A New Legionary Epitaph from Venice
Un nuovo epitaffio di legionario da Venezia

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Abstract: This article presents a fragmentary and hitherto unpublished inscribed funerary stele, which was reused in Venice as an architectural spolium and has recently come to light. The text, written in Latin, is very likely to be the epitaph for a legionario, whose name is unknown since it occupied the part of the inscription that has not survived. Archaeological data and textual analysis suggest that the inscribed stone dates to the 1st - early 2nd centuries AD. It also seems likely that the legionario mentioned in the fragmentary text was a native of Narbonese Gaul who died in Dalmatia or in the eastern Regio X. The inscription can perhaps be associated with another legionario's funerary stele (CIL V, 2162), which was reused in the base of the nearby San Vidal bell-tower.

Riassunto: L’articolo presenta una stele iscritta frammentaria e sinora inedita, che è stata rinvenuta di recente a Venezia come spolium architettonico. Il documento epigrafico, scritto in latino, conteneva con tutta probabilità l’epitaffio di un legionario, il cui nome è sconosciuto in quanto si trovava inciso nella parte dell’iscrizione che non è sopravvissuta. I dati archeologici e l’analisi testuale suggeriscono che il monumento sia databile al I secolo d.C. (o agli inizi del II). Sembra inoltre verosimile che il legionario menzionato nel testo frammentario fosse nativo della Gallia Narbonese e fosse morto in Dalmazia o nella Regio X orientale. L’epigrafe può forse essere messa in relazione con un’altra stele funeraria di un legionario (CIL V, 2162), che si trova nei pressi, reimpiegata nel basamento del campanile di San Vidal.

Keywords: Funerary inscription, stele, legionario, Venice, Dalmatia, Regio X, Narbonese Gaul

Parole chiave: Iscrizione funeraria, stele, legionario, Venezia, Dalmazia, Regio X, Gallia Narbonese

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I. Roman stones in Venice

This article examines a fragmentary and hitherto unpublished Latin inscription, which has recently come to light in Venice. Before focusing on its text, it is first necessary to discuss briefly the presence of classical, and, in particular, Roman, artefacts in the Venetian area, so as to better appreciate the potential significance of such new discoveries.

While Venice did not develop on the site of an ancient settlement, the city was constructed reusing large quantities of earlier building materials1. Most of these objects were bricks or carved stones of different shapes and sizes, whose dating to the classical period is difficult to establish with certainty (although measurements and chemical analyses can offer some precious hints)2. Among these numerous and often undifferentiated *spolia* a specific and, in a certain sense, privileged category is represented by lapidary inscriptions3.

Reused Greek and Roman stones from Venice bearing an epigraphic text deserve scholarly attention for several reasons: first, perhaps most obviously, they can be more readily identified than artefacts without inscriptions; furthermore they are very abundant and thus offer a broad spectrum of information about different types of monuments and inscribed texts, as well as about their dating; finally, their presence in the city centre and on the surrounding islands has been recorded for a very long time, at least since early Humanism, a process itself worthy of study since it allows scholars to examine drawings and transcriptions of dozens of epigraphic documents that, in many cases, have long since disappeared. The concentration of epigraphic *spolia* in certain parts of the city (St Mark’s basilica and bell tower, the ancient cathedral of San Pietro di Castello, as well as many of the earliest parish settlements in the Castello and San Marco districts) and of the lagoon (Torcello and the islands around it, Murano, but also some minor sites in the southern lagoon) seems particularly significant and should be taken into consideration when studying

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the origins and development of these settlements. It should also be stressed that frequent discoveries of previously unknown inscriptions continuously increase the size of this corpus.

At least since Mommsen, epigraphists have been aware of the problems related to the study of inscriptions found in Venice and in the nearby lagoon sites. The most tantalizing of these problems — Mommsen referred to it as the *ineluctabile malum* — is that of their provenance (*origo*). Stones, like all heavy building materials, can easily be placed on ships or boats and then transported, even over long distances. Since no quarries are located in the immediate vicinity of Venice (the closest ones are on the Euganean hills near Padua or at the foot of the Alps, close to Vicenza and Conegliano), the stone-poor inhabitants of the Venetian lagoon and of its near-shore settlements looking for building materials turned first to other relatively nearby coastal regions, such as Aurisina (next to Trieste), Istria and Dalmatia, but also to more distant locations all along the eastern Mediterranean (especially if they were looking for specific materials). This was true both in the ancient and in the medieval/early modern periods. Moreover, and this point should be stressed, ancient artefacts were brought to Venice not only as *spolia*, but also to form part of collections of antiquities, which are attested in the Serenissima at least from the late Middle Ages onwards.

For these and other reasons, a complete recording of all the Greek and Roman inscriptions that are or used to be visible in Venice and in the nearby lagoon settlements is hard to accomplish. Mommsen himself explicitly decided to give up on this task and adopted a radical, but provisional, solution. In the fifth volume of the *CIL* he declared himself satisfied with assigning all the Latin inscriptions that had been spotted for the first time in or around Venice to the ancient *municipium* of Altinum, the closest Roman administrative centre to the Venetian lagoon. As for the inscribed materials coming from antiquarian collections, Mommsen often arbitrarily assigned them to specific geographic areas, such as Dalmatia (those from the Nani Museum) or Rome (those from the Arrigoni and Manin collections).


5. *CIL* V, p. 205: *Venetis titulis hoc proprium insidet ineluctabile malum, ut de vera origine plerumque non satis constet.*


In more recent years, a group of researchers from the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice has begun to reassess the whole corpus of ancient epigraphic documents that have passed through Venice9. The only way to do this is to examine in detail every single inscription, in an attempt to collect all the data that both the text and the monument (when it still exists), as well as any previous handwritten or printed transcriptions, can offer. This is time-consuming research, which almost never gives definitive solutions. Yet even its partial results are encouraging for at least two reasons. First, the possibility of identifying the exact provenance of even one single inscription can be highly significant and lead to a number of consequences for the study of Greek and Roman history (revision of the corpus of ancient sources from a certain area; new social, onomastic, economic, and art-historical data etc.). Secondly, and this should be borne in mind by archaeologists focusing on Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, reused inscriptions can shed new light on the long-debated question of the genesis of the Venetian settlements.

At present, a rough calculation suggests that there are about 500 ancient inscriptions that at some point in their history were recorded in Venice and/or on the nearby islands either as building materials or as objects in antiquarian collections (the two categories may also overlap, since previously reused stones could then enter private or public museums, while the reverse of this is far rarer). In fact, the group of epigraphic spolia includes approximately 170 inscriptions, while the ancient inscribed objects that passed through antiquarian collections number certainly over 300. Even if both lists are probably still incomplete, these are absolutely striking numbers for a city that did not develop on top of a classical settlement. When properly contextualized, such information could thus be very helpful, especially for scholars investigating the development of human settlements in the Venetian lagoon and the way in which urban infrastructures took shape10.

9. For a detailed description of our research projects and a full list of the bibliography so far produced, please visit the Laboratorio di Epigrafia latina and the Laboratorio di Epigrafia greca homepages on the Ca’ Foscari website (www.unive.it).

2. Description and critical edition of the new fragmentary inscription

In autumn 2010 the corpus of Roman inscriptions from Venice increased by one when some restoration works were carried out at a building located in the Campo San Vidal, a few dozen metres to the north of the Accademia bridge. The building, belonging to the Domus Ciliota, a religious institution that accommodates students from the University of Venice\textsuperscript{11}, lies west of the San Vidal bell tower and shares its eastern wall with it\textsuperscript{12}. When a large chunk of plaster and debris from the façade of the building unexpectedly fell down, it revealed that the previously covered side of the left jamb of a ground-floor window bore the remains of a Roman inscription\textsuperscript{13}. Without being removed, the artefact was carefully cleaned on its sides and is now clearly visible in its original (although, obviously, secondary) position (figs. 1-2).

The text of the inscription is carved on a white limestone stele, only a portion of which (broken into two matching halves) survives. It measures $85 \times (23.5) \times 17$ cm. The front surface of the monument is chipped in several places; the left and the right sides have been recut and are certainly not original; the top has been slightly smoothed when the stone was reused; the back is original and appears to have been smoothed in antiquity with a claw chisel. The height of the monument corresponds to two Roman feet and ten inches and is probably original; the depth is certainly original and corresponds exactly to seven Roman inches (i.e., half a foot and one inch). Petrographic analysis of the artefact might prove useful in the future in order to determine its geographic provenance.

The extant text is distributed over four lines. No upper or lower sections of the text seem to be missing, but each of the surviving lines is fragmentary on both sides (except perhaps for the last one, which, as we shall see, is probably incomplete only on its left side). The height of the letters gradually diminishes (line 1: $10$ cm = 4 Roman inches; line 2: $8.5$ cm = 3 and a half Roman inches; line 3: $7$ cm = 2 and a half Roman inches; line 4: $7$ cm = 2 and a half Roman inches).

The text that is visible may be transcribed as follows:

\[- - -\]us \(+\ - -\]
\[- - -\]us \eta\[- - -\]
\[- - -\]r \(\text{leg}\[- - -\]}
\[- - -\]^\text{est}\[- - -\]?

\textsuperscript{11.} On this pious institution, founded by Pietro Ciliota in 1822, see E. Dall’Asta, \textit{Intorno alla vita e mirabili azioni del sacerdote veneziano don Pietro Ciliota della parrocchia di Santo Stefano morto in concetto di speciale santità il giorno 22 novembre 1846}, Venezia 1857.

\textsuperscript{12.} The address of the building is San Marco 2862.

\textsuperscript{13.} The accident took place on 19 October 2010. By a fortunate coincidence Mr Onofrio Gasparro, a student of Latin Epigraphy, lived in the building and immediately notified Prof. Giovannella Cresci and myself of this discovery.
Fig. 1. The newly discovered fragmentary inscription (© Oliviero Zane)

Fig. 2. Rectified and enhanced image of the newly discovered fragmentary inscription (© Gaia Trombin)
All letters are V-cut and have serifs; their carving gradually becoming lighter from the first to the last line. The *ductus* is in general regular and elongated. Words are separated by light interpuncts. A more substantial triangular interpunct pointing downwards is clearly visible at the beginning of the last line. At the end of the first line the left part of a round letter is clearly visible: the only possible letters that could be restored here are a C, G, O, or Q. The letter R at the beginning of line 3 is closed, i.e., its curved bowl touches its vertical bar; the Es in the third and fourth lines have equal cross-bars of medium length.

Despite its incomplete state, the inscription can be interpreted with a high degree of certainty as the epitaph of a legionary. This can be assumed on the basis of the final letters of the third line, which are most plausibly an abbreviation of the word *leg(ionis)*. It is also obvious that the stone bore the name of the deceased man in the nominative case. In fact, the first line of the text is likely to contain the last two letters of his gentilician *nomen* (-*us*), which was in all likelihood preceded by the indication of his *praenomen*. The round letter that followed can be interpreted as the beginning of the filiation formula, which must have been either *C(ai)* or *Cn(aei)* or *Q(uinti) f(ilius)*. The end of the line possibly mentioned the voting-tribe in which the deceased was registered, indicated, as usual, with the first three or four letters of the tribal name. This is also suggested by the fact that all the other surviving lines need room for about four or five letters on their right hand side.

The second line probably began with the *cognomen* of the deceased, the termination of which is still legible (-*us*), followed by the letters NA, which are not easy to interpret. They could be the beginning of an *origo*. In that case, if we assume that the legionary was a Roman citizen at the time of the levy, he could have been a native of an Italian town such as *Narnia* in Umbria (a Latin colony founded in 299 BC, which became a *municipium* after the Social War14) or of a provincial settlement of citizens like *Narbo Martius* in Gaul (a Roman colony founded in 118 BC15) or *Narona* in Dalmatia (a *colonia Iulia*, probably founded by Caesar16). Less probably, the letters NA could also be interpreted as the beginning of the formulaic expressions

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natus or natus domo. These are not frequent among legionaries, but are attested in a number of inscriptions\(^\text{17}\). A third, but unlikely, possibility is that the legionary's origin was marked by the term natio (declined in the ablative). This is of course rare, since in early imperial times (i.e., according to the chronology suggested by the palaeography of the inscription, see below) soldiers who served in the legions should normally have been Roman citizens at the time of the levy. However, there were exceptions to this general rule, namely in the case of peregrini who acquired citizenship when they entered the legions\(^\text{18}\). Several inscriptions, especially from the Balkan area, testify to this phenomenon, but they mostly date to the mid or late imperial period\(^\text{19}\).

In the third line the word ending in R preceding the letters LEG can be restored in several ways. The most likely restoration, based on the frequency of such terms in military inscriptions, is a non-abbreviated word such as signifer, speculator, aquilifer or imaginifer leg(ionis), the first two solutions being far more common. However, abbreviated formulas such as veter(anus) leg(ionis) should also be taken into consideration. The end of the line most probably recorded the numeral of the legion, followed perhaps by an abbreviated title; however, comparison with the probable text distribution in the other lines suggests that there was not enough space for the latter.

It is likely that the fourth and last line of the inscription was entirely occupied by the formula [hic situs] est, which, as shown by its surviving part, was probably not to be abbreviated. Since the ordinatio of the text seems to have been quite regular, the space between the triangular interpunct and the E (8 cm = 3 and a half Roman inches) was probably repeated before the interpunct itself and the end of the preceding word (situs). A similar empty space probably appeared between the T of est and the end of the inscribed field (figs. 3-4).

\(^{17}\) See for instance CIL III, 4188: L(uicius) Licinius / L(uici) f(ilius) Clau(dia) Lepid(us) / natus dom[o]/ Verona vet(erin anus)/ leg(ionis) X[V] Apoll(inaris)]; CIL III, 7520: D(is) M(anibus) / Iul(ius) Ponticu/s vixit / ann(os) XXXXX milit(avit) / ann(os) XIV in leg(ione) V / Mac(edonica) natu s Amastra/is Iul(ius) Ponticus / frater Sentius Pon(ticus) vet(erin anus) Sentius Pon(ticus) mil(es) leg(ionis) V Mac(edonicae) / fratres cohered(es) / b(e) m(entis) / d(e) s(uo) p(osuerunt); AE 1961, 15: C(aius) Iulius Ca(ii) f(ilius) Papuaria natu s Cormasa / missicus lecinis (!) / VII eques mono/mentum (!) fecit / sibi et Iulio Iuicia do libero / suo.


\(^{19}\) See for instance CIL III, 3301: D(is) M(anibus) / Aur(elio) Procudino mil(itii) / q(u) vixit annos XXV / dies L Aur(elius) Procudus / vet(erin anus) leg(ionis) II Ad(iutricis) natio nie / Saurus domo Heme/ sa cum Cl(audia) Candida / parentes filio kal/rissimo posu(erunt) cum Aeli(a) Justina coniug(е); CIL III, 8730: Ven(nonia?) Quartilla Aur(elio) Materno / coniugi incomparabilе et innocentissimo vet(erin an) leg(ionis) II Italic(ae) natio nie Noric(o) qui vixit / ann(os) XLVIII possit coniunx b(e) m(entis); AE 1941, 166: D(is) M(anibus) / Ulpo(ius) Maximus / nat(ione) Pan(nonis) mil(es) leg(ionis) X G(eminiae) stip(endiorum) XVIII / anno(rum) XXXVIII redi(ents) a Parthia de/cessit III Non(as) / Sept(embres) heres faciendum curavit / Tertyllo (!) et Cle/mente co(n)s(ulibus).
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Fig. 3. Facsimile drawing and hypothetical reconstruction of the newly discovered fragmentary inscription (© Gaia Trombin)

Fig. 4. 3D rendering of the reconstructed fragmentary inscription (© Gaia Trombin)
The fragmentary status of the inscription and its post-classical reuse cause numerous problems of interpretation. In particular, two issues have to be addressed: (1) the dating of the monument and (2) its geographical provenance.

As for the first point, some help is provided by palaeographic analysis (fig. 5): the letters with serifs, the shape of the Es, the triangular interpunct at the beginning of line 4, and, in general, the regular and elegant letter forms suggest that the inscription dates to the 1st century AD or, at the latest, to the earlier decades of the 2nd century AD. This is also confirmed by the presence of the non-abbreviated funerary formula *hic situs est*, which probably occupied the entire last line of the text\(^{20}\).

Insofar as the origin of the inscription is concerned, the combination of the formulas *signifer / speculator / aquilifer / imaginifer* or *veter(anus) legionis* and *hic situs est* is so widespread in the Roman world that it cannot be associated with any specific area. Nonetheless, since the inscription was found in Venice, two areas of the empire should be taken into closer consideration to determine its origin: the eastern section of the Augustan *Regio X* (later *Venetia et Histria*) and the coast of the province of Dalmatia. In fact, most Roman inscriptions that were reused in Venice came from either of these areas\(^{21}\). In the former, however, the formula *hic situs est* is very rarely attested: its use by legionaries is concentrated in the area of Aquileia (four inscriptions\(^{22}\), with two more inscriptions coming from a context of reuse and from an antiquarian collection\(^{23}\). On the contrary, in Dalmatia the use of *hic situs est* is extremely common, especially among legionaries\(^{24}\). As a result, the stele is more likely to come from the Dalmatian shores of the Adriatic, rather than from its Italian side. This would be confirmed of course if the reading *Na[ro(na)]* in the second line were correct. But a Dalmatian provenance is also possible if one accepts the other most probable restoration: *Na[rb(one)].* In fact, legionaries from southern Gaul are widely attested in Dalmatia both epigraphically\(^{25}\) and from a passage by

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22. *CIL* V, 911, 920, 927, 932.

23. *AE* 1959, 262 (*spolium* from Cittanova / Eraclea) and *CIL* V, 2500 (from the Obizzi collection, once housed in the Cataio castle near Padua).


Tacitus, who mentions that in AD 65 levies were held in Narbonese Gaul, Africa and Asia to recruit the legions for Illyricum. At any rate a provenance from Aquileia or the eastern Regio X cannot be dismissed. On the basis of all the considerations that have been discussed so far, the following tentative restoration of the text of the inscription can be proposed:

[- -]\textit{us} + \textit{[f(ilius)] - - -}  
[- -]\textit{us Na[r(b)one]?}  
[- -]\textit{r leg(ionis) [- - -]}  
\textit{hic situs} \textit{est}.

One last consideration can be made concerning the potential origin of this newly inscribed stone and its findspot. As mentioned above, the inscription was discovered reused in a building adjacent to the San Vidal bell-tower in Venice. It is relevant here to note that the base of this campanile incorporates one of the most famous Venetian

Fig. 5. Detail showing palaeographic features of lines 2-4 of the newly discovered fragmentary inscription (© Lorenzo Calvelli)

epigraphic spolia (figs. 6–7). This is a funerary slab (divided into two separate pieces) made for himself by Cn. Numerius Fronto, a veteran of the legio VIII Augusta, who had been an eques legionis and who also served as a quattuorvir iure dicundo in an unspecified civic community. Theodor Mommsen assigned this inscription to Altinum, although he was well aware that Cn. Numerius Fronto was not a member of the principal voting-tribe associated with this municipium (the Scaptia), but patently belonged to the Voltinia. Future research should concentrate on the provenance of this inscription, which dates to the Augustan or early Julio-Claudian period. In fact, legionaries and veterans from the legio VIII Augusta are widely attested in the former Illyricum, where the legion is believed to have been based in the late Augustan period, even if its precise transfers and garrison bases remain uncertain. Several veterans from the same legion are also known to have settled at Aquileia. Cn. Numerius Fronto could have been a quattuorvir iure dicundo in Altinum (as it is generally accepted), but he could also have held this magistracy in one of the Roman colonies of Dalmatia, such as Salona or Narona, as well as in Aquileia.


29. A late 16th-century source (Francesco Sansovino’s 1581 guidebook to Venice) states that this inscription came from Pula in Istria; see F. Sansovino, Venetia, città nobilissima et singolare, descritta in XIII libri, Venezia 1581, f. 45v: «A pie del suo campanile sono due inscrizioni antiche di un Caio Numero: portate credo io da Puola». This piece of information was rejected (without adequate explanation) by Mommsen (CIL V, 2162: «Pola venisse Venetias credit Sansovino [...] temere»).


33. The traditional view that Roman colonies were only governed by duo viri has long been recognized as inadequate; for the case of Dalmatian colonies see A. Földy, «Caesarische und augusteische
Fig. 6. CIL V, 2162, lines 1-2 (© Lorenzo Calvelli)

Fig. 7. CIL V, 2162, lines 3-7 (© Oliviero Zane)

during the period when this town was designated as a *municipium civium Romanorum* and, later, as a Roman colony\(^\text{34}\). As for the Voltinia, even if no specific town in the Adriatic context was assigned to this voting-tribe, its presence is well attested epigraphically both in the eastern part of the *Regio X* and throughout Dalmatia\(^\text{35}\). Such a circumstance can be explained by the presence of several legionaries and veterans who were native of other geographic areas of the empire and had originally been registered in the *Voltinia* in their hometown (usually either in Narbonese Gaul or at Philippi in Macedonia), but had died or settled down in or around the areas where their legions were stationed.

To conclude, archaeological data and textual analysis seem to indicate that the broken inscribed stele that was recently found as a *spolium* in the vicinity of the church of San Vidal in Venice came either from the eastern shores of the Adriatic or from the eastern part of the *Regio X*. In particular it seems likely that the legionary mentioned in the inscription was a native of Narbonese Gaul who died in Dalmatia: this is suggested by the funerary formula *[hic situs] est*, as well as by the letters NA, which should indicate his *origo* (possibly Na[rbone], or, maybe, Na[riona]) and appear right after the legionary’s *cognomen*. Finally, the new epigraphic document can perhaps be associated with the long-known funerary monument of Cn. Numerius Fronto, which is built into the base of the San Vidal bell-tower and also commemorates a legionary, who also possibly came from Narbonese Gaul. On a purely speculative basis, it can be suggested that these two inscribed epitaphs originally belonged to a common burial ground that hosted veterans from Narbonese Gaul, who had fought in the Roman legions (perhaps in the same one i.e. the *legio VIII Augusta*) and who later settled in Dalmatia (or alternatively in the *Regio X*, for instance, at Aquileia). A more thorough investigation of the circumstances that brought these two inscribed artefacts to Venice is needed before such a hypothesis can be validated.


\(^{35}\) For the eastern tenth region see *AE* 1995, 564 (from Pula), *CIL* V, 486 (from Tergeste), *InscrAq* 155, 2744, 2762, 2835 (from Aquileia). See also A. Garzetti, «Veterani nelle valli alpine», in *RSA* 6-7, 1976-1977, pp. 173-187, part. p. 184. For Dalmatia see *CIL* III, 2031, 2035, 8740 and *AE* 1991, 1291 (from Salona), *CIL* III, 2714, 2717, 14933 (from *Tilurium*), *CIL* III, 2838, 13251 and *ILJug* III, 2818 (from *Burnum*); *CIL* III, 9761 (from *Aequum*).