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# Dynamic Epigraphy

New Approaches to Inscriptions

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## Chapter 7

### When poetry comes to its senses:<sup>\*</sup> inscribed Roman verse and the human sensorium

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#### Introduction

Some mistakes are very easy to make, very easy to overlook, and at the same time very obvious, as soon as one starts thinking about them. One of these mistakes – not of great consequence in the grander scheme of things, but sufficiently problematic within our academic field – is the tacit assumption that the way in which we encounter inscribed monuments and objects, and the way in which we perceive ancient Roman texts and art, is somehow more or less identical to the way in which they were approached, perceived, handled, and consumed in the ancient world.

The mistake, resulting from a lack of reflection, becomes apparent as soon as one starts considering the – very obvious! – fact that no Roman ever read Vergil or Ovid in the beautifully produced, thoroughly researched editions of the *Bibliotheca Teubneriana* or the *Oxford Classical Texts* series, much less in bilingual editions such as those of the *Loeb*, *Budé*, or *Tusculum* libraries, or even in translation, as those of us who consume the provisions of the *Penguin* or *Reclam* libraries for quick and easy access. In fact, even if these and other esteemed publishing houses and series had already existed in the ancient world (for which there is no credible evidence), the experience would have been altogether different due to the different media formats and types that were in common use in the ancient Mediterranean.

It may be tempting to think that, while this is evidently the case for the literary and technical texts of the Roman world that were transmitted through a manuscript tradition, the same may not be true for texts transmitted on durable objects such

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as inscriptions or coins (or, to a lesser extent perhaps, on papyrus). This, too, is a mistake, however. First and foremost, students of ancient inscriptions today typically encounter the objects of their studies through editions, either digitally or in print. The number of individuals who encountered inscriptions through the ancient counterparts of our editions was, though not zero (there are several ancient sources that transmit inscriptions as part of their text),<sup>1</sup> insignificant.

The substantially more common experience, however, was one of an encounter *in situ*, just as we navigate the lettered world that we inhabit ourselves today. At the same time, it is important to exercise caution: even cultural practices that we might be inclined to consider universal and lasting – such as reading, writing, or singing – may not necessarily have been (and, in fact, in many ways were not) carried out, perceived, and thought of in the same way that we imagine and implement them in our own societies today.

An especially obvious and well-researched, yet still often neglected and underappreciated case is that of the cultural practice known by the deceptively familiar term “reading”. In most contexts, from our own experience, we are used to individuals reading in silence, and, as anyone who has ever encountered anyone mumbling and reading aloud in a library or in public transport will know, violations of that unwritten rule of cultural behaviour are met with significant dismay. As a number of important studies have established with certainty, this was not the way in which those who were able to read in the Greco-Roman world(s) read: the act of reading typically, and for the longest time, was one of reading out loud,<sup>2</sup> adding an acoustic element to the visual experience of the practice of reading that we ourselves (presumably) do not commonly associate with it, and certainly do not associate with it to the same degree that the people(s) of the Greco-Roman world(s) did.

This issue becomes even more complex and important in such circumstances in which a number of cultural practices are intertwined, most notably in the case of, though not at all restricted to, the practice of inscribing verse: here the production and presentation of verbal art manifests itself in the epigraphic habit, and it is vital to get closer to an improved, more thorough understanding of how such art was perceived, encountered, and met by those exposed to it – those, who did not read it in digital or printed editions, potentially in translation, and those who encountered these texts *in situ*, in their original contexts, rather than in a book or in display in a potentially beautiful, yet still de- and re-contextualizing museum display. How were these texts experienced and “felt” by those who were trying to make sense of

<sup>1</sup> There is substantial literature on the use(s) of inscriptions, actual and fictive, in ancient literature. A useful and still up-to-date collection of contributions on this matter, from a wide range of perspectives, can be found in the edited volume of Liddel and Low 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See the important study by Gavrilov 1997 (with Burnyeat 1997). For a more recent, complex treatment of the matter see Busch 2002. On reading in non-typographical societies cf. also Berti *et al.* 2015.

the inscribed environment that they inhabited?<sup>3</sup> These are the questions that merit attention and further study, and it seems sensible to approach this matter in a way that follows the five senses of the human sensorium, re-establishing the sensuous experience, or at least its conceptualizations, of encounters with inscribed poetry (and in many cases: with the inscribed world in general).

## Sight

The most obvious, primary way in which anyone, at any given time, would encounter inscribed poetry is, of course, visual. Sight is, however, a significantly more complex experience than commonly considered, and productively taken into account, in relevant scholarship on the matter.<sup>4</sup> Recent *Carmina Epigraphica* research has investigated a wide range of aspects related to the visual and graphic presentation of inscribed poetry. In particular, scholarship has focused on the paradigms and strategies behind the ways in which poetic texts were commonly presented, both on their own and in relation to the inscribed monuments as well as, where applicable, prose elements of more complex textual compositions.<sup>5</sup>

The (narrow) focus on the actual object, the micro-context of an actual inscription and its wording in relation to the inscribed monument, is only one aspect that matters when it comes to the visual experience of inscribed poetry, however – and in that it also is the one that is most closely related to our own visual experience, as we still encounter texts from up close, *in situ* just as much as in museums, collections, and galleries.<sup>6</sup> This would not, however, be the way in which people in Roman times initially encountered both inscribed objects and, more specifically, instances of verbal art. Rather, the entire encounter is a complex process, escalating (potentially) through a significant number of steps from distance to intimate proximity and familiarity.

Approach and distance/proximity are only two aspects, however, in a much more complicated framework still. Monuments, portable objects, mosaics, once they are placed (or at least considered) in their original context, interact with their experienceable surroundings in a complex and intricate manner, and they

<sup>3</sup> Further on the notion of a “lettered world” in Roman antiquity see Kruschwitz 2016a. Important observations on enclosed spaces, such as *columbaria* tombs, and the specifics of locally found *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* can be found in Massaro 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Landmark monograph-length studies on this aspect were produced by Squire 2009 and Eastmond 2015, respectively. More generally on the role of sight in the context of ancient discourse(s) about the human sensorium see Squire 2016. A number of aspects considered in this section have also been treated by Schwitter 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Further on the relevance of text layout in the study of the Latin verse inscriptions see del Hoyo 2002; Kruschwitz 2008; and, most notably, the extensive study by Limón Belén 2014.

<sup>6</sup> On the meaning of the context for the act of reading and the comprehension of the text see Berti *et al.* 2015, esp. 641–2, 644–6.

are subject – looking at visual matters alone for now – to a (potentially) carefully designed and shaped presentation and (potentially) changing light conditions.<sup>7</sup>

From the ever-changing and ever-shifting sunlight to artificial light sources such as lamps, candelabras, and torches, these variable sources of light provision contribute to the experience of visual encounters with inscribed poetry just as much as they impact on one's mood and perception: of course it matters a great deal whether one reads a collection of poems in romantic candlelight whilst seated in a comfortable armchair, potentially accompanied by a glass of wine, or under cold, fluorescent striplight in the noisy, draughty waiting area of an airport.

It is not unreasonable to assume that, from the way in which letters were cut and text was presented on a monument down to the actual placement of texts, *e.g.* in tombs or in inhabited quarters, lighting matters were quite carefully considered by those who designed inscribed objects and monuments. This, however, is radically and emphatically different from modern-day experiences of inscriptions, especially in sterile museum environments or (sometimes less sterile) archives and storage facilities, in which the light commonly provided is steady, neutral, and unlike any ancient type of light. The situation does not fundamentally change in research settings, in which tools such as torchlights are employed to bring out details of letters and the monuments overall. One could push this catalogue of once important, now commonly neglected, visual factors even further, and thus increase the complexity and accuracy of our appreciation of ancient monuments, by including into the mix the way in which texts interact with sculpted or paved ornaments and even the properties of the materials that were employed in crafting them.

The relevance of such aspects is obvious, of course, and it is even possible to adduce evidence for an ancient awareness of such relevance. Perhaps one of the most striking examples is a text from third-century AD Bowness-on-Solway in the province of Britannia:<sup>8</sup>

[- - - ?]  
 [Ant?]onianus dedico  
 [s]ed date, ut fetura quaestus  
 suppleat uotis fidem:  
**aureis sacrobo carmen**

<sup>7</sup> Some considerations on the environmental factors that could influence the reading of an inscription are discussed in Susini 1968, 74–8; cf. also Susini 1982, 56, where he refers to *CIL* V 74 as an example of an “iscrizione incisa su superficie aggettante e inclinata, in modo da meglio incontrare l’occhio del lettore” (“an inscription engraved on a protruding, slanted surface in order to support the reader’s eye”). More specifically, cf. Di Stefano Manzella 1987, 158–9, on the red colouring (*rubricatura*) of incised letters. Here, he mentions the possibility of colour and/or plastering employed to correct mistakes in the text. This, in turn, is explored further by Orlandi and Panciera 1999, 583 (with n. 29). Finally, Bolle 2019, 193–249 analyzes the difference between “materiality” and “presence” and studies the latter in several contexts, such as public urban spaces (focusing on the case studies of Aquileia and Ostia), churches and that of invisible inscriptions.

<sup>8</sup> See Kruschwitz 2020, 194–5 for a recent discussion of this piece.

5 *mox uiritim litteris.*

I, [Ant?]onianus, dedicate [- - -]. But give that an increase in earning fills my vows with credibility, (and) **soon I will dedicate this song with golden letters, (executed) one by one.**

(CIL VII 952 = CLE 229 = RIB I 2059)

Here, the dedicant, one Antonianus (?), apparently a tradesman or merchant with a desire to increase his *fetura quaestus* through prayer, marked his initial request for higher profits with a verse inscription, thus making the stone and its poetic decoration a valuable and valid gift to the (in the piece's present state of preservation) unspecified god(s). At the same time, he promised a second votive of this kind, offering to boost the object's value through a precious embellishment of the text by means of filling each individual letter with gold.<sup>9</sup> Colour, material, and ultimately value of every letter counts, and a piece of art, such as a poem,<sup>10</sup> increases in value when it is executed in a more precious material.<sup>11</sup>

It is difficult, though by no means impossible, to accumulate additional useful data, and to extract further meaningful information, about visual aspects from the monuments that survive *in situ* and even from those in collections. What is substantially more difficult, however, is to show conclusively that the motivations behind certain decisions in design and presentation were, in fact, the same ones that are stated in the inscription from Bowness – and that they were the same ones, consistently, in all relevant cases, even if no such thing has explicitly been stated. Methods of experimental archaeology (or epigraphy, more specifically) might be usefully employed in future research on this aspect.

A fine example of how experimental epigraphy is able to yield important clues, and one that is especially relevant to the study of inscribed verse, lies in an experimental approach to the oft-repeated assumption that certain texts placed visual markers at their beginning to reach out, and to reel in, their future audiences – using phrases such as *asta ac pellege*, which are attested in numerous variations hundreds of times across the empire. If one puts this view to the test, simply by walking down a *Gräberstraße* at a reasonable (*i.e.*, not-too-high and not-too-low) pace, walking past a number of

<sup>9</sup> One can be certain that this refers to another (promised) inscription, not the present one. No further inscription by the same dedicant has been found so far, which could either mean that the deities did not find in Antonianus' favour or, equally likely, that someone eventually found what appeared to be a better use for the golden letters than permanently to remain on display.

<sup>10</sup> The idea that texts themselves become precious manifestations of art is a concept that is developed much further in subsequent periods and contexts; see *e.g.*, Rhoby 2017.

<sup>11</sup> This notion also finds its way into funerary *carmina*, where it is used as a form of *laudatio*. See, for example, CIL XI 6551 = CLE 1088: (...) *si meritis possem dare | munera tantum | quanta tibi debent|ur praemia laudis | aureus hic titulus et | littera nominis auro | condecorata legi deb|et* (...) ("If only I were able to present you with such gifts as you deserve as prizes for the praise that you receive, this inscription would have to be made of gold, and the writing of your name should be read in golden decoration"). Further on this topic see Cugusi 1980–1981 and Hernández Pérez 2001, 185–6 (§ 199).

inscribed monuments, *e.g.*, at the cemeteries of a town like Pompeii, one realizes that not only it is impossible to make out any such phrase with sufficient certainty, but that it would be even more impossible to perceive this as any form of imagined competition of tombs reaching out for attention over one another.<sup>12</sup>

So what is the point of this phrase (and its like) then? Is it possible to imagine that their actual point was not, in fact, a visual one at all?

Much recently published research has focused on visual clues in the text layout to communicate the poetic nature of inscribed texts to their respective audiences, separating prose from verse, and highlighting metrical and other compositional structures to an audience.<sup>13</sup> Significantly less attention has been paid to the various forms of reading that may occur, for the first encounter with an inscribed poem, one may safely assume, was hardly ever one of a thorough reading of the text in its entirety and with sufficient attention to detail. It is a long, not always linear, not always successful road from (i) a first encounter and realization that there is, in fact, a text to be read to (ii) the realization that parts of the text, if not all of it, were actually written in verse to (iii) a potential appreciation of the underlying rhythm (which, incidentally, may be a completely overrated aspect in modern-day research as compared to the relevance that this aspect held for those who read the text in the ancient world) to (iv) an initial skim-reading to (v) a potential more detailed (though not necessarily complete, but still selective) engagement with the actual wording of the text.<sup>14</sup>

A second aspect that deserves significantly more attention than it has thus far received is the way in which inscribed poetry shapes, and interacts with, its material and immaterial surroundings. This does include, but is by no means restricted to, the under-researched area of text-monument and text-image interactions in the *Carmina Epigraphica*:<sup>15</sup> this important aspect affects the way in which poetic texts enable(d) their readers to read the entire surrounding landscape just as much as to elucidate structure and notable elements of the texts themselves. A particularly obvious case are acrostics, mesostics, and telestics: allusions to these elements in the texts themselves are frequent,<sup>16</sup> similar, in a way, to the not altogether uncommon

<sup>12</sup> For further considerations on this topic in the context of Pompeii, see Kruschwitz 2016b.

<sup>13</sup> See above, n. 5 and cf. esp. Limón Belén 2014, 43–53 and 96–100 on the devices used to distinguish verse from prose in the verse inscriptions from Rome and Hispania.

<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the levels of proximity involved in ancient modes of reading inscribed texts, as well as their reflection in terminology that is used in this context, see now Kruschwitz 2019, esp. 346–55.

<sup>15</sup> Further on this see Feraudi-Gruénais 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Besides the list of acrostics included by Bücheler in the indexes to his two volumes (*CLE* p. 920), see Krummrey 1963, 285 n. 20 and Barbieri 1975, 364–71, who updated that corpus. Further on the topic, with new updates and extensive bibliography, Sanders 1979 = 1991, 183–205. On acrostic *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* see the superficial study by Amante 1913 and Zarker 1966; on Greek and Latin acrostics, see Courtney 1990. There are a few cases of verse inscriptions that exhibit both acrostics and telestics: Colafrancesco 2012 studies *CLE* 1977 as one such example (Mauretania Caesariensis). See also del Hoyo 2014a, who discusses two relevant medieval *carmina* from Hispania.



poetic desire, including in verse inscriptions, to draw attention to puns, wordplays, and etymologies.<sup>17</sup>

There is more, however. Note, for example, direct references to “aboves” and “belows” *vel sim.* in texts themselves. An especially remarkable example of that is the following one, from Brixia (Brescia):<sup>18</sup>

*L(ucius) Naevidius  
C(ai) f(ilius) Fab(ia tribu) (sex)uir  
Aug(ustalis), sibi et  
Vitali, Faustae, Cnomini,  
5 Fidae libertis  
t(estamento) f(ieri) i(ussit).  
deinde hoc elogium breue:  
[Diu uiuen]do multa uidi in(m)od(a).  
[apto requieui] f(lessus) aeuo tempore.*

Lucius Naevidius, son of Gaius, of the *tribus* Fabia, sevir Augustalis, ordered to have this made according to his testament for himself and the (or: his?) freedwomen (?) Vitalis, Fausta, Gnome, and Fida.

**Then this little poem:**

During my long life, I encountered many adversities. At an appropriate time, tired of this age, I retired.

(CIL V 4445 = CLE 142 = Inscr. It. X 5.234 = EDR090234)

Line 7 preserves an element that in the context of the inscription itself is completely meaningless: *deinde hoc elogium breue*, “then this little poem”. Any reader can see that (i) it is a poem, (ii) it follows what was written before, and (iii) it is short. The only reasonable explanation is, of course, that this was meant to be a directive given to the stonecutter to indicate the tentative layout intended by those who created the overall text and contemplated its final design for the purpose of ideal consumption by subsequent audiences. At the same time, it gives us a clear indication that linear nature and consumption of inscribed texts and poetic elements were carefully planned and structured.<sup>19</sup>

Touching on visual matters and interactions between monuments and readers, it may well be possible to advance even further, however, and to explore if there was any concept of gazes that were, in fact, mutual, directed not just from the reader at the monument, but also in the other direction. A fascinating case in that regard can be seen in the following monument, originating from Beja in the province of Lusitania. Fashioned in the (epigraphically) somewhat rare(r) rhythm of Phalaecian

<sup>17</sup> Further on etymologising names in the Latin verse inscriptions see Michalopoulos 1997.

<sup>18</sup> Further on this inscription see Masaro 2017, 378–81 no. 96.

<sup>19</sup> This notion is perhaps explored to the fullest within the realm of figurative poetry. See, for example, Schmidt 2019 on CIL VIII 28110.



hendecasyllables, this piece renders its readers almost observed in their responses and actions, as the deceased comments on likely emotions with a set of instructions:<sup>20</sup>

- Quisq(uis) praet[eris hic]  
 sitam, uiato[r, postquam]  
 termine legeri[s mori]  
 me aetatis uicesim[o]  
 5 dolebis. **etsi sensus er[it]**  
**meae quietis qu(a)e lasso**  
**tibi dulcius precabor.**  
 uiuas pluribus et diu [se]-  
 nescas qua m[ihi non]  
 10 [l]icu[it] fruar[e] uita. [si]  
**[t]e flere iuuat qu[ui]t(n)i inge[m]-**  
**[i]scis? ann[- - -].** Inachus han[c] m[e]-  
 [ri]to fac(it). i, **potius propera: nam**  
**[tu] legis, ipse legeris: i!** Nice a(nnos) XX u(ixit).

Whoever passes me by, as I lie here, traveller, you will feel pain [after] you have read that I [died] at my life's twentieth boundary-marker. **Even though you will experience a sensation of my own rest, I will pray for a sweeter one for yourself, as you are weary.** May you live for many years and grow older still for a long time: enjoy a life which I was denied. **If you feel like crying, why don't you start?** [...] years. Inachus had (this monument) made deservedly. **Go! Nay: hurry! You read, you will be read yourself! Go!** Nice lived 20 years.

(CIL II 59 = CLE 1553 = IRCP 270 = HEP 2006.440 = AE 2006.564 = HEPol 21142)

The poetic I in this text represents young Nice who had died at the age of 20, expressed both factually and through the remarkable phrase *termine ... peremptam ... aetatis uicesimo*, at life's 20th boundary marker. Nice instigates communication with her audience in a common first-person narrative. The passer-by thus becomes a reader, imagined to interrupt their hurry to another place. The speaker thus purports to know that the traveller must be tired and weary, which makes her wishing them "a sweeter rest" than her own. Obviously, the wordplay with *quies*, denoting "rest" just as much as "death", cannot be lost on any reader, and it will remain an ominous presence throughout the poem.

The highpoint of the exchange, however, lies in a double suggestion of the speaker's awareness of the reader's disposition and action(s), resulting in both a description of what is imagined to be perceived and in instructions given to the reader.

First, Nice predicts the reader's emotional disposition, resulting in her inviting them, while maintaining her overall compassionate and comforting tone, to express their sadness and mourning if they so feel. The observation that the reader may well

<sup>20</sup> Further on this piece see Pena and Carbonell 2006, 157–73. We follow their edition of the text (rather than Bücheler's outdated and more problematic version).

feel like crying at this point (yet potentially feel ashamed to do so), [si] / [t]e flere iuuat, is followed by an encouraging permission: *quitrn(i) inge[m] / [i]scis* (ll. 10–12).

Secondly, there is the poem's closing part, which *prima facie* would see to resort to a topical message: *potius propera nam | [tu] legis ipse legeris*, "Hurry! You read, you will be read yourself", releasing the audience from the exchange and restoring them to their busy everyday lives. This commonplace phrase, however, has been framed in a double imperative *i*, "go". Thus the speaker has been fashioned by the author of this text to exhibit an awareness of how a reader of the text, only just invited to stall their journey, might, in fact, now be very reluctant to leave. In its syntactic and pragmatic design, the next carefully varies and regulates the pace of the instructions given, in triplicate, to the reader through the set of directive expressions: "go, nay: hurry ... now go!"

## Sound

More than in virtually all other contexts of Roman epigraphy, with the possible exception of curse tablets, the acoustic aspect<sup>21</sup> is of the utmost importance when it comes to inscribed verse. Since the process of close and careful reading in the Greco-Roman world was – as already stated above – one of reading the text out loud, there is no need to discuss the general relevance of the acoustic dimension of inscribed Roman verse. One must bear this aspect in mind, however, and ponder its implications, when interpreting texts such as the aforementioned Nice epitaph: if an inscribed text, in verse no less, is written with a first-person speaker role, this will, by default, and inevitably so, become a role, almost theatrically, to be taken on by, and associated with, the reader. In funerary environments, such as the one imagined in the Nice epitaph, the living reader would thus, in actual, become the deceased incarnate – a living surrogate of, and proxy for, the deceased in the environment of the burial.

But first things first. The most obvious manifestations of sound in Roman verse inscriptions must, of course, be seen in their extensive use of stylistic devices such as assonances, alliterations, homoioteleuta, and so forth – features that link inscribed manifestations of Roman verse with general practice in Greco-Roman poetic style. These elements become all the more apparent in instances such as the following one, from Pompeii (Fig. 7.1). In this piece visual clues of a figurative poem (here: a snake, to invoke the *serpentis lusus* of a performer called Sepumius) are combined with sound elements (here: repeated use of hissing S-sounds, wherein art emulates serpents' nature):

<sup>21</sup> For a recent and comprehensive collection of studies on this topic see Butler and Nooter 2019. Cf. also Webster 2019, 119–24, specifically on how magic words on healing amulets or curse tablets in the Greco-Roman world had no specific meaning, but reproduced sounds whose repetition would grant the desired effect.

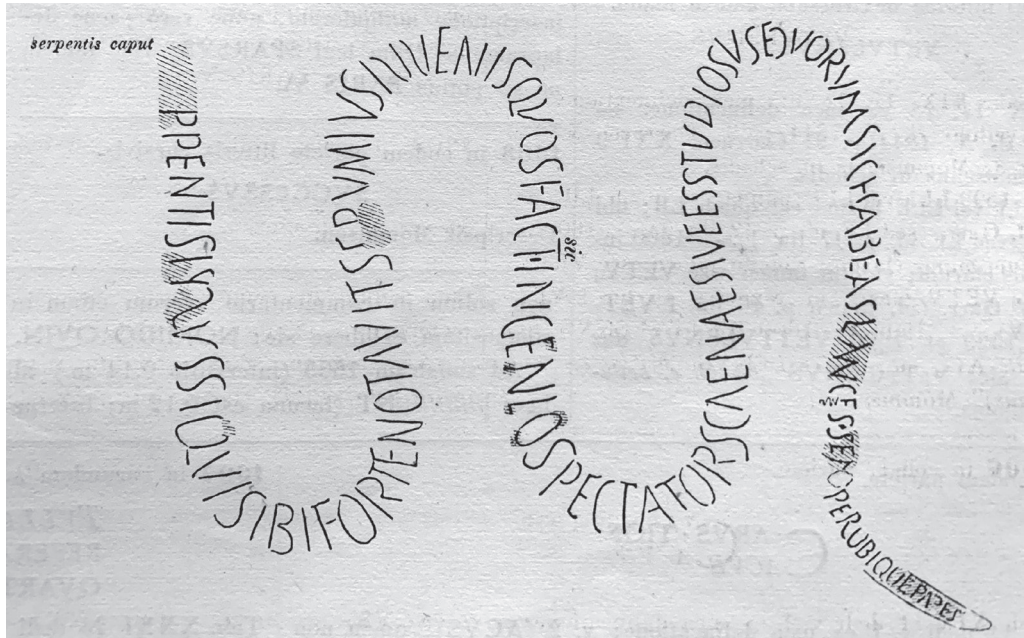


Fig. 7.1: CIL IV 1595. Line drawing from CIL.

[Ser]pentis lusus si qui sibi forte notauit Sepumius iuuenis quos fac(i)t ingenio spectator scaenae siue es studiosus equorum sic habeas [lan]ces se[mp]er ubiq[ue] pares].

Should someone happen to notice the serpent's playfulness that young Sepumius makes in his witty manner, be you a spectator of stage performances or keen on horses, may you thus have your scales in balance, always, everywhere.

(CIL IV 1595 (cf. p. 209, 463) = CLE 927 = EDR170352)

The soundscape of Roman verse inscriptions is neither one-dimensional nor exclusively linked to the decoration of the text by means of striking stylistic features, however.

To appreciate the significance – and power – of texts that are being read out loud, it is instructive to ponder the mythical story of the apple of Cydippe: Cydippe's creepy admirer Acontius threw an inscribed apple in front of her, and when Cydippe picked up this apple and read the inscription (aloud!), this immediately set in motion a spell.<sup>22</sup> It is with that in mind that one ought to consider the relevance of sound, not only for the readers themselves, but for those surrounding them.

The (ancient) reality of experiencing epigraphic verse through an acoustic channel is explicitly mentioned in an also otherwise extraordinary inscription from Sulmo (Sulmona), Ovid's birthplace. In this piece, a man called Murranus presents himself

<sup>22</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of this story cf. Kruschwitz 2010a, 46–51.

as a barbarian from Pannonia, who tragically lost all of his six children, and even contemplated ending his own life, had it not been for the survival of a grandson. In this (in every respect) unique text, with an underlying iambic rhythm, Murranus eventually addresses his audience in second- or third-century AD Sulmo:

(...) rogo at nu[nc]  
 inprecamus deos ut si quis hoc sephulcr[um]  
 40 aut hunc titulum laeserit in[tulerit illi?]  
 fortuna mala et quod mer[itu]m sit [hunc]  
**titulumque quicumque legerit aut lege[ntem]**  
**ausculta(ue)rit** alleuet illos for[tuna]  
 superior et ualeant semper [in aeterno?]  
 45 quicumque in hoc titulo scrip[ta legerit]  
 quietis sit uobis terra leuis et [- -]  
 desperatum qui superant [- -]  
 tempore obito sit [- -].

I ask: let us now implore the gods that, if anyone damages this tomb or this inscription, they may thrust ill fate on such a person and whatever else is deserved; **but whoever reads this inscription or listens to someone reading it out**, may a more desirable fate comfort them and may they flourish forever and ever (?): whoever reads what is written in this inscription, may you find peace and may earth be light on you. (...)

(CIL IX 7164 = Suppl. It. 4 (1988), Sulmo 58 = AE 1989.247 = EDR114466, ll. 38–48)

Not only does this passage contain a vital clue as to how those whose literacy levels were below the required standard to engage with inscriptions and inscribed verse as readers were still able to engage and to participate in a meaningful way (namely acoustically):<sup>23</sup> it also (i) demonstrates that reading out texts aloud was a common, anticipated practice, and (ii) provides a useful idea of how a more substantial audience could be attracted by, and get involved in, the re-enactment of a text that initially served a very specific purpose in the act of (in this case) a burial. What is more, once this acoustic dimension is taken into account, assigning an audible performance to a monument and its text, it also becomes abundantly clear that objects do not by themselves reach out to their audiences: phrases such as *asta ac pellege*, as mentioned above in the section on sight (see also n. 12), become specific and meaningful as soon as one imagines a reader who produces this text in a form that allows others to hear what they are reading (and therefore saying).<sup>24</sup>

The ritual dimension of such acoustic productions and re-enactments of monumental verse (and texts more generally) must not be underestimated. This affects a wide range of issues, not least the widely observed habit to produce *iscrizioni*

<sup>23</sup> This was duly noted by Bodel 1993.

<sup>24</sup> To this one should add the more than likely presence of ambient noises such as crying, lamenting, or even songs and music from a nearby *pompa funebris*. Further on these, as elements of the funerary ceremony, see for example Wille 1967, 65–73 and, more recently, Carroll 2011.

*parlanti*, i.e., texts that would appear to speak in the first-person:<sup>25</sup> this habit becomes a lot less puzzling once one bears in mind that the text would be read out loud by someone who thus would make a statement in the first person about themselves (or the individual they represent in their role as readers). This leads to a second, even more significant matter, namely the observation that there are several instances in which *Carmina Epigraphica* in the funerary record do not only imagine, but clearly articulate, the notion of the living speaker effectively taking on the (almost theatrical,<sup>26</sup> certainly ritualized) role of the deceased, restoring their voice in the act:<sup>27</sup>

*carpis si qui [uia]s, paulum huc depone la[borem].  
cur tantum proper(as)? non est mora dum leg(is), audi  
lingua tua uiuum mitique tua uoce loquentem.  
oro libens libe[n]s releg(as), ne taedio duc(as), amice*

If you there seize these ways, let go of the stress for a short while: why such a rush? **There is no time wasted while you read: listen to a living person who talks in your tongue and with your gentle voice.** I ask you to read this favourably, favourably, so that you will not derive dislike, my friend.

(CIL XI 627 (cf. p. 1236) = CLE 513, ll. 1–4)

This passage does not only provide evidence for an imagination and conceptualization of the dead as communicating through the voices of the living. It goes beyond that through its qualification of the reading voice as *mitis ... uox*, a “gentle voice” to be employed by the reader, adding tone (warmth and calm) to the disembodied and re-embodied transmission from beyond the grave.

The types of voice modulation requested by the dedicants of readers of funerary monuments vary, and in several instances they are seen to reflect the circumstances and personality of the deceased. An excellent example of that is the (unfortunately lost) inscription for Calethyce (*sic!*), from Hispalis (Sevilla), in the province of Baetica:<sup>28</sup>

*[C]alethyc(h)e  
ann(orum) XXII.  
Siste gradum quicumque precor paulumque morare  
[di]sces summisso carmina maesta sono  
5 infelix primo flore sepulta soror  
mirum [- - -] uiuus  
et bis ut undenos inuida morte premor  
[M]anibus ara m[eis - - -]ta in[- - -]  
[- - -] funera nostra [- - -]*

<sup>25</sup> On “iscrizioni parlanti” see Agostiniani 1982 and, for a historical perspective, Gregori 2008. For a comprehensive study of interlocutor arrangements in the Latin verse inscriptions, see Socas 2002.

<sup>26</sup> In that regard, the use of death masks in certain circles may have added to the theatrical, performative nature of the act; cf. also Flower 1996, 114–15.

<sup>27</sup> Further on this notion see Carroll 2007–2008.

<sup>28</sup> Further on this inscription see Martín Camacho 2010, 249–62 (SE7).

- 10 [- - -]la quicumque ui[debit]  
 [- - -] cineri terra sit usq(ue) [leuis]  
 [- - -] miseris etiam solacia pra[estat - - -]  
 [et quos turb]a terit laeta frequenter [- - -]  
 infelix quod sum [- - -] uide  
 15 [- - - - -]  
 S(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(euis).

Calethyce, aged 22.

Stall your step, please, whoever you are, and rest a little: **you shall hear sad verses, subdued in tone.**

My unfortunate sister has been buried here, in the flower of her youth ... wondrous... alive ...

So, as at the age of twice eleven years, I am in envious death's firm possession, ... an altar to the Spirits of the Departed ... our death ... whoever beholds ...: 'May the earth forever rest lightly on your ashes.' ... (offer) the wretched these words of consolation also . ... crushing ... happy frequently, as I am ill-fated ... behold ...

May the earth rest lightly on you.

(CIL II 1094 = CLE 1195 = HEPol 499)

Passers-by who chose to engage with Calethyce's monument encountered a deeply moving poem, in sad verses, and they did so equipped with the advice to read those lines softly with a subdued voice (*summisso ... sono*, l. 4). The reader, reading the text by and for themselves, though within earshot of further passers-by, thus adopts the voice of young Calethyce, keeping not only her memory, but her very voice alive from beyond the grave. The dead person thus remained an audible, though obviously not tangible, presence even after their burial, giving wayfarers a credible reason to express the ubiquitous wish "may earth rest lightly on you" directed at the deceased.

Very little is known about performative practicalities behind the apparent connection of verse (especially when produced by the human voice) and music. Verse inscriptions that were read out loud thus fall somewhere into a not altogether well understood grey area between rhythmical text and song. Songs and music, however, are complementary aspects of an integrated Roman soundscape that is now almost completely lost to us. Work songs, theatre, holy music, children's rhymes and funerary music were, as in every society, part of everyday life.<sup>29</sup> It is perfectly possible that individuals produced verse inscriptions with some kind of melody (in addition to a verse rhythm) – an aspect that is significantly more tangible in the Greek hemisphere, whence annotations of verse inscriptions are known. This aspect was not irrelevant to the authors of Latin verse inscriptions, however, as a funerary monument from the Roman cemetery of Aquincum (Budapest), in the province of Pannonia goes to prove. This text takes its readers to a world of musical professionals in the context

<sup>29</sup> These aspects are covered, *passim*, in the already mentioned unsurpassed evidence collection produced by Wille 1967. For a more recent approach to this topic see Perrot 2020.



of the Roman army. Its text, consisting of hexameters and a closing elegiac couplet, reads as follows:<sup>30</sup>

- Clausa iacet lapidi (!) coniunx pia cara Sab[[d]]ina.  
 artibus edocta superabat sola maritu-  
 m. uox ei grata fuit, pulsabat pollice cordas (!).  
 set (!) cito rapta silet. ter denos duxerat annos, he-  
 u male quinque minus, set (!) plus tres meses (!) habebat,  
 bis septemque dies uixit. Hec (!) ipsa superstes spectata in po-  
 pulo hydraula grata regebat. **sis felix quicumque leges (!), te  
 numina seruent, et pia uoce cane: Aelia Sabina uale.** T(itus) Ael(ius) Iustus  
 hydraularius salariarius leg(ionis) II Ad(iutricis) coniugi faciendum curauit.*

Locked under this tombstone my dear and devoted wife Sabina does lie. She was educated in the arts, she was the only one who managed to overcome her husband. She had a charming voice, she plucked the strings with her fingers, but now, snatched quickly, she is silent. Twenty five years she had lived, alas!, and three months and fourteen days. While still alive, she was popular, admired as a magnificent organist she ruled everyone. **You who read this, whoever you are, be happy: may the gods protect you, and may you sing with a respectful voice: Farewell, Aelia Sabina.**

Titus Aelius Iustus, water-organ player and *salariarius* of the legio II Adiutrix, had this made for his wife.

(CIL III 10501 = CLE 489 = HD068458)

The funerary monument, datable to the early third century AD, was dedicated by one Titus Aelius Iustus, ex-soldier of *legio II Adiutrix*, who had been recalled to his unit, probably with the non-military task of playing the *hydraula*. Iustus praises his wife Aelia Sabina, who, according to his commemoration of her, surpassed him in the art of playing the *hydraula* as well as in her singing. Aelia Sabina's death is described by him in a brief and evocative way, explicitly referring to matters of acoustics and music a number of times. Sound and music come to an abrupt end, however, through Sabina's sudden death: *sed cito rapta silet*. But this silence is not a lasting one. In the last two verses of the inscription, forming an elegiac couplet (and thus a change in tune also from a rhythmical standpoint), Iustus addresses his readership and asks them to greet his dead wife, and to do so through singing with a respectful intonation of the voice: *pia uoce cane*.

Manifestations of the human voice are not the only factors, however, that constitute the soundscape that surrounds the Latin verse inscriptions. Ambient noises contribute a great deal, whether they are those of nature or those of settlements, and, of course, these matters are taken into consideration and conceptualized on occasion. One such circumstantial trigger, responsible for an entire set of verse inscriptions, in Greek and

<sup>30</sup> Further on this piece see *TitAq* II 519; Courtney 1995, 114–15, 324 no. 115; Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2007, 82–5 (CLEPann 36); cf. also <http://lupa.at/3025> (last accessed: October 2020).



Latin, is the “singing” of the Memnon statue at the Theban necropolis at Luxor.<sup>31</sup> To mention but one example from this context:<sup>32</sup>

*Memnonis [Aethiopsis uocem]  
clarumque sonor[em]  
exanimi inanimem mi[ssum]  
de tegmine bruto*  
5 *auribus ipse meis cepi  
sumsique canorum  
praefectus Gallorum al[ae]  
praefectus item Ber(enices)  
Caesellius Quinti f[il(ius)]*  
10 *A Barmo[- - -]. (or: A Bararo?)*

I myself absorbed and took in with my own ears the voice of Aethiopian Memnon and the distinct harmonious sound, animate though emitted from an insensible, inanimate surface – I, Caesellius ... , son of Quintus, prefect of the troop of Gauls and prefect of Bere(?)nice.

(CIL III 55 = CLE 272; transl. E. Courtney, modified)

This piece would be remarkable enough in and of itself for its extensive reference to sounds and imaginations of animated objects, of course. In the present context, however, what is especially noteworthy is the clear reference to the sound as something that must be seen in connection with (i) the presence of the author and (ii) the production of the very poem, which responds to what was heard from an object that is imagined to keep making such noises in the future.<sup>33</sup>

Acoustic elements are mentioned as essential for the setting and experience of verse inscriptions in conjunction with additional sensory factors in a number of occasions and in a number of contexts. An example of that can be seen in verse inscriptions that originate from, and are related to, the Roman bathhouses. Here, both tactile and auditory elements appear simultaneously (and are presented as complementary),<sup>34</sup> e.g. when texts refer to the cold water (with a power to extinguish the warming fire)<sup>35</sup> in

<sup>31</sup> For a recent edition and discussion of these texts (after that of Bernand and Bernand 1960) see Rosenmeyer 2018, who provides a comprehensive overview of the extant texts on pp. 211–40.

<sup>32</sup> Further on this piece see Bernand and Bernand 1960, 54–6 no. 14; Courtney 1995, 90–1, 298–9 no. 76; Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2011, 178, 216–17 (CLEOr 39).

<sup>33</sup> An especially remarkable case is that of CIL III 77 = III 12076 = CLE 271 from Talmis (Kalabsha, Egypt), which, like many other inscriptions, refers to the sounds of the Memnon colossi that, as is implied, went silent, and resumed activity, in response to political changes. Further on this inscription cf. Courtney 1995, 50–3, 245–6 no. 26.

<sup>34</sup> On verse inscriptions from, and more generally ancient poetry related to, bathhouses see Busch 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. e.g., CIL VIII 25362 (= CLE 1754 = 2039 = ILS 8960 = ILCV 787 = ILTun 1154 = ILPBardo 432 = AE 1908.29 = 78 (add.) = 1999.1758 (add.) = 2016.1832 (add.), from Tunis), IRT 918 (= 919 = Zarker 1958, no. 21 = Cugusi 2012, 90 = Cugusi 2012, 116 = Cugusi 2014, 4 = AE 1929.7 = 1987.993 (add.) = 1995.1641 (add.) = 1999.1760 = 2014.1476 (add.) = 2016.1834 (add.), from Bu Njem), and Riese, AL 212 (= Monceaux 1906, 264 no. 160, from Carthage).

contrast with descriptions of natural springs from where water flows freely, falling onto the rocks, thus producing harmonious sounds.<sup>36</sup> In the context of bathhouses one must, of course, also imagine the soundscape that is related to human activities there: the ancient sources relate vivid depictions of substantial noise and big crowds in these settings, especially in the big thermal complexes of the city of Rome.<sup>37</sup>

## Touch

The topic of sensations of hot and cold temperatures leads on to the much wider realm of tactile experiences – an area that has remained altogether under-researched.<sup>38</sup> What is more, considering the wide range of contexts in which inscribed verse can be found, and considering the breadth of inscribed materials in the context of Rome's inscribed world in general, any attempt at describing tactile interactions with verse in its material form is bound to remain incomplete or overly generalizing: an inscribed cup or spoon brings about forms of sensory experiences that are necessarily different from those one would imagine in the context of a mosaic, a tombstone, a graffito, and so forth. An aspect that might meaningfully be explored through future archaeological research is the way in which specific wear and tear of inscribed objects might give us important clues as to how individuals in the ancient world physically interacted with their monuments and inscribed objects. Without such datasets, one must necessarily rely on speculation, common sense, and a small number of verbal clues that might help to reconstruct physical interactions involving the sense of touch.

One important aspect that unites a wide range of text types, as well as their monumental manifestations, is the important matter of their being sacred objects, *i.e.*, objects that are marked as belonging to, as being the rightful property, of the divine sphere and its fearsome representatives.<sup>39</sup> This does not only include inscriptions of an obvious religious nature (such as votives and dedications), but also tombstones and

<sup>36</sup> See for example an inscription from the mosaic floor of the *frigidarium* in a small bathhouse in Sullectum (Africa Proconsularis), published for the first time in AE 1968.610: *En! perfecta cito baiaru(m) grata voluptas | undantesque fluunt aq(uae) saxi de rupe sub ima | nisibus hic nostris prostratus libor (!) anhelat | quisquis amat fratrum veniat mecumq(ue) laetetur*. ("Look! The pleasant delight of the bathhouse has recently been completed and the waters flow freely from the highest rock. Struck down by our efforts, Envy struggles for breath. Whoever of the brothers loves me, should come and bathe with me"). In the small thermal complex, the building was combined with a natural spring discharging its water from a towering rock, whence fresh water fell, forming waves upon hitting the surface (*undantes aquae*); further on this inscription see Busch 1999, 235–9.

<sup>37</sup> See *e.g.*, CIL VI 9797 = VI 33815a = VI 41107a = CLE 29 = ILS 5173 for a lively image of everyday life at the *thermae* in Rome; cf. Schmidt 1999 (= AE 1999.207) for an interpretation of this piece. Topically, Seneca (*ad Lucil.* 56.2), complained about the manifold noises that came with living above the baths, which made it impossible for him to concentrate.

<sup>38</sup> For a recent collection of relevant essays, though not specifically on epigraphic material, see Purves 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Further on this cf. *e.g.*, Scheid 2019, 68 on private votive altars and objects, and 78–9 on necropoleis and tombstones.

graves in general (thus being relevant the vast majority of all instances of inscribed verse of the Roman world). References to the sacred nature of an object and its environs are a common occurrence, generally in Roman epigraphy as well as in the verse inscriptions in particular. This extends to specific appeals to individuals and groups to refrain from physical interference with such structures, especially with a view to forms of desecration through additional burials, to violation of the existing burial, to defecation, and to vandalism.<sup>40</sup> A straightforward example – one of many – can be seen in a late antique text from the city of Rome addressing its audience thus:

*Sic tibi perpetuo sint, lector, uota secunda:  
parce pios Manes sollicitare manu.*

Thus, dear reader, your prayers shall be answered in perpetuity: refrain from bothering the pious Spirits of the Departed with your hand.

(CIL VI 36655 = ICVR VIII 23359 = CLE 1468 = EDB35220)

A more complex approach to the same directive – “do not desecrate!” – is found in the following piece from the city of Rome:

*Dis Manibus Maeuiae Sophes.  
C(aius) Maenius Cimber, coniugi sanctissimae  
et conseruatrici, desiderio spiritus mei,  
quae uixit mecum an(nos) XIII, menses III, dies XIII.  
5 Quod uixi cum ea sine querella;  
nam nunc queror apud (!) Manes eius et flagito  
Ditem aut et me reddite coniugi meae, quae  
mecum uixit tan (!) concorde (!) ad fatalem diem.  
Meuia Sophe, impetra, si quae sunt, Manes, ni  
10 tam scelestum discidium experiscar diutius.  
**hospes, ita post obitum sit tibe (!) terra leuis, ut tu  
hic nihil laeseris, aut, si quis laeserit, nec superis  
comprobetur nec inferi recipiant, et sit ei terra grauis.***

To the Spirits of the Departed of Maevia Sophe. Gaius Maenius Cimber to the most blessed and caring wife, beloved by my soul, who lived with me 18 years, 3 months and 13 days.

As I lived with her without any fight, now I beg her spirits of the departed and implore Ditis: send me also to join my bride, who lived with me in such harmony until the last day. And you, Mevia Sophe, implore your spirits, if they exist, that I do not have to suffer for so long a cruel separation. **Stranger, may the earth be light on you after**

<sup>40</sup> Further on this see Kruschwitz 2010b and del Hoyo 2014b. See also Hernández Pérez 2013, who studies the inscriptions that try to dissuade electoral propagandists from vandalising the monuments, and Caruso 2004. This protection was also sought after through the iconography. Often, the sacrality and inviolability of the funerary space was represented by an *ascia*, symbol of protection of the grave (see Cenati 2017 for this aspect in the city of Rome). For a general analysis of this symbol and its origins, see Couchoud and Audin 1952.

**your death, if you do not violate this grave: if someone violates it, may neither the Gods of Heaven accept him, nor the Infernal Spirits welcome him, and may the earth weigh heavy upon him.**

(CIL VI 7579 = CLE 2170 = EDR107816)

Examples can easily be multiplied,<sup>41</sup> and they are not restricted to the funerary sphere.<sup>42</sup> What is more, they are not always restricted to requests to avoid interference altogether. An especially interesting piece of evidence in that regard is the following inscription from Eboracum (York) in Britain, in which reference to touch is made in an iambic senarius that was added at the end (mostly in draft form, not fully executed in monumental script beyond a mere tracing of the letters):<sup>43</sup>

D[eo sancto]  
 Silua[no s(acrum)].  
 L(ucius) Celerini(?)us  
 Vitalis corni(cularius)  
 5 leg(ionis) VIII His(panae)  
 u(otum) s(oluit) l(aetus) l(ibens) m(erito).  
**et donum hoc, donum**  
**adpertiniat: cautum attigam.**

Sacred to the saint god Silvanus.

Lucius Celerin(i?)us Vitalis, *cornicularius* of the *legio IX Hispana*, has happily, gladly, and deservedly paid his *votum*.

And this gift, let the gift pertain: I shall touch it with care and respect.

(RIB I 659 = HD069924)

No explicit instructions, in the negative as well as in the positive, would have been worth inscribing at some expense, of course, if they had not been of relevance in practice (in practical terms of preventing destruction as well as on a level of showing respect for sacred items).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. e.g., CIL VI 10237 (cf. p. 3502, 3908 = CIL XIV \*417 = CLE 371 = ILS 07870 = EDR126012, from Rome): (...)*impensae causam titulum qui perlegis audi | et iustam quaeso pietatis percipe curam | qui(bu)s vera ut cupiant concorde uiuere mens est | hos animos spectent atq(ue) haec exempla sequantur | haec loca dum uiuent libeat bene cuncta tueri | post obitumq(ue) suum tradant tum deinde futuris | ne deserta uacent ignotis deuia busta | sed tuta aeterno maneant si dicere fas est* ("listen to the cause of these expenses, you who read this epitaph, and understand, please, the inevitable concern that arises from devotion. Those for whom the true intention is to live in harmony, as they wish, shall observe these souls and follow their examples. As long as they live, they shall protect all these places, and after their death, they shall then leave them to their successors, so that these isolated graves will not be abandoned in the hands of unknown people, but remain protected forever, if it is possible to say so").

<sup>42</sup> Bücheler suggested that the fragment that is CIL VI 30117 (cf. p. 3736) = CLE 1469 might have pertained to a fountain of some description. It is much more likely, however, that it originally was part of a funerary inscription: cf. Orlandi *ad* EDR142152.

<sup>43</sup> Further on this inscription see Kruschwitz 2017; 2020, 184–5.

This latter observation has a number of significant implications that must be explored further in a different context: what does it mean, for example, if a human, through touch, creates a connection to a sacred object and thus, ultimately, to the divine sphere, from a ritual point of view? How does a tactile experience relate to the immediate environs, and human motion within this space,<sup>44</sup> adding a multi-dimensional (spatial) facet to the initially predominantly superficial and two-dimensional tactile experience, in which ritual(s), motion, and inscribed memory become a whole.

It is certainly possible to push the aspect of touch much further still, *e.g.*, through a careful examination of references to common tactile experience such as “heavy” and “light”, “hard” and “soft”, “hot” and “cold”.<sup>45</sup> This must be left aside for now, however, not only because of space restrictions, but because these matters, though mentioned with some frequency, are rarely filled with meaning beyond the topical, preventing, to an extent, a clear understanding of their impact on the experiences, actions, and behaviours of those who encountered inscribed verse in the Roman world in terms of their practical significance.

## Smell

Spaces are not only filled with tangible, experienceable objects and sounds, of course, but also – in many cases – marked by specific constant or recurring olfactory experiences.<sup>46</sup> These, too, at least to an extent contribute, and relate, to ritual and memory. It is a well-known fact that scent can be a trigger that may bring back powerful emotions and memories. Precisely this phenomenon appears to be the background of an emphatically sensuous memory of the smell of the deceased’s homeland as it is mentioned in a fragmentary inscription from Cirta (Constantine, Numidia, Algeria). The inscription commemorates one Publius Sittius Optatus, and it does so by invoking a combination of smell, colour, and perception of nature:<sup>47</sup>

*Qui properas, quaeso, tar-  
da, uiator, iter, ut paucis  
discas cum genus (!) exitium.*

<sup>44</sup> Note, for example, instances in which the reader is requested to “rise” (*surgere* vel sim.) before departure such as *CIL* VI 9938 (cf. p. 3471 = XI \*104.2 = *CLE* 989) or *CIL* VI 21521 (cf. p. 3526 = VI 34137 = *CLE* 1109).

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, *CLE* 1147.3-4: *nunc si qu(i)d* Manes sapiunt in mollibus umbris conprecator ut matris sit tibi gratus honos (“now, if the spirits of the departed are able to discern in the soft shadows, I pray that your mother’s offering is pleasing to you”). Here, *umbrae* (the underworld), something untouchable, are referred to as *mollis* (soft), which is an adjective that is linked, in its most denotative meaning, to the tactile world. The choice of this word could have been influenced, in turn, by the semantic proximity with *levis*, used in this funerary context within expressions as *sit tibi terra levis* and such.

<sup>46</sup> For a recent collection of articles on smell and the human sensorium in the ancient world see Bradley 2015. This collection contains an article by Butler 2015 that aims to make “scents” of poetry, but does not cover its inscribed dimension(s).

<sup>47</sup> Further on this piece see Hamdoune *et al.* 2011, 206–9 no. 123.

- non externa satus Scythi-  
 5 ca de gente Syrorum,  
 [s]um satus Aethna, uiros ub[i]  
 cingunt Anspagae moles.  
 cognitus est locus amoenis-  
 simus Alba, **in qua frondicoma**  
 10 **odoratur ad mare pinus, Daphne**  
**pudica ui[ret, sa]lit et loco uitrea Na[is].**  
 (...)

Wayfarer, as you are rushing along, please stall your journey, so that you may learn in a few words about my end in conjunction with my origins. Not a scion of the exotic Scythian branch of Syrians, I am the offspring of Etna, hailing from where the waves of Ampsaga enclose men. This most beautiful place is known as Alba, **where the leafy pine tree exudes its scent towards the sea, where bashful Daphne [i.e., laurel] is green, and where the crystalline Naiad leaps.** (...)

(CIL VIII 7759 (cf. p. 966) = VIII 19478 = *ILAlg* II.1.831 =  
*CLE* 1327 = *AE* 2006.145, ll. 1–11)

The link between scent and the emotive response(s) they trigger is not only important, of course, in bringing back powerful memories. To the present day, smellscape, at least in certain contexts, are deliberately designed to affect our emotions and to shape our behaviours and responses. Their relevance in, and their impact on, our reading habits specifically, however, certainly as far as the ancient world is concerned, have not yet been thoroughly researched. Yet, as anyone who has ever picked up, *e.g.*, a freshly printed newspaper or an old book, with the typical vanilla-scent of its slowly disintegrating paper, or who has entered an antiquarian bookshop with its unique, overwhelming smell, knows and can confirm, reading experiences and our sense of smell are by no means separate entities. As books in the Roman world were made of organic material and then treated with fragrant substances to prevent their decay, and as they were in many instances stored in libraries with purpose-built furniture and even purpose-built and designed rooms (to stall decay even further), experiences comparable to modern-day ones existed beyond any reasonable doubt. But what about monumental environments, monumental settings for encounters with poetry and verse?<sup>48</sup>

It is fair to say that (similar to, say, lighting conditions) smellscape are as varied as there are numbers of settings, and they may, of course, also vary within a very short period of time. In that regard, it will remain impossible to construct an accurate picture of such settings. If one were to imagine, for example, the smellscape around a dining or living room mosaic, with its imagery, decoration, and a poetic addition, both light and smell would vary depending on the time of day, and, for example, the provision of foodstuffs and drinks, resulting in a potentially very complex scenario in

<sup>48</sup> Some aspects of this section have previously been presented to a wider audience by Kruschwitz 2015.

which perceptions of read texts (and their aesthetics and wording) might potentially change rather significantly.

There are, however, scenarios for which at least a certain stability may be surmised, and there is evidence for such stability even being imagined and expressed in the surviving evidence. Unsurprisingly, this is especially true for the funerary record.<sup>49</sup> In the funerary sphere, there are two concurrent, yet contradictory aspects to be addressed: unpleasant smells, related to the inevitable presence of mortal remains, and pleasant smells, either related to the natural environment or designed and planned by those who were responsible for the burials. Mentions of both aspects can be found in the surviving record, usually in conjunction, as the latter often was a response arisen as a necessity out of the former.

A first clue in that regard is a line in an inscription from Hadrumetum (Sousse, Tunisia). The remains of one Lucius Ummidius (who had died at a relatively young age of 32 and a half years, and was buried by his brother Peregrinus) were described as having been buried as follows:

*Sola quies retinet tumulo tellure manentem. //*<sup>50</sup>  
*condidimus cineres **latebris et odoribus** ossa.*

This is the only rest that holds you now, remaining in this earth as your tomb. We covered the ashes and bones **with shelter and fragrances**.

(CIL VIII 22971 = CLE 1829, ll. 9–10)

Here, *latebrae* – adding a visual component of obscurity combined with a notion of a hiding place – is employed alongside *odores*, “fragrances” or scents, to envelop the *cineres* of the deceased, bedding the remains in a safe, olfactorily pleasant environment, for him to remain in this spot forever (*retinet ... tellure manentem*).<sup>51</sup>

Similarly complex experiences are mentioned in the following piece from the city of Rome, in a highly moving epitaph for one Marcus Lucceius Nepos that, despite its length, is worth quoting in full.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Similarly, for a non-funerary example of smell and scent as an important aspect for the general setting in the Latin verse inscriptions see CIL XIV 3565 = CLE 1504, ll. 12–22, a phallic herm dedicated to the Genius of Priapus in a Hercules sanctuary at Tibur. Here the fragrant garlands donated to Priapus (*olentes coronae*) are opposed to criminals that are imagined to be dirty with mud and blood.

<sup>50</sup> The first nine lines are aligned to the left, to make an acrostic stand out; lines 10 ff. are moved further to the right. For an image see [http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=\\$CLEafrique\\_00002.jpg](http://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?bild=$CLEafrique_00002.jpg) (last accessed: December 2020).

<sup>51</sup> A similar idea is expressed in CIL IX 7447 = CLE 1321 (Aternum, Samnium): (...) *Ninnius et cinerem spargit odore gemens* (“Ninnius scattered among laments the ashes with perfume”). Furthermore, see CIL VI 30102 = CLE 1508 (Rome) where the wish of the dedicant is mentioned to adorn the grave with garlands and to keep an oil lamp with nard: *parcas oro uiro puella parcas | ut possit tibi plurimos per annos | cum sertis dare iusta quae dicauit | et semper uigilet lucerna nardo*.

<sup>52</sup> See Bianchini et al. 2020 for a recent study of this piece.



- Memoriae M(arci) Luccei M(arci) f(ili) Nepotis Sex(tus) Onussanii Se[x(ti)] f(ilius) Com[- - -] ||  
 Quum praematura raptum mihi morte Nepotem  
 flerem Parcarum putria fila querens  
 et gemerem tristi damnatam sorte iuuentam  
 5 uersaretque nouus uiscera tota dolor,  
 me desolatum, me desertum ac spoliatum  
 clamarem largis saxa mouens lacrimis,  
 exacta prope nocte suos quum Lucifer ignes  
 spargeret et uolucris roscidus iret equo,  
 10 uidi sidereo radiantem lumine formam  
 aethere delabi. Non fuit illa quies,  
 sed uerus iuueni color et sonus, at status ipse  
 maior erat nota corporis effigie.  
 ardentis oculorum orbis umerosq(ue) nitentis  
 15 ostende(n)s roseo reddidit ore sonos:  
 “adfinis memorande, quid o me ad sidera caeli  
 ablatum quereris? desine flere deum. ||  
 ne pietas ignara superna sede receptum  
 lugeat et laedat numina tristitia.  
 20 non ego Tartareas penetrabo tristis ad undas,  
 non Acheronteis transuehar umbra uadis,  
 non ego caeruleam remo pulsabo carinam  
 nec te terribilem fronte timebo, Charon,  
 nec Minos mihi iura dabit grandaevus et atris  
 25 non errabo locis nec cohibebor aquis.  
 surge, refer matri ne me noctesque diesque  
 defleat ut maerens Attica mater Ityn.  
 nam me sancta Venus sedes non nosse silentum  
 iussit et in caeli lucida templa tulit.”  
 30 **erigor et gelidos horror perfuderat artus;**  
**spirabat suauis tinctus odore locus.**  
 die Nepos, seu tu turba stipatus Amorum  
 laetus Adoneis lusibus insereris. ||  
 seu grege Pieridum gaudes seu Palladis [arte],  
 35 omnis caelicolum te chor[u]s exc[ipiet].  
 si libeat thyrsus grauidis aptara co[rymbis]  
 et uelare comam palmitum, Liber [eris];  
 pascere si crinem et lauro redimire [- - -]  
 arcum cum pharetra sumere, Ph[oebeus] eris].  
 40 indueris teretis manicas Phrygium [decus, Attis]  
 non unus Cybeles pectore uiuet a[mor].  
 si spumantis equi libeat quatere ora [lupatis],  
 Cyllare, formosi membra uehes e[quitis].  
 sed quicumque deus, quicumque uocaber[is] heros],  
 45 sit soror et mater, sit puer incolu[mis].  
**haec dona unguentis et sunt potiora c[orollis],**  
**quae non tempus edax, non rapi[t] ipse rogus].**

Sextus Onussanius Com..., son of Sextus, to the memory of Marcus Lucceius Nepos, son of Marcus.

When I was lamenting my loss of Nepos through premature death, complaining of the easily-snapped threads of the Fates, and was bemoaning his manhood condemned by a cruel destiny, and pain not previously experienced was torturing my whole heart; when I was bewailing my bereft, abandoned, deprived state, moving the rocks with my floods of tears; almost at the end of night, when the dewy Dawn-Star was spreading his rays and riding his swift horse, I saw a shape, glowing with stellar light, glide down from the sky. That was no dream, but the man had his actual complexion and voice, though his stature was greater than the familiar shape of his body. Showing the blazing orbs of his eyes and shining shoulders he spoke from his rosy lips. ‘My noble kinsman, why do you complain that I have been snatched away to the stars of the sky? Cease to bewail a god, lest your affection, unaware that I have been welcomed in the celestial abode, may mourn and by its sorrow distress a supernatural being. I shall not gloomily make my way to the underworld streams and shall not as a ghost be ferried across the waters of Acheron; I shall not with my oar drive forward the dark boat nor shall I fear Charon with his terrifying countenance, nor will ancient Minos pass judgment on me; I shall not wander in those dark places nor be pinned in by the rivers. Rise, tell my mother not to lament me night and day, as the mourning Attic mother does Itys. For holy Venus has forbidden me to know the abodes of the silent and has carried me to the bright halls of heaven’. **I jumped up, and trembling had pervaded my cold limbs; the place was fragrant, redolent with a sweet smell.** Sanctified Nepos, the whole heavenly chorus will welcome you, whether, escorted by a crowd of amorini, you happily mingle with the amusements of Adonis, or you rejoice in the crowd of the Muses or in the artistic skill of Athena. If you should want to fasten heavy clusters of ivy-berries to the thyrsus and veil your hair with vine-shoots, you will be Bacchus; if you should want to grow your hair and garland it with bay and take up bow and quiver, you will be Apollo. Put on fine sleeves and a Phrygian (cap), more than one love will quicken in Cybele’s breast. Should you desire to shake the mouth of a foaming horse with the bridle, then Cyllarus will carry the body of a handsome rider. But whatever god, whatever demigod you shall be called, may your sister, mother and young son be safe and sound. **These gifts, which gnawing time and [the pyre?] do not take away, are better than perfume and garlands.**

(CIL VI 21521 (cf. p. 3526) = VI 34137 = CLE 1109 = EDR176675; transl. E. Courtney)<sup>53</sup>

The highly impressive visual world that is created and invoked towards the beginning, with sensuous elements of light and darkness, of shiny elements and colour, yet combined with utter gloom, with sound elements of lament and also silence, is eventually enriched by two further aspects, references to temperature (cold limbs are mentioned here) and, important in the present context, references to smell: “the place was fragrant, redolent with a sweet smell”. In a captivating, rapid sequence, further references are made to sound and to singing, as well as to taste, only to conclude with another reference to the smellscape (now in a dismissive form): “these gifts, which gnawing time and [the pyre?] do not take away, are better than perfume and garlands”.

<sup>53</sup> A picture of the only preserved fragment of this inscription is available at <https://catalogo.museivaticani.va/index.php/Detail/objects/MV.8720.0.0> (inv. 8720).

The presence of perfume and garlands (and flowers more generally) in funerary contexts is well attested in a wide range of sources.<sup>54</sup> Yet, in actuality, such experiences were far more complex still. The epigraphical record preserves conceptualizations of the ancient smellscape beyond the actual burial. In doing so, they take stock of both the immediate context of the built structure and its decoration and the landscape in a wider sense. An excellent example of that is the following piece, a funerary inscription from Theveste / Tébessa (Numidia, now Algeria) demonstrates:

*Inter odoratos nemorum ubi laeta recessus  
mater pingit humus et lectis dedala Tellus  
floribus exultat gratisque et frondibus alnum  
<u>ix patitur cum sole diem, hic provide felix  
5 Florentine decus cum coniuge sancta pudica  
Hostiliana tua et Splendonillae natoque ||  
(...)*

Where in the fragrant seclusion of the groves mother Earth cheerfully brings colours to herself and ingeniously rejoices in exquisite flowers and with her treetops barely yields the day's nourishing sunlight, here, provident, felicitous Florentinus, your splendour, alongside your saintly, bashful wife Hostiliana and ... Splendonilla's ... boy ... reunited (?) ...

(CIL VIII 2035 (cf. p. 1590) = ILaIlg I 3550 = CLE 469, ll. 1–6)

References to the monument's emotionally charged, aromatic environs are combined with an appreciation of colour and light effects, caused by the flowers and the treetops (which, of course, are also responsible for the emission of the fragrances), stimulating the reader's senses and suggesting happiness (*laeta*), indulgence (*gratis ... frondibus*), and good cheer (*exultat*).

In this instance, the conceptualized smellscape is merely circumstantial. There are more carefully thought-through examples, however, as the final example for this section demonstrates.<sup>55</sup> The monument of the Flavii at Cillium (Kasserine), in the province of Africa Proconsularis, imagines living inhabitants of the structure in addition to the dead ones – and with them comes a very striking and specific smell.<sup>56</sup>

*quid non docta facit pietas: lapis ecce foratus  
luminibus multis hortatur currere blandas  
intus apes et cerineos componere nidos  
ut semper domus haec thymbraeo nectare dulcis  
sudet florisapos dum dant noua mella liquores.*

<sup>54</sup> See Lattimore 1962, 134–6 for Greek and Latin epitaphs and Cumont 1949, 44–8 for a more general view. Šterbenc Erker 2011, 45–6 mentions a relief in which a man appears standing next to the dead body of a matron whom he is about to adorn with a garland.

<sup>55</sup> Much more could be mentioned here, of course, such as, e.g., CIL II<sup>2</sup>/7.116 = CLE 1851 add. and CIL II<sup>2</sup>/7.575.

<sup>56</sup> Further on this piece see *Les Flavii du Cillium* (1993) and Courtney (1995) 186–193, 399–406 no. 199A.

What does a sense of filial duty not achieve: behold, the gaping stonework, with many a light crack, invites enchanting bees to go inside and to build their waxy nests, so that this home forever will exude a sweet scent from the nectar of thyme, when new honey produces flower-dripping juices.

(CIL VIII 212 = 11300b = CLE 1552a + CIL VIII 213 = VIII 11300c = CLE 1552, ll. A, 86–90 = HD064997)

Here, the confident and profoundly reflective individual behind the creation of the monuments reveals his imagination that the structure will eventually be populated by bees, to build their nests in the cracks between the stones, whose activity will bring a specific, pleasant smell to its surroundings and to be perceived by those stopping by. The entire description of this imagination is loaded with sensuous experiences, from the scent to the taste to the texture of the substance in question.

The material gathered in this section, due to its more or less consistent generic background, covers only a segment of the actual olfactory experience involved in the encounters with, and consumption of, inscribed poetry: many further aspects become obvious once one considers the environs of the inscriptions when *in situ*, alongside their specifics. Helpfully, verse inscriptions in the funerary record occasionally reflect on this aspect (and even their planful design). Absence of such reflections in other contexts, or relative lack thereof, does not mean, however, that similar considerations did not occur or were of little or no relevance. What is particularly striking in those instances that were mentioned here is the observations that references to the olfactory experience are quite commonly combined with reflections of simultaneous appeals to other senses.

## Taste

It may seem counterintuitive to include, in a paper on inscriptions, a section on taste:<sup>57</sup> ingestion of monumental texts, and an appreciation of their taste, would appear to be quite beyond regular human capabilities. No fundamental argument to the contrary shall be attempted. At the same time, it would not be appropriate to omit this aspect altogether. Rather, two aspects must be mentioned at least in passing, in addition to noting that, obviously, sensations of smell and taste are closely linked (as anyone knows who has ever had a blocked nose even during a common cold).

The first aspect that must be addressed is derived from experiences that most readers of this paper will have had themselves: it is, of course, perfectly possible to ingest texts, though not necessarily for a sensuous, taste-related experience as such. To swallow a secret note, however, is not beyond the scope of what a human being could experience (and would do, too, if under a certain amount of pressure). There is no particular reason to believe that the same could not be done with, say, a papyrus note or even non-sharp-edged inscribed amulets. What is lacking primarily is the

<sup>57</sup> Taste and the ancient senses are the topic of a recent edited volume by Rudolph 2018.

textual evidence to prove that this has, in fact, happened. Yet, absence of evidence is not the same as evidence of absence. And the notion of “devouring texts” was, at least in a metaphorical way, certainly already known in the Roman world.<sup>58</sup>

The second aspect is more pertinent, and it is also more easily backed up by the evidence: it is a known fact that edible matter was on occasion inscribed. One such example has already been mentioned, above, namely the mythical apple of Cydippe.<sup>59</sup> The best-known actual, rather than mythical, examples might be seen in the stamped, carbonized bread loaves of Pompeii and Herculaneum,<sup>60</sup> which, when eaten, would have made someone devour a genuinely edible text. What is more, it seems entirely plausible to assume that entire foodstuffs were even formed to resemble the shape of letters and potentially even texts.<sup>61</sup> No instance specifically of poetry on ancient baked goods survives. What does survive, however, is credible evidence for their production, most notably through the discovery of a mould that appears to have served as a *patrix*, revealing a poetic inscription, designed for the production of cake moulds that in turn would serve as matrices for actual poetic cakes.<sup>62</sup> And with that, even though some may find it hard to swallow, it becomes altogether inevitable to contemplate a taste-related dimension of Roman poetry!

While inscribing solid matter is perfectly fathomable, poetic drinks may be less easily imagined. These, too, existed, however, most notably through the use of inscribed cups and jars, exhibiting erotic and sympotic themes.<sup>63</sup> And on an even

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Cic., *Att.* 126 [= 7.3.2] S-B and *Att.* 86 [= 4.11.2] S-B.

<sup>59</sup> See above, “Sound” and n. 23.

<sup>60</sup> See *CIL* X 8058.18 for Pompeii. Loreti 1994, 652–3 studies the actual bronze stamp used for that inscription, found centuries after the loaf. Manganaro 2001, 194 defends the same use for many of the bronze stamps with names that have been found, such as those studied by Sotgiu 2000, 1018–19. For Herculaneum, see Allroggen-Bedel 1975, 99–101. Pliny the Elder (*NH* 33.26) laments that at his time everything was stamped, even food and drinks, blaming it on the proliferation of robberies: *quae fuit illa uita priscorum, qualis innocentia, in cui nihil signabatur! Nunc cibi quoque ac potus anulo uindicantur a rapina* (“what lives people led in the olden days, what innocence there was, when nothing was stamped! Now even foodstuffs and drinks are claimed with a seal, to protect them from being stolen”).

<sup>61</sup> See a clay cake mould from Apulum (*CIL* III 6287 = *IDR* III/6, 422): *Accipio | annum | nouum | felicem* (“I receive a happy new year”). An especially noteworthy case is Hor., *Sat.* 1.1.25–6, where Horace would appear to mention an alleged habit of teachers to provide their pupils with cake – thought to be in the shape of letters – as a way to instill a love for the alphabet; further on this cf. Kruschwitz 2016a, 31.

<sup>62</sup> See Alföldi 1945, 71 and, more recently, Thüry 2008, 297; cf. also Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi 2007, 72–3 (*CLEPann* 28).

<sup>63</sup> A short text preserved on a set of “speaking” objects, a ceramic wine service found in a large Roman villa in Ulcisia (Pannonia Inferior) has some poetic echo as well. The set consists of five cups and a jar, all inscribed (*IIL* 180), which, according to the stratigraphy, are to be dated to the end of the third century AD. On the cups very fragmentary texts are to be read: *[a]m[a] me; am[a] me? -as? -at?* (“Enjoy it”); *v[i]l[t]a* or *[i]u[a]t* (“Darling” or “That makes you happy”). The text on the jug is more complex and appears to show a dactylic rhythm (*non amat me cu[p]id[us]*). The interpretation of the text on the jug is challenging. Thüry 1998 proposes to translate this as “a greedy person (who does not mix wine with water) does not like me”. Further “speaking” glasses and jars with erotic or sympotic messages can be found across the Empire: cf. e.g., the following instances from the Gallic and Germanic provinces, to name but a few: *accipe m[e] si[t]ie(n)s et trade sodali* (“receive me when you are thirsty and then hand me

larger scale one could mention the dactylic graffito placed at the stave of a wine barrel that was discovered at *Castra Regina* (Regensburg) in the province of *Raetia*:<sup>64</sup>

*Cauī alios conui(u)as  
orca sto '[- -]ia D'*

*I have been careful with other guests, so I am still a full barrel ...  
'[- -]ia D'*

(ILGIL 998)

The wooden barrel was found in the eastern *vicus* of the military *castellum*, and it has been dated to the late first century AD. Additional inscriptions on the barrel indicate the names of the wine merchants involved. The text on the stave is secondary, presumably an addition from the time when the barrel was already in *Castra Regina* – in a tavern perhaps? – and soldiers deployed to the *Raetian limes* were able to enjoy its contents. The barrel is introduced as a first-person speaker,<sup>65</sup> and it addresses its audience (so presumably the patrons of a tavern) with the welcome news that there was plenty of wine left (a matter that, regrettably, has since changed for the worse).

With that, however, one reaches the very limits of linking inscribed verse and experiences of taste.

## Synaesthesia

Much more could be said about, and added to, the evidence gathered for each of the human senses in relation to the experience of inscribed verse. Much, if not all of it, also bears significance and relevance to non-poetic encounters with inscriptions, with substantial implications for the ways in which individuals and groups who navigated the lettered world of ancient Rome interacted with the writing that surrounded them.

Instead of concluding this section with a paragraph or two that merely repeat and reassert some of the more salient points of what has already been said, it seems worth exploring yet another sensory dimension that, to an extent, is in danger of falling through the cracks of an all-too-rigid categorical approach. As a logical extension to our focus so far, placing emphasis on individual facets of the human sensorium, it seems reasonable to devote a few concluding lines to scenarios in which the divisions between the senses are blurred, and in which sensory experiences are merged into more complex, compound clusters – approaching, at least to an extent,

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over to your companion,” *CIL* XIII 10016.4); *de(s) et do* (“give me (wine) and I will give it to you”, *CIL* XIII 10018.64); *fero uinum tibi, dulcis* (“I bring you wine, sweet thing”, *CIL* XIII 10018.86); *a me, dulcis amica, bibe* (“drink from me, sweetheart”, *CIL* XIII 10025.199). For bibliography on “speaking” objects see above, n. 26.

<sup>64</sup> The end of the second line, given in inverted commas, was added by another hand.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Thüry 1995, 301: “Von anderen Gästen habe ich mich gehütet. (So) bin ich (noch) ein volles Faß” (or “So stehe ich Dir noch zur Verfügung”). See also Frei-Stolba 2017, 192; Thüry 1995, 301–2.

the phenomenon that is known as synaesthesia (though it is impossible for us in some cases to have a clear distinction between that and “merely” multisensory experiences).

Already in what was discussed before, there were numerous occasions in which texts provided their readers with complex, intersecting senses. One particularly fascinating example of that was the epitaph of Nepos:<sup>66</sup> this composition combines a range of expressions referring to a range of senses, and while it is remarkable with a view to the extent to which this happens, it is not at all uncommon to find such clusters that in turn are employed to create vivid and highly effective relatable poetic images. Is it possible, though, to discern instances of (at least imagined) synaesthesia in the *Carmina Epigraphica* – instances in which the experience of one sensory stimulus is inextricably linked to another sense in the poetic expression?

As it has been argued that ancient colour perception was often the result of several cognitive stimuli,<sup>67</sup> the visual component seems to be an especially promising starting point. And, indeed, there appears to be a certain amount of evidence for such conceptualizations and experiences. One such example is the following from a fragmentary piece discovered at Thamallula in the province of Mauretania Caesariensis (Algeria). The passage in question reads as follows:

(...)  
 [qualia p]allente[s d]eclinant l(i)lia culm[os]  
 [pubent]esq(ue) rosae primos moriuntur ad [austros]  
 [aut ubi] uer(na) nouis expirat purpura pra[tis]  
 5 [- - - m]ortis erat pallentis imago O[- - -]  
 [- - - l]ibante pietatis [- - -]  
 (...)

(...) Like lilies droop their paling stalks, and juicy roses die with the first winds of the south or as spring's purple fades away in fresh meadows, [such?] was paling death's appearance ... pouring ... of piety ...

(CIL VIII 20588 = CLE 1787 = AE 1894.95 = HD028810)

Traditionally, the value of this inscription has been somewhat underappreciated by its editors, presumably because at least ll. 2–4 were regarded merely as a direct quotation of Stat., *Silv.* 3.3.128–30, a *consolatio* poem to Claudius Etruscus upon the passing-away of his father. The passage in question, however, addresses the early death of Etruscus' mother in the same poem, with its imagery based on a Vergilian model (with a long, subsequent poetic tradition).<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> See above, “Smell” (with nn. 53–4).

<sup>67</sup> See Bradley 2013, 130–2 and, more generally, the edited volume of Butler and Purves 2013 on representations of, and notions of, synaesthesia in the ancient world.

<sup>68</sup> A useful discussion of this passage and its models (in Vergil and in Statius' earlier work) can be found in Coffee 2019, 187–9 (who does not, however, comment on the inscription at hand).



The purpose of Statius' lines in the context of Statius' *Silvae*, is to provide poetic similes for an untimely death, of a "death in full bloom", so to speak. That is not entirely (and solely) their purpose in the present inscription, however, as far as its fragmentary state allows its modern readers to arrive at any bold conclusions. In Statius, colour is a proxy for vitality – the lilies' fading stalks are put in contrast with the juicy, youthful roses: freshness and vitality are facing languishing exhaustion at too early a stage. In the Thamallula epitaph, by contrast, the very same, complex image that, in a sensuous concerto, links experiences of colour and touch (and, in actual fact, scent!) is linked, *expressis uerbis* and with a clear verbal reference, to the subsequently introduced notion of the *[m]ortis ... pallentis imago*. In that, fading, vanishing colour experiences and the disappearance of life's juices accumulate to grisly effect that is very much absent from Statius' poem. The way in which all of this would sit in the natural, experienceable environment of a burial, as explored in several contexts, above, adds an even more striking experience to the poem's imagery.

Is it possible to move even further, and to go beyond holistic experiences of a multitude of cognitive stimuli in the Latin verse inscriptions that derive their power from the visual component? The answer to that question may well lie in a final piece that must be introduced here, viz. a poeticizing, rhythmical, though not altogether metrical,<sup>69</sup> piece from Arelate (Arles) in the province of Gallia Narbonensis. This bilingual inscription commemorates a young girl called Secundilla – nicknamed Aroma or Aromation (!) – who died an untimely death at the age of three and a half years. Its text reads as follows:<sup>70</sup>

*Iacet sub hoc signo (!) dulcissim(a) Secundilla  
qu(a)e rapta parentibus reliquit dolorem  
ut tam dulcis erat tanquam (!) aromata  
desiderando semper mellea(m) uita(m).  
5 qu(a)e uixit annis III men(sibus) VI die(bus) XVI.  
Ἀρωμάτι · ταῦτα.*

Sweetest Secundilla lies underneath this memorial: when she was snatched, what she left behind for her parents was pain: she was as sweet as fragrant herbs in her desire for a honey-sweet life. She lived 3 years, 6 months, 16 days.  
For Aroma(tion?): This (is it).

(CIL XII 874 = IG XIV 2475 = CLE 1851 = IGF 57 = SEG 13.258)

In an etymologizing, code-switching wordplay on the girl's Grecian nickname,<sup>71</sup> Aroma, the author of this piece first calls Secundilla *dulcissima* (l. 1), introducing a sense of taste (through a common place term of endearment for close family members), then reasserts this impression through the use of the *dulcis* (l. 3) compared to *aromata* (also

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Fernández Martínez 2018, 303.

<sup>70</sup> Further on this piece see Mullen 2013, 296.

<sup>71</sup> On this phenomenon in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* more broadly, cf. Michalopoulos 1997.

in l. 3), viz. herbs of a fragrant, spicy scent (rather than flavour). Finally, a longing for *mellea(m) uita(m)* is introduced, through which sweet flavour and aromatic (herbal) scents are merged, just as sweetness and beautiful scent are apparently imagined to have formed a beautiful unity in Secundilla a.k.a. Aroma(tion).

The bespoke image, related to the recipient of this poeticizing text and her nickname, is already sufficiently striking in terms of the multisensory experience that is expressed, verging on synaesthesia-like blurrings and crossings of sensory experiences. Once one relates it back to the type of imagined smellscape, however, that are described in the aforementioned passage from the Flavii monument at Cillium,<sup>72</sup> the full potential of the sensuous experience becomes all the more apparent.

It would be a wonderful idea, as well as a great, yet worthwhile challenge, to recreate such complexities of reading experiences, especially, but not exclusively, for monumental poetry for its modern readers and students, who now typically encounter these items in (more or less) sterile museum environments.

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. "Smell" (with n. 57).

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