

[This is the peer-reviewed version of the following article: G. Woudhuysen, ‘Myrmeicus or Myrmecius?’, which has been accepted for publication by *Mnemosyne*]

## Myrmeicus or Myrmecius?

### Abstract

In this article, I examine the name of a friend and correspondent of the fourth-century poet Avienius, commonly identified hitherto as Flavianus Myrmeicus. After summarising the current state of research and translating the verse epistle which he received, I argue that, for a variety of reasons, Myrmeicus cannot be his name. Instead, it should be emended to Myrmecius, which was his *signum*: an example of a variety of nickname which many Romans of elevated status in late antiquity bore in addition to their birth names. I examine Myrmecius as a *signum* within the context of late-Roman *supernomina* more generally, in the process clarifying how and in what circumstances and combinations they were used, and suggesting several sources from which they might be derived. I then explain how Myrmecius’ *signum* might have been mangled in the course of transmission, and conclude by noting that while the bulk of attested *signa* are found on inscriptions, Myrmecius suggests that many more may currently lie concealed in literary texts.

### Keywords

Rufius Festus Avienius – Onomastics – *Signa* – Latin Literature – Transmission History.

In 1995, with characteristic vigour, Alan Cameron definitively established that the mid-fourth-century poet, till then commonly known as Rufius Festus Avienus, was in fact called Postumius Rufius Festus *signo* Avienius.<sup>1</sup> This rather minor modification was more significant than it might at first sight seem. *Signa*, additional names which some (mostly elite) late Romans deployed in some circumstances, could be used instead of, or in combination with, someone’s given names. So, the same individual might appear by their name in one place, their *signum* in another, and their name combined with their

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*BNJ* = Brill’s New Jacoby. References are given by the name of the ‘ancient historian’ and (modern editor).

*GW* = *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*

*ISTC* = *Incunabula Short Title Catalogue*

*LGPN* = *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names*, I = Fraser, Matthews 1987, III.b = *idem* 2000, IV = *idem* 2005, V.A = Corsten 2010

*OPEL* = *Onomasticon provinciarum Europae Latinarum*, I = Lőrincz 2005, II = Lőrincz 1999, III = Lőrincz 2000, IV = Lőrincz 2002

*PHI* = The Packard Humanities Institute Database of Greek Inscriptions (<https://epigraphy.packhum.org/>)

*PIR*<sup>2</sup> = *Prosopographia imperii Romani (editio altera)*, V.2 = Petersen 1983

*PLRE* = Jones, Martindale, Morris 1971. References are given by name, number, and page (in brackets).

*USTC* = *Universal Short Title Catalogue*

<sup>1</sup> Cameron 1995, 252-262, restating a case already made in *idem* 1967, 392-394.

*signum* in a third. This mattered in the case of Avienius, for it allowed the apparently inconsistent scraps of ancient evidence for him to be stitched together into one uniform garment. The Rufius Festus whose epitaph survives at Volsinii, a proconsul of Achaëa with the same name attested by statue base at Athens, a proconsul of Africa called Postumius Rufius Festus with the detached *signum* Abienius honoured at Bulla Regia, the Ruf(i)us Festus Avienius some of whose poems survive, and the Avienius (or sometimes, erroneously, Avienus) for whom there are several literary *testimonia* were all the same person, a poetically inclined senator with a successful career in government.<sup>2</sup> Cameron's article was, however, more than a major contribution to the study of a poet little read even in universities.<sup>3</sup> It capped a remarkable trio of essays which explored the naming practices current in the later-Roman Empire, opening up an area vitally important to the era's social and political history and yet still a fecund source of misconceptions.<sup>4</sup> Cameron had earlier offered what remains the most important study of late-Roman polyonymy and an incisive treatment of how and by whom the name 'Flavius' was and was not used.<sup>5</sup> In his study of Avienius, he used the poet as a vantage point from which to survey *signa* more generally – the article is still a reference point for any attempt to make sense of these *supernomina*.<sup>6</sup>

In an onomastic sideswipe in the same piece, Cameron also took aim at those who had attempted to identify the addressee of an elaborate poetic request for some African pomegranates which (somewhat anomalously) survives amongst the works of Avienius.<sup>7</sup> Under the title *RVFVS FESTUS AVIENIUS .VC. FLAVIANO MYRMEICO .VC. SVO SALVTEM*, follow thirty-one (often rather obscure) lines (*Avien. Carm. ad Flav.* 1-31):

(I.1-11) Qua uenit Ausonias austro duce Poenus ad oras, / Si iam forte tuus Libyca rate misit  
agellus / Punica mala tibi Tyrrhenum uecta per aequor, / Quaeso aliquid nostris gustatibus  
inde relaxes. (5) Sic tua cuncta ratis plenis secet aequora uelis, / Spumanti cum longa trahit

<sup>2</sup> See *PLRE* 'Festus 12', (336-337) (correct in its essentials) with the other *testimonia* in Cameron 1995; the classic treatment of the poet by Matthews 1967, still repays study. The inscription from Bulla Regia was finally published in *AE* 2002, 1676. The statue base from Athens was re-edited as *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 13274. There, Sironen (the editor) attempts to revive the identification of the honorand with Festus the historian (*PLRE* 'Festus 3' (334-335)), and thus dates the inscription to after 372, but that Festus was proconsul of Asia, not Achaëa, and there is no reason to associate him with the inscription (*cf.* Dorfbauer 2012, 267).

<sup>3</sup> *cf.* Cameron 1970, v.

<sup>4</sup> To see how common basic misunderstandings of late-Roman onomastics were until relatively recently, one has only to examine some of the family connections which *PLRE* deduces on solely onomastic grounds: *e.g.* its attempt, 50, to suggest one Amantia might be related to Amantius (cos. 345) (the name was common – Kajanto 1965, 255 found 41 Amantii/-ae) or, 769-770, its enthusiasm for suggesting that bearers of the ubiquitous name Romanus were identical or related (Kajanto 1965, 182 found 585 people called Romanus/-a).

<sup>5</sup> Cameron 1985 and 1988.

<sup>6</sup> Subsequent important studies include Salway 1994, 136-137, Salomies 2012, Tantillo 2010, 201-203 (with particular attention to Lepcis Magna, where inscribed *signa* were unusually common), and *idem* 2014.

<sup>7</sup> The poem is occasionally identified (*e.g.* Reeve 1983, 19) as the preface to Avienius' other works, which is not obviously the case. Soubiran 2003, 29 and n. 1 tentatively suggests that the poem survived because the archetype of our manuscripts of Avienius was a presentation copy for Flavianus, at the head of which stood this poem. It seems more likely to me that the (mutilated) archetype of our manuscripts included a selection of Avienius' occasional poems, of which only this has survived.

uestigia sulco, / Romuleique Phari fauces illaesa relinquat: / Sit licet illa ratis, quam miserit  
 alta Corinthos, / †Adria consurgente notus†<sup>8</sup> qua prospicit aestus, / (10) Quamue suis opibus  
 cumularit Hiberia diues, / Soluerit aut Libyco quam laetus nauita portu.

(II.12-19) Sed forsán, quae sint, quae poscam, mala, requiras. / Illa precor mittas, spisso  
 quibus arta cohaeret / Granorum fetura situ, castrisque sedentes / (15) Vt quaedam turmae  
 socio latus agmine quadrant / Multiplicemque trahunt per mutua uellera pallam, / Vnde ligant  
 teneros examina flammea casses. (18) Tunc ne pressa graui sub pondere grana liquescant, /  
 Diuisere domos et pondera partibus aequant.

(III.20-31) Haec ut, amice, petam, cogunt fastidia longis / Nata malis et quod penitus fellitus,  
 amarans / Ora, sapor nil dulce meo sinit esse palato. / Horum igitur suco forsán fastidia  
 soluens / Ad solitas reuocer mensis redeuntibus escas. (25) Nec tantum miseri uidear  
 possessor agelli, / Vt genus hoc arbor nullo mihi floreat horto: / Nascitur ex multis onerans  
 sua brachia pomis, / Sed grauis austerum fert sucus ad ora saporem. / Illa autem, Libycas quae  
 se sustollit ad oras, / (30) Mitescit meliore solo caelique tepentis / Nutrimenta trahens suco se  
 nectaris implet.

(I.1-11) If, by any chance, your small estate has sent on an African ship, by that route on  
 which the Carthaginian (the south wind leading him) comes to the shores of Italy,  
 Carthaginian apples, carried to you through the Tyrrhenian Sea, I ask that you give up a few  
 of them to satisfy my appetite. May thus your ship, its sails full, carve through every sea, as it  
 leaves in its foaming wake a long trail; and may it, unharmed, leave behind the straits of the  
 Romuleian lighthouse: although that ship may be one sent by lofty Corinth, from where ... one  
 can see the waves of the Adriatic, or, if you please, one which fertile Iberia has piled high  
 with its riches, or the sailor, rejoicing, has cut free from its African mooring.

(II.12-19) But perhaps you wonder what sort of apples I am asking for? Send those, I pray  
 you, to which cling close-packed young seeds in a narrow space, and which, like some  
 squadrons resting in their camp, square their flank on the next column and spin a shifting  
 garment from intertwined wools, from which their flame-red multitudes bind delicate webs.  
 Then, lest the seeds, squeezed under a heavy weight, should give off liquid, they have divided  
 their homes and made equal their weight to their position.

(III.20-31) That I should seek these, o friend, disgust born of long sickness compels me and  
 because a taste steeped in gall inside me, which makes my mouth bitter, allows nothing to  
 seem sweet to my palate. Therefore, perhaps dissolving that disgust by the juice of these  
 fruits, I may be called back to my usual fare on the tables returning. And so I may not seem  
 the owner of so poor a little estate, that no tree of this sort blossoms in my garden: well, it  
 grows, weighing down its arms by the number of its fruits, but its heavy juice conveys a harsh  
 taste to my mouth. That sort, however, which raises itself on the shores of Africa, grows  
 mellow by the better quality of the soil and drawing sustenance from the warm air, fills itself  
 with juice like nectar.

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<sup>8</sup> This is the reading of the 1488 *editio princeps* (the sole source of the text). Holder 1887, 1 prints *Adriacos surgente noto* (Barth's conjecture), but it is far from clear what that might mean (Franzoi 200, 291 offers 'al sorgere del noto', but that is almost equally opaque). The general idea must be that from Corinth, you can see the waves of some sea, probably the Adriatic. I have wondered about *surgente nutu* (as in, moving the head up).

These verses, rich in allusion to earlier poets, have never attracted very much attention.<sup>9</sup> Before Cameron's intervention, however, occasional attempts had been made to identify 'Myrmeicus' (a senator, judging by the *u(ir) c(larissimus)* of the poem's inscription) with one of the celebrated Nicomachi Flaviani, scions of an aristocratic dynasty of the late-fourth to early-fifth centuries.<sup>10</sup> Cameron pointed out that both the elder and the younger Nicomachus were always referred to as (at least) Flavianus: that was their 'diacritic', their individuating and most significant name.<sup>11</sup> In late-Roman names, the diacritic almost always came last, so it would have been extremely anomalous for either Flavianus to have had a name which followed it: Myrmeicus (for that must be his name) was 'an otherwise unknown (and undatable) resident of N. Africa'.<sup>12</sup>

Cameron was surely right that the poem's addressee was not one of the Nicomachi. As he also pointed out, even the elder Nicomachus Flavianus, born in 334, was at least generation younger than Avienius, the bulk of whose career in government service and writing should be placed in the 330s, 340s, and early 350s, and whose birth cannot, therefore, have fallen much after 300.<sup>13</sup> While it would just have been possible for the aged poet and young senator to have corresponded, it seems rather unlikely and nothing suggests Nichomachus Flavianus had any special African connections before he was the *uicarius* of the region in the 370s.<sup>14</sup> If anything at all can be squeezed from them, then the poem's playful tone and rather embarrassing topic suggest that Avienius and his correspondent were friends of long standing, not separated by a gulf of age and experience. Yet, correct as it obviously is on this point, Cameron's solution has left us with an individual who is something of an onomastic puzzle. In the fourth century, most Romans of any elevated social status bore a series of names that, while still obviously related to the classical categories of *praenomen*, *nomen*, and *cognomen*, were used with rather greater fluidity to commemorate a variety of family connections.<sup>15</sup> The last of these names – the diacritic – was the one they always used, but they generally went by it and one other name placed before it. So, Sex(tus) Claudius Petronius Probus (cos. 371), the great panjandrum of the

<sup>9</sup> See, however, the careful commentary of Franzoi 2001.

<sup>10</sup> *PLRE* 'Flavianus 14' (345-347), 'the younger', and 'Flavianus 15' (347-349), 'the elder', his father. Monceaux 1887, 194, and Garroni 1916, 128 suggested the elder Nicomachus. Other identifications have been made: Seagraves 1979, 469 and n. 6, favoured *PLRE* '...lius Flavianus 11' (344), proconsul of Africa in 357 (also canvassed by Monceaux and Garroni, though the latter dated him to 355).

<sup>11</sup> Cameron 1995, 257-258. It is of course possible for the diacritic and the most significant name to be different, as in earlier Roman usage where the *praenomen* was the individuating name, but (because of the small number of *praenomina*) it was the *nomen* which was significant and one really needed both to certainly identify a person (Salway 1994, 125-126). In late-Roman usage the diacritic was (generally) also the most significant name.

<sup>12</sup> Cameron 1995, 257, where *n.b.* Cameron refers to him as 'Myrmeicus', *cf.* *PLRE* (iv, 'persons are entered under their last names, which they commonly used') which lists him under M as 'Flavianus Myrmeicus' (614). For the diacritic as the last name, see Cameron 1985, 172-173; there are a very small number of known exceptions. It now seems to be generally accepted that 'Myrmeicus' cannot be identified (see *e.g.* Dorfbauer 2012, 265).

<sup>13</sup> Cameron 1995, 257. While the terminal dates of Avienius' life are unknown, the evidence strongly suggests his career belongs to the 330s and his literary activity to the 340s and early 350s: Dorfbauer 2012 is the most recent discussion, with a chronological summary on 271.

<sup>14</sup> When he became *patronus* of Lepcis Magna (*IRT* 475).

<sup>15</sup> On late-Roman names in general, see Salway 1994, 137 *ff.*, Cameron 1985, Salomies 2012.

later-fourth century, would have answered to Probus and that is how he is addressed in laws issued to him, but when the *Veneti adque Histri peculiaries eius* honoured him with a statue at Rome, they called him Petronius Probus.<sup>16</sup> It is that combination of names that would suggest his connection to Petronius Probinus (cos. 341), his father, and Petronius Probianus (cos. 322), his grandfather, even if we did not have an inscription from Verona which spelt it out for us.<sup>17</sup> Encountering a late-Roman individual called ‘Flavianus Myrmeicus’, one would naturally think that his diacritic was Myrmeicus and that Flavianus was a family name of some sort: his father was perhaps a Flavianus Musca, a variation on a creepy-crawly theme (μύρμηξ, ‘ant’, *musca*, ‘fly’).<sup>18</sup>

Myrmeicus, however, is a very curious name indeed. Jean Soubiran, the editor of Avienius’ adaptation of the *Phaenomena* of Aratus, described it, with some understatement, as ‘rarissime’.<sup>19</sup> In truth, the name is not so much very rare as completely otherwise unattested: in all the vast mass of evidence for the ancient world, not a single other person seems to have been called ‘Myrmeicus’, Μύρμεικος, or any plausible orthographic variant (in Latin or Greek) of those names.<sup>20</sup> There was a diacritical name ‘Myrmex’ (Μύρμηξ in Greek – both third declension), which found literary immortality in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, but even that was vanishingly rare in the real world and generally borne by slaves, not senators.<sup>21</sup> In fact, not only would ‘Myrmeicus’ or Μύρμεικος be a *hapax*, it would be a rarity among onomastic rarities. Almost no Latin names seem to have authentically ended *-eicus/-eica*, nor were those endings common as variant spellings for names terminating (for instance) in *-icus/-ica*.<sup>22</sup> A careful search can find in inscriptions from the Latin-speaking regions of the Empire a few stray counterexamples to such a judgement: an L. Oppius P. f. Trabeicus at Nepi in southern Etruria, for instance.<sup>23</sup> Such names were, however, extremely unusual:

<sup>16</sup> *CIL* 6.1756. *PLRE*, ‘Probus 5’ (736-740) collects the evidence, but see in general Cameron 1985, 171-177.

<sup>17</sup> *CIL* 5.3344. It is worth noting that the family clearly regarded both what in a slightly earlier era would have been diacritic *cognomina* in Prob- and the *nomen gentile* Petronius as markers of heredity.

<sup>18</sup> For *Musca* as a *cognomen*, see Kajanto 1965, 333.

<sup>19</sup> Soubiran 2003, 9.

<sup>20</sup> One cannot, of course, prove a negative, but the name (and plausible orthographic variants like Myrmicus, Murmecus, or Μύρμηκος) has no entry in Preisigke 1922, Kajanto 1965, Foraboschi 1967-71, Mócsy 1983, Solin and Salomies 1994, *OPEL* III, Solin 2003, the *LGPN*, or Dana 2014, nor have I been able to find it in numerous searches of the Clauss/Slaby database, *PHI*, or *papyri.info*.

<sup>21</sup> Solin 2003, ii, 1144 (two freedmen and one slave out of five instances). To Solin’s examples, add in Italy an L. Decimus Myrmex at Florence (*CIL* 11.6712 (143)), C. Cossutius C. f. Myrmex, an aedile from Nemi (*CIL* 14.2219), and an Αἰμύλιος Μύρμαξ from Lipari (*I. Lipara* 651). A search of *papyri.info* finds no Μύρμηκες after 24 B.C. (*POxy.* 78.5165). *LGPN* lists rather more Μύρμηκες (from the epigraphic evidence), but from late antiquity only two (*LGPN* IV, 244, *CIRB* 738 (third- or fourth-century; Panticapaeum in the Cimmerian Bosphorus), 1288 (c. 225-250; Tanais in Scythia)).

<sup>22</sup> Nothing in Kajanto 1965, *PLRE*, Solin and Salomies 1994; vanishingly rare in *OPEL* I-IV. Tracing orthographic variants is more difficult than finding names, but *OPEL* breaks down its entries into the various forms a particular name takes (e.g. under the headword ‘Quintillus’ (IV, 19) there are entries for both ‘Quintilus’ and ‘Quintillus’, *i.a.*), so the judgement is reasonably secure.

<sup>23</sup> *CIL* 11.3222.

rarities derived from other tongues, local dialectical oddities, or possibly just spelling mistakes.<sup>24</sup> In Greek, names ending in -ηικός or -εικός were equally rare.<sup>25</sup> In fact, they seem to crop up only where a name from another language, with some feature that made it difficult to render into Greek, had to be carved on some inscription. ‘Antiquus’, for instance, presented particular problems and in a scattering of inscriptions it is found as Ἀντεικός, but the number of such names is extremely small.<sup>26</sup> Nor (with one important caveat) do we often find -εικός as a variant spelling for names which more normally ended -ικός.<sup>27</sup> It is true that there was a significant exception to this general statement, one which relates to names which usually ended in in -νικός (from νίκη, ‘victory’). These were, in both inscriptions and the papyri, frequently written -νεικός: Ἀνδρόνεικός for Ἀνδρόνικος or Καλλίνεικός for Καλλίνικος are common examples.<sup>28</sup> That, however, does little to salvage the putative names Myrmeicus or Μύρμεικος which obviously have nothing to do with victory. ‘Myrmeicus’, it is fair to say, is a very shadowy name indeed.

Names are strange things, one might riposte: orthography was variable and we should be wary of assuming that because something is rare, it must be wrong. It is not merely the case, however, that the recipient of Avienius’ poem has a unique diacritic: the two names he bears are rather unsatisfactory as a pairing. Flavianus, a *cognomen* formed from the *nomen gentilicium* Flavius and originally bestowed on those adopted or freed by its bearers, was a common Roman name.<sup>29</sup> As aristocratic names expanded in the course of imperial history, it was not unheard of for what had originally been diacritic *cognomina* to be subsumed into a name as a way of commemorating the

<sup>24</sup> In the volumes of *OPEL*, there is only ‘Beieicus’ (I, 117 = *IMS* 2.317, plausibly diagnosed as an error for ‘Bellicus’), ‘Daeicus’ (II, 91 = *ILJ* 2836), ‘Deica’ (II, 96 = *CIL* 5.4880), and ‘Epeicus’ (II, 119 = *Hispania Antiqua Epigraphica* 992).

<sup>25</sup> A search of the *LGPN* database and the Trismegistos People database offers nothing for -ηικός, *PHI* only a Κετέων Θρηικός (*IEph* 1176). For -εικός, *LGPN* has Ἀρέϊκος (III.b, 49; one rather doubtful example of 237-230 BC, a more secure one of the fifth century BC) and Μάλεικος (III.b, 268, 212 BC) and Trismegistos People Ἡραεϊκος (*CPR* 24.15, l. 20; for Ἡραισκος), Κυρειακός (*OEleph. DAIK* 301, l. 7; for Κυρικός), and Πολυντειακός (*PMich.* 4.224, col. 16, l. 624, col. 20, l. 829; for Πολύνδικος).

<sup>26</sup> This conclusion is based on a search of *PHI*, so may be imperfect in detail, but is unlikely to be incorrect in general. Antiquus: *IvO* 102, 110; *IGBulg* 2.606 (Ἀντεικός), *IK* 49.14 (Ἀντε[ι]κός). Other examples: Σείμεικος (*CIRB* 1287 from Tanais), Φρεϊκος (*IK* 65.261 from Naqsh-i Rostam near Persepolis A.D. 260-262) satrap of Γουε-αντιοχ-σαβωρ (Weh-Andiōk-Šābuhr or Gondēšāpur, see Shapur Shahbazi, Richter-Bernburg, 2012), Νομ]ειακός (*IC* 1.xxiii.17; Phaistos, second or third century A.D.).

<sup>27</sup> A search of the *LGPN* database gives seven names terminating in -ικός (excluding those ending -νικός) with more than fifty instances: Ἀττικός (287), Εὔδικος (94), Ζωτικός (92), Ἀριστόδικος (82), Ἀσιατικός (75), Ποντικός (70), and Εὐθύδικος (59). I have found only one Ἀσιατείκη (*SEG* 38.1229) and a fragmentary Εὐθύδεικος (*MDAI(A)* 67, 185.400).

<sup>28</sup> So, the Trismegistos People database lists 193 instances of Ἀνδρόνικος against 21 of Ἀνδρόνεικός (TM nam\_ID 2036) and 174 instances of Καλλίνικος against 27 of Καλλίνεικός (TM nam\_ID 3526). A search of *PHI* for Ἀνδρονεικ- vs Ἀνδρονικ- and Καλλινεικ- vs Καλλινικ- suggests that the proportion of -νεικός relative to -νικός is higher in the epigraphic record than the papyri, though the latter still predominates.

<sup>29</sup> For the Flavianus as a common diacritic, see Kajanto 1965, 35, 146. *PLRE*, 342-349, lists 20 individuals who were called Flavianus/a.

bearer's relationship to someone.<sup>30</sup> The full name of the consul of 343 was M. Maecius Memmius Furius Baburius Caecilianus Placidus: Placidus to his friends, Furius Placidus in official usage.<sup>31</sup> He was very probably descended from C. Memmius Caecilianus Placidus, a suffect consul in the mid-third century, who was in turn likely a descendant (the son?) of M. Memmius Caecilianus a senator from Gigthis.<sup>32</sup> What had started as a *cognomen* had gradually become part of a large package of names which advertised an illustrious ancestry. However, perhaps because it was so common a name, this happened to Flavianus only very rarely: 'Myrmeicus' would be the only individual in *PLRE* I to bear the name who did not use it as his diacritic.<sup>33</sup> In other words, a Flavianus Myrmeicus would be unusual twice over: it is very hard to believe that those appellations, in that order, were his names.

Is there any alternative? An elegant solution to the puzzle would be to suppose that 'Myrmeicus' is not the name of Avienius' friend, but his *signum*: Myrmeicius. *Signa*, sometimes punning, often Greek appellations which ended in *-ius*, were a subset of what Iiro Kajanto, the great Finnish scholar of Roman onomastics, called *supernomina*: a variety of nickname.<sup>34</sup> They were not quite formal enough for an emperor to use when he addressed a law to some bureaucrat, but were more than a moment's passing jest, fit to be carved on honorific inscriptions and used in literary dedications.<sup>35</sup> It is a simple emendation to make the onomastic prodigy 'Flavianus Myrmeicus' into the much more respectable Flavianus (*signo*) Myrmeicius and it makes a good deal of sense, for reasons partly textual and partly contextual. Let us start with the text of the poem's inscription, which there is no reason to think is anything but original.<sup>36</sup> This gives Avienius' name with his *signum* as an undifferentiated part of it and mere symmetry might have made us wonder about *Rufius Festus Auienius u.c. Flauiano Myrmeico u.c. suo salutem*. Knowing, as we now do, that the poet's name was

<sup>30</sup> The (sometimes very) expansive aristocratic names which began to appear in the high empire are pithily explicated by Salway 1994, 131-133. Salomies 2012, 20 collects some fourth-century examples (in the section 'N+C+C')

<sup>31</sup> *PLRE* 'Placidus 2' (705-706).

<sup>32</sup> *PLRE* 'Placidus 3' (707); *PIR*<sup>2</sup> M.459 (V.1, 247).

<sup>33</sup> In *PLRE*, 'Flaviana .... na' (1000), can be discounted: *CIL* 6.37066 (the only evidence for her) is a fragment with the text on two lines and there is no reason to assume that the surviving letters are part of the same name. *OPEL* II, 144 lists two instances of Flavianus used as a *nomen*: *CIL* 5.2629 (an L. Flavianus M(ani) I(ibertus) Adrastus) and Leber 1972, no. 73 (T. Flavianus Aelianus, a *homerista*, in error, for the inscription in fact reads T. Flavius Aelianus – see Heger 1980).

<sup>34</sup> Modern terminology can be confusing and ancient practice varied. Kajanto 1967, 42-90 discussed three different sorts of *supernomen* in his section on *signa*: plural forms/club names (not always distinguishable), '*signa* proper' (distinct from *agnomina*, 52), and 'detached *signa*', generally found on inscriptions and written above or below the main body of the text. Detached *signa*, which seem to have come into being in the late-second century and were much more common amongst the Roman elite than other forms of nickname (which tended to be a more humble phenomenon) (57-58), are best-attested in the surviving evidence (42). When historians of late antiquity talk about *signa*, they normally mean the detached *signa* and (by extension) names ending in *-ius* which individuals bore in addition to their diacritic (e.g. Salway 1994, 136-137; Cameron 1995, *passim*) and that is how I use the term.

<sup>35</sup> For epigraphic *signa*, see Kajanto 1967, 57 *ff. passim*. For their use in literature, see e.g. Firm. *Math.* 1.1.pr. addressing his patron Lollianus *signo* Mavortius.

<sup>36</sup> As Cameron 1995, 258 says, 'the heading to the verse epistle about pomegranates gives every appearance of being original'.

(Postumius Rufius) Festus *signo* Avienius, we would almost expect whatever ‘name’ came after Flavianus to be a sobriquet of some sort. If we then examine the components of the name, we find further confirmation. Myrmecius, a word ending in *-ius* with an obviously Greek root (*cf.* μύρμηξ, an ant), has all the hallmarks of a *signum*. That would neatly explain why it is otherwise unattested as a name of any sort, for we are much less well informed about *signa* (indeed, about every sort of nickname) than we are about names more generally, and they tended to be unique: that was, presumably, part of their point.<sup>37</sup> The *signum* of M. Nummius Albinus (cos. 345), Triturrius, must have meant something to his friends or family, but its significance is quite mysterious to us.<sup>38</sup> So, where an otherwise unattested diacritic is rather suspicious, an otherwise unattested *signum* is exactly what we would expect. If Myrmecius is a *signum*, then Flavianus is the diacritical name of Avienius’ friend. That too would make a good deal of sense, for, as we have seen, the name was almost always a diacritic. It was also particularly common in Africa and borne by those who held office there in the late-third and fourth centuries with a frequency which is almost suspicious.<sup>39</sup>

It is not merely the case that each element of the name Flavianus (*signo*) Myrmecius works on its own: the combination also fits our knowledge of late-Roman names more generally. It was explained above that fourth-century individuals were generally referred to by at least their diacritic, which was normally their last name. That rule almost always holds, but individuals with *signa* present some exceptions to it, for their nicknames could be combined with the diacritical name (and other *nomina*) or used in their place with a degree of flexibility.<sup>40</sup> In literary contexts, *signa* were sometimes used as a substitute for the diacritic. So, in the *Res gestae* Ammianus always speaks of the plotting praetorian prefect whose full name was C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus *signo* Lampadius as plain old Lampadius.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, the most famous of the Christian apologists, one L(ucius) Caelius Firmianus,

<sup>37</sup> Some seem to have been passed down within families (see *PLRE*, ‘T. Fl. Frontinus *signo* Heraclius 5’ (374), ‘T. Fl. Vibianus *signo* Heraclius 2’ (956), ‘T. Fl. Vibianus *signo* Heraclius 1’ (956), all from Lepcis, all related), and some (Gregorius and Eusebius *e.g.*, see Kajanto 1967, 59, 81-82) were more frequent than others, but most of the instances which Kajanto 1967, 76-90 catalogues are attested in only one (or at most two) cases.

<sup>38</sup> *PLRE* ‘Albinus 13’ (37); was his conversation a grinding experience? A C. Iulius Victorinus from Theveste in Africa Proconsularis also had this *signum* (*CIL* 8.1951; the reading should probably be *triturri* not *triturrii*, judging by an image of the inscription [http://cil.bbaw.de/dateien/cil\\_view.php?KO=KO0002275](http://cil.bbaw.de/dateien/cil_view.php?KO=KO0002275)). *cf.* Kajanto 1967, 89; 1965, 347, where he suggests derivation from a word for a building. This seems obvious, though a search of Brepols’ *Cross Database Search Tool* reveals no instances of *turris* or *turrius* (or obvious variants like *turrit-us/-a*) with a prefix to the end of late antiquity. There was also a place called Triturrita, near Pisa (*Rut. Nam.* 1.527).

<sup>39</sup> Kajanto 1965, 146 records that 51 of 161 individuals in *CIL* with the name are found in Africa. *PLRE*: ‘Magnius Asper Flavianus 5’ (343), *praeses* of Tripolitania; ‘...cius Flavianus 6’ (344), *praeses* of Byzacena under the tetrarchy; ‘M. Cocceius Anicius Faustus Flavianus 8’ (344), patron of Cirta under Decius; ‘Flavius Flavianus 9’ (344), *praeses* of Numidia under the tetrarchy; ‘...lius Flavianus 11’ *proconsul Africae* in 357; ‘Lucius Aemilius Metropius Flavianus 12’ (345), *consularis* of Numidia in 379/383; ‘Munatius Flavianus 13’ (345), a landowner in Numidia; ‘Septimius Flavianus 16’ (349), *praeses* of Mauretania Sitifensis under Constantine; ‘Vibius Flavianus 17’ (349), *praeses* of Byzacena.

<sup>40</sup> *Signa* were also, of course, used as a detached appellation (in the genitive?) on honorific inscriptions and epitaphs, with the subject’s full name in the main inscription (Kajanto 1965, 66 *ff.*).

<sup>41</sup> Lampadius, see the evidence gathered in *PLRE* ‘Volusianus 5’ (978-980).



became known to posterity almost exclusively by his *signum*: Lactantius.<sup>42</sup> Alternatively, an author might refer to the same individual by both his diacritic and his *signum* at different points in the same work, perhaps merely as an onomastic sort of elegant variation: in his astrological handbook, the *Mathesis*, Firmicus Maternus called his patron both Lollianus (his diacritic) and Mavortius (his *signum*), but never both together.<sup>43</sup> Combination of *nomina* and *signum* was also an authentic, if occasional, feature of late-antique onomastics and the *signum* (as in the poem's inscription) was generally placed after the diacritic.<sup>44</sup> Aelius Festus *signo* Aphthonius, a writer on metre, and the poet Publilius Optatianus *signo* Porfyrius went, on occasion, by Aelius Festus Aphthonius and Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius.<sup>45</sup> In a similar fashion, the list of *praefecti urbis* in the *Chronography of 354* refers to the prefect of 319-323 as Valerius Maximus Basilius (Basilius was his *signum*, Maximus his diacritic) and the consul of 355 (and Firmicus' friend) as Fl. Lollianus Mavortius.<sup>46</sup>

It is true that, judging by the surviving evidence, it was not that common for individuals to go by just their diacritic and their *signum* (Flavianus Myrmecius, *e.g.*) as a shortened form of their name. There is, however, much we do not understand about how, when, and in what combinations *signa* were used and it was certainly not unheard of for one to be combined with the diacritic as a shortened form of reference. The emperor Diocletian, who had taken the *signum* 'Iovius' as part of the Tetrarchic experiment in Herculian and Iovian imperial 'families', is called 'Iovius Diocletianus' on one contemporary bronze medallion.<sup>47</sup> His colleague Maximian, who had taken the parallel *signum* 'Herculius', crops up frequently in the sources as both Herculius Maximianus and Maximianus Herculius.<sup>48</sup> Maximin Daia, a member of Diocletian's 'Iovian' dynasty and so *signo* Iovius, is called Ἰόβιος Μαξιμίτζινος in what is apparently a copy of an imperial letter and in one inscription, while his

<sup>42</sup> In general on his name, see Wlosok 1993, 429-430. That Lactantius was indeed his *signum* is confirmed by Jerome (Hier. *vir. ill.* 80: *Firmianus, qui et Lactantius*). In late antiquity, only Jerome regularly refers to Lactantius as Firmianus (*e.g.* Hier. *in Eccles.* 10.2, 1. 37).

<sup>43</sup> Lollianus: *Math.* 1.pr.8. Mavortius: *Math.* 1.pr.1. Ammianus also calls Firmicus' patron both Lollianus (Amm. 15.8.17) and Mavortius (Amm. 16.8.5).

<sup>44</sup> *cf.* Salomies 2012, 13-24, who presents an extremely useful survey of polyonomous senators with *signa* or names (other than *gentilicia*) ending in *-ius*, sensitive to the ways in which they could be combined and to the fluidity of actual practice. While rightly cautious, he seems to me at times to conflate three distinct (though obviously related) phenomena: 1) *signa*, which were occasionally (and flexibly) combined with names, but were clearly distinct from an individual's diacritic (characteristic of the early- to mid-fourth century) 2) Names, ending in *-ius*, plausibly derived from *signa*, but otherwise functioning like normal diacritics (characteristic of the late-fourth century, at least amongst senators; *pace* Salomies, 19 it seems to me slightly confusing to refer to these as *signa*) 3) The incorporation of 2 into an individual's nomenclature as names other than the diacritic, signalling some family connection (again, generally a later phenomenon amongst senators).

<sup>45</sup> *PLRE*: Aelius Festus *signo* Aphthonius 6 (335); 'Optatianus 3' (649). For their names in these forms see *Grammatici latini: Scriptores artis metricae* (ed. Keil), 173 for Festus, the *versus intextus* of Opt. Porf. *Carm.* 21 (that this is the *versus intextus* proves the name's form is not a fluke of transmission).

<sup>46</sup> *Chron. 354 s.a.* 319, 342 (ed. Mommsen, *Chronica Minora* I, 67). For the individuals concerned, see *PLRE* 'Lollianus 5' (512-514), 'Maximus 48' (590).

<sup>47</sup> Gneecchi 1912, 124. For these imperial *signa*, see Salway 1994, 139; Rees 2005.

<sup>48</sup> *e.g.* Eutr. 10.2.3 (Maximianus Herculius), *Origo Const.* 1.1 (Herculius Maximianus), Gneecchi 1912, 124 (Herculius Maximianus).

fellow-dynast and mortal foe Licinius is honoured on one inscription as Iovius Licinius.<sup>49</sup> Julian's praetorian prefect, Saturninus Secundus *signo* Salutius, is once called Secundus Salutius by Ammianus.<sup>50</sup> L. Aradius Valerius Proculus *signo* Populonium went by Populonium Proculus in the papyri for his consulship, while (if Benet Salway's brilliant reconstruction is correct) Ionius Iulianus (cos. 325) was really a Iulianus *signo* Ionius.<sup>51</sup> A statue of Iunius Bassus *signo* Theotecnius, erected at Falerii Novi in 364 (after his death), calls him Theotecnius Bassus at its head.<sup>52</sup> In the manuscripts of Lactantius' *Divinae institutiones*, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the work circulated under the name 'Firmianus Lactantius', *i.e.* his diacritic and his *signum*.<sup>53</sup> Flavianus Myrmecius looks rather at home in such company.

The idea that Myrmecius is a *signum* also suits the limited amount of information we have about the social context of this poetic epistle. Flavianus was a senator and *signa*, especially Greek *signa*, were common in senatorial circles. From the mid-fourth century alone, one might mention, in addition to Basilius, L. Aurelius Avianus Symmachus *signo* Phosphorius, prefects of Rome in the 360s, or Aconius Catullinus *signo* Philomathius (cos. 349).<sup>54</sup> *Signa* were also common in literary circles: Avienius and Porfyrius the poets, Aphthonius and Lactantius the writers, all (as we saw above) had them. Flavianus, a senator with enough interest in literature for Avienius to send him his elaborate poem, sits at the intersection of two groups in which *signa* were reasonably common: he is exactly the sort of person we might expect to have had a *signum* and Myrmecius is exactly the sort of *signum* we might expect him to have had. What might his nickname have meant? In analysing *signa*, indeed in analysing nicknames more generally, it is worth keeping in mind that they were inherently contextual and that we are almost always ignorant of their origin: we should be suitably cautious about supposing that we 'get' their meaning.<sup>55</sup> Still, we can perhaps lay out a very general framework for this *signum*'s significance. In Greek, a μύρμηξ was an ant and almost all words related to it (generally beginning μύρμηκ-, which was invariably rendered myrmec- in Latin) had something to do

<sup>49</sup> Eus, *H.E.* 9.9a.4, *IK* 21.310; *CIL* 9.6026.

<sup>50</sup> Amm. 21.3.1 (*cf.* Cameron 1995, 259).

<sup>51</sup> Salway 2008, 289. He suggests that there are no parallels for Ionius as *nomen gentile*, and it is true that (*e.g.*) *OPEL* II lists none. There are, however, scattered inscriptions which might suggest it was a very rare one (*CIL* 5.5743, an M. Ionius Virianus, 8804, seemingly a Ionius Faber, though the inscription is fragmentary), something perhaps supported by the otherwise very consistent orthography of the common *nomen* Iunius (*OPEL* II, 208).

<sup>52</sup> *AE* 1963, 203. *PLRE* 'Bassus 15' (155).

<sup>53</sup> See Heck, Wlosok 2005, xxiv-xxviii.

<sup>54</sup> *PLRE* 'Symmachus 3' (863-865), 'Catullinus 3' (187-188). Salway 2008, 290 n. 84 suggests his *signum* was in fact Philematius (from φίλημα, a kiss) on the authority of Masson 1987, for which there are some parallels (*e.g.* *PLRE* 'Philematius' (694), though that was clearly the man's diacritic, not his *signum*). However, the only source for the *signum*, the list of *praefecti urbis Romae* in the *Chronography of 354* (ed. Mommsen, 68), gives the *signum* as Philomathius (there was a Greek adjective and a rare name Φιλομαθής (*LGPNI* I, 468 (2), V.A, 452 (2); *cf.* *CIL* 6.4669 for an L. Valerius Philomates)), which form should probably be favoured.

<sup>55</sup> As Kajanto 1967 (21 *e.g.*) often pointed out.

with ants.<sup>56</sup> While the sobriquet ‘ant-man’ may look rather odd, perhaps even rude, to modern eyes, quite a few Latin *cognomina* were derived from the names of what Kajanto delicately called ‘insects and other lower animals’.<sup>57</sup> No *signa* formed from insect names are attested, but a few seem to have been derived from words for various plants and animals: Bubalius (βούβαλις or βούβαλος, an antelope or, just possibly, a buffalo), Cissius (κισσός, ivy), Anthius (ἄνθος, flower), Frumentius (*frumentum*, grain), and Mulasius (perhaps *mula*, ‘mule’).<sup>58</sup> It is also worth remembering that the ant’s reputation in ancient literature was good: the arthropod was proverbial for its thrift and forethought.<sup>59</sup>

There are, however, other plausible explanations for Myrmecius. There was the character in Apuleius, for one thing, and some fourth-century individuals acquired literary nicknames: Aurelius Valerius Symmachus, consul in 330, had the *agnomen* Tullianus, presumably to reflect his skill in speechifying.<sup>60</sup> There was also a philosopher called Myrmex (mentioned by Diogenes Laërtius), a mythical girl named Myrmix (who stole the ploughshare from Athena and was turned into an ant as a result), and a Myrmex who lurks obscurely somewhere in the heroic age.<sup>61</sup> A number of *signa* were derived from the names of places, indicating (perhaps) the region in which an individual had been born or where they had significant property or interests.<sup>62</sup> In this connection, it is worth noting that, in antiquity, there was a πολίχτιον called Myrmecium (Μυρμήκιον) on the Kerch peninsula.<sup>63</sup> There is another place which offers a tantalising possibility. There are a number of small islands off the coast of Cyrenaica, and one of these, called Μύρμηξ, would seem to have been opposite the Pentapolis.<sup>64</sup> Given Flavianus’ evident African connections, one wonders about a possible link.<sup>65</sup> Wherever it was precisely, however, this Libyan island must have been pretty minute and there were other places

<sup>56</sup> The meaning could, however, travel quite far from the arthropodic, e.g. μυρμηκιά, ‘ant-hill’, for a throng of people or a type of wart (*LSJ* s.v.). Skin diseases, presumably by analogy to ant-bites, are a recurring theme and so it is unsurprising that the Greek word is also found in the Latin medical authors, e.g. Cels. 5.28 (in a general discussion of warts). Late-antique writers almost always make the word’s Greek origin explicit: e.g. Marcell. med. 34.100, Cassius Felix *De medicina* 12.20. One might also note μυρμήκιον, a type of spider which looked like an ant (e.g. Philum. *Ven.* 15.1, cf. Plin. *Nat.* 29.87).

<sup>57</sup> Kajanto 1965, 333.

<sup>58</sup> Kajanto 1967, 77, 78, 79, 82, 85.

<sup>59</sup> Hor. *Sat.* 1.1.33 e.g.

<sup>60</sup> See Cameron 1999, 480 ff.

<sup>61</sup> Myrmex 1: D.L. 2.11.113; cf. St. Byz. E.80. Myrmix: Serv. auct. *Aen.* 4.402. The identity of the other Myrmex was contested in antiquity: he was either the father of Ephyra wife of Epimetheus (St. Byz. K.161 – from Hecataeus (?), see *BNJ* ‘Hekataios of Miletos’ 1 fr. 120 (Pownall)) or the father of Melite, for whom was named the Attic deme (Harp. M.20, from Philochorus, cf. *BNJ* ‘Philochoros of Athens’ 328 fr. 27 (Jones)).

<sup>62</sup> Kajanto 1967, 65.

<sup>63</sup> Str. 7.4.5.

<sup>64</sup> Ptol. *Geog.* 4.4.14. There was also a promontory, mentioned by the *Periplus maris magni* (*Stad.* 10.10), which was somewhere along the Egyptian coast, but not seemingly far enough to be anywhere near Cyrenaica. It is not totally clear to me whether either of these was the same island as that which housed ‘the lighthouse Myrmex’ which Synesius of Cyrene (*Ep.* 5, ed. Garzya) passed on a voyage from Alexandria (τὸν Φάριον Μύρμηκα παρηλλάξαμεν). The conceit of the letter, however, is that they had not made much progress when they went by it (perhaps not even left the harbour), so it seems unlikely. It is possible that the very small size and obscurity of the place called ‘Myrmex’ which lay somewhere along the coast of Egypt or Libya caused its location to wander over time.

<sup>65</sup> It must be admitted that Flavianus’ African *milieu* was most likely rather further west, in Latin-speaking North Africa, rather than in the very different world of Cyrenaica.

which shared the name: a strait near Rhegium in Thrace, which separated a lake from the Sea of Marmara, and a sunken rock between Magnesia and Skiathos, for instance.<sup>66</sup> The point is less that we can confidently identify any of these options, from insects to islands, as the source of Flavianus' *signum* and more that it has lots of possible origins, all of which have parallels in more securely attested *signa*. There is, in short, quite a lot in favour of a Flavianus *signo* Myrmecius and almost nothing to be said against it.

Almost nothing, because there is of course the problem that the text, as transmitted, reads *Myrmeico* not *Myrmecio*. For Cameron in 1995, this was decisive: 'Nor, ending as it does in -us not -ius can [Myrmeicus] plausibly be identified as a signum'.<sup>67</sup> As we have seen, there are good arguments against the idea that 'Myrmeicus' can be a diacritical name, and emending it to Myrmecius is hardly very adventurous.<sup>68</sup> More importantly, Cameron's judgement puts rather a lot of weight on the shaky foundations of the text of Avienius. The poem on pomegranates survives only in the *editio princeps* of his works (Antonio de Strata, Venice, 1488).<sup>69</sup> This was (ultimately) based on a manuscript in Caroline minuscule and, judging by its almost total lack of punctuation and orthographic idiosyncrasy, aimed to reproduce its source text fairly faithfully: there are numerous errors.<sup>70</sup> It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that while the word in question was something like 'Myrmeicus', it would be unwise to stake too much on the relative position of the c, i, and e, being exactly right. These letters (in Caroline minuscule, all similar strokes with a varying amount of curvature on their right-hand side) were especially liable to be confused, all the more so when three of them were clustered in close proximity in a very unfamiliar word. It is not difficult to imagine them being mixed up in the course of transmission. In fact, unusually, we can show the word being mangled elsewhere. Myrmecium, the town on the Black Sea which we met above, features in the *Historia naturalis* of Pliny the Elder (IV.87). In the early manuscripts, its name is rendered correctly,

<sup>66</sup> Procop. *Aed.* 4.8.16; Hdt. 7.183.

<sup>67</sup> Cameron 1995, 257.

<sup>68</sup> From at least Burman 1759, 494 (lib.3, ep. 58) (there is a misprint in Holder 1887, xix, where 'p. 484' should be 'p. 494'), who seems first to have emended 'Myrmeicus' to 'Murmecius', until well into the nineteenth century (Despois, Saviot 1843, 286-287, 294, Monceaux 1887, 194), the latter form prevailed (Holder notes none of these variants in his apparatus). Burman based his emendation (carefully discussed *ad loc.*) on a suggestion of Thomas Reines ('Reinesius', 1587-1667), discussed at length in a letter (*Ep.* LXLIX) to Christopher Adam Rupert (1612-1647) (Reines 1660, 625 *ff.*). Reines identified Murmecius (which he had silently corrected) as a Greek *cognomen*, suggesting it was derived either from Flavianus' birthplace, or the place where he had his estates, perhaps 'Myrmece' (the lighthouse on an island in the Libyan Sea, perhaps where Flavianus' son was born when he was proconsul or *vicarius*) or Myrmecium (the Crimean town), located (he noted) in a region known for its rich agriculture.

<sup>69</sup> The edition (*USTC* 997338; *ISTC* ia01432000; *GW* no. 3131) was prepared by Victor Pisani on the basis of a copy of a (lost) manuscript made by Giorgio Valla: Soubiran 2003, 79-80 and Woestijne 1961, 15-17 provide useful summaries. It is unpaginated, but the poem is printed on sig. a4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> See Woestijne 1961, 9 n. 2, 15-17 (cataloguing errors in the *Descriptio orbis terrae*), Soubiran 2003, 80-82, esp. 80 n. 2 (mistakes in the *Phaenomena*).

without any significant variants, yet by the fifteenth century it had become ‘Mirinetium’.<sup>71</sup> Even if the name had reached the 1480s intact, that is no guarantee that the printers would have got it right. While they did their best with the unusual names they were trying to reproduce, they were not infallible: several examples of the incunable tell the reader *RVFI FFSTI AVIENII OPERA FINIVNT* at the end of the poet’s works (a stop-press correction was made at some stage in the course of printing the forme).<sup>72</sup> Myrmecius would have presented rather more problems than the simple, familiar Festus.

At some point in his career, the poet Postumius Rufius Festus *signo* Avienius, began to suffer from what sounds like a truly terrible case of indigestion. He wrote to a friend, who owned estates in Africa, asking him to procure some pomegranates to ease his condition: sound medical opinion held them to be the best cure for bilious stomachs.<sup>73</sup> That friend was one Flavianus, a senator who, like many of his peers, had taken a Greek *signum*: Myrmecius.<sup>74</sup> The bulk of currently-attested *signa* are revealed to us by inscriptions: set apart, above or below the main text, they are relatively easy to identify with some certainty.<sup>75</sup> *Signa* do crop up in other contexts, but they are much harder to spot and we often need epigraphic evidence to make the link between an individual referred to in one place by their *signum* and elsewhere by their names. Without, for instance, the inscription from Bulla Regia, which clearly gives Avienius’ *signum* as a *signum*, it is far from clear that anyone would have been able to solve the ‘riddle of Rufius Festus’.<sup>76</sup> Flavianus, whose nickname has been only imperfectly transmitted to us through manuscript and print, hints that other bearers of *signa* may lie cunningly concealed in the literary sources for the fourth century. By uncovering them, it may yet be possible to cast fresh light on problems of prosopography, perhaps even on late-Roman history more generally. Flavianus *signo* Myrmecius is thus revealed as the recipient of Avienius’ entreaty and is a small but

<sup>71</sup> No variants are noted by Zehnacker and Silberman 2015, 65. For Mirinetium, see Paris, BnF, lat. 6805 f. 67r ([ark:/12148/btv1b107221561](https://ark:/12148/btv1b107221561)). This was the basis (Ford 1999, 119) for the *editio princeps* (Venice, Johannes de Spira, 1469 – online, <https://archive.org/details/OEXV10R>, ISTC ip00786000), which reproduces the form.

<sup>72</sup> Le Havre BM RI 4° 8 has *FFSTI* (Neveu 2005, 75 (no. 74)), as does Masson 2654 ((Coq 2008, 60 (no.53)). N.B. also Boston Mass., Public Library Q. 405.93 (<https://archive.org/details/hiccodexauieniic00avie>). It is not impossible that there is an example of the incunable with a stop-press correction to *Myrmecio* in existence somewhere, though none of the examples which I have consulted revealed one.

<sup>73</sup> e.g. Gal. *Methodus medendi* 10.674k.

<sup>74</sup> The fact that Flavianus was a relatively common name makes any more precise identification very difficult. Identity with the Nicomachi is impossible: the younger was too young and if the elder had the *signum*, then it was ‘Flavianus’ (*IRT* 575, not included in *PLRE*); *n.b.* however that Q. Fabius Memmius Symmachus (his son-in-law) did not include one on a dedication to him (*CIL* 6.1782) where he did include his father’s (Eusebius) on the parallel inscription (*CIL* 6.1799). If Myrmecius were to be identified with a known senator called Flavianus then ‘...lius Flavianus 11’ (344), proconsul of Africa in the 350s, or (perhaps preferably) ‘Ulpius Flavianus 18’ (349), *consularis* of Aemilia and Liguria in 323, are candidates.

<sup>75</sup> A glance at the catalogue of *signa* in Kajanto 1967, 76-90 reveals that the great majority are attested by epigraphic evidence.

<sup>76</sup> cf. Seagraves 1979.

suggestive addition to the *corpus* of largely high-status individuals who had taken such nicknames, a late-antique phenomenon which still awaits a comprehensive explication.<sup>77</sup>

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