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Poetry on Stone: Epigram and Audience in Rome

Times have changed. Late Latin poetry has largely shaken free of the prejudices that long inhibited it. Literary scholars, adapting perspectives gleaned from the poetry of early imperial Rome, continue to clarify how the enticements of miniaturization, narrative disruption, generic blurring, and allusion shaped the aesthetic sensibilities of such poets as Ausonius, Prudentius, Claudian, and Paulinus of Nola.[1] That the Latin verse inscriptions of late antiquity,

[1] E.g., Stephen Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Jacques Fontaine, *Naissance de la poésie dans l'occident chrétien* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1981); Jean-Louis Charlet, "Aesthetic Trends in Late Latin Poetry (325–410)," *Philologus* 132 (1988): 74–85; Michael Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca NT: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Marc Mastrangelo in this volume. For author-specific studies see S. Georgia Nugent, "Ausonius' 'Late-Antique' Poetics and 'Post-Modern' Literary Theory," *Ramus* 19 (1990): 26–50; Marc Mastrangelo, *The Roman Self in Late Antiquity: Prudentius and the Poetics of the Soul* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Anthony Dykes, *Reading Sin in the World: The* Hamartigenia *of Prudentius and the Vocation of the Responsible Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Martha Malamud, *The Origin of Sin: An English Translation of the Hamartigenia. Prudentius. Translated and with an Interpretive Essay* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Marie-France Guipponi-Gineste, "Poétique de la réflexivité chez Claudien," in *Lateinisiche Poesie der Spätantike*, ed. Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer and Petra Schierl (Basel: Schwabe, 2009), 33–62; Catherine Ware, *Claudian and the Roman Epic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Nils Rücker, "*Ausonio possis considere portu* (Verg. *Aen.* 3,378): Ausonius, Paulinus, Ovid und Vergil: Spätantike Briefdichtung neu gelesen," in Harich-Schwarzbauer and Schierl, *Lateinsiche Poesie der Spätantike*, 83–108; Gaëlle Herbert de la Portbarré-Viard, "La poétique de l'édification spirituelle chez Paulin de Nole: Un manifeste littéraire explicite ou implicite?," in *Manifestes littéraires dans la latinité tardive: Poétique et rhétorique*, ed. Perrine Galand-Hallyn and Vincent Zarini (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 2009), 109–31; and Kurt Smolak, "*Beatus ille* … Osservazioni sul carme 7 di Paolino di Nola," in *Il calamo della memoria. Riuso di testi e mestiere letterario nella tarda antichità IV*, ed. Lucio Cristante and Simona Ravalico (Trieste: Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2011), 195–206.

too, were at times profoundly original, creatively echoing poets of the classical past as well as one another, is equally a concession granted by an expanding circle of epigraphers and historians.[2] Even so, and despite the burgeoning popularity of epigraphic verse across the fourth century, both the distinct poetic qualities of metrical inscriptions and the broader cultural implications of inscribing poetry on public monuments and tombstones remain relatively under-appreciated.[3]

[2] On classical echoes note the commentary in F. Buecheler, *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, vols. 1–2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1895–97); and E. Lommatzsch, *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, vol. 3*: Supplementum* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1926); Max Ihm, *Damasi Epigrammata* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1895); Ernst Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres. Vols. I–III* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1925–31); with E. Lissberger, *Das Fortleben der römischen Elegiker in den Carmina Epigraphica* (Tübingen: Eugen Göbel, 1934); R. P. Hoogma, *Der Einfluss Vergils auf die Carmina Latina Epigraphica* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1959); Paolo Cugusi, *Aspetti letterari dei Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, 2nd ed. (Bologna: Pàtron, 1996), 165–98 and 339–63; and W. Schetter, "Poésie épigraphique," in *Nouvelle histoire de la littérature latin 5: Restauration et renouveau: La littérature latine de 284 à 374 après J.-C.*, ed. Reinhart Herzog (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), 258–71. The most obvious forms of reverberation are the duplicate (*doppione*) and the repetition (*ritornello*): see John Zarker, *Studies in the Carmina Latina Epigraphica* (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1958), 111–33, with a review of the literature; Paolo Cugusi, "'Doppioni' e 'ritornelli' epigrafici," *Bollettino di Studi Latini* 33 (2003): 449–66; and Paolo Cugusi, "Testi metrici latini ripetuti nelle iscrizioni cristiane di Roma con cenni sugli epigrammi di papa Damaso e di papa Simmaco," *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, 3rd ser., *Rendiconti* 80 (2007–2008): 393–428. For recent affirmation of originality see Christine Hamdoune, *Vie, mort et poésie dans l'Afrique romaine d'après un choix de Carmina Latina Epigraphica* (Brussels: Édition Latomus, 2011), 9; for arguments that the empire's *carmina epigraphica* show signs of their authors' own reading and not recourse to stonecutters' manuals: Dorothy Pikhaus, "Literary Activity in the Provinces: The *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* from Roman Africa (Ist – VIth Century)," *Euphrosyne* 15 (1987): 171–94; and Jean Meyers, "L'influence de la poésie classique dans les *Carmina epigraphica* funéraires d'Afrique du Nord," in Hamdoune, *Vie, mort et poésie dans l'Afrique romaine*, 307–10.

[3] Avoidance is understandable. For the challenges of integrating the literary, epigraphic, and historical dimensions of even a single *carmen epigraphicum*, see Maria José Pena, "Deux *carmina* de *Caesarea* (Cherchel) et la Péninsule ibérique (nos. 170 et 162)," in Hamdoune, *Vie, mort et poésie dans l'Afrique romaine*, 285–98. For new directions, see Pikhaus, "Literary Activity;" Dennis Trout, "Borrowed Verse and Broken Narrative: Agency, Identity, and the (Bethesda) Sarcophagus of Bassa," in *Life, Death and Representation: Some New Work on Roman Sarcophagi*, ed. J. Elsner and J. Huskinson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 337–58; Dennis Trout, "*Fecit ad astra viam*: Daughters, Wives, and the Metrical Epitaphs of Late Ancient Rome," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 21 (2013): 1–25; and Meyers, "L'influence de la poésie classique," 311–17.

Certainly not all the features now readily associated with late antique poetics are equally manifest or traceable in the metrical inscriptions of the age. Brevity alone imposed restrictions, while questions remain about the respective contributions of patrons, poets, and stonecutters in the composition and display of inscribed epigrams, rendering issues of authorship and authorial intention particularly troublesome.[4] Two features of epigraphic verse, however, militate against simply viewing the *carmen epigraphicum* as a pale shade of elite textual or performance poetry. Recognition of both the intrinsically public nature of inscribed epigrams and the broader range of their social distribution opens up distinctive avenues of approach to the dynamic literary culture of late ancient Rome. To be sure, by the mid-fourth century verse began to be composed (or commissioned) for inscription by some of the same Roman aristocrats who circulated the works of an Ausonius or Paulinus while tossing off their own hexameters and couplets.[5] Both the sarcophagus of the urban prefect Junius Bassus, who died in 359, and the mausoleum of the former consul Petronius Probus, buried on the Vatican some three decades later, incorporated inscribed epigrams.[6] Yet much of the age's funerary poetry memorialized men and women of considerably lower social standing, illustrating how authorship served as a form of social agency and a stage for social performance beyond the households of the senatorial class. Indeed, even the im-

[4] Begin with the remarks of Meyers, "L'influence de la poésie classique," 307–9.

[5] Illustrative examples are at Symmachus *ep.* 1.1 and 1.2 (including verses composed and exchanged by Symmachus and his father) and Sym. *ep.* 1.14 (to Ausonius concerning the *Mosella*); see Michele Salzman and Michael Roberts, *The Letters of Symmachus: Book 1* (Atlanta GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). For the epigrams that Paulinus composed and forwarded to Sulpicius Severus, see Paul. Nol. *ep.* 32.

[6] Alan Cameron, "The Funeral of Junius Bassus," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 139 (2002): 288–92; Dennis Trout, "The Verse Epitaph(s) of Petronius Probus: Competitive Commemoration in Late-Fourth-Century Rome," *New England Classical Journal* 28 (2001): 157–76; and Christian Witschel, "Alte und neue Erinnerungsmodi in den spätantiken Inschriften Roms," in *Rom in der Spätantike: Historische Erinnerung im städtischen Raum*, ed. R. Behrwald and C. Witschel (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 396–99. The change is noteworthy: verse epitaphs, eschewed by the nobility of early imperial Rome, only emerge as a medium of elite self-representation in the fourth century; see Étienne Wolff, *La Poésie funéraire épigraphique à Rome* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2000), 21.

perially and episcopally sponsored epigraphic verse of the fourth century presumes a community of readers not circumscribed by the clarissimate yet sensitive to the intertextual gambits characteristic of Late Latin verse.[7] Indeed, one distinct asset of poetry on stone was its capacity for gesturing toward other monuments as well as toward past poets.

An Arch, an Obelisk, and a Basilica

In the year 315 the senate and people of Rome dedicated an arch near the Flavian amphitheater to celebrate both Constantine's recent victory over Maxentius and, with rather less fanfare, the emperor's *decennalia*. The inscriptions prominently set into the north and south faces of the arch's attic announced the rationale behind its construction:[8]

> imp. Caes. Fl. Constantino maximo
> p. f. Augusto s. p. q. R.,
> quod instinctu divinitatis, mentis
> magnitudine, cum exercitu suo
> tam de tyranno quam de omni eius
> factione uno tempore iustis
> rempublicam ultus est armis,
> arcum triumphis insignem dicavit.
>
> To the emperor Caesar Flavius Constantinus, greatest, dutiful, and blessed Augustus, the Senate and People of Rome dedicated this arch, distinguished by his victories, because, by the instigation of divinity and by greatness of mind, with his army he avenged the state with righteous arms against both the tyrant and all his faction at one and the same time.[9]

A little more than forty years later, following his visit to Rome in 357, Constantine's son and successor, Constantius II, erected in the Circus Maximus the largest Egyptian obelisk ever to wend its way laboriously to the capital.[10] That enormous spire, exceeding thirty-two meters in height and originally removed by Constantine from Egyptian Thebes, where it had been dedicated to the sun god, Re, had lingered at Alexandria until Constantius transported it to Rome and hoisted it onto the *spina* of the city's great racetrack.[11] On the massive granite block supporting it, Constantius carved twenty-four hexameters that recounted the monolith's epic journey and its arrival in Rome as a victorious emperor's gift to the city.[12] Between the dedication of Constantine's arch and the installation of Constantius' obelisk, perhaps Constantine and certainly other members of his family elsewhere in Rome embellished imperial foundations with metrical texts. In the 340s Constantine's daughter, Constantina, funded the construction of a large ambulatory basilica at a cemetery along the Via Nomentana and proclaimed her patronage in a dedicatory epigram, the earliest securely dateable imperial *carmen epigraphicum* in Rome. During these same decades at least two celebratory poems were set into the fabric of the Vatican basilica of St. Peter, one on the church's trium-

7 On reading communities see William Johnson, *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), whose approach, though targeting elite writers and readers of the high empire, has much to offer to the study of the *carmina epigraphica*.

8 *CIL* 6.1139 = *ILS* 694 = Grünewald (1990) no. 239 = *CIL* 6.8.2 (1996) ad 1139 (p. 4328). The inscription appears on both the northern and southern exposures of the attic. Translation after Noel Lenski, "Evoking the Pagan Past: *Instinctu divinitatis* and Constantine's Capture of Rome," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1 (2008): 219. On the arch's aesthetic of bricolage, see Jaś Elsner, "From the Culture of *Spolia* to the Cult of Relics: The Arch of Constantine and the Genesis of Late Antique Forms," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 68 (2000): 149–84. On its (mixed) political and religious messages, see Noel Lenski, "Evoking the Pagan Past;" Raymond Van Dam, *Remembering Constantine at the Milvian Bridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 124–40; and Jonathan Bardill, *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 94–100 and 222–30.

9 All translations are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

10 On Constantius in Rome (28 April to 29 May 357), see T. D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 222; David Hunt, "The Successors of Constantine," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 13, *The Late Empire, A.D. 337–425*, ed. Averil Cameron and Peter Garnsey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 29–32.

11 The history of the obelisk is recorded by Ammianus at 16.10.17, 17.4.1, and 17.4.12–23. See further Cesare D'Onofrio, *Gli obelischi di Roma*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Bulzoni, 1967), 160–72; Erik Iversen, *Obelisks in Exile*, vol. 1, *The Obelisks of Rome* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1968), 55–64; Jean-Claude Grenier, "Obeliscus Constantii: Circus Maximus," *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* 3 (1996): 356–57; and Paolo Liverani, "Costanzo II e l'obelisco del Circo Massimo a Roma," in *Et in Aegypto et ad Aegyptum: Recueil d'études dédiées à Jean-Claude Grenier*, ed. A. Gasse, F. Servajean, and C. Thiers (Montpellier: CENiM, 2012), 471–87.

12 On the discrepancies between the epigram and Ammianus' account, see Gavin Kelly, "The New Rome and the Old: Ammianus Marcellinus' Silences on Constantinople," *Classical Quarterly* 53 (2003): 588–607.

phal arch and another in its apse.[13] Somewhat unexpectedly, the heirs of Constantine, for reasons whose fuller implications must await discussion elsewhere, deemed inscribed poetry an appropriate medium for distinguishing themselves within a competitive dynasty.

It was in the decade or so following her father's death, that Constantina oversaw construction of the first basilica dedicated to the virgin martyr Agnes at the suburban *coemeterium S. Agnetis* and announced her benefaction in fourteen inscribed hexameters:[14]

[13] Dating remains controversial but can reasonably be set between 324, crediting one or both of the epigrams to Constantine himself, and the later 350s. See, e.g., Richard Krautheimer, "A Note on the Inscription in the Apse of Old St. Peter's," *Dumbarton Oaks* Papers 41 (1987): 317–20; Richard Krautheimer, "The Building Inscriptions and the Dates of Construction of Old St. Peter's: A Reconsideration," *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 25 (1989): 1–23; Glen Bowersock, "Peter and Constantine," in *St. Peter's in the Vatican*, ed. William Tronzo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 5–15; Paolo Liverani, "L'architettura costantiniana, tra committenza imperiale e contributo delle élites locali," in *Konstantin der Grosse. Geschichte, Archäologie, Rezeption*, ed. A. Demandt and J. Engemann (Trier: Fritz Thyssen Stiftung, 2006), 235–44; and Paolo Liverani, "Saint Peter's, Leo the Great and the leprosy of Constantine," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 76 (2008): 153–72. *ICUR* 1 (1922) 3900, most likely from the Basilica Apostolorum on the Via Appia, is another candidate.

[14] *ICUR* 8.20752 = *CLE* 301 = *ILCV* 1768 = Ihm 84 = Ferrua (1942) 71. See also Carlo Carletti, *Epigrafia dei cristiani in occidente dal III al VII secolo: Ideologia e prassi* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2008), 249–50. The text survived to the modern period only in manuscript copies. For recent presentations with further bibliography, see Paola De Santis, *Sanctorum Monumenta: "Aree sacre" del suburbio di Roma nella documentazione epigrafica (IV–VII secolo)* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2010), 96 and Dennis Trout, "Vergil and Ovid at the Tomb of Agnes: Constantina, Epigraphy, and the Genesis of Christian Poetry," in *Ancient Documents and their Contexts. First North American Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy (2011)*, ed. John Bodel and Nora Dimitrova (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 263–82. There and here I reproduce the text of Ihm, Buecheler at *CLE* 301, and Diehl at *ILCV* 1768. The text at Ferrua (1942) and Ferrua *ICUR* 8.20752 differs only in that editor's preference for *sacravit* (attested by some manuscripts) over *sacravi* in line four. On Constantina, the eldest daughter of Constantine and Fausta, see *PLRE* 1, "Constantina 2." Born perhaps ca. 320, widowed in 337, Constantina was married to Caesar Gallus in 351. She died in Bithynia in 354 but was buried in a mausoleum (now S. Costanza) adjoining the Via Nomentana basilica. The dating is discussed in full at Trout, "Vergil and Ovid." On the building, the largest of Rome's ambulatory basilicae, see Hugo Brandenburg, *Le prime chiese di Roma: IV–VII secolo* (Milan: Editoriale Jaca Book, 2013), 71–77.

C onstantina deum venerans Christoque dicata
O mnibus impensis devota mente paratis
N umine divino multum Christoque iuvante
S acravi templum victricis virginis Agnes,
T emplorum quod vincit opus terrenaque cuncta,
A urea quae rutilant summi fastigia tecti.
N omen enim Christi celebratur sedibus istis,
T artaream solus potuit qui vincere mortem
I nvectus caelo solusque inferre triumphum
N omen Adae referens et corpus et omnia membra
A mortis tenebris et caeca nocte levata.
D ignum igitur munus martyr devotaque Christo
E x opibus nostris per saecula longa tenebis,
O felix virgo, memorandi nominis Agnes.

I, Constantina, venerating God and consecrated to Christ,
having devoutly provided for all expenses,
with considerable divine inspiration and Christ assisting,
have dedicated the temple of the victorious virgin Agnes,
which surpasses the workmanship of temples and all earthly (buildings)
that the golden gables of lofty roofs illumine with reddish glow.
For the name of Christ is celebrated in this hall,
who alone was able to vanquish infernal death,
and, borne to heaven, alone carry in the triumph,
restoring the name of Adam and the body and all the limbs
released from the shadows of death and dark night.
Therefore, martyr and devotee of Christ, this worthy gift
from our resources you will possess through the long ages,
O happy maid, of the noteworthy name Agnes.

Constantina deum venerans is pioneering verse. The poem's acrostic (*Constantina Deo*) expresses the fascination with visually figured poetry already evident in the works of Optatianus Porfyrius and prefigures the popularity of the *carmen figuratum* in later decades. The epigram's intertextual gambols replay the allusive strategies of Lucan and Statius while foreshadowing the terms of engagement with Virgil and Ovid advanced by such Christian poets of the next generation as Prudentius and Paulinus of Nola.[15] But monumental poetry might nod toward other monuments as well, and Constantina's epigram also recapitulates and recasts the bellicose imagery of the newly sculpted battle scenes and attic inscription of her father's Colosseum arch. That downtown monument, even if remarkably candid about the civil nature of the conflict it memorialized,

[15] E.g., Virgil. *A.* 2.302: *summi fastigia tecti*; Ovid, *Met.* 15.446: *per saecula longa potentem*. See further Trout, "Vergil and Ovid," with the studies cited above in note 2.

had not strayed far from the traditional vocabulary of triumphal celebration. Constantina's funerary hall, by contrast, dominating an extra-mural necropolis, honored a novel victor, matchless in his conquest of infernal death itself (*nomen enim Christi … / tartaream solus potuit qui vincere mortem / … solusque inferre triumphum*). At the same time, the basilica's dedicatory epigram trumpeted Constantina's own defeat of her rivals (*sacravi templum … quod vincit*) and trumped the arch's ambivalent *quod instinctu divinitatis* with unequivocal celebration of the empress's celestial alliance: *numine divino multum Christoque iuvante*. Verbal cues strengthened the association of basilica and arch: Constantina's *dicata*, *mente*, and *triumphum* echoed the attic's *dicavit, mentis,* and *triumphis*. In these years when she was the only heir of Constantine resident in Rome, Constantina's funerary hall and its poetic signpost worked in tandem to define her investment in the economy of benefaction and honor that still entwined the imperial family and the populace of the empire's ancient capital.[16]

A decade or so later, in the wake of his brief stay on the Palatine in the spring of 357, Constantius' Roman agents inscribed the granite base of his Egyptian obelisk with twenty-four hexameters. At the time Constantius was undoubtedly aware of his recently deceased sister's basilica on the Via Nomentana; certainly he knew his father's arch in the Colosseum valley. His obelisk now joined them as a Constantinian victory monument. In some measure, right of arms again provided the justification, but Constantius also capitalized on his realization of an engineering feat that had stymied even his father. It is perhaps fitting then that, as had Constantina, he publicized his accomplishments in epic meter.[17]

Patris opus munusqu[e suum] tibi, Roma, dicavit
Augustus [toto Constan]tius orbe recepto,
et quod nulla tulit tellus nec viderat aetas
condidit, ut claris exa[equ]et dona triumfis.
Hoc decus ornatum genitor cognominis urbis
esse volens, caesa Thebis de rupe revellit. 6

[16] Hunt, "The Successors of Constantine," 30; Elizabeth Marlowe, "*Liberator Urbis Suae*: Constantine and the Ghost of Maxentius," in *The Emperor and Rome: Space, Representation, and Ritual*, ed. Björn Ewald and Carlos Noreña (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 215–19.

[17] For the text see *CIL* 6.1163 (Bormann and Henzen) = *CLE* 279 = *ILS* 736 = *CIL* 6.8.2 (1996) ad 1163, p. 4331 (Scheithauer), with E. Courtney, *Musa Lapidaria: A Selection of Latin Verse Inscriptions* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), no. 31; Jean-Marie Lassère, *Manuel d'épigraphie romaine*, 2 vols. 3rd ed. (Paris: Picard, 2011), 534–36; and Liverani, "Costanzo II e l'obelisco," 472–73. Only the final two lines are truly problematic: I follow here the restorations at *CIL* 6.1163 and the arguments of Liverani.

The work of his father and his own gift to you, Rome,
Constantius Augustus dedicated when he possessed the whole world,
and what no land produced nor age had seen
he has set up in order to make his gifts equal to his brilliant triumphs.
Wishing this ornament to be an adornment for the city of his name,
At Thebes his father tore it away from hewn rock.

Sed gravior divum tangebat cura vehendi,
quod nullo ingenio nisuque manuque moveri
Caucaseam molem discurrens fama monebat.
At dominus mundi Constantius, omnia fretus
cedere virtuti, terris incedere iussit
haut partem exiguam montis pontoq(ue) tumenti 12

But a weightier concern about moving it touched the divine ruler
because scurrying rumor announced that by no skill
and exertion and labor could the Caucasus-like mass be moved.
But the master of the world, Constantius, trusting that all things
would yield to his power, ordered this sizeable part of a mountain to advance
over the lands and to the swelling sea

credidit, et placido [vexerunt aequora flu]ctu
litus ad Hesperium, [Tiberi] miranti, carinam.
Interea, Romam ta[et]ro vastante tyranno,
Augusti iacuit donum studiumque locandi
non fastu spreti, sed quod non crederet ullus,
tantae molis opus superas consurgere in auras. 18

he entrusted it, and on calm wave the seas carried the ship
to the Italian shore, with Tiber admiring.
Meanwhile, with a foul tyrant laying waste to Rome,
the gift of Augustus was lying prostrate, as well as the desire for erecting it,
not through scornful arrogance but because none could believe
that a monument of such great mass could rise into the upper breezes.

Nunc veluti rursus ruf[is] avulsa metallis
emicuit pulsatque polos. Haec gloria dudum
auctori servata suo cu[m c]aede tyranni
redditur, atque aditu Ro[mae vi]rtute reperto
victor ovans urbiq[ue locat sublim]e tropaeum
principis et munus condi[gnis us]que triumfis.

Now as if torn away anew from the reddish quarry,
it has sprung forth and strikes the heavens. The glory (of this accomplishment),
long reserved for its executor, with the tyrant's slaughter
is now granted, and with his approach to Rome obtained through his power,

the victor, exulting, bestows on the city the lofty trophy
of an emperor and a tribute to (his own) ever worthy triumphs.

Constantius' Circus monument variously mimicks both the Via Nomentana basilica and the Colosseum arch. Like the latter, Constantius' obelisk loomed over the route of the Via Triumphalis and was associated with a massive entertainment complex that had long been a showcase for imperial largesse. Indeed, Constantine himself had expended lavishly on the Circus.[18] Moreover, both arch and obelisk pay subtle homage to the cult of a sun god long entangled with Constantine's public image.[19] As Constantina's epigram stresses the incomparability of the *templum* she had constructed *ex opibus nostris*, Constantius' verses highlight the marvelous quality (*quod nulla tulit tellus nec viderat aetas*) and personal nature (*suum*) of his new gift to the city.

The medium of verse, however, again facilitated a level of verbal and monumental interplay that transcended the limitations of standard epigraphic formulations. The obelisk's first hexameter, for example, immediately evokes both Constantine and Constantina: *patris opus* obliquely summons the former while the line's final word, *dicavit*, echoes the final word (*dicavit*) of the arch's attic inscription. Within this linear frame Constantius' *opus munusque* reprises two key terms from Constantina's Sant'Agnese epigram: the first, as noted, was central to the empress's articulation of the insuperability of her basilica (*quod vincit opus*); the latter now qualifies Constantius' tribute to

[18] Elizabeth Marlowe, "Framing the Sun: The Arch of Constantine and the Roman Cityscape," *The Art Bulletin* 88.2 (2006): 223–42 on the calculated placement of Constantine's arch in relationship to the nearby colossal statue of the sun god. For Constantine and the Roman cityscape, see John Curran, *Pagan City and Christian Capital: Rome in the Fourth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000); Elizabeth Marlowe, *"That Customary Magnificence which is Your Due:" Constantine and the Symbolic Capital of Rome* (Dissertation: Columbia University, 2004); and Bardill, *Constantine, Divine Emperor*. For Constantine's "lavish embellishments" in the Circus Maximus, which remains the only non-Christian public venue in which Constantine's "architectural benefaction" is beyond dispute, see Marlowe, "*Liberator Urbis Suae*," 216. On the obelisk's victory and triumphal associations see now Liverani, "Costanzo II e l'obelisco," 483–84.

[19] On the arch, see, e.g., Marlowe, "Framing the Sun"; on the obelisk, see Amm. 17.4.12, who verifies contemporary opinion. On the possible pagan and/or Christian associations of solar cult at the time and the obelisk itself, see Garth Fowden, "Nicagoras of Athens and the Lateran Obelisk," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 107 (1987): 51–57; and Caroline Nicholson and Oliver Nicholson, "Lactantius, Hermes Trismegistus and Constantinian Obelisks," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 109

Rome (*munusque suum tibi, Roma, dicavit*), as earlier it described Constantina's gift to Agnes (*dignum igitur munus ... tenebis*). These conceits are echoed in the epigram's closing line through repetition and *variatio*. *Principis*, the first word of the final line, again referencing Constantine, looks back to *patris* in line one,[20] while *munus* is repeated as the descriptor of Constantius' offering to the city. Furthermore, *triumfis*, introduced at the end of line four, now reappears as the epigram's final word. Like *dicavit*, *triumphis* was still legible in the final line of the arch dedication, while as *triumphum* it seals a striking image in Constantina's epigram: *solusque inferre triumphum*. Finally the adjective that described Constantina's gift to Agnes, *dignum*, is echoed in the (restored) *condignis*. Now, however, though visually adjacent to *munus* on the stone, its grammatical force links it with Constantius' triumphs: *et munus condi[gnis us]que triumfis*. These tantalizing correspondences – which would have been highlighted for ancient readers by their sensitivity to ring composition and, perhaps, by the fact that the epigram's layout across the four faces of the obelisk base positioned the poem's final line on the bottom of one face and its first line on the top of an adjacent side – make it nearly certain that Constantius or his poet invited comparison of his obelisk and its epigram with the textualized monuments of his father and his sister.

Any such suspicion is confirmed by what falls between the epigram's opening and closing lines. The obelisk epigram insists that the military success that cleared the way for Constantius' approach to Rome and initiated the final chapter of the obelisk's story be viewed as comparable to the victory recorded by the Colosseum arch. *Tyrannus*, a rhetorical twist central to Constantine's representation of Maxentius and a key word on the arch inscription, was inscribed twice and on two different faces of the obelisk base. Moreover, like Constantine's tyrant (Maxentius), the *tyrannus* of the obelisk (Magnentius) was imagined as a peculiar threat to the city itself (*Romam vastante*).[21] Consequently, like Constantine's coins in the months after the Milvian Bridge,[22] the epigram fashions Constantius as the city's *liberator*. Even the divinities of Constantius' poem look back to the Colosseum arch and the Via

[20] Liverani, "Costanzo II e l'obelisco," 474.

[21] Constantius' victory over Magnus Magnentius at Mursa in September 351 culminated in the latter's suicide in August 353. On Magnentius' revolt against Constans (January 350) and the subsequent course of events, see Ernest Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire: Tome premier: De l'état romain à l'état byzantine (284–476). Édition française par J.-R. Palanque* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959), 138–141; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 101–06; and Hunt, "The Successors of Constantine," 10 and 14–22.

[22] Marlowe, "*Liberator Urbis Suae*,"

Nomentana basilica. Constantina highlighted her intimate relationship with god, Christ, and the *numen divinum*. Constantius' epigram gestures toward the arch by signaling his father's apotheosis (*divus*), and it juxtaposes the personified Tiber to the Christian gods of his sister's epigram. The conservative and ancient landscape imagined by the obelisk base contrasts starkly with the new world mapped by his sister's hexameters at Sant'Agnese.[23]

As representatives of the *avant garde* poetry inscribed by members of the Constantinian dynasty on the Roman cityscape, the epigrams of Constantius and Constantina offer one index of the high status and broad appeal of classicizing verse in the early and mid-fourth century.[24] Monumental verse allowed imperial patrons to announce their cultural as well as civic and religious commitments in a city that had not yet forfeited all its importance as a stage for the performance of emperorship.[25] The kind of patient meditation that allusive verse solicited facilitated the recall of analogous texts on display elsewhere in the city, enhancing the power of the metrical dedication as a medium for subtle self-representation. Far more than the titular laden and formulaic text with which Constantine recorded his renovation of the Aqua Virgo, for example, the *carmen epigraphicum* repaid close reading.[26] It may not be merely coincidence, therefore, that the verse epitaph of the *neofitus* and urban prefect Junius Bassus, who died in 359, shortly after Constantius' obelisk soared into the upper breezes, recrafted a Virgilian phrase that had been quoted by Constantina only a decade or so earlier.[27] Certainly other epitaphs found inspiration in public monuments.

[23] E.g., Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 4.71–72 (*rupes Caucaseae*) and 5.253 (*Caucaseis montibus*); Virgil, *A.* 6.6 (*litus in Hesperium*); Silius Italicus, *Punica* 3.703 (*in latus Hesperium*); *Tiber* or *Tiberinus* appears eleven times in Virgil. The catalog of echoes and allusions can be extended.

[24] Consider also Optatianus Porfyrius and Juvencus, both of whom addressed Constantine in verse, as well as Constantine's own exegesis of Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*. Constantius' own versifying efforts are vouched for (if belittled) by Ammianus at 21.16.4. Further discussion at Trout, "Vergil and Ovid," 274–77.

[25] Raymond Van Dam, *Rome and Constantinople: Rewriting Roman History During Late Antiquity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010). 20–29.

[26] *ILS* 702 = *CIL* 6.31564 = Grünewald (1990) 256.

[27] Constantina's *summi fastigia tecti* reproduces verbatim *A.* 2.302. *Subter fastigia tecti* appears at *A.* 8.366. Lines 13–14 of Bassus' elegiac epitaph (see Cameron, "The Funeral of Junius Bassus") read [*flere vide*]*bantur tunc et fastigia Romae,* / [*ipsaque tun*]*c gemitus edere tecta viae* (then even the high gables of Rome seemed to weep and the very houses along the route to groan). The well-known sarcophagus bearing this sixteen-line epigram was discovered at S. Pietro in Vaticano in 1597.

Epitaphs, *Elogia*, and a Sarcophagus

In the late fourth century at the *coemeterium Pamphili* on the Via Salaria Vetus the epitaph of a certain Liberianus appropriated and reproduced two complete hexameters of the (self-composed) epitaph of Pope Damasus (366–84). The latter had but recently been installed at the bishop's tomb on the other side of the city along the Via Ardeatina. Liberianus' epitaph is both crudely carved and difficult to translate:[28]

vivere qui prestat morienti
a * se * mina terrae solvere qui pot
uit * letalia vincula morti

pepositus Leberianus III idus acu
* stas in pacem

The difficulty is explicable and telling. Damasus' six-line epigram had piled up a series of relative clauses describing miraculous deeds of Christ before arriving at its main clause in the poem's final line.[29]

qui gradiens pelagi fluctus conpressit amaros,
vivere qui prestat morientia semina terrae,
solvere qui potuit letalia vincula mortis
post tenebras, fratrem post tertia lumina solis
ad superos iterum Martae donare sorori,
post cineres Damasum faciet quia surgere credo.

He who walking along trod down the sea's bitter waves,
who ensures earth's dying seeds live on,
who could loose the fatal chains of death
after the final darkness, after three days restore a brother
to the living for Martha, his sister,
he, I believe, will make Damasus rise after he is ashes.

The author (or stonecutter) of Liberianus' epitaph reproduced the second and third verses of Damasus' epigram, laid them out awkwardly over three lines on the stone, missed the final letter of *mortis*, and provided no independent verb.[30] It is especially the bungling character of this attempt to capitalize

[28] *ICUR* 10.26653 = Ihm p. 14 = Ferrua (1942) 12/1. The * indicates the placement of an *hedera* (ivy leaf).

[29] *ICUR* 4.12418 = Ihm 9 = *ILCV* 969 = Ferrua (1942) 12.

[30] See further Ferrua, *Epigrammata Damasiana*, 113–14; Carletti, *Iscrizioni cristiane di Roma*, 101; Cugusi, "Testi metrici Latini ripetuti," 402.

upon a prominent monumental text – one that would inspire other imitations in later years – that attests most loudly to the allure of commemorative verse at social levels considerably lower than those occupied by Rome's late fourth-century bishops.[31] Damasus' impact on the epigraphic environment of Rome is otherwise self-evident. His martyrial *elogia* energized the role played by dedicatory and honorific verse in the celebration of the cult of the saints, while the tendency of his epigrams to repeat or reiterate phrases and themes made inscribed poetry central to the catechesis of key concepts of cult and belief.[32] As the case of Liberianus demonstrates, however, Damasus' epigraphic initiatives also spurred the proliferation of poetic epitaphs in the city's cemeteries during the heyday of late ancient Rome's epitaphic habit.[33]

A particularly compelling example of this phenomenon decorates a late fourth-century funerary monument found in the Catacomb of Praetextatus, a cemetery located along the Via Appia not far from the basilica that housed Damasus' tomb. The sarcophagus of the otherwise unknown Bassa, who died at the age of twenty-two, is an extraordinary example of the Bethesda type.[34] On the right side of Bassa's sarcophagus an epitaph of twenty hexameters arranged in two columns replaces the type's standard sculpted scenes (Jesus healing the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda and the entry into Jerusalem). The poem's acrostic, composed of the first ten letters of each column, announces *Bassae suae / Gaudentius* (Gaudentius to his Bassa). In the epitaph's right-hand column Bassa addresses Gaudentius, ensuring him of their eventual celestial reunion. The first ten lines eulogize Bassa and portray her at ease in an astral paradise:[35]

B assa caret membris vivens per saecula Xpo
A eterias secuta domos ac regna piorum
S olvere corporeos meruit pulcerrima nodos;
S telliger accepit polus hanc et sidera caeli
A etatisq(ue) citae properans transcendere cursum
E xuvias posuit fragiles corpusq(ue) s[epu]lcro;
S edula iudicio credens venerabilis Al[t]i
V enturumq(ue) deum puro [cum] corde secuta
A mplificae sumpsit [sibi gau]dia premia lucis
E ximium [… … umq]ue [de]corem.

[31] E.g., *ILCV* 1517 (*solvere qui potuit*) and the listing of parallels (not all equally convincing) at Carl Weyman, *Vier Epigramme des hl. Papstes Damasus I* (Munich: J. J. Lentner'schen Hofbuchhandlung, 1905), 7–11.

[32] Cugusi, "Testi metrici Latini ripetuti," 419.

[33] E.g., Carletti, "Dalla 'practica aperta' alla 'practica chiusa'," 335, 347, and 380.

[34] Further discussion and bibliography at Trout, "Borrowed Verse."

[35] *ICUR* 5.14076

Bassa is free of her limbs, living through the ages in Christ.
Pursuing an ethereal home and the kingdoms of the pious,
most beautiful, she deserved to loose the knots of the flesh.
Star-bearing heaven and the stars of the sky have received her
and hastening to move through the course of swift passing life,
she has placed her fragile husk and body in the tomb.
Worthy of respect, steadfastly trusting in the judgment of the high God,
and attending with pure heart the God who will come,
she has taken to herself the pleasures (and) rewards of the boundless light
distinguished … … and beautiful.

There are several echoes of classical poets in these verses, but most remarkable for its sheer bravado is the epigram's second line. Bassa's *aeterias secuta domos ac regna piorum* borrows nearly wholesale a line inscribed elsewhere in the same catacomb, the fifth line of Damasus' *elogium* honoring the martyrs Felicissimus and Agapitus.[36]

Aspice, et hic tumulus retinet caelestia membra
Sanctorum subito rapuit quos regia caeli.
Hi crucis invictae comites pariterq(ue) ministri
Rectoris sancti meritumq(ue) fidemq(ue) secuti
Aetherias petiere domos regnaq(ue) piorum.
Unica in his gaudet Romanae gloria plebis
Quod duce tunc Xysto Xpi meruere triumphos.

Behold! This tomb, too, preserves the celestial limbs
of saints whom suddenly the palace of heaven snatched up.
These, at once comrades and attendants of the unconquered cross,
imitating both the merit and the faith of (their) holy bishop,
won an ethereal home and the realms of the pious.
The singular glory of the Roman people rejoices in them
because with Sixtus at that time as their leader they gained Christ's triumphs.

Damasus' epigram had proclaimed the rapid (*subito*) ascension of the two martyrs to a celestial home. Blatantly ransacking a neighboring monument Gaudentius, as putative author, simultaneously aligned Bassa's heavenly reward with that won by the heroes of the age of persecution and advertised himself as a discerning reader of episcopal poetry. Bassa's epitaph, as that of Liberianus makes clear, was not unique in its appropriation of Damasan lan-

[36] *ICUR* 5.13872 = Ihm 23 = Ferrua 25. For the details. see Ferrua (1942) 152–56. There were at least two other Damasan *elogia* in the same general area: Ferrua (1942) 24 (Januarius) and Ferrua (1942) 27 (Quirinus? Maximus?). Fragments of another (Ferrua [1942] 26) point to a fourth.

guage. Indeed, as noted, other poets quarried Damasus' martyrial verse in the decades ahead, redeploying its ideas and expressions throughout the city's suburban cemeteries. Such sampling might seem to document in an uncomplicated manner both the appeal of Damasus' *elogia* and the tastes of his readers. Yet it is not quite so simple, for Damasus' own *clausulae* were often entangled in webs of words that stretched back to Virgil and other classical poets. The expression *regia caeli*, for example, used by Bassa's poet as well as Damasus, had been employed by Virgil to depict the starry home of the divinized hero Dardanus.[37] Indeed, behind Bassa's *aeterias secuta domos* stood not only Damasus' *aetherias petiere domos* but also an expression that Silius Italicus had called upon to describe the ascent of a triumphal shout to heaven: *aetherias adiere domos*.[38] Bassa's *aeterias secuta domos ac regna piorum* as well as her *regia caeli*, therefore, might invoke classical intertexts that could extend the reach of any reading of her epitaph well beyond its immediate Damasan horizons.

Reading, Writing, and Allusion

Early imperial poets often lurked in the lines of late antiquity's verse inscriptions. Constantina's *O felix virgo* draws Agnes' death into alignment with the brutal sacrifice of Virgil's young Polyxena at the tomb of Achilles (*O felix … virgo*), offering a classical model through which to assess the Christian maiden's heroism.[39] When Constantius (or his poet) turned the phrase *haut partem exiguam montis*, he enlisted words that the poet of the

[37] *A.* 7.210–11: *aurea nunc solio stellantis regia caeli / accipit* (now the golden palace of a starry sky admits [him] to a throne); the phrase would resurface in Ovid, Lucan, Statius and elsewhere. Bassa (*ICUR* 5.14076 B5): *Ex[c]ute iam lacrimas, placuit bona [r]egia caeli* (drive off your tears, the noble palace of heaven is pleasing). Damasus returned to it often. See Trout, "Borrowed Verse," 345; Cugusi, "Testi metrici latini ripetuti nelle iscrizioni cristiane di Roma," 419 (*regnaque piorum*) and 421 (*regia caeli*).

[38] Silius, *Punica*. 6.252–53: *clamor ad astra datur, voces repente profusae / aetherias adiere domos* (a shout went up to the stars, and the sound so suddenly released rose to the aetherial abode). See also Ovid, *Epistulae ex Ponto* 4.13.25–26: *nam patris Augusti docui mortale fuisse / corpus, in aetherias numen abisse domos* (for I explained that the body of father Augustus was mortal, but his divine spirit had gone to its aetherial home).

[39] *A.* 3.321: *O felix una ante alias Priameia virgo* (Andromache remembering Polyxena: O happy beyond all others, maiden daughter of Priam). See further Trout, "Virgil and Ovid," 269–71.

Aeneid had used to characterize the enormous rock (*ingens saxum*) hefted by the warrior Acmon during Turnus' assault on the Trojan's riverside camp, a phrase so strikingly "emphatic" that it would also catch the eye of Servius.[40] Bassa's *sidera caeli* once described the final astral home of Aeneas, promised to Venus by Jupiter, while her *stelliger polus* recalls Statius' description of a troubled celestial realm in his *Thebaid*.[41] A clever reader might pick up even faint signs pointing to such texts hovering in the background. A poet's intention is much harder to track down. Nevertheless, an epitaph from the *coemeterium S. Agnetis* may reveal its poet's hand.

Theodora Afrodite died in 382, late in the pontificate of Damasus, and was buried in the same Via Nomentana cemetery that had witnessed the construction of Constantina's basilica some four decades prior:[42]

Theodora qu(a)e vixit annos XXI M VII
D XXIII in pace est bisomu

A mplificam sequitur vitam dum casta Afrodite,
F ecit ad astra viam; Christi modo gaudet in aula.
R estitit haec mundo semper caelestia quaerens.
O ptima servatrix legis fideique magistra
D e<di>dit egregiam sanctis per secula mentem.
I nde per eximios paradisi regnat odores,
T empore continuo vernant ubi gramina rivis,
E xpectatque deum superas quo surgat ad auras.
H oc posuit corpus tumulo mortalia linquens,
F undavitque locum coniunx Evagrius instans.

[40] *A.* 10.127–28: *ingens … saxum, / haud partem exiguam montis* (a giant rock, no small part of a mountain). Servius *ad A.* 12.687 (Thilo): *Mons improbus* pars montis: et ἐμφατικῶς dictum est sicut supra (10.128) *haud partem exiguam montis*.

[41] *A.* 1.259: *sublimemque feres ad sidera caeli / magnanimum Aenean* (and you will bear great-souled Aeneas on high to the stars of heaven); cf. *G.* 2.1, and *G.* 4.58. Stat., *Theb.* 12.564–65: *horret / stelligeri iubar omne poli* (the entire splendor of the star-bearing pole shudders).

[42] *ICUR* 8.20799 = *CLE* 669 = Ihm 85 = *ILCV* 316. For emendation to *de<di>dit*, see Diehl at *ILCV* 316 and Pasqua Carletti Colafrancesco, "Note metriche su alcuni epigrammi cristiani di Roma datati," *Rendiconti delle sedute dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei: Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 31 (1976): 257–58. The stone's subscription yields the date 382: *dep(osita) die … / Antonio et Syacrio con.* Note that the poem was not arranged on the stone by lines of verse but in seven non-metrical lines wherein wider spacing signaled the beginning of a new hexameter. On Afrodite as a *signum*, see Ferrua at *ICUR* 8. 20799.

Theodora, who lived twenty-one years, seven months,
twenty-three days, is at peace in a double tomb.

During the time that chaste Aphrodite pursued a splendid life,
she paved a pathway to the stars; she rejoices now in the halls of Christ.
She stood firm against the world, ever seeking heavenly things.
An excellent guardian of the law and teacher of faith,
she surrendered her noble mind to the saints through the ages.
Thus she reigns amid the choice fragrances of paradise,
where the grasses ever bloom along the streams,
and awaits god so that she may rise up to the lofty breezes.
Leaving her mortal remains behind, she set her body in this tomb,
and her husband, Evagrius, assiduously attending, secured the place.

A near contemporary of the young Bassa, Theodora *signo* Afrodite also died too soon and was memorialized in verse by a surviving husband.[43] Her epitaph's rich imagery of astral immortality and the *locus amoenus* obviously derive, almost effortlessly it seems, from classical forerunners.[44] One expression, however, seems a purposeful summons to follow the trail to its tantalizing end. Theodora's poet, who wrote *superas quo surgat ad auras*, could have read and adapted a phrase – *superas consurgere in auras* – that had been inscribed on Constantius' obelisk base only a few years before Theodora's birth. But both Constantius' expression and Theodora's point to Virgil, who in the *Georgics* (4.486) had written *redditaque Eurydice superas veniebat ad auras* (and Eurydice regained was nearing the upper air) and at *Aeneid* 6.128–29 had offered *sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras / hoc opus, hic labor est* (but to recall one's steps and pass out to the upper air, this is the task, this the toil).[45]

Constantius' poet employed the phrase *superas consurgere in auras* and other Virgilian or classicizing expressions to lend epic grandeur to the transport of a massive obelisk (*haut partem exiguam montis*) from Egypt to Italy (*litus ad Hesperium Tiberi miranti*) and its erection atop the *spina* of the Circus Maximus. The *superas quo surgat ad auras* of Theodora's epitaph,

[43] Theodora and her epitaph are also considered at Trout, "*Fecit ad astra viam*," 1–8.

[44] E.g., Vir., *Ecl.* 10.29–30: *nec lacrimis crudelis Amor nec gramina rivis / … saturantur* (part of Pan's rebuttal to Gallus' lovesickness: neither is cruel Love satiated by tears not the grasses by brooks); *G.* 4.18–19: *et stagna virentia musco / adsint et tenuis fugiens per gramina rivus* (describing the ideal location for establishing bee hives: let pools green with moss be nearby and a tiny brook slipping through the grass).

[45] Further comparanda at Hoogma, *Der Einfluss Vergils*, 279; Lassère, *Manuel d'épigraphie romaine*, 534. The presence of *opus* in *A.* 6.129 enhances the likelihood of the obelisk poet's resort to the Virgilian text.

however, ostensibly engaged the original context of Virgil's words. The pathway to the stars that Theodora paved so spectacularly – *amplificam sequitur vitam … fecit ad astra viam* – contrasted poignantly both with Orpheus' failure to bring Eurydice safely back from the underworld and with the Sibyl's warning to Aeneas. By gesturing toward an apparent Virgilian pessimism, Theodora's poet highlighted the supreme confidence with which she anticipated her own bodily resurrection. If anything binds Theodora's *superas quo surgat ad auras* to the *superas consurgere in auras* of the obelisk base, it is the triumphal self-assurance that pervades both epigrams. Only the former, however, heightens its claim through intertextual association.[46]

Examples of creative allusion in the Late Latin *carmina epigraphica* could be multiplied, as also the repertoire of phrases and images that circulated among the imperial, episcopal, and private verse inscriptions of late ancient Rome.[47] Nevertheless, the handful of texts considered above suggests the range of relationships that bound many of these epigrams to one another and to the city's poetic traditions. Metrical dedications and epitaphs encouraged ways of reading that the turgid prose of formulaic inscriptions surely did not inspire. Moreover, to the degree that epigraphic poetry enacted social performances and embodied agency across a broad social spectrum, it also preserves the vestiges of a community of often otherwise unknown poets, patrons, and readers. Metrical texts inscribed on imperial or episcopal monuments reached an audience that, in theory, included every passerby; private epitaphs may have had less exulted ambitions but still presume a curious readership. The somewhat unexpected revival of epigraphic verse in fourth-century Rome illustrates not only the renewed prestige of classicizing poetry but also the medium's force as a constitutive element of late Roman social identity.

[46] On the usefulness of "allusion" to describe the manifold but generative relations between authors, readers, and intertexts, see succinctly Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext*, 21–25.

[47] For lists of formulae and echoes in a corpus of 174 North African *carmina epigraphica*, for example, see Meyers, "L'influence de la poésie classique," though these are not limited to late antiquity.

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