



## [Philip the Arab as the 'restorer of the whole world' \(CIL III, 8031\) \[1\]](#)

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

**Original Location/Place:** Romula, Dacia (Re?ca, Dobrosloveni Commune, Romania).

**Actual Location (Collection/Museum):** Bucharest, Muzeul Na?ional de Istorie a României. Inventory L: 356.

**Date:** 248 CE

**Physical Characteristics:** Plaque in the form of a *tabula ansata*.

**Material:** Limestone.

**Measurements:**

Width: 108 cm

Height: 90 cm

Depth: 25 cm

**Language:** Latin

**Category:** Roman

**Publications:** *CIL* III, 8031

EDH: [HD043424](#) [2]

**Commentary:** This inscription was set up in the ancient city of Romula, in the province of Dacia Malvensis (modern Re?ca, Romania), to commemorate the construction of a protective wall. Dating to 248 CE, and the reign of 'Philip the Arab,' it is an important source for demonstrating the instability of the imperial court in the mid-third century CE, and how the emperor sought to mitigate such insecurity through claims of 'restoration,' and particularly of the restoration of the Roman world.

The inscription records that *Marcus Iulius Philippus* (so-called 'Philip the Arab,' an equestrian who originated not simply from Syria, as often purported, but more specifically from an area east of the Sea of Galilee), his son, who was known by the same name, and his wife Marcia Otacilia Severa, provided the funds for the army to build around the wall of the colony of Romula (*coloniae suae / Romulae circum muri manu / militari a solo fecerunt*). Philip has taken the honorific imperial titles *Pius Felix Invictus*, indicating both his civic and military virtues, and has awarded almost the same to his son; *invictus* and *Augustus* have been omitted, in the case of the former most likely because its overt militaristic overtone would perhaps have been at odds with his son's eleven-year-old age. The younger Marcus Julius Philippus is, however, described as "junior emperor" (*iunior imperator*), "prince of youth" (*princeps iuventutis*) and "Augustus," the latter of which was awarded to him by the Senate in Rome in 247 CE; the attribution of such epithets appears to have been aimed at establishing his family as a new dynasty, and one that promoted dynastic succession as a means to stability (Brauer, *The Age of the Soldier Emperors*, p. 13). Like the Severan emperors before him, Philip obtained honorific titles for his wife, Marcia Otacilia Severa, including the *sanctissima Augusta* ("most sacred Augusta") given here, but also *mater castrorum et senatus et patriae* ("mother of the camp, the Senate and the fatherland") which is attested in numerous other inscriptions (see *CIL* III, 4636; 4361; VI, 28111; VIII, 22127). Philip clearly intended to present his emperorship as being different from those that had immediately preceded him; unlike the usurper Maximinus and the confusion of the Pupienus, Balbinus and Gordian years, Philip offered sovereignty in its traditional form, with his wife and son ready and primed for the responsibilities that awaited them (for the principate between the fall of Alexander Severus and the accession of Philip in 244 CE, see Drinkwater, "Maximinus to Diocletian," p. 28-36. Philip's reputation as a better emperor than those who came before him even translated to him being portrayed as a Christian sympathiser, see [Eusebius of Caesarea, Ecclesiastical History VI.34](#) [3]).

A return to the traditional norms of imperial government was welcome given the disturbed climate in which Philip took power; Gordian III had fallen against the Persian empire of Shapur not far from Ctesiphon in February 244 CE, with Philip – then Praetorian prefect in Gordian's court – acclaimed emperor by the troops in early March of the same year. His first duty was to negotiate peace with Shapur immediately, which he did by leaving Persia and abandoning Armenia to the Persian sphere of influence. A one-off payment was paid to Shapur of 500,000 gold dinars, but the deal was not considered a total failure; the payment, although expensive, was better than having to pay an annual tribute to an enemy empire, and the Mesopotamian territory won by Timesitheus – who had initiated the Persian campaign – was retained (Drinkwater, "Maximinus to Diocletian," p. 36. For the fall of Gordian III to Shapur, see Lorient, "Les premières années de la grande crise," p. 772-787). Philip entered Rome in the summer of



244 CE, and remained there until he left to fight a campaign on the Danube against the Carpi; these ancient residents of the eastern part of Dacia had begun raiding Roman territory towards the end of 243 CE, entering Dacia by means of the roads built by Rome to facilitate the movement of the army. Having established a headquarters at the new Philopolis in Thrace in 245 CE, Philip forced the Carpi back to the Danube, proclaiming a total victory against them in 246 CE. He had returned to Rome by August of 247 CE, where he celebrated Rome's 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the *Iudi Saeculares* (Saecular games) in connection with his victory and the promotion of his son to the title of Augustus (Drinkwater, "Maximinus to Diocletian," p. 37).

It is in light of these events that the above inscription should be considered, and particularly its claim that the new imperial family had acted as *restitutores orbis totius* ("restorers of the whole world"). *Restitutor* had appeared on imperial coinage from the Flavian period onwards, and had enjoyed a particular prominence under the Antonine emperors, with Hadrian in particular heralded as the "restorer" of several provinces (see [Hadrian, Roman soldiers and Asia](#) [4]; [Antoninianus depicting Valerian, restitutor generis humani, walking and holding the globe \(254-255 CE\)](#) [5]; [Aurelianus depicting the head of Aurelian and a woman presenting a wreath to Aurelian restitutor orbis \(274-275 CE\)](#) [6]). It had several associations: emperors might be acclaimed as *restitutor* on account of the peace and prosperity that they had brought to a particular province, or it could refer more specifically to the capital itself, where it symbolised the restitution of order after civic strife (see e.g. RIC IV/1, Septimius Severus, no. 140 and 140a, p. 108; the same message is included in the dedicatory inscription of the Arch of Septimius Severus in Rome). *Restitutor* could also refer to the restoration of particular virtues, such as *pietas* ("piety"), *libertas* ("liberty") or *securitas publica* ("public safety"), whereby the emperor's own personal connection with these qualities extended them beyond his person and into the populace of the empire as a whole. In the case of the inscription here, Philip is awarded an even greater achievement, bringing restoration to the Roman world as a whole, *totus orbis*. This version of the epithet only appeared in the third century CE, and was first attributed to Gordian III; it equated the human population of the world with Roman citizens, on the basis that the world, the *orbis terrarum*, was the same as the Roman world, the *orbis Romanum*, or the Roman empire. Following Philip's military engagements both in Persia and the Danube, the implication of *restitutor orbis* functioned on both a grand ideological level, bringing together the disparate and wide-ranging areas of the empire under one figurehead, and in the context of a more localised experience, speaking to the Dacian community of Romula whose security may have been threatened by the invasions of the Carpi.

Indeed, the very occasion that the inscription commemorates speaks to the reality of the "restoration" in the *colonia Romula*; the imperial household had, through the Roman army, made...a wall from its foundation up, around their colony of Romula, as protection for the city" (*ob tutelam civitatis coloniae suae / Romulae circuitum muri... a solo fecerunt*). Here, the role of the emperor and his family was that of restorer-protector; they had restored order to the region through Philip's military action against the Carpi, and had restored security to the city through the building of a defensive wall, which in turn protected against a future breakdown of order should the barbarians return. Such building work was in character with much of Philip's reign; as noted by George Brauer, Philip appeared to sympathise with provincial inhabitants, perhaps because of the remote region from which he himself originated, and demonstrated his support of them through the construction of new roads (*The Age of the Soldier Emperors*, p. 13). His largesse, both in the provinces and in acts of benefaction across the empire, demonstrated a desire to return to traditional imperial authority, based on respecting the policies and behaviours of those emperors who had come before him.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Philippus](#) [7]
- [felix](#) [8]
- [invictus](#) [9]
- [Pius](#) [10]
- [pater patriae](#) [11]
- [princeps iuventutis](#) [12]
- [Severa](#) [13]
- [sanctus](#) [14]
- [Augustus](#) [15]
- [Augusta](#) [16]
- [restitutor](#) [17]
- [orbis](#) [18]
- [tutela](#) [19]



- [civitas](#) [20]
- [colonia](#) [21]
- [Romula](#) [22]
- [murus](#) [23]
- [manus](#) [24]
- [milito](#) [25]

Thematic keywords:

- [Philip the Arab](#) [26]
- [Roman emperor](#) [27]
- [crisis of the third century](#) [28]
- [Danube](#) [29]
- [invasion](#) [30]
- [barbarians](#) [31]
- [restoration](#) [32]
- [city walls](#) [33]
- [Roman army](#) [34]
- [oikoumenè](#) [35]
- [universalism](#) [36]

**Bibliographical references:** Géza Alföldy, [The Crisis of the Third Century as Seen by Contemporaries](#) [37], Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies 15 (1974) : 89-111

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Drinkwater, John, [Maximinus to Diocletian and the crisis](#) [39], in The Cambridge ancient history: The crisis of empire, A.D. 193-337 (ed. A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey, A. Cameron; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 28-66

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**Other sources connected with this document:** Numismatic item

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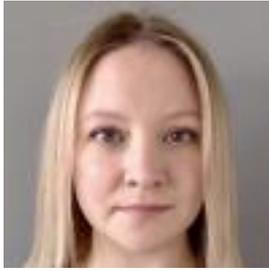
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- [3] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/eusebius-caesarea-ecclesiastical-history-vi34>
- [4] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/hadrian-roman-soldiers-and-asia>
- [5] <http://judaism-and-rome.cnrs.fr/antoninianus-depicting-valerian-restitutor-generis-humani-walking-and-holding-globe-254-255-ce>
- [6] <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/./Google%20Drive/Judaism%20and%20Rome/Files/Files/UNCORRECTED/Aurelianus%20depicting%20the%20head%20of%20Aurelianus%20and%20a%20woman%20presenting%20a%20wreath%20to%20Aurelianus%20restitutor%20orbis%20%28274-275%20CE%29>
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