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IV

MARY BEARD

VITA INSCRIPTA[1]

At some time towards the end of the second century C.E., maybe a little later, a man by the name of MARCUS MODIUS MAXXIMUS held the position of *archigallus* ('chief priest', for want of a better translation) at the sanctuary of Magna Mater in the port-city of Ostia. He was a man of some consequence: not important, perhaps, in the get-rich-quick world of the harbour, nor in the back-scratching world of the local town hall; but in the sanctuary of the Great Mother, MMM was the one who ruled the roost.

At Ostia, as in Rome itself and in many other cities in the western empire, the cult of Magna Mater was a (to us) paradoxical mixture of civic propriety, official patronage and wild, weird transgression: an assertion, at the same time, of 'Roman' identity and its 'Oriental' antitype. The Ostian sanctuary, with its temples of the Great Mother herself and of the goddess Bellona, its array of other cult buildings, all enclosed within a perimeter wall, is the largest planned open space in the city (excepting only the 'Square of the Corporations'). Not only did it cost a lot; the sheer size boasted civic power. And, as if to reinforce that message, the whole site was littered with statues

[1] This paper has been much improved by discussion with John Crook, Keith Hopkins and Neil Wright. John HENDERSON (as himself, and also as *A Roman Life: Rutilius Gallicus on paper and in stone* [Exeter 1997]) prompted more thoughts on *cursus* inscriptions than could be included here. Otherwise, most of what I know of Latin epigraphy I have learned from (or with) Joyce Reynolds.

and dedications from some of the richest and best connected men in town: as much self-advertisements for the local elite as pious offerings to the deity[2]. On the other hand, there *was* something decidedly foreign, decidedly strange about what went on behind those sanctuary walls. The distinctive sacrificial ritual of the cult, the *taurobolium*, flagrantly subverted the norms of Roman civic sacrifice: it seems to have involved the drenching of the sacrificing priest in the blood of the slaughtered bull. The characteristic priests of the goddess, the *galli*, flaunted their Otherness, their un-Romanness even more shockingly: with their long curling hair, their oils and perfumes, their gaudy robes and clanking jewels, they were eunuchs — self-castrated. The story was (though, of course, we cannot vouch for it) that they danced themselves into a religious frenzy and with a stone or broken pot (the use of metal was expressly forbidden) they cut off both penis and testicles; their mythic avatar was the semi-divine Attis, the boy-lover of Magna Mater, driven to self-castrating madness by the goddess herself. Marcus Modius Maxximus was one such (castrated) priest; one such new Attis[3].

We know of his existence from a single object: a marble cylinder, topped by a marble cock, about half a metre high in all, on which his life is inscribed. It is, as we shall see, a clever, subtle and sophisticated biography of exactly six words, interwoven with some very deft visual image-making. It is also something of a mystery; its purpose, the reason for all this subtlety and deftness, is far from clear. The object was rediscovered in the late nineteenth-century excavations of the

[2] The material is collected in M.J. VERMASEREN, *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque* III (Leiden 1977), 107-143; also R. MEIGGS, *Roman Ostia* (Oxford ²1973), 355-366.

[3] The standard account of the cult is still H. GRAILLOT, *Le culte de Cybèle* (Paris 1912); to which add, Ph. BORGEAUD, *La Mère des Dieux. De Cybèle à la Vierge Marie* (Paris 1996), 89-182 and (for the approach outlined here) M. BEARD, "The Roman and the Foreign: the cult of the 'Great Mother' in Imperial Rome", in N. THOMAS and C. HUMPHREY (ed.), *Shamanism, History and the State* (Ann Arbor 1994), 164-190.

sanctuary of Magna Mater — in a small hoard of sculptures hidden away under the long portico that flanked one side of the vast open piazza. Found with a small bronze Venus and a large marble reclining Attis, the excavators guessed that it had been put away for safety, specially prized, as the cult was abandoned or even attacked. Maybe. But what it *was* (some suggest a grave-marker, others a dedication) and whether it was written *by*, *for* or *in honour of* MMM, we simply do not know[4].

We can, however, read it — starting with the inscribed text:

M. Modius / Maxximus / archigallus / coloniae Ostiensis

Marcus Modius
Maxximus,
chief priest (of Magna Mater)
of the colony of Ostia

There is much more here than a routine 'label' of name and office; the words, as they are inscribed on the stone (even if the normalizing conventions of the modern printed text work hard to obscure it) conjure the living presence of the man; the still audible traces of his speech and his music; the priest in his sanctuary. Let's start with the name: 'Marcus Modius MaXXimus'; and let's spell it correctly. For more than a hundred years now, orthodox epigraphy has insisted on bracketing one of the X's or inserting an exculpatory '*sic*'. Silly old stonecutter; couldn't even spell Maximus properly. The layout of the stone, however, shows just how intentional, just how right the stonecutter must have been. MAXXIMUS has a line to itself; the two Xs are central; they are fractionally larger than the letters to either side; they capture our attention. *Spelling* here is closely related to *saying*; to how MMM must have said his own

[4] M.J. VERMASEREN [n. 2], 123-124; *CIL* XIV 385 = *ILS* 4162. For the story of the discovery, C.L.VISCONTI, "I monumenti del Metroon Ostiense", in *Annali Istituto* 4 (1869), 208-245. The Venus had apparently been wrapped in a red cloth before being deposited. See further, R. CALZA, "Le sculture rinvenute nel santuario della Magna Mater", in *Mem.Pont.Acc.Arch.* 6 (1946), 207-227.

name (lingering on the power of those two Xs); to how he must have had it said; and to how we, as readers, are being enlisted in the game of the name. We are being told how to say MaXXimus, right.

The layout of the text on the stone is also crucial in the words that follow: 'archigallus coloniae Ostiensis', as they will (straightforwardly) appear in any printed text. Not so on the inscription. There the three words have been turned into what looks, at first sight, like six, 'archi' separated from 'gallus', 'colo' from 'niae', 'osti' from 'ensis'. And in the gap that splits the end of each word from its beginning is plainly inscribed the shape of the pipes of Pan. Again we are being instructed in how to speak what is written, in how to capture the monumentality of MMM's position: not just 'archigallus', chiefpriest, over in flash; but nice and slow, 'archi...(wait for it)...gallus', the Chief // Priest. But the panpipes do not just mark a gap, a space, a vacuum in MMM's priestly title. They fill it, with one of the distinctive sounds of the sanctuary; embedded at the heart of this man's office, we must be reminded, is the characteristic wailing of the pipes that once upon a time young Attis played[5]....

Above this text, on top of the cylinder which carries the inscription, stands a cock; not just a cock, but a cock whose tail turns into ears of corn. Whatever complicated lesson in Metroac theology might be implied here, a cock with a tail of corn speaks one thing very clearly: he's not real; he's representation and he needs to be interpreted. As soon as we remember that one Latin word for 'cock' is 'gallus', we have one interpretation ready to hand. *Gallus*/bird stands for *gallus*/priest. A visual pun; a marble version of a verbal joke on MMM's religious office. But it's not just that. The pun on the bird/priest was a favourite one of Roman writers when they laughed *at* the *galli*, at their castrated effeminacy — combined (so one of the

[5] For the association of Attis and the pipes, see (for example) M.J. VERMASEREN [n. 2], 148 (n. 453) and pl. CCXCI.

oldest Roman jokes went) with their voracious sexual appetite[6]. Here Marcus Modius Maxximus reappropriates that pun, as a pushy piece of self-aggrandizement. *Gallus*/priest turns *gallus*/cock round to his favour, crowing back at us from the top of whatever this object is.

Which brings us to the cylinder itself. It will probably come as no surprise now that this cylinder has the distinctive shape — a squat truncated cone — of one of the standard Roman corn measures: the *modius*. Another piece, then, of tricksy verbal gamesmanship: it is MMM's *nomen* (in the shape of a corn measure) that carries his inscription, his priestly office (in the shape of the *gallus*) perched on top. But the *modius* is more than just a plain, work-a-day, real-life *modius*. Inscribed all around it are scenes from the myths of the cult. A forest of reeds, a little figure of Attis in his Phrygian cap, Cybele's lion: all evoke the complex cultic story of Attis' early life, abandoned on the banks of the *river* Gallus, to be found by the goddess. And together, as images, they make yet more claims for the life and life-story of Marcus Modius Maxximus. If the stone *modius* stands for our Modius (capital M), then the inscription of the life of Attis into the stone re-enacts (representationally) the inscription of allegiance to the cult that was irreversibly branded onto the body of the priest himself: that is, his castration.

In short, this an object (and a text) whose crude simplicity is wilfully deceptive. It is a celebration of biographical representation; an exploration not only of the different strategies for turning life (*vita*) into stone (*inscripta*), but also of the different ways that a life itself, or a career, might be conceived: as a name, as a voice, a place, an office, a body, and so on. It demands and deserves close reading. One of the main questions that underlies the rest of this paper is whether we can profitably apply that kind of reading to other, apparently more familiar, inscribed

[6] For example, MART. 3, 24; 3, 81.

lives; and how. Is such verbal self-consciousness a feature of other auto/biographical inscriptions? Is such an artful construction of identity a common epigraphical trope? Or is MMM's text a freak of representation, a religious oddity, a maverick even in the transgressive terms of his own cult?

*
* *

Marcus Modius Maxximus' strange stone has, of course, already served to remind us how wide the range of inscribed life is: from just a few words on a grave marker, recording a name and an age, to the column after column of impossibly brazen self-construction that is Augustus' *Res Gestae*; from the fictionalizing career of Aeneas inscribed in the Forum of Pompeii[7] (copied, we assume, from the Forum of Augustus in Rome) to the real-life exploits of some man next door; some life-stories aggressively on public display; others (inside a mausoleum, perhaps) for family eyes only; some inscribed in honour of a living patron; others the record of a woman or man long (or just) dead; some biography, others *auto*biography. And for all these varieties, and more, there must have been as many reading practices. Every inscription, each inscribed life, must have *mattered* to some people more than to others: road-side funerary texts, for example, that were barely noticed by most passers-by would have been subject to careful scrutiny by family, friends or enemies. And times changed too: when the expertly reticent *elogium* of Marius was launched in Augustus' forum[8], many of those who chose to read it must have been all too well aware quite how reticent it was; two hundred years later no doubt only the most learned or most suspicious of readers would have raised an eyebrow, the transformation of Marius from butcher of the civil war to hero of the republic by then almost taken for granted. There is no such thing (nor

[7] *CIL* X 8348 = *ILS* 63; *Inscr.It.* XIII 3, 85 (with discussion).
[8] *CIL* VI 1315; *Inscr.It.* XIII 3, 17 (with discussion).

should we expect there to be) as a single model for how to inscribe a Roman life, or how to read one.

On the other hand, within this wide variety of biographical options, scholarly attention has traditionally been devoted to a single type of inscribed life: not to the memorials of men like Marcus Modius Maxximus, but what is known, by convenient shorthand (for, of course, this type itself is an amalgam of all sorts of very different texts), as the senatorial or equestrian *cursus*; that is, to the literally thousands of inscriptions erected (often in conjunction with funerary monument or statues) to commemorate, or in honour of, individual members of the Roman elite, which listed at the same time their offices held, honours awarded and (occasionally) other achievements or particular qualities. I too, in the rest of this paper, will be concentrating on these *cursus* inscriptions — specifically to explore the implications of different reading strategies, to see what happens if we choose to treat them not so much as *documents*, but as highly loaded, complex and sophisticated *texts*; to discover if the lessons of Marcus Modius Maxximus have anything to teach us here. The bulk of what follows consists in a close reading of some selected documents, of early imperial date: three first-century C.E. *cursus* texts originally on display outside the vast mausoleum at Tivoli of a Roman senatorial family. But first some more general remarks, particularly on the relationship of *cursus* texts, individual biography, the politics of autocracy and dynastic revolution; the links, in other words, between strategies of representation and strategies of power-play in the elite of the early empire.

In interpreting *cursus* texts (no more and no less than any other auto/biographical form) we are always and inevitably negotiating the shifting boundary between individual specificity and communal practice and ideology, between documentary accuracy, wishful thinking, exculpation and (more or less concealed) boasting. Most of the best recent work on these documents as a category of historical evidence has stressed their shared, social significance: first, as documents which illuminate the adminis-

trative and political *structures* of government in the empire (important, that is, not so much for the information they may give on any individual career, but — taken together — on career *patterns* throughout the elite, and on the various aspects of central imperial decision-making and strategy that lie behind such patterns); second, as documents that can throw light on the 'self-representation' of the Roman elite, as illustrations of shared cultural and social values amongst the highest orders of society at Rome, those who ran the empire. On this model, what is important about these texts is the implicit rules of their composition; what parts of a life they repeatedly choose to list; what to omit; and what kind of image of a senatorial or equestrian career is thereby implied. The implication of this approach is that *cursus* inscriptions are much more ideologically loaded than they appear and that they offer neither a full nor an objective account of a man's career. They are the product of a number of ideological choices — but choices that were shared across the elite. These documents are (so this approach suggests) no less standardized and repetitive than they appear in offering a version of a senatorial or equestrian career; *that* is their importance[9].

Both these approaches (and they do, of course, overlap) mark an emphatic end to the kind of prosopographical stamp

[9] Recent trends in this branch of epigraphy are well represented in *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio* (2 vols = *Tituli* 4 and 5; Roma 1982). The most challenging work (particularly on 'senatorial self-representation') is by W. ECK; though my approach differs considerably from his, I have found the following particularly useful: "Senatorial Self-representation: Developments in the Augustan Period", in F. MILLAR and E. SEGAL (ed.), *Caesar Augustus. Seven Aspects* (Oxford 1984), 129-167; "Statuendedikationen und Selbstdarstellung in röm. Stadten", in *Mélanges M. LeGlay* (Brussels 1994), 550-662; "Tituli honorarii, Curriculum Vitae und Selbstdarstellung in der Hohen Kaiserzeit", in H. SOLIN, O. SALOMIES, U.-M. LIERTZ (edd.), *Acta Colloqui Epigraphici Latini 1991* (Helsinki 1995), 211-237; "Rome and the Outside World: senatorial families and the world they lived in", in B. RAWSON and P. WEAVER (ed.), *The Roman Family in Italy: status, sentiment, space* (Oxford 1997), 73-99. My own paper is to be seen partly as a response to G. ALFÖLDY, "Individualität und Kollektivnorm in der Epigraphik des röm. Senatorenstandes", in *Epigrafia*... [above], I 37-53. Alföldy explicitly denies that Roman senatorial inscriptions had a *biographical* function — which, as I hope to show, depends what you mean by 'biography'.

— collecting that is often thought, rightly or wrongly, to characterize much of the work on these texts during the earlier part of this century: "Oh great, my first propraetorian legate of Upper Germany who started his career as IIIvir monetalis under Domitian...". Stamp-collecting, with a sense of administrative structure that was, at best, crude; and with almost no sense at all of ideology; and very little desire to recognize that the inscriptions might not, in fact, be transparent guides to the details, stages and processes of a 'real-life' career.

On the other hand, the highly particularizing reading of these texts that our generation would claim to have left behind is not so easy to shake off. You only have to look at any of the major classical reference works (from Pauly to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*) to observe that individual *cursus* inscriptions not only form the framework for their entries on (probably) most of the historical figures included from the Roman empire; but in many case the epigraphic texts are directly converted into (what looks like) authoritative biography by the mere addition of a few connectives and some implied motivation: "after x's governorship of Germany, Domitian moved him (probably immediately) to Britain" normally means nothing more than that an inscription commemorating x survives which lists those two governorships, that they can probably be dated to the reign of Domitian, and that the *fasti* of the province of Britain would have a particularly embarrassing lacuna, if we were not to date x's governorship as early as possible. That is to say, embedded in the reference tools of the classical trade, at the heart of what we hope we might 'know' about antiquity, is precisely the kind of naive reading of these *cursus* texts that we believe we have rejected[10].

But how firmly should we be rejecting *any* individualizing approach to these *cursus* texts? One objection to the current orthodoxy (in its most extreme form, at least) is that the baby

[10] The entries on A. Platorius Nepos, cos. 119 C.E. would provide a good example of this method in most standard reference works.

has been thrown out with the bathwater; that structure (whether ideological or institutional) has triumphed too successfully over the individual. It is not, of course, (and no-one would now be so unfashionable as to argue) that the *shared* experience, aspirations and self-imaging of the Roman elite were not central to our (and to Roman) understanding and reading of these texts; but, at the same time, each individual inscription represents a personal interpretation of, accommodation with, or subversion of those common norms — against a background (and, for the upper echelons of the elite, this is crucial) of the apparently arbitrary decisions of an autocratic monarch, the paranoia and dangers of dynastic politics and court society. The individual text, parading the life of its subject, has a lot more specific work to do than replicate a shared value system.

I make this point in the context of a changing emphasis in recent work in ancient history more generally. Building on the grand institutional and structural studies of Roman imperial politics, historians are turning (admirers of Ronald Syme — and of Tacitus — would, rightly I think, say turning *back*) to the micro-history of elite politics in the Roman empire; to the role of the individual in the day-to-day life of an autocratic monarchy. How did the (dangerously) well-connected senator survive at the Roman court? How did he avoid self-incrimination, by action or word? How did he 'get it right'? As Tacitus asks us to wonder, in one of his very best exemplary scenarios, what was the 'right thing' to do or say when an imperial princeling keeled over and died just next to you at dinner? Try to help him? (...and so risk incurring the wrath of a murderous emperor?) Ignore it entirely and go on eating? (...and so show that you knew it was murder all along?)[11] And how did you re-adjust to the next reign — when the one thing that was certain was that to have got it all too brilliantly right under Nero or Domitian could turn out to be a major mistake under Vespasian or Trajan?

[11] TAC. *Ann.* 13, 16.

We are all familiar enough with these issues. They are *our* problems too. (Think of all the cvs that, at this very moment, are being rewritten and carefully readjusted in every former Eastern bloc country.) But they prompt us to look much harder at the *words* of Roman imperial political culture; to bring literary concerns much more centrally into history. Senators close to the emperor existed *rhetorically*. Not for nothing was declamation their favourite after-dinner activity; they survived by understanding how (in Shadi Bartsch's terms) to practice the fine arts of 'doublespeak', how to dress up flattery as frankness, how to interpret each spoken word with the complexity or suspicion it did (or did not) deserve. Such is court society[12].

In this context, *cursus* texts take on a new importance. If Bartsch can expertly unpick Pliny's tub-thumping *Panegyricus*, to show precisely how the tropes of sincerity could usefully occlude the shady (not-so-)secret of Pliny's past (that he had been one of the most enthusiastic Domitianic collaborators of them all)[13], how can we not turn our attention to the rhetoric of those inscriptions that publicly parade the most incriminating thing of all about a senator: his career, its timing, its gaps, its silences. A permanent memorial of *res gestae*, or of offices held, was as much a hostage to fortune as it was a display of success. Some of those offices, after all, might have been held at 'the wrong time', or so it might later seem: as we know, to be 'quaestor of Domitian' might be something to boast about in 95, something to explain away in 103. Besides, there were some perennially awkward questions: "What did you do in the year of the four emperors, Daddy?". In a society where everyone knows how much words matter, it is impossible to imagine that the terms of a *cursus* inscription were not individually, carefully and rhetorically considered: as much improvisations, new every time, as routinized standard documents. Prominent

[12] S. BARTSCH, *Actors in the Audience. Theatricality and Doublespeak from Nero to Hadrian* (Cambridge, Mass. 1994).

[13] S. BARTSCH [n.12], 148-187.

Romans, at least, must always have foreseen the possibility that their career records would be all too carefully scrutinized.

Marcus Modius Maxximus reinforces this conclusion, even if he does not provide an exact model for reading the elite texts. The verbal gamesmanship of his inscription is not uncommon on (funerary) texts put up by, or for, those below senatorial or equestrian status; necessarily wealthy *enough*, from the simple fact of their smart(ish) inscribed memorials — but definitely *sub*-elite. I have found no example quite so flamboyant as MMM's self-construction in stone. But there are a good number of other visual/verbal puns on the lines of MMM's *gallus* and *modius* — cultural tropes that bind words to images and images to experience: a Ti. Octavius Diadumenus who bestrides his tombstone as a look-alike Polykleitan 'Diadumenos'; a Laberia Daphne, immortalized by her parents, literally branching out, at the moment of her (i.e. Daphne's) metamorphosis into a tree; a Ti. Statilius Aper, whose memorial flaunts a statue of the young man *standing* on a *boar*, accompanied by some elegantly inscribed verses that wittily (?) assure us that *this* Aper/boar was not killed by Meleager; and others in similar vein[14]. It is also a feature of these texts that they explicitly address the reader, enlisting his (or her) interest in the life commemorated, its story, its interpretation and implications. That kind of engagement is, of course, already implied by the puns and visual play; which inevitably serve to turn attention onto the role of the reader in making sense of, or decoding, the text. But one of the commonest themes of all is a direct appeal to the passer-by: to stop, to read, perhaps to shed a tear or reflect on their own current good fortune (and certain mortality). Funerary texts of this type, so the message is, have readers who *read*[15].

[14] *CIL* VI 10030 (Diadumenos); *CIL* VI 20990 (Daphne); *CIL* VI 1975 = *ILS* 7737 (Aper). See T. RITTI, "Immagini onomastiche sui monumenti sepolcrali", in *Mem.Acc.Linc.*, Class. Scienz. mor., stor. e fil., Ser. VII, 21 (1977), 257-397.

[15] Examples conveniently collected in R. LATTIMORE, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana 1962), 230-237.

These particular games are not generally found in senatorial and equestrian *cursus* inscriptions. Senators it seems, on their tombstones at least, rarely make their points with puns (though elite Republican moneyers were, of course, smarter than anyone in converting their names to images). That said, there are still good reasons to suppose that some version of MMM's sophistication is embedded in the senatorial version of the genre. First, there is a very strong logic suggesting that that simply *must* be so. For it is almost inconceivable that while (for want of a better word) the Roman sub-elite were busy constructing memorials to themselves and each other which revelled in the games of converting life into text, and which constructed the interpreting reader (as well the writer) as an integral part of that game, the highest ranks of Roman society eschewed all such sophistication to give us their careers straight. Not only have we already seen some of the pressures within elite political culture against any unreflectively straight record; but also everything else we know about these characters, their education and literary tastes (these were the readers of Ovid, after all) puts literary self-consciousness and sophistication high on their agenda. If they adopt a version of the 'plain style' for their *cursus* texts, we can be fairly certain that it is as self-consciously artful as the 'plain style' always pretends not to be.

But there is more than logic at work here; there is also some clear evidence (all the clearer for being part of a parodic satire) that the elite were as adept as any priest of Magna Mater at playing these epigraphic games; no less sophisticatedly self-conscious in playing with the conventions of a *cursus*; no less tricksy writers and readers. Towards the end of Trimalchio's dinner party in Petronius' *Satyrica* (a work embedded perhaps more firmly that any other in the imperial court culture of first-century C.E. Rome), Trimalchio, in front of the assembled company, gives Habinnas instructions for the design of his tomb, including the inscription that is to go in the centre[16].

[16] PETRON. 71. The best discussions are Th. MOMMSEN, "Trimalchios Heimath und Grabschrift", in *Hermes* 13 (1878), 106-121; J. D'ARMS, *Commerce and Social Standing in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, Mass. 1981), 108-116.

The interpretation of this text (which, as we shall see, plunders and subverts many different funerary conventions, including the elite *cursus*) will serve to enhance our reading of more 'standard' senatorial inscriptions; it offers a link between Marcus Modius Maxximus and the world of the senatorial, courtly family whose epitaphs will form the subject of most of the rest of this paper.

I print the version of Mommsen, who daringly — if absurdly literal-mindedly — converted Petronius' text 'back' into an inscription.

C . POMPEIVS . TRIMALCHIO . MAECENATIANVS
HIC . REQVIESCIT
HVIC . SEVIRATVS . ABSENTI . DECRETVS . EST
CUM . POSSET . IN . OMNIBUS . DECVRIIS . ROMAE . ESSE . TAMEN . NOLVIT
PIVS . FORTIS . FIDELIS
EX . PARVO . CREVIT . SESTERTIVM . RELIQVIT [CCC]
NEC . VMQVAM . PHILOSOPHVM . AVDIVIT
VALE ET . TV

Predictably, this a dense, complex piece of writing, with all kinds of echoes of other parts of the *Cena*; it is as *deceptively* simple as MMM's monument. I want to consider it quite specifically (and narrowly) in terms of the interpretative strategies it prompts; the challenges it sets up for the (elite) reader.

For many modern critics, Trimalchio gets his epitaph quite 'wrong'; that is the point and the joke of the passage. By mixing up his epigraphic genres, by dressing up the career of a freedman in a rhetorical style more suitable for a senator, or even an emperor, he succeeds only in exposing his lack of culture, low birth and misunderstanding of correct Roman elite norms. So, for example, to talk of a sevirate decreed *in absentia* is, as every Roman reader would recognise, to apply the con-

For the design of the whole tomb that Trimalchio lays out (and is closely linked to the inscribed text), see N. PURCELL, "Tomb and Suburb", in H. VON HESBERG and P. ZANKER, *Römische Gräberstrassen: Selbstdarstellung — Status — Standard* (München 1987), 25-41.

ventions of the very highest offices to a ten-a-penny post, largely restricted to *liberti*. Marius could be elected to a consulship *in absentia*; Augustus could be offered a dictatorship *et absenti et praesenti*; but Trimalchio only looks a fool by claiming the same for the sevirate. And it is a foolishness matched in the next sentence, when again he uses the language of lofty imperial refusal (*noluit* is one of the ways emperors say 'no, thank you' to divine honours) to refer to his decision not to take membership in the freedman *decuriae* at Rome[17].

But it is not as simple as that. One of Petronius' consistent games throughout the *Cena* is to present a Trimalchio who *looks* as if he is getting everything wrong, but in another sense is getting things just right. (Yes, it's a really vulgar dinner party that shows Trimalchio up as just the kind of nouveau riche slob that we despise. But would we like to be invited? Yes, of course we would. So who wins...?) So Petronius is repeatedly challenging his reader to reflect on *how* they judge Trimalchio. Can we really be certain whether he has got it right or not? How do we make our minds up? And what does it say about 'us' (as Roman readers or Roman sophisticates) and about 'our' culture if we find we can't decide so easily?

That is the question with the epitaph. After all, what if Trimalchio *doesn't* look such a fool with his sevirate *in absentia*? For a start, perhaps it's as 'true' as anything else in Trimalchio's fictional world. Perhaps it's a rhetorical strategy that works fine anyway (for most people, most of the time, certainly with most of Trimalchio's friends in the *urbs Graeca* he inhabits). Perhaps we have just convicted *ourselves* of not understanding how Trimalchio's world works — and maybe how 'our' world works too. Similar thoughts are prompted by his name. It's easy enough to see how Trimalchio's self-aggrandizement might have got him into trouble again. As several commentators have pointed out, the addition of the extra *agnomen* 'Maecenatianus'

[17] Marius: *CIL* VI 1315 (above, n. 8); Augustus: *Res Gestae* 5. For imperial refusals, see J. D'ARMS [n. 16], 111, with references.

could be an aristocratic flourish that risks rebounding. What side of the famous Maecenas is Trimalchio taking as his model? Patron of the arts? Notable equestrian and descendant of royalty? Has he forgotten the other stories about Maecenas — that he wasn't quite a 'Man'?[18] And has he forgotten his sense of history too? Improbably sandwiched between Pompeius (defender of the Republic) and Maecenas (the first emperor's henchman)? Or is it *us* that have failed to catch up? Isn't that exactly what the mid-first century's all about? It's taken an imperial revolution — but Pompeius and Maecenas now go together just fine...

So the finger is pointing as much at us in this epitaph as it is at Trimalchio. *We* have to decide if he's got it right — which is, of course, exactly what Petronius' text has already told us. In the sentence that immediately precedes the recitation of his inscription, Trimalchio urges Habinnas (and so inevitably the reader): '*inscriptio quoque vide diligenter si haec satis idonea tibi videtur.*' We are to read *diligenter* (hard, carefully) and to see if the text seems to us to be 'just right' (or — and this is not the same thing at all — 'just right for Trimalchio'). It's an injunction that is effectively repeated at the very end of the inscription with the words VALE ET TV. Replicating one of the conventions of sub-elite epitaphs that we have already noted (engaging and directly addressing the passer-by), the phrase also underscores that the last word on this epitaph lies with us. There is no escape from our obligation to interpret.

Armed now with the experience of reading one cleverly idiosyncratic, biographical *modius* from Magna Mater's sanctuary at Ostia and a parodic epitaph from one of the most artfully sophisticated pieces of Roman court writing, let us turn to the group of three epitaphs from the large mausoleum of the senatorial Plautii, at Ponte Lucano, next to the main highway of the

[18] For example, M.S. SMITH (*ad loc.*), quoting SEN. *epist.* 114, 6.

Via Tiburtina, near Tibur (Tivoli)[19]. One of these, the long cursus of Ti. Plautius Silvanus Aelianus, consul in 45 and 74 C.E., is a well-known text, often anthologized and a convenient prop in many modern historical accounts of Roman administration[20]. The others[21] are less frequently seen; one, in fact, as we shall soon discover, has not been seen at all since the sixteenth century.

The mausoleum is a large circular structure (about 18 metres in diameter), reminiscent of the more famous tomb of Caecilia Metella at Rome. (It too — like the Roman monument — was turned into a defensive tower in the fifth century C.E.; its surviving crenellations give it the appearance of a castle rather than a tomb.) The founder of the mausoleum was M. Plautius Silvanus, the consul of 2 B.C.E., whose family home we can be fairly certain was at the nearby Trebula Suffenas, not at Tibur itself[22]. He and his wife are commemorated twice on the tomb: first in an inscription set into the fabric of the rotunda itself, just below the later crenellations (which I shall not be examining in detail)[23]; second, among the group of three texts that were found (two still remain) on large marble slabs, set into a monumental 'arcade' abutting the tomb, the inscriptions separated from one another by Corinthian half-columns. M. Plautius Silvanus (again with his wife, and this time his young son also) is commemorated in the central

[19] The fullest description is Z. MARI, *Forma Italiae* 35, Tibur (pars quarta) (Roma 1991), 196-210; see also, M. EISNER, *Zur Typologie der Grabbauten im Suburbium Roms, MDAIR* Suppl. 26 (Mainz 1986), 105-108.

[20] *CIL* XIV 3608 (= *ILS* 986); *Inscr.It.* IV 1, 125; M. MCCRUM and A.G. WOODHEAD, *Select Documents of the Principates of the Flavian Emperors* (Cambridge 1961), no. 261; E.M. SMALLWOOD, *Documents illustrating the reigns of Gaius, Claudius and Nero* (Cambridge 1967), no. 228; A.E. GORDON, *An Illustrated Introduction to Latin Epigraphy* (Berkeley, etc. 1983), no. 49; D. BRAUND, *Augustus to Nero. A Sourcebook on Roman History 31 B.C. - A.D. 68* (London and Sydney 1985), no. 401; etc.

[21] *CIL* XIV 3606 (= *ILS* 921) and 3607.

[22] L.R. TAYLOR, "Trebula Suffenas and the Plautii Silvani", in *MAAR* 24 (1956), 2-30; M.G. GRANINO CECERE, "Trebula Suffenas", in *Supplementa Italica* 4 (Roma 1988), 117-240.

[23] *CIL* XIV 3605.

slab, facing the ancient road and directly underneath his epitaph on the tomb itself[24]. The slab to the right (still *in situ*) commemorates Ti. Plautius Silvanus Aelianus[25]; to the left (now lost) was the epitaph of P. Plautius Pulcher (son of the mausoleum's founder)[26]. As early drawings and engravings make clear there must have been at least two other epitaphs flanking these. But we do not know how many more (nor the exact chronology of the construction). Some reconstructions have suggested that, eventually at least, the inscribed arcade extended around the whole mausoleum; others that it was only ever along one side[27].

In what follows, I shall be obeying Trimalchio and reading these three texts *diligenter*; and I shall be setting the construction of the three inscribed lives against what we 'know' of these people, their careers and associations elsewhere; and against each other. It is, in fact, precisely because we have other versions of some of these inscribed lives that I have chosen this group out of the thousands of possible candidates.

On paper, by far the shortest and most reticent of these inscriptions is the commemoration of the founder himself, his wife and young son; all of whom, we may assume, died (just) before the end of Augustus' reign.

M . PLAVTIVS . M . F . A . N
SILVANVS
COS . VIIVIR . EPVLON
HVIC . SENATVS . TRIVMPHALIA
ORNAMENTA . DECREVIT
OB . RES . IN ILYRICO
BENE . GESTAS
LARTIA . CN . F . VXOR

[24] *CIL* XIV 3606 = *ILS* 921.
[25] *CIL* XIV 3608 (and above n. 20).
[26] *CIL* XIV 3607.
[27] See Z. MARI [n. 19].

A . PLAVTIVS . M . F
VRGVLANIVS
VIXIT . ANN . IX
(*CIL* XIV 3606)

M. Plautius' career is summarized in about the most skeletal form that we would still count as a *cursus*: a consulship, a priesthood and triumphal ornaments for deeds well done. Even in terms of the 'conventional' limitations of a senatorial cursus, the list of offices and other information omitted is very long: no junior magistracies, no mention of the fact that he was no ordinary consul, but consul *ordinarius* in 2 B.C.E., the colleague of the emperor; no hint of being the right-hand man of Tiberius, of 'deeds well done' being the saving of the Northern Frontier, Roman annihilation averted[28].

Maybe the point is that we are being encouraged to read M. Plautius Silvanus in traditional Republican mode. Note, for example, the fourth line: the blazoning of the senate behind the triumphal ornaments. Quite correctly, obviously; proper form; but *we* will not be able to help comparing Suetonius' account of just this moment (where it is, of course, the imperial prince who obtains the honours for his generals: *impetrarat*[29]) and so suspect Silvanus' formulation is a self-consciously loaded one. Just like the absence of junior offices. We haven't yet reached the point (or so we will conclude when we look back to this text from a hundred years hence, comparing it with those to left and right) when a man vaunted his (imperially-blessed) career from vigintivirate on. What we have here are the (nostalgically?) Republican essentials.

But the tightrope on which this life is balanced is more precarious than that. If part of the message of the text is to assert old-style virtue, honour and office-holding, service with a

[28] For Silvanus' exploits during these campaigns 'in Ilyrico', see VELL. 2, 112, 4-6; DIO CASS. 55, 34, 4-7; 56, 12, 2. Velleius did not consider him quite the hero he made himself out to be; a general in joint command of one the greatest disasters in Roman military history, narrowly avoided.

[29] *Tib.* 20.

Republican smile, there is also plenty to take us in the other direction. Let's look harder at the name of Plautius junior, *vixit ann. IX.* His *cognomen,* Urgulanius, ought to, is almost bound to ring a bell. For Urgulania is the distinctive name of empress Livia's best friend: later in 16 C.E. she was to show her muscle (and the strength of her connections) by refusing to appear in court when summoned by C. Piso; decried by Tacitus as *supra leges*; the next most powerful woman in the kingdom after the queen mother[30]. To judge from the name of this son, Urgulania was the mother either of Silvanus himself or of his wife Lartia; and — as every modern scholar is agreed — that consulship in 2 B.C.E with an imperial colleague can hardly fail to have had something to do with her (the Plautii otherwise did not have that kind of blue blood behind them; the best they could claim was the praetor of 51 B.C.E, probably Silvanus' father[31]). So much for the Republican style then; this consulship came right out of the heart of the imperial court. But does this text *boast* of that fact? Is that little Urgulanius' *job* on the stone; to remind the reader of the intimate imperial connections lying behind this text? Or is his name a dreadful giveaway? Have Silvanus' Republican flourishes been betrayed, been shown up for the façade that they are, by the name he chose for Plautius junior — who must now join him in the tomb? That's the Trimalchian question again; and, of course, we cannot know the answer. But we should register how large the name Urgulanius bulks on the inscription, a line all to itself — at eye-level for the passer-by.

That brings us back from the printed text to the original inscription. I noted that this epitaph was by far the shortest of all; and so it is, in one sense: under forty words as against more than two hundred in the text of Ti. Plautius Silvanus Aelianus. At the same time, it is by far the biggest — huge letters, generously laid out, plenty of space to *show* that no expense has been

[30] *Ann.* 2, 34; cf. 4, 21.
[31] L.R. TAYLOR [n. 22], 24-26.

spared (no scrimping on the marble here). And, of course, it is the central text, directly underneath the epitaph on rotunda itself, which exactly repeats its words (all but the reference to the dead son). A powerful reminder that apparent biographical reticence may be outweighed by the rhetoric of (dynastic) monumentality.

The epitaph to the left of M. Plautius Silvanus commemorates his son, P. Plautius Pulcher. This stone no longer survives, and our text is drawn from three copies made in the fifteenth century. The sheer idiosyncrasy of what is written may cause a cautious reader to wonder quite how *genuine* this inscription is (or was). But there are overwhelming reasons to trust the version we have; not least because Pulcher (though previously unattested outside this text, and all the more suspicious for that reason) has recently turned up in another inscription from Trebula Suffenas[32]. What follows assumes (I am sure correctly) its authenticity:

P . PLAVTIVS
PVLCHER
TRIVMPHALIS . FILIVS
AVGVR . III . VIR . A . A . A . F . F . Q
TI . CAESARIS . AVG . V . CONSVLIS
TR . PL . PR . AD . AERAR . COMES . DRVSI . FILI
GERMANICI . AVONCVLVS . DRVSI
TI . CLAVDI . CAESARIS . AVGVSTI . FILI
ET . AB . EO . CENSORE . INTER . PATRICIOS
LECTVS . CVRATOR . VIARVM . STERNENDAR
A . VICINIS . LECTVS . EX . AVCTORITATE
TI . CLAVDI . CAESARIS . AVGVSTI . GERMANICI
PROCOS . PROVINCIAE . SICILIAE
VIBIA . MARSI . F .
LAELIA . NATA
PVLCHRI

(*CIL* XIV 3607)

[32] M.G. GRANINO CECERE [above n. 22], 154-155, no. 21.

Pulcher is announced first as *triumphalis filius*. No formal filiation here. None is required; for the filiation is to be read from the layout of the monument himself — P. Plautius Pulcher is the son of the *triumphalis* (M. Plautius Silvanus) on the right. We are to see them together; the son serving to add lustre to his father: *triumphali patre* (in other words); the role of junior to be a pious son of his outstanding senior, a fine monument to his dynasty's success: Pulcher.

We might find our reading harder, however, if we did not start from father in the centre. In that case, we would probably struggle with the syntax. Nominative or genitive? 'Triumphal son' or 'Son of a *triumphalis*'? What would 'triumphal son' mean? Every which way, we will suspect (as many have) that this man's career, in his own right, was going to turn out to be rather thin.

The next line splurges a row of abbreviations (certainly sufficient to remind us that *triumphalis filius* was so unusual and important an indicator as to brook no abbreviation at all): *augur*, mint master in the vigintivirate, *quaestor*. It is not until the next line (and it takes a whole line) that we learn that he was quaestor 'of the emperor Tiberius during his fifth consulship'. The best kind of quaestorship there was, the sort of questorship (we're told) that you were awarded if you were really *going places*. But to stress (unusually) that it was during the emperor's fifth consulship, can't help but draw attention to the particular year; to what was going on in the centre of things when our Pulcher was the emperor's quaestor.

The fifth consulship of Tiberius was the consulship he held jointly with Sejanus[33].

Tribunate and praetorship followed. Then, as if it was (already) an 'office': 'Friend' of Drusus the son of Germanicus. If we start by wondering in what sense friendship (however 'official' and even with a capital F) finds a place in the sequence

[33] DIO CASS. 57, 5-16; with the reconstruction of R. SEAGER, *Tiberius* (London 1972), 214-223.

of a *cursus*, we shall soon also turn to wonder who this Drusus was to whom Pulcher was so attached.

Drusus, the second son of Germanicus, once an ally of Sejanus, then brought down by him, died of starvation in 33 C.E., imprisoned in the Palatine basements[34].

After *comes*, *avunculus* takes its place in the register of this career: 'uncle of Drusus the son of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus' (once more the imperial titles have a whole line to themselves). It takes very little to see that someone has almost been written *out* of this story: Urgulanilla, sister of Pulcher, first wife of Claudius — soon disgraced[35]; *triumphali patre*, according to Suetonius[36] (another sign, if we needed one, that no-one was to be allowed to forget about M. Plautius Silvanus, *triumphalis*). In whatever way Urgulanilla came to be the wife of Claudius (everyone assumes the influence of Urgulania again) and whatever the truths behind her divorce and disgrace, she was not to be mentioned here. But she was not not to be mentioned either: she is inevitably evoked by Pulcher' s claim to his nephew, little Drusus; as glaring in her omission as she would have been embarrassing in her inclusion. But what of the boy? Was nephew Drusus' fate luckier than *comes* Drusus?

Drusus, the son of Claudius, is believed to have been betrothed to the daughter of Sejanus; he died sometime in the 20s, choking on a pear he had thrown in the air and caught in his mouth[37].

But Claudius didn't hold any of this against Pulcher we're told: in fact, he made him a patrician. We have to read that

[34] For his death, TAC. *Ann.* 6, 23; SUET. *Tib.* 54, 2. His earlier career is explored by R. SEAGER [above n. 33], 204; 212-213.

[35] SUET. *Claud.* 26, 2; 27, 1.

[36] *Claud.* 26, 2.

[37] SUET. *Claud.* 27, 1 (for the problems of chronology, see J. MOTTERSHEAD, *ad loc.*).

single ET at the beginning of the line very strongly here: not just 'and' but 'and so' — linking the story that underlies (but isn't told in) *avunculus Drusi* to the following adlection into the patrician order.

The next three lines (all but the first word) describe another office to which Pulcher was *lectus* ('chosen'): road-laying superintendant. This looks much more like a proper office than *comes* or *avunculus*. But is it? And what do we make of its (almost) three whole lines — one of which again succeeds brilliantly in being entirely monopolized by the emperor's title? The first problem is that, although there are of course plenty of *curatores* associated with imperial roads, this particular curatorship is unattested except once in the first century B.C.E. — perhaps a one-off special commission in the 90s[38]. A piece of Claudian antiquarianism then? The revival of an obscure old office and a pretty face to fill it? And all the better for the imperial pedant that the one Republican *curator viis sternundis* we know of was none other than a (C. Claudius) Pulcher[39]. Or is it a few lines of outrageous talking-up? The idea that it was an official post 'chosen by the neighbours' hardly makes any sense at all. Isn't this more likely a bit of local self-help, to which Claudius has given the nod (*ex auctoritate*), now dressed up as an 'office'. And if so, aren't we back in Trimalchio-land? Maybe. But that all depends (as it did with Trimalchio) on who this epitaph is trying to impress; and that might include the neighbours. It also depends on what roads we are thinking of and how important we judge them. After all this tomb is right on the road; its prominence and its readers depend directly on the via Tiburtina.

The finale of the inscribed life is the proconsulship of Sicily; after which — in the midst of a wife and (possibly) daughter — the manuscripts let us down...

This text poses enormous problems of interpretation, inevitably turning attention to the role of the reader as inter-

[38] Th. MOMMSEN, *Römisches Staatsrecht* II 1 (Leipzig [3]1887), 668-669.
[39] *Inscr.It.* XIII 3, 70b; *MRR* 93 B.C., Special Commissions.

preter; and challenging the modern critic to wonder how they recognise Roman failure — not just a failed life, but a failed *representation* of a failed (or successful) life. A duff cv. How suspicious should we be? How much significance do we give to the repeated recollections seeping through this text of Roman tragedy? Is this the inevitable double-bind of the man in the penumbra of the court, the also-ran of the senatorial elite? Raising ghost after ghost in his effort to construct a life around the margins of power (bragging of imperial connections that always have a sting in the tail)? But still better may be than the oblivion of discreet silence, having no imperial connections to vaunt at all? Of course such suspicions must turn the finger of paranoia onto the reader — convicted by their own paranoid interpretation. Down in Tibur, this epitaph may cut just the right dash for a well-known benefactor, whose friends in high places (more emperors than there are lines) leave us all gasping. One Drusus may be much the same as any other for most of inhabitants of Trebula Suffenas; but, anyway, they all signify the Palace. Besides, how far does the malicious court gossip that informs *our* histories spread? And even if they had heard it, would most of those passing by this tomb have believed it? And is it true anyway — all those stories about young Drusus eating his mattress before finally succumbing to starvation. Pull the other one...[40] Has our Pulcher just been caught out by Tacitus, coming along more than half a century later and inflicting his own suspicions on posterity; undermining Pulcher's friends, turning his heroes into tragic victims.

The editors of *CIL* XIV (economically) concluded that "huic Pulchro aut valetudinem fuisse parum aut ingenium tardum"[41]. They saw the problem, but thought it lay only with

[40] A classic case of a local community apparently acting utterly at variance with the Tacitean version of events is *SEG* XVI 748: a statue group (prob. 63-65) of Nero, Poppaea and Britannicus at Amisus in Pontus. Either the local bigwigs didn't know the 'Tacitean' version (yet), or they didn't believe it, or it was not true.

[41] *Ad loc.*

Pulcher. In fact, it lies as much with us. What is really at issue here is (as Petronius made a point of reminding us) the sheer difficulty of reading a cv cross culturally; of knowing whether an epitaph is *idonea* or not. Does it match, enhance or let the life down?

Pulcher has, however, highlighted the strategic gaps in a family mausoleum. As we have noted, his epitaph refuses to mention his sister Urgulanilla by name — even if her absence is glaring and brought to our attention (once more) by the name of little Urgulanius on the epitaph to the right. It is almost inconceivable (though some *have* conceived of it) that she should have been commemorated on one of the missing slabs. If she were, it would certainly change our reading of Pulcher's text. But there are other omissions too. There was another brother, M. Plautius Silvanus — the praetor of 24 C.E., whose wife got accidentally on purpose pushed out of the upstairs window and (so far as the emperor Tiberius was concerned) the husband was the guilty party. Grandmother Urgulania sent him a dagger as a hint — and eventually he managed to kill himself[42]. There's no sign of him in this tomb either; but, however unintentionally, the name of little Urgulanius (though dead and commemorated long before the crime) must have prompted recollections of Urgulania's intervention and Silvanus junior's disgrace; even if it was nowhere mentioned on the tomb.

The last text I shall be considering stands to the right of M. Plautius Silvanus, the founder: the epitaph of Ti. Plautius Silvanus Aelianus. His position in the family is far from clear; his *agnomen* Aelianus suggests adoption into the Plautian *gens* — but there are formidable problems with the details of every solution proposed[43]. His epitaph on the mausoleum, adjacent to M.

[42] TAC. *Ann.* 4, 22.

[43] Many of the problems centre around his apparently patrician status (no tribunate is listed in an otherwise prolix *cursus*) — suggesting patrician birth and testamentary adoption into the Plautian *gens*; but other signs in the text (his

Plautius Silvanus, is reason enough to treat him as part of the family; and that is what I shall do. His epitaph is much fuller than either of the other texts (though it is distinctly *smaller* than that of Silvanus senior); it has also been frequently discussed. My own treatment of it is inevitably selective, focussing on its rhetorical and interpretative structure; and its intertextual relations with the other two inscriptions we have examined.

TI . PLAVTIO . M . F . ANI
SILVANO . AELIANO
PONTIF . SODALI . AVG
III . VIR . A . A . A . F . F . Q . TI . CAESARIS
LEGAT . LEG . V . IN GERMANIA
PR . VRB LEGAT . ET COMITI . CLAVD
CAESARIS . IN BRITTANNIA . CONSVLI
PRO . COS . ASIAE . LEGAT . PRO . PRAET . MOESIAE
IN QVA . PLVRA QVAM CENTVM . MILL
EX . NVMERO . TRANSDANVVIANOR
AD . PRAESTANDA . TRIBVTA . CVM . CONIVGIB
AC . LIBERIS . ET . PRINCIPIBVS AVT REGIBVS . SVIS
TRANSDVXIT . MOTVM ORIENTEM SARMATAR
COMPRESSIT . QVAMVIS PARTE MAGNA . EXERCITVS
AD EXPEDITIONEM IN ARMENIAM . MISISSET
IGNOTOS . ANTE . AVT . INFENSOS . P . R . REGES, SIGNA
ROMANA . ADORATVROS . IN . RIPAM . QVAM . TVEBATVR
PERDVXIT . REGIBVS . BASTANARVM . ET
RHOXOLANORVM . FILIOS . DACORVM . FRATRVM
CAPTOS . AVT . HOSTIBVS . EREPTOS . REMISIT AB
ALIQVIS . EORVM . OPSIDES . ACCEPIT . PER . QVEM . PACEM
PROVINCIAE . ET . CONFIRMAVIT . ET . PROTULIT
SCYTHARVM . QVOQVE . REGEM . A CHERRONENSI
QVAE . EST . VLTRA . BORVSTENEN . OPSIDIONE . SVMMOTO
PRIMVS . EX . EA . PROVINCIA . MAGNO . TRITICI . MODO
ANNONAM . P . R . ADLEVAVIT . HVNC . LEGATVM . IN
IN . HISPANAM . AD . PRAEFECTUR . VRBIS . REMISSVM
SENATVS . IN . PRAEFECTURA . TRIVMPHALIBVS
ORNAMENTIS . HONORAVIT . AVCTORE IMP

tribe and filiation) suggest 'full' adoption. See R. SYME, "Clues to Testamentary Adoption", in *Epigrafia* [n. 9], I 397-410 (esp. 406-407). Of course, an additional *agnomen* may not necessarily indicate adoption at all.

CAESARE . AVGUSTO . VESPASIANO . VERBIS . EX
ORATIONE . EIVS Q . I . S . S
MOESIAE . ITA . PRAEFVIT . VT . NON . DEBVERIT . IN
ME . DIFFERRI . HONOR . TRIVMPHALIVM . EIVS
ORNAMENTORVM . NISI . QVOD . LATIOR . EI
CONTIGIT . MORA . TITVLVS . PRAEFECTO . VRBIS
HVNC . IN . EADEM . PRAEFECTVRA . VRBIS . IMP . CAESAR
AVG . VESPASIANVS . ITERVM . COS . FECIT

(*CIL* XIV 3608)

The text falls into six parts: first, his name and priestly titles; second, his magistracies from the vigintivirate to the governorship of Moesia (which he held under Nero); third, a lengthy account of his achievements in Moesia; fourth, his subsequent governorship of Spain, his prefecture of the city of Rome and (belatedly under Vespasian) the grant of triumphal ornaments for his earlier achievements in Moesia; fifth, a transcript of the words of Vespasian on giving him those honours; sixth, the record of his second consulship (in 74 C.E.). Again, this is an extraordinarily unusual inscription; this time for the detailed account of Silvanus' activities in his province and for the direct quotation of the words of the emperor. It is regularly enlisted in modern historical accounts of the early principate as evidence of mad Nero's neglect of his outstanding generals; of sane Vespasian's recognition of their achievements; and of the underlying structures of administration that kept the show on the road (and the empire humming) even under megalomaniac tyrants (NB the list of achievements in Moesia, rewarded eventually by Vespasian)[44].

So far so good; but the text looks rather different if you see it in the context of the two we have already read. Each of the

[44] In addition to works cited above, n. 20, see L. HALKIN, "Tiberius Plautius Aelianus: légat de Mésie sous Néron", in *L'Antiquité Classique* 3 (1934), 121-161; E. CONDURACHI, "Tiberio Plauzio Eliano e il Trasferimento dei 100,000 Transdanubiani nella Mesia", in *Epigraphica* 19 (1957), 49-65. Typical is M. GRIFFIN, *Seneca. A philosopher in politics* (Oxford 1976), 245: "... all without any reward except survival. Vespasian made it up to him".

first two epitaphs have derived status from triumph: the laconic '*ob res gestas*' of Silvanus senior; the dangerously bathetic '*triumphalis filius*' of Pulcher. Silvanus junior, by contrast (and presumably, at some level, competitively) lays out chapter and verse of his own victories, a detailed case for the honorific award; a packed text (not the expansive lay-out of Silvanus senior) to *show* you how many achievements there are to squash it. He is forced to admit that full recognition of all this came rather too late, but it is a delay masked by the change of regime: what Nero had long left undone, Vespasian rectified. It is up to the reader to make what they will of the contrast between the senatorial authority behind the honours foregrounded in our first text, and the senatorial authority now joined by the explicit role of the emperor exemplified, *ipsissima verba*, in this inscription? A change of times maybe? Imperial power out of the closet by the 70s? Or a different representational gambit? Or is that the same thing?

Anyway, this Plautius Silvanus is the first of our trio to live through a change of imperial dynasty: Nero to Vespasian; the end of the Julio-Claudians. Much of the gratuitous detail of this text aims to find a plausible way through the potential embarrassment of a seamless transition from office under Nero to office under Vespasian; and most modern historians have bought it (the noble public servant, struggling away in a front-line province, till Vespasian's new deal settled the debts...). It was, of course, convenient for both Silvanus and Vespasian to present that public version; but even this text can't fail to hint (silently) at another story. There's no indication, for example, of when Silvanus finished his term in Moesia (possibly not till he was removed by Galba after Nero's death; so hardly a chance for any triumphal ornaments from Nero then)[45]. In another light, he was one of the most loyal Neronian servants

[45] The dates of the end of his governorship are disputed — placed somewhere between 67 and 69 (and exactly where makes a difference). See A. STEIN, *Die Legaten von Moesien* (Budapest 1940), 29-31.

and — and just the kind of man you could trust with the proconsulship of Asiae, when the previous governor had been your reign's first murder victim[46]. (At least, these *Silvani* must have thought, we're not the *Silani*...). To put it another way, the change of regime legitimated this self-glorifying bit of history writing on the epitaph: 100,000 Transdanubians (plus wives and children) brought into the tribute-paying zone; oriental rebellion suppressed; foreign kings on their bended knees before the Roman standards (more than a match, we're meant to conclude, for the Nero/Tiridates pageant); the corn-supply of the city of Rome relieved — in abundance. In the past Romans had paid for that kind of boasting with their lives[47]; here it sneaks through as a stick with which to beat Nero (at the same time no doubt aiming to outbid the *res gestae* of the adjacent epitaph; detail versus size).

The end of the text culminates in offices, honours and imperial words: governorship of Spain, the praefecture of the city, triumphal ornaments and a second consulship, all sandwiching the emperor' voice — as it bestowed the long awaited rewards on our Silvanus:

He governed Moesia so well that his honour of triumphal ornaments ought not to have been postponed until my reign (literally ME) — except for the fact that by the delay, as prefect of the city, he has an even broader *titulus*.

Vespasian, of course, if these *are* his words, is turning insult (by Nero) to his own credit: the triumphal ornaments may have been long delayed, but they are even more honorific now that (thanks to ME) he has them at the same time as he is prefect

[46] TAC. *Ann.* 13, 1 tells of the murder of the Governor of Asia, Junius Silanus ('The Golden Sheep') at the very start of the reign of Nero. Silvanus may have been the next regular governor of the province. If so, he had a line in succeeding corpses; he followed Flavius Sabinus as *praefectus urbi*.

[47] The trilingual inscription of Cornelius Gallus springs to mind: *CIL* III 14147^5 = *ILS* 8995.

of the city, the acme of a thinking man's ambitions in the new Flavian career structure[48]. But in choosing these words to cite, whoever composed this epitaph has exploited very much the kind of self-reflexive play that we saw in Marcus Modius Maxximus. Vespasian himself presumably did not know that his words would one day be inscribed; all the cleverer of the excerptor to re-present his words as a comment on the epitaph itself. The clue is in the word *titulus*: not just a man's honorific titles, but also their inscribed version of his main titles, or the *cursus* inscription in its entirety. Here again the stone itself acts out the life — as it is presented in the words of the emperor. We readers know about that delay (*mòra*). After all, we've read through it in the long description of Silvanus' Moesian activities. That's what's held the honours up on this inscription; there can be no triumph for us readers till we've got through all these provincial exploits. And in the very next word, the deft quotation re-concretizes Vespasian's metaphoric *titulus* as the very stone that we're now looking at. The belated honour of *praefectus urbi*, that we now only meet as we struggle through all these distant peoples and places to the end of our text, really could make this *titulus* wider. Just look at the first three lines; now add *praefectus urbi* ... see what our writer means? This really is 'life into stone'.

Of course, many passers-by would not take the option of reading this text. They might well weigh up the graphic styles of Silvanus senior and Silvanus junior; and wonder which testified to a life of success. They would certainly conclude from the sheer density of words that young Silvanus had a lot of things to say about himself, and they might well spot some of the exotic names of foreign peoples (Rhoxolani; Bastarnae...) to evoke a life of Roman achievement far from Italy. Most obviously of all, for it was at eye level, they would catch the imperial words, set in their own paragraph. They would cer-

[48] For prefects of the city, see L. VIDMAN, "Osservazioni sui Praefecti Urbi nei primi due secoli", in *Epigrafia* [n. 9], I 289-303; J. HENDERSON [n.1].

tainly get the picture (from Pulcher too) that emperors bulked large in this family. But it is hard to deny that there were greater interpretative rewards here as in all these texts for those who chose to look *diligenter*.

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In our own world, we know about *vitae* or *curricula vitae*. We know in what senses they all look the same and how to read them as different. We know that they are individually crafted both to conceal and to reveal; that the apparently bland formulae have readers in mind. We know that we must read them *diligenter* and *interpret* them (the suspicious gaps, the not quite long enough [or the too long] list of publications, the ten year PhD); but we know too that on the selection board or the promotion panel those interpretations are always contested. Part of our job is to reflect on how to judge a representation of a career.

We also know that for all the generic differences in written lives, from diary to cv, tombstone to intellectual biography, they also have much in common: they confront essentially the same problem in the conversion of life into text. Formalism inevitably breaks down, the boundaries of genre fade, as we convert text back into life. 'Married; three children' written telegraphically at the head of a cv has something in common with, and will always evoke, *Diary of a Mad Housewife*. It could not do otherwise.

This paper has tried to show that the *cursus* inscriptions of the Roman elite, as individual texts no less than as a category, also demand close interpretation; that they too overlap in their biographical and rhetorical strategies with different genres of written life; that Marcus Modius Maxximus, Petronius/Trimalchio and the Plautii deserve to be put together as much as they have always been kept apart. Every *vita inscripta* needs careful reading. In that respect Trimalchio's instructions got it absolutely right.

DISCUSSION

S.M. Maul: Sie haben aufgezeigt, daß Monument und Inschrift des M. Modius Maximus in elaborierter Weise aufeinander Bezug nehmen. Denn das Monument kann in gewisser Weise als eine 'ideographische' Verschlüsselung der Inschrift verstanden werden. Vor diesem Hintergrund halte ich es für wenig wahrscheinlich, daß die Schreibung des Namens Maximus mit doppeltem X ein Versehen ist oder eine bestimmte Aussprache hervorheben soll. Steckt nicht mehr dahinter?

Halten Sie es für denkbar, daß XX spielerisch eine weitere Sinnebene eröffnet und — aus welchen Gründen auch immer — für die Zahl 20 steht?

M. Beard: It is extremely interesting to find that someone looking at Marcus Modius Maxximus against the background of a very different linguistic culture finds this object as complicated (and as 'intentional') as I do. It would be impossible to exclude a direct near Eastern influence (on the man, the object or the cult of which it is a part). Nevertheless, within Roman culture itself, there is also a well established tradition of such verbal/visual 'play' (the word 'play' tends to underestimate what lies behind this; this object is asking us to think hard about the relationship between linguistic sign and image).

As for the two XXs, I'm not committed to the idea that this is in some way to do with orality (though I think it would be perverse to deny that two XXs are asking to be pronounced differently from one). I have looked very hard for a particular significance for '20' (which I agree leaps out) but have found nothing outside this text.

G. Bowersock: I think we have to ask at some point the obvious question: does your compelling interpretation of the texts on the monument of the Plautii warrant a generalization that would presuppose comparable tendentiousness in other *cursus* inscriptions? On the face of it, we can probably assume that any *curriculum vitae*, ancient or modern, is designed to make the reader carry away a predetermined opinion. Although few civil servants under a Nero or a Domitian could have been in Silvanus Aelianus' enviable position of adducing the current emperor's own words in support of his probity, many were confident enough to expose their service by the transparent device of calling the delinquent emperor simply *Augustus* or by not naming him at all.

The example of Aelianus seems to me a richer example than most, but representative nonetheless. His *cursus* and other of the same order may not constitute biography, as we understand the term, but they contain without any doubt the elements of biography (or autobiography). They cannot be seen as an impersonal and objective record of public service. They belong at least in the penumbra of biography.

M. Beard: I selected this group of inscriptions with some care — largely because we have references to their activity (or that of their family) in a variety of literary accounts. The existence of these very different representations helped to expose the tendentiousness of the epigraphic texts. Of course, of the thousands of career inscriptions in the Roman empire, there are very few where we can make this kind of comparison (Rutilius Gallicus, *praefectus urbi* under Domitian would be another — on whom there is a forthcoming book by John Henderson). So we are faced with wondering whether these Plautii are dangerously atypical (simply because we *do* know so much about them), or whether they are the tip of the iceberg. The logic of my position is that they are the tip of the iceberg, that almost anyone of public prominence must have been engaged in this sort of tricky rhetorical business. Obviously, as you imply and our experience of the history of this century

shows, there are a large number of rhetorical options for masking failure, collaborations, awkward gaps, etc. They don't all do it exactly like the Plautii (who, of course, themselves take different options); but I think they're all doing it in some form.

S.M. Maul: Die von Ihnen vorgestellten Grabinschriften unterscheiden sich insofern wenig von den historischen Passagen der assyrischen Königsinschriften als sie wie diese lediglich Leistungen und Ehrungen einer Person auflisten, ohne den gesamten Lebenslauf darzustellen. Halten Sie die römischen Grabinschriften dennoch für Biographien?

M. Beard: I take them as *biographical*. I don't care very much whether or not they are labelled 'biography'. But I do care that they should be seen as sophisticated, loaded, rhetorical, ideological texts (like every 'biography').

W.W. Ehlers: Mir scheint, daß das Vorhandensein oder Fehlen genauer Angaben von Geburts- und Todesdaten im Rahmen der impliziten Chronologie verschiedener Zeiten zu sehen ist. In diesem Sinne unterscheiden sich die orientalischen, ägyptischen und römischen Inschriften nur wenig. Das umständliche, genaue Verzeichen hätte den Daten zudem ein unpassendes Übergewicht gegeben gegenüber dem, was für das jeweilige Leben als bedeutsam bezeichnet werden sollte.

M. Beard: Certainly the differences are striking between the content of Roman epitaphs and what we take for granted as 'the essential information' (dates and age) for a tomb-inscription within our own culture. All kinds of factors may lie behind this; and it is more complicated than it might appear at first sight (so, for example, it is regular for the Roman sub-elite, and elite children, to have their age at death inscribed; but not for adult members of the elite). But you must be correct to imply that these differences indicate quite different ways of conceptualizing and defining a 'life' across different cultures.

W. Berschin: Können Sie sich vorstellen, daß es eine Verbindung zwischen den 'career patterns' der 'cursus inscriptions' und dem Schema der *Liber pontificalis*-Biographie gibt?

M. Beard: Who knows? They certainly have some aspects in common. But what I would want to stress is that superficial resemblances do not necessarily mean a genealogical link.

L. Piccirilli: Mi chiedo se nell'iscrizione di T. Plauzio Silvano Eliano non si possa ravvisare, soprattutto nella parte in cui è riferita l'*oratio* di Vespasiano un influenza del genere di 'epistola autobiografica' (ovviamente con le dovute differenze). Penso alla *Lettera a Filippo* di P. Cornelio Scipione, l'Africano Maggiore (*FGrHist* 232) e all'epistola di P. Cornelio Scipione Nasica Corculo indirizzata a un sovrano ellenistico di difficile indicazione (*FGrHist* 233 F 1).

M. Beard: Again there are some resemblances and they might, I suppose, be significant. But, in all these cases where we may spot such similarities, we have to think rather carefully how we could *show* they were significant and what the point of the similarity might be in the context of the epitaph.

A. Dihle: Ist der Unterschied zwischen den Grabinschriften des älteren Plautius Silvanus und des jüngeren Plautius Silvanus Aelianus nicht auch damit zu erklären, daß im frühen Prinzipat die fehlende oder nur indirekte Erwähnung einer Verbindung zum Kaiserhaus eher zulässig war als zur Zeit Vespasians?

M. Beard: One of the ways of understanding the differences between the inscriptions of the Plautii is in terms of a development in imperial politics: the dependence of the senatorial order on the emperor had been made explicit by the time of Silvanus junior (and Pulcher). On the other hand, I wanted to suggest that the absence of the emperor from Silvanus senior's *cursus* is, at best, ambivalent. The prominence of the name Urgulanius prompts our recollection of Silvanus senior's own dependence not only on imperial patronage but also on the domestic intrigues of the imperial court.