

Global Epigraphy. Perception and Representation of the Foreign

Andreas Rhoby*

The public discourse on the “foreign” and “foreigners” is more topical today than ever before. In a globalized world, confrontation with the “other” and “others” is inevitable. Contact with the “foreign” and “foreigners” is commonplace, but at the same time, it is also complex and individual. Questions such as belonging to certain groups, the definition of foreign and non-foreign, are unsurprisingly as common in the past as today.

Already in the premodern era, contact with “others” was an everyday phenomenon,¹ since the then known world was in some respects as “globalized” as it is today.

Not only did objects migrate between continents, but people also often crossed distances to trade or to fight as mercenaries. Entire groups of peoples left their homelands due to climatic changes.² But also, the search for work and the hope of a better life in a new environment were motors of migration movements of whole groups or even individuals already in pre-modern times.³ The encounter of natives and “foreigners” and their assimilation or non-assimilation is a multilayered, intergenerational process.

In order to grasp the perception of the “foreign” and “foreigners” in the course of history, it is necessary to analyze more than just written sources, such as historical works or legal documents. Material culture is also a treasure trove for tracing migratory movements and trade relations. Roman coins in China⁴ and Byzantine jewelry found in Scandinavia,⁵ for example, bear witness to this. Inscriptions stand between the two groups: they are text, but at the same time inseparable from the object or monument on which they are found.

The topic of the “foreign” and “foreigners” has been discussed in inscriptions since Antiquity.⁶ A fundamental distinction must be made between two forms of the “foreign”: 1) The inscription and the object may be “foreign” based on their external appearance, i.e. they are unusual compared to other inscriptions or objects. 2) The inscription mentions “foreigners” or something “foreign” and thus contributes to the analysis of the perception of “foreigners” or the “foreign”.

* Correspondence details: Institute for Medieval Research, Department of Byzantine Research, Hollandstraße 11-13/4, A-1020 Wien, andreas.rhoby@oeaw.ac.at

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- 1 Schuster, *Begegnung mit dem Fremden*. On Antiquity, see, for example, Pülz and Trinkl, *Das Eigene und das Fremde*.
- 2 Preiser-Kapeller, *Die erste Ernte* and Preiser-Kapeller, *Der lange Sommer*.
- 3 Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact*.
- 4 Li, Roman coins discovered in China.
- 5 Ljungkvist, Influences from the empire.
- 6 E.g. Pope, *Foreigners in Attic Inscriptions*.

The sarcophagi from Lycia discussed in the article by Oliver Hüllden (pp. 146-162) belong to the first group. These vary in their form, which is to be distinguished as either “local” or “foreign”. An inscription on a stone block from the harbor of Patara, which was part of a tomb, refers to two individual graves, one of which is referred to as *angeion topikon* (“local receptacle”), and the other as *angeion Asianon* (“receptacle from Asia”). The “foreignness” of such a Lycian sarcophagus also touches the present: while this is basically true for all objects no longer located in their original space – this primarily concerns objects kept in museums – Hüllden reports in particular on a sarcophagus originally from Lycia but now situated in the Istrian city of Pula which differs from the local sarcophagi created for the Roman *Colonia Iulia Pola Polensis Herculanea* and thus represents foreignness.

The Latin inscriptions and associated funerary monuments for members of a Genoese merchant family from the mid-14th century found in Yangzhou, central China, discussed in the article by Eva Caramello and Romedio Schmitz-Esser (pp. 210-228) are “foreign” in two respects. Christian Latin inscriptions are *per se* a “foreign body” in a Buddhist-Chinese dominated environment. But the monuments are also “foreign” from a Western perspective. First, the iconography on the tombstone is borrowed from Buddhist art. Second, the Latin script also shows a strong local influence, making it seem foreign in a purely Western context. This phenomenon is not without parallel: for example, in the Great Mosque in Xi’an, China, the letters of the Arabic inscriptions are influenced by the shape of Chinese characters, which is described as the “Sino-Arabic script”.⁷

Tombstones of people who died in foreign countries are usually important sources that make mobility in pre-modern times comprehensible. We find them in all cultures and at all times. They range, for example, from tombstones of Roman soldiers who died far from home, to Germanic peoples in early Byzantine Constantinople and Asia Minor,⁸ to English, French, Portuguese, etc., merchants, diplomats, and traders attested on 17th-century gravestones in Isfahan, Persia.⁹

As the inscription on the Patara stone block, which distinguishes between “local” and “non-local” in relation to the shape of the sarcophagus, shows, inscriptions deal with foreignness in a wide variety of pre-modern contexts. Peter Kruschwitz’s contribution (pp. 163-194) focuses on the image of the foreign “barbarian” as encountered in Latin verse inscriptions. Greek and Latin verse inscriptions from Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times are a special treasure for socio-historical questions, since, unlike simple prose inscriptions, they permit a broad range of linguistic expression. The Greek term *barbaros* (Latin *barbarus*) originally designated all non-Greek-speaking peoples, especially Persians.¹⁰ At one point in his *opus magnum*, Herodotus relates that the Spartans would equate *xenoi* (“foreigners”) and *barbaroi* (“barbarians”) (see contribution Rhoby, p. 196). But this must have been unusual for the Greeks, otherwise the ancient writer would not have felt compelled to mention it.

7 Djamel, Sino-Arabic Script.

8 Huttner, Germanen.

9 Wright, Burials.

10 Cf. e.g., Sonnabend, *Fremde und Fremdsein in der Antike*, 35-47.

Herodotus (II 158) also mentions that the Egyptians would likewise use the same word for all non-Egyptian (= Demotic) speakers. The term *barbara-* is also used in Sanskrit as well as in other Eastern languages. In the great epic Mahabharata, it means “foreigner, sinful people, low”, etc.¹¹ In the Latin verse inscriptions discussed by Kruschwitz, “foreigners” are referred to as barbarians either as individuals or as anonymous persons, and it is noticeable that this is a highly emotional term.

The above-mentioned term *xenos*, used by Herodotus, has a long tradition in Greek literature, whereby the word – as Andreas Rhoby shows in his contribution (pp. 195-209) – on the one hand can have negative connotations (albeit rather rarely), but on the other hand, is also used as an equivalent to “beholder”, “wayfarer”, etc., or generally denotes the “host”. In adjectival use, it can also mean “extraordinary” (in the sense of “foreign to this world”). Just as Latin verse inscriptions play with the connotations of *barbarus*, so do Greek verse inscriptions of Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Middle Ages with *xenos*. There is also a certain relationship to the descriptions of the types of sarcophagi mentioned in the Patara inscription: a 7th-century verse inscription in the church of St. Demetrius in Thessalonica (p. 196) distinguishes between *politai* (“local citizens”) and *xenoi* (“foreigners”), thus differentiating between the local population and pilgrims coming from outside, both being regarded as equals.

Western European Latin and German inscriptions of the Middle Ages and modern times have a somewhat different orientation. In the contribution of Andreas Zajic (pp. 229-262), it clearly appears that the distinction between “foreign” and “non-foreign” is based mainly on the distinction between Christians and pagans. There is a difference to the contemporary Byzantine inscriptions, in which the *xenoi* are mostly the non-locals, but nevertheless Christians. The purpose of mentioning 400 fallen and buried *pagani* on the “Kumanenstein” near Altenburg in Lower Austria is not to commemorate them, but to celebrate the victory of the Christians over the pagans. That strangers in the sense of members of another religion are not welcome – they are even threatened with the death penalty if they break the rules – is also shown by (Greek) inscriptions from the first century BC from Jerusalem, which were placed near the temple and divided between those areas accessible to all and the sanctified area into which only Jews were permitted: “No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and forecourt around the sacred precinct. Whoever is caught will himself be responsible for (his) consequent death.”¹² Warning inscriptions at temple entrances were also found elsewhere in Antiquity.¹³

Inscriptions themselves survive centuries and political changes. Inscriptions are sometimes torn from their place of origin: this is not a purely modern phenomenon but is encountered far earlier: in the Euro-Mediterranean Middle Ages, objects (primarily stones) with inscriptions were used as spolia for the construction of new monuments, whereby the text was placed in a new context, either no longer having any meaning or being seen as decoration or interpreted as being magical.¹⁴

11 Sūryakānta, *Sanskrit-Hindi-English Dictionary*, 417.

12 Cotton, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*, 42-45, no. 2; cf. Price, *Rose Guide to the Temple*, 78. The Greek term used for “foreigner” is not ξένος (*xenos*) but ἀλλογενής (*allogenes*), which was specifically employed for non-Jews as already in LXX Ge. 17.27, cf. Rodríguez Adrados, *Diccionario griego-español*, s. v. ἀλλογενής.

13 Cotton, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae*, 44.

14 Cf., e.g., Jevtić and Yalman, *Spolia Reincarnated*.

As this introduction and the contributions of the cluster have been able to show, an inscription or its shaping, but also the inscription carrier itself, i.e. the monument or the object, can be “foreign”. The contributions of this cluster cover not only a broad geographic but also a broad temporal frame. This inevitably leads to major challenges in interpretation and comparative analysis. But as the case studies show, there are nevertheless similar phenomena that can be viewed diachronically. It also becomes apparent that, regardless of which culture is the focus, there was already an intense preoccupation with the topic of “strangers” in the pre-modern era. “Foreigners” and the “foreign” are discussed in inscriptions throughout the Euro-Asian region, whether positively, negatively, or neutrally.

The present cluster can only be a beginning: an investigation of the phenomenon in other (script) cultures such as Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Georgian, Persian, Sanskrit, etc. is also needed in order to be able to deepen the global approach in the analysis.

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