



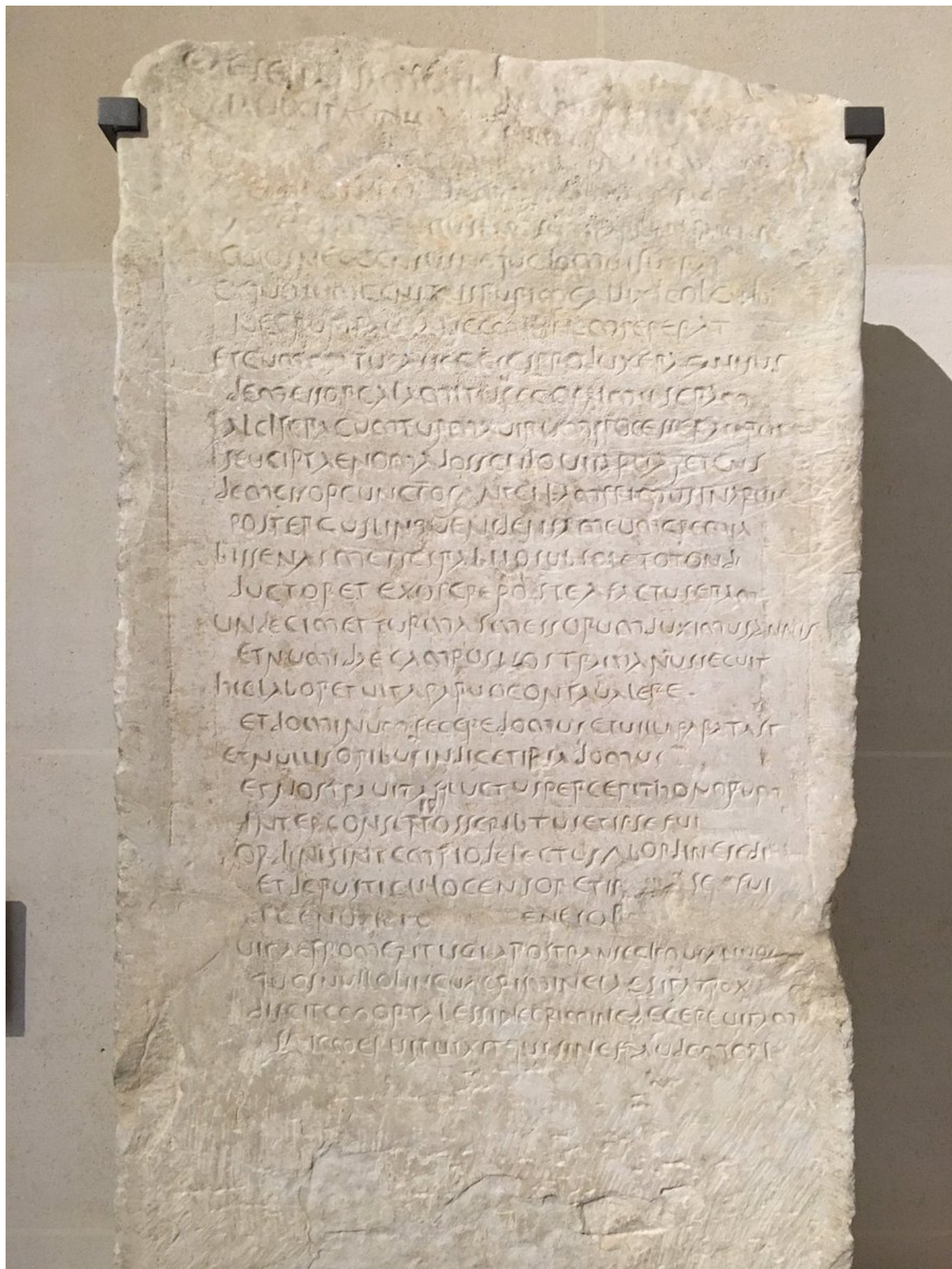
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## THE HARVESTER WHO BECAME A MAGISTRATE – AN INSCRIPTION FROM 260-270 AD

On twitter this evening, I saw a Latin inscription in the Louvre, in a cursive script (!), which tells an interesting story. It's from Mactaris, in ancient Africa Proconsularis, between 26-270 AD (h/t [Susan Rahyab](#)). It tells an interesting story of how a humble corn harvester rose to become a magistrate:



CIL 8, 11824

The monument is today ca. 1.09m high, 0.54m wide, and 0.23m thick. It suffered minor damage during its journey from Tunis to the Louvre in 1886, but at some point lost the

upper part of the inscription.

It begins with the remains of four separate but brief funerary notices, of at least two women and one man, and one unknown, not bearing the classic three names, but which each feature a formula *pius/pia vixit annis* which is normally Christian. They are also in a quite different script, and must be later as they run over the top of the poem. There is a detailed discussion of the monument in Brent D. Shaw, *Bringing in the sheaves: Economy and Metaphor in the Roman world*, p.281 f. <sup>[1]</sup>

**Thanks to Miranda Halsey**, to whom I also owe many of the references, I learn that this was published as *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 8.11824 = *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* 7457 (from Tunisia, 3rd century A.D.).

There is a translation by Tim G. Parkin and Arthur J. Pomeroy, *Roman Social History: A Sourcebook*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 39-40. ([Google Books preview](#)) which reads:

I was born into a poor dwelling and of a poor father, who had no property or household. From the time of my birth, I lived in the country looking after my business; there was no time off in the countryside and none for me at any time. And when the time of year had brought forth the grain ready for harvest, then I was the first reaper of the stalks. When the sickle-bearing gangs of men had made their way to the fields, whether heading for the nomads of Cirta or the fields of Jupiter, as harvester I preceded them all, first into the fields, leaving the packed bands behind my back. I reaped twelve harvests under the raging sun, and afterwards became a work gang leader instead of a labourer. We led the gangs of harvesters for eleven years and our band cut down the Numidian fields. This effort and my frugal lifestyle brought success and made me master of a household and gained me a house, and my home itself lacks nothing. And my life gained the rewards of office: I was myself enrolled among the conscript councillors. Elected by the order [of the decurions], I had a seat in the order's temple and, starting out as a humble country boy, I too became censor. I produced children and saw them grow into young men and saw their children too. In accord with our services in life, we have enjoyed years of fame, which no bitter tongue has hurt with any reproach. People, learn to pass your lives without giving reason for reproach. The man who has lived without deceit has earned meeting his death in such a manner.

But Dr Halsey posted a different, and rather moving translation made by another:

My cradle stood in a hut of poor parents;  
no money, no personnel in sight.  
Since then I kept on working my fanner's land;  
my plot was never rested, nor was I.  
When the season produced a harvest,  
I was the first to mow the grain  
and when the farmers travelled the country  
in droves, carrying their scythes, all the way to Cirta  
I was the first; I was the front mower,  
leaving plenty of sheaves behind me.

For twelve harvests I mowed under the burning sun,  
 then I became a headman  
 and I was in charge of the teams for eleven years.  
 My men mowed every field in Numidia.  
 My hard work, my modest wishes  
 proved successful in the end: they earned me  
 a home. I became the owner of a large villa,  
 and who lives there is never in want.  
 Life also offered me a bunch of honors:  
 I was elected to join the municipal council.  
 In the temple I sat in the seat of honor  
 and from a peasant I became a censor.  
 I got sons and I had the privilege of seeing them grow up,  
 as well as grandsons, whom I loved very much.  
 By living well I had many beautiful years.  
 No vicious neighbor's tongue to ruin it.  
 Dear People, learn to live without sin;  
 he who lives without blame has earned the right to die blamelessly.

The Latin text can be found in the Clauss-Slaby database as EDCS-23200467:

Caeselia Namina [...]  
 pia vixit annis  
 [...]  
 lianus pius [vix]it annis  
 [...] pia vixit annis [...]  
 [.....] annis<sup>[1]</sup>  
 [.....]  
 VE[...]AIIS[...]MA[3... fui  
 paupere progenitus lare sum parvo(ue) parente  
 cuius nec census neque domus fuerat  
 ex quo sum genitus ruri mea vixi colendo  
 nec ruri pausa nec mihi semper erat  
 et cum maturas segetes produxerat annus  
 demessor calami tunc ego primus eram  
 falcifera cum turma virum processerat arvis  
 seu Cirtae Nomados seu Iovis arva petens  
 demessor cunctos anteibam primus in arvis  
 pos(t) tergus linguens densa meum gremia  
 bis senas messes rabido sub sole totondi  
 ductor et ex opere postea factus eram  
 undecim et turmas messorum duximus annis  
 et Numidiae campos nostra manus secuit  
 hic labor et vita parvo con(ten)ta valere  
 et dominum fecere domus et villa paratast  
 et nullis opibus indiget ipsa domus  
 et nostra vita fructus percepit honorum  
 inter conscriptos scribtus et ipse fui

ordinis in templo delectus ab ordine sedi  
et de rusticulo censor et ipse fui  
et genui et vidi iuvenes carosq(ue) nepotes  
vitae pro meritis claros transegimus annos  
quos nullo lingua crimine laedit atrox  
discite mortales sine crimine degere vitam  
sic meruit vixit qui sine fraude mori

D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) C(aius) Mulceius Maximus vixi(t) an(nos) XXX  
D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) S(extus) Au[reli]us F[...]nus vix(it) an(nos) XL

The lines at the top probably have no connection with the poem. Caeselia Namina is a shortened form of a punice name, perhaps Namphamina.

The subject of the poem is known in English as the “Maktar harvester”, as his name is no longer readable.

On either side of the stela are recorded the deaths of C. Mulceius Maximus, died age 30, and S. Aurelius F...nus, who died aged 40.<sup>[3]</sup> These are probably late and probably 4th century.

Interesting and new to me.

1. <sup>[1]</sup>[Google Books preview](#).↵

2. <sup>[2]</sup>Up to this point I have followed Brent D. Shaw’s text rather than the Clauss-Slaby text.↵

3. <sup>[3]</sup>H. Singor, “Africa Romana: een overzicht”, *Hermeneus* 78 (2006), 65-78. Online [here](#).↵

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