E.2. The Ownership of the Licenza Villa

centuries A.D. (including 17 with the gentilicium Claudius).28 The most well-known of them all seems to be T. Flavius Abascantus, Domitian’s rich and powerful freedman secretary ab epistulis, who was the addressee of Statius’ poetic consolatio written in 95 A.D. on the death of his wife Priscilla (Silv. 5.1).29 It is, however, obvious that he could not have been the husband of the Claudia Epicharis from CIL VI.8411; the name and the office are different, as well as the name of the wife. Nor does the dating conform; it appears highly probable that our Ti. Claudius Abascantus belonged to the late Julio-Claudian period,30 which must rule out all the other Abascanti from the time of Domitian and the Antonines.31

CIL VI.8411 states that Ti. Claudius Abascantus, the late husband of a Claudia Epicharis, was the imperial freedman a rationibus. From this one cannot ascertain, however, whether he was in charge of that department or merely a member of its staff.32 It is known that during Claudius’ entire reign this officium was presided over by the notorious M. Antonius Pallas,33 fired by Nero shortly after the latter’s accession to power (Tac. Ann. 13.14). We do not know the names of those who succeeded him, until the emergence under the Flavians of the man known as the “father of Claudius Etruscus” (from Stat. Silv. 1.5; 3.3; cf. Mart. 6.83; 7.40)34 who, like Pallas, held that same office for more than a decade.35 The candidacy of Ti. Claudius Abascantus would have easily filled at least the part of the Neronian gap.36 Given Pallas’ reputation for arrogance and greed, one would expect that his

29. PIR³ F194 + add.; RE VI.2.2529f(Stein); cf. Millar, 79. His praenomen and gentilicium are attested in CIL VI.2214; on his status, see CIL VI.8598f. There existed yet another imperial freedman of the same name, who served under Domitian a cognitionibus (PIR³ F195), although it cannot be determined whether he was that department’s head or merely a member of the staff; he was the husband of one Flavia Hesperis (CIL VI.8628). An attempt to argue that the two were one and the same is demolished by P. R. C. Weaver, “Confusing Names: Abascantus and Statius, Silvae 5.1.,” Échos du Monde Classique 38 (1994) 333-364.
30. Ti. Claudius Abascantus from CIL VI.8411 is dated by Solin (846) to the reigns of Claudius and Nero. In a private communication, Brian Jones also supported the dating earlier than the time of Domitian.
31. Such as, e.g., Domitian’s freedman Abascantus Atimianus (CIL VI.656; 30806; XIV.2657= XV.7818) or the Claudius Abascantus from Ostia who was still a slave in 177 A.D. On the latter’s career see P. Herz, “Claudius Abascantus aus Ostia. Die Nomenklatur eines libertus und sein sozialer Aufstieg,” Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphie 76 (1989) 167-173.
32. Weaver 1972, 259f lists for the first century A.D., apart from Pallas and the “father of Claudius Etruscus,” at least 10 individuals (our Ti. Claudius Abascantus and five others with the gentiliciun Claudius included), who are described as a rationibus in the inscriptions. See also Boulvert 1970, 97 n37. It seems obvious, however, that all of them could not have been the heads of that department. In other words, the problem is, as Weaver states it (259), “how to distinguish between, e.g., an a rationibus and the a rationibus.”
34. RE III. 2670; PIR³ C763; C691; cf. Millar, 73f; on him, note especially Weaver 1972, 284ff.
35. Weaver 1972, 261. For a strong critique of the claim that the “father of Claudius Etruscus” was made the immediate successor of Pallas, see Weaver 1972, 286ff and Boulvert 1970, 97 n37.
36. Cf. below, note 37. It has been suggested that, for the latter part of Nero’s reign, the office a rationibus might have been taken by Phaon, the very freedman at whose villa Nero committed suicide (Suet. Nero 48f; Dio-Xiph. 63.27); cf. Weaver 1972, 289: “Phaon, who is attested both in the literary and epigraphical sources, is perhaps the most likely candidate for at least the latter part of Nero’s reign.” This view, which is based on an inscription on an amphora that reads PHAONTIS AUG. L. A RAT (CIL III.14112.2), is accepted by K. Wachtel (Freigelassene und Sklaven in der staatlichen Finanzverwaltung der römischen Kaiserzeit [Berlin 1966] 118) and Boulvert 1970, 97 n37. It is, however, no longer tenable, due to the argument of C. Bruun, “The Name and Possessions of Nero’s Freedman Phaon,” Arctos 23 (1989) 41-53. Bruun persuasively identified Nero’s Phaon with L. Dominius Phaon from AE 1914.219 and, possibly, CIL X.444, who must have been a freedman of Nero’s aunt, Domitia Lepida. Consequently, he cannot be identical with AUG L. A RAT from CIL III.14112.2. As for Phaon’s rank or post, Bruun comes to conclusion that we “actually do not know