

Remember Me Thus: A Study of Latin Epitaphs of Mime Actresses

This paper examines Latin epitaphs which particularly focus on the career of mime actresses. These epitaphs have a personal attachment to the mimes and give us an opportunity to look at their lives in a different direction. While most of the literary sources shed a negative view on these actresses it is important to discuss aspects unspoken of them. Here, I discuss the epitaphs related to Claudia (CIL 6.10106 II) Arete (CIL 6.10107) and Ecloga (CIL 6.10110) focusing on the importance of the terms *archimima*, *heredes*, *primus* and *diurnus*, and how these terms become significant to their careers. Secondly, I examine the importance of the patron and the early age of death of these actresses.

Claudia and Arete are the only two known *archimimae* in epitaphs who are acclaimed with the phrase, *archimima sui temporis prima*. For one thing, the title *archimima* is a challenging term to decipher. *Archimima* is known as the “protagonist” of the show (Panayotakis 2006), “head comedienne” (Traina 2001) and also, she might “have seen to the plot-line or the script” and “approved” of the scene (Panayotakis 2006). Although there is hardly any evidence on Roman female mimographers, as Fantham defines these “largely improvisational” performances’ plot is devised by the *archimimus/a* along with assigning the cast specific dialogues to improvise (Fantham 1989). Case’s chapter on “Women Pioneers” deals with the mimes as a starting point in history where women were involved in devising a plot and claiming the mimes as “the first women playwrights” (Case 2008).

Arete’s epitaph indicates her career as a wealthy *archimima*. The epitaph states that she set up this tomb for her parents, the members of the Fabian family, herself and a few others. These fourteen named people are believed to be freed persons belonging to her or it could be a list of actors that worked for her (Starks 2004). The term *diurnus* (daily) is an “uncommon” term

and appears specially with *archimimus/a* and it might signify that they were paid for holding this position (Maxwell 1992). *Heredes* (heirs) give the idea that the dead mime actress's legend will be carried on by them. Both Claudia and Arete had heirs, implying "their pride of ownership and occupation" (Starks 2004). Arete states about her property and her will and she wants her property to be shared among the named persons only, further indicating their bond within the troupe.

Ecloga's epitaph shows that whoever set up her epitaph wanted to make the world remember her as the mime of King Juba of Mauretania. Thus, her identity is aligned with a royal political leader of her time. Another recurrent factor in the epitaphs of the female actresses is their early age of death. Ecloga has died at the age of 18 and other actresses such as Eucharis and Hellas at 14 and Luria Privata at 19 (CIL 12.1214, CIL 12.1916, CIL 6.10111 II). When did they start their careers in life to be praised in their teens? This further shows the plight of these mimes who had a very short childhood or none.

If a woman appearing on stage was considered a low condition, then why would an epitaph set up by her parents or relatives want people to remember that she was a mime? It shows that for them, it wasn't a disgrace but an achievement in life (Hov 2015). These epitaphs manifest the power, the authority they had in the society. Claudia or Arete remain in history because they had enough wealth to commission a tomb for themselves. There must be so many untold stories due to their poverty and their social status. Many of the ancient writers remembered them either due to their association with politicians or for their scandalous behaviors. Thus, objectifying the mime actresses made people forget that they also led a life far more complex and powerful as opposed to being a mere object of pleasure for men.

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