

LUCIUS CASTRICIUS PRUDENS

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A Greek inscription dealing with Lucius Castricius Prudens, a Roman Knight, was first published by Quintinus in 1536 in his description of the island of Malta.¹ The inscription, which is generally attributed to the time of the Emperor Tiberius (14-37 A.D.),² is very important for the light it throws on the history of the island in the first century of our era.

Lucius Castricius Prudens was *πρῶτος* of the Maltese.

The common meaning of the Greek word *πρῶτος* like its Latin equivalent *primus* is *first in rank, time or place*. In the plural it is also employed to denote the 'leading persons' in a town or community. This use, already attested in Polybius, survives in the Greek of the New Testament.³ Likewise Cicero employs *primi* and *primus* to indicate the chief persons or person in a city.⁴ In the last century before our era we hear of the *decemprimi* — the first ten — that is the most important ten citizens in a given community: they were invested with special powers and privileges.

After the first century A.D. the *decemprimi* or *δεκαπρῶτοι* were mainly in charge of the collection of taxes.⁵

In imperial times we read of several people called *πρῶτος* of a particular place or city. Lucius Flavius Volonius was the *πρῶτος* of Callipoli, Symmachus of Acmonia and Aurelius Mucianus of Dioclea.⁶ The holder of the title was generally an outstanding personality in the community. Lucius Flavius was a Benefactor of his city, Symmachus a rhetorician etc.

It is extremely difficult to decide whether *πρῶτος* was merely an honorary title or whether there were responsibilities attached to it. That the

¹Cf. *Descript. Insul. Melit.* in *Thesaus. P. Burmanni*, Vol. XV, 2.

²Cf. A.A. Caruana, *Report on the Phoenician and Roman Antiquities*, Malta, 1882, p. 135.

³Polybius, 1, 31, 5; 2, 39, 2; Mark 6, 21; Luke 19, 47; Acts 13, 50.

⁴*Pro S. Roscio*, 25; *Ad att.* X, 13, 1.

⁵Cf. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, Oxford, 1957, p. 390.

⁶Cf. R. Cagnat, *Inscriptiones graecae ad res romanas pertinentes*, Paris, 1911, Tom. 1, No. 816., Tom. IV, 652; IV, 666. Other *πρωτοι* are found at Ephesus (Tom 1, 798), at Thyatiris (Tom. IV, 1226, 1276), at Themisonii (Tom. IV, 882).

person who was called *πρῶτος* carried great weight in the community can be deduced from the title he held. Reference has already been made to the *decemviri* or ten leading citizens in a community. In an inscription we read of the *δεκαπρῶτοι* not of a city in Sicily but of all the cities taken together.⁷ This may mean that the Province of Sicily had ten principal citizens invested with certain powers. If this is so then the Maltese *πρῶτος* might perhaps have been one of them. The difficulty here is that the *δεκαπρῶτοι* were individually known as *δεκαπρῶτος* and not as *πρῶτος*. Another possibility is that the *πρῶτος* might have been the President of a Council of some sort. It is not known whether there was a *municipium* in Malta at this time. The safest thing to say is that no one knows the exact functions and powers of the *πρῶτος*.

Lucius Castricius Prudens who lived in the time of Tiberius (14-37 A.D.) is the first *πρῶτος* we know of. About 60 A.D. there was another *πρῶτος*, Publius, who gave hospitality to St. Paul.⁸ Whether there was any connection between Lucius Castricius and Publius is not known. Publius, *πόπλιος* in Greek, could be either a *praenomen* or a *cognomen*.⁹ We read of more than one Publius Castricius mentioned in inscriptions.¹⁰ In an inscription of the Antonine period we come across an unnamed *Primus*.¹¹

The exact title seems to have been *πρῶτος Μελιταίων* in Greek and *Melitensium Primus* in Latin. This title or office survived throughout the whole of the first century A.D.

Lucius Castricius is styled as *πάτρων* or *Patronus* of the Maltese. In Republican times individual provincials had patrons in Rome to defend them and their interests against a possible miscarriage of justice on the part of the Roman *Praetor*. Diodorus, a citizen of Malta, had to resort to the help of his patrons in Rome to be protected against the unfair demands of Verres.¹² Similarly whole communities could place themselves under the protection of a *patronus* who would defend their interests in Rome. Cities of the Empire chose men of eminence whose occupations took them frequently to Italy to be their *patroni*. These would naturally voice the requests of separate communities.

⁷ Cf. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, No. 139.

⁸ Cf. Acts, XXVIII, 7-10.

⁹ Cf. Dessau, op. cit., Vol. II, 1, No. 7090: I.O.M. conservator Licin. Tugnatius *Publius*.

¹⁰ Cf. Id. No. 9417: P. Castricius P etc.

¹¹ Cf. C.I.L. No. 7495

¹² Cf. In Verrem, 11, 4, 38-39.

Lucius Castricius Prudens was chosen by the Maltese community to present and forward its interests in Rome. It is not clear whether he was Roman, Italian or Maltese. In the inscription we are told that he was a Roman Knight. This does not necessarily mean that he was Roman. Augustus encouraged municipal leaders in Italy to become Equites or Knights, provided they owned 400,000 sesterces¹³ – the necessary qualification. The name Lucius Castricius Prudens does not throw any light on this matter. At this time Malta was slowly but irrevocably becoming Romanized.

The practice of having a *patronus* to represent Maltese interests survives up to at least the middle of the second century A.D. We have on record other names of Patroni chosen to champion the interests of the Maltese and the Gozitans.¹⁴

Lucius Castricius the *πρῶτος* and Patron of the Maltese seems to have filled other offices as well. In the inscription we come across the participle ἄρξας agreeing with the subject. The Latin version reproduced by A.A. Caruana¹⁵ is *praefectus* i.e. Lucius Castricius was put in charge over the Maltese. But the Greek word for *praefectus* is not the word ἄρξας. Nor does the word correspond to the Latin *duumvir*.¹⁶ ἄρξας is the aorist participle active of the verb ἄρχω which could also mean 'I exercise the functions of an archon.'¹⁷ Hence ἄρξας might mean 'after having been an archon.' In Republican times we know of the existence of two Archons in Malta.¹⁸ If we are correct in our interpretation of the verb ἄρξας, then Lucius Castricius had once been an *archon*. Furthermore it would mean that certain forms, at least, of internal government which existed in Malta in Republican times still survived in the first century after Christ.

The participle ἄρξας is followed by a second participle ἀμφιπολεύσας. The normal meaning of ἀμφιπολεύω is 'I serve, I administer to.' It could also mean to be an *amphipolos* or a priest of Zeus Olympios. The Greek-English Lexicon by Liddell and Scott translates the verb ἀμφιπολεύσας by 'having administered' to the God Augustus. Similarly A.A. Caruana reproduces a Latin version in which the verb is rendered by *famulatus ad-*

¹³ Suetonius, Div. Aug. 116; Dion. Halic. VI, 13.

¹⁴ C.I.L. 7506, 7508; Caruana, op. cit. p.146

¹⁵ Cf. A.A. Caruana, op. cit. p.134.

¹⁶ Cf. C.I.L. X, 773, A. Mayr. *Die Insel Malta im Altertum*, Munchen 1909, p.106.

¹⁷ Cf. Liddell and Scott, Greek-English Lexicon.

¹⁸ Cf. Kaibel, *Inscriptiones Graecae*, Vol. XIV, p.142, No.601.

dictus.¹⁹ It is more reasonable to assume that the two participles stand on their own and that θεῶ 'Αυγούστῳ is the indirect object of the main verb. In the other inscriptions in which reference is made to a *Protos* the latter was very often a priest, sometimes a high-priest.²⁰

We know from Diodorus Siculus that in 342-343 B.C. Timoleon established the ἀμφιπολία – the office of an ἀμφιπολος (The minister of Zeus Olympios) – priesthood of the highest order.²¹ Cicero informs us that the Syracusans used to choose a candidate for this office, every year and that this priesthood was held in the highest possible regard.²² Although in Diodorus's own time the *amphipolos* of Zeus Olympios was losing its importance the office still survived.²³ If ἀμφιπολευσας means, as it probably does, 'having been an amphipolos (or priest of Zeus Olympios)', then this priesthood existed also in Malta in the first century A.D.

Lucius Castricius the *Protos* and *Patron* who had once been an *archon* and an *amphipolos* 'did something' to the god Augustus. The main verb in this inscription is incomplete. There are only three Greek letters . . . Ε Σ Χ which seem to be part of the main verb. C.I.G. suggests ('Αν)ΕΣΤ(ΗΣΕΝ) – the common Greek word for the Latin *dedicavit* – he dedicated, he offered, he set up etc.²⁴ There are many Latin inscriptions in which we are told that a certain person *divo Augusto sacrum dedicavit*. On the other hand the verb ἀνέστησεν would do damage to the X. A possible alternative might be ('Αν)ΕΣΧ(Ε) with χεῖρας (hands) understood and it would mean 'he raised up his hands' i.e. 'he prayed' to the God Augustus.

On the 17th of September of A.D. 14 Augustus was declared a god by decree of the Senate. Priests were assigned for his worship, and Livia, his wife, whom in his will he had named Augusta, was made his priestess. By a vote of the Senate a shrine was erected to him in Rome; other shrines were erected by various communities.²⁵ It is not known whether there was a shrine built for Augustus in Malta. This inscription, however, shows that he was recognized in Malta as a god and that prayers or sacrifices were offered to him.

¹⁹ Cf. A.A. Caruana, op. cit. p. 134.

²⁰ Cf. XVI, 70, 6. Cf. R. Cagnat, op. cit., Note 6.

²¹ Cf. XVI, 70, 6.

²² Cf. In Verrem, 11, 2, 51.

²³ Cf. XVI, 70, 6.

²⁴ C.I.G. Vol 3, No. 5754.

²⁵ Vell. 11, 124, 3; Tac. Ann. 1, 8, 2; Suct. Div. Aug. 101, 2; Dio LVI, 46, 1-3.

One can now draw some general conclusions. In the first half of the first century A.D. the Maltese community, like other communities, had its own patron to voice its requests. Whether this means that at this stage the Maltese obtained Roman citizenship is a moot point.²⁶ Secondly there was an office or a title of *πρωτος* whose exact functions are unknown. Thirdly, it seems, that the archonship which existed in pre-Augustan times survived in the first half of the first century A.D. Fourthly, if our interpretation of *ἀμφιπολευσας* is correct there was also in Malta the office of *Amphipolos*. This office links us religiously with Syracuse and the Greek speaking world.²⁷ Finally emperor-worship was also found in Malta. A feature linking us with all the other parts of the Roman world.

This inscription is also interesting from another point of view. It shows that from a cultural point of view the Maltese were still a part of the Greek world. The language of the inscription is Greek, the title or office of *πρωτος* is found in Greek cities, the archonship is of Greek origin, the *amphipolos* is likewise Greek. But at the same time the romanization of the island is slowly under way. Lucius Castricius has a completely Roman name, he is a Roman knight, belongs to the Quirine tribe; there is a Patronus in Malta and Augustus is worshipped as a God. One last point, the Emperor is not referred to as *Σεβαστος* the Greek word for Augustus, but as he was known by the Romans, Augustus.

²⁶ Cf. R. Vol 29, 1931, p. 546.

²⁷ Another *amphipolos* is mentioned in an inscription found at Chalcis.