In one of St. Augustine’s most recently discovered writings (Ep. 8*), Augustine chastises a Christian for defrauding a Jew in the Hippo region of Numidia. The Christian, Victor, had nefariously acquired deeds to the estate of a Jewish landholder and slaveowner by the name of Licinius; Victor had purchased the lands’ titles from Licinius’s mother, who had sold them in revenge for a dispute she was having with Licinius’s wife or slave. Scholars dispute whether this Victor was, in fact, a bishop. Goulve Madec denies this possibility, though Jean Rougé supports it, due to Augustine’s form of address.
the problem; as a Jew he no longer possessed the legal right to bring
direct suit against Victor in court ([Ep. 8*.2–16; cf. Cod. theod. 76.2.41]).2
Augustine expresses concern with Victor’s actions and directs him both
to return the ill-gotten lands and to mediate between Licinius and his
estranged mother, but no record indicates the case’s outcome. 3

This epistle is unusual among Christian writings in that it provides an
attestation of the personal name of an actual Jew. In the letter, August-
ine marks Licinius’ background by preceding the initial mention of his
name with the adjective *Iudaeus* (“Iudeus Licinius”; [Ep. 8*.2]); the legal
context of Augustine’s epistle requires this identification of Licinius as a
*Iudaeus* to determine Augustine’s treatment of the case itself.4 Licinius’s
gentilic name, however, furnishes no indication of Jewish context—it
is an extraordinarily common Numidian personal name in the fourth
through sixth centuries ([e.g., ILA I.1741; CIL 8.27932]).5 Inability to dis-
cern “Jewishness” from Licinius’s personal name, furthermore, appears
to be strategic—his gentilic name indexes conventional North African
onomastic practices rather than particularly Jewish ones. Regardless

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2 Though Theodosian I had “renewed the licensing” of the Jewish religion in 393
C.E., a council of Carthage in 419, specifically canons 128 and 129, “decreed a series
of prohibitions on minority accusation…and furthermore subsumed the Jews with
other groups, as *infames*” (Castritius 1985, 45–51). Also see discussion in Linder (1985,
57). Licinius was forced to seek advice from Augustine, who would have been expected
to address this problem internally within the church.

3 Various scholars have commented on the awkward way that Augustine handles this
case, as the person who perpetrated the malfeasance, Victor, was also the individual
Augustine directed to handle the case. Castritius argues that “Licinius was able to back
up his claims according to ‘optimum ius’ by such solid and irrefutable evidence as a law of
December-112 (Cod. theod. 76.2.41) required of litigants against clericals” (1985, 31).

4 The legal remedy for Victor’s action relates directly to Licinius’s legal status as a
*Iudaeus*. Laws that specifically curtailed Jewish landowning in Africa were passed much
later (1 August 535), and appear to be more clearly directed to prohibit land owner-
ship by Arian groups (Schöll and Kroll 1895, 244–245, no. 37). Also see discussion in

5 The name is especially popular in the regions of Caldis, Tiddis, Cirta, and Thi-
bilis (Lassère 1977, 182; [e.g., CIL 8.27932]). For example, *ILAlg I.1741* reads: *DMS
M Licinius Rutilius/Luicini Paterni/Fil.P.EVA/IL.H.S.E*. In the fourth and fifth centuries,
a common North African tendency developed to mark funerary stele with only the
personal names of the deceased. If this were the case, what would Licinius’s grave
marker have looked like? Would it have borne symbols or markers that Licinius was
a Jew? Or would it have simply read “Licinius” just like other funerary markers from
his period and region in Jewish and non-Jewish contexts? Such questions highlight the
complexity of the onomastic problem.