

Zeus Theopomenos and Theopoma (“Divine Drink (of Water)”?)

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Abstract: In this journal, V. Sauer and E. Olshausen (Sauer - Olshausen, *Gephyra*, 29, 2025, 56 no. 2) have recently published an interesting Imperial-period dedication (“Votiv- oder Weihinschrift eines Altar”) to a deity which they were not able to identify. Following an attempt to elucidate the text, a brief discussion of the epithet of Zeus revealed by this inscription is offered. This is *Theopomenos*, a toponymic epithet which points to an ancient place name *Theopoma* or *Theopomē*. Etymologically, this can be thought to have been formed from a compound word—*theos* + *pōma* = “Divine Drink (of Water)”?)—which in turn could perhaps be identified with a source of fresh water near the findspot of the inscription, at Ayvalı near Vezirköprü, Samsun İli, that is to say in the region of Neoklaudiopolis. The locality *Theopoma*/*Theopome* and its probable divine spring was most likely connected to the broader tributary-system of the Halys/Kızılırmak river which flows nearby.

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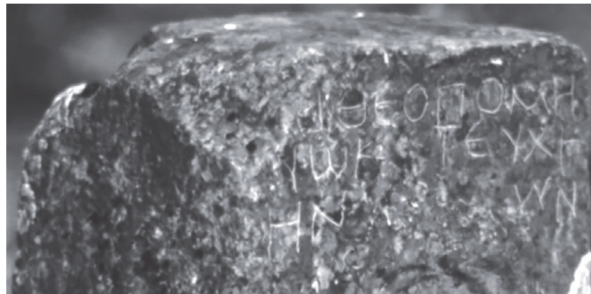
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In the recent pages of this journal, Vera Sauer and Eckart Olshausen have published an interesting dedication to an unknown deity (“Votiv- oder Weihinschrift eines Altar”).¹ The text was recorded by Olshausen in 1988 in the cemetery at Ayvalı, 8.5 km southwest from Neoklaudiopolis/Vezirköprü (Samsun); by 1989, the block had apparently disappeared. The text is inscribed on a small rectangular limestone altar above a moulded wreath which intervenes into the third line of text. The inscription is not dated by the editors (hereafter “edd.pr.”), but the lunate form of epsilon, the “cursive” *mu*, and the Ω -shape of *omega* suggest a date in the 2nd or 3rd c. AD. While the authors recognise that a theonym is expected in lines 1-2 (“Zu erwarten ist hier der Name der Gottheit, der die Weihung gilt, im Dativ”), they are unable to interpret this except as an unknown masculine form (“macht wahrscheinlich, daß es sich um eine männliche Gottheit handelt”).

I read the stone as follows from the published photograph:



Δὶ Θεοπομη-
νῶ κατ' εὐχῆ-
{η}ν ^{corona} ΩΝ

1-2. [.]?ΘΕΟΠΟΜΗ|ΝΩ edd.pr.; before the *theta*, the ph. of the stone shows Δ | 2-3. κατευχή | ΗΝ ^{Dekor} ΩΝ edd.pr., κατ' εὐχῆ|{η}ν [ἐκ ἰδί]ων sugg. edd.pr. in app.cr.; I resist the temptation of restoring the last line, which has been partly obscured by the wreath on the surface of the altar.

The epithet Θεοπομηνός is already attested for the god Ζεὺς in a dedication of “unknown provenance” inscribed on a small bronze tabula ansata. There, the god is also known as Ζεὺς Στράτιος

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¹ Sauer – Olshausen 2025, 56 no. 2.

Θεοπομηνός. The previously known inscription, dated to the 2nd/3rd c. AD, appeared on the antiquities market in Giessen, Germany, in 2009.² It was reported in *SEG* 59, 1913 as follows:

Διὶ Στρατίῳ Θε-
οπομηνῶ
Πόπ(λιος) Πέδιος
Σέξτος κατ' εὐχὴν

It is clear that this small bronze tabula ansata has been looted and illegally exported from Türkiye. The inscribed object no doubt originates from the same general area as the newly published dedication by Sauer - Olshausen, namely Neoklaudiopolis/Vezirköprü (Samsun), most likely from the same sanctuary. I also mention this other object and its provenance—now partly elucidated—in the hope that the current location of the bronze tablet may someday be ascertained by the authorities responsible and that it may be repatriated to Türkiye.

As dedications to a Zeus called by the toponymic epithet Θεοπομηνός, both inscriptions must refer to the same ancient place. To my knowledge, the toponym Θεοπόμα or Θεοπόμη is new. It ought plausibly to derive from a combination of the words θεός and πόμα, a shortened form of πῶμα that is already attested in poetic texts from the time of Pindar (*Nem.* 3.79). A πῶμα refers to a “drink” or “draught” of any liquid, but poets perhaps especially praised the πώματα of springs (cf. e.g. Aesch. *Sept.* 308, of the spring Dirke: ὕδωρ τε Διρκαῖον, εὐτραφέστατον πωμάτων; Nic. *Alex.* 104-105: ἔνθα τε Νύμφη Λαγγείης πόμα κείνο Διὸς τεκμήρατο παιδί). It is therefore not implausible to suppose that the toponym refers to a “Divine Drink” of water or even to “Divine Drinking Water”, and that Zeus was somehow associated with this place and its source of fresh water.³

Where might Θεοπόμα or Θεοπόμη have been located in the region of Neoklaudiopolis/Vezirköprü? The most plausible suggestion would be to relate the probable derivation of the toponym with the broader tributary-system of the Halys/Kızılırmak river which flows nearby. Given this remarkable natural feature and all of its complexities, the region was and remains well known as abundantly watered.⁴ I therefore conclude with a final wish, that the identification of the toponym Θεοπόμα or Θεοπόμη in the region of Neoklaudiopolis/Vezirköprü (Samsun) and its probable divine spring may become clearer in years to come.

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² Gorny & Mosch, Giessener Münzhandlung: catalogue 184, Auktion Kunst der Antike, 18. Dezember 2009, 114 no. 213.

³ For the worship of water, particularly rivers, in Anatolia, see Parker 2016.

⁴ Cf. e.g. Ekici – Kınacı 2024.

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Özet

Bu dergide, V. Sauer ve E. Olshausen yakın zamanda tanımlayamadıkları bir tanrıya ithaf edilmiş İmparatorluk dönemine ait ilginç bir yazıt ("Votiv- oder Weihinschrift eines Altar") yayımladılar (*Gephyra* 29, 2025, 56 no. 2). Metni aydınlatmaya yönelik bir girişin ardından, bu yazıtın ortaya çıkardığı Zeus epiteti hakkında kısa bir tartışma sunulmaktadır. Bu, *Theopomenos* olup ve antik bir yer adı olan *Theopoma* veya *Theopomē*'ye işaret eden toponimik bir epitetir. Etimolojik olarak bunun bir bileşik kelimedenden *-theos + pōma* = "İlahi İçecek (Su)"? - oluştuğu düşünülebilir ve bu belki de yazıtın buluntu yeri olan Samsun İli, Vezirköprü yakınlarındaki Ayvalı'da, yani Neoklaudiopolis bölgesinde bulunan bir tatlı su kaynağı ile özdeşleştirilebilir. Theopoma / Theopome mevki ve oradaki muhtemel kutsal pınar büyük olasılıkla yakınlarda akan Halys/Kızılırmak nehrinin geniş kol sistemine bağlanmaktaydı.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Zeus; Theopoma; Theopomē; Pontos; Neoklaudiopolis; Vezirköprü; sunu; adak yazıtı; Yunan epigrafisi.