Altar for Marcus Aurelius in Volubilis (AE 1957, 202)

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[1]

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Altar
Original Location/Place: Volubilis, Mauretania Tingitana
Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Lapidary museum of Volubilis, (near Meknes, Morocco)
Date: 173 CE to 175 CE
Physical Characteristics: Large altar, found with two others in Volubilis. The inscription, in large, elegant letters is found within on the central front of the altar, within an incised frame. On either side of the frame a scroll/floral decoration is also inscribed.

Material: Stone.
Measurements: Width: 82 cm
Height: 160 cm
Depth: 71 cm

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications: AE 1953, 0078.
IAM 2, 384.
AE 1957, 0202
HD018485 [2]

Commentary: This inscribed altar was discovered in 1952, along with two others, in the ancient city of Volubilis. The altars were not believed to have been found *in situ*, but rather placed in the immediate area of the canal, and at a short distance from each other. The inscription under discussion here belongs to the oldest of the three altars, all of which are believed to have originated in Volubilis and which form a series of "peace altars" that celebrated the good relations with neighbouring tribes, in honour of the Roman emperor.

This inscription begins with a dedication asking for the good health of the emperor, Marcus Aurelius (*Pro salute Impe/ratoris Caesaris Marci Aureli*). The date of the inscription – between 173 and 175 CE – can be asserted by the emperor's titulature; Marcus Aurelius is here awarded the titles *Armeniacus Medicus Parthicus Germanicus maximus*, but not yet *Sarmaticus*, by which he was also known only following his victory in Sarmatia in 175 CE. It is unusual that *maximus* is paired with *Germanicus* in the titles, but the most recent editors of the text believed that itshould in fact be taken with *Parthicus* ("great victor in Parthia") following their usual pairing in Marcus Aurelius's titulature (Euzennat, Marion and Gascou, *Inscriptions antiques du Maroc*, p. 245). The combination with *Germanicus* here is perhaps then indicative of a misunderstanding in a provincial context, rather than evidence for any complication of the date or types of titles given to the emperor.

The altar was dedicated by Epidius Quadratus, the *procurator* or governor of the province of Mauretania Tingitana, in order to commemorate his 'meeting' with Umcetius, the 'prince of the Macennite and Baquates' (*prin/cipe gentium Ma/cennitum et Baqua/tium*). This 'conversation' (*conlocutus*) essentially occurred between the governor

and the most senior figure of a local tribe in order to confirm that the relationship was good, and was one between equals; the conversations officially recognised the laws and religion of each group, which was then recorded in the form of a 'peace' altar, in the name of the Roman emperor, as a permanent testament of their accord (MacKendrick, *The North African Stones Speak*, p. 312). Volubilis was an enormously successful Roman city; it had been elevated to the status of *municipium*, including a grant of Roman citizenship to all inhabitants, in the first century by the emperor Claudius and had continued to grow ever since, but, as the capital of the province its location on the south-eastern edge of the province was vulnerable, and susceptible to invasion, or at least hostility, from the Berber tribes that faced it, so that a ring of five forts were constructed around the city in order to improve its defences (Rogerson, *Marrakesh, Fez and Rabat*, p. 237). The *colloquium* (conversation) between Epidius Quadratus and the Berber *princeps* Umcetius was, therefore, a deliberate act of diplomacy; by recognising the laws and religion of the Berber tribes over which Umcetius was leader, Rome acknowledged the extent of her power in the region in a pragmatic and realistic way, whilst also consolidating good relations with tribes that might come to her protection if necessary. The name of the Berber prince, *Umcetius*, is previously unknown and believed to be a Latinised form of a name of perhaps Punic origins, and may in fact be indicative of his positive reception of Rome's presence in Volubilis. By styling himself as a 'Roman' prince and engaging in the *colloqium*, Umcetius too demonstrated a realistic diplomatic attitude to the dominant power in the city, ensuring the security and protection of his own community too. It is worth noting here that the association of the Maccenite and Baquates – two independent tribes in Mauretania – under one prince was not known to have occurred this early; another epigraphic text refers to the alliance of the Baquates with the Bavares, a further tribal group, but this was under Alexander Severus in the early third century CE, and therefore much later (Frézouls, "Nouvelles inscriptions de *Volubilis*," p. 398. For the history of these tribes, please see Euzennat, "Les troubles de Maurétanie," p. 372-393). It may be that the hostility faced by Rome from certain of the tribes was also faced by the Maccenites and the Baquates, and that some form of diplomatic agreement with Rome was mutually beneficial.

Indeed, the extent to which the Roman administration and these tribes relied on each other for diplomatic support and security can also be seen in the increasing number of dedications that attest to *colloquia* taking place between the Roman procurators and the chieftains of the neighbouring tribes; as Rome's power in the region began to fail during the so-called Third Century Crisis, a greater number of treaties were drawn up to protect her interests and hold on the city. Indeed, the last two 'peace' altars discovered at the site Volubilis, and which date to 277 and 280 CE respectively, both call for a *foederata et diuturna pax* – "a federated and lasting peace," in a last attempt at maintaining control (MacKendrick, *The North African Stones Speak*, p. 312). The hope was unfounded, and Volubilis fell to the Berbers by the end of 280 CE.

Keywords in the original language:

- salus [3]
- Marcus Aurelius [4]
- Epidius Quadratus [5]
- procurator [6]
- conlocutus [7]
- princeps [8]
- gens [9]
- Macennites [10]
- Baquates [11]

Thematic keywords:

- peace [12]
- health [13]
- Volubilis [14]
- Mauretania Tingitana [15]
- Marcus Aurelius [16]
- procurator [17]
- Berber tribes [18]

Bibliographical references: Euzennat, Maurice, Les troubles de Maurétanie [19], Comptes rendus des séances

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  Frezouls, Edmond, *Nouvelles inscriptions de Volubilis* [21], Comptes Rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 96 (1952) : 395-402
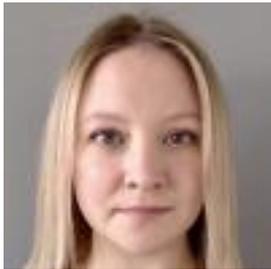 Frezouls, Edmond, *Inscriptions nouvelles de Volubilis II* [22], Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire. Antiquité 68 (1956) : 95-125
  MacKendrick, Paul L., *The North African Stones Speak* [23] (UNC Press Brooks, 2000)
  Rogerson, Barnaby, *Marrakesh, Fez and Rabat* [24] (London: Cadogan Guides, 2010)

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[3] http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/keywords/salus
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