



The ‘*Servi Publici*’: Everybody’s Slaves’ (SPES) Project

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, Individual Fellowship (H2020-MSCA-IF-2015)

Newcastle University / University of London, October 2016 – September 2018

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Fig. 1. Silver cup from Boscoreale (end of the Tiberian age): the young man who is placing a victory crown over Tiberius’ head is probably a public slave; cf. Iuv. 10, 41-42; Cass. Dio 6 (Zon. 7, 21; Tzetzes *epist.* 107, p. 86; Tzetzes *Chil.* 13, 51-52).



Fig. 2. Columbarium plaque of the public slave *Hymnus Aurelianus*, superintendent of the Latin library at the Portico of Octavia, and *Quintia Clara*, freedwoman of *Caius* (Rome, first half of the first century CE; *CIL* VI, 2347 = *CIL* VI, 4431 = *ILS* 1971).

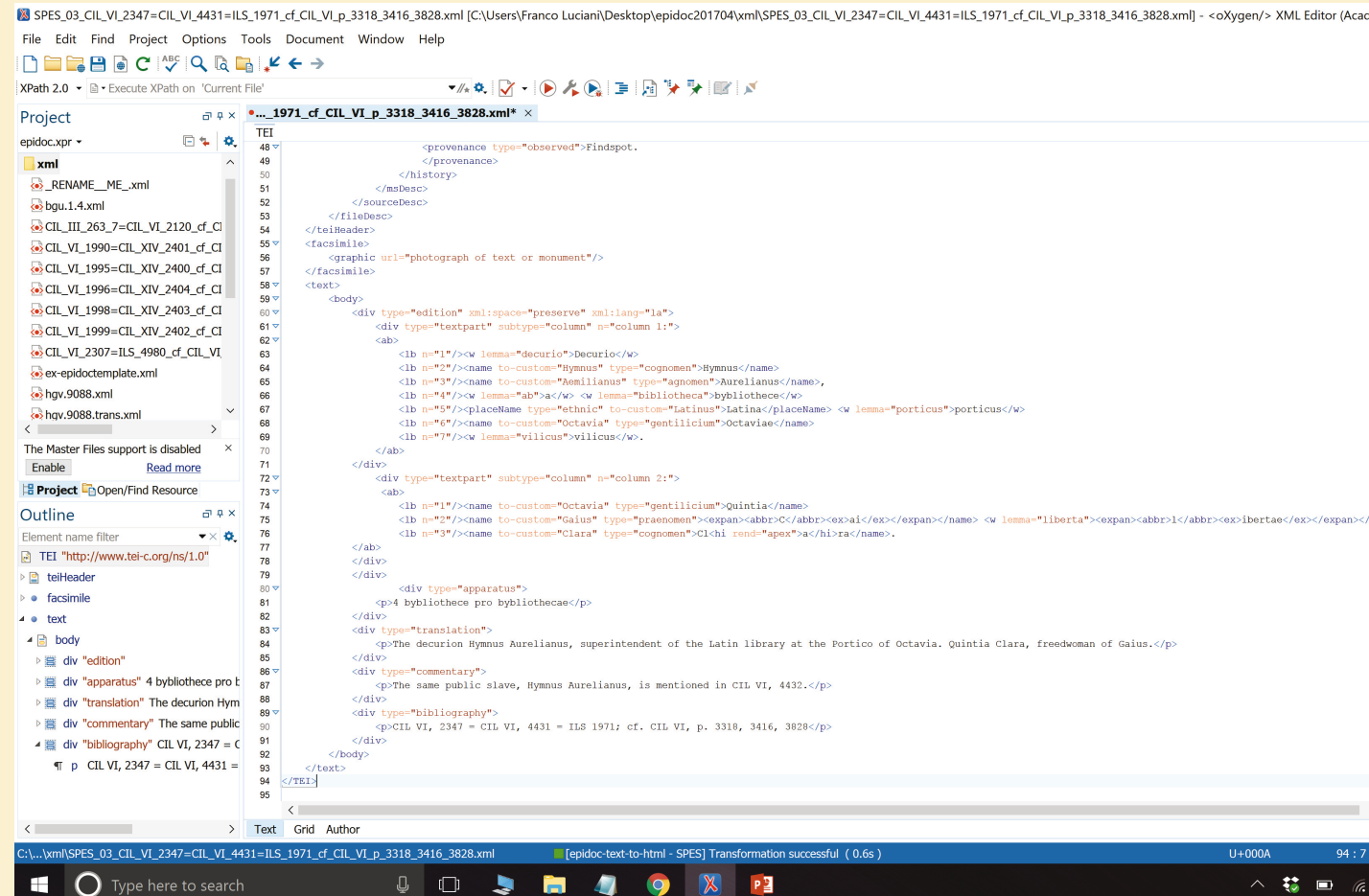


Fig. 3. EpiDoc XML version of inscription *CIL* VI, 2347 = *CIL* VI, 4431 = *ILS* 1971.

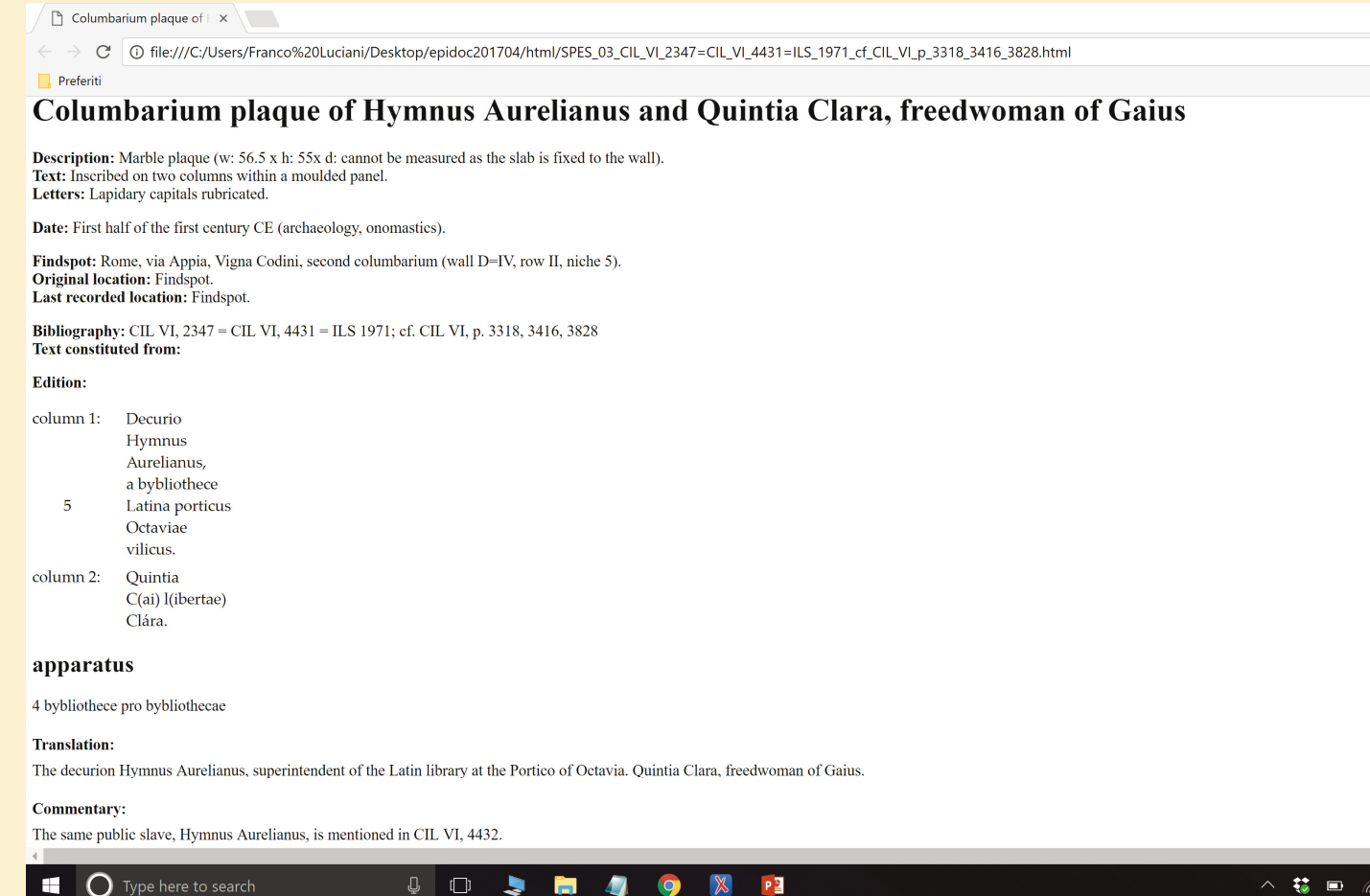


Fig. 4. Html version of inscription *CIL* VI, 2347 = *CIL* VI, 4431 = *ILS* 1971.

When, Where and Who?

The ‘*Servi Publici*’: Everybody’s Slaves’ (SPES) research project started on October, 1st 2016. It is supported by a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Individual Fellowship, with the School of History, Classics and Archaeology (SHCA) of the Newcastle University as host institution.

Dr Franco Luciani is the Fellow, Dr Federico Santangelo is the Principal Investigator. The duration of the project is two years (October 2016-September 2018).

A six-month secondment is scheduled from April, 1st to September, 30th 2017 at the Institute of Classical Studies (ICS), which is part of the School of Advanced Study (SAS) of the University of London, under the mentorship of Dr Gabriel Bodard.

What?

The SPES project sets out to provide a full-scale reconsideration of the position of public slaves in Roman society through a multidisciplinary and comparative study. Its main objectives are:

1. to gather and organize in an on-line database all the available sources (literary, juridical and epigraphic documents) concerning public slavery in the Roman World;
2. to cross-fertilize the historiography of ancient and modern slavery in order thoroughly to understand the predicament and historical significance of the slaves owned by a community, both in antiquity and in the modern age.

How Many Sources?

- More than 100 among literary and juridical sources
- More than 140 inscriptions from Rome
- More than 360 inscriptions from all over the Empire

How?

For each inscription the SPES database will contain these sections:

- description (support, text and letters);
- date;
- findspot;
- bibliography;
- edition;
- apparatus;
- translation;
- commentary;
- photograph.

Following the model of the online edition of Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania (IRT), each epigraphic text will conform to the EpiDoc schema (cf. fig. 3-4).

Which Results?

At the end of the project, the database will be available online for public use, hosted by the Newcastle University website, and will be linked to other existing epigraphic databases, such as Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby (EDCS), Epigraphic Database Heidelberg (EDH), and Epigraphic Database Roma (EDR).

Public Slaves: Who Were They?

Servi publici were non-free individuals, not owned by a private person, but by a community.

Their *domini* could be:

- the Roman people (*populus romanus*), in Rome;
- the entire citizen body of a municipality (*municipes*) or a colony (*coloni*), in Italy or in the provinces.

Public slaves in Rome were under the authority of the Roman Senate, whilst in other cities they were under the power of the local councils.

Which Activities Did Public Slaves Perform?

In Rome, they were mostly employed as attendants to priests and magistrates. *Servi publici* also worked as custodians of public buildings (archives, temples, basilicas and libraries). A *familia publica aquaria*, consisting of 240 public slaves, was used for the maintenance of the water conduits (Frontin. *aq.* 99; 116). Other *servi publici* carried out unspecified public works (*opera publica*: *CIL* VI, 2336-2337).

In the other cities, they were employed for very similar tasks as the ones described for Rome. They were in fact commonly employed as attendants of magistrates. In contrast, their activities within the religious sphere as attendants of priests and custodians of temples (*aeditui*) are scarcely attested. Many inscriptions from various parts of the Empire show *servi publici* acting in the administration of the cities as *treasurers* (*arcarii*), financial agents (*actores*), and archivists (*tabularii*). Other epigraphic sources suggest that public slaves could be employed in the management of markets (*macella*) and granaries as *horrearii*. Some *servi publici* were probably also involved in Trajan’s ‘welfare’ program of *alimenta* (*CIL* IX, 699, 2472 = *ILS* 6519, 5859; *CIL* XI, 6073). Moreover, the public slaves with the specification of *mensores* attested in *Luceria* (*CIL* IX, 821 = *ILS* 6480) and *Sipontum* (*CIL* IX, 699) were probably engaged in land-surveying. Finally, in some cities of the Empire *servi publici* were entrusted with the task of maintaining the public baths, as well as of producing lead-pipes and bricks.

Servi Publici in Rome: Regular or Privileged Slaves? A Case Study

It is generally accepted that public slaves in the Roman world enjoyed a higher status than the private ones, benefiting to some extent from privileged life and good social conditions.

The interpretation of *servi publici* as ‘privileged’ individuals within the slave population originates from some ‘rights’ whose they benefitted by law: legal texts clearly testify that accommodation, board and clothes were granted to public slaves.

- Accommodation: it is well known that the right to lodging was also granted to private slaves. The sole difference concerned the type of accommodation. Private slaves, in fact, must live in their masters’ house, whilst public slaves had lodgings in common spaces of the city at their disposal, where they probably lived together: a *contubernium*, according to Tacitus (*hist.* I, 43).
- Board and clothes: these two presumed privileges were not exclusive to public slaves. In fact, providing clothes and food for a slave fell within any master’s duties, as made clear by Seneca (*benef.* 3, 21) and by a passage of the Digest (7, 1, 15, 2).

Besides their daily board, some public slaves could draw a sort of remuneration: according to Frontinus (*aq.* 100, 118), the members of the *familia publica aquaria* received *annua* and *commoda* from the public treasury in return for their services. However, it was also common practice for private masters to offer a money allowance to their slaves (*peculium*).

The only real privilege for public slaves was the right to make a will of half their *peculium* (Ulp. *fragm.* 20, 16). This money was probably the result of the savings put away by public slaves from *annua* and *commoda* which they possibly received during their services.

The large number of unions between public slaves and free women (*ingenuae, libertae or incertae*), which are attested by many inscriptions from Rome, were also interpreted as proof of their privileged condition. Nevertheless, this is not to be considered as a ‘privilege’: with the approval of their master, all slaves could partner with free or freed women.

At the same time, neither public nor private slaves had right to a *matrimonium*: a marriage between persons of different legal status was always a *contubernium* (Paul. *sent.* 2, 19, 6).

Did public slaves really stand out among the slave population in respect of the right to make a will of half their property or because of the fact that they chose free women as partners?

They probably did not use their money to pay for freedom. In Rome, manumission of public slaves seems to have been extremely rare: only one inscription mentioning a public freedman is attested (*CIL* VI, 2340 = *ILS* 1973). More likely, they used their part of *peculium* to buy inscribed funerary monuments for their family and themselves.

Without any easy opportunity to gain freedom, it seems difficult to argue that public slaves enjoyed a privileged position within the slave population, at least in Rome: they mostly died as slaves. When partnering with free or freed women, they could give birth to free sons, who became their heirs.

Therefore, the possibility to stand out among the lower levels of the Roman society was reserved to the free offspring of public slaves, rather than to public slaves.

First Outcomes

Talks and Seminars:

- October, 17th-18th 2016: ‘*Les esclaves publics chez les Romains*, 120 anni dopo Halkin’, International Conference ‘Romains ordinaires / Regular Romans / Romani ordinari. La fragmentation socio-économique de la plèbe romaine’, Rome, École Française de Rome - Academia Belgica.
- January, 30th 2017: ‘Gli schiavi pubblici a Roma’, Venice, Ca’ Foscari University of Venice.
- June, 14th 2017: ‘*Servi Publici* in Rome: Regular or Privileged Slaves?’, London, ICS.

Publications:

- Luciani F. ‘Notes on the External Appearance of Roman Public Slaves’. In: Binsfeld, A.; Ghetta, M., ed. *Ubi servi erant?* Die Ikonographie von Sklaven und Freigelassenen in der römischen Kunst. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2017. Forthcoming.
- Luciani F. ‘Public Slaves in Rome and in the Cities of the Latin West: New Additions to the Epigraphic Corpus’. In: Noreña, C.; Papazarkadas, N., ed. *Ancient Documents and their Contexts: Second North American Congress of Greek and Latin Epigraphy*. Brill, Leiden 2017. Forthcoming.
- Luciani F. ‘*Servi Publici* in Rome: Regular or Privileged Slaves?’. *Cahiers du Centre Glotz* 29, 2018. Submitted.

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