

D. FISHWICK

A SACRED EDICT(?) AT MACTAR

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 73 (1988) 113–115

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

A SACRED EDICT(?) AT MACTAR

AE 1957,55: IS TVNICA
 M AVREA VTIN
 SIT CAESARIS
 EDICTVMMEVN (*sic*)
 IN LAPIDE
 IN ° TEMPLO
 roMAE ET AVGVS
 EX SVM QVE

What looks to be an edictum sacrum at Mactar in Tunisia provides the sole surviving evidence for the existence of a local temple of Roma and Augustus.¹⁾ This fact in itself is of considerable significance. Traces of the cult of Roma are rare in Africa, where the only other known temple of Roma and Augustus occurs at Lepcis Magna.²⁾ Why this should be so is difficult to say but Augustus himself had never visited Africa and lack of interest in a deity central to the Augustan model of the ruler cult may well be a direct consequence.³⁾ Aside from the temple, however, the inscription holds several other points of interest. Despite the fragmentary nature of the text, it seems clear that a statue, very possibly of the emperor, is to be clothed in a tunica aurea like that worn by the signum(?) of Caesar.⁴⁾ If the letter is the simulacrum of the emperor beside the image of Roma, then the inscription documents the curious case of an imperial statue which has been placed in a temple of the imperial cult and is to be decked in the same apparel as the cult idol of the emperor.

To deposit a statue within a temple, whether of a Greco-Roman, imperial or other deity, is a practice widely attested in Classical antiquity and indeed

1) H.Hänlein-Schäfer, *Veneratio Augusti. Eine Studie zu den Tempeln des ersten römischen Kaisers*, *Archaeologia* 39,1985,230f. The inscription is dated to the end of the third century by C.Fayer, *Il culto della dea Roma*, Pescara 1976,229, following G.Charles-Picard, *Civitas Mactaritana*, *Karthago* 8,1957, 64 with pl.xxvii.

2) Picard l.c.; Hänlein-Schäfer, o.c. 226-230, noting that the temple has a divided cella. For double temples in the East, for example at Ephesus, see S.R.F.Price, *Rituals and Power. The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*, Cambridge 1984,152, n.47. On the date of the Lepcis Magna temple see A.Di Vita, "Gli Emporia di Tripolitania dall'età di Massinissa a Diocleziano: un profilo storico-istituzionale", *ANRW* 2,10,2,1982,550ff.

3) D.Fishwick, "The Foundation of the Provincial Cult in Africa Proconsularis" in *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West*, Leiden 1987, Vol.I,2,265f. For the consecration of the Mactar temple under Augustus see A.Merlin, *BCH* 1953,50f.

4) Cf. the commentary of the editors ad AE 1957,55.

earlier.⁵⁾ In theory such an object was an offering to the deity 'dedicated in accordance with ancient custom for vows and pious reasons',⁶⁾ though how far the theoretical basis was understood in practice can scarcely be judged; for the most part the purpose must have been to honour the emperor in a way custom had made conventional. Parallels to the Mactar example are commonplace in Rome, Italy and the provinces, particularly those of the Greek East. One might adduce, simply exempli gratia, the silver imago of Trajan that C.Iulius Nymphius placed in the temple of sanctus Silvanus at his own expense and dedicated along with other gifts on the Ides of January, A.D. 115 (CIL 6, 543 = ILS 3544); or the gold likenesses of Vespasian, Titus and Domitian that were to be placed (presumably in a temple) by the terms of the will of a centurion of Legio III Augusta, stationed in Africa (CIL 6, 932 ILS 246).⁷⁾ The appropriate place to keep such statues or busts was normally the external porch of a temple but, as a mark of special honour, they could be placed in the *cella*, even beside the *simulacrum*. Where precisely the statue will have been placed within the imperial temple at Mactar is not revealed by the text but there can be no question of its status as technically an offering to Roma and Augustus.

If this feature of the inscription records standard procedure, the fact that the statue is to be clothed is most unusual, not to say unique in the ritual of the western provinces. Statues of the gods had been decked with clothing from the earliest times in both Egypt and Greece and the practice persisted throughout the Roman period, even down to the late empire.⁸⁾ More to the present point, Suetonius records that on the death of Nero there were some who, in contrast to the public rejoicing, displayed his *imagines praetextatas* on the Rostra;⁹⁾ and an inscription from Bovillae has the phrase *additis vestibibus*, which conceivably refers to the clothing of gold *imagines*, presumably of the emperor, within an *aedicula*.¹⁰⁾ Quite clearly, statues and busts of the emperor were treated in exactly the same way as the statues of the gods. That such a custom will have been incorporated into the ruler cult of the Western provinces seems eminently possible. Pekáry has, in fact, proposed that a reference to golden clothes is preserved in a dedication to Divus Verus at Tarraco - not to golden statues as restored by G.Alföldy.¹¹⁾

5) T.Pekáry, *Das römische Kaiserbildnis in Staat, Kult und Gesellschaft: Das römische Herrscherbild* Abt.3, Bd.5, Berlin 1985,55-65; D.Fishwick, "Liturgy and Ceremonial" in ICLW, above, note 3, Vol.II, forthcoming.

6) P.Oxy. 12,1449,11.11f.

7) Cf. CIL 8, 21825; CIL 13, 1769 (= ILS 3206); CIL 2, 1569 et passim.

8) Pekáry, o.c. 116f. with refs.

9) Nero 57,1.

10) CIL 14,2416. Alternatively *vestes* may refer to some other image within the shrine: cf. CIL 6, 927 (= ILS 236); CIL 9, 3887 (= ILS 3626).

11) O.c. 118 ad CIL 2, 6081 = Alföldy, ITarraco 79.

Whatever the merits of that suggestion, our inscription attests a clear case within the imperial cult at Mactar, even to the point of prescribing that the imperial statue shall have the same kind of golden tunic as that worn by the emperor's simulacrum. Significantly or not, this striking provision recalls Suetonius' testimony that the golden statue of Caligula in his own temple had to wear the same clothing as the emperor himself.¹²⁾ As recent research has shown, such statues and busts might be taken out of the temple where they were housed and carried in procession on festival days,¹³⁾ so the interesting possibility arises that they were displayed on these occasions in the same clothing as the cult statue in the temple. Whether the latter was also transported escapes our knowledge; the practice is well attested at Rome but would obviously have been impossible in the case of colossal images.¹⁴⁾ In any event the Mactar inscription evokes a colourful picture of imperial images, dressed like the emperor himself, whether standing in the temple or carried by bearers in festive processions. Like the better known rites of anointing with oil or garlanding with chaplets,¹⁵⁾ the clothing of imperial images was evidently a feature of imperial ritual in the Latin West.

Edmonton

D.Fishwick

12) Calig. 22,3.

13) Price (above, note 2) 104, 189; Pekâry, o.c. 119-122; Fishwick (above, note 5) forthcoming.

14) The prime example is the pompa circensis (Dion.Hal. 7,72,13; cf. Ovid, Amores 3, 2, 43ff.). See recently M.Clavel-Lévêque, L'espace des jeux dans le monde romain: hégémonie, symbolique et pratique sociale", ANRW 2, 16, 3, 1986,2405-2563 at 2440ff.

15) R.MacMullen, Paganism in the Roman Empire, New Haven 1981,45; Pekâry (above, note 8) *ibid.*