

# IMPOLITENESS AMONG SLAVES. AN EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE FOR INSULTS FROM A GRAECO-ROMAN BILINGUAL CONTEXT OF SOUTHERN ITALY

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**ABSTRACT:** A threefold inscription scratched on a tile found in the surroundings of Reggio Calabria, dating back to late 2nd century BCE, evidences for insults addressed to slaves employed in a local pottery. Both context and abusive terms point to a controversy broken out among colleagues within the place of work. The offensive words reveal a Greek-Latin bilingualism, in which Latin plays the role of language first learned and used in everyday speeches, as well as the high degree of literacy of slaves, confirmed by similar manufactures with Latin and Oscan inscriptions. Nevertheless, the threefold inscription raises some questions about text cohesiveness and, more importantly, the number of the addressees implied by the sequence of appellatives in vocative case, which is the key point for understanding the text as a whole.

**KEYWORDS:** insults, slaves, epigraphy, Greek-Latin bilingualism, Southern Italy.

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Generally insults are considered among the most conventionalised impolite expressions. However, offensive words and impoliteness do not always overlap: impoliteness encompasses broader phenomena than insults and, inversely, insults are not at all times aggressive, but according to circumstances they may hint at affection and familiarity to the addressee. In fact a multiplicity of variables may pragmatically define the real value of an insult, such as social status and mutual attitudes of collocutors, contexts and style registers.

Abundance of abusive expressions, known in antiquity, concerns slave speeches, not only when slaves address each other, but also when a master addresses his slave. It is self-evident that masters are licensed to use more direct and impolite language to their slaves than the opposite. Essentially the main sources of insults as address forms in dialogues, where slaves are involved, are both Greek and Roman playwrights, who to different extent exploit the more or less rude language for theatrical effects and comic purposes.

Nature and frequency of insults, however, are differentiated according to the diverse genres of comic theatre. Notoriously in the ancient Attic comedy (e.g. Aristophanes) slaves speak in a more impolite manner than in the Nea comedy (e.g. Menander). In parallel, among Romans in Terence plays servants use more polite expressions than their counterparts in Plautus plays. Such a difference clearly depends on the style adopted by each author with respect to the target of his audience, so that such a distribution rests on different rhetoric and stylistic strategies of insulting. Amazingly skilful manipulations of reciprocal insults animate dialogues either between slaves or between slaves and *lenones* (i.e. merchants of prostitutes) in multiple scenes of Plautinian plays (e.g. *Persa* 407-425; *Pseudolus* 360-370).

It is important to stress that 'impolite' forms do not mean lack of education, low cultural level or ignorance of their users. Rude and offensive expressions put in mouth of slaves very often result from a remarkable proficiency in language, that enables them to master lexical resources for creating new terms and word-plays. Not rarely both interlocutors recognize their equal capabilities in insulting reciprocally<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, bilingual abilities, frequent in slave environments, give rise to jokes obtained by combining lexemes of both languages familiar to the speakers or to word plays basing on the double meaning of some lexical items common to different languages. Both strategies are frequently displayed by Aristophanes, in the Greek front, and Plautus, in the Roman front. The most striking examples are provided by abusive terms arising from hybrid compounds such Plautinian *flagritriba*, *inanilogista* (Lilja 1965, 40) and Aristophanes' Ψευδαρτάβας. A considerable part of insults are *hapax* due to extemporaneous formation of lexical items and improvised word-plays in dialogic contexts. That is why a number of fragments of lost playwrights (e.g. the Sicilian theatre) are known through glosses intended to explain this kind of terms. We may wonder to what extent, however, abusive expressions work as a comic strategy in theatrical plays for featuring slave speeches or they merely mirror a real way of addressing slaves.

#### EPIGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

In contrast with the amplitude of theatrical evidence for rude and offensive expressions, epigraphic remains are very scanty, especially in Greek. The most typical examples of impoliteness

<sup>1</sup> For instance, as recognised by *Pseudolus* after an interaction of reciprocal insults: *in pertusum ingerimus dicta dolium, operam ludimus* (Pl., *Pseud.* 369).

noticeable in the Greek epigraphy consist of threat expressions against thieves of personal belongings or tomb violators. But they have no offensive contents and generally belong to a high register.

Unlike the Roman world, no Greek site has provided with a number of graffiti comparable to those scratched on Pompei's walls, among which plenty of abusive expressions are found, even though only a modest quantity occurs as address form. Even more rare are both Greek and Latin inscriptions, that can be surely referred to dialogical interactions between slaves, coloured by reciprocal insults.

In this respect, an exceptional text comes from Pellaro, a site of southern Italy, in the surroundings of Reggio Calabria along the Messina Strait. An inscription scratched on a tile before drying clay, comprises three sections, distributed in different parts of its surface (SEG XXXIX: 1062; D'Amore 2007, n.º 58). Following the layout of writing on each line, the main editions and commentaries presented the epigraphic sections as follows (Fig. 1):

- A: Κλήμης Ἀλφίου  
Πριμίωνος δοῦλος
- B: Ἄνθου {PH} Ῥηγείνου χεῖρ κεραμεὺς Ἐρμέρωσ Φάλακρε, χαῖρε  
Σωτήριχε κίναϊδε ψευδοκαμινάρι Πριμογένη μάλημπτε  
Αἰσωπιτάνα κεραμῖς
- C: Πριμιγένη CΘI  
TA τῷ μαλήνπ  
τῷ ΚΑΤΤΑΓ  
γάρ ἐστι *vac*  
Πριμο

As to lettering, the first section (A) clearly differentiates from the other ones, so that it seems to have been written by a different hand. Undoubtedly the section (A) displays the most accurate script, shown by the very regular and bold shape of letters in cursive style and text layout in the centre of the tile surface. In contrast the sections (B) and (C) show an increasing degree of inaccuracy: (B) is featured by an erroneous syllabic repetition and an ambiguous wording, that enables alternative readings; (C) is syntactically uneven and undeniably unaccomplished, as proven by the final item Πριμο, an incomplete writing for Πριμογένη mentioned in (B), a variant of Πριμιγένη, the initial word of (C).

Since its publication the threefold inscription has been interpreted as an abusive invective (B) emphasized in (C) against a dead person, mentioned in (A) (Mosino 1989; 2002; Consani 1995). According to this view, the tile would be formerly conceived for a funerary context, as epitaph of the deceased man named in the section (A), i.e. the slave Κλήμης Ἀλφίου Πριμίωνος δοῦλος. The following sections (B) and (C) would have been secondarily added by somebody, possibly another slave, for derogatory and disparaging purpose against the deceased colleague. It is self-evident that the derogatory texts (B) and (C) should have been drafted almost simultaneously with the epitaph (A) and scratched on the tile during the lapse of time between moulding and firing clay.

This view in itself assumes a rather unusual practice of denigrating a deceased, aiming to commit a negative assessment of an individual to the enduring memory of his sepulchral monument. Such a conclusion, however, is insufficiently corroborated by finding circumstances. According to archaeological reports, the tile was placed inside the tomb at a later date than the burial itself. More precisely the tile was found in a filling layer, after the tomb was violated: this detail conveys

the impression that the item resulted from a brickyard dump. In other words, the inscribed tile was reused, so that no relationship can be established between the context of finding and the contents of the text.

In addition, the inscribed surface was unearthed in a reversed position, so that the inscription was invisible to anybody. To sum up, the tile seems to have been reused in relation to the context where it was brought to light. As a result, any primary connection between the inscriptions and finding context of the tile seems to be excluded. In conclusion, neither the finding circumstances nor the text in itself evidence for the original function of (A) as sepulchral inscription, so that an alternative explanation is needed.

The fact that any section of the inscription and finding circumstances are reciprocally unrelated has repercussions on both chronology and text interpretation. As to chronology, the dates, so far suggested, range from 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC to 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. However, on the one hand, the earliest date, connected to the original setting up of the burial (Consani 1995), is to be excluded by the reuse of the tile after violating the tomb and, on the other hand, the latest chronological term, basing on lettering (Buonocore 1991-92, 231), is purely speculative. Consequently, an intermediate date around late 2<sup>nd</sup> and early 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE (Lattanzi 1989, Lazzarini 1989) seems to be more reasonable and consistent with both epigraphic and linguistic data.

#### TEXT COHESIVENESS

Firstly, an important factor, that points to text cohesiveness arises from the circumstance that all parts of the threefold inscription were achieved in a short time span between shaping the artefact and firing clay. Hence, they were drafted almost simultaneously by individuals operating in the same activity and the same production process. All that points to extemporary pieces of writing performed by workers in a moment of their activity within a brickworks.

Two different hands are responsible for (A) and (B)/(C) respectively. The distinction between (A) and (B)/(C) is shown by differences in nature, contents, shape of letters and layout of writing.

Further clues for text cohesiveness are supplied by lexical units linking the diverse parts of the inscribed tile. Among them the most essential one is the mention of individuals indicated as slaves. In (A) the term for 'slave' accompanies the personal name Κλήμης Ἀλφίου Πριμίωνος δούλος. Another word, to be referred to a slave, is μάλημπτε in (B), an adjective in vocative form, addressed to a person different from the individual mentioned in (A). Μάλημπτε is a compound, formed by joining two Latin terms (i.e. *male emptus*), whose literal meaning "badly acquired", that is "result of an unsuccessful acquisition or bargain" refers to the practice of slave sale, as human merchandise, extremely widespread in the Roman world. Pragmatically, its value "bad, worthless, unhelpful", addressed to a person, is an insult, that parallels expressions occurring in theatrical plays for denoting incapable or inefficient persons, e.g. Latin *nihili, minimi pretii* (Lilja 1965, 22). Repetition of this word in dative case (τῷ μαλήμπτῳ) in (C) and, more importantly, in the same noun phrase (Πριμογένη μάλημπτε - Πριμιγένη τῷ μαλήμπτῳ) witnesses to cohesiveness of the sections (B) and (C).

Mentions of slaves occurring in every section of the inscribed tile depict a slave environment, which contribute to define the argumentative structure of the text as a whole. The fact that slaves were responsible for the writing is consistent with the context, given that individuals of this social status conform to the common standards of the workers employed in brickyards and pottery factories during the Roman period.

It is not surprising that slaves wrote on their manufactures. The average level of their literacy is signalled by both literary sources and epigraphic evidence. More frequently they formally sign their artefacts, as shown, in Latin epigraphy, by the late-republican pottery from Cales (e.g. CIL I<sup>2</sup> 412a,b; 413). Noteworthy uniquely Roman nomenclature enables to distinguish slaves from free-born men, due to the use of the term *servus*, shortened *s.* unlike other naming systems, such as the Greek and Oscan ones, that generally omit the terms for ‘slave’, in parallel to those for ‘son’. Furthermore high literacy level acquired by slaves is manifested by informal and playful inscriptions or jokes made on manufactures not immediately visible, such as roof tiles. The commonest contents of this kind of inscriptions are personal names, that mostly work as signatures aiming to mark a personal identity, given that freedom of expression was rather restrained among slaves.

Regarding the type of support and circumstances of writing, the most striking parallel to the inscribed tile from Pellaro is provided by a tile from Pietrabbondante, an important settlement in the heart of Samnium, where a quantity of Oscan inscriptions have been unearthed. In the Samnite tile a twofold inscription has been scratched before drying clay by a pair of women slaves of the same owner, which employed them in his local brickworks (ImIt 1186; CIL I<sup>2</sup> 3556a). Inscriptions were explicitly conceived as signatures of both individuals, who used language and alphabet more familiar to each of them, i.e. Latin and Oscan respectively, for manifesting their identity through their respective signature (Adams 2003, 124; Estarán 2016, II, 17-21).

As to the inscribed tile from Pellaro, nature of a signature is likely to be recognized in the section, (A), where a single name in nominative without any syntactic structure is positioned in the central part of the surface (Κλήμης Ἀλφίου Πριμίωνος δοῦλος). The alternative that this part of inscription was conceived as an epitaph is excluded by archaeological reasons, as said above. Remarkable accuracy, regular shape and considerable dimension of lettering give the impression of a somewhat showy and boastful training in script.

An essential fact, however, differentiates the pair of inscriptions on the Pietrabbondante tile from the threefold inscription on the Pellaro one. The former results from an agreement between two women slaves, who harmonize in putting their signatures, each of them in her own language and alphabet, but in a symmetric way. The latter, in contrast, reveals a disagreement, which is manifested by the derogatory expressions addressed to individuals capable to read those messages. Consequently the addressees cannot be anybody else than colleagues employed in the place of work, where the tile was manufactured.

A clue for the origin of the controversy among colleagues playing an active part in the pottery is provided by a term, addressed as an insult (ψευδοκαμινάρι), referring to laziness or negligence related to specific tasks of the job itself.

## BILINGUALISM AND INSULTS

A striking feature common to both inscribed tiles from Pietrabbondante and Pellaro is the multilingual and multicultural literacy of slaves employed in manufacturing tiles: on the one hand, Oscan and Latin in the heart of ancient Samnium (Adams 2003, 124; Estarán 2016, II, 17-21; Poccetti 2020), on the other hand, Latin and Greek in the district of the Messina Strait (Consani 1995).

As recognized since its finding, the language of the inscribed tile from Pellaro is a mixture of Greek and Latin. Notoriously the concerned region, named *ager Bruttius* by Romans and today Calabria, as a whole, was characterized by a widespread and deep-rooted Greek-Latin bilingual-

ism, carrying on the previous Greek-Oscan bilingualism (Pocchetti 1988), for which this area was renowned in the early Roman period (e.g. P-Fest. 31 L. = Enn., *Ann.* 496 V.; Lucil. 1124 M.). An onward unbroken continuity is currently shown by the considerable impact of Greek on the local Romance dialects as well as by the survival of Greek speaking communities until today.

There is manifold evidence for blending of Greek and Latin in every epigraphic section of the Pellaro tile. Let us start from the personal name Κλήμης Αλφίου Πριμίωνος δοῦλος mentioned in (A). The naming system in itself conforms to Roman patterns. A Latin influence is revealed by the term δοῦλος, which is uncommon in Greek slave names, in parallel to the term υἱός ‘son’ for freeborn men. Significantly a massive rise of occurrences of both terms is observable in Greek epigraphy of the Roman period.

The formula, as a whole, imitates the Roman system of naming slaves, normally constituted by the personal name of the individual, followed by a two-member name of his master and the abbreviated term for slave, e.g.: *Pilemo Helvi A. s.* (CIL I<sup>2</sup> 681), *Bargates Epidi M.s.* (CIL I<sup>2</sup> 2696).

Each member of the formula is also relevant to the Roman nomenclature. Κλήμης is a rendering of the spoken form of *Clemens*, numbered among the most common names of slaves. His master bears a two-member name: Ἀλφιος, a *nomen gentilicium* of pre-Roman origin, occurring in two Oscan inscriptions from the same region (ImIt 1475-1478) and Πριμίων, a hybrid *cognomen*, combining Latin *Primus* and the Greek morpheme -ίων, originally indicating descendants, such as Οὐρανίων “descendant from Οὐρανός” (Chantraine 1979, 165). The local productiveness of this type of derivatives from Latin numerals is confirmed by Σεκουνδίων, attested in Rhegium and Locri (D’Amore 2007, n.º 58; Del Monaco 2013, n.º 114).

A more impressive example of hybridization (Magni 2016) is provided by Πριμογένη, vocative case of Πριμογένης occurring in (B), whereas its variant Πριμιγένη in dative case is found in (C). Πριμογένης is a personal name, frequent in the Roman period, remodelled on Πρωτογένης by replacing the Greek numeral Πρωτο-, as first member of the compound, with its Latin counterpart *Primo-*. If the date suggested above is correct, Πριμογένης would be the first occurrence of the hybrid name, which is recorded in Sicily and elsewhere since the Imperial period. Noteworthy Πρωτογένης, as model for Πριμογένης, is frequent in the Greek epigraphy of Locri, not too far from Pellaro. Its Latin transcription occurs in the earliest Latin inscriptions, as shown by the metrical epitaph of *Protogenes*, a theatrical actor of Greek origin, deemed contemporary with the Ennius’ life (CIL I<sup>2</sup> 1861; ILLRP 804). Most importantly *Protogenes*, like its abbreviation *Protus*, is one of the commonest names of the Roman slaves, as proven by their frequency among *cognomina* of freedmen together with their Latin respective translations *Primigenius* and *Primus* (Kajanto 1965, 18, 77; Solin 1971, 107; 1982, 141-143; 180).

In fact, *Primigenius*, as personal name, could even imply a double meaning, if related to the Latin adjective *primigenius* “original, primeval”. In this sense the adjective is used as epithet assigned to the goddess *Fortuna Primigenia* (Champeaux 1975, Franchi De Bellis 2014). In this case, the fact that the epithet of *Fortuna* is recorded by the earliest votive inscriptions specifically connected with the local worship typical of Praeneste seems to exclude a Greek influence. In turn, later Greek mentions of this goddess either transcribe the Latin form, i.e. Πριμιγένεια, or translate (Τύχη) Πρωτογένεια. The latter procedure seems to overlap Πρωτογένης, properly meaning “first-born”, with πρωτόγονος, which parallels *primigenius* in the meaning “primordial, primeval”.

An intersection of those values is likely to have affected personal names particularly in a bilingual context. Concretely Πριμογένης could be reminiscent of both Greek Πρωτογένης “first-born” and Latin *primigenius* semantically closer to Greek Πρωτόγονος. As to its occurrence as address form in the Pellaro tile, the function of Πριμογένης as lexical unit or personal name is not

clearly distinguishable, due to the different ways of interpreting the text in the section (B), that will be focused later on. What is certain is that Πριμογένη is a vocative case in syntactic agreement with abusive terms (i.e. Σωτήριχε κίναϊδε ψευδοκαμινάρι, μάλημπε), so that it can be interpreted either as a name of the addressee himself or as an expression intended to increase intensity of the insults.

Now let us examine the abusive terms, whose offensive function is manifested by their occurrence in vocative case, i.e. κίναϊδε, ψευδοκαμινάρι and μάλημπε, concentrated in the section (B). Significantly each of them immediately reflects remarkable effects of the Latin-Greek bilingualism.

Κίναϊδε is a Greek word passed in Latin at least since Plautus time, to which its earliest occurrences in Latin date back. More likely, the Greek loanword arrived in Latin prior to literary authors of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, considering its common use in Plautus and Lucilius. The original descriptive value referring to male actors or dancers with effeminate habits, recorded by a Nonius' glose<sup>2</sup>, is preserved by both Plautus<sup>3</sup> and Lucilius. Hence the offensive meaning arises from its use as address form making a direct allusion to homosexual behaviour of an individual. Generally, vocabulary related to sexual habits gives rise to the most popular and vulgar types of rude expressions in any time when insulting somebody (Opelt 1965, 155; Lilja 1965, 68-70; Adams 1982, 200).

The Greek origin of the Latin term for homosexual people parallels a similar phenomenon noticeable in modern languages, as shown by the widespread use of the English term "gay" in the western European languages (e.g., Spanish, French, Italian, German). In turn, the English term, arising from Medieval French, parallels to some extent the semantic evolution of the Greek term from "bright, showy" to "uninhibited by moral constraints" with sexual connotation. In Greek κίναϊδος mainly occurs as appellative for 'dancer', 'catamite' or as generic term for 'obscene', but it is very rare and unusual as address form, as confirmed by its almost unknown use in vocative case (Opelt 1965, 123; Adams 1982, 200).

As an insult, κίναϊδος is much more common in Latin than in Greek. As offensive expression suitable to diverse contexts and occasioned by different reasons, *cinaedus* presents numberless occurrences in both Latin epigraphic and literary sources. In Plautus its use as address form, signalled by the vocative case (*cinaede*), figures besides the descriptive value, indicated by different syntactic structures. In a Plautinian occurrence, *cinaede* is accompanied by an epithet, that emphasises an effeminate habit of an individual in order to intensify its abusive force (*cinaede calamistrate*: Pl., *As.* 627).

A remarkably higher frequency of *cinaede* as address form in vocative is found in Catullus' poetry, as aggressive expression for attacking different persons. Diversity of reasons, underlying the verbal attacks, points out a shifting from a denotative (or cognitive) meaning to a connotative (or emotive) function, which is confirmed by the comparative *cinaediorem*, referred to a woman in a non-sexual context (10, 24). A connotative sense is implied by the occurrence of κίναϊδε in the Pellaro tile like its use by Catullus. Furthermore, the Catullian expressions, i.e. *cinaede Furi* (16, 2), *cinaede Thalle* (25,1), *cinaede Romule* (29,5), *cinaede fili* (33,3), closely parallel the noun phrase Σωτήριχε κίναϊδε in the Pellaro tile. All those utterances consist of a noun phrase, in which κίναϊδε accompanies a personal name (*Furi*, *Thalle* - Σωτήριχε) or an appellative provided with identifying function (*Romule*, *fili*). The syntactic order, however, is inverted in Σωτήριχε κίναϊδε, where the abusive term follows the proper name. The same word order as in the Pellaro

<sup>2</sup> Non. 5: *cinaedi dicti sunt apud veteres saltatores vel pantomimi*, ἀπὸ τοῦ κινεῖν τὸ σῶμα.

<sup>3</sup> Pl. *Mil.* 668: *ad saltandum non cinaedus malacus aequat atque ego*.

tile is found in Pompeian graffiti both in address form (vocative case) and in descriptive utterances (Wachter 2019, n. 1156, 1349, 1350, 1351, 1352). All those occurrences show that *cinaede*, when accompanying a personal name, simply work as abusive and derogatory term, not necessarily referring to sexual behaviour, like English ‘nancy’ or ‘fairy’.

To sum up, κίναϊδος / *cinaedus* was common to the lexica of both Greek and Latin at the date, which the inscribed tile belongs to. In Greek, however, the word displays uniquely a cognitive or denotative meaning, whereas in Latin an emotive or connotative function is increasingly developed, as shown by its frequency as disparaging term for addressing somebody. The extended use of κίναϊδος / *cinaedus* as rude and offensive address form in bilingual contexts, such as Pellaro and Pompei, reveals that Latin was much more familiar to the speaker especially in colloquial speeches of low register.

The role played by Latin as L1 is confirmed by further impolite expressions occurring in the inscribed tile from Pellaro. Ψευδοκαμινάρι is a compound unknown elsewhere, formed by two terms of Greek origin, both borrowed in Latin. The second member (καμινάρι), the head of the compound, is a derivative from *caminus*, a Greek loanword (κάμινος), whose occurrence in Cato indicates an earlier date of the borrowing. This derivative rests on a Latin morpheme *-arius*, frequent in professional qualifications, such as (*faber*) *lignarius*, *ferrarius*, *argentarius*, and so on. *Caminarius*, however, is never attested in Latin, where its synonyms *furnarius* and *fornacarius* are found. On the other hand, the Latin morpheme *-ario-* passed in Greek since late Hellenistic period, as a consequence of the innumerable loanwords from Latin, indicating partly a job activity (e.g. πριμιπλάριος) partly a place (e.g. κελλάριον), and merged with the Greek secondary suffix *-άριος* / *-άριον*. The latter originated from combining *-αρ+ιον* (Chantraine 1979, 74), with diminutive value such as *δουλάριον* “little servant”, *παιδάριον* “little boy”.

That is why the productiveness of *-άριος* / *-άριον* increased over time in late Greek and during the Byzantine age until modern Greek, that presents many *-αρης* derivatives even in personal names. Not rarely the origin of those derivatives is indistinguishable, as shown by *σταταριον* / *statarium* “slave market”, a word circulating amongst Greek and Latin bilingual environments of the eastern Mediterranean area since 2<sup>nd</sup> Cent. BC (Poccetti 1985).

Interestingly, the diminutive value of *-άριον*, when referring to individuals, may convey a disparaging and derogatory sense, as shown by the Aristophanes forms *ἀνδράριον*, *ἀνθρωπάριον* “a nonentity, a person of no value”. It cannot be excluded that the same sense was also implied by *ψευδοκαμινάρι* within a bilingual context.

Noteworthy the vocative ending of *ψευδοκαμινάρι* matches the Latin inflection, that confirms its role as language more commonly used by the speaker. The pattern of compounding, however, is Greek, in that it is modelled on several compounds attested since Classical Greek (e.g. *ψευδόμαντις*, *ψευδομάρτυς*), where *ψευδο-* as first member, works as the adjective *ψευδής* meaning “false, deceitful” (Blanc 2018, 62). The disparaging meaning of the lexical base *ψευδ-* is also proven by its opposite term formed by the negative prefix *α-*, when putting in comparison *ψευδόμαντις* “false diviner” and *ἀψευδόμαντις* “truthful diviner”. The appreciative and admiring value of the negative form *ἀψευδ-* in the meaning of “blameless, irreproachable” as opposite to *ψευδ-* is also confirmed by its occurrence in several personal names, such as *Ἀψεύδης*, *Ἀψεύδων*, *Ἀψευδώ*.

According to this pattern, *ψευδοκαμινάρι* conveys the sense of “false or deceitful oven operator”. This appellation hints at the reason and context underlying the aggressive utterance addressed to a person appointed to an oven for drying clay manufactures in the pottery at issue. The person is addressed by attributing him the blame for laziness or incapability in carrying out his



own job. This behaviour is likely to have had repercussions on the work chain and productivity of the pottery, so that it provoked an angry reaction of job colleagues. Probably it is another slave rather than his master or the owner of the brickworks, who shows his irritated face against a lazy colleague. A master is likely to have not confined his reaction to a written rebuke, but to have inflicted a harsh corporal punishment. Various address forms, used in theatrical scenes (Lilja 1965, 54) refer to whipping and other torture (e.g. *mastigia*, *verbero*, *furcifer*), inflicted to slaves. Frequently, characters of slaves in Roman plays are confronted with allegations of deliberate inactivity, laziness and negligence in their jobs, as shown by the offensive terms, such as *ignave* / *ignavissime*, *iners*, *piger*, *lente*, *nequam/nequissime*, more frequently used by their respective masters for addressing them (Dickey 2002, 183).

A dissimulated laziness indeed is not far from a deception. Accordingly, deceitful slaves are recurrent characters in plots of theatrical plays in antiquity and frequently this sort of characters is sketched by their inclination to cheating. Figures of allegedly mendacious and dishonest slaves often occur especially in Latin comedy, where allegations, more or less founded, of deception are disputed between a master and his slave or by slaves each other, so that this kind of debate forms recurrent themes of cues in theatrical dialogues. In this respect, a number of abusive terms referring to deceitful or cheating behaviour are used as address form in several scenes of Roman plays, such as *perfide*, *infide*, *subdole*, *false*, *fallax*.

The most typical and renowned figure of cheating and dishonest slave is embodied by *Pseudolus*, the protagonist of the homonymous Plautinian comedy, whose name is based on the lexical series of  $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron$ -. More exactly *Pseudolus* is a hybrid derivative combining the Greek lexeme with the Latin morpheme  $-(V)lo-$ . Its meaning “liar, false person” results from remodelling on the pattern of *nomina agentis* like *querulus*, *figulus* basing on Latin lexemes (Zucchelli 1969). Even though  $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron$ - compounds are rare in Latin of the Republican age, the name of *Pseudolus* reveals that Romans were familiar with the Greek lexeme, as confirmed by the preservation of the vowel  $-o-$ , instead of  $-u-$ , that usually precedes  $-lo-$  (Pascucci 1961). As a result,  $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\kappa\alpha\mu\iota\acute{\nu}\alpha\rho\iota$ , a compound created within a bilingual context, could be easily understood by any speaker of each language at issue.

To sum up,  $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\kappa\alpha\mu\iota\acute{\nu}\alpha\rho\iota$ , as an insult, depicts two deviant and undesirable behaviours of an individual within a working place, that are, on the one hand, his incapability of doing a job and, on the other hand, his attitude to deception and inclination to dissimulate.

A direct consequence of the blames implied by  $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\kappa\alpha\mu\iota\acute{\nu}\alpha\rho\iota$  is formulated by  $\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\mu\pi\tau\epsilon$ , that portrays an individual as an unsuccessful purchase, a bargain ended in failure, in one word “bad” or “worthless”. This compound, elsewhere unknown, originated by joining two Latin words, i.e. *male ēmptus*, that occur as verbal phrase, but never as offensive address form. Word formation is modelled on the pattern of Latin adjectives like *malevolus/benevolus*, *maleficus/beneficus*, basing on a verbal root (Lindner 1996, 108-109), but not on a past participle, as it happens in *male ēmptus* >  $\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\mu\pi\tau\epsilon$ .

The compound, occurring in vocative case ( $\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\mu\pi\tau\epsilon$ ) in (B), is repeated in dative case ( $\mu\alpha\lambda\acute{\eta}\nu\pi\tau\omega$ ) in (C), that shows its use as both address form and descriptive term. In both occurrences the compound is recurrent in syntactic agreement with the same element, i.e.  $\text{Πριμογένης}$ . Word repetition is an essential clue for text cohesion, that points to a clear connection between the section (B) and (C), as said above. A further mark of text coherence is provided by the article in attributive position ( $\text{Πριμιγένη τῷ μαλίνπτῳ}$ ), that «typically serve to identify the referent of the head noun» (Van Emde Boas, Rijksbaron, Huitink & De Bakker 2019, 331). In other words,  $\mu\acute{\alpha}\lambda\eta\mu\pi\tau\epsilon$  used as address form in (B) serves as an identity mark of an individual mentioned in (C).

Linguistically, formation of this compound manifests the high proficiency in Latin, that confirms its role as first language acquired and mastered by the speaker. Univerbation of two distinct words gave rise to a phonological restriction, noticeable in the Latin variants of this kind of compounds, like *malivolus* and *malificus* instead of *malevolus* and *maleficus*, even reflected by their derivatives, such as *malificentia*, *benificentia* besides *maleficientia*, *beneficientia*. This phonetic treatment in μάλημπτε is signalled by the grapheme <η>, that in late Hellenistic period is more likely to denote [i] than [ε:]. The change from long /ē/ to short quantity /i/ results from a weakening of the vowel in the middle syllable after accent shift in the compound (Probert 2006, 282). According to Greek prosodic rules, an outcome of an endocentric compound is a recessive accent, that in the specific occurrence overlaps with the feature typical of the vocative case (Probert 2006, 299). Therefore a phonetic transcription of μάλημπτε seems to be more appropriate ['malimpte] than [ma'le:mpte].

A synchronic variation of the vowel in the middle syllable, shown by alternating spelling of Πριμογένης / Πριμιγένης, is to be traced back to the Latin language, as signalled by variants *primigenius* / *primogenius*; *Primigenia* / *Primogenia* (CIL I<sup>2</sup> 60; 1445; 2531), even observable in transcriptions of the Greek personal name like *Protogenes* (CIL I<sup>2</sup> 1861) and *Protigenes* (CIL I<sup>2</sup> 2864), both in Republican age.

Owing to its basic meaning, *male ēmptus* was suitable to both things and slaves, as signalled by an occurrence of *male ēmptus* in Plautus referring to a house, whose purchase resulted to be disappointing or unsatisfactory (Pl., *Most.* 799). The literal meaning of *ēmptus* with reference to a servant is conveyed by a different expression, i.e. *male conciliate*, that occurs in a Terence play for addressing the protagonist eunuch *Dorus*, who entitles the play itself: *Exi foras, scelestē! At etiam restitas, fugitive? Prodi, male conciliate!* (Ter., *Eun.* 669; Dickey 2002, 175; 339). This occurrence parallels the Pellaro tile, in that the same concept, formulated by different expressions, occupies the final position of two sets of three abusive terms, addressed to distinct individuals respectively.

A sequence of three insults is not rare in abusive speeches, given that an emotional state is naturally implied by an aggressive talk, which is required to maximize its effect (Hofmann 1980, 216). For this purpose, a threefold insult increases the force of an offensive utterance. Theatrical dialogues exploit the intensifying force of a threefold insult, as shown by two sets of three abusive words, that emphasizes an address form in an Aristophanes play (Aristoph., *Ran.* 465: ὦ βδελυρὲ κἀναίσχυντε καὶ τολμηρὲ σὺ καὶ μιὰρὲ καὶ παμμίαιρε καὶ μιὰρώτατε). Significantly a set of three insults is frequently replaced by an abusive term in a compound with the number 'three' indicating an insult repeated three times, e.g. τρισκατάρατος, τρισκακοδαίμων, τρισάθλιος in Menander (Dickey 1996, 167-172), *trifur*, *terveneficus*, *triveneficus* in Plautus (Miniconi 1959, 166-168; Dickey 2002, 176-177). The sequence of three insults is a key point to be taken into account, for interpreting the section (B) of the inscribed tile from Pellaro.

#### WHAT IS BEHIND THIS TEXT?

Evidence for three insults, concentrated in the section (B), raises diverse problems concerning their function and use in context. First of all, a crucial question is of whether only one or more addressers and one or more addressees are involved in the speech act and, consequently, to what extent they are respectively identifiable in each block of text. In this perspective the inscribed tile from Pellaro is a challenging test for discourse analysis.

By combining methodical approaches of both narratology and discourse analysis we may distinguish narrator(s) and/or author(s) from actor(s) and, more importantly, addresser(s) from addressee(s). In this respect, also essential is to attempt to outline the plot of the story, revolving around the offensive utterance. As said above, the setting is provided, on one hand, by the circumstances in which the pieces of writing were scratched on the tile and, on the other hand, by the contents of some insults, above mentioned. Both factors converge on the following scenery: a controversy broken out among slaves about working procedures within the pottery, where they were employed.

Narrators are at least two individuals responsible for two parts of writing, which, on graphic grounds, are attributable to distinct hands, that are (A) and (B)/(C) respectively. Uniquely in the first section (A), the author matches the narrator, who is identifiable, assuming that the name Κλήμης Ἀλφίου Πριμίωνος δοῦλος, recorded in (A), is a signature of a slave employed in the pottery at issue. In contrast, narrator of (B) and (C) does not emerge with clarity. A possibility of an overt narrator is allowed by the noun phrase Ἄνθου Ῥηγείνου χεῖρ in initial position of (B), assuming that χεῖρ denotes the hand the writer and not that of the craftsman. In the former case Ἄνθος Ῥηγεῖνος simultaneously would embody the figures of narrator, author and addresser of the abusive utterance. In the latter case the craftsman, whose specific role remains unknown, is a character involved in the story together with the potter, called κεραμεὺς Ἐρμέρωσ, which is probably the owner of the brickworks.

In this case, a covert narrator should be represented by the concluding expression of (B), the noun phrase Αἰσωπιτάνα κεραμῖς, that presents the tile itself as storyteller reminiscent of the Aesop's fables. Αἰσωπιτάνα, a derivative from the Aesop's name through a morpheme *-itano-*, is unknown elsewhere. The suffix *-itano-*, originated as a blending of (Doric) Greek *-ίτας* and Latin *-āno-* after Romanization of Southern Italy (Pisani 1936; Orioles 1975, 186), is mostly used for ethnic names, such as *Neapolitanus*, *Panormitanus*, *Lilybitanus* (Rohlf's 1985, 97; 104). In contrast, Αἰσωπιτάνα occurs in the place of Αἰσωπικός, Αἰσώπειος, the most common derivatives from the Aesop name in Classical Greek. This detail confirms the status of Latin as first language learned by the author and, inversely, his lower level of proficiency in Greek. It cannot be excluded, however, an intentional use of the morpheme *-itano-*, commonly applied to place names, for portraying the scenario evoked by the inscribed tile as a world inhabited by characters of Aesop's fables. In any event, the mention of Aesop implies the acquaintance with the Aesop's corpus of fables, that evidences for the literacy in the slave environment at issue.

Unlike its counterparts of Classical Greek, Αἰσωπικός and Αἰσώπειος, generally referred to terms denoting 'fable', such as μῦθος, μυθάριον, λόγος, αἶνος, the adjective Αἰσωπιτάνα is exceptionally attributed to the word for 'tile', that plays the role of a narrative text. Reasons of the allusion to Aesop are unspecified. Probably they are to be connected to themes of ethics conveyed by the Aesop's tales, whose task was to narrate fictional stories mostly with animal protagonists for educational purposes especially in moral practices. Notoriously behind fiction each tale serves to illustrate a general principle of ethical behaviour to be applied to different events and contexts of the everyday life. That is why the Aesopic corpus of fables provided a solid base for primary education, that yielded a popular heritage without any class differentiation, because their contents involve any aspect of the human life independently of social conditions. In Classical Athens acquaintance with Aesopic tales among common people is proven by the multiple allusions in Aristophanes plays. As to Greek-Roman period we are informed about their use in children's education and as basic exercise in rhetorical schools (e.g. Plut., *Mor.* 14e 10). The fable contents served also to develop the interpretive capability of the allegorical sense of exemplary stories and to acquire ability to ap-

ply appropriately general principles of ethical practices to a particular situation (Jedrkiewicz 1987; Zafirooulos 2001).

The mention of Aesop in the inscription of our tile points out not only the educational level of the single slave revealed by the script in itself, but also the knowledge of the Aesop's tales circulating within an environment of workers employed in a pottery. The allusion to Aesop was meant to be referred to specific circumstances and behaviours, well known to the addressees. Consequently the presupposition ensemble enabled them to recognize the behavioural pattern conveyed by Aesop's tales to be related with the situational context. We ignore the specific facts that triggered the reaction broken into insults. However, as said above, the nature of two abusive terms, i.e. ψευδοκαμινάρι and μάλημπε, that formulate a blame for laziness or conscious negligence relevant to job activities, points to a controversy originated by an imbalanced amount of tasks and inequality of work conditions among colleagues employed in the same place of work. In this scenario the allusion to Aesop is likely to be referred to an ethical norm recurrent in the fable corpus, that is reciprocity (Zafirooulos 2001, 79-97). Reciprocity can be defined as a system of interpersonal and communal relationships that involve mutual obligations between two or more individuals. It is self-evident that imbalance and inequality of work conditions caused by a deviant behaviour or an antisocial habit of colleagues in a place of work prevents teamwork activities and cooperation and obstructs harmony of the communal life. All that transgresses the basic rules of reciprocity underlying any human relation.

#### ONE OR TWO ADDRESSEES?

A more complicated issue concerns the long sequence of address forms in vocative case, among which the threefold insult is found: Φάλακρε χαῖρε Σωτήριχε κίναϊδε ψευδοκαμινάρι Πριμογένη μάλημπε. Possible alternation of offensive terms (κίναϊδε, ψευδοκαμινάρι) and personal names (Σωτήριχε, Πριμογένη) raises the question of whether one or more addressees are involved. Conflicting factors seem to speak in favour of or against each of these solutions. On the one hand, the verb χαῖρε in the second person of the singular points to only one addressee, on the other hand, three elements, i.e. Φάλακρε, Σωτήριχε, Πριμογένη are easily recognizable as personal names, particularly frequent in Southern Italy. More precisely Φάλακρος and Σωτήριχος are found in the Lokroi tablets (Del Monaco 2013, nn. 22; 33), topographically and chronologically not too far from the inscription on the Pellaro tile, whereas Πριμογένης occurs in Sicily since imperial period (LGPN IIIa 376). Actually, its fully Greek counterpart Πρωτογένης is frequent again in Lokroi (Del Monaco 2013, nn. 2; 3; 6; 24; 26; 37), so that Πριμογένης in the Pellaro tile can be considered the earliest occurrence of the hybrid compound, so far attested in Magna Graecia.

Nevertheless Φάλακρος, Σωτήριχος, Πριμογένης are ambiguous to different extent, owing to their transparency with respect to lexicon. As personal name Φάλακρος is identical to the adjective φαλακρός "bald" except the usual regressive accent (Probert 2006, 298-300), in parallel to its Latin counterpart *Calvus*, used as *cognomen*.

A twofold interpretation is conceivable about πριμογένης, if considered either a hybrid calque of the Latin adjective *primigenius* meaning "original, primeval" or a Greek personal name partially remodelled on the Latin numeral. To a lesser degree a relation with lexicon is established by Σωτήριχος, so far known only as personal name. According to a purely speculative view, a lexical item cannot be excluded at all, assuming that the diminutive value of an -ιχος de-

rivative (Chantraine 1979, 404) either shifted to a disparaging sense or was used for ironic purposes.

If all those elements in vocative case are referred to a single person, three interpretive alternatives should be taken into account:

- a) All of them are personal names, referring to a single individual. People with multiple names are not rare in the Roman world, even in Greek speaking areas, such as Sicily, distributed in different contexts (Cordano 1997). Individuals provided with multiple names are also known among slaves, as a consequence of changing master.
- b) All of them work as lexical items, used with a descriptive function. Thus φαλακρός portrays a physical aspect of the individual as “bald-headed” and πριμογένης emphasises his primordial impulses to behave outrageously. Less clear is σωτήριχος, that never occurs as lexical item. According to the above suggestion, this kind of derivative from σωτήρ could sound something like “petty rescuer or preserver”, as derisive and derogatory appellative.
- c) The three elements at issue are partially personal names and partially lexemes. Among them Σωτήριχος is the term, which is more likely a personal name than the other ones for the above reasons and, consequently, it is more easily recognizable as name of the addressee.



FIGURE 1. *Inscribed tile from Pellaro.*

An assumption of more than one addressee is acceptable only on condition that the series of terms in vocative case is split in two parts. A clue for distinguishing two sets of vocative forms addressed to different individuals is provided by epigraphic rather than syntactic criteria. In the second line a larger space between ψευδοκαμινάρι and Πριμογένη invites to separate two columns of writing in vertical direction, that enables to distinguish Σωτήριχε κίναϊδε ψευδοκαμινάρι, on the left side, from φάλακρε χαῖρε Πριμογένη μάλημπε on the right side. In this perspective, two pairs of insults are targeted at two different individuals respectively: on the one hand, a person named Σωτήριχος is addressed as κίναϊδος and ψευδοκαμινάριος, on the other hand, Πριμογένης is addressed as φάλακρός and μάλημπος. In the latter utterance Πριμογένης has to be recognized as personal name of the addressee, given that the same noun phrase Πριμογένη μάλημπε is repeated in dative case (Πριμογένη τῷ μαλήμπτῳ) in (C). Repetition of the phrase evidences for cohesiveness of (B) and (C): the compound μάλημπε, addressed as an insult in (B), is used in descriptive function for labelling the insulted person (τῷ μαλήμπτῳ).

Once recognized as personal name of the second addressee, Πριμογένη excludes φάλακρέ from the same function. Nevertheless φάλακρέ, as lexical item, is problematic with respect to both its semantic value and syntactic order, reciprocally related. Following its literal meaning, that is “bald”, φάλακρός is to be understood as an attribute portraying a physical aspect of the addressee. We are informed by both Aristophanes<sup>4</sup> and Plutarch<sup>5</sup> that bald-headed men were made object of mockery and jests, so that, in this case, the appellative aims to ridicule a physical trait according to a common sense.

When used as address form, φάλακρέ sounds quite impolite in itself, as stressed by a proverb connected to the Aesop’s tales, that comments the same expression with a different word order: Ἀρχὴ ἀηδίας: “χαῖρε, φάλακρέ”<sup>6</sup>. Even in Latin *calve* occurs as a very impolite address forms, for intensifying both physical and moral deformity of an old man, as shown by a Persius verse<sup>7</sup>. Two occurrences of *calve* in vocative case are found in the fragments of the *Atellanae* plays, that witness to a popular way of addressing somebody<sup>8</sup>: one of them occurs in an angry and aggressive utterance<sup>9</sup>.

A depiction of a slave as bald-headed may also have a connotative meaning with reference to the acquired or boasted freedom. Shaving head was a symbol of a manumitted slave, who cut his hair before dressing a *pilleus*, a type of flat hat, that flagged the new status of freedman<sup>10</sup>. If this is the case, we may guess at reasons for adopting the address form at issue in context. An unfair conversion from status of slave into freedman without any merit may have aroused anger among colleagues and provoked such a reaction against him.

In any event, φάλακρέ occurs in predicative position in the syntactic order of the sentence φάλακρέ χαῖρε Πριμογένη μάλημπε, because it works as modifier that precedes the head Πριμογένη μάλημπε. In contrast, the latter adjective occupies an attributive position, serving to identify the referent, as confirmed by its repetition with article in the initial phrase of (C), i.e. Πριμογένη τῷ μαλήμπτῳ. The predicative position is also emphasised by interposing the verb χαῖρε. The word order in which multiple attributes of an addressee are separated by χαῖρε is very uncommon. Normally this verb precedes or follows the sequence of diverse terms in polite for-

<sup>4</sup> Aristoph., *Nub.* 540; Pax 767-771.

<sup>5</sup> Plut., *Galba* 13, 4; *Mor.* 86b.

<sup>6</sup> Aesopus et Aesopica Scr. Fab., Proverbia 144, 1 (ed. Parry).

<sup>7</sup> Pers. I, 56: *nugaris, cum tibi, calve, pinguis aqualiculus propenso sesquipede extet.*

<sup>8</sup> Atell., *Pomp.* Frg. 118 Frassinetti: *quid habes in surpiculi, calve? :: omne piscati genus.*

<sup>9</sup> Atell., *Pomp.* Frg. 134 Frassinetti: *at te di omnes cum consilio, calve, mactassint malo.*

<sup>10</sup> As evidenced in Plautus’ *Amphitruo* 462: *ego hodie raso capite calvos capiam pilleum.*

mulas, e.g. χαῖρε, πάτερ ὃ ξεῖνε (Od. VIII 408); χαῖρε Τίμων εὐμορφότατε καὶ ἤδιστε καὶ συμποτικώτατε (Lucian., *Timon* 46, 2) as well as in funerary inscriptions, such as Ἀμύνανδρε Κλεάνδρου χρηστὲ καὶ ἄλυπε χαῖρε (IG XI 1, 1020). In conclusion, φαλακρέ is not a salient information, but plays the role of a comment, in contrast with Πριμογένη μάλημπε, that makes the addressee clearly identifiable within the context at issue.

## CONCLUSION

The Greek inscription scratched on the Pellaro tile is an exceptional document for diverse reasons. Firstly, as result of an extemporary writing practised by slaves when manufacturing the tile in a pottery. This epigraphic genre evidences for the high level of literacy and cultural training of their authors. Secondly, as a mirror of the Greek-Latin bilingualism, proven by diverse hybrid compounds. Thirdly, as witness to insults and abusive terms used as address forms among slaves, related with controversies aroused for job reasons within their workplace. Fourthly, as epigraphic counterpart of the speech patterns among slaves testified by theatrical plays.

Nevertheless, some crucial problems remain unsolved as to the text interpretation, particularly concerning the number of the addressees of the insults, due partly to syntactic structures partly to ambiguous role of lexical items and personal names. Therefore, this text is a challenging field of discourse analysis, rarely provided by epigraphy.

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