

# DIKE

RIVISTA DI STORIA DEL DIRITTO GRECO ED ELLENISTICO

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18

2015

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18, 2015

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Volume pubblicato con il contributo dell'Università degli Studi di Milano.

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MIMESIS EDIZIONI (Milano – Udine)

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[mimesis@mimesisedizioni.it](mailto:mimesis@mimesisedizioni.it)

Issn: 1128-8221

Isbn: 9788857535159

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*Youval Rotman (Tel Aviv University)*

## The Imperial Eunuch: Traces of Hellenistic Institution in Roman Epigraphy

### *Abstract*

Using epigraphic sources the present study focuses on the integration of eunuchs into the social elite of the Roman Empire. Eunuchs in high positions were a new late Roman phenomenon. Despite the legislative measures taken against castration of a human being, starting from the fourth century eunuchs filled high offices created especially for them. An analysis of twenty-two inscriptions from the first to the sixth century A.D. reveals the Greek East as a source of the imperial Roman use of eunuchs. The phenomenon entered Roman society after being adopted from Asia Minor, and was later institutionalized as an adaptation of local customs of the north-eastern regions of the Roman world. Greek and Latin inscriptions together with historiographic and legislative sources suggest that local social customs, religious positions and positions in the administration held by eunuchs were adopted by the Roman authorities who needed new types of government and social elite. The severe prohibition of castration did not manage to stop this acculturation process, but changed nevertheless its course.

Il presente articolo analizza attraverso fonti epigrafiche il tema dell'integrazione degli eunuchi nell'élite sociale dell'impero romano. Il fatto che gli eunuchi occupassero posizioni rilevanti rappresentò un fenomeno nuovo nel tardo impero romano. Nonostante i provvedimenti legislativi contro la castrazione di esseri umani, a partire dal IV secolo gli eunuchi iniziarono a ricoprire ruoli importanti, creati apposta per loro. L'analisi di ventidue iscrizioni dal I al VI secolo d.C. indica l'oriente greco come origine dell'uso imperiale romano di eunuchi. Il fenomeno iniziò a riguardare la società romana dopo essere stato importato dall'Asia minore, e fu in seguito istituzionalizzato come adattamento di costumi locali delle regioni nordorientali del mondo romano. Iscrizioni greche e latine, insieme a fonti storiche e giuridiche, suggeriscono che i costumi sociali locali, le cariche religiose e il ruolo nell'amministrazione ricoperti dagli eunuchi furono adottati dalle autorità romane che necessitavano di nuovi tipi di governo e di élite sociale. Il divieto rigoroso di castrazione non riuscì a fermare questo processo di acculturazione, ma comunque cambiò il suo corso.

Terence's comedy *Eunuchus* attests to the fact that eunuchs were a known phenomenon to the Romans as early as the second century B.C.<sup>1</sup> However, the earliest references of an actual presence of eunuchs in Roman society are dated to the early Empire. These were castrated slaves who were used in various ways in wealthy households.<sup>2</sup> A major change occurred between the fourth to the sixth century. Sources from this period offer detailed descriptions of individual eunuchs and their public positions in the imperial court, army, and administration.<sup>3</sup> They are described as men of political influence and high social status, who were no longer of slave status.<sup>4</sup>

This phenomenon of Roman "acculturation" of the use of eunuchs has received much attention in modern scholarship, and was studied in different perspectives.<sup>5</sup> Roman historiography informs us about the role eunuchs played both in the private and imperial sectors. This Roman integration of what can be

- 1 Although Terence probably based his comedy on an earlier Greek play. For an analysis see Térence, *L'eunuque*, ed. J. Marouzeau, trans. and comms. B. Bureau and Chr. Nicolas (Paris, 2015), and C. S. Dessen, "The figure of the eunuch in Terence's *Eunuchus*," *Helios* 22/2 (1995) pp. 123-139.
- 2 Tac., II, 71. Suet. *Tit.*, 7, 1. Plin., *HN*, VII, 38 (129). Luc., *Eun. Juv.*, XIV, 91. Mart., II, 60, 3; VI, 67; VIII, 44. For a summary of the use of eunuchs in Roman society under the early Empire see: Ch. L. Murison, "Cassius Dio on Nerva's Legislation (68.2.4): Nieces and Eunuchs," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 53/3 (2004) pp. 343-355, pp. 349-351.
- 3 A few examples: Ammian., XVI, 7, 4-6. Claudian., *In Eutropium. PLRE*, vol. 2, pp. 101 ("Antiochus 5"), 151-152 ("Arsacivus 2"), 660 ("Lausus 1"), 704-705 ("Mamas 2"), 1059 ("Terentius"). G. Greatrex and J. Bardill, "Antiochus the *Praepositus*: A Persian Eunuch at the Court of Theodosius II", *DOP* 50 (1996) pp. 171-198.
- 4 The most famous eunuch of the late Empire was Narses who started his career at the imperial court of Constantinople and became the chief and only commander of Justinian's military campaign in Italy: Procop., *BP*, I, 15, 31. Agath., I, 16.
- 5 Sh. F. Tougher, "Images of Effeminate Men: the Case of Byzantine Eunuchs," in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D.M. Hadley (London-New York, 1999) pp. 89-100. Sh. F. Tougher, *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond* (London, 2002). Id., *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society* (Abingdon-New York, 2008). H. Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe. Zur politischen und sozialen Bedeutung des praepositus sacri cubiculi im 4. und 5. Jh. n. Chr.* (Frankfurt am Main, 1995). Peter Guyot, *Eunuchen als Sklaven und Freigelassene in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Stuttgart, 1980). K. M. Hopkins, "Eunuchs in Politics in the Late Roman Empire," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 189 (1963) pp. 62-80 (repr. in idem, *Sociological Studies in Roman History*, vol. 1, *Conquerors and Slaves*, Cambridge, 1978). K. M. Ringrose, "Living in the Shadows: Eunuchs and Gender in Byzantium," in *Third Sex Third Gender. Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, ed. G. Herdt (New York, 1996) pp. 85-109 (notes pp. 507-518). Ead., *The Perfect Servant. Eunuchs and the Social Construction of Gender in Byzantium* (Chicago-London, 2003). Ead. "Eunuchs in Historical Perspective," *History Compass* 5/2 (2007) pp. 495-506. M. Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch. Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Theology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago, 2001). G. Sidéris, "Les eunuques de Byzance (IVE-XIIe siècle): de la société de cour à la société urbaine," in *Dynamiques sociales au Moyen Âge en Occident et en Orient*, ed. E. Malamut (Aix-en-Provence, 2010) pp. 89-116. Charis Messis, *Les eunuques à Byzance, entre réalité et imaginaire* (Paris, 2014). Y. Rotman, "The Paradox of Roman Eunuchism," *SCI* vol. 34 (2015) pp. 129-150. For a summary of the questions that this subject evokes see Sh. F. Tougher, "Byzantine Eunuchs: an overview, with special reference to their creation and origin," in *Women, Men and Eunuchs. Gender in Byzantium*, ed. L. James (London-New York, 1997) pp. 168-184.



termed the phenomenon of Eunuchism stands in contradiction with the repeated prohibition of Roman law on castration of a human being.

Using epigraphic sources the present study focuses on the integration of eunuchs into the social elite of the Roman Empire in contrast to the prohibition of castration. In what follows we shall examine twenty-two inscriptions from the first to the sixth centuries A.D. mentioning or relating to eunuchs. The epigraphic evidence will prove to be crucial in the examination of the origin of the imperial use of eunuchs. An analysis of this unique data, and in particular the comparison between the Greek and Latin epigraphic evidence, will show that the Roman institutionalization of the use of eunuchs was grounded in the social and cultural life of the oriental regions which the Romans annexed to their Empire, in particular in Asia Minor.

### *The juridical aspect*

Roman law portrays a severe negative attitude toward the act of castration of a human being, both an adult and a male child. This is reflected in a legislative process extending from the first to the sixth century A.D. Although Suetonius and Martial attribute the first prohibition in of castration to Domitian, the first law in this matter that came down to us dates to 97 and is cited in the *Digest*: “he who hands over a slave for castration will be fined half his property.”<sup>6</sup> The prohibition gets more attention as part of the *Lex Cornelia de Sicariis et Veneficis* which equals castration of a human being to homicide.<sup>7</sup> This measure is attributed to Hadrian, and is applied to castration of either a slave or a free man, to both enforced and voluntary castration.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it punishes the person who practices the operation as well as the person responsible for the act. In the beginning of the third century Marcian repeats the same law of Hadrian and adds: ... *et qui hominem libidinis vel pro mercii causa castraverit, ex senatus consulto poena legis corneliae punitur*.<sup>9</sup> Another law, forbidding the act of circumcision except for Jews, quoted in the third century by Modestinus equals the punishment to that for castration.<sup>10</sup> This prohibition of castration as of circumcision manifests the abhorrence of the Roman legislators of any mutilation of the male’s genitals. Moreover, the fact that the punishment becomes more

6 Suet., *Domitianus.*, 7, 1. Mart. II, 60; VI, 2. *Dig.*, XLVIII, 8, 6: *Is, qui servum castrandum tradiderit, pro parte dimidia bonorum multatur ex senatus consulto, quod Neratio Prisco et Annio Vero consulibus factum est.* Neratius and Priscus were both consuls in 97. W. Eck, “Neratius” i, *RE*, sup. 14:286. On Nerva’s legislation in this matter see Cass. Dio., LXVIII, 2, 4, and Murison, “Cassius Dio on Nerva’s Legislation...,” *op. cit.*, particularly pp. 350-351, cf. with the measures taken by Domitian against castration (Cass. Dio., LXVII, 2, 3).

7 *Dig.*, XLVIII, 8, 4.

8 *Loc. cit.*

9 *Dig.*, XLVIII, 8, 3, 4.

10 *Dig.*, XLVII, 8, 11.

severe implies that the first century prohibition in the matter did not stop the practice, although we do have evidence that it was enforced.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the practice of castration of a human being never stopped in the Empire, as the legislation of Constantine, Leo and Justinian shows.<sup>12</sup> Justinian's Novella 142 from 533-552, is the longest and most detailed of all the Roman laws in this subject. It explains that despite the legislation in the subject the practice of castration has become common and dangerous ("out of ninety barely three survive" the operation), and takes severe measures against it by aggravating the punishment and extending it to any accomplice.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to the repeated prohibition of Roman law, no prohibition of this act is known in the Hellenistic kingdoms. An analysis of the epigraphic evidence that comes from regions of Hellenistic political culture under Roman rule reveals the complexity of the Roman use of eunuchs in following the Hellenistic institutionalization of the use in eunuchs from the one hand, while keeping up with Roman juridical norms from the other hand. In his study *Eunuchen als Sklaven und Freigelassene in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Stuttgart, 1980), Peter Guyot has examined together the data from Hellenistic and Roman antiquity relating to the use of eunuchs. Although he underlined the political influence that certain eunuchs acquired in particular Hellenistic kingdoms, he dismissed the idea of a Hellenistic origin of the imperial Roman use of eunuchs because no specific institution existed to solidify the power of eunuchs in Hellenistic time and to enable them to achieve assimilation into the upper class.<sup>14</sup> Only in the fourth century was the use of eunuchs in high positions institutionalized, which in turn resulted in eunuchs developing political interests in opposition to the Roman aristocracy.<sup>15</sup> The epigraphic evidence, however, may suggest a different perspective in regards to the use of eunuchs in high positions. Its analysis reveals that what appears to be a new social phenomenon of the late Roman world, may well have been the adoption of local customs.

11 In his Apology Justin Martyr mentions a young man who wanted to be castrated for religious reasons, Justin, *Apol.*, I, XXIX. Since the surgeons demanded the permission of the authorities, the young man applied to Felix, the prefect of Egypt, but was refused. This case which deals with voluntary castration obviously concerns Hadrian's legislation. Justin wrote his Apology in Rome around 151 and Felix was Egypt's Prefect from 150 to 153. W. T. Wilson, *The Sentences of Sextus* (Atlanta, 2012) pp. 51-54, 279-280. H. Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London, 1967) pp. 74-75. Id., *The Sentences of Sextus, a Contribution to the history of Early Christian Ethics* (Cambridge, 1959) p. 110, n. 3.

12 *CJ*, IV, 42, 1. *CJ*, IV, 42, 2. *Nov. Just.*, 142.

13 *Nov. Just.*, 142. Those guilty will be punished by the same act and will be sentenced to exile for life while their property will be confiscated. Moreover, the Novella states that anyone who helps in the process (by providing shelter for example) will be considered an accomplice and will be punished in the same manner (women will be sentenced to exile and their property will be confiscated).

14 As an exception Guyot states Armenia which demonstrated a close affinity in this respect to the Parthian use of eunuchs: Guyot, *op. cit.*, pp. 101, 119-120.

15 *Loc. cit.* This joins the thesis of Keith Hopkins (*op. cit.*). See Rotman, *op. cit.*

The epigraphic evidence

The table below groups twenty-two inscriptions mentioning or relating to eunuchs.<sup>16</sup>

No	Date	Region	Editions	Epitaph? (age)	Name	Servus/libertus	Data & bibliography
1	1 <sup>st</sup> half of the 1 <sup>st</sup> C.	Anazarbos I (Cilicia)	IK 56, 73 <sup>(1)</sup>	Eunuch's	Krokos ('saffron') <sup>(2)</sup>		Eunuch, <i>trophieus</i> <sup>(3)</sup> of Julia the younger, Tarkondimotos' daughter
2	1 <sup>st</sup> C.	Pantikapaion	CIRB 301 <sup>(4)</sup>	Eunuch's	Amphitiôn <sup>(5)</sup>		<i>Ho epi tôn eunouchôn</i> <sup>(6)</sup>
3	Livia Augusta	Rome	CIL VI 4238		[---]rius	Servus/libertus	Eunuch, in <i>Monumentum libertorum et servorum Liviae Augusti</i>
4	Late 1 <sup>st</sup> -2 <sup>nd</sup> C.	Rome	CIL VI 8954	Eunuch's (75)	T. Flavius Parthenopaëus Popp(a)eanus	Libertus	Eunuch, freedman of T. Flavius Augustus, <i>ab ornamentis</i>
5	Early Empire	Rome	CIL VI 8847	Eunuch's	Cl. Felix	Libertus	Eunuch
6	Late 1 <sup>st</sup> -2 <sup>nd</sup> C.	Puteoli (Campania)	AEp 1996, 417 <sup>(7)</sup>	Eunuch's	C. Cornelius Apolaustus		Eunuch
7	Early Empire	Rome	CIL VI 33855		C. Cartorius Galenus		Eunuch, private sector
8	1 <sup>st</sup> -2 <sup>nd</sup> C. (?)	Egypt	SEG 28 (1978) 1536 <sup>(8)</sup>	Woman's			The term <i>eunouchos</i> used as an adjective.
9	2 <sup>nd</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> C.	Stratonikeia (Caria)	IK 22.1, 1101 <sup>(9)</sup>				Priest, <i>rabdouchos eunouchos</i> , in a dedication to Zeus and Hekate
10-11	3 <sup>rd</sup> C.	Lagina (Caria)	IK 22.1, 513; 544 SEG 35 (1985) 1092 <sup>(10)</sup>				Eunuchs responsible for the sacred forest of Hekate <sup>(11)</sup>
12	(?)	Dura-Europos	SEG 2 (1924-25) 778 <sup>(12)</sup>		Hotês		Eunuch, built an <i>exedra</i> . Insc. on a cubiculum's wall, adjacent to temple
13	3 <sup>rd</sup> C.	Bonn	IG X/2/1 1026 <sup>(13)</sup>	Woman's	Asios B[ata]loi		Epitaph of a woman from Thessalonica describing her relationship with a eunuch

16 All of these inscriptions refer to figures of eunuchs, except no. 8: an epitaph of a woman, in which the term *eunouchos* is used as an adjective.

14	Late 3 <sup>rd</sup> C.	Cappadocia	SEG 34 (1984) 1409 <sup>(14)</sup>	Eunuch's	Euphrates (Armenian) <sup>(15)</sup>	Servus/ libertus	Eunuch, private sector
15	4 <sup>th</sup> C. (?)	Laodicea (Lycaonia)	SEG 6 (1932) 306 <sup>(16)</sup>	Eunuch's	Aurelius Appas		Erected by a father to his <i>presbuteros</i> eunuch son, companion and daughter
16	2 <sup>nd</sup> half of the 4 <sup>th</sup> C.	Appia (Phrygia)	MAMA X (1993) 152 <sup>(17)</sup>	Eunuch's	Heortasius		Bishop, 'reverend eunuch', mother and father are mentioned <sup>(18)</sup>
17	4 <sup>th</sup> C.	Rome	AEp. 1982, 82 <sup>(19)</sup>	Eunuch's (25)	Aedesius (Armenian)		Eunuch, <i>neofittus</i> . An anti- Arian formula engraved on a sarcophagus
18	5 <sup>th</sup> C.	Aquileia	CIL V, 1680 =ILCV 357	Eunuch's (70)	Machrobius	libertus	Christian, 'Palatine eunuch', <i>centenario</i> <sup>(20)</sup>
19	†404	Rome	CIL VI, 3778a =ILCV 358	Eunuch's (~45)	Ioannis		Christian, <i>cubicularius</i> eunuch
20	†487	Rome	CIL VI, 9378 =ILCV 355	Eunuch's	Generosus		Eunuch <sup>(21)</sup>
21	†532	Rome	CIL VI, 9379 =ILCV 356	Eunuch's	Uviliarit (Ostrogoth)		Eunuch <sup>(22)</sup>
22	†571	Rome	CIL VI, 9380 =ILCV 356a	Eunuch's (~30)	Callienicus		Eunuch

(1) J. Strubbe, *Arai Epitumbioi: Imprecations against desecrators of the grave in the Greek epitaphs of Asia Minor – a catalogue* (Bonn, 1997) pp. 266-267, n. 393.

(2) L. Robert, *Noms indigènes dans l'Asie-Mineure gréco-romaine* (Paris, 1963) pp. 181-184.

(3) L. Robert, *Hellenica* 7 (1949) pp. 74-81; *Hellenica* 8 (1950) pp. 73-80.

(4) B. Latyschev, n. 121.

(5) *Bull. Épig.* 5 (1965) p. 202, no. 282.

(6) V. F. Gajdukevič, *Das Bosporanische Reich* (Berlin-Amsterdam, 1971) ch. 10.

(7) G. Camodeca, *AION Archeologia e Storia Antica. Nuova Serie*, v. 3, 1996, p. 152-3, n. 3.

(8) A. J. Sijpesteijn, "An unpublished Greek Funeral Inscription," *Mnemosyne* 31/4 (1978) pp. 418-420. *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1978*, ed. G. H. R. Horsley (Sydney, 1983) pp. 40-43.

- (9) L. Robert, *Études Anatoliennes* (Amsterdam, 1970) pp. 516-523. F. Sokolowski, *Lois sacrées d'Asie Mineure* (Athens, 1955) pp. 162-165, n. 69. L. Vidman, *Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae* (Berlin, 1969) p. 145, n. 281. A. Laumonier, *Les cultes indigènes en Carie* (Athens, 1958) pp. 401-402.
- (10) Hatzfeld (*BCH* 44, 1920) pp. 78-81, n. 11.
- (11) L. Robert (*BCH* 101, 1977) pp. 84-85. Laumonier, *op. cit.*, pp. 389-391.
- (12) F. Cumont, *CRAI* (1924) 19.
- (13) W. Peek, *Gr. Vers-Inschr.* I, p. 309, n. 1093.
- (14) T. Drew-Bear (*EA* 4, 1984).
- (15) Cf. Proc. *BG* iv, 3, 12-21.
- (16) W. M. Calder, "Epigraphy of Anatolian Heresies," in *Anatolian Studies presented to Sir William Mitchel Ramsay*, ed. W. H. Buckler and W. M. Calder (Manchester, 1923), pp. 89-91.
- (17) C. W. M. Cox, "Bishop Heortasius of Appia," in *Anatolian studies presented to William Hepburn Buckler*, ed. W. M. Calder and Josef Keil (Manchester, 1939) pp. 63-66.
- (18) *Bull. Epigr.* 1 (1939) pp. 513-514, n. 421.
- (19) A. Ferrua, *Atti del 1° Congresso nazionale di Archeologia Cristiana* (1950) (Rome, 1952) pp. 153-155.
- (20) *PLRE*, vol. 2, p. 699 ("Macrobius 4").
- (21) *PLRE*, vol. 2, p. 501 ("Generosus 2").
- (22) *PLRE*, vol. 2, p. 1167 ("Wiliarit 2").

A general overview reveals three chronological sections: (1) the inscriptions dated to the first and second centuries A.D. from Rome, Cilicia and the Bosphorus Kingdom (no. 1-7). (2) the inscriptions dated to the late second-third and the fourth centuries, mainly from Asia Minor (no. 9-11, 14-16) and Dura-Europos (no. 12). (3) the inscriptions dated to the fifth and sixth centuries, mostly from Rome (no. 17-22). In addition we note an inscription from Bonn dated to the third century (no. 13).

This chronological and geographical typology marks also different social and cultural milieus. The first section, the inscriptions from the first century and the second century from both Rome and the East, are mainly epitaphs of eunuchs who served in either royal or imperial courts as well as in the private sector. The inscriptions from the third and the fourth century which come from Asia Minor show eunuchs in the private sector and in religious positions. The two third-century inscriptions from Caria concern eunuchs in relation to the cult of Hecate, while the two fourth-century inscriptions from Phrygia and Lycaonia are Christian epitaphs of clergymen. The later six epitaphs (no. 17-22) are from Italy (six from Rome and one from Aquileia) and seem to be of eunuchs in the royal service. Their names in the late inscriptions point to their foreign origin. This typology reveals eunuchs in private, imperial and royal service along with eunuchs in religious positions. Moreover, it does not show a marked difference in their role over times.

### *Eunuchs as slaves in private and imperial service*

The earliest inscriptions from Italy in this corpus indicate the juridical status of the eunuch, who could be either a slave or a freedman. The earliest one among them is an epitaph of a eunuch of which we know nothing else (no. 3). The epitaph no. 4 of the eunuch T. Flavius Parthenopaeus Poppeanus, a *libertus* of Titus Flavius Augustus, indicates that he was seventy-five-year old and *ab ornamentis*, i.e. responsible for jewelry and ornaments. These inscriptions from Rome together with descriptions of Roman authors indicate eunuchs in the ser-

vice of both private and imperial households.<sup>17</sup> According to Suetonius and Cassius Dio, eunuchs were a highly appreciated possession, a kind of luxury that only the rich could afford.<sup>18</sup> The epigraphic evidence clearly shows that these eunuchs were purchased as slaves.

Cassius Dio attributes the first Roman prohibition of castration of slaves to Domitian, stating that his objective was dishonoring Titus who was himself fond of eunuchs.<sup>19</sup> This description finds support in the epitaph of Parthenopaeus Poppeanus (no. 4). One of the results of the legislative process against castration but not against the use of eunuchs, was an increase in the importation of eunuchs. This became the only legal way to acquire eunuchs.<sup>20</sup> Leo's law in this matter, which forbade all property transaction of Roman castrated slaves (*romanae gentis homines*) within the Empire explicitly stated that trade in eunuchs from barbarian origin is legal as long as the castration was not conducted in the Empire.<sup>21</sup> An epitaph from Cappadocia dated to the third century (no. 14) is dedicated to Euphrates who, "though lived most of his life in Cappadocia, was born in Armenia." In fact most of the famous eunuchs from the fourth to the sixth century were from eastern foreign origin: Persia, Mesopotamia, Armenia and the Caucasus.<sup>22</sup> The Italian epitaphs from the same period show that in Italy too, eunuchs were of foreign origin. An epitaph (no. 17) dated to the fourth century states the Armenian origin of the eunuch Aedesius (*natione Armenius*), while another one (no. 21) mentions the eunuch Wiliarit, clearly a gothic name.<sup>23</sup>

Castrated slaves, especially in domestic service, could be freed like any other slaves, as these inscriptions show. Moreover, it is the earlier inscriptions, those from Rome dated to the first century, which indicate the original slave status of eunuchs. Later inscriptions, even those dated to the end of the first and second centuries (no. 6-7) are epitaphs of free eunuchs with no indication of a possible slave or freedman status.

Another important fact which the epitaphs from the first and second centuries reveal is the lack of family lineage. Marriage was excluded for eunuchs of both slave and free status.<sup>24</sup> Sexual relationships were a different matter. Though Roman authors tend to outline the sexual relationship between a eunuch and his

17 *Supra*, n. 2.

18 Suet. *Tit.*, 7. Cass.Dio. LXXVI, 14, 4.

19 Cass.Dio., LXVII, 2, 3. Cf. Cass.Dio., LXVIII, 2, 4. Murison, *op. cit.* Cf. Mart. II, 60; VI, 2. See also Earinus, Domitian's slave eunuch, who came from Pergamum: Mart. IX, 11-13; 16-17; 36. C. Henriksen, "An Imperial Eunuch in the Light of the Poems of Martial and Statius," *Mnemosyne* 50/3 (1997) pp. 281-294.

20 See for example *Dig.*, XXXIX, 4, 16, 7 which states the importation of eunuchs from India.

21 *CJ*, IV, 42, 2.

22 *Supra*, nn. 3-4.

23 M. Schönfeld, *Wörterbuch der altgermanischen Personen-und Völkernamen*, p 265. *PLRE*, vol. 2, p. 1167 ("Wiliarit 2").

24 *Dig.*, XXIII, 3, 39 which distinguishes a *castratus* from any other types of *spado*. Cf. *Dig.*, XXVIII, 2, 6.

master, an inscription from the third century (no. 13) reveals a different case. In this epitaph a woman from Thessalonica describes her relationship with Asios, who, “although a eunuch, managed to conquer her by love charms.” Yet, this is an exceptional inscription in mentioning a relationship of a eunuch as a companion whose juridical status is not indicated.

Put together these inscriptions show a change in the social position of eunuchs in the Roman society between the first and the sixth centuries. While in the early Empire eunuch slaves come from within the Empire, in the later period more eunuchs of foreign origin are mentioned. Another change is their shift from the imperial and private sectors to the imperial sector alone. It is Roman legislation which provides the evidence. A law promulgated under Constantine states that the punishment for castration of a slave will include the confiscation of the slave itself.<sup>25</sup> Roman legislation seems here as a means to procure eunuch slaves to the benefit of the imperial court through the treasury.<sup>26</sup> Liberating all castrated slaves in the Empire the Novella 142 of Justinian aims to put an end to the use of eunuchs in the private sector.<sup>27</sup> Eunuchs remain hereafter only in imperial service, where a new curriculum was opened for them. The Roman change from private to imperial service of eunuchs in view of the epigraphic evidence from the Eastern regions of the empire can indeed be understood as following Hellenistic roots, very much present in the eastern regions of the Empire.

### *Eunuchs in imperial service*

Although epitaphs from the first centuries A.D. mention eunuchs in imperial service, it is only in the fourth century that we find descriptions of the positions and functions of eunuchs at the imperial court. Certain eunuchs who served in the palace held the title *cubicularii*. They were personal attendants of the emperor, and were responsible for his bedchamber.<sup>28</sup> Starting from the fourth century Roman authors mention also a body of eunuchs in the permanent presence of the emperor.<sup>29</sup> Eunuchs traditionally filled the position of the *praepositus sacri cubiculi*, the person in charge of the emperor’s service.<sup>30</sup>

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25 *CJ*, IV, 42, 1.

26 See in particular: *CJ*, IV, 42, 2; XII, 5, 4 and the analysis of this thesis in Rotman, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-136.

27 *Nov. Just.*, 142.

28 Ammian, XXVII, 10, 11. Malal., p. 332. *Chron. Pasch.*, p. 551.

29 Cf. no. 1 from first-century Pantikapaion mentions Amphiþiôn, in the royal service responsible of a body of eunuchs (*Ho epi tôn eunouchôn*), and nos. 10-11 from third-century Lagina, where a body of eunuchs is made responsible for the sacred forest of Hecate.

30 For a detailed analysis of the imperial positions created for eunuchs and the dignities they acquired in the fourth-sixth centuries see: Scholten, *op. cit.* Guyter, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-175. F. P. Retief and L. Cilliers, “The eunuchs of early Byzantium,” *Scholias* 13 (2004) pp. 108-

At the end of the fourth century the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* was promoted from the title *clarissimus* to *illustris*. In the fifth century he acquires privileges equaled to those of the *praefectus praetorio* and the *praefectus urbi*.<sup>31</sup> In the *Notitia Dignitatum* the *praepositi sacri cubiculi* of the East and of the West are marked as *viri illustres* and are ranked between the *magistri militum* and the *magistri officiorum*.<sup>32</sup> The *praepositus sacri cubiculi* was not the only high office created for eunuchs. Such were the *primicerius sacri cubiculi* and the *castrensis*.<sup>33</sup> These were responsible for the administration of the palace, its maintenance, and supervised the work of a large staff. The main question is of course why eunuchs held such important positions and achieved such dignities within the imperial system of power. The Greek inscriptions from the first century may reveal the historical background of this process and show that eunuchs in high royal positions were not at all a new institution.

The earliest Greek inscription in the corpus is an epitaph from Cilicia (no. 1). It was found on a Rock-cut tomb near Anavarzaba, identified with the ancient Anazarbos. It is the tomb of the eunuch Krokos who was the *tropheus* of Ioulia the Younger, the daughter of Tarkondimotos II.<sup>34</sup> The dynasty reigned over some part of east Cilicia from 67 B.C. until A.D. 17. His name, Krokos, which means saffron, is a typical Cilician name of both slaves and freemen. In his study of the use of the title *tropheus* mostly in epitaphs from Asia Minor from the imperial period Louis Robert has revealed that this title indicates an economic function.<sup>35</sup> The title was officially bestowed by the city on benefactors who provided food to persons in need. Robert suggests an economic context to the term translating it as a sort of a public supplier, a “feeder” (*nourricier*.)<sup>36</sup>

A second inscription, also from the first century A.D. comes from Pantikapaion, the seat of the kings of the Bosphorus (no. 2). This is an epitaph erected to Amphitiôn, ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν εὐνούχων (*ho epi tôn eunouchôn*), i.e. the chief, the *praepositus*, of the eunuchs. Although it does not indicate whether Amphitiôn was himself a eunuch, it gives a clear evidence of the existence of a specific “body of eunuchs” supervised by a chief in the royal court of the Bosphorus

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117. Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society*, *op. cit.*..., ch. 4, and ch. 5 for the changes that occurred in this array of positions since the seventh century. For the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* in particular see *CJ*, XII, 5, 4 and J. E. Dunlap, *The Office of the Grand Chamberlain in the Later Roman and Byzantine Empires* [*Stud. Human.* 14] (Univ. Of Michigan, 1924).

31 Previous note.

32 *Not. Dig. Or.*, X ; *Not. Dig. Occ.*, VIII.

33 Retief and Cilliers, *op. cit.*

34 R. Syme, *Anatolica: Studies in Strabo*, ed. A. Birley (Oxford, 1995) pp. 101-105.

35 L. Robert, “Addenda au tome VII. *Tropheus* et *Aristeus*,” *Hellenica* 1-12 (1960) pp. 569-576. A. Heller, “La cité grecque d’époque impériale : vers une société d’ordres ?” *Annales H.S.S.* 64/2 (2009) pp. 341-373.

36 Cf. M. Sartre, “Le *tropheus* de Gadhîmat, roi de Tanukh: une survivance en Arabie d’une institution hellénistique,” *Stud. Bib. Franc. Liber annus* 29 (1979) pp. 253-258.



kingdom, which resembles the description in late Roman historiography of the imperial court at Constantinople.<sup>37</sup>

These two inscriptions seem informative as to the origin of the Roman imperial use of eunuchs, and reveal it as part of the social life in Asia Minor and the Bosphorus kingdom.<sup>38</sup> When Constantinople was founded not only as a new Roman capital, but also as a new type of Roman capital, it required a new type of social elite, created from the local elite of Asia Minor and Syria.<sup>39</sup> It seems logical that the emperors would adopt the local models of royal service and court's administration. Moreover, eunuchs were already used there as highly qualified servants also in the private sector, and Roman legislation proved to be a useful tool in order to direct eunuchs from the private to the imperial service: a law of Leo not only encouraged private persons to donate their eunuch slaves to the imperial service, but also gave immunity to castrated slaves who seek refuge in the imperial court by liberating them.<sup>40</sup> This theory gets a support from historiographic descriptions of the use of eunuchs in the Caucasus.<sup>41</sup> In fact, references to eunuchs in the royal and imperial service are not the only evidence to indicate a Roman adoption and continuity in the use of eunuchs in the Roman Greek East of Hellenistic roots. The same is also the case in regards to the use of eunuchs in the religious service.

### *The religious eunuch*

Eunuchs in religious cult were a known phenomenon in Antiquity. The most famous example are the Galli, Cybele's priests, who in a special ceremony entered an ecstatic state. Imitating Attis' mythological grief some ended up castrating themselves.<sup>42</sup> The act of self-castration in Cybele's cult was still practiced in Asia Minor in the first and second centuries A.D. Lucian

37 *Supra*, n. 30. Malal., pp. 332, 408. *Chron. Pasch.*, pp. 551, 610.

38 For the Seleucid court see Liv., XXXV, 15. Cf. Cic. *Orat.* 70(232). Guyot, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-100 summarizes the literary evidence on the presences of eunuchs in the Hellenistic kingdoms.

39 G. Dagron, *Naissance d'une capitale. Constantinople et ses institutions de 330 à 451* (Paris, 1974) pp. 77-96.

40 *CJ*, XII, 5, 4.

41 For Armenia see Zos., II, 27. Soz., *HE*, II, 9-10. Ammian, XXVII, 12, 5-14. For the Abasgians: Proc., *BG*, IV, 3, 12-21. *PLRE*, vol. 2, pp. 88, 660 for "Lausus 1" and "*Andreas qui et Lausiacus* 10," both from Lausiaca.

42 Catull., 63. Ov., *Fast.*, IV, 221-244. G. Sf. Gasparro, *Soteriology and mystic aspects in the Cult of Cybele and Attis* (Leiden, 1985) pp. 26-30. M. J. Vermaseren, *Cybele and Attis, the Myth and the Cult*, trans. A. M. H. Lemmers (London, 1977) p. 96. L. H. Gray, "Eunuch," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings, 5:579-584, pp. 580-581. G. Thomas, "Magna Mater and Attis," *ANRW*, vol. 12/3, ed. H. Temporini, W. Haase (Berlin, 1984) pp. 1500-1535.

provides details as to the special roles eunuchs held in the cult of Dea Syria in Hierapolis.<sup>43</sup>

Extremely informative data comes again from the epigraphic evidence. The duties of eunuchs in the religious institutions are described in two inscriptions from Caria. The first (no. 9) is a decree from Stratonikeia which institutes the ceremonies in the honor of Zeus Panemerius and Hecate, the two protecting divinities of the city. The circumstances are specified on line 3: the Roman senate's recognition of their temples as sanctuaries thanks to their miracles to the Roman benefit.<sup>44</sup> The decree orders that the statues of Zeus and Hecate in the bouleuterion at Stratonikeia as well as in Hecate's temple at Lagina will be honored daily in hymn chanted by children of high ranked families. Lines 19-21 state the responsibility of the priest and of the ῥαβδούχος εὐνούχος (*rabdouchos eunouchos*) to manage and maintain of the process. The term *rabdouchos*, found in other inscriptions from the imperial period, indicates magistrate, a public attendant, a *lictor*, both in private and public service.<sup>45</sup>

More information is given in the two inscriptions from Lagina. The first (no. 10) is a set of regulations issued by the *stephanophoros* and priest at Lagina concerning the sacred forest of Hecate. The eunuchs were not the priests, but held certain administrative roles. These roles included the maintenance of the sacred forest including the planting of new trees, for which they employ public slaves under their command. In another fragment of the same inscription (no. 11) one of these eunuchs is entitled "solemn eunuch of the goddess" (σεμνότατος τῆς θεοῦ εὐνούχος).

References to eunuchs in pagan cults stop in the third century. However, religious eunuchs continued to exist also in early Christianity, a fact which suggests an affinity to local pagan cults.<sup>46</sup> It is again the epigraphic evidence that may help us in providing both cultural and geographic data. An epitaph (no. 15) from Ladik, formerly the city Laodicea in Lycaonia, is a dedication of a tomb by a father to his dead son, his wife, daughter and himself in their lifetime. The son, as the inscription notes, was a eunuch priest (πρεσβύτερος εὐνούχος.)

43 J. L. Lightfoot, "Sacred eunuchism in the cult of the Syrian Goddess," in *Eunuchs in Antiquity and Beyond*, ed. Sh. Tougher (London, 2002) pp. 71-86. Gasparro, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-30. G. Sandares, "Les galles et le gallat devant l'opinion chrétienne," in *EPRO 68/3 (Homages à Maarten J. Vermaseren)* ed. M. B. de Boor, T. A. Edirge (Leiden, 1978) pp. 1062-1091.

44 Cf. L. Robert and J. Robert, *La Carie: Histoire et géographie historique avec le recueil des inscriptions antiques*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1954) pp. 97-102.

45 IG IX/2 735 (from Larissa), 1109/24 (from Coropa) both from the second century B.C.

46 This does not necessarily imply that all eunuchs who filled religious positions were voluntarily castrated. For a comparison between Christian and pagan self-castration and the attitude of Christian authors towards pagan self-castration see Kuefler, *op. cit.*, ch. 8.

The epitaph is dated to the fourth century according to William Calder who gives the year 325 as a *terminus post quem*.<sup>47</sup>

Another epitaph (no. 16), dated to the second half of the fourth century, mentioning a eunuch, was found in the proximity of Abya village, formerly the city of Appia, Phrygia. This is an epitaph of Herotasios, probably the bishop of Appia. The inscription states (lines 8-9) that he left his Church and *stemma*, which William Cox interpreted as *ordo*, i.e. clergy.<sup>48</sup> On line 5 he is called a “reverend eunuch” (τίμιος εὐνοῦχος.)

The phenomenon of voluntary castration of Christians who followed literally Mt 19:12 is well known and received much attention in modern scholarship.<sup>49</sup> The two inscriptions (nos. 15-16) clearly attest to eunuchs as clergymen. They differ from the other inscriptions in stating family relatives, and describe free-born men who at some stage of their life became eunuchs. This could well have been by their family’s choice or even their own. In both cases these are clergymen. Yet, the most important information is here the geographic evidence, since these inscriptions from Phrygia and Lycaonia suggest that Christian eunuch clergymen replaced the role eunuchs had in pagan local cults. In fact, this cultural-geographic affinity between religious castration of Christians and the Galli in Cybele’s cult was first drawn by Basil of Ancyra, himself from fourth-century central Asia Minor.<sup>50</sup>

The phenomenon of the Christian religious eunuch did not agree with the imperial prohibition on voluntary castration. The first canon of the council of Nicaea I clearly states: “If a man has been mutilated by physicians during sickness, or by barbarians, he may keep his position in the clergy; but if a man in good health has mutilated himself, he should resign from his post after the matter has been proven, and in future no one who has thus acted should be ordained.”<sup>51</sup> This was part of the process during which Christianity became a state religion, which required the Church to adhere to state laws, all the more so since the emperor presided over its first universal council. This process sheds light on the two inscriptions from Phrygia and Lycaonia (nos. 15-16) since both are dated post Nicaea I. This is probably the reason why William Calder and Louis Robert interpreted them as heretic.<sup>52</sup> However, no apologetic tone is

47 Calder, *op. cit.* The *TPQ* is here determined according to the first council of Nicaea (see below).

48 Cox, *op. cit.*

49 Kuefler, *op. cit.*, ch. 8. D. F. Caner, “The Practice and Prohibition of Self-Castration in Early Christianity,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 51/4 (1997) pp. 396-414. Justin, *Apol.*, I, XXIX. D. Pevarello, *The Sentences of Sextus and the Origins of Christian Asceticism* (Tübingen, 2013) pp. 62-70.

50 Basil of Ancyra, *De virginitate*, 62, in PG 30: 797A (following Caner, *op. cit.*).

51 Trans. W. R. Clark in C. J. Hefele, *History of the Christian Councils of the Church* (New York, 1972) vol. 1, pp. 375-376.

52 *Bull. Epigr.* 1 (1939) pp. 513-514, no. 421. Calder, *op. cit.*

detected. We continue to hear about eunuchs as clergymen after 325.<sup>53</sup> From the same particular region of Phrygia *The Acts of Philip*, an apocryphal text dated to the end of the fourth century-beginning of the fifth century, refers to virgins and eunuchs together as symbols of the true spiritual servants of God.<sup>54</sup>

Referring to the two inscriptions from Phrygia and Lycaonia, Cox suggested also the possibility that *eunuchos* may have here an allegoric meaning: ascetic.<sup>55</sup> This possibility can be examined in light of the funeral inscription from Egypt (no. 8). It was copied by Sijpesteijn out of a sarcophagus in the shop of an antique dealer in Cairo. The sarcophagus is now lost. The husband, Loukius Dexius Herkouleanus, made it for his wife Valria, daughter of Markus from Caesarea in Mauritania. Among other things she is described as *philandros* and *philoteknos eunouchos*. To explain this very unusual use of the word, Sijpesteijn writes as follows: “there can be no doubt whatsoever that in this context the word is an adjective. The use of *eunous* in line 2 refutes the folk-etymological connection of *eunouchos* with *eunous*. The word has in this inscription its etymological meaning of who keeps/preserves the nuptial bed, faithful.”<sup>56</sup> Yet, the word *eunouchos* is practically never used as an adjective, although it acquires an allegoric meaning towards the end of the second century. When Clement interprets allegorically the verse in Mt 19:12, he states that those who make themselves eunuchs to attain the Kingdom of heaven are not those who castrate themselves, but those who choose celibacy instead of marriage.<sup>57</sup> But even in his allegorical interpretation Clemens refers to the word eunuch always in regard to men and never to women.

### *To conclude*

Although eunuchs in high positions were a new late Roman phenomenon, both in imperial and ecclesiastic positions, they were not new to the society of Asia Minor. Eunuchs were part of Roman society in Italy already in the first

53 Sev. Antioch., *Ep.*, VIII, 2 (ed. trans. E. W. Brooks, *The Sixth Book of the Selected Letters of Severus Patriarch of Antioch in the Syriac Version of Athanasius of Nisibis*, London, 1904).

54 *Acta Philippi*, 2 vols., eds. Fr. Bovon, B. Bouvier and Fr. Amsler (Turnhout, 1999) I, 7; 8; 10, pp. 13-16. For the date see: Fr. Bovon, B. Bouvier, Fr. Amsler, *Actes de l'apôtre Philippe* (Turnhout, 1996) p. 30.

55 Cox, *op. cit.* see: M. Horstmanhoff, “Who is the true eunuch? Medical and religious ideas about eunuchs and castration in the works of Clement of Alexandria,” in *From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized Jewish Lore and in Early Christian Literature*. Papers of the Symposium in Jerusalem, 9-11 September 1996, eds. S. Kottek and M. Horstmanhoff (Rotterdam, 2000) pp. 101-118

56 To support his argument he cites the unique use of *eunouchos* as adjective, the frag. 789 of Sophocles, though there it appears in its usual etymological meaning of a eunuch.

57 Clement, *Strom.*, III, 12 (79, 3). See also his different interpretation for eunuch as the person who denies the truth: *ibid.*, III, 15 (99, 1). III, 1 (1); III, 12 (79, 3); III, 15 (99, 1). Discussion and analysis in Caner, *op. cit.*, pp. 404-406.

century A.D. But it was only starting from the fourth century that we have evidence of them filling high offices created especially for them. The early epigraphic evidence offers valuable and indeed unique data in indicating the Hellenistic East as a source of the Roman use of eunuchs in the first centuries of the Empire. This phenomenon thus entered Italy after being adopted from Asia Minor, and was later institutionalized also as an adaptation of local customs of the north-eastern regions of the Roman world. This data together with historiographic and legislative sources suggest that local social customs, religious positions and positions in the administration held by eunuchs were adopted by the Roman authorities who needed new types of government and administrative elite, despite of the sever prohibition of castration that did not manage to stop this acculturation process. The epigraphic evidence shows the same continuity in the use of eunuchs as state officials as in pagan and Christian cults.

