

# ARCTOS

ACTA PHILOLOGICA FENNICA

NOVA SERIES

VOL. IV

HELSINKI 1966 HELSINGFORS

# INDEX

Päivö Oksala	Edwin Linkomies in memoriam . . . . .	5
Paavo Castrén	Il <i>titulus memorialis</i> degli scavi di San Pietro	11
Olof Gigon	Plinius und der Zerfall der antiken Natur- wissenschaft . . . . .	23
Pertti Huttunen	Some notes on the use of the verb <i>mereo</i> ( <i>mereor</i> ) in republican political terminology and in pa- gan inscriptions . . . . .	47
Klaus Krister Lohikoski	Der Parallelismus Mykene — Troja in Senecas »Agamemnon» . . . . .	63
Jaakko Suolahti	L'espansione di una <i>gens Romana</i> ( <i>Fabricia</i> ) . .	71
Holger Thesleff	Scientific and technical style in early Greek prose . . . . .	89
Rolf Westman	Zur Sprache der Praetexta Octavia . . . . .	115
Henrik Zilliacus	Zur Passivität der spätgriechischen Urkunden- sprache . . . . .	129

# SOME NOTES ON THE USE OF THE VERB *MEREO* (*MEREOR*) IN REPUBLICAN POLITICAL TERMINOLOGY AND IN PAGAN INSCRIPTIONS

Pertti Huttunen

The D(iis) M(anibus) — formula which is frequently found at the opening of Roman epitaphs has been regarded as the most characteristic feature of such texts. This expression, which was adopted at the beginning of the Imperial era, was very soon petrified into a symbolic phrase, belonging to Roman epitaphs as inseparably as the cross belongs to modern obituary notices and grave-stones.<sup>1</sup> Almost as typical an indicator of this special kind of inscription was the *bene merenti* formula in Imperial Roman epitaphs in connection with the name of the dead person. The function of the formula was to show that the dead person had, by his character and actions, deserved the grave-stone which immortalized his name and memory. S. G. HARROD<sup>2</sup>, dealing with inscriptions in the CIL VI, finds the participial forms *merens* and *meritus* approximately 8 000 times in 36 000 inscriptions in the CIL VI. These forms appear much more frequently than another common term, the adjective *carus*, which is very favoured among the epitaphic expressions of virtue and endearment *carus* being used about one-fifth as often as the participial forms of *mereo*. HARROD deals with his subject mainly lexicographically and in discussing the frequency of *mereo* (*mereor*) he does not specify what kind of inscriptions these 8 000 and 36 000 examples comprise. There are now only about 25 000 epitaphs in the CIL VI; thus HARROD's calculation cannot be based on epitaphs only, though it is in epitaphs that his subject, Latin terms of endearment and family relationships, can most easily be studied. On the other hand we must remember that there occur in Latin epitaphs other forms of *mereo* (*mereor*) besides the active and deponent participle.<sup>3</sup> Thus my discussion of the verb *mereo* (*mereor*) in epitaphic

---

<sup>1</sup> H. ARMINI, *Eranos* 22, 1924, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> S. G. HARROD, *Latin Terms of Endearment and Family Relationship*, Princeton 1909, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> For the different epitaphic formulas derived from the verb *mereo*, see p. 55.

formulas will differ from HARROD's calculations. In his calculations of the frequency of *mereo* (*mereor*) HARROD has evidently considered both the epitaphs and the votive tablets together with the other religious inscriptions edited in the CIL VI this procedure is too general and gives erraneous results, for the functions of this verb vary considerably in these two groups of inscriptions, although its basic meaning remains the same.

Since HARROD's study is largely lexicographic, he has not gone deeply into the special features of social history or the history of ideas upon which epitaphic formulas can throw some light. In discussing *mereo* (*mereor*) he only notes its very great popularity and its formal use. In Latin inscriptions, however, the different forms of *mereo* (*mereor*) are of specific interest. The verb is by no means limited to epitaphs, but has an important function also in Roman votive inscriptions.

Regarding etymology, the verb *mereo* (*mereor*)<sup>1</sup> comes from the same root as the Greek word *μείρομαι, μοῖρα* I get my part of something, *partem accipio*. According to this its primary meaning is to obtain. Thus *mereo* was used when (1.) speaking of obtaining wages or advantage by work, services etc.: Plaut. Pseud. 1192 *quid meres? quantillo argento te conauxit Pseudolus?* Plin. N. H. 10.142 *quaestus . . . voce meritos*. The use of *mereo* (*mereor*) was especially common in reference to the wages of soldiers, *stipendium merere* Isid. Orig. 10.182 *milites, cum stipendia accipiunt, mereri dicuntur*. In this connection the concrete meaning of the verb was perhaps most clearly preserved.

(2) Soon *mereo* (*mereor*) was associated with more abstract meanings; instead of wages it denoted more intellectual 'merits'. Cic. Div. in Caec. 60 *iniurias ferendo maiorem laudem quam ulciscendo merere*. (3) A natural result of the abstraction of *mereo* (*mereor*) was the meaning which it has in most of the inscriptions I have studied: to secure with our deeds an honour or something equivalent to it. in other words to deserve or merit something, to be worthy of the honour<sup>2</sup>. The word was used in this meaning both without<sup>3</sup> and with the accusative<sup>4</sup>. (4) Thus the present participle of *mereo* (*merens*) and past participle of *mereor* (*meritus*) naturally signify a merit obtained through action and acknowledged

<sup>1</sup> This short survey on the etymology and literal use of the verb *mereo* is principally based on the article 'mereo' in Thes. vol. VIII, fasc. VI, 808 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> Thes. VIII, fasc. VI, col. 808: *factis efficere, ut tribui nobis aliquid debeat: dignum esse*.

<sup>3</sup> Ovid. fast. 3. 834 *Si mereor studiis adsit amica meis*. Inscr. Revue archéol., 6 sér., 10, 1937, p. 338 n. 44 *opto tibi terram levem: mereris*. Ovid. e.P. 2. 6. 31 *uoniam laudem pietate mereris*.

<sup>4</sup> Ter. And. 621 *quid meritu's? : : crucem*.

as worthy of respect. Both these forms can be found both without and with the accusative.

In Roman political life *mereor* denoted important aspects of a citizen's relation to the state and to other citizens; the word actually became a political term among the Roman upper classes.<sup>3</sup> Almost all citizens, but especially senators, had to carry out duties (*officia*) to the state, to friends and to clients. If a Roman punctiliously carried out all his duties as a citizen and those involved in his *amicitia* and *patrocinium* relationships, which he was to perform according to the Roman tradition, he obtained acknowledgement, 'merits' and he had the right to expect services in return.

We cannot understand the old Roman conception of the glory (*gloria*) of an individual and the public respect (*dignitas*) due to him without considering the verb *mereor* and the political conception of *merita*. According to Roman thought the *gloria* of every individual was a social conception, inseparably tied to the idea of the community.<sup>4</sup> It was only when the body of all the citizens felt that one of them had carried out his duty to the state in an exemplary way that he received public recognition and admiration (*gloria*); as a concrete result of it he was given magisterial posts. These posts were an honour because they were so exacting. Roman *magistratus*, called *honores*, were by no means honorary offices in the modern sense of the word: The *magistratus* offered to their holders, besides *gloria*, new and still greater duties (*officia*), whose scrupulous and successful performance brought magistrates even greater merits (*merita*). When a respected and a highly trusted citizen had climbed to the top rung of the *officia* — *merita* ladder, with increasingly onerous burdens, he obtained *dignitas* and he could honourably retire to the seclusion of private life, for no one could accuse him of neglecting his duties as a citizen.<sup>5</sup>

In fulfilling his other duties (to friends and clients) the senator naturally did not have to strive so purposefully in accepting cumulative responsibilities. Everywhere, however, we see the same pattern of *officia-merita* coherently repeated; this coherence was a clear conception for Romans in all human relationships. The conception became a political one because the relationships of *amicitia* and *patrocinium*, both of which were built on the *officia-merita* pattern

---

<sup>3</sup> J. HELLEGOUARC'H, *Le Vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politiques sous la République*, Paris 1963, p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> U. KNOCHÉ, »Der römische Ruhmesgedanke«, *Philologus* 89, 1934, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> Cic. *Phil.* 12. 7; ad *Att.* 10. 4. 1.

of thinking<sup>1</sup>, were very important factors in the politics of the Republic<sup>2</sup> In political terminology the word *mereor* was almost always intransitive, and the person (or the thing) for whom (or which) *officia* were performed were indicated by the preposition *de* and the ablative: *mereri de aliquo*. If a citizen, a friend or client neglected his duties, his relationship with the other one could be described by the phrase *male de patria (amico, patrono etc.) mereri*. In the contrary case the adverb *bene* was naturally used.<sup>3</sup>

In Republican times human relationships were always more or less political but the situation changed after the *Principatus* of Augustus. The former politically important social relationships became nonpolitical private relationships of friendship and so on, and *mereo* lost its active and political colour. We may suppose, therefore, that when Roman society had settled down politically and political terminology lost its former specialized meanings, it was possible for *mereo* to widen its function and meaning: The verb acquired an important position in Latin epitaphic formulas, in which it could characterize 'merits' and virtues in non-political relationships.

It could not happen by mere chance that *mereo* got new functions contemporarily with the political settling down of Roman society. In Republican epitaphs the virtues of the deceased were defined by various expressions, but *mereo (mereor)* was not one of them. In the material<sup>4</sup> I have collected from CIL I<sup>2</sup> I have found only one fragment of a relatively late epitaph<sup>5</sup> in which the *merita* of the dead are mentioned. Knowing this it is really surprising to find how frequently forms with *mereo (mereor)* occur in Imperial pagan inscriptions<sup>6</sup>. According to my calculations in the 3867 prose epitaphs of my material<sup>7</sup> there are 1254 epitaphs with a *mereo* formula, which means that about 32 % of the Imperial prose epitaphs contain the verb *mereo* in one form or another.

<sup>1</sup> It is worth noticing that it was not before the Imperial age that the first efforts were made to regulate by legislation the relationship between *patronus* and *cliens*. Cf. A. M. DUFF, *Freedmen in the Early Roman Empire*, London 1958, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> R. SYME, *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford 1962, p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> *Bene de Re publica mereri*: Cic. Phil. I. 33; Mil. 63; Flacc. 81. The reflexive pronoun was very often used in connection with the verb *mereri* and preposition *de*: Cic. Fam. 60. 2 *Homines grati et memores bene meritos de se commendare debent*.

<sup>4</sup> The material used in this study has been collected by picking up every fifth of all the sepulchral inscriptions in CIL I<sup>2</sup> and VI.

<sup>5</sup> CIL I<sup>2</sup> 1930 (Ist cent. B.C.?)

h]ospes reseiste et aspice aet[ernam  
domu *pro meritis* statuit / coiux coiugei e[t sibi]

<sup>6</sup> See p. 47.

<sup>7</sup> In the material collected by picking up every fifth sepulchral inscription in CIL VI.

It is typical of the new nature and function of *mereo* (*mereor*) that we can now find epitaphs with *mereo* (*mereor*) mostly dedicated to close relatives. Though the nature and function of the verb changed, it is not difficult to find the former linguistic patterns in many epitaph expressions; in some Imperial epitaphs the formula with *mereor* resembles exactly Republican political usage:

CIL VI 2325

... coniugi suae | de se bene (sic) merita e...  
fecit

The transference of political terminology to epitaphs did not, however, take place without transformations, for the participle *merens* was undeniably more frequent than *meritus* when the dead person's sense of duty was praised in the epitaphs of Imperial era.<sup>1</sup> We can infer from the writings of Cicero that the form *merens* was rare in the usage of senators in Republican times. Present participle of *mereo* in sepulchral formula, e.g.:

CIL VI 20492 ... Iuliae Helene coniugi | optimae de se bene merent[i] fecit Telesphorus | Domitiae Domitiani ser | et  
...

In these two inscriptions the dedicators refer to themselves in the ablative of the reflexive pronoun (with prep. *de*) in order to express that the dead persons (in these examples their wives) had performed their duties to them during their lives and that now it was in turn their duty to bury the deceased and to immortalize their memory with an epitaph. In both my examples it is a question of a clear *officia-merita* relationship, but we can see that they are quite non-political<sup>2</sup>, as both the dedicators are in fact slaves honouring the memory of their wives.

Republican political vocabulary was not, perhaps, the only feature in Roman thought which influenced the epitaphic *bene merenti* formulas. The verb *mereor* — and especially its participle *meritus* — was used in Latin inscriptions to express religious and ethical conceptions of the Romans even before the birth of Roman literature. I mean votive tablets, in which a very characteristic feature was the *lubens merito* formula<sup>3</sup>, which became so important and necessary part of them that it was soon shortened to *l.m.*. Roman votive inscriptions were

<sup>1</sup> See. p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> The function of formulas with *mereo* in expressing dutifulness in private life is particularly treated on p. 57 sqq.

<sup>3</sup> CIL I<sup>2</sup> 1698

*T. Septumulenus T.f. | Herculei d(ono) d(at)  
l(ubens) m(erito) d(ecuma) f(acta)*

testimonies of a contract of man with god; it was by the act of composing the votive tablet itself that one of the parties, man, fulfilled his own share of the mutual obligations. With the words *l(ubens) m(erito)* he expressed the reliability of his tutelary deity in executing his *officia*. Here, again, the close relationship of *officia-merita* can be seen: The present participle *lubens* functionally corresponds to the adverb *bene* in epitaphs. When the donor of the votive inscription says that he 'willingly' gives a votive gift to his benefactor, he wants to express both his pleasure at the successful conclusion of his affairs and his grateful recognition of the god as having carried out his duties well.<sup>1</sup> It should of course be noted that a votive inscription was by no means always the only gift which a god accepted as the reward for his merits; often a temple or an altar was erected, or a tenth of the profit, salary or war booty was dedicated as a fulfilment of a promise on a votive tablet.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the 'merits' of the god, which were the reason for the offering, were indicated by the word *mereo* in votive inscriptions. To find out how often this word was really used in Latin votive tablets I have studied all the votives in CIL I<sup>2</sup> and three groups of a hundred votives in the *Inscriptiones sacrae*-section of CIL VI; in this material I have counted the frequency of *mereor*, which is as follows:<sup>3</sup>

1. a. Out of the inscriptions composed before the Second Punic war and edited in CIL I<sup>2</sup> there are ten instances connected with the votive promise; six of these contain the form *merito(d)*.<sup>4</sup>

1. b. There are 46 similar votives composed before 218 B. C. and found, in Latium, Umbria, Ager Gallicus, Picenum and in the districts of the Marsi, Vestini and Samnites; 30 % (14 examples) of these have the participle *mereto(d)*.

2. Out of the 91 votive tablets composed between the years 218—44 B. C. and edited in CIL I<sup>2</sup> 36 % (33 examples) have the above mentioned form either written out in full<sup>5</sup> or, in most cases, abbreviated.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> e.g. CIL I<sup>2</sup> 1531 . . .

*Heic vovit voto hoc | solut[o de]cuma facta  
poloucta leiberis lube | tes donu danunt*

*Hercolei maxume | mereto . . .*

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the *elogium* of L. Scipio Barbatus (CIL I<sup>2</sup> 8, 9): *dedet Tempestatebus aide meretod*

<sup>3</sup> Of course it cannot always be exactly determined whether an inscription is merely a votive promise or whether it actually proves the performance of this promise. I am interested in the latter group and I refer (and have referred) to promises performed by 'votive' and 'votive tablet'.

<sup>4</sup> CIL I<sup>2</sup> 27. 28. 29. 31. 32. 33.

<sup>5</sup> e.g. CIL I<sup>2</sup> 1696

*Atitinius A.f. [di]anae | aidicolam votum  
dedit meretod*

<sup>6</sup> e.g. CIL I<sup>2</sup> 1553

*Dexter | Veneri | opsequenti  
l(ubens) m(eritae) don(avit)*



3. During the Imperial era the favour of *mereor* in votives quite obviously decreased, for I have found the (*lubens*) *merito* expression, only in 7 % of the votive tablets of that time.

The difficulty of interpreting the inscriptions in the *Inscriptiones sacrae* section of CIL VI<sup>1</sup> may perhaps be responsible for a somewhat lower percentage of the *merito* formula than the real frequency, but compared to the period 218—44 B.C. the difference is so great that difficulties in interpretation and the small amount of the Republican material are not sufficient explanations. As plenty of votive tablets were still being composed, however, one cannot accept a decline of the religious feeling as an explanation. Instead, we may, taking into account the fact that the decrease of the use of *mereor* in votives on the one hand and the appearance of *mereo* in epitaphs on the other hand are quite contemporaneous phenomena, perhaps, suppose that in the social and intellectual revolutions preceding the establishment of the *principatus* the verb *mereor* lost a good deal of its traditional and respected meaning, characterizing the reliability of gods in their contracts with man. However, one reason may have been the constant abbreviation of the formula.

The direct influence of votive must be taken into consideration in the study of epitaphic formulas with *mereo*. The participle *libens* (*lubens*), which belongs to the essence of votives, is not unknown in epitaphs<sup>2</sup>, either, in which it may be seen even in shortened form<sup>3</sup>, as in votive terminology. The existence of this kind of expression in epitaphs, although they are not very numerous, shows clearly that there is no real functional difference between the forms *libens* and *bene*. When we also bear in mind the fact that the distinction between political and sepulchral terminology was not very sharp either, we can conclude that the same kind of ethical thinking (*officia-merita*) was behind all these three spheres of human activity: politics, man's relationship to god and private life. There was only some kind of 'division of labour' between different participles in expressing the immutable principle of *officia-merita*.

*Mereo*, in sepulchral fraseology, was the last term used to express the ethical concept mentioned above. This is almost all we know about the chronology of formulas with *mereo*, because there are very few datable epitaphs composed in

<sup>1</sup> See p. 52, n. 3.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. CIL I<sup>2</sup> 9690

<sup>3</sup> e.g. CIL VI 3575

*Morphe orna[tr] | vixs. ann. xix*  
*Felix nomencl. | coniu[gi] | libens et meritae*  
*Aur Pusinnio | qui militavit | annis vii vixit*  
*annis xxv m. v | fratri l(ibens) m(erito:*  
*erenti) f(ecit)*

the Imperial era. Some of the formulas possibly came into use quite early, for in one epitaph, evidently composed during the life time of Tiberius and dedicated to one of his slaves, the 'merits' of the dead person are expressed with the *bene merito* formula:

CIL VI 5197 (= DESSAU 1514)<sup>1</sup>

*Musico Ti Caesaris Augusti | Scurrano disp. ad fiscum Gallicum  
provinciae Lugudunensis | ex vicariis eius qui cum eo Romae cum  
decessit evenerunt b e n e m e r i t o | . . .*

It is relatively certain that the active present participle *merens* (*merenti*) came into use in epitaphic expressions in the middle of the first century A.D.; there is a *bene merenti* formula in the epitaph<sup>2</sup> composed to a freedwoman of Claudia Antonia, the eldest daughter of Claudius (Nero had her killed in 65 A.D.). In a grave-stone erected to the memory of the Emperor Claudius' freedman<sup>3</sup> the abbreviation *b. m.* can be seen; hence it may be possible to conclude that by the second half of the first century the *bene merenti* had become so established an epitaphic formula that it was even used in abbreviation.<sup>4</sup> In the epitaphs of Flavians' freedmen we already find many examples of different kinds of formulas with *mereo*. In two of these inscriptions<sup>5</sup> the adverb *bene* was written together with the participle of *mereo*. This way of writing, I believe, shows that the stonecutters understood *bene merenti* as an undivided and established concept and that it sometimes seemed more natural for them to write both parts of the expression as a single word. I shall return to different ways of setting out the formulas with *mereo* later. From the epitaphs of Imperial freedmen it may be supposed that by the end of the first century all the most important epitaphic formulas with *mereo* were in use; unfortunately the difficulty of dating the inscriptions is an obstacle in verifying this supposition by greater material.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. & J. GORDON, *Album of Dated Latin Inscriptions I*, Los Angeles 1963, p. 78, n:o 71.

<sup>2</sup> CIL VI 15517. This epitaph was probably composed before the death of Claudia Antonia.

<sup>3</sup> CIL VI 34865

<i>dm</i>	
<i>Ti C[laudi]us</i>	<i>Claudius Phoebus</i>
<i>Au[g. lib]</i>	<i>coniugi b   merenti</i>
<i>Demetrius et</i>	<i>Pensata</i>
<i>Pensata</i>	<i>sorori   piissimae</i>
<i>parenti opt. b. m. fecerunt</i>	

<sup>4</sup> Cf. abbreviation *l. m.* (= *lubens merito*) in votive tablets (see p. 52).

<sup>5</sup> CIL VI 18407; CIL VI 18057:

<i>T. Flavius Aug. l. Eutactus</i>
<i>Telluciae Chilidae coniugi suae</i>
<i>benemerenti   d m</i>

In the survey of the chronology of formulas with *mereo* there are some features which undeniably show the established position of these expressions in epitaphic terminology. As an matter of fact, to prove this we need do nothing but compare the frequency of *mereo* (*mereor*) (32 %) with that of *carus* (7 %) in the whole material. More detailed study of the frequency of different, more or less petrified formulas with *mereo* (*mereor*) should, however, throw light on some problems of Roman society and Roman social thought.

In the table below I have counted the frequency of the most important formulae with *mereo* (*mereor*) in the epitaphs I have studied. In calculating percentages I have used as basic material the number of those inscriptions (1254 examples) in which *mereo* (*mereor*) has been used in one way or another to express the virtue of the deceased. Only those expressions which have either an active (*merens merenti*) or a deponent participle (*meritus, merito*) are grouped separately. Other formulas (e.g. *ob merita, pro meritis, ob multa genera meritorum, sic meruit* etc.) are so individualistic and so few that they have statistical importance only as one group.

Formula	expl	%
bene merenti . . . .	467	37
b. m. . . . .	541	43
benemerenti . . . . .	162	13
(rare. benemerito, merenti, merito ..	18	1
bene de se merito	19	2
» » » merenti	13	1
ob meritis etc. . . . .	34	3
total	1254	100

The first fact worth noting is that in epitaphic formulas the shortening (*b.m.*) is more frequent than the formula in which the both parts are written in full (*bene merenti*). This seems to me to show without doubt that in the common thinking of the imperial era the *bene merenti* combination had been so firmly crystallized into a formula expressing the virtues and merits of the deceased that only two letters were enough to make clear to everybody what the composer of the epitaph wanted to say about his friend or his relative and his virtues. This abbreviated formula clearly embraced a concept which an Imperial Roman understood as an undivided and indivisible entity; the fact that in 162 epitaphs (13 %) the two parts of the formula have been combined

into one word (*benemerenti*, more seldom *benemerito*, *benemeritae*) quite clearly proves the singleness of the phrase and the idea. So large a number of cases where the words are combined must signify something special in Latin epitaphs, in which every single word was usually carefully separated from each other with points and decorative figures.

The formula with *bene* in which the verbal and conceptual fixing could lead to illogical pleonasm,<sup>1</sup> is predominant compared with cases where the 'merits' of the deceased are expressed with participle alone (*merenti*<sup>2</sup>, *merito*, *meritae*). According to the conventional usage, people probably thought that a formula without the adverb *bene* would not be convincing and could not characterize the 'good merits' of the dead clearly enough. The composers of epitaphs were, perhaps, subconsciously afraid that someone could give the verb a negative meaning which it can also have.<sup>3</sup> Thus the sole participle was not very commonly used; *bene merenti* was safer.

The abundance of the formulas *bene merenti*, *benemerenti* and *b.m.* is in striking contrast to the rarity of the *de se bene merito* (-ae) expression in my material. We can conclude that the deponent participle together with its preposition *de* and the ablative indicating the recipient of the good actions of the dead man, are not proper epitaphic terms, though they are sometimes seen in epitaphs.<sup>4</sup> As this expression can be compared with the language of Cicero and his contemporary senators, the question arises whether the senatorial tradition was not represented in Imperial epitaphs, which, otherwise, so well reflect the intellectual and social tendencies of that era.

Epitaphic material is very convenient for the study of the special social and professional features in the use of *mereo* (*mereor*). It is easy to make a fairly reliable social survey, for this rich material represents very varied social groups and classes in Roman society.

Below I have tabulated the frequency of *mereo* (*mereor*) in sepulcral inscriptions covering some of the most important social classes, professions and oc-

<sup>1</sup> e.g. CIL VI 29647

... Ar  
temis coiux et Sil | vanus filius optime  
de se ben. mer. fecerunt

<sup>2</sup> e.g. CIL VI 2290

d.m. | M Val Atticus  
sacerdos sibi | et Aquilliae (sic)  
Athenaidi | coniugi me | renli vius. (sic)

<sup>3</sup> Ovid. epist. 7. 85.

<sup>4</sup> cf. pp. 50—51.

cupations in Rome. I have not included all possible groups in this list as in some cases the material representing them is not statistically sufficient.

Social class or occupation	Number of epitaphs	Epitables with <i>mereo</i> ( <i>mereor</i> )	
		instances	percentage
1. Senators before Diocl. ....	65	1 <sup>1</sup>	1,5
2. knights .....	40	6	15
3. scribes and apparitores .....	62	7	11
4. Imperial officials .....	79	15	19
5. » artisans .....	93	20	22
6. private » .....	186	37	20
Total (lines 1—C) .....	525	86	14
7. soldiers .....	281	127	45
8. 'sepulcrales' <sup>2</sup> .....	2945	1014	34

This table shows with relative clarity, I believe, that the primary function of formulas with *mereo* was to express virtues of private people. Except in the case of soldiers, we may observe that the more responsible and important a position a social or professional group has occupied in the service of the state or community, the lesser seems to be the need of *mereo* (*mereor*) in sepulchral terminology.<sup>3</sup> We can see the real function of these formulas most clearly in comparing their frequency in those epitaphs in which the social status or occupation of the dead person or dedicator is mentioned and in those very numerous inscriptions in which social status and occupation are not indicated. In the latter group the frequency of the verb *mereo* (*mereor*) is 143 % greater than in the former. This great difference cannot be due to chance. The table, perhaps, reveals one fundamental feature of the social attitude of the Romans: appreciation of services performed for the state; we meet this same attitude, for instance, in the writings of Cicero and Livy. Thus, the need for expressions indicating

<sup>1</sup> CIL VI 37055. This epitaph, which a young man belonging to the senatorial order has dedicated to a freedman of his family is fragmentary, and one cannot say with certainty whether it contains the form [*mere*]nti or not.

<sup>2</sup> Epitaphs in which no profession or social position is mentioned; there are in this group, it is true, many epitaphs composed to and by freedmen.

<sup>3</sup> From this point of view the frequency of *mereo* (*mereor*) (15 %) in epitaphs of knights seems to be surprisingly great. As a possible explanation of the high rate of occurrence of *mereo*, it may be worth mentioning that most epitaphs with *mereo* are from quite a late period, when even in senatorial circles the attitude was changing (cf. p. 59), or they are composed by military persons (cf. pp. 59—60).

special qualities and virtues was not very great in the epitaphs of public men, because a career in the service of the state was held to be the best proof of their virtue. Only in the epitaphs of those who had, all their lives, remained private persons (*homo privatus*) it was necessary to resort to special expressions denoting virtue, the most important of which were the verb *mereo* and formulas derived from it.

It can be considered a rule with very few exceptions that those 'merita' which were mentioned in connection with the name of the dead with special formulas derived from *mereo* belonged to the conditions of private life, and revealed the socially praiseworthy and dutiful attitude of the dead person towards a clearly indicated relative or friend.<sup>1</sup> *Bene de patria mereri* is a literary expression; to state that the epitaph was that of a senator<sup>2</sup>, knight<sup>3</sup> or a libertine Imperial official<sup>4</sup> was equivalent to this phrase, and no further phrase indicating merit was necessary. Really exceptional are the epitaphs and honorary inscriptions dedicated to leading men of the state in which the 'merits' deserved in the service of the state find expression in formulas with *mereo* (*mereor*). As a curiosity it is, perhaps, worth presenting the inscription dedicated to Trajan (CIL VI 959); this is, as far as I know, the only instance where *mereor* is connected with the professional virtues of an Emperor. The clearly archaistic tendency of the inscription is obvious.

SPQR/iMP . CAESARI . DIVI  
 NERVAE . F . NERVAE  
 TRAIANO . AVGVSTO  
 GERMANICO . DACICO  
 pONTIF . MAX . TRIBVNICIA  
 po]TEST . XVI . IMP . VI . COS . VI . P . P  
 O[pt]IME . DE . REPVBLICA  
 merit]O DOMI FORI[sque

Persons belonging to the senatorial order had evidently felt *mereo* to be vulgar — and especially the formula *bene merenti* — and avoided it in composing epitaphs to their relatives and friends. It is only in Diocletian and post-Diocletian times that the epitaphs of senatorial persons first contain the verb *mereo* (*me-*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. I. KAJANTO, »A Study of the Greek Epitaphs of Rome«, Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae II:3, Helsinki 1963, pp. 34–35.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. CIL VI 1409.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. CIL VI 1620.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. CIL VI 8450.

*reor*); but it is remarkable that even then they lack the *bene merenti* formula: the formulas with *meritum*, the substantive derival of *mereo*, are the most common<sup>1</sup>.

In view of what has been said above concerning *mereo* (*mereor*), and especially the formula *bene merenti*, we must admit that epitaphs composed to and by soldiers form an exception: We cannot claim too categorically the private nature of formulas with *mereo* in them. Soldiers themselves must have appreciated their own work and understood its great significance to the Imperium and Emperor. We should expect people belonging to the military classes in describing the moral strength of the dead to have been content with recording the successful military career of their relatives and friends; this would have been possible, for the units of the garrison of Urbs Roma were the élite, the men of which were most often chosen from among the distinguished soldiers of the legions. This being so the need for *mereo* should have been remarkably lessened, and one would expect 10 or 20 % of all the military epitaphs to contain the verb *mereo* (*mereor*) in one form or another; this would approximately correspond to the frequency of formulas with *mereo* in epitaphs of Imperial officials. This is why it is really surprising that 45 % of military epitaphs contain *mereo* and in most cases it is a question of the *bene merenti* formula. Considering that the percentage of *mereo* in military epitaphs is higher than that in the so-called 'sepulcrales', we cannot pass this problem without further discussion.

Naturally it is possible to think that among people belonging to the military classes the verb *mereo* (*mereor*) was a favourite expression of virtue in private life and family circle. But we must remember that this verb, in connection with the noun *stipendium* (= wage of soldiers), had preserved its concrete meaning longest, that of 'earning'<sup>2</sup> and that it was often used in reference to the deserving of a *corona* which was a special decoration given for military bravery.<sup>3</sup> Thus we might, perhaps, suppose that in the usage of soldiers the verb *mereo* was somehow a synonym of the verb *milito*, which very often appears in military inscriptions;<sup>4</sup> accordingly the formula *bene merenti* in their epitaphs could be translated 'to him who has well done his service'. It is my opinion that the function of *mereo* in military epitaphs was to emphasize professional duties.

<sup>1</sup> e.g. CIL VI 2170 *ob merita* in an epitaph dedicated to a vestal. CIL VI 2130 was also erected in honour of a vestal, in which the 'merits' of the dead person are expressed by the formula *ob plura eius in se merita*.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 2. Fest. 234. 27 <*privato sumptu*> *se alebant mili<tes Romani, antequam stipendia> merentur*; Isid. Orig. 9.3. 34 *mereri militare dicitur, ab stipendiis scilicet, quae merentur*.

<sup>3</sup> Vell. 2, 81, 3; Val. Max 3, 1, 1.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. CIL VI 2570 *Aur. Vitus tub. coh. V pr 1 Teo | dori vix. an. xxxvii mil(itavit) an. xv ...*

Expressions denoting professional skill and devotion are very rare in Roman epitaphs and the *bene merenti* formulas attached to Roman soldiers probably form the only coherent group of this kind.

In many epitaphs dedicated to or by soldiers the verb, admittedly, goes with a word which unquestionably stands for relationships of private life, for instance a wife's relation to her husband and a freedman's to his *patronus*,<sup>1</sup> but as it was not before the times of Septimius Severus (193—112) that the soldiers of the Roman army were allowed to be married during their time of active service, family relationships are not so abundantly represented in military epitaphs as in those belonging to other social and professional groups. Unmarried soldiers very often bequeathed their fellow soldiers, who in their debt of gratitude — and in some cases according to stipulation in the will — erected a grave stone to the testator.<sup>2</sup> This kind of will bears witness of friendship among soldiers<sup>3</sup> and it is quite natural that epitaphs dedicated to friends are much more frequent among military classes than elsewhere. It is natural too that soldiers should pay great attention to the military qualifications of their friends, and it is really possible that the *bene merenti* formula in the epitaphs of Roman soldiers was, in many cases, a term of appreciation, given by a soldier to his *commilito* for his professional skill and devotion.

The ethical norms of pagan Romans are relatively easy to define: both in religion and social life all ethical duties were based on services and return services, the performance of which often took commercial forms. The moral value of an individual was measured by his reliability in fulfilling the terms of his contracts. This simple ethical scheme makes us understand, perhaps, that the verb *mereo* (*mereor*) fulfilled so important functions in the usage of political, religious and private life. The fundamental nature of the *officia-merita* relationship was not changed, though it was expressed by the past participle of *mereor* (*meritus*), in the terminology of Republican politics and votive tablets, and the present participle of *mereo* (*merens*) continued to be used in epitaphs of Imperial times. Here it is, perhaps, only a question of 'division of labour'

<sup>1</sup> e.g. CIL VI 3455 *dm | Aur. Maximo | vet(eren) Iulia Ma|trona  
coniugi b.m. et Aur | Apollodorus | lib(ertust)patrono  
b.m. | faciund. curaber (sic)*

<sup>2</sup> e.g. CIL VI 33025 *Sabinio Savi| niano ex epti | one cortale . . .  
Cla| dius Diodorus | her(es) b.m. f(ecit)*

<sup>3</sup> e.g. CIL VI 3640.



between these two words with similar meanings. In the epitaphs the main function of the participle *merens* was to denote dutifulness towards friends and members of family; the composers of military inscriptions used it, perhaps, to express the skill and dutifulness needed in their profession. It is natural that, in being used so frequently, *bene merenti* and other formulas like it became trivial and were formalized in some cases into empty phrases, the purport of which was not taken into due consideration. This kind of expression could sometimes be used even in epitaphs composed to infants, who could not have real merits<sup>1</sup>.

Even contemporaries, perhaps, sometimes understood the triviality of formulas with *mereo*. The formula *bene merenti* was very seldom found in *carmina sepulcralia*. *Poetae lapidarii* had, naturally, an inclination towards individual diction and for this reason they consciously avoided everyday formulas, of which *bene merenti* was probably the best known. Though people sometimes felt the emptiness of the phrases with *mereo*, they could, nevertheless, not manage without them. Even the Christians, in whose ethics merits of this kind were of little importance, accepted with relative readiness the *bene merenti* formula into their own sepulcral terminology.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Thes. vol. VIII, fasc. VI, col. 812.