

Inscribing Identity:

The Development of the Latin Script in Ancient Rome and Early Modern Vietnam

My case studies derive from two places of cultural contact—Rome and Vietnam—when writing practices interact with the identities of individual writers. Four case studies of inscribed objects from 7th-4th centuries BCE (the Marsiliana tablet, a lenticular aryballos, a bucchero amphora, and the Lapis Niger cippus) trace the development of the Latin script in Italy, and two manuscripts from 17th century CE Vietnam (a meeting log, and a personal letter from a Vietnamese convert) show how *chữ Quốc ngữ*—the Latin script that Jesuit colonizers adapted for the Vietnamese language—was negotiated by foreign missionaries and Vietnamese converts.

I consider identity a phenomenon which is personal, social, and cultural (Astoreca 2021b); I use a cultural approach to studying writing, where writing is defined as “an element of social practice within a given cultural environment” (Boyes et al. 2021). Writing, as a performative act (Ragazzoli et al. 2018), must be approached on its own terms.

Across these wide-ranging texts, I identified three common strands: use of writing as a response to historical context, use of writing to evoke orality, and use of writing for commemoration. For example, both the letter and the amphora contain first-person signatures which would be read aloud, necessarily animating them.

The poster illustrates these findings by centering pictures of the six objects, highlighting graphically the relevant details of writing relevant to the three strands. There is an introductory abstract, then an overview of the aforementioned cultural approach. Next are boxes discussing the strands, followed by concluding observations and further reading.

Bibliography

Astoreca, Natalia Elvira. 2021b. “Names and authorship in the beginnings of Greek alphabetic writing”. In *The Social and Cultural Contexts of Historic Writing Practices*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Boyes et al., eds. 2021. *The Social and Cultural Contexts of Historic Writing Practices*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Ragazzoli et al. 2018. “Introduction”. In *Scribbling Through History: Graffiti, Places and People from Antiquity to Modernity*. Bloomsbury: New York.