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Nicolas Preud'Homme

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Nicolas Preud'Homme. Aurelie and divus Verus : new reading of a Greek inscription from Armazi. Iberia Colchis, 2019, 15, pp.201-213. halshs-04426972

HAL Id: halshs-04426972

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04426972>

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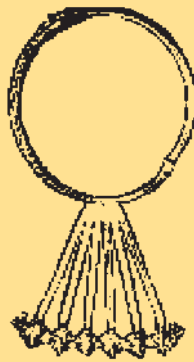


იბერია-კოლხეთი

საქართველოს კლასიკური და ადრემედიევური პერიოდის
არქეოლოგიურ-ისტორიული კვლევანი

IBERIA - COLCHIS

Researches on the Archaeology and History of Georgia
in the Classical and Early Medieval Period



№ 15

2019

საქართველოს ეროვნული მუზეუმის
ოთარ ლორთქიფანიძის სახელობის არქეოლოგიური კვლევის ინსტიტუტი
GEORGIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM
Otar Lordkipanidze Institute of Archaeological Studies



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მთ. რედაქტორი: გელა გამყრელიძე

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ტექნიკური უზრუნველყოფა: ირაკლი ხუციშვილი

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Layout: Irakli Khutsishvili

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<http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.com/2014/09/open-access-journal-iberia-kolxeti.html>

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3, Rustaveli Ave. Tbilisi, 0105, Georgia

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ISSN 1512-4207

UDC 94(479.22)+902. ი-315

- შინაარსი -

ნ. სულავა, არქეოლოგია საქართველოს ოკუპირებულ ტერიტორიებზე (კოლხური ბრინჯაოს კულტურის გამო) 5

გ. გამყრელიძე, სახელმწიფოებრიობის დასაბამი საქართველოში და არქეოლოგია..... 9

ზ. ბრაგვაძე, ზემო იმერეთის შუა საუკუნეების ციხეები - წარსულის რეპრეზენტაცია 40

ნ. მინდაძე, თ. ქანიშვილი, არქეოლოგიური არტეფაქტები და ეთნოგრაფიული რეალიები (ქირურგიული ინსტრუმენტების ისტორიისათვის საქართველოში)..... 45

ნ. ყიფიანი, სვეტებიანი კრატერი წითელფიგურული ნახატით 54

ქ. რამიშვილი, ცხენოსნის გამოსახულება გემაზე ჟინვალის სამაროვნიდან..... 58

დ. ახვლედიანი, მ. ჩარკვიანი, კოლხეთის ტერიტორიაზე გამოვლენილი ძვ.წ. V-ახ.წ. VI სს-ის განძები 86

ირ. სოზიაშვილი, ჟინვალის სამაროვანზე აღმოჩენილი შენობის ნაშთის დათარიღებისათვის 101

გ. გოგოჭური, ანტიკური ხანის მასალები მარნეულის მუნიციპალიტეტიდან..... 107

ა. ჭყონია, ოქროს ისრისპირისებური საკიდები..... 142

ან. როგავა, მცხეთის ჯვრის, გლდანი-ნორიოს და სამადლოს ნამოსახლარების წითლად მოხატული კერამიკის შედარებითი პეტროგრაფიული ანალიზი..... 151

რეცენზიები ახალ ნაშრომებზე 162

სსოპსა

გიორგი დუნდუა (1932-2019)..... 172

გურამ ლორთქიფანიძე (1938-2019)..... 174

ნენა (ელენე) გიგოლაშვილი (1941-2019)..... 176

PAPERS IN ENGLISH:

Giorgi Dundua †, *COLCHIAN TETRI (COLCHIAN COINS IN ANCIENT GEORGIA)*..... 178

Vakhtang Shatberashvili, *ABOUT ONE GROUP OF GILT GLASS JUGS* 192

Nicolas J. Preud'homme, *AURELIE AND DIVUS VERUS - NEW READING OF A GREEK INSCRIPTION FROM ARMAZI* 201

Summaries 215

Abbreviations 223

ინფორმაცია ავტორებისათვის 224

**AURELIE AND DIVUS VERUS -
NEW READING OF A GREEK INSCRIPTION FROM ARMAZI**

Epigraphy of Caucasian Iberia holds information which hasn't yet been fully exploited by historical research. Crucial discoveries occur often by reading with a new look materials quite neglected owing to their difficulty, modesty or obscurity compared with other famous testimonies, like Vespasian's stele or Serapit's tombstone¹.

Among three Greek epigraphic documents discovered during the excavations lead on the royal acropolis of Armazi (Baginet'i Hill) during the 1990s, the inscriptions KGIG 198 and 199 deal with the dedication of a royal bathhouse built by the Armenian *tropheus* Anagranes for Queen Drakontis, drawing appreciable attention from scholars², while the study of the inscription KGIG 200 encountered more difficulties related to its poor state of conservation³. Because of its shortcomings, the reading of this inscription leaves a large part to assumptions. The Georgian epigraphist T'inat'in Qauxč'išvili considered that this inscription relates a sacrifice honouring a deity, bringing together a servant of the Iberian king, the sovereign himself as well as his daughter or daughters⁴. The reading I propose here differs in several points from this interpretation. My new study proposed in this paper aims to rehabilitate the value of short inscriptions and epigraphic fragments in historical studies about ancient societies of South Caucasia. This analysis does not pretend to solve all the problems nor to dispel all the doubts on this document quite difficult to interpret, but it will reach its objective by pointing out new indices and sketching new tracks of clarification on the largely unknown history of Caucasian Iberia.

Transcription and developed reading of KGIG 200

1. ΒΑΣΙΑ[...]	1. Βασιλ[εῖ... βασιλέ-]
ΩΣ ΑΜ[...]	-ως Ἄμ[αζάσπου ? ... ὁ τροφ-] <i>or</i> [ὁ γραμματ-
ΕΥΣ ΒΟ[...]	-εὺς βο[... <i>or</i> βο[υλῆς ? ... αὐτ-]
ΟΥ ΒΑ[...]	-οῦ βα[σίλισσα ? ... Αὐ-]
5. ΡΗΛΙΗ ΟΥΑΡΑ[...]	5. -ρηλίη Οὐάρα (?) [βασιλέως ?]
ΙΒΗΡΩΝ ΘΥΓΑ[...]	Ἰβήρων θυγα[τρὶ ...]
ΩΝ ΘΕΟΥ ΟΥ[...]	-ων θεοῦ Ου[ήρου...]
ΔΕ ΜΕΓΑΛΟ[...]	δὲ μεγάλο[...].

¹ Vespasian's stele: SEG XX, 112. *Korpus der Griechischen Inschriften in Georgien* (KGIG) = Qauxč'išvili T'. 1999-2000, II: 251-252 (KGIG 229). Canali de Rossi F. 2004: 1. Serapit's tombstone: SEG XVI, 781. Qauxč'išvili T'. 1999-2000, II: 255-256 (KGIG 235). Canali de Rossi F. 2004: 3.

² Qauxč'išvili T'. 1999-2000, II: 227-228, n. 198-199. Braund D. 2002. Traina G. 2004 and 2019. Chanishvili N. 2011: 54-55.

³ Qauxč'išvili T'. 1996: 89-91.

⁴ Qauxč'išvili T'. 1999-2000, II: 228-229, n. 200, II: 339, "βασιλέως... ως Ἄν[αγράνης ?] [τροφ]εὺς βο οὐ βα... ρηληιοῦ Ἰβήρων θυγα[τέρ]ων θεοῦ <ου> δὲ μεγάλο[υ]": "Der von Anagranes (?) ... der Tochter des Königs von Iberern, aber Gottes des großen..."

Translation

To King [...] of [King] Am[azaspos ?] [...] [the foster father ?] Bo[...] [or : the Secretary of Council ?] to his Queen (?) [...] Aurelie Vara (?), daughter [of the King ?] of Iberians... of Divine V[erus] (?) [...] and great [...].

Inscription KGIG 200 consists of two fragments of a sandstone slab unearthed during excavations on Baginet'i Hill in 1993 and 1996, near Queen Dracontis' bath building, in the northern part of the Iberian royal acropolis⁵. Their dimensions show that they were pieces of the same original inscription⁶. Eight incomplete lines have been preserved, only on the left side for the first four, while the last four have their right part missing. Each line of this inscription contains traces of horizontal lines used by the lapidary to align letters rectilinearly. The height of the preserved letters is more or less equal to three centimetres on each line. Its material form as well as the writing of its letters bring this inscription KGIG 200 closer to KGIG 198 and 199 which constituted the dedication of Queen Drakontis' baths. However, its content differs from these two other epigraphic documents.

The first line obviously evokes a kingly character, insofar as the four letters ΒΑΣΙΑ can be easily deciphered. Unfortunately, the missing desinence cannot help to determine whether this king is the author of this inscription (nominative case), the destinatory (dative case) or a character associate with one of them (genitive case). The Armazian stele of Pitiaxēs Šargas also begins by the evocation of King Mihrdat II whose victories are celebrated in a piece of epic⁷. In this Greek fragment, the name of the king would have followed the royal title – unfortunately, this first royal name remains unknown.

The second line is also preserved through four letters. The three thirds are clearly omega, sigma and, after a separating point, alpha. The first two letters of the second line (ΩΣ) are followed by a point of separation, while the two following letters begin a new word. T'inat'in Qauxč'išvili read the fourth uncompleted letter as a nu, to reconstitute the name "Anagranes", the name of Queen Drakontis' *tropheus* known in KGIG 198 and 199. This interpretation was inspired by the letters EΥΣ on line 3 which could have been the desinence of his title of *tropheus*, giving the hypothetical reconstitution: "Αν[αγράνης ?] [τροφ]εὺς". However, the acute angle of fourth letter's central part indicates rather a mu. I distinguish indeed not a N, but a M, because of the inclination formed by the first arch of this letter. It is therefore impossible to read here Αν[αγράνης]. If AM- could be the beginning of a proper noun, Amaspos' name would be more suitable. King Amaspos the Great was indeed the husband of Queen Drakontis to whom the bath building was dedicated. However, it is not sure at all that these two letters are designating the Iberian sovereign. We cannot read here the expected sequence "Βασιλέως Ἰβήρων μεγάλου Ἀμαζάσπου" of KGIG 199, insofar as the truncated word ending with -ΩΣ introduces a difficulty. These letters -ΩΣ could be, of course, the termination of Βασιλέως, but in this case, it cannot finish the ΒΑΣΙΑ- of the first line owing to the important number of missing letters.

It is indeed possible to read ΩΣ AM either as the genitive declination of an adjective or a common noun followed by the beginning of a proper name like Amaspos, however the overly damaged state of the inscription makes it only one hypothesis among others. If AM- designates Amaspos, the correct reading would be [Βασιλέ-]ως Ἀμ[αζάσπου], in genitive case, while the ΒΑΣΙΑ- of the first line would designate another Iberian king, probably related to Amaspos' dynasty. This hypothesis would explain the genitive case of [Βασιλέ-]ως Ἀμ[αζάσπου] as the testimony of a

⁵ Qauxč'išvili T' 1996: 81, 89. About Armazi: Braund D. 1994: 205-207, 211; Gamkrelidze G. and *alii* (eds.) 2013: 46-54.

⁶ Qauxč'išvili T' 1999-2000, II: 228-229, giving the dimensions: 34 x 23 x 8/9 cm.

⁷ Altheim F. and Stiehl R. 1961. Preud'homme N. 2019.

grammatical construction completing the nominal group of the first line. In the stele of Vespasian found near Armazi and dating from 75 CE, the title and the name of King Mithridates (Mihrdat) II are declined in dative, preceding his father's title and name in genitive, then his brother's name in dative⁸. As a consequence, if the genitive case would indicate a relation of kinship, the first king evoked in this inscription CIGG 200 could be probably the successor or the predecessor of Amaspos the Great.

Figure 1 – Reconstitution of the damaged M in the second line



The third line has subsisted poorly by five letters divided into two words by a separating point, which was made invisible by the damage on the stone but whose presence is still discernable with the little interval between the sigma and the beta. T'inat'in Qauxč'išvili, who had read the name "Anagranes" in the precedent line, chooses logically to reconstitutes the missing word as [τροφ]εὺς, but providing no reconstitution for the following letters. It could be possible without certainty that line 3 indicates a *tropheus*, that is to say a foster father or a tutor in charge of educating a member of the royal family⁹. His name is not Anagranes, because the beginning of the word on the preceding line shall be read as AM, while first following letters after EYΣ appear quite clearly as a B and an O. This truncated name Bo-, being probably of an Iranian origin, leaves open various hypotheses of reconstitution: Boes, Bodes, Bochres, Boraspos, Bordanes, Borzos, Bostagon, Boubakes, Boubares, and others¹⁰. An interesting possibility would be to imagine a Greek name equivalent to the Iranian name Buzmihr, which refers to the pitiaxēs mentioned in a dish from Bori dated to the third century CE¹¹.

Another interpretation exists about this sequence at the beginning of line 3. A research on the Online Packard Epigraphic Database brings 259 matches of the sequence "εὺς βο" in 230 texts¹². The majority of mentions – 146 matches in 123 texts, respectively 56 % and 53% – attaches this sequence of letters with the words "γραμματεὺς βουλῆς" or "γραμματεὺς βουλευτῶν", meaning "Secretary of

⁸ SEG XX, 112. *Stele of Vespasian*, l. 13-15 : « βασιλεῖ Ἰβήρων Μιθριδάτη, βασιλέως Φαρασμάνου καὶ Ἰαμασσαποῦ υἱῶ ». Canali de Rossi F. 2004: 1.

⁹ Braund D. 2002. Traina G. 2004. Rapp S. H. Jr. 2014: 87-90, 115, 239.

¹⁰ Justi F. 1895: 70-71.

¹¹ About the silver plate from Bori, Burney C. A. and Lang D. M. 1971: 227-228; Ierusalimskaya A. A. 2004: 50-63; Giorgadze G. 2008: 255. Buzmihr seems derived from the Iranian form Burz-Mihr ("Mithra is high"). The word *mihr* could also be a common noun designating contract, love, friendship. MacKenzie D. N. 1986: 56. Gignoux P. 1986: 123. Lang D. M. 1987: 787.

¹² 235 matches in 206 texts for "εὺς βο" and 24 matches in 24 texts for "εὺς Βο". The research was realized on 8th May 2019. URL: <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/>

Council”, “Secretary of Councillors”, or with other almost similar titles. Insofar as most of these Greek inscriptions registered in Packard Epigraphic Database concern Greek *poleis* from Classical Antiquity, it is crucial to ask whether the existence of a civic institution like Boulē could be valid during the third century CE for an Iberian royal city like Armazi, in a Caucasian context being deeply marked by Iranian culture of government¹³.

Finding the trace of an aristocratic council in Iberian court is indeed far from being absurd. In his description of Parthia, Strabo refers to a *synedrion* composed of noblemen occupying a major political position in the Arsacid kingdom of Iran: “*Posidonios attributes to the Parthians a system of two senates compounded for the one of deputies related to each other, for the other of Magians and wise men, kings being selected from one and the other*”¹⁴. While Cassius Dio evokes “eminent Iberians” (πρώτων Ἰβήρων), Theophanes’ *Chronography* designates some Iberian nobles in embassy as “senators” (συγκλητικῶν), a name that recalls the name Strabo used to describe the nobles of Parthia¹⁵. While the utopian model of an ideal political regime imagined by authors living during Hellenistic times is certainly not to be avoided, it does not preclude that an Iranian-style kingship with a strong aristocratic coloring can be sketched out from these different concomitant testimonies. The *Life of the Kings of K’art’li*, a medieval chronicle contained in the Georgian corpus *Life of K’art’li*, sometimes refers to a council of *erist’avni* and high-ranking noblemen discussing about kingdom policy¹⁶. It is thus likely to consider that the ancient kings of Iberia governed with the assistance of a council formed by the high-ranking princes of the kingdom, whose role was essentially to formulate recommendations and to give a guarantee of legitimacy to royal decisions. Therefore, it wouldn’t be absurd that these five letters be the fragmentary testimony of an ancient collegial institution gathering the most eminent aristocrats in a council assisting the Iberian sovereign in his palace of Armazi. This Iberian *boulē* or senate was indeed

¹³ Rapp S. H. Jr. 2014 about Iranian legacy to K’art’li and Caucasus during Late Antiquity.

¹⁴ Strabo, *Geography*, XI, 9, 3 : “*τοσοῦτον εἰπόντες μόνον ὅτι τῶν Παρθαίων συνέδριόν φησιν εἶναι Ποσειδώνιος διττόν, τὸ μὲν συγγενῶν τὸ δὲ σοφῶν καὶ μάγων, ἐξ ὧν ἄμοφοιν τοὺς βασιλεῖς καθίστασθαι*”, adapted from F. Lasserre (transl.), 1975. Drijvers J. W. 1998: 287-288.

¹⁵ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LXIX, 15, 3 = Exc. U^G 56, p. 407 : “*ὅτι Φαρασμάνη τῷ Ἰβηρι ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην μετὰ τῆς γυναικὸς ἐλθόντι τὴν τε ἀρχὴν ἐπηύξησε καὶ θῆσαι ἐν τῷ Καπιτωλίῳ ἐφήκεν, ἀνδριάντα τε ἐπὶ ἵππου ἐν τῷ Ἐνυεῖῳ ἔστησε, καὶ γυμνασίαν αὐτοῦ τε καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ τῶν τε ἄλλων πρώτων Ἰβήρων ἐν ὅπλοις εἶδεν*”. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, AM 6027, C. de Boor (ed.), 216 : “*Τούτῳ τῷ ἔτει ὁ τῶν Ἰβήρων βασιλεὺς Ζαμαναρζὸς ἀνήλθεν ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει πρὸς τὸν εὐσεβέστατον βασιλέα Ἰουστινιανὸν μετὰ τῆς γυναικὸς καὶ τῶν συγκλητικῶν αὐτοῦ, παρακαλῶν αὐτὸν τοῦ εἶναι αὐτὸν σύμμαχον Ῥωμαίων καὶ φίλον γνήσιον. Ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς τὴν τοιαύτην προαίρεσιν ἀποδεξάμενος πολλὰ αὐτὸν ἐριλοτιμήσατο καὶ τοὺς αὐτοῦ συγκλητικούς*”, C. Mango and R. Scott (transl.): 513.

¹⁶ These extracts concern Persia and K’art’li. *Life of the Kings of K’art’li*, in *Life of K’art’li (K’art’lis C’xovreba)*, S. Qauxč’išvili (ed.), 43¹⁴⁻¹⁵: “*მამინ სომეხნი და ქართველნი იყვნეს მორჩილ აჟღალანისი სპარსთა მეფისა*”; R. W. Thomson (transl.), 51: “*Then the erist’avis of Persia gathered together and appointed as king Azgalan the wise*” *Ibid.*, 60⁵⁻⁶: “*მამინ მეფემან სპარსთამან [...] მოუწოდა მთავართა სოფლებსათა პიტიახშთა და ერის-თავთა სოფლებსათა, და ყო განზრახვა*”; 71: “*the king of Persia [...] summoned the princes of the provinces, the pitiaxes and erist’avis of the provinces, and held a council*”. *Ibid.*, 62¹¹⁻¹³: “*მამინ შეკრბეს ყოველნი ერის-თავნი ქართლისანი მცხეთას ქალაქსა სპასპეტისა თანა, რომელსა ერქუა მაეჟან. ზრახვა ყვეს ერთბამად სავსეთა მწუხარებითა*”; 73: “*Then all the erist’avis of K’art’li gathered in the city of Mc’xet’a with the spaspēt, who was called Maežan. They held council together, filled with sadness*”; *Life of the Successors of Mirian*, in *Life of K’art’li*, S. Qauxč’išvili (ed.), 136⁶⁻⁷: “*და წარჩინებულნი თჳსნი-ცა ეტყოდეს წინა-აღდგომასა სპარსთასა*”; R. W. Thomson (transl.), 149: “*His nobles also urged (sc. King Varaz-Bak’ar) opposition to the Persians*”. *Ibid.*, 137⁸⁻⁹: “*მამინ წარჩინებულთა ქართლისათა ზრახვა ყვეს და დასუეს მეფედ სიმამრი ვარაზ-ბაქარისი, ძე რევისი, ძის-წული მირიანისი, კაცი მოხუცებული, სახელით თრდატ*”; 151: “*Then the nobles of K’art’li took counsel and installed as king the father-in-law of Varaz-Bak’ar, the son of Rev, grandson of Mirian, an elderly man by the name of T’rdat*”.

surely much closer to a royal council formed according to an Iranian model than to the civic institution of a Mediterranean city.

The lines 4 to 6 of this inscription KGIG 200 involve at least one female character. The beginning of her title occurs in the fourth line, and can be guessed as the word βασιλισσα (queen), being preceded by what appears as the end of a genitive recall pronoun (αὐτοῦ), which can be applied either to King Amaspos or to the character dedicating the inscription. The fifth line has preserved in a fragmentary way the two components of the lady's name: the first letters, ΦΗΛΗ, refer to the end of the name of Aurelie, probably declined in the dative. The following letters, hardly discernable through their flared ends, are very probably the beginning of Aurelie's cognomen and can be diversely read ΟΥΛΙΑ, ΟΥΑΓΑ, ΟΥΑΤΑ or more likely ΟΥΑΡΑ. Several Greek inscriptions of Cimmerian Bosphorus, emanating from a Sarmatian elite which shares some common traits with the Caucasian aristocracies, mention the names of Vara and Vagasis¹⁷. If the Iranian etymology of this name remains to be clarified¹⁸, its attestation on the Sarmatian lands of the North Black Sea could constitute additional proof attesting the links maintained between the court of Armazi with Tauris and the northern coasts of Pontus Euxinus¹⁹. I therefore choose to read "Vara" as the second probable name of Aurelie, even if this interpretation remains questionable owing to the various alternative possibilities in terms of onomastics. It cannot be determined with certainty whether the title of queen does indeed apply to Aurelie or whether she held another office in the Iberian court. In any case, it is unlikely to assume from the only gentile name a Roman origin for Aurelie, since Iberian dynasts could very well acquire these names through the honorific obtention of Roman citizenship²⁰.

Figure 2 – Possible reconstitution of the damaged letters in the fifth line



With Oulpia Naxia, Aurelie Vara would be one of the Iberian queens whose name contains two components, including an imperial gentile name and a nickname²¹. Obviously, the family of Aurelie had woven political links with the Antonine dynasty. The sixth line clearly indicates the relationship of Aurelie, designated as the daughter of an Iberian dignitary, probably a king, but not necessarily Amaspos the Great. A gap unfortunately prevents us from knowing surely if θυγάτηρ was effectively

¹⁷ CIRB 1243 ; 1265 ; 1282 : “Οὐάρα”. CIRB 1099 : “Οὐάγ[α]σις”. Two Mesopotamian variants: MUSJ 36,1.1959.20,52 (Οὐάραθα) ; MUSJ 36,1.1959.27,85 (Οὐάραβα).

¹⁸ Justi F. 1895: 348. Mayrhofer M. 1977: I/91. MacKenzie D. N. 1986: 87.

¹⁹ Such links were particularly illustrated by the marriage between King Mirian and Nana, who “*was brought from Greek territory, from Pontus, the daughter of Oligotos*”. *Life of the Kings*, in *K'art'lis C'xovreba*, S. Qauxčšvili (ed.), 667-8: “*მოიყვანა ცოლი საბერძნეთით, პონტოით, ასული ოლიღოტოსისი, სახელი ნანა*”; R. W. Thomson (transl.): 78. This last character can be identified with Thothorses, king of Cimmerian Bosphorus between 285 and 309 approximately. Frolova N. A. 1983: 33, 116-117. Nadel B. 1977: 95. Settipani C. 2006: 404-407.

²⁰ Braund D. 1993: 49. Linderski J. 2007: 266-268, 273-276. Schottky M. 2015: 169-171; 2016: 205-207, about the cases of King Flavius Dades and Pitiaxēs Publicius Agrippa.

²¹ About Queen Oulpia Naxia, Mshvildadze M. 2017: 53-61. In Iberia, this system of double names was not reserved for queens, since it is also attested for the kings Flavius Dades and Oustamos Eugenios. Braund D. 1993. Apakidze A. and *alii* 2004: 108-109.

declined in the dative case. I believe, however, that the number of missing letters is too great to relate to this word the letters $\omega\nu$ from the beginning of line 7.

On line 6, one of the least badly preserved, the ethnonym “Iberians” appears in the genitive case (Ιβήρων) before a second word that could indicate one or several “daughter(s)” (θυγα[τρῖ] or θυγα[τέρων]). Reading in the first letters ΩΝ on line 7 the end of the word *tugaterōn*, T’inat’in Qauxč’išvili seems to think that only three letters would be missing on line 6. This interpretation would therefore suppose that each line would contain about twelve letters, but at this stage, this hypothetical number is hardly assured insofar as we cannot manage to reconstitute a complete text. Nevertheless, my restitutive reading of line 5 assumes 18 letters. A longer inscription having about twenty letters on each line is also probable.

The seventh and eighth lines are perhaps the most enigmatic of this inscription KGIG 200. While the other official inscriptions found in Iberia are rather discreet on the gods and divinized heroes, this fragment clearly summons a θεός whose name has been preserved only through its first two letters, ΟΥ. Insofar as the Iberian pantheon remains very poorly known, we hardly see the divinity which could correspond to this name partially preserved²². On the other hand, a trail that offers more enlightenment deals with the names of deified Roman emperors. A research on the Packard Epigraphical Database with the sequence “θεου Ου” gives a result of 64 matches in 58 texts. Among these occurrences, “θεοῦ Οὔεσπασιανοῦ” (“of divine Vespasian”) appears in first position with almost two thirds of mentions (44 matches), followed by “θεοῦ Οὐήρου” (“of divine Verus”), with 17 matches – more than one quarter of mentions. The seventh line refers consequently with a very high probability to a divinized emperor, either Vespasian, the first Flavian emperor (r. 69-79), or Lucius Aurelius Verus, co-emperor with Marcus Aurelius from 161 to 169, the date of his death which preceded his apotheosis. Vespasian is attested with certainty in the famous inscription relating to the fortifications of Armazi dated from 75 CE, and it would be not a surprise to find another testimony of his action in Caucasian ground²³. However, several arguments tend to favor the hypothesis of Verus. The context of discovery belongs indeed rather to the second and third centuries CE²⁴ with the construction of royal bathes of Dracontis contemporary with King Amazaspos the Great whose name seems to appear on the third line. The paleography and material aspect of the stone would tend to connect this inscription with the two other epigraphic documents related to Iberian Court. A third argument is the presence of the gentile name Aurelius in a feminized form, which suggests a contact between Iberian kingship and Antonine dynasty.

This probable mention of Verus in the inscription KGIG 200 shall be understood through the context of the years 160s. In 162, Verus had overseen a campaign against the Parthians, which allowed the Empire to regain control over the kingdom of Armenia. Marcus Aurelius’ colleague had been sent to the East to deal with the disastrous situation caused by the Parthian invasion. In 161 or 162, King Vologaeses IV succeeded in dethroning the pro-Roman king of Armenia and in replacing him with a member of the Arsacid dynasty, Pacorus²⁵. Then, near Elegeia, the Parthian prince Osroes defeated the army of the governor of Cappadocia, Marcus Sedatius Severianus, who committed suicide²⁶. Having invaded Syria, the Parthians plundered this province, forcing the governor to flee, and penetrated as far as Palestine. To support Lucius Verus in this reconquest mission, Marcus Aurelius appointed the legates Staius Priscus, Avidius Cassius and Martius Verus to lead the expeditionary force, two senators, Marcus Pontius Laelianus and Marcus Iallius Bassus, governor of Lower Moesia, as well as a logistician, the

²² Van Esbroeck M. 1990. Rapp S. H. Jr. 2014: 144-160.

²³ SEG XX, 112.

²⁴ Chanishvili N. 2011: 33-37, 55.

²⁵ Chaumont M.-L. 1976: 147-149.

²⁶ Bivar A. D. H. 1983: 92-93.

freedman Nicomedes²⁷. Marcus Statius Priscus Licinius Italicus was a member of the *ordo equester* who got the *laticlavium* and became a senator. Ordinary consul in 159, legate in Britain then in Cappadocia, charge during which he drove the Parthians out of Armenia in 163, seized Artaxata and restored Sohaemus on his throne²⁸.

Historia Augusta understates Verus' role in portraying him as a debauched abandoning himself in the delights of Syrian raffinate cities while his legates lead the army in Armenia, Mesopotamia and Media²⁹. However, once the war was won, Verus would have reorganized the conquered territories by appointing sovereigns in Armenia and Osroene³⁰. It is therefore very likely that very close ties of cooperation were established with Iberia to confirm the legitimacy of these new princes established in these neighbouring Caucasian regions. The loss of the *History of the War against the Parthians* written by Quadratus unfortunately prevents access to the details of these events³¹. However, it is quite likely that between the defeat of Severianus in 161/162 and the victory of Statius Priscus in 163, the Iberian king was confronted with a disturbing situation when his traditional alliance with Rome was challenged by a rise of Parthian power unseen since the first century CE. The arrival of Verus and the Roman restoration of the military and political situation have obviously been experienced as a relief by the Iberian elite. The renown of this emperor therefore took on special importance for the Armazi court, which justified his inclusion in an official inscription commissioned by the Iberian royal family.

Aelius Aristides, in his *Panegyric to Cyzicus* addressed to Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, hyperbolically evokes “*the march around the Caucasus*” and “*the conquest of the Indies and the Caspian Gates*” among the feats of arms accomplished under their reign³². To this campaign is also probably attached the inscription of Caius Iulius Mansuetus, soldier of Legio I Minerva, reporting a Roman expedition that reached the outskirts of the Caucasus, without, however, having completely walked around the mountain range³³. The Romans probably had to negotiate with the Iberians during this military intervention. The year 169, the date of the death and deification of Marcus Aurelius' colleague, would therefore be a terminus post quem for the dating of KGIG 200. Since neither Anagranes nor her foster daughter appear in this inscription, it would be possible to deduce that Aurelie belonged to the generation later than that of King Amaspos and Queen Drakontis. If this were the case, then it would be possible to date the reign of Amaspos the Great on a period contemporary to the reign of Verus during the 160s, succeeding Xepharnougos who probably occupied the 150s CE.

²⁷ Roth J. P. 2017.

²⁸ *Historia Augusta*, “Life of Marcus Aurelius”, IX, 1. CIL VI, 1523. Rémy B. 1989: 222-224. Flinterman J.-J. 1997: 282. Quet M.-H. 2002: 99.

²⁹ *Historia Augusta*, “Life of Verus”, VII, 1-7 ; “Life of Marcus Aurelius”, VIII, 12 ; IX, 1 ; XXI, 2 ; “Life of Avidius Cassius”, VI, 5.

³⁰ *Historia Augusta*, “Life of Verus”, VII, 8 : “*Confecto sane bello regna regibus provincias vero comitibus suis regendas dedit*” ; “*Once the war was victoriously over, he granted kingdoms to some kings, and provincial governments to notables of his entourage*”.

³¹ This work is quoted in *Historia Augusta*, “Life of Verus”, VIII, 4, and “Life of Avidius Cassius”, I, 2. Barnes T. D. 1978: 84, 108.

³² Aelius Aristides, *Panegyric to Cyzicus for the temple*, 242₂₈ = *Orations* XXVII, 27 : « τοῦτο ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μὲν Καυκάσου περίοδον, τοῦτο δ' ὑπὲρ Ἰνδοῦς ἀλίσκομένους καὶ Κασπίας πύλας ». Quet M.-H. 2002: 100. The Caspian Gates of Caucasus mountains usually refer to Derbent Pass, but Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VI, 40, reports a confusion with Darial. The Ancients also gave the name of Caspian Gates to a pass of Elburz in Hyrcania: Polybius, *Histories*, V, 44, 5.

³³ CIL XIII, 8213 : « *Matronis / Aufanib(us) C(aius) / Iul(ius) Mansue-/tus m(iles) l(egionis) IM(inerviae) / p(iae) f(idelis) v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito) fu[i]t ad Alutum / flumen secus / mont(is) Caucasi* ». Chaumont M.-L. 1976: 148-149. Hartmann U. 2019: 35.

If the general meaning of the inscription KGIG 200 remains very obscure, this document can be considered very probably as a dedication in honour of Verus, mobilizing various members of the Iberian royal court. The truncated word *μεγάλό-* readable on the last line was clearly part of a laudatory discourse with regard to this deified personality. This incomplete word, either a common noun or an adjective, could have exalted Verus' greatness of soul (*μεγαλοφροσύνη*), if not his reputation (*μεγαλοδόξος*), his generosity (*μεγαλοδωρία, μεγαλοπρέπεια*), his vast ambitions (*μεγαλοπράγμων*) or his sublime mind (*μεγαλόνοια*). The copulative particle *δέ* at the beginning of line 8 connects this word with another one which was at the end of line 7, today missing, but which could also qualify *divus Verus*. This inscription would be thus the first epigraphic testimony of an Iberian perception about divinized Roman emperors. In literary sources, only a vague and historically contestable mention appears in *Historia Augusta* about Aurelian who would have been allegedly honoured as a god by Iberians³⁴. Could we guess from this honorific inscription a piece of evidence for attesting an imperial cult in the royal court of Armazi? Unfortunately, owing to the present state of documentation, analysis can only remain here at the hypothesis stage.

Taking into account the necessary precautions, the inscription KGIG 200 would thus offer an Iberian look on the profitable issue of Lucius Verus' action in South Caucasia, which visibly reinforced the positions of the Empire and Roman alliance with the sovereign of Armazi, since *foedera* passed by Roman *imperatores* with Iberian kings Artokes and Pharnabazos, respectively in 65 and 36 BCE³⁵. If the exact implication of Iberia in this campaign is not known, the Iberian sovereign should be able to send logistical support or auxiliary contingents, as for Prince Amaspos, the brother of Mithridates II, died in Nisibis in 114 or 117 during Trajan's campaign³⁶. The presents offered by Romans to Iberian elites included the gift of precious ceremonial objects. Some dishes dating from the reign of Marcus Aurelius were found during the excavations in Mc'xet'a, reflecting the intense diplomatic activity that animated relations between Rome and his Caucasian ally³⁷.

This new reading of KGIG 200 would tend to privilege a higher date for the reign of Amaspos the Great than the hypothesis of David Braund placing Anagranes' dedication in the middle of the third century CE³⁸. This epigraphic document contains indeed the fragmentary mention of a deified personage, who is likely to be Lucius Verus, a co-emperor with Marcus Aurelius from 161 to 169 CE. Although the precise meaning of this inscription remains obscure, it nevertheless looks like in its broad outline a dedication gathering several members of the Iberian royal court in honour of "divine V(erus)" praised for his greatness. The Iberians have obviously benefited from the Roman expedition engaged by this emperor to regain control of Armenia in 162 or at the beginning of the year 163 CE³⁹. The intensity of cooperative relations between Romans and Iberians during the Antonine era can be observed through the wealth of funerary material from the tombs of the Iberian aristocracy of the 2nd century CE, among which were identified items of dishes attributable to the reign of Marcus Aurelius and whose use clearly obeyed the logic of diplomatic presents⁴⁰.

An Iberian king whose name is truncated, but who can be identified with Amaspos the Great, appears in this same inscription. The fact that neither Anagranes, nor Drakontis, nor Vologaeses could

³⁴ *Historia Augusta*, « Life of Aurelian », XXXIII, 1, 4. Hartmann U. 2019: 50-54, discusses the doubtful veracity of this text.

³⁵ Braund D. 1994: 166, 217.

³⁶ CIG 6856. Canali de Rossi F. 2004: 2-3. BRAUND D. 1994: 230.

³⁷ Gamkrelidze G. 2014: 31 (dish with Antinoos' portrait) and 33 (*phiale* with Marcus Aurelius' portrait).

³⁸ Braund D. 2002: 31-32.

³⁹ Chaumont M.-L. 1976: 148-149. Quet M.-H. 2002: 99-100.

⁴⁰ Gamkrelidze G. 2014: 31, 33.

be spotted in the Greek text suggests that this document would relate to a time either earlier, or, on the contrary, much later than the period of presence of the Armenian *tropheus* and his foster daughter in the court of Armazi. After Verus' death in 169, an Iberian queen or noble lady named Aurelie is quoted in a dedication honouring him. If Aurelie had received her gentile name from Antoninus or Verus, and if my reading presenting her as "the daughter of the (king) of Iberians" is correct, then it would be conceivable that this Iberian lady would belong to the generation that followed Amaspos the Great and Drakontis. Of course, the inscription KGIG 200 was not necessarily engraved immediately after Verus' apotheosis, since it is quite possible to imagine a dedication in the context of an imperial worship rendered by Iberian elites to a deceased emperor several decades after his death. Nevertheless, the vivid memory of the Roman expedition led in 162 in Southern Caucasia had to revive the zeal of the Iberian court to honour their Roman ally when he left this world, or relatively soon after this event.

Since the reign of Amaspos the Great seems contemporary to Verus' period of existence, it is therefore possible, in my view, to identify the king of Armenia mentioned in KGIG 199 to Vologases I (116/117-140/144), whose daughter Drakontis married the Iberian king Amaspos. Given the reign of Pharasmanes II which ends after 141 CE, and the rule of his son Xepharnougos who succeeded him⁴¹, it is likely to date the ruling period of Amaspos around 150s and 160s. It remains to be determined whether Vologases I, who was very hostile to Pharasmanes II during Alan invasion supported by Iberia in 135 CE⁴², was able to offer his daughter in marriage to an Iberian prince. If this marital union occurred at the end of the reign of the two sovereigns, in the mid-140s, it would be possible to see the mark of a reconciliation between the ruling dynasties of Armenia and Iberia. However, Drakontis could very well have been married after the death of his father, during the reign of Vologases' successor in Armenia, contemporary with Xepharnougos' rule in Iberia. The young age of the princess would have justified the presence at her side of an educator (*daveak*) chosen from the ranks of the Armenian nobles. According to this hypothesis, the rule of Amaspos the Great would have intervened a few years after the death of Pharasmanes II, likely soon after Xepharnougos' reign, which probably wouldn't have been very long. I therefore consider it reasonable to place in the middle of the second century CE the beginning of Amaspos' rule and the dedication of the baths offered to Queen Drakontis. Perhaps this inscription KGIG 200 was engraved after the reign of Amaspos the Great, but without certainty, since it could still have been made during his lifetime.

The interpretation of KGIG 200 remains fragile, however, because of numerous reading uncertainties related to the extremely fragmentary nature of this inscription. As a result, the hypothesis set forth by T'inat'in Qauxč'išvili, placing the reign of Amaspos at the turn of 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, in a time almost contemporaneous with a king of Armenia who is supposed to be Vologases II, remains entirely plausible⁴³. Nevertheless, if this new reading applied to the inscription KGIG 200 gives sufficient reasons to place the reign of Amaspos the Great in a contemporary time with Verus' expedition, this epigraphic testimony should increase our knowledge about relationship between

⁴¹ Braund D. 1994: 213. Schottky M. 2014: 102-105.

⁴² Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LXIX, 15, 1. Mommsen T. 1885: 405 and Magie D. 1950: 1528 n. 2, think that this Vologases is Parthian king Vologases III. Chaumont M.-L. 1976: 146, Juntunen K. 2013: 124-126 and Schottky M. 2014: 94, defend the hypothesis of Armenian Vologases.

⁴³ The testimonies concerning the second King Vologases of Armenia are more questionable. Chaumont M.-L. 1976: 152, adopts a prudent position. Braund D. 2002: 30, Traina G. 2004: 256 and 2019: 124 considered him as a sovereign who ruled between 186 and 198 CE. Schottky M. 2010: 217-224 and 2015: 160-163, contested his historicity by invoking an anachronism of Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of the Armenians*, II, 65. Roman sources don't explicitly mention a Vologases II who would have ruled at the end of Antonine era or at the beginning of Severan times, but they nevertheless leave open such a possibility. Perhaps the Vologases pretending to the Armenian throne evoked by Fronto, *Letters, Ad Verum imperatorem*, II, 18, could have achieved his plan after Sohaemus' death.

Antonine dynasty and Caucasian Iberia. Whatever the uncertainties of its precise dating, the reign of Amaspos the Great can rightly be considered as a peak of Iberian power in Caucasus, visible in the abundant funerary material of the Iberian elites of this time as well as through the architectural achievements on Baginet'i Hill⁴⁴. In such a collaboration between Rome and Armazi, Queen or Princess Aurelie seems to have played a consistent role inside the royal court of Caucasian Iberia.

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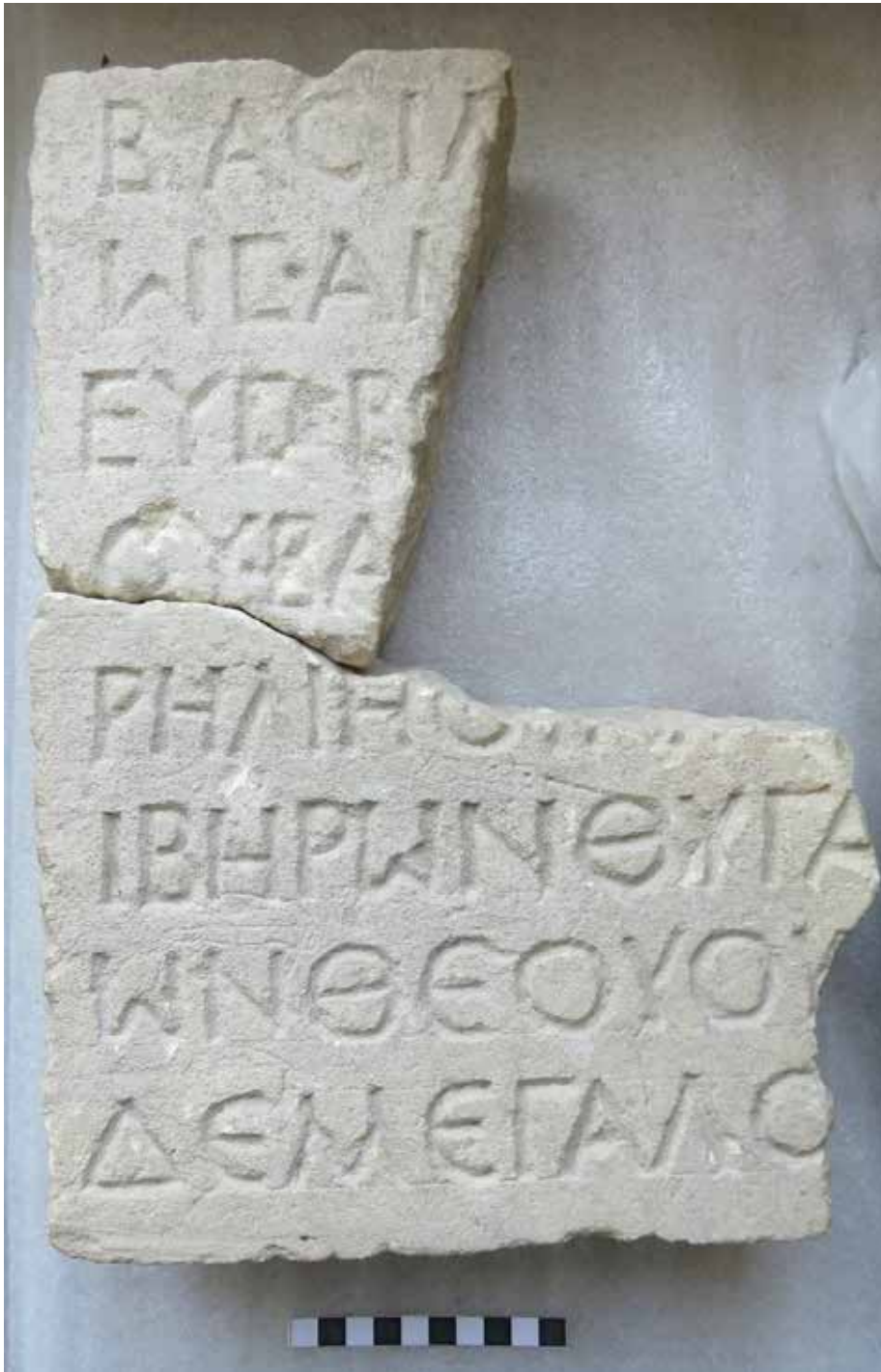
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Appendix 1 – A photography of Greek inscription KGIG 200 from Baginet⁴⁵



⁴⁵ With special thanks to Nikoloz Maisurashvili, Nikoloz Chaduneli and to the staff of the State Archaeological Museum-Reserve of Mc'xet'a for granting me this photography and for the the warm welcome they have given me during my visit in September 2019.