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VALERIUS AND DECORATUS CRESCENS ON CIL III 15169

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Abstract: The paper examines a rediscovered inscription (CIL III 15169) and its dating. It raises the question why the relief depicts one man, though a father and his son were buried under the gravestone.

Key-words: CIL III 15169, Valerius Crescens, Britta, Pannonia, gravestone.

The following inscription can be found at No. 15169 in CIL III¹:

„Buda an der Südseite des Blocksberges bei dem Baue der Villa des Moritz Perczi rep., ibidem asservatur.

Protomae duae

VAL•CRESCES
ET DECORATUS
F H•S•S
BRITTA•CONIV
5 ET•F•P

Kuzsinszky misit.”

Bálint Kuzsinszky sent the inscription to the editors of the volume: Th. Mommsen, O. Hirschfeld, and A. Domaszewski. He also proposed an interpretation of the abbreviations in a study published in 1908.

¹ Suppl. II, 1. Berlin, 1902. Dorothee Janetzke-Wenzel, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Budapest provided valuable support to this study, since the stone is erected in the garden of the residence of the German Ambassador. Ambassador permitted the examination of the inscription and allowed me to take photos. I also render my thanks to my colleagues Barnabás Lőrincz (ELTE) and Ádám Szabó (Hungarian National Museum) for their valuable pieces of advice. The author is to be held responsible for all the errors left in this study.

*Val(erius) Cresce(n)s et Decoratus f(ilius)
h(ic) s(iti) s(unt). Britta coniu(gi) et f(ilio)
p(osuit).*

He dated the inscription to the 1st century AD, due to the “simple and unsophisticated form” of its wording.²

The stone, which was supposed to be lost, is still erected in the garden where it was found. Having examined the stone, I would like to propose some changes to Kuzsinszky’s first publication.

Size of the stone according to Kuzsinszky: 160 cm high, 66 cm wide, 15 cm thick. According to my measuring: 158 cm high, 66 cm wide, yet 23 cm in thickness, which differs considerably from the original statement.

Kuzsinszky published a monochrome image (Fig. 16), which clearly shows that the relief depicts one person, a man wearing a Gallic cloak (*sagum*), thus the description “protomae duae” in the CIL publication is obviously wrong. It originates in the text of the inscription, which claims that two were buried under the gravestone.

There is no trace of later installation or fastening either on the roughly worked back of the stele or on the lateral faces. The height of the rosette of the pediment is 11 cm.

Size of the image area: 63 cm high, 43 cm wide. 52 cm is the height of the two columns at the edges of the relief, the head of each column is 5.2 cm. The right hand of the male figure wearing *sagum* grabs the fold of the cloak higher than the left.

Size of the inscription area: 50 cm high, 51 cm wide. Interestingly, the depth of the inscription area is 2.5 cm at the top and only 1 cm at the bottom.

Average height of letters in the first line: 5.5 cm.

In the second line: 4.8 cm. In the fourth line: 4.5 cm.

In the fifth line the size of letters varies radically between 4 cm (E) and 5.4 cm (P).

Considering the text of the inscription, there are only two corrections to make. First, interpunctio (•) is clearly indicated between F and H in line 3. (The distance between the two letters is considerably big, indeed.) The lower horizontal hasta of letter F is rising from left to right in both cases, so the letter can be easily mistaken with a slightly square P. Second, VAL should be read not as Valerius but as Valerii, since if Britta was the wife of Valerius Crescens and mother of Decoratus (descendant of Valerius Crescens), then it is difficult to presume that Decoratus was not Valerius.³

² B. Kuzsinszky, Magyarországán talált római köemlékek a vidéki múzeumokban s egyéb helyeken [Roman Stone Monuments from Hungary in Country Museums and elsewhere]. Muzeumi és könyvtári értesítő 2 (1908) 87.

³ This possibility was mentioned by Kuzsinszky, too, but strangely enough he did not publish the

The name Britta is worthy of attention. According to our knowledge, Britta as female cognomen is attested only four times: three times in Hispania (CIL II 805, 1335, 5812), and this once in Pannonia. We have altogether one Britta as male cognomen (CIL XIII 5020). It is conspicuous that from the three instances of Brittus we have one from Italia, one from Hispania, and one from Pannonia, yet this latter inscription has a remark: *domo hispano*.⁴ All this data leads us to the assumption that the woman, who buried his husband and son, was probably from Hispania.

There is an important question not raised by Kuzsinszky. If two were buried in the grave, why does the relief depict only one of them? I can imagine three conceivable answers.

1) When Valerius Crescens died and Britta ordered the gravestone, his son was still alive, yet when the inscription was carved, he was also dead. The present form of the inscription does not justify the assumption that the name of Decoratus was inscribed subsequently, yet I have to note that the final S of the name is carved on the frame of the inscription area.

2) Britta used the gravestone of someone else to bury his family members. The fact that such “recycling” is attested in Pannonia only much later contradicts to this assumption.

3) Britta purchased a completed gravestone with a relief at the monumental mason.

The solution may be found in the difference in the depth of the inscription area. Perhaps Britta bought a finished stone, or she had it made for her husband (there is no palpable chronological difference between the relief and the overall view of the inscription), but then she erased the original short inscription that had been written in memory of her husband (thus the upper part of the inscription area is 2.5 cm in depth), and had the new text engraved that commemorated also her son, who deceased meantime. The depth of the lower part of the inscription area did not change since there had been no text there before. The result of the secondary text engraving may be the lack of space to carve the name of Decoratus in the second line, though there would have been enough room in line 3. Letter traces of an earlier or corrected part of an inscription in the third line support this solution.

I suggest the following new formulation of reading:

text in accordance with it, cf. *ibid.* 87. col. 2.

⁴ Brittus: CIL V 5002; II 952; III 3271. Cf. *B. Lőrincz*, *Onomasticon Provinciarum Europae Latinarum*. Vol. I. Budapest 2005², 129.

VAL•CRESCES
ET DECORATUS
F•H•S•S
BRITTA•CONIV
5 ET•F•P

*Val(erii) Cresce(n)s
et Decoratus
f(ilius) h(ic) s(iti) s(unt).
Britta coniu(gi)
5 et f(ilio) p(osuit).*

On the basis of epigraphical features, the HSS formula, and the form of the name (Cresces instead of Crescens)⁵, I would date the inscription to the 2nd century AD, the Era of Severi at the latest.⁶



Fig. 1. The gravestone of Valerius Crescens and Decoratus



Fig. 2. The inscription

⁵ B. Fehér, *Pannonia latin nyelvtörténete* [A Latin Language History of Pannonia]. Budapest 2007, 399–400.

⁶ The finding circumstances of the inscription have been dealt with recently by Péter Kovács in a review, cf. Bölske. *Römische Inschriften und Funde. Antik Tanulmányok* 48 (2004) 201.