

THE CATHEDRAL OF ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY AND SAINT JOHN THE BAPTIST
A BOHEMIAN ECCLESIASTICAL LATIN INSCRIPTION

Susan Eaglesham and Matthew Marinoff in the Spring of 2023 travelled to Central and Eastern Europe. Among sites toured was the historic *Cathedral of Assumption of Our Lady and Saint John the Baptist*. The church is located in Bohemia, a region north-east of Prague, the Czech Republic.

On return from Europe, the question was asked, regarding a Latin inscription on a plaque; “Is the reference to a slain knight?” The story, as revealed by research, spans centuries and commences in the end-days of the Roman Empire.

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The story is about Vincent, a young man who lived in the Roman province of Hispania, known now as Spain. Vincent’s brief life is recounted. The biographical sketch is followed by a discussion of a Latin inscription.

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Onlooker, see below the reliquary and a representation of Vincent.

Vincent of Saragossa, also known as Vincent the Martyr or Vincent of Huesca or Vincent the Deacon; suffered and died during a purge of Christians. The suppression occurred under emperor Diocletian.

Vincent was born in the town of Caesaraugusta, now known as Zaragoza. The town is in Aragon province, beside the Ebro River, with tributaries: Huerva and Gallego. Vincent’s parents were Eutricius and Enola, respectively father and mother. He was born in the late 3rd Century CE.

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1	DEUS + [symbol of a Cross] qui hum [missing] stan [missing]
2	dignitatem mirabili [missing], et mi
3	rabilius reformasti, da [missing] er hujus aque
4	et vint mysterium, ejus Divinitatis [missing] consortes; qui humani
5	ratis nostra fieri dignatus est particeps JESUS Christus Filius tuus. Do
6	minus noster. Qui tecum vivit et regnat in unitate Spiritus Sancti, DEUS , Per omnia
7	sacula saculorum.
8	[space]
9	Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas et circumdabo altare tuum Domine. Ut audiam
10	vocem laudis et enarrem universa mirabilia tua. Domine dilexi decorem domus tua, et locum [missing]
11	bitationis gloria tua. Ne perdas cum impijs animam meam.
12	et cum viris sanguinum vitam meam. In quorum ma
13	nibus iniquitates sunt: dextera eorum repleta est
14	muneribus. Ego autem in Innocentia mea
15	ingressus sum: redime me, et miserere mei.
16	Pes meus stetit in directo: in Ecclesijs
17	benedicam te Domine. Gloria
18	Patri et Filio et Spiritui
19	Santo. Sicut erat in
20	principio, et nunc
21	et semper, et in sa
22	cula saculorum

1	GOD + [symbol of a Cross] who [missing]
2	wonderful sign [missing] and my
3	raving reform, da[missing]er this water
4	and twenty mysteries, of him Devine [missing] shared; who of humanity
5	our raft made of dignity is shared [with] JESUS Christ your Son. Give
6	our lesser. Who, with you, live and reign in united Holy Breath, God, through all
7	Holy of Holies
8	[space]
9	I will wash between my innocent hands and I will surround your altar Lord. That I hear
10	calling praise and explain the wonder of the universe to you. Lord Silex seemliness of your house and place [missing]
11	[unknown] glory to you. Not Destroy with my [unknown] soul
12	and with blooded men my life. In whom
13	iniquitous hands are: their right is refilled
14	offices. I but in my innocence
15	I am engaged: I buy back to me, and my misery
16	my foot stands laid straight: in the Church
17	I speak well of you Lord. Glory
18	The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit
19	Holy. And now
20	chief, and now
21	and always, and in the
22	Holy of Holies

Vincent passed his youth and early adulthood in Caesaraugusta. He was an early convert to Christianity, being baptized by Bishop Valerius of Saragossa.

Valerius had a speech impairment. Therefore, Vincent preached the Gospel throughout Aragon.

When the persecution of the Christians commenced under Diocletian, both Vincent and Valerius were brought before Dacian, the Roman governor. Vincent and Valerius were imprisoned. At their trial Vincent spoke for both. Asked to recant their Christian faith, each man refused. Threats and pleadings were offered, with Vincent being defiant. Dacian angered, then ordered Vincent be tortured.

Aurelius Prudentius, a Christian from northern Spain, was a contemporary who either knew or knew of Vincent. He wrote of him in his *Liber Peristephanon*, the *Book of the Crowns of Martyrdom*.

Vincent was stretched on the rack with his flesh torn from his torso with iron hooks. Then his wounds were rubbed with salt. This act was followed by his being burned alive on a second gridiron. After torture, Vincent was thrown into his prison cell falling upon a bed of prepared broken pottery to lacerate the remains.

Bishop Valerius was not tortured. He was released from jail and exiled.

Vincent's composure throughout his torture was such that his jailer converted to Christianity.

Vincent's remains were placed in a sack and thrown into the sea. Legend asserts raven's guarded Vincent's body to prevent devouring by vultures. Caesaraugusta's Christian community retrieved the sack. His remains were taken to a headland, now known as Cape St. Vincent. A shrine was built, with ravens guarding the site.

Vincent is commemorated on January 22nd.

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The plaque is reproduced at the top of page 2; with following Latin and English texts.

The text does not cite Vincent by name, though the words are of the penitent.

In 1142, the monastic order of Cistercian monks built an abbey church and monastery on this site. The church was later replaced by a Gothic cathedral. Life slumbered until the Reformation swept all before it. The Hussites, followers of Jan Hus, who was the leader of the Bohemian Reformation; burnt the cathedral to the ground in 1421. The site remained a ruin until 1700. Abbot Jindrich Snopek rebuilt the cathedral. The present, Baroque Gothic-style church was consecrated in 1708.

Baroque's artistic flourish is evident in the reliquary and in the plaque.

The plaque's inscription is Classical Latin, with several linguistic variations. One variation is the phonetic shift in pronunciation which occurred during the late Medieval and Renaissance periods. At this time, European languages evolved to meet new social conditions. One example of pronunciation shift occurs on Line 5: JESUS Christus, versus Classical Latin's: IESUS Christus. The phonetic shift is reflected in spelling; the adoption of the letter 'j', which is a modified 'i'.

Line 10, the penitent's words change from narrative prose to the vocative of direct address: Domine Silex.

Dominus, meaning, 'master, lord; and in ecclesiastical usage, Lord'. The noun's nominative ending changes from 'us' to the vocative of '-e'. Vocative address is *differential*. The penitent is *speaking directly* to Lord Silex.

At this time, some Christian communities addressed JESUS Christus as Lord Silex. The Latin noun for *flint*: a hard, black stone is *silex*. If you strike a flint-stone, lightning flashes forth: **silex scintillans**, **flint sparkling**. The penitent seeks moral order.

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Susan and Matthew

With thanks for your interest in Classical Latin studies

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**Corpus licet fatiscens
iaceat recline pallum,
Christum tamen sub ipso
meditabimur sopore.**

**Let, let the weary body
Lie sunk in slumber deep.
The heart shall still remember
Christ in its very sleep.**

Aurelius Prudentius