



## DEVELOPMENT OF THE CITY CONCEPT IN ANCIENT NORTH AFRICA (THE ROMAN CITY AS A MODEL)

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**Abstract :** This study delves into the evolution of urban concepts in ancient North Africa, spanning from the Numidian kingdoms and Mauretania to the Roman occupation era. It explores the profound transformations within the urban systems post-Roman conquest, particularly focusing on their organizational structures. This investigation seeks to uncover the foundational purposes behind these urban developments and their impact on reinforcing the Roman presence in the region, as well as their influence on the native populations of ancient North Africa. The analysis encompasses several dimensions: the initial concept of the city in the region, its evolution during Roman rule, the architecture of Roman urban systems and their components, and the consequent effects on the cities and their inhabitants in the Maghreb. The architectural and developmental prosperities these cities enjoyed during the Roman era were largely due to Rome's strategic enhancements, such as fortifying urban centers with robust walls and establishing castles and defense mechanisms to protect against nomadic incursions, thus exacerbating the displacement and marginalization of nomads in the less fertile territories outside the city boundaries.

**Keywords:** Roman city, ancient North Africa, Rome, Africans, urbanization.

### DEVELOPPEMENT DU CONCEPT DE VILLE DANS L'AFRIQUE DU NORD ANTIQUE (LA VILLE ROMAINE COMME MODELE)

**Résumé :** Cette étude s'intéresse à l'évolution des concepts urbains dans l'Afrique du Nord antique, depuis les royaumes numides et la Maurétanie jusqu'à l'époque de l'occupation romaine. Elle explore les profondes transformations des systèmes urbains après la conquête romaine, en se concentrant particulièrement sur leurs structures organisationnelles. Cette enquête cherche à découvrir les objectifs fondamentaux de ces développements urbains et leur impact sur le renforcement de la présence romaine dans la région, ainsi que leur influence sur les populations indigènes de l'ancienne Afrique du Nord. L'analyse englobe plusieurs dimensions : le concept initial de la ville dans la région, son évolution sous la domination romaine, l'architecture des systèmes urbains romains et leurs composantes, et les effets qui en découlent sur les villes et leurs habitants au Maghreb. La prospérité architecturale et le développement dont ces villes ont bénéficié à l'époque romaine étaient en grande partie dus aux améliorations stratégiques de Rome, telles que la fortification des centres urbains avec des murs robustes et l'établissement de châteaux et de mécanismes de défense pour se protéger contre les incursions nomades, exacerbant ainsi le déplacement et la marginalisation des nomades dans les territoires moins fertiles en dehors des limites de la ville.

**Mots-clés :** Cité romaine, Afrique du Nord antique, Rome, Africains, urbanisation.

## **Introduction:**

Recent archaeological excavations in North Africa have significantly revised the traditional narrative once depicted in classical Latin literature, which portrayed the region as predominantly nomadic prior to Roman annexation. These findings affirm the existence of indigenous urban settlements influenced by Mediterranean cultures, notably Phoenician-Carthaginian and Greek, before the advent of Roman control.

This pre-Roman urbanity, enriched significantly by Roman strategic urban planning, lays the groundwork for this study. The research aims to explore the original urban concept in ancient North Africa, trace its development through the Roman occupation, and assess its dualistic impact, both constructive and detrimental, on the urban landscape across African cities.

### **1. The Concept of the City and Its Origins in Ancient North Africa:**

From the late 4th century to the early 3rd century BCE, as evidenced by contemporary Latin classical texts, the presence of distinct Numidian kingdoms was well established in North Africa. The eastern Numidian kingdom extended from Carthaginian territories in the east to the Lambaesis River (referred to as the Sand River in Constantine), while the western Numidian kingdom spanned from the Sand River to the Mulucha River (also known as Malva or Moulouya).

Additionally, the kingdom of Mauretania stretched from the Moulouya River to the Atlantic Ocean. Despite the accounts found in literary texts, which began documenting the history of this region in conjunction with the Punic Wars between Carthage and Rome in the 3rd century BCE, archaeological evidence currently under investigation suggests that these kingdoms are of even greater antiquity.

The urban development witnessed by the cities within these kingdoms during the 3rd century BCE provides compelling evidence that they had been inhabited and organized at an earlier period. A notable illustration of the civilizational advancements in this region is the structured nature of its cities. One such example is Banasa, a city situated along the Sebou River.

Banasa is distinguished by several archaeological markers that attest to the existence of Mauretanian civilization, such as the presence of kilns used for producing locally dyed pottery, which predate the formal establishment of the settlement by Emperor Augustus in the 1st century CE. This finding indicates that the city's habitation and economic activities preceded Roman intervention (Elayoud, 2010). Similarly, the city of Tamuda, located on the right bank of the Martil River, serves as one of the most significant examples of a Mauretanian metropolis. Characterized by a well-organized layout since the late 1st century

BCE, Tamuda exhibits architectural elements influenced by Hellenistic traditions (Elayoud, 2011).

In addition to these archaeological indicators, historical texts provide further insight into the governance structures of these ancient kingdoms. Titus Livius (1869) references the appointment of Syphax's prefects (*Praefectus*) in the land of the Massyli (eastern Numidia) XXX, 11, 2), while Sallust (1933) documents the role of King Jugurtha's regional governors who hosted the Roman consul Metellus in the city of Vaga (modern-day Béja) during Rome's military campaigns in Numidia (112-103 BCE) (LXIX).

These records suggest the existence of provincial administrators who operated under a centralized authority (Harech, 1992). Scholars, including Camps (2010), have identified these regions as "Regia," or royal capitals, where the ruling monarchs could exercise direct control. Through these prefects, the kings maintained their influence over urban centers by overseeing military garrisons during wartime and managing tax collection. This administrative structure positioned these cities as vital financial and governance hubs (p. 310).

The urban character of these cities exhibited a significant degree of autonomy, regardless of whether they were coastal or inland settlements. Coastal cities often expanded and evolved into semi-independent entities, particularly in matters concerning their internal administration. This phenomenon, known as the municipal system, was equally present in inland cities of Numidian origin. Some cities even minted their own coins, reflecting their internal self-governance. A prime example of this autonomy is "Cirta Tajouraa" (Harech, 1992), where the issuance of locally minted currency underscores the city's capacity for independent economic and political organization.

The distinct characteristics of ancient North African cities reveal a dual influence, where some urban centers exhibit a predominantly Numidian identity, particularly those within the domains of the Numidian kingdoms, while others display a strong Punic character. The latter group, mainly located in coastal regions, was home to a population of diverse origins, including indigenous Libyan inhabitants, descendants of Phoenician migrants, and individuals born from both ethnic groups.

Additionally, these cities attracted various Mediterranean elements who migrated there to offer their expertise in military service, craftsmanship, construction, and mining. Historically, these populations were subject to the authority of Carthage or acknowledged its supremacy, particularly after it had established its dominance over the western Mediterranean basin.

Consequently, the political and administrative framework of these cities, as well as those in the hinterland that fell under their influence, mirrored the Phoenician city-state model. This governance structure was characterized as an

aristocratic system, akin to a merchants' republic, primarily designed to safeguard the interests of the elite class that held dominance within the city's societal framework. Each city functioned autonomously, maintaining independence in its internal affairs while recognizing Carthage's external sovereignty and fulfilling obligations related to defense and support when required (Cheniti, 2013).

The Punic identity of these cities, shaped by Carthaginian civilization, which wielded significant influence over the western Mediterranean during this period, extended beyond the coastal regions and was even present in some Numidian cities. A notable example is Cirta, the capital of the Numidian kingdom. Archaeological discoveries, particularly at the Pit Temple, have provided valuable insights into Cirtan society during the reign of Masinissa (203–148 BC) and later his son, Micipsa (148–118 BC). A bilingual inscription in Libyan and Punic contains the names of individuals bearing Punic names who occupied ranks and positions analogous to those in Carthage and other Phoenician settlements.

This phenomenon may be attributed to Cirta's prominence and influence, as it not only controlled the surrounding villages but also engaged in extensive commercial transactions with distant regions. Textual evidence indicates that Greek merchants frequented Masinissa's capital and that Italian traders had established a presence there. Inscriptions found at the Pit Temple, written in both Greek and Latin, further corroborate Cirta's role as a vibrant commercial hub.

By the second century BC, Cirta had developed into a true capital, exhibiting a strong Punic character (Camps, 2010) due to the widespread use of the Punic language as the primary medium of communication among traders and various groups arriving from different parts of the Mediterranean. This linguistic integration may explain the necessity for inscriptions to be recorded in both Punic and Libyan languages.

The extent to which these cities displayed either a Numidian or Punic identity is most evident in their administrative organization, as reflected in epigraphic records. Several inscriptions from these cities reveal structural similarities with Carthaginian governance. For instance, evidence indicates the existence of a council of elders in Baga at the end of the second century BC. Moreover, textual references suggest that Cirta (Sirta) and Tébessa were governed by suffetes as early as the third century BC (Hareche, 1992). A Punic inscription further confirms that the suffete system persisted in Volubilis (Volibilis) even during the Roman period (Elayoud, 2015; Février, 1966). However, a distinctive feature of Numidian cities was the presence of three suffetes rather than two, as observed in Carthage and other Phoenician cities.

This tripartite governance model is also documented in Mactar, where an inscription from the Temple of Hathor, corroborated by a tombstone of Cintus Virus Rogatus, bestows upon him the title of "Triumvir." The municipal organization of Mactar adhered to a tripartite system until its eventual transformation into a Roman settlement during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (after 290 AD). A similar tripartite administrative structure has been identified in Cirta, where records reference the existence of three principal officers within the Cirtan municipal union.

The municipal governance of Dougga during the reign of Micipsa (148-118 BC) provides a lucid example of early city administration (Hareche, 1992) as evidenced by the bilingual Punic-Numidian inscriptions discovered on a commemorative plaque. These inscriptions offer a detailed portrayal of the city's administrative framework during Micipsa's era. At that time, Dougga's governance was vested in a council of citizens responsible for dedicating a temple to Masinissa. The council included:

- A king (GLD), referred to as Eqlaed in the Libyan dialect and (MMLKT) in Punic, serving a term of one year.
- Two military officials holding the rank of centurion.
- Three civilian officers identified by the titles: MSSKW, GZB, GLDGMIL.
- A commander responsible for fifty men (G L D M ç K).

The inscriptions at Dougga reveal an administrative organization with minimal Phoenician influence (Camps, 2010). This governing body comprised six members, blending military, civil, and religious responsibilities. Given Dougga's geographical position deep within Numidian territory, a region where the Phoenician influence was palpable, the administrative composition of Dougga likely served as a representative model for other Numidian cities (Cheniti, 2013).

Additionally, this tripartite system prevalent in Numidia coexisted with a Punic framework known as the *suffetes* (judges), who presided over municipal councils. Some historical documents indicate that this Punic system was not only retained by the Romans but also integrated with the existing Numidian military structure.

Interestingly, while major Numidian cities commonly had two *suffetes*, some, including Makthar, Altiburos Taberniqe, and Dougga, featured three *suffetes* (Harech, 1992). The city of Guelma, mirroring Dougga's system, was administered by two *suffetes* and a chief known as "princeps" in Latin, with a governance recognized and sustained by the Roman authorities into the first century AD (Ourfa Li, 2007).

## 2. Evolution of the City Concept During the Roman Occupation

The concept of the city within the Roman dominion of North Africa epitomized power and served as both the goal and the clearest manifestation of Roman imperial ambitions in the region. Cities functioned as hubs of administrative, religious, and socio-cultural activities, encapsulating a melting pot for individuals of diverse origins and playing a pivotal role in the Roman strategy to Romanize and control North Africa.

The existence of cities was deemed essential for sustaining Roman presence in the region. However, the Romans did not establish these cities *ex nihilo*; instead, they strategically Romanized pre-existing settlements (Bénabou, 1975). The genesis of Roman cities in Africa can be traced back to the period following the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC.

Starting from 122 BC, Rome initiated the relocation of Italian settlers to North Africa, establishing a Roman colony atop the ruins of Carthage. This colonization process gained further momentum after the defeat of Jugurtha in 102 BC when the commander Marius allocated farmlands to his veterans, thereby laying the groundwork for a sustained Roman presence in the region.

The establishment of settlements that would later evolve into cities intensified under Julius Caesar's leadership, following the annexation of northern Constantine after Numidia's fall in 46 BC. Caesar granted lands in this region to his soldiers who had served in his campaign against Juba I. Notably, they established colonies north of Cirta, with Milev (Mila), Chullu (El Kala), Cirta, and Rusicade emerging as prominent settlements. These areas were originally dense with Numidian-Punic populations.

Continuing Caesar's initiatives, Octavius furthered the settlement drive by disbursing lands to discharged soldiers in the northern territories of the kingdom of Juba II, now recognized as Caesarean Mauretania. The new colonies, predominantly located along the coast, included Igilgili (Ijel), Saldae (Béjaïa), Rusazus (Azeffoun), Rusigonia (Thenia), Cartenna (Ténès), and Zuccabar (Médéa). These settlements also had a significant Numidian-Punic demographic and civilizational base. Latin inscriptions reveal that many of the cities established during this period were either colonies of retired soldiers (Veterani) or military sites around which civilian life gradually developed (Cheniti, 2013).

The origins of Roman cities in the region can thus be categorized into two distinct types: Some were entirely new colonies established by the Romans, intended to serve economic purposes, such as attracting Italian settlers to Africa and providing them with agricultural lands to generate revenue for Rome, or military strategic purposes. Other cities were originally Numidian-Punic settlements that transitioned into Roman urban forms, ultimately becoming fully integrated Roman cities (Bénabou, 1975).

In the transformed urban landscape under Roman rule, cities either became colonies (*colonia*) where residents enjoyed full Roman citizenship rights, or Roman municipalities (*municipium*) which possessed institutions mirroring those in Rome, such as a municipal council analogous to the Roman Senate (*Senatus*) (Albertini, 1955). These administrative units held legal statuses akin to those found in Italy and other Roman provinces, encompassing similar structures, authorities, and community rights and responsibilities.

Noteworthy examples in the province of Caesarean Mauretania, as indicated by Latin inscriptions and noted by Pliny the Elder, include cities like Auzia (Sour El Ghoulane) and Saldae (Cheniti, 1999). As the old Pliny told us (1848) These cities, particularly those on the coasts influenced by Phoenician or Carthaginian heritage or those founded by Octavius's discharged soldiers or settled by Italian communities, were often elevated to the status of towns and colonies by the early emperors (V, 20).

The Roman city was analogous to a republic, designated as *Respublica*, characterized by its autonomy and the self-sufficiency of its surrounding region. These cities typically did not require external supplies for their sustenance except in dire circumstances. Historically, cities arose from economically and geographically constrained communities, which exhibited minimal solidarity with one another due to diverse economic capacities rooted in individually varied property ownership.

This diversity prompted the adoption of strategies to mitigate economic disparities within the city's populace. Such strategies included petitions urging affluent citizens to invest in civic institutions. Over time, such generosity became a symbol of social precedence, endowing benefactors with both moral and legal authority, and positioning them among the city's ruling echelons (Cheniti, 1999).

African elites, comprising both Roman and native aristocracy, often allocated portions of their wealth to enhance their urban and rural residences. This is evidenced by the intricate mosaics found in the rural homes of officials, servants, or major landowners. These individuals typically spent time on their estates overseeing management activities or engaging in hunting.

In the urban context, there was a concerted effort to mirror the architectural styles of Rome, fostering a semblance of prosperity and cultural affinity with the empire (Julien, 1969). Consequently, the Roman Empire evolved into a federation of republics, each governed by a general law that regulated inter-city relations and allowed cities the autonomy to manage their internal affairs, aligning with the interests of their citizens. This autonomy, however, did not conflict with the overarching sovereignty of Rome or the supreme authority vested in the emperor.

The landscape of Roman North Africa was marked by a gradual increase in the number of towns and colonies. This expansion was partly due to the emperors' policy of elevating African cities from foreign city status to Roman city status as they assimilated Roman cultural elements and increased the presence of Roman citizens.

Moreover, military cities proliferated around camps, spurred by the economic and social dynamism fostered by the military presence in agriculturally rich areas. This made such cities focal points for local farmers, with the economic well-being of city residents closely tied to the agricultural output of the surrounding areas (Cheniti, 1999). Conversely, coastal cities thrived on artisanal, commercial, and maritime activities, reflecting a diverse economic base (Cheniti, 2013).

Administratively, the Roman cities exhibited a hierarchical structure. At the apex were the Roman colonies (*coloniae*), followed by Roman municipalities (*municipia*), whose inhabitants, though Roman citizens, did not enjoy the same tax exemptions as those in the colonies. Next in line were the Latin municipalities (*Latini*) (Camps, 2007), and at the base were the foreign municipalities (*Peregrini*). This gradual integration of communities into the Roman administrative fold stratified cities and their inhabitants into varying legal ranks, starting from the lowest socio-political tier, the *Peregrini*. These individuals, not covered by Roman law and without any formal treaty or agreement with Rome, were susceptible to property confiscation and were considered defeated entities under Roman jurisdiction (Cheniti, 2007).

Despite the varied lifestyles of these city dwellers, whether settled or nomadic, the administrative organization of these cities could assume different forms within Roman law. Sometimes, authority was vested in a local leader over a tribe (*des princepes*); other times, it retained structures from the Carthaginian model or evolved into a council that could later transform into a Latin or Roman municipal council, depending on each city's legislative integration level (Albertini, 1955).

Despite the overarching Roman occupation, certain cities like the town of Altava (Ouled Mimoun) preserved a primarily Punic-based system until a much later period. The archaeological evidence from its ruins indicates that, although its citizens were accorded Roman legal status, the governance model remained distinctly traditional. Altava was governed by a prince (Princepes), supported by a council of ten (Decemprimi), reflecting the enduring Punic influence.

Additionally, the town appointed an official titled "King of Sacrifices" (Rex Sacrorum), a role pivotal for conducting sacrifices but which vanished from municipalities that fully embraced Roman citizenship by the third century across the Empire (Cheniti, 1999). The town of "Quiza" (*Peregrinorum oppidum*),



located in the province of Mauretania under Emperor Vespasian's reign, also exemplifies this phenomenon and is mentioned by Pliny (1848) the Elder (V, 20.).

The policy of integration by Rome introduced various ranks among the conquered territories, with Latin cities (Latini) positioned immediately above the foreign status. This designation, initiated in the fourth century BC for Italian allies, included specific legal norms that governed transactions and defined personal and communal statuses.

These cities were poised for elevation to full Roman city status, i.e., a colony, upon satisfying certain conditions which necessitated the abandonment of their previous systems in favor of new governance under Roman law (Cheniti, 2013). Post-Vespasian, cities such as Tipaza, which functioned as a Latin city, "Icosium" (Algiers) recognized as *Latio datum*, and "Arsennaria" as *Latinorum oppidum* are examples from the province of Mauretania (Cat, 1891).

Above these were the cities with Roman rights (Romani), paralleling the rights and duties of citizens in Rome itself. The pinnacle of aspiration for those in the previous statuses, examples include the city of "Iol" (Cherchell), the capital of Juba II, which was granted the status of a colony (*colonia*) and *Oppidum Novum* by the god Claudius, and "Rusconnia" as a colony of Augustus. Additionally, "Rusucurium" received Roman rights from Claudius, and "Rusazus" was recognized as an Augustan colony, alongside *Saldae* and *Igilgili* (Pliny l'Ancien, V, 20). By the mid-first century AD, this Mauretanian province had 16 colonies or municipalities, with 13 along the coast and only three inland (Cat, 1891).

Beyond these classifications were free cities (*Civitas Liberas*), which maintained their original governance structures, notably Punic (Camps, 2007), and were categorized as cities of foreigners friendly to Rome but not formal allies. This classification was particularly relevant to Punic cities that remained neutral or supportive during the Third Punic War. These cities, predominantly coastal and deeply embedded in Punic cultural traditions (Cheniti, 2013), showcase the complex legal statuses and concepts of urban organization during the Roman occupation, traces of which are still discernible today in their administrative and architectural legacy.

### **3. The Roman City System and Its Components in Ancient North Africa:**

The Roman city's social structure comprised the people (*Populus*), with male members required to hold Roman citizenship, and the governing body (*Ordo*), or the Senate. Together, they formed the city's legal personality, known as "*Respublica*." The governance was exercised through decisions made by the town's Senate (*ordo*) and the people (*populus*) via their representatives, reflecting the legislative framework of Rome. This system served as a prototype,

with provinces endeavoring to emulate the administrative and civic model of the city of Rome itself (Cheniti, 1999).

In all Roman municipalities, the town council stood as the pinnacle institution, overseeing all facets of political, economic, and urban life within its jurisdiction. The council typically comprised one hundred (100) *Decuriones* (deputies), although this number could vary depending on the city's population size. Regular sessions of this council were convened at least annually. Eligibility for candidacy to this body required individuals to be free of other obligations, devoid of any criminal misdemeanors, and to possess substantial financial resources.

The division of duties within the council saw various officials undertaking specific roles. At the helm were the *Duumviri* (*Duumvir*), two individuals who led the council of *Decuriones* and were responsible for the execution of public works, maintenance of population registers, and the enrollment of affluent citizens.

Next in line was the *Curator*, who managed the city's finances and public infrastructure projects. Additionally, the role of *Quaestor* was pivotal, focusing on the financial operations, while the *Aedilis* ensured market security, city safety, and the upkeep of roads and public spaces (Ben Abdelmouamin, 2013).

This council's elite members served annual terms and were sometimes referred to as "*Viri Primati*." Documentation has preserved the names of several individuals from this esteemed class within the municipal council, particularly from Mauritanian cities such as Caesarea (Cherchell), Auzia (Sour El Ghozlan), *Albulae* (Ain Temouchent), *Altava* (Ouled Mimoun) (Cheniti, 1999), and *Quiza* (*Portus Magnus* near Arzew) (Ben Abdelmouamin, 2013).

These records highlight the consistency of the Roman administrative systems across provincial towns. This uniformity underscores the model Rome promoted throughout its empire, aiming to ensure administrative stability, foster local governance that protected communal interests, and uphold the overarching political, economic, and civilizational objectives of Rome across all provinces (Cheniti, 1999).

The hierarchy within Roman cities was neither permanent nor uniformly applied across all cities, as shifts in administrative and regional policies, such as the redistricting of provinces, often influenced social structures. Moreover, significant social reforms, such as those initiated by Emperor Antoninus (Caracalla), who extended Roman citizenship universally within the empire, a policy that dramatically altered social dynamics. Economic and tax reforms, particularly those introduced during the late imperial era starting with Emperor Diocletian, also played a crucial role. The spread of Christianity and the ensuing Christianization of authority under Emperor Constantine the Great further

transformed the social hierarchy, elevating the clergy of the Catholic Church to a position of prominence, supported by imperial endorsement (Cheniti, 2013).

These multifaceted reforms and transformations underscore the fluid nature of social stratification within Roman cities in Africa. Turning to the urban infrastructure that characterized these cities during the Roman occupation, it is evident that Roman authorities were keen on replicating the Roman model of city structure, which was adeptly adapted to various geographical and functional contexts.

Roman cities in Africa varied widely in their roles and characteristics, ranging from agricultural centers like Dougga in Tunisia, Annona in Algeria, and Volubilis in Morocco, to military bases such as Timgad and Lambaesis, and maritime hubs like Sabratha, Leptis Magna, Carthage, Utica, Annaba, Cherchell, and Tangier. These cities were equipped with all the necessary components for a thriving urban life (Julien, 1969).

Central to the layout of every organized Roman city was the intersection of two principal thoroughfares: the Decumanus Maximus and the Cardo Maximus. These main streets defined the city's grid, with remnants of Roman street paving still visible, such as the Cardo Maximus in the modern-day city of Skikda, formerly known as Rusicade (Cheniti, 2007). From this primary grid, secondary streets branched out horizontally or vertically, defining blocks or insulae, each containing several residences (El Ayoud, 2010).

### *3.1. The Forum*

The forum, the civic and social heart of the Roman city, was typically a rectangular space, often paved and surrounded by a colonnade. This area served multiple purposes: it housed temples, administrative buildings including the town council's meeting hall, polling stations, and platforms for speakers, as well as spaces for businesses and legal complainants. Depending on the city's origins, the layout of the forum might vary. For cities established *ex nihilo*, like Timgad, the forum was planned according to a well-established model. In cities that predated Roman control, modifications were made to integrate the forum into the existing urban fabric (Julien, 1969).

The Roman architect Vitruvius (1847) emphasized the strategic placement of the forum in urban planning, advocating for its accessibility and utility to all citizens. He advised that if the city were coastal, the forum should be near the harbor, enhancing its role in trade and communication. Conversely, in inland cities, the forum should occupy a central position, ensuring it was the focal point of urban life (*De l'Architecture*, VII). In essence, the forum was not just a physical space but a symbol of public life and governance, where declarations were made, seasons of redemption were overseen, auctions were held, and judicial

proceedings took place. It was also a place for civic engagement, where citizens could vote, pay taxes, trade, and socialize, strolling among the stately columns that defined the space architecturally and functionally (Julien, 1969).

The architectural and functional evolution of the forum in North Africa is exemplified through three distinct models. The first model, prevalent during the Antonine era, was characterized by a traditional layout, a rectangular paved area encircled by a portico on all four sides, offering a harmonious blend of aesthetics and utility. The second model emerged in the Severan era, which, unlike its predecessor, was noted for its political and economic functions but notably lacked a temple surrounding the square. The third and more complex model developed later, featuring a newly designed forum that incorporated multiple halls, gardens, and pools around the square, reflecting an advanced stage of urban architectural evolution (El ayoud, 2010).

Significant forums that adhere to these models have been unearthed across North Africa. In Tripoli, the forums of Sabratha and Leptis Magna are notable examples. In Tunisia, discoveries at Mdaourouch, Bou Grara, Sbeitla, Henchir Ksiba, and Dougga highlight the region's rich Roman heritage. In Algeria, archaeological sites such as Djemila, Khemissa, and Timgad (Julien, 1969) showcase the diversity of forum designs, with Calama's public square, referred to in historical texts as the 'Forum Novum,' indicating its origins in the Severan period (Ourfa li, 2007).

Similarly, in Morocco, the forum of Banasa, akin to those in Djemila and Sbeitla, underwent significant expansion and reconstruction during the 2nd century AD, a period of general urban development observed across many Roman cities in Africa, such as the forum of Volubilis which also expanded during the Severan era (El Ayoud, 2011).

### 3.2. *The Town Council Meeting Hall (Curia)*

Integral to the forum complex is the Curia, a hall designated for municipal council meetings. This structure was typically rectangular or square, varying in size and configuration depending on the city. In Banasa, located in far-western Morocco, the eastern facade of the Forum provides an entrance to a modest-sized building likely serving as the Curia. This setup indicates the spatial and functional interdependence of the Forum and the Curia within the urban layout of Roman cities (El Ayoud, 2011).

In the city of Timgad, the municipal body's meeting hall was not only functional but also architecturally significant. It featured a rectangular structure with three openings and an elevated platform at one end, adorned with movable seats and flanked by two statues. This platform was accessible from one of the

colonnades, directly opposite the public square, which also hosted a speaker's platform extending from the front of a small temple.

The general assembly area included a spacious rectangular colonnade, surrounded by a two-story colonnade where citizens could engage in discussions on the lower floor and enjoy leisurely strolls on the upper floor. This design is echoed in the meeting hall at Leptis Magna, which measures 92 meters in length and 38 meters in width, encircled by a two-story colonnade. This grand structure was primarily constructed under the auspices of Septimius Severus and subsequently completed by Caracalla, illustrating the architectural grandeur and civic importance of such spaces in Roman urban planning (Julien, 1969).

### 3.3. Temples (Capitol):

According to Vitruvius (1847), temples play a crucial role within the cityscape, particularly those dedicated to guardian deities such as Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. It is imperative for these temples to be positioned on elevated ground, allowing for extensive views over the city walls (de l'Architecture, VII). Typically, each city's main temple features a rectangular hall, oriented from east to west, elevated on a podium, and often includes a vestibule leading into the cella.

When temples are dedicated to the divine trinity of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, mirroring the Capitol in Rome, a distinct room is allocated to each deity. In the Maghreb, notable examples include the capitol at Timgad, which boasts six frontal columns and dual rows of columns on each side, culminating in a spacious hall (17 m x 20.11 m) with three chambers housing grand statues. Another significant temple is found in Rusicauda, uncovered during the construction of a French theater, featuring a hall with three wings (Cheniti, 2007).

Additionally, the capitol of Sbeitla, though consisting of a single structure, contains three halls, each preceded by a vestibule. The central hall leads directly to a platform, while the others connect to this platform via steps. In Jamila (Cuicul), the temple dedicated to the family of Emperor Septimius Severus stands on a paved courtyard measuring 33.65 m by 39.50 m, with a height of 4.90 m, accessed via an imposing staircase (Julien, 1969).

### 3.4. Markets and Shops:

Roman markets and shops are typically characterized by open-air squares, usually rectangular and centered around a fountain. An exemplar is the market of Sertius in Timgad, situated in front of a large paved area. This market space measures 25 m by 15 m and features a square pool.

Upon entering, visitors encounter a semi-circular structure containing seven rooms, each fronted with blue granite slabs elevated to 1 meter for

displaying goods. Similar in style but more ornate are the shops in Jamila, which also feature an external row elevated on six columns, including a square, a pool, a room for scales, and statues of the market's founder and his brother (Julien, 1969).

### 3.5. *Baths:*

The tradition of bathing, long embraced by the Greeks, became a staple of Roman culture, with hardly any city lacking a number of these facilities, whether private or public. Bathhouses were carefully designed, often oriented towards the north to optimize environmental conditions. The architectural layout varied, with either linear or orthogonal axial designs, and the distribution of rooms was strategically planned to facilitate various bathing processes (El Ayoud, 2015).

Key features of a Roman bath included the Caldarium (hot room with a pool), Frigidarium (cold room with a pool), Tepidarium (tepid room), and special areas for massages. The bathing sequence typically involved sweating in the Caldarium, washing in hot water, relaxing in the Tepidarium, plunging into the Frigidarium, and concluding with an oil massage and body scrub (Julien, 1969).

The placement of the Tepidarium between the hot and cold rooms was crucial to soften the shock of temperature changes. Additionally, baths often included ancillary facilities such as storage areas, corridors, toilets, and storerooms. Beyond their primary function, baths also served as venues for sports, socializing, and engaging in discussions on various topics, illustrating their multifaceted role in Roman urban life.

Roman African cities showcased an array of both public and private baths, epitomizing architectural and engineering excellence. The baths of Banasa (El Ayoud, 2010) and the grand baths of Lepcis Magna, embellished by Septimius Severus in the second century AD, are notable examples. The main hall of Lepcis Magna's baths featured eight colossal cipollino marble columns, each standing at 8 meters tall, which supported an elaborate vault structure. The preservation of these structures is remarkable, with the floor tiles and marble wall slabs retaining their original freshness due to the protective covering of sands over the centuries.

Similarly, the baths of Timgad, positioned both to the north and south of the city, reveal the remnants of rooms and pillars that once supported marble slabs, along with fragments of the clay piping that facilitated the circulation of hot air throughout the bathing complex.

Not far from these, the major baths south of Jamila are accessed via a colonnade of 12 arcades, leading visitors through a vestibule into a vault-shaped sports hall that spans 83.12 m in length and 20.31 m in width. This sequence of rooms includes changing areas, a spacious cooling room adorned with rich

mosaics and marble, featuring two smaller pools and a large pool measuring 66.12 m by 22.5 m, distinguished by a row of pink marble columns (Julien, 1969).

The baths of Rusicauda also deserve mention, with their marble columns and exquisite mosaic floors uncovered during archaeological excavations (Cheniti, 2007). Similarly, the remains of the baths in Calama reflect their past grandeur, with construction techniques tracing back to the second century AD (Ourfa Li, 2007). These baths were not only centers for hygiene but also substantial architectural undertakings, as evidenced by their extensive footprint, 2600 m<sup>2</sup> in Jamila, 3000 m<sup>2</sup> in Lambaesis, and nearly 4000 m<sup>2</sup> in Timgad. The vast baths of Lepcis Magna and their annexes covered nearly 3 hectares, demonstrating the importance of such facilities in urban Roman life.

### *3.6. Theaters and Stadiums:*

The Greek and Roman tradition of establishing venues for entertainment and cultural expression was prominently observed in the cities of the Maghreb during the Roman period. Theaters, often carved into hillsides as in Greece, and stadiums, elliptically shaped for combat and athletic competitions, were common. Notably, the theater of Timgad and the theater of Dougga are prime examples of this architectural style. The theater of Tipasa, however, was constructed differently, adapting to its unique environmental and urban context.

In Timgad's theater, the design included rectangular openings that facilitated the movement of the stage curtain, a feature providing insight into the technological advancements of the time (Julien, 1969). The remains of the Roman theater in Rusicauda and the theater of Calama, built on a steep slope with part of the hill excavated to accommodate the structure, also highlight the adaptability of Roman architectural practices. The semicircular Calama theater spans a diameter of 58.05 m and includes an auditorium divided into an upper section with 12 steps and a lower section with 10 steps, though many of the original steps have been lost over time (Ourfa Li, 2007).

The theater in Dougga, constructed during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, features 21 tiers divided into three distinct sections, showcasing the grand scale and meticulous planning characteristic of Roman theaters. The stadiums, primarily used for gladiatorial contests and other competitions, varied in size but maintained a consistent elliptical shape. In Sabratha, a wealthy patron once donated sufficient funds to sponsor combat competitions for five days, indicating the significant role these venues played in social and cultural life. Archaeological findings have even pinpointed designated seating areas for VIPs in the stadiums of Carthage and Lambaesis, underscoring the structured social hierarchy of the time (Julien, 1969).

### *3.7. Triumphal Arches:*

A defining architectural element of Roman cities in the Maghreb was the presence of triumphal arches, set against the backdrop of city walls that sometimes enclosed the city and its environs. For instance, the city of Caesarea (Cherchell) was encircled by walls approximately 7 km in length, originating from around the mid-1st century AD.

The construction of such fortifications often intensified from the third century AD, concurrent with the deteriorating security conditions, as observed in the fortifications of the plains of Setif. In contrast, cities without extensive walls often featured prominent gates and triumphal arches. These arches typically had a single opening, as seen in Dougga, Sbeitla, Haidra, and Jamila.

Some cities, like Announa, displayed arches with two openings, while others, such as the Arch of Trajan in Timgad and the Arch of Septimius Severus in Lambaesis, boasted three openings, a large central one flanked by two smaller ones. Exceptionally, the Arch of Caracalla in Tébessa and the Arch of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli were comprised of three openings, highlighting the diversity and significance of these monumental structures in Roman urban landscapes (Julien, 1969).

### *3.8. Libraries:*

The discovery of a public library in Timgad sheds light on the intellectual life within Roman African cities. This library was established through the benevolence of a wealthy citizen and featured a semicircular hall facing a large niche that housed a statue of the goddess Minerva. The hall was equipped with numerous cabinets along its walls and three additional storage rooms, collectively capable of housing approximately 2300 volumes. This setup not only maximized the use of a relatively compact space but also underscored the value placed on knowledge and literature in Roman society, as frequently mentioned in inscriptions and Latin texts (Julien, 1969).

## **4. The Influence of the Roman Urban System on the Cities and their Inhabitants in Ancient North Africa:**

The Roman influence in North Africa was profoundly material, significantly shaping the urban development of its cities (Camps, 2007). This transformation had both positive and negative impacts on the region and its inhabitants. Historically, some scholars have noted a marked increase in urban population during the Roman era, with estimates suggesting that 60% of the population under Roman governance in North Africa might have reached six and a half million people.



This demographic shift was largely due to the economic boom facilitated by enhanced demand for agricultural products, livestock, and industrial goods, as well as the growth of trade between the southern Mediterranean coast, Italy, and other provinces of the empire.<sup>1</sup>

Roman Carthage serves as a prime example of this urban expansion. The city's urban area grew substantially as artisans from neighboring regions congregated there, bolstering its industries. Known for exporting luxury goods imbued with Phoenician traditions alongside abundant agricultural produce such as grains and oils, Carthage epitomized the prosperity experienced by many North African cities during this period.

Similarly, Leptis Magna saw significant urban growth with enhancements to its harbor basin allowing accommodation for larger ships. This pattern of prosperity was mirrored in other coastal cities like Hippo (Annaba), Rusicade (Skikda), Saldæ (Béjaïa), Tipasa, Caesarea, Cartenna (Ténès), and Portus Magnus (Arzew), which all thrived as bustling ports and market centers.

From an economic perspective, the Roman influence is evident in the evolution of both interior and coastal cities from modest colonies to expansive urban centers engaged with both local and distant markets. This urban expansion was supported by accumulated wealth, advancements in city planning, architecture, and the arts, enriching the urban landscape. The architectural grandeur of the cities, the sophistication of artistic endeavors, and the diversity of tastes among the elite, who indulged in luxuries and pleasures, reflected the cities' stature and pride (Cheninti, 2013).

Notably, the financing of these monumental constructions was often underwritten by affluent candidates in various municipal judicial roles, as evidenced by dedicatory inscriptions at these sites. This patronage led to notable disparities in urban development across different cities, each influenced by the wealth of its patrons and the city's significance and population density (Camps, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup>In his study on urbanization in North Africa during the Roman era, J. Toutain (1896) highlights an interesting observation: the scarcity of actual cities in the regions stretching from Tebessa to Sfax, and from Makthar to the Tunisian shores, is not attributed to a low population density. Contrarily, the countryside in these areas was densely populated. The primary reason for this phenomenon lies in a different population distribution pattern; instead of congregating within the closely situated city walls, the majority of the population was dispersed across fields, farms, nearby villages, and relatively considerable towns. This distribution reflects the fact that rural life was more vibrant than urban life.

This scenario indicates that urban development was not merely a consequence of population density but also linked to the strategic and economic significance of certain locations. The city of Sbeitla (Sufetula) serves as a prime example of this; it only developed and flourished because it was a central point in the road network connecting Tebessa to the coast, highlighting its importance as a hub for strategic communication and economic relations (p. 36).

Among the cities that exemplified this urban-architectural development during the Roman period were three key cities in the province of Tripolitania, which flourished under the reign of Septimius Severus. These cities included Tripoli (Oea), notable for its four-sided Triumphal Arch; Sabratha (Sabratha Vulpia), where Italian archaeologists uncovered a capitol, two churches, a theater, and a municipal council meeting hall approximately 70 km west of Tripoli; and Leptis Magna, famed for its harbor docks, a four-sided Triumphal Arch, and ornately decorated baths that utilized rainwater.

Additional ruins in Leptis Magna include the emperor's public square, a justice hall with three arcades, a theater, and a stadium (Julien, 1969), all attributed to the architectural initiatives of Emperor Septimius Severus. This era marked a significant elevation of these cities to standards akin to those of Italian cities, celebrated by the Libyans as the "extraordinary and divine good" bestowed by "Septimius," whose efforts dramatically transformed their urban landscape (Gsell, 1933).

In the Consular province of Roman North Africa, notable urban centers like "Hippo Regius" (Annaba) evolved significantly during the Roman period. Originally a municipality in the time of Augustus, it later achieved the status of a colony. Discoveries in Hippo Regius include well-preserved baths, a theater, and a public square, showcasing the architectural advancements typical of Roman cities.

Adjacent to the Sousse region, in the rugged terrains, stood major centers such as Thelepte (the old city), where ruins of a theater, baths, and Christian buildings underscore a rich historical tapestry. Nearby, Cillium (Kasserine) and Sufetula (Sbeitla) also thrived; Sbeitla, located at a crucial crossroads, transitioned from a municipality to a colony in the late second century AD, and now features impressive remnants of large temples, baths, theater ruins, and churches.

In the Numidian province, cities like Cirta served as capitals and were pivotal to the regional infrastructure, facilitating trade and military movements. Southward, cities such as Khenchela (Mascuda), Lambaesis, and Timgad (Thamugadi) overlooked routes that penetrated deeper inland. Timgad, in particular, is renowned for its well-preserved public square, church, capitol, and the Triumphal Arch of Trajan, which despite its name, dates back to the third century AD. Additionally, Cuicul (Djemila), established in the late first century and flourishing during the Antonine dynasty, remains a testament to the urban architectural development achieved under Roman rule (Julien, 1969).

However, the gleaming facades of urban prosperity often masked stark social inequalities. Many indigenous residents, who made up a substantial portion of the population, lived in deplorable conditions in neighborhoods on

the city outskirts or in rural areas, both within and beyond the city's influence. These communities experienced pronounced class differentiation, which was starkly reflected in the penal laws of the time. For instance, members of the lower classes or plebeians faced harsh penalties for the same crimes for which higher-status individuals might receive less severe punishments. Crimes committed by lower-status individuals could result in being thrown to wild animals, burned alive, or enslaved.

The indigenous Africans often lived in miserable neighborhoods outside the city walls, in huts described as black due to their dilapidated state. These dwellings have left no archaeological trace near the cities or beside the estates of large farmers in the countryside, owing to the fragility of their construction materials and their susceptibility to environmental degradation (Cheniti, 2013). Literary sources from the period, such as the writings of Apuleius of Madauros (*les metamorphoses*), depict the harsh realities faced by native farmers, including evictions from their lands and homes, often met with resistance and the unleashing of dogs on those sent to enforce these evictions, (IX, 35).

Moreover, the constant threat from nomadic groups, seen as a mobile concern to both civil and military administrators, led to the extensive fortification of all Roman cities. These fortifications, whether through robust city walls or equipped forts, were essential for protection against nomadic incursions. Notable examples include the wall of Leptis Magna built during the reign of Constantine, the wall of Caesarea from the reign of Claudius, and the fortifications of Portus Magnus and Tipasa established in the second century AD (Courtois, 1955). The persistent threat from displaced nomadic populations, whose lands had been seized, underscored the ongoing conflict and the Roman authorities' fear of uprisings from those marginalized and expelled from the burgeoning urban centers.

### **Conclusion:**

The development of urban centers in ancient North Africa can be traced back to the third century BC, as evidenced by the urban advancements within the eastern and western Numidian kingdoms and the Kingdom of Mauretania. These developments are documented through both archaeological remains and classical texts, revealing a blend of interior cities with a distinct Numidian flavor and coastal cities influenced by Punic administrative structures.

The transformation of these cities began to prominently feature Roman characteristics following the fall of Carthage in 146 BC. After its conquest, Rome undertook a systematic Romanization of the existing cities. This process not only altered the architectural and administrative landscapes of these cities but also repurposed them as vital administrative centers and hubs of social and cultural

life. The city, in Roman hands, became an instrumental tool for extending Roman influence throughout North Africa, facilitating the empire's control over the region and integrating it into the broader imperial framework.

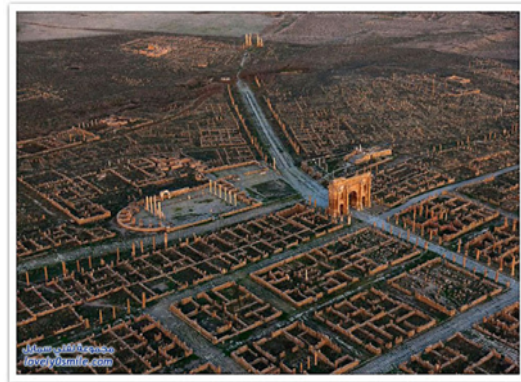
Roman cities in North Africa were classified into several administrative categories: Roman colonies (Colonies), Roman municipalities (Municipes), Latin municipalities (Latini), and foreign municipalities (Peregrinii). The town council (Ordo) was the principal governing body within these cities, endowed with comprehensive oversight of political, economic, and urban affairs. This governance structure, however, was subject to modifications brought about by various regime changes and administrative reforms.

The urban architecture of Roman cities in North Africa mirrored that of Rome, organized around a rectangular grid intersected by two main thoroughfares, the Decumanus Maximus and the Cardo Maximus. These cities were well-equipped with essential urban facilities including forums, curias, capitols, markets, baths, theaters, and stadiums, all fortified with walls that often featured grand triumphal arches. Despite the urban prosperity and significant developmental strides made during the Roman period, these advances came at a cost. The fortification of cities with robust walls and the establishment of military posts were defensive measures against the nomadic populations, who faced continuous hardship due to displacement and marginalization.

### Appendices:



Intersection of the Cardo and Decumanus lines  
(Timgad)



Urban plan of the city of Timgad



- Roman Baths in Mascula  
(Hammam As-Salihin - Khenchela)



Remains of the Roman Theater in Timgad



The triumphal arch of Caracalla (Thevest)

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