

# The significance of an inscribed breastplate captured at Falerii in 241 B.C.

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In 1986 J.-L. Zimmermann first published a remarkable cuirass from Italy, at that time on loan to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, California.<sup>1</sup> This fine Greek type of breast-plate was made in S Italy (perhaps Tarentum) in c.330 B.C. Unlike others of its kind, it bears a Latin inscription recording the fact that it was taken as booty at Falerii Veteres in 241 B.C., when the town was destroyed and then re-located by the Romans.<sup>2</sup> The text is unique as it is the only Latin inscription on a breastplate from the Republican period. It has been assigned to the year 241 itself, which would make it the earliest securely datable inscription in Latin. Thus, both its date and its content reflect its exceptional significance for Republican epigraphy. I have received new colour photographs of the cuirass (figs. 1-3 in colour) which reveal more details about the inscription and the present condition of the breastplate.<sup>3</sup> This new evidence and the special historical significance of the cuirass invite a re-assessment.

The new photographs reveal the excellent condition of the breastplate and of the inscription, which is arranged in two lines of small letters near the area of the collar bone (fig. 3 in colour). Especially remarkable is the fine golden colour of the bronze which does not show any signs of patina caused by age or by conditions of storage.<sup>4</sup> Its present state hints at efforts of restoration and conservation<sup>5</sup> and it seems clear that restoration was complete before the breastplate arrived at the Getty, and certainly before its original publication.<sup>6</sup> Other breastplates of this type show varying degrees of corrosion and surface patina. All such breastplates with a sure provenience have come from chamber tombs, which explains their survival,<sup>7</sup> and the state of preservation in this case also argues for a provenience from a sealed chamber tomb.

1 J Paul Getty Museum no. L80.AC.37. *AE* 1991. 313. See Zimmermann (1986) (cited just below).

The following works will be cited simply by author and year of publication:

D. Cahn, *Waffen und Zaumzeug* (Basel 1989).

I. di Stefano Manzella, "La corazza iscritta di Falerii Veteres: nuove osservazioni," *AnnSiena* 12 (1991) 1- 16.

P. G. Guzzo, "Su una corazza dalla 'Magna Grecia'," *MusHelv* 38 (1981) 55-61.

A. H. Jackson, "Hoplites and the gods: the dedication of captured arms and armour," in V. D. Hanson (ed.), *Hoplites. The Classical Greek battle experience* (London 1991) 228-49.

G. C. Picard, *Les trophées romains* (Paris 1957).

W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek state at war*, III. *Religion* (Berkeley 1979).

R. Wachter, *Altlateinische Inschriften. Sprachliche und epigraphische Untersuchungen zu den Dokumenten bis etwa 150 v. Chr.* (Bern 1987).

J.-L. Zimmermann, "L'armure en bronze de Malibu," *GettyMusJ* 10 (1982) 133-40.

id., "La fin de Falerii Veteres: un témoignage archéologique," *GettyMusJ* 14 (1986) 37-42.

2 For the fate of Falerii Veteres, see Polyb. 1.65.2; Livy, *Per.* 20; Ovid, *Fast.* 3.844-45; Val. Max. 6.5.1; Eutrop. 2.28; Oros. 4.11.10; Zonar. 8.18, with L. Loreto, "Il conflitto romano-falisco del 241/0 a.C. e la politica romana degli anni successivi," *MEFRA* 101 (1989) 717-37.

3 The cuirass is no longer in the Getty Museum but has been returned to its anonymous owner. I have not seen it myself. The original publication did not include a detailed view of the inscription, nor was there a drawing of its text. The cuirass has no known provenience or history before 1986.

4 For patinas on bronze, see C. C. Mattusch, *Classical bronzes: the art and craft of Greek and Roman statuary* (Ithaca 1996) 26-34.

5 To form an idea of how such a cuirass is conserved, see for example P. Tuttle, "Conservation of the bronze cuirass and helmet," *GettyMusJ* 10 (1982) 141-44 (with detailed photographs), relating to the Getty armour published by J.-L. Zimmermann in the same issue.

6 Di Stefano Manzella (1991) 5 n.10 quotes a letter to this effect which he received from the Getty Museum.

7 Guzzo (1981) 55-61 and Zimmermann (1982) 138 n.81.