

The Numidian Country and Its Commercial and Economic Opening on the Mediterranean Basin and Its Southern Prolongation

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Abstract

Our study focuses on the commercial networks linking the Numidian country to the Mediterranean world and to the nomadic, semi-nomadic and sedentary tribes of the Saharan and sub-Saharan regions. Numidia inherited a network covering the whole of the Mediterranean basin, connecting the port areas to the interior of the Numidian lands and even to the sub-Saharan regions. Indeed, the evolution of urban structures in Numidia was accompanied by a significant economic boom that seems to be increasing in the 2nd century BC, especially with the decline of Carthage. It is the Numidian monarchy that benefited greatly by this, and it developed networks of trade with the regions of the Mediterranean basin that were in the Punic sphere, especially after the control of the main commercial ports of the regions of the Syrtes and the Sahel.¹ Thus, Numidian kingdoms were inserted into the commercial networks of the Phoenician-Punic world, as well as those of the Greeks and Romans. These networks could be direct or via Carthage. Numerous questions remain as to the nature of agricultural or artisanal production, to the modalities of trade, and the organization of markets in urban and rural areas in Numidia. However, the interest of Numidian power in international trade does not undermine the importance of interregional trade and pre-Saharan or Saharan caravan trade.² Trade networks have played an important role in forging links and socio-economic exchanges between the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan areas. The “tariff of Zarai”, although it goes back to Roman times, informs us about the presence of several circuits of exchange of pastoral, nomadic and semi-nomadic products of the Numidian-Mauritanian region. Given the geographical position that contributed to the isolation of the North African world with its southern natural prolongation, this did not prevent the Libyan-Numidian, Carthaginian, Greek and especially Roman populations from building bridges and contacts with the various tribes of nomadic, semi-nomadic and sedentary peoples of the Saharan and sub-Saharan regions. These included the Muslims, the Garamantes, the Gules and the Ethiopians, who certainly contributed in one way or another to the shaping of Libyco-Numidia.³

Garamantes, the Model of a Libyan Kingdom and a Hub of Commercial Activities

The city of Germa or Garama, the current Jarma, was the ancient capital of Garamante. It is located in the southern area of modern Libya, about 160 km southwest of Sabha in the valley of Wadi el Agial.⁴ Archaeological studies in the Fezzan region reveal the co-existence of sedentary tribes next to the Confederation of Garam, people on the move.⁵ The Garamantes appear as sedentary people, although they willingly follow a semi-nomadic lifestyle.⁶ Thus, the kingdom of Garamantia was a powerful center of commercial activity in the Sahara, and their territories centered on the oasis belts of the Fezzan region.⁷ The Garamantes were already advanced farmers, long before contact with the Greco-Roman world; they practiced irrigation in an arid region using underground aquifers that constitute their main water resources.⁸ This foggara irrigation system consisted of underground irrigation canals several kilometers in length, which facilitated extensive cultivation in the lower areas of the oasis valley.⁹ The 600 fagāgīr identified so far in the Fezzan facilitated in particular the periodic presence of men and animals involved in long-distance trade.¹⁰ Thus, the development of agricultural products such as cereals, vines, olives and dates, together with the introduction of horses, camels and wheeled means of transport¹¹ created a great network of commercial exchange. This network extended to the north to the Mediterranean, to the east to Egypt, and to the south to sub-Saharan Africa.¹² Documents from the Roman fort of Bu Njem repeatedly allude to Garamantians reported by patrols or outposts on desert tracks.¹³ Indeed, archaeological findings indicate that the Germa capital managed to control the caravan trade routes of the central Sahara.¹⁴ The city seems to have had a number of towers as well as a market used as a transit point for caravans and horses.¹⁵ The study of the archaeological material from Germa reveals an abundance of amphorae for wine or olive oil, fine glass, and imported ceramics from the Roman world. Imports dated from the Roman period seem to testify to a wider distribution of products in society compared to later eras.¹⁶ Indeed, most of the Garamantian traffickers controlled and regulated one of the main Saharan regions routes between sub-Saharan Africa to the cities of the Libyan coast (Sabratha, Oea and Lepcis Magna), and to the south of Tunisia to places such as Gigthis.¹⁷ The island of Djerba, south of Tunisia, which was clearly part of the Numidian Kingdom of the Massyles after the fall of Carthage, was connected by a bridge to the mainland; it becomes another strategic terminus of long-distance land routes. Finally, according to some historiographical accounts, we found that the Garamantes forged links with Carthage and the Numidians. According to Lucan and Silius Italicus, contingents from the southern tribes, including the Garamantes, fought alongside the Numidians or Carthaginians at different times.¹⁸ Silius Italicus also relates the romantic story of Asbyte, daughter of a Garamantian chief, and Iarbas, one of the men of the Carthaginian general Hannibal.¹⁹ At the archaeological level we have some amphoras

and sigilli with Punic graffiti from the necropolis of Saniat Ben Howedi and a bilingual Libyco-Punic inscription found in Taglit.²⁰

The Mode of Contact between the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa

In reality, the mode of contact between Black Africa and the Mediterranean world in Antiquity was known only from the Greco-Roman world. Historiographic texts are difficult to interpret, especially at the ethnic level; archeology provides some fragmentary information, which necessarily goes back to Roman times.²¹ The ancient authors, including Ptolemy, classify Saharan populations under different ethnic names: Leuco-Ethiopians, Getulian, Melano-Getulian, Getulian-Daratites [...]. We also mention the “intermediate populations” of tribes like the *Nigritae* and *Pharusii* that ancient sources sometimes rank among Ethiopians.²² Strabo does not manage to set a limit between the settlement area of the Libyans and that of the Ethiopians.²³ However, it is known that different black or mixed populations occupied the eastern Sahara region, from Fezzan, from Kaouar and Chad to the west, to the Nile Valley to the east. The Ethiopians thus populated, at least partially, the south of Morocco on the banks of the Draa,²⁴ southern Algeria near the river Nigris, the current Wadi Djedi,²⁵ as well as the oases of southern Tunisia and Fezzan.²⁶

Maritime contact between North Africa and the Ethiopians took place mainly in the 4th century BC.²⁷ Trips were conducted by Carthaginian sailors such as Hannon²⁸ and especially by Greek navigators: the journey of Pseudo-Scylax,²⁹ the sailors of Nechao,³⁰ and the Greek sailor Euthymenes from Marseilles,³¹ all of whom skirted the Atlantic coast. According to a text attributed to Pseudo-Scylax, the neighbors of the Ethiopians settled in the west, who lived on the island of Cerné (on the southern coast of Morocco) bartered with the Phoenicians.³²

By land, the Classical sources record some expeditions across the Sahara. Athenian stories mention a Carthaginian named Magon who managed to cross the desert (the “land without water”) three times.³³ Herodotus recounts the journey of the five young Nasamons who crossed the desert.³⁴ According to the testimonies of Herodotus, the oases of Fezzan were a junction point between two caravan routes: one coming from the Nile via Augila, and the other coming from the Mediterranean coast.³⁵ Ptolemy also said that there were two routes from Lepcis Magna to Garama: one requiring 30 days of walking, and the other only 20 days.³⁶ Finally, with regard to the trans-Saharan contacts between North Africa and West Africa, these have been debated and discussed for a long time, because of the lack of archaeological evidence. The contact between North African regions and West Africa is clearly visible in Byzantine and Arab times thanks to the discovery of gold coins belonging to West African ores.³⁷ Archaeological excavations in the Kissi Sea region of northeastern Burkina Faso have revealed a large number

of foreign and imported materials in sepulchral contexts. These objects are potentially dated from the 1st century BC to the 9th century AD.³⁸ These archaeological discoveries highlight the extent of trade between North Africa and the Niger River in West Africa since the Roman period. It also seems that copper and lead objects were imported from Spain, the United Kingdom, Sardinia, and some parts of the eastern Mediterranean to Carthage and then incorporated into the trans-Saharan trade.³⁹

The Rise of Agrarian Production in Numidian Countries

The Numidian kings sought to develop agricultural production especially in the Tellian region, since the intensive farms ensured a considerable productivity of cereals.⁴⁰ One example of this is the city of Mactar, which seems to have had considerable agricultural development.⁴¹ Archaeological discoveries at various Numidian sites also reveal the presence of Punic amphorae from Carthaginian territories dated mainly from the end of the 3rd–early 2nd century BC.⁴² At the city of Althiburos, archaeological excavations carried out by a Tunisian-Spanish team has confirmed the presence of trade relations with the predominant Punic world as well the Italic area.⁴³ The study of ceramics testifies that trade with Carthage and the Punic centers of the Tunisian coast began around 700 BC and reached its peak towards the 3rd–2nd century BC. Punic amphorae become particularly frequent, and after the destruction of Carthage they come mainly from the region of the Sahel or Tripolitania. It is from the 4th century BC that Greek amphorae are the dominant category at Althiburos. As for the Italian amphorae: Dressel 1, in their different variants, and Lamboglia 2 amphorae are attested from the middle of the 2nd century BC.⁴⁴ Indeed, the east of the Numidian country seems to have had direct relations with the Punic metropolis. There is a large number of amphorae and a monetary evidence from Carthage to Cirta, Tiddis, Collo, and *Bulla Regia*.⁴⁵

However, according to V. Bridoux, most Numidian cities did not systematically maintain direct trade with Carthage. It was the fall of Carthage that allowed the various circuits from the Sahel, as well as those from the Greek and Italic world to take its place.⁴⁶ Commercial products from the Sahel are imported in amphorae (Ramon 7.5.1.1, 7.5.2.2, 7.6.1.1, 7.6.2.1) to Mactar, *Bulla Regia*, and Hippo Regius.⁴⁷ Andalusians, Iol, Siga, Gunugu and Igilgili, also have imported amphorae from Tripolitania (datable between the 2nd and 1st century BC) for transporting olive oil.⁴⁸ It is assumed that the possession of Emporia Little and Great Sirte enabled the kingdom of Massyle to inherit much of the maritime power of Carthage, and the Punic coastal cities became Numidian ports. Archaeological excavations undertaken on the island of Djerba revealed that imports of Italic productions, Greco-Italic amphorae, and Campanian Type A and B ceramics grew considerably from the 2nd century BC. The geopolitical changes taking place in the Tripolitan region at this time seem to change the import networks and revive the communications towards the Numidian country.⁴⁹ However, Carthaginian goods do not

seem to have had the same privileged status as those in the western parts of the country. It seems that trade is rather active with the Balearic Islands, namely with Ibiza.⁵⁰ Turning towards the Oran region west of As, ceramics of Iberian origin, such as urns, oinochoés, ampuritan gris and kalathos, are attested in the coastal installations: Andalusian, Portus Magnus, Hippo Regius, Siga, Chullu, Iol and Tipasa. These ceramics are datable between the 3rd and 1st century BC.⁵¹ According to Classical sources, there was a direct sea route linking the Numidian cities Siga and Iol to the Punic Cartagena “New Carthage”, located in the southeast of the Iberian Peninsula.⁵² Indeed, in the year 206, the king of the Masaessyles, Syphax, received Scipio and Hasdrubal the Carthaginian at his capital Siga; Scipio headed to Siga from Cartagena.⁵³ The monetary evidence found at Iol confirms that the city was open to an international trade network linking it to Carthage, the Moorish Kingdom, Ibiza, the Balearic Islands and southern Iberia.⁵⁴ Indeed, Numidian commercial networks go beyond its immediate or near neighbors. Bulla Regia reports the presence of amphorae attributed to the 2nd century BC from the Greek world, the Ionian area, and Pergamon.⁵⁵ Rhodian amphorae are also known in Cirta and Tiddis, which were used to transport Rhodian wine. They date from the last quarter of the 3rd century and from the first half of the 2nd century BC. Note also the presence of red figure Attic ceramics, such as askoi, skyphoi, and guttus, attested in Tipasa, Gouraya, and Andalusians, which are datable from the 5th–4th century BC. As for the Campanian ceramics, they are attested at Tipasa, Gouraya, to the Andalusians, and Collo, and are datable between 190–100 BC.

The important role at the commercial level played by the capital of the Massyles, Cirta, is shown by the presence of Greek merchants, as well as the Italian merchants known at the court of King Massinissa.⁵⁶ Epigraphic sources refer in particular to an Athenian merchant who boasts of being the friend of King Massinissa who also erected a statue in Delos.⁵⁷ The mention of various types of artisans is well documented by the inscriptions from a sanctuary at Cirta. This presence testifies to the nature of some craft activities that linked the markets of cities to the countryside.⁵⁸ Finally, Rome inherited a vast commercial network previously owned by the great Carthaginian Empire. Trade relations were developed between the Numidians and Rome. As early as the first half of the 2nd century BC, Italic products such as “black glaze” and Dressel I-type amphorae are documented in Numidia. In the year 123 BC, Rome managed to extend its hegemony over the Balearic Islands and Italian merchants took over the commercial circuit connecting these islands to the western and center areas of Numidia.⁵⁹ We can conclude that the Italian merchants played an important role in reinforcing trade and commercial circuits between Numidian cities and Rome. One example of this is the circuit that connected Rome to Chemtou for the export of marble in the 2nd century BC.⁶⁰ In the northwest of Tunisia, the city of Thabraca could have played a role in concentrating goods both for import and export. The study by Mr. Longerstay suggests that in Roman times, a “marble road” left Chemtou through the massive Khroumirie and led to Thabraca to supply the Roman world’s need for marble. It is likely that this city had other roads that served

the large inland cities such as *Bulla Regia*, *Sicca Veneria* and Carthage. It is likely that a draft of these pathways already existed in the 1st century BC, as we find the marble of Numidia in Rome at that time.⁶¹ However, it should be noted that other imported products, such as goldsmiths originating from the city of Carthage, are attested in different Numidian regions. For glass paste objects they seem to be imported from Ibiza. Two masks made of glass paste are known from Tipasa and Gouraya. In addition, three vials of glass come from Gouraya, only one at Collo, at Jijel, and at Tipasa, which is datable from the 2nd–1st century BC. The necropolis of Rachgoun has some copies of jewelry whose origin is in the Middle East. We note in particular the presence of silver pendants in a plastron form dated to the 7th–6th centuries BC known in Carthage and Tharros in Spain. Another type of pendant, the “discoïd” form, which has a suspender suspension, was very common in Carthage in the 7th–6th centuries BC. The ankh-shaped earrings encountered at Rachgoun are also attested in Carthage.⁶² At the burials of Lindlès in Andalusian we have bush-shaped pendants similar to those known in Carthage, Sardinia, Tharros, Motya, Palermo, Sicily, Cyprus and Rhodes, datable to the 6th century BC. The necropoleis of Gouraya and Tipasa contained a pendant in the shape of a bell adornment current in Carthage and Utica. Curly rings and rings kitten with their beetles are known from Rachgoun, Gouraya, Tipasa, and Jijel. This type of ring, with a fixed or moving kitten enshrining a beetle are a feature of the Phoenician-Punic origin of jewelry and they are widely attested in Carthage and Utica.⁶³ However, in some Numidian necropolises goldsmiths are almost absent. We have the example of the Thigibba Bure necropolis, which has produced a single silver ring and a few rings made of glass paste. On the other hand, the presence of jewels is a characteristic of certain Numidian sites and at the same time jewels, such as amulet cases, are absent from Carthage. This calls for the presence of local workshops and regional or local production.

Conclusion

The economic boom experienced by the Tellian, Sahelian and Syretic regions between the 2nd and 1st centuries BC contributed to the development of internal and external trade networks in the Numidian countries. After the annexation of a large part of the Carthaginian territory, which benefited the kingdom of Massyles, the Numidian kings sought to develop privileged relations with the regions of the eastern coasts, in this case at Byzacium and Syrtes. Numidian royalty inherited a network that traversed the entire Mediterranean basin, thus linking the port areas to the interior of the Numidian lands and even to the sub-Saharan regions.

The Numidian kingdoms were inserted into the trading networks of the Phoenician-Punic, Greek, and Roman worlds. These networks could be direct or via Carthage. The west and center of Numidia seem to have had a privileged trade relationship with Iberia and the Balearic Islands because of their proximity, the current, and appropriate winds.

Carthaginian products remained in circulation throughout the Mediterranean basin before coming under Roman control.⁶⁴

Finally, we can conclude that the policy undertaken by the Numidian kings for the purpose of agricultural and commercial development succeeded on the whole and contributed largely to the flourishing of the Numidian cities.⁶⁵

Notes

¹ Bisi 1983, 3–13; Bondi 2001, 369–400.

² Gsell 1920, 138–141.

³ Desanges 1975, 407.

⁴ Ayoub 1967a; Daniels 1970–1971, 261–285; Liverani 2000, 31; Id. 2005, 70–72.

⁵ Daniels 1968, 113–194; Mattingly 2014.

⁶ Mattingly 2001, 235–278.

⁷ Mattingly 2003; Id. 2007, Id. 2010.

⁸ Daniels 1989, 51.

⁹ Van Der Veen 1992, 7–39; Mattingly 2003, 235–278.

¹⁰ Wilson – Mattingly 2003.

¹¹ Camps 1968, 7–11.

¹² Mattingly et al. 2003, 346–362.

¹³ Marichal 1992, 110–114.

¹⁴ Mattingly et al. 1997, 13.

¹⁵ Ayoub 1967, 213–219; Edwards et al. 1999, 113–119; Di Lernia et al. 2001, 29–48; Castelli – Liverani 2005, 85–94.

¹⁶ Mattingly 2001, 54.

¹⁷ Crawley Quinn 2009.

¹⁸ Lucain, 4, 677–683; Silius Italicus, 2, 56–57; 2, 82–83; 3, 287–293; 5, 185; 9, 220; 15, 672.

¹⁹ Silius Italicus, 2, 82–83.

²⁰ Ruprechtsberger 1997, 36–74.

²¹ Desanges 1975, 391–414.

²² Ptolémée, Géogr. IV, 6, 5.

²³ Strabon, XVII, 3, 23.

²⁴ Strabon, II, 3, 4; Id., XVII, 3, 5.

²⁵ Ptolémée, IV, 6, 5, p. 743.

²⁶ Ptolémée, IV, 7, 10, p. 785; IV, 3, 6, p. 642; Snowden 1970, 364; Desanges 1975, 393.

²⁷ Gsell 1927, 293–304; Hunwick 1992, 5–38.

²⁸ Cintas 1954, 92, n°5; Germain 1957, 205–248.

²⁹ Peretti 1961, 5–43.

³⁰ Hérodote, IV, 42; Strabon, II, 3, 4–5.

³¹ Pedech 1955, 318–332.

- ³² G.G.M. p. 90; Zadi 1996, 73.
- ³³ Athénée, *Deipn.*, II, 44d.
- ³⁴ Hérodote, II, 32–33.
- ³⁵ Hérodote, IV, 183.
- ³⁶ Ptolémée, I, 10, 2.
- ³⁷ Gondonneau – Guerra 1999; Gondonneau 2000.
- ³⁸ Fenn et al. 2009.
- ³⁹ Magnavi et al. 2002.
- ⁴⁰ Strabon, *Géographie*, VIII, 833; Derudas 1990, 214.
- ⁴¹ Strabon, *Géographie*, VIII, 833; Derudas 1990, 214.
- ⁴² Bridoux 2014, 184–186.
- ⁴³ Kallala – Sanmarti 2008, 87.
- ⁴⁴ Kallala – Sanmarti 2008, 87 f.
- ⁴⁵ Bridoux 2014, 198.
- ⁴⁶ FGRH, III: 187, no7 ; IG, II 968; Strabon, 17.3.13; Diodore de Sicile, 34–35.5.
- ⁴⁷ Bourgeois 1982, 32–36 fig. 6; Morel 1968, 79 fig. 37; Broise – Thebert 1993, 196 f. fig. 202; Bridoux 2014, 186 fig. 10, 4.
- ⁴⁸ Gsell 1903, 31, fig. 18; Astruc 1937, 207. 210 pl. 1; Vuillemot 1965, 343. 350. 383. 385; Benseddik – Potter 1993, 293.
- ⁴⁹ Di Vita 1982, 516; Fentress et al. 2009, 75 f. 83.
- ⁵⁰ Bridoux 2014, 200.
- ⁵¹ Gsell 1903, 45, fig. 26 ; Vuillemot 1965, 187. 237 f. 254–256. 258. 334. 341. 359–361. 363 f. 366. 372. 418. 422–424 ; Morel 1962–1965, 124 f.; Vuillemot 1971, 69–71.
- ⁵² Strabon 3.4.2; Pline, *HN*, 3, 5.19.
- ⁵³ Tite-Live, *Histoire Romaine*, 28, 17.
- ⁵⁴ Alexandropoulos 2000, 326.
- ⁵⁵ Broise – Thebert 1993, 145 f. 192. 195 fig. 170.
- ⁵⁶ Gauthier 1988, 61–69.
- ⁵⁷ IG XI, 1116, 1115; Baslez 1981.
- ⁵⁸ Berthier – Charlier 1955.
- ⁵⁹ Bridoux 2014, 197.
- ⁶⁰ Gaggiotti 1988, 201–204.
- ⁶¹ Longerstay 1987–1989, 146.
- ⁶² Alquier 1930, 14.
- ⁶³ Quillard 1973, 108.
- ⁶⁴ Bridoux 2006a; Id., 2014.
- ⁶⁵ Mattingly 1995, 138.

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