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Water for the Castra Praetoria What Were the Severan *opera min.*?*

CHRISTER BRUUN

The lead pipes for the distribution of water in the city of Rome and its vicinities are interesting in many respects, but have not received the attention they merit.

What will concern us here are the imperial officials that appear in stamps on these pipes (*fistulae*), obviously supervising works in the sector of the *cura aquarum*. These stamps are almost our only source for these freedmen and equestrian procurators, known from the reign of Vespasian on into the III century. On *fistulae* in Rome we find more than 30 procurators, whereas only four *procuratores aquarum* are known from other epigraphical contexts.¹

There are many problems involved in the study of *fistula* officials, not least because some persons that clearly were senators appear in contexts similar to those of the procurators.² This question will not, however, concern us here. Instead we shall take a look at the only two *fistulae* where

* I am most grateful to Prof. Heikki Solin for his encouragement and for pointing out weaknesses in the argument. The remaining faults are of course my own.

¹ The equestrian procurators are listed in H.-G. Pflaum, *Les carrières procuratoriennes equestres sous le Haut-Empire romain III*, Paris 1961, 1032 and the freedmen in G. Boulvert, *Esclaves et affranchis impériaux sous le Haut-Empire romain*, Napoli 1970, 143, n. 340. The inscriptions other than *fistulae* are CIL X 6569. XI 3612. XIV 4451 and AE 1947,89. Furthermore there is CIL VI 1418 from the Later Empire.

² The functions of these men is under discussion, cf. W. Eck, *ANRW II,1* (1974) 208f. and R.H. Rodgers, *HSPh* 86 (1982) 171-80.

we find military personnel involved.³ We shall at the same time touch upon the policy of Septimius Severus towards the population of Rome.

1. Praetorian officers in charge of special water works

CIL XV 7241 gives the text

IMPP SEVERO III ET ANTONINO COS CVRAGEN FVRIO FESTO TRIB
PR[-] CHOR VII PR OPER MIN CVR 7 MESSIO ATTICO CHOR VII PR

This stamp, dating from AD 202, is known from two copies, one of which lacks the first 4—5 letters of both lines. The spot where they were found has a certain importance for us, but unfortunately there is some disagreement as to the place. The *fistulae* first came to notice in the Museo Kirchneriano and were said to come from the Aventine. This is not generally believed to be the case, and the water pipes are instead thought to come from the vicinity of the *castra praetoria*, mainly because they closely resemble the stamp, which I shall present next, which was indisputably found in that area.⁴

PLAVTIANO II ET GETA II COS FVRIVS FESTVS TRIB COH VII PR SVC
CVRA MVCI GENITORIS 7 COH VIII PR G P AEM CONCESSV
(CIL XV 7242 = D 8698b from AD 203)

Normally, when imperial officials appear in a *fistula* stamp, the name of the Emperor (or a member of his family) is also mentioned. These two stamps and four others are the only exceptions in this regard.⁵

We also find another unusual feature, the consular datings. Students have long considered these datings to be a peculiarity belonging to the

³ There are four stamps with names of centurions or tribunes of the praetorians or the *vigiles* in the genitive. I do not think they performed official business but were private conduit-owners (even if W. Eck, *Epigrafia e ordine senatorio* I, Roma 1982, 197—225 does not list them as such), cf. CIL 7243—45, AE 1903, 155.

⁴ G. Henzen, *Ann.Inst.Corr.Arch.* 36 (1864) 7; R. Lanciani, *Le acque e gli aquedotti di Roma antica* (1881), ristampa Roma 1975, 439, n. 111: «certissima la loro provenienza dal castro pretorio»; Dressel in CIL XV 7241.

⁵ The procurator is alone in CIL XV 7310 and 7360, and then there are AE 1903, 125 and AE 1903, 126 (= D 8689), dating from AD 197/205, where Fulvius Plautianus appears in the place of the Emperor, a fact that both testifies to the position he had obtained in the

water conduits for the *castra praetoria*: the Emperors were especially concerned with providing the Guard with water, therefore when the permission to install the conduit was given, it was given for all time. The consular dating is thought to have been needed to show when the grant was given.⁶ Perhaps this is the correct explanation. However, after the introduction of this theory, consular datings have been found on *fistulae* that do not seem to have belonged to the *castra praetoria*.⁷

There are yet further peculiarities in these stamps. The one from AD 203 ends with the formula G P AEM CONCESSV. It is thought that it is an abbreviation for L. Fulvius Gavius Numisius Petronius Aemilianus (cos.ord. 206), that the conduit crossed his property, and permission was therefore needed.⁸ This is most unusual. If this were the case, it would be the only occasion in which we hear of private permission given for a water conduit — though it was a conduit of almost official character. Perhaps Gavius Aemilianus was instead performing some official duty in AD 203 as ex-praetor; as his praetorian career is not known we cannot say in what capacity.⁹

state, and confirms the fact that procurators stamped their names on the pipes exclusively when working for the Emperor, a feature not usually given enough attention to. Actually Plautianus became part of the Imperial family as *adfinis* (from AD 200?) and as *necessarius*, *socer* and *consocer* (from AD 202 when his daughter and Caracalla were married). This family relation might be the explanation for the procurators working for him, but would date the two *fistulae* to AD 202/03, which makes this period, during which our *castra praetoria* conduits were laid out too, all the more interesting. I will deal more fully with this in a paper at the IX. Congrès International d'Épigraphie Grecque et Latine, September 1987.

⁶ De Ruggiero, DE I (1895) 586; Dressel, CIL XV, p. 911.

⁷ CIL XV 7360 is from the vicinity of the Colosseum, AE 1922, 227 from AD 129 was found at the «tenuta di Roma vecchia» (SE of Rome) while AE 1976, 26 from AD 182 stems from an antiquarian.

⁸ The idea stems originally from Th. Mommsen, Bull.Inst.Corr.Arch. 1866, 127. The formula has also been read as *g(essit) Paem(ilius) Concessu(s)*. Mommsen's integration is usually accepted, cf. G. Barbieri, L'albo senatorio da Settimio Severo a Carino, Roma 1952, 61, nr. 250.

⁹ The praetorian career is not known, even if there is some confusion as to the identification of the cos.ord. 206 with the man on the *fistula*, cf. G. Alföldy, Epigrafia e ordine senatorio II, Roma 1982, 352 and F. Jacques, Les curateurs des cités dans l'occident romain, Paris 1983, 220f. Furthermore, the nomenclature in the stamp seems odd.

2. A very minor task?

It is above all the first stamp that interests us here, because of the titles and functions of *Furius Festus* and *Messius Atticus*. The relevant part has always been read as *curagen(tibus) Furio Festo pr[-] c(o)hor(tis) VII pr(aetoriae) oper(um) min(orum) cur(atore), (centurione) Messio Attico c(o)hor(tis) VII pr(aetoriae)*.¹⁰

Thus it is supposed that *Furius Festus* was holding the most unusual post of *curator operum minorum*. The suggestion, dating from the middle of the previous century, comes from Th. Mommsen and W. Henzen, and has since not been challenged.¹¹

The existence of such a title has been used in arguing for the later development of the administration (maintenance) of the *opera publica* in Rome: the sector of *opera minora* in AD 202 foreshadows the later division into a *cura operum publicorum* and a *cura operum maximorum*.¹² H.-G. Pflaum has given this only known case of *curator operum minorum* a special place in his (admittedly all too rigid) scheme for equestrian officials during the Empire, placing it in the *centenarius* category.¹³

But is this *curator operum min(orum)* not pure fantasy? First of all the parallels with the *curator operum maximorum* are rather farfetched, as the latter is found only well into the IV century.¹⁴

Second, it seems odd to label some public works *opera minora*. While it is natural to underline the importance of a task by calling it *maximum* or something similar, it seems rather strange to use an opposite epithet. Admittedly, we know of Roman titles where the adjective *minor* is used, but then it is a question of honorary priesthoods (*curio minor*, *pontifex*

¹⁰ Mommsen 127; Dressel at CIL XV 7241.

¹¹ Henzen 7; Mommsen 128; Lanciani 439; E. Kornemann, RE IV (1904) 1789; O. Hirschfeld, Die kaiserlichen Verwaltungsbeamten², 1905, 271; E. de Ruggiero, Lo stato e le opere pubbliche a Roma, Roma 1925, 133f.; Stein in PIR² F 579.

¹² Kornemann 1788f.; Hirschfeld 271; De Ruggiero 133 (who speaks of a «rappresentante temporaneo del relativo curatore») and A.E. Gordon, Univ. of California Publ. in Class. Archaeol. 2 (1952) 303.

¹³ Pflaum 1029.

¹⁴ The development of the *cura operum* is treated by A. Chastagnol, La préfecture urbaine à Rome sous le Bas-Empire, Paris 1960, 45f.

minor),¹⁵ never of executive tasks. We might add that it is very rare for an equestrian to be given the title of curator, at least in connection with the capital where equestrians were usually *adiutores*, *subcuratores*, *praefecti* and, of course, above all *procuratores*.¹⁶

3. A new interpretation of CIL XV 7241

Third and most important, we should take another look at the stamp and ask what the letters PR[-] at the beginning of line 2 stand for. According to students who have inspected the *fistula* probably two letters are missing. Dressel (and Mommsen) in CIL XV think traces of IN or AV might be found. But no understandable meaning results if *prav* or *prin* are suggested for this word.¹⁷

As a matter of fact the whole word seems misplaced. Furius Festus' official rank is, of course, *tribunus cohortis VII praetoriae*. There is unnecessary repetition if we read *trib(unus) pr[ae(torianus)] coh. VII pr(aetoriae)*, but this has up to now seemed the best (or only) solution. Indeed Dressel thought of it, but rejected it because he did not think the letters would fit.¹⁸ To be sure, a title like *tribunus praetorianus* is very rare in epigraphical contexts.¹⁹

We cannot discount the possibility that we are simply dealing with an error, and that PR[-] is completely superfluous. Many clear examples of

¹⁵ For the *curio minor* see E. De Ruggiero, DE II (1910) 1402f.; a collection of *pontifices minores* in Pflaum 1960 (vol. I), 670, n. 7.

¹⁶ Cf. Pflaum 1022—32, where we find the title *curator* used only four times (CIL VIII 23963. XIV 2922. D. 1454. AE 1924, 82) for odd tasks. There are 4 *subcuratores/adiutores operum publicorum*, 7 *subpraefecti annonae urbis*, 3 *adiutores praef. annonae*, 17 *subpraefecti vigilum* and 3 *adiutores curatoris alvei Tiberis*.

¹⁷ *Prin(ceps)* is a military rank that a tribune cannot hold. Mommsen is cited in CIL XV 7241 as having thought also of *pr(aefecti) a(gente) v(ices)*. Admitted, a tribune might be the deputy of a *praef. praetorio* though it is hardly likely, cf. Passerini 263ff. But why would this most important function be marked so obscurely in this stamp?

¹⁸ Dressel at CIL XV 7241.

¹⁹ The adjective *praetorianus* is used so rarely because soldiers always gave rank and unit in inscriptions. We do, however, find *praetorianus* occasionally: CIL VI 1646 and AE 1955, 225 (tribunes), CIL VI 2442 (common soldier), CIL V 5071. XI 5388 (*speculatores*).

errors may be found in the *fistula* stamps from Rome.²⁰ All the same we shall make a serious attempt at solving this riddle. We suggest integrating PR[AE] (even if Dressel was not happy about it), but think that either this *prae* or the following *pr* stand for *praepositus* (or *praefectus*). (Admittedly, if it is correct that there is only space for two letters, PRAE is a very unusual abbreviation for any of these terms).²¹ This would give us the wording *curagen(te) Furio Festo trib(uno) pr[ae(posito)] coh. VII pr(aetoriae) oper. min., cur(ante) (centurione) Messio Attico coh. VII pr(aetoriae)*.²²

As to the latter part of the inscription, it certainly looks better when we confer *cur(ante)* to Messius Atticus instead of using it to make up the title *oper. min. cur(ator)*. We can make a comparison with the other stamp CIL XV 7242, where the epigraphical context of Atticus' colleague is *suc cura Muci Genitoris*.

The most serious objection to this hypothesis is the question if it is reasonable to expect a repetition of practically the same ablative participle in the same text. We can find numerous cases with two different ablatives like *insistente . . . curante*, but cases similar to the one I am proposing are hard to find.²³ But, of course, if we read *curagentibus FF curatore, MA* the ET particle is missing.

Without doubt the title of *praepositus* ought to be possible in this context. It is originally not a regular military rank, but is used to indicate

²⁰ CIL XV 7235 a, *α opere publicorum*, 7333 *stationis propriae privatae*, 7342 *stat(ionis) patremoni Aug. n.*, etc. And we find a clear error even in our stamp, as "7" has been placed before the name Messius Atticus instead of preceding *cohortis VII pr*.

²¹ The only case known to me with PRAE for *praepositus* is CIL VIII 2494 = D 2636 (Severan age). If we take the first PR[AE] to mean *praetorianus*, it is much easier to find parallels (cf. CIL VI 2568. 2734. 3096. 3102. 32571. 37224).

²² Another interpretation would be *trib(uno) pr[ae(toriano)] cohortis VII pr(aeposito) operis min.* If we prefer *praefectus* instead of *praepositus* we can point to CIL V 3356 *praef(ectus) coh. II pr(aetoriae)* (but Passerini, *Le coorti pretorie*, Roma 1939, 96 suspects that the inscription is correct).

²³ A certain parallel might be found in the near repetition of a word in CIL XI 5694 = D 2666a: *... de ea re referente L. Vario Firmo IIII viro, censente C. Cluvio Sabino, ita cens(uerunt)*.

The formula *curante NN curatore* is rather common, but this does not support my thesis.

command on special occasions. The title is used, for instance, when military personnel are used for civilian tasks, and we are dealing with precisely such a case here. The use of *praefectus* in this instance is also arguable.²⁴

4. The meaning of “Minucia” — is it more than meets the eye?

It seems certain that the *fistula* XV 7241 refers to some special enterprises (probably, but not without a certain amount of doubt, concerning the *castra praetoria*). Were these works really labelled *opera minora*? They cannot even have been very minor as they still continued in the following year, when Furius Festus is conducting the same kind of work regarding the water supply, although he does not bear any special title nor does he have the same *centurio* as his assistant.

Latin vocabulary does not contain many words commencing with *Min-*. However, we should remember that early in the reign of Septimius Severus a reform in the administration of the aqueducts seems to have taken place in Rome. During the greater part of the II century there are no *curatores aquarum* known to us, “after the reign of Trajan the government may have allowed the ‘cura aquarum’ to lapse” writes Ronald Syme.²⁵ Clearly something happens around the turn of the century, as we find three consulars carrying the new title of *curator aquarum et Minucia* under Severus and Caracalla, the first being in office in the 190s.²⁶

²⁴ Kornemann 1799 and above all H. Zwicky, *Zur Verwendung des Militärs in der Verwaltung der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Winterthur 1944, 11ff. (a tribune is *praepositus genti Sorsorum* [15]) and 72—75 for tasks performed by tribunes outside regular service (for instance a *praefectus montis Berenicidis* from the early Empire, CIL X 1129). A *centurio* is *praepositus operi marmorum monti Claudiano* (CIL III 25).

We can especially notice the diffusion of the title *praepositus* for the tribunes (of the *vigiles*) who in the early III century command detachments in Ostia (D 2155. 2158).

²⁵ R. Syme, *HSPh* 86 (1982) 195.

²⁶ M. Valerius Bradua Mauricus (cos.ord. 191) is the first followed by C. Caesonius Macer Rufinianus (suff. 197) and Q. Virius Egnatius Sulpicius Priscus (cos.suff. probably under Septimius Severus according to Alföldy 363). A list of these officials is provided by H.-G. Pflaum, *BJ* 163 (1963) 263f.

There is general agreement as to what happened: Septimius Severus had combined the directorship of the aqueducts and the grain distributions in Rome, the *frumentationes*. These distributions took place in the *porticus Minucia (frumentaria)*. It was probably built by Claudius, who named it after the *porticus Minucia (vetus)* close by, because *Minucius* (the *gens Minucia*) had for many years been connected with largesse towards the urban population.²⁷

To me it seems a very interesting feature that Septimius Severus should continue to use the term *Minucia (Minicia)*; he might well have given the new curator a title such as *cur. aquarum et frumenti*. There is a clear precedent in the title of the official, the *praefectus frumenti dandi*, whom the new curator followed. This *praefectus* had been responsible for the *frumentationes* since Augustus. Furthermore, from the last years of Commodus and during the Severan period we meet for the first time a praetorian official called *praefectus Miniciae*, by many thought to replace the *praef. frumenti dandi* (but perhaps the titles are synonymous).²⁸

It would seem as though the term “*Minucia*” had some special and positive meaning in Rome around the year 200, or it would not have been used in the newly created titles. It is difficult to think of any other explanation than that “*Minucia*” had a positive ring because it was still linked to Imperial largesse and the new dynasty wanted to use the term as a means of propagandizing its policy towards the urban population.

²⁷ On grain distributions see G. Rickman, *The Corn Supply of Ancient Rome*, Oxford 1980, especially 187—97 and 253—56. On the *porticus Minuciae* see F. Coarelli, *L'area sacra di Largo Argentina I*, Roma 1981, 34—36. The connection between the *gens Minucia* and the symbolic meaning of the word “*Minucia*” (*Minicia*) during the Empire was first argued by A. Momigliano in 1936 (see *Quarto contributo alla storia degli studi classici . . .*, Roma 1969, 332—49).

²⁸ The old conception of H.-G. Pflaum (BJ 163 [1963] 132—37) and others, regarding the alternation of the *praef. frumenti dandi* (considered a “senatorial” official) with the *praef. Miniciae* (an “imperial” one) is convincingly disproved by G. Rickman 253—56. Some additional arguments and reasoning on this topic will be put forward by myself in *Studia Historica* 1987 (publ. by SHS / Dept. of Hist., Univ. of Hels.).

5. The social programme of the Severi

It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the first known curators of the aqueducts in the Severan era gives in his career inscription his full title as *curator aquarum sacrae Urbis et Miniciae eodemque tempore praefectus alimentorum* (CIL V 7783). This title is informative in two ways regarding the policy of Septimius Severus and his sons towards Rome. First, the capital is called *sacra Urbs*, an expression that from now on becomes more and more common, and which surely indicates a special kind of concern for the city, even if (or perhaps because!) the Emperor made only four brief appearances there before his residence in 203—207.²⁹

Second, the task of the *cur. aquarum et Miniciae* has been connected with the function of *praef. alimentorum*, which meant responsibility for the *alimenta*, poor-relief for children in Italy. Before this time we do not know of any case where a urban *curatela* should have been combined with the *praefectura alimentorum*, whereas among the handful of *cur. aq. et Min.* from the III century the unidentified “-anus” holds both offices, too.³⁰

One wonders if there is not more than a chance that the tribune Furius Festus really was acting as *praepositus operibus Minuciis* (alternatively *praefectus operum Minuciorum*) or, if some of the reasoning above cannot be accepted, even as an *operum Minuciorum curator*?³¹

The word *Minucia* is not a very common one in Latin epigraphy. Nearly all cases occur in the titles of the *curatores aquarum et Miniciae* and of other *Minucia* officials from the late II century on. It is interesting

²⁹ Other Severan equestrian officials with *Urbs sacra* in their titulature: CIL XI 6337 = D 1422, AE 1945, 80. On Septimius Severus’ brief visits to Rome see A.R. Birley, *Septimius Severus, the African Emperor*, London 1971, 164ff., 192ff., 198ff., 214ff.

³⁰ CIL VIII 11338.

³¹ Mommsen 128 actually considers the interpretation *Minucia* when dealing with *oper. min.*, but prefers *opera minora*. But at that time the meaning of the title *curator aquarum et Miniciae* had not yet been clarified, as can be deduced from Mommsen’s wording. Mommsen’s consideration of “*Minucia*” is quoted by Gordon 303.

to notice that among 20 or so cases we find a parallel to the abbreviation MIN.³²

In a review article on the Severan age G. Walser uses a quotation that speaks of the „Intensivierung der fürsorgenden Tendenzen... die ihren Höhepunkt in der Severerzeit finden.“³³ In fact, something is known about the “social policy” of Septimius Severus in Italy, especially towards Rome and its population.

We know that Severus conferred largesses on a previous unknown scale upon the people, six in all between 194 and 209. Furthermore there were large-scale games in AD 202 and 204.³⁴ There is also the evidence of coins to testify that one of the greater concerns of Severus was the well-being of the capital; legends like ANNONA, PROVIDENTIA etc. can be said to constitute something like a programme, at least on the ideological level.³⁵ (Nowhere in all this do we find the term “*Minucia*”, that must be admitted. Perhaps the meaning I am trying to give it was considered to be too closely associated with the vernacular).

Furthermore it is known that under Septimius Severus not only was grain distributed free but so too was olive oil.³⁶ But who officiated? We

³² In several inscriptions the word *Minucia/Minicia* is fragmentary (CIL VI 37121. 31564. VIII 11338. VI 1648. VIII 11810), it is written out in CIL V 7783. XIV 3902. VI 1532. AE 1961, 302. VI 1418. VI 515. VI 37133. X 4752. XI 5669. III 6753. XI 4182 and the abbreviation MINIC is found in XIV 3900. VI 36951. VIII 12442. But in CIL X 3723 we find the title *praef. Min.*

³³ G. Walser, ANRW II,2 (1975) 644 quoting D. Nörr. M. Rostovtzeff, SEHRE², Oxford 1957, 405 once wrote: “It is manifest, however, that the liberal social policy of Septimius was designed first and foremost to consolidate his own power and that of his dynasty. Like Commodus, he determined to base his power on the classes from which his soldiers were drawn; hence his liberal legislation and his measures for the protection of the peasants and the city proletariat against the ruling classes and the imperial administration”.

³⁴ M. Platnauer, *The Life and Reign of the Emperor L. Septimius Severus*, London 1918, 186f. and Birley, *Septimius Severus*, passim.

³⁵ The six *liberalitates* are well recorded, cf. H. Mattingly — E. Sydenham, RIC IV.1, London 1968 (1. ed. 1936), 72 and 65—71 for an overall analysis of the coin legends. Rickman 266f. in an appendix “Corn and Coins” has rather little to say on Severan minting.

³⁶ HA, *vita Sev.* 18, cf. Rickman 196f.

know of no officials dedicated especially to this task. Were *Minucia* administrators involved?

During the reign of Septimius Severus, Rome saw some active building and reconstruction. (The first students of our *fistulae* thought they were indications of large works also on the *castra praetoria*, but later research does not seem to have confirmed this).³⁷

One of the most important features in the reign of Severus is of course the care he took of the soldiers (e.g. pay-rises and the institution of *annona militaris*),³⁸ a policy that surely also applied to the Guard and other detachments in Rome. If the demands of the people were being met by a welfare policy on a larger scale than before, the soldiers must have received their share too. Perhaps the garrison in Rome had a share of the *Minucia*-labelled imperial policy in Rome, and this is the explanation why Furius Festus, working in the water supply sector, is responsible for *opera Minucia*.

6. Concluding remarks: Messius Atticus, a centurion from Leptis Magna

Finally, we can add a neglected prosopographical detail concerning the centurion Messius Atticus. He happens to be a native of Leptis Magna, the home town of the Emperor. His involvement in the water supply in Rome has escaped prior investigations (but the *fistulae* constitute a poorly known source material).³⁹ Messius Atticus plays a considerable role in Leptis, erecting three inscriptions *post AD 198*, two in honour of Geta, one

³⁷ The known construction work is recorded by Walser, ANRW II, 2, 652. Large works for the *castra praetoria* postulated by Lanciani 528, repeated by L. Cantarelli, BCAR 29 (1901) 205.

³⁸ R. Develin, Latomus 30 (1971) 687—95.

³⁹ The activities of Messius Atticus in Leptis are dealt with by M. Torelli, RAL 28 (1973) 390, who does not connect him to the urban *fistula*. According to B. Dobson, The Centurionate and Social Mobility during the Principate, in Recherches sur les structures sociales dans l'Antiquité classique, Paris 1970, 104f., Messius Atticus plays a remarkably active role in his home town for a centurion.

for Iulia Domna. In these three inscriptions he styles himself *primus sacerdos* (IRT 438), *centurio coh. X urb.* (IRT 439) and *centurio coh. VII praet.* (IRT 408) respectively.

This advancement from the urban cohorts to the Guard is quite normal for a centurion who has managed to gain an appointment in Rome, and it is perhaps unprofitable to speculate if his African background has helped him in his career.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ As is well known there are different opinions regarding the question whether Africans were specially promoted under Septimius Severus (cf. Walser 622f.).