

TIBOR GRÜLL – NÁNDOR AGÓCS – JÁNOS JUSZTINGER – ERNŐ SZABÓ

## THE ICONOGRAPHIC MOTIF OF BOOK-SCROLLS ON FUNERARY RELIEFS IN *NORICUM*

### Abstract

Our article is dedicated to the questions that arise when analyzing the book-scrolls depicted on the funerary monuments of the Danube provinces (*Raetia, Noricum, Pannonia, Moesia, Dacia*) and *Dalmatia*. Among the provinces of the Danube region, most book-scroll depictions are known in *Pannonia* (250–300 examples); *Noricum* also has over 200 monuments with book-scrolls, while in the other provinces the number of book-scroll depictions barely reaches 50. After a brief introduction to the scroll-in-hand database, we will analyse similarities and differences between individual provinces and regions and their possible causes. Our research shows that we have to treat the so-called *librarius* reliefs from *Noricum* differently from the Pannonian book-scroll depictions. At the same time, deciphering their meaning is perhaps even more difficult than with the other depictions of book-scrolls. We are probably not dealing with the religious ideas of the Celtic natives, but with Italic influence.

In August 2021, with the support of the National Research, Development, and Innovation Office (NRDI) of Hungary, we established the »Scroll-in-Hand Research Group« at the Department of Ancient History at the University of Pécs<sup>1</sup>. Our aim was to clarify, to the best of our knowledge, the possible meanings of the relatively large number of »scroll-in-hand« iconographic motifs in the Roman provinces along the Danube and also to create a database, as complete as possible, of the writing materials and writing instruments depicted on such artefacts in the territory of the Roman Empire, which can serve as a tool for future research.

In the course of our research, we relied heavily on the findings of Austrian and Hungarian »Altertumswissenschaft« to date, especially on the volumes of the CSIR »Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani«, and the epigraphic corpuses (e.g. ILLPRON »Inscriptionum lapidarium Latinarum provinciae Norici«; RIST »Die römerzeitlichen Inschriften der Steiermark«), but the ever-expanding online database of »Ubi Erat Lupa« was also of great use to us. Austrian researchers, such as Erna Diez, Manfred Hainzmann, Gerhard Grabher, Christoph Öllerer, and Elisabeth Walde, among many others, have published a number of inspiring studies in the past decades which have enriched our knowledge with valuable observations<sup>2</sup>.

Why build a database? Above all, to be able to provide specific numbers and proportions. To date, we have processed 245 tombstones from *Noricum* based on the Lupa-website and the CSIR volumes, on which a total of 287 writing tools and instruments have been identified. The statistical distribution of these depictions is:

- scrolls: 174 (60 %)
  - closed scrolls (one-column): 118
  - closed scrolls (two-columns): 25
  - open scrolls: 31

<sup>1</sup> NKFIH, K 135317. Members of the research team are Tibor Grüll (Ph.D. habil. D.Sc.), full professor, head of department, team leader (Department of Ancient History, University of Pécs); János Jusztinger (Ph.D.) assistant professor, head of department (Department of Roman Law, University of Pécs); Nándor Agócs (Ph.D.) assistant professor (Department of History, ELTE Berzsenyi Dániel Teacher Training Centre); and Ernő Szabó (Ph.D. candidate) assistant research fellow (Department of Ancient History, University of Pécs), <<https://scrollinhand.hu>> (30.03.2023).

<sup>2</sup> Brein 1973; Grabher 1991; Hainzmann 1991; Walde 1997; Öllerer 2001; Kremer 2004; Walde 2005, 66–70.

- writing tablets: 37 (14 %)
- one-eared tablets: 9 (3 %)
- polyptych hanging from a strip (*codex ansatus*): 8 (2 %)
- containers for books (*capsa*): 18 (7 %)
- *stili*: 41 (14 %)

It is also relevant to our research that 114 scroll-in-hand depictions (46 %) display the gesture of pointing to them in some way (»Ein-« or »Zweifingergestus«). Unfortunately, only 57 reliefs (23 %) have been connected to inscriptions, but for the most part, they did little to further the interpretations of the images. In any case, one thing was clear at the outset of our endeavour: the common scroll-in-hand depictions on the funerary monuments – that is, when a man is holding a rolled-up scroll in his left hand – must be separated from the research on the so-called *librarius*-reliefs, which are specific to the province of *Noricum*. There are 89 such reliefs in our database. Thus, our article will also consist of two parts: the first part deals with the scroll-in-hand iconographic motif, and the second with the depictions of *librarii*. Without wanting to spoil the conclusion, by the end of the study, it will also be clear that certain scroll-in-hand depictions are related to the so-called *librarius*-reliefs.

### THE »SCROLL-IN-HAND« MOTIF

As for the closed scrolls mostly held in the left hands of men (to a lesser extent of boys and rarely of women), it would be a mistake to think that this iconographic motif is prevalent only in *Noricum* and *Pannonia*, although it is comparatively common in these two provinces. We can find funerary reliefs depicting men holding a scroll in their left hand – which we have to separate from the oratorical gesture seen in the statues – in Britain, Gaul, *Achaia*, *Africa*, *Asia*, *Syria*, and even Egypt<sup>3</sup>. All this is important because we seem to be dealing with an iconographic motif that is widespread throughout the Empire; but the interpretation of this motif raises many questions. In fact, the research to date has been much more about asking questions than providing answers.

To our knowledge, there is only one exception: the French-Belgian scholar Jean-Charles Balty showed in a 2016 publication that on the tombstones made by the soldiers of the *legio II Parthica* stationed in *Syria* at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the depiction of rolled-up scrolls in the left hands of the deceased soldiers can be linked to testaments or inheritance<sup>4</sup>. This had previously been suggested by others based on analyses of specific tombstones<sup>5</sup>, but Balty's research was

<sup>3</sup> It is typical that the scroll depictions found on tombstones from these areas are evaluated on an *ad hoc* basis by researchers, e.g. 1) at Sion/Sous-le-Scex (*Raetia*), a scroll in the left hand of a cavalry officer, which according to Devijver is a marching order or promotion document, or, possibly, symbolically refers to education (Devijver 1987, 366–367); 2) at Carthage (*Africa proconsularis*, 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD) a boy wearing a *bulla* holds a scroll (*rotulus*) in his left hand, which is »not only a sign of erudition, it also echoes portraits of Roman emperors and magistrates which also display the attribute, thereby emphasizing the »Romanitas« of the boy displayed« (Yale University Art Gallery; Varner 1990); 3) at *Arados* (*Syria-Phoenicia* 2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD) there is a funerary relief of a ship-owner, on which »Die Schrift- oder Buchrolle darf als geläufiges Motiv bei Reliefs in sepulkralem Zusammenhang angesehen werden, das entweder den Bildungsanspruch des Verstorbenen symbolisiert oder eine Urkunde (Testament, Bürgerrecht) darstellen soll« (Schmidts 2010, 253); 4a) at *Nikopolis* (*Aegyptus*, AD 188/189) there is a funerary relief depicting an ex-soldier called Ares, who holds in his left hand a double-columned closed scroll which has been interpreted as a *diploma militaris* by the research (Łajtar 2002, 46; Waebens 2012, 326); 4b) at the necropolis of *Terenouthis* (Kom Abou Billou, *Aegyptus*) there is a series of Roman grave-stelae from the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD, e.g. of Hermene and Atilion, in a semi-recumbent position, with a scroll in their left hand, surrounded by Egyptian symbols (Abd el-Al et al. 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Balty 2016, 88.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Bauchhenß 1978, 24; Parra 1979, 131. There is no scholarly consensus about the meaning of the scroll depicted on military gravestones, but for some interpretations see Bingen 2003, 67 (scroll contains the will of the deceased soldier); Schmidt 2003, 38–39 (scroll could be produced as evidence of the *honestia missio* or *immunitas* of the deceased soldier); Speidel 2012, 4 n. 18 (scroll may indicate that the deceased soldier had held a position involving administrative tasks); Waebens 2015, 66 n. 29 (scroll which is also shown on civilian gravestones often with an *anulus aureus* was meant to present the deceased as »Roman«; for a similar observation see also Carrié 1992, 132).

compelling, because he investigated almost one hundred funerary monuments of Roman soldiers stationed at *Apameia* (*Syria*). On these grave monuments, the scroll-in-hand motif is linked to the mention of »heir« (*heres*) or »made out of will« (*ex testamento fecit*) in the inscription; however, when we find the term »made out of his money« (*sua pecunia fecit*) or »[died] with no will« (*intestatus*) in the epitaph, there is no scroll depicted in the hand of the deceased soldier. The scroll is therefore easily identifiable with the document of transfer of the *bona castrensia et domestica* received by the heir; or, possibly, with a document recording the ownership and exact description of the tomb, the text of which has survived on an inscription as well (*testamentum Lingonum*)<sup>6</sup>. But to what extent can this solution be applied to the funerary reliefs of *Noricum*?

When we examine funerary monuments of a province – that is, not a single military unit – our first trivial observation is that the scroll-in-hand motif is not limited to monuments depicting soldiers. Although we can draw certain conclusions about the owners of tombstones based on their gestures, clothing, jewellery, etc., the most reliable source is the funerary inscription itself.

### People holding scrolls

Data on the people holding scrolls could be extracted from the epitaphs, but unfortunately there are not many of them, only 57 pieces (23 %); on the other hand, these inscriptions are not very informative either. They do not reveal much, for example, about the social circumstances and occupations of the owners. 236 people holding scrolls are male (96 %), and only seven boys and one woman occur. Analysis of the names revealed that there were Roman citizens among them: e.g. P(ublius) Alb(ius) Calandinus and his wife Silvia Ursula<sup>7</sup> and M(arcus) Mog(etius) Valentinus Vibi *f*(ilius) and his wife Mog(etia) Iustina<sup>8</sup>. In both cases, the wives wear Celtic clothing typical in *Noricum*, so it can be assumed that they belonged to the indigenous population<sup>9</sup>. A monument from the Severan era was erected for Iunianus Burrani *f*(ilius) and his wife Sucella Uconis *f*(ilia), who may have had peregrine status (i.e., the tomb was built before AD 212)<sup>10</sup>. A tombstone from the Antonine era in today's Slovenia was erected by Iulia Calandina to her husband, Sacronius Verinus, who died at the age of 50 and was a veteran armourer at the *legio II Italica: vet(eranus) leg(ionis) II Ital(icae) custos armor(um)*<sup>11</sup>. Another tombstone was made for Lucco *Suri filius* and his wife Dubna<sup>12</sup>, and it is interesting that the man shows the »Zweifingergestus«, with his palms upside down in front of his wife. Given their names, they are probably *peregrini* of Celtic origin. On these, too, the man holds a scroll in his left hand, which he points to with two fingers of his right hand. An example is Candidus, who is referred to in the text of the inscription as *Q(uinti) Morsi Potentis Titiani ser(vus)*<sup>13</sup>.

Depictions in which both father and son hold a scroll in their left hand may be important for the interpretation of the scroll-in-hand iconographic motif. A funerary monument from the border between Slovenia and Austria (Straß/Styria) dated to the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century shows four figures. Fortunately, we are able to identify the individuals on the basis of the epitaph: two adult sons on either side of the image field, Cassius Ingenus and Cassius Restutianus, with their parents in the middle, the mother, Cassia Quarta, from the left, and the father, Claudius Restutus, from the right. The right hand of the husband and wife are clasped together (*dextrarum iunctio*), and she rests her left hand on her husband's shoulder; the husband's left hand holds a closed roll, his fingers show a »horn-gesture« (*cornu*), and a signet ring can be seen on his little finger. There

<sup>6</sup> CIL XIII, 5708 = ILS 8379 = FIRA I, 118 = FIRA III, 49 = AE 2003, 108; cf. Le Bohec 1991.

<sup>7</sup> CIL III 5407 = lupa 1403.

<sup>8</sup> CIL III 5455 = lupa 1424.

<sup>9</sup> One of the additional tasks of the research would be to examine the clothes, to see if they also reveal something about the identity of their owner, cf. the research of the Rhine-Mosel region from a similar point of view (Rothe 2009).

<sup>10</sup> CIL III 5463 = lupa 1402.

<sup>11</sup> CIL III 5106 = lupa 3599.

<sup>12</sup> CIL III 5368 = lupa 1248.

<sup>13</sup> CIL III 5699 = lupa 1229.

is also a rolled-up scroll in the left hand of the boy to his left, but the boy is not making any gesture and is not wearing a signet ring<sup>14</sup>. Even more interesting is a very elaborate but uninscribed depiction of a family. Two minor children are depicted in front of their parents: the son stands in front of his mother and the daughter in front of her father. The father holds a closed scroll in his left hand, and his right hand rests on his daughter's shoulder; his son also holds a scroll, at which the index finger of his right hand is pointing<sup>15</sup>. But why is this gesture only being made by the minor child? In a medallion portrait found at *Flavia Solva*, there is also a scroll in the hands of a father and his minor son, at which, however, both are pointing<sup>16</sup>; in another grave, a father and a minor son are also holding a scroll, but in the boy's right hand we find a fruit<sup>17</sup>. Naturally, the explanation of depictions such as the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century tombstone in *Celeia*, which has a *stilus* and a *polyptichon* in the hands of a young boy, is not difficult, as the writing tools here clearly refer to the child's schooling<sup>18</sup> (fig. 1).

So far, no one has noted the obvious fact that on the funerary reliefs of *Noricum* we see 124 depictions of male and female figures – not necessarily married couples – together (51 %), but if we subtract the 89 *librarius*-reliefs from the total, this proportion increases to 80 %. Nevertheless, the *dextrarum iunctio* gesture is found in only 23 reliefs (18 % of the tombstones depicting couples), and only 18 inscriptions contain the term *coniunx* (spouse)<sup>19</sup>. We observed that the right-hand-clasp gesture occurs in *Pannonia superior* only along with the scroll, which is also characteristic of *Noricum*. This fact may even suggest that the scroll-in-hand motif could be interpreted as a marriage contract as well.

### Types of scrolls and their possible meanings

A scroll held in the left hand of a man is usually referred to in the secondary literature as *volumen*, which means papyrus scroll. A standard size papyrus scroll is approximately 700 cm long and 22–25 cm high, meaning it extended far below and above the hand of an adult man. In contrast, many depictions show narrower scrolls, which are called *rotuli*. The *rotulus* was a narrower and shorter strip of papyrus on which the text was written in a single long column and was therefore read vertically. These scrolls usually contained legal texts, e.g. testaments<sup>20</sup>. Among the depictions of scrolls, we find both a narrow *rotulus* (lupa 593) and a wide *volumen* (lupa 1394) rolled up in two columns; as well as both a *rotulus* (lupa 3614, 4628) and a *volumen* (lupa 1486) rolled up in a single column (fig. 2). Of course, it is not always possible to determine whether the stonemason accurately depicted the scrolls, as sometimes he carved only a slab or a stick. Moreover, the writing materials depicted on the reliefs are not always scrolls in the technical sense, but merely folded sheets of papyrus.

Attempts to interpret the scrolls so far range on a wide scale. In his classic work »Mousikoser: Étude sur les scènes de la vie intellectuelle figurant sur les monuments funéraires romains« published in 1938, Henri-Irénée Marrou placed the scroll depictions in the context of the Greek

<sup>14</sup> CIL III 5357 = lupa 1355.

<sup>15</sup> Kremer 2001, cat. I 88 = lupa 4613.

<sup>16</sup> Pochmarski 2011, no. 10 = lupa 1350.

<sup>17</sup> CIL III 5463 = lupa 1402.

<sup>18</sup> CIL III 5246 = lupa 3118. The writing tablet is interpreted as a widely used symbol of education (Meyer 2004); and, of course, a symbol of the intellectual work of the *scribae* (Hartmann 2020).

<sup>19</sup> For the interpretation of the *dextrarum iunctio* gesture see Reekmans 1958; Walter 1979; Stupperich 1983; Davies 1985; Larsson Lovén 2010.

<sup>20</sup> In the Ptolemaic, Byzantine, Coptic, and Early Western Medieval period the *charta transversa* (script parallel to the width) was popular. Primarily legal texts were written on it, but from the early Middle Ages certain liturgical texts were also written on such scrolls (Daly 1973). Among them only a few wills have been found so far: in 1986 there were 132, mostly from the 4<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> c. (Bagnall 1986). Legal papyri written on *rotuli* from the area of the Middle-Euphrates: P. Euphr. 11. pap. 16.9 × 17.2 cm which is a contract of sale of a ship; P. Euphr. 13. pap. 10.5 × 15.5 cm which is a receipt; P. Euphr. 15. parchment *rotulus* 23 × 23.3 cm which is a donation document of the *ius liberorum* (Feissel – Gascou 2000).





1 Tombstone in *Celeia* with *stilus* and *polyptichon* in the hands of a young boy. Celje – Pokrajinski Muzej inv. L 82, lupa 3118 (drawn by N. Agócs)



2 Depiction of *rotulus* and *volumen*. Stambach/Grafendorf bei Hartberg, private property, lupa 4628 (drawn by N. Agócs)

ideal of *paideia*. »The scrolls« – he writes – »are related to the things of the spirit.«<sup>21</sup> According to Jean-Michel Carrié, the scroll is »the cultural object par excellence, the main mediator of education until the appearance of the codex«<sup>22</sup>, and the scrolls placed in the hands of the soldiers show the efforts of the Antonine era to present the Roman military as defenders of civilization. More down-to-earth researchers examined some monuments and gave a different – less high-sounding – explanation: on a stele at Split, C. Publicius Romanus, *decurio* of the *colonia Narona*, can be seen holding a scroll, which is, obviously, »a symbol of official power«<sup>23</sup>. The scroll on the relief of Ser. Ennius Fuscus and his wife has been interpreted as »nuptial agreement«<sup>24</sup>, but on the stele of P. Romanus Modestus *libertus* at Bonn it was explained as a »document of manumission«<sup>25</sup>. In the case of soldiers, it has already been proposed that the scroll is nothing more than an »enrolment-list«<sup>26</sup>, »Truppenstammrolle«<sup>27</sup>, or a document of discharge<sup>28</sup>.

In our view, the relative iconographic stability of the scroll-in-hand motif throughout the Roman Empire tends to point to a legal interpretation of the scrolls. As we have seen, many scholars have suggested that the *rotulus* or *volumen* are documents of some legal nature: contracts, deeds

<sup>21</sup> »Lié aux choses de l'esprit«, Marrou 1938, 192.

<sup>22</sup> Carrié 1992, 167.

<sup>23</sup> Rinaldi Tufi 1971, 99–100.

<sup>24</sup> Rinaldi Tufi 1971, 102.

<sup>25</sup> Bauchhenß 1978, 15.

<sup>26</sup> »Matricule d'enrôlement«, Carrié 1992, 167.

<sup>27</sup> Hainzmann 1996, 61. 64.

<sup>28</sup> Lajtar 2002, 46.

of possession, bequests<sup>29</sup>, grants of civil rights, documents of discharge, etc. – or in other words, not literary works or the text of the *laudatio funebris*. Research to date mostly attributed this interpretation to depictions of scrolls on an *ad hoc* basis: if the relief depicted a married couple, the scroll represented a marriage contract; if a soldier was seen on the relief, this was a document of discharge; if the inscription spoke of a freedman (*libertus*), it was, of course, a deed of manumission. Our research on the scroll-in-hand motif in *Pannonia* has revealed on several occasions that the holder of the scroll was a *peregrinus*, which means that the scroll cannot be interpreted as a civil rights-granting document<sup>30</sup>. This would not make much sense after AD 212 anyway. In our view, it is worth considering the possibility that the closed scroll held in the left hand is in most cases a document indicating the possession of a tomb.

### Gestures connected to scrolls

According to our database, almost half (46 %) of the scroll depictions in *Noricum* are connected to pointing gestures<sup>31</sup>. In other words, the two things, gesture and scroll, belong together. As is known, the index finger (»Einfingergestus«) or middle and index finger (»Zweifingergestus«) of the right hand point towards the scroll held in the left hand, and in the largest percentage of cases, they also touch the scroll.

- »Zweifingergestus«: 46 (56 %)
  - pointing towards the scroll: 9
  - touching the scroll: 37
- »Einfingergestus«: 36 (44 %)
  - pointing towards the scroll: 5
  - touching the scroll: 31

Manfred Hainzmann and Gerhard Grabher interpret this as a gesture related to an oath (»Schwurgestus«)<sup>32</sup>. But the oath is not necessarily connected to an object; two or three fingers point toward the sky or the heart<sup>33</sup>. In contrast, the gesture we are discussing is deictic: it points towards the scroll as an object and even makes physical contact with it<sup>34</sup>. In addition, a signet ring was observed 22 times on the little finger of the left hand holding the scroll, which also indicates that the nature of this document could be legal. In 2003, Thomas Richter devoted a complete monograph to the issue of »Zweifingergestus«. We agree with what Richter writes about the funerary reliefs in *Noricum*: »It can be assumed principally that only one interpretation of the gesture-scroll motif can be correct, and then it is also consistently valid. This is borne out by the fundamental fact that image motifs must be clear in order to be comprehensible in general.«<sup>35</sup> Put

<sup>29</sup> See the so-called Testamentum Relief from the Trajanic period (Rome, Museo Capitolino): the *testator* lies on a keel, leaning on his elbow, holding a half-open scroll in his left hand, at his feet is a slave-boy with an *abacus*, behind him is a portrait of a shield on the wall, his wife is sitting on a chair at the head of the bed (D’Ambra 1995).

<sup>30</sup> *Peregrini* depicted with scrolls: lupa 2855 = TRHR 116; lupa 632 = CIL III 11302; lupa 3827 = TRHR 42; lupa 3120 = RIU 689, 3273 = RIU 733; lupa 802 = RIU 690; scroll in the hand of a Roman knight: lupa 8817 = CIL III 3985; scroll in the hand of a senatorial woman: lupa 3803 = CIL III 10852.

<sup>31</sup> We found a few funerary monuments where the »Ein-« or »Zweifingergestus« is not connected to scrolls, e.g. lupa 861 = CIL III 4994; lupa 3594 = CIL III 5218; lupa 2882 = Pochmarski 2011, no. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Hainzmann 1991, 128–132; Grabher 1991, 46–48.

<sup>33</sup> Hainzmann here refers to the well-known cult object of Iupiter Sabazius as an example, but the gesture shown on these votive objects (the thumb, index and middle fingers are extended, while the ring and little fingers are folded into the palm) is the so-called *benedictio Latina* (Lane 1980; Berndt 2018).

<sup>34</sup> On the funerary relief of the soldier Servius Ennius Fuscus and his wife at Split (CIL III 9782 = lupa 24430), the man’s left hand shows the usual scroll depiction, but the right hand shows a three-fingered greeting gesture up above his neck.

<sup>35</sup> »Grundsätzlich ist davon auszugehen, daß nur eine Deutung für das Motiv Gestus-Buchrolle zutreffend sein kann und dann auch durchgehend Gültigkeit hat. Dafür spricht das grundlegende Faktum, daß Bildmotive eindeutig sein sollten, um allgemein verständlich zu sein.« (Richter 2003, 90).

simply, the scroll motif and the gestures associated with it must have a single meaning. Richter then cites two interpretations: Elisabeth Walde interprets the scroll as a sign of discretionary power, official authority, and the like<sup>36</sup>; while Manfred Hainzmann »sees a reference to the occupation in the rotulus«<sup>37</sup>. Richter, however, sees the scroll depictions in the context of Roman education, culture, and rhetoric, and he lumps together the murals, mosaics, and sculptures unearthed in any part of the Roman Empire – which we think is methodologically wrong<sup>38</sup>.

But there is also a different, fundamentally legal interpretation of the »Ein«- and »Zweifingergestus« that fits perfectly with the explanation according to which the scrolls depicted in the left hand of the deceased are legal documents. As late as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, the Roman lawyer Sextus Pedius asserts that, for the contract of *stipulatio* to be valid, the subject matter of the obligation can with equal validity be indicated by words or by the gesture of pointing with the finger<sup>39</sup>. As Anthony Corbeill writes, »Gestures viewed as a manifestation of formality, by contrast, are thought to have a real and essential effect on the proceedings within which they are enacted. Without the formality, the legal process or decision has no validity.«<sup>40</sup>.

### THE *LIBRARIUS*-RELIEFS

In the Lupa-database, 89 reliefs have been classified as *librarius*-reliefs. We are going to examine these depictions in the remainder of this study. First, we consider the type of monument on which these paired depictions usually appear<sup>41</sup>. They most often can be found on large funerary monuments composed of several building blocks: at the bottom there is a rectangular pedestal (often with mythological scenes on it); above it, one finds a rectangular middle part with a field inscribed on the frontal side, and on its two narrower sides there is usually a depiction of a male servant and a maid: the former is the *librarius*, the latter perhaps a dresser. The top of the monument was sometimes decorated with medallion portraits depicting the owners of the monument. Within the province of *Noricum*, these reliefs are clearly concentrated in and around *Virunum*, and they occur less frequently in the towns along the Danube. Their dating ranges widely, roughly to the Antonine-Severan era (the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> c.).

Of the monuments containing *librarius*-reliefs, only 19 have inscriptions (21 %), and they are rarely associated with slaves, as the inscriptions refer to the owners and/or builders of the tombs. Of the former, only four held official positions (*aedilis* [2]; *aedilicius*; *servus vilicus vectigalis Illyrici*); three were military personnel (*veteranus legionis*; *veteranus ex praetorio*; *optio legionis*); and two named the status of the deceased (*servus*; *libertus*). Officers usually had clerical servants, and these are perhaps not exceptional for a veteran and an *optio* either. But from these seven cases we cannot draw far-reaching conclusions. Furthermore, the fact that only one-fifth of the reliefs have inscriptions is mainly due to the fact that these depictions have mostly been preserved for us as *spolia*<sup>42</sup>.

Depictions of servants are rather formal: on the left of the central part of the funerary monument is the maidservant with a jug, a chest, a *mappa*, and in each case with a mirror; while on the right hand side one finds the depiction of the *librarius*. We can observe a greater variety in the latter. At first glance, two basic types can be distinguished: those of the reader (41 = 46 %) and

<sup>36</sup> Walde 1997, 244.

<sup>37</sup> Hainzmann 1991, 144–146.

<sup>38</sup> After all this, it is no wonder that he also rejects M. Hainzmann's oath theory, saying that »representations should always be understood as a reference to rhetorical or other types of training«, which is a typical case of circular reasoning: Richter 2003, 92.

<sup>39</sup> Paul. Dig. 12, 1, 6: *Certum est, cuius species vel quantitas, quae in obligatione versatur, aut nomine suo aut ea demonstratione quae nominis vice fungitur qualis quantaque sit ostenditur. nam et pedius libro primo de stipulationibus nihil referre ait, proprio nomine res appelletur an digito ostendatur an vocabulis quibusdam demonstratur: quatenus mutua vice fungantur, quae tantundem praestent.*

<sup>40</sup> Corbeill 2005, 158.

<sup>41</sup> Pochmarski 1994; Kremer 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Wagner 2001.



the writer (30 = 33 %), while on 18 reliefs (21 %) we do not find either of these activities (fig. 3). We should also mention here the writing tools and materials depicted on the *librarius*-reliefs:

- writing tablets (*diptycha* and *polypticha*): 45 = 43 %
- open scrolls: 29 = 28 %
- cylindrical bookcases (*capsa*): 16 = 16 %
- tablets hanging from a strip (*codex ansatus*): 8 = 7 %
- one-eared writing tablets: 7 = 6 %

Our database revealed that 59 % of the scenes depicting *reading* contained scrolls, and 41 % had writing tablets; while 87 % of the reliefs that showed *writing* depicted writing tablets, and only 13 % had depictions of papyrus scrolls. Thus, in the case of reading, the use of the two basic writing materials is relatively balanced: although for the most part, scrolls were used as indications of reading, writing tablets were also used intensively for this purpose. In the case of writing, however, this ratio is much less balanced: writing tablets were mostly used for this purpose, and the use of scrolls constitutes only a negligible percentage. The latter may be due to the fact that while writing tablets were used for everyday activities and economic records, writing on scrolls may also have been related to literary activity, in which obviously very few people engaged. Of course, we caution against drawing conclusions concerning the level of literacy in 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century *Noricum* on the basis of these data. It is by no means certain that the *librarius*-reliefs depict real persons, and are not just decorative motifs intended to embellish the magnificent tombs of the wealthy deceased, exactly as we read about Trimalchio's tomb in Petronius's famous novel, on which, among other things, servants were carved in fictitious situations<sup>43</sup>.

However, the clerks called *librarii* belonged to the bureaucratic apparatus of a city or province<sup>44</sup>. *Librarii* can also be found in the provincial administration of *Noricum*: the deceased husband of Nammonia Materiu, Gaius Sempronius Secundinus, was a *decurio* of the *municipium* of *Solva*; while his son, Gaius Sempronius Secundinus (who died at the age of 19), served as a *librarius consularis*<sup>45</sup>. But the veteran Titus Flavius Campestrinus, and his 20-year-old deceased son Iulius Exoratus were also *librarii consulares*<sup>46</sup> (*Ovilava/Wels*, AD 235–285). Of course, the *librarii* were also important administrators of the legions stationed in *Noricum*, see a *li[br(arius) leg(ionis)] II Ital(icae) [p(iae) f(idelis)]* from *Virunum*<sup>47</sup> (*Virunum/Steindorf*, AD 211–235). Besides these *librarii* may also have served the richer aristocratic families. As Benjamin Hartmann writes in his 2020 monograph on the *scribae* that »[a]ristocratic households had long made use of *librarii* for a wide range of clerical and secretarial duties, above all the transcription and copying of texts«<sup>48</sup>. However, all this does not help much in the interpretation of the *librarius*-reliefs, since – as we mentioned above – only a fifth of the reliefs have inscriptions, and these do not reveal much about the owners of the tombs either.

Assuming that the *librarius*-reliefs served as ornaments for monumental tombs, which may have belonged not only to members of the municipal decurionate but also, according to the inscriptions, to persons of slave or freedman status, we cannot insist on the interpretation that these depictions reflected the official authority of the tomb owner. On the funerary monuments

<sup>43</sup> Petr. Sat. 71, 11: *Ad dexteram meam pones statuam Fortunatae meae columbam tenentem, et catellam cingulo alligatam ducat, et cicaronem meum, et amphoras copiose gypsatas, ne effluent vinum. Et unam licet fractam sculpas, et super eam puerum plorantem.* – Ancient novels usually refer to fictitious inscriptions in situations where the realization of the novel requires this from a literary point of view (»Beglaubigungsapparat«), see e.g. Liddel – Low 2013.

<sup>44</sup> For the range of clerical work exercised by *librarii* see Haines-Eitzen 2000, 30–31.

<sup>45</sup> CIL III 5435 = lupa 1450, Straßgang, AD 180–220; about the administration of the province *Noricum* see Alföldy 1974, 159–165; Wedenig 1995. – In *Pannonia*, the decurions/magistrates of larger cities undertook the duty of *scriba* in smaller cities as *summa honoraria* (see Mócsy 1964).

<sup>46</sup> CIL III 5631 = lupa 579.

<sup>47</sup> AE 2004, 1096.

<sup>48</sup> Hartmann 2020, 44–45.





3 *Librarius* writing on a scroll, Maria Saal, Propstei, lupa 964 (drawn by N. Agócs)

writings in their hands are signs of continuous communication between the »underworld« and the »upper world«<sup>49</sup>. However, firstly, only 33 % of *librarius*-reliefs show writing activity, while the other 67 % show reading; and, secondly, it is not at all certain that the owners of the tombs were of Celtic descent. We may introduce a more distant example, just for the sake of comparison: we now know that the famous *matres/matronae* depictions, equally popular among the Gallic and Germanic tribes, were introduced by Roman settlers in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. Moreover, an interesting transformation can be observed on these reliefs in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries: instead of the fruit-basket, an open papyrus-scroll appears in the lap of some *matronae*. This transformation does not imply an increasing Gallic or Germanic influence. On the contrary, it refers to the wider spread of Graeco-Roman customs, namely, the cult of the goddesses of destiny (Moirae, Camenae, Carmenta)<sup>53</sup>.

In the scholarship on the scroll-in-hand motif, the »realistic« or »symbolic« approaches have prevailed so far, most often in disagreement with each other. But could the ancient men separate these two forms of meaning? The »realistic« meaning of the servant depictions placed in the tombs of the wealthy inhabitants of *Noricum* obviously included the neatness, beauty, and wealth of the wife of the owner of the monument (»Grabherrin«), to which the objects held by the maid-

of *Pannonia* and *Noricum* it was customary to depict male and female servants, especially in the scenes of the funeral feasts<sup>49</sup>. The maids seen on »Totenmahlszenen« are indeed very similar to maidservants depicted on *librarius*-reliefs. According to some interpretations, the female servants are sacrificial assistants: the *mappa* held in their hands or on their shoulders is a sacrificial tablecloth; the jar (*urceus*) is an offering; and the box is an *acerra* for storing incense – so perhaps the female servants of the *librarius*-reliefs are also sacrificial servants<sup>50</sup>? The suggestion is legitimate, but in the hands of the male servants on the »Totenmahlreliefs« we can see the same sacrificial instruments (*urceus*, *patra*, *mappa*)<sup>51</sup>, and we never find writing instruments with them. In addition, there are no signs of a funerary feast on the *librarius*-reliefs in *Noricum*.

Herbert Graßl has traced depictions of *librarii* straight back to Celtic traditions. The 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus claimed that the Celts threw letters at the funeral pyres of their relatives in the belief that they would read them in the afterlife (5, 28, 6). Based on this text, Graßl argues that the *librarii* of *Noricum* »maintain communication between the living and the dead with letters«, and the

<sup>49</sup> Diez 1959–1961; Gáspár 2016, 84–94.

<sup>50</sup> For the female servants see Walde 2001.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. lupa 7805 (Stuttgart, Württembergisches Landesmuseum), where the male servant standing by the *kline* of the deceased holds in his right hand a jug, and – according to the editors of <lupa.at> – in his left hand there is a towel (*mappa*); however, we should consider the possibility that he is holding a scroll in his left hand. On the relief lupa 15354 (*Histria*, *Moesia inferior*) the male servant clearly holds a *mappa* slung over his left shoulder.

<sup>52</sup> Graßl 1989, 34–37.

<sup>53</sup> On this process of Romanisation see Grüll 2021.

servant referred; while the social and economic status, occupation, and education of the owner of the monument (»Grabherr«) may have been indicated by the writing tools and materials held in the hands of the *librarius*-servant. At the same time, the servants may have conveyed »symbolic« meaning as well, as they were depicted on funerary monuments. It is not a question that the objects in the hands of the maidservant may have evoked the sacrifice for the deceased; the real mystery is how to interpret writing or reading *librarii* in this context. It has already been suggested that the *librarius* may be related to the scroll-in-hand depiction of the tomb owner, although there is little evidence of this. On the other hand, if we accept this presumption, it would follow that the *librarius* is preoccupied with a will, or inheritance, or the ownership of the funeral monument.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abd el-Al et al. 1985 A. Abd el-Al – J. C. Grenier – G. Wagner, Stèles funéraires de Kom Abu Bellou, Mémoire 55 (Paris 1985)
- Alföldy 1974 G. Alföldy, Noricum (London 1974)
- Bagnall 1986 R. Bagnall, Two Byzantine legal papyri in a private collection, in: R. S. Bagnall – W. V. Harris (eds.), Studies in Roman Law: In Memory of A. Arthur Schiller, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 13 (Leiden 1986)
- Balty 2016 J.-C. Balty, Le volumen ou »Schriftrolle« des stèles et cippes militaires dans l'Empire romain: à propos des inscriptions apaméennes de la legio II Parthica, Syria 93, 2016, 84–95
- Bauchhenß 1978 G. Bauchhenß, Germania Inferior. Bonn und Umgebung. Militärische Grabdenkmäler, CSIR Deutschland III 1 (Bonn 1978)
- Berndt 2018 S. Berndt, The hand gesture and symbols of Sabazios, Opuscula 11, 2018, 151–168
- Bingen 2003 J. Bingen, Miles armorum custos (CIL III Suppl. 14138<sup>2</sup>, Alexandrie), in: P. DeFosse (ed.), Hommages à Carl Deroux III. Histoire et épigraphie, Droit, Coll. Latomus 270 (Brussels 2003) 67–73
- Brein 1973 F. Brein, Bücher auf Grabsteinen, RÖ 1, 1973, 1–6
- Carrié 1992 J.-M. Carrié, Le soldat, in: A. Giardina (ed.), L'homme romain (Paris 1992) 127–172
- Corbeill 2005 A. P. Corbeill, Gesture in early Roman law: empty form or essential formalities?, in: D. L. Cairns (ed.), Body language in the Greek and Roman worlds (Swansea 2005) 157–174
- D'Ambra 1995 E. D'Ambra, Mourning and the Making of Ancestors in the Testamentum Relief, AJA 99/4, 1995, 667–681
- Daly 1973 L. W. Daly, Rotuli: Liturgy Rolls and Formal Documents, GrRomByzSt 14/3, 1973, 333–338
- Davies 1985 G. Davies, The significance of the handshake motif in classical funerary art, AJA 89/4, 1985, 627–640
- Devijver 1987 H. Devijver, L'iconographie de la stèle funéraire de T. Exomnius Mansuetus, praefectus cohortis, Vallesia 42, 1987, 363–367
- Diez 1959–1961 E. Diez, Zur Darstellung des Totenopfers auf norischen Grabsteinen, SchildStein 9, 1959–1961, 47–57
- Feissel – Gascou 2000 D. Feissel – J. Gascou, Documents d'archives romains inédits du Moyen Euphrate (III<sup>e</sup> s. après J.-C.), JSav 2/1, 2000, 157–208
- FIRA F. Riccobono – V. Arangio Ruiz (eds.), Fontes iuris Romani anteiustiniani I–III<sup>2</sup> (Florence 1940–1943)
- Gáspár 2016 D. Gáspár, Pannoniai síremlékek I–III. Római kori halottkultusz a mai Magyarország területén [Grave monuments in Pannonia. Ancient Roman cult of the dead on the territory of present-day Hungary] (Budapest 2016)
- Grabher 1991 G. Grabher, Die Schriftrolle auf römischen Grabsteinen in Österreich. Bürgerrechtsdekret und Schwurgestus, in: M. Hainzmann – D. Kramer – E. Pochmarski (eds.), Akten des 1. internationalen Colloquiums über Probleme des Provinzialrömischen Kunstschaffens Graz 27.–30.04.1989, Teil II, Mitteilungen der Archäologischen Gesellschaft Steiermark 5, 1991, 42–56
- Graßl 1989 H. Graßl, Beiträge zum keltischen Brauchtum in Noricum, in: J. Grabmeyer – E. Polte (eds.), Die Kultur der Kelten 1. St. Veiter Historikergespräche 16.–18.06.1988 (St. Veit an der Glan 1989) 29–37

- Grüll 2021 T. Grüll, ›The Book of Fate‹: A distinctive representation of Matronae/Parcae and the spread of literacy in the Northern provinces of the Roman Empire, in: *Religion in the Roman Empire VII 3* (Tübingen 2021) 403–429
- Haines-Eitzen 2000 K. Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters. Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford 2000)
- Hainzmann 1991 M. Hainzmann, *Schriftrolle und Schwurgestus. Neue Beobachtungen zu einem alten Bildmotiv*, in: M. Hainzmann – D. Kramer – E. Pochmarski (eds.), *Akten des 1. internationalen Colloquiums über Probleme des Provinzialrömischen Kunstschaffens Graz 27.–30.04.1989, Teil II, Mitteilungen der Archäologischen Gesellschaft Steiermark 5*, 1991, 120–146
- Hainzmann 1996 M. Hainzmann, *Publius Flavoleius Cordus aus Mainz, ein Angehöriger des militärischen Verwaltungsdienstes?*, in: G. Bauchhenß (ed.), *Akten des 3. internationalen Kolloquiums über Probleme des provinzialrömischen Kunstschaffens Bonn 21.–24.04.1993*, *BJb Beih. 512* (Bonn 1996) 59–65
- Hartmann 2020 B. Hartmann, *The Scribes of Rome. A Cultural and Social History of the Scribae* (Cambridge 2020)
- ILS H. Dessau (ed.), *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* (Berlin 1892–1916)
- Kremer 2001 G. Kremer, *Antike Grabbauten in Noricum. Katalog und Auswertung von Werkstücken als Beitrag zur Rekonstruktion und Typologie*, *SoSchrÖAI 36* (Vienna 2001)
- Kremer 2004 G. Kremer, *Die norisch-pannonischen Grabbauten als Ausdruck kultureller Identität?*, in: A. Schmidt-Colinet (ed.), *Lokale Identitäten in Randgebieten des römischen Reiches. Akten des internationalen Symposiums Wiener Neustadt 24.–26.04.2003*, *Wforsch 7* (Vienna 2004) 147–159
- Lajtar 2002 A. Lajtar, *A tombstone for the soldier Ares (Egypt, late Antonine period)*, *JJurP 32*, 2002, 45–48
- Lane 1980 E. Lane, *Towards a Definition of the Iconography of Sabazius*, *Numen 27/1*, 1980, 9–33
- Larsson Lovén 2010 L. Larsson Lovén, *Coniugal concordia: marriage and marital ideals on Roman funerary monuments*, in: L. Larsson Lovén – A. Strömberg (eds.), *Ancient marriage in myth and reality* (Newcastle upon Tyne 2010) 204–220
- Le Bohec 1991 Y. Le Bohec, *Le testament du Lingon*, *Collection du Centre d'études romaines et gallo-romaines: nouvelle série 9* (Lyon 1991)
- Liddel – Low 2013 P. Liddel – P. Low (eds.), *Inscriptions and their uses in Greek and Latin literature* (Oxford 2013)
- lupa F. und O. Harl, <lupa.at> (Bilddatenbank zu antiken Steindenkmälern)
- Marrou 1938 H. I. Marrou, *Μουσικὸς ἀνήρ. Étude sur les scènes de la vie intellectuelle figurant sur les monuments funéraires romains* (Grenoble 1938)
- Meyer 2004 E. A. Meyer, *Legitimacy and law in the Roman world: tabulae in Roman belief and practice* (Cambridge 2004)
- Mócsy 1964 A. Mócsy, *Scribák a pannóniai kisvárosokban*, *AERT 91*, 1964, 16–17
- Öllerer 2001 C. Öllerer, *Die Darstellung von Schreibgerät auf norischen Librarianereliefs*, in: F. W. Leitner (ed.), *Carinthia Romana und die römische Welt. Festschrift Gernot Piccottini* (Klagenfurt 2001) 249–262
- Parra 1979 M. C. Parra, *Una stele di Roma ritrovata a Livorno*, in: G. Camporeale – M. Martelli – E. Paribeni – M. Cristofani – G. Maetzke (eds.), *Studi per Enrico Fiumi* (Pisa 1979) 121–139
- Pochmarski 1994 E. Pochmarski, *Grabsitten und Grabformen in Noricum*, *Archäologische Gesellschaft Steiermark, Nachrichtenblatt 1*, 1994, 35–60
- Pochmarski 2011 E. Pochmarski, *Die Portätmedaillons und Porträtnischen des Stadtgebietes von Flavia Solva*, *CSIR Österreich IV 2* (Vienna 2011)
- Reekmans 1958 L. Reekmans, *La »dextrarum iunctio« dans l'iconographie romaine et paléochrétienne* (Rome 1958)
- Richter 2003 T. Richter, *Der Zweifingergestus in der römischen Kunst*, *Frankfurter Archäologische Schriften 2* (Möhnesee 2003)
- Rinaldi Tufi 1971 S. Rinaldi Tufi, *Stele funerarie con ritratti di età romana nel Museo archeologico di Spalato. Saggio di una tipologia strutturale*, *MemLinc 8/16/3*, 1971, 87–167
- RIU L. Barkóczi – A. Mócsy et al. (eds.), *Die römischen Inschriften Ungarns* (Budapest 1972–)

- Rothe 2009 U. Rothe, *Dress and Cultural Identity in the Rhine-Moselle Region of the Roman Empire*, BARIntSer 2038 (Oxford 2009)
- Schmidt 2003 S. Schmidt, *Grabreliefs im Griechisch-Römischen Museum von Alexandria*, ADAIK, Ägyptologische Reihe 17 (Berlin 2003)
- Schmidts 2010 T. Schmidts, *Aurelius Theogeiton: Ein Schiffseigner aus dem syrischen Arados auf Italienfahrt*, AKorrBl 40/2, 2010, 251–263
- Speidel 2012 M. A. Speidel, *Dressed for the occasion. Clothes and context in the Roman army*, in: M. A. Speidel, *Heer und Herrschaft im römischen Reich der hohen Kaiserzeit*, MAVORS 16 (Stuttgart 2012) 235–248
- Stupperich 1983 R. Stupperich, *Zur dextrarum iunctio auf frühen römischen Grabreliefs*, Boreas 6, 1983, 143–150
- TRHR P. Kovács, *Tituli Romani in Hungaria reperti. Supplementum* (Budapest 2005)
- Varner 1990 E. R. Varner, *Two portrait stelae and the Romanization of North Africa*, YaleUnivB 1990, 10–19
- Waebens 2012 S. Waebens, *Ares: Brother, Commander, Deity or Son? A New Interpretation of the Ares Tombstone*, ChronEg 87, 2012, 322–339
- Waebens 2015 S. Waebens, *The Representation of Roman Soldiers on Third-Century AD Funerary Monuments from Nikopolis (Egypt)*, Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire Ancienne 1, 2015, 63–77
- Wagner 2001 J. Wagner, *Zur ostentativen Wiederverwendung römerzeitlicher Spolien in mittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Kirchenbauten der Steiermark. Bannung, Exorzismus und humanistische Intentionen im Spiegel einer Interpretatio christiana*, FÖ 40, 2001, 345–479
- Walde 1997 E. Walde, *Noch einmal zur Buchrolle*, in: B. Djurić – I. Lazar (eds.), *Akten des IV. Internationalen Kolloquiums über Probleme des provinzialrömischen Kunstschaffens Celje 08.–12.05.1995*, Situla 36 (Ljubljana 1997) 243–246
- Walde 2001 E. Walde, *Die Dienerinnen auf den römischen Grabreliefs in der Provinz Noricum*, in: T. Panhuysen (ed.), *Typologie, Ikonographie und soziale Hintergründe der provinzialen Grabdenkmäler und Wege der ikonographischen Einwirkung. Akten des Internationalen Kolloquiums über das provinzialrömische Kunstschaffen Maastricht 29.05.–01.06.1997* (Maastricht 2001) 235–243
- Walde 2005 E. Walde, *Im herrlichen Glanze Roms. Die Bilderwelt der Römersteine in Österreich* (Innsbruck 2005)
- Walter 1979 C. Walter, *The dextrarum iunctio of Lepcis Magna in relationship to the iconography of marriage*, AntAfr 14/1, 1979, 271–283
- Wedenig 1997 R. Wedenig, *Epigraphische Quellen zur städtischen Administration in Noricum* (Klagenfurt 1997)

*Tibor Grüll, Department of Ancient History, University of Pécs, Rókus utca 2, 7624 Pécs, Hungary.*  
[e] [grull.tibor@pte.hu](mailto:grull.tibor@pte.hu)

*Nándor Agócs, Department of History, ELTE Berzsenyi Dániel Teacher Training Centre, Károlyi Gáspár tér 4, 9700 Szombathely, Hungary.*  
[e] [agocs.nandor@sek.elte.hu](mailto:agocs.nandor@sek.elte.hu)

*János Jusztinger, Department of Roman Law, University of Pécs, 48-as tér 1, 7622 Pécs, Hungary.*  
[e] [jusztinger.janos@ajk.pte.hu](mailto:jusztinger.janos@ajk.pte.hu)

*Ernő Szabó, Department of Ancient History, University of Pécs, Rókus utca 2, 7624 Pécs, Hungary.*  
[e] [szabo.erno@pte.hu](mailto:szabo.erno@pte.hu)