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REFLECTIONS ON A PERIOD
OF TRANSFORMATION IN EARLY
BYZANTINE EPIGRAPHIC CULTURE

As in the case with so many aspects of Byzantine culture, so with its epigraphic habit: a transformative turn seems to occur in the course of the 7th century. Modern scholars view this period as a watershed after which inscriptions should no longer bear the label “late antique”. Nor do they need to be specifically identified as “Christian” as this becomes their exclusive provenance. Meanwhile, the succinct and formulaic character of the inscriptions themselves securely situates such material within the much broader realm of the Middle Ages¹.

If we observe these developments against the backdrop of ancient epigraphic practices, the period between the 4th and 7th centuries already introduces notable, albeit mostly quantitative, changes, whereas the traditional epigraphic categories that remain in use suggest that epigraphy per-

¹ On complementing available literary material using archaeological, epigraphic, sigillographic and numismatic sources on the 7th century, see: J. HALDON, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture*. Cambridge 1997^r, xv–xvii, 92–124. The volume edited by C. ZUCKERMANN, *Constructing the Seventh Century* (TM 17). Paris 2013 (hereafter: ZUCKERMANN, *Constructing the Seventh Century*) allocates considerable space to the assessment of 7th-century epigraphic evidence. For the lacunae and desiderata in the current scholarship, see: A. GNASSO – E. INTAGLIATA – T. MACMASTER – B.N. MORRIS (eds.), *The Long Seventh Century. Continuity and Discontinuity in an Age of Transition*. Oxford – Bern – Berlin 2015, 291–298; L. BRUBAKER – J. HALDON, *Byzantium in the iconoclast era c. 680–850: A history*. Cambridge 2011 recognise the overall lack of evidence for precise dating as the main difficulty of dealing with inscriptional material from this period.

sists as a common feature of written culture, and of the daily life of the late antique world². Predictably, the vantage point of the thriving habits of ancient epigraphy affords an unflattering view of the subsequent, early medieval inscriptional practices. It registers the 7th century in particular as a time when the number of epigraphs dropped very significantly, causing the disappearance of entire inscriptional categories and an epigraphic disaster with fatal consequences on publicly-displayed decrees, boundary stones, honorific inscriptions, donor epigraphy, and, remarkably, on epitaphs, which seem to no longer serve the purpose of commemorating ordinary people³.

The present contribution builds on these compact conclusions. Its focus, however, moves from following the irreversible decline of ancient inscriptional traditions towards situating the available epigraphic evidence in the wider context of early medieval written culture, and also towards considering some inscriptional categories that normally fall outside the perimeter of conventional epigraphy. This approach, inevitably, sheds more light on the complexity of the epigraphic shift. Perhaps surprisingly, it also reveals some of the more productive aspects of early medieval writing practices that have hitherto been overlooked by the traditional scholarship⁴.

² For the outline of late antique inscriptional practices, see: C. MANGO, *Byzantine Epigraphy* (4th to 10th centuries), in: *Paleografia e Codicologica Greca. Atti del II Colloquio Internazionale* (Berlino – Wolfenbüttel, 17–21 ottobre 1983) I–II (ed. D. HARLFINGER – G. PRATO). Alessandria 1991, I, 235–249; II, 115–146 (hereafter: MANGO, *Byzantine Epigraphy*); C. ROUECHÉ, *Written display in the late Antique and Byzantine city*, in: *Proceedings of the 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies I: Plenary Papers* (ed. E. JEFFREYS). London 2006, 235–253; T. ANTONOPOULOU, *A Quantitative Survey of the Christian-Byzantine Inscriptions of Ephesus and Thessalonica*, in: *100 Jahre Österreichische Forschungen in Ephesos* (ed. H. FRIESINGER – F. KRINZINGER). Vienna 2002, 169–178; M. KAJAVA, *Byzantine Greek Inscriptions and Urban Context*, *Acta Byzantina Fennica*, 2009–2010, 105–115; most recently: B. SALWAY, *Late Antiquity*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy* (ed. C. BRUUN – J. EDMONDSON). Oxford 2015, 364–393 (covering both Latin and Greek epigraphic evidence, henceforth: SALWAY, *Late Antiquity*).

³ MANGO, *Byzantine Epigraphy* 235–241.

⁴ This paper presents an overview of the preliminary results of my research on transformative periods in Byzantine epigraphic culture. Several early drafts have been presented over the past three years at the seminars and conferences of the Universities of Oxford, Vienna and Ioannina, to whose organisers and audiences I owe a debt of gratitude for their

DONATION MENTALITY

A general sense that the late antique habit of benefaction was exceptionally prolific can be conclusively verified by the impressive array of surviving dedicatory epigraphs, easily numbered in their thousands. The geographic and linguistic spread of this material is equally remarkable, as is the fairly broad social spectrum of the benefactors, who have left frequent testimonials of their patronage. They made their mark through inscription, and by depicting themselves in their foundations, occasionally also allowing space to epigraphic self-attestations by the craftsmen, mosaic-layers, metalworkers and painters entrusted with the executions of their commissions⁵. Contrary to the traditional view of the demise of donor epigraphy in the early Middle Ages, the most recent research on inscriptions found in the provinces that fell under the Arabs in the 7th century clearly shows that this kind of epigraphic tradition did not cease under new rule⁶. Neither did this mo-

insightful comments, and to some among them (they know who they are!) also for their invaluable feedback on the final version of this essay.

⁵ S. LEATHERBURY, Writing in Colour in Late Antiquity: Evidence from North African Mosaic Pavements. *Mosaic* 41 (2014) 9–16; IDEM, Framing Late Antique Texts as Monuments: The *Tabula Ansata* between Sculpture and Mosaic, in: The Materiality of Text: Placements, Presences, and Perceptions of Inscribed Text in Classical Antiquity (ed. I. PETROVIC – A. PETROVIC – E. V. THOMAS). Leiden, forthcoming in 2016; R. HAENSCH, Le financement et la construction des églises pendant l'Antiquité Tardive et l'évergétisme antique. *L'Antiquité tardive* 14 (2006) 47–58; J.P. CAILLET, L'évergétisme monumental chrétien en Italie et à ses marges. D'après l'épigraphie des pavements de mosaïque (IV^e–VII^e s.). Rome 1993; EADEM, Les dédicaces privées de pavements de mosaïque à la fin de l'Antiquité, in: Artistes, artisans et production artistique au Moyen Age. II, Commande et travail (ed. X. BARRAL – I. ALTET). Paris 1987; J. MORALEE, "For Salvation's Sake": Provincial Loyalty, Personal Religion and Epigraphic Production in the Roman and Late Antique Near East. New York – London 2004; C. ROUECHÉ, Benefactors in the late Roman Period: the Eastern Empire, in: Actes du X^e congrès international d'épigraphie grecque et latine (ed. M. CHRISTOL – O. MASSON). Paris 1997, 353–368 (hereafter: ROUECHÉ, Benefactors).

⁶ One of the most outstanding examples of this continuity is the inscription marking the renovation of the bathhouse in Hammat Gader in 662, under Caliph Mu'awiya. The inscription is written in Greek; it begins with the sign of the cross, and it also uses the Byzantine cosmic era to date the completion of the building work: The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, IAA 1981–1891.

mentous historical event signify the end of the art of mosaic-laying. Quite the contrary: both the epigraphic habit and the medium seem to have continued, and even thrived, well into the 8th century, and beyond, with most of this production surviving in the countryside⁷. Elsewhere within the Byzantine Empire, however, tessellated pavement indeed went gradually out of use⁸, but this by no means indicates any discontinuity of donor culture or discontinuity of its expression through epigraphic means.

In the 7th century, as well as throughout the Byzantine period, wealthy individuals continued to act as benefactors by promoting the ideas of religious devotion and by soliciting perpetuation of their memory from their communities. One particular example of 7th-century patronage stands as a vivid case in point. It is preserved in the Basilica of St Demetrios in Thessaloniki, a church with a long and well-attested history of imperial and aristocratic donation. Two inscribed donor compositions executed in mosaic feature images of the patron saint, one between the benefactors of the church, and the other alongside another clerical figure in a striking pose, holding a book in one hand while gesticulating towards the inscription with the other (Fig. 1). Both images reflect the sentiment, iconography and spatial arrangement of a new variety of donor epigraphy that would gain

⁷ A.M. MADDEN, *Corpus of Byzantine Church Mosaic Pavements from Israel and the Palestinian Territories*. Leuven – Paris – Walpole, MA 2014; G. AVNI, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine: An Archaeological Approach*. Oxford 2014; P. BAUMANN, *Spätantike Stifter im Heiligen Land. Darstellungen und Inschriften auf Bodenmosaiken in Kirchen, Synagogen und Privathäusern*. Wiesbaden 1999; K.C. BRITT, *Fama et Memoria: Portraits of Female Patrons in Mosaic Pavements of Churches in Byzantine Palestine and Arabia*. *Medieval Feminist Forum* (2008) 119–143; J.-P. CAILLET, *L'image du dédicant dans l'édifice culturel (IV^e–VII^e s.): aux origines de la visualisation d'un pouvoir de concession divine*. *L'Antiquité tardive* 19 (2011) 149–169; B. HAMARNEH, *Monasteries in rural context in Byzantine Arabia and Palaestina Tertia: a reassessment*, in: *Christ is here!: studies in biblical and Christian archaeology in memory of Michele Piccirillo* (ed. L. DANIEL CHRUPCALA). Milan 2012, 277–298; L.-A. HUNT, *The Byzantine Mosaics of Jordan in Context: Remarks on Imagery, Donors and Mosaicists*. *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 126 (1994) 106–126.

⁸ As is clear, for example, from the evidence of late antique mosaic material from the Greek mainland: P. ASEMAKOPOULOU-ATZAKA – S. PELEKANIDES, *Σύνταγμα των παλαιοχριστιανικών ψηφιδωτών διαπέδων της Ελλάδος*. I–II. Thessaloniki 1974–1987.

more prominence in the middle and late Byzantine periods. Even if their medium, the mosaic, diminishes in use, these individual cases prefigure later practices in donor epigraphy in several distinct ways: prominently displayed, they occupy wall, rather than floor space; their iconography resonates with strong religious overtones that include elaborate figural representations of both the benefactors (here referred to as κτίσται) and their patron saint; and, finally, both their texts, an invocation to the patron saint and an address to the reader, employ the twelve-syllable verse, a meter that becomes associated with Byzantine epigraphic traditions exactly from the 7th century on⁹.

In addition to the well-attested monumental display of patronage, some further evidence suggests that donor activity survived the transition from Late Antiquity into, and beyond, the 7th century. Numerous silver hoards, as well as textual references in hagiographies, anthologies of poetry and donation lists, testify to the existence of prolific donation culture, describing churches as “treasure houses” filled with diverse objects: copious amounts of furniture, altar revetments, ciboria, synthrona, manuscripts, textiles, liturgical vessels, but also items of secular, every-day use given as votive offerings¹⁰. Much of this material is inscribed. The medium, shape and iconography of such objects are both self-referential and deictic, often giving some indication of provenance and utility and bearing short, set texts, which state the patron’s (at times more than one patron) name(s),

⁹ CH. BAKIRTZĒS – A. DOUMAS – E. KOURKOUTIDOU-NIKOLAIDOU, *Mosaics of Thessaloniki: 4th to 14th century*. Thessaloniki 2012, 166–173; F.A. BAUER, *Eine Stadt und ihr Patron: Thessaloniki und der Heilige Demetrios*. Regensburg 2013, 205–207; on the 7th-century donor inscriptions from St Demetrios, see: A. RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Fresken und Mosaiken*. Vienna 2009, 385–389 (nos. M2 and M3).

¹⁰ Literary sources confirm that this kind of donor culture continued uninterrupted in the 7th century and thereafter. See, for example, *The Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, ch. 42; *The Anonymous Miracles of Pege*, ch. 8; *Antologia Palatina* I, IX, nos. 815 and 818, *Liber pontificalis* LXVI, 178–LXXXVI, 250. Surviving silver hoards with inscribed objects date from between the 5th and the 7th centuries, and are primarily eastern (Anatolian and Syrian) in origin: R.E. LEADER-NEWBY, *Silver and Society in Late Antiquity. Functions and Meanings of Silver Plate in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries*. Aldershot 2004, especially 61–122; M. MANGO, *Silver from Early Byzantium. The Kaper Koraon and Related Treasures*. Baltimore 1986.

and reasons for donation, including: ὑπὲρ μνήμης (memory), ὑπὲρ ἀναπαύσεως (repose [of soul]), ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας (salvation), ὑπὲρ ἀφέσεως ἁμαρτιῶν (atonement of sins), and ὑπὲρ εὐχῆς (vow). Some of the texts feature a standard dating reference: ἐπί + gen, the invocation βοήθει, the formula of anonymity ὧν θεὸς τὰ ὀνόματα οἶδεν ([those] whose names God knows), at times also referring to patrons as καρποφοροῦντες – a term typical of early Byzantium, which would later on be replaced by the more common labels κτίσται and κτήτορες¹¹.

Such artifacts and their inscriptions provide additional evidence for the donation mentality in early Byzantium. They show a broader range of benefaction beyond the costly building activities that were the preserve of the wealthiest, and an overarching concern to express the motivation for donation rather than to focus on the identity of patrons. Most importantly, however, the fixed and repetitive nature of their epigraphic formulae reveals a number of well-established conventions, which would henceforth dominate Byzantine epigraphy, even if not in an obvious way over the following two centuries of relatively obscured writing culture, then more positively from the 10th century and thereafter, when the messages of beneficence, piety and, above all, commemoration unquestionably prevail in the Byzantine epigraphic habit as a whole¹².

THE EPIGRAPHY OF COMMEMORATION

It is perhaps not purely coincidental that during the time when donor epigraphy developed a distinctly commemorative character, funerary epigraphy underwent the most visible change. This development has been dated to the 7th century, and has been described as a process wherein a very large

¹¹ For inscriptional formulae typical of ecclesiastical silver: I. ŠEVČENKO, *The Sion Treasure: The Evidence of the Inscriptions*, in: *Ecclesiastical Silver Plate in Sixth-century Byzantium* (ed. S.A. BOYD – M. MUNDELL MANGO). Washington DC 1992, 39–57.

¹² I. TOTH, *Epigraphic traditions in Eleventh-Century Byzantium: general considerations*, in: *Inscriptions in Byzantium and Beyond* (ed. A. RHOBY). Vienna 2015, 214–215 (henceforth: TOTH, *Epigraphic traditions*).

majority of the population ceased to be commemorated by texts carved on their tombstones¹³. By way of qualifying this somewhat universal claim, it has to be stressed that, prior to this shift, epitaphs had indeed constituted a substantial portion of the epigraphic record; but, even so, that they were still being set up only for a proportionally small segment of the population, namely, for the wealthiest, the “middle and upper classes”, made up of individuals possessing ranks or professions, prosperous enough to purchase and inscribe burial places for themselves and their family members. Such funerary inscriptions were typically formulaic, and they resembled official documents relating the status, occupation, age, and time of death, and could moreover specify terms of the ownership of a grave-site, and penalty against its violation¹⁴. Within these inscriptional practices, the 7th century indeed seems to signify a significant shift, primarily marked by the abandonment of extra- mural cemeteries in favour of intramural church graveyards. Traditionally, already from the early 5th century, burials *ad sanctos* were reserved for the select, and, in the majority of cases, also the most prominent members of local communities. In time, this habit grew to include wider social groups, propelling further changes in funerary customs such as the presence of multiple, uninscribed burials – a development that may indicate that cemeteries were no longer formally administered by civil authorities – and the diminishing use of stone as the preferred medium of funerary epigraphy¹⁵.

¹³ MANGO, Byzantine Epigraphy 239–240.

¹⁴ Funerary inscriptions represent the majority of any late antique/early Byzantine epigraphic corpus, making up between 40 and 70 percent of overall evidence. See, e.g.: the database of early Christian inscriptions from Asia Minor and Greece: <http://www.epigraph.topoi.org/>; C. BREYTENBACH – K. HALLOF – U. HUTTNER et al. (eds.), *Inscriptiones Christianae Graecae (ICG): A Digital Collection of Greek Early Christian Inscriptions from Asia Minor and Greece*. Berlin 2016, accessed 30 June 2016 (epitaphs constitute 2/3 of the entire corpus); E. SIRONEN, *The late Roman and early Byzantine inscriptions of Athens and Attica*. Helsinki 1997 (between 60–70% of the volume is made up of funerary inscriptions), hereafter: SIRONEN, *The late Roman and early Byzantine inscriptions*; C.M. LEHMANN – K.G. HOLM, *The Greek and Latin Inscriptions of Caesarea Maritima*. Boston, MA 2000 (approximately 50% of the material is taken up by funerary epigraphy).

¹⁵ See, for example, the archaeological evidence of late antique/early Byzantine Greece: N. POULOU-PAPADIMITRIOU – E. TZAVELLA – J. OTT, *Burial Practices in Byzantine Greece*:

Tomb inscriptions, as meagre surviving evidence seems to suggest, may have instead been inscribed on softer and more easily perishable surfaces, such as wood, pottery or fresco plastering¹⁶. Alternatively, people might have come to be ever more frequently buried in graves that bore no written record, and may have been commemorated in some other way, perhaps by having their names inscribed on tablets displayed in churches, and read aloud in the liturgy, in a manner illustrated by the survival of a unique 7th-century diptych from Egypt (Fig. 2)¹⁷.

Related to this, a further, better-attested development can be traced from the 7th century, confirming that epigraphy gradually detached itself from graveyard sites, and that texts that had been inscribed in ancient and late antique times in their hundreds and thousands as burial markers were at least in some cases being replaced by obituaries, that is, by notices of death. This alternative kind of commemorative epigraphy is best examined against the evidence of graffiti (*charagmata*) from the Athenian Acropolis, and especially from the Parthenon, or the Church of St Sophia, as it was known in Byzantine times, whose columns and walls, starting from the 7th century, featured numerous of epigraphs, the majority of which were indeed obituaries¹⁸. In addition to providing valuable historical information,

Archaeological Evidence and Metodological Problems for its Interpretation, in: M. SALAMON – M. WOŁOSZYN – A. MUSIN et al. (eds.), Rome, Constantinople and Newly-Converted Europe. Archaeological and Historical Evidence. U źródeł Eu ropy Środkowo-ws chodniej/Frühzeit Ostmitteleuropas, 1.1. Kraków – Leipzig – Rzeszów – Warszawa 2012, 379–390; for case studies based on the epigraphic material from Athens and Corinth, see: SIRONEN, The late Roman and early Byzantine inscriptions 119–325, 384–408; M.B. WALBANK, Where Have All the Names Gone? The Christian Community in Corinth in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Eras, in: S. FRIESEN – D. SCHOWALTER – J. WALTERS (eds.), Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society. Boston, MA 2010, 257–296.

¹⁶ For a grave marker on a ceramic shard from southern Italy containing the inscription ΚΟΝΣΤΑΝΤΙΝΟΥ ΚΟΙΝΟΤΑΦΙΟΝ, see: L. SAFRAN, Public Textual Cultures: a case study in Southern Italy, in: W. ROBINS (ed.), Textual cultures in Medieval Italy. Toronto 2011, 125, and n. 39.

¹⁷ British Museum, London, BEP 1920, 1214.1. (C. FLUCK – G. HELMECKE – E. O'CONNELL, Egypt: Faith after the Pharaohs. London 2015, no. 100, 95).

¹⁸ A.K. ORLANDOS – L. VRANOUSES, Τὰ χαράγματα τοῦ Παρθενῶνος. Athens 1973.

particularly about the history of the Athenian bishopric, this epigraphic material also exemplifies the fact that early medieval commemorative epigraphy survives almost exclusively in the ecclesiastical setting, in which it seems to have been reserved for only the more prominent members of society, and, for the most part, for the members of religious hierarchies such as bishops, clergy, and monks¹⁹. However, these data may have largely reflected a shift in administrative practices whereby maintaining archival records of death (and promoting the more abstract idea of securing eternal memory by inscribing perpetual prayers for the repose of the soul) became the responsibility of the church with a bias towards those serving and funding ecclesiastical institutions.

NORMATIVE EPIGRAPHY

Another inscriptional category attesting to a steady decline from the 7th century includes normative texts. This view should be considered with the following proviso: at no point in the course of Roman and Late Antique history was it mandatory to set up regulatory directives as inscriptions in order to validate their legal force. This means that the overall number of publically displayed documents never faithfully reflected the actual production and proliferation of legislative texts. Furthermore, the location for the display of such epigraphic material within or outside urban space was not always fixed. Also, once inscribed, these epigraphs could include only highlights of, and even substantial changes to, the original versions, and thus might manifest specific political or ideological agenda on the part of the commissioner. All this suggests that both the topographical context and the manner in which normative texts were being

¹⁹ The autopsy of the Parthenon material carried out in July 2014 during the Summer Workshop in Byzantine Epigraphy organized at the British School at Athens by Ida Toth and Andreas Rhoby confirmed that much of what still survives in situ was probably intended as formal epigraphic display. The current research project focusing on the medieval inscriptions of the Parthenon directed by Maria Xenaki on behalf of the *École française d'Athènes* promises to significantly advance our knowledge of this subject.

redrafted and customised could convey additional meaning, and that these factors too should be taken into account in any assessment of this kind of epigraphy²⁰.

The amount and nature of early Byzantine inscriptional evidence vary: already from the late 3rd century, inscribed proceedings and decrees by local magistrates gradually lost ground to regulatory directives from the seats of the increasingly more centralised imperial government. On the whole, late antiquity saw the number of inscribed documents decrease considerably, particularly when compared with Roman imperial times. However, the period between the 3rd and 6th centuries was still marked by a relative abundance of epigraphically-attested imperial decrees, edicts, letters and rescripts, with some imperial reigns, such as those of Constantine, Anastasius and Justinian, showing a noticeable penchant for the monumental display, on stone, of normative epigraphy²¹.

²⁰ For a general assessment of Roman normative epigraphy, see: A. COOLEY, *The Cambridge Manual of Latin Epigraphy*. Cambridge 2012, 220–225; EADEM, *From Document to Monument: inscribing Roman official documents in the Greek East*, in: *Epigraphy and the Historical Sciences* (ed. J.K. DAVIES – J. WILKES). Oxford 2012, 159–182; G. ROWE, *The Roman State: Laws, Lawmaking, and Legal Documents*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Epigraphy* (ed. C. BRUUN – J. EDMONDSON). Oxford 2015, 299–319 (all three with further bibliographical references).

²¹ D. FEISSEL, *Épigraphie et constitutions impériales: aspects de la publication du droit à Byzance*, in: *Epigrafia medievale greca e latina. Ideologia e funzione* (ed. G. CAVALLO – C. MANGO). Spoleto 1995, 67–98 (henceforth: FEISSEL, *Épigraphie et constitutions impériales*); IDEM, *Les actes de l'état impérial dans l'épigraphie tardive (324–610): prolégomènes à un inventaire*, in: *Selbstdarstellung und Kommunikation. Die Veröffentlichung staatlicher Urkunden auf Stein und Bronze in der Römischen Welt. Internationales Kolloquium an der Kommission für Alte Geschichte und Epigraphik in München (1. bis 3. Juli 2006)* (ed. R. HAENSCH). Munich 2009, 97–128; I. TOTH – E. RIZOS, *Consecrated to God, Written for the Salvation of His People: The agency of normative epigraphy across space and time*, in: *The Agency of Inscriptions in Byzantium, in the West and in the Slavonic World (Round Table, convened by A. RHOBY)*. 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, August 2016: <http://byz2016.rs/OkrugliStolovi/SREDA/09RTAgency%20of%20Inscriptions%20in%20Byzantium.pdf> (accessed 8 October 2016). Also, SALWAY, *Late Antiquity* 378–381.

In contrast, the 7th century appears much less productive. Although it can be demonstrated without question that imperial grants of asylum and of fiscal immunity continued to be promulgated as inscriptions, and that inscribed boundary stones did not quite yet go out of fashion²², modern scholars have paid closer attention only to the best attested example of normative epigraphy: Justinian II's edict of 688–689 concerning the donation of salt-pans in favour of the Church of St Demetrios in Thessaloniki²³. Their interest in this text can be defended on several grounds. To begin with, the case of St Demetrios confirms that the public display of official documents recording imperial patronage remained part of the Byzantine epigraphic habit. Beyond that, this inscription testifies to a significant development in early medieval epigraphy: by virtue of its strong religious voice – it attributes Justinian II's victories to the protection of the saint, and describes imperial benefaction as an act of pious gratitude – and also of its placement in the space of a church, this epigraph heralds a tradition that gathers momentum only later in the medieval period. This practice seems to have become more strongly pronounced from the 10th century, when charters recording legal terms of imperial and aristocratic patronage start appeared inscribed on the facades and interiors of religious foundations, to testify to the deep-seeded and prolific culture of donation that persisted in the Greek-speaking world during, and beyond, the Middle Ages²⁴.

Justinian II's edict also serves as an apt reminder of the importance that Byzantine emperors placed on the elaborate means of self-representation as

²² See, for example, an inscribed imperial grant, perhaps of fiscal immunity: *MAMA* XI, 310 (Perta): <http://mama.csad.ox.ac.uk/monuments/MAMA-XI-310.html> (accessed 7 July 2016); for an inscribed boundary stone from Galatia marking a place of asylum, see: *RECAM* II, 207, 208: <http://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/267841> (accessed 7 July 2016) and, more generally, S. COSENTINO, Boundary marks and space organization in early Byzantine epigraphy, in the present volume, 1–15 (hereafter: COSENTINO, Boundary marks). For the continuing use of inscribed boundary stones, see: TOTH, Epigraphic traditions 218, and n. 70.

²³ J.-M. SPIESER, Inventaires en vue d'un recueil des inscriptions historiques de Byzance. I. Les inscriptions de Thessalonique. *TM* 5 (1973) 156–159, pl. VIII, 2.

²⁴ FEISSEL, Épigraphie et constitutions impériales 28–29; TOTH, Epigraphic traditions 210; S. KALOPISSI-VERTI, Church Inscriptions as Documents. Chrysobulls – Ecclesiastical Acts – Inventories – Donations – Wills. *DChAE* 24 (2003) 79–88.

devout Christians, and of their persistent interventions in religious policies, both of which dominated the normative epigraphy of the 6th and 7th centuries. Although by no means being the first of its kind, this inscription certainly provides a most fitting illustration of the process of the “sacralisation of the East Roman state, its laws, and its whole ideological apparatus”²⁵, a development that can also be corroborated through further, indirect evidence: that of the public display of the text of Heraclius’s edict declaring his new, monothelite, creed, *Ekthesis Nea*. Heraclius’s inscription had been set up in the narthex of St Sophia, from where it was subsequently removed on the orders of his grandson, Constans II, in 648²⁶. To this evidence, we should add that a decree of Constantine IV concerning the decisions of the Third Council of Constantinople (680/681) was probably exhibited in one of the liminal spaces of St Sophia, as indeed were several other similar texts, some as lapidary inscriptions, others written on soft material and attached to the marble revetment of the church²⁷. These examples of doctrinal epigraphs signify a well-established tradition, which probably carried on for a considerable time as well as prefiguring another attested case of normative epigraphy – that of the 12th-century display in the Constantinopolitan Cathedral of another imperial edict on a theological issue, by Manuel I Komnenos²⁸.

A further instance of 7th-century normative epigraphy may be seen as belonging to the same general category as the Constantinopolitan dogmatic inscriptions. It was commissioned by Pope Martin I, who had the Canons of the Lateran Council of 649 displayed as part of a figural scene in the

²⁵ J. HALDON, *The Empire That Would Not Die: The paradox of Eastern Roman survival, 640–740*. Cambridge, MA – London 2016, 291 (also, Chapters 2 and 3).

²⁶ References to both the display of the *Ekthesis* and to its dismantling are included in the text of Constans II’s *Typos: Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum, series secunda, volumen primum* (ed. R. RIEDINGER). Berlin 1984, 208, I. 38–210, I. 5.

²⁷ FEISSEL, *Épigraphie et constitutions impériales* 31–35 (including a discussion on the monumental display of imperial legislation in the main centres of the empire).

²⁸ C. MANGO, *The conciliar edict of 1166*. *DOP* 17 (1963) 317–330; J. GOUILLARD, *Le synodikon de l’Orthodoxie: Édition et commentaire*. *TM* 2 (1967) 1–316, especially 216–226; P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180*. Cambridge 1993, 287–288.

presbytery of the Church of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome (Fig. 3)²⁹. The Roman material illustrates, in a most remarkable way, the ever more elaborate textual and iconographic features that religious architecture acquired from the Early Medieval period. It also confirms that the heated religious debates of the 7th century, as well as later, continued to rely on epigraphic means for their additional validation, and on official imperial and patriarchal patronage as the main agency of their proliferation.

INSCRIPTIONS IN POLITICAL CULTURE: THE EPIGRAPHY OF GOVERNANCE, WARFARE AND FACTIONAL STRIFE

Another class of Roman and late antique inscriptions that seems to have seen a gradual and irreversible decline in the 7th century includes honorific texts. This tradition had generated an impressive amount of epigraphic material between the 3rd and 6th centuries, and an especially large number of verse epigrams celebrating senior dignitaries, such as governors, bishops, and other members of the local secular and ecclesiastical elites – all in their capacity as public benefactors. Honorific inscriptions for these deserving citizens were often engraved on statue bases that depicted the honorands themselves or were in some way attached to their portraits, at times, also to painted portraits³⁰.

²⁹ A. AVDOKHIN, *Inscribing Orthodoxy? Four Scroll Inscriptions in the Apse of Santa Maria Antiqua: Dismantling the Narrative of Visual Propaganda* (forthcoming, submitted to *The Papers of the British School at Rome*) includes a summary of the *status questionis* and an overview of the most relevant bibliography.

³⁰ C. MANGO, *Épigrammes honorifiques, statues et portraits à Byzance*, in: Αφιέρωμα στον Νίκο Σβορώνο (ed. B. KREMMYDAS – C. MALTEZOU – N.M. PANAGIOTAKIS). Rethymno 1986, 23–35; ROUECHÉ, *Benefactors*, passim; B. WARD-PERKINS, *Statues at the end of antiquity: the evidence of inscribed bases*, in: *The Last Statues of Antiquity* (ed. R.R.R. SMITH – B. WARD-PERKINS). Oxford 2016, 28–41. On late antique Greek honorific inscriptions in verse, see: L. ROBERT, *Hellenica*, 4. *Épigrammes du Bas-Empire*. Paris 1948; G. GALLI, *L'epigramma greco tardoantico: tradizione e innovazione*. *Vichiana* 16 (1987) 103–134; G. AGOSTI, *Cultura greca negli epigrammi epigrafici di età tardoantica*. *Incontri triestini di Filologia Classica* 6 (2006–2007) 3–18; IDEM, *Literariness and Levels of Style in*

One of the most outstanding examples of 7th-century honorific epigraphy does not survive in its original context. Inscribed on the column carrying a gilded equestrian statue of Niketas, a military commander, and a cousin of the Emperor Heraclius, it was set up on the Forum of Constantine in Constantinople between 610–625³¹. The column and the statue are now lost, but the text has been preserved in a manuscript format, transmitted as part of the well-known collection of epigrammatic poetry, the Planudean Anthology, which quotes, not one, but two poems, in the elegiac distich, for Niketas: one on behalf of the emperor, the army, the cities, and the people, and the other on behalf of the Green Faction³². Whether inscribed with only one or both of these epigrams, this monument has gained significance beyond its topical value by virtue of the fact that it has been identified as the very last reliably dated statue of the Roman world, thus indicating that the 7th century was the time when the production of Roman statuary, together with their inscriptions, formally came to an end. Such a precise dating, whether or not practicable, by no means could signify a point of discontinuity, and an end to an active engagement with the omnipresent and continuing display of the visual and textual monuments of this kind. In fact, ancient statues themselves, and especially those that survive repaired, and even re-inscribed, bear marks of successive alterations, including textual, as vivid records of public attitudes towards still ubiquitous ancient/pagan figural art, and its reception in the Byzantine Middle Ages³³. The other type of

Epigraphical Poetry of Late Antiquity. *Ramus* 37 (2008) 191–213; the editions and commentaries of honorific verse inscriptions are now available in: R. MERKELBACH – J. STAUBER, *Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten I–IV*. Stuttgart – Leipzig 1998–2002, *passim*.

³¹ On the statue and inscriptions for Niketas, see the database of the Last Statues of Antiquity: <http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/database/discussion.php?id=850> (accessed 7 July 2016)

³² *Anthologia Planudea* XIII, 46, 47.

³³ On late antique honorific statuary, see: R.R.R. SMITH, Statue practice in the late Roman Empire: numbers, costumes, and style, in: SMITH – WARD-PERKINS, *Last Statues* 1–27; B. WARD-PERKINS, The end of the statue habit AD 284–620, in: SMITH – WARD-PERKINS, *Last Statues* 295–308. On (early) Byzantine attitudes towards pagan statuary, see: T.M. KRISTENSEN, Miraculous bodies: Christian Viewers and the Transformation of “Pagan” Sculptures in Late Antiquity, in: *Patrons and Viewers in Late Antiquity* (ed. B. POULSEN – S.

evidence of this “afterlife” is literary, perhaps best illustrated by the 8th-century patriographic work that has been transmitted under the title *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*, a dossier of brief notes on the statues of Constantinople and their epistemological value, attributed to anonymous members of the imperial bureaucracy and old senatorial families³⁴. This text engages directly with various figural monuments, many among which were imperial, and inscribed. It confirms their continuing relevance, discusses their iconographic, topographical and historical contexts, and, notably, attributes to them, and their inscriptions, apotropaic, astronomical and prophetic powers.

Still, by the early 7th century, the production of honorific inscriptions for anyone except the emperor himself seems to have virtually discontinued³⁵. The base and column for the statue of the Emperor Phocas, set up by the Exarch of Italy, Smaragdus, carries one such inscription, dating to 608³⁶. Encomiastic in character, it combines the praise of the emperor’s military prowess with his portrayal as a devout Christian, in a manner that not only reflects the imperial ideology of the 7th century but also typifies imperially/aristocratically-sponsored rhetoric and epigraphy known to us from many

BIRK TOFT). Aarhus 2012, 31–66 (with addenda to Kristensen’s list in: I. JACOBS, Cross Graffiti as Physical Means to Christianize the Classical City: An Exploration of Their Function, Meaning, Topographical, and Socio-Historical Contexts, in: *Graphic Signs of Power and Faith in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Essays on Early Graphicacy* (ed. I. GARIPZANOV – C. GOODSON – H. MAGUIRE). Turnhout (forthcoming); L. LAVAN, Political Talismans? Residual “Pagan” Statues in Late Antique Public Space, in: *The Archaeology of Late Antique “Paganism”* (ed. L. LAVAN – M. MULRYAN). Leiden 2011, 439–478; C. MANGO, Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder. *DOP* 17 (1963) 53–75; C. ROUECHÉ, Seing Statues, in: *Roman Sculpture in Asia Minor: Proceedings of the International Conference to Celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Italian Excavations in Hierapolis in Phrygia* (ed. F. D’ANDRIA – I. ROMEO). Portsmouth, RI 2011, 91–100.

³⁴ The text has been translated into English and commented on by A. CAMERON – J. HERRIN, in: *Constantinople in the early eighth century: the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai**. Leiden 1984. See, also: B. ANDERSON, Classified knowledge: the epistemology of statuary in the *Parastaseis Syntomoi Chronikai*. *BMGS* 35 (2011) 1–19.

³⁵ Sic ROUECHÉ, Benefactors 366 (after Mango).

³⁶ For the column and its inscription, see the database of the Last Statues of Antiquity: <http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/database/discussion.php?id=1687> (accessed 7 July 2016).

later periods in Byzantine history. Therefore, in spite of the demonstrable waning of the ancient civic practice, the standard toolbox of honorific epigraphy, with its messages of benefaction, gratitude and remembrance, continued to be employed, often crossing over to other inscriptional genres, such as, for example, donor and commemorative epigraphy. This development can be traced already in the visual and verbal language of patronage in St Demetrius in Thessaloniki as well as in the funerary verses glorifying the accomplishments of Isaac, the Exarch of Ravenna, which survive *in situ*, carved into the lid of a late Roman sarcophagus that had been re-used for his burial³⁷. As to the honorific inscriptions celebrating Phocas, some ambiguities still remain: for example, we cannot ascertain whether the second attested bronze statue of this emperor, which is said to have been erected in 609 in the area of the Great Palace of Constantinople, carried any text, or if Phocas's portrait that was sent to Rome around about the same time was in any way inscribed³⁸. We can only make an educated guess that any associated epigraphic record would most probably have extolled the emperor as an exemplary monarch and Christian, conveying the same ethos as the bulk of 7th-century imperial epigraphy. Within this tradition, a distinct place belongs to another inscriptional category that made a very strong point of praising Byzantine emperors as Orthodox and pious: factional acclamations.

A series of imperial documents, of which the latest was the constitution of Maurice of 585, was inscribed in the course of the 6th century in the

³⁷ M. LAUXTERMANN, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres*. Vienna 2003, 221–223; A. RHOBY, *Byzantinische Epigramme auf Stein nebst Addenda zu den Bänden 1 und 2*. Vienna 2014, 439–444; E.M. SCHOOLMAN, Reassessing the Sarcophagi of Ravenna. *DOP* 67 (2013) 49–74.

³⁸ For the literary sources on the statue of Phocas, see: <http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/data/base/discussion.php?id=3148> (accessed 7 July 2016). A reference to the emperor's portrait can be found in Appendix VIII of Gregory the Great's Letters (*Gregorii I Papae Registrum Epistolarum*, eds. P. EWALD – L. HARTMANN. Berlin 1887–1891). This passage confirms that the images (*iconae*) of both Phocas and his wife Leontia were first acclaimed in the Lateran in the Julian basilica, and then placed in the oratory of St Caesarius inside the royal palace.

Marble Street in Ephesus. A few decades later, this extraordinary archive of normative epigraphy received additional textual material featuring an array of factional and imperial acclamations³⁹. In its own right, such epigraphic display was not a novelty. As a regular component of public and religious celebrations, acclamations constitute a well-documented feature of late antique inscriptional traditions. However, when situated in a precise historical, archaeological, and ceremonial context, as it has been the case with the 7th-century material from Ephesos, and also from elsewhere in the Eastern Empire, these texts demonstrably carry a great deal of topical value⁴⁰. Among them, especially revealing are the acclamations extolling Heraclius and the Green Faction, and Phocas and the Blues, which can be read as evidence for the intensification of factional politics, and for a unique and unprecedented occasion, when the factions took sides in support of rival emperors⁴¹. These historical insights, however, are still more an exception than a rule: the bulk of 7th-century epigraphy survives without explicit dating marks or precise records of provenance. The example of a boundary stone from Crete with an inscription marking the property of a church “from which the Devil was repelled” is a case in point (Fig. 4): this text has been interpreted, respectively, in the context of the factional strife during the accession in connection with Heraclius, of the Arab raids in the 7th and 8th centuries, and as “a sort of talisman in commemoration of a specific event but with the purpose of protecting against all kinds of evil” (*sic* Cosentino)⁴². Even if in this or other similar cases any more pre-

³⁹ D. FEISSEL, *Épigraphie administrative et topographie urbaine: l'emplacement des actes inscrits dans l'Ephèse protobyzantine (IV–VI^e s.)*, in: *Efeso paleocristiana e bizantina/ Frühchristliches und byzantinisches Ephesos* (ed. R.R. PILLINGER – O. KRESTEN et al.). Vienna 1999, 121–132; C. ROUECHÉ, *Looking for Late Antique Ceremonial: Ephesos and Aphrodisias*, in: *100 Jahre Österreichische Forschungen in Ephesos: Akten des Symposions Wien 1995* (ed. H. FRIESINGER – F. KRINZINGER). Vienna 1999, 161–168.

⁴⁰ C. ROUECHÉ, *Acclamations in the Later Roman Empire: New Evidence from Aphrodisias*. *JRS* 74 (1984) 181–199; EADEM, *The Image of Victory: New Evidence from Ephesus*, in: *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron* (ed. V. DÉROCHE et al.). *TM* 14 (2002) 527–546.

⁴¹ P. BOOTH, *Shades of Blues and Greens in the Chronicle of John of Nikiou*. *BZ* 104/2 (2011) 555–601.

⁴²

cise contextualisation may not be possible in this and other similar cases, acknowledging a wide-ranging relevance that many surviving epigraphs carry could be just as important by way of offering some explanation for the longevity and endurance of such epigraphic material.

THE EPIGRAPHY OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AND POPULAR BELIEFS

Much of inscriptional evidence associated with the 7th century is generic, and therefore not truly distinct from epigraphic output attributed to the preceding or subsequent centuries. Most of it can be found assimilated into material culture, and associated with the widest spectrum of devotional practices and popular beliefs among lay Christians throughout the social ranks, across, and beyond, the Orthodox East. Even if not historically precise, it testifies to the experiences of ordinary people as they visited *loca sancta* or venerated saints, holy objects and images in the public and private sites of Christian worship. Prolific literary culture emerging from these traditions gains its true multidimensional qualities only if set against the archaeological, architectural and iconographic backdrop of churches, monasteries, hospices, tombs, cemeteries, and secular buildings – the physical spaces in which practicing Christians actively participated in their roles as authors, readers, performers, users and manufacturers of texts such as scriptural passages, maps, onomastica, pilgrim itineraries, miracle accounts, and ubiquitous liturgical, donor, votive and commemorative epigraphs. To these, we should add the well-attested production of inscriptions in the private sphere, and, furthermore, a large number of graffiti conveying messages of piety and devotion and their place in everyday life⁴³.

COSENTINO, Boundary marks, 7. Also, see A. C. BANDY, The Greek Christian Inscriptions of Crete. Athens 1970, 89-90, no. 61 and G. KIOURTSAN L'Incident de Cnossos (fin September/début Octobre 610) in: ZUCKERMANN, Constructing the Seventh Century, 173-195.

⁴³ A (very) select bibliography: G. VIKAN, Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art. Washington DC 2010 (henceforth: VIKAN, Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art); A. FELLE, Esporre la Scrittura.

Surviving inscriptional data varies in scope and volume, but it leaves no doubt that the written and publicly displayed word remained an essential element, and an effective vehicle, in expressing religious and popular beliefs. Unaffected by high literary culture and on-going Christological disputes, this epigraphic habit spanned across diverse artistic media and archaeological contexts. In purely textual terms, however, it produced markedly homogenous material, which shows a striking similarity, even an overlap, in the use of images, symbols and inscriptional formulae. Examples of this crossover can be found across the board, on eulogia tokens, pilgrim flasks, stamps, magic amulets and *phylacteria*, both on objects of private use, such as jewellery, textiles, and other household items, and of public use, such as official seals, which started being more frequently employed in the Byzantine administration precisely from the 7th century⁴⁴. All of this reveals a complex devotional and didactic dynamic embedded in contemporary visual and textual programmes, and, moreover, makes it imperative that modern students of Byzantine epigraphy should be particularly mindful of the meto-

L'Uso di testi biblici in epigrafi d'ambito pubblico fra tarda antichità e prima età bizantina (secoli IV–VIII). *L'Antiquité tardive* 23 (2015) 335–370; V. SCHEIBELREITER-GAIL, Inscriptions in the Late Antique Private House: Some Thoughts about their Function and Distribution, in: *Patrons and Viewers in Late Antiquity* (ed. S. BIRK – B. POULSEN) Aarhus 2012, 135–165; J. RUSSELL, The Archaeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period, in: *Byzantine Magic* (ed. H. MAGUIRE). Washington DC 1995, 35–50; W.K. PRENTICE, Magical Formulae on Lintels of the Christian Period in Syria. *AJA* 10 (1906) 137–150.

⁴⁴ VIKAN, Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art 59–70; D. KRUEGER, Liturgical Time and Holy Land Reliquaries in Early Byzantium, in: *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond* (ed. C. HAHN – H. KLEIN). Washington DC 2015, 111–151; J. ELSNER, Replicating Palestine and Reversing the Reformation: Pilgrimage and Collecting at Bobbio, Monza and Walsingham. *Journal of the History of Collections* 9/1 (1997) 117–130; B.V. PENTCHEVA, The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium. Pennsylvania 2010, 17–45; P. PETRIDIS, Holy Bread Stamps from Early Byzantine Delphi, in: *Byzantine Small Finds in Archaeological Context* (ed. B. BÖHLENDORF-ARSLAN – A. RICCI). Istanbul 2012, 81–89; J. NESBITT, Apotropaic devices on Byzantine lead seals and tokens in the Collections of Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art, in: *Through a Glass Brightly: Studies in Byzantine and Medieval Art and Archaeology Presented to David Buckton* (ed. C. ENTWISTLE). Oxford 2003, 107–117.

nymic and polysemic aspects of the images and inscriptions that can be found in different, even disparate, contexts in this period.

The same points can be extended to one of the most productive and least studied early medieval epigraphic practices – the habit of leaving graffiti in holy places. Although well attested in the Roman world, it was in fact in Christianity that the custom of informal writing on stone, plaster, wood, and ceramic became integral part of religious worship. Often, such inscriptions consisted of signatures recording the names of the faithful (be they present or absent, alive or deceased), but they could also include invocations, liturgical texts, and even requests to the reader to pray on behalf of the writer⁴⁵. Their persistent and ubiquitous use, and their fixed, repetitive content conveying the messages of commemoration and, above all, piety, reflected well-established conventions. They can be understood as exemplifying the Byzantine epigraphic habit as a whole, and as anticipating traditions that would henceforth dominate Byzantine epigraphy for many centuries to come. Studying this kind of material holds considerable promise for enriching our knowledge of medieval inscriptional habits, and for extending the scope and capacity of Byzantine epigraphic culture such as we recognise it today.

⁴⁵ W. ECK, Graffiti an Pilgerorten im spätrömischen Reich, in: *Akten des XII. Internationalen Kongresses für christliche Archäologie*. Bonn 22.–28. September 1991 (ed. E. DASSMANN – J. ENGEMANN) I. Münster 1995, 206–222; A.M. YASIN, Prayers on site: the materiality of devotional graffiti and the production of early Christian sacred space, in: *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World* (ed. A. EASTMOND). Cambridge 2015, 36–60.

ILLUSTRATIONS



FIGURE 1: *St Demetrios, Thessaloniki, reproduction by Nikolaos Pherekeidis, The Byzantine and Christian Museum BXM 1677, Athens.*
Donor composition with a verse inscription, detail
(Photo credit: Ida Toth)

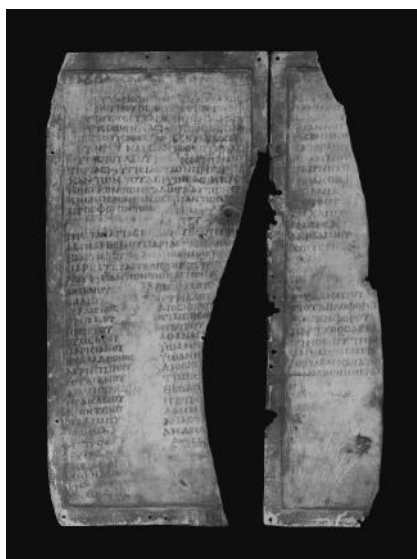


FIGURE 2: *Diptych from Egypt naming the Bishop Abraham.*
British Museum, London BEP 1920.1214.1
(Photo credit: by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum)

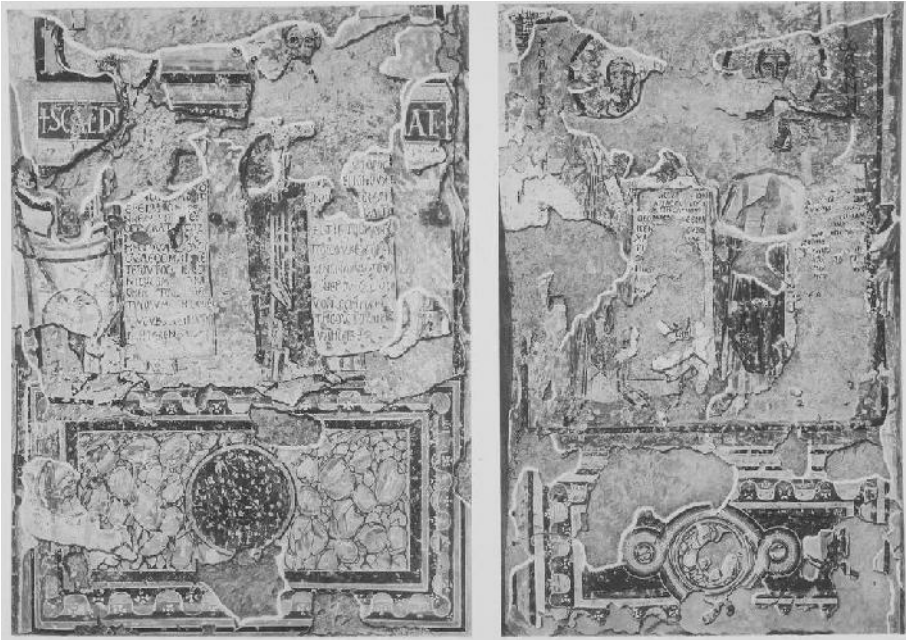


FIGURE 3: *Santa Maria Antiqua, Rome: Palimpsest Wall, Church fathers holding scrolls with the text of the Acts of the Lateran Council* (J. WILPERT, *Die Römischen Mosaiken und Malereien der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert IV.* Freiburg 1916, pl. 142a)



FIGURE 4: *Boundary stone with an inscription marking the property of a church “from which the Devil was repelled”.
Historical Museum of Crete, Heraklion, Crete
(Photo credit: Ida Toth)*



FIGURE 5: Church of St John the Evangelist, Ephesus: a column featuring a pilgrim graffito with an incised cross and an invocation to St John on behalf of Sisinnios and his mother

(Photo credit: Dr. Judith O'Neill, PH.BZ.001-L.73.983 [JO],
Black and White Mounted Photograph Collection,
Image Collections and Fieldwork Archives, Dumbarton Oaks,
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