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Theodor Mommsen and the *collegia funeraticia*

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Abstract: In 1843, Theodor Mommsen completed his legal studies at the University of Kiel. In the same year, his dissertation *De collegiis et sodaliciis Romanorum* appeared in print. This publication, which was small in terms of volume, not only opened the door to an illustrious academic career for its author, but also had an enormous impact on the course of scholarly discussion on Roman colleges. One of the basic concepts used in this discussion is the “funeral colleges” created by Mommsen. The main purpose of this article is to show that we are dealing with an anachronism in this case. Mommsen’s proposed concept of “funeral colleges” found very fertile ground in Germany at the time (“bürgerliche Vereinsbewegung” and Bismarck’s social reforms), but it is not substantiated by the source material. None of the known Roman colleges was a “funeral college” in the sense in which the term was used by Mommsen and his scholarly heirs. The fact that, for many colleges, helping to organise the burial of a deceased member was an important sphere of their activity does not make them “funeral colleges”.

Keywords: ancient Rome, Theodor Mommsen, Roman colleges, funeral colleges

Streszczenie: W 1843 r. Theodor Mommsen skończył studia prawnicze na uniwersytecie w Kilonii; w tym samym roku ukazała się drukiem jego rozprawa *De collegiis et soda-*

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licii Romanorum. Ta niewielka pod względem objętości publikacja nie tylko otworzyła drzwi do wspaniałej kariery akademickiej jej autora, lecz także wywarła ogromny wpływ na przebieg dyskusji naukowej na temat rzymskiego korporacjonizmu. Jednym z podstawowych pojęć używanych w tej dyskusji są wykreowane przez Mommsena „kolegia pogrzebowe”. Głównym celem tego artykułu jest wykazanie, że mamy w tym przypadku do czynienia z anachronizmem. Zaproponowana przez Mommsena koncepcja „kolegiów pogrzebowych” trafiła na bardzo podatny grunt w ówczesnych Niemczech („bürgerliche Vereinsbewegung” i reformy społeczne Ottona von Bismarcka), nie ma jednak uzasadnienia w materiale źródłowym. Żadne ze znanych rzymskich kolegiów nie było „kolegium pogrzebowym” w tym znaczeniu, w jakim tego terminu używali Mommsen i jego naukowcy spadkobiercy. Fakt, że dla wielu kolegiów pomoc w zakresie organizacji pochówku zmarłego członka była ważną sferą ich aktywności, nie czyni z nich „kolegiów pogrzebowych”.

Słowa kluczowe: starożytny Rzym, Theodor Mommsen, rzymskie kolegia, kolegia pogrzebowe

In 1825, in one of the first issues of *Dissertazioni della pontificia accademia romana di archeologia*, Nicola Ratti wrote about a Roman inscription found in Cività Lavinia, issued by the *collegium salutare Dianae et Antinoi*.¹ At the time, the inscription, found almost 10 years earlier, was kept

¹ N. Ratti, *Dissertazione sopra una antica iscrizione rinvenuta nel territorio di Cività-Lavinia spettante alla città di Lanuvio*, “Dissertazioni della Pontificia Accademia romana di archeologia. Atti dell’Accademia romana di archeologia” 1825, vol. 2, p. 435–462. Subsequent editions and significant discussions of this inscription: CIL 14, 2112; ILS 7212; A. E. Gordon, *Album of dated Latin inscriptions. Rome and the neighborhood*, II, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1964, p. 61–68, no. 196, il. 87–88; F. M. Ausbüttel, *Untersuchungen zu den Vereinen in Westen des römischen Reiches*, Kallmünz 1982, p. 22–29; B. Bollmann, *Römische Vereinshäuser. Untersuchungen zu den Scholae der römischen Berufs-, Kult- und Augustalen-Kollegien in Italien*, Mainz 1998, p. 354–355, no. A 48; A. Bendlin, *Associations, funerals, sociality, and Roman law: The collegium of Diana and Antinous in Lanuvium (CIL 14.2112) reconsidered*, in: *Aposteldekret und Antikes Vereinswesen: Gemeinschaft und ihre Ordnung*, ed. M. Öhler, Tübingen 2011, p. 207–295; P. Garofalo, *Lex collegii Dianae et Antinoi (CIL XIV 2112), Testo, traduzione e commento*, Tivoli 2020; P. Wojciechowski, *Leges collegiorum: “statutes” of Roman private colleges in the early empire period*, in: *Antiquitas Aeterna, classical studies dedicated to Leszek Mrozewicz on his 70th birthday*, eds. K. Balbuza, M. Duch, Z. Kaczmarek, K. Królczyk, A. Tatarkiewicz, Wiesbaden 2021, p. 497–506.

in the house belonging to the Frezza brothers – the owners of the fields where several dozen fragments came to light consisting of a board with the inscription of interest here.² Despite the errors or inaccuracies in the reconstruction proposed by Ratti, it reflects the meaning of the inscription. To put it simply, this is a set of regulations regarding the operation of a college of worshipers of Diana and Antinous, which operated in Lanuvium, located near the Roman capital. In addition to this collection, which the issuers of the inscriptions themselves referred to as *lex collegii*, and elements typical of this type of inscription, it contained a fragment of the Roman Senate resolution authorising this association (or colleges in general). It was this fragment of the Lanuvian inscription that caught the attention of Clemente Cardinali, the author of a treatise entitled *Diplomi imperiali di privilegi accordati ai militari*.³ In what circumstances Cardinali's work fell into the hands of a law student at the University of Kiel remains unknown, but we do know that Theodor Mommsen found it helpful when working on his dissertation on the legal aspects of the operation of the Roman colleges.⁴ A treatise published in 1843 entitled *De collegiis et sodaliciis Romanorum* opened the door to Mommsen's illustrious academic career and, as it turned out, would dominate research on Roman corporatism for many decades. Mommsen not only defined a new field of research, which would later become Roman corporatism, and determined the main directions in which this research would develop, but also mentioned the need to create new tools, without which a serious discussion on the status and functioning of the *collegia tenuiorum* would not be possible. As Mommsen expected, this discussion was split down the middle: some historians, with Mommsen himself at the helm, focused on examining the legal framework for the functioning of colleges, primarily their relationship with the state (*de jure collegiorum*), while others focused on the internal structure of colleges, their organisation and function (*forma collegiorum*). The choice Mommsen made was justified by the source database available at that time.

² On the circumstances of finding the inscription, see in particular Garofalo, op. cit., p. 15–27.

³ C. Cardinali, *Diplomi imperiali di privilegi accordati ai militari*, Velletri 1835.

⁴ T. Mommsen, *De collegiis et sodaliciis Romanorum*, Kilonia 1843.

While issues related to the legal status of colleges were fairly well documented in traditional literary and normative sources, attempts at an in-depth discussion on the forms involved in their day-to-day operation were doomed to failure without access to carefully researched epigraphic material. Mommsen was aware of the limitations in this area, which is why he proposed starting work on a possibly complete corpus of Latin inscriptions. Today it seems obvious that the main source of knowledge about the organisation, social structure and spheres of activity of Roman colleges is epigraphic material, but when Mommsen published *De collegiis*, inscriptions were of interest to collectors, antiquarians and enthusiasts of Roman history. “Serious” historians thought that they were consigned to the margins, as decoration, a kind of illustration for theses formulated on the basis of traditional, or literary, texts. The great project of editing the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL), promoted by Mommsen himself, was yet to be born.⁵

The decision to focus research on the legal status of Roman private associations was fully justified.⁶ It was also reasonable to include the Lanuvium inscriptions in the analysis. Its first publisher – Ratti – pointed out the far-reaching similarities between the *senatus consultum* quote included in the Lanuvian inscription and the passage from the *Digesta*, from the third book of *Institutiones* by Marcian (Aelius Marcianus).⁷ The Roman lawyer from the Severan era writes about the imperial ban on tolerating the work of colleges (*collegia sodalicia*) throughout the entire empire and establishing colleges in military camps; the prohibition was not designed to include

⁵ Work on CIL began in 1847 thanks to a grant from King Christian VIII of Denmark, of whom Mommsen – which is rarely remembered – was a subject (see: J. S. Perry, *The Roman collegia. The modern evolution of an ancient concept*, Leiden–Boston 2006, p. 29).

⁶ By focusing on the republican period and the legal aspects regarding how colleges operated, Mommsen continued the traditional discourse on Roman religious and professional corporations, cultivated for decades at German universities – see D. Rohde, *Zwischen Individuum und Stadtgemeinde. Die Integration von collegia in Haffnenstädten*, Mainz 2012, p. 16–17.

⁷ N. Ratti, op. cit., p. 446. It is worth underlining Ratti’s achievements in this area, because later authors usually attribute the discovery of analogies between these texts to Mommsen (see, e.g., J. S. Perry, op. cit., p. 30).

tenuiores, who could meet once a month to collect contributions, provided this was not a pretext for forming illegal associations. Meetings could be held for religious purposes (*religionis causa*).⁸ Assuming that the similarity of the wording in both texts (the inscription and the *Digesta*) is no accident, Mommsen reached the conclusion that the college of Lanuvium was one of the *collegia* described by Marcian where *tenuiores* were able to associate. In the light of Mommsen's reconstructed *lex collegii*, the Lanuvium college's main sphere of action was the organisation of funerals for dying members of the corporation,⁹ which perfectly coincides with the information in the *Digesta*, according to which concern for the burials of members was a condition for recognising the college as legal. The statement that all *collegia tenuiorum*¹⁰ were in fact funeral colleges was a logical consequence of this finding. This is how Mommsen's *collegia funeraticia* came into being...

For Mommsen, shifting the focus from the divine (the cult of divine patrons) to the human (the need to ensure a decent burial) also had a very personal dimension. The strong trends towards secularisation apparent in Europe at that time, of course, also affected German universities, but in Mommsen's case it was a question of a much deeper transformation. As the son of a Lutheran pastor, he was one of those scholars who "had lost

⁸ *Digesta*, 47, 22, 1: "Mandatis principalibus praecipitur praesidibus prouinciarum ne patiantur esse collegia sodalicia, neque milites collegia in castris habeant. Sed permittitur tenuioribus stipem menstruam conferre, dum tamen semel in mense coeant, ne sub praetextu huiusmodi illicitum collegium coeat. Quod non tantum in urbe sed et in Italia et in prouinciis locum habere diuus quoque Seuerus rescripsit. Sed religionis causa coire non prohibentur, dum tamen per hoc non fiat contra senatus consultum quo illicita collegia arcentur".

⁹ In this spirit, Mommsen completed the missing fragment of the *senatus consultum*, a citation from which was included in the Lanuvian inscription. According to him, this part of the inscription read as follows: *quib[us coire co]nvenire collegiumq[ue] habere liceat qui stipem menstruam conferre volen[st in fune]ra in it collegium coeant neq[ue] sub specie eius collegi nisi semel in / mense / c[oeant con]ferendi causa unde defuncti sepeliantur* (T. Mommsen, op. cit., p. 98).

¹⁰ Using the term *collegia tenuiorum* in the sense of a separate legal or social category is problematic, to say the least. It does not appear in the sources apart from one exception, when Marcian states that slaves may join a *collegia tenuiorum* only with the consent of their owners (*Digesta* 47, 22, 3, 2). See A. Bendlin, op. cit., p. 232–233.

the faith somewhere along the way”.¹¹ It therefore comes as no surprise that Mommsen compares the guardian deities of the Roman colleges to saints (St. Martin and Nicholas) “worshipped long ago by our compatriots” who also lent their names to the colleges, which in turn dealt with something completely different than their cult.¹² It is worth noting that in the original Mommsen used the term *nostrates*, which can also be translated as “peasants”, which would have lent his statement a decidedly deprecating tone towards the Christian or, more precisely, Catholic tradition. In 1843, a “funeral college” might have seemed to Mommsen a much more rational entity than a “cult association” or “religious brotherhood” operating in an area that was difficult to define. I emphasise the date 1843 for a reason. I would like to draw attention here to the circumstances in which Mommsen’s dissertation was written.

De collegiis et sodaliciis Romanorum – a work often forgotten – is not the opus of a Nobel Prize winner, the “father of epigraphy”, a professor of the largest German universities etc., but of a 25-year-old law graduate. In fact, when *De collegiis* was published, Mommsen was still awaiting the final results of his law exams and, like most young people in this situation, he faced some important decisions.¹³ Although it is hard to believe today, a scientific career was not an obvious option for him. Excellent results in Mommsen’s final exams opened the door to a legal career. In a letter to her son, Mommsen’s mother states with understandable pride that down to him, and him alone, which career path he chooses among the many available to him.¹⁴ In this situation, the decision he made must have caused quite a stir, not only for her. Theodor Mommsen decided to take a teach-

¹¹ On the circumstances of Mommsen’s apostasy, see J. S. Perry, op. cit., p. 38–39.

¹² T. Mommsen, op. cit., p. 92: “Collegia Deo cuidam sacra frequentissime in lapidibus apparent, quae principaliter ad Deorum cultum spectavisse constare videbatur. [--] Dii illi tutelares collegiorum similes videntur fuisse Sanctis, qui olim apud nostrates collegiis nomina dare solebant, etsi illa ad longe alias res constituta erant quam ut bonum Nicolaum Martinumve colerent”.

¹³ Mommsen’s correspondence shows that his dissertation was published in the last days of March or at the beginning of April 1843, and its defence fell on 8 November of the same year (J. S. Perry, op. cit., p. 28).

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 25.

ing position at a school for girls run by his uncle in Altona, located near Hamburg. Mommsen was aware that his decision would astound his loved ones – in a letter to one of his friends he tries to explain his motives at least partially. The overriding motive here was the desire to become independent from his parents. In Mommsen’s case, the natural need for independence at this stage of life may have had an additional source. Having graduated, Mommsen had already declared himself an apostate. Although we do not know anything about any particular tension in his relationship with his father, it seems that the act of apostasy had an impact on their day-to-day life and the atmosphere at home. We do not know whether from the outset Mommsen treated the position at Altona as a mere temporary solution that would provide him with a minimum of independence before embarking on his “real” career, but we do know that the young law graduate eagerly took advantage of this freedom. During the few summer months of his stay in Altona, he was not only able to devote himself to his literary passion, but was also a frequent guest at a beer hall in Bremen, as he duly told his friend, Theodor Storm.¹⁵ The latter complained about the sad fate that had befallen him as an intern in a law firm. Mommsen and Storm not only had their law studies in common, but also – and perhaps above all – their love of poetry. It is worth noting that at the same time as *De collegiis* was written, they both published a joint volume of poetry entitled *Liederbuch dreier Freunde*.¹⁶ For Storm – one of the most important figures of German poetry in the 19th century – this would debut a wonderful literary career, while for Mommsen it turned out to be just a fleeting episode, although ultimately it was he, not Storm, who would receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. However, this would occur more than half a century later. In 1843, Theodor Mommsen’s academic career was just about to begin. Its opening and striking chord was a treatise on Roman colleges and sodalities. This enabled him to receive a grant from the King of Denmark, Christian VIII, in 1847, to start work on what would turn out to be an epoch-making

¹⁵ *Theodor Storms Briefwechsel mit Theodor Mommsen*, ed. H.-E. Teitge, Weimar 1966, p. 71.

¹⁶ The third participant in this venture was Theodor Mommsen’s older brother – Tycho. See J. S. Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

work – *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. The same year also saw him travel to Rome, where his cooperation and long-term friendship began with another great of this era – Giovanni Battista de Rossi.

Mommsen's proposed vision of Roman corporatism, centred around the *collegia funeraticia*, was highly convincing. To put it briefly, this phenomenon (many years after Mommsen, Francesco De Robertis would introduce the concept of *il fenomeno associativo* in reference to Roman corporatism)¹⁷ was to consist of two basic types of association – professional and religious (such as the *collegium Dianae et Antinoi*), which were in fact identified with funeral colleges. For several generations of historians, the strength of Mommsen's arguments, and his later authority even more so, were enough to relinquish any attempts to seek alternative solutions, especially since the matter seemed devoid of controversy. The *lex collegii Dianae et Antinoi* analysed by Mommsen contained copious information relating to the funeral of deceased members of this corporation – the amount of the allowance (*funeraticium*) paid on this occasion, the regulations regarding very specific perturbations related to the burial of, for example, a member who died far from Lanuvium, or the need to organise a symbolic funeral when the deceased member of the college was a slave and his owner refused to hand over the body (see note 1). In a word, Mommsen – and he was not alone in this – may have formed the impression that a burial/funeral was the axis around which college life revolved. The *leges collegiorum* that were discovered later would largely further this impression.

An inscription containing *lex collegii Aesculapii et Hygiae* was already known to exist in Mommsen's time.¹⁸ The mention of *funeraticium*, included in this inscription, was enough to recognise the Roman association of worshippers of Aesculapius and Hygia as another funerary college.¹⁹ *Lex*

¹⁷ F. De Robertis, *Il fenomeno associative nel mondo romano. Dai collegi della repubblica alle corporazioni del Basso Impero*, Roma 1981.

¹⁸ CIL 6, 10324; see A. E. Gordon, op. cit., p. 90–94, no. 217; R. Ascough, P. A. Harland, J. S. Kloppenborg, *Associations in the Graeco-Roman world. A sourcebook*, Waco 2012, p. 207–210, no. 322.

¹⁹ CIL 6, 10234 (verse 6–8): "...et / ut in locum / defunctorum loca veniant et liberi adlegantur, vel si quis locum suum legare volet filio vel fratri vel liberto dumtaxat, ut inerat arcae n̄(ostrae) partem / dimidiam funeratici"; see T. Mommsen, op. cit., p. 92–93.

familiae Silvani, discovered in the 1930s, also provided some serious arguments for supporters of Mommsen's vision of Rome's *il fenomeno associativo*.²⁰ Most of the regulations contained in this inscription from the *Trebula Mutuesca* concern the extremely complex system of collecting funeral contributions in the event of the death of one of the corporation's members.²¹ One may cite many examples of colleges that emphasised their "funeral" activity by providing information on various forms of participation in the burial of a deceased member of the corporation.²² The sources therefore leave no doubt that the burial of deceased members and everything associated with it (funeral ceremonies, installing a tombstone, taking care of the grave, etc.) was an important component of corporate life. Nevertheless, at the end of the last century, publications began to appear whose authors, to a greater or lesser extent, questioned the vision of Roman colleges, reducing them to the role of "Sterbekassen" concerned primarily with ensuring a decent burial for their members. Work by historians such as Frank Ausbüttel, Onno Van Nijf and Nicolas Tran fundamentally changed our ideas about the social structure of the *corporati*.²³ So, for the first time since

On the specific nature of *lex collegii Aesculapii et Hygiae*, see P. Wojciechowski, *Salvia Marcellina and the "collegium" of Aesculapius and Hygia in Rome: Some remarks on the "lex Aesculapii et Hygiae" (CIL VI 10234)*, "Palamedes" 2017, vol. 12, p. 141–164.

²⁰ AE 1929, 161; R. Friggeri, *La collezione epigrafica del Museo Nazionale Romano*, Roma 2001, p. 173–174.

²¹ *Lex familiae Silvani* is a kind of addition to the list of college members issued a few years earlier. For more on the form and content of *lex familiae Silvani*, see E. Vetter, *Die "familia Silvani" in Trebula Mutuesca und die "sectores materiarum" in Aquileia*, in: *Studi aquileiesi offerti il 7 ottobre 1953 a G. Brusin nel suo 70 compleanno*, Aquileia 1953, p. 96–119; M. Buonocore, O. Diliberto, *L'album e la lex della Familia Silvani di Trebula Mutuesca. Nuove considerazioni*, "Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia. Rendiconti" 2003, vol. 75, p. 327–393; eidem, *Approfondimenti sull'album e la lex familiae Silvani da Trebula Mutuesca*, "Minima Epigraphica et Papyrologica" 2006, vol. 11, p. 210–254.

²² As many as 20% of epigraphically certified Italian colleges provide information on this matter (F. M. Ausbüttel, op. cit., p. 59). In the East, the percentage of corporations active in this area was even higher (O. M. van Nijf, *The civic world of professional associations in the Roman East*, Amsterdam 1997, p. 31).

²³ F. M. Ausbüttel, op. cit.; O. M. van Nijf, op. cit.; N. Tran, *Les membres des associations romaines: le rang social des collegiati en Italie et en Gaules, sous le haut-empire*, Rome 2006.

the publication of *De collegiis*, a question mark hung over Mommsen's "funeral colleges".²⁴

When college members ceased to be perceived as poor people seeking salvation from the nightmare of mass graves as their "eternal resting place", it turned out that the vision of the colleges themselves as "associations whose purpose was to organise the funerals of their members and ensure the performance of rites related to the cult of the dead"²⁵ has little grounding in reality. Most of the *collegia*, which Mommsen and his successors would certainly have considered *collegia funeraticia*, can only be said to have participated in the burial of their deceased *collegiati*. However, it is difficult to determine what this participation involved. The list of expenses incurred by organising a funeral and taking care of the grave was long and included the costs of purchasing a plot of land, making a tombstone, and securing funds for commemorative ceremonies. Depending on the will of the deceased and the financial capabilities of the college, it could assist the family and heirs to a greater or lesser extent. It seems that the main form of this support was *funeraticium* – a funeral allowance paid by the college to the deceased's relatives. All the *leges collegiorum* cited above mention this. The amount varied between corporations, but it certainly did not necessarily cover all burial-related expenses.²⁶ This also applies to associations with their own cemeteries. First of all, one should note that, contrary to com-

²⁴ It should be recalled here that in 1888, W. Liebenam had already postulated a shift in the focus of research on colleges, emphasising the importance of self-help ("vielmehr müssen wir sie [*collegia*] allgemeiner als Unterstützungscassen für Unfall und Krankheit, Vereine zur Selbsthilfe überhaupt fassen" – W. Liebenam, *Zur Geschichte und Organisation des römischen Vereinswesens*, Leipzig 1890, p. 40).

²⁵ J. Kolendo, J. Żelazowski, *Teksty i pomniki. Zarys epigrafiki łacińskiej okresu Cesarstwa Rzymskiego*, Warszawa 2003, p. 162–163; similarly, J. Rivers, *Życie obywatelskie i religijne*, in: *Świadectwa epigraficzne. Historia starożytna w świetle inskrypcji*, ed. J. Bodel, Poznań 2008, p. 140). See also S. Schrupf, *Bestattung und Bestattungswesen im römischen Reich: Ablauf, soziale Dimension und ökonomische Bedeutung der Totenfürsorge im lateinischen Westen*, Göttingen 2006, p. 91–96; F. Diosono, *Collegia. Le associazioni professionali nel mondo romano*, Roma 2007, p. 54.

²⁶ For more about the amount given for *funeraticium* and the costs associated with burials, see P. Wojciechowski, *Roman religious associations in Italy (1st–3rd century)*, Toruń 2021, p. 101–113.

mon beliefs espoused in the literature, a college with its own cemetery was the exception rather than the rule.²⁷ Secondly, even these privileged corporations were unlikely to have provided space in their own cemetery plots or columbaria for all *corporati*. In this context, Ulpia Cynegeis' is worth examining as it offers information about the donation of 12 places in the tomb she built for the Roman college of worshipers of Aesculapius and Hygia.²⁸ Who decided which members of the college would have the chance to benefit from Ulpia's donation? Where had the *cultores Aesculapii et Hygiae* been buried previously? What would happen when these 12 places had been exhausted? These are just some of the questions that arise in connection with the donation mentioned in the inscription. Although most of them will remain without an unequivocal answer, the general conclusion seems quite obvious: members of the Roman college of Aesculapius and Hygia had no guarantee that they would be buried in a corporate cemetery upon their death. In my opinion, they could not count on the college to fully cover the costs of their burial.

Many indications suggest that a collegiate burial was a privilege rather than a right enjoyed by the members of the associations discussed here. This was a privilege that some members could not, and others did not want to, take advantage of. Both effectively undermine the seemingly clear vision of Roman corporatism proposed by Mommsen. The *funeraticium* paid to the families of deceased members could at best alleviate the problems faced by the heirs. It is worth noting that there is no evidence in the sources that would justify the claim that the colleges guaranteed their members a burial at the corporation's expense. The guarantee of *funeraticium* payment, to which the members contributed during the entire period of their membership in the college according to meticulously defined rules, or the granting of a tombstone, is one thing, but the organisation and financing of the burial is an entirely different matter (see above). Of equal importance from our point of view is the fact that some *corporati* decided against burial *in collegio*, which leaves us with a fundamental question: was it really the primary purpose of the colleges existence to provide burial for their members?

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 137–139.

²⁸ AE 1937, 161.

It is hard to resist the impression that many *corporati* belonging to the latter category were looking for something in the colleges other than a guarantee of a decent burial. People such as L. Calpurnius Chius – a member of the authorities of several colleges in Ostia and the owner of an impressive family tomb²⁹ – certainly did not expect help from the corporation in organising his burial. For Calpurnius Chius, the construction of the tomb was, above all, another opportunity to demonstrate the high position he had achieved in the social hierarchy of Ostia. His case is in many respects typical of the *collegiati* category who opted for an *extra collegium* burial. Usually, these were high-ranking people in the corporate authorities, very often working in many organisations.³⁰ These successful people aspiring to join the local elites needed colleges mainly as a platform to facilitate their social advancement or as an effective tool for self-presentation (holding functions in collegial authorities, corporate euergetism). The situation was completely different in the case of people for whom membership in the college was an achievement per se and certified their social advancement. This, of course, applies most to people who, due to their origin and/or limited financial capabilities, could not aspire to play an active role in the city's public life. For the vast majority of freedmen – not to mention slaves – colleges were the only public space where they could exist. Their name immortalised on a corporate tomb or on the list of members displayed at the college's headquarters was the final and most lasting testimony to the position they had achieved. Information about membership in the college inscribed on a tombstone or the presence of a college delegation at the funeral ceremony were probably also treated as kinds of “status symbols”.

On the other hand, one cannot rule out that there were a large number of *corporati* for whom the college's assistance in organising a burial was not only of a symbolic nature. Just as the size, prestige and financial capabilities of individual corporations varied, the financial situation of their members could also differ. Today's quite widely accepted theory that the Roman colleges mainly attracted representatives of what may be broadly under-

²⁹ CIL 14, 309; see R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*, Oxford 1973, p. 561–562, no. 16.

³⁰ O. M. van Nijf, op. cit., p. 39; J. Liu, “*Collegia centonariorum*”: *The guilds of textile dealers in the Roman West*, Leiden–Boston 2009, p. 274.

stood as the middle class does not contradict the statement that, at least for some *corporati*, the funeral allowance paid by the college could have been the only guarantee of what Nicholas Purcell described as “the standard of dying”.³¹ We can, of course, discuss what percentage of college members would have faced a problem maintaining this standard without corporate support. Regardless of the answer to this question, I believe that receiving *funeraticium* was not the main reason for joining one of the colleges operating in the city for any of their members.

Treating Roman professional or religious associations as “funeral colleges” should, in my opinion, be considered one of many anachronisms introduced in academic discussion by 19th-century historiography. Mommsen’s *collegia funeraticia* – the intellectual fruit of a twenty-year-old who questioned the Christian tradition – slot neatly into the new trend of discussion about the role of the sacred and the profane in the emerging modern civil societies. This was certainly one of the reasons for the meteoric rise of the phenomenon that *collegia funeraticia* would become. The concept of funeral colleges proposed by Mommsen found very fertile ground. It is noteworthy that this new approach to Roman corporatism gathered supporters primarily among German historians, which, perhaps not accidentally, coincides with the apogee of the *bürgerliche Vereinsbewegung* and the social reforms conducted by Bismarck. Interestingly, however, the career of the “funeral colleges” was not only rapid, but also turned out to be extremely resistant to the changing ways in which Roman social reality was described. *Collegia funeraticia* are still alive in scientific discourse to this day, and, at least until the end of the 20th century, they were one of the basic concepts used in research on Roman corporatism. As I have attempted to demonstrate, reference to the *collegium funeraticium* concept created by Mommsen finds no justification in the sources. None of the known Roman colleges was a “funeral college” according to the sense in which Mommsen used the term. The fact that many colleges assisted with the organisation of the burial of a deceased member as an important sphere of their activity does not make them “funeral colleges”.

³¹ N. Purcell, *Tomb and Suburb*, in: *Römische Gräberstrassen: Selbstdarstellung-Status-Standard*, eds. H. von Hesberg, P. Zanker, München 1987, p. 35–36.