FORMAE MORTIS: EL TRÁNSITO DE LA VIDA A LA MUERTE EN LAS SOCIEDADES ANTIGUAS.

Francisco Marco Simón
Francisco Pina Polo
José Remesal Rodríguez (Eds.)

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THE FOUR SEASONS AS A FUNERARY SYMBOL IN THE WRITTEN AND VISUAL CULTURE OF ROME: AN APPROACH

Joan Gómez Pallarès Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Abstract

This article deals with the symbol of the four seasons in Roman culture before the Christian period (some pieces are also shown which enable it to be stated that Christianity does not represent a break with the past but rather that, with its arrival, everything is adapted). It attempts to gather and relate all the evidence (very selectively: this is the introduction to a work in progress) of the four seasons in Roman culture: epigraphical texts in prose and verse; signed literary texts in prose and verse (including philosophical); iconic messages on sarcophagi, in paintings and in mosaics. I aim to offer a description of the 'where' and 'how' of the presence of this motif in Roman culture and, at the end of the article, a possible 'why'.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo sobre el símbolo de las cuatro estaciones en la cultura romana antes del Cristianismo (se muestran también algunas piezas que permiten decir que con el Cristianismo nada se interrumpe, sino que todo se adapta) intenta recoger y relacionar todas las evidencias (de forma muy selectiva: se trata de la primera presentación de un trabajo todavía en curso) con presencia de las cuatro estaciones en la cultura romana: textos epigráficos en prosa y en verso; textos literarios firmados (también filosóficos), en prosa y en verso; mensajes icónicos en sarcófagos, en pinturas y en

mosaico. Pretendo ofrecer una descripción sobre el dónde y el cómo de la presencia de este motivo en la cultura Romana y, al final del trabajo, un porqué.

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*

Introduction

R. Turcan, one of the scholars who has studied with the greatest determination and insight the world of Roman sarcophagi, defines to perfection the motive which pushed me to tackle this subject. In Turcan 1978, 1701, he comments that « le problème (du symbolisme dans le décor des sarcophages) est trop souvent discuté en termes théoriques, d'une part ; et d'autre part, il n'est pas envisagé globalement: on ne le traite pas en tenant compte de la totalité des documents en cause, c'est-à-dire avec assez de hauteur et de perspective ». My work on the four seasons as a symbol in Roman culture before Christian times (although I will also deal with some pieces of « evidence » which make it possible to say that Christianity does not represent a break, but rather that everything is adapted in the Christian period) starts from exactly the same premise as is set out in Turcan 1978. I have attempted to gather all the evidence of the presence of the four seasons in Roman culture (although in this first article I will be very selective: this is simply an introduction to work still in progress and I would ask the reader to understand and take it as such), trying not to underestimate or forget any of it: epigraphic texts in prose and verse; signed literary texts (including philosophical texts) in prose and verse; iconic messages on sarcophagi and in paintings and mosaics... My aim is to offer a description of the 'where' and 'how' of the presence of this motif in Roman culture and also, at the end of the work, a 'why'. This presentation of my work and the material gathered seeks "only" to show some of the evidence and offer some initial explanation in broad outline. There are, moreover, numerous ramifications which will be left untouched here, concerning both the actual pieces of evidence presented here and the interrelationships involved in the interpretation of them.

Sarcophagi



Figure 1.- Sarcophagus conserved in the National Archaeological Museum of Cagliari, inv. no. 5936 (Kranz 1984, no.63; Floris 2005, 595 and catalogue no. 239, 566-67)

This is a sarcophagus found in Sardinia (location not specified), conserved in the National Archaeological Museum in Cagliari, Inv. no. 5936. It can be dated, with reservations, to the 4th c. AD. Accompanied by an inscription, it depicts a dead girl through the four seasons (Kranz 1984, n.63; Floris 2005, p.595 and catalogue no. 239 (pp. 566-567). It offers a clear and unequivocal message of mors immatura in connection with the complex iconography of the seasons (photo 1, complete view of the front of the sarcophagus): the central medallion, held by two putti, is a commonplace representation of the dead girl (photo 2), holding in her left hand the *uolumen* of wisdom¹. On her right (the observer's left) is a representation of winter, hooded and with one of the symbols of



Figure 2.- detail of the sarcophagus in photo 1, the medallion depicting the dead girl.

¹ A symbol widely accepted and disseminated by Christianity but one whose roots can be traced back to the images of the Greek philosophers: cf. P. Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates. The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford 2995, 90-145 (especially 130-2).

the hunt (the dog) at its feet; at its side, spring holds out a basket laden with fruit; to the right of the deceased, autumn appears with its most characteristic fruit, grapes after the harvest, and alongside it comes summer, with ripe corn in its left hand. At the feet of the dead girl, reiterating the seasonal message, is the image of a task characteristic of one of the seasons: the beginning of autumn brings the grape harvest, with the treading of the fruit and the making of the must.



Figure 3.- Detail of the sarcophagus in photo 1, the inscription with the age of the deceased at the top edge of the front of the sarcophagus.

+NNO VNO (hedera) MENS(ibus) VIII (hedera) DIEB(us) XVI ²

That this is undoubtedly a case of premature death associated with this type of iconography is demonstrated by the inscription, which tells us that the girl died at the age of one year, eight months and sixteen days.

With the "pretext" of this first sarcophagus and the two types of iconic message (alongside the textual, in this case minimal) that it offers (one linked to the general image of the four seasons; the other to the specific work associated with one of them), and working from the numerous different cases I have studied (both *in situ* and through the bibliography cited below), it should be pointed out that the iconography of the four seasons can "speak" to the observer visiting the funerary monument through images featuring A. Countryside tasks or activities belonging to each season, either together or separate. B. Production cycles over the whole year and therefore over all four seasons. The wine harvest and the treading of the grapes correspond to both A. and B. (since the vegetative cycle of the vine lasts throughout the year but, at the same time, this image is associated with the tasks of autumn) while, for instance, the hunt (symbol of winter) would correspond to A. and the wheat and breadmaking cycle (on a sarcophagus *infra*, photo no.7) would be B.

It is important to stress, again using the example of this sarcophagus, that the most common use of this type of iconography is in relation to the deceased whom the sarcophagus (with images alone or with images and inscription) or the tombstone (see *infra*) identify as having died "before their time", that is, cases of *mortes immaturae*.

Another model of work carried out over the four seasons is provided by the front of this sarcophagus which is conserved *in situ* in the Museum at the excavation site of Ostia Antica (inv. no. 126; Kranz 1984, n.41) but proceeds from the necropolis of Isola Sacra (Fiumicino³) and can be dated archaeologically to the 460s AD. It is interesting to note that an iconography linked principally to the public commemoration of premature deaths is also used here to "speak" to the spectator of the death of a married couple advanced in years. Two things can be deduced from this example (with the added support, of course, of the general information I have at my disposal): the first is that a cultural symbol is born of a specific situation (four seasons = *mortes immaturae*) but if it enjoys success and

² All epigraphical editions presented in this article are the author's. When this is not the case, the editorial source will be indicated.

³ Cf. C. PAVOLINI, Ostia, Roma 1983, 258-74.



Figure 4.- Front of sarcophagus conserved in the museum at the excavation site of Ostia Antica (inv. no. 26), but originally from the necropolis of Isola Sacra (Fiumicino).

is accepted, its further application to other situations (such as the present case) is guaranteed (see the conclusion on Ganymede at the end of this article); the second is that, in Rome, the depiction of (a) *mors immatura* need not invariably be associated with the death of someone who has failed to reach adulthood, although this is in fact the case more often than not. A death perceived in this way may simply be a death felt as having come before the person concerned (of whatever age) has been able to meet his or her goals in life (whatever they might have been)⁴. On this sarcophagus from Isola Sacra we see that the central medallion featuring the married couple is once again flanked by four genii representing the seasons: in this case, from left to right from the observer's point of view, spring is identified by a basket of fruit and garlands of flowers; summer by ripe crops; autumn by a basket of grapes and winter (partially destroyed) by a different, but also quite common, symbol of the hunt (a pair of ducks). *Tellus*, at the feet of the deceased with her cornucopia, offers a "guarantee" of Nature's life cycle: the expression of a desire to live on, at least in the memory of those who see the monument, is associated here with the cyclic nature of the seasons and their produce. The deceased couple being commemorated are identified with this message.

Activities pertaining to one or all seasons

Sarcophagus of Q. Flavia Severina, conserved in the Capitoline Museums (inv. no. NCE 88; Kranz 1984, n.546), dated to the second half of the 3rd c. AD. The dead girl, represented in commonplace fashion on the upper right of the front of her sarcophagus, also suffered death "before her time": ... VIX(it) . ANN(os) . II [M(enses)] X. D(ies) XXII. In this case, the iconography shows the work of just one season, autumn, with the harvest, the treading of the grapes and the making of the wine must. Two of the putti at the top of the decorative part, encircling Flavia Severina, are carrying baskets of fruit, the produce of the autumn wine harvest. This is developed in a much clearer, more graphic and even festive manner at the bottom of the decoration, where other putti pick the fruit from vines raised at least a metre and a half above ground level (exactly as they are today in several zones in the north of the Italian Peninsula, although this sarcophagus was found in the Via Bezoni, in the Garbatella district of Rome), while others tread it and turn it into juice.

-

⁴ Cf. Warren 2004 (speaking of the Epicureans), 155: "as soon as *ataraxia* is attained it is impossible thereafter to die prematurely, whenever and however one dies, since death from this point on cannot prevent a life being complete… the attainment of *ataraxia*, therefore, becomes the necessary and sufficient condition of living a complete life."

Another example of individual tasks associated with the seasons is presented by the sarcophagus of Marcus Claudianus.

This is not a topic that concerns me here but it is obvious from this example (Museo Nazionale, Rome, inv. no. 455, between 330 and 335 AD; Kranz 1984, n.333) that the four seasons are used to the same end by the Christian community: one sarcophagus presents scenes from the Bible (upper left) alongside scenes from summer (reaping) and autumn (grape harvest) on the top right. This iconography serves to express one and the same basic message: for a Christian, the desire to "survive" physical death, in one way or another, does not depend solely on faith. To combine on his funeral monument the iconic messages that clearly identify his faith with other messages (those of the seasons) which before Christian times had already spoken to the observer of a desire to live on is a matter of some importance for Marcus Claudianus.

An example of the production cycle over the year

Sarcophagus of L. Annius Octavius Valerianus (Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. no. 10536; *CIL* VI 11743 = *CLE* 1498; Turcan 1999, p.83 and note 209⁵). As an alternative to the complete metaphor of the four seasons, we find here the work characteristic of one of them



Figure 5.- Sarcophagus of Q. Flavia Severina, conserved in the Capitoline Museums (inv. no. NCE 88; Kranz 1984, no. 546).



Figure 6.- Sarcophagus of M. Claudianus, conserved in the Museo Nazionale Romano (Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, inv. no. 455; Kranz 1984, no. 333).

(the harvesting of the wheat in summer), although it is developed over the whole year, also as a cycle of nature: the wheat cycle. The front of the sarcophagus lid contains the inscription, while its main body offers a graphic cycle, which encircles the deceased being honoured (with the *uolumen* of wisdom in his left hand while he gives instructions to his workers with his right) and offers the spectator, from top left to bottom left, a logical sequence of events linked to the countryside and centering on the most representative activity of summer, the harvesting of the wheat: the top left section depicts the work of ploughing the fields and sowing the crops; the top right shows the reaping; the bottom right depicts the transporting of the harvested cereal and finally the bottom left section shows the wheat being taken to the mill, ground into flour and, once taken to the oven, made into bread. Sowing opens the cycle, in

⁵ R. Turcan, *Messages d'outre-tombe. L'iconographie des sarcophages romains*, Paris, 1999, offers no allegorical interpretation of any kind as I do in including this iconography within the cycle of the four seasons. He only speaks of a *pistor* disillusioned by life who features on his sarcophagus all those who fell under his orders, in the commercial cycle of his product. I would stress that there is no documentary proof (at least as far as I know) to confirm that Annius Octavius Valerianus was a baker, and although the interpretation is perfectly admissible, I do not believe that it is possible to rule out the connection between this job, which stems from the symbol of summer although it it represented over the four seasons (albeit in a special way) and the interpretation I propose for the seasons as a funerary symbol in Rome.



Figure 7.- Sarcophagus of L. Annius Octavius Valerianus, conserved in the Vatican Museums (Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. no. 10536; *CIL* VI 11743 = *CLE* 1498; Turcan 1999, 83 and note 209).

spring; harvesting is one of the activities always associated with summer; while the transporting and grinding of the corn, and the baking of the bread, can be associated both with the end of summer and with autumn and winter (especially in the case of the final phase of the wheat cycle).

Perhaps paradoxically, this iconic message, so closely bound to the cyclical and permanent nature of time, has on this occasion been associated to a clear message which, as we shall see later when we present some other texts, has little connection with ideas of this kind. The inscription (one of the very few metrical ones I have been able to document on the surface of a sarcophagus containing seasonal decoration⁶) states.

D. M. S. L. ANNIVS. OCTAVIVS. VALERIANVS. EVASI. EFFVGI. SPES. ET. FORTVNA. VALETE. NIL. MIHI. VOVISCVM. EST. LVDIFICATE. ALIOS

This is a popular distich, whose roots can be traced back to *Anth. Pal.*, 9, 49^7 and the first hemistich of the pentameter can be found in Ov., *Fast.*, 2, 308, with a practically identical text in *CIL* VIII 27904 (Theveste) = *CLE* 21398, the only variants being an exclamatory *Ha* introducing the hexameter and orthographical variants in the pentameter. That this is a popular message is also shown by *CIL* 11 6435 = *CLE* 4349, with a variant of the type... *Effugi tumidam uitam, spes et fortuna ualete / nil mihi uobiscum est alios deludite quaeso.*

⁶ For no decoration, see some interesting examples in J. Gómez Pallarès, *Poesia epigráfica llatina als Països Catalans. Edició i comentari*, Barcelona 2002, nn.T 11, 102-6; or T 25, 145-51.

⁷ Although it is not exactly equivalent, since *Spes* in Greece is not identifiable with a deity, whereas in Rome it is: cf. O. Weinreich, *So nah ist die Antike. Spaziergänge eines Tübinger Gelehrten*, München, 1970, 116 and 132.

⁸ Cf. A. B. Purdie, Some Observations on Latin Verse Inscriptions, London 1935, 36.

⁹ O. Weinreich, So nah ist die Antike..., 117-19.

Paintings and mosaics



Figure 8.- The so-called Columbarium of "Pomponius Hylas" in the Parco degli Scipioni, Rome.

The so-called Columbarium of *Pomponius Hylas* (although it was first built, as is shown by an inscription in its interior –photo no. 9- by *Q. Granius Nestor*) is an extraordinary and little-known funerary monument, completely conserved in the so-called "Parco degli Scipioni" in Rome, and can be dated to the first half of the 1st c. AD.

All the decoration of the Columbarium is based on the exuberance of nature, which is expressed iconically by means of the presence of winged genii. The seasons and their fruits "guarantee", as early as the 1st c. AD, the association of ideas between the realm of death and its ceremonies and the cyclic and permanent nature of the seasons as seen in nature and its fruits.



Figure 9.- Detail of the interior of the socalled Columbarium of "Pomponius Hylas".

The most recent discoveries on public display, the funerary monuments along the *Via Triumphalis* (in the Autoparco Santa Rosa of Vatican City¹⁰) also depict, in several first-century AD black-and-white mosaics, the tasks of the autumn grape harvest, here associated with Bacchus¹¹.

As we have now reached the Christian "destination" of this topic in the techniques of painting and mosaic, I feel compelled to show how, in the mausoleum of the daughter of Constantine, in the church of Santa Costanza (Rome), its vaults completely decorated with mosaics, the theme of the seasons and, in this case, the autumn grape harvest and wine production still has the power to transmit a message of immortality to the spectator. The emblematic figure of autumn presides over the composition, in which the tendrils of the vine are all-pervasive. At the bottom left the grape-pickers carry their load to the press, where other workers tread the grapes and produce the must. In this Christian funerary monument all of this has a symbolism which connects with non-Christian iconography, and although its ultimate significance (the symbol of survival through time and the "immortality" represented here) is undoubtedly not the same, the underlying idea and the way of expressing it are.

And of course, Costanza's sarcophagus, now conserved in the Vatican Museums (sala A della Croce Greca, in the Museo Pio Clementino), "explains" exactly the same message with symbols of the same type: the harvesters are shown picking the



Figure 10.- Detail of the interior of the socalled Columbarium of "Pomponius Hylas".



Figure 11.- Detail of funerary mosaic preserved in situ in the necropolis of the *Via Triumphalis* in Rome, which can be visited from the Autoparco Santa Rosa, Vatican City

¹⁰ Cf. F. Buranelli (ed.), P. Liverani, G. Spinola, La necropoli Vaticana lungo la Via Trionfale, Roma 2006.

¹¹ It is, of course, impossible to overlook the funerary use of the Bacchus cycle, especially on sarcophagi (cf. R. Turcan, *Messages d'outre-tombe...*, 101-10), but what I wish to stress here is that the fundamental element in this "Vatican" mosaic (and in others) is not the Bacchic cycle or actions related to it, but the grape harvest. The harvest, needless to say, can be reflected in Bacchus, but it is naturally related to the symbology of the four seasons, "arising" from the autumn and there are many examples of the autumn grape harvest not associated in any way with Bacchic iconography. In any case, it is important for our documentation that there also existed funerary mosaics, still preserved, with one or more of the symbols of the seasons. I have been unable to see the mosaic described by Parrish 1984, n.21, 138-40, of *Q. Papirius Fortunatianus*, which also seems to associate the characteristic fruits of each season with the death of a child: *D M S / SVMMA BONITATIS ET INGENI / PVERQ PAPIRIS / FORTVNATIANVS / EVSEBIVS / VIX...VI* (text by A. Merlin, *Inscriptions Latines de la Tunisie*, Paris, 1944, n.1520).





Figures 12 and 13.- Photo of exterior and detail of autumn-decorated vault of the mausoleum of Santa Costanza, Rome.





Figures 14 and 15.- Front and side of sarcophagus of Santa Costanza, conserved in the Vatican Museums (sala A della Croce Greca, Museo Pio Clementino).

grapes on the front of the sarcophagus, while on the sides they are treading the fruit and the juice is being collected in vats under the presses.

The non-epigraphic texts

The great authors normally "use" the seasons to deal with topics directly related to the countryside. For example, Verg. G., 4. 134 (editio Mynors) primus uere rosam atque autumno carpere poma, / et cum tristis hiemps etiamnum frigore saxa /rumperet et glacie cursus frenaret aquarum, / ille comam mollis iam tondebat hyacinthi /aestatem increpitans seram zephyrosque morantis. / ... but with no death-related metaphorical funerary sense, unlike what we have seen above with the associated iconography. Writers also use the seasons to talk about the illnesses they bring in the course of the year, which lead, needless to say, to numerous cases of mors immatura.

One example is Lucr. (*editio* Bailey) *Nat.* 5. 220-7 (although here the poet is talking of sea animals!) ... *cur anni tempora morbos / apportant? quare mors inmatura uagatur? /*

Hor. *Carm.* 4. 7, seems to be using the metaphor of the seasons to speak about the very opposite of what is postulated by our preceding icons, although previous and later evidence will show us that what the poet is doing here is to use the metaphor of the four seasons as the cyclical and unchanging process of time¹² in order to transmit his Epicurean message (a use that is almost *e contrario*: see *infra* the philosophical texts, headed by Lucretius): although it is not the same message we believe we detect in the iconography (and which I shall attempt to explain later with texts), it is no less true that Horace is using the seasons and the passing of time to talk about life and, obviously, about death too (in bold, the most significant lines):

Diffugere niues, redeunt iam gramina campis arboribus comae; mutat terra uices et decrescentia ripas flumina praetereunt; Gratia cum Nymphis geminisque sororibus audet ducere nuda chorus. Inmortalia ne speres, monet annus et almum quae rapit hora diem. Frigora mitescunt Zephyris, uer proterit aestas, interitura simul pomifer autumnus fruges effuderit, et mox bruma recurrit iners. Damna tamen celeres reparant caelestia lunae: non ubi decidimus quo pater Aeneas, quo diues Tullus et Ancus, puluis et umbra sumus. Quis scit an adiciant hodiernae crastina summae tempora di superi? Cuncta manus auidas fugient heredis, amico quae dederis animo. Cum semel occideris et de te splendida Minos fecerit arbitria, non, Torquate, genus, non te facundia, non te restituet pietas; infernis neque enim tenebris Diana pudicum liberat Hippolytum, nec Lethaea ualet Theseus abrumpere caro uincula Pirithoo.

Martial (*Epigr*. 9. 1), by contrast, takes the metaphor, still without referring to death as the sarcophagi do, but expressing a wish that the political power in place at the time, the governing Flavians, may last as long as the passing of the seasons. It is obvious that the poet here is echoing and using the iconic political message that Augustus consolidated in Rome, associating in the eyes of his audience the perennial nature of their power with the unchangingness of cyclical time and the power of the seasons and the fruits of the Earth (photo 16):

¹² M.C.J. Putnam, Artifices of Eternity. Horace's Fourth Book of Odes, Ithaca-London 1986, 134-5.

Dum Ianus hiemes, Domitianus autumnos, Augustus annis commodabit aestates, dum grande famuli nomen asseret Rheni Germanicarum magna lux Kalendarum, Tarpeia summi saxa dum patris stabunt, dum uoce supplex dumque ture placabit matrona diuae dulce Iuliae numen: manebit altum Flauiae decus gentis cum sole et astris cumque luce Romana.

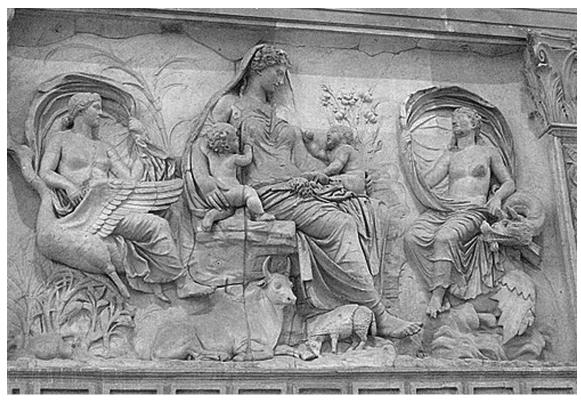


Figure 16.- Photo of detail of the Tellus panel on the *Ara pacis Augusti*, Rome, by Axez02 (www.flickr.com).

To talk of inexorable matters, of things which will always happen, Ov. too, in *Rem.*, 187-98, uses the metaphor of the seasons and associated symbols. But neither is he talking here of death or immortality in a funerary setting:

Poma dat autumnus: formosa est messibus aestas:
Ver praebet flores: igne leuatur hiems.
Temporibus certis maturam rusticus uuam
Deligit, et nudo sub pede musta fluunt;
Temporibus certis desectas alligat herbas,
Et tonsam raro pectine uerrit humum.
Ipse potes riguis plantam deponere in hortis,
Ipse potes riuos ducere lenis aquae.
Venerit insitio; fac ramum ramus adoptet,

Stetque peregrinis arbor operta comis. Cum semel haec animum coepit mulcere uoluptas, Debilibus pinnis inritus exit Amor.

And the poet does this again when he speaks of the cycle of the Year in Met. 2. 25-30:

a dextra laeuaque Dies et Mensis et Annus Saeculaque et positae spatiis aequalibus Horae Verque nouum stabat cinctum florente corona, stabat nuda Aestas et spicea serta gerebat, stabat et Autumnus calcatis sordidus uuis et glacialis Hiems canos hirsuta capillos.

Although here too there is no hint of a symbolic funerary sense to the metaphor and the description of the seasons, it should be pointed out that the way in which they are described has repercussion later in texts which *are* clearly funerary and interpretable from our stance here. Ovid will therefore be "used" and cited by later anonymous epigraphic poets (CLE 439, to give one example) as a model in a funerary context, in principle differing from the one we see here at this beginning of metamorphic time.

Where Ovid certainly does come close to the sense the metaphor has in Rome (at least, to date, in the world of art, whether it be expressed on sarcophagi, in painting or in mosaics), is in *pont*.

3. 1, when, speaking from the living death which his exile at Tomis represents for him, he places on his wife's lips the speech he would have wished for himself. And what are these words that Ov. has issuing from the mouth of his wife? The first metaphor to spring from her lips is, precisely, that of the succeeding seasons. And, as so often in the poetry from exile, it is clearly shown that if Ovid has in mind one source of inspiration for his poetry from "a living death" it is precisely that of the funerary world of Rome:

An mihi barbaria uiuendum semper in ista inque Tomitana condar oportet humo?
Pace tua, si pax ulla est tua, Pontica tellus, finitimus rapido quam terit hostis equo, pace tua dixisse uelim: 'Tu pessima duro pars es in exilio, tu mala nostra grauas.
Tu neque uer sentis cinctum florente corona, tu neque messorum corpora nuda uides, nec tibi pampineas autumnus porrigit uuas, cuncta sed inmodicum tempora frigus habent.

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¹³ Cf. J. Gómez Pallarès, "Ouidius Epigraphicus: Tristia lib.1, with excursus on 3, 3 and 4, 10", in W. Schubert (Ed.)., Ovid. Werk und Wirkung. Festgabe für Michael von Albrecht zum 65. Geburtstag, Frankfurt am Main 1998, 755-73.

The metrical epigraphic texts

CLE 1443 (= CIL XII, 5350, from Narbona; Hanfmann 1951, vol.1, p.187, vol.2, nn.128 and 284^{14}), where age is assimilated to the fruit characteristic of the season:

] / uixdum transcursis Elysium ingrederis
ter rosa uix fuerat ter spicae et pampinus ex quo
tradita Gregorio Festa iaces tumulo
anni uota simul heheu quam parua fuerunt
heu quam uita breuis quam breue coniugium
aetas sola minor nam cetera maxima Festae
adfectus pietas forma pudicitia //]
angelicae legis docta dicata deo
hic ia[c]et hoc superis placitum est huc ibimus et nos
sit modo sancta fides sit pia credulitas
Festa decus nostrum certe ueniemus in unum
si mihi uita proba si tibi cura mei est
at tu sanctuarum moderator summe animarum
fac rata quae cupimus fac cita qu(a)e uolumus

The most recent study, unfortunately still unpublished, is that of H. Bélloc, Les Carmina Latina Epigraphica des Gaules: Édition, traduction, étude littéraire, 2 vols., PhD Univ. de Caen/Basse-Normandie, 2006, n.N 146, 508-19. It must be stressed that we are here dealing with a CLE engraved on the main body of a sarcophagus (all the bibliography, including the archaeological, is on pp. 510-11 of Bélloc 2006), of which the decorated part A (the sarcophagus lid) is separated from part B (the body, with the inscription). Part A depicts, on the left, two *putti* holding up the decoration which serves as a background to the portrait of the deceased, with the *uolumen* of wisdom in her left hand while she seems to be offering a sign of blessing with her right; another two putti hold a central cartouche which seems, according to Bélloc's study, to bear no inscription; and on the right two more putti bear the portrait of the husband who is offering the dedication. Unfortunately for us, it is impossible to relate these images objectively to the genii of the seasons. The same does not apply to the text, in the opening lines of which we read in bold (I use the text of the CLE, as I do not wish to interfere with the publication of the findings of the thesis by Bélloc, who provides, I may inform the reader, a new line of text above the one read hitherto) that the relationship between Gregorius and Festa appears to be symbolized by means of symbols of the seasons. It lasted a mere three years, as only three roses, three ears of corn and three vine leafes grew in the course of it. Why is there no sign of the symbol of winter? It is, in my opinion, impossible to tell, though, as happens with all lists and catalogues in Antiquity, that of the four seasons need not always be complete. It may be that the dedicator did not want to associate his beloved Festa with winter, the season of sterility by nature and which thereby becomes assimilated with it. Or he might simply have been quite happy with the metaphor as it stood.

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¹⁴ Cf. Mª. T. Muñoz García de Iturrospe, "Angelicae legis docta, dicata deo (CLE 1443,b,2): modelos femeninos excepcionales en carmina epigraphica y en la tradición cristiana" in C. Fernández Martínez, X.Gómez Font, J.Gómez Pallarès (eds.), Literatura epigráfica. Estudios dedicados a Gabriel Sanders (Actas de la III Reunión Internacional de Poesía Epigráfica latina), Pórtico, Zaragoza (forthcoming), pp.4-6 and notes.

CIL III, 754 and p.992 = *CIL* III, 7439 = *CLE* 492 (Hanfmann 1951, vol.1, n.274; vol.2, n.277), from Svishtov / *Nouae* (*Moesia inferior*)

[D(is) M(anibus?)] / et b(onae) m(emoriae) Fronto Aug(ustorum) nn(ostrorum) dispens(ator) Moes(iae) inf(erioris) floribus ut saltem requiescant membra iucundis Aeliae carae mihi nunc hoc inclusae sepulcro regina Ditis magni regis [p]recor hoc te nam meruit haec multa suis pro laudibus a me inmeritae propere soluentem fila dearum quae globo Parcarum reuolta cuncta gubernant qualis enim fuerit uita quam deinde pudica si possem effari cithara suadere(m) ego Manes haec primum casta quot[t]e audire libenter et mundi spatia Ditis quoque regia norunt hanc precor Elysiis iubeas consistere campis et myrta redimere comas et tempora flore Lar mihi haec quondam haec spes haec unica uita et uellet quod uellem nollet quoque ac si ego nollem intima nulla ei quae non mihi nota fuere nec labos huic defuit nec uellerem inscia fila parca manu / set larga meo in amore mariti nec sine me cibus huic gratus nec munera Bacchi consilio mira cata mente nobili fama carmini possessor faveas precor ac precor ut tu hanc tituli sedem uelles decorare quodannis et foueas aeui monumentum tempore grato roscida si rosula seu grato flore amaranthi et multis generum pomis variisque nouisque ut possit toto refoueri temporis anno

This is another important text since it is one of the few preserved *CLE* epigrams also written on a sarcophagus. It is also important because it establishes a type of relationship between untimely death and the seasons of the year not encountered in the texts seen so far: in the last lines which the husband dedicates to his wife, Aelia, there is an explcit request that with the passing of the seasons of the year the fruits used as offerings to commemorate the deceased spouse should be renewed: *et multis tenerum pomis uariisque nouisque / ut possit toto refoueri temporis anno*. The sequential, and therefore immortal, nature of the passing of time as regards the honouring and remembering of the dead must affect not only all that is most intrinsically related to the deceased (iconography, epigraphic commemorative text, sarcophagus, etc.) but also all that honours and recalls her on the most outward level: offerings of flowers and fruit of all kinds on the tomb, renewed in the course of each season of the year. The rite must be observed, and the inscription explains this to perfection, so that the memory and recollection of the deceased may always remain "alive" 15.

¹⁵ This text has been studied in great detail by H. Krummrey, "Zu dem Grabgedicht für Aelia in Nikopol a.d. Donau (CLE 492)", *Klio* 63 (1981-1982), 527-49; and by P. Colafrancesco, "Il destino delle Parche: una postilla epigrafica", *Inuigilata*

I would note another possible appearance of the fruits of the different seasons relating to the worship of the memory of a dead one. This is, admittedly, an unparalleled and exceptional case, but one that might admit of interpretation in the ambit of this symbology. I refer to the sepulchral chamber of Patron, on the Via Latina near Rome¹⁶. The tomb was decorated by garden paintings¹⁷ and an epigram, in Greek, explained who the deceased was and what was represented there (his funeral cortege, with symbology relating to the plant world). The text¹⁸, as Settis very wisely recommends, can only be interpreted in the light of what the iconography reveals. And the iconography, in the lower part of the tomb, is unequivocal: some fruit-bearing trees mark out the route of Patron's funeral cortege (in addition, some inscriptions also identify the mourners). In the closing lines of the poem (*Il*. 15-16, the final distich), the decased, speaking in the first person, tells us that death has forced him to give up all that he possessed in his youth, all, that is, except those fruits which he was able to pick

while still alive. I would therefore suggest the possibility that the fruits of the trees symbolize the "fruits of life", those achievements Patron explains in his inscription in a very general way, which would presumably have been represented on his tomb "contemplating" the deceased's procession towards his place of burial. These fruits may also be those which in some seasonal iconographies in a funerary setting can be seen at the feet of the figures representing, above all, spring and autumn.

CIL XI, 656 = CLE 439 (Animan 1951, vol.1, p.186; vol.2, n.277), from Sarsina, with all its symbolic weight on the renewal of the memory of the deceased throughout the year¹⁹.

V er tibi contribuat sua munera florea grata E t tibi grata comis nutet aestiua uoluptas. R eddat et Autumnus Bacchi tibi munera semper A c leue hiberni tempus tellure dicetur.

Even more clearly than in *CLE* 492, this poem dedicated to Marcana Vera connects



Figure 17.- Altar dedicated to Marcana Vera, conserved in the Museo Archeologico Sarsinate (*CIL* XI, 656; CLE 439).

Lucernis, 27 (2005), 147-53. Although my interpretation of the last lines differs from that of Krummrey, since he does not relate them to the four seasons or to the Roman symbology connected with the conquering of death, I owe to him my knowledge of the text and the sarcophagus, which, it must be said, "unfortunately" contains no decoration. I am grateful to P. Colafrancesco for reminding me of its existence and for having observed that it is in fact a sarcophagus.

¹⁶ G. P. Secchi, Monumenti inediti d'un antico sepolcro di familia greca scoperto in Roma su la Via Latina, Roma 1843.

¹⁷ Cf. S. Settis, Le pareti ingannevoli. La villa di Livia e la pittura di giardino, Roma 2002, 25 and note 16.

¹⁸ Cf. G. Kaibel, *Epigrammata graeca ex lapidibus conlecta*, Berlin 1878, n.546; W. Peek, *Griechische-Versinschriften*, Berlin 1955, n.2027 and L.Moretti, *Inscriptiones Graecae Vrbis Romae*, vol.III, Roma 1979, n.1303: the text can be dated to the end of the 1st c. BC.

¹⁹ Cf. also for this inscription P. Cugusi, "Carmina Latina Epigraphica del Sarsinate. Con cenni sulla distribuzione geografica dei CLE", Rivista Storica dell'Antichità, 34 (2004), 299-321 (n.5, 305-7) and E. Courtney, Musa Lapidaria. A Selection of Latin Verse Inscriptions, Atlanta 1995, n.175 and pp.373-4.

the permanent memory of the deceased with fruit (flowers for spring, bunches of grapes for autumn) or with details of the season of the year repeated uninterruptedly, just as the recollection and memory of Vera should suffer no interruption. In this case, of course, there is a triple complicity between the author of the poem and the reader, stemming from the name of the deceased, *Vera*. Although etymologically the name has nothing to do with *uer*, the interpretation *VER-A* is inevitable; working from this veiled reference, the poem opens with a tour of the four seasons, beginning with spring and, thirdly, from this base is also built the acrostich which constructs, precisely, the name of the dead woman²⁰.



Figure 18.- Detail of the inscription on the altar dedicated to Marcana Vera, conserved in the Museo Archeologico Sarsinate (*CIL* XI, 656; CLE 439).

The philosophical, epigraphic and non-epigraphic texts

It is possible to present texts of inscriptions of the type *non fui, fui, non sum, non curo* (or sometimes *non desidero*); or of the type *dum uixi bibi libenter: bibite uos qui uiuitis...* which rather than expressing, in metrical epitaphs, an active Epicureanism, reveal ideas which might be said to be "tinged" with the same philosophy.

More actively Lucretian, as it were, and Epicurean, is *CLE* 1202²¹, which sums up very neatly the Epicureans' line of thought on life and death: in life we only leave behind suffering; when we die we lose nothing; in death there is no suffering; if we do not exist, we can feel no pain: why, then, worry about death? Following much the same lines is *CLE* 1493, *ulterius nihil est morte neque utilius*.

Dum sis in uita dolor est amittere uitam; Dum simul occidimus, omnia dispicias. Orbem sub leges si habeas dum uiuis, ad Orchum Quid ualet? Hic nulla est diuitis ambitio

Even more interesting than the above are the texts of a mosaic found in *Augustodunum*, called « Mosaïque des Auteurs grecs » and which can be dated to the end of the 2nd –beginning of the 3rd centuries AD. *SEG* 42 965 (Koch 2005, n.42), *Augustodunum* (Autun), « mosaïque v.150-début 3 s. ap. J.-C. Deux carrés de mosaïques avec portraits d'Épicure et de Métrodore...trouvé en 1990, conservé au musée Rolin à Autun. »²²

«1. Nous sommes nés une fois pour toutes, il n'est possible de naître deux fois : mais toi qui n'est pas maître du l'endemain, tu diffères la joie ; or la vie se consume dans les délais,

²⁰ Cf. M.T. Sblendorio Cugusi, "Un espediente epigrammatico ricorrente nei CLE: l'uso anfibológico del nome proprio. Con cenni alla tradizione letteraria", *AFMC*, n.s., 4 (1980), pp.257-81 and J. Gómez Pallarès in "Humor 'negro': el diálogo entre vivos y muertos en la poesía epigráfica latina", *Exemplaria Classica*, 11, 2007, p. 167-196.

²¹ Cf. L. Storoni Mazzolani, *Iscrizioni funerarie, sortilegi e pronostici di Roma antica*, Torino 1973, 58-9, n.29.

²² We cite from the SEG.

et chacun de nous meurt à mesure qu'il omet de prendre du bon temps. Métrodore. » « 2. Il n'est pas possible de vivre dans le plaisir sans vivre selon le bon sens, le bien et la justice ; ni de vivre selon le bon sens, le bien et la justice sans le plaisir. Épicure ».

Thus comes down to us, clearly and drastically, the thought of Epicurus and Metrodorus on the idea that « one cannot be born twice » and that therefore « there is nothing after death », so that « we must live as long as we have life with a good sense of right and justice, but above all, with pleasure ».

Following this line, then, all the epigraphic funerary texts, whether metrical or not, that we find with messages like the above or like Kaibel 646 (Koch 2005, n.36, p.231, Rome²³) are clearly Epicurean. We may not be able to categorize all of them, such as those of Lucretius or the thoughts of Epicurus himself, or of Metrodorus, reproduced in the *Augustodunum* mosaic, as examples of Epicurean activism, but they do pertain to a philosophy of life clearly tinged with Epicureanism.

But needless to say, all these texts do not "resolve" or explain the metaphorical complexity of the four seasons or their message in the relationship we have seen established between the iconography of the sarcophagi, the paintings and the mosaics, on the one hand, and the epigraphic texts which also talk about them, on the other. To do this it is necessary, more than with any other text, to have recourse to a Stoic like Seneca, who in one of his letters to Lucilius, *Lucil.* 36. 9-12 (*editio* Reynolds), explains that:

Mors nullum habet incommodum; esse enim debet aliquid cuius sit incommodum. Quod si tanta cupiditas te longioris aeui tenet, cogita nihil eorum quae ab oculis abeunt et in rerum naturam, ex qua prodierunt ac mox processura sunt, reconduntur consumi: desinunt ista, non pereunt, et mors, quam pertimescimus ac recusamus, intermittit vitam, non eripit; veniet iterum qui nos in lucem reponat dies, quem multi recusarent nisi oblitos reduceret. Sed postea diligentius docebo omnia quae uidentur perire mutari. Aequo animo debet rediturus exire. Obserua orbem rerum in se remeantium: uidebis nihil in hoc mundo exstingui sed uicibus descendere ac surgere. Aestas abit, sed alter illam annus adducet; hiemps cecidit, referent illam sui menses; solem nox obruit, sed ipsam statim dies abiget. Stellarum iste discursus quidquid praeterit repetit; pars caeli leuatur assidue, pars mergitur. Denique finem faciam, si hoc unum adiecero, nec infantes [nec] pueros nec mente lapsos timere mortem et esse turpissimum si eam securitatem nobis ratio non praestat ad quam stultitia perducit. Vale.

We find it explained and reasoned out here that, for reasons quite distinct from those of the Epicureans, there is no reason to fear death. This is important because one and the same underlying thought (death is not to be feared) is used by each side to offer two quite different basic ideas: for the Epicureans, death should not be feared because it holds no suffering; there is simply a transition from a situation of life to one of non-life and a painless dissolution of atoms. Since death is « non-feeling », this transition is at the same time « non-suffering ». Since there is nothing after death, one

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²³ « a. Ne fais pas l'impasse sur l'épigramme, voyageur, Mais arrête-toi pour entendre, et une fois instruit passe ton chemin: Il n'existe pas en Hàdes de barque, ni de passeur Charon, Ni de gardien Éaque, ni de chien Cerbère; Mais nous tous les morts d'en bas, Nous voici os et cendres, absolument rien d'autre. Je t'ai parlé droitement; poursuis ta route, voyageur, De peur que même mort je te paraisse bavard ». « b. (inutile de soigner une pierre et de nourrir le mort)».

should concentrate on leading a good, just and pleasure-filled life. Nothing else is smart or makes any sense, and besides there will be no second opportunity to attempt it. For the Stoics, on the other hand, death is not to be feared because it brings nothing to a close: death interrupts life, it does not remove it, and those who lose their lives do not die, they change. To give voice to this concept, which is none other than the pre-Christian desire to survive after life²⁴, Seneca uses the metaphor of the four seasons: one winter will always be followed by another, one spring always by another one. And Roman iconography and art, conceived of as a whole alongside the texts to whose unique civilization they belong²⁵, must express the concept of immortality in exactly the same way. On occasion the intention may simply be to manifest a wish that the memory of the deceased will survive, through the seasonal renewal of the offerings made to him; on occasion we may be talking of the « fruits » harvested (or not) in life; at times we may be witnessing a thought « tinged » with Stoicism and at others one declaredly and militantly Stoic but, whatever the motive, we find it repeatedly manifested through the textual and iconic metaphor of the four seasons. In particular, though not exclusively so, when one wishes to display one's feelings over a case of *mors immatura*, as Seneca explains to us.

Conclusions

Seneca may explain himself from both sides and explain to us the whole Roman iconography that talks to us, in the funerary ambit, of the four seasons, whether jointly or individually (see, for example, the sarcophagus in photo 1); Seneca may explain himself from both sides and explain to us all the inscriptions in the funerary sphere that speak to us of the four seasons, whatever their form ... (see, for example, the epitaph of Marcana Vera, photos 17 and 18). But neither Seneca nor Epicurus can explain the whole combination of texts and iconography displayed on the sarcophagus of L. Annius Octavius (see photo 7). Perhaps, apart from the observations and ideas I have managed to offer by means of the above evidence, this sarcophagus also enables us talk of a global concept of death in the Roman world, a pre-philosophical concept, if I may be allowed the expression. This concept groups together on the one hand the desire to express the "immortality" of the deceased (this is one way to put it: or at least inmortality through the perpetuation of the individual's memory among the living) by means of the iconography of the four seasons or of one of them (autumn and the grape harvest, the most frequent of them, also in part, perhaps, because of the relationship between this iconography and the cult of Bacchus in Rome and its significance²⁶), or of some of the tasks -also cyclical- associated with a number of them (for instance, in the last-mentioned case, wheat and bread, in winter, with the ploughing of the fields; in spring, with the sowing of the crops; in summer, with the harvest; the end of summer, and autumn, with the transporting of the cereal, and the whole year, with the milling of the grain and its transformation, after baking, into bread). If we had to fit this concept in with a philosophical idea, working from all the texts cited above, it would clearly be Stoic. But on the other hand, what is expressed by the sarcophagus, not through the iconography but through the poem accompanying it, manifests the conviction that we are but a cipher, that with death all that the person was now comes to an end and, consequently, the only thing to do is laugh at the transcendence of that moment, the moment of death, at beliefs concerning chance and destiny (we will all end up the same way, dead, and that is it) and act accordingly, that is, enjoying what life has to give without fear and with absolute dedication.

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²⁴ The « prize » for Christians will also be the overcoming of physical death in a way, as they « will be reborn, will rise again ». Consequently they also « get their money's worth » out of this metaphor, as they do with so many other non-Christian ones: cf. A. Grabar, *Les voies de la création en iconographie chrétienne*, Paris 1979, 33-53.

²⁵ Cf. U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorf, Storia della filologia classica, Torino 1967³ (Leipzig 1927), 19.

²⁶ Cf. note 11 and also R. Turcan, Les sarcophages romains à répresentations dionysiaques, Paris 1966.

The importance of this sarcophagus (I am, of course, aware that the objection might be made that this was a simple corn merchant or a pistor, as suggested by Turcan 1999 -cf. supra note 5-, and nothing more, but there is no evidence for this; in contrast, there is sufficient evidence, some of it presented above, to propose that this sarcophagus be interpreted within the series on seasonal tasks and their symbolic and metaphorical interpretation) is that it speaks of the metaphor of the seasons through the symbol of one of them (summer, with the corn harvest) as developed over the whole year. The wheat cycle shows that everything is reborn, that nothing dies, that with winter, in nature (and in life) things come to a standstill, to rise up again later in new forms and with renewed strength in spring and summer. This is obviously Stoic. But at the same time, the textual message is clearly Epicurean! How can this presumed paradox be explained? I think it is important to stress that the Roman version of Epicureanism, basically as transmitted by Lucretius in his *De rerum natura*, contributes certain nuances to the teachings of Epicurus and Philodemus on death and, above all, on the concept of early death (which has nothing to do with the age of the dead person, but with how he has led his life, whatever his age, until the point of wisdom represented by ataraxia -cf. note 4- is reached), teachings which allow us to configure the metaphorical message of the four seasons as if it were concerned with a pre-philosophical melting-pot concerning the prefiguration of death in Rome. In this way alone is it possible to take Lucr., *Nat.* 3. 964-71:

> cedit enim rerum nouitate extrusa uetustas semper, et ex aliis aliud reparare necessest: nec quisquam in barathrum nec Tartara deditur atra. Materies opus est ut crescant postera saecla; quae tamen omnia te uita perfuncta sequentur

Turcan 1978, 1701²⁷ and 1702 - 3²⁸ offers two important reflections for my final conclusion. Turcan deals only with myths, but what he demonstrates for them is applicable and extendible to the whole universe of Roman iconography: the use of the four seasons, as a metaphor through their icons and texts and as a funerary symbol in Rome, is not a chance or casual one, nor does it arise in just any old way. It is basically related to cases of *mors immatura* and to the commemoration and memory of deaths of this kind and it serves, either through Stoicism or through Epicureanism (though much less so), or through an intuitive, pre-philosophical synthesis (through images, monuments and texts) to speak of the need to perpetuate the memory of the deceased, whether there is a belief in the reincorporation of body and soul to a higher, cyclical order of things in nature, or the aim is «only» to recall the regular need to make offerings or to talk about the fruits which the deceased might (or might not) have harvested while still alive in the course of all life's « seasons ». Later, as we have also seen, it will be extended to make it possible to talk of any type of death, and even to do so (at least by means of the iconic symbols) in the Christian world.

Exactly the same thing happened with the Ganymede myth, as was demonstrated in his day by Engemann 1973, 58-9, 4: « Ganymed und die *Mors inmatura*...der epigraphischen und literarischen Überlieferung, in der Ganymed als Heroisierungs bzw. Consolationsbeispiel für *immaturi* verwendet wurde ...In der Forschung ist daher vielfach angenommen worden, dass Ganymedbild sei in der

²⁷ "Il n'y a pas ou très peu de décor gratuit dans l'art antique et surtout dans l'art romain ».

²⁸ "Si n'importe quel mythe pouvait servir à 'décorer' n'importe quel sarcophage, pourquoi tous les mythes connus ne figurentils pas au répertoire de l'imagerie funéraire ? »>>> « donc le choix des thèmes n'est pas commandé par l'esthètique ».

Grabkunst speziell oder sogar ausschliesslich auf als *immaturi* Verstorbene angewendet worden... wenn die Ganymedsymbolik auch besonders für *immaturi* geegnet war, so ist trotzdem nicht auszuschliessen, dass die symbolische Aussage auch verallgemeinet und auf jeden Verstorbenen übertragen werden konnte."

I believe that the process I have described to show the function and symbology of the four seasons in the funerary universe of Rome, through some of its texts and images, has followed the same evolution as the myth of Ganymede, as described by Engemann.