This thesis has as its subject Punic inscriptions from the Roman period (i.e. after the destruction of Carthage in 146 B.C.). Specifically, it studies and describes the so-called ‘Latino-Punic’ inscriptions, that is inscriptions in the Punic language which were written with the Latin alphabet. Most of these Latino-Punic inscriptions have been found in the decades after the Second World War in Tripolitania in North Africa (in the current Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya). So far they have been only roughly studied, with few being satisfying results. This is mainly due to the lack of systematic methodology. The present study has been wherever possible based on autopsy of the texts and attempts to give a linguistic analysis of them. The work falls roughly speaking into three parts: introduction, grammar and text-edition.

The first part is a general discussion that places the texts in the broader context of late-Roman North Africa (as from the second century A.D.). In this part other relevant sources are also discussed, such as the glosses and reports concerning Punic by the church father St. Augustine. Moreover, an attempt is made to describe the mutual relation between the three most spoken languages: Punic, Libyan and Latin. Although most of the inscriptions are in Latin, this fact cannot be used as an argument to claim that this language also had the largest number of speakers. On the contrary, it only proves that epigraphy in Latin was more common than in other languages. Here it is argued that Latin, outside some large cities, did not threaten or replace the indigenous languages (including Punic) of North Africa. The fact that Punic in Tripolitania was apparently in official use longer than elsewhere and that even the Latin alphabet was adopted for this purpose, probably has its origins in the status apart of this region, which had already detached itself from Carthaginian authority during the Second Punic war. The Punic epigraphic material discussed here is corroborated by Latin sources, for example a report concerning the language use of Punic in the family of the Roman emperor Septimius Severus, who was born and raised in Tripolitania.

The following part is grammatical description of the inscriptions. This account also falls apart in two parts. The first part (§1) describes the consonants leathers of Latino-Punic inscriptions. For the first time the orthography of these texts is compared to that of contemporaneous Latin inscriptions from North Africa, so as to determine the intended sounds. Although in the past, ‘Classical’ Latin was used now and then to explain certain phenomena in Latino-Punic, the form of Latin with which the writers of the texts studied here came into contact, was however the ‘Vulgar’ Latin of North Africa. This can be seen especially well in the adoption of the local Latin orthographic practices. Herein lies also the most important feature of these texts, namely that due to the use of the Latin script, these texts are fully vocalised (whereas Semitic languages were generally written unvocalised). Where relevant, Punic (loan-)words attested in Classical sources (i.e. Greek and Latin) have been discussed. The analysis of this material again highlights the importance of clearly distinguishing phonology and orthography. The results of this part of the research make clear that Latino-Punic inscriptions shared a similar (substrate) pronunciation with North African Latin, possibly caused by the common Libyan substrate. The second part of the grammatical description (§2) describes the morphosyntactic aspects of these texts. This data is somewhat limited due to the stereotypical nature of the contents of these texts. However they clearly reflect a (North West) Semitic language. It is noted here that these late Punic texts from North Africa show display common features with the so-called northern dialect of Hebrew, found in some parts of the Hebrew bible, and seemingly the underlying dialect of later ‘Rabbinic’ Hebrew. Although the corpus of Phoenico-Punic inscriptions even more stereotype, it is striking that these late texts show more variation, due to the imitation of Latin epigraphical genres.
Nonetheless Latin influence in the investigated corpus remains limited up to a number of technical loanwords. The frequently presumed influence ‘Libyan’ is entirely absent, excepting the onomasticon,

The third section (§3) contains an edition of all known Latino-Punic inscriptions, among which two yet unpublished texts. Of these sixty-nine inscriptions, most are epitaphs, as is the case with Latin inscriptions. The remaining three texts are dedicatory building inscriptions commemorating the construction of ‘fortified farms’ (the centenaria). Most inscriptions were found in the Saharan pre-desert, which formed the Southern border of Roman Africa. All of the texts found in this region are related in some fashion to border defence, probably reflecting a peasant militia. These texts can be dated from internal and archaeological criteria to the third and fourth century A.D. The earliest texts however originate from the coastal area (Lepcis Magna and Zliten), and are seemingly from the first and second centuries A.D. The sub-corpus of twelve texts found in the catacombs of Sirte, located to the East (on the Gulf of Sirte) form another exception. These fourth century texts are the only known first-hand testimony of Punic-speaking Christians, often mentioned by St. Augustine).

The Latino-Punic inscriptions provide interesting and important dates for the diachronic study of (North West) Semitic grammar. The texts, in their linguistic context, also provide interesting data for studies in language contact (i.e. the interaction of Punic with Latin and Libyan). Last but not least, these texts provide important material on the indigenous peoples of North Africa, esp. Tripolitania, under Roman suzerainty.