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Marble Altar

([CIL VI.20667](#), AE 2005.00009)

This monument was dedicated to the spirits of Julia Saturnina and Gaius Sulpicius Clytus, their portraits carved in the pose of *dextrarum iunctio*, the clasping of right hands and symbolizing their union in marriage, as well as to the memory of Julia Musari.

Rome, c. 130 CE. On display in Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen



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

http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/altar_saturnina3.jpg

http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/altar_saturnina4.jpg



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

Transcription

D[is] • M[anibus]
IVLIAE C[ai] • F[iliae] • SATVRNINAE • ET
C[ai] • SVLPICIO • CLYTO • ET
MEMORIAE • IVLIAE • MVSARI
IVLIA • HEVRESIS • ET • SVLPICIVS
CLYTVS • B[ene] • M[erentibus] • FECERVNT
[hoc monumentum]

Translation

To the Spirits of the Dead.

For Julia Saturnina, daughter of Gaius, and
for Gaius Sulpicius Clytus and
to the memory of Julia Musari.

Julia Hueresis and Sulpicius Clytus
dedicated this monument to the well-deserving deceased.

Glosses

Line 1

D[is] M[anibus] Masculine, plural, dative

*The spirits of the dead; the divine spirits. By the end of the first century BCE, it became customary to dedicate altars to the divine spirits. **DM** is regularly found as a heading on tombstones until the end of the 2nd century CE.*

Line 2

Juliae C[ai] F[iliae] Saturninae Feminine, singular, dative, indirect object after **fecerunt**

*The letters “C F” between the woman’s **nomen** and **cognomen** indicate filiation, the sign of a freeborn woman.*

Line 3

C[ai] Sulpicio Clyto Masculine, singular, dative, indirect object after **fecerunt**. *The threefold name of a male Roman citizen: **praenomen**, **nomen** (gens name), **cognomen**.*

Line 4

Memoria, -ae Feminine singular, dative, indirect object after **fecerunt**.

Line 4

Juliae Musari Feminine, singular, genitive after **memoriae**.

*The woman’s **nomen** indicates she was probably a freedwoman of the **gens Julia**; her **cognomen** (derived from **Mus/Musa**?) suggests it was her former slave name.*

Line 5

Julia Heuresis Feminine, singular, nominative, joint subject of **fecerunt**.

*A woman’s **nomen** and **cognomen**, the latter suggestive of former slavery as does the lack of filiation. Her name, seemingly unrelated, appears on a [tombstone](#) in the Altemps Museum in Rome, (CIL 6.20513).*

Lines 5-6

Sulpicius Clytus Masculine, singular, nominative, joint subject of **fecerunt**.

*He shares a **nomen** and **cognomen** with the deceased male, indicating a relationship, but perhaps nothing more than that of a freedman of the **gens Sulpicius**.*

Line 6

B[ene], irregular adverb of **bonus**, modifying the dative plural participle **M[erentibus]**, referring to the three deceased.

Line 6

Facio, -ere, feci, factum: perfect active indicative, 3rd person plural. *This verb, often abbreviated on tombstones and sometimes omitted (along with **hoc monumentum**) indicates the act of dedication by those who paid for the memorial.*

Line 7

[Hoc monumentum] neuter accusative singular, the commonly omitted direct object of **fecerunt**.

Description & Historical Context

The marble altar dedicated to Julia Saturnina and her husband and an unknown woman is currently located in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, Denmark. It has been dated to about 130 CE, during the reign of the Roman emperor Hadrian, a prosperous and stable period of the Roman Empire.

The altar is masterfully carved, expressly commissioned for the deceased and rich in detailed iconography. While the social class of the couple cannot be identified beyond the fact that they were free Roman citizens, they or their dedicators were certainly wealthy in order to be able to afford this customized quality monument. The altar can be examined in three parts: first the iconography on the front panel containing the portraits, second the inscription below the carved niche, and lastly the trees pictured on the left and right sides of the stone.

The front of the altar is divided into two zones: the upper portion is twice as large as the lower section containing the epitaph. A temple-like structure frames the busts of the couple: its triangular pediment features a central floral wreath flanked by two Medusa heads; it is supported by an Ionic column on each side with spiral shafts. The busts of the couple in the niche are carved in low relief while their faces, clearly portraits of individuals, are carved in high relief. The woman is young, her hair arranged in the style of the day, her earlobes pierced and once probably decorated with earrings of bronze. She is dressed in a modest garment, seemingly a *stola*, that is fastened with carved broaches at her shoulders. The man beside her is a bit older, his brow showing wrinkles and his mouth set seriously; his hair reflects the cut of the period for men. His garment is a toga, legally worn only by male citizens. He clasps the right hand of the woman beside him with his right hand, a gesture that has been named *dextrarum iunctio* and understood to be a symbol of their union in legal marriage. On his left hand, resting on a fold of his toga, he displays a ring.

The inscription at the bottom third of the front of the monument is invaluable for identifying the deceased, presumably the married couple pictured above it: Julia Saturnina, daughter of Gaius (Julius Saturninus?) and Gaius Sulpicius Clytus. The letters are deeply carved Roman capitals, equal in size for the most part. To the left of the inscription is a low relief carving of a dog, perhaps a favorite pet, who looks up and to the right as if toward the clasped hands of the couple. The altar is dedicated to three

people, whose names are connected by **et**. The names of the couple are in the dative case, object of the verb **fecerunt**. The third deceased, a woman, is introduced by **memoriae** in the dative case, the object of the verb **fecerunt**; however, it is not clear from her **cognomen (Musari)** that her name is in the genitive case -- perhaps her Greek name is indeclinable or it was the sculptor's error, The dedicators of the monument are Julia Hueresis and Sulpicius Clytus; although they share **gens names** with the three being honored, there is no mention of their relationship to each other. Based on the names, an educated guess would be that all of them, except Julia Saturnina, are freedpersons and that the dedicators are perhaps the children of Saturnina and Clytus.

The sides of the altar are distinctive, both depicting the same image suggestive of life and fertility. On each side is carved a healthy tree with a thick trunk at the base of which stands a naked little boy. The tree is full of leaves and mature round fruit; on each of the branches stand large birds, perhaps crows.

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