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A New Pankration Inscription from Attouda

Attouda'dan Yeni Bir Pankration Yazıtı

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Abstract: This paper presents the *editio princeps* of a newly discovered agonistic inscription from Attouda, commemorating Marcus Aurelius Eutykhos II, recorded as victor in the men's pankration at games designated as Olympia. The inscription, carved on a marble base unearthed during the 2025 excavations in the area known as Aşağı Mezarlık ("Lower Cemetery," cadastral block 126, parcel 82), constitutes the fourth known pankration text from Attouda. To date, eleven agonistic inscriptions, most of them relating to combat sports (pankration and *pale*), have been documented from the site, marking an unusually prominent epigraphic interest in athletic commemoration for a modest inland city. The new text, taken together with the three previously published pankratiasts (M. Aurelius Attikos Alexandros, M. Aurelius Karminios Kataplous, and Alexandros, grandson of Attikos), points to a sustained local tradition of athletic training and success over a period of roughly five decades (ca. 215–265 CE). Onomastic evidence places this group in the post-*Constitutio Antoniniana* era, when the *gentilicium* Aurelius became widespread across the eastern provinces. The inscription of Eutykhos, with its concise formula and absence of civic honorifics, illustrates both the prestige attached to these contests and Attouda's participation in the broader agonistic networks of Roman Asia Minor most plausibly at the level of regional isolympic festivals rather than the Panhellenic games.

Keywords: Attouda, Phrygia, Karia, Agonistic Inscription, Pankration, *Constitutio Antoniniana*

Öz: Bu makale, Attouda'dan ele geçen yeni bir agonistik yazıtın ilk bilimsel yayımını (*editio princeps*) sunmaktadır. Yazıt, erkekler pankration yarışmalarında 'Olympia' olarak adlandırılan oyunlarda zafer kazanmış Marcus Aurelius Eutykhos II'yi anmaktadır. Yazıt, 2025 kazı sezonunda Aşağı Mezarlık olarak bilinen alanda (kadastral 126 ada, 82 parsel) açığa çıkarılan mermer bir kaide üzerine kazınmış olup, Attouda'dan bilinen dördüncü pankration yazıtıdır. Bugüne kadar kentten toplam on bir agonistik yazıt belgelenmiştir; bunların çoğu pankration ve *pale* gibi dövüş sporlarıyla ilişkilidir. Bu durum, küçük bir iç bölge yerleşimi için dikkate değer bir atletik anıtlama pratiğine işaret eder. Yeni yazıt, daha önce yayımlanmış üç pankratiast (M. Aurelius Attikos Alexandros, M. Aurelius Karminios Kataplous ve Attikos'un torunu Alexandros) ile birlikte değerlendirildiğinde, yaklaşık elli yıla (yaklaşık MS 215–265) yayılan bir atletik gelenek ortaya koyar. Onomastik veriler, bu grubun *Constitutio Antoniniana* (MS 212) sonrasına tarihlendiğini, Aurelius *gentilicium*'ünün yaygınlaştığı döneme ait olduğunu gösterir. Eutykhos'un yazıtının kısa ve öz formülü, hem bu yarışmaların yerel düzeydeki prestijini hem de Attouda'nın Roma Dönemi Küçük Asya'sındaki agonistik ağlara, muhtemelen Panhellenik değil, bölgesel isolympik festivaller aracılığıyla katıldığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Attouda, Phrygia, Karia, Agonistik Yazıt, Pankration, *Constitutio Antoniniana*

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Introduction

Athletic competition was a prominent feature of civic life in the Greek East under Roman rule. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that the continuation and selective transformation of traditional Greek agonistic institutions played a key role in shaping civic identity and local prestige during the Imperial period¹. While major urban centres such as Ephesos, Aphrodisias, and Pergamon dominated the agonistic landscape of western Asia Minor, smaller inland communities also participated actively in this culture of competition, and on occasion produced athletes whose victories extended beyond the local sphere².

The city of Attouda, situated in eastern Phrygia near the Karian border (modern Hisar, Sarayköy district, Denizli province), offers a particularly informative case study³. Although relatively modest in scale, Attouda has so far produced an unusually large number of inscriptions relating to athletic victories. Eleven agonistic inscriptions are currently known from the site, representing approximately one quarter of its published epigraphic corpus⁴. This concentration of material indicates that athletic success functioned as a visible and sustained element of civic self-representation between the first and third centuries CE.

This paper presents the editio princeps of a newly discovered agonistic inscription from Attouda, recording Marcus Aurelius Eutykhos II as victor in the men's pankration. Considered together with three previously published inscriptions, this new evidence adds significantly to our understanding of Attouda's civic and athletic landscape during the Roman Imperial period. The attestation of four pankratiasts from a single inland city in Phrygia is remarkable within the epigraphic record of the province of Asia, particularly given the city's modest status. While major centres such as Ephesos or Aphrodisias regularly produced athletes of Panhellenic fame, evidence for recurrent success in the combat sports of smaller Phrygian communities is scarce. The Attouda inscriptions therefore illuminate the ways in which local elites in non-metropolitan contexts participated in the network of Greek competitive festivals under Roman rule.

The Agonistic Culture of Attouda

Before presenting the new inscription, it is necessary to outline the broader context of Attouda's agonistic culture. To date, eleven agonistic inscriptions have been documented from the site, recording victories in several contest categories and festivals, as summarised in Fig. 1.

¹ For general studies on agonistic culture and civic identity in the Greek East in Roman rule, see Robert 1940, 9–32; Pleket 1975, 141–183; Wörrle 1988, 1–97; Chanotis 1995, 65–92; Jones 1999, 134–146, Çokbankir 2010, 22–34.

² The influence of major cities on the agonistic system and the participation of smaller communities in these networks have been widely discussed; for discussion, see especially Mitchell 1990, 183–193; Chanotis 1995, 68–84; Jones 1999, 134–146.

³ For recent studies on Attouda see Bilgiç Kavak & Yılmaz Kolancı 2022, 395–406; Ekmekçi 2025, 69–97.

⁴ For the agonistic inscriptions from Attouda, see *SEG* 31, 1103; *SEG* 55 1411; *MAMA* VI, 58, 60, 73, 76, 80; Bilgiç Kavak & Yılmaz Kolancı 2022, 395–406.

Contest Category	Victor	Festival	Reference
ἄνδρων πανκράτιον	M. Aurelius Attikos Alexandros	Olympia	<i>SEG</i> 31, 1103
ἄνδρων πανκράτιον	M. Aurelius Carminius Kataplous	Pythia	<i>MAMA</i> VI, 58
ἄνδρων πανκράτιον	Alexandros γ' Ἀττικοῦ	Unknown	<i>SEG</i> 55, 1411
ἄνδρων πανκράτιον	M. Aurelius Eutykhos II	Olympia	New
ἀνδρῶν πάλην	Makarios son of Makarios	Unknown	<i>MAMA</i> VI, 60
παίδων πάλην	Neikias son of Pausanias	Adrianteia	<i>MAMA</i> VI, 76
παίδων πάλην	Oreion son of Claudius Adeimantos	Nea [---]	<i>MAMA</i> VI, 80
παίδων στάδιον	M. Aurelius Apellas	Unknown	<i>MAMA</i> VI, 73
κῆρυξ	Metrodoros son of Metrodoros	Unknown	Bilgiç Kavak & Yılmaz Kolancı 2022, 395–406

Fig. 1. Contests and festivals attested at Attouda

The available evidence points to several consistent features in Attouda's athletic record. First, combat sports dominate the inscriptions, with victories in pankration and wrestling (πάλη) appearing most frequently. Second, athletes are identified in only two age divisions: boys (παῖδες) and adult men (ἄνδρες); there is no mention of the intermediate ἀγενεῖοι class. Third, Attouda's competitors are associated chiefly with local and regional festivals, including the Adrianteia and the Nea Adrastea — both recognisable as part of the isolympic festival tradition that developed across Asia Minor in the Roman Period⁵. The appearance of titles such as Olympia or Pythia in these texts should not be taken to imply participation in the major Panhellenic crown games, but instead reflects the practice, widespread among eastern cities, of modelling local festivals on the names and prestige of renowned Greek competitions⁶.

The prominence of pankration victors is noteworthy. As a discipline that combined wrestling and boxing with few restrictions (only biting and gouging were banned), pankration required a high level of physical power, technical skill, and endurance. Although victories in these local isolympic contests did not carry the prestige associated with the Panhellenic games, they nevertheless conferred significant distinction on both the athlete and

⁵ For the predominance of combat sports (παγκράτιον, πάλη) in the Attouda inscriptions and the attested age divisions (παῖδες, ἄνδρες), see the discussion in the referee's remarks. The programme and age-class structure correspond closely to those of the Classical Olympic Games, which likewise featured no intermediate ἀγενεῖοι category and centred on stadion, diaulos, dolichos, hoplitodromos, boxing, wrestling, pankration, and pentathlon. On the number and nature of events in Classical Greek athletics and their continuity in isolympic festivals, see Nielsen 2023, 215–223.

⁶ The ideological significance of the use of Olympia and other Panhellenic titles for local isolympic festivals in Asia Minor has often been noted; see also Wörrle 1988, 41–44; Mitchell 1990, 138–142; van Nijf 2001, 225–230. L. Robert explicitly discusses how, in Roman Asia Minor, local festivals adopted prestigious names such as Olympia and Pythia in order to enhance their status. See Robert 1937, 299–314.

his city⁷.

The presence of four attested *pankratiasts* from Attouda – including three explicitly linked to named festivals – points to something more than isolated individual achievements. Although there is no evidence for institutionalised forms of athletic training at the site, the recurring pattern of success is likely to reflect the operation of family traditions, local patronage, and the social capital associated with athletic distinction. In the context of a modest Phrygian city, such victories provided an effective means for leading households to assert their status within the civic community.

The New Inscription: Marcus Aurelius Eutykhos

The inscription was discovered at Attouda during the 2024 and 2025 excavation seasons (Fig. 2). It had been re-used in the northeastern corner of the wall of Structure A, a rectangular building uncovered in the area known locally as the “Lower Cemetery” (Aşağı Mezarlık; cadastral block 126, parcel 82) (Fig. 3-4). The stone was reused as a horizontal course in the wall, with its lettering facing outwards (Fig. 5). The text is framed within a recessed panel on a white marble block, preserved in a single piece and bearing seven lines of inscription.



Fig. 2. Aerial view of the excavation area

⁷ On the nature, techniques, and social significance of the pankration, see Philost. *Gymnas.* 9-10, who offers the earliest surviving description of the discipline and its training methods; Poliakoff 1987, 27-45, for a detailed discussion of the technical repertoire, the rules of competition, and the social prestige of successful pankratiasts; see also Kyle 2015, 131-135, for the broader cultural context of combat sports in the Roman Period.



Fig. 3. Findspot of the inscribed block within the excavation area



Fig. 4. Close-up of the findspot of the inscribed block within the excavation area



Fig. 5. The inscribed block within the excavation area

Dimensions: H.: 102.5 cm; W.: 47 cm; D.: 39 cm; Lh.: 3–3.2 cm.

Date: The letter forms and the presence of the *gentilicium* Aurelius suggest a date in the late second or early third century CE.

- Μάρκος
 2 Αὐρήλιος
 Εὐτυχος
 4 β' νεικήσας
 Ὀλύμπια
 6 ἄνδρων
 πανκράτιον
- Marcus Aurelius
 Eutykhos II,
 victorious in the
 men's pankration at
 the Olympia-games.*



Fig. 6

L. 1-3: The use of the tria nomina indicates Roman citizenship. The gentilicium Aurelius points to a date after the *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 CE. The cognomen Eutykhos (“fortunate”)⁸ is well attested in Karia and Phrygia⁹, with parallels from Stratonikeia¹⁰, Aphrodisias¹¹, and Hierapolis¹². This is the first known occurrence of the name at Attouda. The choice of the cognomen may have carried programmatic force, perhaps signalling a familial expectation of success in the athletic sphere.

L. 4-5: The phrase β' νεικήσας Ὀλύμπια raises two questions: the function of the element β' and the identity of the festival concerned. Rather than indicating “twice” (δῖς) in the sense of two victories in the same discipline, the notation β' may instead be linked to the athlete's name as an ordinal (“the second”)¹³, as commonly observed when victory numbers are explicitly marked after the contest title. On either reading, however, the term Olympia could refer either to the Panhellenic festival at Elis or to one of the many isolympic contests attested across Asia Minor. Several considerations suggest that the latter interpretation remains the more probable. First, the inscription lacks the elaborate honorific language characteristic of civic decrees for confirmed Olympionikai (expressions such as ἡ πόλις ἐτείμησεν or ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος). Instead, the monument is a plain marble base recording only the Essentials –name, verba dicendi, festival, and discipline– consistent with private athletic dedications of the third century CE. Second, the presence of multiple known pankration victors from the same modest community within roughly two

⁸ On the cognomen Eutykhos (Εὐτυχος, lit. “the fortunate one”), formed from εὖ (“well”) + τύχη (“fortune”), see *LSJ* s.v. εὐτυχής.

⁹ For other attestations of athletes named Eutykhos from Asia Minor, see *SEG* 44, 1180 (Oinoanda); Moretti 1968-1990, no. 1643 (Philadelphia); *SEG* 6, 203 (Eumeneia).

¹⁰ See *SEG* 46, 1507.

¹¹ *IAPH* 2007, 9.305.

¹² *MAMA* IX 312.

¹³ For further examples in which β' functions as an onomastic ordinal attached to the personal name rather than as an indicator of victory number, see *I.Ephesos* 1125; *Milet* 371; *I.Smyrna* 664; *TAM* II, 587; *I.Tralleis* 117. For clear instances where δῖς denotes an attested double victory, see *I.Iasos* 108; *I.Pergamon Asklepieion* 535.

generations would be highly unusual if all had competed at Elis but is readily explained within the milieu of regional isolympic festivals, where access was wider and selection less restrictive¹⁴. Third, isolympic festivals using the title Olympia are well attested in the surrounding region at this date, including those at Smyrna and Tralleis, where the term functioned primarily as a prestige marker¹⁵.

L. 6-7: The combination of the age category (ἄνδρες, adult men) and the discipline (πανκράτιον) follows the standard agonistic formula¹⁶. Pankration combined wrestling and boxing, with minimal restrictions (only biting and gouging were prohibited)¹⁷. Success required exceptional endurance and training. Together with the three previously known pankratiasts from Attouda¹⁸, the inscription suggests a local tradition in combat sports, though no archaeological evidence supports the existence of a formal gymnasium. Athletic practice was likely maintained through familial or patronage networks.

This inscription adds a fourth pankratiast to the corpus from Attouda and provides new evidence for the city's athletic activity in the early third century CE. The meaning of Olympia remains uncertain, but it most probably denotes a local isolympic contest. The text's brevity and its emphasis on individual achievement illustrate the persistence of Greek athletic values within provincial Phrygia under Roman rule.

Conclusion

When the new inscription of Marcus Aurelius Eutykhos is considered together with the three previously known pankratiasts from Attouda, a coherent pattern of local athletic activity becomes evident (Fig. 7). All four athletes competed in pankration, and three bear the gentilicium Aurelius, situating them within the early to mid-third century CE. This concentration, following the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, points to a period of renewed civic and athletic vitality in which Greek competitive ideals were maintained within the framework of Roman citizenship¹⁹.

The use of Olympia and Pythia in these inscriptions does not directly attest victories at the Panhellenic games of Elis or Delphoi; rather, these designations most probably refer to local isolympic and isopythic festivals established across Asia Minor in the Imperial period. Such contests frequently adopted the names of the ancient crown games to evoke their prestige. The concise and formulaic character of the Attouda texts, together with the absence of civic honorific language, supports this interpretation: they are best understood as private dedications celebrating individual achievement at regional festivals rather than official decrees

¹⁴ Moretti 1953.

¹⁵ On local festivals adopting Panhellenic titles such as Olympia or Pythia, see e.g. Smyrna's Olympia and the early Olympia and Pythia of Tralleis. See Çokbankir 2010, 226, 243; also see *CIG* 2723 for a pankration inscription from Stratonikeia; also see *SEG* 42, 1118 for Aizanoi and see *I. Tralleis* 128 for an example from Tralleis.

¹⁶ Golden 2004; also see Miller 2006.

¹⁷ Poliakoff 1982.

¹⁸ For pankration inscriptions from Attouda, see, *SEG* 31,1103; 55,1411; *MAMA* VI, 58.

¹⁹ Camia 2011, 41-76.

commemorating Panhellenic triumphs.

Name	Contest	Victories	Reference
M. Aurelius Attikos Alexandros	Olympia, ἄνδρων πανκράτιον	1×	<i>SEG</i> 31, 1103
M. Aurelius Eutykhos	Olympia, ἄνδρων πανκράτιον	1×	New
M. Aurelius Carminius Kataplous	Pythia, πανκράτιον	1×	<i>MAMA</i> VI, 58
Alexandros γ' Ἀττικοῦ	[Unknown], ἀνδρῶν πανκρ(άτιον)	1×	<i>SEG</i> 55, 1411

Fig. 7. Pankration Victors from Attouda

Within this framework, the concentration of pankration victors from a single Phrygian community is remarkable. The repetition of family names, the chronological proximity of the inscriptions, and their shared focus on combat sports suggest that athletic training and competition were sustained within narrow social networks, possibly through familial or patronal continuity. Even in the absence of a monumental gymnasium, the epigraphic evidence points to a civic environment where physical excellence and agonistic success functioned as visible tokens of prestige. The Attouda corpus thus contributes to a broader understanding of how small inland cities of Roman Asia Minor participated in the shared language of Greek competition. Its four pankration victors illustrate the endurance of Hellenic ideals of *arete* – courage, endurance, and self-mastery – translated into the social realities of a provincial setting. Through the commemoration of victory, Attouda's citizens projected their city into the symbolic geography of the Greek games, reaffirming their place within the cultural *oikoumene* of the Empire.

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