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Roman Women 3/20/07

Project #1: Funerary Inscription

Transcription of Inscription (CIL VI.8769)

VERNASIAE
CYCLADI
CONIVGI OPTIMAE
VIX[it] ANN[is] XXVII
VITALIS AVG[vsti] L[ibertvs]
SCRIB[a] CUB[icvlarivs]

F[idelissimae]A[mantissimae]P[ientissimae]



Translation of Inscription

To Vernasia Cyclas,
The best mate
She lived for 27 years
Vitalis freedman of the emperor
Official scribe and chamber-man

To the most Faithful, most Loving, most Pious woman

Lexical and Interpretive Commentary

Line 1 – *Vernasia Cyclas*: Cyclas was her personal slave name, now her *cognomen*, suggesting that she was taken from the Cycladic area. Vernasia is the name of her former master, now her *nomen*.

Line 3 – *coniunx, coniugis* (n): spouse/mate, husband, wife

bonus, -a, -um: good, honest, noble; the superlative.

Line 4 – *vixit annis*: Supply the endings for the formulaic phrase *vixit annis*, “she lived for. . .”

Line 5 – *Vitalis Augusti Libertus*: The “L” is short for *Libertus*, indicating that her husband, who erected this inscription for her, is a freedman. The “AVG” prior to this is not Vitalis’ *cognomen*, but in fact indicates that he was freed by the emperor, given the genitive ending, it is translated as “Freedman of the Emperor”.

Though the traditional expression: *Fecit hoc monumentum* is missing, it is assumed to be constructed by the husband, as it is his name which is in the nominative.

Line 6 – *scriba, scribae* (m): scribe, clerk.

cubicularius, cubicularii (m): bed-chamber servant, chamberlain.

The “SCRIB” and “CVB” are indications of the offices the husband performed in service to the emperor. Vitalis earned his freedom probably because of his service as imperial scribe and head of chamber servants, two very prestigious and important employments to the Romans.

FAP: Located between the two figures on the monument, they are most likely standing for *Fidelissimae Amantissimae Pientissimae*. The endings are dative feminine, and are the superlative forms of *fidelis, fidele, fidelior; amans, amantis; and piens, pientis*, respectively.

Description of the Monument

The urn contains the ashes of Vernasia Cyclas as constructed by her husband, Vitalis. The urn can be dated to the first century AD. It is constructed out of marble, which would indicate the relative wealth of Vitalis. Now at the British Museum.

The most prominent feature, besides the inscription itself, is the decoration of the husband and the wife, their right hands joined as during a marriage ceremony. Urns such as these were often decorative pieces placed in a niche or tomb of a family, and constructed as small-scale memorials. The two torches flanking either side act as pillars supporting the temple roof, oddly enough replicated in a smaller-scale above the happy couple. A laurel wreath and decorations hang above the inscription; decorations like these became conventional more toward the time of Emperor Hadrian. The inscription FAP lies

between the two figures, translated as “To the most faithful, most loving, most pious woman”. The decorative braiding and pedestals perhaps goes to further the union that the husband feels for his deceased wife. Above the decoration is the plaque itself, which details the employ of the husband: he was an Imperial Scribe, and a chamber servant.

The letters are all in capitals and are measured to perfection, indicating them to be completed under the empire. Another tell-tale sign of the dating are the curving “G’s” and the “I” in *vixit*, which extends above the other letters.

