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Funerary Tablet for Cornelia Frontina (CIL 6.10164)

Description of the monument:

The tablet is of white marble, simply adorned by a broad raised frame which surrounds the inscription on four sides. The lines are evenly spaced, the letters deeply incised Roman capitals. The first four lines are given prominence by their size and the separation of words, accented by medial dots (interpuncts). These lines contain the dedication, the name of the deceased, her age, and the name of her father, complete with his title as an imperial *libertus*. The remaining lines of the inscription contain words carved in small capitals without any separation, strategies employed by the stonemason to enable the inclusion of all of Callistus's text. The skill of the carver, the length of the inscription and the quality of the stone are evidence that the tablet was made for a family of some means and status among the freed class. The tablet is dated to the early 2nd century CE by the extended tail of the *Q*, characteristic of inscriptions of the early empire, and by Callistus' citizen name, which narrows the date to Trajan's reign (98-117 CE). The tablet was found on the Appian Way, near the tomb of Titus Flavius Pomponius, and is now in Rome at the Museo Nazionale Romano: Terme di Diocleziano. The tablet was affixed probably to a wall in a family tomb or *columbarium* that contained the family's cinerary urns.

Marcus Ulpus Callistus and Flavia Nice, his wife, dedicated this tablet upon the death of his daughter, Cornelia Frontina. Callistus, commander of the Armory of the Ludus Magnus, the largest training school for gladiators in Rome, was manumitted under the Emperor Marcus Ulpus Traianus. Nice, whose *nomen* indicates she was freed by the *gens Flavia*, is not named as the mother (*mater*) of Frontina, whose freed *nomen* is different; thus Nice was probably not the biological mother of Frontina, who was likely born into slavery and freed by a member of the *gens Cornelia*. The tablet is both a testament to the life of Frontina and a mark of Callistus' pride in his status as an imperial freedman, in his authority over the gladiatorial weapons storehouse, and in the financial success that enabled him to own and free slaves of his own and to provide them and their dependents with precious burial space.



http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/inscription_frontina.jpg

Transcription of the inscription:

DIS • MANIBVS
CORNELIAE FRONTINAE
VIXIT • ANNIS • XVI • M[ensibus] • VII
M[arcus] • VLPIVS • AVG[usti] • LIB[ertus] CALLISTVS
PATER PRAEPOSITVS ARMAMENTARIO
LVDI MAGNI ET FLAVIA NICE CONIVXS
SANCTISSIMA FECERVNT SIBI
LIBERTIS LIBERTABVSQ[ue] POSTERISQ[ue] EOR[um]
[hoc monumentum]

Translation of the inscription:

To the Divine Shades
of Cornelia Frontina
She lived for 16 years and 7 months
Marcus Ulpius Callistus, freedman of the emperor,
her father, Commander of the Armamentarium of the Ludus Magnus,
and Flavia Nice, his most pious wife,
made [this monument] for themselves,
their freedmen and freedwomen, and for their descendants

Lexical and Interpretive Commentary:

Line 1:

Di Manes: *The spirits of the dead, the divine spirits. By the end of the first century BCE, the phrase was common used as a heading tombstones until the end of the 2nd century CE.*

Line 2:

Cornelia Frontina: *it is noteworthy that her name does not match her father's, which indicates that she was born when her parents were slaves and came into the ownership of a member of the Cornelia gens.*

Line 3:

m[ensibus]: *a common abbreviation for **mensis**, mensis m. month.*

Line 4:

M[arcus] Vlpivs Callistvs: *Cornelia's father has the three names of a Roman citizen. As is customary with freedmen, he added the praenomen and nomen of his former master to his slave cognomen upon manumission by the emperor Trajan, whose full name was Marcus Ulpius Traianus.*

Avg[usti] Lib[ertus]: *a common abbreviation for imperial freedmen.*

Line 5:

praepono, preponere, praeposui, praepositus: *place in command, in front of or before; the perfect passive participle is used here as a substantive noun and can therefore be translated as Commander or Overseer.*

Armamentarium, armamentarii: *n. armory, storehouse for military equipment. Callistus' position as commander of the armory, where weapons for the gladiatorial games were kept, repaired, and maintained, was a prestigious one.*

Line 6: 1

Ludus Magnus: *the largest gladiatorial school and barracks in Rome, it was attached by an underground walkway directly to the Colosseum.*

Flavia Nice: *her nomen derives from her manumission by a member of the Flavian gens; since Trajan's reign began 43 years after the death of Domitian, the last of the Flavian emperors, it was not one of the imperial family. Her slave cognomen, Nice, suggests her Greek origins.*

Conluxs: *note the omission of "n," the enlarged 'I' to indicate a long vowel and the final 's'; this spelling is often found on tombstones, which preserve common pronunciation.*

Line 7:

fecerunt: *I added the understood "hoc monumentum" to complete the phrase.*

Line 8:

libertabusque posterisque: *a common abbreviation for the suffix 'que' is a simple 'q.'*

Eor[um]: *an abbreviation dictated by the lack of space on the line.*

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