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Old Aramaic Script in Georgia

Helen Giunashvili

Abstract. Old Aramaic and its script are most important to the history of the Georgian culture. On the territory of contemporary Georgia, particularly in its Eastern part, being historically Iberian kingdom (4th c. BC–4th c. AD), a number of original Aramaic inscriptions are found. They are inscribed on different objects and could be dated by the period of 3rd c. BC–3rd c. AD.

The greater part of these Aramaic inscriptions is executed in a variety of the North-Mesopotamian type of Aramaic script, known as “Armazian,” one of the outgrowths of the Imperial (Official) Aramaic writing, widely used in Achaemenid Empire (550 BC–330 BC).


The whole corpus of the Aramaic inscriptions of Georgia requires systematic interdisciplinary researches, for revealing the main trends of its typological development in the light of Near Eastern-South Caucasian cultural-linguistic interference.

1. Introduction

Aramaic is of great importance for Georgia. All the three historical phases of this language: Old, Middle and Modern are well represented in the Georgian cultural tradition (K. Tsereteli, 1994).

On the territory of contemporary Georgia, mainly in its Eastern part–Kartli historically Iberian kingdom (4th c. BC–4th c. AD), a number of original Aramaic inscriptions were found.

They were made on different objects: steles (an epitaph and a victory stele), bone plates, wine-pitchers, silver bowls, and household items, stones of sanctuary buildings and sarcophagi, jewels. For the present, the whole corpus of inscriptions comprises nearly 100 units dated by 3rd–2nd c. BC–3rd c. AD (K. Tsereteli, 1998b) and kept at different

Helen Giunashvili  0000-0003-1271-8354
G. Tsereteli Institute of Oriental Studies/Ilia State University, 3 George Tsereteli St.,
Tbilisi 0162, Georgia
E-mail: elene.giunashvili@iliauni.edu.ge

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funds of the National Museum of Georgia.¹ These ancient Aramaic inscriptions were discovered in Mtskheta, the capital of Iberia, as well as its outskirts—Armazi, Bagineti and other various locations in Central Georgia—Uplistsikhe, Urnisi, Zghuderi, Bori, Dedoplis Gora (Mindori), Dzalisa.²

The Aramaic inscriptions of Georgia are distinguished by their form and content. Some of them are quite extensive, such as Armazi steles and a number of dedicatory inscriptions dated by 3rd c. AD, found on golden bracelets from Armazi burials. The rest of inscriptions are rather short, consisting only of one or two words, denoting a proper name, or a title, they also frequently have an attributive meaning of weight, size and function of an object. The great part of these inscriptions still remains unpublished (K. Tsereteli, 1998b).

The Old Aramaic was one of chief written languages of Iberia before the adoption of Christianity (4th century AD).

Later Aramaic epigraphic monuments (4th–5th c. AD), also revealed in Mtskheta, belong to a particular category. They were created by the Jewish community of Mtskheta, and are written in Hebrew characters, while their language is Aramaic (Jewish-Palestinian dialect) (G. Tsereteli, 1962, pp. 377–378; K. Tsereteli, 1996; 1998a; Shaked, 2006).

Origins of spreading the Aramaic language in Georgia and, generally, in the South Caucasus are to be traced in the Achaemenian epoch (6th–4th c. BC) of the Persian Empire, when firm foundations of Iranian statehood and national culture were laid, and it was widely used as the official language of the Empire.

The most ancient Aramaic inscription found in Georgia, is the inscription on the silver bowl from the Kazbegi treasure (5th c. BC), being a specimen of Achaemenid art, brought into this region of the Iranian dominance. Most scholars considered the bowl's inscription as a proper name of its owner (K. Tsereteli, 2001b) (Fig. 1).³

Iberian kingdom and Kartvelian tribes are not mentioned in the extant Old Persian inscriptions; however, rich historical-archaeological material and linguistic-philological evidences testify the strong Iranian cultural impact on this region.

1. For the first complete list of these inscriptions see Gagoshidze and Tsotselia, 1991, pp. 71–72; cf. also Giorgadze, 2008, pp. 253–255.

2. All these geographic sites are important historical places, where the most valuable archaeological discoveries have been made. On their description and catalogue, see Furtwängler, Gagoshidze, Löhr, and Ludwig, 2008, pp. 257–272.

3. The bowl was found in Georgia, in the village of Stepantsminda (Kazbegi) and is kept at present at the State Historical Museum of Russia (inventory number SB1735, weight ~ 266,5 grams). The Aramaic inscription and the photo of this bowl was first included in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, 1889, and later in the *Corpus of Canaanite and Aramaic Inscriptions* by Donner and Röllig, 1969.



FIGURE 1. Kazbegi silver bowl with the Aramaic inscription, photos reprinted from Smirnov (1909, N 13, Table III).

The introduction of administrative, social, political and legal institutions evolved in the Achaemenid Empire in the South Caucasus was of great significance. These institutions and socio-economic processes taking place in the Achaemenid period played an important role in the emergence and development of the Iberian and Armenian kingdoms (G. Tsereteli, 1974).

Medieval Georgian chronicles (11th c.) preserve particularly valuable data on this subject. One of them, *The Life of Kartli* (consisting of multiple sources several of which are of remarkable antiquity) narrates that the first Georgian king Parnavaz (Pharnabazos, Greek Φαρνάβαζος),⁴ who was a representative of a powerful aristocratic family from Mtskheta and was coronated about 280 BC., created his state “like the kingdom of the Persians” (Qaukhchishvili, 1955, p. 21; Metreveli, 2008, p. 44).

One of the chapters of *The Life of Kartli* dealing with the life and deeds of the Georgian king mentions Aramaic among languages widespread in pre-Christian Iberia: “Six languages were spoken in Kartli: *Armenian, Georgian, Khazar, Assyrian* (i.e., Aramaic), *Hebrew* and *Greek*. And all the kings of Kartli and all the men and women, knew these languages” (Qaukhchishvili, 1955, p. 16; Metreveli, 2008, p. 36).⁵

4. On the Iranian etymology of this royal name in Georgian, see Andronikashvili, 1966, pp. 496–499; Chkheidze, 1984, pp. 32–33, 47. For the complete bibliography on this name, etymological studies and its penetration in Armenian, see Martirosyan, to appear.

5. On the use of the term Assyrian (language) in the meaning of Aramaic in Old Georgian, see K. Tsereteli, 1976, pp. 184–185.

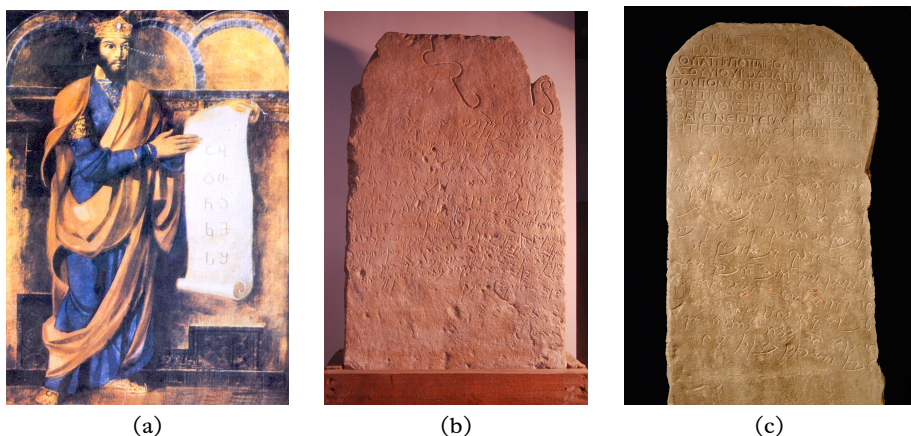


FIGURE 2. (a) A portrait of King Parnavaz done by the Georgian painter Zurab Kapanadze (1924–1989). (b) Armazi Monolingual, photo made at the Stone Fund of the Georgian National Museum. (c) Armazi Bilingual, photo made at the Stone Fund of the Georgian National Museum.

Georgian historiography ascribes to the first legendary king Parnavaz the creation of the Georgian writing (“Georgian literacy”) (Fig. 2a).

According to Professor Thomas Gamkrelidze’s theory (Gamkrelidze, 1989), the “Georgian literacy” might have meant its introduction in the form of the so-called “alloglottography” or “writing-in-another-language” widely used in the Achaemenian chancelleries⁶, i.e., reading a text written in some widespread foreign language, in this case Aramaic, on the basis of the local language (the Georgian), before introducing the national script.

The existence of “literary traditions” in the pre-Christian Georgian World, where Old Aramaic alongside with Greek were widely used, should be assumed in the form of oral tradition and folklore. The introduction of national writing when Christianity was proclaimed as the state religion only served to record such tradition, and further strengthen and develop the literary language.⁷

6. The term “alloglottography” was established in *Ancient Iranian Studies* by Ilya Gershevitch (1979, pp. 114–119). For the modern studies of alloglottography in the Ancient Near Eastern cultural tradition, see Rubio (2006).

7. Such oral traditions were strengthened also by a rule of rendering the Scripture in the newly Christianized Eastern world (and probably in Georgia, too) that may be called “Alloglottoepy” or “Saying-in-another-language,” when religious texts (of the Old, and especially New, Testament) were preached directly through oral rendering and translation. This contributed to the refinement and enrichment of the vocabu-

The most ancient Georgian literary monuments are dated only by the 5th c. AD, the period when the written translation of the Scripture into Georgian has already been realized and recorded in the Old Georgian original script, Asomtavruli.

The Aramaic script used in Iberia passed a long way of development. It was one of the outgrowths of the Imperial (Official) Aramaic writing, widely used in Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC), which displayed a remarkable uniformity. No regional forms of the script could be discerned, although ethnic groups of varied cultural background throughout the vast expanse of the realm used it⁸ (Naveh, 1972; Greenfield, 2001), the same script was used from Central Asia to Egypt, from the Caucasus to North Arabia (Greenfield, 1985, p. 709).

But after the fall of the Empire in the 3rd–2nd c. BC local varieties of the Old Aramaic script were developed in different cultural-geographic regions of the East, including Syria, North Mesopotamia,⁹ Georgia and Armenia. Most forms of local Aramaic scripts began to crystallize in the first century BC.

Aramaic inscriptions of the South Caucasus found in Armenia¹⁰ and mostly in Georgia clearly reflect this process (ibid., p. 702).

2. Studies on Old Aramaic Epigraphy in Georgia

The tradition of linguistic-paleographic studies of Old Aramaic epigraphy in Georgia is related to the name of the outstanding orientalist, Academician George (Giorgi) Tsereteli (1904–1973), who made a significant contribution to the decipherment and analysis of the Aramaic inscriptions discovered as a result of archaeological excavations at Armazi, near Mtskheta. To these inscriptions were devoted G. Tsereteli's two important works: *The Bilingual Inscription from Armazi* (1941, 1942) and *The Armazi Inscription of the Period of Mithridates the Iberian* (1962).

lary and terminology of the language, in which the preaching was performed and the canonical religious texts orally rendered. This, too, must have created the precondition for Georgian to have developed into a refined literary language by the time of the creation of Georgian Christian Script and its recording as a written language (Gamkrelidze, 1989, pp. 200–201).

8. On the Aramaic as an administrative language and *lingua franca* of the Persian Empire see also Folmer, 2011; 2020; Gzella, 2015b.

9. On the late Imperial Aramaic see Gzella, 2011; 2015a.

10. Old Aramaic inscriptions were discovered as well in Armenia, in different places, such as Zangezur, Teghut, Sevan, Sisian and Garni. They are inscribed on different objects: boundary stones, silver bowls, stones. Chronologically they could be attributed to 2nd c. BC–2nd c. AD. Their linguistic-paleographic studies were presented in the works of A. Perikhanian, 1964; 1965; 1966; 1971a,b.

As a result of paleographic studies of Mtskheta-Armazi inscriptions (11 lines bilingual (Greek-Aramaic) epitaphy, dated by 2nd c. AD (Fig. 2c)¹¹ and 14-line Aramaic monolingual inscription dated by 1st c. AD) (Fig. 2b), G. Tsereteli identified hitherto unknown type of Aramaic script as “independent branch of Semitic writing” and named it “Armazi Aramaic” according to the place of its finding.¹²

The bilingual Aramaic-Greek inscription was an epitaph of “Serapitis, the daughter of Zevakh the Younger, viceroy (*bṯḥš*) of King Parsman, wife of Iodmangan the victorious and winner of many victories, master of the court (ἐπίτροπος) of King Xsefarnug, [and] son of Agrippa, master of the court of King Parsman.”

The second stele discovered near Mtskheta called Armazi Monolingual is known as the stele of victory of Sharagas, the viceroy of King Mithridates (1st c. AD).

The story in the text is told by Sharagas, who performed military operations, after the successful ending of which he reported to the great king Mithridates: “I gained this victory for you, my King”.

These extensive Aramaic inscriptions were of great historical and cultural significance. Social titles, personal names, political events attested in them present the most valuable material for pre-Christian Georgian history.

G. Tsereteli distinguished a number of linguistic and paleographic peculiarities of the Armazian script conditioned by close cultural links with Ancient Aramaic-Iranian commonwealth on the one hand and with Hellenic cultural world on the other. Thus, while considering texts of bilingual and monolingual inscriptions, G. Tsereteli defined several similarities with contemporary Middle Iranian (Parthian, Middle Persian) and Semitic (Palmyrene) scripts. At the same time, Greek influence was also evident. For example, in Bilingual inscription using *ayin* for expressing *ē* in the proper name *Serapitis* (Aramaic סערפיט, Greek Σηραπειτίς/Σηραπιτίς¹³) is the early example of *mater lectionis*,¹⁴ Iranian name Xšēfarnūy (in the Aramaic text חסיפרנוי) was rendered by Greek form (*Ksyprnwg*), in Mithridates’ inscription alongside with Aramaic *mlk*

11. The publication of the Armazi Bilingual attracted attention of many prominent Iranologists and Semitists. For the all reviews and notes on G. Tsereteli’s work see G. Tsereteli, 1986, pp. 38–39, see also all scientific publications on this text: K. Tsereteli, 1992, pp. 115–118.

12. Both steles are kept at the Georgian National Museum, the Stone Fund, Bilingual (inventory number SSM 148) and Monolingual (SSM 149).

13. This transcription is given according to T. Kauchtschischwili, 2009, p. 390.

14. Another example of *mater lectionis* is found in Greek-Aramaic inscription on the silver spoon from Zghuderi. There are two graffiti, one is Greek: *XHΔ-Χγδ* and the other Aramaic: *k’d-Ked*. It represents a complete or abbreviated name of the owner. The letter *ē* (*ayin*) was used as *mater lectionis* in Aramaic scribal tradition of Georgia (Chelidze, 1993, p. 21; Braund, 1994, 215, n. 64).

“the king” are attested Greek forms *bzys*, *bzls* (Βασιλεύς) and probably, Latin form *kysr* (Caesar) (G. Tsereteli, 1962, p. 375).

It is noteworthy, that local (Georgian) writing tradition was significantly reflected in the language and script of the Armazian inscriptions, namely, in similar outlines of several Armazian and Georgian letters, also transliteration and transcription of a number of Oriental terms and proper names, for example, Middle Iranian administrative name *btḥš* “a viceroy” presented in Armazian writings differently: *btḥš* (the bilingual inscription), *bytyḥš* (the Bori inscription), which clearly reflects the impact of the Georgian orthography (cf. the Georgian *p’it’iaxš-i*) (G. Tsereteli, 1948b, p. 56).

Armazian inscriptions attest distinguished forms of Middle Iranian proper names of Georgian nobles. These names reflect various dialect layers (south-western, north-western and north-eastern) and are mostly rendered according to their adequate pronunciation, without following the principles of Iranian historical orthography, for example, *Mbrdt*, *Mybrdt* (Monolingual), *’Sprwḡ* (Monolingual, cf. *Ἀσπανρούς* on II century gem from Armazi, Georgian Asparug), *Šrgs* (Monolingual), *Bwz-Mybr* (Bori inscription, cf. *Burzen-Mibr* in 5th c. Georgian inscription in Palestine), *Ywdmngn* (Bilingual).

G. Tsereteli outlined several distinctive grammatical characteristics as well as irregularities of the bilingual text (the lack of a definite article, misuse of genders, the absence of the determinative state, the use of archaic pronoun *zy*), which is certainly a result of the local Aramaic writing tradition.¹⁵

In Armazian writing Eastern and Western elements were transformed on the ground of the native culture, creating most original linguistic and paleographical material (ibid., p. 56). G. Tsereteli also named Armazian script as “Georgian-Aramaic” or “Iberian-Aramaic” (G. Tsereteli, 1942, 51, n. 2).

Studies of the Aramaic inscriptions from Armazi were of special significance not only as a new source for the research of Eastern Aramaic writing and its ramifications, but also shed light on a number of cultural-historical problems of pre-Christian Iberia and its interrelations with Ancient Iran.

The tradition of using the Aramaic script in pre-Christian Georgia is closely connected to the problem of the origins of the Georgian alphabet. G. Tsereteli considered it in genetic relation with the Aramaic script (G. Tsereteli, 1948a; 1949).

15. About the linguistic peculiarities of the Armazi inscriptions—and particularly about the Bilingual—that could not be due to scribal mistakes and misspellings, see Kutscher and Naveh, 1970; Skjaervø, 1995, p. 291.

Apart from Serapitis and King Mithridates' steles, inscriptions on different objects found during the excavations at Mtskheta-Armazi were made in Armazi script.

In this respect, items found in Armazi necropoleis, notably golden plaques (2nd c. AD), silver plate of the pitiakhsh Bersuma, golden rings and bracelets (3rd–4th c. AD) are of a special interest due to their epigraphical value, as well as artistic quality. They reflect national artistic tradition together with contemporary Hellenistic and Oriental cultural style, including Iranian (Chubinashvili, 2007). (Fig. 3a–d).

G. Tsereteli has shown in his researches that the inscriptions found in Mtskheta-Armazi as well as some other epigraphical monuments of Georgia-Bori (2nd–3rd c. AD) (Fig. 3e and 4a), Urbnisi (2nd c. AD) (Fig. 4b), are done in the same "Armazian" script, which are distinguished with common paleographic features.

The inscriptions of Bori as stated by G. Tsereteli, showed a certain tendency to mannerism and stylization, "the lines are broken and in the break places sharp angles are formed," which could be due to material on which the inscription was made.

The oldest one is the monolingual inscription (1st c. AD) made in cursive, where letters have little (if any) distinction from each other, cf. identical are *k* and *n* letters; *r* and *b*; *ç* and *ş*; *t* and *y* etc. The script of the bilingual text is more formal (Fig. 4c), in which all letters have clearly outlined forms. Letters of the monolingual inscription (Fig. 2b), are distinguished by more variations compared to letters of the bilingual text. A number of letters in the bilingual inscription, as of the later monument, are significantly different from the monolingual's (Fig. 4d).

Here it should also be noted that the writing of each mentioned monuments (1st–3rd c. AD) is characterized by certain specific paleographic features. We cannot come across absolutely identical writing of one and the same letters not only in different "Armazi" texts, but sometimes they cannot be attested within the same texts either. Certain variations of identical letters in the "Armazi" script monuments are quite acceptable, but they are very rare and fall within the general limits of the script.

In his later works G. Tsereteli assumed that the Armazian writing originated in "a variety" of the Aramaic script, which was spread in North-Eastern Mesopotamia (Assur, Hatra, Hassan-Kef, Sari) during the Hellenistic epoch.¹⁶

In 1961 in Garni (Armenia), an Aramaic stone-inscription was found. It was published in 1964, by Anahit Perikhanian (1964) and attributed to the 2nd c. AD. The writing of the inscription from Garni paleographically was the most similar from all the Aramaic scripts to that of the Armazian inscription (Fig. 5a). It became clear that the Armazian script

16. These issues were further tackled in the works of the German Semitist Oelsner, 1973, pp. 430–434; 1976.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)



(e)

FIGURE 3. (a) The Plate of Bersuma, photo reprinted from Chubinashvili (2007, Illustration 28). (b) Bracelets, photo reprinted from Chubinashvili (2007, Illustration 17). (c) Serapitis' necklace and pendant with ram head relief, photo reprinted from Chubinashvili (2007, Illustration 7). (d) A gem portrait, photo reprinted from Chubinashvili (2007, Illustration 4). (e) Bori plate, photo reprinted from Smirnov (1909, N 305, Table CXXI:12).



1 וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין
 2 אִין וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין
 3 אִין וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין
 4 אִין וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין
 5 אִין וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין
 6 אִין וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין
 7 אִין וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין
 8 אִין וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין
 9 אִין וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין
 10 אִין וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין
 11 אִין וְיָמָא זְחִדְרָא עֲבָלְכָא אִין

Transcription		Dedoplis Mindori Plates		Armazi Bilingual	Bori	Urbnisi
Hebrew	Latin	№№1,4	№№9,12,20,21,25			
א	'	ע	אֲא	ⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀ	
ב	b	/	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀ	
ג	g			ⲀⲀⲀⲀ		
ד	d	ו	ו	ⲀⲀⲀ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ
ה	h	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀ	
ו	w	ⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀ	Ⲁ
ז	z	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀ	Ⲁ	
ח	h	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀ	Ⲁ	
ט	t	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀ	
י	y	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ	Ⲁ	
כ	k	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ		
ל	l	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ		
מ	m		Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ	Ⲁ	
נ	n	Ⲁ	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀ	Ⲁ	Ⲁ
ס	s	ⲀⲀ	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ		
ע	'		Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀ		
פ	p		Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀⲀ		
צ	s			ⲀⲀⲀⲀ		
ק	k	ⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ	Ⲁ		
ר	r	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀ	Ⲁ
ש	s		Ⲁ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ	Ⲁ	
ת	t	Ⲁ	ⲀⲀ	ⲀⲀⲀⲀ		

FIGURE 4. (a) A facsimile of the Bori plate inscriptions, reprinted from G. Tsereteli (1960, Table VI). (b) Aramaic inscription on the wine-cellar from Urbnisi, photo made at the Urbnisi Fund of the Georgian National Museum. (c) Armazi Bilingual's Aramaic inscription facsimile, reprinted from G. Tsereteli (1942, p. 15). (d) A table of Aramaic script types of Dedoplis Mindori plates (1st c. AD), Urbnisi inscription, reprinted from Gagoshidze and Tsotselia (1991, Addenda) and of Armazi Bilingual and Bori plate inscriptions, reprinted from G. Tsereteli (1948a, p. 100).

was characteristic not only of Georgian reality, but also of neighbouring Armenia. A. Perikhanyan suggested that the inscriptions on the Armazi steles, on the plate of Bori as well as the Garni inscription were written in the same script.

Aspects of comparative-historical development of the Armazian script were considered later by Joseph Naveh in the work "North Mesopotamian Aramaic script-type in the Late Parthian period" Naveh (1972), where paleographic analysis of Armazian letters and close to them (but not identical) letters of the Garni inscription was dealt in the common evolutionary typological scheme of Eastern Aramaic inscriptions of that period (such as Hatra, Dura-Europos, Hassan-Kef and others), several deviations of Armazian script from other writings were shown and the main tendencies of its evolution as an original type in North-Mesopotamian Aramaic writing branch were outlined (Fig. 5b).

The tradition of epigraphic Aramaic studies in Georgia was continued by another outstanding scholar, the late Professor Konstantin Tsereteli (1921–2004), who offered several works to newly-discovered Aramaic inscriptions (Uplistsikhe, 3rd–2nd c. BC) (Fig. 6a, 6b), Dedoplis Mindori (1st c. BC) (Fig. 6c).

In K. Tsereteli's works innovative theoretical assumptions were presented about the Georgian type of Aramaic script, by distinguishing three stages in its development: Pre-Armazian (Uplistsikhe inscriptions—this script was very close to the Official Aramaic and was considered as the predecessor of the Armazian (K. Tsereteli, 2001d), Early Armazian (Dedoplis Mindori inscriptions, which displayed more archaic features than later monuments, K. Tsereteli, 1993; 2001c), Armazian itself (Armazi steles, Urbnisi inscription, Bori silver plate inscription, etc.).

By considering rich factological material, K. Tsereteli defined common tendencies of the Armazian script type development in the South Caucasus: in the 3rd–2nd c. BC, a variety of the Old Aramaic script begins to be formed in this region and took its final shape in the 1st c. BC. In Georgia "Armazian" type of Aramaic writing (1st–3rd c. AD) was raised, typologically similar to the Aramaic script of Armenia but not wholly its identical. In both countries this type of writing was used before the adoption of Christianity (K. Tsereteli, 2001a).

3. Future Prospects

Modern level of Old Aramaic Studies, new epigraphic findings and scientific publications essentially require a complex and systematic research of the Old Aramaic inscriptions of Georgia. The research will comprise two stages: (1) making a catalogue of edited inscriptions with their chronological distribution, photo material, texts, facsimiles, new

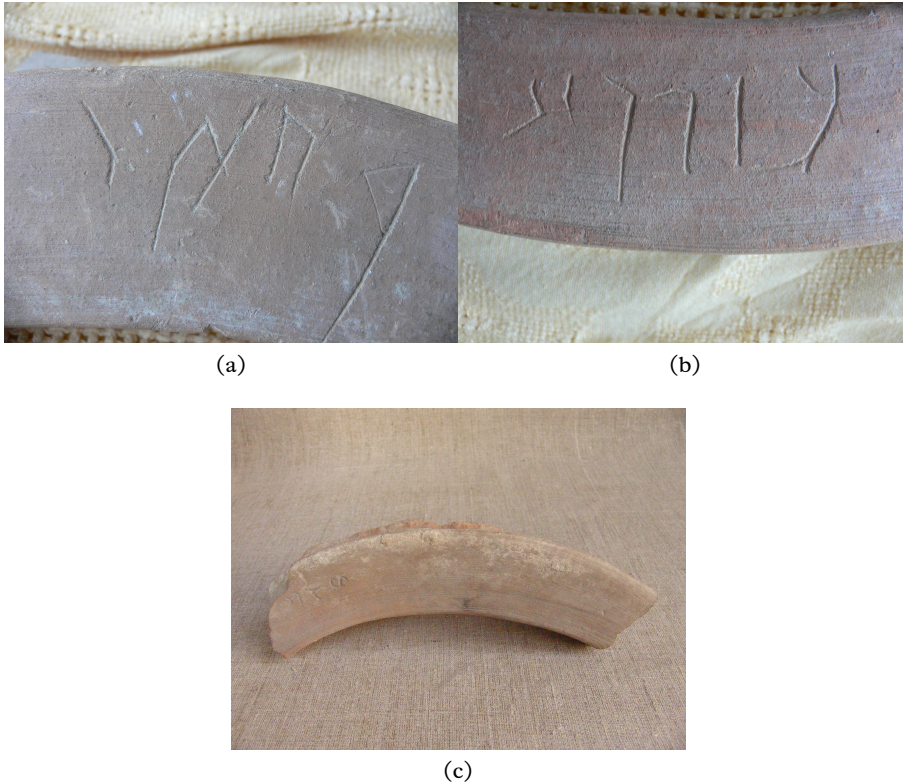


FIGURE 6. (a), (b) Aramaic inscriptions on pieces of wine jars from Uplistsikhe, photos made at the Uplistsikhe Fund of the Georgian National Museum. (c) Aramaic inscription on a fragment of a wine pitcher from Dedoplist Mindori, photo taken at the Dedoplist Mindori Fund of the National Mesum of Georgia.

linguistic interpretations and comments together with a bibliographic index; (2) theoretical studies: a systematic linguistic-paleographic examination of published as well as unpublished material; their comparative analysis with Aramaic script of Armenia and other types of contemporary Eastern Aramaic writings; revealing paleographic peculiarities and evolutionary regularities of the South Caucasian Aramaic script.

The research will be essentially interdisciplinary, for the first time presenting the main tendencies of the Old Aramaic script's development in the light of Near Eastern—South Caucasian cultural-linguistic interference.

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