The Formulas of Funerary Inscriptions in Roman Dacia

Raluca Pop-Chendea*

The importance of the religious realm in a society dominated by mystical-religious beliefs was a major one; even more so, as we are also talking about a world dominated by superstitions, about people who feared not to disturb the order of the gods.

We get the image of a man resigning himself to fate, which does not revolt against *fatum* and tries to please the gods in order to have a happy life, if not on earth, then in Elysium. Consequently, the grave becomes his last chance to obtain this privilege for the afterlife.

The grave has a symbolic religious meaning, being dedicated to the *Manes* gods, in order to win them over, to honor them and, why not, to gain assurance in accordance to the *do ut des* (I give you in order for you to give me) principle.

The present article studies the funerary formulas and the additional elements that appear on funerary inscriptions. We will note the evolution of the inscriptions themselves, from the initial form to a more complex one, filled with secondary information, and will briefly analyze the formulas contained therein.

The funerary monument mainly tried to deliver a self-image to society. So, in many cases, the figurate image and the text of the inscriptions are two totally different things; we even have cases when the number of sculpted portraits does not correspond with the number of persons mentioned in the inscription. These are cases of prefabrication that probably responded to certain emergency situations. A clear example is the funerary stele of *Iulius Secundus*[1], found at Orăştioara de Sus, where three characters are represented (a child in front and a man and a woman in

the background) and the inscription was probably erected by the heirs. A different phenomenon occurs when the funerary monument is not finally bought by the supposed beneficiaries, but by other persons[2]. Such a case is the inscription at Muncelu Brad[3], where the figurate representations of three persons (two adults and a child) is clearly visible and the epitaph is dedicated by *Aurelia Banea* alone, for her husband, without any mentioning of a child.

A possible explanation is the selling of already sculpted monuments, the customers mostly being those with limited incomes[4] who, giving up on the idea of a personalized tomb, bought a "standard" monument or a second-hand one.

Prefabrication was also a solution for those that lacked time, who could buy an already sculpted stone, even if this created a discordance between the representation and the inscription. A situation that might have encouraged the practice of prefabrication was the fact that, often, the condition for getting an inheritance was erecting a monument to the benefactor; thus, the successors were trying to solve this problem as quickly as possible.

Regardless of the size of the monument destined to conserve the body of a deceased or to merely keep the memory alive, there is the habit of engraving an epitaph[5]. Its size depended on the available space, on the desires of the one who erected it, or on time and place[6]. The evolution of the funerary inscriptions was gradual; originally they were very short, with a minimalist structure: the name of the deceased, initially in the nominative, later on in the genitive or dative[7], without any formula suggesting death, even indirectly. This kind of evolution is also visible in the case of votive inscriptions, which, from a simple *Vesta poculum*,[8] come to contain details such as diseases or recipes.

Starting from the age of Augustus, the funerary expression becomes more complex, as a result of the evolution of the religious significance of the grave, perceived from that point on as a monument to the *Manes* gods, which make it sacred, comparable to an altar. The presence of this collective deity symbolizing the spirits of the dead confers new religious meaning to the monument[9], visibly marked by a dedication to the *Manes* gods placed right at the beginning of the inscription.

Generally, the formulas attesting to the cult of the *Manes* gods are commonplace, but they also evolved: *Manibus*[10] or *Dis Manibus*, written entirely or abridged as D.M., or, beginning from the 2nd century A.D., the more complicated *Dis Manibus Sacrum* (with *locum* or *monumentum* implied), abridged as D.M.S. or *Dis Manibus Inferis*, D.M.I.

D(is) M(anibus) is frequent in Roman Dacia, though we also have inscriptions were the introductory formula is completely missing[11]. This omission could be due to the fact that sometimes mentioning the *Manes* was considered to be an ill omen, an idea proven by the expressions *ad Manes*[12] (to the souls of the dead, meaning to the Inferno), or *esse apud Manes*[13] (being on the other side), which were formulas of lexical violence.

Another formula sometimes encountered at the beginning of funerary inscriptions is *In memoriam*[14] or *Memoriae*[15], the memory thus being the capacity of living

men to keep and organize memories – an antidote to oblivion as a consequence of the passing of time. Bringing the past into the present, evoking the dead, memory creates a bridge between the living and the afterlife and so provides the only possible form of immortality. Formulas such as *Memoriae aeternae*, *D(is) M(anibus) et memoriae* do not have to surprise us, as they are encountered even today: "In memory of. . ."

There are many standard formulas, but on the territory of Dacia *D(is) M(anibus)* and *In Memoriam* dominate. Only one complex formula (*Dis Inferis Manibus Sacrum*[16]) appears, as a *unicum*, in Dacia, along with a piece mentioning *Inmatura Fortuna*[17], although in other parts of the Empire we also have expressions such as *Cineribus, Ossibus* etc., which do not show up in Dacia.

Regarding the ending of the epitaph, general in Dacia are the formulas *hic situs est* (H.S.E) or *sit tibi terra levis* (S.T.T.L), *bene merenti faciendum curavit* (B.M.F.C) or *pro pietate* (P.P), but we have also encountered variations of these expressions: *hic ossa sunt, hic quiescit, opto sit tibi terra levis* (O.S.T.T.L).

The funerary rites clearly show that, when the body was interred, people believed they were also burying some part that was still alive. At the end of the funerary ceremony, it was customary for the soul of the dead to be called three times, by name[18]. Then, he was wished to live happily on the other side and *"Vale!"* was pronounced three times, followed by the traditional *"Sit tibi terra levis!"*. All this ceremony proves the belief in the soul's continued existence underground. A common formula was written on the monument, attesting that the deceased lied beneath (*hic situs est*) – an expression that outlived these beliefs and that is still in use today, though nobody still believes that in a grave lies an immortal being.

These formulas are accompanied by various supplementary elements[19]. Thus, the profession of the deceased is mentioned, frequently followed by the age at death. For expressing the age, a series of formulas and abridgements are commonplace, such as *annorum* (A, AN, ANN), *vixit annis* or *annos* (V A, AN, ANN), *qui, quae vixit annis* or *annos*, followed by a figure rendering the number of years lived, sometimes the months - *mensibus* or *menses* (M), days - *diebus* or *dies* (D, DI) and even hours - *horis* or *horas* (H,O). This is the case mostly for children. But there are also formulas suggesting uncertainty regarding the age, such as ± *mensibus,* ± *menses,* ± *diebus,* ± *dies*[20] or *horis, horas*. There is also the situation when the monument is made during the life of its owner, and in this case formulas such as *vivus fecit*, *vivus sibi fecit*[21]*, sibi vivo*[22] or *ipse posuit*[23] are employed.

The initial formula is followed by the name of the deceased, the descent (eventually the tribe) and the career or the profession of the deceased, mostly when it was an honorable one[24].

After the career, the successors or the erectors of the monument were inscribed. This reference was made by name (*Ianuaria Tita..posuit*), as well as by mentioning the relationship they had with the deceased. Thus we have relatives, but also persons connected to the deceased by ties other than blood: *amicus et heres*[25]*, libertus et heres*[26]*,* etc. In most of the cases their quality as heirs - *heres* - is also marked, espe-

cially when erecting the monument and engraving the epitaphs are conditions for obtaining the inheritance.

There are a couple of inscriptions that follow a different pattern: the owners got help from the *collegium* of the *fabri*[27], for the funeral (*ad funus*) and for the monument; these details are mentioned in the inscription. Thus, the *collegium* of the *fabri* took care of the tomb of its members, offering a sum of money (*funeraticium*[28]) to cover all funerary costs. Though sometimes it was not sufficient, this *funeraticium* was enough for a part of the expenditures, covering for a funerary monument or the place of the grave itself. Generally, the college organized the funerals (*collegium suprascriptum aere conlocato*[29]), its generosity obvious in its habit of offering tombs for the families members as well[30] (deceased women and small children). There are also cases when the costs were not completely covered: *ad funus autem Zosimi / et titulo contulerunt / colleg(ium) fabr(um) (denarios) CCCC.*[31] Here the college does not entirely pay for the funerals, but it contributes with an important sum.

These "financial" details are useful in finding out the cost of an inscription or a funeral. Most of the inscriptions vaguely refer to the costs, through stereotypical formulas such as *pecunia sua*[32], *ex bonis suis fecit*[33]. But there is also more precise information, such as the elements mentioned above, the *collegium* paying for the funerals and for the monument 400 *denarii*, this price having close analogies, as paid value: *ex denarium quinquaginta milibus*[34] or the tomb of *T. Terentius Maior* for Pompey, which was worth 2000 *sestertii*[35].

In this part of the inscription, before or after the age, we can find some details regarding the circumstances of death. For this, we have few inscriptions from Dacia where the occurrence of death is mentioned: three of them talk about the murder of the deceased by the so-called *latrones*[36], brigands. References to such robberies can be found on honorific inscriptions (erected in honor of a person who fought against the brigands), as well as on funerary ones, when the deceased had been murdered (unfortunately, these inscriptions are scarce and the formulas are stereotypical, the name of the deceased being simply followed by *occissus, deceptus a latronibus*[37] or, in Roman Dacia, *interfectus ab latronibus*). Other inscriptions describe totally different circumstances: *defunctus in militia*[38], *sua manu cecidit*[39].

The secondary pieces of information can sometimes refer to certain characteristics of the grave, such as its location: *inter pampinea virgulta et gramina laeta / umbra super rami virides ubi densa ministrant*[40], or its dimensions: *in fronte pedes X, in agro pedes. . . ad angulos/*[41] .

Also specific for each inscription is the custom that the deceased is praised by way of different adjectives and epithets. Due to this detail, the epigraphic text also comes a proof of the affection existing between the living and the deceased, of the care and love for the departed one, noticeable in these *laudationes post-mortem* beyond the linguistic stereotypes of the funerary monuments. In this regard, the epithets associated with the names of the deceased are of greatest importance, although the vocabulary is stern and rather rudimentary. There is no rule in choosing these

adjectives; we mention that most of them are used in the superlative, thus expressing self-evident qualities, specificities in the highest possible degree, in themselves or as compared to others.

In most of the cases, the dative, the case of attribution, is employed; here we can also include the dative used as a *iudicantis* verb, marking a point of view[42]: the wife is *carissima*[43], *pientissima*[44], *dignissima*[45], *rarissima*[46] from the perspective of the husband who erects the monument and who himself is, if dying first, *amantissimus*[47], *karrissimus coniunx*[48]. These qualities can also be expressed by collocations with a superlative value: *coniux pietate et castitate incomparabili*[49], *omni obsequio maritali*[50].

Some inscriptions offer notions of funerary law. One of the most common formulas is the one attesting that the deceased had mentioned in his will that the monument would not become the successor's propriety: *h(oc) m(onumentum) h(eredem) n(on) s(equetur)*[51]. Also in his will, *secundum voluntatem testamenti*[52], the deceased could name his heirs (*heres testamento*) and their order of importance[53]. Most of the heirs designated in a will had as their main and immediate obligation the erection of a monument for the deceased, this being a condition for getting possession of the inheritance.

The legal status of a grave was well established, clear differences existing between the monument that also contained the remains of the deceased and a cenotaph. Only the monument which held human remains was a *sepulchrum*, a *locus religiosus*, *extra comercium* and legally protected[54]. The monument that was not a grave, that did not preserve the ashes or the remains of a deceased, was a *locus purus*, an asset which could be sold or donated. Thus, the graves were sacred goods, belonging to the *Manes* gods, the earth and the monument which contained human remains being placed outside the category of patrimonial assets, outside commercial possibilities and giving the *ius sepulchri* to all those born inside the same family.

The most relevant epigraphic document for these details of funerary law is the will found at Sucidava[55], full of information regarding the quality of the will-maker, his right to have a legal will, as well as additional dispositions; the document is a very complex one. In order to make sure that his resting place would be taken care of and the annual rituals on the grave (*sacra*) would be made, the deceased conditioned his inheritance, consisting of the usufruct (*fructus*) of two vine *iugera* and the use (*usus*) of a house (*aedificium*), annexed to the tomb. His heirs had the obligation to find a new keeper, in case the first one died or would not carry out his obligations. This inscription is of a real importance, proving that in Dacia the Roman juridical norms were followed, a certain range of concepts and expressions being employed. The will confirms that the classical Roman law was in force in Dacia. The juridical style adopted by the text writer (maybe the testator himself) and the presence of some specific expressions prove the validity of this will[56]. The will could also contain various stipulations, formulas specific to quiritiar law, such as *volo, damnas*, or even the conditions for legal contestation—*is per gradus vel qui substitutus erit* (the direct successors were, by Roman law, priority heirs).[57] Thus, the testator resorted to his

right to designate his heirs, making sure that his memory would be honored by the perpetuation of the proper sacrifices and offerings made on the grave.

Regarding the heir, he was twice obliged: first through the testamentary dispositions and through his quality of heir, secondly by the existence of the inherited fund, of the tomb itself, which came as both a moral and a religious obligation[58]. Ignoring the testamentary dispositions would have stripped him of his succession rights, *"et (denariorum). . . m(ilia) dare damnas esto. . .,"* and even forced him to pay certain monetary compensations.

Besides the fact that, generally speaking, they were a model employed throughout the whole Empire, the funerary inscriptions remain important historical sources through the information they offer regarding the deceased, the social and political life of that time, as well as through their capacity of dating certain political, social or military events.

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Notes

1. IDR III/3, 263.
2. Alexandru Stănescu. "Monumentul funerar, oglindă a societăţii provinciale," in *Funeraria dacoromană. Arheologia funerană a Daciei Romane.* Ed. Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, p. 116.
3. IDR III/3, 437.
4. A. Stănescu. "Monumentul funerar, oglindă a societăţii provinciale," in *Funeraria dacoromană,* p. 117–118.
5. Constantin C.Petolescu. *Epigrafia latină.* Bucharest. Ed. Ars Docendi, 2001, p. 33.
6. Réné Cagnat. *Cours d'épigraphie latine*. Ed. IV, Paris, 1989. p. 251–252.
7. Using the nominative for the name of the deceased does not indicate allegiance to the *Manes* gods, their invocation meaning simply a conformation to funerary formalism. The genitive is used to indicate possession (to the *Manes* of. . .), marking the integration of the deceased in the funerary cult, while the dative indicates that the monument or the inscription were made (*posuit*, *fecit*) for the deceased: *Dis Manibus/Publio Aelio Diophan/to. . . heredes/fecerunt* (CIL III 14216, IDR II,46).
8. Raymond Bloch. *L'épigraphie latine*. Paris. Presses Universitaires de France, 1964. p. 67.
9. Mihai Bărbulescu. "Ritualuri săvârşite cu prilejul înmormântării şi ulterior," in *Funeraria dacoromană,* 2003, p. 84.
10. DA, *s.v. Manies, Mania*, p. 1571.
11. CIL III 14492, IDR II, 203; CIL III 8011, IDR III/1, 89; CIL III 8012, IDR III/1, 90; CIL III 1512, IDR III/2, 457, etc.
12. Victor Kernbach. *Dicţionar de mitologie generală*. Bucharest, Ed. Albatros, 1995, p.342.
13. Nicolae Guţu. *Dicţionar latin-român*. Bucharest, Ed. Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1983. *s.v.manes*, p.729.
14. CIL III 12589, IDR III/2, 385; CIL III 1507, IDR III/2, 423.

15. CIL III 7982, IDR III/2, 389; CIL III 1470, IDR III/2, 453; CIL III 1382, IDR III/3, 179; CIL III 1311, IDR III/3, 359.
16. CIL III 12598, IDR III/1, 72.
17. IDR III/4, 216.
18. Fustel de Coulanges. *Cetatea antică*. Bucharest, Ed. Meridiane, 1984, p. 56.
19. R. Cagnat, *Cours d'épigraphie latine*. Ed. IV, Paris, 1989, p.254.
20. Ibid.
21. IDR II,38.
22. CIL III 1337, IDR III/3, 373.
23. CIL III 13792, IDR II, 137.
24. Constantin C. Petolescu, *Epigrafia latină*. Bucharest. Editura Ars Docendi, 2001, p. 55.
25. CIL III 14216, IDR II, 43.
26. CIL III 6269, IDR III/2, 388.
27. France Cumont. *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des romains*. Paris, 1966, p. 362.
28. Ibid.
29. CIL III 1210, IDR III/5, 485.
30. Franz Cumont. *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des romains*. Paris, 1966, p. 363.
31. CIL III 1504, IDR III/2, 413.
32. CIL III 14216, IDR II, 43.
33. CIL III 14216, IDR II, 62.
34. ILS, 2044.
35. Robert Etienne. *Viaţa cotidiană la Pompei*. Bucharest, Ed. Ştiinţifică, 1970, p. 320. The *sestertius* was worth a quarter of a *denarius*; Paul Veyne. *Le pain et le cirque*. Paris, Édition du Seuil, 1976, p. 121.
36 Dumitru Tudor. "Interfecti a latronibus," in *SCIVA* 4, 3–4, 1953. p. 596; CIL III 8021, IDR II, 134; CIL III 1579, IDR III, 71; CIL III 1559, IDR III/1, 118.
37. R. Lafer. "Zu den Latrones im Römischen Reich und Ihrer Rezeption in der Forschung: einige Überlegungen zur Methodik," in *Orbis Antiquus. Studia in honorem Ioannis Pisonis*, 2004, p. 100.
38. IDR II, 205.
39. CIL III 1578, IDR III/1, 85.
40. IDR II, 357.
41. IDR III/5, 565.
42. N. I. Barbu, Toma I. Vasilescu, *Gramatica limbii latine*. Bucharest, Ed. Didactică şi Pedagogică, 1969, p. 196.
43. IDR II,36.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. CIL III 7980, IDR III/2, 391.
47. CIL III 1207, IDR III/5, 483.
48. IDR II, 357.
49. CIL III 1191, IDR III/5, 506.
50. IDR III/5, 612.
51. CIL III 1469, IDR III/2, 396.
52. R. Cagnat, *Cours d'épigraphie latine*. Ed. IV, Paris, 1989, p. 259; CIL III 1211, IDR III/5, 488; CIL III 1230, IDR III/5, 510.

53. CIL III 1483, IDR III/2, 460; CIL III 7799, IDR III/5, 476.
54. Alexandru Stănescu, "Monumentul funerar, oglindă a societății provinciale," in *Funeraria dacoromană*, p. 95.
55. CIL III 14493, IDR II, 187.
56. Ilie Şandru, "Testamentul de la Sucidava," in *Funeraria dacoromană*, 2003, p. 199; the formula *damnas*, a syncope of *damnatus*, is found in juridical texts from the ancient period, just like the formula *volo* (*iubeo*).
57. Mircea D. Bocşan, "La réprésentation succesorale-l'actualité d'une règle romaine," in *RIDA*, no. 50, 2003, p. 59.
58. Ilie Şandru, "Testamentul de la Sucidava," in *Funeraria dacoromană*, 2003, p. 199.

Abstract
The Formulas of Funerary Inscriptions in Roman Dacia

This study is meant as an overview of the inscription itself, from an initial form to a vastly complex one, full of secondary information, as well as of the formulas which generally become commonplace. We will subsequently analyze a few poetical epitaphs and a series of funerary legal notions encountered in inscriptions, epithets such as *laudationes post mortem*, and the financial implications of erecting such a monument.

Regarding the formulas, most of the inscriptions begin with the well-known dedication to the *Dii Manes*, although there are plenty of examples when the inscription begins *ex abrupto* with no dedication, directly mentioning the name of the deceased. The second formula, counting by the number of attestations, is the one dedicating to the memory of the deceased. Fewer in number are the ones dedicated to *Dis Inferis Manibus Sacrum* or *Dis Manibus Sacrum*. Even so, among all these standard formulas, we find an original one of Dacia, referring to an *Inmatura fortuna*. The ending formulas are as commonplace as the initial ones (*hic situs est, hic situs est, sit tibi terra levis, faciendum curaverunt, bene merenti posuit*).