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6

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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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FRAGMENTARY INSCRIPTION IN HONOUR
OF THE PRAET. PREFECT VETTIUS AGORIUS
PRAETEXTATUS FROM THE ROMAN FORUM

EDITIONS: *CIL* VI 1779a (p. 4759); *CIL* VI 31929

PHOTOS: *EDH* Photo Database F011338

LINKS: *EDCS* 18100594; *EDR* 128719; *LSA* 1409; *TM* 570242

PLRE: I, pp. 722-24

PRAETORIAN PREFECTS: Vettius Agorius Praetextatus

DATE OF THE INSCRIPTION: 384/385 AD

PROVENANCE AND LOCATION

Ancient city: Roma. Modern city: Rome (Italy). Province: Urbs. Diocese: Italiciana. Regional prefecture: Italia Illyricum Africa.

Provenance: Rome, Roman Forum, close to the column of Phocas. Current location: Rome, Lapidario Forense, inv. 5133. Ancient location: public space, Roman Forum.

TYPE AND MATERIAL OF THE SUPPORT AND TEXT LAYOUT

Type of support: statue base. Material: marble.

Reuse of the inscribed field: yes. Reuse of the monument: uncertain: the monument was cut, possibly for a later reuse. Opisthographic: no.

Dimensions of support: Height: 16.5 cm. Width: 27.5 cm. Breadth: 17 cm. Dimensions of letters: 2.5/3.5 cm.

Inscribed field: One inscribed field (*frons*). Fragmentary.

Writing technique: chiselled. Language: Latin. Rhythm: prose. Palaeography: rustic capitals.

TEXT CATEGORY: Honorary inscription for the praetorian prefect Praetextatus

LATIN TEXT

[Vettio Agorio Praet]extato,
[v(iro) c(larissimo), correctori Tusciae et U]mbriae,

[consulari Lusitaniae, proc]onsuli Achaiae,
[praef(ecto) urbi, praef(ecto) praet(orio) II? II]lyr[i]ci et Italia[e]

5

CRITICAL EDITION

Edition based on *CIL* 1779a.

TRANSLATIONS

– English: «To Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, of clarissimus rank, corrector of Tuscia and Umbria, consular of Lusitania, proconsul of Achaia, urban prefect, (twice ?)* praetorian prefect of Illyricum and Italy ...».

– French: «À Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, clarissime, correcteur de la Tuscie et de l'Ombrie, consulaire de la Lusitanie, proconsul d'Achaïe, préfet urbain, préfet du prétoire (double ?)* d'Illyrie et d'Italie ...».

– Italian: «Al chiarissimo Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, correttore di Tuscia e Umbria, console della Lusitania, proconsole d'Acaia, prefetto urbano, prefetto del pretorio (doppio ?)* dell'Ilirico e d'Italia...».

* «praetorian prefect at the same time over two seats», concerning the iteration see Commentary

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

Since the inscription features on the upper right fragment of an honorary base, only the edge of the epigraphic field has been preserved. According to the lemma published in 1876 by W. Henzen (1816-1887) in *CIL* VI 1779a, the fragment was discovered in March 1874 in the North-West area of the Roman Forum near the Column of Phocas. The German scholar knew the fragment from a transcription by E. Brizio (1846-1907). From 1872, Brizio was 'Segretario della Soprintendenza per gli Scavi e la Conservazione dei Monumenti della provincia di Roma' and from 1874 he was a member of the 'Institutum Archaeologicum Germanicum' at Rome. In 1877 the German archaeologist H. Jordan (1833-1886) included the same text, already published in the *CIL*, in *Ephemeris Epigraphica* 3 (1877, p. 304, nr. 161, in the section «In area Fori ab arcu Severi usque ad aedem divi Iulii»). In 1880 G. Fiorelli (1823-1896) – then 'Direttore Generale dei Musei e degli Scavi' – published in the *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità* (February 1880, sect. X Rome,

p. 53) a transcription of the fragment made by R. Lanciani (1845-1929) (the information was included in the *Addimenta* to *CIL* VI, pars IV/2, nr. 31929, and published in 1902 by C. Hülsen). On l. 3 Lanciani read CONSVLARI-ACHAIAE, which is certainly wrong; on l. 4 he read the letters DVP to the left of the indication of the regional praetorian prefecture of Illyricum and Italia; it could indicate the office of the prefect of Rome – [*praefecto*]o ur[bi] – but this second fragment is currently not visible in the photograph (link above).

Lanciani's transcription raises the doubt that the offices in Praetextatus' *cursus honorum* were engraved without abbreviations (ll. 2-4): [*correctori Tusciae et Umbriae, / consulari Lusitaniae, pro]onsuli Achaiae, / [praefecto urbi, praefecto praetorio II? Il]lyr[i]ci et Italia[e]. In this case, however, while l. 2 contains 28 letters and l. 3 contains 36 letters, l. 4 contains 48 letters, and this difference is incongruent. Three other inscriptions from Rome preserve Praetextatus' *cursus honorum* (on the inscriptions of the senator and his wife, see Niquet 2000, pp. 237-52). These three monuments were made in a private context; the only monument in honour of Praetextatus that we know for sure to be public, is our fragmentary base from the Roman Forum. As was customary in the later Roman Empire, in all his four *cursus*, the senator's appointments are always placed in chronological order. On the funerary altar Praetextatus' offices are all written in full (PPRET 77, side a, ll. 9-18); in the inscription from Palazzo Altemps the posts are alternated, written in full and abbreviated (PPRET 79, *frons*, col. II), as is the case on the inscription from Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne (PPRET 80, ll. 2-5). This approach leaves open the question whether l. 2 of the Roman Forum inscription included the *quaestura* and *praetura*, for which there would be little room. Possibly the two magistracies were abbreviated and without further clarification: [*v(iro) c(larissimo), quaest(ori)?, praet(ori)?, correctori Tusciae et Umbriae*, i.e. 39 letters, anyway not *quaest(ori) candidato*, and not *praet(ori) urbano* (cf. on the contrary PPRET 77, side a, ll. 9-10; PPRET 79, *frons*, col. II, ll. 1-3). The *cursus* of the inscription from Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne (PPRET 80) does not indicate the magistracies. It is likely that the two inscriptions that mention the magistracies of Rome (the altar PPRET 77 and the inscription from Palazzo Altemps PPRET 79) were put up in private locations (sepulchre and *domus*) and were commissioned by the family. The two inscriptions that do not mention the magistracies of Rome (our fragmentary inscription from the Roman Forum and Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne PPRET 80) were displayed publicly. However, the public inscription in honour of the praetorian prefect Sex. Petronius Probus from Trajan's Forum (PPRET 62, *frons*, ll. 1-2), dated*

385/390 AD and almost contemporary with the inscription of Praetextatus in the Roman Forum, indicates the *quaestura* and *praetura* held by the senator. In our opinion, in a monument to an illustrious senator in the Roman Forum, the magistracies ought to have occupied an entire line engraved below the onomastics and above the provincial governorships. That line was never chiselled, but the fragment in our possession is too small to discount the possibility of additions.

The fragment of the inscription from the Roman Forum allows us to state that the epigraphic field was lowered and reworked and that the honorary base was reused; nor does the chiselling appear to be particularly elegant or uniform. It is impossible to say which type of statue was placed upon it (regarding statues to praetorian prefects in the 4th Century AD cf. PPRET 46). It is also difficult to establish whether the fragment was found in the area where the monument to Praetextatus actually stood, or had been re-purposed in any of the 5th or 6th Century AD structures of the Roman Forum. Whatever the case may be, Praetextatus' inscription represents the only monument in honour of a 4th Century AD praetorian prefect to be found in the Roman Forum. The only other inscription to an (anonymous) praetorian prefect to have been unearthed in the Roman Forum – certainly later in date (see PPRET 96) – comprises nothing more than a small fragment of an honorary base. We are undoubtedly dealing with two fragments, not whole bases. It seems possible, therefore, that the two monuments to the two praetorian prefects made towards the end of the 4th Century and in the 5th Century AD were built and placed in another monumental space, and, once demolished, their fragments were reused in the constructions or restorations of monuments or buildings in the Roman Forum during the 5th Century AD (similar fragments of statue bases for late antique senators have been found in the Roman Forum, cf. *CIL* VI 41398 = *LSA* 1525 = *EDR* 093620; *CIL* VI 41366 = *LSA* 1586 = *EDR* 093598). Although it is clear that in the 4th Century AD, the Roman Forum was the place of preference to erect honorary statues to emperors – all of whom were nearly always absent from the capital (see PPRET 99) – the same cannot be said for the senators and dignitaries, since no inscribed monuments have been found intact (on the series of inscriptions from the Roman Forum from ca. 284-600 AD cf. Bauer 1996, pp. 401-8; on the functions of the late Roman Forum and its honorary monuments cf. Kalas 2015, pp. 75-124; Machado 2006, pp. 165-79, and 2019, pp. 95-123; these authors identify five to seven honorary inscriptions for senators in the Roman Forum before 410 AD, but these identifications do not refer to the remains of monuments to

civil dignitaries certainly located in the Forum area). From the 4th Century AD and right up until the 6th Century AD, Trajan's Forum was not only the most prestigious public space in Rome, it was probably the most important one in the whole Empire (see Machado 2019, pp. 95-123, 143-45, 160). The late antique Trajan's Forum housed a crowded series of monuments in honour of senators, high dignitaries who had pursued long and important careers in the service of the state. In 4th Century AD, monuments were put up by the emperors – or with the emperors' permission – to their praetorian prefects in this very prestigious Roman square (see PPRET 46, 48, 51, 54, 62, 93, 98; concerning the inscribed monuments in this Forum in Late Antiquity cf. Bauer 1996, pp. 409-12; Niquet 2000, pp. 18-20, 80-86, 230-32; Chenault 2012, pp. 130 f.; Kalas 2021). We cannot be completely sure that the public monument in honour of Praetextatus was erected in the centre of the Roman Forum, where the fragment was found: for convenience we define the inscription as coming from the Roman Forum, but the public monument could have been erected in Trajan's Forum, for instance.

Because of the fragmentary state of the inscription it is difficult to say whether the *signum* of Praetextatus (Agorius) was in the upper *corona* (see PPRET 79, on the *corona*). The first line ought to contain the complete onomastics, with the particularity of the *signum* being placed between the *gentilicium* and the *cognomen*. As long as the epigraphic field was not too wide, the *cursus honorum* would have begun on the second line with the two provincial governorships, omitting the magistracies of Rome (as in the *cursus* of the inscription from Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne, PPRET 80, l. 2). Unlike the funerary altar (PPRET 77, side a, ll. 3-8) and the inscription from the Palazzo Altemps (PPRET 79, *frons*, col. I), the inscription from the Roman Forum did not include either the traditional priesthoods or the mystery cults in which the pagan senator excelled. The inscribed monument in honour of L. Aurelius Avianius Symmachus *signo* Phosphorius (PLRE I, pp. 863-65), father of the orator, located in Trajan's Forum, which was dedicated in 377 AD (see CIL VI 1698 = ILS 1257 = LSA 342 = EDR 123515, ll. 5-6; cf. Niquet 2000, pp. 178 f.), is the last public inscription in Rome in which a senator's priesthoods are mentioned. Since the reign of Gratian *senior Augustus* (August 378 AD), pagan priesthoods were no longer mentioned in public inscriptions in Rome. The rich and exceptional religious experience of Praetextatus and his wife Paulina pervades their private inscriptions (see PPRET 20, 77, 79). In the base from the Roman Forum the senator's distinguished *cursus honorum* was listed in about five lines (ll. 2-4 and at least in the first line in the lacuna).

After having held the traditional magistracies of Rome in his youth, *quaestor candidatus* and *praetor urbanus* (above), he was *corrector Tusciae et Umbriae*, then *consularis Lusitaniae* in the decade 350/360 AD, before 362 AD. Between 362 and 364 AD, he led a long proconsulate of Achaia at the behest of the emperor Julian (Groag 1946, pp. 45-48). He became prefect of Rome between the Summer of 367 and the Summer of 368 AD (Chastagnol 1962, pp. 171-78; Kalhos 1995). He was also active in improving the monumental and sacred buildings in Rome (see *CIL* VI 102 = *ILS* 4003 = *LSA* 1503 = *EDR* 135295; *CIL* VI 41378 = *EDR* 073920). He governed the city impartially (Amm. XXVII 9, 8-9) particularly during the clash between the Christian supporters of Damasus and those of Ursinus (Kahlos 1997 and 2002, pp. 115-23; Lizzi Testa 2004, pp. 159-69; Reutter 2009, pp. 31-56). In 382/383 AD, fifteen years after the end of his prefecture of Rome, he was honoured in Gortyna by a monument in the cycle of statues celebrating great Roman senators in the local *Praetorium* put up by the provincials of Crete under the aegis of the *consularis Cretae* Oecumenius Dositheus Asclepiodotus (*ICret.* IV 316 = Bigi Tantillo 2020, pp. 192 f., nr. 3). The inscription in Greek records him as an urban prefect, but it is likely that the beginning of his praetorian prefecture of *Italia et Illyricum* was imminent (see Tantillo 2020b, pp. 69, 74 f.; Porena 2020a, pp. 103-5; 113-17; 119 f.; Porena 2020b, p. 156; cf. Porena 2023a, pp. 118 f., 164-66, 182-87, 190-91, and below). At the end of his urban prefecture in September 368 AD, he spent fifteen years of *otium*, all of which were steeped in cultural and religious activity. In this period he carried out numerous diplomatic missions on behalf of the Senate of Rome to the courts of the emperors Valentinian I and Gratian. Whether the embassies on behalf of the Senate would have been celebrated in the Roman Forum inscription is a moot point, although they are mentioned in the inscriptions from Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne (PPRET 80, ll. 6-8) and in the funerary altar (PPRET 77, side a, l. 15). If, as seems likely, the monument in the forum was put up via a decision of the Senate and the Augusti, then it is probable that the embassies would have been extolled in the part of the inscription that is now lost. The senator and his wife became a shining example of the traditional behaviour of the western aristocracy. According to scholars, in 383 or 384 AD, shortly before or after the assassination of the emperor Gratian, Praetextatus was appointed praetorian prefect of Italia Illyricum Africa. In 384 AD Praetextatus held a single praetorian prefecture, shortly after the conclusion of which (September/October 384 AD), he died. His death could not have occurred any later than the first half of December (see below). In the *cursus honorum* chiselled in the fragmentary inscription from the

Roman Forum, after the lacuna, we can unfortunately only read (l. 4): *[praef(ecto) praet(orio) Il]lyr[ic]i et Italia[e]*. In the inscription on the front of the altar (PPRET 77, side a, ll. 16-17) and in the inscription in Palazzo Altemps (PPRET 79 *frons*, col. II, ll. 11-12) – two inscriptions written at a later time but very close chronologically to Praetextatus’ praetorian prefecture – the prefecture has a numeral ‘two’, *II*, between the post of *praefectus praetorio* and the regional determination *Italiae et Illyrici*. In the crisis period after the catastrophe of Adrianople (August 9th 378 AD), emperor Gratian separated the prefecture of Illyricum from the prefecture of Italy and Africa. It seems likely that some senators simultaneously held a prefecture that incorporated two separate areas of jurisdiction, that is to say two administratively autonomous prefectures governed by the same prefect. It is plausible that Praetextatus’ prefecture comprised two separate seats and that the ‘strange’ numeral ‘two’, *II*, firmly chiselled in the well rendered inscriptions from the sepulchre of Praetextatus and Paulina and from their *domus*, reflects this particular administrative situation, which seems to be limited to the period from late 381 to late 384 AD (see Porena 2020a, pp. 113-17 and Porena 2020b, p. 156; 2023a, pp. 182-89, 118 f., and see PPRET 77). In the inscription from the Roman Forum (l. 4), before the regional specification of the praetorian prefecture (*Illyrici et Italiae*) – which is structurally identical to the inscriptions bearing the numeral ‘two’ (*Italiae et Illyrici*) – there is space for the narrow numeral ‘two’, *II*. In our opinion the numeral ‘two’, *II*, was chiselled in all three inscriptions and placed between the title of praetorian prefect and the regional areas, making two related but distinct regions thanks to the conjunction *et: Italiae et Illyrici* or *Illyrici et Italiae*. The inscription from Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne has no iteration, but shows the formula: *praef(ecto) praetorii / Illyrici Italiae et Africae* (PPRET 80, ll. 4-5); in our opinion this formula is probably a late (5th Century AD) update of the original titling engraved at the time of Praetextatus’ death. When the inscription from Palazzo Massimo alle Colonne was engraved, the original titulature (the numeral ‘two’ followed by two regions only) had become incomprehensible and was therefore updated in a monument of lower quality, whose inscription has been, engraved long after the senator’s death.

In the Autumn of 384 AD Praetextatus left the praetorian prefecture and was appointed consul for the following year (*CLRE*, pp. 304 f.), but he died suddenly, passing away no later than December 384 AD (on Praetextatus’ death, see Vera 1983a, pp. 140-42, who dates the death between December 8th and 10th 384 AD; Cecconi 2002, pp. 266-81, who dates it between October and the first half of November 384 AD; see also Kahlos 2002, pp. 151-71). In

all the inscriptions erected in his honour after his death, the senator was remembered as the appointed consul, since it was the most prestigious honour of his career: in all likelihood the designation to the consulate was also chiselled in the Roman Forum inscription, in the lacuna after l. 4 (for further details concerning his *cursus honorum*, see the commentary to PPRET 77; on Praetextatus and his career, see in brief Seock 1883, pp. LXXXIII-XC; Nistler 1910; Ensslin 1954b; *PLRE* I, pp. 722-24; Kuhoff 1997; extensively Kallhos 2002).

The reconstruction of Praetextatus' career allows us to date the inscription from the Roman Forum. According to *CII* 54, 5, the senator is attested as praetorian prefect for the last time on September 9th 384 AD; his successor, Petronius Probus, is in office on October 26th 384 AD (*CTh* VI 30, 6). The *terminus post quem* of the inscription on the base is October 384 AD. Not only did Praetextatus' sudden death shock Rome's inhabitants, it also aroused conflicting reactions, ranging from obsessive exaltation on the part of the pagans, to out and out condemnation on the part of the Christians. There are two possibilities: that Praetextatus was still alive when the inscription was made, that is to say between September and November 384 AD, or – more likely – that the inscription was done after the senator's death, but not before the beginning of 385 AD.

In the lacuna after l. 4 of the inscription, the identity of the dedicator and the explanation for the construction of the public honorary monument have unfortunately been lost (as is the case for the public inscription in honour of the praetorian prefect Sex. Petronius Probus from Trajan's Forum, PPRET 62). This does not stop us from speculating on the identity and circumstances of the making of Praetextatus' public monument in the Roman Forum (but Trajan's Forum is not excluded). Immediately after the death of the great senator, Q. Aurelius Symmachus, who was prefect of Rome and president of the Senate (see Chastagnol 1962, pp. 218-29; Vera 1981, pp. XLVII-LXVI), wrote to the Augusti, that it so say to Valentinian II, furnishing several reports on the sorrowful event (concerning the relationship between Praetextatus praetorian prefect and Symmachus urban prefect in 384 AD, see Ceconi 2002, pp. 271 f.; Olszaniec 2014b). In one of the reports he informed the emperor that the Senate had decreed the erection of statues in honour of the deceased senator and asked the sovereign for permission to make public monuments in Rome (Symm. *rel.* 12, 2-3, cf. Vera 1981, pp. 103 f.). The opposite dynamic is attested much more often: the emperor, invariably absent from Rome, asks the Senate to approve a public monument to be put up in the heart of the city for one of his praetorian prefects (cf.

PPRET 46; 48; 51; elsewhere cf. PPRET 27; 28; 31; 75). In this respect, too, the case of Praetextatus emphasises his aristocratic devotion to Rome and the Senate. As a senatorial ambassador, he had little in common with the sychophantic careerists who were very much two a penny in this period (the distrust of the emperor Valentinian II is foreshadowed in Symm. *rel.* 24; the embassies led by Praetextatus must have put the Augusti in trouble). The grief over the death of the much admired and beloved senator led to a multiplication of posthumous statues and inscriptions. It is no coincidence that Praetextatus' five inscriptions included in this collection all appear to be posthumous. In 385 AD, immediately after the death of her husband Praetextatus, Paulina supported the decision of the chief Vestal (*Virgo Vestalis Maxima*), Coelia Concordia (*PLREI*, pp. 218 f.; concerning this priestess, see PPRET 20), to erect a monument to Praetextatus in Rome on behalf of the college of the Vestal virgins. Symmachus objected to such a novelty that broke the *mos*, but his protests were in vain (Symm. *epist.* II 36, with Cecconi 2002, pp. 266-81). The chief Vestal erected the monument, evidently in a public place. Her monument was inaugurated before the monuments to Praetextatus requested by the Senate and authorised by Valentinian II were made in the ancient capital (cf. Symm. *rel.* 12). Paulina thanked the chief Vestal, Concordia, dedicating to her in turn a monument, the inscription of which was found on the Esquiline hill (*CIL* VI 2145 = *ILS* 1261 = *LSA* 1510 = *EDR* 151259). It seems probable, therefore, that our fragment of a statue base in honour of Praetextatus, found in the Roman Forum is evidence of the monument that the Senate had erected in a public place (Trajan's Forum?) with the approval of the Augusti (Valentinian II). Unfortunately, the lacuna in the lower part of the inscription makes it impossible to know the identity of the dedicator, nor does it allow us to read the motivation for the honour: such information could help us to better understand the relations between Praetextatus, the Senate and the Augusti.

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