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FUNERAL TRADITIONS OF ROMANS AND BARBARIANS OF GALLIA IN I-III CENTURIES AD

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Death and funeral traditions in the pre-Christian era have been studied in different degree, thoroughly in the cultures of ancient Rome and ancient Greece, much less in detail in the cultures of pagans, who in Europe were commonly called barbarians. The article is an attempt to comparatively analyze the customs and rituals of burial of the dead in the Roman Empire and Gallia in the I-III centuries AD. The paper shows the main similarities and differences of funeral traditions in these cultures and their mutual influence.

Keywords: Roman Empire, Gallia, Romans, barbarians, death, funeral traditions, rites.

ПОГРЕБАЛЬНЫЕ ТРАДИЦИИ РИМЛЯН И ВАРВАРОВ ГАЛЛИИ В I-III ВВ. Н.Э.

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Традиции отношения к смерти и погребения умерших в дохристианскую эпоху изучены в разной степени – основательно в культурах Древнего Рима и Древней Греции, гораздо менее подробно в культурах язычников, которых в Европе было принято называть варварами. Статья представляет собой попытку сравнительного анализа обычаев и ритуалов погребения умерших в Римской империи и Галлии в I-III вв. н.э. В статье показаны основные сходства и различия погребальных традиций в рассматриваемых культурах и их взаимное влияние.

Ключевые слова: Римская империя, Галлия, римляне, варвары, смерть, погребальные традиции, обряды.

Introduction

Rome was conquering new territories and all those who functioned outside the Greco-Roman cultural world fell under the category of “*barbarian*”. For the Roman Empire the migration of peoples was a threat, but also a phenomenon that was used for the benefit of the state. The barbarians provided luxury goods (e.g., amber), the cities on the outskirts of the Empire became the centre of trade, the state administration and local chieftains recruited barbarians into the army (into “*auxilia*”), and in the time of Marcus Aurelius, permits were issued for the settlement of tribes. This was a shrewd decision by which new recruits were supplied to the Roman army and a new group of tax payers to the treasury was gained.

Even once some peoples got permission to settle in this territories, it didn't mean that they were a part of the Roman Empire in the cultural sense: they looked different (long hair and beards), spoke differently and, crucially, didn't have codified laws like the Romans. Polish historian Tadeusz Kotula describes the understanding of a barbarian in the following words: “Peoples who did not have urban organization in the style of the civilization of the ‘*oecumene*’ of the Greeks and Romans were generally considered barbaric, although they were not denied access to it, with all the goods of its culture, when it came to peaceful contacts. However, when invasions of Roman lands multiplied, some ancient historians, as in the second century AD Florus, for example, accused the Sarmatians of not even knowing the concept of peace, and in a later time Orosius, a Christian author from Spain, said of the Gotch that barbaric savagery does not allow them to be governed by laws at all, which in the Roman concept was an expression of absolute contempt” [3, s. 8].

In addition to Rome conquering new territories, some tribes entered themselves the Empire in search of a better place and life. Possible reasons why tribes from different geographic areas began their migrations were: 1) cold climate; 2) overpopulation; 3) search for better conditions (in the case of the Visigoths, constant search even when they were already within the Roman Empire); 4) natural disasters; 5) crop failures and, consequently, famine. When one of the above causes forced one tribe to encroach on another tribe's territory, conflict arose and one of the parties had

to leave the land. The sources of these hypotheses are the tribal sagas of the Goths and Longobards.

Therefore, Roman and barbarian traditions were neighbouring, made some impact one to another, but they have not mixed. It applies fully to the funeral traditions, very much ritualized.

This paper as an attempt to answer two research questions:

1. What was the difference between Roman and barbarian burial traditions and rites?
2. How did Roman and Gallic traditions reflect these societal representations of death?

The traditions and rites of Gallia in I-III centuries AD were taken as a research object for barbarians.

Roman funeral traditions

To understand at least a little of the Romans' perception of the world and phenomena that cannot be rationally explained (famine, failure in war, unexpected death) one must immerse oneself in the testimonies of individuals who inherited the beliefs and understandings of Roman deities. Cicero in his "*De natura deorum*" summed up the importance of Rome's religion by explaining the titles attributed to Jupiter: "Jupiter is called the Most Merciful (*Opitmus*) and the Greatest (*Maximus*) not because he makes us moderate or wise, but because he makes us safe, rich and well provided" [qtd.: 5, s. 61].

The Romans cultivated this divinity notion for centuries. Each deity had its own sphere of influence; there were deities of the house and deities to help with farming. In order to have success in a particular task, there was a constant need for sacrifices and a need for divination to understand the will of the deities.

The death moment was very important for Romans; they wanted not to miss the last breath and not to skip the "*obol*" (special coin) for *Charon* (the ferryman of Hades from the Greek underworld), otherwise the person might not reach the hereafter and have peace of mind: "The moment of death was traditionally recognized by the last breath. The first step was to kiss the deceased by a close person

to catch the fleeing soul. Then one of the family members closed the eyes of the dead, and his body was laid on the floor so that he would not lose contact with the mother-earth” [4, s. 126].

Once it was clear that a person had died, the following stages took place: a final farewell, closing the eyes (*oculos condere*), calling loudly and invoking the deceased (*conclamatio*), rubbing the body with oils and lotions (*unctura*), dressing the deceased, applying a wreath, placing an *obol for Charon* and displaying the corpse, which rested at home for 3 to 7 days.

How did the Romans prefer to bury their loved ones? It was an individual decision. In Roman society there were three ways: inhumation, cremation, mummification, that was treated as a foreign way in Italy. It is impossible to say which of the ways was the most popular, because it changed depending on the historical period. “Both rites, inhumation and cremation, were practiced in any case as early as the time of the enactment of the Law of the Twelve Tables; thereafter cremation became the normal practice. In the time of Emperor Hadrian, there was a marked development of *sarcophagi*, which could indicate a gradual shift from cremation to inhumation in the II century; by the III century this method also spread in the provinces” [4, s. 115].

The book “*Roman law and grave and funeral customs*” by Polish historian Marek Kurylowicz explains the Roman approach to death. The author describes a message to a casual visitor in the form of an inscription. Inscription played a very important historical role, it transmitted the collective memory: “For the Romans, ancestral customs (*mores maiorum*) were always of great importance, treated as customary law. With the gradual decline of traditional family and family structures and beliefs, and eventually with Christianity, the legal protection of graves was taken over by the state. However, the legal and customary significance of the inscriptions with their contained prohibitions, requests and orders was preserved” [4, s. 116].

Roman emperors were buried in the most expensive and triumphal way. Imperial mausoleums were built especially for them. The *Castle of St. Angelo* was the mausoleum of Emperor Hadrian, his wife Faustina, their children and subsequent

emperors. Admittedly, it was functioning as a mausoleum until 271 AD, further it was incorporated into the fortification system of Rome. Another interesting mausoleum is the famous *Trojan column*, in the pedestal of which the urn containing the ashes of the Caesar Trojan was placed. Roman people were supposed to pass by and remember to whom a particular mausoleum was erected.

However, that only a small part of society could afford tomb with a monument and inscription. The method of burial depended on the property status of the buried and his legal status. Wealthy citizens could buy themselves a piece of land for a tomb with different purposes: only for their family or individually: “According to Gaius, family tombs (*familiaria sepulchra*) were considered to be those erected by the owner for himself and his family (*familia*), while hereditary tombs (*hereditaria sepulchra*) were those erected by the owner for himself and his heirs (*sibi heredibusque*)” [4, s. 24].

There is no confirmation of whether the Romans believed in an afterlife, but an important observation was that according to their ideas the soul of the deceased can exert a good or bad influence on the surviving family and descendants caused them to take considerable time to properly prepare the deceased and bury the body with dignity.

Considering that over time, either in Rome or in other major cities of the Empire, most tombs were built, how do we know how to distinguish a family tomb from an individual one? Here the distinguishing mark is the inscription with clauses that, for example, the tomb belongs to one family and should not be divided, should not be sold, could not be given to another person not from the founder’s family.

Roman lawyers used several notions to distinguish parts of a tomb: *sepulchrum* – a tomb where there is already a body, *monumentum* – a tomb where the body is not yet present, and *kenotaphon* – a memorial or symbolic monument (if there is no body and the body could not be brought back).

M. Kurylowicz points out the discrepancy between the terminology of lawyers and the existence of other terms that are present in Latin literature and inscriptions. These are: *tumulus* (tomb, sepulcher), it had Etruscan roots, it had the shape of a

cylindrical burial chamber with a slight hill, *bustum* (a place to burn and bury a corpse) and *bisomum* (double tomb, for two people). One other, perhaps “unexpected” detail of the burial process with the Romans is that tomb founders could differentiate persons in the inscription. There was a practice of listing the persons entitled to a place in the tomb, while there were also inscriptions that listed those persons who did not merit or were not worthy of a place in the tomb. This is an example of such an inscription: “Built by Markus Milius Artem for his well-deserving brother Marcus Licinius Succes, and for his wife Cecilia Modestia, and for himself and for his descendants, except for the Hermes, whom, because of his crimes, he forbids to have access, right of bypass or any other at all to this tomb” [4, s. 34].

The people of Gallia, unlike the Romans, put food in the tomb. But sometimes this tradition was accepted by Romans as well. One description says that there were plants and fruits in the Roman tomb. In the description of the sarcophagus of a young woman discovered in Milan: “A garland was placed on her head and a bunch of grapes in her hand, which was depicted on numerous tomb reliefs. This had to do with the cult of Dionysus and the hope of a happy existence in the hereafter” [4, s. 43].

If the died Roman person was noble and could afford to pay for funerals, his friends and neighbours went to the office at the temple of *Venus Libitina* and paid a fee called “*lucar Libitinae*”. Then the details of the dead person were recorded and the ceremony was held. Such a funeral was called “*funus indicativum*” (solemn funeral). Then the herald announced the date of the funeral using a special formula: “A well-known Roman citizen has died. Whoever has the desire, it is time to go to the funeral of (name of the person)”.

Poor people were buried in roadside tombs, near the exit roads of the city, in *columbaria* and *catacombs*. There were 23 exit roads in Rome; tombs were built along *via Appia*, *via Aemilia*, *via Aurelia*, *via Flamina* and others. M. Kuryłowicz emphasizes that the land was owned by the city, and this was by definition the difference between the situation of wealthy people and those who could not pay for tombs, monuments, inscriptions and heralds [4, p. 52].

Along the roads there were arranged columbaria – collective tombs for people. It was a structure about 6x5 meters in size, sunken 7 meters into the ground. Niches were usually intended for two urns, but there could also be places for one to four. Above the niches there were sometimes bas-reliefs and busts, as well as plaques with epitaphs, and the walls between the niches were covered with paintings. Urns held the ashes (*ollae cinerariae*) or bony remains (*ollae ossuariae*) of single people, but often urns were grouped in niches for one or more families [4, p. 55-56].

With slaves, the funeral looked even simpler: they are mainly small stone slabs placed on a base, at the top of which are carved symbols and necks. The slave's name is immortalized with a painted or engraved inscription, but the face is not made visible. Slaves could not count on a grand ceremony, they were buried without cremation in earthen graves (*puticuli*), usually at night (before sunrise), without a funeral procession. This was referred to as “*funus translaticum*” – an ordinary funeral, without ceremony.

There were festivals in the Roman calendar, dedicated to honour the dead. A form of respect and remembrance was the laying of flowers. The first of these was March 22 – *Dies violantionis*, it was a day of mourning, then people dewed violets in cemeteries. From May to June were held *Rosalia*, throwing rose petals on graves. Also in May were held *Lemuria* (May 9, 11, 13) for warding off the shadows of people who died an untimely death by means of rituals, making offerings and throwing black bean seeds behind themselves [4, p. 135].

Barbarian funeral traditions

The groups of barbarians that the Roman Empire had to deal with were numerous: Huns, Gauls, Goths, Ostrogoths, Visigoths and etc. It was difficult to find a study that depicted the funerary customs of all these tribes, given that we can find information about them thanks to Roman sources. Thanks to the fact that the religions of both societies were polytheistic the Roman gods penetrated the beliefs of the inhabitants.

What differentiates some barbarians (for example, the Celts) from the Romans is the former's representation that the soul is immortal and that they get to another

world. The Romans were not sure about the existence of the other world and wanted the person who lost his life to be buried with dignity and have a memento of the fact that he existed [q.v.: 2; 6; 7]. Many tribes were in contact with the Roman Empire, so we selected to examine I-III century inhabitants of Gallia for the comparative analysis.

The Romans brought their language, deities and architecture to the Gauls. Thanks to the fact that the Romans were a minority, their customs intermingled with those of Gallia slowly. The blending of Celtic and Roman elements is visible in the glorification of the deceased a Greco-Roman custom. In the Celts the deity is closer to a man, the heroes occupy an important place and his worship very much resembles the reverence given to the gods. The popularity of tombs in the shape of pillars and pillars is also a distinguishing feature, as is the popular depiction of a craftsman's tool, which seems to guard the tomb. "More often than in other provinces, we find lunar symbols on stele in Gallia, testifying to the belief in the wandering of souls to the stars. Tinged with a few Celtic features, it is a very thorough blend of Roman and Gallic customs, showing the deep intermingling of beliefs and habits to which man is most attached" [1, s. 269].

French historian Paul-Maurie Duval in his book "*Everyday life in Gallia during the Roman peacetime period*" suggested that the deity *Sucellus* is the god of the hereafter for tribes within Gallia and the Irish: "The Druids attributed divine origins to the Celts. They claimed that they were descended from a god to whom Caesar gives the name *Dis pater*, and thus would have been the equivalent of the Italic and Roman *Pluto*, the god of the sub terrestrial world, and the unicorn of earthly fertility" [1, s. 249].

Duval speaks of a certain sculpture found in the Danube region that depicts *Sucellus*. A statue of *Sucellus* was found also near Sauvat, a town in France, which depicts a bearded and long-haired man. It is impossible to state definitely what age he is. In his right hand he holds a tool, actually it is difficult to determine for what purpose. It most resembles a judge's hammer or a barrel on a narrow spear. In his left he holds a vessel. He is dressed in a man's tunic.

The old doctrines of the Republican period, based on the belief in the existence of a subterranean hell, located either in the depths of the globe or occupying the entire lower hemisphere of the earth, were then overturned by the achievements of Alexandrian knowledge, which obtained the theoretical certainty that the sun illuminates both hemispheres of the earth successively, identical. Henceforth, the only place for the dead remained the stars and the upper circles of the atmosphere. “We find other depictions of the starry underworld on tomb stele in Gallia. In the south of the country, we find a pair of *Dioscurus* effigies, symbolizing two hemispheres illuminated in succession, as well as depictions of winds that carry the soul through the atmosphere, birds, meant to represent the souls themselves flying towards their last abode, and finally stars and other astral symbols” [1, s. 261].

Conclusion

The Roman Empire took centuries to shape, giving rise to rituals and ceremonies to honour the death depending on the decision of the deceased (inhumation or cremation, much more preferably mummification) and his financial resources, which he was able to devote to a dignified burial. For the Romans it was very important to leave a memory, as much as possible to leave a trace of what kind of personality the deceased person was, and for a casual visitor to read the inscriptions in this way leading a feast with the deceased.

There was no consensus on what the world is like after death, the Romans were convinced that it was better to bury the individual with dignity, they tried to arrange regular sacrifices to keep the memory alive as long as possible and there were several worlds to celebrate the dead, which settled in the Roman calendar. Ancestor worship was strong during the republican period, but diminished its influence from the beginning of the spreading and rapid development of Christianity.

During the historical period of the I-III centuries AD the people of Gallia benefited from cultural exchange, combining their beliefs and using Latin language inscriptions to decorate monuments, without desegregating from their own deities and graphic representations.

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