



**Roma Tre**

DIPARTIMENTO DI  
STUDI UMANISTICI

**RES PUBLICA LITTERARUM**  
STUDIES IN THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

QUADERNI

6

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2025

## RES PUBLICA LITTERARUM • QUADERNI

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# PPRET INSCRIPTIONS

INSCRIPTIONS PERTAINING TO THE PRAETORIAN  
PREFECTS FROM 284 TO 395 AD.

PAPER EDITION

PIERFRANCESCO PORENA,  
ELEONORA ANGIUS, ANDREA BERNIER,  
GIORDANA FRANCESCHINI, IRENE VAGIONAKIS

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LIBERI NOS SUMUS

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GREEK INSCRIPTION IN ELEGIAC DISTICHS  
HONOURING THE PRAET. PRAEFECT PROBUS FROM  
ATHENS BY THE *PROCONSUL AN(A)TOLIUS*

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PRAETORIAN PRAEFECTS: Sextus Claudius Petronius Probus

DATE OF THE INSCRIPTION: 368/382 AD

PROVENANCE AND LOCATION

Ancient city: Athenae. Modern city: Athens (Greece). Province: Achaia. Diocese: Macedonia. Regional prefecture: Italia Illyricum Africa.

Provenance: the inscription was found in 1869 on a private property (Gaspari) in the Plaka, North of the Tower of the Winds (Aerides, or «Horologium Kiristi» - Roman Agora, Athens). Current location: unknown (lost). Ancient location: public space (East-side of the Roman Agora).

TYPE AND MATERIAL OF THE SUPPORT AND TEXT LAYOUT

Type of support: columnar base. Material: marble.

Reuse of the inscribed field: yes. Reuse of the monument: uncertain. Opisthographic: no.

Dimensions of support: Height: unknown. Diameter: unknown. Dimensions of letters: unknown.

Inscribed field: One epigraphic field, now lost. Inscribed on the convex surface of the columnar base. The first editor reported traces of an earlier inscription on the upper right-hand side. Undamaged.

Writing technique: chiselled. Language: Greek. Rhythm: poetry (one elegiac distich). Palaeography: unknown (no images available).

TEXT CATEGORY: Honorary inscription for the praetorian prefect Petronius Probus

#### GREEK TEXT

1-2 (Verse 1) Εἰκόνι χαλκείῃ σε Πρόβον | τὸν ὑπαρχὸν Ἀθήναις  
3 (Verse 2) Ἀντόλιος <στῆ>σεν Ἑλλάδος ἀνθύπατος.

#### CRITICAL EDITION

Edition based on *IG II-III/2*, pars V, nr. 13275.

3: ANTOΛΙΟΣΣΕΝ, on the stone; σ(τῆ)εν, Robert 1948; σ<τῆ>εν, *IG II-III/2*, pars III/4, nr. 4226, Sironen 1994 and 1997

#### TRANSLATIONS

– English (Sironen 1997, p. 70): «The Proconsul of Hellas Anatolius set you up, Prefect Probus, at Athens in a statue made of bronze».

– French: «Par une statue en bronze, toi, ô Probus, préfet, à Athènes Anatolius, le proconsul de l’Hellas, a élevé».

– Italian: «Con una statua in bronzo, te, o Probus, prefetto, ad Atene Anatolius, proconsole dell’Ellade, ha elevato».

(German translation by K. Hallof in *IG II/III<sup>2</sup> 13275*)

#### THE INSCRIPTION AND ITS PREFECTS: CRITICAL COMMENTARY, UPDATING, OVERVIEWS

The inscription was found in 1869 in the Plaka district in the center of Athens on the private property of the Gaspari family. According to the editor, the German epigraphist U. Köhler (1838-1903), the findspot was located North of the Tower of the Winds (Aerides, or Horologion of Andronikos of Kyrrhos, or «Horologium Kiristi»; see Saladino 2012) on the eastern side of the Roman Agora. The inscription was chiselled on the convex surface of a columnar statue-base. Köhler was probably the only person to see the inscription, which has since disappeared. He states that he could read traces of an earlier inscription on the upper right-hand part of the epigraphic field (where the remains of the word νόμοι were readable). It is possible that the epigraphic support, a reused column drum, had already been used to en-

grave an earlier inscription (on these types of supports, which were widespread in the Greek-speaking area of the late Empire, see Bigi 2020).

The inscription is composed of a single elegiac distich, engraved on three lines. On line 3 the pentameter is irregular. The name of the dedicator, Ἀντόλιος, is a hapax, instead of Ἀνατόλιος, and the second *α* is suppressed to avoid the tribrach rhythm. The following verb <σῆ>σεν, is a sigmatic aorist without augmentation of the verb ἴστημι, used in the homeric epos in place of ἔστησε; curiously in our inscription the verbal theme does not appear. The first editor (Köhler 1870, p. 133) believes that the three letters σῆ were omitted by the stone cutter by mistake. Nachmanson (1910, p. 118) believes that the verb was reduced voluntarily as a contraction. Whatever the case, the syllable σῆ of the verb σῆσεν is necessary not only for the understanding of the text, but also for the establishment of the correct metric of the pentameter.

The dedicator of our elegiac distich in Athens is Anatolius, *proconsul Achaiae* (l. 3: Ἑλλάδος ἀνθύπατος, on this titlature, cf. Corsten 1997, in particular p. 119). He directly addresses the recipient Probus (σε Πρόβον | τὸν ὕπαρχον, ll. 1-2) who is present in the form of a bronze statue (εἰκόνη χαλκείη, l. 1; on honorary statues in the Roman Agora of Athens, cf. Deligiannakis 2013, pp. 114-25; Dillon 2018; Dillon 2021). Private individuals, dignitaries and public institutions all needed the emperor's permission in order to put up a bronze statue in a public space. In our inscription from Athens the permission is not mentioned (see Feissel 1984, pp. 545-58; for bronze statues in honour of praetorian prefects with imperial permission, see PPRET 24, 54, 58. For references to gilded bronze statues in honour of praetorian prefects, erected in prestigious public spaces in this period [*sub auro, inaurata, auro condecorata*], see PPRET 27, 28, 31, 46, 48, 51). If, as it seems, the monument comes from the Roman Agora, the *proconsul* may have had a personal monument placed there (as a personal client of Probus?) with the permission of the Athenian city authorities.

Although the dedicator's name, Anatolius (see *PLRE* I, p. 61), was a common one in the late empire, it can be associated with the *proconsul Achaiae*, who received three elegiac distichs from the city of Sparta, for his commitment to helping the community after the earthquake, dated by historians to 375 AD (cf. Zos. IV 18, 2; Avramea 1997, pp. 41-51; Cartledge, Spawforth 2002<sup>2</sup>, p. 113). The epigram was chiselled on a reused columnar base that was found close to the theatre (Woodward 1925-26, pp. 245-47, nr. 35 = *AE* 1929, 23 = *SEG* XI (1954), 773 = Groag 1946, pp. 57 f. = Robert 1948, p. 63 = Feissel 1985b, p. 288, nr. 26 = *LSA* 357):

Ἀντολ[ί]η πολύολβε, | σέθεν καλὸν οὔνομα | ἔδεκτο |  
 ἀνθύπατον Ῥώμης | ἄνθος εὐκτιμένης. |  
 Ὡς ἀγαθὸς γὰρ ἐὼν πάν|των ἀπὸ κήρας ἐρύκει |  
 Σπάρτην τ' εὐάνδρον τεῦ|ξεν ἐρειπομένην, |  
 ἧ δῶκεν ἄγαλμ(α) κατὰ | πτόλιν ἄγχι Λυκούργου, |  
 ὄφρα πέλοιτο βροτοῖς | αἰὲν ἀοιδότατος.

«Wealthy Anatolia, from thee the proconsular flower of well-built Rome received his fair name. Being so good he saved Sparta, abounding in good men and true, from every grief, when it happened that she lay in ruins. She (Sparta) gave him a statue in the city, close to (that of) Lykourgos, so that he be always most famous to the people». (transl. U. Gehn *LSA* 357)

The proconsulate of Achaia held by Anatolius in 375 AD could well coincide with one of the four praetorian prefectures of the honoured personage, Probus (Πρόβου, l. 1). Since the edition of Symmachus' letters, published in 1883 by O. Seeck (p. xcix), the ὑπαρχος Probus, honoured in the monument of the Athenian Agora, is identified with Sex. Petronius Probus, who was the most important senator of the second half of the 4th Century AD. Born around 328/332 AD, after being nominated to the *quaestura* and the *praetura* in Rome, he was made *proconsul* of Africa in 358 AD, ordinary consul in 371 AD and praetorian prefect of Italia-Illyricum-Africa, Illyricum, Gaul, attaining this position four times between 364 AD and 387 AD (this is the most extensive chronology proposed by the modern historians); he died sometime between 388 and 392 AD (see in brief, Jones 1964b, pp. 85-87, scheme pp. 88 f.; similarly *PLRE* I, pp. 736-40, and scheme pp. 1050 f.; Pergami 1995, pp. 417-23; Lizzi Testa 2004, pp. 316-19; for an analysis of his career, see Porena 2023a, pp. 129-216, and *PPRET* 59). Petronius Probus is attested as praetorian prefect during and at the end of his career in 11 inscriptions (besides this one, see *PPRET* 56, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66), as well as being cited in numerous literary texts and as many as 46 constitutions from the Theodosian and Justinian Codes (source list in *PLRE* I, pp. 736-40; Porena 2020c). Unfortunately, the data provided from such a large number of sources does not always concord. While it is certain that Petronius Probus was proconsul of Africa in 358 AD (*CTh* XI 36, 13, on June 23<sup>rd</sup>; *CIL* VIII 1783) and ordinary consul with Gratian Augustus (*iterum*) in 371 AD (*CLRE*, pp. 276 f.), the chronology, sequence and administrative geography of his four praetorian prefectures is difficult to reconstruct and opinions are divided.

To sum up, we can say that two chronologies and two extensions of the

prefectures of Probus are possible: 1) a ‘backward-looking chronology’ in an Empire divided into three major praetorian prefectures (Galliae, Italia-Illyricum-Africa, Oriens); 2) a ‘forward-looking chronology’ in an Empire divided into four praetorian prefectures (Galliae, Italia-Illyricum-Africa, autonomous Illyricum, Oriens).

The prevailing reconstruction today is the ‘backward-looking chronology’ based on an Empire divided into three praetorian prefectures, that was proposed by Jones 1964b and *PLRE*. According to this interpretation, in the second half of the 4th Century there was only one major praetorian prefecture of Italia-Illyricum-Africa, particularly in the years 381-392 AD, next to the praetorian prefectures of Gaul and the East. Thus Probus would have held a first short praetorian prefecture of Illyricum in 364 AD (*CTh* I 29, 1), a second short praetorian prefecture of Gaul in 366 AD (*CTh* XI 1, 15), and a long third praetorian prefecture of Italia-Illyricum-Africa in the years 368-375/376 AD. The latter prefecture is attested by the Pincio inscription, which was dedicated on August 8<sup>th</sup> 378 AD (PPRET 59, but strangely the office is listed without iteration), and would have been followed with a fourth short praetorian prefecture of Italia-Illyricum-Africa in 383 AD. This series of offices is chronologically compatible with the order of the four prefectures listed in the Verona inscription (PPRET 63), but obliges us to correct the dates of the constitutions of the Law Codes for the period 380-384 AD, in which Probus is reported to be in office as praetorian prefect overlapping with the six/seven other prefects of Italia-Illyricum-Africa. It contradicts the account of Ammianus, who describes Probus holding the prefecture continuously from 368 AD onwards (*intervallando potestates adsiduas*, Amm. XXVII 11 and Amm. XXX 5). This chronology incorporates Probus’ first three praetorian prefectures during the reign of Valentinian I, and assumes only one short praetorian prefecture of two months in 383 AD in the last thirteen years of the senator’s career (376/388 AD).

Chronology:

1st praetorian prefecture over Illyricum in 364 AD, appointed by Valentinian I

2nd praetorian prefecture over Galliae in 366 AD, appointed by Valentinian I

3rd praetorian prefecture over Italia-Illyricum-Africa in 368-375/376 AD, appointed by Valentinian I

[Gothic crisis 376/379 AD: Probus was never appointed praetorian prefect under Gratian (378-383 AD)]

[383-388 AD usurpation of Magnus Maximus]

4th praetorian prefecture limited to the period of August-October 383 AD over Italia-Illyricum-Africa, appointed by Valentinian II

The 'forward-looking chronology' based on an Empire divided into four praetorian prefectures has been proposed recently by Porena (2020a-b; 2023a, pp. 129-216). According to this interpretation, in the years 361-376 AD, there was only one large praetorian prefecture of Italia-Illyricum-Africa, next to the praetorian prefectures of Gaul and the East. However, from 376/377 AD, the praetorian prefecture of Italia-(Illyricum)-Africa was separated from the autonomous prefecture of Illyricum. At the behest of Valentinian I, Probus held a first long praetorian prefecture of Italia-Illyricum-Africa in the years 368-375/376 AD, which is attested by the Pincio inscription dedicated on August 8<sup>th</sup> 378 AD (PPRET 59, appropriately the office is listed without iteration). After this mandate, during the Gothic crisis and around the defeat of Adrianople, Gratian would have divided the prefecture of Italia-Africa (perhaps with a part of Illyricum) and made an autonomous praetorian prefecture out of Illyricum. In the years (379?) 380-382 AD, emperor Gratian would have given Probus a second praetorian prefecture in Italia-Africa. In the Autumn of 381 AD, Gratian also gave Probus a third praetorian prefecture of Illyricum alone, which was extended into 382 AD. Probus was appointed to a second and third prefecture with separate codicils (the two mandates on two locations would have overlapped for a few months). In 384-385 AD, after the usurpation of Maximus in Gaul and the assassination of Gratian, Valentinian II would have given Probus a fourth praetorian prefecture in Italia-Africa with a formal appointment in the same codicils to the praetorian prefecture of Gaul. Since the latter was controlled by the usurper Maximus, Probus never took possession of this prefecture, even though Valentinian II claimed it as his own. This reconstruction preserves the dates of the constitutions of the Law Codes for the period 380-384, while agreeing with the account of Ammianus (Amm. XXVII 11 and Amm. XXX 5). It also concords with the data of the inscription for Probus from the Pincio (PPRET 59) and Capua (PPRET 60) and distributes the praetorian prefectures of Probus between the reigns of Valentinian I, Gratian and Valentinian II.

Chronology:

1st praetorian prefecture in 368-375/376 AD over Italia-Illyricum-Africa, appointed by Valentinian I

[376/379 AD Gothic crisis and creation of an autonomous praetorian prefecture of Illyricum]

2nd praetorian prefecture in (379?) 380-382 AD over Italia-(Illyricum)-Africa, appointed by Gratian

3rd praetorian prefecture in 381-382 AD over autonomous Illyricum, appointed by Gratian

[383-388 AD usurpation of Magnus Maximus]

4th praetorian prefecture in 384-385 AD over Italia-(Illyricum)-Africa (and nominally Galliae), appointed by Valentinian II

Let us return to the Athenian inscription. The identification of the dedicator of Probus' Athenian epigram with the *proconsul* of Achaia Anatolius, who restored Sparta probably after the earthquake of 375 AD, allows us to date the inscription towards the end of the long praetorian prefecture of Italia-Illyricum-Africa, held by Probus in 368-375/376 AD (the third one or the first one of his four prefectures, see above). Ordinarily the honorary verse epigrams do not indicate prefecture iterations and the inscription from Athens does not mention the consulate of 371 AD, but such short poems (one distich) often lack these indications.

The office of the praetorian prefect in our inscription is indicated by the noun ὑπαρχος. This noun is usually not accompanied by an indication of the geographical district of the prefecture. In Greek inscriptions in which the office is indicated by the word ὑπαρχος, it is safe to assume that the monument was made in a city within the district administered by the dignitary being honoured. In our case, the prefecture of Probus certainly included the diocese of Macedonia, the province of Achaia and the city of Athens: it was therefore the prefecture of Illyricum. According to the 'backward-looking chronology', if the inscription from Athens was chiselled after the earthquake of 375 AD, then it is possible that it refers to the third praetorian prefecture at the time of its conclusion, when Probus was discharged in 376 AD. However, if the *proconsul* had been honoured in Sparta a few years after the earthquake for his efforts in rebuilding the city (see Groag 1946, p. 57), then it is equally possible that the inscription refers to the fourth prefecture, held in 383 AD. If the absence of the consulship is interpreted to indicate the inscription dating to before 371 AD, then the prefecture could also be that of Illyricum in 364 AD.

Otherwise, according to the 'forward-looking chronology', the praetorian prefecture mentioned in the inscription from Athens would be the first one held by Probus, dating to 368-375/376 AD, probably towards its end, or equally the third one in an autonomous Illyricum, in 381-382 AD. This prefecture cannot be the fourth (384-385 AD) since Illyricum (with Greece) was not included in it. While Gehn, in *LSA* 1, generically dates the Atheni-

an inscription to the period 368/388 AD, Sironen (1994, p. 30; 1997, p. 69) dates it to the years 375/376 or 382-384 AD. For us, a date during the period 376/382 AD is most plausible (but a wider date 368/382 is not excluded).

It seems very likely that the *proconsul* of Achaia Anatolius was a client of the powerful praetorian prefect Probus and wanted to honour him with a personal monument in Athens. The Athenian inscription is the only one made by a *proconsul* for a praetorian prefect.

In the verse inscription from Athens the noun ὑπαρχος seems to indicate the office of the praetorian prefect. If so, this would be the first epigraphic attestation of the use of this Greek word for the office of the praetorian prefect (for the use of this noun in the epigraphy of the diocese of Asia, see the detailed study by Feissel 1998; updates in Filippini in print). In the epigraphy of the 4th Century AD, only one other instance of the use of the noun ὑπαρχος might possibly be interpreted to indicate a praetorian prefect: in the Aphthonius inscription (see PPRET 76). Since its establishment by Augustus, the office of praetorian prefect is indicated in Greek by the term ἑπαρχος: this term is very common in the prose epigraphy of the 4th Century AD (see PPRET 18; 29; 30; 35; 43; 44; 47; 52; 68; 73; 82; 83; 84; 85; 86; 87; 88; 90). We note that in two Greek prose inscriptions from Gortyna, the praetorian prefect Petronius Probus himself is also referred to as ἑπαρχος (see PPRET 58 and 61). The meaning of the two terms ὑπαρχος and ἑπαρχος has different nuances: ἑπαρχος indicates a perspective from below, «the one who commands above other dignitaries»; ὑπαρχος indicates the perspective from above, «the one who commands below a higher authority». In Greek epigraphy the office of praetorian prefect seems to be denoted by ἑπαρχος in prose texts, but by ὑπαρχος in verse texts; the two nouns are metrically equivalent. In prose, ἑπαρχος is followed by the specification τοῦ ἱεροῦ πραιτωρίου / τῶν ἱερῶν πραιτωρίων, while ὑπαρχος (between the 4th and 5th Centuries AD) does not seem carry any further specification. Only in 6th Century AD prose, is the noun ὑπαρχος sometimes followed by τοῦ ἱεροῦ πραιτωρίου / τῶν ἱερῶν πραιτωρίων. If the noun ἑπαρχος is never ambiguous and always indicates the praetorian prefect, the same cannot be said for ὑπαρχος. In effect, the latter is rarely followed by the indication of the appointment, the praetorian prefecture, nor by any geographical indication and can be ambiguous. It may indicate a diocesan *vicarius* or a praetorian prefect. In the few cases where ὑπαρχος is followed by the geographical indication, it is either the *Asiana* diocese (Ἀσίης, Ἀσίδος) or a seat of *Asiana* linked to the presence of the *vicarius* or *proconsul Asiae* (e.g. in their late inscriptions, Isidorus, Stephanus, Nonnus ὑπάρχοι are the vicars of Asia, cf.

Feissel 1998). It seems likely that the readers of late Greek inscriptions distinguished the dignitary honoured in a monument with the title of ὑπαρχος according to the location of the monument (e.g. in a city that was the seat of a vicar and not a prefect, or within a gallery of statues of vicars or prefects) or according to the style of the statue (the statue of a vicar may have been dressed differently from that of a praetorian prefect, but no secure statue of a late antique praetorian prefect currently allows a study of his clothing and *insignia*). In summary, however, it seems that only from the beginning of the 5th Century AD does the term ὑπαρχος become widespread in Greek epigraphy, mostly in epigrams, to denote the praetorian prefect, with the exception of Probus' Athenian inscription. In the 4th Century AD ὑπαρχος basically indicates the office of the diocesan vicars (Feissel 1998).

A final element is common to the monuments of Probus in Athens and Aphthonius in Gortyna: they are the only honorary monuments to praetorian prefects in the 4th Century – and perhaps in the entire late antique epigraphy – whose base is composed of a column drum and not a parallelepiped base. The titling (ὑπαρχος) and the columnar shape of the base lead us to yet another possibility – that the ὑπαρχος Probus of the Athenian monument made by Anatolius, might actually be a *vicarius Macedoniae*, distinguishable from the aristocratic praetorian prefect Petronius Probus, and that the ὑπαρχος Aphthonius in Gortyna (PPRET 76), may also be a *vicarius Macedoniae*.

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