

CLEGL2022

Commemorating Enslaved and Freed People in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*

The sociological function of verse epitaphs for enslaved and freed people varies according to the identity of the commemorator and the nature of their relationship with the deceased. When enslaved and freed people are commemorated by their masters and patrons, their epitaphs reinforce the ideology of slavery: they emphasize the master/slave or patron/freedperson relationship while sidelining the deceased's family and friends, praise the deceased for being useful to their master, and portray the master as benevolent (cf. AE 1946, 208). Epitaphs for enslaved and freed people composed in their own words, or by their friends and family, present a different picture, and often make negative statements about enslavement (cf. CLE 1276). The verse epitaph, therefore, constituted a space in which different social groups could express different perspectives on slavery and patronage.

Author

The master's perspective (AE 1946, 208)

> Emily Mitchell (Harvard Univ.)
emilymitchell@g.harvard.edu



AE 1946, 208 (tablet; Regium Lepidum, Aemilia; 30 BCE—50 CE)

Text

Tinulei[a] S[ex](ti) l(iberta) Musa
si voce superum ga[udent] qui a luce abierunt
placuisse me patrono [mo]nimentum indicat
quo funere amplo per f[re]quentem gratiam
die supremo lacrumans [me] amissam intulit
in quo hoc effecit me feli[ce]m mortuam 5
ut dicant omnes quod [pat]rono placuerim

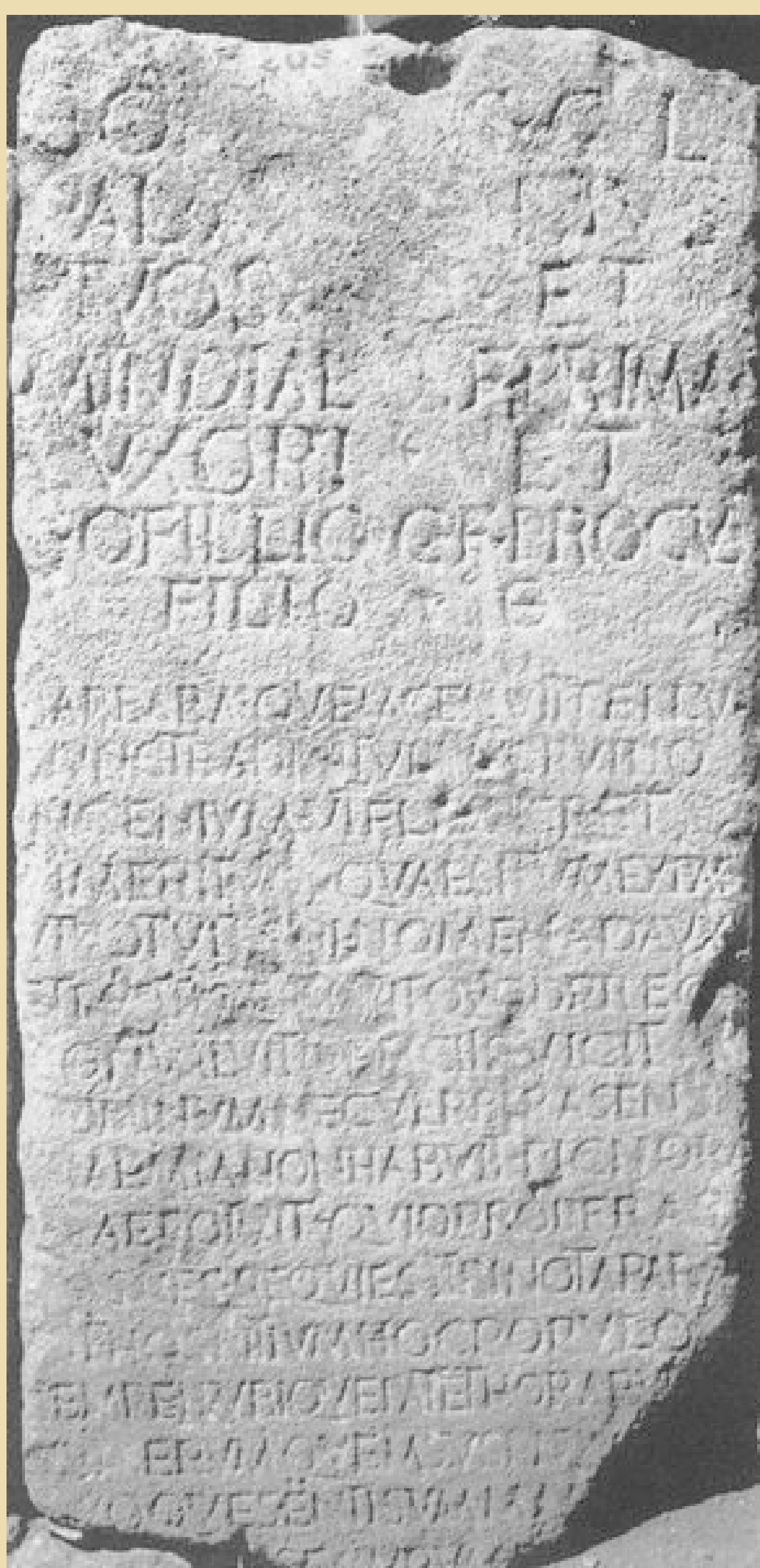
Points of interest

- **'Ventriloquizing' of deceased:** the epitaph is written in the voice of the deceased, Tinuleia Musa, although the tomb and epitaph were created by her patron Sextus. This gives the impression that Musa is endorsing the statements made in the epitaph.
- **Benevolence of patron:** Sextus is portrayed as kind and generous. We are told that he granted Musa funeral rites (*funere amplo*, 3) as well as this monument, which brings with it public renown (*effecit me feli[ce]m mortuam | ut dicant omnes*, 5-6). He is also said to have displayed grief at Musa's death (*lacrumans*, 4).
- **Idea of 'good freedwoman':** Musa is praised for pleasing her patron and fulfilling her obligations to him (*placuisse me patrono [mo]nimentum indicat*, 2; *per frequentem gratiam*, 3; *ut dicant omnes quod [pat]rono placuerim*, 6).
- **Sidelining of deceased's family:** We are told nothing about Musa's life beyond her relationship with her patron, and her family members are not mentioned.

Conclusion: Musa's epitaph presents a model of the ideal patron-freedperson relationship in which the patron is benevolent and the freedperson is obedient and dutiful towards them. The prospect of commemoration is used as an incentive to encourage other freedpeople viewing the monument to demonstrate the same behavior. Musa's epitaph thus reflects the perspective of the slave-owner and reinforces the ideology of slavery.

> Epitaphs with similar messaging: CLE 990, 1116, 1185, 1248, 2092

The freedman's perspective (CLE 1276 = CIL XII 5026)



CLE 1276 (limestone stele; Narbo Martius, Gallia Transalpina; 1st century CE)

Text

C(aius) Ofillius C(ai) l(ibertus)
Pal(atina) A[rimn]estus
vivos [sibi] et
Mindiae M(arci) f(iliae) Primae
uxori et
C(aio) Ofillio C(ai) f(ilio) Proculo
filio et [...]

barbara quem genuit tellus
[hu]nc tradidit usu[s] servitio,
[i]ngenium ut flec[t]eret
[i]mmerit[o]. quaesitum ex pat[re]
ut potuit s[i]bi nomen adaux[it] 5
[e]t pretio [obtin]uit quod prec[e]
non valuit, officiis vicit
[do]minum nec verbera sens[it].
[p]raemia non habuit, pignor[a]
quae potuit. quid properas,
[h]ospes? requies tibi nota parat[a] 10
[es]t: hospitium hoc populo
semper ubique patet. horaru[m]
numerus quem susp[ectas]
quoque senti: summa[st] 15
securum [te cito quae faciat].

> Epitaphs with similar messaging : CLE 89, 1015, 1114, 1247, 1331

Points of interest

- **Negative view of slavery:** Ofillius calls his enslavement "undeserved" (*servitio ... [i]mmerit[o]*, 2-4).
- **Psychological trauma of slavery:** Ofillius says slavery was imposed on him "to bend his spirit" (*[i]ngenium ut flec[t]eret*, 3).
- **Physical violence of slavery:** Ofillius says that he had to "conquer" or "overcome" his master so as not to be subjected to physical violence (*officiis vicit | [do]minum nec verbera sens[it]*, 7-8).
- **Difficulty of obtaining freedom:** Ofillius states that he asked for his freedom but did not receive it, and ultimately had to buy it (*pretio [obtin]uit quod prec[e] | non valuit*, 6-7).
- **Struggles after manumission:** Ofillius suggests that, even after being freed, he had a difficult life with few material rewards (*ut potuit s[i]bi nomen adaux[it]*, 5; *[p]raemia non habuit, pignor[a] | quae potuit*, 9-10). He does not credit his patron with any material or professional support.
- **Prominence of family:** Ofillius begins the epitaph by naming his wife and son (contrast the epitaph of Tinuleia Musa, above, which does not mention her family). Scholars have suggested that the emphasis placed on family relationships in inscriptions by freedpeople may be an emotional response to enslavement, under which they could not form legally recognized marriages and family units (cf. Mouritsen 2005; Bodel 2017).

Conclusion: Ofillius' epitaph challenges the picture of slavery and patronage constructed by the patrons (which we can observe in Musa's epitaph above) by portraying the experience of slavery as traumatic, the life of the freedman as difficult, and the support of the master or patron as non-existent.