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A JULIO-CLAUDIAN BUSINESS FAMILY?

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A small piece of pedantry may be permitted when membership of the Roman Senate is involved and also membership of the elusive profession of slave-trader. In ZPE 116, 1997, M. Giocoli and C. L. Gregori published (pp. 164–166) a brief dedication from Rome which, with the help of another previously published copy of what is evidently the same text, they convincingly restored as follows:

[Q. Caecili]o Q. f. Oinogeno
[conventu]s Carthaginiensis.

The editors drew attention to a previously attested personage who is referred to in an inscription from Rome: “[–] Caecilius Q. f. Oinogenus f. cur.” This text appears on a lead tessera published by Rostovtzeff, and it evidently refers to the same individual or a close relative.¹ The date of the newly published inscription is reasonably said by the editors to be “prima età imperiale”, on the basis of letter forms. They also, unlike E. Groag, favour Rostovtzeff’s suggestion that his Caecilius Q. f. Oinogenus was a senator,² the son, perhaps, of the newly discovered individual, whom they also want to make a senator. The *conventus Carthaginiensis* belonged to Carthago Nova, and they speculate that Oinogenus was also a Spanish, specifically Celtiberian, name. A Celtiberian in the Julio-Claudian Senate, a nice thought: no doubt Claudius had welcomed him.

But the name Oinogenos is not and is not likely to be Spanish or Celtiberian,³ and another Q. Caecilius Oinogenus/es, who (unknown to Giocoli and Gregori) is attested in the same period, takes us to a Greek milieu, where his *cognomen*, though rare, makes good sense.

The subject of the new inscription was probably not a senator, for his honorific inscriptions mention no public office. Rostovtzeff’s supposed senator is also unconvincing. The tessera he published was one of the many made for the *curatores of ludi*. One of these men was of senatorial rank, but it is plain that they were in Julio-Claudian times usually and naturally *equites*.⁴ (Incidentally, the letter f., before “cur.”, can without difficulty be resolved as *filius* – i.e. “the younger”).⁵ There is also the question of dignity, which would be decisive by itself: Mr. “Wine-born” would have been entirely anomalous in the Julio-Claudian Senate, and perhaps at any other time.

As it happens, a Q. Caecilius Oinogenes is also attested in another text, *BGU* iv.1114, a document dated to 5 B.C. in which this Roman citizen is attested as having transported five slaves to Egypt “as a gift”. It was well suggested by I. Biežuńska-Małowist that in fact this Oinogenes had the slaves

¹ M. Rostovtzeff (ed.), *Tesserarum urbis Romae et suburbi plumbearum sylloge*, Suppl. I (St. Petersburg, 1905), 514b.

² According to Groag (*PIR*² C 68), “num senatorii ordinis fuerit . . . omnino incertum [est]”.

³ The editors rely on the existence in the Celtiberian area of some names ending in -geno- (J. Untermann, *Elementos de un atlas antroponimico de la Hispania antigua* [Madrid, 1965], 194–195); but there is on the other hand nothing in Celtiberian onomastics to correspond to Oino-, and Oinogenes, though rare, is a known name in Greek lands, and intelligible. H. Solin, *Die griechischen Personennamen in Rom* (Berlin–New York, 1982), 125, was obviously right to classify it as Greek.

⁴ Cf. E. De Ruggiero, *Diz. Ep. s.v. curator*, p. 1329, H.-G. Pflaum, *Les procurateurs équestres sous le Haut-Empire romain* (Paris, 1950), 42. The editors offer no support for their assertion (165) that all the *curatores* who appear on tesserae were of senatorial rank. The few individuals known are all, except for Oinogenus jr., listed by S. Demougin, *Prosopographie des chevaliers romains julio-claudiens (43 av. J.-C.–70 ap. J.-C.)* (Rome, 1992) (nos. 433, 675 and probably 462). For some background see J. Kolendo, *À la recherche de l’ambre baltique: l’expédition d’un chevalier romain sous Néron* (Warsaw, 1981), 30–42.

⁵ Parallels: see *ILS* III, p. 924.

imported into Egypt in the way of trade.⁶ Since this appears to be virtually the entire dossier of persons of Roman imperial date (there is one irrelevant later exception) with the name Oinogen- in Greek or Latin,⁷ and since they are all four Q. Caecilii, it is overwhelmingly likely that we are dealing with the same person in each case, or with a father and son.

While -genes names are commonly theophoric – Hermogenes, Diogenes, and so on⁸ –, “Oinogenes” has no such pretensions, and is likely to be a heavily humorous reference to the circumstances of the bearer’s conception under the influence of wine.⁹ The name will also have reminded a Greek hearer of the ordinary word for a slave born in the household, οἰκογενής. The only earlier instance of Oinogenes known to me (see n. 7) was probably a slave, and it is reasonably clear that the name implies a slave birth; we are evidently a long way away from senatorial nomenclature.

But the subject of the three Latin texts was in fact born free (the papyrus on the other hand gives no filiation). Presumably his father was born a slave, received freedom, and passed on the rare name which his owner had imposed on him. The most likely reconstruction is that Oinogenes I, the freed slave of a Roman citizen, himself traded in slaves from Asia Minor, which was the principal source of supply within the empire,¹⁰ and also in other commodities. His slave-dealing may (or may not) have been on a modest scale, but in any case he prospered and acquired distant commercial connections. His son Oinogenes/us II was later to be found in the capital, evidently as a man of wealth and influence, eventually a knight and *curator ludorum*. It was he who had a connection, no doubt commercial in origin, with the maritime city of Carthago Nova. As for the business origins of members of the Roman social elite, à la J. H. D’Arms,¹¹ we can in this case say no more – except that the fine old name Q. Caecilius is not attested in the mid- or late-first century Senate.

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⁶ *L’esclavage dans l’Égypte gréco-romaine*, II (Wrocław, etc., 1977), 36.

⁷ *IG ii² 2222* (revised in *’Αρχ. ’Εφ.* 1971, 57) gives the name Oinogenes as the patronymic of an Athenian ephebe of 217/218 A.D. or slightly later. *IG ii 4269 = ii² 13022* (of the mid-fourth century B.C.) mentions an Oinogenes whom Bechtel (next note) detected as a slave.

⁸ Cf. F. Bechtel, *Die historischen Personennamen des Griechischen bis zur Kaiserzeit* (Halle, 1917), 104–107.

⁹ But no direct help is to be found in F. Bechtel, *Die einstämmigen männlichen Personennamen des Griechischen, die aus Spitznamen hervorgegangen sind* (*Abh. Gött.* II.5, 1898).

¹⁰ W. V. Harris, *MAAR* 36 (1980), 126–28. (The dossier on the Oinogeneses: 140 n. 144.) See further *JRS* 89 (1999), 74–75.

¹¹ *Commerce and Social Standing in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 47–71.