



HAL
open science

The Stele of Šargas - New Reading and Commentary

Nicolas Preud'Homme, Schleicher Frank

► **To cite this version:**

Nicolas Preud'Homme, Schleicher Frank. The Stele of Šargas - New Reading and Commentary. *Epigraphica*, 2023, 85 (1-2), pp.341-381. <hal-04861370>

HAL Id: hal-04861370

<https://hal.science/hal-04861370v1>

Submitted on 8 Jan 2025

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

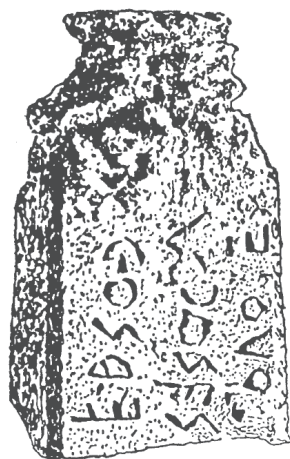


Distributed under a Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 - Attribution - ShareAlike - International License

EPIGRAPHICA

PERIODICO INTERNAZIONALE
DI EPIGRAFIA

LXXXV, 1-2
2023



Carocci  editore

EPIGRAPHICA

PERIODICO INTERNAZIONALE DI EPIGRAFIA

Fondato nel 1939, diretto da Aristide CALDERINI,
Giancarlo SUSINI, Angela DONATI

Direttore: Attilio MASTINO (Sassari) <mastino@uniss.it>
Condirettore: Maria BOLLINI (Bologna) <maria.bollini@unife.it>
Vice direttori: Antonio M. CORDA (Cagliari) <mcorda@unica.it>
e Paola RUGGERI (Sassari) <ruggeri@uniss.it>

Comitato Scientifico:

Giulia BARATTA (Macerata) <giubaratta@yahoo.de>
Alain BRESSON (Bordeaux) <abresson@uchicago.edu>
Francesca CENERINI (Bologna) <francesca.cenerini@unibo.it>
Paola DONATI (Bologna) <paola.donati@unibo.it>
Piergiorgio FLORIS (Cagliari) <pgfloris@unica.it>
Antonio IBBA (Sassari) <ibbanto@uniss.it>
Giovanni MARGINESU (Sassari) <gmarginesu@uniss.it>
Marc MAYER (Barcelona) <mayerolive@yahoo.es>
Stephen MITCHELL (Exeter) <mitchank@gmail.com>
Antonio SARTORI (Milano) <antonio.sartori@fastwebnet.it>
Daniela RIGATO <daniela.rigato@unibo.it>
Manfred SCHMIDT (Berlin) <mgs@custos-corporis.com>
Christian WITSCHHELL (Heidelberg) <christian.witschel@zaw.uni-heidelberg.de>
Raimondo ZUCCA (Sassari) <momoz1967@gmail.com>

Comitato di redazione:

Tiziana CARBONI <carboni.tiziana@tiscali.it>, Valeria CICALA <valeria.cicala@regione.emilia-romagna.it>, Maria Bastiana COCCO <mbcocco@uniss.it>, Federico FRASSON <federico.frasson@gmail.com>, Alberto Gavini <gavini@uniss.it>.

La Direzione si vale inoltre di un ampio Comitato internazionale di lettura al quale sottopone, a seconda delle specifiche competenze e in forma anonima, gli articoli pervenuti con la procedura del «doppio cieco».

Patrocinio: Association Internationale d'Épigraphie Grecque et Latine (A.I.E.G.L.).

Gli estratti vengono inviati agli Autori in formato PDF per uso strettamente personale. Titolare del copyright è l'Editore; non è consentito – salvo specifica autorizzazione scritta – inserire i testi in data base ad accesso libero, per un periodo di 18 mesi a partire dalla data di edizione.

www.epigraphica.it

© 2023

ISSN 0013-9572 – ISBN-978-88-2901-941-0

Stampato nel mese di ottobre 2023
dalla Litografia Varo (Pisa)

INDICE

Attilio MASTINO, <i>Introduzione. Epigraphica a 80 anni dalla uccisione di Mario Segre</i>	p.	9
Attilio MASTINO, <i>La scomparsa di Marco Buonocore</i>	»	15
Francesca CENERINI, <i>In ricordo di Gabriella Poma</i>	»	17
Mohammed ABID, Karol KŁODZIŃSKI, «Munus promissum a patre suo». <i>Un edicule dédiée au dieu mercure a musti (El Krib, en Tunisie)</i>	»	19
Simona ANTOLINI, <i>Bolli rodii da suasa e nuove considerazioni sulla diffusione del vino greco nell'Italia centro-adriatica</i>	»	31
Eugenia BEU DACHIN, Sorin NEMETI, <i>In Search for Justice. A Petitio from Gornea (Romania)</i>	»	57
Michel CHRISTOL, <i>Un nouveau nom de famille a Nimes: la rehabilitation d'une inscription retrouvée</i>	»	75
Antonio CORBO, <i>Due nuove iscrizioni dall'agro beneventano: la liberta Murria Pergamis e l'augustale Marcus Caius Sabinus, e la liberta Trebellia Felicitas</i>	»	91
Giorgio CRIMI, <i>La repentina e inusuale carriera militare di A(ulvs) Graecinius Euporianus</i>	»	103
Francesca D'ANDREA, <i>Inediti epigrafici da un magazzino nell'area archeologica del sepolcro degli Scipioni</i>	»	111
Ivan DI STEFANO MANZELLA, Sofia PIACENTIN, <i>Il graffito londinese di Augustalis (RIB 2,5, 2491,147)</i>	»	197
Alessia GALBUSERA, <i>I rinvenimenti sporadici da Sirtori per una topografia della Brianza lecchese in epoca romana</i>	»	205
Silvia GIORCELLI BERSANI, Francesco RUBAT BOREL, <i>Ricostruire epigrafi e ricostruire storie: un contributo alla storia di Avgvsta Tavrīnorvm</i>	»	215
Víctor GONZÁLEZ GALERA, <i>Una liberta del pantomimo C. Ivlivs Pylades en una inscripció urbana de la colecció Despuig del Museu d'història de la ciutat de Palma (Mallorca)</i>	»	241

Gaëlle HERBETH, <i>L'inscription CIL, X, 4753 de Suessa Aurunca: réflexions et enquête sur c. Lieurius Tranquillius Tocius Soimus</i>	p. 249
Karol KŁODZIŃSKI, <i>Ex avtoritate et sententia imperatoris. A Controversial Phrase in Four Cippi from Jebel Bou Khil (near Mustis) in Africa Proconsularis</i>	» 269
Yann LE BOHEC, <i>Un peintre chez les Éduens a Bourbon-Lancy (ILGL, 2, IAED, 505)</i>	» 285
Sandra MUÑOZ-MARTÍNEZ, <i>Una nueva edición del Carmen Epigraphicum bilingüe del Herma de la villa Albani-Torlonia (CIL VI 520 = CLE 1528)</i>	» 295
Giovanni NACCARATO, <i>La preghiera di Cascelia Elegans nel mitreo dei castra peregrinorum. Una nuova proposta</i>	» 309
Ángel PADILLA ARROBA, Eva M ^a MORALES RODRÍGUEZ, <i>Liberti Hispaniae meridionalis: nuevos testimonios y un cognomen desconocido: Subulcus...</i>	» 325
Nicolas PREUD'HOMME, Frank SCHLEICHER, <i>The Stele of Šargas – New Reading and Commentary</i>	» 341
Alessia PRONTERA, <i>Un carmen epigraphicum da Varaždinske Toplice (Croazia)</i>	» 383
Matteo PUCCI, <i>Iscrizioni inedite dal territorio labicano</i>	» 393
Francesco REALI, <i>Unioni tra liberti e patrone e discendenze artificiose? La famiglia di Vesonius Phileros a Pompei</i>	» 415
Cecilia RICCI, <i>Il liberto Numenius, i dona militaria e i Peducaei del sepolcreto salario</i>	» 429
Endrit SMAILI, Ilir CULAJ, <i>On an Altar dedicated to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Propulsator</i>	» 441
Enrico Angelo STANCO, <i>I fasti dei Ludi Capenates, nuovi frammenti e un riesame della questione</i>	» 449
Francesco TECCA, <i>I sistemi di reclutamento degli apparitores e l'iscrizione inedita del lictor L. Valerius Communis</i>	» 501
Fabrizio Alessandro TERRIZZI, <i>Iscrizioni inedite da Tuscania</i>	» 523

* * *

Schede e notizie

Silvia BRAITO, <i>L'instrumentum inscriptum come fonte storica, sociale ed economica: il caso dell'imprenditoria femminile nel mondo romano</i>	» 535
---	-------

Marco BUONOCORE, <i>Mariangelo Accursio e le iscrizioni di Beneventum</i>	p. 554
Antonio M. CORDA, CIL VIII, 1412 = 15204, <i>Thignica. Rettifica del nome del legato del proconsole d'Africa del 393 d.C.: il clarissimo Epifanius Gemnianus</i>	» 595
Romano CORDELLA, Nazzareno FUSO, Sabina GUIDUCCI, Sergio OCCHILUPO, Luigi SENSI, <i>Frammenti da Spello 2</i>	» 600
Immacolata DI TARANTO, <i>Un curator operum publicorum e un legatus legionis in una nuova iscrizione frammentaria da Aeclanum</i>	» 630
Werner ECK, Arrianus Aper Veturius [S]everus als consul und Grabstifter in CIL XIV 3587	» 635
Stefano Giuliani, Attilio Mastino, con la collaborazione di Salvatore Ganga, <i>Un'ipotesi sulla conclusione dei lavori a Turris Libisonis in occasione dei ludi saeculares septimi in età severiana</i>	» 642
Francesco MUSCOLINO, <i>Graffiti e bolli su laterizi di Iasos di Caria</i>	» 648
Matteo POLA, Božana MALETIĆ, <i>A Recently Discovered Roman Inscription from the Ager Jadertinus (Zadar-Croatia)</i>	» 654
Simonetta SEGENNI, <i>L'iscrizione del sarcofago scoperto a Pisa negli scavi della Sapienza</i>	» 661
Simonetta SEGENNI, <i>Una nuova dedica ad Ercole da Amiternum</i>	» 664
Girolamo SOFIA, <i>L'eco dei luoghi di un mito dalla Sicilia orientale, per una nuova interpretazione di una straordinaria epigrafe di I-II sec. d.C.</i>	» 666
Heikki SOLIN, <i>Il destino di un'iscrizione: dall'autopsia alla scomparsa</i>	» 676
Rex WALLACE, <i>A 'Speaking Inscription' on an Attic Pottery Fragment</i>	» 678

* * *

Recensioni

Marco BUONOCORE, Recensione a: Alfredo Sansone, <i>Lucania romana. Ricerche di prosopografia e storia sociale</i> , Roma, Edizioni Quasar, 2021 (<i>Vetera. Ricerche di storia, epigrafia e antichità</i> , 23), 390 pp.; ISBN 978-88-5491-201-6.	» 683
Alfredo BUONOPANE, Recensione a: J. Remesal Rodríguez, <i>Heinrich Dressel y el Testaccio. Nuevos datos sobre los materiales y la formación del Corpus Inscriptinum Latinarum</i> , XV, Barcelona, Universitat de Barcelona, 2022, 826 pp.; ISBN 978-84-9168-848-8	» 687

Alfredo BUONOPANE, Recensione a: S. Rocchi, R. Marchionni, <i>Oltre Pompei. Graffiti e altre iscrizioni oscene dall'impero romano d'Occidente. Introduzione, testo, traduzione e commento filologico. Presentazione di Antonio Varone</i> , Roma, Deinetra Editrice, 2021 (<i>The Seeds of Triptolemus</i> , 1), 150 pp.; ISBN 978-88-8995-129-3.....	p. 692
Tiziana CARBONI, Recensione a: Simone Ciambelli, <i>I Collegia e le relazioni clientelari. Studio sui legami di patronato delle associazioni professionali nell'Occidente romano tra I e III sec. d. C.</i> , Bologna, Patron Editore, 2022, 396 pp.; ISBN 978-8-855-53565-6.	p. 694
Chiara CENATI, Recensione a: Sebastian Prignitz, <i>Bauurkunden von Epidaurus II (350-300). Abaton, Kleisia, Aphroditetempel, Artemistempel, Theater, Epidoteion, ἐπι Κυνοσ σκαμάτα</i> , München, C. H. Beck, 2022 (<i>Vestigia</i> , 75), 528 pp.; ISBN 978 3 406 79216 8.....	» 697
Geoffrey GREATREX, Recensione a: Olivier Gengler, M. Meier (eds.), <i>Johannes Malalas: Der Chronist als Zeithistoriker</i> , Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, (Malalas Studien, 4) 2022, 304 pp.; ISBN 978-3-515-12645-8.....	» 700
Rossana MARTORELLI, Recensione a: C. Carletti, Farrago epigraphica. <i>Scritti di epigrafia cristiana e altomedievale</i> , a cura di A.E. Felle, Spoleto, Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo, 2022, XXXVIII-632 pp.; ISBN 978-88-6809-373-0	» 705
<i>Nouvelles de l'A.I.E.G.L. 2022</i>	» 711
<i>La VI edizione del Premio Giancarlo Susini (Bordeaux 2 settembre 2022)</i>	» 727
<i>Elenco dei collaboratori</i>	» 731
<i>La collana «Epigrafia e Antichità»</i>	» 733

NICOLAS PREUD'HOMME* - FRANK SCHLEICHER**

THE STELE OF ŠARGAS – NEW READING AND COMMENTARY

■ Abstract

An Aramaic inscription found in the necropolis of Armazisxevi, near the ancient royal citadel of Caucasian Iberia, brings a remarkable testimony about the political and military situation in Southern Caucasia during the last decades of the 1st century CE, insofar as this stele defends the contested legitimacy of King Mihrdat involved through several wars and conflicts. This epigraphic document also provides information on the power and values of the Iberian aristocracy, on the institutions of the Iberian kingdom influenced by Iranian culture, notably on the official duties of the *pitiaxēs*, Šargas, assisting the King, as well as on the role of Aramaic writing in the scriptural practices of an Iberian society inserted in a multicultural context. The stele of Šargas is all the more estimable as it expresses an Iberian point of view on historical events still poorly known and constitutes one of the first milestones in the development of epic genre and historiographies in Southern Caucasia.

Keywords: Aramaic, Aristocracy, Armazic, Caucasian Iberia, Epics, Kingship, Military, Southern Caucasia.

Introduction

In the autumn 1940, during archaeological excavations carried out under the direction of Ivane Javaxišvili, two epigraphic monuments were found inside the grave n. 4 in the necropolis of Armazisxevi, located in Mc'xet'a, the ancient capital of Georgia: the tombstone of Šērapeitis¹, also called the bilingual inscription from Armazi,

* Doctor in Ancient History from Sorbonne University, France; nicolas.preud-homme@ac-normandie.fr.

** Associate Professor at the department of Ancient History at Friedrich-Schiller-University Jena, Germany. Email; frank.schleicher@uni-jena.de.

¹ IGRR, I, 192. SEG, XVI, 781. G.V. CERET'ELI, *The Bilingual Inscription from Armazi near Mcheta in Georgia*, «Bulletin de l'Institut Marr de Langues, d'Histoire et de Culture Matérielle», 13 (1942), pp. 49-83, reprinted in «Iberia-Colchis», 8 (2012), pp. 146-182. J. & L. Robert, *Bulletin épigraphique*, «Revue des Études Grecques», 57, 269 (1944), pp. 175-241, 237. M.N. TOD, *Reviews and Discussions* – G. G. Tsereteli, *A Bilingual Inscription From Armazi Near Mcheta in Georgia. Bulletin of the Marr Institute of Languages, History, and Material Culture (Tiflis)*, XIII (1942), pp. 1-83, «JRS», 33 (1943), pp. 82-86. H.S. NYBERG, *Quelques inscriptions antiques découvertes récemment en Géorgie*, «Eranos Rudbergianus», 44 (1946), pp. 228-243. J. & L. ROBERT, *Bulletin épigraphique*, «Revue des Études Grecques», 61, 284-285 (1948), pp. 137-212, 207. B.M. METZGER,

and the stele of the Iberian prince Šargas, known as the monolingual Armazic inscription. These two stones provide precious information about the history of the ancient kingdom of Caucasian Iberia during the 1st and 2nd centuries CE².

The dimensions of Šargas's stele are 1.63 m in maximum height, 0.70 m in width, and 0.20 m in maximum thickness. The top of the stele, whose edges have undoubtedly been reworked, contains two signs likely to be identified as tamgas – monograms that can be interpreted as religious symbols or emblems of noble houses, perhaps the ones to which Šargas and the Iberian king of his time, Mihrdat, belonged. The two tamgas on the upper edge can be compared with the signs found on the stone of Krivoy-Rog, used during several centuries³. If these signs were indeed of Sarmatian origin, they could designate the clans or the ruling families of these peoples allied to Mihrdat. The left part was also removed insofar as the original aspect of the stele would have been symmetrical. The inscription begins 28 cm below the top edge of the stele. The text consists of fourteen lines, 62 cm high and 69 cm wide, with each complete line between 33 and 37 characters long. According to the current state of knowledge, the stele of Šargas is the longest epigraphic testimony in Armazic writing, also called Armazian, a Caucasian variant of Aramaic⁴.

The stele of Šargas was found as a reused stone in the tomb n. 4 of the princely necropolis of Armazisxevi, probably during the late-ancient period when the acropolis of Armazi declined⁵. This document entirely written in Armazic presents many reading difficulties and peculiarities which explain the very low number of studies dedicated to it. After a first notice presenting the inscription in the volume of excavation reports *Mc'xet'a'*⁶, the Georgian epigraphist Giorgi Ceret'eli proposed a transcription in his paper published in 1962, but he only managed to decipher the first three lines and some other short excerpts⁷. A few years later, the German scholars Franz Altheim and Ruth

A Greek and Aramaic Inscription Discovered at Armazi in Georgia, «Journal of Near Eastern Studies», 15, 1 (1956), pp. 18-26. T. QAUXC'ISVILI, *Korpus der Griechischen Inschriften in Georgien (KGIG)*, Tbilisi 1999-2000, II, n. 235, pp. 255-256. Filippo CANALI DE ROSSI, *Iscrizioni dello Estremo Oriente greco. Un repertorio*, Bonn 2004, p. 3.

² D. BRAUND, *Georgia in Antiquity*, Oxford 1994. B. MEISSNER, *A Belated Nation: Sources on Ancient Iberia and Iberian Kingship*, «Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan», vol. 32, Berlin 2000, pp. 177-206. F. SCHLEICHER, *Iberia Caucasia: Ein Kleinkönigreich Im Spannungsfeld großer Imperien*, Stuttgart 2021.

³ A. BERZOVAN & E. D. PADUREANU, *A clay pot with tamga signs discovered at Şiria (Arad county)*, «Annales d'Université Valahia Targoviste», Section d'Archéologie et d'Histoire, XII, n. 2 (2010), pp. 57-66, p. 60. M. GRANT (ed.), *Civilisations disparues*, London 1974, p. 352. An alternative hypothesis saw the tamgas as esoteric symbols aimed at guaranteeing salvation in the hereafter.

⁴ H. GIUNASHVILI, *Studies on the Ancient Aramaic Epigraphy of Georgia*, «Iran Namag», vol. 4, n. 3-4 (2019), pp. 51-63.

⁵ N. PREUD'HOMME, *Une mémoire enfouie: le réemploi des stèles de Šargas et de Sèrapeitis dans la tombe n°4 de la nécropole princière d'Armazisxevi en Ibérie du Caucase*, conference presented at the doctoral study day of the laboratory HALMA (University of Lille, 5th February 2021), forthcoming publication.

⁶ A. AP'AK'IZE, G.F. GOBEJISVILI, A.N. KALANDAZE, G.A. LOMT'AT'IZE, *Михета: итоги археологических исследований I. Археологические памятники Армазис-Хеви по раскопкам 1937-1946 гг.*, Tbilisi 1958, pp. 72-73.

⁷ G.V. CERET'ELI, *Армазская надпись эпохи Митридата Иверийского*, in *Труды двадцать пятого Международного конгресса востоковедов. Том 1: Москва 9-16 августа 1960*, Moscow 1962, pp. 374-378, p. 375: «Царь Михрдат, царь великий, сын Парсмана, царя великого: Я Шарагас, сын Зеваха владыки, я Шарагас, пияхаш Михрдата царя слово и такое слово сказал»; «3 укрепленных места, крепости»; «4 победы я сделал».

Stiehl published a new reading with a first full translation⁸ which, curiously, was largely ignored in historiography during a long time⁹. This document is all the more unique as it recounts the military campaigns carried out during the reign of Mihrdat from an Iberian point of view. Despite its great interest, the reading of Frank Altheim and Ruth Stiehl contains questionable details that deserve a new review. In addition to the linguistic side which has to do with the nature of Armazic script, the aspects of political and social history touching on the context of the elaboration of the inscription called for an in-depth comment, that we have already partly dealt with in previous work¹⁰.

We would like to thank the officials of the Simon Janašia Museum in Tbilisi, and in particular Salome Bočorišvili, who allowed us to examine the stele. We are also grateful towards our colleague Maria Gorea for her facsimile which we were able to amend in the light of our own observations.

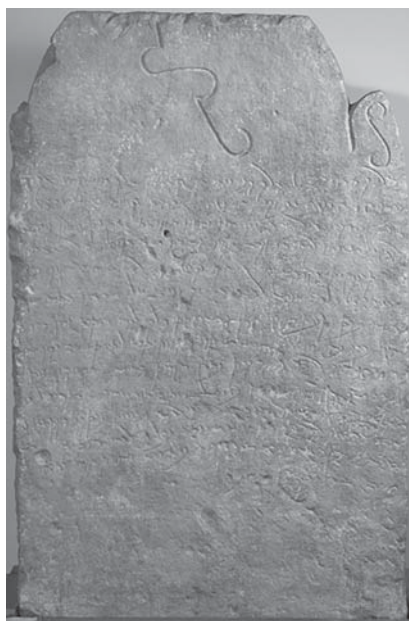


Fig. 1. Photograph of the stele. Copyright: National Museum of Georgia. Simon Janašia Museum in Tbilisi.

⁸ F. ALTHEIM & R. STIEHL, *Die zweite (aramäische) Inschrift von Mchet'a*, «Forschungen und Fortschritte», 35, 6 (1961), pp. 172-178. F. ALTHEIM & R. STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache unter den Achaimeniden*, Frankfurt-am-Main 1963, pp. 243-261.

⁹ Some mentions, however, are visible in G. GIORGAZE, ტომონიმები არმაზის ერთენოვან არამეოგრაფიულ წარწერაში, in Guram MAISURAZE (ed.), «ამიერკავკასიის ისტორიის პრობლემები», Tbilisi 1991, pp. 33-45; E.L. WHEELER, *A New Book on Ancient Georgia: A Critical Discussion*, «The Annual of the Society for the Study of Caucasia», 6-7 (1994-1996), pp. 51-78, pp. 58-59.

¹⁰ N. PREUD'HOMME, *La stèle des victoires du pitahš Šargas et la réaffirmation de la domination royale en Ibérie du Caucase*, «Camenulae», 22 (2019), pp. 1-20. SCHLEICHER, *Iberia Caucasica* cit., pp. 70, 255-256, 287-298.

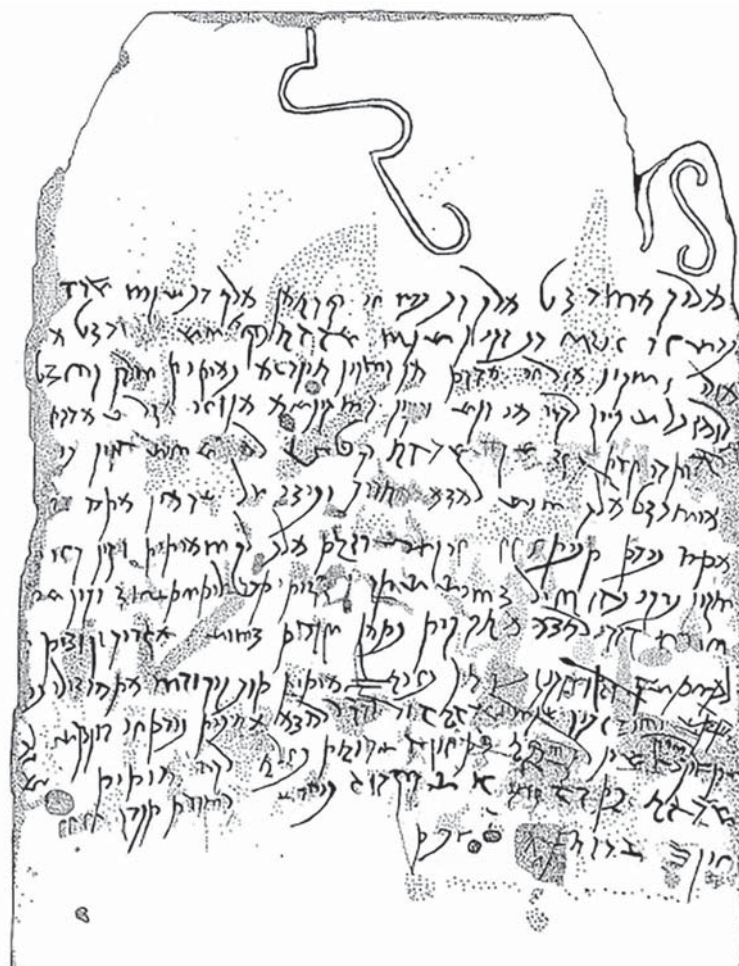


Fig. 2. Facsimile of the stele.

General reading and translation of the inscription

1. mlyk mhrdṭ mlk rb br' zy prsmn mlk rb 'nh šrg[s]
2. br' zy zywh rb wky n'nh šrgs pyṭ[hš] [mh]rdṭ m[lk]
3. mwly whkyn mwl zy mrwt mn whkyn [...] bmytyt hlwk nhḏt
4. lw qwbl' kyn lkry my wñš wbynyn whkyn 'm mnw zy mwl [z]y mrwt
5. [...] t r y t yt(y) / yn(y) kzy 'nh šrgs pyṭ[h]š lq[dm] šhr' hwyn by[rh]
6. myhrdṭ mlk hy' lqdm msryk wbydy 'l'rmyn mtq [1]
7. mtq byrt tbyt 3 zyn' 'rwst mlk lkh mytyt wky n'kzy
8. hkyn byny bgw hyl dhy' 'tr wpydy tr' ltht hwd wky n'š'[r...]
9. hyy zy gwry lqdm msknyt btqn šnryt dhy' msryk wnwdyt z[y]

10. ltht 'klyt (?) hkyn btqn (?) bz ysb mytyt twb nykwrb mtq wdyly by[...]
 11. ltt' yhw ywky 'nh šrgs gyl [...] lqdm msykyt byrt zy ywnt' lb
 12. 't šlyn 'yt rgšyn lkh pqdt zyn' 'rwst bzly lkh mytyt
 13. šrgs bt rg[m...] zy 'sprwg by mr' yšqt tnrw 4
 14. zyn' 'rwst rwbt¹¹

The king is Mibrdat, the great king, son of Parsman, the great king. I am Šargas, son of Zewaḥ the Elder, I, Šargas, am also pitiaxēs of King Mibrdat. My possessions are also the domain of kingship, which is thus established in Mytyt (the residence?). Behold, Naxudaṭ [...] / Let go / Let die Naxudaṭ [...] / The tax naxudaṭ ('given by the chief?') is (levied) at Mytyt (the residence?). This is thus (the case) before the cisterns, and for every people, and among us, and, in the same way, for anyone belonging to the domain of the kingship. [...] I, Pitiaxēs Šargas, in front of the city, I was taking down the fortress. King Mibrdat was in front of the bordering (land). And with my help (he entered) into Armenia, conquered one [...] (?). He destroyed the fort of Tbt. And there were three heroic actions, King, this is Mytyt, and thus [...]. This is how, in the midst of the domain, the army stood in the place and I redeemed the gate below the top (of the mountain), and thus the remaining living (people) who was exiled, before the Msknyt (Moschians or Massagetae?), in the fortress of Šnryt which is the bordering (territory) and Nudyt, below the place of 'klyt. The good fortune is again established in the fortress over Mytyt. Nykwrb was destroyed, and may it be [...] under (this place?). He ordered and thus I, Šargas, rejoice [...] before Msykyt (Mc'xet'a, Moschians or Massagetae?) the fortress of heroes. The heart (was) with the tranquillity during the troubles, and certainly I commanded a brilliant heroic action (literally: the arm-feat in the brilliance). Certainly Mytyt [...] Šargas. The cursed house of Asparug is without lord; (his) statue was burnt. Four great heroic actions were (accomplished)¹².

¹¹ To remind the preceding readings, here is the transcription edited by CERET'ELI, *Армзская* cit., p. 375. 1. mlyk mhrdt mlk rb brh zy prsmn mlk rb 'nh šr[gs]. 2. brh zy zywh rbwnyn 'nh šrgs y(?)pythš myhrdt m[lk]. 3. myly' whkyn myly' (')mryt hn yhwyn mynd'm bmsyt zylwn nyzdt. 4. lkwbl 'nh lkh my.n' wky whkyn 'm mnwzy myly' (')mryt... 5. ... tryšyt kzy 'ny šrgs pytyhš l'. 'hwry hwyn bz.. 6. myhrdt mlk dhy' lqdm ms yn 'bydw 'l 'rmy n mth' .. 7. mth byrt tby III zynh 'rwst mlk lnh mytyt wky kzy p.. 8. hwyn bkzy bgwh ldhy' 'tr .. sryt tr' lytht yhw wky 'nh]. 9. hy. zy hwry lqdm ksr nyt btmn šwryt dhy' msrykyn ydyt wd.. 10. lytht 'rmy n (?) whkyn 'rwst bzys lkh mytyt twb nykwry' mtkwr l by.. 11. dynt' wyhw d (?) wky 'nh šrgs g.l..wrl (?) lqdm msyryt byrt zy y(w?)nt' lb.. 12. 'ynšyn rgšyn l..... s... ryt zynh 'rwst bzly lkh mytyt '[nh]. 13. šrgs btr'hwys 'sprwg br (?) swr' (?) yhwyt tnt IIII. 14. zynh 'rwst 'bt. And here is the transcription proposed by ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die zweite (aramäische) Inschrift* cit., p. 173, and *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 244. 1. mlyk mhrdt mlk rb br' zy prsmn mlk rb 'nh šr[gs. 2. br' zy zywh rb wky 'nh šrgs zy pythš [mh]rdt m[lk]. 3. mwly whkyn mwly zy mrwt mn 'rykyn mtrym bmytyt hlzn nhd. 4. lzmyzbl' kyn lkry my wš wbnynyn whkyn 'm mnw zy mwly zy mrwt. 5. tryšyt kzy 'nh šrgs pyt[h]š lq[dm] šhr' hwyn ky[n. 6. myhrdt mlk hw' lqdm mzwryn wbydy 'l 'rmy n mtk byrt. 7. mtk byrt tbt wzy zyn' 'rwst mlk lkh mytyt wky kzy [...]. 8. hkyn byny bgw hyl dhw' 'tr nknyt tr' lythty hwd wky 'nh. 9. mzwz zy hzky lqdm msknyt btkn šnryt dhw' msryk wnwdyt zly. 10. lwt mt 'klyt whkyn btkn bz yslk mytyt twb nykwrb mtk wdyly by. 11. ltt' yhw wky 'nh ly šrgs gmr ... lqdm msykyt byrt zy ywnt' lb. 12. šyn l... 'tr [w]šyn lkh pqd zyn zyn' 'rwst bzly lkh mytyt zy. 13. šrgs btr g g zy 'sprwg br' zy mr' mskyt tnrw hww. 14. zyn' 'rwst 'bt.

Literal reading

Line 1

mlyk – Active participle Peal of *mlk*₁, ‘to be king’¹³.

mbrdt – Proper name ‘Mihrdat’.

mlk – Common noun ‘king’, absolute state¹⁴.

rb – Adjective ‘great’ applied to the preceding noun¹⁵.

br – Common noun ‘son’, determined state¹⁶. Giorgi Ceret’eli reads *brb*¹⁷.

zy – Preposition ‘of’ connecting the previous noun with its following complement¹⁸.

prsmn – Proper name ‘Parsman’, a king of Iberia also called Pharasmanēs in Greek and Latin sources (see the commentary *infra*). The semkath does not appear, or it could be merged into the mem.

mlk – Common noun ‘king’, absolute state¹⁹.

rb – Adjective ‘great’ applied to the preceding noun²⁰.

nh – Personal pronoun, first person singular ‘me’²¹.

šrg[s] – First truncated mention of the proper name ‘Šargas’. Regarding the etymology, Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl evoke two hypotheses, the first using two Ossetian words, *sār* (‘principal’) and *gās* (‘guardian’)²², while the second, more probable, refers to the Ossetian term *cārgās* (цæргæс), meaning ‘eagle’²³.

Translation of line 1 – *The king is Mihrdat, the great king, son of Parsman, the great king. I am Šargas.*

Line 2

br – Common noun ‘son’, determined state²⁴.

zy – Preposition ‘of’ connecting the previous noun with its following complement²⁵.

zywh – Proper name Zewah, also attested in the stele of Sērapeitis (Greek: Ζηουάχου, l.1; Aramaic: *zywh*, l. 12) and in Iberian glyptic²⁶. Oswald Szemerényi

¹³ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 246.

¹⁴ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, 2, Leiden 1995, 2, pp. 634-640, s. v. *mlk*₁.

¹⁵ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, s. v. *rb*₂, pp. 1045-1051.

¹⁶ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., pp. 246-247. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 188-195, s. v. *br*₁.

¹⁷ G. CERET’ELI, *Армазская* cit., p. 375.

¹⁸ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 312.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 634-640, s. v. *mlk*₁.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 1045-1051, s. v. *rb*₂.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 79-80, s. v. *nh*₃. M. VAN PELT, *Basics of Biblical Aramaic: Complete Grammar*, Grand Rapids 2011, p. 222.

²² V.I. АВАЕВ, *Историко-этимологический словарь осетинского языка; указатель*, I, Moscow, Leningrad 1958, p. 516, s. v. *gæs*; III, Leningrad 1979, p. 73, s. v. *sær*.

²³ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 247. АВАЕВ, *Историко-этимологический словарь* cit., pp. 302-303, s. v. *cærgæs*.

²⁴ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, s. v. *br*₁, pp. 188-195. ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., pp. 246-247.

²⁵ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 312.

²⁶ KGIG, II, 241, 244.

considers prudently an Old Iranian lemma **zīvaka*²⁷. In Avestan, the noun *zavareka* means ‘strength’, ‘vigor’²⁸. In Sogdian, the adjective *zw’n’k* means ‘endowed with life’, and the noun *zwyk*- ‘health’²⁹.

rb – Adjective ‘great’, ‘elder’ applied to the preceding noun, interpreted here as a surname³⁰.

wkyn – Conjunction of coordination and adverb ‘and thus’³¹.

’nh – Personal pronoun, first person singular ‘me’³².

šrgs – Proper name ‘Šargas’.

pyt[ħš] – Common noun of Aramaic form corresponding to the Greek word ‘*piti-axēs*’, official title of the second ruler of Iberia after the king, equivalent to a viceroy or a prime minister (see the commentary *infra*). The end of the word is difficult to read.

[mh]rdt – Proper name ‘Mihrdat’.

m[lk] – Common noun ‘king’³³.

Translation of line 2 – *Son of Zewah the Elder, I, Šargas, who am also pitiaxēs of King Mihrdat.*

Line 3

mwly – Official Aramaic substantive *mwly*₃, ‘possession(s)’³⁴, with the meaning of ‘domain’ here. The final yodh indicates the pronominal suffix of the first singular person³⁵. The lāmādh of this word is very short because the stem of an upper bēth comes to meet it.

wbkyn – Conjunction of coordination with adverb: ‘and thus’³⁶.

mwly – Official Aramaic substantive *mwly*₃, ‘possession’³⁷, ‘domain’.

zy – Preposition ‘of’ connecting the previous noun with its following complement³⁸.

mrwt – Common noun ‘lordship’, ‘domination’, ‘rule’, ‘kingship’³⁹.

mn – Indefinite pronoun, ‘who’, ‘whoever’⁴⁰.

wbkyn – conjunction of coordination and adverb ‘and thus’⁴¹, against Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl who read here *’rykyn*⁴².

²⁷ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 248

²⁸ Avesta, K. F. GELDNER (ed.), *Hawan Gab*, §10; *Rapithwin Gab*, §12; *Usbabīn Gab*, §10.

²⁹ É. BENVENISTE, *Essai de grammaire sogdienne. Deuxième partie. Morphologie, syntaxe et glossaire*, Paris 1929, pp. 238-239.

³⁰ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 1045-1051, s. v. *rb*₂,

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 499, 517, s. v. *kyn* and *kn*₄₀₀.

³² *Ibid.*, 1, *’nh*₃, pp. 79-80. VAN PELT, *Basics* cit., p. 222.

³³ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, pp. 634-640, s. v. *mlk*₃,

³⁴ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 250. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 603.

³⁵ VAN PELT, *Basics* cit., p. 46.

³⁶ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., pp. 499 and 517, s. v. *kyn* and *kn*₄.

³⁷ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 250. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 603.

³⁸ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 312.

³⁹ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 250. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 691, s. v. *mrwt*.

⁴⁰ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 648, s. v. *mn*₄.

⁴¹ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 499 and 517, s. v. *kyn* and *kn*₄.

⁴² ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 250.

An uncertain sequence of two words. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *mtrym* as participle *etpe'el* of *r'm*, derived from Middle-Persian *rām*, 'peace'⁴³, translated as 'established' by these authors⁴⁴. We consider several alternative interpretations: for the first word, the substantive *sny*, kind of 'iron'⁴⁵, or *str*₂, Official Aramaic substantive, 'secret place'⁴⁶. For the second word, the adverb *gm*₂, 'moreover' attested in Moabite and Hebrew⁴⁷, or *gm'* Official Aramaic substantive 'reed'⁴⁸. A last possibility would be *rgm* as the passive participle singular of the verb 'to stone' attested in the Aramaic dialect of Hatra, meaning probably 'accursed'⁴⁹.

bmytyt – The preposition of place *b-* is followed by a name *mytyt* with uncertain meaning but appearing several times in this inscription. No particular clue emerges from the K'art'velian languages. In Ossetian, *myt* (МИТ) means 'snow', 'snowy'⁵⁰. On a more interesting line of inquiry, Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl assert that this word derives from Avestan *maēt-*, 'dwell', 'inhabit', *maēθana-*, *maēθanyā-*, 'dwelling', 'habitation', completed with an abstraction suffix *-yt* similar to Sogdian and recurrent in other place names⁵¹. If this hypothesis is true, it would designate a royal or princely residence in Caucasian Iberia, perhaps around Armazi-Mc'xet'a, even if *Mytyt* doesn't have much to do linguistically with the toponym Mestlēta of Ptolemy⁵².

hlwk – Giorgi Ceret'eli reads *zylwn*, but this word is not corroborated with Aramaic documentation⁵³. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *hlzn* as a word made up of three elements: *b*, interjection 'behold'⁵⁴; *l*, 'for'; *zn* for *znh* as the demonstrative pronoun 'this', 'these', 'those'⁵⁵ thus giving 'behold, for this', to be linked with the following name. Our own decryption gives the sequence *hlwk* which can be interpreted in different ways. It could be an irregular form of the Official Aramaic interjection *hlw*, 'behold', 'now'⁵⁶, even in the introductory formula *hlw kn*, 'now, it is thus', if we had opted to attach the nun of the following word to it. This word could also be regarded as a faulty form for *hlkw*, which can be interpreted either as the substantive 'conduct', 'way of living', cognate to the Qal Perfect 3rd person

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 250. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 1042, s. v. *r'm*₂; 2, pp. 1198-1199, s. v. *šty*₃.

⁴⁴ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 250.

⁴⁵ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 1244.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 805.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 225.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 225.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 1060, s. v. *rgm*.

⁵⁰ V.I. АБАЕВ, *Историко-этимологический словарь осетинского языка; указатель*, II, Leningrad 1973, p. 124.

⁵¹ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 251.

⁵² Ptolemy, *Geography*, V, 10, 2.

⁵³ CERET'ELI, *Армзская* cit., p. 375.

⁵⁴ G. DALMAN, *Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch*, Darmstadt 1960, p. 100. But HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, s. v. *hlw* (p. 280) and *bn*₃ (pp. 285-287), do not seem to have noted an abbreviated variant *b* among the canonical forms of this interjection.

⁵⁵ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 251. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 333-337.

⁵⁶ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 280.

plural masculine of the verb *blk*₁ ‘to go’, ‘to die’⁵⁷, or as the jussive form of the same verb: ‘let go’, or ‘let die’. Another possible interpretation, helped by the context of the following line, could see in this word an irregular form of the common noun *blk*₂ ‘tax’⁵⁸. The form of the last letters is not very clear and the word could also be read *blkn*.

nḥdṭ – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read here a proper name *Naxudaṭ*, cognate to *nwdr* in the Parthian inscription of Kāl-i Jangāl and other variants in Roman and Armenian sources⁵⁹. This word from Iranian origin would mean ‘given by the first’ (or: ‘by the chief’⁶⁰), since in Middle-Persian, *naxust* means ‘first’⁶¹. Another possibility would be to consider this word as an official title linked to Middle-Persian *naxvadār* ‘holder of the primacy’, even if it is not easy to identify the character designated by this title⁶². Giorgi Ceret’eli’s reading *nyzdṭ* doesn’t seem to be more appropriate⁶³.

Translation of line 3 – *My possessions are also the domain of kingship, which is thus established in Mytyt. Behold, Naxudaṭ [...]. Or: Let go, or let die Naxudaṭ [...]. Or: the tax ‘given by the chief’ is (levied) at Mytyt (the residence?).*

Line 4

lw qwbl – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *lzmyzbl* – ‘above Zmizbila’ or ‘above the sand shore’. *Zmīs* means indeed ‘sand’ in Eastern Ossetian⁶⁴, and *byl* ‘lip’, ‘shore’ in Western Ossetian⁶⁵. In Old Iranian, *bilam* is the ‘aperture, cave, mouth’⁶⁶. The problem with this reading is that zain and yodh are more waw-shaped. We read consequently: *lw qwbl*, with *lw* as a deictic particle⁶⁷. The second word *qwbl* is the determined state of *qwb*, variant of *qbl*₃⁶⁸ which operates as a preposition with local meaning, ‘before’.

kyn – Adverb ‘thus’⁶⁹. Another possibility connecting the preceding ālaph would be ‘*kyn*, a form of *kwn*₂, Official Aramaic verb Peal ‘to erect’ or verb Aphel ‘to erect, to consolidate’⁷⁰.

lkry – preposition *l* + *kry* Judeo-Aramaic *karyā*, ‘fountains’, ‘sources’, ‘cisterns’⁷¹.

my – Official Aramaic substantive *my*₃, ‘water’, according to Franz Altheim and

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 282-283.

⁵⁸ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 280-283.

⁵⁹ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 251.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ D.N. MACKENZIE, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*, London-New York 1971, p. 58.

⁶² N. GARSOĪAN, *The Epic Histories*, Cambridge 1989, p. 549.

⁶³ CERET’ELI, *Армазская* cit., p. 375.

⁶⁴ АБАЕВ, *Историко-этимологический словарь* cit., IV, p. 313, s. v. *zmīs*, pp. 281-282, s. v. *yzmīs*.

⁶⁵ АБАЕВ, *Историко-этимологический словарь* cit., I, pp. 277-278, s. v. *byl*, *bilæ*.

⁶⁶ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., pp. 251-252.

⁶⁷ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 567-568, s. v. *lw*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 2, p. 997, s. v. *qwb*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 1, p. 499, and pp. 516-518, s. v. *kn*₄ pp. 516-518.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 1, p. 51; pp. 494-495.

⁷¹ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 252. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 535, s. v. *kry*₄, ‘cistern’, and p. 492, s. v. *kwb*.

Ruth Stiehl, whose opinion is contested by Jacob Hoftijzer and Karel Jongeling⁷². Other options would be *my*₁, 'whoever' or *my*₂, variant of the substantive *mytb*, 'approval'⁷³.

wnš – *w* + *nš*₂, variant of the Official Aramaic '*nš*₃, 'and people'⁷⁴, according to Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl⁷⁵. Other possibilities can be presented: *w* + *nš*₁, 'and an oath'⁷⁶; *w* + *nš*'₁, 'and carry', 'raise'⁷⁷; *w* + *nš*'₃, 'and an offering'⁷⁸; *w* + *nš*'₄, 'and a superintendent', 'chief of intendency'⁷⁹.

wbynyn – *w* + *bbynyn* 'and the constructions'⁸⁰ according to Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl. Another interpretation would be the preposition *byn* with a suffix of the 1st person plural: 'among us'⁸¹.

whkyn – 'and this is how'⁸².

'*m* – '*m*₃, conjunction of the conditional 'if', with a Judeo-Aramaic spelling, used with an imperfective in the future sense, or, with a verb conjugated in a past tense, used as a subject clause in enumerations (or... on the one hand... on the other hand...)⁸³. This word has, however, many homophones: '*m*₁ as feminine substantive 'mother'⁸⁴; '*m*₂ as substantive with unknown meaning⁸⁵; '*m*₄ as adverb of emphasis emphasizing the following word⁸⁶; '*m*₆: unknown meaning in a context with the verb '*py* 'to cook'⁸⁷.

mnw – form of *mn*₄, indefinite pronoun, 'who', 'whoever'⁸⁸.

zy – Preposition 'of' connecting the previous noun with its following complement⁸⁹.

mwł – Official Aramaic substantive *mwł*₃, 'possession(s)'⁹⁰, with the meaning of 'domain'.

[*z*]y – Preposition 'of' connecting the previous noun with its following complement⁹¹. The zain is not visible.

mrwt – Common noun 'lordship', 'domination', 'rule', 'kingship'⁹².

⁷² ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 252. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 619, *my*: "word of highly uncertain interpretation, singular absolute of *mym* (water) incorrectly derived from Plural determined *my*' (improbable interpretation)."

⁷³ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 619.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 84-85; 2, p. 760.

⁷⁵ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 244.

⁷⁶ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 760.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 760-763.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 763.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 763-764.

⁸⁰ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., 1963, p. 252.

⁸¹ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 153.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 279-280, s. v. *hkyn*; p. 499, s. v. *kyn*; p. 517, s. v. *kn*₄.

⁸³ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 253. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 68.

⁸⁴ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 66-68.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 68.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 69.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 94-95.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 648, s. v. *mn*₄; p. 658, s. v. *mnw*.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 312.

⁹⁰ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 250. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 603.

⁹¹ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 312.

⁹² ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 250. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 691, s. v. *mrwt*.

Translation of line 4 – *This is thus (the case) before the cisterns, and to every people, and among us, and, in the same way, to anyone belonging to the domain of the kingship.*

Line 5

[...] *t r y t* – The beginning of the word is practically unreadable owing to the mutilation of the stone. There is space for three to four missing letters. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *tryšyt* as an adverb ‘indeed’, but this interpretation remains very fragile⁹³. The first letters of this sequence could be at the end of the preceding word or constitute a new item. Several possibilities exist: in Moabite dialect, *ryt* as an uncertain meaning: ‘spectacle’, ‘sacrifice’, or a contraction of *r’y*t, ‘satiated’⁹⁴. The word *ry* denotes a substantive ‘moisture’⁹⁵. The word *htr* is an Official Aramaic verb with uncertain meaning, perhaps ‘to cross’⁹⁶. Also interesting is the preposition *ytry* which signifies ‘more than’⁹⁷, linked to the verb *ytr*₁ ‘to add’, the substantive *ytr*₂: (remaining) ‘rest’, the adjective *ytr*₃: ‘exceeding, superabundant’⁹⁸, and the substantive *ytrn*, ‘what is left over’⁹⁹. Other possibilities, the substantives *try*₁, ‘room’ (*tryn* Absolute plural state)¹⁰⁰ and *tryn*, ‘two’¹⁰¹.

yt(y) or *yn(y)* – The reading *yt(y)* would be here a preposition used as *nota obiectivi* or with a temporal meaning, ‘during’¹⁰². Concerning the hypothesis *yny*, it would be either the Old Aramaic Haphel verb ‘to oppress’¹⁰³, or *yn* as the Phoenician form of the substantive *yyn*, ‘wine’¹⁰⁴.

kzy – This word, partly erased, is difficult to decipher. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *kzy* as the conjunction of conditional ‘if’¹⁰⁵. Another possibility would be *knd* as a variant of the common noun *kd*₁, ‘jar’¹⁰⁶.

’nb – personal pronoun, first person singular ‘me’¹⁰⁷. The *hē* is very difficult to read.

šrgs – proper name ‘Šargas’.

pt[h]š – common noun, ‘pitiāxēs’. The word is partly erased.

lq[dm] – ‘in front of’¹⁰⁸. Only the *lām*adh is practically certain, insofar as the second letter is very damaged, and the last two unreadable.

šhr – Iranian word, related to Middle-Persian *šahr* ‘country’, ‘city’¹⁰⁹, and Ossetian *saxar*, ‘city’¹¹⁰. This damaged word can only receive an uncertain reading.

⁹³ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 244. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 1232.

⁹⁴ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 1075.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 1264.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 415.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 482.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 485.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 486.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 1230.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 1231-1232 and 1262.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 461.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 455-456.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 496.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 487-488, p. 518.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, s. v. *’nh*₃, p. 79-80. VAN PELT, *Basics* cit., p. 222.

¹⁰⁸ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 253. ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 253.

¹⁰⁹ MACKENZIE, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* cit., p. 79.

¹¹⁰ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 253. V.I. АБАЕВ, *Историко-этимологический словарь осетинского языка; указатель*, III, Leningrad 1979, p. 49.

hwyn – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl consider here a verb ‘to be’, ‘to exist’¹¹¹. We prefer the alternative way to read it as *hwy*₁: verb Pa’el Imperfect first person singular: ‘to beat’, ‘to make fallen’¹¹². The first foot of the *hē* is scarcely visible. The *waw* seems almost cut into two parts.

by[rb] – Altheim & Stiehl read *ky[n]*: *kn*₄, ‘thus’¹¹³. The *kāph* looks like rather to a *bēth* with a ligature. We read: *by[rb]*, ‘castle’¹¹⁴.

Translation of line 5 – [...] *as I, Pitiaxēs Šargas, in front of the city, I was taking over the fortress.*

Line 6

mybrdt – proper name ‘Mihrdat’.

mlk – Common noun ‘king’, absolute state¹¹⁵.

by – Variant of pronoun *b*₁ used as a predicate to express the verb ‘to be’¹¹⁶.

lqdm – *l + qdm*₂, ‘formerly’, ‘previously’, ‘in the aforesaid’, ‘the time before’¹¹⁷, or, more probable in this context, *l + qdm*₃: ‘before’, ‘in front of’ with local meaning¹¹⁸. The *dālath* is almost erased.

msryk – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *mzwryn* as an adjective ‘strong’, ‘warlike’¹¹⁹, but the reading of this word is unclear. We read *msryk* as the Aphel Participle active singular masculine absolute of *srk*₁, ‘to border (up)on’¹²⁰, so here ‘the bordering (territory)’, ‘the border land’. This is probably the territory corresponding to the marchland of Gōgarēnē (Gugark’-Somxit’i) bordering Iberia and Armenia¹²¹, which is mentioned just after.

wbydy – *w + b + ydy*₂, ‘and with (my) hand’¹²².

’l – *’l*₇ as the preposition ‘on’¹²³.

’rmyn – Proper name, ‘Armenia’. The word is partly erased.

mtq – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *mtq* as the active participle Aphel of *ntq*, ‘to dissolve’, ‘to take away’, ‘to conquer’¹²⁴.

[1] – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read [*byrt*] as the substantive ‘fortress’¹²⁵. This word ending the line is, however, extremely damaged and very difficult to read. The *resh* has a rounded shape that resembles the sign used for the number 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹¹² HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 271.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 516-518.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 155-156.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 634-640, s.v. *mlk*₁.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 264-267, 277. VAN PELT, *Basics* cit., p. 56.

¹¹⁷ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 987.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 988-989.

¹¹⁹ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 253.

¹²⁰ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 803.

¹²¹ S.H. RAPP JR., *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes*, Farnham, Burlington 2014, pp. 73, 247.

SCHLEICHER, *Iberia Caucasia* cit., pp. 49, 52, 114-117.

¹²² ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 245. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 433-439.

¹²³ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 844 and fol.

¹²⁴ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., pp. 253-254. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 771, s.v. *ntq*.

¹²⁵ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, s. *byrb*, pp. 155-156.

Translation of line 6 – *King Mībrdat was in front of the bordering (land). And with my help, (he entered) into Armenia, conquered one [...] (?)*.

Line 7

mtq – active participle Aphel of *ntq*, ‘to dissolve’, ‘to take away’, ‘to conquer’. The second sign is a taw which is connected to the third letter, a qoph, by a ligament. At first it cannot be decided whether a conquest or the liberation of an area occupied by the invading enemy is meant¹²⁶.

byrt – common noun ‘fortress’¹²⁷.

tbyt – Unknown proper name.

3 – These three signs formed like a zain look like, for each of them, the number 1 on the stele of Sērapeitis.

zyn’ – Singular determined state of the substantive *zyn₂*, ‘weapon’¹²⁸.

’rvst – The first letter of this word is damaged, but it can be read as the Parthian substantive which is also found in the stele of Sērapeitis (l. 14). Harold W. Bailey gave it the meaning of ‘victory’¹²⁹. Bruce M. Metzger assumes something like ‘victorious’ but follows Bailey’s advice in translating ‘victories’ about the occurrence in the stele of Sērapeitis¹³⁰. Henrik S. Nyberg prefers to translate it by ‘warlike skill, ability to carry out a fight, valour, courage’¹³¹. Philippe Gignoux gives it for meaning ‘virtue’¹³². Pierre Grelot took up the analysis that Émile Benveniste had carried out about Old Persian *arwasta* on an inscription by Darius in Naqš-i-Rustam; this philologist recognized in it a meaning analogous to that of the Armenian *arvest* (‘skill, ability, art’)¹³³. Pierre Grelot therefore retains the translations ‘skill’ to designate ‘bodily talent, the ability to succeed in practice’. The word would designate a human quality and not its practical results¹³⁴. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl seem to implicitly follow Bailey’s and Metzger’s interpretation by translating *’rvst* as ‘Heldentat’ (heroic action)¹³⁵. Since it is preceded by the substantive *zyn₂*, ‘weapon’, and the number 3, the inscription probably refers either to three military victories, rather than the skill in handling three weapons.

mlk – Common noun ‘king’, absolute state¹³⁶.

¹²⁶ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 253. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 771, s.v. *ntq*, Deir Alla verb Aphel, ‘to loosen’, ‘to take away’, ‘to conquer’.

¹²⁷ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 155-156, s.v. *byrb*.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

¹²⁹ H.W. BAILEY, *Caucasica*, «The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland», 1 (1943), pp. 1-5, p. 2.

¹³⁰ B.M. METZGER, *A Greek and Aramaic inscription discovered at Armazi in Georgia*, «Journal of Near Eastern Studies», 15 (1956), pp. 18-26, p. 24.

¹³¹ NYBERG, *Quelques inscriptions* cit., pp. 228-243.

¹³² P. GIGNOUX, *Glossaire des inscriptions pelevies et parthes*, Lund 1972, p. 47.

¹³³ É. BENVENISTE, *Études iraniennes*, in *Transactions of the Philological Society 1945*, London 1946, pp. 39-78, here p. 40. R. KENT, *Old Persian*, New Haven 1953, p. 170, mentions this explanation but prefers a more imprecise meaning: ‘activity’.

¹³⁴ P. GRELOT, *Remarques sur le bilingue grec-araméen d’Armazi*, «Semitica», 8 (1958), pp. 11-20, pp. 14-15.

¹³⁵ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 257.

¹³⁶ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, pp. 634-640, s.v. *mlk*.

lkb – $l_4 + kb_1$, adverb ‘thus’¹³⁷; l'_2 : exclamatory particle: ‘yes, certainly’¹³⁸. ‘Yes, such it is’.

mytyt – Uncertain word, perhaps a toponym or a common noun (cf. *supra*).

wkyn – Conjunction of coordination and adverb ‘and thus’¹³⁹.

kzy – $k_1 + zy$, introducing relative subordinate clause with a temporal, final, causal, explicative, normative or comparative meaning, ‘when’, ‘so that’, ‘as’, ‘that it was’¹⁴⁰.

Translation of line 7 – *He destroyed the fort of Tb(y)t. And there were three heroic actions, King, this is Mytyt, and thus [...]*

Line 8

bkyn – ‘This is how’ (cf. *supra*)¹⁴¹.

byny – Official Aramaic preposition with spatial meaning: ‘in the midst of’¹⁴².

bgw – Variant of the Official Aramaic substantive *bg*, ‘domain’, ‘fiefdom’¹⁴³. The declension *w* is visible on abstract nouns which indicate a non-physical reality such as ideas or concepts¹⁴⁴.

hyl – hyl_2 as a masculine substantive, ‘army’¹⁴⁵.

dhy – d_3 (variant of *zy*) + *hy*, variant of pronoun h'_1 used as a predicate to express the verb ‘to be’: ‘which is’¹⁴⁶.

tr – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read $'tr_2$ as an Official Aramaic variant of $'šr_4$ ‘place’¹⁴⁷. An alternative interpretation would be the reading $'ty_1$ as the Qal verb ‘to come’, ‘to go’¹⁴⁸.

wpdyt – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *nkenyt* as a single proper name derived from the verb *ni-kan-* ‘to bury’¹⁴⁹. We propose another reading with *w* + verb *pdy* ‘to ransom’, ‘to redeem’¹⁵⁰, with the final *taw* marking the Peal Perfect 1st person singular¹⁵¹: “and I redeemed”.

tr' – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read here the common noun ‘door’, ‘gate’¹⁵². The last sign looks like a $tēth$, so it could be a proper name *Trt*, perhaps a toponym. The general idea can be that Šargas would have negotiated for money the restitution of a locality conquered by the enemy. Another possibility would be the funding by this Iberian prince of fortification works on the gate of this place.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 489.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 560-561.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 499 and 517, s.v. *kyn* and *kn_4*.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 316-317, 496.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 279-280, s.v. *kyn*; p. 499, s.v. *kn_4*, and p. 517.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 152-154.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 143.

¹⁴⁴ VAN PELT, *Basics* cit., p. 23.

¹⁴⁵ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 369-370.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 264-267, 277.

¹⁴⁷ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 254: ‘on the place’. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 125-128, 136.

¹⁴⁸ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, s.v. $'ty_1$, pp. 133-136.

¹⁴⁹ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 254.

¹⁵⁰ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 902.

¹⁵¹ VAN PELT, *Basics* cit., p. 82.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 1232-1233.

ltht – *l+tht*, ‘below’¹⁵³ proposed by Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl. The *hēth* is damaged and uncertain.

hwd – Altheim and Stiehl read *hwd* as the Judeo-Aramaic substantive *hwd*, ‘point’, ‘summit’, ‘top’¹⁵⁴.

wkyn – Conjunction of coordination and adverb ‘and thus’¹⁵⁵.

š[r...] – *š'r₂*: Official Aramaic common noun, ‘the rest’ which remains¹⁵⁶.

Translation of line 8 – *This is how, in the midst of the domain in the midst of the domain, the army stood in the place and I redeemed the gate below the top (of the mountain?), and thus the rest...*

Line 9

hyb – A reading hesitation appears here. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *mzwr*, a word with uncertain meaning, from the adjective ‘strong’ which would give the substantive ‘warrior’¹⁵⁷. We estimate the reading *hyb*, attested as a substantive in Punic, with the meaning of ‘life’ and in Phoenician, meaning ‘animal’¹⁵⁸. This word is cognate to the adjective *hy₂* ‘living’, with a variant *hyy* attested in Samalian language¹⁵⁹.

zy – Pronoun ‘who’ introducing relative subordinate clause¹⁶⁰.

gury – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *hzky* ‘zum Sieg verhalf’, not found in the dictionary of Jacob Hoftijzer and Karel Jongeling¹⁶¹. We read rather *gury* as a Peil derivation expressing the passive voice of the verb *gwr*, ‘to be exiled’¹⁶². The overall meaning of this passage would indicate the payment of ransom for the benefit of captives deported by the enemy.

lqdm – *l + qdm₃*, ‘before’ with a local meaning¹⁶³.

msknyt – Ethnonym naming either Moschians or Massagetae and which met a close occurrence with the “king of Mskyt’n” read in the inscription of Narseh in Paikuli (NPi)¹⁶⁴. The mem is very damaged and it could be a qoph, but no Aramaic word can be linked with *qsknyt*.

btqn – *b + tqn*, ‘in the fortress’¹⁶⁵. Another possibility would be *btmn*, *b + tmn*, ‘there’¹⁶⁶.

¹⁵³ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, pp. 1209-1211 and 1266.

¹⁵⁴ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 254.

¹⁵⁵ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 499 and 517, s.v. *kyn* and *kn₄*.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 1098-1099.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 608.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 369, s.v. *hyb₁* & *hyb₂*.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 367-368.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 310.

¹⁶¹ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 245.

¹⁶² HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 11.

¹⁶³ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 253. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 989.

¹⁶⁴ NPi, §§91-94, H. HUMBACH and P.O. SKJÆRVØ (ed.), part 3.1, 1983, pP. 70-73. The Mskyt’n are in this case identified with the Massagetae (*Idem*, part 3.2, pp. 125-126). SCHLEICHER, *Iberia Caucasica* cit., 2021, pp. 83, 93.

¹⁶⁵ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, *tqn₂*, p. 1229.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 1222.

šnryt – Unknown proper name, probably a toponym. If this geographical name was issued from a Caucasian language, it would perhaps be linked to the K'artvelian root **cn-ex*, 'to press', possibly a reference to a wine press¹⁶⁷. The central part of this word is difficult to read. The letters nun, rēsh and yodh seem linked together by a horizontal line, but they are distinct, since *šht* and *šht* do not exist.

db'y' – d₃ (variant of *zy*) + *bw'* according to Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl¹⁶⁸, with *bw'₂* as a pronoun used as a predicate to express the verb 'to be': 'which is'.

msryk – The semkath and rēsh are here uncertain, but the same reading as the preceding occurrence of this word (l. 6) can be appreciated: 'bordering (territory)'¹⁶⁹.

wmwdyt – and *Nwdyt*. Unknown toponym¹⁷⁰. Here again, the stele is damaged, and there is no better hypothesis of restitution.

z[y] – relative pronoun 'which'¹⁷¹.

Translation of line 9 – *living (people) who was exiled, before the Moschians (or the Massagetae), in the fortress of Šnryt which is the bordering (territory) and Nwdyt which*

Line 10

ltht – preposition *l* + substantive *tht*, 'what is lower'¹⁷², with the meaning of 'below'.

'klyt (?) – Unknown toponym according to Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl¹⁷³. Perhaps a form derived from *'kl₁* (Official Aramaic verb Qal 'to eat') or *'kl₂* (Judeo-Aramaic substantive 'food')¹⁷⁴. This group of words, which seems to have been rewritten, is very hard to read.

bkyn – 'thus this is'¹⁷⁵.

btqn (?) – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *btqn* 'in the fortress'¹⁷⁶. The first and the second letter are damaged. The taw could be also a kāph. The qoph could also be indeed a semkath because of two erased zones. The final nun seems to be a taw. Consequently, this word can also be read *bkst*, but *kst₁* ('substantive garment', 'clothing', 'covering'), is less probable¹⁷⁷.

bz – According to Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, a variant of the verb *bzz₂* 'plunder' (uncertain reading)¹⁷⁸. Another possibility would be the substantive *bz₁*, 'good fortune', 'tribute'¹⁷⁹.

¹⁶⁷ G.A. KLIMOV (†), *Etymological Dictionary of the Kartvelian Languages*, Berlin-New York 1998, pp. 125-126.

¹⁶⁸ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 254. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 237.

¹⁶⁹ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 803.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 721.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 310.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 2, p. 1210.

¹⁷³ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 245.

¹⁷⁴ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 51-52.

¹⁷⁵ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 279-280, s.v. kyn, p. 499 and kn₄, p. 517.

¹⁷⁶ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, tqn₂, p. 1229.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 526.

¹⁷⁸ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 255. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 149.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

ysb – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *yslk*. We disagree with this reading since this word cannot be found in the dictionary of Jacob Hoftijzer and Karel Jongeling. Moreover, the semkhat and lāmadh have a heterodox form, because the upper curve of the lāmadh is inverted, while the ending of the semkath is pronounced very curiously, almost reminiscent of a bēth. We can read *ysb* as the participle active masculine singular constructed state of the Old Aramaic verb *ysb*, ‘being seated’, ‘residing’, ‘presiding over’¹⁸⁰. The chaotic shape of the last letter also opens up the possibility of a dālath, with the hypothesis of the Judeo-Aramaic verb Qal *ysd*₁ ‘to found, to establish’¹⁸¹.

mytyt – proper name, uncertain toponym (cf. *supra*). The loop of the final *taw* seems a little too low to us, and it is not quite clear. The option of *mytyn* should not be ruled out.

twb – *twb*₅, adverb ‘again’¹⁸².

nykwrh – apparently a proper name, probably a toponym of Iranian or Caucasian origin. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl interpret the first component (*nyk-*) as the Old Persian *naiba-* ‘beautiful’, linked to Middle-Persian *nēvak*, and to Ossetian *niv*, ‘shape’, ‘form’¹⁸³. According to them, a possible reconstitution would be **nēvak / (nēk)-vārā*, with the second component derived from Avestan, *var* or *vara* ‘castle’, with the meaning ‘beautiful castle’. However, if this name was of Caucasian origin, it could perhaps be related to the K’artvelian lemma **ni-(s)-kart*, ‘beak’, with Svan *nikrat*, *nikrät*, attested in Classical Georgian in the form *nikart-i*¹⁸⁴. This word combines the prefix **ni-* with the root verb **(s)kert-*; *(s)krt-*, ‘to peck’. The contraction between Georgian *ar* and Svan *ra* seems to be the result of a difference in the vocalization of the old sonant *r*. In Zan repertory, no close term is found¹⁸⁵. A hypothetical perched fortress would be linked by its form and its elevated position to a bird’s beak. The final *hē* of the word is partly erased.

mtq – active participle Aphel of the verb *ntq*, ‘to dissolve’, ‘to tear’, ‘to remove’¹⁸⁶. Whether it is a conquest or the destruction of an area occupied by the invaded enemy, one cannot decide straight away.

wdyly – *w* + *dy*₂ + *ly*₁ as a formula introducing a verbal clause with precativ function¹⁸⁷. The dālath is almost erased. There is also the less probable hypothesis of a variant of the adverb *wdyy*, ‘certainly’¹⁸⁸.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 474.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 462.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 1205-1206.

¹⁸³ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., pp. 255-256.

¹⁸⁴ Z. SARJVELAZE, ძველი ქართული ენის ლექსიკონი (მასალები), Tbilisi 1995, p. 164. S. SARDS-HWELADSE & H. FÄHNRIK, *Altgeorgisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Leiden-Boston 2005, p. 915.

¹⁸⁵ KLIMOV (†), *Etymological Dictionary* cit., p. 143.

¹⁸⁶ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., pp. 253-254. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary*, 2, p. 771, s.v. *ntq*, in Deir Alla dialect, verb Aphel ‘to loosen, to take away, to conquer’.

¹⁸⁷ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., pp. 246, 314-317, 549. ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 256: ‘mein Eigentum’.

¹⁸⁸ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 296.

by[...] – *by*₁ as a Qal verb, active participle singular feminine absolute state of *bwt*₁ / *byt*₁, verb ‘to stay’, to ‘reside’ (uncertain interpretation)¹⁸⁹; or the preposition *by*₂, whose probable meaning would be ‘without’¹⁹⁰.

Translation of line 10 – (is) below the place of 'klyt. The good fortune is again established in the fortress over Mytyt. Nykwrh was destroyed, and may it be...

Line 11

l + tt – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *l + tt* as the Judeo-Aramaic preposition ‘under’, variant of *tht*, singular determined state of *tht* – a very uncertain interpretation¹⁹¹.

*yhw**y* – Despite a difficult decryption¹⁹², it is possible to read this word as either a derivation from the Official Aramaic Aphel verb *yh* ‘to prescribe’, ‘to decree’¹⁹³.

wkyn – conjunction of coordination and adverb ‘and thus’¹⁹⁴.

'nh – personal pronoun, first person singular ‘me’¹⁹⁵. The alaph is partly erased, as well as the nun and the hē which follow. The very long ending of the lāmādh on the lower line merges with certain letters, which complicates their identification.

šrgs – Proper name ‘Šargas’, from Ossetian *cārgās*, ‘eagle’. The beginning of the name is erased; we only clearly distinguish the gāmāl, the semkath and part of the resh. The final semkath is embedded in the taw of the top row.

gyl – Qal verb ‘to rejoice’¹⁹⁶. Since the passage is damaged, the reading remains uncertain.

[...] – This unread word by Altheim and Stiehl seems to have three or four letters.

lqdm – ‘before’, ‘in front of’¹⁹⁷.

msykyt – Proper name, probably the city of Mc‘xet‘a, if not the nation of Moschians or Massagetae. The name is difficult to read, only the final part *kyt* is certain. This word can be compared with Middle-Persian *mskyt'n* in NPi 45 (106)¹⁹⁸.

byrt – common noun ‘fortress’¹⁹⁹.

zy – preposition indicating a relation of belonging²⁰⁰.

ywnt' – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl see in this word a plural common noun from Iranian origin, ‘hero’, ‘young man’²⁰¹ in correspondence with Avestan *yuvan*,

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 148.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 151-152; *by*; variant of *bn*₁ ‘son’, ‘daughter’ (uncertain interpretation). *Ibid.*, pp. 168-172.

¹⁹¹ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 1236 s.v. *tt*'.

¹⁹² The hē could also be read as a hēth because this letter is partly erased. An oblique line connects this group of letters to the line of the previous taw. After the hē or the hēth, an area is damaged where we believe to distinguish a yodh and a rēsh or a dālath. We would therefore have *yhyd*, *ybyd*, *ybyr* or even *yhyr*, but none of these hypotheses is able to satisfy the general reading.

¹⁹³ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, pp. 453-454.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 499 and 517, s.v. *kyn* and *kn*₁.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, s.v. *'nh*₃, pp. 79-80. VAN PELT, *Basics* cit., p. 222.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 222.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 253. ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 253.

¹⁹⁸ GIGNOUX, *Glossaire* cit., p. 29.

¹⁹⁹ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., pp. 155-156, s.v. *byrb*.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 312.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 453.

yūn, ‘youth’, ‘hero’. A further cognate would be the Alanian *iunik* or *unik*, and East Ossetian *vānig*, *vonig*, *unig*, ‘young bull’. Consequently, *yūntā* would be the plural of Alanian **yūn* ‘young man’, ‘hero’ to be added afterwards. Oswald Szemerényi linked this lemma with the ethnonym **ywn* ‘Greek’, “a name that has been used for this people since the 8th century BCE and which is also attested in Armenian” (Յոյն, յուհի, նոց) ²⁰². Other possibilities: *ywn*₁, singular absolute state substantive ‘dove’ in Deir Alla dialect; or, more interesting, *ywn*₂ ‘marsh’, ‘swamp’ ²⁰³. If this word was Aramaic, the desinence *-t* would indicate the plural feminine determined state, but the Iranian etymology can be here privileged.

lb – If we consider an uncomplete word *l*₄ + *b*[...], several possibilities are given by the preposition indicating direction or with locative, possessive, temporal, attributive meaning, ‘to B...’, ‘on B...’, ‘belonging to B...’, ‘during’, ‘until B...’, ‘for B...’. The other option of regarding *lb* as Official Aramaic substantive ‘heart’ ²⁰⁴ should be considered, as it can indicate the inclination or disposition of mind, which matches the start of the following line.

Translation of line 11 – *under (this place). He ordered and thus I, Šargas, rejoice [...] before Msykyt, the fortress of heroes. The heart*

Line 12

This part of the inscription is the most difficult to decipher due to the addition of letters on the interval between lines 11 and 12, added to the damage of several signs.

't – preposition ‘near’, ‘with’ ²⁰⁵. Despite the damaged nature of the field at the beginning of the line, the first letter is more likely an ālaph.

šlyn – uncertain variant of *šlyt*, Official Aramaic substantive, ‘tranquillity’ ²⁰⁶, cognate to Old Aramaic Qal verb *šly* ‘to be at rest, to stay quietly’. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *šyn* as ‘peace’, but they did not take in account the lāmadh placed above and that we attribute to this word ²⁰⁷.

'yt – Above the second vocable, a word is added above the line. Under the branch of lamadh, three letters are disposed: an ālap, a yodh, and a taw above. The area is damaged and the interpretation is uncertain. We don’t retain the reading of Altheim and Stiehl (*'tr* – substantive ‘wealth’ ²⁰⁸), but rather the Official Aramaic preposition *'yt*₃, used temporarily: ‘during’.

rgšyn – We read *rgšyn*, perhaps derived from Official Aramaic verb Qal *rgš*: ‘to be excited, furious, troubled’ ²⁰⁹. We would tend to interpret it as a deverbal of this verb, at plural masculine absolute state, with the translation ‘troubles’.

²⁰² ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 256. H. HÜBSCHMANN, *Armenische Grammatik*, Leipzig 1897, 1, 56.

²⁰³ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 453.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 561.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 131-132, s.v. *'t*.

²⁰⁶ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, pp. 1142, 1144.

²⁰⁷ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 245. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 1129.

²⁰⁸ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 245. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 898, s.v. *'tr*₂.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 1061.

lkb – *l*₄ + *kb*₁, adverb ‘thus’²¹⁰; *l*₂: exclamatory particle: ‘yes’, ‘certainly’²¹¹. ‘Yes, such it is’. The first foot of the second letter goes very low, and could suggest a goph.

pqdt – Peal Perfect 1st person singular form of the verb *pqd*₁ ‘to command’²¹². Another possible reading would be *pslt* as the Peal Perfect verb *psl*₁ ‘to sculpt’, 1st person singular²¹³, ‘I sculpted’. The third letter of this word is damaged by a hole.

zyn – Singular determined state of the substantive *zyn*₂, ‘weapon’²¹⁴.

rwst – Parthian substantive ‘virtue’²¹⁵, translated as ‘Heldentat’ (‘heroic action’) by Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl (cf. *supra*)²¹⁶.

bzlyq – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *b* + *zlyq*, Official Aramaic absolute singular substantive, ‘in the brilliance, the splendour’²¹⁷. The yodh does not seem visible, because it would be in an erased zone.

lkb – *l*₄ + *kb*₁, adverb ‘thus’²¹⁸; *l*₂: exclamatory particle: ‘yes’, ‘certainly’²¹⁹. ‘Yes, such it is’. The last letter of the word is damaged.

mytyt – proper name, uncertain toponym (cf. *supra*). The first letter is partly erased.

Altheim and Stiehl read *zy* – preposition indicating a relation of belonging bound to the proper name at the start of the next line²²⁰.

Translation of line 12 – (*was*) *with the tranquillity during the troubles, and certainly I commanded a brilliant action* (literally: *the heroic action in the brilliance*). *Certainly Mytyt...*

Line 13

šrgs – Proper name ‘Šargas’.

bt – Giorgi Ceret’eli reads unconvincingly *btr’hwys*. A possibility advanced by Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl would be to read *btr* as the preposition *btr*: ‘at the expense of’²²¹. A loop in the direction of the left is engraved under the *bēth*, probably for a purely aesthetic reason. We prefer to read *bt* as *byt*: ‘house’²²².

rg[m...] – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl saw only three *gāmals* as part of a word partly erased²²³. We choose to read with prudence *rg[m]* as the passive participle singular of the verb ‘to stone’ attested in the Aramaic dialect of Hatra, meaning probably ‘accused’²²⁴. The erased zone contained two or three letters.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 489.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 560-561.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 931-932.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 922.

²¹⁴ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 319.

²¹⁵ GIGNOUX, *Glossaire* cit., p. 47.

²¹⁶ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 257.

²¹⁷ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Glossaire* cit., 1, p. 331, s.v. *zlyq*.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 489.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, pp. 560-561.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 312.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 206, s.v. *btr* and *btrb*.

²²² *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 156-163.

²²³ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 156: *g(zīz)*, *g(dīd)*, “„abgeschnitten“ oder *g(hū)*, „radiert, geschabt“.”

²²⁴ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Glossaire* cit., 2, p. 1060, s. v. *rgm*.

zy – Preposition ‘of’ connecting the previous noun with its following complement²²⁵. The zain and the yodh are very near insofar as they look like a gāmal which could have been the last letter of the preceding erased word, even if it remains a pure supposition.

’sprwg – proper name Asparug²²⁶. Although the semkath is partly erased, the name is clearly visible and recognized by Giorgi Ceret’eli, Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl²²⁷. An alternative reading would be *’pk*, Official Aramaic verb ‘to twist’, ‘to distort’²²⁸, but the following *rwg* does not exist in Aramaic, otherwise as an hypothetical proper name.

by – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read here the common noun *br*’, ‘son’. Giorgi Ceret’eli reads : *br*. We differ in proposing *by*₂ as the preposition ‘without’²²⁹.

mr’ – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read here the common noun *mr*’ ‘lord, master’²³⁰. As the letters are damaged, there are other possibilities of reading, such as the substantive *mrš*₁, with uncertain meaning (possibly ‘loan’) ²³¹.

yšqt – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read here *mskyt*, but the form of the letters is nearer of the interpretation given by Giorgi Ceret’eli (*yhwyt*), looking like a variant mixing two verbal forms *yhwḥ* and *yhyt*, both meaning ‘he was’²³². However, another reading is possible, consisting to read *yšqt* as a determined substantive which evokes a cast statue²³³.

tnrw – The third and fourth letters are damaged. Giorgi Ceret’eli reads *tnt*. The privileged reading is *tnrw* as a Pael Perfect verb 3rd person plural masculine of *tnr*₁ (‘to heat’, ‘to excite’, denominative of *tnr*₂)²³⁴. According to Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, this sentence would mean that Mihrdat and Šargas, whose successes have been formerly described, have “heaten” Asparug, who commanded, near Mc’xet’a, the troops gathered in his ‘Fortress of Heroes’. These scholars affirm that the king and his *pitiaxēs* burned him by fire and accomplished the greatest exploit to reconquer the Iberian capital²³⁵. But if *tnrw* applies to *yšqt*, it would mean that a metal statue was melted down, probably as an act of *damnatio memoriae* against Asparug, rather than a large burning during a war.

4 – We disagree here with Altheim and Stiehl’s reading of *hwḥ*. The four signs on line 13 actually seem to indicate a number, insofar as they are identical and recall the last symbol of the inscription of Šērapeitis – the 1 of 21. As a consequence, we shall read here IIII: four. There is an ambiguity with the first sign which consists in a simple

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, p. 312.

²²⁶ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 256.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 17 pp. 256-257.

²²⁸ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 95.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1, pp. 151-152.

²³⁰ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, pp. 682-689.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 2, p. 696.

²³² GIGNOUX, *Glossaire* cit., p. 67.

²³³ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 466. s. v. *yšq*.

²³⁴ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die zweite (aramäische) Inschrift* cit., p. 177. HOFTIJZER & JONGELING *Dictionary* cit., 2, p. 1224.

²³⁵ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 257.

small oblique line embedded in the foot of an upper tau. Considering the general meaning of the sentence, it seems to summarize the preceding narrative into four main events: the conquest of some positions in Armenia (l. 6-7); the “redeeming of a gate” and “exiled people” (l. 7-10); the capture of Nykwrh and the tranquillity established on Mytyt (l. 10-13); and, finally, the victory over Asparug (l. 13-14).

Line 14

The last words of this inscription are almost similarly read by Giorgi Ceret'eli, Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl.

zyn' – Singular determined state of the substantive *zyn*₂, ‘weapon’²³⁶. Even if the last letters are not clear, the context helps to decide the interpretation about this recurrent sentence.

'rwst – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read this word as a common noun from an Iranian origin, ‘virtue’²³⁷, ‘achievement’²³⁸, which would be mean here again ‘heroic action’ (cf. *supra*). The problem is that a significant gap exists and the tau is not certain.

rwbt – Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl read *'bt* as the phonically correct form of the second singular masculine of the Pe'al verb *'bd*. The sign they read as ‘ayn looks more like a waw raised and tilted to the right. We see a rēsh above the two holes, which indicates that the lapidary has compensated a previous damage of the stone. A thin line relieves the final tau at the foot of the letter pē or šādhē of line 13, which could indicate a closing of the text by the lapidary. Thus, this word would be a plural form *rwbt* of *rwb*₂, variant of the adjective *rb*₂, ‘numerous’, ‘big’, ‘large’, ‘great’, ‘important’²³⁹.

Translation of lines 13-14 – ... *Šargas. The cursed house of Asparug is without lord; (his) statue was burnt. Four great heroic actions (were accomplished).*

Historical commentary

The stele of *Šargas* provides valuable information about the kings of Caucasian Iberia, on the structure of their court led by the authority of the *pitiaxēs*, as well as on the conflicts which devastated the Southern Caucasia possibly in the last third of the 1st century CE, and about the status of Aramaic writing in the Iberian society.

1. *The role of pitiaxēs in the Iberian diarchy*

The prince known as the *pitiaxēs* constituted, with the king, the second fundamental pillar of the Iberian political system. As a sign of his importance, this institu-

²³⁶ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 1, p. 319.

²³⁷ GIGNOUX, *Glossaire* cit., p. 47.

²³⁸ CERET'ELI, *Армзская* cit., 1962, p. 375. ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 257.

²³⁹ HOFTIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., 2, pp. 1045-1051, 1062.

tion has left many traces in epigraphy and archaeology. A comparison is necessary with the *bdeašxk'* of Armenia and the *bidaxšān* of Iran to better identify the features of resemblance as well as the differences with the Iberian *pitiaxai*. The *pitiaxēs*, that specialists also designate under the names of *vitaxa*, *bidaxš* or *pitiaxš*, is attested in various sources in no less varied forms: *bḥš* and *pyḥš* in Aramaic²⁴⁰, *πιτάξης* and *βίσταξ* in Greek²⁴¹, *vitaxa* in Latin²⁴², *byḥš* in Parthian, *bḥšy* in Middle Persian²⁴³, *pḥš'* and *'ptkš'* in Syriac (*pḥahšā*)²⁴⁴, *bdeašx* (բդաշխ) in Armenian²⁴⁵, *pitiaxši* (პიტიაქში)²⁴⁶ and *patiaxši* (პატიაქში)²⁴⁷ in Georgian, *biḡas* (بيغاس) in Arabic²⁴⁸. From a linguistic point of view, the softening of the first occlusive consonant pē into beth indicates the anteriority of the form *pyḥš* on the stele of Šargas, compared with the form *byḡy'ḥš* on the plate of Bori dated from the 3rd century CE.

The disparity of sources, as well as the difficulty in grasping the nuances between the different meanings that this institution may have taken over time and space, has rendered difficult all attempts of definition. Strabo, the first source to discuss the institutions of the Iberian kingdom, does not mention the position of *pitiaxēs* by name, but refers to the role of the 'second' of the royal lineage who 'dispenses justice and commands the army'²⁴⁹. However, an etymological argument establishes a link between the second ruler of the kingdom of Iberia mentioned by Strabo and the documents relating to the Iberian *pitiaxēs*: the term of *bidaxš* in Middle Persian can indeed be

²⁴⁰ The form *pyḥš* can be read on the stele of Šargas: AP'AK'IZE and *alii*, *Muxema* cit., plate 61, pp. 72-73; F. ALTHEIM and R. STIEHL, *Die zweite (aramäische) Inschrift* cit., pp. 173-175. The Armazic substantive *byty'ḥš* is engraved on a silver plate from Bori: G.V. CERET'ELI, *Эпиграфические находки в Мухема – древней столице Грузии*, «Вестник древней истории», 2 (1948) 49-57, p. 53 and fol. These names can be compared to those appearing on the Aramaic inscriptions in Hatra, dating from the 1st-3rd centuries CE: *bḥš'*, on a statue: F. SAFAR, *Ketābāt al-Haḏr*, «Sumer», 18 (1962), 21-64, p. 42 n. 143; A. CAQUOT, *Nouvelles inscriptions araméennes de Hatra VI*, «Syria», 41 (1964), pp. 251-272, p. 259; *pdḥš'*, on a commemorative inscription: SAFAR, *Ketābāt al-Haḏr* cit., p. 37, n. 127; CAQUOT, *Nouvelles inscriptions* cit., p. 256. The inscription ŠKZ, §47, P. HUYSE (ed.), p. 59, contains the forms *bḥšy* in Middle-Persian and *byḥš* in Parthian. W. SUNDERMANN, *Bidaxš*, «Encyclopaedia Iranica», IV, 3, London, Boston 1989, pp. 242-244.

²⁴¹ The form *pitiaxēs* (πιτάξης) can be found on the stele of Sērapeitis, l.2 and 3-4, and on the intaglio of Ousas: N. PREUD'HOMME, *On the Origin of the Name K'art'li: Pitiaxēs Ousas' Intaglio and Karchēdoi Iberians*, «Iberia-Colchis», 14 (2018), pp. 212-222. The dative form *πιτάξιῃ* appears on a sigillary inscription (AP'AK'IZE and *alii*, *Muxema* cit., fig. 4 p. 29) and on a silver bowl both found in Armazc'ixe (AP'AK'IZE and *alii*, *Muxema* cit., fig. 26, p. 63), while *βίσταξ* appears only in Hesychius, *Lexicon*, 632. The genitive form *πιτάξου* appears in ŠKZ, §47, P. HUYSE (ed.), p. 59. Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, 13, 16; I, 14, 32; XIV, 32, 38, considers falsely *Πιτάξης* as a proper name.

²⁴² Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XXIII, 6, 14, who qualifies them as masters of the cavalry (*magistri equitum*) of the Persian king.

²⁴³ The Middle-Persian term *bḥšy* appears on an Armazi silver dish, probably dating from the 3rd century CE: AP'AK'IZE and *alii*, *Muxema* cit., table 49.1-4, pp. 552-553; W.B. HENNING, *A Sassanian Silver Bowl from Georgia*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 24 (1961), pp. 353-356, p. 354.

²⁴⁴ J. GIPPERT, *Iranica Armeno-Iberica*, Wien 1993, pp. 207-216.

²⁴⁵ HÜBSCHMANN, *Armenische Grammatik* cit., pp. 119-120.

²⁴⁶ *Martyrdom of St Šušānik*, I, 6; IV, 20; IV, 24; VII, 19, 1; VIII, 17; IX, 20; X, 22, 11; XIII, 24, 6; XVI, 29; *Martyrdom of St Eustathius*, III, 34, 3; *Conversion of K'art'li (Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay)*, version A, codex Šatberdi, 1, 325, 7; 1, 326, 10. *Life of the Kings* (in *K'art'lis C'xovreba*), S. QAUXC'ISVILI (ed.), 60.

²⁴⁷ *Life of Vaxtang Gorgasali* (in *K'art'lis C'xovreba*), S. QAUXC'ISVILI (ed.), 161⁶; 237⁵.

²⁴⁸ CERET'ELI, *The Bilingual Inscription* cit., pp. 49-83 [2012, pp. 146-182], p. 60 [p. 157]. SUNDERMANN, *Bidaxš* cit., pp. 242-244.

²⁴⁹ Strabo, *Geography*, XI, 3, 6: «ὁ δὲ δεύτερος δικαιοδοτεῖ καὶ στρατηλατεῖ».

derived from the Old Persian **dvitiyaxšaya*, ‘second ruler’ or ‘viceroy’, which fits perfectly with the letter and spirit of Strabo’s description²⁵⁰. This function of second after the king can thus be considered as an institution attested in the territories under Iranian influence²⁵¹. In Iberia, the stele of the victories of the *pitiaxēs* Šargas constitutes the first epigraphic testimony of this function which is namely evoked. The prince presents himself as “the *piṭahš* of King Mihrdat” (*pyṭhš [mb]rdt m[lk]*), attaching his function to the service of the royal person and also his domain. Šargas describes his mission which places him in responsibility “before the cisterns, and for every people, and among us, and, in the same way, for anyone belonging to the domani of the kingship”. More specifically, the *piṭahš* is responsible for managing his own domain, “(which is) also the domain of kingship”²⁵², over the city or the land of *Mytyt* conquered in the name of the king²⁵³. This division of roles did not prevent Šargas from participating in the war against the *Msknyt* and the Armenians²⁵⁴. The *pitiaxēs* therefore appears as the second character of the kingdom, sharing all his powers with the sovereign. This prince related to the king held second place in the kingdom, playing a role equivalent to the functions of a prime minister, a supreme court judge and a superintendent. This concentration of sovereign powers conferred on this person a particular authority over the administration, a preponderant influence in the court and the royal entourage, as well as a first-rate legitimacy, making this character the main lieutenant of the sovereign and his potential successor in case of failure. The need to retain substantial resources for the exercise of such a function suggests that this prince was to be in charge of the royal domain with the supervision of his property, as in the case of Pitiaxēs Publicius Agrippa, described as “master of the house of King Parsman” (Pharasmanēs II) on the stele of Sērapeitis²⁵⁵. The possible reading of a tax levied on the royal domain supports this interpretation (l. 3-4). This tax could be understood as part of a war effort that would mobilize significant financial resources, unless it would signify the return of the royal authority in a region formerly rebellious or occupied by the adversary.

The bilingual inscription of Sērapeitis establishes an equivalence between the ‘master of the house’ or ‘head of the court’ (*rb trbš*) and the *pitiaxēs* (πιτιάξης in Greek, *bṭhš* in Aramaic)²⁵⁶. Indeed, this bilingual inscription from Armazi shows the name of Publicius Agrippa, occupying with the king the functions of *pitiaxēs* according to the Greek part, while he is the head of the court according to the Aramaic part. The stele further

²⁵⁰ W. HINZ, R. BORGER & G. GROPP, *Altiranische Funde und Forschungen*, Berlin 1969, pp. 149-153. O. SZEMERÉNYI, *Iranica V*, in *Monumentum H. S. Nyberg*, vol. II, *Acta Iranica* 5, Tehran & Liège 1975, 313-394, pp. 361-366. We do not retain the etymology adopted by GARSOĪAN, *The Epic Histories* cit., p. 516, which derives the Middle-Persian term *bitaxš* from the Old Iranian *axš*, ‘to observe’, and from *paiti*, ‘chief’.

²⁵¹ É. BENVENISTE, *Titres et noms propres en iranien ancien*, Paris 1966, pp. 50-65 ; BRAUND, *Georgia* cit., pp. 211-214; J. LINDERSKI, *How Did King Flavius Dades and Pitiaxes Publicius Agrippa Acquire Their Roman Names?*, «Roman Questions», II (2007), 262-276, n. 4 p. 263.

²⁵² Stele of Šargas, l. 3.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, l. 5-6.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 6-7.

²⁵⁵ SEG XVI, 781. CERET’ELI, *The Bilingual Inscription* cit.

²⁵⁶ Stele of Sērapeitis, l. 3, 6, 12, 14-15. SEG XVI, 781.

qualifies Yodmangan, the husband of Sērapeitis, as head of the court, but establishes as a corresponding term in the Greek part the title of *epitropos* (ἐπίτροπος), since this word has both the meanings of administrator, intendant and governor. It thus appears that the functions of *pitiaxēs*, chief of the court, intendant and governor, tended to overlap without being totally confused, while other characters apart from the *pitiaxēs* were able to perform these functions in the kingdom. The Georgian epigraphist Giorgi Ceret'eli claimed that there were two *pitiaxai* with the Iberian king, one senior and the other junior²⁵⁷. The issue is whether this adjective 'young' relates to the institutional title or to the proper name. Our preference is for this second option, so as to opt for the translation 'Zewaḥ the Younger', perhaps by reference to Zewaḥ the Elder, the father of the *pitiaxēs* Šargas. These two characters would both belong to the same princely family as the second Zewaḥ appearing on the stele of Sērapeitis. The two *pitiaxai* hypothesis does not fit well with Strabo's description of Iberia, which attributes major governmental functions to the second figure in the kingdom who assisted the king²⁵⁸. What is more, apart from the disputed case of the bilingual inscription, no epigraphic or sigillographic document found in Iberia specifies the title of minor or major *pitiaxēs*, and no source enables us to establish with certainty that two Iberian *pitiaxai* would have exercised their functions simultaneously. If, however, it would be necessary to admit the existence of several *pitiaxai* in the Iberian institutional system, one would therefore be inclined to think that the first in rank would have occupied the function of prime minister of the king, while the other *pitiaxēs* would have held military commands or a provincial government, like the *bidaxš* ruling the borderland of Gōgarēnē²⁵⁹.

The stele of Šargas offers the most significant insight concerning the distribution of powers between the king and the *pitiaxēs* in Caucasian Iberia. While the sovereign, supreme leader of the army, reaps the fruits of military victories and radiates his glory, the *pitiaxēs* is the main master builder of royal achievements. As manager of the royal domain, the *pitiaxēs* governs the capital, supervises the sovereign's property in his domain, particularly palaces, lands and herds, and participates in the conduct of military campaigns. Sign of the diarchic nature of their power, their respective legitimacies go hand in hand as well as the tamgas on the stele of Šargas.

2. Royal and aristocratic onomastics

The onomastics of the characters in the inscription denotes a strong influence of Iranian and especially Sarmatian names. Zewaḥ the Elder, father of Šargas, is not explicitly attested in the rest of the documentation, even if the documentation allows

²⁵⁷ CERET'ELI, *The Bilingual Inscription* cit., 1942, pp. 70-71. In the bilingual Armazi inscription, the *pitiaxēs* Zewaḥ is called 'the Younger' (νέωτερος; *qlyl*).

²⁵⁸ Strabo, *Geography*, XI, 3, 6, *supra*.

²⁵⁹ C. TOUMANOFF, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, Washington 1963, pp. 467-475. R.H. HEWSEN, *The Geography of Ananias of Širak (Ašxabac'oyc')*, Wiesbaden, 1992, pp. 200-203. O. LORD-KIPANIDZE, *Das alte Georgien (Kolchis und Iberien) in Strabons Geographie – Neue Scholien*, Amsterdam 1996, p. 84.

a comparison with other Iberian princes: Zēouachos the Younger, *pitiaxēs* of the king Pharasmanēs II, father of Sērapeitis, was probably a descendant of Zewaḥ the Elder. On the other hand, Prince Zeuachēs, husband of Karpak, appears on a gem found in the necropolis of Armazisxevi²⁶⁰. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl derive this name from a form in Old Iranian **zivaka*- not attested and which is close to the Armenian Zik²⁶¹.

In the 1st and 2nd centuries CE, four Iberian kings bore the names Mithridatēs or Mihrdat and Pharasmanēs or Parsman²⁶². Their distribution over four generations marks a certain dynastic continuity in the transmission of the names and values which were attached to them. Etymologically, the name Mithridates comes from the Persian form Mithradāta, 'given by Mithra'²⁶³. The name Miθra itself derives from the substantive *mitrā* denoting 'contract', with the meanings of 'convention, agreement, promise, covenant', insofar as the meaning of the common name has connections with the attributes and functions of the god Mithra²⁶⁴. This divinity, associated with the sun without being confused with it, is perceived as beneficial in the writings of Ṛgveda and Mihr Yašt: Mithra is the guarantor of the oath, protects living beings and watches over the country²⁶⁵. The Avesta emphasizes the belief that this god would strengthen the power of rulers by suppressing popular seditions. Particularly vigorous among the Persians, the cult of Mithras also seems to have marked the religious practices in ancient Southern Caucasia²⁶⁶. This theophoric name finds various variations in Latin (Mithridates), in Greek (Μιθραδάτης, Μιθριδάτης), in Aramaic (Mhrdt) in Armenian (Mihrdat, Միհրդատ), as well as in Georgian (Mirdat, მირდატ)²⁶⁷.

Onomastics clearly link the name of Pharasmanēs to the notion of *farr(ab)* – the glory haloing the rulers of Iranian culture with divine legitimacy. Etymologically, this word means 'stay of the *farr*' or 'spirit of the *farr*'²⁶⁸. In general, this name is attested in our sources in its Latin forms – Pharasmanes and Farasmanis, Greek – Pharasmanēs (Φαρασμάνης), Aramaic – Prsmn, Armenian – P'arsman (Փարսման), Georgian – P'arsman (ფარსმან)²⁶⁹. The name of King Pharasmanēs I appears in classical sources – in Tacitus through the form Pharasmanes, and in Cassius Dio through the form

²⁶⁰ KGIG II, n. 241.

²⁶¹ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., 1963, p. 248.

²⁶² M. SCHOTTKY, *Vorarbeiten zu einer Königsliste Kaukasisch-Iberiens. 2. Das Zeitalter Pharasmanes' I., Anabasis. Studia Classica et Orientalia*, 4, 2013, pp. 133-148. Id., *Vorarbeiten zu einer Königsliste Kaukasisch-Iberiens. 3. Pharasmanes II. und Xepbarnug*, «Anabasis. Studia Classica et Orientalia», 5 (2014), pp. 86-107. N. PREUD'HOMME, *Rois et royauté en Ibérie du Caucase*, doctoral dissertation, Paris 2019, pp. 99-135.

²⁶³ F. JUSTI, *Iranisches Namenbuch*, Marburg 1895, pp. 209-213.

²⁶⁴ H.-P. SCHMIDT, *Mithra I. Mitra in Old Indian and Mithra in Old Iranian*, «Encyclopædia Iranica Online», published August 15, 2006.

²⁶⁵ Avesta, *Yašts*, 13, 24, 95, *Hymn to Fravašis*, translation by P. LECOQ, p. 506.

²⁶⁶ P. BRIANT, *Histoire de l'Empire perse de Cyrus à Alexandre*, Paris 1996, pp. 262-264. G. R. TSETSKHLADZE, *The Cult of Mithras in Ancient Colchis*, «Revue de l'histoire des religions», 209, 2 (1992), pp. 115-124.

²⁶⁷ RAPP JR., *The Sasanian World* cit., p. 224.

²⁶⁸ MACKENZIE, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* cit., p. 53. RAPP JR., *The Sasanian World* cit., n. 193 p. 223.

²⁶⁹ F. JUSTI, *Iranisches Namenbuch* cit., p. 91. Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of Armenia*, II, 46, M. ABELEAN and S. YARUT'IWNEAN (eds.), 171₁₅. R.W. THOMSON, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, Oxford 1996, n. 4 p. 186. RAPP JR., *The Sasanian World* cit., n. 193 p. 223.

Φαρασμάνης²⁷⁰. In the Iberian epigraphy, Pharasmanēs I is mentioned twice, on the dedication of the Armazi fortifications by Vespasian as well as on the stele of the victories of Pitiaxēs Šargas, both relating to the reign of his son Mihrdat or Mithridatēs II – on the first inscription, written in Greek, this Iberian sovereign is mentioned with the title of ‘king’ (βασιλεύς), while on the second, in Aramaic language, he figures with the title of ‘great king’ (*mlk rb*)²⁷¹.

Since the first works published concerning this stele of Šargas, it is commonly agreed that this inscription dates back to the reign of Mithridatēs II, son of Pharasmanēs I. If, unlike his father, the reign of this second Mithridatēs is not known to us with the same amount of detail through the accounts of Roman historians such as Tacitus or Cassius Dio, it is, however, documented by three inscriptions – the stele of Šargas, the stele of Vespasian fortifying Armazi and the epigram of Amaspos²⁷², which makes this Mithridatēs the most cited king in Greek and Aramaic epigraphy relating to Iberia. Some passages from Greek, Armenian and Georgian sources are also of great help in contextualizing events affecting the Caucasian scene.

3. Wars and conflicts in Southern Caucasia

The course of events exposed in the stele of Šargas remains complicated to explain, due to the difficulties of deciphering an inscription whose several fragments are missing or difficult to read owing to the spelling of the Armazic letters. The toponyms and characters mentioned are also arduous to identify and almost always occur as hapax, appearing only through this inscription. However, it is possible to draw some observations about the political situation that Mihrdat had to face during his reign.

The inscription refers to several military operations. In the process, an offensive by the Iberian king in Armenia reportedly led to the conquest of at least one stronghold, namely the fort of Tb(y)t (l. 7), whose exact location remains unknown, but probably near a “bordering (land)” (*msryk*) mentioned on l. 6. This event seems to relate to a border war between the kings of Iberia and Armenia, whose the main purpose was the capture of forts and strategic positions for the control of march territories.

This campaign is, however, correlated with a war of a completely different nature, this time involving an army corps under the command of Šargas, and which seems to have defended a pass in the region of Mc[˘]xet[˘]a. The toponym of *Msykyt*, linked to the “fortress of heroes”, can appear as a reference to the city of Mc[˘]xet[˘]a, according to the hypothesis proposed by Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, associated with the neighbouring acropolis of Armazc[˘]ixe on the other side of Kura River. Another toponym appears four times in this inscription: *Mytyt* (on l. 3, 7, 10, 12). The inscription

²⁷⁰ Tacitus, *Annals*, VI, 32-38; XI, 8; XII, 44-48; XIII, 37, 3; XIV, 26, 2. Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LVIII, 26, 4: “Φαρασμάνου”.

²⁷¹ Stele of Vespasian – *SEG XX*, 112, l. 14-15. Stele of Šargas, l. 1.

²⁷² *CIG 6856 = IG XIV, 1374 = IGUR III, 51 = Année Épigraphique 1996, 0079.*

was found in Armazisxevi, and Šargas seems to locate the context of enunciation in *Mytyt*, where he subsequently ruled. The ‘fortress above Mytyt’ possibly mentioned in l. 10 can perhaps refer to the fortress of Armazi dominating the royal residence on Baginet’i Hill. The Avestan etymology *maēθana-*, *maēθanyā-*, ‘dwelling’, ‘habitation’, proposed by Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl reinforces the hypothesis of assimilating Mytyt with a princely or royal residence in or around Armazi-Mc’xet’a²⁷³. It would therefore be necessary to identify this toponym with a place in Armazi or with a neighbouring agglomeration, near a strategic fortress. The possible mention of a “gate below the top (of the mountain)” recalls the remark of Pliny the Elder who compared Cumania (Darial) to a gate closing the entrance of a world²⁷⁴.

These different aspects suggest that the political centre of Iberian power was exposed to a pressing threat. The enemy the Iberians had to face is not easy to identify. While Armenia is mentioned as a target, neither the King of Armenia nor any known Armenian ruler appears on the stele. Šargas writes he fought the *Msknyt*, a name which seems to refer to the Moschians, a people living in the land of Moschikē in Upper Iberia, or to the Massagetae living in North Caucasia²⁷⁵. If the story of Šargas could be linked to the data of archaeology, it is possible to attribute to these *Msknyt* the destruction of the palace in Dedop’lis Gora and the cult complex of Dedop’lis Mindori that occurred in the last third of the 1st century CE²⁷⁶. However, the inscription also mentions what can be a character name, Naxudaṭ (*nḥdṭ*), which clearly has an Iranian form, which in no way presupposes an Iranian origin territorially speaking. Naxudaṭ finds many parallels: the Latin Nohodares²⁷⁷, the Armenian forms Nixorakan and Nixavrkan, the Greek forms *Ναχοραγάν*, *Ναχόεργαν*, which would all be cognate to an unattested Iranian lemma **naxuβar*²⁷⁸. Another possibility would be to consider this word as a princely title linked to the Armenian *naxarar* and Middle-Persian *naxvadār* ‘holder of the primacy’²⁷⁹. If the latter’s title is not made clear, there is, however, a good chance that this man would be a Caucasian leader of significant enough importance to be mentioned in this official entry. Nevertheless, our new reading shows an ambiguity, since *hllk* can be interpreted either as the departure of Naxudaṭ, or as a tax levied on the royal domain supervised by Šargas (l. 3-4).

It is hard to determine with certainty whether the term *Msknyt* (l. 9) designates the nation of Moschians living in the Lixi mountains which were in the area of di-

²⁷³ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., p. 251.

²⁷⁴ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, VI, 30: “*ibi loci terrarum orbe portis discluso, ex aduerso maxime Harmasti oppidi Hiberum*”.

²⁷⁵ About the Moschians, O. LORDKIPANIDZE, *Das alte Georgien* cit., pp. 141-152. About the Massagetae of Eastern Caucasus, R. H. HEWSEN, *The Geography*, p. 57 and n. 102-104, pp. 121-122.

²⁷⁶ I. GAGOŠIZE, *A Royal Palace in First-Century Iberia*, in I. NIELSEN (ed.), *The Royal Palace Institution in the First Millenium BC*, Aarhus 2001, 259-283, pp. 261-262. I. M. GAGOŠIZE, *Dedoplis Gora – One of the Most Important Archaeological Sites on the Territory of the Ancient Iberia*, in A. FURTWÄNGLER and alii (eds.), *Iberia and Rome*, Langenweißbach 2008, 41-44, note 371 p. 42. I. GAGOŠIZE and S. MARGIŠVILI (†), *For the Identity of King Flavius Dades*, «Iberia-Colchis», 9 (2013), pp. 68-87, p. 68.

²⁷⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XIV, 3, 1; XXV, 3, 13.

²⁷⁸ F. JUSTI, *Iranisches Namenbuch* cit., p. 219.

²⁷⁹ K. MAKSYMUK, *Strategic aims of Šapur II during the campaign in northern Mesopotamia (359-360)*, «Historia i Świat», 7 (2018), pp. 87-97, p. 92.

rect influence of Iberia, or the Massagetae-Alans from the Caucasus. A “king of the Mskyt’n” appears just before the ruler of Iberia in a list of leaders allied with Sasanian Iran in the inscription of the *šāhān šāh* Narseh (r. 293-302), erected in Paikuli between 293 and 296²⁸⁰. Moreover, the Armenian historian Agat’angelos mentions the nation of Mask’t’k’ (Մսքքաթթ) which seems to refer either to the Moschians bordering Iberia and Armenia, or more probably to the Caucasian Massagetae²⁸¹. The identification made by Cassius Dio between the Massagetae and the Alans of Northern Caucasia validates the hypothesis of identifying with the same nation the *Msknyt* in the stele of Šargas²⁸². The presence of Sarmatian tamgas on the upper part of the stele supports the hypothesis of an alliance between Iberians and a part of the Alans. However, this assimilation of *Msknyt* with Massagetae would imply a radically different interpretation, since it would mean that the Iberians would have fought against the Alans alongside the Armenians, Medes and Parthians. Nevertheless, Flavius Josephus does not mention Iberia among the targets of the Alan invasion²⁸³. As the Iberians were allied with Rome as they were in rivalry with Armenia which was allied with the Parthians, it is, in our opinion, improbable that they entered this anti-Alan coalition, even if it must be admitted that no other contemporary source mentions an alliance between the Iberian king and the Alans in 72 CE.

The last feat mentioned by Šargas concerns a victory over a prominent political opponent, Asparug, whose “the house is without lord” and whose “statue was burnt” (l. 13-14). This indication confirms the structuring of the Iberian upper society into aristocratic clans more or less dominated by the leadership of a lord, more or less corresponding to the *erist’avi* of Georgian sources²⁸⁴. The name Asparug belongs to the Iberian onomastics, insofar as it is also found in the glyptic of the princes buried in the necropolis of Armazi. In the inventory of tomb n.1 of the princely cemetery of Armazisxevi, a sigillary ring was found, the carnelian gem of which is engraved with a Greek inscription mentioning “the *pitiaxēs* Aspaurokis”²⁸⁵. The wealth of the *pitiaxēs* can be perceived through the refinement of precious objects, including a pair of silver oenoches, a cameo representing the profile of a young woman, the sheath of a ceremonial dagger, as well as the crown composed of plaques decorated with polychrome inlays. Other artefacts found in the burial²⁸⁶ suggest that this *pitiaxēs* As-

²⁸⁰ *Inscription of Narseh in Paikuli* (NPi), §91-94, H. HUMBACH & P. O. SKJÆRVØ (eds.), part 3.1, pp. 70-73. The identification of Mskyt’n with Massagetae has been proposed: *ibid.*, part 3.2, pp. 125-126.

²⁸¹ Agat’angelos, *History of the Armenians*, §842 and §873, Robert W. THOMSON (ed.), pp. 376-377 and pp. 406-407, who chooses to translate Մսքքաթթ in ‘Massagetae’. About the onomastic similarities leading to confusion between the Massagetae and the Moschians in the Armenian sources, see C. TOUMANOFF, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History*, Washington 1963, pp. 458-460, n. 98. M. GADJIEV, *Armenia and the Land of the Mazkut’ (3rd-5th Centuries AD): Written Sources and Archaeological Data*, «Electrum», volume 28 (2021), pp. 207-219.

²⁸² Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LXIX, 15, 1.

²⁸³ Flavius Josephus, *Judean War*, VII, 7, 4 = §244-251.

²⁸⁴ *Life of the Kings* (in *K’art’lis C’xovreba*), S. QAUXČ’IŠVILI (ed.), 24, 26, 57. S.H. RAPP, *The Sasanian World* cit., p. 62. C. TOUMANOFF, *Studies* cit., pp. 90-144.

²⁸⁵ H.S. NYBERG, *Quelques inscriptions* cit., pp. 230-231. KGIG, T’. QAUXČ’IŠVILI (ed.) 1999-2000, p. 260.

²⁸⁶ In this tomb was found in particular a bowl whose medallion represents Antinous. Four of the

pauroukis would have lived in the first half of the 2nd century CE, some decades after the stele of Šargas, consequently different from Asparug. His name would apparently derive from an Iranian or Scythian origin²⁸⁷, with a possessive compound **Aspa-rauca* (“who possesses a luminous horse”), designating a horse with a white coat, a colour considered particularly splendid and worthy²⁸⁸. In the account delivered in the stele of Šargas, Asparug seems to be an Iberian nobleman who went into rebellion against Mihrdat, and who took advantage of the context of war between Iberia, Armenia and the Moschians or the Massagetae. This prince appears to have succeeded in seizing the citadel of Armazi or another fortified position around the Iberian capital, which Šargas had to defeat to restore royal authority.

If the stele of Šargas does not contain any explicit indication to date the events it relates, a comparison with other testimonies taken from literature and epigraphy would allow us to make some hypotheses. The account given by Flavius Josephus relates that in 72 and 73 CE, the Alans carried out a great raid in the southern regions around the Caspian²⁸⁹.

The people of the Alans, who are Scythians inhabiting the Tanais basin and the edge of Lake Maeotis (we have exposed it somewhere above), had planned around this time an incursion into Media and beyond to plunder; they entered into negotiations with the king of Hyrcania: for the latter is master of the pass which Alexander had closed with iron gates. As he had granted them passage, they attacked the unsuspecting Medes and, no one daring to resist them, plundered this land rich in men and teeming with all categories of cattle. In fact, the king of the country, Pacorus, seized with fear, had taken refuge in inaccessible regions, and renounced all his possessions: and he had great difficulty in obtaining from them, for a ransom of a hundred talents, that they give him back his wife and his concubines, who had been taken prisoners. So looting with the greatest ease and without striking a blow, they advanced, devastating every-

seven currencies recorded there are Hadrian's aurei, while no other numismatic evidence is subsequent to the reign of this emperor. Other coins included an Augustus denarius, an aureus of Titus minted during the reign of his father Vespasian in 76 CE, and another Trajan's aureus dated to the years 112-117. AP'AK'IZE and *alii*, *Muxema* cit., pp. 276-277.

²⁸⁷ F. JUSTI, *Iranisches Namenbuch* cit., p. 46 s. v. «Ἀσπαρ». D. N. MACKENZIE, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* cit., p. 12: *asp*, “horse”; p. 67: *payrōg*, “light, brightness”. The long version of the Armenian Geography composed between 660 and 665 mentions an “Asparhuk son of Xubraat” who fled from the Khazars to retire to an island in the Danube estuary and lead a Bulgarian horde: C. ZUCKERMAN, *The Khazars and Byzantium – The First Encounter*, in P.B. GOLDEN, H. BEN SHAMMAI and A. RÓNA-TAS (eds.), *The World of Khazars*, Leiden, Boston 2007, pp. 399-432, pp. 418-419, pp. 427-428, p. 430.

²⁸⁸ The brilliance of the horse could also be attributed to the gold ornaments attached to it. A. DJAVAKHCHVILI (ed.) & G. ABRAMICHVILI, *Orfèverie et toreutique des musées de la république de Géorgie*, Leningrad 1986, plates 36-37. *Treasury*, Tbilisi 2011, pp. 58-59: 14.7 cm diameter golden phaleras dating from the 4th-3rd centuries BCE found in C'ixiagora; *ibid.*, pp. 56-57, representations of harnessed horses on gold pendants from Axalgori's treasure (4th c. BCE).

²⁸⁹ The date of the Alan invasion can be placed between the annexation of Commagene in the second half of the year 72 and the defeat of Masada in the spring of 73 or 74 CE, insofar as these two events frame the account of Flavius Josephus on the Alan irruption. In 73, there was also a defeat of the Hsiung-nu against the Chinese troops of the Han Empire, an event which must not have been without consequences for the political balance between the peoples of the steppes in Central Asia. M.J. OLBRYCHT, *Parthia et ulteriores gentes*, Munich 1998, p. 199.

thing, as far as Armenia. The king of this country, Tiridatēs, met them and, having fought them, was very nearly caught alive during the engagement. Indeed, an enemy lassoed him from afar and was about to pull him towards him, if he had not promptly cut the rope with his sword and managed to flee. The Alans, who had been made even more savage by the combat, ravaged the land and, taking with them an immense horde of inhabitants and with an enormous booty of the two kingdoms, they returned to their country²⁹⁰.

Contrary to what Flavius Josephus asserts, there is no mention of the Alans in his work before this passage, at least in the versions that have come down to us. As Hyrcania was located at the south-eastern corner of the Caspian Sea, and Media situated in the south-west of the latter, it should be understood that the Alans would have traveled the steppes separating the Black Sea from the north of the Caspian, then bypassed it to reach Hyrcania. What is at stake is to identify “the pass which Alexander had closed with iron gates”, about which the “Scythians” would have obtained the right of passage from the King of Hyrcania who controlled this gorge²⁹¹. This passage has been the subject of an erudite debate: Martin Schottky and Burkhard Meißner argued that the Jewish historian confused Hyrcania with an Armenian version of the name of Iberia (the land of the Virk’); according to them, the king in question in this passage would therefore be the Iberian sovereign, and the pass crossed by the Alans should be identified with Darial²⁹². A further argument in this direction lies in the reference to the Iron Gates that Alexander would have installed to counter the peoples of the northern steppes, a legend which seems to apply to a Caucasian pass²⁹³. This view is, however, contradicted by the fact that Flavius Josephus distinctly evokes the Iberians in a passage from his *Jewish Antiquities* dealing with the Mithridatic Wars²⁹⁴. The hypothesis of a longer route, bypassing the Caspian by its eastern shore, seems more probable, because the Alans would thus have crossed the country of Hyrcania to the south of the Caspian before attacking Media, then Armenia, in accordance with the order of the story of Flavius Josephus. It thus seems more convincing to identify the pass of the Hyrcanians at the Caspian Gates mentioned by Polybius who, in his description of Media, specifies that this region bordered on the “mountains of Tapyria, which are not far from the Hyrcanian Sea”²⁹⁵. The historian of Megalopolis had

²⁹⁰ Flavius Josephus, *Judean War*, VII, 7, 4 = §244-251. Adapted from the translation of P. SAVINEL, Paris 1977.

²⁹¹ V. KOUZNETSOV & I. LEBEDYNSKY, *Les Alains*, Paris 1997, pp. 28 and fol.

²⁹² M. SCHOTTKY, *Parther, Meder und Hyrkanier: eine Untersuchung der dynastischen und geographischen Verflechtungen im Iran des 1. Jhs. n. Chr.*, «Archaeologische Mitteilungen aus Iran», 24, Berlin 1991, 62-134, pp. 122-124. B. MEISSNER, *A Belated Nation*, p. 190. L. GREGORATTI, *The Caucasus: a Communication Space between Nomads and Sedentaries*, in S. MAGNANI (ed.), *Le aree montane come frontiere*, Rome 2013, 525-540, pp. 531-532.

²⁹³ M.-L. CHAUMONT, *L'Arménie entre Rome et l'Iran*, in H. TEMPORINI and W. HAASE (eds.), «Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt», II, 9, 1, Berlin 1976, 71-194. RAPP JR., *The Sasanian World* cit., p. 134, analyzing a passage from the Quran, Sura al-Kahf, XVIII, 83-99.

²⁹⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Judean War*, XIII, 421.

²⁹⁵ Polybius, *Histories*, V, 44, 5: “[...] ἐπικείται δὲ καὶ κρατεῖ τῶν καλουμένων Κασπίων πλῶν, συνάπτει δὲ τοῖς Ταπύρων ὄρεσιν, ἃ δὴ τῆς Ὑρκανίας θαλάττης οὐ πολὺ διέστηκε”. About the debate on the localisation of Caspian Gates, see J.F. STANDISH, *The Caspian Gates*, «Greece and Rome», 17, 1 (1970),

here in mind a pass of the Elburz in northern Iran. Flavius Josephus was able to retain that this pass was in Hyrcania, but he would have confused it with the Caspian Gates of the Caucasus, which would explain this reference to the Iron Gates of Alexander the Great.

If the route taken by the Alans visibly favoured a route of invasion by the east of the Caspian rather than by the Greater Caucasus, a possibility remains that the Alans could quite have, after their attack of Armenia, continued their journey north and cross a Caucasian pass to return to their country, taking either the Darial pass controlled by the Iberians, or the Derbent pass held by the Albanians. However, Flavius Josephus says nothing about the attitude of the leaders of Iberia and Albania towards the Alans. As these invaders were able to travel through the Caucasian passes without the author of the *War of the Jews* mentioning any opposition other than that of the Armenians, it is probable that the Iberians had if not concluded an alliance, at least granted a right of passage to the Alans. The attack carried out by the Iberians against the Armenian fort of Tb(y)t could suggest a joint operation, at least opportunistic, taking advantage of the difficulties encountered by Tiridatēs I against the Alans. If we consider that Pacorus, king of Media Atropatene, was the brother of Tiridatēs I, king of Armenia, and also the brother of Vologases, king of the Parthians, the fact that the Alans attacked the first two rulers visibly testifies to a desire to overthrow the hegemony of the Arsacid dynasty in the region²⁹⁶.

Nevertheless, it remains possible that the stele of Šargas would be a summary of several distinct and time-separated campaigns, rather than the account of one single regional war. The events reported in the stele can indeed relate to a very long chronological period, from the time when Šargas would have helped the king in a campaign in Armenia, until the revolt of Asparug repressed by him. The lack of chronological precision of the information given by the stele leaves indeed many hypotheses open on the progress of military operations.

This Arsacid supremacy obviously worried the rival Iberian dynasty. In Caucasian Iberia, the very young Mithridatēs II had succeeded his father Pharasmanēs I, whose long reign had left a royal family torn by the palace intrigues around the succession to the throne. Having only come to power after the elimination of his ambitious half-brother Radamist, Mithridatēs II also had to face the threat of a coup d'État supported by the King of Armenia Tiridatēs I, who, a twenty years earlier, had welcomed Zenobia, the wife of Radamist, then pregnant with a possible heir to the Iberian crown²⁹⁷. As, following the treaty of Rhandaia in 63, the Romans and the Parthians had agreed to enthrone Tiridatēs I at the head of the kingdom of Armenia, the Iberian rulers could no longer rely on their traditional Roman ally²⁹⁸. Leonar-

17-24. U. HARTMANN, *Hyrkanien in der Partherzeit: ein regnum ohne König?*, in C. BINDER, H. BÖRM and A. LUTHER (eds.), *Diwan*, Duisburg 2016, pp. 391-431.

²⁹⁶ A.I. BOLTUNOVA, *Quelques notes sur l'inscription de Vespasien trouvée à Mtskheta*, «Klio», 53, (1971) 213-222, pp. 219-220. CHAUMONT, *L'Arménie* cit., p. 126.

²⁹⁷ Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 51, 1-4. M.-L. CHAUMONT, *L'Arménie* cit., pp. 85-100.

²⁹⁸ CHAUMONT, *L'Arménie* cit., pp. 116-123. G. TRAINA, *L'Armenia e il trattato di Rhandaia del 63 d. C.*, in L. Prandi (ed.), *Est-Ovest. Confini e conflitti fra Vicino Oriente e mondo Greco-Romano*, Rome 2019, 301-317.

do Gregoratti argues that the terms of this agreement likely deprived Pharasmanēs of the territorial gains he was able to obtain through his military intervention²⁹⁹. As a result, the Iberian king could have decided to call on his Alano-Sarmatian allies in the Northern Caucasus to try to change the situation. This alliance was not only motivated by circumstances, it was also based on old ties of cooperation between the Iberians and the Sarmatian populations of the north. Strabo thus argues that “[the Iberians] are belligerent and live like the Scythians and Sarmatians, to whom they are neighbours and to whom they are related [...]. In the event of an alert, they put tens of thousands of men up on the line, both at home and among the Scythians and Sarmatians”³⁰⁰. However, unlike the Alan invasion of 135-136 in which the Iberian King Pharasmanēs II played an instigating role³⁰¹, there is no direct evidence that the Iberians were at the origin of this Alan expedition in 72.

According to Nicolas Preud’homme, the testimony of Flavius Josephus suggests the possibility of dating the stele a few years after the invasion of the Alans in 72. Literary sources do not mention any other armed conflict in Southern Caucasia during the decades 70-110 corresponding approximately to the reign of Mihrdat. The absence of Šargas in the inscription of Vespasian dedicating the fortifications around Armazi, which, on the other hand, names Amasaspos, brother of the king, as the second character of the kingdom, could imply that the latter would have replaced Šargas in the function of *pitiaxēs* at the latest in 75 CE, date of the imperial stele³⁰². This absence could be explained by a disgrace, by the death of the prince, or by another cause remaining unknown³⁰³. If the story of Šargas relates to the reign of Mithridatēs or Mihrdat II, and not to the time of his grandfather Mithridatēs I³⁰⁴, the geopolitical context he evokes is a time when South Caucasia was destabilized by the irruption of the Alans in 72-73. Iberians and Alans then shared a common adversary, the Armenians, and it is highly likely that the Iberian campaigns in Armenia were carried out at the same time as the Alan invasion of 72-73. As the latter initially campaigned in

²⁹⁹ L. GREGORATTI, *The Caucasus* cit., p. 530.

³⁰⁰ Strabo, *Geography*, XI, 3, 3: «[...] καὶ μάχιμοι κατέχουσι Σκυθῶν δίκην ζῶντες καὶ Σαρματῶν, ὧν περὶ καὶ ὄμοροι καὶ συγγενεῖς εἰσιν· [...] πολλὰς τε μυριάδας συνάγουσιν καὶ ἐξ ἑαυτῶν καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνων, ἐπειδὴν τι συμπίεση θορυβῶδες»; adapted from the translation of F. LASSERRE, Paris 1975. Tacitus, *Annals*, VI, 33, 2-3. The links between the Iberian elites and the Sarmatian world can also be attested by an intaglio found in Žinvali, which includes a legend in Greek: ΒΑΚΟΥΡ ΑΛΑΝΑ; D. BRAUND, *Georgia* cit., p. 247; E. L. WHEELER, *A New Book* cit., p. 59. If the first word refers to the name of the owner of the intaglio, Bakur in Georgian, or Bakurios in Greek, the second name could well refer to the Alan people living in Northern Caucasia. However, it is not known whether this Alana is another part of the owner’s name, whether it designates on the contrary a second character or yet another geographic or ethnic entity. Ptolemy, *Geography*, VI, 14, 3 and 11, names Ἀλανία the Alanian Mountains. On the Scythian presence in South Caucasian toponymy, see T. DALALYAN and A. BOBOKHYAN, *Scythian Penetration into the South Caucasus – From Archaeology and Toponymy to History: An Overview of a New Project*, «Studies in Caucasian Archaeology», I (2012), pp. 206-216.

³⁰¹ D. BRAUND, *Hadrian and Pharasmanes*, «Klio Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte», 73, 1 (1991) 208-219.

³⁰² BOLTUNOVA, *Quelques notes* cit., p. 216.

³⁰³ N. PREUD’HOMME, «La stèle des victoires du *piṭahš* Šargas et la réaffirmation de la domination royale en Ibérie du Caucase», *Camenucae* 22 (2019) 1-20.

³⁰⁴ Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LVIII, 26, 1-4. CHAUMONT, *L’Arménie* cit., p. 88.

Media, their intervention could not have been motivated by a cry for help from their Iberian allies. It would be therefore possible to affirm that Mihrdat and Šargas were at the origin of the conflict with Armenia. However, Frank Schleicher believes that the possibility of dating the stele of Šargas in the second century CE remains open, given that many conflicts between Caucasian nations must have remained outside the scope of literary sources.

The hypothesis of an alliance between Iberians and Alans is reinforced by the account of Movsēs Xorenac'i, placing in the first century CE an attack on Armenia which the legendary King Artašēs had to face.

*Around that time, the Alans, united with all the mountain people and also winning half the land of the Iberians to their cause, spread in a multitude across our country. Artašēs gathered the crowd of his troops, and war began between these two nations of brave men and skilful in the bow. The Alans ceded some ground, returned to the side of the great Kura River and set up their camp on the north bank. Artašēs arrived, encamped in the south, and the river was separating them. But, as the Armenian troops, capturing the son of the Alan king, brought him to Artašēs, the king of the Alans asked for peace, promising to give Artašēs whatever he demands of him. He offered to forever establish a sworn pact that the sons of the Alans would never again break in to plunder our country of Armenia*³⁰⁵.

Chronologically, the position of this account between the ascension of Jesus Christ and the reign of Domitian allows to identify this episode with the Alan invasion of 72³⁰⁶. Movsēs Xorenac'i's point of view grants the major role to the Armenian King Artašēs, presented in a position of strength against the Alan invaders. There is no question of the lasso which nearly brought down King Tiridatēs I, but, in the rest of the story, of the red leather lasso by which King Artašēs hugged the daughter of the Alan King, Princess Sat'inik³⁰⁷. The position of Iberia in the conflict is rather difficult to determine, especially since the Alan trajectory is not precisely explained. Movsēs Xorenac'i suggests that the latter have allied themselves with mountain peoples, presumably those of the Greater Caucasus, but possibly also those of the Elburz range in Hyrcania. The use of the expression յիւրն արկաւնէլ, which can be translated as 'to attract', 'to reconcile', 'to win', 'to captivate', underlines that it is not a simple relation of constraint, but on the contrary of a strong Iberian adhesion to the Alan cause. Unlike Movsēs's account of the other Alan invasion that took place during Vałarš's reign, this passage does not evoke a Caucasian pass, suggesting that the Alans might have taken another route³⁰⁸. However, the Armenian historian suggests quite clearly that the Alan invaders entered Armenia from the north, crossing the Kura River for the first time, then crossing it again before the arrival of Artašēs from the south. The only geographical detail provided therefore lies in the location of the camps of the two armies, located on both sides of

³⁰⁵ Movsēs Xorenac'i, *History of Armenia*, II, 50. Translation adapted from A. & J.-P. MAHÉ, Paris 1993, pp. 203-204.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 33 and 54.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 50, adapted translation from A. & J.-P. MAHÉ, Paris 1993, pp. 204-205.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 65.

the Kura River, obviously in the march of Gōgarēnē, in the current K'vemo K'art'li. No doubt it is from this same territory that King Mithridatēs II was able to conquer the fort of Tb(y)t (l. 7) and penetrate into Armenia, through the 'bordering (land)' (*msryk*) evoked by Šargas (l. 6 and 9).

In this late Armenian literary testimony, the exact strategical position of the Iberian kingship is quite difficult to precise. For Movsēs Xorenac'i, the Alan invaders would have won part of Iberia, likely its eastern part, where they would have passed to attack Armenia from the north. It therefore seems quite clear that part of the Iberians welcomed the passage of the Alans on their ground. The fact that this Iberian support was only partial seems to imply certain divisions that could affect the kingdom, especially since the King of Armazi is not mentioned in this passage. It therefore seems credible that the Alan invasion in 72 CE accentuated certain divisions within the Iberian aristocracy, between supporters of an alliance against Armenia and those who held a more neutral position, even hostile to the Alans. Part of the Iberians could therefore have joined the Alans in Armenia, even if Movsēs Xorenac'i tends to minimize the role of the Virk' by considering only the Alan interlocutor.

Faced with this possible Alano-Iberian alliance, the Armenians had their own allies in Southern Caucasia. The operations that Mīhrdat and Šargas troops had to carry out against the *Msknyt*, who perhaps can be identified with the people of the Moschian mountains bordering Western Iberia, suggest that they may have entered into an alliance with the Armenians in order to open a new front against Iberia. Such an alliance is all the more likely so as the Moschian Mountains were divided between Armenia and Iberia³⁰⁹. If the outcome of this war seems to have been favourable to the Iberians and the Alans, the destruction caused by the conflict greatly weakened the kingdom of Iberia as the reign of Mithridatēs II started.

A passage from the *Royal List I*, part of a compilation of medieval Georgian chronicles known as *Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay* (*Conversion of K'art'li*), seems to resonate with the end of the monolingual Armazic inscription.

*And Rok was king over that side [south of the Kura River], and Mirdat over this side [north of the Kura River]. And under his reign, the royal government in Armazi came to an end; there was only one kingdom left in Mc'xet'a*³¹⁰.

While Roman sources about Caucasian Iberia attest a joint reign of two kings

³⁰⁹ Plutarch, *Life of Pompey*, XXXIV, 1: “Ἴβηρες μὲν ἐπὶ τὰ Μοσχικὰ ὄρη καὶ τὸν Πόντον καθήκοντες”; “the Iberians extending to the Moschian mountains and to the Pontus”. Strabo, *Geography*, XI, 2, 18: “ἡ δ' οὖν Μοσχικὴ, ἐν ἣ τὸ ἱερὸν, τριμερὴς ἔστι· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἔχουσιν αὐτῆς Κόλχοι τὸ δὲ Ἴβηρες τὸ δὲ Ἀρμένιοι”; “concerning the Moschikē, where the sanctuary is located, it is divided into three parts: one belongs to the Colchians, the second to the Iberians, the third to the Armenians”. Translation adapted from F. LASSERRE, Paris 1975.

³¹⁰ *Royal List I* (*Mok'c'evay K'art'lisay*), II, Ilia ABULAZE (ed.), 82₃₈₋₄₀: “და მეფობდა იმიერ როკ და ამიერ მირდატ. და ამისა ზე მოაკლდა არმაზი სამეუფო და მცხეთას ოდენ იყო მეფობა.” Translation adapted from C. B. LERNER, *The Wellspring of Georgian Historiography*, London 2004, p. 140 with modifications. The *Life of the Kings of K'art'li*, component of another compilation of chronicles, the *Life of K'art'li* (*K'art'lis C'xovreba*), 53 does not take up this association of kings, but describes a diarchy between P'arsman (II) and Mirdat which would have degenerated into an armed conflict. According to this medieval source, legendary in its greatest part, after the assassination of P'arsman K'ueli, Mirdat would have taken control of K'art'li with the help of a Persian *erist'avi* residing in Armazi.

only in 370 CE with the rival cousins Sauromaces and Aspacures, it is possible that the medieval chronicler interpreted the partnership between a king and his prince as a diarchy³¹¹. On the onomastic level, Rok could well be understood as a distortion of the name Asparug. The location of Rok's seat of power in the Acropolis of Armazi, south of the Mtkvari River, can corroborate Prince Asparug's case, if *Mytyt* or *Msykyt* can be identified with the royal residence of Armazi. This testimony from the *Royal List I* is far from certain, and the similarity of names may well be a mere coincidence; it deserves to be noted, however, if only to underline the importance of the ruler established in Armazi.

As he subdued Asparug by seizing his city, Šargas asserted that he assumed the second place of the kingdom and united the whole country under the aegis of the king. The royal virtue of serenity (*šlyn*, l. 12) in the midst of unrest is a hallmark of the official portrait of King Mihrdat II made by his *pitiaxēs*. The 'good fortune' (*bz* l. 10) which protects Mihrdat and Šargas is also illustrated in the archaeology of Armazi through a representation of Tychē on a silver plate³¹². In the Georgian chronicle of the *Life of the K'art'velian Kings*, the word *gansueneba*, translated as 'tranquillity', is a compound of the lemma 'fortune' (*sue*) denoting the beneficial fruit of favour, the happy consequences of power anchored in a legitimacy leading to success³¹³. The ideology of political legitimation presented in the stele of Šargas is thus in close agreement with the data of archaeology and literary sources.

Such an exalted victory of a king and his prime minister over a rival aristocratic clan represented by Asparug offers a precious testimony to understand the aristocratic structures in Southern Caucasia, where the royal power was defended against aristocrats by other aristocrats. Nevertheless, the kingdom of Iberia was also particularly exposed, since it was going through a period of transition when the long reign of King Pharasmanēs I had ended to the leaving of the throne to a still very young sovereign, Mihrdat or Mithridatēs II, who could only obtain the crown after the elimination of his ambitious half-brother Radamist. If we remember that the King of Armenia Tiridatēs I was able to welcome Zenobia, the pregnant wife of Radamist³¹⁴, in order to be able to dispose of a possible heir to the Iberian throne as he pleased, it is therefore logical to consider that the King of Armenia was able to take advantage of the death of Pharasmanēs to launch a destabilising operation against the new king of Iberia aimed at contesting the throne, or even installing another dynast in his place, perhaps the young child of Radamist and Zenobia, then in his twenties. It was perhaps in the face of this risk of a coup d'État that Mithridatēs II could have called for the intervention of the Alans in order to counter the enterprises of Tiridatēs.

³¹¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, XXVII, 12, 1-18; XXX, 2, 1-8. RAPP, *The Sasanian World* cit. 2014, n. 188 p. 223.

³¹² G. GAMKRELIDZE, *Archaeology of the Roman Period of Georgia (Iberia-Colchis)*, Tbilisi, 2014, p. 23.

³¹³ *Life of the K'art'velian Kings* (in *K'art'lis C'xovreba*), S. QAUXČ'ISVILI (ed.), 52, about King P'arsman K'ueli: "his fortune gave him victory" (და მოსცა სუემან მისმან ძლევა); see also *ibid.*, 22, 26. SARD-SHWELADSE & FÄHNRIK, *Wörterbuch* cit., p. 1473. RAPP, *The Sasanian World* cit., 2014, p. 228.

³¹⁴ Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 51, 1-4. CHAUMONT, *L'Arménie* cit., pp. 85-100.

Two hypotheses are therefore open to interpretation: either an invasion of the Moschians from the west and supported by the Armenians, or an invasion of the Massagetae-Alans from the south. The invaders would have succeeded in destroying the palace of Dedop'lis Gora and the cult complex of Dedop'lis Mindori in Western Iberia, but would have encountered an Iberian resistance around the fortresses surrounding the citadel of Armazi, the capital which defended the road leading towards the Darial pass. It is possible that this invasion found support within the Iberian nobility, to which Asparug could belong, unless this character may be counted among the chiefs of this army of invaders. Another possibility for interpreting the destructions of Dedop'lis Gora and Dedop'lis Mindori would be to attribute them to the troops of Mihrdat II and Šargas who allegedly suppressed a rebellious Iberian prince. Whatever the probabilities of these different hypotheses, the fact remains that by exalting his victories in the service of the king, Šargas offers, through the stele he had engraved, a unique testimony to the power of the aristocracy in Southern Caucasia.

Three years later, in 75 CE, a dedication honouring Vespasian as well as his sons Titus and Domitian was placed to mark the completion of the fortifications of Armazi, capital of the kings of Iberia³¹⁵. The Alan incursion, while it had hardly affected the provinces of the Empire, had no less worried the Romans, who sought to prevent their allies in Southern Caucasia from being destabilized by such raids³¹⁶. The need to fortify Armazi tends to demonstrate the fact that the Iberian capital has been the target of attacks, probably coming from the Armenians or the Moschians if the hypothesis of an Alano-Iberian alliance is retained. As Vespasian's stele does not refer to Šargas, but seems to recognize the king's brother, Amaspos, as the second most important ruler in their kingdom, perhaps it should be deduced that Šargas had, in the meantime, disappeared from the scene, probably due to his death which occurred somewhere between 72 and 75 CE, perhaps around 73-74, at least after the installation of his own stele which does not mention this disappearance. Amaspos could therefore have taken over the functions of *pitiaxēs* left vacant by the death or withdrawal of this powerful Iberian lord. However, insofar as no document explicitly attests the final fate of Šargas nor the precise title of Amaspos, this interpretation remains purely hypothetical.

4. *The stele of Šargas and the status of Armazic writing*

When Fronto, in the second century CE, described the ambassadors of the Parthians and the Iberians (*Parthos etiam et Hiberos*) addressing praises to Antoninus Pius, he evoked their own language in the singular (*sua lingua*), thereby indicating rather clearly that the two ruling elites did not speak Greek on this occasion, but used the same language, probably Parthian, belonging to the linguistic group of Middle

³¹⁵ SEG XX, 112. CANALI DE ROSSI, *Iscrizioni* cit., p. 1.

³¹⁶ C. TOUMANOFF, *Chronology of the Early Kings of Iberia*, «Traditio», 25 (1969), pp. 1-33, p. 13.

Iranian³¹⁷. The issue therefore arises of determining whether Parthian was the mother tongue of the Iberian kings and of the whole aristocracy of the kingdom, or whether the princes of Iberia spoke another native language, of Iranian nature, like Sarmatian, or Caucasian, namely a primitive form of Georgian. The question has been the subject of a debate by specialists dating back to the publication of the first inscriptions in Aramaic writing discovered at Armazi in the 1940s and 1950s. The chronological distribution of these so-called Armazic inscriptions covers the period between the first century BCE and the third century CE³¹⁸. The authors who looked at the Armazic documentation very early divided into two main currents of opinion, without a decisive confrontation allowing their differences to be settled.

On the one hand, several eminent specialists of Iran have placed the Aramaic inscriptions of Armazi in the field of Iranian epigraphy, sometimes Parthian, sometimes Middle Persian³¹⁹. In this Iranian frame, the spoken language, belonging to Middle Iranian, differs from an arameographic writing system. The Aramaic words would therefore not render the phonetic state of the language, but would translate a solely scriptural phenomenon, which would perpetuate in a fixed manner an epigraphic tradition inherited from the Achaemenid period. This thesis defending the primacy of the Iranian language is strongly supported by the insertion of the Iberian dynasts within the nobiliary networks of the Parthians, probably as early as the second century BCE. The dynastic change that took place in the 260s was also interpreted as the advent of a dynast from the Parthian House of Mihrān, who was one of the main ally of the Sasanian power³²⁰. Linguistically, the Middle Iranian languages, particularly Parthian, had a major influence on the Georgian language since ancient times³²¹. Onomastics, material culture, social structures and the ideological horizon of the Iberian ruling elites clearly belong to the Iranian world, which the Georgian chronicles have kept track of despite their much later redaction³²². Parthian, however, is not the only Iranian language that the Iberian elites probably had to master, insofar as Sarmatian or an archaic form of Ossetian was to be spoken by the Alan populations in the northern Caucasia, with whom the Iberians nurtured close contacts, even within the court

³¹⁷ Fronto, *Letters*, IV, 2, 3-4. David Braund used this passage of Fronto to defend the idea of a Proto-Georgian language spoken by the Iberian nobles: D. BRAUND, *Fronto and the Language of Diplomacy at the Antonine Court*, «Ostraka: Rivista di antichità», 2 (1993), pp. 53-55. About the Parthian language in Arsacid Iran, N.C. DEBEVOISE, *A Political History of Parthia*, Chicago 1938, p. 27.

³¹⁸ K. CERET'ELI, «The Oldest Armazian Inscription in Georgia», *Die Welt des Orients*, 24, 1993, pp. 85-88.

³¹⁹ NYBERG, *Quelques inscriptions* cit. (Pahlavi). R.N. FRYE, *Pahlavi Heterography in Ancient Georgia?*, in G.C. Miles (ed.), *Archaeologica orientalia in memoriam Ernst Herzfeld*, Locust Valley 1952, pp. 89-101. GIGNOUX, *Glossaire* cit., p. 42 (Parthian).

³²⁰ D.M. LANG, *Iran, Armenia, and Georgia*, in I. Yār Šātīr (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, part 1, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne 1983, pp. 520-531. P. POURSHARIATI, *Decline and Fall of the Sasanian Empire*, London, New-York 2008, pp. 44, 48-49.

³²¹ R. BIELMEIER, *Sprachkontakt in der „Bekehrung Kartlis“*, in R. SCHULZ, M. GÖRG and J. ASSFALG (eds.), *Lingua restituta orientalis*, Wiesbaden 1990, pp. 30-44. ID., *On Iranian Influence in Old Georgian*, in H.I. ARONSON (ed.), *Non-Slavic Languages of the USSR*, Columbus (Ohio) 1994, pp. 34-43. ID., *Parthisch uzbar(i) und georgisch zvari*, «Iran and the Caucasus», 12 (2008), pp. 295-306. J. GIPPERT, «წმ. ნინოს ლეგენდა: განსხვავებულ წყაროთა კვალი», *ენათმეცნიერების საკითხები*, 1/2 (2006), pp. 104-122.

³²² RAPP JR, *The Sasanian World* cit., pp. 1-30.

according to the epigraphic documentation from Armazi-Mc'xet'a. The use of an Iranian language within the ruling Iberian circles therefore appears very likely, if not unmistakable.

The prospect of Caucasian Iberia belonging to the Iranian world has not gone without arousing some reluctance within the Georgian historiography, long dependent on the idea of an irreducible national genius in the face of foreign influences. Following Giorgi Ceret'eli, several specialists of Semitic languages from Europe and Georgia, notably Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, as well as Konstantin Ceret'eli, put aside the thesis of heterography to favour the option of an Aramaic language acclimatized to a Caucasian context³²³. The invention of a term specially dedicated to this writing to designate this local form of Aramaic, Armazic (or Armazian), was not really intended to make a connection with Iranian epigraphy, although it is very clear that this writing is graphically related to the Aramaic of the Achaemenid period as well as to the Parthian of the Arsacid period³²⁴.

Despite its dual belonging to the linguistic areas of the Caucasian and Iranian languages, the fact remains that the Iberian context does have certain specificities which plead in favour of the arameophony of a not insignificant fringe of this society. The extensive contacts with Syria and the rest of the Semitic Near East are visible through the literary and archaeological documentation³²⁵. With other testimonies, the amulet of Abraham, son of Sarah, attests to the existence of a Jewish or Judaizing community practicing Aramaic and established in Mc'xet'a³²⁶. Part of the Iberian elite seem to come from this Aramaic-speaking community, notably *Pitaxēs* Bersoumas, whose name visibly resembles the Syriac form Bar Šaumā ('son of the fast')³²⁷. The arrival of the Thirteen Syrian Fathers in the 6th century CE, whose missionary work had a major importance in the Christianization of Southern Caucasia, thus continued a centuries-old tradition of contact with the Aramaic world³²⁸. Georgian chronicles reinterpreted this Aramaic presence in the form of a Jewish diaspora emigrated from

³²³ CERET'ELI, *The Bilingual Inscription* cit. G. V. CERET'ELI, *Эпиграфические находки в Мухета – древней столице Грузии*, «Вестник древней истории», 2 (1948), pp. 49-57. ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die zweite (aramäische) Inschrift* cit. and *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit. K. CERET'ELI, *Aramaic Language in Georgia*, in *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* Jerusalem 1993, pp. 9-16.

³²⁴ About the graphic aspects of Aramaic writings, MACKENZIE, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* cit., plate I p. XI. About Parthian ostraca from Nisa: *Corpus inscriptionum iranicae*, part II, vol. II. M.-L. CHAUMONT, *Études d'histoire parthe. I. Documents royaux à Nisa*, «Syria», 48, 1-2 (1971) 143-164. A. INVERNIZZI & C. LIPPOLIS (eds.), *Nisa partica*, Firenze, 2008. U. ELLERBROCK & S. WINKELMANN, *Die Parther*, Darmstadt 2015, pp. 187-188.

³²⁵ G. GAMKRELIDZE, *A Version of Protojews in Georgia*, in G. GAMKRELIDZE (ed.), *Researches in Iberia Colchology*, Tbilisi 2012, pp. 177-181. T'. MGALOBlishvili & I. GAGOSHIDZE, *The Jewish Diaspora and Early Christianity in Georgia*, in T'. MGALOBlishvili (ed.), *Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus*, Surrey 1998, pp. 39-58. D. SHAPIRA, *Gleanings on Jews of Greater Iran under the Sasanians (According to the Oldest Armenian and Georgian Texts)*, «Iran & the Caucasus», vol. 12, n. 2, 2008, pp. 191-216.

³²⁶ K. CERET'ELI, *An Aramaic Amulet from Mtskheta*, in G. GAMBASHIDZE (ed.), *D. Baazov Museum of History and Ethnography of Jews of Georgia. Works*, IV, Tbilisi, 2006, pp. 225-247, p. 241.

³²⁷ L. COSTAZ, *Dictionnaire syriaque-français*, Beyrouth 2002, p. 299. J.-B. YON, *L'Histoire par les noms*, Beyrouth 2018, pp. 47-52.

³²⁸ RAPP JR, *The Sasanian World* cit., pp. 99-100. E. LOOSLEY-LEEMING, *Architecture and Asceticism: Cultural Interaction between Syria and Georgia in Late Antiquity*, Leiden, Boston, 2018, pp. 20-27.

Palestine and established in the cities of Urbnisi and Mc'xet'a³²⁹. As the *Life of the K'art'velian Kings* evokes the languages spoken by the K'art'velians, this source cites, alongside Georgian, Armenian and Khazar, two Semitic languages, Hebrew (*ebrauli*) and Syriac (*asureli*)³³⁰. This prominence of Semitic languages in the cosmopolitan urban environments of the Kura valley could therefore explain the fact that Armazic epigraphy contains only a very few specifically Iranian words: in addition to the proper names of Parsman, Mihrdat, Zewah, Asparug and Šargas, we note in the inscription of Šargas as in the stele of Sērapeitis the form 'rwst, referring to the valour or to the exploit³³¹. The diachronic variation concerning the forms of the term 'pitiaxēs' in the Iberian epigraphy testifies to a fairly malleable oral state of the language, whose evolution was shaped by the cross influences of the various Middle-Iranian languages, notably Parthian, Sarmatian (Proto-Ossetian) and Middle Persian. The Armazic manifests its ambivalence in that it takes quite a few grammatical liberties with the rules of Judeo-Aramaic and Imperial Aramaic, but that it seems at first glance to remain fairly immune to the influence of Iranian languages. We can prudently suggest that the irregularities of Armazic can be explained more by Caucasian specificities in the handling of the Aramaic language than by a heterographic scheme formalized from a hegemonic Iranian language, which would no longer know Aramaic except in the form of fossilized logograms³³².

In their work on the stele of Šargas, Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl vigorously refute the hypothesis of a logographic reading of Aramaic writing; they indeed insist on the "completely intact Aramaic verbal system" of the inscription (*ein völlig intaktes aramäisches Verbalsystem*), even proposing a versified transcription whose composition obeys "a continuous metric structure", which "confirms that this is a text also read or interpreted in Aramaic"³³³. Among the 149 words identified in the inscription, there are twelve occurrences of five proper names of Iranian origin (Mihrdat, Parsman, Šargas, Naxudaṭ and Asparug)³³⁴ as well as seven occurrences of four Iranian common names: *pythš*, 'rwst, *šhr*' (uncertain) and *ywnt*' (uncertain). The total proportion of Iranian occurrences in the Armazic text is thus 12.75%, and only 4.7% without proper names. The grammatical mastery of Aramaic seems quite developed with the use of participles, the distinction of numbers and genders, the use of various prepositions despite the repetitive and emphatic expressions. The brief wall inscriptions found at

³²⁹ BRAUND, *Georgia* cit., 1994, p. 158.

³³⁰ *Life of the K'art'velian Kings* (in *K'art'lis C'xovreba*), S. QAUXC'ISVILI (ed.), 16₂₁₋₂₃'

³³¹ Stele of Šargas, l. 7, 14. Stele of Sērapeitis, Armazic part, l. 4. HOFIJZER & JONGELING, *Dictionary* cit., I, pp. 104-105. MACKENZIE, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary* cit., p. 11.

³³² GRELOT, *Remarques* cit., p. 11. A comparison is also necessary with the use of Aramaic in Parthian empire, on which we can agree with the opinion of P.O. SKJAERVØ, *Aramaic in Iran*, «ARAM», 7 (1995), 283-318, p. 287: "The Aramaic elements in these inscriptions [from early-mid Parthian period] do not quite conform to the heterographic system of the later Parthian inscriptions. My own inclination is to regard these texts as written in the kind of unskilled Aramaic that was soon to give way to heterographic Iranian".

³³³ ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die zweite (aramäische) Inschrift* cit., p. 174: „Die durchgehende metrische Gliederung bestätigt, dass es sich um einen Text handelt, der auch aramäisch gelesen bzw. vorgetragen wurde“. ALTHEIM & STIEHL, *Die Aramäische Sprache* cit., pp. 245-246.

³³⁴ The uncertain toponyms like Mytyt as well as the ethnonyms have not been taken into account here.

Baginet'i, as well as those appearing on bone plates from the ruins of the palace of Dedop'lis Gora also seem to go in the direction of an autonomous Aramaic language, even if the work of deciphering and commentary has to be completed³³⁵.

These positions around heterography would not be so irreconcilable if we avoided applying to Iberia a preconceived scheme whose rigid character ultimately appears incompatible with the specificities of this Caucasian kingdom inserted in a multilingual context. Admittedly, the mobilization of an Aramaic writing did not necessarily coincide with the oral use of Aramaic, since in the Iranian world, this system of signs was also used by circles of scribes applying a logographic reading to this language. The membership of the Iberian elites in the linguistic and cultural community of Iranians, both in terms of political and material culture, as well as in family and dynastic networks, did imply the use of Sarmatian, Parthian and then Middle-Persian language to converse with the Alan, Arsacid and Sasanian rulers. Nevertheless, it did not exclude also the fluent practice of an Aramaic language intended for the notables from the Near East, whose commercial and religious networks extended their ramifications in the cities of Southern Caucasia.

It is certainly not the last definitive study on the stele of Šargas, since this exceptional document still conceals numerous uncertainties and a great deal of mystery. The longest known Aramaic inscription from Caucasian Iberia appears as a unique document unveiling the Iberian point of view on the troubled history of the territories around the Caucasus, insofar as it attests the existence of an epic tradition and a laudatory writing in the service of the aristocratic elites of Armazi. This major epigraphic document provides rich information about the scriptural use of Aramaic under a local Armazic form at the conjunction of the scriptural traditions of the Official Aramaic belonging to the Iranian domain and the literacy of Syrian and Mesopotamian societies which were all in close contact with Caucasian Iberia.

³³⁵ A. FURTWÄNGLER and *alii* (eds.), *Iberia and Rome*, Langenweißbach, 2008, pl. 34-37. I.M. GAG-OŠIZE, *Bone Objects*, in A. Furtwängler and *alii* (eds.), *Iberia and Rome*, Langenweißbach 2008, pp. 87-116. N. PREUD'HOMME, *Short Aramaic Inscriptions from Southern Caucasia*, «Epigraphica», 84 (2022), pp. 381-423.

