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6

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PPRET INSCRIPTIONS

INSCRIPTIONS PERTAINING TO THE PRAETORIAN
PREFECTS FROM 284 TO 395 AD.
PAPER EDITION

PIERFRANCESCO PORENA,
ELEONORA ANGIUS, ANDREA BERNIER,
GIORDANA FRANCESCHINI, IRENE VAGIONAKIS

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BURIAL VERSE INSCRIPTION OF THE PRAET. PREFECT
PROBUS FROM ROME (ST. PETER'S BASILICA)

EDITIONS: *CIL* VI, p. 389, *ad* 1756a-b (p. 855 *ad* nr. 1756; p. 3176 nr. 31922; pp. 4752 f.); Löfstedt 1913, pp. 79 f.; *CLE* 1347a-b; *ILCV* 63a-b; *ICUR* n.s. II 4219 a-b; Schmidt 1999, pp. 103 f.; Trout 2001, pp. 161-64; Bruggisser 2003, pp. 81 f. (only b); Colafrancesco 2008, pp. 39 f.

LINKS: *EDB* 17058; *EDCS* 18100576; *EDR* 118258 (col. a); *EDR* 118260 (col. b); *MQDQ* 1347a (col. a); *MQDQ* 1347b (col. b); *TM* 279483 (col. a); *TM* 265175 (col. b)

PLRE: I, pp. 736-40

PRAETORIAN PREFECTS: Sextus Claudius Petronius Probus

DATE OF THE INSCRIPTION: 390/394 AD

PROVENANCE AND LOCATION

Ancient city: Roma. Modern city: Rome (Italy). Province: Urbs. Diocese: Italiciana. Regional prefecture: Italia Illyricum Africa.

Provenance: found in Rome in 1452, near the transept of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican; copied only by the humanist Maffeo Vegio (1407-1458). Current location: lost (the inscription was destroyed during the re-construction of the St. Peter's Basilica in the mid-15th Century). Ancient location: tomb (within the sepulchre of Petronius Probus and Anicia Faltonia Proba near St. Peter's basilica in Vatican).

TYPE AND MATERIAL OF THE SUPPORT AND TEXT LAYOUT

Type of support: architectural element, epistyle inside the sepulchre of Petronius Probus. Material: marble

Reuse of the inscribed field: no. Reuse of the monument: yes. Epistographic: no.

Dimensions of support: Height: unknown. Width: unknown. Breadth: unknown. Dimensions of letters: unknown.

Inscribed field: More than one inscribed field, united in two principal epigraphic fields, whose structure is uncertain (a-b). At the time of its transcription the text was undamaged.

Writing technique: chiselled. Language: Latin. Rhythm: poetry (9 + 15 elegiac distichs). Palaeography: unknown (no images available)

TEXT CATEGORY: Burial inscription of Petronius Probus

LATIN TEXT

a

Sublimes quisquis tumuli miraberis arces,
 dices: quantus erat qui Probus hic situs est,
 consulibus proavis socerisque et consule maior,
 quod geminas consul reddidit ipse domos;
 5 praefectus quarto, totum dilectus in orbem,
 sed fama emensus quicquid in orbe hominum est.
 Aeternos heu, Roma, tibi qui posceret annos,
 cur non vota tui vixit adusque boni ?
 Nam cum sex denos mensis suspenderet annos,
 10 dilectae gremio raptus in aethra Probae.
 Sed periisse Probum meritis pro talibus absit
 credas, Roma, tuum: vivit et astra tenet,
 virtutis, fidei, pietatis, honoris amicus,
 parcus opum nulli, largus et ipse sui.
 15 Solamen tanti coniux tamen optima luctus
 hoc Proba sortita est, iungat ut urna pares.
 Felix, heu nimium felix, dum vita maneret,
 digno iuncta viro, digna simul tumulo.

b

Ex[uv]iis resolutus, in aetheris aequore tutum
 curris iter cunctis integer a vitiis,
 nomine quod resonas, imitatus moribus, aequè
 Iordane ablutus, nunc Probus es melior.
 5 Dives opum clarusque genus, praecelsus honore,
 fascibus inlustris, consule dignus avo,
 Bis gemina populos praefectus sede gubernans,
 has mundi phaleras, hos procerum titulos
 transcendis senior donatus munere Christi:
 10 hic est verus honos, haec tua nobilitas.
 Laetabare prius mensae regalis honore,
 principis alloquio, regis amicitia:
 nunc propior Christo sanctorum sede potitus,
 luce nova frueris, lux tibi Christus adest.

15 O numquam deflende tuis, cum vita maneret
 corporis atque artus spiritus hos regeret,
 primus eras nullique patrum virtute secundus,
 nunc renovatus habes perpetuam requiem,
 candida fuscatus nulla velamina culpa
 20 et novus insuetis incola liminibus.
 His solare tuos, quamquam sola[c]ia m[a]esta
 gratia non quaerat, gratia, Christe, tua.
 Vivit in aeterna paradisi sede beatus,
 qui nova decedens muneris aetherii
 25 vestimenta tulit, quo denigrante Belial
 cessit et ingemuit hic nihil esse suum.
 Hunc tu, Christe, choris iungas c[a]elestibus oro,
 te canat et placidum iugiter aspiciat,
 eque tuo semper dilectus pendeat ore,
 30 auxilium s[u]boli coniugioque fer[en]s.

CRITICAL EDITION

Edition based on *CIL* VI, p. 389.

a

- 1: *sublimes*, MSS Ottob. lat. 1863 and Ottob. lat. 731; *sublimis* EDR
 2: *dicis*, EDR; *disces*, MSS Ottob. lat. 1863 and Ottob. lat. 731
 3: *soceroque*, Löfstedt (1913, p. 82 n. 1), Schmidt, Trout
 7: *cui posceres*, suggested by Mommsen (*CIL* VI p. 389), Zwierlein (1978, p. 48 n. 10)
 11: *periise*, ILCV
 14: *at ipse fuit*, EDR
 16: *et urna*, EDR

b

- 1: *eximiis*, MSS Ottob. lat. 1863 and Ottob. lat. 731 (see Della Schiava 2009, pp. 30, 111, 276)
 3: *resonans*, Colafrancesco
 15: *nunquam*, MSS Ottob. lat. 1863 and Ottob. lat. 731, Trout, Bruggisser
 21: *quanquam*, *CIL*, *CLE*, Trout, Bruggisser; *maesta*, ILCV, Löfstedt; *solatia moesta*, MSS Ottob. lat. 1863 and Ottob. lat. 731, ICUR
 25: *denigrante*, ICUR, EDB, EDR
 26: *cessi*, Colafrancesco
 27: *caelestibus*, MSS Ottob. lat. 1863 and Ottob. lat. 731, *CLE*, ILCV, ICUR, Löfstedt; *coelestibus*, EDR
 28: *adspiciat*, ICUR, Schmidt
 29: *semper*, Colafrancesco

30: *soboli ...feras*, MSS Ottob. lat. 1863 and Ottob. lat. 731, Bruggisser, Colafrancesco; *soboli*, *CLE*, *ILCV*, *ICUR*, Löffstedt; *feras*, *CLE*, *ILCV*, Löffstedt, Bruggisser; *ferat*, Schmidt

TRANSLATIONS

– English (Trout 2001, pp. 162 and 164):

a

«Whoever you are who will wonder at the lofty heights of this tomb, will say: how great was the Probus who lies here.

Greater than his consular forefathers and father-in-law, and greater than a (mere) consul,

because a consul himself he restored twin households.

Prefect for the fourth time, beloved throughout the world,
but surpassing in his glory every mortal in the world.

Alas, Roma, why has he, who would demand years for you without end,
not lived as long as his prayers for your prosperity?

For when a month forestalled his sixty years,

he was snatched up to heaven from the bosom of his beloved Proba.

But be it far from you, Roma, to think that for such services your Probus
has died; he lives and possesses the stars.

The friend of excellence, trust, duty, and honor,

not sparing of his riches to anyone, giving abundantly of himself.

Proba, however, best of wives, has obtained this consolation
for such great grief, that the urn may join them as equals.

Happy, alas too happy, while he lived,

joined to a worthy husband, worthy of a tomb together».

b

«Released from the garment of your body, you run your safe course
in the expanse of heaven, free from all errors.

Having equally expressed in your character what you echo in your name,
washed clean by the Jordan, you are now ‘Probus’ better than before.

Rich in wealth, of noble birth, lofty in honor,

distinguished by the fasces, worthy of a consular grandfather,

a prefect twice governing the people in your twofold office,

these ornaments of the world, these nobles’ titles,

you surpass, having been given Christ’s gift in you later years.

This is true honor, this is your nobility.

Before you rejoiced in the honor of a royal table,

in the conversation of the emperor, the friendship of a king:

now nearer to Christ, having gained the abode of the saints,

you enjoy a new light: Christ is present as your light.
 O Probus, never to be lamented by your kin: while you lived
 and your spirit governed these limbs
 you were foremost, and second in virtue to none of the senators;
 now, made new, you have eternal rest.
 Wearing bright robes, darkened by no fault.
 and a new dweller on unfamiliar thresholds:
 console your people with these thoughts, Christ, although grace,
 your grace, does not seek the comforts of grief.
 Blessed, he lives in the eternal abode of paradise,
 he who departing from view has put on the new garments
 of his heavenly post, at whose departure Belial (i.e., Satan)
 retired and groaned that there was nothing here of his.
 Him, Christ, I pray, may You join to the heavenly choirs;
 let him sing of You and ever behold You gentle,
 and beloved let him hang always upon Your world,
 bringing (*ferens*) aid to his children and wife».
 (for an alternate English translation, see Crocke, Harries 1982, p. 117)

– French:

a (Porena)

«Qui que tu sois qui admireras les sommets du tombeau qui s'élevaient vers le ciel
 tu diras: comme il était grand ce Probus qui est déposé ici,
 plus grand que ses ancêtres et beaux-parents (?) consuls et que tout autre consul,
 car lui, consul à son tour, a fait renaître deux familles unies.
 Préfet (du prétoire) à quatre reprises, aimé dans le monde entier,
 mais fameux sans limite dans tout ce qui est humain dans le monde.
 Ah, pourquoi, ô Rome, celui qui a prié avec insistance pour ton éternité
 n'a pas vécu aussi longtemps que les vœux qu'il a implorés pour toi?
 Quand un mois manquait à ses soixante ans,
 il a été enlevé au ciel du sein de la bien-aimée Proba.
 Mais loin de toi, Rome, de croire que ton Probus, pleine de tels mérites,
 est mort: il vit, et a atteint les étoiles!
 Lui, l'ami de la vertu, de la foi, de la piété, de l'honneur,
 jamais avare envers quiconque, mais généreux en s'offrant lui-même.
 Ce soulagement à un deuil si profond a été réservé à son excellente épouse
 Proba, qu'une urne les unisse dans un destin commun:
 elle était heureuse, oui vraiment heureuse, tant qu'il était encore en vie,
 liée à un homme digne d'elle, digne qu'elle partage la tombe avec lui».

b (Bruggisser 2003, pp. 81 f.)

«Délivré de ta dépouille, dans l'étendue de l'éther,
 tu parcours, indemne de tous les vices, un chemin sûr».

ce qu'en ton nom tu illustres, après l'avoir imité dans ta conduite pareillement, lavé par le Jourdain, tu es maintenant un Probus meilleur.

Riche en biens, célèbre par ta naissance, éminent par tes honneurs, éclatant par tes faisceaux, digne d'un aïeul consul, préfet gouvernant deux fois les peuples en un siège deux fois accordé, ces distinctions du monde, ces titres de nobles, plus âgé, tu les dépasses, comblé du don du Christ: tel est ton véritable honneur, telle ta noblesse.

Tu prenais auparavant ton plaisir dans l'honneur de la table du souverain, dans la conversation avec le prince, dans l'amitié du souverain.

Maintenant plus proche du Christ, en possession de la demeure des saints, d'une lumière nouvelle tu jouis, lumière pour toi le Christ est à tes côtés.

O toi qui n'as en aucun moment à être pleuré par les tiens: alors que subsistait la vie

du corps te que l'esprit dirigeait ces membres, tu étais le premier et n'étais second en vertu par rapport à aucun de nos pères maintenant régénéré tu possèdes un repos éternel, entaché d'aucune faute sur tes blancs vêtements, et tu es nouvel habitant en des demeures inaccoutumées.

(au Christ) Par ces biens console les tiens, quoique la grâce, ta grâce, ô Christ, ne requière pas de consolation dans le chagrin.

Il vit, bienheureux dans le séjour éternel du paradis,

lui qui en s'en allant a revêtu les vêtements, nouveaux du don céleste; à son passage Bélial s'est retiré et a déploré que rien ici n'était à lui.

Puisses-tu, ô Christ, l'unir aux choeurs célestes, je t'en prie, qu'il te chante et te contemple éternellement dans ta sérénité et que toujours aimé il soit suspendu à tes lèvres:

puisses-tu apporter (*feras*) de l'aide à sa descendance et à son épouse!»

– Italian

a

«Chiunque sia tu che ammirerai le sommità della tomba che svettano verso il cielo dirai: quanto era grande quel Probus che è sepolto qui,

più grande dei suoi antenati e dei suoceri (?) consoli e di qualunque console, perché egli, console a sua volta, restaurò due casate congiunte.

Prefetto (del pretorio) per quattro volte, amato in tutto il mondo, ma smisurato nella fama in qualunque cosa nel mondo vi sia di umano.

Ah, perché, o Roma, colui che pregò insistentemente per la tua eternità non visse quanto i voti impetrati per il tuo bene?

Quando un mese mancava ai suoi sessanta anni, fu rapito verso i cieli dal grembo della diletta Proba.

Ma lungi da te, Roma, credere che il tuo Probus, ricolmo di tali meriti,
 sia morto: egli vive e ha raggiunto gli astri!
 Lui, l'amico della virtù, della fede, della pietà, dell'onore,
 mai avaro verso alcuno, ma generoso anche di se stesso.
 Questo sollievo a tanto profondo lutto ha ricevuto in sorte
 l'ottima moglie Proba, che una sola urna li unisca nell'identico destino:
 lei felice, sí davvero felice, finché egli restava in vita,
 legata a un uomo degno di lei, degna lei di condividere insieme con lui la tomba».

b

«Liberato dalle tue spoglie, nella distesa dell'etere
 tu percorri, libero da tutti i vizi, un cammino sicuro;
 quanto celebri con il tuo nome con equilibrio hai imitato con i tuoi costumi,
 e, lavato dal Giordano, sei adesso un Probus migliore.
 Ricco di beni e luminoso per nascita, primo fra tutti per la carriera,
 reso illustre dai fasci (consolari), degno dell'avo console,
 prefetto (del pretorio) che governò due volte popoli in una duplice sede,
 questi ornamenti mondani, questi titoli aristocratici
 tu, maturo, trascendi, ricolmo del dono di Cristo:
 questo è vero onore, questa è la tua nobiltà.
 Ti allietavi un tempo del privilegio di cenare con l'imperatore,
 della conversazione con il principe, dell'amicizia del sovrano:
 ora davvero vicino a Cristo, insediato nella dimora dei santi,
 godi di una luce nuova: luce per Te è Cristo presente.
 Oh Tu, che mai i Tuoi devono piangere, finché c'era vita
 nel corpo e lo spirito governava quelle membra,
 eri il primo, e non fosti secondo a nessuno dei padri per virtù;
 ora, rigenerato, sei nella pace perpetua,
 nessuna colpa oscura le tue candide vesti,
 e sei un neo-cittadino sulle soglie di dimore inconsuete.
 (Al Cristo) Con queste (certezze) consola i Tuoi, benché la Grazia,
 la Tua Grazia, o Cristo, non va in cerca di mestizie da consolare.
 Egli vive, beato, nella sede eterna del Paradiso,
 lui che lasciando il mondo indossò le vesti nuove
 del dono celeste; lui al cui passaggio Belial
 si è scansato e ha rimpianto che nulla lí fosse suo.
 Ti prego, o Cristo, di unirlo ai cori celesti,
 che egli canti Te e Ti contempi continuamente nella Tua serenità,
 e sempre da Te prediletto, sia appeso alle tue labbra,
 mentre Tu sostieni la sua discendenza e la sua sposa».
 (an alternate Italian translation of 'b' vv. 1-26 edited by M. Miceli, can be found in
 Janssens 1981, p. 31)

THE INSCRIPTION AND ITS PREFECTS: CRITICAL COMMENTARY, UPDATING,
OVERVIEWS

The inscription, chiselled on (at least) two separate epigraphic fields, was copied – probably in 1452 – by the humanist and ‘canonico di San Pietro’, Maffeo Vegio (1407-1458; on him and his works, see Della Schiava 2010). It was published in the fourth volume of his «De rebus antiquis memorabilibus Basilicae S. Petri Romae», which offers a historical-archaeological description of the basilica (in paragraphs 109-110, see below). Vegio’s work was compiled in Rome in four volumes between 1452 and 1458 and remained unfinished (see, after Valentini, Zucchetti 1946, pp. 375-98, the critical edition by Della Schiava 2009; on the manuscript tradition, the fortune and the cultural context of the work, see Della Schiava 2011 and 2014). Vegio’s precious fieldwork was stimulated by the radical transformations that took place in St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican from the mid-15th Century onwards (see Di Fruscia, Miglio 2012). In 1452 pope Niccolò V (1447-1455) began the demolition of the Constantinian basilica, which, after having stood for over a thousand years, was no longer structurally sound (on the pontiff and his building policy, see Miglio 2000; Bonatti, Manfredi 2000; Borsi 2009). Because of its location, the family tomb of Sex. Petronius Probus was one of the first ancient buildings to be destroyed by the pope’s extensive building interventions, and its materials were immediately reused in the early stages of construction of the new basilica. In all likelihood, the tomb of Probus was a rectangular building in the shape of a basilica (approximately 18 × 12 m.). It probably had a double interior colonnade, which would have divided the room into three naves, with an entrance on the long side. The sepulcher was aligned from East to West with the Constantinian basilica of St. Peter’s in the Vatican: not only was it oriented in the same way, but its short side (towards the East) was contiguous with the outer curve of the basilica’s apse (towards the West). Thus the tomb was almost an extension of the apse of the basilica, so that this important senator was buried exceptionally close to the tomb of the Apostle (see Bartolozzi Casti 2010-2011; D’arcangelo, Della Schiava 2012; Machado 2019, pp. 156-60). Some large central plan tombs of the Theodosian emperors, who were Christians, were built a few years later to the South of Probus’ sepulchre in order to be close to St. Peter’s burial (see Biering, von Hesberg 1987; Alchermes 1999, pp. 7-9; Paolucci 2008; McEvoy 2013b; Thacker 2013; Vollmer 2019; on the topography of the Vatican region in Antiquity, see Liverani 1999, pp. 13-43, in part. pp. 147 f.; Liverani 2003. Concerning the growth in

importance of this *trans-Tiberim* region since the end of the 4th Century AD, see Fraschetti 1999; Bauer 2012b; as regards the Constantinian phases of St. Peter's basilica, see Liverani 2013; Brandenburg 2017). When Probus died in 390/394 AD, he had already arranged (probably around 380 AD) for his great funerary edifice to be positioned as close as possible to the Apostle's tomb. It is unlikely that the Roman aristocracy were particularly desirous to be buried in this area at that time (we know nothing of the 359 AD sepulcher that housed the famous sarcophagus of Iunius Bassus Theotecnius, found in 1597 under the apse of the new St. Peter's basilica, close to the martyr's tomb, see PPRET 10).

The plan of Probus' sepulcher is known from a drawing by Tiberio Alfarano (1525-1596) («De Basilicae Vaticanae antiquissima et nova structura», see Cerrati 1914, Tav. I, letter k, on which, see Silvan 1989-1990; Della Schiava 2007). Although Alfarano drew the plan sometime between 1571 and 1582, the sepulchre had already been destroyed for more than a century. We do not know which graphic sources he drew on and his plan of the building is not considered completely reliable (doubts are cast by Liverani 1999, pp. 147 f.; already in this perspective, see De Rossi 1888, p. 348: «unde acceptam nescio, qua fide dignam deinde dicam»). The proximity of the tomb to the apse of the Constantinian basilica condemned the former to demolition, since Nicholas V's new transept and apse were intended to extend westwards over the area occupied by the senator's sepulcher (cf. Thoenes 2005, pp. 64-72). About six months before the tomb was destroyed in 1452, Maffeo Vegio hastened to visit it and copied the inscription, or rather the inscriptions, containing Probus' epitaph in verse (concerning its authenticity, see Matthews 1990², pp. 400 f.).

The epitaph in verse in honour of Petronius Probus is actually composed of two epigrams of unequal length: one of 9 and one of 15 elegiac distichs in Latin (48 verses). Maffeo Vegio distinguishes the two sets of verses in his transcription and confirms that the two epigrams were engraved on different epigraphic fields (see «De rebus antiquis memorabilibus ...», ed. Della Schiava 2009, § 108, p. 111):

«In hoc ergo ego templum ante sex forte menses quam dirueretur, nescio quo spiritu agente, introivi. Videram enim characteres litterarum inscriptos marmoribus, que columnis in fronte atque utroque ex latere superposita erant, quos magno cum labore (nam nato ibi musco undique pene obscurati erant) excepi. Et, nisi tunc excepisset, inscriptio eorum penitus deperisset quoniam paulo post marmora illa propter magnitudinem et pulchritudinem eorum in magnos usus operum fabrilium conversa sunt. Continebat

vero inscriptio illarum litterarum versus in laudem et memoriam eius quem diximus Probi, qui et eum praefectum praetorio et in ultima etiam senectute ad fidem Christi conversum fuisse, sicuti et supradictum est, aperte demonstrant. Sepulchrum vero eius marmoreum imaginibus sacris insculptum» (i.e. the sarcophagus of Probus) «dum fundamenta altius effoderentur, inventum est ruderebus obsitum sed multo auro plenum, quod vestibus eius intextum erat. Nunc illud repositum est in oratorio sancti Thome Apostoli baptismalis fontis causa; sed iam versus ipsos audiamus: (ibid. § 109) *Exuviis resolutus in aetheris aequore tutum* (etc.)

(ibid. § 110, p. 112) Hoc erat epitaphium Probi, quod sequebatur et aliud eius simul ac Probae uxoris huiusmodi: *Sublimes quisquis tumuli miraberis arces* (etc.)».

Vegio's account raises two problems: 1) the position of the two epigraphic fields in the building, and their relationship to the content of the verses of the two epigrams; 2) the structure and nature of the two epigrams.

THE LOCATION OF THE INSCRIPTIONS

Vegio's concise expression «Videram enim characteres litterarum inscriptos marmoribus, que columnis in fronte atque utroque ex latere superposita erant» fails to make clear the exact position of the epigraphic fields (the ambiguity is also noted by Niquet 2000, pp. 42-44, and by Witschel 2012, p. 398, n. 225). In 1888 De Rossi analysed Vegio's description (*ICUR* II/1, pp. 347-49) and suggested that in the inner portico of the sepulcher, the columns, which divided the room into three naves, also supported an architrave. According to him, the verses were engraved on both sides of the inner colonnade: the 15 distichs of the epigram 'b' (*Exuviis* ...) were engraved along the inner architrave that ran on three sides of the hall; the 9 distichs of the epigram 'a' (*Sublimes* ...) were engraved along the frontal architrave in full view of anyone entering the tomb. Krautheimer (1964, p. 174) assumed that the two long epigrams occupied not only the architrave of the inner colonnade, but also the architrave above the pilasters along the walls of the hall (cf. also D'Arcangelo, Della Schiava 2012, pp. 12 f.). From Vegio's description it seems that the interior of the tomb did indeed contain both columns and architraves. It seems less likely that the colonnade («columnis in fronte atque utroque ex latere superposita erant») surrounded the outside of the building, although Vegio does call it a *templum* and remark that it was rich in columns (§ 106, Della Schiava 2009, p. 110: [...] «templum magis prae magnitudine eius quam oratorium, quod

nostris temporibus vidimus, nunc autem dirutum. [...] Erat porro nobile, magnum multisque marmoreis columnis erectum sed negligentius habitum nullique iam accessum [...]). We should note that epigram 'a' (*Sublimes* ...) consists of 621 letters and epigram 'b' (*Exuviis* ...) consists of 1022 letters. Such long epigrams which are engraved horizontally on lintels, in characters large enough to be readable at some distance, do not seem to be attested in late antique Latin epigraphy. Moreover, the epigram 'a' (*Sublimes* ...) in vv. 1-2 addresses itself to a casual reader, as was usual in the funerary inscriptions that were placed outside the tombs and read from the street. This epigram does not contain any Christian elements and repeats the traditional funerary expressions that one would expect to find outside the tombs in Roman necropoli. In fact, Schmidt's (1999, p. 105) and Witschel's (2012, pp. 397 f.) hypotheses suggest that epigram 'a' was inscribed outside, on the front of the building, and that epigram 'b' was inscribed along the inner and outer sides of the architrave inside the hall: the first seven distichs on one side, the last eight distichs on the other side. However, the length of the two epigrams suggests that they were engraved in groups of verses, i.e. not on a single horizontal line. If Vegio's viewpoint was the entrance to the hall of the tomb, he may have described three groups of verses: one engraved on the wall or above the colonnade in front («in fronte») – perhaps the 18 verses of epigram 'a' (*Sublimes* ...) – and the other two engraved on the two walls or above the two side colonnades («atque utroque ex latere») – perhaps the first 14 verses and the next 16 verses of epigram 'b' (*Exuviis* ...). The question of the layout of the two inscriptions remains open.

We do not agree with Colafrancesco's (2008, p. 39) hypothesis that Vegio read the two epigrams from the collapsed lintel, because such a long text, if engraved horizontally, i.e. on different blocks of a long lintel, would not have been readable once the blocks were broken up due to the collapse. Instead, it seems very likely that the interior of the abandoned tomb was filled with debris, earth and plants, as Vegio claims, and that its floor level in 1452 was much higher than the original one, i.e. the pavement of the 4th Century hall (in order to recover the materials, the demolishers had to dig inside the tomb, where they found the sarcophagi, see above). The fact that the 15th Century floor level was higher would have allowed Vegio to get a closer look at the inscriptions, which would have been engraved over the colonnade, allowing him to clean the moss from the stone and to read the epigrams up close.

STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

Vegio has transcribed the two epigrams in his work in the reverse order to that in which they have always been published. As it seems, the two poems were composed together and engraved at the same time, perhaps in the year of Probus' death or shortly after.

Following the victory of Theodosius I over Maximus (August 388 AD), Probus returned from Thessalonica to Rome, whereupon, in 389 AD, he won a hereditary dispute with Aurelius Symmachus (Symm. *epist.* II 30, see Cecconi 2002, pp. 239-47; Matthews 1986, pp. 174 f.; Poglio 2008; it is possible that the Persian embassy that met Probus, according to Paul. Med. *vita Ambr.* 25, took place in this year, cf. Klíma 1989). Sometime after this and before the inauguration of the joint consulate of his sons on January 1st 395 AD, Probus died (in his *Panegyricus dicto Olybrio et Probino consulibus* Claudianus celebrates the mother of the consuls Anicia Faltonia Proba, implying that she is still alive, vv. 177 and 192-194, while the eulogy of her husband Probus is entirely in the past tense, vv. 31-60; a date of death in the year 390 is very probable, see for example Cameron 2012, p. 143; for editions and commentaries on the *Panegyricus*, see Taegert 1988; Charlet 2017; on his poetics, see Meunier 2021). The epitaph inscribed in the tomb must date to sometime between 390 and 394 AD. Machado (2019, p. 159) suggests that the statues in honour of Probus and his wife Proba (see PPRET 65 e 66), were placed in the Vatican tomb by their sons on the occasion of its inauguration and not before 395 AD (the provenance of the inscribed bases however is unknown).

Differences in the two epigrams include the tone, the narrator and the addressees.

The epigram 'a' (*Sublimes ...*) has an exclusively profane content, with no reference to the Christian faith. This inscription seems to be a 'speaking' funerary inscription. In vv. 1-6 the epitaph addresses the casual passerby, extolling the size and architectural magnificence of the 'mausoleum' (vv. 1-2), after which the inscription praises the glorious senator who created it and his extraordinary career (vv. 4-6). In vv. 7-12 the epigram contains an apostrophe to the personified city of Rome, illustrates the circumstances of the senator's sudden and premature death, but reassures Rome of the blessed fate of its favourite deceased. In vv. 13-18 the epitaph falls within the canons of traditional funerary epigraphy: it contains a *consolatio* in which it praises the moral qualities of the deceased, and declares that the widow's grief is mitigated by the prospect of being laid to rest in the same sarcophagus with her husband.

The epigram ‘b’ (*Exuviis* ...) has an exclusively Christian content. This inscription seems to express the point of view of an anonymous author-narrator (see the reference to Probus’ relatives in vv. 15 and 21, the invocation to Christ in v. 27). The inscription is divided into two parts: in the first part (vv. 1-20) the anonymous author addresses the deceased, Petronius Probus, and extols his Christian faith, his baptism, and his ascent to heaven as infinitely more important than the glory that the senator obtained during his earthly life. In the second part (vv. 21-30) the anonymous author turns to Christ and begs him to admit Probus to the perfect contemplation of the same Christ-Resurrected in Paradise (this Christian apostrophe is opposed to the apostrophe to Rome in epigram ‘a’).

It is not possible to examine the verses of this double funerary epigram in detail. We limit ourselves to a few commentary notes on Probus’ family and career (for a broader analysis of the two epigrams, see Schmidt 1999, Trout 2001, Bruggisser 2003, Piccioni 2006, Colafrancesco 2008, Matthews 2009, pp. 134-38).

REMARKS ON EPIGRAM ‘a’

3, *socerisque*: Schmidt (1999, p. 103) and Trout (2001, p. 161) prefer the singular form *soceroque*. Indeed, Q. Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius is the only father-in-law of Probus attested by the sources, and he was consul in 379 AD (see *CLRE*, pp. 292 f.; on his career and his praetorian prefectures, see *PLRE* I, pp. 640-42 and *PPRET* 70, 71, 72). He is the father of Anicia Faltonia Proba, who was the only wife of Probus (on the family of Petronius Probus and on the connection of Petronius Probus with the Anicii, see Settapani 2000, pp. 373-80; Cameron 2012, pp. 136-40; see the stemmi in Chastagnol 1962, pp. 291 f.; *PLRE* I, pp. 1133 and 1144; Settapani 2000, p. 375; Cameron 2012, pp. 137 and 141).

3, *consulibus proavis*: in the second half of the 4th Century the family of Petronius Probus held the record in the Roman aristocracy for attaining the ordinary consulship in every generation from the age of Constantine onwards: Petronius Probianus (*PLRE* I, pp. 733-34), Probus’ grand-father, was consul in 322 AD (*CLRE*, pp. 178 f.), Petronius Probinus (*PLRE* I, pp. 735), Probus’ father, was consul in 341 AD (*CLRE*, pp. 216 f.) – they are extolled in *PPRET* 63, ll. 16-18. Then Petronius Probus was the ordinary consul in 371 AD together with the emperor Gratian (*CLRE*, pp. 276 f.). When Probus died, this was a record in the aristocracy of Rome. After him, his sons Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius and Anicius Probinus were consuls in 395

AD (*CLRE*, pp. 324 f.), his son Anicius Probus was consul in 406 AD together with the emperor Arcadius (*CLRE*, pp. 346 f.). Moreover, as said, when Probus was very powerful under the emperor Gratian, his father-in-law Q. Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius was consul in 379 AD (above).

4, *quod geminas ... domos*: the higher value of the ordinary consulship of Probus in 371 AD consisted in having restored (*reddidit*) the consulship simultaneously to the two families, Petronii and Anicii, after a lull of 37 years. He did this through his marriage to Anicia Faltonia Proba who was an Anicia by her mother (Tyrrania Anicia Iuliana, see PPRET 70) and her grandmother, Faltonia Betitia Proba (*PLRE I*, p. 732). Amnius Manius Caesonius Nicomachus Anicius Paulinus was the last anician to be ordinary consul in 334 AD (see *CLRE*, pp. 202 f.). The equality of the two families is emphasised by the adjective *gemina*: two ‘twin’ lineages of equal social standing. That each generation and branch of Probus’ family was able to gain the consulate was obsessively celebrated (cf. Auson. *epist.* 16 Pastorino, vv. 21-26, 31-34, 69-72, 96-101; Hier. *epist.* 130, 3; Claud. *paneg. dictus Olybrio et Probino coss.* passim; Prudent. *c. Symm.* 1, vv. 554-557). On the celebration of the consulate in the inscriptions of Probus’ family, see PPRET 65 e 66.

5, *praefectus ... in orbem*: concerning the disputed four praetorian prefectures held by Probus, see PPRET 59 and below, remarks to verse ‘b’ 7. The love for Probus was not universal. This statement contrasts with the negative judgement on our senator expressed by both the pagan Ammianus (*Amm.* XXVII 11 and XXX 5, 1-11) and the Christian Hieronymus (*Hier. chron.* a. 372, p. 246 Helm). A celebration of the virtues and morality of Probus occurs in vv. 31-60 of Claudianus, *Panegyricus dicto Olybrio et Probino consulibus* in honour of Probus’ sons, who served together as ordinary consuls in 395 AD.

6, *fama*: Paulinus of Milan (*vita Ambr.* 25) celebrates the universal fame that surrounded Probus’ personality and recalls the visit of Persian ambassadors to Rome to meet the senator shortly before he died (it is noteworthy that our inscription underlines Probus’ fame *in orbe*). The success and glory of the great senator – a man feared by many, even aristocrats, and loved by his clients – was definitively secured after the defeat of the usurper Maximus (388 AD), whom Probus had thwarted (see Porena 2020a, pp. 118-27; 2023a, pp. 189-208). His fame thus grew towards the end of his life (on *fama* in Late Antiquity and in the early Middle Age, see Guastella 2017).

7, *Roma*: concerning the personification of Rome in late antique iconography and literature, see Roberts 2001; Cameron 2015. Rome personified is the protagonist in one hundred verses of the *Panegyricus* for the sons of

Probus (Claud. *paneg. dictus Olybrio et Probino coss.* 75-173, on which, see Bernstein 2016; Berlincourt 2019).

9, *sex denos ... annos*: this is the only evidence of Probus' age at the time of his death, sixty. On the basis of this evidence, scholars place Probus' date of birth between 328 (PLRE I, p. 737) and 334 AD (Seeck 1883, p. civ; Seyfarth 1970, p. 413).

10, *dilectae ... Proba*: Anicia Faltonia Proba (PLRE I, pp. 732 f.; PChBE II, pp. 1831-33) – the noble woman who, through her marriage to Probus, joined the Anician branch to the Petronii (see Cameron 2012, pp. 136-40) – was the daughter of Q. Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius (above) and Tyrannia Anicia Iuliana (PLRE I, p. 468, for a monument in her honour, see PPRET 70). She was a Christian; we do not know when she was born, she married Probus – who, as said, died between 390 and 394 AD – and she died later, after 410 AD and before 432 AD. She thus remained a widow for some time. She retired to Africa after the sack of Rome in 410 AD, and together with the women of her family gave herself up to a secluded Christian life, aiding the church with her wealth (see Laurence 2002). She probably returned to Rome in 414 AD and, when she died, she was buried in her husband's sarcophagus in the tomb of Probus close to St. Peter's basilica (below). Her three sons, ordinary consuls in 395 and 406 AD, and daughter-in-law erected several inscribed monuments to her, of which three survive (see PPRET 65 e 66). This is a sign of Proba's importance in the management of family wealth after her husband's death. She became the head of the family after the death of her husband. The evocation of Proba and her *consolatio* in the final lines of the epigram 'a' are an elegant way of exalting Probus' wife as the person responsible for the funeral of Petronius Probus, for the preparation of the tomb and sarcophagus, and probably for the supervision of the verse inscriptions and their engraving. The term *gremium* (in reference to Proba) occurs also in the personification of Rome in Claud. *paneg. dictus Olybrio et Probino coss.* 144, where the goddess replaces Proba as the mother of Probus' sons-consuls.

13, *virtutis ... amicus*: the celebration of Probus' virtues contrasts with the criticism circulating about the senator's conduct (cf. Amm. XXVII 11). They are extolled in the inscription in honour of Probus from the *domus Pinciana* (cf. PPRET 59), and in the texts written by the senator's friends (cf. Auson. *epist.* 16 Pastorino/Schenkl) or clients (cf. the posthumous eulogy of Probus in Claud. *paneg. dictus Olybrio et Probino coss.* 31-60).

14, *parcus ... sui*: one of the criticisms directed at Probus was his avarice. Ammianus asserts that Probus was only generous to his friends and clients;

the historian was suspicious of the accumulation of his huge patrimony (Amm. XXVII 11, 1-2). It is not by chance that this verse overturns that negative judgement. A recurrent evocation of Probus in Claudianus' Panegyric is his generosity (Claud. *paneg. dictus Olybrio et Probino coss.* 42-54). His generosity is also explicitly extolled by his clients in Gortyna (PPRET 58, ll. 8-9) and Capua (PPRET 60, l. 6).

16, *iungat ... pares*: as Maffeo Vegio states (above), in 1452/1453, during the excavation inside the tomb of Probus a columnar sarcophagus portraying the 'Traditio Legis' scene was found. The inhumation was rich and contained remains of luxurious clothes and gold. The rear of the sarcophagus shows a scene of '*dextrarum iunctio*'. The sarcophagus is identified as being that of Petronius Probus and Anicia Faltonia Proba. As of 1607 it was located in the Oratorio di S. Tommaso, only to be moved to the Oratorio di S. Maria della Febbre. After 1694 it was placed in the Cappella del SS. Sacramento, and finally since 1923 it has been displayed in the Museo Petriano, now hall VI of the Sale Archeologiche delle Grotte Vaticane (cf. Deichmann 1967, p. 277, nr. 678, Tav. 107; Dresken-Weiland 2003, pp. 118 e 377 f., nr. E 5). On the second sarcophagus found in the tomb – one part of which is now in the Louvre Museum (sarc. 'Borghese'/Louvre, nr. 690, front, left and right sides) and the other in the Capitoline Museums (rear) – cf. for the parts preserved in the Louvre Museum (inv. Ma 2980) Baratte 1985, pp. 312-16, nr. 212; Dresken-Weiland 2003, nr. E 26; for the rear preserved in the Capitoline Museums (inv. 2071) cf. Deichmann 1967, pp. 347 f., nr. 827, Tav. 133.

18, *digno ... tumulo*: note that in the Panegyricus for Olybrius and Probinus the poet Claudianus, depicting the scene of the mother Proba adorning the sons – now consuls – with the traditional *trabea*, praises her in terms similar to this verse of our epitaph: «coniuge digna Probo» (Claud. *paneg. dictus Olybrio et Probino coss.* 199).

REMARKS ON EPIGRAM 'b'

Vv. 1-4 extolls the beneficial effects of baptism, which cleanses Probus of his sins. Vv. 5-20 takes up the elements of Probus' earthly success and diminishes them in the face of his new dimension in Paradise. Among the earthly successes of Probus – patrimonial wealth, noble birth, glorious career in the service of the *res publica*, ordinary consulship – we dwell on the formula relating to Probus' four praetorian prefectures. In v. 7 the anonymous poet says: «bis gemina populos praefectus sede gubernans». Generally this expression is considered to be an arithmetic sum of «two times two posts» as

a prefect, i.e. four appointments (cf. *quarto* in the epigram ‘a’ v. 5, and the numeral adverbs in PPRET 62, 65, 66); the noun *sedes* is always interpreted as a synonym of office, charge, prefecture.

Recently Porena (2020a, in part. pp. 106, 116 f., 127 f.; 2023a, pp. 169 f., 187, 207 f.) proposed to interpret *sedes* literally as being the seat of the prefect, and the expression *gemina sede* as indicating two offices held in two prefectures at the same time. He has suggested that from 376 AD there was an autonomous prefecture of Illyricum, separate from Italy-Africa (although one cannot be sure of the geographical extent of Illyricum, whether it extended from Crete to Noricum or whether it was limited to the dioceses of Dacia and Macedonia). Concerning the reconstruction of Probus’ prefectural career (Porena 2020a; 2023a, pp. 129-216; see PPRET 59) the following sequence of appointments has been suggested:

- 1st praetorian prefecture in 368-375/376 AD over Italia-Illyricum-Africa, appointed by Valentinian I.
- [376/379 AD Gothic crisis and creation of an autonomous praetorian prefecture of Illyricum]
- 2nd praetorian prefecture in (379?) 380-382 AD over Italia-(Illyricum)-Africa, appointed by Gratian.
- 3rd praetorian prefecture in 381-382 AD over autonomous Illyricum, appointed by Gratian (in 381/382 the two positions remained separate and were Probus’ first *gemina sedes* in our epigram).
- [383-388 AD usurpation of Magnus Maximus] 4th praetorian prefecture in 384-385 AD over Italia-(Illyricum)-Africa and only nominally over Galliae, appointed by Valentinian II (the two positions remained separate and were Probus’ second *gemina sedes* in our epigram).

If this hypothesis is correct, the anonymous author of the epigram ‘b’ would have emphasised the primacy of the deceased Probus, having been prefect twice over two praetorian prefectures.

The most discussed aspect of epigram ‘b’ is the hypothesis about its author. Galletier (1922, p. 157) thinks that the author of epigram ‘a’ was Anicia Faltonia Proba herself, and that she commissioned a Christian epigram, ‘b’, to compensate or balance the first, wholly secular epigram. Schmidt (1999, p. 107) appropriately points out that epigram ‘b’ was composed and narrated by a poet from outside Probus’ family (vv. 15, 27, 30), and speculates that it was composed by Bishop Ambrose of Milan. The Milanese prelate could give an authoritative interpretation of the fate of the powerful senator, who had helped him at the beginning of his career (Paul. Med. *vita Ambr.* 5 and 8, 3). On the basis of a lexical and linguistic analysis, Bruggisser (2003) ques-

tions Schmidt's hypothesis that Ambrose was the author of epigram 'b'. Although this view is unproven in terms of linguistic, literary and stylistic comparisons, it remains a possibility. Piccioni (2006) accepts Schmidt's hypothesis, but emphasises the fusion and unity of the two epigrams, not their thematic opposition; similarly Witschel (2012, p. 399).

In our opinion the author of epigram 'a' is not easy to identify. It could be Anicia Faltonia Proba, or the couple's young sons, Olybrius and Probinus, future consuls, whose poetic culture is mentioned by Claudianus (e.g. Claud. *paneg. dictus Olybrio et Probino cons.* 150; cf. Cameron 2011, pp. 327-35) and whose education was close to Ausonius' heart (Auson. *epist.* 16 Pastorino/Schenkl addressed to their father Probus); or perhaps the author could be the poet Claudianus, a client of the family (Claud. *carm. min.* 41, 13-16, p. 335 Birt, see Consolino 2016). In any case, the poem 'a' was created in Probus' family milieu, and shows clear thematic connections with the *Panegyricus dictus Olybrio et Probino consulibus*, commissioned by the consul brothers to the poet Claudianus for the solemnity of January 1st 395 AD (since it highlights virtue, generosity and the career of their deceased father; the apostrophe to Rome, etc.). The style of epigram 'b' seems to be independent of epigram 'a' and is that of a *laudatio funebris* of Probus. Epigram 'b' was composed by someone from outside the family, an authoritative personality who could address the deceased senator directly and give this illustrious personage and his audience a Christian interpretation of his (glorious) earthly life and his entry into Paradise after baptism. The author prays to Christ to receive the soul of the great man and to protect his family. It is possible that Bishop Ambrose, a client of Probus and his collaborator during the recent usurpation of Maximus (see Porena 2020a, pp. 118-27; 2023a, pp. 189-208), composed this poem. Bruggisser's scepticism seems partly justified on the linguistic-literary level. Nevertheless, on a historical level, given their patron-client relationship, it is plausible that the most powerful senator of the second half of the 4th Century AD was celebrated immediately after his death in his Roman 'mausoleum' close to St. Peter's basilica by the most important bishop of the same period (concerning these social relationships, see Mazzarino 1989). Ambrose as bishop and client had the pastoral and social duty to intercede with God for the salvation of his patron's soul.

The double epitaph in verse for Probus is rooted in the republican tradition of epitaphs in verse (see Wolff 2000), but associates the senator with his wife (the rich women of the senatorial class gained independence and visibility in late antique Rome; on the epigraphy of high-ranking women in Rome, see Niquet 2000, pp. 187-99). This seems a fashionable choice in the

aristocracy of Rome in the late 4th Century AD (see PPRET 77, Praetextatus' epitaph containing his longue eulogy written by his wife Paulina and the deceased's two short poems for her). The pagan prose epitaph of Praetextatus with the symmetry between priesthoods and initiations and his civil *cursus honorum* sits well with the three *carmina*, which are mutually shared between husband and wife and engraved on the same monument. Traditional career, religious vocation and the affective element all appear to be syntonik. In contrast, although the two epigrams in memory of Probus converse with each other, they show a certain difficulty in merging these aspects of the life of the deceased and his wife. In Probus' double epitaph, earthly glory is conferred by an excellent senatorial career and nobility at the top of Roman society, a very traditional element which is widely celebrated in his inscribed monuments (see PPRET 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 66). The intrusiveness of the earthly successes appears overbearing and clashes with the declaration of humility of the devout Christian in epigram 'b'. Proba, although important in the construction of the image of her deceased husband, does not appear to participate or be involved in her husband's religious and otherworldly destiny (see 'a' vv. 10, 15-18 and 'b' v. 30). There seems to be more harmony and dialogue in the pagan couple than in the christian couple. Thus the double epitaph is skewed towards the senator's earthly success. His baptism is barely mentioned, the image of Paradise associates the familiarity of the living Probus with the Roman emperors, while linking the closeness of the Probus' soul, now deceased, to Christ. The degree of success in heaven remains the measure of earthly honours ('b' v. 10): Probus is exalted to the summit of earthly *nobilitas* and similarly to the summit of the ranks of the blessed in heaven.

On funerary epigrams in the context of the epigraphy of the city of Rome in Late Antiquity, see Witschel 2012 (p. 373 concerning the «Interaktion von 'alter' und 'neuer' Inschriftenkultur»; on Probus pp. 374, n. 93, 386, n. 149 and 397-99); Trout 2013 and 2016 (originality and overcoming of gender limits). On the evolution of the Latin epigram from 'pagan' to christian, see Pietri 1982 and contributions in Sanders 1991. On the discussed problem of the christianization of the aristocracy in Rome, in relation to the epitaph of Probus, see Salzman 2001, pp. 59 f., 202 f., 214 f.; Matthews 2009, pp. 134-39; Machado 2011, pp. 510-16; Machado 2019, pp. 162-97; Wagner 2019, pp. 288 f.

PIERFRANCESCO PORENA