

**FUNERARY STELE OF JULIUS VICTOR:
AN UNKNOWN SOLDIER OF *LEGIO II TRAIANA FORTIS*****

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Abstract: The funerary stele of Julius Victor provides us with new evidence to the already known documents belonging to the *Legio II Traiana Fortis*. It represents him in a familiar scene, holding his spear and resting his left palm on his grounded shield, and includes a Latin inscription of six lines underneath. On the basis of the epithets of *Germanica Severiana*, it is argued here that the stele belongs to the reign of Severus Alexander or immediately afterwards. It is also argued on the basis of some stylistic features, particularly on the basis of linguistic style and mistakes in spelling, that the Latin inscription betrays the Greek origin of Victor. This observation is also demonstrated by the artistic style of the scene on the upper part of the stele. The deliberate erasure of the name of the legion provides us with a further testimony of the *damnatio memoriae* of the rule of Severus Alexander and his mother.

The collection of Tanta Museum in Egypt includes some pieces which were transferred to it from the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria. One of the monuments belonging to this group, which dates back to the Roman period, is a stele representing a soldier with the name of Julius Victor (plate 1).¹ It is made of marble, rectangular in shape, with its length twice as much as its width. It has a relief which covers the upper greater part of the stele and an inscription of six lines underneath. Most of the letters of the inscription, particularly the lower three rows, still keep remains of the brownish red color which was used in painting them. The relief represents Victor standing in the centre in a frontal pose and wearing his military short *tunic* and *toga*. He appears in a familiar scene holding his spear in his right hand and resting his left palm on his shield on the lower right corner. The stele resembles a great deal a funerary relief in the Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria representing a Syrian soldier named Aurelius Sabius which dates almost to the same period as much as its owner belongs to the same legion, the *Legio II Traiana Fortis* (plate 2).²

The history of the *legio II Traiana Fortis* can be closely considered the history of the Roman army in Egypt for the most part of the second century AD through the fifth. It was originally founded by Trajan who needed reinforcements for his campaigns in Dacia in the early years of the century.³ Despite the circumstances surrounding its foundation, however, the legion happened to play its greatest role in the south-eastern part of the empire. It has been recently argued that the legion was present in Judaea in 107/8 AD.⁴ Also, it took part in Trajan's campaigns in Parthia (115-117 AD) and was stationed in Judaea between 117 and 125 AD to suppress the Jewish resistance to the Roman rule during the reign of Hadrian.

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¹ Tanta Museum 1436.

² Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria 252 (= *CIL* III, 6596); see also the second part of this paper.

³ Ritterling 1903, 480; Birley 2000, 114. Hekster 2007, 353, notes that the name of the legion "emphasized and strengthened the link between army and emperor."

⁴ Urliou 2010, 110-117, with the references to the early literature.

Probably immediately after 127 AD, its base was moved to Egypt where it was stationed at Nicopolis near the ancient city of Alexandria.⁵ It became the only Roman legion based in Egypt after Hadrian moved the *legio XXII Deiotariana* (together with sections of the *legio II Traiana Fortis*) to quell the famous revolt in Judaea under Simon Bar Kochba (132-135 AD).⁶ Although its main stations were located not far from Alexandria, its soldiers were also found in other parts of the province, in Panopolis, Thebes and Syene, where they served to maintain order and played as well an important role in its administration.⁷

However, nothing shows the role the legion played in the history of the country and the empire as a whole more than the titles awarded to it by the emperors and particularly by the emperors of the third century. Already during the reign of its founder, the legion has earned its first title indicating its powerful role during the Dacian campaigns and stressing its strength, *fortis*.⁸ The other consequent titles have been the subject of an article by Patrick Sanger that appeared less than five years ago. He has shown an increasing rate in titles awarded to it in the third century AD and demonstrated that it was awarded then the titles of *Antoniniana*, *Germanica*, *Severiana*, *Gordiana*, *Philippiana*, *Galliana Volusiana*, and *Valeriana Galliana*.⁹ The dates of two titles deserve special attention, as far as this paper is concerned. According to Sanger, the title of *Germanica* was given to the legion by Caracalla during his campaigns against Germania and happened to become more popular than the imperial epithet *Antoniana*. The other important title, *Severiana*, was awarded to it by the emperor Severus Alexander (222-235 AD).¹⁰ Regardless of the nature of each of these two titles, their combination provides a *terminus post quem* for our stele which, therefore, must belong to the reign of Severus Alexander or immediately thereafter.

So far as we know, there are only four inscriptions and two papyrological document which refer to the *legio II Traiana Fortis Germanica Severiana*, and which date necessarily back to the reign of Severus Alexander.¹¹ All inscriptions come from Alexandria and two of them are certainly funerary stelae.¹² Thus, the stele of Julius Victor adds yet a new inscription and a relief to the already known monuments of this type. According to Coulston, twenty two gravestones were discovered near Alexandria at Nicopolis, the ancient site of the Roman fortress that was "mostly associated with the long-resident *legio II Traiana fortis*."¹³ Although the original location of Victor's stele is not identified, the fact that it was transferred from the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria to Tanta suggests that it most likely came from Alexandria. In the following sections of this paper we shall discuss both the characteristics of the inscription and the artistic style of the scene represented above it; we begin with a transcription and a translation of the epitaph (plate 3).

D(is) M(anibus) // Iulius Victor miles leg(ionis) [II Tr(aianae) For(tis)] / Germanic(a)e Severian(a)e | (centuria) II (secunda) has(tati) pos(terioris) S (?) VII (septima) feci(t) / herede Polla su<o=A> nomine Epic(h)aris procurato/re Aeli<o=U> Iust<o=U> | (centurione) VIII

⁵ Haensch 2012, 69. Cf., however, Alston (1995), 25 who is somewhat undecided about the date of its arrival in Egypt: "At some point a new legion, the *II Traiana*, was stationed in Egypt."

⁶ Hassali 2000, 323; Gilliam 1956, 365.

⁷ Alston 1995, 163; Gilliam 1956, 372.

⁸ Ritterling 1903, 480.

⁹ Sanger 2009, 277-286.

¹⁰ Sanger 2009, 279-281 (*Germanica*); 283-284 (*Severiana*).

¹¹ The papyri: *P.Heid.* III 244 (Herakleopolis), *SB XVI* 12809 (Kysis); the inscriptions: *CIL* III 14138, 2; *CIL* III 6594a; *CIL* III 12052; Breccia, *Note epigrafische* (1929) Nr. 8. The evidence is compiled and partially quoted by Sanger 2009, 283-284

¹² *CIL* III 14138; *CIL* III 6594a.

¹³ Coulston 2007, 537 with note 32.

(nono) has(tato) pri(ore) pos(u)it tabula(m) / heres et procurator bene merenti domi/no
pos<u=I>erunt.

To the Spirits of the Dead

Julius Victor, a soldier of the *legio II Traianae Fortis Germanicae Severianae*. He served in the second centuria of the rear spearmen the seventh (unit/line?). By (his) heir Polla, called Epicharis (i.e. Charming), through the procurator Aelius Iustus the centurion of the 9th front spearmen, set up the stele. The heir and the procurator, to a well deserved master, set up (this stele).

As already mentioned, the text includes six lines; three of them (2–4) include the same number of letters (36), which was probably intended by the writer.¹⁴ The first line has endured a deliberate erasure of the name of legion in the second half of the line. But the number of the missing letters (ca. 10) and the titles beginning the second line help us to confirm, *inter alia*, that it was the *legio II Traiana Fortis*. The fourth and the fifth lines have some space in the end for two or three more letters. The final line has only 11 letters which are moved slightly to the left leaving more space on the right.

Line 1: The line begins with the usual formula *D(is) M(anibus)*, which became frequent on funerary stelae from the second century AD.¹⁵ Indeed, this introductory phrase is found in the beginning of the two contemporary epitaphs with our stele.¹⁶ However, the abbreviations are written here in the beginning and the end of the line at a slightly larger size. The name of the deceased (*Iulius Victor*) is written *in toto*. Three observations relate to this form of the name. First, since all the soldiers were by then Roman citizens, the fact that he is referred to by two names may be a sign of his non aristocratic origin.¹⁷ Second, it is put in the nominative case; thus it differs from the two stelae, already mentioned, which were set up for "Aurelium Longinum" and "Marcum Aurelium Neonem" and used the accusative case.¹⁸ As for the name Victor itself, it has further been noted that it was a frequent name in North Africa and that it was also an appropriate cognomen for a soldier.¹⁹ Needless to state, however, that Iulius Victor might not necessarily have been his name at birth since soldiers were given new names when they joined the military service. In a letter from the second century a newly recruited soldier wrote to his father telling him of his news and his new name and military unit, saying: "Apion to Epimachus, his father and lord.... My name is Antonius Maximus, my company is Athenonica."²⁰ *Miles* is not abbreviated as well and is separated from the name of the legion with a dot.²¹ The erasure of the name of the legion was thorough and complete, and affected also the letter *M* in the end of the line. Only faint traces of the word *Leg(ionis)* can be observed. This fact makes it possible that the erasure was deliberate and that it may have been a result of the *damnatio memoriae* of the rule of Severus Alexander and his mother.

Line 2: The line begins after some space in the beginning, probably to highlight the abbreviation of *D(is)* in the preceding line. The final syllables of the titles *Germanic(a)e* and *Severian(a)e* are spelled similarly. However, this spelling is rather peculiar since the writer

¹⁴ Cf. Heinen 1980, 121.

¹⁵ Gordon 1983, 40; Heinen 1980, 117.

¹⁶ *CIL* III 14138; *CIL* III 6594a.

¹⁷ Gordon 1983, 22, notes that only aristocrats managed to keep the old three part form of the name in the third and fourth centuries. See also Saddington 2000, 169.

¹⁸ *CIL* III 14138, 2; *CIL* III 6594a; respectively.

¹⁹ Dean 1918, 58: "The cognomen Victor would seem to fill all the requirements of a suitable cognomen for soldiers." For its frequency in North Africa, see p. 59.

²⁰ *Sel. Pap.* I. 112; cited in Bowman 1995, 157. It is to be noted that he acquired only two names.

²¹ It is worth noting that *mili(tem)* is abbreviated in Longinus' and Neo's epitaphs; see note 18 above.

omitted only the (a) in the final diphthong. We do encounter other abbreviations of Germanicae in the form of G, Ger, less frequently Germ, or in one inscription Germani.²² As for Severianae, it is abbreviated once in the same manner we encounter here.²³ In the remaining inscriptions it is either spelled completely,²⁴ or abbreviated Seve²⁵ or Sever(iana).²⁶ An S with a diagonal stroke precedes the number VII. It is tempting to suppose that it stands for an abbreviation, which is difficult to determine its meaning. A similar one is found in the inscription of Aurelius Longinus which dates to the same period and is separated from the following word by a dot (plate 4: second line).²⁷ A tentative suggestion may be that it refers to the sub unit in his centuria. The final word *feci(t)* omits the final letter. The verb is unusual in this context and one might suppose that it was probably used instead of *fuit*, or even to mean 'served'.

Line 3: Polla is a rare form of the Roman name Paulla or Paula.²⁸ She seems to be Victor's slave as may be surmised from his description as *dominus* in the following line. The same may be adduced also from her nickname as *Epic(h)aris* which is a Latin transliteration of a Greek word meaning Charming.²⁹ The expression *suo (=sub) nomine*, which is not as frequent in Latin,³⁰ is more intelligible in this context as a direct translation of the Greek word *epikaloumene*.³¹ The phenomenon was recorded in Greek areas where "Latin speakers sometimes adopted the Greek construction in Latin texts."³² Thus the phrase indicates that Polla was probably known with her Greek nickname more than her Roman name. Since it is not stated that she was Victor's wife, the stele differs from the preceding two funerary stelae where the relationship between the deceased and the commemorator is clearly defined as such.³³ She is, however, described as Victor's heir and together with his procurator, set up the tablet which gives us, therefore, another example where "[h]iership, not family, is the primary basis of commemoration."³⁴ The line has no abbreviations and the final two letters of *procuratore* start the following line. The size of the letters is somewhat smaller towards the middle of the line as appears from the word *nomine*.

Line 4: The line starts little to the left more than the preceding ones. The writer has misspelled (u) for (o) in the proper names of the procurator who might have been Victor's commander at some point: Aeli<o=u> and Iust<o=u>. The last two words *pos(u)it* and *tabula(m)* are abbreviated; the former by omitting the medial (u), which may be as well a misspelling, and the latter by omitting final (m). The line has a space in the end for two more letters although it has the same number of letters as the preceding two lines.

Line 5: This line (and the next) includes the final sentence in the epitaph which reconfirms that the stele was set up by two persons: *heres et procurator*. It includes the usual final phrase

²² E.g. *CIL* III, 14127, 6594a, 12055, 14138, respectively.

²³ Breccia 1929, 70-73 = Sanger 2009, # 12.

²⁴ *CIL* III 14138.

²⁵ *CIL* III 6594a.

²⁶ *CIL* III 12052.

²⁷ *CIL* III 6594a.

²⁸ Lewis and Short, s.v. Polla.

²⁹ Heinen 1980, 122 on the name Epiktesis in Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria, inv. 24202.

³⁰ See the examples mentioned Lewis and Short, s.v. nomen # 3.

³¹ It is tempting here to take *sua* with *Polla* and to mean "By heir, his Polla..." which will give more weight to the relationship between her and the deceased. But this reading will leave *nomine* alone with *Epicharis*.

³² Adams 1998, 236, speaking, however, of texts found in Delos and Sicily.

³³ *CIL* III 6594a, is set up by Aurelia Isidora to her *coniux dolcissimus*; In *CIL* III 14138 the wife, Aurelia Sabina, describes her self as a wedded wife.

³⁴ Meyer 1990, 78.

bene merenti to which is added the word *domino*. The last two letters of the final word are written on the following 6th line. The line contains only 32 letters and has a space in the end for one more. The letters are somewhat larger in size and written at larger space than the preceding lines. This may be explained by the fact that it begins the final sentence in the epitaph. Noteworthy also is that the phrase *bene merenti* is not abbreviated.

Line 6: The line includes only 11 letters which are not properly located in the middle. The verb *posuerunt* is misspelled since the writer substituted (i) for (u) which he omitted from (*pos(u)it*) in the fourth line. Indeed another explanation for the absence of u in *pos(u)it* and for the misspelling of *pos<u=I>erunt* may be that they both represent the current pronunciation of the two words at the time, which is the case for the epithes *Germanic(a)e Severian(a)e*.

What are we to understand from the preceding epigraphical observations about the letters, text and style of the epitaph? First, the stele seems of a modest nature showing what Heinen has termed "wenig Unbeholfenheit."³⁵ Indeed, this crudeness or un-skillfulness seems to have been a characteristic of the inscriptions of the third century.³⁶ This fact is demonstrated by the inconsistent shape of the letters, the uneven spaces between them and by the somewhat wavy lines. Thus the O is written sometimes elongated and sometimes more rounded. We can also compare the H, I, M, N, and R. Second, the epitaph shows a tendency not to use abbreviations and when so they are used sparingly and then the abbreviated letters were kept to a minimum. Furthermore, it contains several misspellings. Third, the epitaph does not refer to Victor's age at his death. While it can't be determined whether this disregard was intentional, it may be explained by the fact that the stele was set up by an heir who might have been a slave and by a procurator. Fourth, both the legion and the unit of the deceased are mentioned in details, which is a common characteristic of the funerary stelae of the veterans of the *Legio II Traiana Fortis*.³⁷ Finally, it may be surmised from the nickname of Victor's heir and from the way it is presented that we are dealing with a text illustrating "some of the ways in which the bilingualism of the writer might influence the structure and the phraseology of a funerary text."³⁸ Moreover, since the epitaph is written in Latin in a Hellenized milieu, it provides us with a new testimony of Latin as a "language of power,"³⁹ and of the tendency towards Romanization that was emanating from and connected with the army.⁴⁰ In the following discussion of the scene representing Julius Victor, we shall try to show the degree to which some of the preceding points are reflected also in its artistic style.

The scene on Victor's relief occupies three quarters of the stele and contains a diagonal crack almost in the middle of the tablet which could have been the result of a deliberate attempt to destroy the relief, as the erasure of the name of the legion. Victor appears on his stele in a manner closely resembling the way Aurelius Sabius, another fellow soldier of the *legio II Traiana Fortis*, appears on his relief (plate 2). They both seem to belong to the same century. More important, however, is that they belong to a larger group of stelae which were spread in a wide area of the empire. In an important article devoted to the "depiction of [Roman] soldiers on funerary monuments," Coulston has attempted to study the third century "ring-buckle gravestones" against the background of funerary monuments

³⁵ Heinen 1980, 116, 119; commenting on Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria, inv. 24489.

³⁶ Gordon 1983, 39, similarly, observes a "general decline" in the inscriptions of the third century.

³⁷ Haensch 2012, 77.

³⁸ Adams 1998, 236. The point is obviously strengthened by the number of mistakes and the limited use of abbreviations, already alluded to.

³⁹ Phang 2007, 301.

⁴⁰ Heinen 1980, 124: "Insofern ist dieses Denkmal auch ein interessantes Zeugnis für die Tendenz zur Romanisierung, die gerade vom römischen Heer ausging."

including, but not limited to, "funerary alters, sarcophagi and painted 'mummy' portraits."⁴¹ His aim was to reach "some holistic observations" about the way Roman soldiers were represented in death and about funerary practice of the Roman army. Moreover, one of the three features of the gravestones which he identified was "the military equipment, which is often depicted with great care to practical and accurate detail."⁴² In the following discussion of the characteristic features of our stele we will study Victor's armaments, his clothes and his pose all of which combined to present a representative image not only of Victor as an individual, but also of the army as a whole.

Before discussing these points a word must be said about the 'form' of the stele which is in itself a "communicative tool."⁴³ The slab is a rectangular one with its length twice as much as its width.⁴⁴ The relief is rather a high one and occupies a space smaller than its counterpart on Sabius' stele, being three quarters of the whole length of the tablet. Due to the large space allocated to the inscription, the eyes of the viewer are also attracted to the epitaph which is clearly meant to constitute an important epigraphical complement to the visual image and not merely a note to identify the deceased. Moreover, the size of the stele indicates that it was obviously put on the *locullus* where Victor's body was located. In this context the frame of the stele acquires no less significance than the frontal pose of the deceased since it symbolizes the door from which he comes out to meet his visitors.⁴⁵

In addition to his full frontal stance, Victor appears in a standing position with his left foot preceding his right. His right hand holds his vertical spear right under its top and his left rests on an upright shield on his right. The artist was clever enough to show him as if he is moving forward as may appear from the level of both shoulders and the slightly turning face. The features of the round face, particularly the thick hair, the nose, the wide forehead and the short beard may all reflect Victor's personal features. In this case it may be asserted that the stele shows an attempt to represent a portrait of the deceased analogous to what is seen on the 'mummy' portraits of the period.⁴⁶ It is noteworthy however that the eyes and the serene face do not come in contact with the viewer since they look elsewhere as if looking into space or to the world he is going to. Judging from the frequency of Victor's pose on soldiers' funerary reliefs throughout the empire,⁴⁷ it can be described as the soldier's version of the famous *Prima Porta* statue. According to Hekster, this statue, in its heroic ageless Augustus, was meant to "broadcast the image of the emperor as a victorious leader." However, Victor's image is also closer in time to Caracalla who was regularly depicted wearing his military mantle and whose portrait became "properly fashionable in the third century."⁴⁸ Be it an imitation of Augustus's or Caracalla's portrait or a combination of both, our stele shows that soldiers wanted to be represented like emperors after death, on a much smaller level, each in his respective local community. It is interesting to note, therefore, that both Victor and Sabius have a small beard similar to Caracalla's.

In this image of soldier/emperor,⁴⁹ needless to stress, every single detail was important and contributed to the final intended impression on the viewer. Caracalla's military *toga* constitutes an important element of Victor's clothes and of his colleagues and is

⁴¹ Coulston 2007, 530.

⁴² Coulston 2007, 531; the other two features being: "the selective distribution of examples...and the political and cultural implications of the form and distribution of the funerary practice."

⁴³ Riggs 2005, 15.

⁴⁴ It measures 27x53 cm. Compared with Sabius' stele 35x75 cm, it somewhat smaller in size.

⁴⁵ Cf. specially the niche-like background of Sabius' stele, plate 2.

⁴⁶ Riggs 2005, 97.

⁴⁷ For examples from Egypt see plate 2 and Willems et Clarysse 2001, 170, # 50, 51. For other reliefs from other parts of the empire see the various examples mentioned by Coulston 2007, esp. figs 1-3.

⁴⁸ Hekster 2007, 345.

⁴⁹ Coulston 2007, 548 speaks of the "use of imperial portraiture traits on 'private' gravestones," with note 82.

similarly knotted on his right shoulder. Underneath he wears a short *tunic* reaching above the knees and surrounded by a leather "ring-buckle" around his waist. Both the *toga* and the *tunic* constitute the two main pieces of the clothes, even though the length of the *toga* and the manner of its representation may vary from a relief to another. In our example the mantle seems to be a short one and does not show up behind his back. The folds of the clothes are natural and in harmony with the body giving a sense completely different from the one we get from the coarse material and stylistic folds of Sabius' clothes.

Victor appears in the scene holding his arms which are more obvious signs of his profession as a soldier and which are complemented by his description in the epitaph as a *miles*. Since they include a spear and a shield, they are also more specific in indicating that he was serving as a foot-soldier.⁵⁰ The top of the spear is represented in a usual frontal position while the grounded shield is represented in an upright, three dimensional one. Even though the stele does not keep much of the colors which it originally had, both the clothes, the spear and the shield would have been usually colored and covered with some signs indicating the unit which the soldier belonged to.⁵¹ Significant also as a part of the soldier's armament is his "ring-buckle belt." It was a belt made of leather and wrapped around the soldier's waist and "once it had been passed through the ring-buckle and fastened with a stud, it was then looped up under the belt at the wearer's right side before hanging down alongside the right leg." According to Coulston, the earliest "diagnostic representation" of this type of belts goes back to AD 211 on an alter from Eining in Germany.⁵² The present stele which can be securely dated to the reign of Severus Alexander, or immediately afterwards, may therefore give a proof of the speed with which this new type of belts was spreading at that time.

Finally, we come to the individual traits of the artistic style which characterized the work of his sculptor. Above all, it reflects an attempt to present a 'natural' scene which one might see in everyday life.⁵³ Victor is also represented as he may be seen outside the military context.⁵⁴ The relief is rather a high one as can be seen from the head, the top of the spear and from the lower end of the mantle covering the left palm. The sculptor was clever enough in his depiction of Victor's grip of the top of the spear and of his left hand resting on the shield.⁵⁵ The soldier's body movement is more natural than on the other stelae and more natural also is the representation of his clothes with its multiple folds. The "crudeness" already alluded to shows up especially in the large size of the head compared to the rest of the body, in the small size of the lower half compared to the upper one and in the elongated ears. Although many details were lost with the colors, there are still some traces on the shaft and on the epitaph. The stele still retains some of its old elegance and various elements indicating the "Greek" milieu to which Victor originally belonged.⁵⁶

To conclude, the stele of Julius Victor provides us with a new funerary tablet to add to the already existing evidence of the *legio Secunda Traiana Fortis* in the middle of the third century AD. Both the soldier Julius Victor and the centurion Aelius Justus are not attested in our available lists of the forces of this legion.⁵⁷ Despite its bad condition and the disappearance of the colors, it still bears signs of the elegance of style and of the cleverness of its artist who was influenced more with the Greek tradition. The epitaph reflects at the

⁵⁰ Riggs 2005, 22.

⁵¹ Stall 2007, 461.

⁵² Coulston 2007, 532.

⁵³ Riggs 2005, 75.

⁵⁴ Coulston 2007, 535.

⁵⁵ Compared with the 'stylized' movements on Sabius' stele; see plate 2.

⁵⁶ Heinen 1980, 124; see also Willems et Clarysse 2000, 170, # 50, 51.

⁵⁷ Cavenaile 1970, 215-216 (Aelius Justus), 259-268 (Julius Victor); Crinitis 1973, 97 (Aelius Justus), 123-128 (Julius Victor).

same time the importance of the Latin language as a language of "power" in the Hellenized milieu of Alexandria and the poor knowledge of it as a second language.

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The Plates



Plate 1: Tanta Museum 1436.



Plate 2: Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria 252.

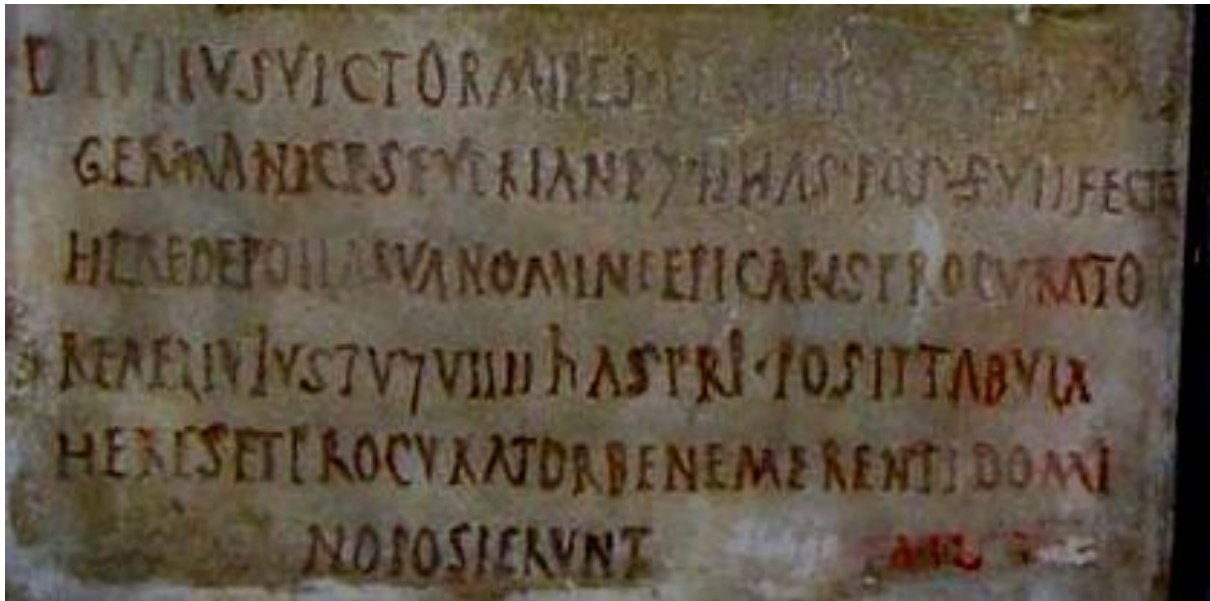


Plate 3: Tanta Museum 1436 (Inscription).



Plate 4: *CIL* III 6594a.