

A FEMALE DOCTOR (*MEDICA*) AT AUGUSTA EMERITA (MÉRIDA)? RE-EXAMINING *CIL* II 497 FROM HUMANIST READINGS TO THE LATEST DIGITAL EPIGRAPHY TECHNIQUES*

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ABSTRACT: This paper provides a critical re-examination of a funerary altar (*CIL* II 497) from Augusta Emerita (Mérida, Spain). It explores the strengths and weaknesses of all previous editions of the text from its first publication in 1633 to the present day, providing a critical review of the development of epigraphic scholarship on Mérida during this long period. Given the problems of all previous editions, including *CIL* II 497, it then re-examines the altar using traditional epigraphic methods alongside the latest digital techniques (especially Morphological Residual Modelling, M.R.M.) to provide a new edition of the text, while setting the presence of a female doctor at the provincial capital of Lusitania into the broader social context of medical practitioners in Rome's western provinces.

KEYWORDS: Augusta Emerita (Mérida), female doctors in the Roman provinces, funerary epigraphy, epigraphic manuscripts, digital epigraphy (especially M.R.M.).

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the cities of Roman Hispania, the colony of Augusta Emerita (Mérida) has provided one of the richest collections of evidence for doctors and the practice of medicine¹. Various assemblages of medical instruments have been discovered as grave-goods in burials in the colony's *suburbium*², while no fewer than six inscriptions mentioning medical practitioners are now known from the urban centre, as well as another from the colony's territory at Villafranca de los Barros, 45 km south of the urban centre³. Emerita's importance as a medical centre is underlined by the fact that a slave, Nothus, of one of the most prominent freedmen of Olisipo (Lisbon), the *Augustalis perpetuus* C. Heius Primus, was sent to Emerita in the mid-first century A.D. to learn medicine from a local slave doctor called Atimetus. Furthermore, an eye-doctor, Q. Aponius Rusticus, was attracted to the Lusitanian capital from his native Corduba in the Flavian period to practise his medical skills⁴. One of the most striking features of this material is that one of these doctors was female: Iulia Saturnina, according to the traditional reading of a funerary altar known since the early 17th century (Figs. 1-3).

¹ On medicine in Emerita, see Sanabria 1964; Bejarano 2015; cf. Curado 2004 (Visigothic Mérida). On doctors in the Hispanic provinces: Rémy 1991; Rémy & Faure 2010, 87-111, n.º 1-19; in Lusitania: Guerra & Reis 2018.

² Borobia 1988, 232-264; Bejarano 2002; Blanco & Peral 2005.

³ (1) *AE* 1999, 876 = *HEp* 7, 1997, 122 = Rémy & Faure 2010, 95-97, n.º 6; P. Sertorius Niger, *medic(us)* (first half of 1st c. A.D.); (2) Edmondson 2009a = *AE* 2009, 518 = *HEp* 18, 2009, 32 (c. A.D. 40-55): Atimetus, *medic(us)*, slave of M. Iulius Rufinus; (3) *AE* 1994, 859a = *HEp* 6, 1996, 102a = Rémy & Faure 2010, 92-93, n.º 4 (Flavian period): C. Domitius Pylades, *medic(us)*; (4) *AE* 1994, 840 = *HEp* 6, 1996, 83 = Rémy & Faure 2010, 90-92, n.º 3: Q. Aponius

Rusticus, *medicus ocular(ius)*, from Corduba (Flavian period); (5) *CIL* II 470 = *EE* VIII 16 = Rémy & Faure 2010, 89-90, n.º 2 (first half of 2nd c. A.D.): L. Cordius Symphorus, *medicus*; (6) *CIL* II 497 = *ILS* 7802 = Rémy & Faure 2010, 93-95, n.º 5 (the *medica* who is the subject of this paper). From Villafranca de los Barros: *CIL* II 5389 (+ p. 841, 1037), rev. Edmondson 1993 [1995], 30-33, no. 10 = Rémy & Faure 2010, 98-99, n.º 8: Ianuarius, slave of D(omitus?) Perca, *medicus* (Flavian period).

⁴ For Nothus, see further Edmondson 2009a; Alvar Ezquerro *et al.* 2021, 138-141, n.º XVIII; C. Heius Primus from Olisipo: Fernandes 2005 and 2007. Q. Aponius Rusticus: Alvar Ezquerro *et al.* 2021, 134-137, n.º XVII.

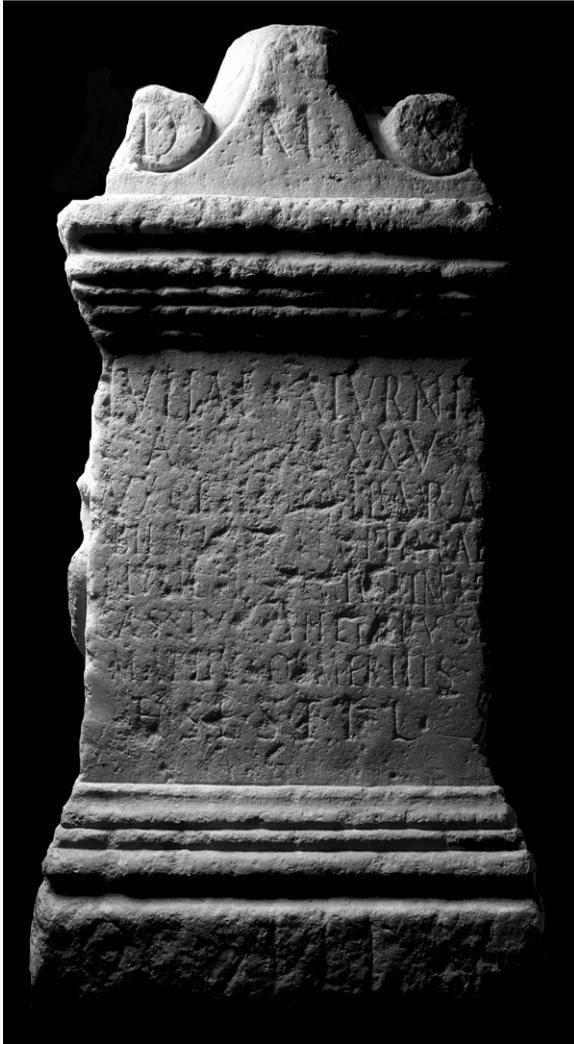


FIGURE 1. *Altar of Iulia Saturnia, medica.* Photo: H. Pires-Project CIL II Mérida.



FIGURE 2. *Rear side, with relief of baby in swaddling.* Photo: author.



FIGURES 3a-b. (a) *left side with praefericulum*; (b) *right side with patera*. Photos: author.

Most studies of this supposed female doctor start from Emil Hübner's text of her funerary altar, published in 1869 as *CIL* II 497. Although, as we shall see, the altar has remained in Mérida since its discovery in 1608 to the present day, Hübner was unable to study it directly during his brief visit to Mérida in March 1861 while he was preparing the entries for *CIL* II⁵. As a result, he was

⁵ Hübner's visit to Mérida: Hübner 1861, 377-389, esp. 382-383, 387-389.

forced to rely on earlier readings and chose to follow the text of José Alsinet de Cortada, chief doctor (*medico titular*) of Mérida in the 1750s, for his own edition of the inscription (Fig. 4):

497 Reperta a. 1608, *en mi casa* (quae fuit postea medici Cantos [*Ponz*] et sita est 'en la calle de Zamarrona, en el descubierta de ella' *Bayér*) cippus magnus marmoreus *Moreno et reliqui*. Intra domum vulgo de Porras *Alsinet*.

D M S
IULIAE · SATVRNINAE
ANN · XXXV
VXORI · INCOMPARABILI
S MEDICAE · OPTIMAE
MVLIERI · SANCTISSIMAE
CASSIVS · PHILIPPVS
MARITVS · OBMERITIS ^{'sic' Mor., Ponz}
H · S · E · S · T · T · L

in parte postica anaglyphum infantis fasciis involuti esse adnotant Moreno et Alsinet

Moreno f. 53 (inde **Martinus** misit **Maffeo** 425, 3); **Velazquez** ms. 13 et 25 (inde **Viu** 1, 54); **Alsinet** f. 3 quem sequor in vv. dividendis; **Bayér** f. 286; **Cornide** ms. **Matrit.** 18, 32; **Ponz** 8, 136 (inde **Masdeu** 6, 164, 828); **Laborde** 1, 126 tab. 189, 15; **Fernandez y Perez** p. 85, 4.

2 SATVRNIAE **Moreno, Ponz**; SATVRNI **Vel.,**
SATVRNIN III III **Bayér**; verum servavit **Alsinet**.
3 XXXV **Fern. y Perez**.

FIGURE 4. Reading of *Emil Hübner*, 1869 (*CIL* II 497).

Hübner noted that two of the eight independent editions that he had consulted —those by Moreno de Vargas and Ponz— had pointed out the grammatical error in the penultimate line in the phrase *ob meritis*, which should read *ob merita*, and that Moreno de Vargas and Alsinet had noted that the back of the altar was decorated with a relief of an infant wrapped in swaddling bands⁶. Given the authority accorded to texts published in the *CIL*, it is no surprise that Hübner

⁶ Luis José Velázquez de Velasco (the Marqués de Valdeflores) also noted the grammatical error by adding *sic* in his reading alongside line 8 (see Fig. 5a-b), while

José Cornide also mentioned the relief sculpture (see below, p. 270 and n. 48).

er's text was taken over without dissent by many subsequent epigraphers and historians of Roman medicine⁷. However, during his work in Mérida in 1928 for a planned (but never realized) new supplement to *CIL* II, Lothar Wickert raised considerable doubts about Hübner's text, especially his reading of the crucial term *medica* in the fifth line⁸. His comments, however, have gone largely unnoticed in subsequent scholarship. As a result, it is necessary to take a closer look at the variant readings from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries that were available to Hübner, when, we may suppose, the altar's surface was better preserved than it is now. This survey will reveal that Hübner's decision to adopt Alsinet's reading was somewhat arbitrary in a situation where alternative possibilities were available. Furthermore, the surface of the altar (Fig. 1) is now so badly worn that the readings of the deceased woman's *cognomen* and her supposed profession as a *medica* are far from certain. This problem, as well as the many variant readings made of the text both before and after Hübner, require a completely fresh study to be made of the surviving altar, to see if a more definitive edition of the text is possible. This study, conducted as part of the project to produce a new edition of all inscriptions from Emerita for the relevant fascicules of *CIL* II^{2/3}, will engage in a critical reassessment of the various versions of the texts that have been published since the altar was first discovered in Mérida in 1608 before turning to the use of some of the latest digital epigraphy techniques, especially Morphological Residual Modelling (M.R.M.) to reach the most authoritative reading possible of the altar's epitaph.

1. EARLY READINGS, 1633-1869

In 1633, Bernabé Moreno de Vargas (c. 1576-1648), a hereditary councillor (*regidor perpetuo*) and local *érudit* from Mérida, published in Madrid his *Historia de Mérida*, the work of an authentic historian steeped in the principles of Renaissance humanism, which he dedicated to the “most noble and ancient city of Mérida” (“la muy noble y antigua ciudad de Mérida”)⁹. In chapter XIII of its first book, the author discusses “the *cippi* and stones with Roman inscriptions which have been found in this city and have come to my notice”, beginning with those “stones with inscriptions” that were discovered in 1608, “when for the purpose of repairing the [Roman] bridge it was permitted to search for stones beneath the ground and many were found”¹⁰. One of these stones, according to Moreno de Vargas, had “on its reverse a relief of a child wrapped up and covered right down to the feet ‘in the French manner’”¹¹. The funerary altar came to form part of Moreno de Vargas' own collection of antiquities, displayed in the patio of his house, where it was seen by various antiquarians when they visited Mérida up until the end of the 18th century, as we shall see. Moreno de Vargas offered the following reading of the text:

⁷ For example, H. Dessau at *ILS* 7802. Medical historians: Gummerus 1932, 84, n.º 323; Cassani 1949, 56-57; Flemming 2000, 387-388, n.º 16 (with an incorrect *CIL* II reference); Buonopane 2003, 130, n.º 17; Alonso 2011a, 89-90, 101, n.º 8 and 2011b, 284, n.º 19; Flemming 2013, 284, 285.

⁸ Wickert 1934, 125-128 (cf. *AE* 1934, p. 7).

⁹ Moreno de Vargas 1633. Critical edition: Álvarez Sáenz de Buruaga 1975a. On the work, see Navarro del Castillo 1963; Sánchez Salor 1994-1995 [1998]; Álvarez Martínez 2011 [2016].

¹⁰ f. 50v.: “los cipos y piedras que con inscripciones romanas se han hallado en esta ciudad y venido a mi noticia. Y comenzaremos por las que se descubrieron el año de 1608, quando para el reparo de la puente se dio licencia para buscar piedras debaxo de tierra, y se hallaron muchas”.

¹¹ f. 52v.: “tiene en el reverso relevado un niño embuelto, y faxado hasta los pies a lo Frances”.

D M S
 IVLIAE. SATVRNIAE
 ANN.XXXXV.
 VXORI INCOMPARA
 BILI MEDICAE OPTIMAE
 MVLIERI SANCTISSIMAE
 CASSIVS PHILIPPVS
 MARITVS OBMERITIS
 H S E S T T L

He went on to offer an accurate translation, but then engaged in some rather fanciful discussion about the illustrious families of the Iulii, Cassii and Philippi, and even presumed that the deceased doctor may have been the mother or kinswoman of Saint Julia, companion of Eulalia, patron saint of Mérida, based on her name and good character¹².

More than a century later, the Real Academia de la Historia (henceforth R.A.H.) soon after its foundation in 1738 initiated a major project to gather as much evidence as possible about Spain's ancient past. In 1752, Luis José Velázquez de Velasco, later the second Marqués de Valdeflores (1722-1772), was charged by the king Fernando VI "to go verify and record the Antiquities of Spain, travelling around the Provinces of the Peninsula to carry out this objective" ("para ir a averiguar y reconocer las Antigüedades de la España, recorriendo a este fin las Provincias de la Península"). His eventual plan was to prepare a *New General History of Spain from Most Remote Times to the Year 1516* (*Nueva historia general de la España desde el tiempo más remoto hasta el año de 1516*)¹³. Unfortunately, his work was truncated for political reasons and never completed, but a substantial amount of the documentation that Velázquez had collected for it is preserved in the R.A.H. in Madrid, including an account of the journeys he undertook around Spain to gather this material¹⁴. His first port of call on his travels was Mérida, where he stayed from December 1752 to spring 1753, as can be inferred from the report he presented to the R.A.H. in November 1760¹⁵. Velázquez's reading of the altar's text is preserved among the archival material pertaining to his work as the fifth of a series of thirty-two inscriptions in a section entitled "The ancient inscriptions, which I saw and copied in Mérida, are the following"¹⁶ (Fig. 5a). Another autograph copy, with exactly the same text, though in capitals, survives on a sheet labelled "Inscriptions that are currently found in Mérida, copied by me" among a sequence of eighteen inscriptions from Emerita¹⁷ (Fig. 5b).

¹² f. 53r.: "Podría presumir fuesse madre o parienta de santa Julia, compañera de santa Eulalia, pues las buenas partes de su persona, y conformidad del nombre dan motivo a ello."

¹³ Maier & Manso 2015; cf. Canto 1994; Álvarez Martí-Aguilar 1996; Cebrián *et al.* 2005; Salas 2010, esp. 15-19 on the visit to Mérida in 1752-1753; Canto 2013; Abascal 2014, 199-204. On the drawings, Manso 2010.

¹⁴ For a detailed analysis, see Maier & Manso 2015, 13-116.

¹⁵ R.A.H., ms. 9-4160-1, outlining that his journey around Extremadura took place from 1 December 1752 to 10 September 1753, with Mérida his first destina-

tion. See Abascal & Cebrián 2005, 466, 473; Abascal & Cebrián 2009, 356, n. 1072.

¹⁶ Velázquez de Velasco, ms. 1752-1753 (R.A.H., ms. 9-4118-1), ff. 33r.-35r.: "Las inscripciones antiguas, que vi y copié en Mérida, son las siguientes". The text of the altar appears on f. 33v., n.º 5.

¹⁷ Velázquez de Velasco, ms. 1753 (R.A.H., ms. 9-4131-47), n.º 7: "Inscripciones q(ue) actualmente se hallan en Mérida, copiadas p(o)r mí". Yet another copy of the same text is preserved in further records of Velázquez's project: Velázquez de Velasco, ms. 1754 (R.A.H., ms. 9-7018), f. 65 [2], in a section where he lists a series of inscriptions involving individuals bearing the *gentilicium* Iulius.

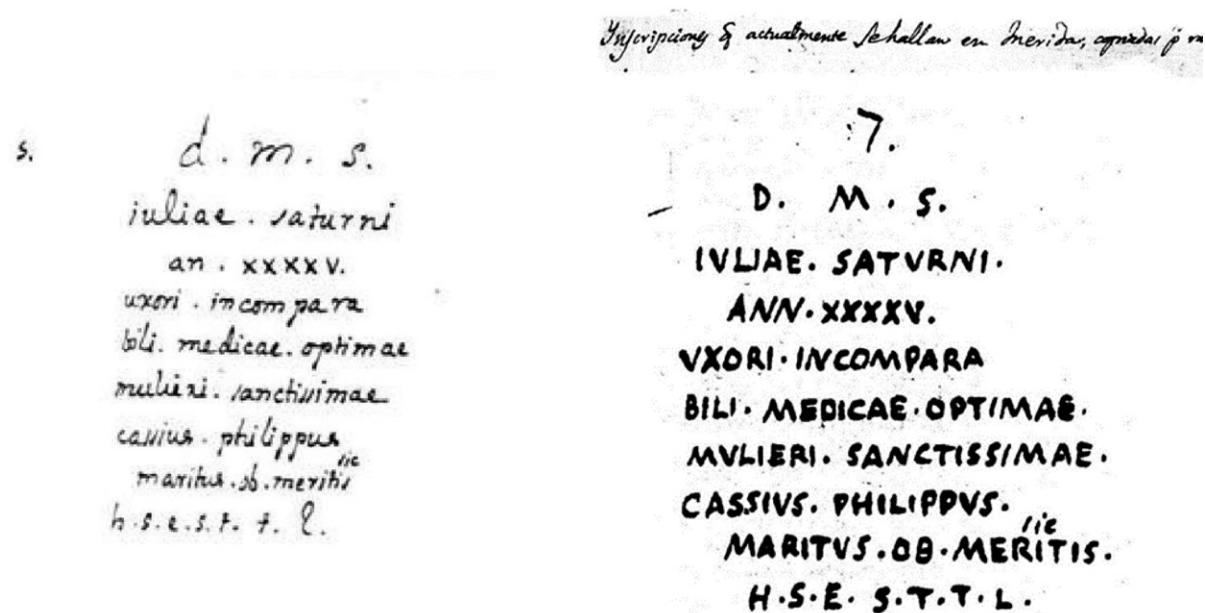


FIGURE 5. Copies of the text by L. J. Velázquez de Velasco, Marqués de Valdeflores, 1752-1753. (a) R.A.H., ms. 9-4118-1, f. 33v., n.º 5; (b) R.A.H., ms. 9-4131-47, n.º 7.

Velázquez's text coincides closely with that of Moreno de Vargas except in the reading of the deceased's *cognomen* in line 2, where he read *Saturni* in contrast with Moreno de Vargas' *Saturniae*. It appears that Velázquez chose not to complete the woman's *cognomen*, honestly recording what he could see on the stone and avoiding the question whether *Saturniae* or *Saturninae* should be understood¹⁸.

In exactly this same period, another local antiquarian, José Alsinet de Cortada (whose exact dates of birth and death are unknown), chief doctor (*médico titular*) of Mérida from 1750 to 1755, was actively collecting texts of the inscriptions from Mérida. As a correspondent of the R.A.H., Alsinet collaborated with Velázquez in his grand project, escorting the Marqués around Mérida during his visit in the winter of 1752-1753, although he frustrated him by not showing him some material, fearful that this might lead to its removal from Mérida¹⁹. Alsinet was also in frequent contact with other scholars in Madrid with epigraphic interests, most importantly the French Jesuit Alexandre Xavier Panel (1699-1764), numismatist, epigrapher and tutor to the royal children, who had served since 1743 as keeper of the Royal Cabinet of Coins and Medals ("Real Gabinete de Medallas") of the Royal Library, and in 1750 was responsible for setting up the numismatic collection of the R.A.H.²⁰.

¹⁸ José Viu y Moreu took over Velázquez's reading for his collection of inscriptions and monuments from Extremadura, first published in 1846, with an expanded second edition in 1852: Viu 1852, 1.53-54.

¹⁹ Velázquez's critical view of Alsinet is evident in two of the Marqués' personal letters dated 5 Febru-

ary 1754 and 17 April 1754 (preserved in the B.N.E.), quoted *in extenso* at Maier & Manso 2015, 66.

²⁰ Sánchez-Granjel 2010; López Gómez 1994, 31, 41, 44, 49, 51-53, 64, 76-77. For Panel's death in 1764 (not 1777), Hernando 2017, 79. On relations between Alsinet and Panel, *ibid.*, 109, 123, 128-30.

It was to Panel that Alsinet sent his own reading of this text, along with his readings of forty-six others from Mérida²¹.

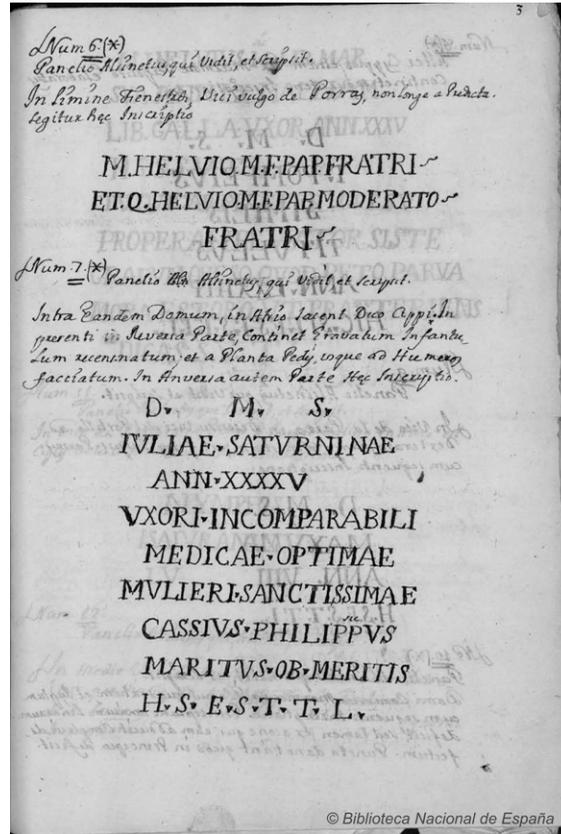


FIGURE 6. Copies of CIL II 559=5259 (n.º 6) and CIL II 497 (n.º 7), c. 1755, by José Alsinet, sent to Alexandre Xavier Panel (B.N.E., Madrid, ms. 8729/2, booklet inserted in the ms. after p. 688, f. 3 r., n.º 6-7).

Panel's copy of Alsinet's text (Fig. 6) makes it clear that Alsinet had himself seen the altar ("*Alsinetus qui vidit et scripsit*") alongside another funerary altar commemorating T. Pompeius Simi-

²¹ Hübner derived his text from the copy made by Alsinet to be found among a group of 47 texts from Mérida which Alsinet had sent to Panel. These form part of a large epigraphic sylloge prepared by Panel of 688 pages, plus 28 folios (Panel 1755-1764a = B.N.E., ms 8729/2) and appear in a booklet inserted in the ms. after p. 688 [according to the page numeration in pencil], ff. 1-12 at f. 3r., n.º 7. On this ms, see Hernando 2009, 315-333 and 2017, 106-110 (esp. 109 & fig. 15), 229-288, Anexo II (esp. 281-282, identify-

ing the 47 texts sent by Alsinet). A further copy of Alsinet's reading is preserved in Caja 2 of a collection of Panel's epigraphic *schedae* (Panel 1755-1764b = B.N.E., ms 20275), which includes three fascicules (fasc. 40-42) of copies of inscriptions from Mérida made by Panel, Francisco Pérez Bayer and Alsinet. See Hernando 2005, esp. 76-81, 2009, 404-408 and 2017, 121-124, 315-346, Anexo V, esp. 331-337, identifying the 114 texts from Mérida in fasc. 40-42.

lis Titullus (*CIL* II 587) in the main reception room (“in atrio”) of a house in the “vico de Porras not far from the gate”. “Within this same house”, he also saw and transcribed the epitaph of M. Helvius M. f. Pap. and his brother Q. Helvius M. f. Pap. Moderatus (*CIL* II 559=5259), inscribed on a block that had been reused to serve as a window lintel²². This appears to be the house that had previously belonged to Bernabé Moreno de Vargas, as is confirmed both by Agustín Francisco Forner y Segarra and by Francisco Pérez Bayer in his account of his visit to Mérida in 1782²³. Alsinet’s reading diverges from that of Velázquez, first, in the transcription of the deceased’s *cognomen* in line 2, where Alsinet confidently read *Saturninae* in contrast to Velázquez’s more conservative reading *Saturni...*, and, secondly, in its incorrect line-division between lines 4 and 5, where he indicates, wrongly, that *incomparabili* was inscribed in its entirety on line 4, whereas the stone clearly reveals that it was split between lines 4 and 5 (*incomparabili*), as Moreno de Vargas and Velázquez had correctly reported. Alsinet, like Moreno de Vargas, duly noted that on the reverse of the altar was carved a relief of a newborn infant wrapped in swaddling from its feet to its shoulders (“*gravatum infantem dum recens natum, et a Planta Pedis usque ad Humeros faciatum*”). It is hardly surprising that the chief doctor of Mérida, who went on to write a treatise on the use of quinine in medical practice, was interested in the text of this epitaph of an earlier medical practitioner²⁴.

Alsinet’s immediate successor as chief doctor, Agustín Francisco Forner y Segarra (1718-c. 1785), arrived in Mérida in 1756. He shared his predecessor’s interest in the town’s Roman antiquities and immediately started preparing a work entitled *Antigüedades de Mérida, metropolí primitiva de la Lusitania desde su fundación en razón de colonia hasta el reinado de los Árabes*²⁵. It is unclear when he completed this manuscript (perhaps c. 1780), but it remained unpublished during his lifetime and thus was not available to Hübner when he was preparing *CIL* II in the 1860s. Hübner, however, was aware of this work, which he described as the first part of a larger discussion of the antiquities of Extremadura that José Cornide had used in 1797 for his own treatment of the inscriptions of Augustobriga (Talavera la Vieja, prov. Cáceres), but Hübner could not locate it and assumed that it had perished²⁶. Forner’s study includes a substantial chapter on Mérida’s Roman inscriptions, but when the decision was taken at the end of the 19th century by the Commission of Historical and Artistic Monuments of the Province of Badajoz (“Comisión de Monumentos históricos y artísticos”) to publish the work, the editors took the unfortunate decision to exclude all those inscriptions where Forner’s readings concurred with those of Moreno de Vargas²⁷. Nevertheless, Forner did include a number of inscriptions that had not yet been published at the time he was preparing his manuscript²⁸, and his entire epigraphic corpus has the merit of including careful descriptions about the contemporary location of each of the stones included.

During his time in Mérida, Forner y Segarra played a key role in the conservation of Roman inscriptions by establishing the “Garden of Antiquities” —effectively Mérida’s first archaeological museum— in the Convent of Jesus of Nazareth (“Convento de Jesús Nazareno”), which then

²² Alsinet ap. Panel 1755-1764a = B.N.E., ms. 8729/2, booklet inserted after p. 688, f. 3r., n.º 7. Altar of T. Pompeius Similis Titullus: *ibid.*, f. 3v., n.º 8. Epitaph of the Helvii, *ibid.*, f. 3r., n.º 6 (with the location of the house).

²³ Forner y Segarra 1893 [c. 1756-1780], 91; Pérez Bayer: *v. infra*, p. XX.

²⁴ Cf. Alsinet de Cortada 1763 and 1774.

²⁵ On his medical career, see further López Gómez 1994, 49, 51-53, 88-92.

²⁶ Hübner at *CIL* II, p. 54; cf. Cornide 1796, 390-393. For Cornide’s favourable impression of Forner y Segarra’s work, see López Gómez 1997, 53.

²⁷ Forner y Segarra 1893 [c. 1756-1780], 81-147. For the editorial decision, *ibid.*, 84 note 1. For Forner y Segarra’s parallel manuscript on the antiquities of Extremadura as a whole, see Cerrillo 2017, with the review by J. M. Álvarez Martínez, *Cuadernos dieciochistas* 19, 2018, 353-355.

²⁸ Forner y Segarra 1893 [c. 1756-1780], 129-147.

functioned as a hospital (it is now the Mérida “Parador Nacional”), in collaboration with the Dominican monk Domingo de Nuestra Señora, who was then in charge of the hospital²⁹. Not surprisingly, this learned doctor provided ample commentary on the tombstone of a female medical practitioner, providing an impressive array of literary and legal texts, including Galen, Aetius of Amida, Pliny the Elder, Diodorus Siculus, the Hippocratic corpus, Plato and Ulpian, to show that the existence of a female doctor in the Roman period should cause no surprise. He confirmed that the inscription still remained in the house that had previously been owned by Moreno de Vargas in the calle de Santa Eulalia (which he spelled “Santa Olalla”), and which remained entailed to Vargas’ heirs³⁰. Forner read the text as follows:

D. M. S.
IVLIAE SATVRNINAE
ANN. XXXXV.
VXORI INCOMPARA
BILI. MEDICAE OPTIMAE
MVLIERI SANCTISSIMAE
CASSIVS PHILIPVS
MARITVS OBMERITIS
H. S. E. S. T. T. L.

Perhaps out of respect for his predecessor as Mérida’s chief doctor, Forner chose to follow Alsinet in reading the doctor’s name as *Iulia Saturnina* in line 2 in comparison to Moreno de Vargas’ *Iulia Saturnia*, but unlike Alsinet he used the correct line-divisions in transcribing the text, although he erred over the spelling of the dedicator’s *cognomen* in line 7, preferring *Philippus* to the correct reading, *Philippus*.

After Forner y Segarra had left Mérida for Guadalupe and then Alcántara, Antonio Ponz Piquer (1725-1792), a member of the royal court of Carlos III, who had been appointed a corresponding member of the Real Academia de la Historia in 1773 and secretary of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in 1776, visited Mérida in the extreme heat of June 1776, as part of his extensive travels in Extremadura, arriving from the north via Caparra, Coria, Alcántara, Cáceres, Aldea del Cano, Casas de Don Antonio and, lastly, Aljucén. He composed a detailed description of what he had observed in Mérida as “Letter IV” in volume VIII (published in 1778) of his monumental *Viage de España, en que se da noticia de las cosas mas apreciables, y dignas de saberse, que hay en ella* (“*Journey in Spain, in which notice is given of the things most appreciable and worth knowing about, that there are in it*”), a work he dedicated to his royal patron, Carlos III³¹. This hugely

²⁹ On the “Garden of Antiquities”, Álvarez & Nogales 2017, esp. 1443-1444; Barrera 2006-2007 [2009]; Álvarez Martínez 2010, 635-636.

³⁰ Forner y Segarra 1893 [c. 1756-1780], 93-94, with notes 1-6.

³¹ Ponz 1778, 105-152, §§ 1-61 (“Carta IV”), with some introductory comments at the end of “Carta III” about his arrival in Mérida in extremely hot conditions, where he remarks sardonically on the physical costs of learned research and caustically comments that his pur-

suit of knowledge should be all the more esteemed by members of the royal court, who preferred to remain there so as never to miss a single night of agreeable “tertulia” or an afternoon spent in a pleasant walk in the “Prado” (Ponz 1778, 103, § 29: “lo que cuesta el ser curioso y cuánto deben estimar saber lo mismo que yo, sin moverse de esa Corte, sin perder una noche la agradable tertulia, ni una tarde el amenísimo paseo del Prado”). On Ponz’s travels, see briefly Mora 1998, 47-48.

successful work, structured as a series of letters addressed to an anonymous friend, eventually extended to eighteen volumes, which were published between 1772 and 1794, and it was quickly translated into Italian, French and German, which ensured that it became widely known in erudite circles across Europe.

In his account of Mérida, Ponz transcribed thirty-four Roman and early Christian texts, thirty-two of which he claimed to have seen personally³². In his discussion of the epigraphic works that he had used in preparing *CIL* II, Hübner claimed that Ponz had tended not to study the inscriptions he included directly, preferring to reproduce texts provided by his friends or local contacts³³. However, near the end of his collection of inscriptions from Mérida, Ponz comments that his readers would find more texts in his work, copied with greater accuracy, than those to be found in Moreno de Vargas, even though he reminded his readers that he was not a professional antiquarian (“un antiquario de profesión”)³⁴:

These are the inscriptions, within a short span of time, that I have seen in Mérida, which are copied as best as I could, not as a professional antiquarian would do, who would reproduce the types of letters used and of each one of them as far as the smallest apices; for to do the contrary would be for that class of erudites a mortal sin. However, you will find many more texts, copied with more exactitude, than the few to be found in Bernabé Moreno de Vargas. I did not see two, which they told me the Conde de la Roca had in his house, apart from those which I have mentioned to you from the same house; but afterwards they gave me copies of them, and they are as follows ...

This would imply, in contradiction to what Hübner claimed, that, unless he was lying, Ponz had himself copied the previous thirty-two texts, unlike the final two (*CIL* II 510, 491), which he admits that he had not seen.

Ponz allegedly saw the funerary altar of the supposed *medica* “in the house of the Dr. Cantos, which had previously been owned by Moreno de Vargas” along with the epitaphs of T. Pompeius Similis Titullus (*CIL* II 587) and the brothers M. Helvius M. f. Pap. and Q. Helvius M. f. Pap. Moderatus (*CIL* II 559=5259); i.e., precisely the same inscriptions that Moreno de Vargas and Alsinet had been reported from the house (*v. supra*, p. 260-264)³⁵. Ponz read the text as follows:

³² Ponz 1778, 133-148, §§ 43-56.

³³ Hübner at *CIL* II, p. xxiii, n.º 74.

³⁴ Ponz 1778, 148-149, §56: “Estas son las inscripciones, á corta diferencia, que yo he visto en Mérida, las quales van copiadas conforme mejor he podido, no como haría un antiquario de profesión, que retrataría los caracteres de las letras, y de cada una de ellas hasta los más menudos ápices; pues lo contrario sería para aquella clase de eruditos un pecado mortal. Sin embargo, hallará V. muchas más, y con más exactitud copiadas, que las pocas que se encuentran en Bernabé

Moreno de Vargas. No ví dos, que me dixeron había en casa el Conde de la Roca, además de las que he referido á V. de la misma casa; pero después me dieron copia de ellas, y son las siguientes.”

³⁵ Ponz 1778, 135-136, §46; cf. Moreno de Vargas 1633, ff. 52v.-54 r., also reporting that he owned the funerary monuments of Egnatia Rufina, Munatia Emmis and M. Attius Firminus, Interanniensis (*CIL* II 552, 580, 509). Alsinet: apud Panel 1755-1764a = B.N.E. Madrid, ms. 8729/2, ff. 3r.-3v., n.º 6-8.

IVLIAE SATVRNIAE
 AN XXXXV
 VXORI INCOMPARA
 BILI. MEDICAE OPTIMAE
 MVLIERI. SANCTISSIMAE
 CASSIVS PHILIPPVS
 MARITVS OB MERITIS¹
 H. S. E. S. T. T. L.

¹ Así está escrito.

His reading coincides in large part with that of Moreno de Vargas: he gives the deceased's *cognomen* as *Saturniae* in line 1 and has the correct line division in lines 3-4. This raises the strong suspicion that he simply took over Moreno de Vargas' reading, despite his claim to autopsy, and it is also possible that he had seen the text of Velázquez, since he notes the grammatical error in *ob meritis* in the penultimate line in a brief footnote ("así está escrito"), which Velázquez had marked *sic* in his copies of the text (see Fig. 5a-b, above)³⁶. However, Ponz carelessly omitted to report the dedication *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum)* inscribed on the volutes and pediment of altar, which had been duly reported in all previous editions of this inscription, and in his line 2 he read *an.* rather than *ann.* He then notes that it can be inferred from the relief of a baby in swaddling robes on the reverse of the altar that "this Julia looked after children"³⁷.

The next antiquarian to inspect the altar was Canon Francisco Pérez Bayer (1711-1794) from Valencia, instructor (*preceptor*) of the royal princes since 1767 and one of Spain's leading epigraphic scholars of the 18th century, soon to become the head of the Royal Library. He had made Ponz's acquaintance during their time in Italy in the 1750s³⁸, and, like Alsinet, he too was in regular correspondence with Alexandre Xavier Panel, providing him with texts of further inscriptions³⁹. Towards the end of a long journey through Andalucía, Portugal and Extremadura, Pérez Bayer visited Mérida in December 1782, arriving from Talavera and Lobón to the west the evening of Tuesday 10 December, as he describes towards the end of the second part of his *Diario del viaje desde Valencia a Andalucía y Portugal*⁴⁰. The following day, escorted around the city by Dr. Pas-

³⁶ Hübner claimed (*CIL* II, p. 54) that Ponz often relied on the texts of Alsinet, but Alsinet read the deceased's name in line 2 as *Iuliae Saturninae*, did not note the grammatical error in *ob meritis* and, rather curiously, inserted a *sic* after the dedicator's *cognomen Philippus* (see above, Fig. 6). Thus, it seems clear that Ponz did not use Alsinet's text for this inscription.

³⁷ Ponz 1778, 135-136, §46: "Detrás de esta piedra está figurado un niño envuelto; de donde se puede inferir, que esta Julia curaba los niños." Ponz's reading was taken over by Juan Francisco de Masdeu in the sixth volume of his monumental *Historia crítica de España, y de la cultura española en todo género* (in a group of five inscriptions relating to doctors): Masdeu 1789, 164-165, n.º 828.

³⁸ Mateu 1953; Mestre 2010. For his relations with Antonio Ponz, see Diz 2012.

³⁹ Hernando 2017, 57-60, 88-89, 107-108, 115, 121, 123, 130-131 (letter of Pérez Bayer to Panel, 14 Aug. 1754), 141-145, 149, 151, 153-155. See also Hernando 2019.

⁴⁰ Pérez Bayer 1782. An original autograph version of this second part of this work is preserved in the library of the Universitat de València (Biblioteca Històrica, ms. 0935). For a copy of the entire work in the Biblioteca Nacional (B.N.E., ms. 5953-5954), see <http://bdh.bne.es/bnesearch/detalle/bdh0000145326>. This copy was used for the printed edition of Mestre Sanchis *et al.* 1998, esp. 585-600 for his account of his visit to Mérida, since it reproduces the same small

cual Sabater, a fellow Valencian and now Mérida’s chief doctor, he dutifully recorded in his journal some forty Roman and early Christian inscriptions⁴¹. In the calle Zamarrona he visited the house that had once belonged to Moreno de Vargas, “historian of Mérida”, where he saw the same three inscriptions that Ponz had observed there six years earlier (*CIL* II 559=5259, 587 and 497) and transcribed their texts in the exact same order (Fig. 7a-b).

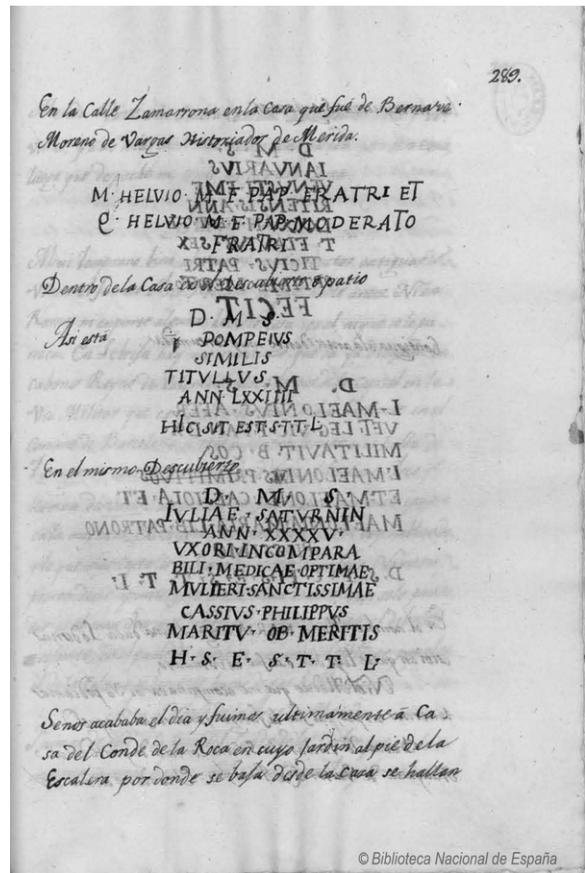
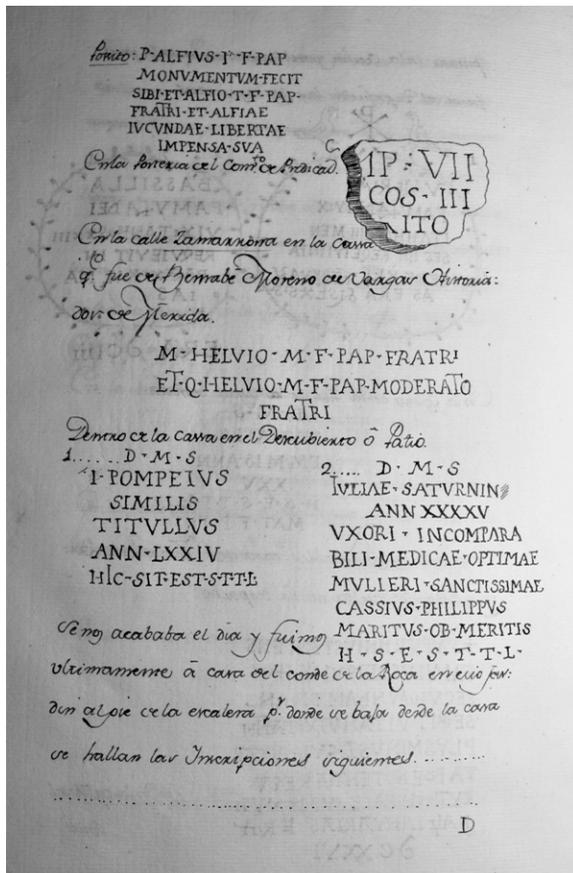


FIGURE 7. Reading of F. Pérez Bayer, 11 December 1782. (a) *Bibl. Històrica, Universitat de València, ms. 0935, f. 338v.*; (b) *B.N.E. Madrid, ms. 5954, f. 289r.*

transcription error in line 8 of the text as the ms. in the B.N.E., reading *maritu* (cf. Fig. 7b) instead of the correct text *maritus* to be found in Pérez Bayer’s autograph copy (Fig. 7a). Curiously, his autograph copy of *CIL* II 587 transcribes the deceased’s age-at-death in line 5 as *LXXIV* (Fig. 7a), whereas the copy in the B.N.E. correctly has *LXXIII* (Fig. 7b): cf. Gamer 1989, 196, BA 47, Plate 83a (photo). On Pérez Bayer’s entire journey, which lasted from 16 April to 30 December 1782, see Salas 2007 (esp. 20-21 for his time in Mérida); more briefly Mora 1998, 45-46. For his arrival in Mérida, U.V., B.Hist., ms. 0935, f. 333v. = B.N.E., ms. 5954, f. 283r.

⁴¹ U.V., B.Hist., ms. 0935, ff. 333v.-339r. = B.N.E., ms. 5954, ff. 283v.-289v. The Roman inscriptions from Mérida that Pérez Bayer recorded are: *CIL* II 465, 468, 472, 476, 477, 481, 481, 491, 497, 502, 504, 505, 512, 515, 528, 540, 546, 556, 559, 579, 580, 585, 587, 592, 594, 598. For Sabater, see López Gómez 1994, 112-116.

Pérez Bayer reports that the monument of the supposed female doctor was situated “in the same *descubierto*” (i.e., patio) as the altar for T. Pompeius Similis Titullus (*CIL* II 587). However, in contrast to Ponz, he read the deceased’s *cognomen* as *Saturnin.*, i.e., *Saturnin(ae)*, following Alsinet, but preferred the (correct) division of lines 3-4 as given in the earlier readings of Moreno de Vargas, Velázquez and Ponz, whereas Alsinet, as we have seen, had transcribed *incomparabili* in its entirety on line 4 of the text. Pérez Bayer goes on to mention that he then visited the palace of the Conde de la Roca, in the garden of which he recorded two further funerary altars (*CIL* II 505 and 491)⁴². By the end of the day, both he and his escort, the learned doctor Sabater, were so fatigued that they could not stand up any longer after all their perambulations⁴³. The following day, Thursday 12 December, they toured the town’s Roman monuments, inspecting the so-called Arch of Trajan, the theatre, amphitheatre and circus before Pérez Bayer left after lunch for San Pedro de Mérida, where he spent the night⁴⁴.

Sixteen years later, José Cornide de Folgueira y Saavedra (1734-1803) visited Mérida in late October / early November 1798 en route for Portugal, arriving on Sunday 28 October and departing on Saturday 3 November. A member of the royal court of Carlos IV since 1789 after holding a series of important administrative positions in his native Galicia, he was then devoting his energies to studying the antiquities of Spain, which had led to his election in 1792 as a Fellow (“académico numerario”) of the R.A.H. His trip to Portugal, which lasted from 20 October 1798 to 28 March 1801, though styled a “literary journey” (“viaje literario”) in the same manner as Velázquez’s, Ponz’s and Pérez Bayer’s travels earlier in the 18th century, had the clandestine purpose of discovering information about Portuguese military defences at a time of growing political tension between Spain and Portugal. His antiquarian interests provided an ideal cover for what was in essence a spying mission⁴⁵.

Cornide arrived in Mérida well prepared, with a dossier of notes on the inscriptions previously seen by the Marqués de Valdeflores, Alsinet and Forner y Segarra⁴⁶. During his week’s visit, he reports in his unpublished journal of his visit that he saw the funerary altar of the supposed female doctor “in the house that was once owned by Bernabé Moreno de Vargas in the patio”, where it was still preserved along with the elegantly decorated funerary altar for T. Pompeius Similis Titullus (*CIL* II 587). He described the altar and then recorded its text as follows⁴⁷:

The other is another cippus a little smaller than the preceding one [i.e., *CIL* II 587], also with its sacrificial jug (“su guturnio o preferículo”) and, on the reverse, with a relief of child wrapped

⁴² U.V., B.Hist., ms. 0935, ff. 338v.-339r. = B.N.E., ms. 5954, ff. 289r.-289v. On the palacio of the Conde de la Roca, Álvarez Sáenz de Buruaga 1975b. By comparison, Ponz reported three inscriptions from this palacio: Ponz 1778, 138, §49 (*CIL* II 505, which he saw), 148, §56 (*CIL* II 510 and 491, which he did not see).

⁴³ U.V., B.Hist., ms. 0935, f. 339r. = B.N.E., ms. 5954, f. 289v.: “Ni el médico que me campanava ni Yo podíamos tenernos en pie, tal fue la fatiga y andanzas de aquel día.”

⁴⁴ U.V., B.Hist., ms. 0935, ff. 339r.-345r. = B.N.E., ms. 5954, ff. 290r.-295r.

⁴⁵ On Cornide, in general see Gil 1991; López Gómez 1997; Maier 2010. For this visit, see in detail Abascal & Cebrián 2009, 75-129 (esp. p. 94 for his stay in Mérida). On his time in Extremadura, see also Abas-

cal 2014, 204-215. On Carlos IV, Manuel Godoy (the Príncipe de la Paz) and their patronage of Spanish archaeological research, Canto 2001, esp. 32-70.

⁴⁶ Abascal 2014, 213.

⁴⁷ Cornide, ms. s. XVIII (R.A.H., ms. 9-3899-6). For the transcription of the section of this ms. dealing with the inscriptions he saw during his visit to Mérida, see Abascal & Cebrián 2009, 346-366. The description of *CIL* II 497 is on p. 364, along with that of three others from the house formerly owned by B. Moreno de Vargas: i.e., on p. 364 the altars of T. Pompeius Similis Titullus (*CIL* II 587), P. Aelius Vitalis, Aug. lib., *tabularius prov. Lusitaniae et Vettoniae* (*CIL* II 485), on p. 365 the epistyle block of two Helvii brothers (*CIL* II 559 = 5259). Cf. Abascal & Cebrián 2005, 156 (text), 183 (drawing).

right down to the feet; of this, the same Moreno de Vargas talks on fol(io) 53 of the said *History* and, although it has become a little worn with the passage of time, the inscription reads as follows⁴⁸:

D. M. S.
 IVLIAE. SATVRNIAE
 ANN. XXXXV.
 VXORI INCOMPARA
 BILI MEDICAE OPTIMAE
 MVLIERI SANCTISSIMAE
 CASSIVS PHILIPPVS
 MARITVS OBMERITVS
 H. S. E. S. T. T. L.

FIGURE 8. *Reading of José Cornide, 1789 (R.A.H., ms. 9-3899-6). After Abascal & Cebrián Fernández 2009, 364.*

This text differs from those of Alsinet and Pérez Bayer and returns to that of Moreno de Vargas, most importantly in reading *Saturniae* in line 2. It, therefore, seems that Cornide simply copied Moreno de Vargas' text rather than produce his own reading.

A pencil drawing, finished in black ink, of this altar and that of T. Pompeius Similis Titullus, produced between *c.* 1798 and 1803, survives among Cornide's papers in the R.A.H. (Fig. 9). Alongside the altar commemorating the female doctor, a comment was added: "This is the front of the tomb which has on its back the stone with the child in swaddling ("este es el frente de el sepulcro que tiene / à su espalda / la lapida con / el niño fajado"). Unfortunately, the drawing of the text, although neat, was carelessly done with several errors over textual details (*Iulia* for *Iuliae*, *incomparabili* for *incomparabili*, *Philippus* for *Philippus* and *h. s. est.* for *h. s. e.*) and with incorrect line-divisions in lines 4-8. We must, therefore, place greater confidence in Cornide's autograph copy of the inscription's text (Fig. 8), taken over from Moreno de Vargas, than in this drawing.

⁴⁸ "La otra es otro cipo algo más pequeño que el antecedente, también con su guturnio o preferículo y, en el reberso [reverso], con un niño faxado [fajado] hasta los pies de relieve; de ella habla el mismo Moreno de

Vargas, en el fol. 53 de la d(ic)ha *Historia* y, aunque se halla un poco gastada del tiempo, se lee la inscripción, q(u)e es la siguiente."

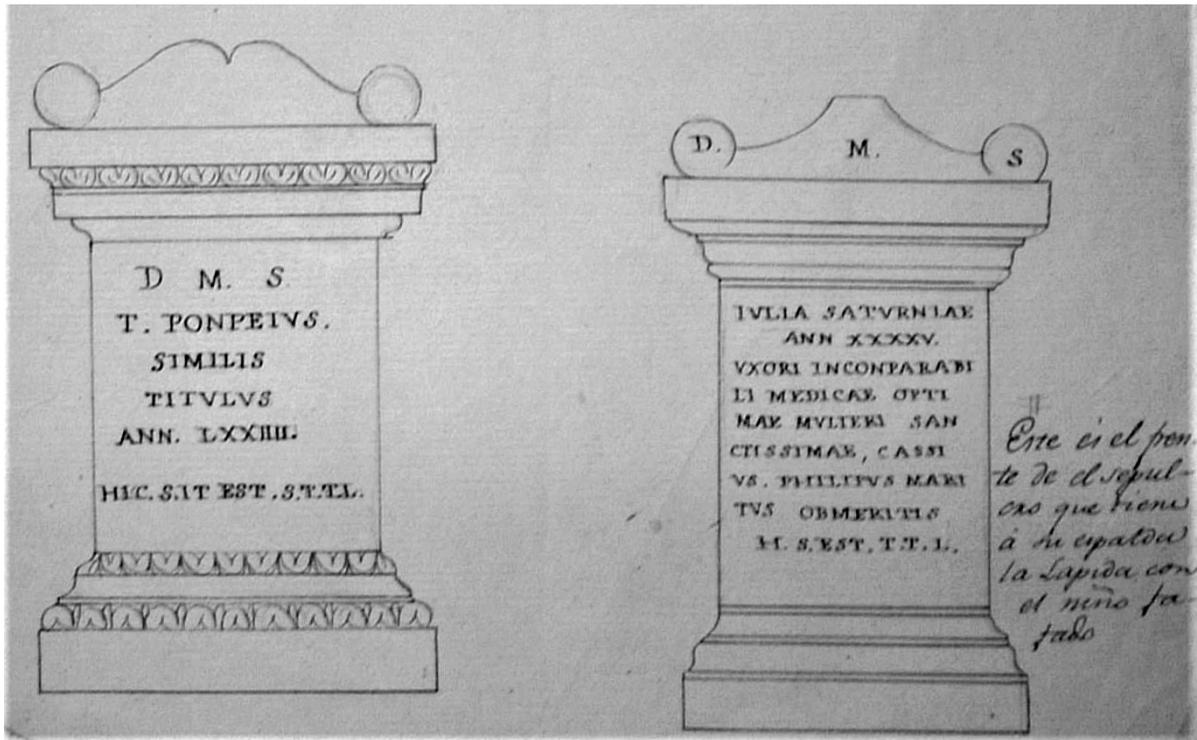


FIGURE 9. Drawings (c. 1798-1803) of the altars of T. Pompeius Similis Titullus (CIL II 587) and Iulia Saturnia (CIL II 497) from the papers of José Cornide in the R.A.H., Madrid (R.A.H. 9-6487-1b). Photo: J. M. Abascal (2003).

Interestingly, exactly these same textual errors occur in a drawing of this funerary altar by Fernando Rodríguez, a native of Mérida, executed on 24 May 1796 as part of a commission he had received from the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando to produce a series of drawings of Mérida's Roman antiquities⁴⁹. One of his plates (RABASF, inv. A-5927, n.º 10), divided into four quarters, includes drawings of the funerary altars of T. Pompeius Similis Titullus (n.º 1 = CIL II 587), the female doctor (n.º 2 = CIL II 497) and Marius Drosus (n.º 4 = CIL II 577), as well as a Roman column that stood in the Plaza (Mayor) in 1796 (n.º 3)⁵⁰. The drawing includes careful depictions of the reliefs that decorate the sides and back of the altar of the female doctor, as well as detailed measurements of the various mouldings that formed part of the altar's entablature and plinth⁵¹.

⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis of the value of his drawings for the archaeology of Mérida, see Morán & Pizzo 2015. They are still preserved in the Academy: RABASF, inv. A-5927.

⁵⁰ According to Rodríguez's note at the top of the plate: "La piedra n. 3 está en la Plaza arrimada a la fa-

chada de las casas consistoriales ...": see Morán & Pizzo 2015, 92.

⁵¹ <https://www.academiacolecciones.com/dibujos/inventario.php?id=A-5927>, on which see Arbaiza & Heras 1998, 322, n.º 10 and Plate 9; Morán & Pizzo 2015, 92-93, with Plate XXXII.

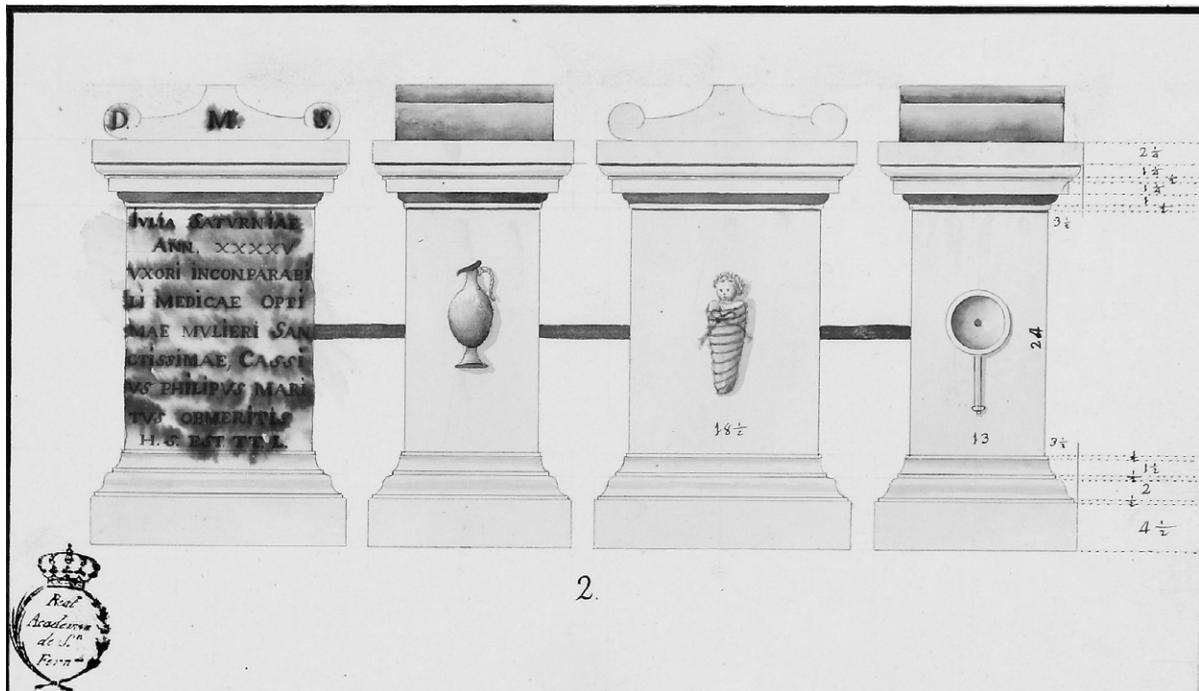


FIGURE 10. Drawing of the altar of the female doctor by Fernando Rodríguez, 1796. (RABASF, inv. A-5927, n.º 10.2). Photo: courtesy of C. J. Morán Sánchez.

Rodríguez's drawing of the altar of T. Pompeius Similis Titullus on this same plate (Fig. 11) has exactly the same textual errors as the drawing of this monument found among Cornide's papers (of c. 1798-1803) (cf. Fig. 9): *Ponpeius* for *Pompeius*, *Titulus* for *Titullus*, although the drawing in Cornide's papers ends correctly with the formula "S.T.T.L." in contrast to Rodríguez's rather curious "S.II"). These shared errors raise the serious possibility that Cornide's anonymous draftsman may have based his simpler versions on Rodríguez's more elaborate earlier drawings. The fact that these drawings are found among Cornide's papers may result from Cornide's decision, taken at the start the 19th century, to revive the plan to create a major corpus of inscriptions from Roman Hispania, for which all sorts of drawings and copies of texts were made from other works and sent to Cornide⁵². The drawings shown in Fig. 9 cannot have been executed *in situ* in Mérida during Cornide's visit in 1798, since they do not correspond with the versions of the texts of the two altars that Cornide recorded on that occasion.

⁵² For this project, see Abascal 2010.

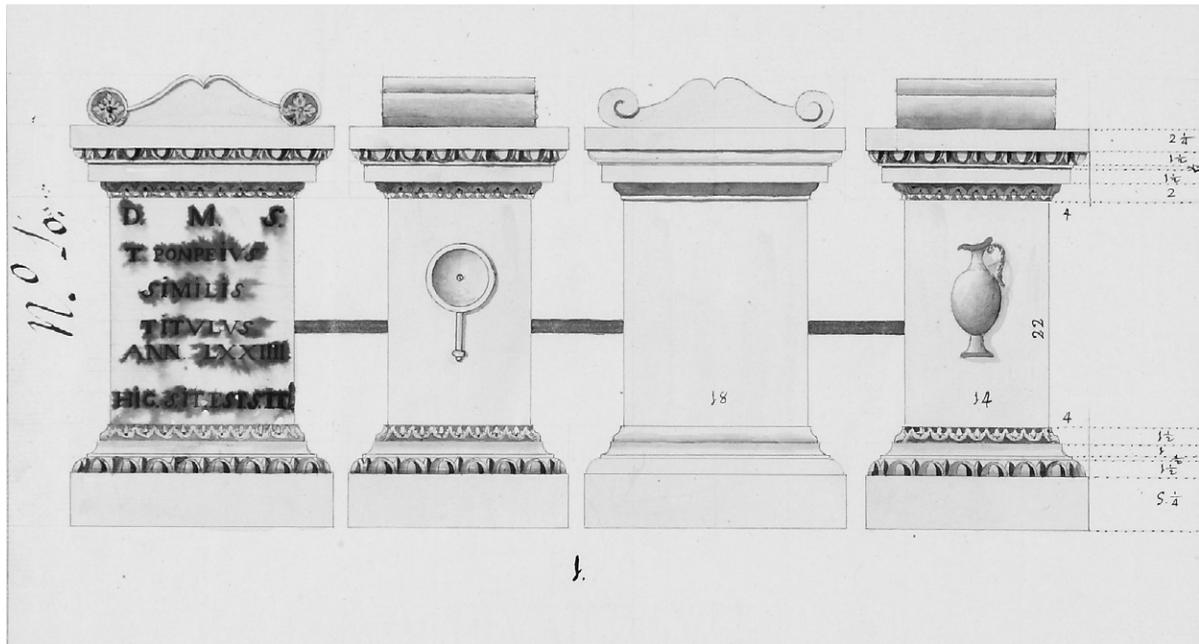


FIGURE 11. Drawing of the altar of T. Pompeius Similis Titullus by Fernando Rodríguez, 1796. (RABASF, inv. A-5927, n.º 10.1). Photo: courtesy of C. J. Morán Sánchez.

Another rather different drawing of the altar appeared in the highly successful *Voyage pittoresque et historique de l'Espagne* of Alexandre de Laborde (1773-1842) in the second part of Volume I, published in 1811. This French aristocrat of Spanish descent, whose father had sent him away to Vienna in 1789 at the time of the French Revolution, undertook a grand tour of Spain at the turn of the 18th to the 19th century. As part of this trip, he visited Mérida with a team of Spanish and French artists, who produced the series of frequently reproduced drawings of its archaeological remains⁵³. A depiction of the funerary altar of the female doctor appears in Plate 189 (n.º 15) as part of an imaginative montage of twenty-five inscriptions from Mérida and other Roman sites in Extremadura (Fig. 12):

⁵³ On Laborde's work on Mérida, see Caballero 2004; Morán 2009, 186-196. The precise date of his visit is unclear. For arguments that the *Voyage pittoresque et historique de l'Espagne* was prepared between 1801 and 1806, see Canto 2001, 49-58,

esp. 55, accepted by Caballero 2004, 59-62. The first part of Vol. I was published in 1806, the second part (which included the material on Mérida) in 1811; the first part of Vol. II appeared in 1812, the second part in 1820.



FIGURE 12. Montage of various inscriptions from Extremadura, with a detail showing the altar of the female doctor from Mérida (n.º 15): from A. de Laborde, Voyage pittoresque et historique de l'Espagne, vol. I, pt. II (1811), Plate 189.

Although a rather stylized rendition of the altar, the drawing does capture aspects of its curved and unusually elevated pediment. The line-divisions of the text are reproduced accurately, which is not the case in the more or less contemporary drawings by Fernando Rodríguez (Fig. 10) and the one found among Cornide's papers in the R.A.H. (Fig. 9). However, Laborde's draftsman committed errors over the dedicator's *gentilicium* in line 7 (*Casius* for *Cassius*) and carelessly omitted the S of the formula *s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(evis)* in the final line. Like Velázquez in 1752-1753, this same draftsman preferred to read *Saturni* in line 2. However, in his translation and brief commentary on the text Laborde himself took her full name to be Iulia Saturnina ("Julie Saturnine") and made reference to the inscriptions relating to female doctors to be to be found "in Gruter", i.e.,

in Jan Gruter's substantial epigraphic corpus of 1602, *Inscriptiones antiquae totius orbis Romani in corpus absolutissimum redactae*⁵⁴:

N.º 15. « A Julie Saturnine, morte à l'âge de quarante-cinq ans, épouse incomparable, médecin excellent, femme très respectable, Cassius Philippus, son mari, éleva ce monument à cause de toutes des qualités. Elle repose ici, que la terre lui soit légère. » On voit dans Gruter plusieurs inscriptions de femmes qui exerçoient la médecine; elles étoient en même temps chargées des accouchements, et leur profession étoit très respectée.

The final edition of the altar's text prior to *CIL* II appeared in the *Historia de las Antigüedades de Mérida* by Gregorio Fernández y Pérez (1778-1837), Corresponding Member of the R.A.H. from 31 December 1825 onwards and parish priest of the church of Santa Eulalia in Mérida from 1826 until his appointment as canon at the cathedral of Badajoz in 1832. It was during his time in Mérida that he composed his history of Mérida, which was not published until 1857, some twenty years after his death, thanks to the efforts of the Commission of Historical and Artistic Monuments of the Province of Badajoz ("Comisión de Monumentos históricos y artísticos de la Provincia de Badajoz")⁵⁵. Fernández y Pérez included a text of the altar of the female doctor as part of his brief survey of sixty-six tombstones from the Roman colony ("Lápidas sepulcrales encontradas en Mérida"). While admitting that some readers might find them of little interest, he argued that they were useful for an understanding of the history of Mérida, giving it some lustre, and insisted that his small corpus of epitaphs would ensure that notice of them was not lost⁵⁶. For those texts already published, he relied heavily on the earlier editions of Moreno de Vargas and Ponz, even repeating some of their errors. However, he did include nine unpublished funerary monuments that he had himself seen in private collections in Mérida, drawings of six of which appear in Plate 4 of the volume⁵⁷. For his version of the funerary altar of the female doctor (p. 85, n.º 4), he evidently followed the reading of Moreno de Vargas, with the same line-divisions, although he transcribed the deceased's age-at-death incorrectly in line 3, reading *ann. XXXV* rather than *ann. XXXXV* (see Fig. 13):

⁵⁴ Laborde 1811, 126 and Plate 189, n.º 15. Unfortunately, this plate is not discussed in Caballero 2004, probably because it does not relate solely to Mérida. For *medicae* in Gruter's corpus, cf. Gruter 1602, n.º 635-636 in the section of his collection devoted to "*inscriptions officiorum minorum, artium, studiorum, &c.*"

⁵⁵ Fernández y Pérez 1857 [c. 1830].

⁵⁶ Fernández y Pérez 1857 [c. 1830], 84: "Algunos pensarán que estas piedras son poco interesantes, pero no tiene duda que traen su utilidad á la historia, y que son de lustre para la ciudad de Mérida; y pues que conviene que no se pierda su memoria, insertaré aquí todas aquellas de que hay noticia, tanto por las publicadas como por haberse descubierto modernamente, y que yo he visto, y existen en poder de algunas personas particulares de esta ciudad." For the full corpus, *ibid.*, 85-88, n.º 1-66.

⁵⁷ The nine previously unpublished texts are *CIL* II 541 (Fernández y Pérez 1857 [c. 1830], 85, n.º 2, with Plate 4.6), 522 (*id.*, 86, n.º 15, with Plate 4.2), 516 (*id.*, 86, n.º 16, with Plate 4.3), 543 (*id.*, 87, n.º 26, with Plate 4.5), 498 (*id.*, 88, n.º 41, with Plate 4.7), 532 (*id.*, 88, n.º 43), 560 (*id.*, 89, n.º 62), 570 (*id.*, 89, n.º 63) and one (*id.*, 88, n.º 40, with Plate 4.4) that seems to remain unpublished. He derived 39 texts from Moreno de Vargas (n.º 1, 4, 6-9, 11-14, 18-22, 28-39, 42, 44-47, 53-55, 58, 60, 61 and 64), 14 from Ponz (n.º 3, 5, 17, 23-25, 27, 48-51, 56, 57, 59), three from Pérez Bayer and Cornide (n.º 52, 65, 66) and one from Masdeu, who had in turn derived it from an earlier reading by Accursius (n.º 10).

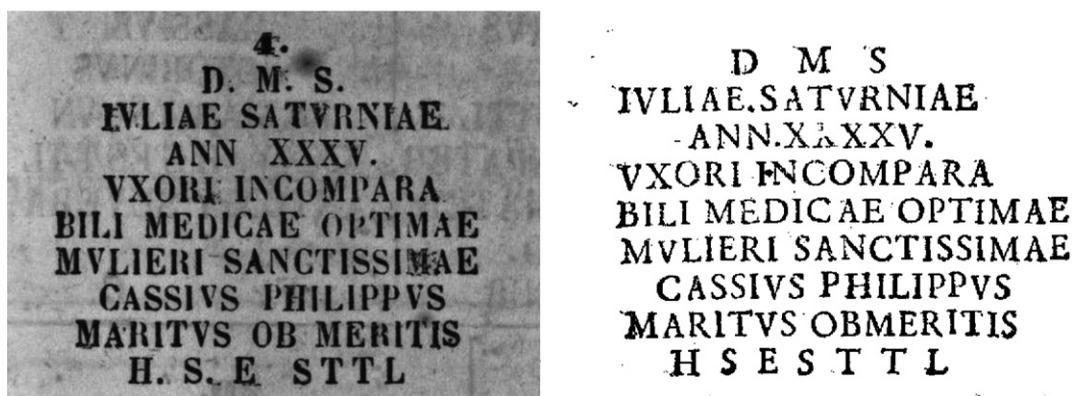


FIGURE 13. Text of Fernández y Pérez, c. 1831, p. 85, n.º 4 (left), compared with that of Moreno de Vargas, 1633, f. 53r. (right).

This detailed analysis of the versions of the text produced between 1633 and 1831 raises serious questions about why Hübner preferred Alsinet's reading over the many others that were available to him. As we shall see, there is insufficient space at the end of line 2 of the epitaph to include a *cognomen* of the length of *Saturnina* and the surviving text on the altar makes it clear that Alsinet had erred in several of his line-divisions, which Hübner adopted for his edition of the text as *CIL* II 497, even though he was aware that most other authorities reported the organization of the text differently and, as we shall see, correctly. In his conspectus of earlier authorities on the epigraphy of Mérida, Hübner reveals that in general he thought quite highly of Alsinet's work: "The inscriptions are carefully copied, with a few exceptions (such as [*CIL* II] 556, 557, 572), the indications of findspots are very accurate, but they are written in semi-barbarous Latin, but I have emended their barbarity there quite a few times"⁵⁸. It must have been his general confidence in Alsinet's readings that persuaded Hübner to accept the local doctor's reading of the funerary altar under discussion. What is not in question is that all the readings of the altar carried out in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries concurred that it was dedicated by a certain Cassius Philippus to his "incomparable wife, excellent doctor and most virtuous woman ... on account of her merits".

2. READINGS SINCE HÜBNER (1911-2011)

By 1910 at the latest, the altar had passed from private hands into the collection of the Museo Arqueológico de Mérida (inv. n.º 158). The museum's registry ("libro de registro") records its provenance as the calle de Santa Eulalia, the street where Moreno de Vargas' house was located according to Forner y Segarra and where Cornide saw the altar in 1798⁵⁹. In 1911 a

⁵⁸ *CIL* II, p. 54: *Tituli descripti sunt diligenter paucis exceptis (veluti n. 556. 557. 572), locorum indicationes accuratissime, sed sermone Latino semibarbaro scriptae, quarum barbariem his illic aliquantisper emendavi.*

⁵⁹ I am grateful to Dr. J. M. Murciano Calles (MNAR) for this information. Alsinet says that it was the "vico de Porras cerca de la puerta", Ponz "in the house of Dr. Cantos, previously owned by Moreno de Vargas", Pérez Bayer "in the calle Zamarrona in the house of Moreno de Vargas".

new reading of this funerary altar was published by Fidel Fita i Colomé (1835-1918) and José Ramón Mérida y Alinari (1876-1930) in a brief article editing ten inscriptions from the museum's collection along with another three from Reina (prov. Badajoz)⁶⁰. Fita, a leading Jesuit, was one of Spain's major epigraphers of the period, and he provided Hübner with much information about inscriptions from Mérida and other sites in the Hispanic provinces for the Supplement to *CIL* II, published in 1892, and the addenda that Hübner prepared for volumes VIII and IX of *Ephemeris Epigraphica*, published in 1899 and (posthumously) in 1913. Fita had been a Fellow of the R.A.H. (*académico de número*) since 1879 and would soon become its director in 1912⁶¹. In 1910 Mérida had just begun his very fruitful twenty-year period as director of excavations at Mérida and had recently completed the collection of material, including epigraphic texts, for the *Catálogo Monumental de España: Provincia de Badajoz*, which he eventually published in 1925. A brief remark by Mérida in the pertinent *Catálogo Monumental* entry makes it clear that it was Fita who was responsible for the text of the female doctor's funerary altar in their co-authored article of 1911⁶².

In this edition, Fita took Hübner to task for not indicating that the abbreviated dedication *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum)* was inscribed on altar's entablature and for reproducing the text with inaccurate line-divisions. Although Fita did correct some of Hübner's errors, he followed his German colleague in reading the doctor's name as Iulia Saturnina and introduced new imprecisions: without justification, he read a non-existent nexus *AE* at the end of the deceased's *gentilicium* in line 2 and extended her *cognomen* onto the third line (*Saturni/nae*), which in turn forced him to modify Hübner's correct reading of the deceased's age-at-death from *XXXXV* to *XXV*. In line 7 he took over the erroneous spelling of the dedicator's *cognomen* (*Philipus* for *Philippus*) from Forner y Segarra's reading, which by then was available thanks to the publication of his *Antigüedades de Mérida* in 1893. Fita's text read as follows:

D(is) · M(anibus) · s(acrum)
Iuliæ Saturni-
nae ann(orum) · XXV
uxori · incompara-
5 *bili · medicae · optimae*
mulieri · sanctissimae
Cassius · Philipus
maritus · obmeritis
h(ic)·s(ita)·e(st)· s(it) · t(ibi) · t(erra) · l(evis)

Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly Mérida incorporated this error-filled text into his widely consulted *Catálogo Monumental de España: Provincia de Badajoz*, completed in 1910, but not published until 1925⁶³. Furthermore, it was in large part taken over, first, by Maximiliano Macías Liáñez, director of the Museo Arqueológico de Mérida from 1910 and Mérida's close collaborator in his excavations at Mérida, in his book *Mérida monumental y artística*, first published in 1913, in the section that provides a catalogue of the museum that Macías had done so much to organize in

⁶⁰ Fita & Mérida 1911, 189-190, n.º 3.

⁶¹ On Fita, see above all Abascal 1996 and 1999.

⁶² Cf. Mérida 1925, 1.225 (at *CMBad* 803). On Mérida, see in general Casado 2006a; on Mérida's

work at Mérida, Casado 2004 [2007]; for his work on the *Catálogo Monumental de Badajoz*, Casado 2006b, esp. 12-24.

⁶³ Mérida 1925, 1.225-226, n.º 803 (= *CMBad* 803).

the Convent of Santa Clara⁶⁴, then by the French art historian Robert Lantier for his 1918 catalogue of sculpted reliefs from the province of Lusitania⁶⁵ and, much later, by Navarro del Castillo in his general history of Mérida⁶⁶. Macías followed Fita and Mérida's text almost entirely, except for introducing the incorrect reading *Iulia* in line 1, while Lantier presented the variant readings of *Saturni/ae* (spanning lines 2 and 3) and *Philip(pus)* (line 7) for reasons that are unclear, omitted some of the line-divisions and gave no indication of the interpuncts throughout the text. At least Macías provides some further details about its situation at the time of its transfer to the museum: "Since it had been serving as fill in a wall, its inscription was found very full of lime and in a bad state" ("por haber estado sirviendo de relleno de una pared, se encuentra muy llena de cal y en mal estado su inscripción"). As we have seen, the museum's Libro de Registro records that it came from the calle Santa Eulalia.

A serious challenge to all previous readings was launched by Lothar Wickert (1900-1989) following his work at Mérida for a projected, but never completed new supplement to *CIL* II. Wickert studied the altar in the museum in 1928 and a sketch of what he could read (Fig. 14) can be found in his notes (*schedae*) that are preserved in the *CIL* Archives in Berlin⁶⁷. Wickert's autopsy of 1928 provided the basis for the revised reading that he published in 1934 in a volume of essays honouring José Ramón Mérida⁶⁸:

D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum).
Iuliae Saturni(nae) (?)
ann(orum) XXXXV,
uxori i[nco]mpara-
 5 *bili, m[a]tri optimae,*
mu[l]lieri ...tissimae,
Cassius Phili[p]pus
maritus ob meritis;
h(ic) s(ita) e(st), s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(evis).

In presenting his text, Wickert commented on the "excessively damaged" state of the lettering, which presented in certain sectors "great difficulties in reading them". His most controversial change came in his reading of line 5, which he claimed to be "secure". As can be seen from his sketch (Fig. 14), he thought that he could make out traces of a T and an R before the final I, which convinced him that the term *m[a]tri* had to be read. If correct, this would have serious repercussions for how we interpret the epitaph, since it would eliminate from the historical record the presence of a female doctor at Emerita.

⁶⁴ Macías 1913, 158-159, n.º 158 in the section (pp. 143-184) entitled, "Museo Arqueológico Emeritense". The altar was displayed at that time in Sala I. (The same text was included in the second edition of Macías' work: Macías 1929, 176-177, n.º 158.) The letters sent between Mérida and Macías provide vivid proof of their close collaboration: Caballero & Álvarez Martínez 2011. For their role as part of the Subcomisión de Monumentos Históricos y Artísticos de Mérida, Morán 2021, esp. 312-341.

⁶⁵ Lantier 1918, 23, n.º 98 & plate XXXVIII, 90.

⁶⁶ Navarro del Castillo 1975, 155.

⁶⁷ Wickert 1925-1935. On the proposed "Supplementum Hispaniense", Stylow 1995, 18-19; Rothenhöfer 2014.

⁶⁸ Wickert 1934, 125-128 (*AE* 1935, p. 7). In his handbook on Latin epigraphy, Batlle (1963, 215, n.º 66), although noting previous readings (*CIL* II 497), reproduced Wickert's reading as being "certain", while carelessly omitting line 6. It was also the text incorporated by José Vives into his unreliable corpus of Latin inscriptions from Roman Spain: Vives 1971, 413, n.º 4368 (*ILER* 4368).

[= supra n. 492] ara marmorea (0,96 x 0,46); titulus valde corrosus
ut. Estet Mérida in museo.

D M S

IVLIAE SATVRNI
ANN XXXV
VXOR ⁵ ~~VI~~ ⁵ MPARA
BILIN ~~VI~~ ⁵ OPTIMAE
MV ~~VI~~ ⁵ TISSIMAE
CASSIVS PHILIPVS
MARITVS ⁵ OB MERITIS
H · S · E · S · T · T · L ·

gerede dicit!

paterna
offand et uxor Meri

in parte postica:
anaglyphum infantis
fasci involute

Descripi: ^{qui lapidam ipse non vidit} Post Insuenerum, (edd. Fita et Mérida Pol. Ac. hist. LVIII (1911)
p. 189, q. 2. 3 (abi Insuener minute castigata); Mérida Catalogo l. l. p. 225 sq.
2.803. - Ex corpore accepit Jossa LS 1802.
2.09. IVLIAE SATVRNINAE ANN. XXV Fita et Mérida; ~~et~~ dedi, quae
cernere huius vias erant. 2. fin. sphera affiit non amplius xii litterae angu-
stae. Nunc ar. legendam sic Saturninae } - 5. mod. lege restitu; MEDICAE pri-
viti primit et } (SATVRNI dedi cum Teleque, v. lib. l. l.).
oxy, anaglypho pat. parte postica ut videtur in errorem induci (non recte igitur,

quamquam suo iure, hanc titulum citavit Friedlaender Strazg. I 99;
[-] Philippus (sic) Fita et Mérida; fuit autem Philippus.

In parte infima aera vidi signa huius fore formae formae:
L et Insuener RE X c. 2495

QCVVLI.V

Nam litterae sint, dubito, fortasse signari potest de signis lapicidae.
L - 6 SANCTISSIMAE priores; fin. mihi videtur fuisse TISSIMAE, vestigia q.
praecedunt illi et huius non favere potest.
Et huius prius (de. Tripalium etc.) videtur?

FIGURE 14. Scheda of Lothar Wickert, 1928, on the altar of the supposed female doctor. Courtesy of the Centro CIL II, Universidad de Alcalá.

Wickert argued that all previous editors had been led into error by two factors: first, by the badly preserved state of the inscription, which he asserted —without adequate justification— would have been no better in the 17th to 19th centuries than when he himself studied the altar in 1928; and secondly —and more justifiably— by the relief of a baby in swaddling on the rear of the monument, which had led all previous editors to suppose that the deceased had been a midwife and hence to read *medicae* in line 5, an “ingenious error”, according to Wickert. In his view, they had all followed uncritically, if respectfully, the reading of Moreno de Vargas’ *editio princeps*. Wickert then contended that it is not at all surprising to have a baby depicted on this funerary monument, since, on his reading, it was set up to commemorate an “excellent mother” (*m[a]tri optimae*). But why did the husband of the deceased choose to have a baby in swaddling depicted rather than an older child? And how could the deceased have proved herself a good mother if her child had died in infancy? And there is no reference to a child joining her husband in the act of funerary commemoration. In short, Wickert’s argument fails to convince.

Although in a footnote he raised serious doubts about the restoration [*sanc*]tissimae in line 6, claiming that the extant traces of letters did not coincide with this traditional reading, Wickert chose not to pursue this or any other aspects of the rest of the text in any further detail⁶⁹. However, in the notes that he made on the text in 1928 (cf. Fig. 14) he justified his own tentative reading of the deceased’s *cognomen* in line 2 as *Saturni(nae)*, while at the same time leaving open other possible restorations, which he chose not to pursue: “There is sufficient space for no more than one narrow letter. Perhaps nothing has been lost here and one ought to read *Saturni(nae)*” (“*spatium sufficit non amplius uni litterae angustae. Nescio an nihil perierit et legendum sit Saturni(nae)*”). In addition, he recorded that on the base of the altar a series of letters seemed to be inscribed, which he tentatively thought might be marks of the stonecutter (see Fig. 14). We shall return to these two important problems in the final section of this article (*v. infra*, p. 282).

The next detailed study of the monument took place just over forty years after Wickert’s visit to Mérida, when Luis García Iglesias produced a characteristically careful and sober edition of the text in his doctoral thesis, *Epigrafía romana de Augusta Emerita*, defended at the Universidad Complutense, Madrid, in 1973, but unfortunately never published⁷⁰. His autopsy confirmed the very damaged state of the text and led to a similar reading of the letters surviving on the stone to that of Wickert:

D M S
 IVLIAE ŞATVRNI[.]
 ANN • XXXXV
 VXOR[.] IN[.]MPARA
 5 BILĪ M[.] OPTIMAE
 MV LIĒ[.] TISSIMAE
 CASSIVŞ PHILI[.]PVS
 MARITVS • OB MERITIS
 H•S•E•S•T•T•L•

⁶⁹ Wickert 1934, 127, note 50.

⁷⁰ García Iglesias 1973, 555-560, n.º 293 (= *ERAE* 293).

However, his analysis of the text led him to reject Wickert's reading of line 5 and resuscitate the traditional reading of *m[edicae] optimaē*⁷¹. He correctly points out (*v. infra*, p. 286) that the extant traces on the stone at this point are in no way consistent with the reading of a T and an R, while the intermediate traces of what García Iglesias thought was an A do not appear in the correct position to justify Wickert's reading of *m[a]tri*. Furthermore, he correctly observes that Wickert did not take into account the extent of the space between the letter M and the word *optimaē*, which evidently requires the restoration of a word longer than *m[a]tri*. With typical balance and good sense, García Iglesias admits that Moreno de Vargas' text *medicae* is not absolutely incontrovertible, but argues that the epigraphic parallels from elsewhere in the Roman world for female doctors make it at least a still possible reading. He does, however, signal his agreement with Wickert that the surviving traces of line 6 do not correspond to the reading *sanctissimae*, a point to which we shall return below (*v. infra*, p. 287).

The most recent detailed analysis of the altar was carried out by Bernard Rémy as part of his substantial work on medical practitioners in Rome's western provinces⁷². The French epigrapher did not study the altar directly, but relied on his own scrutiny of a photograph provided by the Mérida museum and on the readings of, and measurements taken by, epigraphers of the then Centre Pierre Paris of the Université de Bordeaux III (now the Institut Ausonius, Université de Bordeaux-Montagne) at the museum at Mérida on 26-27 September 1972 to produce the following reading (Fig. 15)⁷³:

D(ii)s M(anibus) s(acrum)
 Iuliae · Saturni ^{nae}
 ann(or)um · XXXV
 uxori · incompara-
 5 bili me[di]cae · optimaē
 mulieri · sanctissimae.
 Cassius · Philippus
 maritus · ob meritis. (sic)
 H(ic) · s(ita) · e(st) · S(it) · t(ibi) · t(erra) · l(evis)

De la dernière ligne gravée sur la base du monument, on lit seulement : QCXLIV.

FIGURE 15. Reading of Bernard Rémy, 1991.

⁷¹ As he also points out at García Iglesias 1976, 72.

⁷² Rémy 1991, 328-330, n.º 3 & fig. 4; Rémy & Faure 2010, 93-95, n.º 5. (Rémy's bibliography includes an erroneous entry in its citation of *EE* VIII 16, allegedly deriving from Fita & Mérida 1911, 189-190, n.º 3. *EE* VIII 16 (= *CIL* II 470) is in fact a votive altar dedicated to Venus Victrix by the doctor L. Cordius

Symphorus, now in the collection of the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid, inv. 20220.)

⁷³ Rémy 1991, 328-330, n.º 3, with photo. This edition seems to have persuaded the medical historian Rebecca Flemming (2000, 387-388, n.º 16) to record the deceased's age-at-death incorrectly as *ann. XXXV*.

In 2010 Rémy corrected certain elements of this initial reading in his second edition of the text. He amended the age-at-death in line 3 from *XXXV* to *XXXXV*, added further interpuncts in line 5 (after *-bili*) and in line 8 between *ob* and *meritis* and inserted under-dots beneath the C and the I of *Cassius* in line 7, to produce the following text⁷⁴:

D M S
 IVLIAE · ŞATVRNI'NAE'
 ANN · XXXXV
 4 VXORI · INÇOMPARA
 BILI · ME[---]AE · OPTIMAE
 MVLIERI · ŞANÇTISSIMAE
 ÇASSIVS · PHILIPPVS
 8 MARITVS · OB · MERITIS (!)
 H · S · E · S · T · T · L

Like Wickert, Rémy also noted a series of letters carved on the altar's base of between 5.1 cm and 6.6 cm in height, which he read as QÇXLIV, but argued, correctly in my view, that they are not ancient. In sum, Rémy was able to make out more traces of letters on a photograph than either Wickert or García Iglesias could read on the stone itself, even if he was punctilious in using under-dots to indicate the many places where he decided that the letters were only partially preserved⁷⁵. He also realized that there was insufficient room at the right end of line 2 for reading *Saturninae* in full and so ingeniously posited a nexus of the final three letters *-nae*, inscribed less deeply and at a smaller scale. In the commentary on his 2010 edition, he claims that the reading *Saturniae* is excluded on the grounds that this would be an onomastic *hapax*⁷⁶. But this is not the case, as we shall see (p. 285), since there are ample parallels for the *cognomen* *Saturnia* from Rome, Italy and the western provinces. Rémy also argues vigorously against Wickert's reading of line 5, concluding that there is no trace of an R nor a T, as Wickert claimed, and while he agreed with Wickert that traces of an A are visible, this A cannot be part of the word *matri*, which would be too short to fill the space available on the stone. The key result of Rémy's reading is that, like García Iglesias, he chose to revive the traditional reading of line 5, which attests that the altar was set up to commemorate a female doctor, who was praised as an "incomparable wife, an excellent doctor, and a most pure woman".

Finally, in 2011 in her studies of doctors in the Hispanic provinces and *medicae* and *obstetrices* in the Roman world as a whole, María Ángeles Alonso Alonso, without studying the stone directly, it would seem, included a rather hybrid text in the epigraphic catalogues included in her respective articles⁷⁷:

D(iis) M(anibus) s(acrum) / Iuliae Saturni[nae] / a[nn(orum)] XXXV / uxori [inco]mparabili m[edica]e optimae / mulie[ri san]ctissimae / Cassius Philippus / maritus ob meritis / h(ic) s(ita) e(st) s(it) t(erra) l(evis).

⁷⁴ Rémy & Faure 2010, 93-95, n.º 5, with photo.

⁷⁵ This same reading, devoid of the under-dots, was incorporated into an introductory guide to Greek and Latin epigraphy for French students: Rémy & Kayser 1999, 85, n.º 47.

⁷⁶ Rémy & Faure 2010, 94.

⁷⁷ Alonso 2011a, 101, n.º 8; cf. Alonso 2011b, 291, n.º 19 (taking over the incorrect claim of Rémy & Faure 2010, 93-95, n.º 5 that an edition of this text appeared as *EE* VIII 16; see above, n. 72).

Fully aware of the earlier editions by García Iglesias and Rémy (both from 1991 and 2010), she restores the doctor's *cognomen* as *Saturni[nae]*, even though there is clearly not space on the stone for this restoration at the right end of line 2, and she reads rather fewer letters as extant on the stone in lines 3-6 than did Rémy or even García Iglesias in his more conservative reading. Alonso Alonso felt that she could read a C before *-tissimae* in line 6, which would confirm most editors' readings of this laudatory epithet, but it is difficult to see the basis on which she read a C here.

Given these many textual variants since its discovery in 1608 and, not least, since Wickert firmly insisted that the reading of *medicae* in line 5 is unjustified, it seems timely to engage in a close re-examination of the stone. While traditional epigraphic methods still make a useful contribution towards reading the text, new digital epigraphy techniques, especially Morphological Residual Modelling (M.R.M.), allow for significant new insights.

3. THE FUNERARY ALTAR

The funerary altar is a typical product of the workshops of Augusta Emerita of the second and early third centuries AD. It is sculpted from creamy white marble, probably from the quarries at Borba-Estremoz, 120 km WSW of Emerita. Measuring 97 cm tall by 47 cm wide by 24 cm deep, it is one of the taller funerary altars to have survived from the Lusitanian capital (Fig. 1)⁷⁸. It forms part of the epigraphic collection of the Museo Nacional de Arte Romano, Mérida (inv. n.º 158). It has elegant mouldings around its cornice (comprising a *cyma recta*, *fascia* and *cyma reversa*) and plinth (with *cyma reversa*, *fascia* and *cyma recta*). Its entablature is crowned with an unusually high and curved pediment (18 cm tall) on both the front and rear sides, framed by *pulvini* comprising very realistic laurel leaves (see Fig. 3a-b), which flank a taller than normal *focus*. The altar's sides are decorated, as often at Emerita, with sacrificial vessels: a sacrificial jug (*praefericulum*) 23.5 cm tall on its left side (Fig. 3a) and a platter (*patera*) 24 cm tall, including a handle 10 cm long, on its right side (Fig. 3b)⁷⁹. As has often been noted since Moreno de Vargas's *editio princeps*, on the rear side there is a relief sculpture, 36 cm tall, of a new-born infant wrapped completely in swaddling clothes from head to toe (Figs. 2, 3a-b).

The dedication to the *Di Manes* is inscribed on the front face of the altar's *pulvini* and pediment, as frequently at Emerita, while the epitaph proper is carved on the altar's shaft in narrow square capitals with a few elements of librarial script (such as the upward curl of the upper bars of the E in line 2 and the T of *meritis* in line 8 and the curling lower horizontal bars of the Ls in lines 5 and 9). The letters measure 5.5 cm (line 1), 4.5 cm (line 2; initial I of *Iulia* = 5.5 cm), 4.0 cm (line 3), 3.5 cm (line 4), 2.5 cm (lines 5-7), 3.0 cm (line 8) and 3.5 cm (line 9). The stonemason carved an *I longa* at the start of the deceased's *nomen Iuliae* in line 2, previously noted only by Rémy and Faure⁸⁰. The *ordinatio* of the text is carefully planned, with lines 3, 8 and 9 centred and lines 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7 aligned down the left margin. The worn state of the surface makes it very difficult to make out interpuncts except in the final four lines, where they appear to be triangular in form. In its current damaged state, after a very close study with raking light, the following letters can be made out on the stone with the naked eye:

⁷⁸ For a recent study, see Murciano 2019, 245-261, 297-322.

⁷⁹ For further discussion of the altar's design and decoration, see Gamer 1989, 195, n.º BA 44, with

Plate 78c-d; Vedder 2001, 125-126, n.º 26; Murciano 2019, 317, n.º 132, with Plates 154, n.º 5 and 155, n.º 1-4.

⁸⁰ Rémy & Faure 2010, 94.

D M S
 ÌVLIAE SATVRNIA[-]
 (vac) A[-c.4-5-]XXV (vac)
 VXORI I[-c.3-]MPARA-
 5 BILI M[-c.4-]AE OPTIMAE
 MVLIERI • [-]+ +[-]TISSIMAE
 CASSIVS • PHILI[-]PVVS
 MARITVS • OBMERITIS •
 H • S • E • S • T • T • L •

Based on the formulas used in the epitaph (the dedication to the *Di Manes* and the use of three superlative adjectives to eulogize the deceased) and the onomastics of the deceased and dedicator (the absence of any status indicators and, in the case of the male dedicator, the lack of a *praenomen*), the altar can be dated to the second half of the second or the early third century A.D. The letter forms are consistent with this dating.

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4. PROBLEMS OF READING

The main problems of readings occur over lines 2 to 6, particularly lines 2, 5 and 6. In line 2, as we have seen, Moreno de Vargas in his *editio princeps* read *Iuliae Saturniae*, and Antonio Ponz,

⁸¹ <http://www3.uah.es/cil2digital/inscripciones>

José Cornide and Gregorio Fernández y Pérez concurred after inspecting the altar in 1776, 1798 and between 1826 and 1832 respectively. The Marqués de Valdeflores in 1753, the draftsman responsible for the drawing of the altar included in Laborde's *Voyage pittoresque et historique de l'Espagne*, published in 1811, and García Iglesias in 1973 preferred to report solely the letters that they could see on the stone: *Saturni*. Laborde himself, however, in his translation of, and brief commentary on, the epitaph assumed that the deceased's *cognomen* should be restored as *Saturni(nae)*, as did Wickert in his revisionist text published in 1934. On the other hand, José Alsinet read *Iuliae Saturninae* in full, and this reading was accepted by Forner y Segarra and, most crucially, by Hübner, whose text (*CIL* II 497) was then taken over by several other epigraphers and historians of Roman medicine (see above, n. 7). Pérez Bayer in 1782 preferred to restore the text as *Saturnin(ae)*. Fita, on the other hand, in 1911 mistakenly thought that the deceased's *cognomen* continued onto the following line in reading *Saturni/nae*, which in turn led him to misread the deceased's age-at-death as 25 (*XXV*) rather than 45 (*XXXV*), and this was the text adopted by Mélida for his *Catálogo Monumental de Badajoz* (*CMBad* 803), completed in 1911, but not published until 1925, and by Macías in 1913. However, Fita's text does not take account of the careful *ordinatio* of line 3, with the vacant space to the left of the text mirrored by another *vacat* at the right edge. Most recently, Rémy read *Saturninae*, arguing for a complex *nexus* of the final three letters, while Alonso Alonso preferred to adopt Laborde's and Wickert's reading *Saturni[nae]*, restoring three lost letters, even though there is not space for them at the right end of the line.

Today it is possible to make out the letters *Saturnia* on the stone, although the initial S is very worn and the second A badly damaged because the stone's surface has been chipped at this point, resulting in the preservation of just the lower part of the left diagonal of the A. If the amount of stone damaged at the right end of the line is taken into account, there is space for no more than one further letter. (Similar damage is visible in line 5, where the right edge is now broken off, with only the left upright and the start of the lower horizontal bar of the E extant, but more of the surface has been lost in line 2). This in my view makes it likely that in line 2 the final E was carved at a reduced scale or that the final two letters of the deceased's *cognomen* (*-AE*) were inscribed in a *nexus*. This makes *Saturnia[e]* or *Saturniâ[e]* the only possible readings, with the latter more likely.

While the *cognomen* Saturninus is certainly very widespread in the Roman world, with several examples from Emerita itself, *Saturnia* is also found —*pace* Rémy— with a few scattered examples from the Hispanic provinces, such as *Valeria Saturnia* from Hispalis (*CIL* II 1246), *Saturnia* from São Pedro da Cadeira in the territory of Olisipo (*AE* 1985, 511) and [- - - *Sat*]urnia, another probable case from Mérida (*NEFAE* 147)⁸².

In the central section of lines 3 to 6, the surface of the stone is completely abraded, and it is very difficult to make out any letters with the naked eye. However, it is possible to estimate approximately how many letters were originally inscribed in these gaps: four or five letters in line 3, about three in line 4 and about four in lines 5 and 6. In line 3, it is almost certain that the missing letters comprise the end of the abbreviated word *a[nn(orum)]*, followed by two or, less likely, three elements of the Roman numeral: [*XX*]*XXV* or [*LX*]*XXV*. Hence the deceased's age-at-death would have been 45 or, less likely, 85. In line 4, the restoration *i[nco]mpara/bili* is assured, since there

⁸² Hispania: Abascal 1994, 496 (*Saturnia*), 496-497 (*Saturninus*, the 9th most frequent *cognomen* in

the Hispanic provinces). Roman Empire: Lőrincz 2002 (= *OPEL* IV), 53 (*Saturnius*), 51-53 (*Saturninus*).

are no other plausible Latin adjectives that are consistent with the surviving letters and a gap large enough to incorporate three more.

Line 5, as we have seen, presents a major editorial crux, as highlighted by Wickert's rejection of the traditional reading *medicae*. All editors prior to Wickert read this key term as if it were preserved intact on the stone, but since his edition, all subsequent editors have admitted that the letters in the centre of the line are no longer legible and need to be restored. As we have seen, Wickert's proposed reading of *m[a]tri* is unsustainable, since not only are the letters still partly visible at the end of the word incompatible with the *-tri* that he believed could be read, but there is also space for more than one missing letter in the part of the line that Wickert restored⁸³. García Iglesias was only able to make out a partially preserved M at the start of the word, but argued on the grounds of space that *m[edicae]* was the most plausible restoration⁸⁴. Rémy believed that he could make out the initial M and then part of an E to the left of the damaged section of the stone and then an A and an E to its right⁸⁵. My own autopsy with raking light (see Fig. 16) confirms that the two apices of what must be an M are now visible on the stone immediately after the letters -BILLI, which complete the adjective that begins on the previous line. The surface is then badly gouged, but then —some 7 cm to the right of this M— the lower part of the left diagonal, the apex and the upper section of the right diagonal of an A are visible, followed by the complete vertical stroke and small traces of the upper and lower horizontal bars of an E where they adjoin the left vertical. The line ends with the adjective *optimae*, which is very well preserved and not subject to dispute.

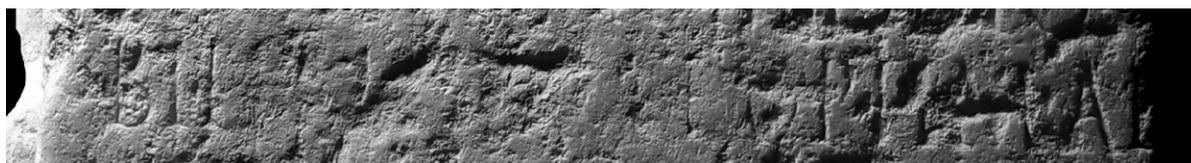


FIGURE 16. Detail of line 5. Photo: H. Pires-Project CIL II Mérida.

In line 6, the reading *mulieri* is completely assured. The initial M and V are well preserved and substantial sections of the two Is are visible, even though the stone is worn in both places. The remaining three letters are very damaged, although some traces of each of them are still visible on the stone (see Fig. 17): the apex and part of the vertical hasta of the L; the lower part of the vertical and the bottom horizontal bar of the E; and the base of the vertical stroke and the end of the diagonal tail of the R. In addition, a triangular interpunct is also visible 1 cm to the right of the final I of *mulieri*, as noted previously only by Rémy.

⁸³ Wickert 1934, 125-128. See above, pp. 278-280.

⁸⁴ *ERAE* 293. See above, pp. 280-281.

⁸⁵ Rémy 1991, 328-330, n.º 3, with fig. 4 (photo); cf. Rémy & Kayser 1999, 85, n.º 47; Rémy & Faure 2010, 93-95, n.º 5, with photo.

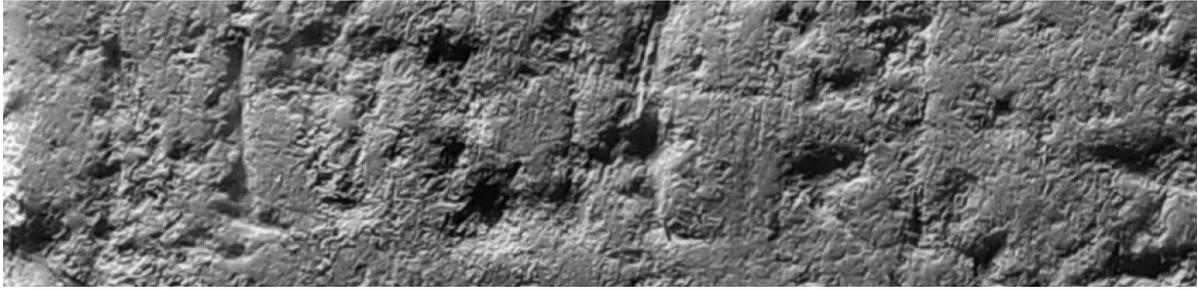


FIGURE 17. *Detail of the left half of line 6. Photo: H. Pires-Project CIL II Mérida.*

There then follows a section of 5 cm where the surface is very badly damaged before the final eight letters of the line (*tissimae*), which are more or less clearly visible (Fig. 18). In this gap, traces of two letters can be made out. After a space sufficient for one letter, the first surviving vestige appears to be part of an ascending diagonal inclined to the right, the second possibly a descending diagonal stroke inclining to the right: so perhaps an A and an N, but it is impossible with the naked eye to be certain of this. After the second surviving trace of a letter, there is a space wide enough for just one more letter before the well-preserved T. Evidently, we have here a superlative adjective qualifying *mulieri*. Among all such epithets attested at Emerita and elsewhere, either [*pien*]*tissimae* or [*sanc*]*tissimae* would fit the space and would each be plausible restorations⁸⁶. As we have seen, *sanctissimae* was the reading advanced by all editors prior to Wickert and then more recently by Rémy. Wickert and García Iglesias preferred to remain agnostic, reading [- -]*tissimae*⁸⁷.



FIGURE 18. *Detail of the right half of line 6. Photo: H. Pires-Project CIL II Mérida.*

The rest of the text is unproblematic. In line 7 the *cognomen* of the dedicator of the altar can confidently be restored as *Phili[p]pus*. In line 8, the B of the preposition *ob* in the phrase *ob meritis* (*sic*) is now badly damaged, but sufficient traces of the top left corner of the upright and the crown of its rounded bowl survive to validate the reading *ob meritis*. The latter strictly speaking involves a grammatical error for *ob merita*, but a number of epigraphic parallels can be found for the phrase *ob meritis*, where the Ablative rather than the more correct Accusative is used with the preposi-

⁸⁶ On such epithets at Emerita, see further Edmondson 2009b.

⁸⁷ See above, pp. 280-282.

tion⁸⁸. The stonemason also erred in inscribing the phrase as if it were a single word, without any gap or interpunct between *ob* and *meritis*. In the final line, interpuncts can be made out after each of the letters, even though only small traces of them are visible after the first S, the second T and the final L because of damage to the stone's surface in these three places.

5. THE CONTRIBUTION OF M.R.M.

To try to resolve the outstanding textual problems, it will be helpful to take advantage of a recently developed photogrammetry technique, Morphological Residual Modelling (M.R.M.). This digital technique, elaborated in the last decade by Dr. Hugo Pires (Oporto), has proved highly valuable for epigraphers working on damaged texts. As a digital visualization procedure, it uses three-dimensional models to permit the different relief levels of an inscribed stone surface to be segmented and classified. In particular, it allows the surface's "residual relief" to be differentiated from its "predominant relief", which is useful for epigraphic purposes since these variations in relief layers in an inscription result from the stonemason's actions when carving the text in the Roman period⁸⁹. The procedure involves the taking of about fifty photographs with a regular digital camera, which are processed using photogrammetry software to create a 3-D model of the stone's levels. The results are then converted into a series of colour-contrasted images, with the small morphological anomalies in the stone's various planes enhanced by accentuating the contrasts in the levels, which were caused by the incisions made by the Roman-period stonemason. Various black-and-white and coloured filters are then applied to heighten the visibility of these incisions to help epigraphers read the letters that were originally cut into the stone.

Four of the M.R.M. images produced by Dr. Pires of lines 2-9 of the epitaph under discussion are reproduced here as Fig. 19. They do not reveal the original text in its entirety and, as has been noted, the technique is often more revealing of texts inscribed on granite than those carved on marble⁹⁰. Nevertheless, a careful scrutiny of these M.R.M. images does allow some further progress to be made in reading the epitaph inscribed on this funerary altar.

The image of the digital surface model (Fig. 19a) reveals a faint trace of the lower part of the left-hand diagonal of an A at the end of line 2 of the epitaph (i.e., the first line in these images), and this is also just perceptible in the black-and-white and coloured images of the morphological residual model (Fig. 19b-d). As we have noted, the stone's surface is damaged at the right end of this line, where there would have been space for, at most, one more letter, an E, after the A, although it might have been joined to the A in a *nexus* or inscribed at a smaller scale. In short, the M.R.M. images confirm the reading of the deceased's *cognomen* as *Saturnia[e]* or, perhaps better, *Saturniâ[e]*. They also emphasize the fact that line 3 (the second line in these images) was well centred, with more or less equal gaps to the left and right of the deceased's age-at-death. More cru-

⁸⁸ Cf. *CIL* VI 23680, 23712, 23736, 36076, Rome; *AE* 1972, 79 and 2014, 324, Puteoli; *CIL* X 1750, Baiae; *CIL* X 3344, Misenum; *CIL* XIII 624, Burdigala; *CIL* VIII 12657, Carthage. For cases from Hispania, *IRPToledo* 149 = *HEp* 2014-15, 688, Caesarobriga; *AE* 2003, 931 = *HEp* 13, 2003-4, 276, Corduba.

⁸⁹ For a full discussion of the technique, see Pires *et al.* 2014; Santos, Pires & Sousa 2014; Santos *et al.*

2014. For its use in improving textual readings of funerary inscriptions from Emerita, Hidalgo *et al.* 2019, 217-218, n.º 5, 379-381, n.º 99, 451-453, n.º 148 (*NEFAE* 5, 99, 148); Ramírez 2018 (a re-examination of *EE* IX 91, not *EE* IX 81, despite the article's title); Edmondson 2021.

⁹⁰ For further discussion, Edmondson 2021, 58-67.

cially, they reveal traces of the two Ns of the word *ann(orum)* that are not visible to the naked eye: in particular, the left apex and the central diagonal bar of the first N and almost the entire second N. In addition, they allow us to discern the upper halves of the first and second Xs of the numeral, as well as part of the lower right diagonal of the first X. This allows the deceased's age-at-death to be established with certainty as *ann(orum) XXXXV* rather than *ann(orum) LXXXV*.

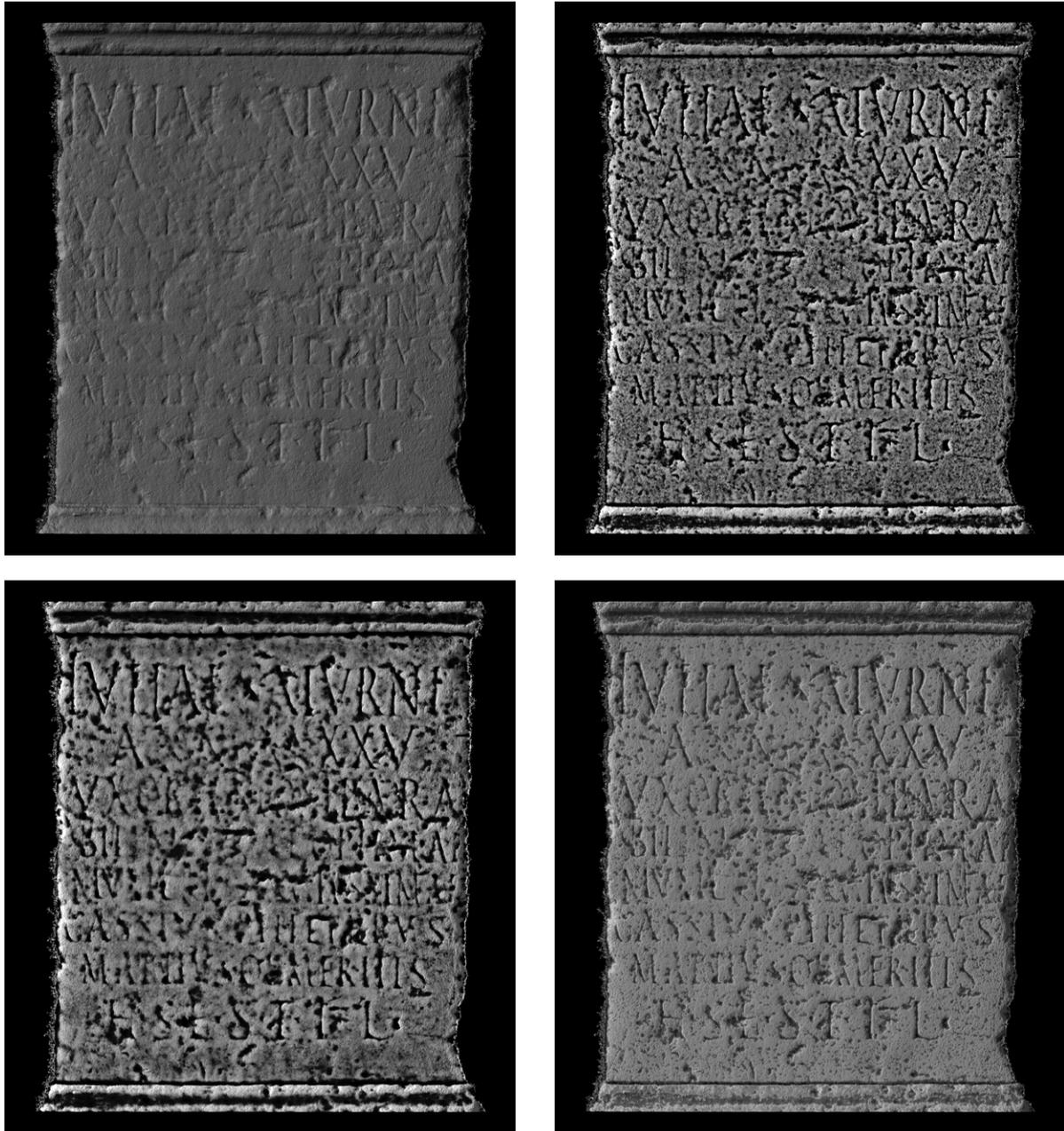


FIGURE 19. (a) Digital surface model; (b-d) Morphological residual model. Photos: H. Pires-Project CIL II Mérida.

As for line 4 of the epitaph, the term *uxori* is visible in its entirety in the third line of all the M.R.M. images. It is then possible to discern a substantial part of an upright stroke (i.e., an I), part of the diagonal bar of an N and then the letters CO inscribed at a reduced scale. In other words, M.R.M. allows us to confirm the reading *incompara/bili* in lines 4-5 in its entirety, without the need to restore any of its letters.

In line 5 of the text, as noted above, several letters are still legible on the stone (cf. Fig. 16): *bili m[-c.4-]ae optimae*, with space for about four letters in the badly abraded central section of the line. The black-and-white and coloured M.R.M. images (Fig. 19b-d, fourth line) reveal after the M and a gap large enough for just one letter the apex and the base of a vertical stroke, which can plausibly be interpreted as part of a D. This is followed by another gap wide enough for two letters before the A and E that are visible to the naked eye (cf. Fig. 16). This observation, which we owe to M.R.M., and the width of the space between the surviving M and A (6.8 cm), which is sufficient to accommodate four or five letters, are consistent with the reading *m[e]d[ic]ae*. In other words, M.R.M. confirms the validity of the original reading of Moreno de Vargas and many subsequent editors, even if now less survives of the word on the stone, while invalidating Wickert's suggested *m[a]tri*. The funerary altar does, therefore, attest the presence at Emerita of a female medical practitioner called Iulia Saturnia.

As for line 6 of the epitaph, the M.R.M. images confirm the reading of the word *mulieri*, followed by an interpunct, which can all just about be made out on the stone with the naked eye despite the damage in this area, as we have seen (see above, p. 286 and Fig. 17). After a gap where no trace of the original letter is visible, the black-and-white and coloured M.R.M. images (Fig. 19b-d, fifth line) confirm the presence of an A with the lower parts of each diagonal visible up to the crossbar, followed by the bottom right corner of an N and then just a small trace of the base of the letter prior to the T. These fragmentary traces are consistent with the reading *[s]an[c]tissimae*.

The M.R.M. images do not elucidate the damaged letter immediately before the final three letters of line 7 of the epitaph: -PVS, but the problem is not grave, since there is no alternative to reading the dedicator's *cognomen* as *Phili[p]pus*. The M.R.M. images confirm in the penultimate line the B of the preposition *ob* and the interpuncts in the final line, which can all be partially glimpsed with the naked eye, as we noted above (Section 4).

In sum, a careful inspection of the text surviving on the altar using raking light, combined with a painstaking scrutiny of the M.R.M. images produced by H. Pires, results in the following improved reading of the epitaph:

D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum)
Iuliae Saturnia[e]
ann(orum) XXXXV
uxori incompara-
 5 *bili m[e]d[ic]ae optimae*
mulieri • [s]an[c]tissimae
Cassius • Phili[p]pus
maritus • ob meritis •
h(ic) • s(ita) • e(st) • s(it) • t(ibi) • t(erra) • l(evis) •

CONCLUSION

This fresh examination of the altar, using the latest epigraphic techniques, set into the context of almost 400 years of epigraphic scholarship, fully validates the original reading by Bernabé Moreno de Vargas in 1633 and forces us to reject many of the divergent readings proposed by visiting antiquarians and epigraphers from the 18th to the 21st centuries. Most importantly, it means that Emerita can still lay claim to one of the few female medical practitioners attested in the Roman Empire. The representation of an infant in swaddling on the altar's rear (Figs. 2-3) would seem to confirm that one of Iulia Saturnia's major tasks as a *medica* was to provide medical assistance to women when giving birth. But in contrast to lower-ranking *obstetrices*, *medicae* would have been trained to deal with a wider range of medical issues and may even have been called upon to treat men as well as women⁹¹. That female physicians received medical training is clear from the case of the imperial freedwoman *medica* (Claudia) Restituta, who in the mid-first century A.D. dedicated a funerary monument in Rome to her "patron and teacher", Ti. Claudius Alcimus, another physician in the imperial household⁹². From the surviving epigraphy, female physicians seem to have been much rarer than their male counterparts in the cities of the Roman Empire, and in the three Hispanic provinces Iulia Saturnia is, at present, the only *medica* on record⁹³. Occasionally such *medicae* received honours from their local community, as at Lugdunum (Lyon), a provincial capital like Emerita, where the local town-council granted the *medica* Metilia Donata some publicly owned space for the erection of a statue in her honour; she herself paid for the statue and recorded the honour on the architrave, some 2.5 m wide, of the structure in which the statue stood⁹⁴.

While many medical practitioners in the Roman Empire were slaves or manumitted slaves⁹⁵, it is difficult to be completely certain about the social status of Iulia Saturnia. Based on her name, she could have been freeborn (*ingenua*) or a freedwoman (*liberta*). Her *cognomen* is not a name frequently borne by slaves⁹⁶, and she was married to someone from a different family, Cassius Philippus, whereas freedwomen often married ex-slaves from their own slave household. These two factors suggest that she may have been freeborn, but they cannot prove it beyond all doubt. If this is right, the salary that she would have been paid for her services would have been controlled by the provincial governor of Lusitania⁹⁷. The high regard in which Iulia Saturnia was held by her hus-

⁹¹ See Eichenauer 1988, 200; Flemming 2000, 33-44; Buonopane 2003, 117-120; Flemming 2013, esp. 289.

⁹² *IG XIV 1751 = ICVR II, 1, 675*; cf. Gummerus 1932, n.º 145; Korpela 1987, 166, n.º 65, with Alonso 2011b, 269. For discussion, Buonopane 2003, 120-123.

⁹³ The arguments of Alonso (2011a, 93, 103, n.º 22b and 2011b, 270, 291-292, n.º 20) that another *medica* is attested at Gades (Cádiz) on a funerary plaque (first published by López de la Orden 2001, 95-96, n.º 52) are not convincing. The deceased is a certain Iulia L.f. Medika, where Medika is clearly the deceased's *cognomen*: see the comments at *HEp* 11, 2001, 196. The text is not included in the catalogue of *medici* and *medicae* from Hispania in Rémy & Faure 2010, 87-177. Ambata Medica, attested at Lara de los Infantes

(prov. Burgos) (Abásolo 1974, 73, n.º 81 = *CIRPBurgos* 379), is also to be excluded, since Medica here too is a *cognomen*: see Alonso 2011b, 269. Rémy included it in his initial study of *medici* and *medicae* from Hispania (Rémy 1991, 347-348, n.º 19), but excluded it from the catalogue of his later monograph on doctors from the Roman West (Rémy & Faure 2010, 87-177).

⁹⁴ *CIL XIII 2019*, with Flemming 2000, 36, 387, n.º 14; Buonopane 2003, 126-127 and fig. 5 (photo), 130, n.º 20; Rémy & Faure 2010, cat. n.º 42, with photo; Alonso 2011b, 274-275, 284, n.º 17; Flemming 2013, 288-289.

⁹⁵ Gummerus 1932 (*passim*); Kudlien 1986, 92-118 (slaves), 118-152 (freed slaves); Korpela 1987 (*passim*).

⁹⁶ Solin 1996, 26 (listing just one case of a slave or freedwoman from the city of Rome called Saturnia).

⁹⁷ Cf. *Dig.* 50.13.1.1-3 (Ulpian).

band—and presumably by her patients at Emerita—is emphasized in the particularly florid praise she is accorded in her epitaph, in which she is described as an *uxor incomparabilis, medica optima* and *mulier sanctissima*. This is the only example so far on record from Emerita of such a triple eulogy⁹⁸. The nearest equivalent is the case of Aelia Agrippina, wife of an imperial freedman, who had accompanied her husband to Emerita in the second half of the second century A.D., when he was posted to Lusitania to serve as subprocurator of the 5% tax on inheritances of the province of Lusitania; on her funerary altar she was praised as a “very special and most virtuous wife” (*coniugi rarissimae et sanctissimae*)⁹⁹.

Iulia Saturnia would doubtless have been a valuable member of the thriving community of medical practitioners at Emerita in the later second and early third century A.D., where the opportunities for her to practise medicine would have been more promising than in any other town in Lusitania, thanks to the particular social makeup of the population and levels of wealth at a provincial capital such as Emerita. It is not too fanciful to suppose that she would have treated not just the members of the local elite and their families, but also, on occasion, members of the Roman provincial administration who resided in the city for varying periods of service. In short, she took her place among the honoured group of local medical practitioners, who, in return for their efforts, could gain important exemptions from local civic duties (*munera*) and who gave provincial cities such as Emerita an enhanced sense of local civic pride¹⁰⁰.

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⁹⁸ See further Edmondson 2009b.

⁹⁹ *CIL* II 487 = *ILS* 1548 = *ERAE* 118: *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / Aeliae Agrippinae / coniugi rarissimae / et sanctissimae / vixit ann(os) XXV / Hypaticus Augustor(um) lib(ertus) / subproc(urator) XX / bene merenti / fecit*. For another *uxor sanctissima* from Emerita, cf. *ERAE* 275. For the use of the epithet *incomparabilis* to eulogize wives at Emerita, cf. *EE* VIII 56; *ERAE* 137, 226, 271, 412; for a *maritus incomparabilis*, *CIL* II 564.

¹⁰⁰ See Flemming 2013, 271-272; cf. *Dig.* 27.1.6.2 (Modestinus), citing a letter of Antoninus Pius, limiting such exemptions to a set number of doctors (five, seven or ten depending on the city's size).

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