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‘*DEO MAGNO MERCURIO ADORAVIT...*’ – THE LATIN LANGUAGE AND ITS USE IN SACRED SPACES AND CONTEXTS IN ROMAN EGYPT

Jiří Honzl[1]

ABSTRACT: The use of Latin in the multilingual society of Roman Egypt was never more than marginal. Yet, as a language of the ruling power, the Roman Empire, Latin enjoyed to some extent a privileged status. It was generally more widely applied in the army, as well as on some official occasions, and in the field of law. Less expectably, various Latin inscriptions on stone had religious contents or were found in sacred spaces and contexts. Such texts included honorary and votive inscriptions, visitors’ graffiti, and funerary inscriptions. All three groups are surveyed and evaluated focusing especially on their actual relation to the religious sphere and social background, noting both continuity and changes of existing practices and traditions. Such analysis of the inscriptions allows to draw conclusions not only regarding the use of Latin in religious matters in Egypt but also reveal some aspects of the use of Latin in Egypt in general and the role of Roman culture in the Egyptian society.

KEYWORDS: Roman Egypt – Latin – religion – temples – honorary inscriptions – votive inscriptions – visitors’ graffiti – funerary inscriptions

Contrary to the widespread stereotype, ancient Egypt was throughout its long history hardly ever a culturally homogenous society. It was always engaged in lively contacts with both its close and more distant neighbours. Some elements of foreign cultures took roots in the land on the Nile, either in form of imported goods, cultural influences, or even whole immigrant communities. The early Roman Period (30 BCE – 284 CE) saw the apex of cultural heterogeneity in ancient Egypt. Simultaneously, Egypt became a multilingual society, which during the time of the Roman province used, apart from Egyptian in its several forms and Greek, a whole range of marginal languages.

Latin was attested in Egypt for the first time in the year 116 BCE, in which three Romans visiting Ptolemaic Egypt left their visitors’ graffito on the Island of Philae.[2] However, it spread more only after the annexation of Egypt by Caesar Octavian, the future Emperor Augustus, in 30 BCE and it remained in use until and shortly after the

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1 Contact: Jiří Honzl, Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University; e-mail: honzlj@ff.cuni.cz. The paper was written within the framework of the project ‘Continuity, Discontinuity and Change. Adaptation Strategies of Individuals and Communities in Egypt at Times of Internal and External Transformations’ supported by the Czech Science Foundation (grant no. 19-07268S). The current article is an elaborated and augmented version of an oral paper presented at *The Egyptological Conference in Copenhagen 2019* (Copenhagen, 7.5.–9.5.2019). The author would like to express his gratitude to Daniela Urbanová, Filip Coppens, and Dana Bělohoubková for their numerous suggestions, comments, and corrections.

2 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* I, no. 2937a = Bernand 1989, no. 321 = Pfeiffer 2015, no. 30; see also Beness and Hillard 2003.

conquest of Egypt by Arabs in 641 CE. In Egypt, it never became more than a marginal language, especially in comparison with predominant Egyptian and Greek.[3] Yet it is represented by a considerable collection of inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca making up an important corpus for studying both the language and the society using it. Its position in society was specific, hardly similar to the other languages used alongside it. Although still not described in its entirety, the special status of Latin was clearly given mainly by it being the language of the current overlord, the Roman Empire.[4] For that reason, the use of Latin could be favoured on official occasions, for example in building inscriptions, or to underscore one's identification with the ruling power or simply with Roman culture in general, as was sometimes the case of high officials, soldiers, or others. Latin was also more often put to use by certain parts of the provincial personnel, for example in the army[5] and in the field of law.[6] Besides, Latin was naturally used by virtue of being the native language of a very small, not well-established but certainly existing community, as shown for example by the private correspondence of Claudius Terentianus and Claudius Tiberianus.[7]

It is, however, possible to encounter Latin also in contexts where it could be deemed improbable or at least unexpected. A considerable number of Latin inscriptions made on stone from Egypt was either recovered from sacred spaces or has content relating to religious or ritual matters. There is, however, no inherent reason for Latin to be used in this context. Actually, in the eastern part of the Roman Empire it was common for Latin speakers to accommodate Greek in the case of religious matters.[8] Thus, they comprise a conspicuous group among the corpus of Latin texts from Egypt deserving closer attention.

Three distinct groups of Latin inscriptions made on stone are surveyed in the current paper, namely [1] honorary and votive inscriptions, [2] visitors' graffiti, and [3] funerary inscriptions.[9] Each of these groups is specific and demands an individual approach and answering of various questions. For all, however, especially two interrelated issues are tackled. Firstly, an investigation whether and to what extent they in fact represent evidence of popular piety, thus reflecting genuine personal religiosity, or whether they fully or at least partly stem from other social and/or cultural phenomena. Secondly, it is determined what was the background of their originators[10] and what were the probable motivations involved in choosing Latin as the language of the inscriptions, if it was not only the religious content of the texts or the sacred context, in which they were placed. Together with the evaluation of the distribution of the inscriptions and their particular context, it provides an insight into the social structures standing behind Latin religiosity in Egypt. By extension, such evidence helps to shed more light on the use of Latin in Egypt in general and on the intensity and nature of the interactions of

3 Adams 2003; Evans 2012; Clackson 2015, esp. pp. 63–95; Mullen and James 2012.

4 Adams 2003, pp. 545–576.

5 *Inter alia* Adams 2003, pp. 599–623; Evans 2012, pp. 518–519.

6 *Inter alia* Adams 2003, pp. 562–564; Evans 2012, pp. 517–518.

7 Adams 2003, 527–529, pp. 589–591.

8 Adams 2003, *passim*, esp. pp. 577–579; see also Blom 2012.

9 The classification of inscription types accustomed in the Latin epigraphy is generally followed with some adaptations with regard to the aims of the current paper; see Beltrán Lloris 2015.

10 Used to designate persons in whose name the inscriptions were written, regardless whether or not they in fact authored them.

Roman Latin culture with both Greek and indigenous elements in Egyptian society. Overall, the research also offers the chance to study the interaction between traditional and innovative ideological and religious concepts and their textual expression, but also the transmission and adaptation of traditional concepts and models in times of major social and ideological transformation.

[1] Honorary and votive inscriptions

Inscriptions of the first group comprise forty-nine individual items. The texts included are of different epigraphic types,[11] yet such that are related to each other and often use similar phrasing. For the sake of the current survey, they are sorted into three sub-groups depending on the addresses of the dedications. These could be private or official persons, emperors and members of the imperial house, or various deities. Only the two latter groups are of particular interest for the current study.

Altogether, imperial dedications, with a total thirty-one individual inscriptions,[12] comprise unsurprisingly[13] the clear majority of Latin honorary and votive inscriptions from Egypt. Like dedications to private or official persons, some imperial dedications could have an entirely honorary character, but many of them were clearly connected with the phenomenon of the imperial cult, in which religion and state ideology merged.[14] Given their placing mostly in various temples and in sanctuaries dedicated to the imperial cult in particular, this was apparently the case for the majority of Latin imperial dedications from Egypt. However, their overall quantity and spread throughout Egypt should not be overestimated as many of them were found together in groups, giving evidence rather for the local intensity of the imperial cult. One such collection of twelve inscriptions was located in the Amun temple at Luxor. The New Kingdom edifice dedicated to a specific form of the chief Theban god was during the tetrarchy integrated into the newly built legionary fortress.[15] In course of that process, one of the inner chambers of the Egyptian temple was adapted to serve as a sanctuary of the imperial cult.[16] This is where four bases for statues of the emperor bearing Latin dedications were found.[17] Seven of original eight inscriptions were discovered on the bases of the two tetrapylons erected over the main street crossings in other parts of the legionary camp.[18] Another group of four imperial dedications inscribed on three statue bases, belonging presumably to a very similar setting as the ones from the temple proper at Luxor, were recovered from the remains of an older auxiliary camp at Aswan, probably its sanctuary.[19] There are more Latin dedications to emperors to be found in various

11 See Beltrán Lloris 2015, pp. 91–93, 97–98.

12 Published mainly in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. For others see Bernand 1977; Bernand and Bernand 1969; Eide et al. 1998; Lacau 1934.

13 See Adams 2003, pp. 614–616.

14 Pfeiffer 2012.

15 el-Saghir et al. 1986.

16 Jones and McFadden 2015; Kalavrezou-Maxeiner 1975; el-Saghir et al. 1986, pp. 27–31.

17 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, Suppl. 2, no. 12073 = Lacau 1934, IV, A; Lacau 1934, III; Lacau 1934, IV, B–C.

18 Lacau 1934, I, I–L; Lacau 1934, II, B–D.

19 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, Suppl. 2, no. 14147, 1–4.

Egyptian temples like at Akoris[20], Philae[21], or Dakka[22]. The abovementioned inscriptions as well as other similar dedications were at least in twenty-one cases commissioned by highly ranked members of the army[23] and civil administration. Members of lower military personnel were attested as originators only in three individual cases. For high officials, it is reasonable to presume that erecting such monuments was not initiated to express personal religious preferences, but rather as a part of the duties of their offices, as well as to demonstrate the loyalty to and self-identification with the ruling power. In this context, the use of Latin was an obvious choice.

Votive inscriptions, including building inscriptions phrased as divine dedications, represent a much smaller, yet no less interesting group. The eleven currently known inscriptions[24] can be divided into two almost equally large groups. The first part encompasses six inscriptions with an official background. The other group consists of five votives that may be considered as personal. There are remarkable differences between the groups in both contents and context.

Three of the official divine dedications form a closely-knit group. They come from various sites in the Nile valley[25], the eastern Delta[26], and the Western Desert[27]. All three had exactly the same wording clearly stemming from the same pre-prepared pattern, were dated to year 288 CE and record the establishment of the military fortresses at their respective locales, apparently built in the course of a single extensive building campaign. In their heading, they were dedicated to Jupiter, Hercules, and Victoria, deities closely related with the ideology of the emerging tetrarchy. Another inscription coming from the surrounds of Aswan[28] commemorated recent quarrying operation conducted nearby and was addressed to, as stated, the protectors of the region, Jupiter Optimus Maximus Hammon Chnubis and Juno Regina. These names in fact represent a clear continuation of a locally existing tradition as they refer to the chief deities of the Aswan region, Khnum and Satis of Elephantine. Khnum, Satis, and other deities of the first cataract region were likely hidden also behind the collective appellation '*Dii Patres*' (Fatherly Gods) used in the famous trilingual stela of Cornelius Gallus, renowned elegiac poet and first Roman governor of Egypt, also from Philae.[29] Together with them, the description of the exploits of the first Egyptian prefect was presented also to the personified Nile. Interestingly, four of the votive inscriptions described above were commissioned in the name of the emperors by high officials of the province, with the Gallus stela being donated only by his

20 Bernand 1988, no. 12.

21 Bernand and Bernand 1969, no. 163.

22 Ruppel 1930, no. 100.

23 Throughout this paper, all military ranks up to centurions are considered as lower military personnel, the rest as higher officers.

24 Published mainly in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. For others see Bernand 1988; Colin 2012; de Ricci 1909; Zawadzki 1969.

25 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, 1, no. 22.

26 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, Suppl. 2, no. 13578 = Carrez-Maratray 1999, no. 396.

27 Colin 2012, pp. 103–117.

28 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, 1, no. 75.

29 Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum III, Suppl. 2, no. 14147, 5; for the interpretation of '*Dii Patres*' see Hoffmann, Minas-Nerpel and Pfeiffer 2009, pp. 162–163.

direct subordinate.[30] The recipient deities belonged either to the major state-sanctioned cults or among the divinities venerated in native Egyptian temples.

As hinted above, personal votive inscriptions show largely a different picture. In four cases, in which their identity was extant, the donators were holders of lower or the lowest higher military ranks. Among the deities addressed, it is again Jupiter who appears repeatedly. In an inscription from Aswan[31], the supreme Roman god is mentioned together with a wish for the well-being and victory of the joint emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. In a dedication from Koptos[32], Jupiter is addressed together with '*ceteri dii*' (other gods). In fragmentary text from Aswan,[33] the deity was named as '*Iuppiter O(ptimus) M(aximus) Hel(iopolitanus)*'. It refers by the '*interpretatio Romana*' to the god from Syrian Baalbek rather than from the Egyptian city near modern Cairo, both of which were called Heliopolis by the Romans. The other two personal Latin donations were addressed to Genius, i.e. the protective deity of a legion,[34] and to the syncretic Serapis[35]. Although there is some overlap, the specific choice of the deities to be honoured by the donations both in official and personal votive inscriptions, clearly reflects much better in the latter case the diversification of popular religious beliefs in the Roman Empire of the first centuries CE. More likely than in other cases, the choice of language of personal votive inscriptions leads to the employment of one's native language, as the relation between the dedicant and the deity is in fact intimate, less prone to take consideration of other potential readers.

[2] Visitors' graffiti

Various places in Egypt and beyond – natural landmarks as well as artificial monuments – were furnished with various graffiti, both textual and iconic, inscribed on their walls or left on nearby suitable natural rock faces. They represent a special group of inscriptions. Although visitors' graffiti were not exclusive to the Nile Valley and its surroundings, their representation there was extraordinary. While bearing a wide scale of messages and reflecting various motivations of their authors, virtually the only common denominator of the visitors' graffiti is their shared function as records of one's presence at the given site. Although the earliest graffiti appeared much sooner,[36] their boom came only during the Greco-Roman Period (332 BCE – 641 CE).[37] They were mostly connected to the so-called 'sacred tourism'[38], encompassing a wide scale of phenomena ranging from profane tourism to pilgrimage. Drawing a clear division between the two is often not possible.[39] In reality, the motivations of

30 According to some opinions, his self-presentation in Egypt could have in fact been taken as a transgression of the gubernatorial position; see Hoffmann, Minas-Nerpel and Pfeiffer 2009, pp. 6–10.

31 Zawadzki 1969, pp. 106–117 = Pfeiffer 2015, no. 70.

32 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, Suppl. 2, no. 13574 = Bernand 1984, no. 93.

33 de Ricci 1909, p. 147.

34 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, Suppl. 1, no. 6577 = Kayser 1994, no. 109.

35 Bernand 1988, no. 21.

36 e.g. Navratilova 2016.

37 *Inter alia* Foertmeyer 1989; Rutherford 2012.

38 After Rosenmeyer 2018.

39 Foertmeyer 1989; Rosenmeyer 2018, esp. pp. 48–53; Rutherford 2012.

'sacred tourists' encompassed everything from simple visiting memorable places to participation in religious festivals and incubation cults.

It is possible to single out graffiti with a religious motivation in cases that refer explicitly to an act of devotion and to presume the same for others based on their context, but usually not with absolute certainty. In most known examples, the direct references make use of the Greek word *'τό προσκύνημα'* and its derivates.[40] The expression was not restricted only to graffiti in Greek but appeared often also in its Demotic equivalent.[41] The meaning of the word underwent a development over time and remained ambiguous. It is mostly translated vaguely as an act of worship, obeisance before the god[42], or even salutation[43]. In some of the oldest occurrences,[44] it was used to describe prostration before the kings of Near Eastern empires. The word itself is notably derived from the verb 'κυνεῖν' (to kiss).[45] The exact character of actions recorded as *proskynemata* in inscriptions is not clear. Use of the word in visitors' graffiti gradually became repetitive and formalized. Thus, in many cases the *proskynema* inscriptions in fact did not denote an actual act of reverence, but simply a presence at the given site, as demonstrated for example in the case of the royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings.[46] Accordingly, one must rely not only on the use of a specific expression, when identifying graffiti of pilgrims, but consider also their specific context. This naturally applies both to Greek as well as Latin inscriptions.

Visitors' graffiti written in Latin or combining both Latin and Greek, altogether 126 inscriptions,[47] were collected from various pilgrimage and touristic sites. Most of them came from frequented touristic hubs at Western Thebes, namely forty-four from the Colossi of Memnon[48] and thirty-three from the Tombs in the Valley of the Kings[49]. Visitors' graffiti were noted in lesser amounts among others in the Paneia of the Eastern Desert[50], on Nubian temples at Kalabsha[51] and Dakka[52], and also in the area of the first Nile cataract including the island of Philae[53]. They are notably missing at some of the most important places of pilgrimage, like Deir el-Bahri[54], also at Western Thebes, and the temple of Seti I at Abydos[55], both sites without substantial touristic significance.

Such distribution of visitors' graffiti itself shows that in a religious context Greek

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40 Liddell and Scott 1940, s.v. *προσκυνέω, προσκύνημα*.

41 *'wšt.t'* (Johnson 2001, s.v. *wš.t*; Griffith 1937, p. 9; Geraci 1971, p. 22).

42 Also Geraci 1971, pp. 12–26.

43 Foertmeyer 1989, p. 28.

44 e.g. Herodotus, *Historiae* I, 119; VIII, 118.

45 Liddell and Scott 1940, s.v. *κυνέω*; see also the Egyptian *'sn-tꜣ'*, literally 'to kiss the ground'; *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae*, lemma no. 136560; *inter alia* Coppens 2019.

46 Foertmeyer 1989, p. 28.

47 Many published in *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. For others see below and Bataille 1939; Bernand 1972; Bernand 1989; Cuvigny and Bülow-Jacobsen 1999; el-Saghir et al. 1986; Zucker 1912; Žába 1974.

48 Bernand and Bernand 1960; Foertmeyer 1989, pp. 23–25; Rosenmeyer 2018.

49 Baillet 1920–1926; Foertmeyer 1989, pp. 25–29.

50 Bernand 1977; Foertmeyer 1989, pp. 20–21.

51 Foertmeyer 1989, pp. 36–37; Gauthier 1911–1914.

52 Foertmeyer 1989, pp. 35–36; Ruppel 1930.

53 Bernand and Bernand 1969; Foertmeyer 1989, pp. 33–34.

54 Bataille 1951; Foertmeyer 1989, pp. 22–23.

55 Foertmeyer 1919, pp. 18–20; Perdrizet and Lefebvre 1919.

was indeed used more preferably than Latin. Considering also the issue of distinction between touristic and pilgrim's graffiti, all Latin inscriptions are, for the sake of the current survey, presumed as not having a religious subtext, unless containing expressions explicitly describing some kind of potentially religious act. Such cases comprise more than a tenth of all Latin visitors' graffiti from Egypt.

One would expect to find such inscriptions to employ some Latin variant of the term *proskynema*. It is in fact possible to find such an expression. Strikingly, it appears in a single documented case.

Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum III, 1, no. 79 (= Ruppel 1930, no. 28):

Deo magno Mercurio	For Mercury, the great god,
adoravit vexillu⟨m=S⟩	an adoration was made by military standard
Leg(ionis) II Traian⟨a⟩e fortis	of the *Legio II Traiana fortis*
nonas Febr[uari]as anno XI	on 5 February in the year 11 (=127 CE)
Imp(eratoris) Traian(i) Hadri(ani).	of the Emperor Traianus Hadrianus.
Scripsit C(aius) Cossutius Nigrinus.	Gaius Cossutius Nigrinus wrote (this).

Gaius Cossutius Nigrinus scribbled his graffito onto the outer wall of the temple at Dakka in the Roman occupied part of the Lower Nubia. The inscription is addressed to the main deity of the temple, Thoth, referred to, following the *interpretatio Romana*, as Mercury. Notably, the author also provided the god with an epithet, a direct translation of one of the commonest Egyptian divine titles.[56] The verb '*dorare*' (to plead with, to approach as suppliant or worshipper)[57] used in the inscription, although having a different origin, carries a meaning very similar to that of '*προσκυνεῖν*', the verbal form of '*τό προσκύνημα*'.[58] Moreover, the wording of the text is well in accord with Greek *proskynema* inscriptions. The graffito was not, as usual, made in the name of a single person, but rather for a military standard (*vexillum*), i.e. metonymically in the name of the whole military unit.[59] As such, it was clearly intended as having at least to some extent an official character. This was probably the reason why Cossutius wrote his inscription in Latin. If it is truly the case, and the use of Latin in this inscription in fact depended on it being made in the name of the whole military unit, it may explain why this is the single known case of a Latin mutation of the *proskynema* inscription.

As in the case of '*adorare*', also for other potentially religiously motivated Latin graffiti the focus is going to remain on the predicate of the respective communications. In other graffiti, three more verbal expressions, i.e. '*honorare*', '*donare*', and '*gratias agere*', were attested which are of interest for the current study. All three phrases appear among inscriptions inscribed on the northern statue of the Colossi of Memnon where they

56 '*nṯr ʿȝ*', translated as '*deus magnus*' both meaning 'great god' (see Roeder 1930 for occurrence of the title in hieroglyphic texts from the temple).

57 *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, s.v. adoro; *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. adoro; see also Hickson 1993, p. 46.

58 Derived from '*orare*' (to pray to, to beseech); *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, *s.v.* oro; *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, *s.v.* oro. Notably, '*adorare*' had gone through relatively dynamic semantic shift ongoing since the 1st century BCE. As such it could have been well suited to be adopted as the equivalent for the Greek '*προσκυνεῖν*'.

59 See *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. vexillum.

expand the usual statement of hearing the deified hero.[60] The northern one of the two monumental statues of king Amenhotep III, considered by the Greeks and Romans to be depicting Memnon, the Homeric king of mythical *Aithiopia*, in fact produced a certain sound. The natural phenomenon was likely caused by the expulsion of air from fissures in the statue caused by thermal expansion of the stone at sunrise.[61] The 'miracle' occurred repeatedly on an irregular basis in the early hours of the day roughly for the duration of the first two centuries CE. It was understood by many as the calling of the hero to his mother Eos, the goddess of dawn. Because of the connection to Homeric myths, in which Memnon appeared as one of the principal allies and defenders of Troy, the Colossi of Memnon became a popular touristic site of Roman Egypt, one clearly of high-profile status frequently attracting visits of various official personages, even of imperial rank. From varying contents of the Latin inscriptions from the Colossi of Memnon, it seems clear that this language was perceived as more suitable for official purposes than Greek.[62]

One such high ranking visitor, the Egyptian prefect Petronius Secundus embellished his statement of hearing the statue by a Greek distich introduced by a separate sentence[63]: '*...et honoravit eum versibus Graecis infra scriptis*/ ...and he (Petronius Secundus) honoured him (= Memnon) by Greek verses written below. ' Another versifying visitor, Statilius Maximus, tells virtually the same in a figurative manner[64]: '*... et donat Camenas.*/ ...and (Statilius Maximus) presents (Memnon) with Muses'.[65] Servius Clemens, author of the earliest datable graffito at the site expressed his gratitude[66]: '*... et egi gratias.*/ ...and (Servius Clemens) expressed gratitude (to Memnon).' In all three cases, the ordinary formula describing the performance of the miraculous sound by Memnon (for the visitor) was appended by the (reciprocal) action taken by the originator of the inscription. Such reciprocity could be well in accord with the usual conception of relations between humans and gods according to the '*do ut des*' principle and, thus, fitting as convincing evidence for the religious dimension of the graffiti. Some serious scepticism is, however, still due in all three cases. Taking into consideration also the *par excellence* touristic character of the site, the former two cases could be explained not only as a show of devotion but also of poetic expressivity. In the third case, the author is probably grateful not for any other godly favour than hearing the sound made by the statue, which would also speak against its religious nature.

Apart from the singular verbal constructions enumerated above, one other more frequent expression still has to be mentioned. Altogether in fourteen cases, Latin visitors' graffiti make use of a phrase containing the adverb '*feliciter*'.[67] The word literally means 'luckily' or 'fortunately', but it was also used as an idiom for wishing

60 *Inter alia* Adams 2003, pp. 546–555; Foertmeyer 1989, pp. 23–25; Rosenmeyer 2018.

61 Sourouzian and Stadelmann et al. 2004, p. 183.

62 Adams 2003, pp. 546–555; see esp. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, 1, no. 43 = Bernand and Bernand 1960, no. 38; Bernand and Bernand 1960, no. 39 having the same originator.

63 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, 1, no. 37, 5–6 = Bernand and Bernand 1960, no. 13.

64 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, 1, no. 47, 2 = Bernand and Bernand 1960, no. 54.

65 Meaning metonymically 'verses' or even 'poetry' in general (see *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. Camena).

66 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, 1, no. 64, 3 = Bernand and Bernand 1960, no. 1.

67 *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, s.v. felix (feliciter); *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. feliciter; see also Hickson 1993, *passim*, esp. pp. 58, 70–72.

good luck.[68] This particular mode of use is clearly apparent on a graffito, where '*feliciter*' is used in parallel with another phrase of similar meaning.

Gauthier 1911–1914, no. 32:

Coho(rti?) I Theb[aeorum],	For (?) Cohors I Thebaeorum,
C(aio) [...]OLE[...] Gemelli[no,	for Gaius [...]ole[...] Gemellinus,
bene valeas.	may you fare well!
T. Staio Domiti[ano],	For Titus Staius Domitianus,
feliciter.	(have a) good luck!

As shown by this inscription, the wish may be directed towards an individual or even an entire military unit. In other cases, it could be made for the benefit of the emperor.[69] Remarkably, most graffiti using '*feliciter*' occur in the context of various sanctuaries, thus entrusting the wish to their deities. Six come from temples of Lower Nubia and four, although likely appearing in course of a single event, from a sanctuary at Gebel el-Tukh.[70] On the other hand, they appear only rarely at predominantly touristic sites, like the Colossi of Memnon[71], royal tombs at the Valley of the Kings[72] or alongside the route crossing the Eastern Desert[73]. Six were explicitly labelled as made by members of the army and the same is expectable for most of the rest. Only once,[74] the originator was a higher military officer. Taking note especially, but not only, of the context in which they appear, the inscriptions containing '*feliciter*' are the only Latin visitors' graffiti likely having a background in actual popular religiosity.

[3] Funerary inscriptions

There are altogether 117 funerary inscriptions using Latin coming from Egypt. In their case the connection especially to popular beliefs is evident. Another aspect to be considered is their role in the presentation of the self-perceived identity, the desired identification with a particular community or the social group of their originators[75] or for acquiring prestige[76]. In some cases, the latter could easily provide a reason for using Latin even by native speakers of Greek and other languages. Otherwise, they should be considered as essentially personal and making use of the language native to people involved in their creation. The construction of an alternative identity can be well observed in a bilingual epitaph from Akhmim.

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68 At Dakka they were labelled as '*Denkinschriften*' and counted among the *proskynema* inscriptions; Ruppel 1930, pp. 71–72, Geraci 1971, pp. 13–14. The Greek equivalent of '*feliciter*' was indeed sometimes used also in *proskynema* inscriptions. In overall, however, such wishes appeared more often Latin than in Greek visitors' graffiti.

69 e.g. Bernand 1972, no. 19.

70 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, Suppl. 2, nos. 12067–12070.

71 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, 1, no. 51 = Bernand and Bernand 1960, nos. 57–58.

72 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, 1, no. 67 = Baillet 1920–1926, no. 1448.

73 Bernand 1972, no. 19.

74 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, 1, no. 67 = Baillet 1920–1926, no. 1448.

75 See Adams 2003, pp. 616–617.

76 See Adams 2003, pp. 545–576.

Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum III, Suppl. 2, no. 14146, 1:

Dis Manibus.	For the souls of the dead.
L(ucius) Corn⟨i=e⟩l⟨i⟩us Sat-	Lucius Cornelius
urninus vix(it)	Saturninus lived
annis V, mense	Five years, one month
uno, diebus XXVIIII.	(and) 29 days.
ἔτους ε΄. Λούκιος	In the 5th year. Lucius
Κορνήλιος	Cornelius
Σατορνεῖλο⟨ς⟩	Saturninus
ἔζησε ἔτη ε΄, μ(ῆνας) β΄(sic).	lived 5 years (and) two months.

The messages conveyed by the Latin and Greek parts of the text are nearly the same. The most striking difference is the presence/absence of the opening formula, '*Dis Manibus*/ For the souls of the dead' in Latin. In the early Roman period (30 BCE – 284 CE), the expression was common and its use was rather formalized. Although the Greek equivalent of the formula did exist,[77] it is not surprising to find it missing in the Greek version. As such, this formula or other allusions to native Roman ideas of the afterlife may not be considered as evidence for the actual beliefs of the persons involved. Another difference to be noted is that the Greek part of the text states twice the age of the deceased child, rather oddly both in the beginning and by the end of the passage. Moreover, a slightly different 'exact' age was given in the Latin and Greek parts of the inscription, as in the Greek part the age was deliberately rounded off to whole months. All these differences point to the Latin text serving as the pattern, according to which the inaccurate Greek translation was composed. On the other hand, the non-standard features appearing in the Latin rendering of Cornelius, in the text as '*Cornilus*', contrasting with the orthographically correct spelling in the Greek part, may suggest a Greek background of either the originator or the creator of the inscription. In the former case, there would be an apparent contrast between the two identities, the everyday Greek one and, as proclaimed, the more important Latin one.

It is possible occasionally to encounter Latin funerary inscriptions at various sites throughout Egypt. The vast majority of them, up to 99 inscriptions, derives from the burial grounds of the legionary camp at Nicopolis adjacent to Alexandria.[78] There, Latin funerary inscriptions greatly outnumber the Greek ones. Accordingly, in all funerary inscriptions in which their social background was stated, the persons mentioned come from the military, with several exceptions from the lower strata of the army. The only exception is a funerary inscription commissioned by a freedman of the Egyptian prefect,[79] which, nonetheless, comes from a social sphere close to the army as well. A connection to the military can be suspected also for other inscriptions, in which the affiliation to the army was not explicitly stated, yet the texts in question come from sites with known military presence.

77 *'Καταχθόνιοι θεοί'*; Liddell and Scott 1940, s.v. καταχθόνιος.

78 The tombstones from Nicopolis and their texts were most comprehensively and completely published in Waebens 2012. For others see Abd-el-Ghani et al. 2013; Breccia 1911; Bernand 1970; Bernand 1977; Bernand 1984; Bernand 1988; *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*; Martin 1979; Ruppel 1930; Tuck 2005.

79 *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* III, Suppl. 2, no. 14136, 1.

Summary and discussion

It was possible to demonstrate the religious subtext only for a minority of the Latin visitors' graffiti. Such cases are clearly much less represented than among Greek inscriptions of the same type. Latin visitors' graffiti with religious content were more common in the area of Aswan and in Lower Nubia. While in general both high and lower ranking persons are encountered among their originators, the religious ones, mainly inscriptions with a wish of good luck, were more often authored or commissioned by members of the lower military personnel. In the class of honorary and votive inscriptions, a larger part of texts was commissioned by various officials. This partly reflects the higher rate of representation of imperial dedications in the group, which were *per se* more prone to have an official background. Soldiers are again very well represented. For votive inscriptions, a relation between the social background of the dedicators and deities addressed was observed. Partly also having a religious background, the funerary inscriptions comprise a large yet geographically mostly restricted group. The group was almost exclusively related to members of the lower military personnel and their relatives.

Although among the Latin inscriptions themselves the ones appearing in a sacral context or having religious contents were well represented, in comparison with other epigraphic evidence from Egypt and Nubia, they were marginal. Still, they provide ample evidence for ways in which on the one hand features of Latin Roman culture penetrated Egyptian society and, on the other, how Latin epigraphic expressions adapted to the before-established phenomena in the land on the Nile, for example the 'sacral tourism' – showing evidence of both continuity and change. Texts of various types dealt with in the current paper could be roughly divided into two groups, as either personal or official. Both tend to appear respectively in similar contexts and relate to particular social groups. Personal inscriptions, mainly such cases of religious visitors' graffiti and divine dedications, were found largely in the connection to temples and other sanctuaries, while the official ones appeared more often outside such sacral contexts, underscoring the formal character of such inscriptions, especially various dedications, with otherwise seemingly religious content. Among the authors and originators of personal inscriptions, one encounters mostly soldiers of lower military ranks. Mostly high military officers, but sometimes also civil officials, are more frequently represented among the commissioners of the official inscriptions. A close relation of both groups to the army is clear.

The social background of the originators is very well mirrored by the geographical distribution of religiously motivated inscriptions that were recovered predominantly from regions with a well-established military presence. The rate of their representation across these regions is, however, far from uniform, as they were well represented only at Alexandria, in the Theban region and in the Aswan area and adjacent Lower Nubia. The apparent fluctuation could to a certain degree have been caused by a lack of preservation, as well as of suitable occasions and/or sites for their commissioning and placement. Such explanation, however, seems not to be entirely satisfactory, and there likely were other factors affecting the geographical distribution of the inscriptions. In the case of the official ones, it could obviously be the accents given to certain regions

by the central power.[80] Concerning the personal inscriptions, the solution is not so easy to grasp. One may presume that in such cases, in which no other 'overriding' motivation for the use of a certain language was noted, the tongue of everyday conduct was chosen for inscriptions by their originators, especially if they were authored by them directly, which may be presumed with high probability especially in the case of many visitors' graffiti. The accumulation of such textual evidence, i.e. personal Latin religious inscriptions, may point to the existence of actual Latin speaking communities or at least the higher representation of its native speakers. Based on the present survey, the former seems to be the case for Alexandria and its legionary camp at Nicopolis in particular. The latter is hinted for the area of Aswan and the Roman controlled part of the Lower Nubia. As tentative as they are, such claims need to be further tested and confirmed or disproved through the results acquired from other sets of data.

The use of Latin in sacred spaces and contexts in Roman Egypt did not by far represent an isolated element connected to a closed community of foreigners and their secluded activities. On the contrary, the language, its speakers, and their culture were in lively contact both with Greek and indigenous elements of the Egyptian society. Romans were able to integrate their own epigraphic habits with the pre-existing sacred landscape. On the other hand, Latin epigraphic culture was able to absorb new features and accommodate itself to new contexts. Both was facilitated through Roman ability to accommodate themselves through the phenomena of syncretism and religious pragmatism. Thus, the inscriptions became one of the means by which the Romans could join in, adapt, or even usurp for themselves the use of established sacred spaces in the existing religious landscape. In this way, they contributed to their development, leading in extreme cases to a complete change of their significance, but at the same time helped to maintain their continuity, as palpably seen for example in the case of the Amun temple at Luxor.

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80 To be compared, besides others, with the main areas of Roman temple building activities; e.g. Arnold 1999; Hölbl 2000; Hölbl 2004; Hölbl 2005.

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