Statuae Deorum Hominumque: The Distinction in Epigraphic Statuary Terminology between Divine and Human Representation in Africa Proconsularis and Beyond

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The sheer number of Latin words for 'statue' suggests that there might be some semantic difference among them. Some scholars have claimed that statua and imago refer only to statues of persons, while signum and simulacrum are reserved for statues of gods. Analysis of epigraphic evidence from Africa Proconsularis reveals that this assessment is only partially valid: statua is used indiscriminately for human and divine statues. Evidence from the rest of the Roman Empire confirms the flexibility of the term statua.

The Latin language possesses several words that could be translated as 'statue:' statua, signum, simulacrum, imago, and effigies. These terms, however, are not all synonyms. Through analysis of literary evidence some scholars have concluded that statua and imago refer to statues of persons, while signum and simulacrum are reserved for statues of gods. These conclusions are partially confirmed and partially challenged by investigation of epigraphic evidence.

Sylvia Estienne, in her study of literary sources concludes that the terms signum and simulacrum refer exclusively to statues of gods, while statua and imago are reserved for depictions of mortals. The term effigies is applicable to either category, but is rarely encountered. She displays her findings quite concisely in a table, but unfortunately does not provide any footnotes to explain where she gets her information.[1] She characterizes signum and simulacrum as fundamentally synonyms, but distinguishes the former as the older and more common term and the latter as more specifically an anthropomorphic depiction of a god.[2] Imago specifically is a bust.[3] Peter Stewart broadly agrees with Estienne's dichotomy of human and divine statues, but adds that the Latin terms statua and simulacrum are the equivalent of the Greek andrias and agalma.[4] Stewart departs from Estienne in equating the term simulacrum with 'cult statue.'[5]

These conclusions about Latin statuary terminology are based almost entirely on literary sources. The present work will investigate whether epigraphic evidence leads to the same conclusions. The words statua, signum, simulacrum, effigies, and imago appear too frequently within Latin inscriptions to allow for analysis within the empire as a whole.[6] To limit the scope of the investigation, the province of Africa Proconsularis will initially serve as a microcosm for the empire as a whole.

Inscriptions that refer to statues are quite common and overwhelmingly occur on the bases that once held those statues. Since statues are less durable than their bases, typically little remains of the statue itself. This presents a significant problem for the analysis of statuary terminology: the word itself is clear enough, but often there is no explicit mention of what the statue depicts. This is understandable, since it would have been obvious from the statue itself. Consequently, the corpus of suitably unambiguous inscriptions is more limited that would be desirable. In the case of inexplicit references, some are more likely to be one type of statue or another, but cannot be absolutely identified. Unambiguous evidence of the nature of a statue is provided by the use of a noun in the genitive case adjacent to a word for 'statue,' e.g. the following inscription (AE 1955, 00196): [De]i Herculis simu[lacrum] / M(arcus) Pacatus Amil]

The term imago appears exceedingly rarely on inscriptions in Africa Proconsularis, and often its use is ambiguous, but in five cases it seems to clearly refer to people.[7] This supports the conclusion of Estienne and Stewart, but is insufficient to be conclusive. Estienne makes the further point that the term imago is specifically a bust (inherently of a human) rather than a full statue. The epigraphic evidence from Africa Proconsularis is ambiguous on this point, but nowhere else is there evidence to support Estienne's conclusion. The term imago refers to far more than simply the famous wax busts of ancestors that prominent Romans kept in special cabinets in their atria and put on display in funeral processions. Such a scenario strikes the imagination so strongly that it is easy to forget that ancient accounts of this practice are limited and that the basic definition of the term is revealed by what the word image has come to mean in English.[8] Stewart argues that the term simply means 'statue' and is often used synonymously

with statua, and very often together with it in the phrase statuae et imagines.[9]

The inscriptional evidence for simulacrum is somewhat clearer because it never refers to statues of humans. Rather, in five inscriptions the word clearly refers to gods and in two additional ones seems to, but only after extensive reconstruction.[10] An additional inscription is puzzling.[11] It includes a reference to what seems to be a statue, but no term for 'statue' is used. Instead, the name of the goddess depicted is put in the accusative case, much as today someone might call a copy of the Venus de Milo simply a Venus de Milo. Following the name of the goddess (Fortuna Victrix) is the phrase cum simulacris victoriarum. Victoria was the personified goddess of military success, but she was conceived of as one deity. It is possible that the plural victoriarum of the inscriptions indicates that there were several individual statues of the goddess. It is also possible that the victoriae are representations of successful battles, not depictions of deities.

As for signum, there are no inscriptions that unambiguously refer to a statue of a human, but there are three that clearly refer to gods, and a fourth that seems to refer to a deity, but this conclusion is vitiated by reconstruction.[12] In addition, there are two inscriptions that mention statues of the she-wolf together with the twins (though in one case the word signum is reconstructed) and one that depicts a statue of Marsyas.[13] Both of these figures are, strictly speaking, mythological characters rather than gods, since they were not worshipped and were not believed to possess any of the powers associated with gods, but nonetheless they were important. The she-wolf supposedly suckled the infants Romulus and Remus and a statue of Marsyas stood in the Roman forum, possibly on the rostra itself, as a symbol of free speech.[14] These figures presumably ranked closer to gods than to men, and so the use of the term signum

in reference to statues of them does not negate the conclusion that the term excludes sculptures of humans.

In all of Africa Proconsularis there is only one inscription that includes the word effigies, and it is in such a poor state that it is difficult to understand exactly what the inscription is trying to convey, let alone ascertain the identity of the effigies.[15] The ambiguity here does not contradict the findings of other scholars, who declare that the rather rare term can be used for any kind of statue.[16]

Estienne and Stewart both argue that statua refers specifically to a statue of a person.[17] The inscriptional evidence from Africa Proconsularis confirms that the term can refer to a statue of a human, but it is surprisingly difficult to find an inscription that unambiguously mentions a statua of a person. There is only one example that specifies with the genitive, but there is an additional inscription in which the genitive phrase that is attached to statua is reconstructed.[18] There are, however, numerous examples of statuae that almost certainly depict a person. Though a name in the genitive adjacent to statua is almost non-existent, there are many inscriptions that begin with the name of a person in the dative case. If an individual or, as often happened, the local government erected a statue to or someone, then it is likely that that statue depicts that person, particularly if no other person or god is mentioned in the same inscription. There are many examples of this type of inscription.[19]

A specific category of statua consists of depictions of living emperors. As with the statuae of non-imperial men, there are no completely unambiguous usages of the term, but there are several whose context makes it extremely likely that the statue is of the contemporary, living emperor. One inscription begins with the name of the emperor Caracalla in the dative case

and later mentions a statuam togatam. [20] Since the toga was specifically the garb for Roman men, it seems likely that this statue depicts the emperor wearing a toga. The second inscription begins with Antoninus Pius and Lucius Verus in the dative and later specifically mentions statuas duas, so it is within the realm of possibility that the two statues depict the emperor and his adopted son. [21] The third inscription is very similar in basic form to the second: it begins with Caracalla and Julia Domna (the emperor's mother) in the dative case, to whom a local notable gave statuas duas. [22]

Africa Proconsularis offers nine inscriptions that include the word statua in obvious reference to a god, as indicated by the use of the genitive case. [23] Such usage is not specific to one or a limited number of gods, but includes Saturn, Mars, (Juno) Caelestis, Hercules, Mercury, Fortuna, the Genius Curiae, Cupid, Concordia, and Asclepius. One of these inscriptions (CIL 08, 01548) mentions a templum Cererum. A multitude of goddess of agriculture, rather than a single Ceres, is attested only in African inscriptions (with only two exceptions, both of which can be attributed to African influence). [24] In addition to the unambiguous examples, there are a further eight inscriptions that mention statues that are very likely to be divine, but whose wording is either slightly ambiguous or partially reconstructed. [25] Furthermore, one inscription bears the term statua applied to a deified emperor (Hadrian), who would be appropriately classified as a god rather than man. [26] Examination of similar inscriptions from the other provinces of Roman Africa shows that this usage of statua is not a peculiarity of Africa Proconsularis: five inscriptions from other African provinces show the same result. [27] Within this last group, two are of particular interest (AE 1941, 00046; CIL 08, 08313) since in both instances statues of both gods and men are listed and the term statua is used for each.

Thus, one must conclude that, epigraphically at least, statua can be a statue of a man or god. This discovery, however, is not completely original to the present work. In a footnote to an article, the German scholar Jörg Rüpke noted that in a paper delivered in 2010 Estienne commented that in Africa statua usually refers to statues of gods. [28] This little disseminated finding, as stated, is somewhat misleading, since Africa displays enough inscriptions describing a statua of a person that it is more accurate to say that the term can indiscriminately refer to each type of statue, rather than that it usually refers to statues of gods. Estienne is incorrect, furthermore, in limiting this proviso to Africa.

Further investigation reveals that statua clearly refers to a statue of a god in inscriptions from provinces throughout the Roman Empire. [29] The eight examples come from the disparate regions of Italy, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Sicily. In all the provinces of Roman Africa the total number of inscriptions containing the word statua in reference to a statue of a god (or divine emperor) is thirteen. This is prima facie evidence that the practice of using statua to refer indiscriminately to statues of gods and people was more common in Africa than anywhere else in the Roman world, but further research is necessary to disprove or confirm this possibility, and even further research is needed to explain it. The most significant point, however, is that the ambiguous usage of statua is not at all confined to Africa.

These findings show that one would be ill advised to use the term statua to make a conclusion about the identity of the figure depicted, in the absence of other information. In her chapter within to Divine Images and Human Imaginations in Ancient Greece and Rome Estienne mentions an inscription from Lanuvium which includes the term statua. [30] The term immediately follows an abbreviation

that clearly refers to Juno Sospes. Since the goddess' name appears as a series of letters, it is impossible to determine its grammatical case. If the name is assumed to be in the genitive case, then clearly this would have to be a statua of a god. If the dative case is restored, then it could be a statue of the goddess, or of someone else (presumably the emperor Hadrian, who ordered the statue to be made out of the old and worn-out gifts dedicated to the temple). Estienne concludes that it must be the latter, basing her decision solely on the use of the term statua, which she argues is used exclusively for statues of persons.[31] Though her research with literary evidence supports this conclusion, the evidence presented here shows that it is untenable in light of the ambiguity of the term statua.

The ambiguous meaning of statua is confined to its usage in epigraphy. These findings do not contradict Estienne's conclusion concerning the usage of the word in ancient texts. This contrast between the usage of a word in literature and in inscriptions is mirrored in Greek. The word agalma, which Stewart equates with the Latin simulacrum, is used within literary sources in reference only to divine statues, but on inscriptions it can also refer to statues of people.[32] Thus, both Greek and Latin possess a statuary term that is used in a more restricted fashion in literature than on inscriptions.

Both literary and epigraphic evidence indicate that the terms signum and simulacrum are used exclusively for statues that depicted gods, mythological figures, or deified emperors. In contrast imago refers to a statue of a person, likely a full statue rather than simply a bust. The term statua is applied only to statues of humans in ancient writings, but the epigraphic usage is ambiguous, referring to statues of both men and deities.

Abbreviations:

AE: L'Année épigraphique

AfrRom: Africa Romana

BCTH: Bulletin Archélogique du Comité des Travaux Historique

CIL: Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum

D: H. Dessau, Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae

ILAlg : Inscriptions Latines de l'Algerie

ILPBardo: Catalogue des Inscriptions Latines Paiennes du musée du Bardo

ILT : Inscriptions Latines de la Tunisie

IRT : Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania

Endnotes:

1 Estienne 2010, 257.
2 Ibid., 259.
3 Ibid., 258; based on the evidence of Daut 1975. Stewart (2003) states that "Daut bases his detailed survey of statue-vocabulary on the works of Cicero, but his conclusions are generally matched in other, later texts" (21). Daut's conclusions are not based on epigraphic evidence.
4 2003, 21-22, 186.
5 Ibid, 186.
6 The Clauss-Slaby epigraphic database produces the following number of results: statua: 1088; simulacr-: 80; imag-: 288; sign- (a word with many more meanings than simply 'statue'): 198; effigie-: 23. A search on the Heidelberg database reveals fewer total results, but roughly the same proportionate frequency of appearance: statua: 442; simulacr-: 32; imag-: 125.
7 1) BCTH-1954-122 = AE 1957, 00077 = AE 1987, 01055; 2) CIL 08, 17143 = ILAlg-01, 01985 = D 06778 = AE 1898, 00040; 3) CIL 08, 17408 = ILAlg-01, 00010 = D 05474 = AE 1910, +00126 = AE 1938, +00045 = AE 1955, +00146; 4) CIL 08, 26279 = Uchi-01-Ugh 00011 = Uchi-02, 00089 = AE 1908, 00268; 5) ILPBardo-01, 00213
8 Polybius 6. 53; Pliny the Elder NH 35. 6
9 Stewart 2003, 23-4.
10 1) AE 1955, 00196 ; 2) BCTH-1946/49-494 = AE 1949, 00054; 3) CIL 08, 15881 (p 2707) = D 05505 = ILCV +04328 = ILPBardo-01, 00366; 4) CIL 08, 26474 = Dougga 00127 = AE 1906, 00122; 5) ILAlg-01, 02033
11 CIL 08, 05290 (p 962, 1658) = ILAlg-01, 00179 = D 0547
12 1) CIL 08, 04836 = CIL 08, 16911 = ILAlg-01, 00561 = D 06804 ; 2) CIL 08, 11999 (p 2397) = D 05441; 3) CIL 08, 26478 = ILTun 01394; 4) CIL 08, 12285
13 1) CIL 08, 00958 = CIL 08, 12438 = D 06819; 2) CIL 08, 12220 = D 06820
3) AE 1997, 01643 = AE 2003, +01890
14 DeWitt 1926, 223.
15 CIL 08, 00758 = CIL 08, 12222 = ILTun 00632
16 Estienne 2010, 259; Stewart 2003, 20, 24.
17 Stewart 2003, 22: "Statua almost always refers to free-standing sculptures of mortals" and Estienne 2010,
259: "With few exceptions, it is common to differentiate divine representations (signum or simulacrum) from human representations (statua or imago)."
18 1) IRT 00562 = AE 1948, 00006a = AE 1952, +00173 2) CIL 08, 00714 = CIL 08, 12133 = D 05499
19 e.g. IRT 00565; IRT 00598; CIL 08, 00714
20 AE 2004, 01875
21 BCTH-1954-122 = AE 1957, 00077 = AE 1987,

01055
22   ILTun 00066 = ILPBardo-01, 00020 = AfrRom-04-02-486 = AE 1934, 00035
23   1) AE 1933, 00233 ; 2) AE 1992, 01798 = AE 1993, 01737 ; 3) CIL 08, 00993 (p 2440) = CIL 08, 12454 = D 04433; 4) CIL 08, 05367 (p 962) = CIL 08, 17496 = ILAlg-01, 00288 = AE 2000, +00068 ; 5) CIL 08, 01842 = ILAlg-01, 03007 ; 6) CIL 08, 01548 = CIL 08, 15550 = D 06827 ; 7) IRT 00316 ; 8) CIL 08, 15447 (p 2595) = Uchi-01-Rug 00023 = Uchi-02, 00003 = AE 1892, +00094 = AE 1908, +00264 = AE 1941, +00073 = AE 1999, +01846 ; 9) IRT 00396 = AE 1991, 01619 = AE 2005, +01662
24 Rives 1995, 157.
25   1) CIL 08, 23749 = AE 1899, 00116; 2) CIL 08, 01887 = CIL 08, 16510 = ILAlg-01, 03066 = AE 1977, 00859; 3) CIL 08, 26279 = Uchi-01-Ugh 00011 = Uchi-02, 00089 = AE 1908, 00268 4) CIL 08, 00712 = CIL 08, 12143; 5) CIL 08, 14377; 6) CIL 08, 10569 = CIL 08, 14394 = AE 2002, +01679; 7) CIL 08, 05299 (p 962) = CIL 08, 17479 = ILAlg-01, 00177 = D 05475; 8) AE 1992, 01766 = AE 1993, +01733
26 1) AE 1910, 00154
27   1) AE 1941, 00046; 2) CIL 08, 07983 (p 1879) = CIL 08, 07984 = ILAlg-02-01, 00034; 3) CIL 08, 02372 (p 951, 1693) = AE 1941, 00047 = AE 1946, +00066 = AE 1987, 01071; 4) CIL 08, 08313 (p 1897) = CIL 08, 08335 = CIL 08, 10900 = CIL 08, 10898 = CIL 08, 20136 = CIL 08, 20141 = CIL 08, 20142 = AE 1925, 00023 = AE 1925, 00024 = AE 1949, 00040 = ILAlg-02-03, 07644; 5) CIL 08, 19122 = ILAlg-02-02, 06487
28   "As Sylvia Estienne demonstrated in a paper presented at the Max-Weber-Kolleg Erfurt, in inscriptions signum is synonymous with simulacrum in this respect. However, exceptionally in Africa statua usually refers to divine statues (2010)" (186). (present writer's emphasis)
29   1) CIL 13, 11245 = CAG-21-01, p 520 (Lugudunensis); 2) CIL 03, 14386d = IGLS-06, 02723 (Syria); 3) CIL 09, 00976 (Apulia et Calabria / Regio II); 4) CIL 10, 00006 = D 05471 (Bruttium et Lucania / Regio III); 5) CIL 03, 00534 (p 1312) = Corinth-08-02, 00120 (Achaia); 6) CIL 14, 02867 = EE-09, p 432 = D 03687a = SIRIS 00528 = RICIS-02, 00503/0602 (Latium et Campania / Regio I); 7) CIL 03, 06888 = D 04062 (Lycia et Pamphylia); 8) ILSicilia 00075 = AE 1989, 00345a (Sicilia)
30 Estienne 2010, 264.
31   "An imperial inscription demonstrates that the transformation of metallic offerings into a statue given to the gods was not unusual, even if, in this specific case, the statue was probably an image of an emperor, as is pointed out by the term statua." (present writer's emphasis)
32 Stewart 2003, 25

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