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A FOURTH-CENTURY INSCRIPTION FROM ABRITUS IN MOESIA SECUNDA

OLLI SALOMIES*

This article deals with an inscription of some interest, found in Abritus (Razgrad in Bulgaria) in what was at the time of the inscription known as *Moesia Secunda* and published recently by A. Kolb and R. T. Ivanov in *ZPE* 199 (2016) 294–9.¹ The text, dated by the editors to the period between AD 311 and the reign of Constantius II (AD 337–361), has been inscribed within a margin (used especially in the lower part for inscribing some letters) with letters very clearly indicating Late Antiquity, on a limestone stele (119 x 43 x 25 cm., the letters being 3 cm.) now broken in two, this resulting in the loss of some letters in lines 6–10. The inscription runs as follows:²

Romulianus p(rae)p(ositus) eqq(uitum) Dalm(atarum)
Beroe(e)nsium comitate(nsium)
et Fl(avia) Maxima casta con-
iux eius filiae suae d-
5 *ulcissimae Romula[e],*
oriundae ex prov(incia) D[ac(ia)],
cives Aquisen[enses],
ubi v[ixerunt par]-

* Thanks are due to two anonymous referees.

¹ The inscription is also available, with photos, at the Ubi Erat Lupa (<http://lupa.at/20851>) and Clauss-Slaby (as EDCS-69000069) websites.

² I quote the text as published by Kolb and Ivanov, a text reproduced as such in the Clauss-Slaby database. At the Ubi Erat Lupa site a text differing in some details is offered, said to be based on Manfred Clauss' study of the photo; cf. below notes 3, 4 and 5.

- entes*,³ *Auius Apat[---]*
 10 *Romulus, vir magnu[s],*
memorat(a)e ex p(rae)p(osito) trib(unus)
q(ua) comite factus,
Valerinus ipsa dig-
nitate secutus <q(uocum)> vi-
 15 *xit tamen Romula an(nos)*
VII^A q(ui) memoriam feci-
mus nobil(i)ssima(e) gra-
tia ipsa hic tamen Romu-
la filia vestra⁵ magnam (!)
 20 *dolorem in pectore fixi(t)⁶.*

As fourth-century inscriptions tend to be, the text is full of errors and mistakes of all possible kinds, and there seem to be many passages where the exact meaning must remain uncertain. The editors have done their best to illustrate and explain what is being said, but I think that some details remain for which an alternative interpretation could be offered. This is something that I shall now turn my attention to.

The text in the first six lines seems clear enough; I cannot say I can see much of the letter *D*, taken by the editors as the first letter of *D[ac(ia)]*, at the end

³ This seems a plausible interpretation of what can be read in the photo and of what could be expected the text to have said; but in the beginning of l. 9 Clausß (n. 1) reads *DIIS* not *ENTES*.

⁴ This must indeed be the correct reading; the word *an(nos)* and the age of Romula (*VI* in my view rather than *VII*, as in Kolb and Ivanov) have been inscribed in the margin to the right of l. 15 and to the left of l. 16 (there are other instances of letters inscribed in the margin elsewhere). Clausß' reading, *Romulan/[i]an/o* (Clausß uses the symbol “//” to indicate that letters that follow are inscribed in the margin), must be based on the (misguided) assumption that there is a ligature of *A* and *N* where the reading is in fact *Romula*; and a mention of an (additional person?) “Romulianianus” would have no point here.

⁵ This reading seems acceptable; Clausß reads *Ro//mu/[---] vestram*, but in l. 19 the reading *IL-IAVESTRA* seems certain (Clausß' *vestram* must be an error) and the letters that can be read at the beginning of the same line can be easily interpreted as *LAF* (for the *F*, cf. e.g. the *F* in *feci/mus* in l. 16), this producing the reading of the editors, in any case corresponding to what one would expect, *Romu/la filia vestra*.

⁶ *pectore fixi* (with *XI* inscribed in the margin) seems clear enough. I cannot see how Clausß has arrived at the reading *PECIDRLA?//XI*.

of l. 6, but a mention of Dacia (the provinces called *Dacia* in the fourth century being located to the south of the Danube) seems plausible enough. However, I wonder about the reading and the interpretation of *cives* in l. 7. The editors interpret *cives* as a nominative plural defining the parents (“Dacia ... wo die Eltern als aquisenische Bürger gelebt haben”), but I would very much prefer to take the expression to refer to the daughter Romula. Romula’s home province has just been indicated (*oriundae ex prov(incia) D[ac(ia)]*), and it would thus certainly be more appropriate if a reference to her, rather than the parents’, hometown followed, especially as it is not uncommon to find particularly in military circles and from about the Severan period onwards a person’s *patria* being indicated with a mention both of the home city and of the province (or Italian region), as for instance in *civi Campano domo Capua* (*AE* 2009, 1168, cf. *AE* 2010, 1276) or *domo Catina ex provincia Sicilia* (*CIL* XII 178).⁷ Moreover, taking *ubi* to refer not to the city, but to the province the mention of which *precedes* the mention of the city, seems to me artificial and far-fetched, and I find hard to believe that anyone in the fourth century would have rendered “where her parents lived as aquisenian (*vel sim.*) citizens” (already in itself an unlikely way of saying that one’s parents resided in a certain city) using a formulation of this structure, with *cives Aquisene[nse]* preceding the relative adverb *ubi*.⁸ Now what one reads in l. 7 is *CIVESAQVISENE[---]*,⁹ and a close study of the photos seems to allow for, or at least not to exclude, the possibility of reading not *cives Aquisene[---]*

⁷ For further instances of the province coming first note e.g. *ex provincia Narbone[n(s)] domo Nemauso* (*RIB* 814); *ex provincia Pannonia superiore civitate Poetabionense* (*CIL* VI 32804a); *oriundo ex provincia Moesopo[ta]miae* (sic) *domo Rac[---]* (*CIL* XIII 7323 = *ILS* 9148); for instances of the city being mentioned first note e.g. [*domo*] *Arelate ex provin[ci]a Nar]bon[ensi]* (*AE* 2003, 1426); *Carnuntiensi provinci[a]e Pannoniae superioris* (*CIL* III 6593); *domo Philippopoli ex prov(incia) Thracia* (*CIL* XIII 1856); *domo Choba ex provincia Maur[e]tania Caes(ariensi)* (*AE* 1963, 16).

⁸ It is of course attested that the subjects of relative clauses or of clauses introduced by relative adverbs are put in “focus” ahead of the clause (as, to mention an epigraphic example, e.g. in *CIL* I² 6/7 = *ILS* 1, *consol censor aidilis qui fuit apud vos* instead of *qui fuit consol ... apud vos*), but I would not be prepared to assume that the author of the text would have had something like this in mind.

⁹ The photo, by O. Harl, at the Ubi Erat Lupa site seems to imply the possibility of reading the fourth letter as an *I* instead of an *E*, the result being *CIVI-*, but in the photo in the original publication in *ZPE* the *E* is clear. The last letter at the end of this line as preserved, read as *E*, seems uncertain to me but its exact identity is of no great importance.

but *cive Saquisenef* --- *J*.¹⁰ In that case, *cive* could be seen as a dative and thus a description of Romula,¹¹ and the ending of the adjective derived from the name of Romula's home town would accordingly have to be modified to represent a dative.

But even if one insists on assuming that the name of Romula's hometown has something to do with the word *aqua* (cf. n. 10), and surely this is (as pointed out by the referees) the most probable interpretation, one can surely still consider attaching *cives* to Romula rather than to her parents by assuming that *cives* is singular, not plural,¹² and by interpreting it as an appositive nominative "without government by the preceding clause":¹³ the author of the text, not an accomplished writer of Latin prose, had simply forgotten or ignored that he should have continued with the use of the dative.

There is not much left of l. 8 and of the beginning of l. 9, but the reading of Kolb and Ivanov, *ubi v[ixerunt par]/entes*, seems plausible; the text would in this case be explaining that Romula was the citizen of the city or village mentioned in l. 7 precisely because her parents had lived there.

In what follows (lines 9ff.) another male person seems to be introduced, *Avius Apat* [---] *Romulus*. What is striking about this man, in addition to the fact that he is defined as *vir magnus*,¹⁴ is that according to the interpretation of the editors he has three names in a context where all other men have just one (*Fl(avia) Maxima* of course does have a *nomen*). Taking into account on the one

¹⁰ Kolb and Ivanov suggest (p. 298) that Romula's hometown could have been a spa or bathing resort with a name beginning with *Aquis/Aquae*, but we could be dealing with an obscure village with a barbarian name (a possibility vehemently denied by the referees, one of whom observes that we must have here a reference either to *Aquae* on the Danube, possibly identical with Prahovo in Serbia, or to some other locality with a similar name).

¹¹ The dative *cive* is attested in *CIL* XIII 6460; for other instances of third-declension datives ending in *-e* see H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae selectae* III (1916) p. 848 (e.g., *sodale*, *CIL* XIV 341 = *ILS* 6144); E. Diehl, *Vulgärlateinische Inschriften* (1910) p. 165.

¹² Cf. e.g. *cives Tribocus* *CIL* VI 31139 (AD 128); *TLL* III 1220, 27–33.

¹³ I quote this from the assessment of a referee. In my original version I was speaking of "disturbed syntax".

¹⁴ Kolb and Ivanov translate this as "ein bedeutender Mann". They observe (p. 297 n. 10; this is confirmed by a search of the Clauss-Slaby database), that there are only two epigraphic parallels for the expression *vir magnus*, *CIL* VI 9783 = 37773 = *ILS* 7778 (a philosopher) and *CIL* XIII 2477 = *ILCV* 1075 (a presbyter).

hand this, and on the other the fact that ‘grandfather’ is in epigraphical Latin, as pointed out by the *Thesaurus*,¹⁵ sometimes rendered not with *avus* but with *avius* (a form no doubt influenced by the female form *avia*), I suggest that, instead of the nomen *Avius*, which is not very common and barely found outside Italy, we have here another instance of *avius* in the meaning of *avus*. This leaves us with the letters that follow, *APAT*, with a couple of letters missing in the lacuna after the *T*. In this case, too, the editors (p. 296) think of a name, but the repertory of names beginning with *Apat-* is not exactly substantial, and there seems to be a point in taking these letters to be a definition of *avius*. That is why I suggest that the letters *APAT* should be understood as *a pat[re]*, and this adverbial expression¹⁶ as meaning the same as the adjective *paternus*. In order to show that this interpretation could be possible I must quote an inscription from Gallia Narbonensis (*CIL* XII 2473 = B. Rémy, in *Inscriptions latines de Narbonnaise* V [Vienne] 3, 669):

[L.] Pompeio C. f. Campano avo a patre, Catiae Secundinae aviae a patre, Pompeiae Maximae sorori, [.] Pompeio Campano fratri ... C. Sentio Agricola[e] [avunculo (?)], Pompeiae L. f. Secundin(ae) amitae, C. Pompeio Ius[to] f[r]atri et parentibus, Voluntiliae C. f. Censae aviae a matre, C. Sentio Iusto avo a mat[r]e ... L. Pompeius Campanus viv(u)s fecit.

L. Pompeius Campanus, the man who set up this inscription, thus enumerates, among a number of persons whose relation to himself is not defined and whose names are left out above, all four of his grandparents by name (but for some reason refers to his parents simply as *parentes*), the paternal grandparents [.] Pompeius Campanus and Catia Secundina and the maternal grandparents Voluntilia Censa and C. Sentius Iustus, and in doing this uses the expressions *a patre* and *a matre*. I do not seem to be able to locate further instances of this particular

¹⁵ *TLL* II 1612, 48–53 “*nota formam avius, -ī (cf. avia) in titulis*”. To the instances cited there (among which there is one from Moesia Superior, *CIL* III 14544 = *IMS* I 123, probably from the third century) add *CIL* VI 20670, *C. Iulio Candido avio dulcissimo*; *AE* 2009, 163 (Rome), *C. Cornelio Abascanto fecerunt nepotes pientissimi avio*. For *avius* and *avia* appearing in the same context cf. e.g. *CIL* VI 16845, *Didiae Felicitati Sex. Titien(us) Epaphroditus avius, Didia Nice avia, Didia Daphne mater*.

¹⁶ Cf. the German adverbial expressions *väterlicherseits* (‘on the father’s side’) and *mütterlicherseits* (‘on the mother’s side’).

expression,¹⁷ but surely the inscription cited above, although much earlier than the one I am discussing and from a quite different region, can be used to show that the expression *avus/avius a patre* ‘paternal grandfather’ existed.

This Romulus would, then, be the third relative of Romula mentioned in the inscription. Seeing in this Romulus a grandfather of the girl Romula – and, accordingly, the father of Romulianus – has the advantage of furnishing an explanation for the names, but at the same time eliminates the possibility of interpreting his presence here as pointing to the conclusion, envisaged by Kolb and Ivanov (p. 297), that he could have been Romula’s earlier “companion” (“Lebensgefährte”).

In l. 11, this Romulus is described as *memorate ex p(rae)p(osito) trib(unus)*. The editors Kolb and Ivanov understand *memorat(a)e* as a dative referring to Romula (“Romulus ... für die eben erwähnte”) and assume that Romulus, too, would have been described as having done something – i.e., participating in the setting up of the monument – *for* Romula, but I wonder whether *memorat(a)e* could not be interpreted as a genitive referring to *ala*, an expression not found in the preceding text but which could be understood as being implied by the mention of the *eqq(uites) Dal(matae)* in l. 1. The text would in that case be saying that Romulus had been a *p(rae)p(ositus)* of the above-mentioned unit, but had then been promoted tribune in the same unit.¹⁸

At the beginning of line 12, the editors interpret the letter *Q* (which can be read clearly in the photo) as *q(ua)* referring to Romula and *q(ua) comite* as an ablative absolute illustrating the circumstances in which Romulus (seen, as mentioned above, by the editors as Romula’s companion) had been promoted tribune, that is with Romula at his side.¹⁹ But one would not really expect the author of this inscription to have stressed the role of a female companion in a description of Romulus’ promotion and, as pointed out above, this Romulus seems in any case to have been Romula’s grandfather rather than an (earlier)

¹⁷ No parallels seem to be on offer in the *Thesaurus* article on *pater* (*TLL* X 1, 667, 69ff.), where the inscription *CIL* XII 2473 is not cited, and B. Rémy has nothing to say on this in his commentary.

¹⁸ One of the referees finds that taking *memorate* in the meaning of *supra dictus* (and referring the expression to the Dalmatian cavalry unit) would be “difficult”, but “in any case a better suggestion than that of Kolb and Ivanov”. The other referee observes that he or she cannot agree with my suggestion but does not furnish a more plausible interpretation.

¹⁹ Cf. the translation “für die eben erwähnte, mit welcher an seiner Seite er vom Praepositus zum Tribun erhoben wurde”.

companion (cf. above). Taking this into account I cannot help suggesting²⁰ that we could understand *q(uo)* rather than *q(ua)*, referring the pronoun to Romulus. *Factus* could be an error for *facto* and the whole of line 12 a flawed ablative absolute introducing a reference to a further person, a certain Valerinus (line 13), of whom it is apparently said that he became the successor of Romulus in a particular *dignitas* (*ipsa dignitate secutus*, ll. 13–4), i.e., in the tribunate, and explaining in what circumstances this had happened, namely when Romulus himself had been promoted *comes*. Another possibility of arriving at about the same conclusion would be to see *comite* as representing the nominative *comes* and to interpret the abbreviation *Q* either as the relative pronoun *q(ui)* or as the adverb *q(uondam)*. Either way this line could be made to say that Romulus had at some point become *comes*.

As for the identity of Valerinus, the editors assume that he could be, after Romulus (cf. above), another “companion” of Romula. There does indeed seem to be a point in identifying him as a husband or companion of Romula (probably the only one, if Romulus was, as suggested above, Romula’s grandfather), for that would furnish an explanation for his presence in the text in the first place. However, he would need to be attached somehow to Romula, and that is why the editors suggest adding *<q(uocum)>* before *vixit* in line 14, the result being that a reference to the length of her relation to Valerinus rather than Romula’s age when she died would follow in lines 14–6. There would be nothing wrong with this, as hundreds of Latin inscriptions contain only information on the length of a marriage or relationship and not also about the deceased person’s age.²¹ However, my impression is that the adverb *tamen* in *vixit tamen Romula an(nos) VII*²² (l. 14–6) is meant to be a signal of sorts, suggesting that the text has arrived at the point where some recapitulation would follow, and with this interpretation it would seem preferable to take the text to say what it says without having to add anything, namely that Romula had died at the age of seven (or six). And the fact that she is described as *dulcissima* (l. 4–5) and her death as causing *magna*

²⁰ This interpretation is regarded as “correct” by one of the referees, who observes that “confusions in absolute constructions are frequent in substandard texts”.

²¹ E.g., *CIL VI 12435, L. Arruntius L. f. Venustus Arruntiae Munniae coniugi sanctissimae, cum qua vix(it) ann(os) XVI, men(ses) III sine ulla quer(ella) (...)*.

²² Or perhaps rather *VI* (n. 4).

(sic)²³ *dolor* (l. 19–20) to her parents and that her grandfather is not only alive but still in active military service could perhaps be used to support this view. On the other hand, there is, as mentioned above, a point in seeing Valerinus as a companion of sorts to Romula, and I would not categorically rule out this view.

As for the rest of the text, my impression is that *fecimus* in *q(ui) memoriam fecimus* (l. 16–17)²⁴ does not, as assumed by Kolb and Ivanov, refer to all persons (except obviously Romula herself) mentioned in the inscription but only to Romulus the grandfather and Valerinus, who seem to be saying that they had erected the monument out of consideration for the girl.²⁵ But do they refer to Romula as “noble”? Kolb and Ivanov read the word in l. 17 as *nobil(i)ssima(e)*, clearly assuming that whatever can be seen between the *B* and the *I* would be the trace of the horizontal stroke of an *L*, the letters *I* and *L* having been inscribed as a ligature. But there do not seem to be other ligatures (or at least ligatures intended as such) in this inscription, and what can be seen here could be anything – the stone might be damaged, for example.²⁶ Assuming this, we are left with the reading *NOBISSIMA*, and although one could think of correcting this to *nobissima*, one wonders whether it would not be possible to see this as a vulgar orthography of *novissima*. In that case, we would not have to assume, referring the expression to Romula, that *nobissima* has been inscribed instead of *nobissimae*; we could interpret it as an accusative with the merger of /b/ and /w/ and the drop of the final /m/²⁷ (phenomena attested already in Pompeian inscriptions) and as a description of *memoriam* (l. 16). In the lemma dedicated to the superlative *novissimus* (separate from that dealing with the positive *novus*), the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* has some meanings that could be relevant here, especially ‘last in order of time’, ‘final’, ‘ultimate’ (listed under *novissimus* 2); it

²³ One is reminded of *la douleur* in French.

²⁴ I think that *q(ui)* is preferable, but *q(uondam)* would perhaps not be impossible.

²⁵ The editors translate their proposed reading *nobil(i)ssima(e) gratia ipsa* as “der in ihrer persönlichen Würde so Edlen”. But this seems a pretty artificial interpretation and I think that *gratia ipsa* is here used simply in the same meaning as *gratia ipsius* ‘for her sake’ or (as above) ‘out of consideration for her’.

²⁶ Note also that in the case of a ligature *IL* one would perhaps expect to find the horizontal stroke of the *L* to have been placed to the *right* rather than to the *left* of the *I*.

²⁷ Cf. J. N. Adams, *Social Variation and the Latin Language* (Cambridge 2013) 183–90 and 128–32, respectively.

would follow that Romulus and Valerinus say that they were setting up the ‘last commemoration’ of Romula.²⁸ Having said this, the two then conclude the text by now turning to address the parents and by observing, surely with some justification, that the death of their daughter (*filia vestra*, l. 19) had caused *magna dolor* in their hearts. In line 18, *hic* is in my view the adverb, perhaps meant to be understood as ‘in this way’, this corresponding to ‘by her death’.

A text modified in some details and a tentative translation of the inscription based on Kolb’s and Ivanov’s German translation but also incorporating the suggestions made above would, then, be as follows (in the text and in the translation, the individual lines do not always correspond to each other):

<p><i>Romulianus p(rae)p(ositus) eqq(uitum)</i> <i>Dalm(atarum)</i> <i>Beroe(e)nsium comitate(nsium)</i> <i>et Fl(avia) Maxima casta con</i> <i>iux eius filiae suae d-</i> <i>ulcissimae Romula[e],</i> <i>oriundae ex prov(incia) D[ac(ia)],</i> <i>cives Aquisen[nsis],</i> <i>ubi v[ixerunt par]-</i> <i>entes, avius a pat[re]</i> <i>Romulus, vir magnu[s],</i> <i>memorat(a)e ex p(rae)p(osito) trib(unus)</i> <i>q(uo) comite factus</i> <i>Valerinus ipsa dig-</i> <i>nitate secutus. Vi-</i> <i>xit tamen Romula an(nos)</i> <i>VII. Q(ui) memoriam feci-</i> <i>mus nobissima(m) gra-</i> <i>tia ipsa. Hic tamen Romu-</i> <i>la filia vestra magnam</i> <i>dolorem in pectore fixi(t).</i></p>	<p>Romulianus, <i>praepositus</i> of the Dalmatian Comitatensic cavalry from Beroe and Flavia Maxima, his chaste wife (have set up this monument) to their sweetest daughter Romula originating from the province of Dacia a citizen of Aquisen[---] where her parents also lived, (and) Romulus, her paternal grandfather, a prominent man, tribune of the (unit) mentioned above promoted from (the rank of) <i>praepositus</i>, in which dignity Valerinus has become his successor when he (Romulus) had been promoted <i>comes</i>. But Romula lived seven/six years; we set up this last commemoration for her sake. Romula has caused profound sorrow in your hearts!</p>
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University of Helsinki

²⁸ Cf. e.g. *heres ...hanc aedem posuit struxidque (sic) novissima templa manibus et cineri posteri-*
isque (sic) meis (CIL XIV 480 = CLE 1255 from Ostia).