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Between epigrams and epigraphs:
the case of the Carthaginian poems in
the Codex Salmasianus

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Between epigrams and epigraphs: the case of the Carthaginian poems in the Codex Salmasianus

Michele Butini

The medieval manuscript tradition passes down a group of Late Antique Latin poems related to Carthage. Scholars have repeatedly associated them with Latin verse inscriptions. This matter is of primary interest to me since the ‘poetic landscape’ of this Roman city is at the very heart of my doctoral thesis. In this paper, my aim is firstly to contextualise and give an overview of these texts and secondly to offer a brief history of the studies aimed at understanding them and to elaborate on motivations for claiming their ‘epigraphic genuinity’. Lastly, I will present and discuss a selected group of these poems in order to put the previous argumentation to the test and to propose new insights.

1. The *Anthologia Latina* and its manuscripts

The texts that I am going to discuss here have been transmitted in a manuscript well-known among scholars. The so-called Codex Salmasianus (Fig. 1) is a parchment codex written in uncial script dated to the 8th century CE and preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris.¹ It is famous for being the codex “A” in the transmission of the so-called *Anthologia Latina*.

The codex consists of 274 pages, of which 188 contain epigrams originally subdivided into 24 chapters. These include some interpolations, other sections are missing – both phenomena are the result of a complicated transmission. The contents of this manuscript were edited critically for the first time at the end of the 19th century by Baehrens (1881) in the third volume of his *Poetae Latini Minores*, then more methodically by Riese (1894; Fig. 2 left) and again, almost a century later, by Shackleton Bailey (1982; Fig. 2

¹ Digitalised version: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8479004f>.



Figure 1: Codex Salmasianus (Paris, BnF, Lat. 10318). Left: manuscript's cover. Right: folio 156 with the incipit of Luxorius' *Liber Epigrammaton*. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

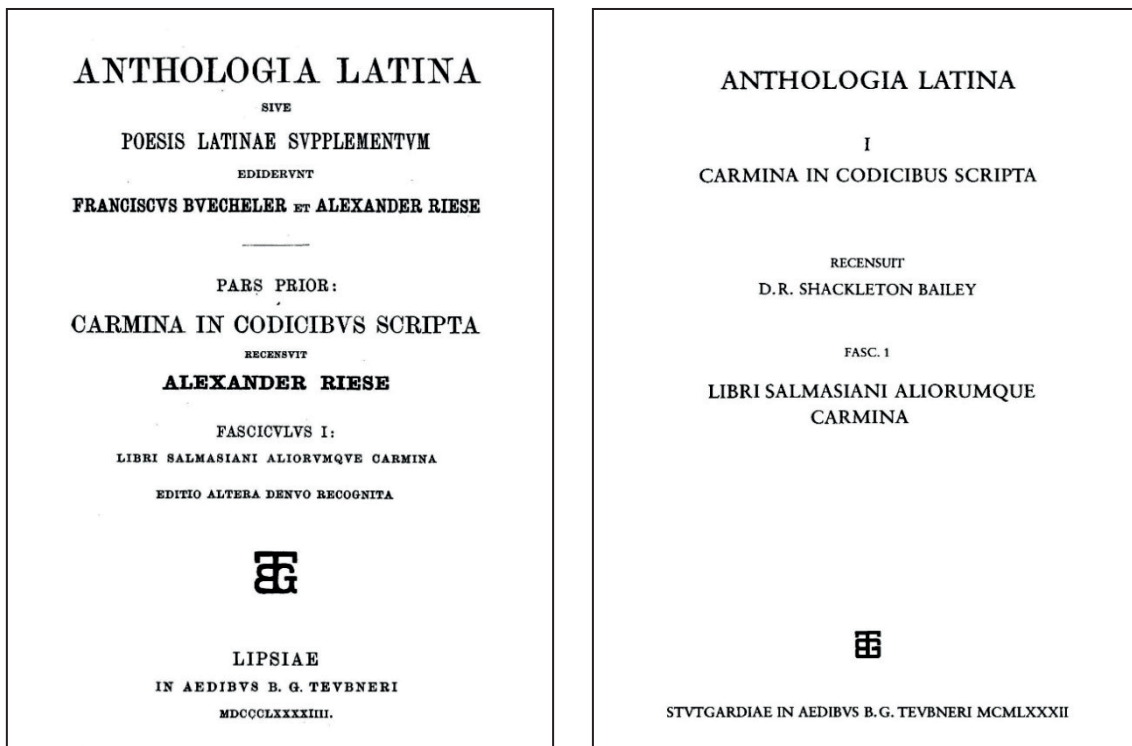


Figure 2: Front pages of the two fundamental critical editions of the *Anthologia Latina*. Left: Riese 1894. Right: Shackleton Bailey 1982

right). The scholarly consensus is that this manuscript, together with two others, the Codex Thuaneus² and the Codex Vossianus,³ transmits an anthology of Latin poems compiled by one or more Carthaginian men of culture after Belisarius had conquered the Kingdom of the Vandals (533–534 CE). The majority of these texts, however, had originally been composed during the time of the Vandal rule. It is widely accepted that one of the ancestors of the Codex Salmasianus arrived in Europe after the fall of the Exarchate of Africa in the 7th century (Mondin – Cristante 2010, 303–304).

2. Overview

The poems of the *Anthologia Latina* that were associated with real inscriptions in the past can be divided into three literary genres: the first and most prominent group is that of the texts relating to public works: 203 R = 194 SB, 210–215 R = 201–206 SB, 377–380 R = 372–375 SB and 387 R = 382 SB. The poems belonging to this group are situated between the epideictic and the ekphrastic mode in the sense that the description of the public work is only a ‘tool’ for the praise of the ruler who realised it. The second group are ekphrastic texts in the strict sense: shorter poems dedicated to the description of an object: 325 R = 320 SB, 346–349 R = 341–344 SB, 369 R = 364 SB, 371 R = 366 SB.⁴ Finally, the third group are funerary texts: 345 R = 340 SB and 354 R = 349 SB.

These poems are part of four of the chapters of the *Anthologia*. 203 R = 194 SB and 210–215 R = 201–206 SB belong to chapter 18. Its name “Carmina ad Vandalos spectantia” was given to it by Riese (1894, xxii); the chapter contains a heterogeneous group of epigrams composed by different authors whose main objective was the praise of the Vandalic rulers. 203 R = 194 SB and 215 R = 206 SB refer to the royal palace of the Vandals. It was situated in a suburban area of Carthage referred to as “in Anclas” by ancient sources, but its actual location remains unknown.⁵ 210–214 R = 201–205 SB belong to a cycle of epigrams about the baths of Alianae composed by an otherwise unknown poet named Felix. The location of these baths, which were rebuilt by king Thrasamund (496–523), is also unknown.⁶

The poems 325–371 R = 320–366 SB belong to the *Liber Epigrammaton* by Luxorius⁷ and vary in terms of genre: 345 R = 340 SB and 354 R = 349 SB are of funerary nature, presenting themselves as “epitaphia” (or “in epitaphion”). 325 R = 320 SB, 347–349 R = 342–344 SB and 371 R = 366 SB are *ekphraseis* of works of art: a painting (325 R = 320 SB), two fountains (347–348 R = 342–343 SB), a well (349 R = 344 SB) and a silver dish (371 R = 366 SB). Finally, 346 R = 341 SB is dedicated to a private amphitheatre built

² Paris, BnF, Lat. 8071. Digitalised version: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9078246d>.

³ Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Voss. Lat. Q 86.

⁴ See Monceaux 1906a, 271–273.

⁵ See Chalon et al. 1985, 242–245.

⁶ On the monument and its possible location see J.-M. Lassère apud Chalon et al. 1985, 237–241.

⁷ On Luxorius see most recently Wasyl 2019.

in a *villa* near Carthage while 369 R = 364 SB is dedicated to the gardens of Oageis, an official at the Vandal court.

Following the reconstruction proposed by Mondin (Mondin – Cristante 2010, 310), the epigrams 377–380 R = 372–375 SB were originally part of a group of poems by different authors. Their purpose was probably to conclude Luxorius' book with a repeated praise of the architectural beauty of Carthage and its rulers: once again the baths (377 R = 372 SB), a baptismal font (378 R = 373 SB), the basilica that was supposedly situated on the Byrsa hill (380 R = 375 SB) and perhaps a monumental cross whose hypothetical location, if it existed, is unknown (379 R = 374 SB).

Lastly, poem 387 R = 382 SB (“*carmen Catonis*”) belonged to a section called “*Versus de singulis causis*” that had originally been part of one of the first four lost chapters. The pages of these chapters had apparently fallen off and were then relocated (Mondin – Cristante 2010, 308). Mentioning king Huneric (477–484), this poem is the oldest of the texts considered here.

3. History of the studies

The first scholar who studied the poems of the *Anthologia Latina* from an epigraphic point of view was De Rossi (1888). He included some texts from the Codex Salmasianus in the *pars prima* of the second volume of his *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae (ICUR)*, a volume dedicated to Christian inscriptions known only through manuscripts. In the introductory note, De Rossi (1888, 238) voices some doubts on the epigraphic nature of the texts in the manuscript:

“*haec Anthologia continet pauca ad rem epigraphicam pertinentia*”
[this anthology contains few things belonging to the field of epigraphy].

Despite this, he expresses a more positive opinion regarding chapter 18:

“*Africanis Vandalorum regum monumentis inscripta certe erat pars epigrammatum libri XVIII ... quorum in Corpore Inscriptionum Latinarum mentio fortasse aliqua fieri debuerat. Haec vero ex auctorum libellis potius quam e monumentis videntur descripta*”
[Some of the epigrams in chapter 18 surely were inscribed on African monuments of the Vandal Kingdom ... which perhaps should have been mentioned in the *CIL*. In reality (these texts) seem to have been transcribed rather from the booklets of the authors than from the monuments themselves].

Then, considering the texts following chapter 18, De Rossi (1888, 239) states:

“*Calbuli et Petri epigrammata Christianis certe inscriptionibus accensenda et alicuius pretii, recipiam in excerpta, quae sequuntur, ex anthologia Salmasiana, quanquam minime constat ea a syllogis vere epigraphicis ad anthologiam pervenisse*”
[the epigrams of Calbulus and Petrus must surely be compared to the inscriptions and, with some effort, I will include them in the following compilation even though

there is just a minimal possibility that they truly found their way into the anthology from an actual epigraphic collection].

Around 20 years later, Monceaux (1906a; 1906b) became a major promoter of associating many texts from the Codex Salmasianus with epigraphic sources with his article “Enquête sur l'épigraphie chrétienne d'Afrique”. He shows a quite probabilistic attitude towards including materials of multiple origins in his collection.

In 1980, an article by Edward Courtney entitled “Observations on the Latin Anthology” was published and followed by a considerable number of responses. Working on the epigrams of chapter 18 Courtney stated:

“it is apparent that the compiler of the Anthology travelled round the buildings of North Africa and gathered verse inscriptions from them which he inserted in his collection (and referenced epigram 43 of the *Epigrammata Bobiensia*⁸). He found a fruitful source of such inscriptions in the baths” (Courtney 1980, 38).

From his point of view, the Codex Salmasianus would be comparable to the ‘real’ ancient epigraphic manuscript anthologies like the Codex Einsidlensis.⁹ Then, regarding 210–214 R = 201–205 SB, Courtney asserts:

“Why should Felix write five poems on the same theme all on the same length? Because, I suggest, they were all intended to be inscribed on the building, and were composed to fit on matching masonry surfaces corresponding to each other in size” (Courtney 1980, 40).

With his publication, Courtney played a significant role in bringing these texts to the attention of epigraphists. From then on, the poems of the Codex Salmasianus made their appearance, more or less regularly, in the various publications on North African metrical epigraphy such as Dorothy Pikhous's *Répertoire des inscriptions latines versifiées de l'Afrique romaine* (1994), Christine Hamdoune's *Vie, mort et poésie dans l'Afrique romaine* (2011) and Paolo Cugusi's *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Africarum provinciarum post Buechelerianam collectionem editam reperta cognita* (2014).

Nowadays, the scholarly opinion seems to have settled on the ‘epigraphic genuinity’ of many of these texts, especially those concerning public works,¹⁰ despite the fact that these texts are known only from manuscript sources. This aspect of transmission, however, is most often not highlighted and taken into account sufficiently or even disregarded completely.

⁸ On the *Epigrammata Bobiensia* see Nocchi 2016.

⁹ Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Codex 326(1076). Digitalised version: <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/sbe/0326/>.

¹⁰ The poems 210–214 R = 201–205 SB are defined as “il ciclo di epigrafi encomiastiche” by Sechi Nuvole 2009, 242 (for further bibliographical references to contributions that share this opinion see n. 28). Actual inscriptions and poems of the *Anthologia Latina* are mixed in the appendix of the most recent work on Late Antique baths (Maréchal 2020, 241–244; see also p. 54). All the texts of the *Anthologia* mentioned above are in the Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss – Slaby with a reference to the edition of Monceaux (1906a; 1906b). In the database, these texts are indistinguishable from real inscriptions.

4. The texts

In the following part, I will briefly address the funerary texts before I will focus on texts concerning public works. Especially the “Cycle of Felix” and the closing section of Luxorius’ book will be considered since they are the parts that have been discussed most intensely and offer many points for reflection.

4.1. Epitaphs

Schmidt (2019) has discussed the epigraphical nature of 345 R = 340 SB and 354 R = 349 SB. He has pointed out that the poems in Luxorius’ book show a “focus on real objects”, “they are from the outset very close to epigraphy” and “show a clear reference to epigraphic tradition”. Then, with regard to poem 345 R = 340 SB (“Epitaphion de filia Oageis infantula”), Schmidt argues that the use of deictics, the reference to the name and the age of the deceased and finally the presence of the commonplaces of Latin verse inscriptions are all relevant hints to the authenticity of the texts, but in the end

“the poem ... could at best have been an inscription, which later has been adapted in form for the literary collection. ... For one thing is clear: despite the deictic ... the sepulchral poem is not an epigraphic text, as little as Martial’s *Liber spectaculorum* with its *hic ubi* ... (2,1.5.7: *hic ubi miramur*) was carved in stone.”

To these convincing considerations I would like to add that Luxorius’ texts are longer than any of the known metric inscription found in Carthage. There is *per se* no reason to suppose that these two are more ‘epigraphically genuine’ than many other funerary epigrams found in manuscripts.¹¹

4.2. Texts related to public works

As already mentioned, the Codex Salmasianus preserves numerous texts that refer to public works carried out by the Vandal rulers or to monuments that must have been prominent in the landscape of Vandalic Carthage. Many of these texts, especially those of the so-called Cycle of Felix concerning the public baths of Alianae, were addressed in an interesting article published by M. Chalon, G. Devallet, P. Force, M. Griffe, J.-M. Lassère and J.-N. Michaud (Chalon et al. 1985). They collected these building related testimonies for the first time and analysed them with great historical sensitivity, thus achieving a proper contextualisation. They were also the first ones to compare the texts from the anthology with the only extant verse inscription concerning public baths from Carthage. I would like to present and translate this inscription before discussing the

¹¹ The most striking case of a funerary text pretending to be epigraphic is that of epigram 45 (“Ex sepulcro Latinae Viae”) in the *Epigrammata Bobiensia*, see Nocchi 2016, 268–276.

codex-texts in more detail. It was published as *CIL VIII 25362* (= *CLE 2039*; *ILBardo 423*) and is composed of two fragments (Fig. 3) that were found in two different locations in the city of Tunis where they had been reused. The text consists of three elegiac couplets.



Figure 3: *CIL VIII 25362*. Zeineb B. Ben Abdallah, *Catalogue des inscriptions latines païennes du Musée du Bardo*, Rome 1986, no. 432

CIL VIII 25362

*Cerne salutiferas splendent]i marmore Baias
 qui calidos aest[us tin]gere quaeris aquis.
 Hic ubi Vulcano Ne[ptunus] certat amore
 nec necat unda ffocos n]ec nocet ignis aquas.
 Gaude operi, Gebam[unde, tu]o, regalis origo
 deliciis sospes ute[re cum] populo.*

Take a look at the healthy baths, shining due to the marble,
 you who are eager to soak your ardours in water.
 Here where Neptune duels with Vulcan in love
 the wave does not prevail over fires, nor does the flame damage the waters.
 Rejoice at your work, Gebamund, royal stock,
 and make use, o saviour, of these sweet things together with the people.

In the first two verses, the inscription addresses wayfarers, trying to capture their attention and inviting them to use the baths. Verses 3 and 4 are dedicated to a short description of the facility. The author stresses its peculiarity, i.e. the fact that water and fire are combined and balanced, which goes against nature and is therefore a source of wonderment. Finally, in the last couplet, the text directly addresses Gebamund, a Vandal prince one generation younger than King Thrasamund. The prince as the promoter of this construction is invited to enjoy the public work together with the people (i.e. the readers of this epigraphic text). It is worth noting that the imperative *utere* recalls the very common formula of good wishes *utere felix* ubiquitous in Late Antique epigraphy related to worldly life.

4.3. The Cycle of Felix

The Cycle of Felix, preserved in the Codex, consists of five poems of 12 verses each. The first three poems are in elegiac couplets while the remaining two are all hexameters.¹²

210 R = 201 SB

Felicis viri clarissimi***de Thermis Alianarum***

*Hic ubi conspicuis radiant nunc signa metallis
et nitido clarum marmore fulget opus,
arida pulvereo squalebat cespite tellus
litoreique soli vilis arena fuit.*

5 *Pulchra sed inmenso qui duxit culmina caelo,
ostendens pronis currere saxa iugis,
publica rex populis Thra<sa>mundus gaudia vovit
prospera continuans munere saecla suo.*

*Paruit imperiis mutato lymphæ sapore
10 et dulcis fontes proluit unda novos.
Expavit subitas Vulcanus surgere thermas
et trepida flammæ subdidit ipse manu.*

(Poem) by Felix vir clarissimus about the Baths of Alianae

Here where now the statues gleam thanks to conspicuous metals
and the work shines bright thanks to the white marble,
the arid land was once a waste of dusty bushes
and the soil was just vile sand from the shore.

5 But the one who threw to the vast sky wondrous pinnacles,
giving a spectacle of subjugated stones running around
is king Thrasamund, who consecrated these public goods to the people
bringing continuity to the prosperous centuries through his work.

Water itself obeyed his orders by changing its taste
10 and a sweet wave washed springs never seen before.
Vulcan himself was frightened by the sudden rise of the baths
and with his trembling hand arranged flames beneath them.

¹² All the Latin texts of the *Anthologia Latina* I present in this paper follow Shackleton Bailey's 1982 critical edition. I took the liberty of modifying punctuation where I felt it was necessary.

211 R = 202 SB

Aliter eiusdem

Nobilis exsultat Baiarum fabrica thermis

et duplicat radios montibus aucta dies.

Hoc uno rex fecit opus Thrasamundus in anno,

inclita dans populis munera temporibus.

5 *Hic senibus florens virtus renovatur anhelis,*

hic fessos artus viva lavacra foveat.

Miscentur pariter sociis incendia lymphis

et gelidos imbres proximus ignis habet.

Utilis hic flamma est et nullos pascitur artus

10 *optaturque magis per nova vota calor.*

Longior hic aegros morborum cura relinquit

nec lavat in vitreis hic moriturus aquis.

Otherwise by the same poet

The building of Baiae with its noble baths challenges <this one>

and the increased daylight reflects its rays up to the mountains.

King Thrasamund made this work in one year,

giving to the people illustrious gifts to the times.

5 Here the wheezing old men renew their flourishing virtue,

here the enlivening bathtubs warm up the fatigued limbs.

In the same way, flames mix up with their fellow waters

and fire has freezing showers nearby.

The flame is useful and does not consume any limb

10 and warmth is chosen through new vows.

The sick person forgets the obsession of his illness

and here the no-longer-dying one washes in crystal-clear waters.

212 R = 203 SB

Aliter eiusdem

*Regia praeclaras erexit iussio moles,
sensit et imperium calx, lapis, unda, focus.*

*Inclusus Vulcanus aquis argentibus hic est
et pacem liquidis fontibus ignis habet.*

5 *Cum lymphis gelidis gestat concordia flammae¹³*

ac stupet ardentis frigida nymphea lacus.

*Uritur hic semper gaudens neque laeditur hospes
et vegetat medicus pectora fota vapor.*

Maxima sed quisquis patitur fastidia molis

10 *aut gravibus madido corpore torpet aquis,*

his Thrasamundiatis propere<t> se tingere thermis:

protinus effugiet tristis uterque labor.

Otherwise by the same poet

The royal command erected an illustrious monument
even lime, stone, water and fire heard the order.

Here Vulcan is imprisoned by cold waters
and fire has peace with liquid springs.

Flames are in harmony with frozen waters

5 and the cold Nymphs cool the burning lakes.

Here the guest is always burnt with benefit and never gets hurt
and the healing steam revives invigorated chests.

But if there is someone that suffers great pains caused by the sun
or feels numb with a body soaked by heavy waters

10 he can hurry up and bathe in these Thrasamundaic baths
and soon both these afflictions will be gone.

¹³ I follow Riese's edition here; Shackleton Bailey corrects "flammam".

213 R = 204 SB

Aliter eiusdem

*Publica qui celsis educit moenia tectis,
hic pia rex populis Thrasamundus vota dicavit,
per quem cuncta suis consurgunt pulchra ruinis
et nova transcendunt priscas fastigia sedes.*

- 5 *Hic quoque post sacram meritis altaribus aedem
egregiasque aulas, quas grato erexit amore,
condidit ingentes proprio sub nomine thermas.
Hic bonus inriguis de<ce>rtat fontibus ignis.
Hic etiam ardentis <nullus> timet ora camini.*
- 10 *Plurimus hic imber gelidas adcommodat undas.
Hic aestus levis est, hic nullum frigora terrent¹⁴.
Hic gemina<ta> dies per candida marmora fulget.*

Otherwise by the same poet

The one who erected public works with high roofs,
here King Thrasamundus dedicated pious vows to the people
thanks to whom all things rise splendidly from their ruins
and the new gables surpass the ancient sites.

- 5 Right here, past the sacred temple with its righteous altars
and egregious halls, which he erected with grateful love,
he founded great baths under his own name.
Here a good fire fights with irrigated springs.
Here no one fears the mouths of the furnace even if it is burning.
- 10 Here an abundant rain provides icy waves.
Here heat is mild, here none fears the cold.
Here shines a daylight doubled by white marbles.

I would like to hint at the fact that 214 R = 205 SB was originally meant to have 12 lines of 37 letters each. Letters in the positions 1, 19 and 37 form an acrostic, a mesostic and a telestic that are highlighted in the Codex Salmasianus (Fig. 4) with red ink and that read *Thrasamundus cuncta* (with a spelling error) *innovat vota serenans* [Thrasamundus with serene spirit renews all the vows]. However, the number of letters is altered in the third and second to last verses, probably due to transmission errors.

¹⁴ I follow manuscript A here; both Riese and Shackleton Bailey accept van Kooten's correction "torrent".

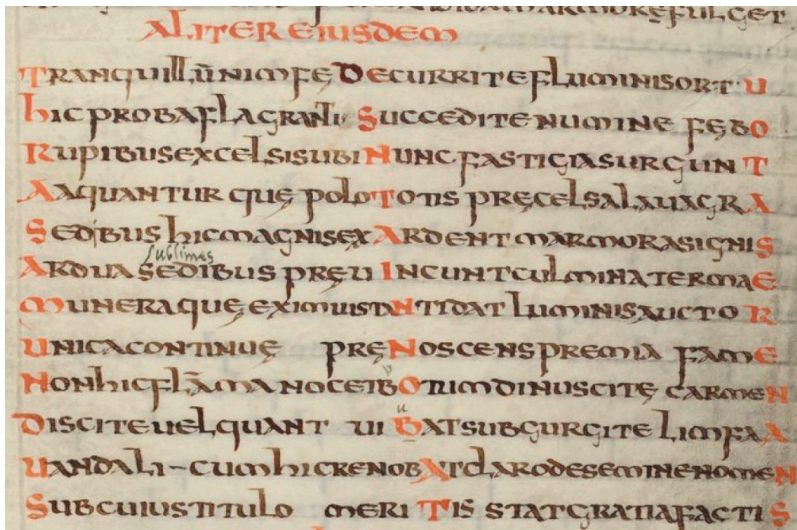


Figure 4: Codex Salmasianus (Paris, BnF, Lat. 10318). Section of folio 116 containing 214 R = 205 SB. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

214 R = 205 SB

Aliter eiusdem

Tranquillo, nymfae, decurrite fluminis ortu.

*Hinc nova flagranti succedite lumina Foebo,
rupibus excelsis ubi nunc fastigia surgunt
aequanturque polo totis praeclsa lavacra*

5 *sedibus. Hic magnis exardent marmora signis,
ardua sublimes praevincunt culmina termae,
muneraque eximius tanti dat liminis auctor
unica continuae praenoscens praemia famae.*

*Non hic flamma nocet. Votum dinoscite carmen,
10 discite vel quanto vivat sub †gurgite† lymfa.*

*Vandalicum hic renovat †claro† de semine nomen,
sub cuius titulo meritis stat gratia factis.*

Otherwise by the same poet

O waters, descend from the calm spring of the river!

Hence come to the marvellous lights of fiery Phoebus,
where now gables rise like high cliffs

5 and the splendid baths equal the vault of heaven from their
foundations. Here the marbles glow through great statues,
and the sublime baths tower above the sharp peaks,
and the eminent founder of such a great building gives gifts
foretasting the unique rewards of a lasting fame.

Here the flame does no harm. Distinguish the vow from the poem,
10 or distinguish how alive Lympha is under the abyss.

Here he, descending from a noble lineage renews the Vandalic name
Under whose inscription lies the gratitude for the deserved actions.

5. Discussion

5.1. Points in favour of the epigraphic nature of 210–214 R = 201–205 SB

Let us now recap some of the arguments brought forward by scholars to support their claim of the epigraphic nature of these texts. J.-N. Michaud's first point was that Felix's texts do not provide a precise description of the monument they refer to. Therefore, he takes for granted that the original readers of these texts could 'integrate' their reading with the view of the actual monument that was standing before their eyes.¹⁵ Furthermore, the frequent use of deictics like "hic ubi ...", "hinc" and so on in these texts might indicate that they were pointing to the environment in which they were supposedly located.¹⁶ Moreover, there is the great similarity with Gebamund's inscription, with which 210–214 R = 201–205 SB share many themes (the duality of fire and water and the subversion of nature), vocabulary (the use of the word "Baiae" as a synonym for "baths") and the narrative strategy (as noted by J.-N. Michaud, in all these texts the point of view is always the one of the "contemplating poet").¹⁷ Additionally, it was argued that 210–214 R = 201–205 SB might work as a cycle of inscriptions, displaying a mindful subdivision of topics and contents.¹⁸ Finally, as said before, the Codex Salmasianus can be compared to the actual epigraphic manuscript, containing transcriptions (or at best literalisations) of real inscriptions.¹⁹

5.2. Points against the epigraphic nature of 210–214 R = 201–205 SB

Concerning the 'lack of details', it has already been stated above that 210–214 R = 201–205 SB show characteristics of the literary genre of ekphrasis, notwithstanding their epideictic value. The 'objective' description of an object, a building or a landscape was never the aim of an 'ekphrastic poet' who, on the contrary, wanted to 'educate' the view of his readers by stimulating their imaginative force. The poet tried to bring the most vivid image of the subject he was describing to the readers' mind.²⁰ It is true that this genre originated "in the presence" of the object, but it is also true that it soon evolved and adapted to be used in its absence.

Regarding deictics, it has already been noted that they are apparently not only a feature of epigraphic texts but also of texts that pretend to be epigraphic: and this is true in the case of the above-mentioned second epigram of Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum*, a

¹⁵ Chalon et al. 1985, 232; with the same opinion Busch 1999, 246.

¹⁶ Courtney 1980, 39–40; Chalon et al. 1985, 232; Busch 1999, 246.

¹⁷ Chalon et al. 1985, 231; Busch 1999, 244, 250–256.

¹⁸ Courtney 1980, 40; the idea is further developed by Busch 1999, 250–256.

¹⁹ Monceaux 1906a, 183–184, 189; Courtney 1980, 38.

²⁰ See Tommasi Moreschini 2010, in part. 261–263.

text on which 210–214 R = 201–205 SB seems to rely considerably both stylistically and thematically.²¹

Before discussing the similarities of the poems transmitted in the Codex with *CIL* VIII 25362, at first I would like to point out the obvious difference in length: six verses compared to five poems of twelve verses. It is true that all are identical in themes, vocabulary and style, but in my opinion, the same cannot be said for the pragmatics of the texts. On the one hand, we have an inscription that speaks to the users of the baths, and every couplet addresses a specific theme and is self-sufficient; on the other hand, we have five compositions addressing solely King Thrasamund, disregarding the readers and constantly repeating the same themes in variation. I do not agree with the interpretation that each text deals with a more specific topic.²² On the contrary, the subdivision of themes does not seem to be clear-cut and it is just a coincidence that individual epigrams linger more on one subject than on another. Additionally, I find it very difficult to understand what the vision behind the creation of this cycle was, what the advantage of a purported placement of these five texts in five different positions in the bath-building would have been and how they were supposed to interact as texts and with the potential readers standing in the baths. These texts do not seem to complement each other and for these reasons I am inclined to think that they would serve poorly as inscriptions.

So, if these texts are not inscriptions, what are they? These texts allude to epigraphy and want to pass themselves off as epigraphs. We have to consider that Late Antiquity was a period in which poets experimented, breaking down the barriers of literature established previously. They were not satisfied with just being good poets, they also pretended to be good architects, stonecutters, glassworkers, blacksmiths and painters, putting their art in competition with that of the real craftsmen,²³ sometimes creating ‘short-circuits’ that are difficult to disentangle today. Moreover, the ‘textual landscape’ of Late Antiquity was very complex. Poems could be found not only in inscriptions on stone and in literary texts written on parchment but also in a series of ‘intermediate media’ such as letters and notes attached to gifts,²⁴ *instrumenta inscripta* like domestic silverware,²⁵ ivory diptychs (Eastmond 2010) and other materials associated with state ceremonials like the *largitiones*.²⁶ I am surprised that until now nobody has considered the possibility that Felix’s poems functioned as propagandistic texts to promote the construction of the *thermae* among an educated elite through non-strictly epigraphical media. In this period, during which poets composed texts suitable for various media, it

²¹ Busch 1999, 254–256; Schmidt 2019.

²² Busch 1999, 251–254.

²³ See Tommasi Moreschini 2010; Agosti 2004–2005; see the important case study of Leatherbury 2017.

²⁴ See Mondin 2019, 586–589 to which we can add the example of Paulinus Nolanus, *Carmina*, poems 1 and 2. Martial’s *Apophoreta* have been considered a collection of real (or ostensible) notes accompanying gifts (see Leary 1996, in part. 21–23).

²⁵ I had the opportunity to study Late Antique poems on silverware in my master thesis. See the examples of verse inscription on silverware collected by Scheibelreiter-Gail 2012, 155–159.

²⁶ See the case of the silver dish for the *decennalia* of Constans found in the Kaiseraugst treasure (Guggisberg 2003, 117–170, 178–179 no. 59a.b). On the *largitiones* see Beyeler 2011.

is not surprising that more than ever epigraphy pointed to literature but also that literature pointed to epigraphy to a certain extent.²⁷

Therefore, the idea that a poem in a manuscript resembling an inscription must have been copied from an actual monument appears too simplistic to be accepted without further questioning. The poems of the Cycle of Felix and the verse inscription of Gebamund are undeniably the product of the same cultural environment, but this does not necessarily imply that the former were originally placed on the same medium and read in the same context as the latter. It is safer to infer that these texts share a group of themes and arguments that must have been popular among the men of culture at the Vandal court. In the case of the Gebamund inscription, however, these themes have been reorganised to create a functioning epigraphic text. This was not done in the case of the epigrams of Felix, which rather seem to resemble a ‘repository of verses’, an inventory of possibilities from which to draw if needed – e.g. to create an inscription or an oration in the *salutatorium* of the royal palace. They might also have been expressions of the poet’s different takes on the same subject,²⁸ created as a rhetoric exercise or as a test of skills with the aim to display the poet’s ability to compose multiple poems on the same subject.²⁹ This would well explain the repetitions, or better the ‘variations’, in these texts. In this regard, I think that the Codex Salmasianus gives us the unique opportunity to see what happens ‘behind the scenes’ of poetic artistry at the service of power in Late Antique times.

6. The closing cycle of Luxorius’ book

I would like to conclude my paper by discussing the poems 377–380 R = 372–375 SB that seem to offer a basis for interesting observations.

As anticipated, it was argued that Luxorius’ *Liber Epigrammaton* had originally been closed (Fig. 5) by a cycle of six epigrams (376–380 R = 371–375 SB plus 389 R = 385 SB from the Codex Thuaneus) by different authors and arranged according to thematic criteria (Mondin – Cristante 2010, 315–317). The epigrams start with a hymn to the sun (389 R = 385 SB) and continue with the direct praise of king Thrasamund and the city of Carthage in the second poem by Florentinus (376 R = 371 SB). Then, the attention is directed away from the royal palace, and we are virtually taken to Carthage. The description of the city’s monuments serves again to praise the magnificence and religious orthodoxy of the Vandalic crown. In 377 R = 372 SB, we are brought back to the *thermae Alianarum* (though the poem does not mention their name nor that of the king). The tour goes on to some religious landmarks of the city. First, we have a text concerning a

²⁷ See for example Agosti 2014 on the influence of literature in Greek epigraphic texts and vice versa, but his reflections are also valid for Latin texts.

²⁸ This would also perfectly justify the titles “Aliter”, meaning “otherwise”, “in a different manner”, given in the manuscript to these compositions.

²⁹ On the parallels between Latin Late Antique epigrams and didactic practices see Mondin 2019, 579–581.

baptismal font (378 R = 373 SB), then a short poem of three verses referring to the Basilica of Saint Mary that was supposedly situated on the Byrsa hill (380 R = 375 SB) and finally a poem concerning the Holy Cross (379 R = 374 SB).

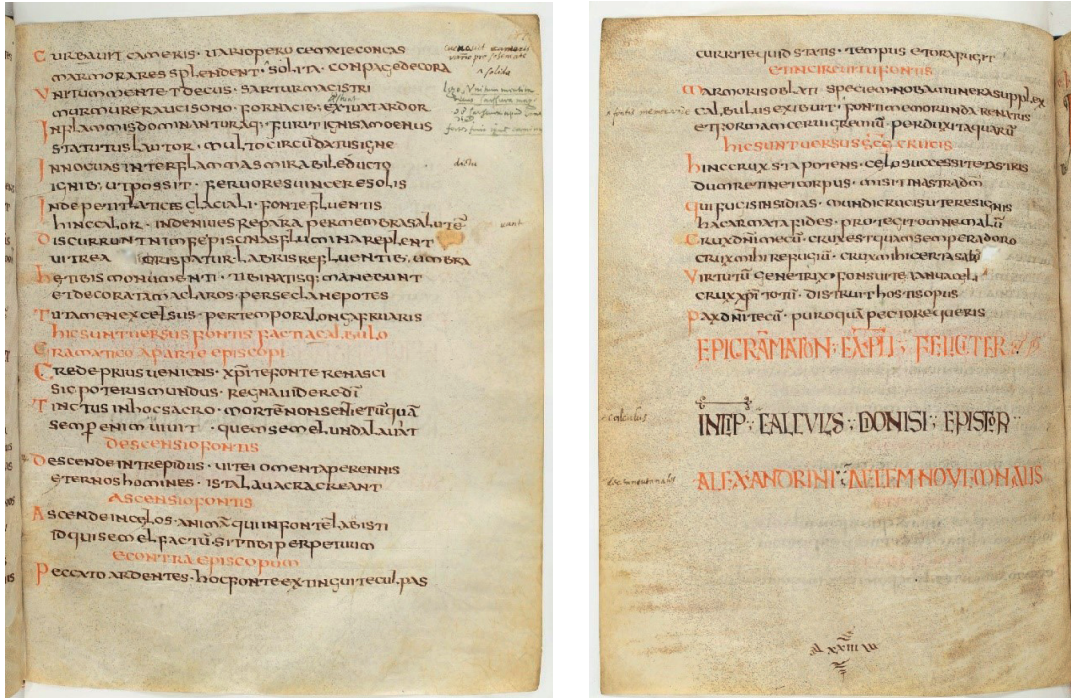


Figure 5: Codex Salmasianus (Paris, BnF, Lat. 10318). Folios 187–188 containing the last two pages of Luxorius' *Liber Epigrammaton*. Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

77 R = 372 SB

Versus balnearum

In parvo magnas fecit manus ardua Baias.

Culmina distendit niveis suspensa columnis.

Curvavit cameras vario pro <s>chemate conchis.

Marmora resplendent solida conpage decora,

5 *unitum mentita <simul> decus arte magistri.*

Murmure raucisono fornacibus aestuat ardor.

In flammis dominantur aquae, furit ignis in undis.

Stat <t>utus lautior multo circumdatus igne

innocuas inter flammis (mirabile dictu),

10 *ignibus ut possit fervores vincere solis.*

Inde petit latices glaciali fonte fluentes.

Hinc calor, inde nives repara<nt> per membra salutem.

Discurrunt nympheae, piscinas flumina replent.

Vitrea crispatur labris refluentibus unda.

15 *Hae<c> tibi sunt monumenta. Tibi natisque manebunt*

*et decora<bi>t avus claros per saecla nepotes;
tu tamen excelsus per tempora longa fruaris.*

Verses about the baths

- In a short time, the daring hand has made great baths.
He stretched out suspended ceilings on snowy columns.
He bent halls for the pools following a complex scheme.
The marble decorations shine from the solid union
5 <appearing as> a unitary decoration through the deceptive mastery of the architect.
Heat blazes from the furnaces with a hoarse-sounding noise.
The waters are mastered in the flames, and the fire raves in the waves.
The bather is completely surrounded by many flames
but he stays in harmless fires (unbelievable to say!)
10 so that he can win the heat of the Sun with fires.
After that, he requires waters flowing from a glacial spring.
Thus, the heat and then the snows recover <one's> health through the limbs.
The waters flow and the rivers fill the pools.
The glassy waves ripple out from the edges.
15 These are your monuments. To your offspring they will remain
and you, as an ancestor, will be the pride of your illustrious descendants in the
centuries to come;
but you, exalted one, will also enjoy them for a long time.

This text shares many similarities with the poems by Felix; the only difference is that it does not mention the king's name though it refers directly to him in the last three verses. If the poem was recited in his presence, however, the poet did not need to mention the king's name to those listening. It is evident that this poem is the continuation of Florentinus' *laus* in terms of purpose and tone.

379 R = 374 SB

Versus Sanctae Crucis

- Hinc Dominus patiens caelo successit et astris.
Dum retinet corpus, misit in astra Deum.
Qui fugis insidias mundi, crucis utere signis;
hac armata fides protegit omne malum.
5 Crux Domini mecum! Crux est quam semper adoro.
Crux mihi refugium, crux mihi certa salus.
Virtutum genetrix, fons vitae, ianua caeli,
crux Christi totum destruit hostis opus.
Pax Domini tecum, puro quam pectore quaeris!*

Verses of the Holy Cross

Through here the suffering Lord passed on to the heavens and to the stars.

Withholding his body, (the Cross) sent his divinity to the stars.

Let the one who wants to avoid the snares of the world make use of the symbol
of the cross;

this so-armed faith protects against all evil.

5 May the cross of the Lord be with me! The cross is what I always adore.

The cross is my refuge, the cross is my sure salvation.

Mother of all virtues, source of life, portal to heaven,

the cross of Christ demolished all the enemy's work.

May the peace of the Lord be with you who seek with a pure heart.

The last line should be considered the closing line of the book, so it is not relevant to the poem.

This composition seems to have little to do with an epigraphic poem. The main problem is the use of the first-person pronoun in verses 5 and 6, which has the effect that the text rather resembles a hymn. If we leave these two verses aside, however, it seems that the remaining couplets might constitute three self-sufficient epigrams. Verses 1–2 define the cross and use deictic means to refer to it. Verses 3–4 are a general invitation to the faithful to use his symbol while verses 7–8 come back to its description.

Line 8 of this composition resembles a peculiar metrical inscription written in nielloed characters on the so-called Cross of Justin II or “Crux vaticana”. The cross is an artefact that was created just around thirty years after the reign of Thrasamund (La Crux Vaticana 2009).

*◁ crux ▷ Li/gno / quo / Ch/ri/st/us / hu/ma/nu/m
s/ub/di/di/t h/os/te/m / da/t Ro/mae
Iustinus opem
et socia decorem.*

With the (same) wood with which Christ defeated
the enemy of mankind
Justin gives to Rome his aid while his lady gives
decency.

Of course, the two texts serve different purposes. The Crux Vaticana aims at commemorating a donation of the emperor to the Church of Rome. Both texts, though, linger on the fact that the cross is the instrument with which Jesus defeated the enemy of humanity (i.e. death). Anyway, this comparison does not prove the ‘epigraphic genuinity’ of 379 R = 374 SB.

The verses that most closely resemble a true metrical inscription are those of poem 380 R = 375 SB:

380 R = 375 SB

Domni Petri Referendarii

Versus In Basilica Palatii Sanctae Mariae

*Qualiter intacta processit virgine partus
utque pati voluit natus, perquirere noli,
haec nulli tractare licet sed credere tantum.*

Verses of Petrus Referendarius

in the Basilica of Saint Mary in the Royal Palace

How childbirth was carried out while the Virgin remained immaculate,
and how the child born wanted to suffer, you do not investigate it,
these things no one is allowed to debate but he must only believe them.

The poem addresses its readers directly, urging them not to question (*perquirere*) the dogma of the perpetual virginity of Mary as well as, seemingly more cryptically, the physical nature of Jesus. I spotted some similarities between this text and a very fragmentary inscription (Fig. 6), apparently metrical, found in the *atrium* of the so-called basilica of Saint Cyprian on the north-eastern outskirts of Carthage (Ennabli 1997b, 191–192 no. 1).

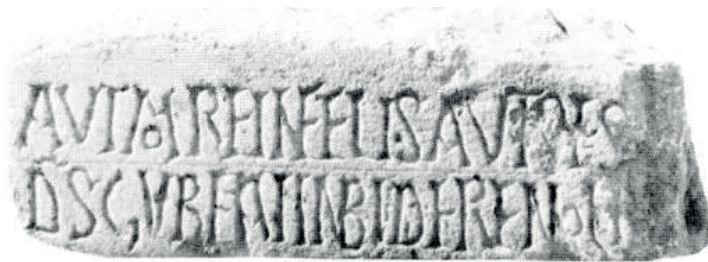


Figure 6: Inscription found in the *atrium* of the basilica of St Cyprian in Carthage. Ennabli 1997b, p. 191

Aut more infelis (!) aut q(u)es[---]

D(eu)s gubeat (!) inbidere (!) noli [---]

Unhappy by habit or [...] may the Lord command “do not be envious [...].”

Although the inscription is very fragmentary and its meaning rather obscure, it is possible to understand its general sense. In my opinion, this was an inscription that was originally displayed inside the *atrium* of the basilica with the aim of admonishing the passing faithful to strive for moral conduct, just like 380 R = 375 SB.

The last text that I would like to discuss, poem 378 R = 373 SB, is the one that piqued my curiosity most and that brought several questions to my mind. It is composed of a group of five epigrams standing for themselves, each with its own title pointing to a specific place around this otherwise unknown baptistery.

378 R = 373 SB

Calbuli Grammatici versus fontis

A parte Episcopi

Crede prius veniens Christi te fonte renasci:

sic poteris mundus regna videre dei.

Tinctus in hoc sacro mortem non sentiet umquam;

semper enim vivit, quem semel unda lavat.

Descensio fontis

Descende intrepidus: vitae lomenta perennis

aeternos homines ista lavacra creant.

Ascensio fontis

Ascende in caelos, animam qui in fonte lavasti

idque semel factum sit tibi perpetuum.

Econtra Episcop*<i>*um³⁰

Peccato ardentes hoc fonte extinguite culpas.

*Currite. Quid statis? Tempus et *<h>*ora fugit.*

Et in circuitu fontis

Marmoris oblatae speciem, nova munera, supplex

Calbulus exhibuit, fontis<s>* memor, unde renatus*

ad formam cervi gremium perduxit aquarum.

Verses of the grammarian Calbulus about a baptismal font

(Coming) from the bishopric's side

Firstly, coming *<here>*, believe in rebirth through the font of Christ:

so that you will be able to see the worldly realm of God

Dipped in this sacred ** one never feels death;

in fact, always lives the one who once bathed in *<this>* wave.

Descent into the font

Descend, intrepid one: the lotions of an everlasting life

<and> these baths create eternal men.

Ascent from the font

Rise to the skies your soul, you, who washed in the font,

and that, once done, will be eternal to you.

³⁰ I think that the text here might refer not to an *episcopus* "bishop" but to an *episcopium* "bishopric". If this were true, it would mean that this group of texts would refer to a key place in Christian Carthage.

On the far side (going) towards the bishopric

You who are burning because of the sin, quench your faults with this font.

Hurry. What are you waiting for? The time is running.

And in the circuit of the font

The pleading Calbulus has provided the appearance of the marble offered,
splendid gifts,

being mindful of the font from which he was reborn

and made (his) heart shaped like a deer (for) waters.³¹

The first four compositions are very similar to the verses of Petrus Referendarius in content and form and it seems that they would perfectly work as inscriptions displayed in a place sacred to Christians. Regarding the baptistery Calbulus is talking about, Ennabli (1997a, 37) suggested that these verses testify to the existence of a private baptistery owned by the poet himself who put his name on it with an inscription. This idea, however, conflicts with the supposed ‘publicity’ of the concluding cycle of Luxorius’ book.

I am very tempted to suggest that Calbulus might have played a clever literary game by which, by composing four texts pretending to be inscriptions from the actual baptistery passed down through his memory (*memor*), he wanted to reproduce the appearance of the monument for the readers (*exhibuit ... speciem marmoris oblatis*). He then, with his last epigram, which takes the shape of a dedicatory inscription, makes himself a participant in the ‘epigraphic cycle’ of the unknown baptistery.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Codex Salmasianus is, in my opinion, not an epigraphical manuscript. As we have learnt during our CARMEN Seminar-Conference 2, epigraphical manuscripts are documents of an entirely different nature that originated in quite different contexts and for quite different purposes. However, it seems that the compiler of the concluding cycle in Luxorius’ book had an interest in epigraphy, in his own way of course. His interest was not sparked by curiosity about the *mirabilia* of a past and vanishing world, and he was not overly concerned with the observation and objective transcription of texts on these artefacts. These objects rather served a specific epideictic purpose, and to achieve this effect he was willing to engage in a dialectical confrontation with them.

³¹ See *Psalmi Iuxta LXX*, 41, 2 (Weber – Gryson 2007): “*Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum | ita desiderat anima mea ad te Deus*” [in the same way that a deer yearns for water springs, so does my soul yearn for you, O Lord!] (= Psalm 42, 2).

Appendix: 203 R = 194 SB and 215 R = 206 SB

The poems 203 R = 194 SB and 215 R = 206 SB are two texts dedicated to the Vandalic royal palace that have also been associated with inscriptions in the past. 203 R = 194 SB, attributed to Luxorius by the Codex Thuaneus, is an epideictic text referring to king Hilderic (523–530). It praises the construction of the *salutatorium* (the receiving hall). Regarding these texts, we can make the same observations as we did for the Cycle of Felix.

203 R = 194 SB

Luxorii***In Anclas; in salutatorium Domini Regis***

Hildirici regis fulget mirabile factum

arte, opere, ingenio, divitiis, pretio.

Hinc radios sol ipse capit, quos huc dare possit:

altera marmoribus creditur esse dies.

Hic sine labe solum, nix ꝥiuncta et sparsaꝥ putatur:

dum steterint, credas mergere posse pedes.

(Poem) by Luxorius**About Anclae; about the receiving hall of <our> Lord the King**

The wondrous work of Hilderic shines

of artistry, work, vision, richness and value.

From here, the Sun itself receives back all the rays it could cast here:

for thanks to the marbles, you could believe that it might be a second daylight.

The pavement is spotless, it might resemble snow ꝥspread all aroundꝥ:

until your feet will stand there, you might think that you can sink them into it.

The point of view is still that of the contemplating poet. He speaks as if he is in the place he describes, but the text does not seem to assume that its readers are also present there as well. This is evident from the hypothetical tone of the last lines.

215 R = 206 SB is an anonymous poem dedicated to an unknown Vandalic king. As far as I know, no English translation of it has been made so far.

215 R = 206 SB

In Anclas

Vandalirice potens, gemini diadematis heres,

ornasti proprium per facta ingentia nomen.

Belligeras acies domuit Theodosius ultor,

captivas facili reddens certamine gentes.

*Adversos placidis subiecit Honorius armis,
cuius prosperitas melior fortissima vicit.
ampia Valenti<ni>ani virtus cognita mundo
hostibus addictis ostenditur arte nepotis.*

About Anclae

Mighty king of the Vandals, heir of a twin crown,
you have honoured your own name with conspicuous deeds.
Theodosius the avenger dominated <many> hostile armies
bringing back, after an easy battle, convicted peoples.
Honorius subjugated enemies with peace-keeping weapons,
whose strongest fortune was even more victorious.
Valentinian's splendid virtue, renown in the world,
now that the enemies have been defeated, it is evident with mastery in his
descendant.

As in 377 R = 372 SB the poem addressed directly the king not mentioning his name, a characteristic that seems more suited to a recitation in his presence rather than to a monumental inscription.

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