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BETWEEN ROME AND THE ORIENT:
JOHAN DAVID ÅKERBLAD'S (1763-1819) NOTEBOOK
VAT. LAT. 9785*

Johan David Åkerblad was born in Stockholm in 1763 and died in Rome in 1819.¹ He studied history and oriental languages in Uppsala. He was employed in the Swedish foreign service and arrived at his first foreign posting in Constantinople 1784. The following decades he travelled extensively in the Ottoman Empire. In 1801 Åkerblad left Sweden for the last time and lived first in Paris, where he in 1802 published a dissertation on the Demotic part of the Rosetta inscription that made him immediately famous in orientalist circles all over Europe.² He later corresponded with the major protagonists in the decipherment of the hieroglyphs and is known as one of Jean-François Champollion's predecessors. In 1804 he was forced to leave France as a consequence of the wars. He lived in Italy from 1805 until his death in 1819.

Vat. lat. 9785 is a leather-bound notebook, size 240 × 185 mm, with 75 numerated ff. It was, together with a smaller notebook, *Vat. lat.* 9784, sold to the library in 1873 by G. Battista de Rossi as “*appunti epigrafici greci e latini e disegni di monumenti e notizie di viaggi in Oriente del dotto Akerblad.*”³ We have little news on the survival of Åkerblad's manuscripts after his death in Rome in 1819. He died in penury, and the estate inven-

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¹ For a full treatment of Åkerblad and his accomplishments see my monograph: *The Life of J. D. Åkerblad: Egyptian Decipherment and Orientalism in Revolutionary Times*, Leiden 2012.

² J. D. ÅKERBLAD, *Lettre sur l'inscription égyptienne de Rosette, Adressée au C.^{em} Silvestre de Sacy...*, Paris 1802.

³ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, *Arch. Bibl.* 14, f. 183r. For a description of *Vat. lat.* 9784: M. BUONOCORE, *Tra i codici epigrafici della Biblioteca apostolica vaticana*, Ravenna 2004 (Epigrafia e antichità, 22), pp. 137-39.

tory made by the Swedish consul in Rome, Ulisse Pentini, lists few possessions and only states that there were some papers and books. Åkerblad's close friend Francesco Cancellieri (1751-1826) wrote about the difficulties after the end of the French occupation in 1814: "Åkerblad va vendendo tutti i libri per campare."⁴ But the situation of Åkerblad's personal papers might have been different. Åkerblad had been competing for the Swedish consulship in Rome and the business brought by Swedish travellers, thus the words of the consul should be read with circumspection:

Il est cependant bien singulier que parmi les papiers du dit défunt, [Åkerblad] excepté une petite partie, tout le reste ne regarde que des correspondance avec des femmes, je serais d'avis de tout remettre aux flammes pour ne pas compromettre la tranquillité de différentes familles, et l'honneur même des personnes qui ont été assez imprudents pour écrire, et pour conserver des documents de ce qui devait être consacré au plus rigoureux silence.⁵

It appears probable that Pentini burned the correspondence; apart from drafts in the possession of the senders, no missives to Åkerblad have been preserved. Some papers did survive, however, and the *Vat. lat.* 9785 is the most important example. According to the correspondence between de Rossi and Mommsen the notebooks came from a collection of a cardinal Pantini (sic).⁶ Ulisse Pentini obviously took the notebooks and after his death in 1820 they became the property of his son Francesco Pentini (1797-1869, created cardinal deacon in 1863) and eventually bought by de Rossi. Other pieces of Åkerblad's papers were bought by a Swedish scholar who went searching for them in Rome in the 1880s and who donated them to the Royal Library in Stockholm.⁷

The notebook is an interesting document and, together with letters from Åkerblad, it is the major source for understanding his readings and intellectual interests. While the notebook at some points served as a travel

⁴ Cancellieri to Aubin-Louis Millin, Rome 28 October 1815, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS FR 24680, f. 317.

⁵ Pentini to Chancery Board, Rome 15 May 1819, Stockholm, Swedish National Archives, Kabinettet, UD, Huvudarkivet, E2FA: Skrivelser från konsuler, vol. 66, no. 973.

⁶ M. BUONOCORE, *Theodor Mommsen e gli studi sul mondo antico. Dalle sue lettere conservate nella Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Naples 2003 (Istituto di Diritto Romano e dei Diritti dell'Oriente Mediterraneo, 69), p. 128.

⁷ K. PIEHL, *Quelques mots sur la vie et les œuvres de l'illustre orientaliste suédois J.-D.-Åkerblad*, in *Actes du Huitième Congrès International des Orientalistes Tenu en 1889 à Stockholm et à Christiania, Section Africaine*, Leiden 1892, pp. 59-65. The papers, N71-N72, consist of various Mss, a Coptic dictionary Åkerblad made, notes on inscriptions, printing proofs etc.

diary it is impossible to date most of the entries and it was used over several decades. The first entry (at the back of the first flyleaf, opposite f. 1) is dated January 1789 and describes a voyage from Tunis to Marseille. Further on there are entries predating this, but it is not possible to establish a chronology within the notebook, neither is any thematic order discernable. Åkerblad continued to use the notebook until his death, and there are entries from his last years in Rome.

Åkerblad's fame was based on his vast and varied language knowledge and the notebook is a testimony to his abilities. While living in Rome he was compared with the famous polyglot Giuseppe Mezzofanti (1774-1849) in Bologna by travellers who visited him: "I also became acquainted with Signior Akerblad at Rome, who is another of these extraordinary linguists — his knowledge [of languages] is *confined to twenty-three*."⁸ Åkerblad wrote in a large number of tongues and scripts: a tentative count exceeds twenty: Albanian, Aramaic, Arabic (various dialects), Coptic, Dutch, English, Ethiopic (Ge'ez and Amharic), Etruscan, French, German, Ancient Greek, Modern Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Kurdish, Persian, Phoenician, Portuguese, Spanish, Syriac, Swedish, Samaritan, Tatar, Turkish etc. The notebook contains drawings and maps, but the most common illustrations are Åkerblad's inscription copies. Examples will be shown below.

The aim of this brief article is to present examples from the manuscript, and to convey its importance for the study of Åkerblad's interests and biography. The notebook is a document that gives an insight into a tradition which has largely been lost during the process of specialization of academic disciplines. This is not meant to be a nostalgic complaint, rather a recognition of the changes in knowledge that it is possible, and desirable, to obtain during the lifetime of a single individual.

Travels in the Eastern Mediterranean

Åkerblad left Sweden for the first time in 1783 at the age of 20. He would end up spending more than 30 of his remaining 36 years abroad. The notebook is an important source for especially his early travels and contain several sections that resemble a diary.

In 1786 he toured Lebanese monasteries looking for manuscripts (Fig. 1). The results were meagre but he did find things that were yet not widely known or published. Two such examples were extracts from a historical work by Ibn Asbāṭ, Ḥamzah ibn Aḥmad (d. 1520) and a medical tract

⁸ Henry Salt to William R. Hamilton, Malta 28 January 1816, in J. J. HALLS, *The life and correspondence of Henry Salt*, London 1834, 1:441.



by Anṭākî, Dâ'ûd ibn 'Umar (d. 1599), (f. 24r).⁹ But he also took time to see natural curiosities and searched for inscriptions. In the company of two monks he descended from the monastery on 22 October 1786:

The descent from St. Michael is quite steep, after which follows a plain that extends to the sea. We took the road southwards. We arrived at the Lycos [Nahr-el-Kalb] ... On the north side are remains of an Arabic inscription which I copied. We passed the river on foot. ... Here the road cut through the mountain begins. A Latin inscription is readable on square tablet hewn out in the rock. It is mentioned by all travellers ... In several places there are hewn tablets on the rock face, as if they were destined for inscriptions (f. 57r).¹⁰

Fig. 1. Map of the Lebanese coastal area, some of the monasteries Åkerblad visited are marked out (f. 33r).

A few days later he went towards the coast:

The 30 October. Rode to the Loeiza monastery to assist at the ordainment of a bishop. It is the Patriarch and two Bishops that officiate. I found the ceremonies of little interest, and an appalling noise of some wild instruments ... insufferable for all but Maronite ears, made me almost leave before the end. Then we ate in a long corridor spanning the monastery. More than 400 persons were fed in the way that when the first comers at the table were satisfied, they

⁹ For Ibn Asbāṭ see C. BROCKELMANN, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, II suppl. vol., Leiden 1938, p. 42, no. 15. Åkerblad had copies made of the manuscript. For Anṭākî see ID. *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*, vol. II, Berlin 1902, p. 364, no. 3, 2nd title.

¹⁰ "Nedstigningen ifrån St. Michael är ganska brant, efter hvilken följer en slätt. som sträcker sig till hafvet. Vi togo vägen åt söder. Kommo till Lycus. ... På norra sidan äro lämningar af en arabisk inscription, som jag afskref. Vi passerade floden till fots. ... Här börjar vägen uthuggen i berget. En latinsk inscription läses på en fyrkantig inhuggning i berget till vänster. Den är anford af alla resande ... På flera ställen äro fyrkantiga planor inhuggna i klippan, likasom ämnade til inscriptioner."

left their places for new hungry. This kind of corridor is called Ruad (f. 57r).¹¹

Åkerblad's appreciation of Christian rites was minimal. There are many indications of his lack of religion. In Rome he once answered a seminary student that: "I have not been made an infidel by Voltaire, but I have been made an infidel by you divines."¹² Like many of his contemporaries he was well versed in both pagan mythology and Christian history but showed no personal interest in faith. Nevertheless, he always underlined that the hospitality of the various orders was exemplary. When he took lodgings in a Catholic nunnery the next day he stressed this:

1. November 2 o'clock in the afternoon mounted mules to make a trip to a place called Fahra, where I was assured that there were antiquities to be found. Rode past Antura, Ageltun and came after a couple of hours to a place where the shape and the way the stones were piled up resemble castles and forts. Saw several villages on the way. Passed a wide valley Vadi el Salib the Cross Valley and came after 6 1/2 hours ride to Deir el Nia a Greek-Catholic nunnery. It is quite an imposing edifice. The nuns treated us the best they could and we stayed the night (f. 57r).¹³

Another interesting section is his description of a visit to the Holy Land in 1788. On Cyprus Åkerblad boarded a French ship bound for Jaffa. On 15 June he wrote: "[I] went ashore in the afternoon and immediately took quarters with Mr Damien V. Consul for, I believe, all European Nations and Knight of Christ's Sepulchre. In the evening I wandered in the gardens that surround Jaffa where people watered the crops in the same ways as in Egypt and Syria" (f. 41r-v). Everyday observations and linguistic comments abound: "The wheel that turns up the water is here called not Naura

¹¹ "Den 30. October. Red til klostret Loeizia för at se en Biskopsinvigning. Det är Patriarchen och tvenne Biskopar, som förätta denna act. Jag fant ceremonierna ganska lite märkvärdiga; och et ohyggligt buller af några vilda instrumenter ... odrägeligt för alla andra än maroniternas öron, gjorde, at jag så när ej quarblifvit til slut. Man spisade sedan i en lång corridor som traverserar klostret. Öfver 400 personer spisades på det sättet at då de som först satt sig till bords voro förnöjde, intogs deras rum af andra som åter lämnade dem för nya hungriga. Denna slags corridor kallas Ruad."

¹² J. WOLFF, *Travels and Adventures of the Rev. Joseph Wolff*, London 1860-61, I:96.

¹³ "1. November kl. 2 eftermiddagen steg på mulor för at göra en resa til et ställe kallat Fahra, där man försäkrade mig funnos antiquiteter. Red förbi Antura, Ageltun och kom efter et par timar til et ställe där stenarnes form och upstapling likna slott och fästningar. Såg på vägen flere byar. Genomför en djup dal Vadi el Salib Korsdalen och kom efter 6 och 1/2 timars ritt til Deir el Nia et grekiskt catholskt nunnekloster. Det är en tämeligen ansenlig bygning. Nunnorna låta undfägna oss så godt de kunde och vi blefvo där öfver natten."

but Byara. The watermelons here are excellent" (f. 41v).¹⁴ Examples of little-known scripts always attracted his attention (Fig. 2).

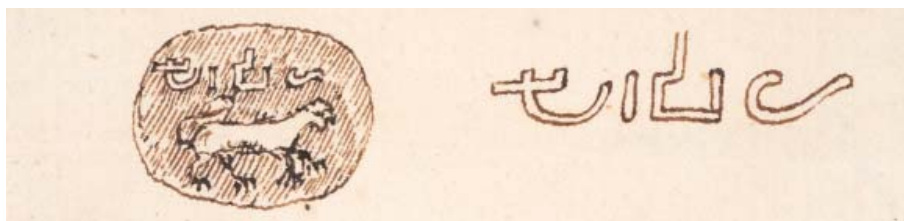


Fig 2. Åkerblad's description of the drawing: "J'ai en vu à St. Jean d'Acre une pierre gravée avec l'inscription ci dessous. Les lettres paroissent être Sasanienues. Le propriétaire de la pierre un négociant François établi à St. Jean d'Acre étoit persuadé que la figure est celle de Nabuchadenazer métamorphosé en bête" (f. 30v).

Before leaving Jaffa Åkerblad trusted the Franciscans with his money. The fear of banditry was all prevailing and the pilgrims made good targets:

[June] 16. Deposited my money with the prefect of the Franciscan monastery against his receipt. Mounted in the afternoon. Accompanied by the Consul and several others we rode to Ramle. We saw several tobacco plantations at the roadside. The country is well cultivated. Lydd ancient Diospolis is mostly in ruins. Remains of a mediaeval church are visible. In Ramle I was received in the monastery. I had supper in the refectory, rested until midnight, when I again mounted accompanied by a little boy on foot and two mounted Arabs, armed with lances. These Arabs, always fighting among themselves, choose to travel at night to avoid meeting their enemies. The terrain was flat for a couple of hours. Then the ground got rough, but the darkness prevented me from getting a clear notion of the district. At the first break of dawn we arrived at the foothills. I had agreed with my Arabs that they should accompany me to Jerusalem but they explained that now the danger was over and went their way. I continued the voyage with my companion on foot through the most worrying mountainous district I ever saw. In a few places remains of buildings could be seen, but not old ones. The road is utterly uncomfortable. We found a spring that gave us some refreshment (f. 41v).

He continued by describing his entry into the Holy City:

The heat was becoming unbearable. In a village we passed through the peo-

¹⁴ "eftermiddagen gick iland och inquarterade mig genast hos Herr Damien V. Consul för jag tror alla europeiska nationer och riddare af Christi graf. Om aftonen vandrade omkring i trädgårdarna som omgifva Jaffa, där man var sysselsatt at vatna på samma sätt som i Egypten och Syrien." "Hjulet som vrider up vatnet kallas här ej Naura utan Byara. Vattenmelonerna äro här förträffliga."

ple demanded Caffar, but I said I was Turk. We saw Jerusalem and lost sight of it two or three times before we arrived. All Christians are made to dismount from their horses when they arrive at the gates of Jerusalem. But as no one considered me Christian I rode all the way to the monastery of the Saviour, to which I was directed. It was midday when I arrived and the heat had all but suffocated me. A large glass of lemonade that was offered me was such an indescribable delight that I cannot remember anything like it (ff. 41v-42r).¹⁵

Caffar was the local duty that non-Ottoman subjects had to pay before approaching the city. Åkerblad knew both Turkish and Arabic well enough to travel in disguise; he also spoke Modern Greek well, the writer Mario Pieri from Corfu admitted that Åkerblad spoke it better than he did himself.¹⁶ Another voyage in disguise occurred when Åkerblad set out towards Alexandria later in 1788:

J'étois à cheval accompagné d'un seul homme monté sur un chameau. Nous partîmes vers le coucher du soleil après quelques heures de marche nous passâmes une branche du Nil. Nous nous réparâmes ensuite pendant quelques heures sur la sable tout près de la mer. Nous côtoyâmes ensuite la mer pendant tout le lendemain et ne vîmes que dans l'après midi un seul misérable village consistant de quelques huttes des joncs (43r).

Åkerblad visited Egypt several times and spent four months in Cairo in 1786. He was taken with a passion for Coptic studies a few years later.

¹⁵ "16. Öfverlämnade mina penningar åt prefecten för Franciscanerklostret emot des reçu. Eftermiddagen satte mig till häst. Åtföljd av Consulen och en hop andra reste vi till Ramle. Vi sågo flera tobaksplanteringar på vägen. Landet är väl brukat. Lydd fordna Diospolis är mäst ruinerat. Man ser lämningar af en kyrka ifrån medeltiden. I Ramle blef jag mottagen i klostret. Souperade i refectorium, hvilade sedan til midnatten, då jag åter satte mig til häst, åtföljd af en liten gosse til fots samt af tvenne Araber till häst, beväpnade med lanzar. Desse Araber som alltid äro i strid sins emellan, välja derföre natten til deras resor för at ej möta sina fiender. Landet var et par timmar slätt. Sedan började ojämnheter, men mörkret hindrade mig at fatta et klart begrepp om dessa trakter. Vid första dagningen kommo vi til foten af bergen. Mina araber, med hvilka var överenskommit at beledsaga mig til Jerusalem, förklarade at numera ej voro någon fara och redo sin väg. Jag fortsatte resan med min följeslagare til fots, genom de ängsligaste bergstrakter jag någonsin sedt. På några ställen syntes lämningar efter byggnader men ej gamla. Vägen är högst oangenäm. En källa funno vi som upfriskade oss något. Hettan började blifva odrägelig. I en by som vi genomforo, fodrade folket Caffar, men jag sade mig vara Turk. Vi sågo Jerusalem och förlorade det åter ur sigtet två eller tre gånger, innan vi där anlände. Alla Christna nödgas stiga af sina hästar, då de komma til Jerusalems portar. Men som ingen ansåg mig för Christen, red jag ända till Frälsarens kloster, til hvilket jag var adresserad. Det var middagstiden, då jag ankom, och hettan hade alldeles förqvaft mig. Et stort glas limonade, som man lät gifva mig, var en så outsägelig njutelse, at jag aldrig påminna mig en dylik."

¹⁶ M. PIERI, *Opere*, Florence 1850, I:240.

He came into contact with both Copts and the Coptic Church while in Egypt and noted down differences in how they spoke Arabic: “Les habitans d’Egypte et surtout les Coptes prononçant le Kaf ق presque comme un gain” (f. 14v).

Manuscripts, libraries and collecting

Åkerblad often commented on the libraries and institutions he visited: “The library in Berlin supposedly has 200,000 vols., something I do not believe. It holds a few hundred Manuscripts, also some Oriental. Work is being done on the Catalogue. Of all books that are published in Prussia two copies are sent to the library, one is kept there and the other is sold, thus a fund is created for the acquisition of other books” (f. 1r). He paid particular attention to whether libraries had any oriental manuscripts. The Leipzig library did, for instance, not appeal to him, it “looks dusty and contains few books — 20,000 volumes altogether” (f. 1r).¹⁷

Åkerblad mentioned his acquisitions on several occasions. He never had enough money to make any substantial purchases of antiquities or rare manuscripts. Nonetheless, he acquired a number of oriental manuscripts. Most of them seem to have been bought during his travels in the East; he acquired a Samaritan fragment in Jaffa (Fig. 3) as well as a wide range of Arabic, Turkish and Persian manuscripts, many of them bought in Constantinople. Several of his Coptic manuscripts bear the mark of the Coptic church in Rome and may have been acquired already during Åkerblad’s 1798-99 sojourn in the city.

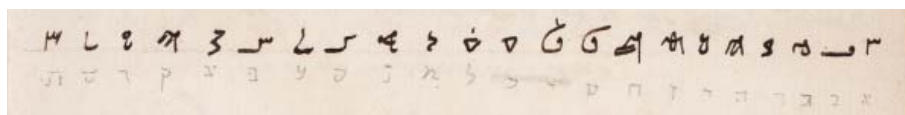


Fig. 3. A Samaritan alphabet with its corresponding Hebrew letters below as noted down by Åkerblad in Jaffa 1788 where he visited the Samaritan community and bought a manuscript (f. 12r).

The list of his oriental manuscripts (ff. 73r-75r) — in Latin as customary — comprises 4 vellum manuscripts; 6 Coptic manuscripts, religious texts and hymns; 5 Ethiopian, religious texts; 23 Arabic manuscripts, some geo-

¹⁷ 16 June 1791: “Bibliothèque i Berlin skall bestå af 200000 vol. som jag ej tror. Det har några hundrade Msc. äfven några Österländska. Man arbetar på Cataloguen. Af alla böcker som utkomma i Preussen skickas två exemplar till bibliothèque; det ena förvaras där, det andra säljes, hvaraf upkommer en fond till andra böckers köpande.”; 24 June 1791: “Bibliothèque i Leipzig ser dammig ut, få nya böcker – 20000 band vid pass inalles.”

graphical works, bibliographies, sermons, medicinal, e.g. a treatise of Avicenna, Korans, anthologies of poetry, history, logic, astronomy, Christian hymns; 17 Persian manuscripts with likewise mixed content, astronomy, history, several works of poetry, mirrors for princes; 27 Turkish manuscripts of various content including grammars and dictionaries and a collection of treaties between the Porte and France and another of treaties between Russia and the Porte, a catalogue of the manuscripts of the S. Sofia library; 3 Tataric titles, a dictionary, a life of poets and a history of Alexander. There is also a list of printed books which includes books of reference, such as Golius' and Castell's dictionaries, grammars, bibles and other religious texts.

Åkerblad's manuscript collection had in some way been transported to Stockholm before his death. They ended up in the vast collection belonging to the Russian envoy to Sweden, the Dutchman Jan Pieter van Suchtelen (1751-1836), which was sold to the Russian state after his death. It is now divided between several Russian institutions.¹⁸

Inscriptions, language studies and reading notes

A large part of the material in the notebook are wordlists, inscription copies and annotations related to the study of languages and scripts. Åkerblad's interest in various forms of writing defined his career. The notebook is proof of these interests, and Åkerblad not only studied single languages but strove to understand their connections and development. In this sense

Arabic	Hebrew	Coptic	Persian	Greek
الشمس	שמש	Πην	خورشید	Hélios
القطار	כרכב	Περαις	زادوس	Εργη
الزهره	זוכה	Cυροτ	ناهيد	Αφροδιτη
الارض	ארץ	Πικαζ	اميس	μην
القمر	לבנה	Πιοσ	ماه	Σελήνη
المریخ	מאדים	Υολος	پهرام	Άρης
المشتري	קדש	Πι2εγ	برجیس	Ζεύς
الرجل	שבתיא	Ρηφλν	کیوان	Κρόνος

Fig. 4. A wordlist in Arabic, Hebrew, Coptic, Persian and Greek (f. 9r).

¹⁸ O. VASILYEVA and F. THOMASSON, *Åkerblad's Collection and Suchtelen's Orientalia: From the Middle East via Sweden to Russia*, forthcoming.

he was part of the burgeoning discipline that would lead to major methodological developments in linguistics in the nineteenth century. An example is how he often listed words in different languages (f. 9r) (Fig. 4). Below I only give a few samples of this material.

Greek and Latin. Christian Callmer's 1952 essay, the only longer work on Åkerblad previous to my monograph, covered Åkerblad's activities as a Greek and Latin epigrapher. Åkerblad is known for the accuracy of his inscription copies. Most of the inscriptions in the two notebooks, *Vat. lat.* 9785 and *Vat. lat.* 9784, have been published in the standard corpuses. Other inscriptions Åkerblad had collected himself in Greece eventually entered the corpuses that were formed in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹ The routes of Åkerblad's travels can sometimes be identified by the inscriptions he copied. He did not for instance write a diary during his visits to Athens but inscription copies proves that he visited the Acropolis (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. A view of Acropolis and the so-called Cimonian Sepulchres (f. 61v).

¹⁹ C. CALLMER, *Johan David Åkerblad: Ett bidrag till hans biografi*, in *Lychnos* (1952), pp. 130-85; reprinted with minor changes in ID. *In Orientem: Svenskars färder och forskningar i den europeiska och asiatiska Orienten under 1700-talet*, Stockholm 1985, pp. 169-221; M. BUONOCORE, *Ida Calabi Limentani e la storia degli studi epigrafici. Riflessioni su un metodo da seguire*, in *Acme: annali della Facoltà di filosofia e lettere dell'Università statale di Milano* 52 (1999), p. 60: "quelli accuratissimi di Johan David Åkerblad nel *Vat. Lat.* 9785;" ID. *Prime esplorazioni sulla tradizione manoscritta delle iscrizioni greche pagane di Roma antica attraverso i codici della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, in *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae* VI (1998) (Studi e testi, 385), pp. 29, 32; ID. *Mommsen cit.*, p. 128. On Åkerblad's, "dem erudito stupendo," Greek knowledge see e.g. B. G. Niebuhr's letter to the Berlin science academy, Rome 10 December 1816, in B. G. NIEBUHR, *Briefe: neue Folge, 1816-1830. Band 1:1, Briefe aus Rom (1816-1823)*, edited by E. VISCHER, Bern 1981, pp. 108-9. Åkerblad's inscriptions in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, no. 2156, 2158, 2160, 2217, 2221, 2222, 2228, 2237.

Åkerblad was considered a great authority on Ancient Greek while in Rome and many travellers went to him to have their inscriptions read and commented upon. The notebook contains e.g. inscriptions from Charles Robert Cockerell's (1788-1863) (ff. 62r-64r) and William Gell's (1777-1836) (f. 60r-v) collections (Fig. 6).²⁰

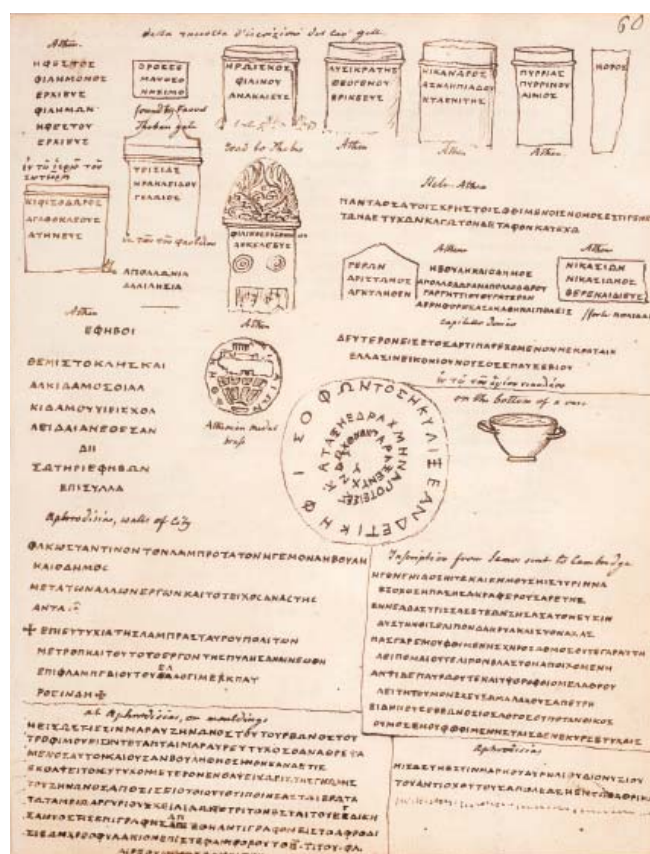


Fig 6. Greek inscriptions from William Gell's collection (f. 60r).

Phoenician. Åkerblad was the first Swede to show antiquarian interest in Phoenician matters. He copied inscriptions in Cyprus which he defined as Phoenician: "1788. à Larnaca en Chypre. Dans le mur de l'église aux Salines il y a plusieurs inscriptions Phéniciennes dont j'ai copié les deux

²⁰ E. A. GARDNER, *Inscriptions Copied by Cockerell in Greece*, in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 6 (1885), p. 144.

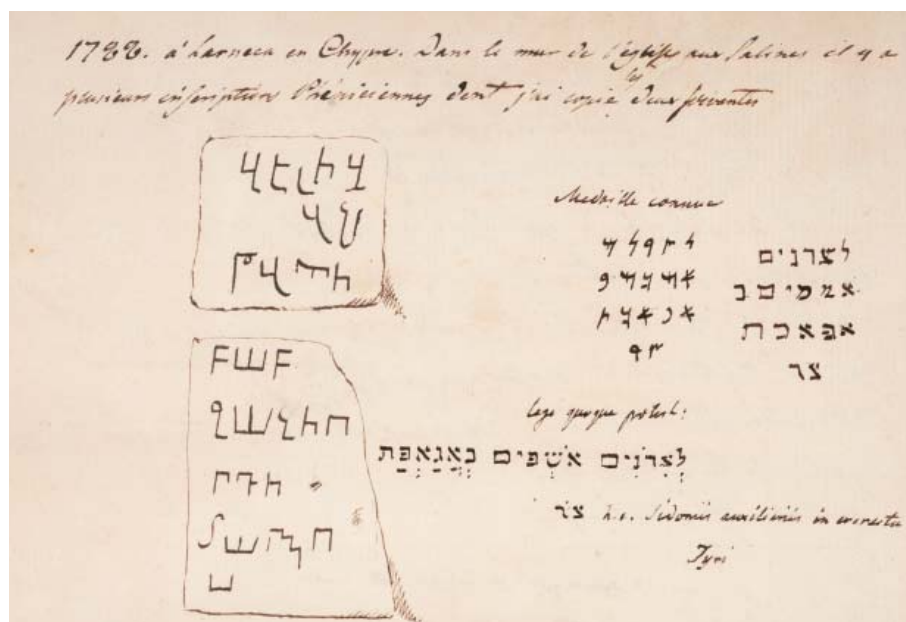


Fig. 7. The two inscriptions to the left are the texts Åkerblad interpreted as Phoenician (f. 29v).

suivantes" (f. 29r) (Fig. 7). Several inscriptions from Kition (the Phoenician settlement preceding modern Larnaca) were copied and published by Richard Pococke in 1743-45. All but one of those were destroyed, Åkerblad would later publish a reading of the surviving inscription. Åkerblad possibly copied these two as they were not published. The inscriptions have yet not been identified or understood and the copies may be considered early examples of how Åkerblad tried to understand letter shapes and languages that he was not yet thoroughly familiar with. Åkerblad continued to pursue his Phoenician interests as quotations and other copies of inscriptions (e.g. ff. 2v, 31r, 66v) and several publications testify.²¹

Albanian. Åkerblad's interest in languages was wide. While in Greece he visited some Albanian villages and came into contact with Albanian — and as usual with a new language — made some efforts to pick it up. He noted that: "L'albanais dans son origin ne paroît ressembler à aucune autre langue, aumoins je ne trouve aucun rapport entre cette langue et autres que

²¹ J. D. ÅKERBLAD, *Inscriptionis Phoeniciæ Oxoniensis nova interpretatio*, Paris 1802; ID. *Lettre sur une inscription phénicienne trouvée à Athènes*, Rome 1817. Wilhelm Gesenius lauded Åkerblad's authoritative readings of difficult texts: "Åkerbladius, reliquis omnibus ingenii doctrinaeque elegantia iudicii acumine facile praestans". W. GESENIUS, *Scripturae linguaeque phoeniciae monumenta quotquot supersunt edita et inedita...*, Leipzig 1837, I:5.

je connais." He added an Albanian wordlist to this judgment (f. 19r). It is not surprising that he could not find any similarities. Only in the 1850s was it proven that Albanian belongs to the Indo-European language family, and its exact relations to other languages are still debated.

Coptic. He studied with Georg Zoëga (1755-1809) in Rome and soon become one of the foremost Coptic scholars in Europe. His knowledge of Coptic was crucial for his work on the Rosetta inscription in 1802 and during his later work on the Egyptian language. A bibliography testifies to his knowledge of his predecessors (f. 3v).²²

Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. Åkerblad knew Arabic and Turkish already before leaving Sweden and according to several testimonies he soon spoke both languages well. There are frequent quotations in all the three languages, mostly in Arabic script, but also some Turkish texts written in Latin script, e.g. a love song (f. 2r). He was interested in Arabic dialects and often noted regional differences (Fig. 8). The annotations in Arabic script are

Tunis	Aleppo	Egypt
Tunis, ditheim	hallak	Dilouakt.
Mafal مال	lisfa لسا	-----
Duni دن	hedger نجس	Makus معكوس
Kasda	Omame عمامة	Ömma عمة
Turic	Kamis قميص	-----
höjam حرام	Junnar زنار	höjam حرام
-----	Waraka ورقة	-----

Fig. 8. Wordlist in three different Arabic dialects, from Tunis, Aleppo, and Egypt respectively (ff. 32r-33r).

²² Le P. Kircher étoit un des premières qui se sont occupé de la langue Copte il publia, *Lingua Aegyptica Restituta*, il fut suivi par Bonjurius /Bonjour/ auteur de *Exercitation monumenta Coptico-Aegyptica* bibl. Valie, *Elementa lingua Aegyptica*, et d'un autre ouvrage qui n'a jamais été imprimé sur les Dynasties Egyptiennes. En Angleterre Wilkins publia le *Nouveau Testament* en copte, en 1716, et une *Dissertation* sur cette langue adressée à Chamberlayne. Avant Wilkins, Bernard et Marshall avoient déjà écrit sur la littérature Egyptienne. Voyez *Commercium Literarium* p. Picquassius publié par Wincher à Leipzig en 1750. Wilkins donna son *Pentatauch Copte* en 1731. Renandont les *Liturgies Egyptiennes* en 1716 et La Croze en Allemagne compila son *dictionnaire Copte* en 1720 publié par Weide. Schlotzius composa une *grammaire*, Walpurga en Didymus Tauriensis un *Rudimentum Literatura Coptica*. En Danemarc Hvideus, Birch et Schow se sont occupé de la littérature copte à Rome, Basschau Turkus publia un *Missal* et une *grammaire*.

examples of Åkerblad's varied interests in languages, history and literature, and cover a range of subjects as a few examples show: lists of tribes in the Alexandria area noted during a visit in 1788 (f. 11v); a copy of a 1799 letter by the Pasha of Tripoli, Yūsuf Bāshā al-Qaramānli, to the Swedish king (f. 72r-v); sepulchral inscriptions (ff. 12r, 13r-v), Persian poetry (ff. 5r, 12v, 36r), Arabic poetry (ff. 7r, 11v, 56r) Turkish poetry (f. 18r), quotations from Arabic authors, e.g. the historian 'Abd al-Laṭīf (1160?-1231) (f. 8v) and the geographer Ibn al-Wardī (d. 1457) (f. 15v) as well as rather more prosaic lists of names of trees and plants (f. 22r)

While in Rome Åkerblad retained his interests in oriental languages, and wrote to a friend: "Vous savez, Madame, que je suis un peu levantin, et que tous les Arabes, Grecs, Chaldéens, Ethiopiens &c de Rome me regardent presque comme leur compatriote et viennent souvent me voir." Åkerblad began taking lessons in Aramaic from one of these: "Depuis ce jour, c'est à dire depuis un mois, adieu grec, antiquités, copte, sociétés, amusements, je ne m'occupe plus que de chaldéen [Aramaic]. Je sais bien que c'est une grande folie, mais que voulez vous, je me suis laissé entraîner, et l'on ne redevient pas sage quand on veut."²³

Another major number of annotations concern Åkerblad's readings. A large number of printed titles are referred to, and quoted from. Sometimes the content of the work is summarized: such a title is Louis Duten's influential *Recherches sur l'origine des découvertes attribuées aux modernes...* (Paris 1766). Åkerblad's comments run over two folios (ff. 10r-11r). Other examples are bibliographies, e.g. a list of Greek inscription collections (f. 11r) and the Coptic bibliography cited above. Åkerblad's literary interests were eclectic, from listing Latin authors classified according to Johann Albert Fabricius criteria (ff. 7v-8r) to a long list of Portuguese writers (ff. 64v-67r).

Politics

Though it might appear that Åkerblad's main interests were scholarly, he did comment on the politics of the day. He was, at least in the beginning of his career, a strong supporter of the French Revolution and looked upon the increasing despotism in Sweden with dismay. He was well aware of the political machinations during his years in Constantinople. When the Vizier Halil Hamid Pasha was executed in 1785 after having been accused of partaking in a conspiracy to depose Sultan Abdul Hamid I, Åkerblad

²³ Åkerblad to Friederike Brun, Rome 7 February 1810, Copenhagen, The Royal Library, NKS 1992, f. 147r-v.

copied the Turkish words justifying his punishment hung beside his cut-off head (f. 14v).

The ambitions of the powers that fought for influence at the Porte, the Ottoman court in Constantinople, were sceptically observed by Åkerblad. It is in this context that a certain passage in the notebook should be understood. He wrote about how the British gained a foothold in the Caspian Sea during the War of the Austrian Succession:

Pendant la guerre de 1744 entre la France et l'Angleterre, celle-ci profita de ses liaisons avec la Russie pour obtenir la permission d'établir un commerce direct et une navigation anglaise en Perse par la mer Caspienne — Les capitaine Elton et Woodroff faisaient construire dans le Wolga des navires ... Il [Nadir Shah] prit à son service la Capitaine Elton, que construisait pour Nadir une flotte sur cette mer et en fut l'Amiral. Politique de tous les Cabinets de l'Europe (f. 16v).

The final phrase — and the beginning of the title of the book where he found the information — is the key in our context; all European countries were striving for commercial and territorial gains to secure trade and communications in the East.²⁴ The diplomatic rivalry in Constantinople made it obvious to everyone what was at stake. Another annotation with a connection to the territorial expansion of one of these empires is a list of Tatar words. Åkerblad served as translator in Finland during the Russo-Swedish war of 1788-90 and was instructed to interrogate Turkic speaking Russian prisoners. The wordlist was compiled during conversations with a Tatar captain, Aḥmad Âghâ al-Qarîmî, “a good Muslim” as Åkerblad put it, who had been captured by the Swedish forces (f. 13v).

A few years later Åkerblad, on the grounds of his exceptional language skills, was invited to join the French invasion of Egypt in 1798. He declined, but followed with great interest the news from Egypt. His work with the Demotic script was only made possible by the discovery of the Rosetta Stone by French troops.

It is a truism to assert that Åkerblad's, and many other scholars' careers, were largely determined by the French Revolution and the 25 years of wars that followed. Åkerblad's interest in politics remained but after rumours of his revolutionary sympathies had a detrimental effect on his career as a Swedish diplomat he became more guarded. There are still other examples of a political nature in the notebook. While he lived in Florence in two reprises between 1805 and 1809 he became a close friend of Louise von Stolberg (1752-1824), the Countess d'Albany (Fig. 9). She was in Paris from

²⁴ J.-L. FAVIER, *Politique de tous les cabinets de l'Europe pendant les règnes de Louis XV et de Louis XVI...*, Paris 1793-94, 1:342f.



Fig. 9. Åkerblad drew a section of the walls of Fiesole, still easily identifiable, during his sojourn in Florence (f. 42v).

1788 together with the Italian poet and playwright count Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803); they fled to Florence in 1792. Åkerblad had access to Alfieri's books, and copied a few verses of Euripides that Alfieri had translated into Italian. The verses seemed particularly well fit to the political climate:

Deh, perché l'uom non porta in fronte scritto
o il buono, o il tristo? Ond altri ivi scorgesse
qual sia verace e qual fallace amico.
Perché non ha due voci? Onde la buona
smentisce ognor ciò che tesse la iniqua,
né l'uomo dall'uomo fosse ingannato mai (f. 67v).²⁵

Alfieri's translation is a fine rendering of the disillusioned speech of Theseus in *Hippolytus*. Åkerblad also copied Alfieri's mockery of the French law that imposed the wearing of the cockade on the same pages: "Se Euripide avesse scritto a' tempi nostri, non avrebbe più desiderato questo segnale per riconoscere i buoni dai cattivi; stante che i francesi l'han trovato coll'appor la coccarda ai veri Francesi, per distinguerli dagli uomini tutti,

²⁵ Euripides, *Hippolytos*. Alfieri wrote in Samuel Musgrave's Oxford edition of 1778, lines 938-44, Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Alf. 39/1, pp. 303-4.

e massimamente dai liberi" (f. 67v). The little tri-coloured button or band, first used in support of the revolution, became a compulsory national symbol during the wars. Alfieri knew that in times of war it was especially difficult to know who was friend or foe; it was not written on the forehead who could be trusted.

Åkerblad had long been critical of the removal of antiquities from Ottoman Greece. To what extent this can be labelled a political viewpoint may be discussed, nevertheless he published a strong critique already in 1800 and repeated it later in print.²⁶ An example of this standpoint in the notebook is a copy of Byron's *Childe Harold* verses on the plunder of Athens by Lord Elgin and others (ff. 70v-71r).

History and geography

Åkerblad was, along with many of his colleagues, interested in the geography of especially the classical world. While in Tunis in 1789 he made an effort to understand where the famous places of Punic history had been located: "Le lac de Tunis était le port de Cartage, cela paroît indubitable par un passage de Polybe L.1.C. 73." He cited Polybius in the original Greek and continued his speculations: "On a prétendue qu'un endroit qui se nomme Marsa étoit l'ancien port de Cartage, mais le passage ci-dessus prouve le contraire" (f. 44r).

Similarly he was interested in the location of Troy. While being stationed in Constantinople he visited the Troad several times and participated in the debate on its location and history. A map that was made during a visit in 1797 is testimony to this interest (f. 28r) (Fig. 10).

Åkerblad's hypothesis that the Roman city Ilion, the successor of Homeric Troy, was to be found at Hisarlık was later proven right. What he did not know was that Homeric Troy itself lay hidden under the Roman remains.²⁷

Åkerblad's interest in oriental history is also evident; there are, for example, lists of Indian emperors (ff. 4v, 6v), Ottoman sultans (f. 71v) and Arab astronomers (f. 21r). Much of the literature referred to is also historical.

²⁶ For an in-depth treatment of this subject see my: *Justifying and Criticizing the Removals of Antiquities in Ottoman Lands: Tracking the Sigeion Inscription*, in *International Journal of Cultural Property* 17 (2010), pp. 493-517 (DOI 10.1017/S0940739110000238).

²⁷ CALLMER, Åkerblad cit. (1985 ed.), pp. 190-92, 194-99; J. M. COOK, *The Troad. An Archaeological and Topographical Study*, London 1973, pp. 24, 94, 146, 164.

wanted to stop Åkerblad from copying them to avoid competition for the future book. Åkerblad continued to visit libraries and collections. There are annotations from e.g. the Barberini Library, where manuscripts on Roman antiquities and Greek travels caught his attention (f. 47r).

The most important source for Åkerblad's Roman years is the correspondence in Italian with Sebastiano Ciampi (1769-1847) who was a professor in Pisa when Åkerblad met him in Rome.²⁹ Before they met, Åkerblad was more than dubious about Ciampi's knowledge of Greek. When Åkerblad wrote about a Greek inscription found in Fiesole, he commented on Ciampi's explanation of it: "Il professore Ciampi ne ha pubblicata una precisa spiegazione che prova solamente la sua incredibile ignoranza" finishing off his own reading of the inscription with: "O che dotto professore"! (f. 45v) Another close friend in Rome — they met almost every Sunday morning — was Girolamo Amati (1768-1834), *scriptor Graecus* at the BAV and whose knowledge of Greek was well attested by his contemporaries.³⁰

Conclusion

The *Vat. lat.* 9785 exemplifies how several of the disciplines which interested Åkerblad were in a period of transition. Åkerblad belonged to both an erudite tradition of earlier centuries as well as being a "modern" scholar in the way he approached the study of languages and their history. An example is his dissertation on Greek magical inscriptions, a pioneering essay on what we today call curse tablets.³¹ These Greek texts were not thoroughly investigated again until the beginning of the twentieth century.

The *Vat. lat.* 9785 is also a testimony to a foreign scholar who was unusually well integrated in the learned circles where he lived. Åkerblad's almost 15 years in Italy is an interesting example of the vivacity of the debates and polemics that involved both local and foreign scholars on the peninsula. The *Vat. lat.* 9785 is only one of the documents that show the extent of Åkerblad's involvement in the social and learned life of Florence

²⁹ Åkerblad's letters in Stockholm, The Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities [Kungliga Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien] and some letters in Pistoia, Biblioteca Comunale Forteguerriana. On Ciampi see *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*; G. BONACCHI GAZZARINI, *Sebastiano Ciampi nella storiografia artistica tra il settecento e l'ottocento*, Pistoia 1970; M. SOLLECITI, *Le carte di Sebastiano Ciampi nella biblioteca comunale Forteguerriana*, Pistoia 1984.

³⁰ On Amati see *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Åkerblad left traces in Amati's collections. M. BUONOCORE, *Codices Vaticani Latini. Codices 9734-9782 (Codices Amatiani)*, Vatican City 1988, pp. 7, 66, 107.

³¹ J. D. ÅKERBLAD, *Iscrizione greca sopra una lamina di piombo trovata in un sepolcro nelle vicinanze di Atene*, Rome 1813.

and Rome. His notebooks and correspondence provide another example that the often pessimistic view of Italian scholarship in this period, as recent efforts have shown, can be nuanced.³²

³² I only cite two works as examples: a comparative study of three Italian cities indicates new directions of research: J. BOUTIER, B. MARIN, and A. ROMANO, editors, *Naples, Rome, Florence: une histoire comparée des milieux intellectuels italiens, XVII^e-XVIII^e siècles*, Rome 2005; on the particular Roman antiquarian milieu see: A. MARCONE, *Le opere di carattere storiografico nelle Dissertazioni della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia dell'800*, in *I duecento anni di attività della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia (1810-2010)*, edited by M. BUONOCORE, Rome 2010 (Memorie in 8°, VIII), pp. 1-25.

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SOMMARIO

F. BARBERINI, Artisti e artigiani al servizio del cardinal Carlo Barberini per le solenni esequie di Giacomo II Stuart. Note dalle <i>Giustificazioni</i> dell'Archivio Barberini	7
M. BUONOCORE, Tre note epigrafiche da codici vaticani	27
A. CONTESSA, A Geography of Learning: The World of the Presumed Map of Theodulphe of Orleans and Its Mid-Eleventh-Century Catalan Author	55
F. COSTE, « Cette lesgende auree est a moy... » <i>marginalia</i> et appropriations de la <i>Légende dorée</i> (Reg. lat. 534)	111
M. G. CRITELLI, La leggenda del Volto Santo di Lucca nel <i>Palatino latino</i> 1988. Osservazioni codicologiche, paleografiche e di storia del testo	147
F. DELLA SCHIAVA, Due inediti per il catalogo di Vincent Raymond de Lodève, miniatore papale	189
M. DELL'OMO, Il più antico inventario dell'archivio diplomatico di Montecassino nel catalogo di papa Paolo II (Vat. lat. 3961, ff. 25r-32v). Edizione della lista e identificazione dei documenti	203
M. DI REMIGIO – Á. NÚÑEZ GAITÁN, Il restauro del manoscritto Vat. lat. 12838: l' <i>Ethica</i> del minimo intervento	265
L. FERRERI, Le dissertazioni <i>De lingua Hellenistica</i> di Pietro Lasena (1590-1636) tenute all'Accademia Basiliana (Barb. lat. 1780)	285
S. FOSCHETTI, Il Reg. lat. 256: un'insolita scoperta in fase di restauro	331
CH. M. GRAFINGER, Ein Bibliothekstransport — ein logistisches Problem. Die Organisation des Transportes der Heidelberger Bibliothek nach Rom durch Leone Allacci während des dreissigjährigen Krieges	343
M. MENGHINI, Il concerto in onore di Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina del maggio 1880. Documenti della Società Musicale Romana conservati nel fondo "Circolo San Pietro" della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana	383
F. MUSCOLINO, Domenico Benedetto Gravina e il suo carteggio con Giovanni Battista de Rossi (dai codici Vat. lat. 14243-14245, 14247, 14249, 14251, 14258)	441
A. RITA, Trasferimenti librari tra Sant'Uffizio e Biblioteca Vaticana. In margine al ritrovamento del manoscritto dell' <i>Ethica</i> di Spinoza	471
L. SCAPPATICCI, Il più antico manoscritto del <i>Tractatus in Iohannis evangelium</i> di Agostino (Vat. lat. 5776, f. 3)	487
F. THOMASSON, Between Rome and the Orient: Johan David Åkerblad's (1763-1819) Notebook, Vat. lat. 9785	497
P. TOMÈ, La <i>princeps</i> veneziana dell' <i>Orthographia</i> di Giovanni Tortelli (con cenni sulla fortuna a stampa dell'opera in veneto)	517

P. TOTARO – L. SPRUIT – P. STEENBAKKERS, <i>L'Ethica</i> di Spinoza in un manoscritto della Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (<i>Vat. lat.</i> 12838)	583
F. TRONCARELLI, La silloge di Lorsch (<i>Pal. lat.</i> 833) e l'epigrafe di Helpis	611
A. TURA, Pietro Bembo lettore del <i>Novellino</i> nel <i>Vat. lat.</i> 3214	627
P. VERSACE, Alcune note marginali in minuscola del codice B: l'esegesi di un lettore bizantino della seconda metà del XII secolo	639
P. VIAN, «Per le cose della patria nostra». Lettere inedite di Luigi Angeloni e Marino Marini sul recupero dei manoscritti vaticani a Parigi (1816-1819)	693
P. VIAN, «Una cambiale scontata prima di presentarsi ufficialmente allo sportello»? Achille Ratti Prefetto della Biblioteca Vaticana (1914-1918)	801
Indice dei manoscritti e delle fonti archivistiche	871
Indice degli esemplari a stampa	881