

***New light on five Latin inscriptions of the later imperial period, with  
special reference to their dating formulae***

**Abstract**

This article consists of a series of comments, revisions, and new readings of five Latin epigraphic documents dating approximately from the third to the sixth century CE. Four inscriptions come from different areas of Italy (Rome, Ascoli Piceno, and Folloni di Montella, near Avellino) and one comes from Spain (Villadecanes, region of León). The common denominator between these assorted inscriptions (one votive inscription and four epitaphs) is the presence of a more or less articulated dating formula within their texts, on which my comments, revisions, and new readings primarily –although not exclusively– focus.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Later Roman Empire, Latin inscriptions, dating formulae, epitaphs, votive inscriptions

**1) Epitaph of Palumba (?), 403 CE (?) (Fig. 1)**

Fragmentary slab of limestone (65 x 60 x 11 cm; letters height 4.5–5 cm). The slab was reportedly found ‘underneath the church of S. Biagio’ at Ascoli Piceno, Italy. It was first brought to the town hall and in 1981 it was moved to the Archaeological Museum (storeroom; the current inv. no. is K 4810 and not 1014, as reported in the latest edition).

**Editions:** *CIL* IX 5274; *ILCV* 2777A; *ICI* X 4.

The text below reproduces the *ICI* edition of the epitaph, followed by a corresponding translation:

*[hic re]quiescit  
[in pace] Palum-  
[ba V or G non]as Iulias.  
[reces]sit de hac  
5 [vita die M]artes lu-  
[cis in ex]ordio.*

I. 1: *[hic re]qu[i]escit, CIL*

II. 2–3: alternatively, *Palum[bus], ILCV*

I. 3: *[ba non]as Iulias, CIL*

I. 4: *[reces]s[i]t, CIL*

II. 4–5: *[reces]s[i]t de hac [luce, ILCV*

«[Here r]ests [in peace] Palum[ba (who died) on the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> day before the non]es of July. (She) [depar]ted from this [life on Ma]rs’ [day] (= Tuesday), at [the crack of da]wn».

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<sup>1</sup> The present study results from my research as part of the ERC-funded project *Calendars in Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Standardization and Fixation*. The project is based in the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at UCL and is directed by Sacha Stern, whom I thank for reading drafts and offering very helpful suggestions. I remain, of course, responsible for any remaining flaws.

My examination of the inscription in the storeroom of the Archaeological Museum of Ascoli Piceno in April 2016 made it immediately clear that the original size of the stone can hardly be reconstructed with any certainty: although previous editors apparently presumed that the original width of the slab corresponded approximately to its current size, the left edge of the slab is in fact not preserved (fig. 1); given the rather substantial dimensions of the preserved fragment (65 x 60 x 11 cm) as well as the height of the inscribed letters (4.5–5 cm), it is conceivable that originally the slab was considerably larger. This would mean not only that the inscribed lines might have been longer than previously assumed, but also that the inscription could have continued further after line 6 – the bottom edge is indeed equally not preserved.<sup>2</sup> Oddly enough, on a significant portion of the left hand side of the preserved limestone fragment no traces of letters are currently visible. The *ICI* editors assumed that the inscription rubbed off as a result of repeated footfall on that specific area of the slab. If that were the case, however, the left hand side of the stone’s surface would be visibly worn out and would look noticeably different from the right hand side. On the contrary, a uniform state of preservation characterises the entirety of the stone’s surface. Finally, it should be noted that there is no consistency in the length of the inscribed lines: at the end of line 2, after *PALUM*, there would have been space for at least two more letters, which, incidentally, would have completed the female name *Palumba* assumed by earlier editors; by contrast, the letters *EHA* on line 4 are very close to each other and their size is somewhat smaller than the rest of the inscribed text, while the last letter on the same line (*C*) was inscribed very close to the right hand edge of the slab, slightly detached from the letters *EHA* (fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

On lines 4–5, the formula *recessit de hac vita*, proposed in both *CIL*’s and *ICI*’s editions, is less probable than *recessit de hac luce*, as Diehl already pointed out in *ILCV*. Indeed, while there are as few as two occurrences of *recessit de hac vita* in the epigraphic record,<sup>4</sup> *recessit de hac luce* appears somewhat more frequently.<sup>5</sup> Whenever it occurs, this formula is always followed by the deceased’s date of death, comprising month-day and consular year, except in one case (*ICUR* VII 17511), where the dating formula precedes *recessit de hac luce*.

Coming to lines 5–6, it is worth noting that the formula *lucis in exordio* is in fact unattested, both epigraphically and in literary sources. In contrast, in a fair number of Latin epitaphs of the later imperial period from various areas of the Roman West, the reference

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<sup>2</sup> An uninscribed space could have followed the last line of the inscription, as is the case on the upper part of the slab: the first line is preceded by a blank space measuring at least 17 cm in height – the upper edge is also not preserved.

<sup>3</sup> The hypothesis, in *ICI* X 4, that the date of death fell either on the fifth or on the sixth day before the nones of July, which is evidently based on the assumption that the inscribed lines had a regular length, is therefore completely speculative.

<sup>4</sup> *AEP* 1992, 1081 (where the verb is not *recessit* but *transivit*) and G. Barbieri, *Il lapidario Zeri di Mentana*, Roma 1982, n. 217, where the formula was almost entirely restored: [*rec(essit) de hac vit]a*.

<sup>5</sup> *ICUR* VII 17511; *ICUR* II 4888 (*recessit* is restored); *ICUR* II 5934 (the verb here is *discessit*); *ICUR* VII 17616 (*de hac luce sublata est*); *CIL* V 4117; *RICG* XV 25; *RICG* XV 227; V. Marek, *Greek and Latin Inscriptions on Stone in the Collections of Charles University*, Prague 1977, n. 43 (all showing the alternative formula *migravit de hac luce*). Cf. J. Janssens, *Vita e morte del cristiano negli epittaffi di Roma anteriori al sec. VII*, Roma 1981, p. 70.

to the day of the lunar month, in the form of *luna* (ablative) accompanied by a numeral (ordinal), follows the day of the week on which the deceased passed away.<sup>6</sup> In all these examples, the dating formula includes month day, day of the week, lunar day, and year. With very few exceptions, lunar dates appear in inscriptions dating from the third century CE onwards which are mostly, though not exclusively, epitaphs. Therefore, it appears more plausible to expect, on lines 5–6, the term *luna* followed by a numeral, indicating on which day of the lunar month the death occurred, rather than the completely unattested formula *lucis in exordio*.<sup>7</sup>

As for the latter part of line 6, the only letters that can be currently read on the stone are *ORDI* (fig. 1). In view of what apparently precedes (lines 5–6), i.e. the mention of the day of the week and of the lunar day on which the passing occurred, a further element of the dating formula could be expected here. Accordingly, the letters *ORDI* might belong to a consular date. At first glance, no consul name seems to suit the preserved text. In fact, the letters *ORDI* could be interpreted as a misspelled mention of Flavius Rumoridus, who was consul in 403 CE together with the future emperor Theodosius II.<sup>8</sup> His name, in the ablative, appears spelled precisely *Rumordio* in a funerary epigram from Rome (line 13): *d(omino) n(ostro) Theodosio Aug(usto) et Fl(avio) Rumordio*.<sup>9</sup> The Germanic name Rumoridus apparently caused some trouble to Roman letter-cutters: a few further epitaphs from Rome and from elsewhere in Italy show the ablative *Rumorido* spelled *Rumodoro* and *Romorido*, for example.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it is not implausible to suppose that this inscription too showed a misspelling of the consul Flavius Rumoridus' name. Still, it could be objected that a formula such as *d(omino) n(ostro) Theodosio Aug(usto) et Fl(avio) Rumordio* would be too long to fit into the sixth line of the epitaph. However, it should be first noted that the consular formula in question could be somewhat shorter: *d(omino) n(ostro)* and *Fl(avio)* could be omitted, and *Theodosio* could be abbreviated as *Theod(osio)*.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, as pointed out earlier, while we cannot actually have a clear sense of the original length of the lines of the epitaph, it appears likely that they were in fact longer than has so far been assumed. Admittedly, given the scanty traces of letters preserved on line 6, the suggested restoration of a formula such as *Theod(osio) Aug(usto) et Fl(avio) Rumordio* is somewhat speculative; it cannot be

<sup>6</sup> Cf., e.g., *ICUR* X 27666; *ICUR* VII 17511 (which also shows the formula *recessit de hac luce*); *ICUR* VII 17249; *ICUR* V 13959; *ICUR* IX 24315; *ICUR* IV 12533; *CIL* XII 1497b; *CIL* VIII 21550; *CIL* III 1051. A full discussion of *luna* dates in Latin sources appear in S. Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity*, Oxford 2012, pp. 313–326.

<sup>7</sup> It should be observed that although Fig. 1 might give the impression that an *S* is inscribed at the end of line 5, my examination of the stone confirmed that there are no traces of letters after *LU*; what might look like an *S* is in fact a small crack in the stone's surface.

<sup>8</sup> *PLRE* I 786; R.S. Bagnall et al., *Consuls of the Later Roman Empire*, Atlanta 1987, pp. 340–341.

<sup>9</sup> *ICUR* I 713 (= *ILCV* 4744 = *CLE* 682).

<sup>10</sup> *ICUR* V 13951 (*Rumodoro*); *ICUR* V 13952, *ICUR* VI 16007c, and *CIL* V 6196 (= *ILCV* 2852 = *ICI* XII 56, from Milan) (*Romorido*); *ICUR* II 4507 has *Romodoro*. Two inscriptions from Capena show the spelling *Romodoro* (*CIL* XI 4044 = *ILCV* 3036b = *ICI* IV 26 and *CIL* XI 4045 = *ILCV* 3036b = *ICI* IV 27).

<sup>11</sup> As, e.g., in *CIL* III 9479. Oddly enough, two inscriptions (one from Rome and one from Milan) do not mention Theodosius at all: *ICUR* IV 12425 (= *ILCV* 3811a) and *CIL* V 6196 (= *ILCV* 2852). Cf. Bagnall et al., *Consuls*, p. 341.

completely excluded that the letters *ORDI* were not part of a consular date but rather of some other term, such as *miser cordia* or *concordia*, which are both not absent from funerary formularies in early Christian inscriptions.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the fact that the letters *ORDI* are placed immediately after the mention of the day of the week and –if the restoration offered here is accepted– of the lunar day on which the death occurred, make it more likely that a further element of the dating formula followed in that position.

Accordingly, I suggest the following new reading and translation of the inscription:

[.....re]quiescit ((folium))  
 [.....] Palum-  
 [ba/us.....]as Iulias  
 [.....reces]sit de hac  
 5 [luce.....die ]Martes lu-  
 [na .. Theod(osio) et Rum]ordi[o cons(ulibus)]  
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l. 3: Both *Nonas* and *Kalendas* can plausibly be restored before *Iulias*, although *Kalendas* appears in abbreviated form more frequently than *Nonas*.

l. 6: a numeral is supposed to come after *luna*.

«[.....r]ests [.....] Palum[ba/us.....]as of July. [.....depar]ted from this [light....on Ma]rs' day (= Tuesday), on the [...] lu[nar day, in the consulship of Theodosius and Rum]orid[us]».

## 2) Votive inscription, 12 February 224 CE (Fig. 2)

The dedication is inscribed on a large rectangular slate plaque. Below the four-line inscription, on the right hand side is the representation of an *ara* containing the letters *LA/PAT*. The plaque was found in 1934 at Villadecanes, in the region of León, in the area of ancient *Bergidum* (Villafranca de Bierzo), province of Hispania Citerior, and is now in the Archaeological Museum of León (inv. no. 3160).

**Editions:** *AEp* 1946, 194; *AEp* 1962, 397; *AEp* 1983, 590; F. Diego Santos, *Inscripciones Romanas de la Provincia de León*, León 1986, n. 43; S. Crespo Ortiz de Zárate, Á. Alonso Ávila, *Las manifestaciones religiosas del mundo antiguo en Hispania romana. El territorio de Castilla y León. 1: Las fuentes epigráficas*, Valladolid 1999, n. 117; R.A. Rabanal Alonso, S.M. García Martínez, *Epigrafía romana de la provincia de León: revisión y actualización*, León 2001, n. 45.

*Iuliano II et Crispino co(n)s(ulibus)*  
*[p]ri(die) ((hedera)) Idus Februarias ((hedera)) Aemilius*  
*Cilimedus I(ibens) ((hedera)) p(osuit) ((hedera)) pro ((hedera)) salute sua et*  
*suorum [d]ie Iovis ((hedera)) [----]*

<sup>12</sup> Cf., e.g., for *miser cordia*: *AEp* 1935, 94; *AEp* 2001, 1338; *RICG* XV 220, 231, 239, 254bis, 284; *CIL* XII 5419. For *concordia*: *ICUR* IV 11310; *AEp* 1960, 90; *CIL* VIII 18714; *ICUR* II 5342; *ICUR* III 8992; *ICUR* IV 11310; *ICUR* VII 17906.

In the *ara*:

LA

PAT

«In the consulship of Julian for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time and Crispinus, on the day before the ides of February, Aemilius Cilimedus voluntarily dedicated (this monument) for his own well-being and that of his family, on Jupiter's day (= Thursday), [.....]»

The date specified in the text corresponds to Thursday, 12 February 224 CE.<sup>13</sup> The *editio princeps* of the inscription stated that the day of the week on 12 February 224 CE was not Thursday but Friday; however, this information, which has been reiterated by subsequent commentators,<sup>14</sup> is incorrect: calendrical calculations show that 12 February did fall on a Thursday in the year 224 of our era.<sup>15</sup> Thus, contrary to what previously assumed, all date elements in this votive inscription match.

It is worth noting that this is one of a total of four examples of votive texts in the entire corpus of Greek and Latin inscriptions including the day of the week in their dating formulae.<sup>16</sup> The inscription also counts among a limited number of inscriptions with a day of the week certainly definable as pagan, as opposed to the bulk of the epigraphic evidence, which can be identified as Christian. Finally, the inscription belongs to a rather small group of early attestations of the use of the seven-day planetary week in the Roman world: besides a limited number of further inscriptions dating to the third century CE, the earliest evidence consists of a few graffiti from Pompeii and a handful of epigraphic texts from the second century CE. The remainder –and, in fact, the vast majority– of the epigraphic evidence dates to the fourth and subsequent centuries.

As the *hedera distinguens* as well as slight traces of a letter on the edge of the breaking indicate (Fig. 2), further text apparently followed the indication of the day of the week.<sup>17</sup> Despite the lack of any substantial trace of letters –and along the lines of what I have proposed with reference to inscription n. 1–, it cannot be ruled out that a lunar date followed the day of the week. The extant letter traces on the edge of the breaking are

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<sup>13</sup> On the consuls, see *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C901 and *PIR*<sup>2</sup> B160.

<sup>14</sup> e.g., by A. García y Bellido, *Iupiter Dolichenus y la lápida de Villadecanes*, «Zephyrus» 11 1960, p. 199, A. Tranoy, *La Galice romaine. Recherches sur le nord-ouest de la péninsule ibérique dans l'Antiquité*, Paris 1981, p. 319 note 93, and F. Marco Simón, *El culto a Iupiter Dolichenus en el norte de Hispania*, «Veleia» 4 1987, p. 147 note 16.

<sup>15</sup> To confirm that I have used the programme Kairos, developed by Dr Raymond Mercier.

<sup>16</sup> The other three are a dedication to Jupiter Optimus Maximus from Apulum in the province of Dacia (modern Alba Iulia in Romania), dating to Thursday, 23 May 205 CE (*CIL* III 1051 = I. Piso, *Inscriptions d'Apulum – Inscriptions de la Dacie Romaine III 5- vol. 2*, Paris 2001, n. 164), a fragmentary votive inscription from Carnuntum in Pannonia Superior (now Pfaffenberg, Austria), dating to Thursday, 11 June 291 CE (*AEP* 2003, 1392), and a dedication to Mercury and Fortuna Redux from Untersaal in Germany, in the ancient province of Raetia, dating to Monday, 23 May 231 CE (*CIL* III 11943).

<sup>17</sup> García y Bellido, *Iupiter Dolichenus*, p. 200.

consistent with a vertical stroke, thus allowing the assumption that the letter in question was indeed an L and that the text might have run as *luna* followed by a numeral.<sup>18</sup>

The recipient god of this dedication has been quite intensely debated and remains ultimately uncertain: if it is Jupiter Dolichenus, as some postulated,<sup>19</sup> it could be assumed that the day of the week (Jupiter's day = Thursday) was specified in order to emphasise the fact that the dedication occurred on a day that was a *dies Iovis* (as in, a Thursday) and, at the same time, a day in some way dedicated to Jupiter. It should be observed that the reference to the day of the week –which, as noted earlier, is not normally included in votive inscriptions– is quite curiously placed separately from the rest of the dating formula (consular date and month day, lines 1–2); in Latin sources, the formula *dies* plus a planetary deity's name in the genitive is used exclusively to indicate a day of the seven-day planetary week, and it is therefore extremely unlikely that *die Iovis* in the inscription under scrutiny refers to a feast of Jupiter, rather than to the day of the week;<sup>20</sup> nevertheless, I wonder whether in this particular case *die Iovis* may not have been placed detached from the rest of the dating formula to highlight the coincidence of Jupiter's day in the weekly cycle with a feast of Jupiter, or perhaps simply with a particular act of devotion towards the god.

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<sup>18</sup> L is one of the letters postulated by García y Bellido, *Jupiter Dolichenus*, p. 200 on the basis of the slight traces that he saw but which can hardly be discerned on Fig. 2. It should be noted that a lunar day concludes the dating formula in one of the votive inscriptions with days of the week mentioned above (note 16): the last line of the dedication to Mercury and Fortuna Redux from Untersaal reads: *d(ie) L(unae) X K(alendas) Iun(ias) L(una) V*. Cf. my discussion of *luna*-dates at pp. 2–3 and note 6.

<sup>19</sup> See especially García y Bellido, *Jupiter Dolichenus*, who builds on the *editio princeps* of the inscription and is generally followed by later commentators (e.g., M. Hörig – E. Schwertheim, *Corpus Cultus Iovis Dolicheni*, Leiden 1987, p. 608; M. Bendala Galán, *Die orientalischen Religionen Hispaniens in vorrömischer und römischer Zeit*, in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* II 18.1, Berlin-New York 1986, pp. 406–407). The argument is based on the interpretation of LA/PAT as an abbreviated form for '*lapathus*', a particular type of plant that was sacred to Jupiter Dolichenus and that he identifies as the plant or leaf depicted both above the *ara* and within the pediment of the quadrangular frame at the centre of the plaque. *Contra* Tranoy, *La Galice romaine*, pp. 319–320, and especially S. Santamaria, *El culto a los Lares en el conventus Asturum: la inscripción de Villadecanes*, in *Paganismo y cristianismo en el occidente del imperio romano, Memorias de Historia Antigua V*, Oviedo 1983, pp. 125–130 (who is followed by Rabanal Alonso, García Martínez, *Epigrafía* n. 45), who argues that LA/PAT would stand for *Lares Patrii* and, consequently, that the phytomorphic element above the *ara* would not be identifiable as the *lapathus*, but as a the fruit of the plant known as 'beleño', apparently widespread in the area, whose seeds contain a narcotic substance that has hallucinogenic effects. This plant was apparently sacred to the god Belenus, a deity of solar origin whose presence in north-western Iberia would be 'constatada a través de la toponimia' (Santamaria, *El culto*, p. 129).

<sup>20</sup> As assumed, conversely, by Diego Santos, *Inscripciones*, p. 63: 'Si no es el día de la semana, puede entenderse alguna fiesta o acto religioso a *Iupiter*, en la frase final e incompleta *die Iovis*... '.

### 3) Epitaph of Laurentius, 18 December 398 CE

Several marble fragments from a stele, found on Via Appia in Rome. Now in the Musei Vaticani (Lapidario Cristiano ex Lateranense, inv. no. 32017).

**Editions:** *ICUR* I p. 206 n. 478; *ILCV* 4539; *ICUR* IV 12543.

*Hic quie[scit .... no]-  
mine Laur[entius.....]  
[p]r(es)b(yster) [.....die]  
Satur[ni] XV kal(endas) Ia[n(uarias) ....]  
5 ann(is) p(lus) m(inus) [X]XII, post cons(ulatum) Hono[ri]  
Aug(usti) IIII [et E]uty(chiani) v(iri) c(larissimi). Bene  
merenti matrona eius  
Remigia fecit.*

L. 1: *Hic quie[scit in pace vir no]-*, *ICUR* IV 12543

L. 2: *mine Laur[entius sanctus]*, *ICUR* IV 12543

L. 3: *[p]r(es)b(yster) [eccl(esiae) cathol(icae), dep(ositus) die]*, *ICUR* IV 12543

L. 4: *Satur[ni] XV kal(endas) Ia[n(uarias), qui vixit]*, *ICUR* IV 12543

«Here res[ts.... n]amed Laur[entius.....p]resbyter [.....on] Saturn's day (= Saturday), on the 15<sup>th</sup> day before the calends of Ja[nuary .....] more or less [2]2 years, after the consulship of Honorius Augustus for the 4<sup>th</sup> time and Euty(chianus), *vir clarissimus*. His wife Remigia set up (the tomb) for the well-deserving (Laurentius).»

Despite its fragmentary state,<sup>21</sup> the epitaph preserves the date of Laurentius' death (lines 3–6): [...die] Satur[ni] XV kal(endas) Ia[n(uarias)] (...) post cons(ulatum) Hono[ri] Aug(usti) IIII [et E]uty(chiani), i.e., apparently, Saturday, 18 December 399 CE.<sup>22</sup> In the first edition of the text, De Rossi already pointed out that the 15<sup>th</sup> day before the calends of January (= 18 December) did not fall on a Saturday in the year 399. Noting that in 399 the concomitance of *XV kal(endas)* and Saturday occurred only in September (*XV kal(endas) Octobres*), De Rossi concluded that either we do not actually have *die Saturni* on the stone or the epitaph was in fact carved a few months after Laurentius' passing, which would have occurred in September, and this circumstance would have led to some confusion in the recording of the date of death. The presence of *die Saturni* as part of the text, however, appears quite certain, and De Rossi's second hypothesis sounds somewhat far-fetched. Ferrua must have been of the same opinion when he produced the second *ICUR* edition of the inscription, where he assumed a more prosaic error with the month day on the part of the letter-cutter: perhaps, Ferrua supposed, the death occurred in fact a day earlier, on 17 December (= *XVI kalendas Ianuarias*), which indeed fell on a Saturday. This is of course possible, but I would like to suggest a further possibility to explain the discrepancy in the date formula of this epitaph: Laurentius might in fact have died on 18 December of the year 398 CE, when the day of the week was Saturday, but the stone was presumably inscribed a few days after Laurentius' passing, when the new year (399) had already begun: as a result,

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ferrua's account of the inscription's 'history' and current state of preservation in *ICUR* IV 12543.

<sup>22</sup> For the consular year see Bagnall et al., *Consuls*, pp. 330–333.

the letter-cutter might have reported the correct day of the week and month day of Laurentius' passing, but since the new year had begun when he inscribed the epitaph, he might have inadvertently completed the dating formula with the current year instead of the one that had very recently expired. If that were the case, all elements in the dating formula of Laurentius' epitaph would match: 18 December did fall on a Saturday in 398 CE.

#### 4) Epitaph of Matrona, 15 May 452 CE (Fig. 3)

Marble table broken into two fragments, from the floor of the Old Basilica of San Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome. Now in the Lapidario Paoliano (Riquadro 23, inv. no. SP 1774).

**Editions:** *ICUR* I 754; *CIL* VI 8460 (cf. VI p. 3889); *ILCV* 701; *ICUR* II 4928, with pl. 11.5.

*hic iacet nomine Matrona c(larissima) f(emina) in pace,  
uxor Corneli primiceri cenariorum,  
filia Porfori primiceri monetario-  
rum, que vixit pl(us) m(inus) an(nos) XXIII, que recessit  
5 die Mercuris or[a] VIII et deposita die  
Iovis iduum Maiarum in contra  
colonna VII co<n>s(ulatu) Fl(avii) Herculani v(iri) c(larissimi)  
  
infra litteris inversis D M<sup>23</sup>*

«Here rests in peace Matrona, *clarissima femina*, wife of Cornelius, chief of the *cenarii*, and daughter of Porforius, chief of the *monetarii*, who lived more or less 23 years and passed away on Mercury's day (= Wednesday), at the 8<sup>th</sup> hour, and was buried on Jupiter's day (= Thursday), on the ides of May, in front of the 7<sup>th</sup> column, in the consulship of Flavius Herculanus, *vir clarissimus*.»

According to her epitaph, Matrona died on a Wednesday, at the 8<sup>th</sup> hour, and was buried on a Thursday, on the ides of May, at the time of the consulship of Flavius Herculanus, that is, in 452 CE.<sup>24</sup> As noted by previous editors, all date elements match here: in 452 CE, 15 May, when Matrona was buried, fell on a Thursday (and of course 14 May, the day on which Matrona passed away, fell on a Wednesday).<sup>25</sup> An aspect of this epitaph that has never been discussed before is the reference, within the dating formula, to the fact that the woman was buried *in contra columna VII*. The preposition *in contra* is, in Diehl's words,

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<sup>23</sup> De Rossi noted that these two letters do not appear in any of the manuscripts that preserve transcriptions of the inscribed text and therefore assumed that they were not inscribed in antiquity.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *PLRE* II pp. 544–545; Bagnall et al., *Consuls*, pp. 438–439. Flavius Herculanus is consistently mentioned by himself in the epigraphic record: as hinted at by Bagnall et al., this is presumably due to the fact that Valentinian III did not recognise Flavius Sporacius, the consul designated by Marcian.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. K. Worp, *Remarks on weekdays in Late Antiquity occurring in documentary sources*, «Tyche», 6, 1991, p. 225, n. 32.



*novum*.<sup>26</sup> The term is found in manuscripts of the Medieval period, when apparently it was commonly employed in the spoken language too. When used as a locative preposition as in our case, *incontra* means ‘in front of, facing, opposite’ –hence my translation, ‘in front of the 7<sup>th</sup> column’.<sup>27</sup> Thus, Matrona’s epitaph includes an indication of the specific location of her grave within the suburban martyrial/cemeterial basilica of S. Paolo fuori le Mura in Rome. During the first half of the fifth century, as the use of catacombs for Christian burials gradually declined, tombs began crowding within and around the martyrial basilicas above ground: S. Pietro in Vaticano, S. Paolo on the via Ostiense, S. Lorenzo on the via Tiburtina, S. Agnese on the via Nomentana, SS. Marcellino and Pietro on the via Labicana, and S. Sebastiano on the via Appia, which had all been originally built by Constantine the Great.<sup>28</sup> Hundreds of epitaphs, dating approximately from the fourth to the mid-sixth century CE, have been found inside and in close proximity of these basilicas. Despite the massive number of people who succeeded in having their sepulchre placed in these sought-after locations, *ad sanctos* burials are generally regarded as the expression of higher social and economic status –they were privileged burials. It should be considered that in the context of *ad sanctos* burials a significant number of ‘ordinary’ deceased were buried in polysome graves, which were not provided with inscriptions. The presence of an epitaph, often on marble or other costly material, is in itself evidence of the high social and economic status of the deceased. The price paid for the tomb apparently depended on the distance from the *locus* that housed the remains of the saint or martyr.<sup>29</sup> The *clarissima femina* Matrona, wife of Cornelius, chief of the *cenarii*, and daughter of Porforius (Porphyrius), chief of the *monetarii*, clearly belonged to a relatively small circle of *very important persons* of mid-fifth

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<sup>26</sup> ILCV 701.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. L.G. Marini, *I papiri diplomatici*, Roma 1805, p. 306; C. Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, Graz 1954, s.v. *incontra*; TLL 7.1, col. 1018, all referring to our inscription as the earliest occurrence of the term as a single word comprised of *in* and *contra*. In fact, *incontra* appears first in a funerary inscription from Portus (H. Thylander, *Inscriptions du Port d’Ostie*, Lund 1952, n. A256 = A. Helttula, *Le iscrizioni sepolcrali latine nell’Isola Sacra*, Roma 2007, n. 141), dating to the Hadrianic period (lines 1–5): *D(is) M(anibus) / M(arcus) Ulp(ius) Mercur(ius) / fecit sibi intrantibus incontra / cum sarcophago et aediculam / et columbaria numero VI*. Thylander’s translation of *intransibus incontra*, ‘en face de l’entrée’, matches my rendering of *incontra colomna* in Matrona’s epitaph.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. V. Fiocchi Nicolai, *Strutture funerarie ed edifici di culto paleocristiani di Roma dal III al VI secolo*, in I. Di Stefano Manzella (ed.), *Le iscrizioni dei cristiani in Vaticano: materiali e contributi scientifici per una mostra epigrafica*, Città del Vaticano 1997, pp. 132–134, 139–140; C. Carletti, «Un mondo nuovo». *Epigrafia funeraria dei cristiani a Roma in età postcostantiniana*, «Vetera Christianorum» 35 1998, pp. 66–67; A.E. Cooley, *The Cambridge Manual of Latin Epigraphy*, Cambridge 2012, p. 237. On the Old basilica of S. Paolo fuori le Mura: LP 1.178–179; C. Pietri, *Roma christiana*, Rome 1976, pp. 33–37; R. Krautheimer, *Corpus basilicarum Christianarum Romae*, vol. 5, Città del Vaticano 1977, pp. 93–164. In general on *ad sanctos* burials, Y. Duval, *Auprès des saints corps et âme. L’inhumation “ad sanctos” dans la chrétienté d’Orient et d’Occident du IIIe au VIIe siècle*, Paris 1988, remains authoritative.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Fiocchi Nicolai, *Strutture funerarie*, pp. 127–128; Carletti, «Un mondo nuovo», pp. 45–46, 55–62; Cooley, *The Cambridge Manual*, pp. 237–238.

century Rome.<sup>30</sup> The mention of the exact location of Matrona's tomb within the basilica of S. Paolo fuori le Mura ('in front of the 7<sup>th</sup> column') served the primary function of certifying that Matrona's relatives had attained permission to bury her in that spot; at the same time, however, the reference appears to be additionally meant to highlight the achievement of a privilege and, therefore, to express the higher social and economic status of the deceased.<sup>31</sup> Analogous formulae (and similar intentions, presumably) are shown by two epitaphs from the basilica of S. Pietro: *ICUR II 4213 (= ILCV 2127), Ad sanctum Petrum apostolum ante regia / in porticu columna secunda quomodo intramus / sinistra parte virorum / Lucillus et Ianuaria honesta femina*, and *ICUR II 4214, Loc(us) Macci VIII in c(olumna)*, both dating between 390 and 425 CE. The latter was found 'nella sinistra parte all'entrare della vecchia basilica nella nave minore della porta del Giudizio a' piedi della base della nona colonna'.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, we can conclude that Matrona's tomb was situated in the nave or aisle arcades of the basilica of S. Paolo fuori le Mura, by the seventh column counting from the entrance. Interestingly, references to space and time are tied together in Matrona's epitaph, as *incontra colomna VII* is placed right in the middle of the formula that informs about the date of her burial (lines 5–7). Moreover, the epitaph tells that Matrona was buried on the day after her passing, which is remarkably soon for ancient standards: this is a further sign of Matrona's high status. Her inscribed epitaph first states explicitly (lines 1–4) and then further emphasises through specific references to time and space (lines 5–7) her family's prominent role in Roman society of the time.

#### 5) Epitaph of Epiphania, 23 January 547 CE (Fig. 4)

Slab of white Thasian marble, found reused as part of a funerary monument of the Renaissance in the monastery of S. Francesco at Folloni di Montella, near Avellino, in the modern region of Campania in Italy (ancient Hirpinia).

**Editions:** S. Schiavone, *Un esempio inedito di tardo reimpiego nel monumento funerario di Diego Cavaniglia dal convento di San Francesco a Folloni in Montella (AV): l'epigrafe di Hepifania*, «Bollettino della Soprintendenza ai BAPPSAE di Salerno e Avellino» 2007, pp. 15–17; Id., *Due lastre marmoree con iscrizione funeraria reimpiegate nel monumento*

<sup>30</sup> As Carletti, «*Un mondo nuovo*», p. 60, labels the diverse elite people buried at S. Pietro, S. Paolo, S. Lorenzo al Verano, and the *basilica Apostolorum*, among whom he includes Matrona. On Matrona: *PLRE II* p. 735; Cornelius: *PLRE II* p. 326; Porforius: *PLRE II* p. 900. The office of *primicerius cenariorum* was *novum* to De Rossi (see *ICUR II 4928*); the same office is probably mentioned in *ICUR VI 15989* (362 CE).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Carletti, «*Un mondo nuovo*», pp. 59–60; Cooley, *The Cambridge Manual*, p. 238.

<sup>32</sup> A. Bosio, *Roma sotterranea*, Rome 1632, p. 33. Further epitaphs inscribed on columns in the same church are *ICUR II 4191, 4195, 4197, 4199, 4215* – however, these inscriptions do not refer in any way to the columns themselves nor to the tombs' location. Similarly, with the exception of Matrona's inscription, none of the hundreds of epitaphs that were found in and around S. Paolo fuori le Mura bears any reference to the specific spot of the graves. Conversely, a few further examples of epitaphs that specify where the sepulchres were situated come from other cemeterial areas in Rome, e.g.: *si[bi] vivo fecit cubuculum in cem(eterio) [A]dauti et Feli[c]is (ICUR III 8669); arco[so]lium in Callisti at domn[um] Gaium (ICUR IV 9924); at Criscent[ionis] introit[um] (ICUR IX 25165).*

*rinascimentale di Diego Cavaniglia*, in A. Stoia (ed.), *Diego Cavaniglia. La rinascita di un conte*, Montella 2010, pp. 159–168, figs. 2-4; *AEp* 2012, 389.

*B(onae) † M(emoriam)*  
† *Hic requiescit in pace dom(i)na*  
*{H}ep{h}ifania. Deposita est X K(a)l(endas)*  
*F<e>bruarias, die IIII f(eria), ] p(ost) c(onsulatum) Basili*  
*qui vixit annus plus*  
*minus XXXII*<sup>33</sup>

«Of happy memory. Here rests in peace the *domina* Epiphania. She was buried on the 10<sup>th</sup> day before the calends of February, on the 4<sup>th</sup> *feria* (= Wednesday), six years after the consulship of Basilius. She lived more or less 32 years.»

Let us focus here on the dating formula (lines 3–4). The day of the week (line 4: *die IIII f(eria)*) is expressed through a formula that was employed in the early Christian West. The Greek nomenclature attested in the East (ἡμέρα β' or ἡμέρα δευτέρα for Monday, ἡμέρα γ' or ἡμέρα τρίτη for Tuesday, and so forth till σάββατον and ἡμέρα Κυριακή for Saturday and Sunday, respectively) was translated into Latin as *feria secunda* (or *feria II*), *feria tertia* (or *feria III*), *feria quarta* (or *feria IV*; also *IIII*, as in the example under discussion), *feria quinta* (or *feria V*), *feria sexta* (or *feria VI*), for Monday to Friday, and *sabbatum* and *dominica* (or *dominicus*) for Saturday and Sunday. As in the case of Epiphania's epitaph, the Latin formulae are occasionally preceded by the word *die*. With the exception of an isolated occurrence in Tertullian, the Christian nomenclature of the Roman West does not appear in literary sources before the fourth century CE.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, the earliest epigraphic evidence belongs to as late as the sixth century CE. The number of '*feria* inscriptions' is in fact very limited. Epiphania's epitaph is among a handful of examples belonging to the sixth century CE.<sup>35</sup> Most '*feria* inscriptions' are of ecclesiastical origin: epitaphs of monks, priests, and other members of the clergy, inscriptions commemorating the foundation of churches, etc. The epigraphic evidence thus suggests that the use of the Christian nomenclature in Latin remained essentially limited to ecclesiastical circles and did not become popular among the rest of the population, who by and large continued to use the planetary designations for the days of the week. In this sense, Epiphania's epitaph represents an exception, as there are no clear signs that the deceased had a religious role. The title

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<sup>33</sup> A couple of inaccuracies in Schiavone's edition of the text, namely *f(erias)* instead of *f(eria)* on line 4, and [*B(onae) † M(emoriam)*] on line 1 –although the author affirmed he had actually seen traces of B, M, and the cross– were rectified in *AEp* 2012, 389.

<sup>34</sup> Tert. *de iun.* 2.3 and 14.2. The origins of the official Christian nomenclature in Latin are quite obscure: all we have is the isolated and rather late testimony of Bede (*de temp. rat.* 8; *de rat. comp.* 5) who reports that the use of this nomenclature was enacted by Pope Sylvester in the first half of the fourth century (314–335 CE).

<sup>35</sup> The other inscriptions securely dated to the sixth century CE are *ICUR* II 4289 (542–575 CE); *CIL* XII 933 (524 CE); H. Solin, *Le iscrizioni antiche di Trebula, Caiatia e Cubulteria*, Caserta 1993, n. 110 (559 CE). As might be expected, this is entirely a western phenomenon: '*feria* inscriptions' come predominantly from the territories of modern Italy, Spain, France, and Germany, with isolated examples from Tunisia and Portugal.

*domina* was widely used in late antiquity as a respectful form of address to women and frequently refers to women belonging to wealthy and prominent families, who were often householders and owners of estates themselves.<sup>36</sup> However, even if Epiphania had no religious role, she was certainly Christian, and being a member of the local aristocracy and possibly a landowner she was probably a fervent supporter and patron of the Church. Consequently, the use of the terminology employed preponderantly in ecclesiastical circles to express the day of the week on her epitaph does not ultimately represent an actual exception to the general pattern.

As for the consular year mentioned in Epiphania's epitaph, Schiavone dated the inscription to 542 CE, i.e. to the year following that on which Basilius held the office of consul (line 4: *p(ost) c(onsulatum) Basili*).<sup>37</sup> In 542, however, 23 January (lines 3–4: *X K(a)l(endas) F<e>bruarias*) did not fall on a Wednesday (line 4: *IIII f(eria)*), but on a Thursday. This discrepancy in the dating formula could be solved by assuming that the S-shaped sign between the day of the week and the consular year (Fig. 4) represents a Greek *stigma* or *episemon*. The sign is commonly found from the second century CE onwards to express the Roman numeral six (both by itself and as part of other numerals), especially in Christian inscriptions, and survived into the early Middle Ages.<sup>38</sup> As Basilius was the last consul, the years after 541 were generally expressed in postconsulates, that is, in number of years after his consulate.<sup>39</sup> If we interpret the sign preceding *p(ost) c(onsulatum) Basili* on line 4 as a *stigma* for the numeral six, then all elements in the dating formula match: 23 January in the year 547 CE did fall on a Wednesday.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *TLL* V 1939, 40–49. Cf. K. Cooper, *The Fall of the Roman Household*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 41–42 and 85. With specific reference to Epiphania's aristocratic status, cf. C. Lambert, *Studi di epigrafia tardoantica e medievale in Campania*, vol. 1, *secoli IV-VII*, Borgo San Lorenzo 2008, p. 95 note 56; M. Fariello, C. Lambert, *Il territorio di Abellinum in età tardoantica. Dati archeologici e documenti epigrafici*, in C. Ebanista, M. Rotili (a cura di), *La Campania fra tarda antichità e alto medioevo: ricerche di archeologia del territorio*, Cimitile 2009, p. 69; Schiavone, *Due lastre*, p. 166.

<sup>37</sup> Schiavone, *Due lastre*, p. 167. On the consul, see *PLRE* III pp. 174–175; Bagnall et al., *Consuls*, pp. 616–617.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. J.-M. Lassère, *Manuel d'épigraphie romaine*, Paris 2005, pp. 57–59; Cooley, *The Cambridge Manual*, p. 358. The examples shown by Lassère, *Manuel*, pp. 58–59, fig. 33, all dating to the fifth and sixth centuries CE, illustrate how the *stigma* or *episemon* as the Roman numeral six could take various shapes, from ζ (B, D, F in fig. 33), to an actual S (E in fig. 33). *ILCV* 251–263 give an idea of the frequency with which the sign was used as part of consular dates during the sixth century.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Bagnall et al., *Consuls*, p. 617. See, e.g., *CIL* V 5403: *XV p(ost) c(onsulatum) Basili*; *ICUR* II 5090: *XIII p(ost) c(onsulatum) Basili*; *ICUR* II 5089: *IIII p(ost) c(onsulatum) Basili*; *ICI* XIII 8: *iter(um) p(ost) [c(onsulatum) B]as[il]i* and *octies p(ost) c(onsulatum) Basi(li)*.

<sup>40</sup> Schiavone, *Due lastre*, p. 164 interprets the symbol in question as a dividing sign, and refers to studies by H. Solin on similar signs in sixth century inscriptions from Campania. Solin, however, does not interpret these various S-shaped signs consistently as dividing signs. As Schiavone himself admits, moreover, the sign j would be the only punctuation mark used in the inscription; it is thus hard to explain why a dividing sign would be required only in that specific position, and not, for instance, between *F<e>bruarias* and *die* too.