

DOI: 10.31857/S032103910017253-1

THE GREEK INSCRIPTION FROM GARNI (ARMENIA) AND KING TIRIDATES THE GREAT

Part I. *PROLEGOMENA*

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Since the discovery at Garni (Armenia) in 1945 of a Greek inscription mentioning a king Tiridates (Trdat), there has been an ongoing debate on the identification of this king. On the basis of paleography and content, most scholars have preferred to date the document to the first-century CE reign of Tiridates I, despite what seemed to be a suggestive indication from the historian of Armenia Moses Khorenatsi that Tiridates the Great, in the early fourth century CE, had dedicated a Greek inscription in memory of his sister at Garni. This study attributes the inscription to the reign of Tiridates the Great, although it shows also that this text cannot be the one referred to by Moses Khorenatsi. This reattribution is of special importance for the early history of Armenia. It paves the way for a new analysis of the reign of the king who initiated the Christianization of the country. Our next article, in a forthcoming issue, will offer a new and full critical edition of the inscription, comparing it with prior reconstructions.

Keywords: Armenia, Garni, Tiridates the Great, Christianization, Agathangelos, Moses Khorenatsi

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Several friends and colleagues have helped us in the preparation of this study, among others by procuring us books and articles that we were not able to access. We wish to extend our gratitude for their generosity to Elena Lyapustina, Diana Mirijanyan, Lada Sementchenko, and Irina Tunkina. In addition, for research assistance, Dr. Fagan is grateful to the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography NAS RA, particularly Director Arsen Bobokhyan, former Director Pavel Avetisyan, and Dr. Ruben Badalyan; and to the History Museum of Armenia, especially former Director Anelka Grigoryan and Ruben Vardanyan.

ГРЕЧЕСКАЯ НАДПИСЬ ИЗ ГАРНИ (АРМЕНИЯ) И ЦАРЬ ТИРИДАТ ВЕЛИКИЙ

Часть I. *PROLEGOMENA*

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Со времени открытия в Гарни (Армения) в 1945 г. греческой надписи, в которой упоминается царь Тиридат (Трдат), ведутся постоянные споры об идентификации этого царя. Основываясь на палеографии и содержании текста, большинство ученых предпочитают датировать документ периодом правления Тиридата I в I в. н.э., несмотря на недвусмысленное указание историка Армении Мовсеса Хоренаци на то, что Тиридат Великий в начале IV в. н.э. посвятил греческую надпись в память о своей сестре в Гарни. В нашем исследовании мы относим надпись к царствованию Тиридата Великого, хотя очевидно также, что этот текст не может быть тем, на который ссылается Мовсес Хоренаци. Эта реатрибуция имеет особое значение для ранней истории Армении. Она открывает путь к новому анализу правления царя, инициировавшего христианизацию страны. Продолжение этой статьи, которое будет опубликовано в ближайшем номере ВДИ, предложит новое полное критическое издание надписи и сравнение его с предыдущими реконструкциями.

Ключевые слова: Армения, Гарни, Тиридат Великий, христианизация, Агафангел, Мовсес Хоренаци

Garni is a site at the foot of a mountain ridge, about 25 km east of present-day Yerevan. Located on a bluff overlooking the Azat River, the place was also naturally easy to defend¹. From the earliest times until the medieval period, it had a special importance for the history of Armenia. Begun in the early twentieth century and restarted after the Second World War, excavations at Garni have revealed the existence of buildings of various periods, especially of a temple built in the early Roman imperial period and of fortification walls of various periods². It is at the fortress of Garni (*castellum Gorneas*), in 51 CE, that Tacitus (XII. 45. 3) locates a tragic episode of the war between Mithridates as king of Armenia and his nephew Rhadamistus, who wanted to succeed him. Mithridates was besieged at Garni, forced to capitulate, and executed (Tac. XII. 44–47).

In 1945, a sensational discovery was made by chance, that of a Greek inscription mentioning a king Tiridates as king of Greater Armenia (*Armenia Maior*). This discovery was

¹ See plan in Hewsен 2001, 61, fig. 53.

² Arakelyan *et al.* 1951–1976. See Khatchadourian 2008 for the history of the first explorations and modern excavations. The exact construction date of the temple is still debated (see Maranci 2018, 26–27, with n. 81). On the symbolic meaning of its modern reconstruction, see Traina 2004, 178–179.

followed by that of three more inscriptions in various languages and scripts and from various periods. The earliest one, in Urartian and cuneiform characters, is a dedication from King Argišti I, in the first half of the eighth century BCE, which mentions, line 3, that the king “conquered the city of 𐎶𐎶[𐎶]rīnīa”³. An Aramaic inscription of the second or third century CE mentions a king of Armenia (his name is mutilated), son of a king Vologases⁴. The latest one, dated to 1291 CE, was engraved in Armenian language and characters on the entrance wall of the temple by Princess Khoshak of Garni⁵. These inscriptions suffice to illustrate the significance of the site of Garni in the *longue durée* history of Armenia.

The Greek inscription has understandably attracted much attention. It has been published and commented upon many times in articles and monographs. Two books, and a large part of another one, have been dedicated to it⁶. It is also easy to understand why it appears regularly in most publications dedicated to the history of Armenia⁷. Since its discovery, the date and meaning of the inscription have been hotly debated. The inscription mentions a king Tiridates. But several Arsakid kings of Armenia are known to have borne this name: Tiridates I, who, with some interruptions, reigned over Armenia from 53 to perhaps 75 CE; Tiridates II seemingly between 216/7 and 252; and Tiridates III between 298 and ca. 330⁸.

In this respect, it may seem that Moses Khorenatsi, the famous historian of ancient Armenia, provides a crucial indication. A propos King Tiridates III “the Great”, the king under whom Armenia converted to Christianity, he mentions: “About that time [after the council of Nicaea] Trdat completed the construction of the fortress of Garni in hard and dressed blocks of stone cemented with iron [clamps] and lead. Inside, for his sister Khosrovidukht, he built a summer palace with towers and wonderful carvings in high relief. And he composed in her memory an inscription in the Greek script”⁹.

The connection with the inscription found at Garni may thus seem obvious. However, only a minority among the specialists who have edited or commented upon this text has retained the view that the king mentioned in the inscription was Tiridates III¹⁰. A significant majority, starting from its first editor, has preferred to see here a reference to Tiridates I, the first king of the Arsakid / Aršakuni dynasty, the family which ruled over

³ Salvini 2008, 351 A 8–12. See the comment of Bobokhyan *et al.* 2019.

⁴ Perikhanyan 1964; Russell 1987, 118–119; Movsisyan 2006, 205.

⁵ Arakelyan 1951–1976, III, 45.

⁶ Manandyan 1946; Trever 1949, with a large part of Trever 1953.

⁷ It is unnecessary to give here the long list of these books, articles, and websites.

⁸ Bivar 1983, 79–85, on the Arsakid kings of Armenia. The dates of reign of these kings have been the object of intense debate. We follow here Toumanoff 1986 for the dates of reign of Tiridates I and Tiridates II, but while accepting Toumanoff’s date of 298 for the accession to power of Tiridates the Great, we keep for him the traditional regnal number, III, not IV: see Weber 2016.

⁹ Moses Khorenatsi 2. 90 (Thomson 1978, 247). On the significance of these castles for the geo-political and economic landscape of ancient Armenia, see Banaji 2016, 199–200.

¹⁰ Manandyan 1946; 1951; Elnitsky 1958; Feydit 1969 (followed by Chaumont 1969); Hewsen 1985–1986, 30–33; 1986, 328–330.

Armenia until 428 CE¹¹. At the compromise of Rhandeia, in 63 CE, Rome acknowledged the fact that Armenia would be ruled by a member of the Parthian royal family, provided this king officially accepted to owe his crown to the Roman Emperor. This is how Tiridates I, who had already reigned over the country, was definitively acknowledged king of Armenia. The conclusion that this inscription should be referred to King Tiridates I has also been followed by general historians of Armenia¹². Finally, this is the date that is now found in many papers and online publications for the general public referring to this text.

As mentioned previously, the inscription has been edited and commented upon many times. Yet, despite its crucial significance as a testimony of the ancient history of Armenia, it is fair to say at this time that no consensus has been reached on the establishment of the text. More than seventy-five years after its discovery, the various editions of the inscription still present essentially different versions, the last ones not bringing the final word. This shows that the reading and understanding of the text have never stabilized.

The first reason for this situation is the fact that the right part of the inscription is missing, which has given rise to very different solutions of restoration. However, even the establishment of the preserved part has not been an object of consensus. The second reason that explains the extreme differences between the editions is a division of the scholarship between schools that did not have full opportunity to collaborate with each other. Three schools of scholars, the Armenian one, the Russian one and the Western one, have studied this text. The Russian school and the Armenian were of course intimately linked, but each retained its own traditions and ideas. For a long period, with few exceptions, Western scholars had little direct access to the studies of Armenian scholars, and limited access to those of Russian ones. Similarly, Armenian scholars had minimal access to Western scholarship or to the works of their Russian colleagues if they were published in the West. In the past, a critical analysis of the previous states of the scholarship on this document was hardly possible. The more open world in which we lived until recently allowed us to reassemble these *membra disiecta*.

Starting for the first time from a complete lemma of the various editions, this study offers a critical edition of the inscription, providing both a new text and a new translation. On several points it provides solutions that had never been envisaged. And on some others, it brings back to our attention, under a new form, some arguments that we believe have been overlooked, thus emphasizing the significant work done by previous generations of scholars who investigated this text. It is clear also that we now benefit from research tools that previous generations lacked and that allow us to quickly test our hypotheses, a luxury completely unknown to the research of the past.

Our strategy of edition will be the following: after presenting the lemma of the inscription and its divergent readings, we present the stone and the script, layout and spelling of the inscription, before analyzing in their context the names mentioned in the text. This

¹¹ Lisitsyan 1945a; 1945b; Abramyan 1947; Trever 1949; 1953; Moretti 1955; Sarkisyan 1960, 67–69; Bartikyan 1965; Krkyasharyan 1965; Muradyan 1981; Vinogradov 1990; Ananyan 1994; Kettenhofen 1995, 113–120. The text has found its place in the collection of inscriptions of the Flavian period by McCrumm, Woodhead 1961, 72, no. 238. For the early history of Armenia and the Aršakuni dynasty, see Garsoïan 1997a; 1997b.

¹² Russell 1987, 269–281; Nersessian 2001, 103; Olbrycht 2016, 101; Mastrocinque 2017, 198–203.

allows us to draw a first conclusion on the chronology of the document. Then we address the question of the word *Helios* at the beginning of the text, which has been a crux in the interpretation of the document. Then follows a line-by-line critical commentary, which finally enables us to propose a new text and translation, as well as a short conclusion on the signification of the text.

1. THE STONE AND ITS INSCRIPTION: PREVIOUS EDITIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The stone (fig. 1), in the local black basalt to be found on the very site of Garni, was discovered in 1945 by the painter Martiros S. Saryan and by Tsolak Davtyan in the cemetery of the village¹³. On one of its broad surfaces (originally the top of the block) it bears a large cross, which shows that the stone was reused as a *khachkar*, the characteristic memorial stele of Christian Armenian cemeteries. On the left side of the *khachkar*, on a side that would originally have been the face of the block, we find an inscription in Greek letters. When one faces the inscription, the right part of the stone is missing, and with it the right part of the text (the block narrows toward that side, possibly because it was carved to help the *khachkar* stand in place). The upper rim of the face with the inscription is also damaged to the right, leaving legible only the lower parts of the letters of the name of a King Tiridates. The lower right corner of the block is also missing, and with it the final part of the inscription.

On the side that bears the inscription, the right part of the stone, which bears the text, was carefully dressed, but the left part was left undressed. The top surface (now with the *khachkar*) still presents three cramp holes, one to the left side, two to the rear. There was certainly a fourth one in the missing part of the block to the right. This massive block does



Fig. 1. The block bearing the Garni Greek inscription. *Photo by E. Fagan*

¹³ Lisitsyan 1945a; 1945 b.

not come from the temple found within the fortress walls¹⁴. It was inserted in a masonry wall, in all likelihood from the fortification, perhaps (but this is not certain) as a lintel¹⁵.

Dimensions (in cm): Stone L 165, W 80, T 50. Cramp holes: 3x5, depth 4. Letters: 5–5.5, slightly bigger in the first line, and letters of smaller size, 3 cm, in the lower left part of the inscription. One interpunction in the shape of a colon line 3, two in the shape of dots in the middle of line 5.

Editions and textual commentaries: Lisitsyan 1945a; 1945b; Manandyan 1946; Abramyan 1947; Trever 1949; Manandyan 1951; Trever 1953; Moretti 1955 (Robert J., Robert L. 1956, no. 345; *SEG* 15836; McCrum, Woodhead 1961, 72, no. 238); Sarkisyan 1956; Elnitsky 1958 (*SEG* 20 110); Sarkisyan 1960, 67–69; Bartikyan 1965; Krkyasharyan 1965; Feydit 1969 (Chaumont 1969, 177–182); Muradyan 1981; Movsisyan 2006, 237–238; Vinogradov 1990, 559–560, no. 605 (*SEG* 40 1315; Canali DeRossi 2004, no. 17); Ananyan 1994; Kettenhofen 1995, 113–120 (*SEG* 45 1873); Ferretti and Magarditchian 2020¹⁶.

This long list of editions has produced texts that present exceptionally sharp differences from one another. In this series, those of Trever 1949 and 1953, Moretti 1955 and Vinogradov 1990 distinguish themselves by the quality of their readings, although many of the other editions also make important observations. However, the condition of the stone and inscription has meant that scholars have found it difficult to resolve all questions, which opened the gate to new speculations and editions, with varying results. As examples of these divergent interpretations, here are the two editions and translations proposed by Trever in 1953 and Vinogradov in 1990.

Trever 1953, 187:

Ἡλιος Τιριδάτης [ὁ μέγας] | Μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας ἀνά[κτωρ]. | ὡς δεσπότης αἵκτισεν ἀ[άρακον] | βασιλίσ(σ)α τὸν ἀνίκητον κάσ[τρον] |⁵ αἵτους αἰ' τῆς βασιλεί[ας] | Μεννέας ὑπὸ ἐξουσίας τειαρί[ου] | λιτουργὸς τῷ μεγάλῳ σπ[αραπέτ] |⁵ καὶ εὐχάρι[στος] | μετὰ Ματηίου τοῦ μάρτυρο[ς].

Helios! Tiridates the Great, Sovereign of Greater Armenia. When the ruler built an *agarak* for the queen [and] this impregnable fortress in the eleventh year of his reign, Menneas, with the permission of the *ter*, [as] liturgist of the great *sparapet*, [as a token of] gratitude, in the presence of Mateis the witness, [repaid his debt]¹⁷.

Vinogradov 1990:

Ἡλιος Τιριδάτης [ὁ μέγας βασιλεὺς] | μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας ἀνα[χθείσης τῆς πόλε] |⁵ ως δεσπότης αἵκτισεν αἰ[αυτοῦ ἀδελφῆ] | βασιλίσσ(α) τὸν ἀνίκητον κάσ[τελλον τοῦτον?] |⁵ αἵτους αἰ' τῆς βασιλεί[ας ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ *vel sim.*] | Μεννέας ὑπὸ ἐξουσίας τειαρι[φόρου κυρίου?] | λιτουργὸς τῷ μεγάλῳ σε[μνῷ θεῷ Ἡλίῳ *vel sim.*] | μετὰ ματη[τοῦ Μαρτυρίου] ᾧ καὶ εὐχαριστ[εῖ].

¹⁴ See already Trever 1949, 9; 1953, 194.

¹⁵ See Vinogradov 1990 for the suggestion that the stone was originally a lintel.

¹⁶ In the following pages, unless otherwise mentioned, Sarkisyan 1960, Chaumont 1969, Movsisyan 2006, Vinogradov 1990, Kettenhofen 1995 and Canali DeRossi 2004 will refer to the pages cited in this lemma. While this text was already in print, we took notice of the article of Ferretti and Magarditchian 2020. Although without a detailed argument, their study correctly suggests a late date for this inscription (late third or early fourth century CE). But for the rest, unfortunately, it represents a step backwards as compared to previous editions, especially that of Vinogradov 1990, and it needs no further comment.

¹⁷ Trever 1953, 187, retranslated from the Russian. For the meaning of the words *agarak*, *ter* and *sparapet*, see commentary below.

I, Helios Tiridates, the great king of Greater Armenia, lord of this rebuilt city, have built for my sister-queen this invincible fortress, in the eleventh year of my reign, for the safeguard (?). Menneas the stonecutter, through the goodwill of the master who carries the *tiara*, has dedicated to the great holy god (Helios?), to whom he also gives thanks with his pupil Martyrios¹⁸.

These two examples suffice to illustrate the breadth of divergences between the various editions.

2. SCRIPT, LAYOUT AND SPELLING

2.1. Layout and script

The layout of the text of the Garni inscription (fig. 2) is not regular. The lines are not aligned with the horizontal axis. The letter height, width and spacing are also irregular. The letters are slightly taller in the first line and they may be smaller afterwards, but with no regular pattern. The letters have small decorative serifs under the form of a short dash. All (or almost all, see below) the letters that may possibly have a lunate shape present this characteristic. This is the case with *epsilon*, *sigma*, *mu*, and *omega* (Ε, Σ, Μ, Ω). The *alphas* present a broken bar and a right stroke that at the top is slightly longer and extends at the top of the letter. The *betas* are narrow and their loops are irregularly shaped. The *deltas* present the same characteristic as the *alphas*, with a right stroke slightly protruding at the top of the letter. The *iotas* are not always vertical (sometimes seriously slanting, like line 5, second letter). The shapes of the four *kappas* vary significantly from one to the other. The *mus* have all a deeply incurved shape, and the bars are reduced to two small dashes at the foot of the letter. The skew stroke of the *nus* attaches itself not at the extremity but a short distance of the left and right stroke. The *xi* has a cursive shape. The loop of the *omicrons* has the full diameter of the line and sometimes even beyond it. The *pis* are large and the upper bar slightly protrudes on both sides. The loop of the *rhos* is small and attaches itself at around one third of the vertical stroke. The *omega* has a fully developed double-U shape¹⁹.

As for the layout, Trever already observed that from line 6, we have so to speak two texts in parallel. Line 6, the first word, MENNEAC, is written in letters smaller than the rest of the line. Line 7, the letters of ΑΙΤΟΥΡΓΟC are only slightly smaller than the rest of the line and they are not in the continuity with, but slanting towards it. As for what corresponds to line 8 of the main text, we have two lines, 8 and 9, in smaller characters, ΜΕΤΑΜΑΘΗ | ΤΟΥΜΑΡΤΥΡΙΟΥ. In this portion of text, a special case must be made for the *epsilons* at the beginning of lines 6 and 8. Twice line 6 for MENNEAC and once line 8 for ΜΕΤΑ, the *epsilons* are square-shaped, which is all the more curious that both in lines 6 and 8 we have lunate *sigmas* in the rest of the line. It seems that the engraver (if there was indeed only one for the whole text) deliberately switched to a different style of letters, as if he wanted to send a warning on the way these lines were to be considered. It is thus an unavoidable conclusion that, to the left, the portion of text MENNEAC | ΑΙΤΟΥΡΓΟC | ΜΕΤΑΜΑΘΗ | ΤΟΥΜΑΡΤΥΡΙΟΥ must not be read in continuity with the

¹⁸ Vinogradov 1990, retranslated from the French (followed by Canali DeRossi 2004).

¹⁹ For parallels of late shapes of *omega*, see for the fourth century Roueché 2004, inscriptions 12–14, 17, 19–25 with pl. IV–VII.



Fig. 2. The Gami Greek inscription. *Photo by E. Fagan*

rest of the lines but forms a distinct unit, exactly a first column, whilst, to the right, the rest of the lines should be read as a second column.

Trever (1953) concluded that the left column (in our edition, see below, lines 6–9) was written by a different hand from that of the second one (in our edition lines 10–12), which in fact is not correct (see below for a different explanation), but her remark shows that she recognized that this portion of text had a different status²⁰. Curiously, in contradiction with this observation, she translated the lines of the first column in continuity with those of the second one²¹. Even though he did not analyze the matter in detail, Moretti (1955) also saw that this portion of text was a distinct unit²². A few other scholars only (Krkyasharyan in 1965 and Muradyan in 1981) also recognized the existence of a separate block of text, although they did not draw significant conclusions from this observation. For now, it suffices to observe that the layout of the text may legitimately appear confusing to the modern reader. But the letters of ancient inscriptions were commonly painted. If we assume that the letters of the first column were painted in a color different from the rest of the text, the inscription would have been easily readable.

One had to wait Vinogradov (1990) to fully understand that “column 1” had been written in the same time as the rest of the text and for this reason his translation is correct (his translation of lines 8–9 should follow immediately that of lines 6–7, but this has no consequence for the meaning of the text). There will remain to make sense of the apparently strange choice to introduce this first column, written in characters distinctly smaller and with a script (for the *epsilons*) partly different of the rest of the text.

The script of the inscription has been used to provide justifications for very different suggestions of dating, and the question must be reexamined in full by putting the stone in its context. The strategy of Trever was to retain as parallels the inscriptions of the Caucasus region only. Ours will start from the broader picture of the Greek inscriptions of the eastern Mediterranean and Iran, before coming back to the inscriptions of the Caucasus.

As observed, except for some *epsilons* (see above), the Garni inscription presents systematically lunate shapes for *epsilon*, *sigma*, *mu*, and *omega*. Lunate letter shapes appear in some inscriptions as early as the Hellenistic period. Lunate or curved letter shapes were used with an increasing frequency in the imperial period, but each region had its own evolution. In Iran, they are to be found systematically in stone inscriptions starting in the early first century CE²³. In Syria they appear earlier than, for instance, in Mainland Greece and in the Black Sea regions²⁴. But all over the imperial period until the

²⁰ Trever 1953, 181.

²¹ Trever 1953, 187.

²² Moretti 1955, 42.

²³ For an early example of systematic use of lunate shape, see for instance the letter of Artabanus II to Susa, dated 21 CE (*IG Iran Asie centr.* no. 3, with fig. 3.1–2), with also a trend towards square letters.

²⁴ For Syria, the selection of inscriptions provided by *Choix Syrie*, which covers a very long chronological period and offers many precisely dated inscriptions, shows the quick dominance of lunate shapes, but non-lunate letter shapes still appear under Domitian, see no. 1, and under Trajan, no. 2.

fourth century (and later), it was always possible to use inscriptions with “traditional” shapes of *epsilon*, *sigma*, *mu*, and *omega*²⁵.

If we turn to the inscriptions from the Caucasus, it is the dossier of Iberia that offers the richest *comparandum*. Discussing the case of the Greek-Aramaic bilingual funerary inscription of Serapeitis, with its lunate or curved shapes for *epsilon*, *sigma*, *omega* and *mu*, Trever does not identify for it a conclusive first century date, allowing that it may also belong to the early second century CE, but she goes on to use it to date the Garni inscription to the first century²⁶. However, when we compare the Serapeitis inscription to the Vespasianic stele of 75 CE from Armazi, we observe in the latter the traditional, non-lunate shapes E, Σ, Ω, Μ, which does not fit with Trever’s chronological argument²⁷.

Admittedly, the point is not to quibble on the chronology of individual inscriptions, and it is the case that whether on stone, gems or silverware, from perhaps the end of the first century CE or the beginning of the second century to the beginning of the fourth century, Greek inscriptions from Iberia present regularly lunate or curved shapes, Ε, C, Ω, Μ (or the square W shape for the *omega*), sometimes with remnant non-lunate shapes²⁸. It remains that, on the basis of the letter shapes, the comparison with the inscription of Iberia does not force us to conclude that the Garni inscription should be dated to the first century, and may even invite the opposite conclusion.

The dossier of the Greek inscriptions of Armenia from the imperial period is more limited but leads to similar conclusions about the possible breadth of dating. Two stone inscriptions from the late second century present lunate shapes²⁹. The same characteristic can be observed on the inscription on a silver cup offered by King Pakoros (second half of the second century CE, who might be the king of Armenia of that name)³⁰. Two inscriptions deserve particular attention.

The first one is the inscription from the bath mosaic from Garni, which has mixed letter shapes: “traditional” *epsilons* and *mus*, but square *sigmas* and *omegas*. On the basis

²⁵ A good case is provided by the various Greek versions of the Maximum edict of 301 CE. A majority of them are then written with lunate shape letters, but some of them still make use of “traditional” or mixed letter shapes (*Edictum Diocletiani Giaccherio*, vol. 2: traditional shapes in Thebes, no. 90, pl. LIV; Carystos no. 16, pl. LXX and LXXI; Tamynaion [Euboia] no. 115, pl. LXXII; Thespis no. 130, pl. LXXVI; Tegea, no. 57, pl. LXXIX). In a period where lunate shapes were now used for a majority of inscriptions, a dedication to Diocletian from Tomis (*I. Tomis* 111), dated to 284–286 CE, used E, Μ, square *sigmas* and a square W shaped *omega*. The examples could be multiplied.

²⁶ *I. Georgien*³ 235 (fac-sim., photo in Metzger 1968, pl. IA), with Trever 1953, 196. See the discussion of this inscription and of its chronology in Metzger 1968, 34–47; the text seems to date to the period of Hadrian or Antoninus Pius.

²⁷ *I. Georgien*³ 229 (fac-sim., photo in Braund 1994, 68, fig. 17). Trever 1953, 201, who dated the Garni inscription from 77 CE, two years after the Vespasian inscription from Armazi, did not comment on the lettering discrepancy.

²⁸ *I. Georgien*³ 229–236 and 241–253, 261, 347–348, including no. 351 (early Christian funerary inscription of a legionary soldier from Sukhumi); inscription of the *pitiaxes* Ousas from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France: Preud’homme 2018.

²⁹ *I. Estremo Oriente* 16 and 19 (both with Μ shape for the *mu*).

³⁰ *I. Estremo Oriente* 21 (fac. sim. Trever 1953, 253, fig. 35). See also below and n. 37 and 84–85 for that inscription.

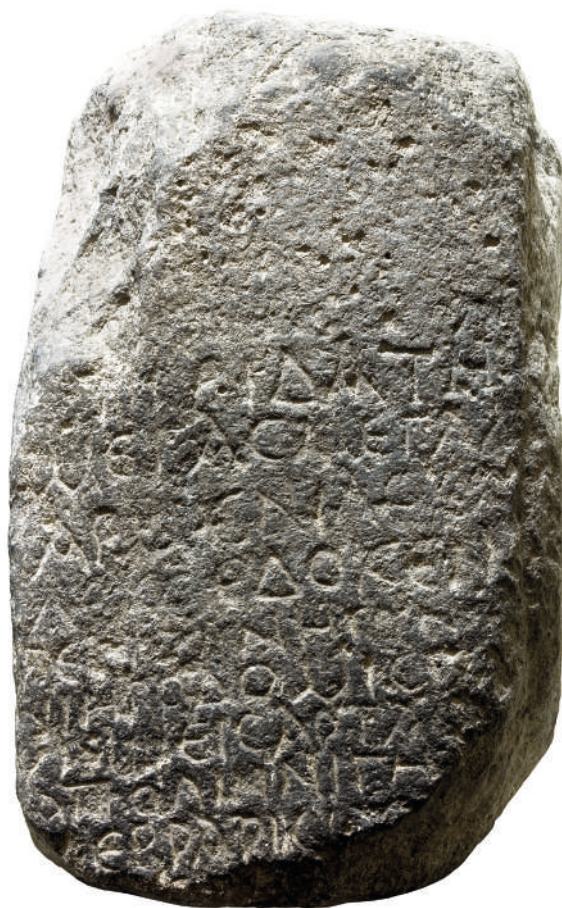


Fig. 3. The Aparan inscription. *Photo courtesy of the History Museum of Armenia*

of stylistic arguments, of the pagan mythologic themes and nudities, and of the letter shapes as compared to those of the mosaics of Antioch, B.N. Arakelyan dated it to the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century, before the conversion of the kingdom to Christianity³¹. Whatever its exact date, a late imperial chronology is indeed certain.

The second inscription that demands attention is the royal donation from Aparan (about 55 km north of Yerevan), made by a king Tiridates (fig. 3). It begins with the titu-
lature Τῑριδάτης [ὁ] | Μέγας μεγάλ[ης] | Ἀρμενίας βα[σι]λεύς (ll. 1–4), for which the parallel with the Garni inscription, though with some differences, is striking³². The script of the two inscriptions is also closely akin (even the broken bar of the *alpha* is found in

³¹ Arakelyan 1956. See Eraslan 2015 for the parallels of marine deities in ancient mosaic art. This inscription should be the object of a new investigation.

³² Aparan inscription: Rostovtzeff 1911; Trever 1953, 271–283; Moretti 1955, 43–46 (*SEG* 15 837); Elnitsky 1958, 148–150 (*SEG* 20 111); Vinogradov 1990, 558–559, no. 604 (*SEG* 40 1316); *I. Estremo Oriente* 18.

both documents). The similarity in their layout makes the parallel between the two inscriptions even more striking: it is characterized by the absence of regularity, irregular letter sizes and poor line alignment with the horizontal axis.

Clearly, the Garni and Aparan inscriptions cannot be separated by a large chronological gap but have a good chance to have been engraved under one and the same king Tiridates, though we must still determine which one. Rostovtzeff argued in favor of a late chronology for the Aparan inscription (the Garni inscription had not yet been discovered)³³. Acknowledging the resemblance in their scripts, Moretti (1955), although after hesitating for a date under Tiridates II, and Vinogradov (1990) dated both texts to the first century CE, whilst Elnitsky (1958) dated them to the turn of the third and fourth century. Although noting the similarity between the two inscriptions, Trever dated the Garni one to 77 CE and the Aparan one to 217–282³⁴. Conversely, Chaumont dated the Garni inscription to the reign of Tiridates III, but the Aparan one to the first century³⁵. Canali DeRossi dated the Aparan inscription (following Vinogradov) to the first century and the Garni one to 298, quoting for this date Kettenhofen 1995, but who in fact dated it to the first century CE: this difference in dating is thus based on a material error and for this reason can be discarded³⁶.

The Iberian inscriptions of the late first or second centuries as well as the inscription of King Pakoros on a silver cup of the second half of the second century are remarkable for the elegance and classic regularity of their layout and engraving³⁷. The question is

³³ Rostovtzeff 1911, 26–29, for a date under Tiridates III.

³⁴ Trever 1953, 271–283, esp. p. 282 for the date. Ibid. 274–277, she adduced a contrast between the script of the Aparan inscription and that of “Tigranocerta” (in fact Martyropolis / Silvan), which she herself republished *ibid.* 283–288 (= *I.Estrema Oriente* 53, with lemma at the date), with its characteristic ligatures and abbreviations, and which she dated to the second half of the fourth century. But this date is impossible to accept. Mango 1985 (*SEG* 35 1475) redated the text to 591 CE. Niehoff-Panagiotidis (2019, 660), on the basis of verisimilitude arguments, proposed a date in the 410s, which however fails to convince for the author does not analyze the script of the inscription. A significantly later date is most likely. The newly found mosaic inscription from Jerusalem (Borschel-Dan 2017), of the sixth century (under Justinian), provides a good benchmark for a comparison. For the history of Sophene in Antiquity, see Marciak 2014.

³⁵ Chaumont 1976, with 185–188, for the Aparan inscription, dated to the first century CE on the basis of her acceptance to read in this text the name of a Rhodomis[tos], who would be the son of the Iberian king Rhadamistos, the besieger of his uncle at Garni. But she herself notes that the name is present in the kingdom of Bosphoros. Indeed, the Iranian name Παδάμειστος is to be found at Tanais (*CIRB* 1262, l. 17, 2nd c. CE; possibly also, with restoration, 1277, l. 27, 3rd c. CE) and at Theodosia (*CIRB* 947 A, l. 6, 3rd c. CE); see also the index of *CIRB*, s.v. Παδάμασις, Παδάμιος (?) and Παδαμόφουρτος (many other Iranian names are attested in the Pontic region). Therefore, there is no particular reason to link the “Rhodomis[tos]” of the Aparan inscription (if the reading is correct) to Tacitus’ Rhadamistos.

³⁶ *I.Estrema Oriente* 17–18. The mistake was already in *SEG* 45 1873. In reality, Kettenhofen 1995, 120, concluded: «Ich meine, daß der Ersteditor der Inschrift, Lisicjan, mit der Datierung ins 1. Jh. n. Chr. schon das Richtige gesehen hat».

³⁷ For stone inscriptions, beyond the above referred to cases of *I.Georgien*³ 229 and 235, see among others *I.Georgien*³ 200 (with photo Preud’homme 2019), 229 and 235; for silverware *I.Estrema Oriente* 21, King Pakoros’ silver cup, with facsimile Trever 1953, 253, fig. 35 (on this inscription, see discussion below and n. 84–85); for rings and intaglios, intaglio of Ousas, Preud’homme 2018.

to determine what to do with the rather sloppy layout of both the Garni and Aparan inscriptions. It is tempting to consider that a chronological gap is here the decisive factor of differentiation. Even if this is certainly not an absolute rule, late imperial inscriptions tend to be increasingly characterized by the sloppiness of their engraving, which can be observed for instance in several copies of Diocletian's Maximum Edict or in *milliaria* of the period³⁸. For this reason, the balance shifts heavily for a late date, in the late third or beginning of the fourth century, for the Garni and Aparan inscription, although admittedly this does not yet provide a final proof for a late chronology of these documents.

2.2. Spelling

The text of the Garni inscription presents a series of spellings that diverge from the standard ones: l. 3, αἵκτισεν for ἔκτισεν, l. 5, αἵτους for ἔτους, which in turn, l. 5, helps to vindicate the restoration αἵ[αυτῶ] (on which see below). The confusion αἵ for ε and vice versa, based on an identical pronunciation /e/, becomes increasingly frequent from the mid-imperial period onwards. As for λιτουργός for λιθουργός, l. 7, and ματητοῦ for μαθητοῦ, ll. 8–9, Moretti³⁹ was the first to interpret correctly the former, and El-nitsky⁴⁰ followed by Vinogradov (1990) rendered appropriately both words: the unaspirated occlusive replaced the aspirated corresponding one. Similarly, we have ἔδοκε for ἔδωκε and [Φ]εβράρις for Φεβράριος in the Aparan inscription, as well as Ἐγιαλός for Αἰγιαλός and Πιθώ for Πειθώ (to which should be added ἡργασάμεθα for εἰργασάμεθα) in the Garni mosaic⁴¹.

Spellings diverging from the norm, which themselves correspond to evolutions in pronunciation, become ever more common from the second century onwards. Admittedly they do not fit mechanically with chronological evolution, and they usually correspond to the level of education, often linked to the social status of the author of the text⁴². As will be shown, the Garni inscription was not a royal inscription, which may seem to depreciate script as chronological criterium. But the Aparan one was a royal donation and if the standard of Garni mosaic (located in the royal palace) was higher, it also contained orthographic variants (“misspellings” if one thinks in terms of norms). The fact that this bundle of texts presents spellings similarly diverging from the norm invites us to date them in the late imperial period rather than in the early one, a conclusion that fits with those made on their letter shapes and layout.

³⁸ For the Maximum Edict, see *Edictum Diocletiani Giacchero*. For the *milliaria*, see French 2012–2016. A well-illustrated series of five milestones from Sekköy, in Caria, bearing a total of 11 texts and covering the period from 201 CE (under Septimius Severus) to c. 340–350 CE (under Constantius II and Constans) illustrates perfectly the differences in the layout and engraving over time (see Varinlioglu, French 1991; 1992 = *I. Carie hautes terres* 93–97 = French 2012–2016 fasc. 3.5 *Asia*, pp. 214–220, no. 118).

³⁹ Moretti 1955, 42.

⁴⁰ El-nitsky 1958, 146–148.

⁴¹ Arakelyan 1956, 154, saw in the forms Ἐγιαλός and Πιθώ a clue for a late dating of the Garni mosaic. El-nitsky 1958 also noted the simplification Θάλασσα, similar to the form βασιλίσσα in the Garni Tiridates inscription, and insisted on the spelling parallels between the two inscriptions.

⁴² Brixhe 1987, 18–25.

3. NAMES

The onomastics of the Garni inscription offer typical evidence on the social life of the circle of people mentioned by the text. But, in addition, one of the names provides crucial chronological information.

Tiridates (Trdat) is a theophoric name that appears frequently in the Parthian aristocracy and in the Arsakid family, especially in its Armenian branch⁴³. It means “Given by Tīr”, the Iranian-Armenian god of writing who was also psychopomp, and who for this reason could be assimilated to Apollon and to Hermes⁴⁴. The theophoric name Μεννέας refers to the god Men and is typical for Asia Minor⁴⁵. It is sparsely represented in the other regions of the ancient world. But it has 28 occurrences, or 9.5%, from Western Asia Minor and an enormous amount of 221 ones, or 75%, from Inland Asia Minor⁴⁶. We have thus every reason to think that the Menneas from Garni came from some eastern province of Roman imperial Asia Minor, in a period when the name had not yet begun to fall out of favor because of Christianization⁴⁷.

There remains finally the case of the name Martyrios, l. 9, a word that has been first recognized as a personal name by Vinogradov 1990. Vinogradov suggested also that it was not attested only in Christian texts, and to support his claim he adduced the case of an inscription from Ikonion (*SEG* 15 819, now republished as *I.Mus.Konya* 183), which he dated to the first half of the third century. He thought that this inscription, which he considered to be a non-Christian text, allowed him to date the Garni inscription, also in a non-Christian context, to the first century CE.

To test the validity of this hypothesis one should start from a survey of the usage of the names Martyrios, Marturis, Martys or Martyria in the various parts of the Empire, on the basis of the *LGN* volumes, and from various sources for the regions that are not yet covered by *LGN*. The results of this inquiry for the four names can be summarized as follows:

Source ⁴⁸	I	II	III.A	III.B	IV	V.A	V.B	V.C	Syr.	Eg.	Total
Count	5	4	5	2	5	3	6	9	17	113	169

A huge majority of occurrences are of the fourth century or later, with very rare exceptions that are the following: *LGN* III.A: 3 3rd–5th c.; III.B: 1 2nd–3rd c.; V.A: 1 imp.; V.B: 1 imp.; V.C: 1 2nd c., 1 3rd–4th c. The dates “3rd–5th c.” or “imp.” (that is “undetermined

⁴³ Chaumont 1986.
⁴⁴ Chaumont 1986; Russell 1986.
⁴⁵ See already Ramsay 1883, 35, for Menneas as theophoric name, on the basis of the information from Pisidia.
⁴⁶ See *LGN* V.B and V.C respectively for Western and Eastern Asia Minor
⁴⁷ For the fate of Menneas after Christianization, Destephen 2019, 269.
⁴⁸ In this row, Roman numerals stand for *LGN* volume numbers. In Syria-Palestina-Arabia the 17 occurrences, all late antique (fifth and sixth centuries): *IGLSyr* 2 334, 400; 3.1 727; 3.2 998; 13.1 9283; 21.2 5, 78, 80–81, 102, 162; *SEG* 7 1184; 8, 5; 30 1711, 1713, 1715; 35 1582. For Egypt, the *Trismegistos* papyrological database shows that the name Martyrios (under its various forms, in Greek or in Coptic) is attested 89 times, and Martyria 24 times, for a total of 113 occurrences, all mentions from the fifth century or later.

in the imperial period”) illustrate the doubt that remains on their actual chronology. The alleged pre-third century occurrences deserve to be examined in detail.

LGPN III.B, from Plataea in Boiotia. On the basis of the first edition of the inscription, *LGPN* dates a Martyrios to the second or third century CE. He appears in a list of names on a bronze plaque⁴⁹. The text is dated by its editor to the late second or early third century on the basis of its script and by comparison with a local text of the Diocletianic period, which among others presented curved *mu*, instead of the M shape of the bronze plaque (which however has besides lunate *epsilons*, *sigmas*, and *omegas*). But, as recalled above, fourth or fifth century inscriptions may also perfectly present such a shape of *mu*⁵⁰. The presence in the list of a series of typically Christian names such as Anastasios, Kyriakos and Kyrillos, and of other names that were very popular in the later period such as Simplikios, speaks in favor of a date in the fourth century or later.

LGPN III.C., from Ikonion, 2nd c. *LGPN*: A Futius Aelius Martyris dedicates a funerary monument for himself and his wife Aelia Zoe in the Greek inscription *I. Mus. Konya* 183 (the document advocated by Vinogradov). The text is engraved on a beautifully decorated marble sarcophagus. The style of the sarcophagus and the script of the inscription point to a date in the third century. The double Roman *gentilicium* Futius Aelius appears in another Greek dedication of Ikonion made by a woman, Futia Aelia Domnilla, for herself and her husband Aelius Nonius, on another beautiful and richly decorated sarcophagus (*I. Mus. Konya* 182)⁵¹. Given the rare association of the two *gentilicia* Futius and Aelius and the extreme rarity of the *nomen* Futius, Domnilla and Martyris were probably closely connected. Both of them belonged to the circle of the traditional Roman elite that was prominent at Ikonion⁵². It should be observed that Ζώη is not *per se* a Christian name (it was used already in Hellenistic times, see *LGPN* s.v.). However, its meaning accommodated well to the Christian faith. Moreover, it was seemingly the name of a Christian martyr of the first half of the second century CE: according to the Christian tradition, the slave couple Ἑσπερος and Ζώη, who lived at Attaleia in Pamphylia, was martyred in 127 CE, under Hadrian⁵³. As for the name Martyri(o)s, it goes without saying that it fits perfectly well for a Christian. Thus, although, beyond the name Martyris, nothing in the inscription of Ikonion is unambiguously Christian, the couple of Martyris and Zoe might well have been Christian⁵⁴. The lack of open Christian signature might be explained by the fact that, in this period, it was too dangerous to advertise one's Christian faith fully publicly, at least in the town of Ikonion itself, and even for people belonging to the traditional elite of the city.

Interestingly, another inscription from the region mentions an Aelius Martyrios, the son of Eudromios, who dedicated a funerary inscription, carved on a block, in honor of

⁴⁹ Skias 1917, 163–65, no. 15 (with photo), col. II, l. 5.

⁵⁰ See above, p. 606.

⁵¹ On the rare *nomen* Futius, see another occurrence *MAMA* XI 370 (from Losta, 80 km south-east of Ikonion).

⁵² Mitchell 1979.

⁵³ Halkin 1957, 245.

⁵⁴ McLean, *I. Mus. Konya* 183, interestingly refers to the cross shape of the *tau* in ταμείω, l. 9, but the stroke at the top of the *tau* is an addition, of which the date cannot be ascertained (see the photo in the ed. pr. Mansel 1954).

his deceased brother Eunomios⁵⁵. The inscription was found at Sadettin Hanı (Zazadin, also Zaz-ed-Din Khan), a site about 27 km north-east of Konya⁵⁶. The inscription is definitely Christian. As observed by Cronin, not only are the names Eudromios and Eunomios Christian or found in Christian inscriptions, but there is a Christian monogram in the shape of a cross at the beginning of the first line⁵⁷. For Cronin, the inscription was probably not later than Diocletian and maybe earlier (it is dated to the 4th–5th c. by *LGPN*). The facsimiles in Cronin's publication do not make it easy to make an independent judgement. The square shape of the letters could as well be pre- or post-Diocletianic. Besides, the frequency of the name Aelius in the region and the presence or absence of the *nomen* Futius are sufficient indications to prevent any identification of the Futius Aelius Martyris of Ikonion to the Aelius Martyrios of Sadettin Hanı, the former being besides of higher social standing than the latter. But, indeed, the textual, chronological and geographical proximity between the two inscriptions is a further indication that the Futius Aelius Martyris of Ikonion might have been a Christian, just like his almost namesake of Sadettin Hanı.

LGPN III.C., from Sienoi, in Pisidia: Martyrios appears as the patronym of the *anteirenarches* Anatolis in a text that belongs to a group of twenty-nine rock dedications from Kocain Cave, in İndağı, in the Antalya province⁵⁸. They were made by *eirenarchai*, *anteirenarchai* and *diogmitai*, the officials in charge of public security in imperial Asia Minor. On the basis of parallel cave locations, it has been suggested that these texts were dedications made to Cybele, although in this case there is no such indication. The religious nature of the texts, if any, cannot be determined. On the basis of the presence of one Aurelius, C. Brélaz dates the text to the third century, while reversing the argument and on the basis of this one Aurelius only H.S. Öztürk prefers to date them before 212: we would be however after the mid-second century, in the context of increasing insecurity in the region (the letter shapes of the Martyrios inscription with its square W-shaped *omegas* and the spelling διωγμίτε for διωγμίται fit with this dating)⁵⁹. A date in the Severian period, before 212 for most of them, seems likely for this bunch of texts.

To conclude, Martyrios (or Martyris), Martyria and Martys are in overwhelming majority late names from the fourth century onward. For now, not a single name of this series can be securely dated to the first century CE or even to the first half of the second century CE. We have good reason to think that the name began to appear in Christian families in the late second and third century, as suggested by the Sienoi and Ikonion inscriptions, which seem to provide the first cases of the use of the name Martyrios, probably in Christian families.

The script, layout and spelling of the Garni inscription all pointed rather toward a late date. The case of the name Martyrios definitely tips the balance in favor of a late date for

⁵⁵ Cronin 1902, 360, no. 120 = *MAMA* VIII no. 319 (but who does not refer to Cronin). Note the absence of sigma l. 1 in Αἴλιο<ς>, which is an indication of sloppiness in the writing.

⁵⁶ Cronin 1902, 358–67, nos. 119–39; *MAMA* VIII nos. 312–24; *TIB Galatien* 220 (with map of the region); *MAMA* XI with map p. XXVIII.

⁵⁷ See Cronin 1902, 362, note 8 on the date of the monogram, comparatively early in the Christian period.

⁵⁸ *SEG* 6686–714, with new edition of several texts by Öztürk 2015.

⁵⁹ Brélaz 2005, 374, B85; Öztürk 2015, 176 and 179.

this text. It is also a clear indication that in all likelihood the bearer of the name in the Garni inscription was a Christian, which nonetheless, *per se*, does not make of this text a Christian inscription. However, there remains seemingly a stumbling block against a late dating: the word HAIIOC at the beginning of the inscription.

4. "HELIOS TIRIDATES"

It is no exaggeration to say that the interpretation of the first word has guided most interpretations of the Garni inscription. Interpreting the word as a reference to the Sun god, most scholars have logically attributed the text to Tiridates I⁶⁰. They however divided about how to make sense of the word.

Treuer rejected the view that this was a name qualifying Tiridates and saw here an invocation to the god, "Helios!"⁶¹. Indeed, invocations to the god(s), θεοί (only rarely θεός), may be found at the beginning of inscriptions in the Classical and Hellenistic period. Initial invocations of individual gods in the nominative are rare but some are attested. This is the case in a dedication of the city of Kibyra from Puteoli dated to ca. 138 CE, which begins with: [ἀ]γαθῆι τύχηι Ζεὺς Σω[τῆρ Ὀλύμπιος (?)]⁶². In this case however, the form of the invocation is made explicit by the association with ἀγαθῆι τύχηι and the layout of the inscription.

Other scholars have preferred to see in the Garni inscription a name appended to that of Tiridates, by assimilation of the king to the Sun god⁶³. In this vein, it has even been proposed that Helios concealed the theophoric name Tiran, supposedly redoubling the reference to the god Tir already present in the theophoric Tiridates, when in fact this god had no connection with the sun⁶⁴.

In any case, the two interpretations supposed that the king was a devotee of Helios. Indeed, we know that the Sun god, whether he was worshipped as Helios, Shamash, or Mithra, with in addition various other local solar deities, was extremely popular from Iran to Syria and well beyond. A link with the god Helios has thus seemed to exclude the possibility that the king was Tiridates III, the founder of the Christian church of Armenia. Thus, the few scholars who have supported the late date have been at a loss to explain this reference to Helios⁶⁵. In fact, as observed by G. Wirth, it should not have been a stumbling block against an attribution to Tiridates III, insofar as it was only in the second part of his reign that this king embraced the Christian faith⁶⁶. But admittedly,

⁶⁰ It is also on the basis of this first word of our text that the temple of Garni has been commonly attributed to the cult of Helios; see for instance most recently Stubbs 2015, 465.

⁶¹ Treuer 1949, 20, 22; 1953, 187–189.

⁶² IG XIV 829 (with SEG 53 1090), l. 1.

⁶³ This has been the standard understanding by most scholars until today (Lisitsyan 1945a; 1945b; Abramyan 1947; Moretti 1955, 41; Elnitsky 1958; Krkyasharyan 1965, 66; Vinogradov 1990; Canali DeRossi 2004; Movsisyan 2006, 238).

⁶⁴ Manandyan 1951 (on the basis of the conjecture that the grandson of Tiridates III might have been called "Tiran-Trdat"). The hypothesis, already criticized by Treuer 1953, 189–190, has however been followed by Sarkisyan 1966, 17–18 (although he thought that the king was Tiridates I); Toumanoff 1986, tab. 13; Hewsens 1978–1979, 105; Muradyan 1981.

⁶⁵ See for instance Elnitsky 1958.

⁶⁶ Wirth 1980–1981, 337, n. 84. This was indeed the view of Hewsens 1985–1986, 32.

this might seem a weak argument. Wirth himself added: “Klarheit über den Helios Tiri-dates ist vorerst nicht zu gewinnen”⁶⁷.

Although they have been quickly pushed back, alternative solutions have been proposed. As early as 1946, Manandyan suggested that the word here stood for the Roman *nomen* Aelius. He adduced the parallel of the second century Armenian king Pakoros, who in an inscription he set up in Rome after 162 CE, advertised his name as Aurelius Pakoros⁶⁸. Trever countered the argument by stating that the normal form of the *gentilicium* in Greek was Αἴλιος, with /αι/, not /η/, “and even more so if it had been in the fourth century, when η was read as ι”⁶⁹. In 1951, Manandyan himself abandoned his original hypothesis and ever since it has been forgotten.

Starting also from the premise that the first name of the inscription was a *gentilicium*, F. Feydit suggested in 1969 that we have here the name Αὐρήλιος and that the three letters AYP had been engraved to the left of ΗΑΙΟC, but lost⁷⁰. This analysis was followed by Chaumont⁷¹. Comparing recent, high-quality photos of the stone and that provided by Trever, it appears that the stone has not suffered since the 1950s and that there is no trace of AYP (see fig. 2). Furthermore, if indeed the letters AYPΗΑΙΟC had been engraved, the first three letters would not be aligned on the margin, as this is the case in the following lines. Therefore, one can safely conclude with almost all scholars that the restoration [Αὐρ]ήλιος cannot be accepted⁷². One should read here ΗΑΙΟC only.

In fact, Manandyan’s initial hypothesis, ΗΑΙΟC for the *gentilicium* Aelius, can be proved to be correct. The first argument in favor of this solution is that, so great was the prestige of the Empire and so strong were the links with the imperial power, that client kings and other rulers in the dependence of Rome commonly took a Roman *gentilicium*⁷³. In the Levant, Mesopotamia and beyond, a series of kings or kinglets bore a *nomen Romanum*.

After 212 almost all **Pamyreneans** adopted the names Iulius Aurelius, stressing their proximity with the Severan family⁷⁴. The princes of Palmyra, Odainath, Hairanes, Orodēs (as well as their generals) all bear the *gentilicium* Septimius, both in Greek and

⁶⁷ Wirth 1980–1981, 337, n. 84.

⁶⁸ IGUR 415 (*I. Estremo Oriente* 22). His brother also had the *nomen* Aurelius.

⁶⁹ Trever 1949, 22; 1953, 189.

⁷⁰ Feydit 1969.

⁷¹ Chaumont 1969, 177–180.

⁷² J. Reynolds (1971, 152), who first found Feydit’s suggestion attractive for it allowed to move the inscription from the first to the fourth century, abandoned it on the basis of the autopsy and comment of D.R. Wilkinson. However, she added that it might perhaps be that a preceding line, ending with AYP, was cut on a lost block standing above the one we have. But this is an unnecessary assumption. Russell 1986 correctly remarked that the “dimensions of the inscription” do not justify the restoration [Αὐρ]ήλιος.

⁷³ Braund 1984, 39–53. Thus, the kings of Bosphoros were *Tiberii Iulii*. This practice is first attested with Cotys I, whose reign began in 45/6 CE and who probably inherited his Roman names from his father king Aspurgos, a contemporary of Tiberius (Braund 1984, 41). Then the kings of Bosphoros kept this designation over the generations. The last attestation is in a building inscription from Pantikapaion of 483 CE (*SEG* 48 993, date Y. Vinogradov), where King Douptounos is styled *Tiberius Iulius*.

⁷⁴ Yon 2002, 138.

Palmyrene inscriptions of Palmyra, and so does Odainath's wife, the famous Queen Zenobia⁷⁵. Her son Vaballath was named *L. Iulius Aurelius Septimius Vaballathus*⁷⁶.

The Arabic kings of Osroene (later of Edessa only) also bore Roman imperial *gentilicia*. Abgar VIII (c. 177/8–212) is known in an inscription and on some of his coins as Septimius Abgar⁷⁷. One of his descendants, Abgar X, who in 240 was in the second year of his reign, is mentioned as Aelius Septimius Abgar in a Syriac parchment⁷⁸.

A king of, or from, Iberia introduces himself as **King Fl(avius) Dades** in an inscription punched around the edge of the circular base of a silver dish by which he offers the object to one of the grandees of his kingdom⁷⁹. The inscription was originally dated to the Trajanic period⁸⁰. Then a date in the third or fourth century was suggested⁸¹. The script, the *gentilicium* Flavius (used as an honorary title) and the context of the find (the dish was found with *aurei* of Decius and Hostilian of 251) could possibly fit with a Constantinian or post-Constantinian date in the fourth century. But the hypothesis of a reburial of the dish has been proposed, with a much earlier date for the inscription, from the turn of the second-third century onward (the Flavian *gentilicium* of the king would be inherited from one of his ancestors)⁸². The question of the chronology of this inscription remains open, but it is certain that this king bore the *gentilicium* Flavius.

For Armenia itself, there is the already mentioned case of **King Pakoros**, who appears in an inscription found in Rome (but lost today) and republished by Moretti as *IGUR* 415 (*I. Estremo Oriente* 22). Pakoros bought a sarcophagus for his brother Aurelius Merithates⁸³. Pakoros introduces himself (ll. 2–5) as Αὐρήλιος Πάκορος βασιλεὺς Μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας. A Pakoros known from various literary sources reigned in Armenia in the 160s before being deprived from his kingdom by Lucius Verus⁸⁴. A king Pakoros appears also in an inscription from the region of Maikop, a dedication on a silver cup, παρὰ βασιλέως Πακόρου (thus without the Roman *gentilicium*)⁸⁵. In *IGUR* 415, Moretti supposed that Pakoros received the *gentilicium* after he was forced to leave his kingdom and to come to Rome. In fact, there is no necessity to adopt this view, as proved by the fact that the other client kings were fully in

⁷⁵ *IGLS* 17.1 (Palmyra), p. 63–86, no. 54–69.

⁷⁶ See references in Yon 2002, 294.

⁷⁷ Inscription: *AE* 1984, 920, ll. 11–12, *Sept(imi) | Ab(g)ari*. Coins: *RPC online* IV.3 Σεπ(τίμιος) Ἀβγαρος 4005, 8985, 9116. See Drijvers 1980, 10–16; Teixidor 1990, 159–163 for the updating of the chronology of the later kings of Osroene, and Ross 2001, 50.

⁷⁸ Teixidor 1990, doct. A scriptura ext. l. 3. See also Ross 2001, 69–75, and Millar 2006, 211–212.

⁷⁹ *I. Estremo Oriente* 2 = *I. Georgien*³ 261 (King Fl. Dades), with fac. sim. Braund 1993: ἐγὼ βασιλεὺς Φλ(άβιος) Δαδης κτλ.

⁸⁰ Braund 1984, 43.

⁸¹ Braund 1993.

⁸² Linderski 2007 suggests that Dades was not the king of Iberia, but a local kinglet. The *pitiaces* Publicius Agrippa (*I. Georgien*³ 235, ll. 2–3) of the mid-second century would provide a parallel.

⁸³ Moretti (*IGUR*) suggested that one should perhaps read Mithridates.

⁸⁴ Fronto *Ver.* 2.15. On this Pakoros, see the discussion of Moretti *IGUR* and Van den Hout 1999, 302.

⁸⁵ *I. Estremo Oriente* 21. As observed, this Pakoros might well have been the homonymous king of Armenia, but the name was also that of the Parthian king Pakoros II, who reigned between 78 and 110 CE; see above p. 606 with n. 30 and 608 with n. 37.

charge when they bore their Roman *gentilicium*. The mention of the Roman *gentilicium* was probably rather a matter of context (see below for the case of Tiridates also).

But the case of Pakoros seems however to raise another difficulty. If at an earlier date – supposing that the king of the Garni inscription was not Tiridates I but a later homonym – an Arsakid king of Armenia, Pakoros, had taken the name Aurelius, should not we believe that a later Arsakid Tiridates must also have been an Aurelius? This was one of the bases of Feydit’s analysis⁸⁶. In fact, there is no necessity to suppose a continuity in terms of Roman *gentilicium* in the Arsakid family of the kings of Armenia. Between Pakoros and Tiridates II or III there is respectively *ca.* fifty years or more or one hundred fifty. In between, many events may have intervened that might have justified the adoption of a different *nomen*, which was certainly the case for Tiridates III⁸⁷.

Admittedly, it remains that if Helius or Helios is frequently used as a *cognomen*, it is not properly a *nomen*⁸⁸. But the point is in fact that Helius or Helios are only alternative forms of the *nomen* Aelius. An interesting case is provided by the *Historia Augusta* (2. *Aelius*), which tells us the life of the father of Lucius Verus, L. Ceionius Commodus. The man was adopted by Hadrian under the name L. Aelius Caesar⁸⁹. He died in 138 before being able to reign, but, although the details of the story told by the *Historia Augusta* are largely fictional, it remains certain he indeed took the *nomen* Aelius. On the coins struck under his name, he is always called L. Aelius Caesar⁹⁰. However, in his *Life* in the *Historia Augusta* most manuscripts spell his name Helius⁹¹. It is also the form Helius that appears in the *Life of Hadrian* (1. *Hadrian* 23. 12 and 24. 1.) to refer to the same character. The misspelling Helius for L. Aelius Caesar in the *Historia Augusta* has puzzled modern editors⁹². The *Life of Aelius* is dedicated to Diocletian, but just like the rest of the *Historia Augusta* there remains little doubt that this life was written in the second half of the fourth century⁹³.

Another character presents an interesting case, Emperor M. Aurelius Antoninus, better known as Elagabalus, for whom it is worth stressing that no author gives this name (or nickname) before the fourth century⁹⁴. The name appears under the form Heliogabalus in the *Historia Augusta* (17. *Elagabalus*), but also in Eutropius (8. 22), Aurelius Victor (23–24) and

⁸⁶ Feydit 1969.

⁸⁷ See below on this point.

⁸⁸ For the name as *cognomen* in the western or eastern part of the Empire, see Jennes 2013 (it is only in Egypt that the name is not attested).

⁸⁹ On the fictional character of this life, see Rohrbacher 2013, 162.

⁹⁰ *RIC*², II. 3, no. 2621–2717 and 2929–2935.

⁹¹ See the detail in the *apparatus criticus* in the ed. Callu *et al.* 1992. Remarkably, Aelius Spartianus, the “author” of this portion or the *Historia Augusta*, has also his name spelled Helius in some manuscripts.

⁹² See the interrogations of D. Magie (1921, 73, n. 1). There is one other case of confusion of Helius for Aelius in the Palatinus mss. for the name of Aelius Maurus, the freedman of Phlegon, himself Hadrian’s freedman (see 10. *Septimius Severus* 20. 1 with Magie’s note 3 (1921, 418)). The confusion is interesting but cannot be compared with the systematic spelling Helius for L. Aelius Caesar.

⁹³ The debate is masterfully summarized in Rohrbacher 2013.

⁹⁴ Arrizabalaga y Prado 2017, vol. 1, 85–94 and 102–105. The nickname is now the name under which this emperor is known in modern scholarship.

the *Epitome* (23. 2), the common form coming back apparently to an original *Kaisergeschichte* published in 357 or 358 CE⁹⁵. It is thus clear that the specific spelling Heliogabalus for the name of Elagabalus, among others in the *Historia Augusta*, necessarily comes back to the fourth century CE. As for the spelling Helius for the name of L. Aelius Caesar, it appears only in the *Historia Augusta* but it is perfectly consistent in the *Life* of the character and is appears also in the *Life of Hadrian* for the same character. The reason of this choice for L. Aelius Caesar remains unknown but the parallel of the form Heliogabalus invites us to admit that the spelling is not the mistake of some medieval copyist but a deliberate choice of the fourth century writer of this part of the *Historia Augusta*.

These are indeed literary works, not writings of ordinary people. But striking spelling confusions can also be observed as early as the third century for the name of the god Elagabalus, the “God of the mountain”, who was originally venerated at Emesa in Syria and associated to the Sun. The name of the god is most frequently spelled Elagabalus, but sometimes also Helagabalus or Aelagabalus in Latin inscriptions from the Western part of the Empire⁹⁶.

Admittedly again, these observations all concern Latin texts. Besides, at least as far as Elagabalus is concerned, as a god or as an emperor, it might seem possible to explain the solar-type variations of the names by the solar aspect of the god. However, the analysis would leave unexplained the spelling Helius for Aelius Caesar and the forms Helagabalus/Aelagabalus for the god Elagabalus. The variations can be better explained by phonetic/spelling confusions. They show at least that we should not draw arbitrary barriers between various forms of the same name. In the later period of the Roman Empire there was no watertight separation in Latin between *Ael-*, *El-* and *Hel-*. On the Greek side this time, this is precisely how also it is possible to explain the spelling ΗΛΙΟC in the Garni inscription.

As we saw, we have the best reasons to think that Menneas, the stone mason who wrote the Garni inscription (if indeed he wrote the text himself), came from one of the provinces of Eastern Asia Minor. He may have spoken good Greek but, as it was more and more frequent at the end of the imperial period, he did not reach the same standard when it came to writing. As mentioned above, this explains the remarkably consistent series of graphic confusions met in this inscription: αἴκτισεν, αἴτους, αἱ[αυτῶ], λιτουργός, and ματητοῦ. In the late period (fourth–sixth century) can be observed many examples of interchange of ε/αι/η in the inscriptions of Asia Minor, such as it is the case with ε>η: τήκνου, ἐνθάδη, and αι>η: κατάκιντη, κατάκιτη; and conversely η>ε: μέ, σοματοθέκε, and αι>ε: γυνεκί⁹⁷. In the Egyptian papyri of the Roman period, η frequently interchanges with ι and ει, but also with ε and αι⁹⁸.

⁹⁵ Bird 1994, xii–xiii with 116 for the name of the emperor.

⁹⁶ See respectively *AE* 1994, 1285, Germania Inferior, apparently to be dated to the reign of Antoninus Pius, and *AE* 1910, 141, Pannonia Inferior, 199–202 CE.

⁹⁷ Brixhe 1987, 49 and 109–110, who however cannot be followed for his hypothesis of a specific tradition in the Pontic region and for his explanation of the substitution of αι or ε by η by a hypercorrection under the influence of schools still teaching the ancient pronunciation of η: these graphic confusions have certainly to do with diverse simplified local pronunciations of the vowels by common people.

⁹⁸ Gignac 1976, 235–249, specifically 247–248 for the interchange of αι and η (in both directions), less frequent than the other interchanges, but well attested, however.

For the interchange of αι/η specifically, a good case (the PHI database returns 45 matches) is provided with αι>η in the spellings γυνηκός/γυνηκεί/γυνηκί, with most examples from Asia Minor, beginning as early as the third century CE. Remarkably, several of the texts with this confusion also present a series of both vowel and consonant misspellings, just like the Garni inscription. This is the case for instance for the third century with *MAMA* VII 221 (Galatia): Αὐρή(λιος) Διογένης ἰδία | γυνηκὺ Αὐρη(λία) Δόμνη | γλυκυτάτη, Αὐρή(λιος) Κυρίων | ἰδία τυγατρει κὲ Αὐρή(λοι) τὰ ⁵ τέκνα εἰδία μητρει | μνήμης χάριν; and *ibid.* 284 (Phrygia, Amorion): Αὐρ(ή)λιος | Μενέλαος Ἡλίου | σὺν γυνηκὸς Τατει | μητρὶ Δόμνη ⁵ κὲ ἀδελπῶ Διοκλῆ | κὲ Νανα τυγατρὶ | μν[ή]μης κάριν⁹⁹.

This is probably a similar confusion that was made by Menneas for the *gentilicium* Αἴλιος. Should we transcribe ΗΛΙΟC with or without the aspiration? For those who like Menneas “wrote the way they spoke”, the difference was inexistent, given that the aspiration had been lost for a long time in everyday life pronunciation, and that the pronunciation of the vowels very close or identical. It is also possible that Menneas’ misspelling was facilitated by his knowledge of the correct spelling of the name of the sun. Whether Menneas also saw in the *gentilicium* an allusion to the god is impossible to decide. An alternative solution would be that, in a process similar to the one that led the author(s) of the *Historia Augusta* to choose the spelling Heliogabalus for Elagabalus and Helius Caesar for Aelius Caesar, the *nomen* Aelius of Tiridates was commonly spelt Helius. Between the misspelling by Menneas or the usual and deliberate spelling Helius for Aelius as *nomen* of Tiridates, only other testimonies could tell us which of these two solutions should be adopted, although in the current state of our evidence the former seems more likely. But the mention of a Roman *gentilicium* remains certain and this solves once and for all, negatively, the question of the alleged reference to the Sun god in this inscription. We thus transcribe Ἡλιος for the *gentilicium* Helius/Aelius.

For Tiridates the Great, if we accept Agathangelos’ account, in his youth he was in exile under the protection of a certain Licinius¹⁰⁰. The *gentilicium* of this Licinius is unknown. Maybe (though this should remain a hypothesis) Tiridates adopted the *nomen* of his protector, given that Aelius was still a frequent Roman *gentilicium* in third century Asia Minor. Besides, it may seem surprising to observe that while in the second century Pakoros, as Arsakid king of Armenia, had born the *gentilicium* Aurelius, Tiridates went by Aelius. But we do not know the *gentilicium* (if any) of the Armenian kings following Pakoros and, as observed, the vicissitudes of Tiridates’ own life may suffice to explain his *nomen* Aelius. Finally, in the Aparan inscription Tiridates does not have a Roman *gentilicium*. But the same lack of consistency can perhaps be observed for Pakoros, who bore the *gentilicium* Aurelius in his inscription of Rome (*IGUR* 415) but no *gentilicium* on the silver cup from Maikop (*I. Estremo Oriente* 21), if indeed it was the Armenian king of that name who was the author of this text¹⁰¹.

We can now be certain that the Garni inscription cannot be dated to the first century CE; that it dates to the late imperial period; and that it mentions a king Tiridates who bore the *gentilicium* Aelius. In the second part of this article, we offer a reading and restoration of the complete text of the inscription, alongside a discussion of previous readings.

⁹⁹ In the latter inscription Ἡλίου is a *cognomen*. See above, n. 88, for Helios as a *cognomen*.

¹⁰⁰ Agathangelos, *History of the Armenians* 2. 37 (Thomson 1976, with 43–44).

¹⁰¹ See above p. 606 with n. 37 and p. 615 with n. 84–85.

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Սարգսյան, Գ. Գառնիի հունարեն արձանագրության շուրջը . *Հայկական ՍՍՀ Գիտությունների Ակադեմիայի Տեղեկագիր* 3, 45–56.
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Abbreviations

- Epigraphic abbreviations follow those recommended by the AIEGL (URL: <https://aiegl.org/grepiabbr.html>; accessed on: 01.08.2022). Other abbreviations used:
- RIC² – Abdy, R.A., Mittag, P.F. *Roman Imperial Coinage*. Vol. II/3. *Vespasian to Hadrian (AD 96–138)*. 2nd ed. London, 2020
- RPC online – *Roman Provincial Coinage online* (URL: <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>; accessed on: 01.08.2022)
- TIB Galatien – Belke, K. *Tabula Imperii Byzantini* 4. *Galatien und Lykaonien*. Wien, 1984