

Devotion and desecration: Artemon and Nenas' dedications in the Cabalia (northern Lycia)

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Some time in the third century AD, Aurelius Artemon and his wife Aurelia Nenas had two reliefs erected at the mouth of a large hillside cave near Çaltılar, in one of the upland plateaux or *yaylas* in the north of the Tekke peninsula, ancient Lycia. Now usually called the Seki basin, Seki being the most prominent modern town in the area, this *yayla* was part of the region known as the Cabalia that was dominated in the period of the Roman empire by the prosperous towns of Oinoanda and Balboursa.

The reliefs were in honour of the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, twins born to the Spartan Queen Leda after Zeus had his way with her in the guise of a swan and the brothers of Helen (of Troy) and Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon. The duo were widely worshipped throughout the classical Mediterranean, and are shown in a range of images, often with horses, with which they were said to possess great skill. By the time of the Roman empire, Cabalian dedication reliefs such as Artemon and Nenas' had taken on a particular form, also shared with neighbouring regions such as the Milyad (the Elmalı basin) and Pisidia: the two gods were shown on horseback, flanking a veiled female (presumably a goddess) in the centre. The concentration of this kind of Dioscuri relief in the Cabalia as well as the fact that they outweigh reliefs to other gods in the region has led J.J. Coulton, director of the Balboursa Survey, to suggest that it may have been the home of a particular Anatolian version of the gods' cult.

The İntaş Cave, where Artemon and Nenas had their dedications carved onto the walls and where there are four such reliefs in total, was in use for millennia, as shown by prehistoric materials found at the cave mouth. It may have



Aurelius Artemon's relief (photo by J.J. Coulton)



Aurelia Nenas' relief (photo by J.J. Coulton)

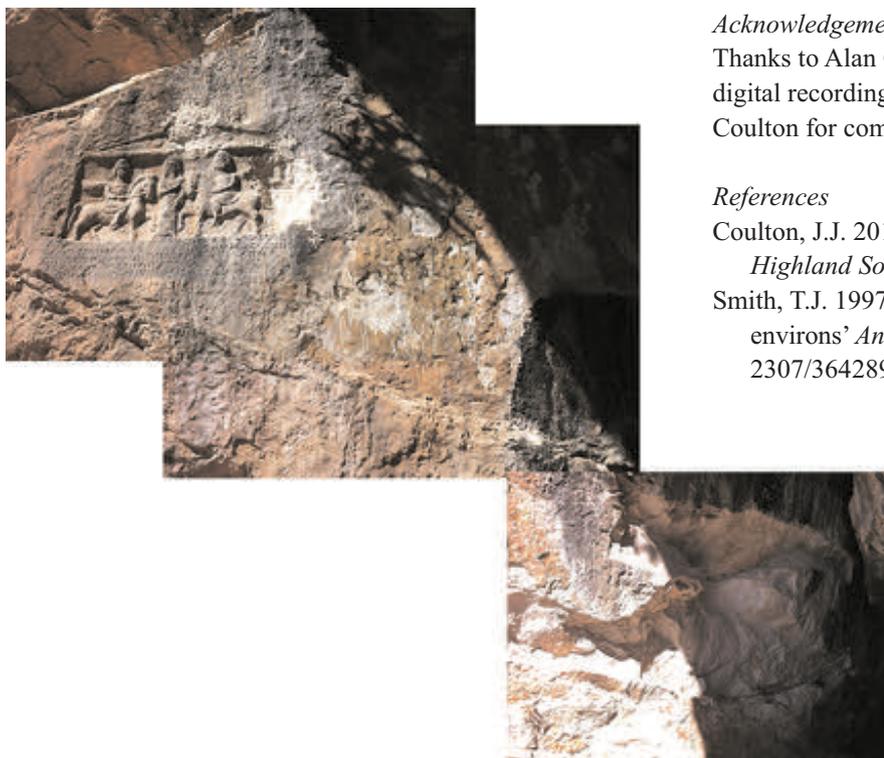


been associated with the Dioscuri by the Hellenistic period (ca 330–30 BC), if not earlier. It was not the busiest Dioscuri sanctuary, at least as far as the number of reliefs suggests. As Tyler-Jo Smith shows in her 1997 *Anatolian Studies* article on devotional reliefs in the Balboursa Survey area, there is a more populous sanctuary to the north, at Kızılbél, which boasts 18 reliefs, 17 of which were for the Dioscuri. Yet it was here, at the İntaş Cave, that Artemon and Nenas decided to have their sculptures placed, perhaps the first at the site.

Although conforming to the standard Cabalian design, their reliefs were interestingly elaborate. Not only did they include remarkably long inscriptions, they both fell into a rare subgroup of such reliefs showing a fourth person to the right of the main group. Smith describes a figure in armour on the right of Artemon's relief and a figure of Hermes on the right side of Nenas' relief, indicating some link with that god, perhaps unique to their aspect at this cave. Unusually, under the Hermes figure was carved the name of the mason who made the reliefs – Nestor – an addition that underscores the quality of the reliefs, even if they look quite unsophisticated to anyone familiar with the 'high art' of the Classical period.

The longer than customary dedicatory inscriptions reveal intriguing details about these *yayla* dwellers. It was, for instance, important to declare that Nenas was from Side, on the coast of Pamphylia, perhaps showing Artemon's (and/or her own) connections. He was himself a citizen of Oinoanda, son of a man with an unusual Anatolian name (Gidlasis), hinting at some level of non-Greek local identity embraced by his family. His nomen, Aurelius, indicates that he was a Roman citizen, a status perhaps achieved only after the *Constitutio Antoniana* of AD 212 – an edict of Caracalla which bestowed citizenship on all free men living in the empire. He worked for the imperial estates in the region of Oinoanda and was a chief farmer on an estate and a representative for a woman called Procla, possibly Claudia Vilia Procla, daughter of a local senator, who provided funds for part of the cave offering.

In his appendix on the inscriptions in Smith's article, Nicholas Milner suggests that the armed figure on the right of his relief represents Artemon himself, possibly complementing his declaration of 'having come' (himself to the cave?) and adding a military aspect of his role not otherwise indicated by his titles, which are themselves of great importance for understanding the nuances of Roman administration and society in the area. The Dioscuri, interestingly, are not named, but called the 'listening gods' (*theoi epekooi*), which Milner points out is an epithet associated with healing or saving gods. Why Artemon and Nenas sought them out at this cave is not clear, but may be related to this special aspect of the gods in this place and a moment in their lives when they sought, or had received, particular aid.



Composite photographs of the reliefs after damage. Artemon's remains at the top left, while Nenas' has been completely hacked out of the rock face, lower right

Also difficult to understand, and in many ways less tempting to do so, is why their devotional offerings were vandalised in the summer of 2012. The reliefs had been recorded by the Balboura Survey and published with photographs in Smith's article. Recognising the risks posed to open-air reliefs such as this, and wishing to test methods of achieving higher-resolution visual documentation, they were scheduled to be documented with three-dimensional scanning and RTI photography in a preservation recording project led by Alan Greaves, director of the Çaltılar Archaeological Project, as part of the *Illuminating the Land of Lights* Turkish-EU Intercultural Dialogue partnership of Liverpool University's Victoria Gallery and Museum, and the Fethiye Museum. Before this could be carried out, however, Nenas' dedication was entirely obliterated and parts of Artemon's, including his little figure, were hacked out. The rest of Artemon's relief, his long inscription and the other two reliefs in the cave were still preserved and duly recorded.

The destruction here is small-scale compared to what is currently happening in Syria and Iraq, and other places in the world, and done, no doubt, for different reasons. Nevertheless, the loss of these small monuments is poignant both because of the disrespect shown to devotional offerings and the hours of effort that went into making them, and because of the loss of sources that help us to understand life that shaped the *yayla* in the past. It underscores the urgent necessity of heritage schemes like the *Illuminating the Land of Lights* project, which can help to safeguard Anatolia's many open-air rock-cut monuments through digital recording, education and empowerment of those living in and shaping Anatolian lands today.

Acknowledgements

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References

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