


## Article

# The *Mustis* arch and its dedication<sup>1\*</sup>

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### Abstract

The arch of Gordian III at *Mustis* (Al Karib, Tunisia) has been the subject of scholarly work since the eighteenth century, and its dedicatory inscription has drawn the attention of antiquarians and archaeologists since the early nineteenth century. The transcription and reconstruction of its text were proposed by the editors of the eighth volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* in numbers 1577 and 1572. This version has prevailed in scientific literature ever since, even though Beschaouch announced in a short note in 1969 the discovery of a fourth block that substantially alters the information it contains. However, a comprehensive study of the complete inscription was never published due to the lack of graphic material. Thanks to the drawing by J. Vérité, the architect in charge of the monument's restoration, we can analyse the inscription as a whole. We conclude that the proposal by the *CIL* editors is incorrect, we provide the complete transcription of the epigraph, and we propose a new date for the dedication of the arch, in 240 AD.

كان قوس جورديان الثالث في موستي (الكريب، تونس) موضوعاً للبحث الأكاديمي منذ القرن الثامن عشر، وق استحوذ نقش التكريس على اهتمام الأثريين وعلماء الآثار منذ أوائل القرن التاسع عشر. وقد تم اقتراح نسخ وإعادة بناء النص من قبل محرري المجلد الثامن من مجموعة النقوش اللاتينية في الأرقام 1577 و 1572. وقد ساد هذا الحل في الأدبيات العلمية منذ ذلك الحين على الرغم من أن باش شاوش أعلن في ملاحظة قصيرة في عام 1969 عن اكتشاف الكتلة الرابعة التي تغير بشكل كبير المعلومات التي يحتوي عليها نقش التكريس. ومع ذلك، لم يتم نشر دراسة شاملة للنقش الكامل بسبب نقص المواد المرسومة. وبفضل الرسم الذي أنجزه جيه. فيرنتيه، المهندس المعماري المسؤول عن ترميم النصب التذكاري، يمكننا تحليل النقش ككل. نخلص إلى أن اقتراح محرري مجموعة النقوش اللاتينية غي صحيح، ونحن نقدم النسخ الكامل للكتابة، ونقترح تاريخاً جديداً لتكريس القوس وهو عام 240 م.

**Keywords:** arch, *Mustis*, Gordian III, inscription, Latin

In the agricultural village of El Krib, in the province of Siliana, ca. 34 ha of archaeological remains have been documented (Misiewicz *et al.* 2018, 208) identifiable with the ancient city of *Mustis*. It is located 120 km from the current capital of Tunis, in an area profusely urbanised in Roman times, 12 km from *Thugga* and 40 km from *Sicca Veneria* (Figure 1). In the second century BC, the city was founded by C. Marius for veterans, but did not attain municipal status until Caesarian or Tiberian times (Beschaouch 2014, 1589). During the reign of Marcus Aurelius it obtained the appellation *Aurelium*, probably ratifying a previous territorial enlargement ordered by Antoninus Pius<sup>2</sup> (Beschaouch 2014, 1593). Under Commodus, an evergeta (benefactor) built one of the two honorific arches documented in the city,<sup>3</sup> located on the southern boundary of the territory of *Mustis*. The remaining one, located at the eastern end of the nucleus, was erected in the time of Gordian III thanks to another evergetic donation.

The inscription recording the disbursement was placed on the west face of the arch, serving as a frieze. It is currently fragmented into four blocks. Three of them have been known since the nineteenth century, while only a single piece of information is known about the remaining one, provided by A. Beschaouch (1969) to the Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France. Although this author announced his discovery and mentioned the main aspects derived from his reading, neither a transcription of the complete text nor an exhaustive study has ever been provided. In fact, the

following published scientific works that have dealt with this inscription have either not considered the information in this fourth block or are based on the information provided by Beschaouch (1969), not supported by any study or evidentiary graphic document.

Thanks to new graphic material,<sup>4</sup> we will approach the *editio princeps* of the complete inscription and reconstruct the vicissitudes of the epigraph that crowns one of the main archaeological remains at *Mustis*: the arch dedicated to Gordian III. In addition, we present two other inscriptions probably placed on the upper part of the structure: a dedication, already known, to Gordian III and another to the *Mustitan Genius* hitherto unpublished.

### First works about the arch and the inscription

The first report of the arch, isolated and with hardly any information, is provided by M.D. Shaw (1743, 227), who visited the site in 1727 and was able to see it in a ruinous state. Otherwise, the first announcement of the inscription comes from Camillo Borgia, a Neapolitan cardinal who toured Tunisia between 1815 and 1817 with the purpose of exploring antiquities and conducting a series of excavations. According to the editors of the eighth volume of the *CIL*, there is a copy of fragment D of the inscription among his manuscripts.

The first publication is by Greenville T. Temple (1835, 351, n. 177), who copies the same block without any attempt at reconstruction or providing information on the place and conditions of the find (Figure 2). The same is done by Pellissier (1848, 395) who presents fragment D (Figure 2), although with some reading errors which were solved five years later in another work (Pellissier, 1853, 253).

In 1858, as a result of one of his trips to Tunisia and with the intention of preparing *Salammbô*, G. Flaubert (Delavoie, C-M.,

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Figure 1. Location map.

**Fragment A**

Guérin (1862)  
 292.  
 GORDIANO  
 AVG

**Fragment B**

Guérin (1862)  
 295.  
 PRO SALVTE . . . . .  
 C · CORNELIVS . . . . .  
 DI . . . . .

**Fragment C**

Greenville T. Temple (1835)  
 178.  
 . . . O COEPIT ET . .  
 . . GYMNASIO VNIV . .

Guérin (1862)  
 294<sup>a</sup>.  
 . . . . .  
 . . SVMMMA · EX TH . . . . . N QVAE  
 . . MEMORIAM · QVOND · SOCERI · SVI  
 . . STATVIS · SOLO · PVBLICO · COEPIT · ET  
 . . OMNIBVS · ET · GYMNASIO · VNIV

**Fragment D**

Greenville T. Temple (1835)  
 177.  
 . . . A CVMQV . . .  
 . . . VAE PROMISERAT . . .  
 . . TIONEM MVSTITANIS . . .  
 . . DEDICAVIT DATIS . . .  
 . . SIS PO . . . ARIBVS . . .

Pellisier (1848)  
 . . . . . RCVMQVEM  
 . . . . . VAE PROMISERAT  
 . . . . . IONEM MVSTITANIS  
 . . . . . DEDICAVIT DATIS  
 . . . SIS. PO. . . LARIBVS (2)

Pellisier (1853)  
 . . . . . CVM . . . . . M  
 . . . . . VAE PROMISERAT  
 . . . . . TIONEM MVSTITANIS  
 . . . . . DEDICAVIT DATIS  
 IS PO . . LARIBVS <sup>1</sup>

Guérin (1862)  
 293<sup>1</sup>.  
 A R C V M Q V E M  
 SVAE PROMISERAT  
 CTIONEM MVSTITANIS  
 DEDICAVIT DATIS  
 SIS POPVLARIBVS

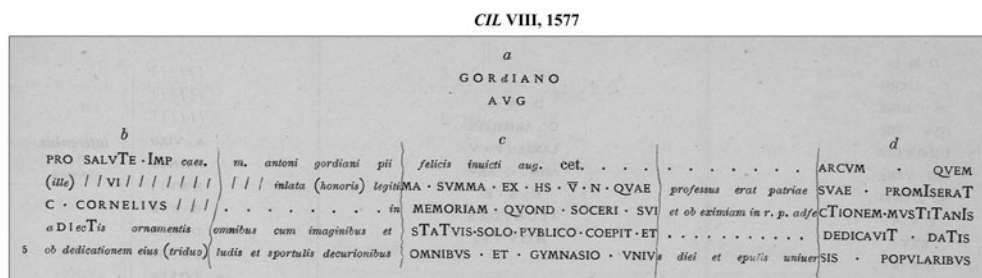


Figure 2. Readings of the main inscription of the Mustis arch according to different authors.

1999, 133–34) describes the remains of the arch, mentioning the existence of a second, less well-preserved, arch which we can identify with the one dedicated to Commodus.

Barely four years later, Guérin (1862, 100–102) provided the first scientific description of the remains of the monument, stating its measurements and locating at its base the four fragments compiled in *CIL* VIII, 1577 (Figure 2).

As early as 1881, G. Wilmanns, editor of the first part of the eighth volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, dedicated to the *Inscriptiones Africae Latinae*, presents in number 1577 the reading and reconstruction of fragments B, C and D,<sup>5</sup> together with a fourth text, called A, engraved on a block originally placed in the upper part of the arch (Figure 2). Ten years later, in number 15572 of the first volume of the supplement, R. Cagnat and I. Schmidt proposed a different solution for the end of the second line. This suggestion, with minor variations, has prevailed in the scientific literature ever since. The first person to compile this proposal was J.C. Rockwell in his PhD dissertation (1909: 21, n. 88).

Shortly after the *CIL*, the architect H. Saladin (1892, 547–49) published a sketch of the arch and proposed a restitution of its original form following the classical patterns of this type of building. As we shall see, this proposal was incorrect and was corrected in the subsequent restoration project for the monument.

### Restoration and the discovery of the fourth fragment

In 1965, a team of workmen began to demolish the south end of the arch on the orders of President H. Bourguiba. However, in 1966, the project to restore the building began, transforming it into its present appearance (Vérité 1988, 54–55; 2021, 27–28). The project was awarded to J. Vérité by M. Fendri, Director of the Service du Monuments Historiques de Tunis. Beschaouch (1969, 273) refers to this work when he mentions the context of the discovery of the fourth fragment. Although he does not specify where it was found (Beschaouch 1969, 273–74; 1981, 108), we can assume that it was at the foot of the monument, as were almost all the blocks that formed part of its structure (Vérité 2021, 5).

The project to restore the arch was explained by the architect responsible for its execution in a little-known publication (Vérité 1988). However, years earlier, N. Ferchiou (1985) analysed and assessed the work carried out, concluding that certain parts of the monument, such as the cornice, were poorly restored. In particular, the author proposes that the fragments containing war-themed decorative motifs should be placed on the east side of the arch, towards *Karthago*, while the flowers and fruits would be oriented towards *Mustis* (Ferchiou 1985, 111). In this work, the author mentions for the first time another inscription related to the arch and dedicated to the *Genius Mustis Augustus* (Ferchiou 1985, 102).

The study by J. Vérité (1988; 2021) rejected Saladin's proposal. In particular, he suggests that the dedicatory inscription was placed on the frieze and not on the attic (Ferchiou 1985, 101). Furthermore, J. Vérité (2014, 3) rectified part of his own work, proposing that the head of the arch was crowned by four supports, not two: fragment A of *CIL* VIII, 1577 – our inscription no. 1, which would have supported a statue of Gordian III; *AE* 1981, 866, whose text alludes to the *C(oloniua) I(ulia) K(arthago)*; another anepigraphic block; and the inscription, already mentioned by Ferchiou, dedicated to the *Genius Mustis Augustus* – our inscription no. 3. According to Vérité (2014, 14), the inscriptions and statues of Gordian III and the *Genius* of *Mustis* would have been placed on the east side of the attic, welcoming passers-by entering the city. On the west side, on the other hand, would be placed the text referring to the city of *Karthago* and the anepigraphic block. As Vérité recognises, this new layout would fit in with the proposed placement of the cornice

enunciated years earlier by N. Ferchiou (Vérité 2021, 18). The dimensions of the four blocks, ca. 50 cm high, fit with the waiting beds documented in the upper part of the attic (Vérité 2014, 2–4). However, Beschaouch (1981, 108–109) identifies the block with the inscription *C.I.K* as a boundary marker of the territory. It was found in the vicinity of the monument, but Beschaouch does not clearly suggest its original position in relation to the arch. In any case, it seems that the monument dedicated to Gordian III served as a boundary marker for the territory of *Mustis* with respect to the *pertica Carthaginiensium* (Beschaouch 1981, 109; Ferchiou 1985, 111; Vérité 2021, 22), just as that of Commodus marked the eastern limit of the nucleus with respect to the territory of *Sicca Veneria* (Beschaouch 1981, 111–14).

### The information provided by Beschaouch and the subsequent work

Four inscriptions were associated with the arch and the present study will focus on three of them. Below, we will call inscription no. 1 the dedication in favour of the emperor Gordianus – Block A of *CIL* VIII, 1577; inscription no. 2 the main text of the arch, divided into four blocks – three of them included in *CIL* VIII, 1577, with the letters B, C and D; and inscription no. 3 which alludes to the *Genius Augustus* of the city, not included in any other repository or published work (Table 1).

The information provided by Beschaouch (1969) is not accompanied by photographs, drawings or a transcription of the full text of inscription no. 2 and, although the block B has been known since 1969, a clear picture of its text has never been published so far. Beschaouch limited himself to mentioning that the unpublished fragment B ‘donne une idée exacte de la disposition des lettres et des lignes et fait rejeter les restitutions proposées par l'éditeur du Corpus’ (Beschaouch 1969, 18). He then lists that: (1) the arch can be dated to 239 AD; (2) that its erection was promised by a perpetual flamen of *Mustis*; (3) that it was completed by his heir, a native of *Zama Regia*; (4) that the sum employed amounted to 50,000 HS; and (5) that, thanks to the expression *SVPERPOSITIS STATVIS*, we know that several effigies were originally placed on the monument.

The first researcher to echo this news is Duncan-Jones (1974, 91), who values the cost of the arch at 50,000 HS, without

**Table 1.** Table of comparisons of the inscriptions to be analysed.

Original reference of the inscriptions	Original designation ( <i>CIL</i> ) of the blocks	Reference in this work	Block designations adapted to new findings
<i>CIL</i> VIII, 1577 = 15572+ Unpublished block declared by Beschaouch (1969)	Block A	Inscription no. 1	-
	Blocks B, C and D+ unpublished block without designation	Inscription no. 2	Block B = Block A
			Block declared by Beschaouch (1969) = Block B
			Block C = Block C
			Block D = Block D
Unpublished block to the <i>Mustitan Genius</i>		Inscription no. 3	-

further details. However, in Ramírez Sádaba's tabulations (1981, 238), the cost is listed as 'more than 5,000 HS', as in a publication by Duncan-Jones (1962: 80, n. 37) prior to Beschaouch's report (1969). Beschaouch (1981, 108–109) mentions the discovery of the unpublished block again in another work, but does not provide any further details about it.

Subsequently, Wesch-Klein (1990, 150, n. 11) copies the transcription proposed by the editors of the *CIL*, but includes, in line 6, the expression *SVPERPOSITIS STATVIS*. He is followed by Fagan (1999, 274, n. 40), who gives a partial reading of the whole text, only highlighting those parts that are most interesting for his study. Saastamoinen (2010, 524, n. 550) also follows the reading of the *CIL*, broadly following Wesch-Klein's proposal. On the other hand, C. Blonce (2015) does not recognise the variants enunciated by Beschaouch. She intends to analyse the decorative motifs of the honorific arches and their meaning based on the terms of the inscriptions, but in this case she relies solely on the *CIL*'s proposal which, as we shall see, is erroneous in many of its points.

Finally, we must mention the unpublished work by Vêrité (2021) which, although focused on the restoration project of the arch, provides in annex 2 a drawing of inscription no. 2 in which, surprisingly, appears the block B enunciated by Beschaouch (1969) but never published.<sup>6</sup> In this same work, the architect mentions that 'Je n'ai pas trouvé de restitution valable (celle de l'Université de Heidelberg est erronée), je donne ici ma copie de la dédicace de la frise' (Vêrité 2021, 18).

### Inscription 1

The so-called fragment A of the edition of *CIL* VIII, 1577 is an independent inscription (Table 1). It was located during the restoration of the structure at its foot on the east side (Vêrité 2021, 14). It is a partially damaged limestone block, ca. 81 cm long, 77 cm high and 59 cm depth (Figure 3), containing the remains of the negatives of the anchor of a possible statue of the emperor (Vêrité 2021, 20). Traditionally, the reading proposed by Guérin (1862, 100) and followed by the editors of the *CIL* has been accepted (Figure 2). In contrast, the unpublished drawing by Vêrité (2021, 14) allows the inclusion of a first line, partially fragmented, which alludes to his position as emperor (Figure 3):

[I]mp(eratori) / Gordiano / Aug(usto)

The small size of the title is in keeping with the dimensions of the pedestal. In addition, the high height at which it was placed would make it unnecessary to provide further details about it.

### Inscription 2: The dedication of the arch

The remaining elements of *CIL* VIII, 1577 are from the dedicatory construction inscription. The *CIL* editor's proposal does not correspond to the Vêrité drawing (Figure 4), which in turn confirms that most of the facts announced by Beschaouch (1969) are correct. However, there are more details that need to be commented on in depth.

If we assume the reliability of J. Vêrité's drawing, which is plausible in view of the care taken in representing the scale, the breaks in the piece and the photographs of the arch available (Figure 5), we can propose the following transcription of the text:

Pro salute Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) Antoni Gordiani Pii Felicis Aug(usti) p(atrici) p(atriciae) trib(unicia) pot(estas) II co(n)s(ul) [desig(nati) II vel iter(um)] arcum quem / [-----] Ianuarius flamen per(petuus) inlata legitima summa ex HS V n(ummum) quae [patria]e suae promiserat / C(aius) Corne(lius) [Vi]talis vel [Na]talis Maior Zamensis Regius vir egr(egius) in memoriam quod soceri sui [et ad]fectionem Mustitanis /

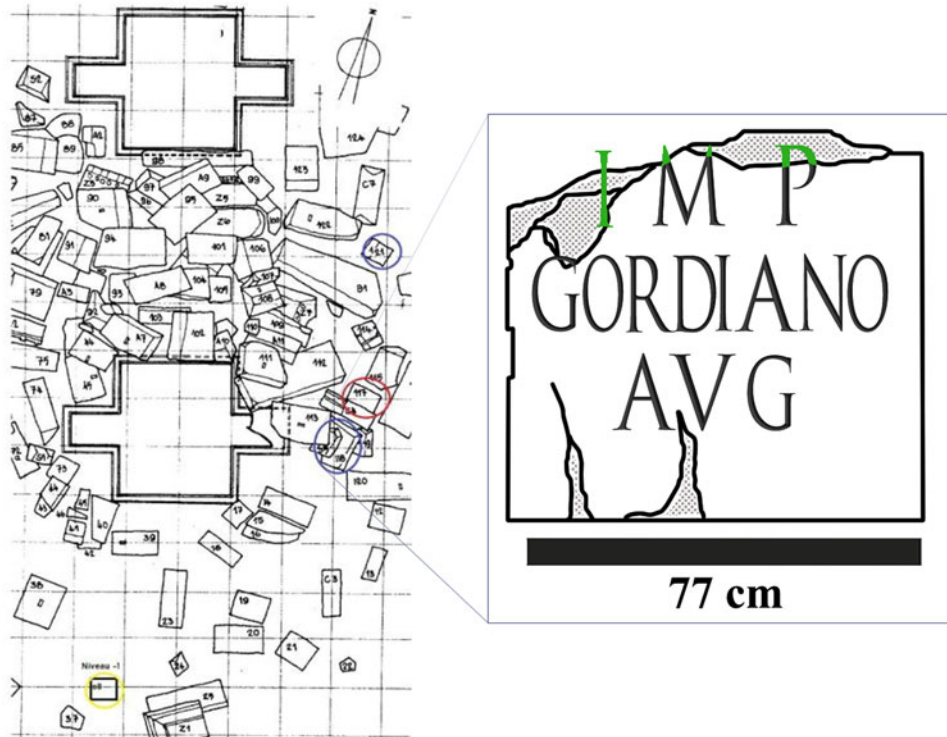
[multipl]icata summa ex HS L m(ilibus) n(ummum) superpositis status solo publico coepit et[iam] dedicavit datis / [sportulis dec] urionibus et epulo c[ur]iis omnibus et gymnasio univ[er]sity po[pul]aribus

As Beschaouch (1969, 18) seems to suggest in the sentence quoted above, (Vêrité 1921, 18), the distribution of the text in the blocks collected in the *CIL* does not fit with the actual layout and, therefore, neither with the drawing by Vêrité (2021), especially as far as the left end of fragment C is concerned. According to this new graphic material (Figure 4), the block contains more text than was represented at the end of the nineteenth century. We believe that this may be due to a misinterpretation of the ellipses placed in the drawings of the other authors. For example, just as Guérin (1862) did not place any in fragment D because he was able to read all the letters present, those in fragment C do not indicate a break, but a series of characters that the author was not able to transcribe. On the other hand, the editor of the *CIL* interprets them as the fracture of the stone, which leads to the above-mentioned misunderstandings in comparison with Vêrité's drawing, which we consider more reliable.

In this way, we can safely complete practically the entire contents of line 1, which records the emperor's title. Thus, we conclude that the term *Invicti* is not among his designations. This is logical considering that such an epithet, although in use since 238 AD, was not officially bestowed on him (Kienast *et al.* 2017, 187). Moreover, we believe that we can postpone the date of the epigraph's production to AD 240, instead of the AD 239 proposed by Beschaouch (1969: 273). The break in block C at its right end, in contact with block D, leaves a space that inevitably had to be filled with some element of the imperial titulature, so we believe that a formula such as *desig(nati) II* or *desig(nati) iter(um)* is plausible, a condition that Gordian III reached in July 240 AD (Kienast *et al.* 2017, 187).

The second line indicates that the construction project began thanks to a promise *ob honorem flamonii perpetui*, made by a personage whose *cognomen* is *Ianuarius*. The *summa legitima* was paid to the local public treasury after attaining priestly office, thus complying with the law, which stipulated that any *pollicitatio ob honorem*, i.e. made in an electoral context, had to be fulfilled after attaining that office (Melchor 1994, 201). Unfortunately, we do not know the full name of the donor. Guérin (1862, 100–102) read [---]VI[---] in the second line of fragment A. Because of their arrangement, the characters could be part of the character's *nomen*. If we assume that the reading is correct, the few characters correspond to too many variants. This prevents us from proposing a safe option, but it could correspond, for example, to the *nomen* [Fla]vi[us]. However, the *nomen* *Cornelius* is typical in Mustitan epigraphy also as a tribe, to which its inhabitants were assigned (Lepelley 1981, 147). In view of this, perhaps the characters read by Guérin are not complete, lacking the initial stroke of the N and the horizontals of the E, so that it can be transcribed as [Cor]ne[lius]. We have left out the mention of the tribe [Cor]ne[lia] due to the limited space available to also insert the character's *praenomen* and *nomen*.<sup>7</sup>

Thanks to the unpublished block, we know the full name of the son-in-law, whose *cognomina* could have been [Vi]talis Maior or [Na]talis Maior. We are inclined towards the first option, both because of the space available and because the first anthroponym is more common in the provinces of North Africa.<sup>8</sup> As Beschaouch (1969, 273) has already stated, the heir financed the construction project, even though he came from another city, *Zama Regia*. Moreover, he is described as *vir egr(egius)*, which is logical if we consider that his relative attained the perpetual flaminiate. This priesthood may have served to honour important wealthy local families, whose



**Figure 3.** On the left, Vêrité's drawing (2021, 14) showing the location of the dedication to the Gordian III and, on the right, the digitisation of the drawing of the artifact.

members had played a good part, if not all, of the municipal career (Melchor 1992, 90), and could thus be promoted to the equestrian rank.

The reconstruction of the end of the third line must also be modified with respect to the *CIL* proposal, since as is the case in all the lines of the text, the editors assumed the existence of a fifth fragment placed between C and D, which, judging by the fit of the two, should never have existed. Therefore, the text in this part, in all the lines, must be smaller than the one proposed at the end of the nineteenth century.

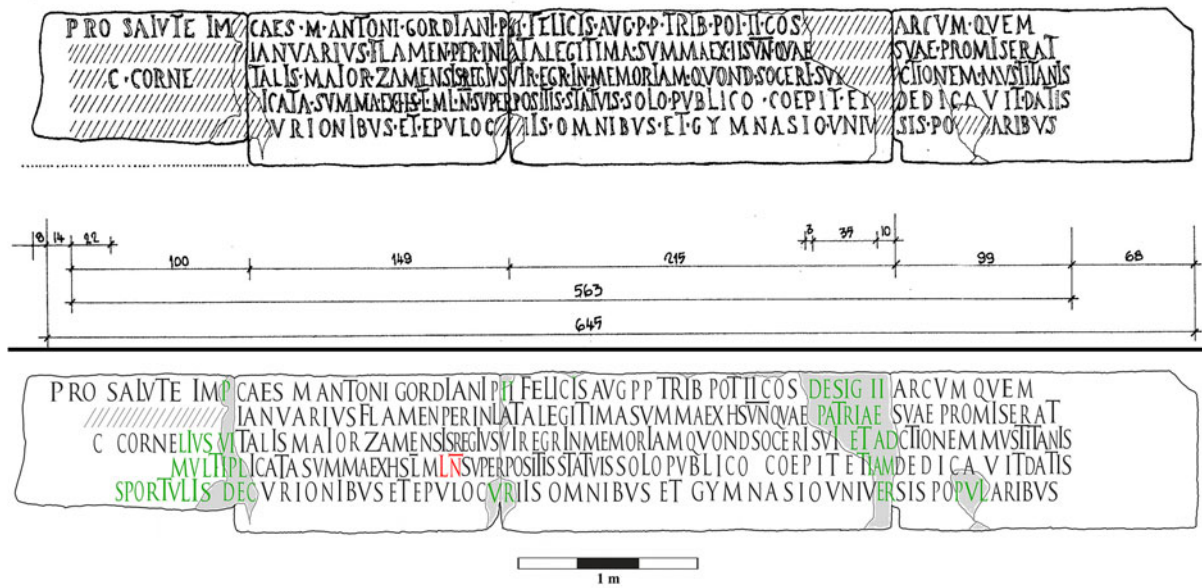
The transcription of the fourth line must be altered both in the distribution of the characters and in its content. Instead of recording the inclusion of all kinds of ornaments for the structure (Figure 2), it merely states that the arch was paid for, after multiplying the money, with 50,000 HS. This sum also included the statues placed on the attic of the arch, which, as we have seen, were to represent the emperor<sup>9</sup> and the *Genius* of the city. We believe that the drawing by Vêrité (2020) shows more characters than those present at this point, since it expresses an unusually precise amount of 50,050 sesterces with a strange solution ... ..*ex HS L m(ilibus) L n(ummum)*... .. Perhaps the architect, in his zeal to copy every character present on the piece, duplicated both numerals, thus causing the text to be more crowded than usual in his drawing. We therefore consider it more likely, in the absence of photographs, to be the presence of an expression such as *ex HS L m(ilibus) n(ummum)*. Since Beschaouch (1969) announced a figure of 50,000 HS, we consider our assumption about Vêrité's failure on this particular point as reliable.<sup>10</sup>

The entire structure was erected on public land, a concession which necessarily emanated from the decurions of *Mustis* after the express request of the evergeta. Moreover, C. *Cornelius* began the works after *Ianuarus* had passed away. After its completion, he also dedicated the monument *-coepit e[tiam] dedicavit-*.

It should be mentioned that Guérin (1862, 100–102) drew, at the beginning of the fourth line, the characters [---]DI[---], which the editor of the *CIL* reconstructed as *[a]di[ec]t[is]*. However, the presence of the word *[multipl]icata*, which is only present in African epigraphy, is obvious. This has traditionally been interpreted as an imprecise extension of the original quantity, unlike the more specific terms *duplicata* or *triplicata*, also typically African (Saastamoinen 2010, 344). The space left at the beginning of the fourth line could perfectly accommodate the term proposed in *CIL*, but it would imply the first attestation of both past participles in succession, whether or not they were separated by the *et* particle. This makes such a solution highly improbable. Perhaps the *T* corresponds to the first character of this type in the word *[multipl]icata* and the *I* could have been confused with the beginning of one of the strokes of the *M* or the *L*. Unfortunately, we have not found a plausible solution for the reading of the *D*. If we take into account the general *ordinatio* of the text, arranged without following a central axis of symmetry, we consider that before the term *[multipl]icata* there was no other word.

Furthermore, the missing text at the right end of block C, as in the previous lines, could not have been so extensive, so we propose the sole presence of the *et* particle or, given that the modulus of the letters and their limited separation in the rest of the text suggest the existence of more characters, a reconstruction as *et[iam]*. Although it is rare, we have also documented it in *Africa Proconsularis*.<sup>11</sup>

The last line of the text includes the ephemeral donations that the evergeta offered to the different sectors of the population in the context of the dedication of the building. In this way, the munificent would increase his *existimatio* and popularity in the population centre, enhancing the day of the inauguration of the monument and ensuring the greatest possible attendance at the ceremony (Gómez-Pantoja and Rodríguez Ceballos 2006, 350; Melchor 1992, 225–26). The editor of the



**Figure 4.** Drawing of Vérité (top) and its digitisation (bottom). This shows our proposed reading. In green the missing characters and in red those that could be removed.

CIL proposes the celebration of *ludi* for several days, the distribution of *sportulae* to the *decuriones*, *gymnasia* and the celebration of a banquet for the *populares*. However, thanks to Vérité's drawing (Figure 4), we know that these donations consisted of the distribution of *sportulae* to the decurions, the holding of a banquet for all the *curiae* and the distribution of *gymnasia* for all the *populares*. Thus, although all the population groups benefited in the same way, the destination of the distributions is different, the duration and the specific quantity of the donations are not indicated, and the organisation of public games is not present.

Therefore, the translation of the whole text would be:

For the health of *Imperator Caesar Marcus Antonius Gordianus Pius Felix Augustus*, father of the fatherland, during his second tribunician power, in his first consulship, already designated for the second. Once the legitimate sum of 5,000 sesterces promised to his homeland by ... *Ianuarius*, perpetual flamen, had been delivered; *Caius Cornelius Vitalis Maior*, originally from *Zama Regia*, *vir egregius*, in memory of his father-in-law and out of appreciation for the people of *Mustis*, began the arch after multiplying the sum to 50,000 sesterces,

with superimposed statues and on public land. He dedicated it after offering *sportulae* to the *decuriones*, a banquet to all the *curiae*, and *gymnasio* to all the *populares*.

### Inscription 3: Dedication to the *Genius Augustus* at *Mustis*

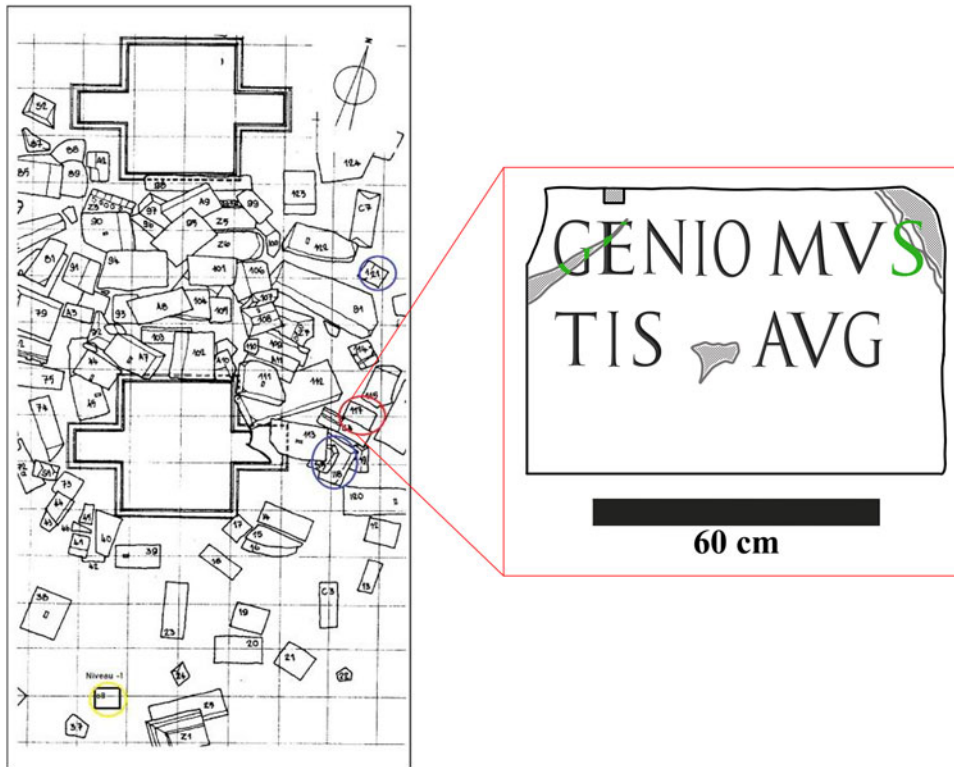
We have previously discussed that there must have been at least two more inscriptions on the arch, one dedicated to Gordian III<sup>12</sup> and another consecrated to the municipal *Genius*. This latter inscription, engraved on a square limestone block measuring 60 cm in height, 87 cm in length and 71 cm in depth, was located, according to Vérité's plans (2021, 14), at the base of the arch on its east side (Figure 6). Its upper part contains the negatives of a possible statue attachment (Vérité 2021, 20). Furthermore, thanks to the new graphic apparatus (Figure 6), we know that the text is distributed over two lines as follows:

*Genio Mu[s]/tis Aug(usto)*

Although known since 1966, it has never been published individually in a scientific journal. Several researchers have mentioned its discovery, such as Ferchiou (1985, 102 and 111), without providing any photographs or drawings of the find. Only Vérité



**Figure 5.** On the left, photograph showing the state of the arch in 1986 (Vérité 2021, 12). On the right, detail of CIL VIII, 1577 in its present state. (EDCS © - Museum RGM Köln).



**Figure 6.** On the left, Vêrité's drawing (2021, 14) showing the location of the dedication to the Mustitan *Genius* and, on the right, the digitisation of the drawing of the artifact.

(2021, 14) offers a drawing of the discovery. Beyond this, we know that this deity was identified with *Pluton Frugifer* (Beschaouch, 1973, 104) and was probably placed at the top of the arch, alongside the dedication to Gordian III, welcoming those who entered the city (Vêrité 2021, 20). This aligns with the references to the so-called African Pluto on the arch itself, contrasting with the warlike motifs associated with Carthage (Ferchiou 1985, 111). Thus, this epigraphic support would serve, along with the rest of the structure, as a boundary marker for the city's territory and would represent the second known dedication to the Mustitan *Genius*.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

According to the information provided, the Arch of Gordian III in *Mustis* would contain up to two epigraphic blocks that have not been previously published individually, despite being known for almost 60 years since the restoration work on the monument began.

The main dedication inscription on the arch, called inscription no. 2 and partially edited in *CIL VIII*, 1577, was completed in 1966 with the discovery of a fourth block – now called block B. However, Beschaouch's report (1969) was never fully developed. This has led to numerous researchers dealing with this *titulus* with partial information about its content. Furthermore, until now, no clarifying graphic material had been published, even though the Arch of Gordian III is one of the most significant heritage attractions of the ancient city of *Mustis*.

A similar situation occurs with the pedestal of Gordian III – inscription no. 1 – and with the dedication to the Mustitan *Genius* – inscription no. 3 – which, despite being mentioned in several works, have been incompletely read or have not been independently edited.

This work serves to complement the partial information about these three inscriptions, thereby allowing their content to be

known through the drawings made by the architect in charge of the restoration of the arch. Thus, we know that the arch could have been dedicated in 240 AD, we are aware of the precise distribution of the characters and we can confidently specify the information it provides.

The erection of the structure in honour of the reigning emperor may have been a token of loyalty after the brief revolt of AD 240 by Sabinianus,<sup>14</sup> a usurper perhaps acclaimed in the neighbouring city of *Carthago*,<sup>15</sup> whose territorial boundary is separated by the arch itself (Beschaouch 1981, 107–109). Gordian III's relationship with Africa is evident, since the origin of his dynasty is located in *Thysdrus*.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, it has recently been argued that he promoted policies for the benefit of the North African inhabitants and communities, in contrast to the inoperative public building and statutory promotions of his predecessor, Maximinus Thrax, thus following the trend set by the Severan emperors (Bertolazzi 2023). This show of loyalty was reinforced by the placement of inscription no. 1 and its attached statue, a type of honour through which local communities could express their loyalty to the rulers (Højte 2005, 143–166).

## Notes

- 1 We appreciate the comments and proposals from external reviewers and the editorial board of the journal *Libyan Studies*.
- 2 *CIL VIII*, 27459; *ILTun* 1560 and España Chamorro (2022, 5).
- 3 *CIL VIII*, 16417.
- 4 We would like to thank Mr. Vêrité for his kindness in making available the graphic material in his possession, which has enabled us to carry out this study.
- 5 We propose a new nomenclature for the fragments below. See Table 1.
- 6 We would like to reiterate our gratitude to Mr. J. Vêrité, who has provided us with information about his work and his digitised drawing (Figure 4).
- 7 As examples of this *nomen*, frequent in *Mustis*, see C. *Corne[lius Vi]talis*, in the same inscription n°2; P. *Cornelius Q. filius Cornelia Vitalis*, in *CIL VIII*,

1591; *Cn. Corn(elius) Datus* in *CIL VIII*, 15585; *P. Cornelius [---]* in *CIL VIII*, 15603; *M. Corneli[us] M. f. Cornelia Laetus* in *AE 1968*, 595 and *AE 1968*, 596.  
 8 In fact, a member of the *gens Cornelia* already has this *cognomen* in *Mustis*. Vide *P. Cornelius Q. filius Cornelius Vitalis* in *CIL VIII*, 1591. Unfortunately, the current state of knowledge prevents us from being sure of a direct family relationship.  
 9 *CIL VIII*, 1577a.  
 10 Moreover, we did not find parallels for this numerical expression under any other inscription.  
 11 *CILPCart* 130.  
 12 *CIL VIII*, 1577a.  
 13 *AE 1968*, 595.  
 14 *Scriptores Historia Augustae, Gordiani Tres*, 23, 4.  
 15 Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, I, 17, I.  
 16 *Scriptores Historia Augustae, Maximini Duo*, 14, 2–5 and *Gordiani Tres*, 7, 4–8,4.

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