Dedication of a pagus in Thugga (ILAfr 558) [1]

Typology (Honorific / Funerary / etc.): Dedicatory.

Original Location/Place: Unknown.

Actual Location (Collection/Museum): Reused: built into the western wall of the Byzantine fortress.

Date: 36 CE to 37 CE

Physical Characteristics: Lintel, formed from two joined blocks.

Material: Limestone.

Measurements: Height: 48cm

Width: 397 cm

Language: Latin

Category: Roman

Publications: ILAfr 558

Khanoussi, and Maurin, Dougga, Fragments d'Histoire, n. 23 (AE (1914), 0172)

Commentary: This inscription is the earliest dated epigraphic text from the Roman pagus (district or community outside of a city) of Thugga (Dougga) in northern Tunisia. It is an interesting text for a number of reasons; it records the dedication of a number of public buildings constructed in the first years of Tiberius’s reign, benefitting our knowledge of the topography of the monumental centre of Thugga, and – more significantly – it demonstrates the development of the local identity of the pagus, including the adoption and worship of religious cults which responded to both local interest as well as imperial influence. The inscription also reveals the different social statuses of the inhabitants of the region, and the degree to which they assimilated to, or were complicit with the ruling power of Rome.

Thugga (modern Dougga), was a small town situated approximately 110 kilometres from Carthage; it began as a Libyan settlement in the sixth century CE and was recorded by Diodorus Siculus as being already of reasonably large size by the fourth century BCE (Historical Library, XX.57.4; for a detailed history of Thugga, see Poinssot, Les Ruines de Dougga, p. 9-16). The town came under Carthaginian control at the end of the fourth century BCE, and remained so until the mid-second century BCE, when Carthage was taken over by the Numidian king, Masinissa (Appian, Punic Wars, 68). When Numidia was annexed by Julius Caesar in 46 BCE, Thugga became part of the territory of Carthage, functioning as a ‘double community’; the land was divided between the original inhabitants – who formed a civitas – and the Roman settlers who came from Carthage, who formed the pagus. Although the precise origins of the pagus are unclear, it would seem that the major influx of Roman citizens into the region occurred following the incorporation of Thugga into Carthaginian territory, with members of the Carthaginian elite acquiring land and estates around the older town, partly because any land owned by them was exempt from taxation. James Rives has noted that this division likely had little tangible effect on the native community; the land belonging to the pagani – wherever it was – was intermingled with the land that belonged to the indigenous civitas (Religion and Authority, p. 104). Local institutions were maintained and the general organisation of the town did not – according to the little evidence that survives – change much in the earliest years of Roman administration (Rives, Religion and Authority, p. 102). The Roman pagani were, however, a ‘privileged group’ compared with the native inhabitants of the town; they benefitted from Roman citizenship, tax exemption on their land and the possibility of social advancement through a municipal career (Thompson, Settler and Native, p. 132-181). The inscription records the dedication of a number of public buildings in Thugga. Although the citizens of the civitas almost certainly had some form of monumental infrastructure, including temples to local gods, the pagani established their own monumental centre south of the earlier city (see Poinssot, Les Fouilles de Dougga, p. 170-176 for thorough discussion of the early topography). Two different individuals are listed in the inscription. Firstly, the dedicatee of the monuments is given: Lucius Manilius Bucco, the duumvir. He is described as a member of the tribus Arnensis – a tribe that indicated Roman citizenship in Carthage – and he was clearly an important and leading citizen of that city. Although superior to the civitas of Thugga in terms of possessing Roman citizenship and social status the pagani did not form a civic body in a legal sense – they had no local council or magistrates, although they were eligible to stand for such positions in the city of Carthage (Rives, Religion and Authority,
The pagus of Thugga was reliant on inviting magistrates from there – such as Lucius Manilius Bucco – to administer their public affairs, such as the dedication of a new monumental centre. The second half of the inscription records the act of euergetism responsible for these building works: the forum and the area in front of the temple of Caesar (aream ante templum Caesaris) were paved (stravit), and an altar for Augustus (auram Augusti), a temple of Saturn (aedem Saturni) and an arch (arcum) were built, by Lucius Postumius Chius in his name and those of his sons, Firmus and Lucius. Louis Poinssot believed Chius was likely the son of a freedman, due to the filiation recorded in the inscription, which describes him as the son of Caius (Caii filii), indicating that he too may have taken on the praenomen and nomen of his father’s patron (Poinssot, Inscriptions, p. 41, n. 4). He is not listed as holding any political office, but he is also a Carthaginian citizen, as indicated by his membership of the Arnensis tribe. Chius was clearly extremely wealthy, but the lack of magistracy suggests he was likely of lower social status, which may be explained by his father’s ‘freed’ status. The reference to his sons names might then be understood as an attempt to raise the status of the family’s honour in the town, highlighting their benefaction and emphasising the importance of their connection to the place in which they lived (Christol, Remarques, p. 617-618). Chius is awarded one title, however; he is described as patronus pagi, ‘patron of the pagus’, an appellation that emerged particularly under Tiberius’s rule. Claude Poinssot has suggested that this was a kind of ‘informal’ magistracy, appointed to take care of the day-to-day business of the pagus without retaining any legal or administrative power (Poinssot, Les Ruines de Dougga, p. 228-238).

Aside from these points of local organisation, the inscription is also important because of what it reveals about the importance of the imperial cult and its significance to the pagani of Thugga. The ‘public cult’ of Thugga should, ostensibly, have been the same as that in Carthage, due to the shared citizenship of the Carthaginians and pagani of Thugga. As James Rives has stated though, religion was an important component of local identity, and so the pagus began to acquire its own cults at the same time as it began to establish its character as Roman municipality (Religion and Authority, p. 105-6). A temple of Caesar – as described in the inscription – already existed, and to this were added an altar of Augustus and an arch, which was perhaps in honour of the reigning emperor Tiberius. It is worth remembering that the pagus was located in a distinctly non-Roman region that had thrived under Libyan, Punic and Numidian rule, and the introduction of Roman cults there was not well-established; although the imperial cult was not specifically Roman (in the sense of being restricted to Roman citizens), developing first and foremost in the East, among Greeks, the construction and dedication of the arch distinctly followed a Roman model. It provided an outlet through which the pagani could express their own Roman identity by conforming to monumental and ideological norms that existed across the Roman world. The imperial cult and the demonstration of loyalty to the Julio-Claudian dynasty that Chius’s building scheme was further emphasis of the Roman character of their community, and helped to secure their status in an area of much greater – and diverse – antiquity.

The first century CE saw a number of shrines for a range of gods, including Venus, Concord, Ceres, as well as dedications to Tiberius and his successors (see Poinssot, Les Ruines de Dougga, p. 241-9). This has led to much debate regarding the legality of ‘cult activity’ in Thugga; as the town was a ‘territory’ of Carthage, it had no legal right to its own cults, and its religious rites (sacra publica) should have been the same as those in the bigger city. Almost all the public cults of Carthage known from the Julio-Claudian period can be identified in Thugga, which has led to the suggestion that they were ‘official’ extensions of the Carthaginian rites, designed ‘to reproduce locally the religious identity of the metropolis’ (Rives, Religion and Authority, p. 108). However, certain elements of this religious activity do not fit such a picture of ‘extension’, not least the worship of a living emperor in a Roman colony, as appears to be the case of the construction of a shrine to Tiberius by a Viria Rustica, who also dedicated the initial temple of Caesar (AE 1969-70, 652). Chius’s construction of a temple of Saturn is also somewhat odd, as the god had little recognition monumentally in Carthage, and certainly not a temple that could be replicated in Thugga (Rives, Religion and Authority, p. 109). James Rives has advocated a simpler reading of the cults instituted in the town that does not see them as an official extension of the religious activity of Carthage. As Thugga had no legal authority of its own, with no council or magistrate to make any cult official, he argues that any cult established there must be private by nature and the result of individual initiative. The function of the cults and their dedication by the leading men of the Carthaginian administration was symbolic, ‘increasing the prestige of the benefactions and reinforcing the Carthaginian identity of the pagani’ (Rives, Religion and Authority, p. 109). For the citizens of the pagus in Thugga, Carthaginian identity was synonymous with that of Rome, and their continued expression of it an indication of their need to assert their superior status in an otherwise well-established African community.

Keywords in the original language:

- Tiberius [2]
- divus Augustus [3]
- Arnensis [4]
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Thematic keywords:
- Carthage
- Thugga
- Dougga
- Africa
- Roman province
- euergetism
- local elite
- Romanization
- Punics
- citizenship
- imperial cult
- arch
- Saturn
- Augustus
- Tiberius
- local cults

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- Khanoussi, Mustapha, Maurin, Louis, *Dougga, Fragments d'Histoire. Choix d'inscriptions latines éditées, traduites et commentées (Ier-IVer siècles)* [34] (Bordeaux; Tunis: Ausonius, 2000)
- Poinssot, Louis, *Les Fouilles de Dougga en 1919 et le quartier du Forum* [37], Nouvelles Archives des missions scientifiques et littéraires 22 (1919) : 133-198
- Poinssot, Louis, *Inscriptions de Thugga découvertes en 1910-13* [38], Nouvelles Archives des missions scientifiques et littéraires 21 (1913) : 1-227

Other sources connected with this document:
- Inscription
- Dedication to the imperial cult at Narbo (CIL XII, 4333) [41]

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Dedication of a pagus in Thugga (ILAfr 558)
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Inscription

Dedication to the imperial cult in Lusitania (CIL II, 473) [42]

- [Read more about Dedication to the imperial cult in Lusitania (CIL II, 473)] [42]

Realized by:

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Links

[32] http://www.judaism-and-rome.org/remarques-sur-une-inscription-de-thugga-le-pagus-dans-la-colonie-de-
carthage-au-ier-si%C3%A8cle-ap-jc

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