Ita valeas, scriptor, hoc monimentum praeteri. Cursing Trespassers, Preserving Monumentality in the Carmina Latina Epigraphica

Introduction. Numerous epitaphs request the reader not to physically outrage the tomb and curse potential trespassers with a set of colourful invectives. While angry divinities are invoked to punish those who illegally appropriate tombs and bury bodies where they are not permitted, physical uneasiness and painful deaths may be threatened to those who do not respect the grave. As early as the Republican period, epitaphs voice genuine concerns about the protection of the tomb. Occasional intruders are warned to stay away from the private space of the tomb with highly formulaic expressions. Formulae such as h(uic) m(onumento) d(olus) m(alus) a(best) not only demarcated the legal character of the grave, underscoring ownership and right to burial, but also prevented the passer-by from dishonouring it. Prohibitions against excrections, written defacement and illegal appropriation underscore the importance ascribed to the physical existence of the tombstone. As evidence from Pompeii suggests, the surfaces of many sepulchral monuments host game or electoral notices signed by professional scribes. Four metrical inscriptions shed new important light on the identity of scribes and further our understanding of the relationship between the reader/viewer, the material layout of the tomb and its physical context.

Focus
Anxiety about contamination, competition and distributed authorship constitutes a quintessential feature of the epigraphic discourse. Monumental epitaphs, votive inscriptions and wall graffiti can all be equally written over, misplaced and erased. By using (actually and metaphorically) on display in public spaces, they are repeatedly exposed to unwanted readerly engagements; engendering responses from reader/viewers. A particular category of intruders is represented by potential writers or scribblers, who were prevented from writing over inscriptions or deploying their surfaces for games and electoral notices.

Prohibitions against bill-posters

Ita candidatus flat honoratus tuus
et ita gratum edat minus tuus munerator
et tu (sis) felix, scriptor, si hic non scripseris.
CIL XI 575, Foro Popili, I cent. AD.
May your candidate gain office and may your games-giver put on a show to please you, and may you, bill-poster, have good luck if you don’t write here. (Trans. Courtney 1995).

Quo(sa)ue in eo vice stercus non posuerit aut non cacavent aut non minaverit habeat illos proprietas, si neglexerit vident.
CIL III 1966, Salona.
Let whoever will not defecate or urinate here be favoured by the gods. Shall he neglect this, he shall see the consequences.

Relief representing Hecate on a funerary or votive monument, Salona. Photo from the Kunsthistorisches Museum website.

IIta candidatus quot petit flat tuus
Et ita perennes, scriptor, opus hoc praeterei.
Hoc si impetra a te, felix vivas, bene vale.
CIL 194, Narnia, date unknown.
May what your candidate seeks come about and may you, bill-poster, have long life, on condition that you pass by this work. If you grant my request, may you live happy. Farewell. (Trans. Courtney 1995).

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haec est quam coniunx candidit atque [pater.]
Purpur opus, hoc scriptor tituli quod luctibus urgen[t];
sic tua praetores saepe manus referat.
CIL X 6193; CLE 1466, Formiae, post-Hadrianic age.
This is the in whom her husband and father laid to rest. 
Bill-poster, spare this work which epitaphs weigh down with grief; so may your aims often carry home (newly-elected) praetors (Trans. Courtney 1995).

Unwanted interactions. Non-professional scribes

Ita valeas, scriptor, hoc monimentum praeteri.
CIL V 1490, Aquileia, date unknown. Farewell. writer. pass this monument by.

Inscription CIL V 1490 originally engraved on the pedestal of a funerary monument, Aquileia, date unknown. Photo from CIL volume V.

Admiror, paries, te non cecidisse ruina.
qui tuis scriptorium taudia sustinere.
CIL IV 2487; CLE 957, Pompeii, I cent. AD.
I am surprised, wall, that you have not collapsed and fallen, seeing / that you support the tedious effusions of so many writers. (Trans. Courtney 1995).

Unwanted Interactions. Non-professional Scribes

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