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RULING CLASS OF ASSERIA: MAGISTRATES AND BENEFACTORS & THEIR FAMILIAE AND FAMILIES

Summary

In this paper the author analyses 16 epigraphic monuments belonging to city magistrates and other distinguished personalities of Asseria, such as the city patron, the priestess of Diva Augusta, or generous benefactors who bestowed on the city some expensive buildings or other valuable gifts, but the inscriptions belonging to their evergetisms did not bring any of their supposed municipal offices nor honorific posts (see, for instance, nr. 8).

Majority of the inscriptions, twelve of them (nos. 1-12) date from the Early Principate (Augustus - approx. 160 AD), while just four (nos. 13-16) date from the Late Principate (approx. 160 AD - end of the 3rd century).

The aim of the paper is to study lives and careers of municipal dignitaries, to become acquainted with their familiae and families, and to analyse ethnic structure of this - the highest - social class. It must be stressed out that terms familia and family are not used as synonyms in this paper. The term *FAMILIA* should be understood in the same sense as the Romans did when they used it: familia generally consisted of all agnates (i. e. all kin related by the male line) and all others who were legally subjected (*in potestate*) to the power of the same man (with him included, of course); in other words, familia consisted of all the household members under the rule of the same pater familias: children (either born to him or adopted by him) and their offspring, as well as all the slaves owned by the same master. However, very often wife was not in potestate of the same pater familias as her children, so legally she was not a member of the same familia as both her husband and her children; term with which in this paper shall be named such a unit consisting of parents, their children, and other kin, either blood-related (both by the male and the female line) or in-laws, is *FAMILY*.

The analysis of inscriptions and persons mentioned in them, among other things, has confirmed some of the earlier conclusions, as is for instance the one regarding population of Roman Asseria (particularly of its ruling class), that was of mixed ethnic structure (cf. n. 8, 52).

Settlers familiae took active part in economic, political and social life of the city since the very early time, most probably actively co-operating with members of local indigenous aristocracy. The latter, on their part, also regarded such a co-operation as beneficial, for furthering their social, economic and political positions. Both sides, joint by mutual interests, were guided by personal and familial gain, while ethnic affiliation was of small or of no importance at all in this

game of power; a number of examples from the early Roman Liburnia testify to this conclusion (cf. n. 53 and 127). Therefore, one should not be surprised that a member of Italic settlers familia held the highest municipal and religious posts (nr. 3) in Asseria at the earliest stage of its life as a Roman municipium.

With regards to the ethnic affiliation of persons attested in inscriptions analysed in this paper, it could not have been established for six of them since they lacked onomastic elements (inscriptions nr. 2, 4, 7, 11, 15, 16). For just one person her indigenous Liburnian origin can be established with certainty (nr. 1), while for other four it can only be assumed that they belonged to already strongly Romanised families of indigenous Liburnian origins (nos. 5, 6, 10, 14). Five other persons belonged to settlers familiae, mostly from Italy (nos. 3, 8, 9, 12, 14). The city patron (nr. 13) was probably also foreign to the city and its inhabitants.

Among the familiae of native origin in the ruling class of Asseria dominate those who were named Iulius upon receiving Roman citizenship already during the early 1st century AD (nos. 1, 5 and 6). At that time Roman citizens became Turus, father of Iulia Tertulla, priestess of Diva Augusta (nr. 1), as well as the father (or grand-father) of T. Iulius Celer of the Legio II Augusta (nr. 5) who might have been father of T. Iulius Clemens, the young decurio of Asseria, and his sister Iulia Proclina (nr. 6). After the end of the 1st century AD Iulii did not appear in the inscriptions belonging to the members of the ruling class of Asseria.

Apart from Iulii, indigenous origins are attributed to a member of Oppii familia (nr. 10), who might have belonged to equestrian or senatorial order, and to the aedilis Clodius Geminus (nr. 14).

Among the settlers familiae of Asseria none dominated, each having one representative - Caninii (nr. 3), Laelii (nr. 8), Publicii (nr. 9), Titii (nr. 12) and Gellii (nr. 14).

It must be stressed out that, when dealing with the population of Asseria (and of most other parts of Liburnia) of the advanced and Late Principate, it is not appropriate to use the term “indigenous” population but rather “local” or “native”, since the ethnic structure was not the same then as it was in the Early Principate, due both to the more or less finished Romanisation and to the presence of large numbers of foreign settlers mixing with the old indigenous population. The population of advanced and Late Principate consisted of descendants of both the pre-Roman indigenous Liburnian families and of the former settlers familiae living there for several generations, so the latter, already for a long time, perceived the city to be the place they called home, the place of their ancestors, same as the former indigenous inhabitants of the area that lived there prior to their settlement. This late, local, population should not and must not be regarded as identical to the original indigenous population since they did not share the same cultural, linguistic and other origins, but they must be regarded as the native population of the certain place in the certain time. In short: the term “indigenous” should be used when dealing with the ethnic Liburnian population of the Early Principate (and earlier periods), while terms “native” and

“local” should be used when dealing with people of mixed origins living in the same place for several generations (usually referring to the later period of the Roman rule).

So, the ruling class of Asseria during the Late Principate consisted mostly of such native *familiae*: some, such as Titii and Laelii (nr. 12), as well as Gellii (nr. 14), were probably of the Italic immigrant roots, and the others, such as the Clodii (nr. 14), were probably descendants of long time ago Romanised indigenous of Asseria. However, some *familiae* might have been new immigrants to Asseria, and one of them were probably Munatii (nr. 15).

For several dignitaries of Asseria it was possible to identify, in the inscriptions from Asseria and its territory, as well as from the nearby Nin (Aenona), other members of their *familiae* and/or families.

One such example give *familiae* of Titii and Laetili. Laetilia Fructa is known from one sepulchral monument that she set up to her son, the aedilis and duumvir C. Titius Priscinus, and from a second funeral monument, that she set up in Perušić to her mother and Priscinus’s grand-mother (see nr. 12 and Fig. 25). According to names and onomastic formulae of both mother and grand-mother, it seems highly probable that they belonged to the servile/libertine class of Asseria, which is - at the first glance - hard to associate with Priscinus’s high municipal posts. However, it is possible to put up a plausible scenario according to which Priscinus’s grand-parents, or perhaps grand-mother and mother, belonged to the servile/libertine class, and yet, that it would not be an obstacle for him achieving high social and political status, which he certainly did have just by being a municipal magistrate. The most plausible seems that his mother Fructa was daughter of a (former) slave named Aprilla and her master who belonged to the Laetili *familia* (this *familia* had their slaves and freedmen in *colonia Iader*, as well) and who later freed Aprilla and took her to be his legitimate wife. Such a scenario could also partly explain the economic foundations Aprilla’s grand-son Priscinus must have had possessed in order to even think about competing for civic offices; and then, if his father belonged to a *familia* of high social and economic standing from the city itself or its territory, Priscinus’s path towards shiny career was wide open, and, if he had not died at such an early age, who knows how far he would get.

The other example - not as direct as the previous one - give members of *familia* Laelii of Asseria (nr. 8). Apart from the city gates, where an inscription mentions the benefactor L. Laelius **Proculus**, other members of this *familia* are known from two other inscriptions: one, from Asseria, mentioning Titus Laelius **Maximus**, and the other, from the territory of the ancient Aenona, mentioning Laelia L. f. **Maxima** and her children (T. Iullius (!) C. f. **Proculus** and Iulia C. f. **Procla**). The two latter inscriptions are both cut on monumental sepulchral monuments, so-called Liburnian cippi, that belong to the group of the most expensive non-building monuments of Liburnia (cf. Appendix 1), which indicate that persons mentioned in them were among wealthier members of the community, similarly to the aforementioned L. Laelius Proculus, the most generous of all of the known benefactors of Asseria. Names of persons from the two

latter inscriptions coincide in great measure, so it seems that they were all members not only of the same familia but of the same family (see Figs 14-19); I find it most probable that L. Laelius Proculus, Laelia Maxima, and T. Laelius Maximus's father, were siblings (Fig. 17), although other relationships are also probable (see, for instance, Figs 18-19), as well as the least likely of them all, that they were not related at all. If we accept the possibility that all of the aforementioned Laelii were members of the same familia, then it can be concluded that this familia was tightly connected with the Iulii, who already gave distinguished members to this community, and with the Trosii, who distinguished themselves among both the indigenous population of Nedinum and the wealthier people from Asseria, judging by two persons mentioned in recently discovered so-called Liburnian cippi of the Asseria typological group (see n. 108).

The third example includes members of the two branches of the Iulii familia of the ruling class of Asseria. Familia of Iulia Tertulla (nr. 1) would belong to the one branch, and to the other the familiae of T. Iulius T. f. Celer (nr. 5) and of T. Iulius Clemens and his sister Iulia T. f. Proclina (nr. 6). According to the systematic repetition of the praenomen Titus in onomastic formulae and/or filiation of these three persons (cf. notes 73-74), to the choice of cognomina that are very frequent in nomenclatures of very Romanised indigenous Liburni, and to the various levels of the social promotion of Celer and Clemens (Celer was a benefactor who had just a single military post in his cursus honorum, while Clemens entered the city council), it seems very plausible that they were close kin, more precisely, that Celer was Clemens's father (see Fig. 10) and that he used this evergetism to further his son's career.

The fourth example regards the origins of T. Atilius Aebutianus, Emperor Commodus's praefectus praetorio, and patron, but not the citizen, of Asseria (nr. 13). Cognomen Aebutianus, generally very rare, is formally similar to the name of the Aebutia gens, and calls for the hypothesis that he was perhaps adopted by the Atilii whilst being born into the familia of Aebutii (see n. 197). The only Aebutius known from Liburnia was a foreigner, Q. Aebutius Liberalis, most probably of Italic origins. He was high ranked centurio in charge of settling territorial boundaries of indigenous communities of Liburnia during the Nero's reign; up to now, he is attested in four different stone monuments of almost identical texts (cf. n. 187). There is a possibility that at some later stage in his life he was adopted into the Claudia gens, and that we find him, already obtaining equestrian posts, in one inscription from Tivoli (*CIL* 14, 4239), with a new name, as Ti. Claudius Ti. f. Qui. Liberalis Aebutianus (on his new familia, see n. 196). From the rarity of the cognomen Aebutianus (cf. n. 192), maybe it may be inferred that Aebutianus, patron of Asseria, originated from this Italian equestrian familia.

T. Publicius Saturninus and his sister Stennia Faustina give an interesting example of relationships between two familiae (nr. 9), because siblings did not bear the same nomen. That indicates that their mother married twice (see Fig. 21), each time into the wealthy and socially distinguished familia.

Aforementioned Aebutianus, as the second most powerful man in the Empire, was undoubtedly the highest ranked of all of the here mentioned persons. Citizens of Asseria elected him as the city patron (though it is very likely that he was not one of them) and erected him a standing statue within or in front of the forum portico A (so-called western portico; see Fig. 4). His *curus honorum* is almost unknown; we know that he was titled *clarissimus vir*, which was reserved for senators and some of the highest ranked members of the equestrian order (see n. 184), and, judging by the inscription *CIL* 6, 31154, he held the position of the Commodus's *tribunus numeri singularium* (see n. 183).

Two benefactors from Asseria (nos. **2** and **10**) might have also belonged to the equestrian or even senatorial order, but certainly were not nearly as high in the state hierarchy as Aebutianus was. Since the inscriptions mentioning them are damaged just where both their careers and names should be, we can only presume that they were probably military (legionary) tribunes (cf. n. 37).

Among the municipal magistrates in Asseria there were those of the city councillors (*decuriones*: nos. **4**, **6**, and indirectly also nr. **9**), aediles (nos. **12**, **15**, and indirectly also nr. **9**), *Ilviri* (nos. **3**, **12**, **14** and **15**), *Ilviri quinquennales* (nr. **3**), and, among the priestly posts, *sacerda Divae Augustae* (nr. **1**), *flamen Divi Claudii* (nr. **3**), and *auguri* (nr. **4**, and also, most probably, nr. **7**). One magistrate obtained municipal posts of *decurio* and *aedilis* and phrased it in the inscription as *omnibus honoribus patriae suae functo* (nr. **9**).

Some members of the ruling class demonstrated their economic strength and social position by very costly acts of evergetism, but without mentioning any public offices or honorific posts: the most generous act of such evergetism was building the city gates (so-called *Porta Traiana*), which is the most considerable act of individual generosity in Asseria (nr. **5**). The inscription nr. **14** also belongs to this group of monuments, and it is a whitewash that members of the *Gellii familia* took care of building an object dedicated to the indigenous Liburnian goddess *Latra* (or restoring it, adding an annexe, or similar).

Several inscriptions testify to quite costly evergetisms, but the benefactors and their careers remain unknown or poorly known, due to damages the inscriptions suffered. One of such benefactors was the anonymous princeps of all of the *Asseriatas* (nr. **2**), who spent maybe even more than 200.000 sesterces on building the forum portico (actually, most probably he built all of the forum porticos and the forum pavement). The other is *C. Oppius* who placed the table of standard measures (*mensa ponderaria*) somewhere in forum (nr. **10**). It is highly plausible that the missing parts of these inscriptions once contained entire, military and civic, careers of these two dignitaries.

It is also probable that the career of another benefactor (*Papirius Secundus*, or *Secundinus*?) was cut in a badly damaged inscription at an architrave (nr. **11**).

Damaged inscription caused decurio and aedilis of Asseria who spent 70.000 sesterces for building a portico (nr. 4) to remain anonymous, too.

The same reason caused anonymity of an augur (?) whose sepulchral monument was set up by Arruntia Florentina (?) (nr. 7), and of a person to whom the city council gave a place either for public funeral, or for placing a statue, or similar (decreto decurionum loco publice dato, nr. 16).

Evergetism of L. Laelius Proculus consisted not only of building the city gates but also of giving the feast (epulum: nr. 8), which is, for the time being, the only such action in Asseria, and one of the few others in entire province of Dalmatia.

It is interesting that all (presently known) great evergetisms in Asseria were made posthumously, according to the testamentary provisions, and that the majority did not mention any public offices (nr. 8: city gates and epulum; nr. 5: at least 20.000 sesterces spent - the benefactor named solely one military post; nr. 2: at least 200.000 sesterces spent, but the benefactor's name and career are not preserved; and, nr. 4: 80.000 sesterces spent, which is the only example giving municipal offices - decurio and augur). These posthumous evergetisms were certainly in service of social and political promotion of benefactors' familiae, as if the evergetisms were long-term investments, the political fruits of which shall pick up in the future their sons, grand-sons, nephews and other, primarily agnatic, relatives. Nice example of such evergetisms paying out in the future might be young, early deceased, decurio of Asseria, T. Iulius Clemens (nr. 6), if T. Iulius Celer, centurio (?) of the Legion II Augusta, who testamentary - i. e. posthumously - decreed building something worth at least 20.000 sesterces (most probably a city hall; nr. 5), was indeed his father. Since Celer himself did not succeed in obtaining some municipal posts since the death prevented him in it, he turned to the evergetism in order to help his son Clemens enter the city hall.

This is one of the commonest ways in obtaining social promotion for those who could not secure the place in the ruling class of their community either by being born into it or by great economic wealth. It was achieved through successful military career when former soldiers, now veterans, after returning to their old countries (or settling somewhere far from it), obtained high municipal posts, sometimes even rising to the equestrian order (see notes 35-36).

This paper has shown, once again, that indigenous, pre-Roman population of Asseria, was early Romanised and that it continued participating in the municipal government during the Roman period, but then together with the members of new, immigrant familiae. Both groups possessed substantial properties, which is manifested in splendid urbanistic and architectonic monuments visible even today in Podgrađe near Benkovac, as well as in inscriptions they left and that testify to very high sums of money they spent for improving the quality of life in Asseria.