

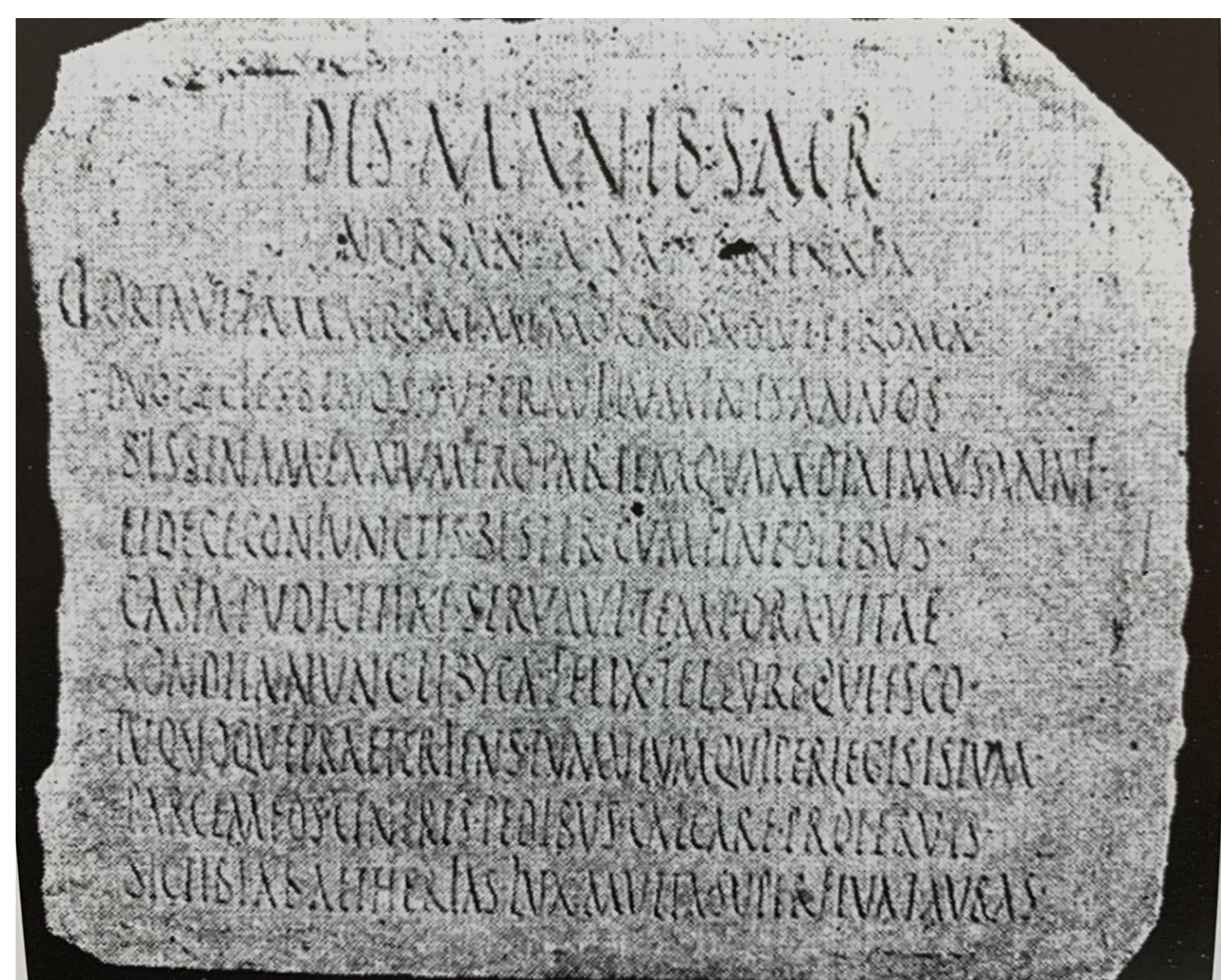
Strong and independent women in Roman verse inscriptions

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Previously, verse inscriptions have not been used in the research of female agency and independence in the Roman world. In my study, I am focusing on a hitherto neglected evidence base in order to gain a better understanding of the ways in which women both self-represented and were represented in Roman society, where and how they fit into their respective communities and into society, and how clear-cut their roles actually were. Epigraphic poems, from a wide range of social and cultural contexts, reveal the ways in which women asserted and defended their level of independence.

➤ Financial Affairs



To the Spirits of the Departed. Norbania Saturnina, the honourable.

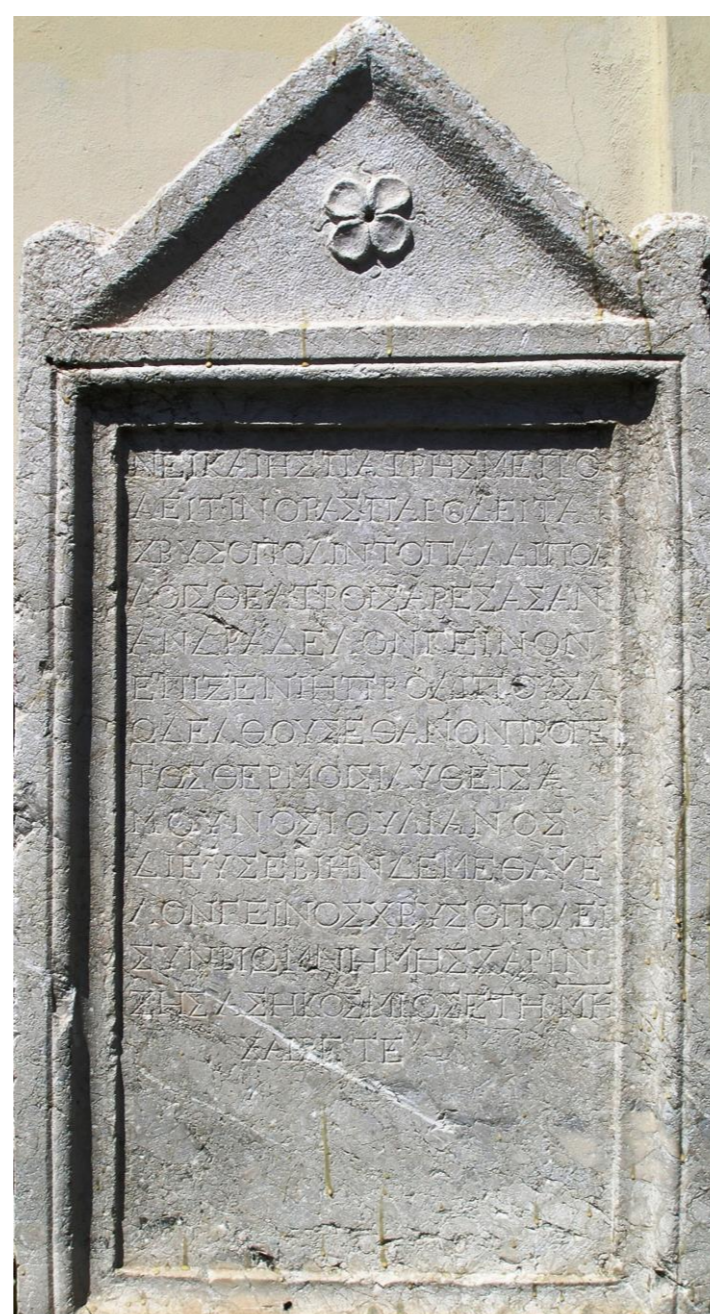
Born, as public opinion proves, worthy of being remembered in splendid Rome. I conquered twelve times two (=24) years of life, the twice-sixth part, in number terms, of the aforementioned year (= 1 month), and, finally, ten days, combined with another twice three of them (= 16 days). With restrained bashfulness I guarded every moment of my life. Now I rest happily, buried in Libyan soil. And you, who are reading this as you pass by my tomb, refrain from trampling my ashes with insolent feet: thus may much light flow upon you from ethereal air.

Norbania Saturnina is telling her life story, without mentioning **any male counterparts**. This poem is only about her life, her life as a migrant, for she was born in Rome, but died in Carthage. She is portrayed as being **in charge of her life and her financial situation**, choosing **an independent and decent life**. What makes this case very strong is that all these aspects are revealed through a **female voice**.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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➤ Professional Life



You see me, traveller, a citizen of my hometown, Nicaea, Chrysopolis, who used to be popular in many theaters; I left my husband Longinus behind, when I came here and died, consumed by fever; Julianus alone buried me, on account of piety.

Longinus, in memory of his wife, Chrysopolis, who lived decently for forty-eight years (made this). Farewell.

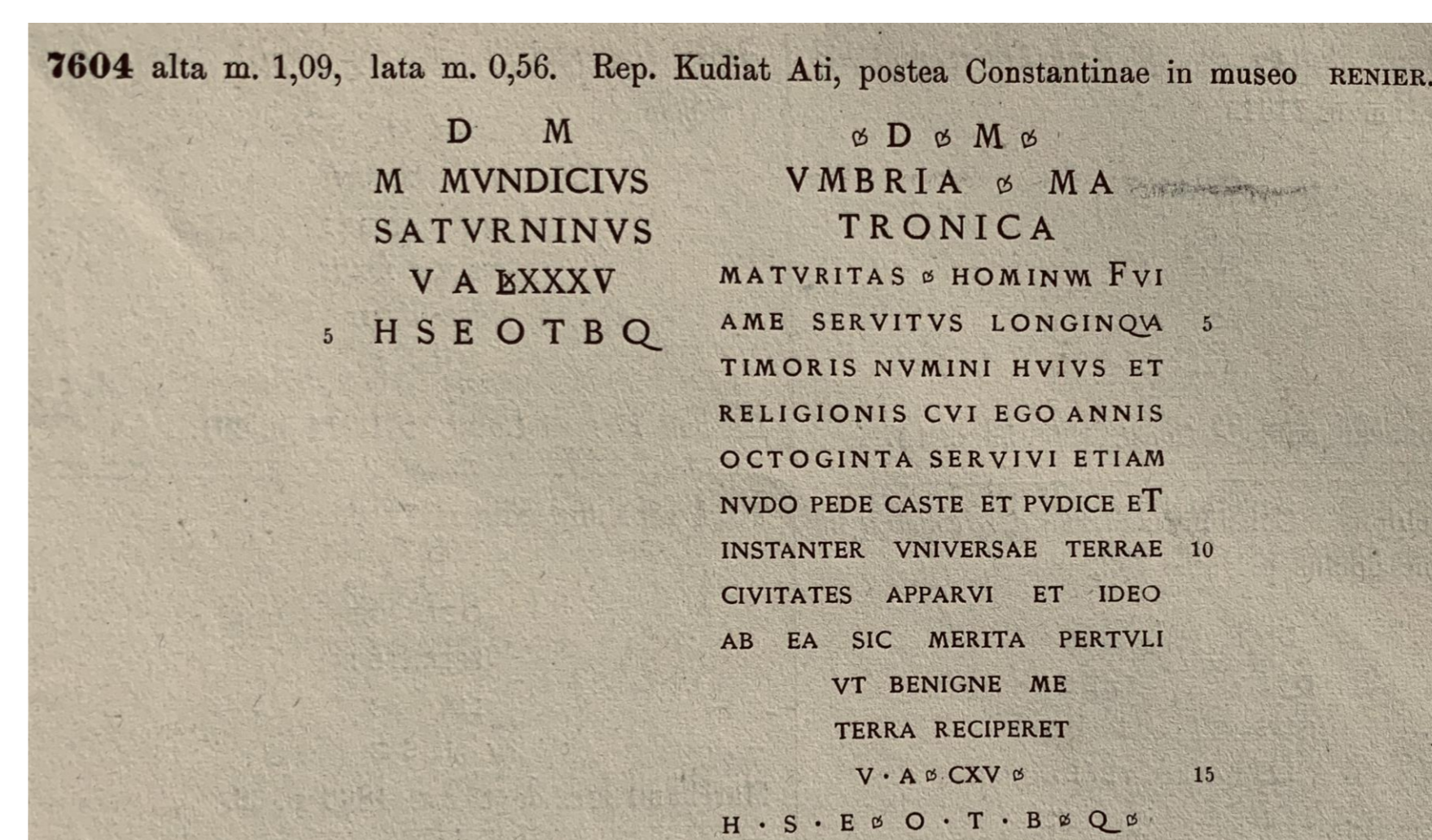
This poem preserves a **female voice**. **Chrysopolis** was in the first place, a **stage artist** and a wife, in the second. Here the emphasis is not on her marital status, as one might expect, but especially on her **civic and professional identity**. She is portrayed as an **active and independent woman** who worked and travelled to many places to contribute to the family income.

Cases like these allow us to see how complex women's roles and position within the ancient Roman society were. These women found a space fundamentally outside of the sphere that is commonly inferred to have been the female one. Finally, their actions and involvement convey a strong sense of their ability to assert and defend their level of independence and self-determination.

REFERENCES & IMAGES

- CIL VIII 24787, Carthage. Chr. Hamdoune (ed.), *Vie, mort et poésie dans l'Afrique romaine*, p. 90-91, no. 43, pl. XIV, fig. 14.
- SGO II 09/09/07 Klaudivi Polis. Stele of Chrysopolis. Bolu Museum, Turkey. © Mustafa Adak.
- CIL VIII 7604, Cirta.

➤ Religious Affairs



To the Spirits of the Departed.

I, Umbria Matronica was the oldest of men. My elongated servitude, respecting the will and desire of the divinity whom I served for 80 years and with bear feet, pure and chaste. I have waited upon (visitors from) the cities of the entire world. For all these merits, I got the earth to receive me kindly.

She lived 115 years. She is buried here; may your remains rest in peace.

This poem introduces a **female** as the **first-person narrator** of her extraordinary life. **Umbria Matronica** was a **priestess** of Ceres/ the Cereres or Tellus who **praised her lifelong devotion and service to the deity**. The poem mentions nothing about her marital status or any other male counterparts. Instead, the emphasis is on her **civic status** and **religious responsibilities**.



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