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Maria Gabriella ANGELI BERTINELLI e Angela DONATI

FRATELLI LEGA EDITORI
FAENZA

MARJETA ŠAŠEL KOS

CENTENARIANS IN THE EMONA AREA
AND THE ADJACENT NORICAN
AND PANNONIAN REGIONS

Introductory remarks, or how a small number of tombstones can change the results of «epigraphic statistics»

In several important articles based on the *CIL* volumes, J. Szilágyi collected the ages of the deceased from the tombstones of the western part of the Roman Empire and published life tables for the inhabitants of various towns and regions in Italy and the provinces. He thought that the obtained «statistical» results might illuminate – within the confines of various restrictions – certain problems of mortality in the Roman period, and, in general, ancient demography. He included only towns for which he could collect at least 75 examples; the figures resulting from less than 75 examples are given in brackets. His articles are titled «contributions to the statistics of mortality» (1), and although he was cautious in formulating any theses from the results of his lists – except for the obvious conclusions – he was nonetheless not aware of all shortcomings related to such studies. Samples, which are greatly biased intrinsically because they represent only a tiny proportion of once existing epigraphic material (perhaps no more than 0.1 % (2), while we may only know 0.015 % of all ages at death) (3), are inadequate from many additional points of view, but most of

(1) J. SZILÁGYI, *Beiträge zur Statistik der Sterblichkeit in den westeuropäischen Provinzen des Römischen Imperiums*, «AArchHung», 13 (1961), pp. 125-155; ID., *Beiträge zur Statistik der Sterblichkeit in der illyrischen Provinzgruppe und in Norditalien (Gallia Padana)*, «AArchHung», 14 (1962), pp. 297-396; ID., *Die Sterblichkeit in den Städten Mittel- und Süd-Italiens sowie in Hispanien*, «AArchHung», 15 (1963), pp. 129-224; ID., *Die Sterblichkeit in den nordafrikanischen Provinzen I*, «AArchHung», 17 (1965), pp. 309-334; he studied Africa in two more articles: *ibid.*, 18 (1966), pp. 235-277, and *ibid.*, 19 (1967), pp. 25-59.

(2) Reckoned by G. ALFÖLDY for Dalmatia, *Bevölkerung und Gesellschaft der römischen Provinz Dalmatien* (mit einem Beitrag von A. MÓCSY), Budapest 1965, p. 24.

(3) M. CLAUSS, *Probleme der Lebensalterstatistiken aufgrund römischer Grabinschriften*, «Chiron», 3 (1973), p. 411.

all in terms of age, gender, chronological status, and class distribution (4). The gathered material cannot be used to illuminate demographic problems; it can only highlight cultural practices in commemoration (5), especially in terms of local peculiarities and the mutual comparison of regions, such as different (parts of) provinces, or towns vis-à-vis rural areas.

The age pattern is seriously distorted both because the ages are rounded off and often exaggerated – whether intentionally or through ignorance – and high infant mortality is unrecorded. There are 183 alleged centenarians in Africa recorded on ca. 15,000 tombstones (6), and even if the Africans were regarded as a healthy race known for their longevity (SALLUST, *Bell. Iugur.*, 17.6), their life expectancy at birth could by no means have been so significantly higher than in the other provinces of the Roman Empire, as these samples would suggest. Thus the figure of 60.2 years for the inhabitants of Castellum Celtianum in Africa, as opposed to 18.1 years for the inhabitants of Virunum in Noricum, is not only implausible but impossible (7). Of course, not all documented centenarians actually were centenarians. On the tombstone of a great-grandfather, T. Flavius Pudens Maximianus from Algeria, his age is recorded as 83 years and 11 months, while in the epigram below the inscription it is stated that he lived 100 years (8). As is evident from Egyptian documents, age declarations by the same person at different dates can be seriously inconsistent, and such declarations could even have a lower age at a later date (9). Hence, «documented» ages must be regarded – in terms of exactness – as highly unreliable. Individual interesting phenomena can nonetheless be studied further, and most of the subsequent research has been and still is based on the results of the material gathered by Szilágyi. He composed an enormous work, which is still invaluable for any further analyses of different commemoration practices.

(4) T. G. PARKIN, *Demography and Roman Society*, Baltimore, London 1992, p. 15 ff.

(5) P. SALMON, *Les insuffisances du matériel épigraphique sur la mortalité dans l'antiquité romaine*, in «La mort, les morts et l'au-delà dans le monde romain» (Actes du coll. de Caen 1985), ed. F. Hinard, Caen 1987, pp. 99-112.

(6) SALMON, *Insuffisances*, cit. (n. 5), p. 107, citing the unpublished thesis by C. BERTRAND in n. 43. C() can only very rarely be interpreted as *c(irciter)*.

(7) T. G. PARKIN, *Old Age in the Roman World. A Cultural and Social History*, Baltimore, London 2003, p. 38.

(8) *CIL*, VIII, 28082 = *ILAlg*, I, 2831; PARKIN, *Demography*, cit. (n. 4), p. 14.

(9) R. DUNCAN-JONES, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne 1990, pp. 79-80.

One of the most evident characteristic features of almost all groups of Roman funerary inscriptions that appear in his lists is rounding up of age to the nearest multiple of 5, which is particularly prevalent in Noricum and the Danube provinces. In individual towns of the Western Roman Empire, this ranges from 0% to 80% (10), although cases where it does not occur are extremely rare. It varies in terms of region, social status, profession, and gender, but not in terms of chronology. There are no significant differences between the two large groups into which Szilágyi divided his material: the first to second centuries AD, and the third to fourth centuries AD. This is convenient, since any chronological division of inscriptions is problematic, and his may in many cases also be incorrect. Gender differences should be viewed with caution, since the collected data offer no safe basis for any further study: while age-rounding in Pannonia is reckoned to have been 64.8% for males and 75.9% for females, the corresponding percentages for Noricum are 82.1 and 77.3 respectively; in Italy outside Rome they are 42.6 and 41.8 respectively (11).

A. Mócsy cited the following scheme presenting the percentage of age-rounding in the western part of the Roman Empire, based on Szilágyi's data: it is lowest in Rome (35%) and Italy (39%), medium in Dalmatia and Africa (53 and 54% respectively), and high in Pannonia and Noricum (70 and 80% respectively). He related these data to a low level of Romanization, but with important modifications, since he was aware that on the other hand erecting inscriptions is in itself a sign of Romanization (12). The picture has been further developed and differentiated in detail, since these percentages vary locally; the percentage of age-rounding is, e.g., higher in Rome than in Latium and Ostia, and there are interesting differences between towns and countryside: in Italy and Africa percentages are higher in towns than in rural areas, while elsewhere the relationship is reversed, which in provinces would seem much more understandable since towns were the centres of Romanization (13).

(10) CLAUSS, *Probleme*, cit. (n. 3), p. 411.

(11) DUNCAN-JONES, *Structure*, cit. (n. 9), p. 86, based on SZILÁGYI'S tables.

(12) A. MÓCSY, *Die Unkenntnis des Lebensalters im römischen Reich*, «AntHung», 14 (1966), p. 405; other percentages are: Gallia (41%), Germania (50%), Hispania (55%), Dacia (56%), Britannia (58%), Raetia (59%), Moesia (66%).

(13) MÓCSY, *Unkenntnis*, cit. (n. 12), p. 397 ff.

Szilágyi classified his material according to regions and provinces as defined by T. Mommsen. He included Emona and its region within Pannonia, which has until recently – with a few exceptions – been regarded as an accepted fact. Mócsy always treated Emona as part of Pannonia (14); thus in the case of this

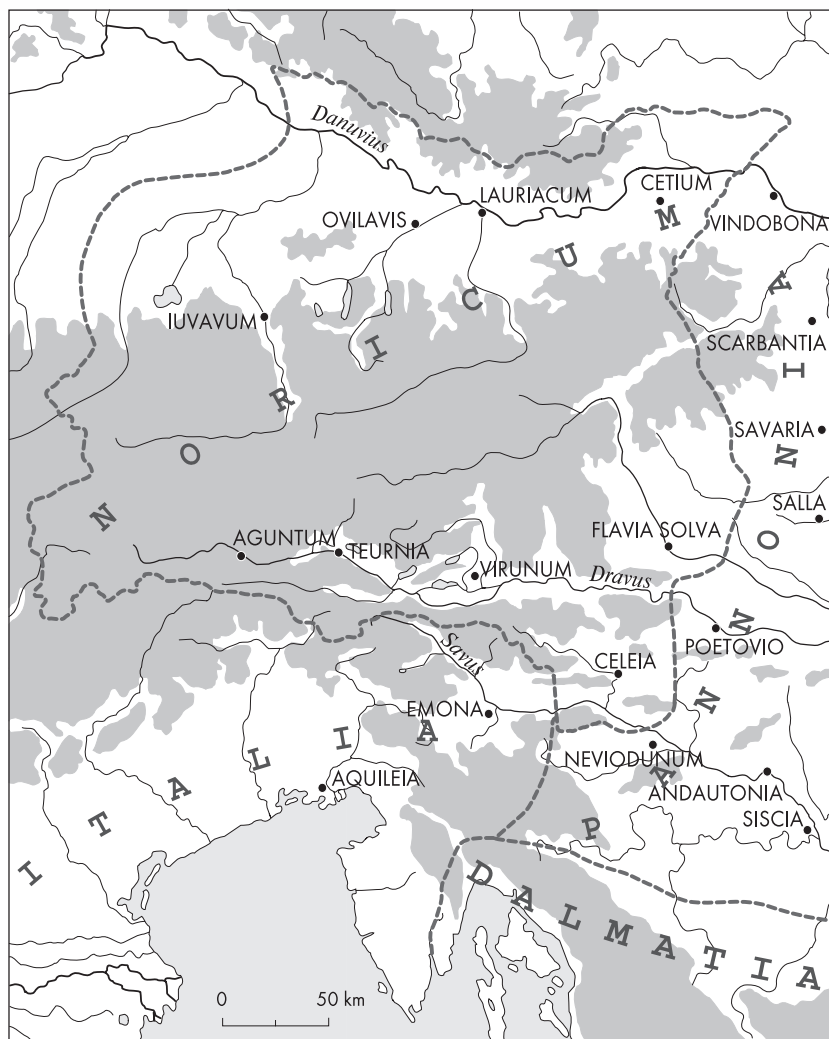


Fig. 1. Map showing Noricum and western Pannonia, bordering on Italy (computer graphics: M. Belak).

(14) Thus also in his later monograph, *Pannonia and Upper Moesia*, London, Boston 1974, although in the general map of Pannonia the Emona region is correctly included within Italy.

town the results of his use of Szilágyi's data are misleading, since it should be included within northern Italy (Fig. 1). Emona was a Roman colony and its inscriptions show many characteristic features of the epigraphy of a northern Italian city, while certain aspects of the epigraphy of rural areas of Emona can be compared to the Celtic Norican and Pannonian countryside, where the population was predominantly of peregrine status. Mócsy considered Emona to be a Roman colony in Pannonia, founded by Tiberius, which can be regarded as obsolete. Emona was most probably an Augustan colony founded in Italy, in *Regio X* (15). Thus first of all, data pertaining to this town should be assessed in terms of Italy and not Pannonia. This is particularly significant for our purpose, because the percentage of age-rounding and concentration of elderly people is very high in the hinterland of Emona, which is due to the fact that the peregrine population south of the town erected an unexpectedly large number of tombstones (over 100). If Emona is transferred from Pannonia to Italy, the percentages concerning ages should accordingly be changed in both regions. Mócsy in his otherwise excellent article also did not pay due attention to the difference between the town of Emona and the nearby village of Ig (16). Although the latter did of course belong to the city's administrative territory, Emona and Ig were two quite distinct worlds, which cannot be compared well, particularly not in terms of «demography».

Average life expectancy - some considerations

Ancient demography has been a controversial subject in modern scholarship, and the bibliography concerning demographic problems is extensive. The main premises should briefly be outlined. Due to high (infant) mortality, mean life expectancy at birth in the Roman world would have ranged – according to K. Hopkins' estimation – between 20 and 30 years; it cannot be expressed in more precise figures (17). This broad estimation has also been

(15) See lastly M. ŠAŠEL KOS, *Emona was in Italy, not in Pannonia*, in «*The Autonomous Towns of Noricum and Pannonia. Pannonia I*», eds. ead., P. Scherrer et al. (Situla 41), Ljubljana 2003, pp. 11-19.

(16) MÓCSY, *Unkenntnis*, cit. (n. 12), p. 410.

(17) K. HOPKINS, *Graveyards for Historians*, in «*La mort, les morts et l'au-delà dans le monde romain*», cit. (n. 5), pp. 113-126, in particular p. 116.

accepted and confirmed by recent scholarship (18); interestingly, it must have been more or less the same among the Roman nobility (including imperial families), despite their privileged position in society (19). However, given the vast geographic and temporal range of the Roman Empire, there was little uniformity. Ethnic differences, climate, geography, tradition, different lifestyles: all these varied from region to region and certainly had some impact on demography, which, however, can never be accurately reconstructed (20). This could be expected least of all from the data offered by Roman tombstones (21).

The different mean life expectancy had far-reaching consequences; if it were 20 years, there should be more than six children on average in a family to replace the parents; if it were 25, less than four children would be enough to replace them. The mortality of new-born – not reflected on tombstones but occasionally visible at cemeteries (22) – and of small infants was particularly high, not merely due to diseases but also due to exposure of sick infants and perhaps of some new-born girls, which may or may not have also been common in the Roman period (23). According to Aristotle, so many new-born infants died before their seventh day – perhaps one third (24) – that they were not even given names before this day (*Hist. anim.* 588a.8-10). At a later age, the most lethal diseases were – due to often polluted drinking water and low levels of hygiene – various dysenteries, which were likely to cause mortal dehydration. Before the vaccination against smallpox was discovered in 1796, one child in two died in the course of the first twelve

(18) DUNCAN-JONES, *Structure*, cit. (n. 9), pp. 103-104; B. W. FRIER, *Demography*, in «*The High Empire, A.D. 70-192*» (CAH² XI), Cambridge 2000, pp. 787-816; PARKIN, *Old Age*, cit. (n. 7), p. 49.

(19) W. SCHEIDEL, *Emperors, aristocrats, and the grim reaper: towards a demographic profile of the Roman élite*, «*Class. Quarterly*» 49/1 (1999), pp. 254-281.

(20) W. SCHEIDEL, *Roman Age Structure: Evidence and Models*, *JRS*, 91 (2001), pp. 1-26, particularly p. 25.

(21) CLAUS, *Probleme*, cit. (n. 3), pp. 395-417.

(22) M. MACKENSEN, *Körperbestattete Neonaten in der römischen Nekropole von Sempeter*, «*Arheološki vestnik*» 29 (1978), pp. 336-342.

(23) Affirmative about this: F. LAUBENHEIMER, *La mort des tout petits dans l'Occident romain*, in «*Naissance et petite enfance dans l'Antiquité*» (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 203), ed. V. Dasen, Fribourg, Göttingen 2004, pp. 293-315, particularly pp. 295-297; see also A. DEGRASSI, *L'indicazione dell'età nelle iscrizioni sepolcrali latine*, in «*Akte des IV. internationalen Kongresses für griechische und lateinische Epigraphik*», Wien 1964, pp. 85-86; sceptical: PARKIN, *Demography*, cit. (n. 4), p. 95 ff.

(24) Cf. W. SCHEIDEL, *Zur Angabe des Lebensalters in den römischen Grabinschriften Österreichs*, «*Römisches Österreich*» 19/20 (1991-1992), pp. 147-148.

months of his or her life. High infant mortality existed in the Roman period even before the disease appeared in the western part of the Empire; the Antonine plague of the late second century AD was most probably a pandemic of smallpox, which since then became endemic, particularly in large cities (25). However, small infants are notoriously underrepresented in funerary inscriptions (26). The mortality of women was also high, due to many pregnancies at a much too early age (the legal age for marriage was 12 years for a girl!) (27).

Results of recent research in ancient demography have shown sufficiently clearly that model life tables, as composed by A. J. Coale and P. Demeny (28), which undoubtedly serve as important comparative material, cannot be regarded as valid to establish the average age structure of the population of the Roman Empire (29). The data we have are insufficient. To assess the age structure in a given area approximately correctly, the local environment is most important, in particular the spread of endemic diseases, while favourable or unfavourable geographical conditions were a particularly important factor – no doubt much more than nowadays when medical care is highly developed. The impact of wars should not be neglected, while further advantages or disadvantages were represented by various migrations. Malnutrition, tuberculosis, dysentery, and malaria (30) were the most common causes of high mortality in antiquity. Data from graveyards and tombstones represent a limited and biased sample, not adequate at all for any demographic analysis that could in any way be valid for the Roman Empire in general and not even locally (31). However, cer-

(25) R. J. and M. L. LITTMAN, *Galen and the Antonine Plague*, «AJPh», 94 (1973), pp. 243-255; see also R. P. DUNCAN-JONES, *The Impact of the Antonine Plague*, «Journal of Roman Archaeology» 9 (1996), pp. 108-136; M. BUORA, *La peste antonina in Aquileia e nel territorio circostante*, in «Roma sul Danubio. Da Aquileia a Carnuntum lungo la via dell'ambra» (Cataloghi e monografie arch. dei Civici musei di Udine), Roma 2002, pp. 93-97.

(26) G. COULON, *L'enfant en Gaule romaine*, Paris 2004 (2nd ed.), pp. 143-145; cf. M. KING, *Commemoration of Infants on Roman Funerary Inscriptions*, in «*The Epigraphy of Death. Studies in the History and Society of Greece and Rome*», ed. G. J. Oliver, Liverpool 2000, pp. 117-154, for Rome, in particular 123 ff.

(27) D. GOURÉVITCH, *La mort de la femme en couches et dans les suites de couches*, in «*La mort, les morts et l'au-delà dans le monde romain*», cit. (n. 5), pp. 187-193.

(28) A. J. COALE, P. DEMENY, *Regional Model Life Tables and Stable Populations*, New York etc., 1983², p. 37 ff.

(29) SCHEIDEL, *Age Structure*, cit. (n. 20); PARKIN, *Demography*, cit. (n. 4), p. 79 ff.

(30) W. SCHEIDEL, *Measuring Sex, Age and Death in the Roman Empire. Explorations in Ancient Demography* (JRA Suppl. 21), Ann Arbor 1996, p. 139 ff.

(31) CLAUS, *Probleme*, cit. (n. 3); HOPKINS, *Graveyards*, cit. (n. 17).

tain commemorative tendencies that emerge from the inscriptions can nonetheless be singled out and commented. The extent to which they can be interpreted as characteristic for a given region is uncertain; rather, they should merely be studied as an interesting phenomenon.

No doubt nutritional differences contributed to human health and longevity, as did the geographical position of settlements located at favourable altitudes above sea level (32), implying good air and fresh water. Both climate and profession could play a role in influencing longevity, despite the contrary opinion of I. Kajanto (33). Large cities were particularly insalubrious, due to unavoidable low sanitary standards, notably in the poorer quarters. Large quantities of garbage, a not well-organized disposal of human waste, and the lack of fresh drinking water were additional reasons for various infections and illnesses even among the well-to-do (34). In the pre-modern period, too, mortality in large towns of the Mediterranean world was higher than in the countryside (35). In antiquity it was well known how important it was to live in a healthy environment, and Hippocrates had already devoted an important treatise to this topic: *De aere, aquis et locis*. Other classical writers, too, who were hardly experts at medicine, were aware of this; thus Pliny the Younger noted in a letter to his friend Domitius Apollinaris how much healthier was his estate in Tifernum Tiberinum in Umbria, which he compared with pernicious coastal parts of Tuscany, pernicious no doubt because of malaria. Pliny remarked how many grandfathers and great-grandfathers were living in that part of Umbria: «The Tuscan coastal regions, those along the sea, have a heavy and insalubrious climate; but this place is far from the sea, below the Apennines, one of the healthiest mountains. ... the air is always pleasantly breezy, sharp winds are much more rare. Many old people are living in the area; you can see grandfathers and great-grandfathers of youths, you can hear old tales and ancestral stories...» (*Ep.* 5.6.1) (36). Tombstones from

(32) SZILÁGYI, *Westeuropäische Provinzen*, cit. (n. 1), p. 154.

(33) I. KAJANTO, *On the Problem of the Average Duration of Life in the Roman Empire*, «Annales Acad. Sc. Fennicae (ser. B)» 153/2 (1968), p. 21.

(34) FRIER, *Demography*, cit. (n. 18), pp. 793-795.

(35) DUNCAN-JONES, *Structure*, cit. (n. 9), p. 104.

(36) *Est sane gravis et pestilens ora Tuscorum, quae per litus extenditur. Sed hi procul a mari recesserunt, quin etiam Appennino saluberrimo montium subiacent. 6: ... semper aer spiritu aliquo movetur, frequentius tamen auras quam ventos habet. Hinc senes multi: videas avos proavosque iam iuvenum, audias fabulas veteres sermonesque maiorum...*

the Emona area, as well as the southern Norican and Pannonian regions, seem to suggest that grandfathers and great-grandfathers were not rare there either.

Age-rounding and age awareness - a sign of Romanization?

Epigraphic evidence for the western part of the Roman Empire shows that indication of age was extremely rare in the Republican period but increased over time and culminated in Christian tombstones. However, local differences were immense, and while, for example, ages were noted rarely in the towns of northern Italy, they were indicated as a rule in the funerary inscriptions of Africa, as well as in the Emona area, and in Noricum and Pannonia, where, in addition, old people are over-represented (37). Rounding up ages was a common phenomenon in the Roman period, as well as the fact that up to 25 years (infants excluded), the ages of children and young people are noted in a more precise way than the ages of those deceased after 25 years. This is indicated by statistical data for the Roman Empire in general, as well as by specific cases where biometrical data have been analysed (38). Samples are further biased by the fact that on many integrally preserved tombstones – and not merely on those erected during the lifetime of the owner of the tomb – ages do not appear. The reasons may be many: custom, fashion, ignorance, or other less obvious motives. Interestingly enough, the existing situation in a given area often finds confirmation in new inscriptions, which usually do not alter previous results (39).

Starting with the reign of Augustus (*lex Aelia Sentia* of AD 4 and *Papia Poppaea* of AD 9) (40), a system of birth registration (*professio liberorum natorum*) was introduced for Roman citizens. However, while there is evidence for penalties for not having registered in the census, no penalties are known for not having registered a birth (41). Throughout antiquity the inhabitants of the Roman Empire were in principal able to offer a document con-

(37) DEGRASSI, *Indicazione*, cit. (n. 23), p. 75 ff.

(38) See, e.g. for Bononia (Bologna), A. DONATI, *Contributo alla demografia di Bologna romana: i dati biometrici*, «Il Carrobbio» 4 (1978), pp. 177-184.

(39) DEGRASSI, *Indicazione*, cit. (n. 23).

(40) G. BARBIERI, in «*Diz. ep.*», s.v.

(41) PARKIN, *Old Age*, cit. (n. 7), pp. 178-180.

firming their age, whether at a law-court or on any occasion when this was necessary. Nonetheless, it does not seem that notices of birth were obligatory, and age could also be proven by witnesses or with a document from the census archives (42). To know one's age was important in particular for young people between 18 and 25, when they came of age. It was often necessary to confirm one's age with a document, as for example to prove the legal age for various official postings, the age of recruits, the age when youths were no longer entitled to receive *alimenta*, the age to have the right to manumit or be manumitted, etc. Nonetheless, it must have sometimes occurred that in the course of legal procedures age had to be established according to external appearance, since otherwise '*probatio aetatis ex aspectu corporis*' would not have been referred to in legal texts (e.g. *Dig.*, 4.4.32). For the second century AD, the existence of birth certificates is documented by an often cited passage from Apuleius, in which he mentioned that the age of the rich widow Pudentilla had been falsified, when in fact it was so easy to prove the right age, since it was officially recorded in the provincial record office (*tabularium provinciae*) and was accessible to everybody, while it could have also been kept at home (*Apologia* 89). Under Marcus Aurelius the duty to declare the birth of children must have been extended to all groups of the population, most notably to those excluded earlier, such as illegitimate children, if the passage from *Historia Augusta* has been correctly interpreted (*vita Marci* 9.7-8) (43).

A. Mócsy offered several explanations for not knowing the exact age at death. In theory, every resident of the Roman Empire would have possessed a birth certificate. Most probably, in practice many did not, since many lived far from the provincial record offices, which were located in provincial capitals. But even those who actually had certificates, would not have been able to reckon the year of their birth if they had not also had a list of consuls or the years of reigning emperors available. However, some of the parents did not even declare the birth of their children (44). Whatever the reason, quite obviously most people did not know their exact ages. For most people living in rural areas possession of a

(42) *Id.*, *ibid.*, p. 181 ff.

(43) MÓCSY, *Unkenntnis*, cit. (n. 12), p. 410 ff.

(44) A. MÓCSY, *Das schätzungsweise angegebene Lebensalter auf römischen Grabinschriften*, «Das Altertum», 12/2 (1966), pp. 108-111.

birth certificate would not have seemed important. Most of them did not think they would need it in the law courts or for any legal procedure. Mócsy's main conclusion is that the high percentage of age-rounding should be related to ignoring certain Roman legal and administrative standards, which would simultaneously mean that the indigenous local administration functioned efficiently in its own way (45). This may not always be a plausible explanation, since on the other hand one of the main features of Romanization must specifically have been the introduction of various Roman administrative practices.

In large cities such as Rome and Ostia children were often commemorated, and tombstones for elderly people were much less common. This was tentatively related to the fact that in major cities the adult population was more aware of an inability of knowing the exact ages of deceased adults, while the ages of children were easier to calculate. Therefore they tended to omit adult ages altogether, while in rural areas people were not reluctant to estimate their years in an approximate way (46). However, it still remains unanswered why ages – considering that they were more or less guesswork – appeared at all on so many tombstones, despite the fact that it would not have been necessary to note them, and that quite often members of the municipal elite, who may have set an example for the rest of the people, often omitted them from their tombstones, partly also in Emona and Celeia (47).

In the regions under investigation, the majority of the population, and in particular the peregrine inhabitants, regarded age to be an important item to engrave on their funerary monuments. Given that every five years the *duoviri quinquennales* in every Roman autonomous town conducted a census of all the inhabitants, both the town residents and the rural population (provincial censuses seem to have been universal) (48), this occasion was no doubt an important reference point in the life of simple people and a good opportunity to calculate one's age. It was quite likely a memorable event, connected with accompanying markets, reunions with relatives from different villages, visiting relatives in the city, in short an occasion to meet with people and do business. If

(45) Mócsy, *Unkenntnis*, cit. (n. 12), pp. 418-419.

(46) Kajanto, *Problem*, cit. (n. 33), p. 13 ff.

(47) See also Degraffi, *Indicazione*, cit. (n. 23), p. 79.

(48) Parkin, *Old Age*, cit. (n. 7), p. 182 ff.

the age of somebody who participated in the census for the first time was not precisely known, it would have been estimated approximately – probably rounded off to a multiple of 5 – while after five years, during the next census, a further five years would have been added to the previously established age. Thus it would seem that within a span of five years, the noted ages may have been – at least theoretically – more or less correct, and this could also in part explain why so many are rounded off to multiples of 5. It can be concluded that centenarians were over 95 years old, or, in the case it is presumed that the awareness of one's age gets more imprecise with the years through confusion and loss of memory, at least over 90; in many cases they were no doubt commemorated on tombstones precisely because they were (thought to have been) so old.

Some data may suggest that rounding up ages (both in terms of style and exaggeration) and the general illiteracy and low level of education went hand in hand, therefore even the data taken from an official context such as census declarations could be equally as unreliable as those from tombstones (49). However, not knowing one's age – given that it was not at all easy to know it – should not necessarily be equated with illiteracy, and even less with a low level of Romanization. In general, members of the municipal elite or the Roman army would have been able to calculate their own age or that of their deceased relatives more correctly than the common people. However, even the soldiers, whose years of service must have been counted in an exact manner, tended to round off their ages (50).

It is not difficult to explain the rounded off years on the one hand and the precise number of months on the other, which often occurs in funerary inscriptions. It was not easy to keep track of one's years, since the lists of consuls were not readily accessible (51), while a yearly calendar, including all holidays and festivals, was available to everyone (52). Birthdays were important family holi-

(49) DUNCAN-JONES, *Structure*, cit. (n. 9), pp. 91-92; p. 101 ff.; ID., *Age-rounding, Illiteracy and Social Differentiation in the Roman Empire*, «Chiron», 7 (1977), pp. 333-353.

(50) MÓCSY, *Unkenntnis*, cit. (n. 12), p. 391; SCHEIDEL, *Measuring*, cit. (n. 30), p. 93 ff.

(51) H. LIEB, *Zur Kenntnis der Konsulnamen im römischen Reich - zwei Inschriften aus dem ager Novariensis*, in «Eine ganz normale Inschrift»... und ähnliches zum Geburtstag von Ekkehard Weber» (Althistorisch-Epigraphische Studien Bd. 5), eds. F. Beutler, W. Hameter, Wien 2005, pp. 299-301.

(52) M. MILIČEVIĆ, *Rimski kalendar* [*The Roman Calendar*] (Biblioteka Latina et Graeca, Radovi 8), Zagreb 1990.

days and were currently celebrated (53). General rounding off of ages in provinces does not betray so much a poor age awareness of the local population, as is usually assumed, but rather a poor knowledge of an exact age, which is not quite the same. Much has been written on the subject of age-rounding (54); critics of the hypothesis that it was due to the recurrence of the census each five years (55), maintain that it would not have been at all easy for relatives of a deceased individual to know how many census intervals had passed from his birth, and why would they have neglected years 1, 2, 3, and 4 – even if the census occurred each five years (56). Kajanto noted that in ancient Greek epitaphs ages had also been rounded off, which may diminish the hypothesis of the quinquennial censuses (57). The second explanation is based on collective psychology and finds confirmation in modern cultures: many people have a predilection for numbers that are multiples of 5 and 10, and tend to round off the ages of people that they do not know exactly (58).

Although the latter explanation no doubt played an important role in rounding off ages, criticism of the census-thesis does not seem entirely justified to me. People probably did not wish to mislead their community intentionally by having false ages carved on tombstones. Therefore it can further be assumed that they elaborated a way of at least approximately knowing their ages. This would have been easiest by making a note of the census every five years and in that way counting the years each year at their birthday celebration. Multiples of five could partly result from the fact that even initially many people would not know their exact ages. Rounding up ages then is merely a minor aspect of Romanization, if erecting inscribed stone monuments is considered an important component of Romanized society.

(53) I. RAMELLI, *Osservazioni sul concetto di «giorno natalizio» nel mondo greco e romano e sull'espressione di Seneca dies aeterni natalis*, «Arys», 2 (1999), pp. 339-342; cf. a tombstone of one Praecilius from Ciria, who happily celebrated a hundred birthdays: *...natales honeste meos centum celebravi felices...* (ILAlg, II, 820).

(54) PARKIN, *Old Age*, cit. (n. 7), p. 31 ff.; see also the cited bibliography.

(55) The census theory is advocated, e.g., by R. ETIENNE, *Démographie et épigraphie*, in «Atti del terzo congresso intern. di epigrafia greca e latina», Roma 1959, pp. 415-424, particularly p. 420.

(56) See, e.g., Y. LE BOHEC, «Peut-on compter la mort» des soldats de la III^e Légion Auguste?, in «La mort, les morts et l'au-delà dans le monde romain» cit. (n. 5), pp. 63-64.

(57) KAJANTO, *Problem*, cit. (n. 33), p. 18.

(58) See, e.g., DEGRASSI, *Indicazione*, cit. (n. 23), p. 82; LE BOHEC, *Peut-on compter*, cit. (n. 56), pp. 63-64.

Supposed centenarians in the Emona hinterland and the adjacent Norican and Pannonian regions

The concentration of centenarians in these regions is interesting. They may have been people over 95 or at least over 90, since W. Scheidel, analyzing the Norican tombstones, concluded that not only were almost all ages of people over 70 years old rounded off, but also that age-rounding ending in 0 prevailed over multiples of 5 ending in 5, with ages being rounded off to the nearest higher multiple of 5 and not to the lower (59). In Aquileia (the starting point for the Romanization of Noricum and Pannonia), as well as in Tergeste, Emona, and Celeia, ages on tombstones are noted much more rarely and in general they are much lower (60). Partly this may have been due to the unavoidably less salubrious conditions of a large town, but most of all to different commemorative habits. Life in cities was always very different from life in the countryside. In an indigenous milieu elderly people may have had a prominence, or *auctoritas*, and may have been esteemed by their community, which could benefit from their knowledge and experience. Centenarians were no doubt commemorated on tombstones because they were exceptional. This may also be the case for the alleged ultra-centenarians from northern Italy under the Flavian emperors, reported by Pliny the Elder (*N. h.* 7. 162-164) and Phlegon of Tralles (*FGrHist* 257, fr. 37), whose accounts contain data (not, however, identical) referring to a recent census, conducted under Vespasian and Titus in AD 74 (61). Pliny noted that in *Regio VIII* over fifty persons had declared their age to be 100, while over twenty claimed to be ultra-centenarians. In Parma three persons had declared themselves to be 120, and two to be 125, and further ultra-centenarians were documented from Brixia, Placentia, Faventia, and Bononia. In Ariminum, one M. Apolinus was 140 and one Tertulla 137 years old; in Veleia, six persons

(59) SCHEIDEL, *Zur Angabe*, cit. (n. 24), pp. 149; 148; 157; cf. DEGRASSI, *Indicazione*, cit. (n. 23), p. 88, who suggested that alleged centenarians must have been over 90.

(60) Evidence for Aquileia is collected in J. B. BRUSIN, *Inscriptiones Aquileiae*, I-III (ed. M. Buora), Udine 1991-1993; cf. DEGRASSI, *Indicazione*, cit. (n. 23), p. 81; for Tergeste in *CIL V* and C. ZACCARIA, *Regio X Venetia et Histria. Tergeste - Ager Tergestinus et Tergesti adtributus*, in *«Supplementa Italica»*, n.s. 10 (Roma 1992), pp. 139-283; for Emona in *CIL*, III and M. ŠAŠEL KOS, *The Roman Inscriptions in the National Museum of Slovenia / Lapidarij Narodnega muzeja Slovenije* (Situla 35), Ljubljana, 1997.

(61) PARKIN, *Old Age*, cit. (n. 7), pp. 38-39; 185 ff.; M. T. FONTANILLE, *Vieillir à Rome. Approche démographique*, 2004 (non vidi).

were allegedly 110 years old, four 120, and one 140. In terms of epigraphy, these data may find confirmation in a tombstone from Aquileia, in which a woman aged 135 years is attested (*CIL*, V, 8595, not included in the *Inscr. Aquil.*), and in a funerary inscription of a priest of Mithras (?) from Mediolanum, allegedly of the same age (*CIL*, V, 5704), but elsewhere in northern Italy centenarians are only exceptionally documented.

Ages over 120 years – extreme human age estimated by the ancients on the basis of summing up three generations (as, for example, the case of Nestor in the *Iliad*) or equated with *saeculum* (62) – are indeed impossible (63), and any age above 100 years should be regarded as quite exceptional and viewed with scepticism, while some are no doubt absurdly exaggerated. In a passage before that, Pliny discussed *mirabilia*, some mythical old ages, where years may have been confused with seasons or lunar cycles; it is not quite certain whether he regarded the ages here cited as possible or whether he doubted them. If he did not, it is clear that they were also accepted as plausible in official documents. In this case we may well doubt «the efficacy of the ancient methods used in the collection of census data» (64). In any case, there was always a certain percentage of people of very advanced age, although clearly centenarians were and are exceptional.

The centenarians in question are concentrated in the regions between Aquileia-Emona, Emona-Celeia, Celeia-Virunum, and Celeia-Poetovio-Flavia Solva (Fig. 2). A pair of centenarians is mentioned on a stele from the village of Ig near Emona, on which relief heads of wife and husband are represented in the niche above the inscription. It was erected by Fronto Vibi f. while still alive, for himself and his living wife Secunda Maximi f.; the occasion for erecting the tombstone may have been their advanced age or the death of one Bugia Sexti f., who died at the age of 60 and is mentioned after the couple. The two lines after the names of the couple (fifth and sixth) were temporarily left empty, most probably to fill in their ages at a later date. In due time, however, their ages

(62) H. GRAßL, *Die älteste Römerin - eine Steirerin? Ein Beitrag zur Frage des Höchstalters in der Antike*, «Schild von Steier (Festschrift Modrijan)» 15/16 (1978-1979), pp. 101-104.

(63) PARKIN, *Old Age*, cit. (n. 7), p. 45; cf. data published by A. R. THATCHER, V. KANNISTO, J. W. VAUPEL, *The Force of Mortality at Ages 80 to 120* (Monographs on Population Aging, 5), Odense 1998.

(64) PARKIN, *Old Age*, cit. (n. 7), p. 39.

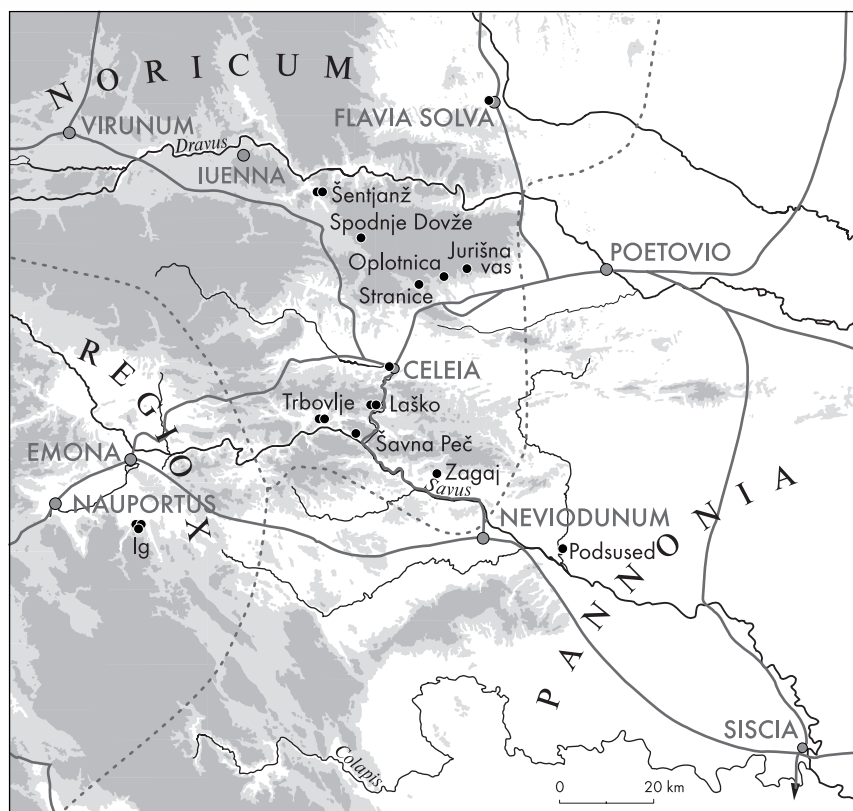


Fig. 2. Centenarians in the Emona area and the adjacent Norican and Pannonian regions
(computer graphics: M. Belak).

were engraved in the fifth line: allegedly both were 100 years old (*o(bitus) an(norum) C et o(bitae) an(norum) C*); in the sixth line there is only *et*. After Bugia, the names of two other persons follow, Fronto Luci f. and Lucius Frontonis f., who died at the age of 50 and 70 respectively (AIJ, 186 = CIL, III, 3862; Fig. 3). The ages of Fronto and Secunda should not necessarily be taken at their face value, but – as has been noted – they were no doubt older than 90 years. It is not plausible to suppose that the letter *C* in this context should signify anything else but the number of years. Most probably the stonecutter indeed left two lines empty in order to put in the numbers for the ages of the couple after their death. Enough space was left for, e.g., the number 90. When the couple died at an advanced age, which was believed by them and/or their family to be (approximately) 100 years – there is no reason



Fig. 3. Tombstone for the centenarian Fronto, the son of Vibius, and his family.

to doubt this – one entire line, which would have otherwise been filled with two longer numbers, was left unexpectedly empty (65). In the next, otherwise empty, line a seemingly unnecessary *et* is engraved, unless it was meant for another family member whose name had eventually not been inscribed on the tombstone. Anoth-

(65) Suggested by Dr. Dragan Božič.

er stele, which was also erected by indigenous inhabitants, is known from the same area: Secco Nammonis and Rega Terti f. were 50 and 40 years old respectively, their son Rusticus only 20, while the grandmother Manuna was 100 (*AIJ*, 195 = *CIL*, III, 3871 + p. 1734). The age-rounding to multiples of 10 is significant in this case, as well as in some of those that follow.

Centenarians further include Vibius Secundus from Trbovlje in the territory between Emona and Celeia, a veteran who erected a marble sarcophagus for himself and his family when still alive. *An(norum) C* seems to have been added at a later date since it is engraved on the frame, outside the inscribed field. The age of his wife Cerula Tutori(s filia) is given as 90, while their daughter Vibia Avita died at the age of 22, as did another young woman mentioned on the tombstone, Valeria Marcellina (*AIJ*, 21 = *ILLPRON* 1927 = *CIL*, III, 5142). Another tombstone mentioning a centenarian may or may not have been from Celeia; it was immured in the «gate with antiquities» in Gosposka St. in Celje. On it a freedman of Itto is mentioned, 100 years old, whose name is damaged; his wife Boniata was 60. The ages of all other members of his family, who were all freedmen and freedwomen of Itto, are rounded off in multiples of 10 (*AIJ*, 51 = *ILLPRON*, 1595 = *CIL*, III, 5242 + pp. 1830, 2285). A tombstone of Diastumarus, son of Ibilenus, was discovered near Trbovlje, between the villages of Plesko and Loke, immured in the Church of the Holy Cross at Retje (*ILLPRON*, 1943 = *CIL*, III, 5144a = 11683). He was 100 when he died, but his wife Coma, daughter of Chilo, died at a much younger age, at 75. The ages of their two sons were also rounded off, Viator was 50, Crispus was 45, while the number indicating the age of their daughter, whose name is damaged, is broken off.

A tombstone of the centenarian Ateloudus, son of Sabinus, was found at Spodnje Dovže, a small settlement between Celeia and Iuenna, probably from the second century AD. It is broken off below, thus the age of his wife Boniata is not known, and neither the names (nor ages) of any further deceased individuals (*ILJug*, 365 = *ILLPRON*, 1774). Another centenarian, Celatus, the son of Tertullus, is from broadly the same area, from Šentjanž near Dravograd; the age of his wife Successa is given as 101 years (*RIS*, 397 = *CIL*, III, 5700). It is remarkable that the number is not rounded off. A fragmentary tombstone was found at Stranice (Slov. Konjice, the territory between Celeia and Poetovio). Somebody whose name is broken off died at the age of 20, then Nonna Tatuc(i)

f(ilia) is mentioned, aged 100 years; the son Successus died at the age of 50 (*AIJ*, 76 = *ILLPRON*, 1917 = *CIL*, III, 5286). From Jurišna vas near Tinje in the Pohorje Mts. (Slovenian Styria), is a tombstone, now in the Joanneum in Graz, mentioning several members of a family of peregrine locals, all of whom rendered their age in rounded numbers in multiples of 10 (66): Excingomarus Valentis f. was aged 100, while the ages of others are twice 60, twice 80, as well as 70 and 50. In the territory of Flavia Solva to the north of Poetovio, a tombstone for Titia Catuco, the daughter of Tiberius, was discovered at the castle of Grottenhofen near Kaindorf (now in the Joanneum); she was allegedly 120 years old (*ILLPRON*, 1231 = *CIL*, III, 5389 = *RIS*t, 131) (67).

On a fragmentary tombstone from Kovaški Vrh near Oplotnica, in the broad region of the Pohorje marble quarries (near the villages of Hudinja, Vitanje, and Šmartno above Slovenska Bistrica), between Celeia and Poetovio, one Indibio, son of Elgiatus is mentioned, who was allegedly 100, while his wife Courtula, daughter of Adbugiounus, was 70 (*ILLPRON*, 1798) (68). The first three names are extremely rare. A tombstone found in the region between Emona and Celeia, at Mala Gorca near Št. Lenart above Laško, was erected by a son Latinus to his parents, who both allegedly lived to be 100: Tertius, son of Rigo, and his wife Tertia, daughter of Belatullus (*ILLPRON*, 1855 = *CIL*, III, 14367,2). At Šavna Peč near Zidani Most, a very fragmentary tombstone was discovered, now in the museum at Laško (*AIJ*, 24). On it merely the last line is preserved entirely, mentioning a hundred-year-old woman. On a fragmentary tombstone from Ajdovski Gradec above Vranje near Sevnica an age of 120 years is noted; no names are preserved on the fragment (*AIJ*, 36).

Ten kilometres west of Zagreb, at Potsused, the site of a quarry in the territory of Andautonia, a fragmentary unfinished stele was discovered, with an entirely preserved inscription, but perhaps broken in the course of transport; it may never have been used in a graveyard. It was set up for C. Iulius Adietumarus, the

(66) *AIJ*, 89 = *ILLPRON*, 1794 = *RIS*t, 375 = *CIL*, III, 11711; cf. PARKIN, *Old Age*, cit. (n. 7), p. 31: *M[a]ximus Masculi an(norum) LX / et Amat(a) Kalandina con(iux) / Excingomaro / Valentis f. a(nnorum) C / et Tertiae Co/mati f. v(i)x(it) a(nnos) LX. / Masculus Excin(gomari) / f. a(nnorum) LXXX, Ecouta Sex(ti f.) / a(nnorum) LXX, Maximilla f. / Adiutus Excingomar[i] (f.) a(nnorum) LXXX, / Marcianus Mascli (f.) an(norum) L.*

(67) GRAßL, *Älteste Römerin*, cit. (n. 62).

(68) S. P(AHIČ), «Varstvo spomenikov», 21 (1977), p. 230.

freedman of Maximus, aged 100 – in accordance with his testament – and for his wife Sporilla, aged 50 (*AII*, 482 = *CIL*, III, 10867). Elsewhere in Noricum and Pannonia, (ultra)centenarians are documented sporadically, more of them may only be attested among the indigenous population in the Vindobona area (69).

As has been seen, it can by no means be claimed that the inhabitants of these regions would have been more healthy and longer-lived than their neighbours. Although it can indeed be claimed that these regions were hilly, with pure waters and woods, which are no doubt important factors for demography, as is also the quality of nourishment and nutritional habits, it is clear that the extant epigraphic data can offer no basis for any demographic evaluation. However, regional differences might have existed, as, interestingly, they do in modern Slovenia, where a difference of two to three years in average life expectancy is attested between the eastern and western parts of the country, to the advantage of the west (70). It may be added, in terms of comparison, that in the present Slovenia with two million inhabitants there are 117 centenarians (71); in the Roman period, there were proportionally much fewer.

These tombstones, which all belong to the autochthonous population, are merely a sign that old people were habitually commemorated in the mentioned areas. This may imply that the role they had played in their community was regarded as important. Until recently people in Albania lived – and in some regions may still live – in a society ruled by traditional rules canonized several centuries ago and written down in the nineteenth century. Elders were to be respected by the young, who were to obey them and carry out their orders, since their elders were experienced and «had already dealt with all the phases of social development» (72). While among some peoples outside the Roman Empire (such as, among others, the German Heruli, Sarmatian Iazyges, and even the Ligurians of Gaul) (73), old people were marginalized to the extent that they were done away with, in the Graeco-Roman world

(69) See *CIL*, III, 4555; 11301; 15196,2 (the age of 150 years may be an error); 4600, 4604 (the latter two of uncertain provenience).

(70) M. ŠIRCELJ, *Tablice umrljivosti prebivalstva Slovenije 1980-1982 - 1994-1995 (Life Tables for the Population of Slovenia 1980-1982 - 1994-1995)*, Ljubljana 1997.

(71) Data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia.

(72) M. BERISHAJ, *Skrita moč bese. Dodatek: Skenderbegov kanon (The Hidden Power of the Besa. Appendix: The Canon of Skenderbeg)*, Ljubljana 2004, p. 19.

(73) PARKIN, *Old Age*, cit. (n. 7), p. 259 ff., with references to ancient sources.

the attitude towards elderly people varied from tolerance to esteem. They were marginal members of society and Cicero's and Plutarch's essays on old age – *Cato Maior de Senectute* and *On whether an old man should engage in public affairs* – confirm rather than contradict this. Both authors thought that elderly people in general merited more esteem and authority than they actually enjoyed. But regional differences no doubt existed, and there may have been regions in the Roman Empire where the role of the elderly people was appreciated more than elsewhere.

APPENDIX

A late Roman centenarian from Siscia

A specific case is represented by an interesting late Roman tombstone made of reddish limestone and found at Siscia (in a vineyard of Sisak, above a grave built from tiles), which was set up for a master of the entertainment actors in mimes (*magister mimariorum*). It is now kept in the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest (Inv. No. RD 195). It reads as follows (AIJ, 570 = CIL, III, 3980 = ILS, 5228; Fig. 4):

*D(is) M(anibus). / Positus est hic Leburna, / magister mimariorum / qui
vicxit (!) annos plus / minus centum. / Aliquotiens mortuus / sum sed sic
numquam. / Opto vos ad superos bene / [va]ler<a>e.*

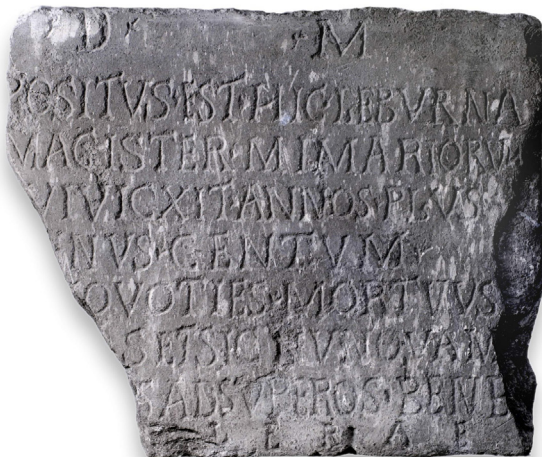


Fig. 4. Funerary inscription for Leburna, the master of the mime actors
(courtesy of the Hungarian National Museum).

Translation: To the divine Manes. Here lies Leburna, master of the actors in mimes, who lived more or less a hundred years. I died several times but never in this manner. I hope you are well in the upper world (74).

The name Leburna is a *hapax*, no doubt derived from the Liburni, who lived along the northern coastal part of the eastern Adriatic and its islands, as far as Histria. The name Liburnus, too, is attested only once in Dalmatia (75). There are not many witty funerary texts from the western part of the Roman Empire, but a similar one, in Greek, was found in Aquileia, erected for a mime actress (*mima*) Bassilla by one of her co-actors (*biologos*) Heraclides (*Inscr. Aquil.*, 710) (76). She died around the mid-third century AD on tour at Aquileia, where the Greek-speaking audience must have been more numerous than expected (77). *Mimi* and *mimae* (actors and actresses in comic performances), are epigraphically well documented, particularly in Rome and other Italian cities (78), but more rarely in provincial towns. Quite likely the relatives of Leburna or his heir wanted the funerary inscription to reflect his profession of entertaining the audience, since the theatrical perception of life and death often associated laughter and death in a contradictory manner (79). Some deaths that Leburna performed during his lifetime must have been funny rather than sad. In contrast, a tombstone from the same city and more or less the same period may be cited, in which a child is commemorated. As is well known, the ages of deceased children are often referred to in a very precise manner. This inscription is particularly interesting because in it the hours of the night are also noted: 6 years, 6 months, 10 days, and 8 hours of the night; the text ends up by stating that the boy fulfilled the duty imposed upon him by fate (AIJ 572): *Dom(us) aet[erna] / Gaudenti[us? -o?] / filio piissim[o]*

(74) Underlined letters were still visible in the transcription of the inscription by Therese von Artner in her letter of July 1825.

(75) A. MÓCSY, et al., *Nomenclator* (Diss. Pann. 3/1), Budapest 1983, s.v.

(76) See C. ZACCARIA, *Testimonianze epigrafiche di spettacoli teatrali e di attori nella Cisalpina romana*, in «Spettacolo in Aquileia e nella Cisalpina romana» (Antichità Altoadr. 41), Udine 1994, p. 86 no. 1: ... *πολλάκις ἐν θυμέλαις, ἀλλ'οὐχ οὕτω δὲ θανούσῃ*. L. PRAUSCELLO, *Rehearsing her Own Death: a Note on Bassilla's Epitaph*, «ZPE» 147 (2004), pp. 56-58.

(77) L. BOFFO, *Epigrafia e «cultura» greca in Aquileia romana*, in «ΕΠΙΓΡΑΦΑΙ. Miscellanea epigrafica in onore di Lidio Gasperini», ed. G. Paci, Roma 2000, pp. 130-132.

(78) See, for Cisalpina, ZACCARIA, *Testimonianze*, cit. (n. 76), pp. 69-98.

(79) L. CALLEBAT, *Le rire et la mort. Effets d'exclusion et dramaturgie*, in «La mort, les morts et l'au-delà dans le monde romain» cit. (n. 5), pp. 257-262.

/ *qui vix(it) an(nos) VI, / m(enses) VI, d(ies) X, h(oras) n(octis) / VIII. Fati m(unus) c(omplevit).*

The formula *plus minus*, which occurs in another late Roman funerary inscription from Siscia (AIJ, 576), is typical of late Roman epigraphy (80). Leburna must have been very old, over 90 at least, even if he did not reach the age of 100. In his case, his profession, which required that dancers and performers be in good physical condition, may have played some role in accounting for his longevity.

I would very much like to thank Prof. Claudio Zaccaria for his valuable opinion on the problems discussed in my paper.

(80) MÓCSY, *Unkenntnis*, cit. (n. 12), p. 390.