

Alienness and (Religious) Otherness in Late Medieval Inscriptions. A Case Study on the Epigraphic Shaping of Christian Self-Representation

Andreas H. Zajic*

This article examines images of (primarily religious, but – at least implicitly – also ethnic) otherness as featured by late medieval inscriptions from Austria and its neighbours. As an introduction to the topic, the author first presents a 19th-century epitaph from South Tyrol (Italy) that is dedicated to the memory of a youth originating from (modern) Sudan who, following his baptism, was brought to Europe by his mentor, a Tyrolean missionary. The exemplary religious lifestyle of the Catholic young man honoured on stone seems to have been directed to the local Christians as an exhortation to develop more religious zeal. Second, the study assesses a memorial erected in 1304 by the Benedictines of Altenburg Abbey, commemorating (pagan) Cumans that were killed on the grounds of desertion (as military allies of the Austrian duke in his campaigns against the king of Bohemia) and assaults against the (Christian) civilian population in battle, of whom 104 were finally buried by the abbot and the monks in a mass grave close to the monastery. A younger inscription (dating from the second half of the 14th century) serves as an epigraphic admonition to Catholic believers entering (what is now) St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna to refrain from pagan idolatry, an appeal that was staged by presenting (today lost) statuettes of either antique or Cumanic origin. Finally, the text investigates the lavish tomb slabs of two Gypsy leaders (from the early 16th century) in Pforzheim and Tulln, who were buried in the respective churches. Highlighting the sharp contrast between the predominantly negative image of alien pagans from the earlier monuments to the self-conception of the Gypsy chiefs as assimilated Christians in their ultimate media of remembrance, the author points out that the process of epigraphic othering served to foster common self-conceptions of the Christian majority society.

Keywords: Epigraphy, Late Middle Ages, self-representation, otherness, Cumans, Gypsies, religious orthodoxy, funerary monuments, battle memorials

* **Correspondence details:** Priv.-Doz. Dr. Andreas Zajic, MAS, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for Medieval Research, Head of Department Text Edition and Source Studies – MIR, Hollandstraße 11-13 (4th floor), A-1020 Vienna, Austria, andreas.zajic@oeaw.ac.at. The author is in charge of the Austrian branch of the international epigraphic edition series “Die Deutschen Inschriften”.

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It is a truism that social groups and societies rely on a large and complex set of rules and practices in order to ensure integration.¹ Narratives and images in which the identity of the community was stabilised likewise helped to create a coherent self-consciousness. Since “processes of group formation [include] labelling, boundary-making and stereotyping”² of concurrent or opposing groups, the perception or rather construction of otherness³ always had an important share in establishing and affirming the self-conception of communities. Or, in other words: the construction of identity requires a process of othering, which can be defined as:

the simultaneous construction of the self or in-group and the other or out-group in mutual and unequal opposition through identification of some desirable characteristic that the self/in-group has and the other/out-group lacks and/or some undesirable characteristic that the other/out-group has and the self/in-group lacks. Othering thus sets up a superior self/in-group in contrast to an inferior other/out-group, but this superiority/inferiority is nearly always left implicit.⁴

Rather than opposing superior in-groups and inferior out-groups, some othering strategies “create distance between self/in-group and other/out-group by means of dehumanizing over-inflation of otherness. The other then, is not so much (implicitly) inferior, but *radically alien*.”⁵ The arsenal of relevant text- (and image-) bearing media that helped to put this process of othering in place included, alongside the mobile manuscripts, acts and charters, immobile or loco-static writing: inscriptions. Placed in more or less openly accessible or restricted spaces,⁶ they could – whether one wishes to attribute to them an inherent “agency”⁷ or not – promote an “internal” communication aimed at the self-perception and self-justification

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- 1 Literature on the topic is abundant; for a good introduction, see the summary of relevant strands of interpretation in Lutter, *Conceiving of medieval identities*.
 - 2 Mayall, *Gypsy Identities*, 3.
 - 3 Woolf, *Knowledge*, 55: “perception of others is part of the process of the construction of the self.” German-speaking scholars seem to prefer the term “alterity” (*Alterität*) rather than “otherness” with a slightly shifted connotation and methodological impact, cf. an overview of the more specific theoretical concept and its history by Becker and Mohr, *Alterität*. On the concept of “otherness”, its many facets, and its history, see Goetz and Wood, *Introduction*, esp. 23: “‘Otherness’ is not just there; it is a matter (and process) of mindset and construction.”
 - 4 Brons, *Othering*, 70; cf. also Ertl and Mayer, *Acculturation* 93.
 - 5 Brons, *Othering*, 72 (emphasis in the original). Brons’ notion “radically alien” seems to be closely related to the significance of “otherness” as “not simply the unlike; it is the very negation of the same”, see Harland, *Rethinking ethnicity*, 113.
 - 6 I have dealt extensively with strategies of placing inscriptions in public (urban) space in an earlier article: Zajic, *Texts* (with select bibliography on the spatial turn and its impact on [post-Roman] epigraphy).
 - 7 Cf. the paradigmatic sketch of Karagianni *et al.*, *Materialität*, on the agency (“Handlungsmacht”) of material “things” pp. 36-38; a round table discussion convened by my colleague Andreas Rhoby in the course of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016, applied the concept to inscriptions (*The Agency of Inscriptions in Byzantium, in the West, and in the Slavonic World*), see: https://www.academia.edu/27904640/THE_AGENCY_OF_INSCRIPTIONS_IN_BYZANTIUM_IN_THE_WEST_AND_IN_THE_SLAVONIC_WORLD (accessed on 1 December 2021).

of communities; on the other hand, they could also address a wide variety of beholders by communicating self-representation to non-group members, thus creating an external impact and maintaining external communication.⁸ Both functions will be illustrated in the following article, which strives to explain strategies of framing alienness and otherness in (pre-) modern inscriptions, predominantly from a sepulchral context, by way of a closer examination of a few instructive epigraphic monuments from Austria and its neighbours. It will become evident, I hope, that images of Others and aliens frequently served to shape the self-consciousness and self-conception of Central European societies.⁹ The sample I am drawing on is primarily focused on the topic of religious otherness,¹⁰ but includes more or less explicit notions of ethnic otherness¹¹ and “deviant” lifestyles. Whereas the greater part of my examples will be from the later Middle Ages, I shall start with a memorial that goes back to the era of colonialism.

In Lieu of an Introduction: Admonition Through a “Christian Savage”

The hotel “Elephant” in the centre of Brixen (South Tyrol) is a remarkable place in many regards. Having lodged travellers from near and afar from 1551 and still being run by the same family since 1773, this “venerable institution”¹² is full of lovingly preserved souvenirs of the past. While most guests will indulge in reminiscences of prominent guests long passed, including European royalty of the 19th and 20th centuries, whose visits were frequently recorded on a wooden commemorative panel in the hall on the first floor, only those who are interested in the history of the long-standing house will, upon special request, receive a tour through the less prominent or rather remote parts of the building. Among the treasure trove of objects mirroring a number of centuries which the hotel and the city of Brixen have witnessed, one finds a collection of funerary monuments attached to the walls of the basement vaults of the historic building. When, sometime around 1930, the ever-expanding burial space in the arcades of Brixen cathedral was getting short, the pertinent authorities decided to dispose of older burial places and their related inscribed monuments. The then owner of the hotel, Wolfgang Heiss, had a keen interest in history and was eager to preserve those material remnants of the past. After some negotiation with the authorities, he was allowed to acquire the surplus stones, which he finally had attached to the basement walls of his hotel.

8 The concept of “object links” between human beings and artefacts to which certain meanings were attributed by users/actors and which had their share in shaping practices of material objects, thus generating new significance, meanings and practices, as suggested recently (see the collective volume Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit, *Object Links*), seems worth further consideration.

9 In this regard, my study is also inspired by the underlying thinking of the classic account by Said, *Orientalism*, who pointed out that the paradigm of orientalism helped to create more coherent European self-images. On images (in the strict sense) in this context, see Patton, *The other*, and the articles in Eisenbeiß and Saurma-Jeltsch, *Images*.

10 Scholars seem to prefer the long-established dichotomy of orthodoxy/heterodoxy when discussing related problems, cf. Head and Christensen, *Orthodoxies*. Whereas these terms seem appropriate in investigations of diverse or concurrent doctrines, confessional heterogeneities, and deviant practices of cult within one (more or less) distinct religion, I will – in accordance with my topic – examine inscriptions that regard “infidels” and “pagans” as fundamentally Others and thus apply the term “religious otherness”.

11 However, at least for the period under scrutiny, religion, not ethnicity, seems to have been the “decisive criterion for demarcation” between factions and groups among composite (multi-religious and multi-ethnic) societies, see Ertl and Mayer, *Acculturation*, 87.

12 Cole, *Der Weg des Elephanten*, 322. On the history of the hotel, see Heiss, *Weg des Elephanten*.

Among the large number of tablets, tomb slabs and epitaphs, the monument that immediately captures the attention of modern beholders is a large sandstone epitaph commemorating a most peculiar deceased (Fig. 1). The entire inscription, consisting of 33 centred lines in epigraphic Fractura reads as follows¹³:

Hier ruht / Franz Xaver Logwit / aus den Stam(m)e der Bari=Neger, / geboren um das Jahr 1848 in der / Missionsstation Kopadiur bei Gondokoro in / Centralafrika und dort getauft am 1. Juli 1855, durch / besondere Fügung Gottes nach Europa geführt, / am 25. Sept(ember) 1863 in Brixen angekom(m)en, / am 27. Dez(ember) 1866 gestärkt mit den h(eiligsten) / Sterbsakramenten im Herrn gestorben. / Festes Vertrauen auf die göttliche Vorsehung, / rührende Andacht zum allerheiligsten Altarsakra=ment und Betrachtung des Leidens Jesu, kindliche / Liebe zu Maria, Verehrung der Heiligen, / besonders der h(eiligen) Martirer, hilfreiches Mitleid mit / den armen Seelen im Fegfeuer, Geduld im Leiden, / Zutraulichkeit und Dankbarkeit zeichneten / den from(m)en talentvollen Jüngling aus. / Andenken an seine / Großeltern / Basilius Lutweri, Häuptling von Kopadiur, / getauft am 14. Juni 1854, gestorben am 27. April / 1858, der erste christliche Bari=Neger, und dessen Gattin Luzia, getauft und gestorben 1857; / Geschwister / Lazarus Pithia, get(auft) 1. Juli 1855, gest. 1860; / Magdalena Kiden, get(auft) 1. Juli 1855, gest. 1862; / Gregor Utschon, get(auft) am 2. gest(orben) am 3. Nov(ember) 1855. // „Jch bitte, bete auch für meine Landsleute“ // „Bitte, Him(m)elskönigin Maria für die unglücklichen / Neger, / Auf daß sie mit uns theilhaftig werden der / Verheisungen Christi“. Pius IX.

Translation:¹⁴ Here lies Franz Xaver Logwit from the tribe of the Bari Negroes [sic!], born c. 1846 in the missionary station of Kapadiur near Gondokoro in Central Africa, where he was also baptised on 1 July 1855, led to Europe by God's will, arrived at Brixen on 25 September 1863, passed away in the Lord, consoled with the last rites on 27 December 1866. The pious and gifted young man was noted for his firm trust in God's providence, his moving devotion to the sacred eucharistic sacrament and the contemplation of the passion of our Lord, his child-like love of Mary, veneration of the saints, notably of the saintly martyrs, beneficial sympathy with the poor souls in purgatory, patience in his suffering, trustfulness and gratitude. To the memory of his grandparents, Basilius Lutweri, chief of Kopadiur, baptised on 14 June 1854, deceased on 27 April 1858, the first Christian Bari negro, and his spouse Luzia, born and deceased in 1857, his siblings Lazarus Pithia, baptised on 1 July 1855, deceased 1860, Magdalena Kiden, baptised on 1 July 1855, deceased 1862, Gregor Utschon, baptised on 2, deceased on 3 November 1855. I beg you, pray for my countrymen! Pray, Mary Queen of Heaven, for the miserable negroes, so that they may with us partake of Christ's promises. Pius IX.

13 This article applies (with slight modifications) the transcription guidelines used within the world's most productive edition series of post-antique inscriptions, "Die Deutschen Inschriften", publishing inscriptions from Germany and Austria up until c. 1650. The series currently comprises more than 100 volumes in print, a good number of which are also available through the online database DIO (www.inschriften.net).

14 All translations in this article are by the author.

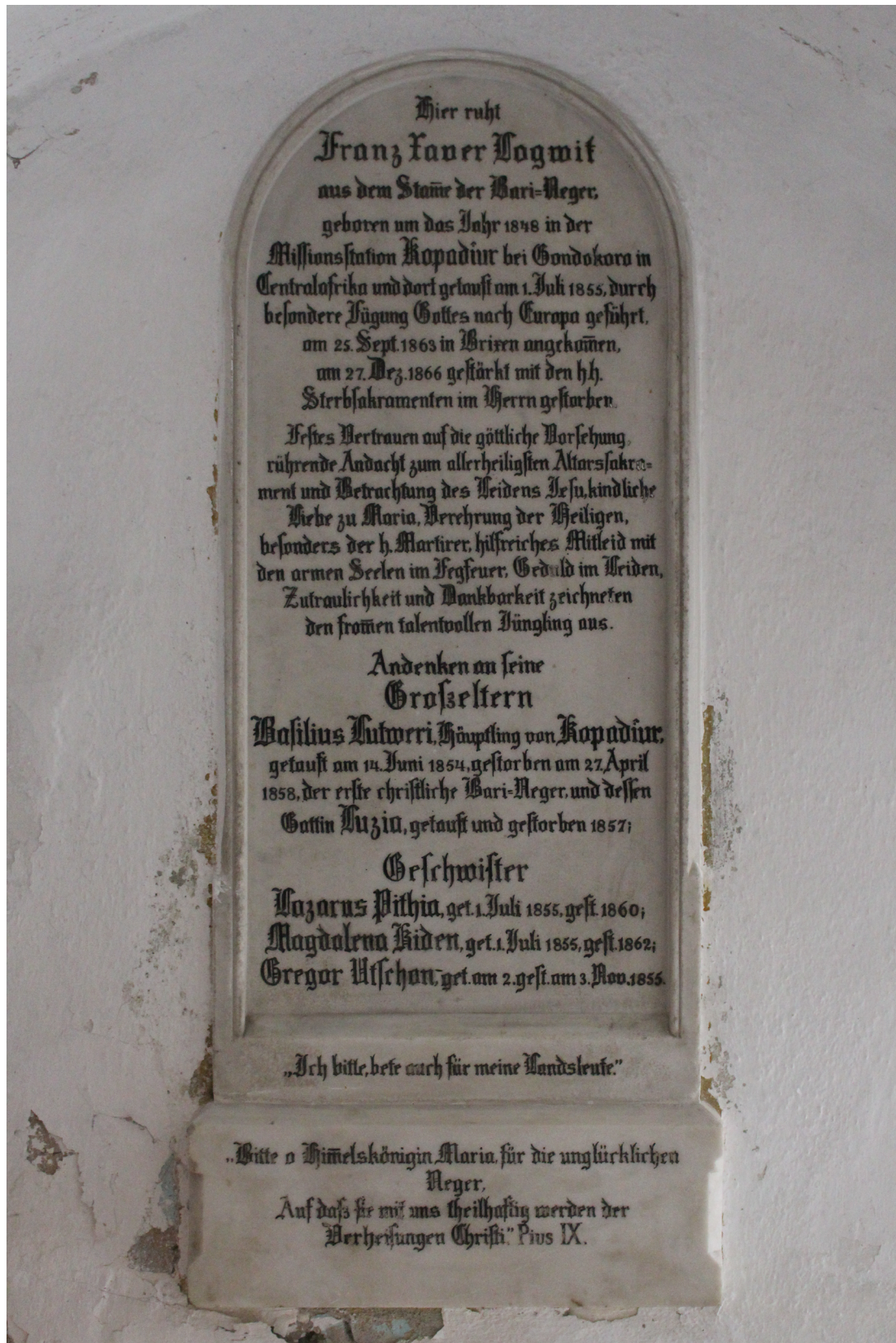


Figure 1: Epitaph of Logwit-lo-Ladú (d. 1866), Brixen (Italy, South Tyrol), Hotel “Zum Elephanten”.

This is not the place to dwell on the baffling number of derogatory terms used in the text – composed at approximately the same time as the US army first called “buffalo soldiers” to arms – that modern readers must feel offended by. True to our topic, we have to restrict ourselves to an analysis of the textual strategies applied in order to evoke images of otherness around which the entire text seems – if not at first glance – to pivot. The attention paid to Logwit by the epitaph is justified not only by his notable Christian faith and religious devotion (far more than by his [intellectual] skills, which are only referred to superficially), but also by the fact that he was the offspring of an elite or ruling family, thus expressing the importance of hierarchy in “primitive” societies just as in European culture. Moreover, Logwit’s family is depicted strictly according to the dominant modern European conception of a patrilinear family, leaving aside the more complex ties of kinship that probably seemed irrelevant to the commissioner of the inscription. Moreover, we are informed that Logwit’s grandfather was the first baptised member of his tribe, which confers upon the family another attribute of historical legitimation.

In a certain sense, Logwit is presented as a special case of an older literary stock character, that of the “virtuous Indian”¹⁵ or noble savage: in the Brixen inscription Logwit represents a “Christian savage”, a figure that was not so much – given the public the monument could possibly address in the cemetery of Brixen – appealing to passers-by to imitate the example of the deceased by underlining the religious orthodoxy and great piety in spite of Logwit’s being converted from a pagan and tribal African background. Rather, it seems quite clearly to act as a triumphal monument: by opposing Logwit’s primitive tribal and pagan origins – he was, in fact, born to the family of the local political and religious leader (*matat*), who in 1853 had sold a piece of land in Kopájur close to Gondókoró to the Jesuite missionaries headed by the pro-vicar Ignaz Knoblecher (actually: Knoblehar)¹⁶ – to the success that religious instruction by the missionaries had on him, the text cannot but be interpreted as a statement of the enormous impact that conversion had on “primitives”. It is hardly by chance that the inscription introduces God’s will as the fundamental reason for Logwit’s “transfer” to South Tyrol and that after all, according to the inscription, Logwit was deeply grateful for his conversion and relocation, even though he died only three years after his arrival in Brixen. What is more, the plinth of the epitaph bears a double inscription relating to the efforts made for the salvation of the pagan primitives by the missionaries: taking up a locus classicus of funerary inscriptions, Logwit himself addresses the passers-by and begs them to pray for his countrymen. The meaning of this does not remain unclear for long: it is the concluding reference to Pope Pius IX’s wish that Mary should help the miserable negroes partake of the well of grace and of Christ’s promises, that points out that Logwit was hoping for a general conversion of his countrymen to Christianity.

Much could be said here on the sharp contrast between the very short reference to Logwit’s skills and intellectual gifts (“*talentvoll*”) in the epitaph and the actual role he played during the formative phase of Austrian African Studies in the mid-19th century as an important interpreter and authority on Central African languages and ethnography to his Tyrolean “promotor”, Father Franz Morlang.¹⁷ Whereas inscriptions apply strategies of communication with a more or less restricted audience, in view of the location of the inscriptions in different

15 See Onuma, *Otherness*.

16 Rohrbacher, Franz Xaver Logwit-lo-Ladú, 53.

17 See Rohrbacher, Franz Xaver Logwit-lo-Ladú.

spaces, and their texts are generally shorter than other textual media to which they refer, it is interesting to learn that contemporary newspaper articles did mention Logwit as a key figure for any research on historic languages of modern Sudan, since he enabled Johannes Chrysostomus Mitterutzner, a Brixen clergyman and teacher who commanded 14 languages, to publish – shortly after Logwit’s death – two internationally acclaimed monographs on the languages of the Dinka and the Bari – an opus that earned the author an Austrian order of merit and prizes and honours from several European scientific institutions.¹⁸ Raised as a semi-orphan from the age of five in the missionaries’ school in Gondókoró, Logwit’s linguistic talent was only discovered in 1855, when Anton Überbacher met the boy at the mission’s school. When the station in Gondókoró closed, the boy was meant to become an ordained priest and to take over the missionary work with his countrymen following studies in Rome and was thus – of his own free will and not forcibly – brought to South Tyrol. Due to the lack of a vacant scholarship for Logwit’s Roman studies, he continued his secondary education at the Stiftsgymnasium of the Augustinian canons at Neustift Abbey close to Brixen, where Mitterutzner became his teacher – and vice versa.

The Brixen monument seems to present a paradoxical case in terms of its internal textual argumentation. It commemorates a deceased who must have appeared as a natural alien to his Tyrolean contemporaries. Since Logwit was a foreigner in so many regards, the inscription does not have to go to great lengths to evoke the notion of otherness when introducing its protagonist.¹⁹ What is striking is that the amount of text that refers to his faith in God and his pious lifestyle clearly prevails. The text is implicitly an admonition to an audience *born* into a Christian society and environment: if this remarkable alien who had gone a long way from his native pagan origins to the refined life (and premature death) as an exemplary model of religious zeal – a telling example of positive racism – managed to obtain God’s grace by leading an honest life as a true believer, how much easier should it be for the native Christians to adopt a life according to God’s commandments and to sip from the well of grace? In this sense, Logwit was introduced as an outstanding outsider who, notwithstanding his baptism and integration into a Christian society, remained an alien even in terms of his exemplary and extraordinary faith. On closer inspection, the actual biographical data on Logwit provided by the memorial did not exclusively serve to deliver information on the vicissitudes of his life, but rather to sketch an “exotic” or “other” backdrop to an implicit admonition addressed as a matter of fact to the local (white) Tyrolean reader.²⁰

18 See Rohrbacher, Franz Xaver Logwit-lo-Ladú, 50–51. It seems that Mitterutzner truly acknowledged Logwit’s role as his teacher and source of the Bari language, calling him “Mein Schwarzer Lehrer in der Bari-Sprache” (my black teacher of the Bari language) in one of the books, printed in 1867; *ibid.*, 52.

19 The tension between two seemingly opposed identities that are sometimes simultaneously ascribed to people of colour in a largely homogeneous “white” society still remains crucial to the view of their work today. See Barratt-Peacock, *Concrete Horizons*, 177: “In these cases [two earlier poems composed by the Australian Indigenous poet Watson] ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Black’ are depicted in binary opposition to the city or European cultural heritage.” In contrast to this, more recent poems from the same author signal “a shift away from a strong binary between Aboriginal and White Australia, towards the assertion of highly specific heterogeneous identities” (*ibid.*, 178).

20 Cf. the analogous purpose of African scenery in motion pictures shot for a white European audience as described by hooks, *Black Looks*, 374: “Films like *Heart Condition* [emphasis in the original] make black culture and black life backdrop, scenery for narratives that essentially focus on white people.”

A “Christian” Burial for the Killed Pagans

Several hundred kilometres northeast of Brixen, we find an older monument that addresses the burial of aliens from distant countries in a completely different manner.²¹

In 1892, during construction work in the village of Altenburg in Lower Austria, a stone stele with a badly damaged inscription and an incised cross was found.²² The archivist of the eponymous Benedictine abbey, Friedrich Endl, a keen protector of material cultural heritage, was informed of the find and arranged for the stone to be transferred to the monastery.

The stone of greyish-yellow conglomerate rock (most probably Gföhler Gneis²³) measures approximately 107 cm in height, 60 cm in width and between 11 and 20 cm in depth. It consists of a base section occupying about the lower third of the total height and a much less thick section making up the upper two thirds (Figs. 2a and 2b). One broadside of the monument (hereafter referred to as the front for differentiation) shows in its upper two thirds a Latin cross carved with a triangular notch into the relatively rough surface with straight-ending, approx. 7-8 cm-wide bars, growing directly from the shoulder of the base.



Figure 2a: Memorial of the “Battle of the Cumans” (front), 1304, Benedictine Abbey of Altenburg (Lower Austria).

21 I have dealt with the following in greater detail in an earlier German article: Zajic, Kumanenstein.

22 Endl, Notiz, and NN., Gedenkstein; Zajic, Kumanenstein.

23 The indication of the material is taken from the catalogue article in *Das Alte Kloster*, no. 29.

Above the crossbar and parallel to it at a distance of about 1.5 cm from the base line is an inscription carved in an almost round triangular notch, which continues in a second line within the crossbar. The upper end of the cross, the end of the first line of inscription and the right end of the horizontal crossbeam with the line of inscription are lost, as the upper right-hand edge of the surface split off in a curving line starting about 15 cm from the left edge at the top of the stone and leading to the right end of the crossbeam. The other broadside (hereafter referred to as the reverse side) features an eight-line inscription, also carved with an almost round triangular notch, on a clearly smoother surface compared to the front side.

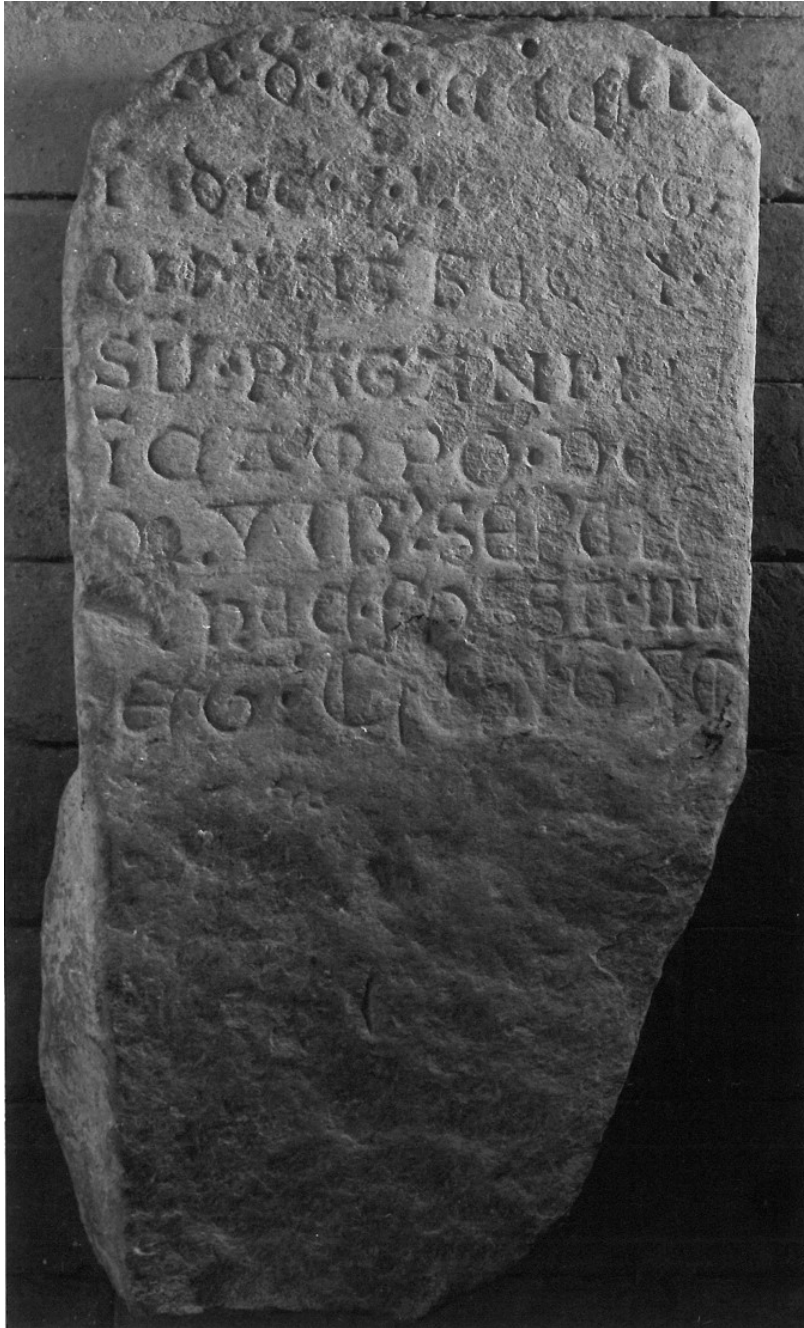


Figure 2b: Memorial of the “Battle of the Cumans” (reverse side), 1304, Benedictine Abbey of Altenburg (Lower Austria).

The reverse side bears stronger evidence of weathering, and the right half of the inscription is also heavily worn due to mechanical stress, with the right edge showing only extremely faint remnants of letters in places.

From what has been said (and because of the arrangement of the inscriptions) it is clear that the monument must have been standing upright in the open for a very long time, exposed to the effects of the weather, presumably with the uninscribed part, described above as the plinth area, sunk into the ground. Older literature, which will be discussed below, proves that the stone served as a doorstep for some time, i.e. it was placed horizontally, at a point in time towards the end of the 18th century that cannot be specified more precisely. This circumstance explains the fact that the reverse side is both more weathered and – in contrast to the front side – worn, whereby the right, more damaged edge probably functioned as the entrance side. It seems likely that the aforementioned break-off on the front had already occurred before the slab was used as a threshold, which is why it was decided to place the damaged side with its base forming a small step in a horizontal position, at the bottom, and the back side, which is smoother (even more so today due to wear), facing upwards.

The inscriptions are cut in Gothic majuscule with letters about 4-5.5 cm in size and read:

Front:

TEMPORI[BVS] / ABATI(S) SIFRI[DI]

Reverse side:

A(NNO) · D(OMINI) · M · CCC III[I] / I(N) DIE · S(ANCTI) · LE[O]DEGA/RII · INT(ER)
FEC[T]I · / SU(NT) · PAGANI · [HIC] / I(N) CAMPO · DE / QVIB(US) · SEPULT[I] /
I(N) HAC · FOSSA · IIII · / <ET · C[E]NTVM>

Translation: At the time of Abbot Seifried (front), In the year of our Lord 1304, on St Leodegar's day, the pagans were cut down here in the field. One hundred and four of them are buried in this grave (reverse side).

The inscriptions thus offer two (as we shall see, complementary) dates: on the one hand a period defined by the reign of Abbot Seifried, and on the other hand, an exact date specified by indicating the incarnation years and the day according to the Roman festival calendar. Furthermore, it is clear from the wording of the inscription on the back that this date refers to a military event (*campus* in the sense of a battlefield) in which unspecified “pagans” were killed and subsequently buried. According to the inscription, the place of the battle as well as the place of burial is marked by the stone itself.

The statement in the text thus confirms the conclusion reached above on the basis of its preservation that the stone was initially erected in the open air, i.e. *in campo*, in the broadest sense of the term. Even if the original location cannot be determined, the earliest credible source suggests that the stone was still on site towards the end of the 18th century, In 1823 Friedrich Reil wrote that this monument “had still been seen by the present Father Burkhard from Altenburg Abbey, and a farmer from the village of Altenburg had had it lying in front of his threshold for a long time”.²⁴ Apparently, Reil refers to two successive sites the stone occupied: first the position at what is assumed to be the original unspecified location, then the

24 Reil, *Wanderer im Waldviertel*, 69.

secondary use as a threshold. However, in 1823 the stone seems not to have been there anymore, because Reil obviously did not see the monument himself. Schweickhardt's account, published in 1839, merely repeats Reil's second statement in which he states that the stone "had been lying in front of a farmer's doorstep from the village of Altenburg for a long time".²⁵ In his *Stiftsgeschichte* (History of the Abbey) from 1862, Honorius Burger writes with regard to the memorial stone:

(...) and is to be found there [in the village of Altenburg]. (...) and there [i.e. near the "Heidenteich" in the vicinity of Altenburg; author's note] is said to have been a memorial pillar, which, however, was casually broken off 60 years ago, and is said to have been used by a farmer as a doorstep.²⁶

It seems paradoxical that Burger, who obviously did not see the stone with his own eyes, was later named as the witness for its location during his reign: "Abbot Honorius Burger has seen the aforementioned memorial stone used as a step in front of a house in the village of Altenburg."²⁷ Eventually, according to Helmling, the stone was found as a "paving stone" in 1892.²⁸ In any case, it is undisputed that it has been kept in the museum at Altenburg Abbey since it was lifted in 1892.²⁹ Having clarified the preliminaries of the find history in detail, which seems justified by the contradictions presented, the content of the inscriptions will now be discussed.

On St Leodegar's Day (2 October) 1304, near Altenburg Abbey, 7,000 Cumans were allegedly put to flight by the troops of King Albrecht I. In the ensuing battle, between 400 and 500 Cumans were killed, the rest driven out. Since this military event has hardly found any major echo in the Lower Austrian regional historiography, let alone in the historiography of Austria as a whole, and the role of the Cumans in the second half of the 13th and at the beginning of the 14th centuries in Central European history is not generally known, a few introductory

25 Schweickhardt, *Darstellung*, 11.

26 Burger, *Geschichtliche Darstellung*, 32. The map of Austria below the Enns from the "Josephinische Landesaufnahme" (1773-1781) (see <https://maps.arcanum.com/de/map/firstsurvey-lower-austria/?layers=151&bbox=1725229.1684572338%2C6211730.477822628%2C1743411.6265605702%2C6218571.591854151>; accessed on 1 December 2021) shows a nameless small pond (north)west of the monastery, immediately south of the road leading to Fuglau, which is almost certainly the so-called "Heidenteich" (the "Pagans' Pond"), most probably close to the spot where the corpses were buried in 1304 and hence named accordingly. Immediately north of the road the map shows a stone cross that is not necessarily identical with the stone of 1304, since it is still included in the "Francisco-Josephinische Kataster". On the map of the "Franziseischer Kataster" (1823), the pond seems to be registered as parcel 829 (see <https://maps.arcanum.com/de/map/cadastral/?layers=3%2C4&bbox=1733517.7188340172%2C6214253.667088684%2C1738063.3333598513%2C6215963.945596565>; accessed on 1 December 2021). The situation seems almost unchanged in the "Francisco-Josephinischer Kataster" (1869-1887), which still displays the pond and the cross, see <https://maps.arcanum.com/de/map/thirdsurvey25000/?layers=129&bbox=1729834.714590587%2C6213788.395581668%2C1738925.9436422552%2C6217208.95259743>; accessed on 1 December 2021).

27 NN., Gedenkstein.

28 Helmling, *Führer*, 45.

29 Mentioned by Strommer, *Stift Altenburg*, 15 (no. 1).

remarks may not seem inappropriate. In the late 11th and 12th centuries, the Cumans (Lat. *comani* and *cumani* from Gr. koumanoi or komanoi, Middle High German *Valwen*³⁰), a nomadic Turkic people from the Eurasian steppe, dominated an area from the Lower Danube in the west to the Aral Sea or even the Talas River in Central Asia in the east. Living primarily from modest agriculture and periodic raids (for slaves and luxury goods), the Cumans also maintained trade relations with Byzantium and the Latin West. Initially followers of shamanic cults, Islam partially spread among them in the 11th century; from the 13th century onwards, orthodox and Catholic missionaries (esp. from the Dominican and Franciscan orders as well as the Teutonic Knights) began their attempts to convert them, but Christianisation was not completed until the 14th century.³¹ Lacking political unity in terms of a proper central authority, but thanks to their remarkable military strength as equestrian warriors (and paid as mercenaries, by plunder and loot), they formed important allies of surrounding empires such as the Kievan Rus' or the Latin Kingdom of Constantinople, but continued to make frequent raids on neighbouring territories (such as Byzantium in the 11th and 12th centuries). In Hungary, as a result of the loss of their old habitats in the steppes north of the Black Sea due to the Mongol invasion or Tatar conquest between 1237/1241 and 1245, between 20,000 and 40,000 Cumans were resettled against the resistance of the Hungarian nobles under King Béla IV.³² Since this settlement in Hungary and throughout the Balkans, Cumans are repeatedly found as lightly armed mounted auxiliaries in battles, where they are always mentioned in close connection with the Hungarians, as for example at the battle of Dürnkrut and Jedenspeigen in 1278 on the side of Rudolf of Habsburg's allies.³³

In 1304, Cumans also formed part of the army of King Charles of Hungary, who, together with the Roman King Albert I and his son, Duke Rudolf of Austria, led an armed campaign into the lands of his opponent in the dispute over the Hungarian royal crown, King Wenceslas of Bohemia. A contemporary account of the events is given by the chronicle of the Cistercian abbey of Zbraslav/Königssaal (today a part of the city of Prague),³⁴ which (drawing on a number of common *topoi*) reports alleged acts of murder, homicide, torture and inhuman and immense cruelty ("*inhumana ac immanis crudelitas*"), including the abduction of

30 The term *valwen* (in English *fallows*, meaning people of a pale complexion) is unlikely to have been coined by "white" inhabitants of Central Europe, but appears to be a designation "imported" from other peoples from the steppe countries. On the common European stereotypes of Others with a dark complexion, cf. Hunt, *Skin*.

31 Spinei, Cuman bishopric.

32 For a succinct recent overview, see Kovács, *Kumans*; for more comprehensive accounts, see Vásáry, *Cumans*, who provides a valuable synthesis, esp. for the relations of the Cumans to the Golden Horde, in spite of severe criticism of his methodology. Among the most authoritative monographs, mention must be made of Kovács, *A Kunok története*; cf. also Kovács, *Origins*; Gurevich, *Image*; Uzelac, *Cumans*. Archaeological evidence is used extensively by Lyubyanovics, *Socio-Economic Integration*.

33 See ample information on the battle, including a precise assessment of the Cumans' role, in Kusternig, *Probleme*; *idem*, *Studien*.

34 *Petra žitavského kronika zbraslavská*, ed. Emler, 88-89: "*Interea dux Austrie cum Ungaris, Bulgaris et paganis crudelitate comitante ipsum per Morauiam fertur feritate ferina [...] virginum quoque et matronarum ac ceterarum mulierum greges misere extra terre terminos ab illo exercitu paganico terribili sunt educti*".

women and the killing of children, committed by the Cumans as allies of King Albert against Moravian civilians. In the course of the campaign, the Austrians complained about the allied Cumans, who were accused of similar serious attacks on the civilian population of Lower Austria. There are primarily three approximately contemporary annalistic sources for these events, namely the *Continuatio Zwetlensis tertia*,³⁵ the so-called *Annales Zwetlenses*³⁶ and the so-called *Styrian Verse Chronicle (Steirische Reimchronik)*.³⁷ According to the *Continuatio*, the Cumans had been allowed by Duke Rudolf to loot and abduct Christian people “*loco solarii*”, i.e. in lieu of pay,³⁸ though it seems reasonable that this concession applied only when the troops remained in the enemy territories north of the Austrian borders. Apparently, however, the Cumans continued to plunder after they had entered the dukedom of Austria, although they had been warned to stop.³⁹ Towards the middle of September 1304, however, the complaints of the Austrians in the camp of the allies between Weitra and Gmünd increased, so that King Albert felt compelled to intervene and demanded the release of the human booty, which the Cumans were rumoured to be more eager to obtain than any other treasure.⁴⁰ After refusing the surrender, c. 7,000 of the Cumans and Hungarians allegedly decided to flee by night, as already stated above. After their desertion became known, Duke Rudolf ordered 4,000 well-armed horsemen commanded by Meinhard von Ortenburg to pursue the fugitives, about 400 of whom were stopped and killed “*in die beati Leodegarii una feria sexta*”⁴¹ between Feinfeld and Altenburg. The rest of the former allies were driven out in the direction of Eggenburg and Kühnring, the liberated prisoners initially remained in Altenburg. The fallen, however, were treated in the following way:

*ubi [i.e. in Altenburg] etiam cadavera occisorum hinc inde sparsa per agros per abbatem loci collecta, ac in foveam grandem, ne aerem corrumperent, sunt proiecta; inter quos quidam nobilissimus comes, qui dicebatur dux ante Silvam, est occisus.*⁴²

The less detailed *Annales Zwetlenses* repeat the statements of the *Continuatio* and conclude with the dating *Facta est autem hec strages in die sancti Leodegarii martiris*.⁴³

35 *Continuatio Zwetlensis tertia*, ed. Pertz, 654-669.

36 *Annales Zwetlenses*, ed. Pertz, 677-684.

37 *Ottokars Österreichische Reimchronik*, ed. Seemüller.

38 *Continuatio Zwetlensis tertia*, ed. Pertz, 660: “*spoliis et captivitate christianorum, que dux loco solarii ipsius [sc. Cumanis] indulsisse dicitur*”.

39 According to the *Verse Chronicle*, the Cumans claimed that they were not acquainted with the exact borderline: “*dô jahan si für den munt, / in wæren unkunt / diu gemerke der lant*”, *Ottokars Österreichische Reimchronik*, ed. Seemüller, vv. 84385-84388.

40 *Ottokars Österreichische Reimchronik*, ed. Seemüller, vv. 84393-84396: “*swâ si kâmen hin / durch roubes gewin, / dô stüend in nâch liuten der muot / mêr danne nâch dem guot*”.

41 On St Leodegar’s day, a Friday, *Continuatio Zwetlensis tertia*, ed. Pertz, 661.

42 *Continuatio Zwetlensis tertia*, ed. Pertz, 661, translation: Here, the abbot of the village also had the bodies of those killed and scattered all over the fields collected and thrown into a large ditch so that they not pollute the air. Among them, there was a most noble prince by the name of Duke Before the Woods [apparently a commander/chieftain from Transylvania].

43 *Annales Zwetlenses*, ed. Pertz, 680.

The *Styrian Verse Chronicle* estimates the number of killed Cumans even higher: “*die ze fliehen wâren laz, / der wurden an dem nâch jagen / wol funf hundert erslagen*”⁴⁴. It also gives evidence about the days after the battle:

*dô der âbent ane gie, / dô kômen alle die, / die mit nâch jagen / der Valben heten vil erslagen / und die niht verrer mohten komen. / herberge wart genomen / bî Horne vil nâhen. / ein klôsterlîn si da sâhen / in den selben kreizen, / was Altenburc geheizen. / darin legten sich die herren; / von einander niht verren / daz ander gesinde lac. / unz an den funften tac / heten si dâ bit*⁴⁵.

In the light of the sources,⁴⁶ it is not difficult to relate the inscription on the stone to the “Battle of the Cumans” in 1304, yet the reason for the creation of this curious monument remains open to assessment.

One of the most common motives for erecting monuments to the memory of the dead, the written supplementation of the liturgical memoria, can be ruled out here: after all, the inscription explicitly refers to those killed as “*pagani*”, while the sources mentioned above usually speak of “Comani” or “Valwen”, and only rarely of “heathens” instead. Rather, the monument is concerned with the depiction of the event, which is probably based on knowledge and personal experience: both the number of dead and the matter-of-fact reference to the Cumans only as “*pagani*” imply necessary background information on the part of the commissioner of the inscription and its contemporary reader. If, in addition to the function of historical remembrance in a public space, the monument marks the actual place of the event, it can be assumed that there must be a functional connection between the memorial stone and similar stone crosses which were erected to commemorate an accident or murder at the site of the event. Such a memorial stone is described by Adam of Bremen as early as the end of the 10th century: “(...) *Burwido fecit duellum contra campionem Sclavorum, interfecitque eum; et lapis in eodem loco positus est in memoriam*”.⁴⁷ A monument in the form of an inscribed crucifix, dating from approximately the same time as our stone, was placed on the site of the battle of Hasenbühl near Göllheim (Palatinate) in 1289 for King Adolf of Nassau soon after the event.⁴⁸ That the Altenburg stone undoubtedly stands in a tradition of similar monuments, most of which, however, have not come down to us from so early a period, is

44 Of those who were too slow to escape, about 500 were slain in a chase, *Ottokars Österreichische Reimchronik*, ed. Seemüller, vv. 84772-84774.

45 *Ottokars Österreichische Reimchronik*, ed. Seemüller, vv. 84805-84819, translation: When the evening closed in, / all those who had chased / and slain a good number of the Fallows / and could not get any further, / came to be lodged / in the vicinity of Horn. / They saw a monastery nearby in the same region, that was called *Altenburc*, and the lords came to rest in it; the servants lay not far from them, and they stayed there until the fifth day.

46 I gratefully acknowledge the additions provided by Kren, Fußnoten, to the limited number of relevant sources I had drawn on in my prior article.

47 Burwido fought in a duel against the champion of the Slavs and killed him; then a stone was set in the same place in his memory, Adam von Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, II.18, ed. Schmeidler, 74; Possibly the stone was still there in Adam’s time, so that he knew it from his own experience, see *ibid.*

48 Neumüllers-Klauser, Schlachten, 195-196.

shown by several memorial stones of the 15th century, which largely follow the model of our inscription. Both monuments of remembrance for individuals and collective remembrance of the fallen and victims of battles make use of the textual scheme we know with only slight deviations and in varying degrees of detail: Year / date / indication of the event or cause of death with the number of victims / indication of the place.⁴⁹

Thus, the “Kumanenstein” appears as a monument dedicated to a memorable battle, its main message undoubtedly being not the commemoration of the fallen (pagans), but the celebration of (Christian) victory. In the final search for the patron of our monument, the question arises as to who was most interested in a public memorial of this specific act of war and who had the opportunity to execute it. The answer would undoubtedly lead us to Abbot Seifried I himself: in 1297, then prior, he was elected as the 11th abbot and successor to Abbot Walchun. He ruled the abbey for 23 years until his death on 5 May 1320. During his reign, he purchased extensive estates and received numerous endowments, including the dotation of the abbey hospital by Hadmar von Sunnberg zu Asparn in 1308.⁵⁰ Abbot Seifried undoubtedly had the best connections to leading ministerial families (Albero, the son of another Sunnberg and at least one other member of a noble family had entered the convent under Seifried)⁵¹ and knew how to draw on their potential for donations to the monastery; in addition, the construction of St Veit’s Chapel and other parts of the building of the monastery took place during his reign. What is more, Seifried’s direct involvement in the military events around the abbey in 1304 is beyond doubt: both the events of the battle itself and the subsequent accommodation of Duke Rudolf’s knights in the monastery (see above) must have caused no small commotion in the convent. Finally, it was also Abbot Seifried who arranged for the burial of the fallen Cumans in a mass grave. Since it is also clear from the text of the inscription that the author of the memorial stone is to be sought in the Altenburg monastery (both the dating of the event after the reigning abbot on the front of the monument as well as the explicit reference to the “fossa” – according to the chronicles, excavated by Abbot Seifried – give sufficient reason for this assumption), it can be concluded with some certainty – based on the dating approaches offered above – that Abbot Seifried I of Altenburg was the commissioner. When, more than twenty years ago, I arrived at this conclusion, I was not aware of the fact that somebody else had done so on the same grounds as early as in the 1450s: Thomas Ebendorfer, a learned cleric (parish priest of Perchtoldsdorf, south of Vienna), theologist, diplomat, and chronicler, who used the *Continuatio Zwetlensis tertia* as a source for his writings, but most probably also knew the Altenburg monument from autopsy, included a reference to Abbot Seifried as its author when describing the events of 1304 150 years later in his *Chronica Austriae*:

*Abbas vero Altenburgensis, ne cadaverum putredo horum [sc. of the killed Cumans] aerem inficeret, facta ingenti fovea tradidit <ea> sepulture, ubi et lapidem erexit in titulum, qui usque permanet ibidem.*⁵²

49 Cf. the examples provided by Neumüllers-Klauser, *Schlachten*, 185, 187, 191 and 194.

50 Burger, *Geschichtliche Darstellung*, 26-30. Cf. also Zajic, *Grabdenkmäler*.

51 Burger, *Geschichtliche Darstellung*, 28-29.

52 But the abbot of Altenburg, in order to prevent the air from being polluted by the stench of their corpses, had a huge grave excavated and buried them there; on the spot he also placed a stone monument, which still remains here to date, Thomas Ebendorfer, *Chronica Austriae*, ed. Lhotsky, 188. I would like to thank my colleague Reinhard Kren for indicating this source to me, which had escaped my attention before.

This turns the “Kumanenstein” into a unique “monastic” battle memorial. As the space available for the inscription was very limited, the brevity of the text is not surprising. In fact, the inscription must have remained somewhat enigmatic to those who were not otherwise informed of the events to which it refers. Without a proper reference to the battle on whose site the stone was placed as a kind of landmark, the inscription leaves the reader puzzled about the circumstances that led to the killing of 104 heathens and their burial in a mass grave. It is remarkable, however, that the wording stays rather “neutral” or unbiased and refrains from any scornful or derisive references to the killed enemies. This might easily not have been the case, considering that Cumans (alongside Mongols and other “barbaric” aliens from the Eurasian steppes) were frequently enough portrayed by contemporary Western sources not only as cruel enemies but – due to their alleged cultural inferiority – as eaters of “unclean” meat or even as cannibals.⁵³ In contrast to other medieval inscriptions commemorating military victories, the Altenburg stone even forgoes any expression of thanks to God for bestowing triumph on the Christian army. Not even the cross carved into the front of the stone can unambiguously be interpreted as a symbol of Christian superiority over pagan troops or as a means of humiliation, since cross-shaped stone steles appear to have been the standard form of memorials erected on battlegrounds at the time.⁵⁴ That being said, it remains noteworthy that in the inscription the killed enemies were not addressed as such nor as Cumans, but simply labelled as heathens:⁵⁵ the core (and in fact single) element that defined their alienness was their paganism, an attitude perfectly in keeping with stereotype notions associated with Cumans in Russian medieval chronicles.⁵⁶ The fact that the monks did not expressly envisage the killed warriors as “barbarian neighbours, whom they viewed with varying degrees of disdain, suspicion and fear”,⁵⁷ but rather stressed their religious otherness as the fundamental characteristic of these strangers⁵⁸ seems to match the distinction

53 Cf. Zemon Davies, *Cannibalism*; Schmieder, *Menschenfresser*; Kovács, *Origins* 127; Weinhold, *Speisenmeidung*. The stereotype of culturally inferior nomad barbarians being cannibals or at least eating “unclean” meat continued to flourish and found its way even into the learned humanistic poetry of the early 1500s, see Klecker, *Politik*, 447 (on Joachim Vadianus’ report on the Tatars’ alleged predilection for horse meat).

54 I have collected a number of corresponding monuments in Zajic, *Kumanenstein*. Years ago, Andreas Kusternig directed my attention to the fact that the battlefield of Dürnkrot – more exactly the spot on the Weidenbach brook where King Přemysl II Otakar had allegedly been killed – had also been marked with a cross-shaped stone memorial. Unfortunately, the stone was lost in the 20th century, but the only known depiction (a watercolour sketch by Adolf Albin Blamauer [1847-1923]; Niederösterreichische Landesbibliothek, Topographische Sammlung, Sign. 25.235: https://bibliothekskatalog.noel.gv.at/PSI/redirect.psi%26f_search=%26sessid=---%26strsearch=IDU=-14C4E8A8-1DD-06726-000008EC-14C433AE%26pool=GLBN%26fil_select=TIT%26; accessed on 1 December 2021) makes it very likely that the object was placed there some time later: the cruciform shape of the elaborate stone (the crossbeams feature broad lily-shaped ends and a crucifix relief appears on the front side) does not match the style of the late 13th century. The monument, however, was known by the name of “Ottokarkreuz”.

55 This is not the place to argue whether the Cumans defeated at Altenburg were still heathens at all; as early as around 1227 a Cuman chieftain or duke/prince by the name of Borč/Bortz/Boricus/Burchi was reported to have been baptised together with 10,000 of his people on the initiative of Archbishop Robert of Esztergom and Dominican preachers, a report that was repeated in a number of chronicles in Austrian monasteries, cf. Vásáry, *Cumans* 63; Kovács, *Bortz*; Spinei, *Cuman bishopric* 425.

56 Gurevich, *Image* 20.

57 Kovács, *Origins* 125.

58 Cf. Steckel, *Verging on the polemical*.

between images of enemies and images of the “Other” suggested by recent authors.⁵⁹ The primary motif of the Altenburg Benedictines for disposing of the dead bodies may have been hygienic concerns, as some of the chronicles suggest. Yet, by laying the corpses of the godless to rest in a proper (if collective) grave, the monks also fulfilled an important Christian duty by performing the last of the seven works of mercy: to bury the dead, after having (according to the chroniclers mentioned above) received and entertained the Christian prisoners that had been freed from the Cumans, thus feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, and visiting the imprisoned/ransoming the captives. To the Altenburg Benedictines the monument not only guaranteed the public remembrance of a peculiar military event that had happened in the immediate vicinity of the monastery, but it also helped to underline the role of the monastic community in the aftermath of the event. Whereas these elements are expressed (if rather implicitly) in the inscription itself and would pertain to the self-representation of the convent addressing an external audience, the monument also targets – as an implicit admonition – the future members of the Altenburg community, thus adding to the epigraphic self-conception of the convent.

Idle Christians and Pagan Idols

The next inscription I would like to discuss seems to comprise, in its notion of alienness and paganism, elements of the two texts presented before, but pursues a textual strategy of a *genus appellativum* that more closely resembles the first example.

Inserted into the westernmost section of the outer north wall of the nave of St Stephen’s Cathedral at Vienna, visitors entering the church through the Bischofstor (bishop’s gate) pass a stone tablet with an inscription of seven lines placed immediately above a niche in the façade, secured by a massive iron grid (fig. 3).

The inscription, cut in a distinctive style of early Gothic Minuscule, most probably dating from the second half of the 14th century, reads:⁶⁰

+ Ir + seligen + gelaubt + in got +/
 vnt + wehalt + christi + gebot
 + des / + die + haiden + nicht + habent · ge/tan ·
 si · paten · an · die · tat(er)man ·
 wand /· die · sew · selb · habent · bereit ·
 da · von · / · w(er)dent · si · wol · geait ·
 in d(er) · hell · fev(er) ·
 alle · / · vrewd · ist · in · tewr ·

Translation: You blessed ones, believe in God and obey Christ’s commandments, which the pagans did not do. They worshipped tatermans (idols) which they created for themselves. For this they will certainly be punished in hell’s fire, they are deprived of every joy.

59 Cf. Vuorinen, *Enemy Images*, 3: “The main difference between Other and Enemy lies specifically in their respective activeness – an enemy is perceived, or imagined, to be actually menacing.”

60 I am very much indebted to my colleague Renate Kohn for providing me with the transcription and ample information on the monument. For a more detailed assessment, see the forthcoming volume dedicated to the medieval and early modern inscriptions of St Stephen’s Cathedral which Renate Kohn is preparing for the edition series “Die Deutschen Inschriften”.

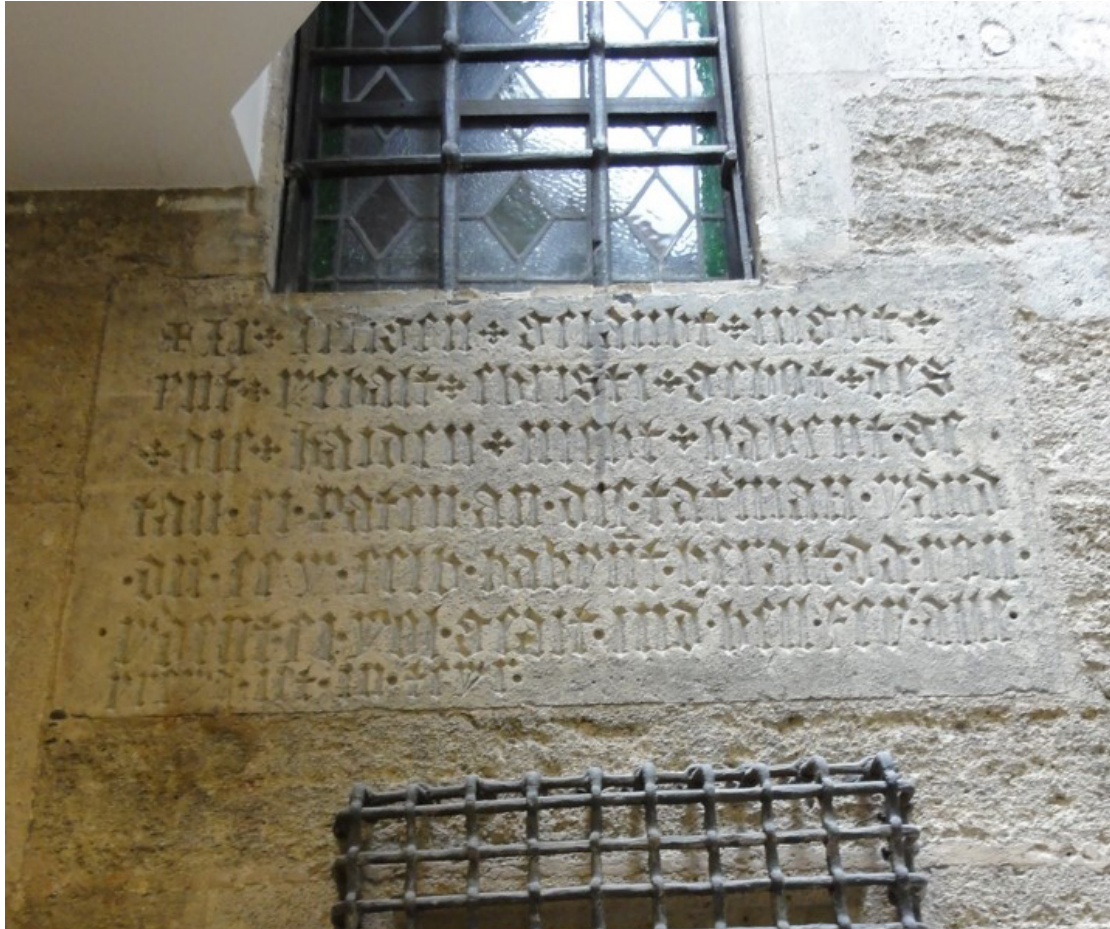


Figure 3: The so-called Taterman inscription, 2nd half of the 14th century, Vienna, St Stephen's cathedral.

The fact that the inscription was composed as an epigraphic comment on another artefact becomes better understandable when one learns that the now empty niche beneath the tablet originally contained some small statuettes which were attached to the back wall by means of iron hooks or clamps.⁶¹ In the middle of the 15th century, the chronicler mentioned above, Thomas Ebendorfer, delivered the earliest and most reasonable assessment of the now lost figurines: according to him, they were pagan idols⁶² or, more precisely, depictions of the

61 Traces of them – the leaden filling used to fix the iron parts – are still visible inside the drilled-in holes.

62 Thomas Ebendorfer, *Chronica Austriae*, ed. Lhotsky, 31: “ecclesiam in Wienn, que ad Sanctum Stephanum [...] dicitur, que usque <hodie> figuras prophanorum ydolorum gerit”; cf. Lhotsky, Thomas Ebendorfer, 107 (n. 25). Translation: [...] the church in Vienna, called St Stephen's, which until today displays the figures of pagan idols.

Roman gods Jupiter and Mars, allegedly transferred to the cathedral from some tower in the village of Guntramsdorf south of Vienna⁶³ in order to underline the religious admonition of passers-by provided by this epigraphic ensemble combining image and text.

Whether those responsible for the arrangement of the antique artefacts and the execution of the inscription were aware of the probable Roman origins of the statuettes,⁶⁴ we do not know. The fact however, that the “idols” were referred to in German as “*taterman*” is highly interesting. Apparently, the etymology of the term,⁶⁵ which in the late Middle Ages initially designated a pagan statuette, bears an implicit reference to the Tatars. Since the term “Tatars” was widely used (at least in the German-speaking regions of Central Europe) as an umbrella term for a wider range of diverse peoples and ethnic groups from the Eurasian east, we should take into consideration that another steppe people could be associated with the *tatermans* that was in fact known for producing little (stone) statuettes to commemorate their ancestors: the Cumans.⁶⁶ Thus, it seems not unlikely that the Viennese inscription – just like the older one from Altenburg – in fact referred to the Cuman pagans of a less distant past than that of Roman Antiquity. The evident difference between the two inscriptions is that the latter expressly warns the Christian reader not to follow in the footsteps of the godless heathens, unless they wish to face eternal punishment in hell. The hint at the detestable idolatry of the pagans, unambiguously manifested by the figurines “locked behind bars”⁶⁷ underneath the inscription, clearly turns the text into a drastic admonition to visitors to the church to

63 Thomas Ebendorfer, *Catalogus praesulum Laureacensium et Pataviensium*, ed. Zimmermann, 8: “*doctrinis abiectis spurciciis ydolorum cultibus, Martis precipue et Jouis, quibus huius provincie quondam delusa vesania incolarum dedita fuisse dignoscitur, prout in ipsorum statuīs, que hodie Wiene pre foribus ecclesie sancti Stephnai cancello ferreo incluse servantur, a Gundramsdorff turri, ut fertur, allatis pro memoria*”; cf. also Lhotsky, *Wiens spätmittelalterliches Landesmuseum*, 69-71. Translation: [...] after they had abandoned their false cult of idols, of Mars and Jupiter in particular, to which the inhabitants of this province had been strongly attached in their insanity, as is apparent from the statues that are today kept close to the doors of St Stephen’s behind an iron grid, but are said to have been brought here from a tower in Guntramsdorf as a souvenir.

64 In contrast to Ebendorfer’s attribution, the figurines may (probably more likely) have been Roman domestic Lares or Penates (bronze) figures, if the statuettes were of Roman origin at all.

65 See Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* sub voce *dattermann* and *tattermann*: <https://www.dwds.de/wb/dwb/dattermann#GTO1286> and <https://www.dwds.de/wb/dwb/tattermann> (accessed on 1 December 2021). The notion of “*taterman*” as a synonym of “*idol*” ([*der heiden*] *abgote unde taterman*) in Hugo von Trimberg’s “*Renner*” (v. 10277) seems most pertinent in this regard. In the 15th century, the term seems to lose this connotation and adopts the more general meaning of goblin or the new specific designation of a (goblin-like) puppet, see the *Frühneuhochdeutsches Wörterbuch* s. v. *tatterman*, <https://fwb-online.de/lemma/tatterman.s.0m>; accessed on 1 December 2021); Klein and Wegera, *Mittelhochdeutsche Grammatik*, 174.

66 Cf. Lyubyanovics, *Socio-Economic Integration*.

67 Whether the grid simply served to protect the statuettes from theft, symbolised Christian triumph over paganism, or had an additional apotropaic connotation in a liminal situation close to a main entrance to the cathedral, cannot be decided.

follow the line of Christian orthodoxy. In a very plain way, the monument juxtaposes pagan cult and Christian belief and opposes the group of heathens, destined to condemnation, to the community of believers, to whom heaven is promised. This is achieved by simply contrasting⁶⁸ the collective religious “otherness” of the pagans (“they”) as a negative example to the religious zeal of the Christians (“you”) in order to create a strong feeling of group cohesion that called for and should be met by a pious individual lifestyle.

Appropriating the Others: Gypsy Memorials

From the epigraphic staging of (religious) otherness as a deliberate means of shaping self-conception in a Christian context we shall now turn to inscriptions that present notorious “others” or “aliens” rather conversely, namely in the appropriated and assimilated framework of Gypsy funerary monuments:

Anno d(omi)ni M cccc xc viii · / vf mentag nach · vrbani · starb · der wolgebvnr · her
Johan / · frigraf · vsz klein · / · egipten · dem · got gnad · des sel got barmherczig sy

Translation: In the year of the Lord 1498, on Monday past St Urban’s, died the high-born lord John, free count from Little Egypt, on whom God may have mercy, on whose soul God be merciful.

68 The inscription clearly follows “othering strategies employed to reflect and support a popular, status quo distinction – the rendering of Us vs. Them groupings via common simplistic polar dichotomies”, see Pandey, Constructing otherness, 155. In the terms of Brons, Othering, 70-71, the inscription applies the strategies of “crude othering” (as opposed to “sophisticated othering”), since “in crude othering, the distribution of the (un)desirable characteristic is more or less assumed or posited, while in sophisticated othering it follows from an argument that is partially based on a self-other-identifying assumption. More specifically, in both kinds of othering, there is a perceived difference between the self or in-group and the other or out-group, but while this difference is the (un)desirable characteristic in case of crude othering, it is a relatively neutral difference in case of sophisticated othering.”



Figure 4: Tomb slab of John, Count of Little Egypt (d. 1498), St Michael's castle church in Pforzheim (Germany, Baden-Württemberg).

The tomb slab,⁶⁹ which bears this inscription, is made of red sandstone measuring roughly 200 x 100 cm, and has been located at the south-eastern wall of the north apse of the castle (and former collegiate) church of St Michael in Pforzheim since at least 1887. In 1862, it was still situated at the pillar between the nave and the left side chapel, close to the sacristy door. Its original place had obviously been in the paving of the middle axis of the nave, close to the pulpit. The modern situation displays the stone arranged between the huge epitaph of the chancellor to the margraves of Baden Martin Achtsynit von Niefernburg (d. 1592) and his wife, Elisabeth von Jestetten. The monument was first mentioned as early as 1595 in the *Annales Suevici* by Martin Crusius, who had been a student of the Pforzheim Lateinschule (attached to the church) and certainly knew the stone from autopsy. A baroque account (“Memoriale”) of the stone, composed by Philipp Jacob Bürcklin in 1737, and a sketch of the local funerary monuments of 1747 contain evidence of a complementary painting on wood, probably attached to the pulpit’s canopy, which featured the figure of the deceased holding a sword in his right hand and a banner in his left, and his coat of arms. This description of 1737 is highly valuable, as it attributes the artefact correctly to a Gypsy (*zigeuner*) and compares it to no less than three other (funerary) monuments in churches in the south-west of Germany (allegedly) relating to Gypsies.⁷⁰

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- 69 Studies on the stone are scarce; for a reliable edition and a basic contextualisation, see the edition by Anneliese Seeliger-Zeiss within the “Deutschen Inschriften” series, now accessible online: DI 57, Stadt Pforzheim, no. 81 (Anneliese Seeliger-Zeiss), in: www.inschriften.net, urn:nbn:de:0238-dio57h015k0008104 (accessed on 1 December 2021); Beck, “her Johan frigraf uß klein egipten”, largely depends on Brändle, Johann Freigraf aus Kleinägypten, and fails to meet scholarly standards in more than one regard, yet offers valuable information. In Bogdal, *Europa erfindet die Zigeuner* 73, the date is erroneously given as 1448.
- 70 Unfortunately, all of them are lost today; cf. the indications given in DI 25, Lkr. Ludwigsburg, no. 74† (Anneliese Seeliger-Zeiss und Hans Ulrich Schäfer), in: www.inschriften.net, urn:nbn:de:0238-dio25h009k0007402 (accessed on 1 December 2021), Seeliger-Zeiss (as in n. 67) and *ibidem*, no. 147+, DI 63, Odenwaldkreis, nos. 138+ and 139† (Sebastian Scholz), in: www.inschriften.net, urn:nbn:de:0238-dio63mz09k0013900 (accessed on 1 December 2021). At least, it is clear that in the monastery of Steinbach Crusius saw the tomb slab and the epitaph of a Pannuel (rectius probably Samuel), duke from Little Egypt, d. (probably) in 1545 and buried in the Abbey, featuring two almost identical German inscriptions: *In dem iar als man zalt von Christus vnsers seligmachers geburt [...]45 vff Sankt Sebastians abend ist gestorben der hochgeborn herr herr Pannuel herzog inn dem klain Aegypten* and *Als man zalt von Christi vnsers seligmachers geburt tausend [– –] sankt sebastians tag starb der hochgeborn Fürst und herr herr Pannuel herzog inn klain Aegypten und herr zum hirschhorn desselben lands*; translation: In the year of Christ our saviour [...], the day before St Sebastian’s died the noble lord, lord Pannuel, duke of Little Egypt viz. In the year of Christ our saviour thousand [...] St Sebastian’s day died the noble prince and lord, lord Pannuel, duke of Littler Egypt and lord of Hirschhorn in that very same country) and the tomb slab of some noble count Peter of Little Egypt, d. in 1453 and buried in Großbottwar (according to Seeliger-Zeiss and Schäfer: *ANNO DOMINI M · CCCC · LIII · OBJT NOBILIS COMES PETRUS DE MINORI CLYPEO* [an apparent misreading for *Egypto*, author’s note] *IN DIE PHILIPPI ET JACOBI APOSTOLORUM*), and a third monument commemorating a free count Anthony of Little Egypt, d. in 1552 and buried in St Martin’s in Pforzheim-Brötzingen (according to Seeliger-Zeiss [DI 57, Stadt Pforzheim, no. 147† [Anneliese Seeliger-Zeiss], in: www.inschriften.net, urn:nbn:de:0238-dio57h015k0014707, accessed on 1 December 2021]: *Anno domini 1552 . den 28. April starb der Wohgebohrne Herr Antoni Frei-Graff aus Klein-Egypten Deß Seel Gott Gnädig und barmhertzig seye*).

All four of the deceased – as testified by their memorials – were armigers, and all four of them used epithets that were reserved for members of the aristocracy from the rank of lords and above – a usage that perfectly matches their description as dukes or at least counts of Little Egypt.⁷¹ We have reason to believe that, in addition to the very fact that they were given precious memorials, their designation as counts or dukes hints at an accordingly eminent position within their communities.⁷² It seems rather doubtful, however, that there was really any need for bearing arms for the leaders of the Gypsy clans in their everyday life, but in any case, they made use of these symbols that the emblematic arsenal we call heraldry offered to distinguished members of European societies.⁷³ The fact that they were Christians⁷⁴ requires no further discussion, given the place of their burials.

It has been claimed that the Pforzheim stone was the only extant Gypsy memorial worldwide that still remains in a church.⁷⁵ For the time being I can, however, present at least one other perfectly preserved tomb slab that was evidently created for the chief of a Gypsy community soon after the Pforzheim stone. Attached to the outer north wall of the parish church of St Stephen's in the Lower Austrian town of Tulln, close to the north gate, we find a tomb slab made of red marble featuring an inscription of five lines cut into the upper half and the outlines of a coat of arms carved into the lower half of the stone (fig. 5).⁷⁶

The text in Gothic minuscule, reads as follows:

Anno D(omi)ni 1524 Jar starb / Der Wollgebor(n) graff Jacob / Am xxi tag des
kristmanet / Ain graff Jberall graffen Avs / klain Egipften dem got genad

Translation: In the year of the Lord 1524 died the high-born count Jacob on the 21st day of December, a count above all counts from Little Egypt, on whom God may be merciful.

71 Egypt was commonly believed to be the homeland of the Gypsies, wherever travelling people were first recorded in written sources. Apparently, the Gypsies themselves readily accepted and used the designation, see Okely, *Traveller-Gypsies*, 3; Schubert, *Mobilität*, 131-132; cf. also Mayall, *Gypsy Identities*, 71-88.

72 Almost throughout Europe, most of the available late medieval sources introduce Gypsy leaders as dukes (*duces*) or counts (*comites*) of Little Egypt, cf. Schubert, *Mobilität*, 131; Kenrick, *Origins*, 81; Asséo, *Visibilité*. When today clan-leaders or chiefs of tribes from several Roma communities are called “kings” or “queens”, it seems that the Gypsies have adopted a term that was first used by non-Gypsies to describe the influential position of these eminent figures, see Chohaney, *Hidden in plain sight*, 58 and 66-70.

73 To name but one of a vast number of handbook literature that cannot be recapitulated here, see: Hablot, *Heraldic imagery*.

74 The question of the religious affiliation of the Gypsies in Europe is answered very briefly by Kenrick, *Historical Dictionary*, 211: “Gypsies have tended to adopt the religion of the country where they live or travel [...]”. More detailed information is provided by Kenrick, *Origins*, 80-81.

75 Beck, “her Johan frigraf uß klein egipten”, 16.

76 The monument appears to have been widely neglected by research; first mentioned by Kerschbaumer, *Geschichte*, 309, it was again introduced very briefly by Biack, *Geschichte*, 471 and more recently by Geyer, *Grabsteine*, 96-98. At least at the end of the 19th century, the stone was to be found in the north aisle at the westernmost pillar.

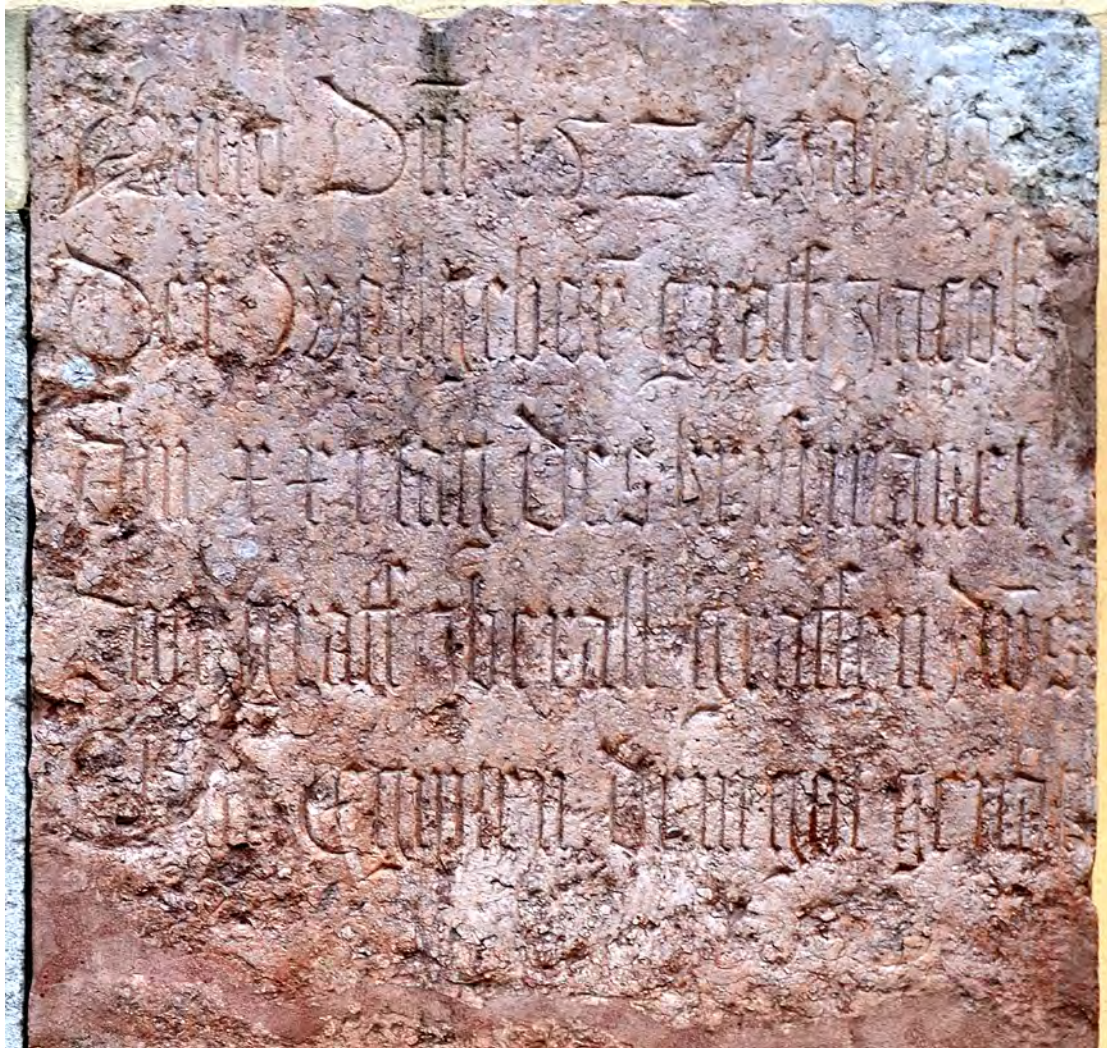


Figure 5: Tomb slab of Jacob, Count of Little Egypt (d. 1524), St Stephen's parish church in Tulln (Lower Austria).

The text bears a remarkable resemblance to the Pforzheim inscription with regard to the epithets and titles used for the deceased: according to the respective stones, both were equally high-born counts from Little Egypt, a designation that unambiguously hints at Gypsy chiefs or leaders, as we have seen.

The stones from Pforzheim and Tulln add substantially to the current state of research into travelling people, whether they be named Romanies or Gypsies (or in German: Roma and Sinti or Zigeuner),⁷⁷ on the one hand, and of studies into sepulchral culture on the other. The placing of impressive tombstones sculpted from precious stone material, bearing finely carved inscriptions and heraldic decoration, preceded by the purchase of a (costly) exclusive

77 The discourse on politically and/or academically correct labelling has not yet come to an end. A good survey of the problem is provided by Marushiakova and Popov, Roma labelling; cf. also (from the viewpoint of discourse analysis) Bartel, "Roma, Sinti und andere 'Zigeuner'".

burial place inside (!) a church building, by no means follows the average routine of burial customs in late medieval Central European society (whether town-dwellers or people living in the countryside). On the contrary, these monuments, prominently featuring the coats of arms of the deceased, perfectly resemble those for the economically successful patrician elites in towns or those of the nobility. At first glance, the two “Gypsy” stones cannot be distinguished from elaborate “ordinary” (in fact: elite) burghers’ or noblemens’ monuments of their time. Even the epithets attributed to the dead perfectly mirrored the usual hierarchy of titles applied in acts and charters as well as in inscriptions throughout the pre-modern Roman Empire, *wohlgeborn* and *hochgeborn* being reserved for higher-ranking nobles (lords and counts of the empire).⁷⁸ Moreover, since it took quite some time from the death of the leaders until the final placing of the carved stone over the grave, these travelling people must have stayed long enough to arrange the burial and make the concluding payments.

If one accepts my reading of the two “Gypsy” tomb slabs as media of self-representation⁷⁹ (which funerary monuments usually are), one encounters two men who were presented as powerful, but otherwise perfectly “ordinary” members of the hierarchically structured society in which they had lived and into which they had fitted in. Most evidently, the commissioners did not wish the deceased to be perceived as aliens by their fellow men (and thus avoided any verbal or pictorial elements that might have stressed their “otherness”),⁸⁰ but as respected residents of the societies and towns in which they (at least temporarily) dwelled.⁸¹ Studies on the self-representation of Gypsies in modern Hungary equally emphasise that there are only “very few indicators that could be described as significantly or distinctively divided into ‘Gypsy’ or ‘non-Gypsy’ identifications, questioning the status of difference in discourses around such minorities”.⁸² It seems only reasonable to assume that this observation also holds true for the Gypsies in large parts of late medieval Europe at least in some respects. Hence, the above-mentioned framework of sepulchral “Gypsy” self-representation may partly be understood as the result of a process of appropriation and assimilation. On the other

78 See Zajic, “Zu ewiger gedächtnis aufgericht“, 314-315.

79 For strategies of self-representation in modern Gypsy-Traveller memorials see Parker and McVeigh, *Do not cut the grass*; Chohaney, *Hidden in plain sight*; Veit, *Forgotten in life*.

80 The contrary holds true for the markedly distinctive elements of sepulchral self-representation (including not least the use of the Etruscan language) deployed by Etruscans in Antique Rome, who were regularly – not unlike the Gypsies in the later Middle Ages – considered as Others by the Roman majority society: Strazzulla, *Etruscan Identity*, 166-188.

81 The absence of distinguishing features on modern (British) Gypsy memorials that would indicate the Gypsy identity of the buried was likewise noted by Okely, *Deterritorialised and spatially unbounded cultures*, 153. For a sceptical assessment of Okely’s widely accepted findings, see Parker and McVeigh, *Do not cut the grass*, according to whom more explicit statements of “ethnicity” can be found on British Gypsy memorials since the 1990s.

82 Tremlett, ‘Here are the Gypsies!’, 1706.

hand, it is in keeping with the fact that the perception and imagery of Gypsies as a distinct group of travelling aliens⁸³ often supported a purposeful (mostly pejorative and stigmatising) othering that served the majority society to maintain cohesion and stabilise their self-conception.⁸⁴ “Alterität transformiert ‘Mehrheitsgesellschaften’ zur einen Entität, die ihre Identität auf Abstand zum ‘singulären’ Anders-Sein der lediglich de nomine als ‘Bevölkerungsgruppen’ quantifizierten Sinti und Roma generiert.”⁸⁵ The necessary “counter-images”⁸⁶ of outsiders and aliens would regularly include negative imagery of Gypsies,⁸⁷ comprising a set of stereotypes that reciprocally had to be avoided in Gypsy self-representation. The itinerant way of life of Gypsies, being perceived as the negative and morally inferior counter-image to “properly” settled lifestyles of “ordinary” Europeans, fulfilled the same purpose of othering as the ostentatious staging of paganism and followed the same mechanism: “Among religious believers there is a rather common misconception that atheists are necessarily immoral [...] In most – if not all – cases, the underlying argument seems to be something like the following: (a) moral beliefs are religious beliefs; (b) the other has no religious beliefs; therefore (c) the other has no moral beliefs.”⁸⁸

Conclusion

This article portrays three examples of pre-modern inscriptions that in one way or another reflect phenomena that may best be addressed through the lens of the research concept of “otherness”. In order to assess the potential of “otherness” as a hitherto largely neglected interpretative approach or tool for pre-modern epigraphy, our sample has deliberately focused on aspects of religious otherness featuring on inscribed monuments from a stretch of time between the early 14th and the early 16th (viz. 19th) century and a geographic area from modern South Tyrol to the East of Austria. Since there are as yet no comprehensive accounts on our topic (and consequently no larger corpus of corresponding sources that could have been exploited and drawn on for comparison), our little case study cannot claim to be more than a first sketch of problems that will have to be addressed more systematically and on a broader basis of sources. However, it appears that by pointing at ethic (and at least implicitly, also ethnic) and religious deficiencies of pagan “Others” from the distant past, inscriptions such as the one from St Stephen’s in Vienna encourage its Christian audience to conceive

83 See Mayall, *Gypsy Identities*. This imagery also includes a lasting association of Gypsies with magic as an alluring “exotic” feature, cf. a forthcoming doctoral dissertation prepared at Mainz University: Novy, *Magie*.

84 Cf. Schubert, *Mobilität*; Saul and Tebbutt, *Role*. I also refer here, e.g., to Bogdal, *Europa erfindet die Zigeuner*, 15, who underlines that Gypsy studies are necessarily about “Redeweisen und mediale Repräsentationen [...] Sinti oder Roma werden geboren, ‘Zigeuner’ sind ein gesellschaftliches Konstrukt.” Cf. Takezawa, *Racialization*, who suggests that the “racialization” of Gypsies, crucial to the discourse of modern Gypsy studies and British legislation, (cf. Mayall, *Gypsy Identities*, 4-6), started already in the Middle Ages. This assumption seems partly confirmed by the discussion on the “*rasse d’égyptiens*” relating to the interrogation of a delinquent military commander from Little Egypt, Jean de la Fleur, in Thionville in 1603, as reported by Asséo, *Visibilité*. On the parallel process of ethnicization of Gypsies see Parut, “Zigeuner” 289-299.

85 Bartel, “Roma, Sinti und andere ‘Zigeuner’”, 400.

86 Saurma-Jeltsch, *Facets*, 9, uses the term of “mirror-image” instead.

87 See Parut, “Zigeuner”.

88 Brons, *Othering* 71.

themselves as members of an in-group to whom eternal life was promised by God. The same holds true for the Brixen epitaph, which stresses the admonition to pursue a decent and devout way of life addressed to the onlookers by hinting at the model of a zealous believer from Africa to whom baptism and immigration to Europe had opened the path to a Christian life and salvation. The staging of a godless life that these inscriptions – at least as a “counter-image” – are pivoting around more or less explicitly may best be called the result of an epigraphic “othering” in the sense of a “process of making someone an ‘Other’ or constructing someone as an ‘Other’ rather than being an ‘Other’ or recognizing the (existing) ‘Other’ as such”⁸⁹. Their pointing at different facets of (alleged) religious “otherness” was meant as a warning to the Christian reader to stick to the doctrine of the church, thus fostering self-concepts of an imagined “we” as opposed to the “these” of alien Others. It is exactly this Christian “we” that the Altenburg Benedictines seem to refer to when they buried – as a work of mercy imposed on believers by God – their killed pagan enemies. Thus, the daunting reference to the detestable practices of the infidels, which some of the inscriptions more or less expressly put forward, rather served to shape the positive self-conception of the Christian readers as opposed to the religious deviance of their doomed heathen counterparts. Conversely, the crucial importance of ostentatious integration into the religious cult and habits of the majority population made it advisable to outsiders, such as the Gypsies in the first half of the sixteenth century, to adopt the epigraphic means of representation used by the local elites. In contrast to their evident “otherness” in terms of outer appearance and lifestyle, their funerary monuments helped to support their fitting into a framework of religion, belief, and religious customs that would alleviate their “alienness” at least in terms of their ultimate self-fashioning.

Whereas we have illustrated, through a handful of monuments, how inscriptions focusing on religious “otherness” added to the self-perception and construction of pre-modern societies in Central Europe, and how they might be analysed in future comparative studies, a much larger task still lies ahead for epigraphic research. For the few monuments that have been taken into account in this article and for the large number of similar sources that would deserve a more comprehensive investigation, the question of the concrete motive behind their being commissioned would have to be determined. It can only be assumed that their concern with the religious deviance of “others” was closely tied to general or specific phenomena of widespread crises of religious thoughts and practices that formed the context and background to the individual epigraphic text/image combinations. I shall try to summarise this in a few concluding remarks that hint at indispensable further study in the future: when the Altenburg inscription was cut in stone, Lower Austria was not only (from time to time) raided

89 Goetz and Wood, Introduction 23.

by pagan aggressors from the East, but (permanently) inhabited by domestic “heretics” that attracted considerable attention from contemporary ecclesiastic authorities, most notably groups of people referred to in written reports under the umbrella terms of “Adamites” or “Waldensians”⁹⁰. One might easily imagine that this internal dissent and the troubled unity of Christian society bolstered the coincident attitude towards external pagan enemies that was expressed by the Altenburg battle memorial. As to the Viennese *taterman* inscription and its admonition of orthodoxy, there may be a more or less direct link to the installation of the collegiate chapter of All Saints at St Stephen’s through Archduke Rudolf IV, his institution of the University of Vienna in 1365 and the secondary addition of its Faculty of Theology in 1384. And finally, and most strikingly, one can hardly believe that the Gypsies who presented themselves as “ordinary” Christians through their tomb slabs would not have wished to emphasise their “correct” religious belief in view of the reiterated persecution of Jews and cruel pogroms that Central Europe witnessed during the 15th and the first third of the 16th century.

These at least subliminal preconditions of politics and societal change and their impact on the epigraphic framing of (religious) “otherness” would have to be considered by a comparative account that is yet to be prepared. For the time being, a series of articles with a more restricted scope such as this one might help to assess the significance of “otherness” to the study of pre-modern inscriptions.

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⁹⁰ Suffice it here to refer to the reports on “adamitic” heresy uncovered in Krems (some 50 kilometres south of Altenburg) between 1312/14, cf. <https://www.geschichtsquellen.de/werk/4178> (accessed on 1 December 2021).

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Abbreviation

MGH = Monumenta Germaniae Historica

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