

Article

Silvia Tantimonaco*

Piissimus and *pientissimus*: two nonexistent superlatives of *pius*?

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Abstract: The combined analysis of epigraphic, literary and grammatical sources allows light to be shed on linguistic problems concerning the two superlatives of *pius*, *piissimus* and *pientissimus*, which have been mostly overlooked by scholars to date. Regarding the first superlative, Cicero says that it does not exist in Latin (CIC. *Phil.* 13.43.9), whereas the second form is exclusively attested in epigraphy, with no occurrences in ancient literary or scholarly texts. Moreover, the morphology of *pientissimus* cannot be explained according to Classical Latin rules, since the only verb which is semantically related to *pius*, *piare*, belongs to the first conjugation (it also does not fit semantically). In the present paper, we will try to demonstrate that *piissimus* was generally avoided in the literature of the Classical age based on linguistic purism, though it was probably used in colloquial Latin, and definitely normalized as a standard form in the Post-Classical age, as can be seen in both the literary and epigraphic instances of this word. In the case of *pientissimus*, this may have initially spread in the epigraphic domain, and subsequently entered so-called Vulgar Latin.

Keywords: Latin linguistics; *Pientissimus*; *Piissimus*; *Pius*; Roman epigraphy

1 Introduction

Pietas represented a central concept within Roman society.¹ Therefore, it is not surprising that epithets alluding to *pietas* appear in huge numbers in Latin epigraphy, particularly in funerary inscriptions, where they are generally applied to the

¹ *Pietas* indeed belongs to the group of “untranslatable” concepts of the Ancient World, cf. Colot (2004).

***Corresponding author: Silvia Tantimonaco**, Department of Finno-Ugric and Historical Linguistics, Research Institute for Linguistics, Benczúr u. 33, 1068 Budapest, Hungary, E-mail: silvia.tantimonaco@gmail.com

commemorated persons, or sometimes to the promoters of the inscriptions in question.² In this context, the superlatives *piissimus* and *pietissimus* are extremely common.³ This paper pays specific attention to these forms and the linguistic challenges regarding them.

2 *Piissimus*

The main problem concerning the form *piissimus* is connected to a passage of the *Philippics*, in which Cicero reproaches Antony for the use of this superlative on the grounds that it does not exist in Latin at all. This passage has been often quoted in the modern literature, but references to it have been mostly cursory. The text in question reads as follows: “You, moreover, seek friends among not merely the loyal (*pios*), but among the ‘loyalest’ (*piissimos*) and, though the word does not exist at all in the Latin language (*quod uerbum omnino nullum in lingua Latina est*), you in your divine loyalty introduce a new one”.⁴

This assertion of Cicero appears to be inconsistent with the presence of *piissimus* – and the related adverb *piissime* – in hundreds of Roman inscriptions, and, above all, with its use in the literary sources, an aspect with which will be dealt later in this paper. Moreover, the same statement openly contrasts with the testimony of the grammarians, who present *piissimus* as the regular superlative of *pious*, whereas they explicitly reject the synthetic comparative, *pior*.⁵ According to

² On this topic, see recently Tantimonaco (2018). They appear more rarely among honorific inscriptions (cf. e. g. *CIL* XI 2698 or *CIL* II², 7, 36), sometimes even in sacred inscriptions (for instance, *pietissimus* is used as an epithet of the worshipped divinity in *CIL* X 4553 and AE 1947, 22).

³ On the specific use of these epithets in funerary inscriptions of children, cf. Milusheva (2012).

⁴ *CIC. Phil.* 13.43.9: *Tu porro ne pios quidem, sed piissimos quaeris et, quod uerbum omnino nullum in lingua Latina est, id propter tuam diuinam pietatem nouum inducis* (English translation by W. C. A. Ker from the edition of the Loeb library). The antecedent of this reproach is *CIC. Phil.* 13.43.1: *Nec Lepidi societatem uiolare, piissimi hominis*. The oration in question dates to 43 BC.

⁵ Cf. e. g. *GL* 1.113.10–12 (*Charisius*): [*Sunt*] *quaedam quae primum et tertium, ut pius piissimus, fidus fidissimus, cuius secunda elatio est magis pius, magis fidus; GL* 1.115.20–22 (*Id.*): *Velut pius debebat in comparatione pior dici; sed quoniam non habet perissosyllabum, nec comparari potest, sicut nec idoneor dici potest; GL* 1.156.30–33 (*Id.*): *Aliquando enim primus tantum gradus inuenitur, ut mediocris; (...) aliquando primus et tertius, ut pius piissimus (nam pro secundo gradu magis aduerbium ponimus, ut magis pius); GL* 1.324.31–37 (*Diomedes*): *Dicimus enim tam bonus tam malus, minus bonus minus malus, minime bonus minime malus, magis bonus magis malus, maxime bonus maxime malus. Eodem modo et pius. Inueniuntur ea quae trifariam ordinantur in hunc modum, uno scilicet deficiente quolibet gradu, aut positio aut comparatio aut superlatio; positio, ut ulterior ultimus, ocior ocissimus; comparatio, pius piissimus; superlatio, senex senior.*

them, the comparatives of vowel-stem adjectives (such as *pius*, *arduus*, *egregius*, *dubius*, *strenuus*, etc.) were avoided for euphonic reasons, and mostly replaced by means of periphrastic constructions formed with the adverb *magis* (for instance, *magis pius*, *magis arduus*, and so on).⁶ Priscian quotes some synthetic forms of both comparatives and superlatives attested in the works of archaic Latin authors, such as *arduus* and *arduissimus*.⁷ However, it seems reasonable to think that periphrastic constructions were extended to the superlatives of this category of adjectives on the basis of analogy with their comparatives (Leumann 1977: 498).⁸

6 Cf. e. g. GL 1.115.23–27 (Charisius): *Quae regula de omnibus appellationibus quae non habent in comparatione perissosyllabum obseruanda est, ut non comparentur. Non minus autem excipimus ex comparationibus quaecumque nomina us pure proferuntur, uelut strenuus necessarius et similia. Comparatiua enim non possunt habere, superlatiua uero habent ex omnibus quibus ueniunt, uelut hic piissimus strenuissimus. GL 2.86.21–87.15 (Priscianus): Inueniuntur quaedam, quae quamuis sint accidentia [id est adiectiua] et eorum significatio exigat, ut faciant comparatiua, tamen non habentur in usu frequenti. Sunt autem ea plerumque, quae uocales ante us habent, ut pius, arduus, egregius, dubius, strenuus, quamuis Plautus ex eo comparatiuum protulit strenuior in Epidico: nam strenuiori deterior si praedicat / suas pugnas, de illius + illae fiunt sordidae. Et puto, hanc esse rationem, quod oportet comparatiuum una syllaba uincere genetiuum positiui, nisi sint anomala, ut teneri tenerior, docti doctior (...). Si in consonantem transeat i, pares esse syllabas genetiuo positiui cum nominatiuo comparatiui uel hiatum intolerabilem fieri tribus uocalibus per tres syllabas continue positae nulla consonante media, si dicamus piior, arduior. Quod ne fiat, non sunt usi eorum comparatiuis. Plerique assumunt igitur magis aduerbium et usum comparatiui complent, ut magis pius hic quam ille. Other groups of adjectives for which the analytic forms were preferred are discussed by Maltby (2016: 342–343 and 358).*

7 Cf. GL 2.87.15–88.14 (Priscianus): *Vetustissimi tamen comparatiuis etiam huiusmodi sunt [est quando] usi. Cato [dixit]: quod iter longius arduiusque / erat a curia. Idem ad populum de triumpho: Asperimo atque arduissimo aditu. Pacuius in Medo: mulier egregiissima / forma. Iuuenalis in IIII: Egregius caenat meliusque miserrimus ho/rum, pro egregius. M. Cato in oratione, ne quis iterum consul fiat: imperator laudem capit, exercitum meliorem, industriorem facit. C. Gracchus contra Q. Aelium Tuberonem: utrum inimicorum meorum factio an magis sollicitudo te impulit, ut in me industrior sis quam in te? Idem Cato de Ptolemaeo minore de Thermi quaestione: quantoque suam uitam superiorem atque ampliorem atque antiquiorem animum inducent esse quam innoxiiorem. Idem Cato de Macedonia liberanda: idque perpetuius atque firmitus repit. Idem in Thermum: sed a benefactis, ab optimis artibus fugit maxima fugella perpetuissimo curriculo. Lucilius in XVI ad Fundium: Fundi delectat uirtus te, uilicus paulo / strenuior si euaserit. See also the example from Plautus quoted in the previous note (GL 2.86.21–87.15). It is interesting to observe that other “irregular” comparatives and superlatives are attested in the works of the Christian authors, cf. e. g. AVG. ciu. 18.45 (*strenuissimus*); PS. AVG. epist. 62.6 (*eximior*); AMBR. off. 1.18.78 (*necessarius*); IORD. Get. 40.207 (*egregius*); TERT. test. anim. 4 (*necessarius*).*

8 Conversely, the widespread use of epithets such as *dulcissimus*, *carissimus*, *rarissimus* might have encouraged the use of the synthetic form *piissimus* in Post-Classical Latin, cf. *infra*, n. 45.

Lebek has observed that Cicero does not make any reference to archaisms in his reproach;⁹ he rather seems to mock Antony's linguistic extravagance, by presenting *piissimus* as a sort of neologism invented by him (Lebek 1970: 175). Lebek goes on to suggest that in this passage there might be an implicit reference to Antony's affiliation with Asianism, a literary current which followed the linguistic doctrine of analogy. Supporters of this current defended the regularity of the language according to a rigid system of grammatical rules (*ratio*), as opposed to anomalists, who defined the correctness of the language based on linguistic usage (*consuetudo*).¹⁰ The *querelle* between analogists and anomalists was very much in vogue in Cicero's day, and his engagement in this debate is well documented (Alberte 1987: 117). Within this intellectual diatribe on the mechanisms of the Latin language, the morphology of the attributes' degree was a pertinent theme (Manfredini 2007).

Scholars have mostly described Cicero's position in this specific debate as anomalist, since in several of his writings he expresses the idea that *consuetudo* lies at the basis of correct Latin speaking (*Latine loqui*).¹¹ Of course, Cicero's pattern of reference was the language of Roman educated classes (*sermo urbanus*), to which he opposed the concepts of *rusticitas* and *peregrinitas*; sociological criteria were thus implied in his definition of linguistic usage (Alberte 1987: 123–125). In light of this, it seems plausible that Cicero's condemnation of *piissimus* was more precisely related to the “popular” nuance of this form, which in that time may have been commonly deployed in the daily language but which tended to be avoided by educated speakers.¹² A political dimension thus seems implicit in Cicero's linguistic criticism, specifically that

⁹ Among the oldest Latin authors, Cato resorts to an alternative expression, *maxime pius*, within a clause in which he uses a series of superlatives ending with *-issimus*, that includes the “irregular” form *strenuissimi*, cf. CATO *agr. pr.* 4.2: *At ex agricolis et uiri fortissimi et milites strenuissimi gignuntur, maximeque pius quaestus stabilissimusque consequitur minimeque inuidiosus*. Here, however, the construction *maximeque pius* is clearly opposed to *minimeque inuidiosus*.

¹⁰ On this topic, cf. Zetzel (2018: 46–49).

¹¹ See e. g. Alberte (1987). For a more critical position on this classification of Cicero's ideas, cf. Gay (1929) and Tondini (1959: 131–133).

¹² Cf. Lebek (1970): “*Piissimus* gehört wohl noch lange nach Antonius dem lebenden Latein an” (Lebek 1970: 174). Nevertheless, it should be observed that in general terms periphrastic forms were more common in the colloquial register and avoided by linguistic purists, being more frequently attested in technical writings, cf. Maltby (2016: 341 and 348–349). This is proven by the fact that analytic comparatives and superlatives prevailed in the Romance languages, cf. Herman (2000: 64–65) and Maltby (2016: 355).

he wanted to highlight Antony's attempt to use "popular" language in order to appear "more popular."¹³

Illuminating in this respect is a passage of Pompeius' *Commentum artis Donati* (from the fifth–sixth century AD), which has been only rarely considered by critics so far,¹⁴ but has a great relevance for interpreting Cicero's condemnation of *piissimus*. It says:

Pius, piissimus has two degrees, positive and superlative. Cicero condemned this form *piissimus* in the *Philippics*, where he said that "it is not natural to say *piissimus*" (*non potest piissimus dici per rerum naturam*), and he blamed Antony because he always (*semper*) used this word; nevertheless, Caper, the famous teacher of Augustus Caesar, carried out a dedicated study and found out those passages of Cicero's letters, where he himself deployed *piissimus*. Know then that he reproached this word to Antony with the acrimony of a rhetor (*amaritudine rhetorica*), when he said that "it is not natural to say *piissimus*". Thus, there is sometimes the positive and the superlative degree, such as *pius* / *piissimus*, sometimes the positive and the comparative degree, such as *senex* / *senior* (and so on).¹⁵

This testimony suggests that Cicero's rejection of *piissimus* had to do with stylistic reasons.¹⁶ In fact, it is stated that, while criticizing the use of this superlative in a rhetorical context, Cicero himself deployed this form in his most quotidian writing output.¹⁷ If the source transmitted by Pompeius is reliable at all, it is plausible to ascribe *piissimus* to the domain of those *cotidiana uerba*, which Cicero explicitly admitted in his letters.¹⁸ For he clearly avoids the synthetic superlative of *pious* in a

13 A criticism of Antony's demagogic behavior can be found in CIC. *Phil.* 2.30.76, on which cf. Cresci Marrone (2020: 76–77). An example of demagogic use of language is Publius Claudius Pulcher's choice to change his name into the monophthongized form Clodius after being adopted by a plebeian. On the relationship between Antony and Clodius, cf. Cresci Marrone (2020: 30–34).

14 There is a brief reference to this source in Landgraf (1902: 150) and in OLD, II, 1384, s.u. *pious*.

15 GL 5.154.9–20 (Pompeius): *Pius piissimus duos habet gradus, positivum et superlativum. Quamquam et hoc piissimus uituperavit Cicero in Philippicis: dicit non potest piissimus dici per rerum naturam. Insultabat Antonio, tu ait utere semper hoc uerbo, piissimus. Tamen Caper, ille magister Augusti Caesaris, elaboravit uehementissime et de epistulis Ciceronis collegit haec uerba, ubi dixerat ipse Cicero piissimus. Scias quoniam amaritudine rhetorica hoc ei obiecerat, ut diceret non potest per rerum naturam dici piissimus. Ergo est aliquando positivus et superlativus, ut pius piissimus, aliquando positivus et comparativus, ut senex senior, aliquando comparativus et superlativus, ut ulterior ultimus, aliquando superlativus tantum, ut nouissimus.*

16 The expression transmitted by Pompeius, *non potest piissimus dici per rerum naturam* – which, however, lacks in Cicero's original passage of the *Philippics* (cf. *supra*, n. 4) – highlights the contrast between the spontaneity of *consuetudo* (which follows "the nature of the language") and the forced character of *ratio* (which imposes rigid grammatical rules).

17 Otherwise, in Cicero's letters analytic forms prevail, for they were preferred in the colloquial register, cf. Maltby (2016: 350–352). Cf. *supra*, n. 12.

18 Cf. CIC. *epist.* 9.21.1: *Epistulas uero cotidianis uerbis texere solemus.*

passage of his philosophical treatise *De natura deorum*, where he prefers the expression *plenissimusque pietatis*, which differs from other superlatives ending with *-issimus* (*castissimus* and *sanctissimus*) that are used in the same sentence.¹⁹ The reference here, however, seems to be to a part of the Ciceronian *corpus* of epistles that, unfortunately, is not preserved (CIC. *epist. frg.* 17.1.1).

Also remarkable in this connection is the fact that Cicero's reproach of *piissimus* takes place in the context of his public reading, in front of the Senate of Rome, of one of Antony's private letters, in a passage where he describes Lepidus as a *piissimus homo*.²⁰ The polemic triggered by Cicero by this gesture seems to have been a pretext for ridiculing his adversary, considering that he himself used the same form in his private correspondence. This gives more strength to the idea of an implicit political meaning in Cicero's linguistic criticism. Thus, it seems possible to conclude that, already in the first century BC, the form *piissimus* was widespread in the *Volkssprache* (Landgraf 1902: 150), despite its rejection by a sector of the Roman intellectuals.

Be that as it may, it seems noteworthy that, apart from Cicero's mention of the superlative *piissimus* in the *Philippics*, the literary sources do not present any attestation of this form until Caligula's reign (AD 37–41),²¹ when, towards the end of his life, Seneca the Elder (ca. 55 BC – ca. AD 39) composed his *Controversiae* (Sussman 1978: 92–93).²² Shortly afterwards, the same superlative was used by his son, Seneca the Younger, in a couple of passages of his *Consolatio ad Polybium*,²³ which was certainly composed at the beginning of Claudius' reign, between AD 41 and 44 (Sauer 2013: 167). In this context, the sudden acceptance of *piissimus*, as a colloquial and emphatic linguistic form, in the Latin literature of the Post-Classical age might be traced back to the rise of a sort of literary “modernism” following the prevailing “Asiatic” stylistic trends of that epoch.²⁴

19 Cf. CIC. *nat. deor.* 2.71.6: *Cultus autem deorum est optimus idemque castissimus atque sanctissimus plenissimusque pietatis, ut eos semper pura, integra, incorrupta et mente et uoce ueneremur.*

20 Cf. *supra*, n. 4.

21 There is an uncertain tradition concerning a possible form *piissimei* (*piissume*, according to Lachmann) in one of Catullus' poems (CATVLL. 29.23). However, most of the modern editions (such as for instance Loeb Classical Library) prefer the variant *opulentissime*.

22 SEN. *contr.* 9.4.14: (...) *Piissimo patri tormentum quaesisse ex filiorum impietate.*

23 SEN. *dial.* 11.7.4: *Quod longe a sensibus tuis prudentissimis piissimisque abest (...);* 11.15.4: *Quod utrumque et piissime idem et fortissime tulit.*

24 Cf. Albrecht (1997): “Cicero had found a classical mean between Atticism and Asianism. Since the time of Augustus, however, prose adopted an Asian ‘pointed’ style. Prose became more ‘poetic’. From this school, which had been the continuation of Hellenistic oratory, grew Seneca's style, Neronian ‘modernism’. The emperor Caligula, a declared enemy of tradition, had been a radical forerunner of that modern trend” (Albrecht 1997: 905). On Seneca the Elder's idea of grammatical correctness, cf. Sussman (1978: 118–119).

Another author who deployed the superlative in question was Curtius Rufus,²⁵ who is thought to have lived under Claudius as well, although his biography still represents a controversial issue.²⁶ There is also evidence of *piissimus* in the collection of *Fabulae* ascribed to Hyginus,²⁷ but the identity and chronology of this author is also problematic: his identification with *Gaius Iulius Hyginus*, a Hispanic *libertus* of Augustus mentioned by Suetonius,²⁸ is nowadays mostly rejected (Smith and Trzaskoma 2007: XLIII). Scholars suggest that his work was rather published in the late first century or in the middle-late second century AD, which is considered to be the definitive *terminus ante quem* for its publication (Smith and Trzaskoma 2007: XLIII–XLIV).²⁹ Similar considerations apply for Pseudo-Quintilian's *Declamationes Maiores*, where the form *piissimus* is attested twice.³⁰ These are the product of different hands with different chronologies, which scholars now date between the very early second century and the middle of the third century AD (Stramaglia 2016: 28, 46). It is precisely around this age, during the so-called “Age of the Antonines”,³¹ when the superlative *piissimus* begins to occur more frequently in the literary sources. For example, it appears within Tacitus' *Agricola*, which can be dated with precision between October 97 and January 98 AD, after Trajan had become emperor (Woodman 2009: 31),³² as well as in the writings of Frontinus,³³ Florus,³⁴

25 CVRT. 9.6.17: *Vobis quidem, inquit, o fidissimi piissimique ciuium atque amicorum, grates ago habeoque (...).*

26 On the problem concerning the origin and chronology of this author, see Atkinson (1980: 19–73).

27 HYG. *fab.* 254.t1.1: “QVAE PISSIMAE FVERVNT [VEL PISSIMI]”.

28 SVET. *gramm.* 20: *C. Iulius Hyginus, Augusti libertus, natione Hispanus.*

29 However, it has to be underlined that Hyginus' collection of fables underwent a long series of modifications and reorganizations over the time, so that it seems to be even difficult to refer to a single author and even to a single date for the composition of this work, cf. Smith and Trzaskoma (2007: XLII). Specifically, titles might have been added later, cf. Kovacs (2003: 134 and 144).

30 PS. QVINT. *decl.* 6.3: (...) *Ille iuuenis etiam ante hoc crimen piissimus (...)* and 10.19: *Iuuenis piissime, iuuenis indulgentissime (...).*

31 This is a conventional label which usually includes emperors from Nerva to Commodus (AD 96–192). However, the same definition was used with exclusive reference to the emperors from Antoninus Pius to Commodus (AD 138–192) by e. g. Grant (1994). Moreover, it has been debated by Canto (2003), who has suggested the alternative definition of “Ulpio-Aelian dynasty.”

32 TAC. *Agr.* 43: *Satis constabat lecto testamento Agricolae, quo coheredem optimae uxori et piissimae filiae Domitianum scripsit (...).*

33 FRONTIN. *aq.* 1.31: *Conuenit et cum is modulis, qui in commentariis inuictissimi et piissimi principis positi et confirmati sunt; 2.88: Sentit hanc curam imperatoris piissimi Neruae principis sui.* However, according to Rodgers (2004) these passages could have been interpolated, cf. Rodgers (2004: 216 and 249).

34 FLOR. *epit.* 2.17.15: (...) *Sed in abolitione sanctissimarum piissimarumque animarum iudicio suo, scelere alieno uterentur.*

Apuleius³⁵ and Fronto.³⁶ It might also be little coincidence that Capere, “the famous teacher of Augustus Caesar” (*ille magister Augusti Caesaris*), who probably lived under Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius (Keil 1889: 7),³⁷ was so concerned about investigating into the superlative form *piissimus* (*elaboravit uehementissime*), as we have read from Pompeius’ passage quoted above.

According to our current knowledge, the chronology of the literary attestations of *piissimus* is best of all confirmed by epigraphy. For example, if we focus on inscriptions which contain this term and can be dated to a specific epoch according to the mention of individuals who explicitly declare their status as *Augusti liberti*, we can trace back the oldest datable evidence to the age of Claudius (AD 41–54). Due to the absence of testimonies with an explicit record of *Augusti liberti* under Tiberius (AD 14–37),³⁸ the few examples of this superlative in inscriptions which mention imperial *liberti* with the name *Iulius* should be connected to the emperor Caligula (who ruled between Tiberius and Claudius) rather than to Augustus (who ruled before Tiberius), and might even date to the first years of Claudius’ reign.³⁹ Starting from the Claudian age, the quantity of evidence of the form *piissimus*

35 APVL. met. 11.22: *Adest tibi dies uotis assiduus exoptatus, quo deae multinominis diuinis imperiis per istas meas manus piissimis sacrorum arcanis insinueris.*

36 FRONTO 2.7.18: *Lenissimum, mansuetissimum, doctissimum, piissimum (...)*. On Fronto, cf. Peachin (2004); on Florus, cf. Bessone (1996: 123–161); on Apuleius, cf. La Rocca (2005: 13–77); on Fronto, cf. Champlin (1980). In view of the evident normalization that the synthetic superlative form *piissimus* underwent after the Augustan age, it seems irrelevant that Fronto used this adjective within an *epistula*, and that the work of Florus was actually a resume of Livy’s *Ab Urbe condita*. This seems to rule out the possibility that this term appeared in the original work of the Augustan author.

37 On this ancient scholar, see also Zetzel (2018: 286).

38 Nevertheless, a possible onomastic coincidence with this emperor can be sometimes suspected, cf. e. g. EDR128815 of the day 21/04/2013 (C. Slavich) (*Centumcellae, Regio VII*): *D(is) M(anibus) / Ti(berio) Iulio Au/curino (!) u/ixit anni<s> / XVIII m(ensibus) V d(iebus) X / frat<r>es piissimi / fecerunt*; CIL VI 19817: *Ti(berius) Iulius Alcimius / fecit sibi et / Aristiae Amabili coniugi et / Iuliae Arescusae libertae et / Ti(berio) Iulio Nouembro fil(io) piissimo / uix(it) ann(is) VI mens(ibus) VII dieb(us) XX / et posterisque suis.*

39 For the moment, it has been possible to identify only one text with these characteristics, cf. CIL VI 20588 (Roma): *Dis Manib(us) / Iuliae Aug(usti) l(ibertae) / Orge / piis<s>imae patron(ae) / Regillus L(uci) f(ilius)*. There is also an inscription which clearly refers to a freedwoman of Augustus, as is proved by the fact that the woman being commemorated, who is possibly called *Iulia Vitalis*, is said to be a *liberta* of the divinized Augustus (Caligula was indeed not divinized but rather condemned to *damnatio memoriae*). However, this document is quite fragmentary and even the term *piissima* has been reconstructed, cf. CIL VI 29069 (= AE 2006, +221) (Roma): *[D]is Man(ibus) / [Iuliae di]ue[i] (!) Aug(usti) l(ibertae) Vitali / [quae] u/ixit ann(is) XXV / [C(aius) Iuli]us Symmachus et / [Iulia] Elegans fecerunt fil(iae) / [piissi]mae et sibi et suis pos/terisque eorum.*

becomes considerably greater.⁴⁰ Further inscriptions can be connected to the reign of Nero by using the same onomastic criteria.⁴¹ Among these, there is a bilingual inscription from Naples that bears the precise consular dating of AD 59.⁴² Other examples can also be found which mention *liberti* of the Flavian dynasty.⁴³ In the age of the Antonines, inscriptions bearing the form *piissimus* are common.⁴⁴

40 Cf. e. g. CIL VI 8506 (Roma): Ti(berius) Claudius Aug(usti) l(ibertus) / Primigenius tabul(arius) / rat(ionis) patrim(onii) fec(it) sibi et / Iuliae Septiminae f(iliae) piissimae / q(uae) u(ixit) a(nnis) XXII d(iebus) II et Iul(iae) Palatinae / filiae et C(aio) Iul(io) Felici f(ilio) et Iuliae / Primae coniugi karissim(ae) (!) et / libert(is) libertab(usque) posterisq(ue) eor(um) / in fr(onte) p(edes) XII in agro p(edes) XIV / h(oc) m(onumentum) h(eredem) n(on) s(equetur); CIL VI 15092 (Roma): Dis Manibus / Ti(beri) Cl(audi) Aug(usti) l(iberti) Heraclae / coniunx piissima / benemerenti posuit; CIL VI 15648 (Roma): D(is) M(anibus) / Claudiae Victoriae / et Ti(berio) Cl(audio) Aug(usti) l(iberto) Euhelpisto / Ti(berius) Cl(audius) Aug(usti) lib(ertus) Petronius / parentibus piissimis fecit; CIL VI 28699 (Roma): Vettia Helpis sibi et / Ti(berio) Claudio Aug(usti) l(iberto) / Amiantho f(ilio) piissumo (!) fecit; CIL VI 37755 (Roma): Diis Manibus / Claudiae Pelagiae / Ti(berius) Claudius / Aug(usti) l(ibertus) / Moschus lanip(endus) / filiae piissimae. See also CIL V 3117 (= AE 1980, 508) (Vicetia, Regio X): [. Salonia (?).] f(ilio) Men(enia tribu) / Ma[ti]d[i]o [. . . .] / a Ti(berio) Claudio Caesare / Augus[t]o Germanico / censor[e] a[d]lecto in / senatum et inter / tribunicios relato / ab eodem adscito in / numerum Saliorum / Salonia mater / filio piissimo / uiua fecit.

41 Cf. e. g.: CIL VI 26915 (Roma): Diis Manibus / Successae / Messalinae Neronis lib(ertae) / Epaphroditus / Prisca Onesime / matri piissimae fecerunt and AE 1974, 266 (Puteoli, Regio I): [L(ucio) C]assio L(uci) f(ilio) Pal(atina) Cerea[li] praef(ecto) / fabrum aug(uri) q(uaestori) curatori o[perum] / publicor(um) et locorum prim[o] facto / Iluir(o) q(- - -) quinq(uenali) curatori aq[uarum] / [[[hun[c]]] uniuersa pleps (!) cum [[ludos] fec(erit) Neroni]] / [[Claudio]] Caesari Aug(usto) in amphithea[tra] acclamauit] / Cassia Cale Cer[lea]li f(ilio) piissimo.

42 CIL X 1504 = IG XIV 794 (Neapolis, Regio I): M(arco) Cominio M(arci) f(ilio) Mae(cia) Verecundo / Quintia Dia filio piissimo / ἐπὶ ὑπάτων Γ(αίου) Οὐεῖψτανοῦ Ἀπρωνιανοῦ καὶ Γ(αίου) Φοντείου / Καπίτ(ωνος).

43 Cf. e. g. CIL VI 18203 (Roma): T(ito) Flauio Aug(usti) l(iberto) / Sedato / Antoniano / P(ublius) Cornelius / Iaso patri / piissimo; AE 1949, 30 (Mactaris, Africa Proconsularis): T(ito) Flauio Aug(usti) lib(erto) Sym/phoro proc(uratori) Aug(usti) IIII p(ublicorum) A(fricae) / Nasenniae Haeresis patri piissi/mo et sibi et suis solo suo pecunia / sua fac(iendum) cur(auit).

44 Cf. e. g. CIL VI 29157 (Roma): D(is) M(anibus) / M(arco) Ulpio Aug(usti) lib(erto) / Clementi Ulpia M(arci) f(ilia) / Clementina fil(ia) / patri piissimo fec(it); CIL VI 8476 (Roma): D(is) M(anibus) / Donato Augustorum / tabulario rationis fisci / frument(arii) fecerunt / P(ublius) Aelius Aug(usti) lib(ertus) Donatus / et Aelia Caenis parentes / filio dulcissimo piissimo / amantissimo qui uix(it) ann(is) XXIX / mense I dieb(us) XXIII et sibi et suis lib(ertis) / libertabusque posterisque eorum; CIL X 1729 (Puteoli, Regio I): D(is) M(anibus) / Gregorio / M(arci) Ulp(i) Nicephori Aug(usti) lib(erti) prox(imi) comm(entariorum) / ann(onae) qui uixit ann(is) XVIII m(ensibus) VIII / d(iebus) XI Nicephorus et Ulpia Pro/futura parentes miseri / filio piissimo; CIL XIV 4019 (Ficulea, Regio I): [-] Aelio Aug(usti) lib(erto) Frontoni coniugi [optim]o patri piissimo ite[m] / [- - -] Janiae Diae Felicis[sima] et - - -]e fecerunt et si[bi]. The superlative also appears several times within the inscription CIL VI 10234 (Roma), quoting a *lex collegii* and dated with precision to AD 153.

This fact is not surprising, since in the second century AD the use of superlatives seems to have spread in the language of the Roman chancery (Frei-Stolba 1969: 19), including allocutions to the emperor (Molinelli 2019: 510–511). From the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, adjectives such as *dignissimus*, *felicissimus*, *fortissimus*, and *indulgentissimus* started to proliferate within the so-called “unofficial titulature” of the emperors (Harvey 2004: 49; Wallace-Hadrill 1981: 313). This phenomenon is also widely reported among the inscriptions of common individuals which are produced in about the same period or shortly afterwards. Generally, epigraphers cite epithets in the superlative form as a dating criterion to mark inscriptions from the middle of the second century AD (Curchin 1982: 182; Edmondson 2009: 256).⁴⁵

With specific regard to *piissimus*, it should be noticed that the virtue of *pietas* was particularly important for the adoptive emperors (Harvey 2004) who, by insisting on this virtue, were able to legitimate their access to imperial power through their claims of moral superiority, despite the lack of blood ties they shared with their predecessors.⁴⁶ For example, Antoninus Pius received his *cognomen* after having divinized his adoptive father, Hadrian. Earlier, Frontinus had explicitly referred to Trajan as the *piissimus princeps*.⁴⁷ As for inscriptions promoted for honoring the emperor, the superlative in question appears for the first time on two honorific bases that were addressed to Marcus Aurelius between AD 140 and 144, shortly after his adoption by Antoninus, and that contain the expression *optimo ac piissimo*.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See also Stylow *apud* CIL II², 7, p. 64: “*Ex saec. II medio accrescit superlatiuorum usus*”. Mariner Bigorra (1952: 62) explains the form *piissimus* as an analogic formation based on other epithets, such as *dulcissimus*, *carissimus* and *rarissimus*.

⁴⁶ See PLIN. *paneg.* 7.4: *Nulla adoptati cum eo qui adoptabat cognatio, nulla necessitudo, nisi quod uterque optimus erat, dignusque alter eligi alter eligere*. On the importance given to *pietas* in the process of Trajan’s adoption of a successor, see also PLIN. *paneg.* 10.3–4 quoted by Harvey (2004: 57–58).

⁴⁷ See *supra*, n. 33.

⁴⁸ The inscriptions in question are: CIL VI 1009 (Roma): *M(arco) Aurelio Caesari / Imp(eratoris) Caesaris T(iti) Aeli Hadriani / Antonini Aug(usti) Pii fil(io) diui / Hadriani nep(oti) diui Traiani Parthici / pronep(oti) diui Neruae abnep(oti) co(n)s(uli) / Petronius Mamertinus et Gaius Maximus pr(aefecti) pr(aetorio) / tribuni cohortium praetoriarum decem et / urbanarum trium centuriones cohortium / praetoriarum et urbanarum et statorum / euocati cohortes praetoriae decem et / urbanae X XII XIII centuriae statorum / optimo ac piissimo*; and CIL XIV 4366 (Ostia, Regio I): *M(arco) Aurelio Caesari / Imp(eratoris) Caesaris T(iti) Aeli Hadriani / Antonini Aug(usti) Pii filio / diui Hadriani nepoti diui Traiani / pronepoti diui Neruae abnep(oti) co(n)s(uli) / optimo ac piissimo*. For discussion, see Harvey (2004).

Thus, the apparent concern of Caper around this superlative, whose correctness he aimed to demonstrate by evoking the authority of Cicero, might be read as the natural consequence of the greater spread of *piissimus* in the spoken and written language, even though this was a form that Cicero himself had condemned more than two centuries before. In the fourth century AD, when other Latin grammarians such as Charisius or Diomedes composed their works,⁴⁹ the synthetic form *piissimus* was fully agreed to be correct.⁵⁰ In fact, when commenting on the passage of Cicero's *Philippics*, the author of the *Glossae Placidi*, whose identification is impossible for us to ascertain (Zetzel 2018: 239), and whose chronology should be fixed in the Late history of the Latin language, explains that *piissimum apud nos antiqui dicere noluerunt*.⁵¹ Here, the concept of "antiquity" seems to refer to the age of Cicero, whereas the expression *apud nos* seems to indicate that the synthetic superlative of *pius* was common to those times when this unknown commentator wrote his remark on the Ciceronian passage.

49 Charisius lived during the reign of Julian or not long after, and Diomedes was a slightly later contemporary of him (late fourth century), cf. Zetzel (2018: 188, 189 and 294).

50 Cf. *supra*, n. 5. Charisius refers to authors of the middle-late second century AD as his sources, cf. Zetzel (2018: 290). In general terms, it is more difficult to identify the sources of Diomedes, cf. Zetzel (2018: 189). However, in the passage mentioned *supra*, n. 5 (GL 1.324.31–37), he seems to contradict himself, since he firstly presents *pius* among the adjectives whose degrees are formed by means of *magis* and *maxime*, but immediately after states that *pius* has a synthetic superlative, *piissimus*, whereas it lacks a similar comparative form. This contradiction may depend on the fact that the grammarian was merging pieces of information belonging to different epochs. In fact, Diomedes' way of combining his sources has been described by modern scholars as a mosaic or montage, cf. Zetzel (2018: 294). Other sources which present similar information about the existence of the superlative form *piissimus* are e. g. GL 4.374.21 (*Donatus*); GL 5.342.10 (*Consentius*); GL 7.399.11 (*Dositheus*) and GL 7.283.26 (*Beda*).

51 Cf. GLOSS. 5.93.5: *Piissimum apud nos antiqui dicere noluerunt nam pius positio magis comparatio non habet superlatium et reuera cum ipso positio perfecta sit ut si uellis dicere hic immortalis est ille immortalissimus*. In this gloss, the absence of the superlative degree of *pius*, which seems to be referred to the age of Cicero, is connected to its meaning, since the adjective *pius* is *perfectus* in itself and no one could be *piissimus*, in the same way as it would be impossible to be *immortalissimus*. Nevertheless, this explanation appears to be inconsistent, as far as the comparative form *magis pius*, which implies the idea of being "more *pius*", is admitted, cf. *supra*, n. 5. Moreover, it also contrasts with the use of other superlative expressions such as *maxime pius* (cf. e. g. MELA 3.55.1) or *plenissimus pietatis*, which is attested by the same Cicero (cf. *supra*, n. 19). However, it is interesting to observe that Varro in the *De lingua Latina* also fully justifies the absence of one or all degrees of adjectives if there is a lack of semantical agreement between the suffixes and the lexical bases to which they should be applied, cf. Manfredini (2007: 213 and 216). See VARRO *ling.* 9.43.72: *Item dicunt, cum sit simile stultus luscus et dicatur stultus stultior stultissimus, non dici luscus luscior luscissimus, sic in hoc genere multa. Ad quae dico ideo fieri, quod natura nemo lusco magis sit luscus, cum stultior fieri uideatur*.

3 *Pientissimus*

Besides *piissimus*, *pientissimus* is also known to be a superlative of *pius*. The main problem for our understanding of this form is the fact that it is exclusively attested within the epigraphic domain, with no occurrences in Latin literature. At first sight, this fact suggests that *pientissimus* belongs to so-called Vulgar Latin, rather than to the standard language of the Classical and Post-Classical ages.⁵² This is also supported by the fact that this form is never mentioned by the grammarians, not even in the passages where they explicitly deal with the degrees of *pius*.⁵³

On the other hand, the morphology of *pientissimus*, which seems to be the superlative of a present participle, appears to be completely unregular. The only verb which is etymologically related to *pious*, *piare*, would have given rise to *pians*, not to *piens*,⁵⁴ since it belonged to the first conjugation.⁵⁵ In addition, the verb *piare* possesses a performative sense which does not include the idea of a moral quality, as the adjective *pious* conveys. According to OLD, *piare* means “to propitiate (a god, etc.)”, “to avert or remove by expiation”, “to perform (expiatory rites)”, “to cleanse (a guilty person, etc.) by expiation” or “to expiate an offence”.⁵⁶ The figurative meaning of this verb even includes the idea of “purifying someone, making him sane, bringing him back to common-sense”.⁵⁷ Moreover, ancient scholars tend to

52 For this reason, the occurrences of *pientissimus* are collected in the “Computerized Historical Linguistic Database of Latin Inscriptions of the Imperial Age” (lldb.elte.hu), which gathers together Vulgar Latin features attested in the inscriptional evidence.

53 Cf. *supra*, Section 2.

54 There is a tombstone from Britain dated to the second century AD that bears the form *pian-tissime*, but this seems to be a technical mistake or a sort of “hypercorrection”, cf. RIB I, 1064 (*Arbeia, Britannia*): *D(is) M(anibus) Victoris natione Maurum / [a]nnorum XX libertus Numeriani / [e]q[ui]tis ala[e] I Asturum qui / piantissime (!) p[ro]se[que]ntis (!) est*. This form is mentioned in *ThLL* X/1.2, col. 2246, l. 15, s.u. *pie*.

55 Eutyches (*GL* 5.450.12–27) presents the verb *piao* as an exception precisely because it follows the first conjugation, though it does not fulfill the requirements of this class of verbs: *Sed illa primae sunt, quae adhaerent nominibus non minus trisyllabis, absque pio pias et hio hias, i puram pae-nultimam nulla sequente consonante semper habentibus in omni genere, ut nuntius nuntio nuntias, saucius saucio saucias, socius socio socias (...). Omne itaque uerbum in io desinens et nomen habens adpositum sibi in i puram pae-nultimam terminans primae coniugationis inuenitur, ut dictum est, excepto hio hias [et pio pias], quod licet primitivum est in io desinens, primae tamen est coniugationis*.

56 OLD, II, 1382, s.u. *piao*. For a meaning similar to *colere*, cf. *ThLL* X/1.2, coll. 2184, l. 70, s.u. *piao*.

57 Cf. F. Gaffiot, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français*, Paris, 1934, 1182, s.u. *piao* (“[fig.] purifier qqn., le rendre sain, le ramener au bon sens”); *ThLL* X/1.2, col. 2183, ll. 15–24, s.u. *piao*.

exclude the possibility of producing the comparative and superlative of Latin participles, arguing that these categories only apply to *nomina*.⁵⁸

Seen from this perspective, it is probable that *pientissimus* spread from *pious* based on the example of the morphological series of adjectives ending with *-uolus*, *-dicus* and *-ficus*, particularly those formed with adverbs, such as *beneuolus* or *maleuolus*. These had been remodeled from adjectivized participial forms (*beneuolens* / *maleuolens*) with which they shared the comparative ending *-entior* and the superlative ending *-entissimus*.⁵⁹ It cannot be excluded that *pientissimus* was perceived as a form derived from the adverb *pie*, and that it was preferred on *piissimus* for euphonic reasons.⁶⁰

Similarly to *pientissimus*, the positive degree *piens* is also exclusively attested in epigraphy, though the number of its occurrences is relatively reduced.⁶¹ In some inscriptions, we can find a form of the dative singular, *pienti*.⁶² This, however, could be plausibly interpreted as being a simple abbreviation of the most frequently used superlative form, *pienti(ssimo)* or *pienti(ssimae)*.⁶³ Incontrovertible evidence for *piens* is found in inscriptions in which the relatives erecting the monument are explicitly labelled as *pientes*, in the nominative

58 Cf. GL 1.48.5–7 (Charisius): *Unde igitur dinoscitur et discernitur nomen a participio? Quod nomen recipit comparisonem et superlationem, unde etiam appellatio deriuatur, participium autem non recipit*; GL 1.113.20–21 (Id.): (...) *Nomina tantum in comparationibus uersari, non etiam participia*; GL 1.184.16–17 (Id.): *Nam sicut comparisonem non recipiunt participia, ita ne in aduerbia quidem transeunt*. Cf. Maltby (2016: 342).

59 Cf. Leumann (1977): “Die Adjektive auf *-uolus*, *-dicus*, *-ficus* bilden im klassischen Latein seit Cicero ihre Steigerungsformen auf *-entior* *-entissimus*. Im Altlatein ist bei *-ficus* einfaches *-ior* *-issimus* reich bezeugt [...]. Der Ausgangspunkt für diese Neuerung ist deutlich: *bene- male-uolentior* *-entissimus* sind die regelmäßigen Steigerungsformen zu *bene- male-uolēns* (diese bei Plt. häufig); *bene- male-uolus* Plt. mit Adverb als Vorderglied ist eine jüngere Bildung [...] d. h. eine Umgestaltung von *-uolēns*; als sie aufkam, waren die Formen auf *-entior* *-entissimus* schon so gebräuchlich, daß sie nicht mehr durch einfaches *-ior* *-issimus* ersetzt wurden; daher nun das Paradigma *bene-uolus* *-entior* *-entissimus*. Bei *bene- male-dicus* gilt mutatis mutandis das gleiche; [...] Denn bei denen auf *-ficus* ist die Steigerung auf *-entior* *-entissimus* lediglich Nachbildung des Gebrauchs bei *-dicus* [...]. Zu *pious* wurde nach *beneuolus* *-entissimus* ein Superlativ *pientissimus* gebildet” (Leumann 1977: 498–499). See also Ernout (1927: 124) and Mariner Bigorra (1952: 62).

60 Cf. GL 2.128.5–7 (Priscianus): *Et notandum, quod, quae in genetiuo duplicant i, extremam earum mutant in e euphoniae causa, ut ‘pius pii pietas’, ‘medius medii medietas’, ‘anxius anxii anxietas’, ‘socius socii societas’.*

61 Cf. ThLL X/1.2, col. 2086, l. 32, s.u. *?piens*: “retrograde a *pientissimus*”.

62 Cf. e. g. CIL III 1531 (Sarmizegetusa, Dacia): *Maxi(mo?) Fan[- -] / an(norum) XXX Domitia S[e]/c[u] / nd(ina) ‘patrono’ / pienti merito fecit*; CIL III 2313 (Salonae, Dalmatia): *D(is) M(anibus) / Epitexu[i] (?) / defunc[to] (?) / Maru[ntius] / Zosimus RV / filio pienti*; CIL VI 29025 (Roma): *D(is) M(anibus) / Viriae Maximae / qu<a>e uix(it) annis XXI / mensibus IIII / diebus XVI / Verus Cae(saris) n(ostris) / coniugi pienti / fecit / et Castre<n>sis C[- -]*.

63 Cf. ThLL X/1.2, col. 2086, l. 34, s.u. *?piens*: “*cetera sunt potius abbrev. superl.*”.

plural,⁶⁴ as well as in another epitaph where we find the expression *natis pientibus*, in the dative plural.⁶⁵ It is also noteworthy that the onomastics of the individuals mentioned in this last group of inscriptions – among whom there are freedmen and freedwomen named *Ulp̄ii*, *Aelīi* and *Aurelīi* – suggests a clear chronology that can be traced back, once again, to the second century AD.⁶⁶ In fact, it is interesting to observe that the basic form *piens* was coined from the superlative, not the other way around, as one would expect (Mariner Bigorra 1952: 62; Leumann 1977: 499).⁶⁷ A role in this process was probably played by the practice of abbreviating the adjective *pientissimus* on the stones: some of these abbreviations, such as the above-mentioned *pienti(ssimae/o)*, were in fact particularly ambiguous.⁶⁸

Finally, it should be observed that anthroponyms which are derived from the form *piens* are also attested in Roman epigraphy.⁶⁹ One of these forms is deployed, again according to a similar chronology, as the *cognomen* (former *simplex nomen*) of an individual, *Pientius Augusti libertus*, who erected an ex-voto for the welfare of his *patronus*, the emperor Marcus Aurelius.⁷⁰ Another is found in an oculist's stamp from Gallia Belgica, where it appears as a “false *gentilicium*”⁷¹ within the series of *tria nomina* of *Sextus Pientius Superstes*.⁷² A further example is attested in

64 Cf. CIL VI 37958 (Roma): *Dis Manib(us) / Alexandro / Caesaris n(o)stri ser(uo) / M(arcus) Ulp̄ius Aug(usti) lib(ertus) / Spendo fratri suo / et Ulp̄ia Successa pientes / semper mihi desiderantissimo / et Flaviae Zusae / b(ene) m(erenti)*; Conrad (2004: 240, nr. 426) (Utus, Moesia Inferior): *D(is) M(anibus) / P(ublius) Aelius Crescens / uix(it) ann(is) [- - -] Aelīi [- - -] nius et Iulianus et / Publius fratres / pientes et P(ublius) Aelīus Crescentinus / filius una cum / auia et fratri/bus bene mer/enti posuerunt / o(p)to s(it) t(erra) l(euis)*; CIL V 368 (Verona, Regio X): *D(is) M(anibus) / M(arco) Aurel(io) / Amand[lo ann(or)um] / IIII Cresce/ns adiut(or) / tabul(ariorum) et / Aurel(ia) Sabi/na parent(es) / pientes fil(io) / fecerunt*. However, *pientes* is sometimes interpreted as a misspelled form for *pient̄i's(sinus)*, cf. ThLL X/1.2, col. 2230, l. 45, s.u. *pius*.

65 Lupa 22281 (Abrittus, Moesia Inferior): *D(is) M(anibus) // T(ito) Ae(lio) Apollonio ex dupl(icario) / patri et Aur(eliae) Restutae (!) / matri parentibus / et Ae(liae) Apolloniae sorori / et Vario f(ratri et Ae(lio) Marti/ali filio et A<n>toniae fili/ae et Vitalioni filio et / Apollodoro et Restu/tae (!) natis pientibus / Ae(lius) Apollinaris et Ant(onia) / Sabina et Ae(lius) Sabinus / et Herculanus / b(ene) m(erentibus) s(uis) p(osuerunt)* (last accessed December 2020).

66 Cf. *supra*, Section 2.

67 See also ThLL X/1.2, col. 2086, l. 32, s.u. *?piens*.

68 Cf. ThLL X/1.2, col. 2230, l. 43, s.u. *pius*: “*abbreviatur (ambigua uix ad posit. piens trahas)*”.

69 Cf. Kajanto (1982²: 251), who also includes a possible use of *Pientissima* as a *cognomen* in CIL XI 20 (Ravenna, Regio VIII), for which see also *infra*, n. 75. For Latin *cognomina* derived from participles, cf. Kajanto (1982²: 92–95).

70 AE 1994, 1885 (*Simitthus, Africa Proconsularis*).

71 On this phenomenon, which is typical in the case of *peregrini*, cf. e. g. Passeron and Veyne (2004: 276), Cresci Marrone (2013: 211), Kakoschke (2016: 49 and 55). Specifically on the Gallic provinces, cf. Sacco (1999: 274).

72 CIL XIII 10021, 89.

a graffito which mentions a certain *Pientianus*.⁷³ Other similar anthroponyms are recorded, both in the masculine and in the feminine versions, and including the derivative form *Pientinus*, on paleo-Christian inscriptions dated between the fourth and the fifth century AD.⁷⁴ Similarly, there are also some examples in the works of Christian authors of late Antiquity and in later centuries.⁷⁵

After this, the adjective *piens* is extensively deployed in the Latin literature of the Renaissance, and the same can also be said of the comparative form *pientior*.⁷⁶ Moreover, in contrast to the silence of ancient grammarians, early modern scholars commented on this adjective, which they connected to the already mentioned Latin verb *pio*.⁷⁷ The fact that – as far as we know – *pientissimus* was never commented on by ancient scholarly and grammatic sources, although a surprise, might suggest that this form did not belong to the standard register throughout the history of the Roman Empire. As noted, this adjective seems to have entered the onomastic system among people belonging to the lower classes, including several Christian devotees, which seems to prove the “vulgar” character of this form.⁷⁸ In contrast, both *piens* and *pientissimus* were fully normalized by Humanists, who recovered Latin as a cultivated language, considering the Roman world as a whole. They certainly knew the superlative *pientissimus* from the ancient inscriptions, and they coined *ex nouo* related comparative and adverbial forms,⁷⁹ while ancient grammarians explicitly rejected not only the comparison of participles – as has been already said⁸⁰ – but also the adverbs derived from them.⁸¹

⁷³ CIL III 11291 (*Carnuntum, Pannonia Superior*).

⁷⁴ Cf. e. g. *Pientia* in *InscrIt.* X, 5, 716 (*Brixia, Regio X*); *ILCV* 3125a (*Aquileia, Regio X*); *ILCV* 3383 and *Pientius* and *Pientinus* in *AE* 1937, 17 (*Germania Superior*).

⁷⁵ An individual called *Pientissimus* is recorded, for instance, in the sixth century's *Vita Sancti Seuerini*, written by Eugypsius (EVGIPP. *Seu.* 28.4.); not much later, a bishop named *Pientius* is mentioned by Gregory of Tours (see e. g. GREG. TVR. *Franc.* 4.18 and 6.12). Moreover, already in modern times, Pope Pius II renamed his native Italian town with the name Pienza, cf. Mack (1987). I thank Johannes Heinisch for this remark.

⁷⁶ Cf. relevant passages recorded in NLW (last accessed December 2020). The form *pientissimus* is also included in Schöll-Kroll's edition of Justinian's *Nouellae* (p. 763, VI), though within a title that was translated from Greek to Latin in much later times. On linguistic aspects concerning the *Nouellae*, see Lanata (1979).

⁷⁷ Cf. PEROTTI *copiae* 16,7 *Hinc fit pio uerbum ... Hinc piens, pientior, pientissimus, pienter, pientius, pientissime*; MARINEVS *fam.* 5,16 p. 355: *Docti quidem uiri qui Latinam linguam ditari uoluerunt a pio uerbo piens, pientior, pientissimus, pienter pro pie, pientius et pientissime dixere.*

⁷⁸ In general terms, Latin *cognomina* derived from participles are more common among lower social strata, cf. Kajanto (1982: 95).

⁷⁹ Cf. *supra*, n. 77.

⁸⁰ Cf. *supra*, n. 58.

⁸¹ Cf. *GL* 1.185.37–38 (*Charisius*): *Non nullis grammaticis placet ut a nominibus sic etiam a participiis et pronominiibus et uerbis aduerbia figurari.*

To return to the rise of this adjective in the Roman world, it is interesting to observe that the first occurrences of *pientissimus* seem to be as early as those of *piissimus*,⁸² dating to the age of Claudius or at least the immediately succeeding years.⁸³ Over time, the epithet *pientissimus* – which, like *piissimus*, seems to have originally spread from Rome⁸⁴ – acquired a resounding success everywhere in the Empire.

In most epigraphic *corpora* the form *pientissimus* appears to be even more frequently deployed than *piissimus* (Figure 1).⁸⁵ There are only few exceptions to this general trend, which include the epigraphic *corpora* of Sicilia, Sardinia, and

82 For the earliest attestations of *piissimus*, see Section 2. An honorific inscription from *Pula* in Sardinia, which contains the expression *in honorem filiae pientissimae* has been dated back to the age of Augustus, not only on the consideration that its promotor, Marcus Favonius Callistus, is said to be *Augustalis primus et perpetuus* of the colony – both epithets, in fact, might only have a honorific value, without any chronological meaning, cf. Fiske (1900: 137–139) –, but also because he is thought to be a *libertus* of Marcus Favonius from *Tarracina*, a renewed trader and politician of the Late Republic (cf. Porrà 2002: 714, ad nr. 526). However, since a direct connection between these two men cannot be proven, nothing stops us from postponing the chronology of this inscription to a couple of generations later at least, for Callistus might have been a *libertus* of a homonymous Favonius, or, alternatively, a *libertus* of a *libertus* of him. The inscription in question is CIL X 7541: *Fauoniae M(arci) f(iliae) / Verae / quae domum Karalibus / populo Norensi dona/uit / M(arcus) Fauonius Callistus / Augustalis primus / Aug(ustalis) perpet<u>us d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) / ob munificentiam in hon/orem filiae pientissimae / Iunoni sacrum / d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*.

83 This information – which contrasts with the indications of *ThLL* X/1.2, col. 2230, l. 50, s.u. *pius*, referring to the Augustan age – is based, again, on the analysis of imperial *liberti* whose inscriptions contain the epithet in question, cf. e. g. CIL VI 5654 (Roma): *Dis Manibus / Lucretia Didyme / mater et / Ti(berius) Claud(ius) Ones(imus) Aug(usti) l(ibertus) et / M(arcus) Anton(ius) Epaphr(oditus) fecer(unt) / filio suo pientissim(o) / Q(uinto) Lucretio / Pal(atina) Proc<u>lo / uix(it) a(nnis) VIII m(ensibus) V d(iebus) VIII*; CIL VI 10089 (Roma): *D(is) M(anibus) / Claudiae Faustinae / filiae pientissimae / quae uix(it) ann(is) XVI / Ti(berius) Cl(audius) Aug(usti) lib(ertus) Philetus / a comment(ariis) rat(ionis) uestium scaenic(ae) et / gladiat(oriae) et Flavia Procula parentes / item Flavius Daphnus et Cl(audius) Martialis / fratres fecerunt et sibi lib(ertis) libertabus / suis posterisq(ue) eorum*; CIL VI 14913 (Roma): *Ti(berio) Claudio Aug(usti) lib(erto) Alex{s}andro / et Pinniae Septimae / Claudia Successa et Claudia Olimpias (!) / parentibus pientissimis fecerunt et sibi lib(ertis) / libertabus posterisq(ue) eorum*; AE 1988, 68b (Roma): *D(is) M(anibus) / Ti(berio) Claudio Aug(usti) lib(erto) / Eutycheti / Claudia Fortunata / filia patri / pientissimo bene / merenti fecit et sibi et / lib(ertis) libertabusque / posterisque eorum*. Possible *liberti* and *libertae* of Augustus or Caligula are mentioned in inscriptions such as the following one (which, however, does not contain explicit reference to *libertinate*): CIL VI 19945 (Roma): *D(is) M(anibus) / C(aio) Iulio Doryphoro fecit / Iulia Doryphoris mater / pientissima filio b(ene) m(erenti)*. A possible *libertus* of Tiberius might be mentioned in AE 1964, 219c (Ostia): *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / Ti(beri) Iuli Telephi / fec(it) Earinus / filio pientissimo*.

84 This hypothesis is based on the fact that the earliest inscriptions containing both these epithets come from Rome or its immediate surroundings, as shown above.

85 Similar considerations are found e. g. in *ThLL* X/1.2, col. 2230, ll. 51–53, s.u. *pius*.

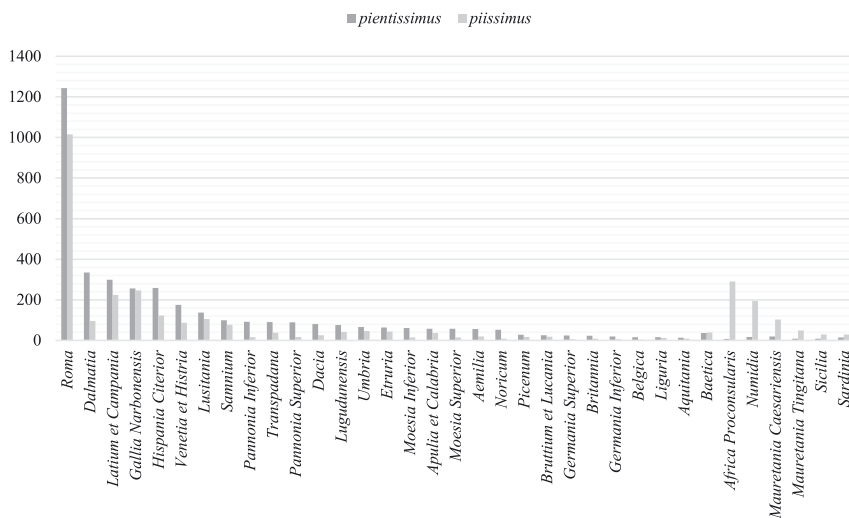


Figure 1: A quantitative distribution of *piissimus* and *pientissimus* in selected Roman provinces. Data from EDCS (November 2019).

the African provinces of Mauretania Tingitana, Mauretania Caesariensis, Numidia and Africa Proconsularis. Here, the use of *piissimus* seems to have prevailed over that of *pientissimus*. In Baetica, both variants seem to have been equally extended.

The preference for one of these epithets might depend on factors such as local habits and the epigraphic tradition. Scholars have often recognized a sort of cultural *continuum* between the above-mentioned territories, which are geographically close to one another, for instance between Baetica and Mauretania Tingitana,⁸⁶ between Sardinia and Africa,⁸⁷ or between Africa and Sicilia.⁸⁸ Moreover, in these territories, there are other epigraphic formulas which refer to *pietas*, that are much more common than both *piissimus* and *pientissimus*, such as *pius in suis*, which is characteristic of the Baetica, or *pius / pie uixit*, which is instead

⁸⁶ Cf. e. g. Gozalbes Cravioto (2004): “En el conjunto de la epigrafía funeraria del Norte de la Tingitana [...] podemos observar una uniformidad bastante apreciable [...] que interpretamos como influjo bético” (Gozalbes Cravioto 2004: 83).

⁸⁷ Cf. e. g. Mastino (1985): “Di un certo interesse è inoltre la convergenza tra la documentazione epigrafica sarda e quella africana, oltre che in tema di onomastica, sul piano dei formulari, delle tecniche di lavorazione e della paleografia” (Mastino 1985: 86). See also Mastino (1985: 56–57 and 82).

⁸⁸ Cf. e. g. Bivona (1999a): “Poiché abbiamo toccato il tema dei rapporti tra Africa e Sicilia, vorrei sottolineare il notevole apporto dato dall’epigrafia nella individuazione di elementi che, di volta, in volta, hanno dato concretezza a tali rapporti dei quali sovente si parla, e non a torto, come di un fatto scontato” (Bivona 1999a: 119). See also Bivona (1999b).

typical of the African provinces.⁸⁹ Thus, it seems that the frequency of *pietissimus* within a certain territory is directly related to the spread of *piissimus*: *pietissimus* is more frequent where *piissimus* is also commonly deployed, whereas it is not frequent where *piissimus* appears as an epithet which is not typical of the local epigraphic habit.⁹⁰

All these elements speak in favor of a filiation of *pietissimus* from *piissimus*. According to the *communis opinio*, both forms are perfectly interchangeable semantically (Harrod 1909: 15; Sigismund Nielsen 1997: 193; Edmondson 2009: 256, n. 17). Both can appear within the same inscription, whether referring to different persons,⁹¹ or to the same individual.⁹² Such cases appear to be hyperbolic, as can be inferred from the particular expression *alumno pietissimorum piissimo et dulcissimo*, which is attested on an epitaph from Rome.⁹³ It is even possible that the extended use of *piissimus* in epigraphy led to the creation of the alternative variant *pietissimus* in order to avoid repetition, especially in the event that this epithet appeared more than once within the same text, such as in the case of multiple addressees of an epitaph, or when the inscription celebrated the *pietas* of both the commemorated and the dedicant at the same time. Nevertheless, the number of texts showing the compresence of both these superlatives appears to be quite small.⁹⁴ Consequently, this hypothesis does not seem to explain the rise of *pietissimus* in epigraphy, although it could help to understand its use in these particular examples and its spreading in other epitaphs, perhaps as the model.

⁸⁹ Cf. Tantimonaco (2018: 845 and n. 38). See also the following note.

⁹⁰ In the above-mentioned African provinces, there are for instance 5,716 inscriptions with the formula *pius* / *pia* / *pie uixit* or *uixit pius* / *pia* / *pie*, 641 inscriptions with the epithet *piissimus* / *piissima* and only 57 with the epithet *pietissimus* / *pietissima* (data from EDCS, October 2020). For the relationship between the formulas *pius in suis*, *piissimus* and *pietissimus* in the province Baetica, cf. Tantimonaco (2018: 849).

⁹¹ Cf. e. g. *CIL* II 531 (*Augusta Emerita, Lusitania*): *D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / Ancharius / Septimianus / ann(or)um LXV Aplani/a Lais uxor piis/sima marito pi/entissimo fecit / h(ic) s(itus) e(st) s(it) t(ibi) t(erra) l(euis)*.

⁹² Cf. e. g. AE 1997, 1513 (*Satala, Cappadocia*): *[Iuli]a[e] Aeque / uixit an(nis) XXI / co<n>iugi uniu/irae piissimae / pietissimae / P(ublius) Iul(ius) Hylas / maritus / eius u(ouit?) m(onumentum?)*. See also the peculiar case of *CIL* XII 679 (*Arelate, Gallia Narbonensis*): *D(is) M(anibus) / T(iti) Carsi Teret(ina) / Certini / ueter(ani) leg(ionis) XX V(aleriae) V(ictricis) / Carsia Titia / filia patri / piissimo // D(is) M(anibus) / T(iti) Carsi T(eret(ina)) / Certini / ueter(ani) leg(ionis) XX V(aleriae) [V(ictricis)] / Carsia Ti[ti]a / [fili]a pat[ri] / pietissim[o]*.

⁹³ *CIL* VI 29639 (Rome): *D(is) M(anibus) / Zmaragdo / Iulia C(ai) f(ilia) / Trebonia / alumno / pietissimorum / piissimo / et dulcissimo*.

⁹⁴ Less than 20 examples. Data from EDCS and EDR (November 2019). Cf. e. g. *CIL* VI 13738 and also examples quoted *supra*, nn. 91–93.

The “invention” of a variant of *piissimus*, which seems to have taken place in the context of the *officinae lapidariae*, may be also explained by practical reasons. In comparison to *piissimus*, the word *pientissimus* – in any one of its declined forms – contained a higher number of letters to be engraved, which might have entailed higher costs for the customers.⁹⁵ However, the form *pientissimus* allowed for the avoidance of possible mistakes that might have been caused by the act of reading the word *piissimus* alone, since the sequence of double <i> contained in this word could be easily confused with a cursive <e>. The letter <e> in fact appeared as a sequence of two vertical bars in the cursive script, which is typical for Pompeian graffiti and other “ephemeral” texts such as those written on wax-tablets (Bischoff 1990: 54).⁹⁶ A similar confusion in the spelling of this word could also lead to equivocal transcriptions on the stone. Stonecutters used to copy the epigraphic texts from a draft (*forma*), which was written in cursive lettering on a perishable material, such as wax-tablets or papyri; the misunderstanding of this draft text often induced craftsmen to commit errors when transferring the text onto the stone (Edmondson 2015: 117–118). The effects of this confusion might be, in this case, particularly embarrassing.⁹⁷ For example, an epitaph from Salona, that is now unfortunately lost, contained an unconventional dedication to the *marito pessimo* of the commissioner, instead of to her *marito piissimo*.⁹⁸

In any case, people soon became acquainted with the form *pientissimus*, denoting a kind of “epigraphical neologism” that they could read on dozens and dozens of stone inscriptions. It is reasonable to suppose that this word soon entered into the spoken language. This is supported by the text of an edict dated to AD 119, by means of which the emperor Hadrian extended the Roman citizenship to all his Praetorians. This edict is known by a series of bronze tablets of uncertain origin, of which four copies have been found to date (AE 1012, 1082; AE 1013, 2182; 2183 and 2184). Particularly

⁹⁵ In fact, according to Edmondson (2015) “it is safe to assume that the more letters an inscription contained, the higher the cost” (Edmondson 2015: 114). Nevertheless, the adjective *pientissimus* often appears in inscriptions in extended form, cf. e.g. AE 1946, 100 (*Roma*), *CIL* VII 28 (*Londinium, Britannia*), *CIL* XI 588 (*Forum Populi, Regio VIII*).

⁹⁶ Cursive <e> sometimes also appears on stone inscriptions, cf. e. g. *CIL* XIII 6393 (fourth century AD) or AE 1959, 112 (end of the second century AD – first half of the third century AD). However, this phenomenon is generally considered as a hint for inscriptions of a Republican date, cf. Salomies (2015: 170).

⁹⁷ The idea that *piissimus* could be confused with *pessimus* was suggested to me by José Luis Moralejo – to whom I am very grateful –, who heard it from Sebastián Mariner Bigorra.

⁹⁸ *CIL* III 2050 (*Salonae, Dalmatia*): [*D(is) M(anibus)?*] / *S'e`sti Nepot/is uet'e`rani ex s(ignifero?) / Aurelia Calli/ste marito p/'ii`ssimo sibi*. Cf. Corbier (2019: 5). Equivocal results of a similar nature might have been further encouraged by the vulgar Latin merging of /i/ and /e/, particularly because, in epigraphy, the form *piissimus* sometimes underwent the contraction of the geminate vowel (Leumann 1977: 120), cf. e. g. *CIL* VI 6442, *CIL* VIII 22922 and *CIL* IX 249. However, the quality of stressed syllables tended to be more stable than that of unstressed ones.

remarkable is the fact that the text explicitly reports the original *adlocutio* pronounced on that occasion by the emperor (*Imperator... dicit*), who is speaking in the first person (*cohortium praetorii mei... proposito meo conuenit... etc.*), and who addresses his audience directly in the second person (*principem uestrum* and *uobis testibus, Quirites!*) (Andriollo 2018: 77). Here, Hadrian refers to his praetorian cohorts as “the very strong and very loyal”, a concept that is precisely expressed by means of the superlative form *pietissimus* (*cum sit ea fortissimarum pietissimarumque cohortium praetorii mei dignitas*). At the same time, “it is hard to know to what extent the preserved document reproduces the words spoken by Hadrian”, and “at any rate, a text prepared in advance probably laid behind Hadrian’s public announcement” (Andriollo 2018: 78).⁹⁹ Nevertheless, the oral character of the original speech reported on these tablets may be considered a hint that the form *pietissimus* was effectively used in the spoken language. It is also interesting to observe that in AD 101, at the beginning of his political career, Hadrian was mocked in the Senate when he delivered a speech with a strong Betic accent (HIST. AVG. *Hadr.* 3.1)¹⁰⁰ and that in his poems he used to deploy popular forms, such as the famous sequence of diminutives *animula uagula blandula... pallidula... nudula* (HADR. *carm. frg.* 3.1).

A similar consideration should be made for another legal document in which the superlative form *pietissimus* is attested, namely the so-called *testamentum Dasumii*. This is a unique example of a will engraved on stone, which was found in Rome, and can be dated exactly to AD 108, during the reign of Trajan, based on the consular reference (*CIL* VI 10229). In it, the testator, who is generally identified with a certain Dasumius, a Baetican from *Corduba* (Eck 1978: 282–283; Tate 2005: 166, 169), established his heirs by using the first person singular (*mihi heres non erit... mihi heredes sunt... mihi heres esto*), as is common in this kind of document. He also deployed the epithet *pietissima* with reference to the first of the heirs mentioned in the text, although this person’s identity cannot be reconstructed due to textual gaps. She is described as clearly a close relative of Dasumius, almost certainly his daughter, as the same reference to her great *pietas* seems to indicate, together with another expression contained in the same text, *[af]fectum praestitit* (Eck 1978: 280–281, 283, 284 and 287; Champlin 1991: 145; Tate 2005: 168). Another adjective in the superlative form is applied to a testator’s friend, who is labeled as *amicus rarissimus* (l. 3), after the trend of this age mentioned above.

The inscription in question has been considered as the testament of a senator for a long time (Eck 1978: 284; Champlin 1991: 37, 153). Nevertheless, it has been recently suggested that Dasumius might have been rather “a stereotypically

⁹⁹ See also Andriollo (2018: 93).

¹⁰⁰ On this passage, see Adams (2007: 231–232).

arrogant, wealthy freedman” (Tate 2005: 169), “a senator’s socially grasping former slave” (Tate 2005: 170), and that his “enterprise of setting up a stone copy of one’s testament sounds like the act of a *nouveau riche* anxious to advertise his status” (Tate 2005: 170). Dasumius’ social status might have also influenced his way of speaking. This is interesting because he probably composed his will on his own, without the assistance of any jurist, as in fact seems to have been the most common practice in the Roman world.¹⁰¹ It is possible that he dictated to a relative, servant or friend his intentions in an original will,¹⁰² which then served as a source for the lapidary copy (Tate 2005: 166). It may even have been that he wrote them down by his own hand.¹⁰³

In Roman times, wills were considered the most personal of documents (Champlin 1991: 75), and the actual “mirrors” of one’s true character and thoughts, including true feelings towards relatives and friends (Champlin 1991: 1, 11 *et passim*). On account of all these considerations, it can be assumed that the language used in this kind of texts reflected the testators’ way of expressing themselves. In this light, even the adjectives chosen by Dasumius in order to describe his personal relationships should be considered as a faithful reproduction of his lexical choice,¹⁰⁴ and, in the specific case of the term *pientissima*, as a reflection of the oral language transposed into the written medium.

In this regard, there is at least another document on bronze where the presence of this superlative might be directly connected to the social *milieu* in which it was produced. This is a *tabula* from *Segisamo*, in Hispania Citerior, dated to AD 239 by means of consular indication (*CIL* II 5812). The nature of this document is unclear, although it seems to be a dedication which the members of a society (*collegium*) made to their protectors.¹⁰⁵ The text mentions the formulation of vows in favor of

101 Cf. Champlin (1991): “There is almost no hint of professional assistance in the composition of wills anywhere, be it from learned jurist or humble scribe” (Champlin 1991: 72; see also 70–75).

102 Cf. Champlin (1991): “The evidence [thus] tends in a single direction, offering frequent tableaux of private writing within the testator’s circle of family or servants or friends, and sometimes explicitly at the testator’s dictation” (Champlin 1991: 73).

103 Cf. Champlin (1991): “[...] Romans expected or were expected to make their own wills, as far as possible, whether writing them personally or dictating them to family, friends or scribes. [...] Both scribes and jurists could well have offered minimal guidance in matters of form, but there is little sign that they did. The duty of testacy should include knowing, or thinking that one knew, what one was doing; and the composition of the document was essentially the testator’s own” (Champlin 1991: 75).

104 It is interesting to observe that Agricola’s *optima uxor* and his *piissima filia* were established as heirs in Agricola’s testament, cf. *supra*, n. 32.

105 Cf. Oliver (1956: 448), who provides a religious interpretation of this society, as connected to the cult of the public Genius of the town.

some *patroni merentissimi et felicissimi et praestantissimi et pientissimi*, including four men and a woman, by a group of *ciues pientissimi et amicissimi Segisamonenses*. These are 15 individuals of both men and women, whose libertine or slave status is explicitly declared or can be inferred based on onomastic analysis, and whose humble profession is in some cases indicated (one *pectenarius*, two *fullones*, one *sutor* and one *clauarius*).¹⁰⁶

Finally, it might be useful to mention the famous stone inscription which records the *ludi saeculares* celebrated in Rome under Septimius Severus (AD 204).¹⁰⁷ Here, the adjective *pientissimus* is most likely attested in the masculine accusative plural form (*[pie]ntissimosque*) within the initial part of the text, which is unfortunately highly fragmentary. It reproduces a direct speech – possibly introduced by the sentence *tunc praeit in haec uerba*, according to scholars' reconstruction¹⁰⁸ – and thus seems to provide a further hint for the general connection of *pientissimus* with the domain of the oral language.

Of course, it cannot be excluded that the variant *pientissimus* originally spread in oral speech rather than in the epigraphic language, as suggested above. Nevertheless, the late date of the epigraphic witnesses of this word outside from the common funerary domain seems to indicate the inverted process, namely its spread in epigraphy and subsequently extended use in the popular language. In addition, there is only a handful of milestones where the emperor is labelled as *pientissimus*, all of which are dated quite late, between the late third and the fourth century AD.¹⁰⁹ This, together with other evidence discussed in this paper, seems to prove that the full normalization of *piissimus* within the standard language was not accompanied by the formal acceptance of *pientissimus*. Actually, it even seems to be possible that *pientissimus* “filled the void” that *piissimus* had left in the colloquial domain, when this latter form was assumed into normative Latin.

106 The inscription in question also presents orthographic misspellings, such as the confusion between <e> and <ae>. Cf. e. g. the forms *Valeri<a>e Seuerin<a>e patron<a>e nostr<a>e* (l. 8) and the hypercorrected spelling *[A]Euaristus* (l. 24). However, these might have been committed by the person who engraved the text.

107 *CIL* VI 32328 (Roma).

108 On this inscription, see recently Rantala (2017).

109 Among the inscriptions recorded in EDCS (November 2019), cf.: *CIL* VII 1176 (*Britannia*, AD 306–337); *CIL* XVII, 1, 182 (*Hispania Citerior*, AD 270–275); *CIL* XVII, 2, 94 (*Gallia Narbonensis*, AD 293–305); AE 2009, 1814b (*Mauretania Caesariensis*, AD 333–337). In recent times, Horster (2001: 293, lb 11.2) has confirmed the idea of previous editors that *CIL* X 832*, where the epithet *pientissimus* is applied to Antoninus Pius, is a false inscription.

4 Conclusions

In conclusion, the synthetic superlative form of *pius*, *piissimus*, which Cicero claims to be “nonexistent” in Latin, was not used – at least in formal contexts by cultivated speakers – during the Classical age, nor is it attested among the oldest Latin literary sources. Nevertheless, this form was already probably deployed in the colloquial language in the first century BC. It is possible that either its widespread use in daily contexts or a new literary taste led to its final acceptance in standard Latin, as is proven by the appearance of *piissimus* in Latin literature of the Post-Classical age. To around the same period – and certainly from the age of Claudius onwards – the first evidence of this superlative in the epigraphic sources also seems datable. By the second century AD, *piissimus* had certainly become a fully normative form, its use becoming more widespread by the general trend to apply epithets in the superlative for both the emperor and common individuals, as the inscriptions clearly reveal. Contemporary with the normalization and spread of *piissimus* in the Latin language, another variant, *pientissimus*, started to be used, at first probably in the epigraphic domain, and then also in oral speech. This superlative, together with the basic form derived from it, *piens*, both of which were “nonexistent” in the Latin literature and scholarly writings of the Roman times, were recovered by Humanists and were widely used until very late in the history of the Latin language.

Abbreviations

AE	<i>L'Année Épigraphique</i> . Paris, 1888–
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> . Berlin, 1863–
EDCS	Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby: http://db.edcs.eu/
EDR	Epigraphic Database Roma: http://www.edr-edr.it/
GL	<i>Grammatici Latini</i> . Leipzig, 1857–1880.
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> . Berlin, 1903–
ILCV	Ernst Diehl, <i>Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres</i> . Berlin, 1925–1967.
InscrIt	<i>Inscriptiones Italiae</i> . Roma, 1931–
Lupa	<i>Ubi erat Lupa</i> : http://lupa.at
NLW	Johann Ramming, <i>Neulateinische Wortliste</i> . Ein Wörterbuch des Lateinischen von Petrarca bis 1700: http://www.neulatein.de
OLD	<i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> . Oxford, 1968.
RIB	Robin G. Collingwood et al., <i>The Roman Inscriptions of Britain</i> . Oxford, 1965–2009.
ThLL	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i> . Leipzig, 1900–

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