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Two Builders and a Woman in Caucasian Iberia: the Inscriptions of Achilles, Aurelios Acholi(o)s and Beurazouria from Mtskheta

Nicolas Preud'Homme

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იბერია-კოლხეთი

საქართველოს კლასიკური და ადრემედიევური პერიოდის
არქეოლოგიურ-ისტორიული კვლევანი

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in the Classical and Early Medieval Period



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GEORGIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM
Otar Lordkipanidze Institute of Archaeological Studies



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TWO BUILDERS AND A WOMAN IN CAUCASIAN IBERIA: THE INSCRIPTIONS OF ACHILLES, AURELIOS ACHOLI(O)S AND BEURAZOURIA FROM MTSKHETA

Nicolas J. Preud'homme

Two Greek inscriptions found at Mtskheta in Georgia shed light on a woman named Beurazouria, married to a chief painter, Aurelios Acholis or Acholios, contemporary of his colleague Achilles.¹ These characters from the Ancient Iberian kingdom are known only by epigraphy which provides about them significant amount of information.² The very rare case of this Aurelios Acholi(o)s appearing on two inscriptions suggests the important role that this man must have occupied in the urban life of the Iberian capital and perhaps in other parts of this Caucasian kingdom.³

The inscription KGIG 202, engraved through 16 lines of text on a sandstone stele, was found near the Church of Antioch at Mtskheta in November 1997, during restoration works – the stone is now preserved in the Archaeological Institute of Mtskheta under the registration number 01-6-XI. The dimensions of the surface inscribed on the stele are 102 x 34.5 cm. The end of the ninth line and lines 10 to 13 are badly damaged. My reading differs in some extent from the interpretation offered by Tinatin Qaukhchishvili, particularly on the first line and on the damaged passage.⁴

Transliteration of SEG LIX, 1641 = KGIG 202

1. ΑΥΩΑΥΩ
2. ΕΠΟΙΕΙΟΝΤΟ
3. ΣΑΧΙΛΛΕΩΣ
4. ΕΠΙΤΩΝΤΕΚΤ
5. ΟΝΩΝΑΥΡΗΛΙ
6. ΟΣΑΧΟΛΙΟΣ
7. ΑΡΧΙΖΩΓΡΑΞ
8. ΦΟΣΚΑΙΑΡΧΙ
9. ΤΕΚΤΩΝΕΦ
10. ΑΕΜΙΝΗΤΕ
11. ΓΕΕΥΑΣΥΛΙ
12. ΤΗΝΤΙΧΙΣΙΝ
13. ΩΔΕΦΕΡ
14. ΤΗΕΚΦΕΙΡΙ
15. ΝΜΝΗΜΗΣ
16. ΑΡΣΠΑΚΟΡΗΣ

¹ KGIG (or *I. Georgien*) 202 = SEG LIX, 1641 & KGIG 236 = SEG LIX, 1644. Qaukhchishvili T. 1951: 253-257.

² Braund D. 1994: 208, 259. Gamkrelidze G. and *alii* 2013: 362. Schleicher F. 2021: 323.

³ About the archaeology of Armaztsikhe: Nikolaishvili V. 2011. Concerning the burials of Samtavro from 1st-3rd c. CE: Ivashchenko M. 1980: 206, 219 about Aurelios Acholi(o)s.

⁴ The reading adopted by SEG LIX, 1641, based essentially on Qaukhchishvili T. 2000: 230. is: ΑΩ ΑΩ | έποίει όντο|ς Άχιλλέως | έπί τών τεκτ| |ό<ν>ων Αύρήλι|ος Άχόλις | άρχιζωγρά{ε}|φος και άρχι|τέκτων ΗΛ| |ΑΣΑΜΗΚΑΤΜ|ΓΕΚΥΑΧΤΑΡ | τήν τείχι[σιν (?)] | ΩΔΕΤΑΤΟ | τής τελείη<ς> || {ν}μνήμης | Άρσπακόρης.

Developed transcription

Αὔω, αὔω !
Ἐποίει ὄντο-
ς Ἀχιλλέως
ἐπὶ τῶν τεκτ-
-όνων Αὐρήλι-
ος Ἀχόλιος
ἀρχιζωγράφ(ε)-
φος καὶ ἀρχι-
τέκτων. Ἐφ-
-α ἐμὴν ἦτε
γε εὔ ἄσυλι;
τὴν τίχισιν
ῶδε φερ-
-τὴ ἐκφείρι-
-ν. Μνήμης
Ἀρσπακόρης.

Tinatın Qaukhchishvili interpreted ΑΩ, ΑΩ as the redoubled biblical abbreviation “Alpha and Omega”.⁵ I think this reading is quite dubious and shall be revised. Even if the disposition of letters is somewhat irregular and barely discernable owing to the damages on the upper part of the stone, the presence of upsilons suggests the reading αὔω, αὔω as the repeated verb present indicative active 1st singular: ‘I shout’, ‘I cry’. Ἐποίει is the verb ποιέω imperfect indicative active 3rd singular: ‘he was doing’. ὄντος is the participle masculine genitive present active singular of the verb εἶμι: ‘being’. Ἀχιλλέως is the masculine genitive singular form of the Greek proper name Ἀχιλλεύς, Achilles. The preposition ἐπὶ, ‘on’, precedes the plural genitive determined article τῶν and the genitive plural form of the common masculine noun τεκτόνων, ‘carpenters’ or more generally ‘craftsmen’, ‘workmen’. Αὐρήλιος is the gentile name in the masculine singular nominative form. Ἀχόλιος, with its three last letters damaged, is the surname also in the masculine singular nominative form. The common nouns ἀρχιζωγράφος, ‘chief painter’ or ‘master decorator’ and ἀρχιτέκτων, ‘master builder’, ‘director of works’, are connected through the coordinating conjunction καὶ, ‘and’.

The damaged area represents many difficulties complicating an assured reading proposal. Tinatın Qaukhchishvili suggested for this difficult passage on lines 9-10: ΗΛ or ΗΡ / ΑΣΑΜΗΚΑΤΜ, or ΚΜΤΗ, or ΗΑΤΑ on the last four letters; for line 11: ΓΕΚΥΑΧΤΑΡ, or ΓΕΟΧΔΑΤΑΡ, or ΓΕΩΤΑΧΡΑΡ; for line 12: ΤΗΝΤΙΧΙΞ(Ο?) Μ; and for line 13: ΩΔΕΤ(Υ?)ΑΤΟ.⁶ By resuming the decryption work, another interpretative proposition can be offered. Dots marking the ends of erased letters can help fill in missing signs.

I read the word crossing lines 9-10 as ἔφα, the Dorian variant for ἔφη, imperfect 3rd singular verbal form of φημί, ‘to say’.⁷ The pronoun ἐμὴν is the Dorian form of the 1st person dative singular ἐμοί, ‘to

⁵ Revelation, I,8; XXI,6.

⁶ Qaukhchishvili T. 2000: 230.

⁷ Other hypotheses that I finally did not retain were: an irregular verbal form cognate to the verb ἐφῆμμαι, perfect passive 1st singular form of ἐφάπτω, ‘to apply oneself to’, ‘to accomplish’, ‘to come after (someone)’, ‘to catch’, ‘to reach’, ‘to be the

me', followed by the conjunction ἤτε, 'that'. The enclitic particle γε precedes the adverb εὖ, 'well', 'regularly', 'fully', 'perfectly', 'fortunately'. The word ἄσυλι is the itacized form of the adjective-noun dative singular ἄσυλει, 'inviolable'.⁸

On line 12, the sequence τὴν τίχισιν (with an Italicism for τείχισιν) includes an article and a noun feminine accusative singular, 'wall building', 'the work of walling'. On line 13, the adverb ὧδε means 'thus'. Then, φερτή appears as the feminine dative singular form of the adjective φερτός, 'endurable', with an adverbial meaning, 'firmly'. The word ἐκφέρειν can be regarded as an irregular variant of ἔκφερν, from the verb ἐκφέρω, 'carry out', 'bring forth', 'accomplish', either at the late Attic form of present infinitive active, or at present optative active 1st singular ('may I carry out', 'may I accomplish').⁹ The first option of an infinitive with time value seems preferable ('he accomplished').

On line 15, the substantive μνήμη, 'memory', appears at the genitive case with most of its letters damaged. The last word of the inscription on line 16 is the proper name Arspakores on the masculine nominative case. This Iranian name seems to encapsulate two components: *ars* cognate to Middle-Persian *arz*, 'worth, value'¹⁰ and *pakores* from Middle-Iranian *bagpuhr*, 'son of a god'.¹¹ As this name to the nominative case seems isolated and detached from the rest of the inscription, it may designate an aristocrat close to Achilles and who would have financed or supervised the installation of the commemorative inscription.

A new proposition of translation can be presented, with the hypothetical reconstitutions in parentheses.

"I cry, I cry! As Achilles was operating above the craftsmen (or: the carpenters), Aurelios Acholios was chief painter and director of works. He was saying to me that (his work was), of course, fully inviolable. Thus, he firmly accomplished the work of walling. In his memory, Arspakores."

This epigraphic document presents a remarkable overview on professional relations among the craftsmen of Armazi-Mtskheta as well as the work of building carried out in Ancient Caucasian Iberia. Apparently, Achilles and Aurelios Acholios were collaborating on a construction project, probably in or around the Iberian capital city, Armazi-Mtskheta. The action of Achilles is situated in a hierarchical framework led by Aurelios Acholios, since the latter has more titles (*arkhizōgraphos* and *arkhitektōn*) as well as a Roman gentile name, like several members of the Iberian aristocracy. Aurelios Acholios therefore had to occupy a hierarchical position superior to Achilles who seems to be only a simple foreman.

Considering the fact that the burial stone of Aurelios Acholios was also found in a different place of Mtskheta (see *infra*), and since KGIG 202 is also clearly a funerary inscription, it appears by deduction that the person honored in this inscription is indeed Achilles, which also justifies the fact that his name is cited first despite his lower hierarchical status. The lines 12-14 suggest that Achilles assumed the

immediate consequence of (something)'; an irregular form of the adjective εὐφάης, 'brilliant'; the verb φάε, imperfect indicative active 3rd singular, 'to shine', applied to the preceding nominal group.

⁸ This fixed form in dative case with an adverbial use is attested in numerous inscriptions, often in the conventional formula ἄσυλει καὶ ἀσπονδει ("with the privilege of inviolability and without libations", about peace). See notably CIRB 1, 3, 4; IG I² 63; IG I² 116; IG IX, 2, 1230; SEG LI, 936; SEG LV, 605.

⁹ The nearest comparable attestation of this verbal form can be found in Chrysippus, *Fragmenta logica et physica*, Fragment 298a, col. 7, l. 15: εκφερν...

¹⁰ MacKenzie D. N. 1971: 11.

¹¹ Rapp S. H. Jr. 2014: 262, with several variants in Armenian (Bakur), in Greek (Pakoros, Bakourios), in Latin (Pacorus, Bacurios) and in Syriac (Bqwrwys).

achievement of the building project led by his colleague Acholios. According to my hypothetical decipherment proposal, the narrator expressing himself at the first singular person, perhaps Arspakores considered as the author of this inscription, recalled laudatory words about the building work of one of the two men – he did not specify him clearly there. The sentence can imply that Achilles or Acholios praised himself either about his own work, or about his colleague’s achievement. Since Achilles is the deceased person honored there, it would be logical that this praise would have concerned his own qualities. The nature of the works would have constituted in the erection of a wall, probably fortifications of the city, if we consider that ἀουλι refers to the alleged impregnable nature of such defensive works. Another famous inscription dealing with the fortifications surrounding Armazi-Mtskheta is the dedication stone of Vespasian engraved in 75 CE.¹² In Ancient Armenia, the Greek inscription of Garni recently reinterpreted by Alain Bresson and Elizabeth Fagan mentions another duo of craftsmen, “Menneas the stonemason with his pupil Martyrios”, likely associated to the construction of an “invincible castle” for King Tiridates and the queen.¹³ As the inscription KGIG 202 relates to a funerary function and not to a dedication, its place of discovery near the Church of Antioch does not presume the location of the construction work mentioned in the text.¹⁴ Numerous mentions of fortification works throughout the Iberian kingdom impregnate also the *Life of the Kartvelian Kings*, a chronicle from the 8th-9th century CE inserted in the Georgian corpus *Kartlis Tskhovreba*.¹⁵ As a consequence, the accordance between the epigraphic documents and the Pre-Bagratid historiography assert the importance of an Iberian and Kartvelian collective memory about urban landscapes and monuments, affirmed with pride in engraved inscriptions and written manuscripts.

As regards the dating of the inscription, I agree with the opinion of Tinatin Qaukhchishvili who considers that the paleographic data can place the inscription between the 2nd and the 6th century CE.¹⁶ However, I deviate from her reading which would place this inscription in a late-antique context due to its alleged Christian nature: nothing indeed explicitly supports any trace of Christianity in this inscription, according to this revised reading. Certainly, the place of discovery of the inscription KGIG 202 is an Early Medieval church, but if Achilles and Aurelios had worked on the erection of a religious building, it would have been plausible that their funerary inscriptions mention the importance of this work in their personal faith, which they did not. The significance of the Greek, Roman and Iranian onomastics places this inscription rather in the pre-Christian period of Arsacid Iberia, before the end of the 3rd century CE.

The other inscription KGIG 236, conserved in the National Museum of Georgia since its discovery in 1938, was found in the necropolis of Samtavro in the northern part of Mtskheta. This Greek text is engraved on a slab broken into two parts, through 15 lines disposed on an area of 33 cm on 59 cm. The lines 11 and 12 are slightly damaged, but the whole inscription has been better preserved than

¹² SEG XX, 112. Canali de Rossi F. 2004: 1.

¹³ Bresson A. and Fagan E. 2022, 907.

¹⁴ The Church of Antioch, which stands on the right bank of the Aragvi River in Mtskheta, consists of buildings from different times: a hall church attached to an Early Medieval three-nave basilica (7th-8th c.), a gate and a defensive tower built on the gate (16th-17th c.). The three walls and the gate of the church are built of blocks of sandstone, while the south wall of the church and the defensive tower are made of rubble, cobblestones and bricks. Abashidze I., Dolidze V. & Kintsurashvili S. 1990: 233-234.

¹⁵ *Life of the Kartvelian Kings* in the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, S. Qaukhchishvili ed., vol. 1: 25, 29, 30, 33, 59, 65. Rapp S. H. Jr 2014: 12. Preud’homme N. 2019: 327-346.

¹⁶ Qaukhchishvili T. 2000: 230.

KGIG 202. My reading is very close to the interpretation proposed by Tinatin Qaukhchishvili, differing almost only on the line 10.¹⁷

Transliteration of KGIG 236 = SEG LIX, 1644

1. ΑΥΡ·ΑΧΟΛΙΣΑΡΧΙΖΩ
2. ΓΡΑΦΟΣΚΑΙΑΡΧΙΤΕ
3. ΚΤΩΝΕΝΘΑΔΕΚΙΜ[-]
4. ΜΕΤΑΤΗΣΣΥΝΕΥΝΟ[Υ]
5. ΜΟΥΒΕΥΡΑΖΟΥΡΙΑ[Σ]
6. ΑΞΙΩΔΕΤΟΥΣΦΙΛΟΥΣ
7. ΚΑΙΠΑΡΟΔΙΤΑΣΕΠΕΙ
8. ΒΛΕΨΗΝΤΑΣΑΛΛΗΛΩΝ
9. ΠΡΑΣΙΝΑΜΗΤΙΣΕΠΕΙ
10. [-]ΙΣΠΟΕΤΑΟΣΤΕΟ[--]
11. [--]ΤΙΣΘΕΛΗΣΙΝ[---]
12. [---]ΜΕΦΘΗΜΩΝ[-]
13. ΤΕΓΕΝΟΣΗΤΕΑΛ[---]
14. ΞΕΝΟΣΔΩΣΙΑΠΟΛ[--]
15. ΙΑΝΕΝΘΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΤΩ!

Developed transcription of KGIG 236

Αὐρ(ἥλιος) Ἀχόλις ἀρχιζω-
-γράφος καὶ ἀρχιτέ-
-κτων ἐνθάδε κῆμ[α]
μετὰ τῆς συνεύνο[υ]
μου Βευραζουρία[ς].
Ἄξιῶ δὲ τοὺς φίλους
καὶ παροδίτας ἐπει-
- βλέψην τὰς ἀλλήλων (sic)
(πράξεις?) ἵναμή τις ἐπέι
[ε]ἰσποετα ὀστέο[ις]
[μή]τις θέλησιν [...]
[...] μεθ' ἡμῶν [ῆ-]
-τε γένος ἦτε ἄλλ[λος]
ξένος, δώσει ἀπολ[ογ]-
-ίαν ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῷ.

¹⁷ SEG LIX, 1644, based on Robert L. & J. 1958: 345, no. 516 : Αὐρ(ἥλιος) Ἀχόλις ἀρχιζω|γράφος καὶ ἀρχιτέ|κτων ἐνθάδε κῆμ[ε] | μετὰ τῆς συνεύνο[υ] || μου Βευραζουρία[ς] | ἀξιῶ δὲ τοὺς φίλους καὶ παροδίτας ἐπέι|βλέψην τὰς ἀλλήλων (sic) | ΓΑΡΣ ἵνα μ[ή] τις ἐπέι|μυρριοστα ὀστέο[ις] | τ[ι]ς θελήσ[ει] --| -] μεθ' ἡμῶν [ῆ]|τε γένος ἦτε ἄλλ[λος] | ξένος, δώσει ἀπολ[ογ]||ίαν ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῷ [Κ(υρί)ω νεὶ Θ(ε)ῶ]; Qaukhchishvili T. 2000: 256: ΑΥΡ·ΑΧΟΛΙΣΑΡΧΙΖΩ | ΓΡΑΦΟΣΚΑΙΑΡΧΙΤΕ | ΚΤΩΝΕΝΘΑΔΕΚΙΜ· | ΜΕΤΑΤΗΣΣΥΝΕΥΝΟ | ΜΟΥΒΕΥΡΑΖΟΥΡΙΑ . | ΑΞΙΩΔΕΤΟΥΣΦΙΛΟΥΣ | ΚΑΙΠΑΡΟΔΙΤΑΣΕΠΕΙ | ΒΛΕΨΗΝΤΑΣΑΛΛΗΛΩΝ | ΠΡΑΣΙΝΑ.ΗΤΙΣΕΠΕΙ | ΜΥΡΡΙΟΣΤΑΟΣΤΕ· | ·ΤΙΣΘΕΛΗΣ ... | ... ΜΕΦΘΗΜΩΝ | .ΤΕΓΕΝΟΣΗΤΑΛ .. | ΞΕΝΟΣΔΩΣΙΑΠΟΛ .. | ΙΑΝΕΝΘΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΤΩ; Αὐρ[ῆλις] (sic) Ἀχόλις ἀρχιζωγράφος καὶ ἀρχιτέκτων ἐνθάδε κῆμ[αι] μετὰ τῆς συνεύνο[υ] μου Βευραζουρία[ς]. ἀξιῶ δὲ τοὺς φίλους καὶ παροδίτας ἐπιβλέψειν τὰς ἀλλ[λ]ήλων [π]ρά[ξ]εις ἵνα [μ]ήτις ἐπὶ μυρριοστά (ἔτη) ὥστ[ι]εῖ[ται] [μ]ήτις θελήσ[ει] θάπτειν μεθ' ἡμῶν [εἶ]τε γένος εἶτε ἄλλ[λος] ξένος, δώσει ἀπολ[ογ]ίαν ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῷ[ῷ].

The text begins by the abbreviated Roman gentile name of Αὐρ(ήλιος). The surname Ἀχόλις, on the nominative case, is a variant of Acholios attested in KGIG 202. The two titles of this character, *arkhizographos*, ‘master painter’ and *arkhitekton*, ‘director of works’, also appear as epithets linked by the conjunction καὶ. The adverb ἐνθάδε, ‘here’, precedes the verb present indicative middle passive 1st singular κῖμ[α] (itacized form of κείμαι, ‘I lie down to rest, I repose’). Then, the preposition μετὰ, ‘with’, is connected with the nominal group τῆς συνεύνο[υ] μου Βευραζουρία[ς], ‘my wife Beurazouria in the genitive singular case.’¹⁸

The second sentence opens with the verb present active first singular ἀξιῶ, ‘I think fit, expect, require that’. After the particle δέ, the subject of the subordinate clause through two plural nouns in the accusative case intervenes: τοὺς φίλους καὶ παροδίτας, ‘the friends and the travelers’. The future infinitive active verb of the subordinate clause, ἐπειβλέψην as alternative form of ἐπιβλέψειν, means ‘look well at, observe’. The article feminine plural τὰς precedes the pronoun genitive plural ἀλ[λ]ήλων, ‘each other’, ‘one another’ and the noun feminine plural πράξεις, ‘activities’, ‘attitudes’, ‘ways of acting’. The ξ of this substantive seems to have been written as a sigma, while the end of this same word has been apparently truncated (ΠΡΑΣ). Furthermore, its first letter is damaged, which makes its reading uncertain. The word ἵναμή encapsulates the conjunctions ἵνα and μή, ‘that not’. It is followed by the pronoun nominative τις, ‘one’, ‘someone’.

A divergent reading appears on lines 9-10. Tinatin Qaukhchishvili saw the preposition ἐπὶ, ‘on’ preceding an irregular form of the substantive adjective plural neutral μυρριοστά (correct spelling: μυρριοστά), ‘ten thousandths’; then, another heterodox occurrence of the verb ὠσπιέται, conjugated at the future indicative middle active third singular form, belongs to the lemma ὠσπίζομαι, frequentative of ὠθέομαι, and with the meaning: ‘will push’. Nevertheless, I read quite clearly on the stone the conjunction ἐπεὶ, ‘after that’, preceding the abbreviated verbal form [Ε]ΙΣΠΟΕΤΑ for εἰσποιῆται, a late verbal form of the present subjunctive middle passive 3rd singular belonging to the lemma εἰσποιέω, ‘bring something new into’, ‘introduce’. The indirect object of this verb is logically the following word, namely the noun neutral dative plural ὀστέοις, ‘to (our) bones’. I agree by this reading with the intuition of Jeanne and Louis Robert in their review of the work of Tinatin Qaukhchishvili in 1958.¹⁹

The pronoun μήτις expresses the wish of non-accomplishment, ‘let alone’, ‘much less’, ‘not to mention’. Then, rather than the hypothesis advanced by Tinatin Qaukhchishvili about a verb θελήσει²⁰ followed by an infinitive θάπτειν, ‘to honor with funeral rites’, I read the noun feminine accusative singular θέλησιν, ‘wish, willing’. As a precaution, I do not propose restitution on the missing sequence of half a dozen letters, but it is probable, with regard to the context, that it deals with a verb or a noun making reference to the practice of burial. On line 12, the circumstantial complement μεθ’ ἡμῶν ‘with us’ is quite clear. The doubled conjunction εἴτε associates two nominal groups: the noun γένος, ‘offspring’, ‘clan’, ‘house’, ‘family’, ‘posterity’ and ἄλλ[λος] ξένος, ‘another foreigner’.

The last sequence of the inscriptions bears the verb future indicative third active singular δώσει, itacized variant of δώσει, from the lemma δίδωμι, ‘to grant, to assign, to be ready to give’. Its direct

¹⁸ On the basis of the Ancient Greek first declension in Attic and Koine, with a feminine singular genitive ᾱς, the nominative form shall be in -ᾱ. As a consequence, I adopt the form ‘Beurazouria’, contrary to ‘Beurazourias’ in SEG 59, 1644.

¹⁹ Robert L. & J. 1958: 345, n. 516.

²⁰ This hypothesis would have consisted in the verb future indicative active third singular of the lemma ἐθέλω, ‘will’, ‘shall’, ‘to be disposed’.

object is the noun feminine accusative ἀπολογία, ‘speech in defense. A final circumstantial complement of time encapsulates the preposition ἐν, the article τῆ, the dative singular noun ἀναστάσει and the dative article τῷ, with its last letters damaged. Jeanne and Louis Robert imagined a final lacuna mentioning the Lord: [Κ(υρί)ω vel Θ(ε)ῷ]; however, there is evidently no place at the end of the line 15 to contain such words, even abbreviated, and the actual state of the stone does not suggest a last missing line. I think preferable to see this τῷ as an enclitic cognate to the indefinite adjective and pronoun τίς, referring to the subject and which should have normally been at the genitive singular masculine case τοῦ: “in his resurrection”, or “about the removal (of the body)”. As a consequence, this revised translation can be proposed.

“I, Aurelios Acholis, chief artist and master of works, am buried here with my wife, Beurazouria. I ask to my friends and to the travelers to observe on each other’s behavior, for after that, nobody will introduce (something new) to (our) bones, and that there will be no willing (to bury) in the same place, neither a relative, nor another foreigner. (And if such a thing will happen), let this person be ready to apologize about the removal (of the body) (or: in his resurrection).”

The paleography reveals in this same inscription different stylistic forms for the letters lambda, sigma and omega. The shapes of the letters σ and ε are notable insofar as they are round in some cases and, in other cases, square shaped. The only abbreviation mark is the dot after Αυρ for Αὐρήλιος. A few ligated and nested letters are visible on lines 8-9 and 15, notably the psi on line 8 which has a ligature with the following letter. Itacisms apply commonly on elongated vowels (ει, ι, η): κῖμ[α] for κεῖμαι; ἐπειβληψεν for ἐπιβλέψειν, ἦτε for εἶτε, δωσι for δώσει and ἀναστάσι for ἀναστάσει.

Aurelios Acholi(o)s appears as a chief craftsman from the Roman Empire who would have migrated and integrated the Iberian society to lead a local workshop or a school of architecture in Armazi-Mtskheta.²¹ Outside Caucasian Iberia, the name of Acholios and its variant Acholis appear in nine inscriptions, mostly from Asia Minor.²² The phrase “another foreigner” (ἄλλος ξένος) on lines 13-14 suggests that Aurelios Acholi(o)s considered himself an alien resident. The noun *archizōgraphos* appears only through rare late occurrences. In Greek literature, it is only seen in three Byzantine authors: Eustathius Thessalonicensis (12th century), the Patriarch of Constantinople Germanus II (13th century) and Manuel Holobolus (13th-14th centuries).²³ Regarding Aurelios Acholi(o)s, few details can presume an official function at the royal court of Caucasian Iberia, insofar as the hierarchical nature of the office belonging to the master of works and its location in Mtskheta were to favour links with the ruling circles of the kingdom. As Jeanne and Louis Robert note, high-ranking craftsmen bearing *archi-* titles were in office in the court of Alexandria from the Hellenistic period to the Roman period and also in the Cimmerian Bosphorus at least until the 3rd century CE.²⁴ A Latin inscription from the city of Rome

²¹ Robert L. & J. 1958, n. 516, p. 345. Schleicher F. 2021, p. 323.

²² IG X, 2, 1 722 : Ἀχολίς (Macedonia, 2nd-3rd c. CE). Magnesia 162: Ἀχολίου. Tralles 243: Ἀχόλιος. Aphrodisias 188: Ἀχολίου (lists of Jews belonging to *dekania* and *theosebeis*).

²³ Eustathius Thessalonicensis, *De Capta Thessalonica*, S. Kyriakidis ed., 158. Germanus II, *Oration 2*, J.-P. Migne ed., column 280, l. 3. Manuel Holobolus, *Oration 1*, M. Treu ed., 77.

²⁴ Robert L. & J. 1958, n. 516, p. 345. About chiefs craftsmen in the epigraphy from the Northern shores of the Black Sea: *Eirene. Studia graeca et latina* 7 (1968) 7 (“Πατίας Χορηγίωνος ἀρχιτέκτων” in Gorgippia, middle 2nd c. CE); IosPE I² 174 (about a bath building in Olbia, 198 CE); Antich. Ist. i Kult. 46 (“ἀρχιτέκτονος Δημήτριον Ηρζεως”, 229 CE); CIRB 1249, 1250 & 1252 (“ἀρχιτέκτονος Αὐρήλιου Ἀντωνεῖνου”, 236 CE); CIRB 1258 (unknown ἀρχιτέκτων, c. 200-250 CE). Some documents about masters of works in Roman Egypt: IGR I, 5, 1254 (“Ἀμμωνίου Ἀλεξανδρεὺς ἀρχιτέκτων”, 98-117 CE); IGR I, 5, 1260 (113-117 CE). On the architecture developed in royal courts of the Hellenistic world: Fyfe T. 1936; Winter F. E. 1993;

mentions a *praepositus pictorum* during the 2nd century CE and who could hold the equivalent office of *archizōgraphos* in Italy.²⁵

The etymology of the name Beurazouria is certainly Iranian, and more specifically Sarmatian, Alan or Proto-Ossetian.²⁶ Vasily Abaev analyzed the etymology of this name by distinguishing two components: *Bewræ-3oræ*, 'long-spoken', 'long-winded', 'full of talk'.²⁷ This name referring to eloquence can be added to a series of testimonies which indicate that the Iberian society granted certain women an eminent place by the role of counsel that they ensured through their teachings. The Georgian chronicles in the corpora of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* and the *Moktsevai Kartlisai* involve indeed several female characters from the aristocracy advising the rulers. The most famous of them is certainly the Christian ascetic woman who converted the first Iberian king to Christianity – Nino and Mirian respectively in the Georgian tradition.²⁸ Furthermore, Samdzivari, the legendary widow of Atskueri in Samtskhe, advised the Meskhians to adopt the Christian faith, according to an apocryphal Georgian tradition relating to Andrew the Apostle.²⁹ Moreover, the Aramaic part of the epitaph belonging to the lady Serapeitis was redacted according to the form of a speech in the first person singular which transcribed the words of the deceased young woman, presenting at length the male members of her family.³⁰ As a consequence, a certain valorization of female conversation explains these specificities of the Iberian history where charismatic women exercised a major influence on circles of power. Of course, in the particular case of Beurazouria, the name does not necessarily make the personal character, and her presence on the inscription falls rather within the conventional framework which promotes conjugal harmony between the deceased spouses,³¹ widely shared in conservative societies of the ancient world. In any case, this intermarriage between a foreign resident with a Roman name and a Sarmatian wife tells a lot about the multiethnic and multicultural atmosphere of Ancient Caucasian Iberia.

The last sentence of the inscription evoking the *anastasis* caused this stone to be attributed to the domain of Late-Ancient Christian epigraphy by Tinatin Qaukhchishvili, who interpreted the term in its religious meaning of 'resurrection'.³² It should be remembered, however, that the belief in a life of the soul after death was not at all a monopoly of Christianity.³³ The faith of an existence in the afterlife is also found, with several specificities, in parts of Judaism,³⁴ in Mazdeism³⁵ and in Manichaeism,³⁶ to name only the religions whose presence is attested in the Southern Caucasia.³⁷ In the current state of the

Kouremenos A. and *alii* 2011; Canepa M. 2015. On the architectural developments during the Roman Imperial period: Macready S. & Thompson F. H. 1987; Thomas E. 2007. About the Iranian landscape policy: Canepa M. 2018.

²⁵ Giuliano A. 2001: 32-33.

²⁶ Melikishvili G. & Lordkipanidze O. 1989: 389.

²⁷ Abaev V. 1958: 262, s.v. *bīræ*, *beræ*, *bewræ*.

²⁸ Thelamon F. 1972. Horn C. 1998. Rapp S. H. Jr 2014: 105-165.

²⁹ *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, S. Qaukhchishvili ed., 38-43. Thomson R. W. 1996: 355-359.

³⁰ Tsereteli G. 1942. Grelot P. 1958.

³¹ In Caucasian Iberia, this marital ideal appears in epigraphy notably through the stele of Sērapeitis and the gem of Zeuachēs and Karpak. Nyberg H. S. 1946: 231. Qaukhchishvili T. 2000: 259-260, KGIG 241.

³² Qaukhchishvili T. 2000: 256.

³³ The ancient roots of the belief in resurrection are plural. The Egyptian myth of Osiris and the Greek notion of metempsychosis, developed notably in Pythagorism and Platonism, constituted also an important legacy on this matter. About the doctrine of resurrection in Early Christianity: Bovon F. & Hébert M. 2011; Decharneux B. & Viltanioti I.-F. 2012.

³⁴ Barr J. 1985. Dimant D. 2000. Madigan K. & Levenson J. 2008 : 201-220.

³⁵ Boyce M. 2001 : 14-15, 27, 29, 77. Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina Y. 2009. Arabi & Keshavarz 2018.

³⁶ About Manichaean eschatology, Hutter M. 2015: 483-484.

³⁷ On Southern Caucasian Christianity: Mgaloblishvili T. & Gagoshidze I. 1998; Seibt W. 2002; Haas C. 2014.

documentary record, there is therefore nothing to define the precise religious denomination of Aurelios Acholi(o)s and his entourage. The fact remains that, if we retain this meaning of ‘resurrection’, the significance of these beliefs in the afterlife must have prepared a very favorable ground for Christian preaching and conversions in these late-ancient environments where Iranian, Greek and Roman cultures mixed together. However, the Greek word *anastasis* can also be understood in a non-denominational sense: namely the signification of ‘removal’ or ‘destruction’,³⁸ with the enclitic τῷ referring to the dead body. If the latter meaning is indeed the correct one, then there would be no longer any argument for attributing this inscription to late-antique Christianity. For the same reasons as the KGIG 200 inscription, I think it is reasonable to date KGIG 236 between the Antonine period and the 3rd century CE.

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³⁸ Séchan and Chantraine 2000, 141.

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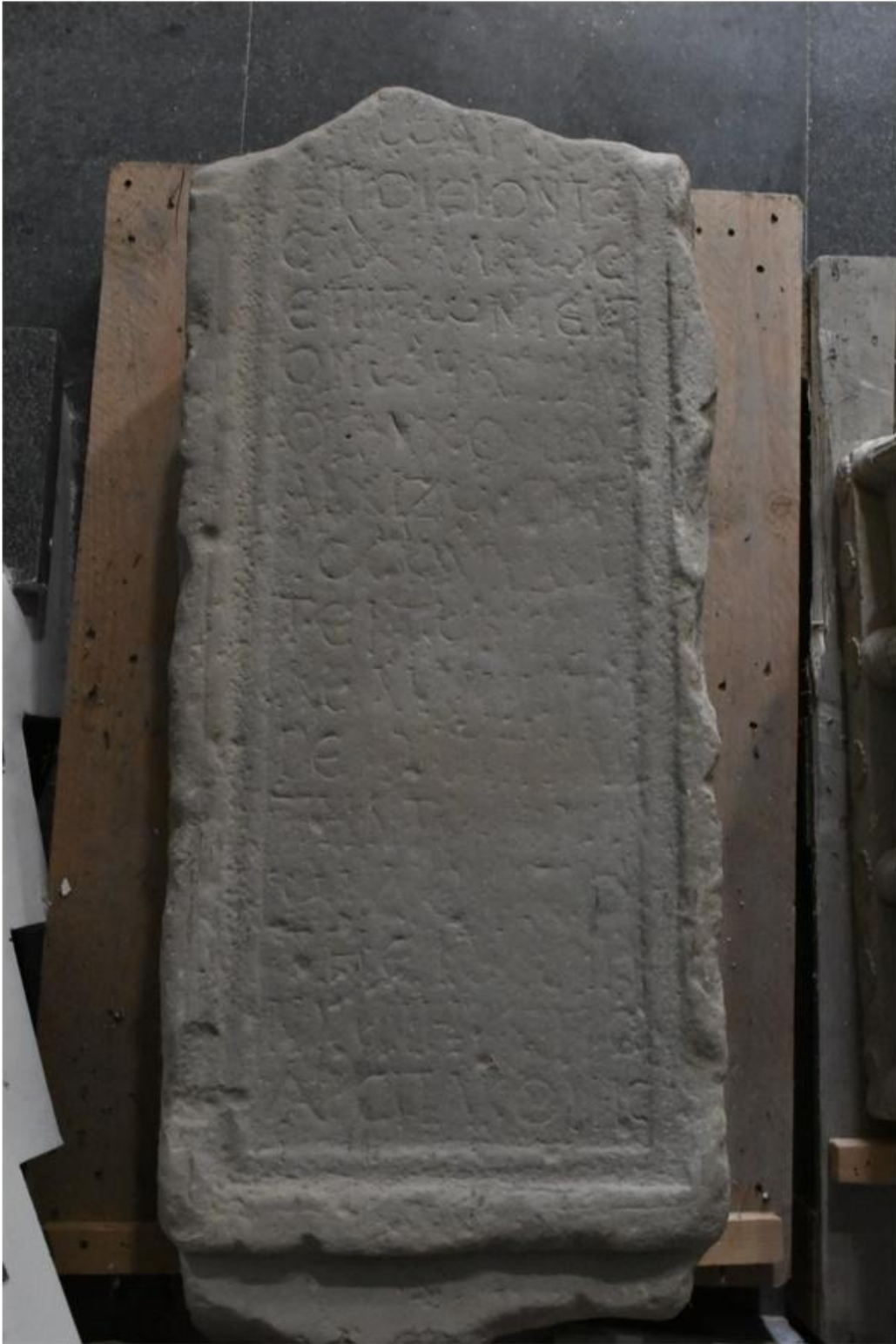
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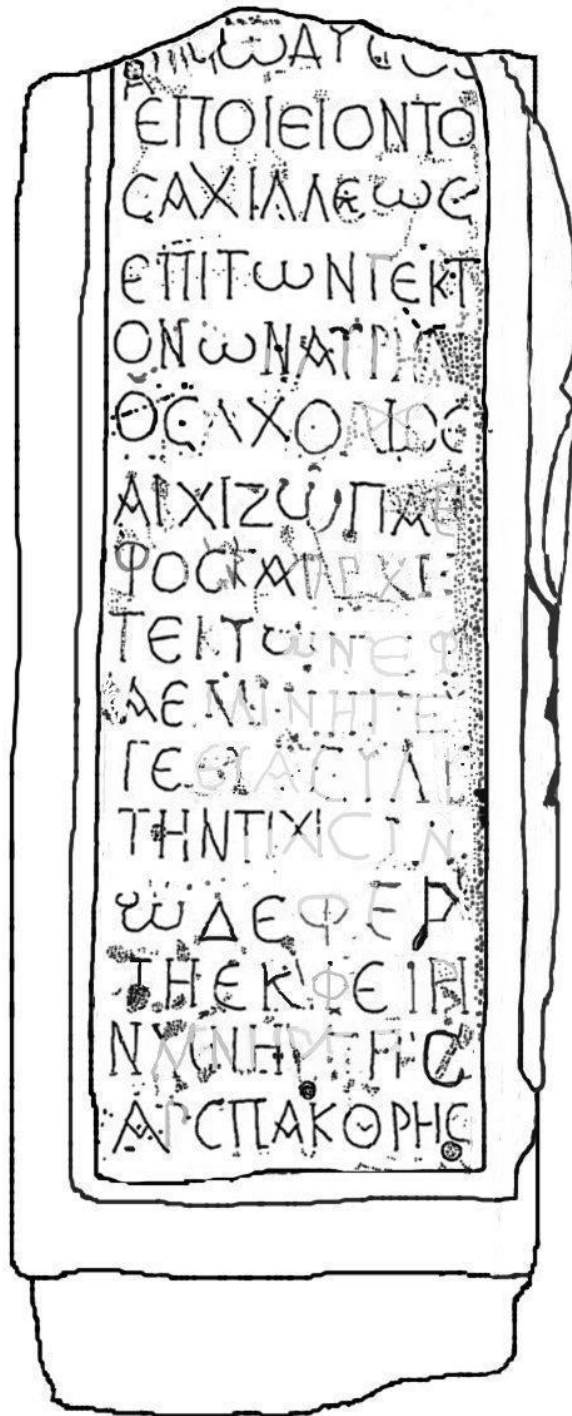
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KGIG 202 – Photograph³⁹

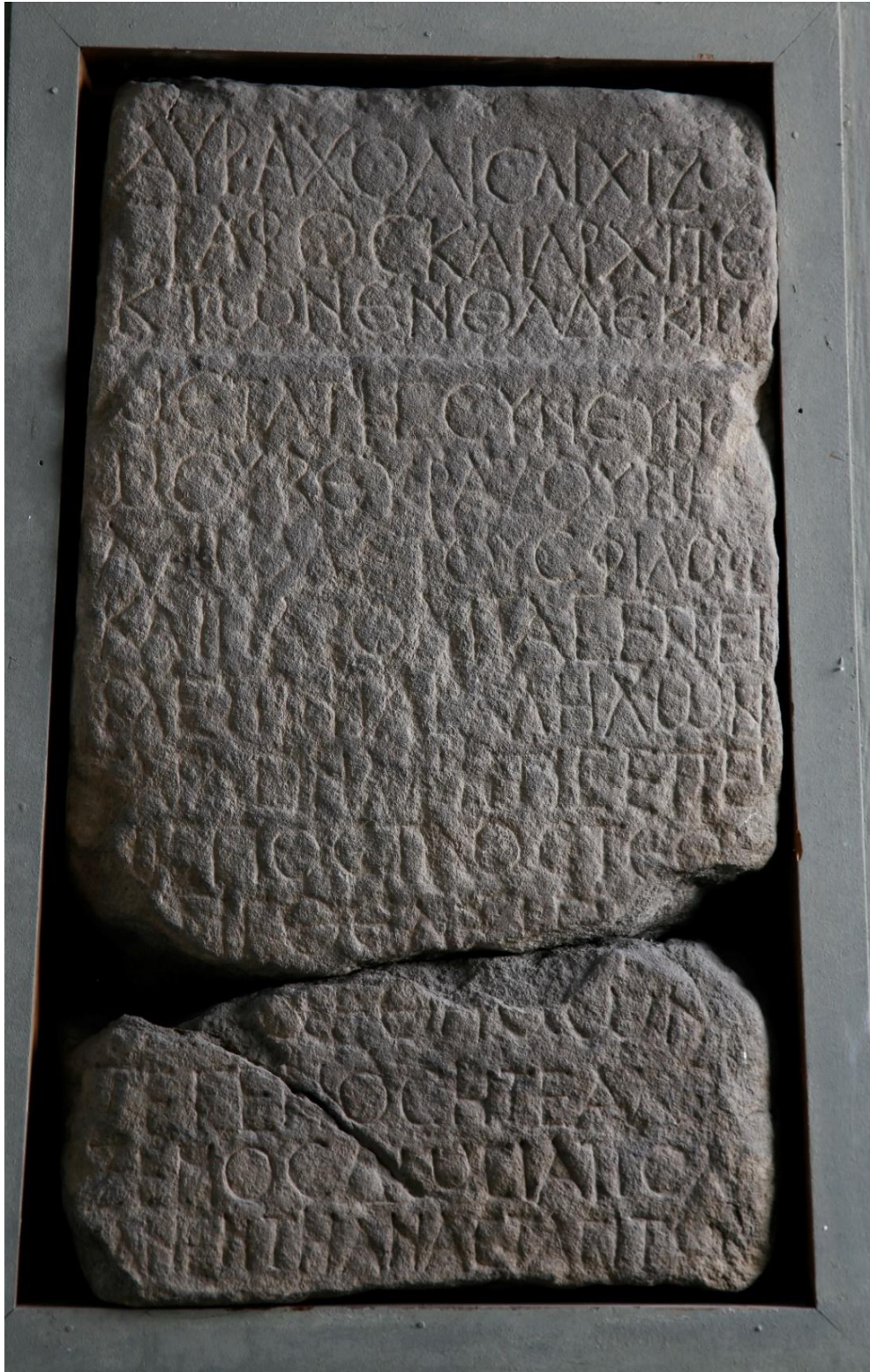


³⁹ Photograph courtesy of Frank Schleicher.

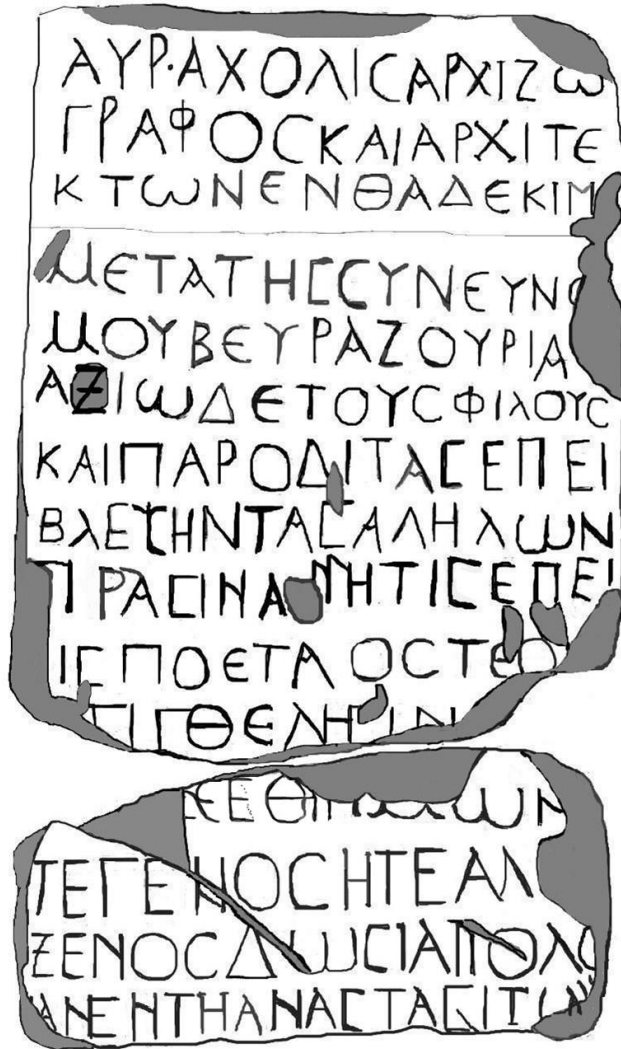


⁴⁰ Drawing by Nicolas Preud'homme.

KGIG 236 – Photograph⁴¹



41 Photograph courtesy of Frank Schleicher.



⁴² Drawing by Nicolas Preud'homme.