

# New England Classical Journal

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Volume 43 | Issue 3

Pages 145-166

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8-2016

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### Recommended Citation

Rosivach, Vincent (2016) "Epitaphs as an Introduction to Latin Epigraphy," *New England Classical Journal*: Vol. 43 : Iss. 3 , 145-166.  
Available at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj/vol43/iss3/4>

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## Epitaphs as an Introduction to Latin Epigraphy

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Epigraphy is the study of inscriptions carved or painted mostly on stone, but also on metal, pottery and wood. Epitaphs carved on grave-markers provide an easy entry to the study of epigraphy and can be particularly useful as an occasional supplement for many Latin classes. Thousands of these funerary inscriptions survive. They are typically short and their grammar simple. They are *real* Latin, written by, for, and about *real* people who lived in Roman times. They also put our students in touch with individuals further down the social scale than those they typically meet in the literary texts written by and for the elite. The limited information contained in most epitaphs invites students to use their imagination to fill in the blanks, as it were. And there is a certain poignancy in the thought that for almost everyone commemorated in these epitaphs all that we can ever know about them now is what is written on the stones.

### A FEW THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT INSCRIPTIONS

1. Inscriptions use lots of abbreviations. The object here is to fit as much information as possible into a relatively small space. These abbreviations were easily understood by contemporary Romans, but they can sometime puzzle a modern reader unfamil-

iar with the conventions. Fortunately there is an exhaustive dictionary of abbreviations in vol. 3, pp. 752-97 of *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (on which see below).

2. Most funerary inscriptions are undated. Roman epitaphs frequently tell us how long someone lived but almost never when. Official documents were, of course, dated by the name of some magistrate (consul or local official) in office at the start of the year, or eventually by the year of an emperor's reign, but the practice never made its way into private documents like epitaphs. Technical aspect of the inscriptions such as changes in the shape of letters and in certain formulaic expressions are also less helpful in dating than we would wish since conservative practices and innovations frequently overlap in time. Thus, unless someone mentioned in an epitaph can be connected to another person or an event datable from another source, we can only say that the epitaph is Republican or Early or Late Imperial (roughly pre- or post-300 CE) in date. Most epitaphs – indeed most surviving inscriptions – come from the Early Imperial period.

3. Many surviving inscriptions are “fragmentary,” that is to say that through erosion or breakage, bits of the stone, and the letters written on them, have been lost. In many cases the missing letters can be supplied with a level of confidence bordering on certainty, but some editors can be very adventurous in their reconstructions of more problematic gaps, and readers should always be aware of how much of a text is actually on the stone and how much comes from the editor's imagination. (See also below on special symbols used in epigraphy.)

4. Many inscriptions are known to us only through transcriptions. Since the Renaissance anything with ancient Roman writing on it has been – and still is – potentially a “collectible.” Before the creation of public museums, well-to-do individuals with a taste for antiquity assembled private collections for the edification of themselves and their friends. Some of these private collections later made their way into museums and other public institutions, others still remain in private ownership, and yet others have dissipated over time and been lost, but not before their owners made them available to scholars (and enthusiastic amateurs) for transcription and publication. The problem with transcriptions, however, is that one can never be sure that a transcription is totally accurate.<sup>1</sup> Besides, from the perspective of a teacher, an image of a

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1 Thus, for example, for our fourth example below all of the standard sources depend, directly or indirectly, on a single transcription which spells Metilianus' name with two *LLs* even though the actual stone (long

stone with writing on it is more engaging than a simple transcription, especially for students who are getting their first introduction to epigraphy.

5. Most funerary inscriptions are dull, formulaic, repetitive and, frankly, boring. But with a bit of patience a teacher can find any number of epitaphs with significant details that can individualize the deceased in their students' imaginations.

## WHERE TO FIND TRANSCRIBED INSCRIPTIONS

1. The principal printed collection of Latin inscriptions is the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (abbreviated *CIL*). The aim of the *CIL* is to bring together accurate texts of all known Latin inscriptions from the Roman Republic and Empire in a single, editorially consistent, multi-volume collection. The project was organized in 1847 by the great Roman historian Theodor Mommsen (1817–1910) under the sponsorship of the Prussian Royal Academy of Literature and the first volume, Mommsen's edition of inscriptions from the Roman Republic, was published in 1862. At present the *CIL* is under the sponsorship of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. It now includes some 180,000 separate inscriptions arranged in seventeen volumes, many of them published in multiple parts, along with supplements and indices; several of the volumes have been re-edited to include more recently discovered inscriptions, and a final volume, containing inscriptions in verse, is in the works. Volumes of the *CIL* are generally arranged geographically, then by public vs. private, with numerous sub-categories in each; funeral inscriptions from Rome and its vicinity, for example, are found in vol. 6, pars ii to pars iv, fasc. 1. The editors have done their best to work from the actual stones, but this has not always been possible, and particularly in the earlier volumes they have relied heavily on previously published versions of the inscriptions. Individual *CIL* items are often accompanied by brief notes discussing principally epigraphic aspects of the inscription. Many also include a drawing of the inscription (which may often be a copy of an earlier drawing). Such drawings can be helpful in understanding an inscription, especially when parts of the stone have been lost through breakage or erosion, but it is important to remember that the only totally reliable version of an inscription is the version carved in the stone; second best is a good photograph or squeeze,<sup>2</sup> and everything

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thought to be lost) has only one.

2 A *squeeze*, in epigraphy, is a copy of an inscription made by squeezing special paper, which has been

else is, to a greater or lesser degree, interpretation. It is standard practice to identify an inscription by its *CIL* volume and number (e.g. *CIL* 6.20854 in our first example below). The *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* is extremely expensive,<sup>3</sup> and copies are to be found almost exclusively in the libraries of major research universities. Fortunately, however, all of the materials published by 1940 are now also available on line at <http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/drupal/?q=en/node/291>.<sup>4</sup>

2. Far and away the best place for browsing inscriptions is Hermann Dessau's *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, abbreviated *ILS*,<sup>5</sup> which contains 9,522 inscriptions with brief but useful commentaries (in Latin) and cross-references to the *CIL*. *ILS* gives only the Latin text of the inscriptions, and there is no effort made to reproduce the appearance of the originals. The work is arranged in three volumes printed in four parts and includes extensive indices, including, as mentioned above, an extensive dictionary of abbreviations (vol. 3, pp. 752-797). Most colleges and universities with Classics departments will have a copy of *ILS* in their libraries. *ILS* is also available on line at the Internet Archive:

vol. 1: <https://archive.org/details/inscriptioneslat1dessuoft>

vol. 2, pars 1: <https://archive.org/details/inscriptioneslat21dessuoft>

vol. 2, pars 2: <https://archive.org/details/inscriptioneslat22dessuoft>

vol. 3 (including indices): <https://archive.org/details/inscriptioneslat3dessuoft>

Epitaphs in *ILS* are found mainly in vol. 2, pars 2, pp. 834-950, nos. 7818-8560, but many of the *tituli* listed elsewhere are also funerary in nature (look especially for inscriptions beginning with the letters *d. m.* (= *dis manibus*)).

3. The most comprehensive database of Latin inscriptions is the on-line *Epi-*

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moistened, against the stone's surface, allowing the paper to dry, then peeling it back. If done properly the dried paper will display a mirror image of the original stone with all its inscribed markings and natural flaws.

3 Vol. 17, pars 4, fasc. 1 (122 pages on the milestones of Raetia and Noricum, published in 2005) sells for \$224 new on Amazon.com – in paperback!

4 Clicking on a volume title will open another window which will give you the choice of using the DFG or TEI viewer. The TEI viewer is preferable (the DFG reader is discouragingly slow). The TEI viewer contains a search engine for finding the inscription you want (although it searches an OCR copy, not the actual images of the *CIL* pages, so it occasionally missed items that have been mis-scanned). The magnification tool in the TEI reader works in Mac Safari and Microsoft Explorer; in Google Chrome, open a copy of the page in a different window and then use Chrome's magnification tool.

5 1892-1916, and frequently reprinted.

*graphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby* (abbreviated *EDCS*) presently under the direction of Prof. Manfred Clauss, now retired, who taught most recently at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main (Germany). At present the databank contains the Latin texts of some separate 495,125 inscriptions drawn from major *corpora* like the *CIL* as well as more recent publications. The Latin texts are all transcriptions from previous editions, with a minimum amount of editing to maintain a consistent format. Each inscription is accompanied by bibliographical references with links where available. Most valuable for the teacher are the 100,826 images also included in the databank.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately the *EDCS* is not easily browsable, but specific inscriptions can be found using the search page at [http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/epi\\_en.php](http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/epi_en.php). The search engine can be a bit persnickety; note, for example, the required caps, punctuation and spacing for e.g. *CIL* 06, 08857. Particularly if a name is rare I have found it easier to enter the name as a text search rather than using the publication number, but be warned here that the text search is by string: entering a second-declension name in the nominative will not find it in an inscription in which it appears in the dative. Despite its inconveniences the *EDCS* is an invaluable resource for its images, which can bring a greater sense of reality to the classroom.

## SPECIAL SYMBOLS USED IN EPIGRAPHY

As mentioned earlier, Latin inscriptions use a large number of abbreviations, which editors sometimes expand to help their readers. Many stones have also been damaged by breakage or wear, and editors will often fill in the gaps to produce a readable text. To indicate what is actually on a stone and what has been supplied by the editor, epigraphists have developed a set of conventional symbols (*sigla*), the most important of which are:

]	beginning of line lost through breakage or wear
[	end of line lost
[XYZ]	letters lost from stone, supplied by editor
[...]	letters lost; points = number of letters lost

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<sup>6</sup> If the *CIL* or similar number at the start of an entry is hyperlinked, the link will bring up an image or images of the inscription, or a further link to same.

[---]	unknown number of letters lost
(XYZ)	resolution of abbreviation
<XYZ>	letters accidentally omitted by stone-carver
{XYZ}	letters accidentally added by stone-carver
[[XYZ]]	letters deliberately deleted <sup>7</sup>
v	empty space where a letter would be expected

It is, however, always a good idea to also check an editor's list of *sigla* for idiosyncrasies.

## SOME EPITAPHS

Here is a sample of funerary inscriptions with commentaries that illustrate some of the things such inscriptions can tell us, and some of the speculation to which they can lead us and our students. Links to images of these inscriptions are supplied in the footnotes.

### 1. *CIL* 6.20854<sup>8</sup>

IVNIA  
AMMIS  
HIC SITA EST

*Iunia* is a good Latin name but *Ammis* is not. When slaves were manumitted they typically took the *gens* (clan) name of their former owner and used their slave name as a *cognomen*. It is thus likely that Junia's name in her native language was *Ammis*, though it is not at all clear what that language might have been. For reasons that are not at all clear Roman slave owners tended to assign their slaves Greek names. Junia *Ammis*' "native" name would indicate that it was her own and not assigned to her by

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7 E.g. the intentional deletion of a the name of a disgraced emperor (*damnatio memoriae*); see, for example, *CIL* 4.7995 ([http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL\\_04\\_07995.jpg](http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL_04_07995.jpg)), a graffito from Pompeii announcing gladiatorial games under the sponsorship of Decimus Lucretius Satrius Valens, *flamen perpetuus* of *[[Neronis]] Caesaris Aug(usti) f(ili)*.

8 Images at [http://www.edr-edr.it/edr\\_programmi/view\\_img.php?id\\_nr=016537](http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=016537) and [http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL\\_06\\_20854.jpg](http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL_06_20854.jpg). The marble grave-marker is at present in a private collection in Montecassiano (Macerata, Italy), but is thought to have come originally from Rome.

her owner, suggesting in turn that she had been taken captive from her native land rather than born to slave parents in Rome.

2. *CIL* 6.27508<sup>9</sup>

D · M  
L · TITIO · SEVERO  
Q · VIX · AN · XXVIII  
TITIA · AGAPETE  
CONIVGI · B · M · F  
CVM · QVO · VIX  
ANN · XI

Or with the abbreviations resolved:

dis manibus.  
Lucio Titio Seuero  
qui uixit annos xxviii  
Titia Agapete  
coniugi bene merenti fecit  
cum quo uixit  
annos xi

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9 Image at [http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL\\_o6\\_27508.jpg](http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL_o6_27508.jpg). The marble tablet is at present in the collection of the Vatican Museum.



The *di manes* were the collective spirits of the departed – there is no singular for *manes*. *Dis manibus* is itself shorthand for *dis manibus sacrum*: land used for a tomb was thereby removed from human usage and consecrated – *sacer* – to the dead. The expression *dis manibus* or *dis manibus sacrum*, regularly abbreviated *D.M./D.M.S.*, frequently appears at the top of funerary inscriptions as a warning to, and a protection against, anyone who might think of “recycling” the stone or using the space for himself.

We see here the most common pattern of funerary inscriptions, with the name of the deceased in the dative case and the name of the person who set up the grave-marker in the nominative, with or without the verb *fecit* or *posuit*. As mentioned earlier, it was a common practice for Roman slave-owners to give their slaves Greek names, whether they came from the Greek East or not. *Agapete* is Greek for “beloved” – the nominative singular of Greek first-declension nouns end in *ēta*, which becomes a long *e* in Latin. *Agapete* continued to use this name as her *cognomen* after she became a *liberta*.<sup>10</sup> *Severus*, on the other hand, her husband’s *cognomen*, is a good Latin name, indicating that he had been born free (*ingenuus*), i.e. that one or both of his parents were free Roman citizens at the time of his birth,<sup>11</sup> while their common *nomen gentilicium* strongly suggests that they were both part of the same household. One likely scenario is that *Severus* was the child of a freedman and/or woman who continued to live in the *Titius* household after manumission; it would have been within the household that *Severus* met *Agapete*, and the two could well have continued to live there even after *Agapete*’s manumission.<sup>12</sup> In this and the next two examples, Roman naming practices provide an insight into the complex relations of slave, freed and free in large Roman households, which teachers may wish to explore with their students.

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10 An ex-slave was called *libertus/-a* in reference to the owner who had freed him but *libertinus/-a* in reference to his/her status as a freedman/-woman in contrast to a free-born *ingenuus/-a*.

11 In Roman law the civil condition of a child of born of a legitimate marriage (*conubium*) follows that of his father; otherwise the child’s civil condition follows that of his mother (Gaius, *Institutiones* 1.80); thus *ex libera et servo liber nascitur*, *ibid.* 1.82). For a citizen child who was the son of a free mother and slave father, see the following example.

12 *Titii* appear as prominent individuals in our sources going back to the first century BCE (*RE* 2.12.1554-70). But without further information, it is impossible to identify the specific *Titius* within whose household *Severus* and *Agapete* lived.

3. *CIL* 6. 12366<sup>13</sup>

D (*crown*) M  
CN · ARRIO · AGAPETō  
ARRIA · AGAPETE · MATER  
ET · BOSTRYCHVS · PATER  
FT · HELPIS · MAMMA · ET  
FIEIE · NVTRIX · FILIO  
PIENTISSIMO · B · M · F  
VIXIT · A · III · DIEBUS  
XXXXV

Or, with the abbreviations resolved:

dis manibus.  
Gnaeo Arrio Agapeto  
Arria Agapete mater  
et Bostrychus pater  
ft Helpis mamma et  
Ficie nutrix filio  
pientissimo bene merenti fecerunt.  
uixit annis iii diebus  
XXXXV.

The inscription has a number of mistakes. The stone-cutter seems to have misjudged the number of letters in Agapetus' *cognomen* and had to squeeze in a miniscule *o* at the end; the *f* of *ft* at the start of line 5 is obviously an *e* missing its bottom line; and the name of the nanny on line 6 is apparently garbled.

The story of young Gnaeus is a sad one, but simple. More complicated is that of his family. Arria Agapete is the citizen here, another freedwoman, as we can tell from the combination of Roman *nomen gentilicium* and Greek *cognomen*. Gnaeus' father's name is also Greek – the word means “lock of hair, curl.” His simple name, without *praenomen* and *nomen gentilicium*, indicates that he was not a citizen, as

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13 Image at [http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL\\_o6\\_12366.jpg](http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL_o6_12366.jpg). The marble tablet, apparently from Rome, passed through different private collections and is now in the Museo Civico Archeologico in Bologna (Italy).

does the fact that the young Gnaeus Arrius Agapetus drew his *nomen gentilicium*, and thus his citizenship, from his mother.<sup>14</sup> Bostrychus may have been a non-citizen immigrant to Rome from one of the Greek-speaking provinces, who met Agapete in Rome, but more likely he was a slave in Arrius' household – and still a slave when he shared in this commemoration of his son.<sup>15</sup> *Elpis*, the wet-nurse's name<sup>16</sup> on line 5, is Greek for “hope” – less well educated speakers of Latin had a tendency to add an aspirant *h* to their words<sup>17</sup> – and the final *-e* on the nanny's garbled name on line 6 indicates that she too was probably Greek: the *CIL* suggests that her name was *Filete*, a Latin transcription of Φιλητή, another Greek word for “beloved.” So, with Greek names and apparently lacking the *nomina gentilicia* of citizens, *Elpis* the wet-nurse and (say) *Filete* the nanny were both probably slaves.

But whose slaves? Possibly *Arria Agapete's*, but the similar meanings of *Philete's* name (if this is correct) and *Agapete's* suggest that the two had been fellow slaves in the *Arrius'* household before *Agapete's* manumission. Indeed the easiest way to account for the union of *Agapete*, who had been given her freedom, and *Bostrychus*, who was probably a slave, is if *Agapete* remained a member of her ex-master *Arrius'* household even after her manumission, which would have been primarily honorific, with little practical consequence. And yet the grouping of *Arria Agapete*, *Bostrychus*, *Elpis* and *Filete(?)* in the common mourning of this inscription suggests that they formed a family of sorts within *Arrius'* larger *familia*.<sup>18</sup>

We said earlier that *Arria Agapete's* manumission had little practical consequence, but we should add one important qualification, that any children born afterwards would be born free – *ingenui* – Roman citizens with full legal rights. This was, in fact, a Roman freedman's version of the American Dream, that their children would prosper in ways that they themselves could not. Alas, the dream was not to

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14 Cf. above, note 10.

15 Note also that, contrary to the practice of the times, *Agapete's* name precedes *Bostrychus'*: citizenship trumps gender.

16 The meanings of *mamma* and *nutrix* are discussed in greater detail below, in connection with the next example.

17 It is probably just a coincidence that the person *Catullus* mocks for doing this was also an *Arrius* (*Cat.* 84).

18 It is unknown which of the many *Arrii* was *Agapete's* former owner, but one might speculate that he was *Cn. Arrius Augur*, consul in 121 CE (= *PIR2* A 1092), or someone close to him, after whom *Agapete* may have named her son. *Augur* is the only *Arrius* with the *praenomen* *Gnaeus* listed in *PIR2* (= the second edition of *Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. i. ii. iii.*, the standard reference catalogue of imperial officials from the first three centuries CE; entries are alphabetized by *nomen gentilicium*).

be, at least not for young Gnaeus, who died when he was only three. Given his age at death, *b(ene) m(erenti)* on line 7, as often elsewhere, is little more than a cliché, as is probably also the adjective *pientissimo* (“most dutiful”).

4. *CIL* 6.16450<sup>19</sup>

D · M  
SER · CORNELIAE · SER · L  
SABINAE  
SER · CORNELIVS  
DOLABELLA  
METILIANVS  
NVTRICI ET MAMMVL  
B · M · F

Or with the abbreviations resolved our inscription reads:

dis manibus.  
Seruiae Corneliae Serui libertae  
Sabinae  
Seruius Cornelius  
Dolabella  
Metilianus  
nutrici et mammulae  
bene merenti fecit.

Servia Cornelia Sabina – her name is in the dative – was a freedwoman (*liberta*), line 2) – and hence once a slave of – Servius Cornelius Dolabella Metilianus,<sup>20</sup> who set up this stone in her honor.

Like most funerary inscriptions this one is undated. Dolabella Metilianus was

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19 Image at [http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL\\_06\\_16450.jpg](http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL_06_16450.jpg). For the inscription's find spot and present location see below, note 23.

20 =*PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 1350.

*consul suffectus*<sup>21</sup> in 113 CE, which gives us an approximate date for our inscription, around the turn from the first to the second centuries CE, though to be clear, we know neither Dolabella's age nor Sabina's at the time of her death. The Dolabellae were a branch of the *gens Cornelia*, particularly prominent in the first centuries BCE and CE. Dolabella Metilianus' consulship indicates that he was a man of considerable wealth,<sup>22</sup> and we can easily imagine that Sabina was part of a large household with many slaves. Our inscription was found near the fifth milestone on the Via Ardeatina – the road to Ardea – south-southeast of Rome.<sup>23</sup> The location suggests that Sabina may have been attached to the family's *villa suburbana*, presumably in the vicinity, at the time of her death.

The inscription devotes a separate line to Sabina's *cognomen*, suggesting that this is what she was usually called, rather than *Servia* or *Cornelia*, which is what we would expect.<sup>24</sup> *Sabina* is, however, an odd name for a slave. As mentioned earlier, a remarkably large number of Roman slaves had Greek names. This was probably not because they or their forebears were kidnapped from Greece or the Greek-speaking East; rather, I suspect, slaves, even those born in Roman households, were given Greek names to mark their essential foreignness. The Sabines, on the other hand, were an old Italic people who shared a long and intimate history with the Romans, one going back to Romulus and the Rape of the Sabine Women. Indeed, *Sabinus* was a *cognomen* used by a number of distinguished Romans whose family roots, real or imagined, lay in Sabine territory. One of these -- and perhaps the key to understanding Sabina's name -- was a certain P. Metilius Sabinus Nepos, consul *suffectus*

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21 During the empire, the consulship was held by multiple individuals in the course of a single year. The first two gave their name to the year, and their successors, the *consules suffecti* (substitute consuls), got to add the title *consul* to their list of personal honors.

22 Around this time the minimum census requirement for a senator was 1,000,000 sesterces (Enk (2000); cf. Saller (2000) p. 817; I thank Allen Ward for help tracking down these numbers). By comparison, an average Roman legionary earned 12 *aurei* a year (Suet. *Dom.* 7), the equivalent of 1,200 sesterces, roughly half of which he paid back to the legion for housing and equipment expenses. It is worth stressing that the 1,000,000-sesterce figure was an absolute minimum for membership in the senatorial order, and many senators had estates worth that figure several times over.

23 Information on the find-spot comes from the inscription's notice in the *CIL*. The location is in Cecchignola (= modern Rome's Zona XXII). The inscription was long thought to have been lost but is now known to have been moved to the near-by Casale S. Cesareo (see de Rossi (1967) p. 88 for details).

24 Roman women, whether slave, freed, or freeborn, normally did not have a *praenomen* and it is unclear why Sabina received one. Calling her "Cornelia" would confuse her with the free-born members of the household.

in 91 CE,<sup>25</sup> some twenty-two years before our Dolabella Metilianus held the office. Now, by the naming conventions of the time, Dolabella's second *cognomen* (Metilianus) indicates that his mother was a Metilia; and given the presence of our Sabina in his household, it is not unlikely that Dolabella's mother was a Metilia Sabina, perhaps even – the ages roughly match – a sister of the same Metilius Sabinus who was consul *suffectus* in 91.

But here is where things get complicated. If Dolabella's mother was called Sabina, it must have been at least confusing to have a slave in the household who was also called Sabina. With all the possible names a slave could have, why name her that? Perhaps – and I stress here “perhaps” – the next-to-last line of the inscription provides an answer. Sabina (the slave) was Dolabella's nanny and his wet-nurse (*nutrici et mammulae*, line 7). The Latin word *nutrix* refers to both a wet-nurse and a general-purpose nanny.<sup>26</sup> *Mamma* properly means “breast,” and so could also mean “wet-nurse.” When, as here,<sup>27</sup> the same person is called both *nutrix* and *mamma* the two words should have different meanings.<sup>28</sup> Given the etymology of *mamma* the easiest explanation is that when these words are used together *nutrix* refers to a nanny and *mamma* to a wet-nurse.<sup>29</sup>

So Sabina was Dolabella's nanny and wet-nurse. Or more precisely she was his *mammula*, “his little/dear nurse.” The use of the diminutive in *-ula* (little *mamma*) in Sabina's funeral inscription speaks to the affection Dolabella held for her throughout her life, the same affection that led him in time to grant her her freedom – a gesture of respect with no practical consequence<sup>30</sup> – and finally, upon her death, to erect this funeral marker for her *bene merenti*: “because she deserved it.” And perhaps this same affection led him to honor her upon her manumission by replacing her slave name with the *cognomen* of his birth mother, who by this point may have

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25 *PIR*<sub>2</sub> M 547.

26 On *nutrix* referring to a wet-nurse, see Bradley (1986) p. 202 with notes.

27 And in *CIL* 6.18032 (*mamma idem nutrix*) and *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Roma* 9.24768 (*mamme nutrici*).

28 Note also that in the previous example (*CIL* 6.16450 = no. 4 above) the *nutrix* and the *mamma* are two different persons.

29 *Mamma* is also a childish corruption of *mater*, as “mommy” for “mother” (and as *tata* for *pater*); cf. Var. *ap.* Non. 81.4 and *CIL* 6.38598 (*Helius tata et Manilia Modesta mamma ... et Apollonius nutricius*; image at [http://www.edr-edr.it/edr\\_programmi/view\\_img.php?id\\_nr=032505](http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=032505)).

30 One would assume that she continued to be part of the Dolabella household since she almost certainly had no resources to live on her own, even if she had wished to do so.

already passed away.

What is striking here is that although this is Sabina's funerary inscription it is Dolabella's story. If Sabina nursed Dolabella one could imagine that she also had a child of her own, and so a mate of some sort, temporary or long-term, but they – her child, her mate, along with everything else except her relation with Dolabella – have disappeared from the story. Indeed, if our hypothesis of how she got the name “Sabina” is correct, she even lost her own name to him.

5. *CIL* 6.11712<sup>31</sup>

C · ANNIVS · C · L  
DIONYSIVS  
]PTVS · AN · IX · SERVIT · A · XII  
]IXIT · ANNOS · LXX

A thin marble panel like this probably served originally as the fronting for a niche in a *columbarium*, an underground chamber with recesses in its walls for the ashes of multiple deceased. At some point a narrow strip was cut from the panel's left side and the stone was repurposed to serve perhaps as a roof tile (hence the holes for the nails that would have held it in place).

With abbreviations expanded and the missing letters on the left side of the stone restored we have:

Gaius Annius Gai libertus  
Dionysius  
captus anno ix servit annos xii  
uixit annos lxx

Again the freed slave takes his former owner's *nomen gentilicium* and uses his Greek

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<sup>31</sup> Images at [http://www.edr-edr.it/edr\\_programmi/view\\_img.php?id\\_nr=131119](http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=131119) and at [http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=\\$CIL\\_06\\_11712.jpg](http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=$CIL_06_11712.jpg). The marble panel is currently in the Giovanni Battista De Rossi archaeological collection (De Rossi was a previous owner of the collection) in the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology in Rome, and was probably found somewhere in or near the ancient city, but there is no evidence of exactly where.

slave name as a *cognomen*. Since he is male he gets to have a *praenomen*,<sup>32</sup> which he also takes from his former master. There is little evidence that freedmen tried to hide their servile origin. It is quite rare, however, for their epitaphs to say anything about their origins, and it is tempting to assume that they all were *uernae*, slaves born in their masters' households, but this and the following example show that this was not always the case. Indeed, for Dionysius the fact that he was born free, only to be enslaved at the age of nine, must have been of special importance to him for it to be mentioned in his epitaph. We can also only wonder what circumstances led to his manumission at the age of twenty or twenty-one, only twelve years after being enslaved. Questions like this, even when admitting of no definitive answer, can invite students to imagine the specific circumstances of slavery as they speculate about possible explanations.

6. *CIL* II.137<sup>33</sup>

C · IVL · MYGDONIVS  
 GENERI · PARTHVS  
 NATVS · INGENVVS · CAPT  
 PVBIS · AETATE · DAT · INTERRA  
 ROMANA · QVI · DVM · FACTVS  
 CIVIS · R · IVENTE · FATO · CO  
 LOCAVI · ARKAM · DVM · ESSE  
 ANNOR · L · PETI · VSQ · A BVB  
 ERTATE · SENECTAE · MEAE · PERVENI  
 RE · NVNC · RECIPE · ME · SAXE · LIBENS  
 TECVM · CVRA · SOLVTVS · ERO.

Below is a copy of the inscription with the abbreviations resolved and using modern punctuation:

32 Roman citizen women normally do not have *praenomina*. Servia Cornelia Sabina in the previous example is very much an exception.

33 Very sharp, but slightly defective, black-and-white images at [http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/arachne/index.php?view\[layout\]=objekt\\_item&search\[constraints\]\[objekt\]\[searchSeriennummer\]=25736](http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/arachne/index.php?view[layout]=objekt_item&search[constraints][objekt][searchSeriennummer]=25736); natural-color images at <http://www.elamit.net/depot/sie2003/sie2003plates12gnoli.pdf>. The inscription is on the side of a marble sarcophagus found in Ravenna and currently in that city's Museo Nazionale (Gnoli (2005, pp. 461-62)).



Gaius Iulius Mygdonius,  
generi Parthus,  
natus ingenuus, captus  
pubis aetate, datus in terra  
Romana, qui dum factus  
ciues Romanus, iuuenta fato, co-  
locui arkam dum esse  
annorum l. peti usque a bub-  
ertate senectae meae perueni-  
re. nunc recipe me, saxe. libens  
tecum, cura solutus, ero.

Mygdonius' story is much like Dionysius' in our previous example: enslaved at a relatively young age and later set free. His *cognomen* is something of a poetic synonym for *Phrygius*, inappropriate for a Parthian, and so probably assigned to him by his master.<sup>34</sup> His *nomen gentilicium* Julius, on the other hand, and the fact that he had been “made a Roman citizen” (rather than that he was a *libertinus* – a manumitted slave) suggests that Mygdonius may possibly have gained his freedom and citizenship amid the chaos of the civil wars and their aftermath at the end of the Republic, perhaps in return for service in the Adriatic fleet under Octavian/Augustus.<sup>35</sup>

The text of the epitaph is neatly carved and framed, with the last three lines written in somewhat smaller letters to accommodate the full text; on the right is a relief of the goddess Fortuna, identified by the cornucopia she holds in the crook of her left arm. The quality of the tombstone stands in contrast to the quality of the Latin inscribed on it. Note the following:

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34 On the adjective *Mygdonius*, see Lewis and Short's *Latin Dictionary* s.v. *Mygdones*. There is only one other Mygdonius in the *EDCS*, Servius Cornelius Mygdonius who dedicates a funerary monument to his wife Flavia Secunda (inscription originally published in *L'année épigraphique* 1985, no. 82; image at [http://www.edr-edr.it/edr\\_programmi/view\\_img.php?id\\_nr=079564](http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/view_img.php?id_nr=079564)). Gnoli sees the name denoting his geographical origin, but this is inconsistent with normal Roman naming practice (2005, pp. 465-466).

35 The Adriatic fleet was created by Octavian either shortly before or shortly after the battle of Actium in 31 BCE. It was based at Classe, a short distance south of Ravenna, where this inscription was found. Recall that after Octavian was adopted by Caesar, his “official” Roman name was *C. Iulius Caesar Octavianus* (although at this point for propaganda reasons he preferred *Caesar divi filius*).

- Line 2: *generi* for *genere*. This seems to be a confusion of pronunciation rather than a misuse of the dative in place of the ablative. Cf. the reverse confusion of *e* for *i* in *ciues* in line 6.
- Line 4: *datus*. The sense is clear but this is still an unusual use of the verb *do*.
- Lines 4-5: *in terra Romana*. Place to which is expressed by *in* + the accusative. *terra Romana* is probably another mistake in pronunciation (a failure to pick up on nasalized final *-m*) rather than a grammatical error (ablative for accusative). Cf. the same mistake in *esse* on line 7.<sup>36</sup>
- Line 5: *qui dum*. Grammatically either *qui* or *dum* is superfluous. *dum* seems to be Mygdonius' go-to temporal conjunction, used here where we would expect *cum*.
- Line 6: *iuuente* for *iubente*, another mistake in pronunciation (*v* for *b*).
- Lines 6-7: *colocau* should have two *ls*. The spelling with one *l* may also reflect an imperfect pronunciation of the word. Mygdonius clearly means to say that he assembled a sum of money but when used in connection with money the verb *colloco* usually means “to place” with someone else (as an investment, a dowry, etc.).
- Line 7: *arkam* for *arcam*. The metonymy of *arca* (“strongbox”) for the money kept in it is not that unusual.

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<sup>36</sup> There is also the question of what Mygdonius means by *terra Romana*. Was he captured by slavers beyond the frontier and shipped back into Roman-controlled territory? Or does *terra Romana* refer more specifically to the area around the city of Rome? Or to Italy as distinct from the provinces?

- Line 7: *esse* for *essem*; cf. above on lines 4-5.
- Lines 7-8: *dum esse annorum l.* The sense is unclear. “I saved money for when I would be fifty years of age”? “I saved money until I was fifty”? “I got a lot of money when I was fifty”?<sup>37</sup>
- Line 8: *annorum l.* Understand as a genitive of description: “a man of fifty years.”
- Line 8: *peti* for *peti(v)i*.
- Lines 8-9: *bubertate* for *pubertate*, confusing the voiced and unvoiced labial stops.
- Line 9: *senectae meae* for *ad senectam meam*.
- Line 10: *saxe* for *saxum*. The vocative singular of second-declension neuter nouns ends in *-um*; only the masculine ends in *-e*.

Especially the mistakes in spelling reflecting mispronounced Latin show that Mygdonius wrote this text out himself: a professional stone-cutter would not make such mistakes even if the text were dictated to him. The epitaph is a résumé of Mygdonius’ life told literally in his own words. On the other hand they are probably not the words he would have used in ordinary conversation. The personification of Fate “commanding” in line 6, the generalizing statement in lines 8-10 “from my youth I have sought to reach old age” (with the implication that “now I have, and so am ready to die”), and especially the apostrophe to his tombstone in the last two lines show an effort to raise the literary level of the epitaph. Mygdonius wishes to present himself in the best possible light, and if his attempt is not always successful this too tells us something about him.

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37 For this third possibility, cf. the use of *dum* for *cum* in line 5 above. If Mygdonius had been in the navy, perhaps this was a discharge bonus.

7. CIL 6.8857<sup>38</sup>

D M  
P · AELIVS · AVG · LIB · MELITINVS  
INVITATOR · FECIT · SIBI · ET · AELIAE  
SEVERAE · VXORI · KARISSIMAE  
LIB · LIBETAB · Q · MEISPOSTERIS  
QVE · EORVM · EXCEPTO · EVTY  
CHE · LIB · MEOCVIVS · NEQVECOR  
PVS · NEQUEOSSA · INHOCMONIMENTO  
IN FERRI VOLO

Or with the abbreviations resolved and some spacings corrected:

dis manibus.  
P. Aelius Augusti libertus Melitinus  
inuitator fecit sibi et Aeliae  
Seuerae uxori karissimae  
libertis libertabusque suis meis posteris-  
que eorum excepto Euty-  
che liberto meo cuius neque cor-  
pus neque ossa in hoc monumento  
inferri volo.

Here a certain P. Aelius Melitinus announces the collective tomb he has set aside for himself, his wife, his freedmen, and his and their descendants. There are some mistakes in the Latin: *k* for *c* in *karissimae* (line 4), *monimento* (line 8) should be spelled with a *u*, not an *i*, and the entire expression should be in the accusative (*in hoc monumentum*) representing place to which.<sup>39</sup> *Libertabus*, dative plural of *liberta*, may look strange but it is found elsewhere.

Melitinus – his Greek *cognomen* means “honeyed”<sup>40</sup> – was an *Augusti libertus*,

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38 Image at [http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL\\_o6\\_o8857.jpg](http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=sCIL_o6_o8857.jpg). The marble tablet, found just outside Rome, is now in the Vatican Museum.

39 Students may take some comfort in knowing that even ancient Romans did not always get this right.

40 Greek μέλι and Latin *mel* both come from the same root but, outside of the nominative, the Greek word has only one L, the Latin two.

a former slave in the imperial household, the *familia Caesaris*.<sup>41</sup> His *nomen gentilicium* places him under the emperor Hadrian, or just may-be Antoninus Pius, whom Hadrian adopted into the *gens Aelia*. More than just a housekeeping staff, the *familia Caesaris* included slaves and freedmen who served as a bureaucracy for the emperor's private business. Within this bureaucracy Melitinus held the post of *invitator*, “inviter,” an official whose name we know from elsewhere but whose exact duties escape us. Still, the fact that Melitinus had freedmen and freedwomen of his own suggests that he was, relatively speaking, a Very Important Person in the *familia Caesaris*. His wife's *cognomen* Severa – Latin, not Greek – suggests that she was born free; her *nomen gentilicium* indicates that she is descendant from a former slave or slaves in the imperial household, where she continued to live, and where she probably met Melitinus.

Melitinus' announcement of this collective tomb for his own *familia* advertises his, the master's, generosity towards the lesser members of his household, as do other similar inscriptions. What stands out here, in this context of generosity, is the animosity – carved forever in stone – that Melitinus shows towards one of his freedmen, Eutyches.<sup>42</sup> We can only wonder what Eutyches did to provoke Melitinus like this – and what Eutyches' side of the story was. In any event Melitinus' outburst shows us a more intimate side of the man, if not a particularly pleasant one.<sup>43</sup>

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41 On the imperial household, see Weaver (1972).

42 In the inscription *Eutyche* is third-declension ablative singular. His name in Greek means “marked by good luck, fortunate.”

43 Interestingly the stone was later “recycled,” with the following inscription carved on the reverse side:

A ✠ Ω  
 DEO ANNOENTE  
 FELIS PEDATURA  
 SUSTI V(iri) P(erfectissimi)

A/Ω and ✠ = XP(ΙΣΤΟΣ) are Christian symbols. A and Ω represent God as the beginning and the end, cf. *Revelation* 1:8. *Deo annoente* (= *annuente* in classical Latin) = “with God's approval” is also a Christian notion. A *pedatura* was a measured-out area (from *pes, pedis*); the word is sometimes used to describe a plot set aside for burials (cf. e.g. *CIL* 5.3072, 6.10235, 6.13539). From the mid-second century CE on, *vir perfectissimus* was an honorific title accorded members of the equestrian order who stood higher than *viri egregii* but not as high as *viri eminentissimi* (*Brill's New Pauly* s.v. “perfectissimus”). *Susti* should be the genitive of the person buried in the plot but it is surprising to see someone as important as a *vir perfectissimus* described with a single *cognomen* and no *nomen gentilicium*. The meaning of *felis* is also unclear; the editor of the inscription in *CIL*

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suggests it is a misspelling of *felix* but a *felix pedatura* makes no sense. There is a copy of the inscription at <http://www.edb.uniba.it/epigraph/icv1/15410> (click on the image for a larger version).

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## Further Reading

For a more systematic introduction to Latin epigraphy, see:

Cooley, A.E. *The Cambridge Manual to Latin Epigraphy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

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