

## Freedmen: new citizens

Patrons and freedmen in Herculaneum: the Balbi

### Source 1: Statue of Marcus Nonius Balbus



M · NONIO · M · F · BALBO ·  
PRAE · PRO · COS · M · NONIUS ·  
BALBI · [L] · VOLUSI[us]

*To Marcus Nonius Balbus, son of  
Marcus - praetor, proconsul - Marcus  
Nonius Volusius, freedman of Balbus  
[erected this monument].*

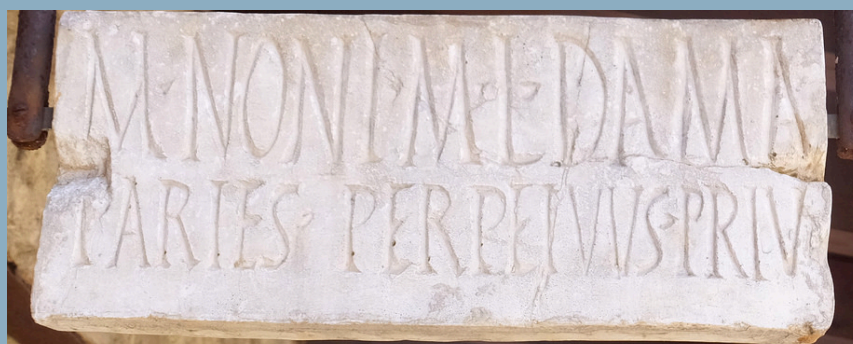
*Statue of Marcus Nonius Balbus, Herculaneum.*

This statue is one of the many commemorations of Marcus Nonius Balbus, a prominent patron in Herculaneum, that have been found across the town. The statue was placed next to a grand altar given by the town council of Herculaneum, outside the suburban baths. The statue was dedicated by one of his freedmen. Statues and inscriptions to Marcus Nonius Balbus from across Herculaneum show the prominent status and great influence of the family in the town. Honorific dedications have also been found to Balbus' mother, father and wife.

What do the statue and its inscription tell you about  
the status of Volusius, and of Balbus?

## Source 2: Boundary sign of Marcus Nonius Dama

This sign denotes the boundary between two houses. The owner of the house on this side is the freedman Marcus Nonius Dama. The name Dama sounds like he may be from Syria originally. He might have been a slave of Marcus Nonius Balbus, or of one of his freedmen. Dama is one of many names that show up in inscriptions from Herculaneum that start with “Marcus Nonius”.



M · NONI · M · L · DAMA · PARIES · PERPETUUS · PRIV[at]us]  
*This side: Continuous private wall of Marcus Nonius Dama, freedman of Marcus.  
The reverse reads: “continuous private wall of Julia.”*

*Boundary sign of Marcus Nonius Dama and Julia, Herculaneum.*

## Source 3: More Marcus Noniuses!

In inscriptions from across Herculaneum, freedmen and members of the Nonii Balbi family are named. There are lists of names of councillors, priests, voting tribes and citizens of the town, in which these names feature.

It can be hard to know whether an individual is a freedman, or free-born (and if they are free-born, whether they are the sons of freedmen, or members of the ‘original’ Balbus clan). One way of trying to differentiate, is by looking at the third name. If it is Greek-sounding, this would often have been a slave’s name. Other conventional slaves’ names are adjectives (like Felix - “Lucky”). It’s often impossible to know!

### *Greek-sounding names:*

M. Nonius Anthus, M. Nonius Eperastus, M. Nonius Hermeros, M. Nonius Stephanio, M. Nonius Terpnus, M. Nonius Cypaerus

### *What about these?*

M. Nonius Carus (*dear/beloved*), M. Nonius Celer (*swift*), M. Nonius Ianuarius (*doorkeeper*), M. Nonius Severus (*strict*), M. Nonius Fuscus (*dark*)

*Marci Nonii attested in inscriptions from Herculaneum.*

Why do you think the name “Marcus Nonius” was so common in Herculaneum?

What benefits do you think might have been associated with being a freedman of the Balbi?

Why would it be in the interest of the Balbi to have a large group of freedman clients?

*Further reading*

- On Roman naming conventions: [http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/roman\\_names.html](http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/roman_names.html)
- The terrace of Marcus Nonius Balbus: <https://sites.google.com/site/ad79eruption/herculaneum-1/suburban-district/terrace-of-m-nonius-balbus>
- For a discussion of the Balbus family see: Wallace-Hadrill, A. (2011) *Herculaneum Past and Future*. Frances Lincoln. p.130 - 134.
- On Dama and Julia’s plaque, see this blog post: <http://british.museumblog.org/telling-the-human-story-of-pompeii-and-herculaneum/>