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TWO OFFICIALS OF SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 79 (1989) 159–160

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## TWO OFFICIALS OF SEPTIMIUS SEVERUS

Not long ago, Michael Peachin discussed a funerary inscription from Etruria which, he thinks, was affixed to a statuary group depicting an emperor and two of his officials.<sup>1</sup> That treatment of the inscription, which I include here for convenience, seems flawed on two counts.

Cerne age, principio uenerandum numen adorans,  
 quos similes fecit nos manus artificis.  
 Sub laeua posui Marcum me nomine Carpum,  
 qui procurauī auro sanctaeque Monetae.  
 5 Sed iam cesso mihi senio hortante libenter,  
 et merui laudis bonae sub principe famam.  
 Altera de parte situs est mihi karus Achilles,  
 prudens et doctus, nostro qui Caesare dignus;  
 hunc merito iuunem cernimus a memor[ia].  
 10 Signum etiam posui nostri maioris Achī[llis],  
 in medio fulgens ut caelo stella Boō[tes],  
 qui solus longe tutatus nobiliter [c. 3-5 litt.]

First, the alleged appearance of an emperor, identified by Peachin as Caracalla. It seems unlikely in the extreme that an emperor could appear in a group whose other two members were equestrian or freedman officials. The fact that one official is named Achilles does not constitute sufficient proof of the view that Caracalla, however much he imitated the hero,<sup>2</sup> was part of the statue group. The inscription intimates that an "exalted Achilles, shining forth in the middle like the star Bootes in the heavens, who alone from afar splendidly has protected" [...] (ll.10-12; trans. Peachin). The apparently distant and almost impersonal guardianship of the deity over the two officials would surely be offensive to an emperor, were he the subject.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the first two lines of the inscription indicate a close physical resemblance between the deity and Marcus Carpus, the former procurator monetae. Again, an emperor might prefer that this similarity between himself and an old man, if it existed at all, be overlooked by the sculptor. All in all, the normal interpretation that maior Achilles represents the Greek hero seems much more likely.<sup>4</sup> The view that Caracalla was depicted

<sup>1</sup> "A Funerary Inscription from Etruria", *Phoenix* 40 (1986) 446-453.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dio, 77.16.7; Herod. 4.9.3.

<sup>3</sup> One ought probably to point out that Caracalla was deified, but an inscription of this nature after his death might well offend subsequent emperors.

<sup>4</sup> So J.M.Reynolds, "Inscriptions from South Etruria", *PBSR* 21 (1966) 66-67; also *AE* (1968) no. 164.

requires much more support to invalidate these obvious objections. Other editors have dated the inscription a generation earlier.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, the identity of the officials. According to the inscription, the officials are an older Marcus Carpus (*qui procurauit auro sanctaeque Monetae*), who placed the statue, and a close friend of youthful age named Achilles (*mihi karus Achilles*), who had been a *memoria*. Peachin avoids the temptation to identify these officials further, though he does discuss their social status.

PIR<sup>2</sup> offers possibilities for both. CIL VI.727 (A 1474) mentions an (Aurelius) Carpus who was *procurator kastrensis* during the reign of Commodus. His son, who appears in CIL VI.727 as well, bears the name M.Aurelius Stertinius Carpus (A 1612), which may indicate that the father's name was Marcus. Either the father, who is attested in the imperial service, or, less likely, the son could be the Carpus in the inscription from Etruria. An Aelius Achilles (A 127) appears as a *rationalis Augustorum* in the year 193 on CIL VI.1585a, b (= ILS 5920). This could be the Achilles of the inscription, if he was promoted to a *memoria*. Carpus presumably aided the career of Achilles, in the time-honoured tradition of the recommendation by an older man of a younger one.<sup>6</sup> The assumption that Achilles was very young<sup>7</sup> is not necessary: *iuuenem* (l.9) is hardly precise, and the contrast is with the age of Carpus.

If these remarks and the identification are valid, the reign of Septimius Severus is a more likely period for the inscription. The emperor himself was not depicted, but the inscription perhaps hints at his identity. The *Historia Augusta* (Sev. 1.4, 18.5) notes that he was well-educated in literature and had an interest in philosophy, characteristics that may be reflected in line 8 (*prudens et doctus*) while the astrological imagery, which probably continues in the very fragmentary second column,<sup>8</sup> may hint at Severus' interest in this area.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> So the editors in AE, who date the inscription to the reign of Commodus, even though they note that the reign of Caracalla seems most suitable at first glance. Reynolds, 66, n.4, remarks that *prudens et doctus* (l.8) might suggest Marcus Aurelius.

<sup>6</sup> It is thus unlikely that Achilles was the son of Carpus, as Reynolds and Peachin suggest.

<sup>7</sup> Reynolds, 66, n.5; AE (1968) 63.

<sup>8</sup> As all the commentators have remarked.

<sup>9</sup> On this, cf. A.Birley, *Septimius Severus* (London, 1971) 71-73, 149-150, etc.