

Public Baths in the 4th-5th Century Rome: Between Popular Needs and Technical Language

The regional catalogues, drawn up in the 4th century AD, document in Rome the existence of 11 imperial thermal buildings. Some of them, built in the 3rd century AD (Caracalla’s Bath) or in the 4th century AD (Diocletian’s Baths), are among the best known structures, preserved, larger and more complex than the Roman Empire has ever had. After the Constantine’s Baths built on the Quirinal around 315 AD, but probably started by Maxentius, Rome was no longer provided for the construction of new imperial thermal structures. Over time, however, interventions aimed at extraordinary maintenance, restoration or embellishment of these buildings of public utility were recorded more frequently. The contribution of epigraphy can be useful to better understand the extent of some interventions - especially in the partial or total absence of archaeological evidence - that from the 3rd to 4th century AD became increasingly frequent. The inscriptions testify that very soon even the thermal baths of more recent construction needed interventions of a certain complexity: a concrete example of this are the Caracalla’s Baths, equipped with a large apse of the *calidarium* thanks to the *munificentia* of Constantine (*CIL*, VI 40772 = EDR073541). A similar case also occurred in the oldest Agrippa’s Baths, which, thanks to Constantine's sons, underwent restoration work due to the antiquity of the building (*CIL*, VI 1165 = EDR1111337). Constantine’s Baths were restored to their former glory (*in pristinam faciem*

splendoremque), on the initiative of the urban prefect *Petronius Perpenna Magnus Quadratianus*, after a period of long neglect and devastation following the looting of the city (410 or 472 AD) had made them unusable (*CIL*, VI 1750 = EDR111536). The initiative of *Iulius Felix Campanianus* is responsible for the embellishment (*ad augendam gratiam*) of the Baths of Trajan, as evidenced by a statue base that has handed down the name of this urban prefect (*CIL*, VI 1670 = EDR111482). The boxes below contain some emblematic cases of epigraphic texts dated or datable to the 4th and 5th century AD united by the presence of a restoration made to a thermal buildings. The first example concerns a well-preserved or easily integrated inscription; the second includes two recently acquired texts, partially preserved, of which it is possible to provide some additions. The last example is a fragmentary text known only from manuscript tradition, engraved on a marble lintel which, although published in *CIL*, VI 30374, has not been given due consideration: the place of the discovery and the part of the text preserved would suggest a restoration in the late antiquity to which a building was subjected, perhaps just the famous and monumental Caracalla’s Baths.

CIL: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berolini 1863-.
EDR: Epigraphic Database Roma (www.edr-edr.it).

Example I: well-preserved or easily integrated text

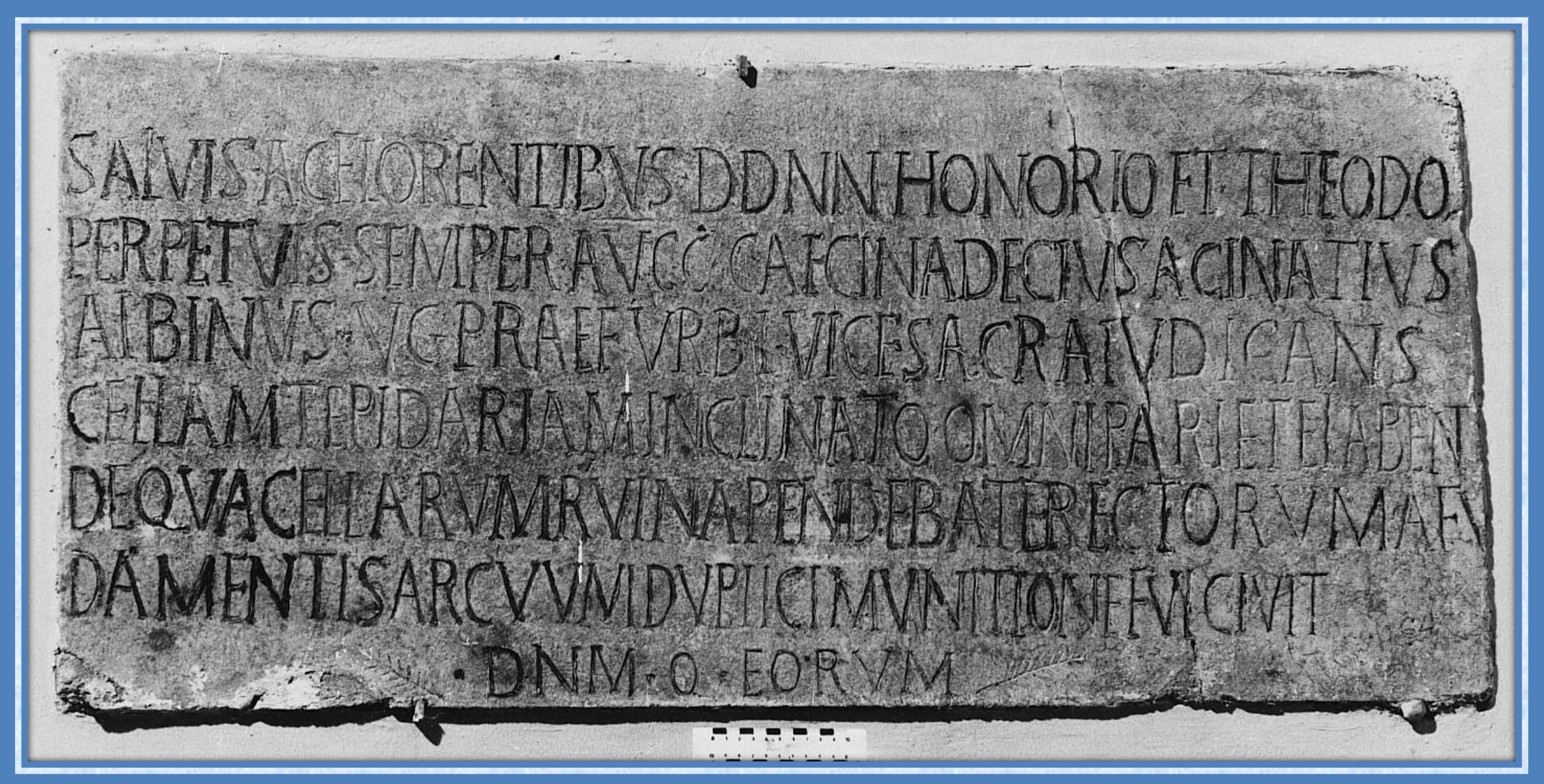
1703 tabula marmorea litteris inaequalibus male exaratis. Romae proximis hisce annis detectus MVR. — Accuratus INSCRIPTIO RECENS sub titulo affixa: 'monumentum hoc in hortis de Caballetis supra Aventinum repertum Hermes de Caballetis conservator s. p. q. r. dd. anno domini MDCCXXV'. — Adservabatur in aedibus Conservatorum, nunc in museo Capitolino.

SALVIS · AC FLORENTIBVS · DD · NN · HONORIO · ET · THEODOSIO
PERPETVIS · SEMPER · AVGG · CAECINA DECIVS ACINATIVS
ALBINVS · V · C · PRAEF · VRBI · VICE · SACRA IUDICANS
CELLAM · TEPIDARIAM · INCLINATO · OMNI · PARIETE LABEN
DE · QVA · CELLARVM · RVINA · PENDEBAT · ERECTORVM · A FU
DAMENTIS · ARCVVM · DVPLICI · MVNITIONE · FVL CIVIT
· D · N · M · Q · EORVM

Descripsit Bormann, ipse contuli. Exhibit Mur. 466, 3 (inde Orelli 3928) missam ab Alexandro marchione Capponio.
Idem Caecina Decius Acinatus Albinus posuit in praefectura titulum supra n. 1659, ad quem observavimus videri fuisse praefectum a. 414.

Salvis ac florentibus dd.(:dominis) nn.(:nostris) Honorio et Theodos[io] perpetuis semper Augg.(:Augustis), Caecina Decius Acinatus Albinus, v(ir) c(larissimus), praef(ectus) urbi, vice sacra iudicans, cellam tepidarium inclinato omni pariete laben[de] de qua cellarum ruina pendebat erectorum a fu[n]damentis arcuum duplici muniti[o]ne fulcivit, d(evotus) n(umini) m(aiestati)q(ue) eorum.

Chronology: 414 AD.
Bibliography: : *CIL*, VI 1703; EDR111467 (A. Ferraro).

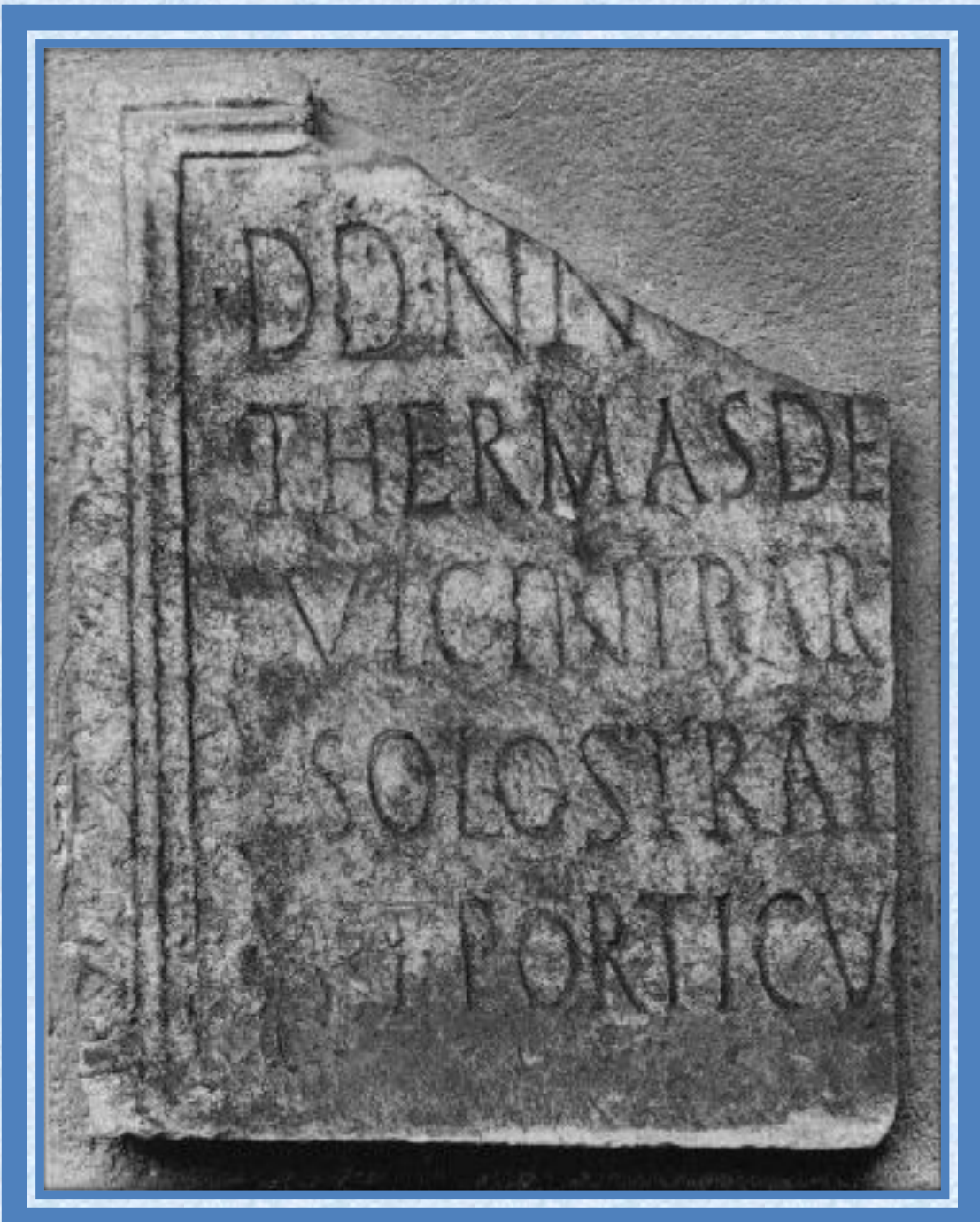


Marble slab mentioning the construction of a double vaulted arch to support the external part of the tepidarium and to prevent the collapse of the walls of the annexed rooms.

Example II: partially preserved texts

DD. NN.(:domini nostri duo) [---]
thermas De[cianas ---]
vicini par+[---]
solo strat[---]
et porticu[---]

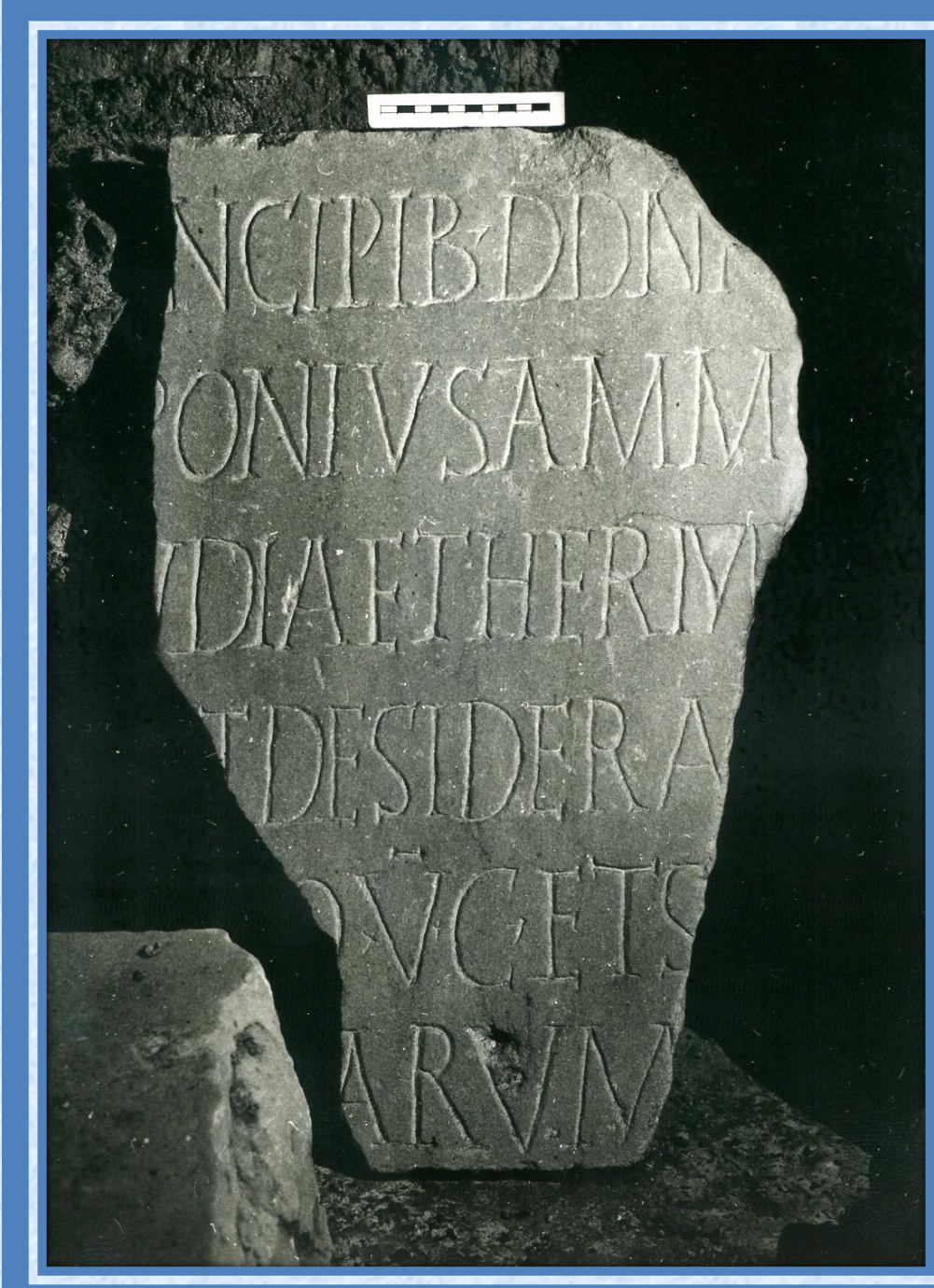
Fragment of a marble slab, mentioning the restoration of the Thermae Decianae, including interventions on specific parts of the building: pari[es?], solum, pavimentum, porticus ...



Chronology: 4th century AD.
Bibliography: L. La Follette, *Rome papers: the Bath of Trajan Decius, Iside e Serapide nel Palazzo, a late Domus on the Palatine, and Nero's Golden House*, Ann Arbor 1994, pp. 19-21, with photo and app. I, p. 83, nr. 6; EDR150579 (G. Crimi).

[--- pri]ncipib(us) dd,nn.(:dominis nostris duobus) [Valentiniano et Valente ---]
[--- Iunius Pom]ponius Ammo[nius v(ir) c(larissimus) et inl(ustris) praef(ectus) urb(i) ---]
[--- aquae Cla]udiae therm[as ---]
[--- u?]t desidera[---]
[---]o v(iro) c(larissimo) et s[pect(abili) ---]
[---]arum [---].

Fragment of a marble slab mentioning a restoration of a bath, including an intervention on a part (castellum?) of the Aqua Claudia, maybe according to the desire of the people.



Chronology: 367 AD.
Bibliography: G. Crimi - S. Orlandi, Un prefetto urbano ritrovato: Iunius Pomponius Ammonius, in *Zeitschr. Pap. Epigr.*, 204, 2017, pp. 287-298, with photo; EDR166240 (G. Crimi).

Example III: very fragmentary text

30374 fragmentum marmoris satis grande, quod pro architravi, ut dicunt, inservit in interiori cella thermarum Antoninarum, ex ipsis ruinis effossum a. 1589 CITT. (Marc.), brevius ID. (Vat.), qui annum addit 1590.

ENTE DELAPSAM
p,OPVLI REDDIDERVnt

Cittadinus Marc. p. 31, Vat. 5253 f. 160.
Datur ut integra utrimque. — 2 REDIDERV Vat.

[---]ente delapsam
[--- p]opuli reddideru[nt ---?]

Fragment of an architrave, mentioning the restoration of a collapsed building (maybe a bath?) to give it back to the public use.

Chronology: 4th-5th century AD.
Bibliography: *CIL*, VI 30374; EDR169395 (G. Crimi).

