Grumentum and Roman Cities in Southern Italy

Grumentum e le città romane nell’Italia meridionale

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NUTRITUS FROM GRUMENTUM

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Abstract: An inscription found in the east necropolis of Grumentum during the years 1968-1969 went virtually unnoticed till its appearance in AE 1998, 390. However, it is only the sixth inscription in the whole Latin corpus mentioning a young maritus. Both socially and geographically, this inscription confirms the pattern of the other epigraphical evidence concerning maritus. In all likelihood, maritus was a regional variation for the term alumnus.

Keywords: Grumentum, inscription, AE 1998, 390, maritus, alumnus.

Introduction

Back in 1968 and 1969, construction works for an artificial canal in the valley which runs east and south of Grumentum revealed four inscribed funerary cippi, which belonged to the Roman necropolis of the town. Though the inscriptions were mentioned and cited by Giardino fifteen years after the discovery, they were not properly edited in the subsequent years. Only after the edition by Munzi and the subsequent mention in Année Epigraphique 1998, this set of inscriptions got somehow noticed by the international community of epigraphists. However, also Munzi quite briefly presents the inscriptions, which both for their appearance and their contents deserve a detailed commentary. In this note, I present one inscription which not only relates to the subject of elites in Grumentum (see BUONOPANE in this volume), but also adds to our knowledge on education and childhood in Roman Italy.

Presentation, edition and commentary

Altar of local limestone (cm. 127.5 x 53.5 x 43.5). Damaged on all sides, especially on the crown list and in the tympanum. Traces of carving all over the surface. The quadrangular shaft is linked to a pedestal, and to a crown list with ornaments on the three sides. On the surface of the shaft, a significant crack also affects some letters. While both the front and the sides have been refined with a hammer, the back has been sketched only roughly, since the altar was put against a wall. On the right side, an umbilicate bowl (patena umbilicata) is depicted; on the left, a bundle of small twigs, possibly in a kind of small case. As a theca or school case containing reed pens (calami), the latter might symbolise schooling and education.

Fig. 1. Altar for the maritus Iunius. Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell'Alta Val d'Agri (n. inv. 262379). Photograph by Alfredo Buonopane.

1 GIARDINO 1983, 205-206.
3 Currently, Alfredo BUONOPANE and Christian LAES are preparing such edition and commentary of the complete collection of Grumentum.
4 Bonner 1977, 128 (with Illustrations).
The letters (cm. 3.8; 3.8; 3.8; 3.8; 4; 4; 4; 3.5; 2.5) appear quite regular, deeply carved, and noticeably pointed. There are traces of triangular punctuation. The stone is now in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale dell’Alta Val d’Agrì (n. inv. 262779). It was edited for the first time by MUNZI 1997, p. 291 (n. 9). See AE 1998, 390. Autopsy by Buonopane, August 2008.

Date: end of the second, beginning of the third century CE.

Di(s) M(anibus).
Lunic(ni) nutri(tio) incomparabil(is), qui visu iterati
missis XVII, mensibus XI, diebus XII.
Pollixi et S[p]en-
dusa Brutti
Crispini

To the Gods of the underworld. To Lunicus, a nutritio to whom nobody compares. He lived for 17 years, 11 months and 12 days. Pollius and Speedusa, slaves of Brutius Crispinus (set this up).

Commentary

line 2: There are basically three possibilities for the intriguing mention NVTRITIO. This might be a proper name, an abbreviation for nutritio(ni), or the dative of a noun nutritur. I will consider the three options.

1) A cognomen Nutritus. This was how both GIARDINO and MUNZI understood it. Since we know of a male name Nutricus as well as a female name Nutrix, this possibility cannot be ruled out entirely. However, there are however two problems with this interpretation. First, this would be the only attestation of the name Nutritus. Second, it would imply that Lunicus was either freeborn or freed. A freeborn status would be somewhat strange given the mention of his two 'parents'/educators who were certainly slaves (cf. infra lines 8-10). When he were to be a freedman, he would in all likelihood have taken the name of Brutius Crispinus, the master of his parents, who then would have acted as his patron.

2) An abbreviation for nutritio(ni). The case on the left might indeed refer to scholastic matters. If one sticks to this interpretation, Lunicus would have been a very young child minder (linked with a nutritu) or more generally an

educator. In fact, only four inscriptions for male educators or nutritores mention the age of the educator. Most are Christian and mention adults, two of whom of considerable age. For paedagogi, the youngest known is a woman Urbanus aged 25.7 There is, however, not a single parallel inscription which can ascertain nutritus as an abbreviation for nutritor(ni).

3) The term nutritus might refer to an exposed infant, or simply to a child who has been raised by persons other than his parents. As such, nutritus can be synonymous with alumnus.8 Contrary to inscriptions for alumnus, which are widespread all over the Empire, the term nutritus is very rare in inscriptions. It sometimes appears as a participle of the verb nutritus.9 Nutritus does not appear as a substantive in any literary source. The only important Latin dictionary mentioning such use of the word is in fact 'good old' Forcellini, dating back to 1771, and referring to one inscription.10 So far, only five instances of the use of nutritus as a noun were known:11

1) CIL IX 495, CIL XI 735, 1 (Venusia);
Cascia Caupriola Silvano nnu nutritus et vernacolo suu / b(e)ne m(eventi) (p(osuit)).
A freeborn or freed woman to a young boy (the diminutive vernacolo is used), who is also described as her home-born slave (vernus).12 The combination of nutritus and vernacolo is interesting. Since Silvanus was home-born, he cannot have been a foundling (cf. infra).
2) CIL IX 1526 (pavus Vaccarosa);
D(is) M(anibus) / Primi(tio) nutritu(lo) (sic) fecerunt Priv(ni) et Vernicia q(ue) visu (animos) XVI m(enses) II / b(e)ne m(eventi).
A slave couple to a slave-girl, aged sixteen.
3) CIL IX 3997, CATALLI 1998 no. 22; AE 2006, 383 (Alba Fucens);
D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / Hostilius Entocy et Hostilia Ferculio Clasio / Hostilio Scribu nutritu / qui visu(um) animos VI / dies XXX Hostilia Ferculo scrib / et suis fecit.
A freed couple, together with a freed boy, six years of age. A slave couple Entocy and Hostilia raised a boy named Strenus. They were freed all three together by

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1 BRADLEY 1981, exp. 69-70.
2 CIL V 7185; CIL VI 25302 (105 (1) years); ICRV VII 18862; ICLV 1474 (28 years); ICAH VIII 21167 (97 years); ICRV X 27332; ICLV 755; AE 1888, 153 (40 years; plus minus).
4 For extensive bibliography on alumnus, see DE RUGGERIO 1899; RAWSON 1986; BLEX 1992, 98-130; BELLEMORE, RAWSON 1990. For the Greek dossiers on ἀλουμνός, see CAPIER 1993; SACC0 1990.
5 CIL VI 61625 (nunescus a nobis); 21695 (nunescus Bracita, mortua Pronanae); X 6435 (tenex nutritus, amnis). The letters are commented upon by Rawson 1986, 866. For a literary example, see Livy 9, 36. vernus et dictus cornes unus esticus, nutritus una coque had ignumus linguam exestrem.
6 FORCELLINI 1771, vol. 3, 417; nutritius absolute est qui a parenthesibus mai defertum, vel ob alia pas, tamquam filius nutritu. The inscription which Forcellini cites is now known as CIL IX 495.
7 BRADLEY 1981 lists these inscriptions and adds an extensive commentary.
their master with the name Hostilius. The boy Hostilius Sirenas cannot have been a legitimate child born after his parents were freed: in this case, it would not make sense to call him *nutritus*.

4) **RUSI 1986, 863-865** (Cereonium; Masseria Finocchio):  
*D(i)us Manibus / Felicia / vixit a(n)is VIII / matris(nis) III, diebus XV / Calitamum sive Estychia / nutriti pieni(aismo) / fecit(unt).*

A slave couple for a slave boy, nine years of age.

5) **RUSI 1986**, pp. 865-866 (Beneventum):  

The inscription is too fragmentary to make any certain conclusions (even the reading *nutritae* is most uncertain and not accepted in *CIL* IX 196313), but there is certainly a context of freedmen.

These five instances have common traits. Three inscriptions are for boys, two possibly for girls (one uncertain reading). Two epitaphs mention a slave couple with a (young) child called *nurtuitus*; one only mentions a woman with her *nurtius* who is identified as a house-bred slave (*nurcius*); and the examples from Beneventum and Alba Fucens in all likelihood refer to an environment of freedmen. Three out of five *nutritiae* were most probably slaves themselves. All inscriptions belong to Central and South-Italy (Regiones II-IV). As regards age, the *nurtius* are all young, between six and sixteen years. Geographically, socially and as age is concerned, our inscription from Grumentum fits very well into this pattern.

Russo has tried to link the occurrence of *nutritus* with the phenomenon of child-exposure in the countryside and in the translatumpace sphere of shepherds (handing over infants of the class of the servilius to shepherds was explicitly forbidden by Emperor Honorius in the year 409). This hypothesis is of course hard to substantiate. The *nutriti* inscriptions are all from the second or third century, and thus much earlier than the law by Emperor Honorius. It is indeed possible that Pollius and Spedusia were a couple of shepherd slaves, working on the countryside of Grumentum for master Brutius Crispinus. By raising their freedling Junius, they would also have increased Crispinus’ slave stock. But the first example from Verona explicitly excludes the foundling-scenario (cf. supra). It is thus much more likely that *nutritus* was a mere regional variation for the term *alunus* - indicating that the child was not raised by his biological parents.

Lines 8-9: Pollius and Spedusia are typically Greek slave names. Contrary to the claim by Munzi, this is not the first mention of the rare name Spedusia - the variant Spensusa was much more attested. This slave couple was linked with an important senatorial family from Lucania. Lucius Brutius Quintius Crispinus was consul in the year 187, and is known from an inscription in Puteoli (*CIL* X 1784). See *PJR* B 169. One of his sons, Caius Brutius Prasens, was consul in 217 (*PJR* B 166); another son Lucius Brutius Crispinus was a consul in 224 (*PJR* B 160). In nearby Barrecolle di Marziocevetera, a villa belonging to Caius Brutius Prasens (*PJR* B 165) was excavated, grandfather or father to Brutus Crispina, who married to Emperor Commodus in the year 178 (*PJR* B 170). All this dates our inscription to the last decades of the second or the first decades of the third century CE.

Another slave from this family, a steward named Buceius, appears in *CIL* X 238 from Grumentum: *Caius / [—] / Gaius / ius / C(aius) Buceius / [—] / C(aius) / [—] / ius / C(aius) / [—] / ius / C(aius) / [—] / ius / C(aius) / [—].* This is the only sixth attestation of a *nurtius* in the Latin inscriptions of the early 2nd century CE. This is the only sixth attestation of a *nurtius* in the Latin inscriptions of the early 2nd century CE. As both as age and concerned in the geographical and social terms, this inscription is very much in line with the geographical and social pattern which were discovered in the other five inscriptions for *nurtia*.

The iconography, which has not been included in the publication note, points to the frustrated hope and the grief of a slave couple, losing their young child in whose education and schooling they had invested.

However, the statement that we are faced with a couple from the shepherd milieu, can hardly be confirmed based
on the evidence. In all likelihood, the term *nurtius* was a regional variation for the word *aluni*.

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**Bibliography**


