proposed for a black-figure epinetron (Eleusis, Archaeological Museum 907: BAD 7965) and a red-figure amphora by Smikros (Berlin, Antikensammlung 1966.19: *Paralipomena* 323.3bis; *Add.*² 154); see Steiner 2007, p. 190, n. 36. Against the interpretation of the word as a sound here, our search for "trumpet" in AVI did not turn up any chains of letters similar to *kheuhke.*

Figure 8. Athenian red-figure hydria, signed by Hypsis, showing three Amazons preparing for battle, 510–500 B.C. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2423. Photo R. Kühling; courtesy Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek München

104. London, British Museum E253 (1843.1103.35), from Vulci (*ARV*² 35.2, 1625; BAD 200204; AVI 4537); see Lissarrague 1990, p. 277, no. A418.

105. Basel, Antikenmuseum BS 488 (*ARV*² 172.4, 1631; *Add.*² 184; BAD 201560; AVI 2003).

Case 4

A red-figure amphora that recalls the Euergides Painter (525–500 B.C.) shows a Greek warrior named Hippaichmos leading a horse toward an Amazon or a Scythian (the gender, as often, is difficult to distinguish) whose non-Greek name is ΣΕΡΑΓΥΕ, Serague (Fig. 9).[104] The same name labels a Scythian-style archer on a contemporary cup attributed to the Delos Painter.[105] In Circassian Serague would mean "Wearing (Armed with) Dagger or Sword." As Circassian is not a gendered language, this name could apply to either sex.

Linguistic Analysis

Serague looks like Circassian, /se-ra-ɣ-we/, sword-locative/possession-wear-present.participle/predicative.suffix, "One wearing a sword." Since today /-ɣ-/ is used for wearing clothes only, this interpretation assumes a semantic shift, which is plausible. The second vowel, <a>, suggests an effort

Figure 9. Athenian red-figure amphora, type A, recalling the Euergides Painter, showing a warrior with a horse and an Amazon or a Scythian, 525–500 B.C. London, British Museum E253. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum

on the part of the vase painter to capture a retraction of the tongue, and this would indicate a voiced uvular fricative (perhaps still a voiced uvular stop in antiquity, */G/) rendered by the Greek gamma. Some dialects and speakers of Circassian place a stress on the present participle ending /-we/, while others would place it in such a construction before the root, i.e., on the <a>. The original might have had the more usual preverbal root stress of Circassian and so presented a phonetic [a] as the second vowel of this form, reflected by the <a> in the Greek inscription. It is possible that the vase painter was trying to capture a rounded voiced velar stop, /g°/; if so, the name would be /sə-rə-g°-wə/, sword/dagger-instrumental-stuff/cram, "jab into someone"(?), although in that case one would expect the preceding vowel to be an <o>. The semantics favor the first possibility.

Case 5

A red-figure amphora in the manner of Euphronios (510–500 B.C.) bears a clearly labeled Herakles and an Amazon named ΒΑΡΚΙΔΑ, Barkida (Fig. 10).[106] The name appears to derive from eastern Iranian, or Indo-Aryan, with a loan into Circassian, meaning "Princess/Noble Kinswoman," a reasonable name for an Amazon.

Linguistic Analysis

The name Barkida could be read as /warq-id-ā/, a compound of the Circassian word /warq/, "noble," with a Greek suffix /-ida/, /-ides/ appended.[107] Circassian has taken /warq/ from an unknown language; it has no cognates in the other members of the family. The original could have been

106. Paris, Musée du Louvre G 107 (*ARV*² 18.1, 1619; *Add.*² 153; BAD 200088; AVI 6451). For Barkida, see Bothmer 1957, p. 131. See also Immerwahr's commentary in AVI 6451, noting a theory that Barkida could refer to Barka, a Greek colony in Libya founded in the 7th century B.C.

107. The same suffix is found in the name of the Scythian king Caduides, the brother of Anacharsis (Diog. Laert. 1.101).

Figure 10. Athenian red-figure neck amphora in the manner of Euphronios, showing an Amazon shooting an arrow, 510–500 B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre G 107.
Photo C. Gaspari; © RMN-Grand Palais/ Art Resource, NY

108. Hdt. 4.28; Thuc. 2.98. Indo-Aryan /sindhava/ ← PIE *sindh-ewo, referring to a boundary river, perhaps the Kuban. The same root is found in Iranian "Hindu" and Irish "Shannon" <sionainn>.

/warq/ or /wark/ (*/k/ → Circassian /q/) or even /varq/ or /vark/, but not /bark/, because this would have remained /b/ in Circassian. If the Greek name is derived from the same borrowed form, we need a form in the source language that gives initial Greek /b/ but Circassian /w/. The most likely candidate is */vark-/. Speaking roughly, this looks Iranian, especially eastern or even Indo-Aryan, since in these parts Indo-Iranian */w/ → /v/ (cf. *Veda* ← PIE *woid-, "knowledge," Greek *oida*, "know," English *wit*). If it were Iranian, however, one would expect */var(a)g-* with voicing of the suffix. Such a form would have yielded Greek *Bargida* and Circassian */warɣ-/. We prefer to take */vark-/ as an Indo-Aryan form, perhaps from the Sindians of the northwestern Caucasus, mentioned by Herodotos and Thucydides.[108] It would be an adjectival form from an earlier *war-ak(a)-. The root *var- itself would be from PIE *wel-, as in Tocharian *walo*, "king, ruler," and English *weal(th)*. We would still take the element /-ida/ as a kinship suffix cognate with that in Greek. On this interpretation, Barkida appears to mean "Princess" or "Noble Kinswoman."
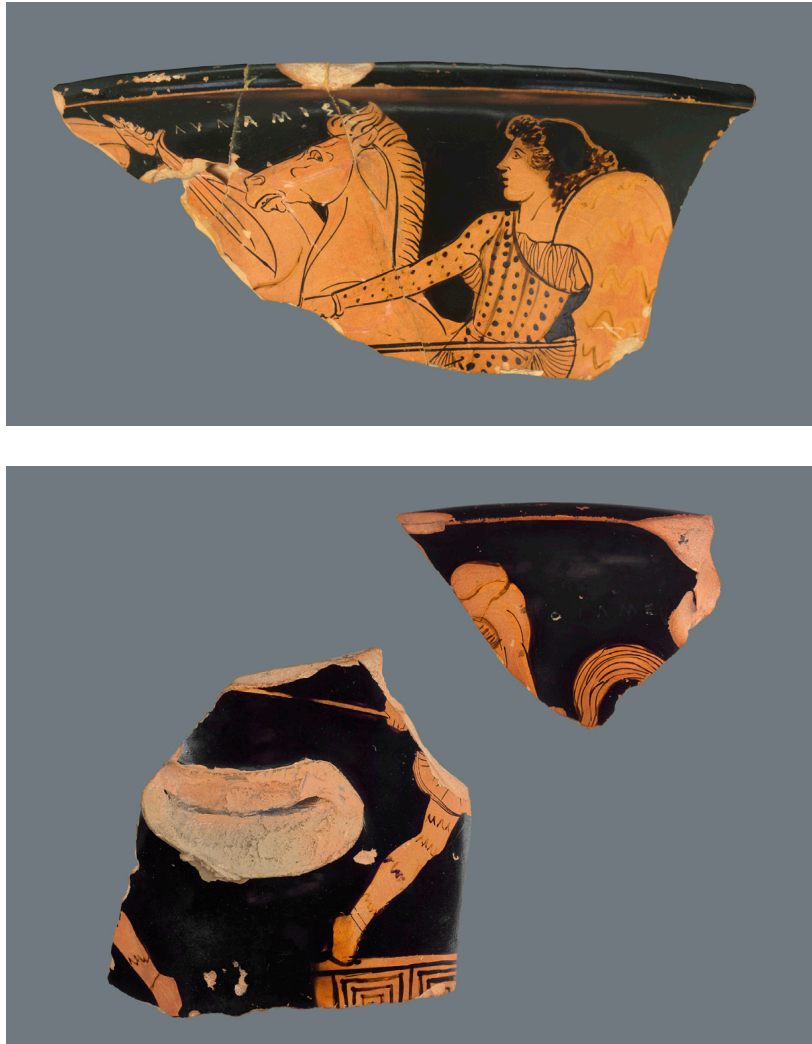
Figure 11. Athenian red-figure rhyton fragments attributed to the Sotades Painter, showing Amazon riders, 475–450 B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre SB 4143, SB 4145, SB 4154. Photos S. Maréchalle and H. Lewandowski; © RMN-Grand Palais/ Art Resource, NY

CASE 6

A fragmentary red-figure rhyton found in Susa and attributed to the Sotades Painter (475–450 B.C.) depicts Amazons labeled ΓΥΓΑΜΙΣ, Gugamis, and ΟΙΓΜΕ, Oigme (Fig. 11).[109] Bothmer notes that the name Gugamis seems to have a Persian ring; the suffix "-mis" is Persian but the root suggests "iron" in Circassian.[110] Notably, the Greeks believed that the Amazons were the first people to use iron weapons (Lys. 2.4). Oigme resembles Ubykh forms for something like "Don't Fail!" The Ubykhs, on the northeastern coast of the Black Sea, were reputed to be among the foremost warriors of the Caucasus. Other vases produced by the Sotades workshop bear literate Greek inscriptions, but since a number are decorated with exotic Persian, Amazon, and other barbarian themes, and since examples have been found at Kerch and in Egypt, as well as in Persia, some may have been made with non-Greek markets in mind. Bothmer and Immerwahr suggest that the painter may have known the destination of the vase and used Persian-sounding names for that reason.[111]

109. Paris, Musée du Louvre SB 4143, SB 4145, SB 4154 (*ARV*² 765.19; BAD 209476; AVI 6724).

110. Bothmer 1957, p. 195: "Gygamis reminds me of Lygdamis or Semiramis, and may also be compared with Toxamis on the François vase."

111. Bothmer 1957, pp. 194–195; Immerwahr in AVI 6724.

Linguistic Analysis

Gugamis appears to be a Circassian name with a Persianized ending /-mis/: /ɣ°ə-ɣe-(mis)/, metal-abstract.suffix-(mis). While /ɣ°ə/ does not appear in modern Circassian dictionaries as "metal," fluent speakers recognize it in compounds such as West Circassian /ɣ°ə-č'ə/, metal-hard, "iron," and /ɣ°ə-č'ə-ƛ'/, metal-hard-man, "iron man, one who deals with iron," which is a common family name. The same root is preserved in the word for "smith" (cf. Russian *kuznets*) and in the word for "cooper," which shows an e-grade of the root. West Circassian /ɣ°ə-č'ʸe/ and Kabardian /ɣ°ə-k'ʸe/, metal-instrumental.suffix, mean "the one with/by metal." In Circassian (both West and Kabardian) /ɣ°a-pƛe/, metal-red, "copper," the /-a-/ is automatic and reflects a root /ɣ°e-/. So the Circassian name Gugamis means "someone associated with metal." The voiced uvular fricatives would most likely be approximated with Greek gammas, and the vowels match up nicely with Guga(mis), the schwa of the first syllable in Circassian being rounded by the initial consonant, and the open vowel of the second being represented by Greek alpha because the uvular pulls the Circassian vowel down and back beyond the articulatory target for *e*.

The name Oigme does not look Circassian. It is more likely archaic Ubykh, /w-a-gʸ(a)-ma/, you-to-fail-not, "Don't You Fail," with the subject in indirect inflection and an archaic suffixal negative.[112] "Don't Fail" suggests a nickname, in keeping with nomad warrior traditions.

Case 7

A fragmentary black-figure olpe attributed to the Leagros Group (525–510 B.C.), described above, shows two Amazons on foot (Fig. 2).[113] Beside them is a dog with a red collar. (Amazons, like Greek warriors and hunters, are often depicted with dogs.)[114] The first Amazon turns back toward her companion, giving the impression of a conversation. The letter strings painted next to the women, OHE(Y)N and KE(Y)N, can be interpreted as ancient forms of Abkhazian.[115] The meaning of the first word depends on the pronunciation of the letter H (as an aspirate or as a vowel): *oheun* would signify "They/She were/was over there," *oēeun* would mean "We are helping each other." *Keun* means "Set the dog loose."

Linguistic Analysis

If the letter H in OHE(Y)N represents an intervocalic [h], the word matches Abkhazian /wax̌ʸa-w-n(a)/, being.over.there-progressive.aspect-indefinite. past. If it represents a vowel, the word is still Abkhazian, but appears to be a verbal form: /wʕáħ°-w-n(a)/, mutual.assistance-progressive.aspect-indefinite.past, "helping one another," perhaps a face-to-face injunctive with loss of pronominal inflection, "Let us be helping one another."[116] Here one assumes that the voiceless rounded pharyngeal /-ħ°-/ was more or less lost in the shadow of the preceding voiced (plain) pharyngeal, /-ʕ-/. As pronounced in current Abkhazian (as opposed to Abaza), the /-ʕ-/ is in fact an a-glide, so that /wʕáħ°-w-n(a)/ would be pronounced [wạaħ°(ʊ)wun];

112. Vogt 1963, p. 122, no. 684.

113. See n. 59, above.

114. See, e.g., Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 99.524 (*Paralipomena* 98; *Add.*² 56; BAD 340236), a black-figure skyphos attributed to the Durand Painter; Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania 4832 (*ABV* 311.14; *Add.*² 84; BAD 301596), a black-figure amphora; Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 21.1204, a gold ring. See further Bothmer 1957, pp. 51, 103, 109; Mayor 2014, pp. 186, 188, 462, n. 28.

115. Immerwahr (AVI 4995) expressed uncertainty about the oddly shaped penultimate letter in both inscriptions; we follow him in cautiously reading upsilon in both places. In the Abkhazian interpretations offered below, the upsilon is taken as the equivalent of /-w(a)-/, marking present continuous aspect.

116. Shakryl, Kondzharia, and Chkadua 1987, p. 182.

this is not far from [oēeun], assuming, naturally enough, that the <o-> represents a [w-]. A Greek might also have heard /-ʕa-/ as [ē], rather than as [ā] due to the acoustic effect called "emphatic palatalization," (as with Phoenician /baʕ(a)l/, "Lord," as opposed to Hebrew /beʔel/, where Proto-Semitic */a/ has gone to Hebrew /e/).

The word *keun* appears to be Abkhazian /qˀʸa-w-n(a)/, setting.the.dog.loose.with.barking.and.noise-progressive.aspect-indefinite.past, "setting a dog (on someone) with whistling and shouting" (cf. Russian *natravlivanie sobak svistom i krikom*).[117] The vase fragment is broken after this word, so it is possible that further letters or words might have added more details.

CASE 8

A Tyrrhenian black-figure amphora attributed to the O.L.L. Group (550–530 B.C.) shows a clearly labeled Herakles fighting Amazons.[118] The words above the women, ΓΟΓΟΙΟΙΓΙ and ΓΟΓΙϜΙΚΙ, *gogoioigi* and *gogiwiki*, are not Greek, but their first syllables are suggestive of the Georgian word for "maiden," which would be appropriate as the first element of a name for Amazons.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

The *go/goi* syllables in *go-goi-oi-gi* and *go-gi-wi-ki* bring to mind /gogo-i/, girl-nominative, "girl" or "maiden" in Georgian. Tyrrhenian vases often bear nonsensical inscriptions, however, and we recognize that this reading could be a coincidence arising from repetitive syllables characteristic of Georgian sound patterns.

CASE 9

The upper register of a Tyrrhenian black-figure dinos (ca. 550 B.C.) features Herakles, Telamon, and other Greek warriors, all labeled, battling Amazons (Fig. 12:a).[119] Although some of the inscriptions have been restored in modern times, at least five of the Amazons are deemed original.[120] Four are Greek names: Toxophile, "Loves Arrows"; Pisto, "Trustworthy"; Okypos, "Swift-footed"; Kleptoleme, "Thief." The fifth, ΚΕΠΕΣ, Kepes (Fig. 12:b), sounds like an ancient form of Circassian, meaning something like "Enthusiastic Sex." Amazon encounters on vases were often eroticized.

117. Shakryl, Kondzharia, and Chkadua 1987, p. 390, second homonym.

118. Paris, Musée du Louvre E 855 (*ABV* 94. 99.53, 684; *Add.*² 26; BAD 310052; AVI 6269); see Bothmer 1957, p. 6; Immerwahr 2006, p. 168, no. 6269.

119. Paris, Musée du Louvre E 875 (*ABV* 104.123, 684; *Add.*² 28; BAD 310122; AVI 6275); see Bothmer 1957, p. 8, pls. 14–16. The Greek warriors are

named Telamon, Deiptes, Euphorbos, Korax, Lykos, and Mnesarchos.

120. Immerwahr (AVI 6275) gives *CVA* readings only when they are accepted by Bothmer and Beazley. We thank Christine Walter at the Louvre for examining and taking photographs of this vase in February 2013; she confirms that the inscription ΚΕΠΕΣ, which we interpret as a Circassian name, is in fact ancient.
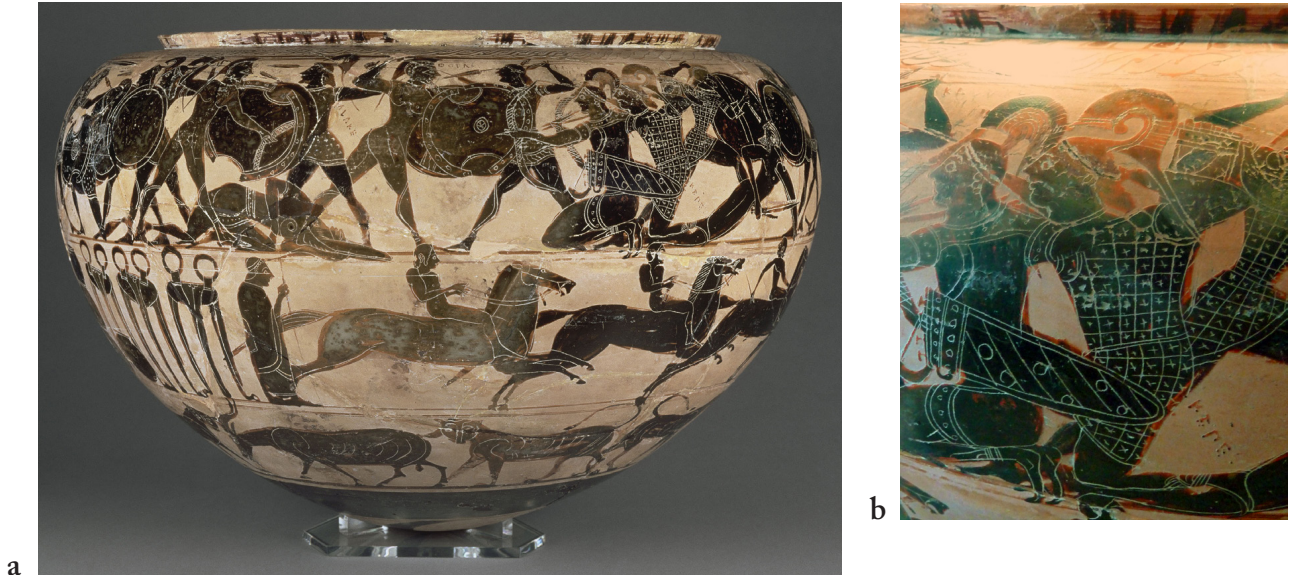
Figure 12. (a) Athenian black-figure dinos attributed to the Tyrrhenian Group, showing an Amazonomachy, 550 B.C. Paris, Musée du Louvre E 875; (b) detail of Kepes. Photos (a) H. Lewandowski and (b) C. Walter; © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Kepes appears to mean "Hot Flanks" (or some other lower body part) in Circassian. The form would be West Circassian /kˁəpə-s/, flank-hot. The element /-s/ is often the second element of modern names, where it means literally "hot," but metaphorically "intense, enthusiastic." The general sense, then, is something like "Enthusiastic Sex." The two stops in West Circassian are voiceless and unaspirated, just as kappa and pi were in ancient Greek. One might have expected the pi to be doubled, like the taus in the inscription on the New York Goose Play Vase (see p. 468, above), but given the differences in time and place between the two vases, this apparent inconsistency may be reasonably dismissed.

CASE 10

A black-figure column krater attributed to the Leagros Group (550–500 B.C.) shows a clearly labeled Herakles fighting Amazons.[121] One of the Amazons is named Andromache, but the letters inscribed beside another, ΟΑΣ ΟΑΣ, *oas oas,* are unexplained.[122] The element *oas* sounds like an Ossetian word for "sacred" or "spirit," but, as noted earlier, vases of the Leagros Group contain much nonsense, so this incomplete sequence of sounds could be accidental.

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Oas, if it is the first part of a name, looks to be Iranian-influenced, as in Ossetian /was(t)/, /wac-/ (/c/ is [ts]), "holy, sacred," perhaps in the sense of "mighty." An alternative meaning of *oas* in Ossetian could be "spirit."[123]

121. Gioia del Colle, Museo archeologico MG.29, from Monte Sannace, Apulia (BAD 9009482; AVI 3817); see Immerwahr 2006, pp. 142, 161, no. 3816.

122. Another unidentified letter follows the final sigma; Immerwahr (AVI 3817) observes that it resembles an Argive lambda.

123. Gershevitch 1955.

Figure 13. Athenian red-figure amphora, type A, attributed to the Kleophrades Painter, showing a warrior with a Scythian archer, a boy, a dog, and a woman, ca. 510–500 B.C. Würzburg, Martin von Wagner Museum L507. Photo P. Neckermann; © Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität Würzburg

CASE 11

A fragmentary red-figure amphora, attributed to the Kleophrades Painter very early in his career (ca. 510–500 B.C.), shows a typical "leave-taking" scene: a Greek warrior setting out (extispicy), flanked by a Scythian archer, a boy, a dog, and a young woman (Fig. 13).[124] The Kleophrades Painter shows a basic degree of literacy on his later vases, but the inscriptions next to these figures are not Greek: ΤΛΕΤΥ *(tletu)* in front of the boy; ΙΤΕΙΣ *(iteis)* before the warrior's head; ΕΙΟΣ *(eios)* above the dog; and by the woman ΙΣΛΕΙ *(islei).* No inscription appears to apply directly to the Scythian archer, but we selected this vase for analysis because of his presence in the scene.[125] Similar strings of letters appear on the other side of the vase depicting komasts and a hetaira: ΕΙΣ *(eis),* ΙΣΥΤ *(isut),* ΙΣΕ *(ise),* and ΙΥΙ *(iui).* Because the Kleophrades Painter's later vases bear clear Greek words and his writing

124. Würzburg, Martin von Wagner Museum L507, from Vulci (*ARV*² 181.1; *Paralipomena* 340; *Add.*² 186; BAD 201654; AVI 8122).

125. Immerwahr (AVI 8122) mistakenly associates *tletu* with the Scythian. The word actually appears next to the diminutive figure, whose small size signifies either a slave or a youth.

is regular, some scholars have found it strange that these inscriptions would be meaningless.[126] Tletu translates as "Jumper" in Circassian. Islei appears to be Circassian for something like "I am dressing him (in armor/garments)." This phrase would be appropriate to a scene of arming and leave-taking. The other two words have locative significance in Circassian, meaning something like "here stands the warrior" and "the dog is beside him."

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

Tletu appears to be a Circassian nickname for an agile youth: /ƛət-w/, jump-predicative, "One who jumps, leaps." Islei might be an archaic construction in Circassian, /ø-y-s-ƛ-e-yə/, those.things-him-on-I-hang-to-prolonged, "I am (having) armor put (literally, hung) on him." (For /-yə-/ of prolonged action, cf. Circassian /-de-kʷ°e-yə-/, outside-go/come-prolonged, "to go for a stroll.") This deviates from the modern sense of /-ƛ-/, "to dress," with a basic sense of "to hang," the modern equivalent being /zə-šʲ°ə-ƛ-e/, self-deixis-I-hang-to, "I dress myself." The word *iteis* corresponds to /yə-tˤ-y-e-s/, [name] flat.surface-on.surface-direction-at-sit/be.located, "[So and so] is (standing) there," while *eios*, the word inscribed above the dog, corresponds to /e-y-e-w-s/, him-direction-present-continuous. aspect-sit/be.situated, "(the dog) is (sitting) by him." *Eios* and *iteis* have an archaic, but natural translation, which appears to reproduce casual speech: The warrior is "standing here" and his dog is "by him."[127]

CASE 12

A red-figure amphora attributed to the Dikaios Painter (510–500 B.C.) includes the Greek names of the gods Athena, Apollo, and Artemis on one side.[128] On the other side, five unknown words are associated with a Greek warrior flanked by a Scythian archer, a dog, and an old man (Fig. 14). Behind the Scythian's head appears ΚΙΣΙ *(kisi)*; to the right of his head and shoulder, ΓΕΧΓΟΓΧ *(gekhgogkh)*; at his feet above the dog, ΧΛΕ[.]ΣΙ? *(khle[.]si)*; along the Greek warrior's back, ΧΕΧΓΙΟΧΕΧΟΓΕ *(khekhgio-khekhoge)*; and along the old man's back, ΧΛΕΙΟΠΧΙΟ *(khleiopkhio)*. The letter strings with many *kh/g* sounds are suggestive of Caucasian languages. Kisi is Circassian, meaning something like "here is his friend," an apparent

126. See Immerwahr's comments in AVI 8122. The painter has used a small number of letters to make a variety of short words in both scenes. Other vases by the Kleophrades Painter bear inscriptions representing similar sounds: e.g., *ioi, iste, ileis, iolele, iali-niune lun, iusp, ulis.* These call to mind the vowels and liquids of classic glossolalia (see n. 156, below). Similar short strings of letters are found in nonsense inscriptions by Pioneer painters: e.g., the kalpides of the Pezzino

Group by Euthymides (see Immerwahr 1990, p. 71, n. 35, p. 82). Immerwahr (2007, 2010) makes a strong case for painters copying others in the same workshops.

127. Mentz (1933, p. 121) suggests that Eios is the dog's name; see also Kuipers 1975, pp. 22, 43. The similar strings of letters on the other side of the vase, *eis, isot, ise,* appear to be Circassian as well. *Eis:* /y-e-s/, it-to-sit, "sitting in it, sits in it," "(s)he lives someplace." *Isot:* ø-i-(e-)s-e-w-t,

it-him-(to-)I-present-progressive-give, "I am giving it to him/her." *Ise:* ø-y-s-e, he-in-sit-at, he/she sits in/inside, "(s)he resides (in a place)" (present meaning). But it is hard to discern their significance in the context of the komastic scene.

128. London, British Museum E255 (1843.1103.41), from Vulci (*ARV*² 31.2; *Paralipomena* 324; *Add.*² 157; BAD 200175; AVI 4539); see Steiner 2007, pp. 205–206, fig. 9:8.

Figure 14. Athenian red-figure amphora, type A, attributed to the Dikaios Painter, showing a warrior with a Scythian archer, a dog, and an old man, ca. 510–500 B.C. London, British Museum E255. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum

reference to the archer, whose name, Gekhgogkh, means "Brave Adversary" in Abkhazian. The label for the hoplite, Khekhgiokhehkhoge, translates as "One Chosen from among the Brave" in Circassian, an appropriate description of a warrior. The old man's name, Kleiopkhio, seems to iden-tify him in Circassian as the descendant of "the daughter of a big man." The incomplete word inscribed above the dog is unclear; perhaps it is the dog's name.[129]

129. The Dikaios Painter is capable of good Greek. This amphora is par-ticularly puzzling because another amphora by the same painter (London, British Museum E254 [1843.1103.88]: *ARV*[2] 31.3; BAD 200166; AVI 4538) bears a very similar scene but with dif-ferent nonsense inscriptions: [.]ΟΠΟΣΑ-ΟΓΙ, ΤΟΠ[. .]ΟΙΟ, ΕΟΙΣ (around the archer); ΤΟΝΕΙ, ΕΟΠΟΙ, ΙΟΠΙ (around the warrior); and ΤΟΤΕ, ΟΠΟΕΝΑΙ, ΙΟΠΟ(Γ)Μ (around the old man). Except for *tonei* ("remaining there," Circassian) and *eois* (locative "by," cf. the comments on *eios* in Case 11), these sounds strike no chords in any languages known to Colarusso. (*Tonei* and *eois* might possibly apply to the dog, who appears to be interacting with the old man).

Linguistic Analysis

Kisi may be read as a Circassian locative form of the verb "to sit" or "to be situated," /ø-q-y-s-y/, 3-horizon-direction-sit/be.situated-and/direction, "(s)he is there/sitting/standing there." Because of the "horizon of interest" prefix and the possibility that the final /-y/ is an old directional suffix (now /-e/), this word would have a heightened emotional sense: "he (friend) is here." The modern locution would require the indirect object, "his heart," /ø-y-g°ø-q-ø-y-s-e/, 3-possessive-heart he(other)-horizon-it(heart)-direction-sit-direction. Even without this, however, the form *kisi* suggests an emotional reading, rather than a simple locative one, in that it betokens some degree of friendship or social involvement. In theoretical linguistic terms, the horizon of interest forces a psychological or emotive dative, suffixed to the root, onto the sense of the verb.[130] *Kisi* therefore signifies something like "Here is his friend."

Gekhgogkh looks like a reduplicated form, but it matches nothing in Georgian, where reduplication is common. It appears to be a name from an old form of Abkhazian, /(a)ɣa-ɣ°aʕ°/, enemy/foe-brave, "Brave Adversary" or "Noble Warrior" (with /ʕ°/ a rounded voiced pharyngeal fricative), or perhaps from an earlier form prior to the Abkhazian backing of palatals, velars, and uvulars, */(a)ĝa-ĝ(ə)ya ɣ°/ (compare the commentary on Case 1, above). This Abkhazian form is one of the more exotic even by Caucasic standards and deserves some comment. The <g-> would capture the voiced uvular fricative of Abkhazian, while the <-ekhg-> would capture its "palatalized" (advanced tongue root) counterpart, with its palatal coloring on the vowel and its heavier frication noise rendered impressionistically by the <-khg->. The combination of <-ogkh> would then be an effort to render the rounded, voiced pharyngeal fricative of Abkhazian. What the vase painter seems to have done is what many people do when confronted by a complex and alien speech sound: they do not hear it as a unity, but rather hear its components as distinct sounds, often in varying order. In this case, the voicing of the middle and last sounds is rendered by the voiced gamma of Greek, while the frication is rendered by the chi, which itself must have been noisy in Greek.

Khekh-gi-o-khe-kho-ge sounds as if it could be West Caucasian, perhaps Circassian, Abkhaz, or Ubykh. In Circassian, it represents something like /qə-x̂-əy-wə+x̂e+x̌°e-g^yəy/, change.of.state-among.group-direction.from-valence+among.group+hero-emphatic.and, "the one (chosen) from among the brave or group of heroes." This form is built upon the same root as x̂e+x̌°-e (Case 3, above).

Khleiopkhio might also reflect an archaic Circassian form, /ƛ'ə-ye-px̌°-ye-w/, man-fat-daughter-one.who.is-predicative, the final /-io/ being somewhat enigmatic. It would mean something like "The One Who Is of/Belongs to the Daughter of the Fat or Big Man," perhaps a family or slave name for the old man.

These preliminary findings suggest that at least some unfamiliar strings of letters on Attic vases may not be meaningless after all. By interpreting these nonsense inscriptions and foreign-sounding names as forms of

130. Colarusso 1992, pp. 84–85; 1994b; 2006, pp. 36–37.

Circassian, Abkhazian, or Ubykh, with some Iranian (Ossetian-like) and Georgian forms as well, we have shown that what appear to be incomprehensible words in Greek can be deciphered as names or descriptions of figures depicted in scenes with Scythians and Amazons. The inscriptions discussed in Cases 1–6 represent non-Greek words that can be interpreted as meaningful names appropriate to warriors; the names of the Amazons discussed in Cases 8–10 are more tentative. The inscriptions in Case 7 suggest fragments of a foreign dialogue. The interpretations in Cases 11 and 12 are most likely to raise questions, because on these vases the foreign words seem to describe Greek figures as well as Scythians.

There are a number of ways to contextualize the foreign words that we have identified. Chronologically, they follow a pattern established by Attic vase inscriptions in general, beginning by the second quarter of the 6th century B.C. Indeed, it is not surprising that our earliest examples occur on vases by Kleitias, given this painter's enthusiasm for inscriptions: the François Vase alone bears more than 100 names and other words. Most of our examples, however, cluster in the late 6th century, with a number occurring on red-figure vases by the so-called Pioneers, such as Euthymides and Hypsis (Cases 1 and 3). They and their contemporaries are distinctive for their references to one another and the frequent and diverse use of labels and words on their vases, and so the incorporation of these non-Greek words can be seen as another facet of their "inscription habit."[131] In the 5th century, however, with the significant exception of the Sotades Painter (Case 6), this phenomenon appears to die out. As noted above, this is the period for which surviving literary sources offer confirmation of a Scythian presence in Athens. Many factors may explain this apparent discrepancy, but perhaps after the experience of the Persian invasions, foreign languages were no longer felt to be suitable or acceptable in the context of Athenian vases—although, as Miller has demonstrated, other elements of barbarian life were incorporated into Athenian society and Athenian playwrights explored the potential of foreign language on the stage.[132]

The rhyton by the Sotades Painter (Case 6) is exceptional in other ways too. It is the only vessel in our sample that was found in the East (Susa), and there is good evidence to suggest that the Sotades workshop did at times cater to an Eastern market.[133] No "foreign" words have been noted on other vases from the Sotades workshop, and these are, to our knowledge, the only named Amazons in the group. Given that the painter would presumably have had a wide range of Amazon names to choose from, the selection of Oigme and the Persian-sounding Gugamis does suggest that they were decorated with an eye to the East.

The findspots of the other vases, where known, are in Italy, and primarily in Etruria. (None of our 12 vases were found in Athens.) As with the chronology, this distribution is characteristic of Athenian vases in general, and the same can be said for the shapes, which are standard sympotic forms (amphoras, hydrias, kraters, cups). In terms of iconography too, there is nothing out of the ordinary. In other words, with the possible exception of the Sotades rhyton, there is no evidence to support the hypothesis that the vases with foreign words were specially commissioned. The nonsense inscriptions should be seen as functioning like other inscriptions on Athenian vases, inviting the users to engage with both the vessel and the image.

131. On the inscription habit, see, e.g., Neer 2002, pp. 87–134.

132. Miller 1997; see also Willi 2003, pp. 198–225.

133. DeVries 1977, p. 546.

If they could have had any more specific purpose, it would be to complement the visual representations of Amazons and Scythians, compelling the viewer to juxtapose Greekness and non-Greekness.[134]

Such an assessment, of course, places the Athenian production context in the foreground. Given the findspots of the vases, however, we may wonder how these inscriptions would have been read outside of Athens.[135] Would, for example, an Etruscan at Vulci have been able at least to appreciate that these words did not sound Greek? Here again, we encroach upon questions asked about Athenian vases more generally. There is evidence that Athenian pottery workshops occasionally produced certain shapes and/or scenes with a foreign audience in mind.[136] Likewise, at the other end of the supply chain, there are clear instances where a recipient or middleman appears to have made a selection of Athenian vases based on shape or iconographic links.[137] But more research is needed to clarify the role that inscriptions played in these processes.[138] Before speculating on the ability of Etruscans to read and understand Greek inscriptions, however, it would be well to bear in mind the phenomenon of *kalos*-name inscriptions. These are popular on Athenian vases from the mid-6th to mid-5th century B.C. and are generally thought to name beautiful youths of the day who were well known in Athens.[139] How they might have been interpreted elsewhere cannot be ascertained, but they evidently served a purpose for their initial audience of Athenians. We would venture that the same is true for the "foreign" inscriptions discussed here.

TEST EXERCISE: NONSENSE INSCRIPTIONS IN NON-FOREIGN CONTEXTS

Many unanswered questions arise from our findings and suggest directions for future investigations. One of the most pressing questions is whether foreign words on Athenian vases were used only in "foreign" contexts. Can potentially meaningful Caucasian or Iranian words be discerned in vase scenes where Amazons, Scythians, or other foreigners are *not* depicted? Anticipating this question and to address the issue of false positive readings, we carried out a control exercise. Mayor and Saunders selected a set

134. Steiner 2007, pp. 234–236.

135. On markets for Athenian vases, see Osborne 2004. On Athenian vases in Etruria, see Reusser 2002. On social, political, and cultural contexts and vase shapes bearing mixed sense and nonsense inscriptions, see Pappas 2012.

136. See, e.g., Shapiro 2000; Oakley 2009.

137. For example, the amphora discussed in Case 5 (n. 106, above) bears an Etruscan graffito underfoot similar to two other amphoras: St. Petersburg, State Hermitage Museum 610 (*ARV*² 18.9, 1619; *Paralipomena* 509; *Add.*² 153; BAD 200089) and Brussels, Musées royaux R296 (*ARV*² 1619;

BAD 202141), both from Vulci. All three are contemporary neck amphoras with depictions of Herakles.

138. For a possible Etruscan inscription on an Athenian vase intended for an Etruscan customer (Florence, National Archaeological Museum PD 66: *ARV*² 969.66; *Add.*² 308; BAD 213194; CAVI 3702), see Gill 1987; cf. Steiner 2007, pp. 234–236. Baurain-Rebillard (1998, pp. 76, 86–87, 91–92, 94–97, 101) suggests that Tyrrhenian and Little Master painters inscribed vases with mock inscriptions mimicking "Etruscan sounds" for an Etruscan market, but it seems dubious that Etruscans would buy vases with fake

inscriptions in their own language. Etruscan, like Basque, had a fairly simple phonology, and contrasted voiceless tense stops (written with phi, theta, chi) with voiceless lax ones (written with pi, tau, kappa, or gamma). It also had clusters (generally considered of late formation, i.e., of the period of historical attestation), but none of the uvular or pharyngeal sounds that are abundant in all Caucasian languages (except Georgian, which lacks pharyngeals). On the Etruscan language, see Bonfante and Bonfante 2002.

139. See, e.g., Neer 2002, pp. 91, 233, n. 11.

of 10 vases with decoration that includes no Scythian or Amazon figures. Each vase bears both nonsense inscriptions and good Greek inscriptions, or is attributed to a painter who writes good Greek elsewhere. We chose vases contemporary with those examined in our case studies, some of which are attributed to the same vase painters. Samples of the inscriptions were transmitted to Colarusso, in small batches of three or four. He was not informed of the iconographic contexts and assumed that the inscriptions were a continuation of the original project. A list of the vases and the subjects depicted follows, with Colarusso's comments on the sample inscriptions.[140]

1. Red-figure hydria attributed to the Pioneer Group (ca. 510–500 B.C.)[141]
   Ransom of Hector
   "junk"
2. Black-figure hydria attributed to the Antimenes Painter (ca. 520 B.C.)[142]
   Women at fountain
   "*xargekexs* might have potential, but nothing obvious here"
3. Red-figure neck amphora attributed to Euthymides (ca. 520–510 B.C.)[143]
   Athletes
   "possibly dialect Greek?"
4. Black-figure neck amphora attributed to the Leagros Group (ca. 520–510 B.C.)[144]
   Chariot; warrior departing; Aineas and Anchises with Aphrodite; Dionysos with satyrs
   "could be Paleo-Balkan words? Illyrian, Moesian, Macedonian, Thracian?"
5. Black-figure band cup, unattributed (ca. 510 B.C.)[145]
   Athletes boxing
   "nothing recognizable"
6. Red-figure cup attributed to Oltos (ca. 520–510 B.C.)[146]
   Dionysos with satyrs and maenads
   "looks like gibberish"
7. Black-figure hydria attributed to the Archippe Group (ca. 550–530 B.C.)[147]
   Frontal chariot with Diomedes between women; battle
   "incomprehensible, nothing familiar, some look vaguely Greek with odd endings"
8. Black-figure neck amphora attributed to the Leagros Group (ca. 510–500 B.C.)[148]
   Herakles playing kithara between Hermes and Athena
   "cannot make any sense of this"
9. Black-figure neck amphora attributed to the Leagros Group (ca. 510–500 B.C.)[149]
   Herakles and Acheloos
   "a three-letter sequence might be Abkhazian for 'we, us,' but nothing looks promising"

140. In order to save space, we have not provided transcriptions of the nonsense words in this group of test vases.

141. Harvard, Arthur M. Sackler Museum 1972.40, compared by Beazley to the Kleophrades Painter (*Paralipomena* 324.13bis; *Add.*² 157; BAD 352403; AVI 3921).

142. London, British Museum B336 (1843.1103.66), from Vulci (*ABV* 266.3, 678; *Add.*² 69; BAD 320013; AVI 4290).

143. Rome, Villa Giulia (formerly Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 84.AE.63: BAD 16321; AVI 4976).

144. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 86.AE.82 (BAD 3891; AVI 4986).

145. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2220, from Vulci (BAD 31912; AVI 5245).

146. Orvieto, Museo Civico 1049 (*ARV*² 64.103, 1600.29; BAD 200539; AVI 5808).

147. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 3613, from Cerveteri (*ABV* 106.1; *Add.*² 29; BAD 310145; AVI 7944).

148. Berlin, Antikensammlung F 1845, from Vulci (*ABV* 370.136, 369, 357; *Paraliopomena* 162; *Add.*² 90; BAD 302131; AVI 2254).

149. Berlin, Antikensammlung F 1851, from Vulci (*ABV* 383.1; *Add.*² 101; BAD 302396; AVI 2256).

10. Red-figure psykter attributed to the Kleophrades Painter
   (ca. 500–475 B.C.)[150]
   Dionysos with kantharos, Herakles, and satyrs
   "overall, this looks like glossolalia, unintelligible, unless drinking
      and dancing are depicted"[151]

With the possible exception of the last vase in the list, Colarusso could not identify reasonable meanings in Northwest Caucasian or ancient Iranian dialects in this sample of nonsense inscriptions unaccompanied by figures in Scythian attire. Caucasian languages may sound strange to European ears, but they do display consistent, distinctive sound patterns. The negative results of this exercise suggest, first, that our positive readings of the foreign inscriptions accompanying Scythians and Amazons are unlikely to be coincidental, and second, that Scythian words were not used randomly by vase painters.

CONCLUSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has resulted in what we regard as plausible translations of non-Greek languages on Attic vases that were long thought to be meaningless scribbles. Our linguistic analysis has recovered several new names of Scythians and Amazons and descriptive words in ancient Caucasian languages, words that have remained undeciphered for 2,500 years.

Assuming for the sake of argument that our hypothesis is correct, how could vase painters in Greece have come to know these barbarian words? One can imagine several possibilities. First, not all vase painters were necessarily Greek—some of their names, known from vase inscriptions, suggest foreign origins or ties.[152] Second, the painters need not have understood the meanings of the foreign words and names; they only had to know how they sounded in order to spell them out. Certain foreign words may have been current or had familiar associations for Greeks, even without knowledge of their meanings.[153] A third possibility is suggested by Cases 7, 11, and 12, in which one has the impression that Caucasian speakers in the Athenian potters' quarter were making comments about the scenes depicted on the vases, either spontaneously or perhaps even at the request of the painters, who added the foreign words and phrases as they heard them in order to give an exotic flair to their scenes, without understanding their meanings. In other cases, the painters or their assistants or customers may have been multilingual.

Vase painters usually illustrated familiar mythic stories, sometimes based on oral narratives or lost traditions that are not preserved in writ-

150. Compiégne, Musée Vivenel 1068, from Vulci (*ARV*² 188.66; *Add.*² 188; BAD 201758; AVI 3217), previously attributed to Euthymides by Beazley and to Oltos by Hartwig.

151. The suggestion that Circassian forms meaning "he is drinking/ dancing" and "it is dangling" may perhaps be represented here is interesting, because this psykter depicts a drinking party with Herakles, Dionysos (a drinking cup hanging from his fingers), randy satyrs, and kraters.

152. See p. 453, above.

153. Compare, e.g., the way in which Americans and Europeans regularly use Japanese words such as Mitsubishi, kamakaze, or banzai, without knowing the meaning in Japanese.

ten texts. They had access to a host of alternative oral traditions, outside of the surviving Homeric texts, during the period from the 8th to the 5th century B.C. Several lost epic poems of antiquity are known to have featured Amazons.[154] Perhaps the foreign-named Amazons known today only from their labeled representations on vases once starred in popular stories like those that coalesced around the Amazons with the familiar Greek names Antiope and Hippolyte. Such stories might have had "sticky" nomenclature, as seen, for example, in Greek historical accounts of the kings of Persia whose Iranian names were Hellenized (e.g., Dareios, from Old Persian, *Dārayavahuš*, "holding firm the good"). In the same way, these oral traditions might have preserved non-Greek names for fighting women of western Asia. The foreign names of men depicted in Scythian attire on these vases might also have come from contemporary oral or written tales that no longer survive, or perhaps they were simply the real names of Scythian archers in Athens.

Herodotos and other authors describe bilingual Scythians and Greeks. Multilingualism may have been more common, and the Athenians more cosmopolitan, than has previously been recognized. Athenians and other Greeks intermarried with Scythians in the Archaic and Classical periods, and many private and public slaves in Athens came from the lands around the Black Sea. Perhaps barbarian household slaves regaled Greek children with tales of celebrated warriors from their homelands, tales in which names or words in their native languages may have been embedded. Vase painters often labeled the figures of well-known Greeks on their pottery. They might also have inscribed non-Greek names recognizable to some of their customers, drawing on myths and legendary traditions now lost to us. Traces of such forgotten stories may linger on Attic vases, not just in the illustrations of mythic scenes that match no written sources, but also in foreign inscriptions previously thought to be "meaningless." Indeed, these inscriptions may be the first and only times some Amazon and Scythian names were ever written down.

Although literary evidence supports the presence of individual Scythians in Greece in the late 6th and 5th centuries B.C., the foreign inscriptions discussed in this article cannot be taken, prima facie, as confirmation of historical reports of a large "official" force of Scythians in Athens. The ethnicity of Scythian-costumed figures on vases remains an open question. But the discovery on Athenian vases of foreign names and other words intentionally and meaningfully associated with Scythian-garbed figures suggests that at least some Scythians were present in Athens and that their language was available to vase painters and their customers. If the figure of an archer on a vase is dressed like a Scythian, acts like a Scythian, and speaks like a Scythian, then the chances are good that it is in fact a Scythian. In the same way, the recovery of meaningful names in Caucasian and Iranian tongues associated with figures of Amazons offers evidence that the Greeks believed the Amazons to be linguistically associated with the ethnic groups of Scythia.

This article considers only a small fraction of potentially interesting nonsense inscriptions. Although the texts are short and the corpus is limited, statistical studies of letter distribution might reveal more clearly

154. On images of lost mythic stories in Greek art, see Snodgrass 1998. Amazons appeared in the *Aethiopis* of the Trojan Cycle, the *Arimaspeia* of Aristeas, and the *Theseis,* all of which are usually dated to the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. Plutarch (*Thes.* 26–28) mentions stories about Amazons recorded by other authors as well; although most of these are later than the vases under discussion here, they too may have preserved names and other aspects of earlier oral traditions. Possible lost traditions about the Scythians and/or Amazons are discussed in Skrzhinskaya 1991; Wachter 1991, pp. 93–95; Blok 1995, pp. 413–414; Barringer 2004, pp. 16–17, 19, 23–25; and West 2011, pp. 17, 21, n. 24, 41, 69–71, 428–430; but the relevance of these to vase paintings is rejected by Ivantchik (2006, p. 198, n. 3, 206, 219–224).

whether the letters in nonsense inscriptions were randomly chosen from the Greek alphabet, or whether the selection favors certain sounds and consonant clusters characteristic of Caucasian or other non-Greek languages. Immerwahr has noted that many nonsense words on vases belonging to the Tyrrhenian and Leagros groups use a restricted alphabet.[155] In our sample, the consonants *kh/g* stand out, with *kh* sounds, the hallmarks of West Caucasian languages, occurring especially often on vases of the Leagros Group. If "meaningless" inscriptions were random gobbledygook, one might have expected the painters to use all the letters available in the Greek alphabet. The inscriptions that have been deciphered show a good range of sounds and distinctive sound patterns. Classic glossolalia (spoken gibberish), by contrast, displays a limited range of sounds and very simple sound patterns.[156] Another useful study would be a comparison of the distribution of phonemes in the nonsense inscriptions found in foreign contexts with those found in, say, mythological scenes, to see if there is a statistically significant variance.

It might also be worthwhile to compare other "nonsense" words on vases to forms in other ancient non-Greek languages and non-Athenian Greek dialects, and to examine other instances of mixed sense and "nonsense" inscriptions. Moreover, several hundred names from Iranian, Caucasian, and other steppe languages appear in the numerous Greek inscriptions on stone found around the northern Black Sea.[157] These might provide material for a broader project with the goal of exhuming fragments and traces of non-Greek languages from Greek epigraphical sources.

Yet another related study might examine the linguistic features of the heavily accented speech of Scythians in Greek comedy in terms of ancient Iranian and Caucasian phonotactics. The discovery of a meaningful line of dialogue in Circassian uttered by an actor playing the role of a Scythian on the New York Goose Play Vase raises a number of questions about ancient theater and the expectations of audiences.

Finally, if these inscriptions are, as they appear to be, actual contemporary records of Northwest Caucasian languages of the 6th and 5th centuries B.C., they give linguists an astonishing glimpse into the evolution of those languages. These vases speak again, not only through illustrating ancient Greek relations with the cultures of the Black Sea and Caucasus region, but also by preserving the earliest written examples of the languages spoken by these "barbarians."

155. Immerwahr 2006, pp. 146–147.

156. See Samarin 1972, esp. pp. 2, 120; Kidd 2014, p. 136, n. 60. For an analysis of the phonological structures of glossolalia across cultures, see Goodman 1972.

157. *CIRB* and *CIRB-Album* collect the scattered publications of more than 1,300 Greek inscriptions from the Bosporus region, many of which contain barbarian names. See also Minns 1913, pp. 37–40.

APPENDIX
LINGUISTIC DICTIONARIES AND SOURCES

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