



JOURNAL FOR LATE ANTIQUE  
RELIGION AND CULTURE

E-ISSN: 1754-517X; Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/issn.1754-517X>

Journal website: <https://jlarc.cardiffuniversitypress.org>

Volume 16, 2022, 1-31; Volume DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/jlarc.v16>

## INTERROGATING THE EUTROPOS GRAVE PLAQUE IN URBINO

Robert Couzin

Article DOI : <https://doi.org/10.18573/jlarc.127>

Date Accepted: 26 December 2021

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## INTERROGATING THE EUTROPOS GRAVE PLAQUE IN URBINO

Robert Couzin (robert.couzin@alum.utoronto.ca)\*

### Abstract

On this Roman grave plaque, a Greek-language epitaph to a certain Eutropos is framed by images of a man holding a cup and a bird with a sprig in its mouth. A unique depiction of a sarcophagus workshop appears below. Although often referred to, the monument has not received the sustained consideration it deserves. Several aspects of the text and imagery can be mined for clues regarding its date (here situated in the mid-third century) and elements of workshop practice, both in the creation of this plaque and in the production of sarcophagi like the one pictured. Previous opinions regarding the identities of the pictured figures are reviewed and pared back to eliminate unwarranted speculation. Most interesting is the matter of religious affiliation. Both Eutropos and his son, the commemorator, have been universally regarded as “Christian” without definition, qualification, or contextualization. Critical examination of the visual and textual evidence, and in particular the use of the term *theosebēs* in the inscription, suggests a more nuanced understanding that recognizes the multi-valence of imagery and terminology in this period, consistent with the fuzziness of religious boundaries and the high rate of inter-generational conversion.

Raffaele Fabretti (1618–1700) was a gentleman scholar from Urbino who served for three years as *Custode delle SS Reliquie*, directing the search for relics in the Roman catacombs. One fruit of this post was a catalogue of inscriptions.<sup>1</sup> Another was an enviable private collection claimed as a prerogative of office.<sup>2</sup> Among his best pieces was a large marble grave plaque, 34.5 cm high, 113.5 cm wide and 2.5 cm thick, now conserved in the lapidary museum of his home town (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> It is in good condition, although at some point in its history the slab was fractured.<sup>4</sup>

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\* I thank Antonio Enrico Felle for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Errors, omissions and inferences are, of course, my own.

<sup>1</sup> Fabretti 1699.

<sup>2</sup> Mazzoleni 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Urbino, Museo lapidario (Palazzo Ducale), inv. N. 40674. Its bibliography is extensive. See, for example: Gabrielli 1961, 144–49; Bisconti 2000b, 245–46; G. Gori 2002; F. Gori 2005; G. Gori 2007; Baratta 2011; Ehler 2012, 2.179–80 (cat. II.7, 19).

<sup>4</sup> Fabretti’s drawing does not show the joint and his notice does not mention it. As late as 1961, the pieces were still lying about in separate rooms: Gabrielli 1961, 144.



Figure 1: Eutropos grave plaque. Urbino, Museo lapidario (Palazzo Ducale), inv. N. 40674. Photo: D-DAI-ROM-75-1101 (C. Rossa).

Fabretti's catalogue entry for this item specified its find-spot as "*ex coemeterio D. Helenae*" (a site on the Via Labicana today referred to as the catacomb of Saints Marcellinus and Peter, or *ad duas lauros*). The notice included a Latin translation of the epitaph, a brief interpretation of the image, and a drawing (Figure 2).<sup>5</sup>



Figure 2: Drawing of the Eutropos grave plaque from Fabretti 1699.

<sup>5</sup> Fabretti 1699, 587–88.

The principal inscription is generally rendered, with two uncontroversial interpolations, as follows (compare Figure 3):<sup>6</sup>

ἅγιος θεοσεβῆς / Εὐτροπος ἐν ἰρήνῃ / υἱὸς ἐποίησεν κ(ατάθεσις) πρὸ ἰ κ(αλανδῶν)  
σεπ(τεμβρίων)

It may be translated:<sup>7</sup>

Holy God-fearer Eutropos. In peace. [His] son made [this]. Laid to rest on the tenth day before the calends of September.



Figure 3: Detail of Figure 1.

To the left of this epitaph a standing man holds a cup or beaker in his left hand while raising his right (Figure 4). On the right is a bird with a sprig in its beak (Figure 5), and below (next page) a workshop depiction unique in the archaeological record (Figure 6).



Figure 5: Detail of Figure 1.

Figure 4: Detail of Figure 1.

<sup>6</sup> CIG 4. 9598a; ICUR VI 17225; SEG 49.1377; EDB 4414.

<sup>7</sup> This translation is adapted from the Latin of Fabretti and an Italian version by Gori 2005, 281. The opening words are not straightforward and are discussed at some length below.

Robert Couzin, "Interrogating the Eutropos Grave Plaque in Urbino," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 16 (2022) 1-31; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/jlarc.127>



Figure 6. Detail of Figure 1.

Many questions regarding the Eutropos plaque remain unresolved. Indeed, little about this monument is certain or verifiable. The aim of this article is to tease out or unpack (choose your metaphor) what this inanimate witness has to tell us concerning its origins and intentions.

### Dating

The plaque has been variously dated to the early, middle, and late third and fourth centuries, rarely with any explicit rationale.<sup>8</sup> There are only so many ways to date a figural grave plaque. The best evidence is a consular, imperial or other chronological reference in its inscription, but of 4,000 pieces catalogued by Elisabeth Ehler, only 145 provide such information; Fabrizio Bisconti's study of plaques with occupational imagery includes sixty so dated, no more than 20 of which are before 400 CE.<sup>9</sup> The Eutropos plaque is not one of these. Archaeological context might provide another source of extrinsic evidence, but find-spots tend to be documented poorly, unreliably, or not at all. And although grave plaques are less portable than small objects like gold-glasses (based on its volume and the density of marble, this one must weigh about 26 kilograms), they can be and often have demonstrably been displaced over the centuries. Even if an artifact has lain undisturbed, the implications of location for dating depend on the chronological specificity of the site or stratum. In the case of the Urbino plaque, there is no assurance it was found in its original location and the area had a long funerary history, extending both before and after the range of proposed dates.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> "Fourth century" is proposed in several of the references in note 3 above and also by Hollinshead 1998, 119; Rockwell 1993, 53n12; De Santis 2013, 382–83. "Mid-fourth-century": Ulrich 2007, 343. "Early" fourth century: Gabrielli 1961, 148; *SEG* 49.1377. Circa 300: Koch 2000, 345; Ehler 2012, 2.179–80 (cat. II.7, 19); Huskinson 2015, 45; Baratta 2011, 34. Second half of the third century: *ICUR* VI 17225; de Rossi 1877, 443; Schultze 1882, 168; Wilpert 1929–36, 2.2. The *EDB* notice (no. 4414) was recently revised from the second half of the third century to a more generic 200–299. First half of the third century: Solin 2003, 3.1368; Bartman 1993, combining 73n51 combined with 72n5.

<sup>9</sup> Ehler 2012, 1.28; Bisconti 2000b, grafico XXVIII.

<sup>10</sup> On the history of the site: Guyon 1987, 94–96.

Therefore, the dating of figural grave plaques—including this one—normally relies on comparisons of style (including portrait types), iconography, and epigraphy (both content and form). This method depends, in the first instance, on securely dated benchmarks. That test is arguably met, since a significant number of such plaques bear verifiable dates. Comparability also requires a level of clarity in similitudes and distinctions that permit the object under study to be closely associated with or differentiated from the dated examples. The Eutropos plaque, like many others, is challenging in this regard. Its images are not readily susceptible to stylistic comparison, since no dated slab provides a convincing match for these drawings. Instead, it is compared in an uncomfortable regression to other undated grave plaques that have themselves been assigned dates based on further visual comparisons, often with disagreements among the experts. The standing man on the left side of the Urbino plaque, for example, loosely resembles the fishmonger on a slab dated by scholars across the same broad range.<sup>11</sup> Comparison of iconography is equally ambiguous. Similar figures holding a cup have been assigned dates from 250 to 350;<sup>12</sup> securely dated plaques with orants or birds grasping olive branches appear (or are generally dated) throughout the third and fourth centuries, although these motifs have often been associated more with earlier than later monuments.

Epigraphy is marginally more promising as a clue to chronology. The store of inscribed epitaphs is vast and a substantial number (although still a small minority) are securely dated. Several aspects of the Eutropos inscription point towards an early provenance. First, a certain archaism has been remarked in both the script and choice of words, although assigning dates based on letter-forms or supposedly “old-fashioned” terminology is hazardous.<sup>13</sup> Second, the use of the Greek language itself is at least statistically suggestive. For Roman inscriptions conventionally classified as Christian, which represent the lion’s share of the preserved corpus, 31% of those dated to the third century are in Greek, compared to only 9% for those assigned to the fourth.<sup>14</sup> The linguistic tendency is not only generic. In the catacomb *ad duas lauros*, where Fabretti reported having found the Eutropos plaque, Greek inscriptions are concentrated in the pre-Constantinian areas.<sup>15</sup>

One problem with the comparative method, whatever the tested variable, is its implicit assumption of conformity. While works executed in the same period can reasonably be expected to share an overall family resemblance in style, letter forms, verbal formulae and iconography, particular artisans, designers and patrons may be conservative or innovative,

<sup>11</sup> Ehler 2.179 (cat. II.7 18; late fourth century); *EDB* 18512; *ICUR* IV 9450 (both third century).

<sup>12</sup> Compare *ICUR* III 6559 (*EDB* 22357), dated 250–299, *ICUR* VI 15867 (*EDB* 7975), dated 300–349.

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Ferrua, in a private communication to Theodor Klauser, invoked both these tests to attribute the inscription to the second half of the third century; Klauser himself qualified the language as “somewhat old-fashioned” (*etwas altmodisch*): Klauser 1965–66, 134, 134n15. On the uncertainty of dating by letter-forms: Bodel 2001, 50–51.

<sup>14</sup> Felle 2018, 308–09, fig. 13.3, 13.4. See also Guarducci 1967–78, 4.529. No such chronological inference is possible for Jewish inscriptions, since the use of Greek was more persistent in this community: Noy 2000, 264. Pagan inscriptions from Rome are, as discussed below, almost always in Latin.

<sup>15</sup> Felle 2018, 308–09.

nostalgic or rebellious. Conversely, stable elements often subsist for too long, or with too uncertain chronological boundaries, to advance the cause of dating, similarities—especially of style but also of iconography and even epigraphy—sometimes pointing not to contemporaneity but to a common workshop provenance or particular patronal tastes. Finally, using disparities between monuments to prove diachronic development is self-fulfilling or circular when the markers are premised on the progression they are meant to demonstrate. These several challenges do not entirely frustrate the comparative method but they do invite prudence in its application, especially in the dating of late Roman grave plaques.

The monument in Urbino presents an additional, unusual and inadequately investigated source of chronological information, namely, the picture of a lion's head strigillated *lenos* sarcophagus (Figure 6; see above page 4).

Some 150 of these are catalogued by Jutta Stroszeck in a volume of the *Antike Sarkophagreliefs (ASR)* series. Most are assigned to the central decades of the third century, only two are placed late in that century, one straddles the year 300, and one more is dated 320–340.<sup>16</sup> This chronology is based entirely on comparisons with other lapidary productions; indeed one “source” for the late-dated examples is the Eutropos grave plaque, on the premise that it was made in fourth century.<sup>17</sup> Most of these sarcophagi differ from the one depicted on the Urbino slab in various respects: some have a clipeus or figural element in the centre rather than a mandorla; striding or fighting lions may appear at the ends instead of decorative heads. For the 25 or so chests that follow the basic form of the one on the Eutropos plaque the median assigned date is 250–260. The closest visual match is a sarcophagus in London. Like the image on the plaque it depicts a cask in its mandorla. It is dated ca. 250 (Figure 7).<sup>18</sup>

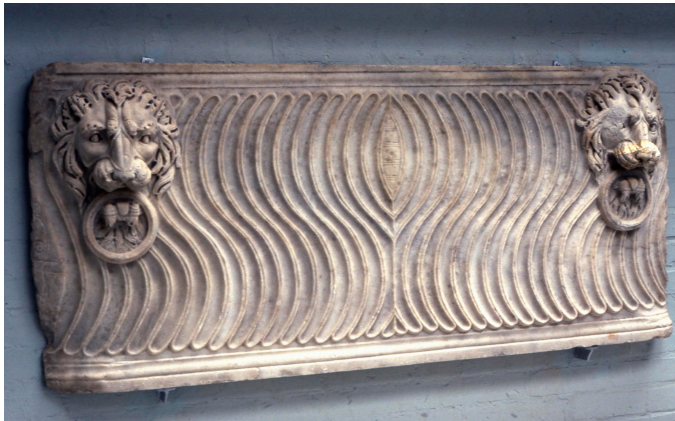


Figure 7:  
*Lenos* sarcophagus front. London,  
British Museum, inv. 1914,0627.3.  
Photo ©Trustees of the British  
Museum.

<sup>16</sup> Stroszeck 1998, nos. 1–168 (including 17 non-strigillated examples); dating is discussed at 73–92, the strigillated form at 95–97. Nos. 19 and 27 are dated late third century, no. 37 to 290–310, and no. 66 to 320–340. See also Baratta 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Stroszeck 1998, 90.

<sup>18</sup> London, British Museum, inv. 1914,0627.3. The museum web site suggests this date; Baratta 2008, 109, and Stroszeck 1998, no. 29, estimate 250–260. Baratta 2011, 33, explicitly draws a connection between this sarcophagus and the Eutropos drawing. Seven of this group have a figure within the mandorla, all assigned slightly later dates. Excluding them, the median for the group would be c. 250.

Dolphins like those on the pictured lid (see Figure 6 and Figure 8) are an ancient motif, reaching back to Greek antiquity. They appear on Roman sarcophagi from the second century CE on. The specific format, with two pairs of cetaceans framing a central tabula, is found on eleven lids included in an earlier *ASR* volume and on nine more in the *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage* (e.g., Figure 8).<sup>19</sup> Two out of these twenty examples can be dated to the middle of the fourth century by consular inscriptions.<sup>20</sup> All of the others are either ascribed to that century in the catalogues or presented without any proposed date.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the one depicted on the Eutropos grave plaque, none of these lids is of the ovoid shape appropriate for *lenoi*, and there is no known instance of a dolphin lid associated with a lion's head chest.



Figure 8: Sarcophagus lid. L'Aquila, Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, inv. 229.  
Photo: D-DAI-ROM-67.482 (Max Hutzler).

Applying the conventional dates to chest and lid, the Urbino plaque thus presents a conundrum: either it was made in the fourth century and depicts a retro sarcophagus with a contemporary cover, or it is a third-century monument that presents the opposite clash, a contemporary sarcophagus with an avant-garde lid. A compromise of circa 300 might just conform to the dating schemes in the catalogues but it still implies a design that looks forward and backward at the same time. A more persuasive alternative is to consider the representation on the plaque as reason to re-evaluate the chronology of either lion's head *lenoi* or dolphin lids. The latter adjustment seems more palatable and would be consistent with the tentative leanings of the comparative method. A date circa 250 is thus proposed for the Eutropos plaque, with a reasonable margin of error on either side.

<sup>19</sup> Earlier examples: Rumpf 1939, 97–101, including his no. 46, 57, 208, 303–23. Paired dolphins with tabula: Rumpf 1939, no. 225–35; Bovini and Brandenburg 1967, no. 128, 129, 223, 301, 471, 564, 614, 683 and 769. The illustration is Rumpf's no. 299, also reproduced in Dresken-Weiland 1998, no. 239.

<sup>20</sup> Rumpf 1969, no. 226 (dated 345), and 227 (Bovini and Brandenburg 1967, no. 87; dated 353).

<sup>21</sup> Fourth century: Rumpf 1969, no. 225, 229, 234; Bovini and Brandenburg 1967, no. 128, 129, 301, 471, 564, 614, 683, 769. The others in these catalogues are not dated. Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 196, regarded this form as especially prevalent in the fourth century.



## Making

Recognizing the valuable contributions of earlier scholars, François Baratte nonetheless concluded that little is or is likely to become known about the organization, scale or working methods of late Roman and early Christian sarcophagus production.<sup>22</sup> Even less can be said about figural grave plaques. Clues on the face of the Eutropos plaque regarding both its own production and the operation of contemporary sarcophagus workshops are therefore invaluable.

The inscriptions on most such plaques are uneven strings of irregularly formed letters scratched on the surface, often riddled with errors; the drawings are usually crude or schematic. To economize on the cost of production, word and image were probably incised by the same person. But perhaps 10 per cent of figural plaques are distinguished by their carefully inscribed characters arranged in straight lines of text with few mistakes, pointing to the participation of a specialized engraver. The epitaph to Eutropos falls into this category (Figure 3). It is laid out on three parallel lines flush at the left and of increasing length; the characters are well-formed square capitals, most embellished with serifs; the words are generally separated by stylized, leaf-shaped inter-points. The text was carefully transcribed but it is not error-free. At the end of the first line an *epsilon* (€) was carved where there should have been a *sigma* (usually formed in this period by the character C). The mistake was caught, but too late; an attempt to erase the errant cross-bar left a visible depression. Even a passing familiarity with written Greek would preclude ending the word with a second vowel; this stone-carver's literacy, if any, must have been limited to Latin. The mistake also confirms that the epitaph had not been provisionally incised on the marble support by the designer but copied by the engraver from another medium.

All the other words are spelled correctly and carefully separated, save for the common elision of EN with IPHNH (in peace).<sup>23</sup> The single letter K is used to abbreviate *κατάθεσις* (laid to rest), a practice that was unusual but certainly not unique.<sup>24</sup> The unaccompanied K appears again in a conventional dating formula. Latin inscriptions generally specified the date of deposition as *ante diem* + Roman numeral + calends, nones, or ides + the name of a month, meaning: this many days before that calendrical marker for the specified month. Greek epitaphs in Rome usually followed the same system. On the Eutropos plaque, the letter K abbreviates calends and the word ΠΙΡΟ, translating *ante diem*, is formed by superimposing the P on the Π, the general practice in contemporary epitaphs although the tiny *omicron* at the upper right of the ligature is rare.<sup>25</sup> To specify the number of days, Greek inscriptions relied

<sup>22</sup> Baratte 2006, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Although often transcribed in catalogues as separated, these two words were usually run together. See, e.g., Ehler 2012, no. I.9.9, II.7.20, III.1.28, V.2.175, V.3.52, V.4.29 (EDB 3146, 4560, 6498, 42066, 14965, 8226).

<sup>24</sup> The word is more often written out in full or abbreviated to its first two or three letters, a single K occurring in less than 10% of the 100 instances recorded by Felle 1997, 140–42. Fabretti mistakenly interpolated the K as *k(αταλίειν)* (1699, 588), which he translated as *obiit* (died).

<sup>25</sup> The addition of a small O is also found in, for example, ICUR III 8081, III 8415 and IV 12846 (EDB 25176, 25690, 3401).

on the numeric function of letters instead of using Roman numerals. The I before the K on the Eutropos plaque thus refers to 10 days before the calends of September.<sup>26</sup> Such details are consistent with instructions having been framed by an individual familiar not only with the Greek language but also prevailing conventions of Greek epigraphy.

The lapidary *mise-en-page* of the plaque also reveals something about workshop roles and functions. The designer apparently specified that the inscription should be left-justified. This compositional device is only occasionally found in Roman epigraphy, and those figural plaques that adopt it do not generally integrate the typographical effect with the imagery.<sup>27</sup> But in Urbino the flush left edge of the text mirrors the standing figure, while the oblique right margin cleverly accommodates the advancing dove. The vertical placement was less successful. The inscription must have been carved first and the space left over for the workshop scene was too small, or at least the image-maker did not quite succeed in fitting it in: the lion's head to the right impinges on the serif of the letter Π immediately above it, and the bottom of the picture is truncated, although this could possibly reflect damage to the block. In his drawing (Figure 2), Fabretti “corrected” the lay-out by raising the epitaph and reducing its size relative to the imagery. (One suspects a drawing from memory, since he also substituted centre- for left-justification, resolved ENIPHNH into two words, and changed the spelling of ΘEOCEBHC to ΘEOCEBEC.)

The name of the deceased on the lid to the right of the sarcophagus serves as a truncated epitaph, with some interesting semiotic implications discussed below. It also provides a further hint about production because of its misspelling. On the plaque, the name ends -ος in both the main inscription and on the pictured lid, and while one also encounters -ις and -ιος endings (in Latin, *-is* and *-ius*) in this period, there is no record of (or excuse for) EYTPPOΠIOC with a doubled *p* in the middle.<sup>28</sup> The carver attempted to follow the example of the main inscription as regards the form of the characters—although less regular, they replicate epigraphic details like triangular serifs and horizontal cross-bars—but seems to have lost his place (the possibility of a female artisan is vanishingly small) and repeated the *rho*. This suggests he was not the engraver of the main epitaph, on which the name is spelled correctly, nor likely Eutropos's son who, as remarked below, is sometimes hypothesized as having had a role in production, but probably the executant of the images. Like the terminal *sigma* of ΘEOCEBHC, the spelling error on the lid may also have been discovered and an effort made at correction. Giancarlo Gori claimed to detect an abandoned attempt at erasure of the doubled letter.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> On Greek and Roman dating formulae: Solin 2008, 267. The *iota* has sometimes been misread as the Roman number *I*: Klausner 1965–66, 126; F. Gori 2005; Baratta 2011, 34. The correct interpretation had been offered by Fabretti (1699, 588).

<sup>27</sup> Centred versus left-justified inscriptions: Di Stefano Manzella 1987, 133. Compare similarly aligned epitaphs placed above and apart from a female orant and a bird on *ICUR* III 8748 (*EDB* 19095) or impinging upon rather than supporting the imagery on *ICUR* IV 9384 (*EDB* 16400).

<sup>28</sup> See Solin 2003, 3.1368–69, for onomastic examples and variants.

<sup>29</sup> G. Gori 2002.

In summary, production of the Eutropos plaque involved several discrete functions and individuals. One, or conceivably more than one, person provided a draft of the text, designed the images, established the lay-out, and supervised execution. A professional engraver, probably a Latin-speaker, followed the designer's requirements for the both the text and the layout of the main inscription. Another artisan then added the pictures and carved the name of the deceased on the sarcophagus lid.

With its workshop depiction, the Eutropos plaque also indirectly documents certain aspects of the activity and organization of late Roman sarcophagus production. A man seated on a three-stepped stool next to the chest guides a strap drill rotated by a smaller figure. To the right is an oblong object, presumably the finished lid.<sup>30</sup> To fit properly the cover should be ovoid, but here that shape is applied to the raised front. The distortion is not so much an error as an instance of false perspective.<sup>31</sup>

This drawing provides several clues regarding workshop practice. One concerns the use of the strap drill. Relying on Fabretti's sketch (Figure 2), Otto Jahn (in 1861) misinterpreted both the tool and its function. He thought the seated man held a rod with an iron point that was being pulled downwards by his associate to carve the strigils.<sup>32</sup> Later observers correctly understood that the upper rod is a drill bit rotated by the assistant, and the lower piece is a guide to aim the bit. Homer had provided a fantastic description of Odysseus using just such an implement to blind Polyphemus, pressing its point on the eye as his men pulled the strap back and forth; the image on the plaque corroborates its employment over one millennium later in the production of late Roman sarcophagi.<sup>33</sup> The target of the bit is not the strigils but a spot just below the lion's right eye. This would be consistent with the usual interpretation that the artisan is cutting channels in the lion's mane by dragging a spinning point in continuous motion, the so-called running drill, although an alternative interpretation under which such channels are made by drilling a series of holes and then chiseling out the residual material is not necessarily excluded.<sup>34</sup> Such final touches were often added after the strigillation, *protome* being the last items to be carved;<sup>35</sup> yet the state of completion of these heads seems well past the phase of cutting creases in the mane. Fine modelling is work for the chisel, not the drill. The image was probably meant as a temporal compression rather than a snapshot, superimposing earlier drill-work on the final sarcophagus.

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<sup>30</sup> Occasionally, although not recently, it has been interpreted as another sarcophagus: Schultze 1882, 168; Leclercq 1950, col. 780. Wilpert's opinion evolved between 1903 (sarcophagus, at 1.476) and 1929–36 (lid, at 2.2).

<sup>31</sup> Klauser 1965–66, 131, considered it a mistake. The technique evokes Byzantine, and even Cubist, comparisons.

<sup>32</sup> Jahn 1861, 301.

<sup>33</sup> *Odyssey* 9.427–32. The representation is often cited as evidence for use of the strap drill: Stroszeck 1998, 19; Rockwell 1993, 53; Durnan 2000, 32; Ulrich 2008, 40; Russell 2013, 291.

<sup>34</sup> Running drill on the plaque: Fittschen 1975, 11; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 85n7; Pfanner 1988, 669–70; F. Gori 2005, 281. On the running drill in Greek and Roman sculptural practice generally: Stewart 1975; Strong and Claridge 1976, 199, 205; Koch and Sichtermann 1982, 85; Hollinshead 1998, 119–20; Lawton 2006, 29. The alternative is posited by Eichner 1981, 105–06; Eichner 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Stroszeck 1998, 20.

As well as the drill, chisels and a mallet are also represented. These could have belonged to a workshop colleague but the more natural implication is that the pictured craftsman was skilled in both drill and chisel work. The image thus undermines the most extreme claims of specialization in the late Roman sarcophagus workshop; Klaus Eichner, in particular, has argued that drilling was a distinct specialty assigned to cheap, unskilled labourers in aid of “mass production” analogous to the modern factory.<sup>36</sup> This workshop scene is inconsistent with both the strict division of labour and the low status of drill operators.

Finally, the depicted lid, ready and waiting to be placed atop the pictured chest, confirms two further aspects of production. First, these two components were apparently prepared together, in the same workshop, by the same sculptor(s); this seems to have been the usual but not invariable practice.<sup>37</sup> Second, while rectangular covers might be used on *lenoi* sarcophagi as a cost- or time-saving expedient, for his own imaginary sarcophagus Eutropos produced a bespoke, ovoid model.<sup>38</sup>

As already remarked, the archaeological record contains no strigillated lion’s head *lenos* sarcophagus with a lid on which dolphins flank an inscribed tabula. The absence of any such surviving monument could be a mere hazard of survival: not many oval-shaped lids have been preserved; most do not include any relief carving; and only two are associated with sarcophagi bearing even a remote resemblance to the one on the Eutropos plaque.<sup>39</sup> On one, the chest supports a lid with a central tabula flanked by profile masks and vases; the other has lions attacking prey at the corners, not lions’ heads, and its lid is decorated with marine creatures, but not dolphins. The Eutropos grave plaque thus extends the known corpus by adding another combination of chest and cover that was probably available to customers.

### Who’s Who?

Epitaphs and funerary imagery can provide a variety of information concerning the deceased and family members, including offices, functions, occupations, date of death, length of marriage, relationships, religious affiliations, personal attributes and accomplishments. The Urbino plaque names the deceased twice and refers to his son; it displays almost certainly one, probably two, and possibly three “portraits” along with an occupational setting. These multiple references invite biographical speculation.

The epitaph is conventionally eulogistic and optative, opening with two laudatory epithets—Eutropos is holy and pious or god-fearing—and wishing him peace after death. It continues with a claim of patronage and dedication—“his son made [this]”—and ends with a record of the date of deposition. The isolated name on the drawing of a sarcophagus lid operates in a different semiotic register. It is a picture of an inscription, simultaneously word

<sup>36</sup> Eichner 1977, 151–63; 1981, 112–13; 2002, 73.

<sup>37</sup> A contrary example: Walker 1990, 92.

<sup>38</sup> On lids for *lenoi* with lions: Stroszeck 1998, 23–24.

<sup>39</sup> Both are from a single tomb in Rome and known only from a nineteenth-century engraving: Stroszeck 1998, no. 161 (at 124), and 388 (at 160); the engraving, from de Rossi, is her fig. 7 (at 125).

and image. EYTRROIIOC (sic) is a synecdoche for an epitaph, perhaps for the same epitaph that is carved on this grave plaque, projected onto a more luxurious funerary monument. A pictured epitaph is occasionally encountered in late antique Roman funerary art, but its appearance on the Eutropos plaque is particularly clever and complex, presented on an imaginary coffin being produced for, and probably by, the very person to whom the plaque is dedicated.<sup>40</sup>

The bearded man on the left is usually interpreted as the deceased Eutropos, either participating at his own funerary banquet or, under a Christian eschatological interpretation, in Paradise.<sup>41</sup> An alternative reading identifies this man as Eutropos's son.<sup>42</sup> It is possible for a cup-bearing demi-orant to represent the commemorator rather than the commemorated; the drinking man pictured on another plaque, this one dedicated to a three-year old child, must be her father named in the inscription.<sup>43</sup> But absent such an unusual circumstance, the figure is more plausibly understood to represent the deceased. The unusual detail of a beard provides further corroboration, pointing to Eutropos's age and perhaps his post mortem state.

Many observers see a second figure of Eutropos in the seated craftsman, the smaller figure being regarded as his assistant, perhaps a slave, or possibly his son in earlier days when he served as his father's apprentice. Others have conjectured that the person holding the drill is the son, aided by an assistant of his own.<sup>44</sup> A few, mostly early, commentators regarded both figures working the drill to be non-family workshop artisans, and several scholars remain agnostic regarding their identification.<sup>45</sup> The plaque is reticent but not silent regarding these issues.

Antique occupational representations on funerary monuments may be symbolic or biographical. A stone-carver's tools could be meant to evoke the instruments of commemoration rather than the life of the deceased.<sup>46</sup> But the specificity of the images on the Urbino plaque seems grounded in reality: a carver and his assistant operate a strap drill with other tools lying at their feet; they work on a near-finished *lenos* sarcophagus while its ovoid lid stands to the side, inscribed with the same name as in the epitaph. These elements should not be taken as strictly accurate but the level of detail does point to an actual workshop.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Compare the simpler instance of a wall painting in the Catacomb of the Giordani where a man holds an open book proclaiming *DORMIT/IO SILVEST/R[A]E*. *ICUR* IX 24489; *EDB* 13596; Mazzoleni 2009, 151, fig. 158.

<sup>41</sup> Or in *refrigerium interim* on the way to Paradise: Stuibler 1957; contra this interpretation, de Bruyne 1958.

<sup>42</sup> Klauser 1965–66, 132.

<sup>43</sup> *ICUR* III 6618; *EDB* 22533; Bisconti 2000a, 62, fig. 61.

<sup>44</sup> Eutropos and his son: Bisconti 2000b, 246; Ulrich 2007, 33; Ehler 2012, 1.28. Eutropos and an assistant: Schultze 1882, 168. Eutropos and a slave: Baratta 2011, 33. Carver is the son, with an assistant: Leclercq 1950, col. 781; Klauser 1965–66, 132; Illuminati 1999, 687 (“perhaps”). Like his opinion on the character of the two pictured artifacts (note 30, above), Wilpert's identification of this figure seems to have changed, from son (1903, 1.476) to father (1929–36, 2.2). On the Roman tradition of “master” and slave or helper representations: Zimmer 1982, 69–70.

<sup>45</sup> Two unrelated artisans: Jahn 1861, 301. The entry in *CIG* 4.9598 is unclear but seems also to take this position: see Baratta 2011, 32n6. Preferring to leave the matter open: Ferrua in the *ICUR* notice; F. Gori 2005.

<sup>46</sup> On the symbolic role of such implements: Bisconti 2000b, 139–41.

<sup>47</sup> This conclusion is drawn by, among others, Koch 1993, 37–40; Bisconti 2010b, 245–46; G. Gori 2007.

Such occupational representations followed the Roman tradition of highlighting the deceased's achievements, including the many late antique grave plaques recording and celebrating the careers of doctors, builders, actors, farmers, and fishmongers.<sup>48</sup>

If the Urbino plaque is correctly situated within this convention, then the man holding the drill should be Eutropos. The claim that this figure is, instead, his son relies primarily on the statement in the epitaph: "his son made it" (YIOC EΠOIHCEH).<sup>49</sup> The Latin equivalent, *fecit*, appears in hundreds, if not thousands, of Roman epitaphs where it clearly means that the named family member was responsible for the commission or purchase of the monument, not its physical production.<sup>50</sup> Of other factors that might be cited in support of the minority view, the most persuasive is the different, and younger, physiognomy of the seated craftsman as compared to the standing figure on the left. But while this disparity could have been intended to distinguish father from son, it more probably represents two different moments in the personal history of the deceased or evokes the ontological distinction between life and death (or both).

On balance, then, it is reasonable to conclude that image and text present multiple reference to Eutropos (seen standing and drilling in his workshop; named in the main and truncated epitaphs), while his son is identified in the epitaph as the commemorator and perhaps he, too, is depicted as the driller's assistant. This last supposition might be supported by the hypothesis of an inter-generational business, with Eutropos as master or owner and his son training to succeed him.<sup>51</sup> "In pre-industrial societies," according to Wim Broekaert, "children usually learned a trade by imitating their father, cooperating with him and eventually taking over the family business."<sup>52</sup> This assumption of occupational continuity is widely accepted but some prudence may be warranted. The vast majority of documented professional activities provide no indicia of family relationship. Nor does all evidence point in the same direction. Member lists of Roman trade associations, for example, do not reveal a rigorous family tradition.<sup>53</sup> Having a sarcophagus carver as a father was neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for becoming a sarcophagus carver.

The high-water mark of familial speculation was provided by Theodor Klauser, who wrote:

Eutropos and his son were among the many stone-carvers who had learned their trade in the Greek-speaking East and come to Rome to make their fortunes. They were clearly

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<sup>48</sup> Zimmer 1982; Bisconti 2000b, 31–60.

<sup>49</sup> Wilpert 1903, 1.476; Leclercq 1950, col. 780. Explicitly contra: Jahn 1861, 300n35; Baratta 2011, 34.

<sup>50</sup> Express statements of production in Latin epitaphs are rare but do exist. See Calabi Limentani 1961.

<sup>51</sup> Koch 1993, 37, called Eutropos the proprietor (*Inhaber*) of the workshop; Wischmeyer 1982, 84 and 84n79, referred to him and his family as workshop masters (*Sarkophagmeisterfamilie*). Russell 2013, 291, observed that Eutropos could have just been a drill operator.

<sup>52</sup> Broekaert 2012, 233–37, quotation at 234. Broekaert cited with approval a similarly sweeping sentiment expressed by Paul Veyne (1961, 288).

<sup>53</sup> Liu 2013, 359.

not particularly successful, since the son could not even provide his father with the kind of simple *lenos* sarcophagus produced, probably in series, in their own workshop.<sup>54</sup>

Beyond restating the biographical conjecture, Klauser also offers lack of commercial success as a rationale for the disparity between the actual and imagined form of commemoration. Other, less picturesque hypotheses are no more convincing. Giulia Baratta wondered if the family wanted a burial *ad martyres* and found the available location too small for a sarcophagus; Ehler raised the possibility that Eutropos died unexpectedly, leaving his family no time to commission a luxurious monument.<sup>55</sup> The simple explanation (which is also noted by Ehler) is that artisans were not buried in sarcophagi. The occupants of these luxury funerary monuments were drawn from the higher ranks of society: *clarissimi*, men and women (and children) of the superior orders, or such occupationally distinguished individuals as clerics, civic officials, military officers, and professionals, including lawyers and teachers of rhetoric.<sup>56</sup> A very few were merchants, like the Nicomedian marble or stone dealer Aurelius Andronikos.<sup>57</sup> Mere stone-carvers are commemorated in a few inscriptions, but not on any surviving sarcophagi.

The biographical uncertainties facing modern viewers of the Eutropos plaque were not shared by its intended audience. Relatives and close friends of the deceased knew his role in the sarcophagus business, his son's occupation, whether there was a family workshop, perhaps even the types of monuments it produced. Most also would have reflected on the relationship between the information conveyed on the plaque and Eutropos's own religious commitment and affiliation, a difficult and intriguing subject to which we now turn.

### The Family Religion

From Fabretti to the present day, published accounts of the Eutropos grave plaque unanimously and without qualification, hesitation or definition, consider that Eutropos, his son and the plaque itself were all “Christian.” The conclusion is not based on any express religious reference: there is no cross or Chi-rho monogram, no invocation of Christ or *nomen sacrum*, no representation of Jesus or his apostles. Nor does it rely on onomastics. Eutropos is an old Greek name that continued to be used, mainly in the East but also in Rome, by pagans, Christians and Jews alike.<sup>58</sup> The religion of this plaque and its protagonists is, instead, deduced from textual and pictorial elements traditionally interpreted as confessions of Christianity. The following discussion is meant not to demonstrate that different conclusions

<sup>54</sup> Klauser 1965–66, 132 (my translation).

<sup>55</sup> Baratta 2011, 35; Ehler 2012, 1.28.

<sup>56</sup> Dresken-Weiland 2003, 30–47.

<sup>57</sup> *IG XIV 2247* (*SEG* 33.766), described as λιθένπορος. On the sarcophagus: Dresken-Weiland 1998, 31–32 (no. 101).

<sup>58</sup> Solin 2003, 3.1368–69 (Rome); *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* database, mainly easter examples: <http://www.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/>. A child of three years, seven months named *Εὐτρόπις* is commemorated in a Jewish inscription from Rome: *JJWE* 2.118; Angerstorfer 2012, 340–42, cat VI.1.9 (illustrated).

are more viable, but rather to test the reliability, strength and coherence of the evidence for the Urbino plaque's Christian religious affiliation.

Many inscriptions are labelled Christian solely or mainly because they include the expressions “in peace” (*in pace, en eirene*) or “laid to rest” (*depositus, katathesis*), both of which appear on the Eutropos plaque. Recognizing a marginal but resolvable uncertainty regarding the former, Orazio Marucchi was categorical about the latter: “*depositus* and *depositio* are of exclusively Christian use, because they imply the hope of resurrection.”<sup>59</sup> His position continues to find support.<sup>60</sup> The empirical evidence is, however, more nuanced; both these formulae also appear in pagan and especially Jewish inscriptions.<sup>61</sup> The Jewish employment of “in peace” commonly appears in an extended phrase, *en eirene e koimesis autou* (“may your sleep be in peace”), but it is not restricted to that usage; nor is the longer expression entirely unknown among inscriptions otherwise identified as Christian.<sup>62</sup> The presence of *en eirene* and *katathesis* on the Eutropos plaque is, therefore, consistent with but not demonstrative of a Christian religious persuasion.

Similarly, the plaque's imagery is suggestive but not decisive. Like “key words” in inscriptions, figural stereotypes are too often uncritically regarded as indubitable signs of Christian provenance.<sup>63</sup> A few grave plaques have been classed as Christian because they display a figure with an oversized beaker, sometimes fortified by *depositus* or *in pace* in the inscription.<sup>64</sup> But the orant with a goblet is a traditional Roman motif; its allusion to funerary refreshment parallels the motto “drink that you may live” (ΠΙΕ ΖΗΣΗΣ, or PIE ZESES in Latin transliteration) that is found on Jewish and pagan as well as Christian gold-glasses.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, while the bird with a sprig in its mouth is usually interpreted as a typological figure of Christian salvation, referencing God's all-clear to Noah (Genesis 8:1),<sup>66</sup> birds are not the property of any one funerary tradition.<sup>67</sup> Danilo Mazzoleni described aviary symbolism on Jewish grave markers as “quite similar to the doves on Christian plaques,” although in this context they might allude to sacrifice rather than the Flood.<sup>68</sup> One difference between Jewish and Christian birds is that only the latter hold sprigs in their beaks, a distinction that could

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<sup>59</sup> Marucchi 1912, 56.

<sup>60</sup> Compare: “la formula indubbiamente cristiana *depositio*” (Bovini 1946–48, 105); *dormit in pace* is “an unmistakably Christian” formula (Charles-Murray 1981, 40); “la foi chrétienne est affichée” by the phrase *bene pausanti in pace* (Guyon and Heijmans 2002, 205, cat. 13, entry by V. Gaggadis-Robin and Guyon).

<sup>61</sup> Dinkler 1974; Kraemer 1991, 159; Carletti 2004; Felle 2007, 357–58.

<sup>62</sup> Kraemer 1991, 149; Felle 2007, 358n21.

<sup>63</sup> A prime example is the “good shepherd.” See Snyder 2003, 41–45; compare the nuanced analyses by Schumacher 1977; Taylor 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Only the representation: *ICUR* IV 10767 (*EDB* 38768); *ICUR* VI 15867 (*EDB* 7975). Plus key words in the inscription: *ICUR* III 6618 (*EDB* 22533); *ICUR* VII 19521 (*EDB* 30880).

<sup>65</sup> Auth 1996, 109–10.

<sup>66</sup> Jahn 1861, 299–300; Bisconti 2000b, 245; F. Gori 2005, 281; Baratta 2011, 32.

<sup>67</sup> Although univalent Christian readings are not uncommon. See Snyder 2003, 39–41.

<sup>68</sup> Mazzoleni 2013, 437 and his fig. 3 (my translation), referring to *JIVE* 2.91 (*CIJ* i.306). Another close example is *JIVE* 2.246 (*ICUR* V 15422; *EDB* 2255).



provide some ground for differentiation. To illustrate the ambiguity, a plaque depicting both a figure with a cup (here a reclining woman) and a bird (albeit sans sprig) has sometimes been regarded as pagan.<sup>69</sup>

Another visual element on the Eutropos plaque that could bear on religious affiliation is the picture of a strigillated lions' head sarcophagus. This type of coffin was not notably Christian, and its appearance here has prompted more than one apologetic explanation. For Giovanni Battista de Rossi, the representation demonstrated that Christian artisans worked for non-Christian customers, although this hypothesis conflicts with the natural inference that this chest, given the inscription on its lid, was meant for the deceased himself.<sup>70</sup> Another nineteenth-century observer supposed that the choice of decoration could be ascribed to Eutropos having been a pagan convert, not at all factually impossible but unhelpful as an explanation.<sup>71</sup> The most plausible reconciliation of a Christian deceased and this form of so-called "neutral" decoration is that such sarcophagi were used on occasion by Christians.<sup>72</sup> Whatever the explanation, the depiction of the lions' head *lenos* presents at least a modest inconvenience to the inference of Eutropos's Christianity.

Returning to the epitaph, the language itself bears remark. Greek is used in only 2% of the pagan epitaphs from Rome, 10% of the Christian, and almost 80% of the Jewish.<sup>73</sup> As a purely statistical matter, the relative proportions would thus favour a classification as Jewish over Christian and either over pagan. Linguistic proportion, of course, is a blunt instrument. The selection of words is more interesting, complex and potentially informative. In addition to "in peace" and "laid to rest," both directionally but not exclusively Christian, the inscription includes two explicitly spiritual terms, ΑΓΙΟC and ΘΕΟCΕΒΗC, neither especially common in late Roman epitaphs. They have not been considered in connection with the issue of religious affiliation for Eutropos since the nineteenth century, when both were summarily treated as confirming a Christian attribution.<sup>74</sup>

In classical Greek literature *hagios* often qualifies a thing, especially a temple, as sacred or holy.<sup>75</sup> The Septuagint applies the word to sanctuaries, altars, the Sabbath, candlesticks and the priesthood.<sup>76</sup> Some Jewish epitaphs of the Roman period so qualify the Law.<sup>77</sup> These two traditions also applied the term to a deity: Sarepta in an inscription from Pozzuoli dated

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<sup>69</sup> *ICUR* III 6559 (*EDB* 22357). Classed as likely pagan by De Bruyne 1958, 106; De Santis 2013, 382; not included in the Christian corpus by Ehler 2012.

<sup>70</sup> de Rossi 1877, 443.

<sup>71</sup> Pératé 1892, 295.

<sup>72</sup> Stroszek 1998, 72; Schumacher 1977, 74; Wischmeyer 1982, 84.

<sup>73</sup> Pagan and Christian: Felle 2018, 307–08 and fig. 13.2. Jewish: *CIJ* i.LXVI; Rutgers 1995, 182–83; Solin 2017, 131–32.

<sup>74</sup> Raoul-Rochette 1837, 259–60; Northcote 1878, 171.

<sup>75</sup> Liddell and Scott 1996, s.v. ἅγιος, with examples ranging from Herodotus to Aristophanes.

<sup>76</sup> See Kittel 1964–76, s.v. ἅγιος, 88–97 (notice by Otto Procksch). I hesitate to cite this reference work because of its recognized anti-Jewish agenda (Casey 1999; compare note 90 below), but Procksch seems to have maintained his scholarly impartiality (Smend 2003).

<sup>77</sup> E.g., *JWE* 1.12, 13.

circa 79 CE, the Jewish God in another from Sicily.<sup>78</sup> In Christian epigraphy *hagios* was commonly extended to people, operating as a eulogistic title or qualification, although most of the examples are from later centuries.<sup>79</sup> These inscriptions do not generally refer to the deceased but rather evoke or entreat a saint.<sup>80</sup> Notwithstanding this usage of *hagios*, an old speculation that our Eutropos was an otherwise unattested saint is unlikely.<sup>81</sup> Instead, it seems that Eutropos's son aggressively ascribed holiness, or saintliness, to his father.

The second word of the epitaph, *theosebes*, can be found in traditional Graeco-Roman, explicitly Jewish and verifiably Christian contexts.<sup>82</sup> It appears sporadically in classical dramatic, historical and philosophical literature and epigraphy as an epithet of piety.<sup>83</sup> Later authors continued this usage: Dio Cassius applied the term to Roman senators; the Emperor Julian so described Diogenes.<sup>84</sup> But the more common term in this tradition was *eusebes*, marking a reverence for the good rather than the gods.

Jews, on the other hand, preferred *theosebes*.<sup>85</sup> It affirmed their devotion to God, and the contraction was sufficiently flexible to satisfy their monotheistic requirements.<sup>86</sup> The use of *theosebes* has been most vigorously examined in connection with “Judaizers,” non-Jews who, stopping short of conversion, overtly attached themselves to the Jewish community by participating in its rituals or customs, worshipping the Jewish God (alone or with other deities), or contributing financially to the synagogue. The most ostentatious manifestation of this nomenclature is a marble slab discovered at Aphrodisias in 1976 associated with its ancient synagogue bearing two long lists of names (lists A and B). The opening of list A is missing but list B labels its members (among whom, it may be remarked, is a certain *Eutropios*) as *theosebeis*.<sup>87</sup> Most scholars consider that both lists identify important

<sup>78</sup> *SEG* 36.923; *JiWE* 1.159 (*SEG* 31.844).

<sup>79</sup> Numerous examples are cited in Lampe 1961, s.v. ἅγιος. Inscriptions from the early period include *IGCVO* 423–28, 433–35, 454. Classical and Jewish instances of this usage are unusual: satirical by Aristophanes (*Birds* 522); in Jewish inscriptions collectively and metaphorically in the formula “sleep with the holy ones”: e.g., *JiWE* 2.50 (*CIJ* i.340), 2.463 (*CIJ* i.55), 2.465 (*SEG* 26.1201), translated in the *CIJ* as “with the saints.”

<sup>80</sup> Evocations: ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ θεολογος: *IGCVO* 424; ἅγιος Μενᾶς: *IGCVO* 427, 428, 433, 435. Entreaties: ἀγία Μαρία βοήθησον: *IGVCO* 520; ἄγιε Θεόδωρε βοέθη: *IGVCO* 521. In rare instances, the beneficiary could be both a saint and the person commemorated, like the martyr Dasios (*IGVCO* 455; *SEG* 45.1433); this inscription was added late in the sixth century to the lid of a second-century sarcophagus (Dresken-Weiland 1998, 102–03, no. 296).

<sup>81</sup> Raoul-Rochette 1837, 259.

<sup>82</sup> It may also be a name: *AE* 1993, 01448, dated 200–400 (in Latin); Jalabert and Mouterde 1939 (*IGL Syr.*), 2.689, dated 386 (in Greek). Frey explicitly remarked the Jewish use of *Theosebes* as a Jewish name: *CIJ* i.LXVII.

<sup>83</sup> Examples cited by Liddell and Scott (1996, s.v. Θεοσέβ-εια) include Euripides, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Xenophon and Plato. An epigraphic instance is *SEG* 45.438 (*IG* VII.2712).

<sup>84</sup> Dio Cassius, *LIV*.30.1; Julian, *Or.* VII.212D. Additional examples in Kraemer 2014, 69.

<sup>85</sup> On the Jewish preference for *theosebes*: Bonz 1994, 294; Lieu 1995, 493, 496. In a slip unusual for a scholar of his calibre, Klauser (1965–66, 132) misrepresents the Eutropos epitaph as calling him *eusebes* instead of *theosebes*.

<sup>86</sup> On *theosebes* embracing both the plural and the singular: Siegert 1973, 156.

<sup>87</sup> Reynolds and Tannenbaum 1987; *IJO* 2.71–112, no. 14 (*Εὐτρόπιος* in List B, line 55; lists illustrated in fig. 3–5); helpful reproduction at aphrodisias.classics.ox.ac.uk/jewishcom.html

supporters of the Jewish community, “full Jews” on list A and, having regard to onomastic analysis and its heading, Judaizing gentiles on list B.<sup>88</sup> A similar usage of *theosebes* is suggested in some other eastern inscriptions, most from synagogues, one for theatre seating.<sup>89</sup>

*Theosebes* appears only twice in the New Testament, in John 9:31 (rendered in the Vulgate as *cultor Dei*, in English translations as a server or worshipper of God) and 1 Tim 2:10 (*pietatis*, “godliness”), but it was deployed with increasing frequency in Patristic texts.<sup>90</sup> In his *Dialogue* against the Jew Trypho (circa 155–161 CE), Justin Martyr deployed *theosebes* as an instrument of apologetic rhetoric:

We [Christians], indeed, have not believed in him [Christ] in vain, nor have we been led astray by our teachers, but by wondrous divine providence it has been brought about that we, through the calling of the new and eternal testament, namely, Christ, should be found more understanding and more religious [*theosebesteroi*] than you [Jews], who are reputed to be, but in reality are not, intelligent men and lovers of God.<sup>91</sup>

On this reasoning, Christians are the true and only God-fearers; the designation is not inherited from or shared with the Jews but freshly extended by Christ under a new dispensation. *Theosebes* thus acquires a positive Christian connotation, whence its later service as a eulogistic title liberally conferred on ecclesiastics, functionaries and emperors. In the fourth century, Eusebius applied it to martyrs in Nicomedia, Constantine’s mother Helena, and Christians generally; in the fifth, Theodoret of Cyrus so qualified some of his meritorious predecessors and contemporaries.<sup>92</sup>

The mark of *theosebes* in the epigraphic record is faint. It appears in perhaps half a dozen Jewish epitaphs, including three or four from Rome (one in Latin transliteration), one from southern Italy (Venusia), possibly another from Cos.<sup>93</sup> If the term identified Gentile

<sup>88</sup> The bibliography concerning the interpretation of *theosebes* at Aphrodisias is substantial. In addition to the references in the previous footnote bibliography, see: Siegert 1973; Kraabel 1981; Cohen 1989, 20–22; Bonz 1994; Lieu 1995; Kraemer 2014; Fredriksen 2015.

<sup>89</sup> From the synagogue at Sardis: *IJO* 2. 241–44, no. 67 and 68; *IJO* 2.281–82, no. 123 (*SEG* 51.1662); *IJO* 2.287–88, no. 132 (*SEG* 46.1518). Synagogue at Philadelphia: *IJO* 2.204–06, no. 49. Theater seating in Miletus: *IJO* 2. 268–71, no. 37.

<sup>90</sup> Patristic sources are cited by Lampe 1961, s.v. *Θεοσέβεια*, and *θεοσεβής*. In the 1930s, Georg Bertram suggested that the term was avoided in the New Testament because of its prevalence among the Jews: Kittel 1964–76, s.v. *Θεοσέβης*. The claim is implausible, contradicted by later Patristic and popular appropriation, and likely attributable to Bertram’s participation in the anti-Semitic program to “dejudaize” the church and Christianity (this entry was in the 1938 edition). On that program and Bertram’s role in it: Vos 1984, 91, 96–100.

<sup>91</sup> Justin, *dial.* 118.3 (Falls translation, 176–77); also 93.2, 119.6. The element of competition is remarked by Lieu 1995, 488, with additional examples.

<sup>92</sup> Eusebius, *h.e.* 8.6.6 (translated by Lake as “Godfearing”), v.C. 3.47.2 and 1.17.3 (PG 20, 1108A, 933B; the former translated by Cameron and Hall as “Godfearing”, the latter, modifying *genos*, as “race of the godly”). Theodoret, *ep.* 17 (applied to the Deaconess Casiana), 19 (to Athanasius), 75 (to the bishop and clergy of Berea); PG 83, 1136B, 1197B, 1243B–C; *theosebes* variously translated by Jackson.

<sup>93</sup> Rome: *JJWE* 2.207 (Latin transliteration); *JJWE* 2.392; *JJWE* 2.627i (rejected as Jewish by Noy in *JJWE* but accepted by Siegert 1973, 157, Reynold and Tannenbaum 1987, 74n217, and others). Italy: *JJWE* 1.12

sympathizers in the eastern synagogue inscriptions, in the funerary context it probably just signified the deceased's piety and observance. The Christian corpus is equally modest. In addition to the Eutropos plaque, standard catalogues include only five instances of the term from Rome dated before 400 CE, not all of which are securely Christian.<sup>94</sup> The combination of *hagios* and *theosebēs* as epithets before the name of the deceased is found in only one other Roman inscription, in this case for a woman.<sup>95</sup> The Christian classification of that epitaph relies solely on the Latin formula *deposita VII kal(endas) maias* appended to the Greek text. In sum, the Roman funerary use of *theosebēs* in the relevant period was restrained and not characteristically Christian. In relative and perhaps even in absolute terms, it was more prevalent among the Jews.

Inferences of religious affiliation for grave plaques sometimes reach beyond visual and verbal elements to find-spots, whether as corroboration or sole authority.<sup>96</sup> As previously remarked, reported modern find-spots cannot be rigorously assumed to represent original locations; for the Eutropos plaque, a connection with the catacomb *ad duas lauros* depends on the accuracy of Fabretti's notes and the immobility of the object. In addition, deducing a Christian provenance based on the find-spot assumes that the particular cemetery was reserved exclusively for members of that community. Based on both textual sources and demographic calculations, all the "Christian" catacombs of Rome cannot have been so restricted in the third and early fourth centuries.<sup>97</sup> Since the capacity of the Christian community to control and to fill funerary spaces increased with the growth in Christian number, the earlier the date of a given funerary monument, the less robust the inference of its Christianity from its putative archaeological context.

An object's modern find-spot, its epigraphic formulae and its use of certain stock images are all, therefore, at best probabilistic evidence of a Christian religious affiliation. A particular place, term or visual form might have been more attractive to one religious group than another, but most were demonstrably ecumenical. Christians and Jews both used the

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(Lorium but reported as taken from Rome; sometimes classed as Christian, as in *IG XIV 2259*, *IGCVO 1026*); *JIVE 1.113* (Venusia, another transliteration). Cos: *SEG 26.949*; *IJO 2. 54–55*, no. 6 (tentatively classed as Jewish).

<sup>94</sup> *ICUR I 2895* (*CIG 6411*, *IGVCO 1014*, *EDB 20003*); *ICUR I 3981* (*IGVCO 1010*; *EDB 12634*); *ICUR I 4042* (*EDB 16210*); *ICUR IV 10652a* (*EDB 441*); *ICVR VI, 17297* (*EDB 14077*). Bonz 1994, 298n46, provides a longer list but some are names rather than descriptions, most are extra-metropolitan, all but the Eutropos plaque are dated after the fourth century and, as she acknowledged, some may not be Christian. In the sixth century, *theosebēs* appears in mosaics and other contexts following the literary usage qualifying a pious saint, bishop or other individual, e.g., *SEG 57.1874*.

<sup>95</sup> *ICUR I 3981*; *EDB 12634*, where dated 290–324.

<sup>96</sup> E.g., *ICUR I 1752* (*EDB 35557*) catalogued as Christian solely because it was last recorded in the Cemetery of Callixtus, or *JIVE 2.34* (*CIJ i.341*) treated as Jewish because it was found in the Monteverde catacomb, even though the name in the inscription, *Iaso*, is attested for a female pagan deity.

<sup>97</sup> See Rebillard 2003, 40–49; Bodel 2008, 183–85; Johnson 1997. Evidence regarding some Jewish cemeteries may be somewhat stronger, although still open to exceptions: Rutgers 2006, 345–51. On mixed Jewish and Christian spaces, see also Kraemer 1991, 152–55.

pagan *dis manibus*; Jews occasionally adopted the Christian Chi-rho monogram.<sup>98</sup> Jás Elsner highlighted a gold-glass that, while displaying explicitly Jewish imagery, was found in the “Christian” catacomb of Marcellinus and Peter, coincidentally the same site where Fabretti reported finding the Eutropos plaque.<sup>99</sup> The potential for such epigraphic, visual and archaeological cross-over complicates the task of religious attribution.

Assessing the “Christian probability” for an object like the Urbino plaque must take into account an important quantitative dimension. The number of late antique epitaphs classified as Christian is orders of magnitude greater than those treated as Jewish or pagan.<sup>100</sup> Absolute comparisons in the frequency of a particular formula are misleading. It is not impossible that “in peace” could actually be more common in Jewish than in Christian inscriptions, or at least in inscriptions with markers that are explicitly Jewish (Hebrew text, cultic symbols, synagogue offices) than in those with equivalent Christian signals (representations of Jesus and apostles, chi-rho, name of Christ, etc.). The prevalence of *theosebes* in Roman epitaphs dramatically favours Jewish over Christian when the numbers are taken into account. The same caution applies to images and locations. The strength of any putative association proving religious affiliation must be based on relative, not absolute, numbers.

A further and troubling aspect of religious classification arguments is an insidious circularity of reasoning that often creeps in, what Elsner called “the game of apologetic archaeology.”<sup>101</sup> One cannot determine that *depositus* or a bird with a twig is inevitably or even predominantly Christian by surveying a corpus of Christian monuments that has been constructed on this very premise. As Ross S. Kraemer remarked: “[Jean-Baptiste] Frey would have found a lot more Jewish *dis manibus* inscriptions had he not begun with the assumption that there was no such thing.”<sup>102</sup> Her observation is easily extended to imagery and find-spots, and to religious characterizations other than Jewish. Although most people in third- and fourth-century Rome self-identified within a specific community, boundaries were fuzzy, practices and belief systems fluid or permeable, commitments variable, identities pluralistic.<sup>103</sup> Those who called themselves Christians were probably sincere and self-aware but they did not all mean the same thing by this confession. Religious identifications were liable to intrusions and appropriations. Church Fathers decried Judaizing and pagan idolatry within their flock but all the other permutations were equally possible: God-fearing (Judaizing) pagans, paganizing Jews, and Christianizing pagans and Jews.

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<sup>98</sup> *Dis manibus*: Caldelli 1997. Jewish Chi-rho: Kraemer 1991, 160–61.

<sup>99</sup> Elsner 2003, 115–17.

<sup>100</sup> For example, *JWE* catalogues around 600 entries for Rome while the *EDB* hosts over 40,000.

<sup>101</sup> Elsner 2003, 117.

<sup>102</sup> Kraemer 1991, 157, one of several such examples exposed in this seminal paper. The author explicitly alludes to the problem of circularity in 145–46n16. See also Rajak 1994, 240: “To determine in advance what is Jewish and what is not (or even ‘probably’ not) is to operate with preconception of Jewish identity, when our task is, precisely, to seek to define that identity.”

<sup>103</sup> Within the voluminous literature, see: Kahlos 2007; Felle 2007; Salamito 2010; Rebillard 2012; Jones 2014.

Finally, the classification of the Eutropos plaque, the object itself, as Christian without further explanation implicitly conflates Eutropos and his son. Terms of commemoration are more probative of the religious affiliation of the survivor who dictated them than the deceased upon whom they are lavished. And in the third century the correlation between members of different generations was far lower among Christians than in the more stable communities of pagans and Jews. As Keith Hopkins observed: “Christians were made, not born.”<sup>104</sup> It is certainly possible that the conventional view is correct, that Eutropos and his son were both committed, practicing Christians operating within a relatively narrow conception of that community. Or, having regard to the rapid evolution in religious demography, Eutropos might have converted late in life or on his death bed, a not uncommon circumstance sometimes highlighted in epitaphs by the qualification *neofytus*.<sup>105</sup> He might even have died a pagan or a Jew, perhaps sympathetic to the Christian beliefs held by others in his family.

### Summing-up

The Eutropos plaque conceals and reveals. Its depiction of a lions’ head *lenos* sarcophagus intimates an early date, gravitating around the middle of the third century. The epigraphy, lay-out and imagery support inferences about the number and skill of its executants, their linguistic backgrounds and the allocation of tasks; the picture of a sarcophagus workshop corroborates use of the strap drill, suggests a degree of artisanal versatility, and evidences the availability of a particular commercial model not otherwise attested in the archaeological record. The plaque is rich in biographical references. The deceased is seen and named twice, in death and in active life; he is commemorated directly (in the epitaphs of the plaque) and indirectly (on the lid of his own imagined sarcophagus). Whether his son, too, appears in the workshop as apprentice or assistant remains uncertain, but he explicitly claims in the epitaph the grown-up and filial status of patron.

The most intriguing question concerns religious affinity. Modern commentary has never wavered in asserting that the plaque represents in word and image a coherent set of beliefs, subscribed by both father and son, that may be labelled as “Christian.” Yet this artifact tells more about Eutropos Junior than Senior, and not enough about either to situate him squarely within the four corners of a stable, sharply defined religious identity as understood in a later period. The richness of the Eutropos grave plaque lies in its accommodation of a gamut of spiritual permutations.

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<sup>104</sup> Hopkins 1998, 219. The literature on Christian number is reviewed in Couzin 2014, 285–86.

<sup>105</sup> Most famously on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus: Bovini and Brandenburg 1967, 279–83, no. 680; *ICUR* II 4164; *EDB* 19223. The Latin term transliterates the Greek word meaning newly planted, but the metaphor is much less common in Greek. One example is *ICUR* VI 16875; *EDB* 13659 (dated 290–324).

Robert Couzin, “Interrogating the Eutropos Grave Plaque in Urbino,” *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 16 (2022) 1-31; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/jlarc.127>

### Abbreviations

- AE* *L'Année Épigraphique*. Paris 1888–.
- CIG* *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*. Berlin: G. Reimer, 1828–.
- CIJ* Jean-Baptiste Frey. *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum, I*. Vatican: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1936.
- EDB* *Epigraphic Database Bari*. <http://www.edb.uniba.it/>
- ICUR* *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*. Vatican: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1922–92.
- IGCVO* Wessel, Carl. *Inscriptiones Graecae Christianae veteres occidentis*. Edited by Antonio Ferrua and Carlo Carletti. Bari: Edipuglia, 1989.
- IJO* *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis II: Kleinasien*. Edited by Walter Ameling. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004.
- JIWE* David Noy. *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*. 2 volumes. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993–95.
- PG* *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca*. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. Paris: Migne, 1857–66.
- SEG* *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum Online*. Leiden: Brill.

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