



Dedication to Flavius Stilicho from the *populus Romanus* (CIL VI, 1731)

Dedication to Flavius Stilicho



[1]

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

Original Location/Place: Found in 1539 close to the Arch of Septimius Severus, Rome, Italy.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Garden of the Villa Medici, Rome, Italy.

Date: 406 CE

Physical Characteristics: Marble base for a gilded statue. The front of the base was cut out and inserted into a wall in the garden of the Villa Medici.

Material: Marble.

Measurements: Height: 160 cm

Width: 86.5 cm

Letter height: 3.5-4.5 cm

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications: *CIL* VI, 1731

[EDR111525](#) [2]

Commentary: This inscription from the Roman Forum in Rome records a dedication to the eminent military general Flavius Stilicho, in the early years of the fifth century CE. The dedication was made by the “Roman people” in recognition of Stilicho’s successes against the Goths and his protection of the empire. It is a rare example of the invocation of the *populus Romanus* in late antiquity, and represents the recourse to traditional dedicatory formulae and ideals that emerged in periods of instability.

Following the death of Theodosius I in 395, Rome’s empire was left in the hands of his sons, eighteen-year-old Arcadius and ten-year-old Honorius, who ruled as Augusti in Constantinople and Milan respectively. As Honorius was too young to rule alone, the western empire was governed under the regency of Flavius Stilicho. Stilicho was a military general who had risen up through the ranks under Theodosius in the eastern part of the empire; he had been sent to Ctesiphon as part of an envoy aimed at negotiating peace with the Persian king Shapur II regarding the annexation of Armenia in 383 CE, at the successful conclusion of which he was promoted to *comes stabuli* (officer responsible for the stables) and then to the office of the *magister peditum* (infantry master), which he took up in 391 CE, and which is noted in lines 3-5 of the present inscription (Williams, *Theodosius*, p. 41; Mitchell, *Later Roman Empire*, p. 95). Theodosius had married his adopted niece, Serena, to Stilicho some years earlier in 384 CE, in order to forge a legitimate familial connection, and also made him the official guardian of the young Honorius (Mitchell, *Later Roman Empire*, p. 95). This dedication in the Roman Forum emphasises these claims of legitimacy, celebrating Stilicho as the “son-in-law of the divine Theodosius Augustus and at the same time father-in-law of our lord Honorius Augustus” (*adfini / etiam divi Theodosi Augusti / itemque socero / domni nostri Honori Augusti*). Indeed, Stilicho’s marriage into the imperial household is presented in the inscription almost as a reward for his military successes: “through the steps of the most glorious military service to the peak of royal kinship by marriage” (*ineunte aetate / per gradus clarissimae / militiae ad columnen regiae / adfinitatis evecto*). Rather than trying to mask Stilicho’s ‘outsider’ status or his connection to the imperial family through marriage rather than



through blood relations or adoption, the inscription celebrates his role as son-in-law and guardian in terms of the worthiness of his selection; Stilicho had been chosen by Theodosius on account of his personal and military strengths and character, which legitimised his otherwise humble origins.

Following Theodosius's death in 395 CE, Stilicho commissioned a commemorative oration from Ambrose of Milan, which appears to suggest that the general had been entrusted with the care of the deceased emperor's sons, but also the security of the empire itself (Ambrose, *On the Death of Theodosius*, 5; Cameron, "Theodosius the Great and the regency of Stilico," p. 247-280). This responsibility for the safety of the empire presented itself relatively soon after Theodosius' death; a large body of Gothic warriors, led by Alaric, a Visigothic warlord, invaded Greece in 395-396 CE and ransacked 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 they were 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. It was the suppression of these forces at the end of that the inscription likely celebrated; although it does not state so explicitly, the inscription commends Stilicho for his "singular love and providence" (*pro singulari eius / circa se amore / adque providentia*), promising to award him a "a statue of bronze and silver to be placed on the *rostra* as a memory of his everlasting glory" (*statuam ex aere argentoque / in rostris ad memoriam / gloriae sempiternae*). The fact that Stilicho was in his second consulship, which occurred in 406 CE, when the inscription was set up (*bis consul ordinarius*) confirms that the "everlasting glory" was indeed his suppression of Radagaisus's forces (see Jones, *PLRE I*, p. 771-772; for these wars, see Orosius, *History against the Pagans*, 7.37.16; Mitchell, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, p. 97-99). A further inscribed statue base was set up by the same dedicatee, the urban prefect of the city Pisidius Romulus, in Rome to honour the emperors themselves for the victory, although it was clear from the inscription under discussion here that Flavius Stilicho's role was recognised as being of singular importance (see Dedication to the emperor's soldiers).

It is worth noting, finally, that the inscription records that the base and the statue were decreed not by the urban prefect, the Senate or emperors, but by the people of Rome (*populus Romanus...decrevit*). 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 Gallo-Germanic army led by Radagaisus – the rhetoric of public honours returned immediately to the traditional ideals and language of the earlier empire. In this inscription Flavius Stilicho received commendation from the *populus Romanus* of the western empire, whose safety he had protected through his own judicious leadership. Such military prowess was a common characteristic of imperial success, which was recognised by the citizen body and honoured accordingly. The emphasis given to Stilicho's dynastic connections also harked back to the earlier empire, when legitimacy was ensured by ancestral familial relationships being evident – even if fictional – between present ruler and those 'good' emperors who came before him. Although the practical government of the empire had long moved away from such ideological presentations, and even away from the city of Rome itself, this inscription reveals that in times of pressure and instability, traditional honours and virtues still had the power to validate the actions and characters of those in power.

Keywords in the original language:

- [Flavius Stilicho](#) [3]
- [consul ordinarius](#) [4]
- [magister militum](#) [5]
- [comes](#) [6]
- [stabulum](#) [7]
- [bellum](#) [8]
- [victoria](#) [9]



- [divus](#) [10]
- [Theodosius](#) [11]
- [dominus](#) [12]
- [Augustus](#) [13]
- [populus romanus](#) [14]
- [providentia](#) [15]
- [statua](#) [16]
- [aes](#) [17]
- [argentum](#) [18]
- [memoria](#) [19]
- [gloria](#) [20]
- [praefectus urbis](#) [21]

Thematic keywords:

- [Flavius Stilicho](#) [22]
- [Theodosius I](#) [23]
- [Honorius](#) [24]
- [Arcadius](#) [25]
- [Alaric](#) [26]
- [Roman people](#) [27]
- [Roman power](#) [28]
- [Rome \(city\)](#) [29]
- [dynasty](#) [30]
- [legitimacy](#) [31]
- [barbarians](#) [32]
- [security of empire](#) [33]

Bibliographical references: Cameron, Alan, [Theodosius the Great and the regency of Stilico](#) [34], Harvard Studies in Classical Philology 73 (1969) : 241-280

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Mitchell, Stephen, [A History of the Later Roman Empire AD 284-641](#) [36] (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015)

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