

“The *Patronus* of Allia Potestas”

From the presentation and content of the epitaph for Allia Potestas (*CIL* 6.37965 = *CLE* 1988), it has long been assumed that her *patronus* and the author of the poetic inscription were one and the same, a certain Aulus Allius as is evident from her nomenclature. It is possible, however, to be more precise. An epitaph for an Aulus Allius Felix (*CIL* 6.25602), himself the freedman of an Aulus Allius, was found in the same area more than a century before the discovery of the Allia Potestas inscription. The presence of his epitaph has been known to at least one scholar (Evangelisti 2012), but no serious argument was put forward that this person might be connected to Allia Potestas. This is understandable since no *cognomen* for her former enslaver is mentioned in the opening lines of her epitaph.

I will argue that two important details have gone unnoticed which increase the likelihood that these two epitaphs are related. First, the combination of the *praenomen* Aulus and the *nomen* Allius is very unusual, making the presence of any inscription, especially one found in the same area of the city as the poetic epitaph for Allia Potestas, more likely to be connected. Second, the author of the epitaph has engaged in some wordplay on *infelix/felix* at the end of the poem as a way to insert his own name into her epitaph. This has parallels to other epitaphs especially where the deceased or the commemorators are named Fortunatus or Felix.

A search in the Clauss-Slaby database turns up occurrences of the *nomen* Allius, including instances where the *pater* or *patronus* of an Allia was named, that represent more than 250 male individuals; but only four of these have the *praenomen* Aulus. In addition to the *patronus* of Allia Potestas, there is an Allia Galla who was the daughter of an Aulus Allius (*CIL* 6.37416). Finally, there are two more occurrences in the following inscription (*CIL* 6.25602 =

EDR 128905): *A(ulus) Allius / A(uli) et ((mulieris)) l(ibertus) Felix* (Aulus Allius Felix, freedman of Lucius / freedman of Aulus and a woman).

The whereabouts of this last inscription are no longer known, but it was recorded by Gaetano Marini in the late eighteenth century. Marini's notes indicate that the epitaph was inscribed on travertine and that he saw it at the Villa Pelluchia. Although the precise spelling and specific location of the Villa Pelluchia is not certain, Evangelisti maintains that it was in the same area as the discovery of the Allia Potestas inscription: "*la cui iscrizione fu vista da Marini a villa Pellucchi (già Galli), tra la via Salaria e la via Pinciana, ossa proprio nell'area del sepolcreto salario-pinciano da cui provengono le altre due iscrizioni sepolcrali di Auli Allii.*"

The most important clue, however, was left by Aulus Allius himself. First, in lines 40-41 he goes out of his way, perhaps even ungrammatically (as argued by Horsfall 1985), to spell her name (POTESTAS) as it would have appeared on a golden armband that he keeps in memory of her. A few lines later, as he transitions to the very end of the poem, Aulus Allius speaks of an image of Allia Potestas that he intends to take with him when he comes to her, in other words when he dies. He first declares himself 'unlucky' or 'unhappy' (*infelix*) as he wonders to whom he might entrust such solemn rites. But then, at the prospect of finding someone to carry them out, he says 'I will be FELIX', playing off the customary meaning of the word and the fact that this was also his *cognomen*.

Names of both the deceased and commemorators that activated the ideas of good fortune or happiness, especially Fortunatus and Felix, presented a particular challenge in funerary inscriptions. The incongruity between the meaning of the name and the general context of death and loss was so great that writers were sometimes at pains to acknowledge this. For example, the epitaph (*CIL* 10.365 = *EDR* 126996) of Staia Quartilla put up by her partner who is described as

“‘Happy’ Antonius (but in fact), the unhappiest husband” (*Antonius Felicia / nus sed maritus / infelicissimus*). In a similar but even more subtle way Aulus Allius Felix took advantage of this aspect of Roman funerary commemoration to weave his own name into the epitaph for his beloved Potestas.

#### Works Cited

- Evangelisti, S. 2012: ‘Elogio funebre di una liberta dalle doti eccezionali’, in R. Friggeri and M. G. Granino Cecere and G. L. Gregori (eds), *Terme di Diocleziano. La collezione epigrafica*, Verona, 545—7.
- Horsfall, N. 1985: ‘*CIL* VI 37965 = *CLE* 1988 (Epitaph of Allia Potestas): A commentary’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 61, 251—72.