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Letters from a Broken Republic: Cicero's Correspondence and Constitutional Transgression (91–79 BCE)

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Abstract: This study argues that Cicero's correspondence offers a privileged lens on the constitutional transgressions that reshaped the Roman Republic between 91 and 79 BCE. In *Ad Atticum* and *Ad Quintum fratrem*, the political, legal, and emotional aftershocks of the Social and Sullan wars are refracted through fear, *exempla*, and recollection, showing how trauma recalibrated what elites deemed constitutionally thinkable. The *mos maiorum* emerges not as a fixed code but as a living customary matrix – often negotiating with, and at times resisting, *lex* – that could be stretched under pressure. Tracing how extraordinary measures – marching on Rome, proscriptions, and the manipulation of magistracies – crossed the threshold into ordinary politics, the article reconstructs the mechanisms by which crisis was normalised and legality became the idiom of domination. Acknowledging Cicero's conservative bias and retrospective stance, it contends that the letters remain indispensable for understanding elite concepts of legitimacy, legality, and political change: a passage from crisis response to constitutional habit culminating in a *novus mos*. Within a broader legalisation of fear, measures such as the *lex Iulia* and *lex Plautia Papiria* redefined inclusion as control, turning legality into a performative mask of coercion.

Keywords: Cicero, *mos maiorum*, Social War; Sulla; constitutional transgression.

1. Introduction

Among the surviving testimonies to the late Republic, Cicero's correspondence stands out as an intimate record of moral exhaustion and institutional erosion, written in real time yet already shaped by the frameworks with which contemporaries sought to understand what was happening to them. Against the backdrop of civil war, dictatorship, and reform, the letters capture both the immediacy of events and the cognitive scaffolding (fear, *exempla*, appeals to tradition) through which those events were rendered intelligible. Focusing on the years from the aftermath of the Social War (91–87 BCE) to the consolidation and eventual dissolution of Sulla's regime (82–79 BCE), this study reads *Ad Atticum* and *Ad Quintum fratrem* as a double register of breakdown: they document ruptures in practice while simultaneously modelling the elite habits of interpretation that made those ruptures thinkable. The focus on *Ad Atticum* and *Ad Quintum fratrem* is deliberate: these collections preserve Cicero's most analytically dense reflections, enabling us to reconstruct not only what happened but how an elite observer processed constitutional rupture in real time. Their exceptional privacy minimises rhetorical

self-fashioning, while their chronological proximity to the Social and Sullan wars makes them the earliest surviving testimony to the cognitive and emotional aftershocks of those crises. Moreover, the dialogical structure of the exchanges with Atticus exposes the very process of deliberation through which the boundaries of the constitutionally conceivable were renegotiated.

The *mos maiorum*, as used in Cicero's correspondence, cannot be reduced to a homogeneous or static repository of ancestral norms. In this study *mos maiorum* is understood not as a codified body of ancestral rules, but as an unwritten, socially embedded repertoire of exemplary practices, expectations and forms of behaviour that structured Roman political life.[1] Recent scholarship has shown that the *mos* operated as a dynamic field of identity-construction and political negotiation.[2] This diachronic flexibility is essential for understanding why, in the aftermath of the Social and Sullan wars, *mos* could serve both as a vocabulary of resistance to innovation and as a rhetorical instrument to legitimise unprecedented measures. In fact, such an approach aligns with the argument advanced here: that constitutional transgression did not occur against the *mos*, but through its selective reactivation and re-signification. As Kenty and Pina Polo have emphasised in recent years, the persuasive power of the *mos maiorum* lay precisely in its ambiguity – its ability to absorb coercion, reinterpret precedents, and naturalise exceptional practices.[3] Späth's recent work further underlines how norms circulated through elite correspondence and rhetorical exchange, a point that reinforces the methodological value of Cicero's letters as a site where the customary order was narrated and reshaped.[4] In this regard, these letters constitute not merely textual artefacts but a *chronotopic* space of aristocratic life – a socially situated medium in which status, hierarchy, obligation and political practice are enacted in real time. Adopting this insight, the present study treats the correspondence not only as a source for attitudes or retrospective judgments, but as the everyday arena in which constitutional norms were performed, negotiated, and subtly reconfigured through interaction. In this sense, the letters do not simply describe the erosion of the Republican order; they participate in the very processes by which elite actors normalised transgression.

Accordingly, Ciceronian texts are not neutral transcripts of reality but 'events' in their own right – crafted for persuasive effect; even when private, they select, arrange, and frame experience.[5] As the *Cinnanum Tempus* revealed with cruel clarity, the Republic's political

[1] Cf. Hölkeskamp 2010, 17–18.
[2] Linke & Stemmler 2000; Bur 2020.
[3] Kenty 2016, 429; Pina Polo 2011, 76.
[4] Späth 2021, 13–14.
[5] Lintott 2008, 3–6.

culture had already internalised a logic of improvisation in law and violence.[6] What began as responses to emergency (temporary levies, *ad hoc* decrees, extraordinary commissions) crystallised into habits of governance (cf. Cic., *Leg. agr.*, 2.11; *Sull.*, 33; Sall., *Hist.,* fr. 1.55 Maur.). By the time Cicero was writing, these habits had solidified into what may be described as an *infrastructural exception*: a form of legality that governed through the constant deferral of normality.[7]

At the centre of this analysis lies an "organic" conception of the constitution: the *mos maiorum* is treated not as a fixed code but as a living discourse, an unwritten, customary matrix continually renegotiated under pressure and often in productive tension with *lex*.[8] Precisely because it is customary, the *mos* could be stretched, bent, or re-signified to legitimise conduct in moments of emergency; precisely because it could be stretched, transgression became the hinge by which extraordinary practices migrated into ordinary politics. The Social War marks the decisive inflection: a traumatic laboratory in which inclusion by force, the suspension of guarantees, and the routinisation of military solutions lowered thresholds of acceptability and reprogrammed expectations. From this vantage, the 90s and 80s BCE appear not as an erratic sequence of crises but as a directed passage – from crisis response to constitutional habit.[9] Indeed, the Cinnan decade, in particular, functions as a hinge in this transition (see App., *BC*, 1.66–69; Plut., *Mar.*, 43–44). During those years the boundaries between violence and law, between office and usurpation, dissolved into a single continuum of survival. What Sulla would later institutionalise, Cinna rehearsed experimentally: decrees issued without assemblies, executions disguised as civic purification, and a jurisprudence of revenge that blurred the very meaning of *Res Publica*. Cinna's regime embodied a paradox of legality: a consul acting within the forms of office while governing through violence – a foretaste of the Sullan synthesis of power and law.[10]

The late Republic was an age of instability and civil conflict, and both written law and unwritten tradition were serially violated by ambitious individuals and violent factions. During these formative years Cicero was a young jurist and orator; his correspondence, though later, looks back on that decade of upheaval and discerns in it the seeds of subsequent collapse. Three questions guide the discussion: first, which constitutional ruptures crystallise between 91 and

[6] Cf. Hinard 1985, 67–74.
[7] See Dart 2014, 111–114; Santangelo 2016, 188–193.
[8] Literally "the custom of the ancestors". The term is sometimes misleadingly treated as a fixed "code"; following Hölkeskamp (2010, 17–18) I use it to denote a flexible, customary matrix rather than a normative rulebook.
[9] The notion of new reality (the notion of *novus mos*) as a Sullan-era reformulation of precedent is discussed in Heredia 2017, 210–15; Hinard 1985, 51–56; Flower 2010, 147–49.
[10] Lintott 2008, 36–37.

79 BCE – armies deployed against the city, the suspension of safeguards, the manipulation of magistracies, the normalisation of violence; second, how these ruptures are reflected – directly or obliquely – in *Ad Atticum* and *Ad Quintum fratrem*; and third, how we should weigh Cicero's testimony – both as historical evidence and as a retrospective, interest-laden narrative shaped by anxiety and self-fashioning. The argument advanced here is that the letters are more than private communications: they are interpretive instruments that allow us to observe how contemporaries experienced the erosion of norms, translated violence into legal and moral categories, and tried to imagine stability anew. Read against a post–Social War "culture of trauma" the correspondence shows how fear and exempla expanded the limits of the constitutionally thinkable and how that expansion hardened into habit.[11]

2. Rome 91–79 BCE: From Social War to Sulla

Understanding Cicero's testimony requires situating it within the exceptional political landscape of his youth. Between 91 and 79 BCE, Rome underwent a sequence of transformations that destabilised the Republican order: first the Social War, then the cycles of civil conflict associated with L. Cornelius Cinna, C. Marius, and L. Cornelius Sulla, and finally Sulla's dictatorship. Read through the lens of an "organic" constitution, this period reveals the *mos maiorum* as a customary discourse whose legitimacy depended on elite interpretation and circumstance, its flexibility generating a constant, constitutive tension with *lex*. The Social War (91–87 BCE) was more than an external conflict with Italian allies; in crucial respects, it functioned as Rome's first great civil war. Unity fractured; citizenship expanded under coercion rather than consensual reform (Cic., *Balb.*, 21; *Sull.*, 22; Liv., *Per.*, 80),[12] and ideals of constitutional inclusion were violently severed from political practice. Imposed through bloodshed, this settlement constituted a breach in the *mos*, inaugurating a conditioning atmosphere in which trauma lowered thresholds and exceptional measures began their migration into ordinary politics – from *extraordinarium* to *ordinarium*. The legislation that accompanied the Social War illustrates this shift (App., *BC*, 1.49; Cic., *Balb.*, 21; Vell. Pat., 2.15.3–4).[13] The *lex Iulia* and *lex Plautia Papiria* redefined citizenship not as a privilege granted by consensus but as an administrative response to rebellion. By transforming the *civitas* into a bureaucratic category to be distributed, recorded, and contested, Rome translated emergency into norm. The inclusion of Italy, achieved through coercion and paperwork rather

[11] See Eckert 2016, 45–52, on the "culture of trauma" in this period.
[12] Bispham 2007, 276–284; Mouritsen 1998, 155–161.
[13] *Cf.* Mouritsen 2017, 135–139; Dart 2014, 93–98.

than persuasion, inaugurated what may be termed a dysfunctional *ciuitas* – an expanded citizen body held together more by coercion than consensus

The symbolism of that act cannot be overstated. Once the *pomerium* had been crossed under arms,[14] the cognitive and ritual separation between war and law was irretrievably broken (App., *BC*, 1.57–59; Plut., *Sull.*, 9–10).[15] The city itself became a stage for military ritual: standards raised, oaths sworn, and magistrates negotiating under threat. From that moment, political legitimacy would always bear the shadow of armed possibility. A further rupture arrived in 88 BCE when Sulla marched on Rome with his legions, violating the *pomerium* and converting the ritualised boundary between war and civic life into a theatre of arms. Contemporary and later accounts register the act as a point of no return: for the first time, regular forces fought "under standards" and "by the custom of war" within the city, importing the logic of the battlefield into urban space and recoding what was politically conceivable. The years 87–82 BCE then unfolded under a regime of factional violence that Cicero would later encapsulate as the *Cinnanum tempus*: irregular procedures, purges, and exemplary terror became instruments of government. Appian's account of Marius – outlawed as *hostis publicus*,[16] yet returning to hold a seventh consulship (*BC*, 1.75) – exposes the collapse of legal constraints, while Plutarch's vignette of executions signalled by the non-response to a greeting (*Mar*., 43.4) renders visible the arbitrariness and dread of everyday politics. What is at stake is not merely excess, but the suspension and selective reactivation of institutions: a transgressive sovereignty that habituated elites to procedures once unprecedented.

With Sulla's victory in 82 BCE and the dictatorship that followed, transgression ceased to be episodic and became institutional. The proscriptions attacked the core safeguard of *provocatio ad populum*; the tribunate of the plebs was deliberately neutralised; juries were reorganised to restore exclusive senatorial control; and dictatorship, prolonged beyond precedent, blurred the boundary between *lex* and *mos*. In the trajectory reconstructed in my earlier research, the juridification of terror (*proscriptiones*, headhunting, the public display of heads on the *Rostra*)[17] and the post-war management of citizenship (a dysfunctional *ciuitas* administered through paperwork, deadlines, and allocations) coalesced into a *nouus mos*: legality became the language that normalised exceptional domination (Cic., *Sull.* 33; *Cluent.*, 170; App., *BC*, 1.104), while reforms of *ciuitas* consolidated this new customary order (App.,

[14] Heredia 2017, 58–60.
[15] Hinard 1985, 78–83; Santangelo 2016, 191–195.
[16] *Cf.* Lovano 2002, 105–109.
[17] See Hinard 1985, 187–192; Lovano 2002, 143–148.

BC, 1.95–103; Cic., *Rosc. Am.*, 127–129; Val. Max., 9.2.1). Although Cicero was not yet writing during the turbulent decade 91–79, his later correspondence returns obsessively to those formative events. The memories of proscriptions, militarised politics, and corroded magistracies supply the background grammar against which he parsed subsequent crises.[18] Framed as a culture of trauma, this work of memory explains how fear and exempla reshaped elite expectations and, through them, progressively redefined what counted as constitutionally admissible producing a *nouus mos* that structured Roman political life for a generation. In this sense, the Social and Sullan wars did not merely alter institutions; they rewired emotional and cognitive expectations. The Republic learned to survive through improvisation, to legislate fear, and to imagine stability through coercion. The correspondence of Cicero, written decades later, is the echo of that adaptation: an archive of how Romans learned to live inside the collapse.

3. Constitutional Transgression in Cicero's Letters

3.1 Armies in the City: Breaking the *Pomerium*

One of the most radical constitutional ruptures of the late Republic was the introduction of armies into the urban space of Rome. The marches on the city by Sulla in 88 BCE, and later by Cinna and Marius in 87 BCE, violated a deeply rooted religious and legal taboo: the prohibition against bringing armed troops within the *pomerium*, the sacred boundary that defined the civic sphere. This was not a tactical manoeuvre but a constitutional convulsion of unprecedented magnitude. What had once been unthinkable in earlier decades suddenly became a decisive instrument of political power. As I have argued elsewhere, this development must be understood within the post–Social War atmosphere, where collective trauma, emergency legislation, and the desensitisation born of sustained violence created a "school of brutality" that gradually lowered the threshold of the unimaginable.[19] The *mos maiorum*, far from being a fixed code, was elastic: it could bend or be reinterpreted under duress. This malleability allowed an act once deemed sacrilegious (bringing armies into the city) to be integrated into elite political practice (App., *BC*, 1.57; Plut., *Sull.*, 9.2; Cic., *Att.*, 7.8).

Cicero's correspondence reveals the long-term normalisation of this transgression. Writing to Atticus in December 50 BCE (Cic., *Att.*, 7.8; 8.3; 9.2), at the height of tensions between Caesar and the Senate, he analysed the Republic's predicament with chilling clarity. If Caesar were denied his candidacy, he would take up arms; if accepted without dismissing his legions, he would march on Rome; if opposed, the Senate would face the choice of defending

[18] Cf. Flower 2010, 59–63; Santangelo 2016, 200–205.
[19] Hinard 1985, 61–64.

or abandoning the city. The sacred taboo of the *pomerium*, once absolute, had by then become a variable in political calculus. "Here, then, is the situation", he wrote, "if Caesar is not accepted as a candidate, he will take up arms; if he is accepted without having handed over his army, Pompey believes that he will come to Rome with his army; if, on the contrary, he hands it over, he fears losing prestige; if he does not come to Rome, the elections will be held without him; if he comes, a decision will have to be made whether to accept him as a candidate or oppose him with arms; and if they oppose him, it will be necessary to deliberate whether the city will be defended or abandoned. You see what terrible alternatives arise and how inevitable war is"[20] (*Att.*, 7.8). This passage encapsulates the moral exhaustion of late republican politics. The unimaginable had become thinkable, even expected.

By 49 BCE, the march on Rome had turned into a standard hypothesis of elite deliberation. Pompey hesitated between remaining in the city and risking outlawry or leaving it and appearing to betray it. "Pompey fears that, if he remains in the city, he will be declared a public enemy; if he leaves it, he fears people will say he has abandoned Rome. As for me, I do not know which is worse. And yet, the second alternative seems to me more tolerable. In any case, nothing can be worse than the civil war that threatens us" (*Att.*, 8.3). A few weeks later Cicero admitted despair: "What can one do, then, if in the one there is a crime and in the other a punishment? I find myself trapped in a situation where any decision I make will be used against me if the regime changes. If I remain neutral, they will accuse me of cowardice; if I support Pompey and Caesar wins, I will be considered an enemy; and if I support Caesar and Pompey wins, a traitor. I see no possible way out" (*Att.*, 9.2). This paralysis was itself the product of normalisation. By mid-century Sulla's precedent had been fully internalised: the march on Rome was no longer a monstrous exception but a tool of political strategy. Cicero's vocabulary reflects this shift. His repeated use of *uis* ("force") and *tumultus* – a technical term for a state of emergency – reveals how military language had become structurally embedded in civic life. After the Ides of March, he noted "a remarkable shortage of money because of fear of the weapons" (*pecuniae summa caritas propter metum armorum*) (*Att.*, 15.13), observing that capital lay frozen as citizens feared a return of confiscations. Political violence now penetrated the economy itself: fear disrupted credit, investment, and trade. The same logic persisted into the 40s BCE, when Antony advanced toward Rome with the *Alaudae* legion (*Att.*, 16.9). What had begun as an extraordinary rupture in 88–87 BCE had by then become habitual. The

[20] All translations of Cicero are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

extraordinary had turned into precedent; precedent into expectation. This is the essence of the *nouus mos*: the migration of transgression into the normative imagination of Roman politics.

3.2 Proscriptions: Legalised Terror

No less transformative was the system of Sullan proscriptions implemented between 82 and 81 BCE. Through official lists (*proscriptiones*), enemies of the regime were declared *hostes*, stripped of civic status and condemned without trial. Their execution was not only permitted but legally sanctioned, and their property could be confiscated by the treasury. In dismantling the *prouocatio ad populum* – the citizen's right to appeal – Sulla converted violence into administration (Liv., *Per.*, 89; Cic., *Leg.*, 3.3; Val. Max., 6.3.3). The proscriptions were not simply a purge but a legal invention: terror clothed in procedure. By codifying death and confiscation, Sulla created a *novus mos iuridicum*, a legal order in which exceptional violence was not merely tolerated but legitimised (Cic., *Rosc. Am.*, 127–129; App., *BC,* 1.95–103; Plut., *Sull.*, 31–32).

Cicero's *Pro Roscio Amerino* offers a precise glimpse of this machinery. He describes how even Sulla's allies could be added to the lists after the official deadline, their estates auctioned at derisory prices to the dictator's favourites (*Rosc. Am.*, 127–129). Two consequences follow. First, the elasticity of legality – lists expanded retroactively to justify crimes already committed. Second, the economic function of terror: confiscation became an engine of enrichment. Violence and greed fused in a single process of state-sanctioned plunder. Economic dispossession financed the regime while spreading fear among the elite, turning expropriation into both punishment and precedent.

This experience haunted Cicero's generation. Writing in December 50 BCE, anticipating another civil war, he warned that the next victor "will not be more merciful than Cinna in killing the leading men, nor more moderate than Sulla regarding the property of the rich" (*Att.*, 8.9–10). Cinna personified personal slaughter, Sulla institutionalised expropriation. In such analogies, past trauma became political method. Historical exempla served as predictive models, allowing contemporaries to interpret future conflicts through inherited patterns of fear.

3.3 Re-engineering Office and Law: Magistracies, Juries, and Everyday Coercion

A third rupture concerned Sulla's manipulation of Republican magistracies and the judicial system. His indefinite dictatorship allowed him to legislate unilaterally, bypassing the reciprocal checks that had once defined republican balance. He curtailed the tribunate of the plebs (App., *BC*, 1.100; Plut., *Sull.*, 20.1–2; Cic., *Leg.*, 3.9), forbidding tribunes from seeking

further office and thus discouraging opposition, while restructuring juries to exclude equestrians and restore senatorial control.[21] These measures did not abolish the *mos maiorum* but reinterpreted it from above, transforming custom into instrument. The tribunate, long the embodiment of popular sovereignty, was neutralised; the courts were absorbed into the Senate; dictatorship blurred the boundary between *lex* and *mos*, turning precedent into command.

Cicero's letters from the 60s BCE convey his unease at this reconfiguration. In *Ad Atticum*, 1.13 and *Ad Quintum fratrem*, 1.2, he remarks on the erosion of tribunician power and the imbalance between Senate, magistrates, and people. For him these were not administrative reforms but signs of structural degeneration. Sulla's system redefined the Republic's equilibrium: what had been a tripartite dialogue between orders became a vertical hierarchy anchored in control. In this sense his reforms crystallised the *nouus mos* institutionally, translating transgressive precedent into constitutional architecture.

By the 60s BCE, Cicero's correspondence shows that political violence had become a daily feature of public life. Armed gangs, intimidation, and assassinations accompanied elections, trials, and legislation (Cic., *Att.*, 1.16.10; *Sest*., 42; *Pis.*, 19).[22] "Clodius's violence is so great", he wrote, "that I fear for public tranquillity" (*Att.* 1.16.10); shortly afterwards, he lamented that "everything is full of turmoil" (*omnia plena tumultus*, *Att.*, 7.11.1). What had begun as exceptional trauma in the 80s had, within a generation, sedimented into habit. Political competition no longer relied primarily on persuasion or law but on the coercive control of the streets. The Social War and Sulla's dictatorship had left a legacy of learned brutality: trauma produced exempla, exempla produced habits, and habits reshaped expectation. Cicero's recurrent use of *tumultus* underscores this shift. What once denoted a temporary emergency had become a routine descriptor of civic disorder. Violence no longer shocked—it persisted as background noise, the permanent hum of politics. By this stage the *novus mos* was complete: extraordinary violence had been absorbed into ordinary life, leaving no neutral ground within the civic arena.

4. Method and Source Criticism: Reading Letters as Evidence

When using Cicero's correspondence as evidence, both its precision and its bias must be recognised. Cicero was not an external observer but a participant—a jurist, magistrate, and witness to the Republic's disintegration. Any reading of his correspondence must therefore take into account his multiple *personae* as philosopher, and politically engaged statesman/orator; the

[21] Arena 2012, 141–148; Lintott 1999, 117–120.
[22] Flower 2010, 69–72.

letters are inflected throughout by this self-understanding. His letters record not only events but perceptions: the way a cultivated Roman experienced the slow collapse of constitutional order. They function simultaneously as historical document and interpretive act. Yet, the letters are profoundly selective: their very silences are historically significant.[23] Methodologically, we should therefore treat speeches and letters as performative artefacts rather than transparent records. Each letter is structured by elite frameworks of thought – by trauma, by exempla, by inherited political vocabulary. Through them, events were not merely remembered but reframed, transformed into moral narrative.

Yet this interpretive richness entails partiality. The correspondence begins in 68 BCE, nearly a decade after Sulla's abdication, and thus looks backward through memory. Even in private exchanges with Atticus or Quintus, Cicero performs a role: the prudent statesman, defender of legality, voice of moderation amid chaos. Indeed, political letters function as acts of persuasion in their own right, comparable in structure and intent to public oratory. Because the *Ad Atticum* were never intended for publication, their tone oscillates between analytical detachment and personal despair—an oscillation that reveals how private discourse rehearsed public ideology. As Lintott notes, the letters to Atticus, though private, were "conversations carried on at a distance, not confessions", revealing a mind reasoning through crisis rather than merely recording it.[24] His language – *uis*, *licentia*, *audacia*, *perditio rei publicae* – moralises structural change, converting political evolution into ethical decline. But this bias does not invalidate his testimony; it defines its value. Cicero's subjectivity is not a flaw to be corrected but an integral element of how Roman politics articulated itself; his emotions and judgments are part of the evidence, not noise to be filtered out. The crises he laments – the entry of armies into the city, the proscriptions, the subversion of magistracies – were not rhetorical inventions but historical realities. Ciceronian conservatism gave them moral shape, embedding trauma in narrative. His correspondence thus reveals how contemporaries converted experience into interpretation, how transgression became story, and how the collapse of the Republic was not merely recorded but cognitively inhabited. In this sense, the correspondence also participates in Cicero's continuous self-fashioning as a statesman torn between principle and expediency.

5. The Rhetoric of the "Unthinkable": *Incredibilis* and the Expansion of the Possible

One of Cicero's most revealing rhetorical manoeuvres lies in his insistence that the Republic had entered the realm of the *incredibilis* – the "unthinkable". For him, constitutional

[23] Lintott 2008, 176
[24] Lintott 2008, 175, 178–179.

transgression begins when practices once deemed exceptional – armies within the city, proscriptions, or indefinite dictatorship – cease to be inconceivable and become accepted elements of political life.[25] In 49 BCE, as Caesar prepared to cross the Rubicon, Cicero confessed his dread of returning *ad Cinnanas illas tempestates* ("to those Cinnan times", *Att.*, 9.10.6), invoking with a shudder the terror of an age he had believed impossible to relive. A year earlier he had described the situation as *incredibilis ac singularis* ("unbelievable and without precedent", *Att.*, 7.11.1); and even in 61 BCE he had observed, with stark simplicity, *omnia plena tumultus* ("everything is full of turmoil", *Att.*, 1.16.10).

This language of disbelief should not be mistaken for naïve astonishment but read as a diagnostic device. The boundary between letter and speech is porous: both rely on *exempla* and moral evaluation to make sense of crisis.[26] It marks the threshold moments at which political reality crosses lines once sustained by the *mos maiorum* and by collective imagination. Cicero's speeches reinforce this pattern. In *Pro Sestio*, 42 he recalls that after the Social War Rome reached a condition *quae antea ne cogitari quidem poterat* ("something that previously could not even be imagined"). In *Pro Roscio Amerino*, 127–129 he depicts the Sullan proscriptions as institutionalised crime – the unthinkable act of killing citizens without trial absorbed into lawful practice. And in *Philippics* 2.7, attacking Mark Antony, he declares that he had never conceived of witnessing a consul act as an enemy of the state. Within the interpretive framework advanced here, these expressions chart the reprogramming of cognitive and cultural expectations that followed the Social War and Sulla's dictatorship.[27] Once the unimaginable happens, it alters the mental horizon of what is politically possible.[28] Cicero's deployment of *incredibilis* and *ne cogitari quidem poterat* reveals not only private fear but a collective awareness among the elite that the constitutional order had undergone irreversible mutation. Through such linguistic markers we can trace the emergence of a *nouus mos*, a new customary order grounded in transgression.

6. Conclusion

Cicero's correspondence provides a uniquely intimate vantage point from which to observe the Republic's constitutional disintegration. His letters document the slow passage by which extraordinary acts – marching on Rome, suspending legal guarantees, institutionalising

[25]Cf. Santangelo 2016, 220–225; Arena 2012, 163–166.
[26] Lintott 2008, 179.
[27] Flower 2010, 73–75.
[28] Heredia 2017, 175–178.

violence – migrated from the realm of the unthinkable into that of the politically admissible. This transformation was neither abrupt nor merely institutional; it unfolded through the subtle interplay of cultural, linguistic, and legal mechanisms that reframed transgression as normality. The *mos maiorum* was not discarded but strategically reinterpreted to legitimise the very practices it once forbade. The taboo against armies within the city hardened into precedent (Plut., *Sull.*, 9–10; Cic., *Att.*, 7.8); the proscriptions turned law into an instrument of terror; dictatorship itself redefined legality as the idiom of domination.

Cicero's letters capture this evolution both structurally and rhetorically. They reveal the manipulation of magistracies and juries under Sulla, the emergence of a vocabulary centred on *vis* and *tumultus*, and the progressive absorption of violence into civic life. As argued elsewhere, legality no longer restrained power but became its rhetorical alibi – a mechanism by which the extraordinary could be rendered lawful. Undeniably, Cicero's testimony is partial, retrospective, and coloured by his conservative anxieties; yet this subjectivity heightens rather than diminishes its value.[29] His correspondence shows how an educated Roman of his generation experienced the disintegration of his world – how each new crisis was measured against the traumatic exempla of Sulla, Cinna, and Marius, and how the boundaries of the imaginable were redrawn beyond recovery. The Republic, in this reading, did not collapse in a single convulsion but eroded through repetition (Sall., *Hist.*, fr. 1.55 Maur.; Cic., *Sull.*, 33), through acts of transgression that, once rationalised, became tradition.[30] The *nouus mos* born of this process was not revolutionary but adaptive: a new customary order in which fear became precedent and precedent, in turn, became law.

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[29] See Santangelo 2016, 207–210; Dart 2014, 112–115.
[30] Cf. Hinard (1985, 196–199); Thein (*forthcoming*).

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The Silence of Men, reflected in "Heroides", the imaginary letters of love written by Publius Ovidius Naso

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Abstract: In this paper, we aim to analyse the set of imaginary letters entitled *Heroides*, written by Publius Ovidius Naso. Employing the elegiac distich, the Latin poet transcends the familiar narrative threads of Greek and Roman myths and legends to explore the intimate impulses that animate the love relationships between famous characters, such as Penelope and Odysseus, Briseis and Achilles, Dido and Aeneas, among others. In recent years, these letters have been re-examined through the lens of gender studies, shifting the critical focus from the frustrated and grieving women to the male perspective on the love relationships. In this article, however, we do not aim to analyse the actions or words of the male characters, but their silences, which are laden with multiple meanings. The theoretical framework will draw upon Max Picard's *The World of Silence* (1948) and Adam Jaworski's *The Power of Silence. Social and Pragmatic Perspectives* (1993). Our discussion will focus on the relevance of silence for the actants: how they employ it, the reasons they approve or disapprove of it, and the connections between silence and spoken or internalized words.

Keywords: silence, frustration, emancipation, letters, Latin elegy.

Max Picard, in his famous book *The World of Silence*, stated that silence is creative, just like language.[1] Silence can convey information beyond words, or it can signal the refusal and inability to use them. Starting from this premise, we propose to analyse the cycle of imaginary letters entitled *Heroides*, written by Publius Ovidius Naso in the first century B.C. Through the use of elegiac distich, the Latin poet transcends the familiar narrative of Greek and Roman myths and legends, to explore the intimate impulses that animate the love relationships between famous characters. The collection comprises twenty-one letters in which mythological figures express an acute sense of abandonment and fear: Penelope to Ulysses, Phyllis to Demophoon, Briseis to Achilles, Phaedra to Hippolytus, Hypsipyle to Jason, Dido to Aeneas, Hermione to Orestes, Deianira to Hercules, Ariadne to Theseus, Canace to Macareus, Medea to Jason, Laodamia to Protesilaus, Hypermestra to Lynceus, Sappho to Faon, Helen to Paris, Hero to

[1] Picard 1948, IX.

Leander, Cydippe to Acontius. Letters 16th, 18th, and 20th are written by men to their beloved women: Paris to Helen, Leander to Hero, Acontius to Cydippe. The three male characters have earned their "right" to write letters because they are the only ones who have actively sought to win the woman they love. The theoretical foundation of this paper relies particularly on the works of Max Picard (*The World of Silence*, 1948) and Adam Jaworski (*The Power of Silence. Social and Pragmatic Perspectives*, 1993). The analysis will focus on the relevance of silence for the actants how they employ it, the reasons they approve or disapprove of it, and the connections between silence and spoken or internalized words. The concept of silence in *Heroides* is also closely associated with that of absence, since the latter conditions the former. As Jaworski observed „in love and friendship silence may function as an expression of bondage, or it may be a sign of a disintegrating relationship".[2]

In the epistles analysed here, Ovid uses silence both as a manifestation of disinterest or powerlessness on the part of the man, and as a catalyst for the woman's devastating emotions as she awaits a response. The letters come to fill a void created by the absence of the beloved, thus becoming a "substitute that can prove to be as powerful as presence, sometimes even more powerful than it, since we identify in absence a painful, memorable, indelible lack".[3] At the same time, these letters can create inner worlds and parallel realities. A typology of the couple relationships reveals the following situations:

- Marriage (8): Penelope and Odysseus, Pyllis and Demophoon, Hypsipyle and Jason, Medea and Jason, Dido and Aeneas, Laodamia and Protesilaus, Hypermestra and Lynceus, Deianira and Hercules;
- Engagement (1): Hermione and Orestes;
- Property (woman as slave) (1): Briseis and Achilles;
- Inappropriate relationship (2): Phaedra and Hippolytus, Canace and Macareus;
- Adulterous relationship (1): Paris and Helen;
- Relationship created by deception (2): Acontius and Cydippe; Theseus and Ariadne;
- Hidden relationship (1): Hero and Leander;
- Love without inhibitions (1): Sappho and Phaon.

Of the women who write the letters, only Briseis and Hero are in a position of social inferiority to the men they love, and they long to be recognized as equals. The others proudly emphasize their noble ancestry or, in Sappho's case, her awareness of her value as a poet, they

[2] Jaworski 1993, 69.
[3] Stoica 2022, 22.

demand, amidst tears of love, respect and recognition. A recurring motif in these epistles is the women's frustration with their social condition, which condemns them to a static way of life full of inner tensions, in contrast to the active, public lives of men beyond the domestic space. Confronted with the men's prolonged silence, the women feel as if they are "banging their heads against a brick wall."[4] In this context, we aim to analyse not the actions or words of the male characters, but their silences, which are loaded with multiple meanings. Let us remember that the letters remain unanswered, regardless of whether a reply is expected or not. Ovidian silence does not signify listening, but rather a refusal of dialogue or an inability to participate in it. Silence is not, as Picard would say, the third participant in the conversation[5], but the second one, for only silence responds to letters. The women seek to conquer, through words, the men who travel through new worlds: the heroes the Trojan cycle – Ulysses, Protesilaus, Achilles, Paris – or the adventurers Hercules and Jason. But these women, unable to make themselves heard, decided to write. In his book *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard rhetorically asks:

> "How hard it is to situate the values of being and non-being! And where is the root of silence? Is it a distinction of non-being, or a domination of being? It is "deep". But where is the root of its depth? In the universe where sources about to be born are praying, or in the heart of a man who has suffered? And at what height of being should listening ears become aware?"[6]

The space in which the female characters live and write is clearly defined; that of the men remains uncertain. There is always a sea between the lovers, agitated by strong winds. The silence of the men is perceived as an uncontrollable force – one the lonely, wounded, self-tormented women wish to overcome through the power of words. Ovid's heroines fight silence with words more than with tears or actions. If silence can exist without words, words cannot exist without silence.[7] Thus, assumed silence becomes a form of power. For the female characters, it is not distance or even the fear of death that poses the greatest danger, but silence itself.

> "Silence is precisely due to the multitude of meanings that reach the reader and is connected to the process of derealization, which represents an act that Hugo Friedrich calls the dislocation of the real into absence. A transformation of language into a means of struggle against reality takes place."[8]

[4] Jaworski 1993, 5.
[5] Picard 1948, 9.
[6] Bachelard 1994, 180.
[7] Picard 1948, 6.
[8] Șipoș 2017, 35.

Women open themselves to the transcendence of what is heard, in order to be heard. "But before speaking, one must listen."[9] Ariadna resorts to gestures first, then to letters:

> *Haec ego; quod uoci deerat, plangore replebam; / uerbera cum uerbis mixta fuere meis. / Si non audires, ut saltem cernere posses, / Iactatae late signa dedere manus.* ["Thus did I cry, and what my voice could not avail, I filled with beating of my breast; the blows I gave myself were mingled with my words. That you at least might see, if you could not hear, with might and main I sent you signals with my hands."][10]

Unable to express themselves openly and vocally before their beloved, absent for various reasons, the women choose to write, transforming letters into the messengers of all their personal emotions and inner worlds. An intimate relationship is established with the document, which, through personification, becomes the confidant *par excellence*.

In the first of the letters, Penelope marks the entry of the Trojan War into realm of folklore: *illi uicta suis Troica fata canunt* [the husband sings of the fates of Troy that have yielded to his own].[11] By returning home unharmed (*pro saluis maritis)*, domestic balance and marital harmony are restored - a state in which communication between the man and wife is central: *narrantis coniunx pendet ab ore uiri* [the wife hangs on the tale that falls from her husband's lips].[12] Only at this point does silence intervene as the third participant in the conversation – in Picard's terms – for it strengthens the power of the word through the attention with which it is received. The importance that Penelope attaches to the spoken word is emphatically underscored by the poet through the topicalization of the verb *referre*, used with its primary sense, "to bring back the word", appearing twice: first in the pluperfect, *rettulerat,* then in the perfect *rettulit*:

> "*Omnia namque tuo senior te quaerere misso / rettulerat nato Nestor, at ille mihi. / Rettulit et ferro Rhesumque Dolonaque caesos,* [For the whole story was told your son, whom I sent to seek you; ancient Nestor told him, and he told me. He told as well of Rhesus' and Dolon's fall by the sword.]"[13]

Penelope listens to the accounts of the Trojan War and, after its conclusion, reconstructs and relives the action. She triggers a second war, her own with her own fears, comparable to

[9] Bachelard 1994, 180.
[10] Ariadne to Theseus, *Her.*, X, 37-40, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 125.
[11] Penelope to Ulysses, *Her.*, I, 28, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 13.
[12] Penelope to Ulysses, *Her.*, I, 30, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 13.
[13] Penelope to Ulysses, *Her.*, I, 37-39, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 13.

the one that has passed into legend: *Diruta sunt aliis, uni mihi Pergama restant* [For others Pergamum has been brought low; for me alone it still stands.][14]

Direct communication also defines, at the familial level, the strong bond between a father and his children. Penelope asks Ulysses to educate their son, Telemachus: *In patrias artes erudiendus erat* [should have been trained by you in his father's ways][15]; Hypsipyle calls upon Jason to rejoice at the birth of their twins: *Nunc etiam peperi; gratare ambobus, Iason!* [And now, too, I have brought forth; rejoice for us both, Jason!][16]

Silence emerges at the moments of separation. The heroines obsessively recall these scenes, emphasizing both their own difficulty, and the men's difficulty in speaking: *Quam uix sustinuit dicere lingua 'uale'!* [How your tongue could scarcely endure to say "Farewell"!][17]; *cetera te memini non potuisse loqui!* [I remember you could say no more.][18]

From the female writer's perspective, the man who adopts silence is either unworthy of her love or indifferent to it. The first situation is illustrated by Cydippe's attitude toward Acontius' rival, unnamed man with whom she refuses to communicate, and who makes no effort to change this:

> "*Nec loquor, et tecto simulatur lumine somnus / captantem tactus reicioque manum / ingemit et tacito suspirat pectore, meque / offensam, quamuis non mereatur, habet* [And (I) do not speak, and close my eyes in simulated sleep, and when he tries to touch me, I throw off his hand. He groans and sighs in his silent breast, for he suffers my displeasure without deserving it.]"[19]

The spoken word, in the form of prayers to deities, is associated with the effort to establish emotional connection. Leander prays to the god of winds to calm the storm: *Parce, precor, facilemque moue moderatius auram* [Have mercy on me, I pray ; be gentle, and stir a milder breeze.][20] He also addresses the Moon god, employing again the religious verb *precor*: *Flecte, precor, uultus ad mea furta tuos* [Bend, I pray, thy face to aid my secret loves.][21] Acontius likewise places himself under Diana's protection, through the spoken word, a gesture

[14] Penelope to Ulysses, *Her.*, I, 51, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 15.
[15] Penelope to Ulysses, *Her.*, I, 112, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 19.
[16] Hypsipyle to Jason, *Her.*, VI, 119, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 79.
[17] Oenone to Paris, *Her.*, V, 52, trad. trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 61.
[18] Hypsipyle to Iason, *Her.*, VI, 64, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 75.
[19] Cydippe to Acontius, *Her.*, XXI, 199-202, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 307.
[20] Leander to Hero, *Her.*, XVIII, 47, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 247.
[21] Leander to Hero, *Her.*, XVIII, 47, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 249.

Cydippe, still undecided, reproaches him for: *Aut, dea si frustra pro me tibi saeua rogatur* [Or if in vain you beseech the cruel goddess on my behalf.][22]

Bachelard believed that silence is directly linked to h the idea of boundless spaces.[23] In Ovid's *Heroides*, such spaces are materialized in the form of the stormy sea – the fundamental obstacle to erotic fulfilment – as the heroines lament: *Per mare, quod totum uentis agitatur et undis* [Across the sea, all tossed by wind and wave.][24] The lantern that Hero keeps lit thus becomes a symbol of steadfast love, guiding the man toward a life full of sentimental fulfilment and serenity. Each night, Leander must cross the Hellespont, drawn by the light of his beloved's lantern, to reach her. "The metaphor of the sea and the shifting wind", as scholars have noted, was used in ancient Latin literature to denote the turbulence of public life, which, as Ovid repeatedly suggests, is a means of avoiding or curing the effects of erotic passion."[25] Hero, by contrast, laments the domestic way of life of women, forever spinning and sewing, and expresses her desire to swim alongside her lover, in an attempt to transcend her social condition:

> "*Nam modo te uideor prope iam spectare natantem, / bracchia nunc umeris umida ferre meis.* [For now I seem to see you already swimming near, and to feel now your wet arms around my neck."][26]; *Ire libet medias ipsi mihi saepe per undas, / sed solet hoc maribus tutius esse fretum.* [Oft am I prompted myself to go through the midst of the waves, but 'tis the wont of this strait to be safer for men.]"[27]

For Hero, the erotic fulfilment amidst the waves is only a compromise: *Exiguum, sed plus quam nihil illud erit* ['twill be little, but more than nothing!][28]

Women experience their partners' silence as a force they seek to master through words, the only means by which they can restore the love relationship. That is why the motif of *imaginary conversation* recurs throughout their letters. Dido imagines Aeneas asking for forgiveness: *quid tanti est ut tum 'merui! concedite!' dicas* ['Tis my desert; forgive me. ye gods!][29] She also imagines that Sicheus is calling her, an invitation she equates with the acceptance of death: *ipse sono tenui dixit 'Elissa, ueni!'* ['twas he himself crying in faintly sounding tone: Elissa, come][30]; Ariadne asks Theseus not to leave her out when he recounts his

[22] Cydippe to Acontius, *Her.*, XXI, 61, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 297.
[23] Bachelard 1994, 74.
[24] Phyllis to Demophoon, *Her.*, II, 35, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 23.
[25] Nicolae 2022, 389.
[26] Hero to Leander, *Her.*, XIX, 59-60, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 263.
[27] Hero to Leander, *Her.*, XIX, 161-162, trans. Grant Showerman,1914, 271.
[28] Hero to Leander, *Her.*, XIX, 169, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 271.
[29] Dido to Aeneas, *Her.*, VII, 71, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 89.
[30] Dido to Aeneas, *Her.*, VII, 102, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 91.

heroic deeds: *me quoque narrato sola tellure relictam! / Non ego sum titulis subripienda tuis* [Tell also of me, abandoned on a lonely shore — for I must not be stolen from the record of your honours!][31]; Medea imagines Jason boasting to his new wife and slandering her: *Forsitan et, stultae dum te iactare maritae /Quaeris et iniustis auribus apta loqui, / In faciem moresque meos nova crimina fingas* [Perhaps, too, when you seek to boast before your foolish bride and say what will pleasure her unjust ears, you will invent new slanders against my face and against my character.][32]

> "In poetry, the engagement of the being who imagines is so strong that the being is not just the subject of the verb *to adapt*. Real conditions are no longer decisive. In poetry, imagination is placed precisely in that area where the function of the unreal comes to seduce or to unsettle – always to awaken – the being asleep in its automatisms."[33]

The character who writes the letter acts out imaginary scenes under the impulse of frustration and emotional imbalance. The lack of control over events, the long silence they strive to explain, produces what Leon Festinger called *cognitive dissonance*. The elements that constitute the characters' "cognition" are grounded in reality:

> "These elements of cognition are responsive to reality. By and large they mirror, or map, reality. This reality may be physical or social or psychological, but in any case, the cognition more or less maps it. This is, of course, not surprising. It would be unlikely that an organism could live and survive if the elements of cognition were not to a large extent a veridical map of reality. Indeed, when someone is 'out of touch with reality,' it becomes very noticeable."[34]

Ovid's characters reconstruct reality in their minds as a way to regain control over external reality. Laodamia longs to hear Protesilaus speak to her again: *Quando erit, ut lecto mecum bene iunctus in uno / Militiae referas splendida facta tuae?* [When will it be mine to have you again close joined to me on the same couch, telling me your glorious deeds in the field ?][35] We have seen how Penelope relives the Trojan War; Dido goes further, projecting a future reality in which she forces Aeneas to confess his betrayal and anticipates hre own suicide: *tu potius leti causa ferere mei* [You shall rather be reputed the cause of my own doom].[36] As

[31] Ariadne to Theseus, *Her.*, X, 129-130, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 131.
[32] Medea to Jason, *Her.*, XII, 175-177, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 155.
[33] Bachelard 1994, 28.
[34] Festinger 1968, 10.
[35] Laodamia to Protesilau, *Her.* XIII, 117-118, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 167.
[36] Dido to Aeneas, *Her.*, VIII, 64, trans. Grant Showerman 1914, 87.

Jaworski notes, „the breaking of silence by women has been viewed as a positive change toward their emancipation”[37].

Regardless of the women’s lament and despair, in *Heroides*, the male characters persist in refusing communication, aware that through dialogue they would be defeated, diverted from the active life they have chosen, symbolized by the voyage on the stormy sea, or forced to acknowledge their faults and weaknesses.

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[37] Jaworski 1993, 120.

L'immagine delle campagne daciche traianee e di Decebalo in Plinio il Giovane, *Ep.*, 8. 4. 2

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Abstract: In this brief paper, which is limited to the simple purpose of synthesis and clarification, we aim to illustrate the characteristics of the overall image of Decebalus and the Dacian campaigns led by Trajan (101/2; 105/6 AD) that Pliny the Younger has given us, especially in Ep., 8. 4. 2 (dated to 107 AD, just at the end of the emperor's second Dacian campaign). This image can be easily compared, among other things, with some passages from his Panegyric to Trajan (delivered earlier, in 100 AD, but published after the revision, perhaps in 102 or 103 AD). This image will be inserted into the overall framework offered to us by Greco-Roman literary sources on the theme of Trajan's Dacian campaigns. Despite the scarcity of such sources on the subject, it is nevertheless possible to find a common element, characterizing the way in which the Dacian war was represented and perceived in the Roman world: the insistence on the difficulty of the clash and on the value of Decebalus – perceived by Pliny as an enemy who caused his own misfortunes, however brave – together with that on the engineering and technical prowess demonstrated by the Romans, such as to tame the wild and inaccessible nature of Dacia, and with it its inhabitants.

Keywords: Trajan, Decebalus, bridges, rivers, Dacian Wars.

Plinio si riferisce in alcune occasioni a Decebalo ed alle campagne daciche (o almeno alle operazioni militari effettuate intorno al territorio dacico) combattute da Traiano[1]: nelle epistole, oltre ai brevi accenni contenuti in 6. 31. 8-9 e 10. 74. 1[2], abbiamo soprattutto 8. 4. 1-5 (ma andremo a concentrarci solo sul sottoparagrafo 2, più ricco di informazioni ai nostri fini); nel *Panegirico*, invece, si hanno 11. 4-5, 12. 1-4, 16. 2-5, 17. 1-4, 82. 4[3]. Cerchiamo ora, basandoci sull'analisi di *Ep*., 8. 4. 2, di trovare elementi distintivi della rappresentazione di queste vicende offerta da Plinio il Giovane, tenendo in considerazione in primo luogo i passi del Panegirico appena citati, legati da varie analogie al passo della nostra lettera, e poi le altre fonti letterarie greco-romane nelle quali si riscontrino gli elementi caratterizzanti l'immagine che, delle campagne daciche di Traiano e di Decebalo, ci è tramandata da Plinio. Ecco il testo completo (8. 4. 1-3) dell'importante passaggio della quarta lettera dell'ottavo libro di epistole pliniane, indirizzata, poco dopo il termine della seconda campagna dacica di Traiano (107 AD), a Caninio Rufo, poeta e concittadino di Plinio (entrambi originari di Como, nella Cisalpina):

[1] Quadro di sintesi sulle fonti letterarie sulle campagne daciche traianee in Strobel 1984, 19-22.
[2] Plin., *Ep*., 6. 31. 8-9: *cum Caesar esset in Dacia…reversus diem dederat*; 10. 74. 1 *Callidromum…a Decibalo muneri missum Pachoro Parthiae regi.*
[3] FHDR, 476-83. I passi di Plinio il Giovane collegati alla Dacia sono repertoriati anche in Beu-Dachin 2019, 53-5.

> *Optime facis, quod bellum Dacicum scribere paras. nam quae tam recens, tam copiosa, tam lata, quae denique tam poetica et quamquam in verissimis rebus tam fabulosa materia? Dices immissa terris nova flumina, novos pontes fluminibus iniectos, insessa castris montium abrupta, pulsum regia, pulsum etiam vita regem nihil desperantem; super haec actos bis triumphos, quorum alter ex invicta gente primus, alter novissimus fuit*[4].

L'epica storica, in esametri e in greco (*Graecis uersibus*), progettata da Caninio Rufo[5], alla quale Plinio si riferisce col titolo di *Bellum Dacicum*[6], viene caratterizzata da Plinio in primo luogo come determinata dalla straordinarietà (*quamquam in uerissimis rebus tam fabulosa materia*): questa straordinarietà, chiaramente ripartita in due sezioni, viene riferita alla sottomissione della natura grazie alla tecnica (*immissa terris noua flumina, nouos pontes fluminibus iniectos, insessa castris montium abrupta*) ed alla drammaticità della vicenda di Decebalo (*pulsum regia, pulsum etiam uita regem nihil desperantem*). Si deve evidenziare come, in generale, le guerre di Traiano in Dacia avessero una particolare risonanza per i Romani: si trattava di guerre finalizzate a vendicare l'onta delle insegne perdute dal prefetto al pretorio Cornelio Fusco, incaricato da Domiziano di condurre la campagna nell'87 (cf. Suet., *Domit*., 6. 1-2; D. C., 67. 6. 1-6 – dove addirittura le operazioni in Dacia vengono definite 'la guerra più grande che i Romani abbiano combattuto sino ad allora', 68. 9. 3; cf. anche Iuv., 4. 111-2)[7], e fonti informate come Critone, che partecipò alle operazioni in qualità di medico di Traiano, parlano di una enorme quantità di perdite da parte dacica, benché la proporzione del danno indicato (40 uomini rimasti in Dacia) sia sicuramente esagerata, ammesso non sia meglio supporre una corruttela nel testo dello scolio che tramanda il frammento critoniano (Schol. in Lucian., *Icar*. 16, p. 104. 19 Rabe=FGrHist IIB, p. 931 n. 2; cf. anche Eutrop., 8. 6)[8]. Inoltre, l'attitudine bellica dei Daci (qui indicati come Geti secondo la tradizione greca)[9] era ben nota e ammirata (cf. ad es. Julian, *Caes*., 22, dove a parlare è Traiano)[10].

[4] In quanto segue, le citazioni particolarmente lunghe verranno sempre riportate in nota.
[5] Su Caninio Rufo, RE 'Caninius' 13; Sherwin-White 1968, 91.
[6] Cf. analoghi titoli di altri poemi epico-storici latini anteriori al tempo di Plinio (ad es. il *Bellum Poenicum* di Nevio, il *Bellum Histricum* di Ostio, il *Bellum Sequanicum* di Varrone Atacino, il *Bellum Siculum* di Cornelio Severo e ovviamente il *Bellum Civile* di Lucano; per *scribere bellum* ad indicare la composizione di un'opera storiografica, cf. Ascon. in Pisonianam, p. 2. 24 Kiessling-Schoell *in annalibus eorum, qui Punicum bellum secundum scripserunt*; Sall. Iug. 5. 1 *bellum scripturus sum, quod populus Romanus cum Iugurtha rege Numidarum gessit*.
[7] Calcani 2025, 10; Beu-Dachin 2022, 38, 41.
[8] Schol. In Lucian., *Icar*., 16, p. 104. 19 Rabe: *Οἱ δὲ Γέται ἔθνος βάρβαρον καὶ ἰσχυρόν, ὃ Ῥωμαίων κατεξαναστὰν καὶ μέχρι φόρου ἀπαγωγῆς ταπεινῶσαν Ῥωμαίους; ὑπὸ Τραιανοῦ ὕστερον οὕτως ἐξωλοθρεύθη Δεκεβάλῳ χρώμενον βασιλεῖ, ὥστε τὸ πᾶν ἔθνος εἰς τεσσαράκοντα περιστῆναι ἄνδρας…Κρίτων ἐν τοῖς Γετοικῖς*; Eutrop. 8. 6: *Traianus uicta Dacia ex toto orbe Romano infinitas eo copias hominum transtulerat ad agros et urbes colendas. Dacia enim diuturno bello Decibali uiris fuerat exhausta*; Beu-Dachin 2022, 41, 58, 84. Su questo frammento critoniano, Russu 1972, 121; Savo 2006, 530-1.
[9] Beu-Dachin 2019, 40.
[10] Julian, *Caes*., 22: *τὸ Γετῶν ἔθνος ἐξεῖλον, οἳ τῶν πώποτε μαχιμώτατοι γεγόνασιν, οὐχ ὑπὸ ἀνδρείας μόνον τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὧν ἔπεισεν αὐτοὺς ὁ τιμώμενος παρ΄ αὐτοῖς Ζάμολξις. Οὐ γὰρ ἀποθνήσκειν, ἀλλὰ μετοικίζεσθαι νομίζοντες ἑτοιμότερον αὐτὸ ποιοῦσιν ἢ τὰς ἀποδημίας ὑπομένουσιν*; Beu-Dachin 2019, 83, 42-3 per i riferimenti alle credenze religiose dei Daci.

Passiamo ora agli accenni sui contenuti dell'epos di Caninio: *dices immissa terris noua flumina, nouos pontes fluminibus iniectos, insessa castris montium abrupta, pulsum regia, pulsum etiam uita regem nihil desperantem.* Essi, entro l'epistolario pliniano, rappresentano gli unici concreti riferimenti, benché fortemente stilizzati, agli elementi materiali caratterizzanti le campagne daciche di Traiano. Sembra plausibile supporre che essi risentano delle informazioni e delle rappresentazioni ufficiali che, delle sue guerre in Dacia, Traiano aveva voluto offrire. Va sempre tenuto a mente, del resto, che Traiano scrisse dei *Dacica*, resoconto della guerra purtroppo perduto al di fuori di un singolo frammento (in Prisc. 6. 13, p. 25 Keil)[11], così come ampio spazio avrà trovato questa materia nei già citati Γετικά di Critone, testimone oculare delle campagne daciche a fianco dell'imperatore. Sembra dunque plausibile che, tra le fonti utilizzate da Cassio Dione (a noi noto, per questa sezione, in formato epitomato, principalmente grazie a Giovanni Xifilino, 231-2)[12], vi fossero anche le opere di Traiano (*Dacica*) e Critone (*Γετικά*): alcune informazioni presuppongono infatti una conoscenza diretta e dettagliata di fatti anche molto circoscritti e specifici (ad es. D. C., 68. 8. 2, Traiano che ricava dalle proprie vesti dei bendaggi per i molti soldati feriti, ordinando di innalzare un altare per sacrifici annuali in loro onore[13]; D. C., 14. 2, l'eroismo dell'anonimo cavaliere romano che, ferito senza possibilità di recupero, preferisce affrontare la morte in battaglia che attenderla nelle retrovie[14], episodio per cui cf. Caes., *Gall*., 6. 38. 1-5 e Caes., *Civ*., 3. 53. 2-4, menzioni d'onore del primipilo Baculo e del centurione Sceva; le circostanziate notizie sul sequestro, operato da Decebalo, e sul suicidio del comandante romano Longino[15]).

Passando al testo di Plinio, i riferimenti ammirati alla costruzione di ponti e alla installazione di opere belliche sulle montagne sembrano piuttosto diffusi nelle fonti letterarie relative alle campagne daciche di Traiano, e la loro frequente rappresentazione nella Colonna Traiana suggerisce che essi fossero elementi notevoli dell'immagine 'ufficiale' che Traiano aveva voluto dare delle sue guerre in Dacia, sia attraverso i suoi *Dacica* (e in generale i resoconti rilasciati al Senato) sia attraverso le opere monumentali[16]. Non a caso, riferimenti a costruzioni di ponti ed espugnazione di fortificazioni montane si trovano accoppiate in un testimone direttamente coinvolto nelle campagne daciche di Traiano, il gromatico Balbo (*Expositio et ratio omnium formarum*, p. 92 Lachmann[17]; cf., per riferimenti a monti e fiumi insieme in scritti di gromatici in contesto non bellico, anche Frontin. grom. pp. 5. 3; 16. 5 Thulin).

[11] Prisc., 6. 13, p. 205 Keil *Traianus in I Dacicorum: inde Berzobim deinde Aizi processimus*.
[12] Xiph., 219-21 per l'epitome della campagna dacica di Domiziano.
[13] D. C., 68. 8. 2.
[14] D. C., 68. 14. 2.
[15] D. C., 68. 12. 1-5.
[16] Sherwin-White 1968, 451.
[17] Balb. Grom., p. 92 Lachmann: *Interuenit clara sacratissimi imperatoris nostri expeditio…postquam primum hosticam terram intrauimus, statim, Celse, Caesaris nostri opera mensurarum rationem exigere coeperunt. Nam quod ad synopsim pontium pertinet, fluminum latitudines dicere, etiam si hostis infestare uoluisset, ex proxima ripa poteramus. expugnandorum deinde montium altitudines ut sciremus, uenerabilis diis ratio monstrabat*.

Fiumi e montagne sono elementi naturali a difesa dei Daci già in *Paneg*., 16. 5[18], anche se essi, ancora assieme al mare, ricorrono altrove per indicare totalità (cf. ad es. *Paneg*., 50. 1).

Quanto a deviazioni del corso di fiumi, le fonti letterarie sulle guerre daciche menzionano quella ordinata da Decebalo al fine di nascondere il proprio tesoro, infine dissotterrato da Traiano, nel letto del fiume Sargezia momentaneamente deviato dal suo corso (D. C., 68. 14. 4), ma considerando il plurale usato da Plinio (*immissa terris noua flumina*) ed il successivo riferimento alla costruzione di ponti (*nouos pontes fluminibus iniectos*), è anche possibile che qui Plinio si stesse riferendo ad altre operazioni, non esplicitamente attestate dalle fonti letterarie, di consueta deviazione del corso di fiumi, alternative alla costruzione di un ponte (cf. D. C., 68. 13. 3: *οὐ γάρ τοι καὶ παρατρέψαι ποι τὸ ῥεῦμα ἠδυνήθη*, sulla necessità di costruire il ponte in pietra sull'Istro, determinata dall'impossibilità di deviare il fiume in quel tratto). Difatti, come è stato giustamente notato, è ben plausibile che il riferimento alla deviazione del corso dei fiumi sia da ricondurre, almeno, anche al canale effettuato entro il 101 nei pressi delle Porte di Ferro, se non pure ad eventuali modifiche al corso dell'Olt[19]. I plurali qui adoperati potrebbero dunque non essere plurali poetici, come sosteneva invece Merrill[20], anche perché altrove Plinio non usa mai *flumina* riferendosi ad un singolo fiume. In tal modo sia le deviazioni dei fiumi che i ponti su di essi rientrerebbero nella rappresentazione dello svolgimento della guerra, piuttosto che ad un singolo episodio accaduto, per giunta, al termine della campagna, come lo scoprimento del tesoro del re: il passaggio verso i successivi riferimenti alla sorte di Decebalo, esito delle vittoriose operazioni di Traiano appena descritte, risulterebbe così ben più ordinato dal punto di vista cronologico.

Quanto ai riferimenti alla costruzione di ponti, l'unico ponte ad essere espressamente menzionato dalle fonti letterarie sulle campagne daciche di Traiano è quello grande, in pietra, eretto sopra l'Istro (cioè il corso inferiore del Danubio), sul quale abbiamo anzitutto Cassio Dione, 68. 13. 1-6, entusiastica descrizione che definisce questo ponte come l'opera più grande realizzata da Traiano (D. C., 13. 1), installata in un contesto tecnicamente difficile (D. C., 13. 2), simbolo della grandezza dell'imperatore e della inarrestabilità dell'ingegno umano (D. C., 13. 5). Va detto però che, di nuovo,

[18]Plin., *Paneg*., 16. 5: *quodsi quis barbarus rex eo insolentiae furorisque processerit, ut iram tuam indignationemque mereatur, ne ille, siue interfuso mari seu fluminibus immensis seu praecipiti monte defenditur, omnia haec tam prona tamque cedentia uirtutibus tuis sentiet, ut subsedisse montes, flumina exaruisse, interceptum mare illatasque sibi non classes nostras, sed terras ipsas arbitretur*. Il riferimento ai Daci non è esplicito ma sembra possibile ricavarlo da 16. 2-3 (cf. FHDP 1964, 481, note 25-6): *magnum est, imperator Auguste, magnum est stare in Danubii ripa…accipiet ergo aliquando Capitolium non mimicos currus nec falsae simulacra uictoriae sed…tam confessa hostium obsequia ut nemo uincendus fuerit*.

[19] Cizek 1981, 64-5; tale canale è testimoniato da una iscrizione (AE 1973 475, 139: *Imp. Caesar diui Neruae f.* / *Nerua Traianus Aug. Germ.* / *pont. max. trib. pot. V p. p. cs IIII* / *ob periculum cataractarum* / *deriuato flumine tutam Da-* / *nuui nauigationem fecit*; su di essa, Šašel 1973, 79-81).

[20] Merrill 1903, 363-4.

il plurale potrebbe fare riferimento anche ad altri ponti, come quello di barche costruito nel 102 sul Danbio inferiore per il passaggio delle truppe di Laberio Massimo[21].

Rispetto all'ammirazione suscitata dal grande ponte in pietra, si può osservare come le fonti letterarie antiche menzionino un solo altro ponte sull'Istro anteriore al tempo di Traiano, ovvero il ponte voluto da Dario di Persia per la sua spedizione contro gli Sciti: esso, famoso e presente in numerose fonti[22], era però soltanto un ponte di barche, non certo di pietra come quello di Traiano; vista anche la politica di Traiano contro i Parti, culminata nell'avvio della spedizione militare del 113, non è da escludere-in via del tutto ipotetica-che alla fama e alla memoria del grande ponte sull'Istro, diversi anni dopo la conclusione delle campagne daciche (106 AD), abbia contribuito un paragone con i sovrani persiani, anch'essi detentori di un impero universale, i quali però, a differenza di Traiano, non erano riusciti a soggiogare le popolazioni a nord del Danubio (cf. Aur. Vict., *Caes*., 13. 3 – dove sono chiare le coordinate universali dell'espansionismo di Traiano[23], e Julian, *Caes*., 22: *ἐπεδείκνυεν τό τε Γετικὸν καὶ τὸ Παρθικὸν τρόπαιον*, in risposta a Cesare che, in *Caes*., 21 aveva proclamato Istro ed Eufrate, entrambi varcati vittoriosamente da Traiano, confini naturali dell'impero; cf. anche in Seneca, *Nat. Quaest*., praef. 9: *ultra Histrum Dacus non exeat…Parthis obstet Euphrates;* del resto Daci e Parti erano obiettivo delle spedizioni che Cesare non riuscì a compiere a causa del suo assassinio, cf. Suet., *Iul*., 44. 6-7 e specialmente Suet., *Aug*., 8. 4; altro parallelo tra campagne daciche e partiche di Traiano già in Frontone, *Princip. hist. epist. Front*., 10, p. 207 Van den Hout[24]; Traiano non tollera l'esistenza di confini, come l'Istro, per l'impero romano in Procop., *Caes. de aedif*., 4. 6. 11[25]). Si ricordi inoltre che, storicamente, Decebalo intratteneva rapporti con i sovrani partici, come mostrato dallo stesso Plinio, *Ep*., 10. 74. 1: *Callidromum…a Decibalo muneri missum Pachoro Parthiae regi* (il fatto risale alla primavera del 102 AD) e si sospettava un accordo daco-partico in funzione antiromana[26].

Tornando ora al testo di Plinio, notiamo anzitutto la formulazione ricercata del periodo, di tipologia chiastica (*immissa*/*iniectos*, participi; *terris*/*fluminibus*, complementi di termine dipendenti da questi participi; *noua flumina*/*nouos pontes*, coppia di sostantivi accompagnati dal medesimo

[21] Cizek 1981, 65.
[22] Basti citare Herodot. 4. 89; Nep. Milt. 3. 1; Kleiner 1991, 183 cita altri esempi di sovrani persiani e romani famosi per la costruzione di ponti fluviali.
[23] Aur. Vict., *Caes*., 13. 3: *quippe primus aut solus etiam, uires Romanas trans Istrum propagauit domitis in prouinciam Dacorum pileatis satisque nationibus, Decibalo rege ac Sardonios; simul ad ortum solis cunctae gentes, quae inter Indum et Euphratem amnes inclitos sunt contusae*. Il testo, in corrispondenza di *satisque*, è corrotto e si sono tentate congetture non pienamente soddisfacenti, come *hirsutis* (Dufraigne 1975, 18, 101-2).
[24] *Front., princip. hist. epist. Front*. 10, p. 207 Van den Hout: *in bellum profectus est cum cognitis militibus hostem Parthum contemnentibus, sagittarum ictus post ingentia Dacorum falcibus inlata uolnera despicatui habentibus,*
[25] Procop. Caes., *de Aed*., 4. 6. 11: *Ὁ Ῥωμαίων αὐτοκράτωρ Τραϊανός, θυμοειδής τε ὢν καὶ δραστήριος, ὥσπερ ἀγανακτοῦντι ἐῴκει, ὅτι δὴ οὐκ ἀπέραντος αὐτῷ ἡ βασιλεία εἴη, ἀλλὰ ποταμῷ Ἴστρῳ ὁρίζεται. ζεῦξαι οὖν αὐτὸν γεφύρᾳ διὰ σπουδῆς ἔσχεν*.
[26] Cizek 1983, 66-7; anche Sherwin-White 1968, 662.

aggettivo: *dices immissa terris noua flumina, nouos pontes fluminibus iniectos*); non casualmente, gli unici altri luoghi pliniani nei quali ricorra l'anafora dell'aggettivo *novus* sono volti alla lode di Traiano (*Paneg*., 21. 1: *nouos aliquos honores, nouos titulos*; 75. 6: *noua merearis, nova audias*). Il nesso *nouos pontes* si ritrova soltanto in Ovidio, *Trist*., 3. 10. 27-8, non a caso in riferimento a popolazioni attorno all'Istro: *perque nouos pontes, subterlabentibus undis,/ ducunt Sarmatici barbara plaustra boues*. In Ovidio è la natura che permette ai barbari di attraversare il fiume, così come è la natura che li protegge nel già citato *Paneg*., 16. 5*;* cf., per la *uirtus* di Cesare che protegge l'Italia da Galli e Germani meglio degli ostacoli naturali, Cic., *Pis*., 81-2[27]*;* cf. per Mitridate, *rex* nemico di Roma difeso da alti monti e natura selvaggia, Cic., *De leg. agr*., 2. 52[28]): ma la natura cede alla *uirtus* di Traiano, e, implicitamente, alla tecnica dell'esercito romano, espressamente celebrata in Cassio Dione, capace di costruire *nouos pontes* grandiosi come quello in pietra sull'Istro: la superiorità di Traiano e dell'esercito sulla natura del luogo è esplicita in *Paneg*., 12. 3-4[29]. Lo scontro tra Traiano e le popolazioni daciche è anche uno scontro tra tecnica (non a caso ampiamente rappresentata, tra macchine d'assedio e ponti, nella Colonna Traiana) e natura, dove la prima vince la seconda, riproducendone in qualche modo la potenza. Sembra infatti almeno in parte paragonabile, restando in ambito fluviale e in ragione del riferimento alla nascita, causata dalla forza della natura, di nuovi confini per i fiumi, la retorica immagine di Sen., *Nat. Quaest*., 3. 27. 8: *quid tu esse Rhodanum, quid putas Rhenum atque Danuuium…cum superfusi nouas sibi fecere ripas ac scissa humo simul excessere alueo?* (cf. anche, per *nouus* riferito ad un elemento naturale eccezionalmente prodotto da una grande forza, Sen., *Nat. Quaest*., 6. 20. 7: *potest dissipare magna spatia terrarum, et nouos montes subiectus extollere, et insulas non ante uisas in medio mari ponere,* detto dello *spiritus* sotterraneo che causa i terremoti; Sen., *Dial*., 6; *Consol. Ad Marciam*, 26. 6: *totos supprimet montes et alibi rupes in altum nouas exprimet; maria sorbebit, flumina auertet,* a proposito del Fato e del Tempo); riferimenti a grandiose modifiche dell'ordine naturale segnalate dall'aggettivo *nouus* (*nouum mare*), e non a caso legate a figure di sovrani universali come Serse (istmo dell'Athos) e Alessandro Magno, anche in Catullo, *Carm*., 66. 41-4: *ille quoque euersus mons est quem maximum in oris/ progenies Thiae clara superuehitur / cum Medi peperere nouum mare cumque iuuentus/ per*

[27] Cic., *Pis*., 81-2: *cuius* [scil. Cesare] *ego imperium, non Alpium uallum contra ascensum transgressionem que Gallorum, non Rheni fossam gurgitibus illis redundantem Germanorum inmanissimis gentibus obicio et oppono. Perfecit ille ut si montes resedissent, amnes exaruissent, non naturae praesidio, sed uictoria sua rebus que gestis Italiam munitam haberemus.*

[28] Cic., *De leg. agr*., 2. 52: *cum rex Mithridates amisso exercitu regno expulsus tamen in ultimis terris aliquid etiam nunc moliatur atque ab inuicta Cn. Pompei manu Maeote et illis paludibus et itinerum angustiis atque altitudine montium defendatur*.

[29] Plin., *Paneg*., 12. 3-4: *an audeant, qui sciant te adsedisse ferocissimis populis eo ipso tempore quod amicissimum illis difficillimum nobis, cum Danubius ripas gelu iungit…cum ferae gentes non telis magis quam suo caelo, suo sidere armantur? Sed ubi in proximo tu, non secus ac si mutatae temporum uices essent, illi quidem latibulis suis clausi tenebantur, nostra agmina percursare ripas…ultroque hiemem suam barbaris inferre gaudebant*. Sulla 'vittoria' degli imperatori romani sulla natura stessa per tramite di ponti fluviali, Kleiner 1991.

medium classi barbara nauit Athon; e in Curzio Rufo, *Hist. Alex*., 5. 3. 22: *inuictus ante eam diem fuerat nihil frustra ausus…mare quoque nouum in Pamphyliam iter aperuerat.* Il dominio sui fiumi (specialmente se proverbialmente grandi come il Danubio/Istro)[30] indicato dalla modifica del loro corso e soprattutto dalla costruzione di grandi ponti come alternativa all'attraversamento invernale, è paragonabile a quello sul mare, dimostrato da celeberrimi sovrani universali, con i quali l'immagine pubblica di Traiano mostra varie analogie.

Questo per quanto riguarda fiumi e ponti; passando ai riferimenti alle montagne (*insessa castris montium abrupta*; per lo scopo difensivo di questi elementi, Plin. Sen., *Nat. hist*., 3. 67*;* per *insedere castris*, normalmente detto d'un territorio pianeggiante; Flor., *Epit*., 1, p. 60 Rossbach; per la natura epica dell'immagine, Luc., 4. 4. 739: *super ardua ducit* [scil. Curione contro i Numidi] / *saxa, super cautes abrupto limite signa*; per la sua caratterizzazione retorica; Flor., *Epit*., 1, p. 70 Rossbach: *positis per abrupta castris ita Macedoniam suam armis ferroque uallaverat* [scil. Perse] *ut non reliquisse aditum nisi a caelo uenturis hostibus uideretur;* cf. Hor., *Carm*., 4. 14. 10-3)[31], il forte legame tra Daci e monti era già diffuso nella letteratura sul tema (cf. Stat., *Silv*., 1. 1. 7; 1. 1. 80-1; 3. 3. 69; Frontin., *Strat*., 2. 4. 3; Plin. Sen., *Nat. Hist*., 4. 12. 80; Tac., *Germ*., 1. 1; Flor., *Epit*., 2, p. 173 Rossbach: *Daci montibus inhaerent…uisum est Caesari Augusto gentem aditu difficillimam summouere,* e cf. anche Flor., *Epit*., 1, p. 95 Rossbach)[32]. L'immagine delle campagne daciche fu modellata anche in base a questo elemento, come indica la presenza di scene d'assedio a fortezze montane in fregi della Colonna (descritte anche in D. C., 68. 9. 3)[33] e come suggerisce, tra le fonti letterarie, anche il già citato luogo prefatorio del gromatico Balbo, direttamente coinvolto nelle opere ingegneristiche della spedizione romana (Balb. Grom., p. 93 Lachmann: e*xpugnandorum deinde montium altitudines ut sciremus, uenerabilis diis ratio monstrabat*), dove è notevole la personificazione della disciplina misuratoria, definita 'venerabile dagli dei' (il nesso *ratio uenerabilis*, a suo modo ricercato, non pare ritrovarsi altrove) e a sua volta venerata come un nume dall'autore proprio attraverso il suo esercizio durante le campagne traianee[34], con conseguente assimilazione degli assedi ai forti daci con operazioni avvallate dagli dei (si ricordi che lo stesso Traiano, com'era ormai consuetudine con gli imperatori, era esplicitamente assimilato a un dio da Plinio nella nostra lettera, *Ep*., 8. 4. 5: *iure uatum invocatis dis et inter deos ipso, cuius res, opera, consilia dicturus es*)[35]: è possibile dunque sospettare che anche

[30] Cf. ad es. Herodot, 4. 48, 50: *Ἴστρος μὲν ἐὼν μέγιστος ποταμῶν πάντων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν…ὁ Ἴστρος ποταμῶν μέγιστος*.
[31] L'esempio oraziano è citato da Rudd 1989, 118.
[32] Su questo anche Beu-Dachin 2019, 43.
[33] D. C., 68. 9. 3: *ὁ δὲ Τραϊανὸς ὄρη τε ἐντετειχισμένα ἔλαβε, καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς τά. τε ὅπλα τά τε μηχανήματα τὰ αἰχμάλωτα τό τε σημεῖον τὸ ἐπὶ τοῦ Φούσκου ἀλὸν εὗρε*; Sherwin-White 1968, 451
[34] Balb. Grom., p. 93 Lachmann *quam* [scil. rationem] *ego quasi in omnibus templis adoratam post magnarum rerum experimenta, quibus interueni, religiosius colere coepi.*
[35] Sherwin-White 1968, 452.

nell'immagine ufficiale delle campagne daciche di Traiano la tecnica ingegneristica adottata dai Romani per sopraffare i Daci nonostante la protezione delle loro alte montagne fosse un elemento messo in evidenza, e in qualche modo collegato all'aura numinosa che circondava la persona imperiale di Traiano.

Passiamo ora, infine, all'ultima sezione delle righe pliniane in oggetto, quelle che sintetizzano efficacemente il dramma di Decebalo (*pulsum regia, pulsum etiam uita regem nihil desperantem*): l'anafora di *pulsum* e la figura etimologica *regia*/*regem* (frequente soprattutto, a causa della rappresentazione storico-romanzesca e quindi vivace o poeticamente connotata, in Curzio Rufo, *Hist. Alex*., 5. 7. 5; 6. 7. 16; 6. 7. 31; 7. 4. 14; 8. 4. 16; 8. 13. 21) sottolineano la cura sottesa al passaggio. Entrambe le parti del periodo si riferiscono alla conclusione della seconda campagna dacica di Traiano, senz'altro quella risolutiva e più ricca di drammatico pathos[36]. Con *pulsum regia*, dove 'regia' vale 'capitale del regno' piuttosto che 'residenza regale'[37] (cf. D. C., 68. 14. 3: *ὡς καὶ τὸ βασίλειον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ χώρα κατείληπτο σύμπασα*. dove va notata la distinzione tra capitale e territorio) si fa riferimento alla conquista della capitale dacica, Sarmizegetusa. Per il nesso *pellere uita*, che denota una costrizione alla morte o una morte violenta, cf. Silio Italico, 9. 533-4 (*non Teucros delere aderam, sed lumen alumnae* / *Hannibalem Libyae pelli florentibus annis* / *uita atque exstingui primordia tanta negabam*), riferito non casualmente ad Annibale[38]. Si noti che tanto nell'epitome di Cassio Dione operata da Xifilino che in questi accenni pliniani, la morte di Decebalo è presentata come conseguenza della perdita del suo regno, con un passaggio di focalizzazione dalla situazione generale della Dacia, conquistata dai Romani, alla figura individuale del re (D. C., 68. 14. 3)[39]. Plinio, però, non parla espressamente del suicidio del re, presentando invece la sua morte come esito, per così dire, obbligato del rovescio militare subito: una morte, cioè, costretta e forzata dalle circostanze piuttosto che stoicamente voluta, come suggerito appunto dall'espressione *pellere uita*. La notizia del suicidio viene invece riferita espressamente, com'è noto, da Cassio Dione, e trova grande risonanza iconografica (Colonna Traiana; vasi di La Graufesenque; dubbie la rappresentazione del suicidio del re dace in una metopa del *Tropaeum Traiani* ad Adamclissi e nel rilievo soprastante l'epigrafe funeraria in onore del veterano Tiberio Claudio Massimo, che poteva vantare di aver catturato Decebalo e di averne portata

[36] Sherwin-White 1968, 451; stranamente, Merrill 1903, 364 afferma che Sarmizigetusa fu conquistata dai Romani al termine della prima campagna, cosa che non pare potersi concludere sulla base di D. C. 68. 14. 3.
[37] Merrill 1903, 364; Sherwin-White 1968, 451.
[38] Citato anche in ThLL 10. 1. 1001. 19-21; cf. Sil., 5. 374: *iacet Appius hasta ad manes pulsus nostra,* chiaro esempio di morte violenta; gli altri esempi di *pellere uita* sono Apul., *Plat*., 2. 18 *eum cui non ex natura nec ex industria recte uiuendi studium conciliari potest, uita existimat Plato esse pellendum*, ed Ennod. dict. 18. 12: *uno itinere uita pellantur, quibus paene par existit et sors delicti*. In entrambi i casi si parla di punizioni o almeno di morti forzate.
[39] D. C., 68. 14. 3: *Δεκέβαλος δέ, ὡς καὶ τὸ βασίλειον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ χώρα κατείληπτο σύμπασα [cf. pulsum regia] καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκινδύνευεν ἁλῶναι, διεχρήσατο ἑαυτόν [cf. pulsum etiam vita], καὶ ἡ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην ἀπεκομίσθη*.

la testa a Traiano)[40]. Pertanto con *nihil desperantem*, com'è stato giustamente osservato[41], Plinio si riferisce più probabilmente alla pervicacia con la quale Decebalo si scontrò con i Romani ricorrendo spesso all'astuzia ed ai più vari espedienti (cf. la caratterizzazione di Decebalo in D. C., 67. 6. 1; anche 68. 11. 3 per il fallito tentativo d'uccidere proditoriamente Traiano) che alla fermezza morale del suicidio, posizione che si può approvare, oltre che sulla base di un parallelo pliniano (cf. Plin., *Ep*., 4. 24. 6: *nihil desperare, nulli rei fidere, cum uideamus tot uarietates tam uolubili orbe circumagi*, dove *nihil desperare* non significa 'non disperare affatto' ma 'non ritenere nulla impossibile'; analoga accezione in Sen., *Ep*., 88. 17: *ego quid futurum sit, nescio: quid fieri possit, scio. ex hoc nihil desperabo, totum expecto: si quid remittitur, boni consulo*; cf. anche, per il contrario di *nihil desperare*, Cic., *de Fin*., 1. 18. 61: *ecce autem alii minuti et angusti aut omnia semper desperantes*, indicando individui pusillanimi, e 1. 21. 73: *ne aut temere desperet propter ignauiam aut nimis confidat propter cupiditatem*), anche in ragione del fatto che in Plinio non ricorre mai il verbo *desperare* usato in senso assoluto ('perdere la speranza'; cf. ad es. Hor., *Carm*., 1. 7. 27: *nil desperandum Teucro duce*), senza alcun tipo di complemento o di oggetto interno. Inoltre, nella letteratura anteriore e contemporanea a Plinio, sembra che il verbo *despero* sia stato usato in modo assoluto (come richiederebbe l'interpretazione 'stoica' data da Merrill *a nihil desperantem*; concettualmente simile, in parte, la *sententia* di Sen., *Ep*., 104. 12: *si sapis, alterum alteri misce: nec speraueris sine <de>speratione nec <de>speraueris sine spe*) e in relazione al suicidio come atto di fermezza stoica ('non disperarsi' nel senso di 'accettare la morte come ultima via d'uscita') soltanto in pochi casi, peraltro di chiaro intento esemplare ed elogiativo, difficilmente concepibile in Plinio nei confronti di un *hostis*, per quanto ammirato, come Decebalo (così, forse, Luc., 4. 509, sul suicidio eroico dei cesariani di Capitone)[42]; si hanno invece casi in cui a fronte della perdita della speranza nei confronti della propria salvezza, ci si uccide proprio malgrado (frequente il nesso *desperata salute* e analoghi, dunque con un oggetto almeno implicito e non assoluti), come *Bell. Afr*., 94. 1[43]; Caes., *Gall*., 5. 37. 6; Curt., 6. 5. 9; Flor., *Epit*., 2, p. 168 Rossbach; Hyg., *Astr*., 2. 4[44]; Plin., *Ep*., 6. 24. 3-4. Il nesso *nihil desperare*, di nuovo, ci riporta ad

[40]Sulla stele funeraria e la sua iscrizione, Speidel 1970; Bruun 2004, 164 sull'eventuale rappresentazione del suicidio del re entro una metopa del monumento di Adamklissi, 171-3 sulle ceramiche di Le Graufesenque.

[41] Sherwin-White 1968, 451. Merrill 1903, 364 e Bruun 2004, 158 ritengono invece, meno probabilmente, che qui Plinio faccia riferimento al suicidio di Decebalo.

[42] Luc., 4. 509: *o utinam, quo plus habeat mors unica famae*/ *promittant ueniam, iubeant sperare salutem*,/ *ne nos, cum calido fodiemus uiscera ferro*,/ *desperasse putent*. Da notare che però qui *despero* potrebbe anche avere come oggetti sottintesi *ueniam* e *salutem*, con efficace antitesi *spem*/*desperare*, e quindi l'uso assoluto non è certo.

[43] *Bell. Afr*., 94. 1: *rex interim ab omnibus ciuitatibus exclusus desperata salute cum iam <omnia> conatus esset cum Petreio ut cum uirtute interfecti esse uiderentur ferro inter se depugnant atque firmior imbecilliorem Iubam Petreius facile ferro consumpsit*, dove la situazione indicata da *omnia conatus* è simile a quella di Decebalo, che in ogni modo aveva provato a tener testa ai Romani, senza infine riuscirci.

[44] Hyg., *Astr*., 2. 4: *filia…desperata spe…in eadem arbore qua parens sepultus uidebatur suspendio sibi mortem consciuit.* Notare l'antitesi ossimorica, con figura etimologica, in *desperata spe*.

una dimensione retorico-tragica, ideale per l'epos di Caninio, e che sembra riecheggiare *sententiae* come quella della Medea senecana, che riferendosi a sé stessa dice grandiosamente (Sen. Med. 163-7)[45]: MEDEA: *qui nil potest sperare, desperet nihil.*/ NUTRIX: *abiere Colchi, coniugis nulla est fides,*/ *nihilque superest opibus e tantis tibi*./ MED.: *Medea superest, hic mare et terras uides*/ *ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina* (cf. anche Quint., *Inst*., 1. 10. 8: *turpiterque desperatur quicquid fieri potest*). Decebalo, come Medea, non si era mai arrestato, in alcun frangente; in questo, egli ricorda figure di grandi nemici di Roma come Annibale (cf. ad es. Liv., 34. 61. 5: *in senatu quidam nihil actum esse dicere exsilio Hannibalis si absens quoque nouas moliri res*) e Mitridate (cf. ad es. il già citato Cic., *De leg. agr*., 2. 52), alle quali, come abbiamo visto, possono forse ricondurlo alcune piccole spie testuali. Complessivamente simile, in quanto nemico che combatte con coraggio sino a venire eliminato, anche l'attitudine di Gneo Pompeo il Giovane nella drammatica descrizione di Floro, *Epit*., 2, p. 153 Rossbach[46], o quella dei soldati di Antonio abbandonati dal loro comandante in Velleio, 2. 85. 4[47]. Si può anche ricordare, benché probabilmente qui *nihil desperans* non faccia riferimento a ciò, di come lo spiccato coraggio mostrato dai Daci in battaglia e quindi di fronte alla morte fosse talora motivato con la loro presunta fede nell'immortalità, portata loro da Zalmoxis (Julian, *Caes*., 22).

Plinio dunque, come del resto varie altre fonti quali, anzitutto, la celebre iscrizione del *captor* di Decebalo, il veterano Tiberio Claudio Massimo, non parla del suicidio del re, ponendo l'accento piuttosto sulla sua sconfitta in generale, senza specificare le modalità della morte (cf. AE 1972, 583 *quod cepisset Decebalum et caput eius pertulisset ei Ranisstoro*), e sulla sua temibile tempra di nemico. Si è sostenuto che, sulla morte di Decebalo, esistessero due versioni, l'una 'alta', per cui il re si era suicidato per evitare di essere fatto prigioniero (riflessa anzitutto nel fregio della Colonna e in Cassio Dione: 68. 14. 3: *Δεκέβαλος δέ, ὡς…αὐτὸς ἐκινδύνευεν ἁλῶναι, διεχρήσατο ἑαυτόν*), e l'altra 'bassa', per cui Decebalo era stato catturato e decapitato (iscrizione sepolcrale del veterano Tiberio Claudio Massimo; iscrizione da Cirene, SEG 9. 10: *καὶ ὁ κύριος Νέρβας Τ[ραῖανὸς Σεβαστὸς τὸν τῶν Δακῶν μόναρ]χον Δεκίβαλλον ἔλαβε*)[48], per cui il silenzio pliniano sulla morte autoinflitta del sovrano sembrerebbe avvicinare i tratti dell'epos suggerito a Caninio più alla seconda versione che alla prima[49]. Le due versioni, però, non si escludono a vicenda[50], sia perché il re potrebbe essere stato effettivamente

[45] ThLL, 5. 1. 739. 50, dove sono giustamente riportati anche i già citati esempi di Plin., *Ep*., 4. 24. 6 e di Sen., *Ep*., 88. 17.
[46] Flor., *Epit*., 2, p. 153 Rossbach: *sed uidelicet uictoriam desperantibus Pompei liberis, Gnaeum proelio profugum, crure saucium, deserta et auia petentem Caesonius aput Lauronem oppidum consecutus pugnantem - adeo nondum desperabat – interfecit*. Notare l'opposizione tra *desperare uictoriam* e *desperare* usato assolutamente.
[47] Vell., 2. 85. 4: *illis etiam detracto capite* [scil. Antonio] *in longum fortissime pugnandi durauit constantia et desperata uictoria in mortem dimicabatur*.
[48] Settis 1988, 226.
[49] Così osserva anche Van Hooff 1998, 53-4.
[50] Giustamente puntualizzato anche in Van Hooff 1998, 53-4.

catturato ancora in vita, ma già morente per il colpo che si era autoinflitto[51], sia perché, forse, questi potrebbe anche essere stato 'catturato' (*quod cepisset Decebalum*) quando ormai era defunto, sebbene da poco tempo: infatti, benché il verbo *capere* si riferisca di norma, in contesti militari, a prigionieri catturati da vivi[52], è comunque ben attestata, soprattutto nei *Commentarii* del corpus cesariano (ma non in Cesare, il cui stile è meno influenzato dai tecnicismi del lessico militare) e in Livio (dipendente in questi dettagli da fonti tecniche e militari anteriori) la specifica del nesso, riferito a prigionieri di guerra e nemici, *uivum*/*uiuos capere*[53], la quale, almeno implicitamente, sembra presupporre la possibilità che qualcuno possa essere detto *captus* anche da morto, benché un uso del verbo in riferimento a corpi privi di vita non sembri espressamente attestato. In questo caso, entrambe le versioni, 'alta' e 'bassa', non altererebbero in alcun modo la realtà dei fatti. Plinio dunque, in questi accenni alla rappresentazione della figura di Decebalo nel poema di Caninio, pone più l'accento sul suo ruolo di nemico, pur valoroso, che su una sua eventuale immagine 'eroica', riassunta nell'atto quasi stoico del suicidio[54]. Questo si può spiegare alla luce della consueta esaltazione pliniana del *saeculum Traiani*: la rovina del re è stata provocata in ultima istanza dal suo *furor* e della sua *insolentia*, e nessuna colpa, in questo *bellum iustum*, è imputabile alla *uirtus* e alla moderazione di Traiano, laddove la grandezza dei barbari non è negata, ma viene presentata nel segno della *immanitas* (cf. *Paneg*., 16. 2: *non times bella nec prouocas* e il già citato *Paneg*., 16. 3-4, 17. 2[55]; la vittoria incruenta è esaltata anche in *Ep*., 2. 7. 2).

E' stata rilevata la somiglianza di questi passaggi pliniani (*dices…nihil desperantem*) con luoghi come Hor., *Ep*., 2. 1. 252-4 e Ovid., *Ep. ex Ponto*, 2. 1. 38-39[56]. Ciò non è casuale, in quanto entrambi questi luoghi si riferiscono a recenti vittorie imperiali (rispettivamente le campagne del 15 aC di Tiberio e Druso contro le popolazioni alpine e quella di Tiberio contro i Pannoni, celebrata in trionfo nel 12 dC) e riconducono a immagini e pratiche adottate durante i cortei trionfali, come le

[51] Speidel 1970, 143 nota 2; ma a p. 150 si ipotizza che la versione dei fatti rappresentata dalla stele funeraria possa essere più aderente alla realtà rispetto a quella, più drammatizzata, testimoniata dal fregio della Colonna Traiana (e da Cassio Dione).
[52] ThLL 3. 333. 65-334. 66.
[53] ThLL, 3. 334. 9-11; nel *Bellum Africum*, nel *Bellum Hispanicum* e in Livio abbiamo: *Bell. Afr*. 39. 3; 95. 1; *Bell. Hisp*. 16. 3; 23. 7; 41. 2 (cf. 21. 2); Hirt., *Gall*., 35. 5; Liv., 3. 8. 10; 3. 18. 10; 4. 59. 7; 23. 37. 6; 23. 40. 4; 23. 46. 4; 25. 16. 23; 27. 26. 5; 27. 27. 8; 28. 2. 11; 28. 20. 6; 29. 36. 9; 30. 36. 8; 32. 30. 11; 35. 5. 13; 35. 7. 8; 35. 22. 5; 35. 51. 2; 40. 40. 11; 40. 48. 7; 41. 11. 6; 42. 66. 9; 44. 28. 14 (cf. 8. 10. 9; 8. 20. 6; 30. 12. 1).
[54] Preferibile, come già detto sopra, la lettura di Sherwin-White 1968, 451 a quella di Merrill 1903, 364, in quanto non si fa riferimento alla morte suicida del re. Sulle due possibili immagini postume di Decebalo, Bruun 2004, specialmente 154-8, 173-5.
[55] Plin., *Paneg*.,16. 3-4, 17. 2: *accipiet ergo aliquando Capitolium… confessa hostium obsequia, ut nemo uincendus fuerit. Pulchrius hoc omnibus triumphis. Neque enim umquam nisi ex contemptu imperii nostril factum est, ut uinceremus…uideor ingentia ducum nomina nec indecora nominibus corpora noscitare, uideor intueri immanibus ausis barbarorum onusta fercula et sua quemque facta uinctis manibus sequentem.*
[56] Ovid., *Ep. ex Ponto*, 2. 1. 38-9: *barbara cum pictis oppida lata uiris*, / *fluminaque et montes et in altis proelia silvis*; somiglianze notate da Guillemin 1928, 143-4; giustamente, Sherwin-White 1968, 451 osserva che il passaggio pliniano non è in ogni caso una mera serie di luoghi comuni modellata su passi simili. Sul passo di Orazio, Rudd 1989, 118; su quello di Ovidio, Helzle 2003, 249, 260-1.

rappresentazioni visive di fiumi, montagne e città del territorio nemico, dipinti in quadri che venivano fatti sfilare assieme ai prigionieri o almeno a loro raffigurazioni pittoriche[57]. Le immagini pliniane, dunque, sono certamente coerenti col contesto trionfale che avrebbe dovuto avere l'epos di Caninio, immaginato come rispondente ai criteri dell'epica storica celebrativa riassunti, come si è visto, da Orazio; esse, però, rispetto ad altri esempi di questo genere (come Prop., 2. 1. 31-4; 3. 4. 12-8; Ov., *Ars amat*., 1. 219-20: *atque aliqua ex illis cum regum nomina quaeret,/ quae loca, qui montes quaeue ferantur aquae*; Ovid., *Trist*., 4. 2. 37-8: *hic lacus, hi montes, haec tot castella, tot amnes/ plena ferae caedis, plena cruoris erant*; *Cons. ad Liv*., 311-4: *nec tibi deletos poterit narrare… fluminaque et montes et nomina magna locorum/ et si quid miri uidit in orbe nouo*; Vell., 2. 96: *gentes Pannoniorum Delmatorumque nationes situmque regionum ac fluminum…alio loco explicabimus*; Tac., *Ann*., 2. 41 *uecta spolia, captiui, simulacra montium fluminum proeliorum*) mettono in risalto non la mera presenza dell'elemento naturale ma, come già osservato, la sua sconfitta da parte di Traiano e della tecnica (cf., per un altro esempio di monti e fiumi soggiogati dalla tecnica e nonostante il diverso contesto, Vitr., *Praef*., 2. 2). Al di fuori di contesti trionfali, fiumi e monti sono talora abbinati, non a caso in contesto epico, a città fortificate, in modo parzialmente simile al passaggio della lettera a Caninio, come nell'epitome dell'Iliade redatta da Bebio Italico, Homer., 861-2: *terra gerit siluas horrendaque monstra ferarum/ fluminaque et montes cumque altis oppida muris*; di contesto epico anche Petr., *Satyr*., 122. 137. 131 e 123. 141. 189; Sil., 16. 33; Val. Fl., 4. 20. Talora fiumi e monti sono accostati ad indicare impervi territori nemici o stranieri (cf. ad es. Liv., 22. 13. 7; 33. 8. 3; Curt., 7. 4. 9; Mela, 3. 29; Tac., *Agr*., 33. 4. 25; *Ann*., 2. 20. 3).

Tutto questo per dire che le immagini pliniane dei fiumi e dei monti vinti dalla tecnica di Traiano sono originali e significative dal punto di vista storico (come abbiamo visto inquadrando questi accenni nel contesto delle testimonianze letterarie sulle guerre in Dacia) e ideologico, e che in ogni caso tali figurazioni vanno ricondotte sia all'immaginario dei cortei trionfali sia al linguaggio dell'epica, quello che Caninio avrebbe non a caso dovuto adottare; il fatto che il loro abbinamento ricorra abitualmente per indicare zone impervie d'un territorio nemico, infine, non fa che accrescere il valore del loro soggiogamento da parte di Traiano.

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Fronto's letter *De nepote amisso* as lament, self-consolation and self-reflection

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Abstract: This article examines the implicit interaction between Emperor Marcus Aurelius and his former teacher Fronto in their correspondence *De nepote amisso*. The assumption I am arguing for is that Fronto writes his own letter of consolation, as the emperor's response seems too inadequate to him. His highly emotional letter also requires explanation, as it is not a traditional letter of condolence that can be classified into conventional rhetorical categories. Fronto implicitly conveys several messages to the emperor which are as follows: Emotional grief is justified in this situation; philosophy is unable to offer comfort; the parents of the deceased child can only offer each other comfort; Victorinus' virtuous character deserves to be held in high esteem by the emperor. Fronto, having reached the end of his life, finds comfort solely in his virtuous life.

Keywords: Fronto, Marcus Aurelius, grief, consolation, interaction.

1. The grief

It is an almost trivial observation that what happens in communicative interaction between correspondents is often not visible on the surface of the ancient text that has come down to us. Particularly when we consider the highly formalised relationships between individuals of the Roman upper class who were different in terms of their hierarchical social status, it seems appropriate to read texts as highly balanced works of diplomacy. A good example of this is the correspondence between Marcus Aurelius, who was first Caesar and then Emperor, and his mentor Fronto. On the one hand, Marcus is higher in the hierarchy and Fronto has to pay him his respects at the palace several times a week; on the other hand, the older Fronto is his rhetoric teacher and fatherly advisor. In any case, the correspondence is an interesting expression of the Antonine era and its subtle and sophisticated communication structures.

The complex interaction between the two correspondents can also be seen in four letters written shortly before Fronto's death, entitled 'De nepote amisso' ('On the death of the grandson') and probably dating from around 165 AD.[1] Fronto's grandson, the son of his

[1] Cf. van den Hout 1999, 533.

daughter Cratia and his son-in-law Victorinus, died in Germania at the age of three without Fronto ever seeing him. Fronto's grief is deep, as his long letter shows. In the following, I would like to show that Fronto subtly and implicitly criticises the emperor's own letter of condolence in his letter, and that he writes down a kind of legacy of his own life and world view, a real *consummatio uitae*[2], and at the same time does what plays a role throughout the entire correspondence: he makes recommendations for his relatives and friends. Intimate expressions of feeling, gentle reproach, justification and summary of one's own life flow together in his letter. Fronto's letter is both a monologue with himself and a dialogue with Marcus. And it is probably also addressed to a posthumous readership.[3] The first letter is Marcus' reaction to the death of Fronto's grandson.

Marcus Aurelius to Fronto (*De nepote amisso* 1, p. 235.3–10 ed. van den Hout)

MAGISTRO MEO SALUTEM
Modo cognoui de casu. Cum autem in singulis articulorum tuorum doloribus torqueri soleam, mi magister, quid opinaris me pati, cum animum doles? Nihil conturbato mihi aliud in mentem uenit quam rogare te ut conserues mihi dulcissimum magistrum, in quo plura solacia uitae huius habeo <quam> quae tibi tristitiae istius possunt ab ullo contingere. Mea manu non scripsi, quia uesperi loto tremebat etiam manus. Vale mi iucundissime magister.

To my master greeting.
I have just heard of your misfortune. Suffering anguish as I do when a single joint of yours aches, my master, what pain do you think I feel when it is your heart that aches? Under the shock of the news I could think of nothing else than to ask you to keep safe for me the sweetest of masters, in whom I find a greater solace for this life than you can find for your sorrow from any source. I have not written with my own hand because after my bath in the evening even my hand was shaky. Farewell, my most delightful of masters.[4]

It is a somewhat bold comparison Marcus makes in this letter. He speaks about himself, about his own grief and his relation to Fronto, and stresses the importance of Fronto for himself. In other words, he communicates the message that *he* needs comfort and gets it from Fronto, more than Fronto could get it from any other source. Besides, Marcus wants to justify the fact that even in this situation where Fronto needs comfort he is not able to write the letter with his

[2] Cf. the term in Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2024, 267.
[3] See Keulen 2024, 5–10 for the thesis that it was Fronto himself who edited the collection of letters for publication.
[4] Translation: Haines 1963, slightly modified by myself (in accordance with the changes in the Latin text by van den Hout).

own hand for health reasons.[5] It becomes clear that Marcus' letter is, on the one hand, rhetorically very well composed, on the other hand, intended to convey honesty and authenticity, and thirdly, that Marcus is neither able nor willing to make any attempt to comfort Fronto.[6] However, Marcus's desire not to disguise himself and his lack of consolation do not seem to be the problem here, in my opinion. Rather, the problem seems to be his focus on himself in comparison to Fronto.[7]

In his reply (*De nepote amisso* 2), Fronto does not use any polite phrases at the beginning, which is unusual for his correspondence: he immediately begins to recount the tragedy of his life, the loss of five children (only daughters, since Fronto had no son[8]). This abrupt beginning emphasises the emotional involvement of the letter writer.

Fronto to Marcus Aurelius, *De nepote amisso* 2, p. 235.12–17 vdH:

ANTONINO AUGUSTO FRONTO
Multis huiuscemodi maeroribus fortuna me per omnem uitam meam exercuit. Nam ut alia mea acerba omittam, quinque amisi liberos miserrima quidem condicione temporum meorum, nam quinque omnes unumquemque semper unicum amisi, has orbitatis uices perpessus, ut numquam mihi nisi orbato filius nasceretur. Ita semper sine ullo solacio residuo liberos amisi, cum recenti luctu procreaui.

Fronto to Antoninus Augustus.
With many sorrows of this kind has Fortune afflicted me all my life long. For, not to mention my other calamities, I have lost five children under the most distressing circumstances possible to myself. For I lost all five separately, in every case an only child, suffering this series of bereavements in such a way that I never had a child born to except while bereaved of another. So, I always lost children without any left to console me and with my grief fresh upon me I begat others.

[5] We can notice the fact that, throughout the correspondence, it is always important whether someone writes by his own hand or has someone else write for him. Cf. on this topic Freisenbruch 2007.
[6] Lucius Verus also writes a short letter of condolence to Fronto (*Ad Verum Imp*., I 9, 113 van den Hout). He too says that he does not dare to console his "teacher Fronto with learned phrases" (*grauiora mala quam ut magistrum doctis dictis consolari audeam*). At least he admits that in such a situation a father must "pour out his heart full of love and affection" (*sed patris est pectus amoris pietatisque plenum effundere*).
[7] Cf. also Fleury 2006, 82 : « On pourrait croire que ce moyen de peindre la tristesse n'est que l'expression emphatique et rhétorique du sentiment : le manque de mots illustre la profondeur de la compassion […]. » Fleury herself, however, sees this more as a rhetorical *topos*, insofar as Marcus (and likewise his brother Lucius Verus) hide behind silence and consternation because they feel unable to offer comfort. In my opinion, however, the two explanations are by no means mutually exclusive: Marcus is concerned and has no desire to offer banal words of comfort that appear to be empty phrases. But he is going too far with his comparison. Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2024, 273 also refers to the virtue of *ueritas*, which is evoked here by Marcus. She speaks of a "competition" and a "latent provocation" on Marcus' part: "Wer tröstet besser?" (see *ibidem*, 277).
[8] Cf. van den Hout, 1999, 535.

These lines convey profound sorrow, yet they also appear to be meticulously composed from a rhetorical standpoint (cf. the phrase *ut numquam mihi nisi orbato filius nasceretur*). Fronto presents himself here as a tragic figure (cf. *cum recenti luctu procreaui*), who has unknowingly provoked the anger of higher powers. However, as Fronto makes clear, it is particularly the grief of his daughter and son-in-law that causes him great pain. He thus extends the perspective to include his relatives. He emphasises that the worries in his life that affected him alone would not have tormented him so much:

De nepote amisso 2, p. 235.17–22 vdH:

Verum illos ego luctus toleraui fortius, quibus egomet ipse solus cruciabar. Namque meus animus meomet dolori obnixe oppositus quasi solitario certamine unus uni, par pari resistebat. At nunc amisso nepote luctus mihi dolore filiae, dolore generi multiplicatur: meum motum pertuli, meorum luctum ferre nequeo; Victorini mei lacrimis tabesco conliquesco.

But I bore with more fortitudes those woes by which I myself alone was tormented. For my mind, struggling obstinately with my own grief, as in a single combat man to man, equal with equal, made a stout resistance. But now after I have lost my grandson, my grief is multiplied by my daughter's pain and by the pain of my son-in-law. I can no longer bear the consummation of my woes, but as my Victorinus weeps, I waste away, I melt away along with him.

Fronto paints a tragic picture of a man who had to struggle with fate throughout his life and had to become hardened as a result. The confrontation with the suffering he sees among his own relatives now overwhelms him. Here he cannot fight anymore, here he can only suffer with them. The modern reader may wonder whether Fronto exaggerates his own or his relatives' grief in Roman terms of virtue. But I would argue that it is precisely the differentiation between one's own suffering and that of others that prevents Fronto from appearing too soft-hearted to potential Roman readers of the letters, and that sympathy for the family and the sympathetic relationship are kindly accepted.

At this point, Fronto changes his tone: grief turns to anger against fate and the powers of destiny. Fronto begins a discussion of theodicy and of divine justice in the world. It is hard to imagine that he is not addressing Marcus's own stoic positions in doing so because he is very familiar with the philosophical and Stoic orientation of his former student. It is also important to note that Victorinus, as the father of the deceased child, is now described as a prime example of Roman *uirtus*, not Fronto.

De nepote amisso 2, p. 235.23–236.9 vdH:

Saepe etiam expostulo cum dis immortalibus et fata iurgio compello. Victorinum pietate mansuetudine veritate innocentia maxima, omnium denique optimarum artium praecipuum virum acerbissima morte fili adflictum, hoccine ullo modo aequum aut iustum fuit? Si prouidentia res gubernantur, hoc idem recte provisum est? Si fato cuncta humana decernuntur, hoccine fato decerni <debuit>? Nullum ergo inter bonos ac malos fortunarum discrimen erit? Nulla deis, nulla fatis diiudicatio est, quali uiro filius eripiatur? Victorinus, uir sanctus, cuius similes quam plurimos gigni optimum publicum fuerit, carissimo filio priuatus est. Quae, malum, prouidentia tam inique prospicit? Fata a fando appellate aiunt: hoccine est recte fari?

Often, I even find fault with the immortal Gods, and I scold the Fates with reproaches. Victorinus, a man of entire affection, gentleness, sincerity, and blamelessness, a man, further, conspicuous for the noblest accomplishments to be thus afflicted by his son's most untimely death, was this in any sense just or fair? If Providence does govern the world, was this too rightly provided? If all human things are determined by Destiny, ought this to have been determined by Destiny? Shall there, then, be no distinction of fortunes between the good and the bad? Have the Gods, have the Destinies no power of discrimination as to what sort of man shall be robbed of his son? Victorinus, a blameless man, is bereaved of his darling son, and yet it would have been in the highest interests of the state that as many as possible of his kind should be born. Which Providence, to the hell, provides so unfairly? The Destinies, they say, are called so from the word "to destine": is this to destine rightly?

In Fronto's presentation, Victorinus is both, a sensitive family member and an important pillar of the Roman state. This justifies his grief. For Fronto, virtue and sensitivity are obviously not mutually exclusive (and we can conclude from the often very warm-hearted letters and remarks in Marcus's *Meditations* that this was also the case for Marcus). Despite all the authentic emotional excitement that Fronto probably felt, we can see here that the text was carefully written, is rhetorically effective and aims to make an impact.[9] This is evident from the rhetorical questions, figures of speech and puns (*fata a fando appellate aiunt: hoccine est recte fari*). Fronto suggests that the Roman empire itself should grieve over Victorinus' loss, as it is dependent on such men. In other words, Marcus should not only be sorry for Fronto, but he should also appreciate the damage that such a death causes to the Roman Empire, and he should hold Victorinus in high esteem.

[9] Cf. Ramírez de Verger 1983 and also van den Hout 1999, 534, who defends Fronto against the accusation of rhetorical exaggeration.

But there is the possibility that the proverb is correct that says “those whom the gods love die young”. Fronto says that he would rather believe in the truth of this proverb than in an unjust or non-existent fate.[10] However, this is not a consolation for those who remember the dead. It is only a philosophical argument in philosophical discussions. Once again, Fronto rejects philosophy: when it comes to existential matters, philosophy cannot help. The memory brings the deceased person so vividly to mind that grief cannot help but break through.[11] The problem is the absence of the deceased person from the family circle, not a metaphysical question about continued existence after death.[12]

2. Some self-consolation or: last words in letters

Up to this point, Fronto has lamented his own difficult fate and that of his relatives, as well as the loss to the empire, and has rejected any philosophical approach to coping with it. In the second part of the letter, he will make clear what gives him and his relatives at least some comfort. Since he himself cannot comfort his daughter and son-in-law, they must comfort each other.

De nepote amisso 2, p. 238.1–5 vdH:

Senex ego parens indigne consolabor. Dignius enim foret ipsum me ante obisse. Neque ulla poetarum carmina aut sapientium praecepta tantum promouerint ad luctum filiae meae sedandum et dolorem leniendum, quantum mariti u<o>x <ex> ore carissimo et pectore iunctissimo profecta.

[10] Cf. *De nepote amisso* 2, p. 236.20–26 vdH: *Quodsi mors gratulanda potius est hominibus quam lamentanda, quanto quisque eam natu minor adeptus est, tanto beatior et deis acceptior existimandus est, ocius corporis malis exutus, ocius ad honores liberae animae usurpandos excitus. Quod tamen uerum sit licet, parui nostra refert, qui desideramus amissos: nec quicquam nos animarum immortalitas consolatur, qui carissimis nostris dum uiuimus caremus./* “But if death be rather a matter for welcome than for mourning, the younger each one attains to it the happier must he be accounted and the greater favourite of the Gods, and he will have been released more quickly from the ills of the body and called forth to inherit the privileges of an enfranchised soul. Yet all this, true though it be, makes little difference to us who long for our lost ones, nor does the immortality of souls bring us the slightest consolation, seeing that in this life we are bereft of our best-beloved ones.”

[11] Cf. *De nepote amisso* 2, p. 236.26–237.4 vdH: *Istum statum, vocem, formam, animam liberum quaerimus, <f>aciem defunctorum miserandam maeremus, os obseratum, oculos eversos, colorem undique deletum. Si maxime esse animas immortalis constet, erit hoc philosophis disserendi argumentum, non parentibus desiderandi remedium./* “We miss the well-known mode of standing, the voice, the figure, the mentality of our children. We mourn over the pitiable face of the dead, the lips sealed, the eyes turned, the colour fled. Be the immortality of the soul ever so established: that will be a theme for the disputations of philosophers, it will never console the yearning of a parent.”

[12] In this context of the visualisation of the dead child, Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2024, 289–291 refers to the connections with ancient Roman death cults and ancestral masks (*imagines*).

> It will scarce befit me, as an aged father, to comfort her (sc. the daughter). For it were more fitting had I myself been the first to die. Nor would any poet's songs or philosopher's precepts be so much useful to console my daughter's grief and soothe her pain as her husband's voice issuing from lips so dear and a heart so near her own.

Here we encounter once again the strong emphasis on family loyalty and mutual support, which does not exclude grief and strong emotions. Fronto's own consolation lies in having led a morally irreproachable life and especially in the fact that he will die very soon. In other words, we hear an extremely pessimistic Fronto, who is nevertheless proud of his life's work and now provides a kind of self-reflection of his life for Marcus and perhaps also for posterity.

De nepote amisso 2, p. 238.6–12 vdH:

> *Me autem consolatur aetas mea prope iam edita et morti proxima. Quae cum aderit, si noctis, si lucis id tempus erit, caelum quidem consalutabo discedens et quae mihi conscius sum protestabor; nihil in longo uitae meae spatio a me admissum, quod dedecori aut probro aut flagitio foret; nullum in aetate agunda avarum, nullum perfidum facinus meum extitisse; contraque multa liberaliter, multa amice, multa fideliter, multa constanter saepe etiam cum periculo capitis consulta.*

> My comfort, however, I find in my life being almost spent and death very near. When it comes, be its advent by night or by day, yet will I hail the heavens as I depart and what my conscience tells me I will testify, that in my long span of life I have been guilty of nothing dishonourable, shameful, or criminal; my whole life through there has not been on my side a single act of avarice or of treachery, but on the contrary many of generosity, many of friendship, many of good faith, many of loyalty, undertaken, too, often at the risk of my life.

The same pride and emphasis on political and civic virtues can be seen here as in the passage above about Victorinus. Feelings of grief and brave resilience are not mutually exclusive, neither are warm-hearted generosity and loyalty towards friends and one's own integrity. And once again we see in this passage a Fronto who seems to be addressing the higher powers on the orator's platform or, perhaps, on the bench in the underworld court (cf. the judicial term *protestabor*).[13]

Family loyalty is also evident in his words about his brother. Fronto rejoices in his brother's close ties to the imperial family and emphasises the harmony in which he lived with his

[13] Cf. Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2024, 295f., who thinks of the setting of an underworld court.

brother.[14] Interestingly, immediately afterwards, he does not emphasise his position as the emperor's teacher or friend, as one would expect. Instead, he highlights his own integrity and incorruptibility, presenting himself as an intellectual who has devoted his life to study.[15] This emphasis on incorruptibility corresponds to what Marcus will later say about Fronto in his *Meditations*.[16] It seems that Fronto proudly presents himself as an independent and free patrician who does not want to make his existence solely dependent on his political position towards the imperial family.

As we have seen, the letter contains several surprising twists and turns, leading to a somewhat conciliatory conclusion: after lamenting and attacking the forces of fate, Fronto finds some consolation in reflecting on his achievements. The grief remains, but it can be contained and overcome through the *consummatio uitae*. This type of epistolary structure contradicts the usual patterns of a letter of condolence.[17] Of course, we cannot exclude the possibility that Fronto may have rhetorically reinforced this impression of emotional spontaneity to a certain extent. But rhetorical composition of the letter and emotional involvement were certainly not a contradiction for Fronto. It is possible that Fronto was prompted to write this letter by the brief response in Marcus' letter, which he perhaps disapproved of.[18] But he gradually transforms his emotional distress by using the letter as a medium for reflection, in which he recapitulates his life and character, praises his son-in-law and his brother, and somewhat dramatically announces his coming death.

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[14] Cf. *De nepote amisso* 2, p. 238.12–15 vdH: *Quom fratre optimo concordissime uixi, quem patris uestri bonitate summos honores adeptum gaudeo, uestra vero amicitia satis quietum et multum securum uideo.*/ "With the best of brothers I have lived in the utmost harmony, and I rejoice to see him raised by your father's kindness to the highest offices and resting in the friendship of both of you in all peace and security."

[15] Cf. *De nepote amisso* 2, p. 238.15–17 vdH: *Honores quos ipse adeptus sum, numquam inprobis rationibus concupiui. Animo potius quam corpori curando operam dedi. Studia doctrinae rei familiari meae praetuli*./ "The honours which I myself have attained I never coveted to gain by unworthy means. I have devoted myself to the cultivation of my mind rather than my body. I have held the pursuit of learning higher than the acquisition of wealth."

[16] Cf. Marcus Aurelius, *Med*., 1.11.

[17] See also Fleury 2006, 84, who considers the structure of the letter to be original and not based on standard arguments. She distinguishes (*ibid*., 67–68) between two types of consolatio, neither of which Fronto's *De nepote amisso* fits into very well: philosophical *consolatio*, which shows that death is not a negative event, and consolation aimed at honouring the virtues and achievements of the deceased. Cf. *ibid*., p. 97: "Mais la lettre frontonienne ne possède aucun modèle antérieur ou contemporain et donne une large place à l'éloge, d'abord du père de l'enfant, puis de l'auteur lui-même." Differently argues Ramírez de Verger 1983, who sees in the letter a typical arrangement insofar as philosophy is rejected. Fleury contests this opinion, arguing that the letter would then be more of a lament than a letter of consolation. However, the letter is not entirely a letter of consolation, but rather a well composed 'final letter' of a pessimistic old man who has been struck by misfortune and tries to cope with it. On the peculiarity of Fronto's letters to incorporate genres (such as the genres of consolation and lamentation), see Keulen 2024, 10–23.

[18] This strong reaction to a rather brief letter from the emperor is not unique in the letter corpus. In the correspondence *De feriis Alsiensibus*, Fronto also writes a long reply to Marcus' rather short and banal letter. For more details on *De feriis Alsiensibus*, see the analysis of von Alvensleben 2024 *passim*.

Even if we do not know for certain whether the letter subsequently transmitted by Marcus (*De nepote amisso* 3) followed immediately after Fronto's, the emperor's reaction would fit perfectly. Marcus had to respond to this long letter and its pessimistic tone. And it is typical of this relationship that Marcus adapts himself completely to Fronto and, in a sense, admits that he is helpless in the face of his friend's suffering.

Marcus Aurelius to Fronto, *De nepote amisso* 3, p. 239.17–240.1 vdH:

MAGISTR<O FRONTONI> SA<L>
Doleo, m<i m>ag<ister, v>e<re>; aliud en<im n>ich<il> reperio quod dicam a<ut> pr<odam> tibi. Mi<hi> personam indu<e>re uideor, <si> consoler e conexu ueritatis nostra<e>, cum ipse indigeam solacio.

To my master greeting.
It pains me, truly, my teacher. I cannot find anything else to say or convey to you. I feel like I have to act like a player when I am supposed to comfort you in view of the bonds of sincerity between you and me, when I myself am in need of comfort...

This is probably the last letter in the corpus that we have from Marcus. Unfortunately, only the first few lines are legible. But these lines show that Marcus understood Fronto's letter and his pessimistic state of mind. And once again, he emphasizes his own need for comfort and the absolute obligation of honesty, which prohibits all acting and mere rhetoric. Once again, he points to the almost symbiotic friendship between himself and Fronto, to the bonds of sympathy that cause both of them to suffer when one of them is suffering. He signals very clearly to Fronto that he empathises deeply with his suffering and has understood the deeply tragic content of the letter. Fronto's concluding letter (*De nepote amisso* 4), which is unfortunately also mutilated at the beginning, ends abruptly in silence. Fronto says he can no longer write because of pain and illness.

Fronto to Marcus Aurelius, *De nepote amisso* 4, p. 240.16–19 vdH:

D<OMINO MEO FRON>TO
[…] Multum et grauiter male ualui, mi Marce carissime. Dein casibus miserrimis adflictus sum: uxorem amisi, nepotem in Germania amisi, miserum me! Decimanum nostrum amisi. Ferreus si essem, plura scribere non possem isto in tempore. Librum misi tibi quem pro omnibus haberes.

> I have suffered from constant and serious ill-health, my dearest Marcus. Then afflicted by the most distressing calamities I have further lost my wife, I have lost my grandson in Germany, I unfortunate one! I have lost my Decimanus. If I were of iron, I could write no more just now. I have sent you a letter which you can take as representing all my thoughts.

Here, Fronto seems to be announcing the end of the correspondence itself, as it were.[19] We don't know exactly which document he is referring to in the last sentence. Perhaps it is a document unknown to us, perhaps it is the rhetorical declamation of *Arion*, which follows this letter as the last in the corpus.[20] But another possibility would be to refer this remark to his previous long letter (i.e. *De nepote amisso* 2), which he wants to be understood as his last words and *consummatio uitae*.[21] Perhaps reference is being made here once again to this letter, which is to be read by Marcus as a last representative statement of Fronto.

Certainly, Fronto is employing rhetorical devices in this long letter and may well have borrowed certain arguments and phrases from Cicero's letter of consolation on the death of his daughter Tullia, as van den Hout has suggested.[22] But this rhetorical skill and education serves Fronto's purpose of using the medium of the letter to express an existential consternation in the face of his loss. Marcus, on the other hand, admits that he cannot find the right words for this loss. In this respect, Fronto once again proves himself a master of epistle writing, albeit one who has now reached the end of his life and career. The letter gives him the opportunity to portray his daughter, his son-in-law, his deceased grandson, his brother and himself in the warmest light and to sketch a balance of emotional grief and other character virtues as far as he and his relatives are concerned.

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[19] See Keulen 2024, 5–10 for the hypothesis that it was Fronto himself who edited the collection of letters for publication.

[20] This is the assumption of Egelhaaf-Gaiser 2024, 301f. The translation "which you can take as representative of my feelings" by Davenport and Manley 2024, 206 is certainly not correct. The words *pro omnibus* must instead refer to other writings.

[21] It is unclear who Decumanus is. Van den Hout 1999, 533 thinks that Decumanus is another grandson who died but this is not probable. Above all, it would be surprising if Fronto first referred to a grandson generally as "grandson" and then referred to another grandson only by his nickname (*Decumanus* refers to the tenth legion stationed in Germania). Davenport and Manley 2024, 207 therefore properly reject van den Hout's proposition.

[22] The Ciceronian letter is partially preserved in the *Institutiones Diuinae* of Lactantius, see van den Hout 1999, 534.

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Die Verwirklichung des quintilianischen Lehrideals in Fronto
Pädagogische Tugenden und Lehren durch Briefe

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Abstract: This article argues that Fronto's epistolary pedagogy with Marcus Aurelius exhibits structural affinities with Quintilian's ideal *magister*, namely a paternal figure combining authority, affective attachment, individualized guidance, and a graduated programme of exercises. Rather than positing direct influence, the study offers a typological comparison, situating Fronto within imperial educational practices and mapping convergences with the *Institutio oratoria* (especially Book II). Three results emerge. First, Quintilian's teacher model hinges on "substituting for the father," where esteem and affection function as conditions of imitation, character formation, and sustained improvement. Second, the *progymnasmata* operate as a hinge between technique and ethos: encomia and invectives train style and arrangement while cultivating moral discernment, turning rhetorical practice into a pedagogy of virtue. Third, Fronto's letters confirm the program in action: vigilant care for the pupil's well-being, tightly structured assignments, detailed feedback, iterative rewriting (including extended "maxims"), and an intensively affective, yet pedagogically framed, relationship vocabulary. Taken together, Fronto's correspondence displays a practice that converges typologically with Quintilian's programme: a paradigmatic model of imperial education in which rhetorical technique and ethical formation are inseparable.

Keywords: Quintilian, Cornelius Fronto, teacher, pedagogy, love-relationships.

Einleitung

Marcus Cornelius Fronto ist ein lateinischer Autor, der uns durch seine Briefwechsel mit römischen Kaisern beim Verständnis der antiken Pädagogik helfen kann. Vor allem kommt seiner Korrespondenz mit Kaisern wie Antoninus Pius, Lucius Verus und Mark Aurel Wichtigkeit zu, da sie für uns ein bedeutsames Zeugnis der Erziehungsmethoden im kaiserzeitlichen Rom darstellen. Diese Erziehungsmethoden bestanden vornehmlich aus einer besonderen Aufmerksamkeit des Lehrers auf die individuellen Eigenschaften seines Schülers, einer affektiven Zuneigung und gegenseitigem Respekt und einer Konzentration auf Rhetorik- und Sprachübungen, die auch einen ethischen Wert hatten. Wenn wir uns spezifisch – zum Beispiel – auf Frontos Korrespondenz mit Mark Aurel konzentrieren, scheint Fronto klarerweise, diese Erziehungsmethoden eines sich um

den Schüler kümmernden Lehrers bei Mark Aurel anzuwenden. Bei genauerer Betrachtung wird deutlich, dass diese Figur eines sich um den Schüler kümmernden Lehrers, der die auch moralische (und nicht nur rednerische) Bedeutung der rhetorischen Übungen (wie im Fall der Beurteilung sowohl von Quintilianus als auch von Fronto über Seneca) betonte, eigentlich bereits von Marcus Fabius Quintilianus vorgeschlagen worden ist. Das Ziel meines Artikels ist es deswegen, diese Überlappung zwischen der von Quintilianus theorisierten Lehrerfigur und dem Lehrer von Mark Aurel, Fronto, als konvergentes Pendant zu diesem Ideal zu profilieren. Einige Textstellen der beiden Autoren deuten in der Tat auf Anknüpfungspunkte gerade in der Figur dieses Lehrertyps hin. Ich schlage daher vor, Quintilianus mit Fronto in Verbindung zu bringen, da diese Verbindung meines Erachtens eine zusätzliche Perspektive auf beide Autoren darstellt. Die Originalität des Beitrags liegt in der systematischen Verschränkung von Quintilianus' Curriculum (insbes. der *προγυμνάσματα*) mit Frontos epistolarer Praxis: Während Quintilianus den ethischen Zweck der Vorübungen programmatisch voranstellt, setzt Fronto zunächst rhetorisch-technisch an. Beide Modelle konvergieren jedoch im Ergebnis in der Ausbildung moralischer Urteilskraft. Zu diesem Zweck werde ich einige Textstellen aus der quintilianischen *Institutio Oratoria* mit einigen Passagen der Korrespondenz zwischen Fronto und Mark Aurel vergleichen.[1] Wir werden also sehen, wie der ideale Lehrer, den Quintilianus als aufmerksame Persönlichkeit beschreibt, die Übungen zuweist, die auch mit der Ethik verbunden sind, in Fronto sein konvergentes Pendent findet.

Der Forschungstand zu den beiden Autoren weist eine lange Geschichte auf[2] und sie sind in neuerer Zeit vor allem wegen ihres pädagogischen Anspruchs[3] wieder von Interesse geworden. Tatsächlich haben die Studien zu Quintilianus nach der Arbeit von Gelehrten wie Wolfram Ax[4] oder Klaus Zierer und Wolf-Thorsten Saalfrank[5] in der Tat eine bedeutsame Rolle für die Pädagogik gespielt. Nur beispielhaft seien die Arbeiten zu Quintilianus Pädagogik von Agustín de

[1] Aus Raumgründen werde ich in diesem Artikel nur meine eigenen Übersetzungen ins Deutsche wiedergeben. Die Ausgaben des Originaltextes sind jedoch im Literaturverzeichnis angegeben.
[2] Wie zum Beispiel: Vittorio Enzo Alfieri (1964, 400), José Luis García Garrido (1969, 229-50), George A. Kennedy (1969, 39; oder 1980, 100), Santiago Montero Herrero (1980, 91), Otto Seel (1977, 36), Pier Vincenzo Cova (1990, 9) oder Graziano Melzani (1990, 174).
[3] Ich berücksichtige hierbei nur die pädagogische Seite der Studien zu Quintilianus und Fronto, weil sich dieser Artikel genau den Erziehungselementen ihrer Schriften widmet.
[4] Ax 2010, 1.
[5] Zierer und Saalfrank 2012, 135-69.

la Herrán,[6] Miguel Ángel Novillo López,[7] Micha Brumlik,[8] Gyburg Uhlmann,[9] Barbara Ellen Logan[10] oder Marc van der Poel erwähnt.[11] In den Werken aller dieser Autoren scheint klar, dass Quintilianus eine bestimmte Aufmerksamkeit auf das Pädagogische richtete. Aus unterschiedlichen Passagen des quintilianischen Texts, die die genannten Gelehrten ausführlich analysiert haben, kristallisiert sich nämlich eine Lehrerfigur heraus, die auf die persönlichen Charakteristiken seiner Schüler aufmerksam achtete. Diese dargestellte Lehrerfigur kümmerte sich um seine Schüler, pflegte mit ihnen eine auf gegenseitiger Einschätzung und Respekt basierende emotionale Beziehung und gab ihnen Rhetorikübungen.

Man kann jedoch meines Erachtens dazu hinzufügen, dass das theoretische von Quintilianus dargelegte Vorbild der idealen Lehrerfigur in Cornelius Fronto seine Umsetzung findet. Der Forschungsstand zu Fronto, einem – im Vergleich zu Quintilianus – weniger bekannten Autor, zählt sowohl ältere Werke,[12] als auch neuerschienene Werke, wie die Arbeiten von Silvana Fasce,[13] Yasuko Taoka,[14] Olga Budaragina,[15] Noelle K. Zeiner-Carmichael,[16] Giovanni Margiotta,[17] Carla Castelli[18] oder Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser und Wytse Keulen,[19] die zu einer Wiederentdeckung des Autors im Allgemeinen beigetragen haben. Die Neuigkeit meiner Arbeit liegt nichtdestotrotz in der Verbindung zwischen Quintilianus und Fronto in Bezug auf das Modell eines sorgfältigen und übungsgebenden Lehrers, das Quintilianus in der Theorie vorschlägt und das Fronto in der Praxis seiner Lehre zu Mark Aurel anwendet. Das Hauptziel meines Artikels besteht daher darin, aufzuzeigen, wie sich im Rom des 1. und 2. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. dieser Archetyp des Lehrers sowohl in der Theorie (Quintilianus) als auch in der Praxis (Fronto) immer deutlicher abzeichnet. Dieses Ziel soll somit einen Beitrag zu den Studien über die

[6] De la Herrán 2012, 303.
[7] Novillo López 2016, 126.
[8] Brumlik 2018, 677.
[9] Uhlmann 2019, 191.
[10] Logan 2019, 157.
[11] Van der Poel 2021: 83.
[12] Wie zum Beispiel: Theodor Mommsen (1874, 198), Charles R. Haines (1914, 112), Rudolf Hanslik (1935, 21) René Marache (1957, 19), Edward Champlin (1980, 1), Pier Vincenzo Cova (1994, 875), Michel P.J. van den Hout (1999, 1) oder Pascale Fleury (2006, 15).
[13] Fasce 2011, 99.
[14] Taoka 2013, 406; oder Taoka 2015, 301.
[15] Budaragina 2015, 49; oder Budaragina 2016, 54.
[16] Zeiner-Carmichael 2018a, 116; oder Zeiner-Carmichael, 2018b, 78.
[17] Margiotta 2021, 273.
[18] Castelli 2021, 1.
[19] Egelhaaf Gaiser und Keulen 2024, 1.

Erziehungsmethoden und -figuren dieser Zeit leisten. Zu diesem Zweck werde ich mich zunächst mit der Erklärung des quintilianischen Lehrmodells beschäftigen und danach mit der Erklärung der Tätigkeit als Lehrer, die Fronto gegenüber Mark Aurel ausübte. Das wird die strukturelle Übereinstimmung zwischen Quintilians Idealbild des *magister* und Frontos brieflicher Praxis sichtbar machen. Zunächst rekonstruiere ich die Figur des Lehrers in Rom und danach das quintilianische Lehrmodell anhand zentraler Passagen der *Institutio oratoria* (vor allem Buch II). Darauf folgt die Analyse der Rhetorikübungen als Scharnier zwischen Technik und Ethos samt dem kritischen Seneca-Casus als Negativfolie. Abschließend zeige ich an Frontos Briefwechsel mit Mark Aurel die Umsetzung *in actu* und bündele die Befunde im Fazit. Im Folgenden wird deswegen keine direkte Wirkungskette zwischen Quintilian und Fronto vorausgesetzt. Der Beitrag verfolgt tatsächlich eine vergleichende, typologische Lektüre, die Übereinstimmungen (trotz einiger Abweichungen) zwischen einem theoretischen Modell (Quintilian) und einer brieflichen Lehrpraxis (Fronto) im Kontext kaiserzeitlicher Bildung sichtbar macht.

1. Der Lehrer im Rom

Bevor ich näher auf die Beschreibung des Lehrers nach Quintilian und die Beschreibung der Tätigkeit Frontos als Lehrer von Mark Aurel eingehe, halte ich es für angebracht, kurz mich auf das römische Bildungssystem vor und während des Kaiserreichs zu konzentrieren, für das Quintilian und Frontos zwei wichtige Beispiele sind. Tatsächlich sind Quintilian und Fronto Beispiele eines Bildungssystems – dem des kaiserlichen Roms –, dessen Wurzeln sowohl in griechischen als auch in lateinischen Modellen liegen. Zwischen dem 3. und 2. Jahrhundert v. Chr. fand die Erziehung in Rom hauptsächlich innerhalb der eigenen vier Wände statt und basierte auf Autoritätsverhältnissen, wie beispielsweise dem zwischen Vater und Sohn. Cato der Ältere ist vielleicht das symbolträchtigste Beispiel für diese erzieherische Beziehung zwischen Vater und Sohn.[20] Bereits Cato verband Ethik und Redekunst in seinem berühmten Satz *orator, vir bonus, dicendi peritus*.[21] In diesem Sinne kann Cato bereits als Vorläufer der quintilianischen ethisch-rhetorischen Bildung angesehen werden. Die quintilianische Bildung geht jedoch hauptsächlich von Cicero in manchen Lehren aus,[22] auch wenn es Abweichungen vorstellt.[23] Die ersten Spuren

[20] In diesem Zusammenhang: Peter Scholz (2019, 190).
[21] Cato, *ad M. fil.*, fr. 1.
[22] Anne-Marie Taisne (1997, 38) ist auch dieser Meinung.
[23] In diesem Zusammenhang: Amedeo A. Raschieri (2017, 302).

eines Bildungssystems tauchten tatsächlich bereits im 3. Jahrhundert v. Chr. in Rom auf,[24] aber vor allem dank der Ankunft griechischer Intellektueller in Rom kam es zu einer bedeutenden Entwicklung des Lehrerberufs und zu einer ersten Theoretisierung desselben.[25] Cicero ist jedoch ein bedeutender Beitrag zur Entwicklung eines Bildungssystems in Rom zuzuschreiben, wie Stanley F. Bonner zu Recht bemerkt hat.[26] Cicero hat – vielleicht auch aufgrund seiner eigenen Ausbildung in Griechenland –[27] wiederholt die Bedeutung einer rhetorischen Bildung im Leben eines römischen Bürgers thematisiert. So lässt sich bereits bei ihm und somit im 1. Jahrhundert v. Chr. eine ausgeprägte Neigung zur Annäherung zwischen Rhetorik, Ethik und Bildung beobachten. Diese Rolle der Erziehung, die einerseits mit Rhetorik und andererseits mit einem Vater verbunden ist, wird vor allem im 1. Jahrhundert n. Chr. deutlich, wie Ovids Vorstellung von Cheiron, dem Lehrer von Achilles, in der Beschreibung der Trauer um den sterbenden Zentauren zeigt:

> *Das Blut der lernäischen Hydra,* 405
> *vermischt mit dem Blut des Zentauren, ließ keine Zeit zur Rettung.*
> *Achilles, in Tränen gebadet, stand vor ihm wie vor einem Vater:*
> *so hätte er auch um Peleus im Angesicht des Todes geweint.*
> *Oft streichelte er die schwachen Hände mit seinen eigenen liebevollen Händen;*
> *der Lehrer erntete den Lohn für den Charakter, den er geformt hatte.*
> *Oft küsste Achilles ihn, und oft sagte er zu ihm, während er dalag:*
> *„Lebe, ich bitte dich, und verlasse mich nicht, lieber Vater".*[28]

Genauer betrachtet wird die Verbindung zwischen einem fürsorglichen Lehrer und seinem Schüler, wie zwischen einem Vater und seinem Sohn – sowie der gegenseitige Respekt und die gegenseitige Wertschätzung –, im 1. Jahrhundert n. Chr. dargestellt, ebenfalls in der Figur des Cheiron, auch von Publius Papinius Statius (ein Zeitgenosse Quintilians)[29], aber vor allem bei

[24] Vössing 2023, 104.
[25] Gwynn 1926, 34.
[26] Bonner 1977, 75.
[27] Cic. *nat. deor.*, 1.59. Das Thema der Bedeutung der Ausbildung in Griechenland bei Cicero wurde kürzlich auch von Meike Rühl (2020, 91) und Valeria Marchetti (2020, 112) aufgegriffen.
[28] Ovid., *fast.*, 5.405-12,
[29] Statius, *Ach.*, 2.96-125. Auch Gelehrte wie Elaine Fantham (1999, 60) haben diesbezüglich bemerkt, inwiefern Cheiron in diesen beiden Autoren gleichzeitig als eine Vater- und Lehrfigur dargestellt wird. Cheirons Figur kann meines Erachtens als ein deutliches mythisches Beispiel gelten, das uns beim Begreifen des quintilianischen Lehrideals helfen kann.

Quintilian und Fronto kann man diese Figur eines fürsorglichen Lehrers gegenüber seinem Schüler beobachten, dem er rhetorische Übungen gibt, die auch eine ethische Dimension haben. Unter Berücksichtigung des pädagogischen Hintergrunds, in den sich die pädagogischen Theorien und Handlungen von Fronto einfügen, können wir nun mit der Analyse der Figur des Lehrers fortfahren, die von Quintilian in der Theorie und von Fronto in der Praxis vorgestellt wird.

2. Das quintilianische Lehrmodell

Quintilianus beschreibt in unterschiedlichen Passagen vor allem des zweiten Buchs seiner *Institutio Oratoria* den idealen Lehrer und seine Aufgaben. Der ideale Lehrer sollte für den Schüler der Stellvertreter eines Vaters für den Schüler sein:

> *Es genügt nicht, dass er selbst ein Beispiel vollkommener Selbstbeherrschung gibt, wenn er nicht auch das Verhalten derer, die seinen Unterricht besuchen, durch die Strenge seiner Disziplin zügelt. Zuallererst sollte er also eine väterliche Haltung gegenüber seinen Schülern einnehmen und sich selbst an die Stelle derjenigen setzen, deren Kinder ihm anvertraut sind.*[30]

Darüber hinaus ist bereits an dieser Stelle anzumerken, dass der Lehrer nach Quintilian ein angemessenes und korrektes Verhältnis zu seinen Schülern pflegen muss. Quintilian bemerkt dazu:

> *Sollte der Lehrer bereitwillig auf Fragen antworten und von sich aus diejenigen befragen, die ihm keine Fragen stellen. Beim Lob für Übungen sollte er weder zu streng noch zu großzügig sein, da die erste Haltung das Lernen langweilig macht und die zweite zu übermäßiger Selbstsicherheit führt. Wenn der Lehrer Fehler korrigiert, sollte er nicht streng sein und so wenig wie möglich beleidigen, denn die Tatsache, dass manche die Schüler tadeln, fast so, als hätten sie einen Groll gegen sie, hält viele davon ab, zu lernen.*[31]

Der Lehrer muss daher fair sein, aber vor allem die Schüler respektieren und gleichzeitig zu einer aktiven Teilnahme am Unterricht anregen, der als interaktive Aktivität verstanden werden muss.[32] Der Lehrer nach Quintilian ist daher für den Schüler eine inspirierende Persönlichkeit mit einem wohlwollenden Verhalten gegenüber seinen Schülern. Darin kommt auch eine gegenseitige

[30] Quint., *Inst*., 2.2.4.
[31] Quint., *Inst*., 2.2.6-7.
[32] W. Martin Bloomer (2011, 124) ist auch dieser Meinung.

positive Reaktion des Schülers zum Ausdruck. Der Lehrer wird deshalb für den Schüler zu einem väterlichen Stellvertreter, den der Schüler seinerseits liebt:

> *Denn auch wenn er ihnen reichlich Beispiele zur Nachahmung aus der Lektüre liefert, so kommt die bessere Nahrung, wie man sagt, von der ‚lebendigen Stimme', und besonders von einem Lehrer, den die Schüler, wenn sie richtig unterrichtet werden, lieben und respektieren. Man kann gar nicht hoch genug einschätzen, wie viel eher wir bereit sind, diejenigen nachzuahmen, die wir mögen.*[33]

Daraus ergibt sich die Figur eines Lehrers, der seine Schüler wie ein Vater respektiert und den die Schüler ihrerseits wie einen Vater mögen. Das führt anschließend zu einer emotionalen und auf gegenseitiger Einschätzung basierenden emotionalen Lehrer-Schüler-Beziehung.[34] Der *rhetor* von Quintilianus muss deswegen Aufmerksamkeit auf die einzelnen Schüler haben und sie müssen ihn mögen. Zu dieser grundlegenden Beschreibung der Lehrer-Schüler-Beziehung fügt Quintilianus eine zentrale Aufgabe des Rhetors hinzu. Das besteht aus der Zuweisung von rhetorischen Übungen, den *προγυμνάσματα*, die wir jetzt in ihrer quintilianischen Anwendung erklären sollten.

3. Quintilianus und die προγυμνάσματα

Bevor wir uns Quintilianus' Anwendung der προγυμνάσματα widmen, sollte kurz erklärt werden, dass die προγυμνάσματα grundlegende sprachliche und schriftliche Rhetorikübungen waren.[35] Sie entstanden vor allem im griechischen Raum.[36] Wissenschaftler wie Laurent Pernot[37] haben bereits darauf hingewiesen, dass die ersten Spuren der προγυμνάσματα bereits in bemerkenswerter Weise in der Redekunst des Griechenlands zu finden sind. In diesem Zusammenhang sind auch verschiedene Passagen aus griechischen Rhetorikhandbüchern zu beachten, wie beispielsweise die *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (zugeschrieben Aristoteles oder Anaximenes von Lampsakos, 3. Jahrhundert v. Chr.).[38] Auf jeden Fall tauchten die *προγυμνάσματα* bereits in Rhetorikhandbüchern

[33] Quint., *Inst*., 2.2.8.
[34] Wolfram Ax (2010, 13) ist auch dieser Meinung.
[35] Für eine präzisere Erläuterung des Begriffs von προγυμνάσματα: Toivo Viljamaa (1988, 184), Ruth Webb (2001, 289), Francesco Berardi (2017a, 18) oder Michel van der Poel (2021, 91).
[36] Christy Desmet (2005, 298) und Robert J. Penella (2011, 77) sind auch dieser Meinung.
[37] Pernot 2008, 286.
[38] Anax., *Rhet. ad. Alex.*, 28.4.5. Zum Zusammenhang zwischen *προγυμνάσματα* und rhetorischem Unterricht in der vorrömischen Zeit siehe Maria S. Celentano (2011, 358) oder Laure Hermand-Schebat (2017, 233).

des 2. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. auf, wie Malcom Heath[39] und George A. Kennedy[40] bemerkt haben. Erst im Rom Quintilians und Frontos erlangten jedoch die προγυμνάσματα besondere Bedeutung, vor allem aufgrund ihres rhetorischen Schwerpunkts, wie auch die Werke von Autoren wie Aelius Theon (1.–2. Jahrhundert n. Chr.) zeigen. Aelius Theon wird ein Werk mit dem Titel *Progymmasmata* zugeschrieben. Bereits zu Beginn seines Werkes[41] bekräftigt er die Bedeutung, die rhetorischen Vorbereitungsübungen hatten. Diese Bedeutung der προγυμνάσματα findet sich auch bei Quintilian wieder. Die eigentliche Wichtigkeit der προγυμνάσματα liegt jedoch nicht nur in der Übung der Rhetorik, sondern in der Möglichkeit, Werte zu vermitteln, wie auch J. David Flaming verdeutlicht.[42] Das erklärt Quintilianus selbst:

> *Der Schüler wird sich dann allmählich an anspruchsvollere Themen heranwagen: Encomia berühmter Männer und Invektiven gegen die Bösen.[43] Dies ist in mehrfacher Hinsicht nützlich: Der Geist wird durch die Vielfalt und Vielfältigkeit des Materials trainiert; der Charakter wird durch die Betrachtung von Recht und Unrecht geformt.*[44]

Die quinitlianischen Rhetorikübungen haben in diesem Sinne die ethische Aufgabe, den Charakter des Schülers zu formen.[45] Das erklärt die Wichtigkeit, die sie im quintilianischen Denken hatten.[46] Der Lehrer ist in diesem Sinne eine Referenzfigur für seine Schüler, da er mit ihnen eine liebe- und respektvolle Beziehung pflegt und ihnen Übungen gab, damit sie sich persönlich mit dem Guten und dem Bösen befassen konnten.[47] Selbst in Quintilianus' berühmtem Urteil über Seneca findet dieser Gedanke seinen Widerhall:

> *Man wünschte sich, er hätte sich mit seiner Intelligenz, aber mit der Ausgewogenheit eines anderen ausgedrückt: Denn wenn er gewisse Dinge verschmäht hätte, wenn er sich nicht nach † korrupten*

[39] Heat 2002, 8.
[40] Kennedy 2003, ix.
[41] Ael. Th., 59.1-10
[42] Flaming 2003, 117.
[43] Diese rhetorische Übung wird zum Beispiel dann auch im Handbuch über die προγυμνάσματα von Aphtonios (8.5) aufgegriffen.
[44] Quint., *Inst.*, 2.4.20.
[45] Bereits Craig A. Gibson (2014, 1) hat zu Recht vorgeschlagen, nicht nur den rhetorischen Aspekt der *προγυμνάσματα* (vornehmlich bei Quintlian), sondern auch ihre moralische Bedeutung anzumerken.
[46] Francesco Berardi 2017b, 162.
[47] Patrice Soler (2021, 278) ist auch dieser Meinung.

Ausdrücken †[48] *gesehnt hätte, wenn er nicht alle seine eigenen Eigenschaften geliebt hätte, wenn er das Gewicht der Argumente nicht in winzige Sätze zerlegt hätte, würde er eher von der übereinstimmenden Meinung der Gebildeten als von der Leidenschaft der Jungen geschätzt werden.*[49]

In dieser Beurteilung Senecas kritisiert Quintilianus sowohl dessen Moralvorstellungen als auch dessen rhetorischen Stil und behauptet, dass der stoische Philosoph zu viel Einfluss auf junge Menschen habe, die noch nicht in der Lage waren, dessen „Laster" zu erkennen, die in kurzen Sätzen (*sententiae*) formuliert waren. Wenn der Schüler jedoch seine Unterscheidungsfähigkeit gestärkt hat, kann er Seneca lesen, um sein Urteil für oder gegen den Philosophen zu untermauern.[50] Das erzeugt in weiterem Sinne eine unbestreitbare Verbindung zwischen dem Lehrer und der Entwicklung der Persönlichkeiten von seinen Schülern. Auch diese Einschätzung Quintilianus' unterstreicht somit die enge Verbindung zwischen Ethik und Rhetorik nach Quintilian.

Zusammenfassend kann man davon ausgehen, dass das quintilianische Vorbild eines Lehrers hervorbringt, der seine Schüler erzieht, als wäre er ihr Vater, und den die Schüler mögen müssen. Beim Kümmern um die Erziehung seiner Schüler bereitet der Lehrer für sie προγυμνάσματα vor, die einen Einfluss auf die Entwicklung der moralischen Persönlichkeit der Schüler hat. Dieses Lehrmodell, das Quintilianus skizziert, lässt sich in Frontos Briefen als praxisnahes Gegenstück beobachten, ohne dass damit eine direkte Abhängigkeit behauptet wäre.

4. Fronto, quintilianischer *magister* von Mark Aurel

Von Marcus Cornelius Fronto sind unterschiedliche Briefkorrespondenzen erhalten. Er hielt sie mit unterschiedlichen Kaisern, nämlich Antoninus Pius, Lucius Verus und (vornehmlich) Mark Aurel.[51] Es ist genau der Briefaustausch zwischen dem Mark Aurel und Fronto, in dem sich in unterschiedlichen Stücken die quintilianische Lehrer-Schüler-Beziehung wiederspiegelt. Wie der quintilianische *magister* sich um die Persönlichkeit des Schülers kümmert, so hat sich Fronto um Mark Aurel gekümmert:

[48] Im Text von Michael Winterbottom (1970, 593) steht *parum*. Meiner Meinung nach ist jedoch *parva* aufgrund des Kontextes des Quintilianus-Zitats richtiger, um die Laster zu bezeichnen, die sich nach Quintilianus aus Senecas Lesart ergeben.
[49] Quint., *Inst.*, 10.1.130.
[50] Marc Laureys (1991, 124) war auch dieser Meinung.
[51] Für eine genauere Darstellung der Beziehungen zwischen Fronto und den anderen hier erwähnten Kaisern siehe: Jo-Marie Claassen 2009, 50.

> *Zu Recht habe ich mich dir gewidmet, zu Recht habe ich alle Errungenschaften meines Lebens in dich und deinen Vater investiert. Was könnte freundlicher, was könnte erfreulicher, was könnte wahrhaftiger sein?*[52]

Fronto hat sich um Mark Aurel lebenslang gekümmert. Dies ist, genau betrachtet, bereits ein erstes Anzeichen für die wechselseitige und persönliche Beziehung, die Fronto zu Mark Aurel aufgebaut hatte. Das zeigt tatsächlich schön die Aufmerksamkeit von Fronto für seinen Schüler, was dem ersten Aspekt der quintilianischen Pädagogik entspricht, die wir schon betrachtet haben.[53] Auf den emotionalen Aspekt dieser Lehrer-Schüler-Beziehung haben wir auch ein Zeugnis aus Mark Aurel, da er selbst sich um das Wohlbefinden seines Lehrers kümmert, wie er selbst in einem seiner Briefe schreibt, der im Briefwechsel von Fronto erhalten ist:

> *Wenn Du nach den wachen Nächten, über die du dich beklagst, wieder Schlaf findest, bitte ich dich, mir zu schreiben und vor allem auf deine Gesundheit zu achten.*[54]

Am Herzen des Schülers liegt die Gesundheit seines Lehrers. Das ist ein erstes Zeugnis des Wohlwollens von Mark Aurel für Fronto und seines Kümmerns für ihn. Das zeugt andererseits, dass auch Fronto, der Lehrer, durch Mark Aurel, seinen Schüler, geliebt wird, sowie der quintilianische *magister* von seinen Schülern geliebt wird. Bei einer genaueren Analyse und unter Berücksichtigung der Tatsache, dass Fronto sein ganzes Leben Mark Aurel gewidmet hat,[55] zeigt sich auch in anderen Briefen von Fronto seine starke Zuneigung zu seinem Schützling und die Mark Aurels Hochschätzung für Fronto:

> *Ich fühle keinen Schmerz mehr, noch irgendeinen Kummer: Ich bin, es geht mir gut, ich springe vor Freude; wo immer du willst, komme ich; wohin du willst, eile ich.*[56]

Aus einer bestimmten Perspektive lässt sich daher ein fast erotischer Aspekt in der Beziehung zwischen Mark Aurel und Fronto erkennen. Dieser Aspekt, der zu Recht von mehreren

[52] Front., *Ep. ad M. Caes. et inv.*, 3.3.1.
[53] Siehe Fußnote 31.
[54] Front., *Ep. ad M. Caes. et inv.*, 3.9.1.
[55] Siehe Fußnote 52.
[56] Front., *Ep. ad M. Caes. et inv.*, 1.3.2.

renommierten Wissenschaftlern kritisiert wurde,[57] deutet meiner Meinung nach eher auf eine starke gegenseitige Wertschätzung zwischen Mark Aurel und Fronto hin. Mit anderen Worten, diese Art von starker Wertschätzung scheint, wenn man die zitierten Texte genau betrachtet, ein wesentlicher Bestandteil der Lehrer-Schüler-Beziehung zu sein, die sich zwischen Mark Aurel und Fronto entwickelte. Diese gegenseitige Hochschätzung zwischen Mark Aurel und Fronto spiegelt darüber hinaus einen der Eckpfeiler der quintilianischen Pädagogik wider, die, wie wir gesehen haben,[58] eine auf gegenseitigem Respekt und Wertschätzung basierende Lehrer-Schüler-Beziehung vorsah. Dies trägt dazu bei, Fronto als potenziellen quintilianischen Lehrer zu identifizieren, wie auch Ute Tischer bemerkt.[59] Zusammenfassend lässt sich also sagen, dass Fronto ein „quintilianischer" Lehrer ist – trotz einer Parodie auf einige Theorien von Quintilianus –, da Fronto in der Praxis genau dieser quintilianische Lehrer ist, der von seinen Schülern geschätzt wird und dessen Schüler sich gegenseitig schätzen.

5. Fronto und die *προγυμνάσματα*

Diese Hochschätzung, die Fronto für Mark Aurel empfindet, ist nichtsdestoweniger nur einer der zwei Leitfäden seiner Briefkorrespondenz und einer der zwei zentralen Gründe, warum man Fronto mit dem quintilianischen Lehrideal in Verbindung bringen darf. Edward Champlin hat zu Recht unterstrichen, dass Frontos andere Leidenschaft, neben derjenigen für Mark Aurel, die Rhetorik war.[60] Fronto, dessen rhetorische Fähigkeiten bereits die Zeitgenossen schätzten,[61] freute sich, wenn Mark Aurel seine Rhetorikübungen erledigte:

> *Aber für mich war es so gut, wie Cratia*[62] *zu haben, dass du deine „*gnomai*" so glänzend gedreht hast; die eine, die ich heute erhalten habe, ist fast fehlerlos, so dass sie in ein Buch von Sallust gesteckt werden könnte, ohne zu stören oder irgendeine Minderwertigkeit zu zeigen. Ich bin glücklich, fröhlich, munter, mit einem Wort, wieder jung geworden, wenn man solche Fortschritte macht. […] Du musst dieselbe* gnome *zwei- oder dreimal wenden, so wie du es mit der kleinen getan hast. Und so schreibe längere zwei- oder dreimal fleißig und mutig.*[63]

[57] Siehe beispielsweise: Finley Hooper and Matthew Schwartz 1991, 99; Amy Richlin 2006, 5; Christian Laes 2009, 2.
[58] Siehe Kap. 1.
[59] Ute Tischer (2024, 170) ist auch dieser Meinung.
[60] Champlin 1980, 4.
[61] Zeugnis davon ist Aulus Gellius: Gell., 2.26.20, Gell., 13.29.5, oder Gell., 19.8.1.
[62] Frontos Frau.
[63] Front. *Ep. ad M. Caes. et inv.* 3.12.1.

Frontos Fokus auf die Rhetorik ist unbestreitbar.[64] In diesem Zusammenhang kann nicht außer Acht gelassen werden, dass die Rhetorik, insbesondere die griechisch geprägte, die in öffentlichen Reden verwendet wurde, während der Zeit des römischen Reiches eine zentrale Bedeutung erlangt hatte.[65] Daher passt die Vorbereitung eines Politikers wie Mark Aurel durch Fronto gut in diesen Kontext, und rhetorische Übungen nehmen bei Fronto ebenso wie bei Quintilianus einen zentralen Stellenwert ein. Die Rhetorikübungen verknüpfen sich bei Fronto auch mit einer ethischen Bedeutung, sowie bei Quintilianus. Ähnlichkeiten zwischen Quintilianus und Fronto in der Verbindung von rhetorischen und ethischen Argumenten lassen sich auch in Frontos Einschätzung von Seneca erkennen:

> *Glaubst du denn, dass du in deinem Annaeus* [Seneca] *gewichtigere Gedanken zum gleichen Thema finden könntest als in Sergius? Aber (bei Sergius) nicht so rhythmisch: Das gebe ich zu; auch nicht so lebhaft: Das ist wahr; und auch nicht mit solcher Klangfülle: Das leugne ich nicht. Aber was wäre, wenn zwei Personen dasselbe Essen vorgesetzt bekämen und der eine die auf dem Tisch stehenden Oliven mit den Fingern aufnähme, sie zu seinem offenen Mund führe, sie auf anständige und angemessene Weise zwischen die Zähne nehme, um sie zu kauen, während der andere seine Oliven in die Luft werfe, sie mit dem Mund auffange und sie, wenn er sie gefangen hat, wie ein Jongleur seine Kieselsteine mit den Lippenspitzen zeige. Schüler würden natürlich applaudieren und die Gäste wären amüsiert, aber der eine hätte sein Abendessen anständig gegessen, der andere hätte mit seinen Lippen jongliert. Sie werden sagen, dass es in seinen Büchern bestimmte Dinge gibt, die geschickt ausgedrückt sind, einige auch mit Würde. Ja, sogar kleine Silbermünzen findet man manchmal in der Kloake; sollen wir deshalb einen Vertrag über die Reinigung der Kloake abschließen?*[66]

Auch Frontos Urteil über Seneca verbindet also Ethik mit Rhetorik, da – so sagt Fronto – der junge Mensch eher von jemandem angezogen wird, der wie Seneca einen schönen Stil hat, aber nicht die richtigen Ziele verfolgt, die in diesem Abschnitt mit dem richtigen Verzehr von Oliven interpretiert werden. Fronto behauptet also, ähnlich wie Quintilianus,[67] dass Seneca kein Vorbild für einen *magister* sei, dem man nacheifern sollte, auch weil, selbst wenn es in Seneca gültige moralische Elemente gäbe,

[64] Bei einer weiteren Ansicht, sieht man auch, inwiefern der frontonische Fokus auf die Rhetorik auch philosophische Aspekten verbirgt, wie Otta Wenskus (2017, 76) und Christian Tornau (2024, 104) bemerkt haben. In meinem Artikel konzentriere ich mich jedoch nur auf die grammatikalischen und praktisch moralischen Ergebnisse, die von der Ausübung der Rhetorik laut Fronto ausgehen.
[65] William Guast (2023, 24) ist auch dieser Meinung.
[66] Front., *Ep. Ad M. Ant. De or.*, 3.
[67] Fußnote 49.

diese durch seinen „lasterhaften" rhetorischen Stil korrumpiert würden. Daher sei Seneca sowohl in rhetorischer als auch in ethischer Hinsicht ein negatives Vorbild. In diesem Sinne lässt sich der Schüler nicht direkt von den Taten ehrenwerter Männer inspirieren, die er durch die Rhetorik kennengelernt hat (wie im Fall von Quintilianus)[68], sondern er entfernt sich gerade durch das Studium von Autoren wie Sallust und Seneca von den Vorbildern, denen er nicht folgen sollte. In diesem Sinne wird das Ziel von Fronto vom rhetorischen zum ethischen, und Mark Aurel dankt seinem *magister* gerade für diese ethische Lehre über die zu vermeidenden Vorbilder:

Von Fronto habe ich gelernt, auf tyrannische Verleumdungen, List und Heuchelei zu achten, und (ich habe gelernt), dass die Adligen, die bei uns Patrizier genannt werden, meist ziemlich grausam und rücksichtslos sind.[69]

Fronto hat in diesem Sinne das Pädagogische mit der Rhetorik eingebunden, wie Felicita Portalupi bereits unterstrichen hat.[70] Die Verknüpfung zwischen Rhetorikübungen und kümmernde Emotionen eines Lehrers für seine Schüler, ein Vorbild, das schon durch Quintilianus dargestellt wurde, wird von Fronto in der Praxis verkörpert. Es ist jedoch anzumerken, dass die rhetorischen Vorübungen, auf die Quintilianus großen Wert legt, und die von Fronto zwei unterschiedliche Ausgangsziele haben, aber dasselbe Ziel erreichen. Einerseits bereitet der *magister* von Quintilianus die Vorübungen in erster Linie aus ethischen Gründen vor.[71] Andererseits bereitet der *magister* Fronto sie in erster Linie aus Gründen der Rhetorik und Beredsamkeit vor.[72] Das Ergebnis ist jedoch dasselbe, da auch die rhetorischen Lehren von Fronto letztendlich wie die von Quintilianus ethische Auswirkungen haben, wie der Text von Mark Aurel zeigt. In diesem Sinne sind der *magister* von Quintilianus und der *magister* Fronto auch hinsichtlich der Auswirkungen der rhetorischen Übungen vergleichbar.

Fazit

Die vorangehende Untersuchung hat gezeigt, dass sich Quintilianus' Lehrideal in Frontos pädagogischer Praxis deutlich spiegelt und typologisch konvergiert. Die Neuigkeit des Beitrags liegt in genau dieser typologischen Verschränkung von Theorie (Quintilianus) und Praxis (Fronto).

[68] Fußnote 44.
[69] M. Aur., 1.11.
[70] Portalupi 1979, 15. Dass zu Zeiten von Fronto Rhetorik und Philosophie, insbesondere im Bereich der Ethik, bereits untrennbar miteinander verbunden waren, wurde auch von Wissenschaftlern wie Christoph Tobias Kasulke beobachtet (2005, 385).
[71] Wir haben dies bereits in Kapitel 3 festgestellt.
[72] Fußnote 66.

Erstens erweist sich das von Quintilianus entworfene Lehrerbild, der *magister* als väterliche Autorität, die zugleich Zuneigung, Respekt und individuelle Zuwendung ermöglicht, als tragfähiger Bezugsrahmen für die Lektüre des Briefcorpus. Nachahmung, Charakterbildung und Leistungssteigerung werden in diesem Sinne dort als Funktionen einer affektiv gestützten, aber normativ geleiteten Lehrer-Schüler-Beziehung sichtbar. Zweitens bestätigt der Blick auf die Rhetorikübungen den Doppelauftrag des Unterrichts, da die Übungen nicht nur der stilistischen Schulung dienen, sondern fungieren zugleich als Medium ethischer Formung, indem sie die Unterscheidung von „richtig“ und „falsch“ einüben. Der im Text herausgearbeitete Nexus zwischen Technik und Ethos (bis hin zur (kritischen) Auseinandersetzung mit Seneca) markiert den Kern des quintilianischen Ideals, weil Rhetorik hier nie bloß Methode, sondern pädagogische Tugendpraxis ist. Drittens macht die Analyse der frontonischen Korrespondenz diese Programmatik in der Praxis anschaulich. Die Briefe dokumentieren eine fürsorglich-familiäre Bindung und wechselseitige Aufmerksamkeit (einschließlich der Sorge des Schülers um die Gesundheit des Lehrers) ebenso wie eine straff geführte Übungspraxis in eng umrissenen Aufgaben, detailliertem Feedback, iterativem Umschreiben (etwa den *gnomai*) und der graduellen Steigerung des Anspruchs. Diese didaktische Mikrosteuerung verbindet sich bei Fronto mit einer ausdrücklich ethischen Ausrichtung, die sichtbar sowohl in der Negativtypik (Seneca als stil-ethisches Gegenbeispiel) als auch in den von Mark Aurel bezeugten Lerneffekten ist.

In der Zusammenschau lässt sich die Relation der beiden Hauptteile präzisieren. Während Quintilianus den ethischen Zweck der Vorübungen paradigmenhaft voranstellt, setzt Fronto mit einem zunächst rhetorisch-technischen Zugriff ein. Jedoch konvergieren beide Modelle in der Wirkung, nämlich der Ausbildung moralischer Urteilskraft im Medium der Rhetorik. So erweist sich Frontos Lehre weniger als „Ausprägung“ denn als konvergentes Pendant zu einem quintilianischen Lehrideal: väterliche Stellvertretung, affektive Resonanz und ein stufenförmiges, auf Ethos zielendes Übungsregime treten in Frontos Praxis deutlich hervor, ohne dass damit eine direkte Abhängigkeit behauptet wäre. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Fronto und Mark Aurel ist damit ein paradigmatisches Dokument kaiserzeitlicher Bildung, das die Einheit von Technik und Tugend exemplarisch vor Augen führt.

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Inscribing Senatorial Authority: Epigraphic Epistles and Senatorial Legislation from Constantine I to Theodosius I

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Abstract: Imperial epistles (*sacrae litterae*), which conveyed the emperor's laws and decrees, were inscribed throughout the empire. Imperial functionaries of the senatorial order in the provinces were the most common recipients of these communications. As a new form of late antique honorific commemoration, honorific inscriptions reproducing imperial letters were set up for the high-ranking members of the aristocracy in Rome and Constantinople. However, the preserved legal inscriptions show that official utterances by high-standing senatorial officials, for which public posting is likely to have taken place, could be also recorded by inscribing in stone in the East and West. This article examines a small dossier of epigraphic *epistulae* by prefects and governors in the regional administration of the late Roman Empire. It argues that the legal inscriptions of officeholders in the provinces – recorded in the form of epistles in Latin and Greek – testify to the legislative means of the senatorial elite in the imperial service. The inscription in the public archives of the (fragmentary extant) prefectorial and proconsular letters, even if valid within the narrow jurisdiction, served to memorialize the laws issued by the imperial officials, whose authority derived from their appointment by the "sacred" ruler.

Keyword*s*: epistolography, epigraphic epistles, edicts, senatorial aristocracy, late Roman Empire.

Introduction

One of the principal means by which late Roman emperors exercised their legislative authority was through pronouncements designed for general observance. These were issued, most commonly, either as edicts (*edicta*) transmitted to the public or as letters (*epistulae*) dispatched to prefects and provincial governors, whose duty it was to promulgate them locally by means of their own edicts.[1] Such communications were made known by public reading and display in

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[1] The emperor could order that a law be publicized to all concerned by instructing the praetorian prefect to forward it by means of letters to provincial governors, who would then display it under their own edicts—an arrangement attested by a law recording both the imperial directive and its execution in Africa (*Sirm*. 12), and by another showing that the prefect could add written emphasis when addressing governors (*Sirm*. 6)—see Matthews 2000, 163. On late

prominent civic spaces – most often through notices written on papyrus, linen sheets, or wooden panels, and, when a more permanent record was preferred, inscribed in stone or bronze. In contrast to rescripts and decrees, which primarily addressed specific legal disputes, edicts and letters could concern any matter that drew the emperor's attention or required his intervention. It is these broader, general pronouncements – rather than judicial decisions – that late Roman juristic sources denote by the term *leges*. Imperial rulings did not all possess identical legal weight, nor did they appear in a single standardized format. Depending on their purpose and audience, some took the shape of edicts – formal proclamations addressed to the general populace – while others were conveyed, most prominently, as letters directed to particular office-holders, serving as administrative or legislative instructions.[2]

Imperial letters (*sacrae litterae*) were recognizable not only by their official seal but also by a distinctive style of script. In a law issued by Valentinian I to the proconsul of Africa, the emperor reaffirmed that this special form of writing was reserved for the emperor alone and prohibited its unauthorized imitation by provincial officials in their correspondence with the ruler. According to the law, the emperor had noticed that the governor's bureau had begun imitating the "celestial letters" (*caelestes litterae*) used in imperial documents, employing the same script as the emperor's chancery when submitting legal referrals and reports to the court. Valentinian denounced this practice (as fostering forgery), declaring that all correspondence from provincial governors must henceforth be written in ordinary script (*communibus litteris*), and that no individual should be allowed, publicly or privately, to reproduce the imperial style (*stili huius exemplum*).[3] Was this distinctive script preserved in legislative inscriptions? How did the publication of imperial letters carved in stone differ from the posting of epistles from prefects and governors? Before an imperial law was officially promulgated in a public setting and permanently displayed – whether carved in stone or otherwise – it was first received through a formal ceremony marking the arrival of the "divine writing" in the cities of the empire. Participation in this event, as evidenced by a letter from the proconsul of Africa to Constantine I and a contemporary Greek legal text, involved ritual gestures such as the "embracing and

Roman legal system in general, see Mousourakis 2007. On the fourth-century legislation, see Harries 1999; Matthews 2000; Sirks 2007; Schmidt-Hofner 2008; Schmidt-Hofner 2010.

[2] Matthews 2000, 17. *CTh* 1.1.5 (429) stipulates that when conveyed through the "sacred imperial letters," the law must be received by the bureaus (*scrinia*) throughout the entire empire and "published with the due formality of edicts."

[3] *CTh* 9.19.3 (367), with Matthews 2000, 188.

kissing" of the imperial edicts.[4] Yet this raises the question: under what circumstance were the letters of prefects or governors received and read aloud?

The imperial legislation could manifest in a variety of forms. First, there are the pronouncements addressed to the senate as imperial orations (or issued directly as edicts), originating either from the emperor's own initiative or another occasion. Second, there are imperial constitutions sent to provincial governors or high-ranking officials in regional and urban administration, made public through their edicts, giving them general applicability. This latter category comprises the vast majority of the texts in the *Theodosian Code*, most of which take the form of epistles to public officials. However, only a small number of imperial laws explicitly mention that they were officially posted by provincial governors under their own edicts. This is because before the law of 426, those transcribing the constitutions did not consider such procedural details necessary to confirm the law's general validity. The authority of a law depended on the emperor's intent in issuing it, not on whether it happened to be published by a governor according to administrative practice; thus, compilers focused on the content of the law rather than the formalities of its publicizing. As John Matthews notes, only after 426 editors of the *Code* faced the question of whether letters (*epistulae*) not explicitly recorded as having been posted by governors still counted as general laws. In practice, the *Code*'s compilers likely assumed that any law dispatched as an imperial letter to a governor carried the force of general validity, even without a surviving record of its formal promulgation (by posting).[5]

The emperors commonly pronounced on various matters in epistles to public officials. In an *epistula*, the header mentions the recipient, and the body of the text uses the second-person singular when addressing a prefect or provincial governor. This feature is characteristic of the epistolary style and begins with an *inscriptio* in the dative, addressing the official by name. In contrast, an *edictum* is defined by its lack of a designated recipient, requiring the verb characteristic of the edict *dicit* after the *intitulatio*.[6] Neither *epistula* nor *edictum* in the strict sense, an imperial encyclical letter was a circular addressing multiple recipients, with none of them is individually named in the *praescriptio*. Similarly, an ordinance issued by the prefect could be preceded by an *intitulatio* without *inscriptio*: neither an epistle nor an edict *stricto sensu*, it was nevertheless, a kind of a circular or *forma generalis* concerning several provinces.[7] However, these distinctions between the forms of law were not rigid, especially when legal

[4] Proconsul's letter to Constantine: Augustine, *Epistula* 88.2. Law: Riccobono et al. 1943, no. 101. See Matthews 2000, 181–82, 187–89.
[5] *CTh* 1.1.5 (*ad senatum*). Matthews 2000, 66–67, with n.27.
[6] Feissel 2010, 445.
[7] *SEG* 44, 909 (480). See Feissel 2010, 486 n.58.

documents show signs of confusion between genres. For example, the absence of an *inscriptio* designating the recipient means that it is not an *epistula*, even though the document's subjective style, as opposed to the objective style of an *edictum*, makes it more akin to one.[8]

The epigraphic record from the late Roman state contains a significant number of pronouncements made public by letter, edict, or decree. Among them, some imperial *epistulae* by which the legislation was communicated to the administrative departments and to local audiences are preserved inscriptionally. Many of the surviving epigraphic texts are copies of imperial letters, addressed to specific officials and with limited territorial application, of laws formulated in more general terms which had not been recovered. This article investigates an epigraphic dossier of laws in a form of epistles issued and posted in the cities across the empire under imperial office-holders' authority. The *Sirmondian Constitutions* demonstrate that praetorian prefects were routinely ordered, upon receipt of imperial laws, to transmit them to provincial governors together with letters directing the governors to promulgate the documents by posting edicts.[9] When this intermediary correspondence is noted, it appears under the formula *antelata* or *praelata litteris*, or a similar subscription, signifying that the imperial law was enclosed with the prefect's or governor's covering letter.[10] This article analyzes a select group of epigraphic *epistulae* issued by the fourth-century senatorial prefects and provincial governors within the administrative framework of the late Roman Empire. It contends that these legislative inscriptions – preserved inscriptionally in the form of official letters, chiseled in stone – reveal the active juridical and administrative agency of the senatorial office-holders, demonstrating their role as a governing class that both implemented and shaped imperial authority through the written instruments of law.

Inscribed Imperial Orations *ad Senatum* as a Medium of Epistolary Communication

Extant inscribed Late Roman imperial orations (*orationes*) to the senate testify to the participation of senators in epistolary communication with the emperor. The *sacrae litterae* –

[8] Feissel 2010, 486.

[9] *Sirm*. 9 offers perhaps the clearest articulation of this procedure: the prefect is told to notify everyone through letters to the provincial governors so that "edicts posted in the accustomed manner" will make the regulation publicly known everywhere. Comparable formulae recur at the close of nearly all Theodosius' and the majority of Valentinian's *Novels*, attesting the regularity of this mechanism for imperial promulgation. *Sirm.* 12 illustrates the full sequence from the imperial law's transmission to its public posting by the proconsul (the only omitted step here, however, is the explicit mention of the "letters" through which the prefect would send the constitution to the proconsul with instructions to promulgate it by edict). See Matthews 2000, 186.

[10] Compare the similar phrasing for the edicts: "*sub edicto*" (*Nov. Val.* 27) and "*antelata edicto*" (*Nov. Val.* 21.1, 23, and 25), meaning that the emperor's law was "prefixed to" or "placed" before the prefectural edict; see Matthews 2000, 186 n.62. See also Lactantius, *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, 48.12; *P. Cairo Isid.* I; with Corcoran 1996, 158–60, 174–75, 246.

imperial epistles transmitting laws and administrative decisions – were widely disseminated and permanently recorded in stone, bronze, or wood across the empire, including imperial centers. In this context, a remarkable new form of late antique honorific practice emerged in the fourth century: at least seven known inscriptions reproduce imperial letters (*orationes ad senatum*) formally addressed to the senate. These were included as part of honorific dedications for eminent members of the fourth-century office-holding senatorial aristocracy. Such monuments erected in Rome, Constantinople, and other cities of the empire did not merely celebrate individual merit of the aristocratic officials in the imperial government but also embodied the evolving dynamics of imperial-senatorial dialogue, making visible the textual and statuary materialization of communication between emperor and senate.

The senate employed the dedication of honorific statues as a means of formal communication and negotiation of status within the imperial system. This practice is exemplified by at least six fourth-century imperial letters to the senate of Rome (*orationes ad senatum Romanum*) that survive in epigraphic form.[11] Of these, no fewer than five can be associated with honorific monuments in Rome that incorporated inscribed copies of the imperial decisions granting permission for the dedication.[12] This mode of commemoration represented a significant innovation in senatorial representation: it marked a departure from earlier, more collective forms of honor and elevated the recipients – members of the traditional aristocracy – to a distinct and privileged position within the senatorial body. The Forum of Trajan, where most of these monuments were erected, functioned as the most prominent urban setting in Rome for such dedications. Long associated with imperial commemoration, the forum not only celebrated the ruling dynasty but also became a fourth-century venue to monumentalize the highest imperial functionaries among the senatorial elite. Traditionally, this space had hosted statues commissioned by imperial ruling in response to petitions from the senate and the Roman people; in the fourth century, however, it became a locus for articulating the renewed prestige and self-representation of the late Roman aristocracy within the evolving imperial order.[13]

Between the mid-fourth and early fifth centuries, a series of honorific monuments erected in Rome reveal the close interaction between the imperial court and the senate through the medium of inscribed imperial *orationes*. The earliest surviving example, dedicated to the urban prefect L. Aradius Valerius Proculus Populonius (336–337), reproduces a letter from Emperor Constantine and his co-rulers celebrating the prefect's virtues and granting permission for a

[11] Weisweiler 2012; Orlandi 2017.
[12] Weisweiler 2012; Orlandi 2017, 408.
[13] Chenault 2012. On petitions, see White 1972.

statue in the Forum of Trajan, where the base was later discovered.[14] Similarly, a gilded bronze statue for L. Aurelius Avianius Symmachus Phosphorius, consul and urban prefect, father of the famous orator, was ordered by Gratian and Valens at the senate's request in 377, also placed at the Forum of Trajan. The inscription, carved on marble and recording the now-lost attached imperial oration (*oratio adposita*), notes that a twin monument of "equal splendor" was to be erected in Constantinople, commemorating the same honorand.[15] A fifth-century example concerns the praetorian prefect Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, whose memory was rehabilitated by decree of Theodosius II and Valentinian III in 431, again through an imperial letter authorizing his posthumous statue in the Forum of Trajan—installed by his grandson Appius Nicomachus Dexter; the inscription omits any mention of the senate's role in erecting the statue.[16] Two further fragmentary inscriptions, both found in the Roman Forum, preserve parts of similar imperial communications granting honorific statues to high-ranking officials, possibly urban prefects.[17] References to a senatorial decree (*decretum senatus amplissimi*) and prestigious setting (*celeberrimus locus*) confirm the legal and honorific contexts of the latter monument erected under Emperors Valentinian and Valens. Together, these monuments demonstrate a distinctive late Roman phenomenon: the integration of imperial epistolography into the fabric of aristocratic honorific display in the cities of Rome and Constantinople. By inscribing imperial letters on statue bases, urban prefects, the heads and "epigraphic spokesmen" of the senate, transformed acts of imperial commemoration into material expressions of aristocratic prestige, political loyalty, and negotiated imperial favor within the most important public spaces of the two imperial centers.

The dedication of Proculus' statue served as an early model for later honors like those given to Symmachus the elder and Nicomachus Flavianus. It contains an official letter sent by the emperor to the senate of Rome (ll. 1-20).[18] The fragmentary marble block measuring 93 × 65 × 24 cm was uncovered in the Forum of Trajan. Only its upper section is preserved, with the lower part broken and missing. The block has been cut down, and all original mouldings are lost. The inscription surface appears roughly worked, perhaps as a result of the erasure of an earlier text. Along the right edge are three post-antique perforations, likely unrelated to the original use of the monument. The top surface bears no evidence of attachment holes that would indicate the presence of a statue above. The inscription reproduces an imperial letter addressed to the senate,

[14] *CIL* VI 40776=*LSA*-2685.
[15] *CIL* VI 1698=*LSA*-342+*LSA*-343.
[16] *CIL* VI 1783=*LSA*-1247.
[17] *CIL* VI 41357=*LSA*-1584; *CIL* VI 41344a=*LSA*-1572. See Machado 2006, 92.
[18] *CIL* VI 40776=*AE* 1934, 158=*EDR*073236.

commending the virtues and prestige of Proculus. A distinguished senator from a prominent family, he held several high offices under Constantine and his sons, culminating in the consulship of 340; the imperial titles in the inscription date it to 336–337, when, after serving as count of the first order at Constantinople, he assumed the prefecture of Rome.[19] Although neither the fragmentary block nor the surviving inscription offers definitive proof, the rectangular form of the marble and the honorific content praising Proculus make the identification of the monument as a statue base highly plausible. Moreover, the Forum of Trajan, where the block was found, was a customary location for statue dedications for the senatorial office-holders, typically commissioned by emperors at the request of the senate and people of Rome, reinforcing the likelihood that this piece belonged to such a monument.[20]

The surviving inscription is composed of three elements: the nomenclature and titulature of the ruling imperial college (ll. 1-9), the initial formal greeting from the Augustus and Caesars to the senate of Rome (ll. 10-13), and a letter regarding Proculus's honors (ll. 14-20). The inscription includes the honorific epithets of Emperor Constantine ("pious, fortunate, victorious and triumphant"), his titles ("highest priest (*pontifex maximus*), greatest victor over the Germanic peoples for the fourth time, greatest victor over the Sarmatians for the fourth time, greatest victor over the Goths for the second time, greatest victor over the Dacians, holding the tribunician powers for the thirty-third time, consul for the eighth time, *imperator* for the thirty-second time, father of the fatherland, proconsul"), and the names of his four Caesars with their titles (Flavius Claudius Constantinus, "*victor* over the Alamanni," Flavius Iulius Constantius, Flavius Iulius Constans, and Flavius Iulius Delmatius, "most noble Caesars"). The name of Caesar Delmatius in line 8 was later erased following his death and *damnatio memoriae* in 337. The letters range in height from 2 to 4.5 cm. The names of the ruling emperors are chiseled at a maximum of 4.5 cm, and the greeting and body of the epistle is at a minimum of 2 cm.[21] The greetings are addressed "to the consuls, praetors, tribunes of the plebs and their senate:" "If you and your children are well, it is good. We and our armies are well." The body of the imperial law is separated from the greeting formula on the stone. The preserved fragment reads as follows: "Recalling the distinguished nobility of the ancestry of Proculus, of *clarissimus* rank, and the virtues acknowledged in the private and public performance of his services, conscript fathers, it is easy to value just how much glory Proculus, of *clarissimus* rank, … received from his

[19] *PLRE* I, 747–49 Proculus 11; Kienast 1990, 301–302; Chastagnol 1962, 100.
[20] *LSA*-2685 (C. Machado) See Niquet 2000, 80; Weisweiler 2012, 309–13.
[21] *EDR*073236.

ancestors…."[22] The imperial oration, addressing the members of the senate of Rome (*patres conscripti*) – who likely petitioned the emperor for the statue honors to their most distinguished colleague – praises Proculus for his noble lineage and exemplary public and private virtues. While the preserved text itself does not explicitly mention a statue, it was almost certainly part of a statue monument. Unlike the later honorific inscriptions, such as the one rehabilitating Nicomachus Flavianus, whose public inscriptions were composed of two separate elements – the standard statue dedication, including the *cursus* of the honorand, and an imperial letter addressed to the Roman Senate – Proculus's inscription does not preserve the dedicatory part.

One further *oratio ad senatum* derives from the eastern court: Emperor Constantius II addressed the senate of Constantinople in a letter whose copy survives inscribed on the Arch of Hadrian at Perge in Pamphylia. The imperial speech *ad senatum Constantinopolitanum* in honor the praetorian prefect Flavius Philippus (c. 344–353) is a long Latin document recently edited by Denis Feissel.[23] The inscription preserves the text of an address delivered in 352 commissioning the erection of statues of the prefect both in Constantinople and in the provincial cities. The pillar of the arch most like carried two different inscriptions: a marble slab with a short honorific dedication naming the honorand and the awarder, and a longer text, cut in two plaques – likely flanking the shorter[24] – that reproduces the imperial communication to the *patres conscripti* of Constantinople requesting that the statues be granted to Philippus by imperial command. Because the dedication in honor of the prefect was not engraved on a statue base, it has been proposed that Philippus' statue formed part of Hadrian's Arch rather than standing independently. Yet, since the fragments of the dedication are no longer accessible, only a comprehensive architectural reassessment of the monument could confirm or refute this conjecture, which for now remains speculative. This oration appears to have formed part of the dossier that accompanied Philippus' honorific monuments and was dispatched with instructions to provincial governors to erect statues on his behalf; the imperial speech itself indicates that Constantinople was to be the first city to receive such a dedication for Philippus, an early member of the eastern senate. The epistle frames the award as a deserved public recognition grounded in his deeds and family's standing.[25]

[22] Trans. C. Machado, *LSA*-2685.
[23] Feissel 2024.
[24] Şahin 2015, 177–78, no. 1, hypothesized that the Greek inscribed plaque may have been inserted between the twin panels framing the principal Latin inscription. Regardless of their relative arrangement, the Latin inscription and the Greek dedication are complementary: Feissel 2024, 109.
[25] For a series of statue dedications for Philippus, see Bodnaruk 2022; Bodnaruk 2025, 8–9.

In late Roman law, the *orationes ad senatum* were fully epistolary in their written form. Although delivered orally, they were formally transmitted as written with a standard epistolary protocol. Imperial constitutions in the late Roman Empire, including the imperial *orationes*, were structured with a fixed arrangement that made them function as legal letters. The three main parts of this protocol, as found in both legal collections and inscribed monuments, were the inscription that served as the formal address and salutation (the beginning of the letter). It explicitly named the issuers: the full college of legitimate emperors (Augusti and Caesars) in order of seniority, as the source of authority, and the recipient, the specific imperial office-holder, such as the praetorian or urban prefect, or in the case of *orationes*, the senate, to whom the constitution was addressed. The body text contained the imperial decree (or response to the senate's petition). In the case of *orationes ad senatum*, this section contained the text of the speech, which in its final, written form became a binding law. The subscription (*subscriptio*) served as the closing and dating clause (the end of the letter), which formally recorded the circumstances of the document's issuance and typically included the place and date. The use of this format confirmed the document's authenticity and authority, with orations inscribed in a form of *epistulae*.[26]

Epistolary Forms of Inscribed Prefectorial Legislation

Members of the senatorial order serving as imperial officials in the provinces frequently appeared as the recipients of imperial communications, underscoring their intermediary role between the imperial center and local administration.[27] Imperial legislation was frequently addressed to the praetorian prefects, and several such communications survive in epigraphic form. The corpus of legal inscriptions demonstrates that many imperial pronouncements – which were likely posted publicly – were subsequently inscribed in more durable media (stone, metal, etc.) across both the Greek East and the Latin West. At the same time, legislation was also promulgated by praetorian prefects themselves: first, prefects issued edicts, which are attested epigraphically as part of the monumental and inscriptional record. While the privilege of issuing edicts had contracted – by the high empire non-imperial officials had largely lost the right to issue edicts – the capacity of office-holders other than the emperor to issue enactments did not entirely vanish. Whereas imperial edicts had empire-wide force and conventionally opened with the words "*imperator dicit*," prefectorial edicts (*edicta praefectorum*) began with "*praefectus*

[26] For broader context on the late Roman legal system and the codification of laws, see Matthews 2000.
[27] Feissel 2010.

edixit."[28] An *edictum* was a formal, public proclamation issued by a praetorian prefect (or another high official) in his official capacity, typically displayed in public spaces and occasionally inscribed in stone. It had normative or regulatory authority, addressing a general audience – much like an imperial *edictum*. Yet several questions arise: Did ordinary Romans recognize that a prefect issuing an edict acted merely as the emperor's delegate? Why did imperial constitutions require confirmation through a prefect's edict or other official instrument? And to what degree could such officials introduce their own innovations? While certain answers remain elusive, the surviving edicts illuminate how imperial administrators contributed to the formulation and transmission of Roman law, materialized in public inscriptions.

Preserved examples from the late Roman period show that the latter edicts frequently accompanied constitutions issued by the emperor. A striking case is a copy of Julian's letter (*CTh* 1.16.8=*CJ* 3.3.5) (*exemplum sacrarum litterarum*) regarding the administration of justice, which was posted on the island of Amorgos via the now very fragmentary Latin edict of the praetorian prefect of the East, Saturninus Secundus Salutius: the fragments re-examined by Denis Feissel form part of an imperial epistle sent to the prefect on 28 July 362 that was published together with the prefect's own edict, which follows the emperor's letter. The inscriptional record on Amorgos thus preserves both the imperial communication and the prefectorial edict – greetings and a copy of the prefect's edict, issued by the prefect's bureau (then stationed in Antioch with the emperor), were carved on Amorgos by the *praeses Insularum*. The imperial constitution, in a form of an *epistula*, was sent to Salutius, who in turn circulated it to the governors of the eastern prefecture – explicitly including the governor of the province of the Islands (where Amorgos lay) seated at Rhodes. Thus, the inscription from Amorgos most plausibly represents a subsequent copy of the letter as dispatched by the prefect's administration.[29] The constitution transmitted to the provinces is followed by an edict of promulgation by the prefect: the letter of an office-holder whose duty was to convey the imperial law. Although the inscription might record a governor's edict, the administrative hierarchy makes it far more probable that the fragments belong to the edict issued by the prefect – a conclusion further supported by indications within the surviving text itself. The prefect's edict was the official promulgation or transmission act, by which the official communicated and enforced the imperial law in the provinces.[30] The legal nature of such non-imperial

[28] *PG* XLV, col. 1751: *Volusianus praefectus edixit*.
[29] *CIL* III 459=*AE* 2000, 1370a. Feissel 2010, 216.
[30] *CTh* 7.13.11 (382) was probably part of an edict of the praetorian prefect of the Orient sent on to a provincial governor. See also *CTh* 5.14.34; 8.1.8, 4.6; 16.2.12, 15, for other cases.

pronouncement, beginning with a standard formula ("*praefectus dicit...*"), was that of a public edict.

Second, prefectorial letters (*litterae*) represented another form of legislative or administrative communication issued by the praetorian prefects. A representative mid-fourth-century instance of a rare *praelata litteris* subscription preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus* records an imperial law sent to the praetorian prefect, who transmitted it (to subordinate officials under his jurisdiction) through his own letter to which the imperial letter was attached.[31] An *epistula* of the praetorian prefect was a letter or communication, usually addressed to a specific person or body (e.g. a provincial governor or a city council). While it could transmit legal or administrative instructions, it did not have the same public, general, or legislative character as an *edictum*. Only a handful of such documents survive, and among them are two unpublished prefectorial letters from Delphi, both addressed to Flavius Felicianus, a former *comes* and priest of Apollo, likely between 342 and 344. These Greek epistles were issued collectively by a college of prefects. According to Polymnia Athanassiadi's reconstruction, Felicianus initially appealed to his former colleague, Fabius Titianus, consul in 337 and later praetorian prefect of Gaul, seeking a formal ruling to secure the continuation of Apollo's cult and the oracle's activities at Delphi. Titianus subsequently brought the issue to his fellow prefects – Flavius Leontius, praetorian prefect of the East, and Furius Placidus, praetorian prefect of Italy – who consented to respond jointly. In their first collective letter, the three prefects struck a tone of measured authority and deference, assuring Felicianus of their protection: anyone interfering with his priestly functions would face exile and a monetary penalty. However, Felicianus later renewed his appeal, prompting a second letter from the same prefects. Although this second communication survives only in fragments, it likely followed the same conciliatory and supportive pattern as the first. Ultimately, the council of the *δαμιουργοί* passed a ruling ordering both prefectorial letters to be displayed publicly as stone inscriptions, thereby formally concluding the matter and reaffirming the prefects' role as intermediaries between imperial authority and local religious institutions.

The letters were most likely authored by Placidus, as Delphi fell within his jurisdiction; they were originally composed in Latin and subsequently translated into Greek. The first inscription begins with the words "Letters sealed by decision of the demiurges and engraved in the public archives" (*Ἐπιστολαὶ δαμιουργ]ῶν δόγματι ἐσφ[ρα][γισμέναι καὶ εἰς τὰ δημ]όσια χαραχθεῖσαι*) and is followed by a salutation of the priest by the prefects: "*Fl(avius) Dom(itius)*

[31] *CTh* 8.4.6 (358) (*data epistula praefecto cui haec sacra fuerat antelata*). See Matthews 2000, 187 n.63.

Leontius, Fa(bius) Titianus, Fur(ius) Placidus to the former count Fl(avius) Felicianus greeting." The *subscriptio* reads as follows: "We wish you health and wellness" (*ἐ̣ρρῷ̣[σθαί σε κα]ὶ εὐτυχεῖν εὐχόμεθα*). The second inscription starts with the identical greeting, while the subscription is not preserved. These two fragments of letters originally belonged to a white marble slab that had been mounted in the public archives of Delphi, where official records were kept and displayed. These two legislative inscriptions were official letters, the joint communications of the praetorian prefects to the aristocratic priest, even if they personalized the matter.

Only a few inscriptions preserving legal acts sent to or issued by urban prefects have survived. Some imperial constitutions addressed to city prefects are known from epigraphic sources – for example, a law of Valentinian I (or II) in favor of St. Peter's Basilica, probably addressed to Eutherius.[32] Prefectorial edicts, similar to imperial ones, typically opened with the formula "*urbi praefectus dicit*,"[33] and a number of their inscribed copies are extant. Epigraphic evidence of prefectorial edicts from Rome largely pertains to the *annona* corporations and the regulation of urban provisioning. Two edicts issued by the city prefect Turcius Apronianus in 362–363, for example, address the reorganization of the meat market and the operation of the *pecuarii* and *suarii*.[34] Both open with *an ex auctoritate* clause typical of official edicts: *Ex auctoritate Turci Aproniani, u(iri) c(larissimi), praefecti urbis,* followed by the law. Another fourth-century edict, preserved only in fragments, appears to concern the administration of the city's wine distribution.[35] Yet another edict, promulgated by Taraccius Bassus in 375/376, regulates the activities of the *tabernarii* guild.[36] Additionally, three fragments, postdating 374, record topographically arranged lists of names and were produced under the authority of the same urban prefect; they originate from several sites in Rome, including the Basilica Iulia in the Forum Romanum.[37] Although incomplete, these inscriptionally preserved documents shed light on the prefect's *ius edicendi* – the right to issue edicts – and on the mechanisms by which such laws were publicly displayed and disseminated. They were intended for public posting (*sub conspectu publico*), a hallmark of *edicta*. The publication of laws by city prefects involved a

[32] *CIL* VI 31982=*ICUR* II 4099: *[Impp. Caess. FFll. Valentinianus Valens et Gratianus PPP. FFF. se]mper Auggg. Fl(avio) Eutherio suo salute[m]*.
[33] *CIL* VI 1711=*CIL* VI 31908: *Claudius Iulius Ecclesius Dynamius, v̄(ir) c̄(larissimus) et īl̄(ustris), urb(i) praef(ectus) d(icit)*.
[34] *CIL* VI 1770; *CIL* 6 1771.
[35] *CIL* VI 1785.
[36] *CIL* VI 1766.
[37] *CIL* VI 1766=31894=41328=*ILCV* 672,1; *CIL* VI 41329=31893=*ILCV* 672,3; *CIL* VI 41330=10099=31899=*ILCV* 672,2: *Ex auctoritate Tarraci Bassi v(iri) c(larissimi) praef(ecti) urb(i)*.

posted legal-administrative announcement in the prominent spaces of Rome issued to regulate urban economic life. However, these documents by the urban prefects cannot be classified as epistles; they present a different structure and formulae and employ impersonal, normative language. Nonetheless, *epistulae* were sent by the fourth-century city prefects. A rare mid-fourth-century example from the *Theodosian Code* documents a law sent to the urban prefect of Rome, which he then prefixed to his own letters addressed to the provincial governor of one of the Italian provinces (*consularis Campaniae*), who received and published the document at Venafrum.[38]

Provincial Governors' Epistolary Legislation

The two principal forms of gubernatorial acts were the *edictum* and the *epistula*. These legal documents differed in terms of their protocol and eschatocol. The edict in its strict sense was introduced by stating the governor's name followed by the verb *dicit* and customarily ended with the subscription *proponatur*. In turn, an epistle began with both the author (*intitulatio*) and recipient (*inscriptio*) of the text and concluded with a final salutation followed by the date.[39]

The proconsul possessed the authority to issue edicts and to dispatch official orders to his subordinate administrators. In the East, several examples of such proconsular legislation have been preserved epigraphically from the province of Achaea. For instance, a Greek inscription from Chalkis on the island of Euboia, dating to 359, records a proconsular edict issued by Publius Ampelius, while in office between 359 and 360.[40] This edict, which includes a list of ἐπιμεληταί (*curatores operum publicorum*), deals with the supervision of public works, notably including the repair of the stoa. It begins with the standard formula introducing an official edict or pronouncement "*proconsul dixit*" (*ἀνθύπατος λέγει*).[41] A Greek decree (*πρόσταγμα*) by the same proconsul, likewise dated to 359, was found in Sparta; it also published a list of *ἐπιμεληταί*, suggesting a systematic effort to regulate civic maintenance across the province.[42] Another Greek proconsular edict, engraved on a marble base at Corinth, the provincial capital and the seat of the proconsul, concerns judicial administration and was issued by Flavius Ulpius

[38] *CTh* 8.5.22 (365) (*prolata* (*sic*!) *litteris sub die XII k. Mart. Rom.; acc. IIII k. Apr. Venabri*). Compare a law prefixed to and published with letters from the count of the sacred bounties, *CTh* 11.12.4 (407) (*praelata litteris v. inl. com(itis) s(acrarum) l(argitionum)*) and another law addressed to the count of the sacred bounties and dispatched by him with letters to the prefect of Constantinople, *CTh* 7.8.11 (414) (*praelata litteris ad Eutychianum praef. urbi*). See Matthews 2000, 187 n.63.
[39] Feissel 2010, 212–13.
[40] *IG* XII, 9, 907: *Πούβλ(ιος) Ἀμπέλιος ὁ λαμ(πρότατος) ἀνθ(ύπατος) λέγει*.
[41] See the restoration of a very fragmentary legal inscription from Carthage, dated to 362–364, *CIL* VIII 24609: … [*Flavia]nus pro[co(n)s(ul) Africae dixit] … Octavianus pro[co(n)s(ul) Africae d(ixit)]* …
[42] *AE* 1929, 19=*SEG* XI 464, 2: *Κατὰ πρόσταγμα [τ]οῦ λαμ(προτάτου) ἀνθ(υπάτου) Πουβλ(ίου) Ἀμπελίου*.

Macarius, governor of Achaea, in the second half of the fourth century.[43] These laws cannot be classified as epistles on account of their structure, which is not consistent with the characteristics of letters.

By contrast, proconsular letters (*epistulae proconsulis*) adhered strictly to epistolary protocol. For example, the senator Decimius Secundinus, serving as proconsul of Achaea, addressed a letter to the *curator et defensor Amfissensium* concerning the aqueducts of Amphissa and the illegal appropriation of public water (*aqua publica*).[44] This Latin inscription, discovered in Amphissa, can be dated after 364, since it mentions the office of *defensor*, established in the Illyrican prefecture by that year (*CTh* 1.29.1). The administrative epistle starts with the standard opening formula, identifying the sender (proconsul) and recipient (local civic official), ending with the formal greeting, common in late Roman epistolography (ll.1-4): "Decimius Secundinus, of *clarissimus* rank, proconsul, to the *curator* and *defensor* of the Amfissians, greetings." The main text of the law begins with reference to an earlier order and issues further administrative commands: to repair and restore the water supply, prevent future usurpation, and mark the cisterns with a lapidary notice (*lapideo titulo posito*). It contains a justification clause and reference to delegation (*gratia agente Hesperio*), typical of provincial administrative style. The closing formula specifies the deadline (*ante diem decimum Kal. Ian.*) for completion and report (*uos ad officium nuntiare debere opto*) and ends with a courteous valediction (*bene ualeatis*), characteristic of formal Roman correspondence. This is a fully preserved proconsular administrative letter issued in epistolary form. It demonstrates the bureaucratic tone of late Roman governance: hierarchical (from proconsul to municipal officials), directive, formulaic, and closing with precise procedural instructions and a farewell clause. Collectively, the legal proconsular inscriptions attest to the continued administrative and legislative activity of proconsuls in late antiquity, as well as their practice of recording official edicts in durable, public form.

In turn, vicars are well attested in legal inscriptions, albeit rare, as shown by the case of Ablabius, probably *uicarius Asiae* in 324–326, who received an imperial letter from Constantine concerning the petition of Orcistus in Phrygia for *ciuitas* status. The emperor's initial direct rescript (*adnotatio*) mentioned a favorable decision "through the intercession of the vicar" (*uicari intercessione*), while the indirect rescript addressed Ablabius (*grauitatis tuae*

[43] *IG* IV 364: *Φλ(άβιος) Οὔλπ(ιος) Μακάριος ὁ λαμ(πρότατος) ἀνθ(ύπατος) (ν) λέγει*.
[44] *CIL* 3 568=*ILS* 5794=*IG* IX^2 751: *Decim(ius) Secundinus v(ir) c(larissimus) procons(ul) curat(ori) et defens(ori) Amfissensium salutem*.

intercessione).[45] A similar example is Constantius' letter to Marinus, likely vicar of Asiana, ordering the erection of statues for the prefect Philippus in 352 – copies of this imperial letter survive in several epigraphic fragments not only from Ephesus, the governor's seat, but also Alexandria Troas in Hellespontus and Laodicea ad Lycum in Phrygia, both addressed to Marinus.[46] Vicars exercised juridical authority and discharged both judicial and fiscal-administrative duties within their dioceses. In Proconsularis, a fiscal tariff for the African provinces – probably promulgated by the vicar of Africa around 370 – is recorded in a fragmentary Latin inscription (in five pieces) from Carthage, the provincial capital.[47] This vicarial law does not display the epistolary characteristics; it is a fiscal document, focused on payments. The legal inscription corroborates the vicar's judicial and administrative role, referring, according to Feissel, to an act of the vicar Caius Annius Tiberianus.[48] However, vicars did transmit imperial laws through their epistles: for example, the *Codex Theodosianus* attests to a mid-fourth-century law prefixed to letters from the vicar of Spain (*praelata litteris v.c. uicarii*) to a subordinate governor.[49] Here the compilers of the *Code* explicitly cite the date of the vicarial letter, to which the emperor's letter – apparently undated in itself – had been appended.[50] The expression *praelata litteris* signifies "placed before the letter" (of the vicar). Consequently, while the law is addressed to the named vicar, the date recorded in the subscription in fact refers to the vicar's own letter to a third party, in which the imperial communication was enclosed as an attachment.[51]

In the late Roman Empire, provincial governors (*praesides* and *consulares*) equally possessed the authority to promulgate legal enactments within their jurisdictions. The aforementioned copy of Julian's letter, together with the copy of the prefectorial edict by Salutius, was inscribed on Amorgos by the *praeses Insularum* in 362.[52] Although it remains possible that the Latin inscription represents an edict of the provincial governor, the established administrative hierarchy suggests an edict of promulgation issued by the praetorian prefect.[53] Within the corpus of legislative inscriptions of the fourth-century provincial governors, an edict

[45] *CIL* 3 352=7000.
[46] *IK Ephesos*, no. 41.
[47] *CIL* VIII 14280a.
[48] *CIL* VIII 14280a, 24609–24611 (Carthago). Feissel 2009, 127, no. 93, *vicarius* in Africa. *PLRE* I, 911–12 C. Annius Tiberianus 4.
[49] *CTh* 9.3.4 (365). See Matthews 2000, 187 n.63.
[50] In accordance with established editorial convention, quoted imperial letters always occupy the position of precedence, that is, they are placed before the officials' correspondence, even when their accompanying letters are necessary for understanding the overall context; see Feissel 2010, 80–83.
[51] Riedlberger 2024, 11, with n.38.
[52] *CIL* 3 459=*AE* 2000, 1370a.
[53] Feissel 2000, 315–37; Porena 2003, 232 with n.106.

issued by the governor of the Islands concerning the *capitatio humana* (a head tax) – enforcing an imperial fiscal regulation from 371 (*CTh* 13.10.7) – has been discovered on the island of Cos. The Greek inscription, preserved on two fragments of a marble plaque, now broken at both top and bottom, records an edict dealing with taxation and financial administration.[54] The text indicates that the imperial law was transmitted by Modestus, the praetorian prefect of the East, to his subordinate, the *praeses Insularum*, whose province fell within the jurisdiction of the eastern prefecture. Written in the formal, administrative style of a legal or bureaucratic document, this edict concerning census (*ἀπογραφή*; *κῆνσος*) and taxation, reveals impersonal tone and lack of epistolary address, albeit fragmentary at the beginning and end. A further governor's edict, which specified the protocol for the *ordo salutationis* in the province's towns and was accompanied by a detailed list of the *sportulae* (fees) to be paid, was carved in stone (and engraved in bronze) at the Numidian city of Timgad in 362/363.[55] The *salutatio* (*εἴσοδος*) was a formal, ceremonial occasion – the prescribed way of presenting oneself to the governor, of attending a court session, or of taking part in an official audience at the *praetorium*. Appearances at these audiences followed a rigid precedence: foremost were the senators; next the heads (*principes*) of the *officium* and officials from the central administrative departments; then former provincial priests together with the most senior members of the city council; and finally, the bulk of councilors, municipal magistrates, and low-ranking members of the bureau. The law was issued by Ulpius Mariscianus, governor (*consularis*) of Numidia.[56] The Latin inscription, which records the official edict regulating the order of salutations in the cities of the province of Numidia, accompanied by a tariff of *sportulae*, does not take the form of an epistle. The edicts of provincial governors memorialized in bronze or stone stand as durable testimonies to the practical mechanics of late Roman provincial rule: they were instruments of lawmaking, administrative regulation, and public communication that both enacted and performed governmental authority at local level.

Lastly, a sixth-century fragmentary inscription contains with three partially preserved legal decisions placed one under another: an imperial letter probably from Emperor Justinian, a law by a high-ranking eastern office-holder, and a pronouncement by a governor of the province of Caria. Paweł Nowakowski assumes that the latter two pronouncements take a form of letters.[57]

[54] *IG* XII, 41, 273.
[55] *CIL* VIII 17896: *Ex au[ctori]tate Ulpi Marisciani v(iri) c(larissimi) consularis sexfascalis promoti primo a domino nostro invicto principe Iuliano ordo salutationis factus et ita at (sic!) perpetui[t]atis memoriam aere incises*.
[56] *PLRE* I, 561, Mariscianus.
[57] *Milet* VI/3, no. 1576: *Fl(avius) Marian(us) [Michaelius Gabrielius (?) ---]ĄII( ) CO[--- I]ohann(es) Patricius, [v(ir) sp(ectabilis), com(es) et cons(ularis) --- παντα]χόθεν ἀντιστῆ(ναι) (?)*. *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, E00812 (P. Nowakowski).

Found in and near Miletus, three fragments of the marble plaque record the legislation concerning the ecclesiastical asylum at a city's sanctuary of Gabriel the Archangel. Dated around 539–542, this Greek inscription curiously incorporates some names and formulae in Latin. First, the imperial constitution (rescript) (ll. 1-11) takes the form of a letter addressed rather to a high-ranking official than a provincial governor (or bishop). Second, the *illustris* office-holder in the regional administration, probably a praetorian prefect of the East under whose command Caria was placed at that time or *quaestor exercitus*, perhaps Bonus, issued possibly another letter or, more likely, an edict (ll. 11-27). Third, yet another letter (ll. 27-31), if correctly identified as such, presumably by the governor (*consularis*) of Caria, according to Feissel, is almost entirely lost. [58] It preserves only his polyonymous nomenclature: Flavius Marianus [Michaelius Gabrielius (?)] Iohannes Patricius, which must have been followed by his rank and office titles: *uir spectabilis*, count and *consularis*. However, the text of the rest of the document – more likely an edict – is in Greek. The governor's document from Miletus, the capital of the province, although preserved only in a couple of the initial lines, illustrates the final stage of a hierarchical chain of correspondence – following imperial letter and prefectural pronouncement in the tripartite inscription – through which provincial authority in Caria formalized the sanctuary's right of asylum under Justinian.

Letters from provincial governors served as the administrative instruments that translated imperial and prefectural directives into enforceable measures at the provincial level, ensuring their public proclamation and local implementation. Thus, a fragmentary Greek inscription from the site of the church of the Theotokos in Ephesus, probably dating to the sixth century, preserves what may have been a letter from a governor (*proconsul*) concerning the status of the churches of Mary and John the Apostle.[59] Two fragments of a marble plaque discovered at the episcopal church of Mary in Ephesus, reexamined by Feissel, appear – despite having been published independently – to constitute missing sections of another large inscription containing a governor's epistle from Ephesus, the provincial seat of Asia.[60] The inscription, which refers to both the emperor and a bishop, represents the monumental publication of a gubernatorial letter addressed to the Ephesians on the occasion of the announcement of an imperial rescript, likely inscribed on a separate plaque and displayed within the same church.[61] By having such epistles inscribed in stone and publicly displayed, governors ensured their authority was both visible and

[58] Feissel 2010, 329–38, suggests *PLRE* III, Bonus 1; *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, E00812 (P. Nowakowski).
[59] *IK Ephesos*, no. 1373. *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, E00765 (P. Nowakowski).
[60] Feissel 1999), 121–32.
[61] *IK Ephesos*, no. 4134. *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity*, E00778 (P. Nowakowski)

permanent, transforming legal correspondence into enduring stone monuments that affirmed imperial justice and reinforced provincial order.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the members of the imperial consistory, and *quaestores* (*sacri palatii*) in particular, had a great influence on the drafting of the "sacred letters."[62] The *scrinia* (*memoriae, libellorum*, and *epistularum*) served as the general secretariat and were responsible for dispatching official *epistulae*, among others, with *magister epistolarum Graecarum* in the east drafting letters issued in Greek and translating epistles dictated in Latin into Greek.[63] Yet, senatorial officials in the civilian government such as praetorian prefects and governors played a crucial mediating role in transmitting imperial authority to the provinces, issuing and promulgating laws that regulated administration across the empire. The epistolary form of these enactments – imperial *sacrae epistulae*, prefectorial letters, and governors' epistles – underscored their communicative nature, transforming legal directives into durable monuments inscribed in stone. These utterances frequently took the form of epistles, reflecting their nature as formal communications within a hierarchical bureaucratic network. Letters from imperial office-holders were also being sent to the emperor, but these reports had no legal force and have not been preserved in epigraphic form. Extant documents illustrate the chain of command through which imperial legislation was transmitted – from the emperor's chancellery to the praetorian prefects and then to the provincial governors, who ensured its implementation. Once carved in stone, such letters functioned both as enduring legal records and as public manifestations of imperial power and administrative order within civic space. In terms of imagery, the sculptural depiction of imperial letters of appointment (*codicilli*) as an attribute of senatorial office-holders in honorific statues and funerary monuments was of central importance to the aristocratic self-representation.

The surviving inscribed epistles from the late Roman senatorial officials reveal how epistolography functioned not merely as part of empire-wide bureaucratic communication but as a performative tool of authority. The inscriptions chiseled in stone and engraved in bronze testify to materiality of late antique bureaucratic practices and public dissemination of laws. The

[62] Matthews 2000, 179–80: A distinction existed between *leges*—in the strict sense, measures approved by the imperial *consistorium* (council) and typically drafted by the quaestor—and the administrative letters through which these laws, or selected portions of them, were dispatched to officials responsible for their implementation within their respective jurisdictions.

[63] The quaestor oversaw the duties of the *magister memoriae*, and letters of appointment to various offices and commands were issued from the *scrinium memoriae* upon the quaestor's authorization. See Harries 1988; Honoré 1998; Bodnaruk 2026, 248–52.

inscribed letters of senatorial functionaries in the government of the empire, who maintained their legislative rights throughout late antiquity, illuminate the connection between the central and regional administration, imperial authority and senatorial power. Unlike private correspondence, these texts exemplify formulaic, ceremonial language intended for collective audiences and public display, blending epistolography with monumental rhetoric. They reveal how imperial officials, from high-ranking praetorian and urban prefects to lower-ranking *praesides* – balanced administrative duties with performative authority, offering insights into imperial hierarchy. The epigraphic form of the legal *epistulae* exhibits the changing conventions of both late antique letter-writing and law drafting otherwise lost in manuscript traditions and legal codes.

List of abbreviations

AE = L'Année Épigraphique, Paris, 1888–.

CIL = Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, eds. Th. Mommsen et al. Berlin, 1863–.

CJ = Corpus Iuris Civilis, vol. 2. Codex Iustinianus, ed. P. Krüger. Berlin, 1877.

CTh = Codex Theodosianus. Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis, eds. Th. Mommsen and P.M. Meyer. Berlin, 1904.

EDR = Epigraphic Database Rome, www.edr-edr.it/.

ICUR = Inscriptiones christianae urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores, ed. G.B. De Rossi. Rome, 1857–1915.

IG = Inscriptiones Graecae, eds. A. Kirchhoff et al. Berlin, 1873–.

IK Ephesos = Die Inschriften von Ephesos (*Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien*), eds. H. Wankel et al. Bonn, 1979–.

ILCV = Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres, eds. E. Diehl et al. Berlin, Dublin, and Zürich, 1925–1967.

ILS = Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae, 5 vols., ed. H. Dessau. Berlin, 1892–1916

LSA = Last Statues of Antiquity database, http://laststatues.classics.ox.ac.uk/.

Milet VI 3 = *Milet VI. Inschriften von Milet 3*, eds. P. Herrmann, W. Günther, and N. Ehrhardt. Berlin and New York, 2006.

Nov. Val. = Novellae Valentiniani. Liber legum novellarum divi Valentiniani A., in *Leges novellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, ed. P.M. Meyer, 69–154. Berlin, 1905.

P. Cairo Isid. = Cairo Papyri. The Archive of Aurelius Isidorus in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo and the University Michigan (P.Cair. Isid.), eds. A.E.R. Boak and H.C. Youtie. Ann Arbor, 1960.

PG XLV, col. 1751 = *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series Graeca*, vol. XLV, ed. J.-P. Migne, col. 1751. Paris, 1844.

PLRE I = *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, vol. 1: AD 260–395*, eds. A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, and J. Morris. Cambridge, 1971.

PLRE III = *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire, vol. 3: A.D. 527-641*, ed. J.R. Martindale. Cambridge, 1992.

SEG = Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum, eds. J.J.E. Hondius et al. Leiden, Alphen aan den Rijn, and Amsterdam, 1923–.

Sirm. = Constitutiones Sirmondianae. In *Codex Theodosianus. Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis*, vol. II, eds. Th. Mommsen and P.M. Meyer. Berlin, 1904.

The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity = The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity database http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/.

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Varietas in the *Variae*: Erudition and Audience in Cassiodorus' Epistles

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Abstract: Cassiodorus' *Variae* has been the centre of a range of scholarly debates, particularly with regard to the nature and originality of its encyclopaedic passages. This paper argues that these passages were not falsified ornamentation but part of Cassiodorus' original chancery rhetoric, this style being influenced by 'jewelled' contemporary literary aesthetics. On the basis of a catalogue of these digressive references and disquisitions, it is shown that Cassiodorus modified the appearance, content, and length of these passages based on a letter's original audience and context. This is illustrated by the interpretation of patterns in letters to the major constituent groups that received the *Variae*'s letters, including Roman senators, Ostrogoths, the kings of Germanic successor states, the Roman court at Constantinople, and the clergy. The paper concludes by offering comments on potential future research directions, the study's implications for Cassiodorus' role as *Quaestor*, and the ends to which he compiled the *Variae*.
Keywords: Cassiodorus, *Variae*, epistolography, Ostrogothic Italy, encyclopaedism.

Upon his retirement from political life, Cassiodorus Senator curated a selection of his career's correspondence into the *Variarum Libri Duodecim*, unknowingly setting a number of snares for future historians in the process.[1] The text is challenging on a number of fronts, not least because Cassiodorus' prose is dense and its meaning often obscure. The editorial process which transformed 468 letters and edicts into *formulae* for the use of future palatine officials had the unfortunate side effect of excising much contextual and chronological information. Since the majority of the letters were composed not in Cassiodorus' name but on behalf of his Ostrogothic patrons, the agencies and identities involved are difficult to discern. The letters' interpretation also starkly differs depending on whether one centres their original chancery context, or their function when they were placed in the *Variae* up to thirty years later. This host of ambiguities has provided the fodder for a vast and dense body of scholarly literature, one rarely in agreement even on

[1] For an introduction to the *Variae*, see Giardina 2005; Barnish 1992, xviii-xxx; Macpherson 1989; Gillett 1998. For a commentary (albeit not fully published) see Giardina *et al*, 2014-2016. For the *Variae* as *formulae*, see Praef. 14; Conso 1982, 284-85. On their stylistic novelty, see Barnish 1992, xxiii-xxv; Pieroni 2009, 141-142; Bjornlie 2012, 199-206. On the collection's historical reliability, see Giardina 2005, 39-40; Barnish 1992, xxx-xxxii; La Rocca 2010, 3-4. Citations from the *Variae* will not contain the collection's name herein and will take the form 'book.letter.passage'.

fundamental subjects such as the extent of the letters' editing, the influence of the nominal addressor in their content, and Cassiodorus' actual intentions for the work.

Herein, we will attempt to resolve two issues that have led to much scholarly head-scratching. The first is the nature of the *Variae*'s encyclopaedic excursuses, a novelty in the ancient chancery tradition. These passages, termed digressions since first catalogued by Helmut Nickstadt, run the gamut of classical learning and often sideline the epistles' administrative function.[2] As with many features of the *Variae*, their interpretation remains contested. Åke Fridh adhered to the early modern tradition of seeing them as contrived ornamentation, or, in his own words, 'torrents d'érudition vaniteuse'.[3] Alternatively, the diversity of the subject matter addressed has led the passages to be linked to the ancient encyclopaedic tradition by Shane Bjornlie, whose extensive bibliography on the *Variae* centres the notion that the digressive material was randomly placed within a programmatic, and potentially falsified, whole.[4] The studies of Bettina Pferschy, Paolo Pieroni, and Andrew Wallace-Hadrill take the opposite tack; by highlighting the situational use of these passages to reinforce an epistle's communicative purpose thematically, intertextually, or even tonally, they have undermined even the use of the term 'digression'.[5]

The second issue is the 'phantom' stylistic variety for which the collection is named. In the *Variae*'s preface, Cassiodorus explains that he adopted more than *unum stilum* since he had to address *personas varias* – those *multa lectione satiatis*, *mediocri gustatione suspensis*, and *litterarum sapore ieiunis*.[6] Likewise, he had to address kings (*regibus*), potentates *(potestatibus aulicis*), and the humble (*humillimis*) in different ways. Yet all attempts to verify this stylistic variety, or its adjustment per audience, have been stymied: lexicon, syntax, meter and rhythm are stable throughout.[7] The typical conclusion that Cassiodorus was simply aping classical precepts is profoundly unsatisfying. His other works, from *De anima* to *De orthographia*, demonstrate that he could tone down his prose when the occasion called for it. Instead, it should be considered that Cassiodorus did not conceive of style in explicitly classical terms. His suggestion that the types of speech are to be tailored to the intellectual capacity of the audience, rather than the rhetor's intent,

[2] Nickstadt 1921, 8-10.
[3] For Fridh's characterisation of the digressions, which draws heavily from Nickstadt, see Fridh 1956, 17-19.
[4] "It would seem that the logic of how and when Cassiodorus included digressive material depended more on the programmatic nature of the encyclopaedic tradition than on criteria internal to individual letters." Bjornlie 2015, 296. See also Bjornlie 2009, 2014, and 2015.
[5] See particularly Pieroni 2009, 146-51, but also Pferschy 1986; Wallace-Hadrill 143-49.
[6] Praef. 15-17.
[7] See O'Donnell 1979, 87; Barnish 1992, xxxii; cf. Barnish on letters' 'learnedness' Barnish 2001, 367.

is drawn from Augustine, not Cicero or Quintilian.[8] Similarly, his clausulae prioritise rhythm over meter, exhibiting a *cursus mixtus* that is distinctly Late Antique in its fashion.[9]

It is thus no surprise that his 'digressive habit' is best contextualised within the aesthetics of later Latin literature. The poetics favoured by Cassiodorus' contemporaries, termed the 'Jeweled Style' by Michael Roberts, favours strings of short, articulated, and self-contained constructions.[10] The style often characterised by digressions varied in subject matter but designed to produce thematic or semantic unity.[11] Its aesthetics were particularly influenced by panegyric, the genre in which Cassiodorus had proved himself worthy of the quaestorship.[12] It is This aesthetic, influenced particularly by panegyric and ekphrasis, The hallmarks of Roberts' literary jewelling – strings of antitheses, rhetorical ekphrasis, and frequent paradoxes – have regularly been identified as central to the *Variae*'s style.[13] Nor is the influence of such aesthetics on the *Variae*'s digressions a mirage produced by the 'variety' of the documents involved: even individual epistles use chains of apparently tangential subject matter to reinforce their intended message.[14] Yet studies of the *Variae*'s style have rarely made the connection with Roberts' work, even after such a link was first proposed by S.J.B. Barnish in the 1990s.[15] Perhaps because of the supposedly political nature of the text, and the certainly political focus of many of its analyses, there has been no enthusiasm for taking up 'jewelling' as a hermeneutic for the text's various learned references and digressions. Doing so would invite us both to at last treat shorter references and longer excursuses ('citations' and 'disquisitions', in Bjornlie's terminology) as part of the same aesthetic phenomenon, and to reconsider the tailoring of these 'jewels' to different audiences.[16]

These invitations are to be taken up herein, but in order to do so it was necessary to produce a new catalogue of Cassiodorus' disquisitions and citations.[17] The latter had been ignored in

[8] Bjornlie 2012, 190-91.
[9] See Oberhelman 1982, 127-28, especially n36.
[10] For the aspects of the style most applicable to Cassiodorus, see Roberts 1989, 49-55.
[11] This was concluded by the editor of a re-evaluation (and recapitulation) of Roberts' work; see Kaufmann 2023.
[12] See Romano 1978.
[13] Kołtunowska 2021, 107-108, cf. Roberts 1989, 63-64. On the use of these devices, also Kakridi 2005, 28-30.
[14] Letter 2.14 invokes animals, plant life, and Roman history in an arranged series; 3.47 combines geological, zoological, and historical trivia; 8.20 uses both medicine and the weather; many more examples can be found.
[15] Barnish 1992, xx: "Connoisseurs would have seen his letters as studded with rhetorical conceits and figures like a meadow jewelled with flowers." These very connoisseurs, Cassiodorus' senatorial peers, and their literary arts are frequently described using the metaphors of jewels and flowers (e.g. 1.13.1, 11.1.8).
[16] Bjornlie identified these as symptoms of the same encyclopaedic phenomenon. Bjornlie 2015, 294.
[17] This catalogue, found in the appendix, is based on the 396 letters in books I-V and VIII-XII. I have excluded the two books of entirely anonymised *formulae*, since this analysis centres the identity and status of the recipient. Word counts are included as a means of relative comparison, not concrete analysis.

previous, digression-focused catalogues, but are fundamental parts of the same aesthetic phenomenon.[18] The interpretation of this catalogue, and Cassiodorus' use of the 'Jeweled Style', merits more than a short article, but even an initial survey is highly revealing. By cross-referencing this catalogue with the cultural, political, and ethnic identities of his letters' recipients, it quickly becomes clear that Cassiodorus differentiated both the use and content of his encyclopaedic references on the basis of audience. The patterns therein appear not only reflect Amal political ideologies, but also a set of social and diplomatic protocols. By surveying such relationships between learned ornamentation and audience, we learn much about the social horizons of Ostrogothic Italy and about Cassiodorus' function in, and aptitude for, the office of *Quaestor*.

Senators and the Senate

We will begin with the senatorial aristocracy (*Viri Illustres*) and the Senate, respectively the group most frequently addressed in the *Variae* and the single most frequent addressee.[19] While his palatine position may simply have been oriented towards such an audience, the letters to the aristocracy may have been deemed most suitable for display: the type of learned references identified above is disproportionately received by both the Senate and its members.[20] Such a propensity to direct ornamentation towards this group appears to have been motivated by the intersection of Roman and senatorial status. That the determiner was not merely the former is suggested by the higher rate of 'jewelling' to *Illustres* Romans than to those not of this status;[21] that it was not merely *Illustris* status is proven by the significantly lower rate of ornamentation in letters to Ostrogothic *Illustres* when compared to Roman ones.[22]

Although we should not be surprised that Cassiodorus felt that the fruits of a liberal education were most appropriate for men of his order, there are certain peculiarities in the character of these passages.[23] For instance, while the majority of the longer-form disquisitions were directed to *Illustres* Romans, not one of the three-dozen longest 'digressions' is found in the thirty-eight

[18] Prior catalogues ignored shorter references to learned material; Pferschy's was criticised on this basis (Pieroni 2009, 142n5) but the same could be applied to the other catalogues: Nickstadt 1921, 8-10; Kakridi 2005, 64n174.
[19] On these titles and their relationship to senatorial participation in Ostrogothic Italy, see Radtki 2016, 122-128.
[20] 110/396 letters surveyed contained 'jeweling', creating a baseline through the ten books of 27.8%. *Viri Illustres* received such content in 36/110 letters (32.7%) and the Senate did in 16/38 (42.1%). *Viri Spectabiles* received such material in 10/42 letters (23.8%). For *Viri Clarissimi* the sample size is too small to be worth evaluation.
[21] Cf. footnote 19. The Senate received 'jeweling' in nearly half of the letters addressed to them, whereas other Italo-Roman group addresses - local *possessores*, provincial populations, and government bureaus - sit at about one-fifth.
[22] See Appendix. Gothic *Illustres* receive such references in 2/18 letters (11.1%); Roman *Illustres* in 34/92 (37.0%).
[23] Liberality was often all that continued to distinguish this class; see Neri 2010, 34-35.

letters to the Senate body itself.[24] Such passages were apparently inappropriate, a protocol that cannot be attributed to the verbal economy required of an address read to a group – letters to other groups as well as edicts feature longer excursuses.[25] This reticence is better credited to the intellectual hierarchy inherent in performative erudition. While the king (given voice by Cassiodorus) could confound the general public with an edifice of specialised prose, he could not risk intellectually outmatching the prickly egos of the Senate or – perhaps worse - erring and appearing unsuitably 'Roman' in learning.

Correspondence with the Senate therefore relied on shorter references, with the stock material determined by a letter's tone. Disciplinary notices lack the type of natural or philosophical references that served to assert Theodoric's common *paideia* with the Senate, using historical examples to condemn or encourage behaviour instead.[26] Meanwhile, notifications to the Senate of palatine promotion – often paired in the *Variae* with the individual's letter of appointment - are remarkably consistent in their thematic deployment of natural science. These establish an acceptable panoply of referential material for such occasions. References to historical senators appear primarily in such letters, as do references to Latin literary figures.[27] These paired appointment letters also constitute roughly two-thirds of botanical and agricultural metaphors in the collection.[28] There is little consistency in the meanings of such metaphors, undermining any sense they constitute part of a concrete and specific political theology based upon natural law.[29] Commonality is found in the stock from which they were drawn, since the letters primarily serve to reaffirm the historical and intellectual continuity of the senatorial community.

The consistency of the material deemed appropriate for the Senate is emphasised by the absence of the type of zoological references one finds elsewhere in the *Variae*.[30] Other collective recipients are not so spared: despite constituting a more modest sample size, two edicts and three

[24] The boundary between a short citation and a long disquisition is subjective, but if we peg the latter at around one hundred words we are left with thirty-nine disquisition, roughly matching Kakridi's forty digressions.
[25] E.g. 11.40 (edict) and 12.22 (to a provincial body). On the oral recitation of certain letters, see Barnish 2001.
[26] E.g. 3.31.4, where 'Theodoric' invokes legendary figures to express his displeasure to the Senate. See Appendix B.
[27] Historic senators: 1.27.5, 8.22.3. Virgil: 5.4.6, 11.1.15. Symmachus: 11.1.20.
[28] See Appendix B.
[29] E.g. the sun could be senators (1.13.3, 6.14.2) or the king (6.23.2). Seeds could be individuals themselves (2.15.1, 3.6.2, 3.29.1) or royal gifts (3.29.1). Sources of water could be offices (8.21.2, 10.12.1) or families (2.15.1). Cultivation could be the task of the monarch (1.12.3, 6.14.1) or the aristocracy (6.11.2).
[30] The single exception is 1.13, an early letter which (rather condescendingly) compares appointee to racehorses, *muta animalia* that are hastened by praise. A senator is never again likened to, or exhorted to behave as, an animal.

letters to provincial groups feature such discussions.[31] Cassiodorus' habit of comparing the lower echelons of society to animals may explain why he abstains in senatorial correspondence; provincials are often encouraged to look towards animals for models of behaviour, but never *Viri Illustres*.[32] Animals are also frequently used in discourse about criminality. Murder is condemned by suggesting that animals knew better, or – suggesting a certain inconsistency – has its punishment mitigated on the basis that animals killed for their mates.[33] Released prisoners are told that they might improve themselves by looking to beasts as models.[34] A man of curial rank who kills a colleague is condemned to live as an animal, while an embezzler is compared to a chameleon.[35] The wretched amongst humanity were to look to animals for improvement, while transgressors were seen to imitate the worst of beastly behaviour. These associations are to be kept in mind as we move onto letters directed to the *Variae*'s second major group of recipients: Italy's Ostrogoths.

The Goths

Fourteen of the seventy-one letters directed to Gothic recipients contain learned references of the type identified.[36] This rate, roughly one-in-five, is well below the rest of the collection – this phenomenon is best illustrated by the aforementioned disjunction between the treatment of Gothic and Roman *Illustres*.[37] No Goths receive any references to literature, astronomy and philosophy are absent, and botanical metaphors, so popular with the Senate, appear only in a joint address to a Goth and an *Illustris* Roman.[38] Instead, Gothic addressees receive a disproportionate number of the collection's medical references.[39] More significant, in light of the previous discussion, is that

[31] Edicts: 9.2.1-6, 9.18.1. To provincial groups including Romans: 2.19.2-3, 3.48.4-5, 12.24.2-6.
[32] For the lower echelons of society being likened to animals, see 1.21.3, 3.51.10, 9.3.5. For animals as positive role models for provincials, see 3.48, 8.3.1, 9.2.5-6. This mitigates Cassiodorus' avoidance of derogatory terms for the lower classes; Neri 2010, 20-22.
[33] The unwillingness of animals to kill their king is used to condemn murder in 2.14 and 2.19, while the tendency for animals to do just this to protect their mates is used to justify a lightened sentence at 1.37.2.
[34] 11.40.
[35] 3.47.4, 5.34.2.
[36] Identified onomastically or through context. This does not necessarily reflect an individual's personal identification, and this article will not engage in the heated debate regarding the porousness of ethnic boundaries in Ostrogothic Italy (see Amory 1997). For our purposes, Cassiodorus' perception of the audience is key.
[37] See Appendix A. Nearly half of the *Variae*'s *Viri Spectabiles* were Goths, which, in light of the treatment of *Illustres* Goths, explains the paucity of *Spectabiles* in our catalogue.
[38] 5.39.1.
[39] The longest disquisition to a Goth, a medical discourse in 10.29, may be explained by the frequency of medicine in letters to Goths. The perceived appropriateness of medicine for such an audience somewhat undermines Bjornlie's suggestion that the letter was inexplicable and thus falsified; Bjornlie 2009, 167-70.

half of letters to Goths in the catalogue make use of zoological material.[40] As to other audiences, such references underline the violence associated with animals – but with Goths, they do so with positive connotations, exhorting them to behave as animals.

This is best illustrated by the deployment of birds, since this discourse differs significantly along ethnic lines.[41] *Variae* 8.31 proffers *turdi* (thrushes), *sturni* (starlings), and *palumbi* (woodpigeons) as models of behaviour for the civilised Roman, since they are musical and sociable flocking birds; nightingales too raise their young in urban environments, as Roman *curiales* ought.[42] The letter continues to contrast these birds with the predatory and violent nature of solitary *accipitres* and *aquilae*, thoroughly unsuitable behavioural models for Roman provincials. It is therefore striking that these very birds of prey are used as positive role models for Goths and their rearing practices. A young Ostrogoth reaching the age of maturity is granted his legal autonomy on the basis that, like an eagle, he has finally learned to hunt on his own.[43] Cassiodorus, in the guise of Theodoric, presents solitude and violence as markers of Gothic adulthood. Another epistle exhorts the Gothic people as a whole to educate their children in the martial manner of *accipitres*, since these birds push their young from the nest to teach them self-sufficiency.[44] These comparisons are not strictly limited to birds, of course. Elsewhere, the military education of young Goths is compared to the wrestling of young bulls or the play-fighting of puppies – a stark contrast with the spiritual terms in which Cassiodorus discusses Roman *paideia* throughout the *Variae*.[45] The lessons to be taken from animals by Romans and Goths are not just different, but opposite.

The emphasis on education and socialisation in such passages hints at the strategy involved. Amal Italy was marked, ideologically at least, by a strict division of labour along ethnic lines: Italo-Romans were entrusted with the bureaucracy, and Ostrogoths the military.[46] This entailed not just strict social boundaries between the ethnic groups, but also that each faced an entirely different set of educational requirements. Cassiodorus, as the mouthpiece of government, was tasked with delineating and reinforcing these borders. Exhortations towards the behavioural models of violent and resourceful animals, and a refusal to engage on matters of literature or

[40] See Appendix B.
[41] There have been numerous attempts to trace Cassiodorus' zoological knowledge to specific sources, but the *Variae*'s use of animals shows genuine textual parallels only with Ambrose's *Hexameron*; Zumbo 1993, 196-97.
[42] 11.31.2-3, 7. On this letter and its presentation of urbanism, see Wallace-Hadril 2025, 115-6.
[43] 1.38.2.
[44] 1.24.3.
[45] 1.40.1.
[46] Heydemann 2016, 24-29.

science, highlighted and reinforced the expectations of 'Ostrogothic culture' under the Amals. There are other hints at such intentions, most prominently Cassiodorus' regular association of the Goths with the god Mars – he even refers to them as *Martium Geticus populus*.[47] This deity is absent elsewhere in the collection, and such an association may have been a sanctioned formulation of Theodoric's system.

None of these letters present a Gothic education negatively, of course – nor would it have been obvious how Cassiodorus' utilisation of such references differed between groups until the *Variae* was published. Yet one does get the impression that Cassiodorus believed, to some extent, his own propaganda. A lower intellectual assessment of Goths is hinted at by two letters to Gothic *saiones*, which use identical analogies involving overburdened birds to explain the limitations of donkeys on the *cursus publicus*.[48] The analogy is facile, and there is no other occasion upon which Cassiodorus uses animals as a didactic tool to explain the behaviour of other animals - or plants to explain plants, *et cetera*. The effort employed, as the cognitive expectation of the audience involved, was minimal.

Diplomacy

Ethnic boundaries were not the sole determiners of how Cassiodorus differentiated his learned ornamentation; geographic ones also played a role. Cassiodorus' remit as *Quaestor* extended to communications beyond Italy's borders, and the *Variae* features a range of diplomatic correspondence both to the imperial court at Constantinople and to the warlords that had carved up the remains of the Roman West (all of whom, be they Franks, Burgundians, Vandals, or otherwise, he terms 'barbarians'). These epistles were not devoid of the jewelled aesthetics of Cassiodorus' domestic correspondence, but they use such passages in a way modified somewhat to serve geopolitical ends.

The twenty-one letters to representatives of the Eastern Empire are remarkable in that they are characterised by the complete absence of learned ornamentation. This can hardly be a coincidence, when one-in-four letters surveyed contained such jewelling and other diplomatic letters were not so reticent.[49] Religious anxieties, particularly after the closure of the schools of

[47] 10.31.2. Other associations of the Goths with Mars include 1.24.3, 5.23.1, and 8.10.11.
[48] 4.34.3, 5.5.3
[49] See Appendices A and B.

Athens in 529, could explain the lack of certain topics (e.g. philosophy or mythology) but cannot explain the absence of more innocuous references. Rather, the hierarchical implications of erudite displays are again the most plausible explanation. The letters to the emperors (and empress, in Theodora's case) of Constantinople are the only communications in the entire *Variae* directed to a recipient of a higher notional political status than the sender, and the Amals continued to derive political legitimacy from the East's tacit acknowledgment well into the reign of Athalaric.[50] Assertion of common *paideia* would be simply inappropriate, let alone the construction of intellectual dominance found in certain letters. Additionally, one must suspect that Cassiodorus – or indeed his masters – suspected that his innovations in the chancery style would be an unwelcome novelty in already-tense diplomatic exchanges.

Letters to the West's various 'barbarian' warlords were not concerned with such niceties. Several letters include elaborate set-pieces not present in letters to the East - ekphrases of diplomatic gifts, for instance, which could devolve into ostentatious displays of learning.[51] Such letters present Theodoric as more Roman than, and thus superior to, his Germanic peers – projecting his vision of Ostrogothic Italy's role in foreign affairs just as internal correspondence had mirrored his domestic political ideologies.[52] These hierarchies could often be implicit. In two letters to distant tribes (one on the Baltic littoral), Cassiodorus ignores the apparent language barriers to craft elaborate descriptive passages related to the letters' diplomatic content.[53] One of these even contains a direct reference to Tacitus as its source, although Cassiodorus' choice to refer to the writer as Cornelius can only have decreased the accessibility of the reference.[54] The recipients, even if the letters were translated, could not have been expected to appreciate the ekphrasis or understand the literary reference. The letters construct a dynamic wherein Theodoric's privileged Roman knowledge subordinates the recipient's ignorance of 'civilised' affairs.

Such a hierarchy is more explicit in a rather inflammatory epistle to Gundobad, King of the Burgundians and former *Magister Militum*.[55] The letter is primarily occupied with a description of two gifts from Theodoric to Gundobad, a water clock and sundial – emblems of Roman *scientia*

[50] E.g. 8.1.
[51] E.g. 4.1, 5.1.
[52] This policy is the subject of a chapter in Hans Ulrich-Wiemer's recent monograph; see Ulrich-Wiemer 2023, 232–78.
[53] 5.1 and 5.2.
[54] 5.2.2.
[55] 1.46. The letter's patronising tone is highlighted by its pairing with a letter (1.45) directing Boethius to procure the devices, which involves a substantial foray into mathematics and astronomy.

– in a perhaps condescending but largely inoffensive manner. Cassiodorus then asserts that without Theodoric's benevolence, Gundobad would be left to tell time by hunger pangs alone – the habit of animals (*beluarum ritus*).[56] The derogatory nature of this evocative phrase is evidenced by its reuse later in the *Variae* to describe the depravity of war-torn Gaul in the aftermath of the battle of Vouillé.[57] There is little doubt that Cassiodorus was aware that Gundobad was by all accounts rather well-read, and had as much experience living amongst the Romans as Theodoric.[58] The comment serves merely to present Gundobad as subordinate to the 'Romanised' Theodoric, who envisioned himself as the *primus inter pares* in a Germanic 'family of kings'.[59]

In domestic letters, Cassiodorus had reinforced the educational hierarchy that placed Romans above Goths by likening the latter to beasts. In letters abroad, he employed this same tactic to subordinate a Burgundian to a Goth but displayed his capacity for restraint in letters to Constantinople. The perceived intellectual hierarchy underpinning his deployment of learned jewels was thus identical to the political hierarchy avowed by Theodoric, in which Ostrogothic Italy sat first among the Germanic kingdoms, but was itself still dwarfed by the Roman Empire.

The Clergy

Cassiodorus' tailoring of learned references to his audience is particularly evident in the seventeen letters to members of the clergy.[60] Here, religious anxiety (or perhaps the perceived reading experience of priests and bishops) led him to omit all references to philosophy, natural history, science, or any other potential display of classical *paideia*.[61] Yet unlike the letters to the East, in which Cassiodorus seems to have been limited by political exigency, the senator was not entirely content to leave these letters unadorned. In two of these letters, he uses scriptural references in a manner unattested elsewhere and analogous to his habitual use of history and natural science.[62] In one, 'Athalaric' tactfully reminds Pope John II of the condemnation of Simon Magus as part of an

[56] 1.46.3.
[57] 5.39.1.
[58] On this letter's relationship with Gundobad's background, see Shanzer 1996, 242-44.
[59] Ulrich-Wiemer 2023, 235-43.
[60] These are 1.9, 2.8, 2.18, 3.7, 3.14, 3.37, 4.24, 4.31, 4.44, 8.8, 8.24, 9.5, 9.15, 10.34, 11.2, 11.3, 12.27.
[61] Religious anxieties in the *Variae* are hinted at by Cassiodorus' fear his scientific excursuses might be seen as omen-seeking; 12.25.7. Denominational divisions, economic competition, or ongoing conflict between the church and state could also be blamed; see Bjornlie 2012, 248-251; La Rocca and Tantillo 2017, 31-34; Moorhead 1983, 116-20.
[62] There are occasional Biblical references in long scientific digressions (e.g. 2.40.2-16, 8.20.1, 8.33.3-8, and 12.25.2-7), but they rarely appear alone, nor are they used in a manner analogous to the letters to the clergy.

effort to address an ongoing controversy over simony in the Roman church.[63] Where senatorial reprimands employed Roman history, ecclesiastical ones invoked the Bible. The consciousness of Cassiodorus' code-switching is even more apparent in the other letter, which compelled a bishop to restore his city's aqueduct.[64] There are many similar letters in the *Variae*, and the Amals' ideological emphasis on infrastructure renewal is well-studied.[65] The others underline the king's command by dwelling upon architecture, geometry, history, or the scientific and healing properties of water; on only this occasion did Cassiodorus choose a biblical example to emphasise his point.[66] He concludes the letter by informing the bishop that by restoring the aqueduct he would be acting in the model of Moses, drawing water from a stone to aid those under his care.[67] There is no comparable use of a biblical story as an exhortation to action anywhere in the *Variae*. Cassiodorus' assertion that he matched his stylistic adornment to the reading that the recipient would understand rings true.

Gender

We can alight only briefly on the issue of gender in the *Variae*, since the vast majority of the collection consists of letters written by one man, on behalf of another, and towards a third. Six letters written on behalf of women, and a further three were written to a woman in a man's name.[68] All nine letters lack substantial ornamentation – but since the sample overlaps heavily with the letters to the East, interpreting this is rather difficult. A letter written for the famously learned Amalasuintha mentions extensive scriptural readings, but not her own.[69] Rather, she praises the scriptural expertise of her co-ruler, and eventual murderer, Theodahad, thereby setting up his discussion of the Book of Kings in the subsequent letter. This is clearly designed to emphasise Theodahad's erudition, but the allusion itself praises Amalasuintha's economy with words.[70] Likewise, another letter written in Cassiodorus' name praises the queen for handling affairs *silentiose* despite speaking Greek, Gothic, and Latin.[71] We cannot know whether these letters

[63] 9.16.11.
[64] 4.31.
[65] On the subject of infrastructure renewal in the *Variae*, see Fauvinet-Ranson 2006.
[66] E.g. 2.39, 5.38, and 7.6.
[67] 4.31.2.
[68] Women to women: 10.1, 10.3, 10.8, 10.10, 10.21, 10.24. Men to women: 4.37, 10.20, 10.23.
[69] 10.3.5. For an extended but speculative discussion of Amalasuintha's education, see Vitiello 2017, 42-77.
[70] 10.4.6.
[71] 11.1.18.

reflect a genuine taciturnity on Amalasuintha's part. It seems more likely that Cassiodorus was merely parroting cultural expectations of women; on the two occasions when Theodahad and his queen, Gudeliva, sent paired letters to Theodora, the letter between women is noticeably shorter.[72] Even while writing their correspondence, Cassiodorus evidently prized women's restraint of their voices.

Some Conclusions

Although we have at last seen definitive proof that Cassiodorus tailored the *Variae*'s various citations and disquisitions to their audience, this does, perhaps, raise more questions than it answers. Future research might examine additional contextual determiners of learned references, as well as discern if and how separate audiences were in receipt of differing literary devices; they might also examine whether Cassiodorus' familiarity with a recipient might play a role in 'digression'. Certain principles have nonetheless been established here that lay the groundwork for such inquiry. It can be said for the first time that this content was not placed randomly, nor should we continue to entertain the notion that Cassiodorus falsified the letters' jewelled ornamentation during the editing process.[73] Case studies of individual passages have long argued that digressions played a fundamental role in the letters' original communicative strategy, but it has now been demonstrated that the decision to deploy such encyclopaedic passages (and their subject matter) was influenced by the political and social exigencies of their initial composition. It is profoundly unlikely that Cassiodorus could or would consciously retroject so much material in such a patterned manner. Not only would the insertion of an untested stylistic innovation have produced inappropriate chancery *formulae*, but there is ample evidence for the *Variae*'s rushed composition – a hastiness which Cassiodorus himself acknowledged.[74] Instead of contriving such theories, we must appreciate that the strategic use of jewelled ornamentation highlights Cassiodorus' aptitude for his role as the Amals' chief publicist - and may explain why he continued to act in the capacity of *Quaestor* when he held the offices of *Magister Officiorum* and *Praefectus Praetorio*.[75]

[72] The pairs are 10.20 and 21, 10.23 and 24.
[73] This is not to say that Cassiodorus did not embellish any letters, but there is no evidence for a wholesale project of rewriting. The letters to Boethius, for instance, have often been seen as suspiciously long – but their content is directly analogous to other substantial disquisitions to less-famous figures such as Consularius (3.52) and Argolicus (3.53).
[74] Praef.2-5. On the various other hints at the hastiness of the editing process, see Barnish 1992, xvii.
[75] Gillett 1998, 41-43.

The principle that we must treat Cassiodorus as more competent than has typically been supposed extends to interpreting the stylistic theory avowed in the *Variae*'s preface. The senator describes style as something to be moderated based upon an audience's capacity to understand it. Contemporary literati had a particular taste for jewelled ekphrastic and encyclopaedic ornamentation, the very thing that Cassiodorus adjusted based on his audience. There is every reason to believe that Cassiodorus identified letters which used more extensive ornamentation or addressed more intellectually complex material as those of a higher style (for readers *multa lectione satiatis*) and those with minimal literary jewelling or less obscure subject matter as those of a lower style (for those *litterarum sapore ieiunis*).[76] The epistemic hierarchies this would imply are certainly present in the *Variae*. Many of the subjects most frequently addressed in senatorial correspondence are identical with those presented as desirable for aristocratic intellectuals in *De anima*, the *Variae*'s 'thirteenth book'.[77] Knowledge of philosophy, music, astronomy, the environment, and even botany (*potestates uirentium herbarum*) are accorded spiritual profundity.[78] Conversely, knowledge of animals is never presented as desirable and such creatures appear only as a senseless foil for human rationality – it does not take a particularly refined soul to understand a soulless creature, it seems.[79] That such hierarchies are shared between the two works lends greater clarity to Cassiodorus' thought, as well as strengthens the case to see this 'jewelling' as a distinctly Cassiodoran chancery conceit.

All these conclusions serve to remind us of the care with which we must distinguish the Cassiodorus who composed the documents from the Cassiodorus who edited them.[80] As *Quaestor*, his job was to deploy his erudition to reinforce the Amals' various policies and ideologies - the ethnic division of labour, the barbarisation of diplomatic rivals, and the rulers' self-presentation as philosopher-kings. This study produces no evidence, however, to support the longstanding theories that these were the ends towards which Cassiodorus compiled his letters.[81] Rather, the very publication of the *Variae* punctured much of this propaganda by arrogating letters once circulated as the speech of kings in order to illustrate Cassiodorus' role in stylising them. Similarly, the

[76] Praef. 15.
[77] *De anima* is announced in the *Variae*'s second preface and described as its thirteenth book at *Exp. Ps.* 145.28.
[78] *De anima* 1, 4, 15.
[79] Compare the characterisation of *beluarum ritus* (*Variae* 1.46.3 and 5.39.1) with the markers of evil at *De Anima* 12.
[80] As highlighted by Gillett, who does, however, underplay the genuine literary novelty of the *Variae*, presenting their style as "character of much quaestorial and other official palatine writings". Gillett 1998, 41-44.
[81] Similar conclusions can be found at Gillett 1998, 46n35 and Giardina 2005, 31-32, *contra* Barnwell 1992, 168-69; O'Donnell 1979, 85; Momigliano 1955, and others.

collective study of the letters undermines the frequent assumption that they reflect either a genuine oral discourse between Cassiodorus and the Amals, or a program insisted upon by Theodoric and his successors.[82] All of the personas assumed by Cassiodorus, including that of himself as *praefectus praetorio*, display a suspiciously similar interest in contemporary literary aesthetics and utilise learned references in a similarly patterned manner. This is explained most easily if we assume that the *Quaestor* (hired, we must remember, for his literary prowess) was given the order that a letter was to communicate and was then left to craft the text in a culturally, aesthetically, and ideologically appropriate manner.[83]

All studies of the *Variae*, it seems, inevitably finish with a few comments on the collection's purposes. The analysis herein endorses Cassiodorus' assertion that the letters were to serve as *formulae* for future bureaucrats, but it does so in a manner that reveals what made these model letters worthy of circulation. The senator had produced a self-consciously novel chancery style by integrating contemporary literary aesthetics into bureaucratic documents, and as we have seen this could be adjusted to serve a variety of political and social purposes. The *Variae* publicised this achievement, which would resound differently with each of the collection's two primary audiences.[84] One, made up of stylistically-challenged bureaucrats, would select models from the collection to ease their work, imbibing a range of encyclopaedic learning in the process. With the models selected on the basis of the headings provided (the recipient's name, title, and office), their jewelled ornamentation would be appropriate for their recipient.[85] The second audience, Cassiodorus' fellow literati, were to appreciate his fusion of senatorial *paideia* and bureaucratic function, something not to be taken for granted in an era when Italy's most blue-blooded aristocrats increasingly eschewed public office. His injection of the sort of literary jewels typically produced by aristocratic *otium* into the labour of his bureaucratic *negotium* justified his invocation of the letters as a *speculum mentis*, a *topos* drawn from the private senatorial epistolary tradition.[86] Despite being framed as an act of intellectual euergetism, then, the compilation of the *Variae* was just as intertwined with senatorial self-publication and self-promotion as any other aristocratic

[82] For a recent reiteration of the former theory, see Wallace-Hadrill 2025, 119-31. For the latter, Devecka 2016, 211.
[83] That Cassiodorus' tastes underpinned the use of such content is further suggested by the increased tendency for longer-form disquisition in the letters he drafted in his own name; see Sirago 1992, 131.
[84] On two audiences for the *Variae*, one concerned with *otium* and the other *negotium*, see Bjornlie 2012, 201-203.
[85] In editing the collection for use as *formulae*, he excised dates, quantities, appended documents, *breves*, and even the names of minor *dramatis personae*, leaving the recipient's name, office, and status as the heading.
[86] Pref. 10.

display of benevolence. Just as Symmachus had restored the Theatre of Pompey so that its visitors and his peers and clients might glorify him, so too did Cassiodorus expect the users of his chancery model to identify their profit – and their style – with his name.

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Appendix A: Learned References in the *Variae* by Group

Recipient	**Number of Letters**	**# with Learned References**
Total	*396 (+ 72 in* formulae*)*	*110 (+ 20 in* formulae*)*
Germanic Monarchs/Tribes	13	5
Clergymen	17	2
Edicts	9	3
Goths	65	13
Provincial Groups	31	5
Saiones	15	5
Senate of Rome	38	16
The Roman East	21	0
Vir Clarissimus	9	4
Vir Spectabilis	42	10
Vir Illustris	110 **(19 Gothic)**	36 **(2 Gothic)**

Appendix B: Catalogue of Learned References ('Jewels') in the *Variae*
Key:

( )	Probable but unlisted titles.	I	*Vir Illustris*
*	Gothic Recipient	MO	Magister Officiorum
C	*Comes*	P	*Patricius*
Cl	Clarissimus	PP	Praefectus Praetorio
Cons	*Consul*	PU	*Praefectus Urbis*
CP	*Comes Privatarum*	Q	*Quaestor*
CSL	*Comes Sacrarum Largitionum*	S	*Vir Spectabilis*
D	*Dux*	VA	*Vice Agens*

Letter	**Recipient**	Description	**Words**
1.2.7	Theon S	Excursus on purple dye production.	217
1.3.4	Cassiodorus (the Elder) I, P	Allusion to Cicero.	20
1.5.1, 3	Florianus S	Medical analogy.	46
1.6.2	Agapitus I, PU	Description of geological materials.	24
1.10.3-7	Boethius I, P	Extended discourse on arithmetic and astronomy.	352
1.12.3	Eugenitus, I, MO	Botanical analogy in praise of candidate.	14
1.13.1, 3	Senate	Compares the Senate to flowers/jewels, candidate to the sun.	65
1.20.5	Albinus I, P and Avienus I, P	Music-related etymology.	27
1.21.3	Maximianus *I*, and Andreas S	Various animals as behavioural exemplars.	47
1.24.3	All Goths*	Reference to Mars, exhorts the Goths to raise children as raptors.	69
1.27.5	Speciosus	Catos as historical exemplar.	5
1.30.5	Senate	Historical etymology of bellum.	61
1.31.3-4	Roman People	Likens the voices of the Roman people to the cithara.	39

1.35.2-4	Faustus I, PP	A long series of nautical/fish/weather based hypotheticals are used to underline the unacceptability of Faustus' behaviour.	178
1.37.2	Crispianus	Behaviour of various as exemplars.	49
1.38.2	Boio S *	Behaviour of eagles as exemplar.	38
1.39.2	Festus I, P	Reference to the Odyssey.	33
1.40.1	Osuin* I, C	The nurturing of animals and fire are used to encourage military training.	44
1.45.2-11	Boethius *I, P*	Prolonged excurses on mathematics, astronomy, and mythology to explain two mechanical devices.	597
1.46.1, 3	Gundobad	Briefer discussion of the same mechanical devices, with a reference to the habits of animals.	63
2.2.5	Felix, I	Botanical metaphor as part of praise of appointee.	12
2.3.3-7	Senate	Muses, Cato, the arrangement of time all invoked to praise the appointee.	52
2.14.2-4	Symmachus (I), P	Various animals, plants, and other natural phenomena are invoked as part of praise of Symmachus.	232
2.15.1	Venantius I	Similarities to plants and natural springs are invoked in praise of the candidate.	36
2.19.2-3	Goths and Romans at Ports and Borders	The familial devotion of birds is used as an exemplar.	51
2.22.1	Festus	Homeric allusion.	19
2.28.1	Stephanus,	Horses and the procedure at public games are used to highlight right proceedings.	21
2.32.2	Senate	Ornate description of swampland to be drained.	49
2.39.2-12	Aloisius, Architect	While ordering the restoration of baths, the wondrous medical properties of water are expounded.	625
2.40.2-16	Boethius I, P	Elaborate excurses on philosophical, musical, and other natural phenomena.	996
3.4.1	Clovis	Streams flowing together are used as an analogy of peoples commingling.	22
3.6.1-2	Senate	A metaphor involving the multiplication of harvest is used to praise the Decii.	20

3.12.1	Senate	Nature invoked in praise of an appointee.	17
3.25.2	Simeon Cl, C	Brief discussion of applicable metallurgic procedure; cf. 1.2.	10
3.29.1	Argolicus I, PU	Agricultural metaphor for the king's role.	27
3.31.4	Senate	Historical figures are invoked to underline the unprecedented poor behaviour of the senate in a disciplinary letter.	25
3.46.1	Adeodatus	Medicine as a metaphor for justice.	31
3.47.2-5	Faustus I, PP	A range of natural phenomena followed by a comparison to a salamander mark the exile of a criminal/	198
3.48.2, 4-5	Goths and Romans of Verruca	Urchins, gulls, and other birds are used to highlight the necessity of restoring a fortress.	177
3.51.3-11	Faustus I, PP	This confirmation of a charioteer's salary involves a history of the games, an ekphrasis of the circuit, and comparisons of arena crowds to animal behaviour.	416
3.52.2-8	Consularis I	A long discussion of the development of geometry and the history of surveying accompanies an order to find a surveyor.	348
3.53.2-5	*Apronianus* I, CP	A water surveyor is sought for Rome, and the letter includes a prolonged excursus on the history and methods of water surveying.	204
4.1.3	Hermanfrid, King of the Thuringians	Ekphrasis of horses delivered by Hermanafrid as a gift.	62
4.31.2	Bishop Aemilianus	Scriptural analogy.	45
4.34.3	Duda* *Saio*	Historic kings used to justify present policy.	16
4.36.2	Faustus I, PP	Comparison of a passing army to a river.	41
4.47.5	Gudisal* *Saio*	Analogy involving animals to explain constraints on the cursus publicus.	33
4.50.4-7	Faustus, I, PP	Description of an eruption of Mount Vesuvius.	217
4.51.3-12	Symmachus I, P	A long discussion of the history and mythological context of theatre performances.	503
5.1.1-2	King of the Warni	Another letter with extended description of gifts, with references to mythology.	132
5.2.2-3	Haesti	Allusion to Tacitus.	79

5.4.5-6	Senate	Botanical metaphor in praise of a candidate, plus a Virgilian allusion.	82
5.5.3	Mannila* *Saio*	Analogy involving animals to explain constraints on the cursus publicus.	5
5.17.2-4	Abundantius I PP	History of sailing, involving Egyptian mythology.	33
5.21.3	Capuanus S	Virgilian allusion, for the appointment of a director of a bureau of notaries.	17
5.23.1	Abundantius I, PP	Mars is referenced in the context of Gothic training.	21
5.33.2	Wiliticanus* D	Doves as a behavioural exemplar.	26
5.34.2-3	Abundantius I, PP	Embezzler is compared to a chameleon.	136
5.38.2	Possessores Near Ravenna	A discussion of the properties of water, similar to others in letters about aqueducts.	62
5.39.1, 3	Ampelius I, and Liuvrit* S	Animal behaviour, agriculture, and medicine are all invoked to highlight issues in the governance of Ostrogothic Spain.	34
5.42.1-12	Maximus I, Cons	A description of circus games, with a history of the event and discussion of related ethical quandaries; includes Virgilian allusion.	629
8.3.5	People of Rome	Reference to Trajan as a model of rulership.	7
8.9.8	Tuluin* *Illustris* (*Comes*)	A reference to a Gothic legendary figure, Gensimund.	45
8.10.11	Senate	Uses Romulus and Mars to represent the Romans and Goths.	7
8.12.4-5, 7	Arator I	A history of letters involving animals, mythology, and references to Cicero is used in praise of the candidate.	72
8.13.4-5	Ambrosius I, Q	Compares the candidate to Pliny, and Athalaric to Trajan.	29
8.14.1	Senate	Agricultural analogy for the king's role.	17
8.16.7	Opilio I, CSL	Seeds used metaphorically to represent senatorial families.	11
8.19.1, 5	Senate	The curia as a fertile field and a meadow; allusion to Cicero.	42
8.20.1, 3	Avienus I, PP	Medicine and weather used to illustrate good rulership.	38

8.21.2	Cyprianus I, P	Compares a senator's vitality to a flowing font, similar to other water-based comparisons.	19
8.22.1, 3	Senate	References to the Olympic tradition and historical senatorial families.	33
8.27.1	Dumerit* Saio, and Florentianus, Vir Devotus and Comitiacus	Medicine used to illustrate justice.	20
8.30.1-3	Genesius S	Description of sewers and water supply to a city, discussing water's properties.	68
8.31.1-3, 5	Severus S	Birds are used to represent appropriate and inappropriate civil behaviour; description of Bruttium using mythological allusions.	196
8.32.1-3	Severus S	Extended ekphrasis on the topography and mythology related to Scyllaceum.	185
8.33.3-8	Severus S	Similar to the prior two letters to Severus, this letter contains an extended discussion of the topography and culture of Lucania.	394
9.2.1, 5-6	Edict	Medicine and the behaviour of birds are used to illustrate correct governance.	135
9.3.1-5	Bergantinus I	Nature's principles are used to justify the opening of mines; miners are compared to moles.	283
9.6.3-6	*Primiscrinius*	An ekphrastic description of healing springs at Baiae.	243
9.9.2	Goths and Romans of Dalmatia	Analogy for union between the Goths and Romans using reed pipes.	18
9.15.11	John	Scriptural allusion to Simon Magus.	11
9.22.3	Paulinus (I?), Cons	Discussion of the ancient Decii and use of seeds as a metaphor for senatorial families.	55
9.23.2	Senate	Seeds of senatorial families again evoked.	19
9.25.5, 10	Senate	Metaphors involving fields and literature, as well as reference to historical senators.	57
10.4.6	Senate	Explicit naming of a biblical book (Kings) - only such reference in the *Variae*.	11
10.11.2	Maximus I	Another letter of promotion using references to ancient senatorial families.	9

10.29.2-4	Wisibad*	Disease symptoms and water's healing properties are discussed while granting medical leave.	299
10.30.1-7	Honorius I, PU	Discussion of the characteristics and history of elephants.	461
10.31.2	All Goths*	Goths linked to the god Mars.	2
11.1.9,19-20	Senate	References to Galla Placidia, Symmachus, and a series of otherwise unknown Gothic figures.	99
11.6.6	Johannus, Cancellarius	Pouring water as a metaphor for literary prowess.	28
11.10.1-3	Beatus Cl	Description of another set of healing springs.	184
11.14.1-5	Gaudosius, Cancellarius	Encomia of the region of Como.	268
11.35.1-2	Edict	Reference to ancient Olympic contests.	18
11.36.2-3	Anatolicus, Cancellarius	Astronomical excursus.	131
11.38.2-5	Johannus, Canonicarius	An excursus on the history and etymologies related to the book.	248
11.39.1-4	Vitalianus Cl, Cancellarius	A tax remittance is linked to the history of Rome's urban development.	199
11.40.2-5	Indulgentia	Criminals given clemency have their captivity compared to Pluto's realm and are encouraged to look to a range of animals as behavioural exemplars.	150
12.3.1	*Saiones** Assigned to Cancellari	Justice compared to medicine, again.	29
12.4.1-2	*Canonicarius* of Venetia	Excursus on wine, its production, and the various accoutrements required to consume it.	355
12.5.8	Valerianus S	Virgilian allusion.	30
12.12.1-5	Anastasius, Cancellarius	Prolonged discussion of the foods produced in Lucania et Bruttium, with mythological reference.	190
12.14.1-5	Anastasius, Cancellarius	Another discussion of Lucania et Bruttium's history and animals.	304
12.15.1-5, 7	Maximus, Cancellarius	An encomium of Squillace, involving its topography and mythology.	325
12.20.4	Thomas and Peter, Cl and Arcarii	Discussion of the Sack of Rome, 410 CE.	62

12.22.1, 3-5	Provincials of Istria	An encomium of Istria, similar in character to letters 12.14, 15.	201
12.24.2-6	Tribuni Maritorium	Prolonged excursus on the local tradition of seafaring.	310
12.25.2-7	Ambrosius I, VA	Excursus to Cassiodorus' assistant on cosmic order using astronomy, agriculture, weather, and more.	395
12.28.2, 7, 10	Edict (Liguria and Aemilia)	A rare reference to a specific scriptural figure (Joseph), appearing twice.	179

Licet interdum confabulationis tale conuiuium doctrinae quoque sale condiatur: Jerome's letters to Marcella, and biblical exegesis in epistolary form

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Abstract: In this paper we try to highlight the variety of epistolary 'topoi' found in the letters of the *Ad Marcellam Liber*, especially those of exegetical content, quickly comparing them with the (much more varied) typologies found in Jerome's only other epistolary *liber*, the *Ad diuersos epistularum liber*. We then attempt to focus on the first paragraph of *Ep*. 29, addressed to Marcella and of exegetical content, illustrating in their context the two metaphors of epistolary discussion and exegetical content as nourishment for the soul. Finally, comparisons for similar food metaphors in Jerome's other letters and with pagan and Christian Latin epistles are sought, highlighting Jerome's sobriety (compared to the refinement of Paulinus of Nola) but also his penchant for using such metaphors, which are apparently less numerous in Ambrose and Augustine, as well as in pagan epistles.

Keywords: Jerome, Marcella, letters, exegesis, food.

Letter 29. 1: overall presentation and epistolary commonplaces

In the first paragraph of Jerome's letter 29, the insertion of exegetical content in a familiar epistolary context is particularly evident. The main content of this epistle, directed to Marcella, is exegetical, as Jerome explains to her the meaning of the Hebrew words 'ephod' and 'teraphim'. Explanation of Hebrew words and extolling the innovative study of the Old Testament directly from the original Hebrew text, is one of the main themes of the *Ad Marcellam liber*[1]. The exegetical letters to Marcella are written by Jerome in response to the exegetical questions that the pious and learned widow used to ask him, orally or via letters. The passage of our interest is the following:

> "*Epistolare officium est de re familiari aut de cotidiana conuersatione aliquid scribere et quoddammodo absentes inter se praesentes fieri, dum mutuo, quid aut uelint aut gestum sit, nuntiant, licet interdum confabulationis tale conuiuium doctrinae quoque sale condiatur. Verum tute in tractatibus occuparis, nihil mihi scribis nisi quod me torqueat, et Scripturas legere conpellat*. *Denique heri famosissima quaestione proposita postulasti ut quid sentirem statim rescriberem; quasi uero pharisaeorum teneam cathedram ut, quotienscumque de uerbis Hebraicis iurgium est, ego arbiter et litis sequester exposcar. Non sunt suaues epulae, quae non et placentam redoleant, quas non condit Apicius, in quibus nihil de magistrorum huius*

[1]The abbreviations used are those of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (ThLL).
Cain 2009, 68-98 about the *liber ad Marcellam*, to which we can trace back *Ep*. 23-9; 32; 34; 37-8; 40-4, all composed during Jerome's second and last residence period in Rome (382-5 AD).

temporis iure suffumat. Sed quia uector et internuntius sermonis nostril redire festinate, rem grandem celerius dicto quam debeo, licet de Scripturis Sanctis disputanti non tam necessaria sint uerba quam sensus, quia si eloquentiam quaerimus Demosthenes legendus aut Tullius est, si sacramenta divina nostril codices, qui de Hebraeo in Latinum non bene resonant, peruidendi."[2]

We can observe an implicit contrast between the epistolary genre and the treatise genre with respect to scientific content: while in the former it should only serve to enliven and spice up the conversation, the true substance of epistolary communication, in the latter such content is instead the exclusive one, and it is precisely towards this kind of works that Marcella drags Jerome. It is no coincidence that Jerome never qualifies one of his own letters as *tractatus*: for particularly extensive discussions he can use, to indicate a certain type of letter, *liber* or *libellus*, or, for a short letter of exegetical or learned content, *commentariolus*, but never uses for this the term *tractatus*.[3] Thus, Jerome's awareness of employing the epistolary genre in a rather original and unconventional manner becomes evident: exegesis, and more broadly biblical and theological scholarship, presented in the form of a letter. This, however, was not an entirely unprecedented phenomenon in contemporary Latin literature. For instance, in the epistolary corpus of Ambrose – roughly contemporaneous – we also find numerous examples of conventional epistolary motifs, as well as several letters of exegetical content, in which the adaptation of scholarly material to the theoretical conventions of epistolography, including the familiar letter, is clearly observable: cf. e. g. especially Ambr., *Ep*., 1. 1. 1, without date and of exegetical content; 5. 23. 1, written in 386 and of exegetical content; 6. 32. 7, without date; 7. 35. 5, written in 390 ca.; 7. 48. 1,[4] without date (cf. for *caedere sermones* Ambr., *Ep*., 2. 7. 1; 5. 23. 1; 6. 33. 1; classical models for the expression are Ter. Heaut., 242ss, Hor serm., 2. 3. 274).[5] The typical epistolary theme of the letter as a conversation between absent friends (*sermo absentium*), as we see, is clearly represented, as well as other epistolary commonplaces, in Ambrose's letters. Jerome also received these commonplaces from grammatical and rhetorical education.[6] Without a doubt, however, Jerome was the first to exploit the potential of the epistolary form in relation to the exegesis of the Hebrew text, as well as the first to engage in such an extensive and dynamic correspondence

[2]See also Conring 2001, 64-70, 95-6 about this first paragraph of *Ep*., 29.
[3] See e. g. *Ep*. 30. 2 to Paola, of exegetical content, where this short letter is defined as *commentariolum*; similarly, in *Ep*. 42. 3 to Marcella, also short and of exegetical content, Jerome says *latam disputationem breui sermone comprehendimus, ut non tam epistulam quam commentariolum dictaremus*; see also Arns 1953, 89-107; Conring 2001, 100-5.
[4] Ambr., *Ep*. 7. 48. 1: *epistularum genus propterea repertum, ut quidam nobis cum absentibus sermo sit* (cf. Ambr., *Ep*., 1. 1) *in dubium non uenit. Sed fit hoc usu exemploque pulchrius, si inter parentem ac filios crebra et iucunda alloquia caedantur*
[5] Thraede 1970, 183-91 discusses Ambrose's role in shaping an epistolary context for exegetical content; at p. 188 he cites our passage from Jerome's *Ep*., 29. 1. This whole monography, devoted by Thraede to the study of ancient epistolary 'topoi' and epistolographic theory, is a reference work, also very rich in examples.
[6] Thraede, 180-3, where it is shown that these epistolary commonplaces were part of the higher scholastic education.

with women – such as Marcella – even on exegetical subjects. Returning now to our text, we offer only some very brief observations to the epistolary commonplaces of *Ep*., 29. 1, other than food metaphors, on which we will focus on a little more in the next part of this paper.

The references to letter-writing theory, here especially related to family letters, are particularly elaborate: first, the merely informative function of the missive is highlighted, as it was already the case in Cicero (e.g. in Cic., *Fam*., 2. 4. 1[7]; *Q. fr*., 1. 1. 37[8]). Remember that Cicero's letters were exemplary for the letter-writing short handbook of Iulius Victor (cf. Iul. Vict., p. 447. 32 Halm: *multum ad sermonis elegantiam conferent…epistulae ueteres, in primis Tullianae*; also Iul. Vict., p. 448. 29 Halm: *quod genus apud M. Tullium multa sunt*). So far, however, only a very little number of direct citations from Cicero's letters have been found in Jerome's epistles.[9] This does not mean that Jerome did not read Cicero's letters: even if this topic merits more attention, it is possible that Jerome knew at least some of them directly (cf. e. g. the diminutive *pagella*, found only in Cicero, *Fam*., 2. 13. 3; 11. 25. 2, and in Jerome, *Ep*., 60. 19, 73. 1)[10]. The object of the epistolary exchange (the *res familiaris* and the *cotidiana conuersatio*) is presented as every day, so it implicitly follows that the language used must also be so, as is often repeated in the epistolary commonplaces (cf. e. g. Cic., *Fam*., 9. 21. 1: *epistulas cotidianis uerbis texere solemus*; Ambr., *Ep*., 6. 32. 7)[11]; the reference to the *res familiaris* as an object of epistolary conversation is also reflected in Cicero's epistolography (Cic., *Att*., 7. 5. 5: *iam plane mihi deest quod ad te scribam; nec enim de re publica, quod uterque nostrum scit eadem, et domestica nota sunt ambobus*), but note that now the two objects of the epistolary discussion are no longer the public and private spheres, but rather the private sphere and the scientific discussion of an exegetical nature, since in some way the Christian faith – a celestial *res publica*, so to speak – has replaced the true *res publica* as the ultimate horizon of man's life. Fully classical and well codified in epistolary topic is the conception of the letter as a tool to make present

[7] Cic., *Fam*., 2. 4. 1: *epistularum genera multa esse non ignoras, sed unum illud certissimum, cuius causa inuenta res ipsa est, ut certiores faceremus absentis, si quid esset quod eos scire aut nostra aut ipsorum interesset*.
[8] Cic., *Q. fr*., 1. 1. 37: *illud, quod est epistulae proprium, ut is ad quem scribitur de iis rebus quas ignorat certior fiat, praetermittendum esse non puto*.
[9] A reference to Cic., *Att*., 1. 12. 4 (and to similar places that show this idiomatic expressions) in Jerome's *Ep*., 74. 6; 85. 1; 108. 12 (*quidquid in buccam uenerit*); to Cic., *Fam*., 9. 3. 2 (but the same proverbial expressions are in Cic., *Acad*., 2. 80 and in Tacitus, *Dial*., 9) in *Ep*., 84. 4. 1 (*domi nobis ista nascuntur*); more doubtful references to Cic., *Att*., 12. 28. 2 (*mea mihi conscientia pluris est quam omnium sermo*) in *Ep*., 22. 13. 3 (*sufficit mihi conscientia mea*), to Cic., *Att*., 13. 20. 4 or *Fam*., 7. 25. 2 (*transversum unguem*, proverbial expression) in epist. 107. 9 (*ne transversum quidem unguem a matre discedat*). The same applies to Jerome's other works in general. For all this, Luebeck 1872, 157-8; the fundamental Hagendahl 1958 offers no parallels to Cicero's letters. For the above listed references to Cicero's epistles in Jerome's letters, see the *index auctorum* in Kamptner 1996, 137. The dubious examples are referred to the ancient authors' indexes in Adkin 2003, 407, Cain 2013, 303 and Lubian 2024, 304. These are no precise wordings which Jerome must necessarily have taken from Cicero's letters, even if the striking similarities suggest that, in at least some cases, maybe he did so.
[10] Scourfield 1983, 429-30.
[11] For the ancient sources about letter-writing theory and principles, the texts are usefully collected by Cugusi 1983, 27-41.

those who are absent (cf. e. g. Cic., *Fam.*, 15. 14. 3: *utemur bono litterarum et eadem fere absentes quae si coram essemus consequeremur*)[12]: this is especially evident in the echo, showed by *Ep*., 29. 1 of a fragment of the comic poet Turpilius (Turp., *inc. fab*., Fr. 1 Ribbeck: *sola res est* [sc. litterae] *quae praesentes homines absentes nobis faciat*). The citation of this *sententia* of Turpilius is found, elsewhere in Jerome and in general, only in *Ep*., 8. 1: *Turpilius comicus tractans de uicissitudine litterarum 'sola', inquit, 'res est quae homines absentes praesentes faciat'*. Jerome is the only testimonium for this fragment. The fact that this very explicit s*ententia* on the power of letters is expressly cited in *Ep*., 8 and echoed only in our passage is not coincidental, since these are two passages contained in the only two *epistularum libr*i, that is, collections of letters, that we know were collected by Jerome himself (*Vir. ill.*, 135): the first, containing the missives written immediately before and then during the anchoritic experience in the desert near Chalcis, is the so-called *Epistularum ad diuersos liber* (c. 373-7, probably containing *Ep*., 2-16; *Ep*., 14 perhaps circulated separately);[13] the other is the afore-mentioned *Epistularum ad Marcellam liber* (c. 382-5; composed in Rome, containing *Ep*., 23-9; 32; 34; 37-8; 40-4). In both these collections, the familiar character of the letters is well accentuated, and the sharing of the same quotation, aimed at underlining the friendly aspect of the epistle as a means of communication, seems to highlight this fact. We should remember, moreover, that also in Ambrose's letters the epistolary exchange was defined by words and expressions taken from comedy, as *sermonem caedere* (found, as we have seen, in Terentius), inasmuch the language of comedy was exemplary with respect to friendly and cultivated oral communication.[14] Likewise, it is no coincidence that references to letter-writing theory are particularly numerous, more than elsewhere, precisely in the epistles that make up the *Ad diuersos liber* and in those of the *liber ad Marcellam*. As Canellis has already noted,[15] in the letters relating to the *Ad diuersos liber*, which are not by chance essentially familiar in nature, we find the greatest number of references to epistolary '*topoi*' as they are linked to the affection and bond between the correspondents. After this strong initial concentration, such references will recur less and less frequently in the subsequent letters: basing ourselves, indicatively, on the index of the masterly study on ancient epistolary practice and theory by Thraede, and considering the Hieronymian places recorded there, 17 references to commonplaces of the epistolary genre appear considering only the books *ad diuersos* and, to a lesser extent, *ad Marcellam* (31 letters in total), against 25 other references

[12] See on this Thraede 1970, 162-4, about the epistolary communication as *sermo absentium* in Late-Antique writers.
[13] On this *liber*, Cain 2009, 13-42.
[14] Thraede 1970, 184.
[15] Canellis 2002, 325-7.

found in the rest of the letters (94 letters in total): a particular concentration of these epistolary '*topoi*' is evident in the two collections just mentioned.

Let us simply enumerate these themes, without discussing them[16]: theme of the letter as a way of making the correspondents present (*Ep*., 3. 1. 1. 1-3; 5. 1. 1. 6-7; 7. 2. 1. 6-10; 8. 1. 1. 10-2, cf. also *Ep*., 71. 7, 76. 1); the theme of the letter as a means to make up for the absence (*Ep*., 3. 1. 2. 11-2; 3. 6. 1. 13-5; cf. *Ep*., 44. 1, to Marcella and part of the *Ad Marcellam liber, ut absentiam corporum spiritus confabulatione solemur*); the theme of the letter as a conversation with the other and with oneself (*Ep*., 5. 1. 1. 10-3; 7. 2. 1. 4-5); the theme of the letter that cements the friendship in Christ (*Ep*., 4. 1. 2. 14-5; 7. 1. 1. 3; cf. 53. 1); the theme of the letter as consolation (*Ep*., 8. 1. 3. 2-4); the theme of the disorder in the letter as caused by affection (*Ep*., 7. 6. 3. 4-5); the metaphor of the soul's wings (*Ep*., 4. 1. 2. 14-5; cf. 71. 1, 143. 1). Confronting this number of epistolary themes with the ones which we find in the places of the *Ad Marcellam liber* containing examples of epistolary 'topoi', we note less variety in this last one: the brevity-*topos* is the most common (*Ep*., 26. 2. 1. 5-6; 26. 5. 1. 3-5; 28. 1. 1. 5-6); elsewhere in this *liber* (excluding the illustration of the main finality of letters, *Ep*., 29. 1: *quid uelint aut gestum sit nuntiant*) only the themes of letters as a means to make present the absent recipient (*Ep*., 29. 1: *absentes inter se praesentes fieri*), the theme of letter exchange as conversation, enriched with the metaphor of conversation as nourishment for the soul (*Ep*., 29. 1: *confabulationis tale conuiuium*; *Ep*., 32. 1. 1. 5-7: *quaeras, quidnam illud sit tam grande, tam necessarium, quo epistolicae confabulationis munus exclusum sit*), and the theme of letter as a consolation to the longing for the friend (*Ep*., 44. 1. 1. 3: *ut absentiam corporum spiritus confabulatione solemur*). The minor variety could be explained with the fact that, while in the *Ad diversos liber* the letters were addressed to various recipients, corresponding to a variety of different situations, the epistles of the *Ad Marcellam liber* were directed only to her, and they were more tied to the 'question and answer' structure often imposed by the exegetical or scientific themes of the correspondence, absent from the letters which make up the *Ad diuersos*.

The food metaphors for epistolary and exegetical discussion in *Ep*., 29. 1: tasty knowledge

Returning to the opening of letter 29, after having mentioned the full awareness shown by Jerome with respect to the non-immediate relationship between form and content of an exegetical epistle, we note the use of the metaphor of conversation as a banquet, flavoured with the salt of science. The metaphors of the banquet to indicate conversation and that of salt to indicate science are certainly not new in themselves, being part of the metaphorical topic of 'spiritual nourishment' already present in

[16] Canellis 2002, 326-7.

the classical world but developed above all by Christian authors starting from biblical references such as, in relation to the seasoning offered by salt to a figurative food, *Col*., 4. 6: *sermo uester semper in sale sit conditum* (cf. Job, 6. 6: *numquid… poterit comedi insulsum quod non est sale conditum?*; IV *Reg*., 2. 20, for waters healed by salt on God's order; Matth., 5. 13; Mk., 9. 49; Lk. 14. 33 as a metaphor of salt which, if it does not give flavour, is of no use).[17]

As for the expression *confabulationis conuiuium*, we note that, in Jerome and in general, it seems to occur elsewhere, in a partially similar form, only in another letter, of similar exegetical content and probably composed in Rome in the same years as the *liber ad Marcellam*, that is, *Ep*., 21. 2 to pope Damasus: *itaque hinc omnis inuidia, cur, quos* [scil. publicans and sinners] *legis praecepta damnarent, eorum confabulationem atque conuiuium dominus non uitaret*. The noun *confabulatio*, synonymous with *colloquium*, is not found before the *Itala* and is therefore late and mainly used by Christian authors, and most of all Jerome, almost always not by chance in the epistles (*Ep*., 9; 11; 21. 2; 29. 1; 32. 1; 39. 5; 44; 82. 7; 108. 19; 124. 3. 8; 128. 3; 130. 8; in Matth., 15. 32)[18]. It should be noted that the term *confabulatio*, in relation to the epistolary communication, is used by pope Damasus itself in one of his letters (to which we will return shortly), in which he requested exegetical explanations from Jerome (and which has therefore been handed down to us by the manuscripts together with the Jerome's missives), namely *Ep*., 35. 1.[19] The term *confabulatio*, however, is never used in the epistolary collections of Cyprianus (only one occurrence with concrete and not figurative meaning), Ambrose, Augustine and Paulinus of Nola. With respect to the epistolary communicative reality and to his own friendly contacts, *confabulatio* in Jerome is found not by chance in a letter of the *ad diuersos liber*, *Ep*., 11. 1 (*minutae quidem litterae sed confabulatio longa est*; cf. also another letter from the *ad diuersos*, *Ep*., 9. 1: *Heliodorus tibi potuit fideliter nuntiare…ut ad primam quamque confabulationem iucundissimi mihi tui consortii recorder*) and in another letter to Marcella, 32. 1: *epistolicae confabulationis munus*. We see another time, then, a peculiar affinity between the only two epistolary collections of Jerome in relation to the presence of clearly stated epistolary themes and commonplaces.[20]

[17] Curtius 1953, 134-6.
[18] ThLL 4. 169. 38-66.
[19] Jerome, *Ep*., 35. 1: *neque uero ullam puto digniorem disputationis nostrae confabulationem fore, quam si de scripturis inter nos sermocinemur*.
[20] Symmachus, among the pagans, refers this term to the letters (*Ep*., 9. 89 *saepius ad me commeent* [sc. *litterae tuae*] *et confabulationem praesentis imitentur*), while among the Christians we will later have Sulpicius Severus, *Ep*., 2. 19 (*ut…tibi ex quadam nostri confabulatione praestaret charta solacium*) and Ennodius of Pavia, *Ep*., 2. 26 (*confabulatio epistularis*). The affective value of *confabulatio* in situations of family or friendship relationships is clear, for example, from a passage in the letter of consolation sent to Paola for the death of her daughter Blesilla, *Ep*., 39. 5 (*redit tibi in memoriam confabulatio eius* [sc. di Blesilla], *blanditiae, sermo, consortium et, cur his careas, pati non potes*).

In authors preceding Jerome, or strictly contemporary, there do not seem to be references to the 'salt of doctrine', so the expression could be a Jerome coinage (cf. Hil. Pict., in Matth., 4. 10[21]; Paul. Nol., *Ep*., 9. 1[22]), but the connection between salt and a pleasant banquet with friends is certainly not unusual (Catull., *Carm*., 13. 1-5 *cenabis bene, mi Fabulle, apud me…et uino et sale et omnibus cachinnis*). More generally, salt as an idiomatic metaphor for the 'bon esprit' typical of the *urbanitas* and therefore of the *humanitas*, is often found in Cicero, who in an epistolary context already says it is a '*topos'* in rhetorical formation: *Att*., 1. 13 (cf. e. g. Cic., *Tusc*., 5. 19. 55; *De Or*., 1. 159).[23] The *sal* is poetic and useful for conveying concepts otherwise suited to the *gravitas* of moral contents in Ambr., *de Virg*., 18. 117 (*nam, licet grauitas dictorum absit, poetice tamen sale declarare uoluerunt* [scil. the ancients with the myth of Icarus]). As for the metaphor of the *sal doctrinae* that seasons and flavours the *confabulationis conuiuum*, one can therefore observe, in *Ep*., 29. 1, an overlap, highlighted by the union of familiar epistolary '*topoi*' of classical origin and the new Christian metaphorical content of Scripture as food for the soul, between the value of *sal* as a fundamental ingredient of the discussion between friends (*confabulatio*) characterised by *humanitas* (a Ciceronian, therefore classical element), and the Christian and biblical value of the same term, to indicate precisely the *doctrina* (*sal doctrinae*) and the science of the Scriptures, nourishment for the Christian soul. In Jerome's epistles, considering also the letters external to the *Ad Marcellam liber* and of a strictly exegetical content, we find three other occurrences of the metaphor of scientific discussion as food: another place in the first paragraph of letter 29 (*Ep*., 29. 1. 2. 15-6 : *non sunt suaues epulae, quae non et placentam redoleant, quas non condit Apicius, in quibus nihil de magistrorum huius temporis iure suffumat)*; 120 praef[24]; 121 praef[25]. In the non-exegetical epistles, the widespread and common image of religious teaching or doctrine as food for the soul recurs several times (*Ep*., 15. 1; 30. 37. 4; 84. 3; 120. 1; 121. 4; 122. 4; 133. 11), but there is no lack of more relevant places, in which

[21] Hil. Pict. in Matth., 4. 10 *merito igitur sal terrae sunt nuncupati [scil.the Apostles] per doctrinae uirtutem salliendi modo aeternitati corpora reseruantes*.
[22] Paul. Nol., *Ep*., 9. 1: *est enim et ipse sal terrae uiuidum referens apostolicae doctrinae saporem.*
[23] Cic., *Att*., 1. 13: *accepi tuas iam tris epistulas… quae fuerunt omnes, ut rhetorum pueri loquuntur, cum humanitatis sparsae sale tum insignes amoris notis*; *Tusc*., 5. 19. 55 : *in quo mihi uidetur specimen fuisse humanitatis, salis, suauitatis, leporis*; *De Or*., 1. 159 *libandus est etiam ex omni genere urbanitatis facetiarum quidam lepos, quo tamquam sale perspargatur omnis oratio*.
[24] Jerome, *Ep*., 120 praef. : *ignota uultu fidei mihi ardore notissima es…ora igitur ut uerus Helisaeus…apostolorum sale, quibus dixerat 'uos estis sal terrae', meum munusculum condiat, quia omne sacrificium quod absque sale est, Domino non offertur.*
[25] Jerome, *Ep*., 121 praef. : *habes ibi sanctum uirum Aletheium presbyterum…nisi forte peregrinas merces desideras et pro uarietate gustus, nostrorum quoque condimentorum te alimenta delectant. Aliis dulcia placent nonnullos subamara delectant horum stomachum acida renouant, illorum salsa sustentant…nostram amaritudinem illius nectareo melle curato…ut possis laeta cantare 'quam dulcia gutturi meo eloquia tua, super mel ori meo'.*

the banquet indicates the exegetical and scriptural discussion, or in which it is combined with the *sermo* and the conversation situations on biblical or spiritual topics.[26]

In *Ep*., 29. 1. 2. 15-8 (*non sunt suaues epulae, quae non et placentam redoleant, quas non condit Apicius, in quibus nihil de magistrorum huius temporis iure suffumat*) the culinary metaphor is used both in reference to the epistolary topic of the letter as conversation and, therefore, of exegetical conversation as nourishment for the soul by virtue of its contents, and as a polemical tool against the still too pagan customs and literary tastes of late 4th-century Rome. This second food metaphor in *Ep*., 29. 1 takes up the image of the epistolary discussion as a banquet[27] and is explained in contrast to the unappealing content, as it relates to the exegesis of the Hebrew Bible, of our letter, with a consideration that could obviously be extended to the rest of the exegetical epistles of the *liber ad Marcellam*. This arduous and uninviting content, in fact, is not particularly suitable for the exchange of letters (the nature of which is explained in the passage we talked about, *Ep*., 29. 1. 1. 10) but is almost extorted from Jerome by Marcella (29. 1. 2. 10-2), who takes him as the highest authority in terms of biblical exegesis and especially of the Hebrew Bible (29. 1. 2. 13-5). In short, some considerations on scientific topics, such as exegetical ones, are permitted in the exchange of letters, but they should not be taken beyond their proper bounds (the *confabulationis conuiuium* which, at times, can be spiced up with the *sal doctrinae*), as Jerome instead complains of being forced to do due to Marcella's requests, worthy of true exegetical tractates. In addition to indirectly highlighting himself as a great expert in exegesis, these words of Jerome also have another purpose, that is to oppose the literary value of writings on a more pleasant subject and form, such as the classics, to works relating to biblical science (whether epistolary in nature or not), indirectly taking a stand in favour of the full legitimacy (and indeed superiority) of the latter: the haste determined by the need to send the letter to Marcella, who had requested exegetical explanations, in addition to the topic of Jewish exegesis, did not allow Jerome to offer a product with particular literary ambitions (*Ep*., 29. 1. 2. 15-3. 1); but this was not even necessary, because the topic was biblical, and as such it was worthy of the utmost consideration even regardless of the elaborateness of the form (*Ep*., 29. 1. 3. 1-5).[28] It should be noted how here Jerome puts on the same level, implicitly leaning towards the latter, the models of classical eloquence (Demosthenes and Cicero), where the formal element dominates,

[26] Jerome, *Ep*., 49. 19: *si autem non disserunt, quod a me expositum est, uelint nolint, suscipient, aut profer meliores epulas et me conuiua utere, aut qualicumque nostra cenula contentus esto* (where the talk is about exegetical explanations, whether satisfactory or not); 60. 10. 8. 8-9 *sermo eius* [scil.of the deceased Nepotianus] *et omne conuiuium de scripturis aliquid proponere.*

[27] Cf. for *epulae* the afore mentioned *Ep*., 49. 19: *aut profer meliores epulas et me conuiua utere, aut qualicumque nostra cenula contentus esto,* in reference to exegetical explanations sent by letter.

[28] Jerome, *Ep*., 29. 1 : *licet de scripturis sanctis disputanti non tam necessari sint uerba quam sensus, quia, si eloquentiam quaerimus, Demosthenes legendus aut Tullius est, si sacramenta diuina, nostri codices, qui de Hebraeo in Latinum non bene resonant, peruidendi*.

and the Bible, where instead it is not the form that counts, admittedly ugly in Latin translation (*codices…in Latinum non bene resonant*), but the divine content of salvation: the explicit and antithetical opposition between *eloquentia* and *sacramenta diuina* repeats here the theme of Jerome's famous dream, which, leading him to consider biblical study far superior to traditional rhetoric and literature, had made him overcome his initial disgust for the uncultured form of the Latin versions of the *Bible*[29] and had consequently encouraged him to practice, with a somewhat ascetic intent, the study of a language often defined as strongly repulsive from an aesthetic point of view, such as Hebrew,[30] at the same time pushing him to abandon, with the famous oath sworn in a dream, the reading of pagan classics, at least for a time.[31]

This is the conceptual framework within which Jerome worked in Rome, and the compromises and adaptations of the familiar epistolary form, of classical and traditional origin, with the new exegetical content should also be seen in this light. This passage from *Ep*., 29 has been cited also to highlight the implicit polemical value of the culinary metaphor *suaues epulae quae* etc., consistent with the frequency with which, in the letters composed in Rome (382-5 AD), Jerome contrasts classical literature and its values with Christian literature, preferring the latter because of its content of truth and salvation. Among the letters composed in Rome, in fact, we find this point expressed in two exegetical letters sent to pope Damasus (*Ep*., 21. 13[32]; 36. 14[33]). The first of these two passages is related, for the analogous criticism of excessive love towards classical literature (experienced first-hand by Jerome before his famous dream) and as evidenced by the recurrence of the identical connection *summo studio ac labore*, to *Ep*., 22. 30[34]; the second, for the similar list of pagan authors whose splendid style is however empty of content compared to the biblical richness, is the afore mentioned *Ep*., 125. 12. 1. 13-4. In the letters composed in Rome, not all of which belong to the *Liber ad Marcellam*, we find polemical remarks against gluttony and luxury, widespread in Rome even

[29] Adkin 2003, 283-5.
[30] Jerome, *Ep*., 125. 12 : *dum essem iuuenis et solitudinis me deserta uallarent, incentiua uitiorum ardoremque naturae ferre non poteram; quae cum crebris ieiuniis frangerem, mens tamen cogitationibus aestuabat, ad quam edomandam cuidam fratri, qui ex hebraeis crediderat, me in disciplinam dedi, ut post Quintiliani acumina Ciceronisque fluuios grauitatemque Frontonis et lenitatem Plinii alphabetum discerem, stridentia anhelantiaque uerba meditarer*; cf. *Ep*., 29. 7 : *nos, ut scis, hebraici sermonis lectione detenti in latina lingua rubiginem obduximus in tantum, ut loquentibus quoque nobis stridor quidam non latinus interstrepat*
[31] Kelly 1975, 41-4.
[32] Jerome, *Ep*., 21. 13 : *possumus autem et aliter siliquas interpretari. Daemonum cibus est carmina poetarum, saecularis sapientia, rhetoricorum pompa uerborum…nihil aliud nisi inanem sonum et sermonum strepitum suis lectoribus tribuunt…at nunc etiam sacerdotes Dei omissis euangeliis et prophetis uidemus comoedias legere, amatoria bucolicorum uersuum verba cantare, tenere Vergilium, et id quod pueris necessitatis est crimen in se facere uoluntatis.*
[33] Jerome, *Ep*., 36. 14 : *scio haec molesta esse lectori sed de Hebraeis litteris disputantem non decet Aristotelis argumenta conquirere nec ex flumine Tulliano eloquentiae ducendus est riuulus, nec aures Quintiliani flosculis et scolari declamatione mulcendae…alii…laudentur ut uolunt, et inflatis buccis spumantia uerba trutinentur; mihi sufficit sic loqui ut intellegar, et ut de Scripturis disputans Scripturarum imiter simplicitatem.*
[34] Jerome, *Ep*., 22. 30: *bibliotheca, quam mihi Romae summo studio ac labore confeceram, carere non poteram. itaque miser ego lecturus tullium ieiunabam*; see Adkin 2003, 288.

among the clergy (see *Ep*., 21.13, cited above), which are connected to what has been said about the opposition between classical literature and the *Bible*. This should be noted since it is also on this level that the second food metaphor of *Ep*., 29. 1 can be read: the polemic against the excessively greedy and refined culinary tastes of the detractors, which metaphorically indicates the contempt towards a form of literature aesthetically less dazzling than the traditional one, such as that of Christian exegesis (*non sunt suaues epulae* etc) presents clear analogies with the similar polemical motifs contained in other letters written in Rome, namely (in addition to *Ep*., 21 and 36 to Damasus, cited above) *Ep*., 27. 1. 3. 12-9[35]; 30. 3. 1. 3-9.[36] Given these parallels, we should understand the polemical references addressed to the *magistri huius temporis*, that is, to people who are learned only in luxuries and vices, and to the form of the topics to be discussed: according to Jerome, this form should not be succulent and empty like Apicius's banquets. It is no coincidence that the name of *Apicius* occurs, throughout the entire whole of Jerome's writings, only in the two cited passages of *Ep*., 29 to Marcella and 33 to Paola, with the same polemical and satirical function. *Suffumare*, moreover, seems to be an 'hapax', attested only here, in this satirical context, where *de iure* ('broth') *suffumare* ('to reek a little') referred to the *magistri huius temporis* is clearly an implicit ironical antithesis between their lowly occupations and their high-sounding titles. For a similar polemical use of *epulae* against adversaries, cf. Jerome's polemical pamphlet *Contra Vigilantium* 1.[37] It should also be noted that *placenta*, considering the Christian Latin letter-writers of IV century, recurs only in Jerome, three times (*Ep*., 29. 1; 84. 5; 128. 1).[38] The term recurs elsewhere, considering the other Latin letter-writers, only in Sen., *Ep*., 63. 6 (*amicos incolumes cogitare melle ac placenta frui est*).

The second food metaphor in *Ep*., 29. 1, therefore, moves on a dual track, containing at the same time a reference to epistolary communication, even of an exegetical nature, as nourishment for the soul, and a polemic against the luxury of the table, which symbolizes, within the metaphor, the

[35] Jerome, *Ep*., 27. 1: *quibus* [scil. to the detractors of Jerome's revision of the Gospel, accused of excessive freedom and arbitrariness compared to the traditional Latin text] *si displicet fontis unda purissimi* [scil. the Greek original of the Gospels], *caenosos riuulos bibant, et diligentiam qua auium saliuas et concarum gurgites norunt, in scripturis legendis abiciant; sintque in hac tantum re simplices, et Christi uerba aestiment rusticana*.

[36] Jerome, *Ep*., 30. 3: *at e contrario saecula nostra habent homines eruditos, sciuntque pisces in quo gurgite nati sint, quae concha in quo litore creuerit. De turdorum saliuis non ambigimus; Paxamus and Apicius semper in manibus*; *oculi ad hereditates, sensus ad patinas, et si quis de philosophis, vel de Christianis qui uero philosophi sunt, trito pallio et sordida tunica lectioni uacauerit, quasi uesanus exploditur*). Wiesen 1964, 24 notes similar polemics against food luxury as a sign of moral decay in epist. 52. 6.

[37] *C. Vigil*., 1: *inter phialas philosophatur et ad placentas ligurriens psalmorum modulatione mulcetur, ut tantum inter epulas Dauid et Idithun et Asaph et filiorum Chore cantica audire dignetur.*

[38] From Hilberg's apparatus, one gets the false impression that *et placentam* is the reading of recent manuscripts and printed editions, but thanks to Vallarsi's note (PL 22. 1 col. 436 note h) we know that *placentam* was also a lesson from the ancient and authoritative *codex Veronensis*: this variant reading, certainly right in comparison with *et placeant*, is attested in tradition already at an early date. This applies also for *epulae*, clearly right variant reading which is not only found in recent manuscripts but may also be present in the tradition from an earlier date, judging from the notes in the printed editions on this place.

merely external splendour of pagan literature, which (at least in his intentions and for a certain period) Jerome had renounced after the terrible and famous dream described in *Ep*., 22. 30, dating back to the period of his stay in Syria.

Moving on to other Latin Christian letter collections contemporary with Jerome, we find, not by chance, a very notable reference to exegetical discussion in an epistolary context as a form of tasty spiritual nourishment in a letter of pope Damasus, transmitted to us by the manuscripts together with Jerome's letters, *Ep*., 35. 1[39]. It can be briefly noted that in this letter, whose authorship has been rightly reaffirmed by Cain in light of attempts to ascribe it instead to Jerome himself,[40] pope Damasus was asking Jerome, in the same way of *quaestiones* and *responsiones* adopted for example with Marcella, to clarify some points of the Scripture, using references to the epistolary commonplaces even of a friendly nature, such as the reference to epistolary brevity (*Ep*., 35. 2. 1. 6-8: *accingere igitur et mihi, quae subiecta sunt, dissere seruans utrobique moderamen, ut nec proposita solutionem desiderent nec epistula breuitatem*), the presence of ironic jokes (*dormientem te et longo iam tempore legentem…excitare disposui*), friendly communication via letter as *sermo absentium* and, specifically, as *confabulatio* between friends and, in the specific case of the Christian letter, the reference to exegetical discussion as a privileged theme and 'nourishment for the soul' for the epistolary exchange, even of a familiar nature.[41] The juxtaposition of biblical and classical quotations, moreover, shows affinities between the literary tastes of Damasus and Jerome.[42] For example, considering the epistles written in Rome by Jerome, we find an echo of *Psalm* 118. 103 only in the afore mentioned epistle 30, directed to Paola and not by chance of exegetical content, indeed a praise of exegesis.[43] Note the similarity with the contemporary Damasus' letter (e. g. *quid iocundius*, cf. *nihil hac luce puto iocundius*). It is also notable the absence of evident classical echoes, in the epistolary passages of other Latin Christian authors containing the image of epistolary discussion, even but not always of exegetical content, as food for the soul (and therefore, often, the reference to Psalm 118. 103), which will be reported immediately below. The recurrence of these motifs in the opening of Damasus' letter is not accidental but corresponds to the common epistolary use of the

[39]Jerome, *Ep*., 35. 1: *dormientem te…excitare disposui…neque uero ullam puto digniorem disputationis nostrae confabulationem fore, quam si de scripturis inter nos sermocinemur…qua uita nihil in hac luce puto iocundius, quo animae pabulo omnia mella superantur. 'quam dulcia…gutturi meo eloquia tua, super mel ori meo* [Ps. 118. 103]; *nam cum idcirco, ut ait praecipuus orator, homines bestiis differamus, quod loqui possumus* [cf. Cic. de orat 1. 32ss], *qua laude dignus est, qui in ea re ceteros superat, in qua homines bestias antecellunt?*

[40] Cain 2005, 257-63.

[41] Cain 2005, 260 note 15.

[42] On the juxtaposition of biblical and classical touches in Jerome, Antin 1968, 47-57.

[43] Jerome, *Ep*., 30. 13: *quid hac uoluptate* [it speaks of the mysticus intellectus of the Scripture] *iocundius? qui cibi, quae mella sunt dulciora dei scire prudentiam, sensum creatoris inspicere et sermones domini tui, qui ab huius mundi sapientia deridentur, plenos docere sensu spiritali?*

theme of nourishment for the soul (and in general of epistolary '*topoi*') at the beginning of letters (as for example in Jerome, *Ep*., 29. 1; 120 Praef.; 121 Praef.; cf. also the epistolary examples of Ambrose and especially of Paulinus of Nola, immediately below). The use of similar language (e.g., *confabulatio*, which recurs, within Christian IV century Latin letter-writers, in Jerome and Damasus but not in Ambrose, Paulinus, or Augustine) and of similar metaphorical images (exegetical discussion as nourishment for the soul) shows – if any were needed – that Jerome, in his letters, including his exegetical ones, uses a language shared with at least some of the exponents of his world – in this case, in the lively environment of the Roman church, the equally learned and literate Damasus.

In Ambrose's letters, in addition to two references, very in keeping with the biblical image, to celestial wisdom as food of the soul (*Ep*., 1. 1. 5) and to Paul's teaching as milk offered to the Corinthians, still immature to receive solid food, that is, a more advanced teaching (*Ep*., 7. 36. 5), there is only an implicit reference to epistolary conversation as food, not by chance with reference to its familiar characteristics (*Ep*., 6. 28. 16). However, in this regard, numerous very elaborate metaphors and similes (much more than those of Jerome) are found in the epistolary of Paulinus of Nola (*Ep*., 1. 1. 4-7; 2. 1. 5-9; 4. 1. 19-4 p. 19; 9. 1. 6-10; 15. 1. 11-5; 19. 1. 22-2; 19. 3. 27-4; 36. 1. 14-5; 37. 1. 10-6; 44. 1. 20-2 p. 371; 44. 2. 14-21; 45. 1. 3-13; 49. 15. 18-20; cf. also *Ep*., 39. 4. 17-9).[44] Noteworthy is the frequency of the theme of the letter as spiritual nourishment, especially at the beginning of letters, along with the frequent reuse of the motif of God's words which are sweeter than honey, taken from *Psalm* 118 – the same motif found not coincidentally in both Paulinus and Damasus. In Augustine's letters, however, metaphors of epistolary discussion as a banquet or similar are not found.

Looking at the classical and pagan epistolary works of Cicero, Seneca, Pliny, Fronto, and Symmachus, it seems that food metaphors relating to epistolary communication are much more limited than in Christian epistolary writers. This is likely explained by reference to the biblical images of knowledge as nourishment for the soul, listed above. In pagan Latin epistolary writers, in fact, we find clear enunciations of the connection between friendly discussion, *sermo familiaris*, and *convivium* (especially Cic., *Fam*., 9. 24. 3),[45] but food metaphors are rarely found in friendly discussions and their contents as spiritual nourishment are rarely inserted into the epistolary topic; sometimes we find similes and comparisons in which a literary work is compared, but not

[44] The numeration of letter, paragraph and lines is that of Von Hartel's CSEL edition (CSEL 29; 1894). Due to their number, Paulinus' citations are not reported in full form.

[45] Cic., *Fam*., 9. 24. 3: *nec id ad uoluptatem refero sed ad communitatem uitae atque uictus remissionem que animorum, quae maxime sermone efficitur familiari, qui est in conuiuiis dulcissimus, ut sapientius nostri quam Graeci; illi 'συμπόσια' aut 'σύνδειπνα', id est compotationes aut concenationes, nos 'conuiuia', quod tum maxime simul uiuitur.*

metaphorically, to banquets (Plin., *Ep*., 2. 5. 8),[46] sometimes there are metaphorical uses, however little developed, relating to the semantic field of taste applied to letters, speeches or books (e. g. Cic., *Att*., 15. 13. 4; Sen., *Ep*., 2. 4; 40. 2, Plin., *Ep*., 4. 3. 3; 4. 27. 5; 1. 10. 5). Similes with food and nourishment are also found in relation to other objects, such as thought, daily routine and lifestyle (e. g. Sen., *Ep*., 63. 6; 84. 4-5; Plin., *Ep*., 7. 3. 5). In Symmachus, however, the only Late-Antique pagan Latin letter-writer considered here, there are some metaphors of the classical type which identify a literary work with food (*Ep*., 1. 23: *siquidem breuis…adponeres*) and others which represent the joy for the letters of a friend and of the good news about him as nourishment for the soul (*Ep*., 2. 47: *amabiles litteras tuas…nobis esui mox fuere*); the letters of a friend are a sweetening for indignation (*Ep*., 7. 19: *iterum tibi indignatio mea litterarum tuarum melle placanda est*); the writings of a friend can be as sweet and as literary polished as honey (*Ep*., 1. 31: *erat quippe in his oblita Tulliano melle festivitas;* 1. 91: *tu quoque ita paginam melle eruditissimi oris obleveras* etc); we find the same opposition between the bitterness of one's own intellectual products and the sweetness of those of others that we saw in Jerome's letter 121, with the difference that there the gustatory qualification was referred to the exegesis and the quality of the person (*nostram amaritudinem illius* [scil. of the priest Alypius, who Jerome is recommending to the recipient] *nectareo melle curato senilemque pituitiam iuuenili ardore conpesce*), while here, more classically, to the stylistic workmanship of the letter (*Ep*., 1. 32:*… ubi uero chartulam pono et me ipsum interrogo, tum absinthium meum resipit et circumlita melle tuo pocula deprehendo*; cf. also *Ep*., 9. 89).

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[46] Plin., *Ep*., 2. 5. 8: *nam et in ratione conuiuiorum, quamuis a plerisque cibis singuli temperemus, totam tamen cenam laudare omnes solemus, nec ea, quae stomachus noster recusat, adimunt gratiam illis, quibus capitur*.

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Letters of Obligation: Debt, Trust and Moral Economy in the Lekhapaddhati

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Abstract*:* This paper examines the letters of debt and obligation preserved in the Lekhapaddhati, a Sanskrit-Gujarati manual of letter writing from early medieval Western India, precisely in the Gujarat. The time and place of its origin are linked to the dynasties of the Cāulukyas and their successors, the Vāghelās, whose rulers are frequently mentioned in the Lekhapaddhati. These letters, written in 'mixed language', offer a rare window into how debt was negotiated, acknowledged, and emotionally experienced in everyday life. Rather than viewing them as administrative or legal correspondence, this study reads them as reflections of a moral economy, where the circulation of money was governed as much by trust, honour, and social reputation. By analyzing two contrasting mortgage correspondences from the Lekhapaddhati, *Gṛihaḍḍāṇaka Patra Vidhi Yathā* and *Gṛihaḍūli Patra Yathā*, this paper explores the structural composition of the letters, identities of creditors and debtors, the role of witnesses and intermediaries, and the diverse emotions through which obligation and trust were articulated. Through the comparative analysis of both correspondences, the paper seeks to reconstruct the everyday texture of credit relations and the ethical world within they were embedded.

Keywords*:* Lekhapaddhati, letter-writing, debt, moral economy, credit system.

Introduction

Letter writing has long been regarded as one of the most intimate yet structured forms of communication, occupying a space between the personal and the official. In premodern societies, letters were not only means of transmitting information but also used as an instrument for negotiating relationships, administrative authority, and personal emotions. The study of letters as historical sources has evolved from being a marginal or less-explored area into a strong interdisciplinary field that connects history, anthropology, and literature. Scholars earlier saw letters mainly as transparent records of facts, useful for reconstructing events or the past of the individuality. However, the emergence of linguistic and cultural turns in historiography redefined letters as performative writings, which not only communicate but also construct social relations, emotions, and hierarchies.

Scholars like James Daybell in his work *The Material Letter in Early Modern England* (2012) have demonstrated the materiality and complexities of epistolary practice in early modern England. Studying the material aspects of letters shows that areas such as paleography (which deciphers the ancient writing) and codicology (which looks at paper, bindings, and the structure or study of manuscripts) are not minor subjects but are vital for understanding early modern letters and the traditions of letter writing. He emphasized the 'social materiality' which explores the cultural habits and social context involved in writing, exchanging, and reading them, as well as the circumstances in which they were produced and circulated.[1] James Daybell argues that material aspects such as handwriting, paper, layout and seals, carried social meaning that people of the time could easily recognize. Every choice, from the style of handwriting to the use of space on the page, reflected social status, gender, and the nature of the relationship between writer and recipient. Citing an example, he explained that writing directly to the monarch without a scribe could seem disrespectful, while the spacing, margins, and placement of the signature could signal politeness, rank, or familiarity. Letters in general were not just written texts but visual and social objects, where every material detail communicated something about hierarchy, etiquette, and intention.[2]

Comparing with the letter-writing of Western countries, Antje Richter in her work *Letters & Epistolary Culture in Early Medieval China* (2013) argues that the lack of scholarly attention to letter writing in China is not because letters were unimportant, but because of historical and cultural factors that shaped academic priorities. She highlights two main reasons; first letters did not hold a central place in the Confucian canon, unlike the influential epistles of the New Testament in the West, which inspired extensive research in this genre. Secondly, China did not develop an early sense of nostalgia for letter writing, since it remained a common and practical form of communication well into the late twentieth century.[3]

The art and craft of letter writing in pre-modern Islamic culture and society have been broadly discussed in Adrian Gully's *The Culture of Letter Writing in Pre-Modern Islamic Society* (2008). The most intriguing part of this work is the concept of *balāġa* which is described in chapter six. He argues about the importance of certain principles of *balāġa*

[1] Daybell 2012, 11.
[2] Daybell 2012, 219.
[3] Richter 2013, 6-7.

(communicative eloquence), particularly *bayān* (clarity of expression), and their role in shaping the structure and style of letter writing in Arabic literary tradition. He justifies balāġa as 'communicative eloquence' instead of 'rhetoric', arguing that the Arabic term centres on the idea of effectively conveying meaning suited to context, rather than persuasion alone. This reflects a nuanced understanding of how *balāġa* connects linguistic precision, contextual appropriateness, and stylistic artistry in communication, especially within the culturally and socially embedded practice of letter writing.[4]

In the historiography of the epistolary system, the materiality and complexity of letters have already been discussed, along with the various objects in their composition and the different regions and time periods in which letter writing emerged as a valuable historical source. However, one crucial aspect that underlies all forms of reading and writing is the subject of genre. Genre plays a significant role in shaping the diversity of letter writing, a point emphasized in Charles Bazerman's work – "*Letters and the Social Grounding of Differentiated Genres*" (2000). He highlights the importance of business correspondence as a genre of letters. Merchants in a long-distance trade relied on letters to exchange information about trade, politics, and finance, which often overlapped with diplomatic correspondence and even evolved into financial documents like letters of credit. Bazerman notes that many businesses written format such as bills of exchange, invoices, and reports, can be traced back to the traditions of medieval letter writing.[5]

In the above section, I have discussed briefly the history of letter writing from a global perspective; now I will gradually shift the focus to letter writing within the South Asian context. Ingo Strauch explained the evolving history of letter-writing in India in his work – '*Die Lekhapaddhati-Lekhapañcāśikā Briefe Und Urkunden Im Mittelalterlichen Gujarat'* (2002).[6] Diplomatics, the systematic study of documents, developed in medieval Europe. This method has rarely been applied to Indian materials, even though India preserves a vast collection of formal documents, especially copperplate charters. India also produced its own rules for writing letters and legal records. Although it is uncertain whether full treaties existed before the twelfth century, early Dharmasastra texts already outline principles for drafting documents, and classical Sanskrit literature shows that letter writing was highly standardized

[4] Gully 2008, 131-165.
[5] Bazerman 1999, 16, 22.
[6] This book is another critical version of Lekhapaddhati, written in the German language by Ingo Strauch.

from the first centuries of the Common Era. Literary references in classical works by authors such as Kalidasa and Visakhadatta further show that letter writing in India was governed by strict conventions from an early period.

More explicit evidence for specialized Indian works appears only in the early medieval period. One of the earliest examples is Kalyanabhatta's *Ṭṛsastilekhyaprakaraṇa,* now lost but known through citations. From the twelfth century onward, several manuals appear. Uktivyaktiprakaraṇa of Damodara written as a teaching text for speakers of old Kosalī, contains chapters on the rules for composing private and legal documents that probably resembled the practical orientation of the *LP*. *Pātrakaumudī* of Vararuci focuses on the formal structure of letters, especially eulogistic openings, and therefore reflects the conventions familiar from private correspondence. The tradition continues to expand in the late medieval and early modern periods. Bālakṛṣṇa Tripathin's *Prasastikāśikā*, composed in the seventeenth century, is mainly a guide to salutations. It offers numerous examples of praise formulas, arranged according to literary form as well as the caste and social position. Vidyāpati's *Likhanāvalī*, composed in Mithilā in the fourteenth century, is especially significant. It organizes model letters according to the social relationship between sender and recipient and includes a substantial section on legal documents.

Two later manuals on letter-writing are also primarily devoted to the composition of legal documents and are, in character, closely related to the second part of the *Lekhāpañcāśikā*. The first of these texts is the *Lokaprakāśa*, attributed to the Kashmiri poet Kṣemendra (eleventh century), although the version that has come down to us appears to have only taken shape in the seventeenth century. It contains, in addition to theoretical discussions on the classification and characteristics of documents, numerous exemplary texts representing various types of documents. In certain sections, it also includes lists of synonyms, which were likely intended to serve as phrasing aids for the scribe. The second text is the *Yavana-paripāṭī-anukrama* by Dalapati-rāya. This work likely originated in western India in the 18th century and, similar to the *Lokaprakāśa*, contains alongside a detailed classification and characterization of documents; model texts for the various categories outlined at the beginning.

Modern scholarship confirms that Sanskrit epistolary conventions remained influential well after the rise of Persianate forms of administration. Studies on Rajasthani documents show that Indian scribes continued to observe many traditional formulas even

when writing under Muslim rule. The long survival of these conventions demonstrates the strength and continuity of the indigenous traditions of letter writing and diplomatics.[7]

Among the different genres of letters, business correspondence or merchant letters are extremely intriguing. Most significant historical sources among them are the Geniza merchant letters. The extremely rich Jewish geniza letters and documents of Jewish 'India traders', pertaining to the period 1000–1300 CE, are examined in the work of S.D. Goitein and Mordechai Friedman. The pre-eminent scholar in this field, S.D. Goitein, collected about 459 documents, letters, legal papers and partnership papers of Jewish merchants, undertaking voyages to and from the Indian Ocean and mostly its western sectors. These letters also offered us information about the exchange network of the merchants from Arabian Sea to the Red Sea. Many Jewish merchants often came to the western coast of India for trading purposes and settled for a while in Gujarat which is mentioned in the merchant letters.[8] Ranabir Chakravarti clearly stated that the geniza documents offer us rare insights into the social and cultural situations of individual merchants and their concerns and anxieties, especially when they went to far-off lands, leaving their families behind. The role of the slave agent and their relations with the inland merchants from faraway countries are uniquely presented in these letters.[9]

The present research examines financial correspondence, particularly debt letters, from the *Lekhapaddhati* to investigate the nature of the credit system and its written format in early medieval Western India. Applying a microhistorical approach, the study analyses two mortgage documents; one usufructuary (*Gṛihaḍḍāṇaka Patra Vidhi Yathā)* and one non-usufructuary (*Gṛihaḍūli Patra Yathā*), to demonstrate how financial correspondence within a *Lekhapaddhati* functions as a critical historical source which reveals the everyday economy, debt bondage, different forms of emotions, and the broader dynamics of credit and debt in the period.

Lekhapaddhati: Historical Context and Methodological Framework

Lekhapaddhati is a significant and unique written source for understanding the history of Caulukya dynasty, which ruled the Gujarat for almost four hundred years, from the ninth

[7] Strauch 2002, 16-18.
[8] Goitein and Friedman 2011,
[9] Chakravarti 2015, 235-248.

century to the beginning of the fourteenth century. Among different kinds of sources that help reconstruct their political and social history, this source occupies a special place. It is also known as Lekhapañcāśikā or model of fifty letters, which was compiled between the thirteenth and fifteenth century. LP contains a wide range of sample letters and documents. These include drafts for land grants, treaties between kings, financial records, and format for personal letters. It was probably meant to serve as a handbook for official scribes, and professional letter writers who needed guidance in preparing formal documents. The compiler is unknown for LP. However, repeated references to the city Patan and the use of certain expressions that are still common there suggest that the compiler either belonged to that region or worked in its administrative office.[10]

Ingo Strauch offers a more critical analysis of the Lekhapaddhati. Although the LP is important both as an early example of Indian letter-writing and as a text written in the understudied form of 'Jaina Sanskrit', it has received little attention from philologists. Historians have made the most use of it, drawing on its model documents to study the society and state of early medieval Gujarat. Much of this material is not available from any other source. However, because the language of the LP has not been well analyzed, historians have often misread or misunderstood parts of it.[11]

The two letters from the LP, when studied through a microhistorical approach[12], provide a valuable way to understand the socio-economic perspective of the period under discussion. Microhistory, with its emphasis on small scale and detailed evidence, allows these letters to be read not only as official models but also as insights into everyday life, social hierarchies, and financial practices. The language, content, and the format used in the letters show how individuals interacted in a certain social structure, managed different human emotions (like trust, anxiety etc.) that are related to debt bondage, and performed their financial morality within a wider socio-cultural setting.[13] Placing these letters within a microhistorical framework allows to examine how individual actions interacted with, and were shaped by, broader institutional norms. The concreate issues addressed in the letters,

[10] See, Puspa Prasad's *Lekhapaddhati Documents of State and Everyday Life from Ancient and Early Medieval Gujarat 9th to 15th Centuries*, translated from the Sanskrit manuscript and written in English.
Also see the actual Sanskrit manuscript of Lekhapaddhati, edited by Chimanlal D. Dalal and Gajanan K. Srigondekar.
[11] Strauch 2002, 19.
[12] The concept of 'microhistory' started in European history through Giovanni Levi in 1977 or 1978, and was slowly adopted by other scholars like Ginzburg, George R. Stewart etc.
[13] Ginzburg et al. 1993, 10-35.

such as collective witnesses, human emotions, fixed interest rates, caste and social identity etc., offer valuable evidence for understanding how formal legal rules function in everyday monetary practice. Through such close reading, microhistory effectively bridges the gap between written prescriptive formats and the lived realities of the people who used them. By applying this approach, the study shows how the two letters reflect broader structure of power, social relations, and the moral economy of early medieval Gujarat.

Table 1: Debt and Credit System in Two Financial Correspondences of the LP

Component	***Gṛihaḍḍāṇaka Patra Vidhi Yatha,* D. No. 52**	***Gṛihaḍūli Patra Yatha,* D. No. 53**
Type	Usufructuary	Non-usufructuary
Time Period	Samvat 1288 (1230–31CE)	Similar
Ruler/Dynasty	Bhimadeva II, Caulukya dynasty	Similar
Loan Amount	400 *drammas*	200 *drammas*
Interest Rate	Not Specified	2%
Repayment Terms	Annual, at ***Dipāvalī***, for 5 years	One-time, strict deadline on ***Akshayatṛitīyā***
Penalty for Default	House remains mortgaged; terms allow for repayment later	**Permanent loss of house**, even with double payment
Creditor's Rights	Usufruct only; no structural changes	Full ownership upon default
Coin Quality	High-quality (*viśvamallapriya*) coins from Śrīmālīya, thrice tested	No coin type is mentioned
Emotions	Trust, and focusing on the mental satisfaction of the creditor	Free from all the mud/dirt which means a clear and straightforward transaction without any delay or blame

Table 2: Occupational and Social Identities of the Creditor & Debtor

Document	Debtor	Creditor
Gṛihaḍḍāṇaka Patra Vidhi Yatha [D. No. 52]	**Name:** Suraka **Father:** Kura/Kūṃra (merchant) **Caste:** *Vayada* caste (a subdivision of Brahmins and Vanias) **Place:** Resident of village A (same as creditor)	**Name:** Dhanika **Caste:** Not specified, but mentioned to belong to "such-and-such" caste **Place:** Resident of village A **Occupation:** Investor—invests money for profit (likely a merchant or moneylender)
Gṛihaḍūli Patra Yatha [D. No. 53]	**Name:** Somaka **Caste:** Identified as a merchant (no specific caste given) **Place**: Resident of Pattan	**Name:** Mala **Caste**: Identified as a merchant (no specific caste given) **Place:** Resident of Pattan

Debt, Trust & Moral Economy: Comparing Two Financial Correspondences in *LP*

The two documents such as *Gṛihaḍḍāṇaka Patra Vidhi Yathā* and *Gṛihaḍūli Patra Yathā* from the Lekhapaddhati discussed here reflect the underlying structure and functioning of the credit practice in early medieval Western India. The credit system refers to an economic arrangement in which goods, services, or money are taken on loan with a commitment to repay them in the future, typically grounded in trust and reputation. Such transactions could involve interest or be interest free, and they might be formalized through written contracts or conducted informally through verbal agreements. Ranabir Chakravarti (2021) states that early medieval India used alternative forms of money, such as *huṇḍikā*, *chirikā*, and *ādeśa,* which functioned like bills of exchange alongside coined money. Bill of exchange or *huṇḍikā* is also mentioned in the Lekhapaddhati. He argued that these credit instruments were known even in Kashmir, as evidenced in Kalhaṇa's *Rājataraṅgiṇī* and Kṣemendra's *Lokaprakāśa*.[14] Kṣemendra's *Lokaprakāśa* also mentions different credit instruments, including *dīnāra-huṇḍikā* and *dhānya-huṇḍikā*. The former was a bill of payment in gold coins or dīnāras, while the latter represented payment in paddy, used as form of money.[15] Credit instruments

[14] Chakravarti 2021, 297.
[15] Jain 1989, 200-201.

are written documents that record a promise to repay money, allowing people to receive goods or funds now and pay later. They include loan deeds, promissory notes, and merchant letters that formalize financial obligations. Among these credit instruments, this study examines two significant mortgage deeds which are usufructuary and non-usufructuary, revealing intrinsic details of the wider society.

Gṛihaḍḍāṇaka Patra Vidhi Yathā (D. No. 52)[16] which is an usufructuary deed written in the presence of *Pañcakula*[17] and *rāula* Dharavarsha,[18] originates from Chandravati, the site of this capital city is the 18 miles in circuit, about four miles south-west of Abu Road station in Sirohi State of Rajputana and close to the left bank of the Western Banas. The time period corresponds to the reign of Bhimadeva II of the Caulukya dynasty, though the document itself does not mention the name of the ruler. *Gṛihaḍūli Patra Yathā* (D. No. 53),[19] is a non-usufructuary deed written in the Pattan city, where both the creditor and debtor's resident are located. A close reading of the two financial correspondences shows that the usufructuary document is described in far greater detail than the non-usufructuary one. *Gṛihaḍḍāṇaka Patra Vidhi Yathā* states that no rent (*bhātakaṁ)* shall be taken for the mortgaged house, nor shall any interest (*vṛddhi*) be charged on the *drammas*, since the transaction is an usufructuary mortgage (*vṛddhi-phala-bhogacāra*, i.e., *āddāṇaka)*. The loan amount is 400 *drammas*, taken by the debtor named Suraka, son of a merchant Kura/ Kūṃra, belonged to the *Vayada* caste,[20] taken from the creditor known as Dhanika from the resident of village A. He invested his own money for the profit. The boundaries of the mortgage house are specified as; to the east, the verandah of the temple; to the south, the limit is *nīvapata*[21] of Deva's house, to the west, the boundary of the royal palace (*rāja-bhavana-koṭa*); and to the north, the royal highway (*rāja-mārga*). The house is enclosed on all four sides by verandahs, contains a *paṭṭaśālā* (a detached room of ritual or domestic significance), is equipped with a *rasavatī*, is roofed with tiles, and is furnished with *kavelukas* (wooden beams). This ancestral house, described as possessing *catur-āghāta* (the four architectural features) and acquired by *pūrva-puruṣa-upārjita*

[16] Prasad 2007, 145-147.
[17] The term *Pañcakula* means five heads of the family or notables. LP mentions the *Pañcakula* as an administrative institution. According to Puspa Prasad, the term occurs both LP and several Caulukyan inscriptions. For further details, see, Puspa Prasad's Lekhapaddhati.
[18] Dharavarsha was the son the Paramara Yasodhavala (EI, VIII, pp.200-4, 208-19, DHNI, II, 1021,1023) For further details, see, Puspa Prasad's Lekhapaddhati, 130.
[19] Prasad 2007, 148.
[20] Subdivision of Brahmin and Vania caste.
[21] 'The falling of the rainwater from the eaves' Cf. D.C. Sircar Epigraphical Glossary, 220. Mentioned in the Puspa Prasad's LP, 147.

(forefathers), is mortgaged for five years to ensure the creditor's confidence. Any loss or claim arising from heirs or state authorities (*anya-gotrīṇa-dayāda-rājakula-prabhṛti)*[22] must be borne by the debtor (*dhāraṇika*). If the creditor or *vyavahāraka* falls into financial distress (*bhidyāṁ*), he may demand repayment, or with the debtor's consent, transfer the mortgage deed to another creditor. The striking part is that the debtor is primarily responsible for repairing damage to the mortgage house from any natural calamities, while the creditor may intervene only for the foundation. It is also mentioned that the creditor cannot misuse the house and enjoys usufruct only for the agreed term or *likhita-avadhi*, after which the debtor must repay principal and expenses at *Dipāvalī* (*dīpocchava).*

The other document *Gṛihaḍūli Patra Yathā* clearly mentions that the merchant Somaka, because of his need, mortgaged his own house and received 200 *drammas*[23] from the merchant Mala. Both of them lived in Pattan. Unlike the first correspondence, this states the interest rate clearly at 2%. It also mentions that if the debtor fails to repay the amount on the day of *Akshayatṛitīyā*, the house will be permanently lost to the debtor, even if he later offers double the amount.

Both the financial correspondences reveal several notable similarities. The two documents originate from different locations: one from Candravati and the other from Śrī Pattan/ Anahilapura. Anahilapura (modern Pattan), the Chaulukya capital, occupied a strategic position between routes to Rajasthan and Gujarat's coast, linking it to Mount Abu via Chandravati, Palanpur, Siddhapura etc. As a major administrative and mercantile hub, it attracted merchants from foreign lands, and Arabic sources mention the welcoming attitude of the rulers from the Chaulukya dynasty towards Muslim traders from the Arab world.[24]

While the credit instruments described here belong to the early medieval period, the underlying concepts of credit and mortgages had already been embedded in early Indian society. The notions of interest or usury are expressed in ancient Indian Sanskrit texts by using the terms *kusīda, vārdhusa, vṛddhi*, and *vyāja*, the last of which appears to have come from a later period. It is difficult to determine whether lawmakers used one phrase for usury and another for interest or if they used both terms interchangeably. Baudhāyana, a lawgiver who lived in the fifth century B.C., suggests that the *vaiśya* should take up usury as

[22] See, Strauch 2002, 177-179.
[23] '*dramma*' is the Indian form of the ancient Greek coin, the *drachma*.
[24] Ghosh 2018, 236-245. For a detailed discussions of the Anahilapura as a port city, see Ghosh 2018.

a source of livelihood and denounces a *brāhmiṇ* who engages in *vārdhusa* practice as a *śudra*. Gautama, however, permits *kusīda* to a *brāhmaṇa* if he chooses to deal with it directly. While explaining the role of *vārdhuṣika*, Manu indicates that the *vārdhuṣika* is the one who lends at interest and ought to approve *vṛddhi* and makes no distinction between *vṛddhi* and *kusīda.*[25]

The *Manusmṛti* adopts a clearly critical stance toward usury or high interest rates, associating it with moral and spiritual impurity. It prohibits usurers from participating in ancestral or divine offerings (MS. III.V.153)[26], asserting that gifts to them lack durability (MS. III.V.180)[27] and equating their sustenance to excrement (MS. IV.V.220)[28], thus valuing the modest life of a vedic scholar over wealth gained through exploitative lending (MS. IV. V.224)[29]. Furthermore, Brahmins engaged in trade or money-lending are socially leveled with Śūdras in legal testimony, which reflects how normative text maintain the ritual purity and hierarchical superiority of Brahmins. These injunctions reveal how MS intertwined economic behaviour with moral, ritual, and social order, discouraging certain financial practices to preserve the perceived sanctity and status of specific social groups (MS. VIII. V.102).[30]

Conclusion

The concept of 'moral economy'[31] is strongly embedded in these two debt letters. The crucial role of collective participation by the members of the same community, who act as witnesses or guarantors also highlights the shared values and morals they possessed. Trust also functions as a central element in these credit practices, shaping the relationship between the creditor and the debtor. Through the evolving history, practices related to debt, loans, and interest gradually shifted from being restricted in normative texts to becoming widely accepted in everyday economic life. The two debt correspondences from the Lekhapaddhati clearly show how such credit transactions were organised through collective participation, shared values and morals, and the strong foundation of trust between creditor and debtor. The detailed description in both usufructuary and non-usufructuary mortgages reveals that these

[25] Sharma 1965, 56.
[26] Olivelle 2005, 116.
[27] Olivelle 2005, 117.
[28] Olivelle 2005, 135.
[29] Olivelle 2005, 135.
[30] Olivelle 2005, 172.
[31]The idea of 'moral economy' first introduced by E.P. Thompson (1971). He sees moral economy as the community's shared expectations of fairness and just conduct in economic life, whose violation provokes resistance. James C. Scott (1976) also used this concept to extends this to peasants, arguing that their actions are shaped by a subsistence ethic that demands security, and protection from exploitation.

financial dealings were not merely economic exchanges, but socially grounded practices supported by mutual obligations.

List of Abbreviations:

LP= Lekhapaddhati

MS = Manusmṛti

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The Panathenaic amphorae: an instrument for the propagation of Athens' discourse and a subject of symbolic conflict

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Abstract: Visual arts represent one way of transmitting different ideas and messages, from personal preferences of subjects to political identities. The Antiquity is not an exception from this practice. An excellent example of illustrating a political discourse, through a type of visual art, is found in the iconography of the Panathenaic amphorae, the prize vases from the Great Panathenaea.

The focus of this paper is the Panathenaics from the Great Panathenaea of 402 BC, represented by four pieces discovered in Libya. These four vases stand out by having the statuary group of the Tyrannicides decorating Athena's shield on the obverse side. This element of iconography will be analysed from the perspective of the symbolic conflict theory of Simon Harrison.

Keywords: Panathenaic amphorae, tyrannicides, symbolic conflict, circulation of ceramics, Athens.

Introduction and Methodology

The context created by Athens, through the reorganization of the Panathenaea into a quadrennial festival, offered a great opportunity for the city to rise to the same level as the other Panhellenic sanctuaries that held contests. At the same time, the Great Panathenaea was an important factor in *creating an exclusive (and superior) Athenian identity*.[1]

The Panathenaic amphorae were a good instrument for Athens to use in transmitting a certain discourse to the Greek community and beyond, as the archaeological evidence shows. Given the fact that the Athenian identity, after 510 BC, was built upon an anti-tyrannical and anti-Persian stance,[2] is not surprising that the iconography of the Panathenaic was involved in the symbolic conflict that took place between the democratic and tyrannical regimes which ruled over Athens.

Simon Harrison proposed that a symbol can be manipulated in four ways in the context of a *competition for power, wealth, prestige, legitimacy or other political resources*. The types of the symbolic conflict depend on the actions that affect the political symbols. They can be manipulated through their value, their production, their ownership, *or their*

[1] Popkin 2012, 224-225.
[2] Petre 2000, 114.

survival as emblems of political affiliations.[3] As these four types of symbolic manipulation can be separated only in theory, actions can be analysed from the perspective of multiple aspects.[4] I will try to show that in the case of the Panathenaic amphorae the theory can be applied from the perspective of the proprietary contests and of the innovation contests.

For a better understanding of how Harrison's theory can be applied on the subject of the Panathenaic, a presentation of the changes that occurred in the iconography of these vases is necessary and will be covered in the next section of this article, alongside some aspects of the circulation of the Panathenaic outside of Attica. The following section will focus on the analysis of the iconography of four vases that were discovered in Libya and which have the statuary group of the Tyrannicides decorating Athena's shield on the obverse side, from the perspective of the symbolic conflict theory.

In the study of the circulation of Panathenaic amphorae, I used the sample of the Beazley Archive Pottery Database, provided online by the Classical Art Research Centre of the University of Oxford. The data provided by this platform was used to determine: the state in which the Panathenaic are discovered the most (whole vases or fragmentary state), and what is the occurrence of the fragments that have inscriptions.

The map for this paper were created through the map function of the online Beazley Archive Pottery Database, by applying exclusion filters so that only findings of Panathenaic amphorae, pseudo-Panathenaic amphorae and miniature Panathenaic (whole vases or in fragmentary state) are marked on the map.

The life cycle of a Panathenaic amphora and of its variations[5]

The annual festival, held in honour of Athena's victory against the Giants, was reorganized into a quadrennial event around 566 BC.[6] In time, the Great Panathenaea held up over 55 of athletic, hippic and musical competitions during each edition,[7] but some of these contests were reserved to the Athenians, who distinguished the Great Panathenaea from the other Panhellenic festivals.[8] The Great Panathenaea is well attested in sources until 390 AD.[9]

The quadrennial festival was held from 20 to 30 of Hekatombaion, the last days being dedicated for the Great Procession to the Acropolis, where sacrifices and offerings were

[3] Harrison 1995, 255.
[4] Harrison 1995, 266.
[5] By "variations" I refer to the pseudo-Panathenaic amphora and the miniature Panathenaic amphora.
[6] Popkin 2012, 209-210.
[7] Neils and Tracy 2003, 5-17.
[8] Popkin 2012, 224-225.
[9] Shear 2021, 8.

brought for the goddess, the feast that followed the sacrifice, rest and cleanup.[10] Until about 229 BC invitations to the Great Panathenaea were sent only to the colonies and the allies of the city. Athens decides to extend the invitations to cities with no Athenian connections until that time.[11]

The winners of the Great Panathenaea competitions were awarded depending on the nature of the contests. The victors of the musical's competitions received golden or silver crowns, while the winners from the athletic and hippic contests were given the Panathenaic amphorae with the sacred olive oil. The city had to commission around 1400 vases for the occasion of the quadrennial festival.[12]

The features of the Panathenaic amphora were standardized since the beginning, but the iconography had been through more changes than the other characteristics of the vase. A vase of this type had around 60-70 cm in height and the volume of some piece went from 29,7 litters to 40,7 litters,[13] but the average volume of the Panathenaic was 39 litters.[14]

The iconography of the obverse side maintained a standardized version from around 540 BC. This version included the goddess Athena, armed, in profile, positioned between two Doric columns surmounted by roosters,[15] and the prize inscription on the left side of the panel (*ΤΟΝ ΑΘΕΝΕΘΕΝ ΑΘΛΟΝ*). The clothes of the goddess and her shield device differ from vase to vase. On the reverse of the vase was illustrated the competition for which it was awarded.[16] The elements of the obverse were meant to show the intimate relationship that existed between the goddess and Athens, the role of Athena as protectress of the city *and her preparedness to compete and fight for the Athenians*.[17] As Athens became dominant in the export of painted vase, during the sixth century BC, and *it was asserting its commercial dominance across the Mediterranean,* the iconography of the Panathenaic presented the *emerging Athenian identity as leader of the Greek World*.[18] The earliest versions of the Panathenaic lack the columns and the roosters,[19] and the birds were replaced once Athens started to lose its dominance.[20]

[10] Neils and Tracy 2003, 16-17.
[11] Shear 2021, 292.
[12] Neils and Tracy 2003, 29.
[13] Anastasiou et al. 2017, 252.
[14] Fisher 2009, 229.
[15] For a more detailed analysis of each iconographic element see Popkin 2012, 212-224.
[16] Popkin 2012, 208-210.
[17] Popkin 2012, 224.
[18] Popkin 2012, 225-227.
[19] Popkin 2012, 210.
[20] Popkin 2012, 232.

Even though the period in which the columns and the roosters were added to the iconography may coincides with the third tyranny of Peisistratus, we can't say with certainty that he was personally involved in these iconographical changes, but it's not unreasonable to consider that these actions were associated with the period of the tyrannical regime of Peisistratus.[21]

The Panathenaic amphorae given to the victors of the Great Panathenaea competitions were not the only vases produced in this context, pseudo-Panathenaic amphorae and miniature Panathenaic were also produced for the occasion. The smaller versions of the Panathenaic amphorae were produced in the first part of the fourth century BC, to serve probably as souvenirs.[22] For the pseudo-Panathenaic, which lacks the official prize inscription,[23] there are more suggestions regarding the reason of their productions: to serve as souvenirs, to serve as containers for wine at symposiums,[24] or they were *supplements to meet the demand for the prize amphorae*.[25]

The several discoveries of these vases in burials and sanctuaries across the Mediterranean show how the types of amphorae were an important trade commodity,[26] as it can be seen in Figure 1.[27] The main factor of the circulation of the Panathenaic amphorae is the victors themselves. The Panathenaic were subjects to second-hand trade because of them.[28] The winners could have sold the olive oil, and the vases in which it was stored, dedicated some of the vases at sanctuaries, or bring the prize home.[29] Another way in which these vases were distributed was through the practice of gift-exchange.[30] Through these channels of distributions, the Panathenaic amphorae and their variations were showing to non-Attic viewers how Athens was unmistakably under the patronage of Athena, and at home they reinforce the pride of being Athenian.[31]

It is difficult to determine the profit made by resealing the Panathenaic olive oil. An Athenian inscription from the fourth century BC, in which the tariffs of fees for sacrifice are listed, gives us the cost for 3 *kotylai* of sacred oil: one-half obols, meaning that a metretes (39

[21] Popkin 2012, 230-231.
[22] Boardman 1974, 179.
[23] Popkin 2012, 228.
[24] Mannack 2022, 6.
[25] Bundrick 2019, 218.
[26] Popkin 2012, 228.
[27] Unfortunately the link doesn't save the version of the map which has exclusion filters applied for the shape type.
[28] Boardman 2001, 155.
[29] Mannack 2022, 6.
[30] Bundrick 2019, 26.
[31] Popkin 2012, 229.

litters) would cost 12 drachmas.[32] It is tempting to assume that the winners would sell a Panathenaic for 12 drachmas,[33] but the prices offered by the list with the tariffs of fees for sacrifice should not be used as evidence for the price for which these vases were resold by the victors.[34] We know that an empty Panathenaic amphora was in Athens for 2,7 to 3,4 obols, in the late fifth century.[35]

The vases meet the same fate, as they were found in the same types of archaeological contexts: burials and sanctuaries.[36] The practice of using the vases as cinerary vases, outside the Athenian community, shows the integrations of the pieces into the local material culture,[37] as Bundrick presented the case of the Etruscan material culture. The presence of these vases in funerary contexts doesn't mean that the graves were the ones of the victors from the Great Panathenaea competitions. Only if the funerary inventory suggests the lifestyle of an athlete, we may assume that the deceased might have won a competition at the Great Panathenaea in his life, as in the case of the grave near Barca, Libya.[38] In most cases, the ceramic material from the Panathenaic amphorae is discovered in a fragmentary state (Figure 2), and it is difficult to determine if the fragments came from a prize vase or from a pseudo-Panathenaic, as the majority of the fragments don't have parts of the official prize inscription, or the name of the archon (Figure 3). The most recent published discovery of Panathenaic ceramic material comes from Olbia Pontica. During the 2015 campaign, two fragments were found mixed with material from the first century AD, near the defensive wall, and they were dated for the last part of the sixth century BC. These fragments don't have inscriptions.[39]

The Panathenaic amphorae of 403/2 BC

The Great Panathenaea of 403/2 represents the first known instance of using the shield's device to express a political discourse.[40] The festival was the first one held after the short period of the Thirty Tyrants[41] and was a great opportunity to reinforce the image

[32] Pritchett and Pippin 1956, 184.
[33] Thomas and Sneed 2018, https://www.colorado.edu/classics/2018/06/15/social-and-economic-value-oil-ancient-greece on 14.04.2025.
[34] Pritchett and Pippin 1956, 199.
[35] Bundrick 2019, 217.
[36] Mannack 2022, 6.
[37] Bundrick 2019, 163.
[38] Elhaddar 1999, 28.
[39] Buiskikh and Khmelevskiy 2022, 311-320.
[40] Shear 2012a, 110.
[41] Azoulay 2017, 77.

adopted by Athens since 507 BC, through the cult dedicated to the Tyrannicides, Harmodius and Aristogeiton.[42]

There are four known Panathenaic amphorae which have the statuary group of the Tyrannicides decorating Athena's shield. One piece is kept at the British Museum (London B 605), two vases at the Roemer-und Pelizaeus-Museum (Hildesheim, 1253, 1254), and one vase is kept at The Archaeological Museum in Cyrene (no inventory number).[43] This iconographic element symbolized and celebrated the victory of the Athenians over tyranny, while the vase celebrated the victory of the athletes in their competitions.[44] The Panathenaic amphora in the British Museum comes from a grave in Tocra, it was bought by George Dennis around 1865, from a group of Arabs that found tombs with fine Greek pottery, and donated to the museum alongside his own discoveries at the site.[45] The Hildesheim amphorae were discovered at Ptolemais.[46]

The image adopted by the city, through the cult of the Tyrannicides, positioned tyranny as opposed to democracy and emphasized that the polis was ruled by the demos. However, the version promulgated by the polis ignored the four years of tyranny after the murder of Hipparchus and the period of *stasis* that followed Hippias' exile. The events were reconstructed to appear as purely Athenian deeds.[47] The presence of the Tyrannicides on Athena's shield was reinforcing this discourse to the Athenians and spread it in the Greek World.

In this case, is it clear that the Panathenaic amphorae are the subject of symbolic conflicts between the democratic and tyrannical regimes. Considering that the vases were maintained as a symbol of the city, with the iconography elaborated during the period of the tyranny of Peisistratus, the Panathenaic amphora held the same value as a symbol for the democratic leaders of Athens as it had before 510. This aspect would be a characteristic of the proprietary contests, as the symbols has the same value to the groups which are competing over their ownership.[48] The marking of Athena's shield with the statuary group, a schematic representation of the Tyrannicides and their actions, represents typical actions for the

[42] Shear 2012b, 30-35.
[43] Shear 2012a, 110.
[44] Azoulay 2017, 79.
[45] Rasmussen 2018, 8-9.
[46] https://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/XDB/ASP/recordDetails.asp?id={1F2DB5B5-55DE-48ED-9E37-EF3BDE054F6C}&noResults=4&recordCount=3&databaseID={12FC52A7-0E32-4A81-9FFA-C8C6CF430677}&search=%20{AND}%20panathenaic%20amphora%20{AND}%20%20[Decoration%20Termword]%20TYRANNICIDES on 14.04.2025.
[47] Shear 2012b, 31-42.
[48] Harrison 1995, 258-259.

innovation contests. A pre-existent symbolic object was manipulated in a way that generated a more elaborate form of the symbol.[49]

Conclusions

The iconography of the obverse side of Panathenaic amphorae went through different kinds of changes. The iconographic phases of these vases are linked to the political context in which Athens founds itself. By analysing these changes through the perspective of symbolic conflicts we could determine the way the city expresses its identity and image by comparing them to the ones from the previous period.

The Panathenaic amphorae and their variations represented key instruments for the propagation of Athens' discourse, by being distributed in the Greek World and beyond through so many and different ways, from the selling of the sacred olive oil to the practice of gift-exchange. Determining the channel of distribution for the discoveries, in Attica and outside of the region, it's almost impossible without other types of evidence. The subject is one of great complexity and difficulty.

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[49] Harrison 1995, 261.

المتاحف العالمية–كؤوس االعياد االثينية الليبية المعروضة في المتاحف العالمية–كؤوس المتحف البريطانيـ الحلقة االولى "الثقافة العربية 4/27(1999) 35-25. ص ص.
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Figure 2 – The quantity the Panathenaic amphora and its variations depending on their fragmentary state (from Beazley Archive Pottery Database).

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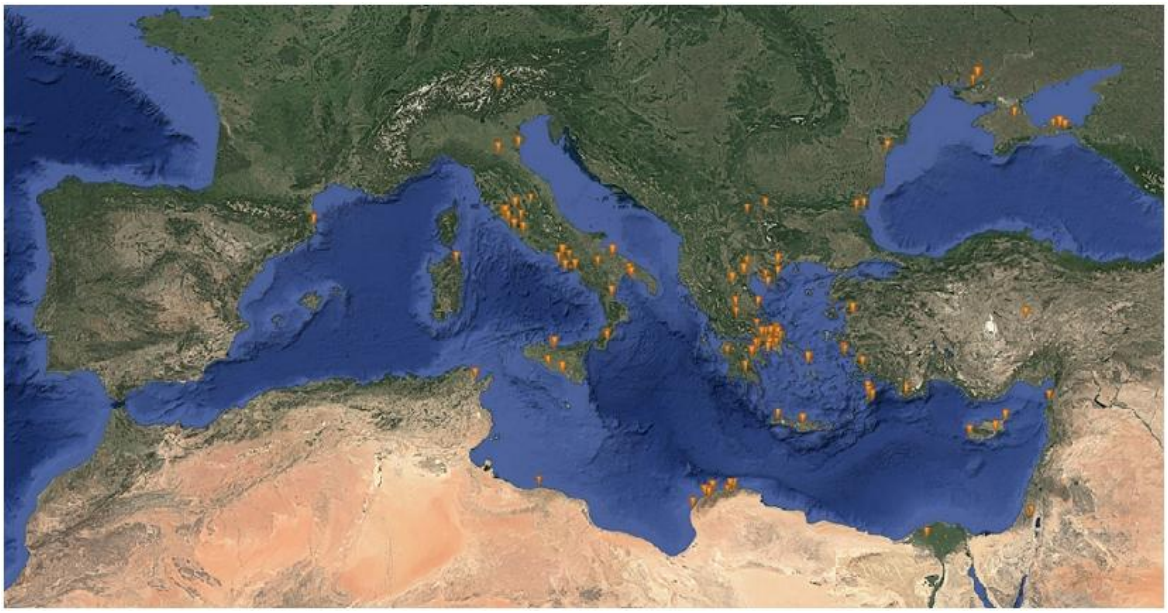

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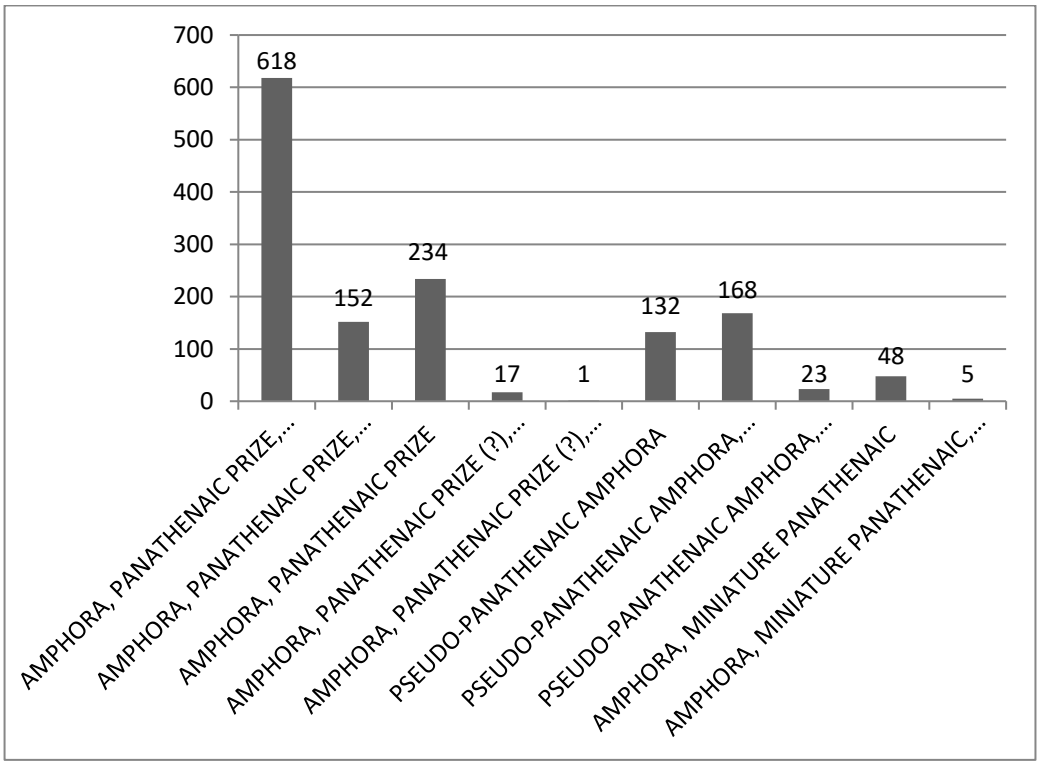

Figure2 - The quantity in which the Panathenaic amphora and its variations depending on their fragmentary state (from Beazley Archive Pottery Database).

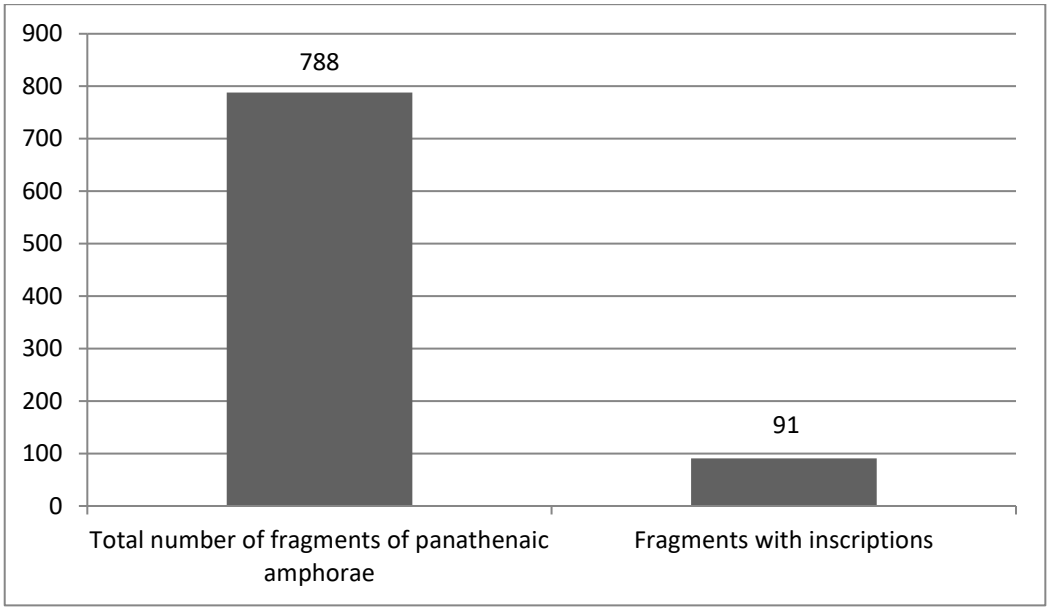

Figure 3- The occurrence of fragments with inscriptions, compared with the total number of fragments of Panathenaic amphorae (from the Beazley Archive Pottery Database).

When distance is not an obstacle. Several preliminary considerations on *Liberalitas* coin types of *Nikopolis ad Istrum* and *Marcianopolis*

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Abstract: The present study highlights a noteworthy and atypical reverse type within Roman Provincial Coinage of *Moesia Inferior*, but also in general. It features *Liberalitas* standing and holding a counting table and *cornucopia*, a depiction commonly associated with imperial coinage. Surprisingly, *Nikopolis ad Istrum* issued coins with this image during a very specific period, the tenure of Statius Longinus under the brief rule of Macrinus and Diadumenianus (April-June/August AD 217). Still, not only *Nikopolis*, but also *Marcianopolis* produced coins with this depiction, doing so during the afore-mentioned reign (under the governor Pontianus, June/August – November/December AD 217) and the period of Elagabalus (AD 218-222). Given the exceptional character of these coin types in the case of the so-called "Greek Imperials", this research seeks to explore a possible context for their emergence in the cities under consideration based on the currently available data (literary, epigraphic and numismatic) and to contour several preliminary observations.

Keywords: *Liberalitas*, coinage, *Nikopolis ad Istrum*, *Marcianopolis*.

I. Introduction

Roman Provincial Coinage's iconography continues to be a consistent resource of information concerning the Empire's cities. It could be seen as reflection of local architecture,[1] natural landscape, but also religious cults or other aspects of civic daily life.[2] Some numismatic representations are less typical for the so-called "Greek Imperials"[3] as we would also observe in the current case study. Still, numerous examples of this kind are unknown, especially because of the specificity of each city and its representations. Consequently, for most of them a highly possible context is difficult to contour as it would also be visible in the following pages, but they are at least described, highlighted and connected to probable reasons of emission.

[1] See Drew-Bear 1974, Donaldson 1859, Burnett 2002, Burnett 2024.
[2] Burnett 2024.
[3] For a detailed description of this category of coinage see Howgego *et al*. 2005, Amandry 2020, Burnett 2024.

Nikopolis ad Istrum and *Marcianopolis* are two of the most important cities from *Moesia Inferior* and they are no exception from the above-detailed aspects. Their beginnings in the Roman Empire date back to Trajan's reign, but their situation is slightly different. As far as *Nikopolis ad Istrum* is concerned, it was an imperial foundation on a Greek pattern and a form of commemoration for the emperor's victories during the Daco-Roman wars.[4] On the other hand, while it is the same kind of foundation, *Marcianopolis* is considered to have been called *Parthenopolis* before the well-known moment from Trajan's reign when it received a name inspired by the emperor's sister, Marciana.[5] At that point, both were part of *Thrace*, but during the last decade of the 2nd century AD, they were transferred to *Moesia Inferior*.[6] Besides, the cities had a slightly different status (not inferior) (*ciuitas stipendiaria*)[7] compared to the others of the region, this aspect being reflected through the governors' name presence in their numismatic output's reverse legend. These mentions could also be seen as an equivalent of the *SC* structure from the Roman Imperial Coinage.[8]

Of high importance in the current study is the moment when *Nikopolis ad Istrum* and *Marcianopolis* started minting. The first was *Nikopolis* that produced its own coins from the reign of Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161).[9] Slightly later, *Marcianopolis* also issues its first local emissions from Commodus (AD 180-192) onwards.[10] As is also clear from the brief details presented above, they produced the so-called Roman Provincial Coinage or "Greek Imperials". Still, a surprising motive appears throughout the two cities' production, an aspect that would be detailed in the following pages.

II. *Liberalitas* – between the centre and the periphery of the Roman Empire

During the brief reign of Macrinus and Diadumenianus (AD 217-218), *Nikopolis ad Istrum* and *Marcianopolis* were the only active coin-issuing cities in the region of *Moesia Inferior*[11] and their numismatic repertory impresses through a highly atypical reverse type (unique in the Roman Provincial Coinage of *Thrace* and *Moesia Inferior*, but also in general) depicting *Liberalitas* with

[4] Poulter 1992, 77 ; Bottez 2009, 18.
[5] Varbanov 2005, 110.
[6] Boteva 1996, 174.
[7] Bottez 2009, 18; Aparaschivei 2010, 124.
[8] Dima 2008, 52.
[9] Pick 1898, 348; Varbanov 2005, 201; Hristova & Jekov 2011, 21.
[10] Pick 1898, 197; Varbanov 2005, 111; Hristova & Jekov 2007, 18.
[11] Dima 2008, 57.

a counting table and *cornucopia*. *Nikopolis ad Istrum* produces this kind of coins in the time of Statius Longinus' tenure in *Lower Moesia* (April – June/August AD 217) for both Macrinus (Fig. 1)[12] and Diadumenianus (Fig. 2).[13] During the next governor of the province, Pontianus (June/August – November/December AD 217), *Marcianopolis* issues the mentioned coin types but only with the obverse depicting the affronted busts of Macrinus and Diadumenianus (Fig. 3).[14] The latter is also the only city out of the two where *Liberalitas* also appears on coins issued during Elagabalus' reign (Fig. 4).[15] These details suggest this type's alternative production by *Nikopolis ad Istrum* and *Marcianopolis*, as they do not issue it at the same time.[16] Still, a more comprehensive analysis of this aspect would be pursued during further studies.

For a better understanding of this motive's uniqueness in the case of the above-mentioned and overall category of "Greek Imperials", a description of *Liberalitas* and its iconographical evolution is mandatory. It is a common depiction of the Roman Imperial Coinage's world which surprises one of the most important virtues. Consequently, it was frequently illustrated when the emperor was involved in actions of generosity to people. Still, the event has its roots in the Republican era when the Ediles were the ones who shared various goods during the well-known *Congiarium*. Consequently, the Empire continued an already established custom, but the most well-known term for it in this era is *Liberalitas*.[17]

As far as its representations on imperial coins are concerned, its origins date back to Nero's reign (AD 62-68) when a more elaborated image (the scene of *Congiarium*) was depicted (Fig. 5).[18] Still, *Liberalitas* is literally mentioned in the coins' reverse legend in this form starting with

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[12] Pick 1898, no. 1779; Harlan J. Berk, Buy or Bid Sale 216 (27 July 2021), Lot 490 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=1861245|4349|490|5b754a27a82a70cdf59eeb55781e0a33 (5.09.2025).
[13] Pick 1898, no. 1863; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 348 (8 April 2015), Lot 435 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=768470|1428|435|8d3b81d657be5ce01a0231a5837a38ff (5.09.2025).
[14] Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles, Auction 70 (4 September 2012), Lot 3350 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=529394|943|3350|390baec7083fdd86fa524ec83750f242 (5.09.2025).
[15] Pick 1898, no. 969; Eid Mar Auctions GmbH, Auction 11 (30 March 2025), Lot 124 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=2536556|6380|124|17fd99634b850a6844238961d014ec86 (5.09.2025).
[16] The possibility that *Nikopolis ad Istrum* and *Marcianopolis* issued coins in an alternative or complementary rhythm is mentioned in Dima 2008, 57.
[17] Madden, Smith, Stevenson 1889, 515.
[18] RIC I, no. 153; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 563 (5 June 2024), Lot 763 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=2397350|5918|763|b075adc9b2fb62e41a277ba1cb782308 (5.09.2025).

Hadrian's rule (AD 117-138) when a simplified iconography is also encountered: a female figure oriented to the right or to the left who empties a *cornucopia* in her hands (Fig. 6)[19] or the same figure but holding a *cornucopia* and a counting table (Fig. 7).[20]

The latter depiction appears as mentioned above also in *Nikopolis ad Istrum* and *Marcianopolis* during a very brief period (AD 217-221). Consequently, how could this atypical image's interference in the coinage of the Empire's periphery be explained? The current study would mainly focus on possible contexts concerning especially Macrinus and Diadumenianus' reign (AD 217-218) for which a consistent analysis is finalised based on the actual stage of research and has several preliminary observations.

III.1. An imperial visit during Macrinus and Diadumenianus' reign (AD 217-218) to the *Lower Danubian* region – a plausible context?

Usually, the appearance of the above-presented depictions is linked to significant events from the city's life. Taking into consideration *Liberalitas*' description[21] which directly concerns the emperor, then it could be supposed that a possible context for the coin types under discussion could be an imperial visit to the region of *Lower Danube* with *Nikopolis ad Istrum* and *Marcianopolis* on the itinerary.

This visit's idea during Macrinus and Diadumenianus' reign (AD 217-218) was formulated in several works which propose two scenarios. One of them was advanced by Henry Jewell Basset who strongly argues that both Macrinus and Diadumenianus were present in the region of the *Lower Danube* towards the end of AD 217 and beginning of AD 218.[22] The other scenario puts forward the idea that only Diadumenianus travelled there at little time after becoming *Caesar* (May AD 217).[23] The supposed reason for this event is the existence of a turbulent context in the region at the beginning of the considered reign.[24]

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[19] RIC II.3, no. 959; Roma Numismatics Ltd, Auction XXV (22 September 2022), Lot 1023 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=2081857|4952|1023|9a5ab39f79d123ab339f52734b20fbad (5.09.2025).
[20] RIC II.3, no. 2214-2217; Nomos AG, obolos 6 (20 November 2016), Lot 794 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=942093|1810|794|c6441681ad85188bb85c4d13d640ad4d (5.09.2025).
[21] Madden, Smith, Stevenson 1889, 515.
[22] Basset 1920, 38-39.
[23] Boteva 1998, 78; Baltă 2025, 65.
[24] Basset 1920, 38; Boteva 1998, 78.

Both perspectives mention several coin types which could be reflective of this supposed visit, and which align well with the *Liberalitas* emissions of *Nikopolis* (Fig. 1, 2)[25] and *Marcianopolis* (Fig. 3).[26] In *Nikopolis ad Istrum*'s case, some of them are dated during Statius Longinus' tenure in *Moesia Inferior* (April-June/August AD 217) and they have reverses depicting the emperor who sacrifices over an altar (Fig. 8)[27] and also holding globe and spear (Fig. 9)[28] or on horseback as *aduentus* (Fig. 10).[29] Here, the image of an imperial visit is even better contoured by types issued during the governor Marcius Claudius Agrippa (November/December AD 217-AD 218) such as one showing Macrinus in a *quadriga* (Fig. 11).[30] To this, we could also add the representation of the city's gate (Fig. 12)[31] which could be interpreted as an iconographical symbol of the concerned episode.[32]

Passing towards *Marcianopolis*, the double-portrait coins dated to the tenure of Pontianus (June/August – November/December AD 217) are considered to be signs of this visit together with reverses showing the emperor holding a reversed spear and with Nike standing on the globe (Fig. 13)[33] or a triumphal arch surmounted by four statues (Fig. 14).[34] Still, not only the two concerned cities' numismatic repertory is mentioned in previously mentioned studies. *Deultum* is also integrated in the imperial itinerary by reference to coin types which surprise the emperor as

[25] Pick 1898, no. 1779; Pick 1898, no. 1863.
[26] Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles, Auction 70 (4 September 2012), Lot 3350.
[27] Varbanov 2005, no. 3495; Basset 1920, 45; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 348 (8 April 2015), Lot 433 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=768468|1428|433|4ab78c8d6314e56c35ce258f80458b63 (6.09.2025).
[28] Moushmov 1912, no. 1258; Varbanov 2005, no. 3456 accessed at https://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/macrinus/_nikopolis_AE27_Moushmov_1258.jpg (6.09.2025).
[29] Gorny & Mosch Giessener Münzhandlung, Auction 129 (8 March 2004), Lot 226 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=71447|76|226|b5d56cc87f52f188dbe0f92074a49304 (6.09.2025); Basset 1920, 38-39.
[30] Pick 1898, no. 1713; Roma Numismatics Ltd, E-Sale 79 (14 January 2021), Lot 574 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=1772048|4080|574|3005c37338b9d25a1cf44886089863bd (6.09.2025); Basset 1920, 46; Baltă 2025, 65.
[31] Varbanov 2005, no. 3345; Roma Numismatics Ltd, E-Sale 84 (16 June 2021), Lot 1198 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=1844114|4292|1198|1c30c19b5f1132cdbd417470889754ad (6.09.2025).
[32] Harl 1987, 54.
[33] Pick 1898, no. 778; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 278 (25 April 2012), Lot 179 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=507273|909|179|a55f4a2e44eb05ab023781088ff2ee7d (6.09.2025); Basset 1920, 45; Baltă 2025, 65.
[34] Pecunem/Numismatik Naumann, Gitbud & Naumann Auction 1 (10 March 2013), Lot 89 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=561077|1001|89|596c62681abf5690e2c6af4ec5c0bb4b (6.09.2025).

adventus (Fig. 15)[35] or crowned by Nike (Fig. 16)[36] and which are dated towards the autumn of the end of AD 217.[37]

Even if the numismatic overview of this possible visit is considerably convincing, a proper analysis of other categories of information (literary, epigraphic, numismatic – for example, coin hoards) regarding the concerned period (AD 217-218) and the region's status in the same timeframe is highly important. This is mandatory for establishing whether this supposed visit has a high degree of certainty or not and, consequently, if it could be a suitable context for the *Liberalitas* coin types of *Moesia Inferior* or not.[38]

As far as literary sources are concerned, a better image of the Macrinus and Diadumenianus' reign and of our region of interest could be reflected through the narrative of Cassius Dio:

> *Moreover, the warfare carried on against the Armenian king, to which I have referred, now came to an end, after Tiridates had accepted the crown sent to him by Macrinus and received back his mother (whom Tarautas had imprisoned for eleven months) together with the booty captured in Armenia, and also entertained hopes of obtaining all the territory that his father had possessed in Cappadocia as well as the annual payment that had been made by the Romans. And the Dacians, after ravaging portions of Dacia and showing an eagerness for further war, now desisted when they got back the hostages that Caracallus, under the name of an alliance, had taken from them*.[39]

The current passage already contours a brief chronological overview of the years AD 217-218. Consequently, Cassius Dio narrates how after the agreement with the *Armenians* was made, the so-called *Dacians* also stopped from their attacks. These specific negotiations (with the *Parthians* and *Armenians*) could be dated during autumn AD 217/winter AD 217-218. As a result,

[35] Jurukova 1973, no. 53; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 559 (3 April 2024), Lot 274 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=2363314|5801|274|b28054cc8d45fb3e6725d3b197402472 (6.09.2025).
[36] Jurukova 1973, no. 77; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 559 (3 April 2024), Lot 276 accessed at https://www.coinarchives.com/a/openlink.php?l=2363316|5801|276|c30a2211a6c6b4674c797555fcf397a2 (6.09.2025).
[37] Draganov 2007, 56; Baltă 2025, 65.
[38] The two scenarios' analysis was realized as part of my dissertation thesis *Nikopolis ad Istrum through the lens of its coinage. Notes on its numismatic iconography's reliability for reconstructing historical landscapes and narratives (AD 193-235)* defended during the summer session of 2025 at the University of Bucharest.
[39] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LXXIX, 27.4-5 translation in English by Earnest Cary accessed at https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/79*.html (6.09.2025).

the episode concerning *Dacians* might be integrated in the chronological sequence of the last quarter of AD 217 and the first segment of AD 218.[40]

Still, the reason why this mentioned conflict might have begun could be traced back to Caracalla's reign, and more exactly to the moment of AD 214: *Then he made ready for a journey to the Orient but interrupted his march and stopped in Dacia* [...] *Then he journeyed through Thrace accompanied by the prefect of the guard*.[41] Then, it is considered that the emperor intervened because the Carpi attacked *Moesia* and *Pannonia*.[42] In the end, an agreement was reached, and it also included hostages' returning.[43] Consequently, the difficult context during Macrinus and Diadumenianus' reign (Caracalla's murder and the Eastern campaigns) could have determined the actions of the *Dacians* who could have had more hostages to receive.[44]

From ancient authors' perspective, the turbulent context that could have determined an imperial intervention in the area under discussion is somehow contoured. Still, coin hoards could shed even more light on the topic, depending on their content and grade of preservation.[45] At the moment, only 3 examples are attested in the region for the years AD 217-218.[46] The Srebarna hoard has as its last piece a coin dated in AD 217 but it's of Caracalla.[47] Another one consisting of 4 bronze coins was found near Belogradets in 2020.[48] To these we could also add a coin hoard from *Histria* which was discovered in a burned archaeological context and it has 34 denarii.[49] More surprisingly, in *Dacia* there are no attested coin hoards for the reign of Macrinus and Diadumenianus.[50] This is in relative contrast to Cassius Dio's words that consider *Dacia* the main affected zone by the concerned turbulences.[51] These mentioned examples are clearly not enough

[40] Scott 2018, 81; Baltă 2025, 67.
[41] Historia Augusta, *Antoninus Caracalla*, 5.4 translation in English by David Magie accessed at https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Historia_Augusta/Caracalla*.html#note30 (6.09.2025).
[42] CIL III, no. 3660, 14416; Gerov 1977, 125; Găzdac 2010, 75.
[43] Scott 2018, 81; Baltă 2025, 67-68.
[44] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LXXIX, 27.4-5 translation in English by Earnest Cary accessed at https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/79*.html (6.09.2025); Scott 2018, 81.
[44] Scott 2018, 81; Baltă 2025, 67-68.
[45] Varbanov 2012, 3.
[46] Varbanov 2021, 63; Dima 2023, 145.
[47] Dima 2023, 145.
[48] Varbanov 2021, 63.
[49] Dima 2023, 145.
[50] Petac 2010, 182-183.
[51] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LXXIX, 27.4-5 translation in English by Earnest Cary accessed at https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/79*.html (7.09.2025).

for contouring a possible hoarding horizon in the region during the specified timeframe (AD 217-218).[52]

Still, a consistent category of information is the one given by epigraphic sources. For example, two dedicatory inscriptions are attested at *Histria* for both Macrinus (ISM I, 92)[53] and Diadumenianus (ISM I, 91).[54] Both of them are dated towards the summer – autumn of AD 217.[55] The same type of inscription is attested for *Thrace* where Macrinus receives a dedication from *Cohors II Lucensium*.[56]

Even more detailed aspects of this type were pointed out by Henry Basset who reconstructed the mentioned emperors' possible itinerary between the last part of AD 217 and the beginning of AD 218.[57] In his endeavour, he combines different particularities identified in coinages' legends with milestones. Consequently, for *Macedonia*, he mentions the emergence of the title *νεωκορος* from late AD 217.[58] Passing towards *Cilicia*, Basset observes how the emperor is named *Μακρινουπο* on the numismatic issues from the end of AD 217 and first part of AD 218.[59] Further, in *Dalmatia* one milestone is identified for the same timeframe.[60] *Noricum* also has 5 such artifacts which are dated through the presence of *Trib. Pot. II*.[61] *Pannonia Inferior* surprises with a few 11 milestones on the path to *Aquincum* from AD 217 based on the formula *Trib. Pot.*[62]

The currently available data puts into light several preliminary observations. First, strictly from a chronological point of view, there is a higher degree of probability that if this visit took place, it did so towards the end of AD 217 and the first part of AD 218.[63] In the case of the other perspective[64] concerning the visit, most sources (literary, epigraphic, numismatic) point out towards the above mentioned timeframe, and not to an early one.[65] Only the two *Histrian* inscriptions (ISM I, 91; ISM I, 92) could be linked to a date around May AD 217 together with the

[52] Petac 2010, 182-183; Varbanov 2021, 63; Dima 2023, 145; Baltă 2025, 68.
[53] ISM I, no. 92.
[54] ISM I, no. 91.
[55] ISM I, 232-234.
[56] CIL III, no. 12339; Basset 1920, 47; Baltă 2025, 69-70.
[57] Basset 1920, 42.
[58] Basset 1920, 39.
[59] MacDonald 1901, no. 7, 526.
[60] CIL III, no. 8307; Basset 1920, 41.
[61] Basset 1920, 41.
[62] CIL III, no. 3714, 3720, 3724, 3725, 10618, 10629, 10635, 10637, 10644, 10647, 10658; Basset 1920, 43; Baltă 2025, 69-70.
[63] Basset 1920, 38-39.
[64] Boteva 1998, 78.
[65] Baltă 2025, 69-70.

Nikopolis ad Istrum's coin types, including the *Liberalitas* ones, dated during Statius Longinus' tenure in *Moesia Inferior* (Fig. 1, 2).[66] Here, it should also be pointed out that there are higher chances of a joint imperial visit of Macrinus and Diadumenianus especially because of the young age of the latter (only 9 years old).

Coming back to the scenario with a higher degree of probability, there are still numerous elements which only give a moderate to low level of certainty to this supposed visit. Here, we could mention the contradiction between Cassius Dio's narrative[67] and the lack of any attested hoards for *Dacia* in AD 217-218.[68] In the same registry, the situation is not so different when it comes to the other hoards mentioned above which are not reliable enough for sustaining a powerful turbulence.[69]

The same uncertainty is also identified in the case of the presented coin types from *Nikopolis ad Istrum*. Its numismatic issues dated during Marcius Claudius Agrippa's tenure (November/December AD 217 - AD 218) (Fig. 11, 12) that show a complex triumphal image could be easily associated with the narrative of Cassius Dio and also with the majority of epigraphic data included here. On the other hand, the coin types from Statius Longinus' government in *Lower Moesia* (April – June/August AD 217) (Fig. 1,2, 8, 9, 10) are correlated chronologically only with the two inscriptions from *Histria* (ISM I, 91; ISM I, 92), but are not in accordance with Cassius Dio's words which point towards a later part of AD 217 and the first quarter of AD 218[70] or with a great part of epigraphic data pointed out by Henry Basset.[71]

Consequently, the image of this supposed visit during Macrinus and Diadumenianus' reign (AD 217-218) to the *Lower Danube* and its neighbouring space still has consistent lack of information. Despite this, the already illustrated sources show a moderate probability of happening but for the above-mentioned period (end of AD 217-first part of AD 218) which should remain under some uncertainty until further discoveries and research would clarify this brief reign even more.[72]

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[66] Pick 1898, no. 1779 (Macrinus); Pick 1898, no. 1863 (Diadumenianus).
[67] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, LXXIX, 27.4-5 English translation by Earnest Cary accessed at https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/79*.html (7.09.2025).
[68] Petac 2010, 182-183.
[69] Varbanov 2021, 63; Dima 2023, 145; Baltă 2025, 69-70.
[70] Scott 2018, 81.
[71] Basset 1920, 39-45.
[72] Baltă 2025, 71.

As far as the imperial presence in *Nikopolis* and *Marcianopolis* in this period is concerned, it should be highlighted that the previous analysis demonstrates that certain cities should not be seen as part of an itinerary only based on their coin types, but through a detailed overview of all types of data (literary, epigraphic, numismatic). Consequently, outside of the presented numismatic data, there is no reliable argument in the favour of an imperial visit which also included the studied cities. Still, the current observation is based on the actual stage of research as future discoveries could shed more light on the topic.[73]

III.2. Preliminary concluding remarks concerning *Nikopolis*' and *Marcianopolis*' *Liberalitas* coin types

Based on the above-detailed analysis, only several preliminary observations could be made regarding a probable context of the concerned *Liberalitas* coin types from *Nikopolis ad Istrum* (Fig. 1, 2)[74] and *Marcianopolis* (Fig. 3).[75] Their link with the supposed visit of Macrinus and Diadumenianus to the *Lower Danube* is under consistent uncertainty. Only the *Marcianopolis*' coin type (Fig. 3) could be linked to the scenario proposed by Henry Basset which has a moderate to low degree of probability.[76] Still, this consideration is subject to change as further discoveries could develop even further the chronological overview of Macrinus and Diadumenianus' reign. Consequently, *Nikopolis*' *Liberalitas* coin types (Fig. 1, 2) seem to remain outside of this proposed context, their dating being fixed during Statius Longinus' tenure (April – June/August AD 217). Considering the numerous gaps in reconstructing this brief period (AD 217-218), future research could significantly contribute to elucidating the context surrounding the appearance of these *Liberalitas* types in the two cities.

Another possible explanation could have been that they (Fig. 1-3) reflect an act of generosity from the emperor, but which did not necessarily happen in the two cities or in their neighbourhood. For Macrinus and Diadumenianus' reign (AD 217-218), one such act is mentioned as in April AD 218 a largesse was given to the people of *Antioch*.[77] Still, this date is far later than the one of *Nikopolis ad Istrum*'s and *Marcianopolis*' *Liberalitas* coin types (Fig. 1-3) which cover

[73] Baltă 2025, 71.
[74] Pick 1898, no. 1779 (Macrinus); Pick 1898, no. 1863 (Diadumenianus).
[75] Ira & Larry Goldberg Coins & Collectibles, Auction 70 (4 September 2012), Lot 3350.
[76] Basset 1920, 39-45; Baltă 2025, 70-71.
[77] RIC IV.2, 2; Halfmann 1986, 230.

the period of April-November/December AD 217. In this context, even a possible imitative behaviour as explanation for this motive's appearance in the case of the concerned "Greek Imperials" is difficult to contour.

Considering the current stage of research and also the above-detailed aspects, it could be stated that a highly probable context for the *Liberalitas* emissions under discussion is far from being established. On the other hand, further studies would bring even more light to the brief reign of Macrinus and Diadumenianus. Subsequently, the pointed problematic remains an open question which highlights once again the complexity of Roman Provincial Coinages' iconography which could not be explained in all circumstances.

List of abbreviations:

CIL III = Mommsen, Th. (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Vol. 3, Parts 1-2. *Inscriptiones Asiae, provinciarum Europae Graecarum, Illyrici Latinae* (1873).

ISM I = Pippidi, D., *Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris Graecae et Latinae, I: Inscriptiones Histriae et Viciniae* (1958).

RIC I = Mattingly, H., Sydenham, E. A., *The Roman Imperial Coinage, Volume I. Augustus – Vitellius (31 BC – AD 69)* (1923).

RIC II.3 = Abdy, R.A, P. F. Mittag, *Roman Imperial Coinage II. 3: From AD 117 to AD 138 – Hadrian* (2019).

RIC IV.2 = Mattingly, H., Sydenham, E. A., Sutherland, C.H.V., *The Roman Imperial Coinage IV.2: Macrinus to Pupienus* (1938).

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Fig. 11 – *Nikopolis ad Istrum*, Macrinus (Marcius Claudius Agrippa, November/December AD 217 – AD 218), Pick 1898, no. 1713; Roma Numismatics Ltd, E-Sale 79 (14 January 2021), Lot 574.

Fig. 12 – *Nikopolis ad Istrum*, Macrinus (Marcius Claudius Agrippa, November/December AD 217 – AD 218), Varbanov 2005, no. 3345; Roma Numismatics Ltd, E-Sale 84 (16 June 2021), Lot 1198.

Fig. 13 – *Marcianopolis*, Macrinus & Diadumenianus (Pontianus, June/August – November/December AD 217), Pick 1898, no. 778; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 278 (25 April 2012), Lot 179.

Fig. 14 – *Marcianopolis*, Macrinus & Diadumenianus (Pontianus, June/August – November/December AD 217), Pecunem/Numismatik Naumann, Gitbud & Naumann Auction 1 (10 March 2013), Lot 89.

Fig. 15 – *Deultum*, Macrinus (AD 217-218), Jurukova 1973, no. 53; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 559 (3 April 2024), Lot 274.

Fig. 16 – *Deultum*, Diadumenianus (AD 217-218), Jurukova 1973, no. 77; Classical Numismatic Group, Electronic Auction 559 (3 April 2024), Lot 276.

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Roman glass vessels in funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis. A reassessment of older publications

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Abstract: This paper represents an attempt to draw the attention on the great potential, still incompletely explored in the Romanian archaeology, represented by this category of finds from the point of view of identifying contacts between individuals and communities, often with very different cultural foundation, in the framework of the Roman world. Based on an assessment of the old publications presenting funerary contexts from two cities from the western coast of the Black Sea, Tomis (Constanța) and Callatis (Mangalia), with glass vessels as part of their grave goods, the authors will discuss the presence of this category of archaeological material on these two sites, with a special focus on the category of *unguentaria* or toilet-bottles.

Keywords: Roman glass, *unguentaria*, Tomis, Callatis, funerary contexts, blown glass.

Introduction

This paper re-examines funerary contexts from the ancient cities of Tomis (Constanța) and Callatis (Mangalia), documented in publications dating from the 1960s to the 1990s. The intention of the authors is to reconfirm the valuable role of funerary archaeology in understanding the interactions between individuals and communities in the Roman world, including in these two urban centres, and to highlight glass vessels, especially *unguentaria*, as significant indicators of social practices, trade, and cultural exchange. These glass vessels continue to hold significant potential for future reinterpretations as local and regional research makes further progress.

The glass finds from Tomis and Callatis: an overview of older publications

The work of Mihai Bucovală, researcher at the Museum of Archaeology Constanţa[1] starting with 1963, represents an important contribution to the study of ancient glass vessels from Tomis. His catalogue, *Vase antice de sticlă la Tomis*, published in 1968, offers a typological perspective of the glass vessels found during archaeological research in the city, mainly during the 1960s, when a large number of burials were excavated.[2] The author analyses various types of vessels, including among them a part of the *unguentaria* found in the museum's collections at that moment. In fact, the author himself mentions the significant number of Roman glass vessels found in the collections of the museum in Constanţa, considering this category of archaeological material as extremely valuable from the point of view of the volume of glass, as well as variety and originality of shapes.[3] Although more than 100 *unguentaria* are mentioned in the book, these vessels were not treated in a homogeneous manner. While an important part was presented as such, using this term,[4] others, despite presenting similar characteristics, were analysed separately and included in the category of *vessels with various shapes*.[5] Thus, there can be noticed variations and uncertainties in the classification of the shapes/forms from the early stages of glass research for this part of the Roman world. It should be also remarked upon the fact that the discussion of the items does not always cover analogies or references to similar finds from other parts of the empire, situation easily explained by the characteristics of the period in which the book was written. This work continues to be cited frequently in the Romanian and international archaeological literature on ancient glass, due to the valuable information offered by both the vessels themselves and their archaeological context.

The archaeological excavations taking place in Constanţa starting with the second half of 1967 and published in *Pontice* 1 brought to light numerous burials dated to the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods.[6] Only three burials were selected for detailed publication in this article, but they are remarkable from the point of view of the variety and richness of their grave goods, covering a large range of materials (clay – including an important number of ceramic

[1] Later Museum of National History and Archaeology (Muzeul de Istorie Naţională şi Arheologie Constanţa - MINAC).
[2] Bucovală 1968a.
[3] Now the Museum of National History and Archaeology Constanţa (Muzeul de Istorie Naţională şi Arheologie Constanţa) – from now on in this paper MINAC.
[4] Bucovală 1968a, 84-130.
[5] Bucovală 1968a, 56-57.
[6] The archaeological excavations covered vast areas of the modern city, and more than 40 burials were uncovered (Bucovală 1968b, 269-306).

unguentaria, glass, bronze, gold, and bone). Several glass recipients were found, with various shapes and colours. Among them, it should be emphasised the presence of a fragmentary glass spindle-shaped (fusiform) *unguentarium* with a pointed base.[7] This specific shape is a rarer characteristic of the spindle-shaped *unguentaria*, most of which are dated to later periods, 3rd – 4th c. AD, and which have a rounded base. The early dating of this shape is ensured by both the archaeological context, dated to the second half of the 1st – 2nd c. AD, and analogies with items belonging to other collections.[8]

Another paper including glass finds published in the same issue of the journal brings information about funerary contexts from the territory of Callatis. As part of the grave goods remarkable glass items are discussed, in some cases also illustrated, such as the cup in the shape of a male head with ethnic features or the fragmentary lotus-bud beaker, rare or even unique finds in the region.[9]

An interesting aspect noticed in the case of the funerary contexts from Tomis is the continuity of the functionality and aesthetics of the *unguentarium* type vessels between the ceramic items and the glass items. This observation was discussed in the paper published in *Pontice* 2, where the ceramic *unguentaria* – spindle-shaped, pear-shaped, with ovoid or spherical body –, characteristic to both Greek and Roman material culture, are studied from the perspective of the evolution of their shapes at Tomis. These ceramic vessels, found in funerary contexts dated from the end of the 4th c. BC to the 2nd c. AD, are interpreted, from a functional perspective, as **toilet-bottles.**[10] Therefore, the presence of both materials (clay and glass) indicates coexistence from the Hellenistic period and continuing during the Early Roman period. The shapes initially created in clay were later adapted and diversified in glass, when glassblowing was invented – a natural evolution, visible in the case of the finds from Tomis dated to the 1st – 4th c. AD. The typological continuity emphasises the aesthetic preferences of the Roman society, the preservation of traditions and functional attributions of vessels. At the same time, it reflects the sustained contacts between the communities from the western coast of the Black Sea with other regions of the Roman world, facilitated by the strategic position of Tomis in the commercial and cultural networks of the period.

[7] Bucovală 1968b, 293.
[8] For example, an item from the collection of The Princeton University Art Museum (cat. no. 322), dated to the 1st c. AD (Antonaras, 2012).
[9] Iconomu 1968, 235-268.
[10] Bucovală 1969, 297-332.

Important glass finds are published also in a paper from *Pontica* 3, in which the author presents the results of rescue excavations, with focus on two burials of Roman period from the north-eastern part of the modern city, considered extremely relevant for the reflection of the social status of the deceased by the grave goods. The glass objects are well represented both in the single burial and in the double burial. Alongside fragments of decanter-type vessels, there were present *unguentaria* with distinctive shapes: one with spherical body (dated to the 2nd – 4th c. AD) and one with a sack-shaped body (dated to the 2nd – 3rd c. AD)[11]. The two *unguentaria* could be identified as belonging to the batch of vessels previously published in the catalogue from 1968, included in the chapter dedicated to the *vessels with various shapes*.[12]

The subsequent archaeological research from Tomis sustained the observations made by M. Bucovală, regarding the frequent presence of glass items in the funerary contexts of the ancient city.[13] This situation is easily explained by the higher chances of conservation of the objects placed as grave goods in comparison with objects from habitation contexts, much more prone to destruction or fragmentation. Therefore, funerary contexts, dated to the 1st – 4th c. AD, become an important source of information, allowing the extraction of valuable data regarding aspects such as social status or economic and cultural relations with other areas.[14] Still, it should be emphasised at this point that the ancient city suffered drastic loss during the communist period, when numerous burials became inaccessible, being covered by modern buildings, or were downright destroyed during the architectural and urban changes triggered by the reorganisation of the modern city of Constanţa.

The glass finds from other Greek and Roman sites of the area also represent important elements in deciphering the function and aesthetics of the *unguentaria* from the MINAC collections. One of the most remarkable finds was made in 1970 at Callatis (present-day Mangalia), an Early Roman sarcophagus burial with rich grave goods, published in *Pontica* 6[15]. The complex character of this finds from Moesia Inferior, due to the exceptional conservation of the grave goods (including preserved organic materials), is reflected also in the quality and rarity of the glass objects.

[11] Bucovală 1970, 189-209.
[12] Bucovală 1968a, 56, 77.
[13] Barbu 1977, 203-214.
[14] Barbu 1977, 203-214.
[15] Rădulescu et al. 1973.

The vessels are characterised by the robustness of the glass and the refinement of the technical execution. The grave goods include, alongside three large bell-shaped *unguentaria* made of naturally coloured or colourless glass[16], five small square bottles or jars[17] – all still preserving powder contents – and a bucket[18] with separate torsion handle made entirely of white transparent glass. The burial, dated to the middle of the 2nd c. AD, also contained vegetal material (wreaths and garlands), fragments of textiles, shoes made of wood and leather (six pairs), a gold diadem with gems, gold earrings, necklaces, two wooden caskets (one for preserving the cosmetic jars), coins, a mirror made of gilded bronze, various bone and metal utensils.[19]

Going back to the glass grave goods, it should also be emphasised the complexity of the context in which they were carefully integrated and personalised, in order to reflect the personality, interests and habits of the deceased, creating the image of a female character with high status.

The three *unguentaria* from the Callatis sarcophagus, which can be included in Isings form 82/A1,[20] present similarities with *unguentaria* found in funerary contexts from Tomis, in 1959, dated to the 2nd – 3rd c. AD; the main differences seem to be the quality of glass, the dimensions (the vessels from Callatis are large), and also some base and shape details.[21] Analogies for the Callatis *unguentaria* were identified also in the collections of the Museum of Ancient Glass from Zadar. Vessels with stylised geometric body, in the shape of a truncated cone, with neck approximately half of total height, ringed rim, and rounded shoulders, are frequent finds in funerary contexts from Zadar and Starigrad, being dated from the middle of the 2nd c. AD till the end of the 3rd c. AD.[22] Bucovală associates similar vessels from Dalmatia, Cyprus, and Egypt with the *unguentaria with the body in the shape of a tall, large bell* found at Tomis and dated to the 2nd – 3rd c. AD.[23] In the collections of the Royal Museum Ontario,

[16] MINAC Inv. Nos. 12741-12743.
[17] MINAC Inv. Nos. 12745-12749.
[18] MINAC Inv. No. 12767.
[19] Rădulescu et al. 1973, 247-265.
[20] Isings 1957, 97, form 82. Although the vessels from Callatis are characterized by a truncated body, they cannot, in our opinion, be included in Isings form 82/A2, since the body is high, not flattened, more similar to the bell-shaped variants, but with straighter walls.
[21] Bucovală 1968, 112, figs. 227-228. In the case of the vessels from Tomis, the quality of the glass is described as low, and they have a kicked-in base.
[22] Borzić – Štefanac 2021, 48-51, cat. nos. 67-68, 75, 80.
[23] Bucovală 1968a, 149.

published by Hayes, there are similar items, dated approximately to the 3rd c. AD. Such vessels are included in the category of *unguentaria*, with uncertain provenance, and displaying characteristics placing them at the border between the Cypriot production and the Syrian production.[24]

Gluščević, analysing a larger batch of such vessels from the necropolis in Zadar (34 items, of which 21 complete), does not include them in Isings form 82/A1. The author considers that they represent a distinct category of vessels, suggesting a local typology (the Zadar *type*), and implicitly a local production. This hypothesis is based on one hand on the large number of finds in the area, and on another hand on the ratio of 1:1 between the height of the neck and the height of the body. This characteristic differentiates these vessels from the form proposed by Isings, in the case of which the body is shorter than the neck, even if the total height is similar, approximately 16 cm.[25]

In our opinion, at least for the moment, the vessels from Tomis and Callatis could be considered a variant of Isings form 82/A1, taking into account the malleability of glass as raw material, allowing for adaptations of shapes and proportions. Similar to what happens in other parts of the Roman world, the vessels from Tomis and Callatis show a dynamic continuity of shapes or continuous reinterpretations, with each variant preserving the function of the reference form, in this case Isings form 82/A1. The integration of particularities concerning proportions, shapes, colour, or quality of execution leads to a typological *perpetuum mobile*, sometimes with specific morphological particularities (as for example the vessels from Zadar), or expressions of aesthetic preferences, such as degree of transparency, clarity, and attention to detail – possibly also influenced by the social status of the owner.

V. Barbu published the results of archaeological excavations taking place at Tomis during 1959 and 1960 in the third issue of the *Studii Clasice* journal.[26] The author analyses a wide chronological framework, offering valuable information regarding the limits of the extra-mural Hellenistic and Roman necropolises, as well as regarding the funerary practices and the categories of grave goods.[27] This ample article focused on archaeological material selected and

[24] Hayes 1975, 123-124, pl. 32, cat. nos. 499-500. From a stylistic point of view, such vessels are closer to the Cypriot production centres, but a Syrian origin cannot be completely excluded.
[25] Gluščević 1998, 185-188.
[26] Barbu 1961, 203-226.
[27] Barbu 1961, 204-210.

analysed exclusively based on the coins found in the funerary contexts.[28] The author considered the use of coinage issues – *criterion A* – as the safest way of dating burials. No matter the objects constituting the grave goods (pottery, glass, metal), Barbu begins with the coin(s) found in the respective context as a chronological landmark, subsequently completed with a comparative analysis.[29]

It can be noticed that, both as number of items and as number of contexts, glass is best represented in the necropolises II and IV[30], in which predominate inhumation burials in limestone sarcophagi, dated to the 2nd-3rd c. AD – period reflecting, in the author's opinion, a prosperous phase in the life of the city.[31]

The glass vessels found in these funerary contexts are neither analysed morphologically nor classified typologically – a consequence of the fact that the article focuses on the delimitation of the funerary spaces, identification of funerary practices, and establishing their chronology. Still, the category/type of some of the vessels can be identified based on shape, unfortunately without further information regarding colours, quality or technological details. In addition, it is clear that the glass vessels cluster in the chronological framework of the 2nd – 3rd c. AD, becoming scarcer in the late necropolises, dated to the 4th c. AD, in general lacking grave goods.[32]

Among the burials analysed in more detail in the paper, graves nos. 35 and 38 stand out from the point of view of glass grave goods. Most of these vessels can be included in the category of *unguentaria*, being dated based on their association with coins. In the grave no. 35, together with a coin issued for Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161), pottery and metal items, there were identified seven free-blown glass vessels, out of which six *unguentaria*. An identifiable form based on the illustration offered in the text is the *candlestick unguentarium* (Isings form 82/B).[33] These vessels were also analysed by Bucovală in his catalogue, described as vessels with *conical body and cylindrical high narrow neck*[34]. A similar vessel, with a comparable profile, found in a funerary context from Poarta Albă – Constanța, dated to the 1st – 2nd c. AD,

[28] Barbu 1961, 205.
[29] Barbu 1961, 207.
[30] Barbu 1961, 205.
[31] Barbu 1961, 207.
[32] Barbu 1961, 207-208.
[33] Barbu 1961, 218, fig. 7, nos. 5-9, 11.
[34] Bucovală 1968a, 99-103; a further division could be made based on the presence/absence of constriction between neck and body.

was published recently in a catalogue dedicated to the ancient glass vessels in the collections of the National History Museum of Romania.[35] This type of vessel is well attested at Tomis in funerary contexts dated at the latest to the 3rd c. AD.[36]

In the grave no. 38, the best-represented grave goods are jewellery and glass vessels, together with coins issued for Aurelian (AD 270-275) and Probus (AD 276-282).[37] There were identified five glass vessels, four of them with spherical body and one with ovoid body, all in a good state of preservation, dated based on their association with the coins to the 3rd c. AD.[38]

Archaeological research conducted in 1971 at Tomis led to the discovery of five skeletons, out of which two were considered as belonging to female deceased. The grave goods recovered from the graves are rich and varied, consisting of objects made of glass, clay, metal, and bone, all in a good state of preservation. Among these finds, there are six glass items, including *unguentaria*. A. Panaitescu published the results of the excavations in *Pontica* 10. The author discussed in detail a double inhumation burial, dated to the 3rd c. AD and possibly to the first half of the 4th c. AD.[39] Among the bell-shaped *unguentaria* (a variant of candlestick *unguentarium*), together with complete items, it is remarked upon a glass vessel (Inv. No. 20.556), which seemed to have been broken in place, possibly as part of the funerary ritual.[40] Still, the particularities of the funerary structure – a tomb with lid, made of limestone, with wooden coffins placed inside – could explain the degree of fragmentation of the glass items.[41]

The rescue excavations in the necropolises of Tomis continued from the fall of 1977. Unfortunately, from the point of view of glass finds, the results were modest, most objects being recovered in an advanced state of fragmentation, despite the large number of investigated burials.[42] The results of these excavations were published in *Pontica* 12, including the description of a glass *unguentarium*,[43] dated to the 1st-2nd c. AD, with intact profile, made of

[35] Bâltâc 2024, 101, cat. no. 59.
[36] Bucovală 1968a, 146; with similar items discussed for his type XIV (*candlestick unguentarium*).
[37] Barbu 1961, 213.
[38] Barbu 1961, 220.
[39] Panaitescu 1977, 339-343.
[40] Panaitescu 1977, 342, fig. 5/3.
[41] Panaitescu 1977, 339.
[42] Chera-Mărgineanu 1979, 247-250.
[43] The absence of an inventory number impeded so far the identification of the vessel in the museum's collections, for verification and eventually determination of further details.

dense glass and characterised by a constriction between body and neck.[44] The author mentions the possibility of a local production.[45]

In the necropolises of Tomis were excavated numerous Late Antique burials, with a wide typological diversity. The predominant types are funerary structures with one or two niches and access rooms, followed by simple graves or graves with tiles, all of them of inhumation.[46] Details regarding this Late Antique necropolis were published in *Pontica* 15. The grave goods associated to the 50 burials are modest. Although the number of the objects is low, in relation to the number of funerary structures, their typological variety is remarkable. The authors discuss coins issued for the emperors Maximianus, Licinius and Constantine I,[47] metal accessories, jewellery made of gold, bronze and glass, as well as pottery, this last category with a very scarce presence during this chronological framework.[48] The glass items dominate the grave goods of this period, represented especially by *unguentaria*, most probably in association with ritual practices or symbolic meanings. The sobriety of the grave goods reflects the introduction of Christian funerary practices in this area. The glass vessels are represented by one small recipient, a jar, dated based on analogies to the 3rd – 4th c. AD, and 14 *unguentaria*, dated to the 4th c. AD.[49] Two of the *unguentaria* are characterised by a spherical body and a long neck, but the predominant shape is the one known in the archaeological literature as toilet-bottles of Isings form 105.[50] This type of glass vessel, included by Bucovală in the category of *unguentaria*,[51] is visibly distinguishable from an aesthetic perspective from its earlier counterparts found at Tomis. The Isings form 105 *unguentaria* are characterised by a spindle (fusiform) shape, a bulbous middle section, a ringed rim, and variable dimensions, of both height and maximum diameter, as well as quite a wide variation in colour/tinge. Variations of the Isings form 105 are frequently found in funerary contexts dated to the 4th c. AD, both at Tomis and Callatis.

The beginning of the 1980s witnessed new developments of the modern city of Constanţa, which made necessary the continuation of the rescue excavations. The results of the archaeological research, published in *Pontica* 16, bring information regarding Late Antique

[44] Chera-Mărgineanu 1979, 249, fig. 3.
[45] Chera-Mărgineanu 1979, 248.
[46] Lungu – Chera-Mărgineanu 1982, 175-199.
[47] Lungu – Chera-Mărgineanu 1982, 182.
[48] Lungu – Chera-Mărgineanu 1982, 188.
[49] Lungu – Chera-Mărgineanu 1982, 189-190.
[50] Isings 1957, 126, form 105.
[51] Bucovală 1968a, 121-130.

burials and their grave goods, containing pottery, glass and metal objects, some of them showing influences or displaying Christian symbols.[52] The 23 graves analysed in this paper show that, while pottery tends to be scarce, the glass vessels, found both fragmentary and in a complete state of preservation, dominate the grave goods.[53] Out of the five *unguentaria*, the majority are the spindle-shaped type,[54] only one item being a vessel with spherical body. All these vessels were dated to the 4th c. AD, either based on their find contexts or based on typological analogies, inclusively with items found in the necropolises of Callatis.[55] The areas investigated during 1983, also as result of the urban development of Constanţa, published in *Pontica* 17, offered rich archaeological materials.[56] The funerary contexts cover a chronological framework between the 2nd c. AD and the 6th c. AD.[57] Out of the excavated burials, 29 were dated to the 3rd – 4th c. AD. Grave no. 30 was dated to the 6th c. AD. The dating of the contexts was proposed based on grave goods, funerary rites and coins. From the point of view of the typology of the funerary structures, they consist of niches with access chamber, and the characteristic disposal of the body is inhumation.[58] It was considered that the decoration of the various grave goods shows the transition from Roman motives to early Christian ones.[59]

Another observation regards the glass vessels, considered as the most numerous finds after pottery, both in the case of the Early Roman graves and the Late Antique graves.[60] As in the previously discussed situations, the glass items are remarkable in terms of diversity of shapes, colours and dimensions. The authors propose a typological separation between the *decanter-type* vessels and the *unguentarium-type* vessels, the latter group being treated as a distinct category in the analysis of the grave goods. Still, several glass containers, found in burial no. 2, are not included in a specific typology; they are analysed against vessels with similar shapes, based on the geometric particularities of their body and neck, which is cracked-off. These vessels are

[52] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1983, 217-230.
[53] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1983, 221.
[54] As already mentioned, this type is well represented in the funerary contexts from Tomis, being found items with a variety of dimensions (height up to 44 cm) and colours.
[55] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1983, 223.
[56] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 109-130.
[57] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 124.
[58] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 109.
[59] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 128-129. The authors emphasise the presence of two clay lamps with Christian decoration in graves dated to the end of the 3rd c. AD. Based on the archaeological context and analogies, these finds are considered early proofs of the existence of a Christian community, either local or arrived from the already Christianized Orient.
[60] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 113.

distinguished also by other particularities, such as, in some cases, their colour. For example, the vessel with Inv. No. 31158, which was included based on aesthetic and functional details in Isings form 103,[61] is described as characterised by a "sour cherry-red" colour, a very rare occurrence in the local funerary contexts[62]. The dating of these vessels, based on association with coins, situates them at the end of the 2nd c. AD and the beginning of the next century. As already mentioned, the vessels from burial no. 2, characterised by a spherical body and a undefined cut rim, are treated as items different from *unguentaria*.

Although not clearly stated, this separation seems based either on the almost 1:1 ratio between body height and neck height or the peculiarities of the rim and mouth[63]. Therefore, such a separation seems to be triggered rather by the shape of these vessels than their probable use, although functionally they could have served the same purpose as the vessels included by the authors in the category of *unguentaria*.

Regarding the typological attribution of similar glass containers from Tomis, with spherical body, slightly elongated below the constriction, and associated by M. Bucovală with Isings form 103[64], in our opinion a more adequate attribution would be Isings form 6,[65] especially for the variants with short ground neck. Their flat or slightly concave base sustains this attribution, although the same typological detail brings them close also to Isings form 26a[66] – for which Isings discusses also early representatives characterised by constriction between neck and body. In this context, the association of the three vessels from burial no. 2 by the authors to the Isings form 103[67] needs a new discussion.

The vessels included by Isings in her form 103 are characterised by a strongly spherical body, a marked constriction between body and neck, and incised decoration[68]. Therefore, the "sour cherry red" vessel from Tomis presents some similarities, but more differences when compared with the representatives of form 103, as it has a less spherical body, flat base, marked constriction, no decoration, and its rim is cracked-off and ground. This combination of traits

[61] Isings 1957, 121-122, form 103.
[62] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 115, pl. I, fig. 12. Still, if possible, it should be investigated in the future if what is described as such ("sour cherry-red") is not in fact an instance of use of purple glass (Mn-colourised).
[63] This type of vessel is frequently attested at Tomis, and it was included by Bucovală (1968a, 62-63) into his type XXVIII – *vessels with spherical body, cylindrical cut and ground neck*.
[64] Bucovală 1968a, 62-63.
[65] Isings 1957, 22, form 6; Isings 1971, 6, cat. no. 1; 45, cat. no. 1, fig. I; 59, cat. no. I, pl. I.
[66] Isings 1957, 40, form 26°.
[67] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 115, pl. IV, figs. 4, 9, 12.
[68] Isings 1957, 121-122, form 103; Biaggio-Simona 2003, 109, 77.

brings it closer to forms 6 and 26a. It could be considered that this vessel represents an intermediary step between Isings form 6 and Isings form 26a – possibly an early variant, made of coloured glass, of Isings form 26a.

The other two vessels, with Inv. Nos. 31157 and 31158, are characterised by a smooth transition between neck and body, a more elongated, less spherical, body, and relatively flat base. Taking into consideration these details, they cannot be included into Isings form 103, as proposed by the authors. Again, these vessels seem to oscillate between Isings form 6 and Isings form 26a. In our opinion, the closest attribution in their case would be to late representatives of Isings form 26a, as described by this author.[69]

Therefore, also the items included by Bucovală in Isings form 103[70] should be re-attributed. Their typological details make them intermediary forms between Isings form 6 and Isings form 26a, the latter being described by Isings as a natural evolution of the first.[71] From a chronological perspective, these types of vessels were produced in the Roman Empire as early as the 1st c. AD. Still, in the case of the vessels from Tomis, their association in graves with pottery dated to the 2nd – 3rd c. AD ensures a later chronological framework. In the specific case of the three vessels from burial no. 2 from Tomis, the dating of the context was possible based on one legible coin, issued for Julia Domna (193-211), the other four coins from the grave being unidentifiable.[72]

Several shapes of *unguentaria* are represented in these funerary contexts. Spindle-shaped (fusiform) *unguentaria*, most of them in a good state of preservation, are present, being dated to the 3rd – 4th c. AD. They are variations of Isings form 105, already known from other funerary contexts at Tomis,[73] both in the details of the median bulb (sometimes slightly indented) and in the dimensions of the vessels. Variants of spindle-shaped *unguentaria* identified at Tomis in 4th c. AD contexts present a less prominent bulb, and the vessel in its entirety is characterised by an elongated, slim shape.[74] Alongside the fusiform *unguentaria*, there is also present a bell-shaped

[69] Isings 1957, 40.
[70] Bucovală 1968a, 62, fig. 80a-c.
[71] Isings 1957, 40-41.
[72] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 119.
[73] Lungu – Chera-Mărgineanu 1982, 185, pl. II, fig. 1; 191, pl. IV, figs. 11-13.
[74] Bucovală 1968a, 152, fig. XI; Lungu – Chera-Mărgineanu 1982, 185, pl. II, fig. 5; pl. IV, fig. 10; pl. V, figs. 16, 20; Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 123, pl. 5, figs. 46-47.

unguentarium, another shape already discussed above, but in this case with the notable detail of a cut neck.[75]

During the same archaeological excavations, there were found *unguentaria* already known at Tomis,[76] with a loose dating in the Roman world, from the 1st to the 4th c. AD. As part of the grave goods in burial no. 10, there were placed two miniature items, of which one was found complete (Inv. No. 31182) and the other in a fragmentary condition. The first vessel, presenting on the body indentations, can be included in Isings form 84. The second one seems to represent a variant of the same form, but with a more pointed base.[77]

The so-called tube-shaped *unguentaria*, also known in the archaeological literature as teardrop-shaped or tubular *unguentaria*, are represented in funerary contexts from Tomis, inclusively in graves published in *Pontica* 17. The item found in burial no. 1 (Inv. No. 31155) was previously attributed to Isings form 82/B1,[78] but again in this case there are some typological problems.

The Isings form 82/B1 is a subdivision of the Isings form 82 – the famous candlestick *unguentarium* – already documented at Tomis in multiple variants. Representative for this subdivision is a vessel found in 1959, and dated based on its association with a coin to the 2nd c. AD.[79] In their turn, the tube-shaped or tubular *unguentaria* are present also as earlier variants, with delimitation between neck and body, representing intermediary forms between Isings form 8 and Isings form 28a.[80] In the case of the *unguentarium* with Inv. No. 31155 from burial no. 1, its morphology brings it closer to Isings form 27. This attribution is proposed based on the description offered by the authors in the article and the illustration.[81] This vessel is similar to items previously published by Bucovală,[82] dated to the 1st – 3rd c. AD in contexts from Tomis, and even to the 1st – 4th c. AD in the rest of the empire.[83]

Roman Glass Vessels Discovered in Dobrudja presents, in the context of recent, at that time, finds dated to the Roman period, a series of vessels of complex shapes and decorations.

[75] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 115, pl. 1, fig. 5.
[76] Bucovală 1968a, 96, fig. 96.
[77] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 120, pl. 4, figs. 38-39.
[78] Isings 1957, 97-99.
[79] Bucovală 1968a, 99, fig. 183.
[80] Paraschiv *et al*., in preparation.
[81] Chera-Mărgineanu – Lungu 1984, 115, fig. 4.
[82] Bucovală 1968a, 122, fig. 251.
[83] Isings 1957, 41.

The author emphasises the economic potential of the main ancient harbour-cities from Dobrudja (Histria, Callatis, and Tomis) during Roman times and the refinement of their material culture, in this case the focus being on the impressive quantity of glass items.[84] Given the fact that the author was interested rather in presenting rarer finds, no *unguentaria* were taken into consideration in this paper.

The archaeological excavations taking place during 1987-1988 brought to light an important number of funerary contexts, with a variety of grave goods. One of the burials, with rich grave goods, was discussed by Bucovală in an issue of *Dacia* journal. The grave contained, together with coins, gold jewellery, bronze and wood objects, and glass vessels. The majority of the glass vessels were still intact – six vessels out of the total of seven. The author identified explicitly only one vessel of *unguentarium* type, in the *category B* of the grave goods, among these vessels. The container is described as a bell-shaped *unguentarium*, dated to the 2nd – 3rd c. AD.[85] Still, consulting the illustration, and based on the available documentation regarding the typological classification of *unguentaria*, it can be proposed in fact the existence of three *unguentaria* in this funerary context, belonging each to another type, showing differences in the shape of their body. At that moment, Bucovală included the other three analysed glass vessels (two complete and the fragmentary one) in the category of *vessels for unguents, with flattened spherical body and tall, wide cylindrical neck*, dating them to the 3rd c. AD, based on their archaeological context.[86]

During this preliminary stage of the documentation, based on the typology of *unguentaria* discussed in the archaeological literature, we identified in this case four vessels which could be attributed to Isings form 82. The main difference between the two variants present in this funerary context is the variation in the shape of the body – flattened spherical and bell-shaped respectively – without affecting in any way their functionality.[87]

The funerary contexts reflect the diversification of religious traditions present in the region. In this context, we could mention at least two *hypogeum* burials, excavated at Tomis and

[84] Bucovală 1984, 59-63.
[85] Bucovală 1991, 189-190.
[86] Bucovală 1991, 189-190, 198, fig. 15/a-b.
[87] Bucovală 1991, 198, fig. 15/a-b.

dated to the 4th c. AD. The authors discussing these finds include them with certainty in the category of the early Christian burials of the city.[88]

One of the best-preserved *hypogeum* structures, from the point of view of both paintings and grave goods, is the one found in 1988 in Constanţa, close to the crossroads between Ştefan cel Mare Street and Mircea cel Bătrân Street. The grave goods, although consisting of a limited number of items, are typologically significant. Among the objects placed inside the funerary structure there are two bronze bracelets, facetted beads, a *philacterium*, and a glass vessel. This last item, belonging to the category of spindle-shaped *unguentaria*, frequently found in the province of Scythia, offers valuable information regarding the chronological framework and cultural context in the region.[89]

An overview of mould-blown vessels from Tomis was published in *Pontica* 25. The authors analyse vessels considered luxury commodities, such as ribbed bowls, poly-facetted bottles and the mythological beaker, from the MINAC collections.[90] Based on the association with other grave goods and analogies with similar finds from other regions of the Roman Empire, these items are dated to the 1st – 2nd c. AD. The presence of such luxury goods is considered as a valuable indicator of the intensity of the imports of glass items in the area.[91]

In the same issue of the *Pontica* journal, another paper focuses on recent archaeological research in the western necropolis of Tomis. The authors discuss 47 burials, dated to the 2nd – 3rd c. AD, with varied grave goods – coins, pottery, clay lamps, jewellery, and glass vessels. The characteristics of the items belonging to the last mentioned category of finds encouraged the authors to advance the hypothesis of a local secondary production.[92]

It can be easily noticed that the Roman glass in the archaeological record from Tomis and Callatis comes from funerary contexts, in the case of older finds. This type of archaeological context provides a high probability for the vessels to be found intact or at least in a tolerable state of preservation, allowing the identification of shape and technological details. In addition, the retrieval of glass vessels from funerary contexts ensures in many cases a more precise dating, based on their association with other categories of objects as grave goods. Still, the analysis of this category of material comes with serious challenges.

[88] Barbet – Bucovală 1996, 105-158.
[89] Chera – Lungu 1988, 11-14.
[90] Lungu – Chera 1992, 279.
[91] Lungu – Chera 1992, 273-280.
[92] Bucovală – Paşca 1992, 270.

An important aspect of the glass studies regards the identification of production centres for the secondary production, turning the raw glass into various items. As it was already discussed above, questions regarding the possible origin of the glass vessels found at Tomis and Callatis were frequently present in the older publications, as well as struggles for determining if specific items or types were imported – and from where – or represented a proof of local production. Unfortunately, despite the inherent difficulties, this line of research cannot be neglected, as the information regarding origin/area of production/workshop is an essential part when dealing with glass production, for economic, commercial, and cultural reasons.

For example, in the case of Early Roman *unguentaria* from Tomis, as part of the (re)evaluation of this category of vessels from MINAC collections, it was determined the existence of a number of items possibly produced in Egyptian workshops.[93] A part of these *unguentaria* present similar characteristics to vessels from Karanis (Egypt).[94] The technical description of the vessels, offered by Harden for several types of vessels of possible local production found at this site, corresponds directly with that of some of the *unguentaria* from Tomis. Other common traits between the selected vessels from Tomis and those from Karanis could be identified: the solidity of the items and their thick walls (influencing also their weight), their strong colour (vivid green, vivid bluish green) – partially intensified by the thickness of glass. Among the *unguentaria* from Tomis, it could be also noticed the presence of an item with very thick walls and base, but a much reduced internal volume. Such vessels, recovered during excavations in Egypt and dated to the 1st – 2nd c. AD, are part of the collections of the Louvre Museum.[95]

Mediterranean production centres are also possibly represented in the MINAC collections by another group of glass vessels, among which *unguentaria*. These items were already discussed above, as they belonged to a funerary context from Callatis, the sarcophagus burial discovered in 1970.

Beyond their functional, aesthetic and symbolic value, the high frequency with which glass vessels are deposited as grave goods during the 1st – 4th c. AD could sustain the hypothesis of a commercial route between the production areas – secondary glass workshops – from other regions of the empire and Moesia Inferior, and later Scythia. The existence at Tomis of small

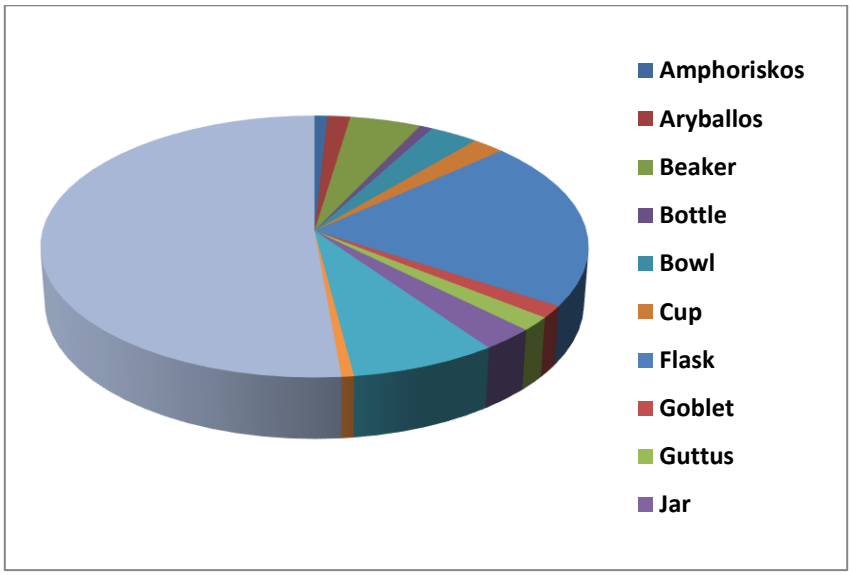
[93] Paraschiv *et al*., in preparation.
[94] Harden 1936.
[95] Arveiller-Dulong – Nenna 2005.

toilet-bottles, some of them mould-blown, belonging to types/forms for which in the dedicated literature was proposed a production in Sidon workshops,[96] brings strength to such a hypothesis. On another hand, the invention, development, and following spread of the glass blowing technique during the 1st c. AD means that a local production of some types or variants of vessels, *unguentaria* included, cannot be completely dismissed. The existence of remains of secondary glass kilns and unfinished glass vessels at Tomis, most probably functioning sometime in the interval between the 2nd and the 4th c. AD lends some strength to this hypothesis.[97]

The glass finds from Tomis and Callatis: a view from the graves

The consultation of the older publications (years 1960s-1990s) presenting glass finds from Tomis and Callatis offers valuable information regarding this category of archaeological material recovered from these two sites.

The extracted information allows the identification of several categories of glass items dated to the Roman period and found in funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis.[98] Their total number amounts to 465 items, of which: 4 amphoriskoi; 7 aryballoi; 22 beakers; 4 bottles; 15 bowls; 10 cups; 97 flasks; 7 goblets; 8 gutti; 13 jars; 36 jugs; 3 stirring rods; 239 *unguentaria* (Fig. 1).



[96] Bucovală 1977-1980, 223-230.
[97] Cliante – Țârlea 2020.
[98] The glass ornaments were not taken into consideration for the present discussion.

Fig. 1. The categories of glass items found in funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis based on older publications

Out of this total, from Tomis come 406 items of which 4 amphoriskoi; 7 aryballoi; 17 beakers; 2 bottles; 11 bowls; 7 cups; 87 flasks; 6 goblets; 6 gutti; 6 jars; 26 jugs; 2 stirring rods; 225 *unguentaria*.

From Callatis come 59 items of which 5 beakers; 2 bottles; 4 bowls; 3 cups; 10 flasks; 1 goblet; 2 gutti; 7 jars; 10 jugs; 1 stirring-rod; 14 *unguentaria*.

This situation of the glass finds from the two sites is also expressed in visual form below (Fig. 2).

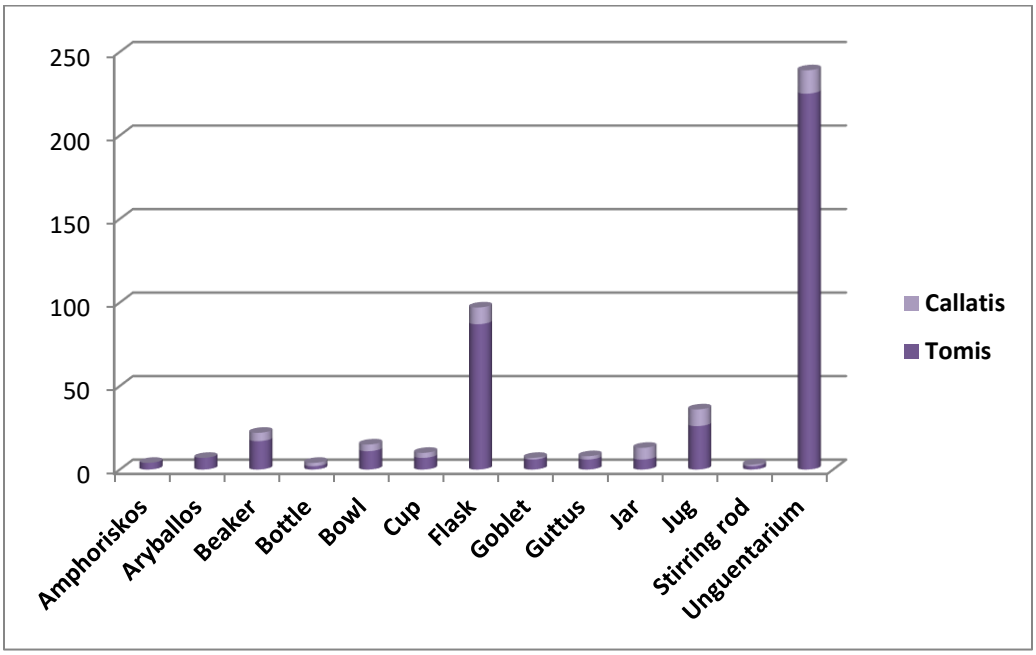


Fig. 2. The categories of glass items from Tomis and Callatis (expressed in numbers)

Prior to discussing the resulting image in more detail, it is extremely important to emphasise a series of weaknesses and limitations of this approach, on several levels.

As already mentioned above, this statistic is based only on the published material, resulting from older excavations. Most of these publications represent in fact archaeological reports, only in a few cases being papers – either articles or even books – focusing on glass vessels as a specific category. Rescue excavations are a constant for the ancient sites of both Tomis and Callatis, from the 1960s to the 1990s (and continuing until present), due to the evolution of the modern cities and their periphery. As a result, the archaeologists were dealing in

the majority of cases with huge amounts of excavated contexts each year. This situation is reflected by the publication of the material, in which sometimes dozens, sometimes hundreds of funerary contexts had to be "squeezed" in a tolerable number of pages. Therefore, various attempts of controlling the avalanche of information can be detected in these papers. The main ways of dealing with the material was either publishing what was deemed as essential information for a large number of contexts – resulting in a brief presentation of the grave goods or presenting several general data and then focusing on a selected number of more interesting contexts. As glass items represent only one category of grave goods, found frequently in association with jewellery, pottery, coins, and other categories of archaeological material, there are rare the cases in which this category represents a priority for publication. The fact that blown glass, especially, does not represent a very thorough/narrow chronological indicator, combined with the limited number of specialists on this category of material in the Romanian archaeology during the decades considered here, led in many cases to only a general discussion in the published texts and a reduced presence in the illustration.

Considering these circumstances, it is only reasonable to presume that an important number of glass vessels remained unpublished – especially in those cases in which their state of preservation / degree of fragmentation impeded identification of category / type / shape. Even more, the published vessels present inherent problems, covering quite a large spectrum, some of them reflecting issues with which generations of archaeologists worldwide, working with this category, had to fight. For instance, the attribution of the vessels to a specific functional category is a very "thorny" aspect of the field of glass studies, due to lack of clear criteria or overlapping of criteria, and it is often reflected in terminological dithering. As an example, the separation between cups and beakers, between bowls and plates, or between flasks, bottles, and *unguentaria* tends to be less clear than one would desire, and various works present various approaches (applied terminology included) to identifiable categories and types. As discussed in the first part of this paper, in many cases becomes unclear what kinds of vessels were in fact found, based only on their description. Unfortunately, even in the case of items for which description is matched by illustration, the quality of the latter (another inherent aspect of Romanian older publications – due to the quality of paper of the journals and books during communist times and a period after) impedes in most cases the identification of necessary details.

Consequently, there are very good chances that, on one hand, the number of published vessels taken into consideration in this paper represents only a part of the real number of items recovered from the excavated funerary contexts, and, on another hand, their attribution to a specific category is faulty in some cases. Another issue identified during our research concerns the publication in some instances of the same glass items in different publications. Normally, as long as the original publication is cited, there should be no problems. Still, there are cases in which the same vessels were published in parallel, so in the same year, by different authors or by the same author in different papers. In combination with variations in description, absence/presence of illustration, and only partial attribution of inventory numbers at the moment of their publication, this leads to the unpleasant feeling that it is possible that some glass items were counted twice for the present statistics. Especially "serial" products, the vessels that are not singled out by technological or typological details are encumbered by the risk of either being counted twice, or, on the contrary, mistaken for items already taken into account. Unfortunately, by default the vessels that can be considered *unguentaria* or toilet-bottles enter this category.

Thus, the results of this statistical attempt should be considered rather in terms of determining trends in the presence and treatment of glass in funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis, than a complete and immovable image.

After determining that this discussion is built on a somewhat questionable foundation, we will try to look at the image created by the glass finds in total and from each of the two sites. The first graph (Fig. 1) displays the clear dominance of *unguentaria* (either vessels identified as such in the respective publications or described as toilet-bottles), followed far behind by flasks and jugs. It is interesting to notice that most categories of tableware, such as beakers and goblets, cups, bowls, and plates, are either relatively rarely placed in graves or practically absent.

As it could already be noticed by consulting one of the previous graphs (Fig. 2), there is a clear discrepancy in number of finds between the two ancient sites, in favour of Tomis. Therefore, it cannot come as a surprise that the degree of the representation of the categories of vessels in the total of finds is strongly influenced by the situation of glass as grave goods in the funerary contexts from Tomis (compare Fig. 1 and Fig. 3). The first three positions of the hierarchy are again occupied by *unguentaria* / toilet-bottles, flasks, and jugs, followed by the other categories far behind.

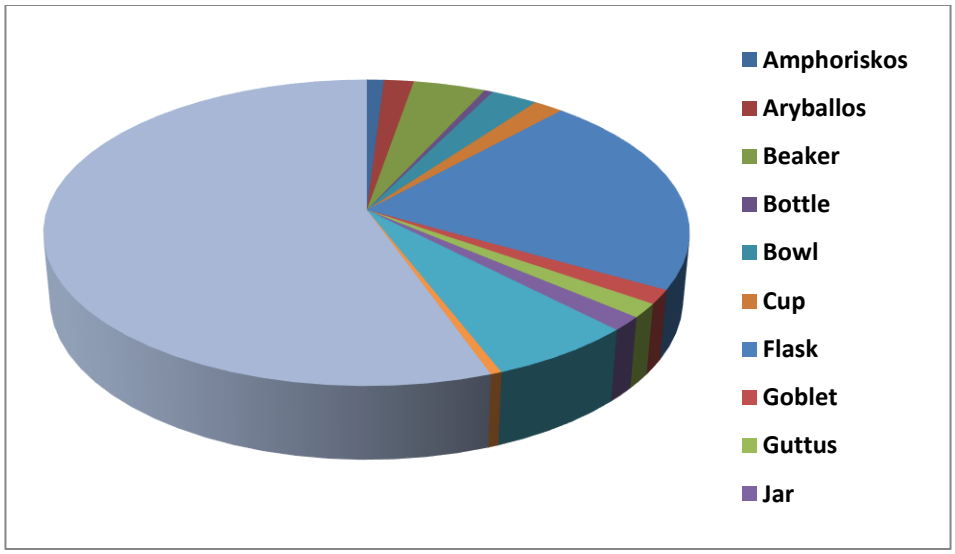


Fig. 3. The categories of glass items found in funerary contexts from Tomis

Callatis, with much smaller numbers for all the categories of glass vessels coming from this site, seems to present a different image (Fig. 4). Although there are the same three categories leading the hierarchy – *unguentaria* / toilet-bottles, flasks, and jugs – the numbers of representatives in this case are much closer to each other. It is less clear, at this point, if this image reflects the reality of the funerary customs in the Callatis necropoleis or the state of research/publication (consulting the bibliography it is clear that a smaller number of graves were published for Callatis compared to Tomis, during the 1960s-1990s).

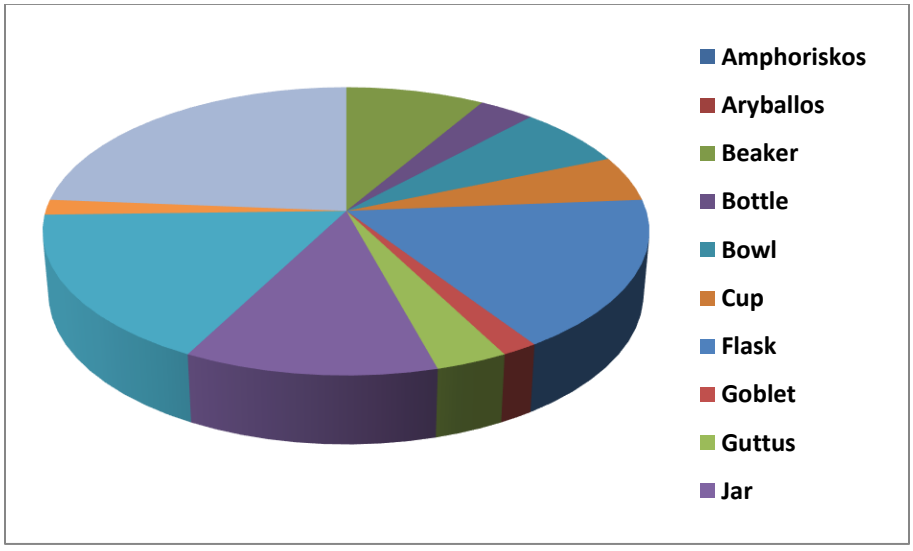


Fig. 4. The categories of glass items found in funerary contexts from Callatis

In an attempt to determine if the image created by the previous two graphs (Figs. 3-4) has chances to reflect the reality of ancient times, rather than the levels of excavations/publications, we created a graph showing in a different visual form the situation of the glass finds from Tomis and Callatis (Fig. 5). The resulting image is useful in that it clearly shows – albeit with different intensity, we could say – the same depositional trends in the case of both ancient cities during Roman times. The same peaks noticed in the case of Tomis – flasks, jugs, and unguentaria – are mirrored in the case of Callatis. Even in the case of other categories, a similar rhythm is visible. Therefore, it seems possible that the two communities had a relatively homogeneous approach to the treatment of glass as an appropriate category of material to be placed in funerary contexts, and a similar interest in specific categories/types or displaying specific functions/uses.

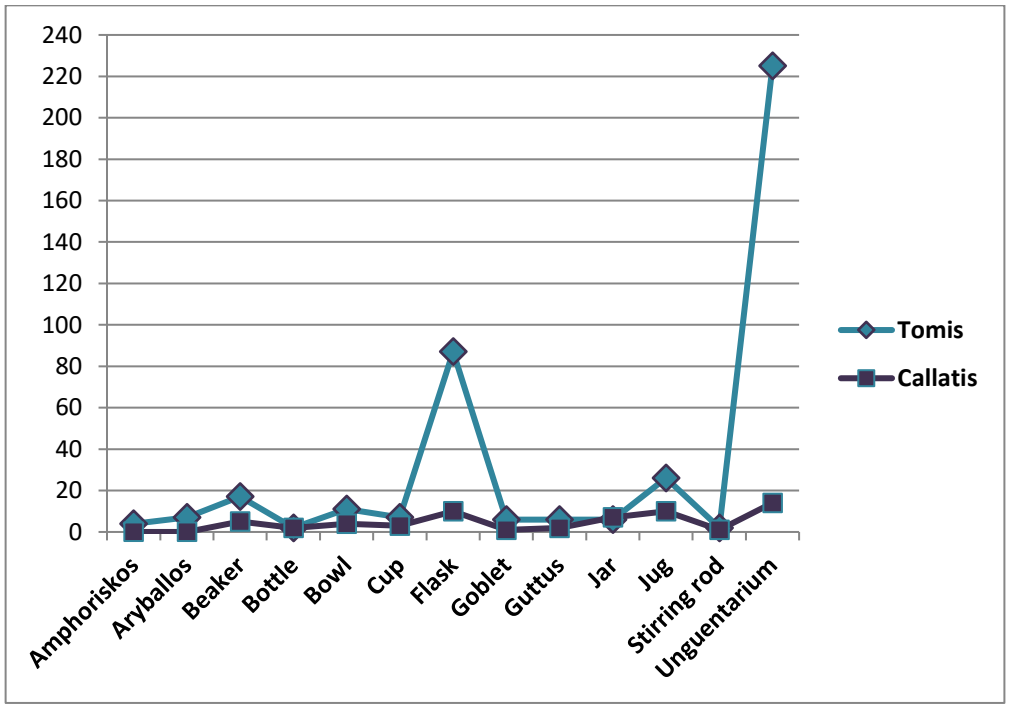


Fig. 5. The glass vessels in funerary contexts at Tomis and Callatis

The place of *unguentaria* / toilet-bottles in the larger context of glass finds from Tomis and Callatis

As it was made very clear by the previous considerations, the vessels that were published as *unguentaria* or toilet-bottles rule incontestably the glass grave goods landscape of Tomis and

Callatis. The frequency of their presence in funerary contexts from both sites against their chronological framework is expressed in the graphs below (fig. 6-7).

Several observations should be made at this point. The graph in Fig. 6 clearly shows that there is an important amount of overlapping of the chronological sequences to which various types/forms of *unguentaria* were allotted in the archaeological literature. This situation is the combined result of the two main criteria applied in general for the dating of Roman glass vessels: dating of the context they were found in and typological – technological characteristics of the glass vessels themselves. This is not to say that there are not good chances for the resulting chronological framework to be correct in both cases, it only means that this chronological framework cannot as a rule be narrowed down too much. Adding to this the unfortunate tendency of many forms of glassware to be produced, used, and trendy during relatively long time spans, and we end with types frequently covering two-three centuries of existence, and partially overlapping each other chronologically. This situation is extremely visible in the case of *unguentaria*, with many types/forms identified as appearing during the 1st c. AD and still being produced during the next century, or starting to be produced during the 2nd c. AD and still going strong during the 3rd c. AD.

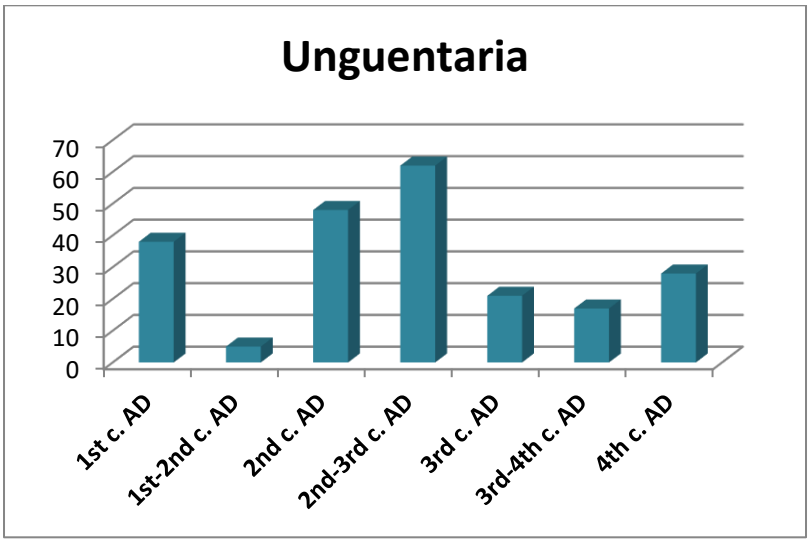


Fig. 6. The chronological attribution of *unguentaria* from funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis

Still, a trend can be noticed in this graph (Fig. 6), with the highest numbers of finds dated to either the 2nd c. AD or the 2nd – 3rd c. AD. Therefore, a further clustering of the finds based on the chronological criterion was attempted (Fig. 7).

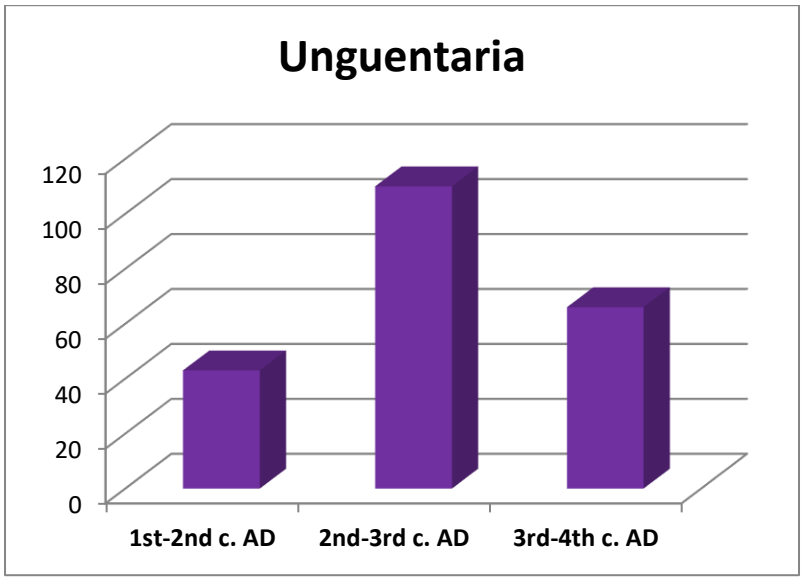


Fig. 7. The chronological attribution of *unguentaria* from funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis

This graph shows a good presence in funerary contexts of early types/forms of *unguentaria*, followed by a peak for the 2nd - 3rd c. AD, when the number of items almost tripled in comparison, and a decrease in representation with the 3rd – 4th c. AD, to almost half of the previous number. Taking into consideration this situation it was considered useful to represent this evolution also as a line graph (Fig. 8).

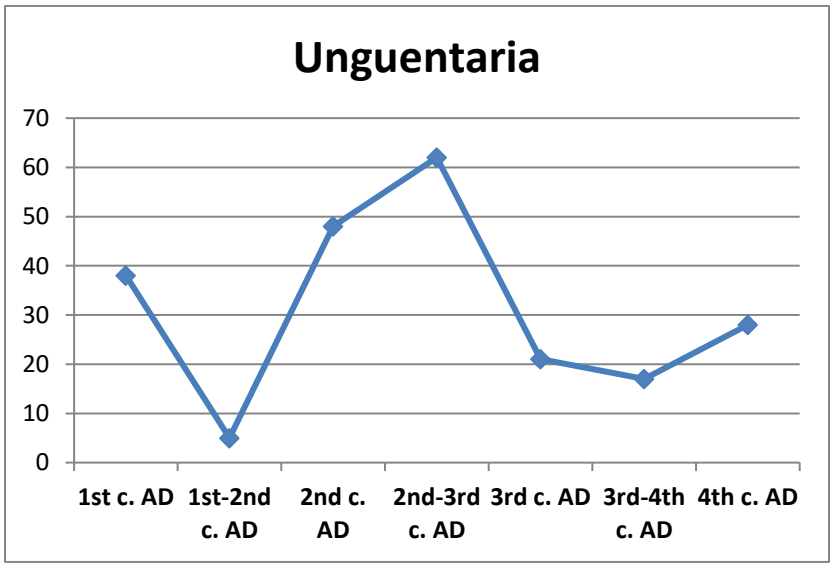


Fig. 8. The evolution in time of the glass *unguentaria* in funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis

This graph (Fig. 8) shows that there is an important number of glass *unguentaria* published during the 1960s-1990s with a firm dating to the 1st c. AD. This chronological attribution was established in various papers, as already mentioned, based either on the dating of associated grave goods or on typological and technological details, or both. A much smaller number of vessels were dated more loosely to the 1st – 2nd c. AD. It should be emphasised at this point that this drop in the graph does not reflect the reality. In other words, it does not indicate an interval with fewer glass *unguentaria* deposited as grave goods, but only that for a small number of finds it was not clear if they were chronologically restricted only to the 1st c. AD. The same observation is valid for the next discussed *unguentaria*. The number of finds strongly increases with items dated to the 2nd c. AD and reaches a peak with the *unguentaria* dated more loosely to the 2nd – 3rd c. AD. The numbers drop for glass containers dated to the 3rd c. AD and the 3rd - 4th c. AD, respectively, the line climbing again with the finds dated to the 4th c. AD. It becomes clear that a more detailed analysis should be made, taking into consideration the main types/forms accepted in the archaeological literature, but, at the same time, again the same obstacle, of production prolonged over centuries for many of them, will hamper such an attempt.

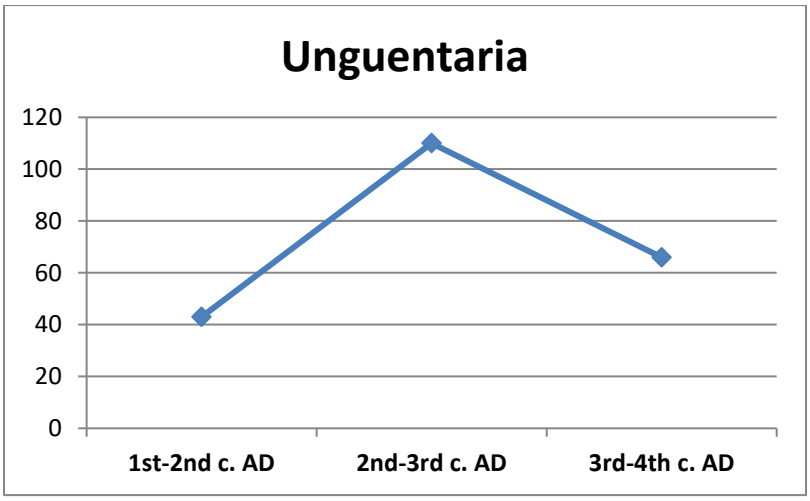


Fig. 9. The evolution in time of *unguentaria* in funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis

The graph above (Fig. 9) shows in a broader form the chronological evolution of the presence of glass *unguentaria* as grave goods in the funerary contexts from Tomis and Callatis. The peak in deposition is recorded for types/shapes dated to the 2nd – 3rd c. AD, followed by a decrease in representation of later types/forms.

Conclusions

All these graphs (and especially Figs. 6 and 8) emphasise an interesting detail: the comparatively large number of early glass *unguentaria* found in graves. In other words, the 1st c. AD blown glass *unguentaria* are remarkably well represented in funerary contexts. Of course, it would be ideal to determine the evolution in their funerary deposition along this century, in order to decide if it is a sudden phenomenon or a gradual increase in numbers from the beginning (or a specific moment/interval) of the century. Still, when looking at the 1st c. AD in comparison to what comes next, it can be said that the deposition of blown glass *unguentaria* in graves represents a strong trend from the beginning of their existence.

This situation deserves further analysis, as it could have different explanations, or it could be the result of cumulating factors. A possible reason for their strong funerary representation from the beginning is that the communities involved in these funerary practices had already established customs regarding the deposition of *unguentaria*, only that made of another material – clay. The glass variants would have been considered as similar, due to their shared function, despite the difference in material, and would have ended superseding their ceramic counterparts relatively quickly. Another explanation, which could be seen as running along the previous one or on the contrary opposing it, could be that these communities were open to novelties and eager to adopt them. Following this line of thought, these vessels can be described as such – combining a new technique and a probably already familiar material but with definite new characteristics (colourlessness, transparency, clarity, thinness of the walls). In consequence, they would have been deemed appropriate for reflecting the social status and cultural behaviours of both the deceased and of those left behind, as well as their connections to other parts of the Roman world.

The massive presence in graves of the *unguentaria* types that appear and evolve during the 2nd -3rd c. AD is not surprising. It rather reflects the general situation noticed for the Roman world, with the largest number of finds in funerary contexts, both of forms identified as *unguentaria* or toilet-bottles and of glass vessels in general, characteristic for these centuries.

Starting probably already with the 3rd c. AD, and especially visible during 4th c. AD, there is a decrease in the presence of glass vessels as grave goods, at the same time with substantial changes in the glass shapes. The more in-depth analysis of these aspects could open new directions in the research regarding the aesthetic and technical evolution of glass production, with implications connected to cultural practices involving this category of objects.

Taking into consideration that the present paper focuses only on the earliest decades of publication of funerary contexts, it does not reflect completely the evolution of Roman glass finds as grave goods. Therefore, it remains open the opportunity of ampler and clearer statistical analyses in the case of these two ancient cities.

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The ecclesiastic status of the see of Tomis between the 4th and 6th centuries. Reading notes on Ionuț Holubeanu's research

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Abstract: The ecclesiastical structure of Roman Scythia was widely discussed among the specialists since the end of the 19th century. Ionuț Holubeanu's contribution, especially his volume discussing the ecclesiastical organisation of both Scythia and Moesia Secunda shed a new light on the issue, especially regarding the status held by the see of Tomis between the fourth and sixth centuries. Although remarkable in its analysis of the primary sources, his work lacks an extended archaeological review, problem that faults the reliability of a part of his conclusions. This paper, presented in a reading notes format, engages with his study, aiming at a critical reassessment of the methodology used by Holubeanu in the particular topic regarding the status of the Tomitan see through the 4th-6th centuries. His work is confronted both with primary sources and secondary literature aiming to help with the understanding of the complex issue of Christian developments in the ancient Dobrudja.

Keywords: Scythia, see of Tomis, early Christianity, suffragan bishopric, metropolitan bishop.

Introduction

Knowledge of the ecclesiastical organization in the Dobrudjan area (the province of Scythia, part of the diocese of Thrace, as we know this region at the beginning of the 4th century) is a key stage in truly understanding the manifestations of early Christianity on the territory of present-day Romania. Unlike the regions north of the Danube, Scythia – being part of the empire – benefits from richer attention in the written sources, the local hierarchy being attested in episcopal correspondence as well as in the context of the Ecumenical Councils. Nevertheless, the rather fragmentary and, in some cases, contradictory data have given rise to long debates among specialists concerning the Church's organization in Scythia, as well as the status of the see of Tomis, the province's main episcopal centre.

The debate dates to the end of the 19th century (with the publication of *Notitia episcopatuum* no. 3,[1] also known as Carl de Boor's *Notitia*, in 1891[2]) and continues to this day, the

[1] Darrouzès, 1981.
[2] Boor, 1891.

interpretations of the sources being complemented by the results of archaeological research. In this context, a key element is to understand the evolution of the status of the bishopric of Tomis during Late Antiquity, evolution that influences and is influenced by the province's overall ecclesiastical structure. Recent studies by Ionuț Holubeanu have shed new light on the issue, producing a welcome paradigm shift within the academic community. Although based particularly on already known sources and on the extensive specialised literature that over the last century has repeatedly addressed the matter, his interpretations have led to conclusions completely different from those of previous scholars.

This paper is intended as a discussion of Ionuț Holbeanu's main book on this issue, *Organizarea bisericească în Scythia și Moesia Secunda în secolele IV–VII*,[3] emphasizing the evolution of the status of the Tomitan see in the 4th–7th centuries, a period that begins with the legalization of Christianity and ends with the reorganization of the structure of the Eparchy of Scythia that established the fourteen suffragan bishoprics of Tomis. These reading notes aim to offer a critical assessment of the conclusions reached by Ionuț Holbeanu, by repeatedly checking his information both against the primary sources he cites and against the views expressed by specialists in the field.

The general framework of early Christianity in Thrace during the IV-V centuries

To better understand the issues surrounding the evolution of the see of Tomis in Late Antiquity, it is useful to examine the development of Christianity across the entire diocese of Thrace. This broader perspective provides a contextual background for analysing smaller regions, such as the province of Scythia or the city of Tomis.

Starting with the fourth century, the whole territory of the Roman Empire entered a stage of Christianisation (especially after Theodosius' reign), the urban landscape being marked by Christian architecture.[4] The end of the fifth and beginning of the sixth centuries were characterised by great building efforts during the reigns of Anastasius and Justinian.[5] Together with defensive structures, the building campaigns also focused on the areas surrounding Christian monuments:

[3] Holubeanu, 2018.
[4] Ruscu, 2020; Zugravu, 1997.
[5] Dumanov, 2015.

churches, monasteries,[6] baptisteries, episcopal complexes.[7] In a time when the affluent class preferred to build private residences rather than public edifices, the monumental structures were, in most cases, churches and other ecclesiastical edifices. This situation reflected the formation of new elites, of clergymen, military commanders and landlords, with the bishop as the leader of his community. The prominent role of the bishop in his local community is the natural consequence of the Church becoming an "one of the important organs of the Empire".[8]

Also, during Late Antiquity, the structure of the Church in Thrace suffered various changes over time. The main changes are related to the increasing number of bishoprics, phenomenon explained by the periods of flourishment of the provinces, despite the number of barbarian attacks from the North of Danube. According to G. Atanasov in the diocese of Thrace, during the fifth century, the following situation was recorded:

> « *(…) seule la province de Scythie est dotée d'un seul évêque-celui de sa capitale Tomis […] Effectivement, d'après ces premières notices épiscopales, le métropolite de Marcianopolis dans la province voisine de Mésie seconde a un archevêque et cinq évêques suffragants. Dans la province d'Héminont, le métropolite d'Héraclée a également un archevêque et cinq évêques suffragants. Le métropolite de Philippoupolis dans la province de Thrace a un archevêque et trois évêques suffragants, etc*. ».[9]

Further, Atanasov insists upon the special situation of Scythia (identifying about seven kinds of so-called *Scythian exceptions*). Two aspects observed by him need to be reminded here: first, the importance of martyrial cults in the province (given the remarkable number of Scythian martyrs) that resulted in a flourishing Christian life, with a large number of Christian basilicas (some of them of an extraordinary monumental size[10]); second, his observations regarded the unusually great number of bishoprics (fourteen), contrasting with the situation in other provinces in this diocese, as shown above.

Also, the Scythian space was known by the monastic presence attested here, both in the works of the Church fathers and, more recently, archaeologically proven at (L)Ibida[11] (modern day

[6] Curta, 2001.
[7] Dumanov, 2015.
[8] Lemerle, 1998.
[9] Atanasov, 2023.
[10] Suceveanu, 2002; Suceveanu, 2007.
[11] Curta, 2001.

Slava Rusă). The presence of a monastic complex in this area is unusual, the monastic cenobitic communities being, if not non-existent, very rare in the Balkans.

Primary sources

The Christian activity in this province in the discussed period is covered by a variety of sources, varying from correspondence and mentions in Councils' canons, to Church histories (like the one of Sozomen). The amount of preserved written sources allows Holubeanu to base the conclusions of his volume on interpretations and criticism of the sources, analysing the existing sources almost exhaustively. It is undoubted that Scythia had a flourishing Christian life, due to the mentioned "abundance" of Christian martyrs venerated in the region and, of course, relics associated with them. Also, the economic growth and the development of this province starting with the Constantinian[12] period and the reconstruction efforts and age of prosperity brought by the reigns of emperors Anastasius and Justinian[13] attracted the attention of the period's authors to Scythia. In order to shortly present the sources about the early Christian life in the province, they will be split into two main categories: ecclesiastical documents (mentions in the Church canons, letters of the bishops, imperial laws) and literary sources (writings of authors of that period). Since the size of this paper doesn't allow an extensive review of the existing sources, only a few will be mentioned, specifically those who are the main basis of Holubeanu's conclusions.

Ecclesiastical documents

We know about the presence and activity of the Scythian hierarchs, and especially the bishop of Tomis, from the great number of ecclesiastical documents preserved, regarding the period of interest. First, we know that the hierarch of Tomis attended various Church councils, the most important being, of course, the Ecumenical ones. The name of the bishop of Tomis appears between the attendees of each Ecumenical Council[14] assembled in the first two centuries after the legalisation of Christianity in the empire. The presence of Scythian bishops is also attested at other

[12]The reconstruction efforts started during the reign of Constantine the Great, following an age of relative stability after the disaster of the Third Century Crisis. An example, from modern-day Dobrudja is the reconstruction of *a fundamentis* of the Tropaeum Traiani city during the time of Constantine and Licinius

[13] Curta, 2001; Dumanov, 2015; Procopius, *De aedificiis*, IV., 1.1.33.

[14] Honigmann, 1939; Dură, 2024.

various Church councils, for instance the one held in Constantinople in 449 and the Home Synod of 440.[15]

Besides the mentions of the presence of the Tomitan hierarchs at the Church councils of the 4th-6th centuries, information about them can be obtained from the episcopal or imperial correspondence[16] involving or regarding them. The hierarchs of Tomis appear among the receivers of multiple letters and encyclicals of the Roman emperors, also among the signatories of episcopal letters regarding Church matters addressed to the emperors. The Tomitan hierarchs are also receivers of personal letters from important Church leaders and even from the emperor himself,[17] the content of these letters (and, especially, the form of addressing) giving us insights about the ecclesiastical matters in the province.

Information regarding the Church organisation and Christian life in Scythia appear also in *corpora* of Roman law. We note here the known *Scythian exception* from Zeno's law (enacted between 474-484 and republished in the time of Justinian in *Codex Justinianus*). The exception refers to the exemption of this province from the obligation of having a bishop in every city recognised as such "by imperial benefaction".[18] The reasons invoked are mainly related to the poor state of province, its churches being "damaged by continuous barbarian incursions or otherwise afflicted by want".[19] It is to be noted that Scythia isn't the only place exempted from the previous rule, but also the city of Leontopolis, although due to different reasons.[20]

Also, the various lists of episcopal centres, known as N*otitiae episcopatuum*, provide a great amount of information, even if their reliability can be debated and their interpretation requires a much larger degree of complexity.[21] Here will be briefly presented the first three *Notitiae* (according to the indexation made by Darrouzes[22]) that constitutes our object of interest. The first

[15] Palladius, *The Dialogue of Palladius concerning the Life of Chrysostom*, XIII; Holubeanu, 2018; Holubeanu, 2024a.
[16] Holubeanu, 2017.
[17] For instance, the *Encyclia* of Emperor Leo I, discussed by Holubeanu (2018, 2024) and Dură, 2024.
[18] *CJC*, I.3.35.
[19] Fragment also from the source cited above.
[20] The exception in their case isn't clear at all, the source saying that "for many have hotly debated whether it should receive a bishop of its own or be subject to the supervision and care of the most reverend bishop of Isauropolis; yet, although it has been granted city status and shall enjoy the rights of cities permanently and fully, it shall remain under the supervision of the aforementioned bishop".
[21] As shown by the debates regarding the dating and the civil or ecclesiastic character of the original documents copied and compiled in *Notitia*, Holubeanu, 2019, Duchesne, 1895.
[22] Darrouzès, 1981.

two lists show the see of Tomis as the only bishopric of Scythia[23], according to the data we know from Zeno's law, mentioned above. However, the third *Notitia* (also known as Carl de Boor's *Notitia*) mentions a wholly different situation, the Tomitan see having about fourteen suffragan bishoprics.[24]

Literary sources

The subject of Christian organisation of the Scythia province (and the status of the see of Tomis) was also referred to by the authors of the period. Of great interest is especially the work of Sozomen, his *Church history*,[25] that discusses the ecclesiastical issues of this province in a few instances. First of all, Sozomen provides one of the earliest accounts about the already discussed *Scythian exception* (at about 440 AD[26]). Also, from his work we know an important part of information related to the life of bishop Theotimus of Tomis, nicknamed *the Philosopher*, and also about his close relationship with John Chrysostomos. Of great interest are the attributes with which the Scythian hierarchs are referred, that can provide us clues about the status of the Tomitan see in their period.

Even if the subject doesn't refer particularly to Christian life and organisation, it is important to cite here Procopius' work, *De aedificiis*, from which we can deduce the development of Scythian cities during Justinian's reign[27] (development that started with Anastasius' large campaign of reconstructions in the region, including the religious edifices[28]). Knowing that the poor state of the province caused mainly by barbarian attacks was the main reason of the exemption of Scythia from Zeno's law, the development of this province's cities and the short period of flourishing in the 5th-6th centuries could possibly explain the changes in the traditional organisation of the Church in the region.

Archaeological data

[23] Information also supported by the geographical work of Hierocles, *Synecdemus* – in fact a summa of tables with geographical and administrative data, Hierocles *Synecdemus* 637.
[24] Boor, 1891.
[25] Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica*, VI, 21.
[26] The year when Sozomen's work was presumably written, in which he specifies that these Scythian customs dates to more ancient times.
[27] Procopius, *De aedificiis,* IV, 7.15; IV, 11.14.
[28] Barnea, 1979; Dumanov, 2015.

The results of over 140 years of archaeological excavations conducted in modern-day Dobrudja help us fill a substantial information gap in the history of this region in Late Antiquity. Even though Holubeanu's work is focused only to a small extent on archaeological data (basing its conclusions mainly from the preserved written sources), their importance to this matter requires a more extensive discussion. It is important to note that the main scholars[29] who discussed the topic of the status of the Tomitan see or the organisation of the Scythian Church (and their works being the base of Holubeanu's own volume) had an archaeological background and that their interpretations were supported mainly by the archaeological remains they found.

One of the first discoveries that drew attention to the problem, as supporting the data provided by Carl de Boor's *Notitia* and contradicting the known situation with the bishop of Tomis as the only hierarch of the province, was the discovery of an early Christian baptistery[30] related to the *marble basilica* (Basilica B) in the city of Tropaeum Traiani (mentioned in de Boor's *Notitia* with the Greek name *Tropaion*)[31], a sign of episcopal presence in the city. The significance of this discovery started a debate among the specialists that will be presented subsequently.

Baptisteries, structures closely associated during Late Antiquity with the presence of a bishop[32], are among the best indicators of the existence of an episcopal see in a late Roman city. This kind of structures were found also at Callatis[33], Axiopolis[34], Halmyris[35] (cities that figures among the fourteen suffragan bishoprics mentioned by the *Notitia* no. 3[36]), also at Argamum[37], with the possible existence of one at Histria[38] (although not discovered yet) and (L)Ibida[39] (in a possible monastic complex and not in an episcopal cathedral).

At Histria, the extraordinary dimensions of the Great Basilica[40] and its proximity to the *Domus* complex, interpreted as an *episkopion*[41] – episcopal palace – indicate also an episcopal

[29] Vasile Pârvan, J. Weiss, Emilian Popescu, Ion and Alexandru Barnea, Alexandru Suceveanu, Nelu Zugravu to cite only a few of the specialists involved in the debate, Holubeanu, 2024a.
[30] Pârvan, 1912.
[31] Boor, 1891; Atanasov, 2023.
[32] Brandt, 2011. Also, criticizing the validity of baptisteries as proofs for episcopal presence: Moreau, 2022.
[33] Holubeanu, 2024b.
[34] Opriș, 2024.
[35] Achim, 2003.
[36] Boor, 1891; Atanasov, 2023; Holubeanu, 2024a.
[37] Achim, 2003.
[38] Suceveanu, 2002.
[39] Curta, 2001.
[40] Suceveanu, 2007.
[41] Bounegru, 2012.

presence. Octavian Bounegru's identification of the apse-like structure in the Domus complex as a chapel (upon which was based the identification of the *episkopion*) was contested by Sodini, who, instead, considered the "chapel" as a *triclinium*[42].

These findings are proofs of the changes in the Scythian church organization, the province where the hierarch of Tomis governed as the only bishop gaining at some later point, suffragan bishoprics inside the province. Chronologically, most of the unveiled structures can be traced back to the 6th century.[43] There is a possible debate regarding the Basilica B at *Tropaeum Traiani*, dated by I. Bogdan-Cătăniciu in the fourth century,[44] dating that we find problematic,[45] as in that period Tomis is attested as the only bishopric.

Also, besides the aforementioned structures, epigraphical information is provided by the inscription discovered in 1960 at Callatis,[46] that mentions two suffragan bishops, Stefanus and an anonymous one, in this city.

Main scholarly views regarding the evolution of the status of the see of Tomis

Debates of the previous century regarding the status of the Tomitan see

The dispute regarding the status of the episcopal see of Tomis in the 4th-6th centuries started after the publication by Carl de Boor of an inedited *Notitia episcopatuum* in 1891,[47] that contradicted the known information about the Ecclesiastical structure in the province. One year later, de Boor's *Notitia* was discussed by Heinrich Gelzer,[48] who showed a special interest with the Ecclesiastical organisation of the Greek space, and dated the document in the iconoclastic period, without making any mention of Scythia. Later, Louis Duchesne[49] stated that parts of the document (including the one regarding Scythia) were copied from a civil document, rather than an ecclesiastical one, thus rejecting the possibility of the existence of fourteen suffragan bishoprics to the Tomitan hierarch.

[42] Sodini, 1997.
[43] Holubeanu, 2018.
[44] Bogdan Cătăniciu, 2006.
[45] However, Pârvan dated the construction of this basilica in the sixth century, after 530, during the reign of Justinian, Pârvan, 1912.
[46] Holubeanu, 2024b.
[47] Boor, 1891; Holubeanu, 2019.
[48] Gelzer, 1892.
[49] Duchesne, 1895; Holubeanu, 2019.

In Romania, the Catholic archbishop R. Netzhammer[50] rejected also the possibility of existence of other bishoprics beside the Tomitan see in the province, agreeing with Duchesne about the copying of information from civil lists in de Boors's *Notitia*. However, after the excavation of the *marble basilica* (Basilica B) and its baptistery at Tropaeum Traiani in 1906, Netzhammer accepted the existence of a bishopric in this city. According to his theory, after the destruction of Tomis the episcopal see was moved at *Tropaeum*, theory rejected by Pârvan. Vasile Parvan, at first, believed that the construction of the *marble basilica* was never finished, thus the city never functioning as a bishopric. After more research was carried-out, Pârvan reviewed his first conclusions, accepting the possible existence of more than one Episcopal see in the province. Supporting the data from *Notitia* no. 3/de Boor's *Notitia*, Jakob Weiss, in a volume dedicated to ancient Dobrudja,[51] considered the elevation of the Tomitan see to the rank of metropolis some time before the Avaro-Slavic invasion. In a later study, Pârvan also supported the information provided by the *Notitia*, asserting that the suffragan bishoprics in the province were created somewhere between the reigns of Anastasius and Justinian.

After World War II, the contributions of Emilian Popescu brought a new understanding of the issue. Supported by archaeological discoveries (the identification of several baptisteries[52]) and the finding of the Callatis inscriptions about the two local bishops[53]) Popescu created the following chronology of the evolution of the Tomitan see, structured in three main stages.[54] First, during the 4th century, the Tomitan see was subordinated to the metropolitan see of Heracleea as a suffragan, later (at the end of the 4th or beginning of the 5th century) Tomis gaining autonomy as an autocephalous archbishopric (term with the same meaning as a titular metropolis[55]), without having any suffragans. The third stage is the one reflected by *Notitia* no. 3, following the creation of fourteen suffragans inside the province and elevation of Tomis to a metropolitan rank, most probably during the reign of Anastasius (491-518).

Nelu Zugravu[56] adopted Emilian Popescu's conclusions about the chronological evolution of the Tomitan see, also supporting its elevation to a metropolitan rank at the beginning of 6th

[50] Holubeanu, 2019; Holubeanu, 2018.
[51] Weiss, 1911.
[52] Achim, 2003; Curta, 2001; Holubeanu, 2024a.
[53] Popescu, 1969.
[54] Holubeanu, 2024b.
[55] Holubeanu, 2024a.
[56] Zugravu, 1997.

century by the mentions during this period of the metropolitan bishop Paternus as overseeing Scythia. Zugravu[57] mentions a fourth possible stage, during Justinian, when the see of Tomis becomes (again?) an autocephalous archbishopric.

Ionuț Holubeanu's view

In his book[58] Ionuț Holubeanu, based mainly on a hermeneutical reapproach of the early Christian sources regarding Scythia and a re-evaluation of the interpretation of the various scholars that discussed this topic, has obtained completely different results. Admitting the existence of the fourteen bishoprics in the province (thus deeming as correct the information provided by the third *Notitia episcopatuum*), he argues about the status of the Tomitan bishop as either a suffragan bishop or titular metropolitan bishop (autocephalous archbishop). Based on the information provided by the lists of attendees of various Church councils and mentions by ancient authors (especially the already-discussed Sozomen and Palladius of Galatia[59]) he made substantial corrections to the chronology presented by Emilian Popescu. His better understanding and interpretation of the early Christian sources, due to a theological, rather than archaeological, background allowed much more accurate conclusions related to this issue.

According to his opinion, the Tomitan bishop was already elevated to the rank of metropolitan by 381, as the see of Chersones features as under Scythian jurisdiction in the attendance list of the first Ecumenical Council of Constantinople. Also, the mentions of Palladius of Galatia[60] regarding the Home Synod of 400 (where Theotimus I is referred to as a metropolitan bishop) is harmonized with the known *Scythian exception* of having the entire province oversaw by a single bishop, in Tomis. Proving also the jurisdiction of the Tomitan see over the bishoprics of Bosporus and Odessos, Holubeanu gave us a new perspective, with a metropolitan bishop existing in Tomis already at the end of the fourth century, overseeing over cities situated outside of his province and (in the case of Odessos) even outside the Roman Empire frontiers.

The situation was preserved in the next century, the ecclesiastical organisation of this region suffering changes only during the first half of the sixth century, during the beginning of Justinian's reign. The reorganisation of the province (indicated by a few measures, like the transfer

[57] Zugravu, 2008.
[58] Holubeanu, 2018.
[59] Palladius, *The Dialogue of Palladius concerning the Life of Chrysostom* XIII.
[60] Palladius, *The Dialogue of Palladius concerning the Life of Chrysostom* XIII.

of the old suffragans of Tomis from its authority between 518-536 and the organisation of *quaestura exercitus Justiniani* in May 536[61]) resulted in changes at a provincial level (the apparition of suffragan bishoprics inside the province), but the city preserved its status as a metropolitan see. Changes in its rank have been performed later, in the early seventh century, Tomis becoming an autocephalous archbishopric due to the decaying state of the Scythian cities, as a result of increased frequency of barbarian attacks in the region[62], but this matter exceeds the timespan discussed here.

Holubeanu also criticises the interpretation given by Nelu Zugravu[63] regarding the presumed status of an autocephalous archbishopric received by the city during Justinian's reign, as this rank was specific to the cities with a metropolitan rank that weren't the capital of a province and couldn't have any suffragans. This interpretation is dismissed as Tomis had suffragans starting from the end of the fourth century to the beginning (?) of the seventh.

What can Holubeanu be criticised for is the small extent of interpretation of the archaeological data (basing his information mainly on the conclusions of previous scholars, without questioning their interpretation). Emilian Popescu's arguments are adopted without an extensive critique. The archaeological sources are, generally, only mentioned without an extensive analysis in Holubeanu's volume. Regarding archaeological data, it is pretty much clear that the Romanian scholars tried to obtain as much archaeological data as possible supporting the existence of other episcopal seats in the province. However, a significant part of these interpretations needs a new critical approach, especially regarding the identification of a surprisingly large number of baptisteries inside the province. Also, regarding the number of the suffragan bishoprics of Scythia, he tends to accept the list given by *Notitia episcopatuum* no. 3 without mentioning that only a part of the cities mentioned in the document are archaeologically proven as episcopal sees and without providing significant proofs of their existence. Furthermore, despite the fact that he mentions the existence of a possible bishopric at Argamum, he doesn't further explain the fact that this city doesn't appear among the suffragan bishoprics of this province.

Criticism of Holubeanu's contributions

[61] Mărculeț, 2017.
[62] *CJC*, I.3.35, Holubeanu, 2018 and 2024a.
[63] Zugravu, 2008.

The paradigms proposed by Holubeanu received attention by the specialists of the field. Georgi Atanasov rejected his interpretation of the Tomitan see as being granted the metropolitan status in the late fourth century, proving his critique by the way the Tomitan bishops signed themselves at the beginning of the fourth century (only as bishops).[64] However, in his later book, Holubeanu demonstrated that this way of addressing was common between the hierarchs of that time, who usually referred to their status by the general rank of bishop, without mentioning their exact position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy as suffragans, archbishops or metropolitans.[65]

Dominic Moreau also rejected Holubeanu's conclusions, first in a review of his book,[66] criticising the lack of archaeological analysis and the reliability of a research based almost exclusively on the insufficient number of primary sources. In a later study,[67] Moreau further criticised the interpretation of the discussed archaeological proofs regarding the existence of suffragan bishoprics in the sixth century. He contested the value of the elements specific to the baptismal rites (baptismal fonts and baptisteries) as proofs for the existence of a local bishop. Also, his study pointed out the inconsistencies between the archaeological realities and Holubeanu's interpretation (including Argamum's case). In his later book,[68] Holubeanu addressed only in part these issues, his covering of the archaeological data remaining unsatisfactory.

In spite of these flaws, a great part of the conclusions pointed out by the 2018 book, and especially those regarding the Tomitan see, still remain one of the best interpretations given in the scholarly debate.

The hierarchs of Tomis after *Pax Christiana* and before 534

Summarizing the much more extensive analysis of the topic made by Holubeanu and correlating it with the opinions of other specialists, it is possible to retrace the main stages of evolution of the Tomitan see, basing it on the interpretation of the previously discussed early Christian sources. The earliest mention appears in the *Acta Sanctorum Julii*,[69] specifically, in the passions of the

[64] Atanasov, 2023.
[65] Holubeanu, 2024a.
[66] Moreau, 2020.
[67] Moreau, 2022.
[68] *Christianity in Roman Scythia. Ecclesiastical Organization and Monasticism (4th-7th centuries)*, published in 2024.
[69] *De SS. Epicteto presbytero et Astione monacho, martyribus Almiridensibus in Scythia*, 1721.

martyrs Epictet and Astion, during their martyrization the Church in Scythia being led by Evangelicus of Tomis as *pontifex et praepositus* (high priest and chief).[70]

After the *Edict of Mediolanum*, although unmentioned by Holubeanu, in the list of the attendees at the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325) in the section designated to the Eparchy of Dacia (*επαρχία της Δακίας*) *Μάρκους Τόμεον* (Marchos Tomeon/Mark of Tomis) is mentioned,[71] without any other epithet or any reference to his function or status.

The next known bishop is Vetranio, half a century later, mentioned by Sozomen in an episode related to the visit of Emperor Valens (364-375) in the city of Tomis.[72] In this context, the author also mentions the Scythian custom (later consecrated by imperial law) that the whole province was under the sway of one bishop.

The next bishop, Terentius, appears between the signatories of the canons of the third Ecumenical Council (in 381 at Constantinople).[73] However, under the heading of the ecclesiastical province of Scythia are listed not only one, but three bishops: *Terentius Tomeun* (Terentius of Tomis), *Aetherius Cersonissi* (Aetherius of Chersones) and *Sebastianus Anchialis* (Sebastian of Anchialus).[74] Later interpretation, although suggesting that the insertion of the third bishop may have been an error (Anchialus being a city of Haemimontus, a heading that can be found in the list), accepted the bishopric of Chersones as being under the jurisdiction of the eparchy of Scythia, proof used by Holubeanu to suggest an elevation in the rank of the Tomitan bishop to a metropolitan status. Also, in the beginning of the fifth century, at the *Home Synod* in 400, the first three hierarchs mentioned by Palladius of Galatia (Theotimus I of Scythia, Ammon of Thrace and Arabianus of Galatia) are described as *πάντων μητροπολίτην γεγ επακωτών /metropolitans advanced in years*[75].

Later in the fifth century the Tomitan see is recorded as having another suffragan bishopric, at Odessos[76], information based upon Holubeanu's interpretation (aligned with the opinion of the Polish specialist Kazimierz Ilski[77]) of the formula "Dizza episcopus civitatis Odissae Scythiae

[70] Holubeanu, 2018; *De SS. Epicteto presbytero et Astione monacho, martyribus Almiridensibus in Scythia*, 1721.
[71] Honigmann, 1939.
[72] Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* VI.21.
[73] Dură, 2024
[74] Holubeanu, 2018; Holubeanu, 2024a.
[75] Palladius, *The Dialogue of Palladius concerning the Life of Chrysostom* XIII.
[76] Ilski, 1994 ; Holubeanu, 2024a.
[77] Ilski, 1994.

similiter"[78] found in the answer of the bishops of Moesia Secunda to Emperor Leo I *Encyclia*. The bishopric of Odessos was, however, transferred under the authority of Marcianopolis after 458, as the data from *Notitiae episcopatuum* suggest. Also, under the Tomitan authority was placed its third suffragan bishopric, the one of Bosporus, situated in modern-day Sevastopol, Crimea. So, with suffragans in Chersones, Odessos and Bosporus, the frontiers of the ecclesiastical province of Scythia do not match with the civil one, the Tomitan bishop extending his authority over the limits of the province and of the empire.[79]

At the end of the century, under Emperor Zeno, the law that required every recognized city to have its own bishopric was enacted, law that exempted the civil province of Scythia and the city of Leontopolis from its application. According to the Zeno's law and the information discussed above regarding the status of the Tomitan see, the whole province of Scythia was under the direct jurisdiction of the metropolitan bishop of Tomis, up until at least 536 (the year of the second publication of the *Codex Justinianus*).

The year 536 was also marked by two important changes, which both took place during May: the see of Bosporus was granted the rank of *metropolis* and Justinian created *quaestura exercitus Justiniani*, containing Scythia, Moesia Secunda, Caria, Ciprus and the Cycladic islands, under the authority of *praefectum Scythiae*[80]. Also, by this year, the bishoprics of Chersones and Odessos were transferred from the authority of the Tomitan hierarch (Odessos somewhere between 518 and 536, Chersones most probably in 536).[81] These are markers of what could possibly be a reorganization of the ecclesiastical structure of the province, leading to the situation that can be found in the *Notitia* nr. 3, with Scythia Minor having (most probably by the end of the sixth century) fourteen suffragan bishops to the metropolitan one of Tomis.

Conclusions

Reviewing the secondary literature on this topic and confronting it to the primary sources used, we can conclude that Holubeanu's work brings one of the best interpretations of the issue discussed, managing to harmonize the conflicting information given by the ancient and early medieval texts. Thus, based upon his 2018 book regarding the ecclesiastical organization in both

[78] From the answers of Moesian bishops to Emperor Leo's *Encyclia*, cited by Holubeanu, 2024a.
[79] Also pointed out by Holubeanu.
[80] Mărculeț, 2017.
[81] Holubeanu, 2018.

Scythia and Moesia Secunda, the Tomitan see went through three stages between the beginning of the 4th and the half of the 6th centuries:

1. Possibly (given the very few information) an ordinary bishopric overseeing the whole Scythian province between the beginning of the 4th century and 381 (as a *terminus ante quem*).
2. Metropolitan see overseeing Chersones, Bosporus and Odessos from 381 until 536.
3. Metropolitan see overseeing suffragan bishops in Scythia from 536 until the beginning of the seventh century (although we do not agree with Holubeanu's opinion regarding the existence of fourteen bishoprics, only eight being archaeologically proven, and only three being certain).

This interpretation isn't yet harmonized with the archaeological data, problem pointed out by the later critique of Holubeanu's volume, but despite this issue, his contribution brought new and valuable understanding to the topic of Christianity in Scythia. Holubeanu's various works regarding Scythian Christianity do not only bring a theologian in a field dominated by archaeologists and classicists, but also prove that even in spite of centuries of analysis, the study of primary sources still plays an important role in the historical research.

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Sergiu Popovici, *Cultura Usatovo. Arheologia funerară a unei societăți din epoca bronzului*, Târgoviște, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2023, 475 pag., ISBN 978-606-537-623-6

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Lucrarea semnată de Sergiu Popovici**,** publicată în 2023 sub titlul *„Cultura Usatovo. Arheologia funerară a unei societăți din Epoca Bronzului”* este o contribuție majoră la înțelegerea fenomenului funerar preistoric din zona nord-vestică a Mării Negre și, totodată, un reper esențial în cercetarea culturii Usatovo. Volumul, rezultat al unei teze de doctorat susținute la Universitatea „Ștefan cel Mare” din Suceava, este structurat riguros, având o construcție monografică clasică, dar modernizată prin aportul de date inedite, sinteze comparative și o iconografie bogată.

Volumul oferă o analiză detaliată a complexului de descoperiri funerare asociate culturii Usatovo. Structurată în mai multe capitole, lucrarea reflectă stadiul actual al cercetărilor dedicate acestei culturi: de la istoricul cercetărilor și abordările istoriografice, la studiul necropolelor, analiza obiectelor funerare, încercarea de periodizare, interferențele culturale în zona nord-vestică a Mării Negre (din a doua jumătate a mileniului IV până în debutul mileniului III î.Hr.), până la concluzii și catalogul descoperirilor.

Din punct de vedere interpretativ, Sergiu Popovici susține că Usatovo constituie o extensie a culturii Cernavoda I, influențată profund de tradițiile tripoliene târzii, dar în același timp, o cultură de frontieră care prefigurează tranziția către modelele economice și funerare ale culturilor de stepă. Volumul acordă atenție deosebită ritualurilor funerare, tipurilor de inventar, poziției defuncților și arhitecturii tumulare, reușind să contureze un model coerent al practicilor mortuare în această zonă la sfârșitul mileniului IV î.Hr.

Printre exemplele notabile se numără tumulii de la Sadove și Moloha, pentru care au fost incluse imagini oferite de arheologul Al. Maliukevici, implicat direct în săpăturile respective. Alte vestigii au fost documentate prin fotografii realizate în muzee din Chișinău, Odesa sau Ismail, în timp ce pentru necropola de la Purcari au fost utilizate materiale din arhiva lui E. Iarovoi. Totodată, sunt prezentate pentru prima dată desene ale pieselor din tumulul de la Oleksandrivka, un complex remarcabil, dar până acum puțin cunoscut.

Planșele volumului sunt dispuse în conformitate cu structura lucrării. Primele 42 se

leagă de partea teoretică, iar următoarele (43–237) ilustrează descoperirile funerare catalogate. Ultimele cinci planșe (238–242) oferă o imagine comparativă între ceramica Usatovo și ceramica pictată aparținând fazei finale a culturii Cucuteni (Tripolie CII), evidențiind similitudini și diferențe stilistice între diversele faze (de la Bădragi la Jivotilovka). Fiecare sit este însoțit de planșe dedicate, în special în cazul necropolelor tumulare, unde ordinea prezentării respectă cronologia săpăturilor. Sunt incluse, totodată, și tabele comparative care sintetizează informații despre tipul mormintelor, orientarea și poziția defuncților, facilitând interpretări asupra relației dintre ritual, inventar și structura funerară.

Volumul impresionează prin seriozitatea cercetării, introducerea de informații nepublicate anterior, valorificarea materialului rezultat din săpături mai vechi și reinterpretarea acestora. Având la bază o teză de doctorat, lucrarea respectă rigorile unei monografii arheologice clasice și aduce laolaltă o cantitate considerabilă de date utile celor interesați de transformările din a doua jumătate a mileniului IV î.Hr. în spațiul vest-pontic.

Este important de subliniat că această lucrare constituie prima monografie românească dedicată culturii Usatovo. În trecut, literatura de specialitate din România folosea denumirea „Gorodsk–Usatovo” pentru a desemna manifestările post-Cucuteni din estul Carpaților, inclusiv pentru unele faze post-Gumelnița. Pe măsura avansării cercetărilor, această denumire a fost înlocuită de nume mai precise pentru grupuri sau culturi locale, cum ar fi Horodiștea, Erbiceni, Folteşti, Stoicani, Târpești ș.a., fără a renunța însă la cadrul cronologic sincron.

Totodată, materiale noi sau reevaluate din situri precum Frumușica, Brad, Cârligi, Târpești, Vânători-Neamț, Costești sau cele mai sudice (Smeeni, Târgșoru Nou, Dămăroaia, Brăilița) au fost recent publicate. Acestea, împreună cu datările radiocarbon, confirmă sincronismul zonei extracarpatice cu cultura Tripolie CII, Usatovo și Jivotilovka, dar și cu complexul Baden–Coțofeni din vest. Această etapă cronologică precede emergența culturii funerare Iamnaia, care va schimba profund peisajul arheologic regional.

După cultura Cernavoda I, care nu cunoaște morminte tumulare în zona Dunării de Jos, Usatovo pare să joace un rol de tranziție, conectând influențele tripoliene cu formele emergente de organizare socială și economică ale culturilor de stepă. Chiar dacă zona vestică a Prutului se află în afara nucleului Usatovo, influențele sunt vizibile. Cercetările recente din nordul Munteniei au evidențiat o dezvoltare proprie, cu morminte tumulare deosebite, inventare bogate și indicii ale metalurgiei timpurii, care amintesc de contexte similare Usatovo.

Un element distinctiv îl constituie apariția cercurilor de piatră în jurul mormintelor

principale, posibil o expresie a influenței acestei culturi. În România, însă, tradiția interpretării mormintelor cu ocru și a celor Iamnaia ca un tot unitar a limitat identificarea diversității lor culturale și cronologice. În lipsa importurilor clare, corelarea acestora cu fenomenele locale a fost dificilă.

Studiul contrazice ideea conform căreia toate mormintele tumulare ar aparține culturii Iamnaia, susținând existența unei varietăți de practici funerare și influențe culturale anterioare acestui fenomen. Astfel, volumul oferă un cadru interpretativ necesar pentru înțelegerea complexității structurilor funerare preistorice și pentru reinterpretarea cronologiilor funerare în spațiul extracarpatic.

Anthony A. Barrett și John-C. Yardley, *The Emperor Caligula in the Ancient Sources*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023, 203 pag., ISBN 978-0-19-885457-9

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Volumul semnat de Anthony A. Barrett și John-C. Yardley, *The Emperor Caligula in the Ancient Sources*, publicat de Oxford University Press, în anul 2023, oferă o abordare cuprinzătoare a domniei împăratului roman Gaius, cunoscut sub numele de Caligula. Lucrarea se remarcă printr-o structură dual, îmbinând o narațiune biografică riguroasă cu o selecție amplă de fragmente din sursele literare, epigrafice și numismatice ale Antichității, însoțite de note explicative și comentarii critice. Comparativ cu alte lucrări precum: *Caligula: The Corruption of Power* de Anthony Barrett (1989) sau C*aligulla: A Biography* de Aloys Winterling (2011), volumul din 2023 aduce o contribuție originală prin faptul că nu impune o interpretare narativă, ci permite cititorului să confrunte direct sursele.

Lucrarea apare într-un moment în care istoriografia clasică este tot mai interesată de relectura critică a surselor antice și de deconstruirea portretelor tradiționale ale marilor figuri istorice. Această alegere este deosebit de actuală, încât reflectă tendințele recente ale cercetării istorice, care acordă prioritate analizei sursei primare în detrimentul narațiunilor secundare. Totuși, sursele antice despre împăratul Caligula sunt fragmentare și adesea contradictorii, ceea ce face dificilă realizarea unei biografii coerente. În acest context, autorii aleg să nu ofere o narațiune biografică tradițională, ci să lase sursele să „vorbească” direct, cu sprijinul comentariilor și al interpretărilor punctuale. Această alegere metodologică transformă cartea într-un instrument util nu doar pentru cercetători, ci și pentru publicul larg interesat de istoria romană. „O biografie a lui Caligula, în sensul modern obișnuit al cuvântului, este o sarcină insurmontabilă și nu poate fi decât o

interpretare personală sumară de către un istoric individual a unei mase de materiale incoerente și adesea inconsistente."[1]

Autorii își propun să depășească imaginea stereotipică a lui Caligula, cel descris în mod tradițional ca un tiran „dement" și crud. Deși Caligula manifesta comportamente autoritare, nu există dovezi concludente care să ateste o nebunie clinică. De la bun început, Barrett și Yardley atrag atenția asupra a ceea ce ei numesc „paradoxul caligulan": o figură istorică extrem de vizibilă în cultura populară, dar esențialmente inaccesibilă istoric, tocmai din cauza abundenței de surse părtinitoare și contradictorii. În schimb, ei îl descriu ca pe un individ imprevizibil, a cărei personalitate este influențată de contextul politic și personal în care a trăit. Tacitus, cel mai fiabil cronicar roman al epocii, lipsește aproape complet din peisajul documentar, iar ceilalți autori antici disponibili, în special Suetonius, Cassius Dio, Seneca și Josephus, trebuie evaluați cu o vigilență critică sporită.

Cartea este structurată într-o manieră ce amintește de o biografie convențională, dar cu inserții frecvente de fragmente și pasaje din surse. Autorii aleg să introducă întâi comentariul contextual, urmat de textele sursă, ceea ce face ca lectura să curgă narativ, dar cu opriri regulate pentru reflecție. Deși sursele materiale sunt ilustrate uneori, lipsa redării textelor literare în limbile originale (latină și greacă) poate fi un dezavantaj pentru cititorul avansat.

Lucrarea este structurată în opt capitole tematice și cronologice: „Familia și copilăria", „Tânărul Caligula", „Ascensiunea", „Tensiunile", „Caligula cel privat", „Caligula cel public", „În afara Romei", „Asasinatul", precedate de o introducere extensivă și însoțite de o selecție de peste 300 de pasaje antice traduse. În plus, se oferă un glosar generos de termeni specifici, referințe bibliografice esențiale, o hartă a Imperiului Roman și un arbore genealogic al familiei imperiale. Această structură face din volum nu doar o contribuție academică importantă, ci și un excelent instrument pedagogic, util atât pentru studenți, cât și pentru cercetători.

Introducerea cărții, deși nu este gândită ca un eseu autonom, oferă un cadru general care se prelungește organic în restul volumului, cu trimiteri interne organizate mai degrabă

[1] Anthony A. Barrett și John C. Yardley, *The Emperor Caligula in the Ancient Sources*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023, p. VI.

pe baza structurii cărții decât prin referințe directe la textele antice. Partea introductivă prezintă succint viața lui Caligula, începând cu contextul istoric anterior nașterii sale (anul 44 î.Hr.), urmată de o trecere în revistă a surselor disponibile. Ultima secțiune a introducerii, intitulată sugestiv „Problema", scoate în evidență două exemple revelatoare: unul privind politicile din Africa, unde sursele literare sunt în dezacord, și altul referitor la imaginea lui Agrippa, unde o monedă pare să contrazică afirmațiile lui Suetonius. Această parte sugerează o preferință clară a autorilor pentru sursele materiale (inscripții, monede), adesea în defavoarea celor literare, chiar și atunci când argumentația nu este complet dezvoltată.

Primele patru capitole sunt organizate cronologic: de la copilăria lui Caligula până la tensiunile din perioada premergătoare domniei. Urmează trei capitole tematice, care tratează aspecte ale vieții private și publice ale împăratului, precum și acțiunile sale în afara Romei. Ultimul capitol revine la firul cronologic, concentrându-se pe asasinarea sa. Capitolul despre copilărie și familie se extinde pentru a introduce contextul din generațiile anterioare, iar cel despre tinerețe include speculații psihologice despre posibilele gânduri sau motivații ale tânărului Caligula.

Printre meritele majore ale lucrării se numără efortul constant al autorilor de a contextualiza sursele și de a evidenția complexitatea procesului istoriografic. Cititorului i se reamintește constant că istoria antică nu se scrie pe baza unor „adevăruri absolute", ci prin negocierea și analiza critică a unor surse imperfecte. Tocmai această poziție epistemologică matură conferă lucrării un statut aparte între studiile dedicate lui Caligula. Barrett și Yardley nu evită subiectele controversate: incestul presupus cu surorile, deificarea Drusillei, execuțiile arbitrare sau faimoasa expediție către Canalul Mânecii. Însă în loc să le trateze anecdotic, așa cum fac autorii antici, ei le supun unei analize atente, contextualizându-le politic și cultural. Astfel, episoadele care altădată păreau dovada clară a nebuniei împăratului devin simptome ale unei relații tensionate între împărat, senat, armata și alte instituții ale Romei imperiale.

De asemenea, autorii dedică un spațiu consistent relațiilor lui Caligula cu lumea iudaică, inclusiv episodului cu delegația lui Philo din Alexandria și tentativa de instalare a statuii imperiale în Templul din Ierusalim. Aceste aspecte sunt tratate cu rigoare și oferă o imagine mai complexă asupra poziției Romei față de provinciile sale orientale.

Ca puncte tari, pot aminti accesul direct la sursele primare, o structură pedagogică clară, o abordare critică și echilibrată, dar și interdisciplinaritate. Totuși, metoda aleasă, prezentarea fragmentelor urmate de comentarii, poate crea dificultăți în menținerea unei narațiuni fluente. Cititorii fără o minimă familiaritate cu istoria Romei sau cu metodologia istorică pot resimți o fragmentare a discursului. De asemenea, ar fi fost utilă o reflecție mai aprofundată asupra criteriilor de selecție a pasajelor incluse.

Această lucrare poate fi utilizată în mod educativ, poate reprezenta un instrument pentru gândirea critică și poate inspira o serie de volume similare pentru alți împărați romani. Deși există pericolul suprasaturării în domeniul lucrărilor despre acest împărat, lucrarea de față oferă o abordare inteligentă și matură a unei figuri istorice controversate. Tocmai de aceea considerăm că este utilă, și, mai ales, că nu ,,vinde" o poveste senzațională, ci o cercetare onestă, chiar dacă sursele primare s-ar fi cuvenit să fie prezentate și în limba originală și să existe mai multe ilustrații a obiectelor arheologice discutate.

Cu toate acestea, *The Emperor Caligula in the Ancient Sources* reprezintă o lucrare solidă, de referință, care reușește să depășească clișeele despre împăratul Caligula și să restituie o imagine mai echilibrată și contextualizată a domniei sale. Este o contribuție valoroasă la studiile romane și un exemplu remarcabil de aplicare critică a surselor antice, util atât pentru specialiști, cât și pentru publicul cultivat interesat de istoria Imperiului Roman.

Eckart Frahm, *Assyria. The Rise and Fall of the World's First Empire,* New York, Basic Books, 2023, 528 pag., ISBN: 9781541674400

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Volumul lui Eckart Frahm*, Assyria. The Rise and Fall of the World's First Empire,* apărut la prestigioasa editură Basic Books în anul 2023, reprezintă una dintre cele mai ambițioase și bine documentate sinteze recente dedicate istoriei Asiriei. Cartea se adresează unui public larg, folosind o narațiune accesibilă, dar poate fi utilizată și ca lucrare de sinteză în mediul academic și în cercurile universitare. Eckart Frahm este profesor de asiriologie la Universitatea Yale și autorul unor contribuții importante în domeniul studiilor asiriene și babiloniene. Prin această lucrare, autorul nu dorește strict să prezinte Asiria, ci să o și plaseze în contextul istoric larg prin interacțiunile cu Egipt, Elam și Babilon. De asemenea, un punct central al acestei lucrări este popularizarea acestui imperiu pentru publicul larg prin expunerea narativă a ascensiunii și perioadei de glorie a acestei civilizații, dar și prin expunerea declinului și a moștenirii lăsate lumii de către Imperiul Asirian. Volumul este structurat în cinci capitole principale și optsprezece subcapitole. Volumul începe cu o introducere generală a subiectului, ce este urmată de stabilirea cadrului metodologic și justifică alegerea titlului, Asiria ca fiind primul imperiu al lumii. Această idee este dezbătută de către istorici, iar Frahm arată cum anumite imperii sunt mai favorizate de istorici decât altele.

Dacă excludem capitolul de introducere și epilogul, volumul este împărțit în trei părți importante, părți care doresc să arate formarea cronologică a imperiului, perioada sa de glorie, dar și căderea acestuia. Primul capitol intitulat „The Long Road to Glory", împărțit în patru subcapitole, tratează perioada preimperială și timpurie a Asiriei. Primul subcapitol începe cu o descriere a originilor orașului Aššur, prezentat nu doar ca un centru comercial, ci și ca un actor emergent în rețelele comerciale ale epocii. Acest oraș este considerat ca fiind originea Imperiului Asirian și nu doar că a fost un oraș-stat important în perioada timpurie, dar a și rămas unul important în perioada imperială. Următorul subcapitol urmărește tranziția de la un oraș-stat autonom la un regat cu autoritate regională în care sunt evidențiate rolul dinastiei, consolidarea elitei locale și începuturile regale. Ultimele două părți ale acestui capitol analizează perioadele de criză ale regatului asirian, perioade caracterizate de invazii și instabilitate politică, perioadă ce a culminat cu un conflict dinastic major și reinterpretarea rolului conducătorului în

societate. Acum suveranii foloseau ideologia divină și continuitatea simbolică a regalității pentru a-și menține puterea, fapt ce a dus la stabilirea bazei Imperiului Asirian.

Următorul capitol principal al acestui volum este și cel mai voluminos, fiind împărțit în zece subcapitole ce tratează perioada imperială a Asiriei, prezentând anumite figuri regale, evenimente, dar și caracteristici ale societății imperiale. Capitolul intitulat „Empire" începe cu o descriere a epocii imperiale în care se discută reformele militare, reorganizarea administrativă și instaurarea unui sistem de taxare coerent, factori ce au permis o stabilitate a imperiului și o extindere fără precedent pentru acea perioadă. Partea administrativă este discutată mai amănunțit în al doilea subcapitol în care sunt detaliate regiunile din zonele de frontieră ale imperiului, respectiv Anatolia, Elam și partea sudică din Levant, și relația acestor regiuni cu centrul puterii. Ideologia divină a împăratului și centralizarea religiei a dus și la crearea unor anumite anxietăți religioase în imperiu, respectiv cele despre moarte, spirite și fantome. De asemenea, autorul ne prezintă și obiceiurile funerare ale asirienilor, mai ales cele ce aveau contact cu regalitatea. Frahm se folosește și de sursele biblice printr-o comparație cu sursele cuneiforme pentru a crea o descriere amplă a contextului militar și diplomatic, folosindu-se de cazul specific al regelui Sanherib la porțile Ierusalimului. Frahm notează și problema celui mai important adversar al asirienilor, Babilonul, într-un subcapitol dedicat acestui subiect. Dar ce este interesant în acest conflict este că nu există un sentiment strict de ură între cele două națiuni, ci și unul de admirație. În aceste relații dintre puteri, un rol important îl avea și regina-mamă, în special cazul lui Naqia, mama lui Esarhaddon, rol ce este amplu discutat în subcapitolul intitulat „Mother Knows Best".

Eckart Frahm ne oferă în ultima parte a acestui capitol două descrieri ample ale unor regi asirieni, o descriere fiind cea a regelui Esarhaddon și a campaniei sale de cucerire a Egiptului. Prin analizarea acestui conflict foarte important, autorul ne oferă informații și despre dificultățile guvernării unei regiuni îndepărtate. A doua descriere regală este ce a regelui Ashurbanipal, care este prezentat ca un colecționar de texte și om ce valora informația, dar și ca un conducător nemilos. Capitolul se încheie cu o scurtă prezentare a vieții cotidiene din imperiu, cu o descriere a vieților muncitorilor, scribilor, soldaților și meșteșugarilor și cu accent pe sursele administrative și judiciare. Această prezentare a vieții cotidiene este urmată de o descriere a conflictelor interne ce au dus la pierderea controlului anumitor provincii și a asediilor intense și succesive ce au dus la o epuizare a resurselor imperiale și la o cădere bruscă a Imperiului Asirian.

Ultimul capitol dintre cele trei menționate este capitolul intitulat „Afterlife", în care sunt analizate moștenirile fizice și culturale lăsate de Imperiul Asirian succesorilor săi. Această parte este împărțită în

patru subcapitole, primul dintre acestea discutând infrastructura lăsată de către asirieni deoarece drumurile, canalele, palatele și orașele întemeiate au continuat să fie utilizate de succesorii babilonieni și persani, fapt ce demonstrează o continuitate regională a imperiului. Pe partea administrativă, Asiria a lăsat modelul ei de guvernare ce i-a permis ascensiunea către Imperiu, model ce a fost urmat de către babilonieni și de către persani. Frahm analizează acest model comparându-l cu cel al Imperiului Persan și cel Roman, identificând potențialele influențe directe ale Asiriei. Problema cercetării este acea a surselor pentru perioada de după căderea imperiului deoarece ultimele texte cuneiforme scrise au fost datate în jurul anului 600 î.Hr., iar cele utilizate după această dată provin din surse terțe precum mențiunările biblice și cele din literatura greacă. În încheierea acestui capitol, Eckart Frahm analizează distrugerile moderne ale siturilor asiriene din cauza unor săpături excesive și uneori realizate de oameni fără experiență, până la distrugerile culturale masive realizate de către ISIS.

În ultimul capitol al acestui volum intitulat „Epilog”, Eckart Frahm menționează ca Imperiul Asirian este văzut într-o lumină proastă de mulți dintre cercetători, iar că lipsa unor săpături profesionale pentru cercetare provine tocmai din această umbră adusă de către comunitatea academică. Acesta îl dă exemplu pe criticul de artă Jonathan Jones care menționa într-o declarație că „Egiptul și Grecia au fost civilizații, Asiria nu.” De asemenea, au fost multe critici aduse de către arheologi din perspectiva unei înclinări pro-asiriene în cercetări, critica principală adusă Imperiului Asirian fiind că a fost unul foarte crud și dur în cuceririle sale. Problema din spatele acestei declarații, după cum spune și autorul în acest capitol, este că această cruzime asiriană nu este analizată și în comparație cu Imperiul Roman, spre exemplu. Ambele Imperii au fost dure în cuceririle sale, deci din aceste declarații critice Asiriei putem vedea perspectiva negativă, părtinitoare a anumitori cercetători. Este adevărat că Asiria prezenta o cruzime și violență destul de evidentă, mai ales din perspectiva cuceririlor sale, dar nu este cu nimic mai profundă decât cruzimea Romană.

Eckart Frahm a realizat un studiu foarte important și necesar pentru această perioadă și pentru această zonă geografică. După cum am văzut în ultimul capitol, multă lume poate pleca cu o perspectivă deja negativă asupra civilizațiilor din această zonă geografică, astfel că o lucrare introductivă precum aceasta poate ajuta la distrugerea cortinei și la răspândirea dorinței de cercetare nu doar pentru Imperiul Asirian, dar și pentru toată regiunea mesopotamiană din mileniile II și I î.Hr. Această lucrare dorește să creeze noi pasionați pentru cunoașterea istoriei Mesopotamiei, adresându-se deopotrivă unui public larg și unui plublic mai avizat, din mediul științific.

Daniel Unruh, *Talking to Tyrants in Classical Greek Thought*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2023, VIII+272 pag., ISBN 978-1-78962-123-5, ISBNe 978-1-78962-426-7

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Daniel Unruh este cadru didactic al Universității Cambridge, unde predă greaca veche, literatură și istorie. Cercetarea sa se axează pe studiul evoluției gândirii politice și sociale, precum și pe studiul relației dintre spațiul civic și puterea politică în mentalitatea greco-romană[1].

Unruh urmărește în *Talking to Tyrants in Classical Greek Thought*, bazată pe lucrarea sa de doctorat, perspectivele scriitorilor antici asupra relațiilor dintre cetățeni și monarhi, în special, modul în care aceștia ar trebui să interacționeze cu monarhii. Scrierile lui Herodot, Xenofon, Isocrate, Platon și Demostene sunt analizate și interpretate prin intermediul unor metode inspirate din teoria comunicării interculturale, precum se anunță încă din introducerea cărții. Lucrarea este compusă din opt părți: introducerea, șase capitole care prezintă analiza de la baza cercetării și un epilog. Fiecare parte a cărții este împărțită în mai multe secțiuni, ceea ce facilitează lecturarea lucrării.

Primul capitol, denumit *Intercultural Interaction in Herodotus and the Fifth Century*, ilustrează convingerile lui Herodot asupra faptului că monarhii nu sunt capabili și nu ar dori să își modifice discursul pentru a-l adapta pentru interlocutorii lor, iar cetățenii riscă să își piardă identitatea, adaptându-se la perspectiva monarhilor. În cadrul capitolului sunt analizate cele trei discursuri referitoare la formele de guvernare, din cartea a III-a a *Istoriilor*, și diferite instanțe în care cetățeni greci interacționează cu monarhi, precum interacțiunile dintre Solon, Alcmeon și Cresus. Asupra unor aspecte analizate este adusă în discuție și perspectiva lui Aristotel. De asemenea, în unele instanțe sunt invocate situații similare din istoria actuală.

Al doilea capitol, *Re-educating the Tyrant in Xenophon's Hiero*, prezintă o schimbare de perspectivă asupra interacțiunii cu monarhii. Capitolul expune ideile ilustrate în lucrările lui Xenofon, dar se axează pe dialogul dintre poetul Simonides și Hiero, tiranul din Siracuza. În cadrul dialogului, Simonides dă dovadă de calitățile unui „interculturalist", prin folosirea practicilor de bun negociator și a strategiei diplomației morale, ceea ce îi permite să pătrundă

[1] *Historiai*, Daniel B. Unruh: https://danielbunruh.wordpress.com/about/, accesat la data de 24.05.2025.

în universul cultural și moral al interlocutorului său. Prin acestea, poetul inițiază o reconstrucție civică a tiranului. Perspectiva lui Xenofon este comparată cu aceea a lui Herodot, iar analiza surselor literare este secondată de surse epigrafice și de paralele din perioada contemporană.

Cel de al treilea capitol, intitulat *Intercultural Communication in Xenophon's Anabasis*, se concentrează tot pe viziunea lui Xenofon, pentru a evidenția modul prin care acesta a „anticipat" ideile teoriei comunicării interculturale. Analizarea interacțiunilor, avute de către greci cu alte popoare din imperiul persan, ilustrează prejudecățile și lipsa de înțelegere a culturilor diferite, ceea ce determină ca părțile implicate să nu perceapă negocierile în același mod.

Al patrulea capitol, *Isokrates. Making Laws for Monarchs*, se axează pe lucrările lui Isocrate, dar se pune accentul pe scrisorile sale către diverși lideri autocrați, precum regele Nicocles din Salamis, Filip al II-lea, Alexandru cel Mare sau Timotheus din Heraclea Pontica. Perspectiva lui Isocrate ar anticipa concepția modernă care se opune interculturalismului și care susține că practicile diplomatice sunt la nivelul de dezvoltare la care diplomații folosesc un limbaj profesional al domeniului. În viziunea lui Isocrate, cultura și structura socială nu reprezintă obstacole pentru un bun orator. Cu toate acestea, abordarea sa are anumite limite, ilustrate prin faptul că apelează la tehnici de comunicare interculturală în scrisoarea către Filip al II-lea. Perspectiva lui Isocrate este comparată cu aceea a lui Xenofon și sunt consultate informații din afirmațiile lui Demostene.

Cel de al cincilea capitol din lucrare, cu denumirea *A Platonic Rejoinder*, atrage atenția asupra faptului că este dificil de identificat care sunt principiile pe baza cărora Platon își construiește perspectiva. Ideile care se regăsesc în mod repetat în lucrările sale, precum și ideile care nu sunt combătute în cadrul dezbaterilor, pot să fie considerate că aparțin filosofului[2]. Este subliniat faptul că, în scrierile sale, Platon condamnă încercarea de a educa monarhii, având o viziune asemănătoare cu Herodot, dar îl găsim pe acesta și pe discipolii săi în ipostaza în care consiliază diverși conducători autocrați. În cazul lui Platon este analizată interacțiunea cu Dionysios al II-lea. În cadrul capitolului sunt examinate principalele lucrări ale lui Platon, dar și șapte dintre cele treisprezece scrisori care i-au fost atribuite, deși Unruh nu se declară convins de argumentele aduse pentru a îl numi pe filosof drept autor al scrisorilor.

Al șaselea capitol din cadrul cărții, intitulat *From Theory to Practice. Talking to Tyrants in Demosthenes and his Contemporaries*, ilustrează tensiunea și anxietățile care caracterizau comunitatea ateniană în secolul al IV-lea î.Hr. Pe de o parte, protejarea libertății și dreptății era

[2] Unruh 2023, 152.

componenta centrală a identității ateniene, pe de altă parte, relațiile cu monarhii erau necesități din punct de vedere economic și strategic pentru Atena, în pofida faptului că asocierea cu liderii autocrați nu era sigură pentru statele constituționale. Diplomația ateniană tradițională prezintă anumite lipsuri în interacțiunile cu monarhii, iar polifonia grupului democratic de ambasadori este percepută drept o slăbiciune a comunității de către conducătorii autocrați. Discursurile lui Demostene, care au fost cele mai bine conservate până în zilele noastre, și ale contemporanilor săi, precum Eschine, sunt analizate alături de surse epigrafice pentru a evidenția discrepanța dintre idealul discursului atenian și practica diplomatică a secolului al IV-lea î.Hr.

Ultima parte a lucrării, *Epilogue: A Lasting Legacy*, poate să fie împărțită în două secțiuni. Partea incipientă a epilogului ilustrează faptul că dispare paradigma interculturală în perioada elenistică, pe baza scrierilor lui Diogenes Laertius, Plutarh, Aristotel, Demetrius din Falera, Diodorus Siculus, Photios și a informațiilor din sursele epigrafice. Acest fenomen se întâmplă în contextul în care monarhia era o parte majoritară a scenei politice. În ultima parte a epilogului, Daniel Unruh evidențiază ideea că problemele actuale ale societăților noastre nu și-ar găsi soluțiile în scrierile gânditorilor antici, în ciuda faptului că există în perioada contemporană numeroase situații similare celor din antichitate. De asemenea, Unruh subliniază faptul că este dificil de spus cât de eficiente au fost soluțiile respective la momentul formulării lor. Cu toate acestea, ar exista câteva lecții din antichitate care pot fi aplicate în perioada contemporană. Autorul invită cititorul să aleagă singur care sunt aceste lecții, iar apoi oferă patru sugestii proprii. Unruh atrage atenția asupra faptului că, în contextul ascensiunii diverșilor lideri cu viziuni autoritare, abordarea interculturală și strategia diplomației morale nu sunt lipsite de riscuri, iar înțelegerea se poate transforma chiar în simpatie.

Conchizând, *Talking to Tyrants in Classical Greek Thought* oferă o nouă abordare asupra diplomației ateniene, prin analiza bazată pe teoria comunicării interculturale. Explicarea clară și concisă a contextelor istoriei antice și a conceptelor politologice, prezentarea fiecărui autor aflat in centrul analizei, alături de structura și limbajul ușor de urmărit, oferă unui public mai larg accesul prin lectură la lucrarea scrisă de către Daniel Unruh.

Daniela Zaharia, Vladimir Crețulescu (coords), *Sensibilități, obsesii, fobii și istoriile lor neașteptate/ Sensitivities, Obsessions, Phobias, and Their Intriguing Histories*, 2024, Editura Universității din București, 282 pag., ISBN: 978-606-16-1499-8

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Volumul colectiv pe care îl coordonează Daniela Zaharia și Vladimir Crețulescu la Editura Universității din București se încadrează într-o tendință foarte actuală în studiile istorice. Nu este vorba numai despre deschiderea spre cercetarea interdisciplinară, prin asocierea metodelor și conceptelor din istoriografie, pshihologie, istoria artelor, sociologia culturii, dar și despre interesesul față de psihologia istorică (sau istoria psihologică?) ca direcție de studii tot mai afirmată. Așa cum indică Daniela Zaharia în studiul său introductiv, în ultimele două decenii s-au înmulțit demersurile pentru o explorare mai sistematică a subiectivității ca agent al schimbării istorice. Fie că este vorba despre ample proiecte instituționale, precum "Max Plank Institute for Human Development Center for the History of Emotions", "Queen Mary Centre for the History of Emotions", sau "Historical Psychology Project" al Harvard University, fie că este vorba despre lucrări care dezvoltă în acest sens noi dimensiuni ale istoriei sociale a intelectualilor, precum *L'Empire des émotions : les historiens dans la mêlée*, semnată de Christophe Prochasson (2008, Paris: Démopolis), re-evaluarea importanței sensibilității și emoțiilor în interpretarea mecanismelor istorice devine o temă de actualitate.

Coordonatorii volumului își propun să meargă dincolo de interesul pentru istoria emoțiilor, asociată mai ales cu istoria culturală sau a mentalităților, pentru a explora terenul mai profund al obsesiilor patologice și al fobiilor sociale, cadre în care prosperă unele dintre cele mai tragice exemple de inumanitate din istorie, precum și unele dintre cele mai fertile forme de eliberare din constrângerile culturale. Întrebarea fundamentală pe care o pun în fața autorilor invitați este legată de modul în care cercetarea istorică, în mare măsură caracterizată de empirism, poate să devină, prin explorarea textelor și artefactelor, o nouă și inedită sursă pentru înțelegerea psihologiei umane, individuală și colectivă. În sens invers și simetric, autorii experimentează validitatea și utilitatea conceptelor psihologice pentru o mai profundă cunoaștere a condiționărilor specifice unor variate procese istorice.

Lucrarea este împărțită în patru părți, a căror organizare nu urmează un criteriu cronologic, ci unul tematic, inspirat de tipologia fenomenelor psihologice/istorice interogate. Prima secțiune, intitulată "Fragilitatea corpului, energia emoțiilor/Body Frailty and Emotional Energy", include contribuții ale unor istorici de artă: Tasos Angelopoulos, Mihai Pascar, Federica Stevanin și Emilia Petre. Textele lor, fie că studiază impactul socio-politic al expunerii publice a vulnerabilității (Angelopoulos, Pascar), fie că analizează relația dintre arta lui Alighiero e Boetti și personalitatea lui dihotomică (Stevanin) sau psihologia camuflării și a metamorfozei individului exprimată în *anime* (Emilia Petre), ne pun în fața unor studii de caz a căror interpretare beneficiază în egală măsură de disecarea proceselor psihologice și de contextualizarea lor culturală.

În secțiunea a doua, "Istorii la limita rațiunii ... și dincolo de ea/ Stories at the boundaries of reason... and beyond", suntem aduși pe terenul mai ferm și (aparent) mai prozaic al istoriei fenomenelor politice. Extrăgându-și exemplele dintr-o varietate de civilizații istorice și punându-ne în fața unui crescendo al emoțiilor periculoase, autorii celor patru studii incluse aici comentează rolul orgoliului, ambiției, al spaimei paralizante și pe cel al urii colective ca fundament sau facilitator psihologic al unor evoluții istorice majore în Grecia antică (Alexandra Lițu, Mihaela Marcu), China imperială (Daniela Zaharia) și în Europa medievală (Laurențiu Săcui). Aceste cazuri, care sfidează rațiunea "comună" sunt plasate într-un pandant foarte interesant cu cele patru care compun secțiunea a treia, dedicată exploatării politice a emoțiilor „banale": „Sensibilități politice/ Political sensitivities". Se poate spune că această a treia parte a volumului prezintă și cea mai mare diversitate epistemică, prin alăturarea perspectivei istoricului asupra propagandei regale în modernitatea timpurie (Ecaterina Lung), cu cea a istoricului de artă (Vladimir Crețulescu, cu un studiu asupra fotografiei ca instrument al compunerii unei identități colective; Eugen Rădescu, cu o analiză a reinventării corpului ca suport artistic în constituirea unei rezistențe politice) și cu cel al etnologului (Florica Mihuț, cu un studiu dedicat reacțiilor emoționale în fața femeii politice în România contemporană).

„Neliniștile omului modern /The Anxieties of the Modern Man" ocupă cea de a patra secțiune a lucrării, în care sunt comentate exemple extrase din istoria variatelor etape ale modernității în secolele XIX-XXI. Concentrându-se pe un teren care din punct de vedere cronologic și istoric este mai unitar, aceste analize explorează sensibilități moderne manifestate în cadre culturale diferite, dar care au în comun tumultul emoțional care însoțește ritmurile accelerate ale schimbării. Reacția în fața alterității este surprinsă în plină dinamică a trecerii de la curiozitatea descoperirii la *voyeurism* (Simona Corlan, Iulia Ciocoiu, Antonia Apetrei), în timp ce neliniștea sau entuziasmul hrănesc nașterea unor noi forme de societate (Alin Ciupală,

Cristina Gudin, Iuliana Dumitru). Viabilitatea provocării lansate de coordonatorii volumului își găsește aici confirmarea prin vădita aplicabilitate a interogării subiectivismelor în procesul de modernizare deopotrivă în Europa occidentală, în spațiul românesc sau în Japonia ultimelor două secole.

Dincolo de calitatea individuală și de diversitatea studiilor pe care le reunește, această lucrare are meritul de a aduce în peisajul istoriografic românesc o problematică inovatoare, în cheie interdisciplinară, care merită să fie continuată și adâncită.

Plutarh, *Vorbele de duh ale spartanilor*, traducere din greaca veche, studiu introductiv și note de Liviu Mihail Iancu, ilustrații de Mihail Coșuleț, 200 pag., București, Editura Humanitas, 2024, ISBN 978-973-50-8647-3

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Lumea spartană a fost dintotdeauna prilej de fascinație, deopotrivă pentru antici și pentru moderni, prin preeminența militară terestră exercitată vreme de veacuri în spațiul sud-balcanic antic, prin simplitatea și, totuși, profunzimea concepție privind organizarea corpului civic al militarilor, denumiți cei ”asemenea” – *hoi homoioi*. Repudiind bogăția și luxul, optând pentru un trai împărtășit în comun de către toți, conviețuire în care până și hrana este supusă unor reguli comunitare în cadrul meselor comune (*ssysítia*) unde toți trebuie să contribuie cu cote-părți obligatorii de orz, brânză, smochine și vin, spartanii au ales calea echilibrului dat de viața militară. Aceasta din urmă este cea care lasă deoparte rostul persuadant al cuvântului dezbătut în adunarea politică a cetății – cum sublinia odinioară Jean-Pierre Vernant[1] – și privilegiează forța, teama și puterea, ca mijloace de configurare a unei unități civice în care norma pare să fie egalitatea. Într-o atare concepție despre propriul univers uman, spartanii dezvoltă cu mândrie concizia discursurilor lor, preferând formulele sentențioase tuturor dezbaterilor cu multă cheltuială de energie și înțelepciune, pe care alte cetăți grecești le-au cultivat. Despre aceste opțiuni de exprimare este vorba în cartea pe care Editura Humanitas o pune la dispoziție cititorilor, pentru prima oară în limba română, în versiunea talmăcită de Liviu Mihail Iancu. Cartea adună așa-numitele apoftegme ale lacedemonienilor culese de Plutarh și transmise nouă prin intermediul cópiilor medievale și renascentiste.

Aparținând celei de-a *doua sofistici* (cuprinsă între epoca lui Nero primul sfert al veacului al III-lea), cum a fost denumită perioada de revigorare a culturii grecești în cadrul lumii romane imperiale, Plutarh din Cheroneea (cca. 45-120) s-a născut într-o familie bogată și de neam, cu șanse reale – și din plin folosite – de a dobândi o educație aleasă, întemeieindu-și o frumoasă familie alături de virtuoasa Timoxena, care ăi dăruiește șase copii. Fin cunoscător al istoriei grecilor și a romanilor, Plutarh se vădește totodată a fi aplecat și spre studiul moralei și al filozofiei, fără a-și neglija cariera politică din orașul natal. La maturitate devine unul dintre cei doi preoți ai cultului lui

[1] Vernant, J.-P. 1995, *Originile gândirii grecești*, trad. rom. Fl. Bechet și D. Stanciu, București: Editura Symposion, 87-91.

Apollo din Delfi (statut atestat epigrafic – *SIG* 829A – și literar – *Quest. Conviv*., 700E), participând activ la ritualuri și în *chorus* (*An seni*, 792F). În propria școală de filozofie, pe care Plutarh o avea în Cheroneea, se discutau operele lui Platon (într-o manieră admirativă) și cele ale epicureicilor (dintr-o perspectivă adesea extrem de critică), cultivându-se o educație (*paideia*) îndreptată înspre căutarea adevărului stimulator pentru o gândire independentă. Cariera sa îl apropie de cercurile intelectuale și politice locale grecești, fără să-i lipsească prieteniile cu personaje politice romane, precum senatorul L. Mestrius Florus, patronul său care îi mijlocește accesul la cetățenia romană, sau consularul Q. Sosius Senecio. Întreprinde numeroase călătorii în Grecia continentală și insulară, dar și în Italia unde, însoțit de amicul său Florus, ajunge până la Ravenna, făcând astfel cu putință de a concretiza valoros intenția sa de comparare a celor două culturi importante ale Mediteranei antice, cea elenă și cea latină.

Lucrările lui Plutarh din categoria biografiilor (cele mai cunoscute fiind *Viețile paralele ale personalităților de greci și romani*) sau cele filozofice și moralizatoare i-au asigurat notorietatea în veacurile antice, prelungită în epoca post-antică doar în mediul bizantin, de unde este recuperat de cultura vest-europeană abia în epoca Renașterii (grație și muncii de traducere în latinește a operelor grecești antice realizate de călugărul bizantin Manuel/Maximus Planudes, 1260-1305). Versiunile operelor plutarhice apărute ulterior în Franța (realizate de Jacques Amyot – *Viețile paralele*, în 1559 și *Moralia*, în 1572) și în Anglia (de către Thomas North, în 1579) l-au readus plenar pe autorul cheronez în atenția culturii europene.

Colecția de *Apoftegme ale spartanilor* culeasă de Plutarh, de curând publicată la Editura Humanitas, completează benefic literatura clasică greacă accesibilă publicului român, care are astfel prilejul să exploreze universul mental al spartanilor prin intermediul cuvântului concis și moralizator. Căci însuși termenul de *apophthégma*, de origine greacă, desemnează o scurtă anecdotă care, prin mijlocirea unui citat, oferă o învățătură născută dintr-un anume dialog contextualizat. Spre deosebire de simplul aforism sau de sentință (ambele conținând concluziv o observație moralizatoare sau despre viață, dar fără să redea și contextul), apoftegma invită la reflectare și – prin imitare – la atingerea unui ideal comportamental. *Apophthégmata* pe care le datorăm lui Plutarh sunt cele cuprinse în corpul lucrării sale *Moralia*, păstrate prin traducerile manuscriselor medievale. Ordonate încă în epoca Renașterii de către Henri Estienne (1572), aceste anecdote cuprind *Apoftegmele spartanilor/ Apophthegmata Laconica* (208A-236E), *Instituțiile spartanilor/ Instituta Laconica* (236F-240B) și *Apoftegmele femeilor spartane/ Lacaenarum Apophthegmata* (240C-

242D), la care se adaugă *Apoftegmele regilor și generalilor*/ *Regum et imperatorum apophthegmata* (172A-207F).

Cercetarea modernă s-a aplecat, mai întâi, asupra comparării manuscriselor medievale pentru a obține cât mai fidel textul lui Plutarh (căruia i s-a dezbătut îndelung autenticitatea) și, de aici, pentru a dobândi înțelesurile conferite de autorul antic acestor scurte relatări sentențiale. Faptul că aceste istorioare reproduc replici pentru a exemplifica reacții ale liderilor politici sau apropiaților lor în anumite contexte sociale, juridice, religioase, militare, politice, denotă utilizarea apoftegmelor de către Plutarh pentru a transmite învățături despre virtute și tipologii caracterial-morale. Se prea poate și ca aceste povestioare să-i fi servit lui Plutarh drept „fișe de cercetare" personală, realizate pentru a-și documenta operele de mare întindere (precum biografiile personalităților grecești și romane), după cum sugerează unii dintre exegeții contemporani[2] și cum o amintește însuși traducătorul în românește al acestei colecții de întâmplări cu tâlc. Dincolo de aceste aspecte, trebuie menționat și faptul că specialiștii moderni au adăugat perspective pluridisciplinare de studiu, legând aceste produse literare speciale de filozofia politică sau de istoria mentalităților.

Cartea apărută recent în românește, despre care discutăm aici, adună 449 de anecdote, unele dintre acestea fiind asociate unor protagoniști cunoscuți (68 de personaje spartane masculine și 4 personaje feminine), altele – unor autori necunoscuți. Relatările despre obiceiurile spartanilor sunt așezate (potrivit tradiției manuscriselor medievale) între apoftegmele lacedemonienilor și cele ale femeilor lor. Cititorul român va descoperi reacții și replici ale liderilor spartani care se confruntă cu simple situații de viață, cu împrejurări politice și militare provocatoare sau cu prilejuri ce reclamă răspunsuri "la cald" date unor întrebări nu adesea tendențioase. Pentru anumite personalități politice – regi, geronți, ofițeri militari (cum sunt, de pildă, Agesilaos al II-lea, rege al spatanilor în prima parte a veacului al IV-lea a. Chr.; Leonydas, regele agiad al Spartei căzut la Termopilai în 480 a. Chr. sau marele reformator legendar Lycurgos) – ne sunt redate mai multe astfel de istorioare pline de învățăminte, pe potriva contribuțiilor lor în istoria spartanilor. Nu lipsesc, însă, figuri mai puțin importante, precum soli (e.g., Deryclidas, *Apoph. Lacon*., 166-9[3]); cântăreți în cor sau simplii cetățeni – indivizi necunoscuți din alte împrejurări (e.g., Damonida, *Apoph. Lacon*., 160-1;

[2] Stadter, P.A. 2014, „Plutarch's Compositional Technique: The Anecdote Collections and the Parallel Lives", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 54, 665-686.
[3] Citările sunt din ediția discutată aici.

Euboidas, *Apoph. Lacon*., 180-1; Thearidas, *Apoph. Lacon*., 197; Namertes, *Apoph. Lacon*., 309-10).

Desigur, importante rămân și de un interes crescând (în condițiile culturale și sociale actuale) vorbele rostite de spartancele din proximitatea marilor personalitați politice și militare lacedomoniene. Archileonis este mama unui important general spartan, Brasidas, al cărui tribut suprem în prima etapă a războiului peloponesiac ar fi determinat-o pe aceasta să dea glas mândriei femeilor din Sparta de a naște bărbați viteji pregătiți oricând să moară în luptă (Archileonis, *Lacae. Apopht.,* 426-8). Iar Gorgo, fiica regelui Cleomenes I și viitoarea soție a eroului de la Termopile, Leonidas, pare să vădească o anumită istețime precoce într-ale vieții politice și militare, rafinată în timpul conviețuirii cu propriul soț. Contribuția acestor personaje feminine la construcția și conservarea *ethos*-ului militar al Spartei[4] este, astfel, neîndoielnică.

Traducerea în românește a acestor istorioare anecdotice aparține unui important istoric și epigrafist al mediului academic românesc contemporan, mânuitor cu profesionalism al contextualizării. Părelnic „laconica" prezentare a Spartei, compusă de Liviu Iancu în paginile introductive, este abundent completată prin explicațiile însoțitoare ale textului apoftegmelor și vorbesc de la sine despre laborioasa și pe deplin lăudabila muncă întreprinsă de către traducător. Detalii de natură istorică privind evenimente militare și actorii umani implicați, explicații conectate la raporturile de forță și la relațiile diplomatice din partea estică a Mediteranei se împletesc cu lămuriri de natură socială și religioasă. Opțiunea personală a traducătorului pentru arhaizarea voită a unor termeni s-ar putea, însă, să constituie o provocare pentru acea parte a cititorilor care vor parcurge aceste apoftegme fără adecvate lecturi anterioare *în* și *despre* limba română de "odinioară". După cum, probabil, se va reflecta asupra titlului, de data aceasta de către specialiștii din mediul de cercetare literar și etnologic, știut fiind că sintagma „vorbe de duh" este utilizată îndeobște pentru a desemna produse ale înțelepciunii populare, așadar asociate cu anonimatul creației orale.

Lucrarea, însă, în ansamblul ei reprezintă o foarte valoroasă contribuție pentru cunoașterea modului cum o cetate militarizată a fost „gândită" și „trăită" într-un timp antic în care virtutea militară instituționalizată genera valori durabile, oglindite în astfel de mărturii concentrate și potențial fecunde pentru viitoarele cercetări.

[4] Cu bibliografie suplimentară, v. Tanga F., 2021, „Prospettive sulle donne negli 'Apophtegmata Laconica' di Plutarco", în *Humanitas*, 77, 71-96.

A Comparative Analysis of Mithraic Imagery: The Regional Adaptation of the Tauroctony in Dacia

Abstract of the bachelor's Thesis, 2025

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Abstract: Mithraism, like other cults, sought to elucidate the origins of the Universe. In this context, The Cosmos is forged through symbolic imagery in the Mithraic iconography. Given the paucity of textual sources by initiates, scholars interpreted the myth through Mithraic imagery. The central iconographical representation of the cult, the tauroctony, displays the sacrifice of the bull by Mithras and each zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motif that frames the sacrifice carries an astral signification. This paper examines regional adaptations of the tauroctony, particularly from Dacia, focusing on their deviations from the Roman canon of representations. In this regard, the Dacian additional motifs indicate the reconstruction of the myth inside the territory.
Keywords: tauroctony, Mithraism, imperial art, provincial art, Dacia.

Introduction

The Mithraic Mysteries have long attracted scholarly attention due to the scarcity of contemporary textual sources. This lack of written evidence has allowed extensive interpretation of the artistic representations. Researchers such as Franz Cumont, Robert Turcan, Maarten Jozef Vermaseren or Robert Beck tried to unveil the mysteries, supporting distinct hypotheses particularly regarding the cult's artistic representations.

One prominent example of such artistic heritage is the tauroctony. It represents the central representation in Mithraic sanctuaries, depicting the moment of utmost importance in Mithras' mythological narrative, the sacrifice of the bull. It is a symbolic act in which Mithras forges the renewal of nature. Although there are differences in representation across the Roman Empire, the tauroctony has a general structure that is respected in every region.

Currently, the tauroctonies are stylistically split into eight categories according to Campbell[1] which stress upon the regional dissimilarities between the *Mithras Taurophorus* representations. This analysis reflects Dacia's deflection from the iconographic canon and the possible symbolism of the additional motifs.

[1]Campbell, 1968, 1-3.

Origin of the tauroctony

The first tauroctony was sculpted in Rome and dedicated by Alcimus, slave of Tiberius Claudius Livianus. The presence of the earliest tauroctonies in Rome suggests that this iconographical representation originated in Latium. The mythical narrative of Mithras killing the bull is unique to the Roman Empire. Hence some scholars support that the cult was created within Rome by clerics and high officials who were highly acquainted with the Eastern religions.[2]

But this hypothesis may be contested by the first epigraphical evidence, an inscription of Sacidius Barbarus of the *Legio XV Apollinaris*, discovered in Carnuntum, Pannonia. It is also worth noting the similarity in representation between the Hellenistic-Iranian sculptures (Fig. 1) and the Mithraic ones. In both regions, Mithras is depicted wearing *anaxyrides, gaunaka* and a Phrygian cap (Fig. 2). It should be mentioned, as well, that *Legio II Adiutrix* had a numerous Mithraic following. Moreover, the annexation of vassal kingdoms such as Commagene, Cappadocia, Pontus, and Cilicia certainly played a role in the spread of the cult within the Roman Empire.[3]

The tauroctony is the depiction of Mithras killing the bull, accompanied by other zoomorphic motifs. The name reinforces this practice, being a Greek compound word from ταῦρος (bull) and κτόνος (killing). Thus, it is highly similar to the word *taurobolium* that is associated with the cult of Cybele. Franz Cumont highlights that the worship of Mithras and the cult of Cybele interrelate.[4] While the cult of Magna Mater is heavily associated with femininity and allows female devotees, Mithraism seems to only have male followers. This is mainly a point of consensus between the scholars[5] but epigraphical evidence could prove that there may have been female participants in the mystery practices.[6]

The mythic narrative of sacrificing the bull has parallels in older religions such as Hinduism and Zoroastrianism. In Hindu tradition, the celebration of *Navaratri* commemorates the fight between Shakti and Mahishasura[7] – asura with an ox appearance – and it bears

[2]Clauss, 2000, 22.
[3]Moga, 2007, 220.
[4]Cumont, 1903, 179.
[5]This conclusion is not only based on the premise of the proximity between the temples but also on the Mithraism's close connection to the military domain. Although we may consider the cult created in Rome, the military aspect can also be seen in the epigraphical evidence and in the third rank, *Miles*, of the sacred hierarchy. It is also worthy to note that the epigraphical records strongly suggest the abundance of male followers in the cult but there are a few rather feminine names that raise the problem of a generalisation (their connection with the Mithraic cult remains uncertain).
[6]Szabó, 2010, 50.
[7]Valipour, 2023, 108.

conceptual similarity with the Mithraic dichotomy of good and evil. However, arguably closer similarities are found in Zoroastrianism, where the killing of *Goshurvan*[8] or *Srishok*[9] facilitates the rejuvenation of nature. In both mythologies, death becomes the precondition of a new existence, emphasizing a cyclical perspective of time. Understanding the possible roots of the Mithraic beliefs contributes to unravelling the meaning of the tauroctony.

Deciphering the Mysteries of Mithras: Symbolism of the Tauroctony

The tauroctony is a point of convergence between the sacred and the profane realms, Mithras acting as the mediating figure that bridges the celestial and terrestrial worlds. The motifs found in the central representation of the Mithraic cult constitute symbols of time and outline the Cosmic dimension of the Mithraic religion.

Tauroctony reliefs and frescoes incorporate zoomorphic motifs such as the raven, the serpent, the bull, the scorpion and the dog, that may have an astral significance according to Vermaseren. Notably, the bull indicates the Age of Taurus. In astrological terms, such ages correspond to the constellation in which the Sun rises during the spring equinox. Thus, the presence of the other zoomorphic figures symbolizes the constellations of *Canis Minor*, *Hydra*, *Corvus* and *Scorpius* – star clusters that laid on the celestial equator[10] during that epoch.

David Ulansey notes that Mithras represents the constellation *Perseus*, pointing to the similarities between the two mythological figures such as: the *pileus*, the Persian origin[11], the Perseus position in the Mithraic hierarchy, the *petrogenesis* and the proximity of the Perseus and the Bull constellation. Another noteworthy observation is given by similar gestures in the iconographic representation of both heroes: Perseus doesn't look towards Medusa's gaze the same way Mithras doesn't look towards the bull.[12] This hypothesis may be contested on the basis that Mithras is a solar deity, and thus not associated with a specific constellation. On this matter, Mithras being represented distinctively from Sol may indicate he was not considered a sun God but a hero that received solar attributes as an outcome of the bull sacrifice. But a strong

[8]More commonly called *Gavaevodata* represents the primordial bull created by Ahura Mazda and killed by Ahriman. After the bull dies, a multitude of grains and healing plants grow from the ground. From the bull's semen, purified by the light of Moon, a bull and a cow emerge. Information taken from Valipour, 2023, 109.
[9]The Iranian eschatological concepts embody Saoshyant – the Saviour of the World – killing Srishok, the last animal that must be sacrificed for the reconstruction of the Cosmos. Information taken from Faraji, 2015, 988.
[10]The *celestial equator* is the projection of the equator onto an imaginary sphere o large radius, having Earth at its center, named the *celestial sphere.* Where the *celestial equator* and the *ecliptic* intersect is the constellation in which the Sun enters during the spring (vernal) equinox.
[11]Romans believed that Mithras is originary from Persia, while Perseus is the legendary founder of the Perseid dynasty.
[12]Ulansey, 1991, 22-30.

counterargument is that Perseus is not on the celestial equator during the Age of Taurus unlike the other zoomorphic motifs.

The two figures that sit in parallel are called *dadophori*. The one who holds the torch up is Cautes and the one who holds the torch down is Cautopates, tracing the symbolism of dusk and dawn. In the upper corners, Luna and Sol are seen. The representation of the sun and the moon is analogous to the diurnal-nocturnal dichotomy, reinforcing their symbolic association with time. The ideas of Mithraism are influenced by stoicism, where the cyclical perspective of time is conveyed through *palingenesis*.[13]

Tauroctonies of Rome

As previously mentioned, the first sculptures of Mithras are observed inside Rome. Consequently, the capital of the Roman Empire dictated the canon representation of tauroctonies. (fig. 3)

Tauroctonies in Rome seldom include iconographic insertions that diverge from the canon. However, these dissimilarities prove that a prototype is inexistent. In comparison to the periphery, tauroctonies of Rome include additional small motifs that are related to the symbolism of the tauroctony. Such motifs are trees consequently put alongside burning altars (Fig. 4), Sol holding a globe (Fig. 6), zodiac signs, Aion (Fig. 7) or additional zoomorphic figures. Burning altars are linked to Zoroastrianism[14] and trees to the rebirth of nature. The zodiac signs show the ecliptic, but with Aion they represent the cyclical nature of time. Sol holding the globe symbolizes his control over the Universe. In the tauroctony of Collezione Torlonia, Pegasus, winged horse born from the blood of Medusa, is represented in the upper left corner. In addition, the narrative myth of Mithras is viewed only on frescoes – a characteristic specific to Rome (Fig. 7).

The frescoes and reliefs are characterized by advanced techniques, high-quality materials, and a classical manner of depicting figures. Carrara marble was frequently used in Rome, allowing meticulous execution and precision. The fine incisions give depth to the characters and clothing while demonstrating great attention to detail. The figures are idealized and proportionally balanced, traits characteristic of imperial art.

[13]*Palingenesis is* the eternal recreation of the Universe. Numerous stoics mention the concept of *epkyrosis* - the destruction of the Universe through fire and its rebirth from water.
[14]Shenkar, 2024, 379.

Mithras slaying the bull is the central figure of the composition surrounded by zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs. In the tauroctony of Tor Cervara, the diagonals are prominent, stressing upon this subject (Fig. 6). According to one study by Dominique J. Persoons, the position of Cautes and Cautopates is linked to the chiasma of Plato.[15] By tracing the diagonals, the dichotomy between the terrestrial and the divine alongside the cyclical nature of time are emphasized.

The balanced composition results from the interplay between dynamic and static elements. The serpent, the position of Mithras, the bull's gestures, the torches, the cave are dynamically traced and counterbalanced by the triangular position of Mithras and the symmetry of Cautes-Cautopates and Sol-Luna (Fig. 7 and 8).

Tauroctonies of Dacia

Campbell's fourth group corresponds mainly to Dacia, describing it as a convergence between type II, characteristic of Thrace, and type III, representative of the lower Danubian regions.[16] Therefore, he described the Dacian tauroctonies as three register, having a round top stele. Other scholars recently suggested that the three-register division is an innovation originating from Dacia, not Thrace.[17] It is also to be noted that the two characteristics mentioned by Campbell are observed separately, tauroctonies having the appearance of round top stele or having three horizontal lines that divide the myth's narrative, showing the different ways of representing the myth across the territories. The division into registers is first found in Germania, element that suggests the communication between this region and the Danube Provinces. In this respect, it is difficult to include all tauroctonies in one category with rigorous rules as Dacian artistic representations exhibit significant regional variation. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the similarities and the distinctions between them. The prominent deviation from the canon found in Dacia suggests the reconstruction of the myth inside the territory.

One aspect that is found in a majority of tauroctonies from Dacia is the inversion of Cautes and Cautopates. The cause likely stems from the oral transmission of the cult which led to variations in the iconographical details. The lack of textual testimonies strongly concludes that Mithraism was propagated orally, feature also observed in Rome, as well, where Cautes and Cautopates are both represented holding the torch down (Fig. 4).

[15]Persoons, 2024, 35.
[16]Campbell, 1968, 3.
[17]Nemeti, 2005, 212.

In comparison to the balanced composition of the tauroctonies in Rome, in Dacia the reliefs frequently incorporate more static elements such as architecture (Fig. 9, 10, 11) carved with horizontal and vertical lines that confer the composition equilibrium. The motif of the *aedicula-naiskos* in the Dragu tauroctony (Fig. 9) displays an additional noteworthy feature – the columns exhibit a Solomonic appearance.[18] In Dacia, certain columns are sculpted having half of their surface fluted and the other half spiral. Thus, the way of representing the column entirely as a spiral constitutes an innovation. Another aspect about the Dragu tauroctony is the presence of Hesperus near Mithras, a figure that is also sculpted on the Mitreo di Santo Stefano tauroctony in Rome (Fig. 12). The *Bull in the House* motif is most prevalent in Dacia, although it can also be observed on reliefs near the Rhine River. In the relief found in Dieburg, Germania Superior, Mithras is throwing stones at the bull enclosed within a sanctuary. In Dacian tauroctonies, the *Bull in the House* is represented in a simplified manner. Furthermore, the bull appears to be in a boat. Zsolt Kiss mentions that this motif could indicate the moment the Taurus constellation reappears in the crepuscular light.[19]

In the tauroctony of Apullum, it is remarkable to point out that the two rams represent a unique motif that has never been observed in other tauroctonies. It may be argued that the ram highlights the previous age before the Age of the Taurus – the Age of Aries or because the Aries is the first sign in the zodiac. It still warrants attention as to why they are a pair and why they are represented resting. In the tauroctony of M. Aurelius Timotheus or the one from Dragu (Fig. 11), it is a singular *lazy* ram. About the tauroctony of Dragu, there is another zoomorphic motif with a noteworthy significance. Above the ram, a goat is sculpted. Goats were eaten during the Mithraic feasts, as osteological evidence proves.[20] Sheep are also the third most eaten animal in Dacia.[21] But the motif could symbolize the constellation Capricorn. This constellation is described by Porphyry as a gate through which the souls ascend (and the Cancer constellation is the gate through which they descend).[22]

The pair of *lion-krater* can also be observed. Not only are the Leo and Crater constellations in proximity of each other on the sky and on the celestial equator but they also represent the elements of fire and water.

[18]Solomonic columns were developed during the reign of Constantine the Great.
[19]Kiss, 2023, 3.
[20]Vermaseren, 1963, 102.
[21]Marian and Haimovici, 2001, 337.
[22]Porphyry, *On the Cave of Nymphs in the Thirteenth Book of the Odyssey*, 11.

In tauroctonies of Sarmizegetusa (fig.13) and Apullum, Cautopates can be seen holding the bull's tail. The workshops of Sarmizegetusa and Apullum are distanced and stylistically different, this motif showing a possible interaction between the sanctuaries situated in different regions. In the tauroctony from Turda, two mythological episodes have been identified that cannot be found in other regions. These are Mithras riding a bovine and Mithras holding an object above the head of Sol, who kneels before the god. The latter depiction is highly unusual, as it is normally Sol who offers the solar attribute to Mithras after the latter performs the sacrifice of the bull.

Regarding the manner of execution, the sculptures from Dacia differ from the tauroctonies of Rome through their deep incisions and more abstract execution. The draperies are rigid, carved with deep grooves, and the facial features are simplified. For example, the contour of the eyes is observed but the eyelids are not represented. In Apulum, the eyes were made through small punctiform incisions. In contrast, the tauroctonies from Rome are characterized by meticulous workmanship, fine incisions, and harmonious proportions, while the facial features are rendered in a classical manner. The simplified manner of depicting the figures in Dacia is a result of the sculptures' reduced dimensions and the varied local materials from which they were made. It may also reflect stylistic influences from the neighbouring provinces.

Conclusions

The earliest tauroctonies appear in the imperial capital, emphasizing that the canon representation was created in Rome. While all the representations of *Mithras Tauroktonos* present recurrent zoomorphic motifs of the snake, scorpio, raven, dog and the selenar-solar motifs of Cautes-Cautopates and Sol-Luna, additional figures are frequently observed.

In Rome, the added elements reinforce the symbolism of the tauroctony. Aion and the zodiac sign represent the cyclical perspective of time, Pegasus is an allusion to Perseus, and the trees suggest the nature's revival. Although the symbolism of the figures is still debated among the scholars, the motifs carved in Dacian sculptures tend to have a more mysterious significance.

Regarding the manner of representation, tauroctonies of Rome highlight the traits of the imperial art. The balanced composition is marked by the juxtaposition of the dynamic and static lines. The diagonals and the symmetry of the lunar-solar figures emphasize the placement of Mithras in the centre of it. The material often used was Carrara marble that allows elaborate incisions and a superior finish, details such as the drapery are carved meticulously.

In Dacia, additional motifs such as the rams resting or the goat in the superior register impose difficulties regarding the adaptation of the myth. Choosing to interpret the tauroctony as a representation of constellations, these figures could symbolize the star clusters of Aries and Capricorn. Through reliefs, communication between Germania and Dacia is suggested, both including registers that detail the myth's narrative that are not found in Rome. Contrary to Campbell's division, three-register tauroctonies are first sculpted in Dacia.

There is another common element that is found both in the tauroctonies of the provinces near the Rhine River and Dacia and that is the *Bull in the House*. This motif illustrates the bull trying to hide from Mithras while the hero throws stone at him. Notably, in Dacia, the bull sometimes seems to be in a boat, suggesting a change in the narrative. Other elements that are distinctive from the canon representation of the tauroctony and from Rome is the inversion of Cautes and Cautopates, Cautopates holding the bull's tail and the lion-krater motif. The inversion of Cautes-Cautopates highlights the oral diffusion of the cult, while the lion-krater figures represent two constellations on the celestial equator and the elements of fire and water. The sacrifice of the bull is often sculpted in a temple, tracing a more static composition compared to the tauroctonies in Rome. In the Dragu relief, the columns are also sculpted in a fascinating manner, in a spiral, similar to Solomonic columns that will be created one century later.

The Dacian sculptures exhibit defining characteristics of the provincial art. The materials are local, extracted from nearby quarries. In this regard, the local marble or limestone used doesn't have the same crystalline structure as *marmor lunense* that is able to hold delicate details. The figures in the reliefs are rendered in a more abstract manner, having profound or inconsistent incisions and the clothes shows deep grooves.

This iconographical analysis emphasized the distinct motifs between the tauroctonies of Rome and the tauroctonies of Dacia. Hypotheses were proposed regarding engrossing figures such as the rams and goat sculpted in the Dacian reliefs. In this way, the differences between the imperial art and the provincial art have also been noted.

Besides that, the divisions of the tauroctonies based on regional differences have been discussed, underlining that for a division to be made, the similarities must be more prominent than the dissimilarities. Considering the regional variability of Dacian sculptures, broad generalizations about the styles are not entirely justified.

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Annexes

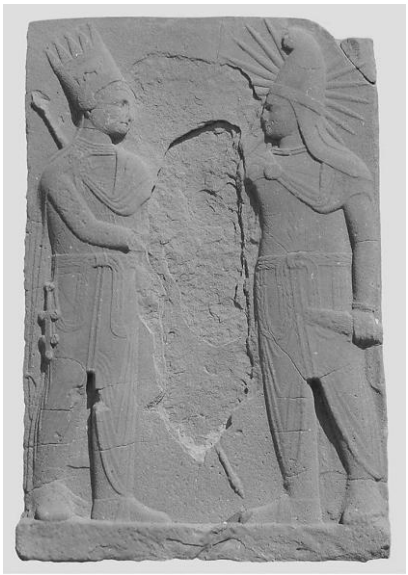

Fig. 1

Fig. 1 – detail

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

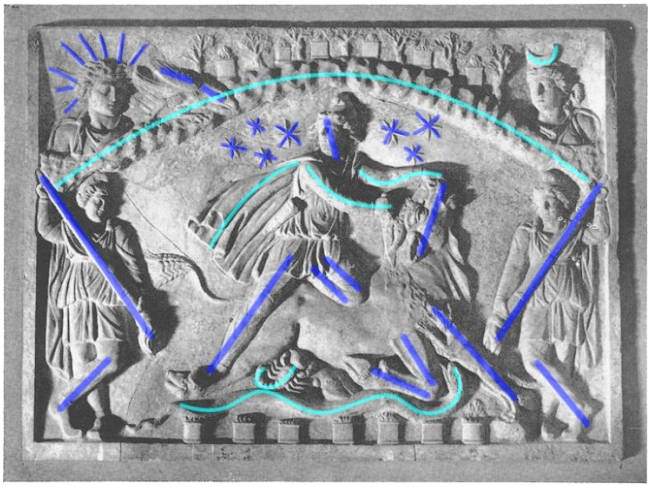

Fig. 9

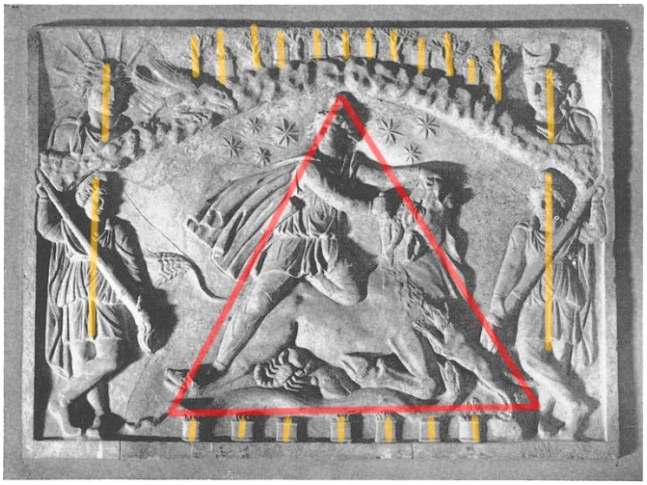

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

Fig. 15

Fig. 16

Cronica activității Centrului de Istorie Comparată a Societăților Antice – 2025

Florica (Bohîlțea) Mihuț

26 Martie 2025 – comunicare ***Europa și taurul* – de la frescele pompeiene la viziunile avangardiste: metamorfoza unui mit în artele vizuale**, prezentată de stud. Ana-Alexandra Badea, stud. Secția de Istoria Artei, din cadrul DIAAIA, FIUB.

8 Aprilie 2025 – **Seminar dedicat deprinderii tehnicii de editare și interpretare a izvoarelor greco-latine** în colaborare cu Centrul de Studii Clasice și Creștine din cadrul Facultății de Istorie a Universității ”Al. I. Cuza” din Iași – cu participarea prof. dr. univ. Nelu Zugravu, conf. dr. Roxana Curcă, conf. dr. Florica (Bohîlțea) Mihuț.

4 Iunie 2025 – **Conferințe numismatice și istorice (I)** – colaborare cu Societatea Numismatică Română, conferințe susținute de Dr. Emanuel Petac (Cabinetul Numismatic al Academiei Române) – *Poveștile deținuților politici: dr. Constantin Deculescu. Despre un stater de tip Alexandru de la Seleucos I descoperit la Ostrov, jud. Constanța*; Ana-Maria Baltă (Facultatea de Istorie, Universitatea din București) – *Cele două fețe și povești ale unui follis din Colecția M.C. Sutzu emis la Antiohia (Theoupolis) în timpul domniei lui Focas (602-610 d.Hr.)*.

3-4 Octombrie 2025 – colaborare cu DIAIA, FIUB, **Conferința Internațională: *Epistolography, knowledge, and the Ancient World***, 26 de comunicări (28 participanți afiliați la Universitatea din București; University of Technology Nuremberg; National and Kapodistrian University of Athens; Universitatea ”Ovidius” din Constanța; Fondazione Bruno Kessler of Trento, Italy; University of Naples Federico II; Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; Northeast Normal University in Changchun; Durham University; University of Warsaw; Oxford University; Georg-August-Universität Göttingen; Universität Heidelberg; University of Hyderabad; University of Bari Aldo Moro; University of Cyprus; Universität Innsbruck; Gent University; Georg-August University Göttingen; Sacred Heart University, Fairfield; University of Rome ”La Sapienza”; Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa; Universidad de Salamanca; Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai din Cluj-Napoca).

12 Noiembrie 2025 – **Conferințe numismatice și istorice (II)** – conferința *Insula Iα din Sectorul Acropolă Centru-Sud (UB) de la Histria. Cronologie și funcționalitate*, prezentată de conf. univ. dr. habil. Valentin Victor Bottez și asist univ. dr. Iulia-Alexandra Iliescu

12-13 Noiembrie 2025 – **Atelier *La preuve imaginaire: asseoir l'authenticité dans les science sociales* (III)**, colaborare cu INALCO, Paris; Institutul de istorie "N. Iorga" din București, Muzeul Național al Țăranului Român, din București:

- 12 noiembrie 2025 – sediul Facultății de Istorie a Universității din București – conferințele susținute de către: Defne Türker Demir (İstanbul Kültür University), *Inscribing the body into the moment: Tracing the authentic in performance art of Marina Abramovich and multi-media photography of Lalla Essaydi* și Mircea Păduraru (Universitatea "Al. Ioan Cuza" din Iași), *The truth of authenticity and the moral ethnographical imagination.*
- 13 noiembrie 2025 – sediul Institutului de Istorie "N. Iorga" din București – atelier dezbatere.

25-26 Aprilie 2025 – **Sesiunea anuală CICSA cu tema *Circulația persoanelor, a bunurilor și a ideilor (din Preistorie până în Antichitatea Târzie)***, cu participarea a 26 de cadre didactice, specialiști și studenți (nivel master și doctorat) din: Universitatea din București – Facultatea de Istorie și Facultatea de Limbi și Literaturi Străine; Institutul de Arheologie "V. Pârvan" al Academiei Române din București, Muzeul George Severeanu din cadrul Muzeului Municipiului București, Institutul de Cercetări Eco-Muzeale "G. Simion" din Tulcea și Muzeul de Istorie Națională și Arheologie din Constanța.