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Reuse and Redistribution of Latin Inscriptions on Stone in Post-Roman North-Africa

Summary

The article examines the redistribution and reuse of Latin stone inscriptions in Maghreb North Africa from late antiquity to the colonial era. Successive modes of reclaiming the carrier, the script on it or both are discussed.

Keywords: Archaeology; epigraphy; Algeria; Tunisia; Libya; history of science; spolia; re-use.

In diesem Beitrag wird die Umverteilung und Wiederverwendung römischer Inschriften im nordafrikanischen Maghreb von der Spätantike bis in die Kolonialzeit untersucht. Im Mittelpunkt steht dabei der sich mit der Zeit wandelnde Umgang mit den Inschriftenträgern und den Texten.

Keywords: Archäologie; Epigraphie; Algerien; Tunesien; Libyen; Wissenschaftsgeschichte; Spolien; Wiederverwendung.

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1 Introduction

Unlike most archaeological artefacts inscriptions are exceptionally well documented. Academic documentation, which started rather early, often contained information on locations of inscriptions before they were potentially concentrated in lapidaria and depositories or re-arranged in excavation sites. Thus the distribution of inscribed blocks from Roman times at least during the last centuries is generally much better retrievable than the locations of archaeological material in general.

Inscriptions offer a diagnostically extravagant case, as they consist of a carrier and a text inscribed on it. Motivations of re-use might differ according to the amount of interest devoted to the qualities of the carrier (e.g. as simple building material) or to the text (as something markedly uncommon and usually recognizable as ‘old’).

Inscriptions allow for a particular encounter of researchers and ‘common people’. As archaeology and partly history as academic practices developing in recent times cannot be regarded as anthropologically self-evident, the quest for old artefacts is often conceived by outsiders as search for mundane material wealth – for hidden ‘treasures’. A search for stone blocks inscribed with texts offers the opportunity to avoid this misapprehension – unless the texts are suspected to contain information leading to ‘treasures’.

2 The loss of the “epigraphic habit” of Graeco-Roman antiquity

Graeco-Roman antiquity witnessed an excessive production of durable and openly advertised inscriptions on stone – texts to commemorate public affairs and honours, donations of buildings or the lives, deeds and merits of individuals. Put on display in a closely built-up urban environment, which included an inestimable multitude of figural representations of likewise honorific and commemorative functions, these inscriptions accumulated to public archives of civic history as it was seen by local elites and – in the case of grave inscriptions – also broader social groups.

This situation did not even survive the final phase of Roman North Africa. Late antiquity was characterized by a considerable transformation of the urban model of the foregoing centuries. By the 6th century CE hardly any city resembled its predecessor of the 4th century.¹ This transformation included the reduction of extension and intraurban density, accompanied by the dismantling of no longer used edifices – and the introduction of new building types like city defences and churches. Dismantling provided much of the material that was needed for new building; re-use of old material

1 Recent syntheses: Leone 2007; Altekamp 2013.

restricted the amount of dilapidated constructions, which otherwise would have been left as disfiguring ruins.

Late Graeco-Roman antiquity marked a sharp break with earlier habits of producing and displaying inscriptions. Although new public and private inscriptions were still supplied in the Byzantine period – even if to largely restricted numbers² – the corpus of earlier inscriptions that had been amassed during centuries was largely disposed of, whereas in previous times inscriptions kept in the public sphere had been deeply stratified, ranging from very ancient up to contemporary times. It is amazing to detect, how even cemeteries were emptied up and some newly erected buildings, especially fortresses, turned to new types of depositories of their cities' history, as they contained inscriptions of whole ranges of major public buildings, like the fortresses of Mustis³ (al-Krīb) or Ksar Lemsā⁴ (Qaṣr al-Limsa, Limisa, both Tunisia).

Late antiquity was only the first of many phases to transform the Roman cultural landscape of North Africa. The characteristics especially of late antique metamorphosis are still roughly traceable, as many sites had been given up in successive times or simply had kept individual constructions essentially in their late antique state (like some defence works). Thus common late antique patterns of re-use of inscribed stones are retraceable as well: the poor regard to their traditional function and their content, their general downgrading to building material, but the continuing display of many inscribed surfaces, even if under conditions that did no longer enable or even encourage reading (see below). Successive situations of survival and distribution of Roman inscribed stones are mostly much less well known, especially what their employment in situations other than important mosques and defence buildings is concerned. Thus many aspects particularly of every-day or local responses to available old stones with inscribed Latin texts on them remain unclear. For the first time an overall re-use and distribution pattern emerges from the epoch of advanced systematic documentation, i. e. in the 19th century CE. The state of affairs made explicit at that time, however, involves many situations frozen in during much earlier periods likewise only very recently created allocations.

3 Reading

Most Latin inscriptions of North Africa produced over centuries lost their functions as texts displayed for public reading at a time when their language was still the dominant means of communication. Although many of them were displayed with inscribed sides turned visible in various contexts of re-use, it is obvious (as it remains puzzling)

2 Durliat 1981.

4 CIL VIII no. 12,026–12,057.

3 M. G. Schmidt 2009, 310.

that hardly any attention was paid to their content any more – as many inscriptions were turned upside down, re-used at levels too elevated to allow reading⁵ or broken into fragments relocated at different positions. Structurally, the late antique allocation of old and re-used inscriptions is already reminiscent of situations in which intended reading can be excluded for cultural reasons: individual inscriptions are found in analogous conditions, e. g., in the late 6th century CE Byzantine fortress of Ain Tounga (‘Ain Tunqa, Thignica, Tunisia) and in the minaret of the Great Mosque at Kairouan (Qairawān), probably from the earlier 9th century CE⁶: they are placed at eye level, but alternatively in correct orientation or upside down and in a fragmented state so that a potential reader would miss parts of the content anyway.

Latin speaking communities lived on in North Africa well after the Arab conquest, but mastery of the language impoverished, while it did not assume any function as an instrument of intercultural communication. Newly produced Latin inscriptions on tombs are still known from Ain Zara (‘Ain Zarā) and en-Ngila (an-Niqla) in Tripolitania⁷ or from Kairouan⁸ up to the 11th century CE, but eventually knowledge of writing and even reading Latin faded out.

North Africa stood out within the Arab empire as a region where the new elites made no use of their predecessors’ language of administration and memory⁹ – unlike the Muslim East and unlike the far West, al-Andalus. Even centuries later only a thin line of pre-Islamic literary tradition had affected the rich Maghrebian historiography, obviously informed by learned interest in some late antique Latin authors like Orosius or Isidore of Seville in Muslim Spain.¹⁰ The very restricted knowledge of pre-Islamic conditions of North Africa still displayed in Leo Africanus’ “Cosmographia et geographia de Affrica” (1526) can be regarded as symptomatic for this phenomenon of commemorative discontinuity.¹¹

When the Fatimid caliph al-Manṣūr (946–953 CE) launched a war campaign against a Berber opponent (946–948 CE), he visited and studied some historical places the army came along, as is reported by an eyewitness reporting on the war.¹² Nobody in the caliph’s entourage was able to decipher Latin inscriptions. So locals reading Latin were asked to help, but they only partly succeeded.¹³

5 The frequent CIL autopsy remark “telescopio usus” points to corresponding positions.

6 Mahfoudh 2003, 153–161.

7 Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 1953, 21–22.

8 Mahjoubi 1966.

9 Strohmaier 1999, 163; Schmitt 2003.

10 Vallvé Bermejo 1967; Molina 1984; Toral-Niehoff 1999; Hurusiyus 2001; Mahfoudh and Altekamp (in press).

11 In general: Siraj 1995. On Leo Africanus: Cresti 2009.

12 Probably by the military judge al-Marwarrūdhi: Halm 1987, 252.

13 Two inscription at two different sites were studied: Halm 1984, 195–197; Halm 1987, 252; Halm 1996, 325–326.

At the beginning of the 14th century CE the traveller at-Tijānī describes the arch of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus at Tripolis (Ṭarābulus = Oea) on which “several lines in Latin characters” had been visible. A Tripolis inhabitant explained to him that his father had looked out for a Christian to decode the inscription and only after great efforts succeeded in receiving a translation, which is cited by at-Tijānī, but offers a shortened and rather free version of the original text.¹⁴

Many centuries passed during which for the inhabitants of North Africa Latin inscriptions meant objects of (special) provenance with conspicuous, but undecipherable signs on them. As we will see, there could be various ways to pay attention to them, but obviously they were not read – at least in the strict sense of a perception of those contents laid down in the Roman era.

Several inscriptions with invocations of pagan gods or with explicit Christian invocations or symbols were visibly re-used – even in mosques (see below). If they did not assume an apotropaic function, one is left with the simple fact that the content played no role, as it was not taken as such.

This constellation of re-use of non-read texts changed drastically with the arrival of European travellers first, and colonizers later. From the beginning inscriptions belonged to the favourite objects of interest of learned visitors, as they promised to ‘speak’ of antiquity. Inscriptions were a first-rate source of ancient local history, which was not reported by those literary sources, which had been available long before. The clue to the historical reading of the inscriptions was knowledge of Latin. While this knowledge was absent in the lands in which ancient inscriptions in that tongue abounded, virtually every early European traveller disposed of a decent knowledge of the dead language. Therefore the Latin reading travellers were able to transform the intricate, but ‘mute’ landscape of Latin inscriptions, as they had been distributed over centuries and presented themselves scattered and often enclosed in later buildings for defence, cult, living or at other places, into an expressive landscape of specific knowledge about political, religious and cultural institutions of the region during a specific era of its ancient history. This acquaintance with aspects of the region’s past added to the fatal conviction of being culturally at home.

Assia Djebar recalls anecdotes and reports of the French conquest of Alger in 1830, when even interpreters failed to communicate with the besieged (as they were not acquainted to the spoken Arab of the area).¹⁵ Simultaneously, the army started to act on the ground as on belonging territory. The antagonists of colonialism were divided by power, but also by competences. On the side of the colonizers, lacking knowledge of nature and culture of the subdued country was compensated by techniques to acquire military, economic and administrative command. Technocratic control relied on skills

14 Al-Tijani 1853, 154.

15 Djebar 1985.

to transform the country's complex realities into codified representations, which supported the instruments of force to govern. These representations included maps, statistics, all other forms of classification, imaging tools like the emerging photography – and Latin. The Latin language was a primary tool to open up systematically an (allegedly) historical background and a precedent to the situation of the 19th century CE. Whereas archaeological remains tend to reflect long-term economic and cultural developments of a predominantly anonymous character, inscriptions offered a key to military, institutional, genealogical and prosopographical aspects of Roman North Africa. Identifying, reading and publishing as many Latin inscriptions as possible became a preferential tool to illuminate an ancient world as model for the colonial one and to present oneself as being familiar with this world. Epigraphy became the most active branch for the study of antiquity in North Africa. In the late 19th century CE the intensity of epigraphic research was further fuelled by international competition, as French activities were supplemented by the megalomaniacal *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, launched by the Prussian Academy of Science, which for the sake of autopsy sent its own emissaries into the territory.¹⁶ And – by the way – as late as in the 1940s CE lack of epigraphic competences (i.e. of comprehending Latin inscribed in stones) could be the most severe professional accusation between academics.¹⁷

Knowledge of Latin, indispensable for epigraphic studies, had integrating and segregating effects. The integrating impact made itself felt on the side of the colonizers. As Latin was part of any higher school curriculum, educated Europeans mastered sufficient skills to spell out and to transcribe Latin inscriptions in a decent way. Bringing Latin inscriptions to public knowledge thus became a kind of common project of the colonial society, in which members of very different professional orientations (from militaries to the clergy) could participate.

On the other hand, the Latin language obviously caused segregation. Even if the Latin script spread once again in the Maghreb and the French (and later Italian) tongues were introduced as languages of administration and higher education, Latin as language remained a European domain. Reading Latin continued to be a symbol of a 'learned' way of appropriation of the Maghreb on behalf of the Europeans as opposed to a 'lived' cultural rootedness on the site of the Maghrebians. This rift is incorporated in a little anecdote from the travel report of Victor Guérin who reports:

Au moment où j'allais abandonner les ruines de cette ville, un vieillard de la localité m'apprend qu'il a vu, dans son enfance, une grande pierre revêtue d'une longue inscription et qui depuis a été enfoui. Le prenant aussitôt pour guide,

16 Irmscher 1987.

17 Bartoccini 1942.

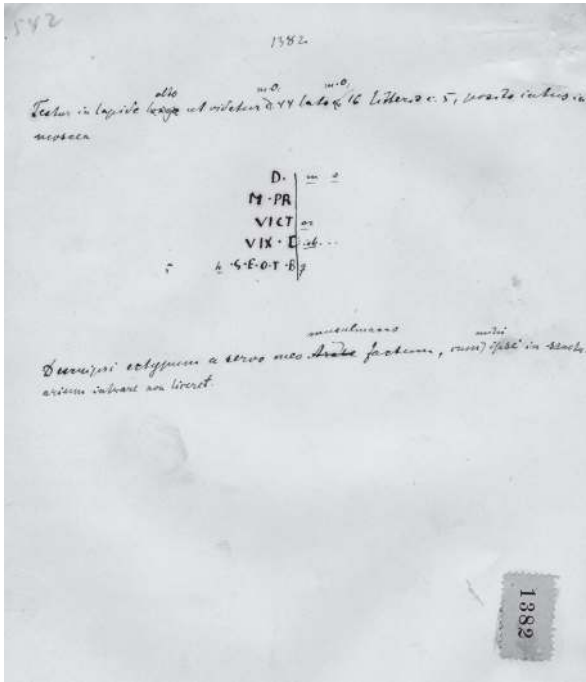


Fig. 1 Latin inscription, re-used in the interior of the Great Mosque of Testour (Tastūr = Tichilla, Tunisia). Record card of CIL VIII no. 1382 by Gustav Wilmanns: “Descripsi ectypum a servo meo musulmano factum, cum mihi ipsi in sanctuarium intrare non liceret.”

je me dirige vers l’endroit où il me conduit, et la nuit me surprend au milieu des fouilles que je fais exécuter sur ce point. [...]

Les indications du vieil Arabe sont parfaitement vraies, car, étant revenu vers six heures du matin au point où j’avais commencé à faire fouiller la veille, je découvre un long bloc à peu près intact, sauf quelques brisure.¹⁸

Whereas the local knowledge of the villager ensures the discovery of the inscription, the French traveller instantly recognizes that the hardly uncovered text reveals the previously unknown ancient name of the place: Sufes (Sbiba, Sabība Tunisia).¹⁹

Similar episodes of a ‘collaborative’ identification of inscriptions – of local spatial knowledge combined with European reading – are included in the – Latin! – commentaries of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* at several instances.²⁰ A related entry reported local memory of a recent manipulation of an ancient inscription.²¹

In a few instances, Muslim assistants or other helpers provided squeezes of inscriptions recovered in mosques, which remained inaccessible to ‘infidels’, among them the researchers from Christian Europe (Fig. 1).

18 Guérin 1862a, 371.

19 Guérin 1862a, 372.

20 The position of an inscription is recalled after 20 years: CIL VIII no. 5230 – An inscription is shown

The rich epigraphic harvest was successfully banned into voluminous editions. Gradually the content of tens of thousands of inscriptions diffused into the analyses and narratives of ancient history. The hunt for inscriptions calmed down, simultaneously the ‘public’ knowledge of Latin on the site of the Europeans faded. De-colonisation did not improve the reputation of this ancient language, which could be blamed as a symptom of colonial rule (in Libya, the Latin script had been banned from official signposting).²²

Today Latin is arcane knowledge also in the West, reading Latin in North African studies is a marginalized competence of specialized European and Maghrebinian scholarship.

In their current allocations, Latin inscriptions (as applied on their original physical carriers) are basically unread again.

4 Patterns of re-use and distribution from the Arab conquest to the eve of the colonial regimes

Re-using material leftover from Roman production remained an ongoing practice throughout this period. Therefore it is important not to neglect chronology and a possible periodization of patterns or re-use and distribution.

It should be further taken into account that demand of or interest in objects which significantly reveal themselves as ‘old’ (e.g. by ‘ancient’ scripts on them) are likely to respond to different conditions of local situations, even when they were transferred from prior contexts.

Openly displayed Latin inscriptions were widely distributed; they appear in public monuments and private dwellings, in buildings of cult, defence, work and living. Obviously, the inscriptions were not read in a ‘literal’ sense. But it is hard to assume that visibility of inscriptions only occurred at random, just when inscribed sides of building blocks happened to turn outside during construction. If visibility of inscribed surfaces was not prevented, it was intended.

Motives of intention to keep the inscriptions visible could have been multiple and this argument will be restricted to the presentation of a few systematized speculations:

after walking three quarters of an hour: CIL VIII no. 8243 – “Les indigènes se rappellent une pierre carrée avec inscription”: CIL VIII no. 10,992.

21 CIL VIII no. 10,230: “Inscription recueillie par un Arabe sur la pente du Djebel Aurès à Tecoult chez

les Touabas. Quelques lettres, dit-il, ont été récemment gravées par les Kabiles [Anonymus].”

22 Benseddik 2006, 69–70 points especially to Algeria, where Latin has been perceived more widely as the alphabet of the colonizers and the language of Christians.

12331 (= Eph. VII n. 86) in lapide alto m. 0,36, lato 1,97, litt. 0,08—0,035; rep. in sacello Sidi Augeb prope Bu Djelida, ubi supra portam muri positus est.

S A T V R N O ◊ A C H A I A E ◊ A V G · S A C R
 P R O · S A L ◊ I M P · C A E S ◊ A N T O N I N I ◊ A V G · P I I · P · P
 G E N S · B A C C H V I A N A · T E M P L V M ◊ S V A · P E C · F E C E R V N T · I D · D E D I C ·
 C A N D I D V S · B A L S A M O N I S · F I L · E X ◊ X I · P R · A M P L I V S · S P A T I V M · I N · Q V O · T E M P L V M · F I E R E T
 D O N A V I T ·

Descriptimus et ectypum sumpsimus. Acceptam a Bordier et Tauzia de Lespin edid. *Cagnat bull. du comité* 1885 p. 154; iterum ab ipsis descriptam Cagnat et Reinach *comptes-rendus de l'acad.* a. 1885 p. 260.

I cum *Saturno Achaiae* editores comparant *Cererem Graecam* n. 10564 (cf. etiam *graecosacraneam deae Cereris* VI n. 1780) adduntque fortasse eo nomine Saturnum in hoc templo cultum distinctum esse a Saturno Punico. — 3 *gens Bacchuiana* intellegenda est res publica, sive pagi instar fuit sive civitatis, cui undecimprimi praeerant et, nisi fallor, etiam princeps ac decuriones (sive seniores). Conferendae sunt quae prius in titulis Africanis prodierunt gentes *Severi* . . . n. 883 cf. infra n. 12386, *Sabodidum* n. 7041, *Serteitana* 8813. 8814. 8826. 8828, *Suburbur(ensium)* n. 10335 (*res publica gentis S.*) 8271, *Ueutaman* . . ., aliae, omnes eodem fere modo constitutae.

Fig. 2 Latin inscription re-used as door lintel in a small sanctuary at Bu Djelida (Bū Jalida, Gens Bacchuiana, Tunisia): “SATVRNO ACHAIAE AVG” CIL VIII no. 12,331.

Basically the decorative or ornamental character of script should be kept in mind. A carefully carved Roman Capitalis produces an eye-catching artefact, and even sloppy scripts from texts of humble or late antique origin provide the kind of aesthetic appeal lettering or writing characters in stone hardly ever fails to evoke.

Many inscriptions appear in positions that suggest a culturally more loaded significance than decor or ornament. This leads to the question in which respect the pre-Islamic provenance of the Latin inscriptions could have directed their allocation and display. It already has been mentioned that several inscriptions of decidedly religious content (pagan and Christian) appeared in prominent positions of relocation. Most remarkable in this context is the display of religious Latin inscriptions in mosques or related religious buildings (Figs. 2–3).²³

Whereas, as argued, the content was not read, pre-Islamic inscriptions in general could have been placed in religious buildings to fulfil an apotropaic function, to neutralize pagan or Christian spirituality or to demonstrate a triumphalist attitude. In this perspective, religious texts of gone civilizations in buildings of the governing religion only haphazardly found their way to these destinations – as a considerable percentage

23 E.g. Mena (Minā, Algeria): CIL VIII no. 2467 (“IOVI OPTIMI MAXIMI”) – Bu Djelida (Bū Jalida, Gens Bacchuiana, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 12,331 (“SATVRNO ACHAIAE AVG”) – Slougiāh (Slūqiya, Chidibbia, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 1326–1327 (= 14,874–14,875) (“HYGIAE AVG SAC” / “IOVI OPTIMO MAXIMO”) –

Tarābulus (Oea, Tripolis, Tripolitania): IRT no. 229 (“APOLLINI SACRUM”) – Sidi ben Gammu (Sīdi bin Qammu, Tripolitania): IRT no. 852 (“DIS MINIBUS SACRUM Q LICINI”) – el-Msufin (al-Mašūfin, Tripolitania): IRT no. 863 (“ΑΩ” + Chi-Rho).

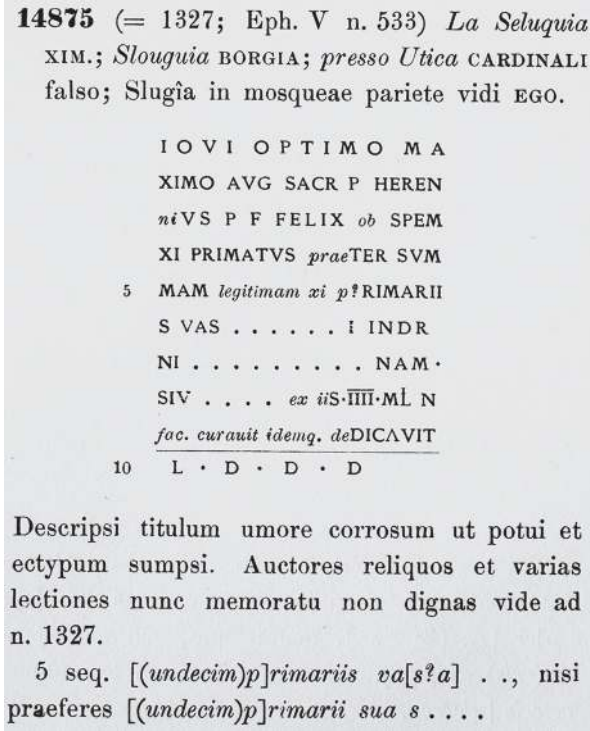


Fig. 3 Latin inscription, incorporated in a mosque wall at Sloughiah (Slūqiya, Chidibbia, Tunisia): “IOVI OPTIMO MAXIMO”. CIL VIII No. 14.875.

of Latin inscriptions in general had religious connotations. They were not set as specifically religious, but as ancient pre-Islamic texts.

Religious pagan and Christian inscriptions also occur in private houses, but again it seems difficult to deduce a more specific significance beside that of Latin inscriptions in general. Attention, however, should be paid to particular positions in houses.

A Latin inscription placed as threshold of an inn at Thala (Tāla, Tunisia) displayed an apotropaic magical formula set between the depiction of a plant and a phallic representation (Figs. 4–5).²⁴

In Roman antiquity, thresholds often contained adhortative or prohibitive messages. The new allocation as threshold of the inn thus (coincidentally?) corresponded to a prior practice. If the Latin script was not read, the magical sense of the verse escaped initiators as well as inn users. However, the ancient script as such and the visual signs on it were recognized. Because of these attributes, the stone could have assumed an apotropaic function, protecting against the Evil Eye. The position of this particular stone possibly gives a hint to a potential apotropaic function of Latin inscriptions set

24 CIL VIII no. 11,683 (“HOC VIDE VIDE ET VIDE VT (POSISIS PLVRA VIDERE”) – Ghaliā 1991, 259.

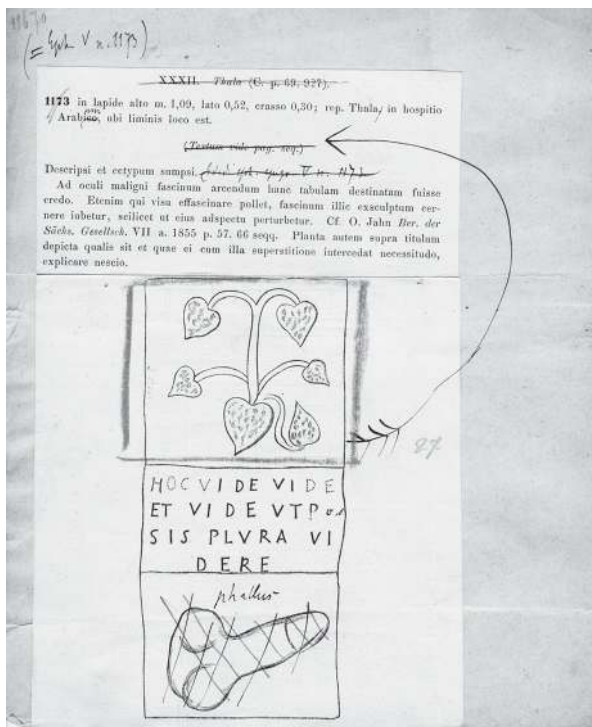


Fig. 4 Latin inscription, re-used as threshold of an inn at Thala (Tunisia): “HOC VIDE VIDE ET VIDE VT P(OS) SIS PLVRA VIDERE”; with detailed drawing of imagery. Proof for publication as CIL VIII no. 11.683.

as thresholds. Visual images others than scripts (but below the level of fully developed figural representations) could have invited to assume an apotropaic meaning even more easily.

At Henchir Metkides (Hanshīr Makkidās, Tinfadi, Algeria) an ancient inscribed block with a Chi-Rho monogram (“Christos”) was used as the threshold of a private house.²⁵ The optically conspicuous sign possibly decided the choice of this stone for this location – to fulfil an apotropaic function. Correspondingly, also at Testour (Tastūr, Tichilla, Tunisia) a gravestone with Chi-Rho added to the lettering was set as threshold of a private dwelling.²⁶ For a potentially more complex motivation of choosing the stone especially at Testour see below.

In a different position, i. e. in the wall of a private house at El-Kef (al-Kāf, Sicca Veneria, Tunisia), a stone was placed with a conspicuous visual marker – the cross –, accompanied by the Christian battle cry “IN HOC SIGNUM [sic] SEMPER VINCES. AQ”²⁷

25 CIL VIII no. 16.756.

26 CIL VIII no. 1390.

27 CIL VIII no. 1767.

11683 (= Eph. V n. 1173) in lapide alto m. 1,09, lato 0,52, crasso 0,30; rep. Thala in hospitio Arabum, ubi liminis loco est.



HOC VIDE VIDE
ET VIDE VT POS
SIS PLVRA VI
DERE

phallus

Descripsi et ectypum sumpsi.

Ad oculi maligni fascinum arcendum hanc tabulam destinatum fuisse credo. Etenim qui visu effascinare pollet, fascinum illic exsculptum cernere iubetur, scilicet ut eius adspectu perturbetur. Cf. O. Jahn *Ber. der Sächs. Gesellsch.* VII a. 1855 p. 57. 66 seqq. Planta autem supra titulum depicta qualis sit et quae ei cum illa superstitione intercedat necessitudo, explicare nescio.

Fig. 5 Same inscription as fig. 4 with reduced representation of imagery. CIL VIII No. 11.683.

Significant visibility of Latin inscriptions in post-Roman contexts is attested in cities which continuously remained urban centres²⁸ as in settlements of rather recent appearance like villages founded by refugees from Andalusia as late as the 16th or 17th centuries CE.²⁹ In both cases vicinity to ancient monuments is a necessary, but not a sufficient con-

28 E.g. Beja (Bāja, Vaga, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 1216ff. 14,394ff. – El Kef (al-Kāf, Sicca Veneria, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 1626ff. 15,829ff. – Thala (Tāla, Thala, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 11,677ff. – Gafsa (Qafṣa, Capsa, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 101ff. – Qasantinah (Qasantīna, Cirta; Constantine, Algeria): CIL VIII no. 6939ff. 10,298ff.

29 Like Testour (Tastūr, Tichilla, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 1,353ff. or Slougiah (Slūqīya, Chidibbia, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 1,326ff. in the Medjerda (Majardā) valley. – On Andalusian immigration to Tunisia see Latham 1986. – For Slougiah see Ben Abdallah and Ben Hassen 1992, 294–295.

dition of the phenomenon. General considerations of re-use patterns of old objects of restricted availability may suggest a more collective commemorative function or a more individual competitive interaction.

In the first case the public presence of ancient objects, the old age of which was attested by a no longer used or even no longer readable script on them, could have added to a sentiment of civic pride in the time-honoured venerability of the place. Arab authors repeatedly mention ancient inscriptions at Carthage, which allegedly testify episodes of a very remote past – which in this case is imaginatively related to history recorded in the Koran.³⁰ Thus, interest in old ages could have especially fit the historic cities with continuity of settlement.

But also new settlements – close to ancient ruins – could have established a link to the tradition of their location by referring – via display – to physical remnants of earlier residency. In this case the distribution of inscriptions to private houses could have added an indicator of domestic prestige, maybe based on the accessibility of resources (inscribed stones) or on luck of discovery.

By the way – an analogous practice can be observed in some Algerian farmer settlements during the colonial era; the later custom is willy-nilly accepted by the archaeologists of the time, who grudgingly praised the spirit of the settlers having turned their houses into a collective village museum (see below).

The case of the villages of Andalusian immigrants might provide a further motive for – collective and individual – interest in Latin inscriptions: Refugees from Spain unlike their new neighbours in the Maghreb were accustomed to a cultural environment in which the Latin script – if not the tongue – was in ubiquitous current use. Thus collecting bits and pieces with Latin letters on them could have been reminiscent of a particular aspect of the visual culture in the lands from which they were forced to go. If this had been the case, the frequent inscriptions in the mosques of Testour or Slougiah could have assumed a more explicitly triumphant significance. But to which extent was the Latin script read by the newcomers from Andalusia? In this context the “HYGIAE AVG SAC” and “IOVI OPTIMO MAXIMO” inscriptions in the mosque of Slougiah³¹ are of special interest.

It has also to be remembered that a gravestone with a Chi-Rho monogram on it appeared as a threshold of a private house at Testour (Fig. 6). The house dwellers probably were very aware of the cultural context of this sign (see above).³²

In several recorded instances, stone slabs inscribed in Latin were re-used to cover the graves at Muslim cemeteries.³³ If, as assumed, Latin was not recognized for the content

30 Mahfoudh and Altekamp (in press).

31 CIL VIII no. 1326–1327 (= 14,874–14,875).

32 On Testour see Saadaoui 1996.

33 Qusantinah (Cirta; Constantine, Algeria): CIL VIII no. 7409 – Henchir Ras Beker (Hanshir Ra's Bakr, Algeria): CIL VIII no. 17755–17756 – Tibissa (Theveste; Tébessa, Algeria): CIL VIII no. 16,626 –

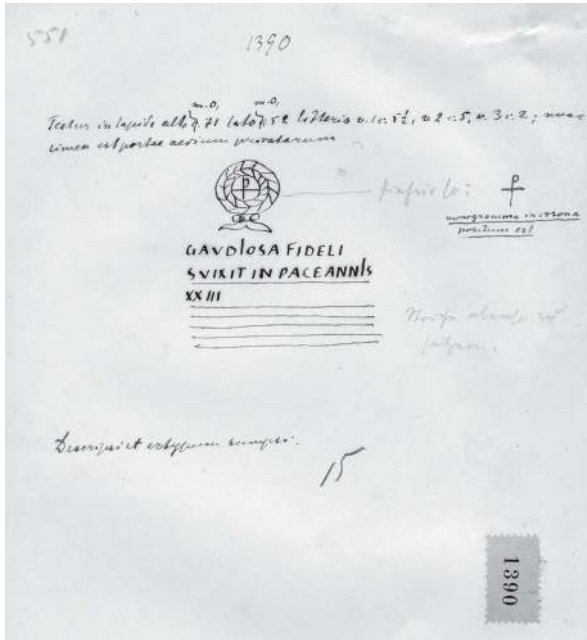


Fig. 6 Latin inscription with Chi-Rho monogram re-used as a threshold at private house at Testour (Tichilla, Tunisia): Record card of CIL VIII no. 1390 by Gustav Wilmanns.

of its wording, it was mere coincidence that also a tomb stone of a Christian bishop re-appeared on the grave of a Muslim dead.³⁴

A special situation is documented at El Kef (Sicca Veneria, Tunisia). Here the graves of the Jewish cemetery, including that of a much-revered rabbi, nearly seem to have aspired distinction by re-using Roman tombstones.³⁵ But also for a few Muslim graves at El Kef blocks with Latin inscriptions were used.³⁶

Movements and relocation of inscriptions never ceased: Three fragments of a building inscription by the Byzantine general Solomon at Gafsa (Capsa, Tunisia) had been scattered to places of different types (fortress, bath, private house), which hints to a series of re-use activities (Fig. 7).³⁷

At Henchir Ain Edja (Hanshīr ‘Ain al-Ḥāja, Agbia, Tunisia) an inscription was transferred from the historic defence it was made for to a private house as recent as the times of beginning epigraphic documentation.³⁸

Hammam Darradji (Ḥamām darraǧi, Bulla Regia, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 14,479 – And a newly provided stone on a fresh grave: K’siba M’rau (Qaṣība Mrāw, Algeria): CIL VIII no. 16,785.

34 CIL VIII no. 11,725 (Thala, Tunisia: inside a mosque with the inscription turned upside down).

35 Guérin 1862b, 56 ; CIL VIII no. 15,894. 15,896. 15,911. 16,026. 16,074. 16,136 (= 1749). 16,230. – Guérin 1862b, 56 speaks of inscriptions “sous une couche de chaux”. Had the texts been intentionally concealed?

36 CIL VIII no. 15,953. 15,997. 16,209.

37 CIL VIII no. 101.

38 CIL VIII no. 1550.

5 Patterns of re-use and distribution in the colonial and post-colonial eras

European investigation of Latin inscriptions in North Africa, which already had become a regular phenomenon before, was enormously intensified with the beginning of the colonial era. The only ever attempted snapshot of the spatial distribution of all existing Latin inscriptions originated from this period. Its initial phase resulted in two processes:

a) Researchers swarmed out to identify and document inscriptions. Their commentaries kept records of the allocations of inscriptions where encountered. These records give an unrivalled insight in a palimpsest of successive patterns of distribution and usage up to the 19th century CE. As the present allocation of many inscriptions recorded for this ‘inventory’ is not known (if the stones still exist at all), the survey remained unique and might prove to be unrepeatable. The moments of identification and documentation produced a maximum of encounters between researchers and population, which could not fail to change drastically and irrevocably attitudes towards Latin inscriptions.

Even extensive journeys could have been made exclusively to collect or publish inscriptions – as that of Victor Guérin in 1860.⁴² Archaeological excavations that did not provide enough inscriptions could be regarded as “*série noire*.”⁴³

Researchers now aspired completeness and for this goal accepted great exertions⁴⁴ and even life danger.⁴⁵ Gustav Wilmanns died of exhaustion after having documented some 15 000 inscriptions during two campaigns to Tunisia and Algeria in 1873/1874 and 1875/1876.⁴⁶

Binoculars were used to read distant letters, squeezes obtained to facilitate independent research at home.⁴⁷ If necessary, inscriptions were dug from foundations⁴⁸ or liberated from limewash.⁴⁹ No fragment was too tiny or insignificant to be included,⁵⁰ eventually even lost texts were established thanks to imprints they left in bedding materials.⁵¹

42 Guérin 1862a, V.

43 Duval and Hallier 1971, 3/6 note 1: a church excavation at Sbeitla (Sbaytla, Sufetula, Tunisia) in the early 20th century CE.

44 CIL VIII no. 17211: *recognovi stans in nive et sole occaecatus*.

45 CIL VIII no. 35: *sed periculis pressus amisi schedulam, in qua descriptum erat, neque iterum eodem reverti placuit, cum quia id sine vitae periculo fieri non poterat*.

46 Theodor Mommsen in: Wilmanns 1881, XXXI: *Gustavus Wilmanns [...] peragravitque primum per annos 1873 et 1874 regnum Tunetanum, deinde per duos sequentes provincias Algerienses, colluctatus non solum cum incepti vastitate unius viri viribus vix exuperabilis*

caelique inclementia, sed etiam cum hominum animis infestis non Arabum, sed Gallorum.

47 CIL VIII no. 11,319: *recognovi telescopio usus a. 1882 et contuli ectypum photographicum subministratum a Cagnato; item recognovit Cagnat a. 1886 et ectypum contulit idem*. – CIL VIII no. 11,326: *contulit Wilmanns telescopio usus; recognovi ipse item oculis armatis*.

48 El Kef (Sicca Veneria, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 1628 (Guérin and Wilmanns); CIL VIII no. 15,847.

49 CIL VIII no. 1267 (Krich el-Oued = Qrīsh al-Wād, Chisiduo, Tunisia).

50 E.g. CIL VIII no. 16,452–16,453.

51 IRT no. 23. 27. 75a. 126. 286.

In certain privileged locations, generations of house dwellers met generations of researchers. Occasionally, generations of squeezes were obtained from one inscription and distributed to different learned institutions.

A private home at El Kef (Sicca Veneria, Tunisia) was visited by four successive parties within half a century (Fig. 8).⁵²

Scholars were allowed to enter many private environments, and it is to be asked how the knowledge about so many 'hidden' and privately kept inscriptions had been established. Intermediators must have played an important role, and the promise of material compensation for the permit to examine inscriptions is likely, although the otherwise talkative commentaries in the editions are not explicit in this respect.

Access to a considerable group of inscriptions was potentially difficult for religious reasons: Christians were not welcome in mosques and related prayer halls, even less when they came with the intention to examine non-Muslim inscriptions and to produce squeezes. In some mosques, however, this work was nevertheless allowed. In other cases, the researchers did not succeed. Alternatively, they tried to have made their observations (and squeezes) by persons of Muslim faith, who were entitled to enter the places.⁵³

It should be noted that the denial to enter the mosques at Testour, one of the villages of Andalusian refugees in the Medjerda valley, was reported as being especially fiercely from the side of local people.⁵⁴

Under these circumstances living with inscriptions was no longer the same as before. Now values were attributed to Latin inscriptions that differed from those that had been attached to them earlier. In individual cases, suspicion was nurtured and sometimes followed by destruction.⁵⁵

b) The colonial period witnessed the most massive relocation of Latin inscriptions since late antiquity. A primary motif for systematic translations must have been the prevention of further (unrecorded) re-use of carriers, possibly without visibility of the inscribed parts, and the avoidance of destruction, e.g. in lime kilns. Ironically, a record number of inscriptions was re-used 'improperly' or even destroyed during the initial phase of the colonial regime itself, especially in Algeria. For reasons of protection and to facilitate study, inscriptions were collected and concentrated. Any single object in these new contexts lost the functions it had assumed previously. Simultaneously the inscriptions were elevated to the status of historical sources, which were read again, and devaluated as cultural markers in a traditional social environment.

52 CIL VIII no. 15,846: Camillo Borgia and Jean Émile Humbert visited El Kef together in 1815; Wilmanns 1881, XXVI; Grenville T. Temple travelled Tunisia in 1832/1833; Wilmanns 1881, XXVII; Victor Guérin in 1860; Guérin 1862a. Final observations were contributed by Roy, who reported to René Cagnat, who is quoted by Wilmanns.

53 E.g. Mses el-Bab (Majāz al-Bāb, Membressa, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 1302; Testour (Tichilla, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 1365, 1373, 1382, 10,069; Thala (Thala, Tunisia): CIL VIII no. 11,725.

54 CIL VIII no. 10,069.

55 CIL VIII no. 18, 53, 250, 693.

15846 (= 1624; Eph. V n. 612) in lapide alto m. 1,0, lato 1,05, litt. v. 1 0,07, seqq. 0,05; rep. el-Kef in Arabis cuiusdam aedibus.

F O R T V N A E R E D V C I A V G
 I M P C A E S M A V R E L I I S E V E R I A L E
 X A N D R I P I I F E L I C I S A V G P O N T I F
 M A X T R I B P O T E S T X I I C O S I I I P P a. 233
 5 E T I V L I A E M A M M A E A E A u G m a t r i s A V G
 N O S T R I E T C A S T R O R V M E T S E N A T V S
 E T P A T R I A E T O T I V S Q V E D O M V S D I
 V I N A E S P L E N D I D I S S I M V S O R D O
 S I C C E N S I V M D E V O T u S N V M I
 10 N I M A I E S T A T I Q V E E O R V M D D P P

Descriptam a Roy edidit Cagnat *bull. épigr. de la Gaule* III p. 35; versuum 1. 2 frustra quaedam descripsit C. Borgia in *Borgianis Leydensibus* IV n. 14 et in *Humbertianis* V n. 196, 63; item versum 1 *Temple* II p. 351 n. 174; Guérin *voy.* II p. 61 n. 236. Reliqua tunc calce obtecta fuerunt.

2 AVRELI (non *Aurelii*) in lapide esse puto, item 5 MAMMAEAE. — 4 ^{vii} traditur. — 9 DEVOTIS traditur. — Titulus spectat ad reditum imperatoris de expeditione contra Persas facta cf. C. VIII, 14447. 14816. 15260; III, 3427.

Fig. 8 Latin inscription in private house at Le Kef (Sicca Veneria, Tunisia). CIL VIII no. 15846.

Apart from museums and museum-like institutions, inscriptions were often concentrated at places of public administration or at military sites, reflecting the involvement of different professional groups. Most conspicuous places have been the prisons at Tazoult (Tazūlat, Lambaesis, Algeria)⁵⁶ and Ain el-Bey (‘Ain al-Bay, Saddar, Algeria)⁵⁷, the commandant’s office at Suq Ahras (Sūq al-ahrās, Thagaste, Algeria)⁵⁸ or the cercle des officiers at Khenchela (Ḥanshīla, Mascula, Algeria).⁵⁹

Collection points illustrate the trend to withdraw inscriptions from dispersed positions in the public or private sphere. Absolute control, however, could not be achieved and thus a considerable amount of inscriptions is found to be diverted to inofficial or private use again, now under the conditions of colonial society.

For a limited period of time, the city of Qusantinah (Cirta; Constantine, Algeria) boasted a “Café de l’Inscription Romaine.”⁶⁰

Otherwise, numerous inscriptions found their (temporary) home in houses or on farms of European immigrants.

At Kherbet Madjuba (Khirbat Majūba), a village of colonizers from France in Algeria, a phenomenologically similar attention to Latin inscriptions was paid as has been observed in some villages in the Medjerda valley in Tunisia. Several inscriptions found by the farmers were included in their private homes. The farmers’ activities are hailed by a local scholar as having created a kind of historical archive of their place.⁶¹

Information on private new re-use by non-Europeans is very scarce.

Transferring inscriptions to museums abroad was mainly a phenomenon of the period preceding the era of formal colonialism and the initial phase of colonial rule. Museums of Florence (Italy), Leiden (Netherlands) and – of course – Paris⁶² profited most from North African inscriptions. The influx from Algeria to Paris corresponds to the topography of major interference (destruction, transformation) with ancient monuments on behalf of the French army: Skikda (Sukaikida, Rusicade; Philippeville), Satif (Saṭīf, Sitifis) or Qalama (Qālīma, Calama; Guelma).

Today, the landscape of Latin inscriptions in the Maghreb – of those inscriptions outside their places of origin in archaeological sites – can be regarded as mortified. The stones themselves have become victims of the extraordinary success story of epigraphy, which due to the quality of its standardized publications has ultimately diverted the scholarly interest from objects to editions or to surrogate objects, the squeezes.

Alienated from more open and general forms of display, collected inscriptions are highly marginalized items in museums or museum depots.

56 CIL VIII no. 2601ff. 18,064ff.

57 CIL VIII no. 5,937ff. 10,293.

58 CIL VIII no. 5,142ff.

59 CIL VIII no. 17620ff. Gsell and Graillet 1893, 501; Duval 1972, 110–113; Gui, Duval, and Caillet 1992,

294–296.

60 CIL VIII no. 6944: “incendio aedium titulum perisse Wilmansio narraverunt Constantinae.”

61 CIL VIII no. 10,907–10,929; Poulle 1878, 402–404.

62 Duval and Royo 1984.

6 Abbreviations

CIL

Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum VIII. Inscriptiones Africae, Berlin: Reimer 1881–1959.

IRT

Joyce Reynolds and John B. Ward-Perkins, *The Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*, Roma: British School at Rome 1952.

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Wissenschaften. 5 Cagnat and J. Schmidt 1891, Nr. 11.683. 6 Courtesy: CIL Archive Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften. 7 Wilmanns 1881, Nr. 101. 8 Cagnat and J. Schmidt 1891, Nr. 15.846.

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