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## A New Latin Building Inscription from the Gaziantep Zeugma Mosaic Museum

### *Gaziantep Zeugma Mozaik Müzesi'nden Yeni Bir Latince İnşa Yazıtı*

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**Abstract:** This study examines a previously unpublished Latin inscription preserved in the stone artifacts depot of the Gaziantep Zeugma Mosaic Museum. Although the exact context is unclear, the inscription must have been erected to commemorate a construction activity in which Publius Iulius Satto and Publius Victorinius Mercator, who served as *contubernales* in the Roman army, were likely involved. The inscription records that these individuals served in the first *cohors* within the *centuria* of the *primus pilus*. The tradition of naming *centuriae* after their commanders (*centurio*) disappeared from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE onwards; instead, as is the case in this inscription, they began to be named according to the duty title within the *centuria*. Since this title is given as *primus pilus* in the inscription, it is understood that these two *contubernales*, Satto and Mercator, were in the first *centuria* of the first *cohors*, the most prestigious unit in the legion. The inscription does not specify to which legion this unit was attached; however, it was most probably one of the legions temporarily stationed in the region and attested by numerous stamped tiles. Both the Celtic origin of the *cognomen* Satto and the exclusive concentration of the name Victorinius in the Rhineland point to a likely Gallo-Germanic origin for these *contubernales*. Based on the naming convention of the *centuria*, the inscription is dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.

**Keywords:** Latin Inscriptions, *Primus pilus*, *Cohors Prima*, Zeugma Mosaic Museum, Roman Army

**Öz:** Bu çalışmada Gaziantep Zeugma Mozaik Müzesi'nin taş eserler deposunda muhafaza edilen ve daha önce yayımlanmamış bir Latince yazıt incelenmektedir. Hangi bağlamda kaleme alındığı tam olarak belli olmasa da yazıt, Roma ordusunda *contubernalis* olarak hizmet veren Publius Iulius Satto ve Publius Victorinius Mercator'un olasılıkla dâhil oldukları bir inşa faaliyetinin anısına dikilmiş olmalıdır. Yazıtta bu kişilerin, ilk *cohors* bünyesindeki *primus pilus*'un *centuria*'sında görevli oldukları kayıtlıdır. *Centuria*'ların, komutanlarının (*centurio*) adlarına izafeten adlandırılma geleneği MS 3. yüzyıldan itibaren ortadan kalkmış ve bunun yerine, bu yazıtta olduğu gibi *centuria* içindeki görev unvanına göre isimlendirilmeye başlanmıştır. Bu unvan da yazıtta *primus pilus* olarak verildiğinden, Satto ve Mercator adlı bu iki *contubernalis*'in lejyondaki en prestijli birim olan ilk *cohors*'un ilk *centuria*'sında buldukları anlaşılmaktadır. Bu birimin hangi lejyona bağlı olduğu bilgisi yazıtta yer almamaktadır; ancak bu lejyon, büyük olasılıkla bölgede geçici görevle bulunan ve çok sayıda damgalı kiremitle belgelenen lejyonlardan biri olmalıdır. Satto *cognomen*'inin Keltçe kökeni ve *Victorinius nomen*'inin Ren Bölgesi'ndeki yoğunluğu, bu *contubernales* için muhtemel bir Galya-Germen kökenine işaret etmektedir. Yazıt, *centuria*'nın adlandırılma şekline göre MS 3. yüzyıla tarihlendirilmektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** Latince Yazıtlar, *Primus pilus*, *Cohors Prima*, Zeugma Mozaik Müzesi, Roma Ordusu

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## Introduction

This study examines an unpublished Latin inscription preserved in the stone artifacts depot of the Gaziantep Zeugma Mosaic Museum. The object was acquired by the museum through purchase in 1998 and registered under inventory no. T.839. No definitive information is available regarding its original findspot or provenance. Within the framework of our 2025 research, the inscription was documented during our work in the museum depot and is here analysed for the first time. Due to the worn condition of the inscribed surface and the partial loss of clarity in the letter traces, particularly in the deformed letters of the lower section, Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) method was applied to enhance the visibility of the surface details and improve the legibility of the inscription<sup>1</sup>.

Description: This is a horizontal, rectangular architectural block or stele carved from limestone. The upper section features a low-profile pediment, while the main body contains the inscribed text. The stylized triangular pediment above the inscription echoes classical temple architecture. Within this pediment, a central circular rosette (floral motif) is flanked by symmetrical laurel branches extending outward to either side. The text itself is framed within a tabula ansata. Flanking both sides of the rectangular epigraphic field are triangular handles (ansae), which are detailed with tiered, concave grooves.

Inv. no. T.839.

Measurements: H. 18,5 cm; W. 33 cm; D. 10 cm; LH. 1,5–3,3 cm.



Coh(ortis) I C(enturiae) p(rimi) p(ili)  
 2 contib(ernales) Publ(ius)  
 Iul(ius) Satto, Publi(us)  
 4 Victorin(ius) Mercat(or).

*Publius Iulius Satto (and) Publius  
 Victorinius Mercator, contubernales of the  
 Cohors Prima in the centuria of the primus  
 pilus (made this).*

It is not entirely clear in what context the inscription was carved on this stele. The stele is intact

<sup>1</sup> RTI is a computational imaging technique that records surface details under varying lighting conditions and is particularly useful for enhancing worn letter traces in epigraphical research. See Malzbender *et al.* 2001. The 'diffuse gain' rendering mode was used to improve the visibility of the letter details.

at the bottom, and the inscription is placed within a tabula that is likewise preserved in its entirety; it is therefore certain that the text did not continue beyond its present limits. The name of one of the *contubernales*, Satto, is certainly in the nominative, which might suggest expanding the abbreviation CONTIB as contib(ernalis), referring to Publ(ius) Iul(ius) Satto, while taking PVBLI VICTORIN MERCAT as ablatives, i.e. Publi(o) Victorin(io) Mercat(ori). Such an interpretation would imply a funerary context. This, however, seems too forced and, in our view, is unlikely to be correct here. Another possibility would be a religious dedicatory context; yet the absence of any divine name in the inscription, combined with our lack of knowledge concerning the spatial context of the monument, makes this interpretation equally unlikely. We therefore consider it preferable to interpret the text as commemorating building work carried out by these soldiers, comparable to the inscribed records left by legionary cohorts on Hadrian's Wall to mark the completion of assigned building sections (see below).

L. 1: C. For the reverse C employed for the abbreviation for both *centurio* and *centuria* in Latin inscriptions, see Speidel 2015, 330.

Coh(ortis<sup>2</sup>) I C(enturiae) p(rimi) p(ili). It is well attested that most legionary *centuriae* were named after the *centurion* who commanded them; see, for example, a few cases from Zeugma, the headquarters of *legio IV Scythica*: Speidel 1998, 178 no. 8 = Omar 2017, 209 no. 50: (centuria) Marciani; Speidel 1998, 178, no. 11 = Omar 2017, 209-210 no. 51: (centuria) Probi; Speidel 1998, 178, no. 12 = Omar 2017, 211 no. 52: c(enturia) Kari. From the end of the second century CE onwards, however, it became increasingly common to designate *centuriae* by the *centurion's* title, as in the present inscription. This development is usually explained by the increased mobility of troops and the more frequent use of vexillations, since such designations made it easier to assign soldiers to their proper place in marching and battle order<sup>3</sup>.

M. P. Speidel argues that the word *cohors* disappears from the *centurion's* title in the imperial period, leaving only the numeral and the post<sup>4</sup>, and that it need not be supplied in the designation of the *centuria*<sup>5</sup>. It should be emphasized, however, that this observation applies only to

<sup>2</sup> We have preferred to expand the abbreviation as the genitive form of the word, although, as Cupcea & Zăgreanu (2018, 144 n. 18) emphasize, the ablative form, i.e. *cohorte*, is also possible, since it may indicate both the precise location of the soldier and his membership within a given unit or subunit.

<sup>3</sup> Faure 2013, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Speidel 1983, 43-61. Chr. Bruun (1988, 35-36), on the basis of a newly discovered inscription from Cappadocia (Mitford 1988, 176-178 no. 12), argues that Speidel's theory cannot be applied to all cases. His objection rests on the formulation *fuit ordine in sexta hastatus I posterior*: the feminine ending of *sexta*, he suggests, implies an omitted feminine noun, namely *cohors*. Speidel (1990, 135-137), however, responded in a later article that the word to be understood is not *cohors* but *centuria*, thereby maintaining his original position on the matter.

<sup>5</sup> Cupcea & Zăgreanu (2018, 144 n. 20) also refers to *centurion* lists (joint dedications made to the emperor or his family by all the professional officers of a legion) which include the term *cohors* beginning under Septimius Severus.

cases in which the *centurion's* position is expressed solely by numerals, as e.g. in *VI hast. post.*, and not to instances in which the term itself is explicitly written, as in the present inscription. The designation of a *centuria* by reference to a *primus pilus*<sup>6</sup>, i.e. the senior *centurion* of the first cohort in a Roman legion, is rarely attested. To the best of our knowledge, the closest parallels are provided by a centurial stone discovered in the Stanwix to Burgh-by-Sands sector of Hadrian's Wall, where it marked construction carried out by legionary cohorts<sup>7</sup>, and by a funerary monument from Potaissa (Turda, Romania)<sup>8</sup>.

Although no legion is named in the inscription<sup>9</sup>, the context seems to us clearly legionary rather than auxiliary. The exact findspot of the stone is regrettably omitted from the museum inventory; its current repository in Gaziantep, however, suggests *legio IV Scythica* as a likely candidate, given that it was the sole legion permanently garrisoned in the area. Should this prove to be the case, the inscription would offer a further contribution to the dossier of the legion's building activities. A substantial proportion of the stamped tiles produced at Zeugma, estimated at 85%, indeed belong to this legion, suggesting that it was responsible for much of the construction activity there<sup>10</sup>. As Hartmann & Speidel (2013, 389–390) observe, however, the soldiers attested at Zeugma and in its vicinity were not limited to *legio IV Scythica*: four Pannonian legions (*legio I Adiutrix*, *legio II Adiutrix*, *legio X Gemina*, and *legio XIII Gemina* (?),

<sup>6</sup> For the post of *primus pilus*, see the standard works of A. von Domaszewski (1908, 112–120) and B. Dobson (1974, 411–431).

<sup>7</sup> *RIB I* 2033 and 2034 : coh(ortis) I (centuria) p(rimi) p(ili).

<sup>8</sup> *CIL III* 908: D(is) M(anibus) | Aur(elius) Celsus | vixit an(nos) LX | Aur(elius) Bassus | vix(it) an(nos) L Aur(elius) | Celsinianus | mil(es) c(...)h(...) I p(...) p(...) | pat(ri) et a(v)unc(ulo) pient(issimis) | ob merita | p(osuit). In their analysis of this inscription, George Cupcea and Radu Zăgreanu (2018, 141–150) provide a new epigraphic resolution for the long-debated abbreviation “MIL CH I P P”. Rejecting previous theories that suggested an auxiliary unit such as *cohors I Palmyrenorum Porolissensium*, the authors ground their argument in the fact that *legio V Macedonica* is the only definitively known military garrison at Potaissa during the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. Drawing attention to the shifting naming practices within the Roman army during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century [specifically, the trend where a *centuria* was no longer designated by its commander's personal name, but rather by its *cohors* and the *centurion's* exact rank within the legion (see above)], their analysis demonstrates that the abbreviation should be expanded as *mil(es) c(o)h(ortis) I (centuriae) p(rimi) p(ili)*. In *AE* (2018, 1336), Ioan Piso states that the authors' interpretation tacitly embraces the ideas presented by F. Matei-Popescu at the Turda colloquium.

<sup>9</sup> The absence of an explicit legionary attribution indicates that the block belonged to a distinct contextual setting within which the specific legion would have been readily identifiable.

<sup>10</sup> Hartmann & Speidel 2003, 122. Cf. Omar 2017, 204; Görkay 2017, 154–155. It is evident that the soldiers of *legio IV Scythica* were extensively engaged in major building projects and infrastructure improvements. These initiatives ranged from the construction of bridges, canals and hydraulic installations to stone quarrying at Arulis, alongside various other undocumented activities throughout the broader region. For a general overview of these construction activities of the legion, see Speidel 2009a, 249–253; Görkay 2017, 154–156. Their engineering works were concentrated not only in and around Zeugma, but also along the Euphrates, extending even to the cutting of tunnels and canals at Seleuceia Pieria, see *IGR III* 1005 = *IGLS III,2* 1137. M.A. Speidel divides these construction efforts into two primary phases: an initial, intensive period during the reign of Vespasian, and a subsequent phase under the Severan dynasty, see Speidel 2009a, 250.

as well as Pannonian auxiliaries, namely *cohors milliaria Maurorum*, appear to have been present at Zeugma at some point during the second or third century CE. More importantly, the fact that stamped tiles belonging to numerous other units are also attested at Zeugma<sup>11</sup>, albeit on a considerably smaller scale, combined with the manner in which these soldiers indicate their unit and battlefield position, strongly suggests that they were serving in a detachment on a distant campaign. As the soldiers' names imply (see below), the headquarters of this unit may well have been located in Gaul or on the Rhine.

L. 2: contib(ernales). For a detailed study on the u > i interchange in Latin, see Zair 2023, 82-105. As his study clearly reveals, while many Latin words that contained a short vowel before a labial consonant underwent a shift where the <i> spelling eventually replaced <u>, contubernalis firmly retained <u> as its standard orthography throughout the imperial period. Based on a search on the EDCS (Epigraphy Database Clauss / Slaby), he finds only 17 instances of this <i> spelling compared to 433 instances of *contubernalis*. The few instances of *contibernalis* that do exist often point to the idiosyncratic habits of specific individuals rather than a broader orthographic standard. For example, in the Vindolanda tablets, his research shows that there is a surprising number of <i> spellings for this word, but this anomaly is largely explained by the fact that four of the six attested instances were likely written by the exact same scribe<sup>12</sup>.

In its strict military sense, *contubernalis* denotes a “tent-mate”; that is, a member of the same *contubernium*, the basic eight- or ten-man living and fighting unit of the Roman army, whose members shared quarters in permanent camps. On the other hand, J. E. Lendon argues that the epigraphic use of *contubernalis* does not necessarily denote membership in the same *contubernium*<sup>13</sup>. Evidence he gathered demonstrates that soldiers from different *centuriae* or even entirely distinct legions on detached service used this term. He therefore argues that *contubernalis* can function broadly as a metaphorical ‘comrade-in-arms’ rather than indicating a precise military affiliation.

L. 3: Satto. This is a cognomen of Celtic origin; see Dean 1916, 95, with reference to A. Holder's observation that Satto is “partly of Germanic origin”. On the Celtic origin of the name, see Holder 1904, cols. 1377–1378 s.v.; Hatt 1964, 327-329; Evans 1968, 199. According to J. L. Weisgerber, the name may represent an indigenous shortened form derived from a name based on Saturnus<sup>14</sup>. The name is quite widespread throughout the western provinces. In Asia Minor, its only known occurrence is the Greek form Σατων, attested in an inscription discovered in Haydarbeyli, Yozgat (within the territory of Tavium; see *I. North Galatia* 498). This findspot is unsurprising, as the area was historically inhabited by a significant Celtic population. In his detailed and exhaustive

<sup>11</sup> Speidel 2009b, 255-271, esp. 262.

<sup>12</sup> For the <i> spelling of *contubernalis*, see also *TLL* IV, col. 789-790; Bowman & Thomas 1983, 135; Lendon 2006, 270 n. 3. For the interchange u > i, see Väänänen 1966, 25-26.

<sup>13</sup> Lendon 2006, 270-271.

<sup>14</sup> Weisgerber 1968, 363.

bibliography on the name, Andreas Kakoschke also refers to Peter Kneißl, who claimed in his unpublished dissertation that the name is “weder kelt. noch römisch-mittelländisch”<sup>15</sup>, on which we refrain from commenting as we have not been able to access the thesis.

L. 4: Victorin(ius). For this *gentilicium*, see Solin & Salomies, *Repertorium*, 208. It is exclusively attested in the Rhineland<sup>16</sup>.

Mercat(or). This is one of the Latin *cognomina* clearly derived from occupations, in this case from the sphere of merchants and bankers; see Kajanto 1965, 321, who notes that the name is common in Celtic areas and adduces three further *cognomina* in the same category, namely Argentarius, Conductor, and Negotiator/-trix. According to the EDCS database, attestations of the name are overwhelmingly concentrated in the western and Danubian provinces, whereas the picture is entirely different, and unsurprisingly so, in the Greek-speaking East: as far as we are aware, it is not attested in Asia Minor or Syria, where individuals would typically have used a Greek equivalent such as Emporos<sup>17</sup>.

The Celtic etymology of the cognomen Satto and the exclusive attestation of the name Victorinus in the Rhineland point to a likely Gallo-Germanic origin for these *contubernales*.

Date: Since the practice of designating *centuriae* in this manner became more common from the Severan period onwards<sup>18</sup>, the present inscription may likewise be broadly dated to the third century CE.

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<sup>15</sup> Kakoschke 2025, 638.

<sup>16</sup> See Kakoschke 2021, 524-525 for a detailed bibliography on the name.

<sup>17</sup> For the *cognomen*, cf. Alföldy 1969, 246; Solin & Salomies, *Repertorium*, 362; Kakoschke 2025, 535-536, with extensive bibliography.

<sup>18</sup> Faure 2013, 22; cf. Speidel 1990, 135; Cupcea & Zăgreanu 2018, 144.

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\* Abbreviations of epigraphical editions and reference works follow the “Liste des abréviations des éditions et ouvrages de référence pour l’épigraphie grecque alphabétique (GrEpiAbbr – Version 03, Septembre 2024)” developed by the *Association Internationale d’Épigraphie Grecque et Latine*.

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