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## “The Scipio’s Dream” in Cicero’s *De republica* – Reminiscence of *praetexta*?

**Abstract:** The article considers the “Scipio’s Dream” as so-called “staged text”, imitating the style of Roman *praetexta*. The dialogue between the both Scipios presupposes existence of audible and visible things like music or stage decorations and contains internal didascalies stressed by words like *video* or *audio*.

**Key words:** Cicero, “Scipio’s Dream”, *De republica*, *praetexta*, internal didascalies, staged text

Looking for reminiscences of Latin *praetextae* was the main purpose of the reflection on the genre at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the scholars like T. Mommsen, G. de Durante or L. Alfonsi were trying to achieve a reconstruction of some plays, which actually or probably existed<sup>1</sup>. This method, although it seems interesting, is already well criticised<sup>2</sup>. My aim is not to reconstruct a play, which could be the prototype for the Scipio’s dream, because such a play did not probably exist. What am I going to do is show, that the passage discussed had been written with the use of dramatic style, which was not a derivation, but an imitation of *praetexta* and its style. Such interpretation seems to be possible when we consider that literary text does not have to be performed on stage to be called a “staged text” because of its potential aspect, which can be defined as a “totality of verbal signs which appear as such both in the text and in the perfor-

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<sup>1</sup> T. Mommsen: “Porcia”. *Hermes* 1880, Bd. 15, pp. 99–102; G. de Durante: *Le fabulae praetextae*. Roma 1966; L. Alfonsi: “Una praetexta Veii?”. *RFIC* 1967, Vol. 95, pp. 165–168.

<sup>2</sup> See H.I. Flower: “Fabulae praetextae in Context: When Were Plays on Contemporary Subjects Performed in Republican Rome”. *CQ NS* 1995, Vol. 45, pp. 170–190.

mance”<sup>3</sup>. The main argument for the “staged” character of Scipio’s dream, which I would like to analyse, is a specific kind of visibility and audibility of things presented in the passage. After the introduction preparing appearance of the Africanus, his ghost begins to chat with his descendant prophesizing his way to the future absolute power over the city of Rome<sup>4</sup> turning at the beginning without any introduction to the city of Carthago: *Videsne illam urbem...?* Although Cicero says *expressis verbis*, which town is talked about: *ostendebat autem Carthaginem*, and tells of the kind of perspective that both of the protagonists have (*de excelso et pleno stellarum illustri et claro quodam loco*), it seems to be added in the manner incomprehensible to the former sentence. The use of pronouns *illam* (*videsne illam urbem*) suggests that the interlocutor as well as the reader both already know, which city is Scipio talking about and the explanation appears unexpected in a parenthetical form as if the author remembered suddenly that such a commentary is desired, for the text is not intended for the stage, where Carthago would be visualized. The parenthesis is also inserted not between the main and the relative clause, for it concerns the object of relativum (for example: *Videsne illam urbem, ostendebat autem Carthaginem de excelso [...], quae parere populo Romano [...]*)<sup>5</sup>, which seems to be inverted and suggests, that the whole sentence was designed without the parenthesis. It could be easily explained if we presume, that it is a dramatic-like dialogue, which requires no explanations for there is decoration on stage but also, and much more important, because there is unity of place required by drama and if Scipio pronounces his prologue “being” at Carthago, he must still be there talking to the Africanus. Of course one can consider problematic that during the dream scene he moves from the inside to the place above the city, but it can be imagined, that after the prologue the actor could appear somewhere else, for example on the *scaenae frons*, i.e. above the stage symbolising Carthago<sup>6</sup>. One of the most interesting passages in the whole dialogue is the discussion about music of spheres<sup>7</sup>. It begins with a question, which Scipio asks hearing a strange voice: *Quae cum intuerer stupens, ut me recepi, Quid?*

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<sup>3</sup> J. Alter: “From Text to Performance: Semiotics of Theatricality”. *Poetics Today* 1981, Vol. 2, No. 3: *Drama Theater, Performance: A Semiotic Perspective*, pp.113–139. J. Alter points out, that as many, or even less, people see plays performed on stage, as they read them as a whole text. That’s why for example in my opinion the discussion about Seneca’s tragedies, whether they were or not performed on stage, does make sense rather from the historical and not from the philological point of view.

<sup>4</sup> Cicero: *De rep.* VI, 11–12.

<sup>5</sup> See Cicero: *Phil.* 1, 10: *qui quamquam parum erat – id enim ipsum a Bruto audieram – a quibus debuerat adiutus [...]*; Idem: *De orat.* 3, 47: *Ergo ista, [...] quae habes a me, non reprehendo, ne me ipsum inrideam – sunt autem ea multo et plura et maiora, quam dicis – quae autem sunt tua plane aut imitatione ex aliquo expressa [...]*.

<sup>6</sup> Although the main interest in studies on the Roman republican theatre concentrates themselves on the construction of the building (to mention just works of R.C. Beacham) and we don’t have many datas to reconstruct the performance itself, the possibility of such use of *scaenae frons* is not, in my opinion, to be excluded.

<sup>7</sup> Cicero: *De rep.* VI, 18–19.

*hic, inquam, quis est, qui complet aures meas tantus et tam dulcis sonus?* It is significant that Cicero introduces this passage not in the diegetic manner of an inserted commentary as he had done it before, for example, when Scipio is asking about the life after life: *Hic ego, etsi eram perterritus non tam mortis metu quam insidiarum a meis, quaesivi tamen [...]*<sup>8</sup>, but he puts the information about the music into the dialogue suggesting that the music should be audible to both protagonists and to the intended audience before. The Aemilianus describes, what kind of voice it should be: loud and sweet – *tantus et dulcis*. If so, the whole passage appears to be internally didascalical. Internal didascalies can be also found in the next chapter, where the Africanus describes a visible, model of earth (*Cernis autem eandem terram*). Cicero gives here an accurate description of it: *quasi quibusdam redimitam et circumdatam cingulis, e quibus duos maxime inter se diversos et caeli verticibus ipsis ex utraque parte subnixos obriguisset pruina vides, medium autem illum et maximum solis ardore torreri*, which exactly as in the case of description of the music, is a part of Scipio’s direct speech. The visible presence of things is also stressed by specific use words like *vides, ostendas, cernis*. In a similar way the audibility of voices is expressed by the consequently repeated verbal form *audio*. It is interesting that there are: Scipio Aemilianus – the one who hears the audible and Scipio Africanus – the one, who can see the visible and shows it to his interlocutor. Such distinction of roles suggests existence of audible and visible things which are represented by music and decoration on real or virtual stage. Cicero writing *De republica* finds himself in the position between literature, historiography and contemporary politics<sup>9</sup>; especially if we presume that the discussed passage has something to do with a plan to make Scipio Aemilianus a dictator<sup>10</sup>. If we take into consideration that Cicero’s dialogue had probably a real political aspect, which was probably the dictatorship of Scipio Aemilianus planned by optimates and it had been written just some years before “Brutus” of Cassius Parmensis<sup>11</sup>, it is quite probable that Cicero anticipated evolution of *praetexta* by using its convention in his dialogue.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>9</sup> See J. Geiger: “Contemporary Politics in Cicero’s *De Republica*”. *CPh* 1984, Vol. 79, pp. 38–43.

<sup>10</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 41. See also A.E. Austin: *Scipio Aemilianus*. Oxford 1967, pp. 240, 266.

<sup>11</sup> See G. Manwald: *Fabulae praetextae: Spuren einer literarischen Gattung der Römer*. München 2001.