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AMPHITHEATRES AND PRIVATE MUNIFICENCE IN ROMAN AFRICA. A NEW  
TEXT FROM THUBURNICA

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 75 (1988) 215–221

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The ruins of Thuburnica lie not far north of the Medjerda River in north-east Tunisia, near the Algerian frontier. Once a modest Roman community, the town received its first implant of veterans under Marius (described in one text as *conditor coloniae*)<sup>1</sup> and another under Octavian, who formalized its colonial status.<sup>2</sup> many of the descendants of these original deductions can be traced through nomenclature and tribe, and not a few of their epitaphs date to the first century or earlier.<sup>3</sup> Few however of the 214 published texts from Thuburnica can be precisely dated, and those that can, fall between the reigns of Pius and Alexander,<sup>4</sup> an optimum period of municipal expansion throughout Africa.

A text (not to my knowledge published) sheds considerable light on municipal development in Thuburnica and is a significant addition to the scanty epigraphic and literary mentions of amphitheatres in Roman North Africa.<sup>5</sup> While most of these sources articulate events within the arenas, few (all epigraphic) refer to the actual construction of the amphitheatres themselves, and only two of these mention the financial participation of private individuals.<sup>6</sup> The new text adds a very welcome third example of private munificence in this area of construction, and corroborates the report of a small amphitheatre at the site by Dr. Carton at the turn of the century.<sup>7</sup> The text also confirms the existence of *curiales* at Thuburnica, and adds two new members to the local nobility.

A convenient *terminus ante quem* for the inscription is provided by the donor's tribe and filiation. The last recorded epigraphic mention of these terms of identification from Africa to which a date can be assigned is AD 268 (CIL VIII 26582 cf. AE 1981,17). A *terminus post quem* is dictated by the nature of the building itself. The earliest construction date recorded

<sup>1</sup> AE 1951,81 cf. P.Quoniam, A propos d'une inscription de Thuburnica (Tunisie), Marius et la romanisation de l'Afrique, CRAI 1950,332-6 & J.Gascou, La politique municipale de l'empire romain en Afrique proconsulaire de Trajan à Septime-Sévère, Roma 1972,16 n5, 18, 70n1.

<sup>2</sup> J.Gascou, *op.cit.* 24n6.

<sup>3</sup> J-M.Lassère, *Ubique Populus*, Paris 1977,120-124.

<sup>4</sup> CIL VIII 14690, 14694-6, 14698 and cf. 14688-9 (early 3rd century?).

<sup>5</sup> It does not occur in any of the standard sources for African epigraphy and was not known to J-C.Lachaux, *Théâtres et amphithéâtres d'Afrique Proconsulaire*, Aix-en-Provence 1979, H.Jouffroy, *La construction publique en Italie et dans l'Afrique romaine*, Strasbourg 1986, or D.L.Bomgardner, *The amphitheatres of Roman Africa*, unpublished dissertation, University of Michigan 1984. I am particularly grateful to Mr. Bomgardner for his kindness in permitting me to consult his thesis.

<sup>6</sup> ILAG II 34 & AE 1967,550. See further p.5.

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Carton, *Annotations à l'Atlas archéologique de la Tunisie*, Bull.Arch.Sousse II 1901,105 cited by D.L.Bomgardner, *op.cit.*, 330, 331 n5. 'The amphitheatre is located near the sanctuary of Saturn, and its major axis points towards the forecourt of this sanctuary' (*ibid.*, 330). For the significance of this, and for parallels with Mactaris, Simitthu and Thuburbo Maius, see *Ibid.*, 157, 281, 299-330, 324, 330.

for any of Africa's sixty (approx.) known amphitheatres, is that of Lepcis Magna in AD 56.<sup>8</sup> While evidence for the dating of many amphitheatres is simply not available, it is significant that those to which a first-century date has been assigned are found either in major urban centres (Carthage (?), Caesarea (?), Utica and Sabratha) or in places whose strategic and commercial potential was seized upon and augmented under the Flavians (Theveste, Thysdrus, Sufetula).<sup>9</sup> As one might expect, the lead of these influential exemplars was soon taken up by those cities who could afford the prohibitive building costs, and the second century became in Bomgardner's view 'the great era of amphitheatre construction' in Africa.<sup>10</sup> Thuburnica's neighbours Simitthu and Bulla Regia appear to have erected large amphitheatres about the reign of Antoninus Pius,<sup>11</sup> and it may be presumed that the initial construction of Thuburnica's own modest amphitheatre was begun sometime in the latter half of the second century. Since our text states that the amphitheatre was embellished (*excoluerit*) for the first time, this reconstruction may conjecturally be assigned to a date between Commodus and Alexander.

#### THE TEXT

Rectangular statue base of yellowish-grey limestone.

Dimensions of inscribed face (approximate only)

Height	1.38 m
Width	0.42 m
Letter height	0,06 m
Location	20 metres before the entrance of a modern residence at the site
Date	ante 268 and probably post mid II century

	C(aio) Sallustio C(aii) fil(io)	Taf. VII b
	Quir(ina) Felici aedili	
	quod primus in co(lonia)	
	sua amphitheatrum	
5	suis sumptibus excolue-	
	rit et quod insign(i) lusi-	
	onis edition(e) patriae	
	suae voluptates ampli-	
	averit addita etiam	
10	singulari ac benigna	

<sup>8</sup> AE 1968,549.

<sup>9</sup> D.L.Bomgardner, *op.cit.*, 135-6, Carthage-254, Caesarea-381, Utica 363, Sabratha-292, Theveste-413, Thysdrus 348, Sufetula-306. Bomgardner prefers a second-century date for Caesarea-136, 381. Possibly first century are amphitheatres at Sicca Veneria-297-8 and Lixus-395.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 301, 246. That at Simitthu is dated to Pius, and Bulla Regia's to the latter half of the second century. Inter-city emulation and rivalry is likely to have made both the amphitheatres roughly contemporary.

erga universos cives  
 liberalitate curiales  
 [l]abori grata obsequi-  
 [a] et ut remuneraren(tur)  
 15 et ut facti eius gloria  
 etiam ad posteros perse-  
 veraret de suo posuer(unt)  
 cur(ante) M. Petronio Felice  
 D(ee)d(icaverunt que) d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)

#### THE LETTERING

Line 1 short i - Sallustio; 2 - short i - Felici (2nd), aedili (2nd); 3 - short o - co(lonia); 4 - ligatures - amphitheatrum (mp, ho, the); 5 - ligature - sumptibus (pt; short i - sumptibus; short o - excoluerit; 6 - short o - quod; short i - lusionis (2nd); 8 - ligature - ampliaverit (li); 9 - short i - etiam; 10 - ligature - benigna (na); 11 - short i - cives; 12 - short i - liberalitate (1st & 2nd); 13 - short o - labori; 15 - ligature - facti (ti); 16 - short i - etiam; short o - posteros (1st & 2nd); 16-17 - short e - perseveraret.

The two other texts which refer to the private financing of amphitheatre construction or reconstruction in Africa come from Rusicade and Theveste. The earliest, at Rusicade (ILAlg II 34), suggests that the donor was one of several private contributors (as was the case with the theatre there, for whose completion he and others were responsible).<sup>12</sup> If a fellow donator to the theatre at Rusicade ('ad opus theatri', cf. ILAlg II 37 and 38) was a contemporary, we have a date of c. 225 for the construction of the amphitheatre. The augmentation or partial reconstruction of the amphitheatre at Theveste in the fourth century (AE 1967,550) was also accomplished by joint contribution, the donors in this case being either four aristocratic families, or perhaps, as Dunbabin has suggested, sodalitates of venatores.<sup>13</sup>

At Thuburnica, by contrast, what appears to have been a major embellishment of the amphitheatre was financed entirely by one individual, the aedile C.Sallustius Felix. The donor from Rusicade states that the 30,000 sesterces put towards the cost of the amphitheatre were given '[ex liber]alitate sua', over and above sums of money and two bronze statues presented 'ob [honorem decur(ionatus) et ob hono]rem pontificatus'. Sallustius likewise specifies that the building works were provided through his '[l]iberalitate' (line 12). A person of such conspicuous financial means can only have been a scion of one of the few

<sup>12</sup> For the theatre, see ILAlg II 34, 37-41, 5, 24.

<sup>13</sup> K.Dunbabin, *The mosaics of Roman North Africa*, Oxford, 1978, 79n60 contra R.Lequément, *Fouilles l'amphithéâtre de Tébesa (1965-8) supp. 2. Bull.Arch.Alg. 1966-7*, 147 who considers them to have been rather local nobility and possibly patrons of the sodalities. C.Lepelley, *Les cités de l'Afrique romaine au bas empire II*, Paris 1981, 188, sees in them 'grandes familles locales pratiquant l'évergétisme'.

pre-eminent aristocratic families in Thuburnica, and his munificence would be connected with his entrance into the municipal cursus as aedilis. Yet even granting the expectation among citizens of Africa communities that newly appointed office holders would spend over and above the fixed *summa honoraria* for the honour,<sup>14</sup> Sallustius' prodigality must have created quite a sensation. Although over 700 buildings in Africa are known to have been erected, repaired or augmented by private benefactors during the principate,<sup>15</sup> the majority of them (where status is known) being municipal dignitaries, only a minority of these constructions were on such a large scale, and only nine other examples can be adduced of building works being undertaken in Africa by aediles acting alone.<sup>16</sup> (There are eight minor building works provided by aediles acting in conjunction with their colleague.)<sup>17</sup> Examination of the beneficence of the nine other aediles reveals that it was not impressive. Of the two buildings where costs are indicated, one a Laetitia (possibly a portico) cost 20,000 sesterces,<sup>18</sup> and the other, an arch, a mere 3,000 sesterces.<sup>19</sup> The latter, like another Numidian text which provided for an unknown building,<sup>20</sup> specifies that the benefaction was given 'ob honorem aedilitatis'. The remaining benefactions comprise another arch,<sup>21</sup> a temple (originally promised by the donor's father),<sup>22</sup> paving work,<sup>23</sup> measures,<sup>24</sup> and two unknown buildings,<sup>25</sup> one of which was restored. None of these constructions is likely to have approached anything like the cost of Sallustius' reconstructions of the amphitheatre, not to mention the additional games (*lusionis editio*, l.6-7) he provided.

Unfortunately, apart from the mention of 30,000 sesterces '[ad opus] amp(h)it(h)eatr(i)' by a contributor at Rusicade, we know no details concerning the cost of amphitheatre construction in Africa, and few more for any other part of the Roman empire.<sup>26</sup> Bomgardner estimates that the construction cost of a small amphitheatre such as that at Agbia (3 km from Thugga) probably approximated that of the theatre at Madauros, whose total cost is known

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<sup>14</sup> See for example R.Duncan-Jones, *The economy of the Roman Empire, quantitative studies*, Cambridge 1982, 107-8, n324-41, under 'individual sums paid or spent in honour of office'. See *ibid.* 109n349-53 for *summae honorariae* paid by aediles, ranging from 4,000 sesterces (at Theveste and Thubursicu Numidarum), 5,000 sesterces (at Auzia) and 20,000 sesterces (at Cirta and Rusicade).

<sup>15</sup> Greater detail will appear in a forthcoming thesis, *Municipal patrons and benefactors in Roman North Africa*.

<sup>16</sup> CIL VIII 4485, 15456, 26641, 12434; IRT 379; ILAlg II 2095, 686, 3608; AE 1906,26.

<sup>17</sup> CIL VIII 978, 23991, 2631, 9062-3; IRT 590, 599a-b.

<sup>18</sup> CIL VIII 12434.

<sup>19</sup> ILAlg II 2095.

<sup>20</sup> ILAlg II 686.

<sup>21</sup> ILAlg II 3608.

<sup>22</sup> CIL VIII 15456.

<sup>23</sup> CIL VIII 26641.

<sup>24</sup> AE 1906,26.

<sup>25</sup> IRT 379; CIL VIII 4485.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Duncan-Jones, *op.cit.*, 160-1 n472-7 for partial Italian costs.

(375,000 sesterces).<sup>27</sup> Both were of similar dimensions (934 sq.m. and 900 sq.m. respectively) and both cut costs by incorporating a hillside or an embankment in the design. Larger amphitheatres however would cost progressively more than theatres of a similar size in Bomgardner's view.<sup>28</sup> The construction cost of the amphitheatre at Thuburnica, a building not dissimilar in size to Agbia's, would on this analysis, also be in the 300-400,000 sesterce range.

Sallustius of course did not construct an amphitheater a solo, but rebuilt an existing one. His pride in the undertaking, manifest throughout the text, was probably justified by the expense incurred. His reconstruction and embellishment was the very first (*primus* 1.3), his liberality singular and bounteous (*singulari ac benigna*, 1.10). For their part, the *curiales* having gratefully acknowledged his 'labor', erected a statue in order that the glory of his deed might ring out for future generations (*ut facti eius gloria etiam ad posteros perseveraret*, II.15-17). It is apparent that we must envisage some large-scale construction work, with will have transformed measurably the appearance of Thuburnica's little amphitheatre. The expenditure outlaid by Sallustius is certainly likely to have exceeded the sum of 30,000 sesterces contributed towards the amphitheatre's construction at Rusicade, since this is but one benefaction in a considerable catalogue, and not the most expensive. The tone of the text suggests that at Thuburnica a major renovation took place, and we may not be far wrong in thinking that Sallustius' outlay was up to or beyond one half of the amphitheatre's initial cost, a figure then (in very round terms) of 100,000 sesterces plus.

To commemorate the opening of the newly embellished amphitheatre, Sallustius put on an entertainment (*voluptates*, 1.8) of games (*lusionis edition(e)*, 1.6-7), probably *venationes* rather than gladiatorial contests given the predilections of audiences in Africa and an abundant supply of beasts.<sup>29</sup> The expression *lusionis edition(e)* (1.6-7) finds only one parallel in Africa, and this in the mid-third century at neighbouring Bulla Regia (*ob editionem lusionis*).<sup>30</sup> Not so rare as *lusio*, but nevertheless infrequently attested in Africa, the word *voluptates* has only seven other parallels in African epigraphy. Four examples come from Lepcis Magna and date from the beginning to the mid-fourth century.<sup>31</sup> The remaining three are third century in two instances (Sufetula and Thugga) and second-third century in the other (Rusicade).<sup>32</sup> In the example from Thugga, the *voluptates* clearly refer to circus events, while that from Sufetula and another from Lepcis Magna indicate *venationes*. The word *voluptas* also occurs in one instance, in a text from Lambiridi.<sup>33</sup> The present inscription adds

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<sup>27</sup> D.L.Bomgardner, *op.cit.* 131.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 175 n32. The *ludi* mentioned in another text from Thuburnica probably refers to a *munus*, since the town possessed no theatre. (CIL VIII 25703-4. The date is the first half of the third century).

<sup>30</sup> AE 1962,184.

<sup>31</sup> IRT 564, 567. 578. 595.

<sup>32</sup> CIL VIII 11340; ILA 527; ILAlg II 42-3.

<sup>33</sup> CIL VIII 18565.

a new town to the 26 recorded African towns where literary or epigraphic sources specifically mention the giving of a munus. In the majority of instances, the towns are known to have had, or can be presumed to have had, amphitheatres.<sup>34</sup>

If we have little evidence for the private financing of African amphitheatres, it must be admitted that our knowledge of those erected at public cost is not much more substantial. The public construction of three (Lepcis Magna, Lambaesis and Sitifis)<sup>35</sup> is certain, and of another three (Thysdrus,<sup>36</sup> Carthage and Caesarea)<sup>37</sup> very probable. The repair of four amphitheatres (Bulla Regia, Lambaesis, Mesar felta and Sitifis)<sup>38</sup> was also publicly financed, and those at Carthage and Sufetula probably so.<sup>39</sup> While these figures perhaps bear out Duncan-Jones' contention that amphitheatres were probably 'not built from private resources as a rule',<sup>40</sup> it must be admitted that the total evidence from Africa remains very small.

Obviously the cost of an amphitheatre's construction would be prohibitive - they were 'almost certainly the most costly of all town monuments', according to Duncan-Jones<sup>41</sup> — and only the wealthiest nabobs could contemplate their expense. Certainly we cannot dismiss the possibility that in Africa (as in Italy, Gaul, Pannonia and Asia) amphitheatres were constructed in their entirety with private means. Indeed, evidence for other privately donated large-scale constructions is not lacking in Africa, even though it never approaches the level of private munificence in Italy. The grander scale of private munificence in Italy is borne out by contrasting the amphitheatres constructed 'a solo' in Africa by private donors (nil), with those recorded in Italy (14).<sup>42</sup> The difference is just as striking with baths and aqueducts where the increase is respectively 10-fold and 6-fold in Italian inscriptions. Instances of private amphitheatre construction in other western provinces are few but do exist.<sup>43</sup> Examples can also be adduced for the East (e.g. AE 1926,78 = CIL III 6832, Pisidian Antioch; IGRRP IV 845, 861, Laodicea).

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<sup>34</sup> D.L.Bomgardner, *op.cit.* 267, would exclude the example from Gouebar bou Aoun, 20 km south of Hippo Regius, as probably relating to the amphitheatre at Hippo.

<sup>35</sup> AE 1968,549 (AD 56); *Ant.Af.* II 1968,218 n6-8 (AD 169); AE 1928,39 = 1949,258, cf. C.Lepelley, *op.cit.* 499 (AD 298).

<sup>36</sup> D.L.Bomgardner, *op.cit.* 337-40 & D.L.Bomgardner, 'The revolt of the Gordians and the amphitheatre at Thysdrus (el Djem)', *B.A.R.Int.Ser.* 109,211-14 (Flavian).

<sup>37</sup> The basis of this presumption is that Carthage and Caesarea (cf. *BCTH* 1946-9,102) were provincial capitals.

<sup>38</sup> CIL VIII 25520 cf. J-C.Lathaux, *op.cit.* 46-7, followed by D.L.Bomgardner, *op.cit.* 246 (AD 286-93); AE 1955,135,137 (AD 177-80, 194); CIL VIII 2488 (AD 177-80); CIL VIII 8482 (AD 261-3).

<sup>39</sup> CIL VIII 24551 cf. 24550; cf. *ILA* 399 (AD 165-9); CIL VIII 11356-8 (AD 238-44?); CIL VIII 11333(4th century?).

<sup>40</sup> R.Duncan-Jones, *op.cit.* 75.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, followed by D.L.Bomgardner, *op.cit.* 126, contra J-C.Lathaux, *op.cit.* 17.

<sup>42</sup> CIL IX 21, 3044; X 852, 4892, 5183, 6429; XI 3112, AE 1938,110, 1957,250, 1962,86-7, 1969-70,183; Tacitus *Ann.* III 72, IV 62-3, Pliny, *N.H.* XXXVI 116-20.

<sup>43</sup> CIL III 14359 (Carnuntum, Pannonia superior); *ILTG* 217 (Lugdunum, Tres Galliae), CIL XIII 11045 (Petruccorii, Tres Galliae). Only amphitheatres constructed a solo are listed.



The mention of curiales in our text adds a new location to the catalogue compiled by T.Kotula 'Les curies municipales en Afrique romaine', Wrocław, 1968. New too are the nomina of Sallustius and of the curial Petronius, to the fifteen recorded nomina of the Thuburnican aristocracy. Of the six other Sallustii known from Thuburnica, none are ascribed either to the Quirina tribe or to the local aristocracy.<sup>44</sup> C.Sallustius Felix is clearly unrelated to another C.Sallustius of the Colline tribe.<sup>45</sup> and is unlikely to be connected to a T.Sallustius, whose name appears on a stele, inscribed in Greek characters.<sup>46</sup> His family may have derived their nomen and citizenship from the historian C.Sallustius, during his governorship of Africa in 46/45 BC. Our Sallustius is the eight recorded person from Thuburnica of the Quirine tribe.<sup>47</sup> (For the multiplicity of tribes in Thuburnica cf. J-M.Lassère 'Ubique Populus', Paris 1977,120. 'L'abondance et la diversité de ces tribus nulle part égale en Afrique'.) M.Petronius Felix is the first attested Petronius from Thuburnica, although two Petronii are known from neighbouring Simitthu.<sup>48</sup>

Only two buildings in Thuburnica other than the amphitheatre are known to have been wholly or partially constructed through private funding. One, a temple to the unusual triad Mercurius Sobrius, Genius Sesis and Pantheus Augustus, was erected in AD 211-17, in fulfilment of a vow, by the flaminica Lucilia Cale.<sup>49</sup> The other, a cella soliaris or room equipped with bath tubs, was provided by an anonymous male donor of unknown rank at an indeterminate date.<sup>50</sup> Neither are likely to have met the same expense or approval as Sallustius' outlay on the amphitheatre.

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<sup>44</sup> CIL VIII 14722, 14723, 25739, 25739, 25780; BCTH 1915,220n31, 1918,169.

<sup>45</sup> BCTH 1915,220n31.

<sup>46</sup> CIL VIII 25739.

<sup>47</sup> CIL VIII 14699, 25742, 25768, 25802b; ILA 473; BCTH 1915,217, 218.

<sup>48</sup> CIL VIII 14655, 25675.

<sup>49</sup> CIL VIII 14690.

<sup>50</sup> CIL VIII 10607.



Inscription aus Thuburnica (Tunesien)