

The form of inscriptions from Roman Dacia
Abstract

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Table of Contents

1.Introduction.....	4
1.1 Epigraphic sources	4
1.2 Classification of epigraphic sources.....	5
1.3 Research methodology.....	8
1.4 Selection and organization of the data base.....	10
2.The wording of funerary inscriptions.....	11
2.1 Dimension and information in the inscription.....	11
2.2 The making of the funerary monument.....	12
2.3 Language and verse.....	14
2.4 Start and end indicators in the wordings.....	17
2.4.1 Preliminary observations	
2.4.2 Ad quietem sepulcri	
2.4.3 Somnus aeternalis	
2.4.4 Dis Manibus	
2.4.5 Funerary cult	
2.4.6 In Memoriam. Hic situs est	
2.5 Information about the deceased: name, lineage, origin.....	31

2.6 The presence of ethnic groups.....	37
2.7 Cursus honorum.....	40
2.8 Annis/Annos and their alternance.....	42
2.9 Participants. Collegium fabrum. Mentionings.....	43
2.10 Death circumstances and their mentioning.....	45
2.11 Funerary epithets.....	46
2.12 Funerary law notions.....	51
2.12.1 H.M.H.N.S	
2.12.2 Testamentum Sucidavense	
2.12.3 Other examples	
2.13 Locus datus decurionum decreto.....	63
2.14 Observations.....	64
3. The wording of votive inscriptions.....	83
3.1 Religious context.....	83
3.2 Language and style.....	87
3.2.1 Particularities. Structures.....	87
3.2.2 Introductory formulas.....	88
3.2.2.1 In honorem Domus Divinae	
3.2.2.2 Deo. Deae	
3.2.2.3 Sanctus. Sancta	
3.2.2.4 Augustus. Augusta	
3.2.2.5 Sacrum	
3.2.2.6 Pro salute	
3.2.2.7 Genio	
3.2.2.8 Numinis Augusti	

3.2.2.9 Dis deabusque	
3.2.3 Final indicators.....	98
3.2.4 Divine indications.....	103
3.3 Gods and epithets.....	109
4. The wording of honorific inscriptions.....	169
4.1 Bibliographic history.....	169
4.2 The titles of dead emperors	170
4.3 Imperial names and titles.....	172
4.3.1 Imperator	
4.3.2 Caesar	
4.3.3 Augustus	
4.3.4 Consul	
4.3.5 Tribunicia potestas	
4.3.6 Pontifex maximus	
4.3.7 Paper patriae	
4.3.8 Honorary appellations	
4.3.9 Censor. Proconsul	
4.3.10 Imperial epithets	
4.4 Laudatory expressions of private persons.....	179
4.5 Complementary formulas.....	182
4.6.1 Devotus numini maiestatique eius	
4.6.2 Locus datus decurionum decreto	
4.6.3 Ob merita. Posuit libens	
4.7 Financial formulas.....	185
• ex aere conlato	

- dupla sportula
- honore contentus sumptum remisit

4.8 Dedicants and honored persons.....	187
4.9 Observations.....	189
5. The wording of building inscriptions.....	198
5.1 The pyramid system and municipal responsibilities.....	199
5.2 Social categories and acts of evergetism.....	201
5.3 Certified building types.....	203
5.4 The vocabulary of construction works.....	209
6. Conclusions.....	225
Bibliography.....	228

The challenge to conduct a study based on the epigraphic wording in Roman Dacia seemed at first sight to be if not an easy task at least easy to approach, especially given my knowledge of the Latin language. But studying the subject put me face to face with an unexpected wording for a provincial environment (complex even novel formulae, poetic epitaphs, etc.)

A repetitive model that is followed more or less by every type of inscription was noticed however for the most part. For example most of the funerary inscriptions present as a starting indicator an invocation of The Manes, but there are many examples of funerary inscriptions that begin *ex abrupto*, directly by mentioning the name of the deceased; it was believed that these types of wordings are, chronologically, among the first used salutations¹. Although in some cases the epigraphic wording from Dacia must be considered generous we must notice the absence of some formulae or expressions often encountered in the Empire and other Roman provinces. And

¹ M.T.Raepsaer-Charlier, *Hic situs est ou Dis Manibus*, in *L'Antichité Classique*, LXXI, 2002, p.221.

by this I mean expressions like *impensam funeris* or *locum sepulturae funeris impensam*, that although are common are not attested in Dacia in funerary contexts. However it can be noticed – in two attestations – the formula *locus datus decurionum decreto* in a funerary context, transforming what was initially a funerary inscription in a commemorative one, taking into account that *locus sepulcrum* belonged to the public space and not to a graveyard.

As for the analysis of the votive wording we must mention the preponderance of formulae *ex visu, somno monitus* (approximately 51 cases), comparative with other provinces, but also the existence in the votive epigraphic wording of expressions that refer to certain testamentary provisions (*testamento libens merito solvit*) as well as the presence in the same wording of unusual expressions, the result of the confluence of several types of formulations. For example the attestation of the formula *ex votum* or *votum posuit* as well as the usage of the *votum benemerenti posuit* or *benemerenti posuit*, formulae, that is unusual in this context.

The honorific wording follows the characteristic pattern (the name of the honored person in nominative, the mentioning of the person or community that decided to build this followed by the final formula, that is the reasons why that person had been honored. These can be expressed either by a substantive in dative, in apposition with the honored person (for example in the case of private persons *patron dignissimo*) or – in case the emperor was honored – by appositions correlated with the person that made the act of *dedication* (*devotus maiestatique eius*). As for complementary formulae, referring to money, we must mention the singular attestations of the formulae *honore contentus sumptum remisit* and *sportula*, that alongside the rest of the financial formulae represent specific markers regarding the price of making an inscription, explicit financial details missing completely.

As for the vocabulary of construction works we notice a prevalence of reconstruction works due to their degradation over time, the characteristic formula for Dacia being *vetustate dilapsum / conlapsum*, although there are attestations of other formulae used with the same purpose *per seriem temporum conlapsam*², *longa vetustate corruptum*³, *incuria longi temporis destitutus*⁴. Although the chronological indicators of these formulae are dated later than those of the formula *vetustate dilapsum* from Dacia, we notice that the epigraphic wording, at least the one from Dacia, followed almost to the letter the specific standard for each case (be it funerary,

² CIL VI, 31556.

³ CIL VIII, 2660.

⁴ CIL XIV, 135.

votive, honorific or for constructions) avoiding however some linguistic complications that were difficult to use. If Carroll's estimation that in the first centuries only 10% of the adult males from the Western provinces were "literate"⁵ is to be taken into consideration this means that inscriptions were, mostly, understood and this because of the monumental writing and of standard abbreviations for a variety of terms and expressions that a "limited literate" could understand. The different joining of abbreviations, their usage in a different context or writing them in full and not abbreviated could make the epigraphic text impossible to understand; it was because of these considerations that a vocabulary based on certain standard formulae and expressions, that would not lead to disjunctions in the understanding of the epigraphic message, was preferred.

Thus, the phrasing of the inscriptions from Dacia follow the conventional and rigorous Roman model, with few exceptions. As for making a chronological analysis of the inscriptions this is achieved only by putting together the results with those obtained from other provinces (in the case of formulae that were analyzed in other provinces it was possible to "chronologically" compare the wording, most often the chronologic clues for other provinces being identical to the results of the analysis of the wordings from Dacia). Because of the lack of references for the epigraphic wording, at least in another province, the attempt to establish the chronology for some formulae must be characterized by caution all the more because social or religious provincial specifics manifest themselves in the epigraphic vocabulary, thus, besides analyzing them as inherent "products" of the province we need to correlate them to the rest of the Empire.

⁵ M.Carroll, *Spirits of the Dead. Roman Funerary Commemoration in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press, New York, p.54.