

## TURIA, LEPIDUS, AND ROME'S EPIGRAPHIC ENVIRONMENT

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### Abstract

This paper discusses the episode in the *laudatio* 'Turiae' of an elite Roman woman's interaction with the *triumvir* M. Aemilius Lepidus (LT 2.13–17). Scholarship of the last century has discussed this element of the LT from a variety of standpoints. None of these treatments has approached the description of the experiences and actions of the *laudata* from the perspective of the ancient consumer of information and meaning within the complete epigraphic environment of the inscription. I will look at the ways in which a contemporary audience perceived and understood the details of this episode in the life-history of the *laudata* in relation to the wider *sensorium* of visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic cues comprising the funerary *monumentum*.

This is a brief study of historical female representation in the discourse of epigraphic *laudatio*. The funeral inscription best known as the *laudatio* 'Turiae' (LT) contains, among a great deal of important political, social, and cultural information, a description of the commemorated woman's interaction with the *triumvir* M. Aemilius Lepidus (LT 2.13–17):

[13] ... ad eius]

[14] pedes prostrata humi [n]on modo non adleuata, sed tra[cta et seruilem in]

[15] modum rapsata, liuori[bus c]orporis repleta, firmissimo [animo eum admone]

[16] res edicti Caesaris cum g[r]atulatione restitutionis me[ae auditisque uerbis eti]

[17] am contumeliosis et cr[ud]elibus exceptis uolneribus pa[lam ea praeferres] ...

'... prostrate at his feet, you were not only not raised up but were dragged away and carried off by force in the manner of a slave. Although your body was full of bruises, your spirit was very strong, and you kept reminding him of Caesar's edict with its manifestation of joy at my reinstatement; and although you heard insulting words and suffered cruel wounds, you placed these things before him openly ...'

Scholarship of the last century has discussed this element of the LT in its historical and literary contexts, addressed a variety of social and legal issues pertinent to the *laudator's* account, and evaluated its depiction of M. Aemilius Lepidus in the light of his attested character and career.<sup>1</sup> None of these treatments has approached the description of the experiences and actions of the *laudata* from the perspective of the ancient consumer of information and meaning within the complete epigraphic environment of the inscription.<sup>2</sup> That is, by looking at the ways in which a contemporary audience of many, few, or even one perceived and understood the details of this episode in the life history of the *laudata* in relation to the wider *sensorium* of visual,

<sup>1</sup> Gowing 1992; Horsfall 1983: 92; Wistrand 1976: 46–49; Flach 1975: 12–20; Balsdon 1962: 205; Maschkin 1954: 180–182; Durry 1950: xciv; Gordon 1950; Warde Fowler 1905: 266.

<sup>2</sup> The recent study of Hemelrijk (2004) looks at the LT from the viewpoint of the male commemorator.

auditory, and kinaesthetic elements comprising the funerary *monumentum*. To make the point simply, we may exclude pre-burial encounters with a part or parts of the *laudatio*'s contents, or aspects of the decorative and structural assemblages associated with the finished memorial inscriptions and tomb design. These omissions still leave us with a major feature of the funerary complex — a sculptural image or images of the female dedicatee and, more than likely, of the male commemorator as well — and a variety of occasions during which this aspect of the funeral monument could be viewed in relation to the textual representation of the memorialized individual, as well as experienced in ritual, festival, and incidental contexts. Karen Stears (1995: 129, n. 2) argues that material culture may 'convey information about a number of referents both at a simplistic and an ideological level'. Therefore, how Roman society and its constituent populations represented identity and subjectivity in spatial and temporal terms will have depended in part on the artefacts and ideologies which they produced and of which they were constituted.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, the inscribed description of a Roman *matrona*'s interactions with the presiding *triumvir* of 42 BCE should be viewed in context with the social and iconographic components of the epigraphic environment in which it was situated. Of course, only the inscription has survived to the modern age. So, too, it is possible that certain aspects comprising the textual, visual, and associated sensory experience of the ancient funerary context may have signified to a contemporary audience a range of meanings hidden from or lost to the modern historian. However, considering one feature in isolation from the remainder unnecessarily compounds the difficulties of analysis and limits the scope for balanced evaluation.

As we read these verses of the LT, then, we should envisage<sup>4</sup> a sculpted statue, either free-standing or affixed, and alone or perhaps beside another of her husband. In terms of gesture, posture and attributes, we may wish to normalize further the imagined representations. This will include visualising the statue of the *laudata* as *palliata* in a *pudicitia* pose<sup>5</sup> and that of the *laudator* as *togatus* with either a *tabula nuptialis* or a *libellus*. Either or both figures may have possessed an arm sling. Although it is difficult to establish precisely the date of commemoration, it would accord well with the details of the inscription to render the portraits according to what is called *der sachliche Stil*.<sup>6</sup> Both *laudata* and *laudator* will have been depicted in the veristic mode, with attention to details of appearance like skin texture, facial lines and blemishes, and other assiduously reproduced physiognomic idiosyncrasies. As far as the portrait of the *laudata* is concerned, we may discount the early to mid-Augustan tendency toward an idealized classicism of style,<sup>7</sup> and minimize the Ovidian catalogue of features likely to engender attraction or accommodate desire.<sup>8</sup> We must also incorporate in

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Giddens 1979; Hadjinicolaou 1978; Woolf 1994.

<sup>4</sup> This discussion relies on Kleiner 1977, Kampen 1991 and Bartman 1999: 18–53.

<sup>5</sup> On the 'pudicitia-type', see, e.g., Bieber 1961: 132–133, figs. 523–525; for earlier scholarship, 132–133, nn. 55, 58; Kleiner 1977: 163–164; cf. Kleiner 1992: 40; Moreno 1994: 673–674; cf. 666, fig. 817; 822, n. 1060 for references; Bartman 1999: 46–47.

<sup>6</sup> This style accords chronologically with the Italo-Hellenistic or mid-Italic representational repertoire in statuary and numismatic portraits.

<sup>7</sup> According to Bartman (1999: 30, n. 66), non-imperial women frequently displayed 'non-idealized features in their portraitures'.

<sup>8</sup> Ov. *Ars am.* 3.163, 227, 261 f.

our reconstruction the addition of paint simulating skin colour and clothing dye and physical decoration, ornamentation of dress and body, to the memorialized subjects. All in all it is more than likely that the *imagines* of the commemorated and commemorating individuals stood in durable and highly visible relation to the accompanying inscription.<sup>9</sup>

In this regard, it is instructive to consider Natalie Boymel Kampen's observation about women as historical subjects of representation (1991: 243):

'Most [women on historical reliefs] appeared in times when the regime was most uncertain about issues of reproduction, legitimacy, and dynastic succession. ... Woman, as the sign of family, had to be represented in public art as domestic and privatized; yet implicit in that representation is her centrality to the well-being of the state'.

It has been argued that Augustus sought to introduce certain moral and reproductive protocols of behaviour and attitude during the last decades of the 1st century BCE.<sup>10</sup> As Horsfall (1983: 93) observes, a considerable proportion of the *laudatio's* second column (LT 2.25–50) expresses a preference for marriage over procreation which was 'starkly and irreconcilably anti-Augustan'. But Kampen's correlation of male uneasiness and the female as ambiguous signifier also allows us to review the incident between the *laudata* and Lepidus with added clarity. In particular, like the *triumvir*, the ancient audience was confronted with a problematic contrast between didactic and moralising non-verbal codes of male and female representation through the modes of portrait production and reception outlined above, and possibly eroticized, certainly non-normative textual traces of an active, intrepid and unyielding woman.

The resonance of these verses with the vocabulary of Augustan ideology<sup>11</sup> and their divergence from the *princeps's* legislation concerning marriage, procreation, and affective relations enhance considerably the notion that the LT should be interpreted within its historical, social and iconographic contexts. As another later epigraphic corollary to this phenomenon, consider the following dedication's alternative representation of notionally dominant ideological discourse (*CIL* 10.5920):

L. COMINIO L. F. L. N. PAL. FIRMO PR(aetori) Q(uaestori) AER(arii) ET  
ALIM(entorum) OPPIAE SEX. ET ) L. EVNOEAE  
EXEMPLVM PERIIT CASTAE LVGETE PVELLAE  
OPPIA IAM NON EST EREPTA EST OPPIA FIRMO  
ACCIPITE HANC ANIMAM NVMEROQVE AVGETE SACR(atam)  
ARRIA ROMANO ET TV GRAIO LAODAMIA  
HVNC TITVLVM MERITIS SERVAT TIBI FAMA SVPERSTES  
SIBI SVIS POSTERISQ. EORVM<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Focussing on the women of the imperial families of the 1st and 2nd centuries CE, Hahn (1994), Rose (1997), Bartman (1999) and Wood (1999) explore this integral icono-epigraphic relation in considerable detail.

<sup>10</sup> Lattimore 1942: 296, n. 251; Raditsa 1980; Wallace-Hadrill 1981: 58 ff; Cohen 1991.

<sup>11</sup> Cf., e.g., *RG* 34.1; *Vell. Pat.* 2.89.2–3, 6; Durry 1950: 53.

<sup>12</sup> For editorial apparatus and commentary, *CIL* 10.1, p. 587. See also *ILS* 6261; *CLE* 423; Courtney 1995: 162–163, 371–372.

‘To Lucius Cominius Firmus, son of Lucius, grandson of Lucius, of the Palatine tribe, praetor, quaestor of the treasury and the child-allowance, and to Oppia Eunoëa, freedwoman of Sextus and a woman. Mourn, the model of a chaste young woman has passed away; Oppia is no longer, Oppia has been taken away from Firmus. Welcome this soul and by category honour her sacred spirit: you, Arria, with the Roman number, and you, Laodamia, with the Greek. Surviving reputation preserves this inscription for you due to your merits. To themselves, their family and their descendants.’

From Anagnia (modern Anagni) in the fertile Sacco valley south-east of Rome, a *municipium* under the Empire, this inscription can be assigned a *terminus post quem* from the citation of the Trajanic *alimenta* or ‘child-allowance’. There is much which at first glance strikes the reader as traditional. One may note the references to *exemplum castae puellae*, which compares favourably to Ovidian combinations and similar Greek epigrammatic inscriptions.<sup>13</sup> Reference can also be made to the deceased’s imagined meeting in the afterlife with two groups of women classified according to their Roman or Greek heritage, each category represented by a woman lauded for devotion to her husband, Arria and Laodamia.<sup>14</sup> But as Courtney (1995: 371–2) observes, citing a private observation by Susan Treggiari, a curious desideratum remains: ‘[I]f Oppia was the wife of Firmus [as mention of Arria and Laodamia suggests] ... their marriage violated the Augustan marriage laws which prohibited men of senatorial rank from marrying freedwomen’. In this context, the subject position of the deceased woman is emphasized by the inclusion of named master and implicit, symbolic mistress in the record of status: *Oppiae Sex(ti) et (Gaiae) l(ibertae) Eunoëae*. Of equal interest is the juxtaposition of Firmus and Oppia with Sextus and absent Gaia. The force of such a remark depends considerably on the perspective of the epitaph’s intended audience.<sup>15</sup>

On the one hand, then, the veristic depiction of the *laudata* may have encapsulated the Augustan ideal of the traditional *matrona* by means of an image strictly under the control of traditional ideological strategies, as Lepidus might have conceived of his temeritous female appellant. But at the same time, the textual residue between dominant male and subordinate female illustrated the radical tensions and ambiguities of power-relations and agency underpinning their encounter. Within these conceptual parameters, we can ‘see’ the life-size figure of the *laudata*, wearing a woollen *stola* over her short-sleeved tunic; her head perhaps veiled by the rectangular mantle of cloth known as the *palla*; her hair bound with the sacrificial woollen bands called *uittae*.<sup>16</sup> Accompanied by the sex-specific body language of the *pudicitia*-form, she would be understood as a chaste Roman married woman of the possessing class.

Yet we hear that this same woman of status and condition placed a request for her husband’s recall from exile before the triumviral tribunal (2.12–13: *per te]/de*

<sup>13</sup> Ovid: *Tr.* 1.6.24, 4.3.72, *Pont.* 3.1.44; Greek epigram: e.g., Peek 1955–7: 404.2.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Prop. 1.19.13, Stat. *Silv.* 5.1.254, *CLE* 1165.1–4, Hyp. *Epit.* 35, *et cetera*.

<sup>15</sup> In an appendix to his article, Voisin (1987: 273–80, n. 21) includes this inscription in a small corpus of material mentioning suicide in a non-derogatory way. Voisin sees the attestation of Arria and Laodamia as an implicit indication that Oppia committed autothanasia *in deuotio*. For related epigraphic instances, cf. Peek 1.2088a (Alkestis in Odessos), 1.1738 (Kallikrateia), and the related Greek and Latin inscriptions *CIL* 10.7565–6, 7569–70, 7574–6 (Atilia Pomptilla).

<sup>16</sup> For the Roman *matrona*’s ‘costume’, see Sebesta and Bonfante 1994: 48–9.

*restitutione mea ... interp[ellaretur]*). This was the act of a confident, capable and determined individual, free to move without challenge between the private and public spaces of the city, cognizant of the rights and obligations of the Roman citizen, and undeterred by the inherent perils of the situation. It should not be hard to assign these perceptions to an elite female already imagined as independent throughout an extended period of civil unrest, participating in public protestations against sanctioned property legislation, and negotiating pardon for her proscribed husband. In marked contrast, that is, to the depiction of a woman dressed in tightly bound garments constraining movement and characterized by arms close to her body in a position of defensiveness and radical modesty.<sup>17</sup> On her own terms, then, she conferred a symbolic significance on her declaration by prostrating herself before Octavianus' colleague (2.13–14: *ad eius | pedes prostrata humi*). In this act, we need not infer suggestions of compulsion or denigration; the humiliation she proffered was of a far more literal kind, grounded in knowledge of Octavianus' prior favourable adjudication. What Lepidus is said to have perpetrated upon the body and person of the *laudata*, however, cuts even deeper into the iconography of matronal *castitas* and *sanctitas* on display. According to the inscription, she was not only left face down on the floor of the tribunal (2.14: *[n]on modo non adleuata*) but dragged away and carried off in the manner of a slave (2.14–15: *sed tra[cta et seruilem in]|modum rapsata*). In other words, when she might have expected herself, and been expected by those present in the forum, to be raised up in Lepidus' presence, instead the *laudata* had the condition of abject prostration conferred on her. This, and not her own act of respect, marked her as truly humiliated in the eyes of the assembly — a status confirmed by her servile treatment and physical abuse (*liuori[bus c]orporis repleta*).

This study makes much of a statue for which there is no ground, and it is improbable that images of 'Turia' or her dedicating husband, or indeed further fragments of the *laudatio*, will ever be recovered. However, the point of the discussion has been to demonstrate the usefulness of providing a more complete context for what remains of this important inscription. To do so requires the modern reader to acknowledge the various elements of the Roman epigraphic environment, and in this instance the speculative reinsertion of funerary statuary. It is more unlikely that statues of commemorator and commemorated were originally absent. In relation to LT 2.13–17, it is possible to see that a freeborn Roman *matrona* suffering the ignominy of public brutalization could only have struck the viewer and reader as a conceptual assault on the ideological principles represented in the repertoire of exposed epigraphic portraits. Simultaneously, statue and inscription interact to reinstate and complicate highly volatile discourses of bodily integrity, personal status and gender relations.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Davies (1997) considers the kinesic, proxemic and paralinguistic utility of body language analysis in relation to gender and Roman art.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Anderson and Nista (1988: 68): 'The history of Roman portraiture looks very different when surveyed not by typological and chronological means, but through a consideration of function and context'.

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