

Summary of Dissertation

The Meaning and Image of GENIUS in Roman Culture

Alexandru Cristian Dudău

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SUMMARY

From the meanings of the notion of *genius* sketched in the introductory part, the dissertation opts for the meaning of deity (Genius) with canonical attributes and clearly delimited areas of competence, acceptance that makes the object of this research. The introduction also offers the motives behind the necessity of comprehending this essential dimension of the collective imagination and of the roman socio-religious behavior and it establishes the coordinates of the research.

In order to delimitate the area of action for the power of a deity, resorting to etymology may not prove to be the best solution. Still we note the observation of G. Dumézil from an article published in 1983 (*Encore Genius*) which presents *genius* as a lexical derivate with a passive meaning, not an active one ('born', 'created'). It is thus depicted the image of a 'born' god, generated at the same time with the person or group that make its area of competence (Cap. I.2.1). From the very beginning Genius seems to have appeared as a divine double, a god of personality (individual or collective) and this image concurs with the numerous ancient testimonies and especially with its first mentions in the comedies of Plautus. This would make the

main theoretical line that directs the whole paper: the historic-religious category of the divine double, transcendent not immanent.

From the opinions of ancient authors who tried to define the meaning of the notion (Cap. I.2.2) the one of Augustine in *De civitate Dei* stands out. The process of continuous creation of Roman Genii is founded on a social principle, not a topical one, idea which is also demonstrated by the documentary material analyzed in this dissertation. Thus Augustine indirectly amends Servius' definition from the schools of Eneida: *Genium dicebant antiqui naturalem deum uniescuiusque loci vel rei vel hominis* – 'The elders called Genius the natural god of every place, thing or person'. Servius' opinion was so much quoted in time that it seems to have earned the position of an undisputable truth. In fact G. loci was a later development and in the case of G. rei the affirmation is not sustained by anything. Only a few inscriptions could illustrate this concept, the so-called atypical Genii (e.g. G iucunditatis, ludi, sacramenti, but they only have an exceptional status).

The theoretical effort of the modern research – apart from the dominant historicism of the theses from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century, excessively concerned with finding the origin of the deity (seen as a solution for the explanation and classification of the remaining evidence) – concentrated on identifying a satisfactory typology that would also have the role of illustrating the evolution of the functions of Genius (Cap I.3). But as in almost all of the cases the perspective was scaled down to a single type of evidence, the established typologies pay tribute to the way that the Genius is reflected in that particular category of evidence. Therefore, keeping in mind the idea of coherence, the present dissertation proposes a typology based on the domain of competence of the Roman Genii, regardless of the nature of the researched documentary material (Cap. I. 4):

A. Personal Genius

- A.I. Genius Familiaris (Patris familias)
- A.II. Genius funerarius (of the deceased)
- A.III. Genius Augusti (Imperatoris)
- A.IV. Genius dei

B. Social genius

- B.I. Genius Populi Romani
- B.II. Genii of the administrative units of the roman state (macro-community Genii)
- B.III. Genii of civilian associations (institutional, professional, ethnical)
- B.IV. Military Genii

C. Genius loci

Atypical Genii – Genii with infrequent or unique uses. Uncertain Genii

To these we may add the Genii derived from syncretism, analyzed in a dedicated subchapter (Cap. II.4). All the information discussed in the dissertation has been typologically filtered in order to sketch a history for the functions, images and cult associated to each type of Genius.

The research deals with the whole historic time span which offers documentary evidence of the Genius (3rd Cen. BC – 4th Cen. AD) and follows two

major leads reflected in two major chapters of the dissertation: a synthesis of the evidence from all over the Roman world (including aspects regarding the organization of the cult) and a monographic analysis of the evidence coming from Dacia.

Chapter II makes the general historic presentation of the attested types of Genii which includes the analysis of all literal occurrences of the notion as well as the synthesis of the whole epigraphic material available in *corpora* of inscriptions or from articles available in widespread journals (1519 recordings in 1503 inscriptions, figures that probably reach the total known by 2010 inclusively). The epigraphic repertory (Appendix, 1) comes from general and regional *corpora* and also from electronic databases (double checked when possible with the printed editions). To exemplify the figurative representations, we turned to a selection of about 400 images from established iconographical studies. Obviously we favored the epigraphic material as the ancient literary references have been discussed in *extenso* (by most researchers) and the iconographical references by H. Kunckel (*Der römische Genius*) and in LIMC (s.v. Genius – Ilaria Romeo) while the inscriptions never made the object of larger studies except for the ones in the 1920s (L. Cesano in *Dizionario epigrafico* and Th. Bullhart in *Thesaurus linguae Latinae* – papers which have a more taxonomical nature and are now outdated by the material discovered in the last century). The synoptic table (Cap. IV) assigns the epigraphic material to each province and each subtype of Genius, thus offering a relevant overview of the spreading of the cult all over the roman world, overview that can be read either vertically (for example, the embracement of the military Genii in different provinces) or horizontally (the number of evidence per each province as well as the quantitative ratio between the types of Genii).

As far as the literary testimonies concerned, what stands out is the overwhelming ratio of personal individual Genii, a revealing aspect for the central feature of this religious phenomenon, its paradoxical character – a specific divine figure with an unspecific content which allowed its spreading over different communities that could claim their own Genius on the base of their distinct personality. New interpretations have been offered to some of the discussed literary references, especially regarding personal Genii, where we remarked the obvious detachment of the Genius from any given morality or a providential role.

At a iconographical level, all the types proposed by H. Kunckel can be subsumed to a binary representation: a) the original civic type: the Genius wears a toga, *capite velato*, performing a libation or a sacrificial act (the case of personal Genii and rarely military ones) – spread mostly in the 1st BC to the 2nd AD centuries; b) the imperial type, almost nude, with a cloak, similar to Greek deities (social Genii) – dominant in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. In both cases the attributes are *patera* and *cornucopia*. The only Genius with a zoomorphic representation and that only incidental is G. loci. We do not consider that the snakes on the *lararia* where they appear associated with the Genii familiares represent topical Geniuses but only ‘powers’, visual complements of the deity.

But the epigraphic material was the one that roused the most important discussions and brought new aspects to light. First of all, in the above-mentioned synoptic table one can notice that the most numerous evidence outside Rome come from Germania Superior, Numidia, Africa Proconsularis, Pannonia Superior and

Germania Inferior. But the large number of evidence does not imply automatically a strong cult. Filtering the quantitative data through the prism of qualitative analysis, we see that in Germania Superior, where the number of inscriptions almost equals the numbers of inscriptions remaining from Rome (182 to 191), few social categories were involved in the cult and there is no large variety of subtypes. Nevertheless one can remark a stereotypic and prolific religious behavior, manifesting at the same time, of a particular category of militaries, *beneficiarii consularis*. They left behind an impressive number of altars dedicated *Genio loci*, most often associated with I.O.M. and Iuno Regina. These combinations were meant to obtain divine favors from any god, be it from their own religion (the Greek-roman pantheon) or foreign (G. loci), an understandable behavior for soldiers sent to dangerous missions. Aeneas, the mythical founder, appears in a Virgilian fragment (Aen. VII, 135 sqq.) setting foot for the first time on italic ground. Cautiously the hero invokes G. loci who cannot be considered by any standard his god. As a founder, Aeneas is the one that brings gods to Latium, not the one susceptible to be 'converted' to the religion of the locals.

The inscriptions also confirm what is obvious from the Latin literature. The Genii, even the personal ones, constitute roman deities *proprie dictu*, as they benefit from celebration rituals, sacrifices, temples, priests etc., a whole ritual world specific to a Roman god. *Vota* were often made, especially to the military Genii. It is obvious that the **personal** nature of these deities - that gave them a solid substance as well as strong flexibility - made them more susceptible to offer protection more than in the case of other gods, but the area expected for a Genius to manifest its powers with predilection is not to be mistaken for their nature. The nature of Roman gods has nothing messianic.

The communities from the Roman world assert a Genius the same way that families assert a G. Patris familias. It constitutes the affirmation of their distinctive personality demanding a 'personal' Genius, a sacred double for their mundane identity, able to project at a divine level their own *Lebensgeist*, as A. von Domaszewski put it. But the roman community was administratively organized; its personality resides in notions like *municipium*, *colonia*, *civitas*, *territorium* etc. Therefore it is not from the Genius loci (the least 'Roman' Genius, in most cases, even non-Roman) that the history of community Genii had begun, but from the personal Genii. The common denominator comes from the personality that the group asserts from a personal Genius the way that the individual personality is the territory of Genius Patris familias.

Of interest is also the particular case of syncretism of African Genii, developed in two stages: the assimilation of local deities under the names of major gods from the Greek-Roman pantheon (Punic or Berber) and then their assimilation in the pattern of communitarian Genii (in which the Africans probably saw a reminiscence of the essential nature of local gods, par excellence poliad deities). One can say that, paradoxically, the Roman name of the god attests the success of the process of acculturation, while the *genius* denomination (*coloniae*, *municipii*, *vici* etc.) attributed to the 'new' gods represents the resistance to Romanization.

Chapter III presents the monographic analysis of the cult of Genii in a province (the Roman Dacia). The interpretations were founded on an extensive catalogue of epigraphic and iconographic evidence. The only monographic study available in the international literature apart from the one proposed here belongs to

J. Alcock (1985) that treats the cult of Genius in Roman Britain, offering a complete perspective on the whole *corpus* of documentary material available in the province.

In the province of Dacia the total number of epigraphic monuments – the most important documentary material – rises to 58, of which 55 are reliable and 3 are uncertain (the 55 reliable documents offers evidence of 57 attested Genii). Outside the Italic space, we find more inscriptions than in Roman Dacia in Germania Superior (182! – but we have already explained the relevance of that figure that has to be ‘read’ cautiously), Numibia, Africa Proconsularis, Pannonia Inferior and Britannia. A similar number of epigraphic monuments were preserved in Pannonia Inferior, Noricum, Hispania Citerior and Gallia Narbonensis.

From the evidence of Genii in Dacia, only one comes from Dacia Inferior, the rest being discovered in Dacia Superior (Porolissensis, Apulensis). A number of 26 of the 57 testimonies comes from the military environment (45,6% from the total), an anticipated ratio in a province highly militarized. Still the ratio is significantly lower than in other provinces on the Nordic *limes* that allow making parallels: Britannia – 35 of the total of 58 evidence (60.3%); Germania Inferior – 48/68 (70.5%); Germania Superior – 134/182 (73.6%); Pannonia Superior – 56/85 (65.8%); Pannonia Inferior – 42/54 (77.7%). This aspect is important, as the civilian monuments are more relevant to the penetration of the cult in the society of the province. The abundance of the Genii in the military environment constitutes an obvious favoring factor for the penetration of the cult but not a guarantee (see the case of Pannonia Inferior). From the same perspective of social adhesion, also important is the number of evidence in the rural environment in order to see to what degree the cult manages to go beyond the walls of forts and cities. From the 29 epigraphic monuments of civilian origins, 16 were discovered in urban settlements and 13 in rural ones. This evidence speaks about a cult with a wide social audience, a situation quite different from the eastern provinces: F. Cenerini for example talks in terms of evidence found ‘in misura scarsa e quasi a livello ufficiale e quindi molto poco significativa del grado di penetrazione dei processi di acculturazione romana’¹.

The multiple form of the cult in the province is also depicted in the types of worshipped Genii. In Dacia only G. funerarius is (yet) unknown – although a funerary statue found at Apulum seems to infirm the silence of the inscriptions (Dac. Ic.1) but, with the exception of Rome, the Genii of the deceased either did not have the necessary permeability to enter the religious conscious of the provincials or (unlikely) they were not caught in epigraphic texts. Otherwise the rest of the types of Genii met at least one worshipper in Roman Dacia. This puts the province on a shortlist that only includes Latium et Campania, Hispania Citerior, Noricum, Pannonia Superior, Africa Proconsularis and Numidia. Statistically, the situation of evidence stands as follows:

D. Personal geniuses	9 (15.7%)
A.I. G. Familiaris	3 (5.2%)
A.II. G. funerarius	-
A.III. G. Augusti	5 (8.8%)
A.IV. G. dei	1 (1.7%)

¹ Cenerini 1994, p. 159

E. Social Genii	40 (70.1%)
B.I. G. Populi Romani	1 (1.7%)
B.II. Macro-communitarian G.	10 (17.5%)
B.III. Micro-communitarian G.	11 (19.3%)
B.IV. Military G.	18 (31.5 %)
F. Genius loci	4 (7%)
Atypical Genii	4 (7%)

Of course, the significance of this list of figures and ratios is merely orienting as its scientific validity is undermined by the small number of evidence demanded by the rigors of quantitative methods and also by the hazard that stands behind it. Yet we can sketch an overview image that would reveal the main patterns of the religious concept in Dacia. From this point of view, the situation in the province is comparable to the one found in many other provinces: the social Genii dominate by far the general picture in the Empire. And still we don't find any other province with similar ratios for the attested subtypes.

The dedicators of the inscriptions also make a relatively heterogeneous mass as one can deduct from the synthesis presented below that lists the number of monuments according to the occupation of the people making the offerings:

CIVILIANS²

- high dignitaries of the Roman state:	5	Dac. 3, 15, 23, 28, 37 ³
- urban magistrates:	3	Dac. 17, 22, 34
- magistrates of rural communities:	3	Dac. 2, 25, 55
- priests:	1	Dac. 38
- <i>Augustales</i> :	4	Dca 6, 43, 53, 54
- simple <i>cives</i> or <i>peregrini</i> :	6	Dac. 31, 39, 52; Dac 30, 32, 36
- <i>liberti</i> :	1	Dac. 26
- slaves:	4	Dac. 14, 29, 40, 56

MILITARIES

- superior officers:	7	Dac. 5, 8, 9, 10, 13, 48, 58
- officers of inferior grades:	10	Dac. 4, 18, 20, 24, 27, 44, 47, 49, 51, 57
- simple soldiers:	4	Dac. 11, 19, 45, 46
- veterans ⁴ :	1	Dac. 26

UNKNOWN DEDICATOR ⁵	4	Dac. 1, 7, 12, 16, 41, 50
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² We have included here the authors of dedications Dac. 3, 15, who cumulated the function of a legion commander with that of a governor because their offerings were made primarily from their position as provincial governors.

³ The abbreviation Dac. refers to the number of the piece in the catalogue of the province (Appendix 2).

⁴ As the dedication is addressed to a G. *militaris* and the inscription comes from the fort of Tibiscum, we considered that we can include the veteran here, taking into consideration the significance of the monument and the message expressed by a character who obviously still considered himself a soldier.

⁵ Four of the pieces with unknown authors come from the military environment (therefore, the above-mentioned total of 26 evidence with military origin).

As far as the ethnic structure of the group of worshippers is concerned, for the moment we only note the dominant number of Roman-Italic *cognomina*. Anyway, as J. Scheid also made the observation in the cases of devotion in Germania Inferior, in the case of Genii that have as a domain of competence social or military structures, the dedicators were probably persons well integrated in the religious universe of the Roman civilization ('une integration plus pousse')⁶. In Roman Dacia, the voice of the local population cannot be heard in the cult of the Genii as it cannot be heard in the epigraphic texts dedicated to the other cults in the province.

The Genii worshipped in the province were also depicted in images, but the figurative portrayals speak less about the penetration of the cult (not only due to their limited quantity, but also by their nature). One paradox is notable which as far as one can deduct from the iconography of the Genii available in the reference publications used in this research, we do not find in other parts of the Roman world. In the case of the epigraphic evidence, Genius appears almost always as 'purely' Roman – most of the times it stands for the only deity worshipped in the inscription by *cultores*, it does not include *dei patrii* (with the notable exception of G. Turmazgadae and maybe of the Genius from Tibiscum, Dac. 26), it reflects all the social layers relevant to the Roman world and it does not privilege particular groups etc. But in a considerable part of the figurative portrayals, Genius appears in fact as a result of a mixture of styles and conceptions (be it artistic or religious), primarily of Greek-Oriental origin, that come from an area that the cult of Genius is not all at home.

In order to set a diachronic journey of the cult in the province, we only took into consideration those inscriptions whose dating allows at least the certainty of belonging to a certain dynastic period. Anyway we considered as more efficient the assessment of the monuments to the three major periods that cover the existence of the province (the Antonine period, the Severan period and the years of the crisis of the 3rd century), rather than assessing them to centuries, thus avoiding the difficult task of splitting the monuments that come from the reign of Septimius Sever. The situation stands like this:

- the Antonian period:	20
- the Severan period:	19
- the post-Severan period:	3
(the years of the crisis)	
- undetermined	13
(sec. II-III)	

The first datable evidence from the province come from the time of Hadrian's reign (Dac. 2- G. canabensium from Apulum and probably Dac. 22 – G. municipii from Drobeta) and the last ones from the time of Gordian the 3rd (Dac. 7-8 – G. Imperatoris Gordiani). Therefore the temporal arch between the above-mentioned pieces stretches from 117 to 244, covering the most part of the existence of the province, with no visible temporal fractures. This gives us the image of a cult that

⁶ Scheid 2006, p. 311.

disseminated constantly and deeply during the whole period of the Roman presence in the province.

The society of Roman Dacia left behind some important pieces at the scale of the Empire, for example rare or even unique evidence. Thus G. Turmazgada(e) (Dac. 57) enters the very shortlist of the Genii of gods or, depending on the adopted literature, of gods invoked under the appellative *Genius*, outside the African provinces where the syncretism of assimilation gave birth to such *interpretationes*. G. armamentarii from Potaissa (Dac. 44) has only one homologous Genius in the empire and G. territorii invoked at Arcobadara (Dac. 25) although it manifested itself in an area of competence typical for Geniuses has no correspondent in any other part of the Roman world with the exception of a dedication from Adony (Vetus Salina in Pannonia Inferior) but in that case the domain of competence of the Genius can be deducted from the text, it is not part of the 'name' of the deity⁷. About the imperial Genius in toga found at Cășeiu (Dac. Ic. 3) apart from the iconography with a strong local touch that portrays a divine image *sui generis*, we are entitled to assume that it represents one of the latest evidence of the oldest form of the known portrayals of Genii, *togatus capite velato*. G. Populi Romani is attested, outside the capital, in only other eight epigraphic testimonies, one of which was found at Micia (Dac. 56). P. Aelius (?Ser)vius (Dac. 26) and M. Magullius Rufus (Num. 43) are the only veterans known in the Empire to have erected monuments dedicated to the Genii of the military formations that they had been part of. *Vilici* from Dacia and the neighboring provinces proved that they had a religious collective imagination so flexible that lead to the worshipping (in some case even to the creation, we might say) of such abstract deities as G. commercii or G. publici portorii. For Felix, a customs officer at Porolissum, the most ingenious and at the same time the most precise in his intentions, the source of welfare could have been no other than the Genius of collecting taxes at customs (G. vectigalis publici portorii), a personal 'god' for Felix, with no analogy in the Roman world.

The Genii of the colleagues presents, besides, of course, the personal Genii, the closest content to the essential substance of this religious phenomenon, as they reflect the 'exaltation' of a restricted group, a typical micro-social Roman form, the same way that G. familiaris represents the double divine of the family. That is why the series of Genii collegiorum from Dacia, the most consistent from the roman world (only in Rome we find a larger number of evidence), represents a significant testimony for the essentially roman, traditionally Italic nature of the manifestation of the cult of the Genii in Dacia. In other words, it signals the quality of penetration and reception of religious ideas, a much more efficient detector than the quantitative analysis. The same deeper layer of Roman tradition is reflected in the congratulation on the medallion found in Bologna (Dac. 16) that we can only find in this exact phrase in literature, in the lines of a famous Petronian character: *Habeas propitium Genium!*

As a conclusion (Cap. IV), the dissertation calls for the opening of the research on this religious phenomenon to the analysis of relationships that, at the level of significant kinship, the Roman Genii are susceptible to have with divine figures from other cultures (for example, the Etruscan *farthan*, the Greek *keres*, the Punic-Berber Genii etc.). An articulated historic-religious research (not unidirectional

⁷ CIL III, 10305=RIU VI, 1442 = AE 19444, 91 – AE 1952, 11.

synchronistic, nor pure historicist) could be able to give us more information on the Genius than the search for its origins in the darkness of history or the assessment of some similarities to deities from other Mediterranean cultures.