CIL III 9527 AS EVIDENCE OF SPOKEN LATIN IN THE SIXTH-CENTURY DALMATIA

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Abstract: The epitaph of Priest Iohannes (CIL III 9527, Salona, August 13, 599 or AD 603) is one of the few inscriptions from the sixth-century Salona, which can be dated with precision. It is also one of the rare inscriptions from Dalmatia of this period, which mention a person (proconsul Marcellinus) known from other sources (*Registrum epistularum* of Pope Gregory the Great). However, its linguistic importance seems to be summarized in the remark of its most recent editor Nancy Gauthier (2010) that the language of the epitaph reflects the features of Latin spoken in Dalmatia at the time ("la langue vivante"). The aim of this paper was to check the plausibility of this statement by comparing the Vulgar Latin features in the inscription with the results of research on Latin in late Dalmatia. Also, a new interpretation of the word *obsis* l. 13 is proposed.
Keywords: Vulgar Latin, Dalmatia, epigraphy, Latin dialectology, Salona, Late Antiquity.

The epitaph of Priest Iohannes (CIL III, 9527 et add., p. 2139 = ILCV, 79 = ILJug 3, 2677a05; Salona IV, p. 305–312, no. 96) was found *in situ* in Marusinac, one of the three old-Christian cemeteries of Salona, in the vicinity of two basilicas one of which is thought to be dedicated to Saint Anastasius the Fuller. It was found in the year 1890 and has been published most recently by Gauthier in the collection of Christian inscriptions of Salona (4th–7th centuries AD) in 2010. It is engraved in three plates of different sizes. The text of the first and smallest plate (three lines) is written in prose and the text of the two other plates is written in hexameter, forming a *carmen sepulcrale* (nine hexameters, fourteen lines). The three plates were positioned horizontally covering three graves. The text of the epitaph and its translation as presented by Gauthier are the following:

	† Hic iacit Iohannes, peccatur et in- dignus presbiter. ◀	Here lies John, sinner and un- worthy priest.
4	✟ Expleto annorum cir- culo quinto, hunc sibi sepulcrum Io- hannis condere iussit,	After the fifth cycle of years had been over, he ordered this grave to be built,
8	Marcellino suo procon- sule nato, germano prae- sente simul cunctosque nepotes. Ornauit tumolum.	in presence of his son, proconsul Marcellinus, of his brother, and of all his grand-children (or his nephews?). He furnished the grave.
12	Mente fideli defunctus, acces- sit obsis una cum coniuge, natis, Anastasii seruans reuerenda limina s(an)c(t)i. Tertio post decimum	After he had died in the spirit of a believer, he presented himself as a hostage (or as a guest?), accompanied by his wife and chil- dren, in reverence, to the venerable threshold (of the mansion) of saint Anastasius. On the
16	augusti numero mens(is), ind(ictione) <I?> I, <brae> finiuit saeculi diem. ◀	thirteenth day of August, in the second (or sixth) indictional year he left this world.

Photograph of the inscription taken from Salona IV ad no. 96

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Given the fact that proconsul Marcellinus, a correspondent of Pope Gregory I (590–604), was mentioned in the inscription, it is dated to the end of the 6th century.[1] And since the indictional year is obviously erroneously written as *LI*, it can be corrected as *the second <I?> I,* or perhaps, as *the sixth <V?> I*, that could then be interpreted, with precision, as the year AD 599 or the year AD 603. Relying on this precise dating, which is perhaps twenty or thirty years before the final destruction or abandonment of the city of Salona, Gauthier in her commentary expresses the belief that this inscription offers not only an insight into the social, cultural and economic level of the religious and civilian elite during the last period of existence of the capital of Dalmatia, but also an insight into the linguistic reality of the same period. In her words: "The epitaph of the priest Iohannes, with its nicely engraved letters and versified wordings testifies that at the very end of the sixth century, just a few decades before Salona was destroyed and erased from the map of the world (which probably occurred before AD 641), that the elite interested and capable of building such a monument existed. Finally, one can just be struck by the vivacity of the Latinity in the region which still forms an integral part of the Roman world; Vulgar Latin features of phonetics, grammar, and versification attest the evolution of the «living language» rather than the barbarization of the language that is about to be abandoned."[2]

If this statement can be interpreted as belief that the language of the inscription reflects the everyday language spoken in Dalmatia, then it can be subject of an examination. In this study this will be done by comparing the linguistic features present in the inscription with the features of the regional Latin language in the province of Dalmatia, as known to us to date.

The total number of Vulgar Latin traits to be analyzed here is 7: there are five (5) phonological misspellings, all of which vocalic and two (2) morpho-syntactic errors. These are: **1** iacit (CL iacet), **6/7** Iohannis (CL Iohannes), **13** obsis (CL obses), **2** peccatur (CL peccator), **11** tumolum (CL tumulum), **5/6** hunc sepulcrum (CL hoc sepulcrum), **10/11** simul cunctosque nepotes (CL simul cunctisque nepotibus). Besides these, there is one orthographic error **3** presbiter (CL presbyter), probably one graphic error **16** brae- (CL praesentis?), and also numerous metrical errors none of which will be considered here.

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[1] Reg. IX, 159.
[2] Salona IV, 312.

Phonological (vocalic) features

One of the linguistic features of this inscription is, as can be seen, the misspelling of front and back vowels **1** iacit (CL iacet), **6/7** Iohannis (CL Iohannes), **13** obsis (CL obses), **2** peccatur (CL peccator), **11** tumolum (CL tumulum). It is a well-known vowel merging that affected the long *e* /e:/ and the short *i* /i/ in the front vowel series, and the *o* /o:/ and the short *u* /u/ in the back vowel series. The result was one phoneme in each of the series (closed *e* [ẹ] in the case of front vowels, and the closed *o* [ọ] in the case of back vowels).[3] Although this change in the vocalic system of Latin is undisputable (Adams calls it *sine qua non* of proto-Romance development) there are different opinions as to whether both directions of misspellings should be considered as evidence of this process, i.e. whether the same change can be detected in, for example, *Felicetas* written instead of *Felicitas*, CIL III 3093, where ĭ was written as e, and in the example where i was written for ē, e.g. *iacit* instead of *iacet*, as it is the case in our inscription.[4] Adams believes that the best evidence of this process is writing e instead of ĭ, and as for the opposite direction, which is the case in most of our examples, he thinks that this may not be the case. "The e- and o-spellings might be taken to represent / ẹ / and / ọ /. Inverse spellings (i.e. i written for ē and u for ō) are far more difficult to interpret, and perhaps should not be used to argue that the vowel change of proto-Romance type is in evidence."[5]

But, since most of the scholars share the opinion that the "direction of misspelling" is irrelevant, all vocalic changes in our inscription should be considered as evidence of the vowel merging, notwithstanding the direction of the misspelling. It can be seen then – regarding our inscription – that this process affected not only the front vowels, but also the back ones – they can be represented in a relative ratio of 1,5:1, or in absolute numbers 3:2. This ratio could demonstrate a small advance of the vowel merging in the back series, since the equal development would show the ratio 2:1 – front vowels occurring twice as much as the back vowels in the language. This however could not be the case, since the development of the front vowels wasn't in any part of the Latin-speaking areas preceded by the development of the back series.

The evidence from our inscription can be compared with the results of Herman's study referring to the linguistic development in the coastal parts of Dalmatia. The analysis of the epigraphic material in this study showed that a very strong vowel change, that was happening in the neighbouring *Regio X* or the

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[3] Herman 2000, 30–31.
[4] Adams 2013, 69.
[5] Adams 2013, 41; Herman 1965, 23; Adamik 2017, 13 n. 4.

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province of *Venetia et Histria*, made an important impact on the language of the coastal Dalmatia, especially in the period from the 4th to the 6th centuries.[6] The back vowels that were still stable in the early period (in comparison to the front vowels that had already started to merge) in the later period in Dalmatia also started to merge. This phenomenon is explained by Herman as a consequence of the frequent and stable land communication between the two regions. Kramer agrees with these results, saying that "Herman's researches showed that the innovations from *Venetia et Histria* were spreading along the eastern cost of the Adriatic."[7] It is interesting to note that Herman admits that it is still not clear why this region (*Venetia et Histria*) showed such a complete and strong vocalic development.[8] But whatever the cause was of this fast pace of development there, in regards to the development in the province of Dalmatia Herman's conclusion can be outlined that in the late period, at the end of 4th and in the 5th century, there was a linguistic unity that included *Regio X* and *Regio XI* on the one side, and Dalmatia, on the other. But this unity, he argues, wasn't complete and stable, since it couldn't survive the disruptions emanating from the extralinguistic parameters, such as wars, migrations, foreign governance, etc.[9]

Morpho-syntactic features
1. masc. pro neutr.

The presence of the syntagma **5/6** *hunc sepulcrum* (CL *hoc sepulcrum*) in our inscription could suggest that the process of losing the neuter gender has been happening in the province of Dalmatia, as well. Although Adams rightly warns that the variations in gender do not always represent the evidence of the proto-Romance development, this final outcome in the Romance languages – where no morphologically distinct neuter gender is preserved, notwithstanding some fragments of neuter in the plural forms – strongly implies that this process was happening in all Latin-speaking regions.[10] If it is to be understood that this was a feature of Latin spoken in Dalmatia, as well, one can ask whether this was a feature of speech among the Dalmatian elite as well. The fact that our inscription was commissioned by a member of higher class of the Salonitan society could give a positive answer to this question. It is interesting here to mention that Ad-

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[6] Herman 1971, 143–4.
[7] Kramer 2014, 252.
[8] Herman 1971, 143.
[9] Idem.
[10] Adams 2013, 385–390; Maiden 2011, 171.

ams, who again with plausibility claims that this development comes from "beneath", i.e. the speech of the lower class, without presenting the right arguments insists that even in the fifth century this was a feature that should be primarily linked to the lower parts of society, excluding the possibility that in that period this variation was widespread among the elite, like it was among the common people. Namely, Adams citing the sentence from the work of grammarian Fortunatianus (5th century) *Romani uernaculi plurima ex neutris masculino genere potius enuntiant, ut 'hunc theatrum' et 'hunc prodigium'* claims that the grammarian "castigated uses of the masculine he had heard among the Roman plebs" since there is a subtle "sociolinguistic remark" contained in the use of the demonstrative pronouns as the article, and which can be associated with the speech of the lower class.[11] However, if the whole passage from the work of Fortunatianus is checked, it becomes clear that it is rather grammarian's remark on the regional features of the Latin language, without expression of the value judgment: *Gentilia uerba quae sunt? Quae propria sunt quarundam gentium, sicut Hispani non 'cubitum' uocant, sed Graeco nomine 'ancona', et Galli 'facundos' pro 'facetis', et Romani uernaculi plurima ex neutris masculino genere potius enuntiant, ut 'hunc theatrum' et 'hunc prodigium'.*[12]

And finally, the question can be posed on the nominative form of the noun of masculine gender whose Acc. Sg. is "*sepulcrum*". The possibility of both endings in -us and -er for this noun is theoretically open: its root is ending in -r. However, the epigraphic data, but also the statistics of the nouns which switched from neuter to masculine gender, show that in this word the -us ending should be expected: *sepulcrus*.[13]

2. acc. pro abl.

10/11 *simul cunctosque nepotes* – After Herman's conclusions that the above-mentioned features of phonological nature bring Latin in Dalmatia closer to the western Romania, the conclusions of Adamik, regarding morpho-syntactic features of the language, bring this regional variety closer to the eastern Romania. Namely, among Adamik's conclusion is, that in the later Dalmatia the declination system is developing towards the Balkan type of a declinational system – that

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[11] Adams 2013, 450.

[12] Fortunatiani Artis rhetoricae III 4, 7–10. In: RLM, 123.

[13] CILA III, 587; ILBug 177–178, no. 246. In LLDB there are 124 instances of the change masc. pro neut. Among these there are 59 in NomSg. but none which is ending in -er. (last visited 5.9.2019).

has a distinct dative and genitive as one case, and a distinct nominative and accusative as the other case. Adamik claims that in the later Dalmatia there was a three-case system in which existed: a separated nominative, merged accusative and ablative, and merged dative and ablative. "Contrary to later Narbonensis and Venetia and Histria, later Dalmatia, with the prevalence of dative genitive inflection (Gen. ~ Dat. 36%) opposite to the well-established accusative-ablative case (Acc. ~ Abl. 18%) and clearly distinct from the separate nominative (Nom. ~ Acc. 1%) simply displays the previous three-case system to the later two-case system of the Balkan type with an opposition of a dative-genitive and a nominative-accusative inflection".[14] Returning to our inscription one can notice that some of these confusions can be found: instead of ablative with the preposition *simul* there is accusative, but we cannot deem it to be special Dalmatian feature, because this kind of data could have come from many other parts of the Latin-speaking world.

The interpretation of *obsis* (CL *obses*)

The noun **13** *obsis* (CL *obses*) poses some difficulties in interpretation. By Gauthier it is translated as "hostage", but as many warned before, this meaning is disputable, since it makes of the deceased priest a hostage (of the saint?). Egger proposed that it should be understood that Iohannes becomes an intercessor in front of the saint. Drew-Bear however suggested reading *hospes* which presumes – as Gauthier calls it – a rather "acrobatic" series of misspellings: *OBSIS – OSBIS – OSPIS*, i. e. (*h*)*ospes*.[15]

But, in the most recent edition of *TLL* there is a definition of the word *obses* as *obsessor*, the *one who occupies,* which, in my opinion, is more appropriate in this place. It is about the priest who is arriving "to take his place" near the saint, after the same has been done by his wife and children before him, in accordance with the custom of burials near the saints' graves (ad sanctos) which was widespread in Salona in Late Antiquity.[16]

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[14] Adamik 2014, 659–60.
[15] Drew-Bear 2005, 400–2.
[16] TLL, s.v. obses, 9.2.219.30-42; Salona IV, p. 100–1.

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