

Analytical reading of a Latin inscription from Théveste

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Abstract:

The history of Thevest is closely linked to that of the Roman Empire in North Africa. The city hosted the Third Legion of Augustus around 75 AD, under Emperor Vespasian, and became a colony of veterans. Under Roman rule, it thrived thanks to the peace and stability of the Empire and distinguished itself through its impressive monuments, such as the Arch of Trajan, as well as its temples, baths, theaters, and forums. Many Latin inscriptions have been found there, providing valuable information about daily life, local administration, and religious cults. This article will focus on one inscription whose study will allow for an analysis of the administrative functions of the local elites and deepen our understanding of the social and cultural practices of the time.

Keywords: Thevest, papiria, aedil, augur, prefect, serveri augustalae, evergesia.

Introduction

Théveste, known today as Tébessa in Algeria, was an ancient Roman city in proconsular Africa. Its strategic location, near the present-day borders of Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, made it a vital commercial and military center in the region.

The history of Theveste is deeply linked to that of the Roman Empire in North Africa. It hosted the Third Legion of Augustus around 75 under the Emperor Vespasian. It thus became a colony of veterans established to compensate for the legion's departure to Lambese¹. Under Roman rule, it prospered as a thriving city, benefiting from the peace and stability that characterized the Empire at that time.

¹Grégoire Caron, *L'évergétisme ludique ob honorem* à travers une inscription latine d'Afrique romaine, *Histoire-Archéologie-Histoire de l'Art*, Lille, Presse universitaire du Setentrion, pp17-26, 2022, p.2.hal-04391697.cf. Roland Syme, *Notes sur la légion III Augusta*, REA, tome 38, 1936, n°=2, pp.182-184.

Renowned for its impressive monuments, some of which are still visible today, such as the Arch of Trajan, it also boasted many other public buildings, including temples, baths, a theatre and forums, which bear witness to its economic, cultural and social importance.

In addition to these monuments, a significant number of Latin inscriptions have been found in Tébessa, providing valuable evidence about many aspects of daily life, local administration, religious cults, and interactions between different communities of this region.

In fact, this epigraphic medium played a key role in promoting the concepts and values shared by the Roman community, both in Rome and throughout the Empire. Epigraphy was an effective means of self-representation, as it served to record and disseminate the eminent positions of notable families within their communities.

A good example of this is an inscription from Théveste (Tébessa), which reveals an interesting vocabulary of social prestige, as well as an act of evergesia (public benefaction).

The investigation will provide an opportunity to gather a body of documentation, revealing the administrative functions held by the local elites. Studying these inscriptions will allow us to extract the maximum amount of information necessary for a detailed analysis of an archaeological find that might otherwise be relegated to a simple entry in a catalogue.

This is therefore the honorary inscription known as Quintus Creperius Rufinus (CIL VIII, 16529 = ILAlg. I 020, Théveste) (Fig. 1)



Fig.1 Inscription of Q. Creperius Rufinus

Sabine Lefevre, 2010, Fig 3, p.112

A-Latin text CIL VIII, 16556 (ILS 6839) = ILAlg . I, 3064

AURELIAE EXCEPTI FILIAE / IANUARIAE SPONSAE / ET UXORI / Q (uinti)
CREPEREI RUFINI // Q (uinto) CREPEREIO GERMANI FILIO PAP (iria)
RUFINO AVGVRI AEDILI PRAEF(ecto) I (ure) D (icundo) IIVIR (o) OB IN
/SIGNEM EIVS VITAM QUIETAMQVE DISCIPLINAM ET IN MVNERIS
EDITIONE PROM (P) TAS / LIBERALITATES QVAS IN CIVES SVOS EXERCVIT
CVRIAE VNI/VERS (AE) ET AVGVST (ALES) SVM(P)TV PROP(R)IO
POSVERVNT / CUIVS HONORIS REMVNERANDI CA (V)SA IDEM RVFINVS
SPORTVL(AS) DECVRI (ONIBVS) AND LIB (ertis) CAES(ARIS) N (OSTRIS)
ITEMQ (UE) FOREN/SIBVS ET AMICIS CVRIIS QVOQ(UE) ET
AVGVSTALIBVS / AVREOS BINOS ET POPVLO VINVM DEDIT
ET/LVDOSEDIDIT

B-Translation:

To Aurelia Ianuaria, consort, daughter of Exceptus and wife of Quintus Creperius Rufinus; son of Quintus Creperius Germanus of the Paperia tribe. Augur, priest, aedile, prefect of justice, duumvir with judicial power. For his exemplary life and discipline, as well as for the generosity he showed towards his fellow citizens, his entire curia and the Augustales erected a statue in his honor at their own expense to reward these deeds. This same Rufinus distributed sportulae to the decurions, the freedmen of our Caesar, and also two parts of gold to the friends of the curiae, the Augustals, and the college of forensic scientists (lawyers). He also offered two aurei to each member of the people, gave wine, and organized games.

C- Analysis of the inscription:

When examining the inscription, three essential points should be noted:

a - The inscription is primarily dedicated to Aurelia Ianuaria , wife of magistrate (Quintus Crepius Rufinus).

She probably came from a family of notables. However, her gentilice is a very common imperial nomen , and unfortunately, it does not allow a connection to any of the

members of the political elite of Théveste, especially since she could be the descendant of an imperial freedman ².

b- Crepereius is the gentilice carried by a magistrate whose career is known from the aedility to the duumvirate³. We know the cognomen of his father, Germanicus and that of his wife Aurelia Ianuaria, daughter of Exceptus. It is also worth noting that Crepereius is a rare gentilice in Théveste⁴.

Unfortunately, to this day, the study of family names does not yet allow us to establish matrimonial alliances between the families that held power⁵.

c - The inscription also mentions the origin of the family. It is the Papiria tribe. Indeed, after having housed the third legion of Augustus in 75 CE, Théveste, which became a Roman colony under Trajan, it was registered in the Papiria tribe ⁶from which many members of the local population hailed⁷.

Apart from the synchronic analysis of the names, the inscription provides a wealth of interesting information about the various functions held by Quintus Crepereius Rufinus, which are as follows:

Augur: This function was of great religious and political importance. The augurs were priests responsible for interpreting divine signs. Their role was to ensure the maintenance of the *pax deorum* by associating the citizen-gods with public decisions. ⁸They played an important role until the imperial period.

Aedil: This is the second function that an elected official could hold. The aediles were responsible for regulating public markets and controlling the prices of foodstuffs by ensuring that the weights and measures used in trade complied with established standards. They were also responsible for maintaining order and security in the city.

² Christol M, Théveste: centre administratif à l'époque impériale, Aoures, 6, Paris 2010, pp.97-98.

³ Lefebvre Sabine, la société politique de Théveste (Tébessa) en Afrique proconsulaire, Aoures, 6, Paris 2010, p.116

⁴ Ibid, cf. HGPflaum, "the Creperii and the Egrelii of Africa, notebook of Tunisia, 15, 1967, pp.65-72 (= Roman Africa. Scripta varia I, Paris 1978, pp.237-244; M. Corbier, The Clarissimo families of proconsular Africa, in Epigraphia e ordine senatorio, II, Tituli 5, Rome, 1982, pp.685-754; M. Christol, Théveste administrative center in the imperial era, Aoures, 6, 2010, pp.83-101.

⁵ Lefebvre Sabine, 2010, op.cit, p.117.

⁶ Papiria: One of the thirty-one rustic tribes of ancient Rome. According to Festus, it took its name from the gens Papiria or from that of a territory that the gaps in the manuscripts have not allowed to be restored.

⁷ Sabine Lefebvre, 2010, op.cit. p.113.

⁸ Berthelet Yann, religion et vie politique sous la république romaine., l'exemple de la divination publique, Pallas, revue d'études antiques, 111, 2019, p.45-50.

They supervised the urban police, ensured that the streets were clean and safe, and took measures against behavior harmful to society, such as fraud or vandalism. In addition, there were in charge of the maintenance of public buildings, such as temples, squares, baths and aqueducts; and organized public games, festivals and religious ceremonies to entertain and entertain the population⁹. These events were often used to strengthen the political support and prestige of the aediles themselves.

Prefect: The prefect of the annona organized the city's supply; he regulated all operations of collection, transport, storage and distribution. This title was reserved for the elites.

Diumvir: Derived from the latin duo which, meaning a magistrate of a college of two members, established to jointly exercise certain special functions, most often temporary. In our inscription, the duumvirate is mentioned in the form Iuir .

It is also worth noting that the term of diumvir is frequently associated with the term Munnerus (organizer of a munus), a connection commonly found in the African provinces¹⁰. This is also the case in five other inscriptions, which mention an organizer of munus, that is, to say a gladiatorial spectacle¹¹, as Quintus Crepereius Rufinus did. However, we should remember that only Theveste is the only city in Numidia where munerarii (Organizers of such spectacles) have been discovered¹², specifically several gladiatorial games. These games were very expensive, and it can be understood that only those with landed property could afford to organize them.¹³

Severi Augustalae: This is a rare mention in Latin inscriptions in Africa. The Severi Augustales were members of a well-known institution of freedmen of Augustus who formed colleges and had curiae. They ranked second after municipal curiae and disappeared in the middle of the 3rd century. This institution is familiar to historians of

⁹ Marquardt Jean, Organisation de l'empire romain, Volume 1, Edit Ernest Thorin, Paris 1889., G. Ville, la gladiature en occident des origines à la mort de Domitien, Ecole Française d'Athènes et de Rome , 245, Rome, 1981, pp.232-233.,

¹⁰ Sabine Lefevre, 2010, op.cit, p.108./ CIL VIII, 24 = 10999 = IRT 232 Oea : Imp (eratori) C[aes (ari) M(arco Aurelio Antonino Aug (usto) , p(atri) p(atriae) and Imp (eratori) Caes (ari) L(ucio) Aurelio Vero Armeniaco Aug (usto) , / Ser (uis) Cor[rnelius Scipio Saludienus] Orfi -tus, proco (n) s (ul) cum Vttedio Marcello, leg(ato) suo , dedicauit . / C(aius) Calpurnius Celsus , curator muneris pub(lici) , munerisus , Iuir q(uin) q(uennalis) , flamen perpetual , / arcum pecunia sua [solo publ] ico et fundauit et] marmore solid fecit //solo publ] lic [o // fl] amen perpetuus / [... public]oe[t fu] nd [auit et marmore solidof] ecit .

¹¹ Munera in the singular munus are gifts offered by wealthy Roman notables, notably the munera gladiatorum

¹² Ibid. note 15, Cf. Ville G., La gladiature en Occident des origines à la mort de Domitien. Rome : Ecole française de Rome, 1981, p. 206.

¹³ Sabine Lefevre , 2010, op.cit. p. 108, cf Suetonius, Domitian 10.

the High Empire (1st century BCE to 3rd century CE), due to a large body of inscriptions. However, this corporation seems to have been reserved for freedmen, a special status, especially since these Augustales were directly linked to the reforms of Augustus¹⁴. In this case, we are referring to Quintus Creperius Rufinus, who appears in our inscription as a freedman.

It is clear that the inscription uses a vocabulary of social prestige, and the fact of having it engaged in stone was a sign of distinction, marking membership in the ruling elite in the cities, particularly those with regular municipal activities¹⁵. Moreover, it is reported that these *severi augustales* themselves wished to honor Quintus Creperius by erecting a statue in his honor¹⁶.

Being a member of the political society of *Theveste* implied participating in its political life, either by becoming a magistrate, *decurion* or priest. Quintus creperius rufinus had a distinguished career: he was an *aedilis*, *praefectus iure dicundo*, *duumvir* and *augur*.

The accumulation of his various titles is very interesting, especially in light of his marriage to the daughter of a notable, which was a common phenomenon. At that time, politicians often sought to strengthen their group through a certain degree of endogamy¹⁷, as is evident in our inscription, not only for *Theveste* but also to *volubilis*¹⁸.

We would add that his integration into the *Augustales* confirms his privileged status in the city of *Theveste*. Indeed, the *Augustal* position allowed wealthy freedmen to acquire a prominent role in their city and provided them opportunity to practice *evergetism* on a city-wide scale; Although they did not receive official powers, they were *grande honors*¹⁹. This was essentially an honorary role, primarily aimed at ensuring the city's

¹⁴ Serrano José Miguel, *Augustality and the organization of municipalities under the High Roman Empire: some remarks* *Historical Review of French and Foreign Law Fourth series, Vol. 66, No. 2 (April-June 1988)*, pp. 231-240.

¹⁵ Pistellato Antonio, *le vocabulaire du prestige social dans la pratique administrative municipale en Italie in le quotidien municipal dans l'occident romain*, Presse universitaire Blaise-pascal, 2008, p 638.

¹⁶ An investigation of the premises is more than desirable in the hope of finding this statue of a notable.

¹⁷ Endogamy: Endogamy, a practice that consists of choosing one's future spouse primarily and predominantly within either: the geographical area to which one belongs; the social class to which one belongs; the profession one exercises or the religion one practices. cf/S.BUSSI, *Mariages endogames en egypte hellénistique et romaine*, *revue historique de droit Français et étranger*, 80(1) Janvier-Mars, 2002, pp.1-22

¹⁸ Lefevre S., *Les élites de Volubilis. Quand l'onomastique aide à l'analyse d'un groupe socio-politique in* Destephen S. and Baudry R. (eds .), *la société romaine et ses élites. Mélanges Deniaux*. Paris, 2012., p. 195-215.

¹⁹ Van Haepere Françoise, *Origine et fonctions des augustales (12 av.n.é-37) nouvelles hypothèses*. In: *Antiquités classiques*, Volume 85, 2016,p.135-136.

financial support from wealthy freedmen, who paid the *summa honoraria*²⁰ and covered various expenses for the benefit of their city. In return, they gained access to the function that Augustality represented, as is the case with our exemple. The position of Augustality required, from the outset, the organization of games or, failing that, *pro ludis*²¹ services.

If this question of the title of Augustal is well defined, we can still ask ourselves an essential question, namely why this significant proportion of freedmen among the Augustals and why this task, that is to say the organization of the Augustalia, was not entrusted to the decurions. It would be possible in fact that the *senatus consultum* did not specify the form of the institution responsible for these games, but that the *augustales* had to be recruited outside the *ordo decurionum* but rather among the richest freedmen²².

As with the *Augustales*, the *Théveste* inscription is one of the rare epigraphic remains that mention the *Liberti Caesaris* of Africa. The majority of these inscriptions come to us from Carthage and are dated from the 1st and 2nd centuries²³. As in Rome, in the provinces, the *liberti Caesaris* held a significant rank in the cities²⁴. This is clearly demonstrated in our inscription, where the generous donor *Quintius Creperius Rufus*, shared his generosity with several social groups, including the *Decurions* the *Liberti Caesaris* and the *Forenses*²⁵.

This freeman from the administration -or more specifically from the service of Caesar- often held collegiate dignities, which attest to his material means and his standing in the eyes of the college.²⁶ They even managed, thanks to their service to the emperor, to position themselves in the society at a rank that many freeborn citizens might envy.

²⁰ Briand- Ponsart Claude, *Summa honoraria et ressources des cités d'Afrique*, actes de la X^{ème} rencontre franco-italienne sur l'épigraphie du monde romain, Rome, 27-29 mai 1996, école française de Rome, 1999, 256. p.229-231

²¹ Van Haepelen, op. cit., p.139.

²² Ibid., p.144

²³ Boulvert Gérard, *Domestique et fonctionnaire sous le haut empire romain, la condition de l'affranchi et de l'esclave du prince*, dit. Les belles lettres, Paris 1974., p. 6./ Cf. R Etienne R et. Fabre G, *Démographie et classe sociale, l'exemple du cimetière des officiales de Carthage*, in *recherches sur les structures sociales dans l'antiquité classique*, 1970. p.81-97.

²⁴ PAVIS d'Esgurac, Henriette *Le personnel d'origine servile dans l'administration de l'annone*, Actes du groupe de recherches sur l'esclavage depuis l'antiquité, 1974,3,, p. 300.

²⁵ Forensics : Lawyers

²⁶ PAVIS d'Esgurac Henriette, op.cit.

The inscription is especially significant because it highlights the preeminent position of the individual, namely Quintus Creperius Rufinus . This position was acquired not only through his personal merits and act of evergetism, but also by a sort of familial, generational right, evident through his lineage to Crepereio Germani of the paperia tribe. This reflects full roman citizenship, as the tribe indicates a social and administrative rank, conferring respect and authority among peers. This affiliation confirms his attachment to the traditions and prestige of participating with the Roman people, and also suggests a privilege of personal freedom, symbolizing the civic ideal²⁷.

Act of evergesia

The inscription also records an act of evergetism by Quintus Creperius who distributed sportulae ²⁸to the decurions and freedmen of Caesar liberii. caesari , as well as two parts of gold to the friends of the curiae, the Augustales and to the college of forensens (Lawyers). He also offered two aurei to each member of the people, provided wine, and organized games. We know that Theveste had an amphitheater (Fig. 2) , likely built when the third legion of Augustus was still stationed in Theveste .



Fig 2. Mosaic of the amphitheater games

(Marcellus Room, Tebessa Baths) Tebessa Museum Gsell, p.IX , Fig.1

²⁷ Silvestrini M. (dir), Chapter XXXIII. Roman tribes and cities under the empire. Epigraphy and History, p.602, in Actes de la XVI Franco-Italian meeting of epigraphy, Bari, Edipuglia ; 2010,p.597

²⁸ The **sportula** (Latin *sportula* , "small basket") is, in ancient Rome, a gift that the *patron* distributes every day to his clients, in exchange for the time they spend in his service, escorting him in public places, voting and getting others to vote for him in elections or for the laws he proposes as a magistrate. Originally, the sportula was a gift in kind (food, which was given in the small basket that gave it its name); gradually, it became a gift in cash.

Evergetism is indeed a practice inherent in municipal life, particularly in Roman Africa, where civic activity demonstrates remarkable longevity. In order to obtain a particular honor or even enter the *ordo*, municipal notables would promise donations to increase their chances in the future elections²⁹.

Although the sources are relatively few, we know from the *lex* of Urso (*Lex ursonensis*)³⁰ that municipal magistrates such as the *diumviri* and *aediles*, were required to organize *Ludi*³¹ or *Munera*³² during their office, partly at their own expense³³.

Although the title of *augustal* is defined, the question remains as to why a significant proportion of freedmen were among them and why the responsibility of organizing the *Augustalia* was not entrusted to the *decurions*. It is possible that the *Auuuutals* were recruited from among the wealthiest freedmen rather than from the *ordo decurionum*³⁴. This reinforces the idea that their primary function was the organization of games. Moreover, from the middle of the 1st century, we observe symbols reserved for magistrates, such as *curule* seats and *fasces*, on the funerary monuments of the *Augustals*, indicating their functions as *editores ludorum*³⁵. Some *Augustales* are also depicted wearing the "pretexta" toga and holding a purse³⁶ highlighting their status.

This is why the organization of games linked to Augustus likely gave rise to the name *Augustals*. They were not responsible for the imperial cult but had the specific mission of organizing particular games.

It is also the category of the *Augustals* that is responsible for acts of evergetism related to public monuments, marble benches, portico crypts, fountains and marble decorations, theater orchestras, circus podiums. This group also covered the costs of theatrical games

²⁹Playful evergetism ob honorem through a Latin inscription from Roman Africa, *History-Archaeology-History of Art*, Lille, Presse universitaire du Setentrion, pp17-26, 2022, p.6.hal-04391697.

³⁰The law of Urso prescribes the establishment of two colleges of priests from the colony (*ex colonia*), that of the pontiffs and that of the augurs, according to the Roman model. cf. Sheid, 2009, p.396-397.

³¹The *ludi circenses* were a set of games, practiced by the Etruscans often inspired by Attic or Greek practices, and then taken up by the Romans. The *ludi Augustalia* began in Rome after Augustus' return from the East in 19 BC, notably on October 12, and were officially instituted from 14 BC after Augustus' deification.

³²See note 12

³³G. Ville, *Op.cit.* p 8.cf. HUGONOT Chr., 2000, les spectacles de l'Afrique romaine : une culture municipale sous l'empire romain, Thèse de doctorat soutenue en 1996 sous la direction de J.-P. Martin, Université Paris IV Sorbonne.

³⁴Van Haepere F., *Op.cit.* 138-139

³⁵*Ibid.* ; p.144-145

³⁶*Ibid.*, pp145

and sometimes provided places for certain fellow citizens, as well as offering meals and sportulae³⁷.

These acts can sometimes be seen as “demonstration effect » a term used by Veyne³⁸, meaning the desire to appease frustration and show that they were on the side of those who could give rather than those who relied on charity³⁹. This term contrasts with the « snob effect » or to

« conspicuous consumption ” which are generally associated with citizens⁴⁰. Unlike Veyne who views this act as an exchange of evergesm for prestige and power, some authors disagree. Mowever, his interpretation seems quite logical, because, as shown in our inscription, Quintus Crepereius benefited from several titles, ranging from simple decurion to that of prefect of the annona.

While private freedmen tended to omit their status during the 2nd century, it is commonly accepted that they signaled their membership in the imperial house, knowing how to represent both an elite and its servants.

In both cases, it is important to note that the epigraphic medium played a key role in highlighting the merits of the honored individual.

Conclusion

There remains one question left unresolved, as it is in the conclusion that one is best positioned to answer. The inscription of Quintus Creperius Rufinus is thought to date from the 2nd century; in fact, we know that Theveste had an amphitheater, built when the third Legion of Augustus was still stationed in Theveste, that is, before 100 AD⁴¹. However, it could also date from between the 2nd and 4th centuries, by comparison with texts which texts that undoubtedly attest to the prestige of appointments to the rank of decurion in North Africa during the Late Empire⁴².

³⁷ Fabre Georges. Les affranchis et la vie municipale dans la péninsule ibérique sous le Haut-Empire romain : quelques remarques. In: Actes du colloque 1973 sur l'esclavage dans l'antiquité 4, Besançon 2-3 mai 1973. Besançon : Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 1973, p.429.

³⁸ Veyne Paul. *Panem et circenses* : l'évergétisme devant les sciences humaines. In: *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*. 24^e année, N. 3, 1969, pp. 801-802.

³⁹ Fabre, G. Op.cit., p.429.

⁴⁰Ibid, p.127.cf. Veyne Paul, op cit p.789-790

⁴¹Gregory Caron, Op.cit., p.7.

⁴² Cf. J. Marcillet -Jaubert, “ Coloni loci vegetable maiorum ”, *Epigraphica* , 41, 1979, p. 66-72; Fr. Jacques, “ Genitalis curia . The heredity of the decurionate claimed in an inscription from Numidia”, *ZPE*, 59, 1985, p. 146-150.)

It is also worth noting that, following the decline in evergetism and public recognition in the Late Empire, there was a significant increase in the use honorific titles. This reflects the crisis and the scarcity of benefactors-members of an elite that itself was facing difficulties and

unwilling to sacrifice for the benefit, now too expensive, of its fellow citizens. Moreover, in the Late Roman Empire, emperors and high officials, seeking to consolidate their power or reward their supporters, granted a multitude of honorary and administrative titles. This accumulation of titles on inscriptions reflects the growing complexity of the imperial bureaucracy and the fragmentation of power.

While in the early centuries of the Empire, titles were often limited and clearly defined, the Late Empire period saw a proliferation of titulatures, often used to mark the authority and prestige of individuals. The inscriptions of this period reveal a proliferation of titles frequently accumulated by the same person to strengthen their social and political position. It is well known that the exercise of public office at the local level in the Late Empire was sometimes due to coercion, as families were not able to provide members for municipal administration, which had become very expensive after the onset of the financial crisis⁴³.

This analysis has allowed us to approach an area of history that belongs to a specific genre, namely, the involvement of elites in various political functions.

By studying the status of the stemma⁴⁴ of a character or a social, political and religious group, we aim to define the criteria that allow such a group to be identified. Many recent studies have made it possible to define the group of elites. Men and women who, through their social behavior, their fortune, their participation in the life of the city, constitute the group of notables. Even if not all of them held magistracies or official positions, they nevertheless constitute form the pool from which the actors of political life are chosen.

⁴³Cf. AHM Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602. A social Economic and Administrative Survey*, II, Oxford, 1964, p. 712-766

⁴⁴ A stemma codicum , often abbreviated to stemma, corresponds to the family tree in ancient Rome.

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