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## CAUCASUS IN GREEK AND LATIN EPIGRAPHY FROM THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

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*Abstract.* Sixteen inscriptions from the Mediterranean world and the Cimmerian Bosphorus, dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., are discussed in this article which offers an anthology of mentions relating to the Caucasus in ancient Greek and Latin epigraphy. Mount Caucasus and individuals, human or divine beings, who bore the name or epithet of “Caucasian,” appear in various contexts linked to the funerary domain, civic and local cults, mythology, military expeditions, gladiatorial fights, or even to political propaganda. The main clichés about the Caucasus included the Promethean legend, as well as the massive nature of these remote mountains, located on the border of the *oikoumene*. All these various documents testify to a relative diffusion of knowledge and beliefs concerning the Caucasus throughout the Graeco-Roman world and ensure the special place occupied by this mountain and its inhabitants in the common imagination.

### INTRODUCTION

Ten Greek and six Latin inscriptions contain attestations of the geographical term designating the Caucasus or about individuals and deities bearing the epithet “Caucasian.”<sup>1</sup> This quite varied epigraphic file,

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<sup>1</sup> Greek inscriptions: *SEG* XLVII 954; *CIRB* 113; *IG* XII 5 1078; *Chios* 8, 37, 40, 68, 75, 499; *Erythrai* 60. Latin inscriptions: *AE* 1996, 1767; *CIL* XII 5687 15; *CIL* XIII 8213; VI 1163; VI 14605; VI 25426.

which extends from the Hellenistic times to the Late Antique period, includes an inscription concerning a sale of priesthoods and evoking Apollo Kaukaseus with Artemis Kaukasis in Ionia, another document regarding the mythical hero Kaukasos whose tradition was particularly living on the island of Chios, a short inscription on the torture of Prometheus found at Orange in former Gallia Narbonensis, funerary documents mobilizing aristocrats and freedmen where the Caucasus appears as a home country or as a borderland of human existence – notably the monument of the soldier Gaius Iulius Mansuetus, known for his commitment in an expedition during the Antonine period on the banks of the Caucasian river Alutus, and also the less renowned funerary eulogy of the Bosporan aristocrat Phanomachos for his father Antistasis. At last, an inscription glorifying the exploits of Constantius II on the obelisk of the Circus Maximus carries the feat of moving this Egyptian monument by comparing it to the mass of the Caucasian Mountains.

Other inscriptions that don't explicitly mention the Caucasus but relate to one of its nationals, peoples or regions, have notably been the subject of a recent work by Natia Phiphia, Ekaterine Kobakhidze and Tedo Dundua<sup>2</sup> – these documents are left aside in this contribution.

#### A FUNERARY INSCRIPTION FROM CIMMERIAN BOSPORUS (*CIRB* 113)

The Bosporan epitaph of Antistasis, dated 344-310 B.C. with some uncertainty, was found in Pantikaïeion, on the Peninsula of Kerch:

Your Phanomachos erected the image to Phoibos, for Antistasis, his mortal father who achieved immortal honor, in the time of the archon Paerisadeos. The farthest bordering mountains guard the earth of the Taurians below the Caucasus.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Phiphia, Kobakhidze, and Dundua 2023.

<sup>3</sup> *CIRB* 113: Εἰκόνα Φοῖβῳ στήσε, Αντίσστασι, Φανόμαχος σο[υ] / ἀθάνατον θνητῷ πατρὶ γέρας τελέσας, / Παιρισάδεος ἀρχοντος ὅσῃν χθόνα τέρμονες ἄκρ[οι] / Ταύρων Καυκάσιός τε ἐντὸς ἔχουσιν ὅροι. Hiller von Gaertringen 1926, 29, no. 71. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.



Map of the Ancient Latin and Greek inscriptions about "Caucasus" and "Caucasian" entities

In this funerary poem, Caucasian mountains are perceived as a physical limit and symbolic protection exercised on the earth where the dead terminate their course. The Taurians were an ancient people settled on the southern coast of the Crimean Peninsula, inhabiting the Mountains of Crimea and the narrow coastal strip between the mountains and the Black Sea.<sup>4</sup> They gave their name to the peninsula, which was once known as Taurica, Taurida or Tauris. The identity of the Taurians remains debated, insofar as it is not certain that they themselves bore this name, which may result from the Grecization of a real auto-ethnonym or refer to the name Tauros that the ancient Greeks would have given to the mountains of Crimea as to other mountain ranges. A Maeotian nation on the eastern coast of the Black Sea bore the name of Toretians (Τορέται).<sup>5</sup> A rapprochement has been considered between the Taurians and the Cimmerians, the Alans and other Iranian-speaking peoples living around Caucasus. From an archaeological point of view, they have sometimes

<sup>4</sup> Hdt. 4.103; Strabo 7.4.2.

<sup>5</sup> Ps.-Scyl. *Peripl.* 74; Strabo 11.2.11; Dionys. Per. 682; Tokhtasiev 2017, 143.

been attached to the culture of Kizil-Koba (8<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C.).<sup>6</sup> This epitaph would tend to suggest that the territory of the Taurians would extend to the northern foothills of the Caucasus, but one should not lend too literal value to this above all poetic and literary assertion: in their imagination, the Taurians of the Cimmerian Bosphorus thought of themselves as neighbouring peoples of this Caucasian boundary of the world by taking up ancient Greek geographical conceptions.<sup>7</sup>

“CAUCASIAN” GODS, HEROES, AND SLAVES IN CHIOS AND ERYTHRAI, IONIA

Most nominal mentions of Caucasus and Caucasians in Greek epigraphy come from the island of Chios and the city of Erythrai on the nearby Ionian coast. Herodotus mentions indeed a place name, *Kaukasa*, on the island of Chios.<sup>8</sup> The editors of the corpus gathering the Greek inscriptions from Chios, Georgios and Aimilias Zolotas, placed this toponym in its north-eastern part, in the bay of Lagadas, on or near the port of Delphinion.<sup>9</sup> Such a toponym was perhaps bound to the slaves imported from Colchis, or to a community of Caucasian expatriates.<sup>10</sup> However, we must remain cautious in not ruling out the possibility of a geographical name linked solely to the quality of the divinities and heroes honoured by the community which places itself under their patronage. An eponym hero was forged to explain the origin of this toponym: *Kaukasos* was a companion among a group of heroes, with *Oinopion*, *Babras* and the Aiolian *Kretheus*.<sup>11</sup> Other toponyms are bound to these mythical characters, notably *Babranteion*<sup>12</sup> and *Oinopionos* also on Chios Island.<sup>13</sup>

The epithet “Caucasian,” which originally designated an ethnic group, then a village, as well as a name of a hero of Chios, also came to be applied to gods worshiped in this region. A text about sale of priesthoods,

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<sup>6</sup> Kravchenko 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Braund 1994, 8-39; Meißner 2000; Preud’homme 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Hdt. 5.33.

<sup>9</sup> Zolotas 1908, 181.

<sup>10</sup> Ath. 6.266e-f = fr. 51 Edelstein-Kidd; Braund and Tsetskhladze 1989, 124.

<sup>11</sup> Hdt. 5.33.1.

<sup>12</sup> Polyb. 16.40.1; Steph. Byz. β3.

<sup>13</sup> Fowler 2013, 589.

and dated between 300 and 260 B.C., was found at Erythrai, on the Ionian coast facing Chios Island.

... On the sacred overseer of Bacchus Pythokritos, of Apollo Kaukaseus and Artemis Kaukasis and Apollo Lykeios and Apollo Delios and on the river Aleontos...<sup>14</sup>

In the sanctuary of Erythrai, a single priest officiated for the couple of deities Apollo Kaukaseus and Artemis Kaukasis.<sup>15</sup> Another dyad associating Apollo and Artemis is also found in Georgian chronicle *Life of the Kartvelian Kings* about the apocryphal tradition on the Meskhian widow Samzivari and Andrew the Apostle in Acquri, a city of Moschikē or Samc'xe in south-western Georgia.<sup>16</sup> Sources are lacking to determine whether these Caucasian expatriates on Chios brought their own cults interpreted by the Greeks through a dyad Apollo and Artemis, or whether these Greek deities were later implanted in Moschikē under the influence of the Greek diaspora established in Pontus and Colchis.<sup>17</sup>

#### FUNERARY AND ORNAMENTAL LATIN INSCRIPTIONS

During the Roman period as well as the Classical and Hellenistic times, Caucasus and particularly Colchis were an important source of slaves furnishing the markets of the Mediterranean world.<sup>18</sup> A Latin inscription from Africa Proconsularis informs about Oppius Caucasius, possibly the young son of a freeman living in this province.<sup>19</sup> Two other epigraphic documents from funerary context were found in Rome:

<sup>14</sup> Erythrai 60: [σ—] Βάικωνος ἐφ' ἱεροποιοῦ Πυθοκρίτου, / [Ἀπό]λλωνος Καυκασέως καὶ Ἀρτέμιδος Καυ- / [κασί]δος καὶ Ἀπόλλωνος Λυκείου καὶ Ἀπόλ- / [λω]νος Δηλίου καὶ ποταμοῦ Ἀλέοντος. Fontrier & Earinos, *Mouseion* 1, 1873-1875, 103-109, no. 108; Rayet, *RA* 33, 1877, 107-128; *Syll*<sup>3</sup> 1014; Robert, *BCH* 57, 1933, 467-480 (*PH*); Sokolowski, *LSAM* 25; *SEG* XV 723; XVI 725; Forrest, *BCH* 83, 1959, 513-522 (*PH*); Dunst, *SDAW* 1960, 1, 5-20, no. 1; *SEG* XVIII 478; \**IEry* 201 (*PH*).

<sup>15</sup> Ackermann 2013, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Thomson 1996, 358.

<sup>17</sup> Preud'homme 2024, 323, 336, 358-359.

<sup>18</sup> Braund and Tsatskheladze 1989.

<sup>19</sup> *ILPBardo*-01, 35 = *AE* 1996, 1767: *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) Opp(rius) Caucasi(us) vixit ann(is) III* ("Consecrated to the Manes gods. Opprius the Caucasian lived three years"). While the place of discovery is unspecified, *D(is) M(anibus)* abbreviated

To the gods Manes. Parents Caucasus and Justa made (this monument) to their well-deserving son Philo. He lived one year and five months.<sup>20</sup>

To the gods Manes. Caucasus made [this monument] on his own to his well-deserving brother Rhenicus.<sup>21</sup>

These inscriptions show individuals probably belonging to a milieu of freedmen who had acquired enough material wealth to be able to start a family and cultivate a family memory by commissioning such funerary inscriptions. The name of Caucasus' brother, Rhenicus, seems at first glance to recall the Rhine (*Rhenus*), but I prefer to consider for my part the hypothesis of a name derived from a less known hydronym — the Rhoas,<sup>22</sup> flowing through the country of Egritice, corresponding to Egrisi or Mingrelia,<sup>23</sup> and cited by Pliny

to two letters outside Italy points to a date from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century–mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. Caucasius appears to be used as a cognomen, which seems to be unattested elsewhere in this exact Latin form. How do equally rare names like Caucadio (*CIL* XI 1823) or Caucavus (*CIL* III 4922) relate to Caucasius and the Caucasus? This is a question that philological research will have to clarify in the future with the contribution of linguistics.

<sup>20</sup> *CIL* VI 14605 (1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> centuries A.D.): *D(is) M(anibus) / Caucasus / et Iusta / parentes / Philoni filio / b(ene) m(erenti) fecerunt / vixit annu(m) I / menses V.*

<sup>21</sup> *CIL* VI 25426: *D(is) M(anibus) / Rhenico fratri / bene merenti / de se / Caucasus / fecit.*

<sup>22</sup> In Greek, the common noun ῥοάς has two meanings: (1) shedding of fruit, a disease of vines (feminine nominative singular form of ῥή ῥοάς, -άδος); (2) pomegranates and pomegranate-trees (feminine accusative plural form of ῥή ῥόα). In Mingrelian language, *roasaa* (რეასეა) means “piece of rock (in a river)” according to Kajaia 2002, 533. I have not found any equivalent of the Rhoas River in other ancient sources.

<sup>23</sup> The Egritice region of Pliny the Elder (*HN* 6.13–14) seems to correspond well to the *Ekrēktikē chōra* (Εκρηκτικήν χώραν) of Ptol. *Geog.* 5.10.5. This region is very likely to be the ancestor of the Georgian name Egrisi designating the region located to the west of the Lixi Mountains. According to Kakhadze (1991, 27–29), this name is attested in classical Georgian not only in the form of a province name in egr-, but also as a hydronym in western Georgia, egr-: we would thus find this root in the name of the river Enguri. A close root in -gr / -gor has the meanings “to roll,” “to wallow,” “to drag,” all verbs which could very well qualify a water-

the Elder.<sup>24</sup>

An interpolation with the active infinitive of the Greek verb ῥεῖν meaning "to flow" may have transformed this hydronym and led to the form Rhenicus as a derived adjective to designate the inhabitants of its banks.<sup>25</sup> It is therefore quite possible that this inscription refers to two freed brothers of servile origin, who were given geographical names that are close to their spatial origin in Western Caucasia.

For ancient and modern minds, the Caucasus was the mythical place of Prometheus's torment. An epigraphic testimony on the dissemination of this Promethean myth to the Gallo-Roman public was found in Arausio (Orange), Gallia Narbonensis: "Prometheus chained in the Caucasus. An eagle feeds on his viscera. Hercules."<sup>26</sup> The popularization of the myth also passed through ornamental medallions with image and legend like the one found in Orange, a Gallic city renowned for its Roman theatre.

#### THE VOTIVE INSCRIPTION OF THE SOLDIER MANSUETUS

One of the most famous Latin inscriptions evoking Caucasus was found in Köln on an altar with a dedication to the Ubian matron goddesses. In contrast to what is usual on inscriptions of Roman soldiers, the donor, Gaius Iulius Mansuetus, a soldier of the *legio I Minervia* stationed in Bonna, names the location of his military deployment during a campaign conducted far to the east. Returning from this distant expedition, exceptional enough to be engraved in stone, Mansuetus thanked the protective

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course from the point of view of a speaker of a proto-Georgian Caucasian language. See Klimov 1998, 31, 45; Preud'homme 2022, 125.

<sup>24</sup> Plin. HN 6.13-14: *et ipsum ab amne influente ibi cognominatum usque quo magnarum navium capacem esse diximus. Et alios accipit fluvios magnitudine numeroque mirabiles, inter quos Glaucum. In ore eius insula est sine nomine, ab Absarro LXX. Inde aliud flumen Charien, gens Saltiae, antiquis Phthirophagi dicti, et alia Sanni, flumen Chobum, e Caucaso per Suanos fluens, dein Rhoan, regio Egritice.*

<sup>25</sup> One would rather have expected the ethnonym Rhenus, Rhenanus or Rhenigenus, since Rhenicus would literally designate the one who "defeated the Rhinelanders," a title which would be more appropriate for an *imperator* than for a freedman. See Gaffiot 1934, 1362.

<sup>26</sup> CIL XII 5687 15 = CAG-84-03, p. 285: [*Prometheus in*] *Caucaso* / [*vin*]ctus viscera / pa[s]cen[tis] / [aq]uila // [Her]cules.



deities who had watched over his journey:<sup>27</sup>

To the Aufania Matrons, Gaius Julius Mansuetus, soldier of the pious, faithful, I Minervia Legion has fulfilled his vow. He was at the Alutus River beside Mount Caucasus.<sup>28</sup>

It is now widely accepted that the expedition in which Gaius Iulius Mansuetus took part was that carried out during the Parthian War in A.D. 162-166, under the joint reigns of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.<sup>29</sup> Aelius Aristides, in his *Panegyric to Cyzicus* addressed to these two emperors, hyperbolically evokes “the walk around the Caucasus” as well as “the conquest of the Indies and the Caspian Gates” among the exploits accomplished during their reign.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the location of the Alutus River has been long debated. So far, the Olt River in Transylvania, also designated by the name Alutus, the Terek River on the northern slope of the Caucasus, and the Alazani in Eastern Georgia have been proposed as identifications of the Alutus. Alfred von Domaszewski and Anton von Premerstein had already spoken out convincingly against the idea of relocating the name of the Caucasus to the Carpathians, which had been put forward several times in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> This Transylvanian option is not convincing since Mansuetus pointed out in his inscription the location of the Alutus near the Caucasus to avoid any confusion with the Alutus of the Carpathians.

It has been assumed that this Alutus River was identifiable with Ptolemy’s Alontas, which he referred to as a river flowing into the Hyrcanian Sea.<sup>32</sup> The Terek was chosen because it is one of the main rivers,

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<sup>27</sup> Speidel 2020, 138.

<sup>28</sup> CIL XIII 8213: *Matronis / Aufanib(us) C(aius) / Iul(ius) Mansue / tus m(iles) l(egionis) / M(inerviae) / p(iae) f(idelis) v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito) fu[i] / t ad Alutum / flumen secus / mont(em) Caucasu(m).*

<sup>29</sup> See Speidel 2020 for the state of the art.

<sup>30</sup> Aristid. *Or.* 27.27: τοῦτο ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μὲν Καυκάσου περίοδον, τοῦτο δ’ ὑπὲρ Ἰνδοῦς ἀλίσκομένους καὶ Κασπίας πύλας... Quet 2002, 100; Dindorf 1829.

<sup>31</sup> Olt: ILS 4795: *Alutus flumen Daciae*; RE III, 1899, col. 1801, s.v. “Caucasus mons” (C. Patsch): “ein Teil der siebenbürgischen Karpathen.” Terek: von Premerstein 1911, 357, n. 1; A. v. Domaszewski *ad* CIL XIII 8213.

<sup>32</sup> Ptol. *Geog.* 5.8.6.

along with the Kura, to flow directly into the Caspian. However, one factor to consider is that the level of the Caspian was higher in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. than nowadays.<sup>33</sup> As a result, the Hyrcanian Sea formed a gulf that sank inland, drawing the course of several small coastal rivers. Michael Speidel's proposal, which identifies the Alutus with the Alazani, a river in eastern Georgia, presents substantial interest insofar as it approaches the option of a river flowing from the southern slope of the Greater Caucasus to empty in the Hyrcanian Gulf.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the Alazani was on the border between Iberia and Albania,<sup>35</sup> which was obviously the subject of a territorial dispute that the Romans had to help settle during another Roman expedition around Caucasus led by Arrian and Rusticus under the reign of Hadrian c. A.D. 135.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the Alazani has already received the names of Alazonios and Ocazanis in classical sources from the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., and these hydronyms only partially approach the forms of Alutus and Alontas.<sup>37</sup> The indications given by Ptolemy that place the Alontas River in the section of Sarmatia Asiatica, at the eastern end of the

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<sup>33</sup> Mouraviev 1992.

<sup>34</sup> Speidel 2020, 140-141.

<sup>35</sup> Plin. *HN* 6.11.29; Speidel 2020, 140.

<sup>36</sup> Them. *Or.* 34.8: ...τοιγαροῦν οὐκ ἄχρι τοῦ βήματος μόνου προήγαγον τοὺς ἄνδρας, ἀλλὰ μέχρι τοῦ στρατηγίου, καὶ διέβαινον μὲν στρατηγοὶ Ῥωμαίων Πύλας Κασπίας, ἐξήλυνον δὲ Ἀλανοὺς ἐξ Ἀρμενίας, ἔταττον δὲ Ἰβηροῖν ὄρους καὶ Ἀλβανοῖς· ἐπὶ τούτοις ἅπασιν τὴν ἐπώνυμον τῶν ὑπάτων ἀρχὴν ἐκαρποῦντο καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἡρμόζον τὴν μεγάλην καὶ προήδρευον τῆς ἀρχαίας βουλῆς... ("As generals of Rome, they [*sc.* Arrian and Rusticus] crossed the Caspian Gates, drove the Alans from Armenia, fixed the Iberians and the Albanians, and for all this obtained the eponymous office of consuls, governed the prefecture of the City and were elected presidents of the ancient Senate." Trans. adapted from Maisano 1995, 1001-1003). The use of the verb form ἔταττον, imperfect indicative of the verb τάσσω, with the meanings of "to put away," "to fix," "to post," "to assign one's place to someone," "to place in a specific place," suggests that Arrian and his lieutenants did not really lead a military campaign against the Iberians and the Albanians but would rather have intervened to impose a territorial division. Kerler 1970, 43, n. 39; Chaumont 1976, 149; Bosworth 1977, 229; Hartmann 2019, 35, n. 27.

<sup>37</sup> Strabo 11.4.5; Plin. *HN* 6.11.29; Radt 2008, 258.

Hyrceanian Sea near the Soana River, with a mouth on a meridian at the 86<sup>th</sup> degree, agree more with a river in Eastern Caucasia than with a border watercourse between Eastern Iberia and the western part of Caucasian Albania.<sup>38</sup> Other Albanian rivers once flowed into the Hyrcanian Gulf, notably Alijanchay, Turyanchay, Goychay and Pirsaat. As the inscription of the centurion L. Iulius Maximus dated from the reign of Domitian and found in the Park of Gobustan attests that Roman soldiers had already reached the Caspian shore at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., it is not impossible that Mansuetus also reached the shores of Eastern Caucasia.<sup>39</sup> It would therefore be in my opinion preferable to remain cautious about the precise location of the Alutus and to situate it preferably in the oriental part of Caucasian Albania, not very far from the Derbent Pass, if we retain its identification with Ptolemy's Alontas.<sup>40</sup>

#### THE GLADIATOR KAUKASOS HONOURED BY HIS REFEREE IN LATE ANCIENT MACEDONIA

A funerary inscription from the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. was found at Stoboi, in the Macedonian region of Paionia. This epitaph depicts a certain Aurelius Severus, second gladiator referee and patron of the *collegium* of gladiators, paying tribute to a deceased man named Kaukasos, probably his colleague:

Aurelius Severus, second referee (σεκουνδαροῦδης, *secunda rudis*), patron (προστάτης) of the *collegium*, to Kaukasos who was formerly (known as) Strategos, on behalf of the *collegium* and in his cherished memory; be well.<sup>41</sup>

Gladiatorial fights were usually refereed by two men, which explains the title of *secunda rudis* held by Aurelius Severus, who was a freed

<sup>38</sup> Ptol. *Geog.* 5.8.6; Hewsens and Salvatico 2001, map 56.

<sup>39</sup> AE 1951, 263: *Imp(eratore) Domitiano Caesare Aug(usto) / Germanic(o) L(ucius) Iulius Maximus (centurio) / leg(ionis) XII Ful(minatae)*. Bais 2001, 88-90; Gagoshidze 2008, 16; Schottky 2014, 96; Hartmann 2019, 38; Eck 2023.

<sup>40</sup> Hewsens and Salvatico 2001, maps 27, 40, 56.

<sup>41</sup> SEG XLVII 954 (*Poikila Epigraphika* 1997, 83-87): Ἀὐρήλιος Σεβῆ- / ρος σεκουνδα- / ροῦδης προστά- / της τοῦ κολληγί- / ου Καυκάσω τῷ / πρίν Στρατηγῷ ἔ- / κ τοῦ κολληγίου / καὶ τ[ῷ]ν ἑαυτοῦ / μνείας χάριν / Χαί- / ραίται {χαίρετε}.

gladiator serving as both instructor and referee.<sup>42</sup> The *collegium* in question must be the professional association of gladiators led by Aurelius Severus and to which Kaukasos would also have belonged, since this institution is also associated with funeral homage. The necessary funds for the burial of the deceased were provided by the association and its chief (προστάτης). In this Macedonian inscription, the deceased is called by two different names, since the gladiators used to change their name and used a pseudonym instead when they started their new profession. Accordingly, the former name of the deceased gladiator was Στρατηγός, and his new *cognomen* Καύκασος.<sup>43</sup> The question then arises whether this gladiator Strategos was originally from the Caucasus or not. His first Greek name does not necessarily presuppose his ethnic origin, because of his servile condition and the fact that this name could very well have been given to him by his first masters. His second nickname of Kaukasos results on the other hand from his choice to change or reform his identity when he entered the profession of gladiator, which supposes a double strategy of distinction from his peers and identification with a model or an ideal associated with the Caucasus. There are therefore two possibilities: by calling himself Kaukasos, Stratēgos would have wanted either to show his Caucasian origins, or to identify himself with a mountain renowned for its high peaks, perhaps to illustrate his great size making him formidable in combat. In both cases, the Caucasus in Graeco-Roman context appears in its ambivalence connoted positively and negatively, as a majestic place exalted by its high mountains, but also as the country of origin for many slaves who share to a certain extent the fate of Prometheus's bound.

#### THE "CAUCASIAN MASS" OF THE LATERAN OBELISK

The dedication of the obelisk of Constantius II in Circus Maximus, dated in A.D. 357, is the last Roman inscription evoking the Caucasus by name in our available sources:

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<sup>42</sup> Robert and Robert 1971, 524; Ville 1981, 369.

<sup>43</sup> Nigdelis 2000, 139-145; Iosifidou 2016, 41.

The work of the father and also [his] gift to you, Rome, Constantius Augustus dedicated it, once subdued [all] the globe, and what no earth brought, nor any age had seen (to you), he erected it, so that this gift was equal to the famous triumphs. His father, wishing it to be a decoration of the city of his name, tore this splendour from the cut cliff of Thebes. But the worry of transport was greatly afflicting, since no ingenuity and effort and hand would have moved the Caucasian mass: (so) warned the fame that was spreading here and there. However, Constantius, the lord of the world, trusting that everything yields to virtue, ordered the not small part of a mountain to advance over the lands and entrusted it to the swelling sea, and the waters, with placid waves, led the ship to the beaches of West, with wonder of the [Tiber]. While a foul tyrant was laying waste to Rome, the gift of Augustus and the zeal for erecting it lay waiting, spurned not because it was rejected but because no one believed that a work of such mass could rise into the celestial auras. Now, as snatched again from reddish quarries this long-preserved glory shone and touched the heavens. When [the emperor] is brought back after the tyrant's murder, a way having been found to Rome through courage, the rejoicing victor erects [this obelisk], a lofty trophy for the city, and the emperor's gift, with triumphs worthy indeed.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Trans. adapted from Liverani 2012 and McGlone 2019. *CIL* VI 1163 (3071, 3778, 4331, 4340) = *CIL* VI 31249 = *CIL* X 1863 = *CIL* XIV 174 = *EE*-08-01 352 = *CLE* 268 = *CLE* 279 = *D* 736 = *ILMN*-01 27 = *AE* 2012 177 = *EDCS*-18200409 = Marchionni 2013, 460-461: *Patris opus munusqu[e suum] tibi Roma dicavit / Augustus [toto Constan]tius orbe recepto / et quod nulla tulit tellus nec viderat aetas / condidit ut claris exa[equ]et dona triumphis / hoc decus ornatum genitor cognominis urbis / esse volens Caesa Thebis de rupe revellit. // Sed gravior divum tangebatur cura vehendi / quod nullo ingenio nisuque manuque moveri / caucaseam molem discurrens fama monebat. / At dominus mundi Constantius omnia fretus / cedere virtuti terris incedere iussit / haut partem exigua[m] montis ponto[que] tumentis // credidit et placido [vexerunt aequora flu]ctu / litus ad Hesperium [Tiberi] mirante carinam. / Interea Romam ta[po]ro vastante tyranno / Augusti iacuit donum studiumque locandi / non fastu spreto sed quod non crederet ullus / tantae molis opus superas consurgere in auras // nunc veluti rursus ruffis] avulsa metallis / emicuit pulsataque polos haec gloria dudum / auctori servata suo cu[m] c]aede tyranni / redditur atque aditu Ro[mae vi]rtute reperto / victor ovans urbi[que] locat sublim]e tropaeum / principis et munus cond[ignis us]que triumphis.*

The Lateran Obelisk, located in Piazza San Giovanni in Laterano, is one of the thirteen ancient obelisks of Rome. With its height of 32.18 m (with the base and the cross, it reaches 45.70 m), this stone is the first tallest monolithic obelisk in the world. This Egyptian monument was built at the time of the pharaohs Thutmose III and Thutmose IV (15<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) and this makes it the oldest obelisk in Rome. This stone of red granite, which comes from the temple of Amon-Ra at Thebes (Karnak) in Egypt, was brought to Rome at the behest of Emperor Constantius II in 357 and erected by the *praefectus urbi* Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus on the spine of the Circus Maximus, near another monument, the Flaminio obelisk which already stood there, and which is now in the Piazza del Popolo. When Pope Sixtus V and his engineers dug up the obelisk from the ruined Circus Maximus in 1587-1588, they found a Latin inscription carved into its lower parts, laid there by Constantius II. They pieced it together, saved it, then took it apart, using the material to repair the broken obelisk. Thus, although the Latin text is known from modern transcriptions, the inscription itself no longer physically exists. The reconstructed text contains four stanzas of hexameters (one on each side of the obelisk) telling the story of its journey from Egypt to Rome.<sup>45</sup> The first stanza relates that the emperor Constantine ordered the obelisk removed from Thebes to decorate his new city, Constantinople. The second stanza details the delay in Alexandria and praises Constantius for being brave enough to undertake the daunting task of moving it to Rome. The difficulty of transporting the monument is emphasized in order to congratulate the emperor for undertaking such a feat, implying that nature itself bent to his will. These lines express in a hyperbolic way that he ordered men to carry Caucasian Mountain and cross land and sea. The third stanza then describes further delays, this time in the raising of the obelisk, which was brought to Rome, again underscoring the difficulty posed by this huge monument. This delay had two main causes. First, Magnentius, a general in the Roman army of Gallic origin, had risen to power in Rome and more or less controlled the Italian peninsula, since he was acclaimed emperor by his legions. Perhaps more importantly, the enormous physical task of

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<sup>45</sup> Rouillet 1972; Richardson 1992; Platner and Ashby 2002; Wirsching 2007; Claridge 2010.

raising the obelisk remained to be done. The last stanza describes the obelisk finally erected in Rome after the defeat of Magnentius. After his victories over this usurper at Mursa Major in 351 and Mons Seleucus in 353, Constantius regained control of the empire and erected the Circus Maximus obelisk as a monument to his triumph. The inscription asserts that he went to Rome with his strength or courage (*virtus*), implying that the Roman ability to raise obelisks had been restored with the victory of Constantius.<sup>46</sup> The reference to the Caucasus thus takes on a Promethean dimension through the titanic feat achieved during the transport of this obelisk and also in the way in which the gods favour the good order of things by punishing the brazen usurper.

#### CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Nominal mentions of the Caucasus in Greek and Latin epigraphy are obviously far fewer than in literary sources. However, they shed invaluable light on the dissemination of this toponym in the public space of the Mediterranean cities, the Roman Empire and the Cimmerian Bosporus. The main clichés about the Caucasus of course included the Promethean myth, as well as the massive nature of these remote mountains, located on the border of the *oikumene*. All these various documents testify to a relative diffusion concerning the Caucasus throughout the Graeco-Roman world and contribute to a common familiarity maintained by myths, cults, and human movements. The diversity of contexts as well as the imprecise or allusive nature of several mentions agree with a commonly shared popular knowledge of the Caucasus far from the shade of its peaks. Few mountains outside the Mediterranean world had the privilege of benefiting from such a reputation.

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<sup>46</sup> Lefebvre 1948; McGlone 2019; Liverani 2012.

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