History & Philology

A Recently Discovered Greek Inscription from Georgia

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ABSTRACT. Greek inscriptions from Georgia are important sources for exploring our past. The history of corresponding studies counts more than one century in our country. Recently a damaged Greek inscription was discovered near the village of Kavitiskhevi. Based on various facts, it is dated to the 2nd–3rd cc A.D. The restored text reads as follows: ‘Kathas put (it) up in my memory (to remember me), (placed me) on the desk as usual and all this was done by a hired man, but if anyone (of the visitors) hesitates, (it should not make him feel disappointed – or it should make him feel respectful).’ © 2007 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Key words: Georgia, Greek inscription.

Greek inscriptions found in Georgia have not been specially studied till the mid-twentieth century, although European, Russian and Georgian scholarly works offer appropriate notes of different precision and character. In this respect, among Georgian scholars particularly noteworthy are Pl. Ioseliani, Dim. Bakradze and EK. Takaishvili. Though in terms of epigraphy their works focus on Georgian inscriptions, they did not neglect Greek pieces if the latter were found next to Georgian ones. In I. Pomyalovski’s work Sbornik grecheskikh i latinskikh nadpisei Kavkaza, published in 1881, ancient Greek, Roman, Byzantine and New Greek inscriptions are compiled all in one line. Anapa, the Kuban, Mtskheta—all are ‘Kavkaz’ for the author. He refers to main Russian and European sources mostly without comments; citations make up the whole work. The author does not offer his own opinion about the inscriptions. Despite rather harsh comments on the part of its critics basically on the account of the above-mentioned drawbacks, I. Pomyalovski’s work was the first in this field and served as a guide for all interested in studying Greek inscriptions from Georgia.

Among Russian specialists, particularly remarkable is V. Latyshev, whose works—collections called Sbornik grecheskikh nadpisei khristianskikh vremyon iz yuzhnoi Rossii, 1895 and K istorii khristianstva na Kavkaze. Grecheskie nadpisi iz Novo-Afonskogo monastyrja, 1911 are very important contributions to epigraphic studies in general and to the analysis of Greek inscriptions from Georgia in particular. I say nothing about other highly important works by V. Latyshev.

In the period following 1920, when the prominent hellenist Gr. Tsereteli assumed authority in the field of classical and Byzantine studies in the newly opened University of Tbilisi, it was decided to thoroughly investigate Greek inscriptions found in Georgia.1 In 1928, A. Amiranashvili published 8 Greek inscriptions kept at the Tbilisi State Museum. Remarkably, they were obtained at different places of the Soviet Union and were ultimately deposited for protection in the Museum of Georgia (their greater part had been published earlier). The same is not certainly true about the well-known Vespasian inscription

1 Grigol Tsereteli was asked to take up the task, but he did not get down to studying closely Greek inscriptions from Georgia evidently because he had already started working on the multivolume collection of papyri. He copied down the Gremi wall inscription, which he did not publish himself. He also recorded part of the Svetitskhoveli wall inscriptions in Mtskheta, which are at present kept in the archive of the Institute of Manuscripts.

found near Mtskheta, which had been treated in quite a number of scholarly works.

Greek inscriptions discovered as a result of intensive archeological excavations on the Georgian territory since the 1940s were published by Akaki Shanidze, Simon Kaukhchishvili and Giorgi Tsereteli. In 1944, the Directorate of the Institute of Language, History and Material Culture and the Department of Source Studies of the same Institute assigned me to study Greek inscriptions found on the Georgian territory. I examined all of the pieces onsite and apart from the relevant published comments, consulted also the specialists of adjacent disciplines (mostly art critics) in order to find out what other material observed at the sites was to be considered.

In 1951, my book *Greek Inscriptions from Georgia* was published. It compiles material dating back to the period from the 5th-4th cc. to the 19th c. The drawback of the work is the way of presentation of the inscriptions, it lacks photographic material. In fact, I drew the inscriptions myself (most probably, not quite successfully). What accounts for this is the hard post-war period and almost unendurable working conditions.

As a result of large-scale archeological excavations started in 1951 in Georgia, many other Greek inscriptions were discovered. Most of them were published by me. In 1999-2000 three volumes of *The Corpus of Greek Inscriptions from Georgia* came out. The work is attached with an ample German afterword. In 2004, the same work was published as a one-volume piece completed with Greek inscriptions discovered in the meantime and furnished with V. Vashakidze’s well-accomplished graphics. The existing texts were revised. However, the number of photos attached was quite small.

At present, Greek inscriptions found in Georgia are being studied by young researchers R. Margishvili, M. Nasidze, G. Kajaia, whose scope of analysis and research activities are quite promising.

In summer 2006, a restorer Revaz Tskhadadze discovered a limestone slab bearing a Greek inscription (Fig. 1). The item was found near a church in a place called Kataula, located in the village of Kavtiskhevi, Kaspi region. He took the find to the S. Amiranashvili Museum of Art of Georgia. The slab is 4-5 centimeter thick, its maximum width being 40 centimeters and height – 38 centimeters. Its upper and right-hand edges are almost completely ruined and its lower edge is obviously broken off; its surface, which bears the inscription, is damaged; however, the latter still remains readable with more or less accuracy.

![Fig. 1. Inscription.](image)
The graphical copy of the inscription was made by Giorgi Gagoshidze and the photographic image by Besarion Matsaberidze.

I was given both copies to read the text (see the photo).

Letters of the inscription are carefully traced as if between preliminary drawn two parallel lines. The letters are $2\frac{1}{2}$ centimeter high and $1\frac{1}{2}$ centimeter wide. The first five lines survived as several isolated letters, which made it impossible for me to restore the meaning of the lines. These letters are:

I ENI
II EΓI
III ΑΠI (?)
IV ΑΙF
V =IΛMH

From line 6 the inscription reads as follows:

VI ΚΑΙΕΓ ΤΗΙ
VII ΜΗΝΗΜΗΙ Υ
VIII ΜΗΥΚΑΛΑΙ ΕΠΙ1AK
IX ΝΗΜΙΖΗΕΤΙ1ΗΤΙΝ
X ΕΑΝΤΙΓ ΆΛΕΥΙΤΑ

Here is the completed version of the text:

καὶ ἐστὶν ἡμᾶς καὶ μενεῖς μενεῖς ΜΟΤΑ, εἰπὶ θάκω γ νομίζεται(?) ἡθικό, ἕαν τι, σαλεύεται...  

I have already mentioned that the restored text lacks the beginning. If compared to other inscriptions, it could possibly have started with ἀγαθηγ τῆχη (“with kind wishes” or “wish you to have luck” – the English translation has more words but renders the sense accurately), with the names of the individual who ordered the job and who accomplished it and with the date. These details normally close an inscription but can as well start it. We should not suppose that all the above-mentioned information was necessarily there; however, on the other hand, it should not be ruled out that the beginning of the inscription included part of the details.

As mentioned above, the text translates as “Kathas put (it) up in my memory (to remember me), (placed me) on the desk as usual and all this was done by a hired man, but if anyone (of the visitors) hesitates, (it should not make him feel disappointed – or it should make him feel respectful).” If my translation and comments are accurate, the text says that Kathas has set up a memorial to a respectable person, has placed a sedentary statue on it and asks passers-by to pay tribute to his memory. The slab with the Greek inscription is evidently a tombstone fixed to or projecting from the desk or the seat where the statue was placed.

As concerns its linguistic properties, attention should be paid to itacism, characteristic of the Greek language at the turn of the new era. The inscription has two such cases: nomizh = nomivzei (by that time, both $h$- and $eι$-diphthong were pronounced as i-) and saleuita = saleuveitai. Analogically, $eι$-diphthong in saleuveitai corresponds to i-). Other ancient Greek norms are also observed – the person who made the inscription obviously had good command of Greek; however, we should also bear in mind that at that period Kathas could not be familiar with Georgian inscriptions, while since the 4th century B.C. Greek inscriptions were already widespread in the eastern part of the civilized world of those times. Greek language and inscriptions are found in Georgia throughout the whole period starting with the mentioned times and up to the late Middle Ages, even though there was a large number of Georgian inscriptions and manuscripts; anyway, this fact has different grounds: they belong to

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2 There is no name $Καθα$, in the Georgian onomastikon. It is mentioned in L. Zgusta’s work $Καθα$. Parnavougou (#659) as part of the Olbia inscription. Scholars consider it to be an Iranian-Ossetian borrowing. Since $t$ and $θ$ are phonetically interchangeable, the name can be related to those mentioned in Bosporic inscriptions: $Κάττα$, $Κατίων$ (2nd c.), $Κάτοκα” (2nd-3rd cc). As concerns their etymology, specialists think that they are of mixed Iranian- Ossetian origin (Cf. L. Zgusta Die Personennamen griechischen Städte der nördlichen Schwarzmeeerküste, Praha, 1955). Anyway, no one considers them Greek-Roman. The Kavtiskhevi inscription suggests nothing about the nationality of its writer. I would like to mention here Agathias’ note although it belongs to a much later period (6th c.) than our inscription – Καγαρο’v a river in Colchis (it has the same root). Cf. the place-name Kataula. It is located near Kavtiskhevi where our inscription was found. It has to be an ancient toponym, as it is mentioned in Georgian inscriptions in 8th c. (N. Shoshiashvili, Corpus of Georgian Inscriptions I, Tbilisi 1980, pp. 39, 118-123).

3 Or nomivzh ejteovn – So I find it true. I believe so. It is normally so.
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the Christian period (various Greek inscriptions are found on slabs, objects, and frescoes; there are also Greek manuscripts).

Another central problem related to this inscription is its dating.

As mentioned before, the inscription is carefully and painstakingly traced out, which suggests that the writer should have cared a lot about the shape of letters. i, E, 1, H are similar in type. As concerns, i and E, such shapes are found in the inscriptions belonging to many diverse periods and countries. 1 and H shapes are very rare (rhombic 2 and # are much more frequent in early inscriptions of various countries). In order to determine the shape of 1 and H, I studied thoroughly our contemporary corpora and the publications of inscriptions from individual countries (most of them being attached with the copies of original inscriptions) and received the following result: 1, H shapes are in fact very rare. I will cite all the examples: Studia pontica, III includes the following piece: # Ἁθ (the Amisos inscription, p.32). It is not dated, but the publisher refers to Augustus and Strabo – i.e. it dates to the first centuries. The inscription is cruciform and there is even one round Θ (rest of Θ's are square).

The Claudiopolis Inscription #64 (p. 72); it does not have letter o at all, Θ is angular 1, it is a burial inscription and is dated to 193-4.

#146a (p. 162), an inscription engraved on a slab dedicated to Artemis, Apollo, Leto (the text mentions the names in this very order). The inscription refers to Julius Severus and consequently, it dates back to the 3rd century. The inscription has no θ; square H is written six times.

A damaged marble stele from Pontic Galatia (p. 230, # 259a). Two of its columns have the letters shaped as H, 1 (Θ is damaged). The rest of the characters are likewise angular: E, i, M, F and others. The publishers of the inscription date it back to the Roman period in general.

So, these are the only samples from the territory south to Pontus.

The Guarduci volume 3, p. 446 offers a mosaic inscription ΗΡΑΚΛΗΣ ΑΘΗ (‘Heraclites made’) dated back to 125-130, and ΣΚ ΠΑΘΗ ΑΙΝΗΑΘΗ (‘Socrates of Athens’), 3rd c. also mosaic, p. 454; Volume 4, p. 508, has inscription #155 from Italy made on a sarcophagus (‘here lie’ …). The engraved letters are quite coarse. The inscription is dated back to the 4th-5th cc. The letters are shaped as H, 1, S, E, i, etc. They all are of the same type.

So, the scanty material mentioned above enables to make the following conclusion: letters shaped as 1, H and systematically used in the Kavtiskhevi inscription are found, although rarely, in the inscriptions discovered in the countries south to the Black Sea. They mostly date back to the 2nd-3rd centuries - with the exception of the Italian examples that belong to the 4th-5th cc. In my opinion, the whole material suggests that the Kavtiskhevi inscription (like the above-mentioned ones) dates back to the 2nd-3rd cc. and the personal name it mentions, as well as the text itself, seems to have nothing in common with the Christian religion confessed later.

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Studia pontica, publiées par Anderson, Cumont, Gregoire, Bruxelles, 1910.

5 I should mention two relatively sizeable mosaic inscriptions from Cyprus included in the Guarduci vol. 4 (#122, p. 418 and #123, p. 420), where letters are shaped in exactly the same way as in the Kavtiskhevi inscription (H, 1, i, E, S), are dated to the 4th-5th cc.

In my opinion, the shape of the letters is dictated by a comparatively large size of the text and by the important and conspicuous place they were engraved on; evidently, such a shape of letters fitted that kind of texts. The inscription on the Kavtiskhevi limestone slab is carefully traced out – apparently, it aimed to capture visitor’s eye.
ათავსეთ და დათქმულიყვა

ახალი აღმოჩენილი პერსონალ ქმნის საქართველოში

თბილისი, გიორგის აკადემიის აკადემიური მითითება

2006 წლის საქართველოში გამოცემის მიერ: ტინათი ყაუხჩიშვილი, პოლიტიკური მაგალითიდან აღნიშნული და ფილოლოგიური საფუძვლებით არსებული რაოდენობით გარემო ჰქონია ახალთვის და საქართველოში იშ. აკადემიიდან ზეიმილობის გარემოში პირველი პირველი წელი, რომლისგანაც პარაგაური დიდი წლები წარწერილია.

ქურთუკიში ახალი აღმოჩენა არის გამოცემიდან თბილისის ქართული სახელმწიფო ტექნიკური სამეცნიერო ინსტიტუტი, რომელმაც გუნდის განუმეორებელ მიძღვნილი წარწერილია.

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