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TOWN, COUNTRY AND PROVINCE IN LATE ROMAN GAUL: THE EXAMPLE OF
CIL XIII 128

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Nymfius aeterno devinctus membra sopore
 hic situs est, caelo mens pia perfruitur.
 Mens videt astra, quies tumuli complectitur artus,
 calcavit tristes sancta fides tenebras.
 Te tua pro meritis virtutis ad astra vehebat 5
 intuleratque alto debita fama polo.
 Immortalis eris, nam multa laude vigebit
 vivax venturos gloria per populos.
 Te coluit propium provincia cuncta parentem,
 optabant vitam publica vota tuam. 10
 Excepere tuo quondam data munera sumptu
 plaudentis populi gaudia per cuneos.
 Concilium procerum per te patria alma vocavit
 seque tuo duxit sanctius ore loqui.
 Publicus orbatas modo luctus conficit urbes 15
 confusique sedent, anxia turba, patres,
 ut capite erepto torpentia membra rigescunt,
 ut grex amisso principe maeret iners.
 Parva tibi, coniunx, magni solacia luctus
 hunc tumuli titulum maesta Serena dicat. 20
 Haec individui semper comes addita fulcri
 unanimam tibi se lustra per octo dedit.
 Dulcis vita fuit tecum. Comes anxia lucem
 aeternam sperans hanc cupit esse brevem.

(CIL XIII 128 = CE 2099 = ILCV 391)

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Translation:

His body bound fast by eternal slumber, here lies Nymfius, his pious soul enjoying heaven. His soul looks upon the stars while the silence of the tomb embraces his limbs, and his holy faith trampled upon the sad darkness of death. In return for the merits of your virtue, your destined fame carried you to the stars, bringing you to heavens on high. Immortal you shall be, for your glory will live and thrive with much praise through peoples (generations) to come. The entire province honored you as its own parent, and public vows desired life for you; the public services (games) formerly given at your expense received expressions of joy throughout rows of cheering people.

Through you your fatherland that nurtured you summoned the council of the chief men, saying that it spoke more solemnly through your mouth. Public mourning (grief) now afflicts the bereaved cities, and the confused fathers sit like an anxious crowd, as with the loss of the head the numb limbs grow stiff, and as with the loss of its leader the powerless flock mourns. Oh husband, as a small consolation of her immense grief, Serena, full of sadness, dedicates this inscription on the tomb to you. She, always present as the inseparable sharer of your couch, devoted herself singlemindedly to you through eight lustra. Sweet was life with you. Your wife, keenly desiring eternal light, hopes that this life be short.

Found in the local church of the village of Valentine (Ar.St.Gaudens, Ht. Garonne, north-east of Saint Bertrand de Comminges), the subject of the inscription has been plausibly identified with the owner of a nearby sumptuous Gallo-Roman villa.¹ This domain, whose scale can be compared with that of its better known neighbor of Montmaurin,² covered a large area which has yielded a few coins, pottery shards, and a highly interesting array of mosaics. The *pars urbana*, a vast rectangular area of 157 x 87 m., with its 'cours d'honneur', nymphaeum, and numerous other rooms was constructed, according to the excavator, in the early part of the fourth century, and underwent numerous modifications in the second part of the same century.³ A noteworthy feature of the villa is its thermal construction which includes the largest hypocaust found to date in Aquitaine. Moreover, the owner of the villa of Valentine had access to and control over the water supply in the area, a fact which must have played a decisive role in defining his position in the local community.⁴

¹ G.Fouet, *La villa gallo-romaine de Valentine (Ht.Garonne)*. Aperçu préliminaire, *Revue de Comminges* 91, 1978, 154-5.

² G.Fouet, *La villa gallo-romaine de Montmaurin (Ht.Garonne)*, 20 Suppl.à *Gallia*, Paris 1969.

³ G.Fouet, *Aperçu* 151.

⁴ G.Fouet, *Exemples d'exploitation des eaux par de grands propriétaires terriens dans le sud-ouest au IVE siècle*, *Caesarodunum* 10, 1975, 128-37.

The inscription has been the subject of much discussion by scholars since the last century, and most recently the religion of the dead man has been re-examined.⁵ It is the intention here to explore the meaning of this verse inscription with a view to placing it within a religious, socio-economic and political context, against the background of the ties between estates and provincial cities in the period.

I. Religion of the defunct. Nymfius has usually been regarded as a Christian, not only on account of the general tenor of the dedication but also because of the presence of four crosses along the sides of the inscribed text.⁶ This opinion has been recently challenged on the basis that not only may the crosses have been engraved when the stone was reemployed as an altar table in the local church, but also that the echoes of classical poets evident in our text must indicate, if not outright paganism, then a form of crypto - Christianity.⁷ Neither of these arguments is conclusive. The use of classical quotations simply attests what has long been established: namely, that Christian funerary language had not developed in the fourth century its own exclusive terminology.⁸ Of the classical quotations listed by Buecheler, some were used within a clearly Christian context by writers like Juvencus, Hilary, and Ennodius, as well as in inscriptions in honor of Christians.⁹

Among the epigraphical inscriptions modelled after Virgil, and echoing verses of our text are CE 1401 = ILCV 3434 (vs. 9-10): *sola tamen tanti restant solamina luctus / quod tales animae protinus astra petunt* ; and CE 734 = CIL VI 32000 = ILCV 60 (vs. 10-11): *sorum tumulum dedit et solacia magni / parva tulit luctus, tristiq.*¹⁰ In fact, both Christians and pagans appear to have used simultaneously suitable portions of classical verses, as is clearly reflected in the near contemporary epitaphs of the pagan senator Kamenius and of the Christian Sex. Petronius Probus (consul 371), both dedicated by their wives, and each using the expression *solacia* (or *solamen*) *luctus* .¹¹ Another echo of the verses in honor of Nymfius is found in a Christian inscription dated to c.400 stating that the defunct *fruitur*

⁵ R.Lizop, *Les Convenae et les Consorati*, Paris-Toulouse 1931, 41, 60 and passim. J.-M.Pailler, *L'énigme Nymfius*, Gallia 44, 1986, 151-65.

⁶ E. Le Blant, *Inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule II*, 595a. J.Sacaze, *Inscriptions antiques des Pyrénées*, Toulouse 1892, no. 163. R.Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, Urbana 1942, 306-7.

⁷ Pailler, 160.

⁸ Lattimore, 301ff. In general, G.Sanders, *Licht en duisternis in de christelijke grafinschriften*, Bruxelles 1965, and Idem, 'Les chrétiens face à l'épigraphie funéraire latine' in *Assimilation et résistance*, Actes du VI Congrès Intern. des Etudes Classiques, Madrid 1974, 283-99.

⁹ CE, p.89-90; vs. 1 is echoed in Juvencus, i, 271; vs. 3 (inspired by Vir. Aen. 2.253) is echoed in Enn.car. 2,20,7 and 2,130,3; while vs. 17 is echoed in Hilary, *carm. gen.*167.

¹⁰ Model: Vir.Aen. 11,62. CE 1401 is dated to the sixth century; CE 734 in honor of Justeius Pomperianus is dated to the fourth.

¹¹ CE 654,9 (Kamenius) is dated to AD 385; CE 1347 (Probus) to a date before 395, the joint consulate of his sons.

nunc lumine caeli, just like Nymfius.¹² It seems, moreover, that pagan elements of funerary formulations are particularly found in long and elaborate Latin verse inscriptions like that of Nymfius.¹³ Nor is the absence of any specific reference to Christ or God in itself sufficient to argue that Nymfius was a pagan.¹⁴ Even the classical flavor of Nymfius' epitaph can be explained as a matter of literary conceit which entailed a slavish imitation of classical epigraphy.

There are also interesting reminiscences of some verses of CIL XIII 128, in themselves of pagan-classical origins, in undoubtedly Christian inscriptions from Gaul. For example, phrases in CE 1362,5 = CIL XII 2395 (Lyon AD 501) with its *astra fovent animam, corpus natura recepit*; and in CE 696,6 = CIL XII 631 (between Aix and Marseille AD 506): *anima migravit ad astra*.¹⁵ The belief that after life comes the eternal light is also Christian in character, even when the term *lux* is used in a pagan manner, as in *non sperans te lucem karerae* (Diehl 1558, Rome, St. Callixtus). Assurances of immortal fame, another pagan relic in the Nymfius inscription, are similarly expressed within an exclusively Christian context such as that of CE 701 dating to AD 523 (vs. 3: *meritis post fata superstis*) and of the CE 1359, written in AD 475 for a bishop.

Two expressions in CIL XIII 128 deserve some attention: namely, *mens pia* and *sancta fides*, both, as it seems, relatively rare. Of the three examples of *sancta fides* cited in the index to vol. VI of the CIL, two relate to the moral context of marriage, while one seems to refer to a senatorial personality but is unfortunately too mutilated to be of use.¹⁶ The expression *mens pia*, once more of rare occurrence within the immense corpus of Roman inscriptions, is used primarily within a religious context of worship, as in *cum pia ... mente rite fecisset* (CIL VI 313) and *pia mente rite deserviens* (CIL VI 32416). In all these cases, the subjects of the inscriptions appear to have been pagan. Yet, in Christian funerary epigraphy the word *mens* acquired the meaning which it has in this inscription where it signifies the separation of the body and the soul upon death.¹⁷ The closest similarities to our text are found in a funerary inscription in honor of the Christian Floridus from the city of Rome, dating to AD 427 (CIL VI 31992 = CE 686). It includes expressions like: *hic pietas, hic prisca fides* (vs. 1), *mentis doctrina probata* (vs. 3), and *perge / caelestis per regna dei. sic vita meretur*. (vs. 16-7), all reflecting the way in which Christian funerary formulae borrowed pagan expressions and adapted them for their own purpose. Similar adaptations include the idea of eternal fame through earthly achievements, best expressed in an inscription from Reims in honor of Jovinus, the consul of AD 367, which reads: *ut quem*

¹² CE 681,2 = CIL XIV 1938 = ILCV 2009.

¹³ Lattimore, 301f.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ CE 1364 in honor of Rusticus, bishop of Lyon (PLRE II, 964, Rusticus 5).

¹⁶ CIL VI 3452 = CE 476; CIL VIU 25876; VI 30214, 20.

¹⁷ TLL 715, 40: 733, 45. Note *mens sancta* of CE 1424 = CIL X 1194. in astris.

*fama dabat rebus superaret honorem / et vitam factis posset sperare perennem.*¹⁸ In short, both Nymfius and his wife Serena can be restored to the Christian fold without any doubt as to their claim to belong there.

Such an affiliation has several important implications. In the first place, it serves to indicate the extent of the spread of Christianity outside urban centers and into the nearby countryside where villas like Nymfius' Valentine were located. The influence, then, of urban Christianity, attested in this area by the early church of St. Bertrand de Comminges,¹⁹ must have reached the landowners through the existence of close ties between the city and its rural vicinity. For persons like Nymfius or Ausonius would spend their time looking after the affairs of their estates while not neglecting to participate in various aspects of urban life.²⁰

Moreover, CIL XIII 128 adds to the meagre information which we have from the area concerning membership and the activities of the Christian communities of late antique Aquitaine. One other inscription from Lugdunum Convenarum (CIL XIII 299), the only one which is securely dated (AD 347), informs the reader of a connection between a woman named Valeria Severa, possibly a lay member of the community, and a presbyter named Patroclus. Although the type of their activity is unspecified, its very existence points to the early involvement of lay members in local ecclesiastical affairs. Another prominent lay member of an urban center in Aquitaine who can be identified as a Christian may have belonged to the circle of people like Nymfius and his wife Serena. Quietus was a curator of Eauze in the province Novempopulana, where Nymfius resided; his piety was attested not only through Christian symbols inscribed on his tomb (CIL XIII 563, perhaps early fifth century), but also through a vow in honor of a martyr to undertake what appears to have been a reconstruction of the local church.

Finally, CIL XIII 128, taken together with the present identification of the religion of the defunct, affords a significant insight into the varieties of religious experience in a region

¹⁸ CE 302,7-8 = CIL XIII 3256 = ILCV 61. Recently R. von Haehling, *Die Religionszugehörigkeit der hohen Amtsträger des Römischen Reiches*, Bonn 1978, 250-1, expressed doubts regarding the Christian affiliation of Jovinus (K.F. Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien*, Tübingen 1948, repr. Darmstadt 1970, 185 no. 203). His arguments are based on a private communication by Julian (Ep. 26, Bidez-Cumont) to Maximus, the philosopher, in which the Gallic army is designated as *theosebes* neglecting, however, the fact that Julian was extremely careful to publicly celebrate Christian festivals in Vienne (Amm. XXI. 2.5); another argument calls attention to Jovian's secret missive to replace Jovinus upon his accession (Amm. XXV. 8.11), once more ignoring Jovian's open confirmation of Jovinus's office in Gaul (Amm. XXV. 10.9), as well as the tendency of every new emperor to reorganise the realm. Moreover, even if Jovinus had been a pagan under Julian, a belated conversion is not unlikely. After all, it was at the court of Valentinian I at Trier that two officials converted to ascetism, and where Jerome himself spent some time, Augustine, *Conf. VIII. 6.15*; J. Steinhausen, *Hieronymus und Laktanz in Tier*, TZ 20, 1951, 126-54.

¹⁹ The church of St. Bertrand is now being excavated. It lies on the edge of the center which includes the forum and the market, and at the foot of the hill on which the mediaeval town was constructed. It appears that the early phase of the church may be dated to the fourth century.

²⁰ Ausonius, Ep. 4 and 6 (Peiper).

where in the early 380s Priscillian of Avila found many adherents and where later Sulpicius Severus established his ascetic community of Primuliacum.²¹ There are no traces of ascetism or of excessive piety in the verses honoring Nymfius, but rather of a type of Christianity which could adopt classical funerary formulae for its own use without apparent lack of propriety.

II. Career. The bulk of the epitaph affords a rare insight into the career of a local notable. He is called *parens* by *cuncta provincia*, his *munera* are mentioned and likewise his involvement with a *concilium procerum*. None of these references is precise enough to reconstruct the political career of Nymfius, but together they can be taken to indicate his position in society. It seems that we are dealing with two levels of activities, municipal and provincial, the former indicated by the reference to the initiative of Nymfius' *patria* in summoning of a council of the notables, (vs. 13-4) while the latter is reflected in the lines referring to the whole province as well as to orphaned cities (vs. 9,15).

To start with, the public services (*munera*) provided at Nymfius' expense were most likely games, but an act of civic generosity such as urban magnates were wont to display towards their less affluent fellow-citizens cannot be excluded. The occasion for public spectacles was usually an appointment at a provincial level such as that of governor of a province or a *sacerdos provinciae*.²² In view of the substantial cost involved, it is hardly surprising that honors like provincial priesthoods were rather dreaded, as is clearly stated in a fourth century inscription from Africa (CIL VI 1736 = ILS 1256) commemorating a *proconsularis* who revived the office of the *sacerdos* which apparently had fallen into abeyance. What is no less significant is the fact that by the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth, the sacerdoties lost their specific pagan religious character, a fact which enabled Christians to hold this office.²³ If the reference, then, in the CIL XIII 128 is to the selection of Nymfius as a *sacerdos provinciae*, the games which he had to supply were likely to have taken place in the provincial capital of Novempopulana, Auch, which would extend the sphere of Nymfius' influence further north from the local territory of Valentine and near-by St. Bertrand de Comminges to the rest of the province.²⁴ Moreover, although provincial priests are attested in late Roman Africa, similar evidence for Gaul is

²¹ Sulpicius Severus, Chiron. 46 (Priscillian in Aquitaine). For the precise location, still unknown, of Primuliacum, J. Fontaine, *Vie de Saint Martin* (Sch 133), Paris 1967, I, 30ff.: somewhere between Toulouse and Narbonne. C. Stancliffe, *St. Martin and his Hagiographer*, Oxford 1983.

²² H. Nesselhauf, *Die spätrömische Verwaltung der gallisch-germanischen Länder*, Berlin 1938, 100 on Nymfius as a *sacerdos*.

²³ C. Lepelley, *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine au Bas-Empire*, Paris 1979-81, II, 412-3.

²⁴ Not Aquitaine, pace Hirschfeld, Buecheler and Diehl, but Novempopulana, as the province is designated in all administrative lists of the later Empire, namely the *Laterculus Veronensis*, the *Notitia Dignitatum* and the *Notitia Galliarum*, all in O. Seeck, *Notitia Dignitatum*, Frankfurt 1886, repr. 1962. For Auch, NGall, Seeck 271 and Amm. XV.11.14.

lacking.²⁵ The hypothetical existence of such an office in the province of Novempopulana at the period is therefore of utmost significance and may indicate a certain continuity between the well-known priests of the cult of Rome and the emperor of the early Empire and the priesthoods in the Later Empire.

While in the Later Empire the term *munus* retained its original meaning of a spectacle offered in the amphitheatre for public benefit at private expense, legal definitions dating from the beginning of the fourth century expanded the term to include a variety of acts such as construction and restoration of public buildings, and the upkeep of aqueducts and public roads.²⁶ We have, therefore, to consider the possibility of another type of munificence which would have earned Nymfius the gratitude of the provincial residents. In an illuminating table for the African provinces Lepelley listed several types of evergetism displayed by office holders as well as by private citizens.²⁷ They include public statues, restoration of public buildings and monuments, banquets, completion of new building projects, and other public works of undetermined character. It is interesting to note that constructions and restorations, rather than games, form the majority of the acts of public generosity recorded in the African inscriptions (13 cases of games out of 85 recorded public services). In every instance of spectacles, the providers held a priestly function, whether at a municipal or provincial level, some also acting as a patron of the city. This affiliation between *flamines* or *sacerdotes* and public games, as well as the reference in our text to cheering crowds (vs. 12) may support the assumption that CIL XIII 128 refers primarily to games given in the past at Nymfius' expense to celebrate his provincial priesthood.

Acts of public generosity raised certain expectations among members of the local community. A friend of Sidonius Apollinaris who had made a substantial contribution to the local church was asked to extend his patronage to the whole city and to exercise his influence even further over the Goths and Romans living in the area (Ep. III.1). Nymfius was lamented as a 'parent', a term which does not denote any precise title but may imply an honor like that of a *patronus*. There are several grounds on which such an assumption may rest. As in the case of the African provinces, there is some evidence of affiliation between priestly functions and patronage in Gaul: CIL XIII 5063 (Germania Superior, Yverdun) refers to Fl. Camillus, a *Ilvir* and *flamen*, *quem ordo patronum civitatis cooptavit*, and who is also called *amicus et patronus*. Other patrons seem to have been chosen from the ranks of

²⁵ Lepelley, *Cités* I, 304-14 (with their respective contribution to the community) and *passim*. The evidence of CIL XIII (index, *passim*) for Gaul points to *sacerdotes* or *flamines* connected with the cult of Rome and the emperors at Lyon or with a specific deity; but late Roman legislation attests the existence of provincial priesthoods (CTh 4.6.3, AD 336) and their connection with the chief decurions of a municipality (CTh 12.1.75, AD 371). For *flamen-sacerdos*, TLL 6.1.A, col. 855ff.

²⁶ *Liber singularis de muneribus civilibus* by Arcadius Charisius apud *Digesta* L,4,18; and *Libri iuris epitomarum* of Hermogenian apud *Digesta* L, 4,1; 5,11; XXVII,1,41 with Lepelley, *Cités*, I, 207.

²⁷ *Cités*, I, 304-14.

honorary counts and governors (CTh. 12.1.36, AD 343), and those of chief municipal decurions (CTh 12.1.61, AD 364) on the basis of community services.

Another piece of evidence in support of identifying Nymfius as a patron is the testimony of Saint Augustine regarding his Thagastan benefactor, Romanianus, a man of considerable local standing.²⁸ According to Augustine, Romanianus' chief merit in the eyes of the public were the costly bear-games which he organised for the people as well as spectacles which had never before been seen by the locals.²⁹ It was presumably for such unheard of generosity that not only Romanianus' own city, Thagaste, but also neighboring cities regarded him as their patron, conferring on him statues and honors.³⁰ But Romanianus' *munera* did not end there; from his vast resources he was also ready to help individuals like the young and talented Augustine to acquire further education in a big city with better schools than those at Thagaste.³¹ As a result, his clients, his co-citizens, and all the people (in the province) were unanimous in praising his humanity and generosity.³² Like CIL XIII 128, Augustine's praise of Romanianus makes no reference to a specific office, although Lepelley calculated that Romanianus held the municipal offices of a *duovir*, *curator*, and a *flamen*, as well as a *sacerdos provinciae*.³³ But while Augustine himself sums up the career of Romanianus with the vague words *influerent honores, adderentur etiam potestates quae municipalem habitum supercrescerent*, (contra Acad. I,2), he leaves no doubt as to Romanianus' municipal and provincial status as patron.

We may not therefore err if we regard Nymfius likewise as a patron, but it remains to establish whether we are dealing with a *patronus civitatis* or a *patronus provinciae*. Since the inscription claims that a whole province regarded Nymfius as *parens*, the natural inference is that Nymfius, like Valerius Dalmatius, *rectior Lugdunensis*, (ILS 8987), was the patron of a whole province, namely of Novempopulana. It seems unlikely that the title of a *parens* here is akin to that of *curator* or *pater civitatis*, the magistrate originally in charge of the city's finances, but who in late antiquity assumed further municipal responsibilities including judicial powers.³⁴ For if there is any affinity between the two titles, *parens* and *pater civitatis*, why would a 'whole province' claim Nymfius as its 'parent' while the title of *curator/pater* is strictly limited to a city? Another possibility which must be ruled out here is that of a *defensor civitatis*, an urban office introduced by Valentinian I, which would

²⁸ Contra Academicos I,2 with Lepelley, Cités II, 175ff.

²⁹ Contra Acad. I,2: *an vero si edentem te munera ursorum et nunquam ibi antea visa spectacula civibus nostris, theatricus plausus semper prosperrimus accepisset.*

³⁰ Ibid.: *si municipales tabulae te non solum civium sed etiam vicinorum patronum aere signarent.*

³¹ Cont.Acad. II, 2-3; Conf. II, 3,5.

³² Cont. Acad. I,2: *in ore clientium, in ore civium, in ore denique populorum, humanissimus, liberalissimus ... ut fuisse, iactareris.*

³³ Lepelley, Cités, II, 180.

³⁴ Lepelley, I, 161f. and passim. Unfortunately, CTh I, 30 preserves only its title: *de curatoribus civitatum*.

again be difficult to reconcile with the provincial ties implied in the inscription.³⁵ The possibility, however, that Nymfius was also a patron of his own urban community, Saint Bertrand de Comminges, may be feasible even though this honor was left unrecorded in an epitaph which refers to the defunct's highest distinctions.

The importance of identifying Nymfius as a *patronus* cannot be exaggerated. We know for certain of only one municipal patron in late antique Gaul and of one provincial patron. The first was Claudius Lupicinus, possibly governor of Maxima Senonia, and a patron of the cities of Auxerre and Sens; the second was Valerius Dalmatius, a Pannonian patron of the province of Lugdunensis III.³⁶ Some of the verses dedicated to Dalmatius by his grateful Gallic provincials bear a close resemblance to the dedication to Nymfius, such as *multis pro meritis haec stat imago tibi, / quam positi longe testantes publica vota / usque procul patriae mittimus in gremium* (vs. 8-10). With the addition of another patron, this time of a south-western province, the annals of patronage in late antique Gaul are thus considerably expanded.

The municipal level of Nymfius' activities seems to be indicated in vs. 13-54, which refer to a *concilium procerum* summoned through Nymfius at the instigation of his *patria*. The council of the chiefs has been variously identified as the *curia* of Lugdunum Convenarum (Saint Bertrand de Comminges), or as the provincial assembly of Novempopulana, the province where Nymfius' estate was situated, or even as an assembly of the whole diocese.³⁷ But before further precision is sought, it is necessary to look at the relations between the three abovementioned components, Nymfius, his *patria* and the *concilium*. While use of the word *patria* would usually denote one's origin particularly one's urban origin,³⁸ the *proceres* refer to the wealthiest and most and more powerful decurions in a city who would participate both in urban and provincial councils. Chief decurions could also become *patroni civitatis* and provincial priests (CTh 12.21.61; 75), and were among those naturally selected as delegates to represent their cities. A law of AD 380 (CTh 12.12.7) refers to municipalities who instead of sending their petitions through a provincial delegation prefer to present their case individually. Since CIL XIII 128 places an emphasis on the provincial level of Nymfius' activities, it is plausible to identify the *concilium procerum* as the provincial council, convened at the initiative of Saint Bertrand through the mediary of its most eminent *procer*, Nymfius. By virtue, then, of his wealth and

³⁵ Lizop, op. cit. 65 identifies Nymfius as a *defensor*.

³⁶ CIL XIII 921 = ILS 6117 = ILCV 80 (Lupicinus); AE 1902, 245 = ILS 8987 = CE 2046 (Dalmatius) with J.-U. Krause, *Das spätantike Städtepatronat*, Chiron 17, 1987, p.78 no. 177 (late 4/ beginning 5th century); and p.76 nos. 164-6 for *patroni civitatum* in late antique Gaul. Krause also adds Avitus as a *patronus* on the basis of Sidonius C. VII, 207ff.

³⁷ Lizop, 47 as a member of the urban *curia*; Nesselhauf, 100 on diocesan context. Note that the earliest reference to a provincial *concilium* dates to AD 364 (CIL VI. 1729), where the assembly is that of Spain.

³⁸ Ausonius, Ordo 20.39: (Burdigala) *haec patria est*; Mosselle, 449: *Burdigalam... in patriam*.

the proximity of his estate to the city, as well as owing to his display of generosity towards provincials, Nymfius was considered an ideal spokesman. The reference in CIL XIII 128 is the only such piece of information regarding the provincial council of Novempopulana before the edict of Honorius in AD 418, in which members like Nymfius and his fellow *proceres* are defined as *honorati* and *possessores*.³⁹

III. D a t e . Not a single element in the inscription points to any precise dating of the career and death of Nymfius. Based on the archaeological reports of the excavator, G.Fouet, who assigned the construction of the villa to the first part of the fourth century, and in his belief in the paganism of Nymfius, Pailler recently dated Nymfius' epitaph to the middle of that century.⁴⁰ There are several objections to this dating. In the first place, it is clear that the villa continued to be inhabited until at least the early fifth century, if not later.⁴¹ There are ample signs of reconstruction and even enlargement of the original plans. The pottery finds usually dated to the fourth century have been recently re-dated to the fifth.⁴² Moreover, the detailed study of the mosaics of the villa, undertaken by Catherine Balmelle, also point to prolongation of its occupation into the fifth century.⁴³

Pailler has taken the well-known opposition of the church to public games as an indication of an early date, when such opposition may have gone unheeded.⁴⁴ But public games of all types continued to be held well into the sixth century, for even the bishops were unable to suppress an institution which was more closely allied with social traditions and civic spirit than with a mere display of paganism.⁴⁵ And it must have been the maintenance of such traditions that influenced the Christian Nymfius to celebrate public games.

The names, Nymfius and Serena, are relatively rare. In fact, not a single Nymfius is recorded in the PLRE, and I have been able to collect only four instances of the name, all from Rome and all, as it seems, from the early empire.⁴⁶ It is also difficult to ascertain whether Nymfius is a learned Greek name like Hesperius (the son of Ausonius) or a

³⁹ J. Zeller, *Concilia provincialia in Gallien in der späteren Kaiserzeit*, *Westdeutsche Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kunst* 25, 1906, 258-73. The edict of Honorius is in G.Haenel, *Corpus Legum*, Leipzig 1857, repr. Aalen 1965, no. 1171, p.238.

⁴⁰ Pailler, 164.

⁴¹ Fouet, *Aperçu*, 157. No traces of fire or a violent end have been discovered, and it appears that the villa was subject to a gradual abandonment.

⁴² M.Gauthier, *La céramique estampée tardive d'Aquitaine*, *Revue historique de Bordeaux et du département de la Gironde* 26, 1975, 19-45.

⁴³ *Recueil général des mosaïques de la Gaule*. Xe suppl. à *Gallia* IV.1: Province d'Aquitaine. Partie méridionale, Paris 1980, no. 49-60. Most of the mosaics of Valentine are dated by Balmelle to the end of the fourth century, while no. 60, which depicts a scheme of floral pyramids, may be assigned to the first half of the fifth.

⁴⁴ Pailler, 159-60.

⁴⁵ A.H.M.Jones, *The Greek City*, Oxford 1940, 254. *Idem*, *The later Roman Empire*, Oxford 1964, 736, 756, 971, 977, 1016-21.

⁴⁶ ILS 3544, 3772, 3856, 5242.

latinisation of a Celtic name. Serena's name may offer some information. The most famous bearer of that name in Late Antiquity was the niece of the emperor Theodosius, and the wife of Stilicho. She was a Spaniard, as was another Serena recorded in ILS 3106.⁴⁷

Perhaps the wife of Nymfius was also a Spaniard, a not unlikely guess in view of the nearness of Saint Bertrand de Comminges to the Pyrenees and to Spain. We know of other marriage alliances between Gauls and Spaniards, most notably that of the Bordelais Paulinus (later of Nola) and the Spanish heiress Therasia at the end of the fourth century.⁴⁸ CIL XIII 128 may provide another example of the connections between Gaul and Spain at the time.

To sum up, CIL XIII. 128 is evidence of the extension of local power, based on a large rural establishment, to an urban environment and beyond this, through the holding of public games, to a provincial level. While a precise dating is excluded until a detailed report of the excavations is published, it may not be unreasonable to see in Nymfius the owner of an early fifth century villa, and a not atypical example of a great Gallic landowner with a considerable influence beyond his immediate environment.

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⁴⁷ ILS 3106 (Merida), 8125 (Concordia).

⁴⁸ Paulinus C.X, 191ff. On other Gauls contracting marriages in Spain, Ausonius, *Professores*, 23 (Peiper). For Gauls pursuing political or legal career in Spain, Ausonius *Prof.* 17 (Exuperius); *Parentalia* 3 (Arboreus).