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THE STONE-CUTTER'S BILINGUAL INSCRIPTION FROM PALERMO
(*IG XIV 297 = CIL X 7296*): A NEW INTERPRETATION

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1. Introduction

It is no mystery that Sicily was one of the regions of the ancient world which were most exposed to language contacts, bilingualism and even multilingualism. Before the advent of Rome, Greek cohabited with the native languages Sicel, Sicanian and Elymian, and with the Semitic language imported by the Phoenicians.² Rome's intervention in Sicilian politics – long after traces of native languages had disappeared from the written record – brought Latin to the island, signalling the beginning of forms of linguistic cohabitation the exact contours of which have so far eluded clear-cut descriptions.³ Yet, bilingual texts from Sicily are scarce and even fewer are those which contain precious information about language contacts between Latin and Greek in the early centuries of Rome's presence on the island.⁴

2. The bilingual stele from Palermo

A fascinating and unique case study in this context – and one which has rightly attracted a good deal of attention – is the bilingual inscription (*IG XIV 297 = CIL X 7296*) advertising a stone-cutter's workshop.⁵ The uniqueness of this inscription is due not simply to its bilingual character, but also to the wording of the text itself:

¹ I am grateful to Elton Barker, Coulter George, Kalle Korhonen and Christian Seppänen for their help with various bibliographical matters. I also wish to thank Kalle Korhonen for his comments and suggestions.

² On the native languages of Sicily, see the classic Conway, Whathamough and Johnson (1933), Schmoll (1958) and Agostiniani (1977); as well as Durante (1964–5), Lejeune (1972–3), Agostiniani (1980–1), (1988–9), (1990), (1991), (1992a), (1992b) and (1999), Poccetti (1989) and the overview in Willi (2008: 331–47). For an archaeological account, see Albanese Procelli (2003) and, specifically on the Elymian area, Nenci, Tusa and Tusa (1990), De Vido (1997) and the proceedings of the four *Area elima* conferences, which include Nenci (1992), Nenci (1997), the collectively edited *Area elima III*, and Corretti (2003). More recent linguistic contributions and overviews are Poccetti (forthcoming) on the identity of Sicanian and Sicel, Marchesini (forthcoming) on language and script in the Elymian area, Meiser (forthcoming) and Simkin (forthcoming) on traces of linguistic contact in personal names and coin legends respectively. For Phoenician and Punic in Sicily, see Amadasi Guzzo (1967), (1972–3), (1990), (1999) and the overviews in Willi (2008: 348–9) and Amadasi Guzzo (forthcoming).

³ Classic works on Latin and Greek in Sicily are Parangèli (1960), Varvaro (1981), Mangano (1988) and (1993). For a more recent account, see Korhonen (2002) and (2010b), Korhonen (forthcoming) and Tribulato (forthcoming, b). On bilingualism in Byzantine Sicily, see Korhonen (2010a). On Oscan in Sicily see specifically Clackson (forthcoming) and also Poccetti (forthcoming). Evidence for Jewish presence in Sicily is discussed by Rutgers (1997), Solin (1983: 746–7) and Korhonen (forthcoming).

⁴ On Latin bilingual and trilingual inscriptions, see the still valid list in Calderini (1974: 67), as well as the general discussion in Adams (2003: 30–40). For a collection of mixed language inscriptions (including bilingual texts) from Asia, see Kearsley and Evans (2001).

⁵ For issues concerning the provenance of the inscription, see § 3 below. Further editions of the stele are *IGR I 503*, *CIG 5554*, *ILS 7680*: cf. *SEG L* no. 1016. A discussion of other aspects of the stele, which are not addressed in this article, can be found in Susini (1968: 17–21) (meaning of *ordinare* and *sculpere*), Di Stefano Manzella (1987: 126; 268 fig. 42) (meaning of *ordinare* and photograph), Calabi Limentani (1991: Tav. I) (photo and brief epigraphical considerations), Kruschwitz (2000: 239 nn. 3–4) (archaisms of the inscription). According to Kruschwitz (2000: 239 n. 2), the marble and letter-forms suggest that the inscription should be dated to the first century AD, a dating already proposed by Häusle (1980: 24). Alföldy (1976: 512), reviewing Manni Piraino (1973) and her dating of the inscription to the second century AD, argues for the first century BC on the basis of letter-forms and archaisms. An earlier dating may be supported by the odd use of <Q> for <C> in *cum*; however, it cannot be ruled out that *qum* was copied out from an existing and more archaic stone. On the other hand, *pace* Alföldy, the presence of archaic forms such as *ei* for *ī* and *ai* for *ae* is not in itself proof of later (first/second century AD) dating: see the general remarks in Poccetti (1986: 102) on archaisms in Latin epigraphy.

στήλαι	<i>tituli</i>
ἐνθάδε	<i>heic</i>
τυποῦνται καὶ	<i>ordinantur et</i>
χαράσσονται	<i>sculpuntur</i>
ναοῖς ἱεροῖς	<i>aidibus sacreis</i>
σὺν ἐνεργείαις	<i>qum operum</i>
δημοσίαις	<i>publicorum</i>

The first part of both versions is clear, and written correctly: the workshop advertises itself as able of both arranging (τυποῦνται / *ordinantur*) and incising (χαράσσονται / *sculpuntur*) inscriptions. The second part, however, explaining that the workshop produces both public and private inscriptions, is blighted by several mistakes in both versions, giving the impression that the first part was copied from an existing correct text, while the second part was produced extemporaneously in the workshop itself, probably by someone who could not write well in Greek or Latin. Before reviewing the various interpretations that have been advanced for this unique text, I shall briefly examine the mistakes occurring in both versions.

In the Greek text the phrase σὺν ἐνεργείαις δημοσίαις is doubly odd. Firstly, σὺν is seemingly employed as a conjunction or a synonym of καὶ – something first noted by Kruschwitz (2000: 239). Such usage is unknown in Classical and generally ‘correct’ Greek, although there are a few cases in Ptolemaic papyri where the meaning ‘together with’ is closer to that of a conjunction (see below). At first sight, the σὺν on the Palermo *bilinguis* would appear to further extend the semantic role of the ‘inclusive’ σὺν, which is attested e.g. in Hdt. 8.113 ὥστε σύμπαντας τριήκοντα μυριάδας γενέσθαι σὺν ἱππεῦσι “thereby the whole number, including the horsemen, was three hundred thousand men”.⁶

The following mistake strengthens the impression that this use of σὺν is unidiomatic, since ἐνέργεια is seemingly used to mean ‘works’ – that is, in place of ἔργα.⁷ Other solutions might be possible for σὺν ἐνεργείαις δημοσίαις: for instance, that what the writer clumsily meant to write is ‘here we arrange and engrave steles for temples *with the help of public funds*’, where σὺν + dative would have an instrumental meaning and ἐνέργεια would be used to mean ‘active support’ *vel sim.* However, the Latin version makes it quite clear that what is meant here is ‘inscriptions for public display’.⁸

Viewed in isolation, the Greek version might be interpreted as the work of a Latin-speaker who wrongly composed the Greek text after writing the Latin. Such interpretation would be supported by the fact that Latin *cum* does indeed have a connective function.⁹ However, the Latin version too contains a striking oddity: *cum* is construed with the genitive, a case which this preposition never governs. This mistake makes the hypothesis that we might be dealing with a Latin native speaker impossible. Admittedly, it would be rather bizarre for the Greek text to have been composed by a Latin speaker and the Latin one by a different person; as far as I am aware, no one has proposed a similar scenario so far.

The two most recent contributions examining this inscription, Kruschwitz (2000) and Adams (2003), leave the question of the stone-cutter’s first language open. Both suggest that the choice of ἐνέργεια for ‘work’ was due to a mistaken analysis of the gender of the word *opera* contained in the Latin version: this was taken to be a feminine noun – another hint of the fact that the composer of the Greek text did not know Latin well (though Kruschwitz (2000: 240) terms him a “lateinischsprachige(r) Verfasser”).¹⁰ As for the odd use of σὺν as a conjunction, Kruschwitz (2000: 239) considers it a “Latinismus”; Adams (2003: 429) agrees and further comments: “it would seem that in a bilingual community in Sicily σὺν had extended its range by acquiring a function of its near-synonym *cum* (a loan-shift)”. However, since the other likely

⁶ Cf. Kühner–Gerth II 2: 467.

⁷ See Kruschwitz (2000: 239).

⁸ On σὺν ‘with collateral notion of help or aid’, see *LSJ* s.v. σὺν 3 and 7. For ἐνέργεια as ‘activity’ see *LSJ* s.v. 1, although a more fitting meaning (‘support’, ‘funds’ etc.) is unknown to me.

⁹ Thus clearly Adams (2003: 429).

¹⁰ Kruschwitz (2000: 239–40), followed by Adams (2003: 429–30).

examples of this use of $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu$ are only attested in Ptolemaic papyri and in the *Septuagint* (see below), the conclusion that it was characteristic of the Greek bilingual community of Sicily is unwarranted.

Turning to the Latin text, Adams (2003: 430) explains the selection of the wrong case for *cum* as an “overextension” of the rule that “one should not assume that Greek and Latin prepositions always took the ‘same’ case: that is, the writer knew that the Greek dative often corresponded to the Latin ablative, but since he also knew that this was not always the case, he selected a different case (one which is never governed by any preposition in Latin)”. Thus, according to Adams, the writer operated a form of hypercorrection, selecting a case which is frequent with prepositions in Greek. Such inter-language errors “may be creative overextensions of a rule perceived to operate in the second language”.¹¹

While Adams' explanations illustrate what linguistic processes are probably at work behind the mistakes, they make the identification of the stone-cutter's first language more difficult. What we are dealing with, it would seem, is a Latin speaker who does not know the language well enough to be aware of the fact that *cum* does not take the genitive, but whose Greek is nevertheless clearly influenced by Latin. Adams (2003: 430–1) himself leaves the question open: “Was there a local variety of Greek showing Latin features, and was our writer a speaker of that without really knowing Latin itself? [...] Is the prepositional expression perhaps an after-thought composed by someone else? Was the writer a native speaker of neither Greek nor Latin?”

For his part, Kruschwitz (2000: 240) takes a different interpretative path. Ruling out the possibility that use of *cum* with the genitive may be due to a precocious loss of case function distinction, or to the influence of the late Greek construction of $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu$ with the genitive (see *LSJ* s.v.), he concludes that the striking linguistic oddity of the inscription must be a joke meant to draw attention to the text (“Scherz des Verfassers, um die Aufmerksamkeit auf den Text zu lenken”). I regret to say that I am not persuaded by this interpretation, which takes too many presuppositions for granted.¹² On what basis would erroneous usage of a case be perceived as a joke as opposed to a mistake? Why would the advertisement need to be linguistically incorrect in order to be notable? How likely is it that someone whose very job it is to compose and arrange good epigraphic texts would want to fill his advertisement with errors? Kruschwitz's reading of the inscription is not that far from Alföldy's (1989: 176) suggestion that the mistakes were made on purpose, in an ironic spirit, to hoax customers and attract their attention.¹³ Alföldy (1989: 173) substantiates his interpretation with the example of an odd inscription from Norcia (*CIL* IX 4549) which he interprets as an epigraphic workshop advertisement listing all possible word-combinations that a prospective customer might be looking for. As far as I can see, however, the two inscriptions are different in kind. Firstly (as Alföldy (1989: 172) himself states), *CIL* IX 4549 is not a complete text running from beginning to end, while the Palermo *bilinguis*, in spite of its errors, is perfectly intelligible. Secondly, even though *CIL* IX 4549 presents an odd list of words (some of which appear to be invented), it contains no grammatical mistakes of the kind we find in the Palermo stele. While I agree that an advertisement for an epigraphic workshop might be conceived in such a way as to summarize the range of inscriptions that the workshop is able to produce (as is the case with *CIL* IX 4549), thus resulting in an odd text, I find the idea that the mistakes on the Palermo *bilinguis* are intentional quite absurd.

3. Is the Palermo stele the work of a Punic speaker?

The last possibility mentioned by Adams, that the author of the text may have been a native speaker of neither Latin nor Greek, deserves more detailed consideration than it has received so far. This interpretation had already been advanced by both Kaibel (*ad IG* XIV 297: “marmorarius nec Graecus opinor nec

¹¹ Adams (2003: 430).

¹² Cf., too, *An.Ép.* 2000 no. 643: ‘C'est peu convaincant’.

¹³ Cf. Alföldy (1989: 176): “... man sich fragen muß, ob den Verantwortlichen einer Steinmetzwerkstatt in einer Stadt wie Panormus solche Fehler wie in diesem Text ausgerechnet auf einer Reklametafel unbemerkt bleiben konnten: Vielleicht lag die Intention darin, dem Kunden in einer ironischen Art weiszumachen, daß die Werkstatt bereit ist, auch ganz ausgefallenen Wünschen nachzukommen”. Cf. also *SEG* XXXIX no. 1017.

Romanus homo cum ab utriusque linguae peritis intellegi cuperet neutris satisfacit”) and Mommsen (*ad CIL X 7296*: “marmorarius hic utriusque linguae infantiam prae se fert”).¹⁴ As far as I am aware, Susini (1968: 18) was the first to suggest that the writer might be a Carthaginian (though it would be more correct to say ‘a Punic speaker’). This suggestion has since been echoed in all the relevant literature: Manni Piraino (1973: 182), Bivona (1970: 86), Häusle (1980: 23), Alföldy (1989: 175), Kruschwitz (2000: 240 n. 6) – who rejects it, yet without clarifying on what grounds (linguistic and/or historical?) – and finally, as we have seen, Adams (2003: 431), who does not express his own view of this proposal.

The hypothesis that a Punic-speaker may have achieved a degree of linguistic competence that made it possible for him to work in an epigraphic workshop in Palermo is not at all unlikely. Contacts between Greeks, Romans and Phoenicians/Punics are well-attested in Western Sicily, especially in Marsala/Lilybaeum, a city where Punics are the receivers as well as the authors of curses in Greek (see the two *defixiones* published by Bechtold and Brugnone (1997)) and are also involved in offerings of ξενία (*IG XIV 279*, second century BC).¹⁵ In the first of the two *defixiones*, dated to the second century BC or perhaps earlier, the cursed individuals bear Greek (Ζωπυρίων), Punic (Μουβυρ) and Roman names (*Iunius, Septimius*, etc.); in the second *defixio* (beginning of the second century BC?) the cursed person’s name is Roman (Νουμήριος, *sic*), while the *defigens* has a typically Phoenician name (Απιθαμβάλ).¹⁶

There is little written evidence for the presence of Punics in Palermo, possibly because of the fact that the modern city has covered the ancient one.¹⁷ Still, a few texts have survived.¹⁸ We have even scantier Punic evidence from early Roman Palermo, i.e. from the period of our *bilinguis*. The most significant texts here are a (funerary?) inscription from the church of Santa Maria della Catena, dated between the first century BC and the first century AD,¹⁹ and two short inscriptions incised on the rim and the outer surface of a fragmentary vase in the Palermo archaeological museum.²⁰ The first of these two vase inscriptions is particularly interesting for our purposes, as its initial word, if read QNT’, may be interpreted as the Latin name *Quintilianus* (or *Quintianus*).²¹ These three texts may be complemented with some of the Neo-Punic inscriptions from the Grotta Regina cave, near Palermo. In this case, however, it is impossible to provide any secure dating: the inscriptions may span a period between the second century BC and the first century AD.²²

It may be objected that there is no clear evidence that the bilingual inscription was discovered in Palermo: all we know is that in 1762 Torremuzza described it as part of the collection of the Museo Salnitriano. Clearly, the inscription may have reached Palermo from other areas of Sicily or Italy.²³ Yet, its

¹⁴ Häusle (1980: 23) mentions Mommsen and Kaibel among those scholars who think that the writer might have been a Carthaginian, but he is mistaken: both editors merely state that the writer was probably neither Roman nor Greek.

¹⁵ On the difficulty of delineating clear-cut criteria to distinguish between Phoenician and Punic texts from Sicily, see the general remarks in Amadasi Guzzo (1999: 40). By the time of our bilingual inscription, the language had definitely evolved into Punic.

¹⁶ For the linguistic interpretation of the name of the cursing man in the second *defixio* (Απιθαμβάλ), see further De Simone (1999: 209) and Amadasi Guzzo (forthcoming). The *defixio* was written by someone who was an expert in this field: cf. Bechtold and Brugnone (1997: 115).

¹⁷ Cf. Amadasi Guzzo (1990: 59).

¹⁸ See those in Amadasi Guzzo (1967: 53–5 no. 1) and Amadasi Guzzo (1990: 92–4 nos. 34–6).

¹⁹ *CIS I* 134. Discussion of this text by Coacci Polselli (1980–1: 473).

²⁰ *Ed. pr.* Garbini (1965: 205–10).

²¹ See Amadasi Guzzo (1990: 91 no. 30).

²² Cf. Coacci Polselli, Amadasi Guzzo and Tusa (1979: 106). One of these Neo-Punic texts, no. 29, inscribed on the drawing of a ship, mentions Isis, who was connected with sea-faring in Roman times. This may be evidence for a later dating of some of these texts. Cf. Coacci Polselli (1980–1: 474–5).

²³ For information and bibliography on the history of the inscription, see Manni Piraino (1973: 181). The first mention of the stele occurs in Torremuzza’s *Le antiche iscrizioni di Palermo* (1762), which frequently provides information about the provenance of inscriptions. However, it is impossible to discern the criterion Torremuzza used in order to assign such provenance, as we do not have any documents concerning the museum’s collection in the 16th century. As Kalle Korhonen has kindly informed me, Manni Piraino’s (1973: 181) statement that our *bilinguis* had been in the collection of the Museo

bilingualism points to an area where Greek and Latin had been cohabiting for some time. The fact that the Greek part of the stele appears to be slightly bigger further points towards a place where Greek was predominant – definitely not Rome.²⁴ Naples might be a possibility, but if Susini is right in assuming Punic influence, then the only place we are left with is West Sicily. Until stronger evidence is found to counter the claim that the inscription comes from Palermo, there is no ground to doubt what already Mommsen had clearly grasped: “Siculam originem prodit quod bilinguis est, cum litterae sint optima aetatis marmorum commendantes”.²⁵

4. On σύν

A few observations may contribute to making Susini's proposal even more compelling. Let us start from the use of σύν as a conjunction, which is supposedly due to Latin influence. The possibility that it may in fact reflect Punic usage is not unlikely. The starting point is that in Phoenician the preposition 'T ('et) 'together with' could also be used as a conjunction.²⁶ Unfortunately, examples of such usage are not so clear-cut, but it will be worth mentioning the fact that in a Punic inscription from Cagliari (Amadasi Guzzo (1990: 74 no. 4)) we find the phrase 'RM 'T 'ŠT, where 'RM is a personal name and 'ŠT 'wife' is preceded by 'T, interpretable both as 'together with' and 'and'. Although this evidence is not decisive, the possibility should not be ruled out that the semantic ambiguity of 'T led certain Punic-speakers to exchange 'with' and 'and' in their second language.

Parallel evidence for the mapping of a Semitic conjunction onto Greek σύν comes from the *Septuagint*, where some less transparent uses of σύν owe to the fact that they translate the Hebrew conjunction *w* (ו) 'and': cf. Ios. 6.24 καὶ ἡ πόλις ἐνεπρήσθη ἐμπυρισμῶ σύν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν αὐτῇ “and the city and/with everything within it was burned with fire”; Par. 1.16.32 βομβήσει ἡ θάλασσα σύν τῷ πληρώματι “the sea and/with its content will roar”; Dan. 3.21 ... ἔχοντες τὰ ὑποδήματα αὐτῶν καὶ τὰς τιάρας αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τῶν κεφαλῶν αὐτῶν, σύν τῷ ἱματισμῶ αὐτῶν “(they were tied up) wearing their clothes, headbands on their heads, and/with their cloaks”.²⁷ Greek σύν is also used to translate Hebrew *l* (וּ) ... *l* (וּ) ‘as well as’, as in Deut. 32.25 νεανίσκος σύν παρθένῳ “both young man and virgin”.²⁸ As Johannesson (1926: 207 n. 2) notes, such usage is also found in Pol. 16.7.2 ἤλοσαν δὲ δύο τετρήρεις καὶ λέμβοι σύν τοῖς πληρώμασιν ἑπτὰ “two quadriremes and seven galleys with/and their crew were captured”, which contrasts with the immediately preceding ἐφθάρησαν ... λέμβοι δὲ πέντε καὶ εἴκοσι καὶ τὰ τούτων πληρώματα “twenty-five galleys and their crews were destroyed” (16.7.1).

In all these quotations there is a degree of ambiguity between a strong comitative use of σύν, through which the elements in the dative would be perceived as adjuncts of the subjects, and a conjunctive use, whereby the elements in the dative would be presented as the subjects' *pars integrans*. Further parallels, displaying the same semantic ambiguity, surface in Diodorus Siculus (e.g. 2.22.2 (φασὶ) τὸν δὲ Τεῦταμον μυρίου μὲν Αἰθίοπας, ἄλλους δὲ τοσοῦτους Σουσιανούς σύν ἄρμασι διακοσίοις ἐξαποστῆλαι “(they say) that Teutamus dispatched ten thousand Ethiopians and a like number of men of Susiana with/and two hundred chariots”) as well as in the Ptolemaic papyri: cf. Mayser (1970: 400), with examples such as Wilck. Ostr. 1535.5 δέδωκας τοῖς συνστρατιώταις αὐτοῦ σύν Πλάτωνι.

The above overview suggests that our perception of the 'inclusive σύν' as an un-Greek feature must perhaps be reviewed, as there is evidence, in both literature and papyri, that the semantic range of this preposition had undergone significant extension already by the first century BC. At the same time, though,

Salnitriano since 1730 may be doubted, as in Antonio Maria (Antonmaria) Lupi's *Dissertatio et animadversiones ad nuper inventum Severae martyris epitaphium*, published in Palermo in 1734, there is no trace of the inscription.

²⁴ On the arrangement of the inscription and its vertical division into two halves, the first of which has bigger letters, see Alföldy (1989: 175).

²⁵ I would like to thank Kalle Korhonen for discussing these points at length with me.

²⁶ Krahmalkov (2001: 271).

²⁷ See Johannesson (1926: 207) and Kittel–Friedrich s.v. σύν 2.

²⁸ Johannesson (1926: 207).

we know that σύν, which in Classical Greek was already competing with μετά, was steadily dying out in the koine – a trend manifest in the Greek translation of the Bible.²⁹ In Medieval Greek σύν has completely disappeared, not least because of the disappearance of the dative; it is only retained, as a convenient variant of μετά or μέ, in literary texts.³⁰ This makes the odd use of σύν in the Palermo stele all the more remarkable. It may be that by avoiding the all-pervasive μετά the author of the text intended to mark it as ‘high’; but the fact that in all probability σύν was not a feature of his spoken Greek makes it even more likely that he had not perfect control over its correct usage. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that μετά itself could have a comitative function close to that of a conjunction, so that some comitative expressions rendered by μετά + gen., when linked to the subject of the phrase, caused the verb to become plural. Bortone (2010: 286 n. 93) points out that this use, far from being an oddity, is a common feature cross-linguistically: it resurfaces in Medieval and Modern Greek (with μέ, deriving from μετά), in Turkish, and in colloquial varieties of Italian.³¹

By way of conclusion, I would like to draw attention to the following points:

(1) While uses of σύν which make it semantically identical to a conjunction are not Classical Greek ‘proper’, it would be false to say that there are no parallels for it in Greek as a whole: for they are found in the *Septuagint*, in Ptolemaic papyri, as well as in Diodorus Siculus and Polybius.

(2) It is likely that the treatment of σύν as a conjunction was encouraged in linguistic contexts influenced by Semitic: indeed, this is the explanation given for the frequent misuse of σύν in the *Septuagint*.

(3) At the same time, the instances in Diodorus Siculus and Polybius also suggest that this development may have been underway in other varieties of Greek as well. In this respect, it is possible that σύν follows the above-mentioned parallel development of μετά, the preposition which ultimately ousted σύν.

(4) What probably explains the phrase σύν ἐνεργείαις δημοσίαις in the Palermo stele, then, is uncertainty over the correct usage of a preposition which was falling out of use, as well as influence from a language (Punic) in which the comitative preposition could be used as a conjunction.

5. On case usage

As concerns the selection of cases in the inscription, it is open to speculation whether the dative ἐνεργείαις δημοσίαις after σύν reflects the writer’s competence over case usage in Greek, or whether it represents the mere repetition of the case of the previous phrase (ναοῖς ἱεροῖς). The use of σύν as a conjunction, as well as the fact that it was not a common preposition in spoken varieties of Greek in this period, make the latter hypothesis the most probable, but it is ultimately impossible to draw any definite conclusions.

The mistaken use of the Latin genitive after *cum*, betraying incompetence in Latin case usage and government, is much more interesting and opens up further perspectives in support of the writer’s Punic identity. One should take account here of the stone-cutter’s linguistic mindset. Punic does not distinguish syntactic functions by means of distinct inflectional forms: syntactic cases are expressed by the use of prepositions and adjuncts. When Punic distinguishes gender and number it does so by adding special suffixes to the root word. This means that in Punic words can be represented by zero-suffix forms – indeed, this is the rule. A native speaker of Punic who wished to speak Greek and/or Latin had to learn that different syntactic functions corresponded to different case forms of the same word. His first instinct would probably have been to identify a form in the Greek and Latin inflections which corresponded to the Punic idea of ‘root’. In most Greek and Latin inflections this is impossible, as all cases, including the nominative, are inflected by means of endings. However, it is likely that a particular case would have been selected as the root form by learners who were not yet proficient in the language.

Evidence for the selection of a Latin inflected form as the default form is attested in two different sets of texts from Africa, both discussed by Adams (2003). In letters inscribed on ostraca from Bu Njem in Tripolitania and dated to the third century AD, the nominative is frequently selected as the default case.

²⁹ See the statistics in Bortone (2010: 184).

³⁰ See Bortone (2010: 233).

³¹ For the syntactic and semantic development of μετά, see Luraghi (2005).

Adams (2003: 236) cites for instance *per kamellarius* (for *per kamellarium*) or *ferentes ... muli* (where *muli* is the object of *ferentes* and should thus be *mulos*).³² Clearly, the nominative is used as a sort of uninflected form.

A different situation is illustrated in a Punic-Latin bilingual inscription from El Amrouni in Libya, dated to the second or early third century AD (Ferchiou (1989), *KAI* 117). As Adams (2003: 218) notes, this funerary text commemorates a man with “a largely Latin name”, Q. Apuleius Maximus Rideus. While other members of his family mentioned in the text have Punic names, his three sons have fully Latin ones: Pudens, Severus, and Maximus. In the Punic version, all the Latin names reflect the Latin vocative rather than the nominative (or the case in which they are inflected in the Latin version): *Apuleius* corresponds to *‘pwl’ý*, in which the ending *-ý* represents the Latin vocative in *-i*; and *Maximus* corresponds to *m’k[šm]’*, in which *-’* reflects Latin *-e*, that is the vocative *Maxime*.³³ The same ending *-’* is also used in the rendering of *Severus*. Further instances of vocatives for nominatives are found in other Punic texts: see for instance the rendering of Roman names in an inscription from Bitia, Sardinia, discussed by Amadasi Guzzo (1990: 81–2), in which names ending in *-us* are rendered with a final *-H* (= *-’*, most probably expressing the vocative in *-e*).³⁴ As Adams (2003: 218–9) explains, “the vocative is the form of a name most commonly heard, and if a Latin name were picked up by Punic speakers from Latin speech rather than written texts, it is that form which might well have been borrowed”. These examples point to the fact that many Punic speakers may not have developed an awareness of Latin declensional patterns.

Let us now get back to the author of the Greek-Latin *bilinguis* from Palermo. It is possible that the first part of both halves of the inscription, displaying correct grammar, was copied from existing workshop signposts, while the second part was produced by assembling bits and pieces of correct Greek and Latin together, leading to some odd mistakes. If the writer was a native speaker of Punic residing in Sicily, it is likely that he had a reasonable degree of proficiency in the two languages – as he was able to write them and use some grammatical functions correctly.³⁵ His control over Latin case government and gender, however, was poorer than that which he had over Greek, since he knew neither the ablative plural of *opus*, nor how to correctly inflect this word. Something he must have known on account of his profession, however, was the set-phrase *operum publicorum*, which frequently occurs in Latin official titles such as *curator operum publicorum*, as already suggested by Susini (1968: 18).³⁶ Only a non-native speaker of Latin would have used the genitive in place of the ablative, and only a speaker of a language devoid of inflections would not have noted the discrepancy with the preceding *aidibus sacreis*. The author of the inscription knew perhaps that *operum publicorum* was often accompanied by *aedium sacrarum* in the Latin epigraphical jargon (e.g. *CIL* VI, 864; 3702; 31128; 31132, etc.), but was unable to recognise the case difference in the forms he used for his text.

Further support for the hypothesis that the writer was a Punic speaker comes from the above-mentioned second-century BC *tessera hospitalis* from Lilybaeum (*IG* XIV 279), which was written in Greek by a Punic speaker: Ἰμύλχ Ἰμίλχωνος Ἰνίβαλος Χλωρός ξενίαν ἐποίησατο πρὸς Λύσων Διογνήτου καὶ τῶν ἐγγόνων. Here both the nominative Λύσων and the genitive τῶν ἐγγόνων are governed by the preposition πρὸς. As Masson (1976: 94) has remarked, “[c]es lignes ont visiblement été rédigées par quelqu’un qui maniait le grec avec difficulté, ignorant la syntaxe des cas, d’où la présence du nominatif [...] et du génitif pluriel [...], erreurs qu’il ne faut pas corriger”: words which apply equally well to the author of the Palermo inscription.

In my view, another factor is likely to have contributed to this particular error of government in the Palermo stele. *Operum publicorum*, which fails to adapt to the syntactic structure of the phrase in which it

³² See further Adams (1994: 96–102), with a more detailed discussion of the use of the nominative for the accusative.

³³ I follow Adams’ spelling.

³⁴ Other examples in Adams (2003: 218 n. 428).

³⁵ As Adams (1999: 124) notes à propos texts from Tripolitania, it is possible for writers of epigraphic texts to be literate and advanced in spelling without having control over syntax and grammatical functions.

³⁶ Cf. further Kruschwitz (2000: 240 n. 10).

is used, is retained as a lexical unit of fixed form. This phenomenon, too, finds parallels in mistakes made in the letters from Bu Njem. A good example is what happens in the letters of Aelius Aemilianus (nos. 76–79), where there are frequent government mistakes, particularly in the consular dating at the end of the letters, e.g. in Letter 77 (from Adams (1994: 92)):

*Octavio Festo dec(urioni) p(rae)p(osito) meo
Aemilius Aemilianus mil(es) salutem
transmisi at te domine per kamella-
rius · Iassucthan sbitualis tridici
vji [sic: i.e. viiii] · noue q(uae) · fiunt · modios centum octo
Consules · futuros **post Thusco et**
Basso cos(ulibus) · xji Kal(endas) Febrarias*

“To Octavius Festus, decurion, my commanding officer, Aemilius Aemilianus, soldier, (sends) greetings. I have sent you, lord, by the camel driver Iassucthan, 7 [i.e. 9], nine, *sbitualis* of wheat, which is equivalent to 108 *modii*. The consuls in office after the consulship of Tuscus and Bassus, 21 January.”

The incorrect phrase *post Thusco et Basso co(n)s(ulibus)* reveals the writer’s neglect of government – further proven by *per kamellarius* and *quae fiunt modios* – as well as his inability to modify the prefabricate pattern of the dating formula expressed in the ablative absolute so that it might agree with the preposition *post*.³⁷ This is to say that in this particular case government is overrun by the normative pressure of the fixed phrase *X et X consulibus*, something which applies to *cum operum publicorum* as well.

6. Conclusion

The problems raised by this fascinating Sicilian inscription are numerous. On balance, I think that the errors can be better understood if we assume that the author of the text was a Punic-speaker who had achieved a degree of proficiency in both Latin and Greek, albeit with imperfect control over case usage and government. In the absence of further information which may clarify the exact provenance of the inscription, the hypothesis that its author was a person able to speak Punic, Greek and Latin lends support to the conclusion that the stele is a product of the remarkable multilingual community that inhabited the city of Palermo at the dawn of the Common Era. To end on a speculative note, if this nicely arranged inscription was produced in Palermo, this might suggest the settlement of an Augustan *colonia* in the city, for a new Roman *colonia* would have been in immediate need of good stone-cutters.³⁸

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³⁷ See Adams (1994: 94): “He [Aemilius Aemilianus] set out to express some idea such as ‘in the consulship after the consulship of Tuscus and Bassus’ ... [b]ut he was incapable of modifying the ablative absolute *Tusco et Basso consulibus* to fit it to the new context.”

³⁸ I owe this last point to Kalle Korhonen. On the question of the Augustan *coloniae*, see e.g. Giardina (1987: 226–31), Wilson (1990: 35 ff.).

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