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**TO A BEAUTIFUL SOUL  
INSCRIPTIONS ON LEAD MIRRORS**

**(COLLECTION OF ROMAN ANTIQUITIES,  
HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM)<sup>1</sup>**

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*Abstract:* There is a collection of several hundred small Roman lead mirrors (former private collection) in the Hungarian National Museum. Greek or Latin inscriptions can be read on 17 mirrors. The present study publishes these items along with the drawings of the inscriptions. Such mirrors were found mainly in graves of women, functioning as escorts to the souls of the dead and as apotropaic amulets.

*Keywords:* Lead mirror, funeral cult, prophylactic eye, apotropaic function.

Small lead-frame mirrors are not unknown for archaeologist of Roman Pannonia, yet these objects have been scarcely processed so far. Such mirror frames have been excavated in graves of young women, cf. e.g. Western Cemetery of Aquincum, Bécsi Road Grave 112. (“The insufficiently preserved, but complete skeleton of a juv f was found in the shallow pit.”)<sup>2</sup> As we often find further furniture belonging to female cosmetics in these graves (in the case of Grave 112: bone hair-pin, necklace, silver ring, etc.), it is tempting to interpret these mirrors as some utensils for primping. However, this interpretation would be obviously wrong, since the glass surface embedded in the small mirrors is normally not bigger than 2cm in diameter, thus these objects cannot be used as

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<sup>2</sup> *J. Topál*, Roman cemeteries of Aquincum, Pannonia. The Western Cemetery, Bécsi Road I. In: *Aquincum Nostrum I.* Budapest 1993, 49. Further finds, cf. *J. Topál*, Roman cemeteries of Aquincum, Pannonia. The Western Cemetery, Bécsi Road I. In: *Aquincum Nostrum.* Budapest 2003, 128; *P. Zsidi*, Gods, soldiers, citizens in Aquincum. Budapest 1995, No. 468, p. 71; *P. Zsidi* (ed.), *Visual store at Aquincum.* Budapest 2009, Nr. 829, p. 151. Aquincum, Military Town, cemetery Nord (Budapest, Kaszás-dűlő – Raktárrét), Grave 209: woman (30-60 years old), further furniture: bronze earring, jet pearl.

mirrors. Being far too soft and vulnerable, lead is not suitable, either, to make utensils for everyday use. Giulia Baratta summarized the provenances of lead mirrors (outside Pannonia, mainly 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD): these objects are found either in shrines (with dedications to Selene, Aphrodite, Venus, Isis, Hera or to the Nymphs), i.e. as votive gifts in cults of women, or in cemeteries.<sup>3</sup> In the graves we can interpret the small mirrors as grave furniture for the deceased and not as objects for personal use. The mirror frames were made of lead not only because it was cheap and easy to shape (mirror frames were moulded in matrix), but also because the colour and the weight of lead traditionally associated it with the underworld and with magic.<sup>4</sup> We can be sure that lead mirrors, being parts of the funeral cult, belonged to the grey zone between religion and magic, thus they form an object group of religious-historical significance, especially if we consider the inscriptions of the mirror frames.

The Hungarian National Museum purchased a private collection containing a great number of small lead mirrors. Provenance of the mirrors is unknown; the object types are common in the provinces of the central Danube region, i.e. in Dacia, Pannonia, and Moesia. While processing the collection, we noticed that Greek or Latin inscriptions run on the frame or sometimes even on the shaft of certain mirrors.<sup>5</sup> By publishing 19 lead mirror inscriptions, Giulia Baratta started the systematic processing of the epigraphs on this object group.<sup>6</sup> We wish to contribute to this processing by publishing the inscriptions in Budapest.

## Catalogue

### 1.

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.364

Measures: 41.15 x 50.38 x 1.87 mm; weight: 13.80 g; mirror hole diameter: 23 mm

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<sup>3</sup> G. Baratta, Uno specchio in piombo da Urbs Salvia. *Picus* 29 (2009) 67-74.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. PGM IV 2130; VII 397; 432; 925; X 37. A good example: R. Wunsch, *Defixionum tabellae*, IG III, 3. Appendix. Berlin 1897, Nr. 105: "As this lead (tablet) is cold and soulless, so be (the body) of the inscribed ones cold and soulless". Nr. 95: "his tongue be turned into lead". Nr. 96: "his soul be turned into lead", etc.

<sup>5</sup> In March 2010 we examined the inscriptions in the company of Marc Mayer Olivé (Barcelona) and Giulia Baratta (Macerata) in the Hungarian National Museum. We wish to express our gratefulness to them for their help in refining the readings.

<sup>6</sup> G. Baratta, La bella e lo specchio: alcune iscrizioni Greche su specchietti in piombo. In: A. Martínez Fernández (ed.), *Estudios de Epigrafía Griega La Laguna* 2009, 427-454.

Inscription:

ΨΥΧΗ | ΚΑΛΗ | Η

ψύχη καλή

To a beautiful soul



Epigraphic commentary: Dative not denoted. Inscription 1 and 2 is also known in the same form from the collection of G. Baratta, thus it is considered the most common mirror inscription.<sup>7</sup>

2.

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.572

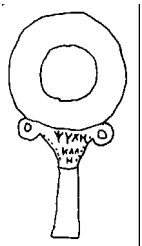
Measures: 39.81 x 76.55 x 1.90 mm; weight: 15.43 g; mirror hole diameter: 20 mm

Inscription:

ΨΥΧΗ | ΚΑΛΗ | Η

ψύχη καλή

To a beautiful soul



3.

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.576

Diameter: 42.33 mm; weight: 17.75 g; mirror hole diameter: 20 mm

Inscription:

ΔΩΡΟΝ ΤΗ ΚΑΛΗ

δῶρον τῆ καλή

Present to the beautiful woman



<sup>7</sup> G. Baratta, op. cit. (note 6) 427-454.

Epigraphic commentary: Cursive omega and lambda; rho, nu and kappa mirrored; dative not denoted. The inscription is also known in the form: τὸ καλῆ τῆ δῶρον (to the beautiful woman the present).<sup>8</sup>

#### 4.

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.476

Measures: 45.83 x 1.45 mm; weight: 15.43 g; mirror hole diameter: 18 mm

Inscription:

EY | TY | X | ω

Εὐτυχῶ[ς]

Successfully (?)



Epigraphic commentary: Lunar epsilon, cursive omega, next to T a V shaped upside down. The EY is on the right side of the mirror frame with retrograde writing, TY on the left side, X on the upper edge, and an ω turned 90° on the bottom. Eutycho is a female name, cf. e.g. IG IX, 2, 1315 (Thessalia, II/III<sup>c</sup> AD), IG II<sup>2</sup> 7086 (Athens, II/III<sup>c</sup> AD), IG II<sup>2</sup>. (Athens, imperial era), LGPN III. A 180 (Argos, V/VI<sup>c</sup> AD). If Eutycho is the name of the deceased woman, then (in accordance with τῆ καλῆ) we can expect a dative form but Εὐτυχῶς is masculine dative, which can be excluded. However, in the case of prefabricated mirrors it is difficult to imagine that such a mirror was manufactured separately for a deceased (young) woman. We might consider Eutycho as a certain female death demon (the name meaning: “good luck”), whose mission was to accompany the spirit of the dead woman to the underworld. The spirit of a man was normally carried by a male death deity (Thanatos), while that of a woman by a female deity or demon. If a man is taken away by a female death demon, then his fate will be oblivion.<sup>9</sup>

It is more probable to assume that the inscription refers to a defective form of the adverb *eutychōs* (successfully). This corresponds with the meaning of the Latin *felix*. The absence of sigma may be explained by the effect of Christianity.

<sup>8</sup> G. Baratta, op. cit. (note 6) 428.

<sup>9</sup> J.-P. Vernant, Figures féminines de la mort en Grèce. In: J.-P. Vernant L'individu, la mort, l'amour. Paris 1989, 131-152.

The four groups of letters are placed in the form of a cross, with the letter chi at the top, omega at the bottom. Perhaps these letters occupy their position as a result of the Christian alpha–omega, while a seemingly redundant sigma is omitted. This assumption is justified by Inscription 5, which gives the full word in a (more or less) cross shape, supplemented by the (probably Christian) symbol of a dove.

**5.**

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.595

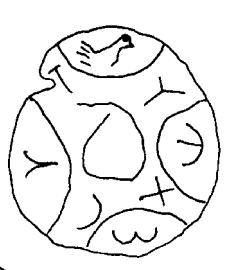
Measures: 44.19 x 1.58 mm; weight: 13.43 g; mirror hole diameter: 19 mm

Inscription:

E | Υ | Τ | Υ | Χ | ω | C

Εὐτυχῶς

Successfully



Epigraphic commentary: Lunar sigma and lunar epsilon, cursive omega. Epsilon on the right side of the mirror frame, upsilon on the left, ΤΥ on the top edge on either side of a dove, and ΧωC in retrograde writing at the bottom. The reading of the inscription follows the shape of the cross. It has an uncertain relationship with Inscription 4, the only difference being the word final sigma (see above).

**6.**

Provenance: unknown

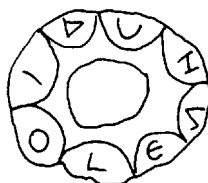
Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.473

Measures: 55.38 x 1.58; weight: 22.50 g; mirror hole diameter: 23 mm

Inscription:

ΔΙΟΓΕΝΗΣ

Διογένης



Epigraphic commentary: Retrograde inscription, lunar epsilon and sigma, reversed nu. The inscription obviously refers to the name of the craftsman who had manufactured the mirror, though it is normally not indicated in the case of this object type.

7.

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.574

Measures: 37.8 x 73.59 x 1.97; weight: 20.72 g; mirror hole diameter: 15 mm

Inscription:

SERVASEROTIVOC

Servas Eroti voc(as)

You call the maid servants of Eros



Epigraphic commentary: The inscription running on the shaft, SERVA, continues on the right side of the round frame of the mirror (SEROTI VOC), then AS is supposed to be read again from the end of servas. This Latin inscription fits well the sexuality/fertility aspect of female cults, though the definition “maid servants of Eros” is more characteristic of prostitutes.

8.

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.560

Measures: 41.21 x 1.74; weight: 10.87 g; mirror hole diameter: 16 mm

Inscription:

[SER]VASEROTIV[O]C

[Ser]vas Eroti v[o]c(as)

You call the maid servants of Eros



Epigraphic commentary: Regarding the texts and letter shapes, cf. Inscription 7, which was probably moulded in the same matrix.

**9.**

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.617

Measure: 38.76 x 1.40; weight: 15.43 g; mirror hole diameter: 15 mm

A piece of glass remained in the hole of the mirror frame.

Inscription:

LAVINIA

Lavinia



Epigraphic commentary: Word initial L is uncertain, the right side of A is visible, the two notches of V do not meet, I is confused (resembling K), the reading of NIA is certain. The interpretation is uncertain. Lavinia appears on a sarcophagus (manufactured around 170–180 AD) during her wedding ceremony with Aeneas, and probably the same scene was depicted on another fragmentary sarcophagus. A series of painted images from the columbarium (dated to the early imperial period) next to Porta Maggiore in Rome can also be attached to the sepulchral theme.<sup>10</sup> The wedding scene of Lavinia often appears in cemeteries, thus the name engraved on a lead mirror found as grave furniture is not accidental. The wedding itself can be attached to the “servas Eroti vocas” love motif found on other lead mirrors. The renaissance of the Roman mythic origins and certain related religious phenomena can be observed in a different relation as well from the first half of the 2nd century AD. Emperor Hadrian renewed the Lavinian cult, which was an ancient ritual of the Latin League, and ordered equestrian priests to serve the cult as flamen or sacerdos Laurens Lavinias or Laurentium Lavinatum. Members of this priesthood appeared also in the Danube region.<sup>11</sup>

**10.**

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.622

Measures: 39.47 x 1.13; weight: 13.41 g; mirror hole diameter: 15 mm

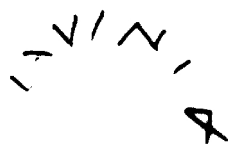
<sup>10</sup> F. Gury, Lavinia, LIMC VI. 1. Zürich – München 1992, 229–230.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. G. Wissowa, Religion und Kultus der Römer, München 1912, 520-521; Chr. Saulnier, Laurens Lavinias. Latomus 43 (1984) 517-533; Szabó Á., Daciai papság [Priests of Dacia]. Budapest 2007, D 8, 70, 76, p. 179.

Inscription:

LAVINIA

Lavinia



Epigraphic commentary: Word initial L is uncertain, the right side of A is visible, the reading of NIA is certain. This item seemingly shared a common mould with that of Inscription 9 and 11.

**11.**

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.501

Measures: 39.80 x 1.52 mm; weight: 10.81 g; mirror hole diameter: 15 mm

Inscription:

L.VINIA

L[a]vinia

L VINIA



Commentary: This item seemingly shared a common mould with that of Inscription 9 and 10.

**12.**

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.640

Measures: 51.84 x 49.72 x 1.93 mm; weight: 41.74 g; mirror hole diameter: 23 mm

Inscription:

On the frame of the mirror:

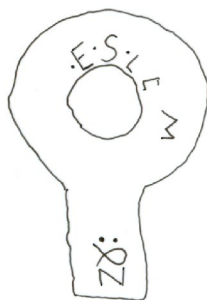
•E•S•L E..M

On the shaft of the mirror:

ZOY:

esle m

ζου:





Epigraphic commentary: Letters of a considerably worn and incomplete Latin inscription can be read on the frame of the mirror. The reading of E and S is certain, the top part of L and of the second E is worn off. On the shaft of the mirror we can read Z and an O-Y ligature before a colon. As the bulk of the shaft is broken off, this can stand for a part of a longer word, though we have very few words ending in -zou. Z can also be read as N.

**13.**

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.440

Measures: 58.91 x 58.76 x 1.80 mm; weight: 28.91 g; mirror hole diameter: 30 mm

Inscription:

V I E K E F E L I X

VTEREFELIX

BENE

Utere felix

bene



Use it with good luck!

B E N E

Epigraphic commentary: N in *bene* is mirrored.

**14.**

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.446

Measures: 57.88 x 58.42 x 1.25; weight: 26.58 g; mirror hole diameter: 31 mm

Inscription:

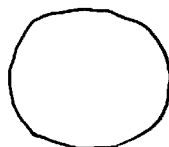
V T E R E F E L I

VTEREFELI.

BENE

Utere feli[x]

bene



B E N E

Use it with good luck!

Epigraphic commentary: I is written over the horizontal hasta of L.

**15.**

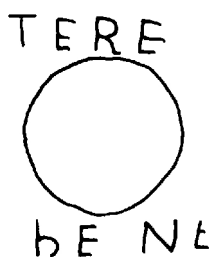
Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.448

Measures: 56.18 x 58.5 x 1.34 mm; weight: 27.96 g; mirror hole diameter: 30 mm

Inscription:

.TERE  
BENE  
[U]tere [felix]  
bene



Use it with good luck!

Epigraphic commentary: I is written over the horizontal hasta of L. On the basis of size, letter shapes and the stylized clusters of grapes surrounding the letters, this item shared a common mould with that of Inscription 16 and 17.

**16.**

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.452

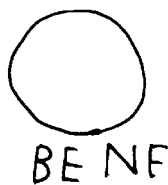
Measures: 56.16 x 56.97 x 1.48 mm; weight: 27.38 g; mirror hole diameter: 30 mm

Inscription:

VTERE FELIX  
BENE

VTERE FELIX

Utere felix  
bene



Use it with good luck!

Epigraphic commentary: On the basis of size, letter shapes and the stylized clusters of grapes surrounding the letters, this item shared a common mould with that of Inscription 15 and 17.

**17.**

Provenance: unknown

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM RR 2010.3.456

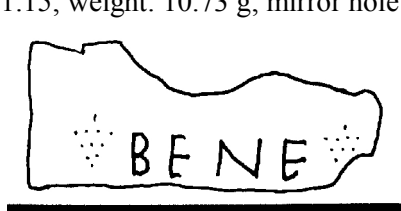
Measures: 56.41 x 23.34 x 1.15; weight: 10.73 g; mirror hole diameter: 25 mm

Inscription:

BENE

[Utere felix]

bene



Use it with good luck!

Epigraphic commentary: The lower part of the rectangular frame remained. On the basis of size, letter shapes and the stylized clusters of grapes surrounding the letters, this item shared a common mould with that of Inscription 15 and 16.

Supplementum<sup>12</sup>

**18.**

Provenance: Intercisa, cemetery

Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM 90.1908.145

Measures: 60 mm high; 60 mm wide; mirror hole diameter: 30.3 mm

Date: 4th c. AD.

Inscription:

VTEREFELIX

BENE

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<sup>12</sup> The following inscriptions do not belong to the items of the recently acquired collection, but these are also kept in the Hungarian National Museum.

Utere felix  
bene

Use it with good luck!

Epigraphic commentary: N in *bene* is mirrored. Similarly to the next item, this one was found in the cemetery of Intercisa.<sup>13</sup> The basic meaning of felix is “fertile”, which suits well to the common female milieu of lead mirrors.

## 19.

Provenance: Intercisa, cemetery  
Collection: Hungarian National Museum (Budapest), inv. no.: MNM  
28.1908.331  
Measures: 60 mm high; 60 mm wide; mirror hole diameter: 30.3 mm  
Date: 4th c. AD.

Inscription:

VTEREFELIX  
BENE

Utere felix  
bene

Use it with good luck!

Epigraphic commentary: N in *bene* is mirrored. Similarly to the previous item, this one was found in the cemetery of Intercisa.<sup>14</sup>

All inscriptions show female characteristics, aiming at beauty, fertility, and the beautiful female soul as an addressee. Since lead mirror frames have been found in graves of women (at least in Pannonia), it is probable that the mirrors were expected serve as ritual/magical tools to facilitate souls of dead women in

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<sup>13</sup> E. Tóth, Römische Metallgegenstände mit Inschriften im Ungarischen Nationalmuseum: instrumenta domestica. *Folia Archaeologica* 32 (1981) 146-147. Nr. 37-38. AE 1981, 717 a-b. Cf. G. Baratta, Nota su un frammento di specchio in piombo. *Sylloge Epigraphica Barcinoonensis* 6 (2008) 55-58.

<sup>14</sup> E. Tóth, op. cit. (note 13) 147.

the afterlife. The glass built into the mirror frame often had triangular shape, which resembles the so-called prophylactic eye, thus the mirrors (as pieces of grave furniture) may have had an apotropaic function as well. The same conclusion can be accepted – at least *mutatis mutandis* – in the case of grave furniture without inscriptions, too.