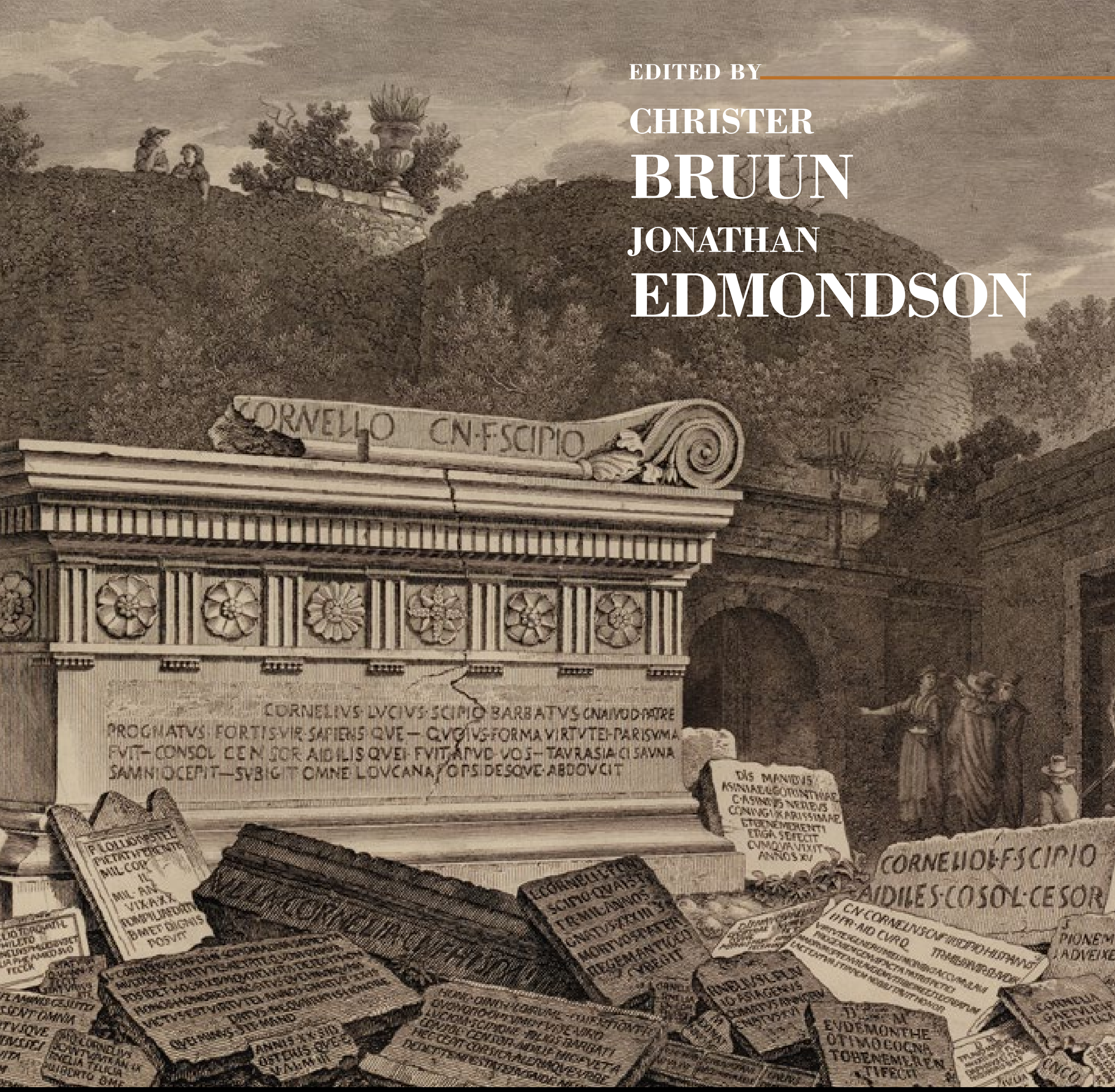
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FVIT—CONSOL·CENSOR·AIDILIS·QVEI·FVIT·APVD·VOS—TAVRASIA·CISAVNA
SAMNIO·CEPIT—SVBIGIT·OMNE·LOVCANA·OPSIDESQVE·ABDOVCIT
CORNELIO·L·F·SCIPIO
AIDILES·COSOL·CESOR

EDITED BY

CHRISTER
BRUUN

JONATHAN
EDMONDSON

The Oxford Handbook *of* ROMAN EPIGRAPHY

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

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and
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CHAPTER 35

CARMINA LATINA EPIGRAPHICA[*]

MANFRED G. SCHMIDT

Characteristics and Frequency of Verse Inscriptions

Latin verse inscriptions, the so-called *carmina epigraphica*, are among the treasures of our epigraphic heritage. These inscriptions are especially demanding because of their metrical form, length, and sophisticated textual content. Depending on the writer's intentions, they are related to epideictic literary genres such as encomium and biography, scoptic epigram (i.e., mocking verses), lament and consolation, hymn and prayer, as well as ecphrasis (i.e., the literary description of architecture or works of art).[1] They are thus very different from the majority of prose inscriptions, which are mostly short and limited to the bare necessities, and which usually consist of a listing of names, offices, or objects in asyndeton, sometimes closing with a stereotypical, often abbreviated, verbal phrase such as *hic situs est* or *posuit* (in funerary inscriptions), *fecit* or *restituit* (in building inscriptions), *dedit* (in texts dealing with financial foundations) or *dedicavit* (in dedications). Above all, for epitaphs the name, age of the deceased, and a funerary formula usually suffice.[2] As a result, one may reach reliable socio-historical conclusions only if one carefully compares similar texts in sufficient quantity.[3]

Of the total number of over 400,000 Latin inscriptions (excluding the so-called *instrumentum domesticum*), only between one and two percent are metrical. This is hardly a sufficient quantity for statistical studies,[4] especially since many questions about the "epigraphic habit" can only be resolved when inscriptions are studied in their provincial and regional context. The resulting smaller sample makes it still more difficult to draw any statistically valid conclusions. We also need to ask how representative the transmitted texts are, when, for example, only three verse inscriptions are known from the province of Mauretania Tingitana, but over one hundred originate from the neighbouring province of Mauretania Caesariensis.[5]

---

[*] Translated by Orla Mulholland (Berlin).

[1] For questions of genre from another point of view, see the inspiring article by Berger 1984: 1149–1273.

[2] Cagnat 1914: 280–293; Ch. 29.

[3] "Epitaphs in bulk": Bodel 2001: 35.

[4] Cf. Sanders 1981: 707–720; Gamberale 1989: 379; Cugusi 2007: 10–11.

At the same time, however, verse inscriptions permit interpretations of language and content even at the level of the single inscription, because they provide a continuous, syntactically connected text meeting the requirements of a poetic form, with a formal structure, and sometimes a striking visual arrangement: for example, *apices* or special word-dividers to point up the quantities or metrical cola; stichic arrangement (i.e., by lines of verse); acrostics or telestics (i.e., when the first or last letters of each line together form a coherent and significant word).[6] On occasion, there is a discrepancy between the metrical form of a poem and its epigraphic representation. The stonecutter did not always respect the metre with the result that single lines of verse sometimes take up more than one line of inscribed text or multiple lines of verse were inscribed on a single line: for example, the verse inscriptions from Lambaesis, Pompeii, and the Cueva Negra, discussed below.

The literary motifs, poetic formulas, funerary commonplaces, biographical, philosophical, and religious themes are similar to literary texts and create for these inscriptions a literary context in addition to their epigraphic and archaeological setting.[7] In certain cases it is important to take into account this background information, namely when material by an individual author is transmitted in both literary and epigraphic versions (for example, St. Ambrose or Paulinus of Nola), when a literary author has only survived in epigraphic form (as with Pope Damasus), or when we suspect that literary epigrams have a partly epigraphic background (as in the case of Luxurius, poet at the Vandal court in Carthage in the sixth century CE). It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that all these examples come from Late Antiquity.[8]

The small percentage of metrical texts among all Latin inscriptions (a percentage which fluctuates depending on the period) is mitigated by the fact that the text of a *carmen epigraphicum* is usually much longer than that of a prose inscription. The longest Latin verse inscription yet known—from the tomb of the Flavii in Cillium (Africa Proconsularis)—consists of over one hundred lines in total (*CIL* VIII 212 + 11300b = *CLE* 1552a).[9] But even in their shortest form, a single line of verse (*monostichium*), metrical inscriptions are of special interest to both philologists and historians. Although its metrical form has previously not been recognized, an unusual example

---

[5] Pikhaus 1983: 170–203 (Appendix II). The numbers from Mauretania Caesariensis have now increased.

[6] Wingo 1972: 140–163; Zarker 1966: 125–151; Sanders 1991: 87–110, 183–205; Bodel 2001: 25–30. For an unusually arranged text from Madauros, see p. 766.

[7] Galletier 1922; Lissberger 1934; Hoogma 1959; Chevallier 1972; Cugusi 1996, 2002; cf. Mayer, Miró, and Velaza 1998.

[8] St. Ambrose: p. 767; Pope Damasus: Ferrua 1942; p. 774; cf. Ch. 21; Luxurius: Happ 1986; cf. Pikhaus 1994: 76–77; Cugusi 2007: 123–124, 181–183. For a survey, Schetter 1989: 229–230.

[9] New edition and full study: *Flavii* 1993; English translation and commentary in Courtney 1995: 186–193; Pillinger 2013.

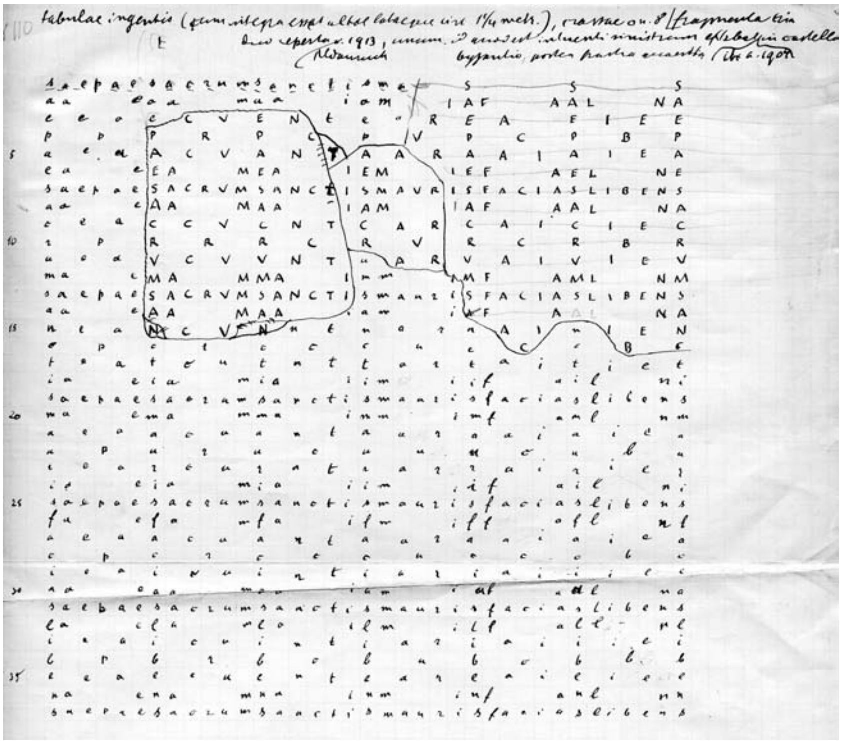

FIG. 35.1 Magical grid incorporating a metrical verse (*senarius*) from Madauros in Numidia (*ILAlg* I 2078). Drawing by Hermann Dessau.

of a metrical text comes from Madauros in Numidia. In a magical grid of six times six letter-squares, a verse comprising six metrical feet (an iambic *senarius*), consisting of six words, each of six letters, is repeated again and again horizontally, vertically, and diagonally, admonishing the reader (*ILAlg* I 2078 + add. p. 395 = *AE* 1914, 49; Fig. 35.1):

> *saepae(!) sacrum sanctis Mauris facias libens*
>
> Offer sacrifice often and gladly to the Moorish gods!

It is tempting to relate the number six to these "Moorish gods" (*dii Mauri*) themselves and to rob the "divine collectivity" of their anonymity by identifying them as a sextet of gods.[10]

THE *ANTHOLOGIA LATINA*

Latin verse inscriptions should be viewed in the context of a broader Roman poetic tradition, from which they differ only through the accident of transmission. This is demonstrated by the presence of *carmina epigraphica* together with shorter poems or poetic fragments variously transmitted in manuscripts in the *Anthologia Latina*, a work that traces its origins to Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, as in the *Codex Salmasianus* of the seventh or eighth century.[11] Thus, in the older edition of the *Veterum Latinorum epigrammata et poemata* by Pieter Burmann the Younger and Heinrich Meyer (1759–1835), quotations from poets preserved in the literary tradition are gathered together with examples transmitted in manuscript and epigraphic form.[12] For example, in the first group of poems in this edition, the *elogia* from the sarcophagi of the Cornelii Scipiones are found alongside literary quotations from Cicero, Livy, Gellius, and others. For these early epigrams in Saturnian metre this is a sensible editorial decision, since both manuscript and epigraphic traditions are relevant, though in different ways, for the understanding of this ancient Italic metrical form. The beginning of the *elogium* to A. Atilius Calatinus (*cos.* 258 BCE), transmitted by Cicero (*Sen.* 61; *Fin.* 2.116: *unum cum plurimae consentiunt gentes / populi primarium fuisse virum <Atilium?>*),[13] even in this version in classical Latin shows great similarity to one of the oldest Latin inscriptions, the *elogium* of L. Cornelius Barbati f(ilius) Scipio (*cos.* 259 BCE) in Saturnians (*CIL* I² 9 = *CLE* 6 = *ILLRP* 310 = *ILS* 3; Fig. 35.2):[14]

---

[10] Schmidt 2008: 1910-11, focusing on its structure and interpretation.

honc oino ploirume cosentiont R[omai]
duonoro optumo fuise viro
Luciom Scipione filio{s} Barbati
consol censor aidilis hic fuet a[pud vos]
hec cepit Corsica Aleriaque urbe
dedet Tempestatebus aide mereto[d]

Most people agree that this man, Lucius Scipio, son of Barbatus, was uniquely best among the good men at Rome. He was consul, censor, aedile among you, he captured Corsica and the city of Aleria, he gave to the Storm-deities a temple, as they deserved.

Likewise, six hundred years later the epigraphic epigrams of St. Ambrose from the end of the fourth century CE take their place as a matter of course alongside his literary works and need to be treated from historical, theological, and philological perspectives, as in the case of Ambrose's epitaph in elegiac couplets for his brother, Uranius

---

[11] Riese 1869: p. xii-xxxiii; cf. Happ 1986: 1.125–126. In general, Tarrant 1986: 9–13, without any mention of the epigraphic tradition.

[12] cf. Burmann and Meyer 1835: p. iii: "Anthologia latina tripartita est, quia partim e codicibus manu scriptis, partim ex ceteris litterarum Romanarum auctoribus, partim ex inscriptionibus est conflata."

[13] Stein 1931: 48, 68–69 for Cicero's text.

[14] The text in classical Latin would read: *hunc unum plurimi consentiunt Romae / bonorum optimum fuisse virum / Lucium Scipionem, filium Barbati. / consul, censor, aedilis hic fuit apud vos. / hic cepit Corsicam Aleriamque urbem, / dedit Tempestatibus aedem merito*. Text and translation from Courtney 1995: 40, 263–264 no. 9; but see the earlier editions and Kruschwitz 2002a: 58–70 no. 3 (L. Cornelius Barbati f. Scipio) and 220–223, Appendix 3 (A. Atilius Calatinus).

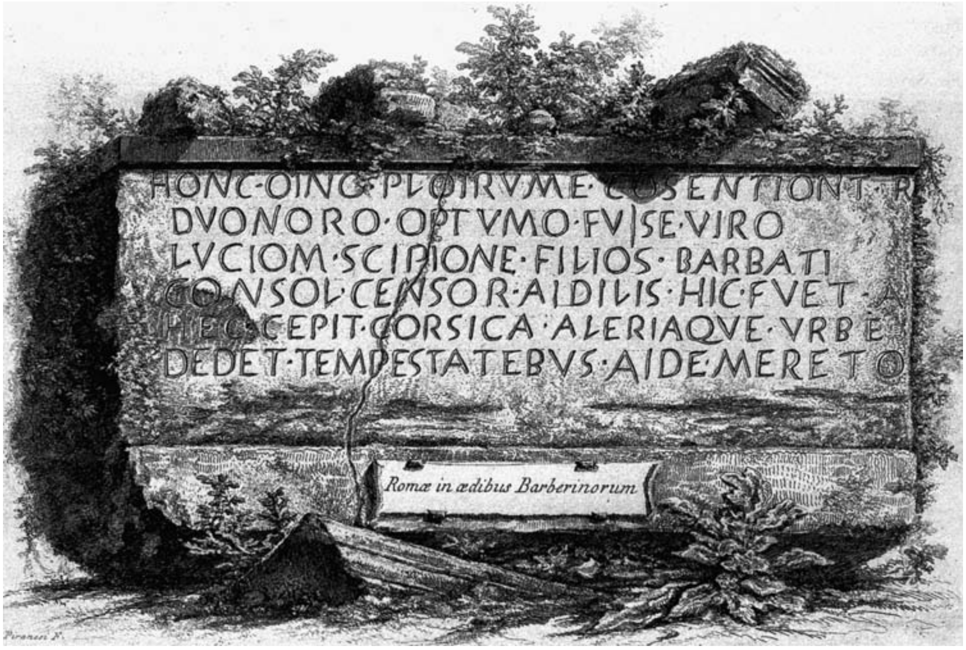
HONC·OINO·PLOIRVME·COSENTIONT·R
DVONORO·OPTVMO·FVISE·VIRO
LVCIOM·SCIPIONE·FILIOS·BARBATI
CONSOL·CENSOR·AIDILIS·HIC·FVET·A
HEC·CEPIT·CORSICA·ALERIAQVE·VRBE
DEDET·TEMPESTATEBVS·AIDE·MERETO
Romæ in ædibus Barberinorum
Piranesi F.

FIG. 35.2 *Elogium* of L. Cornelius Barbati f. Scipio from the Tomb of the Scipios, Rome. Etching by G.B. Piranesi of the inscribed face of a sarcophagus then preserved in the Palazzo Barberini, Rome.

Satyrus (*CIL* V p. 617 no. 5 = *ILCV* 2165 = *CLE* 1421, Mediolanum, from the grave beside that of the martyr Victor):[15]

> *Uranio Satyro supremum frater honorem*
> *martyris ad laevam detulit Ambrosius.*
> *haec meriti merces, ut sacri sanguinis umor*
> *finitimas penetrans adluat exuvias.*
>
> To Uranius Satyrus his brother Ambrosius
> does the final honour at the left hand of the martyr:
> Let this be the wage of (his) merit, that the blood of the saint
> seep through and bathe the remains at his side.

Collections made up exclusively of *carmina epigraphica Latina*, and as a result their classification as a specific group of inscriptions, originated in the seventeenth century, when attempts were made to collect in anthologies a broad range of epigraphic examples of mostly anonymous Latin poetry. This editorial model, on the one hand, helps to remedy the fact that verse inscriptions are scattered broadly among the whole mass of inscriptions. In addition, the prosimetric character (i.e., part prose, part verse) of many inscriptions precludes the unambiguous classification of these "commatica" (a term coined by F. Bücheler)[16] as verse inscriptions, since some of them comprise single metrical *cola* or *commata* together with sections in prose. This often occurs not through artistic design, but rather from a lack of skill or knowledge of prosody and metre. Amateurish—i.e., non-professional—and faulty poems were, therefore, as a rule not included in the anthologies. As subliterary creations, they were neither compared to other occasional poetry nor in any other way evaluated as evidence of Roman everyday verse.[17] From the *Musae lapidariae* of G.B. Ferretti (1672) to Edward Courtney's similarly entitled collection (1995), this tradition of research remains alive today and has determined our selective picture of the *carmina epigraphica Latina*. Also epigraphy, which is largely dominated by historical research, has until recently tended to neglect verse inscriptions. It is characteristic, for example, that Hermann Dessau in a general article on Latin epigraphy, published in 1925, devotes barely a quarter of a page to "poetic epitaphs" and, apart from the Scipionic inscriptions, he only cites one republican epitaph (*CIL* I^2 1211 = VI 15346 = *CLE* 52 = *ILLRP* 973 = *ILS* 8403), evidently because "Mommsen, *RG* I^5 58, granted [it] the honour of a translation."[18] It is hardly a coincidence that in Jean-Marie Lassère's almost twelve-hundred-page epigraphic manual only eight pages are devoted to verse inscriptions, one of them precisely to this inscription.[19]

---

[15] The *CIL* entry is derived from *Cod. Pal. Lat. 833*, f. 42 r.; cf. inter alia *CLE* 906–908 and *CLE* 1347 B (= *CIL* VI 1756; cf. Suppl. 8.3, p. 4752–53 with commentary; Schmidt 1999); *epigrammata Ambrosiana*: Cugusi 2007: 123–124, 182–183.

THE *CARMINA LATINA EPIGRAPHICA (CLE)*

The first edition of all Latin verse inscriptions by Franz Bücheler and Ernst Lommatzsch, published in 1895 and 1897, has never been superseded. (Lommatzsch published a supplement in 1926 and then prepared a second edition of the original work in 1930.)[20] It was published as volume II of the *Anthologia Latina* of Alexander Riese,[21] but was separated from the literary tradition as a collection consisting exclusively of verse inscriptions.

---

[16] Kruschwitz 2002b.

[17] For example, Burmann and Meyer 1835: p. vii: "Omisi enim pessimas, in quibus sententia absurda, verba barbara, numeri innumeri erant, quas omnino haud ornamentum, verum dedecus latinae poeseos esse apparebat."

[18] Dessau 1925: 1–37 (quotation from p. 27).

[19] Lassère 2007: 186; cf. 8–9, 246–250. cf. the instructive surveys on Latin verse inscriptions from a philological perspective: Radke 2002: 37–41; Sallmann 1997: 600–604 ("Epigraphische Gelegenheitsgedichte"), 605–607 ("Carmina sepulcralia"); Schetter 1989: 224–236 ("Epigraphische Poesie"), unfortunately based only on *CLE*; Cugusi 2007.

[20] Following the practice of the *CIL*, only a selection of Christian metrical inscriptions are included in the *CLE*.

[21] Bücheler and Lommatzsch 1895–97 (2nd ed., 1930), with numerous reprints; Lommatzsch 1926. Subsequent additions to *CLE*: Engström 1912; Zarker 1958; and many works by Cugusi and Gómez

Its title became synonymous with this group of inscriptions. The publication of the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* (= *CLE*) took place in cooperation with the editors of the *CIL*, Lommatzsch among them, and can therefore be regarded as a product of the comprehensive project to create a fundamental research tool ("Grundlagenforschung").[22] With the poems arranged by metre, this now canonical edition included all *carmina epigraphica Latina* then known from the Roman world, both the true verse inscriptions and the commatica and fragments mentioned above.

How difficult it was for Bücheler, however, to find criteria for a sensible selection is revealed in a note to one entry in the collection which contains various commatica: "The number of the 'commatica' as I call them, would be increased beyond measure if I chose to present whatever is in any way poetic and every piece of metre in the inscriptions, however small. But that would be a different task" (Bücheler ad *CLE* 1851).[23] Nonetheless, Bücheler's collection was impressively comprehensive. He provided no preface to his edition, which might have revealed the principle of organization he employed. Therefore, it will be useful to sketch its arrangement here, as it implicitly also provides information on topics such as the frequency of the metres used, the proportion of different inscription-genres, and their chronological development. In what was then a complete collection—and still remains at least a representative one—of around 2,500 inscriptions, the relative proportion of the different categories of texts remains valid:

- a small group of *Saturnii* (*CLE* 1–17)
- numerous *Iambi* (*CLE* 18–226, 847–849, 1788–99, 1859–1901)
- a small number of *Trochaei* (*CLE* 227–247, 1902–5)
- the main group of more than sixteen hundred *Hexametri* (*CLE* 248–846, 850–859, 1800–40, 1906–2034) and *Elegiaci* (*CLE* 860–1503, 1841–50, 2035–2140)[24]
- *Hendecasyllabi, Ionici*, and *Anapaesti* (not in all cases with securely transmitted texts, *CLE* 1504–24, 2141–50)
- *Polymetra* (*CLE* 1525–62, 2151–56)
- Commatica (*CLE* 1563–1622, 1851, 2157–2222)
- various poetic fragments of uncertain type except for a small group of *Disticha* (*CLE* 1623–1785, 1852–58, 2223–91).
- three collective *lemmata* containing at least one hundred inscribed literary quotations, mostly from the *Aeneid* and other classics (*CLE* 2292–94).

Pallarès (cited in the bibliography); cf. Fernández Martínez 1998, a very useful two-volume translation of the *CLE*.

[22] Schmidt 1998: 164–165.

[23] "Commatica quae vocavi augerentur numero ad immensum, si poetica quotquot sunt et quantulacumque inscriptionum commata producere vellem, quae res novi negoti est."

[24] As many of the polymetrics, commatica, and fragments have sections in hexameters, the number of hexameter verse inscriptions in this edition probably already reaches two thousand.

Within these groups there is mostly an "eidographic order."[25] In other words, after dedicatory inscriptions come texts from buildings, honorific monuments, funerary inscriptions, then miscellaneous texts—above all graffiti from Campanian cities, which form a special group. Within this division, the inscriptions which can be dated with any degree of security appear first, while formulaic material with no individualizing characteristics come at the end.

A new edition of all *carmina epigraphica Latina* is currently in preparation as part of the *CIL* project. This differs from older editions both in the presentation of the texts and in its system of arrangement.[26] It provides a critical edition of the entire inscription, both its metrical and non-metrical sections. It also presents the inscriptions in a geographical and systematic order, following the long-standing schema of the *CIL*. Paolo Cugusi's extensive preliminary work for a revision of the *CLE* has been helpful in providing an overview of the enormously increased bibliography on individual verse inscriptions and of the overarching themes in epigraphic poetry. In collaboration with Maria Teresa Sblendorio Cugusi, he has begun to edit, province by province, a very useful collection of Latin verse inscriptions, which, in contrast to the *CIL*, largely omits autopsy of the inscriptions.[27]

TYPOLOGY OF VERSE INSCRIPTIONS

Although the practice of composing verse inscriptions began in Rome with the *elogia* of the Scipiones, in the succeeding period no notable separate tradition of such *carmina* developed for use on commemorative funerary monuments of the nobility.[28] This is perhaps not surprising, since the quantity of metrical inscriptions from the archaic and republican periods is exceedingly small.[29] A list of metrical inscriptions transmitted in literary or epigraphic form down to the death of Sulla (78 BCE) is provided by Suerbaum and some current statistics on "metrical inscriptions of the republican period" can be found in the collection of essays, edited by Peter Kruschwitz.[30] From the Augustan period to the third century it is above all epitaphs for individuals below the elite that are composed in verse. Only in Late Antiquity do verse epitaphs become normal also for *equites* and senators. One of the few exceptions is the epitaph which the highly respected consular and literary figure Verginius Rufus composed for himself, transmitted by the younger Pliny (Plin. *Ep.* 6.10.4; 9.19.1; cf. Cass. Dio 68.2.4).[31]

---

[25] In the difficult task of identifying a consistent editorial structure, I have relied in part on the observations of Wissowa 1899: 413.

[26] *CIL* XVIII/2 = *Carmina Latina epigraphica provinciarum Hispanarum*, ed. C. Fernández Martínez et al., Berlin and Boston (provisionally 2016); *CIL* XVIII/1 = *Carmina Latina epigraphica urbis Romae*, ed. B.E. Thomasson et al., Berlin and Boston (the first fascicle of which will provisionally appear in 2015).

[27] Cugusi 2003a (Sardinia), 2006 (Britannia); Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2007 (Pannonia), 2008 (Moesia and Thracia), 2011 (Greek East), 2012 (Hispania), 2014 (African provinces).

[28] Massaro 2002: 17–37.

[29] The otherwise valuable older selection, mostly of verse inscriptions, Lindsay 1897, devotes 113 pages to the inscriptions of the Republic and the "classical" period (i.e., the age of Cicero and the early Empire), but a total of just fifteen pages to the imperial period. For metrical inscriptions of the Republic, Massaro 1992. On Saturnians, see Kruschwitz 2002a.

[30] Suerbaum 2002: esp. 329–338; Kruschwitz 2007. So, for example, Fassbender 2007: 170–171 counts thirty-seven epigraphic examples from Rome, while Buonocore 2007 reaches a total of thirteen

Around eighty percent of all *carmina epigraphica* derive from a funerary context. Such texts are often moving and are thus, on the one hand, a useful source for the history of mentalities (cf. Ch. 26). On the other hand, most treat a narrow range of very similar themes, such as life and death, body and soul, ideas of the afterlife in general, *mors immatura*, divine justice, and the virtues of the deceased. Therefore, their relation to certain literary genres inevitably produces a rather formulaic set of elements of lamentation, grief, and consolation, which were in part already present in Greek funerary epigraphy.[32] This has led to the question whether there was a separate genre of epigraphic funerary poetry which includes typically "epigraphic" elements beyond those found in literary versions of the genre.[33] *Carmina epigraphica* often establish a link between the monument and its audience by including distinctive elements, such as an address to the passer-by (*viator* or *hospes*) by the dedicator or the deceased, a kind of "speaking" *titulus*. One sometimes even finds an exchange of poems between "speakers," as in the verse epitaph of Vettius Agorius Praetextatus and his wife Paulina (*CIL* VI 1779, cf. p. 4757 = *CLE* 111 = *ILS* 1259).[34] Strikingly similar, indeed identical sections are found in many verse epitaphs, even from quite different regions of the Roman Empire. Some scholars have argued that these similarities derive from the conventions of the genre.[35] Cagnat and, following him, Susini preferred to assume that model- or formula-books were used to provide help in the composition of funerary verses (cf. Plut. *De Pythiae oraculis* 25 = *Mor.* 407 B–C).[36]

Most verse inscriptions, however, follow individual patterns and each one reveals its own adaptation of funerary themes. Verse is normally used only for the section of the text that deals with the details of life and death, the deceased's special characteristics, the family, grief, lamentation, and consolation. A pre- or postscript in prose is, in contrast, devoted to such matters as the deceased's name,[37] offices held, age-at-death, since all of these elements are hard to fit into a metrical scheme. In the verse sections, names

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from Italy's Regio IV; Solin 2007 has in total five from Latium adiectum and Campania, Gómez Pallarès 2007: 223–228 includes only seven *carmina* from Hispania.

[31] Stein 1931: 54–55.

[32] In general, Lattimore 1942; Schetter 1989: 227. For Greek inscribed epigrams, Kaibel 1878; Robert 1948; Peek 1955, 1957, 1960; Vérilhac 1978–82; Merkelbach and Stauber 1998-2005. On a striking funerary epigram from Rome dating to Domitian's reign, *IGUR* 1336 = *SEG* 50, 1060 = *CIL* VI 33976 = *ILS* 5177, see Döpp 1996.

[33] Fernández Martínez 1999: 119.

[34] Häusle 1980: 41–63, esp. n. 44.

[35] Cugusi 2007: 190.

[36] Cagnat 1889; cf. Susini 1973: 48; Zarker 1958: 110–121; Häusle 1980: 17–18 esp. n. 44; Hernández Pérez 2001 (focusing on Hispania); Cugusi 2003b; cf. 2007: 190–191. For justified scepticism, Schetter 1989: 228.

[37] cf. Sblendorio Cugusi 1980 on the ambiguous use of proper names in verse inscriptions.

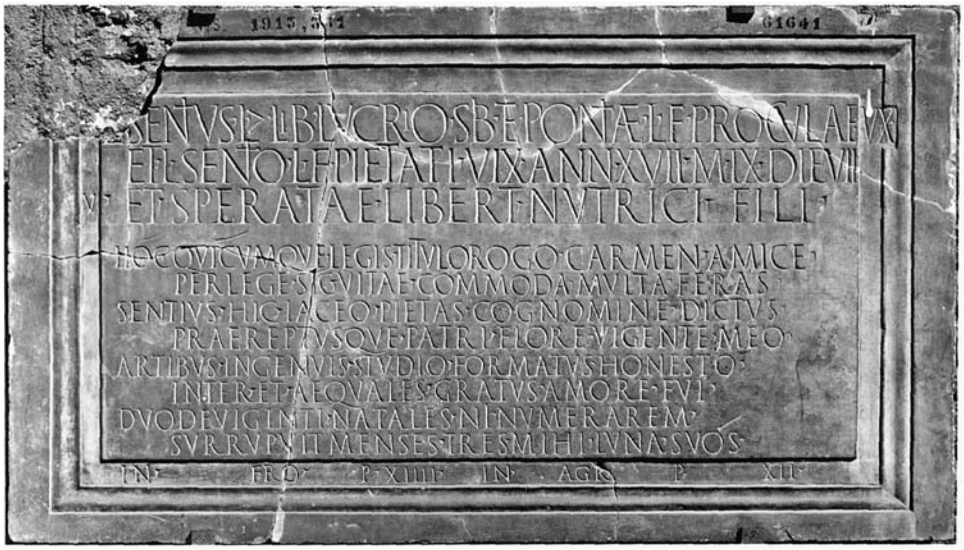

FIG. 35.3 Funerary plaque for L. Sentius Lucrio, his wife Pontia Procula, and their son L. Sentius Pietas from Carsulae (Umbria), with verse in lines 4–11. Museo Nazionale Romano.

with inappropriate prosody are avoided, while complicated numbers for the deceased's age-at-death can only be fitted into the metre if one of the four basic methods of counting (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division) are used. Hence, for example, in an epitaph from Carsulae in Umbria (*CIL* XI 7856 = *CLE* 2068; Fig. 35.3) the precise age of the deceased is stated in the prose prescript (line 2) and also in a metrically inept periphrasis in lines 10–11:

L(ucius) Sentius L(uci et) (mulieris) lib(ertus) Lucrio sib(i) et Pontiae L(uci) f(iliae) Proculae ux(ori)
et L(ucio) Sentio L(uci) f(ilio) Pietati vix(it) ann(is) XVII m(ensibus) IX die(bus) VII
v(ivae) et Speratae libert(ae) nutrici fili
hóc quícumque legis tituló, rogó carmen, amice,
5 *perlege! síc vitae commoda multa ferás.*
Sentius hic iaceo Pietas cognomine dictus
praereptusque patrí flore vigente meo.
artibus ingenuís studió fórmatus honestó
inter et aequales gratus amóre fuí.
10 *duodevigintí natalés ní (= ne) numerarem,*
surrupuit menses tres mihi Luna suós.
in fro(nte) p(edes) XIIII, in agr(o) p(edes) XII.

L. Sentius Lucrio, freedman of Lucius and his wife, for himself and his wife Pontia Procula, daughter of Lucius, and for L. Sentius Pietas, son of Lucius; he lived seventeen years, nine months, seven days. Also for the freedwoman Sperata, who is still alive, nurse of their son.

> Whoever you are, stranger, who reads this inscription, please
> read the poem to the end! Thus may you have many pleasant things in life.
> Here I lie, Sentius, called by the *cognomen* Pietas,
> torn from my father in the full bloom of my life,
> trained in the liberal arts with honourable effort,
> I was also among my peers well loved.
> To prevent me from reaching eighteen full years of age,
> Luna snatched away from me three of her months.
> Frontage: 14 feet. Depth: 12 feet.

In Late Antiquity, under the influence of Christianity (Ch. 21), it is not only new values that start to appear in verse epitaphs (for example, virtues in praise of the deceased), but Christian ideas of the afterlife also take their place alongside traditional material from popular philosophy. These are sometimes eccentrically heterogeneous, so that often a person's religion can only be detected by the addition of Christian formulas such as *neofitus/neophytus*.[38] So, for example, on the sarcophagus of Iunius Bassus, urban prefect in 359, a pagan verse epigram is combined with a Christian prose inscription (*in ipsa praefectura urbi neofitus iit ad Deum*) alongside reliefs with motifs from the Old and New Testament (*CIL* VI 32004 = 41341a–b = *ILS* 1286 = *ILCV* 90 = *ICUR* II 4164). It is, however, due to the innovative force and political instinct of a pope that in the funerary context—in the catacombs just outside Rome—a new form of *elogium* was developed. The exemplary death of the martyrs is presented vividly to the pilgrims by Pope Damasus I in the hexameters he composed—not entirely altruistically.[39] By promoting the ruined crypts and catacombs as an exercise in propaganda, he opposed the imperial presence in the city of Rome with a papal presence in the catacombs on the periphery of the city, which were central places in the growing religion.[40] He created shrines to the martyrs in a new, unified form, with a new type of verse inscription in a special script known as Philocalian, which has remained closely associated with the name of Damasus and which itself began a tradition.[41] One of Damasus' *carmina* in hexameters refers directly to this period of developing the shrines (*CLE* 310 = Damas. *Epigr.* 3 Ferrua):

cingebant latices montem teneroque meatu
corpora multorum, cineres atque ossa rigabant.
non tulit hoc Damasus, communi lege sepultos
post requiem tristes iterum persolvere poenas.
protinus adgressus magnum superare laborem
aggeris immensi deiecit culmina montis,
intima sollicite scrutatus viscera terrae
siccavit totum, quidquid madefecerat humor,
invenit fontem, praebet qui dona salutis.
haec curavit Mercurius levita fidelis.

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[38] cf. Schetter 1989: 232–233; see further Ch. 21.

[39] The standard edition of the epigrams is Ferrua 1942; on the martyrs, Schäfer 1932; Ch. 21.

[40] Schmidt 2007: none of the *elogia* omits Damasus' name, though some omit that of the martyrs!

[41] cf. Wesch-Klein 1999. On Philocalus, Salzman 1990.

> Water encircled the mountain and enmeshed with narrow streams
> the bodies, ashes, and bones of many.
> Damasus did not tolerate that those buried in the usual way
> should again suffer pitiable punishments after being laid to rest.
> At once he set about overcoming the great labour
> and had the mountaintop's huge pile of earth removed.
> He examined industriously the inmost parts of the earth,
> dried everything that the damp had seeped into
> and found a spring which gives gifts of salvation.
> Mercurius, faithful servant, carried out this work.

As with epigraphic material in general, verse inscriptions are mostly found in a funerary context, as we have seen. Apart from these, most of all dedications and building inscriptions were composed in hexameter verse. They are found primarily in connection with temples and bathhouses,[42] churches and baptisteries. In Late Antiquity mosaic floors are a common medium for such texts.[43] An example of such metrical dedicatory inscriptions, which come primarily from North Africa,[44] is provided by an altar dedicated by a member of the municipal elite of Lambaesis to the Nymphs and, at the same time, to the *Numen Aquae Alexandrianae*. Laetus, the dedicator, is essentially commemorating the building of a *nymphaeum* and the aqueduct necessary for it, which was constructed under Severus Alexander (222–235), but he is also celebrating himself (*CIL* VIII 2662 = *CLE* 252 = *ILS* 3895, in hexameters, with two lines making up each hexameter; Fig. 35.4):[45]

> *Numini aquae*
> *<<Alexandrianae.>>*
> *hanc aram Nymphis extruxi*
> *nomine Laetus,*
> *cum gererem fasces patriae*
> *rumore secundo.*
> *plus tamen est mihi gratus*
> *honos, quod fascibus annus*
> *is nostri<s> datus est, quo sanc-*
> *to nomine dives*
> *Lambaesem largo perfu-*
> *dit flumine nympha.*

> To the divine spirit of the Alexandrian Aqueduct.
> I, Laetus by name, set up this altar to the nymphs,
> when I wielded the *fasces* of my native city to favourable acclaim.
> This honour is even more welcome to me, because precisely that year

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[42] Verse inscriptions on baths and bathing: Busch 1999; cf. González Blanco, Mayer, and Stylow 1996.

[43] cf. Gómez Pallarès 1990, 1990–91, 1993a-b.

[44] Overview based on the *CLE* in Schetter 1989: 234–235.

[45] The date is revealed by the erased and then rewritten name of the aqueduct in line 2, named after the emperor Severus Alexander. On the *nymphaeum* and its aqueduct, note also *CIL* VIII 2658; Janon 1973.

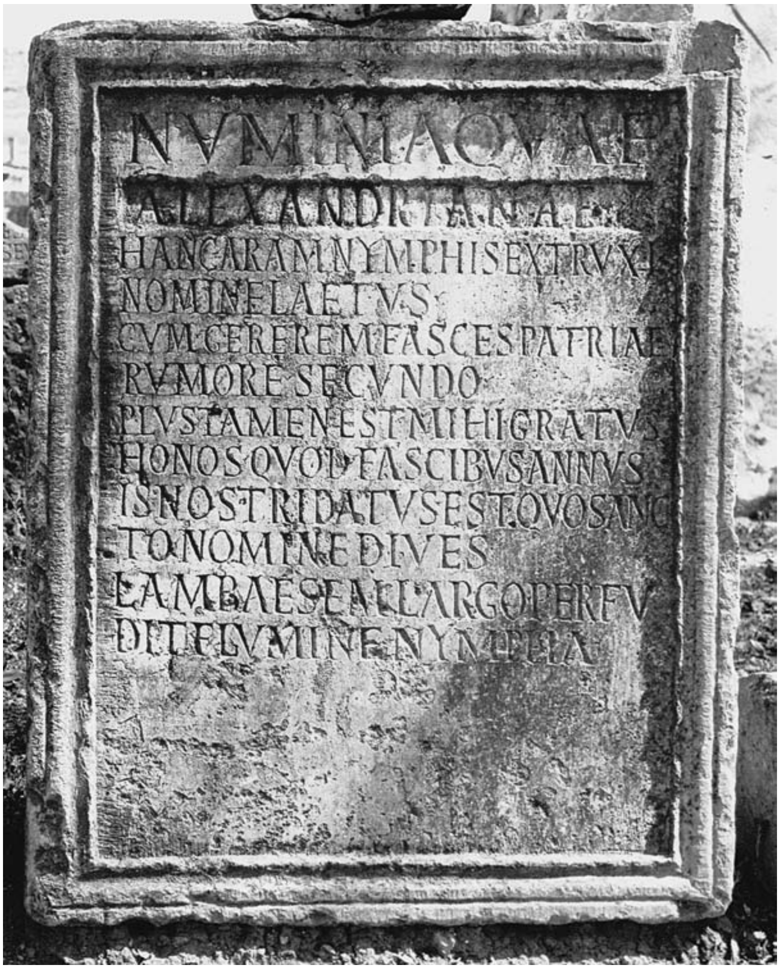
NVMINIAQVAE
ALEXANDRIANAE
HANCARAMNYMPHISEXTRVXI
NOMINELAETVS
CVMCEREREMFASCESPATRIAE
RVMORESECVNDO
PLVSTAMENESTMIHIGRATVS
HONOSQVODFASCIBVSANNVS
ISNOSTRIDATVSESTQVOSANC
TONOMINEDIVES
LAMBAESEMLARGOPERFV
DITFLVMINENYMPHA

FIG. 35.4 Dedication to the Divine Spirit of the Aqua Alexandriana, with *Alexandrianae* excised from and then restored to line 2 of the text. Lambaesis, Numidia.

> was given over to our magistracy (*fasces*) in which the rich spring of imperial name flooded Lambaesis with its powerful stream.

Sometimes the discovery of inscriptions allows an entirely new approach to our understanding of the ancient world. For example, our view of Roman everyday life and culture was totally revolutionized following the discovery of the inscriptions of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae, cities which were buried under the ashes of Vesuvius in 79 CE. Along with the archaeologically important wall-paintings, it is above all these "defacements" of the walls which have made Pompeii and its neighbouring towns famous. One mockingly self-critical verse inscription makes the point amusingly: "I am amazed, wall, that you have not fallen in ruins, since you have to bear the tedious products of so many writers!" (*CIL* IV 1904 = *CLE* 957: *admiror*

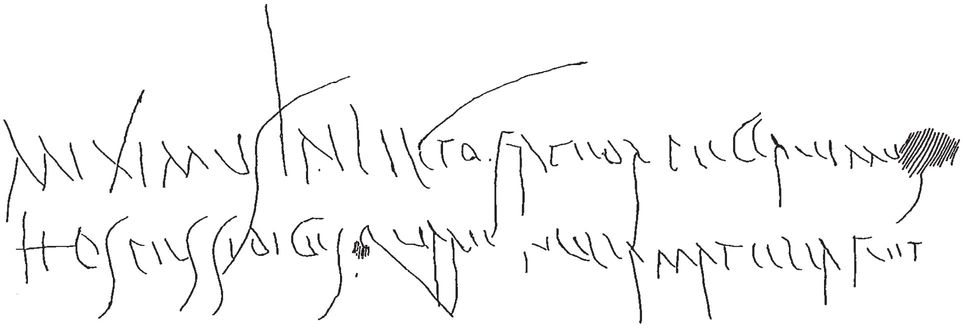

FIG. 35.5 Graffito from a house in Pompeii. The lines of the inscription do not correspond to the verse, with the word *hospes*, which belongs metrically at the end of the first line, appearing in line 2.

parie{n}s te non cecidisse ruinis qui tot / scriptorum taedia sustineas). Graffiti in prose and verse refract the life of the town in garishly bright colour. Among them can be found quotations from poetry—for example, from Virgil's *Aeneid*—and couplets scribbled quickly with a stylus on a wall, full of praise or insults for figures from private and public life, curses and confessions of love, and of course obscenities, to which most publications on Pompeii like to devote much attention and which have undeniably contributed to our present-day picture of the "habits of the ancient Romans" (Ch. 23).[46] An example was found on a wall from a house in Regio VIII, insula 7 (*CIL* IV 4957 = *CLE* 932; Fig. 35.5):

miximus in lecto; fateor, peccavimus, / hospes.
si dices quare: nulla matella fuit.

We pissed in the bed; I admit it, landlord, we did wrong.
If you ask why: there wasn't a pot.

Similarly, some painted inscriptions ("dipinti") were brought to light in excavations in the Mithraeum below the church of Santa Prisca in Rome among the paintings related to the cult of Mithras found on the walls of a subterranean building renovated in the third century CE. These inscriptions can best be classified as hymns and are of some importance for the understanding of this mystery cult.[47] Thus, for example, the central theme of the iconography of the cult of Mithras—the killing of the bull—is explained in one hexameter verse as bringing blessings on the *mystae*, i.e., the initiates (*CIMRM* 485 = *AE* 1946, 84; uncertain reading):[48]

et nos serva[s]ti eternali sanguine fuso

You have saved us too, by shedding the eternal blood.

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[46] Numerous quotations from Latin literature: Gigante 1979. Erotic graffiti: Varone 2002.

[47] Vermaseren 1981: 110–111; Beck 2006. The similarity between Mithraism and Christianity is stressed by Betz 1968; cf. Sallmann 1997: 603.

[48] Full edition: Vermaseren and van Essen 1965: 217–218.

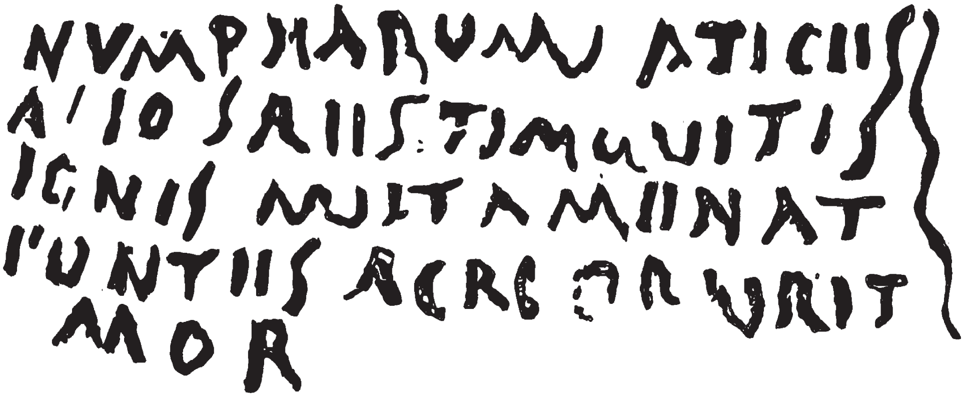

FIG. 35.6 Painted verse inscription from the Cueva Negra, near Fortuna, SE Spain. The two verses of the poem are spread over five lines.

While the relation of these texts to the cult of Mithras is unambiguous because of the occurrence of cultic terms such as *pater, leo*, and *taurus*, another set of texts, also painted, from a cave known as the Cueva Negra ("Black Cave") near Fortuna (Murcia) in Hispania Citerior poses more of a problem, not least because of their poor preservation. All that can be said for certain is that these verses inspired by Virgil refer in general to a spring that rises in the cave itself and probably also to a cultic aspect of the site.[49] Visitors to this "sanctuary" then also composed occasional verses and painted them on the cliff wall—such as the following confession of love, preserved in different versions (*AE* 1987, 655e; Fig. 35.6):[50]

> *Numpharum latices, / alios restinguitis / ignis!*[51]
> *me tamen at / fontes acrior urit / [a]mor.*
>
> O waters of the nymphs, extinguish other fires!
> I am burned at the spring even more sharply by love."

Thus behind every attempt at poetic artistry expressed in a *carmen epigraphicum* lies a special effort to give a depth, even uniqueness, to the act of commemoration, whether it is the memory of a beloved or deeply respected person, of a magnificent building, or, as we have just seen, to preserve the inextinguishable memory of a love that paradoxically flamed even more fiercely at the spring of the nymphs.[52]

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[49] Stylow and Mayer 1987; cf. González Blanco, Mayer, and Stylow 1996.

[50] cf. Cugusi 2007: 63–65.

[51] After the apostrophe, the imperative, rather than the present indicative (here to prevent a hiatus), is actually required; cf. *CLE* 434, 14 (Pisaurum): *alios deludite quaeso*; similar verses: *CIL* VI 11743, 2 = *CLE* 1498, 2 (Rome); *HEp* 1994, 569 (Librilla, Hispania Citerior).

[52] On *monumentum* and *memoria*, Häusle 1980: 29–40.

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