

On Displayed Writing. Bronze Inscriptions from Napoca*

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Abstract: We present below two fragmentary texts carved *in aere* from Napoca, one known from the 19th century and the other novel, yielded by recent rescue excavations. The first inscription (Napoca-1) was carved on a bronze tablet discovered in Piaţa Muzeului no. 4. The document here might correspond to an imperial response (*subscriptio*), delivered by emperor Hadrian upon a request that might have been made for instance by the representatives of the town at Napoca. A second fragmentary inscription in bronze (Napoca-2) originating still from Napoca was discovered in the area of hill Feleac. The preserved words *formis* and *ratio / procuratio* are indicative of an administrative taxation type text.

Keywords: bronze inscriptions, legal text, imperial rescript, Napoca

Rezumat: Prezentăm aici două texte fragmentare incizate *in aere* din Napoca, unul cunoscut din secolul al XIX-lea și altul nou, provenit din cercetări de salvare recente. Prima inscripție (Napoca-1) a fost incizată pe o tablă de bronz descoperită în Piaţa Muzeului nr. 4. Aceste documente poate fi un răspuns imperial (*subscriptio*) dat de împăratul Hadrian unei cereri făcute de reprezentanții oraşului Napoca. A doua inscripție fragmentară din bronz (Napoca-2), provenită tot din Napoca, a fost descoperită în zona dealului Feleac. Cuvintele păstrate - *formis* și *ratio/procuratio* - indică un text administrativ în legătură cu impozitele.

* We wish to thank our colleagues D. Dana (Lyon), P. Kovács (Budapest) and B. Rossignol (Paris) for their valuable suggestions and observations.

Cuvinte cheie: inscripții de bronz, texte legale, rescript imperial, Napoca

Introduction

The topic of book writing and science in the Roman Empire is regularly revived by novel inquiries into written productions and their reception. In provincial towns like Napoca, there is a rich production of official texts inscribed on stone, either votive or funerary, minor epigraphs (like pottery, lamps, tile material stamps and graffiti etc.). Less known is, however, the major epigraphic production, like for instance the legislative and administrative texts carved *in aere*, designed for public display, preyed during the subsequent practice of reuse as raw materials. Texts in bronze designed for remembrance that, owing to their support, should have passed the test of time, survived in fact less than graffiti. We present below two such fragmentary texts, one known from the 19th century and the other novel, yielded by recent rescue excavations.

Bronze inscription Napoca-1. (Pl. I)

The first inscription was carved on a bronze tablet discovered in Napoca, at Piața Muzeului no. 4, during the performance of rescue archaeological excavations.

Location and find conditions:

The investigated building lies on the northern side of the Piața Muzeului, near the “Carolina” monument. The building, also called the “Mikes palace”, took its current architectural shape by the end of the 18th century and early 19th century, undergoing several internal and external improvements (one major in 1870’ies) over the course of its existence. The 2016 rescue excavations yielded foundations of modern buildings, four medieval wells, a part of the Roman town street (on its entire width together with the sidewalk and sewerage) and partially, of a building (*domus*) with inner courtyard dated to the same period. Of the Roman building could be noticed the enclosure wall on the street side, partially two rooms and a stone slab paved courtyard. The room on the southern side of the paved interior courtyard was relatively well preserved, with an antechamber and a *hypocaustum* – heated room being found. The room on the northern side was destroyed to a great extent by modern interferences. It could also be noted how during said improvements (possibly those of the 1870’ies), the builders excavated the Roman structures in search for reusable materials, fragments of the slabs paving the Roman street being discovered incorporated in the “palace” foundations. The medieval wells were filled in the modern period and some even destroyed, their stones being also reused. The rescue

archaeological excavations conducted in the courtyard of the building located at Piața Muzeului no. 4, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj County identified for the first time in the town of Napoca a street that survived completely, on its entire width. Concurrently, the inhabited area from the northern side of the town, very rich and likely with public edifices starts to be delimited. The inscribed bronze plate fragment was discovered in the western gutter of the Roman road.¹

Technical data

Sizes: 9.2 x 5.4 cm; wall thickness varies between 0.16-0.22 cm.

Weight: 52 gr.

Letters: 1.06 cm. Capital letters, carefully carved, uniform. *Hasta* heads end in lines starting from left to right, slightly thickened on the left side, according to the L letter foot pattern.

Text:

[---]DRIA[---]
[---]SIO · AD[---]
[---]VTA · DEF[---]
4 [---]ET · RES · PV[BLICA? ---]
[---]CVM · DI[---]
[---]

Five lines have survived. It is almost certain that the one at the beginning is also the first line of the original text. Words are always divided by *interpunctiones*.

The plate thickness varies, thus in the upper part – surface covered by the first two lines – it is thicker, with such level difference also visible overleaf, the limit between the two registers being represented by an approximately 0.6 mm deep step.

Since the text is carved on a bronze tablet, it could be an official text of legal value. Among texts designed for long-lasting display and issue, the most important are the legal and administrative documents. Religious texts are rarer and generally copy the content of official deeds (*leges templorum*, *Acta fratrum Arvalium* etc.). As a rule, the goal of these displayed texts was to inform all the citizens, effectively or potentially, on certain elements of law and legislation (municipal, provincial *leges*), city planning and monuments' maintenance (*decreta* of the *ordo decurionum*),

¹ <http://cronica.cimec.ro/detaliu.asp?k=5784&d=Cluj-Napoca-Piata-Muzeului-Nr-4-2016>.

administration and finances (edicts and imperial rescripts, the so-called *constitutiones imperatorum*).²

Documents of imperial petitions type survived in a rather small number, owing to several factors. The imperial correspondence, drafted on perishable material³ and deposited in archives, did not survive for the most part. The fact that some of these petitions would be carved in stone or bronze is due to the emperor's response to a mainly collective request, submitted in the name of a group, like town inhabitants etc., a rescript (*rescriptum, subscriptio*) which, as it contained an imperial ruling, became a legal document.⁴ Circumstances described in the document usually impacted a group of citizens. There are mentions which record that transcription of the text on a displayed monument required official approval.⁵ Occasionally, the document designed for public display contained both the petition and the response of the authority, like the case of an inscription from Histria.⁶ A bilingual Latin-Greek text dated to the time of emperor Tiberius, originating from Sagalassus in Pisidia and issued by the emperor's legate, Sextus Sotidius Strabo Libuscidianus, references the requisition related to the transport in the area.⁷ This imperial edict is one of the most important within a series of over twenty texts on the topic.⁸ In a territory where the dominant culture was Greek, bilingual display of legal texts was necessary. It is worth mentioning that the issue of such edicts was not always in response to a petition or upon the governor's or local leaders' taking notice, but is sometimes the result of repeated abuse that weakened the system, thus requiring official interference in order to stop *malpraxis*. In the case of edicts concerning the

² Corbier 1987, 38-39.

³ For correspondence in general, various materials were used, papyrus (especially in Egypt), wood (the tablets of Vindolanda published in Bowman, Thomas, I-III, 1983, 1994, 2003) or parchment, yet also pottery (ostraca) or even lead.

⁴ See Trapp (ed.) 2003, 10.

⁵ Hauken 1998, 203-214, especially 207: a Greek inscription incised on a marble block, discovered at Tabala (Lydia, Asia) in 1987 and representing an excerpt of Pertinax's letter and that of proconsul Aemilius Iuncus, addressed to the magistrates, council and inhabitants of Tabala in 193, mentions the pledge to publicly display the ruling enclosed in the deed: l. 25-26: τὸ δίκαιο[ν δὴ δόξαθε προθήσασ] | θαι κοι[νῆ ἐν τῇ πόλει ὑμῶν] = [You may display] this ruling [in a public place in your town].

⁶ The inscription was discovered nearby the temple of Aphrodite (later proven the temple of Zeus Polieus) from Histria and contains a complaint (*libellus*) addressed by the inhabitants of the settlement of Dagis, whose location (Moesia inferior) remains unknown to date, to Iulius Severus, *legatus Augusti pro praetore*, as well the authority's response (*subscriptio* of Antonius Hiberus). The text was carved on a limestone monument. The complaint is drafted in Greek, while the consular's response is in Latin (see: ISM I 378; Hauken 1998, 170-178).

⁷ Mitchell 1976, 106-131.

⁸ Mitchell 1976, 111-112.

requisition of transport, for instance, it was aimed at settling the abuse by which civil and military officials requested accommodation and free transport means from the inhabitants at a smaller rate than regulated, hence abusing their capacity of state officials, despite the fact such expenses were state discounted.⁹

Other inscriptions discovered at Ephesus and Aphrodisias,¹⁰ compose a lot of legal texts that comprised emperor or other high officials' rulings.

In the first line of the inscription here, three letters may be clearly distinguished: RIA, from the first letter being visible only the central curved part of what could be an O or rather D. The possible letter O should be excluded because of the ORIA succession that appears in words like *memoria, praetoria, gloria, victoria* etc., hardly justified in line 1 of such a text. Instead, letter D is more appropriate. The letter group DRIA is likely part of the emperor's name Hadrian, while the first text line could represent the imperial titulature: IMP. CAESAR TRAIANVS HADRIANVS AVG. PONTIF. MAX., namely *Imperator Caesar Traianus Hadrianus Augustus pontifex maximus* etc.

It is less likely that sequence -DRIA- belongs to the town's name, written in line 1: MVNIC. AEL. HADRIAN. NAPOC., namely *municipium Aelium Hadrianum Napocensium*. This might have occurred in a votive text from the sphere of the civic religion like the *Genio ordinis municipii vel similia* type, however not in a text carved on a bronze tablet.

Since it is the first inscription line and contains letters -DRIA- we may attempt to restore the presumptive original sizes of the monument starting from the imperial titulature. Because the tablet is thin, of 1.5-2 mm, we do not believe that the monument was too large. If line 1 includes the imperial titulature, some of the parts could pass by the beginning of line 2. However, below the name of Hadrianus are letters -SIO, the ending of a feminine noun (of type *possessio, cessio* etc.) which no longer belonged to the titulature. Thus, lines 1-3 might read:

[EX AVCTORIT. IMP. CAESAR. TRAIAN. HA]DRIA[N. AVG. PONTIF. MAX.]
[TRIB. POT. ? COS. ? ...]SIO AD[...]

Thus, in line 1, 35 characters might be found, whereas, if we add an introductory phrase of type EDICTVM or EX AVCTORIT., 42-45

⁹ Mitchell 1976, 114-115.

¹⁰ For decrees and letters from Aphrodisias, see: <http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007/inscriptions/toc/text/D.html>, <http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007/inscriptions/toc/text/L.html>; see also: Reynolds 1982; Reynolds 2000, 5-20; Reynolds, Roueché, Bodard 2007.

characters. Letter widths vary from 2-5 mm (letters I, E), to 1-1.2 mm (letters A, R, T, O etc.). With an average of 1 cm (letter and space between two letters) a ca. 40-45 cm width of the bronze plate might be obtained.

The name and imperial titulature in the Nominative, the bronze plate sizes and surviving letters which do not frame standard and stereotype law texts are rather indicative of a rescript of emperor Hadrian, an epistle addressed to the authorities of the town at Napoca.

The answer of emperor Titus from AD 79 to the duumviri and decurions of *Munigua* is written on a bronze plate sized 20.5 x 30 x 0.4 cm, with 0.8-0.5 cm high letters. The Munigua inscription was displayed in a public place, as evidenced by the perforations in its four corners.¹¹ A recently published fragment, discovered at Seilh, near Toulouse, is 12 x 8 x 0.4 cm, with 1.5 cm, respectively 0.5 cm high letters, being an *epistula* addressed by an anonymous emperor to the *decuriones Tolosanorum*.¹² The restored sizes of this monument are similar to those of Munigua.

In lines 2-5 there are groups of two or three letters from the start or ending part of some words. The only complete word is RES, in line 4, from the syntagm RES PV[BLIC-].

In line 2: *-sio* is the ending of a feminine noun (e.g. *possessio*); there follows an *interpunctio*, then letters AD, which could be a preposition or a composed word containing *ad-*.

In lines 2 and 3 are possible fragments of words *ad[versus]*, *ad[versario]* and *def[ensor]*, *def[endit]* as well as other declensions of verb *defendo*, typical for imperial responses referencing litigation between various communities.¹³ In line 3: *-uta* – the ending of the perfect passive participle, feminine N. sg. or neuter N. Ac. pl. (*instituta*, *constituta*, *soluta?*); it is nonetheless possible that the first letter from line 3, fragmentary, might be an N, hence we would have the ending of a neuter noun, N. pl. (of type *frumenta*, *monumenta* etc.) or of a plural numeral adjective (of type *quadraginta*, *sexaginta* etc.); there follows an *interpunctio* and letters *def-*, of a composed word, which included the preposition *de*. In line 4, *-t* could be the inflexion of the third person singular of a verb of type *fecit*, *constituit*, *instituit* etc.; still visible are the traces of a *hasta* of a letter which might be only a vowel, namely E and hence conjunction *et* would result. There follows an *interpunctio*, then the letter group RES PV[, certainly *res pu[blica Napocensium?*]. Since the single completely preserved word is *res* and because the form might be either in the Nominative singular, yet also in the plural Nominative-Accusative, we do not know

¹¹ CILA II, 1052 = AE 1962, 147 = AE 1962, 288 = AE 1972, 257.

¹² Armani 2012, 267-282.

¹³ Hauken 1998, 22 (Saltus Burunitanus, II.1: *adversarius*; III.7: *adversus*; CIL VIII 10570).

for certain which is the ending of the adjective *publica*. In line 5 survive fragmentarily letters VM, one *interpunctio*, then letters DI.

Letters VTA and DEF may be completed as [*destit*]VTA and DEF[*essa*] with reference to the *civitas Napocensium*,¹⁴ in line 4 ET RES PV[*blica Napocensium*], and in line 5 a phrase of type [c]VM DI[*ligentia restituit*]¹⁵ or [ipse loc]VM DI[*xit*].¹⁶

Thus, a hypothetical partial completion suggestion would be the following:

	[Imp(erator) Caesar Traianus Ha]DRIA[nus Augustus pont(ifex) max(imus) —		
			tribun(icia) pot(estate) —]
	[salutem dicit?]SIO AD[]
	[?civitatem nostram destit]VTA DEF[<i>essa</i> ?]
4	[ET RES PV[BLICA?]
	[]CVM DI[<i>ligentia restituit</i> ?]
	[]

Formally, the document here might correspond to an imperial response (*subscriptio*), delivered by emperor Hadrian upon a request that might have been made for instance by the representatives of the town at Napoca. Because of the fragmentary state of the piece, the document's content is impossible to ascertain, however in general, the reasons for which an appeal was made with the emperor were of financial, urban or legal nature, the emperor being the one to guarantee privileges and benefits or resolve territorial disputes and litigation related to magistrates' rulings.¹⁷ The structure of such a document was supposed to include a few key parts: the issuer's imperial titulature, the form of address, the addressees,¹⁸ the ruling, the closing phrase (*formula valedicendi*) and date. Since this imperial ruling was of collective importance, the petitioners transcribed it on a bronze plate for public display.

¹⁴ CIL X 520.

¹⁵ CIL VIII 8826.

¹⁶ CIL V 7781.

¹⁷ Armani 2012, 273 and note 20.

¹⁸ If the text was addressed to the town of Napoca, then the form of address must have referenced the magistrates, council and inhabitants, alike inscriptions SEG XXXVIII 1244 (see also Hauken 1998, 203-214) or Reynolds 1982, 33-41 (the same inscription also commented in Trapp 2003, 151, 300-302).

Bronze inscription Napoca-2

A second fragmentary inscription in bronze originating still from Napoca was discovered and published as early as the 19th century. The findspot is mentioned as being the town of Klausenbug towards the summit on Fellek (von Hornmayr)¹⁹ or the road to hill Feleac, rising south Cluj city (Neigebaur).²⁰ In CIL, the information becomes *close to the summit of mount Feleac, nearby Clausenburg (in ipso fere vertice montis Felek prope Clausenburgum)*. The piece is published for the first time by von Hornmayr in 1825 and later resumed in various corpora with a slightly different transcription.

J. von Hornmayr describes it as a copper plate («cupfernen Tafel»), slightly rounded (convex), as if it stood on a column (in CIL *curva et olim fortasse columnae alicui affixa*). He also specifies that the large letters are silvered and transcribes the text as follows:²¹

[---]VS · AEL[---]
 [---]FORMIS[---]
 [---]RATIOC[---]
 [---]D · D · D

Additional information is provided by Neigebaur, who states that the fragment is 9 Zoll high (nine inches), namely 23.7 cm. In Neigebaur and the inscription corpus of M. J. Ackner and Fr. Müller, in line 2 appear letters RORMIS.²² CIL resumes the reading FORMIS, after von Hornmayr.²³ Ackner and Müller wonder whether in line 4 we are or not dealing with a *ratio c[astrens]*.

In line 4 may be read [*l(ocus)*] *d(atus) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*, which makes it the last line of the inscription.²⁴

This is the lower, central part of a large, bronze inscription. The fragment is almost 24 cm, which means that letters are ca. 4-5 cm high (if we also include here the line spacing). An inscription of such sizes could not have comprised only four lines. The imperial titlature entails at least 30 characters and, if with letters of 4-5 cm we assume an average width of ca. 3 cm/letter and space, we obtain a 90 cm wide bronze plate. For symmetry, it should be at least 60 cm high. An inscription of such sizes was visible from distance being designed for an *en mouvement* reading. Most likely, the convex shape is due to the fragment's reuse, being

¹⁹ von Hornmayr 1825, 322.

²⁰ Neigebaur, 227.

²¹ von Hornmayr 1825, 322.

²² Neigebaur, 227; Ackner, Müller, 157, no. 745.

²³ CIL III 871.

²⁴ In <https://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD048959>, F. Graf reads *d(onum)? d(edit)? d(edicavit)?*

originally a bronze plate with silvered letters displayed in a public space from the town at Napoca, as evidenced by the final phrase *locus datus decreto decurionum*. In line 1 survive letters AEL, which might belong to an imperial *gentilicium*, Aelius, held in the official titulature by Hadrian, Lucius Aelius Caesar and Antoninus Pius (Imp. Caes. T. Aelius Hadrianus Antoninus Aug. Pius). Letters VS indicate an ending in the Nominative, yet not an imperial *praenomen* (Lucius, Titus), which in official inscriptions appears always in abbreviated form. *Formis* is the Dative or plural Ablative of the first declension feminine noun, *forma*, -ae. It may reference public land like in the inscription of *Canusium*: *fines agrorum publicorum ex formis publicis restituit*.²⁵ Letters RATIO may be the third declension feminine noun *ratio*, -onis, yet also the ending of nouns like *procuratio*, *exploratio*, *comparatio*, or even a *nomen* of type *Horatio*, *Veratio*, *Speratio* etc.²⁶ Words *formis* and *ratio* / *procuratio* are indicative of an administrative taxation type text. The fragmentary state and the fact it is known only by transcription, unfortunately hinder the completion and reading of this important official text.

Conclusions

Both inscriptions discussed here are official texts carved in bronze, designed for public display, *celeberrimo loco* (CIL X 4643). Quoting W. Harris, Napoca too *was full of things to read*. Beside the multitude of votive and building dedicatory texts carved in stone, an important place among texts designed for public display and reading was also held by these texts engraved *in aere*, imperial edicts and *ordo decurionum* decrees, of which regrettably only small, barely legible fragments have survived.

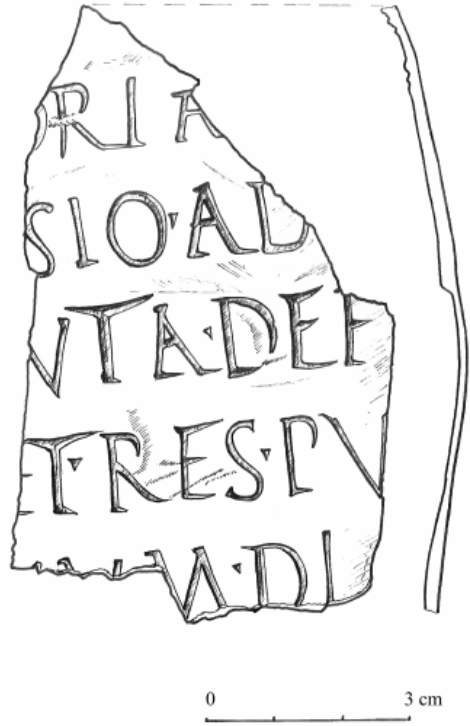
²⁵ AE 1950, 83; AE 1959, 267.

²⁶ The inscription has been recently also mentioned by D. Dana (Dana 2018-2019, 373, n. 16), in an inventory of the bronze inscriptions from Dacia, preserving in line 3 the reading suggestion from CIL: *ratioc[īn-*, thus presuming the completion *ratiocinium*, -i.

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Pl. I