
**INTRODUCTION**

At some point during his pontificate, Damasus composed an influential *elogium* for the virgin martyr Agnes. The short poem, like so many Damasus wrote for other Roman saints during the years of his tumultuous episcopacy (366–384), was elegantly inscribed on a marble panel and installed near the heroine’s subterranean tomb.1 Somewhat surprisingly, Agnes is the only female martyr commemorated in Damasus’ extant poetry, but the bishop was not Agnes’ first poet—nor was she to be the only young woman celebrated in verse at the *coemeterium S. Agnetis*. In fact, by the time Damasus became her impresario, Agnes had already enjoyed the patronage of an empress. Thereafter, among the many epitaphs of the S. Agnese complex on Rome’s Via Nomentana can be found at least eight verse inscriptions dedicated to young women of rather less exalted social rank than a daughter of Constantine and the bishop of Rome.2 Though hardly immune to the frustrations that plague extraction of the lives of women from the patrician and literary sources of the age,3 the inscribed epigrams of S. Agnese offer a distinctive vantage

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1 Ferrua (1942) pp. 175–8, no. 37; context at Sággy (2000).
2 All texts are cited from *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbs Romae*, Vol. 8 (hereafter ICUR) Ferrua (1983), unless otherwise indicated. Alternate readings and fuller bibliography are noted where relevant. The eight epitaphs are: 20799, 20811, 20819, 21015, 21049, 21306, 21513, 21516. Two other fragmentary texts may also commemorate females: 21517 and 21522. See Appendix. Other abbreviations are: *Ifm* = *Ifm* (1895); *CLE* = Buecheler (1895–7) and Lommatsch (1926); *ILCV* = Diehl (1925–31) and Moreau and Marrou (1967); and *PCBE* = Pietri (1999–2000). Special thanks to Christopher Trinacry for discussion of the translations included here.
3 For the sentiment see G. Clark (1993) p. 120, introducing a chapter entitled ‘Being Female’ (with a section titled ‘ Inferiority’); for astute methodological reflection see E. Clark (1998), with elucidation of the limitations the *vitae* of female ascetics; and for reiterated reservations, Evans-Grubbs (2009) pp. 201–2.
point from which to survey anew the nature of ‘being female’ in late antiquity. Ironically, in the more mundane light cast by funerary commemoration certain facets of this problem take on slightly brighter hues.

A good deal of women’s history, of course, has already been written from the information preserved in funerary epigraphy. Epitaphs in aggregate, because of their formulaic character, yield the kind of evidence that has aided computation of such realia as the age of Roman girls at marriage or the mortality and fertility rates of Roman women, while Christian funerary epigraphy in particular has been a valuable ally for scholars estimating the average duration of Roman marriages. In comparison to the vast majority of prose inscriptions whose revelations populate demographic data fields, however, metrical epitaphs are typically longer and more idiosyncratic. Biography and agency appear to hover closer to their surfaces—even when such epigrams share images and vocabulary with one another or draw upon the classical repertoire that formed part of the age’s literary inheritance. To be sure, seductions lurk in the sentiments of affection, hope, and sorrow and it is too easy to imagine that epitaphs offer unobstructed views of the lives they commemorate. Still, the risk is worth taking. Moreover, at S. Agnese—apart from the elogium of Damasus and the verses of Agnes’ imperial benefactress, Constantina—the metrical epitaphs considered below commemorate lives lived outside the narrow confines of the late empire’s senatorial and episcopal ranks. Thus this body of verse offers an approach to ‘the experience of the woman’ along byways other than those charted by elite literature. The journey ahead is undertaken as both complement and compliment to a pioneering book that pointed the way forward.

AGNES ON THE VIA NOMENTANA AND EPITAPHS IN AGGREGATE

Agnes’ popularity on the Via Nomentana was early and long-lived. She makes her first appearance in history in the festal calendar known as the depositio martyrum, a document included in the Codex-Calendar of 354. In this list of 24 memorial celebrations, probably initially compiled in 335 or 336, Agnes’ burial is assigned to 21 January and located on the Via Nomentana. It is impossible to say how the tomb venerated as hers was then architecturally defined, but in the 340s Constantina, eldest daughter of Constantine I, funded the construction of a grand ambulatory basilica less than one hundred metres to the west of Agnes’ subterranean gravesite, announcing her patronage in the 14 inscribed hexameters considered below. One of the largest of the six known ambulatory basilicas that appeared in the Roman suburbs in the early and mid fourth century, Constantina’s funerary hall, and the imperial benefaction it embodied, significantly increased the appeal of Agnes’ cult. The site’s enhanced fortunes are evident, for example, in the expansion of the area’s network of catacombs, an older section of which housed Agnes’ tomb, as well as in the proliferation of burials within the basilica itself. Moreover, it is almost certain that Damasus, as part of a renovation of Agnes’ underground memoria, soon installed there the marble panel bearing his elogium. If some sort of surface memorial then also stood directly over Agnes’ catacomb shrine, Pope Honorius’ (628–638) construction of a new basilica ad corpus in the early seventh century obliterated its remains. In any case, this Honorian basilica testifies to the continuing allure of the Via Nomentana site in the early medieval period, as does the inclusion of Honorius’ ecclesia in seventh- and eighth-century itineraria.

In addition to the verse inscriptions installed at S. Agnese by Constantina and Damasus, the site’s epigraphic corpus, assembled by Antonio Ferrua in volume eight of Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae (1983), includes at least a further 22 carmina epigraphica. This sum of 24 metrical texts falls roughly into two categories. Six can be designated elogia or dedicatory inscriptions; only two of these, the epigrams of Constantina and Damasus, are considered here. The other 18 are epitaphs. Fourteen of these, one of which (20819) commemorates two individuals (a brother and sister), are sufficiently well preserved to serve this study (see the Appendix); the other four are too fragmentary. The 24 complete and fragmentary carmina from the coemerarium represent 2.8% of the inscriptions preserved at the Via Nomentana

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4. Nordberg (1963), a study based on ‘more than 11,000’ Christian epitaphs from Rome; Carletti (1977), with a data set of 417 Roman texts; and Shaw (1987) with the reservations of Scheidel (2007).

5. Shaw (2002) pp. 240–1: ‘the average . . . seems to have been set at not more than fourteen years, and was perhaps significantly less’, a brevity due to high rates of mortality not divorce. For 14.8 years based on the data of 286 marriages see Nordberg (1963) pp. 64–6, who also stresses the limitations of the data.


14. E.g., Valentiini and Zucchetti (1942) pp. 78–9; 115.

15. The six are ICUR 8.20752–7. The four left out of discussion here are 8.20754, three small fragments which, as Ferrua observed, are likely to have been part of at least two other monumental texts in verse; and 20755, 20756, and 20757, which relate to the early seventh-century building projects of Honorius.

16. The four poorly preserved texts are ICUR 8.21515, 21519, 21521, and 21523.
Gender issues immediately stand out in this landscape of funerary poetry—where female commemorands outnumber males two to one; the males, with the exception of the *puer* Remus, are adults commemorated anonymously as professionals; and the females are overwhelmingly young and exclusively commemorated as daughters and wives by parents and husbands. Four of the eight certain female commemorands are daughters commemorated by parents: Urbica (20811) died at 12, while Arcontia (20819), the sister of Remus, was in her ‘fifth three-year span,’ between 12 and 15, therefore, and just reaching marriageable age. Prenuptial status can also be assumed for Evodia (21015) and the anonymous of 21513. The remaining four certain females are wives commemorated by husbands. Of this group Theodora Afrodite (20799) *vixit annos XXI*. Otherwise age is not recorded but relative youth is likely for at least one other: Thecla (21306), it seems, was predeceased by the twins recalled in her epitaph; perhaps she herself died of birthing complications.

The pattern is neither surprising nor unexpected, of course. Men were traditionally honoured for their public and professional lives while domestic and familial roles typically circumscribed the funerary representation of Roman girls and women. The presence and responsibilities of surviving male kin might seem adequate to account for this feature of memorialization, but the very decision to commemorate a life on stone (and even more so in epigraphic verse) was conditioned by cultural not demographic forces. Indeed, the starkly gendered imbalance and distinctions of the S. Agnese metrical dossier highlight the centrality of choice in commemoration. The fact, however, that female commemorands are twice as numerous as males and are young in comparison, while no woman appears as a metrical commemorator on her own, raises questions about the semiotics of metrical commemoration that can only begin to be answered by a widening of the lens.

How, then, does the profile of S. Agnese’s metrical dossier correlate with broader trends in funerary epigraphy in prose as well as verse? Tellingly, when
compared to early imperial funerary inscriptions, fourth- and fifth-century epitaphs show an increased tendency for husbands to commemorate wives and for parents to commemorate children. This shift in practice has been understood by Brent Shaw to signal both the 'more dominant' position of the nuclear family as late Roman society's affective unit and 'the much greater importance' attributed by Christians to the commemoration of children by parents. Although this commemorative pattern is by no means proof of actual change (or improvement) in the physical and emotional lives of women and children, nevertheless the higher percentages of late ancient husband-to-wife dedications and parental commemorations of children, particularly evident at Rome and even more pronounced in the verse epitaphs of S. Agnese, do signal clear changes over time in commemorative preferences. Moreover, equally prominent in the S. Agnese metrical assembly is not only the 'unusual dominance' of the young in the city's Christian funerary epigraphy, but especially the newly achieved premier status of young women in their teens and twenties, who progressed from being 'decidedly not preferred' in the early imperial period to becoming the 'favored gender' in these two deciles in Christian Rome. In this regard, only the exaggerated steepness of the pitch of S. Agnese's verse epitaphs towards the celebration of nuptial daughters and young wives distinguishes it statistically. Within the confines of a complex dedicated to a virgin martyr, however, this is surely a distinction worth registering.

The metrical texts of S. Agnese thus lie at the busy intersection of commemorative practice and the possibilities of being female in late ancient Rome. The preponderance of verse commemorations of young women at this Via Nomentana site may correlate to some degree with the high mortality and high fertility regimes of the Roman world: short life expectancy coupled with early marriage and the dangers of childbirth left young women especially vulnerable. But the preference for memorializing daughters and wives was clearly culturally conditioned. Undoubtedly, the sentiments expressed often reflected the affective and emotional ties that bound parents to children and husbands to wives. Yet, the apparently sharp turn to classicizing verse for public representation of the lives of young women may also have been a manoeuvre toward a prized medium through which male commemorators could make highly nuanced statements about themselves and their households. The funerary epigram, that is, may have offered fathers and husbands the possibility not only of setting on display their own claims to a literary education but also of effectively aligning themselves and the domus they managed with the flow of social and religious discourse about masculinity and femininity in this age of cultural flux. For these reasons the recovery of the subjectivity of women from these texts may seem an enterprise no less daunting than the challenges presented to such a project by elite and patriotic literature. On the other hand, it is not insignificant that the first dateable verse inscription from S. Agnese was almost surely composed by a woman—and that the self-assurance of that text resounds in later epitaphs.

CELEBRATING AGNES: IMPERIAL AND EPISCOPAL PATRONS

The earliest dateable *carmen epigraphicum* from the *coemeterium S. Agnetis* is a magnificent dedicatory epigram once inscribed on marble and installed in the ambulatory basilica funded by Constantina in the 340s. A poetic tour de force and blatant statement of Christian triumphalism, *Constantina deum venerans* not only adumbrated the complex political and religious motives behind the imperial building programme reshaping Rome's suburbs but also unapologetically promoted the social authority and literary sensibilities of a Roman woman in terms virtually unmatched in the city's epigraphic record.31

C constantina deum venerans Christoque dicata
O mnibus impensis devota mente paratis
N umine divino multum Christoque iuvante
S acravi templum victrix virginitis Agnes,

26 Shaw (1984) based on some 3500 Latin epitaphs primarily of the fourth and fifth centuries. Compare the (bracketed) percentages of husband-to-wife dedications in tables 8 (28), 9 (29), and 10 (39) with those in tables 1 (26), 2 (26), and 4 (32); and the bracketed percentages of descending nuclear family dedications in tables 8 (36), 9 (46), and 10 (36) with those in tables 1 (33), 2 (36), and 4 (34). See also Shaw (1996) table 2.


28 For doubts about changes in the conditions of childhood in late antiquity based on perspectives supplied by patristic sources, see G. Clark (2011).

29 Shaw (1984) pp. 474–7. For the relevant data from Christian Rome see table E. The phenomenon is a natural corollary of a cultural praxis that privileged conjugal and parental epigraphic memorialization and not, therefore, transparent evidence for calculating life expectancy.


31 8.20752 = CLE 301 = ILCV 1768 = Ihm 84 = Ferrua (1942) 71. See also Carletti (2008) pp. 249–50, but with several misprints. The text survives now only in manuscript copies. For a recent presentation with further bibliography see De Santa (2010) pp. 96. On Constantina, the eldest daughter of Constantine and Fausta, see PLRE 1, 'Constantina 2'. Born perhaps c.320, widowed in 337, Constantina was married to Caesar Gallus in 351. She died in Bithynia in 354 but was buried in a mausoleum (S. Costanza) adjoining the Via Nomentana basilica. On the dating see Trout (forthcoming).
T empleorum 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 tenebris,
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,
borne to heaven, and 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.

As an exercise in (self-)portraiture Constantina deum venerans foregrounds
the empress’s piety, philanthropy, and poetic prowess, markers of social status
increasingly valued by Rome’s mid-century Christianizing aristocrats.32 The
epigram’s acrostic (Constantina Deo), indulging the same penchant for clever
wordplay evident in the poetry that Optatianus Porphyrius had addressed to
her father two decades earlier,33 is a clear sign, indeed the most obvious signal
to casual readers, of Constantina’s impulse to self-advertisement.34 Her name,
introducing the poem vertically as well as horizontally, frames her devotion
and highlights her intimate relations with the numen divinum and Christ. The
epigram’s metrically meticulous verses were designed to grab attention as well
as please readers of Vergil and Ovid.35 The apostrophe of the final line, O felix
virgo, for example, deftly transfers a Vergilian address from the Aeneid’s
young Polyxena, a defendant Trojan princess brutally sacrificed to the shade of

32 Succinctly at Salzman (2002) pp. 47–9; expansively at Cameron (2011). For an early and
notable Roman epigraphic example see Cameron (2002) on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus
(d. 359), whose fastigia Romae ... lecta (13–14) is reminiscent of Constantina’s summi fastigia
lecti (itself indebted to Vergil’s summi fastigia tecti at Aen. 2.302).
33 Barnes (1975); Levitan (1985).

Achilles, to the Christian virgo Agnes, another victim (it appears) of the
relentlessly male world of war and statecraft.36 Yet it is Constantina not
Agnes who dominates this epigram. While the latter appears here as little
more than a shadowy martyr and victrix virgo, the empress’s basilica rivals
Christ as the real victor in these verses.37 Furthermore, the acrostic signature
and the implied ego of line four (sacram) must also have announced the
empress as poet,38 a claim further advanced with a subtle nod to Ovid’s Tristia
3.7.39 Through a verbal cue recalling (sophisticated) readers to that poem,
Constantina encouraged them to align her with Ovid’s young poetess, Perilla,
portrayed there by the Augustan poet as his disciple in the art of poetry.
Moreover, as a poem that Ovid had constructed around the theme of his own
and Perilla’s literary immortality, Tristia 3.7 was a brilliant inter-text for a
dedicated epigram that trumpeted the (true) victory over death promised to
those who, like Constantina, celebrated the nomen Christi in acts of piety
and munificence. Clever poetry and vivid self-presentation went hand-in-hand.

Of all the carmina considered in this chapter Constantina deum venerans
has the strongest claim to represent a (bold) conception of ‘being female’
fashioned by a late Roman woman. Whatever Agnes’ story may have been in
the 340s, on the walls of her basilica, on the threshold of a new age and
imperial image, Constantina advertised foremost her own commitment to
God (devota mente), realized in spiritually inspired action and articulated in
classicizing poetry. Whether or not readers were aware of Constantina’s
widowhood at the time of the poem’s composition or understood the
empress’s self-identification as Christo dicit to indicate a formal consecration,40
her inscription’s public marriage of piety and poetry would be re-enacted by
a cross-section of society concerned to imagine and commemorate proper
womanhood at S. Agnese and elsewhere in late ancient Rome.

Certainly piety and poetry are so entwined in the elogium that a generation
later Damasus was installed near Agnes’ tomb. Indeed, Damasus’ closing lines,
repositioning traditional imagery, configured poetic composition itself as
prayer.41 But Damasus also inscribed a version (our first) of Agnes’ tale that

36 Aen. 3.321: O felix una ante alias Priamea virgo.
37 Compare line five’s quod vincit and line eight’s potuit qui vincere.
38 Surviving manuscripts show both sacram and sacravit. I follow here Ihm, CLE, ILCV,
and the implication of the acrostic, against Ferrua (1942 and 1983), who preferred sacram. For
39 Detected by Ihm (1895) p. 88. Ovid’s line of praise (Tristia 3.7.20) is ‘aola tuum vates Lesbia
vincet opus [only the Lesbian poet will surpass your work].’ For a further echo of Tristia 3.7
compare Constantina’s victrix virgins Agnes with Ovid’s tenuis in virginitatem annis (3.7.17); on
the popularity of the Tristia as a source for verse epitaphs see Lisberger (1934) pp. 156 and 177–9.
These and other points are further developed at Trout (forthcoming).
40 So Ferrua (1942) p. 249.
balanced the young martyr’s headstrong devotion with her reverence for traditional ideals of female sexual shame and honour. 42

Fama referit sanctos dudum retulisse parentes
Agnen, cum lugubres cantus tuta concrepueiset,
nutricis gremium subito liquisse p Mueller.
sponte truici calcasse minas rabiem(ue) tyranni
urere cum flammis volueset nobile corpus.
viribus inmenmus parvis superasse timorem
nudaque profusum crimem per membra dedisse
ne domini templum facies peritura videret.
O veneranda mihi, sanctum decus, alma, pudoris
ut Damasi precibus faveas precor, inclyta martyr.

Legend has it that a short time ago her holy parents reported that,
when the trumpet had sounded its mournful music,
the girl Agnes suddenly abandoned her nurse’s lap.
Freely she trod under foot the threats and madness of the savage tyrant
when he wished to burn her noble body with flames.
Despite her slight strength she vanquished the immense terror
and set loose her hair to flow over her naked limbs—
lest a countenance doomed to perish see the temple of the Lord.
O kindly saint, worthy of my veneration, holy glory of modesty,
I pray, renowned martyr, that you favour the prayers of Damasus.

The eroticized figure Agnes would become in Prudentius’ Peristephanon43 is
Damasus’ impetuous puella, initially hedged in by her parents and the nurse
from whose lap she leaps. Indeed, the image of Agnes in nutricis gremium
severely limits the metrically highlighted puella to its familial and filial connotations.
Though she is precisely wilful (sponte), it is Damasus’ praise of Agnes
as sanctum decus pudoris, emphasized by the metrical caesura and stretching through a hemistich, that lingers at the poem’s end and tames the tale that has
gone before.44 Thus an epigram that resonates with classicizing echoes is
also ultimately celebrates Agnes’ piety in rather conventional terms. To be sure,
Damasus’ Agnes reprises the subtle mix of devotion, assertiveness, and public
action that energizes Constantina’s self-portrait. At the same time, however,
the (male) poet’s parting gesture toward the young martyr’s pudor, signalling
her allegiance to virtues of modesty and propriety still esteemed by ‘the

patriarchal family and civic mores’, inoculates her against the social disgrace
such spectacular behaviour might otherwise have produced.46

Despite any ideological tensions holding them in strained balance, however,
these two highly visible texts, an empress’s epigram and a bishop’s elogium,
surely enhanced the appeal of metrical commemoration in fourth-century
Rome—just as they revealed how classical poetry and familiar idioms of
honour and praise might also collude in the remembrance of wives and
daughters. Moreover, both texts forcefully recalled readers to the Christian
promise of victory over death. That hope would inspire some of late Roman
funerary epigraphy’s most compelling imagery.

REMEMBERING WIVES AND DAUGHTERS

A good deal of funerary epigraphy is formulaic. Verse epitaphs, however, did
hold out to commemorators the possibility of representing the individuality of the
deceased—or at least of setting out their own views of feminine excellence
and its rewards. The epitaphs of the young Evodia and Arcoitia, preserving
our only traces of their lives, demonstrate well that such convictions might
diverge in ways unexpected in Christian Rome. Only a few years ago the
fortuitous discovery of a photograph preserving the crucial final (lost) line of
Evodia’s epitaph completed the poem dedicated to her.47 Like Arcoitia, sister
and co-commemorand of the puer Remus, Evodia died unwed and was
commemorated by parents who composed or commissioned verses deeply
indebted to Vergil and other classical poets. Moreover, like Arcoitia’s verses,
Evodia’s may reveal as much about her family’s mourning and her society’s
expectations for the public articulation of grief as about Evodia’s character or
accomplishments. In this respect both epitaphs highlight the difficulty of
finding the real lives of children in the texts that commemorate them.48 One
striking feature, however, does divide these two epitaphs, suggesting that
convention did not fully override the expression in verse of a family’s sorrow.
Evodia’s parents allowed her to proclaim her ascent to the celestial realm in
terms increasingly characteristic of the age: 49

Ne tristes lacrimae ne pectora tundite vestra,
O pater et mater! Nam regna celestia tango.

42 8.20753 = Ihm 40 = Ferrua (1942) 37.
44 It is, perhaps, possible to read the line as alma pudoris (mother of modesty/chastity),
following Apuleius’ description of Venus (Met. 4.30) as alma totius orbis (mother of the whole
world), but this leaves sanctum decus orphaned. For sanctum decus pudoris see Weyman (1905)
gloria della virginità’). Elsewhere Damasus has sanctus pudor; see Ferrua (1942) no. 11 (epita-
phius sororis). For alma as ‘holy’ or ‘saint’ see the references at Blaise (1954) ’alimus.’
46 Hagiographers were not always so conservative; see Burrus (2008) pp. 42–3.
47 Colafrancesco (2007).
49 8.21015 supplemented by Colafrancesco (2007) = Carletti (2008) no. 120. ILCV 3420 =
Lommatzsch CLE 2018. The final line’s Christus is expressed by a visually prominent chi-rho. For
the challenges of scanning (as a pentameter) the sixth line, marked off as well by a subtle shift to
the third person, see Colafrancesco (2007) p. 78, n. 4.
Evodia’s home, had emerged as vivid shorthand for the astral dwelling place of Christian souls.\(^51\) In Evodia’s verses, moreover, that heavenly realm is enlivened by *loca amoena* imagery that so artfully evokes Anchises’ description of his pleasant home in Vergil’s underworld—*amoena piorum concilla Elysiumque colo*—that her epitaph has been a touchstone for scholars searching for ‘classical influence’ in Christian inscriptions.\(^52\) Arcontia’s verses, too, are deeply indebted to Vergil.\(^53\) But the devastating power of Erebus and *pallida mors*,\(^54\) adamantly rejected by Evodia’s poet, reigns unchecked in Arcontia’s pitiless Lachesis and Taenarean waters.\(^55\) No celestial Elysian fields receive her; rather Arcontia’s death is a life cut short, a marriage never to be made.\(^56\) If Christianity, filtered through classical imagery and concentrated into a christogram, offered Evodia’s parents consolation in their grief, it seems to have failed the family of Arcontia. Death, arriving before its time, denied her the bridal chamber that still might seem to be the only proper end of girlhood. The news of Agnes’ greater victory, announced in the Damasan *elogium*, had, it seems, fallen on deaf ears.

Arcontia’s grim memorial, however, is exceptional. The epitaph of Theodora *signo* Afrodite, composed in the final years of Damasus’ pontificate, better suggests how poets and commemorators at S. Agnese found inspiration not only in the bishop’s wilful Agnes but also in Constantina’s bravura. Deceased at 21 and commemorated by her husband, Theodora ascended to a heavenly paradise by living the kind of life only implicit in the roughly contemporary and thematically akin epitaph of the young Evodia.\(^57\)

Theodora que vixit annos XXI M VII
D XXIII in pace est bisomu
A mplificam sequitur vitam dum casta Afridite,
F ecit ad astri viam; Christi modo gaudet in aula.
R estitit hac mundo | semper caelestia queerens.
O ptima servatris legis fideique | magistra
D eccedi dit egregium sanctis per secula mentem.

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\(^{52}\) *Aen.* 5.734–735. Lattimore (1942) quote p. 313; Hoogma (1959) pp. 192–200, considering the influence in structure (*imperative...non...sed*) as well as language of *Aen*. 5.733–5, a deceased father’s words to a living son (*nate*), now inverted.


\(^{55}\) The Fate, Lachesis, is *dura* at Ovid, *Trist.* 5.10.35 and *invide* at Martial 10.53.3. At *Ver. Geor.* 4.467 Orpheus passes through the *Taenara etiam fuses*, *alta ostia Ditis*.

\(^{56}\) For the tradition see Lattimore (1942) pp. 192–4.

\(^{57}\) 8.20799 = *CLE* 669 = Ibm 85 = *ILCV* 316. For emendation to *decidedly* see Diehl at *ILCV* 316 and Carletti Colafrancesco (1976) pp. 257–8. The stone’s subscription yields the date of 382: dep(osita) die.../Antonio et Sacricio con. Note that the poem was not arranged on the stone by lines of verse but in seven non-metrical lines, indicated here by the vertical marks, wherein a wider space signalled the beginning of a new hexameter. On Afrodite as a *signum* see Ferrua (1983) 20799.

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I nde per eximios paradisi | regnat odores,
T empore continuo vernant ubi gramina rivis,
E spectatque deum superas quo surgat ad auras.
H oc posuit corpus tumulo | mortalia linguens,
F undavitque locum coniunx Evagrius instans.

Theodora, who lived twenty-one years, seven months,
twenty-three days, is in 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 palace 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.

Once more Vergilian and classical echoes flourish.58 Whether or not casta
Afrodite playfully recalls Ovid's casta Minerva, the epigram's verbal juxtaposition is striking.59
Lines six and seven, describing Theodora's astral home, are
delicious with loca amena imagery similar to that just met in Evodia's epitaph.60
Moreover, some phrases appear designed to prompt the kind of
intertextual reading encouraged by Constantina deum venerans. Vergil's
Apollo had observed of the young Iulus' virtus: sic itur ad astra,
crediting the prince's future apotheosis to a combination of merit and divine aid
not unlike that affirmed in Theodora's epitaph.61 In a charming reversal,
Theodora's assumption that she would eventually (and corporally) 'rise up to the
lofty breezes [superas quo surgat ad auras]' should have induced some readers to
contrast her confidence with the Sibyl's disclaimer to an underworld-bound
Aeneas: 'to recall one's steps and pass out to the upper air, this is the task [sed
revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras/hoc opus].
'The same poet's ill-
fated Eurydice, had been about to do just that (redditaque Eurydice superas
veniebat ad auras), in fact, when Orpheus' backward glance cost them
the victory.62 Like Constantina, Theodora's poet expected smart readers.

The panache on display in such gestures suits well this poem's projection of
a young woman whose self-assurance not only echoes Constantina's but also
seems fully at home in the Rome of Damasus and Jerome, whose circles
included a number of aristocratic women renowned for their ascetically
grounded piety.63 Theodora's name, prominent in the superscriptions, is reinforced
by the announcement of her informal signum in the poem's first line
and, more subtly, by an acrostic—Afrodite H(onesta) F(eminis)—that also
proclaims her social respectability.64 A series of strong verbs—fecit, restitit, dedit—highlights her determination.
Her spiritual commitments, and perhaps ascetic tendencies, are placed on display in her resistance to the mundus,
her exemplary obedience to Scripture, her dedication to the martyrs, and the
qualifying casta, whose artful elision with her signum makes name and virtue
one.65 Her epitaph is, it has been noted, equally remarkable for its unequivocal insistence on the direct ascent of Theodora's soul and the anticipated final
resurrection of her body—a view of the Christian afterlife soon to be couched
in quite similar expressions in the poetry of Prudentius and Paulinus of Nola.66
Even if the verses of Theodora's epitaph are not her own composition,
there is sufficient idiosyncrasy and creativity in them, as in those of Evodia and
Arcontia, to suspect that they reflect some facet of the self-understanding of
the young woman they honour.

But suspicion is not proof. The fourth- and fifth-century metrical epitaphs
of the young women of the coemeterium S. Agnetis, unless it can be shown to
be otherwise, must be read as the compositions or commissions of male
commemorators. First and foremost, therefore, they should inscribe the self-
interest of Roman men for whom careful household management had so long
been a source of 'moral authority' and the modesty of their wives and
daughters 'of use... only if it was widely acknowledged'.67 Indeed, even in the
sixth century, when marriage itself was being reconceived as a mutual and
eternal commitment, elite Christian men are said to have found it advantageous
to invite scrutiny of their households, validating their claims to social
power by exposing the moral and sexual integrity sheltered within their

63 For the issues, see, e.g. E. Clark (1981); Salzman (2002) pp. 166–9; with Cooper (2007a)
pp. 60–1, on anachronistic reconstructions of the fourth and fifth centuries that marginalize
conservative but 'exuberant senatorial Christianity', and Cain (2009) for the complications
presented by Jerome's self-interest.
64 Cameron (1985) on signum as 'domestic' names.
65 In 382 the term should have signalled modesty and faithfulness, though eventually some
Christian writers could hope to edge casitas toward sexual continence; see Cooper (2007a)
pp. 175–86.
66 Kajanto (1978) pp. 45–6; e.g. Prud. Cath. 10, where bodies repinandur in auras (43) and
the dead inhabit the caelestia regna (86), while prior to the resurrection of the flesh animae enjoy
the floral paradise of Abraham's bosom (153–7); and Paul. Carm. 31, where Christ calls us in astra
(190) and paradise is a scented grove (587: odoratum nemus). See also Paulinus' Nolans epitaph
for the young Cynegius (ILC 3482), whose joyous soul sancta placitae requiescit in aula as he
waits judgement day.
walls. Allusive verse epitaphs, then, may appear to be of limited value for reconstituting the real lives of late antique women.

Yet, most funerary epigrams also offer a view of late Roman society less restricted than that framed by the letter collections of senatorial aristocrats or the debates of patrician women—their verses often articulating the ideals of middling Romans for whom funerary cult and the veneration of the martyr may have been the primary public expressions of their Christianity. The preference among this population for memorializing daughters and young wives, a choice grounded in the gendered power structures of ancient society as well as affection, reveals strategies of representation that set a high premium on a sentimental paternalism always capable of restricting the freedom of those subject to it. At the same time, however, these metrical epitaphs, individualized and often idiosyncratic, portray agency in exceptionally vivid imagery. Evagrius allowed Theodora to pause her own pathway to the stars; Evodia could boast regna celestia tango. Such proclamations of victory, already endorsed on the Via Nomentana by the spectacular epigram of a Constantinian empress, may have initially eased the pains of bereavement, but—inscribed and displayed—should also have invigorated the possibilities of being female in late ancient Rome. Inclusive and spirited, the verse epitaphs of S. Agnese offer themselves as congenial guides to an ideological terrain that invites re-mapping.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


68 Cooper (2007a) and (2007b).
69 MacMullen (2009) and (2010).


APPENDIX: COMMEMORANDS AND COMMEMORATORS IN 14 VERSE EPIPHRAPHS FROM S. AGNESE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICUR 8/CLE</th>
<th>Commemorand</th>
<th>Commemorator(s)</th>
<th>Varia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Male Commemorands
| 20798/668  | *Celerinus*      | unattested       | consular date 381      |
|            | *praesbyter*     |                 |                        |
| 20819/     | *Remus (and Arcontia)* | parents | consular date 442      |
| 1355       | *germani fratres*|                 |                        |
| 20919      | Augustus         | unattested       |                        |
| 21048/     | *Flavius Merobaudes* | unattested | died after 443         |
| 1756       | *orator*         |                 | fragmentary            |
| 21130      | [*praecolus (m?)* |                 |                        |
| Female Commemorands
| 20799/669  | Theodora Afroditae | Evagrius coniux | consular date 382      |
|            |                  |                 | *vixit annos XXI*      |
| 20811/     | Urbica           | (parents)       | consular date 397      |
| 1753a      |                  |                 | *quasi metrical ann. XII* |
| 20819/     | (Remus and Arnoldia) | (parents) | consular date 442      |
| 1355       | *germani fratres*|                 |                        |
| 21015/     | Euodia           | (parents)       |                        |
| 2018       |                 |                 |                        |
| 21049      | *domus meae regent* | Flavius Salvius |                        |
|            | (materfamilias)  |                 |                        |
| 21306      | Tecla            | (husband)       |                        |
| 21513      | *in pace recepta* | parentes | fragmentary            |
| 21516      | *fidelis coniunx/castus* | (husband) |                        |
| 21517      | *haec (f)*       |                 |                        |
| 21522/     | *haec (R)*       |                 |                        |
| 2236       |                  |                 |                        |


Self-Portrait as a Landscape: Ausonius and His Herediolum

Oliver Nicholson

BEING CHRISTIAN IN THE FOURTH CENTURY

Being Christian in the fourth century must have meant navigating an ocean of uncertainties and undistributed middles. Christians had consistently claimed that they alone knew how to offer practical worship to the force which had made the universe out of nothing and that the worship of intermediate entities was at best futile, at worst downright destructive. For Lactantius at the beginning of the century, God alone was 'the builder of the world and the manufacturer of all things which make it up or exist in it', so he alone should be worshipped.\(^1\) God's servants 'neither are gods, nor call themselves gods, nor wish to be worshipped, seeing that they do nothing apart from the will and command of God'.\(^2\) Worshipping demons, forces which were not the servants of God, had baleful effects.\(^3\) Only in Christianity was there a concatenation of practical wisdom and rational worship.\(^4\) Constantine had given Christians like Lactantius the opportunity to put their convictions into practice; the sacrifices which had since time immemorial ensured the security of cities in the Roman world were made illegal.\(^5\)

But not all the implications of Christian commitment were immediately obvious. Was it un-Christian to celebrate New Year's Day?\(^6\) Resolving such dilemmas took time and reflection, and in the interim the church did not relax

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1. Inst. I. 6, 16.
2. Inst. I. 7, 5.
3. Inst. II. 14–16.
5. *Codex Theodosianus* XVI, 10, 2, issued by Constans I in 341 to the Vicarius of Italy, threatens 'whosoever will have dared to observe sacrifices, contrary to the law of the divine prince our father and this the command of our clemency'; cf. Bradbury (1994).