

Angelos CHANIOTIS* – Ben RUSSELL**

A Bear Named Barbaros: A *pierre errante* from Apollonia

ABSTRACT: A grave altar from Pisidian Apollonia (Uluborlu), already published various times, is re-examined here. The authors provide a detailed study of the iconography of the altar, which is now on display in a park in Kızılcabölük, ca. 200 km to the west of Uluborlu. The altar is decorated with a dramatic scene, the death of a *bestiarius*, who is depicted being killed by a bear. The rocky, uneven terrain below the figures indicate that the *bestiarius* was killed either while trying to capture the bear, while training the animal or leading it to the amphitheater. The name of the bear (Barbaros) is afterwards discussed in the context of names used for wild animals.

KEYWORDS: Apollonia, Uluborlu, funerary inscription, *bestiarius*, bear, Barbaros.

In their publication of monuments and inscriptions from Pisidia, W.H. Buckler, W.M. Calder, and W.K.C. Guthrie included among the inscriptions of Apollonia a limestone relief stele seen in “Uluburlu in the Bulbul-chesmesi”, i.e. at modern Uluborlu (Isparta province), ancient Apollonia/Sozopolis (Fig. 1).¹ They read the inscriptions as Γν[ωσί]λας (on the molding) and Βάρβαρος (on the relief panel) and described the stele and its relief as follows:

Stele of limestone, on which is represented in low relief the rudely modelled figure of a man raising above his head the recumbent form of another man, with head to l. and legs to r. H. 0.65; w. (top) 0.34, (shaft) 0.30, (base) 0.36; th. concealed; letters 0.03. The thigh of the recumbent man rests on the head of the standing one, whose l. arm extended supports the r. leg of the former. From the recumbent figure’s r. hand a spiral object is suspended (a net?). This appears to be a monument to the recumbent man, presumably a gladiator, showing his death scene. ... The fragmentary name is his, that of the victor is Barbaros. Date, second or third century.

When Michael Ballance visited Uluborlu in 1956, he saw the altar still in front of the Bülbül Çeşmesi. He recorded in his notes (1956/91a) that ‘the larger of the two figures on the relief seemed in front of the stone to represent a bear rather than a man’.² Peter Thonemann has suggested, based on Ballance’s notesgraph, that the scene depicts the death of an *ursarius* by the bear Βάρβαρος. Ballance and Thonemann were right. During a visit to Kızılcabölük (Denizli province) in August 2022 and again in August 2023, we found this monument on display in the park in front of the town’s Tekstil Müzesi.³ It is unclear how this altar made its way to this museum, ca. 200 km to the west of Uluborlu; most of the other monuments collected in this park come from ancient sites in the local area. The new study of this monument (Fig. 2 and 4) allows a better understanding of the image.

* Prof. Dr. Angelos Chaniotis, Institute for Advanced Study, School of Historical Studies, 1 Einstein Drive, Princeton, New Jersey 08540 USA (achaniotis@ias.edu | ORCID: 0000-0002-5893-5381).

** Prof. Dr. Ben Russell, University of Edinburgh, School of History, Classics and Archaeology, William Robertson Wing, Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG (ben.russell@ed.ac.uk | ORCID: 0000-0002-4594-7586).

¹ *MAMA* IV 168. Cf. Robert 1940, 60 note 1.

² Thonemann 2013, 6.

³ Our visit took place as part of a research trip for the study of new epigraphic finds in Herakleia Salbake, found during a survey conducted by Mehmet Ot, whom we warmly thank for his support. The new inscriptions from Herakleia Salbake will be published by Özge Acar, Angelos Chaniotis, and Mehmet Ot separately. During our visit to Kızılcabölük we were accompanied by Özge Acar and Mehmet Ot in August 2022 and Özge Acar and James Hua (University of Oxford) in August 2023.

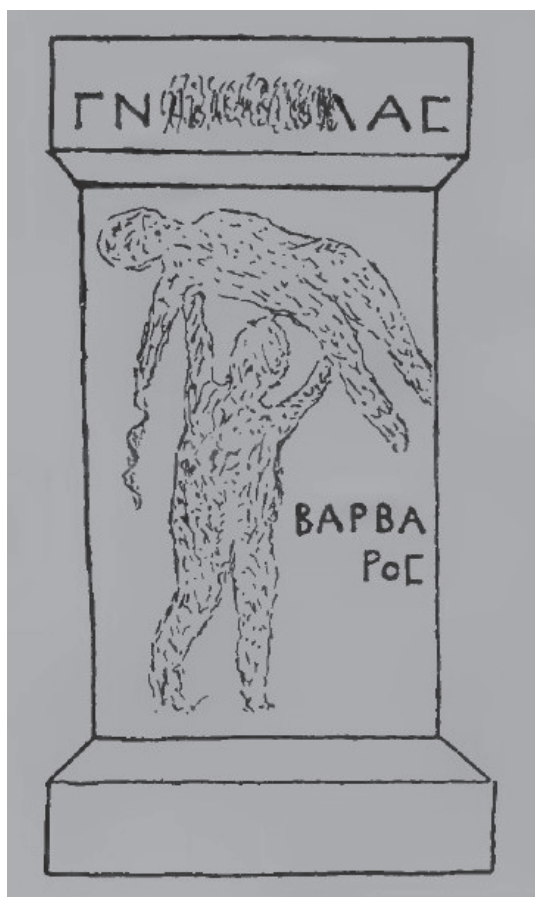


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Marble funerary altar with molding on top and bottom; damaged in the middle of the top molding; the surface of the relief is worn. H 65 cm, W 32 cm (shaft), 37 cm (molding), D 32.5 cm (shaft), 38 cm (molding). An inscription on the molding (letter-height 3.5 cm). On the shaft relief representation of a bear lifting up and biting a *bestiarius*; an inscription to the right of the bear (letter-height 2 cm).

Γν.[..]λας
Βάρβαρος

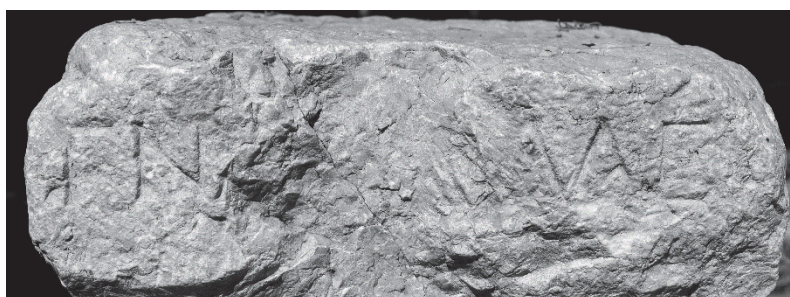


Fig. 3

Of the third letter in line 1, only the lower left part of an oblique line is preserved (Fig. 3). The editors of *MAMA* restored the name as Γν[ωσί]λας, which is only attested in Delphi. This restoration is not completely incompatible with the remains of the third letter, but far from certain. We prefer to refrain from a restoration.

This funerary altar belongs to a type of memorials for gladiators, *bestiarii*, and *venatores* that is well represented in Aphrodisias.⁴ Kızılcabölük is just 30 km east of Aphrodisias but since the *MAMA* report indicates the piece is originally from Uluborlu, ancient Apollonia, and given that it is carved in limestone rather than marble, it presumably has no connection to Aphrodisias. The organization of *venationes* in

⁴ Hrychuk Kontokosta 2008.

Apollonia is epigraphically attested.⁵ The body of the altar is decorated with a dramatic scene, the death of a *bestiarius*, being killed by a bear. The bear stands upright on its rear feet, its back turned to the viewer. Under his feet is an irregular projecting ground level, which probably indicates rocky, uneven terrain; the scene, therefore, takes place in the countryside, not in an amphitheater. With its front legs the bear lifts a man up into the air. The surface of the bear's bulky body and head is worn, but one recognizes the ears on the bear's head and the paws that maul the man's right thigh and calf; it is possible that the bear was also represented biting into its victim's leg. The man's height is larger than that of the bear. As he is being lifted, his head falls back to the left, turning downwards to face his attacker; the facial features are not preserved. His right arm is extended outwards, parallel to the rear of the bear. It holds an object, probably not a whip, as in other representations of *bestiarii*, but a chain, the individual links of which are carefully modelled. The chain is a leash, connected to the bear's right ankle, on which the *bestiarius* tugs in a final, vain attempt to pull the animal away from his leg. Since the scene does not take place in the amphitheater we can assume that the man was killed either trying to capture the bear or, perhaps more likely given that the bear appears to be chained around its ankle already, while training the animal or leading it to the amphitheater; Barbaros had drawn blood before even reaching the arena. The left hand of the man, which possibly held a *mappa*, is bent and touches his left thigh; the legs are wide apart, the left kicking helplessly in thin air. One can recognize his clothes, similar to those of *bestiarii* in analogous scenes. He wears short boots and a short tunic with a belt around his waist, as similar to those worn by the *bestiarius* on an epitaph from Kibyra (Fig. 5)⁶ and the trainer (?) on a gem only known from a drawing (Fig. 6).⁷



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

⁵ MAMA XI 4 with the comments of P. Thonemann.

⁶ Berns – Ekinci 2015, 175 D1. We express our thanks to Christof Berns for providing the photograph of this epitaph.

⁷ Toynbee 1948, 36 and table X.29; republished by Robert 1982, 159–162 with fig. 9.



Fig. 6

The activities of *ursarii*, i.e. the *bestiarii* who were specialized in dealing with bears, have been studied by Louis Robert.⁸ Only limited new evidence from Kibyra has come to light after his study (see below). The techniques that the *ursarii* used to avoid the dangerous animals are represented in reliefs. The men are shown jumping over bears, sometimes using a pole;⁹ or they dodge the animal using a *mappa*, a rolled-up cloth, to deceive and distract it while hitting it with a whip, as on a lamp from Cyprus¹⁰ and a relief in Smyrna.¹¹

A series of reliefs in Kibyra, decorated with scenes from gladiatorial combats and *venationes*, includes images of bears being captured and led to cages, eating, and attacking *bestiarii* and *venatores*. Their victims are shown being wounded by the animals, which snap at their arms and bite their legs, or trying to escape;¹² one of them turns a somersault over a bear (Fig. 7).¹³ The execution of convicts by wild animals, including bears, is also well attested, e.g. on funerary altars from Aphrodisias.¹⁴ But the relief from Apollonia that shows the chained bear doing justice to its name ('the barbarian'), raising the *bestiarius* into the air while mauling him, is hitherto unique. *Barbaros* is also noticeably larger than many of the bears that appear in these other scenes. The fact that he is named here might also indicate that he went on to become something of a star in the arena.

⁸ Robert 1982, 157–162.

⁹ Robert 1982, 157 with references.

¹⁰ Robert 1982, 162 fig. 10. Cf. Robert 1950, table XXII.3.

¹¹ Robert 1982, 160 fig. 11.

¹² Berns – Ekinci 2015, 158 no. 6 (cf. Robert 1950, 49f. no. 334 Aa), 167–174 C 1-C6, C8-C9 (cf. Robert 1950, 56–62).

¹³ Berns – Ekinci 2015, 173 no. 8. We express our thanks to Christof Berns for providing the photograph of this relief.

¹⁴ Hrychuk Kontokosta 2008, 209 nos. 10–11.

The imagination of the Greeks and the Romans in naming animals knew no limits. Bears were given both euphemistic names, such as Εἰρήνη (Peace, Fig. 6) and Χαρά (Joy),¹⁵ humorous names, such as *Innocentia* (one of Valentinian's man-eating bears),¹⁶ mythological and historical names (Διώνυσος, *Fedra*, *Solon*), place names (*Alexandria*, *Nilus*, Νωρικὴ), personal names (Ξανθίας, because of the color of his fur or as a slave-name), names that alluded to their value, speed, and performative skills, such as *Mica Aurea* (Grain-of-Gold), Ταχυνή, and *Gloriosus*, and, of course, names their ferocious and dangerous nature, such as *Lues* (Pest), *Parasitus*, *Latro*, *Leno* (Pander), *Crudelis*, *Omicida*, and *Phobos*.¹⁷ *Barbaros* can now be added to this latter group, revealing the Romans' and Greeks' views both of this wild animal and the people who lived outside the borders of the Roman ecumene.



Fig. 7

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¹⁵ I.Laodikeia am Lykos 78.

¹⁶ *Amm. Marc.* 29.39.9.

¹⁷ Toynbee 1948, 28–30, 36; Robert 1982, 162.

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Barbaros Adında Bir Ayı: Apollonia'dan Bir *pierre errante*

Öz: Pisidia Apollonia'sından (Uluborlu) daha önce çeşitli kereler yayınlanmış bir mezar sunağı burada yeniden incelenmektedir. Yazarlar, şu anda Uluborlu'nun yaklaşık 200 km batısındaki Kızılcabölük'te bir parkta sergilenen sunağın ikonografisi üzerine ayrıntılı bir çalışma sunmaktadırlar. Sunak, bir ayı tarafından öldürülürken tasvir edilen bir *bestiarius*'un ölümü gibi dramatik bir sahne ile süslenmiştir. Figürlerin altındaki kayalık ve engebeli arazi, *bestiarius*'un ayıyı yakalamaya çalışırken, eğitirken ya da amfiteyatroya götürürken öldürüldüğünü göstermektedir. Sonrasında ayının adı (Barbaros) vahşi hayvanlar için kullanılan isimler bağlamında tartışılmaktadır.

ANAHTAR SÖZCÜKLER: Apollonia, Uluborlu, Mezar Yazıtı, *bestiarius*, Ayı, Barbaros.