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SOME REMARKS ABOUT THE MORALITY OF ROMAN PROVINCIAL FUNERARY POETRY

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Abstract: The morality/view of life of the ordinary provincial Roman is hard to discern; for the most part we must rely on the more literary inscriptions. The funerary verse inscriptions provide considerable material, but not individualized wording: they consist mostly of well-known patterns. At the same time these patterns form regionally different structure types; hence they can throw light upon the funeral customs of the different regions. In Pannonia there were two main poem types: one of early Carnuntum, and one of Aquincum in the 3rd c. The differences between these communities in the way they thought about death are clearly visible. There were very few individualized poems referring to personal feelings: two such are analysed here in detail (TAq 769, TAq 512).

Keywords: verse inscriptions, funerary poetry, traditional patterns.

We have practically very little immediate information on the view of life of the Roman common people. Most we can know was handed down by the literature, but inevitably it shows a deformed picture (although not in a pejorative sense). Although we know a great number of immediate epigraphic relics, an enormous majority of them is of strictly technical nature which does not speak of the individual way of thinking at all – nevertheless the greater part of them does not refer to the common people, either. The inscriptions do not transmit individual *personal* feelings as a rule, and only the most eloquent ones mirror the general moral patterns of the society which were more or less required to feel from the individuals, unless we think it is a moral pattern, to which deity one must sacrifice in a certain situation, or in which circumstances it is suitable to erect a long-lasting sepulchral monument. Naturally they are not indifferent problems either, for example, examining the sepulchral monuments, we can deduce that it was strongly depending on the customs of the local communities in the imperial era, from which age onwards the deceased could get stone monuments, or that his age was exactly numbered or roughly estimated – there can be no imperial

average figure produced. (Or else, of course it can be produced but it will be an erroneous average.)[1]

It is an important deduction that the network of customs of the local communities was conspicuously strong. At least the relations of the society to death and the deceased cannot be explained with a common 'Roman moral' but with the local customs of different regions and cities which probably were transmitted from earlier ages. It strongly modifies our general view of the Roman imperial culture as a universal feature, which might be true for the 'commercial' side of this culture, the transfer of wares from one side of the Empire to the other, but not for that of moral and cultural heritage.

As for an investigation of the common people's view of life, we must rely on the few individualized inscriptions, and most of all the funerary poetry. It is also known in a great number – the exact figures are naturally always changing, since new examples turn up every year, we may calculate with certainly over 4000 examples now.[2] They are mostly representations of types and patterns, a pattern sometimes spreads over the world and its scores are known from different provinces. Consequently, they are rather parts of the freely transferable commercial heritage than of the moral and cultural one. This sentence is in some sense literally true, because a funerary poem was a commercial ware like the stone monument itself, and the sample books offered them even like the stone ornaments. But if it is so, these poems do not enlighten the individual or the local community morals either.

The situation is not so hopeless. Certainly there are (totally or partly) individual funerary poems, if only in a few number, and they refer to individual feelings in all probability; moreover the whole of the funerary poetry of a region, although composed mostly from all-imperial patterns, shows us a definitely discernible common type (supposing we know enough examples from

[1] For example: the deceased over 60 years are generally buried in/under a stone monument in Pannonia, but half of them (at the most) in Britannia; moreover even within Pannonia, one might scarcely get a monument in Savaria, but it is not rare in Aquincum; yet while in Aquincum the rate of monuments was multiplied over 30 years, it was not so in the territory of Aquincum, where this age was not a prominent turning point in the rural society, but as we see, it was in the urban community.

[2] The standard corpus of the epigraphical poetry is still F. Buecheler, E. Lommatzsch, *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* 1-3, Teubner 1926 (henceforward: *CLE*), which contains 2299 items (with a few variations), of course partly (but in a far lesser part) non-funeral ones. After the publication of this work, the number of verse inscriptions greatly increased, but we can esteem the figures only approximately, because they were gathered never since. In Pannonia presently we know about 65 verse inscriptions (Cugusi, Cugusi 2007 number 70 items, but some examples are debatable), while the *CLE* contained 29 of them, thus the increase rate seems to be over 100%.

the region). There is a certain local tradition, and in the city or region one is more or less obliged to choose such patterns from the whole store which are fitting into it. In other words, the funerary poetry is a community poetry. Even such view was articulated that it might be seen as part of the folklore.[3] Such wording is naturally strongly exaggerated, but doubtless the funerary poems did not spread only as readymade commercial wares, but through a kind of oral transmission: it was probably frequent that a sepulchral poem was seen, beloved, remembered and reproduced from the memory. Nothing but it can explain the sometimes terrible distortions of those texts.

It is the more fortunate since we scarcely know the real folklore of the Romans. A few examples survive from two genders: the pornographic rhymes, which remain in some collections and in graffiti,[4] are surely partly of folkloristic origin, and the literary sources, mostly historiographers, transmitted some soldiers' songs. Perhaps the most famous one is the song (and dance) about emperor Aurelianus, probably of South Pannonian origin (SHA *Vita Aureliani* 6,5):

Mille mille mille decollavimus.
Unus homo! mille decollavimus.
Mille ⌜b⌝i⌜b⌝at, qui mille occidit!
Tantum vini nemo habet, quantum fudit sanguinis.[5]

As for the pornographic rhymes, it is probably useless to make inquiries about any morality and view of life therein; in the soldiers' songs the military virtue, that is, bravery might be established as moral foundation. For example, the Aurelianus Dance finds the primary source for joy definitely in the greatest possible massacre. If there is any morality in such a short dance tune, its morality is: the aim of life is killing and wine. Evidently the common feeling of the boundary regions in the middle and later 3rd century went to such extremities, but it was reasonable of course. In the hectically incoherent text of the song, which can be hardly described with grammatical patterns, we feel the exaltation of liberation from the Sarmatians, through the barbarian joy. *Aurelianus massacred the Sarmatians (otherwise the Sarmatians would have massacred us), heyday, let us drink!*

It is not reasonable to deny that it was the feeling of a community too (as the HA says, the song was commonly sung and danced).[6] The funerary poetry

[3] Cf. Wachter 1999.
[4] Most of all, the *Carmina Priapea*; many inscriptions in the *CLE* (n. 45-49, 230-231, 1899-1900, 1933-34, 1938 etc.).
[5] Another similar fragment: ibid. 7,2.

shows a different common morality, which is more conservative and more controlled. It is relatively classicizing in terms of poetic forms too. As for the folk rhymes, both types of them show strong trochaic features (Suet., *Vita Divi Iulii* 49,1, 51,2, *Vita Cal*. 6,6, Vell. Pat. II 67,3, *CLE* 230, 231, *Priap.* 72).[7] We may suppose that was the natural metric pattern of the folk rhymes; on the contrary, it is quite infrequent in the funerary poetry (*CLE* 235–247). One may suspect that these rare samples contain some spontaneity. It is mostly true, there are some poems which develop quite their own train of thought and do not contain fixed patterns.[8] Evidently they are individual literary products, but it was an exaggeration to say they were part of the folklore. On the contrary, we can clearly discern an example which is individual because it was written for the memory of a professional (that is, an actor) and, consequently, probably by another professional.[9] Yet their way of thinking was not individual, but fitting to the traditions, a great part of them showing the deceased as examples of the traditional Roman virtue.[10] Or even the denial of the traditional virtue[11] can be another tradition:

CLE 243. *Dum vixi, bibi libenter. Bibite vos, qui vivitis*.
CLE 244. *Quod edi, bibi, mecum habeo, quod reliqui, perdidi*.[12]

Only a few very short rhymes seem to be the actual versifications of the known patterns of the prose epitaphs.[13] On the other hand, the great majority of epitaphs which consist of hexameters or distiches (and not infrequently senarii too), represent well-known types, it is kind of a commonplace poetry – that is, of such patterns and trains of thought, which although were not made by the community, yet represented its demands. Evidently they gave words to the typical way of thinking of a region; and since we know a considerable amount of samples for these types, it may be possible to examine them in a regional

[6] SHA *Vita Aureliani* 6,4: *etiam ballistia pueri et saltatiunculas <in> Aurelianum tales {componerent}, quibus diebus festis militariter saltitarent.*

[7] From the *Priapea* corpus this one gives the most folkloristic air, evidently it was taken down a bit inaccurately, and it preserved us a quasi *hapax legomenon* too.

[8] *CLE* 235, 236, 240, 242.

[9] *CLE* 236. A famous epitaph with a similar context is *CIL* III 3980 (Siscia), which Cugusi, Cugusi 2007, 128-129 take for a metric (or at least commatical) one; for my part, I doubt its metric nature seriously.

[10] *CLE* 237, or *CLE* 241: *cogitato te hominesse* cf. *hominem te memento*!

[11] *CLE* 245.

[12] The meter is surely trochaic, but the first syllables offer some difficulties: either we must suppose *quod* was meant a long syllable (which had to be a blunder of the writer, because we know no grammatical reason for such a lengthening) or it was written down erroneously.

[13] *CLE* 239, 246.

differentiation. However such an examination cannot be made equally for every region, because there are provinces and towns, where the presently known samples are too few. Nevertheless it would be worth the trouble to carry out a whole-imperial examination. Presently I must stick to the province which is most interesting for us: Pannonia. Here we know two clearly discernible group of the funerary poems, one of Carnuntum (mostly from the earlier period), and another of Aquincum mostly from the 3rd century.

The Carnuntum type poems chose their patterns so that they would fit into the following elementary structure: 1) a hint to the happiness of the survivors, 2) the former way of life of the deceased, 3) the cruelty of fate or death.[14] Frequently they finished the poem with some variation of the pattern *sit tibi terra levis*. Naturally this pattern did not contain any proper *thought*, being quite a formulary one. On the whole, these poems are strongly formulary and regular, classicizing in terms of language and metrics. Since a lot of the well-known patterns were fitting into that context, they offered a great variety to choose from, according to the customers' personal likings. The formularism of this type is clearly visible, for example, in the element 'the happiness of the survivors', several times expressed through the variations of the verse *vivite felices, quibus est data longior hora* (which is known from an extreme amount of samples[15]). It is a rigid and lifeless pattern, not speaking for sincerity, even if they sometimes tried to add some kind of explanation, as for example *CSIR Österreich* 349: *nam tulerunt vitae damna minora meae*. The artificial nature of the verse is evident from the metrics: although the professional versifier succeeded in using the archaizing *-ĕrunt* suffix, the customer could do probably nearly nothing with it. Where we know *expressis verbis*, that the poem was written by a relative of the deceased, and consequently it is not an impersonal artefact (*CLE* 1565), the threefold articulation appears which was required by the conventions – by the way, through three verses with shocking metric failures –, yet the survivor appears as an anything but happy man: *scripsi ego per lacrimas miserabilis morte puellae*. So the tradition says: the fate of the deceased is cruel, the survivors are to enjoy their lives (it must be an Italian military tradition, because the poem was written in a 1st century legionary environment). However, the individuals are not able to feel as the tradition requires.

[14] Fehér 1998, 67, Fehér 2007, 24. Cugusi, Cugusi 2007, 38-39, 42 mention some topics typical to Carnuntum, but do not define a local structure.

[15] *CLE* 373, 374, 802-805 (+ *CIL* VI 28239), 859, 1004, 1081, 1091, 1095, 1117, 2023, *CSIR Österreich* 349, EDCS-59800114, and several variants too: *AE* 1953, 00243 *AE* 1940, 00022 *CLE* 404, 1018, 1069 etc.

This tradition blames the *fatum iniquum*, or in other words *iniqua dea*[16] for the cruel death, it was never doubted in the Carnuntum poetry.

The social environment of this poetry is interesting too. The social position of the writer and of the deceased seems to be not accidental. It is surprising that they are scarcely in an equal position; poems were *not* inspired by a classical friendship, kinship or marriage. The relations of the *patronus* and *libertus*, or even master and slave are embellished after the death into poetry – better to say, rhymes. Relations seen from both sides: the author of the afore mentioned *CLE* 1565 epitaph mourns for a 11 year old slave girl; a freedwoman makes to write[17] a very eloquent and personal poem to the veteran C. Pedusius, 60 year old. (Of course she does not forget to mention, that the poor late veteran had not got time enough to look after her properly, although he had loved her so much ...) It is strange but it seems so that the morals of the community of Carnuntum did not request (or tolerate) the public praise of the dead with the utterance of personal feelings in a traditional family relation, but evidently tolerated it in the subordinate relations.

Naturally all communities develop and change. Regrettably only very few poems are known from the 3rd century Carnuntum and environs, but the type seems to have been changed then: although mostly the same patterns were varied, they did not give the same triplicate structure, and there is an example (*CLE* 1121) where the verse epitaph refers to a real family relation.

From the 3rd century, we know the funerary poetry of Aquincum better. (Surely it developed – from historical reasons – later.) It clearly differs from the Carnuntum type, at first formally. For example the name of the deceased was never incorporated into the rhyme in Carnuntum, but almost always in Aquincum.[18] The metric features are characteristic too: there are a lot of metric blunders, and they are typical for the local speech variety, which shows that these rhymes were composed from the imperial patterns and models on the spot.[19] Save for but two very widespread patterns (*hoc iacet in tumulo; quicumque legis* ...), no whole verse corresponds exactly to any other text. It is quite unreasonable to suppose that these rhymes originated from other regions, as whole ones.

It is not surprising that their contents have common peculiarities too. The typical structure of the Aquincum funerary poem is so:[20] 1) at the beginning,

[16] *CSIR Österreich* 349.

[17] *CLE* 1011. Certainly she did not write herself, judging from the archaism *pluruma*.

[18] With the sole exception of the Lupus epigram (*TAq* 512, *RIU* 910), and it is quite an individual poem.

[19] Fehér 2007, 31, cf. 328-329, 197-198, 342-344.

[20] Fehér 1998, 76-77, 79, Fehér 2007, 30-32. Cugusi, Cugusi 2007, no. 34-35 make no statement on possible common features of the Aquincum poems.

the dead man is named with the pattern *hic situs est/hic iacet*. 2) his family relations, age of life and (in several poems) the reasons for and degree of the mourning are expressed in a free order;[21] in some other poems, instead of the mourning pattern, with a seeming objectivity the virtues of the deceased are mentioned,[22] the motive of which being naturally the same, to show us why the absence of the dead one is so cruel. 3) A few poems end with the well-known pattern *quicumque legis* ...[23] Virtually the same type lives to the beginning of the 4th century, as we see it in an epitaph for a child,[24] even though it is of very personal character, doubtless a home-made production.

It is conspicuous that here in Aquincum the traditional family had the highest moral value for a funeral poem. It is not only that all these epitaphs were erected by the (legal) husbands, children or parents, but that the parentage is always emphasized in the texts. It is the fundamental element of the virtue catalogue of Veturia's epitaph, who is shown up as a classical *matrona* in an almost republican sense, as a wife *unicuba uniiuga*.[25] Quite naturally we must not think that the other verse epitaphs were erected for gay women either, including those of Carnuntum, but there people did not feel the necessity of alluding to. Whether it was emphasized in Aquincum because the family virtues were the highest ones for the Aquincum citizens, or because they were short of these in the everyday life, presently we cannot decide, in lack of data.

Another important difference is that here one was not mourned only because his life was short, because of the death itself, but because of his virtues we are now deprived of. Of course they are mostly family virtues, but not exclusively. Every kind of virtue can be mentioned here: that Papirianus *tribunus* was *insons*, that Aelia Sabina was a virtuoso of the organ playing or that the five-year-old Cassia was *sine fine decoris*.[26] There is no reason why we should not think they were real virtues, and that those who had these epitaphs made spoke

[21] *RIU* 1166, 1522, *TAq* 1013 = *CLE* 555.

[22] *TAq* 745 = *CLE* 558, 519 = *CLE* 489.

[23] *TAq* 519 = *CLE* 489, *TAq* 1013 = *CLE* 555; other Pannonian occurrence: Hoffiller, Saria 1938, 401. Well known in the whole empire: for example *CLE* 447, 465, 857, 1007, 1037, 1813, 2025, 2068, 2082, 2217, *AE* 2000, 00190.

[24] *TAq* 587; linguistic analysis ibid. and Fehér 2007, 33-34, structural analysis Cugusi, Cugusi 2007, 94-97, both with epigraphic parallels.

[25] *TAq* 745 = *CIL* III 3572 = *CLE* 558. Examinations of the expression: Adamik 2005 = Adamik 2006, Fehér 2007, 428. This expression is nearly hapax legomenon (Adamik 2005 calls it hapax, but really this is only the first occurrence, as Cugusi, Cugusi 2007, 86 state (*neoformazione analogica*), and very exalted, with an archaizing and august relish. I cannot agree with T. Adamik, who asserts (Adamik 2005, 35) that the word *unicuba* had an erotic meaning in addition to the other.

[26] Resp. *TAq* 222 = *CIGP* 91, *TAq* 519 = *CIL* III 10501 = *CLE* 489, *TAq* 587.

frankly about their deceased relatives. It is worth mentioning that they mostly do not name the power that caused the death (maybe they do not dare to name?), but refer to with a passive voice: *raptus est*. It is not without exception: the poem CLE 555 blames *Fatorum Genesis*.

There are two extraordinary poems in Aquincum. The funerary tablet TAq 769[27] emphasizes the family relations and the mourning, but it has a different structure (the opening pattern is lacking, and the deceased is not named), and most of all, its view of life is radically different. Here the death is mournful only because of the premature omission of life, and the power that caused it *is* mentioned, moreover in a quite individual manner which differentiates between the divine will (which is perhaps supposed to be just) and the ruthless Fate or even Chance:

iniquae
Parcae iudiciis hic, miserande, iaces.

And it ends with the sentence:

fatum vel casus iniquus
hoc ita decrevit, non deus iste fuit.

Naturally it does not reflect the other known Pannonian type either. Can we take it for an individual and conscious piece of art, which reflects a personal moral? Or its unique formulation is due to other reasons? We cannot deny that the greater part of the poem is composed from fixed patterns. We know parallels for the pattern *hic miserande iaces*.[28] I have mentioned already that *Parca iniqua* is a traditional expression; the words themselves are known from other epitaphs (save for the final distich), although not in the same context. Thus the author is not so much a talented poet as a talented juggler, who made a highly unusual picture from the kaleidoscope of the usual material, and emphasized the individuality (maybe with an intent *épater les bourgeois*?), but it is hardly credible that he based it on a precise philosophy. I think it more likely that, as he himself said: *casus ... hoc ita decrevit.*

The other known individual poem is the acrostic of Lupus.[29] It was widely discussed in the literature of the last century;[30] there were scholars who took it

[27] Probably it is slightly earlier than the rest of the Aquincum funerary poetry: the writing manner and the language are equally highly classical, better than those of the other mentioned 3rd century poems in Aquincum. The fact that this is not a sarcophagus but a sepulchral tablet, makes possible an earlier dating as well as a later one; if the expressions of the poem were taken as a model in the epitaph *CIL* III 3362, which is possible, but not sure, it must be earlier than that.

[28] *CLE* 1075, remotely 2106, 2182.

[29] *RIU* 910; *TAq* 512 = *AE* 1947, 31 = *AE* 1977, 634.

for a typical epitaph issued from a sample book,[31] and others, who asserted that it was the work of a local poet. The identification of 'Lupus of Aquincum' was attempted too,[32] without success, but not because the poet could not have been an existing one.[33] During a long period of research we did not know its examples from any other location; recently a new example was discovered in Raphia (Syria Palaestina).[34] Naturally at first it spoke for that it was a widely known pattern poem, but the Raphia text is corrupted, compared with the Pannonian one, and we can presume that its owner immigrated from Pannonia or the neighbourhood to Syria Palaestina; nor is the Raphia text earlier at all.[35] Therefore the spreading of the poem does not disprove its individuality. Carefully examining the expressions of the whole poem, we must come to a shocking assumption, that it contains virtually no traditional patterns, and few single words, which were known from the context of verse epitaphs.[36]

Thus the author had not the chance to imitate any professional verse sample; we cannot suppose the source having been in a sample book. Neither the classical literature could be the source, it is clear from the slightly vulgar language[37]

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[30] For detailed analysis, see Révay 1943, Egger 1952, Soproni 1962, Szilágyi 1963, 190, Adamik 1976, Fehér 1998, n. 12, Cugusi, Cugusi 2007, 86-90.

[31] Szilágyi 1963.

[32] Révay 1943.

[33] On the contrary, the greatest problem is that the name Lupus is relatively frequent. Presently we know 3 occurrences in Aquincum (*TAq* 9, 664, 1371b), 18 in Pannonia, more than in most of the provinces (yet frequent in Dalmatia and Noricum also; cf. *OPEL* III 39.) Thus several persons can be considered in the period in question. But as a matter of fact, it is not likely that any known person were the poet, because partly their biographical dates, partly their profession is contradictory – none of them could be a professional versifier, but it is highly questionable that this epitaph were an amateur's work: it is known from several quite independent inscriptions, and the dead men do not seem to be relatives of a Lupus, moreover the professional skill of the poet is greater than we could hope it, for example, in the case of a Lupus *centurio* (*TAq* 1371b).

[34] Eck 2013.

[35] Eck 2013, 124, asserts that it is later. I am not convinced on that point; I think they might be contemporaneous too.

[36] For example, the word *quassa* is quite unknown from verses, *vita fragilis* from only two poems (*CLE* 603, 698), the expression *vita data est* only from *CLE* 1106. Although the word *stamen* is frequent, and therefore it could inspire the author, but it appears without exception in the compound *stamina Parcae*, never (as here) as a thing on which life is hanging. The form *vivito* does not appear, even other imperative forms only uniquely. *Flores*, where they are mentioned, are almost exclusively real flowers put on the grave, only two times as *flores Veneris* (*CLE* 935, 2008). *Munera Cereris* are unknown, although *munera Bacchi/Liberi* appear sometimes (*CLE* 492, 1552, 1926), and once we find *dona larga* – but they were given exactly by Ceres (*CLE* 1181), and it is a poem of quite different structure and style.

[37] See note 19.

and the relative rarity of classical reminiscences and distorted citations too.[38] (By the way, they are generally rare in Pannonia.)[39] So we can definitely state: this one poem was a real piece of poetic art with an individual view of life, and the probability of its local origin is far greater than that of being an imported ware. The poet 'Lupus of Aquincum' existed, yet it is questionable whether he worded an expressed and stable moral philosophy. The supposed 'epicureism'[40] of the Lupus epigram is based really on its one verse: *Candida vita cole iustissima mente secutus*, since it classifies the ethical life as the just and *serenus* condition. The remaining verses do not speak of anything more accurate but that the life must be wholly enjoyed because it is short – funerary poems frequently refer to that simple idea,[41] which is not radically diverging from the 'mourning' element of the Pannonian poem types either. Although the author expressed this idea with an attractive eloquence, his views do not seem to have been far higher than those of the average reader of the provinces. Probably this same fact contributed much to its popularity, although the poem must have been a little sensational – not because of its morality, but because it throws away the traditional structure of the epitaphs. Now we know with certainty that the poem was at last three times reproduced in a relatively short period, thus the popularity must be granted. Our conclusion must be that the individual wording and this half way traditional, superficial hedonistic commonplace 'philosophy' could find its place in a little town of the borderland in the beginning of the 3rd century, beside the stricter tradition that kept the local moral requirements accurately.

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[38] Cugusi, Cugusi 2007, 89 accurately gather all possible citations, but they are partly rather dubious (e.g. why should *flores Veneris* refer to Ov., *Rem. am.* 103, when it is known from the common epigraphic word treasure, or how likely it is that a Pannonian local versifier would distort Statius (Stat., *Silv.* V 2,3 *fessus ab altis* – whence *fessus ab annis*; not to mention that their other given parallel, Claudianus is certainly far later than Lupus).

[39] Fehér 2007, 49 mentions 11 sure examples, most of them from the Aeneid. However Cugusi, Cugusi 2007 try to identify a lot of more or less sure examples.

[40] Last time expressed by Eck 2013, 123-124. Former scholars supposed Lucrece's influence (Egger 1952), and even the Horatian *carpe diem* was paralleled, see Cugusi, Cugusi 2007, 28.

[41] Only a few examples: *CLE* 190, 245.

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