

Washington & Lee University

Mnēsthē Across the Mediterranean

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Dura-Europos and the Syrian Epigraphic Habit

A city once “poised between the cultural worlds of Rome, Mesopotamia, and Persia,”¹ the archaeological site of Dura-Europos now offers us a wealth of inscriptions. These reflect that cultural diversity: Aramaic scripts and languages, Latin names and proclamations, and a ubiquitous Greek influence all appear on Durene walls—and there are plenty to go around. Immediately before the city’s fall to Sassanid Persian forces circa 256 AD, Roman troops filled the buildings nearest the outer walls with sand to strengthen their defenses. While this evidently wasn’t enough to protect the occupants of Dura, for the plaster walls in those buildings it acted as a fine guard against the threats of time. Many wall decorations of all kinds, then, managed to survive until excavations began in the early 20th Century.²

Dura has preserved—and archaeology has unearthed—the largest concentration of *mnesthe* graffiti, a simple yet distinctive type of inscription found throughout the ancient Mediterranean. In the appendix to this thesis, I have compiled 219 examples of inscriptions featuring the term “μνησθῆναι” (or some similar verb form).³ Since more than 45% of the 219 inscriptions were discovered at the site of Dura-Europos, this city is the ideal starting point for an inquiry into the meaning and presence of a popular inscription the usage of which spans several centuries and hundreds of miles.

In this thesis, I will analyze the *mnesthe* formula using 123 inscriptions from my corpus, all located in one of three areas. First, I will survey the 99 inscriptions at Dura-Europos which adhere to the formula, notable for its simplicity and its strong presence in the city. Then, I will

¹ Stern 2012: 171.

² Stern 2012: 176.

³ The appendix also includes inscriptions that do not feature *μμνήσκω* at all, but which still have relevance to this analysis and understanding of the *mnesthe* formula. These inclusions bring the total number of entries in the appendix to 224. They will be discussed in the “Analysis & Conclusion” section below.

discuss the 13 inscriptions at Grammata Bay in Epirus, the earliest appearances of the formula, which feature a slightly different format with a more religious role than the Durene graffiti. Finally, I'll discuss 11 graffiti from the Italian towns of Pozzuoli, Pompeii, and Oplontis, which represent a combination of and expansion on the trends visible in Epirus and Dura-Europos. Through the inscriptions in these locations I aim to track the evolution of the *mnesthe* format in graffiti from the fourth century BC to the third century AD and to consider possible explanations for how it spread and changed over the centuries.

The Basics of *Mnēsthē*

Mnēsthē inscriptions all follow a distinctive formula, though certain variables exist. According to Jennifer Baird, they may make up as much as one fifth of all graffiti both in Dura's private residences⁴ and at its most heavily inscribed location, the Palmyrene Gate.⁵ The most basic format begins with the Greek *μνησθῆ* (or some other form of the verb *μιμνήσκω*), most commonly translated "may so-and-so be remembered,"⁶ or "x was remembered."⁷ The verb precedes a "governing" name in the nominative case.

I present here the three main ways in which this formula appears at Dura-Europos throughout the 99 inscriptions there. Some of the texts for these inscriptions include more than one use of the verb *μιμνήσκω*, sometimes in different forms. For clarity, I will distinguish

⁴ Baird 2012: 61. In the active voice, *μιμνήσκω* means "to remind" or "to make a person remember" (*LSJ* s.v. *μιμνήσκω*). All of the inscriptions I will discuss contain passive forms of the verb, which translators have interpreted in English both as "to remember" and "to be remembered" (*LSJ* s.v. *μιμνήσκω* B.). I have standardized my translations for each of the forms as they appear, based on my own interpretation of the grammatical context for the forms. For an in-depth explanation of these distinctions, please refer to the section "Subject or Object? The Question of Translation" below.

⁵ Baird 2012: 56.

⁶ Baird 2012: 56.

⁷ Clarke 1992: 118.

between “inscriptions,” which are full texts which can have multiple individual appearances of the word *μυμνήσκω*, and “instances,” which denote a singular appearance of the word. For the full text of these inscriptions, see Entries 1-99 in the appendix. Entries include transcriptions, translations, reference numbers, and available data on the dates, context, and other details included within their sources.

Almost every Durene inscription consists of the verb, as mentioned above, and a governing name directly preceding or following it. These appear in the nominative case—when the case ending is scrutable:



Sketch of the below inscription, designated no. 936, in the 1944 Yale excavation records.⁸

Μνησ-

θη Πολύ-

μηλος

Διοκλέο-

⁸ Rostovtzeff 1944: 168, no. 937.

υς τοῦ Δ-
ανύμου⁹

“Let Polymelos, son of Diocles, son of Danymus, be remembered.”

Although it contains several genitive patronyms, this inscription is governed by the nominative “Polymelos.”

15 of the 99 Durene *mnesthe* inscriptions begin with the verb *μνησθῆ*,¹⁰ the subjunctive passive aorist form of *μμνήσκω*, written out in full:

Μνησθῆ Ναοβιαρίβωλος¹¹

“Let Naobiaribolos be remembered.”

While the full word “μνησθῆ” takes up an underwhelming fraction of the Durene inscriptions, 57 more shorten the verb to *μν*:

Μν(ησθῆ) Μανέος Ἡλειοδώρου¹²

“Let Maneos, son of Heliodoros, be remembered.”

In five inscriptions, the phrase appears shorter still as *μ*:

μ(νησθῆ) (Ζ)ωῖλλος Ζ(ά)βδ(ου)¹³

“Let Zoillos, son of Zabdos, be remembered.”

Since “μ” is used multiple times in one of the inscriptions, there are nine instances of the abbreviation “μ.”

Since these three phrases are all the same verb form, we can combine the abbreviations with their written-out origin. The inscriptions including “μνησθῆ” number 77 out of 99 (one

⁹ Rostovtzeff 1944: 168, no. 936. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰ This includes several inscriptions which technically begin with some other word, but it is not the same sentence or statement as the one containing the *mnesthe* formula; since the format contains itself to one sentence, only that sentence receives consideration when discussing the format. One inscription with “μνησθῆ” written out in full begins with a name instead of a verb, bringing the total up to 16.

¹¹ Rostovtzeff 1931: 115, no. 1.

¹² *SEG* 7.454 = PH320695. Cumont 1926: 392, no. 34.

¹³ *SEG* 7.716 = PH320957. Rostovtzeff 1933: 171, no. 344.

inscription uses both *μν* and *μνησθῆ* once each, so there is a small overlap). Very few *mnesthe* inscriptions in Dura get more complicated than the simple combination of verb and governing name exemplified above.

While abbreviations may be a hallmark of the graffiti including “*μνησθῆ*” specifically, the verb *μιμνήσκω* does not always stay in the subjunctive. The other 22 inscriptions take another form, though it is sometimes challenging to determine which due to the irregularity and inconsistency of informal inscriptions; here, I will list the most common substitutes that might be included in the Durene graffiti. *Μνησθείης*, the aorist passive optative form, is the only format to be used in the second person, and easy to recognize since no other forms resemble its ending *-εις*:

Μνησθείης Διόδωρος¹⁴

“May you be remembered, Diodoros.”

Μνησθείης

Βαρλάας

Ζεβιαλάας¹⁵

“May you be remembered, Barlaas Zebialaas.”

56 inscriptions include *μνησθείης*, which always begins the sentence in the same way that *μνησθῆ* does.

Another variation, the aorist passive indicative *ἐμνήσθη*, presents a challenge: the word can appear not only in its full form but also without its initial epsilon. The records of the Yale excavations at Dura-Europos in the 1920s and 1930s provide most of the inscriptions; the authors

¹⁴ *SEG* 7.502 = PH320743. Rostovtzeff 1931: 109, no. 41.

¹⁵ *SEG* 7-479 = PH320720. Rostovtzeff 1931: 101, no. 15.

interpreted ‘*MNHΣΘH*’ as *μνησθῆ*. It is possible that only one inscription at Dura might use *ἐμνήσθη*:

Ἡμνήσθη Ὀβαῖος Θεοζανδάου¹⁶

“Obaios remembered¹⁷ Theozandaos.”

The Yale records imply that this might be “μνησθῆ,” but the eta augment may be a variation on the initial epsilon of “ἐμνήσθη.” Regardless, it is an anomalous spelling of the verb. To add to the confusion, notations like the iota subscript on *μνησθῆ* would indicate the subjunctive mood, but the Durene inscriptions (or rather their entries, when no picture or sketch is provided, as is most common) do not include it. Given the popular understanding of *mnesthe* inscriptions as a request, it seems most likely that the verb is subjunctive, but this is largely conjecture. As a result, no recorded inscriptions from Dura exhibit *μνήσθη*. All definite examples of (*ἐ*)*μνήσθη* exist elsewhere.

When written with no accents, as one can expect of an inscription, it is impossible to tell even with a good deal of context whether ‘*μνησθη*’ is subjunctive or indicative. In this case, it is entirely dependent on the person recording such an inscription to choose which mood they think it takes. The inscriptions in the Yale excavation records and also those in Franz Cumont’s earlier excavation records at the site edit the inscription as “μνησθῆ” instead of “μνήσθη,” with little evidence past the assumption that the inscriptions are a request rather than a statement—the abbreviated formulas *μν* and *μ* provide no more clues toward their proper mood. I have accepted Cumont’s and the Yale records’ interpretations both for the sake of clarity, and since the inscriptions’ meanings make more sense with the subjunctive “may... be remembered.”

¹⁶ *SEG* 7-569 = PH320810. Rostovtzeff 1931: 125, no. 40.

¹⁷ I’ve translated this passive verb as an active one; as discussed in n.4, there is precedent for both an active and passive English translation of the verb. I’ve translated this instance the same as I will other appearances of *ἐμνήσθη* later in the thesis. I will discuss my translation decisions at those points, and in “Subject or Object? The Question of Translation” below.

In total, the forms of *μιμνήσκω* represented in Dura amount to the following instances (these numbers are different from the numbers of inscriptions, as one inscription may include multiple instances of the same verb):

| <u>Form</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| μνησθῆ and abbreviated versions | 104 |
| μνησθῆ, unabbreviated (subtotal) | 16 |
| μν (subtotal) | 79 |
| μ (subtotal) | 9 |
| μνησθείς | 20 |
| μνησθῆς | 1 |
| ἡμνήσθη (abnormal) | 1 |
| TOTAL: | 126 |

Several inscriptions use the *mnesthe* formula multiple times:

Μν(ησθῆ) Ἀντίοχος Διοδώρου.

Μν(ησθῆ) Ξενοδώρι[ος]?

Μν(ησθῆ) Διογένη[ς]¹⁸

“Let Antiochus, son of Diodorus, be remembered.

Let Xenodorus be remembered.

Let Diogenes be remembered.”

This inscription’s entry specifically notes that the final line was written in a different hand than the first two, meaning at least two people contributed to the series of requests for remembrance. The longest such series separately requests the remembrance of ten individuals, though the entry

¹⁸ *SEG* 7.457 = PH320698. Cumont 1926: 397, no. 42.

does not indicate whether or not every line was written by the same hand. Three out of the ten entries with Durene series-inscriptions note that they switch handwriting.

One other *mnesthe*, despite standing alone instead of in a series, receives another writer's addition in the form of a name:

Μνη[σθειης] Ἀλέξα[νδρος].¹⁹

The placement of the two words near each other, despite being written in different hands, implies that the first writer either supplied no governing name or it has since been removed. Then, a second writer added another name with the probable intention of making the statement “may you be remembered, Alexander.” Something about the nature of this inscription, whether it be its location on a wall as graffiti, the *mnesthe* formula, or something else, led the second writer (presumably Alexander) to determine it as something mutable. Once a message was written on the wall, perhaps others could change it to their own purposes; or perhaps “Alexander” acted out of the norm, but no one else felt it to be enough of an affront to erase his alteration.

“Graffiti” As an Anachronism

Durene *mnesthe* inscriptions—at least the fragments of them which survive—are characterized by the way that they meet the barest possible requirements for the formula as we understand it. A name and a verb do little to explain the deeper (or even general) meaning of a request for remembrance, so we must turn elsewhere for context. In order to understand the nature of a *mnesthe* inscription, we must determine whether it traveled as a formula for formal,

¹⁹ *SEG* 7.501 = PH320742. Rostovtzeff 1931: 109, no. 40. Note that this instance of *μνησθειης* is not an abbreviation, but instead a fragmented appearance of the full verb. Brackets [] fill in illegible spaces where letters were written, while parentheses () add missing letters that were not originally written, as with abbreviations like *μν(ησθῆ)*.

official inscriptions like funereal markers (which are meant at least in part to remember the deceased) or for informal writing (like our modern conception of graffiti).

Modern traditions of graffiti largely revolve around its highly informal and forbidden status, often conditioning a person to see it as defacement, a scar on a neighborhood's cleanliness and order. Karen Stern notes that, in Dura, there is no evidence that owners and caretakers of "defaced" walls ever tried to scratch over or otherwise remove inscriptions.²⁰ Even with so many fragmented or lost graffiti,²¹ a marked failure by others to erase inscriptions on the plaster recovered in excavation proves that they did not bother society as we may expect today. At the very least we should remove the notion that an informal scratching on a wall in ancient times holds all of the same social connotations as one made today. To consider any ancient inscriptions 'graffiti' may be anachronistic in the first place, since

"In modern times when a person writes his name on a tourist site, he wishes to show that he visited there, or perhaps he wants to eternalize himself. It does not seem likely that in antiquity this was also the intention of those who engraved or incised their names on rock-faces or on walls of buildings."²²

It is instead better to define what constitutes a formal or an informal inscription, as above; using the term "graffiti" interchangeably with "informal" is only permissible so long as one keeps the possible differences in cultural context between us and ancient people.

Location, Location, Location

While some sources explicitly designate inscriptions as "graffiti," most indicate informality by simply noting their place on a wall, or their application to a surface by scrawling, scratching, painting, and other such methods. Marked as such, Durene *mnesthe* are overwhelmingly informal—87 of the 99 inscriptions are explicitly scrawled onto walls as graffiti,

²⁰ Stern 2012: 175.

²¹ Stern 2012: 175. Stern estimates in the Durene synagogue, for example, that 40% of potential wall-plaster writings have been lost to the natural ravages of time (not disgruntled graffiti-removers).

²² Naveh 1979: 72.

while 11 are inconclusive and only one, painted on a wall, seems to achieve a higher degree of formality as a professional creation.²³

The general contextual information on Durene graffiti is also useful; articles and archaeological records dutifully log the approximate location of all inscriptions found within a site and structure. Baird was particularly concerned during her treatment of the Yale excavation records with interpreting the Durene inscriptions' degrees of formality.²⁴ She reports that the majority of Durene graffiti were scratched, chipped, hammered, and painted (or combinations thereof) onto one of three places in particular: city gates (specifically the Palmyrene Gates), religious structures, and private buildings.²⁵ The latter two would best explain the heavy presence of plaster-wall writing, since they were far more likely to have plaster interior walls.

As for these 'top locations' for graffiti, the gates accumulate the most *mnesthe* inscriptions in one place: Baird does not provide a set number, but notes that more than $\frac{1}{5}$ of the inscriptions on the Palmyrene Gates (which have the greatest concentration of inscriptions on the city defenses) follow the *mnesthe* formula. The total percentage of *mnesthe* throughout Dura is only 12% of all inscriptions,²⁶ leaving the gates with a higher total of *mnesthe* graffiti than any other singular location.

Private residences lay claim to more graffiti in general, 22% to the defenses' 20%. This number was likely much higher, Baird assumes, since

writing on walls inside houses was relatively commonplace; graffiti on walls were recorded in 36 per cent of the approximately 130 excavated houses, and given that there is a high correlation between preserved wall height and preserved graffiti, this was probably an even more widespread practice than for which existing evidence survives.

²³ Entry #87. *SEG* 7.737 = PH320978. Rostovtzeff 1933: 84, 193.

²⁴ Baird 2012: 49.

²⁵ Baird 2012 56.

²⁶ Baird 2012: 56.

10% of these inscriptions spread throughout the private homes are *mnesthe* graffiti,²⁷ a cumulative slightly lower than the number at the Palmyrene gates alone. So the nature of the formula's application to Durene walls seems to follow the trend of great concentrations in focal, heavily-trafficked public areas, and widespread but less frequent use throughout the city, especially in residential spaces.

The public and private halves of the trend have some striking thematic similarities. *Mnesthe* in residential spaces appear most notably on or next to thresholds and in “waiting rooms” for guests. For example, Rostovtzeff lists two inscriptions in the excavation records for the 1935-1936 season which are found in two separate homes. The rooms where they were found are referred to as “diwans,” essentially a courtyard where guests would often wait to meet a resident of the house. One of them has evidence of a bench for visitors, above which appears a *mnesthe* inscription.²⁸ Meanwhile, the gates to Palmyra feature inscriptions to their sides, likely where guards would have stood.

“By the God”

In defining *mnesthe* graffiti in the context of the Durene synagogue, Baird describes them as “not simply a way of making one's mark but a means of making a religious statement”—along with the standard formula (“may so-and-so be remembered”), “many of these graffiti have” the additional supplication “by the god.”²⁹ Baird does not give any specifics about how many of the inscriptions she claims contain this religious sentiment. However, its inclusion in her general definition of the format implies that invocation of a god must be a defining component *mnesthe* graffiti, if not merely a common one. Out of 127 Durene inscriptions found using some form of

²⁷ Baird 2012: 61.

²⁸ Rostovtzeff 1944: 168-169, 221.

²⁹ Baird 2012: 56.

μυμνήσκω, I have identified few referring to a deity in any capacity—a far cry from what Baird seems to imply with her definition.

Μνησθείης Ἀδαδ[άκ]α[βος]
καὶ Βαρ. . .ν Ζαβαδν[άνου]
πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς καὶ ἀν[θ-]
[ρ]ώπους καὶ Ὁφ. .χο...³⁰

“May you, Adadakabos and... Zabandnanos, be remembered by the gods and men and...”

This is one of two inscriptions referring, as in Baird’s words, “to the gods” in Dura—the other uses the different but equivalent phrase *ἐπὶ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων*.³¹ Both add an extra request towards mortal men, a topic unexplored in the aforementioned definition. According to Rostovtzeff’s records, this combination of mortal and immortal in the request is common enough in connection to the *mnesthe* format to infer that a fragmentary inscription likely begins with “*mnesthe*” when “*ἐπὶ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων*” is visible at its end.³²

Other Durene inscriptions invoke specific deities:

Μνησθ[εῖης] Βαρραβᾶς
πρὸς Δί³³

“May you, Barrabas, be remembered by Zeus.”

The writer references a god by name—another inscription is “πρός” Arabia,³⁴ suggesting the invocation of a personification deity for the region. Few other examples appear to support Baird’s claims. Many inscriptions appear in religious spaces like the Durene temples and synagogue, and the fragmentary nature of many Durene graffiti allows ample opportunity for

³⁰ *SEG* 7.656 = PH320897. Rostovtzeff 1933: 144, no. 139.

³¹ Rostovtzeff 1936: 133.

³² Rostovtzeff 1936: 133.

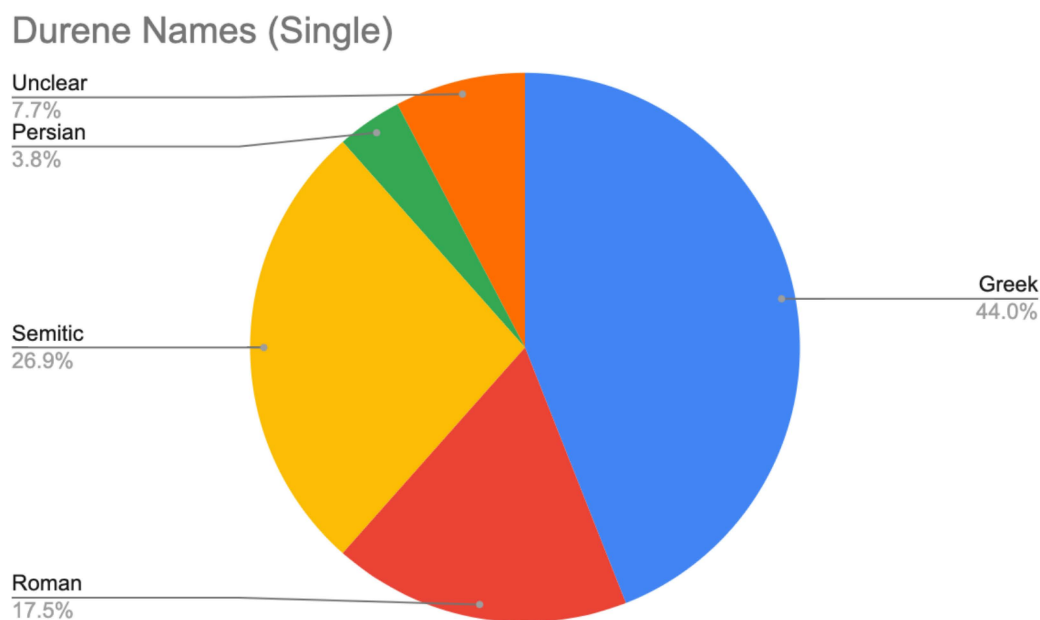
³³ *SEG* 7.489 = PH320730. Rostovtzeff 1931: 106, no. 28.

³⁴ *SEG* 7.507 = PH320748. Rostovtzeff 1931: 110, no. 46.

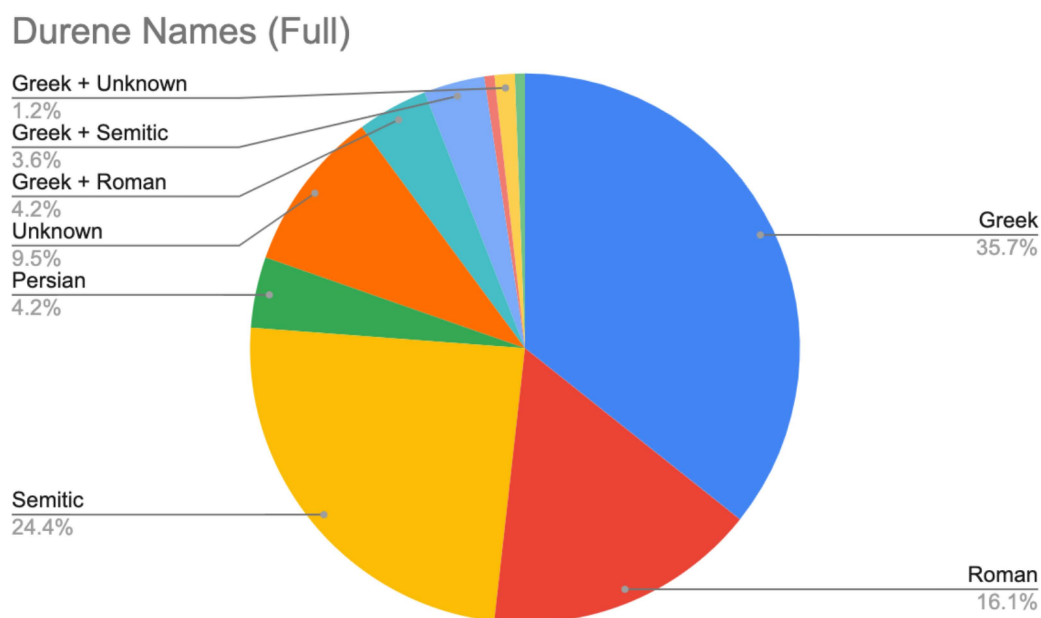
invocations to be lost; but, if they were indeed common, one would expect more of them to appear in the archaeological record. Such a low concentration of explicit religiosity makes me hesitant to agree that the *mnesthe* formula always invokes a deity—in Dura at least.

Prosopography

The most consistent element of Durene *mnesthe* inscriptions (besides the defining verb) is the names; they represent a large swath of cultures, but primarily include names with Greek, Roman, and Semitic origins. The names' constructions also reflect cultural diversity, appearing as single, individual names and as multiple names—with and without patronymics. 168 names are mentioned in the Durene graffiti compiled here. 121 are the aforementioned “governing” names, those immediately following the verb. 102 of these governing names have a case ending in the nominative, compared to only two in the genitive—the final 17 names do not have a discernible ending due to damage and wear on the inscriptions.



The above chart compiles every name in the Durene inscriptions, looking individually at each of 234 components (including patronyms) of the names individually; its counterpart below measures the 168 full names' components altogether. The “unknown” names are those too fragmented to connect with any culture or language.



The Semitic name category includes Nabataean and Palmyrene names specifically, as well as the larger amount of names simply classified as “Semitic” in the excavation records.³⁵ The plurality of the names used are Greek, both individually and in full names; for a non-singular name to span more than one category, one of the names included must be Greek—like the inscription

Μνησ[θείης]

Διόδωρος Ἀχάβου³⁶

“May you be remembered, Diodoros son of Achabos.”

³⁵ Rostovtzeff 1936: 246.

³⁶ *SEG* 7.504 = PH320745. Rostovtzeff 1931: 109, no. 43.

This text features a man with a Greek name whose father had a Semitic one. Only one name, discussed earlier in this chapter, falls outside this category: “Obaios, son of Theozandaos” has a Semitic name and a Persian patronym.³⁷ This makes up 0.6% of the total in the full-name chart above, occupying the unlabelled light-green section above. The other unlabelled section, also containing just one inscription, represents the combination of a Greek and a Persian name. This strong Greek presence in the most explicitly multicultural names concurs with every statement about Dura-Europos—specifically from Baird, here, but according to many other authors as well—that Greek was the *lingua franca* that facilitated cultural connections far more than the relatively newer Latin. Hellenization was a much older process in the area than Roman rule.

Some of the people in the Durene graffiti also identified themselves by their occupations and titles. An anonymous writer (since the graffito only refers to *ὁ γράψας*, rather than a name), a brother, a doctor, and a *bouleutes* (or councilman) all appear among the graffiti. The most common two designators listed are the *stator* and the *beneficiarius* (both words are transliterated from Latin into Greek), attendants and soldiers with special benefits, appearing nine and eight times, respectively. Almost every instance of both relates their positions to a military tribune. However, the strong presence of these two titles may be the doing of a select few: four of the *beneficarii* in separate inscriptions go by the name Aurelius Antoninus (or just Antoninus).³⁸ Other military characters include a list of “gate soldiers” and a knight.

At any rate, the *mnesthe* formula was popular among soldiers. In addition, the only times soldiers make reference to their occupation are when they have a designation of some importance: the writers are flaunting whatever impressive titles they may have. Based on this, it is possible that some of the other graffiti with no sort of occupation or title included may have

³⁷ *SEG* 7-569 = PH320810. Rostovtzeff 1931: 125, no. 40.

³⁸ Entries 35, 36, 38, and 39.

been written by lower-ranking soldiers, making the scale of military involvement higher than we can observe. There is also the possibility that the average soldier (i.e., one not in a position dependent on constantly writing, as one might as an attendant to an officer) was not literate enough to write such a graffito, but I hesitate to consider this strongly. Since so many of the inscriptions at Dura-Europos abbreviate *mnesthe* to “ $\mu\nu$ ” or even “ μ ,” it stands to reason that one would not have to understand much about writing to inscribe two letters plus one’s own name. As Baird notes, “even the illiterate person walking through the gates of the city would understand something of their message;”³⁹ if people see the *mnesthe* being used elsewhere on the walls of the city, it would be easy enough to understand and copy it. At any rate, the military presence in the trend may imply that legionaries brought it from elsewhere and that they could have later spread it to other places in the empire. The former is likely, as the *mnesthe* formula does not originate in Dura-Europos but rather appears in other locations centuries earlier.

³⁹ Baird 2018: 27.

Earlier *Mnēsthē* Inscriptions: Epirus

Grammata Bay

Let us consider the earliest examples of *mnesthe* in inscriptions, starting in the fourth or third century BCE in mainland Greece. The earliest graffiti I found, Entries 100-112 in the appendix, appear at one site in Epirus. Grammata Bay (near the modern-day Albanian border with northwestern Greece) is a natural harbor along a challenging, windy stretch of coast which serves as a safe harbor for ships in heavy weather. The shore in the area is mostly cliff, with only a break for the small bay; “local rock” deposits in the cliffs flanking the cove served as ancient quarries, as well.⁴⁰ Nearby urban development with Grammata’s stone began around the sixth century BCE, with a construction boom in the fourth century.

The bay has served as a protective harbor for an incredibly long time for many ships: some visitors (possibly including famous characters like Pompey the Great⁴¹ and the Byzantine emperor John V⁴²) waiting out storms over the millennia have scrawled messages on the cliffs around it.⁴³ Some of the messages here were first recorded in the fifteenth century by Cyriac of Ancona, with many other epigraphers returning to the spot to record their own readings.

Hajdari et al. surveyed the cliffs most recently, seeking out and photographing every inscription possible for accuracy, as they claim in a “non-exhaustive” survey of the religious inscriptions⁴⁴ at the bay. I have compiled the thirteen *mnesthe* inscriptions included in this survey. Hajdari et al. estimate that nothing on the cliffs was written any earlier than the fourth century; since all of the inscriptions appear on surfaces exposed by quarries, the first visible

⁴⁰ Hajdari 2007: 356.

⁴¹ Hajdari 2007: 370.

⁴² Hajdari 2007: 356.

⁴³ Hajdari 2007: 353.

⁴⁴ Hajdari 2007: 374. “Cette première étude des inscriptions de Grammata ne prétend pas à l'exhaustivité. Elle permet, au moins, d'observer combien la vie religieuse a été active et durable dans cette baie isolée...”

activity in the bay must be that quarrying.⁴⁵ The latest possible date for the pre-Christian Greek inscriptions (since Byzantine and medieval Greek also appears on the wall, along with an intermediary period of only Imperial-Era Latin inscriptions) is the first century BC.⁴⁶ So, all 13 inscriptions most likely date to this period between the fourth and first centuries BC, the Hellenistic Period in Greece.

The most immediate impression made by six of the 13 *mnesthe* graffiti in the cove is their explicitly religious content. They read like supplications to the gods—naming the writer, their gods (mostly the Dioscuri), and a request, as we will discuss below. Other inscriptions refer to a high priest, the Dioscuri, Isis, and Themis.⁴⁷ No physical evidence remains of a conventional sanctuary,⁴⁸ but it is likely that one existed because of the strong presence of religious requests and especially the mention of a priest. If this was the case, all traces of a physical sanctuary have disappeared over the millennia. Without this evidence, we cannot tell whether the inscriptions were paired with offerings or any other practices.

With centuries and miles of separation between them, *mnesthe* inscriptions at Grammata Bay follow a formula distinct from their Durene counterparts:

Ἐπάγαθός ἐμνή-
σθη παρὰ τοῖς Διο-
σκόροις τεῖς ἐμε(ῖ-)
ς ἀδηλοφῆς Ἄνα-
τολῆς⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Hajdari 2007: 357.

⁴⁶ Hajdari 2007: 358.

⁴⁷ Hajdari 2007: 369.

⁴⁸ Hajdari 2007: 366.

⁴⁹ *REG* 120.2.A.2. Hajdari 2007: 379-380. The translation of *παρά* is challenging, since it could mean several things based on the interpretation of the verb and from context we do not have. “Alongside,” “beside,” and “in the presence of” seem most apt, since the gods are likely being called upon to remember with the subject of the verb, or their cult presence at the bay is the facilitator for this remembrance.

“Epagathos remembered my sister Anatole alongside the Dioscuri,”

and

Ἄρχιππο-
 ς Σεβαστη[νός]
 Α...σου ἐμνήσ-
 [θη] τῶν ἀδε[λ-]
 φῶν⁵⁰

“ Archippos from Sebastia... remembered [his] brothers.”

Three main elements are visible here: the nominative subject calling for remembrance, a genitive object, and an invocation of the gods. These invocations appear “following a unique formula ‘ἐμνήσθη παρά τοις Διοσκόροις [sic.]’ followed by nouns in the genitive.”⁵¹ The inscribers invite the Dioscuri,⁵² whom we will discuss later, to remember not themselves, but other people whom they know.

The above inscription by Epagathos has a genitive object for his remembrance; “*τεῖς ἐμεῖς*,” likely a phonetic spelling of “*τῆς ἐμῆς*,” modifies it. Hajdari et al. excuse this (and other things) as a grammatical mistake by assuming that the writers happening upon this relatively remote part of the ancient world were not likely to have perfect epigraphic or grammatical skills.⁵³ Since the verb is in the third person, it may be that Anatole is the writer’s sister, but that Epagathos is not the writer. Hajdari et al. believe that the writer and Epagathos are the same person,⁵⁴ which can only be true if he switched in which person he refers to himself. This seems

⁵⁰ Hajdari 2007: 380.

⁵¹ Hajdari 2007: 365. “... suivant une formule unique ἐμνήσθη παρά τοις Διοσκόροις suivie de noms au génitif.”

⁵² Hajdari 2007: 365.

⁵³ Hajdari 2007: 366.

⁵⁴ Hajdari 2007: 380.

plausible especially if the verb *ἐμνήσθη* matters more as a signal for the *mnesthe* formula than for its proper function as a verb.

At least five of the thirteen graffiti take a genitive object; by adding two more inscriptions taking the objects in a genitive prepositional phrase with *μετά*, the inscriptions with genitive objects are in the majority. Hajdari et al. assume that the object of remembrance is the genitive object of the sentence when it is present. We can assume that the rest of the inscriptions—where only the nominative subjects are distinguishable—must either take their subjects as the people being remembered or, as Hajdari et al. believe, must have lost the fragments including their genitive objects to time. Since Hajdari et al. write in French, their translations use the phrase “*se souvenir de*” for forms of *mnesthe*, which includes the possessive preposition *de*. Does this create a bias towards the Greek genitives serving as objects? I have chosen to translate them as objects, and will explain this rationale in the final chapter.

11 of the 13 *mnesthe* inscriptions which Hajdari et al. present use *ἐμνήσθη* or *ἐμνήσθησαν*—a singular or plural form in the indicative mood. Sometimes, *ἐμνήσθη* appears not at the very beginning of the inscription, but rather in the middle. Again, the phrase “*se souvenir de*” may affect translation as a reflexive verb which translates to the active “to remember” in English. Could the verb’s reflexivity affect the voice of the French translation? By now we may consider that the mechanisms dictating the meaning of “*mnesthe*” can be interpreted in several ways. What determines whether we interpret *mnesthe* as an active or passive verb in English? Could the formula be something besides a request that the nominative name be remembered? What if the meaning changes drastically over different times and locations? This depends on the function of *ἐμνήσθη* versus *μνησθή*; here I translate the former as “to remember,” like Hajdari et al., the specifications of which I will also cover in my last chapter.

Who’s Asking?

As mentioned before, visitors to the bay requested remembrance not for themselves, but for others whom they knew. The relationships included in the *mnesthe* inscriptions range from familial ties like Epagathos’s sister Anatole above to professional and geographical connections; two of the inscriptions refer to these companions as “συνδούλοι” (and some non-*mnesthe* inscriptions mention “συνστρατιώτοι”)—fellow slaves (and soldiers) of the writers:

Ἐμνήσθη
 Τρύφων παρὰ
 τοῖς Διοσκόροις
 μετ[ὰ τ]ων συν-
 [δούλω]ν Μάρ-
 [κου, Κερ]κηνί-
 [ου]⁵⁵

“Tryphon remembered Marcus [and] Kerkenios, alongside the Dioscuri, with his fellow-slaves,”
 and

[Ἐμνήσθη...]
 [παρὰ τοῖς Διο-]
 σκ[όροις μετὰ] τῶν
 Σα...κισ... ἐξελευ-
 θέρων πάντων
 καὶ συνδούλων κ[.]

⁵⁵ *REG* 120.2.A.1. Hajdari 2007: 375. It is possible that, as they’re in the genitive, Marcus and Kerkenios may be either objects of *ἐμνήσθη* or the names of the *συνδούλων* (and thus relegated to the prepositional phrase).

...μεαλλιον Φιλιπ-

[που], Δ...σ...ντης,

...ον...⁵⁶

“... remembered Philippos... alongside the Dioscuri, with ... all the freedmen and fellow-slaves
...”

Though the latter inscription is broken at the top and does not legibly include “ἐμνήσθη” any more, Hajdari et al. infer it from its similarity to Tryphon’s wish for his fellow-slaves.⁵⁷ Instead it is more useful for us to compare the use of genitives and reference to the Dioscuri with all of the other Grammata *mnesthe*, as these two traits are the most common among them.

Another inscription makes a general plea for everyone “ἐν οἴκῳ:”

Ἐμνήσθη

Πέλλας τ-

ῶν ἐν οἴκῳ⁵⁸

“Pellas remembered those in the household.”

This phrase applied not necessarily to a person’s family, but to everyone in their home, including extended family, slaves, and in some cases even visitors. A “household” in many ancient cultures often extended further than the modern, Western idea of a “nuclear family.” It “covered not only people but property, land, and animals as well,” according to the Oxford Classical Dictionary.⁵⁹ In Hellenic Epirus, it seems people writing *mnesthe* graffiti focused on their families and acquaintances’ wellbeing far more than their self-focused counterparts in Dura, many centuries later.

⁵⁶ REG 120.2.I.6. Hajdari 2007: 376.

⁵⁷ Hajdari 2007: 376.

⁵⁸ REG 120.2.F.16. Hajdari 2007: 378.

⁵⁹ Foxhall 2012. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2012 s.v. *household*, *Greek*, [Oxford: Oxford University Press]

The visitors to Grammata Bay tend to add some sort of regional information to their own names with about the same frequency as they mention the Dioscuri (that is, in six of 13 inscriptions) :

Μνήσθη

Λαοδίκεια Ἐπιρωτικ[ά]⁶⁰

“Laodikeia the Epirote remembered...”



A map of the Mediterranean with the rough locations of the cities and region mentioned in Grammata *mnesthe* inscriptions.

At least six personal names—and perhaps several more that are too fragmentary to be certain—precede the names of different cities, turned into demonymic adjectives like “Epirote” above. These locations include Sebastia, Ilion (presumably Ἴλιος, ancient Troy), Epirus, Heraclea in Pontus, and Phocaea—all except Epirus are cities in Asia Minor or Samaria. These

⁶⁰ *REG* 120.2.H.1. Hajdari 2007: 381-382.

visitors' routes to Grammata Bay likely took them over sea or along roads like the Via Egnatia through the Balkans,⁶¹ and their presence in Epirus implies a journey across the Adriatic or Ionian Sea, to or from Italy.

One inscription showcases an unusual name for the supposed time period:

Ἐμνήσθη

Ἀντώνιο[ς]

Φο[ύλβιο]ς

Πλόκαμο[ς]

[---]λείτα⁶²

“Antonius Fulvius Plocamus remembered...”

The full Roman *tria nomina* likely dates the inscription to the first century BC (out of the fourth- to first-century time range estimated by Hajdari et al.), given Rome's standardization of *cognomina* closer to that time. There is a chance that Antonius was an elite Roman traveling through the area earlier than that timeframe, but it is more likely that he was one of many citizens now more likely to have three names. Since Grammata Bay also includes exclusively Latin inscriptions from the Imperial Period, it may actually be that Antonius, as a Greek-speaking Roman citizen, wrote the only non-Latin inscription from this time period, a few centuries after the date range set for all of the *mnesthe* inscriptions.

By the (Two) Gods

At Grammata Bay in particular, Hajdari et al. claim that Hellenistic inscriptions “very frequently” invoke the Dioscuri—the mythological, deified twins Castor and Pollux, famous for

⁶¹ Hajdari 2007: 368.

⁶² Hajdari 2007: 385.

their ties to nautical activity. Out of all of the gods addressed on the cliffs, the bay's *mnesthe* inscriptions only refer to the Dioscuri.

The primary version of this address is “παρὰ τοῖς Διοσκόροις,” as shown in several of the inscriptions above. However, one inscription simply addresses “the gods” (τοῖς θεοῖς):

Εὐήμερος
δοῦλος Ἑ-
ρμοκράτου
καὶ Δημητρί-
ου Ἰλιέων ἐ-
μνήσθη πα-
ρὰ τοῖς θε-
οῖς⁶³

“Euemeros, the slave of Hermokrates and Demetrios, remembered the Ilians alongside the gods.”

This inscription is challenging, since—based on the formats of the other Grammata *mnesthe* inscriptions—Hermokrates and Demetrios’s names should be the objects of the sentence.

However, they appear in front of the verb instead of behind it. None of the other inscriptions place genitive objects here; since the names seem to modify *δοῦλος*, while the number of *Ἰλιέων* leaves a slight disconnect between it and the two names, I have interpreted Hermokrates and Demetrios as Euemeros’s owners (and possibly the Ilians who are the true genitive object, but this is left unclear).

Another may mention the twin deities through an intermediary:

Μνησθής ὁ ἄρ-
χιερεύς της ὑ-

⁶³ *REG* 120.2.F.8. Hajdari 2007: 381.

γίας Ἀπολλω-
 νίου του Διο-
 γένους⁶⁴

“May you, high-priest, remember the health of Apollonios son of Diogenes.”

This high priest is the only solid evidence for a sanctuary in the area⁶⁵—all the rest is conjecture based on the religious content of many other inscriptions.

The first of these two variations should be familiar as the exact phrasing suggested in Baird’s definition of Durene graffiti, but here at Grammata Bay context implies that Euemeros is addressing the Dioscuri specifically. Since no other deities appear in the *mnesthe* inscriptions here, the “θεοῖς” are most likely the Dioscuri alone. The second may imply the existence of a cult in the bay (it is uncertain how permanent this would be due to a lack of archaeological evidence), the ideal location for gods in charge of nautical protection.

The Dioscuri appear in Greek mythological literature as protectors of sailors at the earliest in the Homeric Hymns:

...children who are deliverers of men on earth
 and of swift-going ships when stormy gales
 rage over the ruthless sea. Then the ship-
 men call upon the sons of great Zeus
 with vows of white lambs, going to the forepart
 of the prow; but the strong wind and the waves of the sea
 lay the ship under water, until suddenly these two are seen
 darting through the air on tawny wings.

⁶⁴ REG 120.2.K.3. Hajdari 2007: 386.

⁶⁵ Hajdari 2007: 365-366, 369.

Forthwith they allay the blasts of the cruel winds
and still the waves upon the surface of the white sea:
fair signs are they and deliverance from toil. And when the shipmen see them
they are glad and have rest from their pain and labour.⁶⁶

Hajdari et al. identify the gods playing this same role at multiple instances in Classical theater, and that Plutarch also interprets their appearance as a sign of naval success in battle.⁶⁷ Diodorus Siculus wrote in the first century BCE that, when the mythical brothers joined the voyage of the *Argo*, a terrible storm hit them at sea. The crew's prayers for safety were answered, and simultaneously two stars appeared over the twins' heads. Because of this, sailors attributed delivery from dangerous weather to the Dioscuri.⁶⁸ Many other ancient sources assert the same thing: "the role of the Dioscuri remains decisive, when a storm suddenly strikes and one does not hesitate, when one must go to sea, to place oneself under the protection of the Dioscuri."⁶⁹ Magna Graecia and Sicily in particular seemed keen on the brothers' nautical powers, since they appeared commonly on various states' currency.⁷⁰ They enjoyed a centuries-long major reputation as protectors of sailors and those at sea.

When the *mnesthe* formula disappears among later inscriptions at Grammata Bay, so do the Dioscuri. In fact, a new class of inscriptions in the bay, starting around the time of the first century BC, are entirely in Latin. These consist primarily of personal names and do not mention the Dioscuri (or use the *mnesthe* format) at all. Following this stage chronologically, later Greek inscriptions on the cliffs of Grammata date entirely to the medieval era; again, none of them include the *mnesthe* format. Medieval visitors wrote to the Christian God to pray for his aid for

⁶⁶ *HH* 33.6-17. Translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White.

⁶⁷ Hajdari 2007: 361.

⁶⁸ Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 4.43.

⁶⁹ Hajdari 2007: 362. "... le rôle des Dioscures reste décisif, lorsque la tempête survient à l'improviste et on n'hésite pas, lorsqu'il faut prendre la mer, à se placer sous la protection des Dioscures."

⁷⁰ Hajdari 2007: 364. These cities include: Tarentum, Paestum, Locri, Rhegion, Catania, Messina, and Syracuse.

themselves—not others—during storms.⁷¹ This is not quite the same request as the one made by their Hellenistic predecessors, but since the earlier visitors also called for the attention of nautical protectors, their sentiments do resemble each other.

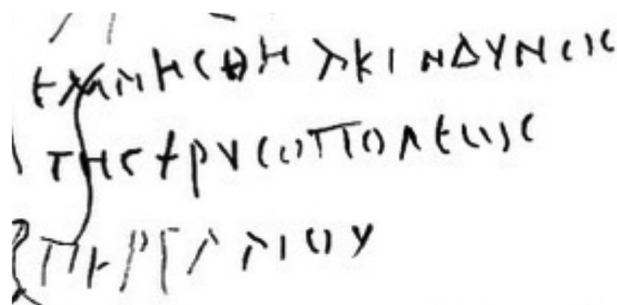
⁷¹ Hajdari 2007: 372.

Italy: Travel and Variation

As we look further west, instances of *mnesthe* tend to concentrate far less than in Syria—both geographically and temporally. While Epirus and the regions near it have their hotspots as well, Italy marks the farthest recorded reaches of the word in inscriptions. Nine different localities throughout the peninsula, including and further south than Rome itself, feature the formula.⁷² However, most areas only contain one or two inscriptions, and their dates range from the first century (or earlier) to the fourth. Here I will discuss 11 inscriptions in the area of modern Naples (Entries 114-124), all of which appear as graffiti on plaster walls. Like those written at Dura-Europos and Grammata Bay, they are hand-written, personal inscriptions incorporating the *mnesthe* formula.

Puteoli

Six of the graffiti in the Naples area are on the walls of two *tabernae* in Puteoli:



Sketch of “ἐμνήσθη Ἀκίνδυνος...” (EDR177754), below.

Ἐμνήσθη Ἀκίνδυνος

τῆς χρυσοπόλεως

Περγάμου⁷³

⁷² They are: Rome, its port Ostia, the island of Ponza, Puteoli, Pompeii, its neighbor Oplontis, Agrigentum, Hydruntum, and Veretum.

⁷³ EDR177754. Camodeca 2018: 211.

“May Akindynos, of the golden city of Pergamum, be remembered.”⁷⁴

This inscription, crammed in among a mess of other graffiti, uses *ἐμνήσθη* along with a nominative subject and the genitives modifying it. The lofty description of Akindynos’s town Pergamum here is not alone; geographic praise abounds in all but one of the inscriptions from Puteoli.

Ἐμνήσθη Κάνωπος⁷⁵

“May Canopus be remembered,”

refers to a port town in Egypt, and

Μνη(σ)θῶσι

Μοψαῖοι οἱ πα-

ρὰ τῷ Πυράμῳ

ποταμῷ⁷⁶

“May the Mopsians on the river Pyramus be remembered,”

refers to a specific group of people from Mopsos (or, more commonly, Mopsuestia⁷⁷), a town on the coast of Cilicia. The writers even refer to local geography, mentioning the river Pyramus near Mopsos.

Two more of the *taberna* inscriptions mention not exactly a location, but rather a personification of Rome itself:

Μνη(σ)θῆ ἡ κυρία τοῦ

κόσμου Ῥώμη,

μνη(σ)θῆ ὁ γράψας

⁷⁴ For the reasoning behind translating this *ἐμνήσθη* (and others in this chapter) into the passive while the Grammata Bay *ἐμνήσθη* are in the active, see “Subject or Object? The Question of Translation,” below.

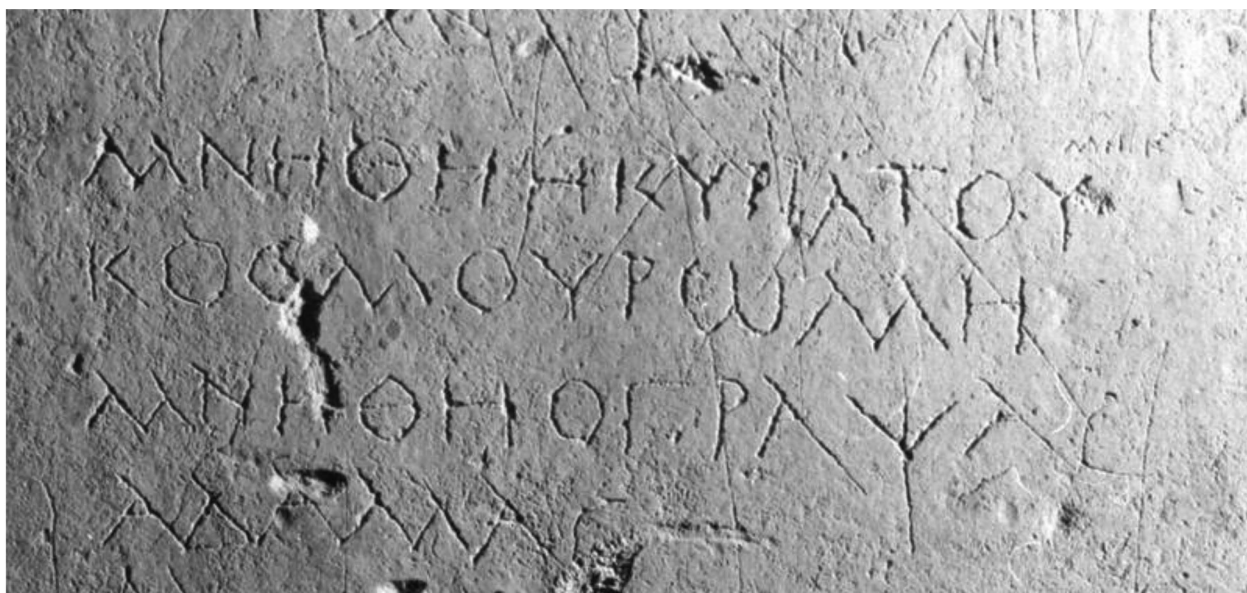
⁷⁵ EDR178202. Camodeca 2018: 216.

⁷⁶ Camodeca 2018: 214.

⁷⁷ Procopius, *On Buildings*, 5.5.1; Stephanos of Byzantium, *Ethnica*, M459.1.

Ἀδάμας⁷⁸

“May the ruler of the world, Roma, be remembered, may the writer, Adamas, be remembered.”



Photograph of “μνηθῆ ἡ κυρία...” (EDR164945).

The inscription includes a spelling of *μνησθῆ* which drops its sigma—a purposeful move, based on its repetition, which denotes the writer’s nonstandard pronunciation of the word—and

Μνησθῆ ἀληθῶς ἡ κυρία
 τοῦ κόσμου Ῥώμη καὶ μνησθῶσι
 οἱ γράψαντες Ἐφήμερος καὶ Λύκιος
 οἱ Λύκωνος Λύκιοι⁷⁹

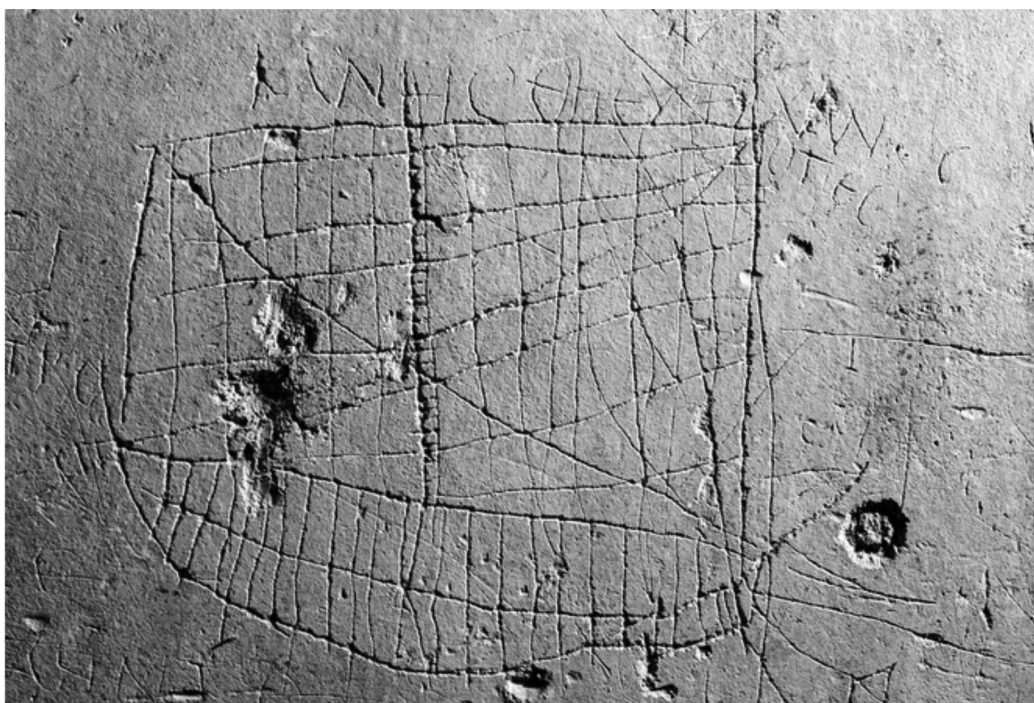
“Let the ruler of the world, Roma, truly be remembered and let the writers, Ephemeros and Lycios, the sons of Lykon, of Lycia, be remembered.”

Both begin with a nod to the wide reach of the Roman Empire and end with an equal level of consideration for the writers themselves—as well as the latters’ home region, Lycia. They and the Mopsians are far from their homes in Asia Minor.

⁷⁸ EDR164945. Camodeca 2018: 215.

⁷⁹ EDR177798. Camodeca 2018: 209.

One possible explanation for this distance may appear in another inscription—not in its written content, but as a drawing:



Photograph of “μνησθῆ Εὐτυχιανός” with a boat (EDR178718).

Μνησθῆ Εὐτυχιανός

ὁ περ

((:navis))⁸⁰

“Let Eutyichianos, the boy, be remembered.”

A large drawing of a ship accompanies the graffito. In a port town like Puteoli, it’s possible that many of the patrons of these *tabernae* were sailors from places as far away as Asia Minor, as well as proud supporters of the Roman Empire and slaves (as the word “boy” might imply in Eutyichianos’s inscription).

Two of these inscriptions use *ἐμνήσθη*, while the other four opt for *μνησθῆ* (and *μνησθῶσι*, its plural counterpart). The former two come from the same *taberna*, as do three of the

⁸⁰ EDR178718. Camodeca 2021.

four inscriptions with subjunctive verb forms. Finally, the subjunctive inscriptions have a date range from 101 to 140 AD, while the indicative ones begin at 115 and end in 140. This overlap in the two verb forms' use implies that the second century AD saw their use (perhaps being introduced at slightly different times) in port towns, introduced by sailors.

Pompeii

Two inscriptions in Pompeii, however, use the indicative *ἐμνήσθη* during the first century AD (before 79, of course), some time before their Puteoli counterparts:

Ἐμνήσθη Θεόφι-
λος Βερόης ἐπ' ἀ-
γαθῷ παρὰ τῇ κυρία⁸¹

“Theophilos son of Beroe remembered in good faith alongside the lady.”

“The lady,” *τῇ κυρία*, refers to an unnamed goddess.

Ἀμέριμνος ἐμνήσθη ἀρμονίας τῆς εἰδίας κυρία[ς]
ἐπ' ἀγαθῷ ἢς ὁ ἀριθμὸς ΑΛΕ τοῦ καλοῦ ὀνόματος.⁸²

“Amerimnos remembered the temperament of his own mistress, in good faith, the number of whose beautiful name is 1035.”

Several sources cite the goddess Isis as the most likely reference for the first inscription's *κυρία*, since she appears under that title in other Pompeian inscriptions.⁸³ In both, the phrase *ἐπ' ἀγαθῷ*, if it follows the example of Thucydides, likely means something along the lines of “for... [a] good purpose,”⁸⁴ or my preferred translation “in good faith.” The second inscription contains an

⁸¹ EDR165180 = *CIL* 4.4189. Varone 2012: 225.

⁸² EDR165178 = *CIL* 4.4839. Varone 2002: 130.

⁸³ *CIL* 4.4189. Varone 2012: 225.

⁸⁴ Thuc. 1.131.1.7. The original text is “*οὐκ ἐπ' ἀγαθῷ*,” or “for no good purpose.” This full translation may give more of a sense of the intentions behind “*ἐπ' ἀγαθῷ*.”

isopsephia, a sort of word puzzle in which letters are assigned number values and readers must guess which letters satisfy both mathematical and spelling requirements. Here, for example, the name “Doxa” might solve the riddle.⁸⁵ The word *ἀρμονίας* can mean not only “temperament” or “harmony,” but “physical figure;” given the romantic tone of the graffito, any or several of these meanings may apply.

A third inscription in Pompeii, whose date is only narrowed down to a time before 79 AD, uses the same form twice:

Μνήσθη Πρειμ(ογ)ένης πύπλεικος Καίσαρος

...ο...ε...

μν[ή]σθη πρι...⁸⁶

“Let Primogenes, the public slave of Caesar, be remembered...”

...

Let... be remembered...”

The two instances of *mnesthe* are interpreted as the indicative form by the *CIL*, but it is possible that the form could be the subjunctive instead, given the lack of any augmented epsilon. With no evidence of the presence of accents nor any way to look at a sketch of the graffito, we cannot know for sure. I have translated them as subjunctives here, in the absence of any discernible object for the verbs.

Oplontis

Nearby, at the Villa Poppaea (or Villa A) in Oplontis, the ashes of Vesuvius preserved at least 68 inscriptions; only 22 of them are “verbal,” while a larger part are drawings and

⁸⁵ Varone 2002: 130.

⁸⁶ *CIL* 4.6828.

numerals.⁸⁷ Since the graffiti with meaningful sentences are so few, it is significant that two of them are *mnesthe* dating to the first century AD:

Μνησθῆ

Βηρύλλος⁸⁸

“Let Beryllos be remembered.”



Photograph of “μνησθῆ Βηρύλλος” (Benefiel 2019: Fig. 19.18).

The inscription was originally thought to be a threat against a specific, historical Beryllos.⁸⁹

Μνησθ[ῆ]

Εὐόπης

“Let Euopes be remembered.”

⁸⁷ Benefiel 2019: 2002.

⁸⁸ *SEG* 29.971. Benefiel 2019: 2042.

⁸⁹ Benefiel 2019: 2040.

This graffito also includes two vertical scores on either side of the name “Euopes.” These markings do not appear elsewhere, and the two words seem to be written in different hands.⁹⁰



Photograph of “μνησθη Ευόπης” (Benefiel 2019: Fig. 19.17).

Again, no accent markings are visible, so we cannot determine whether either of these is as an unaugmented *ἐμνήσθη* or an unaccented *μνησθη*. It seems most likely, based on the inclusion only of the verb and a name, that the writers meant them to be subjunctive requests to remember Beryllos and Euopes.

⁹⁰ Benefiel 2019: 2041.

Analysis & Conclusion

The ancients recognized the popularity of the *mnesthe* formula on some level—in the *Moralia*, Plutarch argues in an essay titled “On Curiosity” against concerning oneself with trivial information, even when it is presented for the general public to read. One of his examples for this sort of announcement is a graffito he may theoretically encounter on a run-of-the-mill journey or daily walk: “so-and-so ‘commemorates,’ so-and-so [ἐμνήσθη ὁ δεῖνα τοῦ δεῖνος].”⁹¹ Was this the first format that came to his mind? It doesn’t seem to be for him a separate or distinctive category as I discuss it here, but the fact that the entire phrase hinges on the certainty of the word ἐμνήσθη proves that its presence and standardization by Plutarch’s time was strong enough to be well-defined and easily recognizable. Plutarch’s example also stands completely devoid of any religious reference, satisfying only the barest requirements of a subject, a verb, and an object. This genitive object, necessary as it seems in his writing, appears in none of the Durene *mnesthe*—though it certainly does at Grammata Bay, in Italy, and elsewhere. Still, we cannot be wholly sure of many Durene inscriptions due to their fragmented state.

Subject or Object? The Question of Translation

The Liddel dictionaries offer a wide variety of options for μμνήσκω in the middle and passive voices—all of the forms of *mnesthe* we cover here are passive. A general definition includes “to remind oneself of, call to mind,” but attests to the passive “to be remembered” appearing, but not in early prose.⁹² “To remember” appears with the possibility of either a

⁹¹ *Mor.* 520 d-e. (and translation by W. C. Helmbold).

⁹² *LSJ* s.v. μμνήσκω B. Sources mentioned with a passive translation include the Book of Ezekiel (18.22) in the Septuagint, placing this usage as early as the third century BC.

genitive or an accusative object, though the genitive is more common, used in Homer at the earliest.⁹³

However, no literary precedents for the specific usage of *ἐμνήσθη* and *μνησθῆναι* appear among these examples, but rather later, in conjunction with the more active definition “to make mention of” with a genitive object.⁹⁴ A passage from Lysias uses *ἐμνήσθη*: “ἐγὼ ἐμνήσθην Ἐρατοσθένους,” or “I mentioned Eratosthenes.”⁹⁵ Xenophon also uses *μνησθῆναι* to an external effect:

ἐάν τις τοῦ λοιποῦ μνησθῆναι δίχα τὸ στράτευμα ποιεῖν...

This can be translated as: “if any man from this time forth should suggest dividing the army...”⁹⁶

Here Xenophon and Lysias both imply recitation of a thought to others. The same appears twice in Plato’s *Ion* to the same effect.⁹⁷ In all four examples, the nominatives *τις* and *ἐγὼ* are the subjects in English, not the objects of the action. Intriguingly, if this concept applied to graffiti, readers may have interpreted the verb not only as an act of simply “remembering”—like the single-meaning English verb which we assign to *μνησθῆναι* would elicit—but perhaps reading aloud or informing others of its object. This supports the notion that the nominative subject of *μνησθῆναι* is actually the one recalling or remembering, not the object of the action like the subject of a passive or middle verb would normally be.

Despite this, Baird’s translation of “μνησθῆναι” as a passive “let... be remembered,” attested as we mentioned above, implies that the nominative governing name is the object of the action by merit of a passive verb. Since both an active and a passive translation can be drawn from

⁹³ *LSJ* s.v. *μυμήσκω* B.

⁹⁴ *LSJ* s.v. *μυμήσκω* B.Π.

⁹⁵ Lys. 1.19. (and translation by W. R. M. Lamb).

⁹⁶ Xen. Anab. 6.4.11.2 (and translation by Carleton L. Brownson).

⁹⁷ “ἐπειδὴν δὲ τις περὶ Ὁμήρου μνησθῆναι...” - “whereas if anyone mentions something connected with Homer...” (Plat. *Ion* 532c2); “περὶ μὲν Ὁμήρου ὅταν τις μνησθῆναι” - “when the subject of Homer is mentioned” (Plat. *Ion* 536c6-7).

passive verbs like *μνησθῆ*, *ἐμνήσθη*, and *μνησθείης*, we must turn to grammatical context like the objects of the verbs in order to discern which is best. For *μνησθῆ*, the overwhelming amount of inscriptions including it are at Dura-Europos. None of them include any form of “object.” Because of this, it makes more sense to agree with Baird’s “let... be remembered” formula, rather than “let... remember” with no object to be remembered. *Μνησθείης* and other forms of the passive subjunctive follow the same logic, with adjustments made for person and number.

Ἐμνήσθη is more challenging, since a large part of the inscriptions have a mix of objects. The inscriptions of Grammata Bay and various towns around the Bay of Naples include ten with no object, five with a genitive one, and one with an accusative. The presence of these objects and the shift to an indicative statement (as a subjunctive request would get its subject from the readers from whom it requests action) favor the conclusion that the verb means “... remembered...”

Despite the official grammatical rules and literary evidence, there is still the possibility of different dialects and especially different registers of writing affecting whether a nominative name is the actor or object of a remembrance. Likely as a direct result of its wide and varied use across a large geographic span, multiple nationalities and ethnicities, and many other social groups. In practice, the passive translation proves more logical in Italy, while the active translation better serves the inscriptions at Grammata Bay. For example, *ἐμνήσθη Κάνωπος*,⁹⁸ “Canopus remembered,” from Puteoli, describes a city. Interpreting the verb as one would *μνησθῆ* would allow the phrase to become “Let Canopus be remembered,” a far more logical sentence in a port *taberna*, since a statement about a city itself remembering something is less plausible. Several more inscriptions exist like it, all from the Italian towns. Since variations in the meaning of the verb can only be expected from a trend spanning hundreds of miles and years;

⁹⁸ EDR178202. Camodeca 2018: 216.

the *ἐμνήσθη* of Grammata Bay may be different in English than those of Pompeii. Change is always a potential factor, whether it comes from grammatical errors or differences in dialect. For these reasons, I have elected to translate “*ἐμνήσθη*” in the passive at Grammata Bay, and in the active among the Italian sample.

Bilingualism

As mentioned previously, we cannot assume ‘graffiti’-writers of ancient times committed vandalism; so we must also remove the stigma that the writers and their content are wholly unintelligent simply due to their informality. The possibility still exists for them to come from many walks of life and thus many levels of education.

For this reason we do not know the likelihood that the average inscriber or indeed the average citizen of Dura or the area around Vesuvius (or sailors visiting Italy and Epirus) were fluent in Greek; the percentage of the population with at least basic literacy is similarly challenging to determine. What certainly stands out is that the wall-scrappers represented a diverse range of peoples and likely languages: for example, as mentioned before, more than half of the names with identifiable origins mentioned in Durene *mnesthe* inscriptions were non-Greek—Roman, Persian, or from one of several Semitic groups. We can also see imperfect Greek and possible accents elsewhere: a previously mentioned inscription from Grammata Bay includes the phrase *τεῖς ἐμεῖς*,⁹⁹ a strange dative form, while an inscription from Puteoli spells *μνησθη* as *μνηθη*.¹⁰⁰

Since *mnesthe* inscriptions might not follow standard Greek grammar in their meaning, it may help to consider whether non-Greek conventions influenced their use. Studies on ancient

⁹⁹ *REG* 120.2.A.2. Hajdari 2007: 379-380.

¹⁰⁰ EDR164945. Camodeca 2018: 215.

bilingualism assert that inscriptions with visible bilingual influence “cannot necessarily be taken at face value as an indication of the writer’s bilingual competence or of the state of one or both of the languages in contact,” nor “assessed purely in linguistic terms.”¹⁰¹ Surely a message’s mere presence at a site so steeped in different languages and cultures should receive the same treatment. This concurs with Baird’s description of Dura, a hub for linguistic and cultural exchange near the limits of the Roman Empire and the meeting points of the Hellenic and Eastern worlds by the time of its demise, and the nature of harbors and port towns like Grammata Bay or Puteoli.

Throughout the eastern Empire, Roman military and governmental titles in particular appear in Semitic inscriptions not as Latin loanwords, but from their Greek counterpart terms (or at the very least hellenized Latin loanwords). The loanwords *stator* and *beneficiarius* in some of the Durene graffiti are prime examples of words taken from Latin but spelled phonetically in Greek, presumably for ease of reading and pronunciation:

Μν(ησθη) ετους κφ’

Ῥαββουλα̃

στατωρ¹⁰²

“Let Rabboula the attendant be remembered in the year 520,”

depicts a man with a Semitic name and a Roman title. The three language groups act on different aspects of his life: Semitic and Latin delineate Rabboula’s personal and official identity in their brief usage, while Greek functions as the grand communicator of information for what we may assume is the most readers possible (an early *lingua franca*).

¹⁰¹ Rostovtzeff 1944: 3.

¹⁰² *SEG* 7.526 = PH320767. Rostovtzeff 1929: 37, no. 11. The date 520, adjusted to modern years, is 208/9 AD.

Adams et al. also recognized this dynamic in the eastern Roman provinces. Whereas Latin seemed to overpower languages like Gallic in western areas of Roman conquest, Greek did not do the same when it became imperially enforced on the East by Alexander, several centuries before Roman presence in the region. Though historians like Josephus expressed conquered nations' discontent with the "gunboat linguistics" policy forcing (or at least heavily encouraging) them to hellenize, the magnitude of Greek influence in the region limited itself to what Adams et al. refer to as High coding. In bilingual societies where one language takes the more formal role, it is referred to as a High language while its informally-coded counterpart is a Low language.¹⁰³

This tradition of *diglossia* and the comfort with multilingualism that accompanied it,¹⁰⁴ absent in Gaul and other Roman provinces where people began to speak Latin at home as well as in official contexts, existed among Near Eastern kingdoms before the presence of Greek so that rulers were disturbed by the appearance of new languages for which they could not hire an interpreter.¹⁰⁵ The dichotomy allowed Greek to take over as the reigning High language of the East as Latin did in the West without shaking the integrity of Low dialects. Given its strong presence in the region by Roman times, the empire evidently grew content with using it as a more ubiquitous High language rather than restarting the whole process with Latin.

Alloglottography and *Dkyr*

With new Latin and old Semitic underpinnings to an overwhelmingly Greek public standard, Durene graffiti follows a complicated mixture of their epigraphic traditions. Grammatical mistakes like the potential issues of case meanings in *mnesthe* inscriptions may be the result of an inscriber's unfamiliarity with the language they use when it's not their native

¹⁰³ Adams 2002: 12.

¹⁰⁴ Adams 2002: 9.

¹⁰⁵ Adams 2002: 12.

tongue, but it may also be a case of *alloglottography*. While a second language’s “interference” on a text is “usually not intentional,” translators sometimes register examples where “the use of one language... represent[s] an utterance in another language” in a way that must be done on purpose given the unmistakable similarities between the translated phrase and a potential source.¹⁰⁶ While many examples highlight the use of words in a translated phrase that are phonetically similar to those from the original language, the notion extends to syntactic patterns, loanwords, contexts, and meanings “due to a conscious *symmetry*, even if that meant departing” from the conventions of one of the languages.¹⁰⁷

For example, an epitaph in Dura for one Julius Terentius, though written entirely in Greek, concludes with *ἐλαφρὰ καλύψαι τε γαῖα*:¹⁰⁸ “may the light earth cover him.” Every Latin epigrapher should find this phrase familiar—*STTL*, or *sit tibi terra levis*, is a hallmark funereal phrase used on Roman tombstones as frequently as modern anglophonic graves feature ‘RIP.’ With almost the same meaning as the Greek above, *STTL* is the unassailable inspiration for its inclusion in a Roman-named man’s epitaph. In addition, the Latin stock phrase almost always appears at the end of the funereal inscriptions which include it. That its Greek substitute occupies the same space is no accident—in writing this inscription, Terentius’s family evidently decided that Latin would reach a narrower audience than Greek in Dura. However, they did not have to forsake Latin epigraphic conventions despite changing languages.

For potential candidates for alloglottographic inspiration regarding *mnesthe*, we will look to Syrian inscriptions in other, Semitic languages. Greek graffiti may inhabit a mess of various

¹⁰⁶ Adams 2002: 4. Here, Adams et al. assume that, when the “interference” is intentional, the author would make it exceedingly obvious that they did it on purpose—for humor, irony, or some other reason. Surely no one would ever want to suffer the embarrassment from allowing the knowledge of one language to affect their performance in another. Given the well-known challenges of language-learning, I fail to understand why this would embarrass more than a handful of exceptionally proud people (much less enough for it to be common enough to consider while debating intentionality), but humanity has never been terribly logical.

¹⁰⁷ Adams 2002: 4.

¹⁰⁸ Rostovtzeff 1944: 176-185

inscriptional databases, academic articles, and reports from excavations, but experts on the ancient Near East like Robert Hoyland very confidently claim that “the vast majority of the some six thousand published Nabataean graffiti (which constitutes approximately ninety percent of all published Nabataean texts)” are comprised of three simple formats. One of these three hinges on the word *dkyr* (or *dakir*), translated as “may [someone] be remembered.”¹⁰⁹ The syntactic requirements are evident in

dkyr hwrw,¹¹⁰

“let Hur be remembered.” The inscription immediately follows a primary verb with the name upon which the inscriber focuses their wish. Both the simple layout and the definition of the verb mirror the *mnesthe* format. If there were any candidate for an alloglottographic connection to the *mnesthe* format, *dkyr* would be most likely.

The majority of *dkyr* inscriptions fall within the Roman provinces of Syria and Arabia, and the format seems to have a more scrutable presence than *mnesthe* does in the Mediterranean. They mostly appear written on rock faces and cliffs outside of settlements, garnering an association in most articles with shepherds, travellers, and others out in the wilderness for extended periods of time. Joseph Naveh dates several thousand graffiti including, yet again, a prominent population of *dkyr*-format messages to the second and third centuries.¹¹¹ Several of the other inscriptions I found date as early as the first century AD. These dates fall short of the earliest *mnesthe*, from Grammata Bay, so we cannot attribute the existence of the formula to its Nabataean counterpart.

¹⁰⁹ Hoyland 2004: 185. The other two formats revolve around *šlm* (“may... be blessed”) and *bryk* (“may... be blessed”). They follow a similar format to *dkyr*, and though Hoyland does not elaborate on the frequency of each of the three formats, it is safe to assume that mentioning them as the ‘top three’ inscription formats likely means that they appear at a relatively similar rate to each other. It is even safer to assume that, as even the least frequent of these three formats, *dkyr* would still have an overwhelming presence in Nabataean graffiti.

¹¹⁰ Knauf 1997: 68-69.

¹¹¹ Naveh 1979: 72.

In analyzing an inscription with the standard *dkyr* formula, Solaiman Abd al-Rahmān al-Theeb defines it as “a noun in the masculine singular construct (passive participle)” while also acknowledging its heavy presence in Nabataean and other Semitic epigraphy. He translates the word as “the good remembrance of...”¹¹²

This leaves a new potential grammatical difference: how does one reconcile a Semitic participle functioning as a noun with a Greek verb? Evidently the ancients did, as Stern notes that the heavily-inscribed walls of the Durene synagogue begin with *dkyr* inscriptions and transition to *mnesthe* operating with the same function in the final phase of the building before the fall of the city—enough for her to explicitly note the similarity between the two phrases.¹¹³ Any of these inscriptions must necessarily date to the first to third century given the fall of Dura in 256 and the range of other inscriptions found there dating no earlier than the first century.

Another, unprovenanced inscription at the Museum of Baghdad recorded by one J. Teixidor features a dual-inscription: one side reads “Let Ogga son of Mala son of 'Ogeilu son of Taibbol be remembered, whose surname is Bar-Ahtai, forever. (In) the year 440” in Nabataean, while the other is Greek. Unfortunately only the very first word (*μνησθη*, of course) survived, but Teixidor is confident from the layout of the writing that this is most likely a correspondent Greek translation.¹¹⁴ Stern’s general observations of the phenomenon in Dura augment the certainty of this evidence of the formats’ connection elsewhere in Syria.

Still, it would not be encouraging to a grammarian that the two words do not take even the same part of speech. However, other definitions for *dkyr* paint it as a word

“often seen in graffiti, engraved by people who wrote their names in a particular place, especially along caravan roads, to indicate that they stopped at the place. The words... were indifferently

¹¹² al-Theeb 2011: 351.

¹¹³ Stern 2012: 179.

¹¹⁴ Teixidor 1963: 42.

used by the travellers before their signatures, as attested by many inscriptions. *Dkyr* does not specifically refer to the memory of a dead person,¹¹⁵

and which, along with the other two major format-words of Nabataean epigraphy, “must have effectively become ideograms, symbols expressive of a particular notion, so losing their identity as distinctive Aramaic words.”¹¹⁶ When translating from an Aramaic language into Greek—since one can assume that a man like Ogga, with his Semitic name and patrilineage, started with his native language and epigraphic tradition—a Nabataean writer would probably not agonize over finding a grammatically accurate match for such an over-familiar word.

This phenomenon could have affected the nature of the *mnesthe* formula alone: if people in a certain area write it enough, the words’ meaning will shift from a specific definition to this symbolic, general meaning. We can see this happen at Dura-Europos with the widespread use of the abbreviations $\mu\nu$ and μ ; if the verb’s tense, voice, and other details were important, this would not be the case. Instead, writers assume that their audience is familiar enough with the format to know exactly what sentiment they’re trying to convey.

Conclusion

Even though *dkyr* inscriptions could not have been the original inspiration for the *mnesthe* formula chronologically, there is still a chance that they affected its meaning, part of an evolution of the *mnesthe* format as it spread eastward over time. Before its influence, the older version of *mnesthe*, represented by the inscriptions at Grammata Bay, used the indicative $\acute{\epsilon}\mu\nu\eta\sigma\theta\eta$ almost exclusively. Its nature was at least partially religious, with almost half of the inscriptions referring to the presence of the gods. While it’s impossible to tell entirely for whom these words were written, we can consider the writers’ intentions closer to those inscribing a

¹¹⁵ Sachet 2010: 251.

¹¹⁶ Hoyland 2004: 185.

votive than later inscriptions were. Sailors and travelers passing along this dangerous coast would have certainly asked that the Dioscuri in particular simply remember them, their fellow-travelers, and the people they left at home when choosing who to protect from the sea.

Whether *mnesthe* originated in Epirus or elsewhere, its popularity with travelers likely explains how it spread so far across the Mediterranean. The first-century graffiti in Pompeii, Puteoli, and Oplontis mark a wide geographic variety of writers and a decreased religious influence. Unlike the inscriptions at Grammata Bay, they shift so much in layout, grammar, and content that we seem to be witnessing a deconstruction of the traditional *mnesthe* format: writers do not adhere to either the indicative or subjunctive form of the verb, and they add riddles and praise for the glory of Rome. The goal of these graffiti seems to tend either towards public recognition, as the *taberna* patrons from faraway places like Mopsos intended, or a more personal tone, as the man writing about his lover's name or the graffiti in private houses like the Villa Poppaea may be.

Finally, *mnesthe*'s arrival in Syria, at cities like Dura-Europos, allowed for it to come into contact with the *dkyr* format, which always begins with the wish for remembrance, followed by a governing name. As we see in almost every Durene inscription, these two qualities are their hallmark, as well. While some of the graffiti in Italy and Epirus place names before the verb and add on information besides a governing name, Durene *mnesthe* list only identifying information about the person being remembered. This format appears earlier on in Italy as well, with *μνησθῆ* *Βερόλλος* and a few others, but they are far from representing the majority of the inscriptions there. This specific format's prevalence in Dura-Europos, however, is near-total. The shift to the subjunctive *μνησθῆ* and *μνησθείης* also indicate a potential change in tone—*dkyr* inscriptions and Durene *mnesthe* both appear in far less religious contexts than the inscriptions in Epirus, instead

requesting remembrance directly from the readers instead of any gods. While there is always the chance that the religious nature of Durene graffiti was implied, they appear not just in religious establishments but in private buildings and high-traffic public spaces to a large degree. The inscribers of Dura-Europos more likely intended their message to reach anyone who walked by and read it.

Whatever the specific goals of any writer, the main aim of the *mnesthe* formula never changed from remembrance. The simplicity of this notion plus the wide variety of cultures, professions, and lifestyles connected to the people seeking remembrance exhibits at its core a common, human desire for recognition. In this they succeeded, since we can still view and discuss their words today: let us remember them.

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Appendix

Instances of *Mnēsthē*

The following page contains all of the inscriptions I compiled for this thesis. Each entry includes: reference numbers; a transcription of the original text; my own translation; the form of *mnesthe* used; the date range ascribed to it; the town or region of origin; the building or location in which the inscription is located; the physical context of the inscription, including notes about its surroundings, medium, and more; the names included, their grammatical roles within the text, and their linguistic origins; deities, cults, and religions mentioned in the inscription; and citations.

