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JFA. 5(1972)2(155-161)

THE CERES INSCRIPTION¹

By JOSEPH BUSUTTIL

CERERI. IULIAE. AVGVSTAE.
 DIVI. AVGVSTI. MATRI.
 TI. CAESARIS. AVGVSTI.
 LVTATIA. C.F. SACERDOS. AVGVSTAE.²
 IMP. PERPET.³ VXOR.⁴
 M. LIVI.⁵ M.F. QVI. OPTATI. FLAMINIS. G(A)VL.⁶
 IVLIAE. AVGVSTI. IMP. PERPET.³ CVM.⁷ V.
 LIBERIS S.P.⁸ CONSACRAVIT.

Cereri Iuliae Augustae, Divi Augusti, matri Tiberii Caesaris Augusti, Lutatia, Caii filia, sacerdos Augustae, imperatoris perpetui, uxor Marci Livi, Marci filii, Quirina tribu, Optati Flaminis Gauli, Iuliae Augusti, imperatoris perpetui, cum V liberis sua pecunia consacravit.

To Ceres Julia Augusta,⁹ (wife) of the Divine Augustus,¹⁰ mother of Tiberius Caesar Augustus,¹¹ Lutatia, daughter of Caius (and) priestess of

¹For this inscription Cf F. Abela, *Descrittione di Malta*, Malta, 1647, p. 215; O. Brès, *Malta antica illustrata*, Roma, 1810, p. 251; A. Caruana, *Report on Phoenician, Greek and Roman Antiquities*, Malta, 1882, p. 137; id *Frammento Critico*, p. 290; Ruggiero, *Dizionario epigrafico di antichità Romane*, Vol. III, 1895-1919, p. 434; C.I.L. No 7501; Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, Vol. I, No 121; *Documents illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*, collected by V. Ehrenberg and A.H.M. Jones, Oxford, 1955, No. 126.

²AVGVS Abela, Brès; AVGVSTAL Caruana.

³The two words are bracketed by Dessau and Ehrenberg.

⁴Omitted by Abela and Brès. The latter adds TI. IMP. after *Perpet.*

⁵M. IVLIO Abela, Brès.

⁶Omitted by Abela, Brès and Caruana.

⁷Omitted by Abela, Brès and Caruana.

⁸*sibi* Abela; *suis* Brès.

⁹In Latin inscriptions the name of the goddess with whom Julia Augusta was identified was placed first. Cf. V. Ehrenberg, op.cit. No. 127: *Iunoni Liviae*, To Juno Livia. In Greek inscriptions the name of the goddess comes after the name of Julia Augusta. Cf. V. Ehrenberg, op.cit. No. 129: Julia Augusta Hestia.

¹⁰The husband's name in the genitive was usually added to the wife's name to make identification easier. Of Ehrenberg, op.cit. No. 127: *Iunoni Liviae Augusti*, To Juno Livia (wife) of Augustus.

¹¹A Greek inscription reproduces almost the same words: Cf. V. Ehrenberg, op.cit. 89.

Augusta,¹² (wife) of the *imperator perpetuus*,¹³ wife of Marcus Livius Optatus, son of Marcus, of the Quirine Tribe, (and) Flamen of Gaulos; to Julia, (wife) of Augustus, *imperator perpetuus*, has consecrated together with her five children at her own expense.

What is the date of the inscription?

We read in the inscription that Lutatia, priestess of Augusta, consecrated something to Julia Augusta, who is identified with the goddess Ceres. Julia Augusta is Livia Drusilla, the second wife of the Emperor Augustus and the mother of the second Roman Emperor, Tiberius, by an earlier marriage with Tiberius Claudius Nero. As long as Augustus was alive, his second wife, whom he had married on the 17 August 38 B.C., bore her father's name — Livia. It was only after the Emperor's death on the 19 August 14 A.D. that Livia, on the strength of her husband's will, was adopted into the Julian family and changed her name to Julia.¹⁴ In his will Augustus had laid down that Livia and Tiberius should both adopt the name of *Augusta* and *Augustus* respectively.¹⁵ Henceforth Livia was known as *Iulia Augusta* or simply as *Augusta*. Similarly Livia's son, Tiberius, who had already borne the name *Caesar* when he was adopted by Augustus in 4 A.D., on the latter's decease, took on the name *Augustus*. Furthermore by vote of the Senate the dead Emperor became *Divus Augustus* or *Divine Augustus*, a temple was voted in his honour and a priesthood (*sodales Augustales*) was set up to look after his cult.¹⁶ In our inscription Livia is called *Iulia Augusta*, *Tiberius Augustus* and *Augustus Divus*. There can be no doubt, therefore, that our inscription is posterior to Augustus's death, i.e. after 19 August 14 A.D.

Livia died at the ripe age of eighty-five in A.D. 29. The Emperor Tiberius did not attend his mother's funeral and was opposed to her deification.¹⁷ It was not until 42 A.D. that, at the instigation of the Emperor Claudius, she was voted a goddess.¹⁸ She was thus the second Roman woman to be addressed with the official title of *Diva* (Divine), the first

¹²In Pompeii a priestess of Ceres was called *Clodia M.F.* Id. No. 327.

¹³Under the Republic a general after his triumph lost his *imperium* and the title of *imperator*. Augustus remained *imperator* and hence his title of (*imperator*) *perpetuus* or *permanent general*. On the meaning of *imperator* Cf. Gilbert Charles Picard, *Augustus and Nero*, London, 1966, pp. VII-XV.

¹⁴Cf. Tacitus, *Annales*, I, VIII: *Nihil primo senatus die passus nisi de supremis Augusti, cuius testamentum... Tiberium et Liviam haeredes habuit. Livia in familiam Iuliam nomenque Augustum adsumebatur.*

¹⁵Cf. Tacitus, *ibid*; Suetonius, *Divus Augustus*, 201.

¹⁶Cf. Tacitus, *Annales*, V, 2; Suetonius, *Div. Aug.*

¹⁷Cf. Tacitus, *ibid*; Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 51.

¹⁸Cf. Suetonius, *Claudius*, 11, 2; Cassius Dio, 60, 5, 2.

being Julia Drusilla, the twenty-one year old sister of the Emperor Caligula, who was consecrated in 38 A.D. In the Ceres inscription Livia is not called *Diva*, which means that the inscription precedes her apotheosis in 42 A.D. Unfortunately there are no more details which help us to determine the date with greater accuracy. All we can say is that the inscription is certainly not earlier than August 14 A.D. and not later than 42 A.D. All the same since Tiberius had vetoed his mother's consecration and reduced the honours which the Senate had decreed,¹⁹ it is very probable that after her death Livia's cult suffered a setback and that, therefore, Lutatia's offering anticipates her death in 29 A.D. So it probably belongs to the period 14-29 A.D.²⁰

Julius Caesar, the real founder of the Roman Empire, was worshipped as *Divus Iulius* (Divine Julius) after his death. Octavian, who had been adopted by Caesar, assumed in his lifetime the title of *Divi filius* or Son of Divine (Julius). In 27 B.C., on the proposition of Munatius Plancus, Octavian received from the Senate the religious title of *Augustus*, which means 'something that goes beyond the human realm and draws near to the divine'.²¹ Poets of the Augustan period, notably Vergil and Horace,²² called the Emperor a god. Augustus, however, tactfully rejected divine honours for himself in his lifetime and initiated the custom by which only the dead ruler could become a god in the Roman state cult.²³ The divine worship of the Emperor and his family never secured a foothold in Rome whilst the Emperor was alive.²⁴ In the provinces, however, and in the Italian communities things were different: emperor-worship, if not exactly encouraged was at least tolerated. In several parts of the Greek and Western world Augustus was revered as a god in his own lifetime and temples dedicated to Augustus and to Rome were erected everywhere. The Emperor was identified with Jupiter, Mercury, Apollo and the other gods. The imperial cult in the provinces was extended to members of the Emperor's household. Julia, the daughter of Augustus, was venerated as Aphrodite and Gaius Caesar as the New Ares.²⁵

¹⁹Cf. Tacitus, *Annales*, V, 2.

²⁰This is also the opinion of Michelangelo Cagiano de Azevedo, Cf. *Missione Archeologica a Malta, Campagna di Scavi, 1968, Rinvenimenti vari*, Roma, 1969, p. 79.

²¹Cf. F. Altheim, *A History of Roman Religion*, London, 1938, p. 368.

²²Cf. Vergil, *Eclagues*, 1, 6-8; Horace, *Odes*, III, 5, 1-10.

²³Cf. F. Altheim, *op.cit.* p. 360 and p. 444.

²⁴Cf. Tacitus, *Annales*, 15, 74: *deum honor principi non ante habetur quam agere inter homines desierit.*

²⁵Cf. *Documents illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*, collected by Ehrenberg and Jones, Oxford, 1955, No. 63, 64.

Whilst Augustus was alive his wife Livia was venerated as a goddess; but it was only after his deification that her cult received a fresh impetus. Artists in all parts of the Empire adorned her statues with the attributes of Venus, Juno or Ceres. Roman traders who travelled across Asia to the Chinese silk markets took presents to the rajahs of Afghanistan of medallions bearing the portrait of a rejuvenated Augusta wearing the crown and a veil of a goddess.²⁶ In A.D. 23 the province of Asia was allowed to erect a temple to Tiberius, Livia and the Senate.²⁷ On the island of Samos Livia had a temple and a priestess.²⁸ Likewise in Gozo she had a priestess – *Augustae sacerdos* – charged with the task of looking after her cult. In Gozo she was identified with Ceres.²⁹ An inscription bearing the word *Λιβίας* (of Livia), which had been discovered in Malta,³⁰ may, perhaps, refer to Augustus's wife. Another inscription recently unearthed by the Italian Archaeological Mission contains the words *Aug. imp.* and the name M.f. Optat(us), that is the self-same words which appear in the Ceres inscription.³¹ If Aug. stands for Augusta, then, perhaps, this last inscription bears witness to the existence of the cult of Livia in Malta.

Ceres was the goddess of corn and as such was worshipped in corn-producing areas. This inscription indirectly records the growing of corn in Gozo. In the first century A.D. Chrestion restored the temple of Proserpina in Malta.³² Proserpina too was connected with the growing of corn, Ceres, like Demeter, was also a deity related to the Mother-Earth, which 'makes all life spring from her bosom'.³³ Hence the cult of the Mother Earth, represented in Malta and Gozo by the fertility cults which go back to early antiquity, makes its reappearance or is perhaps continued in the cult of Ceres.

Livia's priestess was Lutatia, the daughter of Caius. The name Lutatia indicates that she was somehow connected with the plebeian family of the Lutatii. In conformity with Roman usage, Lutatia, being a woman,

²⁶ Cf. Gilbert Charles Picard, *op.cit.*, pp.80-81.

²⁷ Cf. V. Ehrenberg, *op.cit.* No.124, 126, 128-130.

²⁸ *Id.* No. 102; R.E. Vol. XIII, I, 1926, p.917.

²⁹ For coins bearing the legend AVGVSTA CERES, Cf. E.Mary Smallwood, *Documents illustrating the Principates of Gaius, Claudius and Nero*, C.U.P., 1967, No.129, 312a, 312B.

³⁰ Cf. A. Caruana, Report etc. p.138; Vassallo, *Monumenti antichi di Malta*, p.38.

³¹ Cf. Michelangelo Cagiano de Azevedo, *op.cit.* p.79.

³² Cf. C.I.L. No.7494; Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, Vol. II, I p.122, No.3975.

³³ Cf. F. Altheim, *op.cit.* p.120.

retained only one name,³⁴ that of her father. In accordance with the Roman law of agnation the wife was considered a member of her father's, not of her husband's family. This explains why Lutatia and her husband M. Livius Optatus had completely different names. Roman laws governing marriages seem to have been followed in Gozo in the first century after Christ.

Lutatia consecrated something to Julia Augusta. It could not have been the customary offering to Ceres which she, as Livia's priestess, was expected to make from time to time: there would have been no real reason to commemorate such an event in an inscription. It must have been a statue (*signum*) or an altar (*ara*).³⁵ The consecration was valid only if it was made with the permission of the Gozitan community. The expenses in this case were met by Lutatia herself. Her children helped her in the religious ceremony just as the *canilli* helped the Flamen Dialis. Before the word *liberis* (children) there is the letter V which would either stand for *viro* (husband) or else for the number Five.³⁶ If V stand for *viro* and in that case it would be necessary to interpose *et* (and) (her husband and her children), then Lutatia was aided by her husband, who was a priest himself. If on the other hand V stands for five, then Lutatia had her reasons for including that number in the inscription. Augustus had been obsessed by the falling birth-rate in Rome. In 19-18 B.C. two bills went through the Senate: one dealing with marriage between the social classes, the other for the restraint of adultery. Three children constituted the norm of a successful marriage in Rome³⁷ and those parents who had three children received a number of material benefits (*ius trium liberorum*). In the provinces it was only after the birth of a fifth child that parents could claim the same privileges.

Lutatia's husband was Marcus Livius Optatus. The name of his father – (Caius) – is also inscribed: which indicates that Marcus Livius was neither a slave nor a freedman.³⁸ As a free-born person he was allowed to record the fact that he belonged to the Quirine Tribe. He was also a *flamen* – a position reserved to free-born citizens. On the other hand the *cognomen* Optatus is of servile origin. Marcus Livius was at one time

³⁴ Cf. V. Ehrenberg, *op.cit.* No. 327: Glodia A.F. sacerdos.

³⁵ Cf. Festus, 321; Gallus Aelius ait, *sacrum esse quodcumque more atque instituto civitatis consecratum sit, sive aedis, sive ara sive signum sive locus sive pecunia sive quid alius quod dis dedicatum atque consecratum sit.*

³⁶ Cf. C.I.L. No.7501. Cf. also V. Ehrenberg, *op.cit.* no.43B: Iano Aug. sacrum C. Iulius ... *cum liberis* posuit.

³⁷ Cf. J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Roman Women*, London, 1962, p.202.

³⁸ Cf. A.M. Duff, *Freedmen in the Early Roman Empire*, Cambridge, 1958, p.52.

probably adopted into the Livian family, of which Livia, Augustus's wife was the most illustrious representative. Perhaps an ancestor of his had once been a freedman and had, perhaps, a Greek name like Ἐραστος which which was changed to Optatus.

From a historical point of view the most important piece of information is that he was the Flamen of Gozo (Flamen Gaul (I)). In Roman religion the flamen³⁹ was a priest of a particular deity.⁴⁰ Wearing the toga with a purple edge (praetexta) and a tight-fitting head-gear (galerus) on which stood a small rod (apex) the flamen offered the customary sacrifice to the god which he represented. In Rome there were three major Flamines and twelve minor ones. When Julius Caesar died and became a god he was voted a flamen. When Augustus died and was consecrated his wife Livia became his chief priestess.

In the provinces it was the flamen who officiated in the name of a community. Although there is no word like *Augustalis* or *Augusti* after flamen there can be no doubt that Optatus was a Flamen of Augustus in Gozo. He was responsible for the imperial cult on that island. Furthermore the flamen was attached to either a *colonia* – a community of Romans or Italians who had settled down together in a given place – or a *municipium* – a self-governing community.⁴¹ As we learn from later inscriptions⁴² Gozo was not a *colonia* but a *municipium*. This seems to indicate that the municipium in Gozo existed in the first half of the first century after Christ.

The flamen became the most important personage in a municipium. Only rich people could afford to reach that position. Once installed as flamen he was expected to pay a fixed sum of money (*summa legitima*) and to take part in the most important religious ceremonies. Though he was elected annually, it seems, by the *decuriones* – the representatives of the municipium – he retained the title of flamen for life.⁴³

The Ceres inscription is very important for the religious history of Gozo. In the first half of the first century A.D. there was in Gozo the imperial cult. Optatus was responsible for the worship of Augustus on the island and Lutatia was a priestess who looked after Livia's cult. Livia

³⁹The word seems to be connected with the Indian *Brahman*. Cf. Ernout-Maillet, *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue latine*.

⁴⁰Cf. Cicero, *De Legibus*, II, 8, 20: Omnibus divis pontifices, singulis flamines sunt.

⁴¹Cf. J. Gagé, *Les classes sociales dans L'Empire Romain*, Paris, 1964, p. 173.

⁴²Cf. C.I.L. No. 7507, 7508.

⁴³Cf. *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines*, Vol. XIII, p. 1868. Also J. Gagé, *op.cit.* p. 173.

is identified with Ceres – which indicates that the goddess Ceres had been worshipped in Gozo. The cult of Ceres presupposes an agricultural community. The inscription also shows that the 'Romanization' of the island was well under way. The presence of a flamen probably points to the existence of a *municipium*. The inscription is in Latin, whilst another inscription dealing with the worship of Augustus in Malta⁴⁴ is in Greek. The name of the priestess of Livia is Roman and so is that of the flamen of Augustus. Finally Roman customs were being followed in Gozo in the first half of the first century after Christ.

⁴⁴Cf. Kaibel, *Inscriptiones Graecae*, Vol. XIV, p. 142, No. 601.