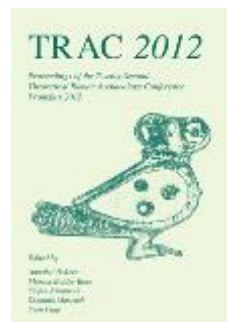

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Author: Lennart Gilhaus
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Equites and Senators as Agents of Change: Urban Culture and Elite Self-Representation in Thamugadi and Lepcis Magna (Second-third Centuries A.D.)

Lennart Gilhaus

Introduction

Theoretical approaches to cultural change in the Roman provinces are to a large extent focused on the question of how the conquered peoples and their elites dealt with the culture of the Roman conquerors. Today most scholars place particular emphasis on the agency of the conquered. Consequently, many accounts focus on the first and early second centuries A.D., and often it seems as if cultural relations within the Empire then remained static until the later third century A.D. when profound changes became evident. The reasons for these changes remain largely obscure – probably because scholars often tried to explain them only within the context of the so called ‘crisis of third century’. There is an obvious gap between scholars working on the first two centuries and those analysing the third century A.D. In an attempt to bridge this gap at least partly, I will enquire whether the way the Empire was run during the period of the Principate was itself an important factor in the development of late antique urban culture. In order not to go beyond the scope of this study, focus is put on urban culture and especially elite self-representation. The African cities of Thamugadi and Lepcis Magna are used as case studies because the state of the late second and third centuries A.D. is outstandingly well preserved in both cases.

Changes in elite self-representation between the second and fourth centuries A.D.

Elite self-representation and urban culture underwent significant changes between the second and fourth centuries A.D. I can give only a very short general overview of some important fields of change in this paper:

- a) *Building activity*: Judging from archaeological and epigraphic evidence public buildings were currently repaired and restored in most provinces but new buildings other than churches were erected seldom after the middle of the third century A.D. (Borg and Witschel 2001: 50–99; Rambaldi 2009).
- b) *Epigraphic habit*: The number of inscriptions shrank during the third century A.D. in all regions of the Empire albeit to a different extent (MacMullen 1982; Woolf 1996; Mrozek 1998). Civic and building inscriptions diminished significantly in number. Emperors and high functionaries were constantly mentioned, but in reduced amount (Witschel 1999: 60–84). Apart from this quantitative decline there have been also qualitative modifications: inscriptions were now regularly re-used, the typeface of new texts appears neglected. Inscriptions of honorary monuments now rarely gave a full *cursus honorum* and highlighted personal

- virtues (Bauer 2007; Griesbach 2011).
- c) *Portrait habit*: The quantity of honorary monuments erected in public places decreased considerably (Witschel 1995b, 2007; Borg 2007; Griesbach 2011; in general Fejfer 2008). In addition, a gradual disintegration of inscription and statue can be detected (Bauer 2007: 84–105). In most cities the traditional *loci* for portrait statues, as notably the *forum*, were not given up until the fifth century A.D. but older statues were arranged according to new tastes (Witschel 1995b).
 - d) *Public games*: Acclamations during public games were continually rising in importance; seat arrangements were getting more clearly fixed – since the fourth century A.D. especially by means of seat inscriptions – so that social positions and hierarchies became more easily perceptible (Borg and Witschel 2001: 93–104).
 - e) *Dress and look*: The *toga* remained the symbol of being Roman until the fall of the Western Empire but with the introduction of the *contabulatio* in the third century A.D. the style of wearing the *toga* changed considerably. The new form required intensive care, and draping was very complex. Luxury materials and rich jewellery were now shown demonstratively, while in the first two centuries A.D. emphasis had been put on frugality and simplicity (Borg and Witschel 2001: 106–113; Fejfer 2008: 345–351; Olson 2008: 96–112).
 - f) *Private housing*: Rich *domus* in general and especially their reception and dining rooms were designed more spacious than before and equipped with apses so that more room for the self-portrayal of the *dominus* during banquets and receptions was available (Borg and Witschel 2001: 113–116; Bowes 2010; for Africa: Thébert 1989; Bullo and Ghedini 2003; Carucci 2007). Regional characteristics seem to have played a very important role in the development of elite housing in Late Antiquity. Polychrome mosaics celebrating elite life and virtues became the most important aspect of domestic decoration, especially in North Africa (Dunbabin 1978; Muth 1998; Carucci 2007: 95–99).

The general trend towards more ostentatious forms of display is obvious. At public games, by means of dress and inside the *domus* fortune and social power were directly demonstrated. In the centuries before, efforts in the service of the community had been stressed, whereas showing off wealth too openly was disapproved. Social rituals had aimed at presenting a reciprocal relationship between local elites and the community and obliged the elites to demonstrate modesty, liberality and readiness to act for the city. Therefore, the community acknowledged the social prestige and leading position of the elites. This euergetic system rested upon the social consensus about the requital of individual deeds for the community with honours by the community (Veyne 1976). The developments in elite self-representation cast in doubt whether this consensus was still given in the third and fourth centuries A.D. (Griesbach 2011: 95–96). All perceivable new forms of elite self-representation and behaviour aimed at producing social distance between elites and non-elites. In addition, elites now favoured semi-public places like

the *domus* and concentrated public forms like games over the *forum*. In sum, two main developments can be traced:

- a) A shift from social practices accentuating reciprocity and closeness to those drawing attention to social distance in the relationship between elites and the community.
- b) A shift of places for self-representation from public to semi-public spaces and concentrated public forms.

The question which factors led to this change in values remains largely unanswered. Recent accounts have shown that the changes were not (or only marginally) due to economic problems and that they did not happen at the same time in all provinces. In Italy and Spain some phenomena were already visible in the later second century A.D., while in other regions like North Africa and parts of the East major changes appeared only in the third century A.D. (Witschel 1999, 2004). Hence, the political crisis of the mid-third century A.D. may have enhanced some processes but was not the reason for them. Even in the very profound study of Borg and Witschel the transformations are only vaguely attributed to changes of mentality (Borg and Witschel 2001; *cf.* Griesbach 2011). Because (a) no fundamental social upheavals did happen during the third century A.D. (Vittinghoff 1990: 277–356; Witschel 1995a: 300–305 in a case study about Thamugadi; *contra* Alföldy 2011: 218–272), because (b) elite self-representation altered with different speed in various regions (Witschel 1999; Borg and Witschel 2001: 116–118), and because (c) the same traits are manifest at least in the core regions of the Roman Empire in the later third century A.D. (Witschel 1999; Borg and Witschel 2001: 116–118), it can be assumed that socio-cultural conditions for self-representation and urban life were changing slowly over a long period of time.

Equites, senators and their hometown

An important ongoing process between the first and third centuries A.D. was the incorporation of provincial elites into the *ordo equester* and the Roman senate. The number of provincial senators increased steadily and especially from the time of the Flavian emperors onwards so that under Septimius Severus there were more provincial than Italic senators (Hammond 1957; Hopkins and Burton 1983: 200, Tab. 3.15). Equestrian officers from Italy were outnumbered by provincials already in Flavian times (Laurence, Esmonde Cleary and Sears 2011: 307, Tab. 11.3).

Rome was the central point of interest for most senators. No matter where they came from, the legal *origo* of senators was Rome (Chastagnol 1977). They were required to take part in senatorial meetings (Talbert 1984: 152–154) and many offices were held in Rome so that the provincial senators were compelled to purchase an adequate house within the city (Alföldy 2005: 56–60). Additionally, an imperial edict of Trajan obliged all senators to have one third of their property invested in Italian land (Plin. *Epis.* 6.19.4); under Marcus Aurelius the obligation was reduced to a quarter (HA *Marc.* 11.8). Although aiming mainly at binding senatorial funds and reducing bribery, these edicts also show that senators maintained continuous links with regions outside Italy

and especially their hometown (Kriekhaus 2001). A statement of the jurist Paulus underlines this impression:

'Senatores licet in urbe domicilium habere videantur; tamen et ibi, unde oriundi sunt, habere domicilium intelleguntur; quia dignitas domicilii adiectionem potius dedisse quam permutasse videtur' (Dig. 1.9.11).

More pointedly, already Pliny lamented that some candidates for senatorial offices were regarding *urbem Italiamque non pro patria sed pro hospitio aut stabulo* (Plin. *Epis.* 6.19.4).

Senatorial families were obviously not completely tied to Rome. Evidence clearly shows that provincial senators owned houses in their old hometown where also large parts of their property were situated; they often kept up relationships with clients and friends there, and some family members stayed in the province (Eck 1980, 1997; Kriekhaus 2006). A number of senators returned to their hometown after their career. Eck has examined several known cases of returners and has considered that an important motive will have been the recognition that a single senator would occupy a far more prominent position in his hometown than he could do at Rome (Eck 1997: 92). Being a senator of the Roman People conveyed a great amount of dignity and respect. Due to their enormous prestige, wealth and relationships senatorial families could excel the members of the local elite in every way. Because senators were liberated from *munera* all their acts for the city could be seen as *beneficia*. Furthermore, senatorial rank was not conferred by the local authorities but from outside by the emperor and the senate of Rome. At the same time, nobody doubted the *dignitas* of senators because at least the potent local elites themselves tried to climb the social ladder. Senators occupied a superior social position in their hometowns and their socio-political relations with the rest of the community were hence *per se* asymmetrical.

Most of this also applies to *equites*. The *equus publicus* or the *adlectio* as *iudex* into the equestrian *decuriae* could only be accredited by the emperor himself. They were second in status only to senators. Unlike senators, their number was not strictly limited but never so high that there were more than a handful of equestrian families in a medium-sized city. Most *equites* never left their hometown. Of course, several *equites* became officers or made career in the imperial service but evidence shows that even these *equites* often returned home after retirement (Duncan-Jones 1967; Devijver 1991). *Equites* were thus normally stronger involved in municipal affairs than most senators.

Nevertheless, evidence that *equites* were invested with magistracies in their hometown after their promotion is scarce, whereas free donations and holding local priesthoods were common (at least in Africa: Duncan-Jones 1967: 162–165). Concerning senators, the combined data from the western half of the Empire outside Italy supplies only 10 senators holding local magistracies or priesthoods, while gifts are more often accounted (Eck 1980: 290, 302–305). Taking over local magistracies was obviously considered 'under the dignity' of *equites* and especially of senators who even refused to assume priesthood – just Italy and the Greek speaking provinces constituted exceptions (Eck 1980).

Local *equites* and senators were not equal to ‘ordinary’ *decuriones*. The influence they exerted on the communities must have increased during the period of the Principate with the growing number of provincials incorporated into the two highest *ordines* so that inequalities grew in urban societies based on competition and reciprocity. One has to ask whether this process had consequences for urban life and the habit of the elites.

Equites and senators in Thamugadi

Thamugadi was founded as a colony under Trajan with an orderly street grid which divided the city into equal *insulae*. The first public buildings were already erected under Trajan and Hadrian though the builders remain unknown. In the middle of the second century A.D. many new projects were undertaken especially but not exclusively to improve the city’s infrastructure. These were mainly financed by public money. The number of privately paid building projects exceeded the public engagement only in the Severan period. In these 80 years of constant activity, the municipal area was nearly doubled, and building inscriptions were regularly put up to commemorate the founders. After the Severan period, the number of inscriptions dropped suddenly, though they did not completely vanish and restorations and repairs are often identifiable in the archaeological record without being commemorated. The public buildings were taken care of at least until the later fourth century A.D. when churches started to dominate the urban landscape. A Byzantine fort was constructed with the spoils of the old city and after the withdrawal of the soldiers in the middle of the seventh century A.D. the place was abandoned and forgotten (for Thamugadi in Late Antiquity: Lepelley 1979–1981: II.444–476; Sears 2007: 58–63; for the urban development in general: Witschel 1995a: 267–277; Corbier 2009; all with further references).

Although Thamugadi was founded very late, the city obviously followed the same common pattern of urban development as others in the region and the Empire in general did. This is also true for the promotion of elites to higher rank in North Africa: the first *equites* are known for the mid-second century A.D., senators appeared a generation later. For the second and third centuries A.D., there is evidence for a total of 10–11 senators from six families and 18 *equites*. Most of these persons came from the local elite which can be proven in some cases (Witschel 1995a: 277–282; cf. Corbier 2009).

Senators are not known to have taken over magistracies in the city (Witschel 1995a: 277–280). For the *equites*, two career patterns can be traced: Seven completed the *tres militiae*, the others acted merely on the local level and apparently obtained the rank as honour. Only two of the seven equestrian officers, but most other *equites* have been priests (Witschel 1995a: 280–282). However, only one was invested with regular magistracies (CIL VIII 2407 = CIL VIII 17826).

Some senators seem to have been very important for the city. The senatorial family of the Flavii Pudentes Pomponiani can be traced over several generations from ca. 150 to 250 A.D. More than ten inscriptions in Thamugadi allude to them (Laronde 1985; Witschel 1995a: 314–319). This family was obviously very present in the city, and the local *ordo* honoured their patron P. Flavius Pudens Pomponianus *signo* Vocontius as

erga civeis(!) patriamque prolixè cultor (CIL VIII 2391 = CIL VIII 17910). However, they made only some small presents to their hometown, no major donation can be attributed to them.

In Thamugadi, contrary to other cities in North Africa, private euergetism is largely limited to the Severan period. Most of the time, the *ordo decurionum* acted as unity. Individual *decuriones* and especially the decurional *flamines* are only known to have donated *aediculae* or most often statues. These honorary monuments were for the largest part dedicated to emperors or gods and frequently were erected *ob honorem* in the *forum*. Senators and most *equites* did not erect statues in the *forum*. On the contrary: besides emperors and other high-ranking persons, only some local senators and *equites* are honoured with a statue, while there are no honorary monuments for normal *decuriones*. The higher prestige of senators also finds expression in the title *patronus* which is only conferred to local senators and imperial officers (for the statues on the *forum*: Zimmer 1989, 1992; Witschel 1995b; Trifiló 2008).

Of the known donations by individuals, two excelled the others: a library donated by a senator in the third century A.D. (ILS 9362) and the erection of a *macellum* by an equestrian family in the Severan period (Wesch-Klein 1990: 331–332 No. 10). The *macellum* is situated next to the *decumanus maximus* in the western part of the city and was built by Marcus Plotius Faustus *signo* Sertius and his wife Cornelia Valentina Tucciana (for the building see Boeswillwald, Cagnat and Ballu 1905: 183–215; De Ruyt 1983: 193–198). Sertius passed the *tres militiae*; in addition, he and his wife held the *flaminatus perpetuus* in the city (cf. CIL VIII 2398; CIL VIII 2399). The *macellum* was constructed on the land of the Sertii and without the participation of the *decuriones* (ILS 5579). On the forecourt facing the *decumanus maximus*, a *libertus* and his daughter set up statues for Cornelia Valentina Tucciana and her husband. Six statues stood inside the complex, three of which were dedicated to Sertius himself, while the others portrayed his wife. Two portraits at the main entrance were dedicated by Sertius to himself and his wife. Their son and again Sertius himself donated two statues of Cornelia Valentina Tucciana in the centre of the open space. Two statues of Sertius in front of the apse in the back of the *macellum* but adjusted to the main entrance were erected by the son and a *libertus*. Additionally, the surrounding architrave praises the name of the Sertii (Boeswillwald, Cagnat and Ballu 1905: 183–215; Zimmer 1992: 312–313). The relationship between the Sertii and their *patria* was extremely uneven: the Sertii gave something to their *patria* but the city was not participant in the erection of the building. On the contrary, the Sertii themselves extolled their merits and emphasised the prestige of their family. The community was only the passive recipient of a gift by a superior person and his family.

Apparently, the couple was as well responsible for the restoration of the capitol (AE 1980 No. 956; cf. Witschel 1995a: 273) and also here the *patria* seems to be only the passive recipient. Perhaps they even arranged for little *thermae* to be erected as a *donum* for their *patria*. Only in this case the *respublica* erected a statue for Sertius *ob merita in cives patriamque et munificentiam eius* in accordance with a decree of the *decuriones* (Cagnat 1896: 285 No. 251 and 252). If these baths were too constructed on

Sertius' land, which is very probable, even in this case benefactor and community are asymmetrically connected because the *ordo* had to request the erection of Sertius and thus was dependent upon his approval.

The Sertii are not only known by their benefactions, also their *domus* has been identified by an inscription naming the couple. With a surface of ca. 2.260m² the *domus* is one of the largest in Africa. It is provided with several peristyle courts, representative rooms and a private bath. The important rooms are richly decorated with mosaics which, for the most part, belong to a later phase (for the *domus* see Boeswillwald, Cagnat and Ballu 1905: 326–333; Lassus 1966; for the mosaics see Germain 1969: 59–64). Even if the most typical components of the late antique *domus* in Africa like *stibadia* or *apses* miss in this house of the Severan period, some elements already point to the future: above all, the enormous dimensions of this *domus* outmatched most other houses of the first to third centuries A.D. in Africa. Moreover, nearly exclusively late antique *domus* in Africa were equipped with private baths consisting of several rooms (Thébert 2003: 363–369). The maintenance was very expensive and required skilled personnel. But more important: private baths were not open to public; rather the access to private baths was limited and controlled by the owner. Sertius, his relatives and friends detached from the rest of the community by bathing in his house and hence reduced communication channels with the public.

Other large *domus* were built around the same time. Contrary to public buildings, new private constructions were undertaken during the third and fourth centuries A.D. Sertius' house is one of the first large *domus* of Thamugadi but other members of the elite followed soon.

Equites and senators in Lepcis Magna

Contrary to Thamugadi, Lepcis Magna was an old Phoenician or Punic foundation. The urban topography was fundamentally altered in the Augustan age. A *macellum* and a theatre were built by Annobal Tapapius Rufus. Other members of the local elite soon followed his example, and some projects were undertaken collectively (Kreikenbom 2011 with further references). After the city had been promoted to *municipium* status by Vespasian and to a colonial rank by Trajan, the local elites did not stop spending funds for new constructions. The existing buildings were maintained, sometimes also enlarged and furnished with marble decorations, though most of these renovations are not commemorated in inscriptions. The emperor Septimius Severus, a native of Lepcis Magna, commenced an immense building project consisting of a new *forum* with a basilica, a columned street and the extension of the city's port. The constructions were finished by his son Caracalla (Ward-Perkins 1993). The city honoured the members of the Severan dynasty with extreme zeal. During the third and fourth centuries A.D., the urban centre was continuously conserved albeit new buildings became very scarce after the Severan period; by the fifth century A.D., large parts of the city were abandoned. After the Byzantine conquest of North Africa, the central parts of Lepcis Magna between the two *fora* were enclosed by a wall, and some churches were installed within older

buildings. However, when the Arabs arrived in Tripolitania in the 650s A.D., there was no resistance and it is far from clear how long the renewed city was taken care for. Lepcis Magna was buried by the sand, while Tripoli became the new regional centre (for Lepcis Magna in Late Antiquity see Lepelley 1979–1981: II. 335–368; Kreikenbom 2007; Sears 2007: 70–73; Tantillo and Bigi 2010; for the urban development in general see Di Vita 1982; Laronde and Degeorge 2005; all with further references).

The promotion of the local elites happened relatively fast. Most families of the local elite received the Roman citizenship before the foundation of the colony under Trajan. Due to the adoption of the *tria nomina*, connections with the elite families of the first century A.D. must remain nebulous (Torelli 1973: 400–408; Birley 1988). Some families then ascended towards the equestrian and senatorial *ordines*. According to Di Vita-Évrard, about 38–45 senators and 17 *equites* are known for the second and third centuries A.D. (Di Vita-Évrard 1993: 302–304) – though this evidence is biased because many members of the Septimii and Fulvii are known by literary references and honorary monuments for the imperial family. The first *equites* and senators are known in early second century A.D., but most are documented for the later second century A.D. and the Severan period (Torelli 1973; Corbier 1982: 721–726).

It is far from clear whether members of senatorial families took over magistracies or priesthoods in the city. Some priests and *duumviri* of the second and third century A.D. whose status is not indicated in the evidence might in fact have been not senators, but of senatorial stock (as descendants and relatives of the *clarissima femina* Aquilia Blaesilla; cf. Corbier 1982: 723). Some *equites* were invested with local magistracies (Torelli 1973).

Local elite families spent immense amounts of money for embellishing the urban outlay from the Augustan age onwards though epigraphic attestations of euergetic acts are scarce already in the second half of the second century A.D., and no liberalities by simple *decuriones* are securely attested after ca. 200 A.D. Senators and *equites* did not appear in the epigraphic testimonies as benefactors until the later second century A.D. (Wesch-Klein 1990: 109–126).

The most important equestrian and senatorial families of the Fulvii, Granii, Sillii Plautii Hateriani and Septimii were related by marriages with each other (cf. Corbier 1982: 721–726). The father of Septimius Severus, who probably was an *eques*, was married to a Fulvia Pia (HA *Sev.* 1.2). Judging from his name, Fulvius Plautianus, Severus' *praefectus praetorio* and relative, seems to have been kin with a Fulvius Fuscus Granianus (Corbier 1982: 722) and the Sillii Plautii Hateriani (Corbier 1982: 722–724). The Sillii Plautii Hateriani themselves descended from the two originally separated local families of the Plautii and Sillii who both have been senatorial at least since the mid-second century A.D. (cf. Torelli 1973: 385–386 with a hypothetical stemma). The leading families of Lepcis Magna apparently tried to separate themselves from the rest of the *decuriones* and to form a restricted group.

The disposition of statues in the *forum* of Lepcis Magna is not as intelligible as in the case of Thamugadi but some general remarks can be made (cf. Bejor 1987; Lefebvre 1994; Condron 1998; Kleinwächter 2001: 236–239, 252–253): as in Thamugadi,

emperors, governors and *procuratores* are the best documented group, though in Lepcis Magna gods were hardly represented. Some simple *decuriones* were honoured in the first and second century A.D. but not at a later date. Local equestrian and senatorial families received monuments from the mid-second century until the late fourth century A.D. Aside from the Septimii, the Plautii and Sillii are the best documented families in Lepcis Magna and their members are often honoured with statues not only on the *forum* but in the whole city. In the second century A.D., Aquilia Blaesilla, a *clarissima femina* (according to an unedited inscription: Corbier 1982: 723), received a posthumous monument by two of her sons in accordance with the *ordo* in the *curia* (IRT 632). Several monuments were erected to her various children and relatives *inter alia* in the *forum*, the *curia* and the *decumanus maximus* mostly by other family members (e.g. IRT 587, 593, 601, 634; cf. IRT 542, 635). Her son Ti. Plautius Lupus, who despite his senatorial background became *duumvir* and *flamen perpetuus*, was honoured by the *ordo* with a *biga* for giving various games and embellishing the *thermae* (IRT 601). Relatives of another son (perhaps his own sons) made career as senators, yet they remained very active in the region (Torelli 1973: 385–386; Corbier 1982: 725). The Plautii, Sillii and their relatives obviously dominated the public to a large extent.

There are not many inscriptions dating to the period between ca. 230–280 A.D.; this was possibly not that much due to a rapid decline in production as it was a consequence of the extensive use of spoils in the later third and fourth centuries A.D. (Kleinwächter 2001: 239 n. 1582). Around the time of the Tetrarchs, it also became common in Tripolitania to remodel older heads for portraits (Bergmann 1977: 154–156).

In the time of Constantine, the Flavii Vibiani Heraclii played an important role (Torelli 1973: 392–393; Lepelley 1979–1981: II.347–351; Tantillo and Bigi 2010: 416–427). Torelli has supposed that they descended from the Sillii Plautii Hateriani though this cannot be proven (Torelli 1973: 393). Flavius Frontinus was a *vir perfectissimus* and *principalis*. He occupied the most important offices and priesthoods within the city and received various honours (IRT 564 = Tantillo and Bigi 2010: 416–418 No. 54). His son Flavius Vibianus Junior even served as *duumvir* together with his father while he was still in *parvulis annis* (IRT 595 = Tantillo and Bigi 2010: 420–422 No. 55; cf. IRT 562), although minors were legally forbidden to hold magistracies; the high prestige of the family obviously allowed evading the law (Tantillo and Bigi 2010: 421). Another relative gave splendid games (IRT 567 = Tantillo and Bigi 2010: 422–425 No. 56; cf. IRT 568 = Tantillo and Bigi 2010: 425–427 No. 57). The leading position of the family is furthermore underlined by the fact that *Heraclii* was carved on the first *gradus* of the amphitheatre (Torelli 1973: 392). Public games were apparently a very important field for their self-representation. The honorary monuments already show some late antique features as rustic capitals and concentration on virtues like *benignitas*, *innocentia* and *integritas*. Until that time, these virtues were ascribed only to the emperor and high standing officers and governors. Now they were also used for the leading members of the local elites (Tantillo and Bigi 2010: 418, 423–424). Other contemporaneous and later monuments even place stronger emphasis on the personal virtues of the honoured person (Christol 1983; Tantillo and Bigi 2010).

Comparison with evidence from other African cities

Size, prestige and urban history of Thamugadi and Lepcis Magna were highly uneven. Some details might be explained by their different background. In the important and populous Mediterranean harbour of Lepcis Magna at least *equites* and perhaps also persons with senatorial background have taken charge of local offices, whereas in the mid-sized hinterland city of Thamugadi senators and most *equites* refrained from local magistracies. Nevertheless, the prominent role of *equites* and senators is visible in both.

Evidence from other African cities supports the observations made for Thamugadi and Lepcis Magna. Just one senator is securely documented to have taken over a local magistracy in Africa (Eck 1980: 290, Tab. 1.b.). Several *equites* are known as *flamines*, though only some *equites* held other local offices (Duncan-Jones 1967).

Some senatorial and equestrian families played a key role in the development of the urban landscape in other cities. In Thugga, nearly all important buildings between c. 150 and 250 A.D. were constructed by the equestrian Gabinii and Marcii (Wesch-Klein 1990: 215–242; Briand-Ponsart 2003: 247–251). The Gabinii and Marcii regularly acted as *patroni* of Thugga, held important priesthoods and were invested not with local but only with Carthaginian magistracies. Most of their later buildings were erected *solo privato* (cf. Golvin and Khanoussi 2005: 207–208) and as closed constructions. Especially the Severan circus (Maurin 2008: 101–104) and the temple of Caelestis (Golvin and Khanoussi 2005: 99–208) extolled the prestige of the family.

In Bulla Regia, several buildings of the later second and third centuries A.D. were erected by members of the senatorial families of the Aradii, Marcii and Memmii, while non-senatorial families played only a minor role (for these families see Corbier 1982: 711–715). The Aradii built a *macellum* next to the *forum* (De Ruyt 1983: 48–52). Statues of family members were positioned inside so that the wives stood behind their respective husbands. They were dedicated by the *universus ordo* who honoured the Aradii as *patroni* (e.g. CIL VIII 14470). Iulia Memmia, a daughter of a consular and *patrona* of the city, was responsible for the construction of the vast baths in the south of the city (Broise and Thébert 1993). The city dedicated a honorary monument for her inside the baths (ILAFr 454). Marcius Tertullus, also *patronus* of Bulla Regia, arranged for the construction of a temple by will (CIL VIII 25515).

The development of large-scale *domus* in the late second and third centuries A.D. is also traceable in most African cities (Thébert 1989; Bullo and Ghedini 2003; Carucci 2007). Thanks to an inscription, a large partly excavated *domus* in the centre of Acholla can be assigned to the senator Asinius Rufinus who had been consul in 184 A.D. (AE 1954 No. 58 = AE 1955 No. 122 = AE 1956 No. 167). Around this time, the house was redesigned, some rooms were carpeted with new mosaics and a huge *vestibulum* which has served as an audience-chamber for clients was built (Gozlan, Jeddi, Blanc-Bijon and Bourgeois 2001: 7–87). Also the *domus* of the Antistii in the centre of Thibilis may have been constructed or rebuilt in the middle of the second century A.D. when the family attained senatorial rank (Cagnat 1905; Bertrand 1973–1974; Kriechhaus 2006: 115–130).

It seems that equites and senators played an important role in the development of domestic architecture in Africa and late antique urbanism in general. Nevertheless, like in Thamugadi or Lepcis Magna most known senators and equites are not known to have made great benefactions.

Concluding remarks

Which conclusions can be drawn from this short overview? Which role did *equites* and senators play for the development of urban culture and elite self-representation in Thamugadi, Lepcis Magna and other cities in Africa in the second and third centuries A.D.?

- a) *Hierarchisation of urban society and dominant position of equites and senators:*
The elites of Thamugadi and Lepcis Magna were highly stratified like in most Roman cities. With the increasing number of senators and *equites* in the respective cities these inequalities became legally established and grew further because the higher status *per se* conveyed prestige. In the case of Lepcis Magna, the leading families tried to keep their group restrictive by endogamous marriages.
- b) *Differing habits:* Some members of the two highest *ordines* are exceptionally often mentioned (the Flavii Pudentes Pomponiani in Thamugadi; the Sillii Plautii Hateriani and their relatives in Lepcis Magna). Only a few senatorial and equestrian families acted as benefactors to the city. On the one hand, the Flavii Pudens Pomponiani and Sillii Plautii Hateriani were very often honoured by the community and particular persons but only few donations are certainly known. The Sertii, on the other hand, were the most active members of the elite of Thamugadi. They were also among the first to build a large *domus*. The habits of the high-ranking persons in the second and third centuries A.D. obviously differed very much:
 - a) Some senators and *equites* kept distance to civic life and thus are only accidentally mentioned in inscriptions or acted in ways that are not perceivable in our evidence.
 - b) A different group, especially the senators, was requested to act as advocates of the interest of the city towards the imperial administration and accepted this role.
 - c) Others like the Sertii or the Flavii Vibiani seemingly have tried to dominate the urban development and civic life passing over or dominating the *ordo decurionum*.
- c) *Social distance:* Connecting these differing habits is their general trend to accentuate the social distance between the high standing persons and the rest of the local society. *Equites* and senators stood outside, above or beside the local elite but were not really part of it. If they did something for the city, the community had to ask for, or they acted on their own accord. Self-celebration and limitation of contact between these super-elites and the community became more and more common as especially the example of the Sertii shows.

The local senators eventually became more masters than benefactors of the city and successful *decuriones* surely tried to follow their way. Classical means of self-representation which had put more stress on the equality of the citizens and the efforts undertaken for the city became outdated. Of course, the appearance of local senatorial and equestrian super-elites is only one aspect in the development of late antique urban culture but one that often has been neglected.

It is striking that the different changes manifested earlier in regions like Southern Gaul and Hispania, which contributed more senators and *equites* in the first and early second centuries A.D., than in Africa and the eastern provinces, whose elites have been incorporated only lately. Senators and *equites* were recruited from Italic cities since the late Republic though Italy passed through the far-reaching transformation to late antique urbanism in the later second and early third centuries A.D. The development of the *ordines* itself probably has played an important role. The military and political developments of the later second and third centuries A.D. may thus indeed have functioned as a catalyst for the social development of the cities but further research on this topic is necessary.

Institut für Geschichtswissenschaft, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

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