



CEU Medieval Studies Department
Late Antique, Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation

of

DORA IVANIŠEVIĆ

on

**EPITAPHIC CULTURE AND SOCIAL HISTORY IN LATE ANTIQUE
SALONA (ca. 250 – 600 C.E.)**

will be held on

Wednesday, 18 January 2017, 10:00

in the

Senate Room – Monument Building
Central European University (CEU)
Nádor u. 9, Budapest

Examination Committee

Chair	Matthias Riedl (CEU, Department of History)
Members	Volker Menze, supervisor (CEU, Medieval Studies Department) Cristian-Nicolae Gașpar (CEU, Medieval Studies Department) József Laszlovszky (CEU, Medieval Studies Department)
External Readers	John Bodel – external reader (present) (Brown University) Jelena Marohnić – external reader (not present) (University of Zagreb)

The doctoral dissertation is available for inspection on the CEUlearning.ceu.edu site

Abstract

The two principal objectives of this dissertation are to examine the related topics of the late antique epitaphic culture of Salona, the capital of the Roman province of Dalmatia, and of the social profile of the “epitaphic population.” While the thesis focuses on 188 sufficiently preserved Latin and Greek epitaphs datable to from the mid-third to the beginning of the seventh centuries, it also discusses many early- and high-imperial epitaphs as well as non-funerary late-imperial inscriptions in order to consider various concepts of the “epigraphic habit” and the changing patterns of commemoration in their *longue durée* and across different epigraphic contexts. Thereby, the thesis attempts not to revolve its discussions around the axis of pagan versus Christian funerary commemoration, and seeks to evade the traditional scholarly divide between Roman, that is, early- and high-imperial, and Christian, that is, late-imperial epigraphy. Moreover, the present thesis privileges the text itself, yet it strives not to disregard the text’s monumental and archaeological context, if it is known: the monument type, material, visuals, craftsmanship, and location are considered if pertinent to the argument. Finally, both the anepitaphic funerary monuments and the two other types of inscriptions, specifically, the honorific and votive texts, are taken into consideration to contextualize epitaphs.

The first part of the thesis critically surveys the dominant models that aim to explain the epigraphic culture in the Roman empire, and questions the concept of the “Christian epigraphy” and the presumed motivation for the revival of the “Christian epitaphic output” in late Roman period. It suggests that the concept of “Christian epigraphy” was built upon the definition of what makes an inscription “Christian” that has been formulated by Giovanni

Battista de Rossi in the first volume of *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae* and taken over by Wilhelm Henzen in the sixth volume of *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. The quest for the evidence of ancient Christianity and the early Christians over-emphasized the given evidence as recorded in inscriptions which has had determinative bearing on the definition of what a “Christian inscription” is, and thus on the principles that governed the scope of epigraphic corpora. Furthermore, considering that the bulk of “Christian inscriptions” from Rome dominate the epigraphic record of both the City and the Latin West, and that the concept of “Christian epigraphy” was modeled on the epigraphic evidence from Rome’s catacombs, it happened that the notion of “Christian epigraphy” has overshadowed the rest of the late antique epigraphic record and has subsumed its totality. The “Christian epigraphy” has thus unwarrantably come to mean the “late antique epigraphy.”

The major problem is that the nineteenth-century paradigm has framed the way in which scholars still tend to look at and interpret the epigraphic record of late antiquity. Namely, the model elaborated by Carlos Galvão-Sobrinho in 1995, which attempts to explain the revival of the “Christian epigraphic habit,” presents the consummated form of the nineteenth-century definition of a “Christian inscription.” According to Galvão-Sobrinho, the statements of faith were the essential element of Christian funerary texts, and epitaphs were the important medium for believers to define themselves as Christian before God, which played a crucial role in securing salvation to them. Nevertheless, the underlying premise that the epigraphic culture of a period was driven and given form by a single motivating factor unique to the period is in itself untenable. It is argued that certain political and economic stability, and the persistence of civic institutions and of urban infrastructure factored the most in the pervasiveness of the practice of setting up inscribed

monuments. Furthermore, to the extent that the late Roman epitaphs permit to assess the relationship between the deceased and commemorator, the burial of dead was the affair of nuclear family and to compose an epitaph was an individual and personal initiative. It is thus suggested that the statements of faith were rather inward-looking, and that they had consolatory purpose for the bereaved family.

As to the conceptualization of sarcophagi, which were the dominant stone funerary monument in late antique Salona, the analysis of the vocabulary employed in epitaphs referring to the container has shown that it shifted from the figurative language, that is attested in a few early examples of sarcophagi and that was commonly applied to other types of monuments such as statue bases, stelas and altars, to the exclusively literal language. The shift in verbiage is taken to suggest that from the third century onward the sarcophagus's functional aspect prevailed over its metaphorical, "monumental" aspect. The growing minimalism of the sarcophagi panels, whereby even the frame of an inscription field ceased to be carved, the increased horror at the exhumation of corpses noticeable from the beginning of the fourth century, and the pervasiveness of the fine threats against the tomb violation in late Roman sarcophagi are all supportive of that idea with the corollary that the place and purported effect of the Christian epitaphs should be redressed.

Commemoration with inscribed funerary monuments lies at the intersection of its affordability and its quality of being socially and culturally contingent, and the chapter 3, 4, and 5 tackle these two topics. The third chapter touches upon the issue of the cost of inscribed tombstones with the aim to raise the question of their affordability. The attested early-

and high-imperial costs are put into perspective with the model of wealth distribution. Given the scarcity and unreliability of the quantitative data from Roman antiquity, the issue is raised merely to make us think about the order of magnitude of the costs of tombstones and to make us cognizant of the extent to which the prices might have been prohibitive. As to the socio-cultural contingency of the epigraphic practices, for the early and high empire, the debate revolves around the socio-legal status of people recorded in epitaphs, and how the “epitaphic population” relates to the social make-up of an urban community, that is, of those people who could afford an inscribed stone funerary monument. Pertinent to it is the question of the motivation that prompted people to set up funerary monuments, and of the nature of both commemorative and epigraphic culture. At stake is, above all, the method for assessing one’s socio-legal status, which relies on Roman onomastics and heavily hinges on a person’s cognomen. In other words, the method presupposes that Greek cognomina and certain Latin “servile” ones indicate the individual’s socio-legal background. Accordingly, freedmen are said to be over-represented in funerary commemoration in urban communities of the early and high empire. Regarding the late imperial, “Christian epitaphs,” the topic of social composition of epitaphs has not been systematically tackled in recent scholarship, and the assessments of the social status of “epitaphic population” are oftentimes somewhat impressionistic and boil down to whether the commemoration went further down or up on the social scale in comparison to the early- and high-imperial period.

The chapter 4 thus critically surveys the onomastic method and its application in the socio-historical analysis of epitaphs time and again recently propounded by Henrik Mouritsen in his studies of funerary

monuments from Ostia and Pompeii. It furthermore explores the onomastic indicators of social status as attested in epitaphs from Salona during the early and high empire. The chapter 5 analyses the changes in the Roman name-form and the disappearance of the *gentilicium* that were evolving over the high- and late-imperial period, and it examines the social significance of the two- and single-name form respectively. While the *Constitutio Antoniniana* caused the proliferation of the *nomen* Aurelius, onomastic reasons factored most in the final elimination of the *gentilicium* during the third and fourth centuries. The two-name system was still the standard in funerary and non-funerary epigraphy of Salona in the first half of the fourth century yet the pace of change seems to have been fast since already around the mid-fourth and in the second half of the fourth century the *gentilia* other than Aurelius and Flavius had seemingly died out. The status *nomen* Flavius endured the longest and it is the only attested *gentilicium* in the fifth century yet with only a few examples. On a methodological level, both the fourth and fifth chapter point out that it is crucial for a productive analysis to keep diachronic perspective, and they attempt to elucidate the fluidity of the Roman name system and the name fashion, and their determinative relation to both epigraphic context, and socio-legal and economic status. Lastly, the chapter 5 analyses the biographical pieces of information as recorded in epitaphs in order to assess what social groups set up stone funerary monuments in late antique Salona. The three groups are discernable: the individuals with senatorial, equestrian, and other lower-ranking honorific titles (the *viri honesti* and *feminae honestae*), the civil and military officials employed in the imperial central and provincial administration, and the craftsmen. They were altogether the moneyed group of people who had access to the gold coinage and who could participate in the urban market economy.

A brief CV

EDUCATION

2013/2014 *Graduate Program in Medieval Studies, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY*

Non-Degree Student and Telluride Association Fellow

From 2010 *Department of Medieval Studies, CEU, Budapest*

PhD Candidate in Medieval Studies

2009/2010 *Department of Medieval Studies, CEU, Budapest*

MA in Medieval Studies, *summa cum laude*

2005–2008 *Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb*

BA in Archaeology

2002-2011 *Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb*

BA in History and Latin Language with Roman Literature

PUBLICATIONS

2015 Theodore Studites. “Spiritual Guidance in ninth-century Byzantium: the Letters of Theodore the Stoudite to Eirene the Patrician.” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 21 (2015): 149-205.

(Co-translator)

2006 “Franciscus Lucianus Gondola’s Baptistinus.” *Latina et Graeca: Nova serija* 2006 (10): 99–133 (Co-translator)

CONFERENCE PAPERS

03/2016 *Roman Archaeology Conference*

Session: Religious Diversity in the Roman Province of Dalmatia (Co-organizer)

Paper: Epigraphic Evidence for Early Christians in Salona

01/2015 *Archaeological Institute of America Annual Meeting*

Paper: Epitaphs and Social History in Salona (First to Sixth Centuries C.E.)