

# Anima, Spiritus, Mens in Sepulchral Inscriptions from the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*. Philological Approximations

TADEUSZ GACIA 

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, tadeusz.gacia@kul.pl

**Abstract:** The subject of this study is the meaning of the words *anima*, *spiritus* and *mens* in the metrical sepulchral inscriptions in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* collection published at the end of the 19th century by Franz Buecheler. This collection comprises almost 1,900 texts, of which around 1,400 are funerary and, particularly, sepulchral inscriptions. This article consists of three sections. The first contains general comments on Roman sepulchral inscriptions. The second, and most important part uses a conventional philological method to analyze the words in the source texts that denote the immaterial aspect of the human being that continues after death. The analysis of the texts reveals that the word *anima* occurs about 80 times, *spiritus* – 20, and *mens* only three times. These three words stand for what is usually expressed by the word “soul,” that is, the spiritual, immaterial aspect of the human being. Conclusions are presented gradually as the analytical compilation proceeds. Firstly, there is no semantic difference between *anima* and *spiritus*; although the word *animus* which is close to the three words discussed in this paper does not occur in this sense in the inscriptions. Secondly, both pagan and Christian inscriptions emphasize the dichotomy between *anima* or *spiritus* and *corpus* or *caro* (alternatively *membra*); some Christian inscriptions, pointing to this dichotomy, express belief in the resurrection. Thirdly, despite the difference in beliefs, Roman worshipers and Christians used very similar patterns of statements about the posthumous fate of the soul, for example, *astra tenent animam*, *astra fovent animam*, *anima migravit ad astra* or *spiritus astra tenet*, *spiritus petit ad astra*, *mens caeli perget ad astra*, which means that the Christian funerary language did not develop its distinct terminology for several centuries. The third section is a very brief summary of the study carried out.

**Keywords:** carmina epigraphica, metric sepulchral inscriptions, anima, spiritus, mens, corpus, caro

There is nothing to equal the beauty of a Latin votive or burial inscription: those few words graved on stone sum up with majestic impersonality all that the world need ever know of us.

Marquerite Yourcenar, *Mémoire d'Hadrien*

The sources for the search queries for this study, centered around the words *anima*, *spiritus* and *mens*, are the rhymed Latin sepulchral inscriptions in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* collection. It consists of texts collected at the end of the 19th century by Franz Buecheler.<sup>1</sup> He wanted to continue *Anthologia Latina sive Poesis Latinae*

<sup>1</sup> *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, I-II (the numbering of the inscriptions is continuous – vol. II continues the numbering of vol. I).

*supplementum* (*pars posterior*), a work published sometime earlier by Alexander Riese.<sup>2</sup> However, Latin metrical inscriptions had been of interest for at least 300 years at that point.<sup>3</sup> A quarter of a century after Buecheler's publication, his collection was completed by Ernst Lommatzsch.<sup>4</sup> As for Buecheler's two volumes, they represent the first systematic collection of inscriptions compiled methodically. Also, it was Buecheler who coined the accepted and widely used term *carmina epigraphica*, in which the noun *carmina* indicates the metrical and literary aspect, while the adjective *epigraphica* defines its constant feature.<sup>5</sup> This study uses the Buecheler collection (without the Lommatzsch supplement), which comprises almost 1,900 metrical inscriptions in both volumes. This number is sufficient for the intended search query and for drawing conclusions from the analyses performed; with Lommatzsch's supplement, there would be around 400 more inscriptions. Some updates to these collections are also omitted, as Buecheler is their reference model, on whom, details aside, later epigraphic researchers have drawn heavily, starting with the very structure of these collections. Moreover, as Dorothy Pikhau points out, a new edition of Buecheler and all the texts published in the later period, especially the numerous Christian verse inscriptions, is greatly needed. However, given the interdisciplinary and international nature of such an undertaking, it will take a long time to happen.<sup>6</sup>

## 1. Remarks on Roman Sepulchral Inscriptions

Before proceeding to source text analysis, a few general remarks should be made. The term *carmina* unambiguously identifies the inscriptions as belonging to the realm of literature. Furthermore, the results of the latest research entitle it to such qualification even if part of the inscriptions is confined to the domain of everyday life.<sup>7</sup> *Carmina epigraphica* is a literary resource that allows the reader to experience the poetry and popular culture of the society of the entire Roman world. This is because they speak about the lives of people inhabiting very different geographical areas, between Britain and Africa, in various social and chronological contexts. They reflect a great diversity, yet a language full of variants and nuances is the common denominator. *Carmina sepulcralia* are highly informative sources of knowledge about the history of the mentality of bygone centuries. To those to whom they were

<sup>2</sup> *Anthologia Latina sive poesis Latinae supplementum*.

<sup>3</sup> *Epigrammata et poemata vetera; Musae lapidariae antiquorum; Carmina ex antiquis lapidibus; Anthologia veterum latinorum epigrammatum et poematum*.

<sup>4</sup> *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*. III. *Supplementum*.

<sup>5</sup> Arena, *Praeteritae carmina vitae*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Pikhau, "Recent Studies," 210.

<sup>7</sup> Gacia – Marczewski – Strycharczuk, *Maioris ad limina templi*, 133.

dedicated, especially those of lowly origin, they were supposed to ensure a form of afterlife and enduring posthumous fame.<sup>8</sup> Although rhymed works are a very small percentage of all inscriptions, according to Concepción Fernández Martínez's findings, up to 75% of all rhymed inscriptions are funerary or sepulchral.<sup>9</sup> This particular literary genre reached a remarkable level of development in the Roman world – from simple inscriptions mentioning the name of the deceased, to rhymed inscriptions, often of high literary quality, harmoniously combining biographical elements such as name, profession, age, date of death, which were difficult to convey in the language of poetry, with elements taken from the Greek epigrammatic tradition. This undoubtedly contributed significantly to the literary character of the inscriptions.<sup>10</sup> This genre within Latin poetry – writes Isabel Velázquez Soriano – or rather a sub-genre within elegiac mourning poetry evolved over centuries, retaining its constant defining elements throughout the history of Latin epigraphy – repeating identical or similar expressions and figurative language and syntactic arrangements, similar literary echoes, and an appropriate meter. The undeniable continuity of these common elements goes beyond the primitive environment in which the inscriptions were composed. The genre is outlined and shaped in pagan epigraphic poetry and continued in Christian poetry. As stated by the aforementioned author, the reflections of pagans and Christians on death are essentially the same. However, there are differences in approach, depending on beliefs, even though they are always about a person facing the loss of a loved one.

A characteristic element of sepulchral inscriptions is the incorporation of specific miniature patterns. Typically, those are related to the context of composition: engraving and fixing an inscription on a hard surface, the transition from a text by literary authors (phrases previously used in funerary literature) to a permanent text engraved on stone or on a grave in which a dead body is placed, and the grave itself is exposed to the view of passers-by. The themes come down to several assumptions. Emphasizing their social function and their influence on the life of the Roman world, which was at first pagan and later also Christian, Velázquez enumerates the following elements in their content: placing the deceased in the grave, grief at the loss of the dead person, eulogy and a catalog of their virtues, the adversities they experienced, the swift passage of life, drawing the attention passers-by to the grave and, possibly, a statement of the circumstances of death, especially of its too early occurrence, presented through repeated epithets: *immatura*, *invida*, *improba*, *inimica*.<sup>11</sup>

Sepulchral inscriptions are a particularly challenging genre (or subgenre, if one takes into account the provision cited above) because of their metrical form, length

<sup>8</sup> Sanders, *L'au-delà et les acrostiches*, 75.

<sup>9</sup> Fernández Martínez, *La fecha de muerte*.

<sup>10</sup> Fernández Martínez, *La fecha de muerte*.

<sup>11</sup> Velázquez Soriano, *Dobletes en la epigrafía latina*, 79.

and sophisticated content. Associated with genres such as encomium, biography, lamentation, consolation, hymn and ekphrasis, they differ from most prose inscriptions which are primarily short. Usually, they include surnames, first names and offices juxtaposed asyndetically, sometimes ending with a stereotypical verbal phrase such as *hic situs est* or *posuit*. Although composed of a relatively formalized set of elements, which include – in addition to those enumerated by I. Velázquez – the theme of body and soul, eternal duration, and divine justice, the texts of the poetic inscriptions are nevertheless moving, affecting the emotions of the reader. They establish a relationship between the memorial on which they are engraved and the recipient of the inscription by including such characteristic elements as an address to passers-by (*viator* or *hospes*) by the dedicator or the deceased – a type of a “telling” epigraph.<sup>12</sup>

In late antiquity, the influence of Christianity can be traced in the inscriptions, with praise of the deceased’s virtues, especially of important church officials, and Christian depictions of life. Despite this, it is sometimes difficult to identify the deceased person’s religious affiliation were it not for the presence of unambiguous terms indicating that they were Christian or otherwise. Indeed, Christians followed the same patterns as the followers of the traditional religion, with familiar forms and expressions, including those of Roman poets and writers. However, Velázquez points out that this did not presuppose direct knowledge of the texts but rather the adoption of elements already established in funerary epigraphy.<sup>13</sup> Undeniably, many ideas were already prevalent among the people before they were included in the inscriptions, and the poets – inscription authors – disseminated the thoughts by repeating them in public.

Before proceeding with the presentation of the inscriptions and their analysis in the aspect indicated in the article title, it must be added that the article takes into account only the metrical part of the inscriptions; the prose, i.e. the *praescriptum* at the beginning or *subscriptum* at the end of an inscription, referred to in Buecheler’s collection, is only a potential aid to interpretation.

## 2. Philological Analysis of Words Denoting the Immaterial Aspect of Human Being

### a) *Anima*

The Buecheler collection contains, as already stated, some 1,900 poetic inscriptions. According to the finding made by Martínez, it can be assumed that around 1,400 inscriptions in it are sepulchral. The author of this study did not count these precisely

<sup>12</sup> Schmidt, “Carmina Latina,” 764–784.

<sup>13</sup> Velázquez Soriano, *Dobletes en la epigrafía latina*, 95–97.

since it would have been a relatively unproductive task in this case. However, a word search in the digitized version of the collection reveals that in the sepulchral inscriptions of the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, the word *anima* appears about 80 times, *spiritus* about 20 times, and *mens* only three times. In the most general terms, these words semantically correspond to what we most often express with the word “soul,” meaning the spiritual, immaterial aspect of the human being that persists after death. The search query showed that the word *animus*, semantically close to the three mentioned, does not appear in the sepulchral inscriptions in the same sense as the others.<sup>14</sup> So how do these words function, and what idiomatic phrases and metaphors do they form?

We begin our review with inscriptions in which the word *anima* occurs in phrases that speak of the fact of death. In an old, undoubtedly pagan, inscription, death is depicted as a force that tears out the soul and thus takes life: *mors animam eripuit* (CLE 56). In two other inscriptions, death is replaced by *fate* – an inexorable, irreversible destiny, further defined by the epithet *iniquum*. From the inscription, a passer-by is addressed by Ottedia Zmyrna, a wife who died at the age of sixteen years and eight months: *animam meam rapuerunt fata iniqua* (CLE 496). The author of the inscription placed on Petronia’s gravestone says that Petronius, her spouse, mourns her so much that his eyes are lacking strength, and –addressing either himself or perhaps the passer-by – says that, while living on earth, one should not let one’s thoughts stray to the underworld abodes, and adds a realistic, bitter reflection: *Fata animam dederant fata eademque negant* (CLE 1041). In other inscriptions, the soul is portrayed differently at the moment of death – it is not taken away violently by fate, an inexorable destiny; the dead are said to give it up themselves: *reddidit ipsa animam* (CLE 1076), *deposui hanc animam* (CLE 1084), *animam deposui meam* (CLE 1539; CLE 1540), *remisit animam* (CLE 607); a deceased wife says that in dying she deposited her cold soul on the lips of her beloved husband: *quoius in ore animam frigida deposui* (CLE 1030).

Secondly, in a number of inscriptions, the word *anima*, with an accompanying epithet, appears as a semantic equivalent to describe a dear departed person (this use

<sup>14</sup> “Animus,” *Totius Latinitatis Lexicon*, I, 248–251; “Spiritus,” *Totius Latinitatis Lexicon*, IV, 452–454. Aegidius Forcellini defines *animus* as the nobler part of the human being, incorporeal, immortal, and, in this sense, distinct from *anima*. The term *anima* denotes the life force of all living beings, while *animus* denotes the spiritual and moral principle (*principium*) in man; *anima* is the psychological force of living beings, and *animus* is the psychological force of man. As understood by Romans, *anima* manifests itself in the very act of breathing, which does not depend on the will, *animus* in all those acts which rely on inner willpower. The difference between *anima*, *animus*, *spiritus*, and *mens* is as follows: *anima* is that by which we live (*qua vivimus*), *animus* is that which guides us (*quo regimur*), *spiritus* is that by which we breathe (*quo spiramus*), while *mens* is associated with cognition. Often, however, these names were used indiscriminately. Isidore of Seville related the meaning of the term *animus* to decision-making; he linked the term *anima* to life; he associated the meaning of *mens* with knowledge and *animus* with the will and learning; Isidorus Hispalensis, *Differentiae*, I, 37.

of the term *anima* is, moreover, often employed to talk about living loved ones). In an inscription found in the Via Appia, its author addresses the deceased, calling him *anima misera* because the deceased had experienced many misfortunes in his life (CLE 143). In the pagan inscription on the grave of a three-year-old child, made by the child's parents, we find a statement full of pain: *Parva anima, dolor immensus crudelique funus* (CLE 443). More often, however, despite the mournful context, the word *anima* is combined with epithets that make the sepulchral inscription convey peace and a kind of warmth. The daughter speaking to her father from an inscription on a marble column calls herself *caelestis anima* (CLE 611); in turn, the term *caelestes animae* is the incipit of a certain Christian inscription and is, as the context suggests, the collective name of all the dead (CLE 783). Other expressions containing the noun *anima* and an accompanying adjectival epithet are *animae sanctae* (CLE 1324), *pia anima* (CLE 696) in Christian inscription, *sublimes animae* (CLE 743), *pollens anima* (CLE 758), *dulcis anima acervo mihi funere rapta* (CLE 737), *dulces animae* (CLE 1917), *concordes animae* (CLE 739) in reference to Christian spouses. One of the inscriptions speaks of the soul's rest: *animae requies* (CLE 1278).

In many inscriptions, the word *anima* occurs in various idiomatic phrases as part of metaphors illustrating the posthumous existence of the soul, combining into a colorful literary mosaic.

*Pia iubente deo anima migravit ad astra* (CLE 696).

[Upon divine command, the righteous soul has departed towards the stars].<sup>15</sup>

*Iam summus fragilem vitam deus abstulit illi*

*Aethereisque auris animam lux alma recepit* (CLE 603).

[The supreme god has already taken away the frail life, / And blissful light has embraced the soul in the heavenly realm].

*Dum vixi, didici quae mors, quae vita homini esset,*

*Aeterna unde animae gaudia percipio* (CLE 1250).

[I have learned by living what death is, what the life of man is, / Therefore I seek eternal joys for my soul].

*Exacto vitae transcendit ad aethera cursu*

*Terrenum tumulo dans, animam superis* (CLE 1366).

[The course of life when completed, moved upwards, to heaven, / What is earthly, given up to the grave, the soul – to the land of the living].

The last citation comes from a Christian inscription, which is worth noting as the vocabulary in the immediate context (*aethera, superi*) is unlikely to indicate this. In turn, a sixteen-year-old slave named Domesticus, whose master has built a tombstone for him, speaks to us through a rhymed inscription. The deceased is convinced

<sup>15</sup> This and all subsequent citations were translated by the author of the study.

that his soul, attached during his lifetime to his master, will always follow wherever he goes, far to the East or the West:

*Nec tamen aut illi sup̄ter crudelia busta  
Aut istas sedes nostra subit anima,  
Sed petat Asurios, petat ille licebit Hiberos [...]* (CLE 1185)

[But not there, however, not under the cruel gravestone / And not in this earth our soul hides, / But let it go to Assyria, to Iberia, if it will [...].

Out of another inscription, a certain Helpis speaks who has already left her husband forever and confesses:

*Maiorique animae parte superstis ero* (CLE 1432).  
[And with the greater part of my soul, I shall persist].

We will now proceed to identify texts in which the word *anima* appears in conjunction with the word *corpus* or some equivalent. A juxtaposition of this kind underlines the dichotomy of soul and body explicitly, often emphasized in sepulchral inscriptions.<sup>16</sup> Two quotations, in particular, should be included in this group of examples; one contains the phrase *astra fovent animam* and the other its variant, *astra tenent animam*. Both are perhaps the most typical metaphors for the posthumous persistence of the soul in sepulchral inscriptions.

*Astra fovent animam, corpus natura recepit* (CLE 1362).  
[The soul among the stars abides, nature has taken the body].  
*Astra tenent animam, caetera tellus habet* (CLE 1420).  
[The soul among the stars abides, the earth holds the rest [...].

The *anima-corpus* dichotomy is undoubtedly based on the beliefs of the ancients, especially the idea of hylomorphism present, for example, in the philosophy of Aristotle.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, in an inscription suggesting antiquity, on the grave of a girl named Xanthippe (a rather obscure text accompanied by lengthy publisher's notes), the phrase *fugit anima corpore* (CLE 98) can be found, which suggests that the body would have been a prison of the soul, as in Orphism or certain strands of ancient philosophy. Another brief inscription puts it differently, stating that the day of death claims both soul and body; nothing more is said about the fate of the soul, while the body becomes dust and ashes:

<sup>16</sup> Cugusi, *Aspetti letterari*, 56.

<sup>17</sup> Nowaszczuk, "Topika antyczna," 147.

*Abstulit una dies animam corpusque simitur  
Arsit et in cineres hic versum adque favillam [...] (CLE 405).*  
[One day claimed both soul and body, / It burned and changed here to ashes and dust].

Another similar pagan inscription from a funerary monument at Solin states that the immortal soul is carried away into the pure, sacred air:

*Corpus habet cineres, animam sacer abstulit aer (CLE 1206).*  
[The body is made up of dust, the soul has been carried away by the sacred air].

Yet another tombstone epigraph states that, by the will of the creator, bodies go to Elysium after death, although mythology – as is known – places the souls, not the bodies, of the dead there.

*Qui mortale genus statuit animamque creavit  
Attribuit reddi corpora Elysiis (CLE 1326).*  
[He who created the race of mortals and the soul, / Has ordered that bodies return to Elysium.]

The words *anima* and *corpus* also appear side by side in Christian inscriptions, as cited above, highlighting the dichotomy of the human being. The first examples that shall be discussed at this point, when speaking of the division between body and soul and their different posthumous fate, do not explicitly refer to the belief in the resurrection. The Christian inscription with the incipit *Quid fatis liceat* emphasizes the shortness of all life, as everything is subject to the law of death, and only righteous morals guarantee man a happy future. Following probably Orphic Platonic views,<sup>18</sup> this is how a kind of soul-body dichotomy is perceived (although the word *corpus* itself does not appear here):

*Carceris humani sors est quae claustra resolvit  
Nec retinet animam dum sua luce vivit (CLE 1858).<sup>19</sup>*  
[This law commands the breaking of the bars of the human prison / And it shall not detain the soul, for it lives through its light].

The inscription on the grave of Christian Eustacia, who died at the age of 70, reads:

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<sup>18</sup> Janssens, *Vita e morte*, 78–80.

<sup>19</sup> In the *CLE*, inscription 1858 is in the *Addenda* in the form of incompletely reconstructed fragments; in this study, the whole text is cited as at <http://mizar.unive.it/mqdd/public/ce/testo/ordinata/pf23159> (accessed: May 15, 2022).

*Deponens senio terris mortalia membra,  
Sed revehens caelo pro meritis animam* (CLE 1444).

[Laying her mortal remains in the earth of old age, / But for her merits, she lifts her soul to heaven].

A similar thought was found on the gravestone of a bishop named Baiolus, except that pagan imagery appears again in the inscription:

*Hoc tumulo Baioli conduntur membra sepulti,  
Sed pollens anima praeclaro manebit Olympo* (CLE 758).

[In this grave were buried the remains of the deceased Baiolus, / But his illustrious soul shall abide upon the famous Olympus].

Let us now proceed to excerpts from three other inscriptions, namely from the graves of the presbyter Dalmatius, a certain Petronius and Silvius. Their bodies rest in the grave while they entrusted their souls to Christ or the martyrs and saints.

*Corporis hanc requiem meruit pro munere vitae  
Commendans sanctis animam corpusque fovendum* (CLE 703).

[He earned this rest of the body for his office in life, / He entrusted his soul to the saints, his body to be cared for].

*Corpus humo, animam Christo, Petroni, dedisti* (CLE 755).

[Body to the earth, Petronius, and soul to Christ you have given].

*Martyribus Domini animam corpusque tuendi*

*Gratia commendans tumulo requiescit in isto*

*Silvius [...]* (CLE 777).

[In this grave lies Silvius, who to the martyrs of the Lord / Entrusted his soul and gave his body to be cared for].

However, several inscriptions, while speaking of the body and soul of the deceased, also express the Christian doctrine of the resurrection:

*Claudia [...]*

*Hic iacet. Hinc anima in carnem redeunte resurget* (CLE 1435).

[Claudia [...] / Lies here. She shall rise again from here once her soul returns to her body].

*Huius anima refrigerat, corpus hic in pace quiescit*

*Resurrectionem expectans [...]* (CLE 1837).

[His soul has experienced a respite, his body rests here in peace / Awaiting resurrection [...]].

*Redditur in terra corpus cui vita haerebat,*

*Spiritus animaque mea expectat die ultimo causam* (CLE 760).

[The body, which once lived, to the earth has been returned, / The spirit and soul await judgment on the last day].

*Cum tuba terribilis sonitu concusserit orbem*

*Humanaeque animae rursus in sua vasa redibunt* (CLE 684)

[When the terrible trumpet shakes the world with its roar, / Human souls shall return to their bodies again].

*Credite victuras anima remeante favillas*

*rursus ad amissum posse redire diem* (CLE 901)

[Believe that when the soul returns, the ashes that come to life / can return anew to the lost light].

[...] *corpus pace quietum*

*Hic est sepultum, donec resurgat ab ipso*

*Quique animam rapuit [...]* (CLE 656)

[...] the body rests in peace, / Here it is buried until / again it rises thanks to Him, / Who took the soul [...].

## b) *Spiritus*

Considering, in turn, the sepulchral inscriptions in which the word *spiritus* appears,<sup>20</sup> in many of these, *spiritus* has the same meaning as *anima*. We encounter this noun as equivalent to the noun *anima* in an inscription in which the deceased, speaking to the passer-by, describes death as the separation of the spirit, death itself is subordinated to the action of fate:

*Tu quicumque legis titulum nostrum nomenque requiris,*

*Aspice quo fato raptus mihi spiritus ore est* (CLE 457).

[Whoever you are who read this inscription and ask my name, / Look what fate has snatched my breath from my lips].

In another inscription, a very similar wording appears: *discedit spiritus ore* (CLE 673), suggesting the image of breath [spirit] leaving the mouth, or rather its departure through the mouth of a person, which allowed Isidore of Seville, quoted above, to define the spirit with the words: *spiritus quo spiramus*, in essence not much different from the definition of the soul: *anima qua vivimus*.<sup>21</sup> To some extent,

<sup>20</sup> "Spiritus," *Totius Latinitatis Lexicon*, IV, 453. Forcellini semantically identifies the terms *spiritus* and *animus*: "Spiritus est principium seu substantia, ut aiunt, simplex et spiritualis, quae in homine animus dicitur." He does note, however, that ecclesiastical writers contrast the term *spiritus* with the term *anima* because, in a moral sense, *spiritus* is used to describe the most important part of man, not only that part by which he lives and understands and is himself, but also that part by which he has been renewed by God's grace through baptism, and is contrasted with the term *caro*. Often, however, these names were used – as is pointed out – indiscriminately.

<sup>21</sup> Isidorus Hispalensis, *Differentiae*, I, 37.

the image of death depicted in a very ancient inscription dedicated to a certain Eucharis, a slave of Licinia, illustrated by the metaphor of an hour running hastily, subordinated to the decrees of fate and taking away life-breath, is connected to the thought contained in the penultimate couplet quoted:

*Properavit hora tristis fatalis mea*

*Et denegavit ultra vitae spiritum (CLE 55).*

[Sadly, my mortal hour has come / And taken the life-breath forever].

Having analyzed these examples, let us refer to the inscriptions in which an explicit opposition *spiritus-corpus* can be found. Let us begin with the inscription on a pagan tombstone:

*Hic corpus vatis Laberi, nam spiritus ivit illuc unde ortus (CLE 1559).<sup>22</sup>*

[Here is the body of the poet Laberius, for the spirit has gone from whence it came].

In the Christian epigraph with the incipit *Haec aeterna domus, spiritus* and *caro* are contrasted; the spirit departs from the body and lives with the saints in heaven, while the body resides in the grave, which is its eternal home here. On the other hand, the body is referred to once with the non-classical word *caro* but two verses later with the word *corpus*: *Mandasti corpus terrae (CLE 1559)*. It appears that the word *spiritus* could easily be considered here as the semantic equivalent of *anima*:

*Haec aeterna domus in qua nunc ipsa segura quiescis,*

*At tuus in caelo spiritus a carne recedens*

*Vivit cum sanctis [...] (CLE 662).*

[This is the eternal home where you now rest alone in safety, / Yet your spirit in heaven, departing from your body / Lives with the saints [...]].

And here are other examples of inscriptions from Christian graves indicating the dichotomy between *spiritus* and *corpus*:

*At venit postrema dies, ut spiritus inania membra reliquat (CLE 512).*

[But the last day comes for the spirit to leave the feeble limbs].

*Spiritum quem tu ferebas corpore elabi sacrum (CLE 2152b).*

[The holy spirit which you bore has left the body].

*Quoius ut est lenis patrium diffusus in aer*

*spiritus, hic mater corpus operta tenet (CLE 1108).*

<sup>22</sup> Massaro, "Le nozze perpetue," 283–325.

[His gentle spirit spreads into the fatherly air, / and here the mother buries  
the covered body].

The examples cited reflect the Christian belief in the separation of soul and body at death and are unlikely to require comment, except perhaps the last one, which comes from an inscription commemorating a bishop named Photius, yet appears as if it were pagan poetry. The same is true in the following example, taken from a Christian inscription as well. Again, the typical opposition of the spirit or soul to the body is expressed using the vocabulary of pagan Rome.

*Spiritus astra petit, corpus in urna iacet* (CLE 1392).

[The spirit moves towards the stars, the body rests in an urn].

Note here the term *urn*, used despite the fact that Christians buried their dead rather than burned them, and the image of the soul's journey towards the stars, firmly rooted in literature, especially poetry, expressed by the metaphor *spiritus astra petit*. This phrase, or its variant *spiritus astra tenet*, used as early as the second half of the fourth century, appears in some Christian funerary poems, owing its spread in the literature above all to Venantius Fortunatus, although not only him.<sup>23</sup> To the examples given here, add two more will be added, which fit perfectly with the motif of the soul's journey towards the stars; the inscriptions from which they come do not mention anything about the body of the deceased:

*Nam meus ad caeli transivit spiritus astra* (CLE 1834).

[For my spirit has moved as far as the heavenly stars].

*Antistes, cuius spiritus astra tenet* (CLE 1425).

[The bishop whose spirit dwells among the stars].

Finally, there is another interesting inscription worth quoting. By depicting the dichotomy between body and spirit, the deceased speaks in it about the superiority of the spirit because it is destined for immortality. Although the time when the inscription was made is not known, its *praescriptum* suggests that it is a headstone

<sup>23</sup> Lambert, "Clauduntur membra sepulcro," 429, 444. In the funerary poetry of Venantius Fortunatus, we encounter the following expressions: *ad astra redire* (*Carm.* IV 7, v. 20; *Carm.* IV 13, v. 12), *ad astra subire* (*Carm.* IV 27, v. 16), *astra recepere* (*Carm.* IV 27, v. 5); *tenere astra fide* (*Carm.* IV 12, v. 8), *spiritus astra tenet* (*Carm.* IV 8, v. 6), [Deus] *dat astra suis* (*Carm.* IV 4, v. 4). The metaphor of being transported among the stars is present in Ovid (*Metamorphoses* IV 271–272; 844–846). Paulinus of Nola uses the metaphors: *conferre astris, animam dare astris, penetrare super astra, properare in astra* (*Poemata XIII*, v. 23. 88; XVI, v. 36; XVII, vv. 157–159. Prudentius (*Peristephanon* III, vv. 59–60; VI, vv. 121–124) also similarly describes the martyrs' journey to heaven: *super astra parare iter, insignesque viros per astra ferri*; see Gacia, *Vernalia tempora*, 116.

inscription dedicated to a certain Roman official. However, its content, rather pagan, could be indeed found on a Christian's grave. It will be quoted here in its entirety because of its unique beauty:

*Munde, tuas fugio insidias, vale, proditor, at te  
nunc peto, terra, mei corporis una quies,  
saecli vana nihil curo in te nomina, quando  
spiritus aethereas ardet adire domos (CLE 1340).*

[World, from your snares I flee, farewell, O traitor; / and now to you, earth, the only peace / of my body; I care nothing for vain, worldly titles, / since the spirit is kindled to enter heavenly abodes].

### c) Mens

This last, very short section is devoted to the word *mens*. The word – as is known – semantically refers to reason, the mind, although – as it turns out – in a few cases in the *carmina sepulcralia*, also to the soul. In all the examples that can be cited – there are only three – it appears alongside the words *corpus* or *membra* in the sense of body and thus highlights the division between soul and body. A three-distich inscription on the grave of a young Roman woman at the end of the second distich says that she is buried (*conditur*) while her father is still alive. However, in the very next distich, a correction is made to the word *conditur*, and it is emphasized that only her body is buried:

*Quin potius corpus: nam mens aeterna profecto  
pro meritis potitur sedibus Elysiis (CLE 1311).*

[Yes, it is rather her body, for the eternal soul surely / for its merits rejoices in the Elysian Fields].

According to another inscription from a Christian tombstone on the grave in which the body (*membra*) of the deceased is buried, the abode of his soul (*mens*) is paradise, clearly in the sense of heaven:

*Hoc tomolo cuius tantum nam membra quiescunt,  
letatur patria mens, paradise, tua (CLE 1368).*

[For in this tomb only his body rests, / but his soul rejoices in your homeland, the paradise].

The words *membra* and *mens* appear in yet another – also Christian – inscription in which, as in many of the examples cited above, the motif of the soul's journey towards the stars – *ad astra* can be found.

*Bustus membra tenet, mens caeli perget in astra* (CLE 1433).

[In the grave is the body, and the soul shall go towards the stars of heaven].

## Summary and Conclusions

A philological analysis of the metrical sepulchral inscriptions collected in the *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* has led the author to several conclusions. First, the word *anima* was used most frequently to describe the spiritual, immaterial aspect of the human being, which persists after death; the word *spiritus* was employed much less frequently and, finally, the word *mens* was used very rarely. As far as the texts of the inscriptions are concerned, there is essentially no semantic difference between the words *anima* and *spiritus*, while the word *animus*, although close to the three words mentioned above, does not occur in this sense in the inscriptions. Second, the content of the inscriptions – both pagan and Christian – emphasizes the dichotomy between soul and body: *anima* or *spiritus* and *corpus* (or *caro*, alternatively *membra*). Some Christian inscriptions, while speaking of the dichotomy and pointing to the posthumous fates of body and soul, accentuate the belief in the future resurrection of the body. Thirdly, the textual analysis makes it possible to conclude that Roman believers and Christians employed very similar patterns of statements about the posthumous fate of the soul. The most common examples are the phrases: *astra tenent animam*, *astra fovent animam*, *anima migravit ad astra* or *spiritus astra tenet*, *spiritus petit ad astra* and *mens caeli perget ad astra*. In addition, it can be noted that the semantic analysis of the words *anima*, *spiritus* and *mens* found in the sepulchral inscriptions, as well as the metaphors they form, confirms in this detailed section what has already been established more broadly, namely that Christian funerary language did not develop its distinctive terminology for several centuries until the fourth century.<sup>24</sup>

Going beyond the strict conclusions, it would seem appropriate at this point to quote the engaging thought formulated by Gabriel Sanders in his study cited above. It refers to sepulchral inscriptions in general and therefore certainly also to the aspect presented here: “[Sepulchral inscriptions] without the brilliance of great literary texts convey to us the message of departed generations, *quae praecesserunt nos*: that long murmur of blossoming hopes. But the ancient soul traveled many paths before it discovered the Way.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Sivan, “Town, Country and Province,” 105–106.

<sup>25</sup> Sanders, *L'au-delà et les acrostiches*, 75.

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