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The imperial presence in Dalmatian epigraphy from Decius to Diocletian.
A note on the epigraphic landscape

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The imperial presence in Dalmatian epigraphy from Decius to Diocletian

A note on epigraphic landscape

In order to explain why, although I am not an archaeologist, I participated in this conference, I would like to start these short notes from the remarks made by Giancarlo Susini when describing Roman towns. He dealt with the inevitable and very close relationship between inscriptions and their context in more than one work¹: in particular, in the handbook on Roman epigraphy published in 1982 he wrote a chapter titled “Iscrizione, monumento, paesaggio”². Here, we can say that he introduced, although without an explicit definition, the concept of the ‘epigraphic landscape’, which rapidly spread among scholars and became one of the most popular topics in this discipline, as it is easy to infer from any bibliographic research³. In fact, in the Roman world, inscriptions actually represented a form of street culture and a *viator* could see them nearly anywhere, mostly in or near towns, but also far from them, along roads and even in fields, not to mention on objects of everyday life. Therefore, we can state that they were in general a fundamental element of civilization and especially of the urban landscape and they appeared on different kinds of backdrop, from official and public buildings to shops and walls, where they could convey a huge range of messages, from prices to electoral propaganda.

Among the many inscriptions a wayfarer could find and read in Roman Dalmatia, for these short notes I have chosen the imperial ones, i.e. those that quote emperors and other members of the *domus Augusta*. They provide a particularly effective explanation of the relationship between the ‘centre’, soon identified as the emperor, and the ‘periphery’ – honouring him for different reasons – and, by examining such documents, their typology and spatial distribution, interesting remarks can be made on

¹ Most of this research was carried out at the University of Vienna thanks to an *Ernst Mach-Stipendium* of the *Österreichischer Austauschdienst-GmbH*, financed by the *Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung* and at the ZRC-SAZU in Ljubljana thanks to a Bilateral scholarship financed by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia Susini 1966, pp. 82-85, Donati, Susini 1986, p. 74, Susini 1988, pp. 105-110, Susini 1989, pp. 271-279, Susini 1997, pp. 90-98.

² Susini 1982, pp. 48-59. See also p. 17: “dal punto di vista di un’analisi tecnica compongono l’iscrizione almeno quattro elementi, tra loro indissolubilmente legati: [...] d) l’ambiente e il paesaggio cui l’iscrizione era destinata, quegli ambienti e quei paesaggi nei quali è successivamente vissuta”.

³ As to this concept, in addition to Susini’s writings, see among others also Lassère 1995, pp. 14-19, Mayer 1999, pp. 18-19, Sartori 1999, pp. 117-120, Santos Yangüas 2008, pp. 95-104 and lastly Ruiz Gutiérrez 2013, pp. 13-23. The subject has been developed in countless studies, in most cases mainly focused on specific geographic contexts: see, for instance, Cooley 2000, Rodá de Llanza *et al.* 2008, Iglesias Gil, Ruiz Gutiérrez 2013 with bibliography and, for Greek epigraphy, so far less investigated from this point of view, the project “The epigraphic landscape of Athens” (<https://epigraphiclandscape.wordpress.com/>) still in progress with the related Lasagni 2017.

the relationship between emperors and the province and the nature of the contacts between communities and rulers. Apart from these few preliminary words on these types of documents and their meaning, the paper will focus, as indicated by the subject of this conference, on the places where they were usually displayed in Roman Dalmatia, following the concept of epigraphic landscape I have just introduced. With regard to the period selected, if it is well known that the ‘epigraphic habit’ lapsed into decline during the 3rd century, Mrozek's studies have shown that the year 250 and especially Decius's reign represent a turning point, and from this date on the amount of inscriptions decreased⁴. He states that the economic crisis affecting the whole empire forced mainly municipal societies to scale back – or even cease – public works and consequently dedications decreased as well, except for the imperial ones still being erected. I decided to investigate only the second half of the 3rd century in this short contribution - precisely from Decius to Diocletian - in order to verify if his conclusions were also valid for Dalmatia, because the situation varies significantly from province to province⁵. Before making a quick comparison in terms of numbers, I would like to state that all these numerical estimates have to be taken with a grain of salt, because of the casualness in archaeological findings and the scarcity of examples, which make these evaluations rather unreliable. While Mrozek in his 1998 article verified that in Dalmatia, as in most provinces, inscriptions erected by and for people of the so-called middle class – for instance, the town *patroni* – mostly disappeared in the second half of the 3rd century, I am going to focus in the following lines on imperial dedications. In the first half of the century (193-249), we count 68 inscriptions, i.e. 1.2 each year, with a higher ratio under short-reigning emperors and surprisingly there is no ‘Severan peak’, often observed in this kind of investigations. In the second half of the century (249-305), the total amount is 60 documents, therefore we have a ratio of 1.1 each year, with a good presence also of emperors reigning for a short period of time, such as Florian (3 attestations). These numbers confirm a continuity and this substantiates what has been highlighted with regard to other contexts⁶. While from a quantitative point of view no turning point can be recognized, one can be

⁴ Mrozek 1973, 1988, 1998.

⁵ In addition to Mrozek 1998, for an updated overview of this matter (with bibliography) see Witschel 2003, pp. 475-478.

⁶ Witschel 2006, p. 364.

identified already in the year 235 from a qualitative point of view, i.e. paying attention to the type of monument and consequently its location; this is the most important aspect for my purpose. In fact, whereas Severus Alexander, the last ruler of his dynasty, is honoured on six epigraphs, among which three are on statue bases and three are votive inscriptions *pro salute imperatoris* on altars, we have 16 attestations for his successor, Maximinus Thrax, the first of the so-called soldier emperors, but only one is not on a milestone. I have underlined this marked difference, even if previous to the period taken into consideration here, because this tendency continued and even increased in the second half of the century.

In fact, starting from Decius and his sons, Herennius and Hostilianus, who co-ruled with him, in Dalmatia eight inscriptions have been found, but only one of them comes from an urban context: a dedication on a statue base from Arupium in Japydia⁷. Since six other similar monuments from Nerva to Florian are ascribed to the same town, it is undoubtedly an imperial statue cycle, erected by the municipality, since in the other texts – not this one, as it is mutilated on its bottom – the formula *D(ecreto) D(ecurionum)* comes at the end⁸. As can be seen also considering other towns, among the many different occasions communities had to honour emperors, especially upon accession, the council used – perhaps was also obliged – to erect his statue in a public space – we can assume the forum with the buildings overlooking it – and this habit in our context mostly disappeared in the mid-3rd century⁹. The other seven attestations are milestones: three quote Decius, two his elder son, Herennius Etruscus, one his younger son, Hostilianus, and finally one the three of them together¹⁰. It is worth underlining as well that the texts only consist in the name of the rulers with a short titulature¹¹, in three examples in the nominative case and four in the dative, identical as on an honorific inscription. Moreover, they do not

⁷ *CIL* III, 10048 = 15084,2.

⁸ *CIL* III, 3006, 3007, 3008 = 10046, 10047, 15086, *ILJug* 1812.

⁹ For the occasions on which statues were erected, see Højte 2005, pp. 143-156. For the end of imperial statue groups erected by towns, see in general Ward-Perkins 2016 and on regional contexts for instance Witschel 2006, pp. 364, 383-385.; Gehn and Ward-Perkins 2016.

¹⁰ *CIL* III, 13309 = XVII/4, 432, III, 13311 = XVII/4, 436, III, 8286 (cfr. p. 2128¹¹⁵) = XVII/4, 538, III, 13311 = XVII/4, 436, III, 13312 = XVII/4, 438, III, 15102,1 = XVII/4, 420 = *ILJug* 2972, *CIL* III, 13321 = XVII/4, 328. In the penultimate mutilated document only the name of Hostilianus can be read and I would ascribe it solely to him, as *CIL* XVII/2, 603 = AE 1965, 340 and *CIL* XIII, 9097 = XVII/2, 600 = AE 1986, 522, while the editors of *CIL* ascribe it also to Decius and Herennius after *CIL* III, 13321 = XVII/4, 328.

¹¹ With regard to short titulatures on milestones, see Walser 1981, p. 391.

include any verb typical for milestones, such as *fecit*, *stravit*, *refecit*, *faciendum curavit*, nor the number of miles, which is not a definitive argument, because they actually could have been painted on stone and have easily disappeared¹². In addition to that, importance should be given to some other aspects, which make it unlikely that they are a testimony to an actual road building or maintenance programme:

- they are spread all over the province and not along specific connection routes;
- the emperor, as many in this period, only ruled for two very difficult years;
- these monuments were located on the same stretches as other ones erected for his immediate predecessors, so that we should assume that roads needed interventions every ten years or even less.

Moreover, of particular relevance for my reasoning is the case of Han Pijesak, along the road from the Sarajevo region to the Drina valley: here two identical milestones for Decius should have been found *in situ* and two for Herennius were found nearby. So, they are very likely to be two pairs of milestones. Apart from the presence of two identical milestones in the same place – unusual, but not unique¹³ – the erection of two monuments nearby for the Augustus and a co-ruling member of the family indicates that a community first set two milestones for Decius and one year later other two to greet Herennius's association on the throne. Similarly to this situation, we have other couples of milestones from several provinces, where the first was dedicated to the Augustus and the second one to the Caesar or to both, after the son's accession¹⁴. This is another confirmation of no existing relationship between the erection of monuments and road works, because the Caesars did not have any real power. Even if the relationship between central authority and local communities as to the procedure for setting up monuments on public roads is still under discussion, it is doubtless that from the adoptive emperors on the responsibilities of local administrations for road works increased and consequently they began to

¹² Buonopane 2003, pp. 345-346.

¹³ Salama 1955, p. 24 for more milestones honouring the same emperor and set up together. Maybe the two identical milestones were located one on each side of the road. I owe this idea to Dr. Camilla Campedelli, whom I sincerely thank. On this phenomenon concerning road inscriptions see Basso 2009.

¹⁴ Rathmann 2003, pp. 125, 129.

use milestones also to celebrate the rulers¹⁵. Thus, we can explain why the dative case became between the 2nd and 3rd century more and more frequent in these texts, which had, especially after the Severan dynasty, mostly an honorific meaning regardless of case and formula¹⁶.

Given this short, but essential explanation of the actual meaning of the epigraphic category of monuments which most frequently occurs in our investigation, we can pass in review the attestations for the emperors of the second half of the 3rd century, starting with Decius's successors, Trebonianus Gallus and his son Volusianus, who were co-rulers for two years. For the former, three honorific inscriptions on statue bases and one milestone have been discovered in Dalmatia, for the latter instead two honorific inscriptions and two milestones, while on two milestones they appear together¹⁷. In Arba a base for a statue of Trebonianus was found, whereas in Doclea and Domavia there are monuments for both father and son, even if they probably were not erected at the same time. Only in the case of Doclea, the titulature still includes the republican magistratures and the title of *pater patriae*, always more often omitted in the 3rd century and usually replaced by the new honorific titles of *Pius* and *Felix*, as is the case of Domavia and Arba¹⁸. As usual, all three of them belong to imperial statue cycles promoted by the *ordo decurionum*, as clearly attested in the texts, and for Arba and Domavia it must be noticed that they are the last ones in the series. The presence of similar monuments from previous times actually makes the hypothesis weaker, that is that the setting of the dedications was approved by the Domavian council to express its gratitude to the rulers for the promotion from *municipium* to *colonia*¹⁹. On the other hand, this hypothesis is motivated by the observation that the only milestone found close to *Domavia* is actually a dedication to both the *Augusti* and therefore we could relate it to the statues and see them as two different proofs of the community's gratitude to the rulers. For the rest, milestones most probably

¹⁵ See among others König 1973, Witschel 2002, pp. 326-327, 367-368 and Rathmann 2003, pp. 129-135 for the increasing role of local communities in road administration and consequently their task of setting up milestones and establishing the text. More doubtful about this right is Buonopane 2003, pp. 346-348.

¹⁶ For the honorific meaning of milestones from the 3rd century on, see some writings by Salama, who more than anyone else investigated it, then, among others, König 1973, pp. 424-427, Lostal Pros 1992, pp. 230-231, 272-273, d'Encarnação 1995-96, pp. 41-42, Rathmann 2003, pp. 120-135. For some examples from the Balkan-Danubian area, see Winkler 1972.

¹⁷ *CIL* III, 3122 = 10119, 12687 (cfr. p. 2252), 12728, *CIL* XVII/4, 243 = *ILJug* 2996, *CIL* III, 12668, 12729, 13307 = XVII/4, 430, III, 13316 = XVII/4, 442, 443 = *ILJug* 2965, *CIL* XVII/4, 348 = *ILJug* 942.

¹⁸ Rösch 1978, pp. 30-52, Chastagnol 1988, pp. 16-17.

¹⁹ The hypothesis was advanced in Bojanovski 1988, p. 197.

have only honorific aims and one, found near *Salona* along the main road to Italy, especially attracts our attention, because the provincial governor also appears with the formula *curante legato Augusti pro praetore* that could indicate his own desire to be cited for propagandist purposes in such an unstable political environment²⁰. Under this point of view, I am persuaded that it is not a coincidence that the only mention of him comes from the neighbourhood of *Salona*, while he did not manage to bring his propagandist message to more remote regions of Dalmatia. After the three months of Aemilianus's reign, the empire encountered a relatively long period of stability with Valerian and his son Gallienus. We have eight attestations for their 15 years of ruling, as many as for Trebonianus and Volusianus, who however ruled for no longer than two years. This basic comparison surprises, at first sight, but is the confirmation of how local communities tended to set up honorific inscriptions for emperors very soon in order to show their loyalty, which was of particular relevance in times of trouble²¹. As for the kind of monuments, the two most recent bases of the cycle of Doclea are one for the father and one for the son and in Nedinum the one for Valerian is also the last one in a series, whose oldest attestation is for Nerva²². The fourth document from the urban environment is curious, because it is addressed to Cornelia Salonina, Gallienus's wife, scarcely attested in Danubian provinces, and it is the only imperial honour *stricto sensu* decided by the *municipium* of Metulum²³. Moving on to the milestones, it is worth noting that all four of them quote the emperors in the dative case, even when – on a stone from Burnum – the traditional formula *vias et pontes vetustate collapsas restituerunt* is added, which must not necessarily suggest an actual restoration intervention²⁴. In the following period until the Tetrarchy, there definitely is a tendency to milestones; without going into detail for every emperor, we can highlight some data and concepts: above all, the numbers show that for three rulers – Claudius Gothicus, Tacitus and Carus with his sons – only milestones are preserved and in general the dative case is strongly

²⁰ For the significance of the governor's mention on milestones in the 3rd century, see Rathmann 2003, pp. 100-102 with examples.

²¹ See n. 9. For the erection of milestones immediately after accession, see Rathmann 2003, p. 129 and Witschel 2003, p. 477.

²² *CIL* III, 2863, 12684 = 13823, 1705.

²³ *CIL* III, 3022.

²⁴ *CIL* III 14333,8 = XVII/4, 251, 14333,9 = XVII/4, 240, 239 = *ILJug* 2999, *CIL* XVII/4, 342 = *ILJug* 2982. Rathmann 2003, p. 127, Witschel 2003, p. 477.

dominant. In this situation, a partially preserved Salonitan honorific inscription on slab for Aurelian is interesting, on which the presence of *cognomina devictarum gentium* that were omitted over the course of the 3rd century is remarkable²⁵. A curious case is that of his successor Florianus, who ruled only a few months: as said about Decius, he had the most recent inscription erected by the *ordo decurionum* of Arupium, which is a confirmation of the fact that communities tried to honour the new ruler as soon as possible, especially in this epoch²⁶. While this Iapydian municipality still showed its loyalty through a statue, some others in the province chose milestones: one of these, found near Ljubuški, is an example of the reuse of stone, typical of this period and this kind of monument. Cancelling the inscription for the predecessor and engraving another one for the new ruler was often the best and quickest way communities found to celebrate the event. In this case, the dedication to Florianus was cancelled and on the bottom of the column the new one to his successor Probus was made. His two attestations from Salona are rather interesting with regard to epigraphic habit: one, in fact, is an honorific inscription erected no longer by an *ordo decurionum*, but by the provincial governor, in accordance to what has been studied also in other contexts, e.g. in Spain²⁷. To this I propose to connect the second document, a building inscription mentioning once again the governor and celebrating the restoration of something in the city thanks to the emperor, who at that time was the one who could most often still provide such financial assistance²⁸. Although the remaining letters allow several solutions, it is more logical to think of Probus and governor *Aurelius Marcianus* rather than his successors Carus, Carinus and Numerian, who ruled for a short period of time²⁹. As to the titulature, the most common one became *Pius Felix Augustus* and new titles, connected to the milieu of the court, appeared: *dominus noster* at the beginning of the text, together with *imperator* and the adjective *perpetuus* after the personal name³⁰.

²⁵ *ILJug* 2073 = AE 1925, 57. For the omission of *cognomina devictarum gentium*, see Sotgiu 1961, p. 18.

²⁶ *CIL* III, 15086, 10061 (cfr. pp. 2328,18; 2328,177) = 14019 = XVII/4, 232 = *ILJug* 267, *CIL* III, 6433 = XVII/4, 351 = *ILJug* 2980.

²⁷ *ILJug* 2072, *CIL* III, 8707. Witschel 2003, p. 477.

²⁸ On financial assistance for erecting and restoring buildings in late antiquity, see with different positions Horster 2001, p. 399 and Witschel 2006, pp. 364-365, 368-370.

²⁹ For comments on chronology, see Jagenteufel 1958, cc. 113-114 and Horster 2001, p. 399.

³⁰ Chastagnol 1988, pp. 12-14.

Finally, after this epigraphic *excursus*, we come to the first Tetrarchy and to Diocletian's reign, who could have gained a large amount of inscriptions in consideration of his ruling years and his Dalmatian origin. Actually, we have only one honorific inscription, erected for him by the *res publica* of *Aquae S.* in central Bosnia³¹. Apart from this, the members of the first Tetrarchy are mentioned in 10 milestones, all in the dative case³². Among these, one is especially interesting, because it reveals the gist of this paper: found in *Salona*, *CIL* XVII/4, 250 absolutely appears as an honorific inscription to Diocletian, because the dedicator is also mentioned: the *res publica Salomitana*³³.

To sum up, in this short investigation we have verified that in the second half of the century also in Dalmatia 'epigraphic habit' with regard to emperors did not change quantitatively but qualitatively and thus deeply modified the epigraphic landscape, creating forests of milestones along the roads³⁴. In fact, the focus shifted from the fora, which encountered a resemantisation and lost their attraction as ideal places for self-representation and to honour important people, above all the emperors, to roads, where more people – in theory every *viator* – could read the inscriptions and in this case appreciate the loyalty of the town towards the court³⁵. Apropos this, I find very appropriate the thesis that milestones were often concentrated in groups, as viewed above, on the border between *agri* of different communities³⁶. Therefore, the emperors were celebrated with about the same texts as on the bases, but on a different support: this process, obviously connected to the change of formulary from the nominative into the dative, seems to have taken place in Dalmatia in general some decades earlier than in Italy and other provinces³⁷. This fact, together with the large concentration of milestones dating to the 3rd century in

³¹ *ILJug* 1578 = *AE* 1937, 248. On inscriptions for the tetrarchs in the Danube provinces see Gehn and Ward-Perkins 2016, pp. 82-83.

³² *CIL* III, 3205 (cfr. pp. 1038, 1651, 2174) = XVII/4, 270, III, 14333,10 = XVII/4, 233, III, 15106 = XVII/4, 271 = *ILJug* 2986, *CIL* XVII/4, 252 = *ILJug* 2984, *CIL* XVII/4, 307 = *ILJug* 2993, *CIL* XVII/4, 352 = *ILJug* 2981, *CIL* XVII/4, 443, 448, 572a.

³³ For similar examples, see, for instance, Walser 1981, pp. 397-402.

³⁴ For milestones as fundamental elements of epigraphic landscape, see above all Susini 1992, p. 119.

³⁵ On the resemantisation of the forum and change of 'epigraphic habit', see, among others, d'Encarnação 1995-96, pp. 41-42 and Witschel 2006, pp. 364-375, 379-380.

³⁶ Weber 1968-71, pp. 132, Lostal Pros 1992, p. 116.

³⁷ For Italy see, for instance, Donati 1974, pp. 10-11, Basso 2008, pp. 69-72, for Spain Sillières 1986, Lostal Pros 1992, pp. 229-237, for Africa Salama 1987, pp. 58-60, for Gaul and Germany Walser 1981, p. 391.

the Danubian provinces, can be explained by the high frequency of emperors with their entourage and troops along these roads³⁸.

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³⁸ For the concentration of milestones in the Danubian provinces, see Rathmann 2003, p. 88.

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