



**Roma Tre**

DIPARTIMENTO DI  
STUDI UMANISTICI

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

QUADERNI

6

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*In re publica litterarum liberi nos sumus*

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Roma TrE-Press

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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FRAGMENTARY INSCRIPTION IN HONOUR  
OF THE PRAET. PREFECT PROBUS  
FROM TRAJAN'S FORUM IN ROME

EDITIONS: Paribeni 1933, p. 494, nrr. 168-169 = *AE* 1934, 160; *CIL* VI 41342a  
(with photo)

LINKS: *EDCS* 01000474; *EDR* 073238; *EDH* 026944; *LSA* 306; *TM* 263699

PLRE: I, pp. 736-40

PRAETORIAN PREFECTS: Sextus Claudius Petronius Probus

DATE OF THE INSCRIPTION: 384/390 AD

PROVENANCE AND LOCATION

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

Provenance: found in 1933 in Trajan's Forum in Rome. Current location (fragments a-b): Roma, Museo dei Fori Imperiali, Basilica Ulpia, inv. F.T. n. 62 and 2736 = F.T. 63. Current location (fragment c): lost. Ancient location: public space, Trajan's Forum.

TYPE AND MATERIAL OF THE SUPPORT AND TEXT LAYOUT

Type of support: statue base. Material: marble.

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

Dimensions of support (fr. a, now): Height: 25 cm. Width: 77 cm. Breadth: 19 cm. Dimensions of support (fr. a, according to Paribeni): Height: 31 cm. Width: 78 cm. Breadth: 18 cm. Dimensions of support (fr. b, now): Height: 28 cm. Width: 37 cm. Breadth: 18 cm. Dimensions of support (fr. b with fr. c, according to Paribeni): Height: 48 cm. Width: 33 cm. Breadth: 14 cm. Dimensions of letters: 2.5 (*frons*)/5 (*corona*) cm.

Inscribed field: One inscribed field (*corona* and *frons*). Fragmentary: the inscription consists of three fragments: 'a' is the *corona*; 'b' is the upper central fragment of the base; 'c' is the upper left part of the base, lost (the central, right and lower part of the base are lost).

Writing technique: chiselled. Language: Latin. Rhythm: prose. Palaeography: late Roman monumental capitals.

TEXT CATEGORY: Honorary inscription for the praetorian prefect Petronius Probus

LATIN TEXT

*corona*

Petronio Probo

*frons*

Petronio Prob[o], v(iro) c(larissimo), quaestor[i cand(idato)?],  
praetori urban[o, procons(uli) Afr(icae), praef(ecto)]  
praetorio qu[ater, consuli ordinario],  
sublimi v[- - -]

5

ti pi+[- - -]  
 - - - - -

CRITICAL EDITION

Edition based on *CIL* VI 41342a.

3: qu[ater Italiae, Illyrici, Africae, Galliarum, co(n)s(uli) ord(inario)], Paribeni 1933

4-5: sublimi v[irtute bonitateq(ue) praestan]/ti pii[ssimo - - -], Niquet in *CIL*

TRANSLATIONS

– English: «To Petronius Probus. To Petronius Probus, of clarissimus rank, candidate quaestor, urban praetor, proconsul of Africa, praetorian prefect four times, ordinary consul, sublime ...».

– French: «À Petronius Probus. À Petronius Probus, clarissime, questeur candidat, préteur urbain, proconsul d'Afrique, préfet du prétoire quatre fois, consul ordinaire, sublime ...».

– Italian: «A Petronius Probus. Al chiarissimo Petronius Probus, questore candidato, pretore urbano, proconsole d'Africa, prefetto del pretorio quattro volte, console ordinario, sublime ...».

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

In 1933 R. Paribeni found six fragments of a large inscribed base in the area of Trajan's Forum in Rome. The inscription was in honour of the senator Petronius Probus (Paribeni 1933, p. 494, nrr. 168-169). Notwithstanding

its fragmentary state, the inscription retains the onomastics and the entire *curtus honorum* of the senator. Fragment ‘a’ corresponds to the upper moulded crown of the base and consists of four matching fragments; his name, in the dative case (*Petronio Probo*) was placed on the crown, where one would normally expect to find the genitive *signum* of the senator. The size of the crown shows that the base was among the largest in Trajan’s Forum. Fragments ‘b’ and ‘c’ preserved the upper central fragment of the base containing the first line of the inscription (‘b’), and the upper left part of the base, containing the beginning of five lines of the inscription (‘c’, now lost). Unfortunately, the remaining part of the base (the central, right and lower *frons* of the epigraphic field) is lost.

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). In 4th Century, other monuments were put up by the emperors – or with the emperors’ permission – to their praetorian prefects in this very prestigious Roman square (beside our inscription, see PPRET 46, PPRET 48, PPRET 51, PPRET 54, PPRET 93, PPRET 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; regarding the topography and architecture of this Forum in Late Antiquity, see Fleury, Madeleine 2013). For a praetorian prefect in this period, to have a gilded bronze statue erected in his honour in such a prestigious public space in the heart of the capital city was a great distinction indeed (for records of such gilded statues – *sub auro, inaurata, auro condecorata* – see PPRET 27, PPRET 28; PPRET 31; in Trajan’s Forum, see PPRET 46, PPRET 47, PPRET 48, PPRET 51). The public monuments in honour of the praetorian prefects, which were removed and then reinstated not only shows the importance of these dignitaries, but also the high esteem with which they were held by the emperors at that time (for inscriptions after rehabilitation in Trajan’s Forum, see PPRET 46, PPRET 48, PPRET 93; elsewhere see PPRET 91). Thus, to have a gilded statue mounted within Rome’s Trajan’s Forum was the highest possible honour for a dignitary of the later Roman Empire, a tribute that cannot be overstated.

Although Probus’ base from Trajan’s Forum has come down to us in a very bad condition, it was nevertheless, the most important monumental inscription of the many intended to glorify Petronius Probus praetorian prefect (he is attested as praetorian prefect during and at the end of his career in 11 inscriptions; besides this one, see PPRET 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63,

64, 65, 66). There is no doubt that the inscription that would have borne the official interpretation of Probus' long career has been lost. Like other dedications of praetorian prefects in Trajan's Forum, it is highly likely that this one was decreed by the emperors: Valentinian II, with Theodosius I and maybe Arcadius. Needless to say, the motivation for the monument's elevation, were it known, would be of the utmost interest for those studying the Empire in the second half of the 4th Century AD. Nevertheless, the fragments of our inscription are extremely significant.

The fragments of the base in honour of Probus from Trajan's Forum do not preserve the upper surface, but its size (probably about 100/120 cm. separate the lower plinth from the upper moulding) and the practice of honouring lofty dignitaries with metallic statues suggests that the base would have mostly likely supported a gilded bronze statue. Both on the *corona* and at the beginning of the epigraphic text on the *frons*, instead of the *signum*, the *gentilicium* and the *cognomen* Petronius Probus are repeated twice in the dative (for inscriptions to prefects that open with the genitive *signum*, see PPRET 10, 45, 79). Dative onomastics is common in early 4th Century inscriptions. Also, Probus' reduced onomastics, here limited to the *gentilicium* and the *cognomen*, is the most widespread onomastic structure of the senator, in comparison to the broader polyonymy Sex. Claudius Petronius Probus, which only appears engraved (without *praenomen*) on the Capua inscription (PPRET 60; on the onomastics of Probus, see Cameron 1985, pp. 171-78; Salomies 2012, p. 5; in general Salway 1994).

After the onomastics, the text from Trajan's Forum turns to the senator's *cursus honorum* (ll. 1-3): there may well have been some space left underneath. Contrary to Paribeni (1933), the editor of the *CIL*, H. Niquet, works on the assumption that there must have been about 30 letters per line. If this is the case, we can exclude that the regional prefectures were listed after the official title *praefecto praetorio* (ll. 2-3) with its numeral *quater*. This specification would have required a lot of space, but at l. 4 another section of the epigraphic text began. We can say that at the time of the inscription's execution, Probus held four praetorian prefectures (see below). After the *cursus*, the intact epigraphic field probably would have gone on for another 8-10 lines at least. Presumably, this would have contained the motivation for the dedication, the names of the dedicators (perhaps the Augusti with the involvement of the Senate) and a short eulogy of the senator, which also may have given the reasons why the latter was so worthy of such illustrious celebration. Given the inscription's fragmentary state, not to mention its position in the heart of the city and the reference to four praetorian prefectures,

no hypothesis about its date can be advanced without first examining the senator's career.

Born around 328/332 AD, Sex. Petronius Probus, was the most important senator of the second half of the 4th Century AD. He was nominated to the *quaestura* and the *praetura* in Rome (our inscription in Trajan's Forum, ll. 1-2, is the only source to mention the two ancient magistracies held by the senator). Later, 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 time span is the longest proposed by historians today). We know that he died sometime between 388 and 392 AD (see in brief, Jones 1964b, pp. 85-89; similarly *PLRE* I, pp. 736-40 and 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 both during his career and at the end of it in 11 inscriptions (besides this one, see PPRET 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 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 together 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.

In sum, 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 the *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, together with the praetorian prefecture of Gaul and the East. Thus Probus would have first held a 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 longer third praetorian prefecture of Italia-Illyricum-Africa

in the years 368-375/376 AD. The latter prefecture is attested by the inscription of the *domus Pinciana*, which was dedicated on August 8<sup>th</sup> 378 AD (PPRET 59, although curiously the appointment 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 official appointments 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 as being in office as praetorian prefect, thus making his mandate overlap with that of six or 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 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).

The 'backward-looking chronology' of Probus' prefectorial career produces the following 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; on the historiographic viewpoints from 1883 to the present day, see Porena 2020a, pp. 89-91, with nn. 18, 20, 29; 2023a, pp. 133-39, with nn. 23, 25, 34). According to this interpretation, in the years 361-376 AD, there was only one large praetorian prefecture of Italia-Illyricum-Africa, besides the praetorian prefecture 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-Illyri-

cum-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 appointment is listed without iteration). After this mandate, during the Gothic crisis and round about the time of the defeat of Adrianople, Gratian would have divided the prefecture of Italia-Africa (perhaps with 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 XXX 5). It also concords with the data from Probus' Pincio inscription (PPRET 59) and Capua (PPRET 60) and distributes the praetorian prefectures of Probus between the reigns of Valentinian I, Gratian and Valentinian II.

The 'forward-looking chronology' of Probus' prefectorial career produces the following 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

In our opinion, the most fitting context for Petronius Probus monument in Trajan's Forum would be the time of Valentinian II's reaction to the usurpation of Magnus Maximus in 384/385 AD (a), or shortly after the vic-

tory of Theodosius I in the war against Maximus in 388 AD (b) (concerning the usurpation of Maximus and the events of the period 383-388 AD, see Palanque 1965; Matthews 1975, pp. 174-82; Vera 1975 and 1979; Curran 1998, pp. 107 f.; Errington 2006, pp. 31-37; Hubeňák 2008; McEvoy 2013a, pp. 83-92; Szidat 2015. Regarding the end of Valentinian I's dynasty, see Raimondi 2001, pp. 171-85; Omissi 2018, pp. 255-90).

(a)

After the usurpation of Maximus in Gaul and the assassination of Gratian (August 383 AD), Valentinian II would have given Probus a fourth praetorian prefecture in Italia-(Illyricum)-Africa in 384-385 AD. At the same time the latter would also have been formally appointed in the same codicils to the praetorian prefecture of the Gauls (see also PPRET 63). As the *senior Augustus* since September 383 AD, Valentinian II would have wanted to exercise his right to appoint the prefect of the Gauls in order to reaffirm that he was the legitimate heir to the *pars* of Gratian. However, since the Gauls were controlled by the usurper Maximus, Probus never took possession of this prefecture, even though Valentinian II claimed it as his own. Both Socrates and Sozomenos (Socr. *hist.* V 11, 2-3 and 10-12; Soz. *hist.* VII 13, 1 and 9-11) emphasise the presence of the former consul and praetorian prefect Probus in the administration of Italy alongside the young emperor Valentinian II. In 384 AD the praetorian prefect Probus inspired Valentinian II's policy of open opposition to Maximus: the Italian aristocracy did not want to be subjected to an Augustus who was a mature military commander living in Gaul, as had happened during the reign of Valentinian I. The situation changed abruptly in the middle of 385 AD: an embassy sent by the usurper Maximus directly to the emperor Theodosius in Constantinople led to the recognition of the usurper by the Augustus residing in Constantinople (Zos. IV 37, 1-3). Valentinian II reluctantly bowed to this absurd alliance. The position of Probus became untenable. The praetorian prefect was dismissed from the prefecture of Italy-(Illyricum)-Africa and Gaul (nominally) before June 1<sup>st</sup> 385 AD. The latter went into voluntary exile and since he feared repercussions at the hands of Maximus, he went to Thessalonica, the eastern extremity of Valentinian II's *pars*. Finally, the usurper invaded Italy in the Spring of 387 AD (see also PPRET 59). In our opinion, the monument in honour of the praetorian prefect Petronius Probus in Trajan's Forum may have been erected at the behest of Valentinian II in the period late 384 May 385 AD, during the fourth (double) praetorian prefecture of the senator (l. 3: *quater*). It could not have been elevated between the

second half of 385 AD and September 388 AD, because the political strategy of Probus had been abandoned by Valentinian II. Thereafter, between the Summer of 387 AD and the Summer of 388 AD, Rome and its forums were under the control of Maximus who was Probus' enemy. It is reasonable to think, with caution, that the fragments of the base from Trajan's Forum, found by Paribeni, are the remains of a monument erected by the emperor Valentinian II during the fourth praetorian prefecture of Probus (October 384/April 385 AD), and which were subsequently torn to pieces by order of Maximus in the second half of 387 AD by his urban prefect Rusticus Iulianus (Chastagnol 1962, pp. 230-32; *PLRE* I, pp. 479 f.; a negative appraisal of this prefect can be found in *Amm.* XXVII 6, 1-3; the fragments of the monument may have been reused as building materials).

(b)

In June 387 AD Magnus Maximus marched with his army down from the Gauls into Italy (it is uncertain whether he came via the Susa pass or the Brenner pass). The emperor Valentinian II fled Milan and embarked, perhaps from Ravenna, with his mother Justina, to reach Thessalonica, where they joined the former praetorian prefect Probus, himself in voluntary exile, in Thessalonica, the extreme eastern city of his own *pars* (*Zos.* IV 42-44). Here in mid-September Valentinian II met the emperor Theodosius I, who, after having married Galla, sister of Valentinian II, decided to attack the usurper. The dioceses of Italy, with Rome, and Africa were under the control of the usurper Maximus from July 387 AD perhaps for a year, until the Summer of 388 AD. After the Winter break 387/388 AD, towards the end of April 388 AD, Maximus with his army advanced into Pannonia as far as Siscia. On June 14<sup>th</sup> 388 AD, Theodosius was in Stobis (in Macedonia, *CTh* XVI 5, 15) and left with his army for Naissus and Sirmium: between July and August 388 AD Theodosius I's army led by Timasius and Promotus defeated Maximus' army twice in battles at Siscia on the Sava river and then at Poetovium on the Drava river. Thanks to these victories Theodosius I entered Emona and proceeded to Aquileia, where on August 28<sup>th</sup> the usurper, abandoned by his army, surrendered to the victor and was beheaded (*Ambr. epist.* 74 F = 40 M, 22-23; *Pacatus, Pan. Lat.* 2 [12], 34-45; *Zos.* IV 46; it remains uncertain whether Valentinian II led a fleet against Maximus in the Summer of 388 AD). In September Theodosius I was in Aquileia (*CTh* XV 14, 6); between October 388 and May 389 AD, Theodosius I sojourned in Milan (*CTh* XV 14, 7 and VIII 4, 16), then went down to Rome, accompanied by his young son Honorius, who was 5 years old. In the capital he cel-

celebrated a triumph and remained there from June 13<sup>th</sup> to August 30<sup>th</sup> 389 AD (*CTh* XVI 5, 18 and 2, 5; *Consul. Constant.* in *MGH AA IX, chron. min.* I, pp. 245 and 298; the panegyricus was then pronounced by Pacatus). According to our hypothesis on the context of Probus' fourth praetorian prefecture (October 384/May 385 AD), it seems very likely that the senator after at least three years in Thessalonica returned to Rome between October 388 and the Spring of 389 AD (in 390 AD he was alive and resided in Rome, cf. *Paul. Med. vita Ambr.* 25). Probus returned to Rome, where he was received with admiration and approval, since he had had a clear and early perception of the danger posed by the usurper Maximus. The victory of Theodosius I in the civil war undoubtedly confirmed his political strategy.

It seems possible that the powerful senator Probus, again resident in Rome, obtained his monument in Trajan's Forum during the visit of the emperor Theodosius I to Rome in 389 AD. The monument could only have been built by the will of the emperors and with the consent of the Senate, or by the Senate with the permission of the emperors. The emperor Theodosius I had put himself at great risk in fighting against Maximus, his former ally from 385/387 AD, who was an experienced general and a client of Theodosius' father; Probus had been prescient, but his fate was entirely dependent on Theodosius I's military success against Maximus' army in Pannonia. Theodosius I's victory put everything in place and returned Probus, glorified by four praetorian prefectures, to the city of Rome and its Senate. In 389 AD the conditions existed for the construction of the monument to Probus in Trajan's Forum. For unknown reasons the monument was destroyed and only fragments of it were found by Paribeni in 1933.

A final hypothesis. It cannot be excluded that a first monument to Probus was made in Trajan's Forum during his career, that is to say after his second and third praetorian prefectures by Gratian (382/383 AD), or during the fourth praetorian prefecture by Valentinian II (384/385 AD). The monument would have been destroyed by Maximus (387/388 AD), and then replaced by a monument with an inscription of rehabilitation by Valentinian II and Theodosius I (after the end of 388 AD). The loss of the text after the first four lines prevents us from formulating any more hypotheses.

PIERFRANCESCO PORENA