

The literary environment of the Greco-Roman world has many aspects, and while the canonical texts and authors rightfully take pride of place in any discussion of ancient literacy, the production and circulation of literary works far outside the cultural centers of Athens or Rome can offer invaluable insight into the development of literary culture on the frontiers. One example of localized production on the periphery of Greco-Roman civilization comes to us from the provinces on the Danube, Pannonia Superior and Pannonia Inferior. The Roman occupation and colonization of this region gave rise to a corpus of epigraphic poetry containing approximately seventy texts and fragments, of which the majority come originally from a funerary context. These verse epitaphs, most of them in Latin but a few in Greek, attest to the production of original poetry in the Pannonian centers of Aquincum and Carnuntum as well as smaller towns throughout the provinces. Many of these inscriptions contain poems whose metricality appears defective by Classical standards; some of them are defective by any standard, including the later Latin used to write them. Nevertheless, the Pannonian verse epigraphic habit demonstrates the importance of poetic Latin and Greek in funerary practice. Building largely upon the work of Adamik (1995), Boatwright (2005), Cugusi (1996, 2007), and Kovács (2007, 2009-11), this paper will address the role played by verse inscription in the memorialization of Pannonians and Romans in these provinces by analyzing the register of language, the ratio of formulaic to individuated elements, and the biographical details of their prose prescripts and postscripts. This paper will argue that Pannonian verse inscription, and specifically epitaphs, illustrate the symbolic value of Latin and Greek poetry for displaying not only literacy, but also familial relationships and cultural identity among a wide range of Roman and provincial Pannonian social groups.

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