

UDC 94(376-44)“652”
DOI 10.24919/2519-058X.37.346029

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Bibliographic Description of the Article: Culaj, I., Hajdari, E., & Berisha, M. (2025). A New Inscription From Ulpiana: Testimony of a Dedication or a Civic Association. *Skhidnoievropejskiy Istorychnyi Visnyk [East European Historical Bulletin]*, 37, 8–16
doi: 10.24919/2519-058X.37.346029

**A NEW INSCRIPTION FROM ULPIANA:
TESTIMONY OF A DEDICATION OR A CIVIC ASSOCIATION**

Abstract. *This paper presents the interpretation of a previously unpublished epigraphic inscription discovered within the urban context of the ancient city of Ulpiana (Moesia Superior). The study aims to highlight the role of inscriptions not only in addressing archaeological questions but also in enhancing*

historical reconstructions related to Roman urbanism in Dardania. **The methodology of research** employs an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates archaeological evidence – namely material culture – with written sources. Comparative analysis has been essential, both in evaluating the stylistic and technical features of the inscription and in contextualizing its content within broader epigraphic traditions. Analytical methods have further supported the effort to reach plausible interpretations. **The novelty of the study** consists in the publication and interpretation of this inscription for the first time. The text offers new data on the onomastics and socio-cultural dynamics of Roman Ulpiana, contributing to a better understanding of the local population and their integration into Roman administrative and cultural frameworks. **Conclusions.** The inscription, a dedication to Valeria, provides new information regarding ethnic, political, and cultural elements in the province. The onomastic features suggest a strong Roman influence in naming practices, illustrating the spread of Roman identity in this region and its relation to the process of Romanization. The nature of the inscription, as suggested by its form and content, indicates a funerary function – most likely a family dedication on a grave stele. However, the possibility of a religious or honorific context, while less probable, cannot be definitively excluded. Although the available evidence does not permit precise dating, the style of the engraved letters, the formulation of the text, and the broader epigraphic trends in Ulpiana suggest a chronological placement between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE. Importantly, the reuse of the inscription as spolia in the pavement of the city's main street (*cardo maximus*) sheds light on cycles of destruction and rebuilding in Ulpiana, particularly after the major earthquake of 518 CE. This event, followed by the reconstruction initiatives under Emperor Justinian I, reflects broader patterns of urban transformation in the Late Antique Balkans.

Keywords: Ulpiana, epigraphic inscription, Roman Empire, city, local population, Late Antique

НОВИЙ НАПИС З УЛЬПАНИ: СВДЧЕННЯ ПРИСВЯТИ АБО ГРОМАДСЬКОГО ОБ'ЄДНАННЯ

Анотація. У статті представлено інтерпретацію раніше неопублікованого епіграфічного напису, виявленого в міському середовищі стародавнього міста Ульпіана (Верхня Мезія). **Мета дослідження** – висвітлити роль написів не лише у розв'язанні археологічних питань, але й у поліпшенні історичних реконструкцій, пов'язаних з римським урбанізмом у Дарданії. **Методологія дослідження** використовує міждисциплінарний підхід, який інтегрує археологічні дані, а саме матеріальну культуру, з письмовими джерелами. Порівняльний аналіз був важливим як для оцінки стилістичних і технічних особливостей напису, так і для контекстуалізації його змісту в ширших епіграфічних традиціях. Аналітичні методи додатково підтримали зусилля щодо досягнення правдоподібних інтерпретацій. **Новизна дослідження** полягає у публікації та інтерпретації цього напису вперше. Текст пропонує нові дані про ономастику і соціально-культурну динаміку римської Ульпіани, сприяючи кращому розумінню місцевого населення та його інтеграції в римські адміністративні й культурні рамки. **Висновки.** Напис, присвячений Валерії, надає нову інформацію щодо етнічних, політичних і культурних елементів у провінції. Ономастичні особливості свідчать про сильний римський вплив у практиці іменування, ілюструючи поширення римської ідентичності в цьому регіоні та її зв'язок з процесом романізації. Характер напису, як впливає з його форми та змісту, вказує на похоронну функцію – найімовірніше, сімейну посвяту на надгробній стелі. Однак можливість релігійного чи почесного контексту, хоча й менш ймовірна, не може бути остаточно відкинута. Хоча наявні дані не дають змоги точно датувати, стиль гравірованих літер, формулювання тексту та ширші епіграфічні тенденції в Ульпіані вказують на хронологічне розміщення між II та IV століттями н. е. Важливо, що повторне використання напису як сполі на тротуарі головної вулиці міста (*cardo maximus*) проливає світло на цикли руйнувань та відбудови в Ульпіані, особливо після сильного землетрусу 518 року. Ця подія, за якою зародилися ініціативи з реконструкції за імператора Юстиніана I, відображає ширші закономірності міської трансформації на пізньоантичних Балканах.

Ключові слова: Ульпіана, епіграфічний напис, посвята, Римська імперія, місто, міське населення, пізня античність.

Problem Statement: Ulpiana was one of the most significant urban centres in ancient Dardania. Located approximately 10 kilometers southeast of present-day Pristina (Fig. 1), the site is now protected as an archaeological park and is regarded as the most important archaeological site in Kosovo and the surrounding regions. Strategically positioned near mines rich in precious metals and surrounded by fertile lands, Ulpiana also held a central place in the network of ancient roads. Its geographical location made it a crucial hub of communication between Constantinople and Rome. Several key routes intersected near Ulpiana, connecting the Adriatic Sea with the Aegean and the Black Seas (Berisha, 2014, p. 298). Among these, the Lissus-Naissus route was the most important road crossing Dardania and directly served the city (Shukriu, 2013, p. 144). Another significant road passed close to Ulpiana, linking the Danube region with Skopje and other settlements in the southern Balkans (Mala, 2007, p. 45).

These geographic and economic advantages played a fundamental role in the establishment, growth, and long-standing prosperity of Ulpiana. During the reign of Emperor Trajan (98–117 CE), the city was elevated to the rank of municipium, marking its formal integration into the Roman administrative system (Mirdita, 1976, p. 328–330; Robinson, 1994, p. 49).

Ulpiana reached its peak in the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, becoming a prominent political, economic, and cultural center in the region. The 5th century continued to be a relatively prosperous period, although the city began to experience the adverse effects of increasing barbarian incursions. However, the beginning of the 6th century marked a turning point. In 518 CE, a powerful earthquake devastated the city, effectively ending its period of flourishing. This catastrophic event marked the close of an era and the beginning of a new phase in the city's history. It was Emperor Justinian I (527–565 CE) who took the initiative to rebuild the city. He renamed it Justiniana Secunda, although archaeological evidence suggests that the newly reconstructed urban area was significantly smaller in scale than the original municipium (Hajdari et al., 2010, p. 449).

Review of Recent Research and Publications. Numerous studies have already addressed the inscriptions discovered within the territory of Dardania, and more specifically, those found in the ancient territory corresponding to present-day Kosovo. Within the scope of these studies are also included the inscriptions unearthed in the administrative area of Ulpiana (Evans, 1885; Vulić, 1931; 1933; 1934; 1941; 1948; Čerškov, 1973; Mirdita, 1976; 1981; 2001; Peja, 1998; Shukriu, 2003; Ferri, 2001; 2012a; 2012b; Dobruna-Salihi, 2003; 2005; Kalaja-Hajdari, 2017). Epigraphic sources attest to the existence of certain important Roman officials, individuals who played a significant role in the economic and cultural development of the city within this region. The forms of Roman presence in Ulpiana are also reflected in the military sphere; however, it should not be overlooked that the city's vast territory was also home to large landowners – Roman patrician families such as the *Furii* and the *Pontii*. This extensive Roman presence in Ulpiana greatly contributed to the process of Romanization of the city, a phenomenon that manifested in various forms (Čerškov, 1973, p. 56; Hajdari, 2013, pp. 222–243; Kalaja-Hajdari, 2016). The presence of the Dardanians is also attested in multiple ways, notably through onomastic evidence found in the city's inscriptions. These data have been studied by E. Kalaja-Hajdari, who identifies several names drawn from epigraphic sources (Kalaja-Hajdari, 2016, pp. 34–36).

The Results of the Research. Archaeological excavations at the site of Ulpiana, conducted by the Archaeological Institute of Kosovo in 2016, were focused on a segment of the *cardo maximus* near the Northern Gate. The primary objective was to reach the original level of the

street in order to clarify its function in relation to the surrounding public buildings and to trace the different phases of its development and transformation. Opposite this section of the road, where the inscription was discovered, stands the temple complex with a portico, over which, following urban planning changes that had affected this area, a palaeo-Christian basilica was later constructed (Brisha et al., 2018, pp. 7–17). In the final phase of its transformation, this building was fortified with a surrounding wall and four circular towers positioned along the main axes. The inscription was discovered during excavations led by Milot Berisha, Director of the Ulpiana Archaeological Park (Berisha, 2016).

At the moment of its discovery, the inscription was found positioned horizontally, integrated into the western surrounding wall of the basilica. Near the inscription, aligned with the same defensive wall and close to the watchtower, three other stone blocks of similar dimensions were also discovered lying horizontally. This suggests that the inscription, along with the additional blocks, was in a secondary context and had been reused as *spolia* within the basilica's fortification structure.

It is clear that the archaeological context does not contribute to the interpretation or dating of the inscription. Since the inscription was found in this secondary use, it cannot directly inform us about its original purpose or chronological attribution. However, its presence provides significant evidence for understanding the various phases of construction and urban transformation that Ulpiana experienced over the centuries, as well as the role of reused building materials in these processes.

The inscription remains preserved *in situ* on the *cardo maximus*, near the point of discovery, and is now placed in a vertical position to enhance visibility for visitors. In this way, it serves not only as a valuable epigraphic testimony but also as a meaningful example of the practice of *spolia* in Late Antique architecture.

Description

The inscription is carved on local white marble with grayish tones and is only partially preserved, as part of the epigraphic field and the base are missing. The surviving fragment measures 70×40 cm. On the front face, a portion of the decorative crown is preserved, featuring geometric motifs. This crown is separated from the epigraphic field by several horizontal decorative lines. The lateral sides are undecorated and show visible traces of damage.

The epigraphic field is clearly delimited at the top by horizontal lines and on the left side vertically, while on the right side, although damaged, a thin line allows the boundary to be determined. The epigraphic field has a preserved width of 26.5 cm; however, the total height remains unknown, as the inscription has been truncated from the fourth line onward. Its condition is relatively well-preserved. Within the epigraphic field, the use of inter-puncts (punctuation marks) and ligatures is evident, particularly in the second line. These elements represent important indicators for the palaeographic analysis of the inscription.

Inscription Text

The inscription is preserved in three lines, with well-formed letters of nearly uniform height (5 cm). The profiling of the letters is clear, deeply carved, with sharp angles, indicating careful execution and a skilled hand in its production. From the preserved lines, the following can be clearly read:

1. *Valeriae*
2. *L(ucii) fil(iae) Lucilâe*
3. *Ulpia Gai[a]*
4. -----

Translation: For Valeria Lucilla, daughter of Lucius. From Ulpia Gaia (?)

Commentary

Lines 1–2 – In the first and second lines, in the dative case, we find the name of the individual honored in this inscription: *Valeriae Lucilae*. While *Valeriae* is written in full, *Lucilae* is rendered using ligatures, specifically the combination of the letters CI and AE. This was most likely done due to the limited space available to the stonecutter (*lapicida*). Between the personal name (*praenomen*) and the family name (*gentilicium*), the filiation appears, indicating that Valeria was the daughter of Lucius: *L(ucii) fil(iae)*. As for the onomastics, Valeria is a widely attested name in the Roman world, commonly used as a family name (*gentilicium*) (Pflaum & Duval, 1977, p. 510). Lassere precises that: «Le *gentilice* Valeria est extrêmement fréquente» (Lassere, 2011, p. 931). For this reason, it is possible that in this case as well, Valeria functioned as the *gentilicium*, while *Lucilae* served as the *cognomen*. An inscription featuring somewhat similar onomastic elements comes from the province of Narbonensis in Gaul, where an epitaph reads – (CIL, 12, 901): *D(is) M(anibus) / Valeria Luci f(ilia) / Lucilla / Cn(aeo) Cornel(io) Luciliano f(ilio) / et Protoceto cont(ubernali) / pientissimis / et Eutythiae* (See also: Nuorluoto, 2021, p. 78).

However, given that her father was named *Lucius*, it is more reasonable to assume that *Lucila* reflects her *gentilicium*, while *Valeria* functions as her *praenomen*. The name Valeria is well documented in the province of Upper Moesia, (Consult the name index in: Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure, Vol. IV (p. 143), vol. VI (p. 189). See also: CIL, 03, 8253; CIL, 03, 8212; AE, 1977, 729; AE, 1993, 1352; AE, 1995, 1313). Whereas *Lucila* is attested more rarely and with a more limited geographical distribution (Solin, 1977, p. 123). In this province, it is primarily attested in the Skopje region, where it typically appears as a cognomen for women and girls (IMS, vol. VI, n°. 95, 103, 129). Used as a cognomen for women and girls (IMS, vol. VI, n°. 78, 103, 107). In Dardania, the variant *Lucilla* has also been recorded on two occasions (Mirdita, 1981, p. 178).

Line 3 – In the third line appears the name *Ulpia Gai[a]*, who most likely represents the dedicator of this inscription. *Ulpia/Ulpia* is an imperial *gentilicium*, widely spread throughout the Empire, primarily attested as a *nomen*, but in some cases also as a *cognomen*, and frequently documented in the province of Upper Moesia (OPEL, IV, p. 179; Bruun & Edmondson, 2014, pp. 15–16). For its distribution in this province, consult the volumes of the epigraphic corpus of Upper Moesia (IMS, vol. I-IV, VI).

As such, it is also widely attested in Dardania (Mirdita, 1981, pp. 51–53), indicating the broad distribution of this *nomen* in the region. This *nomen* is closely linked to the expansion of Roman citizenship under the reign of Emperor Trajan, who, through granting citizenship rights, influenced its more frequent appearance in epigraphic sources. Therefore, its presence serves as an indicator that *Ulpia*, or her ancestors, likely acquired Roman citizenship during the rule of Emperor Trajan. On the other hand, *Gaia* is a noticeably rarer name, not attested with the same frequency. It mainly appears as a cognomen, but in rare cases also as a *nomen* (OPEL, II, p. 159). Lawrence Keppie precises that: “The reversed C served as an abbreviation for *Gaia*, a female form of *Gaius*. *Gaia* was not in use as a *praenomen*, but was a standard legal notation for ‘a woman’” (Keppie, 1991, p. 20). Further, Tuomo Nuorluoto explains: “Clear examples of *Caia/Gaia* are not numerous. In some cases, it may represent an imperial name or a combination derived from a prominent name, i.e., *Iulia Caia/Gaia* (following *C. Iulius*: CIL, VIII, 16078; CIL, VIII, 21876). There are also a number of other cases in which the name appears as an identifier, but without a clear connection to a *praenomen*: (IAM, II, 2534 (*Antonia Caia*); AE, 1981, 742 (*Valeri(a)e Gai(a)e*); AE, 2015, 1234 (*Ulpia Gaia*); CIL, III, 1665 (*Ulpia Caia*); AE, 1981, 730 (*Aur(e)l(ia) Caia*); IMS, III, 263 (*Aelia Gaia*)” (Nuorluoto, 2021, p. 63). In the epigraphic corpus of Dardania, this name is documented only sporadically (Mirdita, 1981, p. 105–106).

Line 4 – In the fourth line, only traces of letters are visible, but these are insufficient to allow a definite identification of which letters they are. Accordingly, the interrupted lines indicate that several lines are entirely lost, the exact number of which remains undetermined. However, the horizontal dimensions of the epigraphic field suggest that the inscription below the lacuna could not have been very extensive. Thus, if the inscription belongs to a funerary monument, one would expect the lower part to first indicate the relationship of the dedicator to Valerian (perhaps the mother or another close relative). Following this, it is common to find the funerary formula *vixit annos/annis*, although this often appears immediately after the name of the deceased, before that of the dedicator. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume the presence of typical formulas such as *hic situs est* or *sit tibi terra levis* (Mirdita, 1981, pp. 240–241), and finally closing formulas of the type *fecit*, *bene merenti posuit*, or *faciendum curavit* (Lassere, 2011, pp. 236–238).

Conclusion. In fact, apart from the dedication to Valeria in the Dative case and its logical connection with the rest of the inscription, there are no other indicators that conclusively prove we are dealing with a funerary monument. Therefore, although this remains the most likely hypothesis, the possibility that the inscription served an honorific function cannot be excluded *a priori* – for example, as a form of recognition for one or several members of a community or civic collegium.

The presence of such collegia is attested in Ulpiana through epigraphic sources. A marble plaque discovered in 2011, not far from the find-spot of the monument under study, contains the names of twelve women, accompanied by the cognomina of their husbands. The fact that the first name is associated with the epithet *mater* has led scholars to interpret this as evidence of the presence of an organized collegium or association, possibly with a religious character (Feraudi-Gruénais & Teichner, 2014, pp. 275–283; Dana, 2019, pp. 159–179).

Another collegium is documented through an inscription published in 1980 (Mirdita, 1981, pp. 190–191), in which this institution had undertaken the erection of a commemorative monument for a couple, based on the will of Alexandria. Although the name and function of the collegium remain unknown, as well as whether Alexandria was a member, this epigraphic source clearly demonstrates the role of such associations in the public life and social organization of Ulpiana. In this context, although the inscription under examination is fragmentary and lacks essential elements for a definitive determination of its function, the possibility that it was connected to a collegium or a similar association cannot be excluded.

Nevertheless, based on the arguments presented above, the primary function of this inscription should be understood as commemorative; in other words, it is more appropriately interpreted as an epitaph rather than an honorific dedication. The presence of Valeria's filiation in the dative case, the horizontal dimensions of the epigraphic field, and several paleographic and typological features support this interpretation. The absence of the formula *Dis Manibus/Dis Manibus Sacrum*, which became widespread in Rome from the mid-1st century AD and in the provinces from the second half of that century, does not preclude this reading, as the formula was not obligatory and a considerable number of epitaphs lacking it are known. Furthermore, with the spread of Christianity, the use of this formula gradually declined, although it remained in use until late antiquity. Additionally, the fact that women generally did not hold political offices, and that their religious or administrative roles were limited, further reinforces the hypothesis of the funerary nature of this inscription.

The issue of dating this inscription remains complex. Its reuse as *spolia*, the absence of the *Dis Manibus* formula, and the loss of several lines do not allow for a precise chronological determination. Based on the overall analysis and the elements discussed above, the inscription can be placed within a broad chronological framework spanning from the 2nd to the 4th century AD.



Fig. 1. The location of Ulpiana on the map (© MAFKO-Hajdari, Goddard, Berisha)



Fig. 2 Inscription (CAD: B. Abazi)

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*The article was received June 24, 2025.
Article recommended for publishing 28/11/2025.*