

The Cinerary Urn of the *Haruspex* M. Titius Stephanus

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ENG Abstract: We present a study on a Roman funerary urn, with a Latin inscription mentioning a *haruspex* that does not appear or is poorly studied in the lists of diviners or religious officials. The monument presents a complex and varied decoration, topical images of the urns, and some dionysiac instruments.

Keywords: Roman urn; epitaph; symbolic decoration; *haruspex*; *Marcus Titius Stephanus*.

ES La urna funeraria de *M. Titius Stephanus, haruspex*

Resumen: Se estudia una urna cineraria romana, con la inscripción latina que menciona a un *haruspex* hasta ahora no catalogado en las listas de adivinos o de personal religioso. El monumento presenta una compleja y variada decoración, imágenes tópicas de las urnas, y algunos instrumentos dionisiacos.

Palabras clave: Urna romana; epitafio; decoración simbólica; arúspice; *Marcus Titius Stephanus*.

Sumario: 1. The Monument. 2. The inscription. 3. The *haruspex*. 4. The decoration: topical symbologies. 5. Singular decorative elements: Dionysiac instruments. 6. Bibliography.

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1. The Monument¹

The first documented news we have of this Roman urn is the Catalog Joachim Ferroni, a book published in Rome in 1909 on the occasion of the public auction of the artistic treasures of this private collector. The preface to the Catalog insists on the love that this lover of fine arts (Joachim Ferroni), and at the same time a marble artist, had for works of art of great quality and fine taste. Throughout his life, he treasured a large quantity of first-class paintings in Rome (Rubens, Perugino, Andrea Verrochio, Gianbologna, and many others) and treasured sculptures by Cellini and Donatello. To these works, worthy of being in the best museums in the world, we must add a large number of Roman works of art, especially bronzes and marbles. After the public auction, the entire collection of the late Ferroni was distributed among museums and private collections around the world.

The art collection, including this urn that we are now studying, was auctioned on April 20, 1909. This reference is unequivocal due to the description made of it (*Catalogue Ferroni*, p. 56, lot 578: “Urne cinéraire ornée d’escarpe, têtes de béliers, mascarons et oiseaux. Inscriptions au milieu. Époque romaine. Haut 0,45 x 0,37), and by the photo of it on plate LVIII, of poor quality but sufficient to identify the urn without a doubt (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Image of the urn in the *Catalogue Ferroni*, 1909.

We are unaware of the changes in the location of the urn until, in the middle of the 20th century, it was part of the private collection of Paul M. Leake (1908-1983) in Massachusetts and New York. It is upon the death of this collector, in 1983, that the monument changes hands several times, always at art auctions, passing from hand to hand, possibly always in private collections. In 1987, the text of the urn was published, with a description, in the work of Friedericke Sinn,² which reproduces the little we know about the origin of the urn, before the Ferroni auction in 1909. Sinn does not provide a photo of the urn at that time, nor does he indicate its location (Aufbewahrungsort

¹ To the Memory of my great friend Santiago Montero. He read this work and encouraged me to publish it in *his Gerión*. VOTVM SOLVIT.

² Sinn 1987, 205, n° 473.

unbekannt). We have news that the urn went on sale at Christie's, in New York,³ for an estimated starting price between 15,000–20,000\$. The following year it was exhibited in London, and also put up for sale at auction, between October 16 and November 14, 2014 at the Charles Ede Gallery (1 Three Kings' Yard, London), as we have seen it in its Catalogue 188, 14, n° 29. To this day we do not know its location, although it can be assumed that it continues in that incessant travel through the rooms of ancient art; or perhaps it has already found rest and a seat, as befits the dignity of a funerary monument.



Fig. 2. <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/Lot/a-roman-marble-cinerary-urn-and-lid-5747599-details.aspx> (Website visited on 21-12-2023)

The monument, of which we only have a frontal image (Fig. 2), is very well preserved, despite the transfers from Europe to North America, and vice versa. Exceptionally, it also preserves the lid, which is missing in many urns, despite the fact that, in their original location in the *columbaria*, the lids were attached to the body by staples or iron anchors that ensured the closure, preventing looting and the two parts of the monument, body and cover, from being separated. With the passing of the centuries and the deterioration of the necropolises, urns without lids, and lids without urns, have arrived in recent times. It is possible to think, therefore, in principle, that it was found intact in an archaeological site that we cannot specify in any way. These small monuments —here we are talking about 45 x 37 cm— were placed by dozens, perhaps hundreds, in *columbaria*, in Rome and in large cities with important necropolises, as is the well-documented case of Ostia. The small size of these works of art is perhaps the main reason why they have been the subject of looting and transactions in galleries and the object of the greed of art collectors for several centuries.

We only see a break in the mask in the lower left corner. In the 1909 photo the mask is complete. There are minor defects in the corners of the base, which are also seen in the 1909 image.

³ Antiquities auction at Christie's, Sale 2755. Antiquities. 13 December 2013, New York, lot 138.

2. The inscription

In addition to its beauty as an archaeological monument, the most interesting thing about it is the inscription, or more accurately, the office of the deceased, *haruspex*. In the central panel, and centered, the inscription (the epitaph) appears perfectly preserved. The text is framed by a quadruple-edged, graded frame. In the upper corners, exactly in the position of the straight rings, the letters D.M. appear, on either side, perhaps engraved after having sculpted the lines of the main text, since, note that the first letter of the first line (the letter M) is completely stuck to the left and top margins.

In the only edition of the text, F. Sinn, loc. cit., read *Titi Stephani*,⁴ and in the age of the deceased *annis XXVII (?)*. But we believe that the solution is not correct, since the father is *Titius* (and not *Titus*), and therefore the genitive should be *Titii*. In other epigraphs the name of the deceased is in the dative⁵, but this is not our case, since the endings of *Tit() Stephan()* have to be resolved syntactically by making them agree with *harispicis*, which is genitive.⁶ And this is how we propose:

D(is) M(anibus)
M. Titi(i) Stephan(i), harispicis (*sic*), qui
vixit annis XXVIII,
diebus VI, M. Titi-
us Stephanus pat-
er fil(io) dulc(issimo) b(ene)m(erenti).

To the Manes Gods of Marcus Titius Stephanus, *haruspex*, who lived 29 years and 6 days. His father, Marcus Titius Stephanus (dedicates it) to his most deservedly sweet son.

As for the age, there is no doubt that the two stems II written outside the frame, due to the stone's calculation error, correspond to the age of the deceased, who died at the age of 29.⁷

The most probable dating of the monument is the Trajan period, proposed by the aforementioned F. Sinn,⁸ or perhaps something earlier, from the Flavian period, since the name of the deceased in the genitive case as a determinative of D.M. ("Consecrated to the Manes of...") is more typical of the 1st century AD.

3. The *haruspex*

M. Titius Stephanus is an unstudied, uncatalogued *haruspex*, even though the text was published several times, although certainly more in relation to the urn itself and the art market than to *haruspicum* prosopography.⁹

It is striking that in the text father and son present the same onomastic. It is not common, but it should not surprise us either. Although it is not stated in the text, perhaps the father, the dedicator, was also *haruspex*, although this circumstance is certainly not expressed, and here the fact that the onomastic repetition also reflects the same inherited profession is formulated only as a hypothesis.

⁴ In the revision of the text in *L'Année épigraphique* (1989, 117) it was proposed, for the most conflictive words: *M(arci) Titii Stephani har<u>spicis qui / vixit annis XXVII*, etc., version included in the Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss / Slaby (EDCS 06100058), and in the Epigraphic Database Rome (scheda EDR 081268).

⁵ For example, if we look at the cognomen *Stephanus*: *M(arco) Manlio Stephano* (AE 1988, 00193; EDCS 07000167, Ostia); *M(arco) Nemonio Stephano* (AE 2008, 00375; EDCS 51200090, Puteoli); *Lappio Stephano* (CIL 06, 21092; EDCS 12600149, Roma); *Mutilio Stephano* (CIL 06, 22780; EDCS 13201064, Rome); *P(ublio) Publilio / Stephano* (CIL 06, 25183; EDCS 13801435, Rome); *M(arco) Sempronio Stephano* (CIL 06, 26189; EDCS 14200364, Rome); etc. These are just a few examples out of dozens.

⁶ The vowel variant *-harispicis* instead of *haruspicis*— is unimportant. These changes are frequent in epigraphy. You don't even have to consider them pencil errors.

⁷ And not at 27, as Sinn indicates, 1987, n° 473.

⁸ Sinn 1987, n° 472.

⁹ *Vacat in* Haack 2006; *vacat in* Rüpke — Glock 2008. But it is included in the extensive catalogue of Rüpke *et alii* 2005, referring to the members of the priesthood and sacred functional personnel (see, vol. 2, p. 1325, n° 3272, only text).

This makes sense in Etruscan *haruspicina*, which was a technique, and therefore taught-learned in the family circle, emulating the aristocratic castes or families expert in this arcane art, as indicated by the scholar Marie-Laurence Haack: “Les Romains pourraient ensuite avoir favorisé l’enseignement de l’haruspicine dans des familles aristocratiques étrusques (Tac. *Ann.* 11.15). Enfin, à l’exemple des Caecinae, des grandes familles étrusques semblent avoir perpétué une transmission familiale de l’haruspicine. Cic., *Fam.*, 6.6.3, s’adressant au Volterran A. Caecina, qui tient son savoir de son père”¹⁰.

4. The decoration: topical symbols

With respect to the decoration, we must distinguish, between the decorative elements of the urn, the topical elements (common and frequent in many other urns), and the specific ones, which in this case are reduced to the homogeneous set of symbols that are just below the epigraphic framework, “subscribing to it.”

The cover, happily preserved, does not show serious damage: it barely breaks at the upper vertex of the pediment, the images are intact. On both sides, the acroters finish the corners, giving, as in many other cases, an architectural appearance to the urn. The decoration that occupies the entire pediment is especially important. It is a separate image from the symbols below on the box, but it naturally complements them. We see a peacock located in front (although with its head turned) of a wicker basket, girthed, in a horizontal position, with the overturned fruits coming out of the interior. The image defies the law of gravity –because if the fruits are fallen they should be on the ground; but the artist wanted to present them one on top of the other to fill the space. Possibly for the same purpose, the craftsman makes the peacock turn its head: so that the animal displays its beautiful crest and that it, vertically, coincides with the bisector of the upper corner. The symbolism of the peacock is frequent in funerary monuments (reliefs and paintings). The animal represents the placidity of life in the *παράδεισος* (the Edenic garden) where the souls of the deceased who were virtuous in life travel,¹¹ a kind of celestial garden; on an earthly level, the *paradeisos* or terrarium around the tombs and the “anti-earth”.¹² And it also represents the beauty of the soul, or simply immortality¹³. The base of the lid, the lower line of the triangle, presents a decorative wavy line identical to the one drawn on the base of the urn itself. On the urn box itself, the topical elements are represented twice, symmetrically, on both sides of the front face. Let us pay attention, first of all, to the elements that we have called “topical” or frequent in Roman urns.

Another relevant image is the head of the ram (Aries), as a totem. They are represented in the upper corner angles. There are parallels. It is a repertoire image, whose funerary meaning is strange. Perhaps it is related to the rams that, in some representations, pull the Dionysian procession chariot, as Cumont suggested many years ago.¹⁴ At the base of the head, on the neck of the animal, a type of spring is sculpted, on both sides, from which the ends of the large garland of fruits seem to hang, which in a fertile semicircle occupies most of the surface of the central face. from the urn. Likewise, below the ram’s snout, two wide ribbons are sculpted, this time vertically, that fall, undulating, with a sensation of movement, until they connect with the image placed on both sides, in the lower corners: the theatrical mask. These masks are also very common elements in funerary monuments, and especially in cinerary urns, perhaps metaphorically alluding to the drama or comedy that is life itself.

Finally, among the topical elements, we find, located behind the masks, some birds, perhaps wood pigeons or turtle doves, which furtively peck at the fruits located at the base of the garland. They are very common motifs and can be related to the peacock, that is, natural inhabitants of the paradise garden.¹⁵

¹⁰ Haack 2003, 65, n. 118.

¹¹ Cumont 1942, 353 n. 3; 386ss; 493.

¹² Cumont 1942, 353 y 59.

¹³ Cumont 1942, 231, n. 3.

¹⁴ Cumont 1942, 335.

¹⁵ These topical motifs on Roman urns; some examples: garlands (for use, in general, in funerary monuments: Honroth 1971; Guillaume-Coirier 1999; in urns: Sinn 1987, 16-17, and monuments no 6-11, 25-31, 51, 53-58,

5. Singular decorative elements: Dionysiac instruments

More interesting are the specific symbols on this urn, which appear sculpted below the epigraphic cartouche. They are interesting because, in some way, they are supposed to personalize and have a relationship with the deceased, with his personal or professional life. At first we thought we saw a representation of a ship's keel, a basket, a military shield and a trumpet;¹⁶ but really that set lacks meaning and homogeneity. The military element is unnecessary. We give credit to Friedericke Sinn's interpretation of this ensemble: "*Syrinx, Cista mystica*, aus der sich eine Schlange windet, *Tympanon, Pedum*".¹⁷ That is, three musical instruments (*syrinx* or "flute of Pan", the *tympanum*, that is, the tambourine, and the *pedum* or staff, to which is added, in relation to them, the *cista mystica* with the serpent. The four elements have a common denominator: their rustic, agrarian-pastoral origin, which is consubstantial with the Dionysian mysteries and cults.

The *cista mystica*,¹⁸ made of reeds or fine branches, is a religious element that is part of the iconography of various divinities, such as Isis¹⁹ or Magna Mater, but it is especially related to the Eleusinian mysteries, therefore in direct relationship with Demeter and Dionysus. It is with this god—who has a much richer iconography than Demeter, and much more widespread in time and space—that we must especially relate the cist in Roman times, as the sources indicate.²⁰

The *syrinx* (σύριγγ) is the flute of the god Pan. The *pedum* is the staff that peasants or shepherds used to help themselves to scare away beasts. It is the attribute of Pan, of the Satyrs and in general of rural deities, as well as of Dionysus, a wild god who presides over wild life. Several reliefs depicting the triumph of the god are shown to the acolytes equipped with staffs to tame the beasts that accompany the god in his procession. The βουκόλος or shepherd is a rank within the religious and processional organization chart of the Dionysian cult, as has been demonstrated.²¹ The *tympanum* is the tambourine or small drum used in the disorderly Bacchic parades, and in other mystic ceremonies.

In a spectacular Roman sarcophagus from the Paul Getty Museum (Fig. 3a), with an indisputably Dionysiac representation, several of these elements appear: two men with the staff or *pedum*; in the center a woman, in a trance, dancing to the sound of a *tympanum* that she herself plays; next to her is Dionysus, further to the right the god Pan undressing the Nymph *Syringa*, above a lady clinking her rattlesnakes. The scene reflects, at the same time, rural life, the wild, drunkenness, trance, dance and music, the disorder of love, the mixture of the human and the divine, the animal and the sublime.

61-54, etc.); birds (Sinn 1987, no 32, 33, 37, 40, 102, 131, 224, 225, 296, 207, etc.); peacock (Sinn 1987, no 381, 473, 548).

¹⁶ For their part, the editors of the *Catalogue Charles Ede* (2014) explain these symbols as follows: "pipes, a *lagabolon*, a basket with emerging snake and a shield".

¹⁷ Sinn 1987, 205, n° 473: "An den Ecken oben Widderköpfe, an denen eine Frucht-Blütengirlande befestigt ist, Taniendenen. In der Lünette dionysische Requisiten: *Syrinx, Cista mystica*, aus der sich eine Schlange windet, *Tympanon, Pedum*. In den unteren Zwickeln zwei Vogel; an den Ecken unten Theatermasken. — N ss.: Vorne umbiegender Eckdekor. Deckel: Vorne Giebel; zwei Akrotere. Unten Leiste mit geritzter Wellenlinie. An den Giebelschragen Leiste mit Ritzlinie. Im *Tympanon* Vogel vor umgefallenem Fruchtkorb. Die Urne ist vermutlich in Rom gefertigt. Trajanisch".

¹⁸ About this religious symbol in different religions and traditions, Jahn 1869; Lenormant 1887; Mau 1899. On the anthropological meaning of the *cista* as *mundus*, see: Caro Baroja 1989, 54-55.

¹⁹ Heerma Van Voss 1979, 23-26.

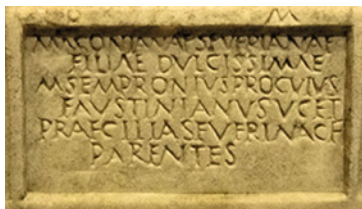
²⁰ Tib. *Carm.* 3.6.1-2: *Candide Liber, ades — sic sit tibi mystica vitis semper...; Virg. Georg.* 1.166: *virgea praeterea Celei vilisque supellex, arbuteae crates et mystica vannus Iacchi*; Serv. *Ad Georg.* 1.166 *comm.*: *ET MYSTICA VANNVS IACCHI id est cribrum areale. Legimus tamen et "vallus" secundum Varronem ꝥanc fisticula pollio mysta vallus, quod idem nihilominus significat. "mystica" autem "Iacchi" ideo ait, quod Liberi patris sacra ad purgationem animae pertinebant*]. For his part, Varro indicates: *mystica a mysteriis, quae ibi in propinquis locis nobilia fiunt* (L.L. 7.19.1).

²¹ Perea Yébenes 1991.



Fig. 3a. J. Paul Getty Museum, 83.AA.275. Roman sarcophagus. Severan

The lid of the sarcophagus is also decorated with symbolic-religious and musical elements: Pan playing the syringe, Eros with the lyre, a Satyr playing the flute, and other rustic scenes. In the center of the cover, on a rectangular frame, we find the following epitaph (Fig. 3b)²²:



*D(is) M(anibus)
Maconianae Severianae
filiae dulcissimae
M(arcus) Sempronius Proculus
Faustinianus v(ir) c(larissimus) et
Praecilia Severiana c(larissima) f(emina)
parentes*

Fig. 3b. Detail of inscription

It is important to emphasize now that the text, typical and topical in its Roman funerary formulation, has no functional relationship with the iconographic program so overwhelmingly developed in the tomb (the sarcophagus) that houses the body of the daughter of Senator M. Sempronius Proculus Faustianus. Were the senator or his wife, or his deceased daughter, devotees of Dionysus? In the sarcophagus of the Paul Getty Museum there is a dysfunction between the content of the text and the decorative representation of the tomb, the sarcophagus in this case; or maybe not. It makes no sense that the characters that appear in the epitaph had no relationship with the Dionysiac world, beyond artistic taste. Every monument has complete meaning: both the inscription and the images speak to the viewer, although they do so with different languages: the word, on the one hand, and the symbolic representation of the images, on the other hand. We have no doubt that the deceased woman deposited in this sarcophagus had “something more than sympathy” with the Dionysiac universe. Otherwise, such a fabulous economic waste in the creation of this spectacular tomb cannot be understood. Even more, here the decorative program is more important than the text of the epitaph, which is very modest in relation to the whole. It must be remembered, at this point, that the cinerary urns are “the little

²² *CIL* 06, 03834 = *CIL* 06, 31733.

sisters”, and antecedents (the oldest) of the sarcophagi. At the ballot box, therefore, text and images also matter. The substantial difference between the urn and the sarcophagus is that the latter were only available to rich families, and that the urns, which were more humble, could be acquired by more humble people. In fact, a large part of the bones deposited in the urns correspond to freedmen or slaves, especially those dating from the first half of the 1st century AD. And it is also true that, in the urns, “personalization” of the decorative-sculptural elements is not abundant. Most of the symbols are repertoire images, which are repeated in many urns; and for precisely that reason, “non-topical” elements should be considered “personalized adaptations” to the life of the deceased. This is the case of the urn of the *haruspex* Marcus Titius Stephanus, where topical elements are mixed with personalized elements (Fig. 4). Thus, the text indicates that he was a *haruspex*, and the image with the Dionysian elements that underwrite the epigraphic cartouche indicates that he had some relationship or sympathy with the religion of Dionysus.

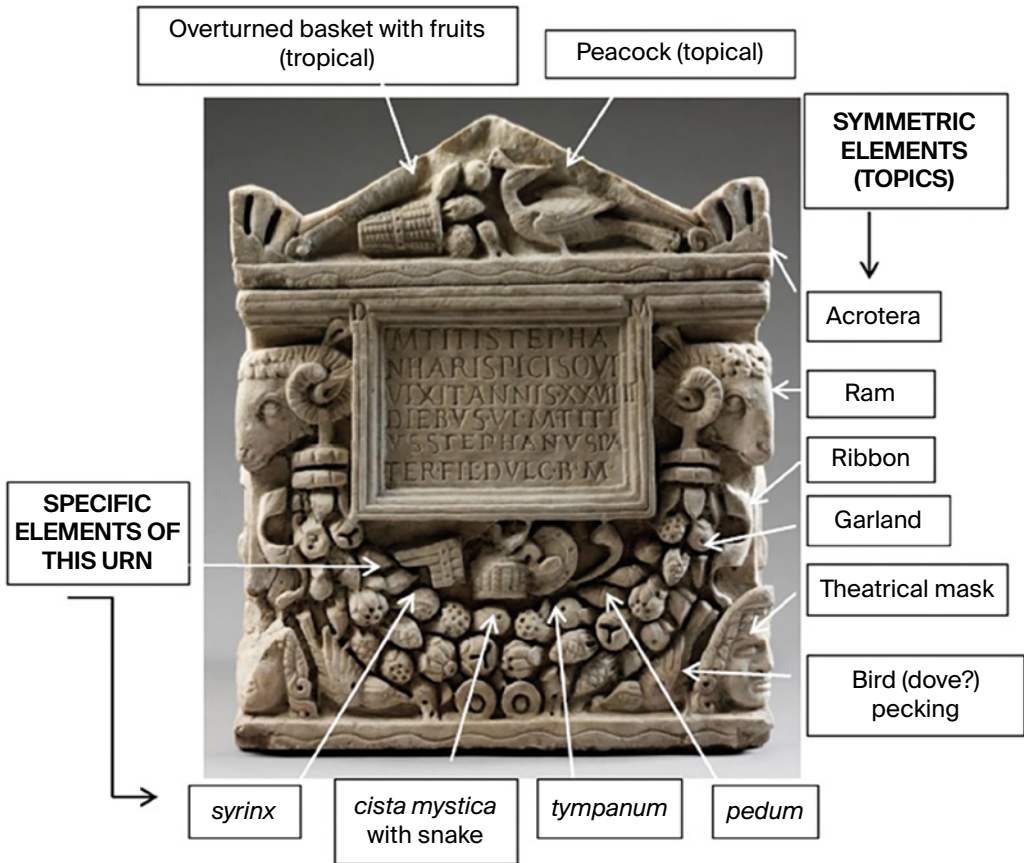


Fig. 4. Decorative program

But what could these Bacchic elements mean in the tomb of a *haruspex*? A part of the answer, or an approximation to it, is provided by a relevant epigraphic document (Fig. 5): the epitaph of the *haruspex* M. Antonius Sotericus²³ in an inscription found in Rome, preserved in the Museo Nazionale Romano.

²³ Friggeri 1982, 80-81. Haack 2006, 9; *AE* 1960, 365; *AE* 2005, 199. *EDCS* 13302529; *EDR* 074257. Quoted by Rüpke – Glock 2008, 770, n° 672.

M(arco) Antonio Soterico (h)arus/pici filio karissimo et sacer/doti Solis Invicti dei et Iovis Ederanisve Dol(i)chen(i) / antistes(!) Liberi Patris colitor/que(!) deorum qui vixit annis / XXV diebus XXII hic est situs in dolore / patris nomen ut supra.



Fig. 5. Museo Nazionale Romano. Photo: <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/foto/F009093>.
Edition: http://www.edr-edr.it/edr_programmi/res_complex_comune.php?do=book&id_nr=EDR074257

As the monument has arrived, there are no religious figures or symbolic elements in it, despite Sotericu's priestly curriculum. The order in which the different priesthoods that he held appear indicate that the last, and most important, is that of *haruspex*, since it appears first, next to the name of the deceased to emphasize his last office, and because later, through the conjunction *et*, it marks other moments: the various eastern priesthoods: that of Sol Invictus (sc. Mithras), of the Syrian Hadaranes,²⁴ of Jupiter Dolichenus, and finally *antistes* of Liber Pater, this being the first religious position held by Antonius Sotericus, and the least important. In any case, this document is useful to us to support the argument that various priesthoods, such as those mentioned here, are not incompatible throughout the life of an individual prone to the *negotium* of religion. If in this inscription there is no doubt that *Sotericus* held various priesthoods or religious positions, explicitly named (et *sacerdoti... antistes... colitorque deorum*), the same does not occur with the inscription of the *haruspex*. From this we deduce that *Titius Stephanus* was not "*sacerdos*" of *dei Liberi*, but only a devotee of Liber Pater –Dionysos. This idea is also supported by the fact that the symbols represented (*cista*, *syrinx*, *tympanum*, *pedum*) are not priestly objects but ritual ones, or more precisely the objects carried in the hands of those men and women who are part of the Bacchic procession.

This also explains why *Stephanus* (or his father, who commissioned the monument) did not include an official "Bacchanal" religious position in the written epitaph.

Trying to refine further, what relationship did *Stephanus* have with the Bacchic cult? It is impossible to know, and it is not advisable to simplify the possibilities. Looking at the list of degrees that this cult presents in the monumental inscription of *Torrenova*, in Italy, we see up to 25 hierarchical degrees of the Dionysian clergy in imperial times,²⁵ with their generic names (*herôs*, *dadauchos*, *hierêis*, *hierophantes*, *theophoros*, *kistaphôros*, etc.). If *Stephanus* did not make any written allusion to any of them, it is because he was surely a simple devotee, and, in any case, it was considered that this Dionysian devotion could not be compared in importance with the fact of being a professional *haruspex*, although the Dionysian religious sentiment—so different from that of the *haruspex*!— could not be forgotten, and was forever suggested in the monument by ordering those symbols that were recognizable to every spectator to be sculpted on it.

Consequently, therefore, on the one hand the profession (*haruspex*) is expressed in writing, on the other hand the Bacchic religiosity or piety towards that religion is expressed in images, which does not

²⁴ Haack 2005, 172-174.

²⁵ Vogliano 1933, 215-231; Cumont 1933, 232-263, esp. 247-249 (list); Nilsson 1934, 1-18; Scheid 1986, 275-290; Guarducci 1984, 183ss. (with list); Perea Yébenes 1991, 183 (list).

have to appear expressed in words. The flexibility that the Roman religion had in this sense allowed an individual to attend to both cults, in each one playing a different role, but not at all incompatible in this case, nor was it rare, but rather frequent, for an individual to be devotee of various gods, or goddesses, throughout their life, or being an expert in some religious “trade,” such as being a fortune teller.

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