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IVNIVS SATVRNINVS: A NEW AFRICAN CENTENARIAN

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It is known that Africans tended to celebrate the deaths of their own in a peculiar mode that emphasized old age, indeed very old age, and seniority. One result that is readily apparent in the epigraphical corpora for the African provinces of the Roman empire is, comparatively speaking, an unusual emphasis on the upper-ages in the deciles of death. Amongst all of the deaths, this means that Africa boasts a truly unusual number of centenarians compared to other provincial populations of the empire.¹ We can now add one more instance to the list. A local shepherd discovered the honorand's tombstone in an olive grove near the base of a hill, outside of al-Waslatiyah (Oueslatia), Tunisia. The find spot lies in a lush, high basin fed by rainwater runoff from surrounding mountains, 40km ESE of the site of Roman Maktaris, 25 km SSW of Limisa (°Ain/Ksar Lemsa), and about about 45 km NW of Kairouan. Other agricultural installations were located in the immediate vicinity of the stone's original find spot, although a determination of the site's occupation and temporal phasing will require a detailed archaeological survey.²

The stone was originally found as a whole, but it was then broken into three pieces after being moved from the find spot to a sheep fold on the farm, where it was when initially brought to the attention of the authors (fig. 1). Pieced together, it measures approximately 46 cm wide, 110 cm in height, and 15 cm thick. A notch carved into the upper left corner indicates that the stone was intended to be clamped to another, perhaps a similar marker honouring the subject's wife.

The text is a simple standard funerary declaration. The inscription is set within a tabula ansata. The writing is standard formal epigraphy for the place, although with quite distinctive right-leaning 'N's that are rather unusual for the epigraphy of the region.³ There is substantial wear to the upper left hand part of the stone due to subsidiary use.

D M S
I V N I V S
S A T V R N I N V S
V I X I T
A N N I S C

D(is) m(anibus) s(acrum) / Iunius / Saturninus / vixit / annis C (centum)

The top of the stele features a relief sculpture of the deceased, a bearded paternal figure dressed in typical formal cloak or what Leglay has called 'un vêtement rituel' frequently found pictured on Saturn stelae, apparently in the act of sacrificing, with a ritual table/altar to his right.

Africans bearing the gentilium Iunius are found fairly widely through the proconsular province. They seem to be related to early Italian settlers in the rich plains in the northern part of the provinces, especially at sites in the Bagrada valley and in regions closer to ours.⁴ The name soon became wider spread among

¹ B. D. Shaw, Latin Funerary Epigraphy and Family Life in the Later Empire, *Historia* 33 (1984), 457–97, at pp. 479–81; id., The Cultural Meaning of Death: Age and Gender in the Roman Family, chap. 4 [in] D. I. Kertzer and R. P. Saller eds., *The Family in Italy from Antiquity to the Present*, New Haven–London 1991, 66–90, at pp. 78–79, Table 4.4.

² We are grateful to Dr. Samir Aounallah and the INP (Tunisia) for formal permission to publish. We are also thankful to Yvette Haakmeester, Mohamed Nabli, and to Hichem Gassab, of the *ferme* Dar el Henchir, located about 3 km SE of al-Waslatiyah, for bringing this inscription to our attention. We would encourage a permitted archaeological survey to be undertaken on the site, and are happy to share more precise details regarding the find spot with interested archaeologists.

³ Based on photographs, one might be tempted to under-dot the 'D' at the beginning of line one and the 'I' at the beginning of the following line; but on autopsy of the stone, they are fairly easily seen.

⁴ J.-M. Lassère, *Ubique populus: peuplement et mouvements de population dans l'Afrique romaine de la chute de Carthage à la fin de la dynastie des Sévères (146 a.C. – 235 p.C.)*, Paris 1977, pp. 80–88, 152–55, 254–69; for several cases from Limisa, just to the north, see Z. B. ben Abdallah, Catalogue des inscriptions latines inédites de Limisa (Ksar Lemsa), *AntAfr* 40–41 (2004), 99–203, at p. 196.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

indigenous Africans. This is almost certainly the case with our man who boasts the very common indigenous African cognomen of Saturninus, prompted as a choice, surely, by the importance of the great god Saturn in the family's life. Both his cognomen and garb echo other inscriptions from nearby al-Waslatiyah (Oueslatia) such as the stone of one Gaius Hil... (Helvius?) Felix, a priest of Saturn and worshipper of the god who set up his dedication on 28 November 216.⁵ At this time, the hamlet from which both these men derived was still governed by *magistri*, in this case by a *magister* with the Punic name of Baric. A similar situation is found from this same age at Limisa (Aïn/Ksar Lemsa) where *sufetes* are assisted by a minor magistrate called a *magister* who bears a Punic name, Baliatho.⁶ The similar type and presentation of the other inscription from al-Waslatiyah, as well as its epigraphical formatting, suggests that our inscription also

⁵ *IL Afr.* 82 = *ILTun.* 274 = *AE* 1908: 20 = *ILMS* 64 = *EDCS* 16400475: *C(aius) H(eli)u(s) Fel(ix) sacer(dos) / Saturni, cultor / dei ex(egit?), v kal(endas) / Novembres Salbino et Anulli/no co(n)s(ulibus) per / Baricem mag(ist)rum*; see M. Leglay, *Saturne africain. Monuments, I: Afrique proconsulaire*, Paris 1961, p. 243, no. 6. The man's nomen, Hil(...) on the inscription, seems more likely to be either Hel(vius) which is very common (e.g. *CIL* 8.2564, 3691, 22850, 24408, 24412) or Helvidius (rather rare) than Hil(aris) *vel sim.* which is not attested in Africa; cf. Lassère, *Ubique populus* (above, n. 4), p. 699.

⁶ Z. B. ben Abdallah, Une cite sufétale d'Afrique proconsulaire: Limisa, *MEFRA* 102 (1990), 509–15; the *magister* like the *sufes* ('judge') appears to be a Roman 'translation' of a 'teacher'-judge figure who served with *sufetes* in these towns; for other cases, see ben Abdallah, *Catalogue* (above, n. 4), p. 197. For the municipal *magistri*, see S. Belkahia and G. Di Vita-Evrard, Magistratures autochtones dans les cités pérégrines de l'Afrique proconsulaire, [in] *Monuments funéraires, institutions autochtones en Afrique du Nord antique et médiévale*, Paris 1995, 255–72, at pp. 264–69.

dates, broadly speaking, to the same late Antonine or Severan age.⁷ Helvius (?) is costumed much the same as our Iunius, in a fashion which was, one suspects, the normal formal wear worn by persons in connection with the cultic worship of Saturn and which is therefore pictured on their funerary monuments.⁸ At the top of the stela, our man is standing in a cupola-type frame, facing the viewer. He is holding a small pyxis or patera containing incense in his left hand and with sacrificial table to his right (fig. 2).⁹ Far more important, and an item that definitely links Iunius to the cult of Saturn, is the object that he is holding in his right hand. The top end of the instrument is clearly discernable to his right: it is a *falx*, a reaping/pruning hook that was one of the core symbols of the god and therefore of his worship.¹⁰ There are more elaborate versions of this sacrificial scene on Saturn stelae from central Tunisia, of which ours is a somewhat simplified version.¹¹

Province/Region	Total number of inscriptions counted	Number of centenarians ¹²	Percentage of total
Africa			
Cirta: 'Four Colonies'	1597	85	5.3
Small Rural Centers	5477	185	3.4
Theveste Region	389	9	2.3
Western Proconsularis	2544	67	2.6
Northern Proconsularis	1522	37	2.4
Southern Proconsularis	522	12	2.3
Africa: Total	12051	395	3.3
Other Provinces/Regions			
Noricum/Raetia	782	6	0.8
Dalmatia	578	4	0.7
Hispaniae	1893	7	0.4
Italy/Northern	3822	12	0.3
Britannia/Germanies	789	2	0.3
Gauls	899	2	0.2
Rome/Christians	2607	4	0.2
Rome/City	9981	5	0.1
Other Regions: Total	21351	42	0.2

⁷ Based on the DMS formula, the age formula *vixit annis*, and the nomenclature in the nominative, as attested for regions immediately to the north and the south of our site: J.-M. Lassère, *Recherches sur la chronologie des épitaphes païennes de l'Afrique*, *AntAfr* 7 (1973), 7–151: at Thugga (58–71) and at Thala (78–80).

⁸ See Leglay, *Saturne africain. Monuments* (above, n. 5), 243, no. 4 and pl. XI, fig. 1, for the altar and sacrifice; for similar costuming on Saturn stelae, see pl. XV (Aïn-Nechma, Thabarbusis); pl. XVI (Ksiba, Civitas Pophthensis) esp. no. 7; and pl. A and B, pp. 272–73 (Khamissa, Thubursicu Numidarum), esp. nos. 26–50.

⁹ For the function of the table and the pyxis/patera containing incense or wine, see M. Leglay, *Saturne africain. Histoire*, Paris 1966, p. 162 (with another instance attested from Oueslatia/al-Waslatiyah).

¹⁰ On this symbol and its significance, see Leglay, *Saturne africain. Histoire* (above, n. 9), pp. 142–46.

¹¹ See, e.g., Leglay, *Saturne africain. Monuments* (above, n. 5), pl. VIII, nos. 1–3; pp. 224–25, nos. 2–4, now in the Bardo Museum (Tunis), all from unspecified sites in central Tunisia.

¹² 'Number of centenarians' includes all persons celebrated as one hundred years age or older in the funerary epigraphy of the region concerned. For each sample, the figures are derived from data extracted from the epigraphical corpora as noted in R. P. Saller and B. D. Shaw, *Tombstones and Roman Family Relations in the Empire: Civilians, Soldiers and Slaves*, *JRS* 74 (1984), 124–56, at p. 156, with subsequent additions made from *AE*. Compilations were updated to the late 1990s, but were still heavily dependent in the accuracy of the counts done by Szilágyi. Whatever slight modifications might be necessary because subsequent epigraphical discoveries, however, they would be most unlikely to alter the basic pattern revealed here. For example, of the 69 previously unedited date-of-death funerary inscriptions (out of 114 total funerary stones) from nearby Limisa published by ben Abdallah, *Catalogue* (above, n. 4), there were two new centenarians, or roughly 2.8–3% of the total (that is to say, even with the discovery of large numbers of new funerary stones, the proportions do not change in any significant fashion).

In some senses, our man was very African in culture and background. This is attested not only by his attachment to worship of Saturn as pictured on his tombstone, but also in his celebration of a very old age. This, too, was a distinctive African cultural peculiarity. The cultural preference can be demonstrated by a brief comparison of African funerary monuments that note age-of-death with similar data on tombstones from other provincial venues in the western empire (Table 1). As can readily be seen, Africans had a propensity to value seniority and to celebrate it more frequently (proportionately) when compared to the notation of younger ages at death. In fact, as can be seen from the data on the attached table, they tended to do so by factors of ten to fifteen times as often as other populations in the western empire. This propensity was accompanied by another: a greater tendency to indulge in age-rounding – in more than a few cases, one must suspect, to favor or to ‘enhance’ great old age.¹³ This was not, of course, a measure of any supposed African superior natural capacity to live to greater old ages, but rather a cultural practice that was peculiar to their social relations. Our man, Iunius Saturninus, is another centenarian to be added to the numbers of the very aged so celebrated and as one who further corroborates this African cultural peculiarity. His iconography, cultic appurtenances, and his name, as with Baric from al-Waslatiyah, also confirm the continued importance of African and Punic cultural substrata well into the high Severan age of the empire.

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¹³ See R. Duncan-Jones, Age-Rounding, Illiteracy and Social Differentiation in the Roman Empire, *Chiron* 7 (1977), 333–53, at pp. 341–43, Tables 6 and 7, for our regions of Africa. Age-rounding occurs with greater frequency in more rural regions and parts further removed from Carthage and other large urban centers (as was our site).