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On the Curse Formula in Wʿzb’s Inscription (RIÉ 192 B, ll. 5–9)*

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Several royal inscriptions of the Aksumite kingdom contain curse formulas, which were recently the object of a comprehensive study by George Hatke.¹ These curses, belonging to the concluding parts of the inscriptions, have preventive function and threaten with divine punishment anyone who damages the respective inscription. Their exact wording varies, but a common pattern can be established. The formulas have the structure of conditional sentences, whose protasis mentions the possibility of various damages being made to the inscription (and/or the stone bearing it), whereas the apodosis, with the main verb being a jussive, introduces various kinds of punishment that the culprit and his relatives would receive. The curses often stress that the malignant act against the inscription is bound to return back and afflict the guilty person. This idea is conveyed by employing the same roots in the protasis and in the apodosis of the curse.²

* This article is an output of the research project ‘Semitic lexicography in synchrony and diachrony’ implemented as part of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE University), Laboratory for Middle Eastern and North African Languages and Cultures.

¹ Hatke 2023.

² Typologically, both the concept and the linguistic device employed to express it (the so-called ‘cognate curse’, a term introduced in Stewart 1997) have parallels beyond Ethiopia. On the employment of the root ‘wr both in the protasis and the apodosis of a Safaitic curse formula used precisely with the same function as the Gəʿz curses under scrutiny, see Maraqten 1998, 197 and al-Jallad 2022, 89. A typological survey is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is not difficult to find reliable instances of the same strategy in curse formulas elsewhere (see e.g. Danet and Bogoch 1992, 154–155 on the so-called ‘doubling’ in the curses in the legal Anglo-Saxon medieval documents). As rightly put by Stewart (2017, 56), ‘the cognate blessings and curses serve to stress the immediate consequences, reward and punishment, for proper and improper behaviour’. In the detailed discussion of the Aksumite curse formulas by G. Hatke, this phenomenon is underestimated: only in the analysis of RIÉ 188, ll. 24–28, he mentions ‘playing on the idea of overturning and removal with respect to both the monument and the one who acts thusly upon it’ (Hatke 2023, 67).

Thus, in RIÉ 188, ll. 26–28 the description of the hypothetical damage to the inscription employs the verbs *našata* ‘to destroy’ and *naqala* ‘to uproot’, whereas the punitive part contains their passive derivatives *tanašta* and *tanaqla*, referring to what is going to happen to the culprit, his land, and his tribe:

laʾəma | boza | našato | wanaqalo | wəʾətu | wabəheru | wazamadu | layətnaqal | wayətnašat | ‘if there is anyone who has destroyed it and removed it, may he and his land and his kin be removed and destroyed’.

In RIÉ 189, ll. 50–51, *naqala* and *tanaqla* are used to refer to the damage and the punishment, respectively:

laʾəmabo | zanaqalo | waʾamāsano | wanašato | wəʾətu | wažamadū | yašara[w] | wayətnaqal | ‘if there is anyone who has removed it and demolished it and destroyed it, may he and his kin be eradicated and removed’.

In RIÉ 191, ll. 39–40, the verb *našata* refers twice to the destruction of the inscription (in the introductory clause ‘I have entrusted it... against anyone who might demolish it and destroy it...’ and in the protasis of the curse formula), and once to the punishment (in the apodosis, marked for jussive, with the noun ‘God’ as the subject, and the hypothetical destroyer of the inscription as the object):

wʾmhškw | ḥb | ʿ[ḡ]zʾ | bḥr | gbr | sʾmy | wmdr | ʾmz | ʿymsʾn | wʾmsʾt | wysʾb[r] | w]z | nsʾt | wʾmsʾn | ysʾt | ʾgzbḥ[r] | bb]t | wbsʾbsʾ. [...] ‘and I entrusted it to God, creator of heaven and earth, against anyone who might demolish it and destroy it and break it up. And whoever might have destroyed it and demolished it, may God destroy him in his house and in ?’.³

The inscription by Wʿzb, RIÉ 192 (a sixth-century Gəʿz inscription in South Arabian script and hence, unvocalized) also contains a formula in the shape of a conditional sentence. However, due to the poor preservation of some parts of the text, its interpretation is not so obvious as in other cases.

The relevant formula, according to *RIÉ*, is as follows:

³ For the sake of clarity, the South Arabian symbols for sibilants are represented as *s*¹, *s*², *s*³ (instead of the traditional *s*, *š*, *ś* used in *RIÉ*). In Gəʿz inscriptions employing South Arabian script, *s*¹ and *s*³ usually render Gəʿz *s*, whereas *s*² stands for the lateral sibilant *ś* (see Drewes 1991, 386). In this paper, the selfname of Old Ethiopic will be transcribed as ‘Gəʿz’ (instead of the more widely accepted, but definitely anachronistic transcription ‘Gəʿz’; see discussion in Bulakh 2016, 117–118).

RIÉ 192 B, ll. 5–9:

wlm^[6]b̄ | d̄h̄[...] | wlmnlth | whm | gft' | whm | wgr | ym..h | 'gzb^[7]hr̄ | wlȳt
 | bbyth | wbwldh | wmbbrt | wbtḡbrh | wyfdy^[8]h | [']g[z]bhr̄ | wmq²ft |
 'gzbhr̄ | 'yr̄f̄ | bl'lyh | bdn̄ | w^[9]d̄ | ŷ[...] | 'lm |

The first scholarly discussion of RIÉ 192 belongs to Roger Schneider.⁴ Schneider's tentative reading contains many gaps (which were later deciphered by himself and A. Drewes, as we can see when we compare it with the reading in RIÉ I adduced above), and as a result, his translation is only fragmentary.

...^[6] ... whm lft' whm wgr ...^[7] bwldh wmbbrt ... wyfdy^[8]h [']g[z]bhr̄ wmq²ft
 'gzbhr̄ 'yr̄f̄ bl'lyh ... '... que le Seigneur le retribue, que la punition du
 Seigneur (ne tombe pas?) sur lui...'
 '... may God recompense him, may God's punishment (not fall?) upon
 him ...'.⁵

In 2014, Paolo Marrassini's *Storia e leggenda dell'Etiopia tardoantica* appeared, which contained translations (into Italian) and discussions of the royal Aksumite inscriptions, including the inscription by W'zb. Marrassini renders the relevant fragment as follows:

E se c'è chi lo distrugge e al suo *mnl* (e) se lo rovescia o lo getta via, lo affligga il Signore e sia annientato nella sua casa, nei suoi figli e nelle sue dimore (o 'troni'); che per quel che ha fatto lo retribuisca il Signore; che la punizione del Signora sopra di lui non lo faccia riposare per questo; e que egli [...].⁶
 'And if there is anyone who destroys it and if he turns it over to his *mnl* or throws it away, may God afflict him, and may he be annihilated at his house, at his children and at his dwelling; so that God may repay him for what he had done; so that God's punishment upon him would not give him rest; and that he ...'.

In 2015 Christian Robin published English translations of several Ethiopian and South Arabian inscriptions relevant for the discussion of Aksumite–Himyarite relationships. In his translation of RIÉ 192, the relevant passage is rendered as follows:

⁴ Schneider 1974.

⁵ Schneider 1974, 786.

⁶ Marrassini 2014, 265.

If there is ... God and may he bless⁷ (?) in his house, in his offspring, in {his} condition and in {his} works, may he be paid back by God, and may God's punishment not rest (?) upon him in this ... world.⁸

In 2019, the final volume of *RIÉ* was published, from the *Nachlass* of Abraham Drewes, edited by Manfred Kropp. Drewes's translation is as follows:

Et s'il y a quelqu'un qui [prend soin] de <cette pierre> et de son entourage, au case où <ce monument> aurait été renversé et jeté à terre, que Dieu ait pitié de lui, qu'il soit béni dans sa maison, dans ses enfants, dans ses moens de subsistance et dans son travail. Que Dieu le rétribue, que le châtement de Dieu ne demeure pas sur lui, dans ce monde-ci ni dans celui à venir.

'And if there is anyone who [takes care] of <this stone> and its entourage, in case <this monument> is overturned and thrown upon earth, may God have mercy upon him, may he be blessed in his house, in his children, in his (means of) subsistence and in his labor. May God recompense him, may God's punishment not rest upon him, neither in this world nor in the coming one'.⁹

In the above-mentioned study, Hatke mostly follows the reading and translation of *RIÉ*. The only significant correction is the translation of the enigmatic lexeme *mnlth*, which he tentatively renders as 'adornment'.¹⁰

And if there is one who has guarded its (i.e. the stele's) adornment(?) in case it is overturned or is thrown down, may God show him com[passion] and may he be blessed in his household and among his children, in his residence and in his labor. And may God recompense him. And may the chastisement of God not come to rest upon him in this world and that (world) which is to come.¹¹

The proposed interpretations differ not only in their details, but also in their general evaluation of the intention of the inscription's author. Only Marrassini regards this fragment as a traditional curse formula. The other scholars believe it to be a benediction addressed to those who would keep the inscription in order and repair it in case of damage.

⁷ Presumably, 'may he be blessed': the form reconstructed by Robin is ***yātbāarak*, which fits the context.

⁸ Robin 2015, 168.

⁹ *RIÉ*, IIIB, 258.

¹⁰ See the discussion in Hatke 2023, 76–77.

¹¹ Hatke 2023, 76.

The interpretation of the passage as a benediction is based on the following assumptions:

1. In line 6, *dh*[...] is to be restored as *dh*[*lwh*], corresponding to Classical Gə'z *za-ḥallawo* 'who guarded it'.¹²
2. The forms *gft'* and *wgr*, undoubtedly related to *gaftə'a* 'to overturn'¹³ and *wagara* 'to throw',¹⁴ are analyzed as passive derivatives, either verbal (*ta-gaftə'a*, *tawagra*) or nominal (*gəftu'*, *wəgur*).¹⁵
3. In line 6, *ym..h* is to be restored as *ym*[*hr*]*h*, corresponding to Classical Gə'z *yəmḥarro* 'let him have mercy upon him'.¹⁶
4. In line 7, *wlyt* is to be reconstructed as an abridgement of what corresponds to Classical Gə'z *wa-la-yətbāarak* 'and may he be blessed'.¹⁷
5. The verb *fadaya*, which primarily means 'to pay a debt', is used in lines 7–8 with the meaning 'to reward'.¹⁸
6. In line 8, *yrf* is to be reconstructed as *y<'>rf* and to be identified with Classical Gə'z *ʾi-yā'raf* 'may it not rest'.¹⁹

Now, all these assumptions are rather shaky.

The reconstruction of the verb ***ḥallawa* 'to watch, guard' in line 6 is difficult to accept, *inter alia*, because the reliably attested spelling of this root in the Aksumite period is with the initial *ḥ*.²⁰

While the forms *gft'* and *wgr* undoubtedly refer to various types of damage to the inscription, the attempts to analyze them as passive forms are unconvincing. The unvocalized text does not contain any marker of the passive diathesis. The solution offered by Drewes²¹ is to vocalize these forms as passive participles *gəftu'* and *wəgur*. However, while curse formulas often employ T-stem verbs, no secure instance of the employment of a passive participle in a similar context has been detected in Epigraphic Gə'z.

¹² See *RIÉ*, IIIB, 268; Hatke 2023, 76.

¹³ Leslau 1987, 184.

¹⁴ Leslau 1987, 608.

¹⁵ See *RIÉ*, IIIB, 258; Hatke 2023, 76.

¹⁶ See *RIÉ*, IIIB, 258; Hatke 2023, 76.

¹⁷ See *RIÉ*, IIIB, 258; Robin 2015, 168; Hatke 2023, 76.

¹⁸ See Schneider 1974, 786; Robin 2015, 168; *RIÉ*, IIIB, 258; Hatke 2023, 76.

¹⁹ See *RIÉ*, IIIB, 258; Robin 2015, 168; Hatke 2023, 76.

²⁰ In MSS Abbā Garimā I and III, the root is consistently spelled with *ḥ*: *yəḥel(l)əwu* 'they (masc. pl.) watch' in Abbā Garimā I, fol. 88va l. 2 etc. On the reliability of Abbā Garimā I as a witness of the early orthography of Gə'z see Bulakh 2024.

²¹ *RIÉ*, IIIB, 269.

The damaged element *ym..h* can be restored in a number of different ways, for instance, as *ym[s¹n]h*, equivalent of Classical Gəʼz *yāmāsanno* ‘let him destroy him’.

Similarly, *wḷỵt*, if seen as an abridged writing²² of a verb belonging to a T-stem, does not necessarily represent the verb *tabāraka* ‘to be blessed’. In fact, a T-stem verb of cursing, such as *tawagza* ‘to be anathematized’,²³ would fit the context perfectly.

The verb *fadaya* present in lines 7–8 can mean not only ‘to reward’, but also ‘to repay (an evil deed), to punish’.²⁴

In line 8, firstly, the restoration *y < > rf* is not the only possibility; secondly, even this restoration and identification of this lexeme with the Classical Gəʼz verb *ʾaʿrafa* allows different interpretations. In particular, Marrassini’s translation of *ʾaʿrafa* as ‘to make rest, give rest, give relief’ (attested in Classical Gəʼz alongside the meaning ‘to rest’),²⁵ allows him to interpret the whole section as a curse formula rather than as a benediction formula.

In the absence of solid arguments in favour of a blessing formula, let us revisit the curse interpretation.

Firstly, this should be the default interpretation—in view of the fact that the Epigraphic Gəʼz corpus does not contain any other blessing formulas in connection with the preservation of the inscriptions, but does offer several instances of curse formulas, which can be expanded with curse formulas in the Aksumite Greek inscriptions.²⁶

Secondly, several references to damage (*gftʼ*, *wgr*) and punishment (*mqs²ft*) unambiguously point towards the topic of crime and punishment. Conversely, the preserved text does not contain any unambiguous reference to good deeds and reward.

What follows is a reading and interpretation of the relevant passage from RIÉ 192, accompanied by a discussion of linguistic features. The proposal to read *wlmns²th* instead of *wlmnlth* in line 6 is the crucial point insofar as it eliminates the problem of the indecipherable *mnlth* and bolsters the curse interpretation.

²² RIÉ 192 indeed employs abridgements, such as *ybl | bmṣ* (line 21) or *bḥ | ʾgzbḥ.r.* (line 39), corresponding to Classical Gəʼz *yəbəl ba-maṣḥaf* ‘He says in the Book’ and *ba-ḥayla ʾəgziʾabəḥer* ‘by the power of God’, respectively.

²³ Leslau 1987, 609; Dillmann 1865, 940.

²⁴ See a lengthy list of the relevant passages in Dillmann 1865, 1379.

²⁵ See Leslau 1987, 69; Dillmann 1865, 970–971.

²⁶ All discussed in Hatke 2023.

Lines	Text	Reconstructed vocalization	Classical Gə'z equivalent	English translation
5–6	wlmḅ	**wa-lVmmabo	wa-la'amma bo	and if there is (anyone)

Comments: for this interpretation, see Marrassini, Robin, and Drewes.²⁷ The contraction *la-'amma* > ***lVmma* is unattested in Classical Gə'z, but plausible, in view of the fact that loss of intervocalic ' occurs in the same inscription: see comments for lines 6–7 on the form 'gzbhr (< 'agzi'a bəher).

6	dḥ[...]	**za-ḥ...	za-...	that ...
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Comments: the relative pronoun *za-* must be followed by a verb, which has not been identified so far. Drewes's proposal of *hallawa* 'to watch, guard' is unacceptable (see fn. 20). Marrassini tentatively suggest the root *ḥlq* 'to perish', but admits that in this case, the causative 'aḥlaqa (or an otherwise unattested causative derivative *ḥallaqa*) would have been expected. Perhaps it is plausible to restore the lacuna as *ḥarawa* 'to pierce, perforate, make a hole; to carve, engrave, chisel'.²⁸

6	wlms ² th	**wa-lVmma-naśatVhu	wa-la'amma naśato	and if he destroyed it
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Comments: the fifth character is read here as *s*² rather than *l*.²⁹ Both in the photo published in Schneider³⁰ and in *RIÉ*³¹ the shape of *s*², with strokes to the right at the lower part of the letter, can be discerned. Compare a similar symbol in *RIÉ*,³² in *ldḥgs²n*. Such a reading permits the reconstruction here of the verb *naśata* 'to destroy', frequently employed in curse formulas elsewhere in Aksumite inscriptions. The lack of a word divider between *wlm* and *ns²th* does not invalidate this interpretation: compare *ḡbrlt* just three lines earlier (RIÉ 192 B, l. 3), vocalized as ***gabra lita* 'he did for me'.³³ For the contraction *la-'amma* > ***lVmma*, see the comments for lines 5–6 above.

²⁷ Marrassini 2014, 265; Robin 2015, 168; *RIÉ*, IIIB, 258, 268.

²⁸ Leslau 1987, 265; Dillmann 1865, 588.

²⁹ For the reading *wlmlth* see *RIÉ*, IIIB, 643; Marrassini 2014, 265; Hatke 2023, 76–77. All interpretations of the hypothetical *mmlt* are contextually based and find no support in Classical Gə'z or its siblings.

³⁰ Schneider 1974, plate x.

³¹ *RIÉ*, II, plate 137.

³² *RIÉ*, II, plate 137, line 9.

³³ See *RIÉ*, IIIB, 258, 617, 633.

Lines		Text	Reconstructed vocalization	Classical Gəʕz equivalent	English translation
6		<i>whm</i>	** <i>wa-hamma</i>	<i>wa-ʾamma</i>	and if

Comments: the form *hm* was correctly identified as the conditional particle by Marrassini.³⁴ The phonological discrepancy with the corresponding Classical Gəʕz form *ʾamma* ‘if’ is unproblematic: in RIÉ 192, *h* repeatedly appears in place of the expected *ʾ* in a number of prefixes, suffixes, and pronouns. Already in his first publication of this inscription, Schneider noticed this phenomenon, mentioning three possible explanations: Sabaic influence, orthographic convention, or dialectal origin.³⁵ From these options, South Arabian influence seems the most attractive.³⁶

³⁴ Marrassini 2014, 265, with fn. 7. Contra *RIÉ*, IIIB, 268, 621, where *hm* is interpreted as the 3 pl. masc. personal pronoun.

³⁵ Schneider 1974, 779. The same three explanations are adduced by Bausi (2023, 159, fn. 110). At least for Schneider, this meant that the choice between each of these possibilities must be made in each particular case. Thus, the similarity between the 3 sg. masc. pronoun *hʾt* in RIÉ 192, l. 3 and Təgre *hətu* with the same meaning led him to suggest ‘une variante dialectale qui est à l’origine de la forme tigré’ (Schneider 1974, 779; see further Bausi 2005, 153, with fn. 14, *RIÉ*, IIIB, 260). On the contrary, in case of *hm* ‘if’, in principle direct borrowing from Sabaic cannot be excluded (on the Sabaic conditional particle *hm(y)* ‘if’ see Stein 2003, 219–220, Beeston et al. 1982, 56).

³⁶ The inscription contains a number of lexical borrowings from Sabaic and some other grammatical elements which may have a South Arabian origin (notably the negative element *dʾ-* and the complementizer *k-* ‘that’, for which see *RIÉ*, IIIB, 260–261, 607, 628). For Robin (2022, 192 with fn. 81), this is an instance of fake Sabaic, that is, of Gəʕz into which Sabaic-like features were deliberately and artificially introduced (it remains unclear whether the same view is shared by Frantsouzoff (2021), who made a few preliminary observations on the Sabaic-like features of RIÉ 191 and 192). However, it seems reasonable to draw a distinction between the ‘quasi-Sabaic’ features in inscriptions such as RIÉ 185 I, 185 bis I (for the evaluation of which see Sima 2003/2004), and the Sabaic-like features of RIÉ 192. In the latter inscription, the non-standard features such as *h*-forms are employed consistently and meaningfully. Notably, not all of them can be interpreted as direct borrowings from Sabaic. Thus, the form *hʾt* discussed in fn. 35 and the form *hmnt* ‘they’ (RIÉ 192, l. 9) do not have direct correspondences in Sabaic (nor can they be explained by a ‘blind’ replacement of the initial *ʾ* by *h*: the form *hʾt* corresponds to Gəʕz *wəʾətu*). The occurrence of these features in RIÉ 192 cannot be dismissed as a superficial Sabaicization. Rather, we are dealing with the result of deep language contact—either on the level of the idiolect of the author of the inscription, or on the level of the milieu in which this text was produced. An intriguing possibility is that RIÉ 192 is influenced by the variety spoken in Adulis—a variety which must have

On the Curse Formula in W'zb's Inscription (RIÉ 192 B, ll. 5–9)

Lines	Text	Reconstructed vocalization	Classical Gə'z equivalent	English translation
6	gft'	**gftV'a	gftə'a	overturned (it)

Comments: the object pronoun is implied, but its actual presence (**gftə'o) is doubtful: object suffixes are mostly marked by *h* in this inscription.³⁷ The uncertainty as to the quality of the vowel in the penultimate syllable is due to the fact that the guttural rule aHa# > əHa# is often not reflected in Epigraphic Gə'z.³⁸

6	whm	**wa-hamma	wa-amma	and if
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Comments: see above.

6	wgr	**wagara	wagara	threw (it)
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Comments: again, the object pronoun is implied, but its actual presence (**wagaro) is doubtful: object suffixes are mostly marked by *h* in this inscription.³⁹

6	ym..h	**yāmāsənVhu (?)	yāmāsənno (?)	let Him demolish him (?)
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Comments: the verb 'amāsana 'to destroy' is attested in several curse formulas (RIÉ 189, l. 50; RIÉ 185 I, ll. 21–22; RIÉ 185 II, ll. 21–22; RIÉ 185 bis I, ll. 23–24; RIÉ 185 bis II C, l. 38; RIÉ 191, ll. 39, 40). Although in these formulas it refers to the destruction of the inscription rather than to punishment, its appearance in the apodosis is also possible: a root referring to the destruction of the inscription can very well be reemployed in the description of the punishment (see the discussion in the beginning, with fn. 2).

6–7	'gzbhr	**'agzVbəher	'agzi'a bəher	God
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Comments: the spelling 'gzbhr (with loss of ' and, presumably, subsequent contraction) is consistently applied throughout RIÉ 192 (and is sporadically attested in other Aksumite inscriptions).⁴⁰

been in long contact with Sabaic (and/or other South Arabian language varieties), as well as with Təgre, Gə'z, and perhaps also Təgrəñña (we still do not know whether the Adulis variety was a dialect of any of these languages or a distinct language; see a discussion in Lusini 2006, 451). In any case, the existence of an elite group with an Adulis background in sixth-century post-war Aksum is a plausible hypothesis.

³⁷ See RIÉ, IIIB, 258–259.

³⁸ See Bulakh 2013, 207.

³⁹ See RIÉ, IIIB, 258–259.

⁴⁰ See RIÉ, IIIB, 551–552.

Lines	Text	Reconstructed vocalization	Classical Gə'z equivalent	English translation
7	wl̥yt	?	?	?

Comments: following Drewes,⁴¹ one can regard this as an abridged notation of a verb belonging to the T-stem. The root cannot be restored with any degree of certainty. Furthermore, based on the photos in Schneider,⁴² all the symbols, except the final one, are completely illegible, and thus, the reading wl̥yt is far from secure.

7	bbyth	**ba-betVhu	ba-betu	in his house
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Comments: a similar formula is employed in RIÉ 191, l. 40: ys²t | 'gzbh[r |] bb,t | wbs¹bs¹. [... **yāsšatto 'əgzVbəher ba-betu wa-? 'may God destroy him in his house and ?'

7	wbwldh	**wa-ba-wəludihu	wa-ba-wəludihu	and in his children
7	wbmbrt	**wa-ba-mabbart	wa-ba-manbart	and in (his) life
7	wbtǧbrh	**wa-ba-tagbārVhu	wa-ba-tagbāru	and in his deeds
7–8	wyfdyh	**wa-yəfdəyVhu	wa-yəfdəyyo	and may (God) repay him
8	[ʔ]g[z]bhr	**'əgzVbəher	'əgzi'a bəher	God

Comments: see above.

8	wmq ² ft	**wa-maqšafta	wa-maqšafta	and the punishment of
8	'gzbhr	**'əgzVbəher	'əgzi'a bəher	God

Comments: see above.

8	'yrf or 'yrq	?	?	?
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Comments: morphologically, we are apparently faced with the negative marker ('i- or 'ay-) followed by a jussive form. The shape of the final symbol suggests either *f* or *q* (it was read as *q* by Schneider;⁴³ the symbols for *q* and *f* are virtually indistinguishable in RIÉ 192). The restoration 'y < > rf **'i-yā'raf 'may it not give

⁴¹ RIÉ, IIIB, 269.

⁴² Schneider 1974, plate x, and in RIÉ, II, plate 137.

⁴³ Schneider 1974, 786.

rest/may it not rest'⁴⁴ is a possibility, but it is not the only way to understand the passage. For instance, if the final symbol is read as *q*, one could offer the restoration $\gamma < ^\circ > r\dot{q}$ ***i-ya'raq* 'may it not be empty/withdraw, fall off, stop'.⁴⁵ The difficulty with both interpretations is that they imply the loss of \circ (otherwise unattested in Epigraphic Gə'z), which is difficult to explain unless one reconstructs the phonological process as $\circ > \text{'} > \emptyset$ (reliable instances of loss of ' can indeed be found in the corpus of Epigraphic Gə'z⁴⁶). With this interpretation, the form under scrutiny becomes a candidate for the earliest evidence of confusion between \circ and ' in Gə'z.

8	<i>bl'lyh</i>	<i>**ba-lā'lehu</i>	<i>ba-lā'lehu</i>	upon him
8	<i>bḏn</i>	<i>**ba-zə-ni</i>	<i>ba-zə-ni</i>	in this as well as
8–9	<i>wḏ</i>	<i>**wa-za</i>	<i>wa-za</i>	and that which
9	<i>ḡ[mṣ']</i>	<i>**yamaṣṣə'</i>	<i>yamaṣṣə'</i>	will come

Comments: the restoration of the verb 'to come' proposed by Drewes⁴⁷ is suggested by the context.

9	<i>'lm</i>	<i>**'ālam</i>	<i>'ālam</i>	world
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Thus, the reading and translation of the passage that is proposed here is as follows:

192 B, 5–9:

wlm^[6]ḅ | ḏḥ[...] | wlmns²th | whm | gft' | whm | wgr | ym[s'n]h | 'gzb^[7]hr | w'lyt < ... > | bbyth | bwldh | wmbmt | wbtgbrh | wyfdy^[8]h | [']g[z]bhr | wmq²ft | 'gzbhr | γ < ^\circ > rḡ | bl'lyh | bḏn | w^[9]ḏ | ḡ[mṣ'] | 'lm |
 'And if there is someone who [perforated ? (it)] and if he destroyed it and if he overturned (it) and if he threw (it down), may God demolish him and may he be [anathemized ?] in his house and in his children and in (his) life and in his deeds, and may God repay him and may the punishment of God not cease upon him in this as well as in the coming world'.

⁴⁴ See Marrassini 2014, 265, with fn. 11; *RIÉ*, IIIB, 269.

⁴⁵ Leslau 1987, 70–71, Dillmann 1865, 961. See especially expressions *'araqat hāymanot* 'the faith will become empty' and *'i-ya'arrəq həllāwehu* 'His (Christ's) existence will not cease'.

⁴⁶ See Bausi 2005, 154.

⁴⁷ *RIÉ*, IIIB, 269.

With this interpretation, the inscription under scrutiny follows the same pattern and employs the same rhetoric devices as earlier Gəʿz inscriptions. However problematic some of the readings and restorations outlined above may be, the whole principle, already proposed by Marrassini in his 2014 book, seems justified and hence to be preferred to the ‘benediction interpretation’, unless weightier arguments are brought forward in support of the latter.

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Summary

The article deals with the curse formula belonging to the sixth-century inscription by an Aksumite king Wʿzb (RIÉ 192 B, ll. 5–9). After summarizing the extant interpretations, the author proposes a new reading and interpretation, arguing that the text under scrutiny follows the same pattern and employs the same rhetoric devices as the curse formulas in earlier Gəʿz inscriptions. Within this approach, the ‘benediction interpretation’ (the one implied by most of the previous translations) can be safely rejected. Rather, RIÉ 192 B, ll. 5–9 is to be analyzed as a curse of anyone who ‘destroys or overturns or throws down’ the inscription. This interpretation is bolstered by a new reading (*wlmns²th* ‘and if he destroyed it’ instead of the enigmatic *wlmnlth* in l. 6).