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Varus and *Varia**

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In what follows I will present a few arguments in order to show that the feminine counterpart of the cognomen *Varus* was in fact *Varia* rather than *Vara*. As we shall see, this may have various consequences for prosopography.

1. *Varus* was an old pejorative cognomen referring to the physical defects of the feet. For this reason *Vara* would be most unsuitable for women, and was therefore avoided. A look at Kajanto's LC 235ff. shows that this is the general trend with many similar cognomina. There was, however, a remedy to remove the negative connotations of these unfeminine names, viz. the use of suffixes. To cite some examples, such names as *Balba*, *Flacca*, *Paeta* etc. are either never attested or they are extremely rare. Similarly, there are no *Taurae*, but we know a handful of *Taurinae* and *Taurillae* (LC 329).¹

2. *Varus* was also an ancient hereditary cognomen in a few Republican *gentes*, notably among the Quinctilii. Old hereditary names of this kind were used almost exclusively by male members of the family. And even after women had adopted individual names in the beginning of the Imperial period, they did not use these names in their basic form, but

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¹ For these names, see H. Solin, in *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio I* (Tituli 4), Roma 1982, 429ff.

rather as suffixed derivations. So e.g. the daughter of L. Munatius Plancus cos. 42 B.C. was called 'Munatia Plancina' (PIR² M 737), while her aunt was still only 'Munatia'. This is a very clear and conspicuous phenomenon since the late Republican and early Imperial times. Accordingly, *Vara* was also avoided and instead suffixed forms were used. This is clearly revealed by Kajanto, LC 242, who records only one 'Vara' from the Republican period (CIL I² 2694,4; Minturnae) and two further cases from the Imperial time (I will tackle them a little later). In addition to the Republican aristocratic *Vari* Kajanto has registered as many as 95 instances of *Varus*. The suffixed form *Varilla* is documented 11 times among the lower orders (in CIL, LC *ibid.*) and twice in the senatorial class. The daughter of Sex. Appuleius cos. 29 B.C. was called 'Appuleia Sex.f. Varilla' (PIR² A 968), the cognomen deriving from the maternal side. An inscription found in Cyme (Inscr. v. Kyme, 18) shows her to be the daughter of 'Quinctilia', who is to be identified with the sister of P. Quinctilius Varus cos. 13 B.C.² The other case is found in an inscription from Reate, which records a *Varilla* as the *patrona* of a freedman.³ The text implies that she was closely related to the Lurii and Nonii Vari of the early Imperial period.⁴

3. There is prosopographical evidence to show that certain persons called 'Varus' and 'Varia' were linked to each other by family connections. The consul of the year 160 A.D., T. Clodius Vibius Varus from Brixia, was most obviously the grandfather or the uncle of Vibia L.f. Salvia Varia.⁵ It seems to be quite certain that the elements 'Vibius Varus' and 'Vibia - Varia' correspond to each other. Varia's second husband was M.

² For these persons, cf. recently R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy*, Oxford 1986, 316—317.

³ M.C. Spadoni Cerroni, *Athenaeum* 57 (1979) 308ff. The *libertus* is L. Nonius Varillae lib. Athenio, procurator M. Luri Vari.

⁴ M. Torelli, in *Epigr. ord. sen. II* (Tituli 5), Roma 1982, 195 thought that she could be the sister of M. Lurius Varus (PIR² L 428) or of his father P. Lurius Agrippa from the Augustan period. Lurius Varus was consul under Caligula or in the early years of the Claudian period, cf. R. Syme, *HSCPh.* 88 (1984) 165ff. It is, however, much more plausible that she was a (Nonia), see now Raepsaet-Charlier, FOS 576.

⁵ Cf. especially G. Alföldy, *Epigr. ord. sen. II* (Tituli 5), Roma 1982, 348, nr. 16 and 349, nr. 28. The pair 'Vibius Varus' appears by many other persons, too, cf. PIR V s.v. *Varus* and RE, *passim*.

Nummius Umbrius Primus Senecio Albinus cos. 206 A.D. from Beneventum, and their daughter was called 'Nummia Varia'. Further evidence may be produced in the names of 'Postumia Varia' *c.f.* (CIL XI 6076; Urbinum; from the latter half of the 3rd century A.D.) and '[Fla]via Postu[mia] Varia', who is attested as participating in the Ludi saeculares of the year 204 A.D.⁶ Both women must be somehow related to T. Flavius Postumius Varus, *praefectus urbi* in 271 A.D. (PLRE I 946; styled 'Postumius Varus' in Chron. 354, otherwise with his full name).

Such evidence points to the unavoidable result that besides *Varilla*, *Varia* could also be used as the feminine form of *Varus*, yet at the same time being identical with the gentilicium *Varia*. Good parallels are at hand in such opposites as *Marcus:Marcia* and *Titus:Titia*, the feminine praenomen never appearing as 'Marca' or 'Tita'.⁷ It is to be concluded that *Vara* would be a most odd and exceptional name, in particular among the nobility.

Under such circumstances how is it possible that two upper-class women bearing the cognomen *Vara* are documented from the Imperial period? A closer look may solve the difficulties. Firstly, both cases are known from brick stamps. The earlier one is the Ostian LSO 1195 (= Bloch S. 440 = XIV 5308,39): *Varae Quirin(i or -alis)*, dating from the late Claudian or early Neronian time.⁸ She is the wife of a *Quirin(- - -)*, who may be the same as the *dominus M. Quir(- - -)* attested from LSO 1194 (= Bloch S. 439). Their identity, however, cannot be firmly established. What is important here, is the cognomen itself. From the photograph (in LSO II, Pl. 204) one reads clearly that it was written $\widehat{V\bar{A}R\bar{A}E}$ with two ligatures, but in theory it might be equally possible that the first ligature could be solved as $\widehat{A\bar{R}I}$. The problem is, however, that no sign of the letter I is visible, and that letter was usually clearly portrayed in ligatures. Accordingly, we should perhaps suppose that $\widehat{V\bar{A}R\bar{A}E}$ was an error for either $\widehat{V\bar{A}R\bar{I}\bar{A}E}$ or $\widehat{V\bar{A}R\bar{I}\bar{A}E}$. The other example is CIL XV 1310

⁶ G.B. Pighi, *De ludis saecularibus*, Amsterdam 1965², 253, nr. 70 (he proposes *Postu[ma]*).

⁷ Cf. also the pair *Longinus:Longinia* (like *avus:avia*) cited by Schulze, ZGLE 61.

⁸ See M. Steinby, *La cronologia delle figlinae doliari urbane dalla fine dell'età repubblicana fino all'inizio del III secolo*, Roma 1976 (BullCom 84 [1974—76]), 96, n. 7. Cf. also her comments in LSO 1194.

from Rome, of which two copies are documented. The stamp dates from the Severan period, and the *domina* is called ‘Mummia Vara’ *c.f.* (Raepsaet-Charlier, FOS 559 = PIR² M 715),⁹ her name appearing as MUMMIAE VARA/E. One of the copies was seen by Gatti and the other by Dressel. Despite this fact, I hold it possible that VARA/E could in fact be VARIA/E (the ligature \overline{RI} was relatively common in brick stamps, although it is true that ligatures were not particularly frequent in stamps of the Severan period).¹⁰ It seems that neither Dressel nor Gatti has considered this possibility.

Of Mummia Varia (?) we do not know anything else; her ancestry remains totally unknown.¹¹ Concerning her identity, I would like to put forward a very cautious and tentative hypothesis. From the same Severan period we know the above-mentioned *clarissima femina* Nummia Varia.¹² Could she be identical with Mummia Varia? Because Nummia is a well-known person from inscriptions, we should be prepared to accept one of the following alternatives: either ‘Mummia’ is an error on the part of the stamp maker or, what seems less probable, ‘Nummia’ on the brick stamp was carelessly read as ‘Mummia’. Unfortunately, no photo is available, but a possible confusion could be explained in two ways. Firstly, there was an abrasion between N and V, which led the editors to think that the righthand stroke of the letter M had vanished (in CIL there are, however, no comments on any uncertainties in this respect). The other but not very plausible possibility is an inverted N (= \mathfrak{N}), which has in fact sometimes been interpreted as the letter M.¹³ As for Nummia Varia, we know that she was a native of Beneventum, and we also know about her interests and

⁹ For her, cf. P. Setälä, *Private Domini in Roman Brick Stamps of the Empire*, Helsinki 1977, 152–3.

¹⁰ As M. Steinby kindly informs me, the letter I sometimes “disappears” in ligatures when connected with verticals such as L or N. Perhaps the same is true with the letter R, too.

¹¹ A possible link with M. Pontius Varanus Sabinus (AE 1903, 284; Ulpiana and AE 1982, 956; Lambaesis) on the basis of his cognomen *Varanus* is naturally erroneous. *Varanus* was an ethnic (LC 205), not to be confused with *Varus*. For Sabinus, cf. in particular J. Marcillet-Jaubert, ZPE 43 (1981) 237ff.

¹² Cf. PIR² N 240–241 = Groag, RE XVII, 1414–15, nr. 19.

¹³ Cf. e.g. LSO 985, where $\mathfrak{N}\overline{AEVI}$ was printed as JM \overline{AEVI} by Vaglieri in NSc. 1913, 236.

freedmen in Peltuinum (CIL IX 3429,3436) and in Canusium (IX 395).¹⁴ She might well have been an owner of *praedia* and a brick producer.

In conclusion, the following facts may be summarized: 1) From the semantic point of view *Vara* would be very unsuitable for women; 2) *Vara*, a basic feminine form of *Varus*, would be exceptional in the nomenclature of upper-class women and, as we have seen, among the lower orders, too. 3) Prosopographical evidence reveals that *Varia* was used as the feminine form of *Varus*. From these arguments it seems to follow that the two examples of '*Vara*' on brick stamps should be interpreted as '*Varia*' instead. Consequently, the real name of the Severan '*Vara*' emerges as '*Mummia Varia*'. If the tentative hypothesis proposed here is accepted, she could be the same lady as '*Nummia Varia*', daughter of the consul in 206 A.D.

Addendum

The three main arguments presented above (cf. especially note 7) could also be supported by the results of a recent article of Y. Malkiel, *A la recherche des désignations latines des femmes et de femelles en -ia*, *BullSocLingParis* 80 (1985) 145ff. Using the evidence of the Romance languages the author reconstructs such Latin words as **cania*, **cervia*, **convortia*, **novia*, **servia* etc., and regards them as deriving from the *avia-/neptia*-types. For this piece of information I wish to thank Dr. Martti Nyman.

¹⁴ For her and the landed property of the whole family, cf. G. Camodeca, in *Epigr. ord. sen. II* (Tituli 5), Roma 1982, 143f.