A NOTE ON THE GARNI INSCRIPTION

DAN SHAPIRA
Jerusalem

This inscription, found in 1961 at Garni, Republic of Armenia, was published in Perikhanian 1964, who read it as follows:

...MLK RB ZY 'RM[NYN]  BRH ZY WLGS MLK,
X, the Great King of Arme[nia/ns] son of Vologesus  the King.

This short Aramaic inscription, with its title of the son of Wologesus is of certain historical importance, as the title MLK RB ZY 'RM[NYN] found in its Aramaic form helps to solve an old problem.

The Iranian title RB' MLK' 'rmn'n of the pre-Christian kings of Armenia, known long time ago, caused a controversy regarding its translation. This title in its Iranian form is a very ambiguous one, because *wazurg Armenan Šah, or *wazurg Šah Armenan could have been interpreted as "the King of Great Armenia", or "the great King of Armenia", while the Aramaic form of the title exludes this possibility.

The problem, however, is complicated by the fact that the Armenian form, known only from much later period, being a calque from Iranian, t'agawor Hayoc ' Mecac, has only one possible meaning, namely "the King of Great Armenia[ns]". In the previous literature, there were polemics about this question, without referring to our Aramaic inscription, known only since 1964.

The title wazurg Armenan Šah was compared to wazurg Küšan šahan šah, generally rendered as "Great King of Kings of the Kushans", or "King of Kings of the Great Kushans". It is perhaps of interest in this context that Armenian authors - and only they, as Frye 1983, 142, had observed - mentioned the relationship between the Arsacids of Armenia and the Kushans. Henning 1952, 517, wrote: "Narseh was in Armenia, where he held the office of Vazurg Armenan Šah king of Great Armenia"; ibid., n. 4: "not "Great king of Armenia" (as has often been translated); the title equals Arm. t'agawor Hayoc ' Mecac, similarly, king of Great Kushan is preferarble to Great king of Kushan." These words were written by Henning in 1952; some years later, Maricq 1958, 318-9, translated "du Grand roi d'Arménie Hormizd-Ardachir" for the Greek of ŠKZ 48 καὶ Ωμισαδ — ἀρταξαρσου μεγαλου βασιλεως Άρμενιας και... and the Middle Persian W 'w(w)xrmzd 'rtxstr ZY LB' MLK' 'lmn'n W....

Nevertheless, Lang 1983, 517 n. 2, stated: "not "King of Great Armenia"... during the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D., the Armenian throne was regularly reserved for the Parthian Great King's nearest kin, who was known as "Great king of Armenia" - rather as their heir apparent to the British throne is called the Prince of Wales. This custom, political conditions allowing, continued into early Sassanian times: thus, prior to 293, the future Great King Narseh was viceroy of Armenia with the title of Vazurg Armenan Šah ("great King of Armenia")..

Historically, Armenia was a part of Parthia rather that of Persia; it was after the rise of the Persian Sassanian dynasty in the first half of the 3rd century CE that the Armenians, with their Parthian Arsacid royal family, broke up with the Iranian monarchy of Sasanians who were seen by the Armenian Arsacids as usurpers, and only after
this split the evangelization of Armenia became possible.

The Sasanians tried their best to keep Armenia within the Iranian Empire, using some old Parthian practices of ruling in Armenia, and the preservance of this old Parthian title, in its Parthian form, as distinct of a Middle Persian one (where *arminan šah i wazurg* for *"the great king of Armenia[ns]"* would be required) was one of those. The meaning of this title known from the Middle Persian rock inscription arose a great deal of polemics, whether it means *"king of Great Armenia"*, or *"great king of Armenia"*, because it was not realized that this title is in Parthian within Middle Persian text.

Our Aramaic inscription is of a pre-Sasanian provenance, and here the title MLK RB ZY 'RM[NYN] clearly means *"great king of Armenia[ns]"*; ZY makes any other translation impossible; it must be the Aramaic rendering of the Parthian *wazurg Armenen šah*, *"great Armenen šah, "great king of Armenia[ns]"*, later re-interpreted as *"king of Great Armenia"*, *t'agawor Hayoc' Mecac*, while the term *"Great Armenia"* is younger than the evangelization of Armenia, starting only after the Sassanian-Byzantine wars.

### NOTES

1. Cf., e.g. ŠKZ (the inscription of Šäpur I at Ka'ba-i Zardušt, Middle Persian 23, 25 RB' MLK' 'rmn'n; Parthian 18, 20 RB' MLK' 'rmyn;n; Greek 41, 48 TOY ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΡΜΕΝΙΑΣ.
2. This is the uzvarishn, *"opening-up"* form used by all Iranists. Cf. the next note.
3. I do not know the reason why Chaumont 1987, pp. 426, 429, used this form.
5. Prior 293, the future Sasanian King of Kings Narseh was the ruler of Armenia with the title of wazurg Armenan šah.
6. Used on Sasano-Kushanian coins, cf. Marquart 1901, 48 ff.; it was also the title of Peroz, *"Great King of the Kūšan",* against whom he had to protect his country, cf. Christensen 1944, 191.
7. As to the Kushan question, cf. more recently Lukonin 1983, 730: *"Great Kings of Kūšan",* as Sasanian vice-roys, sons of Ardashir II, Peroz and Hormizd, where an analogy is drawn upon the title in question.
8. Cf. also Chaumont 1965, 168.
10. Cf. also Lukonin 1987, 221: "великий царь Армении".
11. Similarly, there is a 4th century seal of Arminduxt, i.e., the daughter of the Arminanšah, cf. Brunner 1980, 39. It implies the title was still in use, though in an abrupted form due to the political changes that took place consequently. PersArmenia turned to a Marzbanship, 428 CE, cf. Kolesnikov 1981.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Back 1978  
Brunner 1988  
Ch. J. Brunner 1980, *"Sasanian Seals in the Moore collection:"*

194