



[The effect of the *Constitutio Antoniniana* on Roman names \(CIL VI, 2799\) \[1\]](#)

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

Original Location/Place: Esquiline Hill, Rome.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Capitoline Museums, Rome. Inventory no.: NCE 619.

Date: 227 CE

Physical Characteristics: Large marble tablet, that has been broken into several pieces and restored; some fragments from the right side and bottom of the tablet are missing. Found re-used in a late antique wall in Piazza Manfredo Fanti.

Material: Marble.

Measurements:

Height: 100 cm

Width: 70 cm

Depth: 9 cm

Letter heights: 2-2.5 cm

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications: *CIL VI, 2799*

[EDR121711](#) [2]

Commentary: This fragmentary marble dedication was made by Thracian soldiers serving in the Praetorian Guard in the city of Rome, and was offered by them to the god Asclepius Zimidrenus, possibly at a cult site devoted to a number of Thracian deities in the city; a number of dedicatory and honorary inscriptions were evidently commissioned by the members of the Praetorian Guard, judging by the number that have been excavated in the city and which were reused in two late antique walls beneath Piazza Fanti and to the east of S. Eusebio. This inscription is particularly interesting because of the evidence it offers not only for the worship of the cult of Asclepius in the capital, but crucially for what it may reveal about the impact of the grant of citizenship made by Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana* in 212 CE; nineteen of the twenty soldiers listed on the inscription give "Marcus Aurelius" – the official name awarded to Caracalla in 195 CE – as their *praenomen* and *nomen*, which it has been suggested that they adopted in direct response to the emperor's grant. Due to the relative paucity of discussion of this award of citizenship in the literary sources, the evidence offered by an inscription such as this may reveal the more tangible effects of its influence.

The *Constitutio Antoniniana* is believed to have been issued shortly after Caracalla ordered the assassination of his brother, and joint-emperor, Geta in 211CE (*Historia Augusta. Life of Caracalla; Life of Geta; Aurelius Victor, Epitome de Caesaribus* 21). In an unprecedented act of imperial benefaction, the grant awarded Roman citizenship to all free peregrine inhabitants of the Roman empire, a status enjoyed – particularly in the eastern Mediterranean – by a few privileged groups, such as veteran soldiers honourably discharged from auxiliary service, athletes, or those who had been rewarded with a personal grant from the emperor (see Lavan, "The Spread of Roman Citizenship" for qualitative analysis of possible statistics for Roman citizenship before the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, and Lavan "The Foundation of Empire" for an excellent synthesis of how citizenship was obtained from the Republic to the reign of Caracalla). This universal allocation of Roman citizenship must, then, have represented an unparalleled imperial vision on the part of the emperor – and indeed much scholarship has debated why so – but the material evidence for it is frustratingly little. A Greek copy of the actual grant appears to have been recorded in a papyrus roll from southern Egypt, in which the statement "I give to everyone across the world citizenship of the Romans" could be read with reasonable certainty (for discussion of this papyrus and the different issues it presents, see [P. Giss. 40](#) [3]). To this can be added a brief comment in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, in which he says that "this was the reason why he [Caracalla] made all the people in his empire Roman citizens; nominally he was honouring them, but his real purpose was to increase his revenues by this means," as part of a claim that Caracalla's motivation to extend citizenship across the empire was in order to relieve Rome's economic pressure by increasing the numbers subject to inheritance tax (*Roman History* 78.9.5). Myles Lavan has noted that this criticism was unlikely to be the real reason behind the grant, given that Roman citizens already made up the largest proportion of the taxable wealthy in provincial society, and so the additional fiscal benefits must have been



somewhat limited (Lavan, “The Foundation of Empire,” p. 13; see also Buraselis, *Theia Dorea*, p. 8-9). Further confirmation is given by Ulpian, the Severan-era jurist whose *Digest* recorded that “all persons throughout the Roman world were made Roman citizens by an edict of the Emperor Antoninus Caracalla” (*Digest*. 1.55.17), but without any additional details as to why or what lay behind the emperor’s decision. Based on what can be reconstructed from *P. Giss.* 40, Caracalla himself appears to represent it as “an act of *religio*,” giving thanks to the gods for having protected him from his brother Geta’s attempt to assassinate him, by adding to the total number of worshippers (Lavan, “The Foundation of Empire,” p. 14). As suggested by Clifford Ando, “the *consensus* of the empire’s population would speak more loudly if all were citizens” (*Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty*, p. 395).

A vast quantity of scholarship has been dedicated to exploring the different issues that may have motivated the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, particularly given the lack of detailed discussion in the sources. Some – such as Valerio Marotta – considered the grant of citizenship to have been relatively meaningless because it was already common across the empire (see *La cittadinanza romana*); others, like Kostas Burselis, have criticised the argument from silence and have instead inferred that it must have had a great deal of impact, particularly given the number of epigraphic sources that appear to attest to the adoption of *Marcus Aurelius* as part of the nomenclature of ordinary inhabitants across the empire, and particularly in the east, which have been understood as evidence for ‘new’ citizens (see *Theia Dorea*, p. 94-20; Rizakis, “La diffusion des processus d’adaptation onomastique,” p. 253-262). The inscription under consideration here would appear to support this latter argument; dated to 227 CE, some 15 years after the *Constitutio* was issued, 19 of the 20 soldiers listed in the dedication give names that begin with *Marcus Aurelius*. A previous register of Praetorian guards in Rome from 210 CE records only 39 of 802 with the *nomen* Aurelius (CIL VI, 1058). Most interestingly, the soldiers are all recorded as *cives Philippopolitanorum* (“citizens of Philippopolis”) a community in Thrace. Although Thrace had seen a steady progression of Roman settlement and urban development since the reign of Claudius, when the first group of veterans were accommodated there, the first *coloniae* were not established until the reign of Trajan, and Roman citizenship is likely to have been limited to the urban elite (Lozanov, “Roman Thrace,” p. 85-86). This citizenship was, as noted by Athanase Rizakis, attested in Thrace through the enthusiastic adoption of the *praenomen* and *nomen* of the emperor under whom citizenship had been granted, which was combined with the traditional Hellenic *cognomen* (or “known-name”), and accompanied by a patronymic (La diffusion des processus d’adaptation onomastique,” p. 253). In the list of names given here, however, the members of the Praetorian Guard appear to have abandoned the additional patronymic in favour of the traditional Roman *tria nomina*, which 15 years after the *Constitutio* was issued, may be an indication of the norms of Roman practice that were now understood (for the use of the *tria nomina*, see Salway, “What’s in a name?” p. 124-145). Certainly the proportion of individuals in the list that appear to have taken on the names *Marcus Aurelius* would appear to indicate an enthusiastic engagement with Roman tradition and association.

However, as Myles Lavan has recently re-stated, onomastic evidence alone provides insufficient proof of the numbers of inhabitants of the empire that received citizenship following 212 CE; names are too challenging and ambiguous a form to rely upon for citizen status, and their evidence is “sparse and uneven” depending on the communities from which they come (“The Foundation of Empire,” p. 12; “The Spread of Roman Citizenship,” p. 7). Although the naming practices identified by Athanase Rizakis in the east of the empire might suggest a high number of “new citizens” as a result of the imperial grant, the inconsistencies of the epigraphic habit do not permit a more widespread hypothesis for the empire as a whole, particularly given the lack of specific dating in certain kinds of inscriptions, such as epitaphs (see Rizakis, “La diffusion des processus d’adaptation onomastique,” p. 253-262 for analysis of the eastern evidence). In any case, the tangible impact of Roman citizen on the issue of identity should not be overstated, for an individual’s identity cannot always be said to have been bound up with their citizenship. Although “Roman” status came with a number of benefits, such as the application of Roman law and the right to stand for public office, it is clear that the differentiation that mattered most was a social one, which prioritised hierarchy of birth, wealth, education and the associated moral status over citizenship. As Myles Lavan has stated, “throughout the history of Roman expansion, the ruling elite always recognised a social distinction in the societies they incorporated...[they] accorded special treatment to those they acknowledged as fellow-aristocrats, regardless of whether they were Roman citizens” (“The Foundation of Empire,” p. 19). Amongst the peregrine communities too it is unlikely that Roman citizenship overwhelmed local traditions and symbols of power; in the case of a third-century CE sarcophagus from Palmyra, for example, Roman citizenship was celebrated in the depiction of a togate figure, but it appeared alongside a host of other symbols that indicated loyalty to the Palmyrene gods and the individual’s superior social status as a wealthy caravaner (see [Sarcophagus from Palmyra](#) [4]). Roman citizens might identify with Rome, but not to the exclusion of their place of origin.

In the case of the soldiers listed in the inscription here, their adoption of Caracalla’s nomenclature following the grant of citizenship is perhaps less surprising than we might find amongst other communities; they were based in



Rome, where there must have been made more familiar with traditional 'Roman' behaviour and customs, and – most crucially – their status as soldiers made them more disposed to the promotion and advertisement of Roman citizenship. The Roman auxiliary forces were responsible for the diffusion of citizenship at lower levels of provincial society than the usual social beneficiaries represented by elite magistrates and their families (Lavan, "The Foundation of Empire," p. 15). Caracalla's popularity with the army may have further encouraged the adoption of his name amongst the Thracian Praetorians under discussion here too; these soldiers had not yet been honourably discharged following a standard 25-year service, and yet the *Constitutio Antoniniana* rewarded them with the same benefits, for which they showed their gratitude through the reformulation of their names. However, the question of identity should again be raised if we consider the god to whom this list of soldiers was dedicating; Asclepius Zimidrenus represented the syncretism of a particular Thracian deity (Zimidrenus, or sometimes Sindridus, as per *CIL VI*, 30685), who is attested twice in the capital city in association with the healing god Asclepius. The worship of Zimidrenus is otherwise known only from a sanctuary near Philippopolis, meaning that the cult celebrated by these Praetorians was specific to their place of origin; they had become Roman citizens, but their local identity and religious loyalty remained unchanged (for the worship of Asclepius Zimidrenus, see Renberg, "Public and Private Places of Worship," p. 150-154).

The *Constitutio Antoniniana* undoubtedly changed the individual circumstances of a significant number of the inhabitants of the Roman empire following its institution in 212 CE; although we should acknowledge that the process by which "new citizens" were integrated into the various practices of Roman life may have been irregular, it is nonetheless clear that the aim of the order included offering the possibility of living and working within a more universal framework of civic interaction to all who made up the empire (Jacques and Scheid, *Rome et l'intégration de l'Empire*, p. 289). However, we should be wary to overstate the immediate tangible effects of Roman citizenship on many of those whom it now affected; as Peter Garnsey has suggested, the general purpose of Roman citizenship was "an enabling mechanism," which gave access to Roman judicial procedures and benefits. Whether or not all the "new citizens" of the empire ever engaged with this judicial status, or the potential for municipal office that now lay open to all is far less clear. Local social status, dependent on birth, wealth and education, remained the decisive factor common to all communities of the Roman empire (Garnsey, "Roman Citizenship," p. 155).

Keywords in the original language:

- [honor](#) [5]
- [Asclepius Zimidrenus](#) [6]
- [Marcus Aurelius](#) [7]
- [Philippopolis](#) [8]
- [cohors praetoriae](#) [9]
- [centuria](#) [10]

Thematic keywords:

- [Praetorian guard](#) [11]
- [Rome \(city\)](#) [12]
- [Thrace](#) [13]
- [Roman army](#) [14]
- [Roman citizenship](#) [15]
- [Marcus Aurelius](#) [16]
- [Antonine Constitution](#) [17]
- [Constitutio Antoniniana](#) [18]
- [Severan dynasty](#) [19]
- [Caracalla](#) [20]

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Other sources connected with this document: Inscription

[Nomenclature and *Constitutio Antoniniana* in Aphrodisias](#) [34]

A funerary text inscribed on a sarcophagus of Aphrodisias records the change of nomenclature caused by the *Constitutio Antoniniana*.

- [Read more about Nomenclature and *Constitutio Antoniniana* in Aphrodisias](#) [34]

Inscription

[Offering slaves to the Mother of Gods in Leukopetra after the *Constitutio Antoniniana*](#) [35]

A dedication of slaves in the sanctuary of the Mother of Gods in Leukopetra (Macedonia) records a new Roman citizen following the regulation of the provincial governor in 213 CE, i.e. immediately after the issue of the *Constitutio Antoniniana*.

- [Read more about Offering slaves to the Mother of Gods in Leukopetra after the *Constitutio Antoniniana*](#) [35]

Papyrus

[P.Giss. 40 and the *Constitutio Antoniniana*](#) [36]

An edict issued by the emperor Caracalla records a universal grant of citizenship as an expression of magnificence and gratitude to the immortal gods.



Language English

- [Read more about P.Giss. 40 and the Constitutio Antoniniana](#) [36]

Sarcophagus

[Sarcophagus from Palmyra](#) [37]

- [Read more about Sarcophagus from Palmyra](#) [37]

Inscription

[Citizenship for an African headsman. The Tabula Banasitana \(IAM II, 94\)](#) [38]

- [Read more about Citizenship for an African headsman. The Tabula Banasitana \(IAM II, 94\)](#) [38]

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[Caroline Barron](#) [39]



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- [3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/pgiss-40-and-constitutio-antoniniana>
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- [17] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/thematic-keywords/antonine-constitution>
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