

Reading Inscription in the Ancient Novel

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Inscriptions are a small but intriguing part of the polyphony of voices in the ancient novel. Sometimes they function as ‘reality effects,’ by their presence anchoring or at least tethering the action around them to a plausible picture of the contemporary or historical Graeco-Roman world. Other inscriptions, particularly ones in exotic settings or with riddling texts, could be said to function as ‘unreality effects,’ dramatizing the role of the heroic explorer and interpreter, who sees something in them that no one else can. With this type we see the balance of interest shifting to the reading, rather than the writing, of inscriptions, as the hermeneutically and narratologically more intriguing activity. Finally, as has been partially explored before, inscriptions play a role in guaranteeing identity over time and thus aid in recognition. Their public nature takes them one step beyond the private recognition tokens in the world of New Comedy.

The ancient novel gives us a number of vignettes of both the writers and readers of inscriptions. In several cases it has been tempting to mine the individual passages for what they might tell us about specifically epigraphical or more generally social reality. Trimalchio, for example, in Petronius’s *Satyricon*, leads a highly inscribed life, from the carefully labelled paintings of his career in his entrance hall (29,3 <cum> *titulis pictum*) and the silver dishes inscribed with both his name and their weight (31,10 *in quarum marginibus nomen Trimalchionis inscriptum erat et argenti pondus*)¹ to the notices dotted around his house.² These many *inscriptiones minores* lead up to Trimalchio’s great planned *res gestae* for his tomb at *Satyricon* 71,12:

¹ To the very useful survey of inscriptions and the list in its Appendix in Sironen 2003 could be added these two small inscriptions.

² See also Rimell 2007, esp. 66-71 on inscriptions in the *Satyrica* as boundary markers in the text.

C. Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus hic requiescit. huic seviratus absenti decretus est. cum posset in omnibus decuriis Romae esse, tamen noluit. pius, fortis, fidelis, ex parvo crevit; sestertium reliquit trecenties, nec umquam philosophum audivit. vale: et tu.

Gaius Pompeius Trimalchio Maecenatianus lies here. He was elected sevir in his absence. Although he could have been a member of any of the decuries in Rome, he did not wish it. Pious, brave, faithful, he grew from little. He left 30 million, and he never listened to a philosopher. Farewell—and do likewise.

Starting with Mommsen, a number of studies have traced linguistic parallels in surviving inscriptions that show Petronius's ear was well-attuned to the lexicon and style of such inscriptions³ though part of the comedy surely lies in the fact that they are usually honorary rather than funerary inscriptions, such as this with which Trimalchio wishes to honor himself.⁴

Indeed, if we look at the inscriptions simply as 'reality effects' within the text, we will miss the deeper comedy of Trimalchio the writer's anxiety to control the reading process, the reception of the inscriptions he has so carefully composed. The first inscription to be met in his house expresses his power dramatically and unambiguously for slave and visitor alike:

quisquis servus sine dominico iussu foras exierit, accipiet plagas centum.
(28,7)

Any slave leaving the premises without his master's orders will receive a hundred lashes.

Such clarity is quickly undermined, however, for readers with insufficient repertoire to interpret later examples. Commentators still earnestly debate the meaning of this inscription on the doorposts of the dining room:

³ Donahue 1999, citing much earlier literature, including Mommsen 1878, Hübner 1878, and Paley 1891. It is not without interest, however, to note a certain slippage at work in Donahue's title, which speaks of the 'inscriptions at *Satyricon* 71. 10.' There are no inscriptions recorded at *Sat.* 71,10, nor is it even clear that Donahue's excellent argument suggests that Trimalchio's plan for a sculpted banquet representation was to include inscriptions that are simply not specified. He is rather noting parallels between extant inscriptions recording public banquets as benefactions and Petronius's *descriptive* language here—yet the impulse to recover a new bit of historical reality has unconsciously morphed into a title which implies we can find a new inscription in the passage.

⁴ Though the categories are beginning to blur in the early imperial period: see the discussion of inscriptions in Prag 2006 and the following note.

‘III. et pridie kalendas Ianuarias C. noster foras cenat’ (30,3)
30 and 31 December, our Gaius dines out.

Does this inscription simply record this month’s calendar of activities, a very modest ‘reality effect,’ or is it meant to convey the more heavy-handed message that Trimalchio is so self-sufficient for entertainment that he only accepts engagements on the last two days of the year?

A much more important inscription then marks the entrance to Trimalchio’s *triclinium*:

in postibus triclinii fasces erant cum securibus fixi, quorum imam partem quasi embolum navis aeneum finiebat, in quo erat scriptum: ‘C. Pompeio Trimalchioni, seviro Augustali, Cinnamus dispensator.’ sub eodem titulo et lucerna bilychnis de camera pendebat. (30,2-3)

On the doorposts of the dining room were fixed fasces with axes, with the lower part ending in a bronze ship’s ram, on which was inscribed: ‘To Gaius Pompeius Trimalchio, sevir of Augustus, from his steward Cinnamus.’ Under the same inscription a double bronze lamp also hung from the ceiling.

Inscriptions here multiply with a vengeance, for each of the pair of fasces apparently rests on an inscribed ram, while a third copy of the same text floats above an elaborate lamp.⁵ Formally, the inscriptions speak for Cinnamus to Trimalchio, but even if Trimalchio did not dictate the wording himself, he undoubtedly determined their placement in his house and therefore their reception by spectators.

Indeed, anxiety over the correct reception of what he writes is foremost in Trimalchio’s mind just before he dictates his great *res gestae*. He has been laying out the sculptural program for his monument, including his wife Fortunata, a pet dog, and a boy weeping over a broken urn. Here then is what immediately precedes the inscription he dictates:

⁵ Prag 2006, 544 compares Cinnamus’s inscription here honoring Trimalchio as *sevir* to the *pater patriae* inscription in Augustus’s *vestibulum* (Augustus, *Res Gestae* 35). The inscription may therefore, among other things, reinforce the funerary atmosphere on entering Trimalchio’s home. Note that Augustus’s body later lay in state in the same *vestibulum*, wherein the *pater patriae* inscription stood (Suetonius, *Aug.* 100). Beard 1998, 97 hints that Trimalchio’s election as *sevir* in *absentia* plays off the offer to Augustus of the dictatorship in his absence, cited in *Res Gestae* 4: *dictaturam et absentem et praesenti mihi delatam ... non accepi* (‘the dictatorship offered to me both absent and present ... I did not accept’)..

horologium in medio, ut quisquis horas inspiciet, velit nolit, nomen meum legat. inscriptio quoque vide diligenter si haec satis idonea tibi videtur (71,11)

I want a sundial in the middle, so that anyone checking the time, like or not, reads my name. And check out if this inscription seems good enough to you ...

The utilitarian sundial is the bait to induce the passers-by to pay any attention at all to his monument and its inscriptions.

Peter Bing in a fundamental analysis of the actual reception of inscribed verse has suggested that this is precisely the fate most writers of inscriptions in antiquity were forced to struggle against.⁶ The picture from historical sources supports his argument: few and odd are the actual readers of inscription, and even Cicero, tracking down the grave of Archimedes at Syracuse because he remembers hearing of the verse inscription about sphere and cylinder thereon, is more concerned to dramatize his own role as the recoverer of the lost monument than to tell us what the verses said (*Tusc. Disp.* 5,23). Bing's provocative thesis suggests that exceptional readers, usually themselves poets, are the first in the Hellenistic age to pay much attention at all to others' inscriptions—and in the process help invent the literary epigram.

At least one of the Greek novels offers initial support for this operational picture overall: Xenophon's *Ephesian Tale*. Anthia and Habrocomes, off on their ill-motivated wanderings in Book I, dedicate a panoply in the Temple of Helios on Rhodes with the following inscription:

οἱ ξεῖνοι τάδε σοι χρυσήλατα τεύχ' ἔθηκαν,
 Ἀνθία Ἀβροκόμης θ', ἱερῆς Ἐφέσοιο πολῖται. (1,12)⁷
 The strangers offered you these weapons of beaten gold,
 Anthia and Habrocomes, citizens of holy Ephesus.

Near the end of the novel, their servants Leucon and Rhode, long separated from our hero and heroine but back on Rhodes, put up their own dedication next to that of Anthia and Habrocomes:

⁶ Bing 2002.

⁷ Text from Dalmeyda 1962; translation after Anderson in Reardon 1989.

ἀνέθεσαν στήλην γράμμασι χρυσοῖς γεγραμμένην ὑπὲρ Ἀβροκόμου καὶ Ἄνθιας, ἀνεγέγραπτο δὲ καὶ τῶν ἀναθέντων τὰ ὀνόματα, ὃ τε Λεύκων καὶ ἡ Ῥόδη. (5,10,6)

They erected a pillar, inscribed in gold letters, to Habrocomes and Anthia, with their names as dedicators written on it, Leucon and Rhode.

The gold letters are a nice touch: the former slaves have come up in the world and indeed will eventually offer their former masters help from their new riches—but still they do not rival the ostentatious solid gold of the original dedication.

Habrocomes, himself back on Rhodes but unbeknownst to Leucon and Rhode, comes to the temple and sees the pillar:

ἀναγνοὺς οὖν καὶ γνωρίσας τοὺς ἀναθέντας καὶ τὴν τῶν οἰκετῶν εὐνοίαν ... μέγα ἀνωδύρετο παρακαθεσθεὶς τῇ στήλῃ. (5,10,7)

Reading [the inscription] and recognizing the donors and the good will of his servants ... he mourned greatly sitting next to the pillar.

Leucon and Rhode happen upon him there mourning, fail to recognize him at first, and then ask this key question:

τί βουλόμενος ἀναθήμασιν οὐδέν σοι προσήκουσι παρακαθεζόμενος ὀδύρη καὶ θρηνηεῖς; (5,10,10)

Why are you sitting next to dedications having nothing to do with you, groaning and mourning?

The natural assumption is their dedications, even in this public space, can have no such emotional resonance for an unfamiliar reader—and they are right, insofar as this reader is not in fact unfamiliar. We shall return to this scene later, when we consider inscriptions and recognitions, but for the moment let us simply note that an expectation of more indifferent readers of inscriptions than engaged ones is an important part of inscriptions' 'reality effect.' Within the world of the texts, public and private meanings of inscriptions are open to dynamic negotiation.

The supposedly simple Xenophon is also the only novelist to attempt the genre of sepulchral epigram. When the bandit Hippothous tells his story to Habrocomes at the beginning of book III, his narrative culminates with the shipwreck in which his young lover Hyperanthes drowns beside him, despite

Hippothous's efforts to uphold him. He is only able to drag the body ashore for burial and erect over it this epitaph of his own composition:

Ἰπόθοος κλεινῷ τόδε <σῆμ'> Ὑπεράνθη,
 οὐ τάφον ἐκ θανάτου ἀγαθὸν ἱεροῖο πολίτου
 ἐς βάθος ἐκ γαίης, ἄνθος κλυτόν, ὃν ποτε δαίμων
 ἤρπασεν ἐν πελάγει μεγάλου πνεύσαντος ἀήτου.
 Hippothous fashioned this tomb for far-famed Hyperanthes,
 A tomb unworthy of the death of a sacred citizen.
 The famous flower some evil spirit once snatched from the land into the
 deep,
 On the ocean he snatched him as a great storm blew. (3,2)⁸

This is not a great literary epigram, but it does show considerable familiarity with the conventions of the genre, even as it plays with them. The epigram evokes the hidden presence⁹ of the body rescued from the sea. As it etymologizes Hyperanthes' name as a 'famous flower' in its lament, it may evoke the terrible beauty of Aeschylus's image in *Agamemnon* of the sea, after the wreck of the homebound Achaean fleet, flowering with the corpses of the heroic dead:¹⁰

ὀρῶμεν ἀνθοῦν πέλαγος Αἰγαῖον νεκροῖς
 ἀνδρῶν Ἀχαιῶν ναυτικοῖς τ' ἐρειπίοις. (*Ag.* 659-660)

The epigram rather oddly calls him a 'sacred citizen' when he is buried, not in his hometown of Perinthus, but in Lesbos, off which they were wrecked. It also skillfully lays the responsibility for Hyperanthes' death onto a δαίμων that 'snatched [him] from the land into the deep,' when in fact the one responsible for taking Hyperanthes on his fatal voyage is Hippothous himself, even though his motive was to rescue his young from a dire fate.¹¹ The ἤρπασεν also curiously raises the false implication that Hyperanthes' body

⁸ Translation Anderson in Reardon 1989, 148.

⁹ Bruss 2005, *passim*.

¹⁰ Compare also Aeschylus's reference to the 'flower of the Argives,' ἄνθος Ἀργείων, 197-198.

¹¹ After the two fell in love in Perinthus, Hyperanthes is with the connivance of his own father carried off by a predatory older lover Aristomachus to Byzantium. Hippothous pursues, bursts in on the other two *in flagrante*, kills Aristomachus, and rescues Hyperanthes, with whom he then returns to Perinthus, apparently by land. At Hippothous's initiative, they then leave immediately 'for Asia' by ship, and the shipwreck ensues.

was not recovered, when in fact Hippothous buried him with his own hands and carved the sepulchral inscription. Xenophon combines two epigram types here, one designed for the cenotaph, often erected for those who perished at sea, and another for the conventional funeral monument, perhaps in an attempt to evoke both kinds of pathos. Once again, the inscription speaks differently to readers who know the full story behind it than it does to the imagined public passing by.

Elsewhere in the novels, a public audience can read more into an inscription than is actually there. The *Alexander Romance* bears witness to both the reality and the reality effect of one inscription by its hero. The narrative tells us that in his newly founded city of Alexandria Alexander inscribed five letters:

ΑΒΓΔΕ τὸ μὲν Α Ἀλέξανδρος, τὸ δὲ βῆτα βασιλεύς, τὸ δὲ γάμμα γένος,
τὸ δὲ δέλτα Διός, τὸ δὲ Ε ἔκτισεν πόλιν ἀμίμητον. (1,32)
A for 'Alexander,' B for 'the King,' Γ for 'of the race,' Δ for 'of Zeus,'
E for 'founded an inimitable city.'

The letters seem originally to have been simply an administratively convenient labelling system for the organization of the city.¹² The acronymic interpretation, which grows desperately expansive with the epsilon, might seem a random bit of pseudo-learning, were it not for the fact that one region of the city, as Achilles Tatius tells us, was indeed named for Alexander.¹³

ἦλθον εἰς τὸν ἐπώνυμον Ἀλεξάνδρου τόπον. εἶδον δὲ ἐντεῦθεν ἄλλην πόλιν ...

I came to the quarter named for Alexander himself, where I saw a whole other city. (Achilles Tatius 5,1)¹⁴

Who is in control of the reading process here? One doubts that the acronymic interpretation originates with Alexander: he did not name one section of the city 'for himself.' Some anonymous source has imposed this interpretation on the purely functional text and so lodged itself in the public mind that the alpha district is indeed 'named for Alexander.'

¹² So Dowden in Reardon 1989, 675 n. 33.

¹³ In that novel itself the most spectacular part of Alexandria, a *mise en abîme* of the whole.

¹⁴ Text from Gaselee 1917, translation from Winkler in Reardon 1989.

This example of reader response in action is delightfully ironic, given the fictionalized Alexander's role as a masterful reader and interpreter of riddling texts. He was not the only such reader, of course, and we might begin to examine the 'unreality effects' of inscriptions by looking at a simple example of a hero solving a riddling inscription. Iamblichus's vast *Babylonian Story*, relating the adventures of Rhodanes and Sinonis, now survives only in Photius's summary, near the beginning of which we learn that:

ἐν ᾧ καὶ χρυσὸν Ῥοδάνης εὔρισκε τῆς στήλης τοῦ λέοντος ὑποδηλούμενον τῷ ἐπιγράμματι. (3)¹⁵

Rhodanes found in [a field] gold that had been revealed by the inscription on the stele of the lion.

Photius's summary is so breathless that we are often left to puzzle out what the narrative context might be. Since through the Hellenistic period, the word ἐπίγραμμα is used 'almost exclusively' for a metrical inscription on an object,¹⁶ the term here too probably indicates that Rhodanes decoded a (riddling?) verse inscription. At a minimum, Rhodanes' feat of interpretation must have been unusual (more than a simple reading), else the gold would have been found long ago. A later reference may make the situation a bit more ambiguous, for the story returns in ring composition to this same gold and same location at the end. Rhodanes recovers the treasure at this point and employs it to persuade a group of Alan mercenaries to take his side:

ὁ δὲ τὸ μνηθὲν χρυσίον εὐρών, καὶ τέχνῃ τινὶ καὶ σοφίᾳ ἐκ τοῦ ὀρύγματος ἀνιμώμενος, τοὺς Ἄλανοὺς ἔπειθεν, ὡς ὑπὸ θεῶν ταῦτά τε καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἐκδιδάσκειτο (21)

By finding the gold that was pointed out to him and by skillfully and cleverly extracting it from the tunnel, he convinced the Alans that he had been taught this and other things by the gods.

Even if he had help in interpreting the inscription, as the passive μνηθὲν may imply, Rhodanes understands how to use both the gold itself and his prowess as interpreter to reinforce his own position with the mercenaries. His improvisational abilities convince the barbarian troops that the gods

¹⁵ Text and numeration after Habrich 1960, translation adapted from Sandy in Reardon 1989.

¹⁶ Bruss 2005, 6 notes that through the Hellenistic period, ἐπίγραμμα is used 'almost exclusively' for a metrical inscription on an object.

have taught him special secret knowledge, making him both divinely skilled and divinely favored.

Such improvisational interpretation is also the hallmark of the hero of the *Alexander Romance*, as Richard Stoneman has already suggested.¹⁷ The novel represents Alexander as the son of the last native king of Egypt, Nectanebos, who fled eventually to Macedon and set up shop as a prophet there. Falling in love with the queen, Olympias, he constructs an elaborate scheme to make her think that he is the god Ammon, visiting her by night, and thereby fathers Alexander. Alexander only learns the truth of his parentage when he is responsible for the death of Nectanebos. When Alexander later conquers Egypt, he finds in Memphis a statue with this inscription on the base:

ὁῦτος ὁ φυγὼν βασιλεὺς ἥξει πάλιν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ οὐ γηράσκων ἀλλὰ νεάζων, καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς ἡμῶν Πέρσας ὑποτάξει ἡμῖν. (1,34)

The king who has fled will come again to Egypt, not in age but in youth, and our enemy the Persians he shall subject to us

When Alexander learns that this is a statue of Nectanebos, he leaps up, embraces it, and claims Nectanebos as his father, thereby both interpreting the inscription and asserting his claim as the real heir to the Egyptian throne.

As Stoneman further points out, Alexander's interactions with inscriptions suggest the Hellenistic fascination with remote lands and what lay beyond the known world.¹⁸ In the gamma version of the eighth century, when Alexander encounters the statue of Nectanebos (2,27), it reaches down to crown him and put a globe in his hand. Alexander responds by erasing the inscription on the statue that foretold his own coming, because he wishes to be seen as a descendant of the gods rather than of the former king Nectanebos. This Alexander will have no other texts before him. Yet when he himself comes to what he thinks is the end of the earth, he inscribes that boundary by erecting an arch and writing upon it:

οἱ βουλόμενοι εἰσελθεῖν ἐν τῇ μακάρων χώρα δεξιᾷ πορεύσθε, μήποτε ἀπόλησθε.

You who wish to enter the land of the blest, travel to the right and avoid destruction. (2,41)

¹⁷ Stoneman 1995.

¹⁸ Stoneman 1995, esp. 165-168.

Writer or reader, inscriber or inscribed—who controls interpretation at the edge of things? Having writ, Alexander suddenly tries to move on, doubting whether he really has reached the end of everything, where sky meets earth, and attempts to test his own text by flying up to the heavens on the backs of yoked birds.

From the limits of both earth and interpretation, we turn back finally to the role of inscriptions in recognition and identity. Errki Sironen's valuable survey of inscriptions in the ancient novel suggests a division of practice and perhaps ideology between the more popular fictions, in which inscriptions are more common, and the sophistic novels, where they are rarer or absent, but the space is often filled by letters between characters, wherein 'deep feelings are very often mirrored.'¹⁹ Though the point cannot be pressed too far, there is some plausibility to the notion that letters, usually with a single author and a single intended recipient, offer not only variety of focalization but a broader scope as well for both interpretation and deception.²⁰ Inscriptions generally must address a wider audience—although the most complex of the novels can play games with just this relation of text to intended audience and the definition of inscription. In Heliodorus's *Aethiopica* the text embroidered on a cloth band by Queen Persinna with the story of the birth and abandonment of her daughter Charicleia begins as a letter to her daughter,²¹ turns into a defense speech aimed not just at her daughter but public opinion as well (*ἀπολογοῦμαι πρὸς τε σέ ... πρὸς τε αὐτὸν ὅλον τὸν τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίον*, Heliodorus 4,8,2), and ends by meditating on whether what she writes will be a memorial for her grave or the key to her recognition (*γνωρίσματα ... ἐπιτύμβια*, 4,8,8). The successful restoration of the princess rests on the gradual transformation of this text from a letter with one intended recipient to a more public document with more readers, first and foremost Calasiris, but others as well.

In some ways only the anonymous *Apollonius, King of Tyre* employs truly public inscriptions—and posits a world in which these serve public justice. As previously noted, the inscriptions in Xenophon's *Ephesian Tale* reunite Habrocomes with Leucon and Rhode—and in due course Anthia as well,

¹⁹ Sironen 2003, 296

²⁰ Rosenmeyer 2001, 136 suggests that 'letters exemplify and illustrate a whole culture of writing in the novel.'

²¹ At Heliodorus 4,8,1, Calasiris calls the text a *γράμμα*, which should probably be translated as 'inscription,' as I can find no parallel for the singular as 'letter, missive,' but the text itself opens with a standard epistolary formula: *Περσίννα Βασίλισσα Αἰθίοπων τῇ ὄτι δὴ κληθησομένη ... θυγατρὶ*.

after she dedicates a lock of her hair in the same temple with a tell-tale inscription:

ΥΠΕΡ ΤΟΥ ΑΝΔΡΟΣ ΑΒΡΟΚΟΜΟΥ ΑΝΘΙΑ ΤΗΝ ΚΟΜΗΝ ΤΩΙ
ΘΕΩΙ ΑΝΕΘΗΚΕ. (5,11,6)

Yet such votive inscriptions are as much private missives to the god as they are public declarations, and only the sharp eyes of Leucon and Rhode, caught by the names of their master and mistress next to the offering, bring about the final reunion.²² It is in *Apollonius* that we finally find inscriptions with public, corporate authorship—embodying public obligation.

Near the beginning of *Apollonius*, the grateful citizens of Tarsus erect a statue in the marketplace to their benefactor, showing him in a chariot with the grain he has used to alleviate their starvation. The text also records the inscription on its pedestal:

*TARSIA CIVITAS APOLLONIO TYRIO DONUM DEDIT EO QUOD
STERILITATEM SUAM ET FAMEM SEDAVIT.* (10)²³

The city of Tarsus dedicated this to Apollonius of Tyre for ending its blight and famine.

Sironen finds the wording of the inscription not well paralleled in the actual epigraphical record, though the notion of such a dedication is by no means implausible.²⁴ Indeed, G. A. A. Kortekaas offers the very intriguing suggestion that the text's ephrasis of the statue group as a whole may be based on a coin of Caracalla, minted at Tarsus, showing such a triumphant figure in a chariot on the reverse.²⁵ The novel offers its readers one red herring about

²² In fact, it is not clear from the text that she even revisits her own dedication of the golden panoply, for Leucon and Rhode spot her hair and inscription among multiple offerings (5,12,1, βλέπουσι τὰ ἀναθήματα καὶ γνωρίζουσι τῶν δεσποτῶν τὰ ὀνόματα), and the reunion actually takes place the next day when they find her sitting and lamenting next to her own offerings (5,12,3, προσκαθίσασα δὲ τοῖς ἀναθήμασιν ἐδάκρυέ τε καὶ ἀνέστεινεν).

²³ Except as noted, I quote from recension A, Schmelting 1988. The B recension varies the text of the inscription slightly: QUOD LIBERALITATE SUA FAMEM SEDAVIT.

²⁴ Sironen 2003, 292.

²⁵ Kortekaas 2004, 69-72. The coin plays a key role in the debate over the Greek or Latin nature of the original text of the narrative, which I do not intend to enter. The iconographic connection seems quite plausible, though the inscription on the statue base then represents authorial invention unconnected to any text on the coin. Kortekaas does suggest (71) that, when the populace later hails Apollonius as *patrem patriae* (50, which

this dedicatory inscription early on. Apollonius has left his daughter Tarsia with foster parents who have never told her of her true identity. When her nurse Lycoris, previously her own mother's nurse and left behind to care for Tarsia in turn, is dying, she reveals her true parentage to the girl and tells her that, if her foster parents ever mistreat her, she can go to the statue, grasp it, and appeal to the populace for help on the basis of her father's benefactions. Although Lycoris does not specifically mention the inscription, the text that marks him as the city's benefactor is undoubtedly key to the efficacy of such a gesture. Of course, this scene never comes to pass: her foster mother plots to have Tarsia murdered, and pirates conveniently snatch her away, preserving her life but separating her from the statue and its protective text—though it will return later in another guise.

Instead, as Tarsia is now generally believed dead, she is accorded an honorific but deceptive funerary inscription by the same public that honored her father. Curiously, the novel quotes the inscription in two closely related but not identical forms, first thus when the citizens erect it:

DII MANES CIVES TARSII TARSIAE VIRGINI BENEFICIIS TYRII APOLLONII EX AERE COLLATO FECERUNT. (32)²⁶

The citizens of Tarsus erected this from public funds to the sacred memory of the maiden Tarsia in remembrance of the benefits of Apollonius of Tyre.

Here we read the inscription through the eyes of its authors, the citizens of Tarsus. When Apollonius himself arrives back in Tarsus but doubts the story he is told of Tarsia's death, he is directed to this false tomb and reads the inscription there thus:

DII MANES. CIVES TARSII TARSIAE VIRGINI APOLLONII [REGIS] FILIAE OB BENEFICIUM EIUS PIETATIS CAUSA EX AERE COLLATO FECERUNT. (38)

The citizens of Tarsus piously erected this from public funds to the sacred memory of the maiden Tarsia, daughter of [King] Apollonius on account of his benefits.

Sandy 1989 curiously translates as 'savior of our country'), this 'echo[es]' the IIII abbreviation for Πατήρ Πατρίδος on the coin's obverse.

²⁶ The C recension here offers: *TARSIAE VIRGINI APOLLONII FILIAE OB BENEFICIA EX AERE COLLATO MONUMENTUM FECERUNT.*

Since the textual problems of this novel and its recensions are well known and manifold, it seems curious on the face of it to treat this second scene as though it were reporting a second, separate inscription.²⁷ Imagining a suppressed or omitted narrative in which the text of an original inscription has since been revised seems quite excessive. It seems better in this ‘fluid’ text to follow Stelios Panayotakis’s argument that ‘the individual episodes highlight different aspects of the hero’s character.’²⁸ It is thus intriguing to note that the revision and expansion, in epigraphically plausible terms, increases the emphasis on the benefactions of Apollonius for the one reader who might care most: Apollonius himself.

At the end of the novel, after Tarsia has recognized Apollonius and been identified in turn, the king’s first impulse is to take vengeance on the whole city of Mytilene which allowed such things to happen. The citizens hunt out the pimp, who is burned alive, and offer honors to Apollonius. In gratitude, the king restores the walls of Mytilene and in turn is honored with a complicated statue group, showing his reunion with Tarsia and vengeance on the pimp, and another public inscription:

*TYRIO APOLLONIO RESTITUTORI MOENIUM NOSTRORUM ET TARSIAE PUDICISSIME VIRGINITATEM SERVANTI ET CASUM VILLISSIMUM INCURRENTI UNIVERSUS POPULUS OB NIMIUM AMOREM AETERNUM DECUS MEMORIAE DEDIT. (47)*²⁹

To Apollonius of Tyre, restorer of our walls, and Tarsia, who most chastely preserved her virginity even in the most desperate circumstance the whole populace out of the greatest love has dedicated this eternal monument to their memory.

The inscription not only honors the restorative *euergesia* of Apollonius but the restoration of his family and his role as monarch over many cities.

There seems to be no one master narrative of the work of inscriptions in the ancient novel, only an interlocking set of reading strategies. Sironen may be right that the truly public mode of inscriptional discourse held little interest for the more playful and personal novelists, as this public mode survives

²⁷ As Sironen 2003, 293 apparently does.

²⁸ Panayotakis 2007, 314-315 (and I am very grateful to Dr. Panayotakis for sharing with me an early copy of his important article).

²⁹ Redactions B and C offer somewhat different texts, in particular citing Apollonius as the restorer of ‘our [public?] buildings’ (AEDIUM) and themselves as Mytilenians.

only in *Apollonius*. Superficially similar examples, such as Trimalchio's boastful texts, satirize themselves, as the novel's audience, reading over the shoulder of the less astute narrator, wrest control from a resistant author and discover meanings he did not intend. Where heroic readers from Alexander to Rhodanes conquer resistant texts (if not specific authors) and decode meanings hidden from ordinary mortals, Encolpius and his companions can be baffled even by simple inscriptions. Some readers in the Greek novels find reunion through textual interpretation, conquering a fate which would hold them apart. The polyphony of inscriptions, though, resists any attempt to read them as a single body of data, susceptible to a single decoding. Sometimes realistic, sometimes fantastic, they serve rather the multiple narratives in which they are embedded.

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