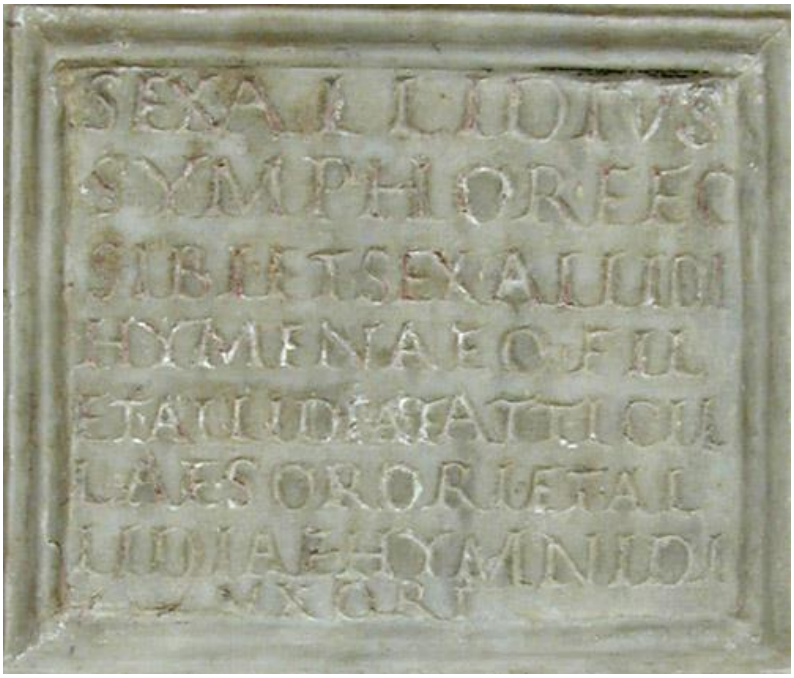
Cinerary Urn for Allidia Hymnis (CIL VI.6828)

http://www.vroma.org/images/raia_images/urn_allidia.jpg



Cinerary Urn, marble, for his wife Allidia Hymnis, sister Allidia Atticilla, son Sextus Allidius Hymenaeus; scene of marriage (*iunctio dextrarum*); inscribed and set up for himself as well by Sextus Allidius Symphorus. Rome, c. 120-50 CE. (CIL VI.6828). Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek.

Transcription

SEX[tus] · ALLIDIVS
SYMPHOR[us] · FEC[it] [hoc monumentum]
SIBI · ET SEX[to] ·ALLIDI O
HYMENAEO FIL[io]
ET ALLIDIAE ATTICIL
LAE SORORI ET AL
LIDIAE HYMNIDI
VXORI

Translation

Sextus Allidius Symphorus
made this monument
for himself and for Sextus Allidius
Hymenaeus his son
and for Allidia Atticilla
his sister and
for Allidia Hymnis
his wife

Lexical and Interpretive Commentary

Lines 1-2
Sex[tus] Allidius Symphorus: masculine nominative singular; subject; **Symphorus**: a Greek adj. meaning *accompanying, suitable, useful, profitable.*

Line 2
fecit: perfect active indicative.

hoc monumentum: direct object. This commonly understood phrase was often omitted from inscriptions.

Line 3
sibi: third person sg. dative reflexive pronoun; indirect object of **fecit**.

Lines 3-4
Sex[to] Allidio Hymenaeo: masculine dative singular, indirect object. From the Greek noun **Hymenaeos**, meaning the wedding refrain or the personified god of weddings.

Line 4
filio: masculine dative singular; in apposition to Sex[to] Allidio Hymenaeo.

Lines 5-6

Allidia Atticillae: feminine dative singular; indirect object; **Atticilla**: a Greek adj. meaning *little Attic woman*; Attica was the region in Greece in which Athens is located and the name may indicate the place of her birth.

Line 6
sorori: feminine dative singular, in apposition to Allidia Atticillae.

Lines 6-7
Allidiae Hymnidi: feminine dative singular; indirect object. **Hymnis** is a Greek noun related to the word *hymnos*, meaning *hymn*; it was the title of a comedy by Caecilius Statius. She is named in *CIL*.6.6829 as the dedicator of a monument to her husband and son.

Line 8
uxori: feminine dative singular; in apposition to Allidiae Hymnidi; this word indicates that Symphorus and Hymnis married after they were freed and represents their right as citizens to be legally married.

Historical Essay

Inscription

Sextus Allidius Symphorus erected this funerary monument, now housed in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, for himself, his son, Sextus Allidius Hymenaeus, his sister, Allidia Atticilla, and his wife, Allidia Hymnis. The Latin *praenomen* and *nomen* and Greek *cognomen* indicate that Symphorus was a freedman who, along with his wife, son, and sister, had belonged to the *gens Allidia*. The same persons are named in *CIL* 6.6829, where Hymnis appears as the name of both Symphorus's sister and his wife, who jointly dedicated a separate funerary monument to him and his son, Hymenaeus.

This monument was erected in Rome between 50-120 CE. The inscription is laid out in a symmetrical fashion with centered lines of the same length, indicating its quality. The letters are clearly defined, carefully carved, and evenly spaced. Elaborate monuments such as this often have a specific die or panel on which the text was inscribed (Toynbee 247). The inscription was placed within a framed panel in the center of the monument. Because of these traits, the inscription was likely commissioned by a person wealthy enough to pay for talented craftsmen.

Monument Description

Funerary monuments in the first century CE such as this shifted from being large memorials glorifying an individual to communal tombs oriented around a household or common work group (Hope). The urn was intended to hold the ashes of the deceased family members to whom it was dedicated. The decoration is classical, following the Greco-Roman artistic tradition established by Augustus (Touchette). A professional with skill in carving did the work. The

monument is made entirely of marble (Raia), a rock that is metamorphic and comes from limestone (Witkowski), has been used for sculpture from 600 B.C.E. to the present because it is relatively easy to sculpt and is prized for its translucence and durability (*Encyclopedia of Sculpture*). A common misconception regarding Greek and Roman sculpture is that the artists used completely pure white marble (Witkowski). However, it is likely that this funerary monument is made of off-white marble, meaning it is darker than typical white marble, allowing finer details to be more clearly displayed and emphasized (Witkowski).

Although the monument was dedicated to four people, the decoration and iconography are focused on the wife and *materfamilias*, Allidia Hymnis. At the top of the urn, in the area called the "gable," two rams' heads are carved on either side of a Medusa head. Funerary urns and tombs in this period often displayed wild animals and mythological figures that served as protectors of the souls or that accompanied the souls to the afterlife. Rams were seen as fierce, war-like creatures during this time, making them ideal to protect the souls of the dead and were typically sacrificed to appease Janus (Beard, North, and Price 151). The rams' heads signify the two faces of Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and transitions, one face looking to the future and the other to the past. (*OCD*) Because Janus was the god of doorways (and an open door is represented at the bottom of the monument) he may be said to guard the gates to the afterlife. Rams' heads also appear as the volutes on the capitals of the mixed, or composite, order columns that frame the monument. The composite capital combines the volutes of the Ionic order with the acanthus leaves of the Corinthian order. The spiral flute design on the shaft of the columns became popular in the early imperial period. (*Oxford History of Classical Art* 262). Between the columns and the inscription, there are some markings that resemble leaves or a vine motif, providing an attractive decorative motif.

Between the rams' heads appears the face of Medusa, a common image on funerary monuments during the time period. Medusa's inclusion on the urn can be interpreted in a number of ways, but one potential explanation suggests that she served as a marker between the living and the dead, and helped the soul reach the afterlife. Because this family was of Greek origins, Medusa could be interpreted as a protective symbol, as ancient Greeks utilized the portrayal of Medusa to avert evil and to show that death was inevitable. Moreover, Medusa's presence is potentially telling of Roman men's perception of women. Perhaps, as Medusa is said to have been, women were seen as unruly and even sinister when put in positions of significant power. Though women were seen as subordinates to men in this period, this urn shows that they must

have been seen as possessing some degree of strength and value. Medusa had snakes for hair, symbols of death but also of rebirth and immortality. The wings behind her head could be representative of Pegasus, the winged horse who was the son of Medusa in myth. The wings could also symbolize protection and guidance for the deceased during the journey to the afterlife (*OCD*).

At the bottom of the urn, a couple holds hands, framed by a set of open doors and a pair of winged Cupids above the door panels. The Romans carved representations of the values they held to be most important onto funerary monuments in order to honor the deceased, which commonly included images of great victories, battle scenes, and depictions of mythology. This more intimate scene, the *dextrarum iunctio* or the "clasping of hands," was an exceedingly popular image of second-century Rome and symbolized marriage and the importance of fidelity and harmony in matrimony (*OCD*). This image appears on funerary monuments for both men and women in ancient Rome, but when it appears on men's tombs, it is often accompanied by other images, such as scenes of battle or honors achieved in one's lifetime. However, on this urn the *dextrarum iunctio* is displayed by itself, suggesting that a woman's main role in society was as a wife to her husband and mother of his legitimate children. The husband and wife are usually shown in "civic dress." The holding of hands signifies their union, pointing to the importance of marriage, and emphasizes their longing for a reunion in the afterlife. Marriage was more commonly depicted on the tombs of women than men, because it was such a crucial aspect of their lives (Rawson 544) and gave evidence of their Roman citizenship. The doors that frame the couple most likely depict a part of the marriage ceremony, as many other monuments show the couple under an arch or in a doorframe. Ancient Roman funerary facades evolved from narrative to an increasingly emblematic and non-narrative composition. This non-narrative form, like the Urn for Allidia Hymnis, usually had one scene rather than a set of episodes. In the second and third centuries, the Republican ideal of worldly virtue became less valued and was replaced by the ideal of spiritual superiority. The change in ideals transformed funerary monuments. In the third and fourth century, sarcophagi with battles, weddings, and scenes of the life of the mind became prevalent (Kampen 57). As the Urn of Allidia Hymnis includes a marriage scene, it is a forerunner to this trend of marriage scenes on funerary monuments. In the imperial times, public arenas for self-representation were restricted and therefore aristocratic competition focused on the funerary realm (Touchette). This urn may be one such competition-based creation in which freedpersons imitated the aristocracy in their desire to be honored and remembered.

All in all, the urn comes together with a balance of artistic and social significance, a testimony to the value that Sextus Allidius Symphorus placed on his family and their civic status, and his hopes for their union in death.

Contributors

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