

**“Godlike Askanios, from faraway Askania”,
or the Anatolian connection of an eponymous hero**

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In *Iliad* 2.862-3 the Phrygians appear as allies of the Trojans led by Phorkys and Askanios “from faraway Askania”. Even if *Phorkys* and *Askanios* are not actually Phrygian anthroponyms (Innocente 1997; Brixhe 2013), the PIE etymology of *Phorkys* is confirmed (Wathelet 1988, s.v.). Concerning *Askanios*, Wathelet (1988, s.v.) identified it as a name of foreign origin, derived from the toponym *Askania*. But where is Askania? And can an etymology of both the toponym and the eponym be provided?

Strabo (12.4.8) localized Askania in Bithynia, as a region surrounding Lake İznik. The Geographer stated that it is impossible to find another “Askanian lake” elsewhere in Anatolia. However, Arrian (1.29.1) said that Alexander encountered another “Askanian lake” characterized by salt water traveling from Pisidia to Phrygia. According to Labarre and Özsait (2018), both the description of the route taken by Alexander and the water’s chemical composition confirm that the lake in question is Lake Burdur. If Ἀσκάνιος was etymologically related to PIE **salsko-*, ‘salt’ (Georgiev 1959:233), then the Phrygians of the *Iliad* would come from the region of Lake Burdur, which is salt and “far away” from Troy. However, this etymological hypothesis must be rejected, because the other lake bearing the same name “Askanian”, i.e. Lake İznik, is not salt. What do these two lakes have in common?

I propose to reconstruct the (pre)history of Ἀσκάνιος and Ἀσκανία/η in the following way. The first element could be identifiable as Hittite *āška-*, ‘door’, comparable with the Sumerogram KÁ (.GAL), literally ‘door of the city’, as attested in the oldest Hittite texts. Kloekhorst (2007, s.v., following Oettinger) suggested that Hittite *āška-* derived from a hypothetical PIE **h₂os-ko-*, also related to the verb *haš(š)-*, *heš(š)-*, ‘to open’. However, since the preform involves **h₂-*, the phonological outcome of PIE **h₂os-ko-* in Hittite should have been ***hāška-*, and not *āška-*. This special treatment according to which laryngeal-loss preceding **o* is allegedly regular (previously discussed by Kloekhorst 2006) is far from being widely accepted. Thus, for the moment, Puhvel’s hypothesis (1984, s.v.) of *āška-* as a word of indigenous Anatolian origin, with no known parallels elsewhere, is preferable. There was actually an anthroponym built with *āška-* as first member of a personal name in an Old Hittite context, i.e. *Āška-liya-*, the local ruler of Hurma (cf. Laroche 1966:45, 338, s.v. **askali(ya)-*: “portier”, ‘gate-keeper’).

In order to exclude the existence of a hybrid Hittite-Luvian Anatolian ethnic or gentile **āška(w)anni* (the second alpha is short in Greek), the simplest solution in an entirely Hittite linguistic environment

would be assuming that next to the sure *Āška-liya-* there was simply a variant name **Āška-niya-*, since *-l- ~ -n-* alternations are not infrequent in an Anatolian context. A Hittite name **Āškaniya-*, 'Askean', originally meaning 'of/pertaining to a gate(way)/passage(way)', could be easily adapted by Greek to its own *-io-* and *-ia-* suffixes, i.e. *-ιος, -ια/η* (Smyth & Messing 1956: §844.3), first by interpreting Ἀσκανία/η as a feminine name referring to both the lake and the surrounding region, and then by building a masculine Ἀσκάνιος for the eponymous hero. Through this process they could be regularly inflected according to the rules of the masculine and feminine thematic declensions in Greek.

From a semantic point of view, the epithet *Askaenos* of the god Men as worshipped in Antioch of Pisidia (Labarre 2010) can confirm the idea of 'door, opening': he had the role of a "gatekeeper" who assured access to a new life. Thus, in order to justify a toponym meaning 'door, opening' for a lake, *āška-* should refer to the status of water as a passageway. More specifically, Erbil and Mouton (2012) emphasized the importance of water in Hittite cultic activities related to the netherworld. In this respect, both Lake Burdur and Lake İznik are 'openings'. However, since Hellanicus of Mytilene (FrGrHist 4F31) described Askania as a marshy region, and since this description fits the surroundings of Lake İznik better, the latter seems a better candidate. Either way, my proposal provides new evidence for the indigenous Anatolian substrate of both the toponym and the eponym.

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