

Inscriptions in the *Domus Trimalchionis*
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In Petronius' *Satyricon* the narrator Encolpius describes his reactions to the house of the freedman Trimalchio where he has been invited to dine. In a rather under-discussed portion of the narrative, he reports several inscriptions in the rooms of the house that lead toward the dining room: the first is in the vestibule that proclaims any slave who leaves the house without permission will be flogged; he sees the common inscription "beware of dog;" then he sees an inscription posted on a *fascis*-like sculpture to honor Trimalchio's title *sevir Augustalis* (as a member of the civic priesthood established by Augustus); and nearby he sees one that informs the reader that Trimalchio will be dining out two days in December. Later, near the end of the dinner party, he and the other guests bear witness to their host's epitaph which is presented during his mock funeral. In this paper, I will discuss the ways in which these inscriptions indicate many facets of the Roman cultural microcosm within the household of Trimalchio. (Among previous scholarly treatments, I will make use of John Elsner ("Seductions of Art" in PCPhS, 1993) and Edward Courtney (A Companion to Petronius, 2001).

In juxtaposition to Trimalchio's lowly status (as a foreigner and a freedman), the debased nature of his rise to wealth (via a sexual liaison with his master and his application to trade), and his penchant for tasteless excess, the inscriptions challenge the notion that Trimalchio is a buffoon who barely maintains order over a cacophonous and trembling household: the seeming incompetence of the master and chaos of interfamilial relations within the *domus* are merely aspects of the deceptive nature of the banquet. The inscriptions suggest (rather) that Trimalchio is a firm but fair master, that he is involved in the wider community's politics and maintains a respectable public *persona*, that he infrequently leaves his *domus* for external entertainments, that he and perhaps his household is literate, and (via the epitaph) that he desires to be included among those who memorialize themselves as men of action rather than pedants or philosophers. Also, there are characteristic similarities between these inscriptions and the sort that adorn the public monuments of great men and those that inform the public as graffiti. I would go so far as to suggest that Trimalchio's household reflects the new order of imperial Rome in a way that the epitaphs of the Scipios (in their still extant tomb at Rome) once reflected the aristocratic order of republican Rome.