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HOW THE ROMANS READ FUNERARY INSCRIPTIONS: NEGLECTED EVIDENCE FROM THE *QUEROLUS**

1. The *Querolus* and an Inscribed Funerary Urn

The late antique¹ Latin comedy *Querolus* (or *Aulularia*) is an extraordinary piece in many respects.² It is the sole (almost) completely surviving comedy after Plautus and Terence. It is written in (albeit rhythmical)³ prose rather than in verse. In a number of ways it reads as though it was written as a sequel to Plautus' *Aulularia* – as an 'Aulularia: the Next Generation', so to speak, since *Querolus*, the play's protagonist and quintessential grouch, is cast as son of an Euclio and protected, like Plautus' Euclio in the *Aulularia*, by a (somewhat masochistic) Lar familiaris.⁴ Despite its lengthy monologues and somewhat static dialogues, it is a radically challenging political read, dissecting forms of political and religious corruption as well as the ambitions of certain social types with meticulous attention to detail, sarcastic wit, and decent verbal humour.⁵

Querolus, unbeknown to him, houses a treasure in his home. In a dedicatory letter, the anonymous author of the play explains to the addressee, one Rutilius, that –

Pater Queroli nostri fuit auarus Euclio. hic Euclio aurum in ornam conguessit olim, quasi busta patris, odoribus insuper infusis tituloque extra addito. nauem ascendens ornam domi fodit, rem nulli aperuit. hic peregre moriens parasitum ibidem cognitum filio coheredem instituit tacita scripturae fide, si eidem thesaurum occultum sine fraude ostenderet.

* For the purpose of this paper, I follow the text and numbering system of the Budé edition by C. Jacquemard-Le Saos (Paris 1994) with two exceptions: see below, nt. 11 and 24. I have added my own translation to key passages from the *Querolus* to provide the reader with some guidance to this often neglected text.

¹ Cf. e. g. J. Küppers, "Zum "Querolus" (p. 17.7–22 R) und seiner Datierung", *Philol.* 123 (1979) 303–323. There have been occasional attempts to suggest a radically later date, most notably by A. Masera, *Querolus sive Aulularia. La nuova cronologia e il suo autore* (Turin 1991); these have quite rightly been rejected as unfounded: cf. e. g. K. Smolak, rec. Masera, "Querolus sive Aulularia", *WS* 109 (N. F. 30) (1996) 321.

² For a bibliography on the *Querolus* see D. Lassandro – E. Romano, "Rassegna bibliografica degli studi sul *Querolus*", *BStudLat* 21 (1991) 26–51.

³ Cf. A. García Calvo, "La versificación del «Querolus» y el doble condicionamiento prosódico del ritmo", *CFC(L)* 15 (1998) 323–332.

⁴ An argument has been made for Plautus' *Aulularia* as the immediate point of reference for the invention of the *Querolus* plot by W. Emrich, *Griesgram oder Die Geschichte vom Topf. Querolus sive Aulularia. Lateinisch und Deutsch* (Berlin 1965) 16, supported by E. Lefèvre, *Plautus' Aulularia* (*ScriptOralia* 122) (Tübingen 2001) 48–50. In a slight variation to that, J. Küppers, "Die spätantike Prosakomödie "Querolus sive Aulularia" und das Problem ihrer Vorlagen", *Philol.* 133 (1989) 82–103 suggested the origin of the *Querolus* plot was to be found in ancient scholarly discussions surrounding Plautus' *Aulularia*. More radically still, K. Gaiser, *Menanders 'Hydria'. Eine hellenistische Komödie und ihr Weg ins Lateinische Mittelalter* (Heidelberg 1977) saw Menander's *Hydria* as a source for the *Querolus* (if through a Plautine intermediary); this view was credibly rejected by M. Molina Sánchez, "Observaciones sobre el original del *Querolus* siue *Aulularia*", *Estudios de Filología Latina* 4 (1984) 133–143.

⁵ For a critical appraisal of the ancient audience of the play cf. Küppers (above, n. 4) 88, a view shared by Lefèvre (above, n. 4) 49–50.

Our Querolus' father was Euclio, a miser. This Euclio once upon a time put his gold in an urn, as if it were the burial of his father, with added sprinklings of fragrances and an inscription attached to the outside. When he was about to go on a boat trip, he buried the urn in his house, and he did not tell anyone about it. When he was about to die abroad, he made a parasite, whom he had met there, co-heir with his son in a secret testamentary instrument, on condition of his honest pointing out the treasure to the son.

(*Querol.* 3 J-LS)

Similarly, in the Lar's prologue to the actual play –

Pater huius Queroli Euclio fuit avarus et cautus senex. hic enorme pondus auri olim in ornam condidit. sic quasi <busta> paterna uenerans, aurum celabat palam. peregre uadens ornam domi sepeliit ac reliquit ante aras meas: tumulum suis, mihi thesaurum commendauit. abiit neque rediit senex. peregre moriens, uni tantummodo rem indicauit fraudulento et perfido, cui tamen siue oblitus siue superacuum putans de busto et titulo nihil exponit.

The father of that man Querolus was Euclio, a greedy and wary old man. He once placed an enormous amount of gold in an urn. Thus, worshiping it like his father's burial, he concealed the gold in plain view. Going abroad, he buried the urn and left it in front of my altar: thus he left the burial with his family and his treasure with me. The old man left and never returned. As death was imminent when he was abroad, he revealed the matter to but a single person, a fraudulent and dishonest one, whom, however, he told nothing about the burial and its inscription – be it that he forgot or regarded it as superfluous.

(*Querol.* 12–13 J-LS)

In short, Euclio forgot to mention that there was a trick involved – something that would make it rather more challenging to retrieve the gold than it would at first appear – as well as an ominous inscription (*titulus*).

Mandrogerus, the parasite in question, accompanied by two colleagues – Sardanapallus and Sycophanta –, shows little inclination to share the inheritance with Querolus.⁶ Instead, they concoct a plan to abscond the gold from him, exploiting Querolus' misanthropy and his superstition.⁷ Mandrogerus, reinventing himself as a magician, offers to expel spirits from Querolus' domicile through a procedure that does not allow Querolus' own presence inside: an obvious ploy to gain time to search the house for the hidden urn, of course. They find the urn and steal it – only to

⁶ On this 'trio of rogues' see in more detail K. Smolak, "Das Gaunertrio im *Querolus*", WS 101 (N. F. 22) (1988) 327–338, who makes an argument in favour of an interpretation of the three as styled in the fashion of early Christian monks. For an appreciation of Mandrogerus and the others as instances of the comedic stock character that is the parasite and its manifestations specifically in the *Querolus* see G. Vidović, "Dish to Cash, Cash to Ash: Mandrogerus the Applied Parasite and the Evolution of Comedy", *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU [Central European University, Budapest]* 16 (2010) 9–29.

⁷ The play's critical focus on matters of pagan superstition and abuse of cultic positions has led T. Adamik, "Moralität im *Querolus*", *AAntHung* 39 (1999) 1–8 to believe that there is an underlying Christian current to the play. Slightly more cautious (though uninformed by any methodology as to how to interpret dramatic scripts and their overall message) M. L. Colish, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. II. Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century* (Leiden 1985) 94–96 (who lists the *Querolus* under 'Latin Christian Poets' as part of her chapter on 'Lesser Christian Writers of the Fourth and Fifth Century'). This is tentative at best, of course, as there is nothing inherently Christian about the play and its plot itself, and as a criticism of pagan practice (or its extremes, anyway) hardly constitutes a Christian position. For a view diametrically opposed to that of Adamik see F. Corsaro, "Garbata polemica anticristiana nella anonima commedia tardoimperiale *Querolus sive Aulularia*", *MSLC* 13 (1963) 11–21.

discover that it, inspite of its significant weight, does not seem to contain what they were hoping for.

Disappointed, Mandrogerus and his companions decide to throw the urn back into the house. The urn, now smashed, reveals its true treasure – leaving the greedy parasites, who still wish to obtain their inherited share upon eavesdropping on the people in the house, between a rock and a hard place: if they wish to assert knowledge of the urn and its contents, they must essentially admit to theft or sacrilege – or both, breaking the *sine fraude* requirement that Euclio had stipulated when appointing Mandrogerus co-heir to his son. True to comedic convention, Querolus and Mandrogerus find an amicable solution after all.

2. A Fake Wake

In scene 10, Mandrogerus, Sardanapallus, and Sycophanta mourn the ‘loss’ of their treasure – after they discovered that the urn did not contain what they were hoping for. Their treatment of, and focus on, the urn and its elusive treasure amounts to a what is *de facto* a mock vigil, following the rogue *exequiae* that was the theft and abduction of the urn. Commemorative speeches are being given in turn by those in attendance – and in mourning over their loss:⁸

Sardanapallus. *Sumite tristitiam, miseri sodales, cucullorum tegmina. plus est hoc quam hominem perdidisse: damnum uere plangitur. quid agitis nunc, potentes, quid de thesauris cogitatis? aurum in cinerem uersum est. utinamque totum sic fieret aurum: magis essemus diuites.*

Mandrogerus. *Depone paulisper inane pondus, lacrimas demus funeri. o fallax thesaure, ne te ego per maria et uentos sequor, propter te feliciter nauigauī, propter te feci omnia. mathesim et magicam sum consecutus, ut me sepulti fallerent? aliorum fortunam exposui: fatum ignoraui meum. iam iam omnia recognosco uaria haec phantasmata. erat hic plane bona fortuna, sed alteri debebatur, non mihi. nostra haec mutauere fata: thesaurum nos, sed alienum inuenimus. quatenus est haec peruersitas? numquam ego fleui meum, nunc plango alienum. et te, Querole, iustus non tangit dolor?*

Sardanapallus. *O crudele aurum, quisnam te morbus tulit? quis te sic rogos adussit? quis te subripuit magus? exheredasti nos, thesaure. quonam redituri sumus, tot abdicati? quae nos aula recipiet? quae nos olla tuebitur?*

Sardanapallus. Wretched companions, wear mourning, seek the cover of our hoods.⁹ This is more than just to have lost a human being: we mourn a true loss. What are you going to do now, powerful people, what do you think about treasures? Gold has been turned into ash. If only all gold would become like that: we were a lot richer.

Mandrogerus. Put down for a while the worthless weight, let us give tears for the funeral. Oh deceitful treasure, indeed I follow you across the seas and through storms, for you I have sailed under a good star, for you I did everything. Did I achieve mastery of science and magic, so the buried may mislead me? I have brought other people’s fortune to light: I did not know my own fate. Now I understand all those visions already. Good fortune was here all right, but it belonged to someone else, not me. Our fates have been exchanged: we found a treasure, but someone else’s. What perversity is this? I have never cried for anyone of my own, now I mourn someone else’s? And you, Querolus, are free of deserved pain?

Sardanapallus. Oh you cruel gold, which illness took you away from us? What pyre did burn you so, beyond recognition? Which sorcerer took you? You disinherited us, treasure.

⁸ Surprisingly enough, even though ‘what happened when the grave or pyre was reached remains largely unknown’ (V. M. Hope, *Roman Death. The Dying and the Dead in Roman Antiquity* (London – New York 2009) 77), this scene from the *Querolus* does not appear to have played any significant role in the study of death-related rituals in ancient Rome.

⁹ On this aspect of the trio’s dress, resembling the hoods used by monks, cf. Smolak (above, n. 6).

Where are we supposed to go, having been rejected so many times? Which hall will receive us? Which pot will protect us?

(*Querol.* 83–84 J-LS)

Their mournful ‘commemoration’ does not stop here, however. Mandrogerus requests from the others:

Mandrogerus. *Perlege, quaeso, iterum titulum funeris atque omnem scripturae fidem.*

Mandrogerus. Please do read the funerary inscription once again as well as the whole testamentary instrument.

(*Querol.* 85 J-LS)

Sardanapallus superstitiously refuses, whereas Sycophanta is happy to oblige. No sooner has he done so as he is put off by the foul smell that evaporates through the urn’s lid – the smell of ritual-related fragrances, as the initial dedication of the play had already given away. Soon their display of self-pitying respect for the ‘deceased’ is over, however, and they carry on with their actions along the lines that were described in the previous section.

3. The Inscribed Text

The text of the urn’s inscription that Sycophanta volunteers to proclaim¹⁰ reads as follows –

*Trierinus*¹¹ *Tricipitini filius conditus et sepultus hic iacet.*

Trierinus, son of Tricipitinus, lies contained and buried here.

(*Querol.* 85 J-LS)

Scholarly responses to this (obviously fictive) inscription appear to have focused on its onomastic aspects alone. Whereas some contented themselves with the

¹⁰ Repeated verbatim at *Querol.* 101 J-LS, on which see below, section 4.2.

¹¹ The manuscripts show an ambiguity regarding this name. The majority of surviving manuscripts have indeed *Trierinus*, as printed above. Complications arise from the observation that the Hamburg codex for the *Querolus*, which belongs to an important, different branch of the text’s stemma, has *Trierinius*. M. D. Reeve, “Tricipitinus’s Son”, *ZPE* 22 (1976) 21–31 thus plausibly argued that ‘[m]ore pertinent to the decision between these variants is the second of the questions I raised a moment ago, whether the Remensis was the manuscript at the top of the stemma. If it was, and if Sciasius is less likely to have read *Trierinus* twice as *Trierinius* than a French monk to have read *Trierinius* twice as *Trierinus*, then the inscription on the urn has been circulating in a corrupt version.’ The problem is, however, that this only makes sense to the textual critic in defence of the cherished, yet problematic force of the *lectio difficilior*. In onomastic terms, *Trierinius* has to be regarded as a *nomen gentile* (derived from *Trierinus*). *Trierinus* in turn would be a *cognomen* (just like *Tricipitinus*), very much as required in this context. Therefore the text of the otherwise sensible edition of C. Jacquemard-Le Saos has been altered here accordingly. The need for a *cognomen* (rather than a *nomen gentile*) overrides the otherwise at least remotely interesting observation that formations of gentilicia along the lines of **Trierinius* from *Trierinus* (such as e. g. *Severinius* from *Severinus*) have been claimed to be representative of Gallic practice (i. e. close to the assumed geographical context from which the *Querolus* has been claimed to be); cf. H.-G. Kolbe, *Die Statthalter Numidiens von Gallien bis Konstantin* (268–320) (Vestigia 4) (Munich 1962) 17 (with n. 5).

(misguided) view that Trierinus and Tricipitinus were names made up altogether to convey a foreign sound,¹² others were more adventurous. In particular, Dean Lockwood – in the common, if deplorable move of denying Roman authors their originality – tried to establish a Greek substrate and sought to connect the name to ‘(Hermes) Trismegistos’.¹³

It is hardly absurd to suspect meaning behind the names Trierinus and Tricipitinus. They are suspicious by nature, as they, in their awkwardness, are of course the exact opposite of our own time’s ‘John Smith’. It is absurd, however, to suspect a Greek substrate behind these names: the very shape of the onomastic formula with its filiation is altogether Roman.

Even if it is clear that Lockwood’s explanation of the deceased’s name Trierinus is wrong and that (thus far) no straightforward explanation has been established, matters are not altogether hopeless. The father’s name that features in the filiation, Tricipitinus, as Lockwood himself had pointed out, is attested in Roman onomastics as cognomen. It was in use by the semi-legendary family of the Lucretii, and perhaps the most famous bearer of this name was Spurius Lucretius Tricipitinus, the father of Rome’s heroine Lucretia, whose (Lucretia’s) honour suicide, according to Roman legend, heralded the end of tyranny and the beginning of a new era – the Roman Republic. The origin of the cognomen, as far as the Lucretii are concerned, is not entirely clear; yet it not particularly difficult to explain. The cognomen Tricipitinus was most likely related to a three-headed (*triceps*) deity worshipped by this family, as Hermann Usener pointed out over a century ago.¹⁴ In fact, it may even be possible to narrow this down even further, from an unknown deity to Hecate in particular, as Raffaele Pettazzoni tentatively suggested.¹⁵

An inherent allusion to the powerful, chthonic deity that is Hecate, the three-formed (with three bodies and three heads in visual representations) moon-goddess, seems particularly appropriate in the context of the *Querolus* and its buried treasure. Already Hesiod had written –

ἦ δ' ὑποκυσαμένη Ἑκάτην τέκε, τὴν περὶ πάντων
 Ζεὺς Κρονίδης τίμησε: πόρεν δέ οἱ ἀγλαὰ δῶρα,
 μοῖραν ἔχειν γαίης τε καὶ ἀτρυγέτοιο θαλάσσης.
 ἦ δὲ καὶ ἀστερόεντος ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ ἔμμορε τιμῆς
 415 ἀθανάτοισι τε θεοῖσι τετιμένη ἐστὶ μάλιστα.
 καὶ γὰρ νῦν, ὅτε πού τις ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων
 ἔρδων ἱερὰ καλὰ κατὰ νόμον ἱλάσκηται,
 κικλήσκει Ἑκάτην. πολλή τέ οἱ ἔσπετο τιμὴ
 ῥεῖα μάλ', ᾧ πρόφρων γε θεὰ ὑποδέξεται εὐχάς,
 420 καὶ τέ οἱ ὄλβον ὀπάξει, ἐπεὶ δυνάμεις γε πάρεστίν.

(Hes. *Th.* 411–420)

¹² Thus Emrich (above, n. 4) 189 nt. 63 (‘gesucht fremdartige Namen, die weiter nichts besagen sollen’).

¹³ D. P. Lockwood, “The Plot of the *Querolus* and the Folk-Tales of Disguised Treasure”, *TAPhA* 44 (1913) 215–232, esp. 232 (and 226, where the author suggests a connection to Hermes Eriounios, whose epithet he suggests to survive in what he believes may once have been **Trierinius* in the *Querolus*). This view, obviously absurd and against any phonological likelihood, has been repeated by Jacquemard-Le Saos (above, in the initial note, marked with an asterisk) 66 ad *Querol.* 101 (without reference to Lockwood’s article).

¹⁴ H. Usener, “Dreiheit”, *RhM* N. F. 58 (1903) 1–47, 161–208, esp. 176.

¹⁵ See R. Pettazzoni, *Essays on the History of Religions* (transl. H. J. Rose) (Leiden 1967) 119 n. 65.

The mysterious personal name Trierinus and the rather more accessible filiation are not the only peculiar constituents of this inscription, however. The phrase *conditus et sepultus hic iacet* is equally astonishing, as it states the same thing thrice (!) over: *conditus*, *sepultus*, and *hic iacet*. No question: all of these are amply attested in Latin funerary inscriptions individually. What is rather less common, is a cluster of them. The closest parallel in terms of a cluster of those three expression in a single text may be seen in a metrical inscription from Alcala del Rio / Ilipa in the Baetica, which reads as follows:

*D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum). | M(arcus) Calp(urnius) Lucius | decurio. | flere cupis q(ui)cumque
meos | in marmore casus, siste paru(m) | lacrimas. sorte miserandus iniqua | amis{s}isse pium
pater dedit(um)q(ue) sepulcro. quam bene iam gesse (!) ann(os) XXVI | m(enses) VI d(ies)que
VIII, **conditus ego iaceo** | misero genitore relictio. iam ma|ter misera palmisque ubera
tu|ndens et soror infelix comi|tantur luctibus ambe (!). coniux | cara mea relictio cum paruo|lo
filio casta mater uidu(a) | n(un)c mi inuita suprestat, (!) | qui (!) nostrum tumulum
(h)ono|rauit corpus fos(s)a ima (?) q[ui]ete (?), | pihi (!) parentes, regna qui mun|di tenetis:
hic ego sepultus | iaceo placidusque quiesco. | h(ic) s(itus) e(st). s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(euis).*

(CIL II 1088 = CLE 541)

Even here, however, the relevant phrases show a mere two of these expressions at a time rather than combination of all three as seen in the *Querolus*. Is the triad of *conditus*, *sepultus*, and *hic iacet* intentional, a third allusion to the magical number three after Trierinus and Tricipitinus? Is it thus intended to be read carefully, with a keen eye, by those who know how Latin funerary inscriptions and their phrasing commonly work – following the train of thought step-by-step: ‘enclosed, buried, and yet it lies in here’?¹⁶

4. Taking Note of the Inscription

When Mandrogerus and his fellow parasites try and locate the treasure, they are looking for an unspecific vessel placed on an altar in Querolus’ home. Consequently, they pay little attention to its appearance or even its inscription:

Mandrogerus. *Pulchre edepol res processit. inuentus, spoliatus, clausus est homo. sed ubinam ornam respicimus uel ubi arculam istam confringemus atque abscondemus, ne furtum indicia prodant?*

Sycophanta. *Nescio, edepol, nisi ubicumque in flumine.*

Sardanapallus. *Credis, Mandrogerus, prae gaudio ornam illam inspicere non ausus fui.*

Sycophanta. *Neque ego.*

Mandrogerus. *Atqui, hercle, ita facto opus fuit, ne mora suspicionem afferet.*

Sycophanta. *Verum est.*

Mandrogerus. *Primum fuit, ut inueniretur. istud iam sequitur: tutum est.*

Mandrogerus. By Pollux, that went nicely. We found, robbed, and locked in the man. But where do we examine the urn – where shall break open that box¹⁷ and hide it, lest the evidence gives away the theft?

Sycophanta. No idea, by Pollux, unless perhaps somewhere by the river.

¹⁶ Note that *condere* and *sepelire* are also used in the Lar’s description of how the deposit came about; see *Querol.* 12–13 J-LS (quoted above, section 1).

¹⁷ This refers to an *arcula* they used in order to remove the urn from the house without arousing any suspicion.

Sardanapallus. Will you believe it, Mandrogerus, I was so chuffed, I did not even dare to take a closer look at the urn!

Sycophanta. Me neither.

Mandrogerus. And, by Hercules, that is how it had to be done, lest any delay raised any suspicion.

Sycophanta. True.

Mandrogerus. Our first job was to find it. That other thing will follow: it is safe now.

(Querol. 80 J-LS)

As the text makes clear, they identified the object of their desires on the basis of its location (as indicated by Euclio before his death) as well as on its roughly appropriate shape. The object's inscription, according to this account, did not only remain unread, but, in fact, altogether unnoticed: further examination of the object – *ornam inspicere* or *respicere*, as they call it – merely would have stalled the perpetrators' actions.

Their negligence may seem somewhat far-fetched to professional epigraphists, even though for several decades now the view persists that inscriptions are merely additions to objects that serve a primary purpose other than merely being stationery of sorts. In the context of the play, as well as in the context of a sneaky crime carried out under time constraints, this is perhaps less ludicrous than it may at first appear. In fact, even to the audience this would not have been particularly surprising, if it were not for the fact that they already knew of the inscription, since the Lar familiaris had mentioned it in his opening monologue.¹⁸ The audience's previous knowledge, however, is not so much designed to give them a sensation of being intellectually superior to the rogues of the play. It is a device to create suspense, as one must now – following the thieves' repeated comment on their failure to examine the loot carefully! – expect the inscription to become an element of surprise to them.

4.1. Ignoring, Reading, Reciting

Within the context of the play, the inscribed object is read, or 'inspected' (*inspicere*) at least three times; only the second and third occasion are part of the action however:¹⁹ the first instance is merely implied to have taken place when the parasites were finally examining the urn, as is indicated by the word *iterum*, 'again', in the context of the first 'public' reading of the text:

Mandrogerus. *Perlege, quaeso, iterum titulum funeris atque omnem scripturae fidem.*

Sardanapallus. *Quaeso, inquam, sodes, funus egomet quodlibet contingere nequeo: nihil est quod metuam magis.*

Sycophanta. *Meticulosus homo es tu, Sardanapalle! ego perlego: 'Trierinus Tricipitini filius conditus et sepultus hic iacet.' Hem me miserum, hem me miserum!*

Mandrogerus. *Quidnam tibi est?*

Sycophanta. *Anima in faucibus. audieram egomet olere aurum, istud etiam redolet.*

Mandrogerus. *Quomodo?*

Sycophanta. *Clastrum illud plumbeum densa per foramina diris fragrat odoribus. nunquam ante haec comperi aurum sic ranciscere usurario cuilibet faetere hoc potest.*

Mandrogerus. *Quisnam cinerum est odor?*

Sycophanta. *Ille pretiosus atque tristis, cultus quem poscit miser.*

Mandrogerus. *Honorifice hoc bustum tractatum apparet, cuius adhuc sic redolet dignitas.*

¹⁸ See above, section 1.

¹⁹ The inscription is referred to, but not discussed in greater detail, a fourth time, at Querol. 104 J-LS, where Querolus denies to have had previous knowledge of the inscription.

Mandrogerus. Please read the funerary inscription again as well as the entire testamentary instrument.

Sardanapallus. Please, I say, if you don't mind, I cannot possibly touch a burial of any kind: there is nothing I fear more than that.

Sycophanta. You are a fearful man, Sardanapallus. I will read it: 'Trierinus, son of Tricipitinus, lies contained and buried here.' Ugh, wretched me, ugh, wretched me!

Mandrogerus. What is up with you?

Sycophanta. I am choking. I had already heard that gold smells, but this stuff stinks.

Mandrogerus. How so?

Sycophanta. That leaden lid exudes such foul smells through those little holes. I had never heard before that gold gets rancid like that. This has the ability to outstink any usurer.

Mandrogerus. What is the smell of the ashes like?

Sycophanta. It is precious, yet sad, as the wretched cult requires.

Mandrogerus. Clearly a burial has been treated respectfully, if its dignity reeks to the present day.

(*Querol.* 85 J-LS)

Mandrogerus asks his fellow parasites to (re-)perform an act that he calls *perlegere* on two documents, the *titulus funeris* and the *omnis scripturae fides*. The second element never happens, as the first element is powerful enough to let the action take its course. First, Sardanapallus reveals his fear of touching (*contingere*) the burial (*funus*). Then Sycophanta takes over and reads out the inscription's text aloud;²⁰ this he introduces with a direct reference to Mandrogerus' request *perlege quaeso*, when he says *ego perlego*. Subsequently, the smell of the urn's contents becomes the focus of interest, diverting attention from the text itself.²¹

Two main questions arise from the epigraphist's point of view: (i) why does Mandrogerus ask for the inscription to be read, and (ii) how does the 'reading' of this text actually happen? As usual with dramatic scripts, one must approach these questions from two different angles, namely from the viewpoint of the play's internal logic as well as with a view on the audience and its privileged knowledge (as compared to that of the characters of the play itself).

From the perspective of an outsider to the play's fictional reality, the answer is straightforward. First, Mandrogerus must ask for the inscription to be read, so that the audience may acquire knowledge of its content – having already learnt at the beginning of the play that this inscription will play a certain role. Secondly, the reading must take the form of a reading aloud, for how else would the audience get to know its content and its peculiar wording (with its subtext, as discussed above)?²²

On the level of the play's internal logic, however, a response to the two questions are somewhat more complicated and requires more careful attention to the wording. Moreover, one must be careful to acknowledge that what happens on stage may partly be a result of the requirements that arise from the need to play to an audience and thus not be an altogether faithful depiction of human activity as one would encounter in actual practice. On the basis of that, one must acknowledge that no express motivation is given for Mandrogerus to ask for a (re-)reading of the inscription. One may infer from his request for the inscription to read (*perlegere*) in conjunction with *omnis scripturae fides*, however, that it was his intention to check the information and the instructions he was given by Euclio against what he

²⁰ Note that he would appear to read out in full what – presumably – was written in abbreviation, as customary: *f(i)lius*.

²¹ On the issue of smell see below, section 5.2.

²² Cf. above, section 3.

encountered when he tried to retrieve the treasure. Individuals might check documents against each other in silence, but, of course, when more people are involved, reading aloud what is written is rather more effective.²³

This leads to a tentative answer to the second question, of course: Mandrogerus requests *Perlege, quaeso, ... titulum funeris*, a phrase that in its use of *perlegere* in the imperative and in conjunction with the politeness marker *quaeso* closely resembles a ubiquitous phrase of Roman funerary epigraphy. In response to that, Sardanapallus asks to be let off the hook for the following reason: *funus egomet quodlibet contingere nequeo: nihil est quod metuum magis*. His response implies that, in order to perform the act of *perlegere*, handling – and in fact: holding and touching (*contingere*) – the inscribed object becomes necessary, and it does so to an extent that a superstitious person (like Sardanapallus) may feel like committing an act of sacrilege. As Sardanapallus is afraid (*meticulosus*) of reaching out to, and interfering with, the realm of the dead, Sycophanta performs the deed for him (*ego perlego*), only to be struck by the stench that the object emits. How does he interact with the inscription? On the basis of the text, one may infer that he took and held the object (*contingere*) and further infer, from the scripted speech assigned to his character, that he read the inscription out aloud – and that he did read it in entirety while maintaining physical contact with the object.

4.2. Piecing It All Together

Sycophanta's (and Sardanapallus') behaviour is rather different from that of Mandrogerus when, after the urn had been smashed to pieces and the deposit of the treasure had come to light, he faces the investigations of Querolus and his two supporters, Arbiter and Pantomalus. Insisting that he has a claim to part of the treasure, as stipulated by Querolus' father Euclio, Mandrogerus asserts that he had left the funerary urn unharmed (until he threw it through Querolus' window, that is):

Querolus. *O Arbiter bone, plus iste admisit quam putabamus. hic, nisi fallor, ipse est qui urnam illam funestam nobis proiecit in domum.*

Mandrogerus. *Dii te seruent: ipsam ego proieci. tandem apparet ueritas.*

Querolus. *Dic, quaeso, Mandrogerus, fragmenta si aspexeris, potesne agnoscere?*

Mandrogerus. *Ita ut conpaginari per me possint omnia.*

Querolus. *Hem, Pantomale, nescio quid paulo ante hic proferri iusseram.*

Arbiter. *Praesto sunt partes illae in quibus titulus inscriptus fuit.*

Querolus. *Agnoscisne, Mandrogerus?*

Mandrogerus. *Agnosco, hercle. tandem cessent artes²⁴ et praestigia.*

Querolus. *Si uerum agnoscis, lege celeriter quod scriptum hic fuit.*

Mandrogerus. *Et legi et lego. cedo huc mihi, Pantomale, fragmentorum paginas. 'Trierinius²⁵ Tricipitini filius conditus et sepultus hic iacet.'*

Querolus. *Eho scelestissime, dispicis? si uiuorum neglexisti gratiam, etiamne mortuis manus intulisti ad ludum et ludibria? neque contentus eruisse bustum atque honores ultimos,*

²³ Note that this is also implied in a number of Latin inscriptions; further on this matter see below, section 5.2.

²⁴ Jacquemard-Le Saos's edition gives the text as *cessent partes et praestigia*, which follows the text of the Hamburg codex (cf. above, n. 11), but is clearly an inferior reading, introducing a meaningless alliteration (which may have been caused by the occurrence of the word *partes* immediately before the passage in question). Bizarrely enough, the same editor then disregards this *uaria lectio* in her own translation, where she renders the passage as '[f]inis les artifices et les tours de passe-passe'.

²⁵ See above, n. 11.

per fenestram etiam funestas mihi proiecisti reliquias. quid ad haec dicis? thesaurum abstulisti, uiolasti sepulchrum, perдите: (...).

Querolus. Oh Arbiter, good man, he admitted more than we were hoping for. Unless I am mistaken, he himself is the man who threw us that funerary urn into our house.

Mandrogerus. May the gods save you: I threw that very thing. Finally, truth comes to light.

Querolus. Say, please, Mandrogerus, if you looked at the fragments, would you be able to identify it?

Mandrogerus. To such an extent that with my help everything could be pieced together again.

Querolus. Hey, Pantomalus, I had ordered for some stuff to be brought here a little while ago.

Arbiter. Here are those parts, where the inscription had been written.

Querolus. Can you identify this, Mandrogerus?

Mandrogerus. I can, by Hercules. Finally, trickery and deceit will come to an end.

Querolus. If you can truly identify this, quick, read what was written here.

Mandrogerus. I read it then and I read it now. Pantomalus, hand me over those fragmented bits. ‘Trierinus, son of Tricipitinus, lies contained and buried here.’

Querolus. Oy, you rogue, you can make it out? You may have betrayed the gratitude of the living; but you even have laid your hands on the dead, for fun and mischief? Not content with having excavated the burial and last honours, you even threw me those mortal remains through the window. What do you have to say to that? You stole the treasure, you desecrated the burial, you scoundrel: (...).

(Querol. 100–101 J-LS)

Here, too, the inscription is read out aloud, but under rather different circumstances – and, as will become clear shortly, in a rather different manner. Querolus asks Mandrogerus if he were able to identify (*agnoscere*) the *fragmenta* of the urn – a question to which Mandrogerus responds that with his guidance one would be able to piece everything together again (*ut compaginari per me possint omnia*). He is not shown all fragments of the vessel, however, but only those parts on which the *titulus* was inscribed. Mandrogerus confirms that he is able to identify the pieces in question, expressing his hope that the charade will soon be over.

Querolus, putting Mandrogerus’ words to the test, asks him: *lege celeriter quod scriptum hic fuit*. This is different from what Mandrogerus had requested from his companions before in two essential points:²⁶ first, Querolus uses the simplex *legere* rather than the compound *perlegere*, and secondly, there is an emphasis on the rush perusal of the text – *celeriter*. Mandrogerus’ response to this differs from that of his companions as well. He does not merely start to read, as Sycophanta had done after taking on that responsibility (*ego perlego*, above). Instead, he says *et legi et lego*, then requests the fragmented pieces from Pantomalus (*cedo ... fragmentorum paginas*), and then verbatim repeats the text that the audience had already encountered in the earlier scene.

Contrary to the act denoted by *perlegere* earlier, *legere* here seems to imply a mere ‘gathering of content’ from a text – something that Mandrogerus was capable of doing both earlier (*et legi* – from the intact inscription) and now (*et lego* – with the inscription in pieces). For why, one must ask, does Mandrogerus request the fragments of the inscriptions to be given to him? It seems altogether reasonable to assume that this was supposed to be staged in a way in which Mandrogerus did precisely what he had offered to do before: his knowledge of the fragments was *ita ut compaginari per me possint omnia*, and he would appear to conclude his act of

²⁶ See above, section 4.1.

compaginare omnia by reading out the restored text on the basis of the re-arranged fragments. This view is supported by Querolus' reaction to Mandrogerus' efforts, *eho scelestissime, dispicis*. This must mean that the whole point of asking Mandrogerus to *legere celeriter* was not to gauge whether or not he was able to reproduce the text with his voice (*perlegere*),²⁷ but whether or not he was indeed capable of *dispicere*:²⁸ a verb that denotes an ability to see clearly even under difficult conditions (such as emerging from darkness or from afar).²⁹

5. Instead of a Conclusion: Rethinking Encounters with Inscribed Texts

Innate knowledge and a default understanding of common human activities and cultural practices – such as 'reading' – are often taken for granted. Latin epigraphists, for example, just seem to know how to read an inscription. But all we really know is how we ourselves read such texts. What do we really know about how they used to be read?³⁰

An approach that sees a direct, unbroken, and unchanged tradition between contemporary reading experiences and those of Roman antiquity may seem natural; yet it means turning a blind eye to what potentially may have been a markedly different manifestation of a familiar cultural practice. In that regard, it must be argued, the hitherto neglected evidence from the *Querolus* has a number of potentially quite wide-ranging and significant (if hardly altogether surprising) implications for the way

²⁷ Related instances (and distinction) may be seen in Petronius. As for *perlegere*, cf. Petr. 34.7 (labels on amphorae, stating origin and age, are being read out, triggering Trimalchio's comment on how wine outlives humans; a silent reading would not warrant such a response), 129.10 (*perlegisse* with an added *totum*, suggesting that Chrysis *intellexit* that the reading-out of the message was now complete). *Legere* by contrast occurs in 71.11 (*horologium in medio, ut quisquis horas inspiciet, uelit nolit, nomen meum legat*: the emphasis is not on the reading aloud of the inscription, but on the fact that a visual encounter cannot be avoided when checking the time), and as a more general expression of an ability to read in 48.7 and 75.4. *Legere* as in reading aloud features in 59.3, where a reference to the use of the *uox* is added. On inscriptions in Petronius see further J. Nelis-Clément – D. Nelis, "Petronius' Epigraphic Habit", *Dictynna* 2 (2005) (available online at <https://journals.openedition.org/dictynna/137>; accessed January 2019) and U. Roth, "An Epitaph for Trimalchio: Sat. 30.2", *CQ* 64 (2014) 422–425.

²⁸ A similar use of *legere* must be assumed for a passage that immediately precedes the 'reading' of the fragmentary inscription. At *Querol.* 96 J-LS Mandrogerus hands the *fides* that he obtained to Querolus in order to assert his entitlement to a share of the treasure, and he does so saying *Quid multis opus est, Querole? quod scriptum est, lege. sume igitur. noui fidem uestram* ('Why waste a lot of words, Querolus? Read what has been written. Take it already. I know your trustworthiness.'). Querolus takes the writ and gives the following response: *Hercle, explorasti. hem, quid istuc est? 'Senec Euclio Querolo salutem dicit filio. (...)'* ('By Hercules, you ascertained it. Huh, what is that? 'Old Euclio to Querolus, his son: greetings! [...]') The only reasonable explanation for this verbal behaviour is that the author imagined Querolus to receive the *fides*, to skim-read it as advised (*legere*!), an act he acknowledges by his comment regarding Mandrogerus' having done his homework (*explorasti* can hardly refer to a mere level of careful preparation, but must refer to the writ's content), and then to hesitate over the peculiar content – something he then finds necessary to read out aloud (not least for the need to involve the audience, of course).

²⁹ Cf. *ThLL* s. v. *dispicio*, 1415, esp. 24–54 (for the verb's use *proprie*).

³⁰ For some relevant studies on the Greek and Hellenistic side of matters cf. P. Bing, "The Un-read Muse? Inscribed Epigram and Its Readers in Antiquity", in: M. A. Harder – R. F. Regtuit – G. C. Wakker (edd.), *Hellenistic Epigrams* (Hellenistica Groningana 6) (Leuven 2002) 39–66; cf. also D. Meyer, *Inszeniertes Lesevergnügen: Das inschriftliche Epigramm und seine Rezeption bei Kallimachos* (Hermes E. 93) (Stuttgart 2005) as well as J. Day, "Epigraphic Literacy in Fifth-century Epinician and Its Audience", in: P. Liddel – P. Low (eds.), *Inscriptions and their Uses in Greek and Latin Literature* (Oxford 2013) 217–230.

in which one may imagine ancient encounters with funerary inscriptions, putting into perspective certain notions and expressions often found in inscriptions themselves. These affect three areas in particular, namely (i) the visual, (ii) the sensory (beyond the visual), and (iii) the spiritual.

5.1. Visual Engagement

Maureen Carroll, in an important article on ‘dialogues with the dead in Roman funerary commemoration’, has raised the significance of the involvement of the readers’ voice in Roman funerary inscriptions, quite rightly raising the issue of silent reading vs. reading.³¹ The same issue, on a more fundamental level still, has recently seen fundamental re-evaluation by Stefan Busch.³² If anything, this area requires further exploration and even closer readings of the ancient evidence. To begin with one rather remarkable example, Ricardo Hernández Pérez, in his study of the topoi and common phrases of the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* from Roman Spain, discusses two inscriptions from Idanha a Velha (Civitas Igaeditanorum, Lusitania), both of which contain the phrase *tu qui legis, aue; qui perlegisti, uale*.³³ He suggests (for very good reasons) that the varying greeting formulae may indicate that *legere* refers to the beginning of the act of reading, where as *perlegere* refers to the completion of the same act.³⁴

Based on the evidence from the *Querolus*, is it possible to think that the point of the Lusitanian inscription was, in fact, something else? After all, in neither of the two cases from Idanha a Velha the phrase *tu qui legis* comes first in the text: in both cases, it sits at the beginning of the third line – something that one’s eye might catch upon skim-reading the inscriptions. Is it possible that the casual greeting *aue* was for the skim-reading, whereas the wish of well-being, *uale*, was reserved to those who made an effort to read the text aloud as well to the end?

The answer to this question need not, and will not, be straightforward. As Wytse Keulen in the relevant *Thesaurus* entry has established, *perlegere* may refer to readings of texts in their entirety just as much as it can refer to careful readings and to readings aloud – or silent.³⁵ Even only a quick survey of inscriptions that contain both *legere* and *perlegere* yields sufficient evidence to support the view that an express distinction between (silent?) skim-reading and reading aloud (in entirety) does indeed exist, even if such a distinction was not ‘enforced’ universally.³⁶ A small number³⁷ of

³¹ M. Carroll, “‘*Vox tua nempe mea est*’. Dialogues with the Dead in Roman Funerary Commemoration”, *Accordia Research Papers* 11 (2007–2008) 37–80. The same aspect has been touched upon in the context of Pompeian graffiti, if somewhat marginally, by P. Kruschwitz, “Reading and Writing in Pompeii: an Outline of the Local Discourse”, *Studj Romanzi* n. s. 10 (2014) 245–279, esp. 272 and 277–278 with n. 88.

³² S. Busch, “Lautes und leises Lesen in der Antike”, *RhM* 145 (2002) 1–45, esp. 30–33 on inscriptions and their depictions in literary sources.

³³ *AE* 1967.158 and 174.

³⁴ R. Hernández Pérez, *Poesía latina sepulcral de la Hispania Romana: estudio de los tópicos y sus formulaciones* (València 2001) 230–231. This view was repeated, without any significant additions or further insights, by A. A. Nascimento, “*Legere, perlegere*: da singularidade epigráfica ao sentido do texto e do monumento”, *SEBarc* 8 (2010) 13–27, esp. 14–17.

³⁵ *ThLL* s. v. *perlego*, 1513.18 ff.

³⁶ A particularly peculiar case in that regard is *ILAlg* II 2.4725 = *CLE* 2025, where the text of the inscription has been read as follows: *tu qui praeter[tiens titulum per]|legis istum oro legas to[tu]m ut discas bene uiuere semper* eqs. Here *legas to[tu]m* would appear to mean something like ‘to read the text in its entirety’, leaving *[per]|legis* as a more general expression for ‘scanning’ (or some such).

instructive cases may suffice to illustrate the ways in which this distinction between *legere*, ‘skim-read’, and *perlegere*, ‘read aloud (in entirety?)’, was indeed productively utilised in Latin inscriptions. Note, for example, the following piece from Milan:

Atiliae [- - -] | contuber[nali - - -]. | hunc qui leges [titulu]m peto perlegas | neue reu[ell]as | de se quod immatu[- - - la]udabile cernas. | hic iacet triste [- - -]erabile funus | uere flori similis [- - -] nostra per annos | ornabat cubita [- - -]ia laeta gerebat | nunc huius memo[ri]ae p[er]scripta posuere | ut quae hilari[- - -]mas cum littera | Mes[- - -].

(CIL V 5961 = CLE 639)

While it seems straightforward to imply a meaning like ‘skim-read’ for *leges*, one may wonder about the meaning of *peto perlegas* – is this a reading to the end, or is it reading aloud? The peculiar following phrase *neue reu[ell]as de se quod immatu[- - - la]udabile cernas* is a clear indication of what the author had in mind: unless one wanted to argue that there is a pointless and inelegant repetition of a request to read the text in its entirety, this must be a request to read aloud (*perlegere*) and not to omit anything praiseworthy (*neue reu[ell]as*) about the deceased. If taken in conjunction, the request is both meaningful and much fuller than if taken as a mere reduplication.

Equally relevant in the present context would appear to be the following inscription from Lyon:

Murrae et Verecundo Murrani fili(i)s. | qui legis has pueri moribundas perlege uoces et lacrimam fati da gemitumque meis. | Murra patris primam referens e nomine partem, amborum effigiem matre fauente tuli. | bis mihi septenos aetas ostenderat annos certaque iam nostri fama pudoris erat, | cum subitae mortis, pro fallax causa fuisti lusus et aequalis non inimica manus. | nam temere emissus non ad mea funera clauus haesit et in tenero uertice delituit. | [at uos hoc(?)] primum perculsi uolnere Manes parcite iam luctu sollicitare meos, | [- - -] posuistis funere nati, trimus et in decimo mense sepulte iaces, | [- - -] uocarunt immunes: nostribus ossibus urna sat est.

(CIL XIII 2219 = CLE 1198)

Edward Courtney, in his book *Musa Lapidaria*, renders *has pueri moribundas perlege uoces* as ‘read to the end these dying words of a young boy’ and explains: ‘The *moribundae uoces* seem to be 11–16 [i. e. *[at uos hoc(?)] primum perculsi eqs.]. perlege = ‘read to the end’, contrasted with *legis*’.³⁷ This is true on two counts: first, Courtney is right in his assumption that the *moribundae uoces* of the boy ought to be seen in the final three lines of the inscription (following the actual layout); secondly, Courtney is right to suggest that one ought to contrast *legere* and *perlegere*.*

Courtney is most certainly mistaken, however, in his suggestion that *perlegere* means to the end – for what would be the point of reading the dying boy’s (alleged) final words to the end? There is nothing closer to the end of that passage that is particularly worth noting – it is a reference to a second loss the family of this boy had suffered only a short while ago. The point is something else: the boy’s final words, as presented in this text, contain a strong exhortation to his parents: *Manes parcite iam luctu sollicitare meos* – *nostris ossibus urna sat est*. This directive, combined with an

³⁷ Further cases are collected e. g. by R. A. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 28.1–2) (Urbana, IL 1962) 232–234.

³⁸ E. Courtney, *Musa Lapidaria. A Selection of Latin Verse Inscriptions* (Atlanta 1995) 184–185, 396–397 no. 197.

element of consolation, becomes much more immediate – and geared towards the requirements of the grieving family – if it were to be read aloud. In that regard, the text would appear to follow the logic of what has been suggested so far and to request from its readers who gave the text a quick glance (*qui legis*) to do the boy's parents a favour and to read out (*perlege*) at least the final part of the inscription, combined with expressions of compassion and pain that are both visible (*lacrimam*) and audible (*gemitumque*).

Finally, there is the following case from Arles (Arelate, Gallia Narbonensis):

[Cae]c[ilio] | Nigro fa[bro nauali]. | [praete]riens quicumque leges h[aec carmina nostra] | [qu]ae tibi defuncti nomina uer[ba dabunt], | [incomptos] elegos ueniam peto ne ue[rearis] perlegere, et dicas carmen ha[bere bene(?)]. | [C]aecilius Niger est hic ille [sepul]tu[s]: [eundem] | quo cernis titulum, sta[te] habet ecce locum]. | nunc tibi nauales pauci damus ul[tima uota], | hoc et defuncto corpore munus [habe]. | ossa tuis urnis optamus dulce quiesc[ant] | sitque leuis membris terra mo[lesta] tuis]. | arti[fi]c[i] artifices Nigro damus ista s[odali] | carmina quae claudit iam res[oluta] salus].

(CIL XII 5811 = ILGN 108 = CLE 1191 = ILS 7726)

This text does not add much in terms of the already established distinction between skim-reading and reading aloud; it is quite noteworthy, however, due to its reference to a reader's potential dread to engage with it (*ne uer[earis] | perlegere*), reminiscent of Sardanapallus' fear to handle the urn and its inscription in the *Querolus*. Moreover, with *dicas* it even more explicitly than the previous texts implies an undeniable act of speaking (as opposed to an act of silent text processing).

In short, there are excellent reasons to believe that – as depicted in the *Querolus* – visual engagements with funerary inscriptions were deemed to trigger, or at least deemed to be capable of triggering, acts of reading texts out aloud. The terminology used in the *Querolus* finds more or less exact equivalents in the corpus of Latin inscriptions, suggesting that a more general reconceptualisation is in order.

5.2. Other Forms of Sensorial Engagement

In addition to visual forms of engagement with Latin inscriptions, other forms related to different aspects of the human sensorium have begun to emerge that relate to a much richer and fuller reading experience. These include not only the obvious acoustic side, as a natural consequence of *perlegere* as an act of reading aloud; as the evidence of the *Querolus* demonstrates at some length, they also cover the tactile and the olfactoric.³⁹

The inscription from Lyon, above, appears to contain the request to *perlegere* the final words of the deceased as an act of exhortation directed to the parents of the deceased in particular. When it came to the act of *perlegere* in the *Querolus*, however, the point of reading aloud was not to direct any request at anyone but, rather simpler and more practical, to share knowledge of content in a most effective way. The exact same approach to spreading knowledge effectively (and, unlike some may be inclined to argue, not at all evidence for lack of literacy) can be seen in a long (and in many respects hugely remarkable) poem from Sulmo:

³⁹ Although the image of 'devouring texts' was known to the Roman world (cf. e.g. Cic. Att. 126 [= 7.3.2] S-B and Att. 86 [= 4.11.2] S-B), somewhat unsurprisingly no strong case can be made as of yet that the fifth human sense – taste – was also conceptualised as relevant for inscriptions.

C[- - M]urranus et Decri[a] | Se[- - S]ecundae l(iberta) Melusa sibi et [suis]. | sal[ue] u]iator qui istac iter facis, | saluo tuo corpore consiste et lege: | iniquitate Orchi qui perperauit saecula | quod debuerant facere filii patri et | matri fecerunt miseri{s} pater et mater | fili(i)s dulcissimis suis, quoniam non | potuerunt exsorare deos ut [- -] | suis, neque ipsi retinere potuerunt, neque | etiam restituere. hoc quod [p]o[t]u[erunt] | nomina suorum restituerunt ad superos | Primigeni Seueri Pudentis Casti Lucillae et | Potestatis et miseris derelictis [a fi]li(i)s | quoniam sperabant se citius [- -] suos, | uiuis nomina eodem adiecerunt dum | malo fati nati et iniqua fortuna | qui non potuerunt antecedere suos | neque etiam persequi tam cito quam | ipsi cupiunt. at nunc miseris desertis | a natis nostris rogamus deos superos | atque inferos ut liceat nepotulum | nostrum Thiasum qui est nobis derelictus | ex Pudente filio inmaturo qua[li]s scintilla | quae de igne exierit, memoria nostrorum, | exsuperet nos: uiuat ualeat sint illi quae | ipse expetet. et nunc te rogamus nepotule | noster per tuorum maiorum misericor|diam ut tu pietati seruias et hoc sephul|crum tuorum tutaris et | si qui(s) te roga(ue)rit qui hoc comporta(ue)rit | dicito auus meus Murranus, nam ipsa | miseria docet etiam barbaros scribere | misericordias. et nunc rogo uos om[n]es natos nascentesque ut si quid la(p)sus | me praeterit hominem barbarum natu | Pannunium multis ulceri(bu)s et malis | perturbatum ignoscatis. rogo at nu[nc] | inprecamus deos ut si quis hoc sephulcr[um] | aut hunc titulum laeserit in[tulerit illi?] | fortuna mala et quod mer[itu]m sit [hunc] | **titulumque quicumque legerit aut lege[ntem] | ausculta(ue)rit alleuet illos for[tuna] | superior et ualeant semper [in aeterno?] | quicumque in hoc titulo scrip[ta legerit] | quietis sit uobis terra leuis et [- -] | desperatum qui superant [- -] | tempore obito sit [- -].**

(AE 1989.247)

In a final prayer (*inprecamus deos*), Murranus – after commemorating the deeply upsetting fate of his family, expressing his hopes in his grandson, and requesting forbearance for his lack of refined expression and poetic abilities – curses those who will interfere with the burial and blesses those who may read (*quicumque legerit*) or may, in fact, listen while someone reads (*quicumque ... lege[ntem] | ausculta(ue)rit*), with additional blessings for the actual reader to follow.

Of importance to the action in the *Querolus*, where the object is handled on several occasions and the act of reading appears to have involved an act of *contingere* (as Sardanapallus put it), the issue of a tactile experiences of inscriptions is something that does not seem to stand out as a topic in actual inscriptions. Typically, when tactile experiences are mentioned, they come in the shape of instructions to refrain from physically interfering with existing monuments – suggesting *e silentio* that touching was fine (and perhaps even assumed), as long as it did not exceed a certain level of invasion and interference.⁴⁰ From other parts of the Mediterranean of the Graeco-Roman sphere, physical interaction is equally scarcely attested – most notably, though, in *SIG* 3.985, a mysterious inscription from Philadelphia that, in the context of a cult, required participants to touch the object on a regular basis,⁴¹ adding a potentially religious or cultic facet to an act that otherwise may just be seen as a practical necessity. If that assumption is not altogether absurd, it might provide a meaningful backdrop for a better understanding of Sardanapallus' behaviour.

Finally, the issue of smell as related to the experience of Latin inscriptions. There are quite a few instances in which issues of smell have been addressed in these

⁴⁰ For the use of *tangere* in such context see e. g. *AE* 1939.195 and, arguably, *CIL* VI 30117 (cf. p. 3736) = *CLE* 1469.

⁴¹ For a discussion of this matter cf. K. B. Neutel, "Slaves Included? Sexual Regulations and Slave Participation in Two Ancient Religious Groups", in: S. Hodkinson – D. Geary (edd.), *Slaves and Religions in Graeco-Roman Antiquity and Modern Brazil* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2012) 133–148, esp. 138–139.

texts.⁴² Unlike in the *Querolus*, smell, when linked to the funerary sphere in the Latin inscriptions, appears to have been addressed consistently as a positive aspect. This is different in Roman Egypt, however, where from 2nd century A. D. Hermoupolis at least one text has emerged that implies widespread unpleasant olfactoric experiences (as related to mummification on this occasion):⁴³

Τὸν Ἐπιμάχου με παῖδα μὴ παραδράμης,
ὁδεῖτα, σφίγγῃ· μείνον, οὐ δύσωδία
παρ' ἐμοί σε λυπεῖ τῆς ἀηδοῦς κεδρίας·
σταθεῖς ἐπάκουσον ὀλίγον εὐώδους νεκροῦ.

(GVI 1975 = Bernand, *Inscr. métriques* [1969] 377, 97, lines 1–4)

A text that suggests that there is no harm in stalling one's step near this particular monument, as there are not any unpleasant odour-related experiences (δυσωδία) to be expected, must mean, of course, that the 'smellscape' on Roman burial grounds – due to the mixture of human decomposition and fragrant substances that were in use – must have been rather overpowering, justifying Sycophanta's summarising expression *anima in faucibus*.

5.3. Spiritual Engagement

Last, but certainly not least, one must consider the level of spiritual involvement that an engagement with inscribed funerary monuments (and vessels) may have implied. Sardanapallus, in the *Querolus*, refused to engage, because, as he put it: *funus egomet quodlibet contingere nequeo: nihil est quod metuam magis* – a response that earns him the label of being *meticulosus*, a fearful man. Similarly, the aforementioned inscription from Arles seems to imply a certain level of (potential) distance and fearful reservation when it asks the reader *ne uerearis*.

There is no need for an exhaustive record of ancient necrophobia and related attempts to provide rationalising narratives for it, in which aspects of hygiene, pollution, and personal disgust are reinterpreted in religious or cultic terms.⁴⁴ What emerges from the *Querolus*, however, is that even an engagement with funerary texts – at least when inscribed on actual containers of mortal remains – might have been seen as problematic by some. Approaching and handling them, as required, would appear to set in motion a string of cultic and ritual events that was deemed to be feared – engaging with a sphere outside of human control.

⁴² See this author's blog post at <http://thepetrifiedmuse.wordpress.com/2015/06/24/more-than-meets-the-eye-fragrance-sensuousness-and-inscribed-latin-poetry/> for a rough and ready survey of such instances in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*.

⁴³ Further on this text see e. g. D. Montserrat, "Unidentified Human Remains: Mummies and the Erotics of Biography", in: D. Montserrat (ed.), *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings. Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity* (London – New York 1998) 162–169, esp. 167–168. – On the topic more generally see also A. O. Koloski-Ostrow, "Roman Urban Smells: The Archaeological Evidence", in: M. Bradley (ed.), *Smell and the Ancient Senses* (London – New York 2015) 90–109, esp. 107–109.

⁴⁴ A number of interesting observations in that regard may be found in F. Retieff – L. Cilliers, "Burial customs and the pollution of death in ancient Rome", in: *Health and Healing, Disease and Death in the Graeco Roman World* (Acta Theologica Suppl. 7, 2005) 128–146, an aspect that would seem to persist to some extent even in archaeological scholarship, cf. E.-J. Graham, "Memory and Materiality: Re-embodiment the Roman Funeral", in: V. M. Hope – J. Huskinson (edd.), *Memory and Mourning: Studies on Roman Death* (Oxford 2011) 21–39.

The fact that this can be presented as covering the very reading of an inscription, involving making contact with an object that represents the otherworld, reinforces the more general notion of funerary inscriptions as a spiritually charged and religiously marked texts as well as that of the human voice as a medium powerful enough to invoke spirits and to cast spells that may not be controlled anymore once they have been uttered.

Mandrogerus, the *Querolus*' original epigraphist, does not seem to have been particularly bothered: whether it was his nature of being a scoundrel or his self-professed mastery of science and magic (*mathesim et magicam sum consecutus!*) that led him to a more rational approach, is a another story.

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