



Between digit and symbol: The figure ‘6’ in Christian epigraphy*

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ABSTRACT

In late Latin inscriptions, particularly in Christian epitaphs, a <Ϟ>-shaped sign is sometimes employed alongside the conventional notation <VI> in order to express the digit ‘6’. Traditional explanations about the origin of this sign are discussed and rejected in favour of an alternative hypothesis which focuses on its symbolic significance. Over and above its numerical value, the Greek digit <Ϟ> ‘6’ (the so-called *episemon*) can in fact be regarded as a Christological symbol, and it is by virtue of such an ideological connotation that it was adopted in the graphic/writing repertoire of Latin Christian epigraphy.

KEYWORDS: Christian epigraphy, writing contact, alphabetic mysticism, sacred onomastics

To see the writing without the image
is like hearing a voice without seeing the form;
to see the image without the writing
is like seeing a person but not hearing his words.
(Zheng Qiao, *Tongzhi. Tupu lüe*, XII cent.
in *Siku quanshu*, Vol. 374, *juan* 72.1b)

1. *Introduction*

Besides the usual notation <VI>, late Latin epigraphy and Christian epigraphy in particular attest with some frequency a sign <Ϟ> with the logographic value of the digit ‘6’, both in isolation (e.g. *CIL*

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XI 4043: *que vicsit annos* ζ ‘6 years’, AD 395, Capena) and with more complex numerical sequences (e.g. *CIL* V 1702: *vixit annus* XCII *mesis* ζ II ‘18 years and 8 months’, 4th century AD, Aquileia). This figure is employed both in the calculation of years and months of life in tomb inscriptions (cf. above) and in dating (e.g. *AE* 1971, 137: *sub d(ie)* ζ II *Kal Decembres*; *CIL* IX 1392: *die* ζ I *kal Maiias*); any subsequent <I> figures are sometimes indicated in subscript (e.g. *AE* 1979, 312: < ζ _{II}> ‘8’ and < ζ _{III}> ‘9’). Depending on the radius of the curved stroke, and the inclination, length and curvature of the descending stroke, the design exhibits a certain degree of variability. This can cause the basic shape (Figure 1a) to resemble either a capital <C> (Figure 1b, where the descending stroke is barely noticeable) or a capital <S> (Figure 1c).

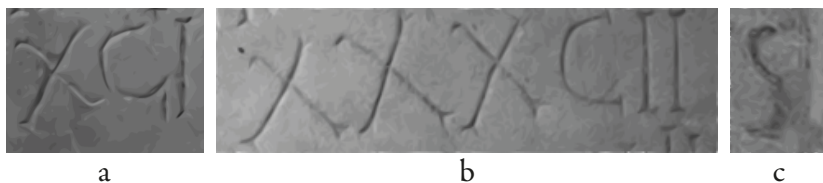


Figure 1. a - *AE* 1990, 454 (detail); b - *AE* 1990, 454 (detail);
c - *CIL* XI 2583 (detail).

This sign is not exclusive to stone inscriptions; it also appears in imperial papyri, in the Ravenna papyri of the 5th-8th centuries, and in Merovingian diplomas (Mallon 1952: 125-126)¹. And again, in a seventh- to eighth-century addition to a late fifth-century manuscript (*Urb.lat.* 1154; Pellegrin 1982: 658, with bibliography), pagination is indicated in figures and words as follows (Figure 2):

¹ See, e.g., MABILLON (1709: 379 tab. XIX 1 = *ChLA* 13 564): *Marcus, dies dieci, annum* XC [= 16] *regn(i) dom(n)i nostri Chlothachariae, glor(iosissimi) regis* (France, Lamorlaye, 10 March 673); MABILLON (1709: 379 tab. XIX 2 = *MGH* Dipl. I no. 57 = LAUER-SAMARAN 1908: no. 17): *sub d(ie) tertio Kal(endas) Novembris, annum* XC [= 16] *rigni nostri* (France, Compiègne, 30 October 688). Further *fac-similia* are available in LAUER-SAMARAN (1908: nos. 6, 16, 17, 29, 31, 32, 37). It should be noted that, in both of the examples cited here, the palaeographic datum, though visible in the *fac-similia*, is not recorded in the edited text, where the numbering is normalized respectively as *ann(o) XVI* and *Annum XVI*. The same problem also arises for epigraphic documents (cf. below, footnote 11).

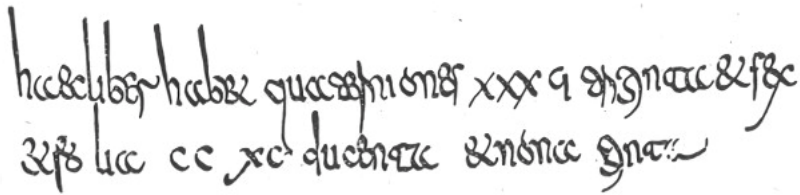


Figure 2. MS Urb.lat. 1154 f. 289r.

Text: *haec liber habet quaterniones XXXϞ triginta et sex /
et folia CCXC ducenta et nonaginta.*

There is an obvious homography with the <Ϟ> / <Ϟ> forms of *digamma*, used in Greek numeration with the value of ‘6’ and with the arithmonym of *episemon*². Although it has no phonological reference³, *digamma* is preserved as the sixth element of the sequence in the Greek alphabetic numbering system due to the fixity acquired by the alphabetic series at the moment it also begins to serve as a notation of numer-

² The arithmonym *ἐπίσημον* (lit. ‘sign, mark’; cf. the corresponding adjective *ἐπίσημος* ‘remarkable, illustrious’) was used until the Middle Ages only with reference to the digit ‘6’, as in the treatise attributed to Bede *De loquela per gestum digitorum* (*Patr. Lat.* XC 697): *Prima est Ϟ quae dicitur Episimon et est nota numeri VI.; secunda est η (sic) quae vocatur kophe et valet in numero XC.; tertia est "* (sic) *quae dicitur enneacosia quia valet DCCCC.* It was only later, in the 16th century, that the term came to refer indifferently to each of the three additional *notae* (at least since Joseph Justus Scaliger, *Animaduvers.* 116: *tria episema trium numerorum VI, XC, DCCCC*), then further distinguished as *ἐπίσημον βαύ* ‘6’, *ἐπίσημον κόππα* ‘90’ and *ἐπίσημον σανπί* ‘900’ (so also in MONTAFAUCON’s *Palaeographia graeca*, 1708: 122, 128, 132: *ἐπίσημον βαύ, ἐπίσημον κοφή, ἐπίσημον σαμπι*). The statement of the recent GARIPZANOV (2018: 33: «*Sampi, which was known as an Episemon, a distinguishing sign in Greek*») is thus inaccurate: the definition of *sampi* as *episemon* does not come from Greek, but from the Renaissance. The collective name of the three characters in antiquity was rather *παράσημα*, as stated in the *scholia* of Dionysius Thrax (UHLIG 1883:1.318.29-37, 319.21-31).

³ Apart from the well-known dialectal survivals, the residual uses of *digamma*, mostly in archaic epigraphs, are phonetic scripts of a transitional glide that can occur in intervocalic context or between diphthong and vowel (SCHWYZER 1939: 87, 223; BUCK 1955: 49; ALLEN 1987: 82 n. 57; LEJEUNE 1987: 163-164; WOODARD 2014: 62-63; cf. instead BRIXHE 1976: 52-53 for the dialect of Pamphylia). See, for instance: *SEG* 4.64: *δύφο τάλαγ[τα]* (Sicily, 6th century BC); *IG* I³ 1251: *ἀφυτάρ* (Attica, 550-540 BC); WACHTER (2001: CHA 2): *Γᾶρυρόνῃς* (Vulci, 550-510 BC) as opposed to *Γῆρυρόνῃς* (cf. McDONALD-CLACKSON 2020: 95); and, more recently, *SEG* 37, 340: *ἐδραλωσαι* (Mantineia, ca. 350 BC) against other Arcadian forms such as *δεᾶτοι* and *δεα[ση]τοι* (cf. GARCÍA RAMÓN 2018: 40).

ical sequentiality (Prosdocimi 1990: 223-224)⁴. In particular, it is the form <Ϛ> (and not <ϛ>) of *digamma* that specialises in the digit function (Threatte 1980: 113; Ranocchia 2018: 208; 2020: 199-200, both with further bibliography), with its square pattern gradually cursivising into the <Ϛ> / <ϛ> forms attested both in epigraphy (reff. in Tod 1950: 135 n. 22) and in imperial papyri (reff. in Ranocchia 2020: 199 n. 8). Here, too, the design allows for variations (cf. Gardthausen 1913 [1879]: 367; Tod 1950: 135) which can make it coincide, on the one hand, with that of the lunate *sigma* <Ϙ>, on the other hand, with that of an <s> of the Latin alphabet and, later, with the so-called *stigma* <Ϟ>, the original ligature of the nexus <σ> + <τ> (Ranocchia 2020: 199 and reff. in n. 7)⁵.

The following sections illustrate the shortcomings of the traditional explanations provided for the introduction of <Ϛ> in the graphic/writing repertoire of Latin Christian epigraphy. In particular, Section 2 discusses the hypothesis of its Greek origin, understood as the simple borrowing of the Greek digit for ‘6’ in the Latin numbering sys-

⁴ The same applies, of course, to the other two ‘dead letters’ as well, *goppa* (18th position, ‘90’) and *sampi* (27th position, ‘900’). Cf. JANNARIS (1907), TOD (1911-1912; 1950: 135-136), THREATTE (1980: 113-114) and CHRISOMALIS (2010: 134-147).

⁵ On Greek numbering systems, their chronology and local and regional variants, the contributions of TOD (1911-1912; 1913; 1926-1927; 1936-1937; 1950) and, confined to Attica, THREATTE (1980: 110-119) remain fundamental. For intent of inventory: in the alphabetical numbering system (also called “Ionian” or “Milesian”) the 27 letters assume a progressive numeral value ordered by units (α-θ ‘1-9’), tens (ι-ϙ ‘10-90’) and hundreds (ρ-ϛ ‘100- 900’) (TOD 1950; THREATTE 1980: 113-117; CHRISOMALIS 2010: 134-147). From the 1st century AD onwards, this system definitively supplanted the acrophonic system of the Attic type, in which each digit (with the exception of ι ‘1’) is instead represented by the initial letter of the corresponding numeral, e.g. π(έντε) ‘5’, δ(έκα) ‘10’, h(εκατόν) ‘100’, χ(ίλιοι) ‘1,000’ (TOD 1926-1927; 1936-1937; THREATTE 1980: 110-113; CHRISOMALIS 2010: 98-105). There is, however, no clear-cut chronological divide that marks the passage from one system to the other, since the two coexist for centuries: in Attica the first attestations of both are substantially coeval (5th century BC), even if the alphabetic system spreads mainly from the Augustan age (cf. TOD 1911-1912: 128, who does not exclude a higher chronology for the acrophonic system, to the 7th century BC; TOD 1950: 137-138; THREATTE 1980: 112, 117). Rather, their distribution is better characterised in terms of more or less broad functional domains: while the alphabetic system is applied in all contexts where numerical notation is required (TOD 1950: 129-134), the acrophonic system is instead excluded from the notation of ordinal numerals, fractions (except those indicating monetary values) and dating (TOD 1911-1912: 128; THREATTE 1980: 112; CHRISOMALIS 2010: 104). On the other hand, even after the generalisation of the alphabetic system, it will continue to be employed in the stichometry of literary works (TOD 1911-1912: 129-130).

tem; Sections 3 and 4, on the other hand, illustrate and refute the current interpretation of Mallon, which attributes the origin of this sign to a ligature of the Old Roman cursive script. Sections 5 and 6, finally, propose an alternative hypothesis that does recognise a Greek origin of <Ϛ> but gives priority to its symbolic and specifically Christological values for explaining its adoption in Latin Christian inscriptions.

2. *The shortcomings of the Greek hypothesis*

The phylogenetic review of hypotheses concerning the origin of <Ϛ> in the Latin script begins from the self-evident formal identity with the Greek digit. Within the field of diplomatics, Mabillon (1709: 215-216) observed that <Ϛ> was scatteredly employed to denote the number six («*passim ad numerum sextum designandum*»), both in chapter numbering and in dating formulas of Merovingian diplomas. He concluded that «*haec nota sine dubio est ipsum ἐπίσημον Ϛ graecum, quo sex significantur*». Similarly, in the field of epigraphy, since at least the work of Maffei (1749: 180), the symbol has been identified as «*numeralem notam [...] ex Graeca Ϛ derivatam, ac senarium numerum significantem*». The hypothesis of a Greek origin and the label of ἐπίσημον βᾶϚ persisted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century⁶. Even in the mid-twentieth century, this interpretation remained influential, as reflected in the sylloge of *Inscripciones cristianas de la España romana y visigoda* where Vives (1942: 190) stated: «[e]písemon deriva de una letra griega Ϛ, arcaica, con valor de: VI (seis)».



A few years later, this explanation was finally superseded by the accounts presented by Mallon (1948; 1952), which continue to exert a significant influence in this field (§ 3). After all, in the absence of corroborating evidence, it is not possible to claim that the addition of a Greek digit to Roman numerals was due to interference between the two systems. To reach this conclusion, it is sufficient to apply to num-

⁶ Cf. SCHWARZ (1724), TASSIN-TOUSTAIN (1797 III: 513), DE WAILLY (1838 I: 705), LE BLANT (1856 I: 73, 151; 1865 II: 124), and CALMETTES (1867, with references also to Merovingian coinage).

bering systems the more general considerations made by Prosdocimi (1990) regarding writing systems. Each numbering system is, by definition, as a ‘system’, comprehensive and self-contained in terms of notation, and it is characterised by a distinct set of symbols (e.g., *I* ‘1’, *V* ‘5’, *X* ‘10’, etc. vs. α ‘1’, β ‘2’, γ ‘3’, etc.) and its own “syntactic” rules, which lead to different analyses of the same arithmetic reference (e.g., *XXII* ‘10+10+1+1 = 22’ vs. $\kappa\beta$ ‘20+2 = 22’). Thus, the substitution of <Q> for <VI> would import an entirely incongruous element into the Latin system. Not (only) because its form is Greek, but, most significantly, because its structural properties continue to be Greek. This is evident from the following considerations: (i) it involves completely different semiotic principles of notation (<Q> = symbolic/opaque vs. <VI> = diagrammatic/articulated); (ii) it is the only logogram with a value greater than ‘1’ that does not conform to a base of 5 (*V*, *L*, *D*) or 10 (*X*, *C*, and, later, *M*); and (iii) unlike all other numerals, it functions solely as an additive element (<QI> ‘6 + 1 = 7’) and never as a subtractive one (*<IQ> ‘6 - 1 = 5’), due to the fact that there is already a dedicated symbol for ‘5’.

In sum, the mere coexistence of the two numbering systems, albeit centuries-long and occasionally resulting in a physical contiguity on the same material support (see § 6), cannot, in itself, trigger any interference, particularly in the absence of further motivations that cannot be structural in nature. The improbability of such a state of affairs is akin to writing, today, *20IVI* instead of *2016*.

3. *Mallon and the ligature <vi>*

Building on an intuition by Fumagalli (1802: 175), who sees in <Q> of the Late Latin documents ‘the Roman VI, somewhat deformed and reduced to a cursive character’ [transl. F.R.], Mallon (1948; 1952: 125-135) reported the genesis of the sign in the groove of Latin palaeography: <Q> would be a cursive ligature of the digraph <vi>, already typical of the Old Roman cursive script (1st-3rd century). In the numerous papyri, tablets, and ostraka that document this variety, <v> is realised as a single curved stroke in the upper half of the line (<  > / <  >; cf. also Cherubini-Pratesi 2010: 53) and created ligatures

with the following letters, as in the cases of <va> (Figure 3a), <vm> (Figure 3b; cf. other *fac-similia* in Mallon 1952: 126-127) and, indeed, <vi>, both in its alphabetic/phonological reading /wi/ (Figure 3c) and in its logographic/numerical reading ‘6’ (Figure 3d):

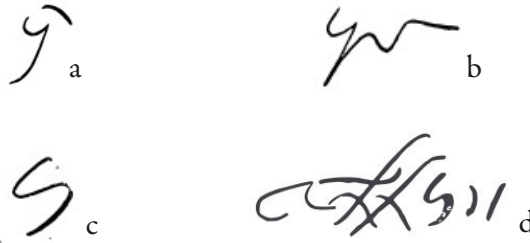


Figure 3. a - Ligature <va> (Mallon 1952: 126); b - Ligature <vm> (Mallon 1952: 126); c - Ligature <vi> in *quid* (202-207 AD; Mallon *et al.* 1939: n. 28 l. 7); d - Ligature <vi> in *CCXXVI* (II cent. AD; *CIL* XV 4407).

This ligature – but only in the numerical value ‘6’ – survived in the following centuries in similar domains of use (e.g. Ravenna papyri, Merovingian diplomas), even though the New Roman cursive (4th-6th century) had by then replaced the earlier variety, while retaining some of its signs as numerals (cf. in addition to <VI> ‘6’, the cases of <L> ‘50’ and <D> ‘500’ discussed in Mallon 1948: 16-25; 1952: 128-130)⁷. However, if the fate of a *cursive* ligature is likely to have been one of continuity in the *cursive* tradition of documentary writing, the reasons for its introduction into epigraphic *capital* script from the 4th century onwards are less straightforward.

According to Mallon, however, even this fact can be explained within the framework of the transition from Old to New Roman cursive between the 3rd and 4th centuries and, in particular, in the

⁷ An examination of the discontinuities marking the evolution from Old Roman (majuscule) to New Roman (minuscule) cursive is beyond the scope of this paper. For a comprehensive overview of the various positions and related bibliographical references, please refer to CHERUBINI-PRATESI (2010: 75-85) and COTUGNO (2015: 57-58). After all, aside from the survival of the former (the *litterae caelestes* of the imperial chancery) and the early emergence of the latter (the appearance of “preminuscular” forms of <d> and fully minuscule forms of <h> and <q> as early as the 1st century AD), there is a significant consensus regarding the completion of the transition from one to the other between the 3rd and 4th centuries.

light of its consequences for the process of *ordinatio* of inscriptions. In his contributions on *ordinatio*, Mallon (1955; 1957) isolates three moments in the composition of an epigraphic text: (i) the drafting of a minute in cursive writing; (ii) the transposition of the text on stone, drawn in square capitals by an *ordinator*; and (iii) its engraving by a stonemason along the lines drawn by the *ordinator*. Some errors, which cannot be explained in any other way, especially in the presence of complex and/or ambiguous ligatures, would be evidence of the *ordinatores* mechanically transliterating letter by letter from cursive to capital, without being able to understand what was being transcribed.

As long as, in the Old Roman cursive (1st-3rd century), the *ordinatores* were able to recognise in <Q> not only the logogram/digit '6' but also the alphabetic digraph <vi>, they would always have been able to decipher and reconvert the ligature read on the cursive minute into the sequence <vi> of the epigraphic capital – hence the absence of <Q> in the inscriptions of this period. When, with the New Roman cursive (4th-6th century), numerical and alphabetical notation became increasingly distant, they would have read <Q> only as a figure and limited themselves to reproducing it on stone, thus introducing into the epigraphic capital a sign that had never been part of it before:

[Q]uand l'écriture courante eût changé, la syllabe *ui* s'est trouvée faite d'une manière différente du prétendu episemon, et le sigle ne représenta plus une syllabe déterminée, mais ce fut seulement une chiffre et un chiffre qui ne ressemblait à aucune lettre [... S]i un chiffre de notre système se trouve gravé sur pierre, c'est précisément parce qu'il n'est plus qu'un chiffre, parce qu'il ne correspond plus à une lettre de l'écriture courante. (Mallon 1948: 31, 33)

Such an explanation is, to date, currently accepted both in diplomatic-codicological (Marichal 1953: 189; Bischoff 1990 [1986]: 176; Munzi 2007: 109, with references in n. 13) and epigraphic studies (Gordon 1983: 46; Lassère 2005: 57; Panciera 2006 [1974]: 714 n. 36; Piras 2017: 155)⁸.

⁸ Also CHRISOMALIS (2010: 111) refers to it, but rather loosely. Of the presence of <Q> in inscriptions after the 4th century, however, CAGNAT (1898: 30) and COOLEY (2012: 358), among others, merely take note without advancing any interpretation.

Despite the radical difference in his interpretation, Mallon shares with the earlier 18th- and 19th-century proposals a “monogenetic” approach insofar as he traces the origin of the <Q> sign in both diplomatics and epigraphy to a common cause – in this case, the transition between the two cursive varieties. There are, however, major dissimilarities between the two writing domains that must be taken into account: purposes and intended recipients of the documents, their private or public dimension, techniques, materials and contexts of production, and so forth. Thus, the hypothesis presented here eschews a *reductio ad unum* and instead suggests two separate patterns of development. Obviously, the following sections (§§ 4.1-4.2) do not intend to refute Mallon’s reconstruction of the origins of <Q> as a cursive ligature and its survival as a numerical figure into the cursive realm of documentary, administrative, and book writing. Rather, the objections concern the second part of his proposal, namely the assumptions and the supposed process that would explain the adoption of this cursive ligature among the capital forms of inscriptions as a consequence of the script change from Old Roman Cursive to New Roman Cursive.

4. *The origin of <Q> in epigraphy: The shortcomings of the palaeographic hypothesis*

4.1. *The role of the ordinator*

A preliminary objection arises from the need to assume a process of *ordinatio* that required the use of a cursive-written minute. It is important to recall Panciera’s (2006 [1967]) observation that the three steps postulated by Mallon represent a coherent sequence and, in numerous instances, were undoubtedly implemented. However, it is also evident that a multitude of alternative procedures were concurrently in use. For example, it is conceivable that the minutes were already inscribed in epigraphic characters; the drawing of the text on the stone and the subsequent engraving might have been the

work of the same individual; the irregular spacing, alignment and dimension of the letterforms in the less accurate epigraphic monuments indicates that the text was not previously laid out on the stone with a preparatory drawing but was engraved freehand on the spot; in other instances, the text could have been scribbled on the stone in the form of a note, rather than as a calligraphic model to be traced with a chisel; '[t]o conclude, the potential scenarios are manifold and limiting them to a single hypothesis is both inappropriate and dangerous' (Panciera 2006 [1967]: 1811 transl. F.R.; cf. also Adams 2003: 84-93).

A significant number of the inscriptions attesting <Q> provide evidence that their arrangement is anything but *ordinatum*. In some instances, this is due to the fact that they are graffiti (*ICUR V 14815a,b*, *CIL XI 4046*, *ICI IV 40*), which, by their very nature, rule out a preparatory composition of the text. Additionally, a number of gravestones engraved with a chisel exhibit a somewhat haphazard redaction, characterised by inconsistencies in letter size, spacing, and misalignment of lines. Examples such as *CIL X 100* (Figure 4a, which features, among other things, the alternation of <s> with <z> in reverse and varying sizes and alignments of the <o>s), *CIL X 7766* (Figure 4b, where the progressive "squeezing" of letter-spacing from left to right and the line breaks <minu | s> and <pac | e> clearly indicate miscalculated spacing), and the «meschino quadretto» (De Rossi 1874: 112) of *CIL XI 3516* demonstrate the absence of any preliminary layout of the text on the stone.



Figure 4. a - *CIL X 100*; b - *CIL X 7766*.

Nevertheless, even if one were willing to accept the premise of *ordinatio*, several additional considerations arise regarding the skills and practices that would need to be assumed for the *ordinatores*. Mallon (1955; 1957) demonstrated that even when they did not accurately understand the cursive lettering of the minute, they still transcribed it into a sequence of capital letters – perhaps even linguistically incongruous⁹ – but they never “drew” brand new forms outside the repertoire of that variety. Above all, it seems very *ad hoc* to assume the creation of a numeric sign that remains completely isolated and inconsistent in relation to the rules of the established numbering system: even in the hypothesis of a Latin origin, the same structural inconsistencies outlined in § 2 still persist. Furthermore, if the *ordinatores* identified in <Ç> «un chiffre qui ne ressemblait à aucune lettre», it is unclear why, once they recognised its numerical value as a figure, they would not have been able to reproduce it in the numbering system of the capital script that they otherwise continued to employ and dominate fully. Nor is it clear why, within one and the same inscription – which, in Mallon’s framework, it is reasonable to assume was derived from a single minute – <Ç> can coexist with the sequence <VI> in its numerical use, as evidenced by *CIL* X 100 (<VI> and <ÇII>), *CIL* X 7836 (<VIII> and <ÇII>), *ILCV* 3061 (<VII> and <XÇI>), *ICI* VIII 57 (<XVIII> and <Ç>), and *CIL* XIV 3418 (<XVIII> and <XÇ>). The solution clearly cannot lie in multiplying the number of *ordinatores*, claiming that more than one worked on the same (brief) text in a single workshop but with such heterogeneous criteria and skills.

⁹ The case discussed by MALLON (1957: 185-190) is an illustrative example. In this instance, the form *aralibus* (which is non-existent in Latin) of *CIL* VIII 19929 is derived from the misreading of a cursive *ara libe(n)s* in *scriptio continua*. Among the texts collected in the *Appendix*, the epitaph *CIL* X 7499 appears to be written «*litteris fere cursiuis*» ‘in almost cursive letters’ (cf. *ILCV* 2734). However, these letterforms are not copied from a minute but rather the result of the technique whereby the text was created. This was not done by engraving with a chisel, but rather by ‘writing with minium on the plastered lime of the stone that sealed the opening of a tomb’ (cf. *CIL* X 7499, transl. F.R.). The implausible <ω>s in place of <a>s, as seen in the forms [*p*]ωce and Kωl(endis) of the *CIL* edition, should therefore be understood as two <a>s in the New Roman cursive.

4.2. *The type of inscriptions*

Ultimately, a comprehensive survey of the distribution of <Ç> in epigraphic materials unequivocally demonstrates its univocal association with Christian epigraphy¹⁰. The fact that ‘6’ in the form of <Ç> is associated with these types of inscriptions has long been recognised, albeit in a cursory manner (at least from Hübner 1885: lxx: «Ç, sex numeri nota in titulis christianis non rara» to Solin 2019: 110). However, it is necessary to emphasise the categorical nature of the quantitative scrutiny: <Ç> is not simply characteristic of Christian epigraphy, it is exclusive to it.

The survey was conducted using the online EDR database, which collates 105,917 inscriptions dating before the 7th century AD from Rome and the rest of peninsular and insular Italy, with the exception of Christian epigraphy from the city of Rome (see below for details)¹¹. Out of the 5,299 Latin or bilingual inscriptions from the 4th to the 7th century, the period during which <Ç> is attested, 2,084 are Christian. The remaining 3,215 are classified as pagan (392), Jewish (20), uncertain (86), or, for the most part, they are unclassified in terms of the “religion” variable (2,717). Within this sample, all instances of the two different notations for the digit ‘6’ (<Ç> and <VI>) were counted, both in isolation and within more complex sequences (e.g., <XVIII> and <XÇII>), up to a maximum numerical value of ‘106’. The results are presented in Table 1¹².

¹⁰ Labels such as “Christian epigraphy” and “Christian inscriptions” are not understood here in a strictly chronological sense *à la* ADAMIK (2023: 322 fn. 5: «[t]he term ‘Christian era’ refers to the period between the 4th and 7th centuries»), but rather in the sense of inscriptions composed/commissioned by Christians. It goes without saying that, in fact, most of these documents tend to cluster in the indicated period.

¹¹ For further information, please refer to the Epigraphic Database Rome (<http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php>; consulted on 15.05.2023). The decision to utilise this resource was based on its status as the sole computerised corpus to annotate the palaeographic feature of the use of <Ç> (searchable via the string “%6” and, in certain instances, “6%”). This sign is, instead, consistently “normalised” to ‘VI’ in texts edited, for instance, in the Clauss-Slaby database (<http://www.manfredclaus.de/>). It seems pertinent to recall that data, whether linguistic or otherwise, are inherently vulnerable to deterioration and that any editing, standardisation or normalisation process inevitably results in a certain degree of impoverishment. For further details on this topic, see SIMONE (2022).

¹² The results extracted from EDR excluded the inscription published in VAGLIERI (1908: 249), which is too fragmentary, and *CIL* VI 3404 (= *ICUR* I n.s. 1446b), where the string edited in the *facsimilia* of *CIL* VI and *ICUR* I as ÇII is read by HÜBNER (1885: lxx)

	<Q>	<VI>
Christian inscriptions	56	488
Others	0	387

Table 1. Cyphering of the digit '6'.

The constraint is clearly evident, and it should be added that the Christian nature of the inscriptions attesting <Q> can always be established on the basis of other contextual elements (cf. *Appendix*): formulas (e.g., [*requiescere*] *in pace*), symbols (e.g., crosses, Christogram, the apocalyptic letters *alpha* and *omega*), pictorial representations (e.g., the dove, the fish), and archaeological context (e.g., catacombs, cemeteries). These are, in all cases, funerary inscriptions (gravestones or graffiti in catacombs). However, it must also be noted that (i) the vast majority (1,700) of the 2,084 Latin or bilingual Christian inscriptions from the 4th to 7th centuries collected in EDR are funerary; (ii) while these typically record the age of the deceased and the date of death, inscriptions commemorating public works, donations, and benefactors rarely contain numerical values. Consequently, only 7 non-funerary Christian inscriptions include the numeral '6', which is noted with <VI> in all cases¹³.

The provenance of the texts, which span the entire peninsula from Aquileia to Vibo Valentia (cf. *Appendix*), does not exhibit any notable areal constraints. It is noteworthy that some of the inscriptions are of Roman origin (*CIL* VI 38364, 35802, 32953, 32941, 32949, 32948, *ICUR* V 14815a,b, Slavich 2019: no. 78), despite the fact that the Christian epigraphy of the city of Rome was not included in EDR's original scope. In any case, further confirmation of the spread of <Q> also in the Christian epigraphy of Rome can be found in the *ILCVs*. A manual perusal of the first volume returns over 20 occurrences, all

as *XII*. The text is inscribed on the hidden side of an opisthograph tombstone embedded in a wall, on the other face of which the later inscription *ICUR* I n.s. 1446a (= *ILCV* 2926) is now visible.

¹³ The occurrences are the following: *AE* 1987, 437, *AE* 1992, 702 [*bis*]: three inscriptions on mosaic floors indicating the measurement (in feet) of the surface offered; *CIL* XI 4966: epigraphic *carmen*; *CIL* X 4724: statue base; *InscrIt* X,1 552: dedication of a *basilica*; *CIL* X 478: *tabula patronatus*.

in epitaphs (*ILCVI* 134, 287, 301, 471, 485, 490, 496, 502, 591, 592, 619, 696, 698, 808b, 841, 1137, 1271, 1327a, 1479a, 1561, 1637c, 2007, 2124, 2268)¹⁴.

The chronology deserves further consideration, as the appearance of <Q> in epigraphy only from the 4th century onward has been used as an argument to support the theory that its origin is linked to the transition from the Old Roman cursive to the New Roman cursive (§ 3). However, once the association with Christian epigraphy is recognised, the chronological edge becomes an epiphenomenon rather than a substantive difference. Further examination of the EDR database reveals that: (i) the number of Christian inscriptions dating before the 4th century is significantly lower than those of the following period (469 pre-4th century vs. 2,084 from the 4th to the 7th century); (ii) the frequency of the number ‘6’ in these inscriptions is even lower (73 occurrences pre-4th century vs. 544 occurrences from the 4th to 7th centuries); (iii) some inscriptions containing <Q> have broad dating ranges, with the earliest possible dates potentially falling before the 4th century (*CIL* VI 35802; Corda CAR114; Fiocchi Nicolai 1988: 192; *ICUR* V 14815a,b); and (iv) apart from these four, the majority of the remaining inscriptions attesting to <Q> (39 out of 52) are clustered not so much after the 4th century as after the 5th. Thus, it is difficult to pinpoint a clear-cut boundary at the transition between the 3rd and 4th centuries, which seems rather to be projected from the interpretative hypothesis.

In addition to the previous objections (§ 4.1), the distribution highlighted here reveals a further, perhaps the most fundamental, limitation of the hypothesis that <Q> was introduced into epigraphic documents through a process “from minute to carving”. Indeed, this

¹⁴ It is worth mentioning once again the absence of <Q> in the sections *Tituli operum locorumque publicorum*, *Tituli aedificiorum priuatorum* (*ILCVI* 773-807), and *Tituli aedificiorum et operum sacrorum* (*ILCVI* 1752-1979). Partial surveys outside of Italy confirm this distribution: 8 of the 9 African inscriptions cited by MALLON (1948: 38 n. 1) as examples of lapidary attestations of <Q> are Christian epitaphs (*CIL* VIII 9111, 9862, 9885, 20301, 20302, 21479, 21602a, 21772), and the same symbol is well-documented in Christian funerary inscriptions from Visigothic Spain according to VIVES (1942: nos. 60, 78, 127, 130, 156, 185, 269, 306).

explanation overlooks an important piece of evidence that it cannot account for: why the proposed process should apply only to those *ordinatores* – or, in cases where they did not intervene, stonecutters – who were commissioned to produce Christian funerary inscriptions? The presence of <Q> in Christian epitaphs does not seem to be the result of a misunderstanding, but rather the result of a deliberate choice, the reasons for which should be sought through the use of the symbolic values conveyed by the written sign as a heuristic key.

5. *Episemon as a Christological sign*

Starting from the obvious premise that the introduction of <Q> in Latin inscriptions is not a matter of language but of writing, it follows that one must give relevance not only to its grammatological and referential functions (in this case, numerical notation), or to the technical and material facets of the processes that shape its palaeographic aspect. Writing is, indeed, also ‘an ideological space’ within which it is necessary to distinguish ‘a structural, denotative aspect and an aura of connotations, not functional but ideologically charged’ (Cardona 2009 [1981]: 88 transl. F.R.; see also Durand 2014).

Each writing system is a ‘culturally specific and autonomous symbolic apparatus’ (Mancini 2014: 36 transl. F.R.) due to the radical historicity that determines the social and ideological connotations of writing practices. In structuring such a system, ideological values are (at least) as important as the functional needs of a mere representation of a phonological form. The product of such a system, that is, each individual writing event, can therefore only be interpreted within the historical-cultural framework that dictates its ‘conditions of meaningfulness’ (Prosdocimi 2004: 533 transl. F.R.). This is especially true in the case of multi-layered documents such as inscriptions, where the written form of the linguistic-propositional content is just one of the media conveying the overall message, alongside script variety, layout, writing material, location, and so forth (Susini 1982: 16-18; Petrucci 1986; Prosdocimi 2004: 532-539; Mancini 2012).

From this perspective, the hypothesis of a Greek origin for the introduction of <Ϟ> in Latin epigraphy may resurface. Not only because, in general, since Early Christianity, the Greek language represented a symbol of religious identity for Christians (Felle 2018; cf. also below, § 6), but especially because, in Late Antique Christianity, the number ‘6’ – and, even more so, the Greek figure that represents it – is the object of considerable treatment, intertwining “the mysticism of numbers” and “the mysticism of letters”. On the one hand, there are the numerological speculations of the Gnostic Christianity that draws from the Pythagorean and (Neo-)Platonic traditions (Kalvesmaki 2013; «the Greek Qabalah», in the terms of Barry 1999); on the other hand, there is the Judeo-Christian tradition of the *onomastica sacra*, whose complex ramifications among the Church Fathers, as well as their origins in rabbinic hermeneutics, have been thoroughly reconstructed in Mancini’s (2022) recent work¹⁵. It is within this ideological system of interpreting signs that, in the Greek context, the *episemon* ‘6’ – also as the counterpart of the Semitic *wāw* – came to represent the *Episemon*, “the Sign” of Jesus Christ.

5.1. *The Marcosian doctrine*

As with a large part of Christian numerological apparatus, this theory can be traced back to Gnostic circles, and in particular to the Valentinian Marcus (*floruit* 160-180 AD) – which implies that it is known to a

¹⁵ These reflections would contribute to a broader corpus of treatises on the myths of the *inuentio litterarum*, the numerological values of letters, the iconic meanings of their hatching, and other such concepts. This would result in the proliferation of treatises *De litteris* ‘On letters’ during the Carolingian era. Such a surge of interest in graphemics reflects an approach that explores alphabetic forms from a semiotic perspective that is independent of their phonetic reference, thus transcending their traditional definitions in terms of *nomen*, *figura*, and *potestas* as outlined in artigraphic and orthographic studies (MUNZI 2007; MANCINI 2018). On occasion, these explorations yield highly original results that diverge from mainstream traditions, intertwining numerological values and symbolic interpretations of palaeographic design in innovative ways. An example of this is the *De littera of Leidensis* 135 (MUNZI 2007: 95-117), in which the meaning of the letters is derived from the number of strokes required to draw them (1: the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; 2: the two Laws, Old and New Testament; 3: the Trinity) and from the iconic interpretation of their design. To illustrate, the two strokes of the lowercase represent the Old and New Testament, but because they are of different lengths, they also symbolise the brevity of human suffering compared to the reward of eternal life (MUNZI 2007: 101, 107).

large extent from the accounts and refutations made by orthodox here-siology, with Irenaeus of Lyons *circa* (130-202 AD) being a key source of information. A section of his *Adversus haereses* (I 14-16) offers an overview of the Marcosian doctrine through a compendium of the *Revelation* received by Marcus (Kalvesmaki 2013: 183-223; cf. also Drucker 1995: 82-83; Barry 1999: 107-112). In the course of the *Revelation*, the Truth utters a *logos*, ‘and the *logos* became a name, and the name was the one we know and pronounce, Christ Jesus’ – then it falls silent. The Tetrad, therefore, addresses Marcus, who expects the Truth to speak further:

Ὡς εὐκαταφρόνητον ἠγγήσω τὸν λόγον, ὃν ἀπὸ στομάτων τῆς Ἀληθείας ἤκουσας· Οὐ τοῦθ’ ὅπερ οἶδας καὶ δοκεῖς ἔχειν παλαιὸν ἔστιν ὄνομα· φωνὴν γὰρ μόνον ἔχεις αὐτοῦ, τὴν δὲ δύναμιν ἀγνοεῖς. Ἰησοῦς μὲν γὰρ ἔστιν ἐπίσημον ὄνομα, ἕξ ἔχον γράμματα, ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν τῆς κλήσεως γινωσκόμενον.

‘You have deemed of little worth the *logos* you have heard from the mouth of Truth. That which you think you know and believe you possess is not the ancient name: for you hold only its sound, yet remain ignorant of its power. Indeed, Ἰησοῦς is an *episemon* name, bearing six letters, known to all those who have received the calling’.

(Iren. *Adu.haer.* [*Revelation to Marcus*] I 14,4)

The superficial objection raised by Irenaeus (*Adu.haer.* II 24,2) – namely, that Ἰησοῦς has six letters in Greek but not in Hebrew – is not of concern here, especially because it is not based on the number of letters that the ἐπίσημον ‘6’ is associated with Christ. Rather, the entire passage revolves around two key points. On the one hand, there is the ambiguity of the form ἐπίσημον: as an adjective referring to ὄνομα (‘distinguished, notable name’; as it appears in the Latin version of the passage: *Iesus autem est insigne nomen*), or as its apposition (‘name-sign’ and, in particular, ‘sign 6’ = ‘figure 6’). On the other hand, it is centred on the distinction between the name of Jesus as a sound (φωνή), which is accessible to all, and the name as a written sign (ἐπίσημον), which is known only to the elect.

The passage continues illustrating the manifestations of the three Powers (Δυνάμεις) within the letters of the Greek alphabet (Iren. *Adu.haer.* I 14,5-6). The associations and numerological operations presupposed in this section are far from clear (Kalvesmaki 2013: 123-125;

see also the summary in Mastrocinque 2003: 96). What is important, however, is the observation that the 24 letters of the alphabet alone would not have been sufficient, and only the descent of the one who is with the Father restored order to their sequence (Iren. *Adu.haer.* I 14,5: Ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ ὑστερήσαντος λόγου ὁ ἀφεδρασθεὶς ἐν τῷ Πατρὶ κατῆλθεν).

Τὸν γὰρ τέλειον Νοῦν, ἐπιστάμενον τὸν τῶν ἕξ ἀριθμὸν δύναμιν ποιήσεως καὶ ἀναγεννήσεως ἔχοντα, φανερώσαι τοῖς υἱοῖς τοῦ φωτὸς τὴν διὰ τοῦ φανέντος ἐπίσημοις αὐτὸν ἀριθμοῦ γενομένην ἀναγέννησιν. [...] ὁ γὰρ ἐπίσημος ἀριθμὸς συγκεκρασθεὶς τοῖς εἰκοσιτέσσαρσι στοιχείοις τὸ τριακονταγράμματον ὄνομα ἀπετέλεσεν.

‘Indeed, the Perfect Mind, knowing that the number 6 holds within itself the power of creation and regeneration, revealed to the children of light the regeneration that was brought about through Him who appeared as the ἐπίσημος (?) / ἐπίσημον (?) number in relation to it. [...] For the ἐπίσημος number, in merging with the 24 στοιχεῖα, completed the name formed by the thirty letters’.

(Iren. *Adu.haer.* [*Revelation to Marcus*] I 14,6)

The ἐπίσημον ‘6’ is thus the “number ἐπίσημος”, an allegory of the Christ-ἐπίσημον, who must descend to earth and become part of the numerical-alphabetic series of the elements (στοιχεῖα) in order to bring it to completion – a theme that is further explored in the writings of Clement of Alexandria (§ 5.2) and will be further elaborated in the treatise *On the Mystery of the Letters* (§ 5.3)¹⁶.

5.2. *Clement of Alexandria*

Clement of Alexandria’s contribution (*circa* 150-215 AD) is notable for his attempt at aligning the doctrine of the ἐπίσημον with orthodox teachings (Kalvesmaki 2013: 224). This passage revolves around the numerical values associated with the episode of the Transfiguration, which is also central to the Marcosian theories (Kalvesmaki 2013: 125):

ὁ δὲ, διὰ γενέσεως, ἦν ἐδήλωσεν ἡ ἑξάς, ἐπίσημος, ὄγδοαὺς ὑπάρχων φανῆ, θεὸς ἐν σαρκίῳ τὴν δύναμιν ἐνδεικνύμενος, ἀριθμούμενος μὲν ὡς ἄνθρωπος,

¹⁶ Irenaeus’ text and arguments were subsequently adopted, almost verbatim, by Epiphanius (*Panar.* XXXIV) and Hippolytus of Rome (*Ref.* VI.40-56).

κρυπτόμενος δὲ ὅς ἦν· τῇ μὲν γὰρ τάξει τῶν ἀριθμῶν συγκαταλέγεται καὶ ὁ ἕξ, ἡ δὲ τῶν στοιχείων ἀκολουθία ἐπίσημον γνωρίζει τὸ μὴ γραφόμενον. Ἐνταῦθα κατὰ μὲν τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς αὐτοὺς σώζεται τῇ τάξει ἐκάστη μονὰς εἰς ἑβδομάδα τε καὶ ὀγδοάδα, κατὰ δὲ τὸν τῶν στοιχείων ἀριθμὸν ἕκτον γίνεται τὸ ζῆτα, καὶ ἑβδομον τὸ <η>. Εἰσκλαπέτος δ' οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως τοῦ ἐπισήμου εἰς τὴν γραφήν, ἐὰν οὕτως ἐπώμεθα, ἕκτη μὲν γίνεται ἡ ἑβδομάς, ἑβδόμη δὲ ἡ ὀγδοάς· διὸ καὶ ἐν τῇ ἕκτη ὁ ἄνθρωπος λέγεται πεποιῆσθαι ὁ τῷ ἐπισήμῳ πιστὸς γενόμενος ὡς εὐθέως κυριακῆς κληρονομίας ἀνάπαυσιν ἀπολαβεῖν.

‘And He [Christ], illustrious (ἐπίσημος) by virtue of the creation revealed by the Hexad, appeared in truth as the Ogdoad, a God manifesting His power in a body of flesh, counted as a man, yet hidden in His true nature. Indeed, within the orderly series of numbers, the six is included, yet the sequence of letters reveals that the ἐπίσημον remains unwritten. Therefore, according to the numbers themselves, each unit is preserved in its rightful order up to the Hebdomad and the Ogdoad; but according to the reckoning of the letters, ζ is counted as the sixth and η as the seventh. However, with the ἐπίσημον introduced into the script – I do not know how –, if we proceed thus, the Hebdomad becomes the sixth and the Ogdoad the seventh. Hence, it is said that man, too, was created on the sixth day, he who, having become faithful to the ἐπίσημον, was deemed worthy to receive directly the solace of the Lord’s inheritance’.

(Clem. *Strom.* VI 16)

Referring to Drucker (1995: 83), Bandt (2007: 39-40), and Kalvesmaki (2013: 244-261 and the references therein, including the reading of εἰσκλαπέτος) for doctrinal interpretations and certain specifics of Clement’s exposition, which also associates the numbers ‘7’ and ‘8’ with Christ, the passage synthesises what is found in his contemporary Irenaeus: (i) the dual usage, both adjectival and nominal, of ἐπίσημος/-ον, which is employed in both cases to refer to Christ; (ii) the discrepancy between sounds and writing: the ἐπίσημον ‘6’ is not written (τὸ μὴ γραφόμενον) among the στοιχεῖα, but instead enters into the writing (εἰς τὴν γραφήν) as part of the numerical series; (iii) the consequent incongruity between the alphabetic and numeric series, which is only ordered following the entry of the ἐπίσημον. This is interpreted as an allegory of the incarnation of Christ, ‘counted as a man’ (ἀριθμούμενος μὲν ὡς ἄνθρωπος) among the elements of the world (στοιχεῖα; on the ambiguity of which, cf. below, § 5.3).

5.3. *On the Mystery of the Letters*

Also belonging to a Gnostic *milieu* but, at least in part, independent from the Marcasian theories, the later anonymous treatise *On the Mystery of the Letters*, composed in Palestine in the mid-6th century (Bandt 2007: 4-8), devotes a core central section of its content – 9 of the 42 total chapters (Chaps. 26-34) – to the *wāw/ἐπίσημον* as a sign of Christ (Bandt 2007: 36-44)¹⁷. However, compared to what was discussed above, this text arrives at this identification through a different route. In fact, it aligns with the hermeneutic approach of rabbinic derivation of *onomastica sacra* ‘sacred onomastics’, whose task is to ‘reinterpret the grammatonyms transmitted by the biblical text (in acrostic psalms) as words imbued with spiritual significance. The grammatonyms, therefore, undergo a transformation from *signa propria* into *signa translata* [...]. This operation is particularly favoured in the case of Hebrew grammatonyms, because [...] ancient exegetes were cognizant of their double *potestas*, referring both to phonological values and specific meanings of the lexicon’ (Mancini 2018: 440 transl. F.R.). Moreover, the *interpretamenta* derived in this way, if sequenced according to the alphabetical series, would result in *conexiones* of coherent microtexts (Mancini 2018: 438-447; Mancini 2022)¹⁸.

As the detailed table in Mancini (2022: 145-147) exhaustively illustrates, with the exception of a few instances where the etymological transparency of the Hebrew grammatonyms leads to converging interpretations from different hermeneutical traditions, these latter diverge significantly from each other (Mancini 2018: 442). The treatise *On the Mystery of the Letters*, which explicitly quotes patristic sources

¹⁷ There exists also a Coptic redaction of the text, whose edition by HEBBELYNCK (1900-1901) remained for a long time the reference version for this treatise, to which DORNSEIFF (1925), DUPONT-SOMMER (1946), and BAUSANI (2023 [1974]: 119), among others, have referred.

¹⁸ To elucidate further, see the interpretation of St. Jerome (*Epist.* XXX 6). Once the meanings of the first four letters of the alphabet are derived (*Aleph* = *doctrina*, *Beth* = *domus*, *Gemel* = *plenitudo*, *Deleth* = *tabularum*), the first *conexio* (*doctrina domus plenitudo tabularum* ‘doctrine of the home fullness of the tablets’) can be deciphered as ‘the teaching of the Church, which is the house of God, is found in the fullness of divine books’ («*quod videlicet doctrina Ecclesiae, quae domus Dei est, in librorum reperitur plenitudine divinorum*»).

(*ML* 158 14-20) and for which the alphabet represents a sort of psalm hiding a Christological message, unravels the first *conexio*, made up of the first six letters, at the beginning of Chapter 26 as follows:

Ἄλεφ· Βήθ· Γάμελ· Δάλεθ· Εἷ· Οὐαῦ· τὰ μεθερμηγευόμενα· θεμελίωσις οἴκου πλήρης ἀνώτερον γένεσις ἐν αὐτῇ σημείον.

Aleph, Beth, Gamel, Daleth, Ei, Wāw: which, when translated, signifies thus: *the foundational stone* (Ἄλεφ = θεμελίωσις) *of the house* (Βήθ = οἴκου), *creation* (Δάλεθ = γένεσις) *fulfilled in a loftier manner* (Γάμελ = πλήρης ἀνώτερον), *and within it* (Εἷ = ἐν αὐτῇ) *a sign* (Οὐαῦ = σημείον). (*ML* 164.23-25)

The following nine chapters seek to demonstrate that the σημείον ‘sign’ in question is Christ and that it is represented by the *episemon* (*ML* 174.9 and 174.19: τὸ Ἐπίσημον τύπος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ‘the *Episemon*, character of Christ’; *ML* 174.16 and 176.6-7: τὸ Ἐπίσημον τὸ δηλοῦν τὸν Χριστόν ‘the *Episemon* that reveals Christ’) as the Greek counterpart of the Semitic *wāw*. This central idea is proclaimed from the very outset of the treatise (Chapter 2):

Πρὸς τοῦτο δὲ διδάσκει ἡμᾶς ὁ παρῶν θησαυρὸς τῶν γραμμάτων, ὅτι διπλοῦς ὁ Χριστός, τουτέστι θεὸς καὶ ἄνθρωπος ὁ αὐτός· καὶ ὅτι σημείον Ἐπίσημον ὑπάρχει.

‘And furthermore, this treasury of letters imparts to us the truth that Christ is dual in nature, being both God and man; and that He is represented by the sign *episemon*’. (*ML* 108.6-8)

The Gnostic doctrine of the letter *wāw* is also known from an amulet chiselled on a silver plaque from the 2nd century AD, containing a hymn in Aramaic to *wāw*, invoked with Christological epithets (Dupont-Sommer 1946; cf. also Daniélou 1961: 150)¹⁹. What

¹⁹ BANDT (2007: 36-37), however, avoids establishing a direct connection between the amulet, in which *wāw* essentially functions as a magical-theurgic name, and the much later treatise, highlighting several differences: in the 19 lines of the hymn, despite the epithets ‘Son of God-*Theos*’ and ‘Holy One of God’, the name of Christ is absent, nor is there any reference to the numerical value of the letter. The lack of correspondence is not surprising, given that, as already noted, the *Mystery of the Letters* encompasses the outcomes of diverse traditions and significant elements of originality.

is important to note is that in the Greek interpretation (*ML* 170.25-172.23), once the equivalence $w\bar{a}w \sim \textit{episemon}$ is recognised, the grammatical peculiarities of the latter are remarkably emphasised: in particular, its being a sign without phonetic reference that cannot be removed from the alphabet series nor placed in another position without completely invalidating its fundamental numeric function. Here again, as in Irenaeus (*adu.haer.* I 14,6) and Clement (*Strom.* VI 16), the argument of the incompleteness of the numeric-alphabetic series in the absence of the *episemon* is revisited, but in a much more elaborate version: briefly, the Greeks do not pronounce it (cf., below, εἶπεν) because they are pagans – which, for the author, further proves its identification with Christ – but they cannot do without it so as to order the sequence of the *στοιχεῖα* as an allegory of the order of creation (*Bandt* 2007: 40-41).

Οὐαῦ· τοῦτο τὸ γράμμα ὁ Ἕλληγ οὐκ εἶπεν ὄλωσ, ὡς μὴ πιστεύων τῷ Χριστῷ τῷ δηλουμένῳ δι' αὐτοῦ.

'*Wāw*: this letter the Greek utters not at all, for he believes not in Christ who through it do reveal Himself'. (*ML* 170.29-30)

Ὅρα γὰρ μὴ κεκτημένου αὐτὸ τοῦ Ἑλλενος μήτε καταριθμοῦντος αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ βαθμῷ, ψευδῆ πάντα τὰ στοιχεῖα καὶ αἱ γραφαὶ αἱ κεχωρισμέναι αὐτοῦ τυγχάνουσι. [...] Διδάσκοντος γὰρ τὸν κόσμον τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ τοῦ τοιούτου ὑποδείγματος, ὅτι πᾶσα γραφὴ καὶ πᾶσα ἀνθρώπου πίστις καὶ πᾶσα πνοὴ καὶ κτίσις μὴ καταδεχομένη καὶ ὑπογράφουσα τὸ σημεῖον τὸ Ἐπίσημον τοῦ Χριστοῦ ψευδῆς ἐστὶ καὶ πεπλανημένη καὶ ἀργὴ ὑπάρχει.

'Behold, indeed, that if the Greek did not possess it nor enumerate it in its rightful place, all letters would prove fallacious, as would the texts that were composed without it. [...] For God, through this exemplar, instructs creation that every scripture, every belief of man, and every breath and creation, if it doth not embrace nor bear within itself the *Episemon* sign of Christ, is false and found in error and of no avail'. (*ML* 172.24-174.3)

The entire allegory hinges on the ambiguity of the term *στοιχεῖα* between grammar and (meta-)physics: on the one hand, *στοιχεῖα* refers to the *elementa* as the minimal units of λέξις, that is, of articulated sound (φωνή) that can be transcribed in writing (cf. the notorious defi-

nition in Diog. Laert. VII 55; \approx *sch. in* Dion.Thrax GG III 482); on the other, it also denotes the minimal constitutive elements of matter and creation (cf. among others, Pl. *Tht.* 201e, *Ti.* 48b, Arist. *Metaph.* 1014a26). This interpretative key is made explicit in the opening of the treatise itself (*ML* 106.1-4: *στοιχεῖα λέγονται ταῦτα τὰ γράμματα οὐχ ὅτι στοίχον τινα καὶ τάξιν ἀποτελοῦσιν [...] ἀλλ' ὅτι τῶν στοιχείων τῶν κτισμάτων τοῦ κόσμου τοὺς τύπους καὶ τὰ σχήματα ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἔχουσι καὶ ὑπογράφουσι* 'These letters are termed *στοιχεῖα* not because they constitute some sequence [*στοίχον τινα*] or order [...] but because they themselves hold and bear inscribed the characters and the forms of the elements [*τῶν στοιχείων*] of that which has been fashioned in the world') and it is within this framework that the following passage clearly elucidates the grammatological specificity of the *episemon*-Christ as a written *σημεῖον* to which no element of *λέξεις* corresponds (Bandt 2007: 39).

Οὐκοῦν βουλόμενος ὁ θεὸς δεῖξαι, ὅτι οὐ συντάσσεται τοῖς κτίσμασι καὶ τοῖς στοιχείοις τοῖς ἐκτυπουμένοις ἐν τούτοις τοῖς γράμμασι Χριστὸς ὁ κτίστης τῶν ἀπάντων, τούτου χάριν ἐν τοῖς συγγράμμασι μᾶλλον τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σημεῖον τέθηκεν, ἐν οἷς οὐκ ἔστι τύπος κτίσματος.

'Thus God has intended to demonstrate that Christ, as the creator of all things, does not reside upon the same tier (*οὐ συντάσσεται*) as the created things and the *στοιχεῖα* which are depicted in these letters, and therefore has placed His sign amongst the *συγγράμματα*, amidst which no created things are represented'. (*ML* 170.20-24)

The same argument is reiterated shortly thereafter (*ML* 174.3-8) for the other two numeric *notae*, *qoppa* (τὸ Κὼφ ρ '90') and *sampi* (τὸ Ἐννεακόσια λ '900'), which are symbols of the other two persons of the Trinity (*ML* 174.14-18), like Christ, not created and therefore not included among the *στοιχεῖα* that represent the elements of creation. In the same passage the reasons for associating Christ not only with the sign <Ϛ> but also with its numeric value '6' are also explained: he is at once dual (man and God) and triune (*ML* 174.12-14: 'for in him dwells all the fullness of the deity according to the unity of the *logos* with the Father and the Holy Spirit'). The other two numbers of the

Trinity ('90' and '900') – the passage continues – are only triple, as the Father and the Holy Spirit, unlike Christ, do not partake of the dual nature, both divine and human²⁰.

5.4. *Further ramifications*

In conclusion, despite the specificities of its various interpretations, a coherent doctrine of the Christ-*episemon-wāw*, centred on the special grammatological status of the sign <Ϛ>, has traversed the centuries along a boundary often tenuously positioned between heresy and orthodoxy, particularly where Christianity has adopted and reworked other traditions. The available evidence does not allow for a fine-grained reconstruction, but the distinction often seems to have hinged on matters of detail. And perhaps the differentiation is more etic than emic, especially when considering the reception of this doctrine within forms of popular religiosity. Consequently, as is often the case with practices involving the use of written symbols, the manifestations of this branching tradition surface at various points along 'the considerable distance between the most subtle treatises and everyday practice' (Cardona 2009 [1981]: 130 transl. F.R.).

On the one hand, the *episemon* has been identified among the magical characters of Gnostic amulets engraved on gems (Mastrocinque 2003: 92 n. 297, 96); on the other hand, the Greek-Latin numerical list in *Cod. Sangallensis* 1395 p. 435a (9th century; cf. Hawk 2012)²¹ seems to provide evidence of the awareness of its symbolic value even in more orthodox contexts. This is not the only Greek-Latin numerical list in the manuscripts of St. Gall. Kaczynski's Appendix (1988: 117-120) documents others, and from a review of the excellent *fac-similia* available online²², in at least four cases <Ϛ> is not only associated with its Latin counterpart <VI> but is also identified as *episemon* (*Cod.*

²⁰ All of this, incidentally, highlights the trivialisation of the Marcosian doctrine carried out by Irenaeus, where he characterises Ἰησοῦς as an ἐπίσημον ὄνομα ('distinguished name') because it consists of six letters (Iren. *Adu. haer.* I 14,4; cf. above, § 4.1.1).

²¹ The list is incomplete and stops at the Greek <Υ> and its Latin counterpart <CCCC>.

²² Cf. *e-codices - Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland* (<https://e-codices.ch/en>).

Sang. 459 p. 111 and p. 154, 9th century; *Cod. Sang.* 671 p. 207, 9th century) or *epissema* (*Cod. Sang.* 1026 p. 7, 13th century). Such numerical-alphabetical series, often accompanied by their respective arithmonyms and grammatonyms, are also well-attested elsewhere (Mancini 2018: 475-477, with further references).

In this instance, however, between the *notae* <Q VI> and the arithmonym <epifimon>, the incipit of a widely known liturgical hymn is inserted, celebrating the cross as an *admirabile signum* (Figure 5)²³.

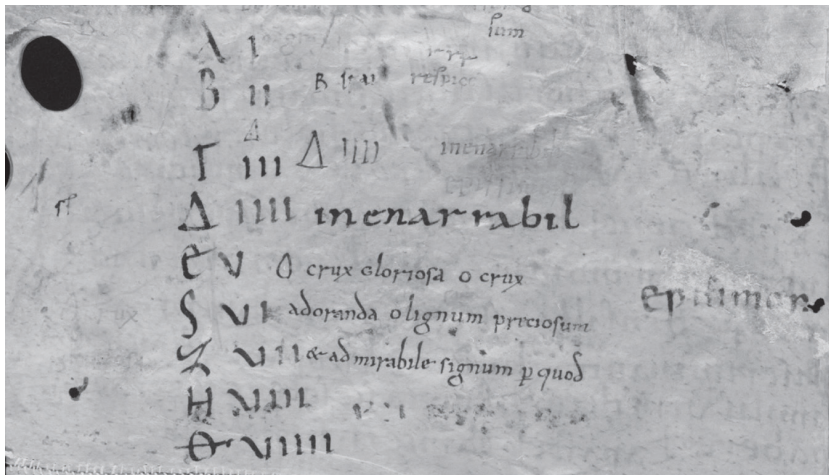


Figure 5. *Cod. Sangallensis* 1395 p. 454a ll. 1-9.

That the short text is to be referred to <Q VI> is confirmed not only by its exact centering with it, but also by the invocation «*o crux*» that flanks it, though barely legible, even on the left side (Figure 6)²⁴.

²³ The text (*O crux gloriosa o crux | adoranda o lignum preciosum | & admirabile signum p[er] quod*) continues with «*et diabolus est victus | et mundus Christi sanguine redemptus*». It is also known with minimal variations and is very common in medieval antiphonaries. A search for the *incipit* «*o crux gloriosa*» through the portal <https://cantusdatabase.org/> returns 175 attestations.

²⁴ Note the two different scripts: the one used for the numerical list, *inenarrabil*, and *epifimon*, «largest in size and in the darkest ink on the page, is the same Caroline minuscule as that of the glossary on the preceding pages» (HAWK 2012: 33). The script for the three verses, on the other hand, is «a more rounded minuscule with thinner strokes and a slight cursive aspect» (HAWK 2012: 34). The first scribe, instead of vertically aligning *epifimon* with *inenarrabil*, seems to have intentionally left space for *O crux* etc. to be added.



Figure 6. Cod. Sangallensis 1395 p. 435a l. 6 (detail).

Here, the *episemon* thus seems to associate not directly with Christ, but with his most prominent attribute. Moreover, also the line <Δ IIII inenarrabil> suggests that the compiler of the list was aware of interpretations attributed to certain Greek symbols that went beyond mere phonological and/or numerical references. In the broader practice of using Greek letters in the abbreviations of *nomina sacra* (cf. § 6), <Δ> can indeed represent, as a sort of heterogram (Mancini 2014: 33), the word *Deus*. This is also the case in the Book of Durrow's Gospel, in a particularly significant place: the *incipit* of the Gospel of John: *In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud <ΔM>, et <ΔS> erat Verbum* (IE TCD MS 57 f. 193r; cf. Berschin 1988: 86; Tilghman 2011: 101). The pairing of the adjective *inenarrabilis* with <Δ> is therefore understood in light of the theme of divine ineffability. God is described as *inenarrabilis* already in Irenaeus (*adv. haer.* IV 20), and the phrase *Deus inenarrabilis auctor mundi* and within the prayer *Deus iustitiae*, both of which were widely known at the time when the numerical list was compiled (Hawk 2012: 38-39).

6. *Episemon between Greek and Latin script*

Far beyond Gnostic thought, in late antique Christianity the symbol <Ϟ> accumulates considerable symbolic values and sacred connotations. It is due to these that the hypothesis seems plausible that the sign <Ϟ> found in Latin Christian funerary inscriptions is not merely a cursive ligature transposed into a capital epigraphic script, but rather the Greek *episemon* imported into the repertoire (whether graphic or scriptorial, cf. § 7) of Latin epigraphy. The motivations for this intro-

duction are, of course, entirely different from an implausible interference between numerical systems (§ 2): indeed, <Ϛ> is not adopted *for its referential value as the digit '6'* but *for its ideological value as a symbol* associated with Christ, thereby becoming part of the symbolic apparatus of Christian funerary inscriptions, akin to other Greek letters.

The accurate survey by Felle (2018) on the use of Greek in early Christian inscriptions from Rome and Italy has clearly demonstrated that the deliberate use of the Greek language and/or the Greek script (in the form of Latin-to-Greek codeswitching, monograms, abbreviations, acrostics, and symbols, etc.) represented a symbol of cultural and religious identity for Christians already in the 3rd and 4th centuries. As explicitly noted by Bede (*art. metr.* I 2), 'after receiving the faith of the Lord', Latin scribes adopted individual Greek letters (η, χ, ρ, α, ω), predominantly used in abbreviations of the *nomina sacra*: «*littera H, intromittentes, propter auctoritatem nominis Ihesu [= <IHS>]; χ et ρ, propter nomen Christi [= <Xρ>]; α, et ω, propter auctoritatem dominici sermonis, 'Ego sum α et ω'*» (cf. Mancini 2018: 444; Mancini 2022: 135)²⁵. In Christian epigraphy, sometimes combined in the form of a monogram, these letters are not confined to isolated decorative elements but can be syntactically integrated into the Latin text of the inscription. A simple survey of *ILCVI* shows that the abbreviation <Xρ> is effectively treated as a heterographic logogram corresponding to the lexical morpheme *Christ-*, to which Latin inflectional (cf. the frequent forms: <Xρ>*us*, <Xρ>*i*, <Xρ>*o*, etc.), derivational (cf. *ILCVI* 1557: <Xρ>*iane*), and compositional processes (cf. *ILCVI* 211: <Xρ>*icolae*) are applied.

The symbolic prominence of such an element is evident, given that the heterographic strategy makes it "stand out" from its context not only due to forms alien to the Latin alphabet but also because of usage rules unfamiliar to Latin orthography, which typically does not in-

²⁵ It is reasonable to ask why Bede does not mention <Ϛ>. There are at least three motivations: (i) the ones he is discussing (η, χ, ρ, α, ω) are only letters with alphabetical value, whereas <Ϛ> serves only as a numerical function; (ii) these are letters used in the manuscripts of sacred texts (*art. metr.* I 2: «*Graecas litteras, etsi non in alphabeti ordinem recipiunt, divinis tamen paginis inditas continent*»), while <Ϛ> appears in inscriptions; (iii) Bede's list includes the most frequent and representative elements but is not exhaustive, as it, for instance, omits <Δ>, which can also occur in manuscripts as a *nomen sacrum* (see § 5.4).

clude logograms. The same effect is produced by <ϸ>, which is also an emblem of the *nomen sacrum* of Christ, within numerical sequences: it is integrated therein but, at the same time, is readily distinguishable from the rest in both form and structural properties (§ 2)²⁶.

Since this use also requires knowledge of its numerical value, it is obviously necessary to assume that both the authors and recipients of these texts were familiar with the Greek alphabetic numeral system. The evidence that Latin scribes were acquainted with Greek numerals is broad across epochs and contexts. It is no surprise that Priscian, when discussing *de figuris numerorum* (Passalacqua 1987), demonstrates knowledge of both Greek numbering systems, acrophonic and alphabetic. For centuries thereafter, the Greek alphabet and the numerical value of its letters were addressed in largely diffused treatises among medieval scholars, such as Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (*Etym.* I 3), Bede's *De temporum ratione* (*De temp.* 1), and Hrabanus Maurus' *De computo* (*De comp.* I 8). The most evident signs of these are the scattered but numerous instances of Greek alphabets and numerical lists (like the one illustrated above; cf. § 5.4), found in libraries and *scriptoria* across the West²⁷, sometimes scribbled among the *marginalia*, sometimes structured into actual tables of alphabetical and computational correspondences, sometimes expanded into short works like the *Κατάλογος γραμμάτων Ἑλλήνων* or the *ABCDIS Grece cum numero* (cf. Mancini 2018: 466-467, 475-476).

It cannot be ruled out that, in the case of <ϸ>, the recognition of its numerical value was further facilitated by the existence of a homographic and homosemic Latin ligature in documentary writing (§ 3). However, this remains a pure accident without causal value and leaves no room for a hypothesis halfway between that of Mallon and the one presented

²⁶ All this cannot be subsumed under Adams' (2003: 71) concept of "character switching", where the transposition of individual letters of the Greek alphabet into Latin inscriptions (or *vice versa*) takes place in the writing practice of individual writers without further dissemination. The evidence is abundant: in addition to Adams' illustrative survey (2003: 71-76), one might also consider, for example, the Republican-era graffiti on the *ollae* of San Cesareo (Rovai, in press).

²⁷ For a representative overview of the evidence of Greek writing in Western Europe during the Early Middle Ages, see BISCHOFF (1951: 32-39), BERSCHIN (1980: 41-42; 1988: 88-89), KACZYNSKI (1988: 33-45), MANCINI (2018) and HAWK (2012).

here, namely that <Q> is the original cursive Latin ligature introduced into Christian inscriptions as a consequence of its reinterpretation as the Greek *episemon*. In fact, an interpretation of this kind would only reconfirm that the sign <Q> can enter the repertoire of epigraphic writing solely as an *episemon*. Furthermore, the possibility that the two writing systems in their “usual” forms (in the sense of Cencetti 2014 [1966]: 23-24, as well as below, “normal”) developed homographic signs and ligatures (although not necessarily homophonic; cf. the useful table in Bianconi *et al.* 2021: 53-55) is well demonstrated by the existence of a Greco-Roman scriptorial *koiné* in the civil and military administration of the East from the 4th century onwards (Cavallo 2005 [1970]). In more than one case, due to the affinities between the two alphabets in their “normal” forms, homography is the result of parallel developments rather than mutual influences (Cavallo 2005 [1970]: 47-48).

The two numbering systems could also coexist on the same medium, as in the case of bilingual milestones (e.g., *CIL* III 14154,1; *AE* 2001, 1922). More importantly – and from ancient times – the ability to “do arithmetic” in both systems seems to have been part of elementary education, even for individuals from modest social backgrounds. Each of the fifteen circular bone tokens found in the funerary urn of a child in Rudiae (3rd-1st century BC; cf. Susini 1962: n. 176) bears on the same side a number from ‘1’ to ‘15’ in both Latin and Greek (including: <VI · Q>), forming ‘a true Greco-Latin abacus, which must have served as a teaching tool for the child’ (Susini 1962: 179 transl. F.R.). Rudiae was famously a bilingual territory but, more generally, the importance of Greek computation in daily commercial transactions, even in Rome itself, is easy to imagine.

7. Conclusions

In light of the limitations of traditional hypotheses regarding the origin of <Q> in epigraphic documents (§ 4), the heuristic potential of a semiotic approach becomes evident. This approach highlights the ethnographic and anthropological values of the written sign, seen as a manifestation of awareness and an intent upon making a deliber-

ate effort to represent a specific cultural identity through writing, in this case, a religious one. The sign <Q> in Latin Christian epigraphy is neither the Greek digit simply introduced into the Roman numeral system (§ 2), nor the mechanical transposition of a ligature arising from the cursive stream of Latin writing (§ 3). Rather, it is the Greek *episemon* adopted as a Christological symbol (§§ 5.1-5.3).

The Greek origin raises broader issues because, within the larger framework of “contacts between cultures”, it allows for the isolation of an aspect of “contacts between scripts” that is independent from “contacts between languages”. While the study of interlinguistic contact in the ancient world can now rely on a widely accepted theoretical and methodological framework, explicit reflection on the phenomena of contact between writing systems has only recently begun (Mancini-Turchetta 2014, eds; Baglioni-Tribulato 2015, eds; Consani-Perta 2019, eds). From this perspective, the *diamesic* factor is not merely a parameter of sociolinguistic variation but enriches the exegesis of documents with additional levels of analysis. Since writing includes written language but cannot be reduced to it (Cardona 2009 [1981]; Perri 2014), the focus of the investigation is no longer solely the propositional-linguistic content visually encoded, but also the ensemble of ideological connotations that the written medium independently conveys, separate from orality (§ 5). In a case such as this, it is precisely within these connotations that the genesis of <Q> in Latin epigraphy appears to lie.

Finally, the ways in which the sign is employed within inscriptions (§ 6) also bring into question the debated distinction between ‘graphic’ and ‘scriptorial’ (Perri 2014). ‘The distinction between (systems of) *figures* (i.e., images, more or less abstract graphic forms) and *writing* is, in fact, a clear-cut and indisputable dichotomy only when viewed from classificatory perspectives that privilege an ‘objective’ or *etic* study’ (Perri 2014: 166 transl. F.R.). This typology results from a glotto- and, even more so, alphabet-centric perspective, which isolates graphic notations with univocal linguistic reference from all others. Once the ideological framework is clarified (§ 5), it becomes evident that <Q> functions simultaneously as both a numeral and a symbol. As a logogram-digit, it has a unique linguistic reference, though only regarding the semantic aspects (= ‘6’) and not the phonological or morphological ones (since

<Q> = /'seks/, but <QII> = /'okto/). At the same time, the use of such a graphic notation does not adhere solely to the glottic principle of representing meaning: it is only by virtue of its Greek form as an *episemon* that it can be associated with the sacred name of Christ and replace the Latin script <VI>, which is semantically but not symbolically equivalent. The same considerations apply to the heterographic sequence <Xρ>, symbolically more significant, beginning with the cross-shaped design of <X>, compared to its Latin counterpart <Christ(us)> (§ 6).

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Appendix

- AE 1971, 137 (Cagliari, 400-600; gravestone): *Hic iacet b(onae) m(emoriae) Muscula q | ui vixit annis pl(us) minus XXIII | requievit in pace sub d(ie) | GII Kal(endas) Decembres in | dictione duod(ecima).*
- AE 1979, 312 (Cuglieri - OR, 500-600; gravestone): *+ Hic iacet b(o)n(ae) mem(oriae) ABUS | Iscribonissa qui bixit | ann(os) pl(us) min(us) XXGII requi(escit) | in p(a)ce s(u)b d(ie) XÇIII mensis | Octobrii ind(ictione) XIII +.*

- AE 1987, 428 [= Brusin 1993: n. 3109] (Aquileia, 400-500; gravestone): [...] *Largi* | [*us ...*]s *fdelis* | [*in pac*]e recessit | *qui vixit annos XXÇIII men | sis sex, dies sex, III Idus{i}* Oct(*obres*) | *qui recessit in pace. Parentis contra votum posu | erunt | α + ω* | ((dove)) ((orant figure)) ((lamb)).
- AE 1988, 639 (Cagliari, 400-500; gravestone): *Hic iacet bo(nae) m(emoriae) An{i}* ziocia | *✠ | qui vixit plus min(u)s añni(s) | LV requiebit in pace de | posita est sub die XÇI | kalendas Februarias* ((palm branch)).
- AE 1990, 454 [= AE 1999, 812; Solin 1989: 216] (Porto Torres, 400-500; gravestone): [*H*]ic iacet bone m(emoriae) | [...]a qui vixit añn(is) plus | minus XXXÇII | requievit Ioilus | in pace sub die | XÇI kal(endas) Iulias.
- AE 1997, 417b (Tropea – VV, 573-575; gravestone): + *In oc tumulo requiebit in p | ace s(an)c(t)e recordationis Fanti | nus presbiter ed abbas mon | astirii qui bissit annos p(us) | m(inus) XXV defuntus est V id(us) Iu | nias, ind(ictione) ÇII i(n) nom(i)n(e) ✠ poscon | solato codam Basili añ(n)o XXXIII | Iustini [Aug(usti) ?] an(no) [VII]I in(d)ic(ione) e(ad)em].*
- AE 2000, 572 (Civitavecchia, 500-550; gravestone): + *Hic req[escit in pace] | Quarage[sima ? quae ? vix] | sit plus m[inus annos] | XXÇII deposit[a ? est ...] | kalenda[s ...].*
- AE 2005, 424 (Mirabella Eclano – AV, 400-600; gravestone): ✠ *Hic requies | cet in sum | no paces Luce | rna que vixit | añ(nos) XXÇ depos | [it ...].*
- AE 2007, 600 (Aquileia, 300-400; gravestone): *D(is) M(anibus) | Benemereti Iulianeti q | ui vixit annus XÇII fecet | cun virginio suo | p(lus) m(inus) annu unu m(enses) II d(ies) [...] | Dolies maritus con | tra votum poset. Recess[it] | in pace fedeles II id(us) M(aias) | ✠ ✠* ((dove on a branch)) ((orant figure)) ((dove on a branch)).
- CIL V 1702 (Aquileia, 300-400; gravestone): *Quirace | vixit annus | XÇII mesis ÇII* | ✠.
- CIL V 6237 [= *ILCV* 2738a] (Milano, 485; gravestone): *B(onae) M(emoriae) | hic requiescit in pac[e] | Iustinus qui vixit in s[e] | culo an(nis) pl(us) m(inus) | L deposi | tus sub d(ie) Ç idus Decem[b(res)] | Fymmacum v(irum) c(larissimum) c(on) s(ulem) | B(onae) M(emoriae) | hic requiescet in pac[e] | Martina qui vixit in s[e] | culo an(nis) pl(us) min(us) | LV depo[sit] | ta sub d(ie) III kal(endas) April(es).*
- CIL VI 38364 [= *ICVR* VI, 15808] (Roma, 300-350; gravestone): *D(is) M(anibus) | Fl(avius) Aris | tomen | es q(ui) b(ixit) an(nis) | XLIII mes(ibus) | sex d(iebus) ÇI.*
- CIL VI 35802 [= *ICVR* VII (n.s.), 19080] (Roma, 271-400; gravestone): *L(ucius) Marcus | Rufinus | vixit ann(is) | XL Ç qui nun | quan in Rome fuit.*
- CIL VI 32953 [= *ILCV* 490] (Roma, 490; gravestone): + *Hic positus est Antiochos candidatus premececi(us) | [...]CALLE[...]. | [...] domino [...] | Placidiae qui visit anus p(lus) m(inus) LÇ in pace, ÇI Kal(endas) Mart(ias) | consul(atu) domini nostri Valentiniani Aug(usti) ÇI et Abinio cons(ule).*

- CIL VI 32941 [= AE 1997, 166] (Roma, 350-400; gravestone): *D(e)p(ositio) Fl(avii) Valentis protector(is) pr(idie) Idus [[Se]ptembres]] | Aug(ustas) vixit annos XLÇII civis Conco[r]diensis | Fl(avius) Constantius filius patri fecit ben[e]merenti].*
- CIL VI 32949 [= ICVR II (n.s.) 5194] (Roma, 300-450; gravestone): *Hic pax quiescet ꝥ[...]. Eucari duk(enari) scut(ari) | scol(a) secund(a) qui m[ilit]avet an(nis) p(lus) m(inus) XÇIII biarcus | vixit an(nis) p̄(lus) m(inus) XXXV [depos]it[us] diae pridiae Idus | Iu[nia]s Z[...].*
- CIL VI 32948 [= ICVR II (n.s.) 5198] (Roma, 300-450; gravestone): *[Hic iacet ...] tinus scutar(ius) e | [schola] prima senat(or) | [vix(it) ann(is) ...] IIII d(iebus) XX d(e)p(ositus) | [in pace ?] ÇIII Kal(endas) Iul(ias) | [...].*
- CIL IX 1392 [= ILCV 1151] (Mirabella Eclano – AV, 400-500; gravestone): *[Hic re]quiescit in [somno pacis] | Claudia Salunina q[uae] v(ixit) an(nis) | pl(us) m(inus) XV menses sex [... depos]ita | die ÇI kal(endas) Maiias L(ucius) Faust[us] | praesbiter patr[onae] | b(ene) [m(erenti) f(ecit)].*
- CIL IX 1393 [= ILCV 1309] (Mirabella Eclano – AV, 400-500; gravestone): *ꝥ Hic requi | escit in so | mno pacis Iuliana pr(ae)p(osit)a(e) qu | ae vixit an | nos LIIII d̄(e)p̄(ositio) eius | ÇII kal(endas) Ian | uar(ias).*
- CIL IX 1381 [= ILCV 1260] (Mirabella Eclano – AV, 511; gravestone): *+ + + Hic requiescit in | somno pacis Caelius | Iuhannis exhorcista | qui vixit ann(is) pl(us) m(inus) ((20 ?)) | depositio eius ÇII Id̄(u)̄ | Decembres Fl(avio) Felice v(iro) c(larissimo) | consule.*
- CIL X 100 [= ILCV 3119] (Vibo Valentia, 500-600; gravestone): *ꝥ Paulus infas hic recui | escit per inditione(m) VI | cui bissit annos III | m(enses) ÇII et depositus | K(a)l(endis) Octobris f(e)l(ici)t(er).*
- CIL X 1218* [= AE 1988, 629] (Cagliari, 400-500; gravestone): *+ Hic iacet b̄(onae) m̄(emoriae) Furiosus qu | i vixit annis p̄l(us) m(inus) LX | quievit in pace de | positus est XÇII Kal(endas) | Februarias +.*
- CIL X 7499 [= ILCV 2734] (Malta, uncertain dating; painting on plaster): *In [hoc] l[oco] iacet | bon(a)e memori(a)e | Bo[nifati]us q[ui] bicsit | in [h]oc sec[u]lo an | nis L ueq[ui]ebit | in [p]oce s[ub] [d]ie Ç K̄al(endis) Sep | tembre indictio | ne [duod]ecima.*
- CIL X 7836 [= ILCV 4376] (Cagliari, 400-500; gravestone): *[...] | dies XX dep(ositus) in pace sub d(ie) non(arum) Aug(ustarum) | B(onae) m(emoriae) Iohannes qui vixit a[nn(is) ...] | quievit in pace VIII kal(endas) Nov[embr(es)] | B(onae) m(emoriae) Cresconius qui vixit annis pl(us) m(i)nus L qui[evit] | s(ub) d(ie) ÇII kal(endas) Mai(as) et depos(itus) s(ub) d(ie) VIII kal(endas) Septe(mbres).*
- CIL X 7770 [= ILCV 3103] (Cagliari, 400-600; gravestone): *B(onae) m(emoriae) Renobata qui | vixit ann(os) pl(us) m(inus) | XXV quiebit | in pace s(ub) d(ie) | Ç non(as) Mai(as).*

- CIL X 7766] (Cagliari, 400-600; gravestone): *H(ic) iacet b(ona)e m(emoriae) Pascasius | qui bix(i)t ann(is) plus minu | s XIII requiebit in pac | e sub di(e) CII k(alendas) Iulias ind(i)c(tione) XI.*
- CIL X 7775 [= ILCV 3062] (Cagliari, 400-600; gravestone): + *Ihc iacet bene memoria | e Sergis bixit annos plus | minus LXX requiebit in pa | ce sub die C(i)d(us) Ianuarias.*
- CIL X 7762 [= ILCV 3062 A] (Cagliari, 400-500; gravestone): ((blossoming tree)) *b(i)c iacet bene memoria | Ma'r'ia qui bissit annis | plus minus XXXXXX requi | evit in pace sub d̄(ie) C̄I kalēnd̄(as) Ma | ias ((fish)).*
- CIL X 7763 [= ILCV 3062 B] (Cagliari, 400-500; gravestone): [*H*]ic iacet b(ona)e m(emoriae) *Maria qui vix | it annis pl(us) m(inus) LX. B(ona)e m(emoriae) Honorn | us qui vixit pl(us) m(inus) | XXX requiebit in pace sub d(ie) | C kal(endas) Iunias.*
- CIL X 7752 (Cagliari, 400-600; gravestone): + *Hic iacet b(ona)e m̄(emoriae) B̄ernaceii | qui bissit annis plus min(us) | XX, requiebit in pace XC k̄āl(en) d̄(as) | Dece(m)b(res) [i]nd(ictione) X.*
- CIL X 7755 (Cagliari, 400-500; gravestone): [*Hi*]c iacet b(ona)e m(emoriae) *Flo-rus qui b | [ix]it ann(is) pl(us) m(inus) LXX quiebit in | [p]ace su(b) d(ie) CIII kal(endas) Februarias | Hic iacet b(ona)e m(emoriae) Pulceria qui bi | xit ann(is) pl(us) m(inus) LXV quiebit in | pace su(b) d(ie) kal(endas) Ianuarias.*
- CIL X 7756 [= ILCV 4692] (Cagliari, 400-500; gravestone): *Hic iacet b(o)n(ae) m(emo)r(i)a(e) Fortuna | qui bissit plus minus | annis XXCI m(e)ns(i)bus III quie | vit in pace s(u)b d(ie) non(arum) | [...] digna bissit an(nis) | [...] cui bir clusito | clos.*
- CIL XI 2583 (Chiusi, 455; gravestone): *Requiescit | hic Sthefanus | qui vixit an-nus CIII | requievit in pace | d(ie) kal(endarum) | Decemb(rium) coss. | Divi Va-lentiniani | Augg. CII.*
- CIL XI 4043 [= ILCV 3036] (Capena, 395; gravestone): *Anic(i)s Olybrio et Pro-bino cons. d(e)p(ositio) Iuli(a)e V idus | Decembres qu(a)e vicsit annos C et dies XXII | benemerenti in pace | parentes fecerunt.*
- CIL XI 4335 [= AE 2002, 437] (Terni, 503; gravestone): ((palm branch)) + ((palm branch)) | *Hic requies | cit bene me | morie Splen | dida que vi | xit annus | plus minu[s] | XXXV, dep[o] | sita in pa | ce CII Kale(nda)s I[a] | nuarias | consula[tu] | Bolu[siani] | v(iri) c(larissimi) | ((palm branch)) ?.*
- CIL XI 1714 (Firenze, 400-550; gravestone): [...]XXq[...] | [...] an(nos) LX[...] | [...] recept[...] | [...]XCk(alendas) + [...] | [...]est d(... ?) [...] | [...] + [...].
- CIL XI 3516 [= ILCV 2013] (Tarquinia, 300-500; gravestone): *Euticius | confessor | depositus CII | Kal(endas) Septenbris | in pace ₰.*
- CIL XI 3567 [= ICUR I 1093] (Civitavecchia, 557; gravestone): + *hic requiescit in pa | ce VVilifara qui vi | xit annus pl(us) m̄(inus) XC depo | sita est CIII kal(endas) Augustas p̄(ost) c̄(onsulatum) Basili v̄(iri) c̄(larissimi) anno XC indi(ctione) quin-ta | D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum).*

- CIL XI 7587b [= ILCV 262] (Civitavecchia, 557; gravestone): + *hic requixscit Iusta in pace | qui vixit plus minus annus LXXV | deposita est XV kalendas | Augustas p(ost) c(onsulatum) Basili v(iri) s(larissimi) an | no XÇ indictione quinta.*
- CIL XI 7589 [= ILCV 03123 add.] (Civitavecchia, 500-600; gravestone): + *hic requ | esci[t] Vincom | al[u]s sub die | sex(to) Ç kal(endas) | Marti.*
- CIL XI 4046 [= ICI IV 28] (Capena, 407; graffito): [...] +++ *Saturnino | [... vixit an]n(is) pl(us) m(inus) LXXV | [...] Mart(ias) D(omino) N(ostro) Honor(io) Aug(usto) ÇI.*
- CIL XIV 3418 [= ILCV 2956] (Praeneste, 399; gravestone): *Primenius qui vixit | anus XÇ depotus XVIII | kal(endas) I de(cem)b(res) Th'e'odoro.*
- Conda CAR114 (Cagliari, uncertain dating; gravestone): [...] | *req[ui]evit ... | die Ç [...].*
- Eph.Ep. IX 880 [= ILCV 4299] (Praeneste, 300-500; gravestone): *D[ulci]ssime cu[i]ugi Pauline | [marit]us benemerenti in pace | [quae vix]it anus XXXIII. Fecit in m | [atr]im(onio) annus XÇII. Deposita.*
- Fiocchi Nicolai (2006: 25-26) (Nepi / Sutri, uncertain dating; gravestone): *Deposit[io] ? ... qui vixit ann(os) ? | plus min[us] - - | d[ie]s (?) ÇI.*
- ICI IV 40 (Capena, 300-500; graffito in a catacomb): [*Depositio* ?] *Gaudenti (?) qui (?) vixit annos XII decem (?) | [menses ?] quidecem dies (?) XÇ k(a)l(endas) (?) Decem[bres].*
- ICI VIII 57 (Mirabella Eclano – AV, 559; gravestone): *α Ϝ ω Hic requiescēt | in pace Letus, Benedic | tula | Flora et Lumi | nosus qui vixeruēt | quantu(m) voluit D(eu)s | Dēpositus sub d(ie) XIII | kal(endas) Decembr(es) ind(ictione) Ç | p(ost) c(onsulatum) Basili v(iri) c(larissimi) anno XVIII.*
- ICUR I (n.s.) 3662 [= AE 2003, 299] (Anzio, 300-400; gravestone): *D(is) M(anibus) | Maxxima dece | sit in pas(e) dul | cissima bixxi[t] | annus ÇII et | mensens ÇII | d(iem) I spo(n)sata no(mi) | ne Vincentium [st] | ructorem | V Idu(s) | A(priles) | [...].*
- ICUR V 14815a,b [= AE 1937, 160] (Roma, 200-400; graffito in a catacomb): *cocorum XI | cocorum Ç.*
- ILSard I 102 (Cagliari, 300-400; gravestone): *Puero innocenti E | ytychio filio dulcissi | mo pater Eutychiān | us māter Felicissimā | contrā votum fecer | uñt qui bixit ann(os) | XXI meses Ç dies XIII.*
- ILSard I 166 (Decimomannu, 400-500; gravestone): [...] *R + + | [... r|d]ec(essit) in | [p]ace Ç ka[l(endas) ...].*
- ILSard I 117 (Cagliari, 300-500; gravestone): *B(onae) m(emoriae) Restituta | [... a] nnis pl(us) m(inus) XXÇIII re | [quievit in] pace sudd(ie) XX | [...] qui bissit annis pl(us) m(inus) [...] | qui{a}ebit in pace [...] Nobemb^rre^r.*

- ILSard I 120* [= *ILCV 3061*] (Cagliari, 400-600; gravestone): + *Hic iacet b(onae) m(emoriae) Thed | ote qui bissit an | nis pl(us) m(i)n(us) XCI re | quiebit in pace su(b) d(ie) VII kalendas | Septemb(res) ind(ictione) | secund(a) +.*
- ILSard I 122* [= *ILCV 3061*] (Cagliari, 400-600; gravestone): *Hic iacet b(onae) m(emoriae) Vitalis [qui bis] | sit annis pl(us) m(inu)s XCI quiev[it in] | pace su(b) d(ie) CI id(us) Ianuaria(s) | Hic iacet b(onae) m(emoriae) Mu | sa qui bissit anni[s plu] | s minus XLV requie | bit in pace s(ub) d(ie) CI i(dus) | Apriles in[d(ictione) ...].*
- Sc.Ant. XIX 28* (Civitavecchia, 543; gravestone): [...] + *N + [... de] | [p]osita est XCI[I ? Kal(endas)] | [Ia]nuarias indictio | ne septima ite | rum p̄(ost) c̄(onsulatum) Basili Iūn̄io(ris) | v̄(iri) c̄(larissimi) cons̄{s̄}(ulis).*
- Slavich (2019: n. 78)* (Roma, 300-430; gravestone): [... vi]xit mensis CI [...] | [... Sep] tumbres im[pace ? ...].