

A Roman Sailor's Mysterious Voyage to New Orleans

In spring 2025, local homeowners in New Orleans were clearing vegetation overgrowth from their backyard when they discovered a marble plaque beneath some leaves and soil. It had a Latin inscription, and they thought it might be associated with a nearby church. Curious about what they had found, they contacted area archaeologists and local university faculty for help in identifying it. When I received the email from them, I was stunned by what I saw: it appeared to be a Roman funerary inscription!

This paper is not the standard academic research presentation. It is an account of how a Roman antiquity discovered in a most unlikely place was identified and the collaboration involved in its return. In the first part of the paper, I explain how the inscription was identified as one that appears in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL)* that allowed its provenance to be established as the city of Civitavecchia (Italy), about an hour north of Rome. Next, I outline the steps taken to initiate the repatriation process, working with the Italian museum, the FBI, and the homeowners. Finally, I examine the likely circumstances under which this funerary monument for a sailor in the Roman imperial fleet disappeared from its original location and how it may have traveled to New Orleans.