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CHRISTIAN GRAFFITI ON A REUSED LINTEL FROM MAMLUK-PERIOD RAMLA: A GLIMPSE FROM THE EAST INTO WESTERN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

CLÉMENT DUSSART¹

The subject of this paper is an inconspicuous stone lintel kept in the Rockefeller Museum, Jerusalem, heavily marked with graffiti and writing. The stone exhibits various kinds of markings: drawings of coats of arms, pilgrim names and ad hoc inscriptions, clearly carved by Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land during the Mamluk period. The scribbles allude to the inner way of thinking of the pilgrims, offering unique information as to the personal motives for undertaking the arduous travel and insights into the making of Western Christian societies in the European late medieval period. Most of the markings on the stone lintel are ascribed to a group of German pilgrims, who stayed at a pilgrim hospice in Ramla in 1486. The stone lintel bears witness to the experience, identities and nature of social interactions of the pilgrims in a way that no plain building stone could.

Keywords: Graffiti, Pilgrimage, Heraldry, Western medieval society, Christianity

INTRODUCTION²

An inconspicuous block of white marble (c. 92 cm long, 21 cm high and 19.5 cm thick; Fig. 1), on display at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem, was a Byzantine-period architectural element reused as a lintel during the medieval period. Graffiti that were carved and scratched into one face of the stone by medieval Christian pilgrims offer a glimpse into the experience of Western Christians undertaking pilgrimages to the Holy Land, as well as clues into the makings of European societies at the end of the fifteenth century CE.

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² This study is part of a PhD dissertation at the University of Poitiers, France, dealing with Christian graffiti and inscriptions from the medieval period in connection with religious buildings, which in turn is part of a broader research project on this subject (GRAPH-EAST), focused on the Eastern Mediterranean and funded by the European Research Commission (Grant No. 948390). Photographs and drawings of the stone lintel held in the Rockefeller Museum, and a photograph of another stone lintel found in the sacristy of the Franciscan convent of Saint Nicodemus at Ramla, were produced by the author.



Fig. 1. The lintel from Ramla (IAA Archives, Church of the Holy Sepulchre II, SRF_87, No. 22062).

The lintel is believed to have been found in Ramla at the time of the British Mandate, although no record of its discovery was made in the IAA Archives, probably as it was an unprovenanced archaeological find. All that is known about the stone is gained from the manner of its carving, which identifies it as a Byzantine-period architectural element, and the presence of what are clearly Crusader-period graffiti. The first curator of the Rockefeller Museum, J.H. Iliffe, published a study of the markings appearing on the lintel (Iliffe 1940). More recently, the lintel was briefly mentioned by Rozenberg (1999) and a more in-depth study of the drawings and inscriptions was undertaken by Pringle (2021b).

The presence of markings on building stones made by pilgrims is not unusual for the medieval period in the East. Information concerning graffiti-making was gleaned from hundreds of pilgrims' accounts left by the multitude of Western Christian pilgrims at that time, describing their travels to the Holy City of Jerusalem (Röhricht and Meisner 1880; Halm 1994). Interestingly, Ramla is frequently mentioned in such accounts in connection with graffiti-making. While the numerous graffiti found on buildings in Jerusalem and Bethlehem demonstrate highly standardized and repetitive forms, the graffiti from the hospice at Ramla are of a more personal nature. This information is unique for this period, as it does not typically occur in written accounts by pilgrims, which tend to use language and formulae of contemporary written guides (Campopiano 2020:16–18). Thus, the graffiti offer a rare glimpse into individuals' lives in extraordinary circumstances. They also complement other sources regarding the identity of pilgrims to the Holy Land at that time. Graffiti that could be dated are assigned to the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries, predating the period for which records of visitors were kept in the pilgrim hospice at Ramla.³

³ Such record keeping was initiated by the Franciscan Order that administered the Ramla hospice only in 1561 (Zimolong 1938).

Here, the graffiti on the lintel are contextualized in relation to writings and heraldic representations of Christian pilgrims from the European late medieval period. The study bears on previous research on this topic (e.g., Kraack 1997) that did not take this particular find into consideration.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

Apart from the item described here, three examples of lintel stones carved with medieval-period Christian inscriptions and drawings are known from Ramla. Two architectural elements were reused in the present-day Franciscan convent of Saint Nicodemus: one was found above the entrance of the sacristy and the other was installed as part of a window in the convent's exterior wall. A third such item, whose present whereabouts are unknown, is documented in two photographs taken upon its discovery (IAA Archives, Ramleh I Report, SRF_157: Nos. 5631, 5614).⁴

The lintels are believed to have originated from a building in Ramla, which is well-known from pilgrim accounts, but otherwise not uncovered: the Christian pilgrims' hospice (Pringle 2021a). The Mamluk authorities succeeding the Latin Kingdom of the Frankish period implemented a policy of welcoming Christian pilgrims, who were an important source of revenue through the numerous tolls levied on visitors to the holy places (Pringle 2021a). The Franciscan Order established a local infrastructure to cater to the needs of the many Western pilgrims to the holy places during their short stay, usually a few weeks. This also served to maintain Catholic influence in the Holy Land. Ramla was one of the first cities to introduce such an infrastructure due to its strategic location between the Jaffa harbor—through which most of the pilgrims arrived at the country at the beginning of the fourteenth century—and their final destination, Jerusalem.

The earliest known record of Franciscan presence in Ramla is an account by the Franciscan Fra Giovanni di Fedanzola of Perugia, who visited the city in 1330 (Pringle 2021b:217). A detailed description of the Christian buildings erected in the city at this time, including a pilgrims' hospice, is included in an extensive work (the *Evagatorium*) by the Dominican friar Felix Fabri from Ulm, Germany, who undertook two pilgrimages, in 1480 and in 1483 (Felix Fabri 2:246–247):

When we came into the city, at no great distance from the gate, we came to a house with a low and narrow door, before which the governors stood and counted us, one by one, just as they had done when we left the sea, and bade us enter through the little door. Howbeit, within there was a large and beautiful court, with many chambers and vaulted rooms of various kinds, and a fountain full of good wholesome water. This house was bought long ago by Philip, Duke of Burgundy, of blessed memory, for the use of pilgrims, and was entrusted by him to the charge

⁴ A similar item bearing inscriptions of a later date, mainly from the eighteenth century, is found in a secondary context in the Franciscan Convent of Saint Saviour, Jerusalem (unpublished).

of the brethren of Mount Zion; wherefore it is called the pilgrims' hospice [...]. So here we divided ourselves among the various chambers, each company by itself, and my lords and all their followers had a spacious dwelling, for which we bought mats to cover the earth, so that we might not be obliged to sit, lie, sleep and eat on the bare ground; for there was nothing more than a vaulted chamber with walls and paved floor, without any furniture whatever, save what we brought into it ourselves.

Drawings of Franciscan buildings are found in a manuscript by Conrad Grünemberg, a patrician from Constance, Germany, who described his pilgrimage in 1486 (Grünemberg 1487:31v–32r); these, however, do not offer precise information regarding the form of the buildings. According to an account by Francesco Suriano, a Franciscan friar who lived in c. 1445–1529, the Franciscan hospice could accommodate 500 persons (Francesco Suriano:22).⁵

The scholarly significance of the pilgrim graffiti from Ramla is connected with the importance of this site for the pilgrims. Besides spending a short while at the port in Jaffa to receive authorization to enter the country, the first night that they spent in the Holy Land was often in the hospice at Ramla. This was the last stop before they continued to their final destination in Jerusalem, undoubtedly the emotional and spiritual apex of their journey. The overnight stay at Ramla may have inspired pilgrims to execute graffiti of a more mundane nature than what is known from buildings at other holy sites. Fabri reports an anecdote that he witnessed at the site (Felix Fabri 2:259):

A pilgrim nobleman, by way of pastime, drew his coat-of-arms and those of his companions, on the wall, very finely and beautifully, and just as he finished his work, at which he had wrought for many hours, one of the Saracens ran up with his hand full of filth, bedaubed the picture shamefully, and went away laughing. At this the nobles were exceeding wroth, and cursed that youth, yet no one of them dared to lay hands upon him. If he had done such a thing in our own country he would have been torn to pieces.

An idea of the prevalence of this phenomenon is given in a quote from 1593 by the French pilgrim Nicolas de Hault: “The French who passed through there, were eager to leave their name against the wall: it is all painted. All the Hospice has been covered with names of pilgrims” (Hault 1601:25v.–26r.).

The motivation for pilgrims to leave their mark at the hospice may have stemmed from imitation (*mimesis*), or a desire to preserve a testimony of their presence in the Holy Land for posterity, as part of the legacy of their family. The four documented lintels with graffiti from Ramla mentioned above, including the present example, are the only surviving material evidence of this practice, and complement existing knowledge of the history of medieval Christian pilgrimage, which is otherwise based mainly on fragmentary information

⁵ The Franciscan complex in Ramla continued to function after the Ottoman conquest in 1516, when the Franciscans acquired additional properties near their convent and received permission to carry out repairs (Pringle 2021a:218–219).

in archival sources. The reuse of two of these lintel stones in the present-day Franciscan convent of Saint Nicodemus at Ramla may not have been a coincidence, perhaps reflecting a wish to preserve the legacy of the order’s long-term presence in the city.

THE STONE LINTEL: AN ARCHIVE IN STONE

The cleaning of the white-marble stone (Rozenberg 1999:135) has rendered it more difficult to discern its graffiti (compare Figs. 1 and 2). The markings must be understood as a palimpsest, with the earlier engravings partly obliterated by the later ones. The systematic documentation of the marks proceeded from those most evident to those least evident, so that the different layers of marks can be reliably discerned (Fig. 3). This analysis uncovered the existence of a group of graffiti from 1486, with several individual graffiti from 1488, 1491 and 1501, and some undated markings.

The Graffiti Group of 1486

Six escutcheons bearing coats of arms, with inscriptions above them, extend along much of the marked face of the stone (Fig. 4). The marks are mostly easily discernable, including clearly legible names and coats of arms, which are identifiable despite the absence of color. The presence of a date, 1486, carved in Arabic characters at the center of the lintel, allows



Fig. 2. The lintel of Ramla, after cleaning.

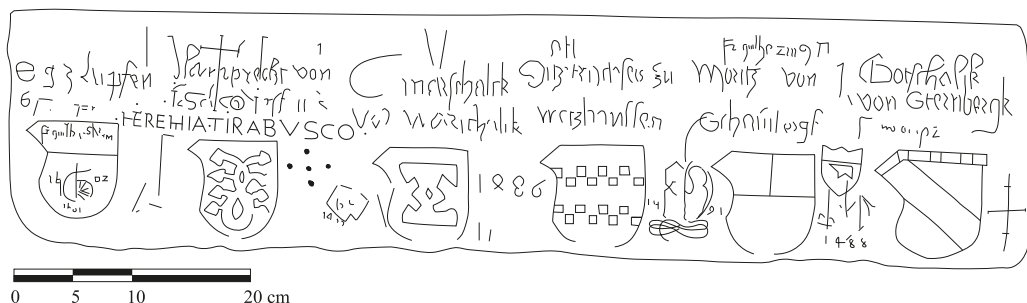


Fig. 3. A drawing of the lintel with all markings shown.



Fig. 4. Drawing of the lintel, highlighting the six shields and names of knights from 1486.

for a consideration of the markings in their historical context. The most informative account is that of Conrad Grünemberg (1487; see Halm 1994:227–230; Denke 2011),⁶ with crucial information also available in an armorial, in which the same author depicted coats of arms of numerous contemporary German noblemen (Grünemberg 1480).

The six escutcheons carved into the lintel were well-executed—although the quality of the carving is not that of a specialist—and have the shape of a ‘targe,’ typical of Germany in that period. The escutcheon on the right belongs to Count Sigmund von Lupfen, apparently the highest in social standing⁷ among those present on the lintel; however, he may not have been part of the cohesive group formed by the other five individuals (see below). Remarkably, the other five names of knights on the stone, and their respective coats of arms, are displayed in almost the same order as Grünemberg presents them in his text, raising the intriguing question of whether he was the one who carved the graffiti on the lintel stone. The reason for the particular order of names remains unknown; it was possibly related to the knights’ social status or family relations.

Each pair of name and title is written above the shields in two lines, approximately as wide as the shields: *S[i]g[mund] z[u] Lupfen/[]*; *lamprecht von/[Seckendor]ff*; *C marschalck/von marschalck*; *Ditz truchses zu/wetzhausen*; *Moritz von/Schawbergk*; *Gotschalk/von Sternbergk*. A comparison with Grünemberg’s (1480) armorial reveals some discrepancies in the manner of writing, e.g., ‘Truchses zu Wetzhausen’ on the lintel is written ‘Trugsas vō Wetzhausen’ in the armorial. This inconsistency could be explained by the fact that strict spelling conventions had not yet been established in the fifteenth century. In one case, it appears that the name may have been entirely corrupted, as *C. Marschalck von marschalck* on the lintel may correspond to ‘Cristoffel Marschalck von Ostheim’ in the armorial.

⁶ The pilgrimage of 1486 is well-known and described in at least three other pilgrim accounts (Antonio da Crema, Georges Lengherand, Anonymous of Rennes); a fourth such account (Girolamo Castiglione) is believed to describe the same pilgrimage, although no specific reference to a date is provided.

⁷ For further biographical details of this individual, see Pringle (2021b:277–278).

A palaeographic consideration of the writing on the stone compared to that in Grünemberg's text demonstrates a general resemblance in the rounded shape of the capital *S* and the final *s*, the shape of the upper parts of long letters, such as *h* and *b* (even if the loop in the carved letters is barely visible), and that of the *z*. Slight differences probably have to do with the technical constraints of carving in stone, as compared to writing on paper or parchment: the tail of the *g* is directed outward on the lintel and inward in the armorial, and the *r* on the lintel has the shape of the numeral 2, while in the armorial it is formed from two lines in a cursive form. The close resemblance between the stone and armorial in the module, the shape of the letters and the shape of the shields, as well as the high level of professionalism in their execution, strongly suggests that the stone was carved by a Germanic hand. It further reinforces the possibility that both the carving and armorial were executed by the same person. It is possible that one individual made all six drawings, acting on behalf of his colleagues. We may safely exclude the possibility that the author was Cristoffel Marschalck von Ostheim, as his name was written incorrectly on the stone. It is also clear from the form of the carvings that the individual who made them was a literate nobleman.

It seems that the carving of the lintel was performed with two different tools in a practical manner: first, a pointed-edge tool was pressed into the stone to sketch a dotted outline—especially evident in the case of the letters, and then the dots were connected by scratching over them, probably with the same tool (Fig. 5); then, a chisel was used to form flat surfaces within the drawings (Fig. 6).

No traces of pigment were detected in a careful examination of the lintel stone and hence, it is unclear whether color was ever applied to the escutcheons. Without the use of color, the drawings would have been barely visible on the background of the bright white marble, unless the stone surface was already darkened with dirt and left in that state by the engraver/s. Colors were a significant part of heraldry, which often allowed coats of arms of similar shapes to be distinguished. This raises questions as to whether the carvings were meant to be observed, and if the writing of the names above the escutcheons was meant to compensate for the absence of color.



Fig. 5. Detail from the lintel showing carving made by pressing a sharp tool into the stone with subsequent scratching.



Fig. 6. Detail of the lintel showing a straight line carved with a chisel; note the V-shaped profile of the line.

Other Graffiti

A few thin lines and a date (1488) in Arabic characters were traced on the stone by an anonymous pilgrim, likely marking his day of arrival (Fig. 7). Three years later, the date 1491 was carved together with a monogram of which the reading is uncertain (Fig. 8). While Iliffe (1940) suggested *ph* for the monogram, associating it with Count Philip of Hanau who made a pilgrimage in the same year, Pringle (2021b:278) proposed the more likely reconstruction of *ah*.

In 1501, a pilgrim by the name of Hieremia Tirabusco carved a cross and wrote his name in capital letters, with the first three letters of the forename conjoined, and the date of his visit in Arabic characters (Fig. 9). Hieremia Tirabusco was probably a member of the Bergamasque Tirabusco or Tiraboschi family, although this particular name is unknown

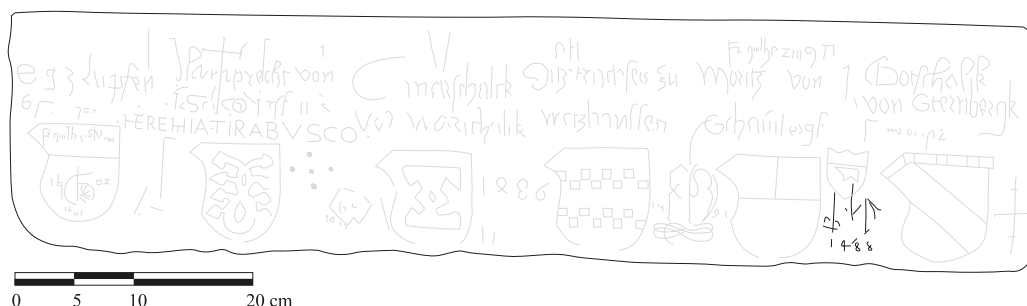


Fig. 7. The markings from 1488.



Fig. 8. The markings from 1491.



Fig. 9. The markings from 1501.

from existing documents. As there is no known pilgrim account from the year of the visit, there is no further information regarding this individual.

Another pilgrim wrote his *signum* inside the shield of Count Sigmund von Lupfen (Fig. 10). A hardly legible series of markings associated with the *signum* may be the date 1502, while an illegible series of four numbers below the *signum* may be another date. Iliffe (1940) interpreted the *signum* to have been part of Lupfen's shield: a badge depicting a half wheel, recalling Lupfen's well-known visit to Famagousta, the presumed birthplace of Saint Catherine (Pringle 2021b:277). However, it seems highly unlikely that a man of a great noble family such as Lupfen would add such a common brisure to his prestigious coat of arms. The quality of the drawing also deviates from that of the shield. If the count had wished to recall his pilgrimage to Famagousta, he would have placed a badge beside his escutcheon, a widespread custom among noble German pilgrims (Boulton 2000:64; Meer 2021:23). The *signum* is more likely of the kind that merchants and clerks used for signatures, which have also been found as part of graffiti at pilgrimage sites, as mentioned for example in an account of the pilgrim Jean de Tournai, from his visit to Jerusalem in 1488 (Dansette and Nielen 2017:100).

An undated, badly preserved graffiti comprises a geometric shape, in which at least two letters were carved; the numerals 14/] can be read below it (Fig. 11). This graffiti appears to have been carved at an undetermined year in the fifteenth century, probably after 1486 according to its position in between the graffiti of that year.

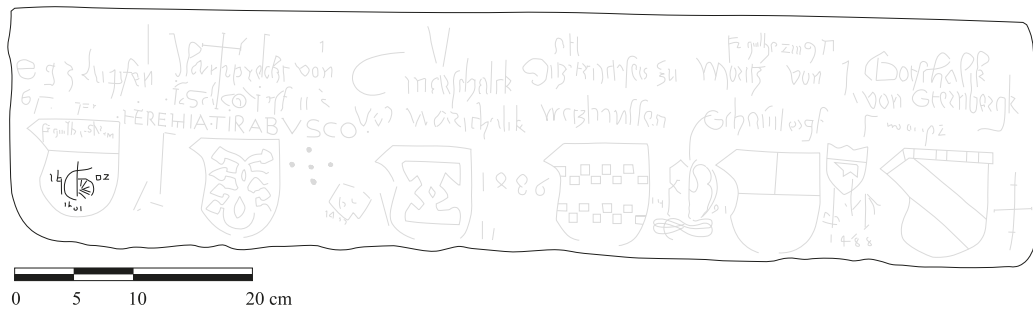


Fig. 10. The markings from 1502.

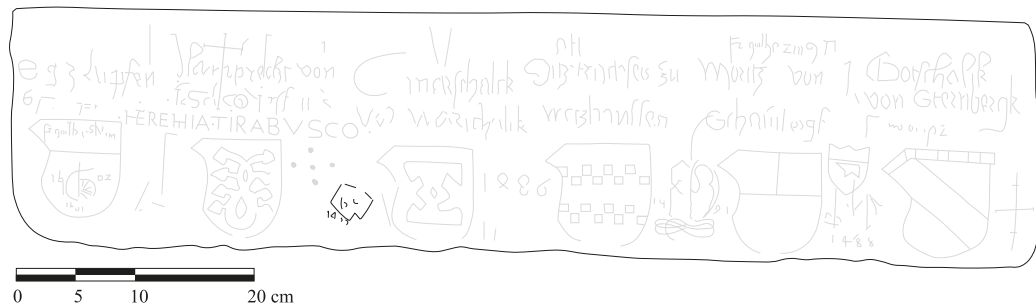


Fig. 11. Markings of an unknown date in the fifteenth century.

A certain *Guilhermus* wrote his name on the lintel twice: the first, *fr. Guilha[r]*, appearing on the *chef* of Lupfen's escutcheon, where it is unclear whether the name was carved before or after the abovementioned *signum* from 1502; and the second, *fr. guilhermus*, appearing on the left upper part of the lintel (Fig. 12). The repetition was perhaps a consequence of an initial failure. The occurrence on the right is hard to read, perhaps because it was enclosed in a narrow space, and the author may have written it again in a more convenient place. The use of the latin title *fr.* for *frater* suggests this individual was a clerk, possibly from the southern part of France or northern Spain, regions where the name forms *Guilhem* or *Guilherm* are common also today. The position of the two occurrences of this name in relation to the carvings from 1486 suggests that they may have been executed after that date.

A small shield occurring in-between two of the shields from 1486 is blurry (Fig. 13). Its position between the two larger escutcheons and the depth and regularity in which it was carved suggest that the small shield may have been contemporary with the shields from 1486. Its different shape may be due to the different geographical region in Europe which it represented, or the technical limitation of carving within a confined space. The individual which this shield represented remains unknown despite a thorough consultation of armorials and travel accounts.

Other markings of unclear nature were observed on the lintel, in an unmarked space alongside the various graffiti described above: a letter above the last shield on the left and two crosses (Fig. 14). The position of these marks indicates that they may have been carved after 1486.



Fig. 12. Two inscriptions of the name *Fr. Guilhermus*.



Fig. 13. A shield with an unidentified coat of arms, probably postdating 1486.

A few meager marks at the edges of the lintel (Fig. 15) may predate the graffiti group from 1486. It is possible that the engraver/s of the names and coats of arms from that year took pains to obliterate earlier markings, leaving only scattered traces that did not interfere with their endeavor. The superposition of markings from different periods is also exhibited on one of the graffitied stones from the sacristy at the Franciscan convent of Saint Nicodemus in Ramla (Fig. 16).



Fig. 14. Alphabetical and non-alphabetical graffiti postdating 1486.

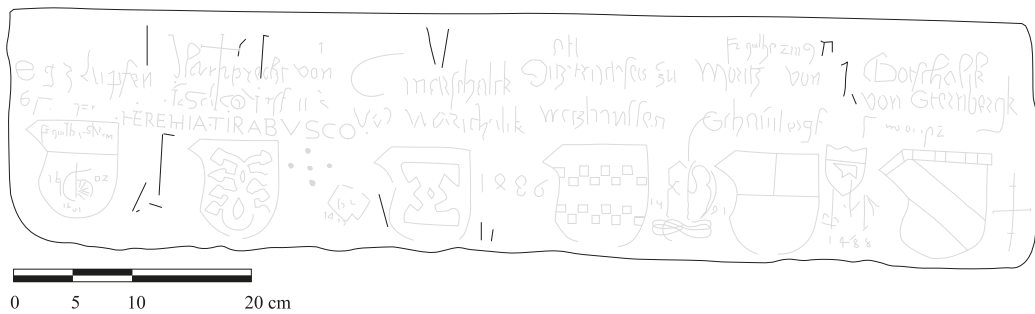


Fig. 15. Markings of an unidentified nature predating 1486.



Fig. 16. Parts of carved letters overlain by shields from 1435 on a reused lintel in the sacristy of the Franciscan convent of Saint Nicodemus at Ramla.

DISCUSSION: A GLIMPSE INTO WESTERN MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

Self-representation, by individuals or a collective, as in the present graffiti was a common phenomenon among travelers of late medieval Europe (Kraack 1997; Meer 2021), a practice apparently brought over to the East by Christian pilgrims. The account by Felix Fabri alludes to the carving or painting of coats of arms on existing stone surfaces of buildings, as well as on paper that could be affixed to walls, which may have been a more practical solution for journeying pilgrims (Felix Fabri 2:249–250):

Pilgrims of noble birth must not deface walls by drawing their coats-of-arms thereon, or by writing their names, or by fixing upon the walls papers on which their arms are painted, or by scratching columns and marble slabs, or boring holes in them with iron tools, to make marks of their having visited them; for such conduct gives great offence to the Saracens, and they think those who do so to be fools.

The use of paper for this purpose was also mentioned by a German pilgrim, Georg von Gumpenberg, traveling in the same year as Fabri: “After that, Christian knights came to the Holy Land, and they put their paper coats of arms in the corner” (see quotation in Kraack 1997:419–420). Four sheets of paper with painted coats of arms were discovered under the wall plaster of the Cenacle in Jerusalem (Clermont-Ganneau 1885:225–226; Fig. 17).

The group of graffiti from 1486 on the lintel at the Rockefeller Museum appears to represent a case of collective action of this nature. Early evidence of a similar collective representation is known from ancient Egypt. A study of graffiti from the Scribes’ Cave at Deir el-Bahari, dated to c. 1500 BCE, suggested the expression of a collective sense of



Fig. 17. A drawing of one of the paper sheets bearing shields from the Cenacle in Jerusalem (from Clermont-Ganneau 1885:225; Bibliothèque nationale de France: ark:/12148/bpt6k56138702).

belonging and sharing of a common social identity among the temple staff (Ragazzoli et al. 2018:26–27).

The earliest known testimony of this collective practice in the context of Latin pilgrimage to the Holy Land dates to around the ninth century, comprising a list of four names lightly carved on a column of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem (personal observation). Such collective markings from later periods are also visible on other columns in the Nativity Church in Bethlehem (Bacci 2021) and the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem (personal observation). The columns of the Church of Nativity bear painted crests of arms ascribed to the mid-fourteenth century, which may represent the earliest evidence of this practice in the context of late medieval-period European Christian pilgrimage in the Holy Land (Bacci 2021). Although these last examples are difficult to decipher and put into the context of pilgrims' accounts, it is noteworthy that the palaeography is characteristic of the Germanic manner of writing in the mid-sixteenth century. While a detailed study of these representations is ongoing, it is possible to speculate that five of them at least could have been executed at the same time by Frankish knights. The examples indicate that this phenomenon may have been a Germanic practice, a possibility which clearly resonates in Fabri's admonishment of his German fellow pilgrims: "it is only our German nobles who do this folly" (Felix Fabri 1:87).

It is difficult to evaluate the extent to which such collective representations, associating names and heraldry, was practiced, or its chronological span, as too little has been systematically published about medieval graffiti. No parallels for the markings on the lintel stone from Ramla were found in the corpus of Cretan graffiti (Tsoukarakēs 2015) or in the few published instances of graffiti from medieval Cyprus (Enlart 1899:132–133; Schryver and Schabel 2003; Trentin 2010).

The examples of such graffiti from the Holy Land include the lintel from the sacristy of the Convent of Saint Nicodemus in Ramla. Here, several names associated with coats of arms were probably jointly carved during a pilgrimage in 1435 by Hans von Egloffstein, Hans and Friedrich von Kunsberg and Martin von Wallenfels (Halm 1994:79–81). Some traces of earlier markings are present on the stone, although it is difficult to discern whether they include heraldic devices. The group of German knights who came to Ramla in 1486 seem to have carried on the same tradition. Another group of eight pilgrims is represented by their carved names, coats of arms and the year of pilgrimage (1550) in the Franciscan complex on Mount Zion (personal observation). This exceptional instance was documented in the accounts of Reinhard von Hanau, who seems to have executed the drawing on behalf of the knights: "4 batz for carving in stone the coat of arms of my lord in Jerusalem" (see quotation in Kraack 1997:440).

The motives that led these men to represent themselves through their emblems, both in sacred and mundane contexts, are of much interest. As we are dealing here with a context of pilgrimage, it is particularly challenging to determine to what extent these actions were

inspired by religious devotion or social ambitions, or both (Bacci 2021:18). The reasons undoubtedly varied among individuals and the context in which the graffiti were made.

The relevance of social motivation in pilgrimages of the late medieval period is undeniable, as traditional pilgrimage was entwined with *rittereise*, the ‘knight’s journey’ (Marin 2015). This latter custom, the roots of which lay in the fourteenth century, became commonplace during the following century, as attested in the accounts of pilgrims and other travelers (Favreau-Lilie 1995:323). Material evidence of this social development in European society is to be found in the remnants of inscriptions and graffiti examined here. These representations of names, emblems and coats of arms gradually replaced the prayers and devotional formulae that mostly typify the pilgrim graffiti of earlier periods. Such changes within European society were also propelled by increasing literacy among the lay elites from the fourteenth century onward.

An avid reflection of the changing attitudes and mentalities of Christian pilgrims may be found in the conflict expressed by Fabri, where he condemns the practice of pilgrims leaving behind inscriptions or heraldic devices in sacred places visited in the Holy Land (Felix Fabri 1:85–91). A consideration of this account in light of other contemporary historical sources suggests that Fabri did not criticize the gesture itself, but a reversal from prioritizing religious over secular acts during pilgrimage.

The collective dimension of such representations echoes a social process in late medieval European society, whereby the act of pilgrimage was coopted by Germanic elites as a means for forging a common identity (Campopiano 2020:9). At that time, pilgrimage was no longer an enterprise of individuals, and those who considered embarking on such a journey would attempt to travel as a group with relatives or neighbors. Cohesive pilgrim groups with a shared social background seem to have chosen to be represented together, for example, in the refectory of Saint Catherine Monastery on Mount Sinai (Kraack 2018:194). These choices offered opportunities to form or reinforce horizontal social connections, and pilgrim accounts often mention the importance of traveling together or instances in which the authors recognized the names or coats of arms of pilgrims with whom they were related.

While it is clear that the six German pilgrims from 1486 engraved their names and shields on the lintel from Ramla as a group, deciphering the relationships among them remains difficult due to the dearth of information. Grünemberg’s armorial, published a few years before 1486, lists five of these individuals in one chapter, “The Honorable Societies of Francken, Anhiren, Spenchy and Peren” (Grünemberg 1480:272).⁸ The genealogies of these five people reveal that their families were connected (Kolba 2013). The sixth member of the group, Sigmund von Lupfen, may have joined the other five during the journey.

⁸ The locations of the coats of arms in Grünemberg armorial are as follows: Seckendorff (fol. 272, 1st row, 3rd), Schaunburg (fol. 272, 2nd row, 2nd), Sternberg (fol. 275, 2nd row, 1st), Ostheim (fol. 276, 2nd row, 4th), Wetzhausen (fol. 280, 1st row, 2nd), with that of Lupfen displayed elsewhere in the book (fol. 125, 1st row, 3rd).

Patrician families from the fifteenth century onward seem to have increasingly employed participation in pilgrimage as a strategy to advance in social position, in addition to other means such as wealth and business connections. Reinforcing evidence of the importance of this process among families is gleaned from other sources: a painted panel of the Ketzler family of Nuremberg depicting eight family members with the badges of pilgrimages that they attained between 1389 and 1503;⁹ an account by Sebald Rieter, also from a patrician family of Nuremberg, compiling the narratives of his own pilgrimage (1462) together with those of other family members (Kraack 1997:408–409); an account by Georg von Gumpfenberg, mentioning a commemorating board that he commissioned following a pilgrimage (1512) and listing the names Gumpfenberg, Czumbern, Praitenstain, Rossel, Nothafft, Trugsass, Rechberg, Freyberg, Schaumberg, 3 von Ahaimb-Egloffstain,¹⁰ Seiboldstorf, Haslang, Prantenstain, Schenckhen, Nussdorf, Nothafft, Mossbach, Münchaw, Rieder, Helrit, Puchler, Sunler and Zeller (Kraack 1997:419–420). A wealthy official, Elector Palatine Otto Heinrich, commissioned a set of two tapestries of monumental dimensions (each 425 × 517 cm) in 1541, depicting himself and eight other companions kneeling in front of the Holy City, each person flanked by a crested shield showing their coats of arms, with a two-line inscription below each knight giving his name.¹¹ Moreover, badges—the emblems of pilgrimage and affiliation to a chivalry order (e.g., the cross of the Holy Sepulcher, the wheel of St. Catherine in Sinai, the sword of the Cypriot Order of the Sword), were commonly displayed with the coats of arms on tombstones or in paintings and stained glass windows associated with memorial or funerary monuments. In this context, the graffiti of names and heraldic devices left on the way to Jerusalem were, among other things, a form of public display providing proof of the pilgrimage and social value of their authors (Meer 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

The stone, graffiti-bearing lintel from Ramla offers a glimpse into the inner workings of Western medieval society. The quest for honor and social standing by undertaking pilgrimage among the elite of that time, especially in the Germanic region, is well-reflected by the motto ‘*mobilia – nobilia*’ (the more mobile, the more noble; Kraack 2001:87). The graffiti (inscriptions, drawings and marks) etched in stone on civil and religious buildings reveal the motivation of their authors, for whom they represented an important social capital guaranteeing nobility or the promise of social advancement (Kraack 2018:209–210).

⁹ Wooden panel (68 × 109 cm), Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Inv. No. Gm581.

¹⁰ The presence of the number 3 may have been due to a transcription error by Röhrich and Meisner (1880); it may have originally been a Z.

¹¹ Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Inv. No. T3860.

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