Fakes and Forgeries of Written Artefacts from Ancient Mesopotamia to Modern China

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Fakes and Forgeries of Written Artefacts from Ancient Mesopotamia to Modern China

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Cécile Michel, Michael Friedrich

Fakes and Forgeries of Written Artefacts: An Introduction

Fakes and forgeries of written artefacts have made their way through all written cultures, past and present, in various ways. In the cultures of Antiquity, scribes already tried to reproduce ancient inscriptions and manuscripts or create new ones imitating archaic scripts, thus producing what we would now call 'antique fakes'. Since the Renaissance, the production of fake artefacts has greatly increased in Europe, a situation similar to developments in China from the eleventh century onwards. These 'modern fakes' refer to written artefacts produced in recent centuries that pretend to be ancient.

Fakes have always been objects of fascination. They are often a response to demands from both the public and the scholarly milieu. Sometimes they are exceptional items that are unique or of particular artistic, scientific or technical interest. When a forgery is detected as such, it obviously results in a feeling of disappointment, but it can also provoke admiration for the virtuosity of its originator and inspire scientists to develop new methods of testing.

There has been a growth in the number of publications dedicated to fakes and forgeries for around thirty years now, many of which have focused on books and literary works.[1] The topic has also inspired a dozen conferences in the last decade, some of them dedicated specifically to antique fakes.[2] Among other subjects, these various scholarly events have dealt with the scientific duel between

1 See Myers 1996, Rosenblum 2000 or Landon 2003, among others. Köhler 2015 also includes types of fakes. Freeman 2014 and Havens 2014 are concerned with the *Bibliotheca Fictiva*, which is a collection of literary forgeries from 400 BCE to the present day. According to Havens (2014, 27), manuscript forgeries are 'physical "autograph" specimens that represent the perennial effort of forgers to establish alternative truths in unique written forms ostensibly recorded for the ages by the great figures of literature and history'.

2 For instance, 'Fake and Real in Ancient and Modern Societies – Objects, Places and Practices' (Goethe University, Frankfurt, 15–16 March 2018); 'Faking It – Forgery and Fabrication in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture' (University of Gothenburg, August 2019); 'Impostures savantes. Le faux, une autre science de l'antiquité' (Paris, INHA, 6–7 May 2015); 'Imitations, copies et faux – Des rives du Nil à Rome' (Paris, Collège de France, 14–15 January 2016, published in Gaber et al. 2018).

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forgers and experts, the debate about truth and falsity, methods of authenticating objects and identifying forgeries, and developments in criticism as a response to forgery. In the same vein, several exhibitions of fakes and forgeries have also taken place since the end of the twentieth century (Lehrer-Jacobson/Jacobson 1989, Jones 1990, and Casement 2015, among others).[3] Last but not least, there is now a museum in Vienna entirely devoted to fakes: the *Fälschermuseum*, or Museum of Art Fakes.[4]

Faked written artefacts have often been used to manipulate and modify history, partly for propaganda purposes or to rewrite history by producing apocryphal texts. This was the case for the Karaite inscriptions that Abraham Firkowicz altered or completely invented in the nineteenth century, for example – a Karaite scholar, he aimed to prove that Karaites had settled in Crimea during Antiquity (Dan Shapira and Malachi Beit-Arié).

An important distinction needs to be made here between (i) the act of forging an object, i.e. the written artefact itself, as in the case of the Glozel tablets (Catherine Breniquet), the Lead Books of Granada (Claudia Colini) and the *Codice Diplomatico* produced by Father Vella (Jan Just Witkam), and (ii) the act of forging the content, i.e. the text written on the artefact, for example by producing text copies and drawings of imaginary written artefacts, as in the case of publications of Greek and Roman inscriptions by Michel Fourmont (Olivier Gengler) and Wolfgang Lazius (Ekkehard Weber).

Some ancient faked written artefacts have been historicised and become part of the history of a society, such as the cruciform Maništušu monument pretending to belong to the third millennium BCE, but actually made by late-first-millennium Babylonian priests (Cécile Michel). Indeed, traditional societies also produced written artefacts that pretended to be something they were not. It may be difficult to decide when such an object and/or its text actually becomes a fake, as in the case of Arabic manuscripts produced in early medieval times (François Déroche). Many fakes can now be found in museums and collections around the world, but their identification is problematic. Several questions arise as to how they were made, what their originator's profile was and why they were made in the first place.

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3 Also see *Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculptures*, February 2009, Brooklyn Museum; 'Intent to Deceive: Close Examination: Fakes, Mistakes and Discoveries' (London National Gallery, 30 June–12 December 2010); 'Fakes and Forgeries in the Art World' (Springfield Museums, 21 January–27 April 2014) and earlier exhibitions mentioned in Craddock 2009, 6.

4 The museum, which is dedicated to paintings, opened in 2005 and is at Löwengasse 28, 1030 Vienna, Austria. Its website is at <https://neu.faelschermuseum.com/> (last accessed on 29 March 2020).

This volume, which presents thirteen contributions devoted to fakes and forgeries of written artefacts, covers both a long chronological scale and a wide geographical area, with a focus on Mediterranean, Islamic and Chinese cultures. The oldest fakes date back to the beginning of writing in Mesopotamia, while the most recent forgeries date to recent decades and were produced in China (Michael Friedrich) and Italy (Ira Rabin and Oliver Hahn). These studies are aimed at understanding the subtle distinctions conveyed by a developed vocabulary related to the reproduction of ancient artefacts and the production of artefacts claiming to be 'old': from copies and replicas to fakes and forgeries. A wide variety of methods are employed to produce fake written artefacts, which relate to the material they are made of, their content or both aspects.

The forgers often come from a scholarly milieu. Their motives for producing such items may be economic, political, religious or personal, such as aspiring to fame or playing a joke on fellow scholars. What these fakes have in common is their makers' intention to keep their quality of being fake secret. So how can we possibly identify them? Combining the study of contents, codicological, epigraphic and palaeographic analyses and scientific investigations helps experts to detect forgeries (Jost Gippert). However, there are several famous unsolved cases for which modern technology has been unable to provide a clear answer (Craddock 2009, 3). Nowadays, one finds fake artefacts in museums and private collections alike, but they can also be found on the antique market, mixed with real artefacts that have often been looted. The attitude of the scientific community towards these objects requires ethical reflection.

The following introductory remarks will initially address the terminology used in this volume, then deal with the making of fakes and the background and motives of their producers. Towards the end, we will discuss the identification of fakes and the ethical problems associated with them. The focus will be on written artefacts here, occasionally drawing on other domains if they can contribute to a better understanding of the former.

1 Terminology

The very notion of fake or forgery presupposes a concept of 'original', 'genuine' or 'authentic'. The idea of 'copy' is defined by its relation to an 'original', too, albeit in a different manner. The understanding of these terms may vary according to place, time and the type of artefact considered. In China, for example, oil paintings from the famous village of Dafen that reproduce earlier works are considered as originals by some people, referring to the centuries-old tradition of

copying in calligraphy and painting. In the Western world, however, these are regarded as copies or replicas.[5] In addition, what we categorise with these words today could have been understood differently in ancient times or even a few centuries ago. In medieval England, for instance, documents were faked for various reasons, including the necessity to reproduce originals which had been lost or the need to provide evidence of a narrative that was believed to be true, thus making it part of an alternative historiography (Hiatt 2004). Jones (1992, 7–10) suggests that the concept of authenticity was much more flexible in the sixteenth and seventeenth century than the one that has developed since the nineteenth century. What's more, when the words 'fake', 'forgery' or 'counterfeit' are applied to a written artefact that is not genuine, they can cover a wide range of meanings depending on the motives behind its production. The different understandings of these terms therefore require some clarification. This also implies a discussion of their antonyms, such as 'authentic' or 'genuine', and of the vocabulary linked to the various forms of copies that exist.

An 'authentic'[6] monument, object or written artefact is often depicted as an 'original'[7] of known origin and context. The word 'authentic' has more or less the same meaning as 'genuine',[8] which is an antonym of 'fake'. According to Craddock (2009, 8), however, the concept of authenticity is 'fluid' to archaeologists and art historians. For some scholars, the object itself must be original in terms of its materiality, while for others, it should preserve strong links with the original object, although large parts of it may have been restored. The degree of restoration work undertaken on an ancient artefact in the eighteenth and nineteenth century may compromise its authenticity in today's perception (Vaughn 1992, 42). As an example, the nineteenth-century restoration of the Sargon Palace reliefs at Khorsabad showing the transporting of logs assembled as rafts on the Mediterranean has turned a crab, a marine animal, into a crayfish,

5 Besides creating new works, thousands of professional painters, many of whom are graduates of art schools, produce copies of known works in Dafen that can be ordered online; see the list of famous painters they copy at their online shop <https://www.dafenvillageonline.com/> (last accessed on 9 May 2020).

6 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'authentic, adj. and n.': '7. Genuine; not feigned or false [...] a. Of a document, artefact, artwork, etc.: having the stated or reputed origin, provenance, or creator; not a fake or forgery. [...] c. Presenting the characteristics of the original; accurately reproducing a model or prototype; made or done in the original or traditional way'.

7 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'original, adj. and n.': '1.b. *spec*. Designating the thing, as a document, text, picture, etc., from which another is copied or reproduced; that is the original'.

8 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'genuine, adj.[1]': '3. Really proceeding from its reputed source or author; not spurious; = authentic adj. 7a'.

a freshwater animal (Michel/Lion 2000). After the fire that destroyed the roof of the iconic Notre-Dame Cathedral in April 2019, a debate developed about the type of restoration that should be carried out during its reconstruction: should the spire added by Eugène Viollet-le-Duc during the previous restoration of the building in the nineteenth century be preserved or not? Thus, the question here is how far the restoration – the recreation of the building's 'original' appearance – should respect the original work (see also Cécile Michel's comments on the reconstruction of the walls of the processional street of Babylon in this volume.)

In the early twentieth century, conservators at the India Office Library dissected scrolls from Dunhuang into the sheets they were composed of and bound them in leather volumes for archival storage (Van Schaik/Galambos 2012, 77). Nowadays, conservators do not usually try to restore the 'original' state of an artefact or neglect its present state, but preserve the object as they find it, with all its blemishes and traces of later interventions. If new interventions are necessary, the current thinking is that these should be reversible and well-documented. This not only holds true for monuments, but for written artefacts, too, and nicely demonstrates how the changing label of an 'original' may justify the opposite practices when it comes to handling objects.

A 'copy' intends to imitate the original object.[9] If it is more or less identical as an artefact and in terms of its content, it can be called a 'duplicate', as are documents issued by legal and administrative authorities, or a 'replica',[10] a term more commonly used for works of art. In China, copying has been done widely in order to preserve originals – for centuries in some cases. The dividing line between a copy and a fake can be very tenuous, as the training of scribes and calligraphers in several cultures was based on the reproduction of model writings (François Déroche, Uta Lauer and Michael Friedrich). Replicas made with the same materials and possibly in the same workshop as the original may become originals in turn. In other instances, replicas made for conservation purposes may become objects of tourism, as if they were originals. In France, for instance, in order to preserve the unique prehistoric cave paintings found in the Lascaux cave, no less than two replicas of the cave were made for visitors.[11] Museums sometimes

9 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'copy, adj. and n.': '2. A writing transcribed from, and reproducing the contents of, another; a transcript. [...] 3. A picture, or other work of art, reproducing the features of another. [...] 4.a. Something made or formed, or regarded as made or formed, in imitation of something else; a reproduction, image, or imitation'.

10 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'replica, n. (and adj.)': '3.a. A copy or duplicate of a work of art, *esp*. a copy made by the original artist'.

11 Lascaux II in 1983. Lascaux IV, which is a complete replica, was opened in 2016. See <https://archeologie.culture.fr/lascaux/fr> (accessed on 29 March 2020). A full replica of the

present moulded replicas of valuable or fragile objects, or of originals presented elsewhere, and publishing houses produced expensive facsimiles of manuscripts, at least up to the advent of open access digital images in the internet. An 'imitation'[12] is also made from an original; it is inspired by it without necessarily reproducing it identically, as a 'replica' does. Roman statuary was a source of inspiration for both ancient Roman and later artists who produced a great number of pseudo-Roman statues.

There are three main terms in English that refer to non-genuine artefacts that pretend to be genuine: 'fake', 'forgery' and 'counterfeit'. 'Fake' is used as a generic term applied to an artefact that is made to look like something it is not. The object is also sometimes referred to as a worthless imitation that is intended to deceive people. This term evokes a whole range of meanings from erroneous to falsification, i.e. altering an artefact or a document to deliberately mislead people.[13] The word 'counterfeit'[14] corresponds to an imitation of a physical object, often implying inferior quality. 'Forgery' is the process of fraudulently making, adapting or imitating objects, or the result of this process – an object that is made to look real or valuable – with the intention of deceiving or cheating people.[15] A forger shapes an object that is artistically, stylistically and technically realistic and corresponds to the period to which this object claims to belong (Craddock 2009, 61). Forgery is a crime punishable by law. Thus, the term 'forgery', a subcategory of 'fake', is mainly used in cases dealing with a legal aspect. However,

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Palaeolithic painted cave at Chauvet, a UNESCO world heritage site in France, was made with the help of digital tools and was opened to the public in 2015. See <https://archeologie.culture.fr/chauvet/fr> (accessed on 29 March 2020).

12 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'imitation, n.': '2. The result or product of imitating; a copy, an artificial likeness; a thing made to look like something else, which it is not; a counterfeit'.

13 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'fake, n.[2] and adj.': 'A.5. An object intended for use in a particular manner indicated by the context; a contraption, a gadget; (in later use chiefly) an item used by a conjuror to perform a particular trick or tricks. [...] Originally apparently without specific implication of dishonesty or deception, but in later use not always easily distinguished from sense A. 6. [...] 6. Originally *U.S.* Something which has been faked; *esp.* something which has been counterfeited or forged, or which has been fraudulently modified in order to give it the appearance of something else; a forgery'.

14 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'counterfeit, adj. and n.': 5.a. Of material things or substances: Made in imitation of something else, 'imitation', not genuine; made of inferior or base materials; spurious, sham, base (esp. of coin)'.

15 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'forgery, n.': '3.a. The making of a thing in fraudulent imitation of something; also, *esp.* the forging, counterfeiting, or falsifying of a document'.

the verb 'to forge'[16] has a wider meaning including 'to produce a fake' or 'to fake'.[17]

These terminological considerations are only meant to serve as an orientation since the use of these terms is often not precise, not even in scholarly writing. Beyond the idiosyncrasies of individual scholars, each field of scholarship has its own linguistic conventions and established ways of referring to objects and practices, therefore the editors have refrained from trying to standardise the use of terms in the contributions to this volume. In general, however, the following distinctions may be helpful:

- 'Fake' refers to all objects and contents produced with the intention to deceive, whether just for fun, for profit or for higher aims.
- 'Forgery' is a term involving the production of a fake item, which can potentially have legal consequences.
- 'Copy' is a neutral term for duplicating a complete artefact or parts of it; a copy may serve educational or further honest purposes or it may be produced in order to deceive.
- A 'replica' is a copy which duplicates a complete artefact perfectly.

With the exception of 'replica', the first three terms in colloquial usage may refer to a complete physical object, the artefact, including its written content, or only to the content. Sometimes fake content is written on an authentic material or added to a genuine written artefact, and in other cases fake content is given a fake provenance or even a fake archaeological context.

2 Producing fakes

A wide variety of fake artefacts can now be found in antique shops, museums and private collections all over the world. The processes involved in their design, manufacture and presentation are highly diverse. In general, two types of fakes

16 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'forge, v.[1]': '5.a. To make (something) in fraudulent imitation of something else; to make or devise (something spurious) in order to pass it off as genuine. [...] b. To imitate fraudulently; to counterfeit'.

17 *Oxford English Dictionary* 2020, sub 'fake, v.[2]': '4.a. transitive. To tamper with or modify (something) for the purpose of deception, or for some other dishonest or illicit purpose. 7.b. transitive. To make (something) in imitation of something else, generally with the aim of misleading or defrauding someone; to counterfeit, falsify, forge; to fabricate (something false or non-existent)'.

can be distinguished, namely copies or replicas of an original on the one hand and objects only resembling authentic artefacts on the other. The latter are often produced for the tourist market nowadays and are usually easy to identify.[18]

Many fake items are produced by copying. They are created either by imitating an authentic object by hand or by reproducing it using a specific technique such as moulding. In the first case, the forger must be skilled enough to reproduce the original very closely using traditional materials and techniques so that a non-expert would not spot any difference between the original and its handmade replica. This practice is widespread with regard to paintings, for example, and allows forgers to produce close substitutes of a limited number of precious objects (Jones 1990, 29–30). As for ceramics, original materials may be used, which makes identification a high-tech enterprise (see Museum für Asiatische Kunst 2007).

The second technique, which is also readily attested in Antiquity, consists in reproducing the object in question by casting. A mould is made from the original, which can allow it to be reproduced at will, depending on which moulding process is chosen. A technique of this type was widely used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to obtain hundreds of fake cuneiform tablets, for instance (Cécile Michel). However, these are easy for experts to identify because tablets were reproduced in two halves, then joined together in such a way that the joint between the two pieces is visible.

Today, new methods such as electrotyping and 3D printing are being used to make fake artefacts intended to deceive people or to make replicas for cultural heritage purposes. The development of new methodologies and technologies to detect fakes has been accompanied by the growing progress made by forgers who produce such artefacts, though. Some forgers have created fakes by transforming authentic written artefacts – Abraham Firkowicz transformed letters and numbers on real tombstones to make them several centuries older than they really were, for example (Dan Shapira, Malachi Beit-Arié). Other forgers have shaped fakes by imitation, using a known language and script to invent a new text. There is a general tendency to use archaic forms of language and writing with the idea of obtaining more credible forgeries (Grafton 1990, 54); many Roman inscriptions were forged from Antiquity onwards, for instance (Barker 1990; Ekkehard Weber). The Arabic language and script have inspired many counterfeiters attracted by the aesthetics of calligraphy (Gallop 2017; François Déroche). Giuseppe Vella created his Arabic *Codex Martinianus* by pretending it belonged

18 In forensic document analysis, this is called 'simulated' vs. 'simple'; see Koppenhaver 2007, 56.

to the Aghlabid dynasty in Tunisia (Jan Just Witkam), and the holy Lead Books of Granada, which are written in archaic Arabic characters, were the subject of a long dispute between Spain and the Vatican (Claudia Colini).

Many such fakes were produced and sold with mixed success throughout history, depending on the credulity of potential buyers. Denis Vrain Lucas (1816–1881) managed to sell a considerable number of fake Old French letters to the mathematician Michel Chasles (1793–1880), a member of the French Academy of Sciences, claiming they were written by Alexander the Great, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Racine, Galileo, Molière and Pascal; Lucas even suggested that Pascal had discovered the Law of Universal Attraction before Newton (Bloch 1941, 57), and Chasles obviously believed him.

In some instances, forgers faked the content of a written artefact on an old, authentic item to make it seem genuine. The Jehoash inscription in Old Hebrew, which describes the repairs made to the Temple of Jerusalem by the king of Judah (2 Kings 12), is one such case – a modern inscription made on an antique limestone tablet (Greenstein 2016). The same collection belonging to the controversial antiquarian Oded Golan included a pomegranate made of hippopotamus ivory and covered with an ancient Hebrew inscription. It was thought to have been placed on the top of the sceptre of Salomon, the temple priest. However, according to experts at the Israel Museum, it could actually be a fake inscription made on a very old artefact; the debate about the status of the inscription is still going on (Ahituv et al. 2007). Other forgers did not bother to produce the artefact itself, but published a hand-made copy that they claimed to have made from it, thus fabricating a fake mentally rather than materially (Lowenthal 1990). This is what Abraham Firkowicz did with his Karaite manuscripts, for instance, or what Father Vella did with most of his *Codice Diplomatico*.

Michel Fourmont did not create the artefacts either, but made drawings of imaginary inscriptions (Olivier Gengler). However, unlike the previous forgers mentioned, Michel Fourmont invented a completely new alphabet to support his story; he even thought about publishing partially broken texts to make his fake inscriptions look more convincing. The originator of the Glozel tablets actually created a new script, which would supposedly have made it the oldest one in the world if it had been genuine, but no language was identifiable with it (Catherine Breniquet). Moreover, Glozel's clay tablets were all the more suspect because they were all intact despite them having been found in the soil in a field; had they been real, some of them would have been broken.

On the market, broken antiquities are not as easy to sell as whole ones. Dealers may therefore be tempted to get intact copies, embellishing damaged antique objects, which are then more sellable (Jones 1990, 247). In other instances,

authentic written artefacts are broken on purpose so the dealers can increase their profits by selling two or three antiques rather than just one.[19]

3 Forgers' backgrounds

The variety of methods used to produce fake artefacts reflects the different personalities forgers have, and some of the methods go back as far as Antiquity. In China, fake calligraphic works from the fifth century have been reported, for example. The growing market for works of art from the great masters was fuelled even more when a first wave of antiquarianism developed in the eleventh century (Michael Friedrich, Uta Lauer). In European history, fakes flourished from the Renaissance onwards – the great age of explorations and discoveries – with the growth of collections of antiques, and forgers showed considerable imagination when it came to producing such items (Havens 2014, 13; Stephens 2014). During the sixteenth century, scholars devoted themselves to uncovering lost texts from Antiquity, and inspired by the new discoveries, some of these learned people created their own 'ancient' manuscripts and inscriptions, sometimes inventing a whole new world. Wolfgang Lazius (1514–1565), a renowned epigrapher, published a large number of genuine Roman inscriptions, but also forged some with the aim of consolidating his historical discourse (Ekkehard Weber). Apart from spending their time reading and writing in libraries, a number of scholars also started to go out into the field to make more discoveries themselves, an attitude that testifies to an evolution in humankind's relationship with his past (Schnapp 1993).

At the same time, criticism was developing and progress was being made in identifying forged written artefacts (Grafton 1990, 123; Hiatt 2004, 181–187), contributing to what would be called 'auxiliary sciences' later. This required forgers to be more skilful in their production. Michel Fourmont (1690–1746) was sent to Constantinople and Greece by the King of France to find ancient manuscripts for the royal library. Since he was unable to trace and acquire such documents, he collected Greek inscriptions from several sites in the Peloponnese and Sparta instead. He increased the number of his discoveries by producing a considerable amount of fake inscriptions himself, however (Olivier Gengler). Arabic or quasi-Arabic texts presumably dating to the Islamic domination of Sicily were actually

19 This is the case for some cuneiform tablets that exhibit a clear break, which was presumably made deliberately.

invented by Guiseppe Vella at the end of the eighteenth century (Jan Just Witkam).

The production of fakes increased during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Some of the counterfeiters hid their fake artefacts in large collections of authentic items. Thus, Abraham Firkowicz (1786–1874), renowned for having collected more than fifteen thousand Jewish manuscripts, also 'corrected' the inscriptions on tombstones in his publications and composed fake ones (Dan Shapira, Malachi Beit-Arié). In the majority of cases, though, the identification of a written artefact as a fake does not mean the name of its creator is known.

When a forger is identified, it often turns out that he (or she) belongs to a scholarly or religious milieu. In Mark Jones' view (1990, 12), 'the fake itself is evidence of the historical sense of its maker and recipients', and in Anthony Grafton's opinion (1990, 48), the desire to forge something can infect almost anyone. The different examples presented in this volume, which concern faked written artefacts, were largely made by educated forgers – people who acquired sufficient knowledge and skill to create credible fakes capable of deceiving their colleagues. Among these 'artisans', there are historians, philologists and archaeologists such as Wolfgang Lazius (Ekkehard Weber) and Pirro Ligorio, who also worked in the sixteenth century, producing almost three thousand fake inscriptions in all (Metzger 1997, 125). The expression 'forger' may also be applied to certain famous contemporaneous scholars, such as James Mellaart (1925–2012), who was known for his discovery of the Neolithic site of Çatal Höyük in Turkey. He was banned from the country in the 1960s, however – for illicitly trafficking antiquities. In fact, he was recently suspected of having produced the inscriptions and paintings he had claimed to have found all by himself.[20]

Having access to original artefacts is an important factor for fakers. Marino Massimo De Caro, a former director of the Girolamini Library in Naples, Italy, and the man behind the theft of many of its valuable old books, made a complete copy of Galileo's *Sidereus nuncius* published in 1610, adding unique hand-painted watercolours of views of the moon signed with Galileo's signature. This truer-than-life achievement fooled scholars for a decade before they realised what had really happened (Ira Rabin and Oliver Hahn; Bredekamp et al. 2014). There is no doubt that the forger was only able to carry out his work because he had access to the original book. For the same reason, some forgers were also able to act as merchants or were in close contact with merchants selling authentic written

20 See <https://www.livescience.com/61989-famed-archaeologist-created-fakes.html> and <https://luwianstudies.org/app/uploads/2018/03/LS_MI_20180301_Mellaart_ENG.pdf> (accessed on 29 March 2020).

artefacts and fakes at the same time. The Ready brothers, who presumably produced a large quantity of fakes in the late nineteenth century, were officially employed by the British Museum to produce replicas and were in close contact with Joseph Shemtob, an antiquarian who sold thousands of cuneiform tablets in Europe and North America (Cécile Michel). Konstantinos Simonides (1820–1890) is another famous philologist who was both a merchant and a forger of antiquities. He sold biblical manuscripts which are now thought to have been fakes created with his own hands (Müller et al. 2017). Those in charge of restoring antique objects also possess the knowledge and skills necessary to produce fakes themselves (Tait 1992). Merchants selling antiques may acquire such knowledge to fool their own customers, as Moses Shapira has demonstrated. Fakes produced by artists are a special case in point here: in Islamic and East Asian traditions, the art of calligraphy is practised by erudite artists and scholars alike, and both are prone to the temptations of faking. In China, calligraphers not only copied the works of great masters, but their own works as well if there was a demand for them, so they produced or authenticated fakes (François Déroche, Michael Friedrich).

If forgers had to be well educated to produce fake manuscripts and inscriptions, it is hard to understand how someone like Émile Fradin, a poor, sixteen-year-old farmer boy, could have produced clay tablets bearing a completely new script, possibly inspired by the Phoenician alphabet, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The mystery of the identity of the Glozel inventor(s) and his (or their) motives is still unsolved (Catherine Breniquet).

4 The forgers' motives

Legitimate copies or replicas of antiquities and works of art are made for practical purposes such as protecting the original work or for display purposes if the original itself is too fragile to be handled; these reasons are openly admitted by the manufacturers. But at times, some of these copies are turned into fakes or serve as a source of inspiration to forgers (Harrist 2004, 34; François Déroche). Fake artefacts that are allegedly authentic are actually clandestine copies or artefacts intended to deceive people. Forgers have a wide variety of motives for producing fakes, such as financial gain, historical, cultural, political or religious reasons, social ambition or professional recognition, or simply for their own amusement. Even hatred of a colleague can be a reason (Grafton 1990, 36–68; Higbie 2017, 12). Fakes may be intellectual projects intended to serve as evidence to confirm the ideas and hypotheses of their originators. In many cases, the motivation behind

them is far from simple, being intertwined with the beliefs and opinions of the forger and the wishes of the recipients. This is highlighted in the case of the Lead Books of Granada, for instance (see Claudia Colini quoting Elizabeth Drayson 2013, 111).

Fakes have been made for economic reasons ever since ancient times. This was what motivated the Babylonian priests who were hoping to see their crown endowment increase by making the apocryphal Maništušu cruciform monument, for example. The growing production of fakes from the eleventh century in China or the European Renaissance to the early twentieth century corresponds to an increasing demand born out of a fascination about antiquities (Jones 1990, 119 and 161). The collecting 'mania' concerning ancient artefacts is no longer limited to scholars or rich aristocrats, but has spread more widely in society. Forgery can be a lucrative business, with a market that is often accessed by poorly educated buyers. This is what makes forgers cut genuine clay cuneiform tablets that are still intact into two or three pieces or cut pages out of old volumes to sell them individually and make more money. Sometimes, ordinary manuscripts are turned into luxury items embellished with calligraphy (François Déroche) or images (Obi/Müller 1997, 56). The many fake Roman inscriptions sold by scholars and adventurers alike were marketed with the aim of making money (Ekkehard Weber). The case of the Glozel tablets in France is quite unusual here, however, as it was presumably not the forger who took advantage of his fakes, but the owner of the field where they were supposedly found; the young man, who was a teenager at the time of the 'discovery', made a business out of it, which he exploited throughout his long life, arranging tours for curious tourists, setting up a museum about the finds, writing and publishing books on the matter, and so on (Catherine Breniquet). The market for fakes grew smaller during the first half of the twentieth century as detection methods become more effective. In the last few decades, however, the production of fakes rose again due to various factors, such as the wars in the Middle East and China's entry into the international art market. In addition, famous cases like the forged diaries of Hitler (1983) and Jack the Ripper (1992) demonstrate the unbroken attraction of trying to fool the experts as well as the general public (Koppenhaver 2007, 52–53).

From Antiquity onwards, the production of fake antiques served historical and cultural purposes. Their originators, often learned priests or monks, believed that these objects descended from the glorious ancient civilisations of Babylon and Egypt, and they tried to use the power of the past to impact the present, thus attempting to rewrite history (Jones 1990, 59–60). They gathered genuine written artefacts and created fakes with them to prove such links (Grafton 1990, 41); Father Michel Fourmont created a corpus of Spartan texts to prove the Semitic

origin of the city, for example (Olivier Gengler), and Brother Guiseppe Vella invented an early Arab history of Sicily (Jan Just Witkam). The mastermind behind the Glozel fakes, in contrast, wanted to demonstrate that the Occident had played a role in the foundation of our societies by developing the very first writing system as early as the Neolithic period.

All forgers are active in social, economic and political settings, which encourage and inform their work. If there is a market for certain objects, then these objects will be created, if necessary by forging them. Besides simply serving market interests, however, there are more sophisticated demands that forgers try to satisfy as well, such as religious or political needs. Abraham Firkowicz transformed and produced inscriptions and manuscripts in order to prove that Karaite Jews had moved to Crimea centuries before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, for instance; he was successful, too, as Karaites not only escaped persecution, but also received protection from Russia (Dan Shapira, Malachi Beit-Arié). The Lead Books of Granada were used as political and religious tools both by the forgers and their opponents, depending on the interpretation given to them (Claudia Colini). Numerous forgeries that were intended to prove the truth of the Bible have been identified, such as the Jehoash tablet or the sixteen pseudo-Dead Sea Scroll fragments that were bought by the Museum of the Bible in Washington.[21]

A social group, an institution or even a state may try to adjust to a new situation by making historical claims, especially in times of political change. The reinterpretation of history is, of course, greatly facilitated by the discovery of 'original' artefacts proving such claims. In China, even archaeology has had to contribute to linking the modern Chinese state with the distant past. Thus, ancient manuscripts containing texts which supported contemporary ideas were welcomed by many scholars (Michael Friedrich).

If a willingness to discuss seemingly improbable hypotheses did not exist among scholars, however, then the higher art of forgery would soon be out of business; scholars and scientists are exposed to and influenced by the opinions and prejudices of their time, but some of them have preconceived ideas of their own, making them unable to see a fake artefact when it is in front of them because they want to see what it actually purports to be, as in the case of the *Sidereus nuncius* forgery (Bredekamp et al. 2014).

The 'discoverers' of forgeries that aim to change the course of history are sometimes the forgers themselves with the secret wish of becoming famous. Some scientists have succumbed to fraud because of their own social and professional

21 <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2020/03/museum-of-the-bible-dead-sea-scrolls-forgeries/> (accessed on 29 March 2020).

ambitions, seeking recognition from the scientific community and more widely from society in general. This was presumably what drove Wolfgang Lazius to forge Roman inscriptions (Ekkehard Weber), or what went through Michel Fourmont's mind, as he yearned for honour and glory despite facing pressure for not having accomplished his official mission (Olivier Gengler).

There are many other reasons why scholars produced fakes, such as wanting to trick their colleagues, students or professors, especially on archaeological excavations – sometimes for personal amusement, but professional rivalry and even hatred played a role as well (Havens 2014, 1). Motives of this kind seem to be behind the three inscribed Davenport tablets discovered in 1877 by Reverend Jacob Gass during an emergency excavation at a Native American burial mound in Iowa. The tablets include representations of hunting and cremation, an astronomical table and writing in an unknown script. According to Marshall McKusick (1991), these artefacts must have been placed in the excavation area by jealous members of Davenport's academia. He suspects the 'tablets' were actually modified roof tiles from a nearby building.

A case in its own right concerns Zhang Daqian (1899–1983), one of the most famous (and expensive) Chinese painters of the past century. He liked fooling the experts, and since 'he felt he was an equal to the old masters', 'the true test was whether he could copy them' (Barboza et al. 2013). There are many stories about him. One of them reports that when he was shown works by famous Chinese painters from the last dynasty in a North American museum, he burst out laughing, saying he had done quite a few of them himself. In 2007, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston dedicated an exhibition to him with the telling title '*Painter, Collector, Forger*'.[22]

5 Identifying fakes

According to Jones (1992, 9), 'questions of motive are perhaps less important than the quality and impact of the result'. While important progress has been made in detecting fakes by scientific analysis, counterfeiters' ability to make fakes that look like authentic artefacts has been growing at the same time (Lowenthal 1990). They now have a better understanding of the physical and chemical processes of corrosion and natural ageing, for instance (Craddock 2009, 10–12). Forgers may also be helped if they have access to radiometric data (Ira Rabin and Oliver

22 See <https://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/zhang-daqian> (accessed on 26 April 2020).

Hahn). This explains the endless debates on certain emblematic artefacts. The Silwan ossuary, for example, which was discovered in 2002, bears an inscription suggesting that it belonged to 'James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus'. Numerous examinations and counter-examinations by experts have been unable to prove that it is either a forgery or an authentic ossuary.[23] In other cases such as antique bamboo manuscripts acquired by Chinese public institutions in recent years, doubts concerning their authenticity have remained because the artefacts have either not been tested using scientific methods or the test reports have not been published (Michael Friedrich). In fact, in forensic science, even the experts disagree about methods and results (Fisher 2008).

Fakes may be detected from a historical, archaeological, artistic or philological point of view or from a natural science perspective, the latter being based on tests involving a large number of technologies (Ira Rabin and Oliver Hahn). This implies the need for collaboration between disciplines. One important way of identifying a fake is by tracing its provenance back to the time it was made (Tait 1992). Although this is obviously impossible when dealing with antique objects, an analysis of their original context is still very important. As Craddock has noted (2009, 16), forgers and dealers often add an archaeological background to their creations. However, objects found during archaeological excavations need to be consistent with the archaeological layer in which they were exhumed and with the artefacts discovered in connection with them; there should not be any anachronism. The Glozel tablets were found along with a mixture of objects from very different periods (from the Neolithic onwards), and the only archaeological structure was dated to the Middle Ages (Catherine Breniquet).

The situation is complicated even further by fakes made in the past, as very old items frequently appear in more recent archaeological strata. In cases like this, the materiality of the written artefact, the layout of the text, the shape of the script, the language and the textual content all have to match up and fit the period and culture they are supposed to belong to. In some instances, the media may be authentic, like the Jehoash tablet or dismembered pages of ancient books that were used to make fake items (François Déroche). In other cases, suspicion may arise from the script or text having too much originality, as in Michel Fourmont's pseudo-discoveries, in which the shape of the letters had no parallel and the morphology of the words was unique (and quite impossible) (Olivier Gengler). Other reasons for scepticism in the past were the poor recurrence of sign

23 See <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-artifacts/artifacts-and-the-bible/is-the-brother-of-jesus-inscription-on-the-james-ossuary-a-forgery/>, for example (accessed on 29 March 2020).

sequences on the Glozel tablets which could not fit with a language (Catherine Breniquet) or the many contradictions and linguistic errors observed in the Lead Books of Granada (Claudia Colini). In this last case (and several others as well), the debate about authenticity lasted for a very long time, and this had a damaging impact on the reputation of the scholars involved in the debate.

The archaeological context in which an artefact originated is generally unknown when it first appears on the antique market. Items of this kind usually end up in a private collection or museum. In the latter case, if they are not identified as fakes beforehand, then they are likely to be exhibited in a showcase along with various authentic objects, as they are thought to be genuine. When curators realise that they are fakes, though, the artefacts may well get hidden from view in the museum's storerooms. Alternatively, the items may get exhibited for educational purposes since they are real examples of fakes (Casement 2015). The Musée Postal de Paris used to have showcases containing letters from different periods, including some written on fake clay tablets, for example (Michel 1987, 12–13), and the Israel Museum exhibited an inscribed ivory pomegranate to the general public in order to explain the process of identifying a fake (Rollston/Parker 2005). The Asiatisches Museum in Berlin presented Chinese ceramics pretending to date to the Neolithic Period or Han era, at the same time discussing their production techniques and the scientific methods employed to reveal their true nature (Museum für Asiatische Kunst 2007). Other museums may have been tempted to exhibit replicas, but passing them off as what they are not. In the case of painting replicas, for instance, the card in the showcase could say 'from the school of [name of the artist]' or 'from the workshop of NA', or even 'attributed to NA' (Bohn 1999). Exhibiting replicas instead of authentic artefacts makes sense at a time when the credit given to culture is declining and rules on purchasing works of art and antiques are getting stricter and stricter.

6 Fakes and looted artefacts on the antique market

The antique market has become more important in recent years, which is linked to the looting of archaeological artefacts that has ravaged the Near and Middle East for decades. It also plays an important role in the sale of looted Asian antiquities. Artefacts on sale on the antique market do not come from scientific excavations; they have either been torn from their archaeological context thus being deprived of half of their data (Michel 2019, 143), or they are simply fakes.

Indeed, even though the production of fakes may have declined since the middle of the twentieth century, it is still going on because of the very high prices that authentic antiquities fetch on the market and the growing popularity of cultural heritage (Lowenthal 1990; Luke/Kersel 2005).

Most of the important museums around the world have stopped acquiring artefacts without a context and proof of their provenance, as they wish to avoid buying fakes or objects acquired illegally. The latter are described in the UNESCO Convention of 14 November 1970, which concerns the 'Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property'.[24] On the basis of this declaration, which was signed by a great many countries, scholars now use the non-exclusive term 'object of unknown provenance' to refer to any archaeological object acquired after 1970, considering that it is likely to have been acquired illegally (Michel 2019, 142). This convention does not explicitly include fakes considered as being of 'unknown provenance'.

The value of fakes – once they have been identified as such – is very low unless they are considered to be real artefacts. In May 1994, a report was published under the UNESCO umbrella concerning the feasibility of introducing an international code of ethics for dealers in cultural property.[25] The report included a discussion of the definition of the word 'dealer', suggesting that this term should be limited to individuals with a degree of knowledge of the material being dealt with and able to discern fakes and forgeries (section 68). However, this point was left out when the International Code of Ethics for Dealers in Cultural Property was approved in November 1999,[26] the idea being that no dealer whatsoever should escape the control of this adopted code.

Unfortunately, some smaller museums and private individuals are not concerned about ethical considerations and are ready to buy any antiquity, whether or not its provenance is known and even if they are aware it has been stolen. These customers generally try to avoid acquiring any forgeries, but they lack documentation proving the origin of their acquisitions and their scientific interest. Eager to prove that their collections only consist of genuine artefacts, they regularly contact scholars who are able to authenticate these artefacts for them, although some of the items have been acquired illegally. The more famous

24 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000133378> (accessed on 29 March 2020). Also see Luke/Kersel 2005.

25 The report is entitled 'Feasibility of an international code of ethics for dealers in cultural property for the purpose of more effective control of illicit traffic in cultural property' (15 May 1994), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098554> (accessed on 29 March 2020).

26 International Code of Ethics for Dealers in Cultural Property (November 1999), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000121320> (accessed on 29 March 2020).

the scholar, the higher the remuneration for an assessment – and the lower the degree of transparency.

The scientific community is divided on how to deal with artefacts whose provenance is unknown, even more so where written artefacts are concerned, as they often have a high value on the market and may have important historical, political or religious implications. For example, North-West Semitic written artefacts connected to the Bible have emerged in recent decades, and several scholars have been tempted to publish this important new data, thus authenticating artefacts which, in some cases, were shown to be forgeries. As noted by Vaughn and Rollston (2005), some of these scholars have been accused of complicity even if they acted in good faith, believing they were dealing with genuine artefacts.

Researchers must be able to conduct their research freely in order to advance knowledge and defend scientific truth. Those who study these objects believe they are saving them from oblivion: the historical importance of their contents would take precedence over everything else. Others, including archaeologists, feel that if scholars are free to carry out their research, then they must also be responsible for it. While the publication of ancient artefacts confirms their authenticity and gives them legitimacy, it also boosts their monetary value. This, in turn, fuels the antique market for ancient written artefacts and encourages the looting of sites and the production of forgeries.

There is no clear answer to solve this dilemma, but an ethic and responsible attitude should prevail in any case. The origin of artefacts must be investigated, and if they are found to have been acquired illegally, then scholars must inform the collector he may have been complicit with looters by buying the items. Moreover, they have to ensure the preservation of the artefacts and work for their repatriation to their country of origin (Michel 2019, 143). Craddock (2009, 21) also suggests that 'responsible laboratories [...] should not, as a general rule, undertake the authentication of the undocumented antiquities except possibly to remind the collecting world of the prevalence of fakes and forgeries and thus keep the market depressed. Unfortunately, the likelihood that a piece has been stolen or looted does not seem to deter purchasers; the possibility that it is forged does'.

Fakes intermingle with looted artefacts on the antique market and should therefore be controlled in the same way. Beyond the high financial stakes involved, if fake artefacts are not identified as such, they may help to distort the history of the past, which has been patiently reconstructed by scientists from all kinds of disciplines (archaeology, philology, history, art history and many more). In the scientific world where power and reputation rule just like everywhere else, competition for positions is fierce and the principle of 'publish or perish' prevails,

making it difficult for some people not to succumb to the temptations of being the first to gain access to a spectacular object. Under these circumstances, it is more important than ever to uphold the highest scientific standards.

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Part I: **From Copies to Forgeries**

Cécile Michel

Cuneiform Fakes: A Long History from Antiquity to the Present Day

Abstract: During the three millennia in which cuneiform script was used, scribes copied texts for educational purposes or to preserve existing knowledge. They also created new texts, even reproducing older scripts in some cases. Some of the antique fakes that were produced in the process, such as the cruciform monument to Maništušu, are well known to Assyriologists, but the authenticity of other texts is still being debated, one example being the royal letters of the kings of Ur. In legal texts and royal inscriptions, certain clauses prevented the possible appearance of a false document. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, archaeological excavations in the Near East brought hundreds of thousands of cuneiform tablets to light and caused people's interest in Mesopotamian antiquities to grow. This led to the production of modern fakes, too, for obvious economic reasons, and many of these were bought by private collectors and museums around the world. This article deals with a great variety of such cases, including copies, replicas, imitations, transformations and fakes, in a bid to understand the context in which they were made, what motivated their originators and, when possible, how they were treated by scholars and collectors.

During the three millennia in which cuneiform script was employed (from the late fourth millennium BCE to the first century CE), scribes produced a great variety of texts, mainly on clay, but also on other materials such as stone, metal or wooden board covered with wax. To date, more than a million cuneiform texts have been discovered in a large area of the Near East ranging from Anatolia to Iran and from northern Iraq to Egypt and Bahrain. Cuneiform script, which was created with a stylus pressed down on fresh clay, consists of combinations of wedges forming as many signs as necessary. The system is ingenious and very easy to reproduce, but the scribes had to memorise a large number of different signs. Most of the collections around the world include some fake pieces of writing,[1] either antique

1 The word 'fake' is used in a generic sense here, referring to a written artefact that appears to be something it is not.

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or modern. While Assyriologists generally have no problem identifying modern fakes, they have more difficulty when it comes to antique fakes.

Besides writing original texts, Mesopotamian scribes also copied literary compositions, scientific and official texts for centuries for educational purposes or to preserve the knowledge these contained. These copies may have been written several centuries after the original text. The scribes also created new compositions using old scripts in some cases. Although some of these texts can be defined as apocryphal today, such as the text on the Maništušu cruciform monument composed with the deliberate aim of deceiving the reader, rewriting the past as the author of the composition intended, others should simply be regarded as writing exercises for which historians would not have the manual. Their authenticity is still being debated, as for instance some of the letters of the kings of Ur. Fake documents may also have been created and used in legal contexts. Certain clauses prevented the possible appearance of a false document, and matters dealt with in court sometimes involved fake wills. These fakes were obviously created with economic motives in mind. Whenever such ancient documents are discovered these days, it is difficult for scholars to identify them clearly as fakes, for reasons that shall be discussed later.

By creating royal inscriptions, Mesopotamian rulers partly intended to leave their name to posterity. Consequently, these texts often end with maledictions directed at anyone who might want to alter or erase them. This has not discouraged various victorious rulers from deleting parts of older inscriptions and adding a few lines of their own to them, however. When they 'signed' inscribed items of booty, they did not create a fake, but they did destroy the integrity of an older text. The historian has to deal with ancient inscriptions bearing texts from different periods. If it does not respect the original building plans, the restoration of ancient monuments may cause the same problems of interpretation for future archaeologists and historians.

The first archaeological excavations conducted in the Near East in the nineteenth and early twentieth century brought hundreds of thousands of cuneiform tablets to light and subsequently caused scholars' interest in Mesopotamian antiquities to grow. The increasing popularity of cultural heritages gave birth to the production of 'modern fakes', some of which were actually cast from originals. This was also the case for non-inscribed artefacts such as terracotta reliefs, statues and seals. Several private collectors and museums around the world bought these cuneiform tablets in the belief they were authentic objects. The production of forgeries that were then sold on the antique market occurred for obvious economic reasons. However, the making of fakes may be due to other motives.

This article is dedicated to cuneiform fakes and aims to help the reader understand the context in which they were made, the motives their originators had and, when possible, their treatment by scholars and collectors. It deals with a great variety of cases in which the originator's intention is not always clear – did the person want to make a copy, a replica, an imitation, a fake or a forgery? It starts with some ancient examples, discussing their identification as possible fakes and the reasons for their production. The second part deals with modern examples, from production techniques to the methods used to detect them. Modern fakes appeared on the antique market at an early stage; we will follow the history of their production from the nineteenth century up to today and try to understand how museums and scholars have dealt with them. The chapter will end with some written artefacts that may be referred to as 'useful fakes', namely those made by scholars as an experiment.

1 Ancient fakes

Mark Jones, one of the world specialists on fakes, has pointed out that the question 'what is a fake?' is not easy to answer.[2] How can fakes be distinguished from copies, imitations or replicas? This is a problem of terminology and applies not only to modern times where making fakes may be seen as a lucrative activity, but to Antiquity as well, when copying could interfere with the creation of fakes. For cuneiform scribes trained in the practice of copying, only one step was necessary in order to add new elements to their copies, compose entire forged texts reproducing archaic signs and thus manipulating history, or simply create legal forgeries.[3] The following examples present a variety of situations in which scribes produced fakes or altered ancient inscriptions, and they also illustrate the reasons why the fakes were made.

1.1 The status of copies

Copying texts was an essential task for Mesopotamian scribes and apprentices for many different reasons. Apprentices had to copy long lists of signs and words, metrological and numerical tables, proverbs, contractual phrases, and religious

2 Jones 1990, 29–30.

3 The word 'forgery' includes a legal dimension which deals with the intention to deceive people.

and literary texts for educational purposes as copying them was the best way to memorise signs, practice writing and learn Sumerian and mathematics.[4] Scribes also reproduced important texts such as pieces of literary and mythological writing or royal inscriptions for the sake of preserving them in libraries.[5]

Administrators produced annual accounts texts, compiling the data they wrote down on daily and monthly accounts contained in huge tablets.[6] Scribes working for private people or individual writers sometimes had to prepare duplicates of contracts so that each party could have its own copy, or make duplicates of letters if the sender wanted to have a copy or the message was addressed to several people.[7]

Thus, copying texts was considered a normal and very ordinary activity; it was part of scribal education, and later on, it was part of a scribe's daily work, too, regardless of whether he was employed by the palace or the temple or worked as a public scribe. In addition to this, copying was the predominant way of learning and memorising information as well, partly to maintain traditional skills and partly to perpetuate the past, showing admiration of its achievements. In some cases, colophons usually written at the end of a text specify its status as a copy, but many copies did not contain a colophon at all.

To historians nowadays, copies of this kind sometimes represent the only evidence of the existence of older texts that have long since disappeared. For example, eighteenth-century scribes copied official inscriptions left by kings of the twenty-fourth century BCE on clay tablets, the originals of which have now been lost. These copies may cause some confusion when it comes to dating a literary composition or a historical account of an event, however. In a few cases, such copies may be confused with ancient historical fakes, as is the case with some royal letters of the kings of Ur III, to which we shall now turn.

1.2 From educational copies to new compositions: the case of the royal letters

Akkadian scribes of the second and first millennia BCE both copied and composed fictional royal letters purportedly written by ancient kings. The royal correspondence of the Sumerian kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur (twenty-first century BCE)

4 Veldhuis 1997, Proust 2007.
5 Clancier 2009.
6 Molina 2016.
7 Michel 2018.

presumably includes copies of original letters and compositions created by Old Babylonian scribes of the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries.[8] The corpus consists of 24 letters, half of them addressed to King Šulgi, which have been reconstructed from 115 tablets produced by Babylonian scribes as part of school exercises. Modern scholars disagree on the status of these tablets; some of them think that the corpus should be considered apocryphal and that it is an Old Babylonian creation,[9] while Piotr Michalowski, who published the whole corpus masterfully, proposed that authentic elements were incorporated in some of these letters. It is very difficult to distinguish the different levels of redaction which transformed them into school texts. Michalowski identified seven letters that are clearly new compositions, but left the possibility open that they may have been created as replies to real letters. Eight of the remaining letters could derive from authentic letters.[10] On the basis of their contexts, these letters can be interpreted as school, literary or narrative texts. Those historical texts that Assyriologists might consider as ancient fakes were certainly genuine in their composers' eyes.[11]

Fictitious royal letters that are not part of this peculiar corpus also existed, and several of them have been attributed to important kings of the third and second millennium BCE, such as Sargon of Akkad, Samsu-iluna of Babylon, and Kurigalzu, a Kassite king of Babylon.[12] One of the most famous of these letters was purportedly written by Gilgameš, a hero familiar from his epic who is supposed to have ruled the city of Uruk during the twenty-seventh century BCE. Three copies of this letter dating to the seventh century BCE were found in an Assyrian library at Sultantepe,[13] while another copy comes from the late Babylonian temple of the Sun god Šamaš at Sippar south of Mesopotamia. In this letter, Gilgameš makes enormous demands of tribute to an unknown king threatening his country with devastating military action:[14]

> As soon as you see this letter, make ready and go to the land of Eriš, take with you a caravan of [...] white horses with black stripes, 70 thousand black horses with white stripes, 100 thousand mares whose bodies have markings like wild tree roots, 40 thousand continually gambolling miniature calves, 50 thousand teams of dappled mules, 50 thousand fine

8 Michalowski 2011.
9 Huber 2001.
10 Michalowski 2011, 219–220.
11 Lowenthal 1990 for other examples.
12 Westenholz 1997, 141–142.
13 Gurney 1957.
14 George 2003, 117–119.

> calves with well-turned hooves and horns intact [...] and then come yourself. I want to fasten one nugget of red gold, it should weigh 30 minas, to the chest of my friend Enkidu [...] 90 thousand talents (2,700 tons) of iron: pure, excellent, choice, select, scrutinized, precious, first-rate, beaten, flawless, so the smith can make stags.

In an obvious allusion to the epic, Gilgameš needs gold to make a statue of his friend Enkidu. This fictional composition is part of the traditional scholarly literature of Babylonia, but such a Babylonian kingship model was also copied by Assyrian scribal apprentices who included into the text Neo-Assyrian royal features. As a result, according to Jennifer Finn, the text, written as a parody of the Assyrian royal style, tries to undermine kingship ideology. Scholars in important cultural centres outside the capital were actively engaged in such counter-discursive dialogues about the king and kingship.[15] If the correspondence of the kings of Ur is made up of narrative texts that include real historical events, then the Gilgameš letter appears to be a fabrication by first-millennium scholars who wanted to parody their kings; it may have been motivated by political resistance or opposition to their power, for example. Other forms of such political parodies are represented by the many narrations linked to Sargon, who ruled the first centralised state, Akkad, during the twenty-fourth century BCE.[16] The *Old Assyrian Sargon Legend*, for example, presents the royal hero in various absurd situations.[17]

1.3 The apocryphal cruciform monument to Maništušu

Official cuneiform texts also include examples of manipulation and falsification of history. One of the most famous inscribed artefacts is the cruciform stone monument to Maništušu made of black basalt stone and now preserved in the British Museum.[18] This has the shape of a plain cross, and all twelve sides of the monument are covered with an inscription, which spans a total of 346 lines engraved in an archaic type of cuneiform writing (Fig. 1). The monument is one of the rare antique forgeries for which the archaeological context of discovery is known: it was found in 1881 during excavations conducted by the British Museum at the site of the ancient city of Sippar and was in the temple of the Sun god Šamaš in a Neo-Babylonian context (sixth century BCE) together with two other inscriptions

15 Finn 2017, 138–141.
16 Westenholz 1997.
17 Günbattı 1997; Foster 2005, 71–75.
18 Gelb 1949; Sollberger 1968; Powell 1991; Al-Rawi/George 1994.

by King Nabonidus.[19] The inscription purports to be from the time of the Akkadian king Maništušu, however, whose reign dates to the twenty-third century BCE.



Fig. 1: Cruciform stone monument; 346 lines of archaic writing are inscribed altogether: statements of grants and privileges bestowed on the Šamaš Temple by the Akkadian king Maništušu (2269 BCE–2255 BCE). London, British Museum (acquired in 1881); ©Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

19 Woods 2004, 34; Finkel/Fletcher 2016, 218.

The text concerns the renovation of the Šamaš temple and the very substantial increases in revenue that the temple received from the crown; it contains an inventory of the grants and privileges bestowed on the Šamaš temple by the Akkadian king. The authenticity of this monument was revoked on the basis of several philological and historical anachronisms; the measures of capacity, the names of some of the months, and elements of titles mentioned in the text are only known from the end of the third millennium. Other things only appeared at the beginning of the second millennium BCE, such as the *ilkum* corvée or the *nadītum* priestess of Šamaš at Sippar. The scribe made an effort to compose an archaic text, but made the mistake of mixing elements from various periods. The cruciform shape of the monument is unique for ancient Mesopotamia where texts written on stone or clay came in a great variety of shapes and sizes. We do not know what inspired it. One suggestion is that it could have been carved in one of the many *kudurru* stelae that were kept in the Šamaš temple.[20]

The stone was first thought to be a *fraus pia* ('pious fraud') dating from the Old Babylonian period and made in order to establish the antiquity of certain privileges and revenues of the Šamaš temple at Sippar.[21] But the inscription on the monument actually date to the Neo-Babylonian period, i.e. the sixth century BCE. It is known from several copies found in Sippar, including one from the library, and the colophon of this particular copy refers to originals from Babylon and Borsippa (both northern centres).[22] At some point, the text was added to the traditional corpus of compositions copied by scholars. Al-Rawi and George suggested that the copy from Babylon could have been that of an authentic historical inscription supplying the forgers with the historical background they needed and that later on, several copies of this antique forgery were made that reflected the organisation of the text in columns. The Maništušu monument, which was found together with inscribed barrel-shaped cylinders of King Nabonidus, was probably made by the priests of the Šamaš temple of Sippar for their own purposes, establishing the great antiquity of privileges and revenues of the temple and reinforcing the temple's claim to them.[23]

This reconstruction is suggested by another tablet from the Šamaš temple library at Sippar which is also a fake. It is a literary letter purporting to be from King Samsu-iluna, who ruled Babylonia during the eighteenth century BCE, and which is a copy of an exercise tablet from Ur. The letter is addressed to a royal

20 Finkel/Fletcher 2016, 242–245.
21 Sollberger 1968.
22 Breniquet 2018, 34
23 Al-Rawi/George 1994.

prince and includes a draft of a text dealing with Babylonian cult centres, which is intended for a monumental inscription, presumably the model used later for the cruciform monument.[24]

The Maništušu inscription is apocryphal; it constitutes the *a posteriori* side of a story and rewrites the past according to present intentions. It represents a tentative manipulation of history, supplying evidence of historical precedent for propaganda and economic purposes. Such historical forgeries were created for ideological, religious and economic reasons, but they ultimately appear as historical texts themselves, historicised by archaeology and history.

1.4 Alteration of ancient texts and monuments

The cruciform monument to Maništušu ends with common maledictions to anyone who might have wanted to alter the inscription: 'He who damages this text, let Enki fill up his canals with slime. Let Ninhursaga stop childbirth in his land! Let him plant and let Adad smite it and gather all his descendants!' As kings wanted to leave their name to posterity, especially when it was linked to palaces and temples they had built, many of the royal inscriptions found in Near Eastern sites include maledictions of this kind, following benedictions to any future king who would restore their masterpiece. Tukultī-Ninurta I, ruler of Assyria during the thirteenth century BCE, for example, celebrated his victorious military campaigns and the building of his new palace in one of his stone inscriptions. The text ends as follows:[25]

> In the future may a later prince, when that palace becomes old and dilapidated, restore it. May he anoint with oil my monumental inscription, make sacrifices, (and) return (it) to its place. (Then) the gods Aššur and Adad will listen to his prayers. He who erases my inscribed name and writes his (own) name; (who) discards my monumental inscription and puts (it) in another place where there is no visibility; who conceives of and does anything injurious; or (who) prevents the gods who dwell in the city Aššur from entering my palace during the festivals (and) summons (them) to another palace; (who) abandons that palace and neglects it: May the gods Aššur and Adad, the gods of heaven (and) the underworld, extinguish his sovereignty; may they destroy his name (and) his seed from the land; may a king who is his enemy take away his throne (and) under his very eyes rule his land. May the goddess Ištar, my mistress who designated my turn for sovereignty, bring about the defeat

24 Al-Rawi/George 1994.

25 Grayson 1987; RIMA 1 A.0.78.5.

> of his land; may he not stand firm before his enemies; may she hand him over to his enemies.

By including this set of blessings for those who would respect and restore the inscription in the future and adding curses for those who would alter it, the king sought above all to make his name and achievements known to his distant successors. The aim of such maledictions was also to prevent any alteration or transformation of the stone inscription and consequently any alteration of the historical facts – to prevent a further king from claiming to have achieved what his predecessor had done, for example, and thus abuse the truth for his own ends.

Such curses did not prevent the Elamites from altering Akkadian and Babylonian monuments, however. During the twelfth century BCE, the Elamite king Šutruk-Nahhunte brought back a huge amount of loot from his victorious campaign in Babylonia, including the *Hammurabi Code*. He kept all the trophies in his capital, Susa, in present-day Iran, which was excavated by French archaeologists in 1900. A scribe from Sippar who copied the prologue of the Code in the sixth-century BCE said in the colophon of his tablet that he had made his copy directly from the stele which was still on display at Susa.[26] Another trophy was the *Stele of Naram-Sîn*, a king of Akkad during the twenty-third century, which tells of the king's victory over the Lullubi people from the Central Zagros mountains. The stele, which is now on display at the Louvre Museum,[27] shows the king leading his army over the steep slopes of the enemy's territory – a symbol of a king ascending to be equal to the gods. It was carved in pink limestone. In the primitive cuneiform inscription glorifying Naram-Sîn, the Elamite king ordered a text to be carved dedicated to his own glory, in which it was indicated that he had taken the stele with him after looting the city of Sippar. The Elamite king also erased seven columns of the *Hammurabi Code* stele with the same intent, but did not have anything new inscribed on it. In doing so, he did not create a fake with the intention of deceiving people, but misappropriated a trophy and then 'signed' his booty, leaving his own mark on it.

In a sense, Saddam Hussein did something very similar when he had his own name inscribed on a brick that was then inserted in the reconstructed walls of the processional street in Babylon, reading: 'Restoration of the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar during the reign of the glorious Saddam Hussein' (Fig. 2b). In this political act, he imitated the content of the stamped bricks left by

26 Fadhil 1998.

27 <https://www.louvre.fr/oeuvre-notices/la-stele-du-roi-naram-sin> (accessed on 10 September 2019).

Nebuchadnezzar with his name in the walls which he ordered the construction (Fig. 2a). As the Elamite king, he was searching for personal glorification by raising himself to the level of an illustrious predecessor. The 'restoration work' that Saddam Hussein ordered to be done was nothing other than a (re)construction of the past.

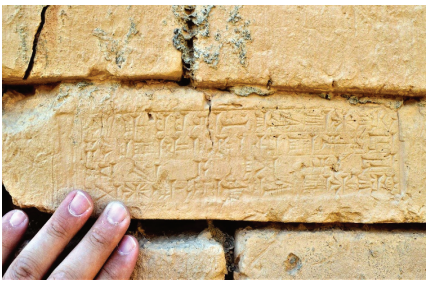

Fig. 2a: Stamped mud-brick bearing the name of Nebuchadnezzar; © Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP (Glasg) / CC BY-SA, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stamped_mudbrick_with_a_cuneiform_text,_procession_street,_Babylon,_Iraq.jpg>.



Fig. 2b: Stamped brick on a processional street wall in Babylon bearing the name of Saddam Hussein; © Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP (Glasg) / CC BY-SA, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Stamped_brick_at_the_ancient_city_of_Babylon_bearing_the_name_of_Saddam_Hussein.jpg>.

1.5 Neo-Babylonian kings' interest in archaeology and history

It is no surprise that many historical fakes such as Maništušu's cruciform monument date to the Neo-Babylonian period, a time when kings developed a special interest in the past, even making archaeological investigations, for example, and their scribes looked for the origin of cuneiform signs, deciphering ancient texts and producing antique forgeries.[28] King Nabonidus (556–539 BCE), for instance, who wished to reactivate the religious tradition of the middle of the third millennium BCE began restoration work in the cloister of the priestesses of the Moon God at Ur and found ancient inscriptions about Enanedu, daughter of the king of Larsa and a priestess in the second half of the nineteenth century BCE.[29] Asking his scribes to decipher these 1,500-year-old texts, the king then decided to follow

28 Glassner 1993, 31; Schnapp 1993; Michel 2011; Charpin 2018.
29 Charpin 1986, 192–206; Frayne 1990, 225–226, 257, 299–301.

the religious acts of his distant predecessor and consecrated his own daughter as the Moon God.[30] Confirming the great antiquity of some historical facts and citing them as an example, he thus legitimised his actions.

This interest in archaeology and history came with a passion for antiquities. Some kings set up museums containing a large number of ancient inscriptions and their scribes copied these ancient texts to ensure their transmission from generation to generation. A Neo-Babylonian scholar thus recorded the imprint of a lapidary inscription of Šar-kali-šarrī, king of Akkad at the end of the twenty-third century BCE, and another copied an inscription by the same king, applying himself to reproducing the archaic signs from that time; he probably copied the ancient text as it stood, just adding a colophon revealing that the original was a stone foundation tablet.[31]

Historical fakes such as 'royal' letters and inscriptions also flourished among the copies of genuine antique texts. Another text genre that could be defined as 'fake' even though its content may be close to reality is what we refer to as fictional autobiography or pseudo-autobiography – a biography allegedly written by the person whose life is being recounted.[32] The text is composed in the first person, but it is actually written by another individual who adds real or fictitious anecdotes to it. The most well-known fictional autobiography is inscribed on a stela and spans approximately 150 lines. It starts as follows: 'I am Adad-guppi, mother of Nabonidus'.

Revering his mother and presumably fascinated by her long life, Nabonidus, in a very personal process, ordered this pseudo-autobiography of Adad-guppi's life (c. 648–544) to be written. The text is completed by an account of her death at the venerable age of 104 and a description of the burial ceremony, written in the third person. It ends with exhortations to worship the gods.[33]

1.6 Producing forgeries for economic reasons

As for Maništušu's cruciform monument, the production of forgeries may have been motivated by the wish to change the truth: it resulted in the concretisation of a lie with the aim of deceiving the reader. The deliberate construction of a forgery of this kind was often driven by economic factors. In the case of Maništušu's

30 Beaulieu 1989, 127–131.
31 Frayne 1993, 191–194; Beaulieu 2013.
32 Longman III 1991.
33 Longman III 1991, 97–102.

monument, the Babylonian priests of the Šamaš temple at Sippar wanted to secure important economic privileges. There are many attestations of suspected forgeries in the cuneiform sources, which means that these are likely to have existed, as shown by the following examples dating to the first centuries of the second millennium BCE.

During the nineteenth century BCE, Assyrian merchants established long-distance exchanges with Central Anatolia and settled there. The archives found at Kültepe – the ancient city of Kaneš – include many legal texts with judicial records and testimonies by witnesses, suggesting that it was extremely important to establish facts and provide proof of them because of the complexity of trade between Aššur and Anatolia.[34] Written documents were important to prevent false testimonies. They were only useful if they could be proven to be genuine. Legal texts were written down to establish a person's right to something or their legal situation. Various types of contracts were kept by these Assyrian merchants, such as loan and purchase agreements, but there were also witnessed depositions with sworn testimonies, records of private arbitrations, verdicts and suchlike. These documents were entrusted to the person who could be prejudiced (the creditor, buyer, etc.) in order to protect them. In case of dispute, such legal texts were used as proof of the truth of a claim.

To prevent forgery, the legal clay tablet was enclosed in a clay envelope called a *harāmum*. This itself was a legal act. The contract was actually written again or summarised on the envelope before this was done, and parties and witnesses had to roll their personal cylinder seal on each side of the envelope, thus giving its legal value to the document.[35] Once the envelope was broken, the document was no longer valid. A loan contract, for example, was sealed by the debtor and kept by the creditor. When the debt was paid, the creditor gave the document back to the debtor. The latter could cancel it by breaking the envelope containing the imprints of the seals and could then keep it in his archives as a personal record. If the loan contract could not be returned to the debtor upon payment of the debt, the creditor would then seal a receipt and give it to the debtor instead. A receipt of this kind could include the following clause: 'any tablet with the seal/concerning PN's debt that may turn up is false (*sar*)', as in the following example:[36]

34 Hertel 2013, 138–143.

35 Michel 2020.

36 Michel 1995, 24–25, text TC 3, 264a: 2–10, 12–18, cited from n. 43.

> Aššur-nīšu (declared) the following to Šu-Bēlum: 'With regard to your money, with regard to the money I owe you, you have now been satisfied. Give me my loan tablets so I can destroy them!' Šu-Bēlum replied as follows: 'Your tablet has already been destroyed! [...] any tablet that would turn up in my house about Aššur-nīšu's debt as to how interest would accrue to him is false.'

Such declarations naturally suggest that fakes were regularly used by merchants to make more money. With a similar logic, purchased contracts were normally given to the buyer so that he could prove his acquisition and its payment; a document of this type was regarded as proof of ownership, in other words. In a number of houses excavated in South Mesopotamia and Iran, Old Babylonian archives (from the first centuries of the second millennium BCE) were found that contained several purchase contracts relating to the respective buildings: all the tablets from the previous successive transactions had been passed on to the last owner of the house. An Old Babylonian judicial text from Susa concerns a dispute about the status of one such purchase contract: a house was sold by a man, but his son and grandchildren took legal action against the son of the buyer, claiming that the house was not sold and that the document he had presented was fake. The son of the buyer had to swear before the goddess Ištar to confirm the validity of his deed.[37]

The production of forgeries could also concern family law. This is suggested by a trial linked to an inheritance which took place in the late nineteenth or early eighteenth century BCE in the city of Sippar: a priestess received all the property that had belonged to the deceased priestess who had adopted her. Two men, presumably members of her family, accused her of having written a fake will, claiming the following: 'Amat-Šamaš absolutely did not give you a house and she did not write a tablet for you. When she died, you wrote the tablet (yourself)'. They thus suggested that she was able to write a legal document and had made a fake will in order to inherit her adoptive mother's property. However, witnesses confirmed that Amat-Šamaš had, indeed, given the house to the priestess while she was still alive and that she had written the will herself as well; she was a literate woman.[38]

All these suspicions about the existence of fake tablets most likely reflect reality and suggest that the practice of making forgeries for economic gain was common practice. The protection of a legal document by a clay envelope bearing the imprint of the seals of the parties and witnesses ensured that the document was authentic.

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37 Scheil 1933, no. 393.

38 Pinches 1896, pl. 47; Lion 2018.

2 Modern fakes

The production of antique fakes stopped very naturally with the disappearance of cuneiform at the beginning of our era. Fake objects and fake translations reappeared with the rediscovery of the ancient script, even before its decipherment. Once the first official excavations began in Iraq in the mid-nineteenth century CE and the cuneiform writing that was found was deciphered, collectors started to take an increasing interest in Mesopotamian antiquities, resulting in a large number of fakes in order to meet the demand for such items. The techniques employed in order to produce fakes improved, and more and more fakes began to be bought – by private collectors and public museums alike.

As in Antiquity, there are other motives for making fakes than the purely economic ones that drove antique sellers: they may be intended for scientific experiments, for didactic purposes, to honour a colleague, to promote a discipline or even to express a political opinion, for instance. These various reasons for making fakes will now be examined more closely, starting with the most obvious one: the economic aspect.

2.1 Before the decipherment of cuneiform: the first 'imaginative translations' and fakes

The last cuneiform clay tablets to be discovered are written in Akkadian and cuneiform script and date to the first century CE. Cuneiform disappeared after this date and the history of Mesopotamia slowly sank into oblivion. It took more than a millennium to rediscover its history.[39] The first expedition to visit Mesopotamia and Iran was Danish and dates back to the early 1760s. The members of the expedition included Carsten Niebuhr, a mathematician and biologist who copied some of the cuneiform inscriptions engraved on monuments at Persepolis in Iran.[40]

In 1786, the Michaux Stone (or stele) was one of the very first inscribed monuments brought back to Europe. It is now kept at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris (Fig. 3).[41]

39 Faivre 2009.
40 Larsen 1996: 7.
41 Lion/Michel 2016: 17.



Fig. 3: The Michaux Stone (*kudurru*), a genuine object which inspired imaginative translations; © Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Médailles / Public domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Caillou_Michaux_CdM.jpg>.

The inscription on it interested and intrigued scholars who tried to decipher it. Anton August Heinrich Lichtenstein deserves a medal for the most eccentric translation: wishing to be recognised as the decipherer of cuneiform scripts, his translation is an obvious act of mystification. His arguments and translation are detailed and commented on by S. de Sacy in a letter published in 1802.[42] Lichtenstein imagined that the cuneiform characters were an early variant of Kufic, an old calligraphic form of Arabic script, and that it was written in Chaldean or Aramaic. He supposed that there was an old Kufic letter hidden in each combination of wedges, and thus he had to take away several useless wedges to find the letter he was looking for; the other wedges were added arbitrarily without following any rule. As a result, his translation is a matter of pure fantasy. He thought that the inscription described a rite during which mourning women were going to the temple to be comforted by priests. Here is an extract of what Lichtenstein translated after specifying his approach: 'I will give a faithful, albeit rather free, translation of this monument, which I have deciphered in its entirety':[43]

> The priest of the temple of the god of death addresses women dressed in mourning clothes, and gathering on the day of the commemoration of all the weapons, near the tombs of their deceased relatives, to engage in the manifestation of their pain [...] 'You must not forget that weakness is the lot of women. Too often, you are blind to your own faults. We solemnly recommend you morals taught by our belief, so that our orders are obeyed. Your happiness is guaranteed, we are your guarantors, provided that you bring the fruit of your hope to maturity when we impose the serious obligation on you.'

The reality was much more prosaic: the text concerns a dowry consisting of land offered by a father to his daughter, and it dates to the eleventh century BCE. Interestingly, Lichtenstein anticipated the disbelief of his contemporaries regarding his discovery:[44]

> I expect that more than one Orientalist scholar will revoke my discovery, or perhaps seek to demonstrate its falsity, precisely because it would seem to reproach them a little harshly for not having noticed this striking resemblance, and which is obvious between the main features that form the letters of the wedge-shaped writing and the elements of the Kufic or Estrangelo [Syriac] alphabet, and for having ignored this similarity because of their prejudices (my translation).

42 de Sacy 1802.

43 Lichtenstein 1802 and 1803, 111–116 (Latin); French translation by De Sacy 1802.

44 Lichtenstein 1803, 111–134 (Latin), reported by De Sacy 1802.

De Sacy could easily demonstrate the flaws in the reasoning of this false decoder. While regretting that Lichtenstein only provided a translation of the text and no transliteration, he noted the following weaknesses in his argumentation:[45]

- Lichtenstein read the cuneiform text from right to left. However, it must be read from left to right.
- He deleted parts of the wedges forming each sign, doing so arbitrarily and without any explanation.
- He started the decipherment with the more complex cuneiform version of trilingual inscriptions, even though Carsten Niebuhr had already suggested that only the simplest one might be an alphabet.
- The translation he provided is quite far from the Oriental genre. Moreover, he did not discuss the mythological symbols and iconography of the stele.

The following part of de Sacy's letter concerns the work presented by Georg Friedrich Grotefend, a young German Latinist who claimed to understand fifteen of the forty cuneiform signs of the Old Persian cuneiform inscription. Although he had some reservations about details in his demonstration, de Sacy was generally convinced by it; indeed, Grotefend actually laid the foundation for deciphering the Old Persian alphabetic cuneiform script.[46]

It may not be pure coincidence that the very first modern cuneiform fakes that are attested date more or less to the same period, illustrating the growing interest in this mysterious writing among scholars. The fakes belonged to Claudius James Rich (1786–1821), a pioneer archaeologist and collector of Mesopotamian antiquities, and British Consul in Baghdad between 1808 and 1820.[47] He built up his collection before anyone was able to read cuneiform. It included cuneiform tablets and a moulded cylinder belonging to Nebuchadnezzar II, presumably made in Iraq with local clay. Perhaps he already realised that some of his written artefacts were forgeries because when his secretary, Carl Bellino, prepared some beautiful drawings of the items in the collection, the fakes were not included in the publication.[48] Some of the cuneiform tablets were simply the result of real tablets being pressed onto fresh clay, which explains why the signs do not appear in a negative form as one would expect, but as a positive imprint (Fig. 4). The collection was acquired by the British Museum and is still on display there today. The creation of cuneiform fakes is probably

45 De Sacy 1802.

46 Joannès/Tolini 2009.

47 Jones 1990, 165, no. 169; Larsen 1996, 19–22.

48 Barnett 1974; Walker 1987: 59–60; Finkel 1996: 196, n. 13.

linked to scholars' growing interest in this mysterious writing in the general context of a new fascination about antiquities serving as witnesses of the past.



Fig. 4: A fake tablet in a positive imprint, part of the collection of Claudius Rich, British Museum. Jones 1990, no. 169b.

2.2 After the decipherment of cuneiform: new techniques to produce fakes in large quantities

During the nineteenth century, the production of fakes exploded as collecting relics of the past became a general interest.[49] This collecting mania encouraged the forgers to meet the demand for cuneiform artefacts by producing even more

49 Jones 1990, 161–162.

forgeries. Large quantities of cuneiform tablets were shipped to Europe and North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, genuine and forged ones being mixed together.[50]

This increasing interest in antiquities was concomitant to the decipherment of cuneiform. Indeed, Akkadian cuneiform was declared deciphered on 27 May 1857. The Royal Asiatic Society arranged a test involving four scholars who claimed they understood the script and language. One of these was Jules Oppert, a Jewish scholar born in Hamburg who left Germany for France in order to get an academic position there.[51] In his correspondence, which is now preserved in the library of the French Academy, there is an answer he sent to his colleague at the Academy, George Maspero, a well-known Egyptologist, including his report regarding a cuneiform text found in Egypt. In his letter to Maspero dated 8 January 1888, Oppert wrote the following:[52]

> My suspicions had arisen above all because of the resemblance of the tablet you sent with the famous so-called Cappadocian tablets, all of which come from Caesarea and which I believe are all forgeries; at least [I have] up to now. There are fake antiques workshops all over the Orient, which have to be paid a higher price because they are charging the labour force for it. The characters are a mixture of Assyrian and Babylonian styles [...]. I am inclined to think they are authentic (for now).

The 'Cappadocian tablets' mentioned by Oppert come from Kaneš, the ancient site at Kültepe; they belonged to merchants and date to the beginning of the second millennium BCE (see section 1.6). These tablets are written in the Old Assyrian dialect, but they originated from Central Anatolia. This discovery far from the city of Aššur led Oppert to be sceptical about their authenticity, just like the tablets found in Egypt. The tablet sent by Maspero came from El-Amarna (ancient Akethaton) in Egypt and was also confirmed as being genuine. It dates to the middle of the second millennium BCE as the pharaoh had to use cuneiform and

50 Walker 1987.

51 Lion/Michel 2009.

52 Letter no. 164: 'Mes soupçons s'étaient surtout éveillés par la ressemblance de la tablette envoyée par vous avec les fameuses tablettes dites cappadociennes qui proviennent toutes de Césarée et que je crois toutes fabriquées ; du moins jusqu'à présent. Il existe dans tout l'Orient des ateliers de fausses antiquités qu'il faut payer plus cher, parce qu'ils en font payer la main-d'œuvre. Les caractères sont un mélange de styles assyrien et babylonien [...] J'incline (à présent) vers l'authenticité'. I wish to thank Mireille Pastoureau, the former director of the library, who allowed me to work on Jules Oppert's correspondence together with my colleague Brigitte Lion. This letter has already been cited before in Kulakoğlu/Michel 2015.

Akkadian in order to correspond with all the kings of the Near East since they were the diplomatic language and script of the time.



Fig. 5a: A fake handwritten tablet with diagonal lines; the Monserrat Museum (Márquez Rowe 2006, no. 2); © Photo CDLI, P432801, <https://cdli.ucla.edu/dl/photo/P432801.jpg>.



Fig. 5b: A fake Old Assyrian moulded tablet with erased edges; the Vorderasiatische Museum Berlin, VAT 13460 (Michel 2003, 32); © Photo CDLI, P358324, <https://cdli.ucla.edu/dl/photo/P358324.jpg>.

The letter written by Jules Oppert confirms the active manufacture of forged cuneiform tablets in the late nineteenth century CE. In fact, this massive production of cuneiform fakes went on for several decades, at least up to the 1930s. Oppert's answer to Maspero also shows the difficulty that specialists face when they have to produce an expert report on an artefact. The collections of Old Assyrian tablets in museums and private hands in Europe and North America

were built up during this period before the official excavations of the site at Kültepe were begun in 1948. Eighty per cent of the Old Assyrians tablets now in the Louvre were acquired and published at this time.[53]

A set of ten tablets that the Louvre Museum bought off a private collector in 1968 contains a letter with a text found in fifteen other tablets around the world. Even though merchants often made copies of some of their texts, such a high number of duplicates is unusual and intriguing. A closer look at their layout convinced me that there were only two copies that were genuine and all the other tablets were forged. The line breaks are the same as well as the layout of the text on both sides of the tablets.[54] The forged copies were clearly produced using a mould created from an original. It is quite easy to make a mould for each side of a tablet (i.e. the obverse and reverse) and then glue the two halves together while the clay is still fresh. This technique has an advantage over the hand-made production of tablets today in that the object produced has all the characteristics of a real tablet, exactly reproducing the text as it is written on each side of an antique cuneiform tablet (compare Fig. 5a and b). However, the forger usually had some trouble with the edges at the join between the two half-moulds, which were inscribed most of the time in original tablets. Either he left them blank or he wrote wedges on them, albeit randomly and sometimes even upside down (an example can be seen in Fig. 5b). The Old Assyrian tablets that have been unearthed so far are plentiful – there are about 23,000 of them in all – and many more are yet to be found. It must have been easy for forgers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century CE to sell such well-made fakes together with genuine tablets.[55]

The suggested technique used to produce these fakes was confirmed in May 2014 with the discovery of a lead object during a survey of a field near the village of Büyükhırka on the road from Çorum to Yozgat in Turkey (in the region of Bayındır) (see Fig. 6).

53 Michel 2003, 13–19. The Louvre Museum has 720 Old Assyrian tablets and envelopes. A group of ten tablets was bought in 1968 and a group of 137 tablets was given to the museum in 1982 by the Assyriologist Marguerite Rutten.

54 Michel 1987, 9–13.

55 Such fake Old Assyrian tablets are now preserved in a dozen collections around the world, but there is a concentration in the collection preserved in Adana Museum where they amount to roughly a quarter of the twenty-five tablets. Knowing more about the history of the collection could possibly help researchers find out who the forgers were. There is also a group of several Old Assyrian fakes (and other fakes as well) in the Böhl Collection in Leiden; these were acquired from the estate of Felix Ernst Peiser in 1899 (Böhl 1932).



Fig. 6: A lead mould from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century CE (on the right) and its imprint (on the left). Photo courtesy of Ilknur Taş.

The heavy object was a broken lead mould which was clearly used to make one side of an Old Assyrian clay tablet;[56] this half-mould is now kept at Çorum Museum. Physical analyses were made to determine the age of the object. The ensuing report defined it as 'ancient', but did not say exactly how ancient it was. The most likely hypothesis is that the artefact actually dates to the end of the Ottoman Empire, presumably the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The text on this half-mould does not match the one on the tablet which has so many fake duplicates, so several other moulds of original tablets must have been prepared. It is quite unique to have found the tool which was used to produce such fakes more than a century ago.

2.3 Fakes in museums and private collections

The Old Assyrian period was not the only one affected by the widespread production of fakes. Presumably around the same time, tablets from the Neo-Babylonian

56 Taş/İpek 2015.

period (the second half of the first millennium BCE) were produced in large quantities by the same technique, moulding.

In 1970, Erle Leichty from Philadelphia noticed that groups of tablets preserved in the University Museum of Pennsylvania, the Chicago Oriental Institute, the Yale Babylonian Collection and the Metropolitan Museum in New York were actually modern fakes. These tablets, often in fragmentary pieces, had been bought at the shop of a Baghdad dealer called Joseph Shemtob between 1888 and 1910. They were duplicates and were also duplicates of originals preserved at the British Museum.[57] On taking a close look at these fakes, Leichty discovered that the obverse and reverse of some of them were duplicates of two different texts, which were eventually dated to the eras of two different kings: the forger had glued two halves together both corresponding to the reverse faces of tablets, both of which included a date.[58] Moreover, many of the fragments turned from obverse to reverse around a vertical axis, like a modern book, rather than around a horizontal axis, as cuneiform tablets usually do. Just like the Old Assyrian samples, these fakes had been cast in two halves and joined together later, the joint being visible on the edges. The forger(s) made moulds of different tablets that were genuine, casting the obverse and the reverse separately, then pressed them together while the clay was still soft. In some cases, they did not make much of an effort to match the obverse and reverse properly. Fakes of this kind look authentic at first glance precisely because they are casts of originals. It is likely that Joseph Shemtob bought them from the faker(s) sometime before the middle of the 1880s. He also sold hundreds of authentic antiquities to North American collectors and museums. According to Christopher Walker, a former curator at the British Museum in London, many of Shemtob's fakes may have been made by the Ready brothers, who were employed by the British Museum to prepare official copies and thus had access to originals.[59] Since these fakes were produced from very common administrative tablets dating to the Neo-Babylonian period, it was easy to sell them. It is clear that the seller made a good profit by selling them as there was a market for such forged artefacts.

The same production technique was also used for Ur III tablets dating to the twenty-first century BCE, a period represented by hundreds of thousands of administrative texts. Presumably, no less than fifty-seven forged Ur III tablets purportedly from the city of Girsu south of Mesopotamia were produced by a

57 Leichty 1970.

58 See also Spar/von Dassow 2000, comments on text no. 129.

59 Walker 1987, 59–60.

single forger; these are now preserved in the British Museum and the University Museum of Pennsylvania.[60]

It is not surprising that the Ur III, Old Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods inspired counterfeiters the most. Given the abundance of texts from these three eras, it was easy for forgers to find samples to reproduce and then to include groups of fakes in the many lots of tablets from these periods on sale during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century CE. According to Jones, the nineteenth century was a golden age for forgers and dishonest dealers.[61]

The production of fakes of Mesopotamian antiquities was so widespread that it inspired the nineteenth-century Assyriologist Joachim Menant to write a book about the subject.[62] However, all the examples that he mentions were made of stone, a type of production that required completely different techniques to be used. It seems that fake cuneiform artefacts carved in stone were also produced in great quantities by counterfeiters who were very imaginative, and highly skilled as well in some instances, even creating new types of inscribed monuments.[63] Cylinder seals carved in semi-precious stones with miniature scenes and sometimes a short cuneiform inscription were also produced in large quantities, presumably because they were highly valued on the antique market (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7: A fake inscribed cylinder seal made of stone; the Walter Art Museum, Baltimore; © Photo CDLI P272884, <https://cdli.ucla.edu/dl/photo/P272884.jpg>.

60 Pomponio 2012; Firth 2015.
61 Jones 1990, 161.
62 Menant 1888.
63 Márquez Rowe 2006, no. 15.

Although bigger in size, statues copying the work of artists from the second half of the third millennium BCE were also produced by counterfeiters – several statues of Gudea and members of his family were made, for example. Some of these statues were obviously the work of a skilled artist and were carved in a very fine and pretty stone such as translucent green diorite, which was used to produce the Gudea M statue supposedly found at Tello, the ancient Sumerian city of Girsu excavated by a French team from 1877 onwards. It was bought on the market in 1926 and is now kept at the Detroit Museum. This artefact, which has an inscription on its back and on a shoulder, has been the subject of much debate among art historians and philologists. In a recent study, Eva Braun-Holzinger showed that the statue itself may be a fake even if the text is genuine as philologists claim.[64] The counterfeiter mixed up characteristics of statues of Gudea and his son Ur-Ningirsu, then carved an original text copied from another ancient artefact on its back.

2.4 Modern replicas and modern originals

Most of these modern fakes were made with an economic motive: the temptation to earn money. The production of modern replicas and modern originals may be for other purposes, however. Since the decipherment of cuneiform, a few Assyriologists have created replicas of ancient written artefacts or produced new items of their own in ancient script (and some of them still do so; see Fig. 8); their motives were (and are) scientific, sharing knowledge of an ancient culture and enhancing their academic discipline.

From a scientific perspective, the aim of reproducing the scribes' strokes and making wedges in fresh clay is to understand what techniques are linked with producing cuneiform script and to discover differences in texts produced by different scribes in order to identify scribes' hands. This academic research also includes the shaping of clay tablets, the making of envelopes (Fig. 8), the printing of seals and other such related activities.[65]

64 Braun-Holzinger 2018.

65 For an example, see the research carried out in Hamburg in the cluster of excellence entitled 'Understanding Written Artefacts' (project RFA09): <https://www.written-artefacts.uni-hamburg.de/research/field-a/rfa09.html> (accessed on 10 October 2019).

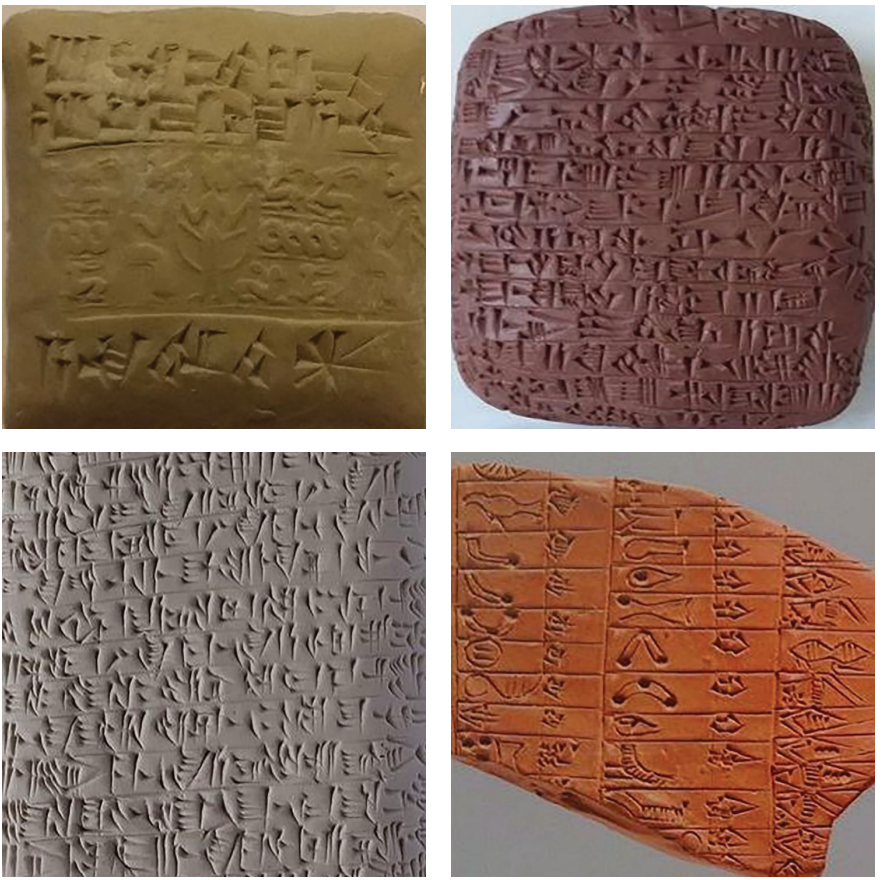

Fig. 8: Four modern replicas. A clay envelope and its tablet enclosed inside (upper left corner), and tablets produced by the author in experiments; © Cécile Michel.

Secondly, organising scribal schools that are open to a wide range of people helps scholars share their knowledge of cultural history and in some cases prevent ignorance from leading to the destruction of the cultural heritage of humanity.[66] Educational activities may also be channelled at the elite and rulers by creating honorary gifts for them containing original or specially written texts. In doing this, Assyriologists also show how much they value their own discipline, which

66 <https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/cuneiform/documentation_e.html> (accessed 5 June 2018).

is only represented by a small number of specialists worldwide, and how they are able to gain the attention of rulers and managers alike.[67]

Modern artefacts of this kind may be referred to as 'modern replicas' and 'modern originals', and they are not produced with the intention of deceiving anyone.

2.5 Publication of a 'modern original' to honour a scholar

Some scholars used to prepare tablets that were modern originals for friends and colleagues, celebrating a special event such as a marriage, birthday, the birth of a child, a scientific event or an anniversary, for example.[68] Some of the clay tablets made by modern Assyriologists may be very accurate, regardless of whether an existing text has been created or a brand new one, but once again, tablets like these are not produced in order to deceive anyone on purpose, even though this might well happen to non-specialists unfamiliar with the field.

The clay cuneiform tablets made by Assyriologists, whatever their motives, usually end in personalities' or colleagues' homes or are used as experimental or educational tools. Once they are recognised as modern artefacts, they usually have no scientific value to posterity, unlike genuine tablets, which are studied, published and commented on by scholars. However, at least one such modern tablet ended up in a book containing the publication of Neo-Babylonian tablets preserved in the Yale Babylonian Collection at New Haven. In volume XXI of the Yale Oriental Series (YOS), published in 2011, the authors discretely inserted a tablet in the category of 'letters' – no. 43, which they described in their catalogue as 'greetings in extremely late Babylonian'.[69] A copy of the text was included among the other copies.

As for the other tablets, the dimensions are provided as well as the names of the sender and addressee, which are also listed in the index of proper names together with another name mentioned in the text. These names sound extremely modern compared to those found in the other tablets. The sender is 'Alberti', a

67 Several state presidents, queens, European officials, local governors, mayors and university presidents have received a cuneiform clay tablet bearing their name, title, the date or a short original text in Akkadian. Ideally, when I do so, I try to enclose a euro cent in the clay so that future archaeologists will be able to date the tablet, a 'modern original'.

68 The organisers of the Third Kültepe International Meeting which took place at Kültepe at the beginning of August 2019 received very well-made tablets with an original Old Assyrian text from a friend and colleague, formerly the curator of a large museum cuneiform collection.

69 Frahm/Jursa 2011, 37.

descendant of 'Kalaya', with a note in brackets saying that it corresponds to Albert Clay. The tablet is, indeed, referred to as the 'Clay tablet', which could also be understood as a pun on the medium of the manuscript.

Albert T. Clay (1866–1925) was one of the most famous American Assyriologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. He studied in Philadelphia with H. Hilprecht and received his PhD in Assyriology in 1894 on business texts from Nippur from the Achaemenid period.[70] He was a lecturer in Hebrew and assistant curator of Babylonian and Semitic antiquities before becoming professor of Semitic philology and archaeology in 1909. In 1910 he was offered a professorship in Assyriology at Yale, which was specially created for him, and the following year he became the curator of the new Yale Babylonian Collection. In the years that followed, he bought large groups of tablets, setting up the biggest collection of cuneiform texts in America, and published thirteen volumes with copies of cuneiform, many of these on Babylonian tablets from the first millennium BCE. His excellent knowledge of cuneiform written artefacts and his renowned competence regarding cuneiform copies explain the excellent formal quality of his 'forged' letter, which he gave to a couple of good friends.

The addressees are Harles, a descendant of Turria, and Miryam, a descendant of Rihardis, and thus a couple. In the index, footnotes referring to each other provide the identity of these persons: Charles Cutler Torrey (1863–1956), a biblical scholar and Semitist, chairman of the Yale Department of Semitic and Biblical Languages, Literature and History in the graduate school and curator of the university coin collection, and Marian Edwards Richards, whom he married in 1911.[71] This cuneiform letter was presumably made and given to them on the occasion of their marriage.

By including this modern original tablet in their publication of Neo-Babylonian tablets preserved in the Yale Babylonian Collection, the authors of the volume paid tribute to a great Assyriologist from the early years of the discipline.

2.6 Fakes and politics: the scientific expression of a political opinion

Humour and parody were not the prerogative of Mesopotamian scribes alone, and some mischievous Assyriologists in the US have recently reacted to the election

70 Foster 1999, 17–18.

71 Foster 1999, 756–757.

and political speeches of their president by writing parodies of scientific articles including the publication of imaginary tablets, fruits of their creativity.[72] Two articles have supposedly been published[73] in a surrealist series called 'Occasional Publications of the Museum of the Sealand'. By using the artifice of parody, their authors express their fears about future political decisions concerning their country. Both articles are preceded or followed by the very end or the first few paragraphs of other contributions which are also full of humoristic and absurd mentions and references.

The author of one of these articles has included the edition of two invented prophecies which are purportedly written on an undated and unprovenanced tablet from a private collection, and included its cuneiform copy. In this example, the tablet has not even taken shape; it is suggested by the pseudo-scientific study that is being done. By doing this, the author mystified at least one colleague since his article is cited in a recent book devoted to the prophecies of Antiquity. The author of this book compares these prophecies to existing 'apocalyptic literature'.[74]

3 Conclusion

Cuneiform fakes have a very long history spanning from at least the late third or early second millennium BCE to the present day, albeit with a long interruption from the beginning of our era to the eighteenth century CE, corresponding to the time during which cuneiform script and the history of Mesopotamia had fallen into oblivion. Under the generic word 'fake', this chapter presents a variety of cases that show the difficulty of applying modern terminology to each of them.

The current practice of copying texts as part of scribal education complicates the work that Assyriologists have determining the date of production of literary works. According to Jones, 'copying comes closest to faking (... because of) the skills used in their manufacture'.[75] It then becomes difficult to distinguish between originals, copies, replicas and fakes. The correspondence of the kings of Ur is a mixture of copies of original letters from the late twenty-first century BCE

72 Garfinkle et al. 2016; Richardson 2017.

73 They are also available online at Academia. (This highlights the problem of the scientific status of 'publications' that are deposited on such a private shared website.)

74 The tablet published in Richardson 2017 is mentioned in Nissinen 2018, 112–113, n. 276–277, and in the bibliography on p. 408.

75 Jones 1990, 29–30.

and compositions written by scribes in the first few centuries of the second millennium BCE, these creations sometimes including elements of genuine letters.

Mesopotamian scholars have shown deep interest in the past, even copying ancient texts. Kings from the first millennium BCE dug into the foundations of buildings, asked their scribes to decipher the unearthed ancient inscriptions, and Nabonidus even decided to revive ancient religious traditions. This antiquarianism was reflected in the scholars' study of ancient texts and their mastery of archaic signs; it led them to the creation of forgeries, such as the cruciform monument to Maništušu.[76]

The production of fakes in the ancient Near East was often motivated by economic factors, but could also have a religious or political background as well, such as the creation of texts caricaturing kingship ideology. The main motive is also an economic one today. Hundreds of fake tablets were produced between the end of the nineteenth and the first few decades of the twentieth century CE. The production of such fakes decreased perceptibly during the 1930s as new expert techniques were developed and legal sanctions were taken against fakers. The phenomenon still exists today, however, alongside the making of legitimate modern replicas or 'modern originals' by Assyriologists, but fake items have to 'compete' with thousands of genuine artefacts put on the market by looters taking advantage of the wars that have plagued this area of the world the last forty years. This organised looting of antiquities and their appearance on the market causes some significant problems for Assyriologists, who are thus deprived of part of the scientific information relating to their contexts of discovery. In addition, they face a difficult dilemma: on the one hand, they feel obliged to prevent the information contained in these written artefacts from being lost forever by disappearing into private collections, and on the other, they do not want to promote the market of antiquities by giving added value to an object once it has been certified as genuine and published.[77]

The identification of fakes is not always obvious, even to specialists. According to Christopher Walker, it is difficult to distinguish between a well-made fake cylinder seal and a third-class antique one, for example.[78] There are still debates about some items which became famous as a result and were thus historicised. When a fake is identified as such, its fate varies according to the size of the collection in which it is preserved. Large museums that have a department dedicated to ancient Near Eastern antiquities usually keep the fake cuneiform tablets they

76 Beaulieu 2013.

77 Michel 2019.

78 Walker 1987, 59–60.

have acquired in their storerooms, while other museums that only possess a small collection of written artefacts present their fakes in showcases for educational purposes. If the fakes are real pieces of art, such as inscribed statues, they may also be displayed in museum exhibitions. Some fakes have been the subject of a specific exhibition insofar as these forgeries have become objects that have their share of history.[79] A few Assyriologists study them as historiographical testimonies,[80] and the main database of cuneiform texts – the Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative[81] – has decided to include them.

The fakes created during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century tell us another story, one of the rediscovery of the ancient Near East within the Orientalism movement. This fascination about the Orient and the past led certain individuals to create some fantastic stories and theories, such as those published by the writer Zecharia Stichin (1920–2010) who took the mythological battles of gods related in the authentic *Babylonian Epic of Creation* to be real astronomic phenomena.[82] Such publications possibly inspired the Iraqi Minister of Transport, Kazem Finjan, in 2016 when he declared that the very first airport was built in Iraq around 5,000 BCE by the Sumerians, who explored space and discovered the planet Pluto.[83]

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Catherine Breniquet

How Writing Came about in Glozel, France

Abstract: Glozel is a small hamlet in Ferrière-sur-Sichon, a rural district in the French Bourbonnais near Vichy, Central France. In the 1920s, it became an archaeological 'hot spot' when various strange artefacts made of clay and stone were 'discovered' in a field there. These objects included clay tablets containing writing in an unknown script, which suggested that writing had appeared there earlier than anywhere else. Authentic items to some scholars, but forgeries to others, the Glozel finds quickly became one of the most famous scientific controversies of the twentieth century in France, even involving the judiciary.

It is hard to imagine all the commotion about it today as the place and the various arguments concerning the affair have more or less been forgotten. However, in the 1920s, the controversy about the authenticity of the site grew into a major one. How is it that so many scholars were tricked by the finds? Just pronouncing the name 'Glozel' set the entire Auvergne on fire for years afterwards right up to the 1980s.



Fig. 1: General view of the hamlet of Glozel. The site is below, in the background (photograph by the author).

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In order to shed some light on the matter, a brief summary of this complicated affair will be presented here first of all. The written documents about the writing found on the artefacts is the focus of the second part of the paper, while the third section examines the scientific context of the period, which is key to understanding why the affair had such an impact.

1 A short history of the Glozel affair

The story began when a young man called Émile Fradin and his grandfather were ploughing a field of theirs on 1 March 1924.[1] The wheel of the plough suddenly dropped down into the earth, into a pit which was possibly a grave or a glass-maker's oven from an unknown date. The two peasants started digging in order to get the plough out of the hole. Rather than filling the hole in, Émile Fradin, who was 16 at the time, removed the stones around it and claimed a few days later that he had made some extraordinary discoveries there and elsewhere in the field, known first as 'Les Durantons' and afterwards as 'Le Champ des Morts'. Some local teachers soon became aware of the findings: first of all, Mrs Adrienne Picandet visited the place and then informed the authorities about the site. Shortly after that, Mr Benoît Clément, another school teacher who came from La Guillermie, went to the field to make a scientific report on the find for the *Société d'Émulation du Bourbonnais* and applied to the same *Société* for a small grant, but was refused because money was lacking. Mr Clément then advised Dr Antonin Morlet, an eminent and respected doctor from Vichy and an amateur archaeologist in his free time, to conduct an archaeological dig in Glozel. The latter rented the field from the peasants, requested Émile Fradin to work with him on his own excavations and offered him the property rights to any objects found at the site. This would provide some credible justification for any future finds (it would be unlikely for a peasant family, presumably almost illiterate, to have faked the whole thing) and would create a lucrative business in future as well. Whether or not these two ideas were suggested to Morlet or were his own – or simply pure coincidence – is impossible to say.

One should bear in mind here that being an archaeologist was not a full-time profession in France in this period. Most archaeologists were actually local people with some degree of authority by way of their main profession (doctors,

1 For an overview of the affair, see Reinach 1928a and 1928b; Morlet 1932; Torchet et al. 1978; *Glozel* 1983, Bessy et al. 1993.

chemists, solicitors, teachers or members of the clergy, for example). Most, if not all, were members of local *sociétés savantes*, so they would have been likely to have had a good understanding of local history and their local area. Furthermore, the society officials would have been aware of current research at that time.

Focusing on the main discoveries here (except for some flint and glass artefacts, which could well be genuine), the Glozel archaeological findings are an assortment of bone figurines and pendants reminiscent of famous prehistoric pieces such as the 'Vénus de Brassempouy', clay objects and anthropomorphic pots (with a clear connection to Trojan material). There are also numerous bisexual objects made of clay,[2] but of unknown use, and tablets with a hand imprint or an unknown script on them reminiscent of the Phoenician alphabet. Despite the presence of written documents, and compared with other well-known sites, these artefacts mainly seemed to be Palaeolithic or Neolithic to scientists in the 1920s.[3]

A first surprising observation concerns the layout of the site. The field slopes considerably and it is impossible to find any stratigraphic layer *in situ* in Glozel (no soil, no architecture, and no pits or graves). This observation is not obvious in itself; it is always possible to admit we are facing considerable subsidence here. Owing to the slope and this possible subsidence, the original location of the artefacts would probably have slipped down towards the valley from the upper part of the field. A situation of this kind would have brought broken or damaged objects up to the surface, however, which is not the case; all the objects were still intact and, indeed, complete. Findings like these rarely occur in normal archaeological digs, except in primary graves where objects are usually found in a broken condition (along with rubbish). Many witnesses said they had seen objects extracted from the earth during the archaeological excavation. This leads us to the conclusion that the site in Glozel is unlikely to have been an ancient one. Due to the archaeological methods of the 1920s, which are now considered inappropriate, it is reasonable to assume that people may have got confused or carried away and failed to recognise the real situation. Pictures taken on site also show the great disorder in the field's terrain caused by strollers from the village, visitors, tourists and so on.[4]

2 Objects with male and female attributes; the term 'bisexual' is used to describe the objects in the original reports.

3 Morlet/Fradin 1925–1928.

4 Delporte 1983, 75–77.

In order to get a reasoned scientific evaluation of the affair (which increased day after day and soon became impossible to control), an International Commission was set up in 1927.[5] This body involved eminent experts from the field of archaeology such as Salomon Reinach, Pere Bosch-Gimpera and Denis Peyrony. These authorities on prehistory, one of whom was Dorothy Garrod, the first woman to become a professor at the University of Cambridge and a scholar with extensive experience of working in difficult fields, expressed great reservations about the authenticity of the site.[6] Indeed, small pits dug intentionally from the surface were observed in which objects may have been placed deliberately. Together with other eminent scientists with whom the Commission had connections, the scientific board of the Commission quickly split into two factions. Among the believers in the site's authenticity were Salomon Reinach, Auguste Audollent (a local professor) and Arnold Van Gennep (who was more cautious in his interpretation), all of whom were involved in the study of historical periods. The opponents included the prehistorians Comte Bégouen, Denis Peyrony, Abbé Breuil, Louis Capitan, André Vayson de Pradennes[7] and René Dussaud, the renowned specialist in Oriental writing. The variety of expert opinions and evidence, however, prevented them from coming to any definitive conclusions as a result of their studies.

Despite the precarious position and viewpoint held by scientists at the time, hundreds of papers in French, international newspapers and scientific reviews were published, including books written both by renowned scientists and amateurs in the 1920s and later (indeed, well into the 1960s). It is practically impossible to know how many times Glozel was quoted in the literature that was published. The place became an archaeological mystery for a large part of the population, depicting an unknown people who may have invented writing earlier than anywhere else in the world. Moreover, as a real archaeological fact, Glozel might have gone against the official reconstruction of France's history. Some people thought that this 'evidence' was kept secret.

Later on, in 1983, a second commission manned by eminent French archaeologists, including Jean-Pierre Daugas, Jean-Paul Demoule, Jean Guilaine and Jean-Claude Poursat, stated their viewpoint as to the absence of an archaeological site in Glozel in the periphery of Le Champ des Morts.[8] They drew attention to the presence of numerous glass residues belonging to a craftsman's

5 Morlet 1928.

6 See the overview in Garrod 1968.

7 Vayson de Pradenne 1930.

8 Daugas et al. 1995.

workshop located there in modern times. The field has been badly disturbed by the diggings of the 1920s more or less everywhere. Another argument the Commission developed relates to the acidity of the soil in the area, which would probably have destroyed any object made of bone or clay after several decades. If this is true, it might invalidate claims about the discovery of intact artefacts. Many, if not all, of the artefacts may have been forgeries made by unknown individuals. Contrary to this viewpoint, there is evidence that some of the finds – particularly the oval objects – may be authentic and have been baked in a glass-maker's oven. If so, these artefacts could belong to the Iron Age, the Middle Ages or Early Modern Times. Physical and chemical analyses were conducted under the auspices of the French Ministry of Culture using modern techniques (spectrography, thermoluminescence or carbon-14 dating) involving numerous laboratories around the world that specialise in glass, pottery or bone object identification.[9] Various dates appeared as a result: 'mediaeval', the thirteenth century CE, the Iron Age, Gallo-Roman times and even the twentieth century! This was enough to maintain suspicion that could distort the official scientific evaluations. It is also possible that the samples were contaminated significantly or that real archaeological materials were used to make forgeries. The *Carte archéologique de la Gaule* for the Département de l'Allier left some ambiguity as to the authenticity and nature of the site in 1989.[10]

2 The written objects

A number of unusual objects were among the artefacts the Glozel excavation brought to light. It is hard to say exactly how many inscribed objects were found there, though, as reports mention about 34 tablets, but some other written objects also existed. The most stunning pieces of all were clay tablets, square and rectangular in shape, covered by signs in an unknown, undeciphered script (see Figs. 2a and a', and 2b). Most of the tablets are intact and are curiously bigger than tablets usually are (they can easily be held in one hand): around 20 cm high, and even 33 cm in some cases. The signs have mostly been written in lines and are incised. All in all, 133 signs were recorded.

The tablets are not the only objects covered in writing; other artefacts – the precise number is unknown – bear inscriptions, too, such as anthropomorphic

9 McKerrell et al. 1974.

10 Corrocher et al. 1989, 104 (under no. 203 for Ferrières-sur-Sichon).

vases (Fig. 2c), stone bracelets (Fig. 2d), pebbles and even a small, engraved stone slab with the appearance of a reindeer (Figs. 2e and e').

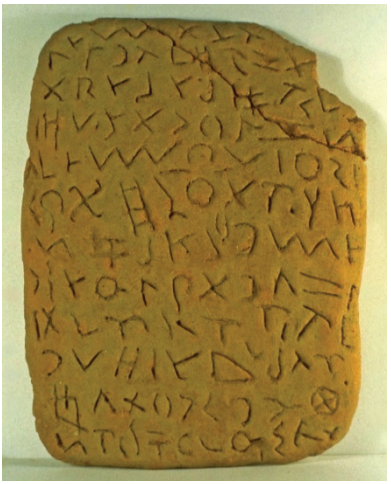



Fig. 2a and 2a'

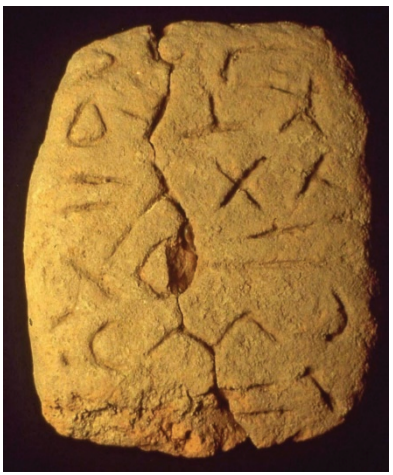



Fig. 2b and 2c



Fig. 2d





Fig. 2e and 2e'

Fig. 2: A selection of written objects from Glozel: **a**: tablet from Glozel - **a'**: the same tablet redrawn from Reinach 1928a, pl. II-2 - **b**: small tablet - **c**: anthropomorphic vase - **d**: stone rings or bracelets - **e**: pebble with a 'talking reindeer' - **e'**: the same pebble redrawn from the photograph. Photographs by Patrick Ferryn <http://www.kadath.be/media/glozel.html>, under free licence; © Photo Kadath – Patrick Ferryn.

Items of this type bring several problems to light:

- the larger-sized tablets are quite unusual;
- the material and/or objects that bear such inscriptions are clay or stone (written pots are quite unusual finds in archaeology, especially

anthropomorphic vessels. Stone plaques engraved with Palaeolithic iconography are unknown, so the one from Glozel is unique); and
– the date of the material: the stone plaque looks Palaeolithic, the stone bracelets or rings could be Neolithic, and the vessels could date to the Neolithic or Bronze Age. Summarising, these artefacts seem to be very mixed and therefore cannot be readily assigned to a single period with absolute certainty.

Some tablets were covered by diluted clay or mud, producing a kind of patina with marks that appear to have been made by a brush. In Émile Fradin's house, Court officials found a pot with the same mud on it, but in another colour, and confiscated it, but Fradin claimed that his younger brother only used it to play with the mud. Most of the tablets were made with well-levigated clay, but in some of the analysed samples it was possible to determine the presence of some unusual fresh elements inside the paste, such as apple seeds or small leaves, and even fibres of cotton or wool. In one famous example, vegetal roots described as calcified were embedded in the clay, suggesting that the tablets had not been fired. Surprisingly, the roots had not been altered by several thousand years of exposure to the acidic soil. They did not break the tablets either. Additionally, the hole through which a root went in a tablet was filled with another form of clay, suggesting that it had been introduced in it deliberately.[11] Samples of the tablets were cut into pieces and put in water for testing (twice, in fact: in the 1920s and 1980s).[12] Some of the tablets dissolved quickly, showing that they were not all compacted the same way. Leaving the question of the writing on them aside for the time being, it seems clear that these tablets are, in fact, recent forgeries.

Other issues appear when we turn to the question of the writing on the tablets. All the specialists found that the Glozel signs were reminiscent of the Phoenician alphabet.[13] However, no trace of Phoenician writing is attested in France for the supposed dating of the material between 700 BCE and 100 CE (according to thermoluminescence dating on written materials). During this span of time, the Greek alphabet is attested in the south of France (due to the presence of Greek colonies there), followed by the Latin alphabet during the Roman period. The Etruscan alphabet existed, too, in the eastern part of France. It has

11 Adam 1975, 79–83.
12 Adam 1975, 75–77 and Fig. 4.
13 See Fig. 3 and Adam 1983.

been impossible to determine the direction of the writing on the tablets: from right to left or vice versa, or even bi-directional.[14]

Several interpretations emerged from these observations:

- The Glozel writing is a cursive script from the Gallo-Roman period mixed with magic signs such as those that can be seen on the lead *Defixionum tabellae*. This hypothesis was presented by Camille Jullian and August Audollent.[15] The latter was a specialist in this type of magical writing and had a collection of lead tablets of his own from Carthage, where he had worked. This impressive collection is now stored at the Musée Bargoin in Clermont-Ferrand.
- The Glozel writing was invented by a local people at the end of prehistoric times or the beginning of the Neolithic period, well before writing appeared anywhere else in the world. This proposal was put forward by Émile Fradin and Dr Morlet,[16] who were followed by Émile Espérandieu.
- Some variations of this hypothesis suggest that the writing could have been invented by an unknown people who arrived at Glozel at that time (from where?) and disappeared shortly after.
- The Glozel writing is certainly a mystery. It is impossible for us to say whether the signs are alphabetical, syllabic, ideographic or even numerical, hence the writing has still not been deciphered yet. The conjecture about its origins was so uncomfortable to scientists that the truth was kept hidden from local citizens; Glozel's archaeological history was turned into a para-scientific affair instead in the 1960s.[17]
- More recently, a computer analysis brought to light that there is no more than one duplication of six signs in the material.[18] This suggests that the so-called 'Glozelian language' does not actually exist at all and that the way the written signs have been organised is simply random. The existence of an early form of writing in France at the end of the Palaeolithic period is highly unlikely in view of current archaeological and scientific analyses.

14 Crawford 1977.

15 Audollent 1927.

16 Morlet/Fradin 1925–1928; Morlet 1955.

17 Castigated by Adam 1975, 1983 and 1988.

18 Crawford 1977.



Fig. 3: The Glozelian letters, in comparison with the other known alphabets (cited in Adam, 1983, 69).

One can conclude that both the sloping configuration of the site, the acidity of the soil there, the existence of complete artefacts rather than broken shards, and the direct parallels with archaeological pieces known at the time strongly suggest that the Glozel site is a sham and that most of the objects 'discovered' are fakes. Archaeological science and investigations have not been able to provide any information as to why this hoax was set up.

3 The historical context

As in other cases of archaeological forgery, the most interesting point about the Glozel site is the context of the affair: it involved local people and probably other unidentified persons at a higher level as well.

For a modest peasant in the 1920s, Glozel quickly became a highly lucrative business. The village is close to Vichy, a place where wealthy people, including officials and colonial administrators, used to go regularly for health reasons. Trips to the theatre, the racecourse for horse-racing and the casino filled their free time, but an archaeological affair would probably have been perceived as much more exciting. A regular bus route was set up quickly for tourists, curious onlookers and scholars who wanted to make the journey to the site, as Vichy would soon host the Congress of Prehistory.[19] A museum was opened in 1926 at the Fradins' farm and exhibited more than 2,500 items. Thanks to the income generated from it, Émile Fradin soon owned his own car and he became a local celebrity portrayed on postcards sold by local booksellers. He even wrote books about the finds, the site and his own life.[20] The perfect culprit, he was suspected of having made fake artefacts. He was accused of forgery by the Court of Justice, but eventually acquitted as no evidence of his 'workshop' was ever found. Fradin died in 2010 at the age of 103 without having addressed the circumstances of the discoveries; he only wrote books and papers about his life and the objects that had been unearthed at the site. He cannot be suspected of being a forger any longer. His only shortcoming at the end of the day (if it is one at all) is to have taken advantage of the situation and made money out of it. But was that really a crime for a family living in very modest circumstances? Since he was such a renowned doctor, Morlet was never taken to court or even suspected of being involved. He was probably honest or simply naive, or possibly both, as he

19 *Glozel* 1983, 53.

20 Morlet/Fradin 1925–1928; Fradin 1979.

generally spoke in defence of Fradin. Nobody else was suspected. The truth of the matter is probably buried deeply in some unpublished archives or hidden from us in another way. The other stakeholders have all been forgotten in the meantime. The answer to the affair possibly lies elsewhere. If we argue that Glozel was not simply a hoax, then we have to go back and delve more deeply into our knowledge of ancient writing in the 1920s.

In 1923, the archaeological breaking news was the discovery of the sarcophagus of King Ahiram in Byblos by the French archaeologist Pierre Montet.[21] The antiquity of the find was confirmed by the discovery of several inscribed Egyptian vases inside, which were dated to the reign of Ramses II (1303–1213 BCE). The sarcophagus itself was inscribed in the Phoenician alphabet. In 1924, this discovery allowed René Dussaud to make an assumption just before the discovery of Glozel that Semitic people had invented the alphabet.[22] This conclusion was first announced at the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* in Paris on 14 March 1924. The discovery was published widely in newspapers and scientific journals alike. During the same period, books were written for a more general audience including copies of other antique inscriptions known in the 1920s, meaning that any forger who wanted to 'invent' a new form of writing only had to select, copy and mix letters from ancient texts and re-format them. The main issue here is not as much identifying the forger as reaching an understanding as to why such a forgery developed in the first place.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, two main theories existed in archaeology and history: Diffusionism and Evolutionism. As archaeology focused mainly on great civilisations (Greek, Egyptian, Near Eastern), the temptation to see the influence of the East on any aspect of a particular civilisation was paroxysmal: *ex Oriente lux*... Dating methods were imperfect and based on cross-dating. Some absolute chronological links may well have existed between Egypt and Greece, for instance, but these links disappear for the rest of Europe as no written documents exist there. Parallels were then researched by examining the shape of the objects, their style or their decoration.[23]

In this methodology, the existence of a European writing form dating back to the Neolithic period was a contradiction to known wisdom and official conclusions about the origin of the alphabet. From this perspective, the only way forward was to consider Glozel as a testimony of the origin of writing in France from an evolutionary point of view. The alphabet has always been considered

21 See Montet 1923 and 1928 for the final report.

22 Dussaud 1924, 155 and 1927.

23 Renfrew 1983, 118–120, Fig. 21.

the epitome of ancient writing, at the origins of our own system of writing. Perhaps an unknown people had developed their own civilisation in Glozel, alone, well before the great civilisations of Antiquity – this fact would have incarnated the triumph of Europe against the East. This point of view should be considered in its proper context.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it was still possible to imagine civilisation emerging with a linear development and cumulative steps. The invention of writing, and especially that of the alphabet, would have been one of these steps, but probably totally disconnected from the social or economic needs that we consider now. The entire affair goes far beyond the social promotion of a modest peasant family, and far beyond the archaeology of the Bourbonnais. The Glozel affair helped to shed some light on a poor part of the country far from the richer regions and towns, and forgotten by the Republic in the difficult economic context of the 1920s. It is probably best interpreted within the historical context of the period, viz. in view of Europe's position in the world, France's position within Europe, the need for identity, the rise of anti-Semitic ideas, and other forces which may have had an influence.[24]

It is still possible to visit Glozel Museum,[25] which is one of the oldest in the Bourbonnais, over at Émile Fradin's farm. It is open every day and is often full of curious visitors who want to see the entire collection of artefacts under the auspices of the descendants of Émile Fradin. Somehow, Glozel is still alive.[26] The panels by the roadside indicate the site by showing a drawing of an inscribed anthropomorphic pot (for those who are aware of the controversy, because the panel lacks any explicit reference to it).[27] An image reminiscent of the Glozel tablets associated with a mammoth is painted on the fresco which decorates the main hall of the Université Clermont-Auvergne (Fig. 4).

Despite these conundrums, scientific quarrels and issues of questionable historical accuracy and authenticity regarding the Glozel affair, the Auvergne is one of the most exciting regions in France for an archaeologist to explore: important sites and rich collections of artefacts still need to be extensively studied in themselves. The time for forgeries is over.

24 Delporte 1983.

25 <http://www.museedeglozel.com/> (last accessed on 8/4/2019).

26 Gerard 2013.

27 <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panneau_de_signalisation_d%27int%C3%A9r%C3%AAt_culturel_et_touristique_en_France#/media/File:Glozel-panneau-routier-2008.jpg> (last accessed on 8/4/2019).



Fig. 4: Detail of a wall-painting in the main hall of the UFR Lettres, Culture et Sciences Humaines of the University Clermont Auvergne (photograph by the author).

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Uta Lauer

Venerable Copies: The Afterlife of a Fragment of a Letter by Wang Xizhi (303–361)

Abstract: This article explains how and why a seventh-century tracing copy of the lost original fragment of a letter by the fourth-century calligrapher Wang Xizhi was not regarded as *fake* but on the contrary was considered a top-class piece of calligraphy.

> 東坡所謂君家兩行十三字氣壓鄴侯三萬簽者此帖是耶[1]
> Is this really this letter about which Dongpo said: 'Two lines with thirteen characters from your Highness / Their energy surpasses the thirty thousand scrolls of the Marquis of Ye'?

The calligrapher, painter and art connoisseur Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555–1636) once wrote these words in a colophon appended to a two-line fragment of a letter attributed to China's most famous calligrapher, Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361). The quote of Su Shi 蘇軾 (Dongpo 東坡, 1037–1101), famous statesman and poet, has traditionally been understood to refer to this fragment, but since there is no context, Dong voices his doubts, adding them to the transmission history of the 'copy', at the same time highlighting the value of calligraphy against mere collections of manuscripts, such as the library of Li Bi 李泌 (722–789).

This piece of calligraphy is one of twenty-one Tang-dynasty (618–907) tracing copies of works attributed to Wang Xizhi worldwide. It is the only such tracing copy in the United States and now belongs to the Princeton University Art Museum. Seven other copies are kept at the National Palace Museum in Taipei, seven at various museums in China, five in Japanese collections and one has simply disappeared. The original letter that Wang Xizhi wrote has not survived; the

1 Colophon by Dong Qichang on Wang Xizhi, *Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest* (*Xingrang tie* 行穰帖), Tang tracing copy, handscroll, ink on paper, letter alone 24.4 × 8.9 cm, entire scroll 30 × 372 cm, Princeton University Art Museum. More detailed discussions on this piece of Yuang 2008.

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closest things we have to it now – in a literal and a figurative sense – are tracing copies from the Tang dynasty.

The full Chinese term for 'tracing copies' is *shuanggou kuotian* 雙鉤廓填 ('double outline and fill-in copy'). How were such tracing copies made?

> [...] Using this technique, the artist places a sheet of paper over the model and copies it by tracing [...]. With a fine brush, the shape of each original stroke is painstakingly outlined, then filled in [...] the copyist must see through the paper [...] when employed expertly, this method produces the most accurate duplication of all the ancient means of reproduction.[2]

Why are these manuscripts held in such high esteem, although they are only copies and not originals? Examining another fragment of a letter – *Sending Regards to a Friend* (*Yuanhuan tie* 遠宦帖)[3] (Fig. 1) – may shed some light on this question. It consists of six columns of writing containing a total of fifty-three characters and is written in fully cursive script (*caoshu* 草書). This type of script lends itself very well to artistic and personal expression since an almost unlimited range of forms are possible. *Sending Regards to a Friend* is mounted as a handscroll and is now part of the collection kept at the National Palace Museum in Taipei, which houses a large part of the former imperial art collection. The manuscript is not signed, it is only a fragment and not the original either, but a tracing copy. Despite these apparent shortcomings, it is still treated as if it were the original itself.



Fig. 1: *Sending Regards to a Friend* (*Yuanhuan tie* 遠宦帖), Tang tracing copy, handscroll, ink on paper, 26.1 × 170 cm; © National Palace Museum, Taipei.

2 Fu 1977, 3.

3 Tang tracing copy, handscroll, ink on paper, 26.1 × 170 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei. Further studies on this letter: Xu 1987, 29; Zhang 1996, 12–13; Chuanxin et al. 2008, 35–41.

How did this manuscript acquire its almost sacrosanct status? First of all, this tracing copy was in direct physical contact with the original when it was made, as the sheet of paper was placed over the original manuscript. Second, the scroll was imbued with authority, which can be seen in the forty-one seals stamped on it and in an inscription, added by influential people. Third, there was an active involvement with the copy of the letter fragment in the form of texts written about it, naming the author as Wang Xizhi after analysing the letter's contents, mounting the original fragment together with other established writings by Wang Xizhi to produce a single handscroll, reproducing this large scroll on stone and taking rubbings of it, and recreating the letter based on such a rubbing in a freehand manner (*lin* 臨).[4] These activities will be outlined in what follows.

1 Markers of authority on the scroll itself

Colophons and other forms of inscriptions on a piece of calligraphy were crucial elements for securing its place and status within the calligraphic tradition. Equally important were seal impressions as markers of ownership, approval and appreciation.[5]

The earliest visible trace of an authoritative voice is the title inscription by Huizong 徽宗, the art-loving Song emperor (r. 1100–1126). In his distinct slender-gold style of calligraphy (*shoujin shu* 瘦金書), the emperor wrote the following words on the mounting silk in front of the fragment (Fig. 2):

晉　王羲之 遠宦帖
Jin, Wang Xizhi, letter *Sending Regards to a Friend*.

By way of this inscription, the emperor dated the piece to the first Jin dynasty (265–420), provided the hitherto anonymous fragment with an author's name (Wang Xizhi's) and gave the manuscript a title: *Sending Regards to a Friend*. In giving a name to the scroll, Emperor Huizong followed the established tradition of choosing two characters from the first column.

4 *lin* 臨, '[...] The artist confronts the original and transfers its forms by free-hand imitation. The method trains both eye and hand, and the copyist learns to discriminate between the essential qualities of the model, both good and bad [...]' (Fu 1977, 3).

5 For the importance of seals see: Ledderose 1986; Lauer 1996.

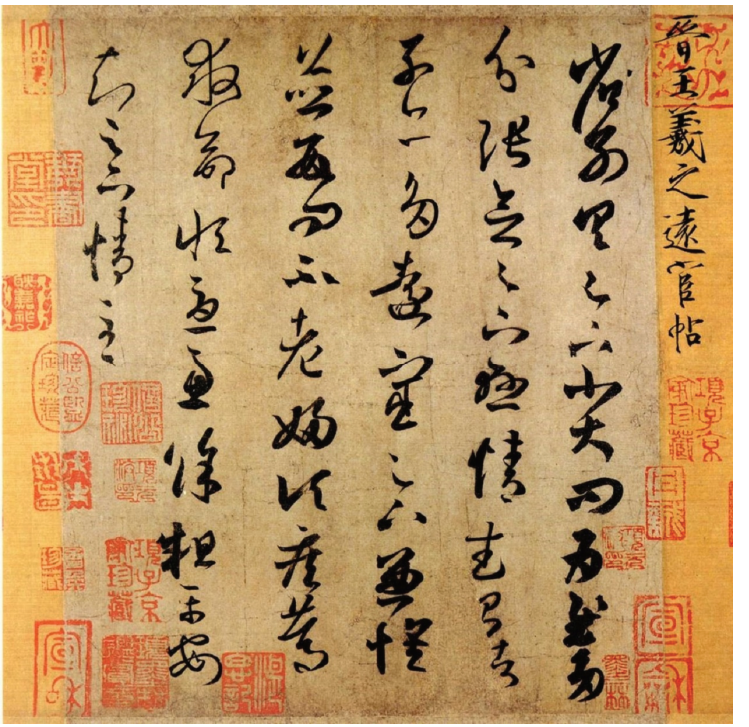

Fig. 2: *Sending Regards to a Friend* (*Yuanhuan tie* 遠宦帖), Tang tracing copy, handscroll, ink on paper, 26.1 × 170 cm; © National Palace Museum, Taipei (detail).

Emperor Huizong affixed two seals to the scroll. The first is his double dragon seal placed at the beginning of his inscription. The second is the seal he used during the Xuanhe era (1119–1125), imprinted on the joint between the silk of the title slip and the paper of the actual piece of calligraphy.

After the Jurchen had defeated the Northern Song and established their Jin dynasty (1115–1234) in Northern China, the scroll became part of the Jin imperial collection. Two rather large seals were imprinted on the scroll, one on the joint between the silk mounting following the manuscript and the paper slip pasted thereafter and another on the sheet of paper after that narrow slip of paper.

When the Mongols invaded China and established the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), they not only took over the country, but also the imperial art collection, including the letter fragment of *Sending Regards to a Friend*. One large seal was placed directly above the first of the two Jin dynasty seals. There was no more room above this seal, so no later seal would be able to challenge the prominent seal of the Yuan, reading *Duanben* 端本. *Duanben* refers to Duanben Hall, which

was where the crown prince studied. This is a clear indication that the crown prince used this scroll as a model to practise his calligraphy, placing himself in the calligraphic tradition of Wang Xizhi and politically at the top of the class of Han scholar-officials.

During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the scroll left the palace and was offered for sale on the open market, where it was purchased by the wealthy and highly discerning art collector Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴 (1525–1590) from Jiaxing in the South. One of the ten seals that are his does not contain Xiang's name, but reads 神品 (*shenpin*, or 'divine work'; this seal was reserved for the very best works of art). Xiang placed this seal right next to Emperor Huizong's 'double dragon' seal at the beginning of the scroll, the most prestigious place available on it at that time. Both the seal's inscription and its placing at the most prominent position available underline Xiang's veneration of this letter fragment and its accumulated history. Xiang Yuanbian was quite generous about access to his collection of calligraphies and paintings. The numerous visitors and friends who were allowed to view the works of art in his collection and copy them included Dong Qichang, the most eminent calligrapher of the time. He left no traces of his own on *Sending Regards to a Friend*, but it is highly probable that he had a good look at the manuscript at Xiang Yuanbian's house.[6] In the Ming dynasty, this manuscript was widely copied to practise the Wang Xizhi style of calligraphy.

In the early Qing dynasty (1644–1911), the scroll was acquired by the court attendant, calligrapher and Qin player Geng Zhaozhong 耿昭忠 (1640–1686). He was related to the Manchu imperial family by marriage. Geng left five seals on the fragment, two of which were imprinted on the silk title slip near Emperor Huizong's inscription, one on the joint after the letter and the following silk mounting and two more on the silk strip after the calligraphy.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, An Qi 安岐 (1683–1742), a private art collector with the largest collection of high-quality paintings and calligraphies at that time, was able to buy the manuscript. He put two of his own seals on the mounting silk and recorded the item in the catalogue for his art collection, listing it as a Tang tracing copy.[7]

6 There is no absolute proof that Dong Qichang had seen this manuscript at Xiang Yuanbian's residence but it is highly likely since Dong was a frequent guest there and at one point boasted that: '[…] I had the opportunity to see all the original works from the Jin and Tang periods in the collection of the University Scholar Xiang Zijing [Xiang Yuanbian][…].' as recorded in Dong Qichang 1630, juan 6, 5.

7 Qi 1742, preface.

Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1735–1796) was an ardent admirer of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy. He took great pride in owning three pieces of calligraphy produced by members of the Wang family. These three letters – Wang Xizhi's *Timely Clearing After Snowfall* (*Kuai xue shi qing tie* 快雪時晴帖)[8], Wang Xianzhi's 王獻之 (344-386) *Mid-Autumn Festival* (*Zhong qiu tie* 中秋帖)[9] and Wang Xun's 王珣 (350-401) *Letter to Boyuan* (*Boyuan tie* 伯遠帖)[10] – were stored in the Hall of Three Rarities (Sanxi tang 三希堂) next to the Emperor's living quarters. Qianlong had thirteen seals carved, all relating to this hall. Furthermore, in 1747, Qianlong ordered 134 select pieces of calligraphy from the Imperial Collection to be carved into stone and had rubbings made on the carvings: the *Model Calligraphies from the Hall of Three Rarities* (*Sanxi tang fatie* 三希堂法帖). The stones were set into the wall of the specially constructed *Pavilion of Reviewing the Past* (Yuegu lou 閱古樓) in the Beihai Gardens nearby.

Qianlong was always eager to include the best examples of calligraphy in his art collection. In fact, he eventually confiscated An Qi's whole collection. Thus, *Sending Regards to a Friend* re-entered the palace. Interestingly, Emperor Qianlong did not leave a seal or inscription on this letter fragment and hence did not record it in the catalogue for his own art collection. One can only speculate about the reasons for this omission. Perhaps it was because this manuscript was known to be a Tang tracing copy and not an original by Wang Xizhi. If Qianlong believed his *Three Rarities* to be originals, he may not have felt the need to study or even handle a Tang tracing copy of a calligraphic work that Wang Xizhi had produced.

2 Gaining further authority through active involvement with the letter

The earliest mention of *Sending Regards to a Friend* in a text is in Zhang Yanyuan's 張彥遠 *Fashu yaolu* 法書要錄 (*Essential Records on Calligraphy*) from the ninth century. Some crucial events in the life of the manuscript took place during Emperor Taizong's 唐太宗 reign (r. 626–649). Taizong selected this

8 Wang Xizhi, *Timely Clearing After Snowfall* (*Kuai xue shi qing tie* 快雪時晴帖), album leaf, ink on paper, 23 × 14.8 cm, National Palace Museum Taipei.

9 Wang Xianzhi, *Mid-Autumn Festival* (*Zhong qiu tie* 中秋帖), handscroll, ink on paper, 27 × 11.9 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.

10 Wang Xun, *Letter to Boyuan* (*Boyuan tie* 伯遠帖), handscroll, ink on paper, 25.1 × 17.2 cm, Palace Museum, Beijing.

anonymous letter fragment to be mounted together with twenty-seven other letters by Wang Xizhi, forming a single handscroll. This was called the *Shiqi scroll* 十七帖 (*On the Seventeenth Day*) after the first two characters of the opening letter. It bore the Zhenguan 貞觀 seal of Taizong's reign. Furthermore, the Emperor ordered his court calligrapher Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596–659) to make copies with the double outline and fill-in method. Finally, all twenty-eight letters were carved into stone so rubbings could be made. Chu Suiliang wrote these words at the end of the carved version (Fig. 3):

> 付直弘文館，臣解無畏勒，充館本，臣褚遂良校無失，僧權。
> Tracing copied by Xie Wuwei at the Institute for the Advancement of Literature, proof-read by Chu Suiliang (no mistakes found).

Above this there was the character *chi* 敕 ('by imperial order'), which indicated the Emperor's approval. So, by the seventh century, the original letter of *Sending Regards to a Friend* still existed. A tracing copy was made and the letter was carved into stone, from which rubbings were made.



Fig. 3: Song rubbing of the *Shiqi tie* scroll, Shanghai Library (detail); © Uta Lauer.

By the following dynasty Song, there was still hope that Emperor Taizong's *Shiqi scroll* could be recovered. The official and calligrapher Mi Fu 米芾 (1051–1107) claimed that he had seen five different versions of this scroll, none of which was the original. Mi Fu was an outstanding copyist. Occasionally, he would borrow works of calligraphy from the imperial collection to study and copy them. In some cases, he kept the original and returned his copy without this being noticed. A case in point is Wang Xianzhi's *Mid-Autumn*, which was later treasured by Emperor Qianlong as one of the *Three Rarities* mentioned above; today it is generally agreed that this is, in fact, 'just' an excellent copy that Mi Fu made.

The letter fragment had been published in 992 in the imperially sponsored calligraphy compendium *Chunhua ge tie* 淳化閣帖 (*Model Letters in the Imperial Archives in the Chunhua Era* [990-994]). The model letters were carved into stone and rubbings were made of them. Nowadays, Song-dynasty rubbings of the *Shiqi scroll* are extremely rare.

A hundred years after the publication of the *Chunhua ge tie*, the epigrapher and calligrapher Huang Bosi 黃伯思 (1079–1118) studied the model letters thoroughly, both in terms of their style and their contents, checking the subject matter against historical facts. He concluded that nearly half of the model letters were actually fakes. The *Shiqi scroll* withstood his rigorous examination, leading him to praise it as the 'dragon of calligraphy' (*shu zhong long ye* 書中龍也). Huang Bosi's finds came to the attention of Emperor Huizong, who subsequently ordered a corrected version to be engraved: the *Daguan tie* 大觀帖 ('Model Letters of the Daguan Era' [1107-1110]). The stones with the engraved model letters were stored in a specially built hall in the palace grounds known as the *Taiqing lou* 太清樓. The stones no longer exist, but rubbings of the *Daguan tie* do. In 1141, a privately sponsored version by Zhang Hu 張舒 (early twelfth century) was re-engraved on stone. Zhang Hu did not have access to the imperial collection; his model letters – the *Ding tie* 鼎帖 – relied on rubbings of the *Chunhua ge tie*. Ever since then, the study of the different versions of a piece of calligraphy – especially the works of Wang Xizhi and his son Wang Xianzhi – has been a highly specialised field of research and connoisseurship. In 2016, the National Palace Museum in Taipei devoted a whole exhibition to the different copies of the *Shiqi scroll* that existed through the ages.[11]

Rubbings also served as models for freehand copies. One such copy of the *Shiqi scroll* was produced by the foremost calligrapher of the Mongol period, Zhao

11 *Shu zhong long ye – lidai 'Shiqi tie' fashu mingpin zhan* 書中龍也—歷代〈十七帖〉法書名品展 ('Select Examples of the "Shiqi Modelbook" through the Ages').

Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322) (see Fig. 4).[12] We do not know exactly which model Zhao Mengfu based his copy on, but it later became part of a collection kept by Xiang Yuanbian, the same man who came to own the Tang tracing copy of *Sending Regards to a Friend*.

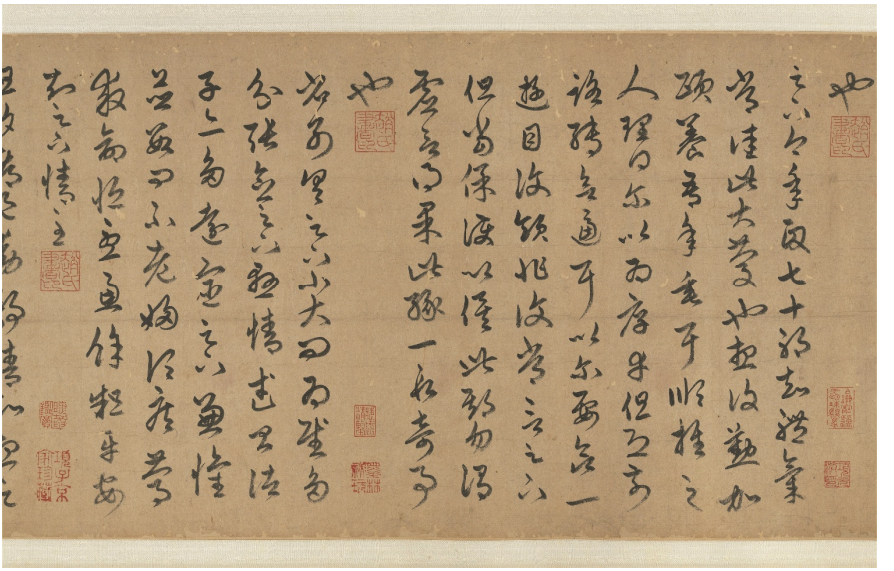

Fig. 4: Zhao Mengfu, *Shiqi tie* scroll, freehand copy, handscroll, ink on paper, 30.2 × 392.4 cm; © National Palace Museum, Taipei (detail).

In the Qing dynasty, the official and epigrapher Wang Shu 王澍 (1668–1739) also made a freehand copy of the entire *Shiqi scroll*,[13] including Emperor Taizong's character *chi* 敕 ('by imperial order') and Chu Suiliang's proof-reading notes (Fig. 5). At the end of his copy, Wang Shu remarked:

> 此宋搨全本，為錫山秦氏所藏，不唯與世俗流傳本天地懸隔，并與唐摹亦微不同。
> This complete Song rubbing was in the collection of Mr Qin in Xishan. Not only does it differ markedly from other versions in circulation, but it also varies slightly compared to the Tang copy.

12 Handscroll, ink on paper, 30.2 × 392.4 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei.
13 Album, ink on paper, 26.6 × 12.4 cm, National Palace Museum, Taipei.

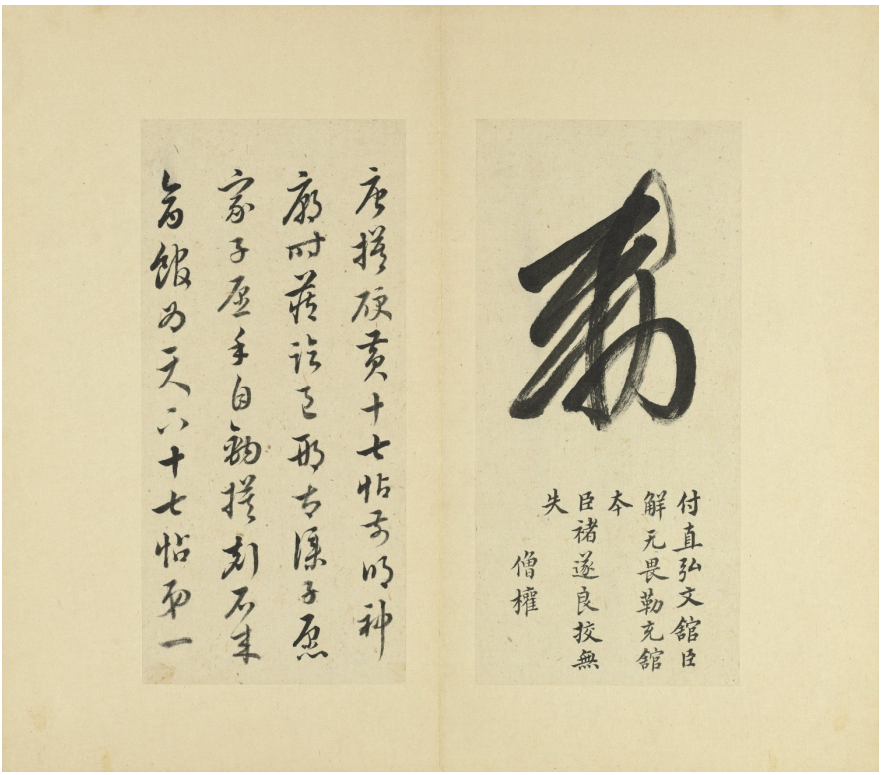

Fig. 5: Wang Shu, *Shiqi tie* scroll, freehand copy, album, ink on paper, 26.6 × 12.4 cm; © National Palace Museum, Taipei.

This comment neatly sums up the situation in the 1700s. Wang Shu had seen a Tang tracing copy and compared it to rubbings of the scroll then in circulation. At Mr Qin's house, he chanced to see a rare but complete Song rubbing of the *Shiqi* scroll, which he chose as a model for his own freehand copy. What Wang Shu and other calligraphers aspired to achieve was to be able to write as well as Wang Xizhi himself. To this end, he compared the different versions and copied them. The act of copying was crucial to understanding the movement of the calligrapher's brush, his writing speed and how much or how little pressure had to be applied to achieve a natural effect so the finished piece of calligraphy looked as if it were alive.

Sadly, not a single character of the original work written by Wang Xizhi has survived, just different types of copies. The most venerated exemplars are those with a close physical proximity to the original, i.e. Tang-dynasty double outline

and fill-in copies (*Tang mo* 唐摹). The calligraphy that Wang Xizhi once produced has been kept alive for hundreds of years by these copies and scholars' active engagement with them and will hopefully continue to have an impact for many years to come.

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François Déroche

Fakes and Islamic Manuscripts

Abstract: Faking manuscripts in Arabic script has a long history. The prospective targets of these fakes are various groups that have remained fairly constant over the centuries: bibliophiles and collectors are very prominent among those who acquire dubious items, but fakes were also prepared for scholars or pious individuals. Various techniques have been used, sometimes doctoring an original manuscript, sometimes producing a new one imitating an older model. Even facsimiles which were produced in good faith may have been turned into fakes in some cases.

A true 'typology' of fakes is difficult to establish in the field of manuscripts in Arabic script. There have been many instances of clear forgery, the purpose of which may have been profit or mystification, but a multitude of cases abound that cannot be clearly labelled as fakes, involving other processes of text production, such as imitation, reconstitution and embellishment.

Let us start with the most obvious situations. The Blue Qur'an, as it is known, is a manuscript probably produced towards the year 800 and is one of the most magnificent early copies of the Qur'an we know of, even though only a few folios of it have been preserved. Many of them were sold on the market from the end of the nineteenth century onwards and they are now a very coveted item among collectors of Islamic art. One folio currently in a private collection was produced by a modern forger who knew that he would make some money from imitating a manuscript that has achieved such fame. However, the forger was apparently unaware that part of the text he selected for his forgery was actually on an original but unpublished folio of the genuine manuscript.[1]

At a more modest level, we know of folios in Persian or Arabic that are provided with imitations of miniature Persian or Moghul paintings by workshops catering for contemporary travellers, who buy them and take the items back with them when they return home from their journeys in the East, convinced they have

1 Tarek Rajab Museum, Kuwait, P30.

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laid hands on something old and valuable, only to be sold on the internet later.[2] Pages of this kind are often cut out of existing volumes that are dismembered by painters in Iran, India or elsewhere – artists who use traditional techniques in the best cases, but who are often happy with a rough imitation of the original work. The old paper provides the artist with an ancient material that lends some legitimacy to works inspired by the traditional repertoire, but there is no regard for the text and its meaning. This type of activity has turned out to be disastrous for a number of manuscripts pitilessly reduced to being sources of paper for such Persian or Indian miniatures. Whenever parts of the paint flake off or the paper is transparent enough so that one can see through, the underlying script becomes visible, revealing the forgery.

Whole manuscripts are rarely used in such cases, although examples of manuscripts embellished with unrelated paintings can also be found. One exemplar is Paris, BnF Supplément Persan 2086, a sixteenth-century copy of the *Masnavi*, the poems of Jalāl al-dīn Rūmī, the famous mystic (d. 1273), to which some paintings were added in the twentieth century.[3] A more exceptional case can be seen in an Ottoman copy of the Qur'ān, which was painted over in some places: technically, the forgery was obvious, as some parts of the text were missing, having been covered by the paintings, but what was even more surprising was the presence of representations of human beings in it, which is highly unusual in a Qur'ān.[4] However, both may be witnesses to an age when art dealers were more respectful of the book in itself, even when tampering with it. A famous case concerning a slightly different situation is a Seljuk copy of the Qur'an now kept at the Philadelphia University Museum: NEP 27 (dated 559/1164), which is supposed to be one of the few manuscripts from that period.[5] However, a closer look at it will reveal that many of the manuscript's illuminations are actually a patchwork made up of various pieces cut from other ornaments in order to complete or restore the original illuminations. Using the same method, it turns out that marginal decorations like vignettes and medallions are actually pieces cut from larger illuminations and transformed by crude drawings in ink. It is hard to say whether this 'restoration' was performed a long time ago or shortly before the manuscript was sold to an American collector.

2 See <http://www.1001inventions.com/worldspokearabic>, for instance: the last but one image shows a doctor healing a patient, the two figures obviously being painted over an underlying text.

3 See fol. 76b and 77a; information provided by Mr F. Richard.

4 Gottheil 1931.

5 Ettinghausen 1935; Ettinghausen (1964–1965), 1946, n. 6, 1948 and 1951.

This practice can avail itself of a certain tradition to some extent. Paintings were added to a copy of Jami's poems in Persian, which can be dated to the end of the fifteenth century. We know this was done in the Sultan's entourage in Istanbul around 1530.[6] A number of poems are actually covered by miniature paintings that illustrate the previous poem: on fol. 22b, for instance, the upper part of some of the letters that were covered by the painting is still visible.[7] This is a case of 'embellishment' that was at least partially respectful of the text in the manuscript. The artist's goal was not to deceive the reader, but to transform an ordinary copy of the work into a luxury one.

The latter case brings us into contact with an old and important Muslim tradition: that of bibliophily. The search for the oldest copies of scientific or literary texts or autographs is a constant preoccupation of book lovers in search of rare items for their own library. This probably explains the relatively frequent modification of the dates of copies simply by changing a number in the colophon. In a Qur'ān kept at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul (see Fig. 1, in fine), the first line of the colophon has been slightly retouched by a forger in order to introduce the name of a famous calligrapher, Ibn al-Bawwāb (d. 1022).[8] The first component of his name, 'Ali, is original, but the name of his father, Hilal, has been written over an erasure. The date was altered in the same way on the next line so it would coincide with those of the calligrapher's life.

Another process that was less complicated was adding a note assigning the copy to an artist or a known character (which often happens in the case of loose sheets for albums). It cannot be ruled out that the authors of similar notes acted in good faith in a number of cases. Finally (although we will return to this point later), the calligraphers knew how to reproduce writings. In the thirteenth century, Kamāl al-dīn Ibn al-'Adīm bought a sheet for forty dirhams bearing writing by Ibn al-Bawwāb: after practising, he made a copy of it that he then sold to a bookseller for sixty dirhams as an authentic work by the master.[9]

Bibliophiles were not the only targets of forgers, however: Muslim scholarly tradition paid a great deal of attention to the quality of written texts. In the Middle Ages, Muslim scholars were on the lookout for marginalia – ownership marks and statements indicating collation or transmission – that could indicate that a manuscript had once been in the hands of a famous scholar, as it was thought that

6 MS Paris, BnF Supplément Persan 552; see Richard 1997, no. 89.

7 See <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84229982/f54.image.r=supplement%20persan%20552> (accessed on 15 March 2020).

8 MS Istanbul, TIEM, 449.

9 Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arīb ilā ma'rifat al-adīb*, ed. Margoliouth 1907–1926, vol. 6, 41.

these gave the text a guarantee of its accurateness.[10] In the colophons, the copyists themselves did not hesitate to emphasise the quality of the original text they had transcribed if it was the author's copy, for instance. This did not escape the forgers' attention, of course, who saw it as an opportunity to make some money, consequently adorning manuscripts with false notes for the sole purpose of increasing their value. A copy of Galen's *Firaq al-ṭibb* kept in the BnF (Arabe 2859) bears an ownership mark by Avicenna himself (d. 1037) on its first page, to mention just one prominent example.[11] To give some credit to his falsification, the forger was probably also responsible for a minor change made to the colophon, making the manuscript seem considerably older than it really was.[12] Admittedly, it is impossible for us to establish who the 'beneficiary' of this forgery was now: he could have been a collector or a doctor, or both.

To remain in the genre of 'misappropriations' of original manuscripts, namely those without any particular lustre, ancient copies of the Qur'an also provided forgers with abundant material. Early on, the Muslim world lost its precise knowledge of the beginnings of Arabic writing. Now, the script used in north-west Arabia during Muhammad's lifetime or slightly later had nothing remarkable about it from an aesthetic point of view: a collective consciousness arose with a history of Arabic writing, the oldest stage of which was 'Kufic'; in fact, its varieties seem mostly attributable to the second half of the eighth century and especially to the ninth century, but in the eyes of Muslims, their appearance was no doubt better suited to the historical and religious importance of the rise of Islam. From a time that it is difficult to specify, perhaps in the twelfth century, forgers began to add colophons to some of the oblong Qur'ans copied in this style that attributed the copy to some of the most important figures of that period, particularly to the third 'Rightly Guided' caliph, 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (r. 644–656).[13] These forgeries are often distinguished by their rudimentary character and in some cases only rely on a word-of-mouth tradition.[14] Thus a ninth-century copy of the Qur'ān preserved in Istanbul ends with a colophon clumsily placed in the middle of a full-page illumination recycled from another later manuscript, in a vertical format. The forger had to turn it ninety degrees in order to include it in the oblong manuscript and write the colophon.[15] In this case, he was clearly more sensitive

10 See the recommendations in the specialised literature collected by Rosenthal 1947, 20–21 and 23, for instance.

11 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b11002054f/f5.item.r=arabe%202859>.

12 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b11002054f/f91.item.r=arabe 2859>.

13 al-Munajjid 1972, 50–60; Buresi 2008.

14 The Tashkent Qur'an, for instance; see Déroche 2013, 57–77.

15 MS Istanbul, TIEM, 457, fol. 442b.

to the caliph's reputation than to historical facts: the sources attribute the writing down of the Qur'an to 'Uthmān, but they do not credit him with a copy of the text. Most of the manuscripts belonging to this group of 'misappropriations' are ancient copies of the Qur'ān, but in recent years isolated folios have also been produced by forgers who crudely imitated the Kufic script for clients eager to own a sample with the name of a famous figure from the beginning of Islam.[16]

An exaggerated interest in very old copies could also lead forgers to cater to the needs of amateurs, sometimes producing whole manuscripts with great skill. The manuscripts produced for the market cover a wide range of texts and situations. A list of Persian manuscripts made between the sixteenth and twentieth century to satisfy the curiosity of amateurs and scholars has been created. Long controversies may arise and the authenticity contested by some will be fiercely defended by others. It should be added that the widespread habit in Islamic countries of providing manuscripts with a new binding when the old one is in a bad condition makes it difficult to distinguish the different dates of reshuffling that a volume goes through. In the Persian domain, the case of the *Andarz Name* (or *Qabus Name*) agitated the circles of specialists in the 1950s; a symposium was even organised to take stock of this illustrated manuscript, which concluded that it was a forgery. It was far from being the only case of this kind, however, even if its miniatures did give it a special place among them all. Up to four early copies of 'Umar Khayyām's *Ruba'iyyāt* surfaced in the 1950s as well, first eliciting the enthusiasm of such scholars as Arthur Arberry until it turned out that they were produced by a 'manuscript factory' in Tehran transcribing the text from a printed edition published in 1925. The manuscript BnF Arabe 6726 is a copy of a text by al-Aṣma'ī (d. 828?) whose colophon says it was transcribed by Ibn al-Sikkīt, a famous Arab philologist of the ninth century (d. 858?).[17] The text itself had aroused the distrust of specialists in Arabic literature, especially since the colophon was dated to a few months after the death of the copyist, as is commonly accepted. In addition, codicological and palaeographic studies shed light on a series of peculiarities that have very little to do with actual practice in the ninth century.[18] In spite of these arguments, though, some scholars still believed it was a genuine copy.[19]

16 I will not take into account the letters supposedly sent by Muhammad to various rulers here as they are not manuscripts but documents.

17 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10030057s/f54.image.r=arabe%206726>.

18 Déroche 1990.

19 For instance Zīdān 2004, 122.

The careful and very specific script in this copy invites us to compare it with other manuscripts apparently from the same early period that are noteworthy due to the quality of their writing, their unusual features, the age of the copy and the character of the text, which is dubious sometimes. This is the case for a manuscript with the *Adāb al-falāsifa* by Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (d. 873), the renowned translator of Greek medical texts.[20] It was copied in 863 in a very particular script that reappears on a manuscript of the *Dīwān al-Sajjād* in a private collection transcribed in 910 according to the colophon, but which also seems suspect.[21] Are they the work of the same forger or the same workshop? Both of them surfaced in Iran. In these two cases as well as five other manuscripts from the tenth century reported as forgeries, it should be noted that they are texts composed by authors who enjoyed great prestige. Judging by the quality of the writing, this aspect was probably important to the buyer.

The borderline between imitation and forgery was actually very thin since professional scribes and calligraphers were trained to imitate earlier scripts. In Ottoman times, the teaching of calligraphy gave a high status to an exercise called *taklid* (Arabic: *taqlīd*). To attain a certain level of mastery in using the reed pen or *qalam*, a student had to memorise a piece of calligraphy that had been placed in front of him and then reproduce it – by memory – to the point where one could not tell the difference between the original and the copy. This practice was not restricted to those who were still students, as confirmed calligraphers reported in their signature of a page that they engaged in the exercise of *taklid*. This explains the important role that copying played in calligraphic production, be it in manuscripts or in calligraphic compositions (*levha* in Turkish). This is something quite different to transcription, of course, since the result of the copy operation thus understood is ideally a duplication of the original.

This exercise, which has been scrupulously performed by generations of Ottoman calligraphers, is separated by the thickness of a hair, so to speak, from a reprehensible activity: forgery. A brief anecdote will demonstrate this. One of the disciples of Şeyh Hamdullah (d. 1520), the great Ottoman calligrapher of the sixteenth century, had succeeded in imitating his master's writing to the point of perfection, but was still waiting to be recognised as a calligrapher in his own right. He slipped one of his own works among the productions waiting for his master's signature. Şeyh Hamdullah signed it without realising the trick until the student revealed it to him. Understandably, he was severely reprimanded for

20 MS Tehran, University Central Library 2165 (see Dānesh-Pajūh 1961, 858–862 and pl.).
21 Déroche 1987–1989, 351.

doing this.[22] Calligraphers frequently found themselves working in such grey areas between *taklid* and producing fakes of real documents.

While the previous examples undoubtedly took place in the field of forgery, the particular situation of calligraphy is rather more complex. The exercise of the *taklid* turned artists into possible forgers, but it was also a way of obtaining public recognition for their talent. Let us go back to Ibn al-Bawwāb a moment, who was mentioned previously. He was once in charge of a library belonging to Bahā' al-dawla (r. 989–1012), a Buyid prince who owned a valuable copy of the Qur'ān copied a century earlier by another famous calligrapher, Ibn Muqla (d. 940). This manuscript was a multi-volume set of thirty *juz'* – a popular division of the Qur'ān into thirty sections each containing the same amount of text. One of the volumes had been lost, though. Ibn al-Bawwāb bet his master that he would succeed in redoing the missing *juz'* and that it would be impossible to distinguish it from the others. He set to work immediately. In the prince's library, he collected old papers from Samarkand or China, which resembled the original manuscript, and copied the text. Then he executed the illumination, taking care to give the gilding the appearance of being old. Finally, he took the binding from one of the original *juz'* of the series to cover the one he had just written and made a new one to replace the one he had taken, artificially aging the latter. Almost a year later, his master remembered the bet, asked the calligrapher if he had completed his work and was shown the now complete thirty-volume set. Despite examining it carefully, he was unable to identify the new volume. The forger was not rewarded for his skill, however, as the prince did not pay the stake; eventually, Ibn al-Bawwāb was 'paid' with scraps of Chinese paper from the library instead.[23] The story does not say if he used them for new fakes, though…

Similar anecdotes provide a stage for other calligraphers, too; again and again, imitating the hand of an illustrious master of the past provides the copyist with a means of being recognised as his equal. The 'false' piece of writing thus helps to reveal the truth.

Bibliophily and more generally the taste for collecting famous calligraphers' works developed from the tenth century onwards in highly diverse circles. We can leave the scholarly libraries aside here since their owners often copied the texts they needed themselves and valued the accuracy of the text more than the quality of the script in which it was written. As we have seen, however, this did not protect them from forgers. On the other hand, it was not uncommon for a wealthy person to privilege prestigious pieces signed by great calligraphers. One

22 Huart 1972, 126–127.

23 Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arīb ilā ma'rifat al-adīb*, ed. Margoliouth 1907–1926, vol. 5, 446–447.

of the most popular figures in the Muslim world is Yāqūt al-Muṣta'simī, who lived in Baghdad in the thirteenth century (d. 1298); manuscripts copied in his hand or imitating his style abound. Looking at the latter, it is difficult to distinguish outright fakes from copies made by later calligraphers who indicated in the colophon that they had reproduced a work originally produced by the master. The copies made in the manner of a master also draw our attention to the existence of facsimile production, perhaps intended for collectors keen to have a specimen of Yāqūt's artwork in their own library. The manuscript BnF Arabe 6082, a copy of the Qur'ān ending with an apocryphal colophon in the name of Yāqūt on fol. 381 b,[24] was probably produced in Ottoman Turkey during the fifteenth century and was no doubt intended to satisfy some rich patron from the outset. The script and illuminated double-page opening on fols 1b–2a were clearly not a thirteenth-century production.[25] This discrepancy was probably soon forgotten, though, making the manuscript another fake Yāqūt among many others.

The skill of the copyists, their knowledge of ancient texts and practices, and the absence of watermarks in Oriental paper sometimes make it hard for us to be sure about the authenticity of an item we are holding in our hands. In a general way, codicological examinations make it possible for us to see some of the truth. In the case of BnF Supplément Persan 1918,[26] the presence of a recent European watermark in the paper used for the first quire with an illumination stating that the manuscript was copied for Mehmet II's library in Istanbul is the only clue that enables a researcher to tell that this volume was skilfully transformed into a 'royal' copy in the nineteenth century. In many other cases, there is still some doubt remaining, however, particularly regarding calligraphy, but also in terms of the illuminations included in the manuscripts or copies, as great value was attached to imitating the old masters in Persian and Ottoman culture.

Oriental bibliophiles seem to have been great consumers of copies and facsimiles of manuscripts, which became potential fakes once the circumstances in which they were produced were forgotten. There is nothing extraordinary about this, seeing as our dictionaries highlight the ambiguous relationship between fakes and copies. In French, 'copy' is offered as a synonym for counterfeiting, and vice versa; the borderline between the two is tenuous. We have now seen how the passage from one register to another is not always easy to spot in the world of Muslim copyists and calligraphers. A fake readily takes the form of an ambiguous tribute to an illustrious predecessor, and identifying skilfully produced but

24 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10031320w/f400.image.r=arabe%206082>.

25 <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10031320w/f6.image.r=arabe%206082>.

26 Blochet 1928, 296.

forged Islamic manuscripts will remain an arduous task as long as the tools facilitating this identification remain as poor as they currently are.

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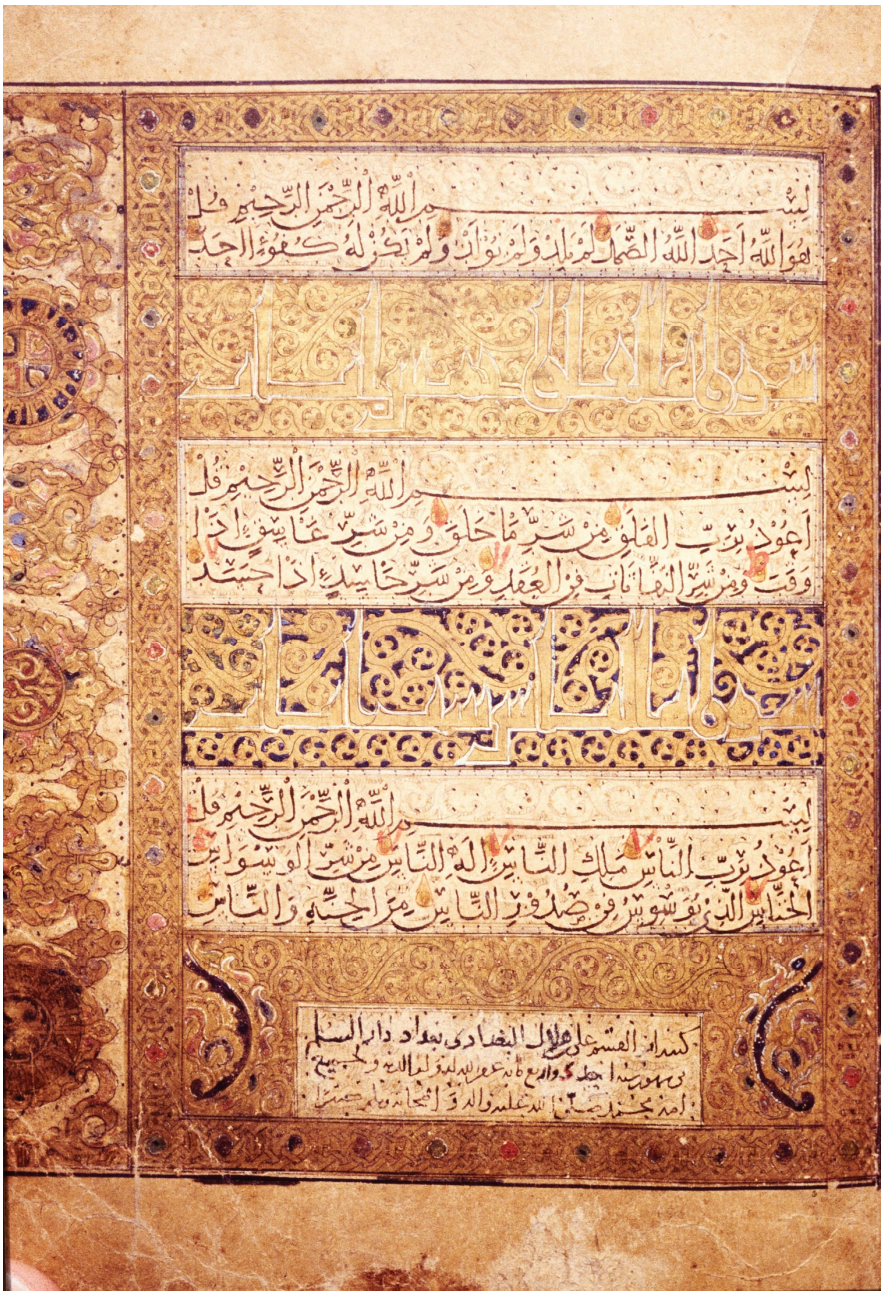

Fig. 1: MS Istanbul, Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, 449, *Qur'an*. Fol. 148 r° with the modified colophon; © Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts.

Part II: **Forgers and Their Motives**

Ekkehard Weber

Fake Ancient Roman Inscriptions and the Case of Wolfgang Lazius (1514–1565)

Abstract: Roman inscriptions have been forged ever since Antiquity. This article mentions some examples from Carnuntum near Vienna, where a considerable number of counterfeit inscriptions were produced on stone, most of them, as it seems, to earn money. In the period of humanism, learned people in Italy and other parts of Europe took a particular interest in inscriptions as important testimonials to the past. Generally, they did not collect original inscriptions on stone, though – a privilege left to emperors and noblemen – but rather news about them, the purpose being to show their peers how many important inscriptions they knew and/or to use them as documentary sources in their own scholarly books and manuscripts. Vienna, the residence of the Holy Roman Emperor, was an important centre of epigraphic research from the fifteenth century onwards. Wolfgang Lazius (1514–1565), an epigraphic scholar who worked in this city, inserted genuine Roman inscriptions in his numerous works, but mixed them up with fake inscriptions of his own as well.

1 Forgeries from Carnuntum

Thousands of Roman inscriptions were forged in the past and, as it seems, in the present as well. In this article, I shall present a few examples of such forgeries found in Carnuntum near Vienna in Austria, which was the capital of the province of Pannonia in Roman times.[1] As most of these fakes are 'altars', as we call them, it is necessary to explain the typical Roman custom of erecting monuments of this type for the reader to appreciate their significance. If a Roman man or a Roman woman ever felt they needed the help of one of the Roman gods to resolve an issue, they made a vow, promising the god or goddess a sacrifice. In order to

1 Or Pannonia superior when the province was divided at the beginning of the second century CE. See Scherrer 2008 for an overview of forgeries in Carnuntum, albeit a rather exaggerated one sometimes.

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https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110714333-006

be successful, the person was bound to fulfil their vow. They generally set up an 'altar' made of stone, as large as they could afford, which was dedicated to the god or the goddess in question. I suspect that canny Romans sometimes erected their altars ahead of time to oblige the gods to fulfil their part of the contract, according to the principle of *do ut des*, as it is called ('I give so that you may give').[2]

Roman altars have a particular form: they usually have a rectangular base, a vertical shaft and an upper part consisting of a cornice and top. The largest altars are over 1.5 metres high and the smallest ones just a few centimetres in size, with the vast majority lying somewhere in between. The inscriptions they bear also follow a certain pattern containing the name of a Roman god or goddess, the name of the dedicator, and a formula of dedication at the end. There are slight modifications in some cases, such as the name of the dedicator being inscribed first or even being missing, but as a rule this one pattern was generally used.

Roman names always have a definite form, even the names of indigenous people in the provinces. Roman citizens always had a *gentilicium*, which corresponds to a person's family name or second name in modern European society, and the *praenomen* or first name preceding it was mostly abbreviated. The *cognomen*, a third component, was originally an attribute of the upper classes, but from the first century BCE onwards, it became the actual proper name. People in the provinces without Roman citizenship had their individual name, and indicated their father's name in official documents and on their gravestones as well.[3] An example of a genuine altar is shown in Fig. 1:

> I(ovi) o(ptimo) m(aximo) / diis de/abusqu^e / L(ucius) Comi^n^ius /[5] Aph^ro^d^is^ius / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito).
> 'To Jove, the best and greatest, (and all) gods and goddesses, Lucius Cominius Aphrodisius fulfilled his vow eagerly as (the gods) deserved.'

This altar made of local calcareous sandstone is about 90 × 59 × 44 cm in size and was found in 1891 in the 'Tiergarten' near Petronell Castle in the area where the ancient city of Carnuntum used to be. The inscription on it has the same pattern as the common one described above: the name of a particular god or goddess – in this case, the supreme god of the Roman pantheon and all the other gods and

2 Rüpke 2006, 148–150.

3 The scholarly literature on Roman names is quite extensive, so I shall only include a few key references here: Sandys 1969, 207–221; Salway 1994; Dondin-Payre 2011; Cooley 2012, *passim* and 409–421; Weber 2016. The custom of having the individual name followed by the father's name is preserved in some cultures until now, even in Europe: Iceland, Russia.

goddesses as well – followed by the dedicator with his *tria nomina* (the three names of a Roman citizen). Since the person did not indicate his father's name, and because his *cognomen* is of Greek origin, he was probably a freedman. Roman slaves of a higher level and therefore freedmen often had individual Greek names, a custom dating back to the second century BCE when Greek slaves were taken to Rome as prisoners of war during the Eastern Mediterranean wars, and were often highly respected because of their superior culture. The Cominii family, which included numerous merchants from Italy, is attested at Carnuntum in the middle of the first century CE.[4] Note the practice of sticking letters together, evidently done on purpose here to give the inscription a more sophisticated appearance. The wording ends with the common formula of dedication.

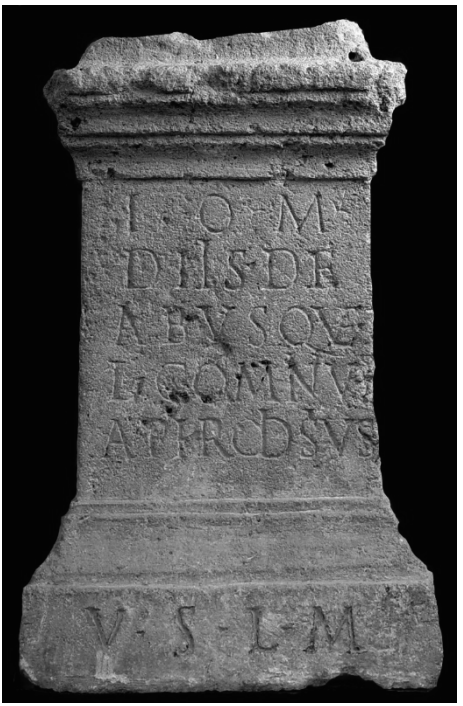


Fig. 1: Genuine Roman altar from Carnuntum (CIL 3, 11125; Kremer 2012, 171, n. 334, plate 98); © Project CIL III2 Pannonia, directed by the author.

4 AE 2008, 1099.

Let us now have a closer look at our first suspected forgeries. These are small altars, which were easier to forge than large ones. They are said to come from Carnuntum, but owing to the black market, some of them ended up in private collections and even museums in Germany. Sometimes it is hard to prove that a specimen is fake because there is no clear evidence from which one can deduce that the inscription on it is not genuine. But if one is familiar with the genuine article, then even inconspicuous peculiarities can be found that make one suspect that something is wrong with the object in question. I shall demonstrate some of these points in this article.

The inscription on the altar to the Roman god Mars (Fig. 2), the most important Roman god of war, reads as follows:

> To Mars / *C(aius) I(ulius) Ver(us)* / fulfilled his *votum*, his vow, willingly and happily.

The last letter **M** in this formula – *m(erito)*, meaning '(as the god) deserves' – is missing, surprisingly enough. There are other examples, admittedly.[5] The first **M** in this inscription provides us with almost incontrovertible evidence of a fake: in Roman inscriptions, the central angle of the letter nearly always touches the ground. The **R** has a strange bow or loop, and the horizontal bar of the **T** has the two serifs coming down. The name *Caius* is abbreviated the usual way, but the dedicator's *nomen gentile*, i.e. his family or second name, is only abbreviated with one letter, which is surprising.[6] The person's last name (the proper name by which they were known) was hardly ever abbreviated.

In the next example (Fig. 3), there is a dedication to *Iuppiter optimus maximus* again: 'to Jove, the best and greatest', the chief of the Roman pantheon. The poor writing does not seem to be of ancient origin at all. The **S** has a larger upper curvature than usual. Again, the *cognomen*, the third component of the dedicator's name, is abbreviated, and the **Q** of *Quint(us)* is written without a 'U', according to the German custom, where this letter is always pronounced 'KW'. Furthermore, the final **M** of the dedicatory formula is missing.

5 Sometimes even in genuine inscriptions, albeit rarely; take CIL 3, 4435; AE 1929 226; and AE 1979, 461, for example, all of which are from Carnuntum.

6 Very common names or names used by the imperial family are abbreviated, but never using just one letter. *Iulius* is the family name of the emperor, Augustus, and his successors Tiberius and Gaius (Caligula).



Fig. 2: Altar to Mars, the Roman god; Kremer 2012, 173, n. 339, tab. 100 (Trier, private collection); © IKAnt, ÖAW (Photo G. Kremer).



Fig. 3: Altar to Jove; Kremer 2012, 161, n. 311, tab. 89 (Trier, private collection); © IKAnt, ÖAW (Photo G. Kremer).

Here are some further examples (Fig. 4):

Genio / centur(iae) / sacrum.
'To the genius of the platoon consecrated'.

The letter **I** in *Genio* is smaller, evidently inserted afterwards in the cavity, where the stone is damaged.

The name of the dedicator is missing, which sometimes occurs on small stones, even genuine ones, especially if the dedicators were a group, but a pious lady or gentleman or even a single soldier who dedicated such an inscription would first and foremost have wanted the gods to know who did it in order to get his or her reward in due time. Ligatures of letters are not uncommon in Roman

inscriptions (see Fig. 1), but the ones at the end of lines two and three are strange. What's more, no Roman stonecutter would ever have formed an **R** like this.

The next inscription (Fig. 5) is a dedication to *Silvanus silvest(ris)*, i.e. 'Silvanus from the woods'. It seems Silvanus was the most popular god in Carnuntum and its neighbourhood, and a great many forged inscriptions are dedicated to him, too. The name of the dedicator of this particular exemplar is not indicated, and some of the letters do not resemble their paradigms in the ancient Roman alphabet either: the **S** with its slightly larger upper curvature (a phenomenon already observed) along with the **C** and the **R**. The central angle of the **M**, even if it was unfinished, was evidently not intended to touch the baseline, as usually with Roman inscriptions. Both stones seem to come from the same workshop because the lettering on them is so similar (cf. Figs. 4 and 5).



Fig. 4: Altar to a *Genius*; Kremer 2012, 307, n. 751, tab. 209 (Trier, private collection); © IKAnt, ÖAW (Photo G. Kremer).



Fig. 5: Altar to the god *Silvanus*; Kremer 2012, 310, n. 766, tab. 211 (Trier, private collection); © IKAnt, ÖAW (Photo G. Kremer).

Another type of forgery can be seen in some other inscriptions (Fig. 6): apart from the shape of the letters being unusual, the words *dii nocturni*, 'gods of the night', are used, an expression which is not attested in Roman times. One of the inscriptions (6d) was evidently copied from a third one (6c)[7], i.e. it is a fake made from a fake.



Fig. 6a: Scherrer 2008, 219, Fig. 31.2: Kremer 2012, 306, n. 748, tab. 209 (private collection in Austria?); © IKAnt, ÖAW (Archiv Scherrer).



Fig. 6b: Kremer 2012, 306, n. 749, tab. 209 (Trier, private collection); © IKAnt, ÖAW (Photo G. Kremer).

7 Both are said to have been found during an excavation at Carnuntum in 1892 and came into the museum's possession after being acquired from the landowner. There is a slightly different photograph of them in the archive of the Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut in Kremer 2012, 307, n. 750, tab. 209 (left), so obviously more than one picture of them was taken (evidently from a forged original).



Fig. 6c: CIL 3, 13461; Kremer 2012, 135, n. 255, tab. 70 (Carnuntum Museum); © IKAnt, ÖAW (Photo G. Kremer).

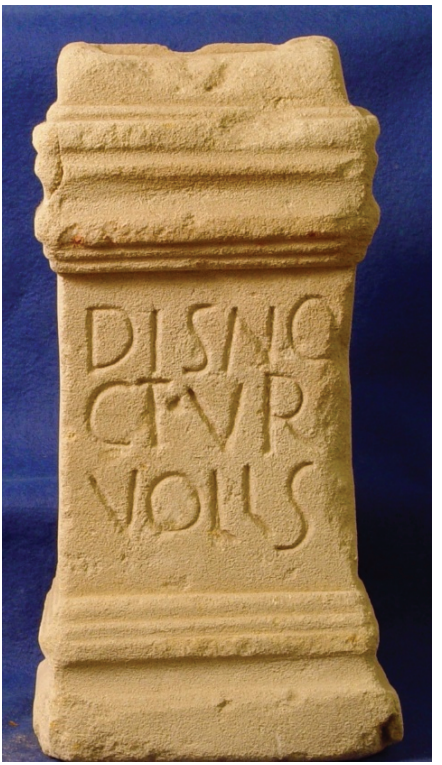


Fig. 6d: CIL 3, 13462; Kremer 2012, 306–307, n. 750, tab. 209 (Carnuntum Museum); © IKAnt, ÖAW (Photo G. Kremer).

Why exactly were these forgeries made? Mainly to make money, I suspect. I was told by local people that Roman inscriptions sell for about ten euros a letter these days. Sometimes the forgers take original ancient artefacts – altars without an inscription – and carve some letters on them to earn more money when they are sold. These stones are sold on the black market, mostly to private collectors, and rarely come to our notice,[8] but sometimes museums acquire them, even in Carnuntum itself. Some years ago, the front page of a local newspaper showed some small altars that had recently been bought by the trustees of Carnuntum Museum, but it turned out that all of them were fakes (Fig. 7).

8 In addition, see Noelke 1991, which contains five more examples (the author seems to believe they are all genuine). It also contains further references.



Fig. 7: Front page of an illustrated Austrian newspaper (in colour) showing a girl with two small altars; 'Krone Bunt', Sunday edition from 3 March 2002. The two altars are also pictured in Kremer 2012, 308, n. 758 and 309, n. 760, both tab. 210; © Project CIL III2 Pannonia, directed by the author.

There is at least one example of a forged tombstone from Carnuntum (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8: Tombstone (unpublished, Carnuntum Museum, CAR-S-604). © Project CIL III2 Pannonia, directed by the author.

As the early ones are rather large, tombstones of this size were/are rarely forged because of all the effort involved. The one shown here is relatively small, approximately 50 centimetres in height and with an odd representation of the deceased, supposedly an early product made by a local Celtic stonecutter. The inscription is doubtless a fake. The letters **D M**, standing for *D(is) m(anibus)*, which dedicates the tomb to the gods of the netherworld, only became common in the second century CE. Thus the inscription and the picture of the deceased do not match chronologically.

When the Iron Curtain fell thirty years ago, the black market was flooded with genuine antiquities from the Balkans, but forgeries were soon among them as well. The cunning manufacturers quickly found out that small bronze objects were much more easily forged and sold than large, heavy monuments made of marble or limestone.[9] However, they also had to produce a natural-looking patina

9 Bronze artefacts known as 'military diplomas' became very popular with forgers. These are tablets documenting Roman citizenship awarded to soldiers after twenty-five years of service (or even more). See Pangerl 2006, 929–933, for instance. Years ago, I published a small bronze tablet from former Yugoslavia, the inscription of which was copied, remarkably enough, from a late-

on them to deceive naive buyers, which they achieved with the aid of modern chemistry.

Most of these forgeries were, as we said, made to make money, but some of them – a remarkable number, in fact – were made just 'for fun' by students who wanted to deceive professors or directors of museums, for example. We know of various famous incidents in the past where sensational finds were shown to be fakes later on (sometimes many years later), especially in archaeology.[10] There are plenty of fakes that were made for no other purpose than to become famous and/or deceive the scientific community.

2 Early collections of Roman inscriptions

From the fifteenth century onwards, learned people north and south of the Alps became enamoured of Antiquity. They often studied at universities in Italy and brought the ideas and ideals of the Italian Renaissance back with them afterwards. North of the Alps, the remains of Roman art, occasionally found, once made by local artisans were not always produced with great skill, though, and so did not always fulfil the ideals and satisfy the taste the admirers had developed during their sojourns in Italy. The individuals therefore concentrated on Roman inscriptions, which were to be found here and there; the texts were written in Latin, contained abbreviations and were sometimes incomplete, which meant that considerable knowledge and skill was needed to read them correctly. Apart from being valuable as texts about an idealised past, inscriptions of this kind were regarded as an intellectual challenge and consequently proof of and training for one's intelligence. Princes and noblemen collected ancient inscriptions. The first person to do so, it seems, was Maximilian I (1459–1519), the Holy Roman Emperor in Vienna, who inherited a passion for collecting *objets d'art* from his father and acquired ancient coins and inscriptions mainly from Roman Antiquity. Most of his counsellors had the task of drawing his attention to potential new acquisitions. They were in touch with learned people all over Europe and even

antique tombstone from Treves / Trier in Germany; Weber 2001, 471–472. The original in Trier is CIL 13, 3683 = CLE 792.

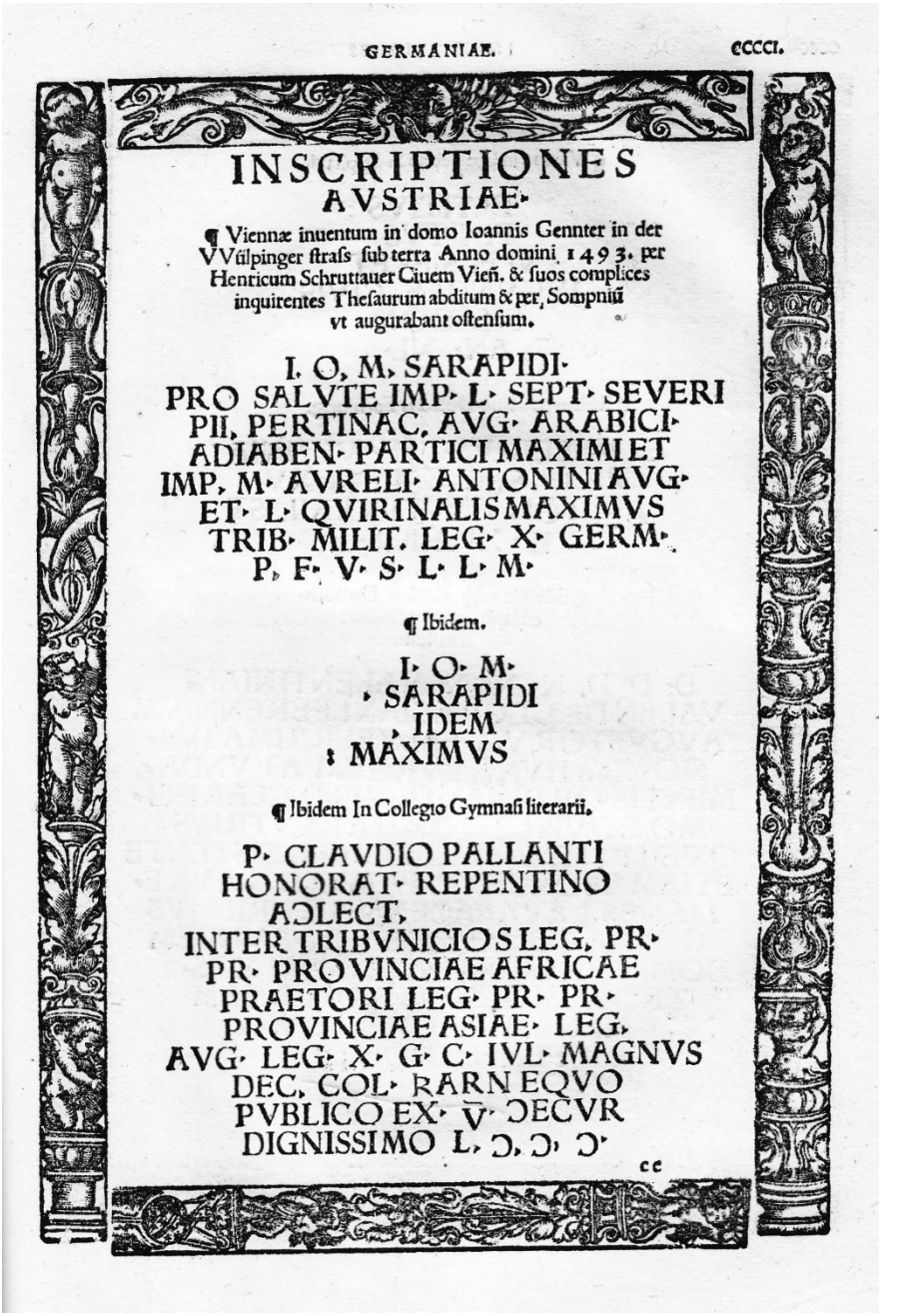
10 Brein 1980, 6–14 provides a remarkably good overview of them that is still useful today, among other things referring to the famous 'Tiara of Saitaphernes' and the sensational finds made in Glozel near Vichy, France (see the article by C. Breniquet in this volume). The typical behaviour of the scientific community in such cases was depicted satirically by Charles Dickens in *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (see chapter 11).

collected Roman inscriptions themselves – not as much original texts written on stone, but information about them, and copies of the texts. They were delighted by every new message from the past and added information about them to manuscripts of their own. Thus the first comprehensive collection of Roman inscriptions was published in those days: Petrus Apianus and Bartholomeus Amantius, *Inscriptiones sacrosanctae vetustatis, non illae quidem Romanae, sed totius fere orbis summo studio ac maximis impensis terra mariq[ue] conquisitae*, Ingolstadii, *in aedibus P. Apiani*, 1534.

Page 401 of this book contains two dubious Roman inscriptions which are shown in Fig. 9. As it is said, these were found by treasure-hunters in Vienna in 1493 under remarkable circumstances.[11] They are probably fakes. One of the problems with the first one – there are several issues with it, actually – is that the Roman legion garrisoning at *Vindobona* (Vienna) is mistakenly called '*Germanica*' instead of '*Gemina*', a wrong spelling that subsequently lived on in popular and even scholarly books. The first of the inscriptions reads as follows:[12] 'To Jove Sarapis, the best and greatest, for the welfare of Emperor Lucius Septimius Severus Pius Pertinax Augustus [the official name of Septimius Severus, 193–211], victorious over the Arabs, the people of Adiabene [a territory in modern northern Iraq] and greatest of all over the Parthians [the predecessors of Persia], and for Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus [the official name of his elder son, commonly called Caracalla, 197–217], and Lucius' – the Latin letters **ET L** are evidently wrong here (in his famous *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin, 1873, Theodore Mommsen amended it to **FL**, thus creating a *gentilicium* that otherwise is missing): 'Flavius Quirinalis Maximus, military tribune of the *legio X Gemina* (not *Germanica*!), the pious and loyal, fulfilled his vow eagerly and happily, as the god deserves'.

11 The third item on this page is CIL 3, 4567, the honorific inscription for P. Claudius Pallas Honoratus Repentinus, effective commander of the *legio X Gemina* in Vienna.

12 CIL 3, 4560. The Latin headlines in English: 'Found in Vienna underground in the house of John Gennter in Wipplingerstraße *AD* = CE 1493 by the Viennese citizen Henry Schruttauer and his collaborators, who tried to find a hidden treasury which they believed was shown to them in a dream'. Wipplingerstraße still exists in central Vienna; it corresponds to the *via principalis sinistra* of the legionary fortress.



GERMANIAE. CCCCI.

INSCRIPTIONES AVSTRIAE.

¶ Viennæ inuentum in domo Ioannis Gennter in der VVülpinger ſtraſs ſub terra Anno domini 1493. per Henricum Schruttauer Ciuem Vieñ. & ſuos complices inquirentes Theſaurum abditum & per, Sompniũ vt augurabant oſtenſum.

I. O. M. SARAPIDI·
PRO SALVTE IMP· L· SEPT· SEVERI
PII, PERTINAC, AVG· ARABICI·
ADIABEN· PARTICI MAXIMI ET
IMP. M· AVRELI· ANTONINI AVG·
ET· L· QVIRINALIS MAXIMVS
TRIB· MILIT. LEG· X· GERM·
P. F· V· S· L· L· M·

¶ Ibidem.

I· O· M·
· SARAPIDI
, IDEM
: MAXIMVS

¶ Ibidem In Collegio Gymnaſi literarii.

P· CLAVDIO PALLANTI
HONORAT· REPENTINO
ADLECT,
INTER TRIBVNICIOS LEG. PR·
PR· PROVINCIAE AFRICAE
PRAETORI LEG· PR· PR·
PROVINCIAE ASIAE· LEG.
AVG· LEG· X· G· C· IVL· MAGNVS
DEC. COL· RARN EQVO
PVBLICO EX· V· DECVR
DIGNISSIMO L. D. D. D.

cc

Fig. 9: Apianus and Amantius (1534), p. 401.

Approximately fifty years ago, a bronze tablet was published in Prague that is a fake without a doubt, representing the same text as the present inscription, but with slight modifications. It mentions the *legio Germ(anica)* again (Fig. 10). The question is, what did the treasure-hunters actually find in 1493 if their story is true? Was the inscription in the book copied from the tablet or was the tablet copied from the book?



Fig. 10: Bronze tablet, approx. 9 × 11 cm, Prague, unknown private collection (Ryba 1950, tab. 2). Note the probably correct letters F L in line 6 of the tablet.

The second inscription on Apianus' page (Fig. 9), evidently found at the same spot and probably on the same occasion, but now also lost, is enigmatic, too: no high-ranking Roman officer – and no simple Roman person either for that

matter – would ever have referred to himself as *idem Maximus* = 'Maximus, the same'.[13]

The scholar who collected so much relevant material in those days was unknown for a long time, so Theodor Mommsen referred to him as the 'Antiquus Austriacus' when preparing his monumental *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*.[14] Doris Marth recently succeeded in demonstrating that this mysterious collector was Johannes Fuchsmagen (or Fuchsmag), one of the most important ministers and counsellors of Maximilian I at his imperial court in Vienna. Despite Fuchsmagen's unquestionable merits and achievements, he was evidently a rather modest man as he never praised himself about his achievements in epigraphy and left no portrait of himself either except for one on a rather expensive tapestry that he donated to a monastery in Vienna. It seems likely that it was Fuchsmagen who made the manuscript from which Apianus' and Amantius' book was printed in 1534 (now Prague, National Library of the Czech Republic, CP XIII G 14).[15]

3 A gifted forger: Wolfgang Lazius

One generation later, during the mid-sixteenth century, there was another man who played a similar role in epigraphy: the Viennese physician Wolfgang Lazius (1514–1565), whose interests also extended to history, geography, genealogy and epigraphy (Fig. 11). He wrote many books and left even more manuscripts to posterity, all of which had a significant influence in subsequent periods. In spite of the fact that he was appointed *rector magnificus* of the University of Vienna twice and was highly praised for his work, he simply did not have the same profile as the comparatively modest Johannes Fuchsmagen.

13 CIL 3, 4561. If you want to keep this inscription and prove it genuine, you may argue that whoever copied the text saw that the dedicator was the same man and abbreviated his task by adding only this short note (in Latin, of course). So it found its way into the 'scientific community'.

14 CIL 3, 564.

15 Marth 2016. For a portrait of Fuchsmagen, see Marth 2016, plate 3.



Fig. 11: Wolfgang Lazius; drawing by Hanns Lautensack (1554). <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wolfgang_Lazius.jpg> (last accessed on 17 April 2020); Creative Commons Public Domain.

Wolfgang Lazius quoted a great number of genuine Roman inscriptions in his works, fully aware that these original texts were the best way of proving certain historical points. But if there was no convenient inscription at hand, he simply took one from elsewhere and modified it as much as necessary; he even produced new ones of his own invention. He used them repeatedly in his writing, but altered them time and again, so it is difficult to discern what the original form

was or might have been – if there ever was one. Here is an example from one of his famous works, a local Roman history:[16]

> Et ne dubitemus, istum belli Marcomannici apparatum prope Viennam factum extitisse, supersunt aliquot fragmenta columnarum ac basium, ut ego opinor, ab arcubus triumphalibus diruta, in quibus uictoria illa Marcomannica ad plenum exprimitur, cum titulo uidelicet fortunae Reginae: M.AVREL. AVG. V. S. L. L. M. Et iterum uictoriae de Marcomanis, M. AVR. V. S. L. L. M. hoc est, Votum soluit, locum legit memoriae.
> 'Lest we doubt that these preparations for the war against the Marcomanni near Vienna existed, some fragments of columns and bases are still preserved, plundered, I believe, from triumphal arches on which this Marcomannic victory was fully documented with an inscription to Fortuna Regina, for example M. AVREL. AVG. V. S. L. L. M. And another one to Victoria against the Marcomanni, M. AVR. V. S. L. L. M., which means 'he fulfilled his vow and selected this place for memory'.

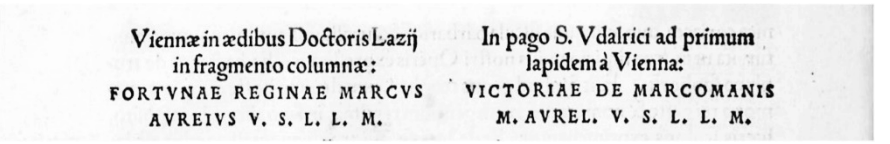


Fig. 12: The two inscriptions that Lazius dealt with in his book; Lazius 1551, 900.

The *Marcomanni* were a mighty Germanic tribe on the other side of the Danube that had made incursions into the Roman realm, penetrating as far as northern Italy and plundering the provinces on their way. In this text, the author says that a triumphal arch was erected in Vienna *c.* 170 CE in honour of Marcus Aurelius after his victory over the *Marcomanni* to underline the importance of Vienna in these days. In the case of the first inscription, which is dedicated to Fortuna, the goddess of good fortune, he may have imitated some preserved fragments of writing, probably from an altar dedicated by a certain Marcus Aurelius, a very common name in the second and third century CE, but we do not know whether this supposed original is from Vienna or from Carnuntum (which is more likely) or what it really looked like. The second inscription, dedicated to Victoria, the personified goddess of victory, is pure invention, and his interpretation of the final dedication formula is simply nonsense.[17] It hardly needs to be said that the inscription on a real triumphal arch would be rather different. In fact, when he

16 Lazius 1551, 669.

17 The letters *v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) l(aetus) m(erito)* mean 'he fulfilled his vow eagerly, happily, as (the goddess) deserved'. Several lines before that, the 'German legion' occurs again.

quotes the same inscriptions later on in the same book (Fig. 12), there are slight variations: apart from the evident misspelling in the case of the Fortuna inscription, even the emperor's name is abbreviated inconsistently.[18]

Lazius' reason for inserting so many similar forgeries in his works was not to gain money, but to boost his reputation among the scholars of his time by pretending he had so many original documents from Antiquity at hand. In fact, he often asserts that the inscription in question is kept at his own house – without adding any details as to how he acquired it. Like most of the humanists of his time, he was convinced that inscriptions – original texts from Antiquity – were reliable documentation that helped to prove various historical facts. This was felt to be much more important than literary tradition, especially if the latter did not shed enough light on a matter. So obviously, he felt he had to forge an inscription if a suitable one did not happen to be readily available.

Wolfgang Lazius was not the only person who forged inscriptions in those days, though. Probably one of the most famous forgers of all was his contemporary, Pirro Ligorio, an architect and archaeologist living in Rome[19] who not only invented Roman statues of his own and reconstructed fragments as he saw fit, but who created 'Roman' inscriptions as well. I do not know what the real reason was for him producing his forgeries, but he must have had a sense of pleasure in deceiving others.

Wolfgang Lazius, however, is the primary source of one of the most important inscriptions we know of concerning Vienna: the only inscription that seems to prove that Vienna employed Roman municipal law in Roman times and that also mentions a local functionary.[20] It was found, as Lazius says, 'last summer', i.e. the summer of 1544, during construction work on Vienna's fortifications after the first siege by the Ottomans in 1529. In Fig. 13 we can detect Lazius' own handwriting and the very first attestation of this inscription, which he claims is kept in his own house.[21]

18 Lazius 1551, 900. Latin S. Udalricus – St. Ulrich in German – was a small village in the suburbs of Vienna, now part of the seventh district of Vienna itself.

19 Coffin 2004; Cooley 2012, 386–389; Theodor Mommsen on him: CIL 6 (1876), LI–LIII.

20 CIL 3, 4557 and p. 1793. The question of the bronze tablet which is said to be a fragment of the (Viennese?) municipal law is too complicated to be discussed here; cf. Rafetseder 2019.

21 For example Lazius 1551, 725: Viennae repertum quod in meis aedibus adservatur.

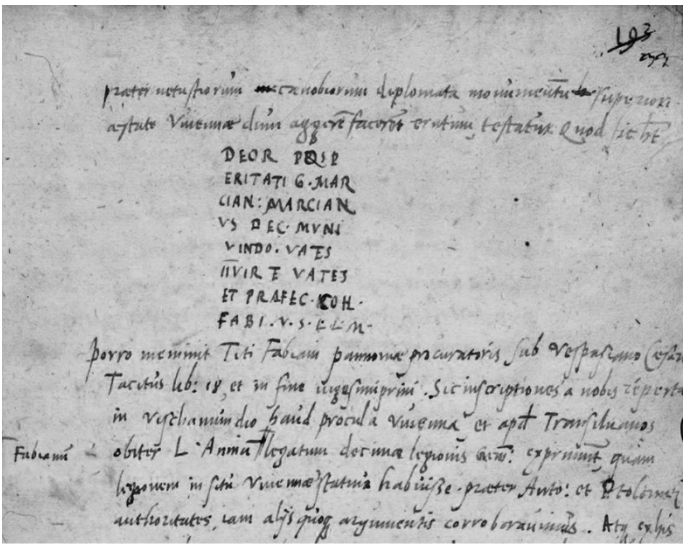


Fig. 13: Lazius-Codex Vienna, ÖNB, lat. 8457 (a. 1545), fol. 33 (detail); by courtesy of the trustees of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

His main argument was that Vienna was called *Fabiana* in Antiquity – an incorrect designation, actually, but one of some importance nonetheless.[22] He insisted on this theory, which is why he quoted the inscription so often. However, the monument is dedicated 'to the happiness of the gods' (*deorum prosperitati*), which is absurd and virtually unparalleled in any ancient inscription. It is most unusual for the dedicator of such an inscription to quote his full curriculum, so I am inclined to see this inscription as a fake, symptomatic of Lazius' methods. He was always eager to produce 'original' documents, in this case because of the forgery's unique testimony about the ancient history of Vienna.

22 The letters FABI occur in the last line. *Favianis* – Mautern on the Danube – was the monastery where St Severinus, a very important local saint, spent the last years of his life and died in the late fifth century. The theory that it was Vienna or at least part of it was proposed by the medieval historian Otto of Freising to support the efforts of the Babenberg margraves in making their residence, Vienna, a bishopric.

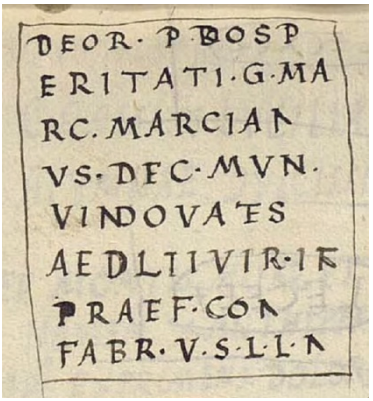


Fig. 14: The inscription as drawn by (or for) Antonio Augustín, from MS Madrid, BNE, 5781, fol. 46; by courtesy of the trustees of the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid.



Fig. 15: The inscription as drawn by Carolus Clusius, from MS The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 72 B 22, fol. 1; by courtesy of the trustees of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague.

There is a problem here, though, as there are two more authors who seem to have read this inscription and understood it in slightly different ways. The first is Antonio Augustín, the papal nuncio at the court in Vienna in 1558. This high-ranking archbishop presumably did not visit Lazius' house personally to make a copy of the inscription (and others as well), but he copied them or had them copied from drawings supplied to him. So his version is probably not an independent one (Fig. 14). The second source is even more difficult, however. Carolus Clusius (Charles de l'Écluse) from Arras stayed in Vienna in 1573–1576. He was a prominent scientist who chiefly studied the plants, flowers and mushrooms of the adjacent regions and the Austrian Alps in those days. He scrupulously copied Roman inscriptions *in situ*, including the dedication *deorum prosperitati* as well. His drawing seems to derive from the original – *insertus parieti*, 'built into a wall', as he says (Fig. 15).[23] Clusius provides a somewhat different reading of the stone,

23 Codex Haag 72 B 22, fol. 1. Clusius' manuscript is not preserved in the original form because a hundred and fifty years later, Christopher Sachse, a professor at Utrecht University, cut his

especially of the lower part, but it coincides precisely with the words *deorum prosperitati*. This could be explained somehow, of course. Did Lazius, who died about ten years earlier, possibly have this stone made by a skilful stonecutter? To sum up, then, this inscription also seems to be a fake, although I cannot prove it – at the moment.

Abbreviations

AE *L'année épigraphique. Revue des publications épigraphiques relatives à l'antiquité romaine*, founded by René Cagnat in 1888. The inscriptions are only cited by the year of the relevant volume and number.

CIL *Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum*, edited by Theodor Mommsen and his collaborators from 1862 onwards. The inscriptions are only cited by volume and number.

CLE *Carmina Latina Epigraphica. Anthologia Latina sive poesis Latinae supplementum, pars posterior*, edited by Franz Buecheler and Erik Lommatzsch, 1894–1930. The inscriptions are only cited by number.

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Olivier Gengler

Michel Fourmont and His Forgeries

Abstract: In the years following his return from a mission in Greece conducted in 1729–1730 on behalf of the king Louis XV, the priest and scholar Michel Fourmont presented to the *Académie des Inscriptions* several forged texts dating supposedly back to the very origin of Sparta, the famous Peloponnesian city. This paper explores the motivations and the technique of the forger, focusing especially on the relation between inscriptions and monuments, in his forgeries as well as in his copy of genuine texts.

In 1729–1730, Michel Fourmont, a French priest, scholar and antiquarian, travelled through Greece at Louis XV's bidding in order to find manuscripts to add to the Royal Library. He could not find any that were worth to take, but he did copy inscriptions, hundreds of inscriptions, especially in Athens and Sparta. In the letters he sent to his friends and patrons while in Greece and the preliminary reports he made to the *Académie des Inscriptions* upon his return, Fourmont boasted of the enormous value of the documents that he had discovered:[1]

> *Depuis plus d'un mois, quoyque malade, je travaille avec 30 ouvriers à l'entière destruction de Sparte ; point de jour que je ne trouve quelque chose, il y en a eu qui m'ont produit jusqu'à 20 inscriptions [...] Par ce que j'ay déjà je puis vous assurer que nous avons une suite presque entière des prestres et des prestresses, des éphores, des gérontes, des gymnasiarches, des agoranomes et plusieurs choses des bidiaei. Le bonheur a voulu que j'aie trouvé les tombeaux de Lysander et d'Agésilas (celuy de Lysander n'est sans doute que pour l'honneur, il a été inhumé proche de Thèbes), des bases qui soutenoient les statues de plusieurs philosophes, rhéteurs, capitaines et autres personnages de ce païs-cy, jusques à présent inconnus, beaucoup de colonnes inscriptes et quantité d'autres choses de cette nature.*
> 'For more than a month, though ill, I have toiled with 30 workers to completely destroy Sparta; there has not been a single day in which I was unable to find anything; some have given me up to 20 inscriptions [...]. With what I already have, I can assure you that we have a near-complete sequence of priests and priestesses, ephors, senators, gymnasiarchs, agoranomes and some things concerning the *bidiaei*. I was lucky enough to find the tombs of Lysander and Agesilaus (Lysander's is undoubtedly only honorary: he was buried close to

1 Letter from Fourmont to Bignon (see below), Sparta, 20 April 1730, quoted by Omont 1902, 616 (my translation).

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> Thebes), statue bases of several philosophers, rhetoricians, captains and other notable figures from this country, unknown until now, many inscribed columns and a lot of other things of this nature.'

Yet as was subsequently discovered, the few texts he published in the fifteen years between his return to France and his death in 1746 were all forgeries. It is my intention in this paper to address the story of these fakes and outline how and why they were produced and the extent to which they can inform us about Fourmont, his work and his intellectual environment.[2]

1 The mission

It all began officially in 1728. On 28 August, the Count of Maurepas, who was Secretary of State to King Louis XV at the time,[3] announced the decision that a mission was to be sent to the Orient to collect manuscripts for the King's library. The Count entrusted the mission to two scholarly clergymen who were members of the *Académie des Inscriptions*, namely François Sevin and Michel Fourmont.[4] The undertaking was actually prepared beforehand upon the initiative of the royal librarian, Abbé Jean-Paul Bignon,[5] who had been a mentor to Sevin and Fourmont for some time.[6] Bignon had heard from Mehmed Said Efendi, the son

2 These pages have an introductory character. I am currently engaged in a long-term project about Michel Fourmont in which all the material at our disposal is going to be reassessed. For now, see Boeckh 1828, 61–104; Spawforth 1976; Stoneman 1985; Raspi-Serra 1998; Gengler 2016. Many of the documents pertaining to Fourmont and his travels were published by Omont in 1902.

3 Jean-Frédéric Phélypeaux de Pontchartrain, Comte de Maurepas (1701–1781), Secretary of State for the Navy from 1723 to 1749. See Picciola 1999 for more on this figure from Louis XV's reign.

4 François Sevin (1682–1741); Michel Fourmont (1690–1746).

5 (1662–1743). The position of royal librarian had been held by members of his family since the time of his grandfather, Jérôme Bignon (1589–1656), and the tradition continued until 1784, albeit not without some interruption. Jean-Paul Bignon was related to the Count of Maurepas through his mother, Suzanne Phélypeaux, who was Maurepas' great-aunt; see Balayé 1988, 147–230. Bignon was the main organiser of the mission, while Maurepas was the minister in charge of it, but Cardinal André-Hercule de Fleury (1653–1743), a former tutor and the *de facto* Prime Minister of Louis XV, had supported the enterprise, which was conducted in the name of the King. Fourmont wrote directly to Fleury during his trip (Omont 1902, 630–631; substantially the same letter as the one previously quoted) and met him upon his return (Omont 1902, 644).

6 The project was conceived in its practical form in 1727; see the *Mémoire* describing the enterprise quoted from Paris, BnF, NAF 5384, fols 63–67 by Omont 1902, 439–443. Some preparatory work conducted at Bignon's initiative is preserved in two manuscripts at the BnF in Paris (NAF

of the former Ottoman ambassador in Paris,[7] that there was a wealth of manuscripts to be discovered in the Sultan's library, supposedly containing the remains of the last Byzantine Emperor's library, and that the Grand Vizier was open to Western culture and keen to help Westerners.[8] Having evidently waited for the final decision of the King for some time,[9] Sevin and Fourmont were ready to depart quickly and made their way to Toulon as soon as 1 September 1728, eventually embarking for the Levant on 14 October.[10] The mission reached Constantinople on 4 December after 51 days of sailing.[11]

The instructions given to Sevin and Fourmont were quite clear and enable us to understand the mission's proper context.[12] The two academicians were supposed to access the Sultan's library in Constantinople and acquire any texts written by the most important authors of Antiquity that were missing in the King's own collections – or copy them if this was not possible. Both the sponsors of the expedition and learned circles hoped for a complete Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Diodorus Siculus, Cassius Dio and even Livy, none of which has been integrally preserved by the manuscript tradition. In other words, they set their hopes unreasonably high.[13] They dreamt of finding the library where Photius, the patriarch of Constantinople in the second half of the ninth century, read the 280

5441, fols 366–383, and 8942, fols 285–293). One of them contains some archives belonging to Leroux-Deshauterayes, a nephew of Fourmont's; Omont 1902, 1209. See Balayé 1988, 215–218 as well. On mentoring and family ties in Michel Fourmont's personal network, see below and Figs. 10 and 11.

7 Inspired by his stay in France, Mehmed Said Efendi installed a printing press in Constantinople. See Göçek 1987, 113–114.

8 Sevin 1733, 334–335. The information obtained in 1727 was probably too optimistic, as Bignon himself acknowledged in his instructions to Sevin and Fourmont (quoted by Omont 1902, 439–443, esp. 439–440).

9 The two men had a letter of recommendation on them from Bignon to Mehmed Said Efendi dated 13 August (quoted by Omont 1902, 444–445). In a letter to the Marquis de Villeneuve (see the following note), the Count of Maurepas refers to a previous letter from 25 August concerning Sevin and Fourmont (Omont 1902, 434).

10 The two clergymen had to wait for the arrival of Louis-Sauveur, Marquis de Villeneuve (1675–1747), who had recently been appointed as ambassador to the Ottoman Empire and was to take them to Constantinople.

11 Omont 1902, 434–436.

12 Omont 1902, 434–443.

13 Scholarly circles in Paris were very excited. The famous Bernard de Montfaucon, the inventor of palaeography and an archaeologist *avant la lettre*, who had travelled through Italy himself in search of manuscripts of Saint John Chrysostom, expressed his expectations in a letter commenting on the mission. He hoped 'an entire Polybius, a Dionysus of Halicarnassus, a Diodorus Siculus, but especially a Cassius Dio' would be found; see Omont 1902, 432 n. 1.

works of classical literature which he summarised in his *Bibliotheke*, the majority of which were lost. They dreamt of finding the library where the copyists working for Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the tenth century collected quotations from a large pool of ancient historians whom we only know of now through these excerpts.[14] It was already too late for that, however.

From Bignon's perspective, anything was good for the taking, whether in Greek, Latin or Syriac, Armenian, Persian, Turkish or Arabic. The King's envoys were meant to acquire as many manuscripts as they could as long as these were *curieux*, i.e. worthy of interest.[15] Sevin and Fourmont were also instructed to visit the monasteries located on Mount Athos, whose monks were believed to think little of the ancient manuscripts that were kept there.[16]

The mission quickly proved to be more difficult than expected and, above all, far less fruitful: Sevin and Fourmont were never to access the Sultan's library, which was far from rich in the expected works anyway. Fourmont left Constantinople as early as 8 February 1729 since Sevin was able to carry out the main mission of collecting manuscripts in the Ottoman capital alone and set out for the Greek islands and then Athens to visit as many monasteries as possible.[17] Although Sevin failed to get his hands on any of the ancient texts that were so eagerly awaited in Paris, he did bring back at least 600 volumes of interest to the Royal Library.[18]

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14 On Photius and his *Library*, see Schamp 2012. Regarding the *Excerpta Constantiniana*, see Németh 2018.

15 *Trésor de la Langue Française*, s.v. 'curieux', II A: 'Digne d'intérêt en raison de sa valeur. Synon. : intéressant'.

16 The instructions given to the travellers reveal some prejudices about the country they had to visit: *Il faudrait du moins qu'ils ne revinssent point sans aller auparavant dans les monastères du Mont Athos, dans lesquels il est certain qu'il se trouve un très grand nombre de ces sortes d'ouvrages, qu'ils pourraient acquérir avec facilité, les religieux en faisant fort peu de cas et étant disposés à les donner pour peu de chose. Il faut cependant que, pour réussir ainsy dans ces monastères, ils ne fassent paroitre aucun empressement d'acheter ces livres et qu'ils ne s'y montrent qu'à titre de voyageurs curieux de visiter des endroits si célèbres et disposés à soulager la misère des pauvres solitaires* (Omont 1902, 438). ('At least they should not come back without going to the monasteries of Mount Athos, in which it is certain that there are plenty of volumes of this kind, which they could acquire with ease, as the religious [i. e. monks] do not care much for them and are willing to give them up for a small sum. In order to succeed in these monasteries, however, they must not seem eager to buy these books, but should only present themselves as travellers who are curious to visit such famous places and ready to relieve the misery of the poor hermits'). Fourmont's report about his visit to monasteries in Chios shows that, in this case too, the mission was not as easy to accomplish as it was thought in Paris; Omont 1902, 540–541, 544 and 546.

17 Omont 1902, 537–539.

18 Balayé 1988, 218.

As for Fourmont, he was even less successful than Sevin: he failed to find any interesting manuscripts at all, but he did collect other material in accordance with his mission. Indeed, the *Memoir of the King to serve as an instruction to the masters Sevin and Fourmont of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-lettres* also stipulated the following:[19]

> *Il n'est nécessaire d'avertir lesdits sieurs Sevin et Fourmont que, quoique l'objet principal de leur voyage soit la recherche et l'acquisition des livres pour la Bibliothèque de Sa Majesté, ils ne doivent pas négliger ce qu'ils pourront trouver de médailles de toute espèce, qui pourraient manquer à son Cabinet, comme aussi d'apporter, s'il est possible, d'anciennes inscriptions, ou du moins d'en tirer des copies figurées exactement, en désignant précisément les lieux où elles se trouvent.*
> 'It is not necessary to warn the said masters Sevin and Fourmont that, although the main purpose of their voyage is the search for and acquisition of the books for His Majesty's Library, they must not neglect *médailles* (i.e. ancient coins) of any kind they may find, which may be lacking in his Cabinet, nor to bring back ancient inscriptions if possible, or at least to draw accurate copies and record the places where they are located precisely.'

Fourmont was to commit himself to this last task; he did not bring back any monuments, but did copy hundreds of ancient inscriptions he found on the islands, in Athens and in the Peloponnese, the majority of which are only known to us through his copies now, which, as imperfect as they sometimes are, constitute a precious source of information.[20] They would normally have amounted to a major scholarly contribution – at least from our modern point of view – if Fourmont had not forged around thirty of these texts.

2 The forgeries and the discovery of the fraud

After returning to Paris in 1730, Fourmont had to face the frustration of his sponsors. Sevin had collected hundreds of manuscripts, albeit not the ones expected, whereas Fourmont hardly had any to show. [21] The latter also stayed in the Peloponnese for too long, a region to which he was not supposed to go initially, and

19 Mémoire du Roy pour servir d'instruction aux sieurs Sevin et Fourmont de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres, BNF Français 7194, fols 16–19, quoted after Omont 1902, 436–438 (quotation on p. 438).

20 See Follet 2005; Summa 2015; Doyen 2016, for example.

21 See the letter from Fourmont to Della Rocca (Sparta, 27 Mai 1730), in which he explains how he decided not to buy any uninteresting books, but rather to collect material to write books (Omont 1902, 1210).

he searched intensively for inscriptions even though it was not his primary mission; in letters to him, Bignon and Maurepas asked him explicitly what he was doing and ordered him to come back as soon as possible.[22] Nevertheless, Fourmont was convinced that the inscriptions he had collected were valuable. After his return, he began to work on an ambitious publication with plates and commentary, but never managed to persuade his sponsors to pay for it.



Fig. 1: Some forged inscriptions published by Fourmont (1743, pl. 1–3): fake lists of Spartan magistrates in invented archaic script.

At the time of his death in 1746, some preparatory work had been done, but only three inscriptions had been published by him. Strikingly, all three were forgeries (Fig. 1).[23] More revealing is the fact that, using Fourmont's paper transmitted to the Royal Library, Count Caylus and Abbé Barthélémy, two famous scholarly contemporaries of Fourmont's, posthumously published some inscriptions allegedly copied in Sparta. These were also forgeries, however (see Figs. 2 and 4, middle).[24]

22 Omont 1902, 574–575.

23 Fourmont 1743 (text presented to the Academy on 15 November 1740).

24 Caylus 1752–1767, I (1752) 59–65 (pl. 20) and II (1756), 153–154 (pl. 51); Barthélémy 1756. Caylus also published some genuine documents after taking a second look at the material: Caylus 1752–1767, VI (1764) 163–196.

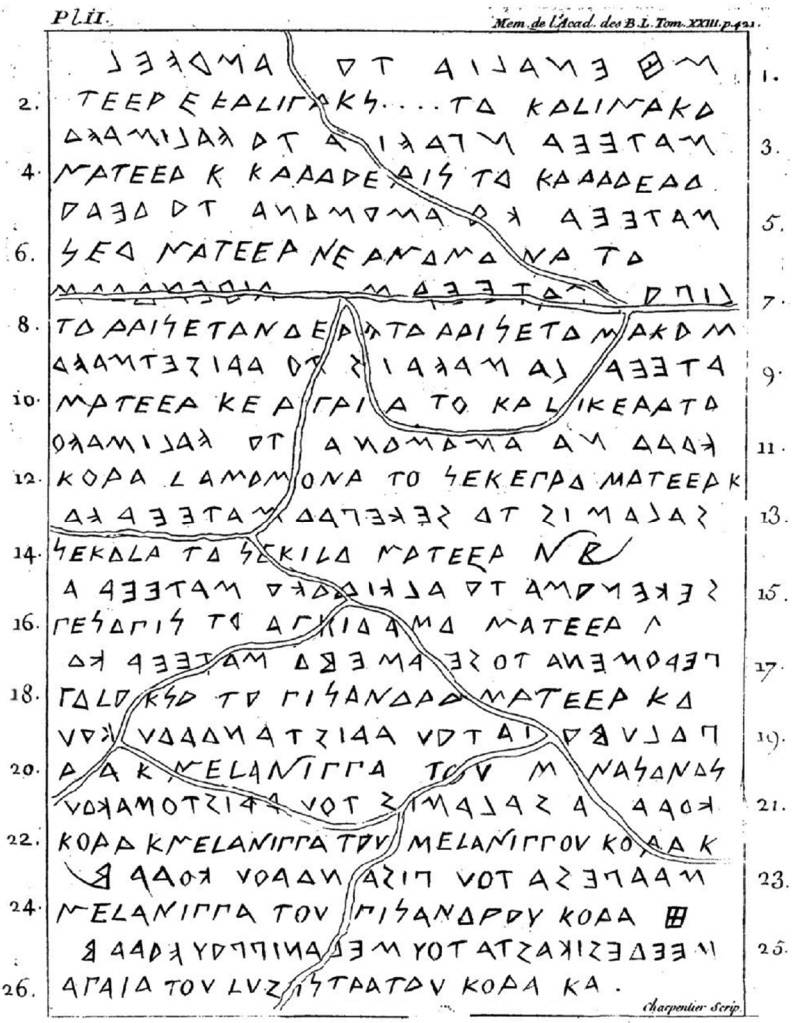

Fig. 2: Forged inscription published by Barthélémy (1756, Pl. 2): fake list of priestesses in invented archaic boustrophedon script (alternately written from right to left and left to right).

The reason why Fourmont published those forged documents and why Caylus and Barthélémy also did so is obvious: the forged texts were the most interesting ones for his contemporaries. Before I explore the origin of the deception any further, it is necessary to briefly consider its posterity.

Fourmont invented a special alphabet for his forgeries, a strange mixture of Greek and Phoenician letters with which he wanted to prove that the Spartans were of Semitic origin. The texts published in facsimile in his lifetime and the ones published by Barthélémy and Caylus almost always use these extraordinary letters. They aroused great interest and were presented and discussed in such learned books as the *Nouveau traité de diplomatique*, a handbook of historical criticism of documents often considered a milestone in the emergence of history as a modern scientific discipline.[25] The learned circles thought it was a sensational discovery.

Too sensational to be true, though, as we now know. Several decades went by before the fakes were revealed; it was only in 1791 that Richard Payne Knight published a famous book devoted to the Greek alphabet, in which he raised the first serious doubts about the authenticity of the texts Fourmont had provided.[26] As he pointed out, the forms of the letters were without parallel, the morphology of the new or dialectal words was impossible, the phraseology of the texts strangely close to French and the stones themselves looked very strange on the drawings accompanying Fourmont's articles, especially the broken ones.[27] The arguments developed by Knight should have sufficed to convince the scholarly circles of the fraud, but scholars continued to support Fourmont nonetheless, especially in France.[28]

The fatal blow was eventually struck by an English gentleman: George Hamilton Gordon, the Fourth Earl of Aberdeen and peer of the Kingdom, who was to be Prime Minister from 1852 to 1855. During the *grand tour* that led him to Greece – something quite unusual in his time – this gentleman, a future member of the Society of Dilettanti to whom Knight was a mentor in classical studies, discovered two stone bas-reliefs in a chapel south of Sparta in October 1803. He arranged their transfer to Great Britain[29] and had them published in 1817.[30]

25 Tassin/Toustain 1750, 615–632.

26 Knight 1791, 111–130. Gengler 2016, 66–67.

27 Fourmont, at least, knew better than the forger of Gozel that the ancient artefact had to be broken somehow; see C. Breniquet's contribution to this volume.

28 See Gengler 2016.

29 On Lord Aberdeen in general, see Chamberlain 1983, esp. 30–45 on his travels; cf. Balfour 1922, 22–24 and 26. Regarding his membership of the Dilettanti, see Cust 1914, 283. For more on the Society of Dilettanti in general and the role of Richard Payne Knight, see Redford 2008 and Kelly 2009.

30 Walpole 1817, 446–451.

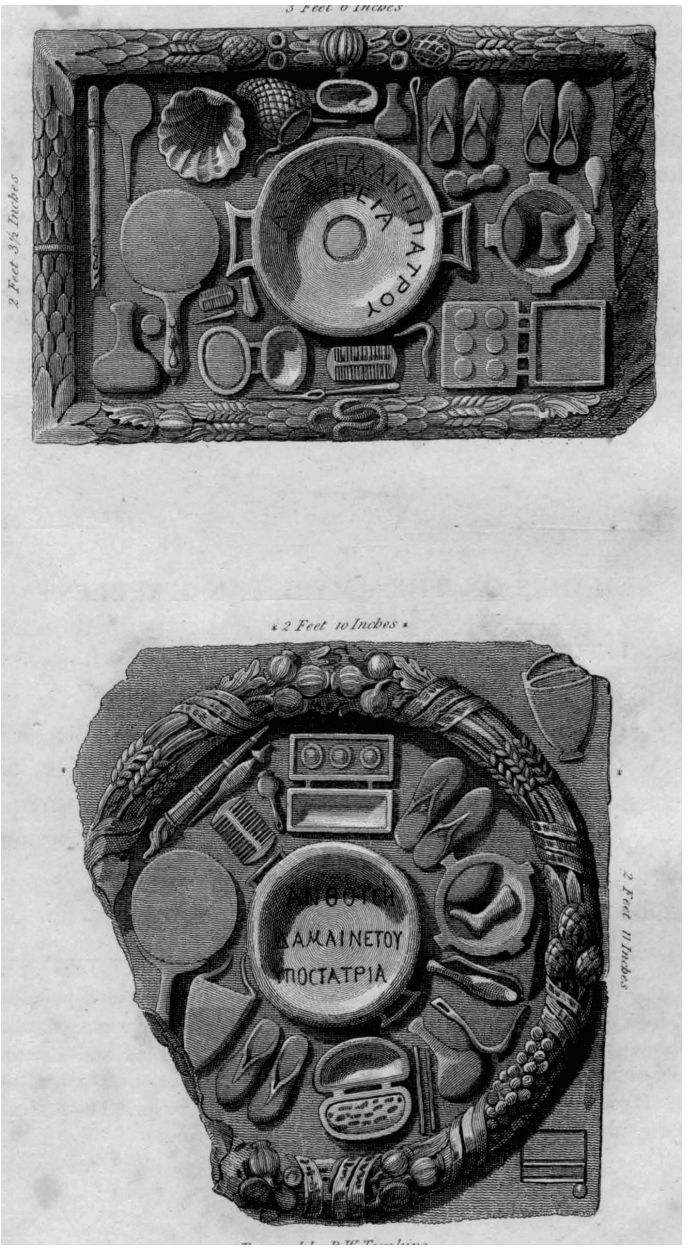

Fig. 3: The Aberdeen reliefs in Walpole 1817, in front of p. 446.

These monuments are now kept at the British Museum (Fig. 3).[31] They show a series of objects relating to women's cosmetics and dress, framed by a garland. Inside two-handled plates cut in the middle of each panel, an inscription identifies the women who made these offerings.[32] The Aberdeen reliefs, as they are known, are two of the monuments that were posthumously published by Caylus after Fourmont's papers, and a comparison of the originals with those copies shone light on Fourmont's crude methods (Fig. 4). Although these reliefs were not truly forged (not entirely, at least), they do reveal the Frenchman's lack of scruples in his work: the reliefs in the drawing that he had made are unrecognisable.[33]



Fig. 4 (left to right): Paris, BnF, Suppl. gr. 571B, fol. 212 recto (reproduced by kind permission of the BnF), engraving published by Caylus (1752–1767, II, pl. 51.2) based on Fourmont's paper, and by Walpole (1817, in front of p. 446) based on the original.

The publication of the Aberdeen reliefs triggered a feud with the French scholar Désiré Raoul-Rochette, who, for his part, believed in Fourmont's sincerity, saying that if the latter's copies were inaccurate, it was only due to his ignorance or the conditions in which he had examined the stones. Besides that, Raoul-Rochette said that Knight's arguments, which he also tried to refute, were preposterous: since the monuments published by Fourmont were so extraordinary, how could

31 British Museum 1861,0523.2 and 1861,0523.1. They were published and analysed in Walker 1989.

32 IG V1 249: Κλαυ(δία) Ἀγήτα Ἀντιπάτρου/ ἱέρεια ('Clau(dia) Agēta, daughter of Antipatros, priestess') and IG V1 248: Ἀνθούση/Δαμαινέτου/ὑποστάτρια ('Anthousē, daughter of Damaimetos, assistant'). See Gengler 2010.

33 Regarding some details of the letter forms, Fourmont's copy is actually slightly more accurate than the pictures published by Lord Aberdeen. See below regarding the original copy that Fourmont made.

Knight call their veracity into question? Their oddity is proof of their antiquity, not of their falsehood, he insisted.[34]

3 Texts and monuments

We have a considerable number of texts at our disposal documenting Fourmont's work in Greece as well as in France after his return. The French National Library has a series of manuscripts containing several copies of the inscriptions collected by him: drafts, sketches and cleaned-up copies preparatory to the publication of the texts. Obviously, these are composite volumes in which sheets of different provenances were gathered together, perhaps not even by Fourmont himself. This collection is probably not quite complete, as it contains some drafts without cleaned-up copies and copies without drafts.

Before turning to Fourmont's motives for making his forgeries, it is necessary to look at his working method in general since, as we will see, fakes emerged from genuine items. According to the King's instructions, copying inscriptions was only supposed to be a secondary task, to be done in case it was impossible to acquire the inscriptions themselves. Monuments bearing inscriptions were as interesting for the King's collection as coins and manuscripts were.[35] Thus, the copies had to depict the inscriptions exactly and the two envoys were urged to 'draw accurate copies' of the inscriptions.

The ambitious publication plan that Fourmont submitted to the King's minister Maurepas provided for the illustration of every single text he had copied in Greece. Even without counting the melting of new types for the composition of the Greek text of the most archaic inscriptions – including the fanciful Graeco-Phoenician alphabet that Fourmont conceived – the price of the plates would have been still prohibitively high. With the help of his nephew, Fourmont had begun to produce definitive copies of the inscriptions, which were added to previously prepared drawings of stones: columns, statue bases, blocks, fragments of all sorts, and so on. The drawings seem to have been carefully executed and are

34 This is an episode in the diplomatic war between France and Great Britain in which archaeology was often exploited. See Challis 2008 and Gengler 2016 for more details, among other works.

35 See Schnapp 2014 concerning the intellectual shift from antiquarianism to archaeology occurring at this time.

individualised enough to correspond to some extant monuments, but this is probably not the case in reality.[36]

The comparison of preserved texts with their counterparts in Fourmont's paper is revealing (see Figs. 5–9). In the composite manuscript known as Paris, BnF, Suppl. grec 855, we have the text of Spartan inscriptions in capital letters, which seem to be the original copies established *in situ* during the mission (Fig. 5).

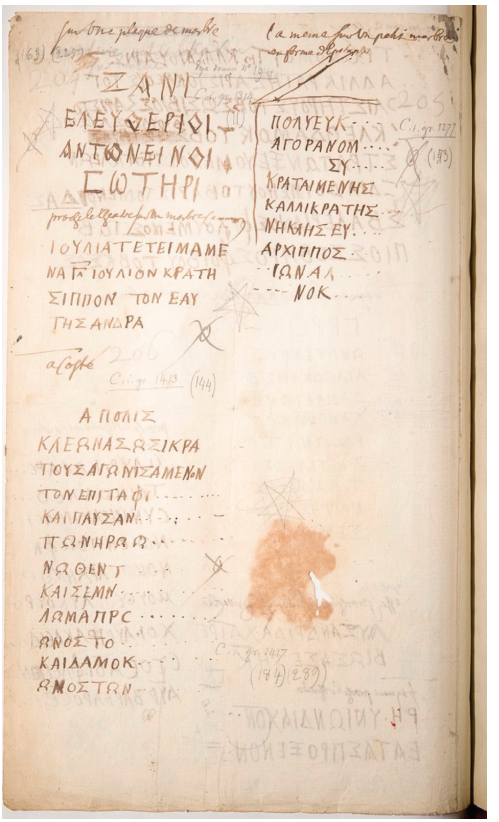

Fig. 5: Paris, BnF, Suppl. gr. 855, fol. 83 verso (reproduced by kind permission of the BnF).

36 During his travels, Fourmont's nephew Claude was responsible for the drawing; see the letter from Fourmont to Maurepas sent from Athens on 20 July 1729, which is quoted in Omont 1902, 566. Claude was also instrumental in discovering the inscriptions in Sparta according to Fourmont (1733, 357).

Let us consider the text on the bottom left of the page:[37] there is an indication of its original location, in this case *a costé*, i.e. 'nearby', referring to the theatre, which is mentioned as the spot where the inscriptions directly preceding our example were found and copied.

Another part of the same manuscript contains other copies of the same texts in minuscule letters, this time in non-topographical order. Those new copies were apparently conceived as a draft for the drawing of the monument, with indications of the mouldings for the top and bottom of the stone and sometimes even a sketch of the whole monument. Here we found our example again (Fig. 6). Even though the text is written in minuscule letters, a few of them are written in epigraphic capitals to make a particularity in the layout clear.

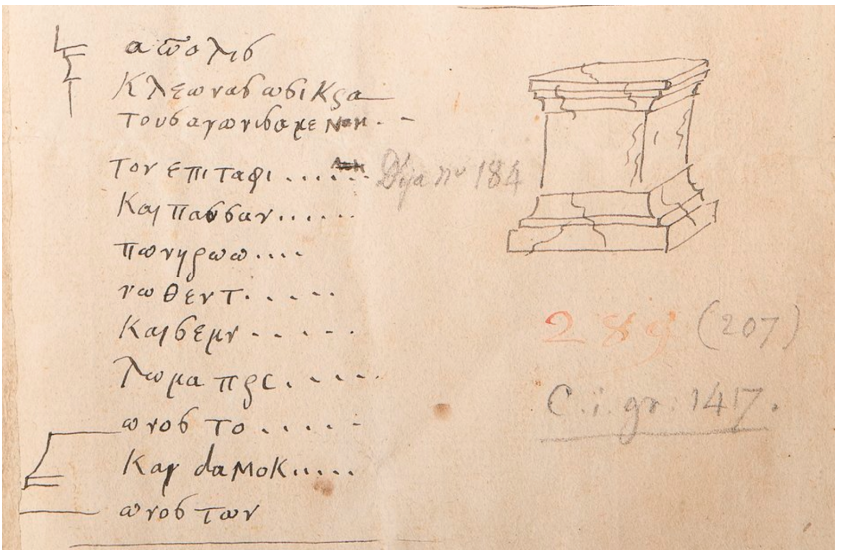

Fig. 6: Paris, BnF, Suppl. gr. 855, fol. 212 recto (reproduced by kind permission of the BnF).

37 IG V1 660: ἀ πόλις| Κλέωνα Σωσικρά|τους ἀγωνισάμενον| τὸν ἐπιτάφι[ον Λεωνίδα]| καὶ Παυσαν[ία καὶ τῶν λοι]|πῶν ἡρώω[ν, καὶ στεφα]|νωθέντ[α ἀνδρείας ἕνεκα]| καὶ σεμν[ότατος, τὸ ἀνά]|λωμα προ[σδεξαμένων Κλέ]|ωνος (?) το[ῦ - - - - -]| καὶ Δαμοκ[ράτους τοῦ Δαμί]|ωνος τῶν [ἀδελφιδῶν(?)], ('The city honours Kleōn, son of Sōsikratēs, who was engaged in the funeral contest [for Leonidas] and Pausanias [and the o]ther heroes [and was crown]ed [because of his courage] and his dign[ity, the ex]pense be[ing covered by Kle]ōn (?), the son of [- - - - -] and Damok[ratēs, the son of Dami]ōn, his [nephews (?)]').

All these details were duly reproduced in the final drawing, some of which are also preserved in other volumes of the French National Library. Things did not always go smoothly first time round, as a few examples of faulty drawings show. In our example, a previous version of the text (Fig. 7, left) took up too much space and did not fit in the frame. The drawing of the stone was then reproduced almost identically (Fig. 7, right) and the text was written anew, but in a smaller script. We also have another draft of the same text with far fewer details and a few mistakes, which probably justified its discarding.[38]

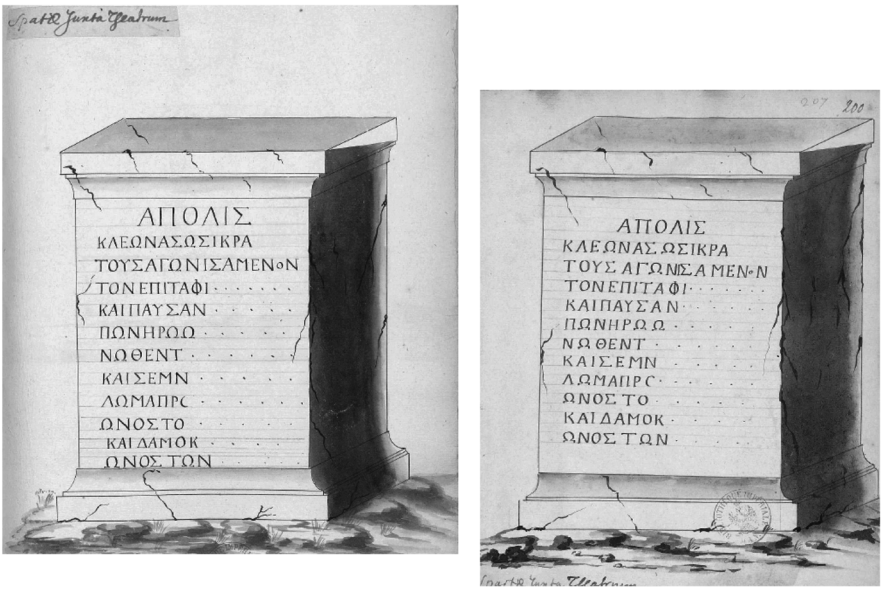

Fig. 7: Paris, BnF, Suppl. gr. 571, fols 181 and 200 recto (reproduced by kind permission of the BnF)

But how reliable are these drawings really? They were prepared carefully, and the final result follows the draft's instructions, but what about the step before? We know that some drawings were prepared well in advance since we have a whole volume of stone drawings without any text.[39] Were they really meant to represent specific monuments? The copies of the texts Fourmont collected are only occa-

38 Paris, BnF, Suppl. gr. 855, fol. 203 verso.
39 Paris, BnF, Suppl. gr. 571D.

sionally supplemented with information about the monument bearing the inscription. It thus seems that the combination of text and monument on the drawings was probably made up *a posteriori,* but perhaps not quite arbitrarily.

We can surmise from the drawings associated with the text of our example that the monument was a statue base, and the text itself actually points in the same direction. The inscription was found again in an excavation conducted at Sparta at the beginning of the twentieth century,[40] but the archaeologists did not provide any measurements, pictures or descriptions of it. I was unable to locate the stone in Sparta when I looked for it. Although it was impossible to verify the reliability of the drawing in this case, the modern edition at least confirmed that the copy Fourmont made was quite accurate.[41]

Fortunately, I was more successful with another stone that can now be seen in front of the Roman theatre in Sparta (Fig. 8). It is a monumental base with an inscription that Fourmont copied accurately (there is only one small mistake in it, which is repeated in all three versions of the text in the manuscripts).[42] A comparison between the real monument and the drawing clearly reveals some differences. However, the overall shape of the stone and the layout of the text are not significantly different. This is unlikely to be a coincidence. In the original copy, Fourmont noted that it was 'another base with bigger dimensions'. I am convinced that the drawings were made on the basis of these indications. They are thus of limited accuracy, although they are not totally fake.

40 Tillyard 1905/1906, 478; CIG 1417 = IG V1 660.

41 Fourmont carefully noted the smaller omicron in l. 3, a detail neglected in the modern edition of the text.

42 Tillyard 1905/1906, 478; CIG 1376 = IG V1 563: ἡ πόλις ἡ Λακεδαιμονί|ων Αἴλιον Μητροφάνη|τὸν ἀξιολογώτατον ἤ|θει τε φιλοσόφῳ καὶ παι|δ<ε>ίᾳ καὶ τοῖς λόγοις δια|φέροντα τῶν ἡλίκων,| προσδεξαμένου τὸ ἀ|νάλωμα Μ(άρκου) Αὐρ(ηλίου) Κλεάνο[ρ]ο[ς]||[τ]ο<ῦ> Ῥ̣ο̣ύφου. ('The city of the Lacedaemonians honours the most outstanding Aelius Metrophanes, distinguished among his contemporaries by his philosophical custom, his education and his discourse, the expense being covered by Marcus Aurelius Cleanōr, son of Rufus').



Fig. 8 (top to bottom, left to right): Copies of the text in Fourmont's papers, Paris, BnF Suppl. gr. 855, fol. 1 verso, Suppl. gr. 855, fol. 213 recto and Suppl. gr. 571, fol. 197 recto (reproduced by kind permission of the BnF), and the monument today (O. Gengler).

Nevertheless, what we are glimpsing here is the first step in the forgery. Fourmont paid little attention to the King's instructions: he did not make a precise or systematic record of the shape of the stones bearing the inscriptions that he copied. In the process of preparing the publication of his discoveries – probably to conceal his carelessness – he assigned a form to every text, that matched up with his own descriptions, his memory, and probably his imagination.

I shall now come back to the Aberdeen reliefs. The plates published by Caylus are identical to the preparatory drawings preserved in Fourmont's papers (Fig. 4, left and middle). But we also have the original copy of the inscriptions made by Fourmont on location (Fig. 9) and Fourmont's lemma: it is interesting to note that he speaks there of the figured objects he called hieroglyphs, but clearly says that he could not really see them on one stone and that they were only slightly more visible on the second one. Fourmont had the drawings of these reliefs made on the basis of his deficient observations, but was possibly not fully aware that he was actually producing fakes.

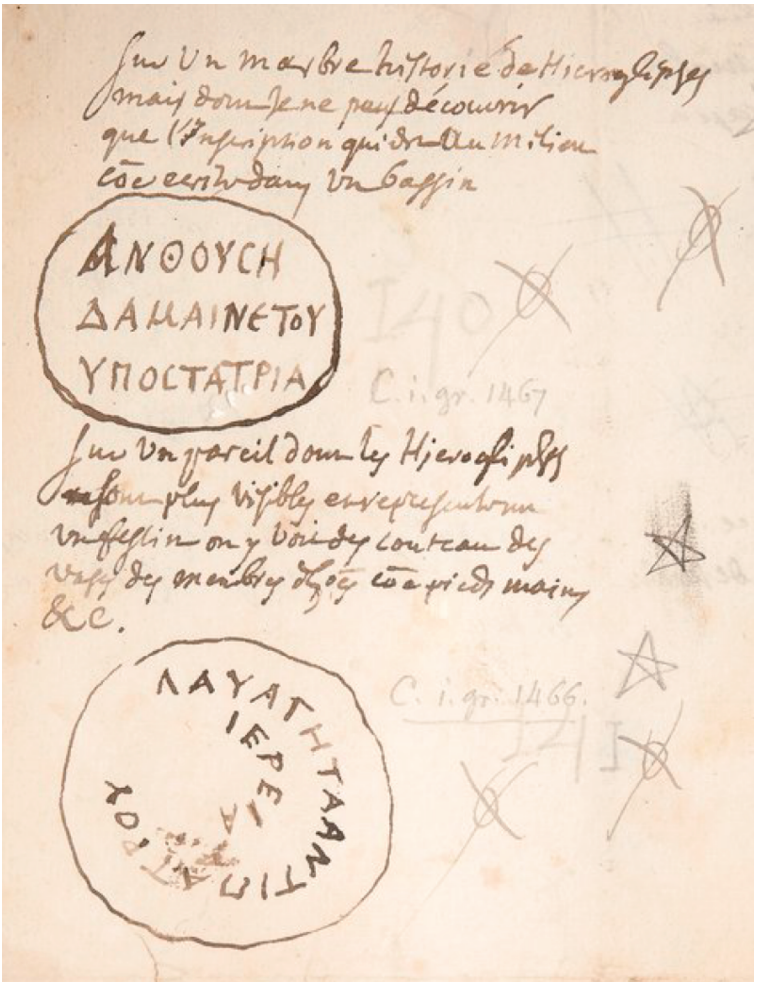

Fig. 9: Upper part of Paris, BnF, Suppl. gr. 855 fol. 61 verso (reproduced by kind permission of the BnF).

Transcription:

Sur un marbre historié de Hierogliphes mais dont je ne peux découvrir que l'inscription qui est au milieu co(mm)e ecrite dans un bassin
'On a marble decorated with hieroglyphs where I can only discern the inscription that is in the middle, as if written in a basin'
Sur un pareil dont les Hierogliphes sont plus visibles et représentent un festin on y voit des couteaux des vases des membres d'ho(mm)es co(mm)e pieds mains &c.

> 'On a similar one, where the hieroglyphs are more visible and depict a banquet, one sees some knives, vessels, human limbs like hands, feet etc.'

Nonetheless, he definitely forged 27 other inscriptions. Why did he do that and how exactly did he go about it? Richard Stoneman has surmised that it was the impatience of his sponsors which compelled Fourmont to increase the value of his collection this way – he wanted to conceal the fact he had failed in his main mission of finding manuscripts.[43] Yet he could not be blamed for having followed at least part of the King's instructions by making copies of inscriptions, as he said to Maurepas himself.[44]

In one of the letters that he wrote in reply to Bignon's and Maurepas's threatening inquiries quoted at the beginning, he boasts of the incredible documents he found in Sparta: 'I was *lucky enough* to find the tombs of Lysander and Agesilaus [...], bases of the statues of *several* philosophers, rhetoricians, captains and other notable figures from this country, *unknown until now*'.[45]

I do not think he was a forger at this point. Rather, his behaviour was probably just due to ignorance (albeit not much more than that of his colleagues). His education, the knowledge of ancient Greece at the time – mainly acquired through classical literary texts – and common opinion about Sparta did not prepare him for the identification and assessment of his discoveries, which were mainly inscriptions from the Roman period, from the first to third century CE. As soon as he discovered that his rhetoricians bore the forenames Marcus Aurelius or Aelius and that his ephors were mainly Gaii Iulii and Tiberii Claudii, as I am sure he did, the value of his collection sank dramatically in his own eyes and those of his contemporaries. This happened at the latest once he was back in France again. Nevertheless, Fourmont was already under pressure and potentially in trouble during his mission since the discovery of inscriptions alone would not satisfy his sponsors, as a letter from Sevin to Caylus commenting on his work clearly shows: 'a good manuscript would be more valuable and instructive' than inscriptions, he pointed out.[46]

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43 Stoneman 1985. See Fourmont's letter to Maurepas, 20 April 1730, quoted by Omont 1902, 618, which includes this ironic statement: *pour en trouver de l'espèce de ceux que l'on souhaite, il faudra les forger, car il n'y en a point* ('in order to find some [manuscripts] of the kind that are expected, it would be necessary to forge them because there aren't any').

44 In the same letter, he wrote: *j'ay été obligé de faire de l'objet le moins principal le premier* ('I was obliged to turn the least important aim [of the mission] into the main one').

45 Omont 1902, 616. See the longer extract quoted at the beginning of this article.

46 Bourlet de Vauxcelles 1802, 19: *M. Fourmont a été encore plus malheureux : il a parcouru plusieurs monastères de la Morée , et dans ces monastères, il n'a pas trouvé un seul morceau qui mérite*

At the end of June 1730, Fourmont was recalled to France. Upon his return, he reported on his travels before the Academy on several occasions. We can see how his forgeries emerged from the subjects of Fourmont's accounts. On 11 December 1739, he held the first of three lectures dealing with the Phoenician origin of the Spartans and subsequently five lectures about his forged inscriptions, from August 1740 to January 1741.[47]

What all of Fourmont's forgeries have in common is that they are associated with the shrines of Apollo and Athena-Onga at Amyclae, the second of which never actually existed. Fourmont developed a whole system revolving around the imaginary Phoenician origin of the Spartans, which he wanted to demonstrate through etymology, letter forms and religious history. The talks he held in 1739 aimed to support his interpretation of the forged inscriptions, the alphabet of which was supposed to establish the Semitic origin of the Spartans when combined with some lexical creations of his. The keystones of the system were actually the reliefs, however, representing – in Fourmont's overactive imagination, at least – human remains, evoking images of barbaric sacrifices and the inscription mentioning a female cult attendant. This is the origin of the bizarre idea that sees the traces of a Phoenician Onga cult in Sparta, which the Spartans supposedly practised in their distant past more than 1,000 years before Christ.

Clearly, the plan to forge documents was implemented from December 1739 onwards. But when must it have been conceived? We have no evidence that Fourmont was put under particular pressure by his sponsors after his return, but this was probably the case; after all, he had announced he had made a great deal of finds and had to fulfil his promises at some point.[48] The publication of the inscriptions was clearly an issue. After his return, he gave a publication plan to

d'entrer dans la bibliothèque du roi. En revanche, il a copié quelques centaines d'inscriptions qui n'ont point encore vu le jour, et il se promet de porter bien plus loin ses découvertes en ce genre : c'est toujours autant de gagné; mais, à vous parler franchement, un bon manuscrit seroit plus précieux et plus instructif. ('M. Fourmont was even more unlucky: he went through several monasteries in the Morea, and in these monasteries he did not find a single piece that deserves to enter the King's library. Nonetheless, he copied a few hundred inscriptions that had not yet been published, and he promises to carry on with such discoveries: it is something, at least, but to be frank, a good manuscript would be more valuable and instructive').

47 See the details in Raspi-Serra 1998, 40–46.

48 The report published in 1733 names the extraordinary findings announced in the letters from April 1730 and also mentions the Temple of Apollo and *boustrophedon* inscriptions from Amyclae (Fourmont 1733, 358). It could be another delusion of Fourmont or an evidence that the forgeries were already prepared by this date.

Maurepas, who refused it because of its cost.[49] To a certain extent, this refusal protected him for a while from having to show what sparse material he had actually collected.[50] The publication was also meant to earn him social and academic credit, however, and by the end of 1739 he probably felt it necessary to make a move in order to please his sponsors and gain some personal prestige – the records of the Academy show that he was keen to present his results, at least. The publication of exceptional documents might also have helped him to raise money to publish the whole collection.

But we also know that Sevin, who for his part brought back almost six hundred manuscripts from Constantinople, profited from his success after his return: he received a clerical appanage that could have assured him an income of 1,800 pounds, which he converted into an annuity of 500 pounds. In May 1737, he was also appointed librarian for the royal manuscript collection, which he had helped to develop.[51] Fourmont never received such reward. Prestige and the associated social and economic advantages could have motivated Fourmont just as much as certain opinions about the remote antiquity of Greece.

The personality of the man and his background certainly also played a role. While it is difficult to gain access to this level of Fourmont's personality,[52] an overview of his network will help the reader to understand the social pressures that contributed to the creation of the forgeries and the conscious or unconscious help he may have received.

49 Omont 1902: 641–644. The cost was an issue discussed by Fourmont's supporters (including Bernard de Montfaucon) as early as 1734; see Omont 1902, 655–656.

50 The same letters by Montfaucon reveal that Fourmont was not keen to show his treasures (see Montfaucon's letter to Bouhier on 31 Dec. 1733, for example: *Je me ferois un plaisir de vous envoier quelques inscriptions du nombre de celles que l'abbé Fourmont a apporté du Levant; mais il ne seroit pas possible d'obtenir cela de lui*. ('I would be happy to send you some of the inscriptions that Abbé Fourmont brought back from the Levant, but it would be impossible to obtain them from him'; quoted in Omont 1902: 655.)

51 Gros de Boze 1751. Cf. Balayé 1988, 164–165.

52 Ulrich von Wilamowitz considered it a psychological puzzle to understand Fourmont's motives (Wilamowitz 1927, 28). See some elements in Moureau 2005, 133–140.

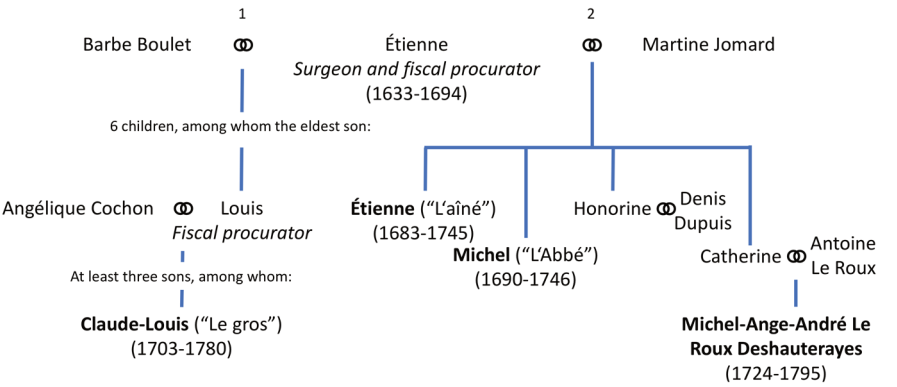

Fig. 10: Michel Fourmont's family tree (based on Leung 2002, 22–25).

Coming from a family of provincial notability, the young Michel Fourmont sought after his father's death the help and support of his elder brother, Étienne, who was already a successful and honoured scholar.[53] After numerous solicitations, he was finally accepted by him as a pupil and came to benefit from his learning and his network.[54] As the family tree shows (Fig. 10), Michel was not the only one to benefit from Étienne's help. As was very common in his time, two other family members were able to gain some social mobility as well through Étienne's connections (Fig. 11). Michel was admitted to the Academy in 1724 as an associate member thanks to help from Bignon.[55] He was also chosen for the Greek expedition because of this connection: Sevin was an old college friend of Étienne's.[56] In turn, Michel took his nephew, Claude-Louis, to Greece with him as an assistant.[57]

53 See Leung 2002, especially 22–25. Michel Fourmont was the son of Étienne, a surgeon and fiscal procurator, and his second wife, Martine Jomard. The *Éloges* of Étienne and Michel Fourmont by Fréret (Fréret 1753a and 1753b) named their mother Catherine Jomard, but this seems to be a mistake; see Forget 1974, 33.

54 Fréret 1753b, 432–433.

55 Sevin and Étienne Fourmont, who were a few years older, joined the Academy as *élèves* ('pupils') in 1711 and 1713 respectively. See de Mas Latrie 1840.

56 See the biographical elements given in the *Abrégé de la vie et des ouvrages de M(onsieur) Fourmont* (de Guignes/Le Roux Deshauterayes 1747), especially p. 9 concerning Bignon's role in Michel's admission to the Academy. Sevin himself was also mentored by Bignon; see Gros de Boze 1751, 282.

57 Claude-Louis was later appointed by Bignon to search for manuscripts in Egypt; Omont 1902, 779–805.

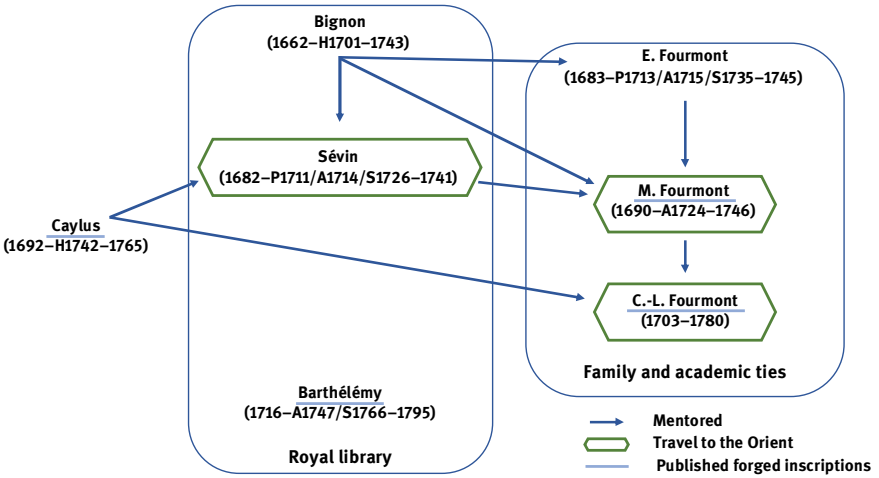

Fig. 11: Michel Fourmont's networks. The members of the Academy are identified along with their status (P = Pupil, A = Associate, S = Stipendiary, H = Honorary) and date of admission (based on de Mas Latrie 1840).

Claude-Louis's contribution to the forgery was probably a far more active one than is usually stated. He was the one who discovered the inscriptions in Sparta near the theatre. In Michel Fourmont's posthumous praise, it is said that Claude-Louis drew figured monuments and some maps on location and was the one who helped Michel Fourmont prepare the publication of the inscriptions and make the facsimile, a 'tedious and unpleasant task'.[58] After Michel's death, Claude-Louis was charged with resuming the publication work. He is cited by Caylus as his source for some of the details concerning the aspect and size of forged monuments.[59] He was there during the expedition, he worked on the final publication and he probably helped to publish a few more forgeries after his uncle's death. He profited directly from his work with Michel: he received Bignon's and Maurepas's protection, was accepted by the Royal Library as an interpreter and went abroad again to collect manuscripts for the King.[60]

58 Fréret 1753b, 441. This is confirmed by Fourmont's papers; see Omont 1902, 645.
59 Omont 1902, 647; Caylus 1752–1767, I (1952) 60.
60 Fréret 1753b, 446.

4 Conclusion

How could these forgeries have deceived scholars for more than sixty years? Although Richard Payne Knight had already pointed out the incongruity of the supposed inscriptions, there were still many respectable intellectuals whom Fourmont's forgeries deceived when August Boeckh published his systematic study in 1825.[61] This actually gives us an insight into the knowledge and expectations of learned circles in eighteenth-century France.

Firstly, scholars in Fourmont's time had few documents with which they could have compared the forgeries and, generally speaking, far less knowledge of Greek epigraphy than we have today, but also much less than Fourmont had himself. Travelling to Sparta was no easy enterprise. This is probably one of the reasons why Fourmont forged Spartan inscriptions and not Athenian ones, for example, and it definitely goes a long way to explaining why it took a such a long time for the fraud to be discovered.

Secondly, the scholars of Fourmont's time had a taste for the extraordinary, for what they named 'curious', with fake detachment. As a corollary, the genuine inscriptions that Fourmont copied, which are of prime interest to us because of the information they contain about Spartan society in the Roman period, were underrated and neglected at the time. Fourmont himself initially succumbed to the temptation to see what he wanted to see in the texts he copied: the famous Sparta of archaic times. He effectively discovered a few catalogues used by Spartan officials, ephors, *nomphulakes* and so on, but from Roman times. The names Agesilaus and Brasidas were, indeed, in the texts he read, but they were not the famous Spartan kings and generals of the fifth and fourth century BCE, but Roman citizens – Flavius Agesilaus and Tiberius Claudius Brasidas (who was at least a Roman senator) – trying to be as Spartan as their namesakes.[62]

The network in which Fourmont was involved backed up his credibility. His connections and academic positions – also obtained through his network – were accepted as proof of his seriousness. It would have been difficult for those who promoted his career to admit that he was a fraudster.

Lastly, there was national pride. From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, the Mediterranean and especially the search for antiquities became a

61 Boeckh dealt with Fourmont's forgeries in a part of the introduction to his *Corpus*, the first fascicule of which was published in 1825.

62 Gengler 2005; see Rizakis et al. 2004, especially LAC358 on Flavius Agesilaus and LAC274 on Tiberius Claudius Brasidas.

symbolic battlefield between France and Great Britain.[63] At the time Lord Aberdeen published the reliefs that he had brought back from Laconia, competition was at its peak. Suffice it to say that if Lord Elgin – a friend and fellow Scottish nobleman of Aberdeen – had not taken the Parthenon marbles himself, they would probably now be in the Musée du Louvre. Against this background, scholars like Raoul-Rochette could do nothing less than defend Fourmont.

Interestingly enough, Fourmont conceived the inscriptions as monuments and not as mere texts. Accordingly, he not only forged some of the inscriptions, but imagined the stones that were supposed to bear them. Since the monuments allegedly stood in a distant country that was quite difficult to reach at that time, he could create them with a pencil and a sheet of paper. He showed considerable creativity in doing this and made use of his linguistic and epigraphic knowledge, albeit with a certain naivety. Paradoxically, his forgeries reveal his considerable competence as well as a genuine interest in the materiality of the inscriptions, from which his copies of real texts benefitted. Unfortunately, however, his reputation as a fraudster continues to mar his reputation as an epigrapher.[64]

Abbreviations

BnF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
CIG	*Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*
NAF	Nouvelles acquisitions françaises

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63 Gengler 2016.

64 Morris 2009, 389.

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Jan Just Witkam

Sicilian Sweets. The Fanciful Frauds of Wily Father Vella

Abstract: Father Giuseppe Vella was a Maltese clergyman who wrote counterfeit Arabic texts on the history of Sicily at the end of the eighteenth century. This article looks at the texts that Vella produced, analysing them both in terms of their form – written in a sort of limping Maltese Arabic – and in terms of their content, particularly the preposterous claim of being authentic historical sources on the relationship between the rulers of Sicily and the Fatimid territories in North Africa and Egypt. The general story of the counterfeit texts has been known ever since the meticulous detective work done by Bartolomeo Lagumina more than a century ago, and more recently it has also been covered in several publications by Thomas Freller. The grammatical and lexical nature of the counterfeit texts is less well known, however. This is examined in this article. Even though the texts are not genuine, they are nevertheless products of their time and a particular place, namely late eighteenth-century Palermo. The article concludes with a short survey of the modern literary afterlife of the Vella affair.

The story that follows is not entirely unknown. In a nutshell, it goes like this.[1] From 1788 onwards, the Maltese abbot Giuseppe Vella (1749–1814), who lived in Palermo,[2] allowed two Arabic or quasi-Arabic texts of his own invention to be distributed.[3] These texts were meant to illustrate the early Arab history of Sicily. Vella published a work in six volumes called *Codice diplomatico di Sicilia sotto il*

1 Comprehensively taken from Lagumina 1882, Freller 2001, 2004, and 2005.

2 His grave is located in the Chiesa di San Matteo al Cassaro in Palermo; see Bonnici 2015, who also provides a portrait of Vella and states 1749 as the year of his birth, as opposed to other sources that mention 1740.

3 I first came across Abbot Vella and his counterfeit documents while sorting the manuscripts of the Juynboll family in Leiden. I lectured about Vella's fakes a few years ago (at the conference entitled 'Documents & Histoire. Session III. Le faux, le simulacre et la copie. Islam VIIe/XXe s.', Paris, 14 November 2013) and did so in Hamburg as well a few years later (2018). This presentation can be found here: <http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/files/Vella-falsifications-Hamburg-2018-complete.pdf>. It was the point of departure for the present article.

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governo degli Arabi (Palermo, 1789), first in Latin and Italian (in parallel) and then primarily in Italian (but not in Arabic). The *Codice diplomatico* is a collection of documents purportedly coming from the rulers of the Aghlabid dynasty in Tunisia (184–296/800–909).

Vella's patron, Archbishop Alfonso Airoldi (1728–1817), believed in the authenticity of the documents, however, and signed the title-page of the *Codice diplomatico* as if he himself was the learned editor and translator. This spurious action cannot have been entirely alien to Airoldi, as his bishopric was one of the cities called 'Heraclea in Europe', a diocese that had ceased to exist after the Ottoman conquest several centuries earlier. Along with the 'translated text', the *Codice diplomatico* provided a specimen of the 'original' manuscript, the '*Codex Martinianus*', paleographically a hard nut to crack. Its near-illegibility did much to contribute to the *Codex*'s aura of authenticity. That authenticity was further enhanced by numismatic evidence also provided in the *Codice diplomatico*.[4]

The long Italian text created a furore in learned Europe. In 1791, a German translation of the Italian text was begun by Philipp Wilhelm Gottlieb Hausleutner. The Danish Orientalist Olaus Gerhard Tychsen (1734–1815), who worked at the University of Rostock, did not hesitate to stake his great reputation as a palaeographer and numismatist on the authenticity of Vella's faked documents. He was able to 'decipher' and publish the Arabic text of the specimen of the '*Codex Martinianus*' that Vella/Airoldi had put at the beginning of the *Codex diplomaticus*. However, this *Codex* was written in such a way – no doubt at Vella's instigation – that nobody would be able to decipher it. In fact, Vella had given Tychsen the key to his graphical labyrinth.[5] Not everybody was as naïve (or vain) as Tychsen, however, and serious doubts emanated from other quarters, the French Orientalist Joseph de Guignes (1721–1800) being just one of the critics.

Encouraged by this general success, as of 1793, Vella started to publish another set of Arabic source materials that he called the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr*, or 'The Council of Egypt', containing documents that, it is assumed, were exchanged between the Norman rulers of Sicily and the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt – documents that were also fakes. This time, the documents were in both an Arabic and an Italian version. While this project was still underway, Vella started a third masquerade: he pretended to have discovered the sixtieth Book of Roman History

4 For a numismatic perspective of Vella's counterfeit work, see Travaini/D'Ottone Rambach 2019.

5 The irony of the brazen insolence of the Lucretian motto on the title-page of Airoldi 1788, '*E tenebris tantis tam clarum extollere lumen*', i.e. 'to take out of so much darkness so clear a light', will not be lost on the modern reader.

by Titus Livius in Arabic translation. Vella manufactured a mystification in which fact and fiction were cleverly interwoven. A contemporary described it as follows:

> Abbot Vella is the owner of the manuscript of the sixtieth book of Titus Livius, which was lost and which he received from Pinto,[6] the Grand Master of the Maltese Order. Chevalier Favray[7] had found this manuscript and several others as well in part of the roof construction of the Aya Sophia in Constantinople. He took these to Malta and gave them as a present to the Grand Master, who presented the Titus Livius manuscript to Vella.[8]

The Latin text of the missing work had been lost since Antiquity. This important discovery, however, proved to be a step too far, and shortly after he made this claim, Vella's house of cards fell apart – one still wonders what words he would have put into Livius' mouth. The ongoing publication of the bilingual *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr* was halted[9] and Vella was summoned before a criminal court and convicted of fraud. During the trial, Hager's report was used against Vella, and after the latter's conviction yet another expert was invited to make a report on the matter: Germano Adami, the Melkite archbishop of Aleppo, wrote a detailed analysis of Vella's counterfeit documents.[10] Vella received a prison sentence, but the verdict was subsequently commuted to house arrest. In the following, I shall concentrate on the two Arabic texts that he created.

1 The 'Codex Martinianus'

We only have a facsimile of the first text page of this seemingly non-existent manuscript. However, a 'Codex Martinianus' really does exist. It is MS Palermo 18, which contains a 'Life of the Prophet Muḥammad' according to the five canonical collections of al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dawūd, al-Tirmīdhi and al-Nasāʾī, and also according to other classical authors mentioned at the end of the volume. Vella ravaged that volume, renamed it '*Dīwān Siqilliyya*' and added his illegible

6 Manuel Pinto de Fonseca (1741–1773), the 68th Grand Master of the Maltese Order.

7 Chevalier Antoine de Favray (1706–1798) was a French painter noted for his portraits of personalities of the Ottoman Empire as well as paintings of Grand Masters of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. See Degiorgio/Fiorentino 2004.

8 My translation from Hager 1799, 58. As Pinto died before Vella came up with his story, it was impossible to verify the spurious provenance of the Livius manuscript.

9 The Bavarian State Library in Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek) owns a copy of the very rare second volume (2 A.or. 138-2); see <http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/0007bsb00076612/images/index.html> (last consulted on 13 February 2020).

10 Dated 1 September 1796. Fully quoted in Lagumina 1882; see the footnotes on pp. 13–15.

specimen page to it. When his empire of counterfeit writings collapsed, he had wanted to destroy that manuscript, but the time constraint caused by the subsequent criminal proceedings made this impossible.[11]

The facsimile of the spurious sample page, which was attached to MS Palermo 18, was printed on paper 24.4 × 17.1 cm in size with a visible mould of the printing plate measuring 22.1 × 14.3 cm. The name of the engraver is given as Melchior de Bella (a signature on the bottom line). There is some text in Latin script on the recto side, and the facsimile is on the verso side. The latter shows the opening page of an unusual Arabic manuscript with a heading in Latin: *Specimen Characteris Codicis Martiniani*, i.e. 'a sample of the script of the Martinian codex'. This presumed manuscript, the 'Codex Martinianus', was said to originate from the Monastery of San Martino not far from Palermo, an establishment considered to be Sicily's most important Benedictine abbey. The Latin and Italian translation of this forged text was distributed by Giuseppe Vella's protector, Bishop Alfonso Airoldi, who put his name on the title-pages of the six volumes of the Italian translation of the *Codex diplomaticus*, not without gratefully acknowledging the work of 'our Vella'.

The *Specimen* was originally published in 1788 and served as an illustration in Archbishop Airoldi's bilingual (Italian and Latin) edition of the beginning of the *Codex diplomaticus* of 1788 and was used again in 1789 as the opening passage of the first volume of the Italian edition of the *Codice diplomatico di Sicilia*.[12] Apart from the pages inserted in the 1788 and 1789 editions of the *Codex diplomaticus*, I consulted the loose leaf of the facsimile that was formerly part of a collection belonging to the Juynboll family in Leiden, now MS Leiden, University Library Or. 26.731 (27), which I extensively described in 2012.[13] It is one of the copies distributed among European Orientalists by Vella. It served as bait, and

11 Lagumina 1888, 16–17. Lagumina ordered and selectively edited and summarised the Arabic text of this 'Life' as contained in MS Palermo 18; see Lagumina 1882, 37–46, 47–60, 61–85 respectively. Lagumina's real scholarly interest was not in Vella's fraud, but in the original 'underlayer' of the Codex Martinianus.

12 Airoldi 1789. I consulted the much shorter 1788 edition, Airoldi 1788 [Leiden class mark: 913 A 13]. Apart from vol. I/1 (1789), I also consulted volumes I/2 (1789), II/2 (1790) and III/1 (1792) of Airoldi's *Codice diplomatico*, as found in the internet archive. All in all, the work comprises three volumes in six parts. More volumes were supposed to come, but these were never published. As regards the Latin translation, only the pages in the 1788 edition were published. A modern facsimile edition of the entire six-volume work seems to be available from Nabu Publishers in Charleston, South Carolina, USA.

13 Witkam 2012, 68–75.

Tychsen snapped at it. I did as well, in fact, though in a different way, as discovering this document was how I first became acquainted with Vella and his work.

We are familiar with four different versions of the introduction of the *Codex Martinianus* (which, to be frank, never existed as such), and ultimately, they all come from Giuseppe Vella. The illegible facsimile (Fig. 1) and the Latin and Italian translations were published by Bishop Airoldi in 1788, but came directly from Vella. The German translation by Hausleutner was based on the Italian text and was published from 1791 onwards. Last but not least, the Arabic text of the *Specimen* was published by Tychsen in 1792. As all the versions were supplied by Vella, we can ignore the facsimile page, which was not intended to be legible anyway, and concentrate on the original versions that were typographically published in Arabic, Latin and Italian. I also examined Hausleutner's German version, of course, if only because my knowledge of Italian is not very extensive.[14]

Secretly assisted by Vella, Tychsen 'deciphered' the Arabic text of the *Specimen* and published it in an Arabic grammar with an anthology in 1792. Vella must have believed that the illegibility of the Arabic text would increase its authenticity, and it is indeed quite hard to read. After making a few attempts at it, I desisted from ruining my eyes on the *Specimen* itself and decided to work with Tychsen's 'Arabic' text instead. This is much more legible, but an incomplete version of Vella's text. The preface tells us that the text was written in 375 (the Islamic lunar year beginning on 29 May 985) and 162 years after the Arab conquest of Sicily (Fig. 2).

'Codex Martinianus', Arabic text[15]	**'Codex Martinianus', translation**[16]
بسم الله لا اله الا الله محمد رسوله **|75|**	**[75]** In the name of God. There is no God except God. Muḥammad is the messenger of God.
اليامر بتع الكبر بتع الامير الكبير عبد الله ابن محمد ابن ابو الحسن العمل هذ الكتاب في سنت ثلث ماي وخمس وسبعين بتع محمد	By command of His Greatness *al-Amīr al-Kabīr* ʿAbdallāh b. Abī al-Ḥasan this book has been made, in the year three hundred and seventy-five of Muḥammad and a hundred

14 I here gratefully acknowledge the help I received from Dr Lucia Raggetti (University of Bologna) to help me to better understand, and when necessary translate for me, the Italian sources used for this article. She also identified the remains of the engraving in Fig. 6 for me and translated lines of Giovanni Meli's poetry about Vella.

15 From Tychsen 1792, 75–78.

16 Made after the Arabic text in Tychsen 1792: 75-78, the Latin and Italian texts in Airoldi 1788: 1-2, and the German translation in Hausleutner 1791: 3-6.

وماي تنين وستين والخلص بتع الله لي هوم المسلمين في اسقلي،
[76] وباسم الله ومحمد نبينا انكتب هذ الكتاب،
عبد الله ابن محمد ابن ابو الحسن والخلص بتع الله امير الكبير بتع سقلي كلها تاني الامر لي اب[17] المفت مصطف ابن حاني والخلص بتع الله اول رجل الديون بتع اسقلي لنجمع البرات كلها من مت حوفيم بعت عند المول بتع عرون ابرهيم ابن علبي ليريد العينون بتع الكبر هذك المول وبيش ياخد هذا البلد كلها والرحول لما كانو بتع حوفيم المول ابرهيم ابن علبي بعت في اسقلي القوا بتع الشخص بتع عدالقوم الكبير بعت بعسكر كبير وسق بيش يغلب اسقلي كيف نعمل لي عدالقوم الكبير كان الاول اخذ اسقلي،

بمت كان لي الامر بتع الكبر بتع الامير الكبير جمعت البرات كلها اللي كانو الموال يبعتوهم في اسقلي والعمر الكبار بتع اسقلي كانو يبتعوهم[18] الموال والبرات لي كانو العمر الكبار يبعتوهم العمر والحكام
[77] بتع البلد بتع اسقلي كلها هذاك البرت كلها مرفوعت في اسدوق بتع السرو في بيت اليزم فيه الديون وهذاك اسدوق دايم مغلوق بثلثت مفتح وكل وحد ما يقبل مع الاخر ووحد يزم الامير الكبير وحد عند المفت الكبير بحال اول رجل بتع الديون الرض ووحد عند القاض الكبير بحال اول رجل بتع الديون البحر

لي مت عند يفتح داك السدوق وكان بيش يرفع شي براءَ او كان بيش تنخد شي براءَ بيش تنقر او بيش ينعرف داك العند ينكتب عندنا نجمعو الامير الكبير والمفت الكبير والقاض الكبير بحال لاول رجل بيع[19] الديون

and sixty-two years since the Muslims entered Sicily by the grace of God.
[76] And in the name of God and Muḥammad, our Prophet, this book has been written.
ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī al-Ḥasan, by the grace of God *al-Amīr al-Kabīr* of entire Sicily, has given the order to me, the *Muftī* Muṣṭafā b. Ḥānī, by the grace of God, the first man of the *Dīwān* of Sicily, to bring together all letters, from the time when Euphimius has demanded help from His Greatness the *Mawlā* of Qayrawān, Ibrahīm b. ʿAlbī, … (?)[20] to obtain the cities and villages there, that were not subject to the rule of Euphimius. Then the *Mawlā* Ibrahīm b. ʿAlbī sent the courageous man, the Great ʿAdālqūm with a huge army in order to conquer Sicily. And thus was done, so it happened that the Great ʿAdālqūm was the first conqueror of Sicily.
As I had thus received the order of His Greatness *al-Amīr al-Kabīr*, I collected all letters that the *Mawlā* had sent to Sicily and those that the *Amīr Kabīr*s of Sicily sent to the *Mawlā*, and those that the *Amīr Kabīr*s sent to the *Amīr*s and the governors **[77]** of the country of entire Sicily. All these letters were kept in a chest made of cypress wood, kept in a house in Palermo where the *Dīwān* was held. This chest was always closed with three different keys. One was kept by *al-Amīr al-Kabīr*, one by the Grand-*Muftī*, as the first man of the *Dīwān al-Arḍ*, the land council, and one by the Grand-*Qāḍī*, as the first man of the *Dīwān al-Baḥr*, the sea council.
Thus, when while opening that chest, either in order to deposit one of the letters, or in order to take out a letter in order to be read, so that one would know what should be written, then *al-Amīr al-Kabīr*, the Grand-*Muftī* and

17 In Tychsen, a typo for ان.
18 In Tychsen, a typo for يبعتوهم.
19 In Tychsen, a typo for بتع.
20 From here till the end of the paragraph, several passages in the Arabic text remain unclear to me and the translations by Vella and Hausleutner were no more helpful.

الارض والديون البحر بتع اسقلي بيش يفتح داك السدوق ان كان ينقص وحد منهم ما يفتح داك السدوق وكان ياتي شي صدف بتع شي مرض ينعمل رجل اخر من الديون علي داك اليكون مريض

the Grand-*Qāḍī* in their qualities as leader of the *Dīwān al-Arḍ* and the *Dīwān al-Baḥr* of Sicily must be brought together so that that chest can be opened. If one of them fails to be present, that chest cannot be opened. In case there would be an accident, such as an illness, another man of the *Dīwān* would be put in the place of the man who was ill.

وعليك الامير الكبير اتاني الامر لا نعمل جوز كتب ونكتب داك البرات كلها في جور[21] كتب مكتوبين من هذ جوز **|78|** الكتب وحد يتقعد في بيت الديون بتع الارض ووحد في بيت بتع ديوت[22] بتع البحر والسدوق ما يستع يفتح الا عندهم يترفع فيه البرات
وقبل لا يترفع البرات في السدوق اما اول رجل بتع ديون الرض كذا اول رجل بتع ديون بتع البحر عندهم يكتبو البرت في الكتب العندهم قابل لا يترفعو في السدوق ويرفع الكتب عندهم

Hence *al-Amīr al-Kabīr* has come to me to ask that two books are made, and that all letters are written in these two books. Of the two **[78]** books, one would be placed in the room of the *Dīwān al-Arḍ* and one in the room of the *Dīwān al-Baḥr*. The chest cannot be opened, except when a letter must be placed in it.
And before the letter will be placed in the chest, the first man of the *Dīwān al-Arḍ* and the first man of the *Dīwān al-Baḥr* should copy the letters in the books that they have with them, and before that is done, they will not place the letters in the chest and he will place the letters with them.

بيش ينصاب في ذاك الحين متع يتعمل الديون ما يمس هذاك بتع السدوق دان[23] جوز كتب عندهم يرتفعو مغلوقت وحد في بيت بتع الديون الارض ووحد في بيت الديون بتع البحر وكل مفتح يكون وحد عند اول من الديون بتع الارض ووحد يكون عند اول من الديون بتع البحر

In such a way they are in the situation that, when the Council is held, the chest is not touched. These two books remain locked with them, one in the room of *Dīwān al-Arḍ* and one in the room of the *Dīwān al-Baḥr*, while one of the keys remains with the leader of the *Dīwān al-Arḍ* and the other with the leader of the *Dīwān al-Baḥr*.

وباسم الله ومحمد بيدا،

And in the name of God and of Muḥammad, it begins.

We actually have five versions of this introduction. First there is the alleged facsimile of the manuscript, which is written in such a way that it cannot be deciphered. The rest of the Arabic text does not exist in manuscript, except for a fake

21 In Tychsen, a typo for جوز.
22 In Tychsen, a typo for ديون.
23 In Tychsen, a typo for داك.

title-page (Fig. 2);[24] the '*Codex Martinianus*' is a phantom manuscript. Four of the five versions of the introductory text directly originate from Giuseppe Vella:

1. The facsimile of the non-existent manuscript, which Vella somewhat savagely added to a genuine volume, MS Palermo 18.
2. The Arabic text, which was published with Vella's help by Gerhard Olaus Tychsen in 1792.
3. and 4. The Latin and Italian texts, which were published with Vella's help by Bishop Alphonsus Airoldi in 1788.
5. The German translation by Philipp Wilhelm Gottlieb Hausleutner, which was based on the Italian text and published in 1791.

Looking at this tableau, it is as if one is examining an *avant la lettre* version of the Rosetta stone, whereby Father Vella provided all the sources from scratch. As will be apparent from the Arabic text, my literal translation and my tentative glossary hereafter, the *Specimen* is couched in strange language. Tychsen devised a special name for this linguistic variant of Arabic, namely *lingua plebeia*, or 'lower-class language', whereas he called the non-classical or spoken Arabic *lingua vulgaris*, 'common language'.[25] While reading this and other examples of Vella's Arabic, Michele Amari (1806–1889) wrote the following:

> In such a misery appeared in Palermo the Maltese Giuseppe Vella, chaplain friar of the Hierosolymitan Order, with his dialect that was a mixture of corrupted Arabic and awful Italian. He could understand the Arabic language the same way that a Roman peasant can understand Cicero or Titus Livius without having studied Latin. Moreover, Vella was not aware of the script, which he only learnt many years later from a Muslim slave who used to live in Palermo. Lacking any erudition, but being a cunning, bold trickster (who used to sell numbers for the lottery), he started a new trade: he forged two manuscripts in Arabic, so he said, but he only showed the Italian version. To the first, he gave the title 'The Council of Sicily',[26] and in it he faked the correspondence of the Muslim rulers of the island with the Aghlabids and Fatimids in Africa. [...].
>
> In these codices, the ignorant fraud collected annals, geography, statistics, civil law from two different periods, the wealth of aristocracy, together with all the lies that he somehow found profitable. This in addition to the false legends that he connected with real coins and

24 Airoldi 1789, vol. 1, between p. 52 of the introduction and p. 1 of the text of the *Codex diplomaticus*. It must have been made by the same artist who also produced the title-page of the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr* (Fig. 3).

25 Tychsen 1792: 75, 79.

26 Dīwān Ṣiqiliyya. The *Codex diplomaticus* is meant here.

> seals. He [even] reached the point of faking coins, it is said; together with the 17 lost books of Titus Livius, which he boasted he had in an Arabic version kept in a safe.[27]

Already in or before 1788 Vella must have had the help of someone with at least some basic knowledge of the Arabic language and script. The specimen of the *Codex Martinianus*, as shown in Airoldi's/Vella's bilingual Latin–Italian edition, was produced in such a way that it could never be deciphered, but the language revealed is Arabic, not just an Arabicised graphic fantasy, which can sometimes be found in inscriptions on objects. With some effort, one can read the beginning of Tychsen's edition in the first two lines of the specimen. The illegibility is exacerbated by the profuse use of vowel and reading signs, so it is clear that this is Arabic, albeit an untenable version. Moreover, Vella did everything possible to promote this text.

2 Tentative glossary of the *Codex Martinianus*

Some of Vella's wildest orthographical extravagancies (and a few lexical ones) in his work on the *Codex Martinianus* are explained hereunder.

اسدوق = *al-ṣandūq*, the chest.

اسقلي = Sicily.

البرات = 'the letters', from *barāʾa,* document. Also written as البرت. The singular is written براءَ.

الخلص = 'by the grace of …'.

الديون = al-*Dīwān*, the Council.

الرض = *al-Arḍ*, the land.

الرحول = al-Ruḥūl = ?

العندهم = *ellī ʿandahum*, 'which are with them; which they have'.

العينون = *al-ʿaynūn*: if not a typo, then possibly a contamination of *ʿaynān* and *ʿuyūn*, the dualis and the plural of *ʿAyn*, eye, spring.

المول = *al-Mawlā*, the master; plural: الموال, *al-Mawālī*.

اليامر = *ilā amr*, 'by command of …' or: *ellī yaʾmur*, 'who gives the order'.

اليكون = *ellī yakūn*, 'who is'.

اليزم = Palermo (?). Also see the skeleton version of this word in *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr*: بليرم.

27 Translated from the Italian of Amari 1854, x–xi.

انكتب = *inkataba* 'is written'. The passive in Maltese is made by the prefix *n* or *t* and a few others. Some other examples: إنجمع, نعمل, ينعمل, تنقر ('is read'), يتعمل, يترفع, ينصاب, نجمعو, تنخد, ينعرف.[28]

بتع = the conjunction meaning 'of', perhaps pronounced as *btāʿ*. In the *Codex diplomaticus* this word is used between substantives instead of the *status constructus*. In his glossary, Tychsen translates it as 'the genitive note του in the popular idiom of the Maltese'.[29] However, Maltese syntax predominantly uses the *status constructus* as the common means to connect two substantives, and the frequent use of بتع that we see in the *Codex diplomaticus* is unusual in Maltese grammar. Aquilina mentions it *s.v. ta'*.[30]

بيش = apparently, to judge from the context, a conjunction of finality, 'in order to'. Tychsen mentions the word in his glossary, but does not give a meaning.[31] It is the Maltese *biex*, a conjunction indicating an intention.[32]

جوز = *ǧūz*, two, a Maltese word and also a Maghribī word. Aquilina mentions it s.v. *żewġ* together with its variant, *gix*/*giex*.[33]

عرون = Qayrawān.

قابل = adverb: 'before'.

مت = read *mattā*, when; also written as متع.

مفتح = *miftāḥ*, key.

هوم = *hūm*, used here as the copula *hum*.

وسق = *wāsiʿ*, large (?)

يستع = read as *yastaṭīʿ*, it can.

3 'The Council of Egypt'

Vella's next counterfeit work, the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr*, or 'The Council of Egypt', was published in 1793. It is assumed to be a collection of Arabic documents (as Vella suggests to his readership) and purportedly comes from Cairo. It provides details of the relations between Sicily and Fatimid Egypt. On the title-page, Vella men-

28 Vella 1834, 190–198.

29 Tychsen 1792, 93.

30 Aquilina, 1987–1990, vol. 2, 1395, and with reference to the Arabic etymology with *mtāʿ* and *bitāʿ*, the same, pp. 1397–1398.

31 Tychsen 1792, 96.

32 Aquilina 1999–2000, vol. 1, 121, where the etymology from Arabic *bi-ayyi shayʾ* (بأي شيئ) is also given.

33 Aquilina 1987–1990, vol. 2, 1612.

tions himself as the editor and translator. It is a bilingual publication with texts in Arabic and Italian. Vella must have realised that the Arabic of the *Codex diplomaticus* was far from convincing, even in Tychsen's edition of the introduction. The 'Council of Egypt' shows that Vella had learnt a great deal in just a few years, although it is unlikely that he wrote the Arabic text alone. Lagumina mentions the names of his possible accomplices: Camilleri, La Barbera and Drago.[34] The contrast between 1788/1792, when he was a mere ghost writer for Bishop Airoldi and Professor Tychsen respectively, and 1793 is striking. Vella's name is now on the title-page and it is clear that he has gone up in the world: a professor of Arabic at the Royal Academy of Palermo and a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Literature and Arts of Naples, all thanks to his ground-breaking work on the *Codex diplomaticus*. Looking at the Arabic of the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr*, one must concede that Amari's bitter judgement of Vella's Arabic was only applicable to the *Codex*. By a lucky coincidence, Vella's manuscript, on which the 1793 edition is based, has been preserved. Rather than following the sloppy edition[35] of it in the *Consiglio di Egitto* of 1793, I shall present my transcript of the title-page and the first page of the manuscript here together with my translation:

The 'Council of Egypt', the Arabic text in Vella's manuscript[36]	**The 'Council of Egypt', my translation**
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وصلى الله على نبينا محمد واله	In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. May God bless our prophet Muḥammad and his family.
كتاب ديوان مصر | بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وصلي الله علي سيدنا و نبينا ومولانا محمد وعلي اله و سلم تسليما،	The book of the Council of Egypt. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. May God bless our lord, our prophet and our master Muḥammad and his family, and grant him peace.
المستنصر بالله الحمد لله خليف وامير المومنين امر الي ابو الموقريم وزير استعمّل هذا الكتاب لديوان مصر حتى ان فيه يتنسخوا هنّ المُكاتيب كله ان الخليف وامير المومنين ياخذ من برّ الغرب ومن صقلية وان مازال يتنسخوا هُنّ المكاتيب كله	Al-Mustanṣir billāh, praise be to God, Caliph and Prince of the Believers, commanded me, Vizier Abū al-Mūqarīm, that I make this book of the 'Council of Egypt', so that all these letters are copied in it, the letters that the Caliph and Prince of the Believers has

34 Lagumina 1882, 23, 26 (footnote, sub III). These people signed the pages of the manuscript.

35 A complete line of the manuscript is missing in two cases in this edition. As the Italian translation is complete, though, the mistakes may have been the work of the typographer, forever the token scapegoat.

36 Now MS New York, Columbia University, Smith Or. 388, pp. 1–2 (Fig. 4). Lagumina 1882, 23, mentions a bookseller, Agostino Russo, as having a Vella manuscript for sale.

ان لامير المومنين يبعت فى برّ الغرب وفى صقلية،

وبسم الله وحده يبداءَ يتنسخوا المكاتيب فى هذا الكتاب فى هذا اليوم عشرون من شهر جمادي الاول سنة سبع وستين واربعماية،

في اليوم عشرون من شهر جمادى الاول سنة سبع وستين وأربعماية جاء من تونس مركب من تونس في مصر معه ... (؟) مكتوبة التى كانت تقول،
المستنصر بالله الحمد لله خليف وامير المومنين انا امير يخى بن اسماعيل بوجهى علي الارض تقبّل ايادي كبرتك وتعرفك يا سيدي أن فى اليوم عشرون من شهر ربيع الاخر سنة سبع وستين واربعماية جاءَ مركب في تونس بخمسين بحري كلّه مسلمون الذي مركب بعثه ريبّرت امير بليرم الذي بعث لي مكتوبه نسخة منها كبرتك توجدها جواً هذه المكتوبه لكي تدرسها وتبعث تقول لى كبرتك ان شى عندي نكتب لريبّرت فيما ما عندي أن نكتب اخر بوجهى علّى الارض نقبّل ايادى كبرتك ونخطّ يذى هكذا،

لامير يخى بن اسمعاعيل الحمد لله خدّم المستنصر بالله خليف وامير المومنين تونس ست وعشرون من شهر ربيع الاخر سنة سبع وستين واربعمايه،
النسخه من المكتوبه ان كانت جواً الورقة ان بعث لنا امير تونس كانت تقول هكذا،

ريبّرت الحمد لله وحده امير بليرم وقلورية الكبيرة يسلمك ويقول لك يا امير يحيى بن اسماعيل ان يبعثلك هذه المكتوبة من باليرم مكتوبة في يوم اربعة عشر من شهر ربيع الاخر سنة اربع وسبعين والف الجسده يسوع المسيح علي نعرفك يا امير ان قوم المسلمين مثمكنه فى مدينة باليرم طلبتنى نبعث لك هذه المكتوبه علي نعلمك ان تكون حاجة صحيحة تعمل العهد لان تنعمل العهد تفتح المشاعله لبرّ الغرب مع صقلية وهكذا قوم المسلمين ان هي بليرم تستطيع يكانلها ديك المشاعلة ان كانلها تخوله في القديم والناس برّ الغرب تكسي مازال فاذن انا

received from the Land of the West and from Sicily, and also all these letters that the Prince of the Believers sent to the Land of the West and to Sicily.

And in the name of God alone, (here) begins the copying of the letters in this book on this day, 20 Ǧumādā I of the year 467 [January 17, 1075].

On 20 Ǧumādā I of the year 467 arrived from Tunis a ship from Tunis to Cairo in which there was a letter with this text:

Al-Mustanṣir billāh, God be praised, Caliph and Prince of the Believers, I, Amīr Yaḥya b. Ismāʿīl with my face on the ground kiss the hands of Your Greatness, and inform you, o lord, that on 20 Rabīʿ II of the year 467 [December 19, 1074] a ship arrived in Tunis with fifty sailors, all Muslims, which ship was sent by Robert, the Prince of Palermo, who sent me a letter, a copy of which Your Greatness finds herewith, so that you may study it and that Your Greatness tells me what I should answer to Robert. Further I have nothing to tell you. With my face on the ground I kiss the hands of Your Greatness, and I sign as follows:

The *Amīr* Yaḥya b. Ismāʿīl, praise be to God, servant of al-Mustanṣir billāh, Caliph and Prince of the Believers in Tunis, 26 Rabīʿ II of the year 467 [December 25, 1074].

The copy of the letter that was kept inside the sheet that the *Amīr* of Tunis sent to us, has the following text:

Robert, praise be to God alone, Prince of Palermo and Great Calabria, salutes you and says to you: O *Amīr* Yaḥyā b. Ismāʿīl, I am writing this letter from Palermo, written on 14 Rabīʿ II [December 13] of the year 1074 after the incarnation of Jesus the Messiah, so that it be known to you, o *Amīr*, that the Muslim population of Palermo asked me to send you this letter, so that we let you know that it is a good thing to keep the pact, since the pact opens up the co-operation between the Land of the West and Sicily. And equally the Muslim population that is in Palermo

نريد الجواب على نعرف اى شي ما عندي نقصّ للناس ان تعمّر في بليرم والمجاوية نريده متعاجلاً لان عندي ... (؟) في قلورية الكبيرة نشوف شغلى فيما ما عندي ان نقول لك ازيد ونسلمك كثير،

can have this co-operation that it has since old times and that the people of the Land of the West have continuously enjoyed. Therefore, we would like to receive an answer so that we know whether or not something can be told to the people that live in Palermo and surroundings. We wish to have this urgently because we have ... (?) in Great Calabria if more needs to be said to you, and we greet you very much.

في يوم ثلث من شهر جمادي الاخر سنة سبع وستين واربعماية بعثنا مكتوبة الامير تونس التى كانت تقول | هكذا،...

On 3 Ǧumādā II 467 [January 30, 1075] we sent a letter to the *Amīr* of Tunis with the following text: ...

As with the *Codex diplomaticus*, Vella put several versions of the text of the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr* at the disposal of his readership:

1. The original manuscript that is now in New York.
2. A purported facsimile from the manuscript of the beginning of the text, published just before the edition and translation of 1793, but which is quite dissimilar from the manuscript.
3. The Arabic text in the bilingual edition of Palermo, 1793.
4. The Italian translation in the bilingual edition of Palermo, 1793.

In view of the entirely fictitious character of the 'Council of Egypt', the Italian text must be considered as the point of departure of all the other versions. The so-called facsimile ('Prima Faccia del Manuscritto') is an imprecise transcript from the manuscript (Fig. 5).

The Arabic of the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr* is not as suspicious as the linguistic hotchpotch of the *Codex diplomaticus*, and despite it being opaque in places, it is still proper Arabic, something that cannot be said of the *Codex*. There is evidence of some Maltese influence, though, especially regarding the morphology of the passive voice of the verb.[37] The manuscript itself has evidently been written by a Maghribī scribe, but it is unclear who the author of the Arabic work was. I take it that Vella's new informant had a better education than his former one, but he must have been an Italian or Maltese. Two examples of a curious Italianism may suffice as proof. The Arabic conjunctive ان (*an, anna* or *inna)*, Italian *che*, is used as a relative pronoun in the same way that the polyvalent *che* works in Italian (especially in its spoken variants), as can be seen here:

37 See the remarks at *inkataba* in my tentative glossary of the *Codex diplomaticus* above.

النسخه من المكتوبه ان كانت جواّ الورقة ان بعث لنا امير تونس كانت تقول هكذا، و هكذا قوم المسلمين ان هي بليرم[38].

'The copy of the letter *that* was kept inside the sheet *that* the *Amīr* of Tunis sent to us has the following text.'
'And equally the Muslim population *that* is in Palermo'.

The other curiosity is Vella's use of the Maltese *hinn* (vocalised by Vella as *hunna*). It could also be the Arabic *hunā*, meaning 'here', or, more probably, the feminine plural of the third person of the pronominal suffix. Vella uses it as a demonstrative pronoun:

ان فيه يتنسخوا هنّ المُكاتيب كله .

'... so that all *these* letters are copied in it, ...'

هُنّ المكاتيب كله ان لامير المومنين يبعت فى برّ الغرب وفى صقلية

'... all *these* letters that the Prince of the Believers sent to the Land of the West and to Sicily.'

Even if Vella's counterfeit manuscripts are worthless and misleading as objective historical sources, they do tell us what sort of fakes were credible in the Palermo of his time.[39] Over time, many questions have been answered, but several issues still remain unclear. I have asked myself a number of such questions:[40] What exactly was the relationship between Vella and Airoldi? To what extent was Vella himself the maker of the *Specimen*? What about the similarity of the names of Vella and the engraver of the *Specimen*, Melchior de Bella? Was Melchior de Bella also from Malta? What would have been the example from which the engraver worked to reproduce the *Specimen*? What about the numismatic evidence in the *Codice diplomatico* and the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr*? Which originals did the engraver of these coins, Raffaele Aleja, work from? The long text of the *Codice diplomatico* (which spans several thousand pages) may not have been the product of Vella's fantasy alone; he must have used some sources as well, and probably a great many of them. Indeed, he mentions a few of them in his annotations on the *Codex diplomaticus*.[41] What were they and how did he use them? These questions are enough for a further study of Vella's life and works.

To the modern reader, Vella's choice of texts may seem somewhat abstruse. Why revive an imaginary past in such a complex way? However, that past was

38 Vella 1834, 236 describes the relative pronoun in Maltese very differently.

39 Mallette 2010, especially chapter 3 (pp. 65–99): '*I nostri Saracini*: Writing the History of the Arabs of Sicily'.

40 Witkam 2012, 75.

41 Leo Africanus (1494–1554) was obviously one of them.

very much alive in Sicily and still is today, not as a reality, but as art. The form it has taken is entirely imaginary, of course. The battles and skirmishes of the past with the Moors became the stock-in-trade of popular literature, visual art and the theatre: the *Opera dei Pupi*. While I was travelling in Sicily in 2014, I was struck by the ubiquity and popularity of the theme of the Paladins of Charlemagne fighting against the Moors (Fig. 7). In Palermo, I watched a performance of the Sicilian Puppet Theatre called 'Mimmo Cuticchio', which presented the tragic episode of Tancredi and Clorinda backed by the music of Monteverdi and set within the former Arab presence on the island. Such stories inspired by the Carolingian cycle had all taken the form in which we know them by the end of the eighteenth century, and suddenly Vella's fakes, which date from about the same time, made more sense to me than I had ever thought when first reading the texts he wrote in his tortuous Arabic.

4 An Afterlife

Vella's trickery produced several literary echoes. Poetry by his contemporary Giovanni Meli (1740–1815) is quoted by Lagumina.[42] In modern times, the history of the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr* was an inspiration for the Sicilian novelist Leonardo Sciascia's (1921–1989) book *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*. To Vella's scholarly fantasies Sciascia added an environment of political intrigue. Sciascia makes his story extra shocking by letting an innocent man (not Vella!) lose his life. In 2002, Sciascia's novel inspired film director Emidio Greco to make a film with Silvio Orlando in the role of Vella. Greco brought yet another dimension to Vella's fakes, the element of romance.

More recently, the Italian actor Giorgio Sparacino produced a theatrical version of *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* with himself in the role of Vella. Sciascia's novel has been translated into at least ten languages. The Italian novelist and crime writer Andrea Camilleri (1925–2019), a namesake of Vella's accomplice, wrote 'Le

42 Lagumina 1882, p. 21, n. 1: 'Gazetta problematica relativa all'imposture di lu codici arabu di l'abbati Vella: | Sta Minsogna Saracina | Cu sta giubba meda misa | Trova cui pri concubine | L'accarizza, adorna e spisa. | E cridennula di sangu, | Comu vanta, antica e puru, | D'introdurla in ogni rangu | Si fa pregiu non oscuru'. [Problematic gazette concerning the fraud of the Arabic codex perpetrated by Abbot Vella: | This Saracen lie, | Badly clad in its jacket, | Becomes the concubine of the one | Who caresses, adorns and pays for her. | And believing that she is made of (flesh and) blood | an ancient and pure blood, as he boasts, | derives pride from introducing her in every rank of people.] English translation by Dr Lucia Raggetti.

"Croniche" di uno scrittore maltese', published in *Romanzi storici e civili*. In this prequel to Sciascia's novel, he created his eighteenth-century literary ancestor, who helped Vella with his fraud.

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Figures

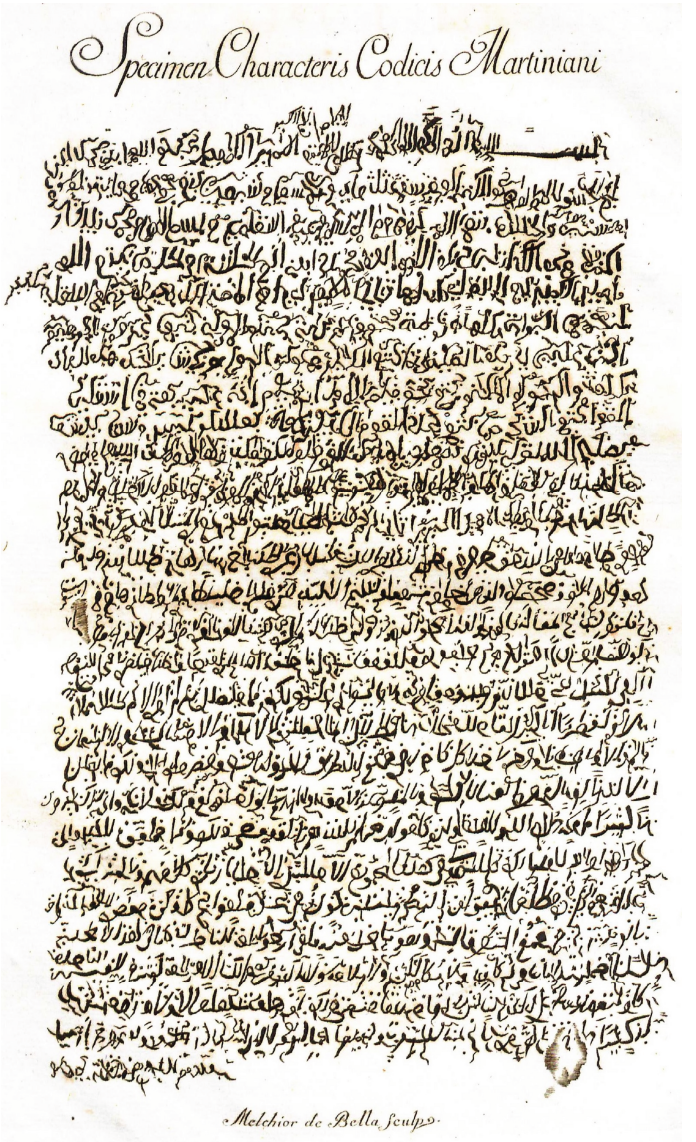

Fig. 1: Alleged facsimile of the first text page of the *Codex Martinianus*. Source: *Codex diplomaticus*, Palermo, 1788. Leiden University Library, 913 A 13. Photograph by Jan Just Witkam, 2019.



Fig. 2: Alleged title-page of the *Codex Martinianus*. Source *Codice diplomatico* (Palermo, 1789), illustration between p. 52 of the Introduction and p. 1 of the main text. Possibly by the artist who also made the title-page of the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr*. The text in the *Shamsa* reads: *Hādh' al-Kitāb Kātibuhu Muṣṭafā ibn Ḥānī Muftī al-Kabīr fī Siqiliyya Sanat 375*, 'the author of this book is Muṣṭafā b. Ḥānī, Grand Mufti of Sicily, in the year 375'. Leiden University Library, 913 A 13. Photograph by Jan Just Witkam, 2019.



Fig. 3: Title-page of Vella's manuscript of the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr*, 'The Council of Egypt', possibly made by the artist who also made the title-page of the *Codice diplomatico*. MS New York, Columbia University Library, Smith Or. 388, p. 1. Photo Columbia University Library, 2017.

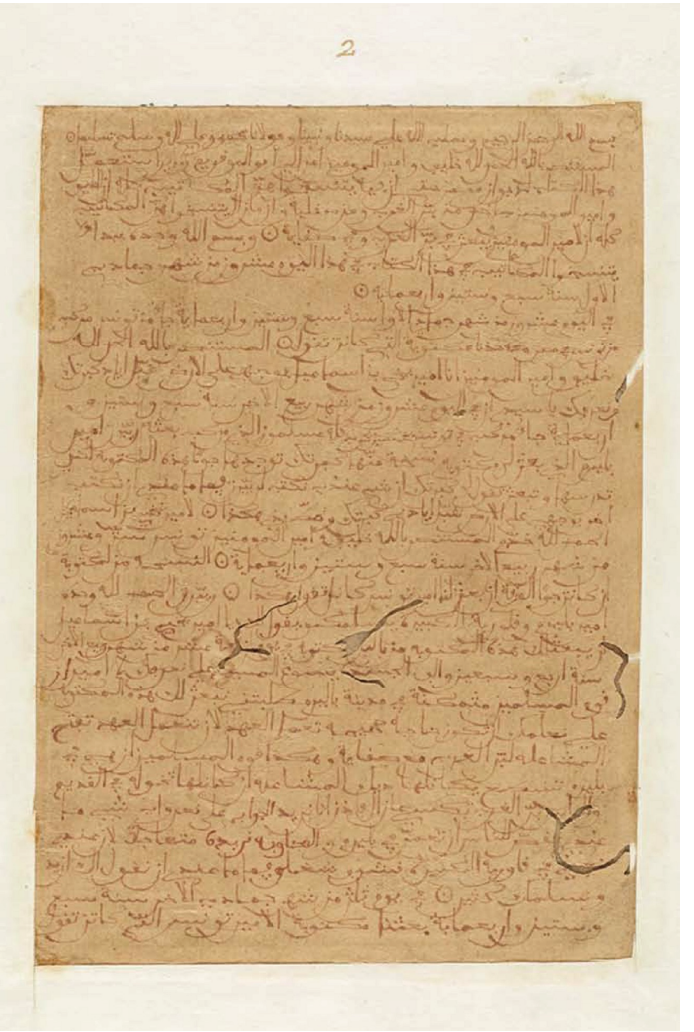

Fig. 4: First text page in Vella's manuscript of the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr*, 'The Council of Egypt', MS New York, Columbia University Library, Smith Or. 388, p. 2. Photo Columbia University Library.

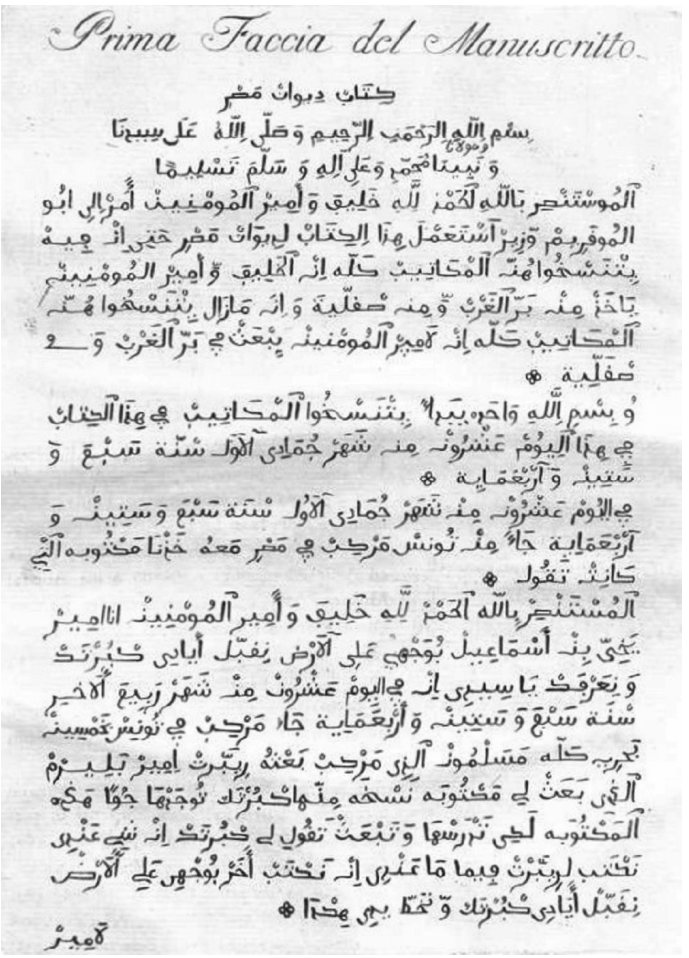

Fig. 5: Vella's facsimile of the first text page in the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr* ['The Council of Egypt'], vol. 1, Palermo, 1793, with some variant readings when compared to the manuscript. The Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich supplied the photograph digitally (2 A.or. 138-1 <http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00085173/image_24>).



كتاب ديوان مصر

LIBRO

DEL CONSIGLIO DI EGITTO

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم و صلى الله
على سيدنا و نبينا و مولانا محمد و على اله و
سلم تسليما *
المستنصر بالله الحمد لله خليف و امير
المومنين امر الى ابو المؤتزم وزير استعمل هذا
الكتاب لديوان مصر حتى ان فيه يتنسخوا
هنّ المكاتيب كله ان الخليف و امير المومنين
ياخذ من برّ الغرب و من صقلية و ان
مازال يتنسخوا هنّ المكاتيب كله ان لامير
المومنين يبعث فى برّ الغرب و فى صقلية *
و بسم الله وحده يبداء يتنسخوا المكاتيب
فى هذا الكتاب فى هذا اليوم عشرون من شهر
جمادي الاول سنة سبع و ستين و اربعماية *
فى اليوم عشرون من شهر جمادى الاول سنة
سبع و ستين و اربعماية جاء من تونس مركب
فى مصر معه خذنا مكتوبه التى كانت تقول *
المستنصر بالله الحمد لله خليف و امير
المومنين انا امير يحى بن اسماعيل بوجهى
على الارض نقبّل ايادي كبرتك و نعرفك
يا سيدي ان فى اليوم عشرون من شهر ربيع

Tom.I.

NEL nome di Dio Clemente, e Misericordioso: la protezione, e la beneficenza di Dio sia sopra il nostro Padrone Profeta Maometto, e sopra la di lui famiglia, e li benedica.

Almostanser Bi'llah, lode a Dio, Califa ed Amir Almumenin comandò a me Abu al Mukarim Wazir di far prontamente formare questo libro del Consiglio di Egitto, acciocchè in esso si copiassero tutte quelle lettere, che il Califa, ed Amir Almumenin riceve dalla Barbaria, e dalla Sicilia; ed altresì tutte quelle altre lettere, che l'Amir Almumenin manda in Barbaria, e nella Sicilia.

Ed in nome di Dio Unico si principiano a copiare le lettere in questo libro nel dì presente 20. del primo Giumadi dell'anno 467. (*principiò questo anno a 27. Agosto* 1074.)

A dì 20. del primo Giumadi dell'anno 467. venne da Tunisi un bastimento nel Cairo, col quale ricevemmo una lettera, in cui si diceva:

Almostanser Bi'llah, lode a Dio, Califa ed Amir Almumenin, l'Emir Jahya ben Ismael con la faccia per terra bacia le mani della sua Grandezza, e le avvisa, o mio Padrone, che il dì 20. del secondo Rabi

A

Fig. 6: Beginning of Vella's bilingual edition of the *Kitāb Dīwān Miṣr* ['The Council of Egypt'], vol. 1, Palermo, 1793. The Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich supplied the photograph digitally (2 A.or. 138-1 <http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/bsb00085173/image_25>). The stone in the lower left-hand corner of the engraving by R. Aleja identifies the ruin as the Castle of Maredolce, a medieval building in Palermo dating from the Siculo-Norman era <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Castello_di_Maredolce>.

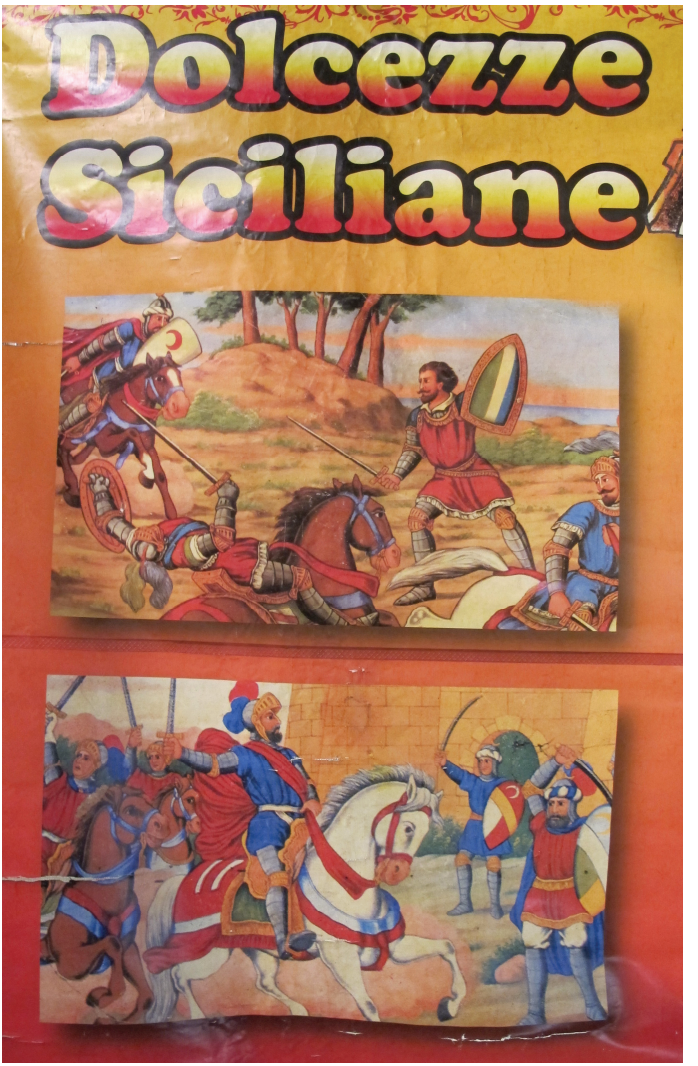

Fig. 7: The wars against the Moors in popular Sicilian imagination. A Sicilian sweet seller's tent as seen in Via Dante, Milan, on November 12, 2013. Photograph by Jan Just Witkam.

Dan Shapira

Et tout le reste est littérature, or: Abraham Firkowicz, the Writer with a Chisel

Abstract: Abraham Firkowicz (1787–1874) was a Karaite educator, communal leader, autobiographer, traveller, translator and political lobbyist, a man remembered best as the person who assembled the three greatest collections of Jewish books and manuscripts in the world. All of them are named after him: the First Firkowicz Collection, the Samaritan Firkowicz Collection (these two were bought by the Russian Imperial Library while the collector was still alive), and the Second Firkowicz Collection (bought by the Russian Imperial Library after his death). He is also remembered for the book he wrote about Jewish tombstone inscriptions from the Crimea. In fact, he was accused of forging the texts he obtained from the tombstone inscriptions and the manuscripts he had collected. This essay is an inquiry into the epoch in which Firkowicz lived. It provides parallels to contemporary activities undertaken by possible forgers such as Sulukadzev, Moses Shapira, and Dom Pedro II of Brazil and his circle, and claims that most of all, Firkowicz was 'a writer with a chisel'.

Jews leapt into the Early Modern Period straight from Late Antiquity; there was no such thing as a Jewish 'Middle Ages' in the European sense. If we do not count such Proto-Yiddish translations as the chivalric *Dukus Horant* and *Kinig Artus Hof*, for example, there was no proper medieval Jewish literature, which is why the writer Shmuel Yosef Agnon tried to fill the gap and created a pseudo-medieval Hebrew corpus in the twentieth century. This was a modern-day continuation of a Western tradition of producing a series of outbursts of literary activity in Eastern Europe, especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, some of which were intended to create a suitable past for a newly formed sense of nationalism, others being literary exercises. Prosper Mérimée (1803–1870), a French author and a noted archaeologist, is now best remembered for his *Carmen* and his role in the discovery of *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries (despite him also being a qualified Russianist and the first French translator of Alexander Pushkin as of 1848). In 1827, he published a French translation of folk ballads composed in 'Illyrian' (what we now call 'Serbo-Croatian') by one Hyacinthe Maglanowich, under the title *La Guzla, ou Choix de Poésies Illyriques recueillies dans la Dalmatie, la Croatie et l'Herzegowine*, but it was actually a literary hoax, or, as they called it back then, 'a literary mystifica-

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tion'. Hyacinthe Maglanowich never existed and the poetry ascribed to him by Mérimée was simply composed by Mérimée, himself, in French. Nevertheless, Alexander Pushkin translated these 'Illyrian' ballads into Russian as 'the Songs of the Western Slavs' (1833), believing they were pieces of real folklore. In fact, almost all the young Eastern European literatures (with the exception of the Poles) were in pursue to enlarge quickly their literary corpus and to make it look older as it was. The long shadow of *Ossian* (1760–1765) – presumably a collection of Scottish Gaelic epic poems of old possibly translated into English by James Macpherson (1736–1791) – was hovering over these developments. Owing to the lack of opportunity for political advocacy, the clashing narratives of Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and many other nationalities were expressing themselves through language and literature. The Latin West hardly knew the notion of defining one's identity or ethnicity through language, but in the East, this became the norm, which is why Eastern Europeans are said to be 'literature-centric' – their literatures are their *patriae*. '*Kde domov můj?*' ('Where is my home?'), asks the Czech national song written in 1834. If you lack a home, though, you can always invent one. So it all began, it seems, where Germanic met Slavic – in Bohemia. By then, Prague was one of the most important centres of the nascent – and much belated – Jewish *Aufklärung*, the *Haskalah*, and the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* (and some of the most prominent participants in both intellectual movements took part in the *Affair Firkowicz*). In 1818, two medieval Czech texts – *The Manuscript of the Queen's Court* and *The Judgement of Libusse* – were made available by Václav Hanka (1791–1861), a Slavicist. Although they were immediately recognised as forgeries by many people, it took around eighty years to prove that the texts were not genuine. Taking Hanka's lead, one of the men from the Prague *Haskalah*, Marcus Fischer (1788–1858), 'found' the so-called *Ramschak Chronicle*, a history of the Bohemian Jews from the thirteenth century up to his own times.[1]

After Alexander I, the Russian Czar and Grand Duke of Finland (as of 1809) had told his Swedish-speaking Finnish audience that '*mon désir est que vous soyez Finnois*', Finland's intellectuals began to explore the folklore traditions and the native language of their country, and by 1835–1836, Elias Lönnrot (1802–1884) had published the first version of the Finnish-Karelian *Kalevala*,

1 See Cermanová 2017. Unfortunately, we cannot go into the complicated problems concerning the discovery of the Old Russian *Slovo o polku Igoreve* here (i.e. *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, *The Lay of the Host of Igor*). This was found in the late eighteenth century and immediately became the subject of suspicion. A Czech connection existed here, too; compare Keenan 2003. See Jagič 1910, 133–134, 248–251, 304.

the so-called Old Kalevala.[2] It is still questionable how much of the text reflects genuine folklore traditions and how these can be discerned from Lönnrot's own contribution or editing. Nevertheless, the *Kalevala* became the most important part of the Finnish linguistic strife and is the backbone of Finnish identity.

Like the Eastern European 'national literatures', Modern Hebrew literature still did not exist in the first half of the eighteenth century; to remind you, Avraham Mapu (1808–1867) published the first printed novel in Hebrew in 1853 (*Ahavat Zion*, The Love of Zion) and the second one, *'Ayit Tzavua'* (Hypocrite/Coloured Eagle), in 1858.[3] Joseph Perl (1773–1839) in Ternopol/Ternopil, Galicia, published satirical epistolary novels in Hebrew from 1819 onwards up to the 1830s, such as *The Book of a Revealer of Sublime Secrets*. These were really pieces of mind-blowing 'post-Post-Modernism' (before any Modernism came into being).[4] There is actually more than one link binding Joseph Perl and Agnon together, possibly including Agnon's pseudonym as a tribute to Perl.[5] A couple of pages of satire penned by Perl, reminding one of the best pages of Eco's *Baudolino*, sent Firkowicz on a scandalous journey to the Caspian Sea in 1840 (Firkowicz took Perl's satire to be real history and went to the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus to see the 'truth' for himself).

Who exactly was this Firkowicz, though? A 'medieval' character to a large extent, he was a Jewish Karaite educator, translator and religious dignitary. He was also a lobbyist, collector of books and manuscripts, an editor, publisher, businessman and a forger of historical artefacts.[6] An amateur archaeologist and traveller, he was, above all, a writer who created his own Tolkienesque universe, who populated it with tribes, men and histories of his own creation using just his pen and chisel. Firkowicz was a novelist who took the literature of the past as his topic, like Sir Walter Scott, who enjoyed huge popularity at the time, but with the difference that there was no Hebrew literature yet (at least, the literature Firkowicz could understand, since as we have alluded to above, he

2 Kalewala, taikka Wanhoja Karjalan Runoja Suomen Kansan muinosista ajoista.

3 Mapu worked on his first novel for around twenty years, so one could actually date the beginning of modern Hebrew literature quite early, in the 1830s. This is merely playing with words, though. In the same year, 1858, Mapu complained to Firkowicz about the Russian Censorship Office, which had banned his novel (it was published later, in 1869), and asked for Firkowicz' assistance in dealing with the censors (Russian National Library, Manuscript Department [hereafter RNL OR], f. 946, op. 1, no. 715).

4 See Meir 2013 and other works by Jonatan Meir, for instance.

5 Compare Sinkoff 2003.

6 Shapira 2015.

was unable to grasp the fact that Joseph Perl's satire was just fiction).[7] Hebrew did not have the genre of the historical novel, of course. So Firkowicz worked on his own plots and his literary heroes.

Born in 1787 in Łuck (Lutsk or Lutzk in Volhynia) in a tiny Turkic-speaking community of Jewish religious dissidents, the Karaites, a subject of Rzeczpospolita (the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), by the age of six Avraham Firkowicz had witnessed how the Russian Empire had entered his town with the Second Partition of Poland. At the time of his death in 1874, he had outlived everyone he had known as a mature man. By the end of his life, he was completely alone, surrounded by the dead, as it were – his friends and, mostly, enemies – and by those ghostly ancient dead 'from the Year of Salvation of Israel' (a hint at Jesus' birth) with whom he had populated the Jewish cemetery of Çufut-Qal'eh in the Crimea, within walking distance of his home, packed with the manuscripts that nowadays constitute the biggest collections of Jewish manuscripts in the world.[8]

In between, Firkowicz lived through the first Russian-Jewish century: from the Partitions of Poland via the emergence of the *Wissenschaft des Judenthums* and the Jewish Reform Movement, secularisation and emergence of new nationalisms, the surge of both the specific Russian-Jewish civilisation and the Hebrew and Yiddish literatures, and beginnings of the Leftist Terrorism in Russia. He died only a few years before the Pogroms of 1881–1882, which prompted the massive Jewish emigration to America, the surge of the first Palestinophile (or proto-Zionist) organisations, and the *Auto-Emancipation* (1882) written by Leon Pinsker, the son of his friend and colleague, Śimḥah Pinsker.

While Firkowicz was growing up, the question of whether Jews deserved the rights of a human and a citizen was being debated in many parts of Europe. It was generally felt that certain characteristic features of the Jewish religion (i.e. the Rabbanite version of Judaism) were still preventing civil rights from being granted to the Jews and that they, the Jews, ought to work towards meeting the requirements. This is why the men of the Jewish *Aufklärung* and *Haskalah* sought a suitable past in their search for the 'original', 'uncorrupted' form of Judaism, which would serve as common ground for Jews and Gentiles. Many men in the *maskilic* and Reformist movements imagined they would find it in

7 Just imagine: you are fifty years old, you read Swift for the first time, it blows your mind and you go to Blefuscu or Lilliput to see things for yourself.

8 The First Firkowicz Collection, the Samaritan Collection of Firkowicz and the Second Firkowicz Collection, all of which are kept in St Petersburg now

the history of Karaism. This tendency found its expression in the correspondence between Mordechai (Isaak Markus) Jost (1793–1860) and the Crimean Karaite tycoon Śimḥah Babowicz (1788/1790?–1855); Firkowicz played a direct role in this as Babowicz's secretary.[9] Similar contacts with the Crimean Karaites, including Firkowicz, were maintained in the 1830s by Beṣalel Stern; born in Austrian Galicia, he became the leading Russian *maskil* close to the authorities and was appointed to supervise the famous Odessa Jewish Seminary founded in 1826.[10] This was the benevolent cultural and social climate that surrounded Firkowicz in the 1820s–1830s.

In 1822, Scottish missionaries were given a free hand to work in Southern Russia and two societies were established there under the patronage of Czar Alexander I: The Russian Biblical Society and The Society of Israeli Christians. Both were headed by Prince Golitsyn, whose wife was deeply influenced by Barbara-Juliana Krüdener, a mystic who was close to Alexander I and had convinced him to create the *Holy Alliance*. She was also a strong believer in the idea that all Russians and Europeans originally came from the Israelite Lost Tribes.[11] The Golitsyns owned an estate in Qarasubazar (now Belogorsk) in the Crimea, the town of Babowicz, and Firkowicz first met Krüdener there, probably in 1823. In parallel, at the turn of the nineteenth century, Anglo-Israelism – an inner-Anglican, sect-like movement – arose in England. Anglo-Israelism went hand-in-hand with conversionist efforts, which were spurred on in 1809 by the foundation of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. To achieve this end, the Philo-Judaean Society was established in 1826. Besides the conversionist effort, Anglo-Israelism was closely connected with the search for the ancient fatherland of the Israelite ancestors of the English, the Goths, which was supposed to be in Southern Russia (roughly, what is now Southern Ukraine).

In the mid-1820s, Southern Russia and the Crimea briefly became a Mecca for English and Scottish missionaries, most of whom were believers in Anglo-

9 This correspondence was translated into Crimean Turkic a few years later and published in Gözleve; see Walfish 2003; Shapira 2003b.

10 At the Europeanised city of Odessa, Galician Jews, mostly from Brody and Tarnopol, formed an important circle of *maskilim*, some of whom were also associated with the Reform Movement. See Zipperstein 1985 and Bartal 2011.

11 Cf. Ley 1994 and Grečanaja 1998. Krüdener herself was deeply influenced by the German mysticist H. Jung-Stilling, who claimed that all the Europeans are, in fact, of Israelite origin and that the Messiah should be looked for in Russia. His commentary on the Apocalypse of John, translated into Russian as *Pobednaja povest' xristianskoj very*, was published in 1815 and had a great impact on the growing of Judaising Russian sects (cf. Lvov 2004, esp. 72, n. 39).

Israelism, i.e. in a connection between the Samaritan Exile, the transfer of the Jews to Scythia (Southern Russia and the Crimea), and their association with the Goths, later to become the British.[12] The title of a book by one of these missionaries, full of valuable information, including some details about the Karaites and their texts, speaks for itself: E. Henderson, *Biblical Researches and Travels in Russia*, London, 1826.[13] The Anglo-Israelite ideas were also propagated by Dr Moses Margoliouth (1819–1871), a Polish Jew who became an Anglican minister near London, in his *History of the Jews in Great Britain* (1846). Margoliouth claimed the authenticity of some forged Hebrew inscriptions from England and Spain that were allegedly very old. Firkowicz was involved with some of these missionaries, who gave him printed Hebrew Bibles bound together with a Hebrew translation of the New Testament[14] to be distributed among Jews. Firkowicz bartered these printed copies for ancient Jewish manuscripts deemed by their owners to be sacred documents, but of no value any longer as no-one really needed them any more.[15] Jews tore off the Hebrew New Testament and kept the printed Old Testament. Apparently, Firkowicz also shared some of the missionaries' views (he held the *maskilim* of Brody and the Scottish missionaries in high esteem even decades later),[16] and in a text written by him in Russian,[17] he claimed he 'recognised' remnants of Slavic words in Hebrew texts he had allegedly found 'in the Khazar city of Mangup' in the Crimea – evidence of the

12 Sharon Turner's *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, which was first published in 1805, was essential to early Anglo-Israelist propaganda. The movement was formally established after Brothers had published his *Correct Account of the Invasion of England by the Saxons, Showing the English Nation to be Descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes* (1822), and in 1845, J. Wilson gave the movement its present form with his *Our Israelitish Origin*. Cf. Godbey 1930.

13 Henderson noted that Karaite Rabbis were acquainted with the Talmud and the New Testament, and he saw a copy of the New Testament on the shelf of the Karaite Rabbi of Łuck *c*. 1821 (the Rabbi was also acquainted with its contents); see Henderson 1826, 320, 330. Was it Firkowicz, by any chance? Henderson and Patterson actively distributed New Testaments among the Rabbanites and Karaites of Łuck in the 1820s. According to their reports, the Karaites were particularly enthusiastic about being given them (cf. Kizilov 2003, 70, 243, n. 820).

14 See the previous note about Henderson's remark about the acquaintance of the Karaite Rabbis with the NT.

15 To allude to Hoffman/Cole 2011. Jewish holy books or fragments of them no more in use (old, torn, etc.) are put in a *genizah*, a kind of grave for books; it is a sort of Limbo: the books are not thrown away really, but they are still dispensed with. Such *genizoth* (pl.) became sources for many manuscript collections in modern times; the Firkowicz Collection in St Petersburg and the Cairo Geniza are the best examples.

16 See Shapira 2007, 326–327.

17 See Vernadsky Ukrainian National Library, Jewish MSS OPI 1210.

common ancestry of Jews and the inhabitants of Southern Russia (Ukraine). This short text is interesting as it reveals Firkowicz's interest in Sarmatism, which was characteristic of Polish *Szlachta*'s ideas, and it argued that the population of what had been Poland had non-Slavic origins.[18] He also stated that the present inhabitants of Southern Russia have more in common physically with the Semites than with the Japhetides, so the Malorossians (Ukrainians) should be Semitic.[19]

In the autumn of 1839, Firkowicz began his excavations in the Crimea, mostly at the Jewish cemetery of Çufut-Qal'eh ('Jewtown'), a Jewish Karaite suburb of Bâkhçe-Sarây, the former capital of the Crimean Tatar Khans of the Girây dynasty, unearthing hidden parts of the tombstone inscriptions.

One of the tomb inscriptions he found read 'Isaac Sangaru P″G' (יצחק סנגרו פ"ג). The tomb inscription was meant to be that of the Jewish scholar (*ḥaber*), the collocutor with the Khazar king in the *Book of the Kuzari*, written by Rabbi Judah Halevi (*c.* 1075–1141). According to the book (which is a series of theological and philosophical dialogues), this *ḥaber* had the king converted to the true religion of Judaism.

In the Hebrew literature that followed the *Book of the Kuzari*, the anonymous *ḥaber* was identified with a person by the name of R. Isaac Sangari, about whom nothing else was known. One of the first people to use this name was Nachmanides (1194–1270) in about 1263.[20]

At that time, the sources available to Firkowicz on the Khazars would have been the following: the *Book of the Kuzari* (as it seems from the list of books possessed by Firkowicz in the 1830s, he owned a Venice edition of the work); the short version of the epistle sent by Joseph, the king of the Khazars, to Ḥasday Ibn Shaprut, as published in Constantinople by 'Aqrish around 1577;

18 Cf. Shapira 2009 as well.

19 A fragment written by Joseph Perl (a parody, a satire, we remember) and dealing with the Khazars was published in a Russian translation in a publication by Moscow University in 1846 as if it were a real historical work (Gartenštejn 1847). In the note on p. 3 of this publication, Gartenštejn speculates whether the source of the 'Malorossian' (Ukrainian) word каганец ('bedside lamp') is connected to the title of the Khazar ruler, Kagan. Firkowicz was familiar with this publication and went a few steps further.

20 Jellinek 1872; cf. Dunlop 1954, 122. Sangari was also mentioned by Shem-Tov ibn Shem Tov in 1430; see Dunlop, *ibid.* Quite strangely, R. Isaac ben Samuel of Acre (1250–1340) confused this R. Isaac Sangari with R. Isaac of SRNYGWB (Černihiv in Ukraine), who was active in Norman England; cf. Abrams 1997, 335, 338–339. I cannot prove my hunch yet, but I believe that this tradition was known to Firkowicz somehow and added something to his own confusion.

and the information from the Russian chronicles on the Khazars that was widely discussed in the Russian newspapers of the 1830s. In his book, *Massah u-Meriḇah* (1838), Firkowicz still considered the *ḥaḇer* from Judah Halevi's *Book of the Kuzari* as a Rabbanite Jew and an enemy of Karaism.[21] In 1838, Firkowicz did not yet know the Jewish scholar by his name or anything about his Karaism. Firkowicz's theological approach to this *ḥaḇer* changed between 1838 and the end of 1839, and on 15 September 1848, Firkowicz would write the following in a Russian report that he delivered to the Society for the Study of the Antiquities of Odessa:[22]

> This book [the *Book of the Kuzari*] was edited [!] in 740 by Isaac Sangari, under the title 'A Dissertation [*dissertaciju*] with [!] the King of the Khazars on the Foundation of a Pure Biblical Religion'. The book found its way to one of the Talmudists by the name of Yuda Levi [!] some 400 years later,[23] and he [i.e. Judah Halevy] reworked it for his own needs. However, at the time of Sangari, that sect [*etago sektarstva*, i.e. Rabbanite Judaism] did not exist yet in Taurida [i.e. the Crimea and New Russia/South Russia].[24]

The *Book of Kuzari* connects the conversion of the king to Judaism with a place called Warsân, or Warshân.[25] This spelling is similar in Hebrew to Krsân (erroneously written as Ḥurâsân in some of the versions of the *Book of the Kuzari*), and this name, in turn, is close to Koršun,[26] the former Russian name for ancient Chersones (Aqyar, Sevastopol). Although he was familiar with these forms, Firkowicz was inconsistent in the way he spelt them.[27] He derived the ancient

21 On p. 136, quoted by Harkavy 1876, p. 205, n. 2.

22 The translation and remarks in square brackets are mine. The abbreviated report on the activities of A. Firkowicz over ten years, written in Alupka (in the Crimea), comprises 25 pages (12+13 pages): RNL OR, f. 946, op. 1 no. 32.

23 Judah Halevy says in his book that the dispute described by him took place 400 years ago; since he died *c*. 1141, the dispute must have taken place *c*. 740.

24 He also mentions a number of scrolls of the Pentateuch (*svertkov*) that the king of the Khazars donated to the synagogue of Sulkhat.

25 See Shapira 2005 on this name.

26 One should also note that in Firkowicz's mother tongue (a Turkic-Qıpçaq language, 'Karaim') in the Lutsk dialect, the difference between *s* and *š* was eroded; see Shapira 2002, 479–480 and n. 14.

27 In his letter from 1839 to his patron, Śimḥah Babowicz, cited by Deinard 1878, 28: 'for the Lord put into the heart of the king of the Khazars that he should go to the forests of *Chersones* (*krswn'*) and he found there in a cave Israelites who preserve the Sabbath in secret in the year four thousand and five hundred, and made a *korespondencje* with those people, and he, with the men of his army became circumcised and accepted upon themselves the religion of Israel [...].' Also see Deinard 1878, 35. The allusions to the *Book of the Kuzari* are obvious.

Russian name for the city, that is, Koršun, from the name of the ancient Persian king, Cyrus (Kóresh in Hebrew), who was later to acquire a place for himself in Firkowicz's theories about the appearance of the Karaites in the Crimea. According to him, Cyrus gave the Karaites the Crimea and they named the city of Chersones/Koršun after the king. At the same time, according to the Russian chronicle known as the Chronicle of Nestor, or *Povest' vremennyx let*, the Prince of Kiev, Volodymir/Vladimir, was converted to Christianity[28] in Chersones. Firkowicz was aware of a Karaite 'tradition' connecting Volodymir (which Firkowicz spelt in this Ukrainian form) to Isaac Sangari. In the introduction to his book, *Abnei Zikkaron* ('Monument Stones'),[29] Firkowicz quotes a 'tradition' by Eliahu Yefet, one of the leaders of the community of Çufut-Qal'eh, saying that Sangari was buried in Chersones.[30] Whatever the case, Firkowicz was determined to search for Sangari's tomb in Chersones, but the area had been declared a closed military zone with access prohibited to Jews due to the works in the naval port. If he could not have it found in Chersones, why not try another place? He looked for the tomb in Mangup in the Crimea, but in vain.

However, if one is determined enough to find something, then it will be found eventually. Ultimately, in the autumn of 1839, Firkowicz discovered the tomb in the ancient section of the cemetery of Çufut-Qal'eh. The information on his quest is based entirely on what he himself related years later, both in his book, *Abnei Zikkaron*, and in reports and letters kept in his personal archive in St Petersburg. For the time being, though, there is no reason to doubt Firkowicz's early efforts to locate the tomb of 'the converter of the Khazars' outside Çufut-Qal'eh.

In Firkowicz' opinion, the fact that the gravestone of 'Isaac Sangaru P″G' was found in the Karaite cemetery proved that this *ḥaber* was a Karaite and therefore that the Khazars who were converted became Karaites rather than Rabbanites.

It is noteworthy that in his will, Firkowicz asked to be interred next to 'the tomb' of this *ḥaber*,[31] but his request was not granted; when he died in 1874 (on Sunday, 22 Sivan 5634), he was buried alongside his beloved wife, Ḥannah, close to the entrance of Çufut-Qal'eh Cemetery and in a Rabbanite manner, facing eastwards. Yet when his book, *Abnei Zikkaron*, was published in 1872, the

28 This was actually his second conversion; this one was to the Byzantine Christian faith, as he had been converted to the Roman variety previously by German monks and priests.

29 Wilna 1872, 6–7.

30 Cf. Firkowicz's letter to Shelomoh Beim quoted in Harkavi 1876, 266–267.

31 RNL OR, f. 946, op. 1, no. 490.

area close to the tombstone of the *ḥaber* was considered an honourable place to be buried (we have a large tomb inscription of an important lady buried next to this *ḥaber* in 1873, mentioning the *ḥaber*'s tomb).

In his reports about his discoveries, which he sent to the *maskil*s of Europe, Firkowicz first insisted that the inscription on the tomb of this *ḥaber* read YṢḤQ SNGR**W** P"G, i.e. something like *Sangaro*, not *Sangari*. Western scholars recognised quite quickly that this form was the result of a misprint in Johannes Buxtorf's Basle edition of the *Book of Kuzari* published in 1660. In addition, compare the title of Buxtorf's Basle edition of 1660: כוזרי *Liber Cosri* [...] *habitam ante nongentos annos, inter Regem Cosareorum & R. Isaacum Sangar**u**m Judæum* [...] (the emphasis is mine). It is possible that Firkowicz *also* interpreted the Latin case ending as an indication of a **u** originally.

When the misprint was spotted, Firkowizc claimed that the name was actually the date of the scholar's death. The name of the deceased was, indeed, SNGR**Y**, he agreed, but on the tombstone the reading was SNGR**W** (which could mean something like 'his/His defender' in Hebrew[32]), and the year of death of Isaac Sangar**o** was 767 CE: YṢḤQ = 208 + SNGRY = 323, in total 531; the difference between the letter *yod* and the letter *waw* is 4, thus making 527, which corresponds to 767 CE.[33] Scholars have already noted the strangeness of such a method of dating. It did not stop there, though: Firkowicz seems to have filled the lower part of the letter *waw* (ו) to make it look like the letter *yod* (י). The further history of this inscription is like an intricate detective story and is too long to be repeated here, unfortunately; see my earlier discussions of it.[34]

Firkowicz himself was openly accused of forgery by eyewitnesses while he was still alive.[35] Were his deeds unusual, though? Not necessarily, I would argue. In the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century, Alexander Sulakadzev (d. 1832), a Russian aristocrat of Georgian extraction, was known for both his impressive collection of antiquities and for his insolent forgeries, for instance. Sulakadzev's private *Museum* contained such bizarre objects as the stone on which the Moscow Prince Dmitrij Donskoj had rested after the battle against Mamai, the Golden Horde pretender on Kulikovo Polje (1380); the helmet of Dobrynja Nikitič, a fictional hero in Russian *byliny*, or epic folk songs; the Greek *Nomokanon*, which had survived the burning of the Alexandrine Library; and

32 The Hebrew word is derived from Greek συνήγορος, meaning 'interlocutor'. Firkowicz did not know that, of course, but what a sense of the language he had!

33 Beginning of the fifth Jewish millennium.

34 See Shapira 2002–2003; Shapira 2003c; Shapira 2004a.

35 See Dinker 1869–1870, 129 and Grigorovič 1874 for more details.

various other *exotica* as well. However, Sulakadzev did collect some genuine manuscripts, too, aside from indulging in forgeries. One of his genuine manuscripts is the *sinodik* of Ivan IV from Valaam Monastery, kept now in Kuopio, Finland. Nevertheless, Sulakadzev made many additions to the *sinodik*, with one of the interpolations indicating that he was a relative of the poet Deržavin.[36] In a way, Sulakadzev tried to create the pre-Christian Slavic epos by his own hand and rewrite – and occasionally correct – its history.

In 1840, a Slavic idol was found in the River Zbruč, dividing Austrian Galicia from the Russian Empire (the river is a day-long journey from Firkowicz' home, Łuck). This idol was used as an artefact explaining the Slavic pagan religion for almost two centuries and is still kept in Cracow's Archaeological Museum. However, it is now regarded as an exercise in historical fiction by the Polish romantic poet Tymon Zaborowski (1799–1828);[37] money and politics were not involved in forging this idol, though, just the love of a young woman and the past.

In contrast to this, a lucrative industry did actually exist in the Crimea and Odessa in the 1850s–1870s while Firkowicz was still alive, forging Hellenistic coins and inscriptions and Scythian objects, such as the tiara of a Scythian king made by a Jewish forger from Odessa and sold to the Louvre.

Now we shall make a brief digression to the Americas, after which we shall return to Europe and the Middle East. Among other things, Dom Pedro II (1825–1891), the second and last Emperor of Brazil, was a prominent Hebraist renowned for his Portuguese and French translations of Classical Hebrew poetry. The Emperor's well-known philo-Semitism made Jewish things fancy in Brazil.[38] In 1872 (and then in 1876), Dom Pedro II visited the Land of Israel. While he was in the Orient, a broken stone tablet was found in the tropical rainforest in Paraíba State in Brazil. The stone contains what was claimed to be a Phoenician inscription, telling of the arrival of the Sidonian Canaanites, who had embarked from Ezion-Geber to the Red Sea in the nineteenth year of King Ḥiram, and who sailed around Africa in ten ships for two years, travelling to 'New Island' or 'Iron Island'. Now, the word for 'new' and 'iron' used in the

36 On Sulakadzev's manuscripts, see Pypin 1898, 1–22; Speranskij 1956, 44–46, 62–74, 90–101; Mazon 1940, 76, 77, 162, 217; Lotman 1962; Smirnov 1979; Kozlov 1999. On the falsification of historical documents in Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Kozlov 1996; a student of the 'Firkowicz Problem' will find a great deal of corresponding points there. Also cf. Kozlov 2001, where the forger's mind is explored; similarities to Firkowicz' ways are not only astonishing, but also quite amusing.

37 Komar/Khamaiko 2011.

38 For more on Dom Pedro II, see Williams 1937; Barman 1999; Da Costa 2000.

inscription is derived from the Semitic root ḤDD. The forger, with a forger's twist, implied that another word was hidden under this word, namely Brazil, presumably derived from Hebrew *barzel*, meaning 'iron'.

In fact, Brazil owes its name to a very hard variety of tree, but the idea of a mythical island called Hy-Brasil (which sounds similar to the Hebrew for 'Island of Iron') is much older: it appeared somewhere in the Atlantic on European maps drawn by Angelino Dilcert (1325), by Andrea Bianco (1436) and on the 'Catalan Chart' (1480), long before Brazil was discovered.[39]

Don Pedro and his adviser, the head of the National Museum, and a Hebraist, Ladislaus Netto, turned to Ernest Renan for guidance. In a letter to Dom Pedro written on 6 September 1873, the latter declared that the text found in Paraíba was a forgery. Meanwhile, one Francisco Pinto allegedly found over 20 caves along the Amazon deep in the Brazilian jungle in 1872 and discovered about 250 Phoenician-like inscriptions on the rocks. He acquainted Netto with his findings. In 1874, the Halle Professor Konstantin Schlottmann wrote rather favourably on the authenticity of the Paraíba text while attacking Clermont-Ganneau for his criticism of Moses Wilhelm Shapira's *Moabitica*[40] (cf. below). Gossip named the alleged forger of the Paraíba text Dom Pedro himself, his secretary Ferdinand Koch or Ladislau Netto, all of whom were Hebraists.

Amidst all the gossip, Dom Pedro went to the Third Congress of Orientalists in 1876, which was organised by St Petersburg University. Daniel Chwolsson made an important presentation there about the longer version of the 'Reply of the Khazar king Joseph to the Letter by Ḥasday Ibn Shaphrut', the version Abraham Harkavy had discovered in Firkowicz' papers in 1874.

I personally found the text of the longer version with Firkowicz' notes in August 2018, along with a remark about the long version from New Cairo (which Firkowicz had visited in 1863/1864) (see Fig. 1). Another version of the same text by Firkowicz is kept in Kiev.

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39 Obviously, one should compare the account of the Necho expedition and those of the Bible: 'And King Solomon made a navy of ships in Ezion-geber, which is beside Eloth, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to King Solomon' (I Kings 9:26–28; cf. II Chronicles 2:2–12,13–18; II Chronicles 8, beginning verse 8:17–18: 'Then went Solomon to Ezion-geber, and to Eloth, at the sea side in the land of Edom. And Hiram sent him by the hands of his servants ships, and servants that had knowledge of the sea; and they went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and took thence four hundred and fifty talents of gold, and brought them to King Solomon'; cf. II Chron. 9:20, 22, 27).

40 Schlottmann 1874.

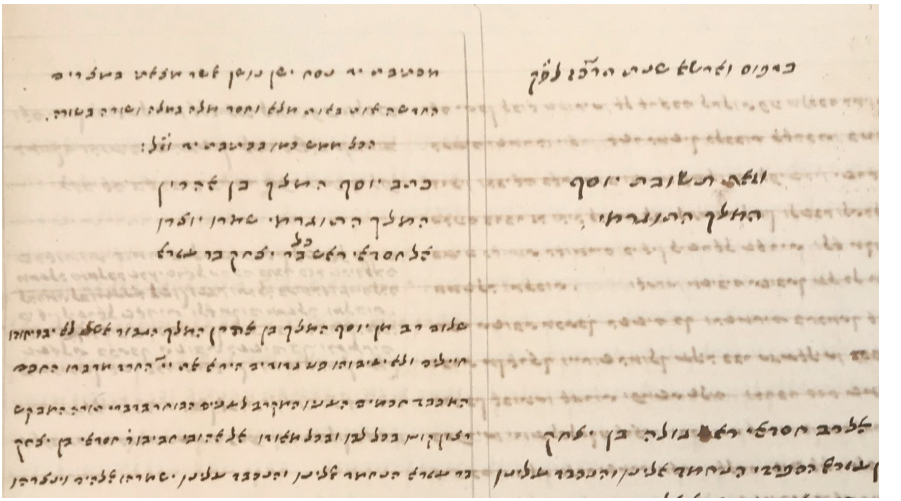

Fig. 1: Firkowicz' collation of the short and longer versions of the 'Reply of the Khazar king Joseph to the Letter by Ḥasday Ibn Shaphrut'.

On 6 September 1876, Dom Pedro II went to the Imperial Public Library in order to examine the Hebrew and Samaritan scrolls and manuscripts in the Firkowicz Collections and spent two hours there with Abraham Harkavy (whose name the Emperor misspelt as 'Garkavine' in his diary), talking about the dates of Hebrew manuscripts in Firkowicz' collections (while demonstrating his understanding of the details of the debate surrounding the ancient history of the Crimean Jews) and discussing the newly found Moabite inscription of King Mesha'.[41]

During his stay in St Petersburg, Dom Pedro II met Ephraim Deinard, Firkowicz' former secretary and now a critic of the old man's ways, and heard about Firkowicz' misdeeds from him. The Emperor then left for the Crimea: on 7–9 September 1876, Dom Pedro II visited Kyiv, where he strolled along the main street, Khreshchatyk, then came to Podol/Podil, known for its large Jewish population. After that he proceeded to the Crimea, where he visited Çufut-Qal'eh and its cemetery. He spent several minutes at Firkowicz' tomb apparently.

41 The Mesha' Inscription was found in 1868 and acquired for the Louvre in 1870. In 1871, the Temple Stele was found in Jerusalem. Both of them have inspired numerous forgeries since then.

On 4 December 1876, the Emperor was in Jerusalem and one of the first things he did before going to any holy place was to go the shop run by 'the famous Safira, whose face does not show the truth, and who looks like a Schliemann without any fanaticism to me – a bit serious'.[42] This 'Safira' was, of course, Moses Wilhelm Shapira (1830–1884), a baptised Jew born in Kamienets-Podolsk. He came to the Holy Land in the footsteps of his very observant father, a pupil of the Vilna Gaon (1720–1797), in 1856, at the age of 25. In Jerusalem, however, 'Moyshe Schapiro' converted to Anglicanism, lived in Christ Church near the Jaffa Gate, and in 1861 he set up a shop in Christian Quarter Road for the Christian pilgrim tourists. The place, which is now under different management, still sells books.

Moses Wilhelm Shapira became one of the leading dealers on the antiquities market. His case is a very complicated one, but it is nonetheless important in the context of forgeries of historical and religious Jewish documents. Although we know that Shapira *was* engaged in different acts of petty forgery, such as producing souvenirs said to be authentic Moabite statuettes for tourists (and selling them to the British Museum as well), it was only after the Qumran Scrolls were unearthed that scholars realised the Palaeo-Hebrew 'Leathers of Moab', which contained a different text of Deuteronomy, might well be genuine. Shapira suggested that the British Museum should buy them from him, but it was rejected by it as a forgery.[43] We know for certain that there was *some* contact between Shapira and Firkowicz in 1864, but no specific importance can be attributed to this; Firkowicz visited Shapira's antique shop in Jerusalem and possibly acquired something there, but that is all. We should bear in mind that Shapira was purely a businessman and never pretended to be a scholar, unlike Firkowicz. His alleged forgeries appealed to religious feelings and were not presumed to be of any particular 'historical' value.[44]

As Joseph Perl suggested in 1838, Firkowicz went to the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea in 1840 to look for Khazar remnants. He encountered the Iranian-speaking 'Mountain Jews' there, whom he described in a way similar to how

42 Faingold 1999, 143: '[…] do célebre Safira, cuja fisionomia não denota veracidade, e parece-me um Schliemann sem fanatismo, pouco sério'.

43 See Clermont-Ganneau 1885; Rabinowicz 1956; Goshen-Gottstein 1956; Mansoor 1958; for the whole episode, see Deuel 1965, chapter 20; Allegro 1965; Heide 2012.

44 It is even possible that the sensational discoveries of the mid-nineteenth century, including the 'Derbend and Mejelis Documents', actually inspired forgers. According to Clermont-Ganneau, Shapira's leathers were the lower parts of the Torah scrolls (just like some of Firkowicz' forgeries; cf. Shapira 2004b).

medieval Jewish travellers and adventurers imagined the valiant members of the Lost Tribes. This is how the myth of the 'Mountain Jews' as a 'militant Israel' was born.[45] Following Firkowicz' descriptions in search of an alternative to Jewish misery and deprivation, Eastern European Jews became fascinated with the Mountain Jews, who were said to have exotic biblical names and be ignorant of the Talmud, which is exactly what some of the *maskilim* and Reformists wanted Jews to become.

While at Derbend on the Caspian See in 1841, Firkowicz acquired a huge leather Torah scroll written in a Persian post-Mongol hand (now MS Evr I A 1 at the Russian National Library in St Petersburg). This Torah scroll was sold or given to Firkowicz because it was no longer wanted: brought to the area from Iran in the early nineteenth century by an Iranian Jew by the name of Dimašqi ('of Damascus'), who tried to sell it there, the scroll was found to be improper in terms of Jewish law.[46] Nobody needed it, but it was impossible to throw it away since it was a sacred object, however 'improper' it might be. It was on the last folio of this manuscript that Firkowicz 'found' the so-called 'Derbend Document', a lengthy marginal note of sensational historical character. The contents of this 'document', which seems to have been written by Firkowicz himself, relate to Hebrews of the Judaean Kingdom who came to the help of their Israeli brethren in Samaria and were taken with them to Media (in Hebrew *Maday*) in Assyrian captivity. There they learnt the Median language. Media was known to the Jews from the Bible, where it appears together with Persia. The Crimean Karaites called the Crimean Tatars 'Maday', i.e. Medes (but the actual meaning was 'ruffians, idiots'). The language spoken in the nineteenth century in ancient Media, which is now Iranian Azerbaijan, was Turkic, which is very close to a variety of Crimean Tatar. This explains why the author of the 'document' thought that the 'Median' learnt by Judaeans in their captivity was a kind of Azeri.

Cambyses subsequently gave the Crimea to these Judaeans as a gift and they taught the local inhabitants their 'Median'. This is why the Crimean Tatars, or 'Madays', speak what they speak. The Khazars also appear on the scene in this 'document': Prince Volodymir (the Saint) asks the Karaite prince David of the Crimea to send him rabbis to teach him the true religion (this motif is appar-

45 Cf. Shapira 2006a.

46 As appears in a note in a thick notebook written by Firkowicz himself, on an unknown date. The notebook was read thoroughly by Harkavy, as is evident from his handwritten notes, and compared to the text of the printed *Introduction* of *Avney Zikkaron* published by A. Firkowicz in Hebrew in Vilnius in 1872.

ently taken from the Russian Primary Chronicle, albeit with a wrong date, as was common in the 1840s).[47]

This concoction became one of the cornerstones of Firkowicz' theories, together with the tombstone inscriptions from the Crimea, where Firkowicz 'found' graves of the people mentioned in this text and forged colophons and marginalia supposedly written by the people buried in Çufut-Qal'eh and Mangup on old biblical manuscripts he actually collected in various places in the 1840s.[48]

Firkowicz published his book *Abnei Zikkaron* ('The Stones of Remembrance') in Vilnius in 1872, almost thirty-three years after he had begun to study tombstone inscriptions. The book is a collection of Hebrew inscriptions from the Crimea with an extensive introduction, which is actually his autobiography from 1830 till 1848. Even the title of the book was plagiarised – from *Abnei Zikkaron*, Prague, 1841, by Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1865), in which tomb inscriptions from the cemetery of Toledo were published. In Firkowicz' version, there are 564 inscriptions from the Çufut-Qal'eh cemetery. Having compared the drafts of the book with the printed book, I can say that Firkowicz was aware of far more inscriptions than those he published; apparently, he was forced to reduce the volume of the book. Around four hundred of the inscriptions published still exist in the cemetery. Dozens have been lost since then, and a few never actually existed, it seems, but were merely created by Firkowicz 'on paper'.[49] In quite a few of the cases, he created duplicates of the same inscription, publishing them twice and ascribing them to different dates, with gaps of hundreds of years.

Of all those inscriptions that were published, about a third of them (around 160) have a date formed from a Hebrew biblical verse (a chronogram). Almost all of the tombstone inscriptions that still exist now were published by Firkowicz. These inscriptions are characterised by the fact that counting the date depends on the purely arbitrary choice of the word whose letters are to be

47 The chronology of the earlier part of the Russian Primary Chronicle (see Chadwick 1946; Cross/Sherbowitz-Wentzor 1953) is all wrong; this fact was established by scholars as late as the early twentieth century.

48 For more on Firkowicz, see Shapira 2008, 1–81 and Shapira 2003a; on Firkowicz in the Caucasus, see Shapira 2006a; on the 'Derbend Document' and its 'twin', see Shapira 2007 (or Shapira 2006b for a shorter version). On other documents forged by Firkowicz, see Shapira 2004b.

49 From the period between 1607 and 1698, only fifteen inscribed tombstones are missing, while from the period between the years 262 and 1178 CE (dated thus according to Firkowicz, of course), 86 inscribed tombstones are missing.

counted to make the date since Hebrew letters are also used as digits. This creates considerable leeway for 'forgery'. As for the 'normal' Hebrew dates, they look like תשע"ט/TŠ'Ṭ, or התשע"ט/HTŠ'Ṭ, which stand for [20]18/9 and 2018/9 CE respectively. In the second example, H/ה can be omitted since we know which Hebrew millennium we are in: H/ה, when appearing as the first letter in the date, stands for 5,000, while D/ד in the same position stands for 4,000 (so changing H/ה to D/ד, we get to the previous millennium and can make a date look 1,000 years older).

T/ת stands for 400; Š/ש stands for 300; R/ר stands for 200, and Q/ק for 100. For instance, HŠLG/השלג means 5000 (H) + 300 (Š) + 30 (L) + 3 (G), that is, 5333 = 1572/3 CE. However, the Hebrew letters H/ה and T/ת are sometimes very similar in writing, and in many cases, Firkowicz changed H to T, thus gaining 600 more years than the real date: T cannot count for thousands, unlike H; if H is not the first digit of the date, the reader should assume that the thousands are simply implied, not indicated; HŠLG/השלג changed to TŠLG/תשלג becomes 400+300+30+3, thus 733, and it is up to the reader to decide which millennium is meant.

Here is another example: HT means 5400 (= 1639/40 CE), where H stands for the thousands; 1839/40 was the Jewish year of HTR (5600); the changed date TT would be equal to 800, and without the thousand unit it would belong to the former Jewish millennium, 1039/40 CE. Dates beginning with HQ belong to the years after 1339/40; dates beginning with HR belong to the years after 1439/40; dates beginning with HŠ belong to the years after 1539/40. Another confusing point is that the first H can sometimes be understood as the Hebrew definite article and not as a digit.

Among the existing tomb inscriptions published by Firkowicz and dated by the usual way of substituting Hebrew letters for dates, 124 have a date beginning in HT (5400 or 400), 33 beginning in TT (800), two beginning in HR (5200 or 200), 12 beginning in TR (600), 19 in HŠ (5300 or 300), 46 beginning in TŠ (700), 81 beginning in TQ (500), and one (and possibly two more) beginning in HQ (5100 or 100). Using this technique, Firkowicz changed the dates of the deaths of dozens of Crimean Jews from the seventeenth/eighteenth to the seventh/twelfth centuries, which supported his fancies about Karaite history on the Crimean peninsula.

In several cases, Firkowicz published inscriptions changing the names of the deceased or parts of the dates, adding or skipping words or even whole

lines;[50] only in a couple of cases did he (or his associates) create a completely new inscription (the inscriptions that were forged are very short, sometimes just a word without the date).

Firkowicz created criss-cross connections between the persons whose tomb inscriptions he had changed and forged, supplying them with new biographies, ascribing them books they had never written and in many cases forging their signatures on biblical scrolls as well as texts they had supposedly written. His forgeries were politically motivated in most cases, but sometimes he simply seemed to enjoy creating such inscriptions with his chisel ('*Meißelfreude*', one could say [Fig. 2]).

Abraham Firkowicz could possibly be considered a writer of fantasy literature working with real objects at a time when modern secular Hebrew literature did not even exist (aside from Perl, the post-modernist), let alone have any kind of genres. A Jewish Tolkien with a chisel before there was any modern Jewish literature at all, willing to be buried next to his literary hero in a Jurassic Park of his own making – what a role!

So who is the greater post-modernist? Perl, who, no doubt choking with laughter, sent Firkowicz to look for Khazar farmers near the Caspian Sea, or Firkowicz, who envisaged he would be buried among his literary heroes one day?

50 This type of forgery is especially attested in the case of the 'Yerushalmi family', which Firkowicz invented completely; see Shapira 2008, 218–232; compare Shapira 2004a.

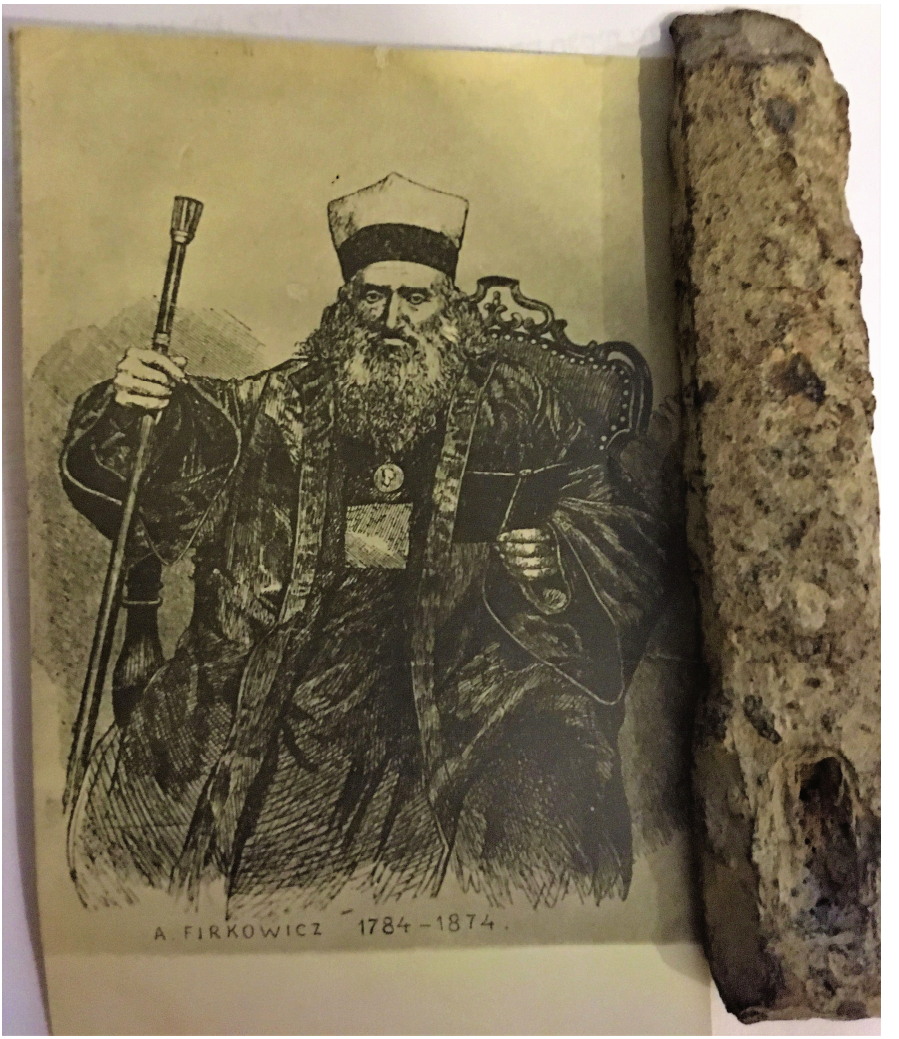

Fig. 2: A picture of Abraham Firkowicz next to his (?) chisel found near a tomb at Çufut-Qal'eh (courtesy of Dr. Mikhail Kizilov).

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Malachi Beit-Arié

Supplement: The Forgery of Colophons and Ownership of Hebrew Codices and Scrolls by Abraham Firkowicz

Abstract: The manuscripts and Torah scrolls that Abraham Firkowicz (1787–1874) appropriated served the same purpose as the epitaphs he forged. He not only tampered with colophons of codices, but also fabricated long Karaite ownership inscriptions and records of dedication to Karaite foundations that allegedly attested to the early settlement of the Karaites on the Crimean Peninsula. Above all, like his date-changing in epitaphs, he inscribed very old dates within the first millennium in the many fake notes he added to liturgical Torah scrolls. He did not tamper extensively with authentic colophons or paratexts, but mainly fabricated paratexts of his own and occasionally created historical records as well.

> Forgeries have often played a central role in religious, political, and literary history. And forgery has stimulated, both in the forgers who tried to create convincing documents and the critics who tried to unmask them, the development of a richer sense of what the past was really like. [...] Forger and critic have been entangled through time; [...] the changing nature of their continuous struggle forms a central theme in the development of historical and philological scholarship.[1]
>
> Antony Grafton

The Karaites are a Jewish sect that does not acknowledge the authority of the post-biblical Jewish tradition (so-called 'oral law') incorporated in the Talmud. Apart from the Samaritans, it is the only Jewish sect that has survived for more than 1,200 years and is still in existence. Karaism originated within the confines of the medieval Muslim realm, principally as a result of the intellectual and social ferment within the Jewish community in Iraq, which enjoyed substantial autonomy in its internal affairs. The sect represents an indirect link to the Qumran community in its resistance to certain elements of Judaism in the oral law. The movement was founded in the middle of the eighth century. By the tenth century,

1 Grafton 1990, 6.

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the schism had spread from its Iranian–Iraqi birthplace to Palestine, Syria and Egypt.

The First Crusade put an end to all Jewish activity in Palestine and much of Syria, including the main Karaite Academy in Jerusalem. New Karaite settlements were established in the Byzantine Balkans, Cyprus and Spain and later on in Crimea, Lithuania and Poland as well. The decline of Turkey in the eighteenth century shifted the leading role of the Karaite communities to the Crimean Peninsula and Lithuania.

My subject here refers to Crimea after its annexation to the Russian Empire in 1783. The Crimean Karaites are an ethnic group derived from Turkic-speaking adherents of Karaite Judaism in Central and Eastern Europe. The earliest written evidence of Karaite settlements in Crimea is from the late thirteenth century; the numerous genuine dated tombstones that exist go back as far as the fourteenth century, but no earlier than that. Like all Karaites, the Karaite inhabitants of Crimea used the Hebrew script both in Hebrew and in transcribing their vernacular languages.[2]

Karaites were treated just like other Jews for a long time. Under the Tatar khans and the Ottoman Turks, Rabbinic Jews and Karaites in the Crimea had the same legal status. It was only at the end of the eighteenth century when Russia annexed Crimea that a difference in status was made between Rabbinic Jews and Karaites under the law. Karaites were relieved of the double tax imposed upon other Jews as well. Inequality between the two groups before the law was increased further in 1827 when the Karaites were exempted from compulsory military service, a privilege that was not extended to other Jews. The Karaites even strove to achieve greater civil liberty by stressing their fundamental difference to other Jews, namely their refusal to accept the validity of the Talmud.

In 1839, following a visit by Tsar Nicolay I to Crimea, the governor of Novorosia (New Russia) told the Karaite leader that the members of his community were still Jews despite their rejecting the Talmud, so they were still responsible for the death of Jesus. The administrator advised him to provide the government with proof to back up their claim that their religion was older than the Jewish religion and that the Karaites had not played any part in persecuting and crucifying Jesus.

The most eminent, captivating and evasive Karaite scholar of the nineteenth century and the most active, creative and cunning champion of the Karaite struggle for civil rights was Abraham Samuilovich Firkowicz (1787–1874), an

2 See Nemoy's excellent entry on the Karaites in the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*: Nemoy 1986.

unusual character who invented and fabricated an incredible new Karaite historiography.

According to Firkowicz, the Karaites were descendants of the ancient Israelites, who, as the Hebrew Bible relates, were expelled from the northern kingdom of Israel following its conquest by the Neo-Assyrian Empire in 692 BCE (some 1,500 years before the emergence of the Karaite movement). Thus the Karaites departed from the rest of the Jews long before the birth of Christ and consequently had nothing to do with his crucifixion. Moreover, he claimed that permission for their settlement in Crimea was granted by the Persian King Cambyses II in the sixth century BCE. This bizarre fake history was invented to serve a political goal, of course.

When the Karaite leaders discussed how to comply with the Russian governor's demand, Firkowicz claimed that it was possible to furnish the required documents from the epitaphs found on Karaite tombstones and manuscripts, which would prove the antiquity of Karaism, especially in Crimea. Firkowicz was commissioned to carry out an extensive archaeological survey in cemeteries and to search for records and manuscripts, even receiving authorisation from the Russian administration to collect them. Armed with this official mandate, Firkowicz travelled through Crimea and the Caucasus, taking whatever manuscripts he deemed necessary from their owners and even plundering the Rabbinic Krimchaks and their synagogues and sealed depositories.

As Dan Shapira has shown elsewhere in this volume, Firkowicz' survey of the cemeteries enabled him to fake some epitaphs and alter the date on hundreds of tombstones, making them anything up to a thousand years older than they really were. The manuscripts and Torah scrolls that he appropriated, adding them to his so-called 'First Collection', served the same purpose as the epitaphs he forged. However, he not only tampered with colophons, but he also fabricated long Karaite ownership inscriptions and records of dedication to Karaite foundations that could allegedly attest to the early settlement of the Karaites on Crimea. Like his date-changing in epitaphs, he inserted very old dates lying in the first millennium in the many fake records he added to Torah liturgical scrolls (which would never contain any such paratextual content; had they ever done so among the Karaites, the paratexts would have been put at the head or the end of the complete scroll, but most of Firkowicz' interpolation was written at the beginning or the end of *fragments*!). Unlike the epitaphs, he did not tamper extensively with authentic colophons or paratexts; his main intervention was faking whole texts, something which was hardly possible in epigraphic forgery on a major scale.

In order to substantiate his bizarre fake history of the origin of the Crimean Karaites, our 'hero' had to furnish some historical documents, of course. He exploited the many fake ownership inscriptions that were mainly in the scrolls by including some fake events which supported a later part of his fabricated history, like his alleged contacts with the Khazars. One of the fake dedications, for instance, dated 805 and apparently written by the son of the legendary person who converted the Khazars, relates how the Khazars saved the Karaites of Crimea. Altogether, a total of fifteen records relate to the Khazars.

But the fundamental document that would depict Firkowicz' invented origin of the Karaites in general and of those who settled on the peninsula still had to be fabricated. At the beginning of his survey while travelling in Dagestan, he claimed that he had found a document in an old Torah scroll in a synagogue in Derbend, which contained a concise history of the Karaites' exile from the kingdom of Israel and their settlement in Crimea, seemingly written at the time of King Khosrow I of Persia (between 531 and 579). This was despite the written protest by the synagogue leaders, who denied the existence of such a document in their liturgical reading scroll. In order to reinforce his fake history and substantiate his discovery, he reported that he had discovered an extensive copy of the document in Mejelis, a Jewish village near Detrend, which had been written in 986.[3] The second document did not survive, but was published in journals on Jewish Studies in Germany. The 'Mejelis document', as it came to be known, was a fake and became the foundation stone of Firkowicz' invented history. It was published in several countries nonetheless and survived the rigours of time. Firkowicz incorporated it into a scroll made from six different fragments of Torah scrolls, which was acquired by the National Library of Russia later.[4]

In order to reinforce his fake history, he even invented a new era starting from the year of the Karaites' expulsion from Israel in 692 BCE, namely לגלותנו, 'since our exile', which he made use of in dating his fake records of ownership, dedication and deed of sale interpolated in codices and scrolls[5] in addition to the many tombstone epitaphs he tampered with or forged. The use of this era became a conspicuous 'fingerprint' in Firkowicz' fakes.

To understand how Firkowicz was so tempted to tamper with codex colophons (and epigraphic epitaphs) and how it was feasible to reveal his forgeries, one should be aware that the Hebrew square alphabet allows easy conversion of

3 See Shapira's contribution above, especially p. 187.

4 See Harkavy/Strack 1875, 173–181 (MS A 1).

5 Cf. Harkavy/Strack 1875, xxiv–xxviii. This fake era was employed in the Derbend document mentioned above.

certain letters to other letters just by adding or erasing a single engraved stroke. Furthermore, dates in Hebrew according to the common Jewish era since the Creation are frequently designated not by words, but by the alphanumeric system and consequently make it possible to alter the digital letters effortlessly as well, particularly the millennia.

The primary way of refuting the authenticity of the forged artefacts, though, is simply by palaeography. In the late nineteenth century, Hebrew palaeography was underdeveloped, and discoveries, publications and knowledge of epigraphic and manuscript writing in late antiquity and the early medieval period was very limited. Therefore, the main critical tool was textual and historical, which proved effective in exposing the forgeries. The main scholar who uncovered the forgeries and substantiated his critical claims on textual grounds was Albert Harkavy in the introduction to his (and Strack's) catalogue of the biblical Torah scrolls and codices printed in 1875. His *Altjüdische Denkmäler aus der Krim* ('Old Jewish Monuments of the Crimea'), which was published the following year, was a critical examination of epitaphs. Based on a philological approach examining their style, lexigraphy, orthography and geographical terminology coupled with historical facts, he unmasked the absurd mass production of fake or tampered-with epitaphs and claimed that all the inscriptions dated prior to 1240 were actually forgeries.

The following are a few examples of colophons and ownership notes that Firkowicz tampered with:

1 MS St Petersburg, Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, D62 (Fig. 1).
2 MS St Petersburg, RNL Евр. I B 3 (Fig. 2).
3 MS St Petersburg, NLR Евр. II B 124 (Fig. 3).
4 MS St Petersburg, NLR Евр. I B 111 (Fig. 4).



Fig. 1: MS St Petersburg, Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, D62. Bible. Middle East (Palestine?), *c.* 1000; © St Petersburg, National Library of Russia.

Below an early undated deed of sale, there is a fake record of a re-sale added by Firkowicz in a coarse script, allegedly dated 847. Up until recently, this manuscript was said to be the earliest Hebrew codex, which was produced before 846,[6] thus preceding the earliest extant dated codices from the early tenth century.

6 The date of Marḥeshvan 4608 (847) noted in the record of sale in the manuscript of Minor Prophets was already familiar in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. Known as Codex Karasubazar, it provoked debates among scholars. Abraham Harkavy doubted the reliability of this annotation, but Daniel Chwolson believed it was genuine; see Chwolson 1882, cols. 184–196.

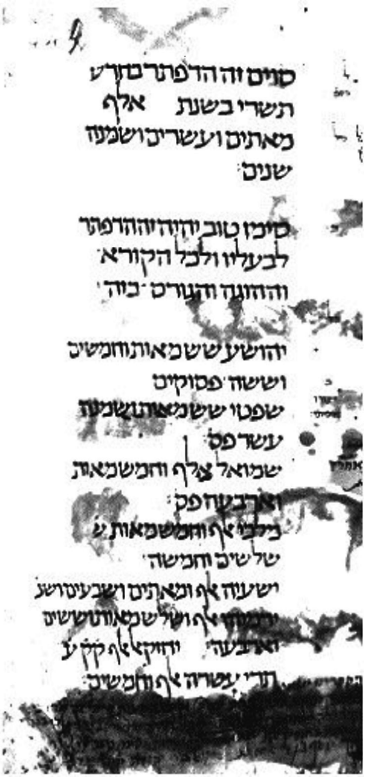

Fig. 2: MS St Petersburg, RNL Евр. I B 3. Latter Prophets with Babylonian vocalisation. <Iraq?>, 916; © St Petersburg, National Library of Russia.

Some scholars still regarded the date as authentic as late as 1974; see Starkova 1974, 38–39 (where the date was erroneously noted as 747 instead of 847). However, see Yeivin 1968, 371 on the impossibility of ascribing the vocalisation, cantillation and Masora of this manuscript to such an early period. From an examination of the manuscript itself, even of lithographs 99–100 provided in Chwolson's book, and more clearly from a colour scan sent to me recently by Shimon Iakerson, it is clear that the deed of transfer of ownership at the end of the manuscript has two parts. The upper one is in a skilful Oriental semi-square script, the authenticity of which cannot be denied, but it does not contain a date. Underneath, there is a dated inscription in coarser script that was added later. Some of its letters are blurred, presumably deliberately with the intention of making the wording hard to decipher. This appears to be another of the forged colophons from the Firkowicz enterprise; see the extensive article by Iakerson (2014) for more details. On the late adoption of the codex book form by the Jews and the basic oral transmission of post-biblical Hebrew literature, see Beit-Arie 2019, 39-49.

MS St Petersburg I B 3 is the earliest known complete codex in Hebrew that is dated. It contains numerous authentic records of sale and ownership over the period. Two of the records are fake, however; they are attributed to an ancient leader of Israel, a 'grandson of David', and have been smeared by Firkowicz, which he probably did deliberately in some his manuscript forgeries, claiming cunningly that he had employed 'gall liquid' (מיץ העשוי מעפוצים) in order to enhance the legibility of the texts; in truth, he tried to blur his forgery.[7]



Fig. 3: MS St Petersburg, NLR Евр. II B 124 Kairu<an> 4701–4979 / 941–1036; © St Petersburg, National Library of Russia.

7 For a detailed codicological description, see Beit-Arié et al. 1997, 42–47 (manuscript 3).

MS St Petersburg II B 124 is the earliest extant codex from the Hebrew Sephardic region. It has the same type of script and involved the same codicological practices as manuscripts produced on the Iberian Peninsula and in Provence and Languedoc, the Maghreb and Sicily. It contains parts of the Prophets. The colophon was severely damaged when someone – probably Firkowicz – attempted to change the following details in it: the date, the location of the manuscript's production and the name of the person who commissioned the manuscript. These details are now blurred, no doubt due to Firkowicz's device of smearing the ink. The damage inflicted on the original date makes it only partly legible, but it can be restored to a year between 946 and 1036. By removing part of the date, Firkowicz made it 407.[8]



Fig. 4: MS St Petersburg, NLR Евр. I B 111; © St Petersburg, National Library of Russia.

8 See Beit-Arié et al. 1999, 83–91 (manuscript 29).

The only remaining folio is from an Oriental Pentateuch. It contains a long, decorated but undated colophon dedicated to the person who commissioned the manuscript, as was customary in the tenth century (the scribe's separate colophon has not survived, unfortunately) and it was probably produced in Jerusalem in the eleventh century before the conquest of the city by the Seljuks in 1077 when the Jewish Academy left Jerusalem, or else it was made in Tyre where it stayed until 1096 when the First Crusade struck the town. This is implied by the fact that the manuscript was commissioned by a person whose father and grandfather were senior members of the Jerusalem Academy.

The final scribal formula was preceded by the interpolated word 'the year' written over some erased letters and was marked by upper dots for rendering the date by its numerical values, <= 1088>. This practice was never employed in Hebrew manuscripts or documents, but it was used extensively by Firkowicz, his main trick in tampering with the tombstones. Ironically, the original date is very likely to have been earlier than the forged one.

As extravagant as all this fake evidence Firkowicz created might seem nowadays, it nonetheless found credence in Russia at the time, especially in government circles. In fact, it paved the way for the emancipation of the Russian Karaites, who, according to the alleged documentary evidence, lived in Russia long before Jesus was born and had therefore played no part in the crucifixion, renouncing all connections with Jews and Judaism. Thanks to his efforts, the Russian Karaites received full civic liberty in 1863.

Firkowicz managed to assemble the largest private library of Hebrew manuscripts to have existed, containing the earliest extant Hebrew codices. Notwithstanding his many forgeries, tampering with early colophons and ownership records, Jewish Studies undoubtedly owes him a great debt of gratitude for saving some 17,000 codices and remains of manuscripts, some of which were certainly obtained cunningly and by dubious means during his travels in Crimea, the Caucasus, Palestine, Syria, Egypt and Constantinople – manuscripts of Rabbinic and Karaite literature which had been presumed lost. Jewish Studies should also be grateful to the Tsarist government, which purchased his first collection from him in 1862 and the larger second collection from his heirs later for the Imperial Library (now the Russian National Library in St Petersburg).

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Part III: **Identifying Fakes**

Claudia Colini

La invención del Sacromonte: How and Why Scholars Debated about the Lead Books of Granada for Two Hundred Years

Abstract: At the end of the sixteenth century, a number of relics and artefacts were discovered in Granada, Spain. They included what became known as the Lead Books of the Sacromonte, twenty-one written artefacts made of circular lead leaves engraved in archaic Arabic characters. The authorship was attributed to some Arab disciples of St James the Greater considered to be the first evangelisers of the Iberian Peninsula. The texts, the materiality and the circumstances of the discoveries fuelled a debate surrounding their authenticity that lasted more than two centuries, a debate so fierce and controversial that not even papal condemnation in 1682 was able to stop it. Soon after the discoveries were made public, scholars highlighted the many contradictions and errors of a historical, linguistic and theological nature present in the texts, identifying members of the local Morisco community as possible forgers. This article focuses on how the scholarly community of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries handled these findings and looks at the methods employed by the scholars to evaluate the authenticity of the artefacts. It will also look at how the particular interests of the various authorities involved influenced the acceptance or dismissal of relevant academic results.

Many interesting objects were found in Granada towards the end of the sixteenth century. These included a box filled with relics and a piece of written parchment, which were discovered in the rubble of the *Torre Vieja*, the old minaret of the Great Mosque. Other remains and peculiar written artefacts were excavated from a complex of caves in Mount Valparaíso on the outskirts of the city. The relics found in the caves were attributed to St Caecilius, St Ctesiphon and St Hesychius – martyrs, companions of St James[1] and first evangelisers of the Iberian

1 The figure of St James is very important in Spain and many legends have been created around this character. In one of these, he is considered to be the first evangeliser of the Iberia Peninsula.

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Peninsula – thanks to the information engraved in Latin on lead sheets found together with the remains. The area where the find was made was renamed Sacromonte (Holy Mountain) once the artefacts were identified as relics.

Twenty-one lead books were also found in addition to these lead sheets: the volumes are made of a number of small, circular leaves of lead engraved on both sides, each inside a sort of cover made of folded lead. The titles of the books are inscribed on the covers in Latin, while the circular leaves are written in Arabic. Both types of writing look very archaic. After the discoveries were made, the inhabitants of Granada experienced an unprecedented religious fervour: not only did the city possess some relics of its own now, but the relics themselves included the remains of St Caecilius, the first bishop of Granada, which corresponds to the Roman town of Ilíberis. Moreover, the texts testified that Ilíberis was the first town evangelised by St James, thus making Granada one of the most important Catholic cities in Spain, contending the leadership of Santiago de Compostela and Toledo.

Since the use of the Arabic language was forbidden by royal decree in 1567 as it was believed to be a sign of Muslim identity, such strange finds were extremely controversial. Not only were the books written in Arabic, but in some passages, St Mary is said to consider the language worthy of the word of God. Moreover, according to the biographies on the lead leaves, both Caecilius and Ctesiphon were Arabs. Finally, Christian readers felt that the message transpiring from numerous translations into Spanish was tainted by Islamic concepts.

Contemporary sources described the finds as the *invención* of the Sacromonte, which is the vernacular form of the medieval hagiographical *inventio*. Like its Latin counterpart, this word conveys both the meaning of discovery and that of creation.[2] Following their discovery and right up to the end of the eighteenth century – that is, almost a hundred years after the books (not the relics) were declared heretical by Pope Innocent XI in 1682 – many, many pages were written expressing arguments in favour of or against the authenticity of the finds. The materials are now unanimously considered forgeries by scholars and are mostly seen as the last attempt by the Morisco community to be accepted and

In others, his body was transferred to Spain either by a miracle or by seven of his disciples, in this case combining the figure of St James with the medieval legend of the Apostolic Men (see below, n. 13). He played an important role during the *Reconquista* when he got the epithet of *Santiago Matamoros* (the Moor-slayer) due to his miraculous appearance during the legendary battle of Clavijo in 844. He was the patron saint of Spain from the 1620s until 1760 when Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception was declared patroness of the country; St James remained patron of the Spaniards. See Martínez Medina 2006, 93–96; 2015, 58–61.

2 Harries 2007, XIV.

recognised by Spanish society. The debate concerning the production and reception of the forgeries is still going, however, and is far from reaching a conclusion in the near future. This is due to the exceptional circumstances in which the entire matter originated and evolved, the numerous actors who played a role in it, the many interests involved and also the fact that there is still no scholarly edition of the texts.[3] In fact, the original leaves were kept hidden in the Vatican from the point where they were banned in 1682 until the year 2000 when they were returned to Sacromonte Abbey. Since then, accessing them has been difficult at best.[4]

Despite these obstacles, numerous researchers have published articles on the Lead Books over the last few decades, all looking at the Sacromonte affair from different angles: the relation between the textual messages and Catholic and Islamic religion, the many protagonists and scholars involved in the affair, the materiality of the various objects, the social context surrounding the production and reception of the forgeries, and even studies focusing on Orientalism in Spain.[5] This paper will evaluate all this data to explore the subject from a new point of view: how the scientific community received the finds in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. First of all, however, it is necessary to outline the context that led to the production of the forgeries, their discovery and the behaviour of the main characters involved. This will put into perspective the positions that were taken by the scholars involved to evaluate the authenticity of the relics, the methods they employed and the credit they were paid, depending on the various competing interests at play. For the sake of readability, both the chronology of

3 There are however, many translations and editions based on secondary literature, that is, on the copies, engravings and translation made between the sixteenth and eighteenth century during the process of trying to authenticate the texts. A complete edition and translation of the Arabic texts of the Lead Books will be the outcome of the studies now being conducted by the Dutch scholars Pieter van Koningsveld and Gerard Wiegers. They have already edited some of the books and presented the current state of their project on 19 March 2019 in Granada; see van Koningsveld/Wiegers 2019.

4 The journalist Alejandro V. García argued about the Archbishop's motives for impeding the study and investigation of the Lead Books on the pages of *webislam.com* in April 2007. García even suggested the possibility that the returned artefacts may not have been the originals, but just copies; see Drayson 2013, 6-7. García's articles pages are not accessible any longer as the online journal changed its name and domain into *Verislam.com*.

5 A summary of these studies highlighting the new approaches can be found in Álvarez de Morales 2003–2004. The most recent and comprehensive works on the topic, which are also the main sources of this paper, are these: Barrios Aguilera/García-Arenal 2006, Harris 2007, García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2010 and 2013, Barrios Aguilera 2011, Vega García Ferrer et al. 2011, Drayson 2013 and Martínez Medina 2015.

the finds and the biographies of the scholars mentioned have been included in the appendix.

1 The context

The events leading to the production of the Sacromonte relics and the reasons for their controversial value are to be found in how the *Reconquista* affected the area of al-Andalus and the population inhabiting it.[6]

The *Reconquista* ended with the fall of Granada in 1492. The treaty's terms were very generous to the Muslims, who were even allowed to maintain their faith, although the pact was only respected for the first few years under the guidance of the first archbishop of Granada, Hernando de Talavera. He pursued the evangelisation of the city through a series of measures intended to persuade the Islamic community to assimilate, which included preaching in the Arabic language. The situation changed when forced mass conversions were ordered by Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros in 1499 and 1501 and those who refused to be baptised were expelled or even executed. Those who converted were called *Moriscos* to differentiate them from the Muslims, who were called *Moros* ('Moors'). Despite the conversions, the Moriscos were always treated with suspicion by the Old Christians (the Spaniards and those who converted before the fall of Granada) since the mass conversions were not perceived as genuine conversions to the Christian faith. In fact, the Moriscos were accused of practising their original faith in secret and of conspiring with Moroccans and Turks against the monarchy in order to retake al-Andalus; the fact that they did not abandon their previous traditions and customs or their language and books was sufficient proof of this. As a result, restrictive measures against the culture of the Moriscos started to be introduced around the 1520s, culminating in the royal decree of 17 November 1566 (ratified one year later), in which use of the Arabic language was prohibited as well as Arabic names, Morisco clothes and symbols, their music and bathhouses. Their rights to carry weapons and have servants and slaves were also lost. Moreover, the pressure and control that the Inquisition exercised on Moriscos increased.

6 The main sources of this chapter are Barrios Aguilera/García-Arenal 2006, Harris 2007, García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2010 and 2013, Barrios Aguilera 2011, Drayson 2013 and Martínez Medina 2015.

Such oppressive measures led members of the Morisco community to express their consternation in different ways: the elite and in general the citizens of Granada fought the measures in a peaceful way, mostly by sending representatives to the authorities, filing complaints and writing essays against the reforms, while the population of rural and mountainous areas in particular started a rebellion that ended in the Alpujarras War, as it came to be known (1568–1571). This civil war was extremely ferocious and bloody; even though the rebels could count on some help from Berbers and Turks, they were still outnumbered, ill-equipped and had little or no military training. When the rebellion was eventually suppressed, Granada was in a shambles: the economic and social infrastructure of the area was badly damaged, the current harvest was destroyed and more than half of the Morisco population was expelled from the region, adding a big demographical drop to the already dire situation. The Spanish administration tried to repopulate the area by giving land previously owned by Moriscos to settlers from all over Spain, but the difficult conditions there did not attract enough volunteers, resulting in a much slower recovery process than it had hoped for. Meanwhile, the city of Granada lost the prominent political position it had enjoyed under the rule of the Catholic monarchs, as exemplified by Philip II's decision in 1573 to remove the remains of his deceased wife and of Charles V's family from the Royal Chapel of Granada.

In 1580 there were still around 10,000 Moriscos in the territory of the former realm of Granada. Many of them returned to the area after their expulsion, but a good number of them were descendants of Moors who had converted to Christianity before the conquest of Granada, people who were legally considered to be Old Christians and who were therefore never expelled to begin with. Among them were clergymen, doctors and translators; for them, knowing Arabic was convenient, if not necessary, and they proved valuable to the Crown in maintaining diplomatic relations with the rulers of Morocco and the Ottoman sultan. During the Alpujarras War, they were even employed to spy on the rebels and forge letters and documents. They were tolerated for these reasons, although never fully trusted, and always needed to prove their loyalty and faith by showing irreproachable conduct. Landowners and noblemen of Nasrid origin – thus part of the last Moorish Muslim dynasty ruling the Emirate of Granada – were also considered Old Christians. Members of these families converted to Christianity and were assimilated into the Christian aristocracy by the end of the *Reconquista*, playing a fundamental role in the process of integrating the kingdom of Granada into the Spanish state. Consequently, they enjoyed special economic benefits and tax exemptions. They preferred the epithet 'natives of Granada' (*nativos de Granada*) over Moriscos to define themselves and considered themselves

Christian Arabs. They believed they had the same right to gain honour and power as any other aristocrat. Their position was severely diminished after the *Reconquista* and especially in the wake of the Alpujarras War.

It is among this circle of privileged Moriscos and Old Christians of Arab descent that the defence of the cultural identity of the minority took place, especially in families like the Muley Fez, Núñes Muley and Granada Venegas. They developed their ideas at the literary gatherings organised in the house of the Granada Venegas and spread them by writing essays and treatises focused on two main points: the separation of culture from faith and the distinction of the 'good' Moriscos – those who integrated socially and religiously despite maintaining their cultural identity – from the 'bad' ones, such as the rebels involved in the Alpujarras War.[7] Moreover, they highlighted the noble origin of their families (which was indispensable to get the *hidalguía*, i.e. the status of aristocrats in Spain) and for this reason they produced family trees and histories of their lineages based on both genuine and forged documents and legends. These presented the Moriscos as heroes of chivalric romances, as the descendant of Goths or as crypto-Christians during the Muslim era.[8]

This is most likely the cultural context in which the Sacromonte forgeries were conceived, as the goals appear similar: in the Lead Books, Arabic is considered a Christian language and the Arabs are presented as the first group converted to Christianity in the Iberian Peninsula, implicitly suggesting that the Moriscos present in Spain in the fifteenth century were the descendants of these first converts. A very similar pattern of cultural resistance by way of rewriting history can also be observed in other communities and minorities, perfect examples being the Marranos of Toledo and the forgeries and inventions of Jeronimo Román de la Higuera, a Jesuit who tried to build a glorious and sacred past for his

7 See the position of Alonso Granada Venegas in his letters to Diego Hurtado de Mendoza concerning the Alpujarras War, for example. These letters highlight the oppression and discrimination suffered by Moriscos. In his *Memorial*, Francisco Núñez Muley emphasised the presence of Christian Arabs in Syria and Egypt who were not discriminated by the language they spoke. Perez de Hita stated in *Guerras Civiles* that the Moriscos who decided to remain in Spain wanted to assimilate and should therefore have been attributed the same status they had had before the fall of Granada. See García-Arenal 2006a, 62–74.

8 See *Origen de la casa de Granada*, for example, written for the Granada Venegas family, *Las lágrimas de Angelica* written for the Dukes of Osuna by Luis Barahona de Soto, and *La historia verdadera del rey Don Rodrigo* by Miguel de Luna. García-Arenal 2006a, 69–76; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 157–165.

city, promote the integration of his community and embellish his own genealogy.[9]

Despite all these efforts, the Moriscos were definitively expelled from Spain between 1609 and 1611. However, this final expulsion did not affect any of the protagonists of the Sacromonte matter or the noble families of Nasrid origin, suggesting that their ideas influenced Spanish society to some extent.[10]

2 The events

The story started on 18 May 1588 when the *Torre Vieja* – the old minaret converted to a bell tower – was demolished in order to make space for the construction of the Cathedral. A lead box was found among the rubble, containing an image of St Mary dressed in an Egyptian way, a triangular piece of cloth later attributed to the veil of St Mary, a bone later attributed to St Stephen, and a piece of written parchment (Fig. 1).[11]

The parchment contains a table divided into two sections: the first one contains squares filled with Latin and Greek characters, with one character per square, while the second one sports rectangular spaces filled with Arabic words, with one or two words per space. The characters and words are alternately written in red or black ink, so if one space contains red ink, the next one contains black. There are some irregularities, however. The table is introduced and followed by Arabic text, with a signature at the bottom and a few notes in the left-hand margin. There is a note in Latin in the margin at the bottom left, which was the first thing to be understood due to the language skills of the first readers. It is a report by Patricius the presbyter about the imminent martyrdom of St Caecilius, the contents of the lead box and how he hid it in the Turpiana Tower, which was supposedly the original name of the tower before it was converted into a minaret.

9 One example of his writing is the *Chronicon* attributed to Flavio Lucio Dextro, a collection of fictional stories presented as historical facts. In one of the reports, it is narrated that the Jewish community present in Toledo at the time of Christ asked the apostles for evangelisation, so it is thanks to them that St James arrived in Spain; see Ecker 2002, 369–372; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 195–224.

10 Álvares de Morales 2002–2003, 736.

11 For an exhaustive description of the parchment, see van Koningsveld/Wiegers 2003.



Fig. 1: Parchment from the Turpiana Tower; © Reproduced by kind permission of the Archivo Abadía del Sacro Monte de Granada.

All the texts were then deciphered and translated by Miguel de Luna under the supervision of Francisco López Tamarid and were separately translated by Alonso del Castillo as well, although the latter could not interpret them

completely. The translators, who were both doctors and thus part of the Morisco elite, were later accused of being the authors of the parchment (and of other fake artefacts that were subsequently discovered, too).[12] The decrypted text of the first part of the table revealed a prophecy by St John, translated by St Caecilius into Spanish, and the second part contained St Caecilius's commentary on the prophecy in Andalusian Arabic. The advent of Islam and of the Reformation, the coming of the Antichrist and the beginning of the Final Judgement were all predicted in the prophecy. The notes following the table were interpreted as conclusive remarks made by St Caecilius, who signed it in a way usually transcribed as '*Caecilius Obispus Granatensis*'. It is important to note that the figure of the first bishop of Granada, St Caecilius, and the story of his lost relics only came to people's attention a few years before the aforementioned discoveries thanks to Pedro Guerra de Lorca: in 1584, he wrote *La Historia de la vida y martirio de San Çecilio y sus seis compañeros llamados los apóstoles de nuestra Hespaña*, reporting the medieval legend of the Seven Apostolic Men, the first evangelisers of Spain.[13]

The miraculous finds – both the box and the relics had a persistent floral scent – obtained the immediate approval of the population and of the local church in the person of Juan Méndez de Salvatierra, Archbishop of Granada. He died soon after, however, and the successor appointed in 1589, Pedro Vaca de Castro y Quiñones, was interested, but sceptical. Before pursuing the authentication of the relics, he had them evaluated by a number of experts.

In the same years, two treasure hunters were chasing rumours about an abandoned gold mine on Mount Valparaíso, based on the directions found in a diary

12 Both historical documents and modern research seem to corroborate this hypothesis.

13 The manuscript in which the text is preserved is now in Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España MS 1499; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 174. The legend of the Seven Apostolic Men was created around the seventh to eighth century. According to the legend, seven men (Torquatus, Caecilius, Ctesiphon, Euphrasius, Indaletius, Hesychius and Secundius) were ordained clerics by St Peter and St Paul and then sent to Spain. When they were in Guadix, they were recognised as Christians during the celebrations in honour of the Capitoline triad and were chased to the river by the pagan population. The Christians managed to cross the bridge, but it miraculously collapsed when the pagans tried to cross it. This event converted a noblewoman called Luparia, who then helped the men to hide and continue their journey for the conversion of the Iberian Peninsula. In another version of this legend, the Apostolic Men were disciples of St James who were sent to transfer the remains of the Apostle to Spain. Once in Galicia, they asked a noblewoman, Luparia, to give them a pagan temple that she possessed in order to bury their master, but she reported them to the King. They were miraculously saved again when their pursuers were killed by the destruction of a bridge or the collapse of part of the caves where the Christians were hiding; this account varies according to which version one reads. Luparia is then converted and offers the temple to the Christians. See Martínez Medina 2015, 57–60.

obtained by a prison convict. On 21 February 1595, in a cave blocked by a heavy stone, they found some objects and a lead sheet indicating that the burnt body of a martyr had been left there. The sheet was written in Latin, but used strange characters that the Jesuit Isidro García,[14] the first translator of this text, identified as Spanish-Baetic, thus implying that this peculiar script was developed in *Hispania Baetica* – the Roman province approximately corresponding to modern Andalusia. A report about this find reached the Archbishop, who then assigned two of his men to conduct an excavation. The news spread fast, though, and the population fell into a state of apprehension also incited by the declarations of Isidro García, who suggested there was a relation between the Valparaíso caves and the catacombs recently found in Rome. All sorts of people, from peasants to nobles, gathered at the site and participated in the digging. Ashes, bones and lead sheets continued to be found: the texts mentioned the martyrs Ctesiphon, Hesychius and Caecilius, disciples of St James, and talked about the Arabic origin of Ctesiphon and Caecilius, about their activity as writers, and mentioned some of the titles of the Lead Books that were about to be found. The books were made of circular lead leaves varying between 6 and 15 cm in diameter and engraved on both sides in peculiar Arabic characters called 'Solomonic' at the time of their discovery, which displayed some archaic features (see Figs. 2–3). The leaves were held together by a lead thread passing through a small hole on the margin and were placed inside a folded lead cover inscribed in Latin (Fig. 4). They continued to be dug out of the cave until 1599, ultimately amounting to a total of 21 units.[15]

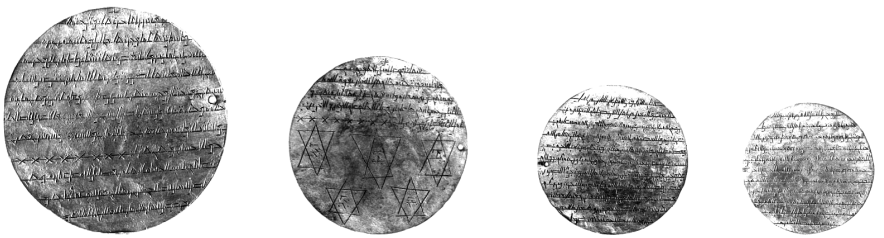

Fig. 2: Dimensions of the Lead Books.

14 Isidro García (1566–1604) was a teacher of rhetoric at Granada's Jesuit College; Harris 2007, 162.

15 See Appendix 1 for a complete list of the finds, including the titles of the books and the date of their discovery.

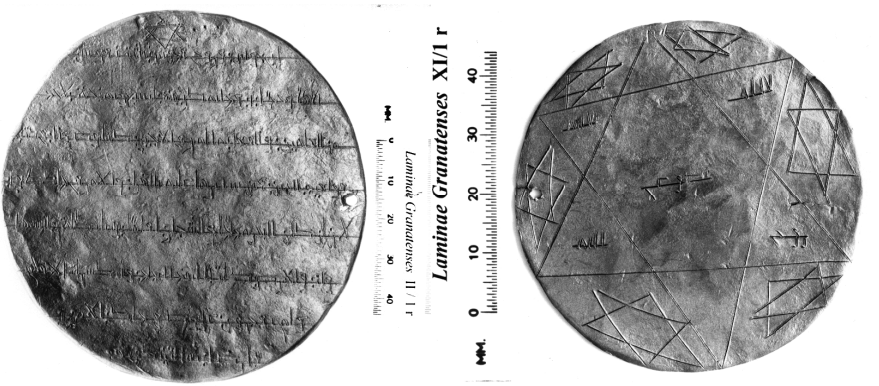

Fig. 3: Examples of the Lead Books; on the left, *On the Essence of God*, fol. 3r, Archivo Abadía Sacro Monte Granada, Laminae Granatenses II/1r; on the right, *Book of Sayings on Faith*, fol. 1r, Archivo Abadía Sacro Monte Granada, Laminae Granatenses XI/1r.



Fig. 4: Cover of the Lead Book *The Fundamentals of the Faith* with Latin characters; © Figs 2, 3 and 4: Reproduced by kind permission of the Archivo Abadía del Sacro Monte de Granada.

The devotional fervour of the population was now at its apex. After the discoveries, pilgrims visited the holy caves almost daily and votive crosses were put up over the area, which was also renamed Sacromonte. Archbishop Pedro de Castro immediately understood how important the relics must have been to a community without a Christian history and saints. As the qualification of the relics according to the norms established after the Council of Trent was under the jurisdiction of the local church, he therefore gathered all the favourable evidence he could find in order to build up a sound case. In particular, he collected all the testimonies of miraculous events connected to the finds – such as the scent of the Turpiana relics, the lights coming from the Sacromonte, and the protection of the entire city from the Plague in 1578. He even got architects to examine the ruins of the Turpiana Tower in order to prove that it pre-dated the Islamic conquest.[16] He had the lead sheets, the ashes, bones and receptacles in which they were found evaluated by experts – goldsmiths, silversmiths, engravers, blacksmiths, plumbers, charcoal burners, potters, and lime and soap makers – who all confirmed the antiquity and authenticity of the finds.[17]

However, the Nunciature and the Roman Church were unconvinced. Although they did not interfere with the authentication of the relics, in 1596 the Pope ordered the Archbishop not to discuss the books any more as the Pontiff alone was responsible for their judgement. Pedro de Castro did not follow this order, though. In fact, he went a stage further and contacted all the Orientalists and Arabic interpreters available in Spain (including Moroccan members of Muley Xeque's entourage) and did so at his own expense. Later on, he even contacted renowned scholars in Europe.[18] Some of them were actually persuaded to move to Granada in order to translate and evaluate the parchment and Lead Books. Subsequently, many more transcriptions, copies, translations and reports were produced by these scholars, although the ones who first worked on the task (and did so more extensively) were actually the same people who translated the

16 The tower was attributed to Jews by the architect Ambrosio de Vico (c. 1555–1623), which linked it to the theory postulated by Pedro Guerra de Lorca (d. 1597) and Pedro Velarde de Ribera about an ancient Spain inhabited by one or more of the ten lost tribes of Israel. Luis de la Cueva, Francisco Bermúdez de Pedraza (1576–1655) and Justino Antolínez de Burgos supported the idea of the oldest populations on the Iberian Peninsula being of Phoenician origin and thus a similar origin for the Turpiana Tower. All of them affirmed that this first population must have been Arabic-speaking, regardless of its origin. See García-Arenal 2006b, 572–577; Harris 2007, 55–87; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 219–224; Urquízar-Herrera 2017, 172–179.

17 Harries 2019, 220–221.

18 See the correspondence between Pedro de Castro and the Dutch Orientalist Thomas Erpenius, for example; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 245.

Turpiana parchment: Alonso del Castillo and Miguel de Luna. This search for skilled linguists is most likely to have been motivated by the need for the ideal translation: one accurate enough to be accepted by all the parties involved (the population, monarchy and papacy), but doctored enough to convey a 'proper' Christian message.

Meanwhile, the commission that had to evaluate the relics established their authenticity in April 1600, and in 1609 Sacromonte Abbey was founded by Pedro de Castro over the caves. At this point, everybody wanted to have the books: King Philip III wanted them in Madrid, the various popes that came in succession wanted them in Rome, but the Archbishop managed to keep them, and even after his death in 1623 the books remained in the Archive of the Four Keys in Sacromonte Abbey. The King only managed to obtain the books in 1632, despite the monks' refusal to hand over their key.[19] Philip III did not have them for long, though, as he was obliged to send them to Rome in 1643 when Pope Urban VIII threatened him with excommunication if he failed to do so. Once in the Vatican, they were studied and assessed by a committee established in 1645, composed of cardinals and six clergymen – expert Orientalists – who were tasked with the translation of the books. They were Antonio dell'Aquila, Bartolomeo de Pettorano, Ludovico Marracci, Giambattista Giattini, Athanasius Kircher and Filippo Guadagnoli (who died before completing the translation).[20] The committee finished its translation in 1665 and a list of Islamic terms used in the books was included in the report. Due to several diplomatic attempts organised by the Abbey with the King's support, the final decision was delayed until 1682, almost a century after the discovery of the Lead Books, when Pope Innocent XI declared the finds to be fake and heretical.

This could have been the end of the story, but it was not. The relics and the books – especially the passage in favour of the Immaculate Conception – were so widely venerated in Granada and, indeed, the whole of Spain that the sentence was not accepted: important people – among them King Charles II and his mother – wrote to the Pope asking him to reconsider his decision. Printed books, pamphlets and manuscripts defending the Lead Books were produced and circulated well into the eighteenth century.[21] The last attempt trying to rehabilitate the

19 The Chancery officials were forced to smash the lock; Harris 2007, 45.

20 For more information concerning this committee and the people that were part of it, see García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 297–305; Martínez Medina 2015, 185–190.

21 To quote a few examples, *Información para la historia del Sacromonte* by Adán Centurión y Córdoba, Marquis of Estepa, the first part published in Granada in 1632 and later put on the Index of Prohibited Books, then re-edited in 1706 in Lyon under the title of *Relación breve de las reliquias que se hallaron en la ciudad de Granada*; *Vindicias cathólicas granatenses* by Diego de

books was staged in 1754 when Juan de Flores y Oddouz started digging in the area of the Alcazaba under the supervision of a commission which included such names as Cristóbal de Medina Conde, Juan Velásquez de Echeverría and Luis Francisco de Viana y Bustos (canon of the Cathedral of Malaga, and canon and the Abbot of Sacromonte respectively). Flores y Oddouz discovered several inscriptions on marble and lead tablets in writing similar to the 'Solomonic' and Spanish-Baetic characters found on the Sacromonte leaves. These new finds 'proved' that everything was true: the identification of modern Granada as the ancient city of Ilíberis, its evangelisation by St James, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception and even the authenticity of the Lead Books and the treasures of the Turpiana Tower. The excavations continued until 1763 when they stopped due to a lack of financial sponsors. As a consequence of the negative reports produced by Spanish and foreigner specialists, Charles III ordered the evaluation of the finds by royal decree in 1774. This time, the forgeries were quickly exposed, and the authors were punished in 1777. The artefacts themselves, fake and authentic alike, were all destroyed. The involvement of the Sacromonte in this matter marked its inevitable decline along with the Lead Books' cause, as later authors would rarely defend their authenticity.[22] Despite this, people kept on supporting and venerating the fictitious Christian history of the city, along with the figure of St Caecilius and his relics.

3 The reception

As Mark Jones states: 'Faking is itself an index of the value of the objects faked'.[23] The Sacromonte forgeries are not copies of a specific object, however, but original artefacts that their creators wanted to be perceived as something they were not: ancient and holy relics and books transmitting a reliable message. Borrowing the

la Serna Cantoral, published in Lyon in 1706 by royal commission; *Guerras catolicas granatenses* written in 1730 by Vincente Pastor de los Cobos; *Mystico Ramillete* published in 1741 by Diego Nicolás de Heredia y Barnuevo; *Historia authéntica del hecho de los dos descubrimientos de Torre Turpiana y Monte santo de Granada* by Luis Francisco de Viana y Bustos and José Juan de Laboraría, commissioned by Ferdinand VI in 1756, but never published due to the new discoveries of the Alcazaba. See Barrios Aguilera 2011, 239–358; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 32.

22 These authors were strictly connected to the Sacromonte institution, however, one example being Zótico Royo Campos, canon of the Abbey from 1925 and abbot from 1955 up to his death in 1971.

23 Jones 1992, 9.

words of Elizabeth Drayson, 'fakes represent what the recipients most want',[24] meaning that in order to understand the impact that forgeries have on a community, the forgers' intentions are less important than how their forgeries are interpreted by the people who see or use them. This can be clearly seen in the matter of the Sacromonte inventions, since they have been interpreted in many ways and used to support completely different causes. In this sense, it is important to remember that every translation and interpretation is biased, as it is used to strengthen the position of the group that is supporting it.[25]

Outside Spain, the relics were quickly identified as fakes, with scholars pointing out many specific problems, inconsistencies and outright impossibilities that clearly framed the finds as recent fabrications. In Spain, too, scholars versed in the Oriental languages considered the books fakes, with the important exception of Bernardo de Aldrete and, of course, the two translators Alonso del Castillo and Miguel de Luna. The scholars agreed that the parchment and books were made by Moriscos and that Christian themes were used to mystify the heretic Islamic message that the books conveyed. The sole dissonant voice belonged to Ignacio de las Casas, the most ferocious opponent of the Lead Books, who instead identified concepts from the heresies of Arianism and Nestorianism, thus believing the forgeries were of an Oriental origin. Others, such as Juan Bautista Hersonita, Marco Dobelio and Diego de Urrea, affected support for the authenticity of the objects or avoided giving their opinion while under the hostile influence of the supporters of the finds.

The Pope and the clergymen in Rome also opposed the discoveries. Their rejection was most likely motivated by political and doctrinal reasons, such as maintaining the status quo of a Church led by the Roman community. This meant that both the hysteria of the population and the claims of the *laminarios* – the name given to the literate, more or less renowned, who stood in defence of the finds – fell on deaf ears and failed to really influence the papacy. In Spain, however, the consensus in favour of the finds' authenticity was almost universal, with the exception of the aforementioned scholars and their few followers.

24 Drayson 2013, 111.

25 Hagerty defines the concept of 'traducción interesada' (biased translation) as 'traducción interlingüística en el que el traductor traduce consciente y tendenciosamente como concepto preciso un concepto no expresado con precisión en el texto original' (interlinguistic translation in which the translator consciously and tendentiously translates a concept that is not expressed as a precise one in the original text). He divides the translators of the Lead Books into two large groups: those who *a priori* condemned the books as forgeries and those who *a priori* accepted them as genuine; Hagerty 1991, 1179–1181.

The Morisco community was obviously one of the groups that supported the finds. The Arabic origins of St Caecilus and St Ctesiphon and the Arabic language used for the texts were essential for the arguments about the acceptance and assimilation of Moriscos' cultural values in the new social context of Catholic Spain. This not only found the passionate support of the Nasrid noble families, but also that of the Marranos, who joined the cause in the hope of being included in the process of acknowledging minorities.[26] Unfortunately, the exacerbation of the measures against the Moriscos and their final expulsion limited the diffusion and influence of this view.

With time, a different reading of the books started to gain favour among the Moriscos, especially those who had to leave Spain: the true message was not that some Arabs (and their Arabic language) were among the first Christian saints, thus redeeming the Moriscos and their culture, but rather that Islam was the one true religion and that the mysterious content in one of the Lead Books (*The Truth of the Gospel*, better known as the *Mute Book*)[27] would somehow lead the whole world to embrace it. The main supporter of this view was Aḥmad ibn Qāsim al-Ḥajarī, also known by the Spanish name of Diego Bejarano. In his book *Kitāb Nāṣir al-dīn* (1637), he says that he translated the Turpiana parchment for Pedro de Castro (possibly around 1598), who then paid him to revise his translation because it was too Islamic. Al-Hajari commented that the Spanish translations were full of errors, lies and false Christian interpretations. The existence of commented Arabic transcriptions shows that the texts were also circulating in an Islamic environment and highlights their ambivalence, which was probably intentional.[28] This interpretation came to leverage another legendary text, the *Gospel of Barnabas*.[29]

Just as the Roman Church had political reasons to be against the Sacromonte artefacts, the Spanish Church and in particular the clergy of Granada had political reasons to be in favour of them: they gave Christian roots to Granada, which

26 See the support offered by Jeronimo Román de la Higuera in his letters to Pedro de Castro, for example.

27 The *Mute Book* is a particularly puzzling artefact: it consists of 16 leaves filled with symbols and letters. So far, it has been impossible to decipher it.

28 This ambivalence is clearly shown by Roisse in his analysis of the content of the Lead Book, *The History of the Seal of Solomon*; Roisse 2006.

29 This text was probably produced in the Morisco circles in Istanbul around 1600. For further readings about the content and circulation of the *Gospel of Barnabas*, the involvement of Muhammad b. Abī al-ʿAsī and his possible identification with Alonso de Luna, the connection of this text with the Lead Books and the Morisco communities, see Pons 2006; Roisse 2006; Wiegers 2006; Drayson 2013, 176–182; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 148–153.

helped to counterbalance and possibly forget the previous seven centuries of Islamic rule, they gave Granada leverage to claim religious primacy over other Spanish cities, and they sparked and inflamed renewed religious fervour in the population. They also lent credit to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception – an extremely debated topic at the time – which was very close to the hearts of both the Spanish Church and the monarchy.[30] Archbishop Pedro de Castro was an active supporter of this doctrine, so much so that the quote '*a Maria no le tocó el pecado original*' (Mary was untouched by original sin), translated from the Lead Book called *Fundamentals of the Faith*, became his and the Sacromonte's motto.[31]

Besides the passion that Philip II had for relics, the Crown had its own political interest in seeing the finds legitimised. The prophecy found in the text of the Lead Book called *Book of the History of the Truth of the Gospel* caught Philip's eye because a dialogue between the Virgin and St John mentions the figure of a man favoured by God, a man who will help to spread the Gospel, a king of the Arab kings who is not himself an Arab and who will be feared by everyone in the West.[32] The Spanish Crown read this as a clear reference to the Christian monarchs who reconquered Spain from the Muslims, and both Philip II and Philip III fancied themselves to be kings favoured by God. To support this reading of the Lead Books and the claim to their authenticity, both the Spanish Church and the Crown exerted considerable pressure on the academic scene at that time.

Actively supporting this Christian reading of the Lead Books were the *laminarios* such as the aforementioned Pedro Guerra de Lorca, who were instrumental in manipulating the people of Granada and later of all Spain. Their main strategy was to spread the theories and evidence supporting the authenticity of the discoveries; essays, pamphlets, copies and translations were printed and circulated by them for this reason. These texts were full of fantastic theories that were often unacceptable to the scholarly community, covering such things as the antiquity of the Spanish language, from which Latin was supposed to be derived, or the Phoenician origin of the Arabs in the peninsula, both of which were theories which rested on questionable sources such as invented chronicles and forged

30 The Immaculate Conception was only declared dogma in 1854 (by Pius IX). In Spain, during the sixteenth and seventeenth century, universities pronounced vows to defend the doctrine at any cost. Temples and columns were erected to commemorate the triumph of the Immaculate, and the schools of plastic arts in Seville and Granada created the iconography to express the concept that was absorbed and accepted in all European Christian art, thanks to the works by Alonzo Cano and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, for example. Martinez Medina 2015, 311–318.

31 He had the quote inscribed on the foundation stone of Sacromonte Abbey and his personal seal together with the Seal of Solomon, also taken from the Lead Books.

32 Martinez Medina 2015, 135.

documents. It is notable they chose to use printing, thus multiplying the number of copies and the diffusion of their works. The actual scholars studying the matter were not as direct and outspoken as the *laminarios*, and whenever they attempted to voice their doubts and criticism, mostly by exchanging private correspondence or by circulating manuscripts in a small circle of academics, they suffered opposition and discredit at the hands of the *laminarios*, who often resorted to attacking the person by questioning their competence and motives rather than engaging with the argument itself.[33] The case of Ignacio de las Casas is exemplary in terms of the intensity and persistency of the attacks: he was described, even centuries after his death, as an ignorant, lying Morisco who was jealous of the official translators, and was even accused of being a crypto-Muslim.[34] Looking at the *laminarios*, we can easily see a coordinated public effort to push and defend their opinion in favour of the Sacromonte artefacts. It is unclear whether the scholars adopted a comparable approach in order to present and support their critical views or if they mostly worked alone and privately. A few manuscripts presenting a collection of such scholarly critiques are known to exist, but without further research it is unclear whether these books were produced by the scholars as a way to circulate their results or they were a private collection produced by certain *laminarios* to methodically organise their defence of the artefacts (Fig. 5).[35]

33 They were despised by their opponents both as persons and as scholars. For example, Marco Dobelio described them as 'personas ricas y poderosas que no admiten razón ninguna, sino el propio capricho' ('rich and powerful people who admit no reason but their own whim'). Rodríguez Mediano/García-Arenal 2006, 328.

34 The resentment towards this scholar was still felt in 1759 when Viana and Laboraría wrote a completely forged biography of him in their work *Historia authéntica del hecho de los dos descubrimientos de Torre Turpiana y Monte santo de Granada*.

35 I am referring in particular to three multiple-text manuscripts: Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España MS 7187, London, British Library Add. 57490 and Valencia, Biblioteca Historica de la Universidad de Valencia MS 376. The Madrid manuscript contains the following texts: 1) Discurso de Gonzalo de Valcárcel o Valcázar; 2) Parecer del obispo de Segorbe Juan Bautista Pérez; 3) Discurso atribuido a D. Francisco Aguilar Terrones del Caño; 4) Discurso de D. García de Silva; 5) Carta de Benito Arias Montano al arzobispo de Granada, de 3 de mayo de 1595; 6) Carta del obispo de Segorbe, Juan Bautista Pérez, a un corresponsal anónimo, de 8 de junio de 1595; 7) Carta del P. Ignacio de Las Casas S.J., al cardenal Belarmino; 8) Carta del P. Las Casas al cardenal Baronio; 9) Informe del P. Las Casas al papa Paulo V sobre lo hallado en Granada (1607); 10) Parecer de Pedro de Valencia al cardenal D. Bernardo de Rojas y Sandoval, Inquisidor. In the margins, there are annotations written in reply to the critics of the main texts. They are most likely in the hand of Adán Centurión, Marquis of Estepa, and they are probably the preparatory work for the second part of his *Información para la historia del Sacromonte*. The London manuscript is a direct copy of the Madrid exemplar, with the difference that the annotations are grouped at the end of every part. The Valencia manuscript contains the same texts of the

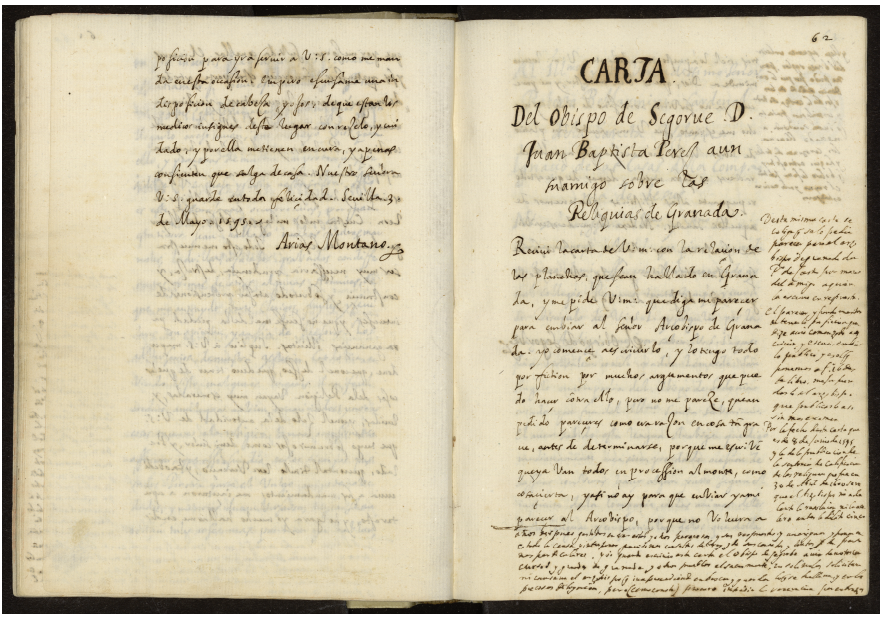

Fig. 5: End of the copied letter by Arias Montano to the Archbishop of Granada and beginning of the copied letter by Juan Bautista Pérez to an anonymous correspondent. Some annotations can be seen in the margins that were probably made by Adán Centurión, Marquis of Estepa. Madrid, BNE 7187, fols 61v–62r; © Reproduced by kind permission of the Biblioteca Nacional de España.

Another way of winning favour for the *laminarios*' and Sacromonte cause was to bribe conniving scholars, which proved to be particularly effective with foreign Orientalists such as Juan Bautista Hersonita, the Archbishop of Mount Lebanon, who even agreed to move to Spain to assess the finds after being contacted by Pedro de Castro and his agents. Alternatively, as with Marco Dobelio, a Kurdish academic residing in Italy, those who could not be bribed were blackmailed, leveraging the economic problems of foreign translators who, once in Spain, had no resources or contacts to count on.[36]

previous books with the exception of the last one (Parecer de Pedro de Valencia) and of the annotations. Benitez Sánchez-Blanco 2006a, 143–144.

36 Their stories were reported by Luis Tribaldo de Toledo, bearing the charge of *Cronista Mayor de las Indias* and opponent to the discoveries, in an exchange of letters with the Marquis of Estepa in 1633 concerning the translation of the Lead Books published by the latter. See Harvey/Wiegers 2011.

When no other means seemed to work, the scholars were even reported to the Inquisition, as in 1618 when the papers and drafts of Pedro de Valencia, Francisco de Gurmendi and other members of their circle in Madrid were confiscated. The official reason was the application of the *breve* by Clemens VIII from 1596, prohibiting discussion about the finds and advocating their assessment to the papacy alone. A more probable reason was the intention to block the printing of what was supposed to be an extremely critical text by renowned scholars who were totally independent from the control of the Archbishop of Granada. The members of this circle, although crippled by the Inquisition's acts and control, continued to express their opposition to the Sacromonte finds at court. Unfortunately, the majority of the papers produced in connection with this circle have since been lost, possibly dispersed or destroyed soon after the deaths of its members.

In this exceedingly hostile environment, it is not surprising that several scholars tried not to get involved in the matter in the first place, possibly for fear of retaliation or because it already looked like a lost cause. In a letter to Arias Montano, Juan Bautista Pérez, the bishop of Segorbe, for example, wrote that it would have been useless to send his report to the General Inquisitor, who had commissioned it in 1595, since Pedro de Castro would not listen to any unfavourable opinion due to his own involvement.

4 The scholars' methodology

The scholars involved in the evaluation of the Sacromonte finds employed various methods to reach their conclusions. But while the relics were tested by experts and artisans of various professions for the purpose of their evaluation,[37] only a few scholars had access to the written artefacts, with everyone else having to work on copies, transcriptions or mere translations (Fig. 6).

37 Harris 2019, 220–221.

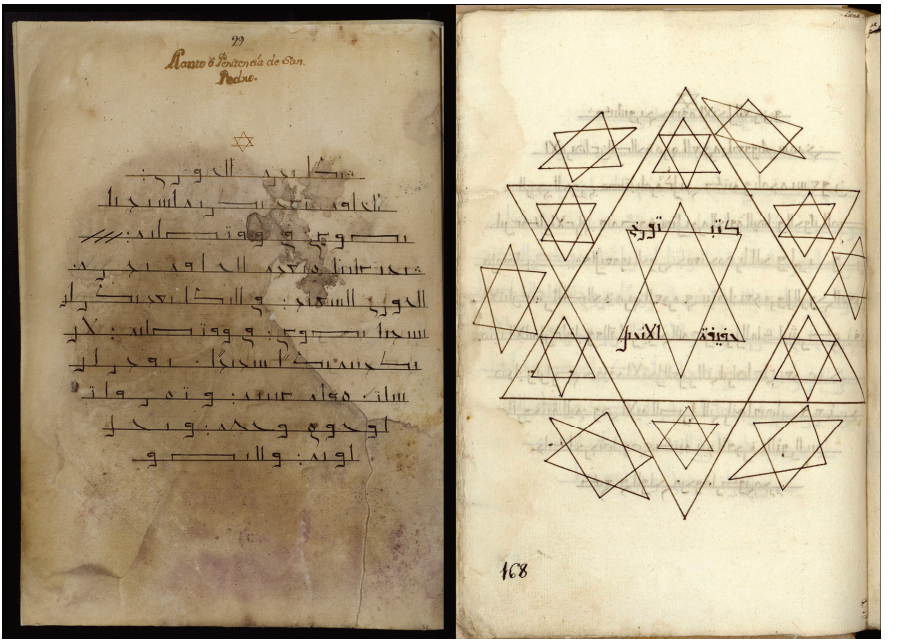

Fig. 6: On the left, a copy of the beginning of the Lead Book entitled *Lament of Peter*; Granada, ARCHGR 097COSAC, Caja 2432.6, fol. 29r; © Reproduced by kind permission of the Archivo de la Real Chancillería de Granada. On the right, a copy of the beginning of the Lead Book *On the History of the Certification of the Gospel*; Archivo Abadía del Sacro Monte Granada, fol. 168r; © Reproduced by kind permission of the Archivo Abadía del Sacro Monte de Granada.

This lack of access to the originals prompted a host of complaints, as it forced the scholars to rely on secondary sources and made it virtually impossible to consider an artefact's materiality. This restriction was hardly a coincidence, as most observations based on the examination of the physical properties of the written artefacts seemed to quickly disprove their authenticity. For example, Pedro de Valencia highlighted how the state of the Lead Books' conservation was too good for an artefact that had supposedly been buried for centuries, Gonzalo de Valcárcel commented on the many methods and substances known to give metal an ancient look, such as acids, and Arias Montano found that both the parchment and the inks used were not ancient, but merely old and poorly preserved. He also noticed that the writing implement employed was a relatively modern quill (introduced in Europe less than four centuries earlier) rather than the reed pen used by Greeks and Romans. Access to the originals also allowed him and Marco Dobelio to spot parallels between the Lead Books and a tradition of talismans commonly produced

in al-Andalus, as they both sported engravings of very similar symbols, shapes and layouts (Fig. 7).[38] The dimensions of the Lead Books' leaves, however, are obviously bigger than those of the talismans since the former had to contain more text.



Fig. 7a: A circular lead amulet with part of Surah 112, 40 mm in diameter, possibly tenth century; Madrid, Tonegawa collection; images in Gaspariño 2010, TV6-0-3.



Fig. 7b: A circular lead amulet with an inscribed seal of Solomon, 25 mm in diameter, possibly tenth century; Madrid, Tonegawa collection; images in Gaspariño 2010, TV6-0-3; © Figs 7a and 7b: Reproduced by kind permission of Sebastian Gaspariño and the Tonegawa collection.

38 Regarding the description, fabrication and use of talismans and amulets in al-Andalus, also see Labarta 1982–1983; Martínez Enamorado 2002–2003, Gozalbes Cavioto 2005; Ibrahim 2006; Sánchez Gallego/Espinar Moreno 2017; Krasner Balbale 2019; and the web page Gaspariño 2010 (consulted online on 20 December 2019).



Fig. 7c: A circular lead amulet containing the seal of Solomon, 32 mm in diameter, possibly thirteen century or later; private collection; image in Gaspariño 2017, 80; © Reproduced by kind permission of Sebastian Gaspariño.

Another feature shared by the Lead Books and the majority of the talismans produced in al-Andalus is the use of lead for the writing support. This metal was of great significance at the time and was probably part of the stagecraft designed to bestow power to the fake artefacts. On the one hand, the common folk of al-Andalus were used to associating mystical value to lead as it was the material of choice for many charms and talismans; being soft, the metal was easy to inscribe even with crude tools, while the presence of lead mines in the area made it both cheap and easy to obtain.[39] These talismans were popular among Jews and Christians alike, leading to a melting pot of symbols and icons – again, as we find

39 There are deposits of lead in Linares and La Carolina (north of Jaén), in Sierra Morena (north of Cordoba) and in Sierra Almagera and Sierra de Gádor (in Almería). Lead was also mined in Elvira and Berja. Silver was mined at Guadalcanal in the Sierra Morena, in Elvira and Jaén. Since lead is a by-product of silver extraction, these places are another possible source of the less expensive metal; Imamuddin 1981, 101–102; <https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/institutodeestadisticaycartografia/atlashistoriaecon/atlas_cap_25.html#> (consulted online on 20 December 2019). Martínez Enamorado observes that the talismans combined magical and cabalistic formulas with religious content (frequently in the form of Qur'anic quotes), which are characteristics of popular religious practices. The lack of formal repetitions in the selected passages and the variety of forms (circular vs rectangular) and layouts suggest rural production in numerous places; Martínez Enamorado 2002–2003, 115–127.

in the Lead Books. Using talismans was common among the more educated segments of the population as well, and even among the clergy: Dobelio reported with disgust how Pedro de Castro had them, too.[40] They were so popular, in fact, that in 1526 the Council of the Royal Chapel in Granada issued a prohibition to prevent the Moriscos from wearing metallic charms bearing writing, hands or other symbols – referring most likely to the hand of Fatima or Hamza and the seal of Solomon. This ban would go on to become the main focus of many Inquisition cases.[41]

On the other hand, scholars connected the use of lead to its value in alchemy and astrology, especially thanks to the many repetitions of the six- (or sometimes five-)pronged star motif on the Lead Books – a clear reference to Solomon's seal.[42] This connection summoned up images and meanings found in the aforementioned Islamic and Hebrew talismans, but also in magical and alchemical manuscripts such as the *Clavicula Salomonis* (the Key of Solomon) or the *Picatrix*, translated in Spain in 1256 for Alfonso X the Wise, which links lead to the planet Saturn.[43] In name, layout and conception the previously mentioned *Mute book* quite closely resembles an old Latin alchemical treatise made of images called the *Mutus liber*.[44]

Although it is unclear whether the actors involved in the Sacromonte events were aware of ancient magical practices from the Mediterranean area (which is quite unlikely), some of their ideas may have trickled down through history: the use of lead as a conduit for magical energy and signifiers has roots in Greek and Latin culture where it was employed to enact curses, often by encasing a paper or parchment text within lead sheets or boxes (just like the Turpiana box and the Sacromonte books).[45] Finally, the discovery of a hermetic metallic box containing

40 García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2010, 275.

41 Labarta 1982–1983, 185–188; Drayson 2013, 32–37.

42 'Solomon was a great magician, according to Muslim belief; his ring plays a great part in Talmudic legends and Arabian tales. [...] The talisman, still known as Solomon's seal and worn by Muslims and Jews alike, represents a six-pointed star'; J. Ruska, B. Carra de Vaux, and C. E. Bosworth, 'Tilsam', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 20 September 2019; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7553>.

43 Drayson 2013, 23–37.

44 The first printed edition appeared in la Rochelle in 1677; Drayson 2013, 28.

45 It was believed that the magical protection or curse it contained would cease to be effective once the written text was disclosed; Curbera 2015, 105–107. On Greek and Latin curse tablets found in Spain, see Curbera et al. 1999.

a prophecy is a common topos in many Arabic stories and lead was often used by Moriscos for divination.[46]

Despite it having access to the physical artefacts, the committee in Rome chose to focus on the historical, theological and linguistic analysis of the texts they contained. The same analyses were carried out by the Spanish scholars who studied the finds. The first and main issue was understanding the writing. The parchment containing the prophecy sported Arabic annotations in the margins of the text which are almost illegible because they mimic an extremely slanted cursive script. The prophecy and its comment use Latin and Greek characters to write Arabic words, all organised within two grid tables. As a result, the text can be interpreted in different ways depending on the order used to read the various sections of the tables.

Coming to the Lead Books, the identification of the phonetic value of the characters was a problem in itself. In Arabic script, several letters may share the same basic shape (*rasm*) and are only distinguished with the help of diacritical signs (dots) above or below the character. Unfortunately, the Sacromonte books were written in the so-called Solomonic script, which lacks both diacritics and the signs for short vowels. As a result, every word can be read in several ways, leading to starkly divergent interpretations. It is possible that this script was chosen as one of the ways to make the books look more antique, as its very angular characters (possibly due to the technique used to scratch the writing on the lead) reminded the viewer of various historical and mystical scripts such as the Early Abbasid styles and the New Style of early Qur'ans (inaccurately referred to as Kufic), or the epigraphic script found in al-Andalus talismans, or even the one used in the *Clavicula Salomonis* and other books on astronomy and necromancy. Moreover, the absence of diacritic signs and short vowels was typical of the most ancient forms of Arabic.

It is interesting to observe how these elements were adopted by different scholars to support opposing views: according to intellectuals such as Ahmad ibn Qāsim al-Ḥajarī and other *laminarios*, they support the antiquity of the artefacts since the scripts used in modern occult treatises and talismans are derived from what was employed in the Lead Books, thus inheriting the observed common traits. According to academics such as Juan Bautista Perez, the opposite was true; he identified occult texts as the original inspiration for the production of the al-

46 The knowledge of witchcraft and necromancy that the Moriscos of al-Andalus possessed, in particular those from Granada, was already a literary topos in the sixteenth century. They were particularly renowned for making (and wearing) powerful talismans and charms. See Drayson 2013, 23–37.

leged Sacromonte relics. Modern experts like Koningsveld seem to agree with the latter point of view, highlighting inconsistencies and errors in the evaluations. Al-Ḥajarī, for example, stated that the Solomonic characters were ancient and came from the East, while in reality some letters bear a clear resemblance to Maghribi characters and therefore came from the West, if anything.[47]

Arias Montano, who analysed the palaeographical characteristics of the Latin texts on the parchment and the unbound lead sheets labelling the relics, was one of a small number of scholars who observed that the characters did not match those of the period. Once again, however, the use of pseudo-antique characters, such as Spanish-Baetic ones, was meant to root the finds in local history, suggesting there was a similarity with the scripts found in the inscriptions on ancient Iberian coins.[48]

The languages used in the finds were also studied extensively. The Spanish passages were a problem, as that language was not supposed to exist at the time the relics were thought to have originated. Some *laminarios* actually theorised that Spanish was older than Latin in a bid to explain its use in the parchment. A quaint position was that of Bernardo de Aldrete, who, being both a supporter of the relics' authenticity and a knowledgeable linguist, proved the *laminarios* wrong by demonstrating how Spanish had descended from Latin, only to then explain its use in the parchment as God's gift to the Apostles of being able to speak all languages: being omniscient, God would have known the time of the find, and therefore the parchment was written in a language the readers could understand, even though it was not yet in use at the time the relics were produced. Another issue was the Arabic language, which was forbidden by the Spanish monarchy as an expression of Islam. In this case, the *laminarios* tried to show how Arabic was, in fact, a Christian language and that the Arabic alphabet was introduced in Spain by the Phoenicians. As we have already seen above, this was a theme particularly dear to the Morisco community.

The other languages present in the prophecy text were problematic, too, as Arias Montano pointed out: the vocabulary and structure of the parchment – supposedly a translation from Hebrew into Greek, then into Latin and finally into Spanish – did not coincide with the vocabulary and structure of any language used at the supposed time of production. Moreover, several scholars noticed how both Spanish and Latin terms were employed according to their

47 However, he recognised that the hand or hands that wrote the Lead Books were experienced in writing in Arabic script, although it was most likely to have been a modern one. See Koningsveld/Wiegers 2003, 346–349.

48 Harris 2019, 218.

contemporary usage rather than the forms that would have been historically accurate. Take, for example, the word *divos*, typical of late medieval Latin, which was used in the lead sheets to indicate saints, or the concepts and words *moros*, *mozarabe* and *aljamía*, which only came into use after the Islamic conquest.[49] The Arabic wording had the same problem and even sported characteristics typical of the dialect spoken in Granada and the Maghreb at the time of the discovery.

The literary style used was also inconsistent, further eroding the credibility of the texts as a unique and original historical work. Francisco de Gurmendi noted how the linguistic register clearly differed between the refined parts, copies or adaptation of Qur'anic excerpts and the rough and dialectal ones, corresponding to the new material inserted by the forgers. Marco Dobelio highlighted that this new material did not correspond to any ancient author in terms of its language and style, regardless of whether he was Arabic or Christian.

Beyond the language, the content was also extremely controversial: the ambiguity of the translations led to a message that could be understood as Catholic or Islamic, depending on the interpretation. Marco Dobelio observed the use of Islamic terms to express Christian concepts, a fact that was also detected by the scholars working in Rome. This discovery was of particular importance in evaluating the adherence of the texts to Christian doctrine and language and was used as an argument to declare the authors heretics.[50] This is only partially accurate, however. If these terms confirm the modern origin of the finds, they do not automatically characterise the texts as being Islamic since Mozarabs made use of terms with an Islamic tradition acquired from the Arabic language in order to express Christian concepts in their own texts.[51] The same terms even appear in the catechism and glossaries by Pedro de Alcalá and other Christian authors, tools employed in the preaching and conversion of the *Moros* after the fall of Granada.[52] The Mozarabs' books and the Christian glossaries were probably the linguistic models used by the forgers to produce the new parts of the texts in the Lead Books.

49 Benitez Sanchez-Blanco 2006a, 155–156.

50 Scholars in Rome, in particular, compared the language used in the forgeries with that of the Maronites, who monopolised the canonical Arabic versions of the Christian texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The Maronites wanted to show that their orthodoxy had not been contaminated by long centuries of co-existence with followers of Islam, and thus purged their language of any shared terms. See García-Arenal 2009, 524.

51 Interestingly enough, both Alonso del Castillo and Miguel de Luna had access to such texts, as many of them were kept in El Escorial Library, which they went to between 1570 and 1594. López Tamarid consulted a Mozarab gospel in 1565 thanks to his work for the Inquisition.

52 García-Arenal 2009, 527.

Putting aside the theological dispute extensively treated elsewhere,[53] it is interesting to note how the scholars tried to focus on the logical and historical plausibility of the content. Arias Montano, Juan Bautista Perez and Gonzalo de Valcárcel asked themselves (and the *laminarios*) the following questions: Why were the books written in Arabic using characters that were so difficult to read if the passages they contained were meant to be preached to the reader's followers? If we assume that Arabic was spoken in Spain when the texts were originally written, why were the names of the people translated into Latin? And if we assume that Spanish was already spoken, as the parchment suggests, why were the Books written in Arabic in the first place?

Moreover, several historical incongruities are present in the texts: for instance, the name of the town used in the parchment, Granada, when it should have been Ilíberis, as attested in Roman inscriptions.[54] The scholars also noticed that some theological concepts expressed in the Lead Books, such as the Trinity and the Holy Spirit, had only been conceived during the First Council of Nicaea (325 CE) and Constantinople (381 CE), thus making them alien to the apostles and Saint Mary, who could not possibly have conveyed them in their books. A similar argument was brought forth by Gonzalo de Valcárcel: how could the parchment refer to St John as a saint and evangelist if it dated back to a time when he was still alive and had not composed his Gospel yet? And how could the beginning of his Gospel, written in Greek, be present in the parchment (and have been translated into Latin and then Arabic) when it had not even been written? What's more, Nero did not persecute Christians before the tenth year of his reign, while the date reported on the Sacromonte lead sheets puts the martyrdom of St Caecilius in the second year of Nero's rule, corresponding to 58 CE.

In another example, Arias Montano pointed out that the early Christian authors always mentioned Jesus as the 'son of God' and never as the 'spirit of God', the latter being the expression used in the Lead Books.[55] Concerning the prophecy in the parchment, he noticed that the prediction is clearly made in retrospect and that the method employed to encrypt the message is similar to the word plays used by alchemists and Paracelsians, albeit less refined. Marco Dobelio followed

53 Regarding the contributions dealing with the theological meaning of the Sacromonte finds and the dispute generated by them, see Martínez Medina 2015 and Benítez Sánchez-Blanco 2006b in particular.

54 Even the identification of modern Granada with Roman Ilíberis was a topic of debate (as it still is).

55 The same expression was used in a talisman written in *Brillenbuchstaben* and owned by a certain Juan Andres, who was judged by the inquisition of Cuenca in 1557. It was translated by Diego de Urrea. See Labarta 1982–1983, 187–188.

a similar path by comparing the texts in the finds with Arabic manuscripts in his personal collections and, even more relevantly, with books belonging to individuals in the Morisco community in Pastrana that had been found and confiscated by the Inquisition after the Moriscos' expulsion.[56] He demonstrated that the histories of Jesus, Moses and Solomon in the Lead Books are very similar to those told in Islamic sources,[57] that the type of writing and the seal of Solomon could be found in the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* by al-Thaʿālabī and Ibn Wathīma, and that various Qur'anic quotes can be found in the texts in the Lead Books – he even provided the exact passages from which they were copied. If the books pre-date the Islamic religion, how can they contain so many Islamic messages and quotes? This thorough analysis allowed Dobelio to contextualise the production of the books with the *fatwa* of the Mufti Abū al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad ibn Abī Jumʿa al-Maghrāwī, granting Muslims living in Spain the moral and religious right to pretend to be Christian while practising Islam in secret. In his opinion, the use of symbols and writing systems taken from alchemical and magical works reinforced the secrecy and elitism of the texts in the Lead Books, which had been conceived to spread the Islamic message within the Catholic community.[58]

One particularly acrobatic debate focused on the figures of Caecilius and Patricius and the exact time of their deaths. The parchment contains a prophecy written by one hand and signed by Caecilius, bishop of Granada, who is identified as the saint who evangelised the Iberian Peninsula in Roman times, followed by a note written by a second hand and signed by a certain Patricius narrating how he is hiding the parchment and the relics from the Moors because of Caecilius' imminent martyrdom. There are two problematic statements in this note. First of all, more than 600 years lie between the time when St Caecilius was possibly martyred by the Romans and the time when the Moors conquered the Iberian Penin-

56 The town of Pastrana in the province of Guadalajara in Castile-La Mancha hosted a large community of Moriscos from Granada (which made up around 30 per cent of the city's population at the beginning of the seventeenth century). They experienced the same situation of abuse and marginalisation seen in their home-town and the rest of Spain. The community fought for their rights, and the dukes of the city partially supported them, possibly because of their economic importance – it was thanks to them that the city became one of the most important textile centres in Spain; see García López 1995. Amongst other things, the confiscated books now lost included a Pentateuch, an Islamic religious text, vocabularies and texts about grammar, philosophy, geometry and medicine; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 279–291.

57 In particular, he pointed out the similarities between certain texts in the Lead Books and the *Kitāb al-Anwār* by al-Bakrī, a thirteenth-century book extremely popular among the members of the Morisco community; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 285–289.

58 García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 289–291.

sula. In reply to this, the *laminarios* said that the parchment was antique and written by St Caecilius, and that it had been found later by a person named Patricius, who decided to hide it from the Moors. The second problem was that in the parchment, Patricius mentioned Caecilius' martyrdom as a current event relating to someone he knew personally. The *laminarios*' reply to this was that Patricius was talking about a different person that he knew who happened to be called Caecilius and was also a bishop. Among other people, Arias Montano rebutted such explanations by pointing out that the parchment appeared to be recent and did not date back to the first century CE. To this the *laminarios* replied that the parchment was, indeed, recent as it had been written by an anonymous scribe who copied the original prophecy of St Caecilius, which was annotated later and hidden by Patricius. The later Sacromonte finds seem to clarify the matter, stating that both St Caecilius and Patricius died together around 58 CE when Nero was emperor, simultaneously proving the antiquity of the parchment and its contents while invalidating all the *laminarios*' arguments in defence of it, which re-opened the question of the artefact's age.

All of this created a complex puzzle of timelines in the centuries-long discussion about the relics' authenticity, a puzzle made even more complex by the inherent ambiguity of the source materials' language. It is important to note how the production and (staged) discovery of the forgeries took place over the course of several years and possibly involved numerous individuals. This could explain some discrepancies and inconsistencies in the message found in the texts in the parchment and the lead artefacts, and even among the books themselves. Two different conclusions are possible here: either whoever produced the forgeries tried to use later artefacts to improve the impact of earlier ones in a chain of subsequent finds or someone within their group decided to pursue a different agenda, unbeknown to the others.

Finally, Pedro de Valencia and Gonzalo de Valcárcel have pointed out how the mode of the discoveries was particularly suspicious, and made a very plausible reconstruction of the events: the box filled with the parchment and the relics may have been placed in the ruins of the Turpiana Tower after it was taken down; the books and the lead leaves were put in old sepulchres, next to the remains of unknown people, and then treasure hunters were guided in the area. Some of the latest Lead Books were even found outside the caves, in deposits of soil taken from them that were already examined, possibly because the entrance of the caves was too well-guarded to plant the forgeries inside them. The finds were then read and translated by the Morisco author(s) of the artefacts, the only one(s) who could really understand and interpret them.

5 Conclusions

The Sacromonte forgeries are a perfect example of fakes produced with the intention of manipulating and rewriting history in order to obtain social and economic benefits by blending the Christian and Morisco communities and their values. They were most likely made by members of the Morisco community to improve their status in the new Christian society and ultimately avoid their own expulsion. The fakes are relatively new objects made in such a way as to remind one of a mystical and mythical past, and their materiality is connected with the magical and talismanic traditions of Muslim, Jewish and even Christian culture. These elements were presented within the context of a complex theatrical display based on translations of non-existing manuscripts, misinterpretations of existing inscriptions, and medieval legends and traditions both known and forgotten – a fiction being spun following the rhythm of multiple staged discoveries.

The story told by the forgeries aimed at establishing a new historic past – the role of the Arabs in the evangelisation of the Iberian Peninsula – that would help to guide the current social change brought about by the conquest of al-Andalus in the desired direction, in this case the rehabilitation of the Morisco people and culture. This invented history was built upon pre-existing elements such as the town of Ilíberis, Bishop Caecilius, the legend of the Seven Apostolic Men and the evangelisation of al-Andalus by St James. The new fiction included the presence of the Apostolic Men in Granada, the Arabic origin of two of these men and a Christian message blended with Islamic doctrine.

Although these goals may have been the ones pursued by the forgers, it is 'the audience that makes the fakes', as Elizabeth Drayson provocatively puts it.[59]

In fact, the discoveries did not benefit the Morisco community as much as they will have hoped – although none of the individuals directly involved in the forgeries was expelled – but their meaning was twisted by the Spanish Church (the intended audience) to establish a different invented history: the existence of a Christian community in Granada long before the Muslim conquest and the attempt to forget those seven centuries of occupation. The passages in the Lead Books referring to Islamic culture and religion were underplayed or explained in light of the Christian message. However, this interpretation could not be acknowledged universally or stand the test of time. The invented history proposed by Pedro de Castro and the Spanish Church could not take root beyond their local circle since the conditions needed for its success were not present in

59 Drayson 2013, 111.

Rome. Moreover, the failed forgeries of the Alcazaba tarnished the reputation of Sacromonte Abbey in Spain, too.

What was the impact of these events on the academic world, then? And which role did scholars play in the matter? On the one hand, there is no doubt that the Sacromonte finds stimulated Spanish Orientalism and the historical debate in Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.[60] This stimulated academic researchers to adopt a more critical and analytical approach, promoting the use of multiple ancillary disciplines in order to provide clearer and sounder arguments in favour or against a given theory. On the other hand, it showed how the role and importance of scholars and their academic results were mainly social 'tools' in the arsenal of the involved powers: a stamp of quality providing increased authority and credibility when convenient, or just an opinion easily ignored and silenced when contrary to one's interests. This is why, despite the overwhelming evidence against the Sacromonte finds, scholars were unable to persuade the population and the authorities that the artefacts were fake.

What makes the Sacromonte matter quite unique is the length of the debate surrounding such crude forgeries – literally two hundred years of fervent activity followed by two more centuries of trailing arguments – and the stark difference between the intended effect and the actual outcome. The fact that the scholars' reputation was exploited without much regard for the validity of their research is not surprising, really – this has happened frequently throughout history and it still happens today. Maybe Benítez Sánchez-Blanco was right when, introducing his research on the Sacromonte forgeries, he said: 'If it was legitimate to evaluate the efforts made by the many people involved [in the Sacromonte matter] – the reader and I included – in terms of their productivity, it is likely that far better results would have been achieved if we had devoted ourselves to a different activity'.[61]

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60 García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 9–11, 308, 339–341.

61 'Si fuera legítimo valorar el esfuerzo empleado por tanta gente como la que ha estado implicada – incluyéndome a mí y al lector – con criterios de productividad, posiblemente se hubieran obtenido mejores resultados dedicándonos a otra actividad'; Benítez Sánchez-Blanco 2006a, 144.

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Appendix 1: Chronology of the finds

This list was compiled by combining the information given by F. J. Martínez Medina (Martínez Medina 2015, 117–133), M. García-Arenal and F. Rodríguez Mediano (García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 23–24, n. 11), and E. Drayson (Drayson 2013, 242–244).[62]

18 March 1588

A lead box was found among the rubble of the Turpiana Tower. It contained the following:

- an image of St Mary dressed in an Egyptian way
- a triangular piece of cloth (attributed to the veil of St Mary),
- a bone (attributed to St Stephen)
- a written parchment (prophecy of St John in the encrypted text in Spanish, but written in Greek and Latin letters; comment on the prophecy by

62 Martínez Medina follows the description and titles that Adán Centurión, Marquis of Estepa, provided in his *Información para la historia del Sacro Monte*, published in Granada in 1632. Drayson uses the Latin titles quoted by L. P. Harvey derived from a manuscript in the National Library of Spain (Madrid, BNE, 6.637); she also translated them into English. The titles and even number of the books do not always coincide, as already mentioned by the same scholars.

St Caecilius in the encrypted text in Arabic; notes in Arabic by Caecilius and others concerning the prophecy and its author; report by Patricius in Latin concerning the circumstances of the imminent martyrdom of St Caecilius and the hiding and contents of the lead box) (see Fig. 1).

November 1594
Beginning of the excavations in the caves of Mount Valparaíso (then Sacromonte).

21 February 1595
A folded rectangular sheet of lead was found in the caves, inscribed in Latin and identifying the remains of St Mesitón.

21 March 1595
Another folded rectangular sheet of lead was found in the caves, which was also inscribed in Latin and identified the remains of St Hesychius.

30 March–9 April 1595
Bones, teeth and human ashes were found in the caves.

10 April 1595
A folded half-moon-shaped sheet of lead inscribed in Latin was discovered in the caves, which identified the remains of St Ctesiphon.

13 April 1595
Human ashes and bones were found in a mass of quicklime in the caves.

22 April 1595
A Lead Book with five leaves was found underneath a stone in one of the caves: the *Liber Fundamentorum Fidei* (*The Fundamentals of the Faith*) by Ctesiphon (Fig. 4).

25 April 1595
A Lead Book with three leaves was discovered in the caves underneath a stone: the *Liber de Essencia Veneranda* or *De Essencia Dei* (*On the Essence of God*) by Ctesiphon (Fig. 3, left).

30 April–1 May 1595
Human ashes and a bow-shaped sheet of lead inscribed in Latin were discovered

in the caves, the latter identifying the remains of St Caecilius, Septentrius and Patricius.

20 September 1595
A Lead Book consisting of six leaves was found in soil taken out of the caves: the *Oratio et defensivum Iacobi* (*Prayer and Defence of James the Apostle*).

1 October 1595
Another Lead Book containing seven leaves was found in soil taken out of the caves: the *Liber Ordinationis Missae Jacobi Apostoli* or *Liber modi [celebrandi] Missam a Iacobi Apostolo (On the Ritual of the Mass of James the Apostle)* by Ctesiphon.

16 October 1595
A Lead Book containing twelve leaves was discovered in soil taken out of the caves: the *Liber excelentis beati Apostoli Iacobi* (*Book of the Excellent Blessed Apostle James*) by Ctesiphon, also known as the *Catecismo mayor* (*Large Catechism*). It also contains the *Planctus Petri Apostoli Vicarii post negationem Domini nostri* (*Lament of Peter, Apostle and Vicar, after the Denial of Our Lord*) by Ctesiphon.

23 November 1595
A Lead Book with twenty-one leaves was found, probably in a cave again: the *Liber bonorum actorum Domini nostri Jesu et Virginis Mariae* or *Liber rerum preaclare gestarum Domini nostri Jesu et Virginis Mariae* (*Book of the Famous Deeds of Our Lord Jesus and the Virgin Mary*) by Ctesiphon.

2 January 1596
A Lead Book containing ten leaves was found in soil taken out of the caves: the *Liber Assequibilium Divinae Potentiae et Clementiae* (*Book of Knowledge of the Divine Power and Mercy*) by Caecilius.

24 April 1596
A Lead Book containing twelve leaves was discovered in soil taken out of the caves: the title is actually unknown, but it is sometimes called the *Catecismo menor* (*Short Catechism*).

27 August 1597

Four Lead Books containing a total of twenty-one leaves were discovered in the same cave where the ashes of St Caecilius were found:

- *Pars altera Liber Assequibilium Divinae Potentiae et Clementiae* (*Book of Knowledge of the Divine Power and Mercy: Part Two*) by Caecilius; eight leaves
- *Liber historiae sigili Salomonis* or *Liber historiae signis Salomonis* (*Book of the History of the Seal of Solomon*) by Caecilius; three leaves
- *Liber relationis Doni Domus Pacis et Tormenti Domus Vindictae* (*Book of the Story of the Gift of the House of Peace and of the Torment of the House of Vengeance*) by Caecilius; four leaves[63]
- *De Natura Angelis et eius Potentia* (*On the Nature of the Angels and Their Power*) by Caecilius; six leaves.

4 September 1597

A Lead Book with eighteen leaves was found in the same cave where the ashes of St Caecilius were discovered: the *Liber sententiarum circa Fidem* or *Liber sententiarum erga legem et directionem* (*Book of Sayings on Faith*) by Caecilius (Fig. 3, right).

31 September 1597

Three Lead Books were found in the soil at the bottom of a ravine:

- the *Liber Certificationis Evangelii* (*Book of the Certification of the Gospel*), also known as the *Libro de la verdad del Evangelio* (*Book of the Truth of the Gospel*), *Hakikat Lenguil* or *Libro Mudo* (*Mute Book*); sixteen leaves
- the *Liber Historiae Certificacionis Evangelii* (*Book of the History of the Certification of the Gospel*), also known as the *Libro de la historia de la verdad del Evangelio* (*Book of the History of the Truth of the Gospel*), by Ctesiphon; number of leaves unknown
- the *Liber Colloquii Sanctae Mariae Virginis* (*Book of the Colloquy of St Mary the Virgin*) by Caecilius; twenty-five leaves, the first three of which are all blank.

11 May 1599

Two Lead Books with a total of twenty-two leaves were discovered in a black bag in the soil at the bottom of the ravine:

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63 Drayson mentions it as the *Book of the House of Peace and Torment* (n. 12). She failed to notice that this item in Harvey's list coincides with the book appearing in Adán Centurión's translation and Hagerty's edition as *Libro de la Relación del Don del Lugar de la Paz*.

– the *Liber donorum praemii Certificationem Evangelii credentibus* (*Book of the Rewards to Be Given to Those who Believe in the Truth of the Gospel*) by Ctesiphon; number of leaves unknown.
– the *Liber Mysteriorum magnorum quae vidit Iacobus Apostulus in Monte Sancto* (*Book of the Great Mysteries that James the Apostle Saw on the Holy Mountain*) by Caecilius; number of leaves unknown.

Possibly discovered in 1599, delivered to King Philip III on 15 December 1606, who finally handed them over to Pedro de Castro in December 1607:
two Lead Books (the same text in two parts) with a total of fifty-one leaves:
– the *Liber Rerum praeclare gestarum Iacobi Apostoli* or *Liber actuum [sic] Iacobi Apostoli (Book of the Deeds of James the Apostle)*; number of leaves unknown.
– *Pars Segunda, Liber Rerum praeclare gestarum Iacobi Apostoli* or *Liber actuum [sic] Iacobi Apostoli (Second Part of the Book of the Deeds of James the Apostle)*; number of leaves unknown.

Appendix 2: Biographies of the scholars

This section focuses on the biographies of the scholars of Oriental languages and experts in Arabic who were involved in the Sacromonte affair. A few other characters have also been added to the list, such as Pedro de Castro, Róman de la Higuéra and Guerra de Lorca, because they are relevant to the general discourse. The names and biographies of the *laminarios* have not been provided for reasons of clarity and space.

Bernardo de Aldrete (1560–1641)[64] believed in the authenticity of the finds.

He was canon of Cordoba Cathedral, a renown linguist and the author of the book *Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana* (1606), in which he demonstrated how the Spanish language was derived from Latin. Despite being subject to ferocious verbal attacks by his opponents, especially by Gregorio López Madera, a devotee of the theory that Spanish was spoken before the Goths, who used the idea to justify the use of the language in the parchment, Bernardo clarified his position in support of the finds in a book called *Varias Antiguedades* (1614), which was dedicated to Pedro de Castro. In this work, he justified the use

64 Woolard 2006.

of Spanish in the parchment, which he said was due to the gift given to the Apostles of being able to speak every language on Earth, even those that would only be spoken in the future. This way, the scholar could defend his academic hypothesis while supporting the religious authenticity of the finds. Did he truly believe in the finds or did he support them because it was convenient to? Considering his correspondence with Pedro de Castro and Cristóbal de Aybar – the secretary of the Archbishop – and his publications and reasoning, it is possible that he decided to vouch for the Sacromonte finds because of the pressure and discrediting he was subjected to by the *laminarios* and the economic assistance he received from the Archbishop. He never changed his official position, even after Pedro de Castro's death. From 1618, he defended the finds in the name of the Archbishop in Madrid. Despite his stance and the help he gave to the cause, he was never allowed to study the originals. He complained about this several times in his letters; he believed that the truth could only be found by making the books' contents readily available for examination, possibly in Latin, and as a result of the scholarly discussion about them. Perhaps he was not allowed to study the books precisely because of this attitude or for fear he might change his mind about them.

Benito Arias Montano (1527–1598)[65] did not believe the finds were genuine.

A humanist and librarian at the El Escorial Library, he studied languages at the University of Alcalá de Henares (Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic and Syriac) and attended the Council of Trent as an expert in Theology at the request of Martín Pérez de Ayala, Bishop of Segovia. He wrote the Polyglot Bible of Antwerp, best known as the *Biblia Regia* published in 1572. This work and Montano himself were denounced to the Inquisition for the significant differences between the *Biblia Regia* and the previous Polyglot Bible and the Vulgate. The charges were finally rejected in 1580.

Pedro de Castro asked for Montano's opinion on the parchment from the Turpiana Tower and later the Lead Books. He tried not to get involved in the Sacromonte affair, possibly due to his experience with the *Biblia Regia*, excusing himself because of his poor health. However, he did express his doubt about the antiquity and authenticity of the artefacts (the parchment, books and lead sheets) in various letters he sent to the Archbishop and the Chapter of the cathedral of Granada in 1593 and the following years, although he refused to be more specific concerning the authenticity of the relics and, indeed, on the entire matter. He saw the original piece of parchment in 1593 when Miguel de Luna and Pedro Guerra

65 Cabanelas 1969–1970; Macias Rosendo 1995.

de Lorca, who both worked for Pedro de Castro, took it to Seville where Arias Montano was living. Pedro de Valencia was also present during the analysis of the artefact. Arias Montano also received copies of the Lead Books and the lead sheets in 1596 (in particular some prints taken directly from the originals), but he could not read them because of the bad quality of the printing. In the following years, he was contacted again by the Archbishop regarding the translation of specific terms.

Ignacio de las Casas (c. 1550–1608)[66] initially believed the finds were genuine, but rejected their authenticity later.

A Morisco and Jesuit from Granada, he supported the evangelisation of Moriscos through preaching to them in Arabic and was firmly against their expulsion. In 1581, after his brother had refused to adopt the Catholic faith and fled to Morocco, he was called to Rome where his own belief was found to be genuine. Thanks to his knowledge of Arabic, he was asked to participate in a mission to the Middle East (1583–1584), where he made contact with Christian Oriental Churches. He attended several Spanish universities in order to study Theology and finally returned to Granada in 1597. He worked on the translation of the first Lead Book, *The Fundamentals of the Faith*, and had a favourable opinion of it. However, when he worked on other books, he changed his mind and, after a confrontation with Pedro de Castro in March 1598, he fled Granada in haste, leaving his transcriptions and translations behind. Despite losing his material, he wrote several negative reports and letters about the finds to the Inquisition, the Nuncius and even the Pope, the last of which dates to 1607. He was pressured by the clergy in Granada and the Jesuit Order to recant his opinion and was even accused of being a crypto-Muslim, but he remained adamant in his stance.

Alonso del Castillo (c. 1520–1607/1610)[67] believed in the authenticity of the finds apparently, but he may, in fact, have been one of the forgers.

A Morisco, he was the son of the pharmacist Castillo *el viejo*, probably Hernando del Castillo Acahal (the apothecary), and studied to be a doctor. During the Alpujarras War, he was employed as a translator and a spy. Despite having some friends among the rebels, he forged letters to persuade them to surrender. He was awarded the position of royal translator in 1583, possibly thanks to his role during the war. He also had friends in the Muley family and was described

66 Benítez Sánchez-Blanco 2006b.

67 Cabanelas 1991; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 95–120; Drayson 2013, 55–67.

as a servile man who spent his entire life trying to be accepted as a good Christian, partly to avoid expulsion.

Luis de Marmól believed that del Castillo was involved in the Sacromonte forgeries, as the former had noticed certain similarities between the prophecy written on the parchment from the Turpiana Tower and the *jofores*, prophecies circulating among the Moriscos during the Alpujarras War, which Alonso had translated into Spanish. According to Marmól, Alonso even predicted there would be finds in the Turpiana Tower, reporting the words of an Alpujarras rebel called el-Meriní. His behaviour was suspicious, too. Alonso had some experience in classical Arabic, but he mainly knew the local dialect. Nonetheless, he declared under oath that the language employed in the forgeries was ancient and not written in any dialect. This is not the case, however, as we know from scholars who studied them in the past and present-day research. On the other hand, despite knowing about the finds in the Turpiana Tower beforehand and the content of the *jofores* that inspired the prophecy written on the parchment, Alonso was unable to translate its text completely. Perhaps he was merely one of Miguel de Luna's accomplices or he learnt about the forgeries and decided not to expose them, as he understood what benefits they could have for his community. This second hypothesis seems more plausible to me than the first one, since Alonso behaved in a similar manner when translating the Alhambra inscriptions and a banner in Cordoba. In both cases, he changed or avoided translating all the expressions that could be related to a religious context, possibly in order to preserve the artefacts from certain destruction if they were recognised as being Islamic. This hypothesis is corroborated by the opinion he had of the other translator: in a letter sent to the Inquisition in 1600, Alonso wrote that Miguel de Luna was a *morisco de los de contrabando*, 'from the other side', which possibly means the Muslim side.

Pedro de Castro (1534–1623)[68] believed the finds were genuine.

He was a scholar, jurist and priest. He studied Philosophy, Hebrew, Greek, and Canonical and Civil Law at the Universities of Salamanca and Valladolid. His father was the Governor of Peru, and when the latter was imprisoned and accused of embezzlement, Pedro de Castro defended him and managed to get him cleared of all charges. In 1561, he was ordained a priest and came to hold several offices, some of which were in Granada, before he was appointed archbishop there in

68 Barrios Aguilera/García-Arenal 2006, 28–50; Barrios Aguilera 2011, 27–197; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 21–30; Drayson 2013, 114–134.

1589. This experience made him familiar with the city and its 'Morisco problem'; he was not particularly in favour of them.

When the lead relics started to be found, he understood how important they would be for Granada and therefore promoted their examination. He also had the Lead Books translated by several scholars for the same reason – against the direct orders of the papacy.

De Castro spent all his money and credibility in this quest, and according to Tribaldo de Toledo, Marco Dobelio, al-Ḥajarī and others, he and his followers discredited or bribed anyone whose opinion undermined his efforts.[69] Moreover, he supervised the translations made by Castillo and Luna, suggesting them alternative readings for those passages that sounded unorthodox to him. It was also he who reported Pedro de Valencia and his circle to the Inquisition in 1618.

Some years before that happened, he founded the Abbey of Sacromonte over the holy caves in 1609, but in 1610 he was appointed Archbishop of Seville. This event can be regarded as a promotion to a bigger and richer city, but could also hide the attempt to remove him from Granada, the Sacromonte affair and the control over the Lead Books.

In fact, Castro believed that the finds belonged to Granada: he was very selective concerning access to the books and disobeyed both the Pope and the King when they ordered him to send the artefacts to Rome and Madrid respectively. Did he know that the books were forgeries and was afraid they would be dismissed once they were in different hands? Or did he simply consider himself to be essential for the books' positive reception in such distant environments? These questions so far remain unanswered, but it is unlikely that he participated in the forging process.

Marco Dobelio Citerone (c. 1572–before 1654)[70] rejected the authenticity of the finds, then he changed his mind about them, eventually returning to his initial stance.

Also known as Marco d'Obelio and Marcos Obelio, he was a Kurdish Orientalist and professor of Arabic at La Sapienza University in Rome from 1604 to 1610. He was also in contact with the Academy of Lincei in Rome. Canon Juan de Matute, Pedro de Castro's delegate to Rome, tried to persuade him to move to Granada and work on the Sacromonte finds. Although reluctant at first, in 1610

69 The stories were reported by Luis Tribaldo de Toledo in an exchange of letters with the Marquis of Estepa in 1633. See Harvey/Wiegers 2011.

70 Rodríguez Mediano/García-Arenal 2006, 323–324; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 245–268.

he accepted the request of Bernardo de Sandoval y Roja, the Cardinal of Toledo, confessor of the King and General Inquisitor.

This acceptance may have been motivated by the problems he was experiencing in Rome due to his rivalry with an older colleague, Giovan Battista Raimondi, a sponsor of the Tipografia Medicea Orientale. Or perhaps, but less likely, he was sent on a secret mission by Pope Paul V.

Dobelio followed Pedro de Castro in Seville, where he translated the parchment and several of the Lead Books. When he declared that the Lead Books were not authentic, the Archbishop dismissed him from the task without paying him his promised salary, questioning his competence. Dobelio sued Pedro de Castro for this and became desperate to leave Spain for England, as he wrote to Isaac Casaubon, the Genevan scholar, in 1613. Unfortunately, his plan did not work out. In order to solve his economic problems, he recanted his position on the finds and was paid 100 escudos by Pedro de Castro (according to Luis Tribaldo de Toledo).[71] During the time he stayed in Spain, he worked as a private teacher (the Marquis of Estepa and possibly Francisco de Gurmendi were among his students), made a list of the Arabic books at El Escorial Library and collaborated with the Inquisition, enjoying its protection. In 1623, he petitioned the King for the position of translator, which had been vacated by both Diego de Urrea and Francisco de Gurmendi, although no existent sources confirm that he got it.

Among his scholarly achievements, Marco Dobelio translated a work of medicine, an Arabic grammar and part of the historical book written by Abū l-Fidā', *Mukhtaṣar ta'rīkh al-bashar*. He also had an important personal library including dictionaries, moral fables, biographies, a copy of the Qur'an and of traditional sayings and texts dealing with religion, and works on grammar, medicine, botany, poetry, geography and history. Thanks to his work for the Inquisition, he was able to get access to a large number of books found in Pastrana on several occasions after the Morisco expulsion (between 1615 and 1622). These books, which are now lost, were of great help in identifying the texts circulating in the Morisco communities and used as reference material for the texts in the Lead Books.

No information is available concerning his death, but it must have occurred before 1654, as that is the date of the letter in which the Marquis of Estepa reported it to his friend Martín Vázquez Siruela. His books and papers were lost despite the attempts to locate them made by Nicolás Antonio and Vázquez Siruela, both connected to the Sacromonte and the circle of the Marquis of

71 The story was reported by Luis Tribaldo de Toledo in an exchange of letters with the Marquis of Estepa in 1633. See Harvey/Wiegers 2011.

Mondejar, considered to be the core of Spanish Orientalism in the seventeenth century.

Pedro Guerra de Lorca (d. 1597)[72] believed in the finds apparently, but was possibly involved in the forgery himself.

He was canon of the Cathedral of Granada from 1588 until he died. A convert of Jewish origin, he was the son of a bureaucrat at the Alhambra. Although a graduate of Theology, he was also a well-known poet. In 1586, he wrote *Catecheses mystagogicae pro aduenis ex secta Mahometana: Ad Parochos, & Potestates* about the Morisco problem and how to deal with it. In this work, he expressed a sincere desire for the full incorporation of the Moriscos and the saving of their souls. Besides writing the Catechism, he also composed two other texts that are relevant to the debate on the Sacromonte forgeries: *Historia de la vida y martirio de San Çecilio y sus seis compañeros llamados los apóstoles de nuestra Hespaña*, written in 1584, and *Memorias eclesiásticas de la ciudad de Granada*, a defence of the finds, undated but probably composed between 1595 and 1597.[73] Lorca was one of the *laminarios* and worked together with Archbishop Pedro de Castro. García-Arenal and Rodríguez Mediano believe he may have participated in fabricating the Sacromonte forgeries, if not directly, then at least by providing insights about theological doctrines and Church histories.

Francisco de Gurmendi (d. 1621?)[74] rejected the authenticity of the finds.

He moved from the Basque Country to Madrid when he was very young and he was raised in the house of Juan de Idiáquez, a prominent member of Philip III's court. He learned Arabic with Diego de Urrea and possibly also with Marco Dobelio, and was appointed translator for the Crown in 1603. When the library of Muley Zidan was acquired in 1611, he made a first assessment of the collection and translated some of the books. In 1615 he translated the first two Lead Books for the King (*The Fundamentals of the Faith* and *On the Essence of God*) in his *Libello primero*. After the negative critiques he received from Pedro de Castro, he wrote another report, *Libello Segundo*, in 1617 together with the theological comment by Martín Berrotarán y Mendiola, an ex-Jesuit, expelled from the Society of

72 García-Arenal, 2006b, 572–573, García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 173–174.

73 Both texts are preserved in manuscripts, the first one in Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Ms 1499, and the second one in Granada, Archivo de la Abadía del Sacromonte, MS C 48, fols 166–377; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 174.

74 Magnier 2006, 203–205, 210–215; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 241–244; Floristán 2014.

Jesus for his opposition to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. This report was sent to the Royal Council and then to Pope Paul V. Both Gurmendi and Mendiola were associated with the humanist Pedro de Valencia and their papers were confiscated by the Inquisition in 1618 when the Archbishop of Granada denounced their circle. The *Historia apologetica sobre las postradas láminas granadinas*[75] reports that he recanted his opinion on the finds, but suffered a violent death in 1621, which prevented him from publishing his new point of view. No sources confirm this information, however, and since the aforementioned text was composed in the circle of the *laminarios*, the circumstances of his death and his change of heart are extremely doubtful. The date of his death is plausible, though, since no other documents exist in connection with Gurmendi after 1618.

Aḥmad ibn Qāsim al-Ḥajarī (1569/70–shortly after 1640)[76] believed the finds were authentic.

Also known by the Spanish name of Diego Bejarano, he was probably part of the Morisco community of Pastrana, a town in the province of Guadalajara in Castile-La Mancha. He travelled far and wide during his life and lived in Madrid, Seville and Granada, and after fleeing Spain in 1599, he stayed in Marrakesh, Paris, Bordeaux, Amsterdam (or Leiden), Tunis and probably Cairo. He worked as a translator, diplomat and eventually as a smuggler and spy for the Saadi sultans of Morocco. He was sent to France by Muley Zidan in 1610 in order to rescue some Moriscos who had been captured and robbed by corsairs who were supposed to take them to Morocco from Spain. He was very sensitive to the Moriscos' situation and became part of a network that helped them to flee from Spain, settle in other countries and even retrieve some of the possessions they had had to leave behind. He was also a scholar and had contact with many European Orientalists of his time (he taught Arabic to Thomas Erpenius, for example).

In his *Kitāb Nāṣir al-dīn* (1637), al-Ḥajarī claimed he translated the Turpiana parchment for Pedro de Castro (possibly around 1598). He was then paid to revise the translation by the Archbishop since the clergyman found it too Islamic. Al-Ḥajarī asked for permission to see and translate the *Mute Book* several times, but the Archbishop never allowed it. The linguist only read Spanish translations and Arabic transcriptions of the Lead Books (including those done by Alonso del Castillo) at the end of his life. It was in this late period while he was living in Morocco and Tunis that he wrote his book *Kitāb Nāṣir al-dīn* and other polemical essays against Christianity.

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75 Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, MS 9/2299; Floristán 2014, 369.

76 García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 139–153; Drayson 2013, 134–139.

Juan Bautista Hersonita (end of the sixteenth–beginning of the seventeenth century)[77] rejected the authenticity of the finds, then he changed his mind about them, eventually returning to his initial stance.

Hersonita was born in Hasrum, Lebanon and was initially called Yuhanna al-Hausabi or al-Hasruni. He eventually became Archbishop of Mount Lebanon. He studied in Rome between 1603 and 1614 and later went to Madrid, where he expressed his opinion that the Lead Books were not authentic. In 1618, while he was part of the group around Pedro de Valencia, he was invited to Seville by Pedro de Castro and changed his mind there after being bribed. According to Luis Tribaldos de Toledo, Hersonita was robbed on his way back to Madrid, an event that caused him to move back to his original negative evaluation of the finds.[78] His reputation suffered greatly from his conduct, however, and his opinion was no longer deemed trustworthy.

Miguel de Luna (c. 1550–1619)[79] believed in the authenticity of the finds, but he may actually have been one of the forgers himself.

He was a doctor and a translator, although not much is known about him prior to the Sacromonte affair. He was part of an important Morisco family from Baeza, well integrated among the Christian nobility of the city (his grandfather obtained *hidalgo* status in 1554), and this is most likely the reason why he avoided expulsion in 1570. In a letter written to the King, he claimed that he had served as a translator during the Alpujarras War, a service that is not (or no longer) documented, however. He wrote a short treatise about the therapeutic virtues of baths and bath-houses[80] and a book called *Historia Verdadera del Rey Don Rodrigo*, published in 1592 and reprinted several times. When writing the latter, Luna used a translation of an old chronicle supposedly found in El Escorial Library to give historical value to his beliefs, thereby unwittingly producing a forged document. (The book was only recognised as a forgery in the eighteenth century.) He translated both the Turpiana parchment and the Lead Books and consequently tried to obtain an official acknowledgment of his status in the form of a position as royal translator, which he requested – in vain – in 1584.

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77 Rodríguez Mediano/García-Arenal 2006, 332; Harvey/Wiegers 2011, 65; Florián 2014, 366–367.

78 The story was reported by Luis Tribaldo de Toledo in an exchange of letters with the Marquis of Estepa in 1633. See Harvey/Wiegers 2011.

79 García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 155–193; Drayson 2013, 68–93.

80 The text *Tratado de los Baños* is included in a letter addressed to the King on 25 May 1592 and is now in Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 6149, fols 292r–294v; Gracía-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 165–166.

In fact, Luna and his family were threatened by the expulsion decree announced in 1611, but, thanks to the work he was doing for the Sacromonte, they all managed to remain in Spain. In 1610, he had even submitted the documents required to obtain the personal title of *hidalgo*, but it took so long to process that he never obtained the title; he died in 1619 before it could ever be granted.
Judging by this picture of him, Miguel de Luna seems to have been the perfect example of an assimilated Christian Arab, yet he is mentioned in papers concerning the trial of Jeronimo de Rojas – a Toledan merchant condemned by the Inquisition in 1601 and burnt as a heretic in 1603 – as a knowledgeable and active crypto-Muslim. In these papers, Luna's interpretation of the texts in the Lead Books is mentioned, which is similar to that of al-Ḥajarī and contrary to the translation Luna made for the Christian authorities. He was not called to testify at the trial, however, although he continued to visit Toledo until 1607 at least. Possibly his close relations with the city's authorities and the Christian Church shielded him from the Inquisition.

His contemporaries accused him of being one of the forgers of the Sacromonte finds. In particular, Luis de Marmól reported that the idea of the forgeries was conceived by El Meriní, a rebel involved in the Alpujarras War, ten or twenty years before the discoveries were made in the Turpiana Tower and that the soldier's daughter gave the papers in which the plan was explained in Arabic to Miguel de Luna. However, the latter's linguistic knowledge was questioned by his contemporaries and by present-day scholars, as he was familiar with the local dialect of Arabic, but not very well-versed in classical Arabic. In fact, when challenged with authentic old documents written in classical Arabic such as those he had translated in Toledo in 1607, he was unable to interpret them properly and wrongly vocalised the personal names. It seems unlikely, then, that he was able to translate the extremely complicated texts in the parchment and the Lead Books without experiencing the same problems. His ability to translate such esoteric texts might lead one to the conclusion that he already knew their content, probably because he was their author. In fact, the parts in classical Arabic are excerpts copied from traditional Islamic texts, kept together by original material composed in the modern Andalusian Arabic that he was familiar with. Moreover, his circle of friends included a few characters who were involved in the invention of other forgeries and in the defence of the Sacromonte finds, such as Jeronimo Román de la Higuera, Pedro Guerra de Lorca, Joan de Faría and Luis Barahona. The last two were active members of the literary circle of the Granada Venegas and although no document exists today showing Luna's affiliation, it is very likely that he was also part of the group.

If he was really the forger of the Sacromonte finds, or one of them, Luna's agenda seems to have been much more ambitious than that of the circle of the Granada Venegas: the Lead Books were not only intended to persuade Christian society to accept the Morisco minority, but to induce the Roman Church to include crypto-Muslims themes in the Christian doctrine.

Francisco López Tamarid (c. 1530–1590?)[81] believed in the authenticity of the finds, but was possibly involved in the forgery himself.

A priest of Morisco origins, prebendary of the cathedral and interpreter for the Inquisition of Granada. He was very active during the Alpujarras War, working for John of Austria. When the latter gained command of the Christian forces, López Tamarid and Alonso del Castillo were working in the same entourage. In 1570, he wrote various reports to King Philip II concerning the situation in Almería, his hometown, and Granada, in which he stressed the distinction between good and bad Moriscos. He suggested Miguel de Luna should be employed to translate the parchment text and also supervised his work when the latter was commissioned with the task. He wrote a compendium of Arabic terms. There is no other news about him after 1588; he probably died between this date and the discovery of the Lead Books or else he would have been involved.

Luis del Mármol Carvajal (1520–1600)[82] rejected the authenticity of the finds.

A soldier in Africa, he was captured in Morocco and fought for the Spanish army during the Alpujarras War. He worked with Alonso del Castillo during this period. He was also a famous writer, publishing *Descripción General de África* (1573) in two volumes – a work including a history of Islam up to the battle of Lepanto and a geographical description of North Africa – along with *Segunda parte de la Descripción General de África* (1599) and *Historia del rebellión y castigo de los moriscos del reino de Granada* (1600), possibly the most important chronicle of the Alpujarras War that still exists today. In 1593, Pedro de Castro commissioned him to write a report about the Turpiana finds. He pointed out the similarities between the prophecy written on the parchment and the *jofores* circulating among the Moriscos rebels during the war, translated by Alonso del Castillo. In various letters he sent to the Archbishop, he alluded to Castillo's and Luna's involvement in the affair.

81 García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 124–128; Drayson 2013, 76–77.
82 García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 22, 91–93.

Juan Bautista Pérez (1534–1597)[83] rejected the authenticity of the finds.

Archbishop of Segorbe from 1591, he was a renowned Humanist. He studied languages (Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic) at the University of Valencia, where he later taught Hebrew. Being related to the work of Martín Pérez de Ayala, he supported the gradual assimilation of Moriscos and preaching in Arabic, although he considered their expulsion as a viable option in the most extreme cases. Later he worked for Bishop Gaspar de Quiroga. Among other works that he never published, he wrote a *Dictionarium arabicum*, a dictionary of Arabic, Hebrew and Greek. Since the scholar had already exposed Jerónimo Román de la Higuera's invention of the *Chronicon* attribute to Flavius Dextrus, the General Inquisitor Jeronimo Manrique de Lara asked his opinion concerning the Sacromonte finds in 1595. He wrote the report, but sent it to Gonzales de Valcárcel instead, who was a royal counsellor, with the aim of circulating it anonymously at court, as he did not think Pedro de Castro's opinion would be changed. The Archbishop got informed nonetheless, thanks to his agents in Madrid, and the two clergymen exchanged several letters about the matter. Juan Bautista Pérez died in 1597, leaving the task of publishing his report rejecting the authenticity of the finds to his successor, Feliciano da Figueroa. As the latter was a supporter of the discoveries, however, the report was never published.

Jerónimo Román de la Higuera (1538–1611)[84] believed the finds were genuine.

He graduated in Theology and taught Philosophy at the University of Alcalá de Henares until 1562, when he was ordained as a Jesuit. He was born and raised in Toledo in the community of converted Jews living there. He tried to build a glorious and sacred past for his city, promote the integration of his community and link his own genealogy to the Mozarabs – the Arabic-speaking Christians living in al-Andalus – by producing false chronicles and documents. The best-known example of his forgery work is the *Chronicon*, a collection of reports attributed to Flavius Dextrus and Maximus, both renowned Latin authors. The main theme in it is that the arrival of St James in Spain was motivated by the Jewish community in Toledo asking the apostles for evangelisation. Higuera created a fake letter in order to attribute the ruins of an ancient temple found in Toledo in 1595 to St Thyrsos's shrine, Thyrsos being one of the Apostolic Men. The shrine was allegedly built by Mozarabs during the Muslim occupation, showing the Christian origin of the city. What is even more important here is the invention of the legend of the cross of Caravaca, published in 1615 under the title of *Historia*

83 Ehlers 2006.

84 Ecker 2002, 369–372; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 195–224.

del mysterioso aparecimiento de la Santíssima Cruz de Carabaca. It was written by Juan de Robles Corbalán, Higuera's pupil, who confessed that he used documents belonging to his master to write it. The legend says that a friar called Chirinos was allowed to perform Mass by the Arab king. But since he forgot to bring the cross with him, a miracle occurred: a piece of the Holy Cross appeared, which caused the Arab king and his wife to convert to Christianity. Inscriptions in strange letters were written in the room where this miracle took place to remember the fact. The inscriptions were translated by Miguel de Luna, who claimed that they were written in Arabic and confirmed the story. The reproductions of the inscriptions in Corbalán's book show the fraud of the translation. This forgery, most likely conceived by Higuera and Luna, combines the personal interests of Jeronimo Román de la Higuera, who claimed to descend from Chirinos and therefore from the Mozarabs, with those of the Morisco community, showcasing the liberality of the Arab king and his final conversion.

The commonalities of intents and strategies with Luna and the Morisco community can also be seen in the many letters that Román de la Higuera wrote to Pedro de Castro from 1596 onwards in defence of the Sacromonte books. The Archbishop did not accept his support, however, possibly because Higuera's reputation was already questionable at the time.

Diego de Urrea (c. 1560–1615)[85] rejected the authenticity of the finds, then he declared he had no official position on them, eventually returning to his initial stance.

Urrea was born in the south of Italy, then captured with his mother by Ottoman Turks and raised as a Muslim. Under the name of Morato Aga, he studied at the madrasa of Tlemcen, Algeria. He occupied high posts, in particular as a diplomat in the service of several Ottoman rulers. In 1589, he fled (or most likely was captured by Christians) and reached Sicily, where he was taken under the protection of the Count of Alba de Liste, who recognised his potential. There he learned Latin with the Jesuits. He followed the count to Spain around 1591 and entered into the service of the King as a royal translator of Arabic, Turkish, Persian and Tartar and as a diplomat (he played an important role during the transfer of Larache in 1609). In 1593, he was appointed Professor of Arabic at the University of Alcalá de Henares, but at the same time worked as a translator for the Inquisition in Cuenca and as a cataloguer at El Escorial Library. He composed a history of Spain based on Arabic sources and completed an Arabic dictionary

85 Rodríguez Mediano/García-Arenal 2006, 299–322; García-Arenal/Rodríguez Mediano 2013, 225–241.

as well, both of which are now lost, and also worked on the *Thesauro arávigo en Lengua Castellana*, which was never finished.

Urrea was sent to Granada by the King to translate the Lead Books and went there twice for a few months in 1596 and 1597. Since he exposed Luna by revealing that the source of the *Historia Verdadera* was nowhere to be found in El Escorial, the relationship between the translators was tense. His translation was not to Pedro de Castro's liking, however, the latter claiming the translator was only familiar with vernacular Arabic and highlighting his inability to decipher the small and unusual characters on the lead leaves. Later, though, Castro wanted him back again and tried to win him over to the Sacromonte's cause at any cost. In the end, Urrea received several payments from Pedro de Castro and his agents, but even so, he never worked on the translations any more. In his view, the Lead Books were fabricated, but he was discrete about his position on the matter, only sharing his opinions with a few close friends (among them Luis Tribaldos de Toledo and Lupercio Leonardo de Argensola). He finally managed to return to Italy in 1611, where he joined the circle around the Count of Lemos in Naples. There he established relations with Cardinal Borromeo, for whom he translated some texts, and in 1612 he became a member of the Neapolitan branch of the Academy of Lincei, founded by Cesi in Rome; only there would he express his objections concerning the Sacromonte finds. He probably died in Naples in 1615.

Gonzalo de Valcárcel (end of the sixteenth century)[86] rejected the authenticity of the finds.

Very little information is available about this man today. We know he was a 'jurisconsult' and lawyer who worked for the Royal Councils (*abogado de los reales consejos*). He sent a paper he wrote on the relics – *Discurso sobre las reliquias* – to the Nuncios Monsignor Caetani and to the counsellor Juan de Morillas Osorio, who presented it to the *Real y Supremo Consejo de Castilla* on 18 May 1595. He was one of the first scholars to reject the authenticity of the finds and the first one to point out how the parchment, lead sheets, relics and Lead Books were inextricably related and therefore all forgeries.

Pedro de Valencia (1555–1620)[87] rejected the authenticity of the finds.

He was the royal chronicler and general chronicler of the Indies from 1607. He was also a renowned humanist, disciple and colleague of Arias Montano. He was present in 1593 when Miguel de Luna and Pedro Guerra de Lorca took the

86 Benítez Sánchez-Blanco 2006a.
87 Magnier 2006, 201–203 and 209–210.

parchment to Arias Montano in order to evaluate it. The General Inquisitor Bernardo de Sandoval y Roja, following the orders of Pope Clemens VIII, tasked Pedro de Valencia to write a report on the finds. He consequently wrote *Sobre el pergamino y laminas* in 1607,[88] exposing them as forgeries. The report was possibly sent to Rome in 1616 together with the translation of two Lead Books made by Francisco de Gurmendi. It circulated in Madrid in 1618 when Pedro de Valencia, Francisco de Gurmendi and Martín de Berrotarán y Mediola joined forces to oppose the supporters of the finds at court. In 1618, the papers this circle wrote, including the report, were confiscated by General Inquisitor Bernardo de Sandoval y Roja, who was a fervent supporter of the Sacromonte finds by then. His health deteriorated rapidly in the last year of his life and consequently he died in 1620.

88 Three manuscripts of this treatise exist: Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 2316, fols 1r–30r; Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 7187, fols 116r–138r; Granada, Archivo de la Abadía del Sacromonte, Leg IV, 2, fols 143r–168; Magnier 2006, 202.

Jost Gippert

Identifying Fakes: Three Case Studies with Examples from Different Types of Written Artefacts

Abstract: This article addresses the question of how to judge the authenticity of different types of written artefacts with different analytical methods. After discussing the reception history of a highly disputed inscribed object, the *Praeneste Fibula*, the case of hitherto unpublished leather 'cigarillos' from the Near East that are inscribed in an unknown script and language is presented as an example of the interplay of linguistic and philological methods and those of the natural sciences. The third topic is a slate sherd from Dagestan bearing the alphabet of the Caucasian Albanian script, which may be taken as a classic example of a self-revealing fake.

Written artefacts are the most important material basis of all for comparative linguistics, given that they bear the 'tangible' manifestations of historical states of languages and language change that may otherwise only be hypothesised or reconstructed theoretically. Under these premises, the authenticity of such artefacts is of extreme importance when it comes to their scholarly exploitation, and faked witnesses to the past may have a disastrous impact, not only on linguistic reasoning, but also beyond. Three different sample cases with which I have personally been confronted during my career as a comparative linguist will be sufficient to show how methods from different disciplines can yield different results that need to be balanced and aligned with each other to obtain a clearer picture of the historical 'truth'.[1]

1 A preliminary German version of this article was printed under the title of 'Der Fälschung auf der Spur. Inschriften und Handschriften unter der Lupe' on the occasion of the centenary of Goethe University, Frankfurt (Main) in a freely distributed leaflet called 'Original, Adaption, (Ver-)Fälschung' edited by Iwo Amelung (2014).

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1 The *Praeneste Fibula*

MANIOS MED FHEFHAKED NVMASIOI – 'Manius made me for Numerius'. When I graduated in Comparative Linguistics in the 1970s, this inscription, engraved in rather clumsy letters running from right to left on a golden brooch (see Figs 1a–d),[2] was considered the oldest Latin text ever to have been preserved for posterity. The inscription was tentatively dated to the seventh century BCE owing to its linguistic characteristics – the nominative ending -OS instead of later *-us*, the dative ending -OI instead of later *-ō*, the intervocalic S in NVMASIOI instead of later *r*, the pronoun MED with a final D instead of later *mē* and, especially, the reduplicated perfect form FHEFHAKED, 'he made', instead of later *fēcit*; in addition to that, it shows archaic-looking letter forms including the spelling FH for the sound *f*. What a disappointment for comparative linguists like me, then, when the Italian epigraphist Margherita Guarducci published extensive work in 1980 proving that the inscription on the brooch, which is usually called the *Praeneste Fibula* on account of its origin (today's Palestrina, approximately 40 km east of Rome), is, in fact, a forgery from the late nineteenth century CE jointly produced by its discoverer, the German archaeologist and deputy director of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome, Wolfgang Helbig, and the antique dealer Francesco Martinetti, a friend of his.[3] Guarducci's reasoning was based on various suspicions, some of which had previously been expressed by other scholars as well, such as contradictory statements by Helbig on the place and date of the

2 For some excellent colour photographs of the brooch and its details, see Mangani 2011–2014, 3–6 and Ferro 2011–2014, 54, 61, 64–65.

3 Guarducci 1980. The discovery was first reported by W. Helbig at a working session of the Roman Section of the German Archeological Institute on 7 January 1887. The report was published in the first issue of the Institute's *Mittheilungen* in the same year (Helbig 1887), followed by a first transcription and interpretation by Ferdinand Dümmler (1887, 40), which also included the first drawing of the *fibula*, shown here in Fig. 1b. A short account of the session including Dümmler's transcription appeared in *Wochenschrift* 1887, 121–122 (vol. 4, issue no. 4, 26 January) before the *Mittheilungen* were printed (anonymously, but not necessarily written by Helbig himself as some have assumed, e.g. Gordon 1975, 2), and Wilhelm Deecke published remarks concerning graphical questions in issue no. 7 of the *Wochenschrift* (16 February 1887, 220), which Dümmler then replied to (1887, 43). In another quick reaction, the next issue of the *Mittheilungen* included a letter to Helbig by Giacomo Lignana, who was the first scholar to raise doubts as to the authenticity of the brooch (Lignana 1887, 139). The very first mention of the brooch and its inscription is found in a letter of Helbig's to Theodor Mommsen on 1 January 1887 (published in Buonocore 2011–2014, 76 along with a facsimile of it on pp. 77–80).

find.[4] Above all, however, the author applied methods of scientific analysis for the first time that suggested that the *fibula* could not possibly be an authentic artefact from the seventh century BCE and that the inscription must have been engraved by a 'modern' forger who was not very skilled at such work – probably Helbig himself.



Fig. 1a: The *Praeneste Fibula*, housed in the Museo Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini in Rome.



Fig. 1b: Same, drawing from 1887 (first publication).



Fig. 1c: Same, inscription.

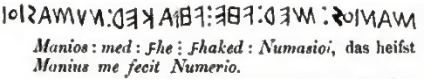

Fig. 1d: Same, sketch from 1887 (first publication).

4 According to Helbig's own report, the *fibula* was acquired by an unnamed 'friend of his' in Palestrina as early as 1871. Helbig indicated neither the date nor the place where it was found, but assumed it was in a 'tomb' from the sixth century BCE that might have belonged to the same 'stratum' as the *Tomba Bernardini*, also called the 'tesoro di Palestrina', which was discovered in 1876 (Helbig 1887, 38). In 1900, Georg Karo, another German archeologist, stated in a letter to the director of the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico 'Luigi Pigorini' in Rome that Helbig himself had told him that Martinetti the antiquarian had bought the fibula from the head of the excavations of the *Tomba Bernardini*. This letter, first published by F. Zevi (1976, 50) and more recently by E. Mangani with some amendments and a facsimile (2011–2014, 24–25 with Fig. 3), had the effect that Helbig's published account was rendered doubtful. Yet even though the acquisition was now under suspicion of being illegal, the authenticity of the *fibula* was actually supported by this rather than contradicted by it. See Gordon 1975, Ridgway 1977 and Wieacker 1984 for more detailed discussions on the question of the provenance and authenticity of the brooch.

Guarducci's publication split academia into two groups, those convinced and those unconvinced, thus making the *fibula* unusable for linguistic reasoning until about 30 years later when the tide turned again. In 2011, the Italian scientists Daniela Ferro and Edilberto Formigli presented the results of new physical and chemical investigations they had undertaken with a scanning electron microscope.[5] Among other things, the analysis revealed microcrystallisations on the engraved surface, which in their view clearly demonstrated that the brooch itself and the inscription on it are genuine. Thus, comparative linguists can finally use the inscription again, and there is no longer any need to interpret FHEFHAKED as 'faked'.[6]

2 Cigarillos from the Levant

The eventful reception history of the Manios brooch is by no means an isolated case. Scepticism about the authenticity of written artefacts is not restricted to inscriptions on stone, metal, wood, bone or other 'hard' materials either, but can also apply to manuscripts (on papyrus, leather, parchment, paper or any other 'soft' writing material). When it comes to unmasking forgeries, comparative linguists are not the only ones who should look at particularly 'sensational' finds with suspicion and seek help from natural scientists. In fact, the natural sciences employ a wide range of methods today that can be used to check the authenticity of an 'old'-looking document. At the Institute for Empirical Linguistics in Frankfurt, we have been faced with a relevant case for about twenty years now that is well suited to illustrate this point.

Sometime during the summer of 1998, we received a visit from a very polite English-speaking young man who introduced himself as an employee of an international airline and asked me whether we were well versed in old writing. 'Well,'

5 The discovery was presented at a special conference devoted to the *fibula* at the Luigi Pigorini National Museum of Prehistory and Epigraphy on 6 June 2011 and was first reported on by D. F. Maras (2012) in a journal called *Etruscan News*. Ferro's and Formigli's presentation was only published in 2015, however, together with nine other conference papers that appeared in volume 99 of the *Bullettino di Paletnologia Italiana* (see Ferro and Formigli 2011–2014).

6 See Ridgway 1977 for this allusion. As a matter of fact, there was much debate about the authenticity of the inscription on purely linguistic grounds, beginning with Lignana (1887). Personally, I remember discussing it for the first time with Eric Hamp during his stay in Berlin in 1981 (Hamp 1981, 151). For a comprehensive bibliography up to 2011, see Mangani 2011–2014, 30–41.

I replied, 'not in everything, but quite well-versed in some types of writing. What kind of thing have you got in mind?' He immediately took a rolled-up artefact from his wallet that was about 10 cm long and strongly reminiscent of a cigarillo, but which was obviously made of leather rather than tobacco. The gentleman carefully opened it at one of the corners, and there were written characters on the inside. 'This is certainly very interesting,' I said, 'but unless the entire thing is unrolled, we will certainly not be able to determine what it contains. I would also strongly advise you not to unroll it yourself because otherwise the object might get damaged, especially if it's very old. There are specialists for things like this at the State Library in Berlin, for example, who we've been working together with for years. In other words, the item should be sent to Berlin where it can be unrolled professionally and prepared for reading in a suitable form before we can say anything more about it.' – 'I'll have to obtain permission first in that case,' the guest admitted before he left us. My question about the exact origin and ownership of the artefact remained unanswered; from what he told me about it, I could only gather that it came from the eastern Mediterranean (Israel, Palestine, Jordan or Lebanon) and had belonged to a private person who had found it in a clay jug on his own estate along with similar objects.

To my great surprise, the young man reappeared a few weeks later; not only had he obtained permission to send the object to Berlin, but he was also carrying a second 'cigarillo'. So I asked Hartmut Ortwin Feistel, head of the Oriental Department of the State Library,[7] whether the Library's restoration department could scrutinise these finds, and thankfully, he agreed to that immediately. Having no opportunity to go to Berlin himself, the bearer handed one of the objects over to me (he did not want to hear anything about a contract or the like), and I had it taken to Berlin by a trusted person. A few weeks later, the restoration workshop had done its work:[8] the artefact was now unrolled, and it actually revealed several lines of text on the inside, obviously written from right to left (a few characters even seemed to be written on the outside; see Figs. 2a and 2b).[9] The script bore a certain resemblance to Semitic scripts of the first pre-Christian millennium, but it was not immediately identifiable with any of these (Canaanite, Moabite, Samaritan, Phoenician or Aramaic)[10] and therefore was not 'decipherable'.

7 My e-mail to H. O. Feistel, 12 October 1998, 19:17.

8 E-mail from H. O. Feistel, 20 January 1999, 9:19.

9 High-resolution images of the unrolled object taken in Frankfurt; both sides, 2 February 1999.

10 For comparison, see Faulmann 1880, 78–79; *Alphabete* 1969, 10; Gippert 2010b, for example.



Fig. 2a: 'Cigarillo' no. 1, inside.



Fig. 2b: Same, outside.

This was not surprising, of course, because the characters were barely recognisable on the dark brown leather background. First of all, it was necessary to improve the visibility of the writing. The State Library had experimented with ultraviolet imaging before, but this did not yield any noteworthy results, except for the suggestion that the ink might be soot-based.[11] So we tried digital photographic processing in order to enhance the contrast between the brown tint of the leather and the slightly darker tint of the characters, which did, in fact, give us a much clearer picture (see Figs. 3a and 3b).[12] However, the script was still not

11 E-mail from H. O. Feistel, 20 January 1999, 8:28.

12 Digitally enhanced images of the inside, produced in Frankfurt, 9 February 1999; see <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/didact/semit/leather/leather1.htm> (last accessed on 14 May 2020) for an assortment of images of the artefact.

identifiable,[13] let alone the content, age or provenance of the document.[14] On his next visit to Frankfurt, the bearer – who had revealed his name in the meantime, but will remain anonymous here – received an answer from us that was hardly satisfactory: 'Yes, it is a very old-looking inscribed leather fragment, but we don't know any details about it yet'.



Fig. 3a: 'Cigarillo' no. 1, inside, upper part, processed.



Fig. 3b: Same, lower part, processed.

In order to find out more, I therefore proposed to subject the artefact to radiocarbon analysis (also known as ^{14}C or carbon-14 analysis).[15] This procedure makes it possible to roughly determine the age of organic material (which includes leather, of course) with an accuracy of between 30 and 100 years, depending on the state of conservation of the object and its degree of contamination by dirt and suchlike; it should at least enable us to determine the authenticity of the object, we thought. The gentleman needed further permission for this, of course, given that a ^{14}C analysis, which involves determining the decay time of the radioactive carbon content in dead organisms, 'contaminates' itself to a considerable degree:

13 Besides Semitic scripts of the above-named types, 'Hellenoid' alphabets such as Lydian and Lycian (see Faulmann 1880, 168; Gippert 2000a; *Lycian* 1991–2020; *Lydian* 1991–2020) or even scripts from ancient Italy (see Gippert 2001; *Old Italic* 1991–2020) had also been taken into account (my e-mail to H. O. Feistel, 15 January 1999, 18:41).

14 During one of his later visits (on 5 February 1999), the bearer indicated a region approx. 50 km north of the Dead Sea (my e-mail to H. O. Feistel, 8 February 1999, 11:14).

15 A ^{14}C analysis was first suggested by H. O. Feistel (e-mail, 18 January 1999, 11:30).

a piece has to be cut out of the object, about 1 cm^2 in size and ideally with no ink on it, which then gets completely destroyed during the analysis, damaging the document forever.[16] For this reason, the radiocarbon method had rarely been used on original manuscripts in the past – the Berlin State Library employed it for the first time in 2004[17] to determine the temporal stratification of Tocharian manuscripts from the Turfan collection, which extends over nearly the whole of the first millennium CE.[18]

To my surprise, our bearer received the necessary approval again, and he also brought two more 'cigarillos' along with him to have a radiocarbon analysis carried out on them. I helped him to find institutions in Germany and abroad that knew how to use this method. He first intended to go to Zurich (because he had to 'land' there frequently anyway), but in the end he decided on a laboratory in Oxford,[19] which estimated a time range of five months for the work. In order not to waste the waiting time, the bearer had another one of his 'cigarillos' opened, this time simply by applying undistilled water (!), and had a high-resolution colour scan of it made by Gernot Feucht's team at the Analytical Laboratory at Aventis Research & Technologies in Frankfurt,[20] which was kindly lent to us for further processing (see Figs. 4a–c).[21] Unfortunately, neither the script nor the text disclosed any secrets.

16 See Rabin 2015, 28 as to the difference between 'contaminating' and 'non-destructive' methods of analysis.

17 E-mail from P. M. Grootes to H. O. Feistel and T. Tamai, 27 July 2004: 18:34.

18 Tamai 2011, 370–375.

19 My e-mail to H. O. Feistel, 17 May 1999, 11:54.

20 E-mail from G. Feucht, 4 Oct. 1999, 8:23. Since 2004, Aventis has been part of the Sanofi-Aventis corporation.

21 My e-mail to H. O. Feistel, 14 Oct. 1999, 12:36; see <http://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/didact/semit/leather/leather2.htm> (last accessed on 14 May 2020).



Fig. 4a: Cigarillo no. 2, unrolled, inside.



Fig. 4b: Same, excerpt, processed.

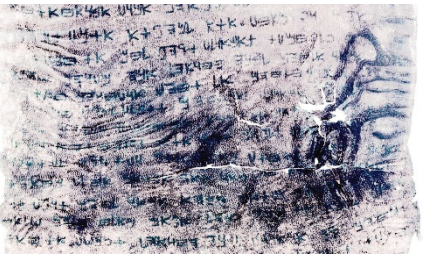

Fig. 4c: Same, processed further.

More than twenty years have passed since then, in which I have not heard from or seen anything of the polite employee from the unknown airline. I do not want to conclude from this that he had the ^{14}C analysis carried out in Oxford and it revealed that the leather dates from the middle of the twentieth century CE – which would mean that the lettering cannot be older; perhaps the silence has been for completely different reasons. What has remained, though, is the 'cigarillos' that were unrolled, and I am still eager to solve the question of whether they are 'real' documents from the first millennium BCE – all the more so since the applicable scientific processes have improved considerably meanwhile. In 2013, I handed the 'cigarillos' over to Ira Rabin, a renowned specialist in the material analysis of manuscripts. The first investigation she carried out concerned the ink: with an X-ray fluorescence-based 'Jet Stream M6' instrument,[22] she was able to show that it is, indeed, soot-based, as previously suggested. As this type of ink was always used in the Near East, however, it unfortunately gives us no further hints as to the date or origin of the artefacts.[23] Consequently, there seems to be no way round radiocarbon analysis,[24] which I hope will be performed on them one day to reveal more information.

3 Why fake a written artefact?

The question remains: what makes someone fake a written artefact at all? In the case of the Manios *fibula*, two things were suspected: addiction to profit in the case of Martinetti the antiquarian (the inscription makes the *fibula* even more valuable than the gold from which it is made), and craving for recognition in the case of Helbig the archaeologist (being acknowledged as the discoverer of the oldest Latin inscription we know of certainly boosted his reputation in the late nineteenth century). In the case of the Near Eastern 'cigarillos', if they are indeed fakes, then the former motive is likely again: interest in pre-Christian manuscripts from the region has risen sharply at least since the discovery of the 'Dead Sea Scrolls' (which, mind you, were also kept in clay jugs), and if provided with

22 For more on the technique and the different sorts of inks and their characteristics, see Rabin 2015, 29–30. The research was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) as part of the work done at Collaborative Research Centre 950 ('Manuscript Cultures in Asia, Africa and Europe') and was conducted within the scope of the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) at Hamburg University.

23 E-mail from I. Rabin, 9 Dec. 2013, 19:06.

24 E-mail from I. Rabin, 9 Dec. 2013, 21:36.

a certificate of authenticity, artefacts like ours are likely to yield a very good price at auctions. Occasionally, there may also be legal or even political motives for creating such fakes: claims of hegemony and possession can readily be derived from a document that is 'back-dated' by five hundred years (as in the case of the so-called 'Donation of Constantine', a document allegedly from the year 315 attributed to Emperor Constantine, which granted extensive rights to the Roman popes and was recognised as a forgery as early as the fifteenth century).[25] This even applies to the founding charters of entire states (such as the so-called *privilegium maius* of the Habsburg emperor Rudolf IV, a document from 1358–1359 which considerably expanded the authentic founding document of Austria, the *privilegium minus* of 1156, from which it was allegedly copied).[26]

Sometimes we may also assume less 'tangible' interests to be involved, as in the case of inscriptions that are used to prove that a people or a language community possesses ancient literacy and is therefore superior to others.[27] This motive applies to a slate sherd approx. 10×6×1 cm in size[28] and covered with letters in the alphabet of the so-called 'Caucasian Albanians'[29] (see Figs. 5a–5d), found in 1970[30] in Upper Labko in Dagestan in the north-eastern Caucasus,[31] which obviously reproduces the 'Albanian' alphabet list published in 1937 on the basis of an encyclopaedic Armenian manuscript of the thirteenth century (MS 7117, fol. 145rv of the Matenadaran, Yerevan; see Figs. 6a and 6b).[32] Not only

25 Nicholas of Cusa's treatise *De concordantia catholica* of 1433 (ch. III, sect. 2; edition from Basel, 1565, 780–783; <http://diglib.hab.de/drucke/413-theol-2f/start.htm?image=00880> (last accessed on 14 May 2020).

26 See the article by Ira Rabin and Oliver Hahn in Part III of this volume.

27 A similar case may be seen in the Glozel tablets discussed in Catherine Breniquet's article in Part I of this volume.

28 These measurements are stated in Gukasjan 1971, 132.

29 See Gippert 2015 for a brief summary of the written heritage of the Caucasian 'Albanians'.

30 Arslanbekov 1970 and 1971, 70–72. Not much is known about the circumstances of the find. According to Arslanbekov (1971, 70), the sherd was found by 'young local historians' ('юными краеведами') in an 'open field near the village' ('в открытом поле близ селения'); Gukasjan (1971, 130) gives the name of the 'students' ('учащиеся') as Arslanbek Arslanbekov, a son of the aforementioned author, and Galina Isabekova. Gukasjan further quotes the historian V[ladimir] G[erasimovič] Kotovič for the information that the place in question once bore a 'settlement' ('поселение') in the third–seventh centuries (1971, 130).

31 Russ. Верхнее Лабкомахи, 42° 20' 19" N and 47° 26' 00" E.

32 The 'Albanian' alphabet is highlighted in the images (which were kindly provided by Arshak Banouchyan, e-mail from 5 May 2010); it is preceded by (the end of) the Old Georgian alphabet and followed by (the beginning of) the Coptic alphabet. The first publication of the list (Šanidze 1938) included greyscale images of the relevant pages with the rubrics re-drawn in red (tables

can this be deduced from the letter forms, which coincide with those of the alphabet list in nearly every detail, thereby distinguishing them from authentic inscriptions and manuscripts in the same script,[33] but it can also be seen in the order of the letters, which has obviously been changed by the division of the list into two manuscript pages, with the second page taken first (see Figs. 7a–7f).[34]



Fig. 5a: The slate from Upper Labko.



Fig. 5b: Same, rear side.

between pp. 16 and 17); Šanidze 1960 contained a black-and-white reproduction of only the 'Albanian' alphabet (Table 1).

33 See Gippert et al. 2008, II-2–6 where the letters from the alphabet list are compared with those appearing in the only 'Albanian' manuscripts preserved, the palimpsests of St Catherine's Monastery on Mt Sinai.

34 Murav'ev 1986 and Gippert et al. 2008, II-92–93.

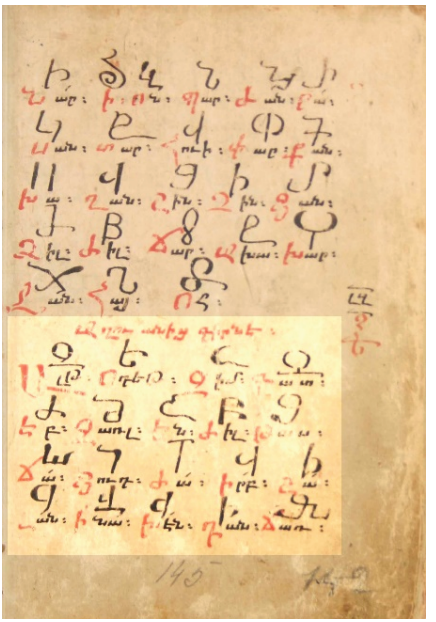

Fig. 6a: Caucasian Albanian alphabet list in ms. Matenadaran 7117, fol. 145r.

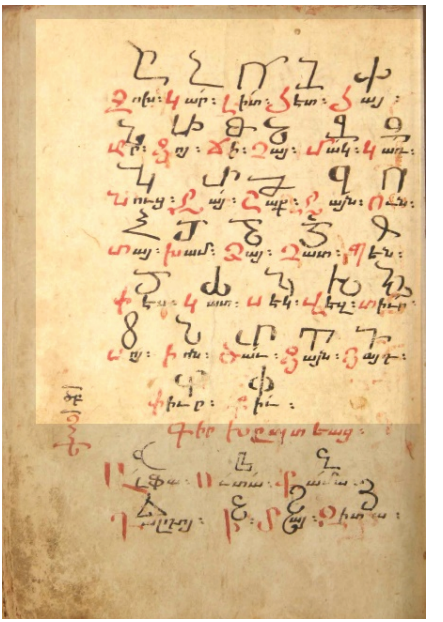

Fig. 6b: Same, continuation on fol. 145v.

As in the latter case, it need not always be scientific analyses that enable us to detect a fake. In many instances, inconsistencies between (paleo)graphical forms, linguistic characteristics and textual content are sufficient to raise concerns or make a forgery seem likely. However, it is particularly the interplay of linguistics, philology, archaeology and 'hard' sciences that promises to yield important new insights into the history of written artefacts and help us identify documents as fakes. We cannot expect every forgery to be uncovered easily, of course, but as the case of the *Praeneste Fibula* shows, new methods can lead to an increase in our knowledge and put an end to long-lasting debates.



Fig. 7a: The slate from Upper Labko, drawing.



Fig. 7b: Same, rear side.

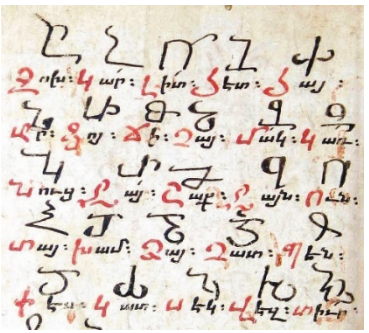

Fig. 7c: Caucasian Albanian alphabet list in ms. Matenadaran 7117, fol. 145v, upper part.

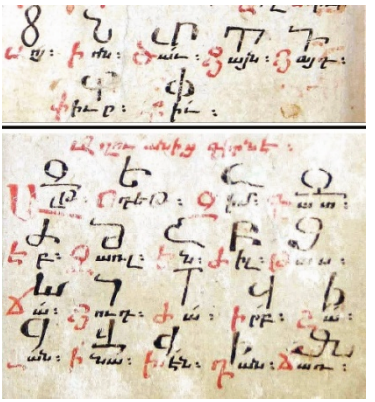

Fig. 7d: Same, continuation on fol. 145v, and beginning on fol. 145r.

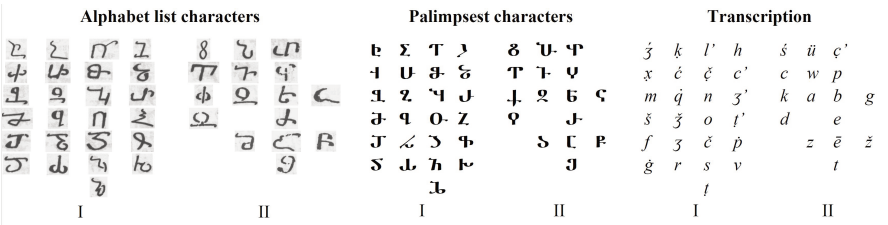

Fig. 7e: Characters from the slate contrasted with those appearing in the Caucasian Albanian palimpsests.

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Ira Rabin, Oliver Hahn

Detection of Fakes: The Merits and Limits of Non-Invasive Materials Analysis

Abstract: This paper addresses the sensitive issue of authenticating unprovenanced manuscripts of high monetary value to certify they are genuine. Over the last decade, the popularity of material studies of manuscripts using non-destructive testing (NDT) has increased enormously. These studies are held in especially high esteem in the case of suspicious writings due to the methodological rigour they are reputed to contribute to debate. We would like to stress that materials analysis alone cannot prove that an object is genuine. Unfortunately, audiences with a humanities background often tend to disregard the technical details and treat any published interpretation of instrumental analysis as an objective finding. Four examples are outlined here to illustrate what questionable contributions the natural sciences can make in describing manuscripts that have actually been forged.

Today it is difficult to pinpoint the beginnings of instrumental analysis in the world of archaeology and art, but the growing number of scientific papers appearing by the end of the nineteenth century testifies to the onset of its popularity. It seems that metal studies of prehistoric finds in the 1870s belong to the earliest documented chemical investigations. In 1888, the first chemical laboratory to assist with conservation was opened in Berlin: the Rathgen Research Laboratory. Scientific studies in archaeology and conservation became established over the next fifty years, mostly concerning Egyptology, as witnessed by numerous editions of the standard textbook *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*, first published by Alfred Lucas in 1926 (Lucas/Harris 1962). It is not surprising that the natural sciences came to play an important role in examining artefacts of questionable authenticity.

Moreover, studies in art and archaeology involving experiments performed by members of the natural science community are held in high esteem due to the methodological rigour they are reputed to contribute to debate. And yet, as Jeffrey Spier has said in his article 'Blinded with science: the abuse of science in the detection of false antiquities':

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> Many technical and scientific studies, however, are not conclusive, especially in determining authenticity, and often appear to be invoked by archaeologists as a desperate appeal to the unattainable, 'objective' result rather than as a proper study.
>
> (Spier 1990, 623).

Despite this warning and the plea for cautiousness, the popularity of such studies has increased enormously over the last two decades due to the industry-driven development of non-destructive technology (NDT), which does not require any sampling. Further technological developments led to the appearance of NDT methods with extremely small interaction windows (in the μm range). These methods have obvious limitations when they are employed to analyse objects whose composition displays heterogeneity of the same order of magnitude. Scanning mode or a statistically relevant number of points establishing characteristic material properties of the area under study are used to overcome the limitations. Nevertheless, their random application in a single-spot measurement is rather common. Obviously, implementation of such methods requires specific protocols to be used that take heterogeneity and possible degradation pathways into consideration. A materials scientist with experience in archaeometry is certainly familiar with such problems and would be able to avoid the pitfalls of misinterpreting the complex analytic results.

In general, the fulfilment of the following requirements is indispensable for authentication issued by an accredited technical authority: standard references, certified procedures and characteristic samples. It is patently clear that the prerequisites mentioned above can rarely be found when dealing with unique objects belonging to cultural heritage, meaning that no certificate of authenticity can be issued. It does not mean, however, that we know nothing about the production technologies, writing materials or painters' palettes of the past. Equipped with existing databases, experts working in forensics and archaeometry are often capable of identifying a forgery as it is often betrayed by anachronistic details: the use of paints unknown at the time or incompatible with the period, or the use of paper containing whiteners that were either tampered with or developed recently. However, we cannot automatically come to the conclusion that the object under scrutiny is authentic if nothing suspicious is found.

On one hand, the ever-growing number of materials studies is helping researchers to characterise the materials used in cultural heritage. On the other hand, studies of this kind are also helping to produce sophisticated forgeries that cannot be identified easily. It has become fashionable to conduct a non-invasive analysis as part of a technical examination of a suspicious object. In many cases, however, the results of such an investigation have not been particularly helpful. The following four case studies serve to illustrate this point.

1 The *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*

At the Tenth International Congress of Coptic Studies held in Rome in September 2012, Professor Karen King from Harvard Divinity School presented a new Coptic Gospel fragment to the audience (King 2014, Camplani 2012). The papyrus fragment, which is approximately 4 × 8 cm in size (Fig. 1), allegedly belonged to a fourth-century copy of a Coptic translation of the Gospel and contained an indication that Jesus was married. During the four years of scholarly controversy that followed the appearance of the sensational fragment and which was skilfully spurred by the media, it received the name *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* (or 'GJW' for short). In June 2016, Ariel Sabar's investigation published in *The Atlantic* magazine proved unequivocally that the fragment was actually a modern forgery (Sabar 2016). What makes the story interesting is the use – or rather, misuse – of the results of materials analysis in the attempt to prove that the manuscript was genuine.

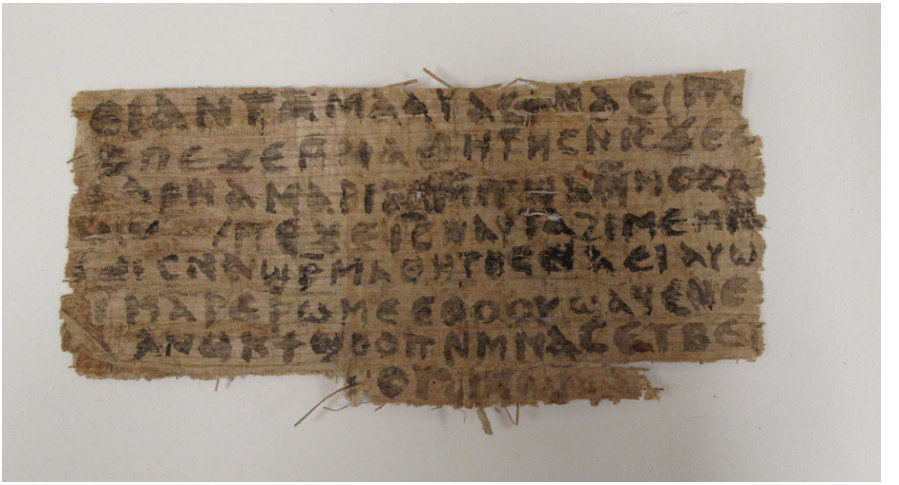

Fig. 1: Gospel of Jesus's Wife (papyrus fragment), Recto; © Harvard University

Issue 2 of volume 107 of the *Harvard Theological Review* was dedicated almost entirety to the question of the fragment's authenticity, with four papers reporting the results of the materials analysis conducted on (a) the papyrus writing support using Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy (FTIR) in reflection mode (Azzarelli et al. 2014); (b) black inks with Raman spectroscopy (Yardley/Hagadorn 2014);

(c) and (d) radiocarbon dating of papyrus (Hodgins 2014; Tuross 2014). In the first two studies, the investigations included the suspicious fragment and control material for comparison. Two radiocarbon dating tests were conducted on the fragment and the control fragment from the Gospel of John. Radiocarbon dating first conducted in the Arizona Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) Laboratory failed to produce a reasonable date due to contamination, and suggested re-dating the fragment. The second radiometric measurement conducted at the National Ocean Sciences Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (NOSAMS) Laboratory in Massachusetts dated the material (papyrus) to the eighth century. This result effectively disputed the initial claim that the Gospel of Jesus' Wife originated from an early Christian manuscript. Moreover, it suggested that the fragment from the Gospel of John, which had hitherto served as an impeccable reference, could be a modern forgery. It was in fact confirmed later since it was written in a dialect that no longer existed in the eighth century CE (Askeland 2015).

In comparison, the non-destructive spectroscopy tests, (a) and (b), delivered rather meagre results. The first one found that the main material of which the writing supports were made was papyrus, that it could be old and that it was homogeneous in its chemical composition. This means that all the spectra measured in this study indicated that the material was papyrus, i.e. no contamination could be detected in fourteen random spots 100 × 100 μm in size on the inked and non-inked portions of the supports. Ancient papyrus rarely displays homogeneity, however – it usually contains uneven distributions of salts or other mineral deposits that are best assessed by micro-X-ray fluorescence (micro-XRF) in scanning mode rather than by investigating a dozen micro-spots with a technique only capable of detecting the main material.

In the second study, the Raman spectra of the inks used in the 'Gospel of Jesus' Wife' and the Gospel of John were first compared qualitatively to those collected from commercial lamp-black and vine-black pigments. In a second step, the Raman spectra were analysed to obtain a quantitative comparison of the inks from the two papyri in question. The authors concluded that the inks from the two fragments only contained soot (lamp black) as a colouring agent, that they differed from each other and that they were very similar to the dated ancient inks, gently implying that the inks in question could, indeed, be ancient. In other words, this study suggested that Raman spectroscopy could not only be used to differentiate between lamp-black pigments, but for their non-destructive dating as well. This was a sensational result without a doubt. Unfortunately, the proof provided later that both inks were modern forgeries strongly compromised the authors' conclusions (Sabar 2016). More generally, there is no possibility of dating carbon inks using Raman spectroscopy.

Destructive radiometric dating of the papyrus substrates is the only investigation in this series that contributed fruitfully to the debate. It also shows that it is not that easy to buy an old piece of papyrus of the right age. In this respect, easy accessibility to radiometric dating could be extremely helpful to forgers. Consequently, many scientists are now considering whether to issue a ban on dating unprovenanced material in the hands of antiquity dealers (Huysecom et al. 2017).

2 The Vinland map

In contrast to the previous example, Raman spectroscopy played a decisive role in identifying the Vinland map (Fig. 2) as a modern forgery, thus ending a scholarly debate that had lasted over forty years.



Fig. 2: Vinland Map (*Hystoria Tartarorum*); © General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

One day in 1957, a fifteenth-century map came to light that contained an accurate depiction of the coastlines of Greenland and Newfoundland along with a Viking

voyage made around the year 1000 in order to discover Vinland. If it was authentic, it would have meant that Vikings discovered America around 500 years before Columbus (Charney 2015, 226–230). Using Raman microprobe spectroscopy in 2001, Katherine Brown and Robin Clark from University College London found that the ink on the map contained modern pigment in addition to carbon-based ink (Brown/Clark 2002). In this case, then, a single analysis was able to prove that the manuscript in question was a modern forgery.

3 *Privilegium maius*

In the third case study, a series of non-invasive and micro-invasive analytical tests were conducted on five parchment charters known by the name of *Privilegium maius* and currently preserved in the Austrian State Archive (AUR 98, AUR 187, AUR 520, AUR 708 and AUR 1845). These were allegedly signed in 1058, 1156, 1228, 1245 and 1283 respectively (see Fig. 3). The charters substantiate the Habsburg claim to the elite circle of the prince-electors of the Holy Roman Empire, but are believed to be a forgery produced in the Habsburg chancellery in 1358–1359 by order of Duke Rudolph IV of Austria. Basing his conclusions on anachronistic details, Wilhelm Wattenbach identified the charters as forgeries from the time of Rudolph IV (Wattenbach 1852).

Scientific investigations conducted recently in the Austrian State Archive in the course of preparing an exhibition on the *Privilegium maius* included X-ray radiography, infrared reflectography and diagnostic photography (Strolz/Griesser 2018), identification of the animal precursor of the parchment using microscopic analysis and proteomics (Vnouček/Fiddyment 2018), elemental analysis of the writing inks with micro-X-ray fluorescence analysis (micro-XRF, Uhlir 2018) and chemical analysis of the inks and coloured seal threads with ultraviolet-visible fibre-optic reflectance spectrophotometry (Aceto et al. 2018). For a complete evaluation of the chemistry underlying dyeing of the threads, extracted microscopic samples were subjected to testing with conventional and surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy (SERS) as well as high-performance liquid chromatography coupled with diode-array detection and mass spectrometry (HPLC-DAD-MS). Unlike the majority of cases that scientists investigate in which one asks whether the object under examination could be a fake, in this one, the study was expected to offer insights about the materials the forgers used. Since the documents were believed to have been produced in one and the same workshop, the investigators were more interested in finding out what materials the forgers employed than in confirming the act of forgery itself. The study has

shown, however, that all the inks used to produce the documents were different in terms of their relative elemental composition. Furthermore, it was found that the threads were not dyed in the same bath. All in all, one comes to a striking result that the charters were not produced in one stage or even in the same workshop, raising the question how the forgery was conducted.



Fig. 3: Five parchment charters constituting the *Privilegium maius*; © Österreichisches Staatsarchiv.

We should not forget, though, that the task was far from easy, especially if we take into account that the documents under study are at least 650 years old. To identify anachronistic details in the production of these documents, one would expect to be able to differentiate between the materials and production technologies used in a period of 300 years during the Middle Ages. To meet such a

requirement, one would have to study a statistically relevant number of documents from the period in question and establish the degree of variance of the inks and dyes used. We hope that the results presented in this work would serve as a starting point for a larger project dedicated to the study of medieval inks.

4 Galileo's *Sidereus Nuncius*

One other striking case is that of the so-called galley proofs of Galileo's *Sidereus Nuncius*, a revolutionary work in which the scientist experimentally confirmed the theory that Copernicus had proposed. In addition, the book, which was printed for the first time in Venice in 1610 in some 550 copies, contained copper-plate etchings of the moon that depicted its surface based on Galileo's telescopic observations. Unlike other extant copies, the New York one containing watercolours instead of etchings caused a great deal of excitement in scholarly circles. After its discovery in 2007 no suspicions were raised by the experts, who immediately started to study the book and even solicited paper-and-ink analyses from scientists to complement their scholarly research. As is customary in such cases, all the analyses had to be conducted in a non-destructive way despite the known limitations of such an approach. Although the scientists were offered two other uncontested copies, there were no ink samples of the inscription or drawings for comparison. Like the case of the GJW, the mere thought of having discovered Galileo's original drawings seems to have caused the scholars working on this book to miss or ignore a number of idiosyncrasies revealed by the scientific analysis. The more scholars studied the volume, however, the more anomalies were found. One of these – the word *periodis* printed as *pepiodis* (Fig. 4) with a ligature *pi* that did not appear in any other copy – revealed that the 'galley proofs' were modern copies produced with the help of photopolymer plates. Following this discovery in 2012, the original team of researchers undertook another series of tests. The results were published as a sequel to the previous volumes on the alleged galley proofs, which 'describes the chronology and methods by which the discovery of forgery was made – a veritable watershed moment in the continuing struggle between the ever-more refined methods of forgers and new methods used to apprehend them. Ultimately, the work also provides insight into the psychology of specialists who "research themselves" in order to prevent similar errors in the future' (Bredekamp et al. 2014, flyer).

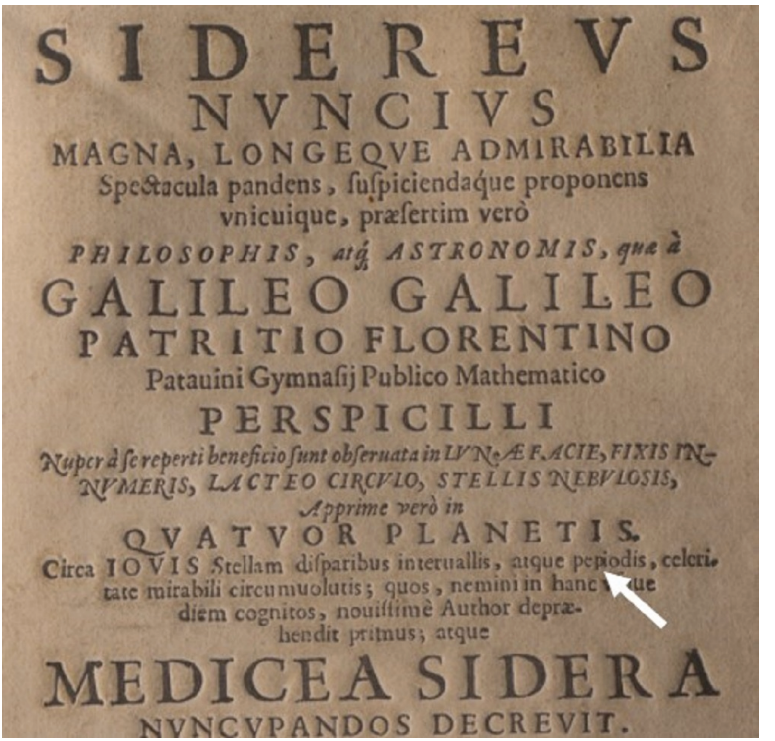
SIDEREVS
NVNCIVS
MAGNA, LONGEQVE ADMIRABILIA
Spectacula pandens, suspiciendaque proponens
vnicuique, præsertim verò
PHILOSOPHIS, atq; ASTRONOMIS, quæ à
GALILEO GALILEO
PATRITIO FLORENTINO
Patauini Gymnasij Publico Mathematico
PERSPICILLI
Nuperrimè à se reperti beneficio sunt obseruata in LVNÆ FACIE, FIXIS IN-
NVMERIS, LACTEO CIRCVLO, STELLIS NEBVLOSIS,
Apprime verò in
QVATVOR PLANETIS
Circa IOVIS Stellam disparibus interuallis, atque periodis, celeri-
tate mirabili circumuolutis; quos, nemini in hanc vsque
diem cognitos, nouissimè Author depræ-
hendit primus; atque
MEDICEA SIDERA
NVNCVPANDOS DECREVIT.

Fig. 4: Close-up showing part of the front page of the 'galley proofs' of Galileo's *Sidereus Nuncius*; © image: Barbara Herrenkind, Berlin. The white arrow indicates the word '*pepiodis*'.

5 Conclusion

To summarise, then, we would like to return to the sensitive issue of authenticating objects of great cultural and monetary value – certifying that they are genuine. Sometimes it is possible to identify forgeries beyond a shadow of doubt when non-contemporary materials were used to produce it. We would like to stress, however, that materials analysis alone, especially its non-destructive variety, cannot verify the authenticity of an object, i.e. prove that it is genuine. The best that materials analysis can do, after all appropriate tests have been conducted, is to announce that nothing has been found that contradicts the assumption of genuineness.

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Michael Friedrich

Producing and Identifying Forgeries of Chinese Manuscripts

Abstract: In just a little more than two decades, from 1994 to 2015, seven public institutions in China acquired considerable numbers of unprovenanced bamboo-slip manuscripts. Following the economic upsurge the country experienced during this period, the art and antique market expanded rapidly. The artefacts that appeared on it did not always have a flawless history, though; some of them came from a flourishing industry producing and selling fakes, or even worse, from looted tombs. In the light of this development, it comes as no surprise that the authenticity of many of these manuscripts has been questioned. In order to understand how exactly judgements on the authenticity of these manuscripts were passed, it is necessary to go back to ancient and medieval ideas and practices. Traditional attitudes towards written artefacts are identified as determining modern approaches assessing and appreciating manuscripts from ancient China.

> [...] calligraphy, valued for its capacity to embody in brushwork the mind and character of the individual artist, was more amenable to accurate and efficient replication than any other form of art.[1]
>
> Robert E. Harrist Jr.

Manuscripts from ancient and medieval China have only been excavated in large quantities since the twentieth century. They are invaluable sources of information for scholars, and in collectors' eyes they are precious artefacts – if they

1 Harrist 2004, 32.

Note: I am grateful to Thies Staack for drawing my attention to Hu (2010) and to further relevant literature as well as for critically commenting on a draft of this article. Thanks to Xiaomeng He for providing a collection of early Chinese legal stipulations related to faking and forging, from which I have drawn below. For simplicity's sake, I have used traditional characters here, even in cases where the source was produced in simplified characters.

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are authentic, that is.[2] In 2013, prize-winning *New York Times* author David Barboza and his colleagues exposed the mechanisms governing the Chinese art and antique market. In their article entitled *Forging an Art Market in China*, they connected the artists' traditional training by copying to the modern art market:

> Artists here are trained to imitate the old Chinese masters, and they routinely produce high-quality copies of paintings and other works, such as ceramics and jade artifacts. That tradition has intersected with the newly attractive art market, in which reproductions that so many have the skills to create are often offered as the real thing. It would be hard to create a more fertile environment for the proliferation of fakes.[3]

Barboza reported on nouveaux riches and government officials buying and selling in close co-operation with auction houses and quoted a study saying 'that as many as 250,000 people in about 20 Chinese cities may be involved in producing and selling fakes', with Beijing, Tianjin, Suzhou and Nanjing being centres for replicating paintings and calligraphies, 'the workhorses of China's art market'.[4]

A brief look at Chinese traditions of forging written artefacts (Part 1) will serve as an introduction to more recent developments since the early twentieth century (Part 2). I shall then offer some general observations on method (Part 3). The term 'manuscript' will be used in a very general sense here to refer to handwritten artefacts, no matter whether they are works of art or shopping lists.[5] In accordance with Chinese usage, traditional designations of periods will be provided as well as absolute dates, i.e. the Warring States (fifth–third centuries BCE), Qin (the state and empire up to the latter's demise in 206 BCE) and Han (Western: second–first centuries BCE, Eastern: first–second centuries CE).

2 Susan Whitfield meant the same thing when she said 'Dunhuang manuscripts are neither wholly akin to works of art nor to texts, but something of each'; see the introduction in Whitfield 2002, 12.

3 Barboza et al. 2013; this article was the first in the three-part series called 'A Culture of Bidding', the Chinese version of which is not accessible any more, as Thies Staack has noted.

4 Barboza et al. 2013. Part two of the series on Poly Auction, a company belonging to the state-owned military technology specialist China Poly Group and one of the major players on the Chinese art market, was not accessible.

5 See Lorusso et al. 2015.

1 Traditions of forgery

Forgeries of written artefacts are occasionally mentioned in anecdotes from ancient times, but they are not a major topic, at least in the received literature.[6] From Han times onwards, the histories are full of attempts to fake documents and other artefacts. Recently published manuscripts additionally provide new evidence.

1.1 Forging: law and canon

The expansion of territorial states from the fifth to the third century BCE, the unification of the empire by the state of Qin in 221 BCE and the establishment of the first long-lasting imperial state by the Han (202 BCE–8 CE) would not have been possible without written communication – this made effective control of the populace possible as well as the efficient administration of resources. Archaeological evidence from the Qin and Han not only demonstrates the geographical range of the early empires, but it shows how central administration penetrated the realm: imperial decisions were cascaded down to military deployments and administrative units more than a thousand miles away from the capital and, in turn, constituted the lowest level of a reporting system conveying information on all aspects relevant to higher authorities and ideally to the imperial court as well. Copying documents, either excerpting or duplicating their content *in toto*, was essential to the functioning of the administration and the stability of the ruling house.[7] In light of the ever-growing importance of written evidence in law and administration, it does not come as any surprise that the practice of falsifying and forging documents appears to have grown along with it. A Daoist text from the second century BCE has the following lament:

> 蒼頡之初作書，以辯治百官，領理萬事，愚者得以不忘，智者得以志遠；至其衰也，為姦刻偽書，以解有罪，以殺不辜。[8]
> When Cang Jie first created writing, it served to distinguish and regulate the Hundred Offices and to control and regulate the Ten Thousand Affairs, so that the stupid would not forget things and the intelligent would be able to achieve their far-reaching ambitions;

6 Harrist 2004, 39 quotes a famous one, with Emperor Wu (r. 140–86 BCE) identifying the forger by his handwriting.

7 See Giele 2006 for an in-depth study of Han central administration.

8 *Huainan zi* 淮南子20, by Liu An 劉安 (180–122 BCE), in Liu W. 1989, vol. 2, 673.

> when it came to its decline, it was used for treacherously and malignantly forging documents in order to set the guilty free and kill the innocent.

Legal stipulations of late pre-imperial and early imperial times (third–second centuries BCE) contain many items concerning falsifying or completely forging documents, testifying to the authorities' concern about any attempt to hamper the communication apparatus. Statutes from the early second century BCE contain articles on different types of forgery:[9] a forger who had produced fake copies of the Emperor's seals, for instance, would be sentenced to death by cutting his body in two at the waist and publicly displaying the remains afterwards, and if they forged the seals of lower offices, then the offenders had to work as wall-builders or grain-pounders for the rest of their lives. The death penalty for forging an imperial decision was only applicable if any harm had resulted from it; if that was not the case, the offender would merely be fined a certain amount of gold.[10] In general terms, the punishment for forging documents was tattooing and doing hard manual work as a wall-builder or grain-pounder for the rest of the offender's life (為偽書者：黥為城旦舂). Destroying the seal on a document that guaranteed its authenticity would also be heavily punished.[11]

Further evidence from legal cases dealing with 'fraudulent' (*zha* 詐) producing or altering of documents confirms the relevance of these stipulations.[12] The main terms used are *jiao* 矯 ('bend straight' > pretend to act on higher authority, mainly for *zhi* 制, imperial decisions) and, most commonly, *wei* 偽 ('make believe' > produced, artificial, non-genuine, mainly for *shu* 書, documents or writings in general).[13] According to archaeological and literary evidence, the term *wei shu* 偽書always referred to forged documents at that time.

In the late first century BCE, a certain Zhang Ba 張霸 produced a forgery of a collection of archaic canonical texts called the *Documents* (*shu* 書). Probably following a call to contribute writings to the imperial court in 26 BCE, he submitted

9 From the tomb Zhangjiashan 247 (closed in 186 BCE); see Barbieri-Low/Yates 2015, 392–395.

10 Loyal generals or officials possibly faked commands because of urgency or difficulties in communication, but they were pardoned once they had been cleared of treason.

11 Barbieri-Low/Yates 2015, 428, n. 80: 'Qin and Han official documents written on wooden boards or bamboo slips were bound with a cord and sealed with a "lump of clay" (fēng 封) that received the impression of an official's seal'.

12 The 'exemplary cases' 9 to 12, also found in Zhangjiashan 247, all deal with the forgery of documents; see Lau/Lüdke 2012, 161–176 and Yates and Barbieri-Low/Yates 2015, 1245–1267. In addition, case 14 from a similar collection in the Yuelu corpus also deals with a faked document, a private letter produced in order to obtain certain benefits by fraud; see Lau/Staack 2016, 276–294.

13 Unger 1989, 44 and 132.

a collection of 102 *Documents*, which he had fabricated (*kong zao* 空造) by cutting and re-combining the 29 known chapters and mixing them with texts from other sources. The Emperor compared them with another collection of 100 *Documents* from his private library and found they were completely different. Although Zhang deserved the death penalty, he and his documents were spared because the Emperor liked both.[14] Shortly after Zhang's failed attempt to deceive the Emperor, the 'court librarian' Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE–23 CE) tried to establish the primacy of written evidence over the oral traditions of the Confucian canon still dominant at that time, which were more prone to corruption than the former.[15] His argument was based on manuscripts discovered in the imperial collection or found in other places under rather mysterious circumstances, which contained 'Confucian' texts that were unknown or only known in a different version, which is why they were called fakes by his opponents. These and other forgeries were called 'forged writings' (*wei shu* 偽書) or 'forged classics' (*wei jing* 偽經) later and sparked off a debate on the authenticity of the canonical or 'Confucian' texts, which continued right up to the twentieth century.[16]

The first known catalogue of Buddhist scriptures in Chinese by Daoan 道安 (312–385) used the term 'dubious sutras' (*yi jing* 疑經) for sutras that had not come from India in 374: 'without critical examination, there is no way of distinguishing genuine from fake (*zhen wei* 真偽)', he wrote.[17] In addition, Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518) called them 'forged sutras' or 'forged classics' (*wei jing* 偽經) in 515.[18] In Western scholarship these Buddhist texts have been called 'apocrypha'.[19]

With the exception of the seals and their impressions in clay as means of authentication, what all the cases presented so far have in common, regardless of whether they are legal or canonical (both Confucian and Buddhist), is that their point of departure is the text. A fake document is a material object, of course, but the material support in these cases was only a support for the relevant content. Conversely, one of the fine arts is intimately related to the written artefact.

14 *Lun heng* 論衡 81 by Wang Chong 王充 (27–*c.* 100); see Forke 1907, 448; the *Documents* were a favourite object of forgery; for a brief summary, see Liu G. 2016, 99–110.

15 See Loewe 2015.

16 Fischer 2008–2009 provides a short history of 'authentication studies'.

17 *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 5, in Su/Xiao 1995, 222.

18 *Chu sanzang jiji* 5, in Su/Xiao 1995, 224.

19 See Buswell 1990.

1.2 Replicating: art and religion

The art of writing or 'calligraphy' (*shu fa* 書法) emerged in the second century CE. Copying 'permeates nearly every aspect of this art', and by 'repeatedly copying a piece of calligraphy of another writer, a calligrapher internalizes that person's style'. In addition, copying also served to preserve and transmit earlier works.[20] Apparently similar to Islamic calligraphic tradition,[21] copying was therefore ambivalent: on the one hand, it served multiple honourable purposes, while on the other, copies could be used to deceive people, with a variety of purposes in mind. Robert E. Harrist Jr. distinguishes between two types of calligraphic 'forgeries': a 'good copy gone bad', i.e. a copy originally produced just as a replication of a work for study or other reasons, and 'a work that is not based on a pre-existing model, but executed in the style of another calligrapher or historical period'.[22]

By the fourth century at the latest, works belonging to this art had become collectibles for the rich and powerful, with an aesthetic discourse developing at the same time. The market soon attracted forgers. The imperial clansman Liu Yizong 劉義宗 (d. 444) was an admirer of the works of the famous artists Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303–361) and his son Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344–386).[23] He publicly announced his willingness to pay any price for their works, but then:

> Base fellows cunningly made copies. They used the drippings from thatched roofs to change the color of the paper and further aged it, making it like old calligraphy. Authentic and fake (*zhen wei* 真偽) were mixed together, and no one could tell the difference. Therefore, among works accumulated by the Marquis of Hui, there were many that were not authentic (*fei zhen* 非真).[24]

The memorial to Emperor Ming of Song 宋明帝 (r. 466–472) containing this story was submitted in 470. It was composed by Yu He 虞龢 at the emperor's request in order to identify the authentic works and bring order to his collection.

A few decades later, Emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (r. 502–549) exchanged letters with his friend Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) on the authenticity of pieces in the very same imperial collection Yu had catalogued one dynasty and two emperors earlier. The number of forgeries had obviously grown at such a rate that almost every work was greeted with scepticism by them, with Tao serving the

20 Harrist 2004, 41–42.

21 See the contribution by François Déroche in this volume.

22 Harrist 2004, 34.

23 See Uta Lauer's contribution in this volume.

24 Harrist 2004, 39.

emperor 'as an artistic consultant and as a copyist'. They exchanged detailed arguments as to why a piece should be considered genuine or a copy, in the latter case also trying to determine who the originator was. These copies were possibly 'good copies' or 'honest copies',[25] just like those produced by Tao for personal study and appreciation.[26]

Tao, a Daoist polymath and calligrapher, was certainly qualified for discerning hands, not only because of his artistic family tradition, but because he had started to collect remnants of the 'Maoshan revelations' around 484; in the late fourth century, immortals had visited a certain Yang Xi 楊羲 and revealed texts and talismans to him, either by leading his hand with the brush, by dictation or by showing him heavenly scriptures which he then copied. These writings had already existed prior to the creation of the world, in a supramundane script inaccessible to human beings, and therefore had to be converted into forms manageable by them. Even these forms were only revealed to the worthy ones, however – in this case, Yang and the two disciples to whom he entrusted the manuscripts. The written artefacts as such, the 'traces of the Perfected' (*zhen ji* 真迹, lit. the genuine, i.e. the immortals),[27] guaranteed the authenticity of the teachings. The first forgeries appeared in the early fifth century, making it increasingly difficult to identify the authentic writings. After travelling in Southern China and searching for manuscripts that were not in the imperial collection, Tao edited all the documents he thought were genuine as well as some doubtful cases. His criterion for deciding on the authenticity of a manuscript was the 'inspired hand'[28] of Yang and his two disciples, who had continued to copy the revelations. In his famous work *Zhen gao* 真誥 ('Declarations of the Perfected'), he meticulously recorded all the material traces of the revelations, including the size and colour of the paper slips and the colour of the ink used if it was not black.[29] In fact, the ritual production of apotropaic and other written artefacts still plays an important role in Daoist traditions to this day.

25 Cohen 2002, 22.

26 In *Fashu yaolu* 2, in Jie 1984, 45–54; see Harrist 2004, 42–46 for details.

27 The expression *zhen ji* in contemporary usage means 'authentic traces' of an artist's hand, i.e. an original.

28 Robinet 1993, 29.

29 Strickmann 1977; Ledderose 1984; Robinet 1993, 1–18; Harrist 2004, 40–41.

1.3 Works of art and antiquities on the traditional market

During the Tang period (618–907), works of the 'ancient masters' such as Wang Xizhi could earn 1,000 taels of silver on the art market, a huge sum approximately equal to the salary a lower official earnt over more than thirty years.[30] Forgery of artworks gained momentum again in the late Northern Song period (960–1126). Members of a new social stratum, the *shidafu* 士大夫 or 'gentry', found their identity in traditional art and literature, amongst other things, including material culture as manifested in bronze vessels and stone inscriptions from the past. These objects were collected, catalogued and traded on the flourishing art and antique market. The inscriptions on bronze and stone provided new evidence of the past, and together with the emerging field of epigraphy, the study of them created new, critical approaches to the study of literary sources. Scholarly and commercial interests merged in a vogue of antiquarianism, far exceeding the former circulation of ancient calligraphies and paintings,[31] which incited forgers to create fakes of bronzes with an artificial patina.[32] In addition, members of the new elite not only consumed calligraphies as connoisseurs, but also produced them as the art of writing became one of the tokens of a literate and educated person. The great Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101), famous as an upright statesman, was not only praised for his poetry and paintings, but also for his calligraphy, leading to heavy forging of his works even while he was still alive.[33]

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, famous painters and calligraphers had to hire 'ghost artists' in order to satisfy growing demand for their works. In addition, some of the celebrities forged famous works themselves, at times even adding their own colophons to those pieces, thus authenticating them. Colophons and seal impressions were an important means of authentication, as a connoisseur's seal would signify a positive assessment of the work by a known authority and attest its provenance.[34] Playing with authenticity had its roots in the early phase of the art and even led to open trading in 'counterfeits by famous hands', although these works were still considered less valuable than an original. Only creations by the ghost artists producing 'original' works exactly like their masters' hands were regarded as being as good as the genuine works. At the end of the imperial period, many workshops all over the empire catered to

30 Jang 2016, 60.

31 See Falkenhausen 2013 for a general overview and Sena 2019 on bronze and stone artefacts.

32 Craddock 2016, 356–357.

33 Jang 2016, 64.

34 Fölster 2015.

the needs of different groups, many of them surviving well into the Republican era.[35]

2 Modern forgeries

A new chapter in the history of copying, replicating and forging was opened in the second half of the nineteenth century when Westerners became increasingly interested in East Asian antiquities and works of art. From the late sixteenth century onwards, East Asian artefacts had found their place in the collections of the noble and rich and paved the way for the *chinoiserie* that characterised the eighteenth century. Since there was no expertise on these objects yet, Europeans had to rely on their taste or on locals when acquiring objects. Export industries began to spring up in the seventeenth century, producing porcelain, furniture and other handicrafts for the far Western market. The traditional Chinese arts such as calligraphy and antiquities such as bronzes were only known in general terms.

After the inglorious invasions of the imperial capital by Western powers in 1860 and 1900 and the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911, an international market developed with centres in today's Beijing and Shanghai. In the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese, Japanese and Western dealers tried to profit from the political unrest in China and acquire valuable objects to sell. At the same time, clever business people produced what the market wanted, even if it was only ceramics from late pre-imperial and Han times.[36]

2.1 Medieval manuscripts from Dunhuang

While most of the transactions took place in the treaty ports and those areas officially open to foreigners, the provinces of Xinjiang and Gansu, the Central Asian part of the empire in the northwest became a destination for expeditions by the major powers. The desert sands concealed riches in the form of manuscripts, which were excavated and sold by locals. Forgers took part in their businesses together right from the start, with a certain Islam Akhun in Kashgar, whose Indic fakes even fooled a serious scholar, being the best-known case. Akhun was finally exposed by the Hungarian-British Indologist Aurel Stein (1862–1943).

35 Jang 2016, 63–66.

36 Museum für Asiatische Kunst 2007.

Stein worked for the government in India and was to become the first Westerner to see the famous 'library cave' in Dunhuang in 1907, which was discovered by a Daoist monk in 1899 or 1900. On this occasion, Stein acquired a considerable amount of manuscripts. The French Sinologist Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) arrived only eight months later and also took a cache of manuscripts of a similar size with him when he returned to Europe again. In 1909, Pelliot showed some of his acquisitions to local scholars in Beijing. As a result, the Chinese authorities realised what was going on in the far West and dispatched an official to fetch the remaining contents of the cave and bring them to the capital. They arrived in 1910, but the official was arrested shortly afterwards – on charges of theft. It is still unclear who stole the manuscripts, but scholars agree that copying and forging began soon after it happened. To complicate things, the official mission to empty the cave does not seem to have been entirely successful since subsequent Japanese and Russian expeditions were still able to procure a number of such artefacts. This has led some scholars to suggest that all the objects acquired after 1910 are actually forgeries, while others maintain that most of them are genuine beyond a doubt.[37]

The corpus of Dunhuang manuscripts is huge; it contains tens of thousands of items. The number is difficult to determine, actually, because many of the objects are fragments. In some cases, different fragments belonging to one and the same artefact are now kept by two different institutions, so the original manuscript has effectively been scattered by collectors. The impact of the Dunhuang discovery can hardly be overestimated: large numbers of original written artefacts from the fourth to the eleventh centuries became available to scholars for the very first time. Even though the majority of them contained copies of well-known Buddhist sutras, many of them carried texts that were still unknown at the time, dealing with religion and literature to some extent, but particularly documents concerning everyday life such as contracts. While the study of these texts largely remained in the hands of scholars, the discovery of 'real' handwriting from medieval times also appealed to a large audience of art connoisseurs. The manuscripts were hardly ever meant as works of art, it seems, but calligraphers and connoisseurs started studying and copying them nonetheless. Here we can see the same pattern as the one outlined above: in light of the surging prices for these treasures, trained calligraphers started to produce copies or fakes of them; even 'honest copies' 'went bad' sometimes. At an auction held in 2019, more than US$580,000 was paid for a scroll from the ninth century containing notes on a Buddhist sutra. Together with the catalogue, the auction house

37 Introduction in Whitfield 2002, 1–21; Van Schaik/Galambos 2012, 13–29.

published a volume on the Dunhuang studies of the former owner, a known scholar and collector, thus indirectly providing evidence of its authenticity.[38]

The reluctance on the part of institutions and individuals to admit that they spent huge sums of money on buying a forgery might, at least in part, be responsible for the delay of systematic research. Another reason, however, is probably even more important. Jean-Pierre Drège noted:

> [...] that, although an examination of handwriting usually gives rise to a judgement, this often lacks any methodological basis. Palaeography as it developed in the West has no counterpart in Chinese calligraphy. In the latter case, experience becomes a substitute for method and, as a result, assessment procedures are not easily transmitted. Moreover, it is remarkable that the dating of handwriting, and consequently manuscripts, is more often than not based on styles as defined by historians of calligraphy.[39]

Thus the traditional *calligraphic approach* has dominated the approach to the study of non-calligraphic artefacts for a long time. Only in the second half of the twentieth century were attempts made to remedy this situation, with Fujieda Akira 藤枝晃 (1911–1998) and Jean-Pierre Drège taking the lead. Preliminary surveys of the whole corpus including codicological and palaeographic features have been undertaken, and initial material analyses are now available.[40] Overall and in spite of the growing number of case studies, systematic research on these aspects of the Dunhuang manuscripts is still in its infancy. The situation is even less favourable for medieval written artefacts from other Central Asian sites.

2.2 Ancient manuscripts

In Dunhuang,[41] Stein had not only acquired medieval manuscripts, but also recovered nearly 1,000 wooden and bamboo slips containing administrative documents from signal towers mainly from the first century BCE and the first century CE. In 1930, members of the Sino-Swedish expedition discovered a

38 The scroll had belonged to Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 (1918–2005) and was described by the renowned Dunhuang scholar Fang Guangchang 方廣錩 in the catalogue; see Beijing Wulun guoji paimai youxian gongsi (2019), 14; according to an email sent on 8 October 2019 by Jiao Ao, the company's manager of rare books and manuscripts, the price including the commission for the sale was 4,025,000 yuan (almost US$585,000 on 14 July 2019, the day of the auction). See Jiao 2019 for the accompanying volume.

39 Drège 2002, 44.

40 In addition to the contributions in Whitfield 2002, see Helman-Ważny 2016 and Drège 2017 on the history of Chinese paper.

41 For an overview of the major discoveries up to 2010, see Liu G. 2016, 27–47.

similar site in Juyan 居延/Etsingol yielding more than 10,000 slips and fragments. The study of these documents has remained a highly specialised field that only a handful of historians are exploring. The scribal traces on them were included in studies of the history of the script, but since they were just 'ordinary' documents, they never attracted as much attention as the literary manuscripts produced in medieval times.[42]

In the early 1940s, robbers looted a tomb in the southern province of Hunan and found three silk manuscripts from approximately 300 BCE, which were sold to a US soldier by a Shanghai art dealer in 1946 and are now kept in the Sackler Foundation and the Freer and Sackler Galleries respectively.[43] Because of its previously unknown content, one of these manuscripts, commonly called the *Chu Silk Manuscript*, has received considerable scholarly attention. It was the first complete non-documentary manuscript from pre-imperial China to be seen by modern scholars.[44]

Due to internal strife and war, archaeological activities were only resumed on a large scale from the 1950s. In 1959, tomb Mozuizi 6 in Gansu, dated to the early first century CE, yielded a ritual text written on long wooden slips and already familiar from transmitted literature. From the 1970s onwards, some major manuscript collections were unearthed from tombs, most of them found during construction work and rescued in emergency excavations. The following are just a few of those unearthed well before 2000 (with the assumed sealing dates in brackets followed by the main contents) and excluding those which only yielded written artefacts related to the funeral:

- 1972 Yinqueshan 銀雀山 1 and 2, Shandong (118 and 134 BCE): military theory
- 1972 Mawangdui 馬王堆 3, Hunan (168 BCE): literature, divination, maps
- 1975 Shuihudi 睡虎地 11, Hubei (217 BCE): legal texts
- 1977 Shuanggudui 雙古堆 1, Anhui (165 BCE): literature
- 1983/84 Zhangjiashan 張家山 247, Hubei (186 BCE): legal texts
- 1987 Baoshan 包山 2, Hubei (316 BCE): divination
- 1993 Guodian 郭店 1, Hubei (approx. 300 BCE): literature.

Harvard professor and Confucian Tu Weiming compared the finds from Guodian to the 'Dead Sea Scrolls' and said in an interview in 2001: 'With the discovery of

42 See Guo 2019 for a review of recent Japanese scholarship.

43 See Li L. 2020 on the history of these discoveries.

44 Silk was obviously an expensive writing support and manuscripts made of it were only found in relevant numbers in the tomb Mawangdui 3. Hu (2010) only reports one clumsy attempt to fake silk manuscripts, hence they are not dealt with here.

these texts, I think you can say that the history of Confucianism itself will have to be rewritten', and 'by implication, the history of ancient Chinese philosophy in general will have to be reconfigured'.[45] Whether or not it is really appropriate, this statement reflects the excitement that the discoveries caused among philosophers and intellectual historians of ancient China. Research on the content of these manuscripts naturally dominated scholarly debates in the East and West. This *historiographical attitude* still dominates research today.

An estimate from 2011 states a figure of more than 300,000 slips and tablets, including unprovenanced items.[46] An archaeological survey from 2014 lists 237 tombs from approximately 500 BCE to approximately 500 CE containing a total of 377 manuscripts, including tomb inventories and fragments.[47] New finds are made almost every year, some of which are spectacular. Most of the tombs were discovered on the territory of the pre-imperial southern state of Chu, many of them in the vicinity of its former capital near Jingzhou 荊州 in today's Hubei province, such as Hujia caochang 胡家草場 12 (Figs 1a-c).



Fig. 1a: Wooden and bamboo slips from a bamboo hamper, tomb Hujia caochang 12, Hubei, closed 163 BCE or later (Jingzhou bowuguan 2020, 19).

45 Shen 2001.
46 Liu G. 2016, 46.
47 [Giele] 2014.



Fig. 1b: still in hamper (Jingzhou bowuguan 2020, 19).



Fig. 1c: in situ (Jingzhou bowuguan 2020, 19).

In addition, hoard finds from wells in Hunan province have yielded huge amounts of discarded documents, the most important ones being Zoumalou 走馬樓 in 1996

(third century CE) and 2003 (second–first century BCE), Liye 里耶 in 2002 and 2005 (third century BCE) and Tuzishan 兔子山 in 2013 (third BCE –third century CE).

With the exception of some wooden tablets, most of the written artefacts consisted of wooden and bamboo slips. Originally, these slips had been bound together with strings, but due to their state of preservation the overwhelming majority had decayed. Some surviving specimens and remnants of these bindings showed that their number varied from two to five, according to the length of the slips, which ranged from approximately 8 cm to 80 cm. There was no tradition of codicology to rely on, and real progress has only been made since the turn of the millennium. In the case of bamboo manuscripts, two features have to be mentioned here that were only discovered rather late. Since scholars were eager to decipher the writing on the slips, they neglected their rear side if there was no writing on it. Closer inspection, however, showed that many of the slips were marked with diagonal lines on the verso side (Figs 2 and 3).

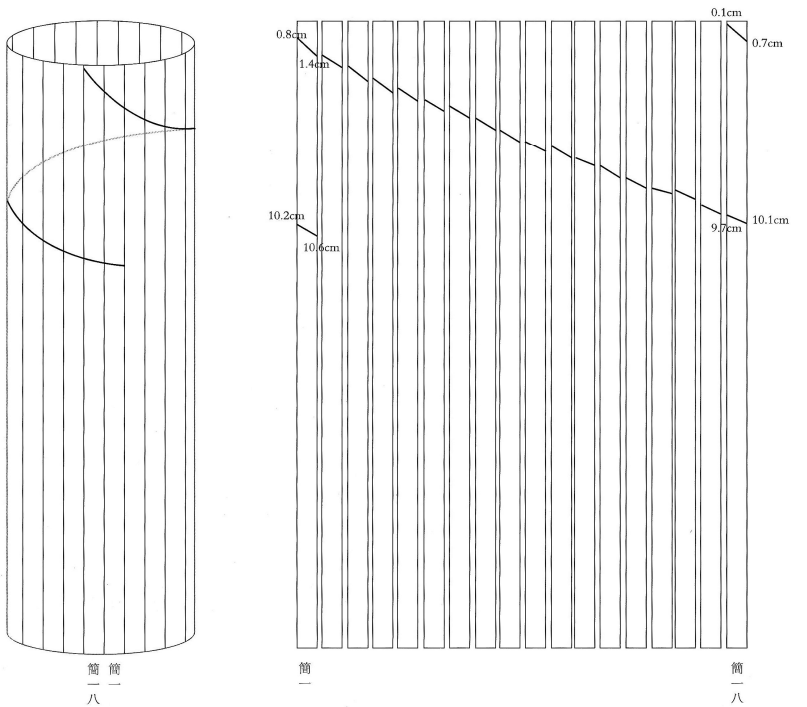

Fig. 2: Spiral-shaped verso line on Peking University *Laozi* slips 1 to 18 (Staack 2015, 164, Fig. 5; Han Wei 2012, 229).



Fig. 3: Tsinghua University *Xinian* group/set 4 (slips 70 to 95) (Staack 2015, 176, Fig. 9).

The original function of these verso lines is still disputed, but since these lines often match up with the sequence of the writing on the recto side of the slips, they can help researchers to reconstruct codicological units if the bindings have been lost. A second feature one can find is imprints of writing on the rear side of the slips, resulting from them being soaked in water for two thousand years. These verso imprints mirror the writing in the exact position the slips had at the time of their entombment, again helping us to reconstruct the original unit (Fig. 4).[48]

48 Staack 2015 and 2016.

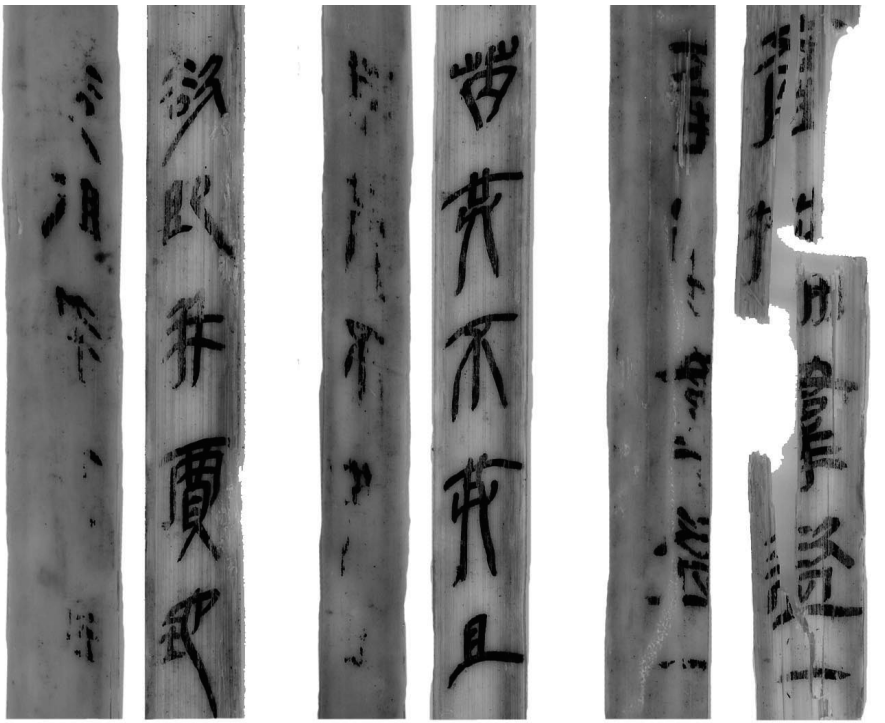

Fig. 4: Examples of verso imprints with their respective recto original counterparts (Staack 2017b, 19, Fig. 8).

Depending on their age and provenance, these manuscripts were written either in the Chu script[49] or in varieties of 'clerical script'. While the latter was already close to the later standard forms and therefore did not pose any fundamental problems in terms of reading, the former was only known from the short texts on the *Chu Silk Manuscript*. Chinese scholars have dated the manuscripts written in Chu script to the middle or late 'Warring States' period, i.e. the fourth or third century BCE, apparently assuming that its use ended after unification and the

49 By using epigraphic evidence, Haeree Park has tried to show that the 'Chu script' preserved on manuscripts should not be seen as an independent writing system, but as representing the script current from approximately 800 BCE to late pre-imperial times; see Park 2016, 22–23, 243.

establishment of the Qin empire in 221 BCE. This previously unknown script possessed quite a few unknown features, and new approaches had to be developed to study it. The calligraphic approach mentioned above added some conceptual problems: in calligraphy, standard styles have evolved that supposedly followed a 'genetic' model, developing one after the other. While the Chu script was absent from this traditional taxonomy, 'clerical' is one of its styles. According to the schoolbook history of calligraphy, it gave rise to a 'standard' form, which, in turn, was followed by 'half-cursive' and 'cursive' – much later, namely in the first few centuries CE, just when calligraphy emerged as an art and probably hardly anyone was still familiar with the ancient scripts. Although it was noted in 1991 that cursive and standard styles probably co-existed at any given time,[50] the genetic model continued to play a role in dating and interpreting the evidence provided by manuscripts.

While the sites mentioned above were scientifically excavated, at least in principle, looted artefacts from tomb robberies started appearing on antique markets in China and Hong Kong in the 1990s.

2.3 Tomb robbing

The looting of tombs must have been a widespread phenomenon in ancient times. When noble people were buried, their tombs were sumptuously furnished with precious objects, which made them attractive targets for thieves and vandals. An 'exemplary' criminal case from the late third century BCE dealt with tomb looting.[51] An anecdotal source reports that Liu Quji 劉去疾 (d. 70 BCE), King of Guangchuan 廣川王, practised it 'as sport', opening all the tombs in his fief.[52] In 279 CE, a robber who had looted a royal tomb from the pre-imperial state of Wei 魏 in Ji 汲 was caught with bamboo manuscripts containing ancient writing.[53] Converting funeral sites into farmland and robbing tombs was done continuously in the past and is still done today, in fact, despite it being a punishable offence.[54]

50 Friedrich 1996, 109.

51 A case of tomb robbery is among the 'exemplary cases' in the Yuelu Academy collection; see Lau/Staack 2016, 129–144.

52 *Xijing zaji* 西京雜記 6; see Kolb 2006, 436.

53 See Liu G. 2016, 17–25.

54 The first extant legal code from 653 contains stipulations on both activities; see *Tanglü shuyi* 唐律疏議 13, article 168, and 19, article 277; for an English translation see Johnson 1997, 142-143 and 286-288.

Following the upsurge of the art and antique market, the looting of tombs intensified in the 1990s in a bid to satisfy the ever-growing demand for such artefacts among collectors. Ni Fangliu 倪方六, a leading Chinese expert on tomb robbing, estimated in 2015 'there may be as many as 100,000 full-time tomb raiders in the country'. Local peasants and migrant workers participate in the trade. Some families have even specialised in looting tombs, doing so for generations in some cases. On top of that, young people have been attracted to the activity after reading or watching the Chinese version of *Tomb Raider*, *Grave Robbers' Chronicles*, which first appeared in print in 2007 and has been successfully merchandised in various media since then.[55] In 2015, 175 alleged tomb robbers were arrested in an operation involving around 1,000 police from six provinces. The *South China Morning Post* reported about it:

> Investigators found a well-oiled network, with different tasks from site excavation to contacting traders on the black market divided between 10 teams.
> To hide its origins, an illegally excavated artefact will usually change hands at least three times – going from looters at a remote rural site through a network of dealers to a regional hub before reaching a port to be shipped overseas, several antique dealers told the *Post*.
> Once the smuggled artefact reaches an international trading centre like Hong Kong, dealers declare it as a Chinese artefact secured overseas that can then be legally traded in the mainland.[56]

Not only works of art were among the artefacts offered in Hong Kong, but manuscripts were as well.

2.4 Unprovenanced ancient manuscripts: looting and faking

The first major ancient-manuscript deal that a Hong Kong antique dealer struck was with the Shanghai Museum, which first bought 1,200 slips in Chu script in May 1994 and then another 500 slips a few months later. And as Hu Pingsheng reported in 2010, negotiations to purchase three caches of approximately 2,000 slips each for Chinese universities had been underway since 2006. All these deals were finalised in little more than a year, from late 2007 to early 2009: a corpus with legal stipulations and practical texts from the late third century BCE went to the Yuelu Academy of Hunan University, a collection mainly containing literary

55 The starting point is the looting of the tomb yielding the *Chu Silk Manuscript* and its 'fraudulent removal' by an American: [Xu] 2007, 6; also see Ge 2015.
56 Ge 2015.

texts in Chu script from pre-imperial times was acquired by Tsinghua University, and the third cache, again mainly with literary texts, but this time from Han times (the second century BCE), ended up at Peking University.[57] Research institutes were established to study these manuscripts, and it became a matter of prestige to own some – in fact, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao 溫家寶 visited Tsinghua University for a personal inspection of the slips in 2009.[58] Accordingly, further institutions of higher education followed: Zhejiang University in 2009 (slips from abroad), Wuhan University in 2011 (from Hong Kong), and Anhui University in 2015 (from abroad). Funds came from alumni or other 'friends of the University' and foundations whose identity was not always disclosed.[59]

Forgeries of ancient manuscripts began to appear on the market in the 1990s. Hu Pingsheng 胡平生, one of China's senior experts in ancient manuscripts, summed up his own experience with forgeries in 2010.[60] He reported thirteen cases in detail that had occurred since 1995 and said that he and his colleagues had been shown fakes hundreds of times in the last twelve years or so. Li Xueqin 李學勤 (1933–2019), the famous historian from Tsinghua University, is said to have seen a corpus of 5,000 slips at a friend's – all of which were fakes. At first the victims of this type of fraud were mainly private collectors in East Asian countries first of all, the objects often being channelled through Hong Kong, but increasingly through the Beijing Antique Market (Panjiayuan 潘家園) as well later on. Fakes were also offered to universities, not just private buyers. In some cases, the forgers just produced clumsy imitations, but in others they imitated the scribal hands found in authentic manuscripts, using content from received literature. In 1996, a manuscript with 82 chapters supposedly from Han times with a text by the ancient military theoretician Sun Wu was the object of heated debates on its authenticity, involving the media and scholars on both sides. The matter finally ended up in court. The experts immediately knew that it was a fake since the first reports had already mentioned that the three units were bound together with strings running through holes and that it was written with lacquer – which genuine manuscripts never contained.[61] The most disturbing instances of forgery,

57 For reports on the acquisitions, see Hu 2010, 104–105; Liu G. 2016, 51–54 (Tsinghua University) and Foster 2017, 181–184 (Peking University); Peking University later purchased a corpus of manuscripts from Qin times, but this will not be dealt with here.

58 Liu G. 2016, 87.

59 If at all, information about this is usually provided in the first public announcements and publications of the slips.

60 See Foster 2017, 173–177 as well.

61 Hu 2010, 89–90. According to Hu, the person having fabricated it including its provenance was well-connected, and in 2004 he started a new attempt to advertise it, see Li R. 2004.

however, were those in which authentic slips were mixed with fake ones. 'Some Hong Kong universities' received a large number of slips in the 1990s, most of which turned out to be fakes and were returned to the dealer. In other cases, hearsay had it that corpora acquired by Chinese institutions at the end of the 1990s also contained fake slips.[62]

Hu supposes that the forgeries may have begun with the replicas and copies produced for museums to sell.[63] To do this, some local museums in Hubei had used slips made from original wooden boards unearthed from tombs. These objects would obviously withstand radiocarbon testing because they were authentic.[64] Finally, Hu asserts that the forgers have made a 'leap forward' since 2008: they not only refined the techniques they used to age materials, but they also greatly improved their ability to faithfully reproduce characters of the Chu script and of the Qin and Han clerical scripts. Some fake slips he had recently seen in Hong Kong were 'of a deep black colour, the writing neatly executed, genuine-looking and, with the exception of a few strokes, hard to distinguish [from original ones], so if one is not really concentrating, one could easily misjudge them'.[65] This advance naturally made it much harder to identify forgeries.

2.5 Identifying fakes

In his article, Hu goes on to propose four 'principles' for identifying fakes. While the last one – provenance – is self-evident, the first three warrant a closer look, especially since *mutatis mutandis*, they remain the point of departure for later authors:

1. 'Characters, style and textual coherence' (*wenzi, wenfa yu wenli* 文字、文法與文理): the 'spirit' (*qi* 氣, lit. 'breath') of the Ancients is difficult to fake; palaeographers can even read the difficult Chu script, but forgers are unable to produce fine works in it; a script style changes over time – even Han clerical changed [which was basically known before] – and if a forger were able

62 Hu 2010, 76–84; for the slips of the Chinese University of Hong Kong see Liu G. 2016, 46 and Chen 2001.

63 See Cécile Michel's contribution to this volume regarding the similar case of the Ready Brothers at the British Museum.

64 Hu 2010, 100.

65 Hu 2010, 101: 黑色濃黑，書體工整，逼真，除了個別字畫外，很難判別，稍不留神便會"走眼". This might or might not refer to the Zhejiang University slips which had also appeared in 2008; see Cao 2011, *Qianyan* 前言, 1.

to grasp the rules of script development, he would not need to be a forger any more, but could become a scholar. The same holds true for the content.

2. 'Material and form' (*zhicai yu xingzhi* 質材與形制): in the North-west, wood is mostly used as a writing support: salt cedar (*hongliu* 紅柳, *Tamarix ramosissima*), *qianersong* 杆兒松 (*Picea neovetchii mast.*),[66] Euphrates poplar (*huyang* 胡楊, *Populus euphraticus*), bamboo (but only for canonical books and important documents). If unearthed and kept away from light, wooden slips can keep their light colour for a long time, but they will darken soon after being exposed to light. Forgers either use fresh wood whose colour is too light or they age it, with the result that the colouring is too homogenous. In the South, slips have been soaked in water for two thousand years, resulting in the destruction of their cells, meaning that they basically resemble spaghetti, which has been impossible to fake so far; forgers prefer wood because it is easier to deal with, but they make mistakes regarding the dimensions of the slips.
3. 'Calligraphy and calligraphic style' (*shufa yu shufeng* 書法與書風): forgers exaggerate certain features of Han clerical, but even in good fakes the 'calligraphers cannot hide their superficial and ordinary spirit'.[67]

This is not an innocent sequence, but clearly signifies the primacy of textual study *based on calligraphy*. While the second of these principles apparently refers to codicology, the first and the third overlap. The first one seems to include philology and palaeography, but we can already see clear references to the art of writing here, and the third one deals explicitly with calligraphy. Hu follows an approach developed by epigraphy, *combining the calligraphic and historiographical attitudes*.[68] We should bear in mind here that in colloquial usage, 'calligraphy' is used for the quality of every type of handwriting, and that the word 'writing' is not only ambiguous in Chinese, as it may stand for composing a text as well as writing it down. In consequence, then, authentic manuscripts retain traces of the spirit of the Ancients. Only scholars can recognise this particular quality, and forgers are never able to reproduce this kind of spirit. If they could, they might as well become scholars – which is obviously thought to

66 Written as 仟兒松 in the article; Hu probably quoted Xia Nai's survey of some newly discovered Han slips from Dunhuang, see Xia 1948, 260. Thanks to Xiaomeng He who provided this reference.

67 Hu 2010, 98–101; Foster 2017, 176 has translated the first three 'principles' as 'textual errors; physical constitution of the manuscript; calligraphy'.

68 He more than once invokes the epigrapher Chen Jieqi 陳介祺 (1813–1884).

be a desirable status. Hu does not mention the other possibility, though – that a scholar might become a forger.

In 2009, Jiang Guanghui 姜廣輝 proposed textual criticism (*wenxian kaozheng* 文獻考證) and intellectual history as a remedy against forgeries since material analysis (i.e. radiocarbon dating) and the assessments of specialists based on experience (i.e. palaeography) were not reliable. He did not rule out the possibility that a 'high-calibre' (*gaoji* 高級) forger might be able to produce a fake that was so good it could deceive natural scientists and palaeographers.[69] Jiang's article was a response to the first publication of one of the texts contained in the unprovenanced manuscripts that Tsinghua University had acquired, which was authored by Li Xueqin; Jiang doubted it was genuine. Just like the article by Li and further debates in the following years, Jiang's critique appeared in the *Guangming ribao*, thus airing this scholarly dispute in public.

In 2012, Xing Wen 邢文 published his arguments disputing the authenticity of one of the Zhejiang University manuscripts called *Zuo zhuan* 左傳. A student of Li Xueqin's and a professor of Asian societies, cultures, and languages at Dartmouth College, he first discussed codicological aspects, then the content and finally the calligraphy: 'the style of writing of the Zhejiang University slips is coarse-looking and very inferior, the structure of the characters confused and faulty, they are vulgar and without rule or any sense of antiquity – they are definitely not traces of writing from the Warring States', he declared.[70] Since many scholars apparently shared this assessment, there was a silent consensus about them being fakes, in spite of radiocarbon dating and ink analysis supposedly confirming their non-modern production.[71]

A similar critique followed in 2016, this time directed at the *Laozi* owned by Peking University. This attack generated heated debates, however, which were additionally fired by the lack of radiocarbon dating and by rudimentary material analyses.[72] Xing mainly based his arguments on features of the verso lines and of characters written on broken slips. In turn, these allegations were critically analysed and refuted by other scholars who had independently arrived at the same conclusion. One of them remarked that his arguments against Xing 'do of course not prove that the Peking University *Laozi* is not a forgery. They can merely serve to disprove or at least put into perspective the arguments advanced to claim that

69 See Foster 2017, 177–178.

70 Xing 2012: 浙大藏簡筆法粗陋拙略，結字混亂錯謬，俗而無法，了無古意，決非戰國書迹.

71 Foster 2017, 178–180.

72 Foster 2017, 183–184; radiocarbon dates were provided for the cache of Qin manuscripts later acquired by Peking University.

it is a forgery'.[73] Since the text of the *Laozi* was well-known, and Xing obviously did not detect any problems here, his analysis concentrated on codicological and palaeographical features.

In the same year, 2016, Ulrich Lau and Thies Staack used the occurrence of verso lines and verso imprints on slips to refute the forgery of unprovenanced manuscripts kept at the Yuelu Academy. Since their codicological relevance was first discussed in publications in 2011 and 2013, forgers could not have known about this feature before, even though the verso lines were already briefly mentioned in a publication from 1991. In addition, the texts contained some formerly unknown linguistic features that were only found later in scientifically excavated manuscripts and thus confirmed the authenticity of the artefact.[74]

A recent attempt by Christopher J. Foster to establish a 'method for positively authenticating purchased bamboo manuscripts' combines Hu's approach summarising the first decades of research with some new ideas 'appealing to more objective criteria' by integrating the codicological argument and generalising it:

> We must identify within the newly purchased manuscripts completely novel features, ideally irregularities that are unanticipated by the current state of knowledge in the field. Such features may include aspects of the manuscript's physical constitution (from raw materials used, to how the strips are fashioned and bound), calligraphy (the type or style of brushwork, unusual character forms), and content (vocabulary usage, odd grammar, surprising facts that go against accepted history, etc.) ... If these novel features can then be confirmed by archaeologically excavated data first available or fully appreciated only *after* the purchased artefact was secured, then we may be convinced of its authenticity.[75]

As the author states, this method was developed while studying a manuscript from the Peking University collection. He convincingly showed that it worked just as well as for the manuscript studied by Lau and Staack, in his case mostly relying on texts only published *after* the acquisition of the Peking manuscript. As much as his methodological optimism is to be applauded, it should be kept in mind that each manuscript, whether genuine or not, is a unique artefact with its own history and might thus require individual treatment. Moreover, it is clear that this 'method' will no longer work for artefacts surfacing once the 'novel features' have been publicised.

One of the latest additions to the debate is an article by Mai Di 麥笛, published at the end of 2019, which draws on recent research. Vehemently defending

73 Staack 2017a, 15; also see Foster 2017, 185–215.

74 Lau/Staack 2016, 12–13.

75 Foster 2017, 215–216.

the authenticity of the Tsinghua University and Anhui University bamboo manuscripts, the author builds on the 'principles' of Hu Pingsheng and develops five criteria for determining a manuscript's authenticity:

1. Judgement based on direct inspection of the writing support (part of Hu's second principle, codicology).
2. Scientific analysis of the support (absent from Hu's list, including radiocarbon dating and comparison with scientifically excavated bamboo slips by non-destructive methods such as infrared spectroscopy and measurement of crystallisation degree and water content; no ink analyses because of the difficulty in taking samples).
3. Form of the support (another part of Hu's second principle, codicology).
4. Structure and style of the characters (part of Hu's first principle and his third principle, palaeography).
5. Elements of content (another part of Hu's first principle).[76]

In conclusion, then, no forger would be able to cope with even one of the five criteria, let alone all of them. While material features have become more prominent and the language less 'calligraphic', Mai leaves no doubt that criterion no. 4 is the most important one. His rebuttal to 'sceptics' only addressing the content obviously targets scholars like Jiang Guanghui who based their doubts about certain texts in unprovenanced manuscripts on textual criticism. The harsh language and the advice to leave these matters to the experts make it clear that there was more at stake here than just an academic dispute.

Li Xueqin was not just *a* historian; he was one of the most influential historians of his generation – a member of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences close to the State Council, an expert in many fields and the mastermind behind the 'Xia-Shang-Zhou Chronology Project' (1996–2000), which established an absolute chronology of Chinese history going back to the late third millennium BCE. This prestigious undertaking involved 200 scholars and produced results that were completely rejected outside China and politely ignored by numerous scholars in the country as well. Using highly disputed methods, it pushed the origins of the Chinese state back a further thousand years to the late third millennium BCE.[77]

76 Mai 2019.

77 See Li X. 2002 for an English presentation of the project. For devastating critiques by two of the foremost Western scholars in the field, see Nivison 2002 and Shaughnessy 2008 and 2011. The project is said to have been inspired by the rich archaeological and textual evidence of Egypt's long history witnessed by Chinese archaeologists in the early 1990s; see Storozum/Li 2020, 16.

Since the Prime Minister had visited Tsinghua University in 2009 to inspect the bamboo slips and looked into the project at the time, it would have been more than embarrassing to admit that there were still doubts about the authenticity of the manuscripts. Furthermore, one of Li's projects was to revise the prevalent critical attitude towards traditional views of the prehistory and early history of China and to restore the credibility of ancient sources.

The texts in the Tsinghua manuscripts obviously supplied arguments in favour of this approach: among other things, they contained one of the lost chapters of the *Book of Documents* and the 'last words of King Wen', as Li called it. King Wen was the first king of the Western Zhou (1050/1045–771 BCE) and later became the ideal representative of legitimate rule in the Confucian tradition. In the text, the notion of 'the mean' (*zhong* 中) played an important role, which was emphasised by Li in order to show that this central Confucian concept could indeed be traced back to the early Zhou. This nicely matched the slogan of a 'harmonious society' with its 'Confucian' elements advocated by General Secretary Hu Jintao 胡錦濤 and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, the same man who had looked into the Tsinghua project in 2009. In his critique from the same year, Jiang characterised the text's notion of the mean as anachronistic and constructed with ideas only developed from the eleventh century CE onwards. The question of authenticity clearly involved a fundamental disagreement on the history and historiography of early China and the role Confucianism played in it.

3 Some observations on method

Science and scholarship can never prove beyond doubt that an object is authentic; in some cases, they may be able to show it is not, but in most, they can only assemble evidence making either option more or less plausible.[78] Just as in other historical enquiries, a consensus among the experts defines what is to be accepted – until better arguments are put forward in favour of the weaker position or another point.[79] The following observations critically examine criteria and arguments for authenticating originals and identifying fakes in order to uncover underlying patterns.

78 See Craddock 2016, 2–5 on the limitations of material analysis and its interdependence with art history. Also see Oliver Hahn and Ira Rabin's contribution in this volume and the introduction in Whitfield 2002 regarding the Dunhuang manuscripts.

79 Koselleck 1977; see Jost Gippert's article in this volume for a case study.

3.1 Material

Almost[80] all of the unprovenanced manuscripts discussed so far consist of bamboo slips, most of which are in scroll form.[81] In some cases, their writing support has been identified as belonging to the genus of *hard bamboo* (*gangzhu* 剛竹, *Phyllostachys*), while in others the reports lack information. No analysis of the species seems to have been made yet.[82] One of Hu's criteria for discerning fakes was the condition of the bamboo slips at the time of acquisition. Genuine ones will have been soaked in water for two thousand years, making them look like cooked spaghetti, which is a condition no forger is able to fake. Why not?[83] One would have to prove this, which is impossible, of course, and there may be methods which yield similar results.[84] A tacit understanding seems to exist that samples of unprovenanced bamboo slips should not be subjected to destructive testing such as fibre analysis or radiocarbon analysis. If slips are tested at all, then only one or two of them, usually just fragments without any writing on them. Sometimes even bamboo objects other than slips are analysed.[85] Sampling methods and procedures which are decisive for controllability are hardly ever mentioned. This means that a forger would just need to insert one or two blank slips or fragments which are often found in ancient tombs into a bundle of fakes to scientifically prove their ancient origin.[86]

A comparative method is employed to determine the relative age of bamboo slips: properties of one or two of the unprovenanced slips are compared to those of fresh bamboo and to specimens from scientifically excavated sites. For two tests of the slips held by the Yuelu Academy and Peking University respectively, one slip unearthed near Jingzhou was analysed (not a slip, but an excavated

80 I am grateful to Oliver Hahn for commenting on a draft of this sub-chapter.

81 One of the few exceptions is a codicological unit consisting of approx. 25 wooden slips in the Yuelu corpus; see Lau/Staack 2016, 18.

82 See Staack 2015, 165; see Huet al. 2011 on the Han slips acquired by Peking University.

83 Craddock 2016, vii: 'This book is intended as a comprehensive guide to the technical and scientific study of the authenticity of a wide range of antiquities and artistic creations'; it does not mention bamboo, however.

84 Apparently, no experimental archaeology has been done on bamboo slips that might help us find out more about the splintering of slips, which has been observed in quite a few cases. Jörg Fromm and Silke Lautner have recently conducted tests showing that maceration of *Phyllostachys* produces results similar to the condition of bamboo slips described by Chinese scholars. Their results will be published shortly.

85 Foster 2017, 180 and 183–184.

86 In Baoshan 2, for example, 170 of the 448 slips did not have any writing on them; see Hubei sheng Jing Sha tielu kaogudui 1991, 3.

'piece of bamboo' was used for the second test) and one from Zoumalou, both of which are sites archaeologically dated to Han times. The fibre structure and water content of the fresh bamboo were completely different to the other ones, which closely resembled each other, thus suggesting a similar date.[87]

In most cases, documentation of the condition of slips is cursory at best, but a quick look will reveal some differences: while the Yuelu Academy slips were received in plastic bags containing eight bundles at least partially maintaining the state they had when they were first unearthed,[88] the Tsinghua University slips 'were bound with plastic wrap, with some of the strips matted on fresh pieces of bamboo, and shut with tape wound around both ends'. Judging by a picture of them, these wraps came in more or less identical batches consisting of two or three dozen slips, which probably no longer looked the way they did at the time of looting.[89] Dissolving the original codicological units would obviously allow them to be manipulated, such as by mixing fake slips among them. In addition, there is always the possibility that one corpus contains slips from more than one spot, leading to different dating.[90]

Furthermore, in most cases where tests have been conducted, only the results have been published, not the reports leading to them, as the following list shows (the initial number of slips includes fragments and is often substantially reduced when fragments are joined after closer examination):

- Shanghai Museum (approx. 2,000 slips): radiocarbon dating (third century BCE), report repeatedly announced, but still not published.[91]
- Yuelu Academy (approx. 2,200 slips): comparison of properties of the slips with those of scientifically excavated Han slips, report published,[92] but no radiocarbon dating.

87 Fang/Tong 2010; Hu et al. 2011; also see Cao 2011, 192–193 and Fang et al. 2012 on the ageing of bamboo.

88 See the report in Chen 2009 and the images in Zhu/Chen 2010, 204–220.

89 Liu G. 2016, 55–56.

90 See the statement by Chen Songchang 陳松長 in Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo 2009, 9–10.

91 Ma Ch. 2001, Qianyan 前言, 2: 'late Warring States' (third century BCE); also see Foster 2017, 172, n. 17.

92 Fang/Tong 2010 compared slips from the Yuelu Academy with Han slips from Jingzhou and Zoumalou and found them to be very similar, unlike fresh ones.

- Tsinghua University (approx. 2,400 slips): radiocarbon dating of one blank fragment (303+/-30 BCE), analysis of water content (400%); no reports published.[93]
- Peking University (approx. 3,300 Han slips): analyses of blank bamboo fragments, red pigments and traces of bindings, report published; no radiocarbon dating.[94]
- Zhejiang University (approx. 160 slips): radiocarbon dating, fibre analysis, depth of ink penetration and comparative infrared spectroscopy, all reports published (approx. 340 BCE).[95]
- Wuhan University (approx. 110 slips): not published.[96]
- Anhui University (no number of slips available): radiocarbon dating ('approximately 2,280 years before now'), no report published.[97]

For preservation and better readability, the slips are usually subjected to chemical treatment that obliterates all possible trace elements that might help in characterising ink and other pigments. Although the routines vary from place to place, a report on the Tsinghua slips is revealing in this regard. Besides being used to kill off mildew, chemical agents are also employed for 'washing' the slips:

> Before photographing a bamboo strip, we needed to decolorize it, that is to say, remove any staining from the strips and return them to their natural coloring. Each bamboo strip has its own unique shading, and because the coloring is not uniform, it is often difficult to obtain ideal results from the photography. Decolorization helps bring the strips back to what was approximately their original appearance. Having gone through this chemical treatment, most of the strips turn beige, which is basically the original color for the bamboo, and the writing on them becomes even clearer, producing superior results during the shoot.[98]

As a rule, the scroll bindings did not survive, but traces of them were often found on the slips. The results of analyses have been published in a few cases; usually it is a variety of ramie (genus *Boehmeria*, *ningma* 苧麻).[99]

Compared to international standards, this data is meagre and does not prove anything. On the other hand, scholars do not usually regard it as being of decisive

93 Just a few lines in Li X. 2010, *Qianyan* 前言, 3; also see Li/Liu 2010, 9 and Liu G. 2016, 79-80. The water content of the slips is said to have been 400%.
94 Hu et al. 2011.
95 Cao 2011, 191–196.
96 Xia Jing 2013, dated to approx. 350 BCE.
97 Huang/Xu 2019, *Qianyan* 前言, 1.
98 Liu G. 2016, 80; see 60 for the mildew treatment.
99 E.g. Hu et al. 2011.

importance: in 2010, the preface to the first volume of the publication of the Tsinghua slips mentions that after authentication by scholars in 2008, the slips were subjected to radiocarbon testing 'in order to verify the scholars' assessment'.[100] In addition, it said the high water content in the slips, which is impossible to fake, was only 'collateral evidence' (*pangzheng* 旁證).[101] The wording leaves no doubt that judgement is first pronounced by the scholars and scientific data is only collected in order to corroborate their assessment.[102]

When 'authenticating' the Peking University slips in 2009, Peng Hao 彭浩 asked why the cinnabar used for writing the titles on one of the Peking University manuscripts looked so fresh and had not come off, because there was no solvent in pre-imperial times. He recommended analysing this material and, being an archaeologist, expressed his hope that

> together with the publication of the slips also reports relevant to authentication will be published. I believe that many tests should be undertaken, but today there is no opportunity to explain. The data on the Shanghai Museum slips from two accelerators reported earlier were extremely divergent, making it difficult to pass judgement, and it was never published how the samples were taken and how they were tested. That rumours about fakes among the Shanghai Museum slips have never stopped, is closely related to the fact that those data were never published.[103]

The Zhejiang University slips were tested most comprehensively according to standards prevalent in China, with the results confirming their age, and all the reports were published – but these slips are generally accepted as forgeries.[104]

3.2 Form

Scrolls made of wooden or bamboo slips, sometimes hundreds of them, were a book form that went out of use for much more than a thousand years and which is only known to us from literary sources. Accordingly, their study only

100 Li X. 2010, *Qianyan* 前言, 3: 為了印證學者們關于竹簡時代的鑒定論斷.

101 Li X. 2010, *Qianyan* 前言, 3.

102 Also see Liu G. 2016, 70–72 on the authentication of the Tsinghua slips. This is basically a clearance certificate by famous scholars without any discussion of possible problems. Since Liu G. 2016 is the English version of a doctoral dissertation supervised by Li Xueqin, one may safely assume that it represents the 'official' story; see Li/Liu 2010, too. Allan 2015, 68–70 quotes articles by Hu Pingsheng and declares the slips to be authentic.

103 Peng's statement was one of the few not only congratulating Tsinghua University and Li Xueqin; see Beijing daxue chutu wenxian yanjiusuo 2009, 9.

104 See Foster 2017, 180, n. 47.

commenced after the first discoveries were made in the early twentieth century. While most of the evidence initially consisted of wooden slips from the Northwestern deserts, more recent discoveries of bamboo manuscripts from soaked tombs and wells in the South confronted scholars with new problems. Only recently has it become clear that despite the apparent similarity of wooden and bamboo scrolls, the production of the latter differs considerably from the former due to the practice of using slips from the same culm segment as a codicological sub-unit.[105]

It has become a commonplace to use the occurrence of verso lines as an argument for the authenticity of bamboo manuscripts if they were acquired before the publication of the seminal article in 2011. As has been remarked more than once, the 1991 report on the excavation of tomb Baoshan 2 already mentioned them, albeit without any reference to their relevance. This argument is persuasive, but it still leaves room for doubt. The short paragraph on those lines *does* contain all the relevant information:

> On the rear side of a few bamboo slips there were diagonal lines drawn with a knife or brush, based on which some of the neighbouring slips could be joined according to their order (*ke juci yici xiangjie* 可據此依次相接), but not others. These two types of lines were possibly a kind of mark (*jihao* 記號) applied before binding the slips.[106]

Twenty years is a long time. What if someone realised this feature – a mark of genuine manuscripts from Chu before its 'official' recognition – and the 'discovery' of the relevance of these lines had been made more than once? It is noteworthy that Sun Peiyang 孫沛陽, the undergraduate student who first published it in 2011, claims to have already noticed this phenomenon 'a few years earlier' while working on one of the Shanghai Museum manuscripts, and articles discussing this feature had possibly even appeared before Sun's did.[107] The presence of these lines in many more corpora, whether provenanced or not, proved that this feature was authentic; it did not, however, prove that every slip was marked in this way. Some statistics would be welcome here in order to assess the presence or absence of these lines properly. How many scientifically excavated objects do they appear on, for example? Is their presence related to any other features, either content-related or material? How should we deal with cases in which a codicological reconstruction does not match the textual reconstruction? Since the verso of the

105 See Staack 2016 for an overview of the history of attempts to reconstruct the original units.
106 Hubei sheng Jing Sha tielu kaogudui 1991, 4; see the slightly different translation in Foster 2017, 218.
107 Foster 2017, 218; Sun 2011, 49.

bamboo manuscripts was long neglected if there was no writing on it, there are still 'authentic' artefacts lacking documentation of the verso today.[108]

The notches used to fix the binding strings are another feature we known of from scientifically unearthed manuscripts. The 1991 report on Baoshan 2 described them in detail, mentioning that most of the slips had them, but a few of them did not.[109] Again, statistics from the whole corpus of archaeologically excavated slips would help us to learn more about their distribution.

The Zhejiang University slips neither have verso lines nor notches – according to common opinion clearly arguments against their authenticity.

3.3 Writing

Palaeography is certainly the softest of the 'auxiliary' disciplines, not only in terms of Chinese written artefacts.[110] Recent advances in tools provided by computer science have not yet become part of the mainstream, thus leaving judgement to the scholarly experts. Western authors sometimes use 'connoisseurship' to refer to the knowledge these scholars have, but this has a rather pejorative ring to it. It might be more appropriate to call it *experience*, as Drège has done, and reserve the other term for amateurs. By handling artefacts over the years, scholars, curators and librarians come to acquire first-hand knowledge of such objects that cannot be gained from merely ruminating on them. This does not mean, of course, that practical experience of this kind is always reliable and should not be open to criticism.

The approach called *calligraphic* above stills informs many of the judgements passed on ancient manuscripts. Part and parcel of this approach is the assumption of a mono-linear, ubiquitous genesis of script styles: Chu is followed by Qin, which, in turn, is followed by Han, which then developed sub-types over the centuries, and this development has been the same everywhere. This model clearly mirrors the imperial state with its central administration, but we simply do not know how effective it was in its early phase. This model could therefore be anachronistic. The dating of artefacts is mainly based on this assumption in many cases, but the situation actually may have been much messier. In the study of art and archaeology, non-synchronous developments of style have been known for

108 See Staack 2017b.

109 Hubei sheng Jing Sha tielu kaogudui 1991, 4.

110 Western palaeography and forensic science have developed their own approaches, some of which might be helpful in the study of Chinese writing as well. See Sirat 2006 on the former, for example, and Nickell 1996 and Koppenhaver 2007 on the latter.

a long time, regardless of whether the reasons for them are regional, religious or political. It has been shown that the Chu script only differs from the script used in other media and states in minor respects.[111] Since the central power of the Qin empire perished before the empire could establish itself firmly and the Han empire only controlled half of its territory in the first decades of its rule, it is actually more likely that regional and other traditions continued to co-exist until well into the second century BCE at least. Most of the unprovenanced manuscripts are dated to exactly this period, namely the late fourth to the second century BCE.

Some scholars still seem to assume that the palaeographic evidence was produced by a more or less homogenous group of scribes. In 1998, however, the writing found on the Guodian manuscripts was described by the eminent palaeographer Qiu Xigui 裘錫圭 as 'crude, with many basic mistakes in the characters, suggesting that the scribes were not highly educated' and indicating 'incompetence'. Li Xueqin drew attention to some of the Shanghai Museum's slips having 'a high standard of calligraphy, which indicates the scribes were highly skilled professionals', but he also referred to 'basic mistakes' they had made, which could be 'attributed to carelessness or simply irresponsibility'.[112] Regardless of whether the scribes were professionals or lacked education, mistakes in writing were to be found everywhere. What exactly were the standards for 'correct' writing? What were the criteria for committing a mistake? And who produced these artefacts? Were the scribes members of the hereditary offices known from ancient literature?

The *Statutes for Scribes* (*Shi lü* 史律) found in a tomb closed in 186 BCE stipulate that, in principle, scribes employed in the administration were trained as apprentices in their families and were tested on their proficiency in eight styles of writing, but the expanding empires needed many more scribes than the traditional families could supply. This led to an 'opening of the scribal profession' beyond the hereditary profession and the emergence of 'administrative literacy'.[113] Recent research has brought to light that broken or erased slips were used for practising writing.[114] Some of the arguments put forth against the slips of Zhejiang University might thus be invalidated: faulty writing on broken slips may simply represent exercises and not a lack of competence on the part of a forger.[115]

111 See Park 2016.

112 Allan/Williams 2000, 134 and 133, n. 22: 'The identity of the scribes was not a specific topic of discussion'.

113 Ma Ts. W. 2017, 301–304.

114 Guo 2019, 341.

115 Foster 2017, 180.

Why exactly those pieces of writing would have been thought worthy to follow the owner into his tomb is another question, of course. Some of the ancient Chinese manuscripts or fragments thus might be closer to what papyrology deals with than the tradition of literary transmission investigated in Classical Studies, but without knowing more about *scribal practices* of the time, we can do little more than speculate.[116]

All this suggests it might be helpful to jettison the anachronistic calligraphic model and consider a basic distinction developed by Latin palaeographer Bernhard Bischoff (1906–1991). William G. Boltz has applied this distinction between 'book hand' and 'casual writing' or 'refined' and 'utilitarian' to Chinese manuscripts. In principle, it does not necessarily signify a distinction between different levels of competence by the producers, but signifies different statuses for the artefact – writings executed in book hand signify higher status than those in casual or cursive hands. One of the surprising results of applying this distinction to ancient Chinese manuscripts is the fact that some of the funeral texts like the inventories are produced in much higher 'calligraphic' quality than those literary texts modern scholars are interested in.[117] This phenomenon cannot be explained by palaeography alone, but has to be seen in a broader archaeological context.[118]

A discomforting observation was made by Peng Hao, namely 'unusual features in character structure in texts that have different calligraphy', meaning that some characters do not match the 'style' of the main body of writing. If this stands the test and is not a singular phenomenon, it will have consequences for the reconstruction of manuscripts as well as for the identification of scribal hands.[119] The fact that slips written by another hand than the main scribe's were inserted into manuscripts raises similar concerns.[120] In one scientifically excavated legal manuscript from the second century BCE, at least three different hands have been identified, and a mathematical manuscript from the same tomb was written by two hands with different tasks.[121] What is the reason for this and how widespread were such practices?

116 See Ma Ts. W. 2017 for a detailed analysis of the findings at Xuanquan 懸泉 in Gansu province.

117 Boltz 2012–2013 on the manuscripts from Guodian 1.

118 See B. Wang 2020 for a selective but systematic survey of the archaeological context of manuscripts recovered from tombs.

119 Allan/Williams 2000, 134.

120 Feng 2017, 189.

121 Tomb Zhangjiashan 247 again; see Morgan/Chemla 2018.

Modern scholars compare individual characters in order to identify or distinguish particular hands. Providing *all* occurrences of one character in a manuscript are taken into consideration, this method can work quite well.[122] In many cases, however, just a few occurrences are selected in order to support an argument. This makes it rather difficult to arrive at safe conclusions in the case of very large manuscripts with a restricted vocabulary from an administrative background where writing must have been standardised to a certain degree. Furthermore, writing not only means producing one 'atomic' unit after the other, but it involves more or less continuous movement of the individual's hand. In the study of modern signatures, this characteristic style is called 'physiological habit', which the individual cannot abandon and unconsciously sticks to even if he or she wants to deceive the reader. It can therefore allow us to identify the originator if these traits are already known.[123] Now, the reader may remember Harrist's words quoted above, namely that by 'repeatedly copying a piece of calligraphy of another writer, a calligrapher internalizes that person's style'. What 'copying' means in calligraphy and the other arts is copying a writer's or painter's 'physiological habit', which is widely thought to be individual and unchangeable.[124] How long would a skilled calligrapher need to 'internalise' the style of writing that an ancient scribe employed? Hu Pingsheng's remark that very good fakes have appeared on the art and antique market since 2008 should not be forgotten. Hopefully, it is just a coincidence that some major corpora of unprovenanced manuscripts were acquired that same year.

3.4 Content

In his critique of the textual approach, Mai accused some scholars of exclusively relying on the content to identify fakes in a malicious way: if the content of a manuscript is known, it is copied; if not, it is made up.[125] Even if this statement is overly apodictic, it still points to a fundamental problem. The period to which the unprovenanced manuscripts have been dated is not known very well: there are only a few literary sources available, and these often have widely differing

122 See Morgan/Chemla 2018, 158–160 for an assessment of earlier attempts at a 'graphological' analysis of single characters.

123 G. Wang 2019; see Mohammed 2020 for a tool that is not based on individual characters.

124 This is how Han van Meegeren was able to produce new Vermeer paintings and how Zhang Daqian created new works of the masters of bygone centuries, deceiving everyone, including the critics; see the introduction to this volume.

125 Mai 2019.

interpretations. Archaeological evidence has already shown us more than once that most of them present partial views that are partisan.[126] The chances of finding materials that neither fit in with literary evidence nor our present ideas of the past are high. If such materials are scientifically excavated, no one will doubt them, but if they happen to surface on the antique market, debates about their authenticity are sure to follow.

Criticising what he called the 'positivist paradigm' in art history, which would include the calligraphic approach exemplified by Hu Pingsheng in our case, Jerome Silbergeld stated the following back in 1999:

> What this positivist paradigm does not prepare us for, it seems to me, is the possibility that some very fine forgeries might seem to us, in our imperfect state of knowledge, even more real, even more authentic, than the real thing; that some copywork or pastiche might seem even more true to its subject than the original. Conversely, we might misjudge some authentic but anomalous works that come along because they radically disrupt our current understanding of what is normal in, let us say, tenth-century painting style and because they require a thorough redefinition of that norm.[127]

The consequence of this for forgers is clear: either copy works that are already known (with a few slight modifications) or modify or re-write known texts, thus producing a new 'work'. Imagine stock phrases or patches of text from transmitted works being 'copied and pasted' and configured anew. While discussing the content of some of the Shanghai Museum manuscripts, it was noted that many of the 'new' philosophical or historical texts were not actually as new as they seemed to be, as most of their content was already familiar from received literature.[128] This observation confirms the claim made above that scholars' historiographical approach influences the study of the content in the artefacts. Whenever archaeologists unearth new materials, 'everything after the inception of the Neolithic – the period corresponding with the time of Sima Qian's mythical rulers – is, to the traditional Chinese scholars, potentially the subject of textually-based inquiry'.[129] The Han-era historian Sima Qian (*c.* 140–*c.* 85 BCE) presented a mono-linear sequence of rulers and dynasties up to his own time. Li Xueqin's chronology project actually tried to prove the existence of the Xia, one of these prehistoric 'dynasties'.[130]

126 Selbitschka 2011.

127 Silbergeld 1999, 164.

128 Hans van Ess in a lecture at CSMC on 31 October 2013.

129 Selbitschka 2015, 7 quoting Falkenhausen 1993, 841.

130 Selbitschka 2015; whether or not this approach should be understood as nationalist, regionalist or traditionalist is of little importance here.

An archaeologist like Peng Hao has an important voice in the study of ancient manuscripts, but this cannot belie the fact that the majority of scholars involved in this field are philosophers, intellectual and other historians, integrating the new material evidence into their textual cosmos. They interpret and re-interpret concepts, sentences and texts in the context of literary transmission, thus focussing on a small segment of the much richer world of ancient knowledge and knowledge practices. Whether provenanced or not, ancient manuscripts help to recover domains eliminated from transmission, such as law, administration, medicine, mathematics or divination. These domains were probably much more significant for contemporary everyday life than Confucian or other lore, which played a local or regional role at most before the late second century BCE. In addition, the archaeological evidence allows us to reconstruct practices no longer visible in later unified accounts produced by a central court.[131] The study of these manuscripts is in the hands of a small number of experts, however.

The hierarchy of the content found in manuscripts is evident: literary texts occupy the highest place, legal and practical texts follow, and administrative documents, which are plentiful, are at the bottom of this pyramid. Forgers would naturally be less interested in producing everyday documents than philosophical texts, unless they had authentic documents among which the fake ones could be hidden.[132] By default, then, manuscripts containing legal stipulations and rulings are more likely to be genuine than those containing philosophical texts. Archaeological evidence is not accepted as such, but only as 'collateral'.

3.5 Scholars and forgers

Librarians have become thieves stealing books that are in their custody, curators have done the same with works of art, and scholars have turned into criminals as well. As the contributions to the present volume show, scholars have stolen ideas and forged evidence at all times and in all places. Their motives may differ and the impact of their activities may be felt to varying degrees, but it is either naïve or arrogant, or both, to assume that 'true' scholars were and are immune to the temptation of meddling with their sources. What's more, the faking industry is different to the tomb-looting business. While very practical skills are required for the latter, the former employs artisans and craftspeople, many of whom have a

131 See Harper 2016 and Chemla 2018, among others.

132 Which seems to happen quite often in the case of cuneiform clay tablets, as Cécile Michel has pointed out to me.

background in the arts or in scholarship. As science progresses, so does the art of faking. Some scholars seem to assume that forgers are illiterate, but in other countries convicted forgers have often been well-educated and well-read people, making them much closer to their own sphere than scholars would like to acknowledge. The study of literature on authentication would be part of their job anyway. It is only natural, therefore, that the quality of fakes should continue to improve, as Hu Pingsheng has also noted. Furthermore, looted manuscripts only need the assurance that they were excavated, exported, re-imported and constitute artefacts of high cultural and national value to be marketable to collectors around the world. This is an effective substitute for the provenance which has to be created in other cases.

Even scientifically excavated corpora may not be beyond doubt, however, as early rescue operations in particular were carried out under extremely challenging conditions: over a short period of just two or three weeks, a handful of professional archaeologists had to uncover huge tombs with the help of unskilled labourers. In some cases, scientifically excavated manuscripts disappeared after the very first report. In others, decades went by before they were published, and in other cases a report will probably never appear.[133] In principle, it can neither be ruled out that genuine objects were taken from such excavations and sold on the antique market nor that fake artefacts were slipped into scientific excavations, thus 'establishing a context' for them.[134]

On the other hand, scholars *are* involved in the art and antique market. Their expertise is needed to authenticate artefacts, and it is not improbable that they are remunerated for their advice. If a well-known scholar judges an object to be genuine, then its value is sure to rise. Ancient manuscripts are not comparable to calligraphic works that fetch millions of dollars, of course, but there is profit in this trade, too. Hu noted that a dealer had asked 750 yuan for the manuscripts later acquired by Tsinghua University and Peking University, which was approximately US$105 at the time – *per slip*. The Qin legal manuscripts purchased by the Yuelu Academy were cheaper (500 yuan/US$70), probably because there was little demand in this specialised field of study. Hu does not disclose how much was paid in the end,[135] but serious crimes have been committed for much less than 200,000 dollars.

133 The findings from tomb Huxishan 虎溪山 1 in Hunan province (excavated in 1999) still await publication; for an 'unfortunate tomb' see van Els 2009.

134 See Craddock 2016, 16–17.

135 Hu 2010, 102.

3.6 Ethics

Looting and illegal artefact trafficking are prohibited all over the world now, and everyone involved in it can expect to be punished severely. Chinese scholars know this as a matter of course and have discussed the dilemma posed by the appearance of unprovenanced cultural heritage on the international art and antique market. As far as ancient manuscripts are concerned, two arguments in favour of their acquisition are put forward. First, the condition of them, which is very poor; without immediate treatment, they may get damaged beyond repair. Second, if they are not repatriated, they may go to other countries.[136] Hu Pingsheng warned that private collectors should be dissuaded from buying ancient artefacts, as this group of buyers constitutes the main audience for the tomb raiders. He reports using two arguments to this end: first, private collectors do not have the expertise and the technical means to deal with the poor state of these manuscripts, thus endangering their very existence; second, because of their lack of expertise, it is very likely that they will fall prey to forgers. A handbook on the scientific investigation of fakes pursues the same line: 'Unfortunately, the likelihood that a piece has been stolen or looted does not seem to deter purchasers; the possibility that it is forged does'.[137]

Most scholars do not seem to have any scruples about using unprovenanced manuscripts for their research. In 2013, however, Paul R. Goldin correctly pointed out 'that the study of an unprovenanced manuscript from most other parts of the world would be frowned upon – and some academic journals might, on principle, refuse to consider articles' like his own on one of the Shanghai Museum manuscripts, in which he voices these concerns. He concludes that 'scholars must not contribute to the sale of looted antiquities by providing authentication and expertise, and that by referring to such objects in print, we inescapably provide authentication and expertise'.[138] Foster has presented arguments justifying the study of unprovenanced manuscripts in general beyond his own research on one of the Peking University manuscripts. He suggests

> to weigh between, on the one hand, the material and intellectual losses that may be suffered in the future by further incentivizing looting and, on the other hand, the material and

136 Hu 2010, 105–106.
137 Craddock 2016, 21.
138 Goldin 2013, 157–158.

> intellectual losses we will suffer imminently by neglecting looted artifacts already on the market, as well as the future loss of neglecting those that may surface later.[139]

What Foster means here is that the handful of scholars in the West seriously studying ancient Chinese manuscripts have little or no impact on the field, which is dominated by colleagues from East Asia, even if the occasional appearance of Western scholars at a conference might lend prestige to the collections of unprovenanced manuscripts. There is no indication at all, however, that Chinese academia will terminate their work just because some scholars in the West tell them to. The second argument concerns a heightened awareness of the value of bamboo manuscripts. Since many robbers were looking for valuable works of art in the 1990s, such as ancient bronze vessels, they left the manuscripts behind or even let them burn. This kind of loss might be prevented in the future by teaching the robbers not to disregard the slips, thus giving them 'a chance to survive for future generations',[140] if only as an incidental catch. This pragmatic argument would certainly not satisfy Goldin, but there is yet another facet to it.

Goldin claims: 'If one wants to study excavated artifacts, there are plenty of properly excavated materials still awaiting thorough investigation'.[141] Indeed, there are many provenanced manuscripts that have not been fully explored yet. The only problem is that results from research on unprovenanced manuscripts have infiltrated all the related fields since the late 1990s, from palaeography to intellectual history. If one took Goldin's approach seriously, then many aspects of ancient Chinese history would be anathema or be reset to the state the field was in twenty years ago, because there is little chance any more of disentangling the results obtained from genuine finds and dubious evidence.[142]

At the end of the day, this might just call for a return to basic scholarly virtues: a critical examination of all the evidence while not taking too much for granted. The ethical issue, however, will have to be resolved by every scholar individually.

139 Foster 2017, 233.

140 Foster 2017, 238.

141 Goldin 2013, 158. In this article, Goldin first discusses textual problems in an unprovenanced manuscript before advising the reader not to do so and blaming the German Research Foundation (DFG) for funding a project on the Yuelu collection; two volumes edited by him include articles using such artefacts: Goldin 2017 and Goldin 2018.

142 I am grateful to Ondřej Škrabal for pointing this out to me.

4 Concluding remarks

We will possibly never know for certain whether the unprovenanced manuscripts held by public institutions in China are fakes. As long as scientific analyses remain as cursory and ill-documented as they are at present, the shadows of doubt will not disperse, and judgement will remain an exercise in philology and history. Since the period under scrutiny is little known with the exception of few literary sources, scholars' decisions are even more tentative than they are anyway. While the calligraphic approach is slowly giving way to palaeographic study, the historiographical approach is still dominant.

The prosecution of tomb looting in China in recent years may help to discourage potential robbers. Will it also deter potential forgers from producing fake manuscripts, though? Even if this may not work for private collectors, there have been no reports on new acquisitions of unprovenanced written artefacts by public institutions since 2015. And this, at least, is promising.

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