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The Senatorial Family of the Cocceii after Nerva: Some Reflections Regarding CIL XI 5672 = EDCS 23000344 and a New Brick Stamp

In the absence of data regarding Nerva's immediate family and his descendants, historians have tended to accept the observations made by Pliny the Younger or, more accurately, have taken refuge in them. Pliny states in his *Panegyricus* 7, 4–6, when referring to the relationship between Nerva and Trajan at the time of the succession:

Nulla adoptati cum eo, qui adoptabat, cognatio, nulla necessitudo, nisi quod uterque optimus erat, dignusque alter eligi, alter eligere. Itaque adoptatus es non, ut prius alius atque alius, in gratiam uxoris, ad civitatem te filium non vitricus, sed princeps, eodemque animo divus Nerva pater tuus factus est, quo erat omnium. Nec decet aliter filium adsumi, si adsumatur a principe, an senatum populumque Romanum, exercitus, provincias, socios transmissurus uni successorem e sinu uxoris accipias summeque potestatis heredem tantum intra domum tua quaeras? Non per totam civitatem circumferas oculos et hunc tibi proximum, hunc coniunctissimum existimes, quem optimum, quem diis simillimum inveneris? Imperaturus omnibus eligi debet ex omnibus: non enim servulis tuis dominum, ut possis esse contentus quasi necessario herede, sed principem civibus daturus imperator.

On his part, Cassius Dio (68, 4, 1) asserts: οὐδ' αὖ ὅτι Ἰβηρ ὁ Τραϊανὸς ἀλλ' οὐκ Ἰταλὸς οὐδ' Ἰταλιώτης ἦν¹, emphasizing the fact that Trajan was a Spaniard, not an Italic, and subsequently highlighting that this did not hinder his adoption by Nerva, who chose him for his virtue and the interests of the state, 68, 4, 2: τὴν γὰρ ἀρετὴν ἀλλ' οὐ τὴν πατρίδα τινὸς ἐξετάζειν δεῖν ᾤετο². The break in the dynastic criterion seems evident, which, in the opinion of Cassius Dio, can only be seen as a positive development, as reflected in the text.

The flattering and propagandistic statements of Pliny the Younger have had, and continue to have, a long historiographical trajectory, since there is nothing to suggest that Emperor Trajan had any familial ties to Nerva—an element that would have brought us closer to a much more common and traditional form of Roman succession, such as that between Octavian and Caesar, to name just one example, and limiting ourselves to the very origins of the Principate³.

1 We follow the Weidmann edition by U.Ph. Boissevain, *Dionis Cassii Cocceiani historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt*, vol. III, Berlin 1901, p. 190.

2 See Syme 1958, pp. 785–786, where he comments on the passage regarding Trajan's origin and considers a possible distant Illyrian ancestry.

3 An interesting perspective is offered in Canto 2003, esp. pp. 313, 319–320, 322 y 327, where the author provides a critical commentary on the conditions surrounding the 'alleged' adoption of Trajan by Nerva, and on pp. 314 and 322, offers insightful observations on the elements that seem to parallel the succession of Trajan by Hadrian.

However, we cannot overlook the fact that the relationships between the *Ulpii Traiani* and the Flavian dynasty are, at the very least, open to consideration⁴, although this is not the case—given the available information—regarding any connections they may have had with the *Cocceii*, which, as F. Chausson has rightly noted, must have somehow existed⁵.

We also hesitate to propose a connection between the *Cocceii* and the *Aelii*, the latter of whom are certainly linked to the *Ulpii*, likely through marital alliances⁶. As we will see below, this connection can only be detected in the polyonym of *Stertinia Cocceia Bassula Venecia Aeliana*, which is chronologically distant and overly complex to draw such a conclusion. However, it remains a door that is worth keeping open⁷.

It is evident from the epigraphy that Emperor Nerva had a direct family, although we cannot specify the exact degree of kinship. This family evidently outlived him, and most likely, based on the data we can work with, it did so through the female line, which likely interrupted the series of *Marci Cocceii Nervae* that had been succeeding one another since the Republican era⁸.

Regarding its origin, there is no doubt that a family of such ancient prestige as his was linked to Rome, although a *fistula* of a *clarissima femina*, *Cocceia Galla*, might lead us to consider *Baiae*⁹, and a *Callistus Coccei Nervae* appears in inscriptions from *Praeneste*¹⁰. The properties of the *Cocceii* were presumably located in Latium and

4 Cf. Mayer i Olivé 2018, pp. 17–33, with previous bibliography; Mayer i Olivé 2020, pp. 77–86; Pastor 2018, pp. 127–145.

5 Chausson 2002, pp. 201–206, where he highlights the scarcity of information regarding Nerva's family, data that might perhaps provide the key to understanding Trajan's adoption.

6 Canto 1999, pp. 233–251, esp. *stemma* p. 236; Canto 2010, pp. 27–64, esp. pp. 32–45, and on the *Tra(h)ii* of *Italica* pp. 42–45, where the author proposes a Celt-Iberian origin for the *Traii* and suggests, on p. 48, a family tree based on data from Italica, assuming an adoption close to the emperor's time; in this same volume, Cortés Copete 2010, pp. 305–328, esp. pp. 306–308, revisits the issue of the family's origins and also believes that the *Vlprii* could have been of highly Romanized indigenous origin or descendants of Italics, but that the *Traii* were Umbrians. On the *Traii*: Caballos Rufino 1987–1988, pp. 299–317; Gil 1986, pp. 325–327; Caballos Rufino 1990, p. 309, does not see the need for an adoption between the *Ulprii* and the *Traii* in her family tree and rightly observes, in our opinion, on p. 313, note 39, that the *Traii* could be related to *Trea* in the *Picenum* and may have connections with the Pompeian clientele recruited from that region. Cf. also the sound reasoning on p. 310 regarding their origin. See also Castillo 1993, pp. 35–47.

7 The Greek coinage that refers to Hadrian as *Nerva Traianus Hadrianus* may perhaps not be merely a reminiscence of an early moment in Hadrian's nomenclature.

8 Cf. now Grainger 2003, pp. 66–88, for the aristocratic social circle of Nerva, and pp. 89–102 for the possible causes and circumstances surrounding the selection of Trajan as heir.

9 EDCS 65300090 y 65300091(= EDR134562 and EDR130018 with additional bibliography) de *Bauli*, *Bacoli*. See also *PIR*² C 1233.

10 Documented by three stamps *CIL* XV 2314, 1–2 = EDCS 21200265 and 21200266, as well as *CIL* XIV 4091, 26, 3 = EDCS 21200267.

Campania, although the fact that the future emperor's birth is situated in *Narnia* (Narni) may extend their properties to this area of Umbria¹¹.

It should be noted that in a Roman marriage between landowners, properties acquired through the maternal line were added to the family estate. Let us recall here that the emperor's mother was *Sergia Plautilla*¹², daughter of *C. Octavius Laenas*, who, through the *Octavii Laenates*, was connected to the *domus Augusta*¹³. This connection undoubtedly played a decisive role in the beginning of his career, although it may have caused some inconveniences during the Flavian period, and especially under Domitian.

An inscription from *Sentinum*, also in Umbria, as a *privatus*, that is, before becoming emperor (*CIL* XI 5743 = *ILS* 273 = *EDCS* 23000418), shows him as an *evergetes*, since he restored some kind of building that had collapsed due to old age, likely as a result of being chosen *patronus* of the city¹⁴. We can assume that Nerva's interests as a landowner were likely also concentrated in that area, and possibly, as we will see, in the neighboring Umbrian cities¹⁵.

This is the point where we believe it is worth pausing, and it is precisely in this area where we can assume that the emperor's family was well established. Specifically, we find in *Attidium*, the present-day Attigio near Fabriano, the presence of a senatorial family, the *Sertinii* (*CIL* XI 5672 = *EDCS* 23000344) (Fig. 1), one of whose members bears the names *Sertinia Cocceia Bassula Venecia Aeliana* and is the wife of *Q. Cornelius Flaccus Sertinius Noricus [Q. Camurius] Numisius Iunior*, and the mother of *Q. Camurius Numisius Iunior*.

L. Vidman¹⁶ proposes a stemma of this family, according to which *C. Camurius Clemens*¹⁷ would be the father or grandfather of *Q. Cornelius Flaccus . . . Noricus [Camurius?]*

11 Gaggiotti, Sensi 1982, pp. 245–274, esp. p. 265 (M. Gaggiotti), for the properties between *Roma*, *Alisium* and *Lorium* of *Sertinia Bassula*, identified with *Sertinia Cocceia Bassula Venecia Aeliana*.

12 Cf. *CIL* VI 31297 = *ILS* 281 = *EDCS* 18700464: *Sergiae / Laenatis f(iliae) / Plautillae / matri / Imp(eratoris) Nervae / Caesaris Aug(usti)*.

13 *PIR*² C 1227, pp. 292–294 (A. Stein), esp. p. 292: “fuit patricius utpote salius. Per matrem affinitate aliquatenus coniunctus cum domo Augusta, nam frater matris Octavius Laenas videtur duxisse Rubelliam Bassam filiam Iuliae Drusi Caesaris filiae. Cf. the stemma in *PIR*² O 46, pp. 423–424 (K. Wachtel), esp. p. 424.

14 *M(arcus) Cocceius [M(arci) f(ilius) Nerva] / augur sodal[is] August(alis) praet(or) quaest(or)] / urb(anus) VIvir turma[e - - - salius] / Palat(inus) triumphali[bus] ornamentis] / honoratus patronu[s] municipii] / vetustate conla[ps - -] / - - - - -*. A reasonable assumption of economic interests in the area is also made by Gaggiotti, Sensi 1982, p. 258.

15 Let us consider the presence of Cocceii in *Sentinum*, *CIL* XI 5750 = *EDCS* 23000425; in *Pitinum Mergens*, *CIL* XI 5972 a = *EDCS* 23100779 and in *Suasa*, *CIL* XI 6181 = *EDCS* 23100514, which indicate an extensive presence of dependents of this aristocratic family.

16 *PIR*², Vol. V, p. 395.

17 *CIL* XI 5669 = *ILS* 2728 = *EDCS* 2300034; *PIR*² C 382, pp. 90–91 (A. Stein).

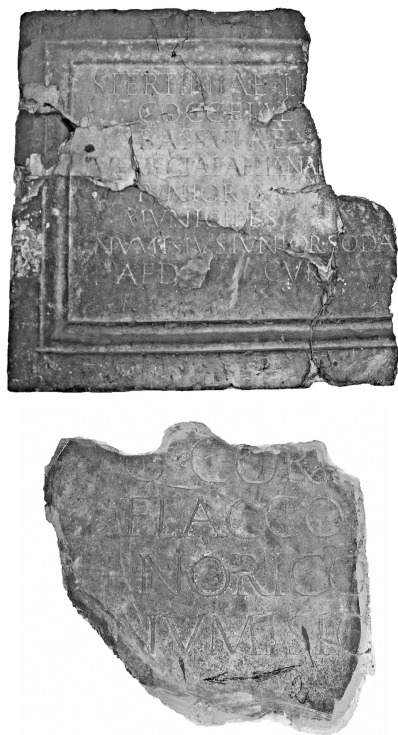


Fig. 1: Latin inscription *CIL* XI 5672. Foto: M. Mayer.

*Numisius Iunior*¹⁸, who would marry *Sertinia Cocceia Bassula Venecia Aeliana*¹⁹, and their son would be *Q. Camurius Numisius Iunior*, consul *suffectus* between February and April of 161 AD²⁰. He, in turn, would have a daughter named *Cocceia Bassula Numisia Procula*²¹, thus recovering the nomen *Cocceius* received by his mother through the

18 *PIR*² C 1363, p. 322 (E. Groag), which expressed doubts regarding the kinship between him and *Sertinia Cocceia Bassula Venecia Aeliana (Numisi) Iunioris uxore* and *Q. Camurius Numisius Iunior* and also questioned whether he could be the same individual as the *Noricus* who was consul *suffectus* in 113 AD. It was also raised, cf. *PIR*² II, C 1362, p. 322 (E. Groag), whether *Q. Cornelius Flaccus . . . Noricus . . . Numisius* might not have received part of his name from the *Cornelius Flaccus* who was *legatus legionis* under the command of *Domitius Corbulo* in 58 AD (*Tac. ann.* 13, 39).

19 *PIR*² S 915, pp. 340–341 (K. Wachtel), where the doubt is raised regarding the kinship between the three individuals mentioned in *CIL* XI 5672 = EDCS 23000344.

20 *PIR*² N 207, pp. 395–396 (L. Vidman), at this point, follows the conclusions of M. Gaggiotti in Gaggiotti, Sensi 1982, p. 254 and esp. pp. 265 and 267 with *stemma*.

21 *CIL* VIII 626 = EDCS 15300165 from *Mactar*, which appears to be the same *Numisia Procula* mentioned in a *fistula* from the *Via Ardeatina*, along with an individual integrated as *L. Fulvius Gavius Numisius Petronius Aemilianus*, *CIL* XV 7459 = EDCS 37900295; *PIR*² N 220, p. 398 (L. Petersen). Eck 1982, esp. p. 218 and note 102, referring to the *fistula* with the indication of *Numisia Procula*, notes that we cannot be certain it is the same individual as the one bearing the name *Cocceia Bassula Numisia*

maternal line. On the other hand, this last individual would have adopted a son of *M. Gavius Appalius Maximus*²², who, after the adoption, would take the name *M. Gavius Crispus Numisius Iunior*, who was proconsul around 200 AD²³. This is not the opinion of O. Salomies, who links the possible adoptions in a different manner based on the present, albeit fragmented, onomastics, and suggests that *Q. Camurius Numisius Iunior* might have been the adopted son of a *Q. Camurius*, brother of the well-documented *eques C. Camurius Clemens*²⁴. In our discussion, we have primarily followed the stemma established by L. Vidman for these family relations, which does not align exactly with the one outlined by M. Gaggiotti²⁵.

Our proposed reconstruction of *CIL* XI 5672 = EDCS 23000344²⁶, based on what we just exposed, would read as follows:

STERTINIAE L F Q CORN[ELIO Q F LEM]
 COCCEIAE FLACCO [L STERTINIO]
 BASSVLAE NORICO Q CAMVRIO
 VENECIAE AELIANAE NVMISIO [IVNIORI PATRI]
 IVNIORIS [IVNIORIS]
 MVNICIPES ET [INCOLAE]
 NVMISIVS IVNIOR SODALIS TITI[ALIS FLAVIALIS]
 AED CVR DESIG [POSVIT]

Procula, though this remains an open question. Cf. also *FOS*, n. 264, pp. 235–236, and *stemma* LXI, where she follows the filiations proposed by W. Eck.

²² *PIR*² G 92, p. 19 (E. Groag).

²³ *PIR*² N 208, pp. 396–397 (L. Vidman).

²⁴ On *C. Camurius Clemens* cf. *CIL* XI 5669 = *ILS* 2728 = EDCS23000341 and S.M. Marengo, *Suppl. It.* 12, n. 4; also Salomies 1992, p. 54, n. 21. On this individual *PIR*² C 382 (A. Stein), where the author also believes he was the father of *Q. Camurius Numisius Iunior*; Le Bohec 2008, pp. 31–43, esp. pp. 35–36, n. 4; Devijver 1976, pp. 220–221, C 72, with previous bibliography.

²⁵ Cf. note 11.

²⁶ Thus collected in EDCS: *Stertinae L(uci) f(iliae) / Cocceiae / Bassulae / Veneciae Aelianae / iunioris // Q(uinto) Corn[elio - - f(ilio) Lem(onia)] / Flacco [- -] / Norico [- -] / Numisio [- -] // municipes et [incolae] / Numisius iunior sodalis Tit[ialis Flavialis] / aed(ilis) cur(ulis) desig(natus) [- -]*. On this inscription cf. S.M. Marengo, *Suppl. It.* 12, p. 19 and Mayer i Olivé 2021a, pp. 59–88, esp. p. 63 where the text of this inscription can be seen in the *Orthographia* of A. Manuzio, Venice 1566, p. 195; on p. 66 in fol. 125v of the manuscript Vat.Lat. 6035, which presents the printed text of Manuzio cut out and glued, and finally on p. 71, where we include the reading from the manuscript of Giovanni Vecchio de' Vecchi, fol. 81r, preserved in the Biblioteca Comunale of Fabriano, which was already known to E. Bormann for his edition in the *CIL*. Furthermore Mayer i Olivé 2021b, pp. 113–133, esp. pp. 124–126, for the location and current condition of the piece.

Obviously, not all scholars agree with this stemma, as is the case with W. Eck²⁷, who argues, on the contrary, that *Q. Cornelius [- -] Flaccus [- -] Noricus [- -] Numisius [Iunior?]* is the son of *Q. Camurius [.] f. Lem. Numisius Iunior* and *Stertinia Cocceia Bassula Venecia Aeliana*, which would lead to this assumption of a reconstruction for *CIL* XI 5672 = EDCS 23000344:

STERTINIAE L F Q CORN[ELIO Q F LEM]
 COCCEIAE FLACCO [L STERTINIO]
 BASSVLAE NORICO Q CAMVRIO
 VENECIAE AELIANAE NVMISIO [IVNIORI FILIO]
 IVNIORIS [IVNIORIS]
 MVNICIPES ET [INCOLAE]
 NVMISIVS IVNIOR SODALIS TITI[ALIS FLAVIALIS]
 AED CVR DESIG [POSVIT]

W. Eck's position would thus align with the hypothesis of B. Borghesi, who saw this same kinship between the individuals and even suggested that *Cocceia Bassula Numisia Procula* would consequently be the sister of the consul of 161 AD, and that this same lady might even be mentioned in *CIL* XI 5672 = EDCS 23000344 in the lost final section, such that the inscription would be a dedication from both individuals to their father²⁸.

A position that must be considered carefully, although it seems less likely to us than the dedication of a son to both his mother and father, as we have included in the first possible restitution.

A different issue arises if we turn to the *stemma* of the Stertini to clarify the prominence of this family. First, we see that the *consul suffectus* of 92 BC, *L. Stertinus Avitus*²⁹, was the father of the *consul suffectus* of 113 AD, *L. Stertinus Noricus*³⁰, and perhaps the father of *Stertinia Bassula*³¹ and grandfather of the repeatedly cited *Stertinia Cocceia Bassula Venecia Aeliana*. Clearly, this could establish a kinship with *Q. Cornelius [- -] Flaccus [- -] Noricus [- -] Numisius [Iunior?]*, whom we reconstruct as *Q. Cornelius Flaccus Stertinus Noricus [Q. Camurius] Numisius Iunior*, if we consider him the son of the *Numisius Iunior* mentioned in the same inscription, *CIL* XI 5670. The maternal line would have produced, likely through hereditary adoptions,

²⁷ Eck 1980, pp. 31–68, esp. pp. 36–40 on *M. Gavius Crispus Numisius Iunior*, and p. 39 with *stemma*; *FOS*, pp. 584–585, n. 735 and *stemma* LXI; Birley 2005, p. 256, follow the hypothesis of W. Eck.

²⁸ *CIL* XI p. 826 (E. Bormann).

²⁹ *PIR*² S 907, pp. 335–336 (K. Wachtel).

³⁰ *PIR*² S 909, p. 336 (K. Wachtel); Birley 2005 p. 282; Thomasson 1996, p. 56, with a brief reference to his *cursum*.

³¹ Known from the stamps impressed on *tegulae* *CIL* XV 2201–2205; *PIR*² S 914, p. 340 (K. Wachtel); *FOS* n. 734, pp. 583–584 and *stemma* LXI; Braito 2020, pp. 292–294.

the *polyonym* of the individual. The connection with the *Cocceii* would apparently come from the *Stertini*, the family of the mother. To further frame the complex network of relationships of the *Stertini* in the 2nd century, we should also recall the existence of a *Stertinius* who carries the name *L. Stertinius Quintilianus Acilius Strabo Q. Cornelius Rusticus Apronius Senecio Proculus*³², *consul suffectus* of 146 AD, of complicated kinship, but possibly linked to the other powerful *Cornelii Proculi*: *Cornelius Proculus*, *consul suffectus* perhaps in 124 AD³³, and *Gnaeus Arrius Cornelius Proculus*, *consul suffectus* of 145 AD³⁴.

We can also add that the mother of *L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus*³⁵, *consul suffectus* of 82 AD, must have been the sister of Emperor Nerva and wife of *L. Salvius Otho Titianus*, *consul* of 52 AD³⁶. Furthermore, we know of a *clarissima femina*, *Cocceia Galla*, already mentioned³⁷, from the second half of the 2nd century, who, based on her onomastics, appears to be related to *C. Aufidius Victorinus Cocceius Gallus*, of Umbrian origin and *consul iterum* in 183 AD³⁸.

As can be seen, the path of the *Cocceii* leads to Umbria, and the female line appears to have been the means by which the *cognomen* was perpetuated. This is a very important factor that must be considered when addressing Nerva's succession, who most likely found himself without close male heirs, which must have greatly facilitated Trajan's adoption, undoubtedly also from a family of Umbrian and Picene origin, established in Hispania, and very possibly distantly related to the emperor. However, we can only conjecture these probable connections, which are typical of the Roman landowning families, to which the successive imperial families were not strangers.

Consequently, regarding Nerva's succession by Trajan, the providential reason upheld by Pliny the Younger does not seem to be realistic. Instead, it would likely reflect an attempt to connect with the previous dynasty, the Flavians, through a close and notable member of it in the person of Trajan. It was almost a dynastic restoration, a fact that probably did not displease Nerva, a member of a prominent family related to the Julio-Claudian dynasty and a loyal supporter of the established power, who had been protected by Vespasian and was also a candidate for the succession to Domitian chosen by the Senate³⁹.

32 *PIR*² C 1423, pp. 350–353 (E. Groag).

33 *PIR*² C 1421, pp. 349–350 (E. Groag).

34 *PIR*² C 1422, p. 350 (E. Groag).

35 *PIR*² S 144, pp. 55–56 (K. Wachtel).

36 *FOS* n. 263, pp. 234–235 and *stemma* XXIII. For this last individual cf. *PIR*² S 145, pp. 56–57 (K. Wachtel).

37 See note 9.

38 *PIR*² A 1393, pp. 278–280 (E. Groag).

39 On Nerva cf. *PIR*² C 1227, pp. 292–294 (A. Stein), esp. p. 292. Cf. the *stemma* in *PIR*² vol. V, p. 424; for the protection of Nerva and Trajan by Domitian, see the observations by Strobel 1994, pp. 359–398 and

There is no doubt that we can also legitimately consider the possibility that dynastic criteria may not have weighed in this decision and propose other reasons, such as Nerva's proximity either to Trajan's father or to his wife's family, or even that the succession may have been imposed upon him for political reasons⁴⁰, although ultimately these always involved personal connections. However, one fact stands out above all possible reasoning and causes: the Plinian explanation, with its almost propagandistic nature, perfectly fit the ambiguity—likely intentional—of the circumstances that led to Trajan's ascent to the empire⁴¹. Although one may argue about the elective nature of the immediate successors' appointments, it must be acknowledged that, in all cases, family alliances and proximity played an important role in selecting candidates. This is only to be expected when we consider the parameters within which the great Roman families operated, the only ones capable, in that chronology, of providing individuals *capaces imperii*.

[MM]

A Coc(ceia) M. f. Plautilla on a brick stamp

In the Deposits of the National Archaeological Museum of Naples⁴², a fragment of a tile is preserved, mutilated on all sides, with remaining dimensions of (15) x (23.3) x 2.8/3 cm. The fragment, lacking an inventory number, has an unknown provenance.

The tile bears a rectangular stamp bordered by a surrounding frame (measures 2.8 x 5.2 cm), certainly made with a *signaculum ex aere*⁴³. The impression is clear, and the text, arranged in three lines, is easily legible; the hollow letters (height 0.4 cm) have slight serifs. In line 1, there is a punctuation mark in the form of a small lanceolate leaf (Fig. 2a–b).

442–444. Moreover, recently, Morelli 2014, pp. 241–320, discusses the brief reign of Nerva and his succession; additionally, Hamacher 2018, pp. 215–238, esp. pp. 215–216, 224–228 and 233–234.

40 Cf. Eck 2002, pp. 211–226, esp. pp. 214–215. It will be necessary to explore in the near future the familial ties and the family of Nerva itself, which may likely offer us other interpretative keys or reinforce what currently seem to be mere intuitions or extrapolations, cf. Chausson 2017, pp. 133–154, esp. p. 143 with prior bibliography on the subject; Chausson 2008, pp. 201–206.

41 It is significant in this regard to consider Plin. *Pan.* 94, 4, where it is proposed that Jupiter spoke through Nerva during the adoption of Trajan, which would thus be seen as a manifestation of *Providentia*: *Tu clara iudicii tui signa misisti, quum proficiscenti ad exercitum tuo nomine, tuo honore essisti. Tu voce imperatoris quid sentires locutus, filium illi, nobis parentem, tibi pontificem maximum elegisti*; cf. Mayer i Olivé 2019, pp. 139–166, esp. pp. 144–147; also our note 4.

42 I would like to thank Umberto Soldovieri for bringing this artifact to my attention, which was discovered during a broader project of revision and re-edition of the epigraphic collection of the MANN.

43 The simple rectangular shape falls into the typology of *laminae* classified in Baratta 2014, p. 110 n. 1B.

(a)



(b)



Fig. 2a–b: Brick stamp. © Napoli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Foto U. Soldovieri.

The text reads:

*Coc(ceiae) M(arci) · f(iliae) Plau-
tillae et
Maecior(um)*

The stamp mentions a woman, whose abbreviated gentile I propose to expand as *Coc(ceia)*, although alternatives such as *Coccia* or *Cocceienia* are possible⁴⁴. The cognomen *Plautilla* leaves no room for doubt in interpretation, as it is written in full. The woman's name is followed by the mention, introduced by the conjunction *et*, of the genitive plural *Maecior(um)*.

The meaning of the formula seems to imply a form of co-ownership or partnership (*societas*) established between the woman and members of the *Maecii* family

⁴⁴ Cfr. Solin, Salomies 1994, p. 58.

group. The structure of the text reflects a formula that, in its various forms, is well attested in the *signacula ex aere*⁴⁵.

The woman is not otherwise known. The onomastic formula, *Cocceia M. f. Plautilla*, could naturally immediately suggest a close relative of Emperor Nerva, for example a sister who inherits the maternal cognomen from her mother, *Sergia Plautilla*⁴⁶. However, we believe that this suggestive identification hypothesis should be excluded, especially due to the chronology of the stamp, which, based on the structure of the text and its paleographic characteristics, seems to date to the 2nd century A.D. Furthermore, no other evidence exists of connections between the gens *Cocceia* and the gens *Maecia*, whose relationship in this case appears to be limited to an association aimed at establishing an economic partnership, materialized in the creation of a *signaculum* that was later possibly used in a secondary function for the branding of building materials.

It should be noted that the stamping of bricks was certainly not the primary use of a bronze *signaculum*; these were intended for marking other types of materials⁴⁷, and for the stamping of heavy ceramics, terracotta or wooden stamps were commonly used. Therefore, it must have been an occasional, albeit practical, use⁴⁸. Also, the simultaneous presence of female names alongside those of potential *socii* or business partners is not unusual, as evidenced by the attestations found on brick stamps⁴⁹. We can therefore add to the *corpus* of known attestations a new “businesswoman”.

[SB]

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⁴⁵ See Girardi 2014, who collects the attestations of *plurima nomina* on this category of *instrumentum inscriptum*.

⁴⁶ FOS n. 704. An unrecorded sister of Emperor Nerva must have been the mother of *L. Salvius Otho Cocceianus*, cos. 52 AD, cfr. FOS n. 263.

⁴⁷ See Mayer i Olivé 2014.

⁴⁸ The use of *signacula ex aere* for the stamping of building materials is well attested, both through the identification of several matches between bronze *signacula* and marks on roof tiles or bricks, and by the large number of brick stamps that show characteristics of impression undoubtedly traceable to the use of a *signaculum ex aere*. For a summary of the established correspondences and the general issue, see Di Stefano Manzella 2011, pp. 359–360. Subsequent publications that contribute to the discussion include: Di Stefano Manzella 2012, Di Stefano Manzella *et al.* 2012, Mennella 2014, Braitto 2014.

⁴⁹ Braitto 2020, pp. 29–31.

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