

POPULUS IN CLASSES DISTRIBUTUS IN MUNICIPAL *CURIAE*
UNDER THE EARLY EMPIRE*

By

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The present author has published two other works on municipal *curiae* – or the sections into which the municipal *populus* was divided in Italy and the provinces, just as *populus Romanus* was divided into *tribus* – limiting their territorial scope to Roman Africa¹; for it is for that part of the Empire that we know the most about *curiae* thanks to inscriptions from African *municipia* and *coloniae*², already well over a hundred in number. That relative abundance of sources has attracted the attention of scholars investigating the Roman municipal political system, especially as the African soil, rich in monuments, has been revealing ever new documents able to shed light on the origins, organisational structure and evolution of the institution in question.

In recent years a new centre has appeared on the map of Roman Africa's municipal *curiae*: the city of Mustis, or *Municipium Iulium Aurelium Mustitanum*³. Luckily the latest French-Tunisian archaeological dig in the ruins of Mustis

* Originally published in Polish in "Eos" LX 1972, fasc. 1., pp. 115–128.

¹ T. KOTULA, *Les curies municipales en Afrique Romaine*, Wrocław 1968 (Prace Wrocławskiego Towarzystwa Naukowego, ser. A, CXXXVIII); IDEM, *Studia nad genezą municypalnych kurii w rzymskiej Afryce*, Antiquitas III 1969, pp. 87–132.

² It is only very rarely, on the other hand, that any information on *curiae* is transmitted by literary sources, so that in practice we have here an institution which it is only possible to research through epigraphic discoveries, as is the case with many other municipal institutions. The latest, and owing to paradoxical coincidence the most specific testimony on African *curiae* in ancient authors is a passage in St. Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (75, 1 and 121, 7), although by his time they were but an empty shell, a shade of the past. Even the very term *curia* had completely changed its meaning: in the late Empire it denoted the municipal senate. See KOTULA, *Curies municipales...* (n. 1), pp. 132 ff.

³ On my map of preserved inscriptions referring to *curiae*, published before the publication of most recent inscriptions, there is under no. 93 for Proconsular Africa the town of Henshir el-Ust, which we now know to lie within the territory of the ancient city of Mustis; KOTULA, *Curies municipales...* (n. 1), p. 48 and tables on p. 38, no. 93.

(present-day Henshir Mest) revealed within the sector of the Byzantine citadel a whole set of official inscriptions which greatly improve our knowledge of the history of that town of Proconsular Africa. We owe the publication of those new Mustitan inscriptions, and extensive commentary on them, to A. BESCHAOUCH, who in the first part of his monograph on Mustis presented its history in the light of literary, epigraphical and archaeological sources⁴. The Tunisian scholar put forward the very likely hypothesis according to which *Municipium Iulium Aurelium Mustitanum* was one of Julius Caesar's few African *municipia*. The city was situated on the Numidian side of the *fossa regia*, which had once separated Masinissa's kingdom from Carthaginian territory, in an area of Marian colonisation, which had left its permanent traces in epithets of the surrounding towns, and in Mustis itself in the form of the many veteran Marii enrolled in *tribus Cornelia*; it also lay on the main axis of Roman expansion, connecting Caesar's colony of Carthage with the later colony of Thebeste, and probably enjoyed particular favour of the dictator victorious at Thapsus. With time, the *municipium Iulium* received further privileges from an Aurelian emperor, probably Marcus Aurelius, and immortalised his memory with its new epithet⁵.

Hypothesising that the origins of the *municipium* were so early, perceptible as part of the Roman colonisation of the fertile basin of the middle Bagradas, sheds new light on the problem of the chronology of municipal *curiae* in Mustis. Collecting all African epigraphic material to mention *curiae* demonstrates that they only made it into the local inscriptions in the 2nd century in the reign of Trajan⁶. To an extent that is explained by the general state of preservation of epigraphical sources, and in particular of municipal inscriptions, which during the first century of the Empire were still relatively few. However, there can be no doubt that citizens were automatically enrolled in *curiae* as soon as their African cities were granted a Roman charter, and so the beginnings of municipal *curiae* in Africa reach back to the decline of the Republic and the rise of the Empire, to the time of Caesar and Augustus, when the first *coloniae Iuliae* and *municipia Iulia* were founded, of which Mustis was probably one, in the territory of the former Carthaginian state, in the kingdom of Numidia and on the coast of Mauretania. *Curiae* were among the Roman municipal institutions and they took a Roman form in Africa too, modelled on the charters of cities in Italy. An echo of a municipal charter seems to sound in an inscription from Trajan's *Municipium Ulpium Thubursicu Numidarum* in the north-western part of Proconsular Africa province, an interesting text which next

⁴ *Collection épigraphique de la Revue "Karthago"*, fasc. 1: A. BESCHAOUCH, *Mustitana. Recueil des nouvelles inscriptions de Mustis, cité romaine de Tunisie*, vol. I, Paris 1968.

⁵ BESCHAOUCH, *op. cit.* (n. 4), pp. 33 ff.

⁶ See KOTULA, *Curies municipales...* (n. 1), pp. 34–32, tables.

to the *ordo*, or council of *decuriones*, lists as its partner in the honorific decree the *[popul]us in cu[r]ias cont[ri]butus*⁷.

The origins of African *curiae* are somewhat elucidated by an inscription from the colony of Curubis on Cape Bon, one of the *coloniae Iuliae* in the vicinity of Carthage itself, probably founded by Julius Caesar⁸. In that text, dated to the second half of the 2nd century AD, so rather late, we have a *curia Poblicia*. Its name, stemming from somebody called Publicius, has not been explained so far, but it probably reaches back to the beginnings of the colony, founded in the territory of a Punic city governed by suffetes, who during one of Caesar's consulships took as their patron an otherwise unknown Gaius Pomponius⁹. It is exactly the archaic name *Poblicia*, that of the only curia attested in Curubis, that would allow us to date its origin as early as the forties of the 1st century BC. That would make it the earliest municipal *curia* known in Africa and a confirmation of *curiae* being formed in the earliest Roman colonies in Carthaginian territory.

It needs to be emphasised, however, that the mere fact of grafting the Roman institution on African soil does not explain the particularly intense (judging from the preserved sources) development of municipal *curiae* in Africa. Already towards the end of the 19th century scholars noted the striking disproportion between the considerable number of epigraphical testimonies relating to *curiae* found in the African provinces, and the few located in Italy and the remaining parts of the Empire, and wondered whether the African *curiae* had a predecessor in an equivalent Punic municipal institution¹⁰. As I have mentioned above, Mustis lay in the close vicinity of the border which before the Third Punic War separated the Carthaginian state from Masinissa's kingdom, growing at the expense of Carthage. However, the influence of Carthaginian civilisation extended

⁷ *ILAlg* I 1295. Municipal charters themselves have not been preserved among African inscriptions. The primary comparative source in that regard is the so-called *lex municipii Malacitani*, the charter of one of the Spanish *municipia Flavia*, unfortunately to paragraph 51 preserved only in part, on one bronze tablet (*CIL* II 1964 = H. DESSAU, *ILS* 6089). From paragraph 52 the charter determines the rules for convoking the *comitia* and the voting system (par. 55), which took place according to the Roman tradition *curiatim* and were based on all the citizens being distributed in *curiae* (cf. par. 52: "ea distributione curiarum de qua supra comprehensum est", that is in the part of the *lex* that is lost). On the basis of that *lex Malacitana* it is usually accepted that such a system of convoking the popular assembly and distributing the municipal *populus* into *curiae* acting as voting units was universal in the early Empire; see M. GERVASIO, *Curia*, in: E. DE RUGGIERO, *Dizionario epigrafico di antichità Romane*, II 1910, p. 1395; cf. J. ROMAN, *Notes sur l'organisation municipale de l'Afrique romaine. I: Les curies*, *Annales de la Faculté de Droit d'Aix IV* 1910, fasc. 1–2, pp. 96 ff.

⁸ *ILA* 320 = DESSAU, *ILS* 9407; KOTULA, *Studia nad genezq...* (n. 1), p. 100.

⁹ *CIL* VIII 10525, cf. 977; L. TEUTSCH, *Das römische Städtewesen in Nordafrika von C. Gracchus bis zum Tode des Kaisers Augustus*, Berlin 1962, p. 107; P. ROMANELLI, *Storia delle province romane dell'Africa*, Roma 1959, p. 141 and n. 1.

¹⁰ See KOTULA, *Curies municipales...* (n. 1), pp. 11 ff., and the bibliography.

far beyond the *fossa regia* into the interior, and grew especially strong after 146 BC, in the period known as Neo-Punic.

It is not a coincidence that recently, several scholars have directed their interest towards an inscription of momentous import for the problem in question: a text from Thugga, an old Numidian centre near Mustis. It is a dedication from 48/49 AD, to divine Augustus and the incumbent emperor Claudius, by the patron of the local community of Roman citizens, *pagus civium Romanorum*, which from the 1st to the early 3rd century co-existed with the native city (*civitas*) on allotted ground next to it¹¹. The piece of information in the text of particular importance to the question of the origins of *curiae* in Africa is the mention of suffete elections – evidence for relics of the Punic political system surviving in Thugga into the Empire – by the *senatus et plebs omnium portarum sententiis* (lines 10 f., my emphasis; cf. “a civitate et plebe suffragio creatus [*scil. sufes*]” in line 15)¹². Without going here into the very complex issue of whether there was a popular assembly in Carthage¹³, I would like to pause at the word *portae*, which in Thugga must have meant a municipal institution. The text of the inscription suggests that they were districts or quarters of the city adjoining its several gates, according to which all the citizens of *civitas Thugga* were distributed into groups. So constituted and under the aegis of their “senate”, they voted to elect their officials. In that sense, though, the expression “senatus (= *civitas*) et plebs omnium portarum sententiis (= suffragio)” would in fact indicate the existence in *civitas Thuggensis* of a specific popular assembly, probably stemming from the Punic tradition¹⁴. And in that same sense the *portae* could be considered, on the one hand, a distant echo of *hetaireiai* into which, as Aristotle seems to suggest in his *Politics*, the Carthaginian population (arranging, just as

¹¹ CIL VIII 26517 = DESSAU, *ILS* 6797. See W. SESTON, *Des “portes” de Thugga à la “Constitution” de Carthage*, RH CXXXVII avril–juin 1967, pp. 277–294, and, partly arguing against him, G.-C. PICARD, *La révolution démocratique de Carthage*, Bruxelles 1968 (Collection Latomus CXII), pp. 129 f., and KOTULA, *Studia nad genezq...* (n. 1), pp. 93 and 101; IDEM, *Curies municipales...* (n. 1), pp. 26–30. In earlier literature, see L. HOMO, *Les suffètes de Thugga d’après une inscription récemment découverte*, MEFRA XIX 1899, pp. 297–306.

¹² It is worth noting the extraordinary synonymy of *senatus* (the native city council) and *civitas* in the passages quoted. *Civitas* used in this sense is a ἄπαιξ λεγόμενον of sorts in the African epigraphic corpus, as is the term *portae*. SESTON, *op. cit.* (n. 11), *passim*, deduces both those terms from the Punic and Oriental traditions of Carthage, the new Tyre.

¹³ SESTON, *op. cit.* (n. 11), claims that the Carthaginians did not have a popular assembly in the classical sense of the term; contra: PICARD, *op. cit.* (n. 11).

¹⁴ Recently, C. POINSSOT expressed the view that all the institutions mentioned in the Thugga inscription are typically Punic and that the inscription itself seems as a whole to be a translation of a Neo-Punic text into Latin: C. POINSSOT, *M. Licinius Rufus, patronus pagi et civitatis Thuggensis*, BCTH V 1969, p. 238 and n. 86.

the Spartans or the Cretans, common meals) was divided¹⁵; and on the other, an African equivalent of the municipal *curiae* of the Imperial period. Most likely the institution of Punic origin referred to as *porta* in the Latin version of the Thugga inscription towards the end of the Republic spread through the part of Africa which was under the influence of Carthaginian civilisation. Taking into account that the greatest concentration of municipal *curiae* attested by sources can be found within the territory of the former Carthaginian state or on its periphery, it appears that the Roman institution was particularly lively on African ground in those places which had a living local tradition of the city people being distributed into *hetaireiai*, or *portae*¹⁶.

Still, it is necessary to admit that so far in Mustis, the city whose example I mean to use to present in the light of new inscriptions the evolution of *curiae* as reflecting the social changes of the Imperial period, no traces of Punic municipal institutions have been found. What is more, the Mustitan *curiae* appear more Roman in form than elsewhere, even though the *municipium* probably did have a pre-Roman past as the *oppidum Musti*¹⁷.

In our *municipium Iulium Aurelium* municipal *curiae* come up in four inscriptions altogether, all rather late. The one earliest chronologically, and the longest known, comes from 188 AD, so from the reign of Commodus¹⁸; of the recently discovered ones, one was carved under Macrinus (217–218 AD)¹⁹; the remaining two, under Severus Alexander (222–235)²⁰. It is in the latter two that we find the only named *curia* in the Mustitan epigraphical corpus, the *curia Augusta*. Mustis is the fifth city, after Lepcis Magna, Leptis Minor, Sabratha and Lambaesis, where there was a *curia* bearing that imperial name. Comparing in my book all

¹⁵ Arist. *Polit.* II 8, 2. It should be emphasised that African *curiae* regularly held sacred feasts as well, which was probably a local tradition.

¹⁶ I elaborated on that conception in my *Studia nad genezq...* (n. 1), and in chapter 1 of *Curies municipales...* (n. 1). Here I merely summarise my argument, confronting it with more recent approaches. My hypothesis has been questioned in a review by L. MAURIN, REA LXXI 1969, pp. 230 ff. Since discussion continues in latest literature, I plan to return to the problem of the Thugga inscription, marginal to this article, in another paper. Recently, H.-G. PFLAUM, in his excellent study on the Romanisation of the former Carthaginian territory, drew attention to the Romans intentionally inhibiting that process themselves, unwilling to do away with Punic city institutions still prospering in that highly urbanised region in the first two centuries of the Empire: H.-G. PFLAUM, *La romanisation de l'ancien territoire de la Carthage punique à la lumière des découvertes épigraphiques récentes*, AntAfr IV 1970, pp. 75–117. In my opinion PFLAUM'S thesis could also explain why there were no municipal *curiae* in that part of Africa before the 2nd century: it was only gradually and slowly that they replaced the Punic institution the traces of which I am looking for.

¹⁷ BESCHAOUCH, *op. cit.* (n. 4), pp. 9 f.; cf. pp. 33 ff.

¹⁸ CIL VIII 16417 = BESCHAOUCH no. 14 (= AE 1968, 609).

¹⁹ BESCHAOUCH no. 16 = AE 1968, 591. According to the editor that is the only municipal inscription in the honour of the ephemeral emperor Macrinus in Proconsular Africa.

²⁰ BESCHAOUCH no. 19 (= AE 1968, 593) and no. 20 (= AE 1968, 588).

known names of *curiae*, usually stemming from names of emperors and gods, I reached the conclusion that the name *curia Augusta* could refer to any of the emperors. It would then have a general, common adjectival meaning: “the imperial *curia*”²¹. However, if we are to accept BESCHAOUCH’s theory about Mustis as Caesar’s Julian *municipium*, then in that particular case the *curia Augusta* would owe its name to one specific Augustus: the first princeps, making it another argument for the *municipium*’s early origins²² and at the same time the first instance in African inscriptions of a name of a *curia* derived from a 1st century emperor. While we could suspect that under Augustus a new *curia* formed in Mustis was given his *cognomen* as its name, it seems more likely that one of the original *curiae* of Caesar’s *municipium* was renamed in honour of the son of *divus Iulius*.

That set of four inscriptions paints quite a stereotypical picture of the activities of municipal *curiae* in Mustis, with their social relationships and religious life the same as can be observed for all the other *curiae* in Africa²³. As was the custom, outstanding and wealthy citizens, the officials and priests, on the occasion of being made *duumviri*, *aediles* or *flamines* of the municipal imperial cult, vowed to honour and adorn their city with statues or to erect monumental buildings. On the day of the dedication, accompanied by religious rituals, they held sacred feasts, or *epula*, for all the *curiae*, comprising all the *populus* of the city. Sometimes they would also leave the city sums of money in their will with the provision that *curiae* could spend their interest to hold such feasts themselves on the anniversaries of the benefactors’ birthdays.

One such event in Mustis fell in 188. C. Orfius Luciscus, one of the *duumviri*, the highest officials of the *municipium*, who then had judicial and censorial powers, the municipal priest of the goddess Caelestis and of Aesculapius, adorned his home town with a “triumphal” arch, so fulfilling an obligation he had undertaken, as well as erected statues to Janus and the silenus Marsyas, the latter of which in the forum as the traditional symbol of municipal autonomy. To commemorate the dedication of the arch the founder had theatre plays staged in the city, as well as the customary *epulum* held for the municipal *curiae* and the collegium of worshippers of Ceres²⁴.

The new inscription of 217/218 AD brings an interesting testimony regarding the initiative of a former curial priest, who had held his religious function for one year, as reflected in his title, *flamen annuus*²⁵. That man, L. Nonius Rogatianus

²¹ KOTULA, *Curies municipales...* (n. 1), pp. 77 ff.; see *ibid.* for the conclusions.

²² So MAURIN, *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 234.

²³ Cf. chapters 2 and 3 of my *Curies municipales...* (n. 1), *passim*.

²⁴ *CIL VIII 16417* = BESCHAOUCH no. 14 (cf. n. 18), revised and amended.

²⁵ BESCHAOUCH no. 16 (cf. n. 19). The difference ought to be explained between two functions in Honoratianus’ career, *fl(amen) an(nuus)* and *fl(amen) perp(etuus)*. In his commentary on the inscription BESCHAOUCH claims that both titles refer to the position of the municipal priest of

Honoratianus, then had a municipal career in Mustis, and during the reign of Macrinus, an emperor from Caesarea in Mauretania, dedicated some monument vowed to the city, left undefined in detail in the text, increasing the amount of money declared for that purpose. On the same occasion, together with his wife Orfia Fortunata, a member of the generous *gens Orfia* mentioned above, and with his sons, he treated the municipal *curiae* to a sacred feast.

However, among the stereotypical two inscriptions stand out, and those two I have saved for last. They are the first epigraphical sources to contain the information that municipal *curiae* were internally subdivided into *classes*. Let me quote both in full (the numbers refer to BESCHAOUCH's edition²⁶):

[No. 19:] Pantheo Aug(usto) sac(rum). Pr[o s]alute / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) Aur(elii) Seve(ri) Ale[x]andri Aug(usti) / totiusq(ue) domus eius divinae; classis tertia / ex curia Aug(usta) templum vetustate corruptum, sum/[ptu suo, re]stit[uit et e]x[or]n[avit] ex decreto decurio[n]um.

[No. 20:] Cereri Aug(ustae) sac(rum). Pro [salute] / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) Aureli(i) Severi A[lexandri] / Pii Felicis Aug(usti) [et Iuliae Mamaeae Aug(ustae)] / [matris Aug(usti)] et senatus et cas[trorum et pa-]triae; munus quod Iulia Q(uinti) filia [.....] ho[nestae] memoriae flaminica, imi[tata paren]tes maioresq(ue) suos – qui munifici in [patriam] / extiterunt, id est C(aium) Iulium C(aii) filium Cor(nelia tribu) Fe[licem] / Felinianum flam(inem) perp(etuum) qui statuam Iov[i victo]ri in foro posuit patriae suae per decr[etum] / universi ordinis – promisit, inlata suo [tempo]re legitima summa honoris, et ampli[us, curi]ae honestiss(imae) Aug(ustae) classi prim(a)e summam p[ro]p[ri]etariae dignam, ex cuius usuris annuis redac[tis] / omnib(us) annis in perpetuum epularetur, t[ri]but[um] donoq(ue) dedit epulumq(ue), decedens, ob dedi[c]ationem / curiis dari iussit – Q(uintus) Iulius Felix frater eius / et Iulius Homullus et Iulius Honoratus eius / ab ea statuam adlat(am) statuer(unt) et, epulo curiis dato, ded(icaverunt).

the imperial cult, first held for a year and then appointed perpetually, but in my opinion *fl(amen) an(nuus)* is the curial priest, whereas *fl(amen) perp(etuus)* is the municipal priest of the imperial cult, in Africa appointed for a year with only the honorary title “perpetual” granted for life (cf. POINSSOT, *op. cit.* [n. 14], pp. 250 f.). One must agree with BESCHAOUCH that the title *flamen annuus* is rare in African epigraphical sources (but see an example he failed to mention, *ILT* 728, Thuburbo Maius, *curiales universi curiarum undecim* in honour of a *flamen annuus*; and cf. *ibid.* the editor's commentary). It is also true that curial priests are also at times called *flamines perpetui* (undoubtedly under the influence of the municipal office) or simply *flamines* (see KOTULA, *Curies municipales...* [n. 1], p. 35, n. 67 and pp. 67 ff.). On the whole, however, at the present state of preservation of the sources, the examples for contrasting *flamines annui* or (as in Leptis Minor) *antistites sacrorum anni...* with “perpetual” priests argue for the view, proposed already by O. HIRSCHFELD and J. SCHMIDT, that the inferior title *flamen annuus*, emphasising the temporary status of the distinction, was generally reserved for curial priests. In Mustis we would then have a priest who, having completed his curial function, started on a municipal career, crowned with the high office of the “perpetual” flamen. Let us add that according to W. SESTON one-year priestly offices were characteristic of the religious life of *curiae* in Africa (W. SESTON, *Liber Pater et les curies de Lepti Minus*, *CT XV* 1967, p. 74 = *AE* 1968, 630).

²⁶ See n. 20 for references to *AE*.

At first glance, in those two texts nothing departs from the stencil either. Some representatives of the *curia Augusta* probably came forward with a project, resulting in the council of the *decuriones* issuing a decree authorising members of the *curia*, who were expected to fund public projects, to rebuild at their own cost the temple of some deity called Pantheus Augustus, which was threatened with ruin. The second text informs its reader that the inheritors of the late *flaminica* Julia, a municipal priestess generous to her home town, carried out her last will by erecting a statue of Ceres and holding an *epulum* for all the *curiae*. However, the rebuilding and redecoration of the pantheistic god's temple was undertaken not by the whole *curia Augusta*, but only its *classis tertia*, third class, presumably especially involved in his cult; and the *flaminica* did not honour the whole *curia Augusta* either, but rather its *classis prima*, first class, making special generous bequest to it as a foundation. Interest from that *summa pecuniae digna* was to provide the members of that first class with enough to pay for yearly banquets²⁷.

An explanation is needed for what those curial *classes* were, so far out of almost 140 inscriptions from 49 African cities attested only for Mustis. The texts quoted above indicate that the Mustitan *curiae* were divided into at least three classes each. And so there was a hierarchy to the collective of *curiales*, a grading the criteria for which we do not know. Sill, since municipal curiae were a Roman institution in origin, we can suspect that the *populus* in *municipia* and colonies reflected – *mutatis mutandis* – the traditional structure of the Roman *comitia*. Using the sources for the so-called Servian reform, A. BESCHAOUCH presented a hypothesis, very likely and convincing in the present state of the sources, according to which the “class” division of *curiae* was based on a property census²⁸. According to his theory, the formal distinction between the internal structure of the *comitia centuriata* in Rome and the composition of municipal curiae would all come down to the fact that the Servian classes were higher level units than *centuriae* (voting units), while the curial ones were fractions of whole voting units of the popular assemblies of *coloniae* and *municipia*.

But the question remains of how we ought to reconcile the existence of property classes with the information we have of another internal subdivision of *curiae*, namely that into groups of *seniores* and *iuniores*. We know of those from two inscriptions, from Leptis Minor and Lambaesis²⁹. The first mentions the *iuventus cur(iae) Ulp(iae)*³⁰; the second, which dates to the reign of Severus

²⁷ For the cost of such “banquets” in Africa, probably hardly Lucullan, see KOTULA, *Curies municipales...* (n. 1), pp. 62–64 and 108–119.

²⁸ BESCHAOUCH, *op. cit.* (n. 4), p. 38: a list of sources to mention the Servian *census* and the division of *populus Romanus* into five property classes.

²⁹ For a discussion see KOTULA, *Curies municipales...* (n. 1), pp. 130 ff.

³⁰ *CIL VIII 22901 + AE 1896 32*, not dated. I believe it is not an autonomous *collegium iuvenum* that is meant here, but merely a fraction of the *curia*, its junior group.

Alexander, just like both the Mustitan inscriptions to mention *classes*, points to a group of curial dignitaries, *seniores curiae Sabinae*³¹. Yet, as BESCHAOUCH was right to point out, it would be difficult to regard the Mustitan *classes* as such age groups, since there were in Mustis at least three of them. We must then suppose that in those cities where the citizenship formed into age-based groups of *curia* members alongside the political units of *curiae* themselves and their *classes*, the two divisions co-existed. Probably such a system of perpendicular divisions made the life of the *curia* a tad more complicated, especially when it came to co-ordinating its operations. The *seniores* and *iuniores* groups in Lambaesis and Leptis Minor worshipped and honoured emperors, their outstanding fellow citizens, their benefactors and patrons just as the several *classes* did. However, it bears emphasising that in contrast to the official distribution of *curia* members into *classes*, the senior and junior clubs formed quite spontaneously: an illustration of the universal Roman association drive, they were a result of natural differences, also in rank, of the *natu maiores* and *natu minores* in the municipal community. They were purely social institutions and did not encroach upon the political divisions and organisations of the *populus in curias contributus*.

The significance of discovering a system of property classes in the internal structure of municipal *curiae* lies primarily in facilitating the solution of one of the hardest problems presented by that institution so far. Namely, that kind of division is a decisive argument in favour of the hypothesis put forward by J. ROMAN and taken up by me, according to which in Africa, too, *curiae* comprised all the citizens of a city, rather than only the privileged elite, as others supposed³². Naturally we would need to make the assumption that the division into *classes* was universal in the internal structure of *curiae*, but that does not seem to raise any doubts. As indicated by the inscriptions quoted above, it was official, and so probably based on the charters of *municipia* and colonies which regulated the *distributio curiarum*. In that case it would have been present in African *curiae* since the dawn of the Empire, and that would apply, among others, to Mustis, and perhaps already to the original *municipium Iulium*.

Without returning to the arguments adduced in *Curies municipales...* in order to demonstrate that they comprised the whole municipal *populus* in the political sense, let me add to them an interesting testimony from Agbia. That city in Proconsular Africa, again a neighbour of Mustis, apparently until the 3rd century

³¹ CIL VIII 2714 + 19118. The presence of *iuniores* and *seniores* in the *curiae Ulpia* (Leptis Minor) and *Sabina* (Lambaesis) would seem to mean that such groups of *curiales* existed in both those cities from the 2nd century on.

³² See KOTULA, *Curies municipales...* (n. 1), pp. 54–62, arguing against G. CHARLES-PICARD. That scholar presented further arguments in defence of his thesis and against mine in his review of my book, before he could have access to the new Mustis inscriptions: G. CHARLES-PICARD, BCTH IV 1968, pp. 223 f.).

remained, just as the nearby Thugga, a so-called double community³³. Now one of the inscriptions from Agbia, made in the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–161), actually mentions that “double community”: *pagus (civium Romanorum) et civitas*³⁴. It is a typical honorific inscription, in which a grateful city decrees honours due its outstanding citizen and patron for his generous donations to the public. It deserves our attention that a text of this type should contain formulaic expressions commonly found in inscriptions referring to municipal *curiae*: “*decurionibus [...] sportulas [...] universis civibus epulum*”. It would seem to be one of the many African examples of native cities, *civitates peregrinae*, aspiring to take over certain Roman institutions or even to apply Roman terminology to their own political solutions before they reached the higher status of a *municipium* or *colonia*. For us here what matters is that the formula *universi cives* already replaces here, as though in advance, the expression *universae curiae*, obviously synonymous to municipal *curiae* which undoubtedly did not yet exist in *civitas Agbia* under Antoninus Pius.

Also in those cities where *curiae* are attested in inscriptions, the expressions *universae curiae* (or similar) and *universi cives* (or *universus populus*, *universa plebs* etc.) appear in inscriptions side by side. In some of those cases they were without any doubt used synonymously and interchangeably³⁵.

As I have mentioned above, the new information on the organisational structure of *curiae* reinforces the impression that they took a completely Roman form. However, for the problem at hand the archaic “Servian” traditions are less important than the role played by the property classes in the changing societal relationships of the Imperial era. In chapters 2 and 3 of my *Curies municipales...* I tried to demonstrate that under the principate that institution, democratic in its premises, a legacy of the Roman *comitia*, was doomed to a gradual loss of its original political functions. As monarchy solidified in the Empire, *curiae* first of all lost their important power to appoint municipal officials and to issue decrees. In the face of the growing authority of the city council, *splendidissimus ordo*, the assembly of *universi cives* distributed into *curiae* fell by the wayside. The

³³ That view has recently been opposed by C. POINSSOT, who maintains L. POINSSOT’s claim that Agbia was administratively subordinate to Thugga as its *vicus*: POINSSOT, *op. cit.* (n. 14), p. 237 and n. 77. However, see PFLAUM, *op. cit.* (n. 16), p. 76.

³⁴ *CIL VIII 1548* = DESSAU, *ILS 6827*.

³⁵ For example on the 3rd century inscriptions from Sufetula, *CIL VIII 11332*, *curiae universae* to the city’s curator for his services to *singuli universique cives*; or *ibid.* 11340, *ordo et universus popul(us) col(oniae) Sufetulensis* to a city magistrate and at the same time imperial procurator, for services *erga singulos universosque cives*. In that context it is tempting to suppose that in the inscriptions from those *municipia* and *coloniae* where so far we know nothing of municipal *curiae*, occurrences of *universi cives* (and similar formulae) are identical with *curiae*, provided that at the moment of their carving the city already had a Roman charter. That would allow us to add at least a few cities to the map of *curiae* in Africa; but in the present state of the sources it would be difficult to go beyond guesses.

banal epigraphic formula *d(ecreto) d(ecurionum)*, so obvious and common that two letters, standing out in the text by their size, were enough to indicate it in official documents engraved in bronze or marble, is an eloquent symbol of the new political reality in which the city *populus* of full citizens had to be content with empty acclamation of motions prepared by the council of *decuriones*. Native African traditions, it seems, had been moving in the same direction anyway. The *portae* of *civitas Thuggensis*, sections of its popular assembly which had survived through the Neo-Punic period and into Roman times, were probably similarly subordinate to the local “senate”³⁶. In such circumstances *curiae* inevitably degenerated, turning into quasi-colleges, increasingly locking themselves up within their close confines and contenting themselves with religious and social activities. That process probably went further in the 2nd century under the rule of the Antonines to find its conclusion in the “military monarchy” of the Severi.

The political degradation of the popular assembly was accompanied by corresponding social change. Let me remind the reader that beginning with the end of the 2nd century, within the order of *decuriones* itself, so far quite homogeneous, there occurred a clear stratification, resulting in the emergence of an oligarchic group of *principales*, well known from the African epigraphical corpus. The same phenomenon took place *a fortiori* in the collective of the *universi cives*, and so within the structure of municipal *curiae*. Now it is very characteristic that no activity of the several curial classes was apparent before the 3rd century, and it is only under Severus Alexander that they left a trace of their life in Mustitan inscriptions. In earlier inscriptions one usually finds *universae curiae*, or else *curiae singulae* taken as a whole. Most likely it is the aforementioned social change that explains such a late appearance of *classes* in the preserved sources. These smallest cells of the municipal *populus* were undoubtedly born with the *curiae* and for two centuries of the principate led their statutory existence within the voting units of African *municipia* and *coloniae*, but it was only the climate of a later era with the stratification of social classes typical of it that woke them to autonomous life, making them closed “clubs” of sorts whose hierarchical gradation mocked the democratic appearances of municipal *comitia*. Thus from the 3rd century on whole electoral sections lost initiative for their subsections which presumably numbered fewer than twenty citizens each: the *classes* and the groups of *seniores* and *iuniores*; and by initiative I mean that regarding the whole urban life, political, religious and social: dedications in honour of emperors, worship of gods, construction and reconstruction of temples, finally holding regular *epula* or curial banquets.

We can witness that “club-like” operational style on the example of *curia Augusta* of the *municipium* of Mustis, whose epithet *honestissima* seems to reflect the social division, dating to the Severan era, into *honestiores* and *humiliores*. It

³⁶ Cf. SESTON, *op. cit.* (n. 11), pp. 293 f.

is not an accident that the second of the two Mustitan inscriptions quoted above indicates a privileged status of the first class, which led its *curia Augusta* and received from the wealthy *flaminica*, who certainly belonged to the same social class and circle as the most prominent *curiales*, a considerable sum for its expenses. However, members of the third class of that *curia* were not quite poor either if together they were able to pay for reconstructing the temple of Pantheus Augustus³⁷. In the ubiquitous emulation, in that municipal rivalry in furnishing their home city with as much grandeur as possible, they too tried to distinguish themselves at all cost from the masses of the *humiliores*. The dominant position of the members of the first class, the *principales* of the city; the ambitions of the third class citizens, possibly not yet the lowest in the structure of the Mustitan popular assembly; it all seems to indicate that the dissociative process in the municipal society was running even deeper. In the third century of the principate, so grandly begun in Africa under the auspices of the Severi, *populus in classes distributus* heralded the dynamic change from which the hierarchical pyramid-like social structure typical of the late Empire would emerge.

³⁷ There is not enough data for us to calculate the cost of that undertaking, and thereby to determine, if roughly, the degree of wealth possessed by those less distinguished *curiales*. In his statistics of public expenses in African cities, R. DUNCAN-JONES listed 27 examples of liturgical construction of temples. Most of those fall in the 2nd century and during the reign of the Severi. The most expensive of those temples, the Capitol in Lambaesis, cost its founder 600 thousand sesterterii. The cheapest, dedicated to Mercury Sobrius, 3 thousand sesterterii. Thirteen of the examples, so nearly half of those listed, fall between 100 and 20 thousand sesterterii. The latter sum is regarded by the author as the cost of an average temple with appropriate décor (R. DUNCAN-JONES, *Costs, Outlays and Summae Honorariae from Roman Africa*, PBSR XXX 1962, pp. 79 f., cf. p. 64). If we were to assume that such was the sum collected by *classis tertia curiae Augustae* for the reconstruction and renovation of the temple of Pantheus Augustus; that an average *curia* in Africa counted, as DUNCAN-JONES would have it (*Wealth and Munificence in Roman North Africa*, PBSR XXXI 1963, p. 171; but cf. KOTULA, *Curies municipales...* [n. 1], pp. 62–67) 60 members; and that there were in Mustis only three property classes, each of which had on average 20 members – then the share per member would be a round one thousand sesterterii. Now if we take into account that under the Severi charity for public undertakings was still generous, we have here people of rather modest means. However, too many variables in those rough calculations remain unknown.