

Evidence for Junian Latins in the tombs of Pompeii?

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The *Lex Iunia* of Augustus, implemented at the end of the 1st c. B.C., led to the creation of a new status group of Roman freedmen, made up of former slaves who had been granted legal freedom, but not Roman citizenship.¹ Although several works, particularly those of P. Lopez Barja de Quiroga and P. R. C. Weaver,² have helped to show the widespread presence of these “Junian Latins” in both Italy and the provinces, their lives and the ways in which their status differed from that of other freedmen remain little understood. Fourteen tombs at Pompeii have the potential to provide new information on the life experiences of this group. Their owners broke with Pompeian practice by not including filiation indicating freeborn or freed status in their epitaphs. Internal evidence from the tombs, considered along with the text of Herculaneum’s so-called *Album Augustalium* inscription, suggests that the deceased were Junian Latins, a group that has not previously been identified among the thousands of personal names preserved in Pompeii’s epigraphic record. Although the owners of the tombs appear to have been freedmen, the tombs themselves differ from those of other former slaves. The funerary culture of these individuals — including commemorative goals reflected in epitaphs, tomb types used, and locations selected for tombs — follows a pattern preferred by the élites and freeborn of the town, while eschewing the values and priorities put forward in the tombs of other freedmen.

The question of the legal status of Junian Latins

Junian Latins were former slaves who had been freed informally in a manner that did not adhere to the legal standards for manumission.³ Formal manumission, which resulted in freed status and Roman citizenship, could be granted when a slave was over 30 years old, owned by a Roman citizen of sound mind who was over 20 years old, and freed by way of a standard procedure — either before a magistrate (*vindicta*), by entry onto a census list (*censu*, a method that perhaps went out of use in the Early Empire⁴), or in the will of the owner (*testamento*). If any of these conditions was not met, the freedman or freedwoman would be granted Junian Latin status.⁵ Junian Latins were primarily distinguished by their lack of hereditary rights: upon their death, their property reverted to their patron or patron’s heirs. In effect, Junian Latins lived free, but died with the rights of slaves. Additionally, they faced some legal restrictions during life: they were unable to inherit from others, they did not possess the *ius connubii*, and it seems that they were barred from holding public offices open to other freedmen, such as membership in the college of *Augustales*.⁶

1 The date of this law is a matter of some debate, but the most likely years seem to be either 25 or 17 B.C.: Lopez Barja de Quiroga, 1998, 137-40.

2 Weaver 1990, 1991 and 1997; Lopez Barja de Quiroga 1998.

3 For a detailed look at the laws, see Venturini 1995/96; Lopez Barja de Quiroga *ibid.*

4 Lopez Barja de Quiroga *ibid.* 135.

5 There were some limited exceptions to the age requirement: if the slave and master had a close personal or familial relationship (e.g., the slave was a natural child or intended spouse), he or she might be manumitted *vindicta* under the age of 30, with the added restriction that the process had to be carried out under the supervision of a council of senators. In addition, if a slave was freed *testamento* as the only heir of an insolvent master, he or she might be given citizenship regardless of age. Cf. the discussion in Weaver 1990, 276; Rawson 2010, 197-98.

6 Arangio-Ruiz 1974, 535-51; Guadagno 1977, 119-20; Lopez Barja de Quiroga 1995, 329.