

A ROMAN INSCRIPTION IN CAPE TOWN¹

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The South African Cultural History Museum in Cape Town is well known for its fine collections, not least those of Greek and Roman antiquities.² On my last visit to Cape Town I was surprised to see something in the museum which I had not noticed before, a Latin inscription attached to the wall. There are of course very few ancient Latin inscriptions in South Africa. It reads as follows:

D M
T•AEL•DIONYSIVS
AVG•LIB•FECIT•SEVIVO
ET•AELIAE•CALLITYCENI
COIVGI•SANCTISSIME
CVMQVEMVIX•ANN•XXX•SEN
VLLA•QVERELLA•FEMINE
INCONPARABILI•ET•AEL•
PERSEO•COLLIBERTO•ET•LIBER
TIS•LIB•POSTERIQ•EORVM

In classical Latin and with the abbreviations expanded:

Dis Manibus.

T. Aelius Dionysius Augusti libertus fecit se uiuo et Aeliae Callityceni coniugi sanctissimae cum qua uixit annos XXX sine ulla querella, feminae incomparabili, et Aelio Perseo colliberto et libertis, libertabus posterisque eorum.

It may be translated as follows:

To the Spirits of the Dead.

T. Aelius Dionysius, freedman of the emperor, had (this tomb) constructed while still alive (for himself) and for his most pious wife Aelia Callityche with whom he lived for 30 years without a quarrel. She was a woman without compare. Also for Aelius Perseus his fellow freedman and their freedmen, freedwomen and posterity.

The inscription was discovered in Rome on the Appian Way at a vineyard called Morona and was duly published in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Volume VI, as number 10676. The *Corpus* gave its then location as Lowther Castle near Penrith in Westmoreland. Ms. A. Boshoff, Curator for Ancient Cultures in the Cape Town Museum, kindly supplied the museum's account of its acquisition:

¹ Professor P.R.C. Weaver kindly read, and improved, an earlier version of this paper.

² The Greek vases have been published by Boardman, J and Pope, M 1961. *Greek Vases in Cape Town*. S. A Museum Guides 6.

Purchased from Folio Fine Art in London in 1971. Found in Morona vineyard on the Via Appia outside Rome [CIL VI 10676]. A vertical fracture was repaired before it was sold. From the Lowther Castle Collection, the Earl of Bessborough. Accession number: 1/142.

Unfortunately it contains little of specific historical interest.³ The deceased bear the nomen of the emperor Hadrian and his successor Antoninus Pius: the latter was T. Aelius Antoninus and hence must have been the emperor who gave Dionysius his freedom and Roman citizenship. The cognomen of Dionysius and of the other freedman, Perseus, are typical Greek names. When acquiring Roman citizenship freedmen typically retained their former or slave name as their new cognomen. Dionysius' wife's name, Callityche, is also Greek, the feminine form of Callitychus (ThLL, Onomasticon II, p. 97). It means 'Good Fortune'. For a freedman and freedwoman a marriage of 30 years was a long one.⁴

It is difficult to establish Aelius Dionysius' social position. Since Rome had no equivalent of a modern civil service or state bureaucracy, and since delegated administrative and clerical functions were beneath the dignity of the senatorial and senior equestrian orders, the emperor used his ex-slaves not only for personal service but also for routine administrative duties. The brevity of Dionysius' epitaph suggests that he fell into the lower rather than the higher category of imperial freedmen.



³ On imperial freedmen, cf. Weaver, P R C 1972. *Familia Caesaris: A Social Study of the Emperor's Freedmen and Slaves*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Boulvert, G 1974. *Domestique et fonctionnaire sous le Haut-Empire romain*, 68, 313. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.