



Dedication to the imperial virtues of the emperor's soldiers (CIL VI, 31987)

114450.jpg



[1]

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Honorific.

Original Location/Place: Unknown. Found in front of the Curia, near the Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum, Rome, Italy.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): In loco. Soprintendenza Foro-Palatino inventory number: 12436.

Date: 406 CE

Physical Characteristics: Large marble statue base, originally for an equestrian statue. The base was turned on its end and reinscribed with the present inscription; the base is cracked in several places, but was restored with metal clamps already in antiquity, some of which are still in situ, others are indicated by the visible settings. Originally moulded at the top and bottom, but these were cut back on what is now the bottom, although mouldings remain to frame the side onto which this inscription is found (for further details of the original base for the equestrian statue and its reuse, see Giuliani and Verduchi, *L'area centrale del Foro Romano*, p. 77-78).

Material: Marble.

Measurements: Height: 230 cm

Width: 148 cm

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications: *CIL* VI, 31987

[EDR114450](#) [2]

Commentary: This inscription, still located in the Roman Forum in Rome, records a dedication to the *fides* ("loyalty") and *virtus* ("valour") of the soldiers of the emperors Arcadius, Honorius and Theodosius. It was set up on a re-used statue base from an earlier equestrian statue, and was intended to hold a statue, although it is not clear whether or not the statue represented the personification of the virtues themselves, one or more of the emperors or Flavius Stilicho, the military general also named in the inscription. In any case, it is an important source for the importance of traditional imperial virtues and their continued importance, even in the late-antique empire, although here they are attributed to the soldiers, rather than the ruling emperor(s).

The statue and commemorative base were dedicated by the Senate and People of Rome, under the supervision of Flavius Pisidius Romulus, prefect of the City in 406 CE (*senatus populusque Romanus / curante Pisidio Romulo viro clarissimo / praef(ecto) urbi*; for Pisidius Romulus see Chastagnol, *Les Fastes*, p. 262-264). Together, they recognised the significance of the loyalty and valour (*fidei virtutisque*) of the "most devoted soldiers of our lords Arcadius, Honorius and Theodosius, everlasting Augusti" (*devotissimorum militum domnorum nostrorum / Arcadi Honori et Theodosi / perennium Augustorum*). *Virtus* had long been present in the catalogue of virtues attributed to successful emperors; derived from the Latin for man, *vir*, it was "central to conceptions of Roman identity" and symbolised all kinds of 'manly' behaviour, although primarily courage in warfare (Noreña, *Imperial Ideals*, p. 77-78). It represented a kind of ideal valour that was conceptualised as being of service to the state, which ensured its continued prominence in spite of the evolution of the government of the empire as the principate progressed. *Fides*,



or “loyalty”, was not of as centrally important a concept in Roman identity, but there was a strong connection with the military; the personification of the goddess Fides appeared on coins often holding a spear or in military garb. Two coins of Vitellius and Nerva depict the goddess with a military standard held by two right hands, with the legend *FIDES EXERCITVM*, emphasising the good service and loyalty of the army to the reigning emperor (Stevenson, *Dictionary of Roman coins*, p. 384).

In the case of this inscription, the loyalty and valour of the soldiers was ostensibly aimed at the emperors, Arcadius, Honorius and Theodosius (who had died in 295 CE and is honoured posthumously here), who are celebrated for having brought to an end the Gothic war (*post confectum Gothicum bellum*). However, it also associates this victory more specifically with Honorius (*felicitate aeterni / principis domni nostri Honori*), the emperor in the west, and to Flavius Stilicho, the military general who acted as regent for the young Honorius (*magistri utriusque militiae / Flavi Stilichonis*). His name was erased from the inscription following his *damnatio memoriae* after his death, but a further inscription from the Roman Forum, which was set up by the same urban prefect Pisidius Romulus, survives and records that he was honoured individually, as well as in the text of this inscription, for his protection of the security of the empire (CIL VI, 1731; see [Dedication to Flavius Stilicho](#) [3]). The “Gothic war” that Honorius and his father and brother are celebrated for having brought to an end was that fought against the Visigoth Alaric, and the army led by Radagaisus. Soon after Theodosius’ death in 395 CE Alaric had led a large body of Gothic warriors to invade Greece and ransack Athens (Zosimus, 5.6.1). He was put down by Stilicho, but had managed to cross the Epirus, which contributed to the collapse of an important internal frontier, dividing the western and eastern empires (Mitchell, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, p. 96-97). By 402 CE Alaric had moved as far as northern Italy, where he was defeated by Stilicho in battles at Pollentia and Verona, after which Stilicho changed tactics. He named Alaric the *magister utriusque militiae* for Illyricum, with the intention of recovering the province, but at the end of 405 CE his plans were diverted by the invasion of another army of Goths, led by Radagaisus, into Italy. Stilicho’s “counsels and bravery” (*consiliis et fortitudine inlustris viri*) had brought these invasions to a halt, for which he was celebrated by the Senate and the People of Rome in recognition of the practical security that his decisions had ensured. In a further acknowledgment of traditional honorific practice, the inscribed base and statue were decreed by the *populus Romanus*. As a collective term, the “Roman people” had come into being in the Roman republic, to signify the entire community of adult male citizens; under the early principate, the term had evolved to encompass the notion of the Roman state, indicating that the Romans did not conceptualise the ‘State’ as being different from the individuals who composed it. In theory, even as Rome became an empire, the *populus Romanus* remained sovereign in all matters, but by the end of the fourth century CE, such a notion had arguably been absent for a considerable period of time. As the empire had fractured across political, social and religious differences, it could be said that membership in a common body, even one that had existed fundamentally as a concept of government, was now less meaningful, as it no longer corresponded to the reality of how the communities of the empire were organised. However, as this inscription demonstrates, in times of instability – such as the threat posed to the security of the western empire by Alaric and the army led by Radagaisus – the rhetoric of public honours returned immediately to the traditional ideals and language of the earlier empire. Along with the *virtus* and *fides* of the emperors’ soldiers, it is clear that the presentation of Rome’s security in this period was one that relied entirely on the stability provided by traditional virtues and concepts.

There is some debate as to the identity of the statue that surmounted the base; some have argued for a statue of Stilicho himself, although we might question whether or not two statues, potentially in close proximity to each other, would necessarily have been dedicated at roughly the same time, and for the same victories (see Giuliani and Verduchi *L’area centrale del Foro Romano*, p. 77; Jones, *PLRE I*, p. 853-858). However, as noted by André Chastagnol, when read literally the inscription is dedicated to the virtues of the soldiers, to their *fides* and *virtus*, so it is possible that the statue may have represented these qualities personified (Chastagnol, *Les Fastes*, p. 263). It is equally possible that the statue represented the emperor Honorius, or even the trio of emperors named in the dedication. Whoever stood above the dedication, it is clear that the inscribed base intended to recall themes, terms and expressions from Rome’s classical past, and to present the events of the contemporary empire as having been built around such ideological concepts in order to demonstrate their significance in light of traditional virtues.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Arcadius](#) [4]
- [Honorius](#) [5]
- [Theodosius](#) [6]
- [perennius](#) [7]



- [Gothicus](#) [8]
- [bellum](#) [9]
- [felicitas](#) [10]
- [aeternitas](#) [11]
- [consilium](#) [12]
- [fortitudo](#) [13]
- [illustris](#) [14]
- [comes](#) [15]
- [magister militum](#) [16]
- [Flavius Stilicho](#) [17]
- [iudicans](#) [18]
- [fides](#) [19]
- [virtus](#) [20]

Thematic keywords:

- [Flavius Stilicho](#) [21]
- [Honorius](#) [22]
- [Arcadius](#) [23]
- [Theodosius I](#) [24]
- [statue](#) [25]
- [dedication](#) [26]
- [Roman army](#) [27]
- [Rome \(city\)](#) [28]
- [Roman virtue](#) [29]
- [bravery](#) [30]
- [loyalty](#) [31]
- [invasion](#) [32]
- [Alaric](#) [33]
- [barbarians](#) [34]

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