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**The *Tabula Ceбетis* in the 1st-2nd century philosophical
milieu**

Theses of the doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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1. The subject and objectives of the dissertation

Tabula Cebetis (Κέβητος πίναξ, hereinafter referred to as *Tabula*), presumably originated from the 1st century, was probably a famous and widely read philosophy book at that time. Nowadays, however, the work is ignored both by Hungarian and international scientific circles, but undeservedly so in my opinion. In the field of Hungarian classical studies, *Tabula* captured the interest of many nineteenth-century scholars: three published and one handwritten translations proved the interest shown about this little philosophical dialogue. But in the 20th century, *Tabula* disappeared from Hungarian scientific discourse. In light of these facts, one of the main objectives of my dissertation is to highlight the importance of *Tabula*'s role in intellectual history by introducing new aspects into the analysis of the work and to give an overall picture of the copious tradition of the text, observed in ancient literature and cultural history. My intention is to draw the attention of the academic circles to *Tabula* with the help of its rich tradition.

Above all, we need to note why we should devote attention to this work again in academic research. The content of the work itself is an answer to all this. *Tabula* is a peculiar ekphrasis embedded in a philosophical dialogue which shows by way of a description of a painting – imaginary or real, it is irrelevant in regard to the interpretation of the text – the way to Happiness itself. The narrative framework of the description is provided by the narration of an elderly wise man who explains to young travellers the message of the picture. This painting represents human life itself via a picturesque metaphor: a high mountain. At the top of the mountain sits on her throne the embodiment of Happiness. The work – essentially a handbook – writes about the roads leading astray or leading to Happiness. This road is bumpy, precipitous and hard to walk on. Enkrateia (Self control) and Karteria (Patience) help the wanderers over the hardest part from where they can reach the Paideia (Real Education). Paideia purifies from sins those who come to her, then leads them to the Virtues and the Happiness itself. Then they crown those who are coming to them, like a winner of a race and by doing so man can trust and hope for a happier state of being in future life, and man will not seek this faith in others or in any external thing, but in himself/herself.

In the *Tabula* numerous contemporary rival and sometimes conflicting philosophical schools' teachings are combined. Some researchers tried to emphasize with far-fetched arguments that the work is exclusively linked to a definite philosophical school, but all of them, in my opinion, were unsuccessful attempts from their part. In modern literature it is

more or less accepted that the ethically oriented world view of *Tabula* is painted from a broad palette of antique philosophy, and not from a random collection of the most influential philosophical teachings of its time. I would argue that behind this lies a conscious concept of the author: the work combines the intentions and thoughts of different schools to create a universal ethical vademecum. The work binds together the seemingly contradictory elements of each school with different views in a way that each ethical goal can be realized at the same time: to achieve a happier, more balanced life. Among other things, this momentum makes *Tabula* a significant and enduring creation: it is simultaneously characterized by the diversity of thoughts and a kind of universal ideal. For example, the work refers to Pythagoras, Parmenides, and Plato by name, moreover, the dialogue at the end of the work is debatable Socratic in its character, and a Stoic approach to the neutral nature of things is also discoverable. Interpretation of Metanoia's allegory as a direct effect of the early Christian tradition is a new, unexplored aspect of the work. The motive of redemption and salvation, in addition to Christianity, evokes the teachings of Pythagoreism. The rejection of the liberal arts is a feature of cynical philosophy, sometimes adopted by the Stoics. With all this in mind, I am undertaking in my dissertation to demonstrate the relationship of the work to the stream of ideas of the era, that they are organized into a unified worldview, discussing not only linguistic-stylistic similarities, but also content allusions.

Furthermore, in accordance with the general aim of my dissertation, I strive to explore *Tabula's* text tradition as thoroughly as possible, including editions from the first published to the early 20th century, as well as translations, commentaries and interpretations of the fine arts.

To support the findings of the dissertation, I translated *Tabula* into Hungarian that you can find enclosed with a copious commentary.

2. The structure and methodology of the dissertation

The first chapters of the dissertation are about the rich tradition of *Tabula*. In the first chapter, I present how and why it became popular immediately after the first printed edition and was the editio princeps followed by about three hundred related publications, not counting early commentaries, shorter dissertation with more and more sophisticated

researches, and modern literature. In this first chapter of my dissertation, I present the most important stages of this path and I try to show what caused the work to decline in popularity and why it may have been ignored for modern research.

The subject of the second chapter describes the text tradition of the work. Although the last critical edition of *Tabula* was published in 1893, since then research has developed and unknown fragments have emerged that may create the need for another critical edition of the text. The chapter takes stock of the passages in case of which, I believe, there is a definite need for a new conjecture because research in this regard has not yet yielded an acceptable or reassuring solution.

At this point, I will discuss the analysis of different translations and commentaries by language: Latin translations are first presented, followed by *Tabula's* translations into modern languages. Studying large numbers of commentaries also confirms the popularity of the work both among the academic and the educated public. Finally, I will present the Hungarian afterlife of *Tabula*, which also played a role in the teaching of the Greek language.

This summary may serve as a starting point for a monograph aimed at a comprehensive examination of the afterlife of the work: how it was integrated into scholarly life and education throughout Europe, and how it became one of the important foundations of moral breeding.

One of the most important elements of the dissertation was the preparation of a sophisticated modern Hungarian translation of the work with a modern in-depth commentary, which aims to summarize available material and research on related cultural and philosophical history. Although a new Hungarian translation was published in the second half of last year, my translation offers different interpretations on several points which, I think, combined with a broader, deeper commentary, can be a stimulant for a useful and fruitful dialogue in Hungarian research on this topic. Among the commentaries I also present the results of the revision of the authoritative edition's original text and show cultural history supplements and also texts where parallels could be drawn. The inclusion of humanist commentary in my work also offers interesting additions: with a focus on classical hermeneutical aspects, humanist commentary can point out momentums of a different kind –which, in my view, escape the attention of modern interpreters of the work.

After centuries of debate, modern research has come to a consensus on the timing of *Tabula*'s emergence. Researchers now agree that the work may have originated in the 1st century BC and its author is unknown. (There have also been endless and unreserved controversies in the research of the name Kebés as its author alongside or in conjunction with the date issues. Today, most researchers believe that Kebes' name is intended to help embed the work in the Socratic-Platonic tradition.) Thus, the literary-philosophical background of *Tabula* was the Greek and Latin philosophical literatures of the 1st-2nd century. The latter serve as parallels in terms of language, whereas in Latin writings (we have to think here especially to Seneca) the study of the parallels in thinking is justified. In my dissertation I narrowed the investigation to four authors: Plutarchos, Dión Chrysostomos, Lukianos and Seneca. Their works reveal the most numerous and the most significant parallels with the *Tabula*. Parallel passages, similar philosophical ideas, almost identical or identical structures and patterns of the structure of the works of these four authors justify their comparison and a deeper analysis. However, the direction of the various transcripts is unclear (and it is doubtful that philology will ever give a reassuring answer) whether these author affect *Tabula* (especially in the case of Seneca and Dio Chrysostomos) or it is *Tabula* which affects them. (This is only clear in the case of Lukianos, as the author himself explicitly states this) In terms of allegories, most of the parallel elements can be found in Lukianos, but Dion Chrysostom also has plenty of loci where parallels with *Tabula* can be drawn. From my point of view, Plutarch is noteworthy for his linguistic-stylistic parallels in terms of linguistic form, his writings are the closest to *Tabula*. Thoughts of Seneca from the *Epistulae morales* are a recurrent theme in *Tabula*. The parallel passages presented in the dissertation underline and justify the generally accepted view in modern research that *Tabula* probably dates from the period of life of the four very important authors mentioned above. Based on the testimony of the passages, *Tabula* is organically incorporated into the texts of these authors. Lukianos himself dispels any doubt as to its significance and notoriety.

In line with the objectives outlined above, my dissertation breaks with the tradition of research that defines *Tabula* solely as the mouthpiece of a philosophy school. I rather strives to present that *Tabula* displays, collides, coordinates, or pacifies not only one but several philosophical schools's teachings. Therefore, seemingly contradictory or contradictory thoughts form an organic unit: *Tabula*, in my opinion, is an extremely successful attempt to

bring different doctrines into symbiosis and then synthesis. My dissertation explores the relation of the work to contemporary philosophical schools in the following subdivisions. The effect of the Socratic-Platonic tradition, which is very probable by the name Kebés, is presented first: Plato is actually mentioned in the work. The closing stages of *Tabula* prove the neutrality of life, death, or even wealth (neither good nor bad) in form of a Socratic dialogue. In addition, the influence of the motives of the Myth of Er, which is also Platonic, and the allegory of the cave can be demonstrated in certain sections of *Tabula*. The number of academics who viewed the text as Pythagorean is also significant throughout the research history of the work, so in the next subsection, I was looking for evidence of this, both in terms of vocabulary and use of certain motifs. In contrast, recent research considers Stoic influences more decisive because of the not-so-flattering view of liberal arts (although noteworthy, this could even be seen as a cynical effect) and the triad of things (good, bad, neutral - neither good nor bad), also of Stoic origin. The role of Tyché also shows the influence of the Stoics. The impact of Christian teachings on *Tabula* has already been raised however in a tangential and sporadic way, as I will prove in this chapter.

There are some passages that show a close match, the use of some words follow the language of the New Testament books. The research with the TLG-database highlighted that certain words and expressions appear much more frequently with later Christian authors than with pagan authors. However, it should be taken into consideration that due to the regrettably low number of remaining works, it is not possible to fully demonstrate the presence of the Christian tradition in *Tabula*. At the end of the chapter, I examine the philosophical tendencies that have a lesser effect on *Tabula*. It turned out that Parmenides was not only mentioned in the work but his effect can also be seen in some of the thoughts of *Tabula*. The Aristotelian school, the Peripatetics, are also mentioned among the followers of Pseudopaideia, but some terms refer to the influence of this philosophical trend.

Tabula is a fascinating work from the point of view of educational theory and educational history, various aspects of which are presented in chapter seven of my dissertation. In this, I explore the findings of the work on education, including its relation to encyclios paideia. I examine the role of philosophy in Greek-Roman education. In this context, I also explore how the language of *Tabula* and the moral teaching included have for

centuries been an integral part of the study of the Greek language, and the role that can be attributed to the educational history of the work.

The dissertation concludes with the presentation of the broader tradition of *Tabula*. An important part of this is exploring the rich afterlife of the works in fine arts, since dozens of paintings and engravings have been made trying to illustrate the painting described in *Tabula* and make it visually graspable. It is the reason why the presentation of Iustus Velsius' grandiose commentary is included in this chapter. This is a commentary that can situate *Tabula* in a broader context of interpretation, and sum up the philosophical thoughts from which the work originated. In addition, several poetic interpretations of *Tabula* were created. In this chapter, I analyze Filippo Alberici's poem, who views the work as the basis of a *speculum regis* and richly illustrates it, so his work in itself gives a unique synthesis of the entire *Tabula Ceбетis* tradition.

In addition to the translation, there are two appendices to the thesis, one a transcription of Filippo Alberici's *Tabula Ceбетis* poem and the other a bibliography of the translation and publication history of the work between 1496-1700.

3. The major results of the dissertation

The presentation of possible Christian influences on *Tabula* is a relatively recent development in the literature which have not yet been specifically and purposefully analyzed and the systematic presentation of parallel passages has not yet been showed.

In my dissertation I made a successful attempt to prove that the *Tabula* coherently summarizes the various philosophical teachings and creates a synthesis which made it a worthy philosophical work, not only in its own time, but also later in the history of culture.

During the in-depth analysis of the literary-philosophical background of the work, I have summarized not only the textual parallels and allusions already discovered but I also added new ones. Through comparisons with Seneca I found such remarkable and significant passages through which the textual and cultural embeddedness of *Tabula* in the intellectual

medium defined by Seneca can be illustrated. The analysis of the numerous Seneca passages presented in the dissertation raises further hypothesis concerning the identity of *Tabula*'s author: there is good reason to believe that this person may have been Sextius, who founded a philosophical school in Rome. However, this can only be clarified if new sources are found, and until then it remains hypothetical.

An important benefit of the research described in the dissertation is the Hungarian translation of *Tabula* with a commentary, which, on the one hand, synthesizes previous commentaries and, on the other hand, seeks to give *Tabula*-research a new impetus through the use of the new ideas and results presented in the dissertation.

4. Further research opportunities on this topic

Subsequent research focuses on the oeuvre of authors closely associated with *Tabula*, which is expected to reveal new motifs that may be related to *Tabula Cebetis*. From this point of view, Dión Chrysostomos' works are of particular interest, since his work is the least explored in this regard.

There is further research potential in the afterlife of *Tabula Cebetis*. My goal is to explore the entire publishing and translation history of the work, from the editio princeps to the present. In my opinion such a bibliography could illustrate in what periods, in what areas the work was popular.

The processing of secondary sources related to the textual tradition of the work may also lead to an even wider discovery of the *Tabula* tradition. such as correspondence from translators, commentators, publishers, or even printers to supplement our knowledge of the *Tabula* tradition.

Tabula's critical edition was completed in 1893 and since then several manuscripts have become known and researchable, so it is not a futile goal to revise the previous critical edition

using newly discovered manuscripts and fragments, including early Latin translations and first printed editions that will help to restore a more authentic text.

5. Publications related to the subject of the dissertation

A Tabula Cebetis, mint a sztoikus etika lehetséges forrása. in: ARISTEIA, Budapest, 2009 173-177.

A titokzatos Tabula Cebetis. in: Belvedere Meridionale. Szeged 2011. 88-93.

A filozófia virágoskertje - a Tabula Cebetis, mint a görög filozófia népszerűsítője. - in: Szikora Patrícia (szerk.): CALAMUS. Budapest, 2015. 63-76.

A sztoikus bölcs és a politika in: Purosz Alexandrosz (szerk.): Közéleti és politikai viszonyok az antik világban. Szeged, 2015. 31-45.

Az Élet képe - a Tabula Cebetis hagyomány in: ACTA UNIVERSITATIS SZEGEDIENSIS, ACTA ANTIQUA et ARCHAEOLOGICA, Supplementum XIV. Szerk.: Székely Melinda és Illés Imre Áron. Szeged, 2015. 69-80.

Tabula Cebetis and Christianity in: Székely Melinda, Illés Imre Áron (szerk.): Chronica. Szeged, 2017. 37-43.

A Tabula Cebetis Magyarországon. in: Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények 122. (2018). 187-192.

Filippo Alberici Tabula Cebetis-interpretációja. in: Boros István (szerk.): Litteris vincimur. Scriptorium I. Konferenciakötet. Budapest, 2019. 201-208.

„Vivere omnes beate volunt...” Seneca és a Tabula Cebetis párhuzamai. in: Belvedere Meridionale. Szeged. 2019. 80-88.

Antik filozófia reneszánsz köntösben. A Tabula Cebetis humanista kommentárjai. in: BSCA XII. Budapest, 2020. (közlésre leadva)

6. Lectures related to the subject of the dissertation

A Tabula Cebetis, mint a sztoikus etika lehetséges forrása [*The Tablet of Cebes as a source of Stoic ethics*] The 4th National Conference of Collegium Hungaricum Societatis Europaeae Studiosorum Philologiae Classicae. Piliscsaba, 29-30. May 2009.

A filozófia virágoskertje - a Tabula Cebetis, mint a görög filozófia népszerűsítője [*Orchard of philosophy – The Tablet of Cebes, as promoter of the Greek philosophy*] The 9th National Conference of Collegium Hungaricum Societatis Europaeae Studiosorum Philologiae Classicae. Budapest, 9. May 2014.

A Tabula Cebetis és a kereszténység [*Tabula Cebetis and Christianity*] The 12th Hungarian Conference on Classical Studies. Debrecen, 26-28. May 2016.

Filippo Alberici Tabula Cebetis-interpretációja. [*Filippo Alberici's Tabula Cebetis interpretation*] The 1st Scriptorium Conference. Vác, 11-12. May 2017.

„Vivere omnes beate volunt...” Seneca és a Tabula Cebetis párhuzamai. [„*Vivere omnes beate volunt...” – Parallels between Seneca and the Tablet of Cebes*] The 13th Hungarian Conference on Classical Studies. Szeged, 24–26 May 2018.

Antik filozófia reneszánsz köntösben. A Tabula Cebetis humanista kommentárjai. [*Ancient philosophy in renaissance robe. Humanist commentaries of the Tabula Cebetis*] National Széchényi Library, Annual Conference. Budapest 22-23. November 2018.