

CIL, III, 6155: A THIRD CENTURY INSCRIPTION FROM TOMIS

A. G. POULTER

During the construction of the railway line out of Kunstendje, modern Constanța, during the mid 19th century, a large Latin funerary stele was recovered by British engineers. The inscription, along with seven others, was, in 1864, deposited in the basement of the British Museum. First published fully in 1868, the inscription was reproduced in the third volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* as number 6155¹. The following discussion offers a few observations on: 1) the stone itself, its decoration and lettering, 2) the publication of the inscription and a correction to CIL, III, and 3) the titulature employed and its probable interpretation.

The coarse, whitish grey limestone block measures 2.10 m in height, has a width of 0.90 m and is 0.08 m thick. The stone has been chiselled back on its reverse surface to a depth of 2 cm and to a height of 20 cm from its base. Some decoration has been removed from the bottom left hand side of the front face and the right hand side had been slightly damaged. The top of the stone also appears to have been broken off and the stele may well have originally had some additional decoration above the surviving sculpture. However, the principal portion of the stele with the inscription is undamaged (Fig. 1).

The stone is divided into two unequal parts: the larger and lower portion contains the inscription, the smaller, a depiction of the *cena funebris*. The borders of the stone are decorated with the vine, tendril and vase motif which occurs throughout the province of Moesia Inferior from the latter first to the third century A. D.² The *cena funebris*, though here in its ultimate and crudest form, was especially popular with the cities of the Black Sea coast from the Hellenistic period down to the fourth century A. D.³ In this scene, a bearded man and a woman recline on a couch while a young woman sits in the wickerwork chair to their left. Diminutive servants offer food and drink to the family group from a small, three-legged stool in the foreground. The inscription is clearly cut with letters of approximately equal height, between 5.5 and 6 cm. Triangular interpuncts are used, but varied, for decoration, with *hederae distinguentes*. The style of the lettering, particularly the distinctive flourished L and the style of the relief suggest a date towards the end of the third century A. D.⁴

D(IS) M(ANIBVS)
VLPIAE AVRELIAE VA-
LERIAE VIRGINI DEXTRA-
TE ANNIS III MENSIBVS

¹ Registers of the Brit. Mus.: found by W. Price esq., Gloucester, deposited 31st. March 1864, no. 5; A. M. Smith, *Cat. of Gk. Sculptures in Brit. Mus.*, vol. I (1892), p. 345 no. 743 (incorrectly described as having been found at Kertch in the Crimea); AA, 1864, pp. 286–287. Gerhard lists eight inscriptions. Information supplied by C. Newton. No. 3 is described as a Latin inscription in honour of Vibia (sic) Aurelia Valeria; E. Huebner, *Monatsberichte Berlin, Akad.*, 1868, p. 82–5; CIL, III, (1873) pars 2, 6155; S. Stati, *Limba Latină în Inscripțiile din Dacia și Scythia Minor*, 1961, p. 125.

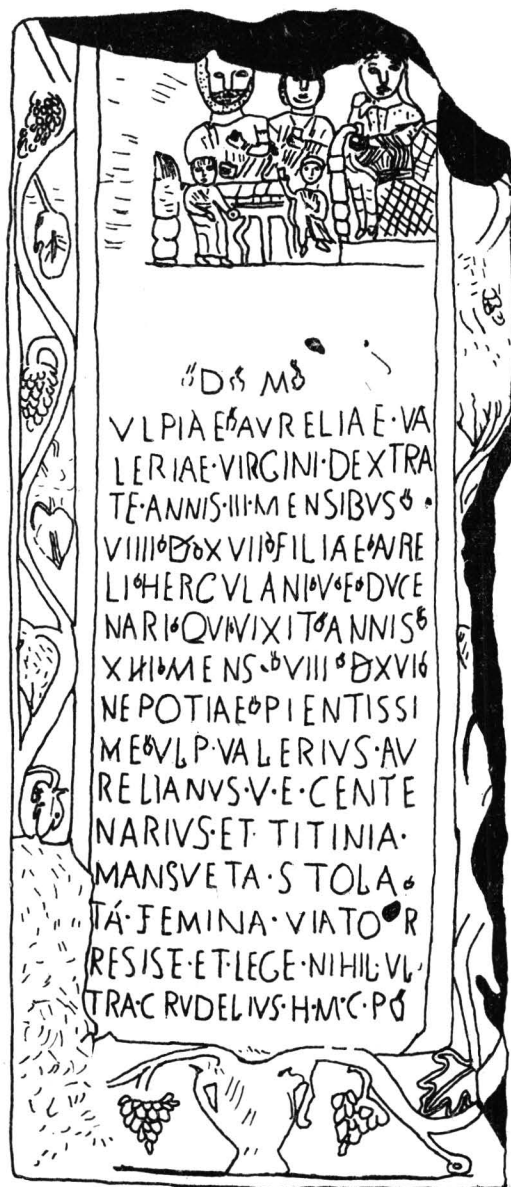
² M. Alexandrescu-Vianu, *Contributions à une classification des stèles funéraires de la Mésie Inférieure*, Dacia, N. S., 1973, p. 220.

³ L. Robert, *Les Stèles funéraires de Byz. Rom.*, Paris, 1964, p. 18ff.; G. Bordenache, *Termini e motivi della plastica funeraria di età Romana nella Moesia Inferior*, Dacia, N. S., 9, 1965, p. 253ff.

⁴ Distinctive letters in the inscription are: L, A, G, F and Ø for *dtebus*. cf. E. Popescu, *Inscripțiile Grecești și Latine din Secolele IV–XIII descoperite în România*, București, 1976, no. 236 (Troesmis), no. 17 (Constanța); no. 206 (Ulmetum) is an epitaph to Valerius Victorinus, a *biarchus*, dated to A. D. 324; no 5 (Constanța) depicts a man and his wife in a similar style to the *cena funebris* on the Ulpia Aurelia Valeria monument; the eyes are large and almond shaped. Both crude carvings are deeply incised. However, the best parallel for CIL, III, 6155 is a recently discovered stele from Tropaeum Traiani, Pontica, 7, 1974, p. 251ff. The manner in which the *cena funebris* is depicted and the style of lettering suggest a similar date. However, this inscription is dated on 'stylistic grounds' and ascribed by the editor to the latter second, early third centuries A. D. It seems better to date this inscription from Ulmetum and CIL III 6155 to the latter third, early fourth centuries A.D.

5

VIII D(IEBVS) XVII FILIAE AVRE-
LI(I) HERCVLANI V(IRI) E(GREGII) DVCE-
NARI(I) QVI VIXIT ANNIS
XIII MENS(IVS) VIII D(IEBVS) XVI
NEPOTIAE PIENTISSI-



0 40 80
cm.

Fig. 1. — Latin funerary stele.

10

ME VLP(IVS) VALERIVS AV-
RELIANVS V(IR) E(GREGIVS) CENTE-
NARIVS ET TITINIA
MANSVETA STOLA-

15

RESISTE ET LEGE NIHIL VL-
TRA CRVDELIVS H(OC?) M(ONVMENTO?) C(ERNERE?) PO(TES?).

The abbreviation H.M.C.P. is unique to this inscription. Its interpretation as *hoc monumento cernere potes*, following *nihil ultra crudelius*, seems to be the best since it completes the sense of the phrase and is paralleled by similar funerary formulae⁵. Clearly, the age of the father can not have been only thirteen years. It may have been forty-two which would be an acceptable lapidary error on the part of the sculptor (XIII=XLII). There is a diagonal line on the stone which cuts the first two vertical bars which might be an attempt at correcting the mistake. Perhaps he was thirty-one (XXXI).⁶ The use of the word *nepotia* for *nepos* is a late form particularly popular in Latin inscriptions from Dalmatia, dating to the second and third centuries A.D.⁷

A literal translation of the inscription presents no problems :

"To the spirits of the departed. Ulpia Aurelia Valeria, a young girl, 'on the right hand side' (*virgo dextrata*), three years, nine months, seventeen days, daughter of Aurelius Herculanus, His Excellency with the rank of HS 200,000 (*vir egregius ducenarius*), who lived for thirteen years, eight months, sixteen days. (This monument was erected) to their most dutiful grand-daughter by Ulpus Valerius Aurelianus, His Excellency with the rank of HS 100,000 (*vir egregius centenarius*) and Titinia Mansueta, a woman 'who wears the stola' (*stolata femina*). Traveller, stop and read. Nothing could be found to be more cruel than this monument."

There is another inscription from Tomis which was published as a fragment : CI III 7571. This Latin inscription was first published by J. Millingen in 1871⁸. It was one of several inscriptions copied by an English clergyman, C. G. Curtis, which, like the epitaph of Ulpia Aurelia Valeria, had been discovered during the construction of the railway line from Constanța to Cernavoda although CIL III 6155 does not figure in the copies made by Curtis and sent to Millingen. However, the supposed fragment fits exactly into the top right hand corner of the epitaph to Aurelia Valeria :

LIAE VA
DEXTRA
BVSϙ
AEϙAVRE
EϙDVCE
VNISϙ
XVIϙ

In *L. 1* of the fragment, LIAE VA coincides with the end of the second line in the epitaph, Ulpiae Aureliae Va-. In *L. 2*, *dextra* in the fragment corresponds to that portion of the phrase *virgini dextra/te* which occurs on the right hand side of the epitaph, the BVS in line three to the end of the word *mensibus*. In *L. 4* AE AVRE corresponds to *filiae Aurel*.

Similarly, the ends of *II. 5-7* in the fragment fit into *II. 6-8* in the epitaph. In *L. 4*, the ligature of the A and V in the fragment corresponds to the ligature of the A and V in *L. 5* of the complete inscription. The *hederae distinguentes* in *II. 3-7* are identical with their position in the epitaph. Since it is highly improbable that two such similar inscriptions should have been found during the construction of the same railway line at about the same time, it is reasonable to suppose that they are one and the same. There is, also, a probable explanation to hand as to how the confusion originally came about. When Huebner, who was responsible for the first full publication of the epitaph, saw the stone in the British Museum, he was unable to copy it since it was covered in what he describes as, a 'calcareous concretion' which was only later removed to reveal the inscription in time for his second visit in 1867.⁹ It seems probable that Curtis had only been able to see part of the inscription and published what he could make out without making it clear in his notes that this was part of a larger, complete stone. Consequently, this copy was accepted as being a fragment and published as such by Millingen and then in CIL III. CIL III 7571 can therefore be discounted as an early and partial copy of the epitaph of Ulpia Aurelia Valeria¹⁰.

The most interesting elements in the inscription are the titles ascribed to these members of an evidently important local family. Both the grandfather and father of Aurelia Valeria were *virii egregii*, the former styled *centenarius*, the latter *ducenarius*. The importance attached to the

⁵ R. Cagnat, *Cours d'Épigraphie Latine*, Paris, 1914, p. 403; R. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, Illinois, 1942, p. 233; F. Buecheler, *Carmina Latina Epigraphica*, Leipsig, 1897, no. 984 and no. 989.

⁶ E. Huebner, *op. cit.*, suggests that the oblique line is accidental. He prefers to allow for a miscutting of the second letter i.e. Aurelius Herculanus was forty-two at the time of his death.

⁷ CIL, III: 2039, 2599; 2690, 2756, 2798, 8441, 13013, 9703/4.

⁸ J. Millingen, 'περί τινων Ἐπιγραφῶν τῆς πόλεως Τόμης', in 'τοῦ ἐν κονσταντινουπόλει Ἑλληνικοῦ φιλολογικοῦ Συλλόγου τὰ περισωθέντα. Ἀπὸ 1863 Δεκεμβρίου μέχρι 1870 μαιου Τόμο 8'(IV) 1871, pp. 105-108.

⁹ E. Huebner *op. cit.*, note I.

¹⁰ The difficulties experienced in trying to read the inscription before 1867 may well account for the incorrect version of the girl's name passed to Gerhard by C. Newton and published in Arch. Anz. (1864). Above, note I.

titles *centenarius* and *ducenarius* is such that they are written out in full without abbreviation. It has been supposed that they were both procurators¹¹. However, Professor Pflaum has demonstrated that, by the second half of the third century, the title *ducenarius* no longer presupposes that an equestrian so qualified actually held a ducenarian procuratorship: *ducenarius* came to be simply an honorary title, conferring on the recipient a status higher than that of the ordinary *vir egregius*.¹² By a series of laws recorded in the *Codex Theodosianus* and dated to the year A. D. 317, Constantine confirmed that the *ducena* and *centena dignitas* could be awarded to those who had been employed in the imperial civil administration and to veterans, as a reward for good service.¹³ The edicts no doubt confirmed existing practice and, since the inscription dates to the latter third century (or early fourth), it seems most probable that neither the grandfather nor the father of Aurelia Valeria acquired their rank from being equestrian procurators but as a reward for honorable service, probably in the army.¹⁴

The grandmother, Titinia Mansueta, is described as a *femina stolata*, a title reserved in classical literature for *matrones*, married women of high social standing, entitled to wear the *stola*.¹⁵ This description of women is met with epigraphically, both in Latin and in its transliterated Greek form. The title occurs throughout the empire although it appears to have been particularly popular at Celeia, in Noricum, during the second and third centuries A. D.¹⁶ With certain exceptions, the majority of women qualified with the title were married and of equestrian stock.¹⁷ It served, much as *honesta femina*, to designate a woman whose husband or near relatives were equestrians or could aspire to equestrian rank. The use of such a title for Titinia Mansueta therefore conforms to the rule: she was, after all, the wife of a *vir egregius centenarius*.

The description of Ulpia Aurelia Valeria as a *virgo dextrata* is more difficult to interpret. The adjective *dextratus* is otherwise only attested in two contexts: as a surveying term and as a technical word for a horse 'on the right hand side' in a chariot team.¹⁸ Neither usage is appropriate to a description of a young girl. Nor is there any readily discernible lapidary error which could provide an alternative and more comprehensible meaning. A new interpretation for *dextratus* is required. Th. Mommsen suggested that the description referred to an honorary position which the girl had held in a religious procession,¹⁹ an interpretation which has subsequently been accepted, albeit with some reservation.²⁰ However, there appears to be no evidence to associate the adjective *dextratus* with any religious ceremony, especially one which would be understood by so enigmatic a reference. The girl was, after all, not yet four years old when she died and is unlikely to have taken any active part in religious ceremonial! Huebner suggested that the phrase referred to her manner of dress. But, if there ever was a *palla dextrata* then there ought to be references to it in classical sources. There are none.²¹ It seems better, since all suggestions without close parallels are inevitably speculative, to restrict the discussion to attested usages of cognate forms of the adjective.

The position of the deceased is sometimes recorded in epitaphs, to the right or left of some fixed point, often the grave of another named individual.²² *Dextrosus*, for example, is used to locate the burial plot in ILS 8363: *a via Campania publica dextrosus*. The use of *dextratus* in a similar sense would not be surprising, but, in the case of the epitaph to Aurelia Valeria, it would be, at best, obscure since there appears to be no obvious 'fixed point' to which the adjective could refer,

¹¹ Th. Mommsen CIL, III, 6155; PIR, ed. E. Klebs, Berlin, 1897, pars I p. 208, no. 1262.

¹² H. G. Pflaum, *Les Carrières Procuratoriennes Équestres*, 1960, p. 950; *ibidem*. Titulature et Rang Social sous le Haut-Empire, in *Recherches sur les Structures Sociales dans l'Antiquité Classique*, Colloque National du CNRS 1970, p. 179.

¹³ *Cod. Theod.* VIII, 4,3; X, 7, 1; X.20,1; XII.1,5.

¹⁴ H. G. Pflaum, *op. cit.*, note 12, suggests that *ducenarius* in the inscription is an honorary title but makes no mention of *centenarius*. Though the grandfather must have received his title earlier, probably towards the middle of the third century, he probably also received the title as recognition for distinguished service. However, it is not impossible that he did in fact hold a centenarian procuratorship.

¹⁵ cf. Ulp. Dig. XXXIV, 2, 23, 2.

¹⁶ CIL, III, 5225, 5283, 5293, from Celeia; also CIL, III, 8754, CIL, XIII, 1898; *Ann Ép.* 1956, no. 77; F. Buecheler, *op. cit.* no. 23; *Le Bas Waddington, Inscriptions Grèques et Latines recueillies en Asie Mineure*, Paris (1870), p. 375 no. 1606.

¹⁷ A woman is described as a *femina stolata* although her husband was only a *duplicarius* in the *legio X Gemina*, CIL,

III, 5293. The daughter described as *stolata femina* in CIL, III, 5225 may not have been married.

¹⁸ *Auct. de Limit.* p. 298, Goes; for its connection with horses and horse racing, *Tab. Devot.* Audollent, 161, 64.

¹⁹ Th. Mommsen, *op. cit.*, note II.

²⁰ *Thcs. Ling. Lat.* p. 938; A. Forcellini, *Lex. Tot. Lat.*, 1940, p. 107; *Ox. Lat. Dict. Fasc. III*, 1971, p. 535 states that *dextratus* is 'an honorific title of uncertain significance, perhaps referring to a position in a religious ceremonial'.

²¹ Th. Mommsen was probably thinking of Solinus 45,15 which refers to a religious ceremony in Rome as a *dextratio*. This single reference is of little help and seems to be a tenuous link with the adjective *dextratus*; Huebner *op. cit.*, pp. 82–85; *ibidem*, *Com. Phil.* a Hon. Th. Mommseni, Berlin, 1877, p. 106; Dr. B. Kuebler, *Zeit. Sov. Stif. XXXI* (1910) p. 176 ff; cf. Apuleius *Met.* II, 3, describes the *palla* as a young girl's garment which was wrapped around the right hand side but never refers to it as a *palla dextrata*.

²² cf. V. Beshevliev, *Spaetgriechische und spaetlateinische Inschriften aus Bulgarien*, Berlin (1964) no. 7, 11, 9–10; no. 115, 1, 3; Buecheler, *op. cit.* no. 1016.

unless it be to the grave of her father. Although this would allow the full sense of *dextratus*, positioned on the right, to stand, the argument still does not appear very convincing.

Alternatively, *dextratus* may here have a different sense, connected with the secondary meanings of the adjective *dexter*: happy, fortunate or lucky. However, such a meaning seems inappropriate. *Sinister*, in its sense of unfortunate, unlucky, is more commonly applied in funerary inscriptions.²³ There is a funerary inscription which refers to a man's life in more optimistic terms: *dextera fama mihi fuit et fortuna* but this is untypical.²⁴ A much more promising link would be with the noun *dexteritas*, implying that the girl had natural ability or particular talents, in addition to being an obedient grand-daughter, *nepotia pientissima* (11.9–10).

It has been suggested that there is a connection between the honorary epithet, *femina stolata* and *virgo dextrata* in the sense that the latter, like the former, expresses the social rank of the family; she was, after all, the daughter and grand-daughter of equestrians.²⁵ Since every other individual mentioned in the inscription is qualified by a title denoting rank, this suggestion is certainly attractive. The right hand side, being on the right hand side, does have connotations of honour and is used as such, for example, in the *Codex Theodosianus*, Novel 15,2, 1.²⁶

In sum, there are two reasonable interpretations of *virgo dextrata*: 1) that it describes the personal qualities of the young girl, and 2) that it alludes to her honourable status as daughter and grand-daughter of equestrians. However, it is not unlikely that both explanations are correct. Roman titulature often exemplified the accepted connection between personal ability and social or political standing: *boni*, *optimates*, *honestiores*, *egregii viri*, etc.; titles which assume that personal qualities and ability went hand in hand with social superiority. It seems quite possible that the adjective *dextratus*, in this novel context, is meant to express the same twofold meaning.

The inscription is of particular interest for the history of Tomis. The city emerged as one of the most important in the province of Moesia Inferior, head of the koinon of the Hexapolis and, with the Diocletianic reorganization, capital of the new province of Scythia Minor. Its importance as an economic and social centre had also become fully established during the prosperous years of the second and early third centuries A. D. By the early second century A. D. it boasted a small but influential Roman community which participated in the affairs of the Greek city while asserting its independent and privileged position. Even after the extension of the citizenship by Caracalla, the Latin-speaking population seems to have, at least in part, maintained its status. Here, in the epitaph to Ulpia Aurelia Valeria, are recorded members of a family which probably acquired citizenship less than a century before and who were concerned to stress, with some pride, that they were members of the privileged class, *honestiores*, who enjoyed the economic and social advantages denied to their inferiors.

²³ Cf. Buecheler, *op. cit.*, no. 640: *hic iacet extremum fatis oppressa sinistris*.

²⁴ R. Lattimore *op. cit.*, p. 155.

²⁵ S. Stati, *op. cit.*, pp. 117–118; Ruggiero, *Dizionario Epigrafico di Antichità Romane*, II, 1906–12, p. 179.

²⁶ Cf. also Varro *frag.* Serv. Aen. I, 468.