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A Via in Context: Via Salaria in Rome

Abstract

Urban archaeological evidences on Via Salaria from Porta Salaria to the Tomb of Lucilius Paetus.

Le evidenze archeologiche del tratto urbano della Via Salaria da Porta Pia al sepolcro di Lucilio Peto.

About a century ago, Rodolfo Lanciani used to say that people in Rome were impressed by the change of *via Salaria* in the last years. Once the walker felt to be in the “Roman Campagna” in the imperial time thanks to the beauty of villa Albani, for example. Lanciani wrote about *via Salaria*: “The scene is now changed, and not for the better”; today a lot has changed from Lanciani’s time, and for sure “not for the better”. Anyway something still remains of the archeological context (dating late republican, imperial age). From 1695 to 1741 in the vineyard of the Naro family, between the *Porta Salaria* and the *Porta Pinciana*, diggings brought to light twenty-six graves of praetorians and one hundred and forty-one of civilians. Later, in 1887 along the new “*Corso d’Italia*” eight hundred and fifty-five tombs were discovered in nine months. The tomb of the *Licinii Calpurnii*, discovered in 1884 in the foundations of the house N.29, *Via di Porta Salaria*, preserves a tragic story. *Marcus Licinius Crassus Frugi* was *ex-praetor, ex-consul* (A.D.27) was the governor of Mauritania; he was married with *Scribonia* and he had from her three sons. He named his eldest son *Pompeius Magnus*, after his grandfather. Emperor *Caligula*, jealous of his fame, pronounced the sentence of death against *Pompeius* and his parents. The execution took place in the spring of 47 A.D. The second son, *Licinius Crassus*, was murdered by *Nero* in 67 A.D. The third son, *Lucius Calpurnius Piso Frugi Licinianus*, who was only eleven at the time of the executions of 47 A.D, spent many years in exile; lastly he was adopted by *Galba* but, only four days later, he was murdered by the praetorians. The fourth *Calpurnius* buried at *Via Salaria* is *Calpurnius Licinianus, ex-consul*

A.D. 87. Having conspired against *Nerva*, first he was exiled in Tarentum with his wife, later on a solitary island by Trajan; he died trying to escape from it. In a second very large chamber ten marble sarcophagi were discovered; no name is engraved upon them.

As we already said, *Porta Salaria* was the name of the gate in the Aurelian wall by which the *Via Salaria* left the city. It was flanked by two semi-circular towers of brickwork, that of the west tower being perhaps the original work of Aurelian, below which were tombs faced with marble, wrongly described by archeologist Nibby as bastions. The arch was of stone, with a brick arcade repaired in *opus mixtum* above it. In the year 1871 the destruction of the 3rd-century gate brought to light the altar of *Quintus Sulpicius Maximus*. *Porta Salaria* was replaced in 1873 by a new gate designed by V. Vespignani; Vespignani's gate was later dismantled to facilitate the flow of traffic and in 1921 *Maximus'* tomb was re-erected to the east of a new opening in the Wall at piazza Fiume. The front of the altar once was faced by *via Salaria*, today it is faced by *via Po*. The monument was placed on a tall quadrangular base of travertine with a marble cippus upon it, ornamented with a statue of the youth (the altar was transferred to the Museo della Centrale Montemartini, coll. Musei Capitolini inv. 2963, and replaced on the site by a plaster cast). The commemorative inscription found near by declared it the tomb of *Quintus Sulpicius Maximus*, a boy of eleven years, five months and twelve days. He had won honorable mention by improvising a long poem in Greek in the third *certamen* in honor of *Jupiter Capitolinus* (94 A. D.); fiftytwo Greek poets took part. The verses by which he won the competition were engraved on the monument by his parents. The central niche of the altar encloses a portrait of the deceased: *Maximus* stands in frontal pose and he holds a scroll in his raised left hand. *Maximus'* poem is carved on the left and the right of the portrait niche; there are three epigrams carved beneath the Greek poem. The Parian marble monument is crowned with a triangular pediment decorated with a wreath with long fluttering ribbons; the acroteria are in the shape of two half palmettes. The niche with a rounded top is cut into the upper part of the front of the altar with a disregard for the borders of the frame. It encloses the full-length portrait of *Sulpicius*: he wears a tunic covered by a toga and the *calcei*; he holds a partially unfurled scroll in his raised left hand. The entire front at the right and left of this niche are closely inscribed with the hexameters of the poem; the last three verses (nine lines) are inscribed on the *volumen*. The space below the niche contains first a dedication in Latin and under this, in two columns, two Greek epigrams written probably by the father of *Sulpicius*. An *urceus* is engraved on the right side of the monument, on the left side there is a *paterna*. According to Kleiner, the base has a plain marble plaque that was once covered with another epi-

taph, although the inscriptions on the altar are so extensive that an additional epitaph was probably superfluous. The altar of *Quintus Sulpicius Maximus* is an “unicum” because of the the long poem in Greek carved on the left and the right of the niche. An inscription discovered at Vasto, the ancient *Histonium*, describes the celebration for a thirteen years old poet which took place A.D.107, in these words (CIL, IX, 2860): *L. Valerius Pudens qui annorum XIII Romae certamine sacro Iovis Capitolini lustro sexto claritate ingenii coronatus est inter poetas latinos* “To *Lucius Valerius Pudens*, son of *Lucius*. Being only thirteen years old, he took part in the sixth *certamen sacrum*, near the temple of *Jupiter Capitolinus*; and he won the championship among the Latin poets by the unanimous vote of the judges.” *Lucius Valerius* was crowned by the emperor with the Capitoline laurels and awarded the championship of the world, but he wrote in Latin; *Sulpicius Maximus* didn’t win, but he wrote in Greek a long poem of fortythree verses. The father of the young poet was probably a freedman, as the *cognomen Eugramus* shows us, that’s why *Sulpicius* knew Greek language so well. The title of *Sulpicius’* verses “The extemporaneous verses of *Quintus Sulpicius Maximus*: the words great Zeus might have used, upbraiding *Helios* because he gave his chariot to *Phaeton*” explains the meaning of the poem, an ethopoietic one. The poem refers to a rebuke of *Helios* by Zeus because *Helios* had entrusted *Phaeton* with the chariot of the sun. *Phaeton* destroyed the world burning it. The speech can be divided in two parts: the first contains the description of the world’s destruction; the second part contains the new instructions for *Phaeton*. Some people have thought that the literary merit of these verses is due to *Sulpicius’* father, who rewrote the poem after the extempore verses of the son. *Sulpicius* was too young to be such a good poet: in the poem we find the vocabulary remarkably varied and complete; fortythree hexameters appear in the text, twelve of them are dactylic verses (vv. 6-7-8-17-18-19-20-26-27-31-36-42), thirtyone are spondaic hexameteres, two are irregular verses (vv.5 e 10). The poem is carved in lunate letters; the last three lines are not well visible as they are inscribed on the scroll that *Sulpicius* holds in his left hand. A translation of the epitaphs follows:

Sacred to Manes

“To *Q. Sulpicius Maximus*, son of *Quintus*, born in Rome, and lived eleven years, five months, twelve days. He won the competition, among fifty-two Greek poets, at the third celebration of the Capitoline games. His unhappy parents, *Quintus Sulpicius Eugramus* and *Licinia Januarina*, engraved his extemporized poem on this tomb to prove his talent and to make sure that they have not been inspired solely by their deep love for him”.

“Epigrams

I was twelve years old, I left this world for the land of shades. Illness killed me, for I served the Muses day and night. I pray you in the name of this young dead, stop here and

appreciate the beauty of his verses. Speak with nice lips falling tears and saying: "You will be accepted in the Elysian land, you left us living poems which Aidoneus will never destroy. This is a little tomb, but your fame will reach heaven, *Maximus*; the terrible death didn't kill you without fame, she didn't kill your verses. No one will pass your tomb with tearless eyes, reading your verses. Your glory is secure, for not unknown, your word will shine more than gold."

The 1887 destruction of the western tower of *Porta Salaria* revealed a funerary precinct and its altar: the latin epitaph shows that the deceased was a woman, *Cornelia*, the daughter of *Lucius Scipio* and the wife of *Vatienus*. The mausoleum was composed by a basement, built of opus coementicium and travertine, and a podium covered by marble reliefs. Only one relief, depicting a *bucranium*, is still conserved along Corso d'Italia ; part of a marble funerary lion is preserved too.

The mausoleum of *Lucilia Polla* and her brother *Lucilius Paetus* was discovered in 1885 in the Villa Bertone, opposite the Villa Albani. It was originally composed of two parts: a basement, built of travertine and marble, which is the only part that remains, and a cone of earth and trees. The funerary inscription is engraved on the side facing the Via Salaria; it records that *Marcus Lucilius Paetus*, an officer in the time of Augustus, had built the tomb for his sister *Lucilia Polla* and for himself. In the reign of Trajan, the monument was buried and the inscription itself was covered by a red paint because of the color of the three other walls of the crypt. Towards the end of the fourth century Christians tunnelling the ground for catacombs, discovered the crypt by accident, and occupied it and they knocked out the marble busts of *Lucilius Paetus* and *Lucilia Polla* from their pedestals. It was the end of the monument's life.

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