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Celebrating the Severans: Commemorative Politics and the Urban Landscape in High Imperial Sicily

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Author
Pfuntner, Laura

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1. Introduction

Sicily is often characterized as resistant or immune to the dramatic processes of social and cultural change that affected the Mediterranean basin during Rome’s most intensive period of imperial expansion in the late Republic and the early Principate, and then as socially, politically, and culturally isolated from the wider Mediterranean world for the rest of the imperial period.¹ The usual evidence cited of Sicilian communities’ resistance or apathy to the cultural and material trappings of Roman imperial power is the limited use of Latin in public and private inscriptions,² as well as the lack of explosive urban growth and monumentalization on the island. For example, relatively few imperial-era, purpose-built administrative buildings (curiae, basilicae), leisure structures (bath houses, theaters, amphitheaters) or cult buildings have been identified in Sicily, even within the island’s six Augustan colonies.³

¹ Scholarship on the processes of cultural change in Rome and its empire that were described as “Romanization” for much of the twentieth century is extensive. A. WALLACE-HADRILL, Rome’s Cultural Revolution, Cambridge, 2008, p. 7-32, and D.J. MATTINGLY, Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire, Princeton, 2010, p. 22-42 and p. 203-245, offer notable critiques of “Romanization” and other similarly restrictive terms for describing cultural change in ancient communities, and put forward the alternative concepts of “bi-/multi-lingualism” and “discrepancy”, respectively.


³ The six Augustan coloniae are Tyndaris, Tauromenium (modern Taormina), Catina (modern Catania), Syracuse, Thermae Himeraeae (modern Termini Imerese), and Panhornus (modern Palermo); see R.J.A. WILSON, Sicily under the Roman Empire: The Archaeology of a Roman Province, 36 BC-AD 535, Warminster, 1990, 35-40 for foundation dates. Catania is the only Sicilian city in which multiple imperial-era bath complexes have been found, and only three cities are known to have acquired amphitheaters (Catania, Thermae, and Syracuse – all Augustan colonies).
Sicily’s supposed political, social, and cultural isolation from the wider Roman world is usually attributed to the general neglect of the province by imperial authorities, the dominance of senatorial and imperial estates, and to the apathy of local elites, who showed little interest in civic euergetism and exhibited limited social mobility. The relative paucity of monumental and epigraphic evidence, as well as the general silence of Roman historical writers on events in Sicily after the early Augustan period, led past generations of scholars to describe Sicily under the Principate as an island without history – in the words of Biagio Pace, “una pagina bianca”.

However, the view of Sicily as an economically, politically, and culturally isolated and impoverished province in the centuries after Augustus is increasingly being questioned in the light of new archaeological and epigraphic evidence, and it is perhaps most improbable for the Severan era (193-235 C.E.). Sicily lay at the heart of the Severan empire, between Italy and Africa, and some of its cities experienced a relative burst in epigraphic activity, and possibly also in monumental construction, under the Severan emperors and in succeeding decades. These activities, their causes, and their consequences for the urban landscape will be the focus of this article.

4 In an important article on early imperial Agrigentum, D. Vera (Augusto, Plinio il Vecchio e la Sicilia in età imperiale. A proposito di recenti scoperte epigrafiche e archeologiche ad Agrigento, in Kōkalos 42, 1996, p. 31-58) cited these interrelated factors to explain why relatively few Sicilians reached the Roman senatorial ranks during the Principate, compared to natives of other central and western Mediterranean provinces.

5 Arte e civiltà della Sicilia antica I. I fattori etnici e sociali, 2nd ed., Milan, 1958; quoted by Vera, Augusto [n. 4], p. 31. Cf. M.I. Finley’s conclusion that “Sicily had effectively lost its identity, other than geographical, at least to the outside world. To the emperors and the senatorial aristocracy, Sicily had from the early imperial period become an outlying district of Italy” (Ancient Sicily, 2nd ed., London, 1979, p. 154). See also, more recently, W. Eck’s characterization of Roman imperial Sicily as “geschichtslos” (Senatorische Familien der Kaiserzeit in der Provinz Sizilien, in ZPE 113, 1996, p. 109-128, at p. 109).

The commemorative activities of Sicilian cities under the Severans also have relevance for broader discussions of urban life in the High Roman Empire. Modern scholarly assessments of the Severan era are mixed, likely reflecting our Roman sources’ ambiguity or hostility towards the dynasty. On the one hand, the period witnessed urban growth and promotion in many regions, and so in some respects it may be seen as the culmination of the Antonine “golden age” of urban embellishment. On the other hand, some scholars have emphasized the pressures on communities, the increased signs of compulsion, the tensions between local populations and imperial authorities, and the beginnings of urban decay that the monumental building projects and effusive dedications of the Severan era seek to conceal. The period can be viewed pessimistically, therefore, as a precursor to the so-called “third century crisis” that marked the beginning of the end of Roman urbanism in the Western Mediterranean.

One criticism that can be leveled at recent assessments of urban development under the Severans is that they lean heavily on a few types of evidence (mostly monumental building projects) from a small number of provinces (mainly Africa). As R.J.A. Wilson points out regarding Sicily, a lack of new building under the Severans may not necessarily be evidence of a lack of vitality, especially in regions like Sicily where most cities had been founded centuries earlier, and already possessed the basic amenities of urban life. In addition, the diverse histories and political, economic, and social circumstances of urban communities in the various provinces should make it clear that the significance of the Severan era cannot be assessed in broad strokes, for the

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9 See J. Frakes, Severan (Material) Culture, in JRA 23, 2010, p. 622-629 (a review of Swain et al., Severan Culture [n. 7]).

10 Wilson, Sicily [n. 3], p. 183-184.
entire Roman Empire. Even in the rather small province of Sicily, as I will demonstrate, there was considerable variation in communities’ economic and political fortunes under the Severans, and in their interactions with the dynasty.

And so in this article, I begin with what is known of political developments and monumental building projects in Sicily’s cities, mainly from inscriptions from the cities themselves. I then place these developments within the wider contexts of Severan imperial policy and commemorative practices in the provinces, and I conclude with an assessment of broader changes in the urban landscape of Sicily under the Severans. I argue that the apparent increase in epigraphic activity (and perhaps in monumental construction – most notably, of a septizodium in Lilybaeum) is reflective not only of Severan political and economic policy, but also of the rise of a true provincial elite, as well as being the result of the gradual geographic realignment of the Sicilian urban system that had been in progress since the early Principate.

2. Septimius Severus and Sicily

Our historical sources for the Severan period (Cassius Dio, Herodian, and the Scriptores Historiae Augustae) make almost no mention of Sicily, so it is from inscriptions alone that we know about Septimius Severus’ interventions in the province as emperor: namely, that he raised two municipia to the status of coloniae, Lilybaeum (modern Marsala) and Agrigentum (modern Agrigento). The grant of colonial status to Lilybaeum has long been known from numerous inscriptions found in and around Marsala. The evidence of Agrigentum’s promotion came to light only recently, however, in the form of an inscribed marble slab that was re-used in a late Roman tomb excavated in the center of Marsala in 2008. The text reads:

\[\text{Col(oniae) Septimiae} \]
\[\text{Aug(ustae)} \]
\[\text{Agrigentor(um)} \]

11 For example, the divergent fortunes of the communities of the Danubian provinces and those of the Iberian peninsula, or of Africa Proconsularis and Cyrenaica (Wilson, Urban development [n. 7], p. 307-319 and 322-324).

12 CIL X, 7205 and AÉ 1990, 438 (from Mazara del Vallo); CIL X, 7222, 7228, 7236, and 7239 (from Marsala). The new name of the city – colonia Helvia Augusta – gives some pause, since it could indicate that the status was actually conferred by Severus’ short-lived predecessor, Publius Helvius Pertinax, even if the grant was carried out by Severus. However, as M. Silvestrini, Colonia Septimia Augusta Agrigentinorum, in S. Cagnazzi (ed.), Scritti di storia per Mario Pani, Bari, 2011, p. 455-468 points out (p. 460), the only other known colonia Helvia Augusta – Ricina, in Picenum – acknowledged Septimius Severus as its founder (conditor: CIL IX, 5747).

13 This inscription was first published by Silvestrini, Colonia Septimia [n. 12].
Silvestrini interprets this inscription as part of a dedication, perhaps of a statue of a patron of the *colonia* who lived in Lilybaeum.\textsuperscript{14} In any case, it attests to a change in juridical status that had been hypothesized by some scholars, but for which there was no previous evidence.

The two Sicilian promotions may be seen as part of Septimius Severus’ effort to reward – and, perhaps, to devolve administrative duties to – cities in economically and strategically key areas of the Roman Empire. After the conclusion of the long civil war in which he rose to power, which saw him acclaimed by the army in Pannonia and proceed to defeat challengers across the empire, Septimius Severus sought to secure his reign in part by punishing cities that had supported his opponents – such as Byzantium and Antioch (HERODIAN 3.6) – and by rewarding the cities that had supported him in vulnerable parts of the empire: especially along the northern and eastern frontiers. Of the seventeen or more colonies attributable to Severus, twelve are located in Mesopotamia, Syria, and in the region of the Danube.\textsuperscript{15} In addition, Severus was active in the African provinces – and especially in Africa Proconsularis, one of the most economically vital regions of the empire and a locus of significant Roman military activity. Between 198 and 211 C.E., he raised two or three African *municipia* to colonial status, granted *ius Italicum* to two or three existing *coloniae* (his home city of Lepcis Magna, Utica, and perhaps Carthage), and made more than a dozen grants of municipal status to peregrine communities.\textsuperscript{16} These grants have been interpreted as recognition (and further encouragement) of the accelerating urban and economic development of the region – and as a method of fostering the growth and solidifying the loyalty of its local elites – more than as a sign of special favor to the emperor’s native province.

Like the African grants, the two grants of colonial status in Sicily were only indirectly tied to the events of the civil war and Severus’ rise to power, and are better seen as the result of a combination of local and island-wide political, social, and economic developments of long duration. In Sicily, Severus followed the tactic Augustus had utilized two centuries earlier of ensuring the loyalty (to himself) of the most economically vital and strategically important cities via promotions in their Roman juridical status. These promotions cost the

\textsuperscript{14} Silvestrini, *Colonia Septimia* [n. 12], p. 457f.

\textsuperscript{15} Four in Mesopotamia (Nisibis, Singara, Rhesaina, and Zaitha); four in Syria (Laodicea, Heliopolis, Tyros, and Samaria); and four in the Danube area (Carnuntum, Aquincum, Siscia in Pannonia, Drobeta in Dacia); Silvestrini, *Colonia Septimia* [n. 12], p. 460.

\textsuperscript{16} A. Daguet-Gagey, *Septime Severe: Rome, l'Afrique et l'Orient*, Paris, 2000, p. 370-373, with nos. 13-19: *municipia* of Auzia and Vaga promoted to colonies, with Thysdrus promoted to municipal status; *ius Italicum* granted to Lepcis Magna and Utica, but to Carthage only under Caracalla. Cf. Wilson, *Urban Development* [n. 7], p. 295: *municipia* of Vaga, Thysdrus, and perhaps Auzia promoted to colonies; *ius Italicum* granted to Lepcis Magna, Carthage, and Utica.
emperor little (unlike the relatively rare grants of *ius Italicum*), but they were meaningful to individual communities, despite their limited practical effect, especially after Caracalla’s near-universal grant of the Roman citizenship. 17 Severus’ grants of colonial status were therefore less disruptive to the social and political order than Augustus’ imposition of Roman colonies in six major Sicilian coastal cities in 21 B.C.E. (also in the wake of civil war), and they served to reinforce the ruling classes of each city rather than to replace them. 18

Before and after its promotion to colonial status, Lilybaeum was, along with Syracuse, the main center of Roman administration on the island, serving as the seat of the provincial quaestor. 19 Situated on Sicily’s western tip and originally a Carthaginian stronghold, it was also a major port for traffic between North Africa and Italy, located at the midway point on the journey between the Tunisian coast and Rome. Indeed, Lilybaeum maintained strong cultural and social connections with Africa in the imperial period. 20 Relatively little is known of the city’s ancient topography, due to the presence of the modern city of Marsala – for example, the hypothesized Roman forum is overlain by the city’s cathedral. Nonetheless, recent excavations in the heart and on the fringes of the ancient city provide glimpses of a prosperous and growing urban community in the first two centuries C.E. For example, the city’s main thoroughfare – the so-called *decumanus maximus* stretching eastward from the port district – was paved in the late first century B.C.E., and was continuously maintained and embellished for the next three centuries. Public inscriptions found in and around this street indicate that it served as a locus for local euergetism. 21 Recent

17 Lilybaeum, for example, continued to celebrate its colonial status after the *constitutio Antoniniana* (*CIL* X, 7236).


19 It is not clear if Sicily continued to receive two quaestors under the Principate, as it had during the Republic (see Wilson, *Sicily* [n. 3], p. 35, n. 21). In any case, it is apparent from the epigraphic record that Lilybaeum retained its role as the (or a) quaestor’s base.

20 Some of the elements of the urban landscape of Lilybaeum – such as the *plataea* of the Cereres that was paved by a local magistrate during the reign of Marcus Aurelius (G. Barbieri, *Nuove iscrizioni di Marsala*, in Kōkalos 9, 1961, p. 15-52, at p. 16-32) – would probably have been recognizable to travelers from Africa.

excavations in the *insulae* around this thoroughfare hint at significant building activity in the late second and early third centuries C.E.: most notably, the reconstruction and expansion of a cult complex that was probably dedicated to Isis.\(^{22}\) The city’s residential areas also show signs of renovation in the second and third centuries, mostly geared towards the consolidation of multiple building units into single residences of great size and luxury.\(^{23}\)

Agrigentum, the other Sicilian city upon which Septimius Severus bestowed colonial status, was located 90 miles down the southwestern coast from Lilybaeum and was also a major port for central Mediterranean commerce. In addition, it was the center of a vital sulfur industry, much of which would have been under imperial control by the late second century.\(^{24}\) Recent excavations have revealed significant building activity in the city center – including a new temple complex to the north of the Hellenistic *bouleuterion* – in the early imperial period.\(^{25}\) As in Lilybaeum, Agrigentum’s residential quarters were continuously occupied in the second and third centuries, with evidence of expansions and renovations of existing homes.\(^{26}\)

Lilybaeum and Agrigentum both also had substantial populations of Roman citizens, a result of immigration that had been underway since the Republican period, and both had been awarded municipal status in the Augustan period. In Lilybaeum, the full range of municipal institutions and offices (the *ordo* of *decuriones*; *quaestor*,aedile, *duovir*) are attested in inscriptions from the early


\(^{22}\) See Giglio Cerniglia *et al.*, *Lilibeo* [n. 21], p. 229-233 for the excavation of this sanctuary. The “grotta della Sibilla” – the long-lived cult complex connected to a spring, now beneath the church of San Giovanni in Capo Boeo – may also have been renovated in the late second and third centuries (R. Giglio, *Capo Boeo. Traffici, naviganti e divinità alla luce delle ultime ricerche nel Parco archeologico di Marsala*, in E. Acquaro *et al.* (eds.), *La devozione dei naviganti. Il culto di Afrodite ericina nel Mediterraneo. Atti del convegno di Erice, 27-28 novembre 2009*, Lugano, 2010, p. 71-87, at p. 75-76).


and high imperial periods. \(^{27}\) And so, along with the Augustan colonies, Lilybaeum and Agrigentum were among the most politically and culturally Roman cities in high imperial Sicily.

According to the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (Sev. 4), Septimius Severus had served as proconsular governor of Sicily under Commodus, and so he would have developed knowledge of the economic situation of its major cities and formed links with the island’s elites. \(^{28}\) The timing of the grants of colonial status to Lilybaeum and Agrigentum is not known, but the two centers probably shared a border somewhere around the modern city of Sciacca, and there is some evidence of competition between them over territory. \(^{29}\) It is easy to imagine that the grant came relatively early in Severus’ reign to both cities at once, or that the concession to one city (Lilybaeum?) was swiftly followed by a concession to the other, as a result of local lobbying.

The epigraphic record of Lilybaeum indicates that the grant of colonial status had a significant impact on the city’s political life and on its topography. There is limited evidence for imperial euergetism in the city; a fragmentary Greek inscription may commemorate Septimius Severus’ sponsorship of a *palaistra* in Lilybaeum (*IG* XIV, 275), but nothing is known archaeologically of the location or nature of this structure, and its date and attribution to Severus are questionable. Latin inscriptions found in Lilybaeum provide firmer evidence for relations between the community, its Roman administrators, and the imperial family: for example, a base inscribed on two sides that was dedicated to Caracalla in 213 C.E. by the *colonia*, under the auspices of the quaestor of the province (*CIL* X, 7228).

This base is one of an unusually large number of inscribed dedications to the Severans from Sicily, concentrated in the *coloniae* of the northern and western coasts. \(^{30}\) The majority of these come from Panhormus (modern Palermo), where

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\(^{28}\) DAGUET-GAGEY, *Septime Sevère* [n. 16], p. 173-178 dates Septimius Severus’ pro-consulship from July 189 to June 190, after he had served as praetorialis legate in Gaul and before his suffect consulship in 190 (and so turning out to be the antepenultimate post in his *cursus honorum*). His brother P. Septimius Geta also served as proconsul of Sicily at an unknown date (*PIR*\(^2\) S453).

\(^{29}\) Namely, an inscription commemorating the *Concordia* between the two cities achieved with the help of provincial authorities under Nero (*CIL* X, 7192). The few surveys that have been conducted in the probable territory of ancient Lilybaeum – including the recent Marsala Hinterland Survey (E. BLAKE / R. SCHON, *The Marsala Hinterland Survey: Preliminary Report*, in *Etruscan Studies* 13, 2010, p. 49-66, at p. 59-62) – are broadly suggestive of an intensification (and perhaps consolidation) of agricultural production in the Roman period.

\(^{30}\) Compare the sixteen or more Severan-era dedications to the fifteen dedications to emperors of earlier dynasties catalogued in J.M. HØJTE, *Roman Imperial Statue Bases: From Augustus to Commodus*, Aarhus, 2005 (including five to Julio-Claudian emperors.
at least ten dedications to members of the Severan family have been found, dating from early in Septimius’ reign to the early years of the reign of Severus Alexander, the last member of the dynasty. These inscriptions, most of which seem to come from honorific statue groups, can be attributed to at least three separate initiatives. Three inscriptions originally affixed to statue bases appear to have been dedicated to Septimius Severus, Julia Domna, and Caracalla between 195 and 196 C.E. by the government of the colonia (the res publica Panhormitanorum). Statues of Septimius Severus and Geta – whose name was later erased from the inscription – were dedicated in 198 or 199 by the colonia and its duoviri. Around the same time, a young sister and brother, Maesia Fabia Titiana and Maesius Fabius Titianus, made a dedication to Caracalla. Three of the other dedications from Panormus are more fragmentary, and two – one honoring Severus Alexander, and the other honoring Alexander or his predecessor, Elagabalus – appear to have been erased later.

From Thermae Himeraeae (modern Termini Imerese), an Augustan colony on the Tyrrenian coast east of Panormus, comes a dedication to Septimius Severus from 197 C.E. by the same sister and brother – Maesia Fabia Titiana and Maesius Fabius Titianus – who honored Caracalla at Panormus (CIL X, 7343). From Tyndaris, another Augustan colony west of Messina, come dedications by the colonia in honor (pro salute) of Septimius Severus and his sons, as well as to Julia Mamaea and, probably, to her son, Severus Alexander. One dedication to Septimius Severus is known from a fourth colony, Tauromenium (modern Taormina), on the northeastern coast (CIL X, 6991). Finally, in Soluntum, a hilltop settlement located midway along the coast between Thermæ and...
Panormus, Fulvia Plautilla, the wife of Caracalla, was honored by the city’s government in the period between her marriage in 202 and her exile in 205.\textsuperscript{36} This group of dedications has been interpreted as a desperate and unsuccessful attempt by Sicilian communities to gain the attention and patronage of the emperor,\textsuperscript{37} but I would argue that these inscriptions instead show the effectiveness of the communications networks that had developed between the provinces and the imperial center under the Principate – networks from which Sicily clearly was not isolated. The concentration of the dedications in cities with colonial status (in addition to Lilybaeum, the Augustan colonies of Panhormus, Thermae, Tyndaris, and Tauromenium) suggests that there was some official move to honor the emperors in these centers.\textsuperscript{38}

The numerous inscriptions from Panhormus, however, seem to reflect especially enthusiastic and diffuse monumental displays. These inscriptions are all that remain of at least three separate commemorations of the emperor and his family, probably in the form of dynastic sculptural groups. Such dynastic groups were common features of the urban landscape throughout the empire – and unsurprisingly, portraits of the Severan family were particularly numerous in the cities of North Africa (for example, at least three different dynastic groups were on display in the theater of Septimius Severus’ hometown of Lepcis Magna). At the other pole of the central Mediterranean trade axis, Severan sculptural groups could be found in Rome itself and in the cities of Latium and Campania.\textsuperscript{39} Less is known about such groups of honorific statues in Sicily.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{CIL} X, 7336 = \textit{Bivona, Iserzioni} [n. 31], no. 48. It is tempting to link this dedication to the imperial family’s visit to Africa in 202-203 C.E., on which Fulvia Plautilla accompanied her new husband.

\textsuperscript{37} E.g. R.J.A. Wilson, \textit{Towns of Sicily during the Roman Empire}, in \textit{ANRW} II.11.1, Berlin, 1988, p. 90-206, on the Palermo inscriptions (p. 158).

\textsuperscript{38} The site of Tyndaris in particular has produced numerous dedications to emperors from Augustus to Constantine, as well as honorific sculpture of members of the imperial family and local notables. These inscriptions include \textit{CIL} X, 7472 = \textit{Bivona, Iserzioni} [n. 31], no. 64 (in honor of Trajan, 102/103 C.E., found with his portrait statue); 7473 = \textit{Bivona, Iserzioni} [n. 31], no. 65 (in honor of Marcus Aurelius, ca. 140 C.E.); 7474 and 7475 (in honor of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, ca. 166 C.E.). It is likely that these dedications formed part of a public monument to the imperial family, though the original context of their display is unknown. See E.C. Portale, \textit{La scultura, in U. Spigo (ed.), Tindari. L’area archeologica e l’antiquarium}, Milazzo, 2005, p. 79-83 for sculpture from Tyndaris.


\textsuperscript{40} Most of the Severan portraits in Sicilian museums come from antiquarian collections, so it is difficult to determine their original display contexts (see, e.g., the portraits of Geta, Caracalla, and Julia Domna in Catania, Trapani, and Messina: N. Bonacasa, \textit{Ritratti greci e romani della Sicilia: Catalogo}, Palermo, 1964, nos. 138, 139, 150 and
For example, although we have numerous dedications to the Severans from Panormus, no Roman portrait sculpture survives from that city, and we know little of the topography of the Roman settlement because of the continuous post-antique occupation of the urban center (as in Marsala, the likely area of the Roman forum lies under Palermo’s Norman cathedral). Nonetheless, we can gain some idea of the possible monumental contexts for the display of such dynastic groups from the inscriptions of Lilybaeum. Although the Roman city’s public areas remain obscure, two texts allude to spaces in Lilybaeum that could have been used for public dedications: an *aedes* of the *genius* of the *colonia*, and the *uicus* of the *septizodium*. The inscription of unknown date that commemorates the construction of an *aedes* (shrine) to the *genius* of the *colonia* by an aedile (*CIL* X, 7222) is reminiscent of an earlier inscription that records the dedication of an *imago* of the *genius* of the *municipium* by another magistrate (*CIL* X, 7223). Though the date of the dedication of this *aedes* is unknown (as are its size and location), the earlier dedication of an *imago* of the *genius* of the *municipium* shows that there was some public space or structure suitable for setting up officially-sanctioned sculptural displays that honored the ruling order of Rome. The construction of the *aedes* would have served to further monumentalize, or expand on, such space, as befitted Lilybaeum’s new, elevated status as a colony.

The second inscription commemorates the paving of the *uicus* of the *septizodium* with the assistance of a provincial quaestor. This inscription was discovered in mid-twentieth century excavations in Marsala, in the same area as the recently-discovered inscription mentioning Agrigentum’s colonial status, where it was reused as a paving stone in a later street. The preserved text reads:

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..... opere plataeum uici sep[tiz]o[di] | lapide Drepanitano sua pec(unia) strau(it) |
Q. Fabius Q. fil(ius) Maec(ia) Caesilius |
Modius Titianus q(uaestor) propr(aetore)
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151). The only portrait of the Severan era whose provenance is somewhat secure is a marble bust of Geta, probably produced in Rome ca. 204-205 C.E., that was discovered in the vicinity of a villa complex at Sabucina Bassa, in the territory of Caltanissetta (R.M. Bonacasa Carrà, *Nuovi ritratti romani della Sicilia*, Palermo, 1977, p. 25-30; Germanà, *Alcune osservazioni* [n. 6], p. 238-239).

But, as in Lilybaeum and Agrigentum, it appears that some elite residences in Panormus were refurbished in the Severan period; see F. Spatafora, *Da Panormos a Balarm. Nuove ricerche di archeologia urbana*, Palermo, 2005, p. 45-46, for the extensive renovations to Edificio A in Piazza della Vittoria, near the cathedral.

The *aedes* must date to the Severan period or the following decades (i.e. after the grant of colonial status). Although dedications to the imperial family are relatively common in the colonies founded by Septimius Severus, this is the only epigraphic attestation of an *aedes* to the *genius* of the *colonia*.

Editio princeps: Barbieri, *Nuove iscrizioni* [n. 20], p. 34-45.

The discovery of the inscription was first noted in a local news magazine in 1952 (Barbieri, *Nuove iscrizioni* [n. 20], p. 34 and n. 52).
The inscription, whose first lines are missing, only mentions a *uicus* of the *septizodium*, so we do not know the exact form of the monument, its location, or even its precise date. The *quaestor pro praetore* of Sicily, Q. Fabius Caesilius Modius Titianus, was responsible for the completion of the pavement of the *plataea* of the *uicus* of the *septizodium*, but the inscription may also honor another individual who had invested in the project, whose name is now missing.

3. Septizodia in Rome and the Empire

This inscription points to the existence at Lilybaeum of a monument that had strong associations with the Severan regime. However, the text commemorates not the construction of the *septizodium* itself, but the paving of the *plataea* of the *uicus* of the *septizodium* in stone from nearby Drepanum (modern Trapani). And so we must turn to archaeological and epigraphic evidence from other parts of the Empire to better understand the nature, date, and purpose of this monument. The first and best-known monument bearing the enigmatic name of Septizodium was constructed in Rome by Septimius Severus in 202 or 203, around the tenth anniversary of his accession (Figure 1).

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45 The lettering of the text is rather small and ornate (with letter heights ranging from four to six cm: BARBIERI, *Nuove iscrizioni* [n. 20], 34), so the stone seems not to have been intended for use in the pavement of the *plataea* itself. Compare, for example, the monumental dedicatory inscription in several paving stones of the *decumanus maximus* of Lilybaeum (PALAZZO and VECCHIO, *Il decumano massimo* [n. 21], p. 143).

extensive building program in Rome – which also included the famous arch in the Forum – and it was intended, as were most of his efforts, to foster an image of the emperor as the restorer of prestige and harmony to the Roman state, and to promote his family, their concordia, and their association with the divine, and hence to bolster the legitimacy of the dynasty. The reconstruction of this monument is controversial, but it appears to have been a nymphaeum with an ornate façade on three levels, fronting a paved plaza and marking the southern entrance to the Palatine next to the Circus Maximus. Its façade would have incorporated sculpture of the Severans in close association with celestial deities, suggesting both celestial harmony and the imperial family as the domus diuina. The water that collected in a large porphyry basin in front of this façade would have evoked the fertility and prosperity of the empire under Severus, and may have alluded to one of the omina of the emperor’s rise to power recorded by Cassius Dio (75.3), in which water gushed from his hand.

Figure 1. Engraving of the ruins of the façade of the Septizodium in Rome, 1575. Public domain image from Wikimedia.org.
Though the Roman Septizodium was unparalleled in its size and lavishness, its design and appearance are reminiscent of the monumental *nymphaea* constructed in prominent locations in Eastern Mediterranean cities, especially in the second century, and of the elaborate theatrical stage buildings of Lepcis Magna and Sabratha in Tripolitania.⁴⁹ However, the name of the Roman monument is evocative both of Severus’ gentilician and of the astrological connotations of the number seven.⁵⁰ And even if it was not intended as such by its creator, it was later perceived as a fundamentally African monument. The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, for example, note that when Severus constructed the Septizodium near the terminus of the Via Appia, “he had no other thought than that his building should strike the eyes of those who came to Rome from Africa” (Sev. 24). Indeed, the only known examples of other monuments bearing the name of Septizodium or variants, besides the one attested epigraphically in Lilybaeum, come from the African provinces (Figure 2).⁵¹ It seems that in Africa, and in Lilybaeum, the sponsors of these monuments chose explicitly to embrace the imperial and astrological connotations of the Roman monument.⁵²

Unlike the Lilybaeum monument, a few of these African *septizodia* have left some physical traces. As Longfellow has recently pointed out,⁵³ however, the design, the number of stories, the placement, and the size of the African *septizodia* differed from each other and from the monument in Rome. In fact, as numerous scholars have noted, the monumental *nymphaeum* constructed in Lepcis Magna at the initiative of Septimius Severus in the first decade of the third century C.E. offered a more immediate (and feasible) model for imitation than

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⁴⁹ *Lusnia, Creating Severan Rome* [n. 46], p. 124 describes the Septizodium as combining the architectural forms of the Roman *scaenae frons* and the façade fountain; she also notes that Septimius Severus could have seen grand monumental fountains in the cities of Asia Minor and Syria during his education and imperial service in the Eastern Mediterranean, e.g. as legate of the *legio IV Scythica* at Zeugma (p. 131). However, the paths of influence between the Roman Septizodium and provincial monuments were multi-directional (cf. *Trimble, Rome* [n. 46]), with architectural forms emerging in the provinces brought to Rome, then cycled back in modified form to the provinces: this is seen especially in the popularity of three-storied *nymphaea* in cities of Asia Minor in the early third century (*Longfellow, Roman Imperialism* [n. 46], p. 180-181).

⁵⁰ This view has been affirmed recently by *Thomas, Metaphor* [n. 46], p. 337; *Lusnia, Urban Planning* [n. 46], p. 524 and *Creating Severan Rome* [n. 46], p. 125; and *Longfellow, Roman Imperialism* [n. 46], p. 173-174.

⁵¹ I omit from this study the two-sided columnar façade building at the center of the Griematt healing sanctuary in Augusta Raurica (Augst, Switzerland) that R. *Lauber, Ein Septizonium in Augst*, in *JSGU* 48, 1960/1961, p. 28-42 identified as a *septizonium* based on its architectural characteristics, but with no epigraphic support or any other evidence that it was identified as such in antiquity.

⁵² As *Longfellow, Roman Imperialism* [n. 46], notes (p. 180), this contrasts with Asia Minor, where cities embraced the architectural form, but not the name or sculptural program, of the Roman Septizodium.

⁵³ *Longfellow, Roman Imperialism* [n. 46], p. 175.
Figure 2. Map of known locations of *septizodia* in the Roman Empire.

Figure 3. Remains of the façade of the Nymphaeum in Lepcis Magna. Public domain image from Wikimedia.org.
the monument in Rome (Figure 3). Though some elements of its design differ from the Roman monument, other features suggest that the Lepcis Magna structure may have been called a septizodium, and that it was intended as a companion piece to the Roman Septizodium. The Lepcis Magna nymphaeum, like the Roman Septizodium, fronted a paved plaza: a circular space that had been created to accommodate the change in direction of the new colonnaded street leading from the harbor. The nymphaeum consisted of an apse receding from a straight, two-story back wall that was flanked by wing walls and screened by a two-story decorative colonnade, creating a shallow trapezoidal, open-fronted space holding basins. The central apse held seven niches intended for statues, probably of the imperial family. Although smaller in scale, the visual impact of this monument – given its location at a nodal point in urban space and its elaborate façade – would have been similar to that of the Roman Septizodium.

Since they did not have the financial resources to match the Roman Septizodium in size and lavishness – and since there were models closer at hand than the Roman example – it is not surprising that African communities seem not to have associated the name septizodium with a particular architectural format. Rather, in addition to their commemoration of the Severans, the African septizia have in common the monumental display of water, elaborate façades, an association with the number seven, and (perhaps) the inclusion of statues of members of the imperial family and of planetary deities favored by the dynasty.

The inscription associated with the septizodium at Henschir Bedd in northern Tunisia – of which little physical trace remains – is dated to 210 C.E.: the earliest known use of the name outside of Rome. This edifice – whatever its nature – appears to have been constructed at the initiative of the community and with the assistance of a local dignitary, the aedile Tiberius Aprarius. The two other known septizodia from Africa appear to be older monuments that were

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54 Daguet-Gagey, Septime Sévère [n. 16], p. 378; Wilson, Urban development [n. 7], p. 297; Longfellow, Roman Imperialism [n. 46], p. 183-185. No dedicatory inscription remains, but the nymphaeum was probably completed between Severus’ visit to the city in 202/203 and 211 C.E., based on the find of a buried lead water pipe stamped with the names of Severus, Geta, and Caracalla.


56 In addition to the Lepcis Magna nymphaeum, several monumental fountains and nymphaeae were constructed in the second and third centuries in African cities; see Aupert, Le nymphée [n. 46], p. 90-104, and W. Letzner, Römische Brunnen und Nymphaeae in der westlichen Reichshälfte, Münster, 1990 for descriptions of these structures, many of which have not been excavated or fully published and are therefore difficult to reconstruct and to date with precision.

57 Longfellow, Roman Imperialism [n. 46], p. 175.

58 CIL VIII, 14372, with Aupert, Le nymphée [n. 46], p. 95.
later renovated and given a variant of the name of the monument in Rome. The bath complex holding the *septizodium* (*septidonium*) at Cincari (Henschir Tounga, Tunisia) dates to the second half of the second century AD, predating the monument in Rome.\(^59\) A façade consisting of seven semicircular statuary niches was added to the southern interior wall of the *frigidarium* of this complex in the first half of the third century – and it is this work that is labeled a *septidonium* on an inscribed block from an entablature. Fragments of three freestanding statues were found nearby: a head of Saturn, the king of African gods; a head of Mars that resembles portraits of Caracalla; and a heroic nude young man with a chlamys over his shoulder, identified as Sol/Helios. All three statues appear to have been produced by an African workshop active in the era of Caracalla or his successors (ca. 220s C.E.).

The monument at the legionary center of Lambaesis (Tazoult, Algeria) consisted of a fountain located at a main intersection that appears to have served as a distribution point (*castellum divisorum*) for the town’s aqueducts.\(^60\) Its façade, which fronted the town’s Via Septimiana at its junction with the Via Sacra, had seven niches, with at least the large center niche holding a statue – a location and design reminiscent of the Lepcis Magna *nymphaeum*.\(^61\) The two inscriptions associated with the building suggest that when it was constructed in 226 C.E. it was called a *nymphaeum*, and that the name *septizonium* had been applied to it by the time of its renovation by the provincial governor M. Aurelius Cominius Cassianus ca. 246/247 C.E.\(^62\)

Although the *septizodium* at Lilybaeum is the only attested provincial example outside of Africa, given Lilybaeum’s geographic position, its history, and its favorable relations with the Severans, it is not too surprising to find epigraphic evidence of a *septizodium* in the city. As BARBIERI noted,\(^63\) the fact that the *septizodium* gave its name to a district – or *uicus* – of the city indicates that it was a monument of considerable prominence. Lilybaeum had water

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\(^{60}\) Lambaesis was the base of the Third Legion and, under Severus, the *de facto* capital of the newly created imperial province of Numidia.

\(^{61}\) LONGFELLOW, *Roman Imperialism* [n. 46], p. 175-176.

\(^{62}\) *CIL* VIII, 2657: … Cominius Cassianus … septizonium marmoribus musaeo et omni cultu uetustate dilabsum restituit. Cf. THOMAS, *Metaphor* [n. 46], p. 358; LONGFELLOW, *Roman Imperialism* [n. 46], p. 174, n. 54. The relationship between the *nymphaeum* and the *septizonium* is not straightforward; PICARD, *Le Septizonium* [n. 59], p. 82 suggests that the *nymphaeum* was either the same structure as the *septizonium* itself, or an annex to it. The dedicatory inscription for the *nymphaeum* (*CIL* VIII, 2658) indicates that the aqueduct supplying it was the work of the Third Legion. See LETZNER, *Römische Brunnen* [n. 56], p. 396-398 for a description; and AUPERT, *Le nymphée* [n. 46], p. 98-99, for other inscriptions associated with the structure, which indicate that it was maintained at least until the tetrarchic era (e.g. *CIL* VIII, 2660).

\(^{63}\) *Nuove iscrizioni* [n. 20], p. 35.
supplied from an aqueduct at least since the time of Domitian (CIL X, 7227), so the basic infrastructure would have been present to allow for the construction of a monumental nymphaeum in the city center. 64

The physical remains of the African monuments can also give a general idea of the function and of the spatial context of the septizodium of Lilybaeum. The *plataea* of the *uicus* of the septizodium in Lilybaeum was perhaps a monumental street leading to the septizodium, or an open plaza in front of it, as in Rome, Lambaesis, and Lepcis Magna – an additional indication of the monument’s high visibility and prestige. The Severan *Forma Vrbis* (Marble Plan) indicates that there was an open square in front of the Septizodium in Rome, allowing an excellent view of the façade to those approaching the Palatine on the Via Appia as they came through the Porta Capena. 65 Similarly, the Lepcis Magna nymphaeum was located on the eastern side of a 40m-wide circular piazza that had been created to accommodate the change in direction of a colonnaded street. The Lambaesis monument was certainly situated at the junction of two major roads (the Via Septimiana and Via Sacra), and may have also faced an open piazza. 66

Though incomplete, the text of the Lilybaeum inscription, when considered alongside the inscriptions associated with the African septizodia, can give a general idea of the individuals and institutions responsible for the construction and upkeep of these expensive and elaborate structures: namely, Severan-era imperial officials, in conjunction with local elites and city governments. Like the aedile Tiberius Aprarius in Henschir Bedd, the anonymous individual whose efforts are commemorated in the first two lines of the Lilybaeum text [*….. opere plataeam uici septicodi | lapide Drepanitano sua pecunia strau(it)*] was perhaps a local magistrate fulfilling his *summa honoraria*. However, it seems that the project in Lilybaeum was only brought to fruition by the provincial quaestor, who oversaw and dedicated the paving project. In Lambaesis too, a series of individuals and groups – including the provincial governor, legionary soldiers, and members of the local elite – were involved in the construction and maintenance of the septizonium and associated infrastructure over the course of several decades.

The construction of septizodia in certain cities in Africa and in Lilybaeum is perhaps the most geographically and temporally specific manifestation of the

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65 See especially Gorrée (*The Septizodium* [n. 46], p. 664-666) and Trimble (*Rome* [n. 46]) on the visibility of the Roman Septizodium.

66 Letzner, *Römische Brunnen* [n. 56], p. 114, and Longfellow, *Roman Imperialism* [n. 46], p. 175.
common practice of dedicating monumental dynastic sculptural groups in urban public spaces, a practice that served to forge visual and ideological connections between communities across the empire and the ruling regime in Rome, and hence to enhance these communities’ prestige. It is these connections between communities, provincial authorities, and the emperor – as revealed in inscriptions from Sicily – that I explore next. I would like to suggest that the Severan period saw the culmination of the integration of the region’s notable families into the Roman imperial elite. The relationship between urban communities and this ascendant regional and imperial elite – and their continued patronage of the cities of western Sicily – was mediated especially through honors paid to the emperor and his family, with important implications for the topography of individual cities.

4. The Severan Dynasty and the Rise of a (Western) Sicilian Provincial Elite

We can explore these relationships between Sicilian urban communities and provincial elites using the inscription commemorating the paving of the plataea of the uicus of the septizodium at Lilybaeum as a starting point. The exact date and nature of the project commemorated is unknown since the beginning of the text is missing, but it is clear that this work was overseen and dedicated by the quaestor pro praetore of Sicily, Q. Fabius Caesilius Modius Titianus, who was based in Lilybaeum. This individual belonged to a prominent family with social and political links of long duration to western Sicily, and especially to Thermae and Panhormus, where some of the family’s various branches may have been based. He was the grandson of Q. Aquilius Niger, a proconsul of Sicily who was commemorated in an inscription from Panhormus (PIR² A997; CIL X, 7287). Through this maternal grandfather, he was also related to one C. Maesius Aquiliius Fabius Titianus, who was honored as a patron of Thermae (CIL X, 7345, ca. mid-third century), and who is probably to be identified as the C. Maesius Titianus who was consul ordinarius of 245 C.E. (PIR² M73 and M82). This consul was in turn related to – and perhaps was the son of – the clarissimus puer Maesius Fabius Titianus who, with his sister, had made dedications in the late second century to the Severan family in Panhormus and Thermae (PIR² F82, M75, and M84; see above). The consul of 245 married into the Fontei Frontinii, a notable senatorial family with extensive links of patronage to African cities, but he seems to have retained links with his probable hometown, since his son was honored in Thermae by an eques upon his receipt of the toga uiritis, probably in the second half of the third century.

67 L. Bivona, Iscrizioni Latine Lapidarie del Museo Civico di Termini Imerese, Rome, 1994, p. 120-121 and Tav. VI.
68 The consularis filius Titianus: CIL X, 7346, and PIR² M81, where it is noted that one of his tituli – patricius – is rare, and not found before the mid-third century. See PIR² F472 and F478, with Silvestrini, Colonia Septimia [n. 12], p. 463-465, for the
Though their exact origins and the relations between their various members remain obscure, the Maesii and Fabii Titiani were the most visible of the families of equestrian and senatorial rank based in western Sicily, but with ties to other regions of the Mediterranean—and especially to Africa and Italy—who often held office in Sicily as part of their imperial cursus, and served as patrons of its cities. These families may have been descended from colonists and other Roman landowners who immigrated to Sicily earlier in the Principate. Their members began to reach the senate by the Flavian period, culminating in the reigns of Hadrian and the Antonines. For example, Acilius Rufus, whose equestrian and senatorial cursus included the quaestorship of Sicily, was honored as patron by the Hispellates in Thermae in the late first or early second century, an indication that he was a native of Hispellum (modern Spello in Umbria) or at least had personal ties to the community (CIL X, 7344 = Bivona, Iscrizioni [n. 31], no. 53). The governing body of Lilybaeum made numerous dedications in the second through fourth centuries to members of local families who had “made good” and joined the senatorial ranks, but who remained patrons of their patria. As the similar dedications of the brother and sister in Panhormus and Thermae show, and as the discovery of an inscription commemorating (the patron of?) the colonia of Agrigentum in the rival city of Lilybaeum suggests, these families formed a supra-local elite whose members could be involved in the affairs of more than one Sicilian city.

The individual dedications to the emperor and his family, as well as monuments like the Lilybaeum septizodium, were expressions of local pride that reflect the renewed political and economic prominence of western Sicily under the Severans, but that were accomplished with the assistance of wealthy individuals with local ties but extra-local spheres of activity. Several scholars have described a “triangle” of elite activity and influence in western Sicily in the second and third centuries that had its corners at Thermae, Lilybaeum, and Panhormus. The activities in western Sicilian cities in the Severan period indicate more, however, than a simple economic revival. They also mark the culmination of a process of elite mobility and integration that had been underway.

marriage of C. Maesius Titianus to Fonteia Frontina, a relation of D. Fonteius Frontinius L. Stertinius Rufinus, consul of 162-3, known from several inscriptions from Numidia (where he served as legatus pro praetore under Antoninus Pius).

69 This is most clearly the case for Thermae, where Augustus established a veteran colony in 21 B.C.E., and where many inscriptions honoring magistrates of the first century C.E. refer to lengthy military careers (Bivona, Iscrizioni [n. 67]).


71 And that we may now extend to the new colonia of Agrigentum, in light of the inscription recently found in Lilybaeum.
for at least a century. The individuals involved in the communities of western Sicily were part of the same provincial society as Septimius Severus, and many had similar – if not as illustrious – careers in the imperial service. In addition, the burst of epigraphic activity honoring the emperor and his family that we see in the Severan period is not fleeting: we have inscriptions honoring later third-century emperors from Marsala, Palermo, and Tyndaris. 72

5. Conclusion: The Significance of the Severan Period for the Urban Landscape of Sicily

In order to assess the wider significance of these social changes, I turn finally to the archaeological record and to physical changes to the urban landscape of Sicily in the Severan period, from which we can discern a gradual but definite shift in the urban “center of gravity” to the island’s western and eastern coasts. The late second and early third centuries saw the continued decay, and perhaps the final stage of occupation, of cities on or near the northern coast, including Halaesa, Soluntum, and Segesta. The early third century appears to mark the final phase of occupation of the civic center of Segesta, a once-prosperous and influential hilltop center in the interior southwest of Panormus that had been in decline since the early imperial period. By the mid-third century, the city’s main public buildings in and around the forum appear to have collapsed and sediment had begun to accumulate over their remains, followed shortly thereafter by the end of frequentation of the area. 73 Halaesa, located on the upper slope of a hill rising from the Tyrrenian coast east of Thermae, prospered in the early imperial period, but its forum shows signs of a reduction in activity from the late second century C.E. onwards. 74 Soluntum appears to have been abandoned shortly after its government made a dedication to the wife of Caracalla in the early third century – and there is little evidence of new building, or of the renovation of existing structures in the city, after the first century C.E. 75

72 To cite only dedications by the civic body (res publica coloniae): from Lilybaeum, CIL X, 7205 (to an unidentified emperor’s numen); and from Panormus, CIL X, 7281 and 7282 (= Bivona, Iscrizioni [n. 31], no. 23 and 24, to the deified Claudius II Gothicus and Diocletian, respectively).
75 A. Cutroni Tusa et al., Solunto, Rome, 1994, p. 12-15. M. Wolf (Die Agora von Solunt, Weisbaden, 2013, p. 41-42) observes that by the late third century, the public buildings in Soluntum’s agora had begun to collapse and were subject to spoliation.
This urban contraction on and near the northern coast could be connected to the decline of Tyrrenhian Italy as an exporter to the provinces, and the movement of trade routes away from the northern coast of Sicily to the western and eastern coasts, whose cities were better-positioned to take advantage of the increased commerce between Rome and the African provinces. Septimius Severus added olive oil to the annona, and Lepcis Magna notoriously expressed its gratitude for the emperor’s benefactions by “donating” its olive oil to Rome (AURELIUS VICTOR, De Caesaribus 41.19-20; cf. SHA, Sev. 18). This gesture, though ultimately detrimental to the Tripolitanian economy, reflects the region’s tremendous agricultural wealth and the key role it played in supplying Rome by the early third century; and in turn it would have ensured a steady traffic on the sea routes between the Tripolitanian coast and Rome – routes that passed the eastern and western coasts of Sicily. The growth of North African olive oil exports is reflected in Sicilian ceramic assemblages, as the Dressel 20 transport amphorae used for Baetican olive oil disappear after the end of the second century, to be replaced by Tripolitanian transport amphorae by the early third century. Another glimpse of the impact of the annona on the Sicilian economy comes from a fragmentary inscription found near Kaukana, on the southern coast of the island, that dates to 209-211 C.E. and mentions two praefecti annonae.

We should be cautious, however, about distinguishing too strongly between “prosperous” and “declining” regions and urban centers of Sicily, especially given the limited and fragmented nature of the archaeological, epigraphic, and historical evidence at our disposal. In addition, there are some indications of financial strains on cities beginning in the second century and continuing into the Severan period, though these indications are by no means unambiguous.

76 Malfitana et al. (Economy [n. 6], p. 425) note that, in contrast to the early Principate, Northern Italian wine amphorae are absent from Sicilian ceramic assemblages by the Severan era.

77 See Lusnia, Creating Severan Rome [n. 46], p. 189-190 for an overview of Severus’ reforms of Rome’s food-supply systems.

78 Wilson, Urban Development [n. 7], p. 306. Lilybaeum is listed in the maritime section of the Antonine Itineraries (O. Cuntz, Itineraria Romana, vol. 1. Itineraria Antonini Augusti et Burdigalense, Leipzig, 1929) as a stopping-off point on the journey both to Carthage (494,1-2) and to the Tripolitanian coast (517,5-518,5). This section of the itineraries includes many routes between the northern Mediterranean and Africa, and so it may record the paths taken by the annona militaris of the late third century (N. Reed, Pattern and Purpose in the Antonine Itinerary, in AJPh 99, 1976, p. 228-254, at p. 245-246).

79 Malfitana et al., Economy [n. 6], p. 424-425. A similar development seems to have occurred in Rome, as shown at Monte Testaccio, where African amphorae become more common between the mid-second and mid-third centuries (J. Remesal, Monte Testaccio, in J. Arce et al. (ed.), Hispania romana: da terra di conquista a provincia dell’impero, Milan, 1997, p. 81-85, at p. 84).

80 Germanà, Alcune osservazioni [n. 6], p. 228-229.
The presence of *curatores rei publicae* is attested under Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus in Tyndaris and Catania and, in the case of Catania at least, this imperially-appointed official seems to have come into conflict with the local *curia*.\(^{81}\) A *curator* is also honored in an inscription from Lilybaeum from the Severan period or later (*AE* 1990, 348).

However, the presence of these imperial officials in Sicilian cities (and in African cities) and their involvement in financing and carrying out public building projects need not imply that the cities themselves were in financial crisis. Rather, the continuing social and political imperative to improve and maintain the urban monumental infrastructure, coupled with the expanding presence of imperial officials in provincial communities especially under the Antonines and after, many of whom would have had previous social connections to these communities and knowledge of their economies, meant that monumental building was increasingly a process of negotiation between local communities and provincial authorities, especially concerning the appropriation and use of funds.

The contrasting fates of neighboring cities like Panhormus and Soluntum, and the presence of *curatores* in Lilybaeum and other cities in the second and third centuries, also suggest that the burst in epigraphic activity in the Severan period is not simply a reflection of a generalized economic revival in western Sicily. Rather, the attention that Severus showed to Sicily – in the form of grants of colonial status – and the accompanying impulse in certain Sicilian communities to commemorate their links with the ruling dynasty, are products of social, economic, and political processes that had been at work in Sicily for much of the imperial period, but that were influenced by broader political and economic changes in the empire, and that culminated in the late second century. These processes included the movement of economic activity away from the interior and from the northern and southern coasts of Sicily, and towards the eastern and western coasts; and the development of patronage links with Roman administrators, especially in the cities of western Sicily, as some wealthy Sicilian families moved into the ranks of the provincial and imperial elite. They hint at the links between the exercise of political power in Rome, the vitality of provincial communities, and shifting currents of Mediterranean commerce and communications in the High Empire.

*University of California, Davis.*

Laura Pfuntner.

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