

A Roman Veteran at Tomis. A New Reading of CIL III 7552 = ISM II 199

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ABSTRACT

The present paper examines a fragmentary epitaph from Tomis and puts forward a new reading, using analogies with other contemporary inscriptions. The text is then interpreted in the context of the regional epigraphic traditions and used to open a perspective on Greek-Latin bilingualism in Moesia Inferior.

KEYWORDS

Roman veteran; Moesia Inferior; Tomis; epitaph; bilingual inscription; bilingualism; tomb protection; funerary fines.

A fragment of inscribed limestone, of unknown provenance, was discovered in Constanţa, Romania, built into the wall of a 19th century house. The inscription, partly damaged by reuse, was first published by Tocilescu (1887, 40–41, nr. 49), whose reading was improved in the subsequent editions of Mommsen (CIL III 7552), Cagnat (IGR I 628), Aricescu (1980, 211, nr. 104) and Stoian (ISM II 199). The monument was recorded in the inventory of the National Antiquities Museum of Bucharest, today the Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology, under number L515 and has the following dimensions: 0.8 m height, 0.6 m width and 0.18 m thickness. The height of the letters is 0.02–0.03 m.¹

The inscription is a bilingual epitaph, carved in a rectangular frame, with the *DM* formula placed just above it. The text is carefully laid out, with no ligatures or intrusive letters. The Latin words are separated by *hederae* and the letters have occasional serifs. The Greek text is written in a mix of square and round letters, with broken cross-bar *alpha*, rectangular *sigma* and closed *omega*. I propose the following reading:

D(is) M(anibus)
Val(erius) Valens uet(eranus) [cl(assis)]
Fl(auie) Mo<e>sie me[m(oriam) f(eci) ui]-
 4 *uo meo mi et [— — — — —]*
ae coiugi m[e — — — — —]
 [με]τὰ τὴν σύμβιον [ταφῆνε?, μὴ ἄλ]-
 [λο]ν τινὰν τεθῆνε· [ἐὰν δέ τις το]-
 8 [λμ]ήσει, θῖνε τῷ φίσκῳ δ(ηνάρια) [—]

1 I was not able to locate the stone and I used instead the facsimile included by Stoian in his volume. I am nevertheless very grateful to Florian Matei-Popescu for assisting me in my efforts to locate it.

Line 3: *MOSIE* on stone.

Lines 4–6: *mi(hi) et [— —]|me coiugi m[ae, τὴν γλυκυ]|τάτην σύνβιον Mommsen; mi et [dulcissi]|me (sic) coiugi m[ae — — | τὴν γλυκυ]|τάτην σύνβιον Stoian, but the last line would be too long. The first letter at the beginning of line 5 must be an A, as all the other Ms on the stone have vertical *hastae*.*

Lines 6–8: *μη̄ ἕτερον* also possible on lines 6–7. [ὄς ἂν | ἄλλο]ν τιν' ἀντέθη νε[κρὸν | ἢ πωλ]ήσει, <τ>ίν<η> Mommsen, Stoian. Stoian also suggested the alternate reading ἦ]ν τιναν (*sic*) τεθῆνε.

Translation: To the spirits of the departed, I, Valerius Valens, veteran of the Flavian Moesian fleet, erected this monument while still living for me and for..., my wife... Do not place (here) someone else after (the burial of?) my wife. If anyone dares (to do so), he must pay... *denarii* to the *fiscus*.

DISCUSSION

Based on the lettering and nomenclature, the inscription was tentatively dated to the 2nd century AD by Stoian and to the first half of the 3rd century by Matei-Popescu (2010, 255). Both suggestions are equally plausible.

Mosie is an unusual spelling and I am unable to tell whether the omission of the first E was intentional or not. The ablative absolute *uiuo suo/meo* is particularly frequent in this region (GALDI 2000). Spellings such as *mi* for *mihi* and, perhaps, *me* for *meae* show historical tendencies in Latin, namely, the dropping of /h/ between vowels of similar quality (ADAMS 2013, 126–127) and the contraction of hiatus (ADAMS 2013, 110).

I think that it is reasonable to assume the Greek text started on line 6, as suggested by Stoian. I propose [με]τὰ τὴν σύνβιον followed by an aorist infinitive, as we find in other inscriptions displaying similar testamentary dispositions: μετὰ τὸ ἐμὲ τεθῆναι at Thessalonike (IG X,2 1582) and μετὰ τὸ κατατεθῆναι ἡμᾶς καὶ τὴν θρεπτὴν ἡμῶν at Byzantion (ΛΑΥΤΑΡ 2000, 258, nr. 383). The use of the infinitive as an imperative is customary in laws and treaties, but also in epitaphs: see, for example, μη̄ ἕτερον καταθέσθαι at Philippopolis (now Plovdiv, Bulgaria) (IGB III.1, 1007). The accusative singular τιναν with analogical -ν reflects a tendency in the language (HORROCKS 2010, 120–121) and it is also attested epigraphically. A funerary inscription from Perinthos (now Marmara Ereğlisi, Turkey) contains quite a similar wording: ἕ]τερόν τιναν καταθ[έσθαι (SAYAR 1998, 419, nr. 305). Finally, θῖνε is probably a spelling for θείναι. Although rare, the use of the infinitive in the apodosis is attested in another epitaph from Perinthos: δοῦναι τῷ ταμείῳ καὶ τῇ πόλει (SAYAR 1998, 303, nr. 137).²

The monument was erected by the veteran Valerius Valens, bearing a common name among Roman soldiers which became quite popular in the northern Balkans in the 2nd century AD (ŠAŠEL KOS 1978, 21). His unit, the Moesian fleet, was quartered at Noviodunum (near today's Isaccea, Romania) and controlled the traffic on the lower course of the Danube

2 I am in debt to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion. The previous reading, θῖνε as τίνη, is possible, though less likely. The alternation between θ and τ may occur in the initial position before front vowels (GIGNAC 1975, 91; SLAVOVA 2004, 93). The ε spelling is copiously documented in Roman Egypt (GIGNAC 1975, 242–262) and it also occurs in another funerary inscription from Tomis (ISM II 281 = SEG 24, 1079): ἰδία μητρὲ κατεσκευάσεν ζησάσε σεμμνῶς· χαίρε παροδετα.

(MATEI-POPESCU 2010, 245–255). The usual nomenclature is *classis Flaviae Moesicae*, but the form attested here is paralleled by a *classis Alexandriae* mentioned in a funerary inscription from Rome (CIL VI 32775 = CIL VI 33131).

The final part of the inscription forbids the burial of others and subjects this offense to a pecuniary sanction. The omission of the tomb founder in this formula is surprising,³ but may be either accidental or the result of a later intervention, after the death of Valerius Valens, when mentioning him would have been superfluous. The threats against tomb violators are a common theme of ancient epitaphs, especially in the Greek-speaking Asia Minor (KASER 1978; RITTI 2004). This phenomenon is attested, albeit on a smaller scale, in the Balkan provinces, as well. There are 20 inscriptions of this kind in Moesia Inferior and half of them are from Tomis. The statistics on such small numbers could indicate patterns where there are none, however some circumstantial arguments suggest that this distribution may not be accidental. Several elements in the funerary vocabulary of inscriptions from Macedonia, Thrace and Moesia Inferior originated in north-western Asia Minor, particularly Bithynia and the neighbouring regions (AVRAM 2013b). They can be conveniently explained through a cultural influence exerted by Bithynian settlers, especially in the city of Tomis, one of the main ports on the west Pontic coast, where they are solidly attested (AVRAM 2013a; AVRAM 2013b). This opens, therefore, the intriguing possibility that these Bithynians brought with them also the tradition of engraving protective threats on epitaphs.

The language of the Moesian inscriptions shows compelling evidence for bilingualism. Nevertheless, there were some limits to it and our inscription is informative in this regard. The two texts are complementary, displaying awareness of a mixed readership (ADAMS 2003, 35–36). Different messages were meant for different types of readers. The tomb founder is commemorated in Latin, revealing himself to be a member of an inward-looking group that included his family and his fellow soldiers. The Greek-speaking community was largely excluded from the personal part of the epitaph. On the other hand, the provisions against unauthorized burial were not addressed to his family or close friends, but to the others, and thus they were composed in the language understood by most.⁴ Another bilingual inscription (IGB I² 218 = CIL III 14458) from Odessos (now Varna, Bulgaria) displays the same structure: the Latin epitaph commemorates the spouse of a *beneficiarius consularis*, while the Greek addendum threatens the would-be tomb violators with a steep fine of 2,500 *denarii*. We may wonder if these soldiers had any taste for Ovid's poetry.

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3 A μετά τήν σύνβιον καὶ ἐμέ *uel sim* would be even more problematic, being an unusual wording and in opposition with *mi et coiugi* in the Latin text.

4 The existence of such bilingual inscriptions casts considerable doubt on the idea that funerary fines were used as a status marker by wealthy families (VAN NIJF 2010, 169–170). Only a smaller part of the readership, literate in both languages, could have connected the identity of the deceased with the magnitude of the fine.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AE	<i>L'Année épigraphique</i> (Paris, 1888–)
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (Berlin, 1863–)
IG	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> (Berlin, 1873–)
IGB	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae</i> (Sofia, 1958–1997)
IGR	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes</i> (Paris, 1901–1927)
ISM	<i>Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris Graecae et Latinae</i> (Bucharest, 1980–)
SEG	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum</i> (Leiden – Amsterdam, 1923–)

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