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MISCARRIAGE AND OTHER HORRORS OF A MOTHER FROM ROMAN SKOPJE:  
A NEW READING OF *IMS* VI 164 = *AE* 1984.752 = *CLEMOES* 11

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I.

In the sixth volume of *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure* (1982), Borka Dragojević-Josifovska included a previously unpublished monument, described as a severely damaged limestone plaque (45 × 84 × 10 cm), from Roman Scupi (now: Skopje, North Macedonia), where it was found, together with further Roman funerary monuments, at Partizanska Street.<sup>1</sup> The stone, edited as item n. 164 of the collection and repeated from there, without alterations, in *AE* 1984.752, was imagined to have been part of a funerary monument, and it carries the fragment of what appears to have been a verse inscription. The text of the inscription was read by its first editor as follows:<sup>2</sup>

[- - -]PLV primo abortau(i)t masculum inf[antem - - -]  
[- - -]SEDEM luce dedita som[no - - -]  
[- - -]itatis concepe[rat - - -]  
[- - -]ma[trem uicensimo nat[o - - -]  
5 [- - -]T sedul[a - - -]  
-----

Based on the photo published by Dragojević-Josifovska, Paolo Cugusi and Maria Teresia Sblendorio Cugusi, in *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Moesica* (*CLEMOes*), where it features as item n. 11, corrected an obvious oversight and added some poorly legible letters in l. 2, made a small change to the beginning l. 3, and edited a slightly longer text in l. 5:<sup>3</sup>

[- - -]plu primo abortau(i)t masculum inf[antem - - -]  
[- - -] sedem te luce dedita somno [- - -]  
[- - -] . . . tatis concepe . . . [- - -]  
[- - -]ma[trem uicensimo nat[- - -]  
5 [- - -] . . . set sedul[- - -]  
-----

Similarly, the editors of the Packard Humanities Institute (PHI) database of Greek inscriptions, provided an *exemplum* of the text, based on their inspection of the photo, that diverges from the reading given by Dragojević-Josifovska:<sup>4</sup>

[- - -]PLV primo abortau(i)t masculum inf[antem - - -]  
[- - -]SEDEM luce {[- - -]ISEDEMFE(?) luce (photo)}<sup>2</sup> dedita som[no - - -]

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<sup>1</sup> On Skopje's ul. Partizanska Roman necropolis, see further, e. g., G. Spasovska-Dimitrioska, Zaštitno iskopavanje na rimskata nekropola na ul. Partizanska – Skopje, *Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica* 12 (1991) 221–233. On burial practice in Roman Scupi more generally see L. Jovanova, Colonia Flavia Scupinorum: The World of the Dead, in: V. Sekulov (ed.), *Acta Musei Tiberiopolitani* I (Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium of Archaeology: Funerary Customs: Mortui Vivos Docent), Strumica 2016, 54–74.

<sup>2</sup> A similar version of the text has been included in the *Musisque Deoque* (*MQDQ*) database, cf. <https://www.mqdq.it/texts/CElappel0154> (last accessed: September 2022).

<sup>3</sup> P. Cugusi – M. T. Sblendorio Cugusi, *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Moesica* (*CLEMOes*), *Carmina Latina Epigraphica Thraciae* (*CLEThr*), Bologna 2008, 40 n. 11.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/175161> (last accessed: September 2022).

[- - -]itatis {<sup>2</sup>[-]MIATIS(?) (photo)}<sup>2</sup> concepe[rat - - -]  
 [- - - ma]trem uicensimo {<sup>26</sup>uicesimo}<sup>26</sup> nat[o - - -]  
 5 [- - -]T sedul[a - - -]  
 - - - - -

The quality of Dragojević-Josifovska's photo (which has been incorporated in the Clauss–Slaby database)<sup>5</sup> is not good enough, however, to confirm much, if any, of the reading especially in the more challenging-to-read areas of the monument.

Dragojević-Josifovska's photo is not the only photo in existence. A more recent photograph, included in the Master's thesis of Maja Basotova, allows us to ascertain that the object in question was not, however, as previous scholars have claimed, a funerary plaque. In her thesis, the author describes it as top part of a tombstone.<sup>6</sup> While Basotova's photograph is better in some respects, the inscribed text remains unreadable due to the poor overall resolution of the image. At any rate, Basotova retained the text of Dragojević-Josifovska. The same author then treated the item again in her 2019 PhD thesis.<sup>7</sup> While the edition remained unchanged from the original one of Dragojević-Josifovska's, Basotova now argues that the monument was made specifically of travertine, and that it once formed part of the front of a sarcophagus.

Based on the original edition, a small number of assumptions were made about the monument in general and the text and its nature and content in particular. Dragojević-Josifovska explained that the monument displayed an 'épitaphe métrique émanant d'une mère accablée par les coups cruels de sa destinée', *i. e.* a metrical epitaph from a mother overwhelmed by the cruel blows of her fate. Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi accepted the case of a metrical epitaph by inclusion of the item in *CLEMOes*, and suggested that the versification be iambic. Based on the word *abortau(i)* (l. 1), they added that the inscription ought to be placed 'in età tarda'. The editors of the *Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg* suggest a date in the second or third century A. D.,<sup>8</sup> a view with which the editors of the Venetian *Musisque Deoque (MQDQ)* agree:<sup>9</sup> though not improbable as such, neither database provides any justification for their respective dates for the item.

## II.

Considering the high level of problematic information surrounding this inscription, it may be useful to start with a summary of what can actually be regarded as established with a certain level of certainty. It is beyond doubt that the stone fragment in question (whose measurements are 45 × 84 × 10 cm, and whose letters, with a couple of exceptions, are 3.5–4 cm tall) once formed part of a much larger monument made of limestone (travertine, more specifically). Its relatively slim diameter, as well as the sculpted upper frame area, make it eminently plausible that it, indeed, once formed part of a sarcophagus, as Maja Basotova has observed. The lettering and the spelling of the inscription do not allow for the establishment of a precise date: in the absence of any strong markers, a larger, rather than a more narrow, time frame of "second to third century A. D." would initially seem reasonable. Considering that Roman Scupi suffered severe attacks from the Goths in the mid-third century, attacks from the Huns and the Ostrogoths in the fifth century, and destruction due to an earthquake in the early sixth century A. D., a date in the second-to-mid-third

<sup>5</sup> [https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?s\\_language=en&bild=\\$IMS\\_06\\_00164.jpg](https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/bilder.php?s_language=en&bild=$IMS_06_00164.jpg) (last accessed: September 2022).

<sup>6</sup> M. Basotova, *Општество и романизација во Скупи низ епиграфските артефакти*, Master's thesis: Skopje 2009, 113 n. 154 (<https://repository.ukim.mk/handle/20.500.12188/1211>, last accessed: September 2022).

<sup>7</sup> M. Basotova, *Antični nagrobni spomeniki na območju mesta Scupi in področju Kumanova: izdelki, proizvodni cikli in kupci*, PhD thesis: Ljubljana 2019, 144 n. 115 <https://repozitorij.uni-lj.si/IzpisGradiva.php?lang=eng&id=124317> (last accessed: September 2022).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD002031> (last changes: 2011-11-22, Feraudi) (last accessed: September 2022).

<sup>9</sup> See above, nt. 2.

centuries or (less likely considering letter shapes and fragmentation of the piece) the fourth century seems to be the most plausible option.<sup>10</sup>

The stone fragment is preserved in the lapidarium of the Museum of the City of Skopje (Музеј на град Скопје) (inv. n. 2764):



Fig. 1. Photo of IMS VI 164 = AE 1984.752 = CLEMoes 11  
Image taken by Lenče Jovanova (© Museum of the City of Skopje, September 2022)

Based on this, it is possible to provide a new reading of the text:

[- - -]plu primo abortauī masculum inf[an- - -]  
[- - - aeterna]m (?) sedem fetuiq(u)e dedit a (vel dedita?) somn+[- - -]  
[- - -in]uisum fatis conceptum [- - -]  
[- - -] matrem uicensimo natu[- - -]  
5 [- - -]++set sedul++[- - -]  
-----

As part of a sarcophagus, the inscription, originally inscribed on a long wall of the sarcophagus (rather than a side by the head or feet of the deceased), must have been wider than its currently surviving 84 cm.

If this sarcophagus was meant to contain an adult body, a total width of no less than 200 cm would seem plausible. This in turn would mean that, in the best case scenario, some 40–50% or so of the original line length have survived even in the longest surviving line (l. 1) – arguably somewhat less than that, however. If, however, the sarcophagus was designed for a child burial (which is less plausible), smaller dimensions may be assumed.

Either way, consideration of the object's original form and function has a number of significant consequences for the text's reconstruction and interpretation, including its metrical design.

<sup>10</sup> For the history of Roman Scupi, see B. Dragojević-Josifovska, *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure* VI, Belgrade 1982, 15–40 (esp. 21–23 for the literary evidence); J. Wilkes, *The Illyrians*, Oxford 1996, *passim*; L. Jovanova, Scupi from the 1st to the 3rd Century According to New Archeological and Epigraphic Evidence, in: M. Mirković, *Römische Städte und Festungen an der Donau* (Akten der regionalen Konferenz, organisiert von Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung, Beograd 2003), Belgrade 2005, 153–166, and, addressing a broader audience, L. Jovanova, *Scupi – Colonia Flavia Scupinorum* (The Most Significant Values of the Macedonian Cultural and Natural Heritage), Skopje 2015, 11–13.

## III.

Before one may turn to the text's overall interpretation and any meaningful metrical appraisal, it is important to document and discuss the transmitted text and some tentative supplements.

1. In its surviving part, the first line contains some rather troubling information, namely a reference to a premature, unhealthy, or dead foetus delivery. Given that this is, however, the first line of the text altogether, one might reasonably expect some information preceding the surviving passage that introduces the deceased and, potentially, the honorand. If the surviving text, as was argued, is in verse, preceding information need not necessarily be the same: a short prose prescript would certainly have been a plausible and viable option.

**[- -]PLV:** It is possible that the word to which these letters pertain was not written out in full, but that a final letter (or even several) were dropped. This is even more plausible if this word was not part of the poem, since abbreviations in verse parts of Latin inscriptions are fairly uncommon. There are not a great number of feasible words to which a final syllabic element *-plu-* might pertain (assuming that this was not, in fact, supposed to mean *plu(s)*, which would seem awkward for many reasons). Apart from adjectives denoting multiples (*simplu(m)*, *duplu(m)*, *triplu(m)*, *quadruplu(m)*, etc.), obvious candidates for this fragmented word would be *[tem]plu(m)*, *[exem]plu(m)*, *[am]plu(m)*, and the syncopated form *[po]plu(m)*.

There is another option however, that fits significantly better with the surviving form *-plu* (i. e. without loss of a word-final *-m*, which was retained in subsequent *masculum!*): the letters may have formed part of a Greek name such as Haplus, Eplus, Peplus, Paipus, Kataplus, or Euplus, for which the ending in *-plu* are, in fact, attested in the Latin inscriptions for the dative and ablative cases.<sup>11</sup> Notably, in addition to Paipus, certainly Euplus and Kataplus are attested not only as male, but also as female names.<sup>12</sup> If this is the right solution, then this interpretation would fit well with the earlier observation that the text requires some onomastic information, preferably towards its beginning. (At the same time, of course, one must be very wary to introduce any form of circular reasoning.)

**primo:** While it is tempting, considering the placement of this term in the line and within the larger context, to interpret *primo* as an ordering term, one ought to be very careful not to rule out too soon its interpretation as male cognomen *Primo*. If previous *[- -]plu* was part of a Grecian cognomen (as is plausible and, in fact, likely), then an additional cognomen *Primus* may almost certainly be ruled out and an interpretation as ordering term remains the only viable option.

**abortauī:** Dragojević-Josifovska, *ISM* ad loc., as well as all subsequent editors, printed *abortauī(t)*, suggesting a belief that the epitaph was presented in the third person singular. While this is certainly possible and not at all unheard of, both formally and from an orthographical point of view, one must note that within the surviving fragment there is positively no information that presupposes such an interpretation. Thus it is certainly possible that the text opened with a first-person narrative, and, since the transmitted text has to provide us with the starting point for interpretation, it must the claim to the contrary (i. e., the claim in favour of an interpretation as *abortauī(t)*) that has to bear the burden of proof. Unfortunately, even with the new reading of the text and its consequences for l. 2 (*dedit* or *dedita*?), there is no reliable evidence to decide the matter, and one must be content with the observation that, in its current state, the inscription does not provide sufficiently strong clues to resolve the matter. At any rate, the subject for this part of the inscription, whether as first-person speaker or third-person subject, has to be female.

The meaning and implications of the verb *abortare*, sometimes regarded a mere equivalent of *aboriri*,<sup>13</sup> are not fully explored in current Latin dictionaries. Lewis and Short (1879) define it as 'to bring forth prematurely', and similarly does the Latin-German *Georgese* dictionary (in both its 1913 edition and its

<sup>11</sup> See H. Solin, *Analecta Epigraphica CCLXV–CCLXXI*, *Arctos* 45 (2011) 143–170, 166 (n. CCLXIX. *Varia Urbana*).

<sup>12</sup> See the evidence readily available at [http://clas-lgpn2.classics.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/lgpn\\_search.cgi?name=Κατάπλους](http://clas-lgpn2.classics.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/lgpn_search.cgi?name=Κατάπλους) (3 female vs. 4 male instances) and [http://clas-lgpn2.classics.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/lgpn\\_search.cgi?name=Εύπλους](http://clas-lgpn2.classics.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/lgpn_search.cgi?name=Εύπλους) (3 female vs. 57 male instances) (last accessed: September 2022).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Gloss.* V 637.22.

2013 revision): ‘zu früh gebären’. The 1982 edition of the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, contrary to the evidence collected in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (in a fascicle published in 1900), restricts the verb’s use to animals, and suggests a meaning along the lines of ‘(of a beast) to cast its young’: this has not been amended in the *OLD*’s second edition of 2012. Returning to the evidence gathered in *ThLL* s. v. (from which the present inscription is absent for obvious reasons, as it was still undiscovered in 1900), one must first acknowledge that the oldest evidence, Varro *rust.* 2.4.14, does, indeed, refer to animals. Whether this use initially was exclusive, cannot be determined with certainty, as evidence is scarce. Yet, Firmicius Maternus, in his *Matheseos libri octo*, clearly uses it for humans, when he says that for certain women giving birth was an issue if Venus was in the sixth house by day or night:

*Si vero mulier in sexto loco geniturae suae Veneris stellam habuerit collocatam, magnas difficultates et magna pericula patietur ex partu; aut enim abortabit frequenter aut difficile edit partum, ut intra uiscera eius laceratum pecus a medicis proferatur.*

If a woman has Venus in this house she will suffer great difficulty and danger in childbirth. She will frequently abort or have the foetus lacerated in her womb and brought forth by physicians.

(Firm. *math.* 3.6.12, transl. J. R. Bram)

Similarly, in a later passage, –

*Sed haec per loca peregrina ducetur, et erit frequentibus causis et frequentibus et magnis accusationibus implicata. accipiet etiam eam publica custodia, et crebras turbationes et crebriores iniurias sustinebit, abortabit etiam filios geminos.*

But she is forced to travel through many foreign places and is involved in frequent law suits and accusations. She will be in prison <she will sustain many disturbances and even more insults,> and will abort twin sons.

(Firm. *math.* 6.31.90, transl. J. R. Bram, modified)

The evidence confirms use of *abortare*, in the meaning of ‘to miscarry’ or even ‘to abort pregnancy’,<sup>14</sup> applied to humans from at least the fourth century onwards (but that does not, of course, preclude any earlier use of this term in this specific way).

Slightly later, the *Leges Visigothorum*, in turn, dating back in their essence to the fifth century A. D., specifically rule on human-induced miscarriage (typically as a result of male violence) using the verb *abortare*.<sup>15</sup> Regardless of when the term *abortare* was first applied to humans, one must note that already in the earliest example, the aforementioned passage from Varro’s *De re rustica*, it refers to termination of pregnancy as a result of (in the specific case: externally applied, blunt) force. Varro gives instructions regarding the construction of pigsties, arguing for their low height above ground, so as to avoid an injury in a pregnant sow when jumping out of the structure, –

*ne dum exilire uelit praegnas sus, abortet*

lest the pregnant sow, as she desires to jump out, terminates her pregnancy.

(Varro *rust.* 2.14.4)

While it is not clear whether the author of the inscription from Skopje wanted to suggest that a pregnancy had been terminated as a result of a violent act (intentional or otherwise), or whether they merely wished to suggest that a miscarriage occurred, it is effectively clear that already the first line of the inscription points

<sup>14</sup> On induced termination of pregnancy in the ancient world, see K. Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World*, London 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Further on this source, see A. Niederhellmann, *Arzt und Heilkunde in den frühmittelalterlichen Leges. Eine wort- und sachkundliche Untersuchung* (= R. Schmidt-Wiegand (ed.), *Die volkssprachigen Wörter der Leges Barbarorum*, Teil III = Arbeiten zur Frühmittelalterforschung 12), Berlin 1983, 120–141.

towards a traumatic event, arguably the first one (*primo*) in a sequence of events, in which a child's life was lost even before it was born.

**masculum inf[an]tem - - -**: The supplement *inf[an]tem*], already proposed by Dragojević-Josifovska, *ISM* ad loc., would appear to be the only meaningful way to restore this text. The lost child was of male sex, and it was not given any official name, whence the reference to him merely as a *masculus infans*. *CIL* IV 3890, in addition to the mostly literary evidence listed in *ThLL* s. v. *masculus*, 427.36 ff., suggests that the adjective *mascul(us)* might also be used as a noun for male offspring, but one must note that in this Pompeian inscription the phrase would appear to refer to chickens, not humans. The phrase *infans masculus* is attested in Latin literature; cf. e. g. Liv. 32.12.6, Firm. *math.* 6.32.26, Plac. *med. rec.* β 17.6.

2. The reading of this line has been almost completely changed as a result of the new photographic evidence that has become available. The commentary, below, will not discuss the potential meanings or implications of any of the earlier, obviously false reading(s) of this text. While the exact sentiment of l. 2 still remains somewhat unclear, much of what has been expressed here points towards a narrative touching upon the burial for the *masculus infans* introduced in l. 1, unless one is to assume that in the lost part a (notional or actual) *deinde* introduced a second devastating loss of a close relative.

**[- - - aeterna]m (?) sedem**: Previously, the trace of the letter at the beginning of the line had been read as N. Neither the slanted angle of the final vertical line (\ rather than l) nor the traces of what precedes it confirm this reading. If this letter was indeed, as suggested here, an M, then a supplement along the lines of *[aeterna]m*, *[perpetua]m*, *[pia]m* vel sim. would be the most obvious solution. *Sedem* is, of course, a common expression to refer to the burial spot, or burial provision as (everlasting) resting place, and thus requires no further comment. *Aeternam sedem* occurs as an established sequence in (relatively) nearby places, cf. *IMS* III.2, 113 = *CLE*Moes 52 = AE 1995.1322 (Gamzigrad / Romuliana) and *IScM* II 383 = VI.2, 383 adn. = *CLE*Moes 62 (Constanta / Tomis), and, from further afield, e. g., *CIL* VI 33054 (Rome) and *CIL* VIII 6360 = 19338 = *CLE* 1605 (Ibn Zaid / Castellum Elefantum).

**fetuiq(u)e**: Due to the worn surface, this word is somewhat difficult to make out. The I has been inscribed in somewhat smaller script between the V and the Q. The tail of the letter Q is clearly visible, though parts of the curve on the letter's right have almost vanished. The letter E, significantly smaller than the average letters in this inscription, has been placed at the centre of the letter Q.

*Fetus* is not an altogether exceptional term to refer to offspring in Latin verse inscriptions, cf., e. g., *CLE* 442 and 748. In *CLE* 1438, from Salona / Solin (Dalmatia), the term is used to refer to a double tragedy during a (failed) childbirth: *[fu]nesto grauis heu triste puerperio | nequiu[m] miserum partu depromere fetu(m) | hausta qui nondum luce peremptus abiit ...* ('Pregnant, alas, she experienced a grievously difficult labour and was not able to drive out from her womb the wretched fetus which, destroyed, passed away not yet in the light').<sup>16</sup>

Use of the connector *-q(u)e* would appear to imply that an additional verb has been lost to the damage that precedes *[- - - aeterna]m (?) sedem*, presumably a verb to express the creation, purchase, or decoration of the (*aeterna*) *sedes* that was subsequently given to the child.

**dedit a somn+[- - -]**: The sequence of letters that is DEDITASOMN+ poses a number of problems. Previous editors chose to print *dedita som[no]* or even *dedita somno*, which is certainly possible. This phrase resembles, e. g., Lucr. 3.112–113: *praeterea molli cum somno dedita membra | effusumque iacet sine sensu corpus honustum* ('furthermore, as the limbs are given to gentle sleep and the burdened body lies, spread out, without its senses ...'), an expression, in this funerary context, arguably akin to phrases such as, e. g., *deditus fato* of *CLE* 362.<sup>17</sup>

Looking at the wording of *[- - - aeterna]m (?) sedem fetuiq(u)e* and the connector *-q(u)e* used in *fetuiq(u)e*, however, an alternative word division of *dedit a somn+[- - -]* might be preferable, taking *dedit*

<sup>16</sup> Translation by A. G. Hug, *Fecunditas, Sterilitas, and the Politics of Reproduction at Rome*, Diss. Toronto 2014, 278 n. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Further on this piece, see P. Kruschwitz, Zu republikanischen *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* (III), *Tyche* 18 (2003) 59–71, esp. 66–71 (with tab. 7).



with *sedem* as a reference to the provision of a burial facility for the stillborn child. Certainly, a construction of *somn*+[- - -] with the preposition *a(b)* is implausible. It is, however, perfectly possible, that *a* (if one were to accept the case for it) was not, in fact, used as a preposition: the exclamation *a(h)!* is in use in the Latin verse inscriptions, cf., e. g., *CLE* 937, 1875, and 1995. In that case, the *somnus* (or even *somnium*, cf. below) would form part of a subsequent statement.

While the matter cannot be decided with sufficient certainty, the representation of the text provided here is what this editor finds to be the most plausible solution overall, with significant doubts remaining.

Finally, previous editors read the remaining traces *somno* or *som[no]*. There is no reason, however, as to why the remaining traces might not also be understood as *somni*[- - -]. Unless reference to a dream (vision) was made, *somnus* is a reference to death, most likely.

3. As was the case for l. 2, the reading of this line has been completely revised. Previous readings will not be discussed in the subsequent commentary. The emphasis of l. 3 would appear to have been on the topical motif of fate's envy.

**[- - -in]uisum fatis conceptum:** Though not previously found in inscriptions, the term *conceptus* is attested as an expression signifying a 'conceived offspring' in imperial poetry and prose alike, cf. *ThLL* s. v. *conceptus*, 23.72–24.8 (where *conceptus* is explained as a synonym for *fetus*). The reference here either refers back to the *masculus infans* of l. 1, another ill-fated birth, or a close male relation.

4. The most natural interpretation of this line would be to read it as a reference to the mother of the *masculus infans* of l. 1, indicating her age, possibly at the time of her own death. It is not clear, however, whether this sarcophagus was for the *masculus infans* or the mother (or someone entirely else, e. g. the father of the stillborn child).

5. While traces of further letters are visible at the beginning and the end of the (surviving part of the) line, these traces are not sufficient to gain additional textual information.

**sedul++:** *Sedulitas* is commonly introduced as a female virtue in Latin verse inscriptions, cf., e. g., *CLE* 552, 856, 1026, 1140, 1836, 1845, 1988, suggesting that this line made reference to the *mater*, and possibly, considering the position of this phrase in the text overall, the recipient of the sarcophagus.

#### IV.

Based on the new edition of the text, it is now possible to consider any underlying metrical pattern. Only sufficiently certain elements of the text will be scanned, uncertain elements will be marked as ×, potentially elided elements, or those potentially affected by synizesis, will be given in curly brackets, words that are partly or wholly restored will be given in square brackets):

[- - -]plu primo abortauī masculum inf[antem - - -]

[. . .] -- {-} ∪ ----- ∪ {-} - [- - . . .]

[- - - aeterna]m (?) sedem fetuiq(u)e dedit a [or: dedita] somn+[- - -]

[. . . -- -] --- {-} - ∪ ∪ ∪ -- [- . . .] or [. . . -- -] --- {-} - ∪ - ∪ ∪ [- . . .]

[- - -in]uisum fatis conceptum [- - -]

[. . . -] ----- × [. . .]

[- - -] matrem uicensimo natu[- - -]

[. . .] × --- ∪ -- × [. . .]

5 [- - -]++set sedul++[- - -]

[. . .] -- ∪ [- . . .]

The emerging structure is not especially satisfying with a view to any potentially emerging quantitative rhythmical pattern, and it seems inadvisable to introduce the possibility of irregular prosodies to make the

evidence fit any hypothetical model. There is a good chance, however, that, instead of a iambic rhythm (as was proposed by Cugusi and Sblendorio Cugusi), an accentuating dactylic rhythm was intended by the author. Discounting what arguably was part of a name in a prose praescriptum as well as the highly fragmented final line, one might be inclined to accept the following dactylic sequences (accentuated syllables in capital letters, elided and thus discounted syllables in curly brackets):

*PRI{mo} aborTAui MAScul{um} inF[ANtem - - -]*  
 ' ~ ~ | ' ~ ~ | ' ~ ~ | ' ~ ~ . . .  
 [- - - aeTERna]m (?) SEdem fetVIq(u)e<sup>18</sup> DEdit a [or: DEdita] SOMn+[- - -]  
 ~ | ' ~ ~ | ' ~ ~ | ' ~ ~ | ' ~ ~ . . .  
 [- - -in]VIsuM FATis conCEPtum [- - -]  
 ~ | ' ~ ~ | ' ~ ~ | ' ~ ~ . . .  
 [- - -] MATrem uiCENSimo NATu[- - -]  
 ' ~ ~ | ' ~ ~ | ' (?) ~

Unfortunately, due to the fragmentary nature of the evidence, it is impossible to say whether (a) an accentuating dactylic pattern was really what the author had in mind, and (b) whether any underlying rhythmical design – be it iambic or dactylic, accentuating or quantitative – had also been reflected in the item's overall layout.

## V.

Thus far, discussion has focused on the constitution of the text, its elucidation in terms of its verbal constituents, as well as its form. Looking at the newly constituted (fragmentary) text as a whole, and in the attempt to provide a satisfying translation, the full extent of the dramatic events that have been commemorated on this monument begins to unfold:

[- - -]plu primo abortaui masculum inf[an]tem [- - -]  
 [- - - aeterna]m (?) sedem fetuiq(u)e dedit a (vel dedita?) somn+[- - -]  
 [- - -in]uisum fatis conceptum [- - -]  
 [- - -] matrem uicensimo natu[- - -]  
 5 [- - -]++set sedul++[- - -]  
 - - - - -

... to [- - -]plus (?). – First, I (or: she?) lost a male infant, due to external interference, during pregnancy ...

... [an eternal] resting place and (she? he?) gave (it) to the offspring: alas, (sleep? dream?)

[or: ... [an eternal] resting place, and for the offspring ... given to sleep ...]

... conceived to be envied by the Fates ...

... the mother ... twentieth ... born (?) ...

... eager ...

- - - - -

In addition to the *mater* of l. 5, arguably the recipient of this sarcophagus, it is possible to argue that up to three miscarriages or lives of shortlived children are recorded in this inscription: first (*primo*) there was the *masculus infans* of l. 1 whose life forcibly ended while still in his mother's belly. It is not clear whether or not this *masculus infans* was the same *fetus* who is placed in an early grave in l. 2 – he may have been, but considering the overall loss of text that has occurred, this is not necessarily so. Finally, there was an *inuisum fatis conceptum* that almost definitely is a second, but may even be a third, child who did not live long enough at least to outlive their own mother. Especially harrowing, of course, is the reference to a

<sup>18</sup> This presupposes synizesis of -ui- in *fetuiq(u)e*.

more or less violent, externally induced termination of the first pregnancy with the rare, but explicit term *abortau(i)t*.

Considering that the inscription mentions motherhood, combined with a reference to the virtue of *sedulitas* (l. 5) that is commonly ascribed to females rather than males, the inscription appears to commemorate a (young?) woman, whose name would seem to have ended in *-plus* (l. 1), cursed with exceptionally bad luck as far as pregnancy and childbirth were concerned.

While the verb *abortau(i)* in l. 1 suggests an opening with a first-person narrative, the third-person endings in *dedit* (l. 2) and *[ - - ] ++ set* (l. 5) might imply that subsequent commemoration took place in the third person. Regardless of that, however, it would seem reasonable to assume that the entire act of commemoration had been taken care of by a man who, in addition to repeated child loss, eventually also had to face the premature death of his wife.

To the present day, around half a dozen poetic (or poeticising) inscriptions have emerged from Scupi and its immediate vicinity.<sup>19</sup> The death of children and young mothers is a recurring theme in these texts, written predominantly in Latin but partly also in Greek, and the piece presented here, though fragmentary in nature, is arguably the most devastating piece of them all. This would already be true on the basis of the loss of human life that is palpable from the text. It is guaranteed, however, by the explicit reference to *abortare* as the reason for the loss of (at least) one child.

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<sup>19</sup> In addition to *CLEMOes* 8–12 and 56–57 see also *IMS* VI 81 = *ILJug* I 33.