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GRAECOLATINA

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3. Cicero's Roman Mysteries

On 13 February of 50 B.C., Cicero wrote to Atticus from Laodicea in Phrygia. At the end of this letter he turns to various “domestic affairs”; the last of these is a request to be told whether a month is to be intercalated at Rome, for he wants to know precisely when the mysteries will occur (*Att.* 5.21.14): *cum scies Romae intercalatum sit necne, velim ad me scribas certum quo die mysteria futura sint*. A week later, at the end of another letter to Atticus, the same request (6.1.26): *faciesque me in quem diem Romana incidant mysteria certiore*.

Cicero's Roman mysteries have baffled his modern readers. The rites of the Bona Dea used to be invoked; these are once called “mysteries” by a Greek.² But these nocturnal rites were in early December; the *natalis* of her temple on the Aventine lay nearer in the future, 1 May, but this observation should not have been called “mysteries.” Tyrrell and Purser (III 187) doubt that the May festival could be variable in date, but they chiefly object to the irrelevance of rites of Bona Dea to Cicero in Phrygia; they considered that the reference “may perhaps be to some private affairs ... just possibly to the engagement of Tullia.” The mysteries of Ceres have since been urged, whether these were attached to the Cerealia on 19 April or the *sacrum anniversarium* in summer;³ for Ceres, and not Bona Dea, was most often associated with “mysteries” by Romans.⁴ Most recently Shackleton Bailey (III 238) has adduced both the *natalis* of Bona Dea and the Cerealia but rejects both “since these had fixed dates ..., which would not be affected by intercalation.”

This last objection, which has dominated discussion of this question,⁵ misapprehends Cicero's problem. He knew very well that the Bona Dea was honored in early December and on 1 May, Ceres on 19 April: the question for him, as he counted the days that passed in Anatolia, was not on what dates these rites fell, but when those dates themselves would come along—that is, he had to know whether an intercalary month was going to be added after 23/4 February in order to know how many days he must count in order to reach (say) 19 April.⁶ Cicero's question has been taken to show that his mysteries were a movable feast: to the contrary, that he asks about an intercalary month and not about when the pontiffs have fixed a particular variable ceremony should indicate that the date itself was fixed in the calendar.

The more serious objection to both festivals is the one that Tyrrell and Purser quote approvingly from Shuckburgh: “Why did Cicero care to know this?” This seems to me fatal to both goddesses.⁷ The

¹ Cf. *ZPE* 102 (1994) 191–193. At 191 I was mistaken in calling *ῥωμαϊκῆς* a hapax, as Adam Laitar has kindly pointed out, citing *Bull.épigr.* 1983, 475.

² App. *Sic.* fr. 7, *μυστηρίων ἀγομένων* (of the Clodius scandal). H. H. J. Brouwer, *Bona Dea* (Leiden 1989) 359, says that her rites were “often described as mysteries”; but his corpus of the evidence shows only Appian (or rather the Byzantine epitomator). At 173 he judges the pertinence of the Cicero letters to be dubious.

³ H. Le Bonniec, *Le culte de Cérès à Rome* (Paris 1958) 400–438: he concluded from Cicero's two letters that Ceres' mysteries were part of the movable *anniversarium* (in June, he argued) rather than the Cerealia which was fixed on 19 April. Answered by H. Wagenvoort, *Mnemosyne* IV.13 (1960) 111–142 (also *Pietas* [Leiden 1980] 114–146), without reverting to Cicero's mysteries (and at *Pietas* 144 urging for the *anniversarium* a somewhat later date, toward or in July).

⁴ In fact their usual term was *initia* rather than *mysteria*; Cicero (*Leg.* 2.36) treats the former as a Latin gloss (the Greek *mysteria* of Demeter, *initiaque ut appellantur*). See Wagenvoort, *Pietas* 135–136, 255.

⁵ The principle was evoked e.g. by Wissowa, “Bona Dea,” *RE* 3 (1897) 688; I have not tried to trace it earlier.

⁶ It happens that we too do not know whether a month was added to the year 50: A. K. Michels, *The Calendar of the Roman Republic* (Princeton 1967) 171 (the nearest certain intercalations at 52 and 46 B.C.).

⁷ Le Bonniec 430–436 gives the doxography. Bayet thought that Cicero would honor the Bona Dea (1 May) because of her aid in his victories over Catiline and Clodius; but the nocturnal December rites are the ones relevant to Cicero, and only they might have been called “mysteries.” Le Bonniec argued that the summer rites of Ceres were relevant because Cicero,

certain criterion we have for identifying these mysteries and Cicero's interest in them is that he classed them with personal matters (*reliqua sunt domestica*), along side his daughter's betrothal (called ἐνδόμυχον), his brother's inaccessibility, the weather in the Taurus, his cultivation of the governor of Asia, the insolvency of someone in his province who was obligated to Atticus (5.21.14).

A different passage in the second letter may therefore be relevant. Cicero's son and his nephew both accompanied him to his province, and their care and handling were much on his mind during these months of travel. At the middle of this letter he dilates upon the character of each boy, and tells Atticus that, in keeping with his brother's request,⁸ he means to bestow the toga virilis on Quintus Cicero—this upon the Liberalia (17 March),⁹ which he will reckon on the assumption of no intercalation (6.1.12): *Quinto togam puram Liberalibus cogitabam dare; mandavit enim pater. ea sic observabo quasi intercalatum non sit*. It is several pages later, a last thought in this long letter, where he repeats his desire to know about intercalation and the effective date of the "Roman mysteries."

I suggest that these three passages allude to one ceremony, not to two. The three have in common Cicero's anxiety about intercalation: the second shows the Liberalia to be affected by the question raised in the first and third. In the first passage the coming of age of Quintus would be properly categorized among *domestica*. If this suggestion is plausible, the question is why Cicero would call the Liberalia "mysteries."¹⁰

It had been said already before Cicero's day that Liber was the god whom the Greeks called Dionysus.¹¹ Eventually the natural deduction was made, that the Liberalia were called in Greek Dionysia.¹² Upon this familiar equation, I would urge, Cicero is merely working a conceit, one apparently already known to him and Atticus. The mysteries of Dionysus, a rite of initiation, were of course quite familiar to Romans. Cicero would seem to be playing on this in calling the Roman boy's rite of passage at the Liberalia "mysteries": Liber is Dionysus and Dionysus has mysteries, and in any case this ceremony for Quintus is an initiation. It is a waggish conceit, and a modern translator of Cicero might best put his "(Roman) mysteries" in quotation marks to capture the tone. As can be seen in Ovid *Fasti* 3.771–78, Romans were given to tiresome punning on the name of Liber and the Liberalia; Cicero was not immune.¹³ Here, however, he seems to aspire to something more clever and recondite, a Hellenizing jest. And the conceit may have been further incited or at least kept alive by the fact that the boys' tutor was named Dionysius, as Cicero goes on to mention at 6.1.12 after speaking of the Liberalia.¹⁴

This identification of the mysteries has two serious difficulties. First, writing in February, Cicero could hardly expect to get an answer before 17 March; proximity in time was in fact an argument of Le Bonniec's against even the Cerealia of 19 April. If my suggestion is correct, Cicero must already intend

who wanted to leave his province promptly in June, would scruple to undertake a voyage on a *dies nefastus*; but to avoid this (if such were the date and character of Ceres' mysteries) he needed only to wait a few days.

⁸ Mentioned already at 5.20.9 (mid December 51), but without stating the intended occasion, only that his brother wanted it done "at Laodicea."

⁹ As was normal: Ov. *Fasti* 3.771 ff.; testimonia at Degrassi, *I. Ital.* XIII.2 pp. 425–426.

¹⁰ Le Bonniec (433) rightly sees that *Nat.D.* 2.62 evokes the Eleusian mysteries, not any of Liber (whose relationship to Ceres and Libera, says Cicero, "can be understood from the mysteries"). For *Tusc.* 1.29 ("remember, as you are an initiate, ...") shows his belief that a theogony is what is expounded by "the mysteries," where the Eleusinian cult is clearly meant; *Leg.* 2.35 shows that Atticus was an initiate of Eleusis, and invoking the superior understanding of initiates was something of a platitude, cf. Ael. Arist. 48.32 K., "Who could express these things [a dream vision] in words? If one is among the initiated, he sympathizes and understands" (εἰ δὲ τις τῶν τετελεμένων ἐστίν, σύννοιδέν τε καὶ γνωρίζει).

¹¹ On a Praeneste cista of the fourth century B.C. a bearded god holding an ivy tendril is labeled *Leiber*: G. Bordenache Battaglia, *Le ciste prenestine* (1979) I no. 5 with pl. LXI (*CIL* I² 563; Vetter, *Handbuch* no. 367b).

¹² Festus ap. Paul. s.v. (p. 103 Lindsay); Tert. *Spect.* 10.

¹³ Cf. *Att.* 14.14.2, *Liberalibus ... libere potuimus sententiam dicere*; *Nat. D.* 2.62, *quod ex nobis natos liberos appellamus ... nominati sunt Liber et Libera* etc.

¹⁴ This Dionysius was Atticus' freedman, first attested in 56 B.C. (*Att.* 4.8a.1), and first seen as tutor to at least Marcus' son in 54 (4.15.10).

to act on the assumption of no intercalation; and this precisely is what he says of the Liberalia at 6.1.12. Second, there is the plain contradiction, in a single letter, between his intention to proceed with the Liberalia and his question about a proper date for the “mysteries.” These two objections are perhaps less serious, however, if 13 February was not his first request for the information. Cicero frequently repeats himself across the letters, especially when questions went unanswered; among the extant letters, 5.20.9 of two months earlier alludes to his brother’s request about Quintus’ toga virilis, which must have been made earlier still. And the familiarity with which Cicero writes to Atticus of these “mysteries” suggests that he had written about the matter before 13 February. If that is so, then we are seeing only part of a repeated refrain. It is a human thing to hope for word up to the last minute; and his statement on the 20th about proceeding on the assumption of no intercalation may reflect some exasperation over not having yet received an answer.

4. A Soldier at Gortyn

An inscription from Gortyn on Crete records that a Roman was made a proxenos and citizen there (*I.Cret.* IV 215c [*IGR* I 1515]):

Γ · Λυτ{ο}άτιος · Κρίπος · στρα-
τιώτης · Πτο(λεμαϊκός) · Γορτυνίων πρόξε-
νος · καὶ πολίτας · αὐτὸς · καὶ ἔγγονοι.
(leaf)

2 πτῶ

The expansion of the abbreviation goes back to De Sanctis, the first editor, who dated the inscription to the mid first century B.C. However disconcerting we might find both the phrase and the fact, a Roman serving as a “Ptolemaic soldier,” this understanding seems to have been universally approved. De Sanctis (followed by Guarducci and the *Pros.Ptol.*) thought that he was one of the Roman troops stationed in Egypt by Gabinius in the 50’s; A. Reinach thought that the soldier had served in the Ptolemaic garrison at Itanos, which he felt may well have existed as late as the Roman annexation in the 60’s; van’t Dack noted other Lutatii in Republican Greece and considered that ours probably was an officer.¹⁵

Here are impossible difficulties. An ethnic Roman is not likely to have served in the woeful armies of the last Ptolemies.¹⁶ We have no reason to assume that there were Ptolemaic troops at Itanos as late as the 60’s B.C. A Greek city would not call a Roman soldier “Ptolemaic” even if he was stationed in Cleopatra’s Egypt. In neither garrison situation is such a soldier likely to have been voted proxeny and citizenship at more or less distant Gortyn. The phrase “Ptolemaic soldier” appears to be unparalleled.¹⁷ A leaf on an inscription suggests an Imperial date.

All this rests on an abbreviation, ΠΤΟ. Is a less daring expansion possible? The inscriptions have recorded for us a good many Gortynian proxenoi, most under Roman rule. Professions are rarely stated: occasionally theatrical performers (222A–B, 223); more pertinent is a Roman centurion, K.

¹⁵ G. De Sanctis, *MonAnt* 18 (1907) 327–328; A. Reinach, *REG* 24 (1911) 411 n. 3; J. Hatzfeld, *Trafiquants italiens* (Paris 1919) 159 (“mercenary of the Ptolemies”); *Pros. Ptol.* II 4002 = VI 14929; E. van’t Dack, in *Das römisch-byzantinische Ägypten* (Mainz 1983) 28.

¹⁶ M. Launey, *Recherches sur les armées hellénistiques* (Paris 1949–50) I 606–607, II 1262 (omitting Lutatius) lists only four Romans in Ptolemaic service. Most suggestive here is Λεύκιος Γάϊου Ῥωμαῖος, phrourarch at Itanos in an earlier period, 217–209 B.C. (*I.Cret.* III IV 18; for the date cf. R. S. Bagnall, *The Administration of the Ptolemaic Possessions Outside Egypt* [Leiden 1976] 121). Launey’s other three explicit “Romans,” all found in Egypt itself, have obvious Greek names except Δίννος Ῥωμαῖος of *P.Lond.* VII 1986.12 (252 B.C.), which has been taken (see Skeat’s note) as an error for the rare nomen Dinnius (e.g. *CIL* X 185, 2081, 3572–73) or an unattested praenomen Dinnus; but one thinks naturally of the Greek names based on διν-, of which the most frequent is Aeolic Δίννος.

¹⁷ De Sanctis, followed by Guarducci, adduced as a parallel Dittenberger’s [- - - Πτολε]μαϊκοῖς at *Syll.*³ 410.17; but this restoration was later refuted by De Sanctis himself (*AttTor* 47 [1911/2] 793–800; bibliography at Engelmann, *I.Erythrai* 24). We have “Ptolemaic troops” (ὄπλα) at 3 Macc. 1.2, the “Ptolemaic house” at *I.Cret.* III IV 9.97.

Μουνατίδιον Μάξιμον ἑκατοντάρχαν Γορτυνίων πολίτας αὐτὸς καὶ ἔργοι (220, not quite grammatical).¹⁸

I see two possibilities. First, ΠΤΟ might indicate a praetorian, which we would readily expect to find in a provincial capital like Gortyn. Praetorians are met not infrequently in Greek lands or Greek texts, variously phrased: e.g., στρατιώτης χ(όρτης) ἢ πραιτωρίας;¹⁹ collective πραιτωριανοί;²⁰ most relevant here, the individual στρατιώτης πραιτωριανός.²¹ But an expansion π(ραι)τ(ωριαν)ό(ς) is apparently without parallel; and indeed ΠΤΟ seems on its face a misleading abbreviation for a praetorian.

I urge therefore a different solution. It is common enough for a Roman soldier to indicate his *origo*—most often in funerary texts, but in others as well. This is most fully and normally phrased as tribe and city: *Gal. Lunesis* (ILS 2016 with Dessau's note), *Stel. Aug. Taurin.* (2024), *Aniensis Cremona* (2263), *Palatina Nicomedia* (2151), *Ser. dom. Laranda* (2252), *Vel. Pessinunte* (2253). But city alone is frequent, as noun or ethnic: so the lists at ILS 2102, 2160, 2304, 2381, 2483 (*Isinda, Alex., Sid., Lugd., Cyren., etc.*), or individual soldiers from *Aquileia* (2025), *domo Heraclea Sentica* (2030) *Scupis* (2088), *Philippis* (2127), *Amasia* (2247), *domo Arethusa* (2315), [N]εικοπο[λίτης] (8865), Ἀθηναῖος (8876), στρατιώτης, Δυκυρηνός (*IGBulg III.1* 1809), at Nicaea a bilingual δόμ[ω] Νει[καία?] ... [Bla]esus d[omo Nicaea?] (*IGR III* 1403). And abbreviation is common: *Anies. Crem.* (ILS 2069, 2256), *Ouf. Med.* (2330), *Lem. Bon.* (2244, 2324), *Floren.* (2106), *Nicom.* (2087), *Nicop.* (2104), etc. Not a few of the Gortynian proxenoi come from the Cyrenaica; once we find a Πτολεμαῖός (*I.Cret.* IV 211), almost certainly from Ptolemais-Barca, the second city of Libya.²² This, I suggest, is our most reasonable expansion for Crispus: στρατιώτης, Πτο(λεμαῖός). Both abbreviation and the citation of *origo* are more common in Latin than in Greek; but what is manifest in this document is its Latinate flavor, both in Crispus with his *tria nomina*, and in his inscription with its interpuncts²³ and its abbreviation mark.

The locale may favor this expansion: it is hardly surprising to find a soldier recruited from Libyan Ptolemais assigned to the governor of his province. But this implies a date after 27 B.C. for our soldier's honor at Gortyn: it was then that Gortyn became the seat of the governor of the conjoined province Crete-Cyrenaica (Dio 53.12.4). Whatever his exact date, Crispus will be one of that class of Romans resident in the Cyrenaica whose behavior famously concerned Augustus in the first Cyrene edict of 6 B.C.²⁴

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¹⁸ The accepted I B.C. date of the script for this and a number of other of the proxeny grants seems to me somewhat early.

¹⁹ *IGUrbRom* 590, cf. 134. In Latin the praetorians are commonly abbreviated *mil. coh.* (number) *pr.*, often adding *p.v.* (*piae vindicis*; see *ILS IV* p. 443; unabbreviated at *I.Ephesos* 2319).

²⁰ *Athenaeum* n.s. 43 (1965) 333 τριβοῦνον πραιτωριανῶν; *TAM V* 419 [- - - οἱ πραι]τωριανοί (both III A.D.); *I.Ephesos* 620 *praetorianorum* (II A.D.)

²¹ *IG XIV* 1452 (Latium); *SEG* 35.649 (Thessaly); *IGBulg III.1* 1701, 1810. The Latin equivalent e.g. at *ILS* 2419a.

²² See generally C. H. Kraeling, *Ptolemais, City of the Libyan Pentapolis* (Chicago 1962).

²³ These were indicated only by the first editor.

²⁴ I am most grateful to Jerzi Linderski and Everett Wheeler.