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PERSONAL NAMES ON VISIGOTHIC SLATE TABLETS

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This article analyses the personal names that appear in texts inscribed on slate tablets from Visigothic Hispania (sixth to eighth centuries AD). The texts were found at rural sites clustered around the borders between the provinces of Salamanca, Ávila and the north of Cáceres, in areas about which the historical sources are largely silent. The author analyses the kinds of text in which these personal names appear and the ways in which they are presented. In some cases, the slates simply contain lists of names, probably of farmers who worked the land, but in others they provide the names of sellers, buyers, judges or witnesses to legal documents, some of whom wrote their names and signed in their own hand. The origins of the names, mainly Graeco-Roman or Gothic, are also analysed. The presence of names of diverse origin in the same documents, especially in those dealing with agricultural matters, might perhaps indicate the presence of a mixed population. Finally, the author considers the names of Hebrew origin, which on these slates almost always refer to biblical characters or angels.

Keywords: Visigothic slates, personal names of Graeco-Roman origin, personal names of Gothic origin, Biblical names, signatures and signatories, witness signatures, farmers, rural society

ЛИЧНЫЕ ИМЕНА НА ВИЗИГОТСКИХ СЛАНЦЕВЫХ ТАБЛИЧКАХ

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В статье анализируются личные имена, встречающиеся в текстах на сланцевых табличках из вестготской Испании (VI–VIII вв. н.э.). Тексты были найдены в сельских районах, сгруппированных вокруг границ между провинциями Саламанка, Авила и к северу от Касереса, в районах, о которых исторические источники в основном умалчивают. Автор анализирует, в каком тексте появляются эти личные имена и как они представлены. В некоторых случаях на табличках содержатся только списки имен, вероятно, тех фермеров, которые обрабатывали землю, но в других случаях засвидетельствованы имена продавцов, покупателей, судей или свидетелей юридических документов, часть которых собственноручно написали свои имена и поставили подписи. Также анализируется происхождение имен, которые в основном являются греко-римскими или готскими. Наличие разнородных по происхождению имен в одних и тех же документах, в особенности сельскохозяйственных, может указывать на смешанный характер населения. Наконец, автор также рассматривает имена еврейского происхождения, которые на этих сланцевых табличках почти всегда относятся к библейским персонажам или к ангелам.

Ключевые слова: вестготские сланцевые таблички, личные имена греко-римского происхождения, личные имена готского происхождения, библейские имена, свидетельские подписи, крестьяне, сельское общество

The so-called “Visigothic slates” comprise a collection of mainly sixth-, seventh- and eighth-century AD texts found in the Central Plateau of modern Spain, in settlements scattered around the borders between the provinces of Ávila, Salamanca, and the north of Cáceres. However, slate tablets have also been found in other areas and from other periods, including two fifth-century curse tablets (*defixiones*) discovered near Braga (Portugal), the tenth century “Carrio” slate in Asturias and several ninth-century pieces in Andorra.

There are three types of inscribed tablet: slates with text, slates with numerical signs, and slates with very varied drawings including representations of animals, buildings, agricultural tools and human figures. These latter in particular have yet to receive sufficient study.

Slate is a soft material on which signs can easily be inscribed or scratched and it has been used as a writing medium throughout history, although it was not the most common medium in antiquity or the Middle Ages. By way of example, inscribed slate tablets have been found at various sites in Huelva and Córdoba (dated to the first to third centuries AD), and at the Irish monastery of Smarmore (County Louth) (thirteenth and fifteenth centuries); however, despite their interest, these still await detailed study¹.

Here, I shall discuss the slate texts written during the Visigothic period in the above-mentioned area. Most of these slates were not uncovered during archaeological excavations, but instead were found on the surface in rural settings². Although some archaeological excavations have revealed a Visigothic context, the slates have often been found without a clear location that could provide information as to their function. Unfortunately, the majority are fragmentary: there are virtually no complete pieces and some retain so little text that they offer negligible information about their exact content.

Nevertheless, these slates comprise documents of exceptional value. With the exception of conventional epigraphy, they are virtually the only original documents to survive

¹ On this subject, see Velázquez Soriano 2022, with previous bibliography.

² Only two small fragments have been found in urban areas in Visigothic archaeological contexts, one of which – still unpublished – comes from the city of Ávila, while the other is from the city of Toledo. On this latter, see the edition by I. Velázquez Soriano in *CIL* II² 13, 78.

from sixth- and seventh-century Visigothic Hispania, and they therefore provide us with valuable information about the type of script in use at the time. This was the “new common Roman cursive”, although some elements of the so-called “Visigothic cursive writing” are also evident³. Apart from the well-known manuscripts of Autun 27 and 107⁴, possibly the codex of the “Camarín de las Reliquias” (El Escorial)⁵, and the Verona Orational (c. 700)⁶. Very few manuscripts in Visigothic script survive from the seventh century: most are of a later date, generally from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. Meanwhile, the only documents to have been preserved are the parchment charters discovered in the National Historical Archive and studied by Mundó⁷.

Another reason why these slate texts are so important is that they offer an exceptional insight into the agricultural economy and everyday life of Visigothic Spain. They include sales documents, court statements and other legal documents (*placita*) and even a private letter (*epistula*). Others are of a religious nature — generally psalms — and may have served an educational purpose, and there are also *defixiones* and texts of an apparently magical nature. Some list the names of animals, agricultural products and even clothing, while another large group of slates gives the names of farmers, who must have paid taxes in kind or have received some products.

These texts also provide evidence of the value ascribed in the Visigothic period to *scriptura* and thus to written legal documents. This is already attested to by Visigothic laws⁸ and formularies⁹, but the legal documents preserved on slate demonstrate that it was common practice to record private transactions in writing. In the words of P. Riché¹⁰:

D'autres faits montrent que l'écrit joue toujours un rôle important dans la vie de ces royaumes barbares... Dans le domaine commercial les échanges exigent toujours un minimum d'écritures et lorsqu'il arrive que des marchands soient illettrés, ils ont des écribes qui les aident dans leurs comptes et leur correspondance. Les ventes, comme les donations et testaments, ne se conçoivent pas sans la rédaction d'un acte dont la valeur n'est plus simplement probatoire, mais tend à devenir dispositive.

PEOPLE AND NAMES

We do not know the names of those who inscribed the texts, the *scriptores* or *scribae*, and in some cases, several hands appear in the same document. In contrast, however, the names of the signatories of the legal documents are sometimes given, enabling us to identify the people involved in the transactions being recorded. It is highly likely that many of

³ del Camino Martínez 1990, 29–37; Alturo 2004, 347–386; Velázquez Soriano 2006, 109–119; 2012, 15–53.

⁴ Robinson 1939.

⁵ Codex written in uncial script, containing some fragments written in Visigothic cursive. Held in the El Escorial Library (without number). See Lowe 1966, no. 1628b.

⁶ Vivancos 2006, 121–144.

⁷ Mundó Marcet 1974, 5–8. Recently edited in Calleja-Puerta *et al.* 2018, no. 1–5.

⁸ See LV 2.1.5, 2.1.6, 2.5, 5.4.3. See also CE 286. On this subject, see Zeumer 1944, 166–170; Petit 1983, 168–169; Marlasca 1998, 563–584.

⁹ *Formulae Visigothicae*: Gil 1972, 71–113.

¹⁰ Riché 1962, 60.

the people whose names are recorded on the slates were unable to read or write, and of these we know only their names or the minimal references given in the texts.

The Visigothic kings can be identified, but their names are always included as part of the dating clause, not as part of the text content. Biblical names – *nomina sacra* – also appear in texts of a religious or magical nature, phylacteries and *defixiones*. Sometimes, individuals' professions are indicated, as in the case of the *iudices* or *uicarii*, but for most people mentioned on the slates, we have no further information other than their names. However, the context in which these names are transmitted tells us something about the reasons why they were recorded on the slates.

Below, I shall analyse these personal names to elucidate the information they provide about the onomastic registers in Visigothic Hispania, including the origin of the names, which is mainly Graeco-Roman and Gothic. I shall also explore the use of signatures and signs to identify individuals on legal documents.

Significant information about the purposes of the texts can be retrieved from the way in which the names are presented. These often are recorded in vertical lists, some of which provide no further information other than the names themselves. However, in most cases the lists also include numbers, or quantities of grain, products or animals, as well as the personal names. The way in which these lists are structured and the information they record suggest an administrative function, and the following sections are organised according to this premise. The first section discusses the majority of the names that appear on the slates. These are mostly names of farmers, although some of the people named may have belonged to the ruling classes. The texts in which these names appear concern agricultural or livestock matters and often record contributions – payments, most probably – or the distribution of products.

The second section concerns people whose names appear on legal documents, in particular the signatories. Sometimes, the signatures are written in a different hand from that in which the document is written, while at others the signatories have simply signed with a *signum crucis*, and it is highly likely that in some cases it was the scribes themselves who wrote the signatories' names.

The third section examines the names according to their origin –generally Graeco-Roman or Gothic. Besides the names of the Visigothic kings, which, as indicated, only appear in the dating clauses of the documents, the names of the *iudices* and *uicarii* are also of Gothic origin and perhaps the people referred to were as well; however, in all the other cases, the names are of a mixed origin. It would be rash to assume that a name closely coincides with the named person's origin: in seventh-century society, it is probable that a name was no longer necessarily indicative of an individual's ethnic origin.

Names of Hebrew origin, as well as the *nomina sacra*, discussed in the final section, never refer to real people living in the Visigothic kingdom; instead, such names only appear in religious or liturgical texts, school exercises and some texts of a magical nature.

FARMERS' NAMES

As noted above, some slate tablets simply contain lists of personal names without any additional information. These include slates from Mogarraz (no. 113)¹¹, Salvatierra de

¹¹ Here, I follow the numbers assigned to the texts in the edition by Velázquez Soriano 2000. The numbering is identical in the 2004 edition, except that the latter lists 163 slates and the former, 153.

Tormes (no. 117–119) and Pelayos (no. 129, 131 and 132), all villages in the province of Salamanca. On some slates, the names are accompanied by numerical signs such as I or II, as on the slate no. 1 (Lerilla, Salamanca), one of the few slate texts found at this site¹²:

Vincentius II | Bonifatius II | Bitorius I | Profidentius I || 5 Ferbodus I | P e r i a s [---]

Several of them also present a particular arrangement of names. For example, on slate no. 6 (Salvatierra de Tormes, Salamanca), the names are written one below another, and are furthermore divided into pairs by means of an additional blank line separating each pair from the rest. The first side of the slate reads as follows:

Rufinus
Placidius

Macarius
Auinus

⁵ *Darcus*
 [- - -] *sicius*

 [- - -] *egiusnu<s>*
 [- - -] *mistidinus*

 [- - -] *inismus*
¹⁰ *Cantinus*

 [- - -] *inus*
Pius

 [- - -] *ius*
 [- - -] *sicius*

It is impossible to determine why the names are arranged in this manner, but it would not appear to be an unintentional structure. Another slate in this group (no. 129; Pelayos, Salamanca) exhibits a highly unusual method of recording the names, alternating between nominative and genitive. Although fragmentary, it appears to contain two columns separated by a vertical line. Remains of numbers are still visible in the left-hand column:

[- - -] II | [- - -] II | [- - -] II | [- - -] II | - - - - -

while the right-hand column consists of names written one below the other (fig. 1):

Rustici | Flabios | Costanti | Seueros ||⁵ Ponpuni | et Ponpello

The alternation of names in nominative and genitive may express a tie of dependence, perhaps a form of ownership or maybe simply a father-son relationship. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the first term, *rustici*, refers to the genitive of the name *Rusticus* or is a reference to the *rustici*, which would indicate that these were the personal names of farmers. The latter case may be more likely, because the term *rusticus* was commonly used at the time to designate people who worked the land, cf. Isid. *Etym.* 10.239: *Rusticus dictus*

¹² Only three or four slate fragments with text are known from this location, but there are hundreds of fragments with numerical signs.



Fig. 1. Slate no 129, Pelayos (Salamanca). Salamanca Museum, Spain. Photo by I. Velázquez, 1998

*quod rus operetur, id est, terram*¹³. In Visigothic law, a *rusticus* is also referred to as a *seruus*, cf. LV 3.3.9. The slate text could be interpreted as follows: “Farmers: Flavius of Constantius, Severus of Pomponius, and Pompeius”, but it remains unclear whether the interdependence between the people on this slate is based on family ties or some other type of relationship.

However, in the case of the very fragmentary list on slate no. 120 (Salvatierra de Tormes, Salamanca), the individuals whose names are recorded appear to be fathers and sons:

[- - -]car[- - -] | [- - -]fili¹⁴ Manli[- - - ?] | Innocenti [- - -] | fili et i + [.]s[- - -] || 5 [- - -] + + [.] + tini |
[- - -]sconius¹⁵ | [- - -]em + [- - -]s | [[- - -]] | [- - -]na [- - -] + [- - -] | - - - - -

If this hypothesis is correct, the same might be true for the above-mentioned slate no. 129.

Slate no. 55 (Diego Álvaro, Ávila), contains a similar text, but the term used is *infantes*, not *filius*. Canellas¹⁶ has suggested that this is an allusion to cattle; however, Díaz y Díaz¹⁷ has argued that *infantes* refers to the children of the people mentioned in the text¹⁸:

¹³ “A *rusticus* (farmer) is so-called because he works the *rus* (countryside), which is to say, the land”.

¹⁴ *Fili* should be read as *fili*.

¹⁵ The reading [- - -]sconius on line 6 could be restored as [Va]sconius, a name that also appears on slate no. 131, from Pelayos (Salamanca).

¹⁶ Canellas López 1979, 259, n° 199.

¹⁷ Díaz y Díaz 1975, 23–29.

¹⁸ There is a horizontal line between lines 8 and 9 separating the text into two blocks.

*Eugami duo se[s]taria in [- - -] | uac. [in]fa[n]tes unu [- - -] | Leonis duos [- - -] | Verici unu [- - -] |
maiores infantes quator ||⁵ Ispinaeli infa[n]tes duo[s] | A[ui]uiti infante unu | Emili infan[t]e unu |
ate[- - -]ri infante unu | | Ic[- - -]terio unu ||¹⁰ Anulli unu | Megeti infantes tris | Simplici unu |
Martinus tris | Ga[. . .]ri unu ||¹⁵ Senpruni unu | uac. [i]nfan[te- - -] | - - - - -*

Canellas may be right because the term *infans* was occasionally used to refer to young animals, albeit not very frequently¹⁹. Unfortunately, however, owing to its fragmentary state, the slate provides no further clues as to the meaning. However, the term *sestaria* in the first sentence suggests that it refers to some kind of contribution or payment, in which case it is more likely that *infans* refers to livestock rather than to people. The addition of *maior* (*maiores infantes quator*) probably indicates that it refers to older — albeit not fully mature — animals.

In several texts, lists of personal names are associated with varying amounts of *modii* (of wheat), *sextarii* (usually written *sestari*, *sestaria* or *sistari*, *sistaria*) and sometimes *quartaria*. In some instances, given expressions suggest that the texts refer to tax payments²⁰, as in the case of the slate no. 5 (Peralejos de Solís, Salamanca), in which expressions such as (l. 2) *Simplicius mod(ium) I*, (l. 14) *suas conlibertas Flaina s(estarium) I*, *Maxima s(estaria) IIII* and (ll. 15–16) *Manno mod(ium) I*, *Procula s(estaria) III*, *Bonus et Flamnus | et Nonnus maior et Patricius mod(ium) I*, accompany sentences such as (l.4): [- - -] + *s dedi licias mod(ium) I* (probably *dedit*), which can be translated as “gave rope worth a peck of wheat”.

The term *angaria* in line 8 ([- - -] *uit Ioannis in angarias mod(ios) LX*) is used to refer to a tax on the transport of animals, land ownership or the employment of workers. Unfortunately, the initial part of the word is missing, but it might be *[leua]uit*²¹, a verb which also appears on another slate (no. 11), although in a different context. If this were so, the sentence could be interpreted as “John paid 60 pecks of wheat in tax”. In addition, l. 17 “*exprendit Ioannis ad kaballos mod(ios)*” could be translated as “John paid 33 pecks of wheat for the horses”. Here, the verb *exprendit* could be a vulgar form of the verb *expendit*, contaminating *expendit* and *prahendit* (*prahendo* > *pre(h)endo* > *prendo*) (fig. 2).

Notable among the texts associating personal names with quantities of agricultural products are slates nos. 45 and 46, from Diego Álvaro (Ávila), due to their large size and the number of names they contain. Unfortunately, however, they are difficult to read owing to their poor state of conservation, the shallow, irregular inscriptions, rudimentary writing and the use of some difficult to decipher abbreviations. Slate no. 45 was found broken into two fragments, one very large and the other much smaller. Gómez Moreno edited the slate as two different pieces and thought that the larger fragment recorded King Wamba’s will²². However, further investigation revealed that what Gómez Moreno had regarded as

¹⁹ For meanings and uses of the term, see *TLL* 1934–1964, 7.1, 1346–1350, s.v. In reference to young animals, the term appears in Acc. *Trag.* 315, Plin. *NH.* 10.168, Mart. 13.97. *Infantia* in Colum 8.5.19; Plin. *NH.* 8.71; 9.21; 10.182; 11.260; Tert. *Paen.* 6.1.

²⁰ These slates may also be related to those that only list numerical quantities, which some authors have suggested record tax payments made by communities and/or individual community members. For further comments on this question, see below and the references given in note 25.

²¹ Cf. Velázquez 2004, 131–141.

²² See Gómez Moreno 1966, 4–79. The first, left-hand piece is quite large (390 × 220 × 10 mm), albeit fragmentary, and almost the entire front surface is covered in writing, whereas only a few lines are inscribed on the back. The second, right-hand piece is smaller (205 × 105 × 10 mm) and only has writing on the front. Both fragments were edited by Gómez with the numbers XXXII–XXXIII and XXXIV, respectively.

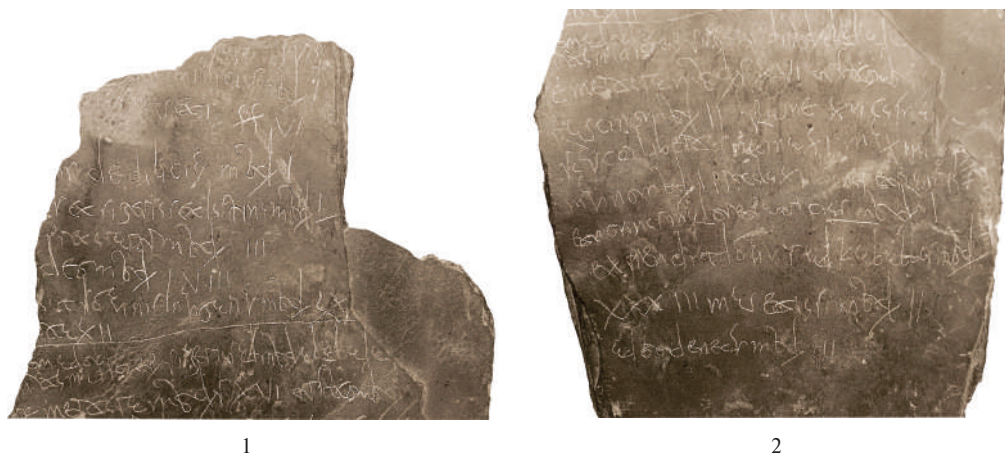


Fig. 2. Slate no 5. 1 – upper part; 2 – lower part. Royal Academy of History, Madrid, Spain. Photo by I. Velázquez, 1986

two separate slates were in fact two halves of the same one. Furthermore, the writing on the larger fragment had been covered with a layer of white pencil, and once the surface had been cleaned, the text turned out to be shorter than initially believed and did not record King Wamba's will at all. Instead, it contained a list of personal names beside which were written various amounts of *sextarii* and *modii*²³.

The author of the text used the term *cusso* or *cussos*, sometimes written as *cusso*, a word also used in the texts on the slates no. 46, 47, 48 and 125. This term is not used in other earlier Latin texts, but may be a vulgar form of the word *cursus*, and might be the antecedent of the Spanish word *coso*. Its meaning was probably similar to that of *praedium*, a rural property and more specifically, a particular kind of field. Therefore, I suggest that slates nos. 45 and 46 record the amounts (in *sextarii*, *quartarii* or in some cases, *heminae*) that were paid in kind for each field or *praedium*²⁴.

Without dwelling any further on the content of these texts, I shall turn to the important question of the wide variety of personal names recorded, which are mostly male although there are some female names as well, and the mixture of names of Latin or Graeco-Roman and Gothic origin:

45.1.13 *Feruodus in alio cus[so] - - -*

45.1.26 *Aiutor in alterum || cusso sestaria] dua*

45.2.3 *[- - -] in alio cusso sistari II*

46.2.4 *[- - -]fredo s(e)s(taria) III, Argefredis in alio cus[so] 's(e)s(tarium) I'*

46.2.6 *[N]atouigius in tercio cusso s(e)s(tarium) I*

46.2. 8–13 *[in ali]o cusso s(e)s(tarium) I, Deucicius s(e)s(tarium) I Ranila / in alio cusso s(e)s(tarium) I, Aloricia s(e)s(tarium) I, Vstrildina [I⁰ alios cussos s(e)s(tarium) I, Agutor s(e)s(taria) II, Lunaredus in | alio cusso s(e)s(tarium) I, El[i?]sinus matri Decentini + | sestaria dua, Aurosus [- - -]so [.] IIII domnus s[- - -] | salior in alio cusso, Iermina, Ranila in tercio [cusso]*

The larger fragment of slate no. 45 is divided into two columns by a vertical line, and the left side is conspicuously incomplete. It contains the expression *sestarium unum*, sometimes

²³ Velázquez Soriano 2000, I, 56–60; 2004, 251–260.

²⁴ On this question, cf. Velázquez Soriano 2004, 25–27.

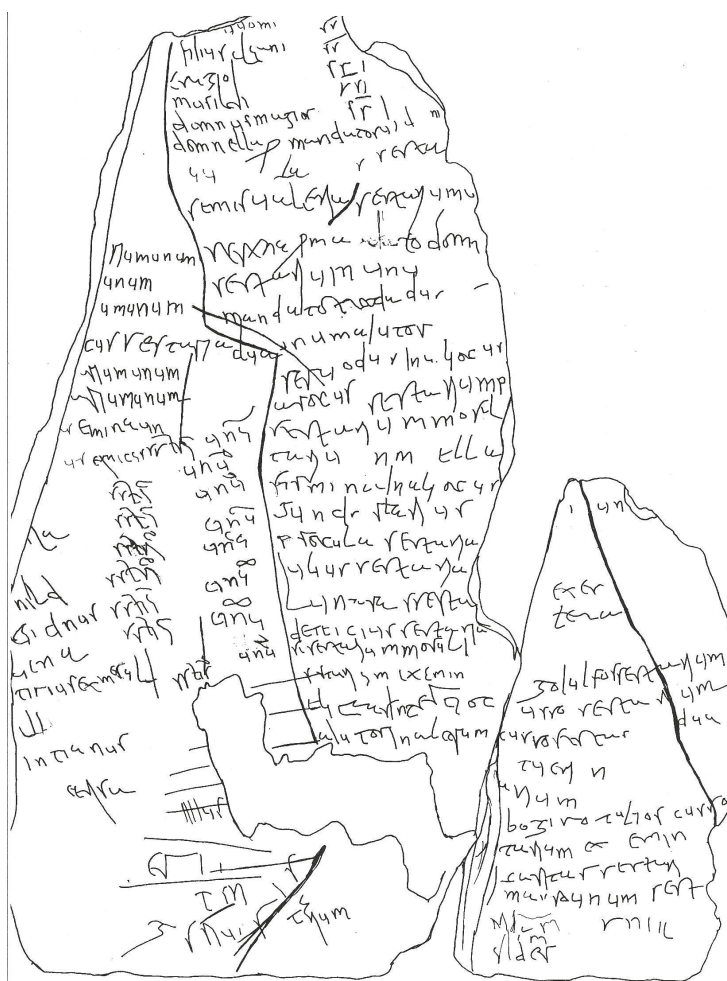


Fig. 3. Slate no 45, Diego Álvaro (Ávila). Ávila Museum, Spain. Tracing by I. Velázquez, 1986

in the abbreviated forms *sstri unu* or *sstiu unu*, but written in a very peculiar way. At first glance, these look like signatures, but the content of the text in the right-hand column, as well as the content of the very similar slate no. 46, suggests that they are in fact instances of the expression *sestarium unum* (fig. 3):

[- - -]cus sestaria dua || 5 [- - -]sest]arium unum | [- - -]sest]arium unum | [- - -]us emina un[a] |
 [- - -]us Eriricus s(e)st(a)ri(um) unu(m) | [- - -] s(e)st(a)ri(um) unu(m) ||¹⁰ [- - -]ila s(e)st(a)
 ri(um) unu(m) | [- - -] + s(e)st(a)ri(um) unu(m) | [- - -]nild(us) s(e)st(a)ri(um) unu(m) | [- - -]?
 Egid<i?>nus s(e)st(ar)iu(m) unu(m) | [- - -] + ena s(e)st(ar)iu(m) unu(m) ||¹⁵ [- - -]tirius et
 Merul(us) s(e)st(a)ri(um) unu(m) | [- - -]d(us) uac. | [- - -]intianus uac. | [- - -] + erisa uac.

Both the position of the names on these slates and the way in which the amounts are documented suggest that these are records of people and payments in kind.

The other slates mentioned earlier in this section also appear to be administrative records. Slate no. 139 (Portillo, Salamanca) seems to have been a ledger, and the text is divided into three columns separated by vertical lines (fig. 4):

1. Left-hand column: -----|/---/IIII|/---/
s(e)s(taria) IIII|/---/no m(o)d(ios) II|/---/d
/---/ I||5|/---/|/---/ s(e)s(taria) IIII|/---/
II|/---/ II
2. Middle column: -----| trim(o)d(ius) I|
trim(o)d(ius) I| trim(o)d(ius) I
3. Right-hand column: -----| Paulus s(e)
s(taria) III| Rufino s(e)s(tarium) I/ Red|/---/
s(e)s(taria) IIII| ++|/---/ III||5++|/---/
/---/ /-----

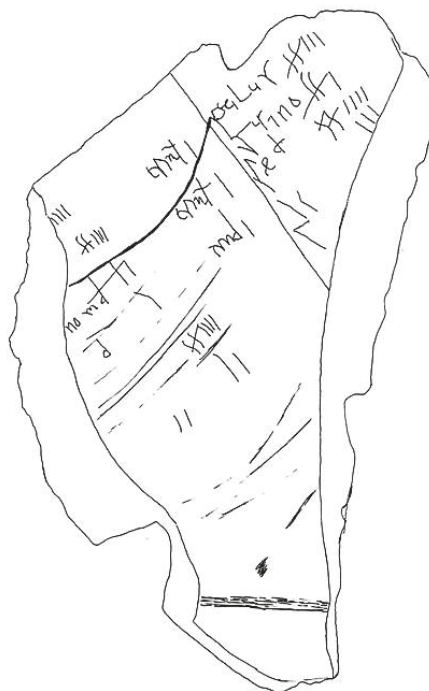


Fig. 4. Slate no 139, Portillo (Salamanca). Salamanca Museum, Spain. Tracing by I. Velázquez, 1998

Some researchers have suggested that the numerical slates, which is to say those that only contain numbers, were tax records²⁵. It is quite possible that the wealthy would have used them to manage the economy in districts where royal power was absent or negligible, thus enabling these elites to exercise power within their areas of influence. This hypothesis is primarily based on the slates found in El Cortinal de San Juan, in Salvatierra de Tormes (Salamanca), which may have formed a kind of “accounting office”. Numerical slates have also been found in agricultural areas devoted to cereal crops, livestock farming, and similar activities.

I believe there may be a link between the numerical slates and the text slates, but this possibility has yet to be fully investigated. Nevertheless, although not all the numerical slates were necessarily tax records, the text slates listing what people gave in kind probably reflect part of the same tax system or lists of payments or contributions of any kind recorded on the numerical slates.

Some of the texts on the slates do in fact appear to refer to tax payments, as is the case with the previously mentioned Peralejos de Solís document (no. 5). Meanwhile, other slates seem to record what people earn or charge, and still others appear to record amounts of food, as in the case of slate no. 11 (Galinduste, Salamanca), which contains a *notitia de casios*.

THE SIGNATORIES OF THE DOCUMENTS

An important group of the text slates consists of those containing private legal documents: sales agreements, statements in court, *condiciones sacramentorum* and *placita* of various

²⁵ By way of example, see the publications by Iñaki Martín Viso, who has studied these aspects in most depth: Martín Viso 2006, 272–273; 2013, 145–168; 2015, 285–314; 2018, 298–312; see also Díaz, Martín Viso 2011, 221–250.

kinds. Several of these latter are so fragmentary that their full original content remains a mystery, but they do provide sufficient information to classify them as *placita*.

The slates in this group include the names of the principal individuals involved in legal transactions such as sales. For example, the text of slate no. 8 (from Galinduste, Salamanca, dated 586) states that *Crisciturus* sold something to some *dominis honorabilibus fr[atribus]*, while the text on the front of the slate no. 40 (Diego Álvaro, Ávila) explains that *Gregorios* sold a piece of land to his nephew *Desiderius*:

Domno e sourino meo De[siderio], Gregorios uinditor quoniam | hoc inter nobis placuit adq(ue) conuenit ut | ego tibi uindere et uindo portione ||⁵ de terra,...

The text on the back of this slate, written in another hand, states that one *Unigildus* has travelled from a place called *Langa Tomanca* to the house of an individual named *Froila* to testify in a court case related to some kind of fraud. He presents *Froila* as a witness and also visits the house of *Desiderius* (perhaps the same *Desiderius*, the nephew of *Gregorios*, mentioned on the other side). He also mentions other individuals in his statement, namely *Busano* and *Fasteno*.

The text on the slate no. 42, from the same place, explains that *Amantius*, *Fulgentius* and one *Meli*[- - -] are involved in some kind of *conmutatio* or exchange, while slate no. 39 (Diego Álvaro, Ávila) contains *condiciones sacramentorum*. The dispute concerned some horses that had been loaned (*mutauerant*). An individual called *Lolus* is sworn in, at the request of another called *Basilus*, and does so by order of some vicars (*uicarii*) and judges (*iudices*) whose names are specified: *ess urdinatione Eunandi, Argeredi, uicariis, Ra[- - -]ri, Vviderici, Arguindi, Gundaci iudicib(us)*.

Slate no. 92, from El Tiemblo or perhaps Diego Álvaro (both villages in the province of Ávila), contains a *securitas* dated to the reign of King Chindasuinth (642–649). In this case it is *Gisadus* who is sworn in before the vicars *Amaranus*, *Ranulfus*, [- - -]fredus and *Argeredus*, in a matter concerning some pigs given as a guarantee for some (unknown to us) business conducted by the principal and in which other parties such as *Anianus* and *Theodoteus* are also mentioned.

Although these texts were written on slate, they constituted full legal documents as valid as those written on parchment. Sometimes the texts include the signatures of the witnesses or principals of the legal transactions, with marks such as *signum manus* and the inscription of their particular *signum*, sometimes in the form of a cross. Such is the case of slate no. 8 (side 2, lines 8–13), from Galinduste (Salamanca), which reads: *ego Crisciturus [- - -] | [- - -]m fieri uolu[eri]m [- - -] ||¹⁰ [- - - signum] manus [meae?] | (signum) | [- - - Criscit] uru[s] | [- - -] + + [- - -]*. The *signum* is a cross.

Another *crux* followed by *manu mea* appears on slate no. 19, from Pelayos, which is also a sales agreement, dated in the reign of Sisebut, or possibly Sisenand: *gl(oriosissimi) dom(in)i n(os)tri Sise[- - - regis] | (signum) m[a]n[u] mea[- - -]*, although unfortunately, the text that has been preserved does not contain the names of the parties involved in the legal transaction.

Sometimes, the expression used is *subscripsi*, and the abbreviation, *s(ub)s(cripsi)*, may even be written in an unusual manner as if it were a personal signature. Such is the case of another fragment from Galinduste (slate no. 9), on which only mention of the kings Chindasuinth and Reccesuinth has been preserved, which would have formed part of the dating clause, together with a striking sign consisting of two interwoven letters *S*, which

should be interpreted as a *signum*, possibly as *s(ub)s(cripsi)*, which can be understood as a signature: *Cindasuinti et Rec[es]/[u]indi r(e)g(um) | (signum)* (fig. 5)

Still more interesting are the personal subscriptions of the *iudices* and *uicarii* signing the above-mentioned *condiciones sacramentorum* on slate no. 39 (Diego Álvaro, Ávila). They sign them with their personal symbols, in the same order in which they are cited at the beginning of the document, even though it is not complete²⁶:

*Condicionis sacramentorum ad qua[s] debea
d iurare Lolus
ess urdinatione Eunandi, Argeredi, uicariis,
Ra[- - -]ri, Vviderici, Argiuiindi, Gundaci
iudicib(us)
ad petitione Basili iurare debead Lol(us)
propt[er] caballos quos mutauerunt:
(...)*

*Factas cond[ic]iones - - -]
anno feliciter tertio regni glo[ri]osissimi d(omi)ni nos[tri] Reccaredi regis?
Eunandus as condiciones a nouis ordinatas s(ub)s(cripsi). (signum) Ra[- - -]rus/
¹⁰ Argeredus as condicionib(us) s(ub)s(cripsi). (signum) sign[um]
Vvidericus in as condicionis s(ub)s(cripsi). A[rgiuiindus]*

Conditions of oaths to which *Lolus* must swear, by order of *Eunandus*, *Argeredus*, vicars, *Ra[mi]?* *rus*, *Widericus*, *Argiuiindus*, *Gundacius*, judges; at the request of *Basilius* he must swear in the matter of some horses that have been exchanged (...). Having fulfilled these conditions in the third year of the happy reign of our most glorious lord [King Reccared?]. *Eunandus* subscribed these conditions (*personal sign*). *Argeredus* subscribed these conditions (*personal sign*). Signature [of - - -], <*Ra[mi]rus* subscribed these conditions (*personal sign*)>. *Widericus* subscribed these conditions. *Argiuiindus* subscribed these conditions (*personal sign*). *Gundacius* subscribed these conditions (*personal sign*)

Although it is difficult to discern, I believe there is a change of hand in the last lines, and that these were written by the parties themselves as opposed to the scribe who drew up the rest of the document (fig. 6).

Besides some statements from a court case, the back of slate no. 42 also contains the signatures of various people, most probably witnesses in the trial. These are listed on several lines that are written obliquely over the court case text, and again, the different hands suggest that these were probably written by the witnesses themselves:

*Signi Gand{a}ari t(estis?) | [- - -]l[. . .] Vararicus rogitus a sup[rasc]ri[p]to in anc cartula
condicio{n}is testis | Marius rogitus a sup[ra]scripto an cartula con{d}ic{t}ionis iscrip[si] die et
anno co | supra | [- - -]no*

Some of the other slates also preserve the very fragmentary remains of witnesses' names and their signatures in the form of signs, generally a cross, including the following from Galinduste (Salamanca).

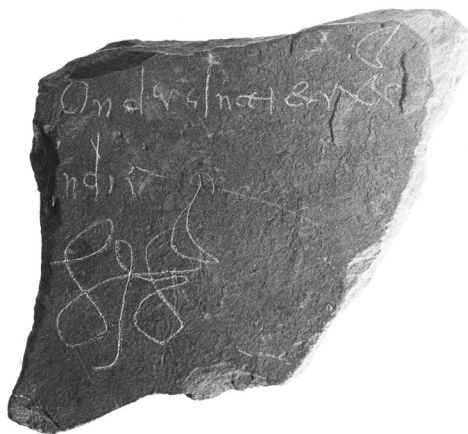


Fig. 5. Slate no. 9, Galinduste (Salamanca). Ávila Museum, Spain. Photo by I. Velázquez, 1986

²⁶ Only the first and last lines of the text are given.



Fig. 6. Slate no. 39. Fragment 3º: signatures. Diego Álvaro (Ávila), private collection of M.C. Díaz y Díaz, Santiago de Compostela (Spain). Photo by I. Velázquez, 1986

Slate no. 121:

-----|[- - -]/+ + +[- - -]/[- - -]/+ + +[- - -]/[- - -] *signum* (signum) *cruc[is?]factum* [- - -]/
[- - -] *sig(num)* (signum) *Prouidentis testis* [- - -] ||⁵ [- - -] *sig(num)* (signum) *Potiti t(estis)*
factu[m - - -]/[- - -] uinditionis su[b die? - - -]/[- - -] ianuaris regn[i - - -]/[glorio]sissimi
Rec[credi regis]/[era] DCXXXI c[- - -] ||¹⁰ (signum) ego [- - -]/-----

Slate no. 122:

-----|[- - -] *Jeui ri t(estis)* [- - -]/[- - -] *si/gn(um)* (signum) *Pauli t(estis)* [- - -]/[- - -]
sign(um) Se[- - -]/[- - -] t(estis) [- - -] *[sig]num* [- - -] ||⁵ [- - -] *cro* [[- - -]]/[- - -] *e* *go Au{ra}*
rasus (signum) *sign[um]* | [- - -] + *meos et auo[- - -]/-----*

Slate no. 126:

-----|[- - -] + *i rec[- - -]/[- - -] miri test[is - - -]/[- - -] GJeronti [- - -]/[si/gn(um)] (signum)*
Non[- - -] ||⁵ [- - -] t(estis)? [- - -] jur hunc +[- - -]/[- - -] subsc]rips[i - - -]/-----

The name *Paulus* appears on the back of the slate no. 128 (Pelayos, Salamanca), which contains a very different kind of text. It is written in an unusual manner, with a very marked prolongation of the final “s”, which seems to represent a kind of personal signature (in the modern sense). The text itself consists of a few isolated phrases of a religious nature, and centred beneath appears the name of *Paulus*, most probably the same person who wrote the sentences (fig. 7):

*Beati immaculati immaculati qui ambulant in lege D[omini] | Sugerendo d(o)m(in)o | Referentis
memoriae Dei uocaris ego serbus tuus | Paulus*

Blessed are the pure, the pure who walk in the ways of the Lord; imploring the Lord, at the mentioned remembrance of God you are called, I am your servant, Paul.

The first sentence is from Psalm 118.¹²⁷ We do not know why *Paulus* wrote this text. Could it have been a school exercise? Or was it perhaps a personal expression of religious faith?

¹²⁷ Psalm 128.1 in the King James Bible.



Fig. 7. Slate no. 128. side B, Pelayos (Salamanca), Salamanca Museum, Spain. Photo by I. Velázquez, 1998

This text is also of particular interest because of the text inscribed on the front. The first few lines are totally illegible due to surface wear, but below these are some lines from Psalm 82²⁸ according to the Visigothic-Mozarabic liturgy, and these are followed by others with a very different content, namely a petition (*sugerendum*) to King Reccared (587–601):

sugerendu(m) gloriosis<si>mo d(o)m(in)o n(ostr)o Reca|redo rege Gana++fredi d(o)m(in)o n(o)s(t)ro Recare|do rege Gumari++[. .]s seruus uoster | T++eredo ad++ullum

This term inevitably evokes the word *sugerendo* that appears on the back of the slate in the text cited previously. It should be noted that the right-hand stroke of the initial *S* of *sugerendu(m)* extends into a horizontal line separating this text from the previous one containing lines from Psalm 82.

TYPES OF NAMES

The mention of King Reccared (587–601) on the slate no. 128 provides a segue into the types of names written on the slate tablets. In the previous sections, I noted the names of some of the Visigothic kings, which are always quoted in the documents' dating clauses. Thanks to this practice, we can date some of the slates and thus establish a classification of the writing that can be used to date other texts on slates without a dating clause.

These kings' names are of Gothic origin, reflecting their ethnic background²⁹, and this may also be the case of the names of the *iudices* and *uicarii* mentioned in the *condiciones sacramentorum* on slate no. 39, *Eunandus*, *Ranemirus*, *Widericus*, *Argiundus* and *Gundacius*, and the *securitas* on slate no. 92, *Amaranus*, [- -]*fredus*, *Argeredus* and *Ranulfus*, as well as the subject of the case, *Gisadus*, all of Gothic origin. Thus, it is possible that their

²⁸ Psalm. 83 in the King James Bible. I shall return to these sentences later.

²⁹ I shall not enter into the question of differences between possible Visigothic or Ostrogothic origins of individual names, such as *Theudis*, for example.

names reflect a Gothic ancestry of the *iudices* and *uicarii*, given that these were public offices of some importance which may have been reserved for people of Gothic origin, although we cannot be sure.

However, the buyers, sellers, witnesses and others mentioned in the documents present a mixture of names, some of Gothic origin, such as *Gisadus*, from slate no. 92 which I have just mentioned, *Lolus* (no. 39) and *Froila* (no. 42), or of Graeco-Roman origin, such as *Gregorios* and *Desiderius* (no. 42), *Crisciturus* (no. 8) and *Paulus* and *Faustinus* (no. 103).

It cannot be argued that a person's name – any name – is conclusive proof of ethnic descent or place of birth. It should be noted, however, that most of the slates examined in the first section – which contain lists of personal names possibly belonging to farmers – present a mixture of names of various origins: Graeco-Roman on the one hand, and Gothic on the other. While it is true that some of the lists contain only Graeco-Roman names, these are exceptions. It could be said that this combination reflects a mixture of ethnic origins (of Hispanic-Roman descent on the one hand, and Gothic on the other) in seventh century society. It is also likely that people of Gothic origin had Roman names and vice versa. For example, the historian John of Biclaurum (*Iohannes Biclarensis*), born in Scallabis (now Santarém, in Portugal), was of Gothic origin.

Besides these names, a very small number of others are documented for the first time in the slate texts. Some of these are related to other languages, particularly Celtic, such as *Auitus* (slates nos. 55 and 117), *Canterius* (slate no. 65) and *Cantinus* (slate no. 6). Others are of unknown origin, such as *Ammica* (no. 103), perhaps related to the term *amma*, characteristic of childhood language, and *Aroculus* (no. 45), which is also known from other inscriptions (cf. *CIL* II 5085; III 4980)³⁰.

NAMES OF HEBREW ORIGIN AND *NOMINA SACRA*

The slate tablets also contain some names of Hebrew origin. However, these always occur in the context of biblical passages or of the evocation of angels and archangels in invocations or texts of a religious or magical nature.

Obviously, the absence of personal names of Hebrew origin on the slates is merely circumstantial: Jewish communities did exist in Visigothic Spain and the use of their names is attested, although these do not appear on the slates. However, we do not know if there were Jewish communities in the areas where the slate tablets have been found, as most of the sites are yet to be excavated.

I noted earlier that the front of slate no. 128 contained some barely legible lines of preserved writing. Between these and the legible lines cited previously, recording a *suggerendum* to Reccared, the following appears:

[- - -]rum et d e t + amasione sicut Oreb [Zeb] / Zebe et Salmana qui dixserun[t] / ereditatem possideamus nobi<s> s(an)c(t)uariu[m] Dei]

³⁰ For an analysis of each particular name, see Velázquez Soriano 2004, passim. Fundamental works on the onomastic register documented on the slate tablets include those by Morlet 1968; 1972; Piel 1956, 111–150; 1960, 421–444; Piel, Kremer 1976. See also Kampers 1979; García Moreno 1974 and Kremer 2004, 133–148.

Despite the incomprehensible term *amasione*, this small text should be placed in relation to Psalm 82.12³¹ according to the Visigothic-Mozarabic version of the liturgy:

Pone principes eorum sicut Oreb, Zeb, Zeeb et Salmana; omnes principes eorum qui dixerunt hereditatem possideamus nobis sanctuarium Dei.

Treat their princes like Oreb, Zeeb, Zebah and Zalmunna; all their princes who said: "Let us take the sanctuary of God as our inheritance".

With the exception of the well-known name *Iohannes* – widespread under Roman Christianity – which is documented on the slates as a personal name, all other names of Hebrew origin, such as those cited, always appear in connection to prayers, incantations or phylacteries and refer to figures from the Old Testament. Thus, for example, slates nos. 3, 104 and 123 list the names of the archangels *Uriel*, *Gabriel*, *Rafael* (spelt thus) and *Michael*. In addition, the typical *nomina sacra*, such as *Deus*, *Dominus*, *Altissimus* and *Saluator*, appear prominently both in these contexts and in the oath clauses.

There is one peculiarity among the names of Hebrew origin that merits highlighting. As in many Latin texts, Hebrew names ending in *-el* are indeclinable and appear thus on the slate tablets, but some of them are names of angels that are documented neither in the Bible nor in apocryphal texts of the Old and New Testaments, as far as we know. The *-el* ending of these names suggests that they are Hebrew names or at least were written in that form as if they were Hebrew or Biblical names, particularly when naming angels. Most probably, they represent traces of a folk tradition that has not been recorded in texts other than the slates.

Thus, slate no. 123 from Galinduste (Salamanca) contains the following fragmentary names: [- - -] *-jug[. . .]* [- - -] *-jet+uel Carcumiel Mi[chael?]* / [*Ragu?*] *el Gabriel Vriel et Rafael*. This may be a list of seven angels (cf. Apoc. 8: *et uidi septem angeles stantes in conspectu Dei*). [- - -] *-jet+uel* seems to refer to *Iehuel*, as recently proposed by Jiménez Sánchez³², and the first letters [- - -] *-jug[- -]* might perhaps be an erroneous transcription of *Raguel*. In that case, the proposed [*Ragu?*] *el* would actually refer to another similar name, but this remains uncertain.

Be that as it may, it seems clear that the list consists of a series of archangel's names. Some are well known, but *Carcumiel* appears to come from an oral tradition, this slate being the only instance where it is documented. The list of angels on the well-known Carrio slate (Villayón, Asturias), traditionally considered a Visigothic slate but actually dating from a much later period, probably the tenth century, also includes names of angels: *Micael*, *Grabriel*, *Cecitiel*, *Oriel*, *Ralfajel*, *Ananiel* and *Marmoniel*. Together with the traditional archangels *Michael*, *Gabriel*, *Uriel* and *Raphael*, *Ananiel* is also mentioned, a name that in other sources is written as *Ananel* or *Ananeel*, and the book of Enoch³³ identifies the bearer of this name as an angel. In turn, *Cecitiel* could be an erroneous transcription of *Setekiel* or *Sedekiel*³⁴. *Marmoniel*, however, refers to an angel unknown to us. All these angels, called *patriarcas* in the text, are summoned by the author of this text, which is a kind of protection charm against destructive hail.

³¹ Psalm. 83.11 in the King James Bible.

³² Jiménez Sánchez 2018, 394.

³³ Knibb 1978.

³⁴ Fernández Nieto 1997, 279.

The inscribed slate tablets from the Visigothic period are an important source for the study of the history of writing, the evolution of the Latin language and, last but not least, life in Visigothic society. Apart from conventional epigraphy, such as monumental and funerary inscriptions, and the parchment documents studied by Anscari Mundó (five short fragmentary documents in total), they are the oldest documents preserved on the Iberian Peninsula from this period. All other documents (*chartae*) and manuscripts date from the eighth century and later.

The texts written on these slate tablets cover a wide range of human activities, including agriculture, livestock farming, economic transactions, school exercises, personal messages, prayers, invocations and even curses and incantations. In short, they offer a unique insight into the daily life of the society of Visigothic Hispania, at least in rural settings.

Nevertheless, the Visigothic slate tablets are not totally exceptional. They are easily compared to the cedarwood Albertini tablets³⁵ containing legal documents written in ink, which date from the end of the fifth century, as they share many similarities in terms of their content. They also share striking similarities with the *ostraca* of the fifth and early sixth centuries – recently studied by Rodney Ast³⁶ – from Tebessa and its surroundings, in present-day Algeria, North Africa. Written on different materials such wood, slate and ceramics, these documents all spring from a cultural impulse to leave a lasting written record of commercial and economic transactions and various activities of daily life in different places.

The names that appear in the slate texts generally belong to people otherwise unknown to us, as there is no record of their existence in other historical or literary sources. Notable exceptions are, of course, the names of the kings included in the dating clauses and the biblical names that appear in some texts.

The personal names recorded on the slates are mostly of Graeco-Roman and Gothic origin. The slates show that farmers at least had names of various origins, suggesting that people from different ethnic backgrounds mixed and that their names probably did not directly reflect their origin. However, there may be exceptions to this rule. Such might be the case of those holding public office, the *iudices* and *uicarii*, all of whom had names of Gothic origin and perhaps did belong to the *gens Gothorum*. The mixture of names in the texts inscribed on the slate tablets sheds light on the inhabitants of Visigothic Spain, not only the erudite intellectuals whose texts have been preserved, but also the farmers who cultivated the land and people who are not named in any other written sources.

Finally, it should be noted that the personal names do not appear solely in simple – albeit abundant – lists of names of various origins. On the contrary, the various forms in which these names are presented in the texts provide information on the content, purpose and use of these slate tablets. The names of individuals that appear in simple lists and/or as part of a series of numerical quantities, indicating contributions or the distribution of grain, cereals or other commodities, are probably the names of farmers. The buyers, sellers, witnesses and judges involved in legal transactions sometimes wrote their names in their own hand, signing documents with a *signum crucis* or other sign, on occasion in the form of a Chi Rho, as is the case, for example, of slates nos. 39 and 40.2. We can even infer the feeling of pride of a man called *Paulus*, the only scribe whose name we know, who transcribed a few sentences on

³⁵ Courtois, Leschi, Perrat, Saumagne 1952.

³⁶ Ast 2016, 7–32.

slate no. 128, from Pelayos (Salamanca), and then signed it with his own name. He placed his name in the centre of the text, carefully prolonging the end of the final *S* in his name, as a simple way of recording his direct participation in the act of writing.

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