The *Vernae* Texts: Learning to Read Inscriptions

This activity introduces students to the conventions of Latin epigraphy through inscriptions that range from easy to challenging on *Companion*'s *Vernae* webpage (https://feminaeromanae.org/vernae.html). It lends itself to other instructional goals and to different types of assignments as well. The unit can be incorporated into a syllabus, assigned for extra credit to an advanced student, or offered as a group project in an intermediate level Latin class. The minimum grammar needed is as follows: knowledge of the cases; the appositive; perfect indicative active verbs; the personal, relative, and reflexive pronouns; the relative clause; superlative adjectives; the accusative of duration of time; and Roman numerals.

Instructions for Students:

Preparation
1. Read Paul Shore (1997), *Rest Lightly: An Anthology of Greek & Latin Tomb Inscriptions* (Wauconda, Ill.:   Bolchazy-Carducci), Introduction, pp 1-7; Lawrence Keppie (1991), *Understanding Roman Inscriptions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), Appendix 2, pp. 138-139.
2. Study "Roman Nomenclature" to understand Roman naming conventions (http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/roman_names.html).

Exercise
1. At the top of your page, copy the title of the inscription and the inscription itself exactly as you see it on the *Vernae* webpage.
2. Explain the abbreviations and other epigraphic conventions found in the above models, such as omission of entire words.
3. Explain the Greek and Roman names and what they indicate about the relationships of the individuals named on the stone and their status.
4. Translate the inscription into English.

Notes for Instructors:

Inscriptions *CIL* **6.15459** and *CIL* **6.17431** use typical, common, and accessible abbreviations and will teach students about conventions of abbreviation and the epigraphic protocol of resolving them. Abbreviated forms of the common dedication to *Dis Manibus* appear here and in three inscription below. Students experience the complete omission of the common phrase *hoc monumentum fecit*, which is repeated or truncated in

subsequent passages, and they are introduced to Roman nomenclature and the enslaved category of *vernae.*

Inscription **CIL 6.14099** adds the relative clause but otherwise features the same syntax as the first two inscriptions, leaving students free to think about content, particularly the cult of Sol Invictus and the murder of an enslaved woman.

Inscription **CIL 6.8958** substitutes *Iunoni* for *D.M.* and offers more opportunity for extrapolating social history from Roman names and relationships, e.g., how to read the status of freedpersons from a name and the linguistic marker of Roman legal marriage (*coniunx*).

Inscription **CIL 14.1642** reinforces what students have learned above with no new grammar or abbreviations.

Inscription **ILS 8438** adds a modifier to *D.M.* and also features a pair of relative clauses. *PIENTISSIMAE BENE MERENTI*, a laudatory phrase commonly found in inscriptions, is used here.

Inscription **CIL 8.7767** features the abbreviation designating an imperial freedman and another for children of the imperial household, as well as an iteration of the honorific adjective *BENEMERENTI* written as one word.

Inscription *AE* **1904.0217** is a document of manumission. An advanced exercise that could be used as a class sight-reading after exploration of the above funerary inscriptions, it differs from them in material, content, and place of origin, though they are good preparation for meeting this challenge. It features lengthy and more complicated nomenclature, new abbreviations, conventions for naming and describing places, monetary values, and conventions for dating by consular year and Roman calendar.

Below are additional inscription exercises that could be used as individual assignments or group projects, or might be added to the activity above:

1. **Reading an Inscription**: 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

2. **Transcription**: Studying the image provided of the inscription, transcribe exactly what you see into a Word document, keeping the line and word arrangement. Then compare it to the photocopied excerpt from *CIL* supplied. Note differences, if any. Record any other marks you find on the stone. Models for transcription may be found in Brian K. Harvey. 2004. *Roman Lives: Ancient Roman Life as Illustrated by Latin Inscriptions*. Newburyport, MA: Focus.

3. **Monument Description**: If there is an image of the monument, describe it in detail (e.g., date and origin, if known; appearance of the stone, including lettering and decoration; portrait sculpture). Models for descriptive analysis may be found in Brian K. Harvey. 2004. *Roman Lives: Ancient Roman Life as Illustrated by Latin Inscriptions*. Newburyport, MA: Focus. Prepare an essay describing the monument and inscription, placing it in its historical and cultural context.

4. **Historical and Cultural Essay**: Explain the evidence these inscriptions provide for the institution of *vernae* in your essay. Include as appropriate information on names, family relationships, Roman women, and other historical, cultural, and social contexts such as the time period, the location of the grave, or the personal and public world surrounding the deceased women.

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