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BOHEMOND VI AND
THE ENIGMATIC INSCRIPTION
FROM TRIPOLI

KRJNIE CIGGAAR

'seste tor de la monee de la comunauté des gens de Triple'  

The inscription in Old French on a marble plaque from Tripoli of which Bohemond VI was the commissioner, remains enigmatic until the present day. The damaged state of the inscription, especially where the date of the text is given and the use of the term 'communauté de Tripoli', are the main obstacles for a definite interpretation of this inscription. The marble slab, discovered in 1928 in Tripoli, in or near the port, is now in the National Museum of Beirut. A mould of the inscription arrived in Paris as a gift from the National Museum in Beirut in 1936 and is part of the collection of the Cité de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine (Palais de Chaillot, Paris). The marble plate measures 60cm x 60cm x 9 cm.

Inscription from Crusader Tripoli
(Courtesy of the Musée des Monuments Français, Paris (Palais de Chaillot))

1 Leiden University.
2 Inscription found in Tripoli, see below, and ill. 1.
3 I am very grateful to Mr Hervé Lemoine, Directeur du Musée des Monuments français, for this information and for giving permission to publish the inscription.
G. Schlumberger, the well-known Byzantinist who had a great interest in Latin Outremer, was the first to publish the inscription (ill. 1). He briefly discussed the titles used by Bohemond VI in the text, i.e. prince of Antioch and count of Tripoli. Schlumberger concluded that in 1267, 1268 or 1269, Bohemond VI built a new mint or restored the already existing mint of Tripoli where coinage for the county of Tripoli was minted (Schlumberger 1928:102-105). Schlumberger saw a link with the capture of Antioch by Baybars (1260-1277), the sworn enemy of the Latins in the East. The capture of Antioch would have taken place in 1267, hence his interpretation of Bohemond’s building activities to create or recreate the mint in Tripoli, since Antioch was definitely lost for him and could no longer function as the capital of the principality. Nowadays, however, it is generally accepted that Antioch was captured in May 1268, which sets the inscription in a slightly different context. For his date of the capture of Antioch Schlumberger seems to have followed the nineteenth-century translation of Al-Maqrizi (Quatremère 1837-1845, vol. II, 1:52).

The ‘tor de la monée’ in crusader Tripoli, the monument for which the inscription was made, is otherwise unknown. J. Prawer, initiator of the research on the existence of ‘communes’ in crusader cities, published a transcription of the Old French text and a translation into English: “In the name of the Holy Spirit. / I, Bohemond, by the grace of God, prince of Antioch, / count of Tripoli, / ordered the building of this Tower / of the Mint of the Community of the / People of Tripoli, / in the year of the Incarnation / of our Lord Jesus Christ, 126...”. He concluded that before the establishment of the well-known commune of Tripoli in 1275, after the death of Bohemond VII, son of Bohemond VI, the city had known an earlier ‘commune’ in the 1260s, thus interpreting the term ‘comunaute des gens’ in the Tripoli inscription as a possible reference to the existence of such an earlier ‘commune’. The normal use of Roman numerals would reduce the dating of the inscription to the years 1266, 1267 or 1268, thus leaving out the possibility that the inscription could have been produced in 1269 (Prawer 1977:171-174; idem 1980:76, n. 64; idem 1972: illustration of the inscription. opp. 72). There are, however, examples in Outremer where Roman numerals were used differently. In an inscription to commemorate the capture of Antioch one finds ‘Ab Antiochia capta LXIII [anni sunt]’, and in a funerary inscription the year 1290 is given as MCCLXXX (de Sandoli 1974:108 no.133, 315 no. 417).

Prawer followed Schlumberger’s interpretation of the text that the inscription commemorated the instalment or re-instalment of a mint. He made the suggestion that the Tower of the Mint may also have functioned as
a Customs House. For the time being, the date and circumstances of the first ‘commune’ in Tripoli and the lack of more concrete evidence, in the context of the inscription as we know it had to remain conjectural, not to say enigmatic (Prawer 1977:171-174).

Studying the later history of the County of Tripoli, and especially the period before its eventual capture in 1289, I came across the article by Schlumberger with its intriguing conclusion. From the Crusader states we do not have any information about mints or mint towers in Antioch or in Tripoli, or about the issue of coins by a commune (Metcalf 1995:148-168). Only a seal is known to have been issued by the commune of Antioch (Schlumberger 1943: 71 no. 168). Of course this does not mean that such towers were non-existent. One wonders if the limited issue of Crusader coinage in Syria and Palestine would not rather have been produced in the well-guarded palaces of the rulers and that special buildings or mint towers were therefore not necessary. The context of a Tower of the Mint, in combination with a community of people of a specific city, is puzzling enough, let alone its existence in Tripoli. The princes of Antioch ruled Tripoli since 1187, but nothing is known about the practical circumstances of their coin production in Antioch, before or after they held power over Tripoli. The same goes for the county of Tripoli until 1187.

A careful and close re-reading of the text of the inscription is therefore necessary and may reveal part of its mystery. If we are to believe the Gestes des Chiprois, Bohemond VI was not reputed for having been a ruler who ‘enough sympathised with his people’, i.e. the inhabitants of Tripoli, as to include them in such a commemorative inscription. After the death of Bohemond VII in 1275, the burgesses of Tripoli complained about the misdeeds and the outrageous behaviour of Bohemond VII, his father Bohemond VI, and his grandfather Bohemond V (Raynaud 1887:232; Prawer 1977:172 n. 5). One can hardly believe that such rulers allowed or accepted the existence of a ‘commune’ which found its origins in a ‘movement of protest’ manifesting feelings of discontent which would soon have been suppressed by the just mentioned rulers.

At first sight, a careful reading of the original inscription on the marble plaque results in a few minor improvements of the earlier transcription by Prawer. Firstly the name Antioch (in Old French ‘Antioche’)

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4 Due to the damaged state of the seal (which has now disappeared) Schlumberger was not able to give it a date. The commune of Antioch started in the late twelfth century and lasted a number of years finishing in the early thirteenth century (Cahen 1940:584s; Prawer 1980:68-76).
was not written in an abbreviated form and, taking into consideration the importance of the title ‘Prince of Antioch’ in the historical and political context of the time, an abbreviation of such an important element is not likely to have been accepted by its commissioner. Secondly, there is the adding of the proposition ‘de’ at the end of the inscription where, at the end of line eight and the beginning of line nine, the marble plaque has suffered damage. Grammatically speaking it was not necessary to add the possessive preposition ‘de’ (‘en l’an de l’incarnas/ion [de] nostre senior’). In Old French one could easily leave out the genital preposition. Moreover the damaged part of the marble plate does not offer enough space for adding the word ‘de’ (Buridant 2000:91,461-462). Apart from the fact that the sculptor may already have had problems to produce his text in the remaining space, there is no need to add such an element to the ‘restoration’ of the inscription. More than one contemporary inscription leaves out this element, like an almost contemporary funerary inscription in Outremer, ‘lan de l’incarnation Notre Seiggnor Ihū Crit m.cclxxVIII’ (Schlumberger 1928:104; Clermont-Ganneau 1884:90, pl. X, A). Schlumberger also gives the funerary inscription of the tomb of Marguerite de Beaumont, widow of Bohemond VI, where we find the same phenomenon, ‘femme monseigneur Bemont, Prince d’Antioche et conte de Triple ...’ (Schlumberger 1928:104 n. 2). The tomb, once in the abbey of Maubuisson, near Paris, seems to be now lost (Lebeuf 1883, II:121, inaccessible).

The execution of the inscription is carefully done and resulted in a beautiful decorative text, a pleasure for the onlooker. It is remarkable that the sculptor placed the important names and terms (‘Beimont’ ... ‘prince’ ... ‘conte’ ... ‘seste tor’ ... ‘gens’ ... ‘senior’) in the centre of the plaque so that those who passed by could not miss the essentials of the inscription. Such careful planning of the text does not allow for failures to be made by the sculptor. Needless to say that Bohemond VI, builder of the monument and patron of the commemorative stone, would not have accepted a serious fault or misreading in the text. This would certainly also apply to the very reason of the plaque’s existence, i.e. the building of this specific monument, ‘seste tor de la monee’, which is composed of two elements: ‘tor’ and ‘monee’. The term ‘tor’ is not problematic. Undoubtedly it stands for ‘tour’ (‘tower’), the translation ‘taureau’ (‘bull’) not being relevant here (Tobler-Lommatzsch 1975, VI, cc. 215-216; Godefroy 1892, V:747). The choice for ‘tor’ may have been prompted by its Occitan origins and connotation, and have been a ‘concession’ to the Frankish population of Tripoli. This leaves us with the other component, ‘la monee’. A modern reader, consciously or
unconsciously, is tempted to read ‘monnaie’ (‘money’), since the pronunciation and the orthography easily suggest such reading and interpretation. However, the modern French ‘monnaie’, a word also used in various modern languages, derives from Latin ‘moneta’, and has given in Old French ‘monnoie’ (Tobler-Lommatzsch 1965, VI, cc. 215-216, ‘moneage’; Godefroy 1888, V:388, ‘moneage’). In modern Dutch the word ‘portemonnaie’ (‘purse’) can also be written ‘portemonnee’.

In Old French, however, the word ‘monee’ (or ‘mounée’) derives from vulgar Latin ‘molinata’, which became ‘monée’ in modern French and should be translated as ‘le grain qu’on porte au moulin pour le faire moudre’, or ‘la taxe sur la mouture’. The term ‘monee’ in the Tripoli inscription can therefore be translated as ‘the grain brought to the mill to be milled’ or ‘the taxes on the milling’, the so-called milling dues and/or the ‘portage rights’. If the first translation is right, and could be applied to the Tripoli inscription, this would justify the suggestion that the Tower in Tripoli, is a Grain Tower and may have served more than one purpose: the place where the milling of grain took place, the bureau where the milling dues were paid and very likely the place where the grain could be stored.5 One should therefore not exclude the possibility that the tower was equipped or could be equipped, if necessary, with a milling system since mills, if motioned by wind, had to be installed on fortifications or on towers (see also below).

The new interpretation of the inscription, and in consequence the function of the building where it was placed, should be considered and interpreted in the historical and political context of the late 1260s when the Latins in Outremer were facing perilous times and had to counterbalance enemy threats.

In the 1260s Sultan Baybars (1260-1277) was actively trying to drive out the Latins from Syria and Palestine. For the Latin rulers it was crucial to withstand the confrontations with the Mamluk forces. The county of Tripoli was then ruled by Bohemond VI (1251-1275) who was ruling prince of Antioch until 1268, when Baibars conquered the city. After the fall of Antioch he was titular prince of Antioch and had to take up residence in Tripoli more permanently. Where the date of the inscription is given, the

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5 Tobler-Lommatzsch 1965, VI, c. 308 (‘monee’), c. 359 (‘mounée’ = ‘grain’; Godefroy 1888: V, 388, ‘monee’ (‘mouture’), 1. mouture, 2. droit sur la mouture; Grandsaignes d’Hauterive 1947 etc.: ‘monée’ (‘molnnee’), 1. grain qu’on porte au moulin pour le faire moudre, 2. taxe sur la mouture; Niermeyer 1984: molinagium: 1. mouture (no English translation given), 2. redevance de moulage (‘milling dues’). In Tripoli one finds the family name ‘de la Monie’ (‘de la Moneta’), in Acre the ‘de la Monée’ family (Richard 1945:55 and n. 3).
marble plaque has unfortunately suffered damage and only the numerals M:CC:L:VI (i.e. 1266), have been preserved, leaving space for two or three more '1's. But even if the exact date of the making of the inscription cannot be re-established, the political context may enlighten us on the monument and the reason for its building.

In June 1266, the county of Tripoli was raided by Qalawun, one of Baibars' generals; Baibars himself was heading north to Antioch. Qalawun's starting point was Homs, from where the way was open to reach Tripoli. The fortresses of Halba, Arqa and Qulai'a, lying some 20 and 25 km north/northeast of Tripoli, were captured. These fortresses dominated the road between Tripoli and Homs (Grousset 1934-1936, III:631; Dussaud 1927: map V, B 2). For these events, Claude Cahen quotes a number of Arab sources, among them Al-Maqrizi, and a letter sent by the papal legate Simon de Brion to the bishop of Tournai. This was apparently a circular letter based on information about the disastrous effects of the raids of Qalawun, since the letter encourages its correspondents to help the Christians in Outremer (Cahen 1940:715; Quatremère 1842, I, ii, 27; El², VI, 193). Runciman refers to the writings of two authors in Arabic, Abu al-Fida' who was born in Damascus in 1273 and died in 1331 as governor of Hama, and the fifteenth-century chronicler al-Aīnī. Abu al-Fida' did not witness the events, but was well informed about the hostilities having taken place in the area. Al-Aīnī's report, based on earlier sources, gives more details about the raids, such as the destruction of trees and churches in the environs of Tripoli, and the transport of captives who were attached on camels (Runciman 1971, III:322; Abu al-Fida', RHC, Or. I, 151, and EF, I, 118-119; al-Aīnī, RHC Or., II, 222-223, 227, and El², I, 790-791).

The letter of the papal legate, Simon de Brion, seems to have been inspired by a letter written in Outremer by an abbot of an unknown abbey, and which has only been preserved as an anonymous letter. The latter was originally in the possession of the Monastery of the Dunes in Koksijde, on the Belgian coast (near Veurne) before it found its way to Bruges. The Monastery of the Dunes was a Cistercian monastery. It seems that the original letter was written at the end of 1266 by a monk of an abbey near Tripoli (F. Kervijn de Lettenhove 1850:18-19 (Anonymus), 22-27 (Simon de Brion); later published by J.B.M.C. Kervijn de Lettenhove 1875:14-15 (Anonymus), 549-551 (Simon de Brion). The anonymous letter has only occasionally been referred to (Röhrich 1893:360 no.1383; Huygens 1981:15).6

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6 Röhrich erroneously dated the letter to 1271.
So far now for the original letter of which the name of the author and the name of his abbey in Outremer has not been established so far. The anonymous letter, in its present form is very emotional. Its author describes in detail what happened during these raids in the county of Tripoli. Some seven thousand horsemen invaded the region. During the capture of the three fortresses three thousand people were made prisoner. The enemy came as far as the Gate of Tripoli (‘usque ad portam Tripolis discurrentes’). His abbey suffered losses and out of fear for the future the author and his companions fled to Tripoli. They did not dare return to their abbey (‘moramur siquidem in civitate Tripolitana, nec audemus ad abbatiam reverti’). The abbey had lost its two ‘grangia’ (outlying farms) at Bossombre and at Roseia. The goods, stored in the tower near the Fons Ortorum at Bessombe, were lost and the trees had been felled. They had also lost their growing crop and/or their corn (‘bladum’), which meant that the seeds for future crops were no longer available either. The houses and the mill had been burnt down and the mill stones had been broken. Also, their farm at Roseia had been destroyed, and so their labour of years had gone (Kervijn de Lettenhove 1875:14-15). If the letter was indeed written at the end of 1266 the refugees had spent already a considerable time in Tripoli and must have been desperate for help from the West. The destruction of mills and the cutting down of trees were part of military activities in those times (e.g. Raynaud 1887:184, attack on Acre in 1167). The long lasting effects of such destructions must have been a great frustration for the victims. The importance of mills, so essential for daily life, was sometimes expressed in negotiations, as one finds in a treaty of Qalaun with the Latin Kingdom in 1283, according to which the mills of Acre were spared (Holt 1995:78).

It has been suggested that the abbey in question was the Cistercian abbey of Belmont (modern Balamand), situated some 15 km south-east from Tripoli (Kervijn de Lettenhove 1850:6; Huygens 1981:14). J. Prawer called him a ‘clerc des environs de Tripoli’ (Prawer 1969-1970, II:490). The abbey’s property in Bossombre and Roseia may have been located north of Tripoli where most of the hostilities took place, between Tripoli and Tortosa according to the Annales de Terre Sainte, ‘un fors amiraus courut toute la terre de Sur et la terre de Triple et prist Arches et Albe et le Gouliait et mist le feu par toute la terre qui est entre Triple et Tourtouse’ (Röhrich 1884:452). The abbey where the ‘refugee letter’ was written or conceived, may not yet have suffered from hostilities which pleads for its location south of Tripoli and corroborates the suggestion of earlier commentators that the letter came from, or referred to, Belmont, the more so because the number of
Latin abbeys in the area was limited. If the monks came from Belmont Abbey they may have found some form of hospitality in the Cistercian convent of Saint Mary Magdalena in Tripoli. In spite of modern statements, the existence of a Cistercian convent in Tripoli has been confirmed by Jacques de Vitry in his *Historia Occidentalis* (Hinnebusch 1972, chapter 15:18, 268; Grossel 1997:123; Hamilton 1976:410-412; Hamilton 1979: 410-412).

The letter ends with a prayer for help, for the congregation itself and for the Christian people in Outremer who were not powerful or numerous enough to resist the enemy, *Supplicantes ut nos et christianum populum citramarimum qui vires ad resistendum tantae potentiae non habemus, precibus vestris apud Dominum recommendatos habere velitis, ut quibus vires propriae non sufficiunt, suum dignetur clementer auxilium impartiri* (Kervijn de Lettenhove 1875:15). The loss of grain and seeds, and the destruction of mills was catastrophic in an area where more attacks could be expected. It was necessary to guarantee food supplies for the inhabitants of Tripoli and for the many refugees who flocked to the city and for those who were still to come in the spring of 1271 like the defenders of Krak des Chevaliers and the survivors of Akkar who came to Tripoli after having obtained a safe-conduct to Tripoli. Many more refugees were to come (Runciman 1971, III:334; Deschamps 1973:308). During the siege of Safet mainly the indigenous Syrians (‘*tous les Suriens, sergans, archiers*’) were offered such a safe-conduct out of the castle (Raynaud 1887 : 179).

The situation grew even worse when, early 1268, Baybars himself laid siege to Tripoli as we read in the biography of the sultan written by Ibn ʿAbd al-Zahir and in the letter written by Baybars to Bohemond after the capture of Antioch in May 1268; the letter has been preserved in Baybar’s biography. When Baybars laid siege to the city, Bohemond VI resided in Tripoli and witnessed the atrocities of the siege, which, fortunately for the Latins, did not result in the city’s capture. According to the biography it was ‘Zeal for Islam and religious fervour [that] forced the Sultan to attack Tripoli ... The Sultan seized most of the region and then, following the best counsel, retired’. In his letter, included in the biography, the sultan informed Bohemond VI about the destruction of Antioch and announced that soon he would come back to Tripoli, stressing that Tripoli’s leader was already informed about events, adding a serious warning, ‘You know too that we left you, but only to return, that we have deferred your total destruction, but only for a certain number of days’ (Gabrieli 1969:308,310). Another, more sober version of the biography of Baybars, is more succinct on the siege of Tripoli or an attack on the city (Sadeque 1956:56,58).
The fourteenth/fifteenth-century Arab historian Al-Maqrizi describes the unsuccessful siege of Tripoli by Baybars and mentions the attack on its fortifications, the faubourg and the stronghold Mont Pélérin (its Arabic name Qalʿat Sandjil derived from the founder’s name, Raymond de Saint-Gilles). After Baybars’ siege, early 1268, the faubourg Mont Pélérin was left in ruin and its churches were demolished (Quatremère 1842, II, 1:102-103; Salamé-Sarkis 1980:34). The city’s fortifications must have suffered damage as well. Where the faubourg of Tripoli had been, debris was lying around, readily available for repair works and new constructions, as was the wood of the many trees which had been cut down by the enemy (Deschamps 1973, I:293-295; Salamé-Sarkis 1980:34; Gabrieli 1969:310). In 1268 building conditions were thus even more favourable than in the summer of 1266, but lack of evidence does not allow to suggest a date for the building of the Grain Tower in Tripoli on the basis of the availability of debris.

Bohemond VI had to take seriously the sultan’s repeated threats and he had to face another attack or siege. One wonders if he really felt an urgent need to build a new mint or restore an already existing one. The ruler of Tripoli would rather have felt the need to prepare the city for a new siege and take measures to withstand a new attack such as repairing the walls and the other fortifications. Part of such preparations would have been to bring food reserves into the city, since the situation was becoming more and more alarming. Even during the period before the capture of Antioch the situation was so dangerous that food supplies had to be stored in the city to assure the city’s grain supplies and protect the inhabitants from famine. In the East towers were regularly used as storage rooms for various goods (Adler 1907:13; Andrea 2000:211).

It is not unlikely that Bohemond VI built a tower, re-used or restored an already existing tower, and prepared it to store seeds, grain, and other foodstuffs. The tower may have been part of the already existing defence system of Tripoli or may have been a free-standing tower. If the tower was built after the siege of 1268 or later, then debris was easily available in the faubourg. If the construction took place earlier, the material had to be brought in from further away. After the raids of Qalawun the situation became more urgent and the inhabitants had to be engaged in restoration works and other (re)building activities for the common cause, in other words, they were obliged to work in the interest of the community, which must have included the foreign communities as well. The latter owned their own mills and storage capacity, in Tripoli and outside the city, which may already have
suffered damage by enemy attacks. The same was probably the case of grain and other food supplies coming into the city from landed property elsewhere in the county, which was in the possession of these foreign communities or of other parties or individuals. The ‘portagium’, the payment for the threshing and milling of the grain, and/or the obligation to bring the grain to the threshing floor and/or to the storehouse, has been discussed by various scholars (Richard 1985:257; Prawer 2001:376; Boas 1999:61). According to A.J. Boas it was a tax levied on the transport of grain to granaries or for the use of threshing floors (Boas 1999:61). The various interpretations of the term ‘portagium’ do not facilitate the exact interpretation of the function of the Grain Tower in Tripoli. The ‘common cause’ in the inscription may be more easily interpreted. The ‘comunaute de gens de Triple’ may here refer to the interest and welfare of the entire population of Tripoli, residents, foreign communities, refugees etc. In the meantime the grain market, including the taxes on storing and milling of the grain, must have remained the ruler’s prerogative. In times of war this was even more obvious. Bohemond’s initiative and his role as patron of the monument were probably the outcome of the menaces from outside.

There were several mills in the crusader cities. In Jerusalem they were owned by the king, the military orders, the Genoese and Venetians, and private individuals (Röhrich 1887:320). Sometimes they were outside the cities, like the mills of Antioch, which stood along the Orontes. Sometimes the mills seem to have been built within the precincts of the cities but this was more than once problematic because of their ‘closed character’. For Tripoli we know three mills: the ‘molendinum Gibeleti’, the ‘molendinum Guillelmi Bernardi’, and the ‘molendinum maris’. The latter must have been a windmill and may have stood on a bastion on the seashore, outside or inside the walls of Tripoli. Its location near the waterfront suggests that this mill belonged to one of the foreign communities. The city was built in the form of a triangle and was protected by the sea on two sides. On the seashore and on the bastions the wind was favourable to set into motion a mill, which could have put into motion more than one set of millstones (Röhrich 1887:317). A number of books with references to these mills being inaccessible, it is impossible to give a date post quem for some of these mills (Paoli 1733:7,270; Delaville Le Roulx 1883:24,178). One cannot exclude that the ‘molendinum Gibeleti’, apparently in the possession of the Embriaco family in 1243 (lords of Gibelet)\footnote{Delaville Le Roulx 1897, II : 604s, where the molendinum maris belongs to Jean de Giblet which is possibly identical with the molendinum Gibelett.}, was
returned to Bohemond VI whose suzerainty had been contested by members of this family during the revolt of 1258. Bertrand of Gibelet, leader of the revolt, was murdered and his head was presented to Bohemond (Runciman 1971, III:288; Deschamps 1973:207). Modern research on windmills in Outremer has concluded that the first windmill was installed during the siege of Acre in around 1190 which suggests that the mills of Tripoli belong to a later period (Lohrmann 1995:24-26; Idem 2000:134-137). It may be useful to draw attention to the existence of the ‘Torres Molendinorum’ (Towers of the Mills) in Acre and on Rhodes, which seem to have made ‘work’ more than one mill. The Grain Tower in Tripoli may have been built to function in the same way, especially if the other mills were located outside the city and could not function as such in times of war or had already suffered damage from enemy attacks. Tripoli was protected by a double wall creating possibilities for the building of mills, even temporary ones, to make millstones turn and which were installed on the inner wall of the city or in other places less vulnerable to attacks from outside (Röhrich 1884a:378 n. 53; Riley-Smith 1995:345, map of Rhodes).

Details about the mills or a grain market in Tripoli are not known. In times of war or threat of war, a special regime for food distribution must have been put in place. One wonders if the building of the Grain Tower was a strategic measure and a political manoeuvre in more than one sense, such as allowing the possibility to mill grain within the walls of Tripoli in case the other mills (outside the city) could not function properly in times of war, but also to help the ruler of the city to gain more influence and authority over the foreign communities which, from time to time, were inclined to rebellion.

The perilous situation of the time, notably in the late 1260s may thus explain why, for more than one reason, the inscription refers to the ‘comunaute de gens’ of Tripolis, making clear that the population of the city was engaged in the city’s defence. At the same time the ruler charmed and honoured its inhabitants by including them in the inscription, which must have been accessible to the public. Communal interest was the basis for common undertakings. One cannot exclude that a commune, in the sense of a revolutionary movement, may have been on its way at the time, but if so it must certainly have been prevented by the ruler who, at this occasion in a positive way, involved the inhabitants in his plans, for their own safety and, more importantly, by choosing French for the inscription, the language of the ‘native’ Franks of Tripoli, as Prawer described them. This may have been a

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8 Unfortunately Delaville Le Roulx 1883:24, for the ‘molendinum Gibeleti’ is inaccessible.
political manoeuvre to come to peace with the Franks after the discord in the city in the late 1250s. Various groups of peoples, among whom the Franks, had played a role in these troubles (Grousset 1936:552-556; Cahen 1940:707-708). At the same time Bohemond may have expressed his gratitude, even advertised it indirectly by having the inscription made in French, for having good relations with Saint Louis and the French Crusaders who had come to Outremer in the early 1250s, thus stressing the French connection. In 1252, the king of France had knighted young Bohemund in Jaffa, in 1252 (Prawer 1977:174; Cahen 1940:533, 702).

By placing the community under the protection of the Holy Spirit (‘En non dou saint Esprit’) Bohemond created a spiritual bond with the Tripolitan community. Community versus commune, Holy Spirit versus revolt. Inspiration and action may have been the goals of Bohemond VI’s policy when he built the Grain Tower in Tripoli.

Sympathetic as the idea of the existence of a ‘commune’ in Tripoli may have been to modern scholars who ‘wanted’ to see an influential role for the burgesses in daily dealings of the Crusader realms, the late 1260s were not appropriate in allowing internal weaknesses which could lead to such a ‘commune’, bringing society into great turmoil. Immediate action was needed to face the enemy, and the ruler of Tripoli justly seems to have seen the urgency and need to build a tower for the milling of grain and the storage of food in case of future enemy attacks, rather than the need for building or restoring a mint tower in Tripoli.

Due to the damage of the marble slab, the exact date of the tower’s construction has to remain enigmatic, as does its location, its functions and its ultimate destination. Taking into consideration the variable way of using Roman numerals in inscriptions, Schlumberger’s dating (1267, 1268 or 1269) therefore still holds true.

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