

“Teaching Latin from Inscriptions: The Roman Funerary Inscription Project in the College Classroom”

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Introduction

Today I will describe a project that teaches students to read and edit Roman inscriptions.

The Class

I assigned this project last fall in my Intermediate Latin II class. Every student but one was first-term freshman who had placed into the course after three or more years of HS Latin and taking Furman’s Latin placement exam. The course is designed to be the gateway to the Latin major but also fulfills a student’s language requirement. It consists of an intensive three-week review of Latin grammar in which they are introduced to Allen and Greenough, *New Latin Grammar*, nine weeks reading Latin, and three-four weeks on a Latin project, this year, “The Roman Funerary Inscriptions Project.”

The Theme of the Class

The theme of the course this year was the lives and worlds of Roman women. Students read selections from a variety of Latin texts investigating the social and cultural history of women in ancient Rome to gain an understanding of what written texts can—and cannot—tell us about these women.

Question: How do we recover the lives of women in antiquity, in the absence of so much evidence, and especially the women's own voices?

The Textbook/Website

Answer: can be easy. Let someone else figure it out. And we did that: We used the textbook, *The Worlds of Roman Women*, and its online companion website (display). The book and site contain texts giving evidence for the lives of women in a surprising variety of aspects: as children, daughters, wives, and mothers, but also as writers, artists, priestesses, midwives, philanthropists, and behind-the-scenes kingmakers, to name just a few.

Recovering the lives of Roman women from literature is difficult. Literary texts—poetry, oratory, history, and letters—are largely written by and for an aristocratic male audience and typically say little about women except in very conventional ways. Much more evidence comes from what we call “sub-literary” texts, which might include encyclopedias, public records, medical handbooks, and inscriptions. *WRW* includes this variety of materials and we read many, but for us the particularly fruitful texts were the inscriptions.

Inscriptions

Inscriptions are writings on stones that might be buildings, statues, or, in our case, funeral monuments. There are thousands of these inscriptions in existence—Keppie estimates that there are 300,000, with 1,000 more uncovered annually--, many of which have never been studied or translated or annotated. They are not easy but they are short. They are ideal vehicles for undergraduate research, in a way that literary texts are not, since, among other things, there is no French or German scholarship to master. There are of course some difficulties, or challenges.

Challenges and Learning Opportunities

One problem with reading inscriptions is that they are formulaic and full of abbreviations--of names, places, personal relationships, and public offices, and so forth. Non-specialists in epigraphy, even those who know Latin quite well, need help reading them, and it was this kind of help that my students provided. To do this they had to become literate in a variety of areas and acquire a few basic skills, such as

1. Basic conventions of epigraphy, including the concept of a visual versus a verbal biography of a person

Depending on the content of the inscription they had to delve into

2. Political history

- Names of rulers (consuls, emperors, imperial bureaucrats)

- Political offices, not just the *cursus honorum* but also the complex and specialized imperial administrative posts

- Military organization, like cohorts and imperial guards, and their titles

3. Social history, esp. how to read visual and epigraphic indications of legal and political status, and how to decipher a Roman name for what it tells us about a Roman life. I gained a new appreciation for the complexities of Roman nomenclature.

4. Art History

They faced a range of styles of funerary monuments, portrait types, and decorative elements to research.

So this seemed daunting, to say the least, but after some initial doubt and hesitation, my students embraced these challenges. I should add that I was as much of a novice at this work as the students. It was quite a useful professional development project in that respect and at this point in my career I both have the time to do this kind of work as class preparation, and I am anxious to branch out and enrich my pedagogy.

Roman Funerary Inscriptions Project:

To begin with, each student selected an inscription from a list provided by Ann Raia, director and mastermind behind the Roman Funerary Inscriptions Project (display).

http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/Raia_inscriptions.html

The project was launched as an effort to enlist collaborators to expand the corpus of texts available to Latin students at every level of study, from beginning through advanced, with the added incentive that the most successful of these projects would be published online. In other words I did not have to conceive or develop this project. All I had to do was follow the directions and run with it. And the directions are a model of clarity.

Description

Funerary monuments, damaged though most of them are, are original documents that come from all areas of the Roman world, record the great and the powerless, and encompass hundreds of years of Republican and Imperial history. Funerary inscriptions add breadth, depth, and texture to the corpus of literary sources from Rome. Composed by people from all walks of life, women as well as men, they allow us to "see" and "hear" the otherwise silent many who are on the margins of Roman society, particularly women. However, commemorative inscriptions,

couched in formulaic terms and standardized phrases, frequently preserve a culture's most conservative sentiments and expectations.

Objectives

1. Acquaintance with the field of epigraphy through the study of funerary inscriptions
2. Appreciation of the value of funerary monuments as textual and visual evidence for women's lives
3. Composition of an interpretive text-commentary for intermediate-level Latin students

Preliminary Instructions (my HO)

1. Read Paul Shore, *Rest Lightly: An Anthology of Greek & Latin Tomb Inscriptions*, Introduction, pp 1-7 (HO)
2. Read John J. Dobbins, "Steps in Reading a Latin Inscription" and follow the instructions online at <http://pompeii.virginia.edu/tti/eb-insc/eb-insc-list.html>.
3. Visit "The Roman Funerary Inscriptions Project" online at http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/Raia_inscriptions.html for Dr. Raia's description of the project and her bibliography of resources. Please take careful note of the two sets of student projects published on the site. This is your guide for your finished product.
4. Follow the instructions below. *Please note that I have tailored Dr. Raia's instructions to meet our needs.*

GO TO WEBPAGE (The following is from Ann Raia's RFIP website)

Instructions:

1. Select *up to three inscriptions* from the "Monument Options" below. Each student will prepare *one* inscription. I will make every effort to accommodate everyone's wishes but I will also honor "first come, first served." [Later note: I was able to accommodate everyone's first choice. Most of them took their time to make a careful selection.]
2. Consult print and Internet sources (see Bibliography below) to familiarize yourself with the conventions of the genre, especially inscriptional abbreviations and formulaic expressions.
3. Comparing the image with the Xeroxed excerpts from *CIL* supplied, transcribe each inscription into a Word document, keeping the line and word arrangement.
4. Describe each funerary monument in detail (e.g., date, origin, and appearance of the stone, including lettering and decoration): models for descriptive analysis and transcription may be found in the Kleiner and Harvey books.
5. Translate each inscription.
6. Write glosses for each word of the inscription that you think would offer difficulty to an intermediate Latin student and/or for which you have found information (models for lexical and interpretive assistance can be found in Raia et al., *The Worlds of Roman Women* and Cirolao's *Pro Caelio*).
7. Make an oral and written presentation of this assignment to the class.
8. Submit a written and an electronic version of your project using the student projects posted online as your guide (transcription, monument photo, description of monument,

translation of inscription, lexical and interpretive commentary). The project counts for 20% of your final grade.

Monument Options:

Sarcophagus fragment for Raconia Pia (*CIL* [VI.25358](#)): [inscription](#)
Tablet for Acilia Lamyra (*CIL* [III.6077](#)): [inscription](#)
Cinerary urn for Bovia Procula: [cinerary](#) AND Cinerary urn dedicated by Sextia Psyche (*CIL* [VI.2317](#)): [cinerary](#), [inscription](#), [scene](#)
Altar for Primigenia: monument: [front](#), [side 1](#), [side 2](#); [inscription](#)
Tablet for Parthenopeis (*CIL* [XII.2366](#)): [inscription](#)
Tablet for Claudia Lachne (*CIL* [VI.2329](#)): [inscription](#)
Tablet for Hilara (*CIL* [VI.33824](#)): [inscription](#)
Altar for Julius Martianus and his wife (*CIL* [XIII.1920](#)): [monument](#), [inscription](#) ([end](#))
Monument dedicated by Cartilia Materna (*CIL* [VI.12428](#)): [monument block](#), [inscription](#)
Cippus for Heria Thisbe (*CIL* [VI.10120](#)): [monument](#), [side 1](#), [side 2](#), [inscription](#)
Tablet for Cornelia Frontina (*CIL* [VI.10164](#)): [inscription](#)
Stele for Dasumia Soteris (*CIL* [VI.16753](#)): [monument](#); [inscription](#)
Altars dedicated by Anicia Caecilia (*CIL* [XIV.2057](#)): [altars](#); [inscription 1](#); [inscription 2](#)
Altar for Julia Victorina (*CIL* [VI.20727](#)): monument [front](#), [top](#), [back](#), [left](#), [right](#); [portrait and inscription](#)

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Schedule (my HO)

Week 13

16 AL: Prepare Altar for Annia Isias (*CIL* [VI.11789](#)): [monument](#); [inscription](#) followings instructions 2-6 above

18 Students: Project steps 3 & 5 (transcription and translation) due in class for presentation*

20 No class: work on projects

Week 14

23 Step 6 (lexical and grammatical commentary) due in class for presentation*

25 Thanksgiving Holiday

27 Thanksgiving Holiday

Week 15

30 Step 4 (monument description) due in class for presentation*

12/2 No class: work on final (complete) project presentations. These presentations should be about five minutes long.

4 Final project presentations

Week 16

7 Final project presentations

Final projects due in hard copy and electronic form (e-mail). Name the file "Inscriptions_Project_Yourlastname.doc(x)."

Evaluation

**Nota bene: The project counts for 20% of your final grade. Class presentation and discussion of the intermediate steps of the projects are required, and will counts towards the 20% class participation grade. If you are ill or otherwise unable to attend class you must e-mail me the assignment. These presentations are designed to help you polish and improve your final project. Please come prepared with handouts and/ or a sheet for the overhead projector.*

Grading record

Name	11/16	11/18	11/23	11/30	12/2/4
	Annias Isias Steps 3 &5	Step 6	Step 4	Presentation	

1. Allison
2. Chelsea
3. Mason

4. Cynthia
5. Ben
6. James
7. Katie
8. Brian
9. Alex

Model: Annia Isias

I decided to prepare an inscription and take the class through the steps. I deliberately chose a very simple text, deceptively simple, I should say, so that we could get through it in one class period. The monument I chose, which has since been published, is *CIL* 6.11789 Funerary Inscription for Annia Isias.

GO TO WEBPAGE: <http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/isias.html>: **Outcomes (many felicitous ones, including presentation at this conference) but two I'd like to mention:**

I Student presentations at Furman Engaged!: Six of the nine students agreed to present their inscriptions on April 16 at an event called *Furman Engaged!*, a day devoted to showcasing undergraduate research of many kinds at Furman. We rehearsed twice. I moderated the 90-minute session and each students spoke for ten minutes, fielding dozens of questions from an audience comprising 30+ students, faculty, parents, and visitors. These six students are now working on publishing their projects. Alex Rice was one of the presenters.
www.furman.edu/engaged/furmanengaged2010.htm

II Publications

1. Instructor

Annia Isias (<http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/isias.html>)

N.B.: Great for professional development. You can not only expand your own knowledge of antiquity and pedagogy but also make a professional contribution and gain some visibility and recognition as a scholar.

2. Student: Alex Rice

Sextia Psyche (<http://www2.cnr.edu/home/araia/psyche.html>)

Conclusion

1. Instructor reflections

I must admit I was reluctant at first to undertake the project since I have no experience with inscriptions, our library lacked the most important resource, the *CIL*, and organizing the project took time and preparation. The study of inscriptions takes one well beyond Latin into Roman epigraphy, political, military and social history, and funerary art, just to name a few areas of expertise. But the very thing that made this project complex made it an ideal learning vehicle, so, after a crash course in Roman epigraphy, I decided to do it. I must say I could not have done so, however, without the generous and tireless support of Professor Raia.

2. The student experience

The project was gratifying and educational for everyone. The students were excited to work with primary source materials that for the most part had never been studied, translated, described, or published, and they were motivated at the prospect of an e-publication credit on *WRW* companion website. Several of them threw themselves into it like graduate students attacking a seminar paper. Since our library has the holdings of a typical undergraduate facility they had to look elsewhere, finding many things online, in Google books, and through interlibrary loan. I was impressed at how readily they helped one another. Even though each student was working on his or her own inscription and in theory competing with the others for a good grade, they were generous with resources and comments. I think the fact that we presented the work for critique as a group over several class periods (see my schedule) gave them a sense of collaboration, and, besides taking off some of the pressure of working in a new field, these sessions made their work better. (Sometimes when students present projects in class the others pay little attention unless, as I have learned, this material is on the test, too. This time was different.) Since an inscription is considered a sub-literary genre they probably learned less about Latin (but still something) than about Roman culture and history, but this is often the case in the Latin classroom, and it's why we learn Latin in the first place.

I can't do better than to let a student speak for himself, and so I will turn the podium over to our next presenter, Alex Rice.