

SOME REMARKS ON THE USE OF THE ABLATIVE IN CENTRAL-EASTERN INSCRIPTIONS

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In this paper I will present some introductory results of a wider research concerning the language of the Latin inscriptions discovered in the central-eastern provinces of the Empire (from Raetia to Egypt)¹. I will focus on a few points concerning the noun morphology and, more particularly, the study of the ablative. In the table below is reported the total number of epigraphs published in CIL 3².

Provinces	Inscriptions in CIL 3	Percentage of all inscriptions in CIL 3
Dalmatia	5522	36,8%
Pannoniae	2815	18,8%
Non-European provinces	1726	11,5%
Dacia	1544	10,3%
Noricum	1426	9,5%
Moesia Inferior	661	4,4%
Moesia Superior	397	2,6%
Graecia	466	3,1%
Raetia	248	1,6%
Thracia	150	1%

Beside these, there are several thousand more inscriptions, which have been published since in other corpora³. Nevertheless, the numbers of CIL 3

¹ This work has been recently published. See GALDI, G., *Grammatica delle iscrizioni latine dell'impero (province orientali). Morfosintassi nominale*, Roma 2004.

² For a more detailed list of the single provinces, see GALDI, G. (2004), *l.c.*, XXV-XXVII.

³ These are the data collected by Mihăescu (concerning only the European provinces): Dalmatia 8525 inscriptions, Pannoniae 6357, Dacia 2628, Moesia Inferior 1688. See MIHĂESCU, H., *La langue Latine dans le sud-est de l'Europe*, București/Paris 1978, 168. For a discussion of these data, see HERMAN, J., "Le latin dans les provinces danubiennes de l'Empire", *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 29/2, Berlin 1983, 1094f and GALDI, G. (2004), *l.c.*, XXVII-XXIX.

offer a representative sample of the epigraphic material of the central-eastern regions, particularly as regards the numerical proportions between the single provinces. Dalmatia is in first place with 36% of all the CIL 3 epigraphs⁴. More than 18% behind follow the two Pannoniae, the non-European provinces (namely Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt, Arabia, Crete and Cyprus), etc. I took into account only the imperial inscriptions, from 27 a. C. until the VI century of our age. Unfortunately, only a small part of them is dated by the editors with certainty or with a reasonable approximation; the greatest part, however, go back to the period from the second to the fourth century AD.

In the next three tables, I give the total number of morphological errors in nouns and adjectives of the first three declensions (names with thematic *u* and *e* have been excluded, since they seldom figure on the stones). If the same type of error occurs more than once within the same inscription, I have counted each occurrence. The reference-parameter for all deviations is Classical Latin. I distinguished, as far as possible, between: A) Phono-morphological or purely mechanical errors, for example the loss of final *-m* and *-s*, the passage *i > e* in the singular of the third declension, etc.; among these I haven't considered in the tables the use of final *-e* for *-ae* and *-i* for *-ii*, since both phenomena are more interesting from a graphical than a morphological point of view. B) Syntactical mistakes, such as the use of the adnominal dative for the genitive, the accusative of origin, etc.; I have not included the constructions *careo*, *fruniscor*, *fungor*, *potior* + accusative, which are commonly found in literary texts of the archaic period⁵. In the left columns of the tables is indicated the total number of errors found in each of the grammatical cases. The six columns on the right show the mistakes recorded in particular eastern territories. I restricted my analysis to: a) the Greek-speaking or bilingual areas (i.e. the non European provinces, Greece and Moesia Inferior), and b) the European eastern provinces with the largest number of epigraphs (Dalmatia, Pannoniae and Dacia). The figures in brackets indicate syntactical mistakes, which have already been included in the totals. The percentage is calculated on the basis of the overall errors recorded in each of the cases.

First declension

Total errors for each case	Non European provinces	Moesia Inferior	Dalmatia	Pannoniae	Graecia	Dacia
Nominative 41	1 = 2,4%	8 (1)= 19,5%	9 (1)= 21,9%	20 (2)= 48,7%	0 = 0%	3 = 7,3%
Genitive 159	33 (11)= 20,7 %	27 (15)= 16,9%	30 (16)= 18,8%	46 (22)= 28,9%	10 = 6,2%	13 (1)= 8,1%
Dative 185	27 = 14,6 %	12 (1)= 6,4%	74 = 40%	52 = 28,1%	10 = 5,4%	10 = 5,4%
Accusative 102	25 (1)= 24,5 %	20 = 19,6%	30 = 29,4%	21 (1)= 20,6%	0 = 0%	6 = 5,9%
Ablative 67	28 (25)= 41,8 %	16 (16)= 23,9%	6 (5)= 8,9%	6 (6)= 8,9%	6 (4)= 8,9%	5 (4)= 7,4%

Second declension

Nominative 321	65 = 20,2%	32 = 10%	76 = 23,6%	105 = 32,7%	19 = 5,9%	24 = 7,4%
Genitive 131	23 (2)= 17,5%	31 (23)= 23,6%	42 (26)= 32%	24 (13)= 18,3%	4 (2)= 3%	7 (4)= 5,3%
Dative 88	22 (13)= 25%	9 (3)= 10,2%	25 (8)= 28,4%	21 (8)= 23,8%	3 = 3,4%	8 (2)= 9%
Accusative 162	32 (5)= 19,7%	37 (4)= 22,8%	35 (2)= 21,6%	35 (6)= 21,6%	11 = 6,8%	12 = 7,4%
Ablative 109	28 (14)= 25,7%	41 (28)= 37,6%	14 (12)= 12,8%	10 (5)= 9,1%	4 (2)= 3,6%	12 (10)= 11%

Third declension

Nominative 118	24 (4)= 20,3%	18 (1)= 15,2%	23 = 19,5%	33 = 28%	6 (1)= 5%	14 (2)= 11,8%
Genitive 126	31 (6)= 24,6%	23 (1)= 18,2%	37 (2)= 29,3%	21 (3)= 16,6%	9 (1)= 7,1%	5 = 4%
Dative 161	59 (25)= 36,6%	29 (8)= 18%	35 (11)= 21,7%	18 (4)= 11,2%	8 (4)= 5%	12 (3)= 7,4%
Accusative 96	23 (3)= 24%	18 = 18,7%	15 = 15,6%	19 = 19,8%	4 = 4,1%	17=17,7%
Ablative 136	34 (21)= 25%	38 (32)= 27,9%	14 (4)= 10,2%	19 (11)= 14%	15 (7)= 11%	16 (9)=11,7%

As for the individual areas, Moesia Inferior, in spite of the low number of inscriptions, presents a high percentage of errors (on average 19,2% per case): here there emerged a set of morphosyntactical characteristics, some of which I have dealt with in detail⁶. The non-European provinces, which are in the third place in table 1, display the highest average percentage of errors (22,8). From Dacia, which, as well known, was in the Roman Empire for only 165 years (from 106 to 271 AD), we have a large number of epigraphs but a very low percentage of error (on average 8,4% and mostly under 10%).

⁶ See GALDI, G., "Reflexive and possessive pronouns in Greek and Latin inscriptions of the Empire (Moesia Inferior)", CALBOLI, G. (ed.), *Papers on Grammar V*, Bologna 2000, 73-94, and "The grammar of Latin inscriptions of Eastern Roman Empire", SOLIN, H.; LEIWO, M.; HALLA-AHO, H. (edd.), *Latin vulgaire-latin tardif VI. Actes du VI colloque international sur le latin vulgaire et tardif (Helsinki, 29 août-2 septembre 2000)*, Hildesheim 2003, 501-511.

⁴ The greatest part of this material comes from the city of Salona.

⁵ *Fungor*, particularly, is attested only with the accusative in pre-classical Latin: the earliest employ of the ablative appears in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4, 34, 46). See GALDI, G. (2004), *l.c.*, 444.

These data reveal a substantial stability in the morphosyntactical system of this province and are thus in full agreement with Herman's results in the phonetic domain⁷. In Dalmatia, I recorded the second highest average of errors (22,2%), which is obviously related to the large number of inscriptions: the percentage is particularly high in the dative of the first declension (because of the frequent usage of the ending *-abus*) and in the genitive of the second declension (33%), which results from the widespread use of the *datives ad-nominalis*⁸. The third highest percentage was found in the Pannoniae (22%), where I counted a large number of deviations in the nominative of the first and second declension⁹.

Let us turn now, specifically, to the ablative case. As a preliminary, we must remark that the inscriptions of Dalmatia and the Pannoniae generally display the lowest percentage of errors (around 10%) in the ablative. By contrast, in Moesia Inferior and the extra-European provinces the highest frequency of deviations appears in this case (the only exception is in the dative of the third declension). A similar situation appears in Greece, where, apart from the second declension, the percentage of ablative errors exceeds those in the other cases.

In the next section I reported the overall number of errors occurring in the ablative. The six areas under investigation are set out here in decreasing order according to the number of deviations in this case. On the left, is indicated the name of each territory and, in bold, the number of mistakes in the ablative followed, in round brackets, by the percentage, calculated as a proportion of the overall number of ablative errors (312). I have distinguished between syntactical (synt.) and phono-morphological (morph.) mistakes, subdividing the former (on the right) into morphosyntactical (morph. synt.) and purely syntactical (pure synt.). The number in square brackets following both these types of error indicates the occurrences after prepositions. All percentages are reckoned on the basis of the number of ablative errors in each province. In curly brackets, you have the percentage of all errors involving an improper use of the accusative.

⁷ See HERMAN, J., "Latinitas Pannonica. Vue d'ensemble des caractéristiques de la latinité pan-nonnienne: un essai", *Filológiae Közlöny* 14, 1968, 364-376.

⁸ On this phenomenon see HERMAN, J., "Le datif possessif dans la latinité balkanique", *Omăgiu lui Alexandru Rosetti*, Bucureşti 1965, 375-378, and GALDI, G. (2004), *l.c.*, 432-435.

⁹ This is mostly related to the frequency of the endings *-as*, *-us* (< *-uus*) and *-os*. See GALDI, G. (2004), *l.c.*, 59f, 64, 75-79.

Total number of errors in the ablative of the first three declensions: 312

Moesia Inferior 95 (30,4%):	75 synt. (78,9%) [55]: [66 acc. (69,4%) [52]] 20 morph. (21,1%)	→ 47 morph. synt. (49,4%) [35] → 28 pure synt. (29,4%) [20]: 19 acc., 7 gen./dat., 2 nom.
Non-Europ. prov. 90 (28,8%):	60 synt. (66,7%) [27]: [32 acc. (35,5%) [17]] 30 morph. (33,3%)	→ 21 morph. synt. (23,3%) [12] → 39 pure synt. (43,3%) [15]: 11 acc., 15 gen./dat., 13 nom.
Pannoniae 35 (11,2%):	22 synt. (62,8%) [12]: [18 acc. (51,4%) [10]] 13 morph. (37,2%)	→ 8 morph. synt. (22,8%) [7] → 14 pure synt. (40%) [5]: 10 acc., 3 gen., 1 nom.
Dalmatia 34 (10,9%):	21 synt. (61,7%) [14]: [20 acc. (58,8%) [14]] 13 morph. (38,3%)	→ 12 morph. synt. (35,2%) [8] → 9 pure synt. (26,4%) [6]: 8 acc., 1 nom.
Dacia 33 (10,5%):	23 synt. (69,6%) [17]: [16 acc. (48,4%) [13]] 10 morph. (30,4%)	→ 11 morph. synt. (33,3%) [9] → 12 pure synt. (36,3%) [8]: 5 acc., 4 gen., 3 nom.
Graecia 25 (8%):	15 synt. (60%) [8]: [7 acc. (28%) [6]] 10 morph. (40%)	→ 6 morph. synt. (24%) [5] → 9 pure synt. (36%) [3]: 1 acc., 6 gen., 2 nom.

In each area, the syntactical errors clearly exceed those of a phono-morphological type, the percentage of which varies from 21 to 40%. Moreover, in the three European provinces of Dalmatia, Pannoniae and Moesia Inferior over half the deviations involve the use of the accusative, which accounts for 88% of all syntactical errors, reaching almost 100% in Dalmatia. A similar situation was observed in Dacia, where the accusative replaces the ablative in almost half the total errors. This type of irregularity mostly occurs after prepositions and in the singular. The use of the accusative for the ablative (particularly after a preposition) represents a well-known phenomenon of Vulgar Latin, which spreads throughout the Empire. Quite different is the picture in Greece and the non-European provinces, where the wrong usages of the accusative account for, respectively, only 28 and 35% of all ablative errors and about half of the syntactical ones. These two areas, especially Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt, present a much richer variety of mistakes, which require a closer examination.

Here we have 21 improper usages of the genitive or dative instead of the ablative, 15 from the extra-European provinces. This type of error is preceded, in eleven cases, by the prepositions *ex* (6), *a* (3), *de* (1) and *pro* (1). See the following examples¹⁰:

- (1) AE 1999, 1485 *D.M. M. Iulius Sabinianus miles ex clas. praetoriae Misenesi* (Achaia, II)

¹⁰ For all occurrences see GALDI, G. (2004), *l.c.*, 428-431.

- (2) AE 1983, 903 (miliarium) *a Nicomediae mil. XXIII* (Bithynia, 275/276)
 (3) CIL 3, 12309 *L. Olius Quartus et Mi. Olius Secundus et Mi. Olius Maximus [f]ili de sue pec. fecerunt* (Macedonia)
 (4) AE 1986, 678 *B(ona) F(ortuna) pro salute et victoriae Imp. Caesaris* (Asia, 249/250)
 Similar cases were also found in Moesia Inferior. Ex.
 (5) ADB¹¹ 389 *pro Flavia Ingenuae*
 (6) AE 1973, 481 (mil.) *a Saci<ci>dave m. p. IIII*.

Most of these examples are probably due to Greek influence. It is significant, in this connection, that 21 of the 28 occurrences of the genitive or dative (including Moesia Inferior) are in the singular of the first declension. The Greek language, as is well known, lacked the ablative case, the functions of which were usually performed by the genitive and the dative. Now, both cases were expressed, in the Latin first declension, by the ending *-ae*: this circumstance seems responsible, in Greek or bilingual areas, for the frequent use of this ending instead of the ablative in names with thematic *-a-*. The hypothesis of Greek influence applies particularly to the constructions *ex* and *a + genitive* (see examples 1, 2 and 6), which probably result from a syntactical interference by the corresponding Greek patterns ἐξ and ἀπό + genitive. Likewise, in examples 4 and 5 the error may arise from the construction ὑπέρ + genitive: this explanation fits in particular to example 4, in which the formula *B(ona) F(ortuna)* corresponds to the Greek ἀγαθῆ τύχη¹².

In six inscriptions (four from Moesia Inferior) the ending *-(a)e* involves the ablative *causa*, within the pattern *memoriae cause, ex.*:

- (7) MAMA¹³ 8, 25 *mun[i]mentum fecerun[t pos]ito conmuniter [de] suis in pesis [m]emoriae causae* (Lycaonia)
 (8) AE 1911, 17 *Apollini Tadeni Aelius Tarsas (centurio) coh. II Lucensium memoriae causae v.l.s.* (Moesia Inferior)

The funerary formula *memoriae causa* appears to be modelled on the Greek μνήμης χάριν (or ἔνεκεν) and its use is mainly restricted to inscriptions from bilingual or Greek-speaking areas¹⁴. Referring to some of these

occurrences, Adams suggests that the ending of *caus(a)e* is 'perhaps intended as a dative (of purpose)' and might be 'inflicted on the word by a non-native speaker of Latin'¹⁵. This hypothesis presupposes a syntactical Graecism and is strengthened by the clearly Greek backgrounds of the six inscriptions. It is possible, however, that *caus(a)e* partly results from a mechanical assimilation to the foregoing *memoriae*, and is therefore intended as a genitive of cause.

Of particular interest is the following example:

- (9) CIL 3, 12150 Οὐαλερίας Σατορνεΐνης. *Col(onia) Iul(ia) Augusta I Fida Comama Paccia Saturninam pudicissimam femimam defunctam honorav[it], statuae omnia impendia exhibente Luciae Pacciae Valeriane Saturninae filiae suae secundum vera testamenti* (Cappadocia)

Several elements here hint at a Greek environment: a) the name Οὐαλερίας Σατορνεΐνης, above the epigraph, in Greek characters; b) the frequent use of the letter delta instead of *d* reported by Ramsay¹⁶; c) the use of final *-n* for *-m* in the name *Paccian*; d) the accusative of the honorand and the juxtaposed nominative of the dedicator followed by the honorific verb, which reproduce the typical Greek formulary¹⁷. Also worth noting is the use of *suae* instead of *eius*. The syntax of the text is unclear: *Luciae Pacciae Saturninae*, the name of the honorand, may be either a genitive depending on *statuae* or a dative, resulting from the construction *exhibere aliquid alicui*¹⁸. In both cases *filiae suae* appears to be used instead of the ablative *filia sua*¹⁹: 'with her daughter paying all the expenses'. The two endings *-ae* can be explained in three ways: 1) they are datives due to a contamination with the usual Latin formulary (in which this case was the most frequent for the honorand): this hypothesis is weakened by the Greek milieu, in which the inscription was produced; 2) they result from a mechanical assimilation to the foregoing ending; 3) they are genitives, due to confusion between different constructions: the author slips from an initial ablative absolute (with the verbal form *exhibente*) to a genitive absolute, namely the correspondent Greek construction with which he was probably more familiar.

¹¹ *Antike Denkmäler in Bulgarien*, KALINKA, E. (ed.), Wien 1906.

¹² See ADAMS, J.N., *Bilingualism and the Latin language*, Cambridge 2003, 81.

¹³ *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiquae* (edd. var.), Manchester 1930ff.

¹⁴ See ADAMS, J.N., *l.c.*, 37 and MEDNIKAROVA, I., "The accusative of the name of the deceased in Latin and Greek epitaphs", *ZPE* 143, 2003, 117, n. 3.

¹⁵ See ADAMS, J.N., *l.c.*, 472.

¹⁶ CIL 3, 6887.

¹⁷ See KAJANTO, I., *A study of the Greek epitaphs of Rome*, Helsinki 1963, 19f.

¹⁸ See ThLL V/2, 1433, 36-39.

¹⁹ See ThLL V/2, 1431, 50f.

In a single occurrence the ending *-ae* could be explained as a dative:

- (10) AE 1991, 1572 *Felsonius Verus, aquilifer leg. II Par(thicae) Gordianae ... qui mil. ann. XI, natus in Th<i>uscae* (Syria)
Here the syntagm *in Thuscae* is either a deviant locative or is modelled on the Greek ἐν + dative. A possible parallel was found on an epigraph from Macedonia:
(11) CIL 3, 14406 *in civitati Idissensi fati munus complerunt* (Macedonia, IV).

However, I excluded this form from the syntactical deviations, since *civitati* can also be due to the well-known oscillation of the vowels *-i/-e* in the ablative singular of the third declension²⁰.

As concerns the deviant uses of the nominative in Greek or bilingual areas, we can distinguish three contexts:

a) Within an ablative absolute, ex.:

- (12) ISM²¹ 1, 326 *cura agentibus mag(istris) Cla. Gaius et Durasse Bithi* (Moesia Inferior, 149)
(13) AE 1924, 145 *curag(entibus) mag(istris) Tib. Firmo et Val. Cultiunis et questor Fl. Secundo* (Moesia Inferior)
(14) CIL 3, 14180 *heres eius cura agente cum lib(ertis) eius Aelio Sosia et Aelio Epagatho* (Cappadocia)

In 12 and 13 the text lapses from the verbal pattern *cura agentibus* to the nominal elements *Gaius* and *quaestor*, a type of agreement error which frequently occurs in other areas too²². More peculiar is the *ordo verborum* of example 14, a bilingual inscription from Cappadocia. Here the author returns from the deviating nominal element to the ablative; in the Greek version we read, according to the editor, the regular genitive absolute κληρονόμου αὐτοῦ ἐπιμελοῦντος. We can thus assume that the inscription was written or commissioned by a Greek speaker, with a reduced knowledge of Latin, who put *heres* in the nominative either because he felt it to be the underlying subject of the action, or, perhaps, because he wasn't able to decline the word in the right case.

b) The form *natio* (for *natione*) occurs eight times in Greek areas (Achaia, Syria and Egypt), ex.:

- (15) IGLS²³ 3/2, 1171 *Papirius Oneratus III Fortuna, miles ex classe praetorii Misatium, natio Frux, istupendioro duo, heredes bene merente fecerunt* (Syria)
(16) CIL 3, 6109 *D.M. M. Iulius Sabinianus miles ex clas. Praetoriae Misensis [.] Antoni Prisci, vixit annis XXX, militavit annis VIII, natio Besus* (Achaia)
(17) CIL 3, 7291 *D.M. Sex Valeri Pudes (centuria) Iul. Quintini militavit anos VIII, vixit anos XXX, natio Besus. S. heres Iulius Apolinaris posuit ex clas. pr. Misenses* (Achaia)
(18) AE 1939, 224 *D.M. T. Aquilius Alexandr. mil. ex class. pr. M[i]s. natio Gal. [vix. a]nn. XXX* (Syria)

Several editors interpret the form as an abbreviation and correct it by adding in brackets the ablative suffix *-ne*. This solution may be right for some cases (see 18) but cannot be applied to all instances, and this for several reasons: 1) the common abbreviation of *natione* in the inscriptions is *nat.* or, less frequently, *n.*; 2) in four of the eight occurrences the text contains very few abbreviated forms or none at all (see 15 and 16) and therefore doesn't show any evidence of lack of space; 3) the use of *natio* for *natione* is uncommon in the rest of the Empire, where it occurs 20 times, all in Italy²⁴: 14 in Misenum, 4 in Rome, one in Ostia and one in the Regio X. It is worth noting that in all examples it refers to people originating from the eastern provinces: 8 from Thracia (*Bessus*), four from Egypt, four from Asia Minor, 2 from Greece, and one each from Pannonia and Dalmatia. Eleven of these involve soldiers of the praetorian fleet at Misenum. In the light of these three points, I suggest that another cause of the errors lies in the process of production of the epigraphs, an aspect that has mostly been overlooked in the linguistic studies of the inscriptions. As is well known, the epigraphic workshops often had fixed formularies containing the most frequently required data (such as origin, degree of kinship, years of life etc.). Now we can assume that in some cases this information was expressed in the nominative (used as a standard form for guidance) and that the *redactores* or stonemasons, with a limited knowledge of Latin, inserted the forms directly into the text (without declin-

²⁰ See GALDI, G. (2004), *l.c.*, 223-226, with further literature.

²¹ *Inscriptiones Daciae et Scythiae Minoris antiquae* (edd. var.), București 1976ff.

²² See GALDI, G. (2004), *l.c.*, 394-396.

²³ *Inscriptiones graecae et latinae de la Syrie* (edd. var.), Paris 1929ff.

²⁴ I am particularly grateful to Dr. Hugo Beikircher and Dr. Dietfried Krömer for allowing me to consult the schedules of the word *natio* in the archive of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*.

ing them), in order to give the basic information. In this respect, it is noteworthy that in all occurrences the form *natio* is followed either by an abbreviation (see number 18) or, 20 times, by the nominative of the ethnicus: other grammatical cases never occur. Moreover, several of the examples collected exhibit morphological or syntactical errors, which indicate a low linguistic competence: in 16 and 17 we find the construction *ex* + genitive, which, as discussed above, hints at a Greek background; in number 15 the forms *praetoriu* for *praetorian*, *istupendioro duo* for *stipendiorum duorum* and *merente* form *merenti* clearly reveal the poor linguistic skill of the author. Similar examples from Italy display a lack of agreement between the dative of the honorand and the indication of the ethnicus (*Frux, Bessus*):

- (19) CIL 5, 4506 *D.M. Iantino Retiario, qui vixit annos XXIII m. IIII natio Frux pugnarum V. Ingenua posuit coniugi karo, cum quo vixit an. V, m. II* (Brixia)
 (20) AE 1988, 310 *L. Flavio Bitho veter. exscrib. cl. pr. M[is.] natio Bessus vix. ann. LXII. Flavi Potamilla et Flavi Bithus patri f.* (Puteoli)

This type of error is attested three more times with the formula *natio Bessus*, which occurs in total 10 times and seems to have become, to some extent, an epigraphic cliché.

c) A similar explanation applies to the formula *trib.* or *tribunicia potestas*, which was found on five inscriptions, four from Syria and Asia Minor, one from Pannonia, ex.:

- (21) AE 1926, 75 *Imp. Caesari L. Septimio Severo Pio Pertenaci Felici ... tribunicia potestas X ... et Imp. Caesar M. Aureli Antonino Pio Maximo tribunicia potestas* (Pisidia, 203)
 (22) AE 1961, 25a [*Imp.*] *Caesar M. Aur. [S]everu[s] A[lexa]n[der P]ius Felix Invictus Aug. pont. max. trib. potestas [cos.] p. p. proco[s]* (Bithynia, 222/235)
 (23) CIL 3, 3721 *Severus Alexander Pius Felix Aug. pontif. maximus, trib. potestas VIII, cos. III* (Pannonia Inferior, 230)

In the rest of the Empire, there are, as far as I know, only three occurrences in Africa, ex.:

- (24) CIL 8, 10094 [*Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Antoninus Pius ...*] *m[aximu]s, tribunicia potestas* (216)

This expression, which usually figures on official inscriptions among the titles of the emperor, should be expressed in the ablative case. Several times, however, especially in later inscription, the genitive *tribuniciae potestatis* is attested: thus we cannot rule out the possibility that *potestas* here replaces the genitive instead of the ablative. This is the solution adopted by some editors, who consider *potestas* an abbreviation of *potestatis* and expand it by adding the syllable *-ti-* before the final *-s*. This correction can be misleading, because in example 21 we twice read the form *tribunicia*, which also occurs in number 24 from Africa. Instead it is remarkable that six times out of eight the name and titles of the emperor are all in the nominative. Thus Poukens, referring to the African examples, assumes a sort of syntactical alignment to the other words in the text: “le titre *tribunicia potestas* semble avoir été construit sur le modèle des titres précédents, qui son tous au nominatif”²⁵. This explanation presupposes a certain linguistic skill in the stonecutter, who, misled by the syntactical context, would be able to decline the ablative *potestate*, putting it into the nominative case. Once again, I prefer to believe that those who inscribed the text often had at their disposal pre-established formularies in the nominative, which they simply copied on to the stone without regard for their syntactical function.

Summing up, from the linguistic study of the Latin central-eastern inscriptions (from Raetia to Egypt) it appears that the non-European provinces and Moesia Inferior, despite the relatively low number of inscriptions, show a high frequency of morphosyntactical deviations if compared with the other territories. In particular, over half of all ablative errors recorded in the central-eastern provinces occur in these two areas. I believe that this special situation in Greek or bilingual areas results, to a great extent, from the lack of the ablative in the Greek flexional system. Specifically, in Moesia Inferior this case is mostly replaced by the accusative, whereas in the extra-European regions it is often substituted by either the genitive or the nominative. The former type of deviation seems a direct result of Greek influence, whereas the second could generally arise from the straightforward transcription on to the stone of fixed formularies, which the stonecutters were not able to decline in the case required by the sentence. Both types of errors, particularly the second, are uncommon in “vulgar Latin” sources and can hardly be considered the direct reflex of a spoken usage. However, they possess a special linguistic interest, since they are clear signs of a generally poor linguistic awareness among the speakers.

²⁵ POUKENS, J.B., “Syntaxe des inscriptions latines d’Afrique”, *Le Musée Belge* 16, 1912, 243.