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Maecenas – *Musa* for Latin poets of the Augustan era

Abstract: Statesmen, glorious commanders or wise leaders valued and contributed to the development of literature, arts and sciences, but the one who cultivated best the love for literature was Maecenas. The period in which Maecenas lived equals with the Augustan period or "golden" age in regaining prosperity, glory and peace, of restoration of fundamental roman values. The literary patronage was a structure but also an ideology. The name of Maecenas became a symbol of its qualities and principles. Maecenas, was recognized by everyone as a great patron of literature, he was a noted political and public figure.

Keywords: *Musa, vates, patronus, carmen, officium, immortalitas*

Rezumat: (Mecena – *Musa* poezilor latini din perioada augustană) Personalități de stat, comandanți glorioși sau lideri în elepe au contribuit la valorizarea și dezvoltarea literaturii, artelor și științelor, dar cel care a cultivat cel mai bine dragostea pentru literatură a fost Mecena. Perioada în care a trăit Mecena este cea a lui Augustus, epocă de recâștigare a prosperității, a gloriei și a păcii, de restaurare a valorilor fundamentale romane. Patronajul literar a fost o structură, dar, de asemenea, și o ideologie. Numele de Mecena a devenit un simbol al calităților și al principiilor sale. Mecenas a fost recunoscut de către toată lumea ca un mare protector al literaturii, el a fost o figură politică și publică remarcabilă.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Musa, vates, patronus, carmen, officium, immortalitas*

If fame is measured by the spread and duration of fame, then Maecenas is at the same time the eloquent patriot, guide for the great statesmen, and above all, *musa* for Latin poets of the Augustan era. After more than two thousand years, the genius of Maecenas is floating across ages and borders through the writings which are due to him, for as Horace says, they make illustrious men's soul to rise:

„quam per vatis opus mores animique virorum
clarorum apparent”¹.

One of the oldest cities in Etruria, Arretium, where Maecenas was born and where his ancestors have reigned as kings”² stands on a hill about three miles from Arezzo, southeast on a hill called Poggio di San Cornelio or Castel Secco”³, where today there are ruins of Etruscan walls and” still have a height of about ten meters and still have eight massive buttresses, located at frequent intervals”⁴.

¹ Horatius, *Opera omnia*, cared edition, introductory study, notes and indices by Mihai Nichita, Universe Publishing House, Bucharest, 1980, vol. II, c.II, *Ep.* I, pp. 288-289.

² Ronald Syme, *Roman Revolution. Rome between 60 î. Hr.–14 d. Hr.*, translation by Gabriel Tudor and Simona Ceaușu, All Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010, p. 219.

³ George Dennis, *The World of the Etruscans*, translation by Ersilia Moroianu, foreword by Ion Frunzetti, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1982, vol. II, p. 293.

⁴ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 293.

Arretium was a large and prosperous city built of brick, made famous through the red clay pottery, "these potteries were made of a very fine red clay, coral pink on the wings were decorated with reliefs and potter's name [...] different in style, material, decoration"⁵.

The people whose offspring was Maecenas was the last who governed Rome. Theodor Mommsen indicates this fact in "*The Roman History*", where he says that "the last family that ruled Rome, that of Tarquin, was of Etruscan origin, whether it was fired from Tarquinius as the legend certifies or from Caere, where it was recently discovered the family tomb of the Tarchnas"⁶. In "*The World of the Etruscans*", George Dennis believes that this nation had a civilizing effect on Italy "yet no one can doubt that the Etruscan civilization was the first Italic civilization that gave Rome the decisive impulse and showed it the paths of glory and success"⁷.

Maecenas's ancestors settled in Rome, where they received equestrian rank⁸. Maecenas spoke Latin; his conscience was conceived by Latin pattern. He spoke Latin and then Greek, loved poetry, politics, friendship, but his greatest love was for Rome and Augustus century poets. The eternity of his glory binds to his exemplary life, his vast spirit and invaluable influence as patron of literature and cultural life in general. Like Muses, Maecenas took care of all aspects of *thinking*: rhetoric, persuasion, wisdom. *Muses* had a great importance in the history of Roman thought.

Mythology has developed for the service of literature, literary work is one that endures, and the study of myth remained inseparable from that of literary works. Pierre Grimal states that "with the school of Callimah, legend is no longer the base of the poem, but often its principal object"⁹, more "deprived from its popular sources and its religious support, mythology evolves in multiple directions: the neo-mystical symbolism of the Pythagoreans, the Epicurean and Stoic moralizing symbolism, literary or plastic patterns of the statuary creation or painting"¹⁰. Just like other deities, Muses were dedicated lines, and even honorary monuments and sacred places¹¹.

Mythology is "an instrument of expression, a rhetorical or poetic in itself"¹². To

⁵ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 291.

⁶ Theodor Mommsen, *The Roman History*, foreword by Ph. D. Emil Condurache, translation by Ioachim Nicolaus, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1987, vol. I, p. 84.

⁷ George Dennis, *The World of the Etruscans*, translation by Ersilia Moroianu, foreword by Ion Frunzetti, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1982, vol. I, p. 125.

⁸ Ronald Syme, *Roman Revolution. Rome between 60 î. Hr.–14 d. Hr.*, translation by Gabriel Tudor and Simona Ceau u, All Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010, p. 97.

⁹ Pierre Grimal, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Mythology*, foreword by Charles Picard, translation from French by Mihai Popescu, Saeculum I.O Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p. 16.

¹⁰ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 17.

¹¹ Léon Homo, *Nouvele histoire romaine*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1941, p. 359: „conséquence de même caractère topographique qui forernit pour la construction des édifices publics l'espace trop souvent parcimonieusement mesuré dans le reste de la ville-les monuments commencent à y faire leur apparition: Temple d'Apollon an V-e siècle, temples de Bellone et de Janus, cirque de Flaminius, an III-e temples d'Hercule et des Muses, de Junon, de Juno Sospita, des Lares Permarini, et de la Piété, portiques de Minucius et de Metellus, an II-e, temple de Venus Victrix, portique de Philippe et de Pompée, théâtre de Pompée, an I-er, pour ne citer que les principaux”.

¹² Pierre Grimal, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Mythology*, foreword by Charles Picard, translation from French by Mihai Popescu, Saeculum I.O Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p. 17.

explain more precisely what the Muses meant, Pierre Grimal mentions Hesiod "who boast of their benefits: they were the kings' companions and dictated them convincing words, the words needed to reconcile quarrels and restore peace between people, the Muses gave kings the gift of kindness that makes them loved by their subjects"¹³. *Muses* were daughters of Zeus and Mnemosine. Mnemosine was the personification of Memory. She was the daughter of Uranus and Gaia¹⁴. Muses were "divine singers whose choirs and hymns enjoyed Zeus and all the gods"¹⁵.

Pierre Grimal states that in classical era there were nine Muses, each holding an office: "Calliope was considered the muse of epic poetry, Clio of history, Polhimmia of pantomime, Euterpe that of the flute song, Terpsihore of lyric poetry and dance, Erato of the choral poetry, Melpomene of tragedy, Thalia of comedy and Urania of astronomy"¹⁶.

In Rome, the Nymphs of springs, *Camene* were early assimilated to Muses¹⁷. Very interesting is the etymology of the word *Camenae*, from the verb *canere* (to sing) explained by Professor Dan Negrescu in his book *Culture and Civilization in Words*: "the verb has implications within the sacred areas, originally was a term of magic omen, whose forms were the rhymed melopees, hence the later meaning of *to sing*, but to sing someone else's actions, thoughts belonging to someone else, from another world, hence the intermediate status of the *vates* and then, of the poet. The meaning of to sing refers to humans, birds, instruments. Its intensive form – *cantare* (hence *cantator*, *cantatrix*, *cantatio*, *incantare* and *excantare* – both with magical effect in *Lex XII Tabularum*, aiming influence on crops "qui fruges excantassit") mostly kept meaning of *to sing*, from *canere* deriving the nominal forms in *-cen*: *tibicen*, *tubicen*. Ancients associated *camen* to *canere*, originally the noun denoting a rhythmic magic formula, a text with religious implications (see *Carmen Fratrum Arvalium*), penetrating into literary language, it means any production having a rhythm and that could be sung, *carmen* is explained from a **can-men*, anyway reported to the root of *canere* + the instrumental suffix *-men*. Despite numerous assumptions (Macrobius gives it as being Etruscan), it appears that *Camenae-arum* have to be related to *canere* and *carmen*, at least semantically, but also by root. The same radical *can-* would be in the name of Camillus, too"¹⁸.

Camenas were mentioned by Naevius, the poet for whom "poetic work is characterized by a national coat completely, it stands in a strong and serious drama to his national epic"¹⁹. Naevius expressed in his epitaph, the benefits that o the Roman people owes to him: Top of Form. The courageous attempt of Naevius to form through a history an epic and a Roman drama was based on the noble feeling that Rome was a state, something that

¹³ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 345.

¹⁴ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 341.

¹⁵ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 345.

¹⁶ Pierre Grimal, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Mythology*, foreword by Charles Picard, translation from French by Mihai Popescu, Saeculum I.O Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p. 345.

¹⁷ A. Ernout, A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine. Histoire des mots*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2001, pp. 89-90.

¹⁸ Dan Negrescu, *Roman Civilization and Culture in Words*, West Univerity Publishing House, Timi oara, 1995, pp.64-65.

¹⁹ Mommsen Theodor, *Roman History*, foreword by Ph D. Emil Condurache, translation by Ioachim Nicolaus, Scientific and Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 1987, vol. III, p. 516.

Greece was not. Watching carefully the significance of the term *Camenae*, we note that the concept of *carmen*, which was associated by the Romans to the verb *canere*, too, is closely related to *vates* and *Camenae*.

This relationship between *Camenae* and *vates* is further emphasized by the meanings written in dictionaries. For example, in the dictionary of Latin prosody and poetics, Quicherat refers to the word *Camena* (*Camoena*) for which he gives the sense of *Musae*²⁰, to the word *carmen* for which he gives the following meanings: 1. *song*; 2. *poem, poetry*; 3. *chant, song*; 4. *oracle* (oraculum)²¹.

Besides these, we find a few new meanings in the dictionaries of Gh. Gu u²² and Félix Gaffiot²³, where *carmen, -inis* has the meanings: 1. *song* (voice or an instrument); 2. *poetry, poem, composition in verse*; 3. *lyric poetry, play*; 4. *inscription in verse, answer of the oracle, magic formula, spell, law formula or oath*. In the same comparative way, we follow the meanings of the term *vates*.

Vates, -is has the following meanings:

1. Quicherat, L.: a) person who guesses quickly (fr. *devin*) with synonyms *vaticinator, sacerdos, divines*;
b) interpreter of the gods;
c) omen of Rome;
d) prophet, poet;
e) poet²⁴.
2. Gh. Gu u: a) prophet, seer, forteller;
b) singer;
c) a master science, star (oc)²⁵.
3. Félix Gaffiot: a) person who guesses quickly, prophet;
b) poet;
c) a master art, forteller;
d) prophet, priest²⁶.

The meaning of these terms (*Camena, carmen, vates*) explains the different approaches in relation to *poesia and Musa*, which Augustan poets had, even if their attitude towards them was much the same. The metaphors and the style used are different because the type of poetry is different (lyric poetry, elegy, satire, epic poem).

A request for lyric poetry of Maecenas, a possible panegyric, accounted for Horatius as an opportunity to justify his new interest in philosophy:

„Prima dicte mihi, summa dicende Camena, [...] ne populum extrema totiens exoret harena. [...] condo et compono, quae mox depromere possim”²⁷.

²⁰ L. Quicherat, *Thesaurus poeticus linguae latinae*: dictionnaire posodique et poétique de la langue latine, II-ème édition, Paris, Hachette, 1875, p. 160.

²¹ Idem., *ibidem*, p. 173.

²² Gh. Gu u, *Latin-Romanian Dictionary*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 180.

²³ Félix Gaffiot, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français*, Hachette Publishing House, Paris, 2000, p. 269.

²⁴ Quicherat, L., *op. cit.*, p. 1198.

²⁵ Gh. Gu u, *op. cit.*, p. 1398.

²⁶ Félix Gaffiot, *op. cit.*, p. 1677.

²⁷ Horatius, *op. cit.*, vol. II, *Ep.* I, p. 178.

In these verses, Horace claims that Maecenas was honored (*dicte*) of the first Muse and will be honored (*dicende*) by the last, too, so he is subject to the convention of writing a book of poetry dedicated to his patron. Horace consents to dedicate his own mastery to his employer. His talent converts the poet's duty into that of his benefactor's: the words that accompany Maecenas, *dicte* and *dicende* are included and subsumed to the words that describe Horace's *Musa*.

Such an image of interdependence between patron and poet makes it clear that Maecenas owes its poetic life to the discourse of his protégé. Moreover, *dicende* could suggest a continuous duty of the poet, such as a future obligation. Horace inverts the hierarchy of the employers and believes that aesthetic values have priority over social or political *officia* of a dependent. The poet bases his justification for refusing his employer on account of the credit or symbolic capital that he accumulated through the celebration of Maecenas, drawing attention to the duty that Maecenas has assumed in his dependence on immortality. Horace combines his small rural property, *parva rura* with his disposition for "frail spirit of Greek Muse" (*spiritum Graiae tenuem Camenae*): "mihi parva rura et spiritum Graiae tenuem Camenae" (my little field, the Greek Camenae inspired breath)²⁸.

The confidence that the poet acquired by the aesthetic celebration of his employer guarantees the ability to return his benefactor the gifts:

„usque ego postera crescam laude recens,
Dum Capitolium scandet cum tacita virgine Pontifex
Dicar, [...] ex humili potens
princeps Aeolium carmen ad Italos
deduxisse modos”²⁹.

In the *Twentieth Ode* to Maecenas, Horace uses the swan metaphor to explain the role of *vates*, the "winged poet" who will ascend to heaven and become immortal. Largely, the metaphor is a kind of transfer that can lead to new discoveries, or in the words of Paul Ricoeur in *Vivid Metaphor*, "metaphor is to poetic language what is the model to scientific language [...] the model belongs to no proof logic, but to the logic of discovery"³⁰.

In our case, Horace is a "*vates biformis*", *biformis* referring to the two faces, two stages of the poet – *man* and *swan*, that Maecenas is calling next to him – *quem vocas* (whom you call):

„Non usitata nec tenui ferar
Penna *biformis* per liquidum aethera
Vates neque in terris morabor
Longius invidiaque maior”³¹.

The beginning words of the *Ode*, *non usitata nec tenui* (not seen) Horace is considering himself as the first lyric poet.

The motif of *the last swan song* often appears in poetry as a theme. The explanation

²⁸ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 170.

²⁹ Idem, *ibidem*, vol. I, c. III, 30, p. 248.

³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Living Metaphor*, translation and foreword by Irina Mavrodin, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1984, p. 369.

³¹ Horatius, *op. cit.*, vol. I, c. III., *Ode XX*, p. 176.

could be that "It was believed that before it died, the swan rises to the sky, to the sun, playing a few notes and then falling dead in the water. In this context, it became a symbol of the poet and poetry"³². The *swan*, "by its beauty and grace, this bird was destined to become a character for the mito-poetry of many peoples of the world. It symbolizes purity, innocence, loneliness, pride, courage, poetry, spiritual elevation"³³.

In Virgil's *Aeneid*, the swans devoted to Venus, considered auspicious for sailors, symbolize the twelve ships that Aeneas thought he lost:

„Nuntio et in tutum versis Aquilonibus actam,
Ni frustra augurium vani docuere parentes.
Aspice bis senos laetantes agmine cyenos"³⁴.

In the *Twenty-second Ode*, Horace argues his desire to write with "soft tones" "tender chants" in relation to his patron Maecenas attitude in the spirit of measure: "*me dulces dominae Musa Licymniae cantus*" (my muse urges me, however, about my dear Licymnia to play). Horace could not resist the desires of the Muse; they are even above the wishes of his employer.

Again, Musa is what enslaves him, Horace being left only with the explanations of this helplessness:

„candide Maecenas, occidis saepe rogando:
deus deus nam me vetat
inceptos, olim promissum *carmen*, iambos
ad umbilicum adducere"³⁵.

About the significance of Maecenas for Propertius and his poetry, we talked in Chapter IV. 3 of the work. Like Horace, Propertius expressed his gratitude for the glory due his patron Maecenas, under whose protection his talent grew:

„Crescet et ingenium sub tua iussa meum"³⁶
„Hoc mihi, Maecenas, laudis concedis, et a te est,
Quod ferar in partes ipse fuisse tuas"³⁷

Muses accompany Propertius the first thing in the morning:
„Mirabar, quidnam missent mane *Camenae*
Ante meum stantes sole rubente torum"³⁸.

Maecenas had a bright and prominent role for Augustan era poets and their works. Along their works, the Augustan poets sought a place in Roman society and among poets, and in

³² Ivan Eseev, *Dictionary of Symbols and Cultural Archetypes*, Amarcord Publishing House, Timi oara, 2001, p. 98.

³³ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 98.

³⁴ Virgile, *Oeuvres*, Librairie Hachette, Imprimerie Lahure, Paris, Texte latin, publiées avec une introduction biographique et littéraire, des notes critiques et explicatives, des gravures, des cartes et un index par F. Plessis et P. Lejay, vv. 391-393, p. 264.

³⁵ Horatius, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 322.

³⁶ Sexti Propertii, *Opera Omnia*, cared edition, established text, foreword, translation in the original rhythm and notes by Vasile Sav, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1992, p. 158.

³⁷ Idem, *ibidem*, p. 158.

³⁸ Sexti Propertii, *Opera Omnia*, cared edition, established text, foreword, translation in the original rhythm and notes by Vasile Sav, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1992, III, 10, p.158.

this search, Maecenas plays an essential role. For this reason, we find Maecenas as the recipient and so often mentioned in the works of Propertius, Horace, Virgil, Ovid and beyond. Maecenas's presence dominates the poems even when his name is absent in some fragments, making us not doubt a moment about the connection with all that was important for poets.

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