

The Siscia Curse Tablet from a Linguistic Point of View. A New Autopsy

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Abstract

In 1912, during the dredging works of the river Kupa (in Sisak, today Croatia) a curse tablet was found by workers. Its text was published several times which showed differences in certain sections. On one hand it was due to the poor legibility of the text. On the other hand the reason of the discrepancies is that only some of the researchers could examine the tablet personally, the rest of them applied photographs or previous editors' sketches which they interpreted in their own way. Because of the divergent readings, even establishing the correct text order of the outer and the inner side of the tablet has given rise to much controversy. Despite these problems, the text of this curse tablet has become a standing exemplar of vulgar Latin features on the course of the past 100 years, handbooks and publications on the Latin of imperial times refer its well-known "mistakes". For obvious reasons, a new autopsy could not be delayed any longer.

This paper aims to present a revised and interpreted reading of the Latin curse tablet from Siscia based on a recent autopsy.

Keywords

curse tablet; Siscia; Pannonia; Vulgar Latin; revision

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1. Introduction

From the first moment after its discovery more than one hundred years ago, the Latin curse tablet of Siscia has continuously been a subject of investigation. It was found among the archaeological findings of the dredging work in the river Kupa carried out in Sisak, today Croatia, in 1912.¹ Josip Brunšmid, director of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb published the tablet in the 1915–1919 issue of the Croatian journal *Vjesnik hrvatskoga archeoloskoga društva*.² He identified the tablet as a *defixio*, gave an accurate description, and presented a reading and a commentary, without a summarizing translation due to the many uninterpretable parts of the text. The next scholar who intended to give a better reading was Petar Guberina, later a well known Croatian philologist, phonetician (1936–1937). He was permitted to make personal investigation on the tablet by the director of the museum, Viktor Hoffiller who was then working on the epigraphic collection *Antike Inschriften aus Jugoslawien* (AIJ). Two years later the editors of AIJ published a revised, third reading which was based on a newer autopsy and was contrasted with Brunšmid's and Guberina's interpretations (1938). Hoffiller and his co-author Balduin Saria were the last scholars who examined the tablet personally. Later, because of the great efforts the first editors made it became widespread that the tablet had become almost entirely illegible.

In 1958 Emil Vetter rediscovered the Siscia curse tablet, which unfortunately rose from ignorance – he seems to have not known Guberina's reading, nor the one in AIJ, he read only Brunšmid's publication and a reference in Anton Mayer's work on the illyric language.³ Two years later (1960), having obtained a photo and Guberina's publication too, Vetter published a second version, which actually later proved to be less acceptable than the first one was. With reference to linguistics, for 50 years the tablet was referred mainly according to Vetter's first version. Although Haralambie Mihăescu was aware of the different readings, in his monography he accepted solely Vetter's first one without mentioning the other possible versions (1978).⁴ Giovanbattista Galdi also took into consideration the linguistic features of Vetter's reading, but he drew attention to the discrepancies between this one and the AIJ (2004).⁵ The Hungarian philologist Bence Fehér in his work on the Latin language in Pannonia presented a new interpreted reading on the base of the AIJ and Vetter's first version (2007).⁶ One year later Amina Kropp proposed an emendation for Vetter's second reading.⁷

1 For the finding circumstances, see Brunšmid (1915–1919: p. 176).

2 Referred: AE 1921, 95.

3 Mayer (1957: p. 210).

4 Mihăescu (1978: pp. 334–335).

5 Galdi (2004: p. 120).

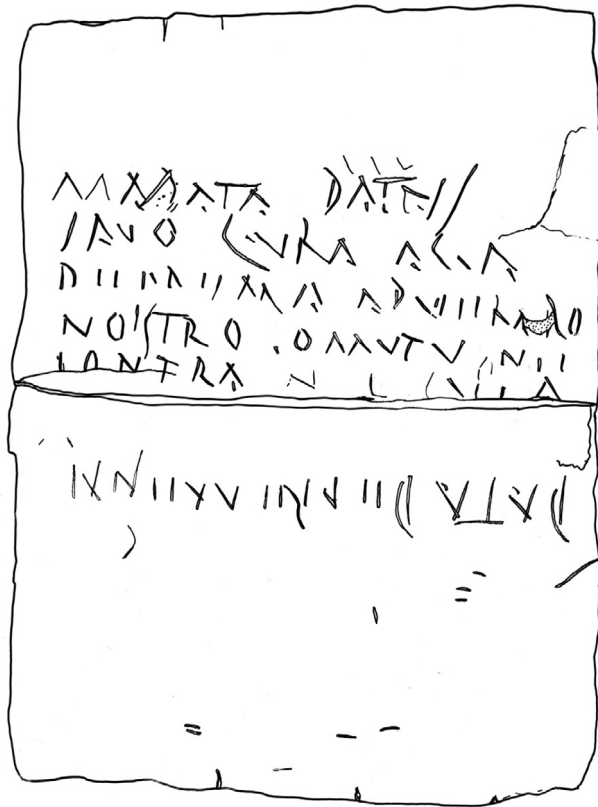
6 Fehér (2007: p. 219; p. 228, n. 46; p. 519, Nr. 80). Fehér later modified his reading in his report on my PhD thesis, see below.

7 Kropp (2008, dfx 8.1/1).

Still in 2008, in connection with the Hispanian person mentioned in the tablet Francisco Marco Simón and Isabel Rodà de Llanza published a new reading on the base of a photo, contrasted with the version of AIJ.⁸ Disregarding the lack of autopsy their detailed and comprehensive article has rightly become a reference work to this tablet.⁹ Nonetheless, they are also at fault for an answer for the hapax names and some language mistakes.

The Siscia curse tablet is not entirely illegible today. It is exhibited in the permanent exhibition of the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb. It was restored about ten years ago, its general condition is still good. Compared to the previous publications, it could not be much more legible – today mainly the same parts of the text are difficult to read as previously was. The only difference is that just one well-marked folding can be perceived in the middle of the tablet, any other traces of folding have disappeared.

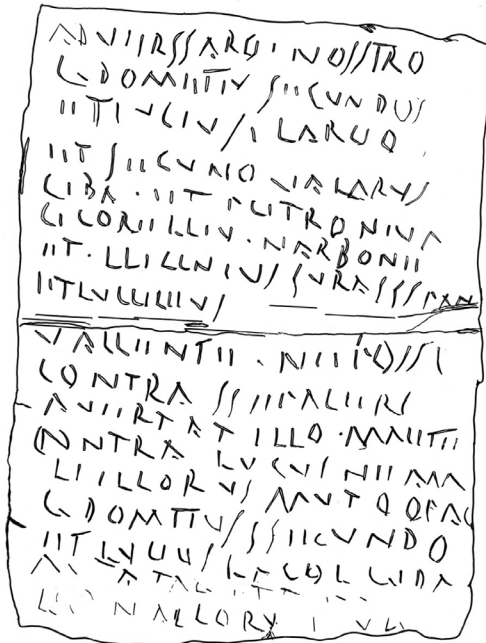
In this paper the results of a new autopsy will be presented which was carried out between the 16–18th January 2017.



1. Outer side of the Siscia curse tablet (author's illustration)

8 Marco & Rodà (2008: p. 168): „The fact that it is barely legible today led us to give up trying to carry out an autopsy on it”.

9 For example: Blänsdorf (2010: pp. 240–241), Urbanová (2014: pp. 240, 363).



2. Inner side of the Siscia curse tablet
(author's illustration)



3. The letters used in the Siscia tablet
(author's illustration)

2. Diplomatic transcript

The text presented here is based on what can be seen today on the tablet. Previous editors' divergent transcripts are compiled in the apparatus criticus.

Outer side

- a1 MADATA DATA SS
- 2 SAVO CVRA AGA
- 3 DEPREMA ADVERARO
- 4 NOSSTRO OMVTV[-] NE
- 5 CONTRA N[-]L[-]CVIA

- b1 DATA DEPREMENTI

Inner side

- 1 ADVERSSARO NOSSTRO
- 2 GDOMETIV SECVNDVS
- 3 ETLVCIVS LARCIO
- 4 ET SECVNO VALARVS

5 CIBA ET P CITRONIVA
 6 GCORELLIV NARBONE
 7 ET LLICCNIVS SVRAISSPAN
 8 ETLVCCILLIVS
 9 VALLENTE NE POSSI
 10 CONTRASSEFACERI
 11 AVERTAT ILLO AMETE
 12 CONTRA LVCVI NE AM
 13 LI ILLORVSMVTOOFAC
 14 GDOMTIVSSSECVNDO
 15 ETLVCIVSLACIOLGIDA
 16 M[-]TATAGIT[-]
 17 [-]NAILLORV[-]

3. Reading with diacritical marks¹⁰

Outer side

a1 Ma(n)data, data s(upra)s(cripta)
 2 Savo: cura<m> aga<s>,
 3 depr´i=E`ma<s> adver<s>ar<i>o<s>
 4 nos{s}tro<s>, omut{u}<escant> ne
 5 contra n[os] l[o]´qu=CVI`a(ntur)
 b1 Data depr´i=E`menti

Inner side

1 Advers{s}ar<i>o<s> nos{s}tro<s>:
 2 G(aius) Dom´i=E`tiu<s> Secundus
 3 et Lucius Larci´us=o´
 4 et Secun<d>´us=O´ Val´e=A´r<i>us
 5 Ciba(lis) et P(ublius) C´ae=I´troni´us=A´
 6 G(aius) Corelliu<s> Narbone
 7 et L(ucius) Lic´i=C´inius Sura <H>is{s}pan(ia)
 8 et Luc{c}il{l}ius
 9 Val{l}ente (!). Ne possi<nt>
 10 contra s{s}e(!) facer´e=I´.
 11 Avertat illo<s> ame<n>te<s>,
 12 contra l´o=V´´qu=CV´i ne AM

10 () Abbreviation in the text, expanded by the editor.

<> Letters missing due to linguistic or technical reasons, restored by the editor.

[] Letters missing due to surface damage, restored by the editor.

´=´ Mistakenly written letters restored by the editor.

{ } Letters considered superfluous by the editor.

- 13 LI illoru`m=S` mut`um=O` o<s> fac(iat?)
 14 G(aius) Dom<i>tius S{s}ecund`us=O`
 15 et Lucius La<r>ci`us=O` {L}? `Cib=GID`a(lis)
 16 M[u]ta Ta`c=G`ita [-]
 17 [-]NA illoru[m—]

4. Normalised version

Adversarii nostri: Gaius Domitius Secundus et Lucius Larcus et Valerius Secundus Cibalis et Publius Caetronius, Gaius Corellius Narbone et Lucius Licinius Sura ex Hispania et Lucilius Valens.

Ne possint contra se (hos) facere, avertat illos amentes, contra loqui ne [-], illorum os mutum faciat.

Gaius Domitius Secundus et Lucius Larcus Cibalis.

Muta Tacita

[-]

Mandata, data suprascripta Savo: curam agas, deprimas adversarios nostros, ut obmutescant, ne contra nos loquantur.

Data deprimenti

5. Translation

Outer side

The above mentioned [names] entrusted and given to *Savus*: take care and force our opponents down, in order they become mute and they cannot speak against us.

Given to the one who forces down

Inner side

Our adversaries: Gaius Domitius Secundus and Lucius Larcus and Valerius Secundus from Cibalae and Publius Caetronius, Gaius Corellius from Narbo and Lucius Licinius Sura from Hispania and Lucilius Valens.

May they be unable to act against them (i.e. against the defigentes; *or* against us).

May she turn them as insane away.

May they not ... to speak in opposition.

May she make their mouth mute.

Gaius Domitius Secundus and Lucius Larcus from Cibalae.

Muta Tacita ... their ...

6. Apparatus criticus¹¹

Outer side 1 *dat is* BRUNŠMID, VETTER 1958, FEHÉR; *ma ata*¹² *da is* GUBERINA; *da is* AIJ 557; *dabis* VETTER 1960; *data istos* MARCO & RODÀ; *da<t> is* DFX 8.1/1 **2** *aga<t>* BRUNŠMID, VETTER 1958, VETTER 1960, DFX 8.1/1; *aga<s>* GUBERINA; *aga* AIJ 557; *agat* MARCO & RODÀ **3** *de me M A* BRUNŠMID; *de me <et> m<e>a* GUBERINA; *adver<s>ari'um'* FEHÉR **4** *no{str}um'* BRUNŠMID, GUBERINA; *no{s}str'um'* FEHÉR; *o(s) mutu'm=S'* BRUNŠMID; *omutu* GUBERINA; *omutua* AIJ 557; *omutua<nt>* VETTER; *omutua<t>* MARCO & RODÀ, FEHÉR **5** *cantra* GUBERINA; *no(s)* VETTER 1960; *n(os) l(o)cuia* GUBERINA; *locui p(ossint)* VETTER 1958; *locui au(t)* VETTER 1960; *lucua(nt)* MARCO & RODÀ **5|6** *lo'q=C'ui a|ud(eat)* BRUNŠMID; *age[r]e isti [possi(nt)]* VETTER 1960 **turned upside down** *detr'i=E'menti* BRUNŠMID; *dep<e>r'i=E'menti* GUBERINA; *deprementi|/b]us* VETTER 1958

Inner side 1 *adversari'um'* *no{s}str'um'* FEHÉR **2L.** VETTER 1958; *Dometiu<s>* BRUNŠMID, DFX 8.1/1; *G(aius). Dom'i=E'tiu(s) Secund'us=O'*; **3** *Lucium* VETTER 1958, VETTER 1960; *Lartio* BRUNŠMID, VETTER 1960; *Lartio*¹³ DFX 8.1/1; *Larci'us=O'* MARCO & RODÀ **4** *et. Secundus · Carus* BRUNŠMID; *et Secundo Vac<e>ar<i>us* GUBERINA; *S{s}ecun'o=D'* AIJ 557; *et. Secundum Carus* VETTER 1958; *et. S(exti). Sign(i) Nova (servus) Carus* VETTER 1960; *Vacarus* DFX 8.1/1, MARCO & RODÀ **5** *Ciba(lensis)* BRUNŠMID, GUBERINA *Ciba(lis)* MEYER 1957; VETTER 1958; *Giba* VETTER 1960; 'C=G'iba DFX 8.1/1; C'γ=V'ba(lenses) MARCO & RODÀ; *P. Citronius* BRUNŠMID, GUBERINA; *P(?) Citroniu* AIJ 557, *Citronium* VETTER 1958, VETTER 1960; *Citroniu's=M'* DFX 8.1/1; *Caetronius* FEHÉR **6** *Cicorelliu<s>* BRUNŠMID; *Cicorelliu<m>* GUBERINA; *Narbone* BRUNŠMID, DFX 8.1/1 **7** *Liccaeus* BRUNŠMID; *Liccnius* GUBERINA; *Lic'i=C'n'ius* AIJ 557; *Liconium* VETTER 1958; *Licinius* DFX 8.1/1; *S{s}ipan(us)* BRUNŠMID; *<Hi>{s}sspan(us)* GUBERINA; *Saurus (Hi)sspan(us)* VETTER 1960; *Sura (H)is{s}span(ia)* FEHÉR **8** *Luccilliu* GUBERINA; *Licilidius* VETTER **9** VALLENTE FEHÉR; *Val{l}en{te}<s>* MARCO & RODÀ **10** *cuntra* GUBERINA; *me facere* VETTER 1958; *issiti faceri* VETTER 1960; *contra eum(?) agere'e=I' (?)* DFX 8.1/1 **11** *illos · ma et e* BRUNŠMID; *illo maliti* GUBERINA; *illo<s> a me<n>te* AIJ 557; *illos. maete* VETTER 1958; *illo.magi-ce* VETTER 1960; *illo<s> ame<n>te<s>* DFX 8.1/1 *illo(s) am{a}e<n>te(s)* MARCO & RODÀ *ill'um' a m{a}e<n>te* FEHÉR **12** *cauntra locui* GUBERINA, AIJ 557 **12|13** *ma|ci : ma|'g=C'i<s>* BRUNŠMID, VETTER 1958; *ma|[-]i* GUBERINA; *ma|li<nt>* DFX 8.1/1 **13** *illor(um)* 'o=V's *mutu<m> o fac* BRUNŠMID, AIJ; *<i>llor(um)* 'o=V's *mutu<m> <h>o(c) fac* GUBERINA; *illoru<m> mutu<m> os fac* VETTER 1958; *.illorus muto osfac* VETTER 1960; *illoru'm=S' mutu<m>. o(s). fac(iat)(?)* DFX 8.1/1, MARCO & RODÀ **14** *C Domtium Sec undo* VETTER 1958 **15** *La(rtio) Cico(re)l(lius) Giba* BRUNŠMID; *L Ccol G da* GUBERINA; *La(r)c(i)o Giba* AIJ; *Lucius. Cricol Ciba* VETTER 1958; *L(a)rcio.L. Giba(lis)* VETTER 1960; *L(ucius) Giba : Cicorellius Giba* DFX 8.1/1; *La(rcio) / L<a>r(cio) col(onia) Gi'b'a(lis)* FEHÉR; *La(r)c(i)o L(ucii filius) C'γ=V'ba(lenses)* MARCO & RODÀ **16** *M(u)ta ta'c=G'ita l'o=V'u'q=C'u(i) tu* BRUNŠMID; *mta tagita [-]* GUBERINA; *m(u)ta ta'c=G'ita ...* AIJ 557; *Muta Tagita* MARCO & RODÀ; *muta tacita locutu* VETTER 1958; *faciat agat ut*

11 The divergent diacritic marks of some editors are unified here in order to get a consequent and transparent summary of their readings.

12 The diplomatic transcript: *ma ata* differs from the emended version of the commentary part (*man<n>data*).

13 Diplomatic transcript: LARCIO.

volon|ta VETTER 1960; *faciat agat ut vol<u=O>n/ta/s* DFX 8.1/1 17 *f(ac) lab(ia) n{a}e <il>loru<m> pr'o=V'te'g=C'as* BRUNŠMID; *S(ura or Secundus) Lar(cio) n{a}e <il>loru<m> fa'b=V'ela* GUBERINA; ... *iloru ...* AIJ 557; *-labna. iloru prutegas* VETTER 1958; s. *limbna iloru pavisca(nt)* VETTER 1960; *li<ngu=MBN>a <il>lor<m>(!)pav<e=I>sca<t>(?)* DFX 8.1/1; [*b?jona illorum* [-] MARCO & RODÀ

7. Commentary

Text order: Both the text and the marks of the pre-arrangement can refer to the original text order. The slight lines on the left part of the inner side, already mentioned by Brunšmid¹⁴ and still visible today, make clear that the main text field was designated by the scribe there. Then the tablet must have been folded at least once, in the middle, earlier than the text was written on it, because the slight roughness caused by folding in two must have detained the scribe from writing on the second half of line 8.

The curse begins with the phrase ‘our adversaries’, and it is followed by their names.¹⁵ Then four requests are worded. Before the infernal goddess of silencing *Muta Tacita* is addressed two of the adversaries are named again. Since the last line of the inner side is not readable any longer with the exception of one word, it is impossible to verify any of the previous editors’ readings.

After finishing the scratching on the inner side the scribe turned the tablet: another deity (the river god *Savus*, in contrast to *Muta Tacita* of the inner side) was addressed and asked to force down the opponents, presumably to the underworld where the goddess resides. This time none of the adversaries were named repeatedly, they were referred just as *adversarii* of the previous side. At last, according to Brunšmid, the tablet was folded three more times (cannot be seen any more), and the address *Data deprementi* (‘Given to the one who presses down’) was written on it. Only these two words were perceivable before the archaeologists opened the lamina. Vetter already in his first article determined the same steps of the production, which can be proved by the new autopsy.

Outer side, line 1 *Ma(n)data, data s(upra)s(cripta)*: *Mandata* was deciphered already by Brunšmid, but *data* was suggested only by Marco & Rodà.¹⁶ The new examination can confirm the great part of the latter’s reading, but what they proposed to follow *data* cannot be proved (*istos*). There are only two oblique strokes which resemble the geminated S over the curse. Double S usually stands for *s(upra)s(criptus)*, which is a common abbreviation not only on stone inscriptions, but on any epigraphical instances, so is in

14 Brunšmid (1915–1919: p. 176).

15 For the same text structure, see dfx 1.4.4/15 (modified): on one side: *Inimicos meos commendo: Domitia Omonia Menecratis...*, on the other side: *Dii Manes commendo ut perdant* (‘I entrust my opponents: (namely) Domitia, Homonia of Menecrates etc... Infernal souls, I entrust (them to you) in order they perish’). And dfx 1.1.1/1; dfx 5.1.4/7 etc.

16 Marco & Rodà (2008: p. 173).

curse tablets, too.¹⁷ *Suprascripta* fits into the context better than *istos*, and it can explain too why the names are not repeated on the outer side.

2–3 *aga<s>*, *deprⁱ=Eⁱma<s>*: These subjunctive verbs are lacking the personal suffix. Adjusted to *Savo* it can be either the second person *-s*, or the third person *-t*. The word-ending consonants seem to be generally unstable in this text,¹⁸ but actually a third person *avertat* was given correctly while all the verbs were written or have become incomplete. If the second person is preferred to the third, the text structure goes as it follows: the magician or the defigens proclaims: the names of their above-mentioned adversaries are here given and entrusted¹⁹ to the river god *Savus*. Then, the scribe turns towards the god and directly calls upon him to take care and to press down the adversaries.²⁰ At the same time, there is no reason why not *-t* should be supposed to have been omitted.

3 *deprⁱ=Eⁱma<s>*: Writing an E instead of I is the most common vulgar Latin feature, because the short /i/ and the long /e/ were not distinguished in pronunciation.²¹ Or, it may represent the phenomenon of recomposition: *de + premo* > *depremo* instead of *deprimo*.²² With regard to the meaning: *Savus* could be responsible to get the enemies (by *deprimere*) to the territory of *Muta Tacita*, who will silence them, and he draws her attention (*curam agere*) to them. The text is not consequent since *deprimere* (especially in case of a river god) could refer to drawn the opponents, although in the inner side a less cruel, a not fatal request can be read: drive them away from the court, make them insane.²³

3–4 *adver<s>ar<i>o<s>* *nos{s}tro<s>*: The omission of the letter *s* after *r* must be a technical mistake, because there is no such type of mistake in vulgar Latin and it is not missing on the other side in the same word, in fact it was written duplicated.²⁴ The absence of *i* shows the well-known simplification of the cluster consisting of a consonant and the semivowel [j].²⁵ Fehér drew attention to the fact that usually a mistakenly written final

17 Cf. dfx 3.19/1 *donatur deo s(upra)s(crip)to* ('it is given to the above-mentioned god' – to be noted that the reading is not without dispute). Although it is not abbreviated, but used certainly: dfx 11.1.1/4 *Adligate linguas horum quos suprascripti...* ('Bind the tongues of those who I mentioned above ...').

18 Cf. in nouns: *advers{s}ar<i>o<s>* *nos{s}tro<s>*, *Domⁱ=Eⁱtiu<s>*, *Corelliu<s>*; in verbs: *poss(nt)*, *l[o]qu=CVI^a(ntur)*.

19 *Do* and *mando* are termini technici for handing the names of adversaries to the infernal deities. For the expression *mandata*, *data* see Marco & Rodà (2008: p. 173).

20 The same change from general statement to a personal demand can be seen in dfx 3.2/73: *nomina eorum qui iuraverunt ad fontem deae Sulis pridie Idus Apriles quicumque illic periuraverit deae Sulis facias illum sanguine suo illud satisfacere* ('the names of those who have sworn at the spring of the goddess Sulis on the 12th April. Whosoever has perjured himself there you are to make him pay for it to the goddess Sulis in his own blood.'). dfx 5.1.4/4: *Data nomina ad inferas larvas ... neca illa nomina* ('The names given to the infernal larvas ... Kill those names').

21 Herman (2000: p. 19).

22 Väänänen (1966: p. 107).

23 Nonetheless, in the ordinary sense *deprimere* means 'to sink, to force down, to press down', but in a figurative sense it can refer to the act of humbling someone or to depreciate, to lower in estimation, too.

24 Though the tablet is damaged around these letters, noticeably there was not any ligature there as supposed by Fehér (2007).

25 Herman (2000: p. 48).

O stands for a singular *-um* ending.²⁶ If so, that would mean the scribe took no notice of the number of the *adversarii*, he must have copied the singular form of the pattern book – the carelessness of the scribe was a common mistake in curses. Despite the frequent confusion *o-um*, it is much more likely that in these words rather a final *-s* was omitted. Seeing that there are more than one adversaries, all the previous editors proposed *adversarios nostros* and *illos* for ADVERSSARO NOSSTRO and ILLO respectively which mistake could also have happened in a vulgar Latin context, but was less likely.²⁷ The superfluous geminations (in *adversarios nostros*, *Lucilius*, *se*, *Hispania* and *Valens*) of this tablet are recurrent mistakes, they are usually regarded as the personal characteristic of the scribe. For the first sight the mistakenly written form of NOISTRO read by Brunšmid and Guberina can be verified by the autopsy, but seeing the inner side another S can be affirmed.

4 *omutu<as>*: It is obvious from the first moment that the letters extant hide an expression which refers to silencing. With the exception of Brunšmid (*os mutum*), all editors interpreted it as a form of the verb *ommutesco*. Guberina explained OMVTV as an imperative form of *ommutuo* with a missing *-e* at the end.²⁸ Hoffiller and Saria did not interpret, neither complete their reading (*omutua*).²⁹ Vetter dealt with it at length, he emended it as *obmutuant* and gave a translation, too (*daß sie stumm werden* ‘may they become mute’) by interpreting this form as a *praesens* of *obmutesco* formed of the perfect *obmutui* without the *-sc-* derivative.³⁰ Marco & Rodà skimmed this question, and besides they interpreted the form OMVTVA as a singular form *obmutuat*, the Spanish and the English version of their article disagree in the transitivity and subject of the verb.³¹ The present condition of the tablet makes impossible to restore the original version of the text. We must count with some mistakes due to lack of space. The new autopsy can affirm partly Guberina’s reading (OMVTV[-]NE) as there must have been a letter before *ne*, too. The letter A proposed by the AIJ and Vetter too, creates a form which is well adjusted to the subjunctive AGA and DEPREMA. But both *obmutuat* and *obmutuant* are a hapax, no such forms were attested in the classical literature nor on epigraphical instances. Vetter presented a theory how *obmutuant* = *obmutescant* could be born, which is not inconceivable on the base of vulgar Latin features.³² *Obmutuat* as a transitive verb

26 Fehér (2007: p. 228, n. 46).

27 The expression *Vixit annos* has some mistakenly written instances without the final *-s*: e.g. *vixit annos<s>* IX (CIL VI 26173 dated to 1–50), *fecit annos<s>* XXI (CIL III 1895 dated to 171–300).

28 Guberina (1936–1937: p. 16).

29 AIJ 557 (pp. 256–257).

30 Vetter (1958: p. 308).

31 Marco & Rodà (2008b: p. 110): *enmudezcan*: intransitive, third person plural “(Nombres) dados, mandados, dados éstos al dios *Save que hunde*, para que se encargue de nuestros adversarios, los hunda, enmudezcan y no (puedan) testimoniar contra nosotros.” Marco & Rodà (2008a: p. 172): *so that he can ... silence them*: transitive, third person singular “(Names) given, sent, these given to the god *Save that sinks*, so that he can take care of our adversaries, defeat them, silence them and that they (cannot) testify against us”.

32 But to be noted: In the LLDB database (<http://lldb.elte.hu> which collects linguistic and technical mistakes from the epigraphical evidences for the study of the regional changes and differentiation of the Latin language of the Imperial Age) as regards *-sc-* verbs the only type of mistake is the omission of the S before

form can be explained, too ('to silence somebody'). Paralelly to the following word-pairs, *surdesco* – *surdo* ('to become deaf' – 'to make sy deaf or inaudible'), *siccesco* – *sicco* ('to become dry' – 'to dry, to dry up'), *sanesco* – *sano* ('to get well, to recover' – 'to cure, to heal') a new word could be built: *obmutesco* – **obmutuo* ('to become silent' – 'to make somebody mute or silent'). It may be noted that all the transitive forms belong to the first conjugation, while **obmutuo* according to the hypothetical subjunctive *obmutua[t]* form must belong to the third one. It can be also explained either by the perfect form of *obmutesco* – *obmutui* (similarly to the *tribuo* type 3rd conjugation verbs *tribuo* – *tribui*) or by the incorrect *u*-stem form MVT{V}OS from a North African defixio, but never checked after Audollent (DTAud 219, dfx 11.1.1/5). On curses *obmutesco* was used a few times (dfx 11.1.1/8 OMMVTE SCANT and OMMVTE[SCANT]; dfx 2.2.3/4 OMVT[E]SQ[VA]NT; dfx 4.3.1/2 OMMVTVERVN[T]), always without morphological mistakes. That is the reason why rather an abbreviated form of *obmutesco* can be hidden in OMVTV[-] and not the transitive *obmutuat/obmutuas*. With reference to Brunšmid's reading *o(s) mutu'm=S'*, for the omission of *s* from a one-syllable word he might had in mind the similarly problematic and doubtful expression in line 13 of the inner side ILLORVS MVTO O FAC.³³

5 contra n[os] l[o]qu=CVI'a(ntur): the second part of this line has almost disappeared by now. It can be completed only on the base of the previous autopsies, but can be supported grammatically. The preposition *contra* requires an accusative, thus *n[os]* can be accepted. The negative *ne* requires a subjunctive which is marked by an *a* in this form of *loqui*. A superfluous *i* was inserted, maybe due to confusion between conjugations (*loquio* < *loqueo* instead of *loquo* from *loquor*).³⁴ The personal suffix is missing, but due to the space available it could be meant to be the active *-nt* instead of the passive *-ntur* of the *deponentia*.³⁵

Brunšmid and Vetter saw letter fragments under the 5th line which cannot be approved by the recent autopsy.

b1 Data depr'i=E'menti: This line could be meant to be the address of this infernal letter. *Data* is the same word as can be read in the first line, and *deprimenti* refers to the verb *DEPRIMA* some lines above (with *e-i* confusion again). It must have been scratched on at last, after folding up the tablet.

Inner side, line 1 Advers{s}ar<i>o<s> nos{s}tro<s>: The expression bears almost the same mistakes as the one on the other side. The emended plural form this time can be

the C, all of them dated from the 4th century on (REQVICVNT pro *requiescunt* – RICG 15, 265; REQVICET pro *requiescit/requiescet* – ILCV 1463; [Q]VIECET pro *quiescit/quiescet* – RICG 1, 132 etc.; retrieved 08.07.2017).

33 There is only one expression with *os* and *mutum* in curses up to nowadays: *ut eius os mutum sit* ('in order that his mouth become mute' dfx 7.2/1). Brunšmid's reading can be correct only if we suppose a much more epitomized version of the inner side on this side, that is: *Mandata, data suprascripta Savo* (referring to the names of the inner side, without a verb), *curam agas, deprimas adversarios nostros* (an order to the river god). *Os mutum* (elliptically without a verb again, ie. *illorum os mutum sit*) *ne contra nos loquantur* (a subordinate directly to *os mutum*, and not to *deprimas*).

34 Herman (2000: pp. 70–71). With an *e-i* confusion, as well.

35 For the simplification of deponent verbs, see Herman (2000: p. 77). On curses: *PERSECVATIS* pro *persequamini* dfx 7.5/1), but except this tablet the forms of *loqui* are always correct on the extant pieces.

either an *accusativus enumerationis* or elliptically a direct object of a verb (for example *demando, devoveo, desacrifico* dfx 1.1.1/1) which is followed by the list of names of the adversaries, mainly meant to be nominative as regards the following context and the other examples in curses.³⁶ The combination of *-us, -u, -o* endings reflects the weakening of the final *-m* and *-s* and the confusion it caused in the usage of nominative and accusative.³⁷

Chart 1: Readings of names in the previous editions

| | Brunšmid 1915-1919 | Guberina 1936-1937 | AIJ 557 | Vetter 1958 | Vetter 1960 | Marco & Rodà 2008 |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Gaius Domitius Secundus | G. Dometiu(s) Secundo | G. Domitius Secundus | G. Dometius Secundus | L. Dometius Secundus | G. Dometius Secundo | G. Domitius Secundus |
| Lucius Larcius | Lucius Lartio | Lucius Larcio | Lucius Larcio | Lucium Lar- cio | Lucium Lar- cio | L. Larcius |
| Valerius Secundus Cibalis | Secundus Carus Ciba(lis) | Secun(d)us Vac(c)ar(i)us Ciba(lensis) | Secun(d)ius ? Vacarus Ciba | Secundum Carus Cibalis | S. Signi Nova (servus) Ca- rus Giba(lis) | Secundus Vacarus Cy- ba(lensis) |
| Publius Caet- ronius, Gaius Corellius Narbone | Publius Citro- nius Cicorelliu(s) Narbone | P Citronius Cicorelliu Nar- bone(nsem) | P (?) Cit- roniu(s) Cicorelliu(s) Narbone | P. Citronius Cicorelliu(s) Narbone | P. Citronius Cicorelliu(s) Narbone | P(ublius) Citronius Cicorelliu(s) Narbone(nsis) |
| Lucius Licinius Sura | L. Liccaeus Sura Ssi- pan(us) | L. Lic'i=C'nus Sura Ssspan | Lic'i=C'nus Sura Issp- num | L. Liconium Sura Isspa- num | L. Licinius Saurus (Hi) sspan(us) | L(ucius) Lic{c}<i>nus Sura <H>is{s} pan(us) |
| Lucilius Valens | Luc{c}il{f}ius Vallente | Luccilliu Val- lente | Luccillius Vallente | Luccillius Vallente | L Lucilidius Vallente | Lucilius Valens |

2 *G(aius) Dom'i=E'tiu<s> Secundus*: The cognomen is very likely to be *G(aius)* according to the general form of G in this tablet. The nomen was written again incorrectly as regards *e-i* confusion, and the final S could be omitted due to general absence of word-ending consonants or the scribe might be deceived by the initial S of the following word. In contrast with the previous readings, *Secundus* seems to be written correctly.

3 *Lucius Larci'us=ō*: he is named by only a duo nomina. His nomen *Larcius* goes back to the early republican era, but was retrieved from the 1st c. BC and used in the imperial times. In Pannonia and in the surrounding provinces it was widely attested. The nomen

36 Adams (2013: p. 227).

37 Galdi (2004: p. 129) reads all the names as accusative forms, even the *-us* endings. Fehér (2007: p. 228) discusses the tablet among the *-us* and *-u* ending nominatives, he considers the different endings (*-us, -um, -u, -o*) either nominative or accusative, and regards them as the mark of the scribe's confusion noticeable all over the text. Adams (2013: pp. 227-228) presents some instances where a switch can be observed (accusative into the nominative or vice versa), with no difference in function.

shows that the cognomen was meant to be the same nominative case.

4 *Secun<d> 'us=O' Val'e=A'r<i>us Ciba(lis)*: The missing D of a *-nd-* cluster was so common that beside the epigraphical instances it can be found in the *Appendix Probi*, too.³⁸ The following name has given rise to much controversy. After a thorough personal examination an L came to light in the place of the C. The *e-a* confusion is usually considered to be a misspelling or a phenomenon feeded by the Celtic substratum (*Atrasmus-Atresus, Eraviscus-Araviscus*).³⁹ The *i* is missing due to the same reason as in *adversarios*. The order of nomen and cognomen is usually fixed, but it might be reversed here. For CIBA the editors came to an understanding, beside *Narbo* and *Hispania* it can refer to *Cibalae*.⁴⁰ When referring to an origo in inscriptions the city is mentioned in the form *Cibalis* (if the entire form was given),⁴¹ and not the adjective *Cibalensis* was given as Guberina and Marco & Rodà proposed.

5–6 *P(ublius) C'ae'I'troni'us=A' and G(aius) Corelliu<s> Narbone*: Fehér in his unpublished report on the thesis of the author of this paper (2015) presented a new reading which would cancel the phantom names of these two lines. In front of CORELLIV two letter elements stand which previously were identified as a C and an I which lead to the hapax name of *Cicorellius* (presented by Brunšmid, and disputed slightly only by Vetter). Fehér proposed to read them as a G then it could be a real praenomen beside the well known nomen *Corellius* attested in the neighbouring Dalmatia and in Venetia-Histria, too.⁴² *Caetronius* was emended by him, too, and he drew attention to its correct form.⁴³ Thus the one tria nomina became two duo nomina.

7 *L(ucius) Lic'i=C'inius Sura <ex H>is{s}pan(ia)*: Marco & Rodà discussed this name comprehensively, their reading requires only a slight comment.⁴⁴ The origo is difficult to decipher. It looks like if it begins with three similar Ss, but one of them (the first obviously) must be regarded as an I. The amendment also rises questions. According to other inscriptions and on the base of the ablativus loci of *Narbone*, the same case should be proposed for ISSPAN: the normalised form would be *ex Hispania* which is not without parallels.⁴⁵

38 Either with double N: SECVNNVS (CIL XIII 5191), or with single N: SECVNE (ILAlg 1, 1071/I). App. Probi. 214. *Grundio non grunnio*.

39 In curses: MATARNVS pro *Maternus* (dfx 3.2/22).

40 Nevertheless, there is a cognomen *Gibba* attested three times in inscriptions: *C(aius) Manlius Gibbae l(i)bertus Priamus* (CIL V 2986); *P(ublio) Iulio P(ubli) f(i)lio Arn(ensi) Gibbae* (CIL VIII 23820); *[P]omponaeus Q(uinti) f(i)lius Gibba* (EMarsi 164).

41 *M(arco) Aurelio Capitolini fil(io) Valenti Cibalis ex Pannonia inferiore* (CIL II7 127a); *Aurelius Clemens Cibalis* (CIL VI 32624).

42 On 7 inscriptions from Dalmatia (Salona and Brattia). CIL III 2414 is to be noted as two *Corellias* are mentioned together with a *Lartius*: *L(ucius) Lartius Terpinus v(ivus) f(ecit) sibi et Corelliae Nice coniugi suae sanctissimae et Corelliae Melete delicatae suae et libertis libertabus(que) suis in fr(onte) p(edes) XX in a(gro) p(edes) XXX h(oc) m(onumentum) h(eredem) u(on) s(equetur)*. One inscription from Venetia, naming a *C. Corellius*, too (Sup-It 15,79).

43 A *P. Caetronius* is known from Pannonia Inferior (AE 2003, 1448) together with a *Valeria*.

44 From Sisak an altar came to light naming the same family: *Silvano Dom(estico) sac(rum). Licinii v(otum) s(olverunt)* (AIJ 547).

45 *L(ucius) Rutius L(uci) f(i)lius Serg(ia) Italica Sabinus ex Hispania mil(es) leg(ionis) X Gem(inae) ...* (CIL V 932).

8–9 *Luc{c}ül{l}ius Vallente (!)*: The lacuna between the two names is due to a surface damage caused by the folding which must have been carried out sooner than the scratching itself. They can belong together, because the first one is a common nomen gentile, while *Valens* is a common cognomen. Both of the names have superfluous geminations. VALLENTE is the only form in this context which most probably can be emended as an accusative with a missing *-m*.⁴⁶

9–10 *Ne possi<nt> contra s{s}e(!) facer^re=I*: The list of names is followed by a list of requests. The legible letters refer to those kinds of expressions which were very common in judicial binding curses. But the spelling mistakes and the surface damages make difficult to interpret these lines word by word. *Possint* lost its ending, the *-nt* was so weakened that it was common not to mark them in inscriptions. In *facere* the stressless, short *e* was marked by I. The superfluously geminated *se* requires an explanation. The subjects of the verb *possint* (the adversaries) obviously are not the same persons as those who were referred by the pronoun *se*.⁴⁷ According to the indirect reflexivity,⁴⁸ *se* represents the subject of the antecedent clause, which is actually missing here. From a point of view of the magician we can conceive the following context (otherwise it would not fill the requirement of the third person): The defigentes ask/request the deity: may the adversaries not be able to act against them. Without this antecedent clause, another word (most probably *nos*) should have been used in order to give a clearer request, but this kind of confusion would attest that the scribe was not aware of the correct use of pronouns.

11 *Avertat illo<s> ame<n>te<s>*: the omissions of the marked letters are known in vulgar Latin context.⁴⁹ The special meaning of *avertere* is well discussed by Marco & Rodà, and Faraone & Kropp.⁵⁰ *Averto* here means not only ‘to turn away’, i.e. from court,⁵¹ but ‘to turn, to convert into’. The subject of the verb is not yet named, maybe it was also included in that above-mentioned elliptical clause. Presumably it cannot be *Savus* while his function is to force down the opponents. The deity who can act, similarly the harmful way what she had to suffer in the underworld is *Muta Tacita*,⁵² addressed 5 lines below.

12–13 *contra l'o=V^rqu=CVⁱ ne AM/LI*: Concerning the subject, there is a switch again. This clause can be subordinated to either the previous or the following one, but the hypothetical principal clause can have an effect on it, too. The problematic AMLI was read previously as *mali<nt>*, which would be a rare expression among curses. On the base of autopsy the first letter is an A, which is followed by an M, in the next line the L was writ-

46 At the same time, although it is less likely it cannot be excluded that VALLENTE could refer to a place name or even to the subjection of *Lucilius* to *Valens* (since the final *-e* could stand for a genitive *-is* ending, too).

47 Due to the different structure and principal verb this sentence was not meant to be the same as the *ne contra nos loquantur* on the outer side.

48 Hofmann & Szantyr (1972²: pp. 175, 103, § a, α): “Das indirekte Reflexiv [steht in] innerlich abhängigen Nebensätzen (insbesondere in Frage- und Finalsätzen)”.

49 Fehér (2007: p. 228) draws attention again that it is more likely to expect singular endings of the accusative.

50 Marco & Rodà (2008: p. 173) and Faraone & Kropp (2010: esp. p. 381).

51 Urbanová (2014: p. 240): in contrast with *dfx* 4.3.1/2 e.g., where it means ‘to murder’.

52 On her punishment, see *Ov. F.*, V, 607–611.

ten a little bit farther in than the rest of the lines (maybe a letter has disappeared) and it ends in an I before the next word *illorum*. Nevertheless, the switch of two neighbouring letters is a common mistake in inscriptions, even more if they are similar.⁵³ If we make an allowance for a fade-out of a letter with some more mistakes, other words can be expected here which would fit better into this kind of text.⁵⁴

13–14 *illoru* $m=S$ mut $um=O$ $o<s>$ *fac(iat?)*: Apart from the possible endings for FAC (*fac, facias, faciat*), the request is aimed directly at the deity. Both the missing letters and the unusual word order make difficult to restore this sentence. If we accept the principle of the fewest possible emendings we can count on only recurrent mistakes: the general weakening of both *m-s* can be the reason for the confusion at the end of *illorum*. Writing an O instead of *-um* (or *-us*) occurs in some of the names above, too. Since the text overabound in the omission of the final *-s*, we cannot refuse it, even in this peculiar case of *os*. *Mutum/mutos facio* is a well known expression of curses,⁵⁵ only the word order should be changed: *illorum os mutum fac(iat)*.⁵⁶ FAC was written at the end of the line, though no fresh damage can be observed, the personal suffix of a subjunctive form cannot be excluded. In order to reckon with the least number of switches, a third person *faciat* is proposed.

14 *G(aius) Dom<i>tius S{s}ecund $us=O$* : the full name of the first person of the text is repeated, this time with different kind of mistakes: The final *-s* of *Domitius* is not missing, in fact a superfluous one was inserted. The *i* in the middle of the word was omitted due to negligence. *Secundus* was spelled erranously (O instead of *-us* next to the nominative *Domitius*).

15 et Lucius La<r>ci $us=O$ {L}? $Cib=GID$ $a(lis)$: *Lucius Larcius* is also repeated, with the same mistakes. GIDA resembles the word CIBA in line 5 where it stands after *Valerius Secundus*. Between *Larcus* and *Cibalis* an L can be seen, for unknown reasons. It may be noted that in line 3 there is an oblique hasta between *Lucius* and *Larcus*, probably their function is the same: it might stand for *L(ucii)*.

16–17 *M[u]ta Ta $c=G$ ita [-] / [-]NA illoru[m—]*: The remaining letter fragments make almost undeniable that the name of *Muta Tacita* was squeezed in here, the silencing goddess was addressed.⁵⁷ Two new defixiones from Aquincum confirm her existence in the Pannonian magical context.⁵⁸ The confusion of *c-g* should be regarded only as a technical mistake, because apart from few unclear examples it seems that the weakening of the

53 VIXTI pro *vixit* (ILAlg 1, 2417), VAELR pro *Valeri* (CIL XIII 10009/284g2) etc.

54 AMLI instead of e.g. *ne ambulent* ‘let them not go to...’ or ‘in order they cannot go to...’ (mistakes can be a syncope of *-u-*, omission of *-b-* and *-nt-*, and a confusion between *e-i*) or even *ne admoliantur* ‘let them not struggle...’ or ‘in order they cannot struggle ...’.

55 *Facias illos mutos* ‘make them mute’ (dfx 11.1.1/5); *mutos et metu plenos facias* ‘make them mute and full of fear’ (dfx 11.1.1/6); *facias illos mutos* (dfx 11.1.1/32); *facias Germanum mutum* ‘make Germanus mute’ (dfx 11.1.1/6), and similarly *ut eius os mutum sit* ‘in order that his mouth become mute’ (dfx 7.2/1).

56 It is similarly constructed as the expression *eius titulum posuit* on funerary inscriptions, e.g. CIL XI 7244; CIL XIII 3895.

57 Marco & Rodà (2008: pp. 172, 176), and Marco (2010).

58 Aq-3: ... *Muta et Tacita! Quomodo di manes muti et taciti sunt, sic qui tibi antepistolam adferent, muti et taciti sint* ‘Mute and Silent goddess! Just as the infernal souls are mute and silent, so those who will bring

intervocalic consonants started only after the fall of the Roman Empire.⁵⁹ Since with the exception of one and a half word everything has disappeared what followed her name, it cannot be determined what used to stand there (probably another request).

8. Text structure

Inner side

1–9 List of adversaries

1 A usual beginning which makes clear that the adversaries are going to be named. Due to a missing verb (*demandō, devoveo* etc.) formally most likely accusative

2–8 The adversaries listed one by one. Formally nominatives, but sometimes carelessly accusative-like forms resembling the spoken versions of their names

9–13 Requests concerning silencing, formally subordinated to a clause not written down

9–10 1st request – subject: adversaries

11 2nd request – subject: deity

12 3rd request – subject: adversaries

13 4th request – subject: deity

14–15 Names of two adversaries repeated

16 Name of the responsible deity, *Muta Tacita*

17 Line disappeared – maybe another request to the deity

Outer side

1–2 A kind of address naming the messenger deity *Savus*, and a reference to the adversaries of the inner side

2–4 Requests to this deity

4–5 Requests of the inner side repeated

turned upside down final address

9. Interpretation

Despite the hardly interpretable parts the Siscia curse tablet is a great source for many fields of the classical studies. It gives an inside view of a prospering settlement where the ‘Romanized’ practice of making harmful curses was alive, there was a group of men who could afford it or less likely was able to produce one. They were aware what to mention in a binding curse. It is a typical judicial *defixio* when not trusting in a favourable decision of a judge, someone or a group of persons turns to supernatural powers in order

a curse-in-reply to you may be mute and silent’, Barta (2015); and Aq-2: *sic illos mutos tacitos manes CRASSA vobis rogamus* ‘so the infernal souls may ... them mute and silence, we ask you’, Barta (2017).

59 Herman (2000: pp. 45–47).

to get help. They wanted their opponents to become mute that they cannot speak in court. They used the same expressions which usually were used in this kind of curses. We do not know the exact reason why this tablet was made, but we can see which deities were regarded suitable for such request. A local deity, *Savus* and a common Roman goddess, *Muta Tacita* (whose story was related in a well-known poem of Ovidius) were summoned against adversaries from different parts of the Empire.

The text was written entirely in Latin (beside the other Siscia curse tablet which is in Greek, but contains many Roman names, too),⁶⁰ the defigentes or the magician relied on only one language. They were not able or they did not want, did not attach importance to use another or more magical language.

The scribe seems to be influenced by the spoken language. The text probably was not composed beforehand, nor with care. The reader can feel if the tablet was meant to be a summary of what was delivered during the cursing ritual. Though the text field is quite arranged, the text structure is incoherent. For this reason there can be many interpretation, even the present article offers different possibilities.

The mistakes made by the scribe reflect a poor education which was based on the spoken and heard Latin, and was not demanding enough. On one hand the scribe wrote consequently, used the same forms for each letter, but the execution was mostly deformed. The letters are characteristic: A is written by two legs, between them there is a small oblique hasta. E was always formed by two vertical lines, and P can be regarded as cursive, too. For scratching L the stylus usually was lifted between the two elements. The most problematic part of the interpretation is that the carelessly written letters make difficult to decipher the words full of spelling mistakes.

The date of production cannot be determined unquestionably. Different times were suggested by each editor on different grounds, from the first half of the 1st century AD to the turn of 3rd/4th century.⁶¹ Dating on linguistic or palaeographic grounds is a problematic, risky task. We have to accept that only an approximate time can be determined for this tablet. *L. Licinius Sura* can represent a *terminus post quem*, thus the first half or the middle of the 2nd century can be the earliest date for the tablet. Accepting Fehér's theory on the *ae-i* confusion attested in *Caetronius*, an even later period is more conceivable, namely the 3rd century.⁶²

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60 Recently Curbera & Jordan (1996).

61 Bartoletti (1990: p. 34): first half of the 1st c.; Marco & Rodà (2008: p. 172) around *Traianus*; Vetter (1960: p. 132) in the middle of the 2nd c.; Guberina (1936–1937: p. 7) before 313.

62 Confirmed by the data of LLDB (92% of this kind of mistake can be dated surely from the middle of the 2nd century on). Fehér (2007: pp. 361–364) and in his unpublished report on the thesis of the author of this article.

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