



*Neptunus Africanus: a Note**

Attilio MASTINO

Università degli Studi di Sassari, Italia.

mail: mastino@uniss.it

We aim to summarise the complex phenomenon of the cult of Neptune in North Africa, by way of about hundred inscriptions and dozens of mosaics, with reference to the latest developments (that have recently been published in “Epigraphica”)¹ in relation to the *fons Thignicensis* and the work undertaken for the gathering of the spring waters of *Thignica* carried out by the knight *Publius Valerius Victor Numisianus Sallustianus*, of the Papiria tribe, by his father *Valerius Tertullianus* and mother *Caecilia Faustina* for the “Temple of the Waters” in Aïn Tounga in Tunisia, in the period of Gallienus and Salonina. In reality, this is a monument dominated by the *aedes [dei Nept]uni*, which has been conceptually compared to the far more famous “Temple of the Waters of Zaghouan”, which was the origin of the Hadrian-era Carthage aqueduct; the dedication *Neptuno Augusto sacrum* links it closely to the Imperial cult, also by way of the use of the *summae honorariae* of the three *flamines perpetui*². This is an area that has been affected by the decrees of *lex Hadriana de rudibus agris* studied by Hernán Gonzáles Bordas of the Università of Alcalá de Henares in the text found at Henchir Hnich (Krib

* Cfr. A. Mastino, *Neptunus Augustus* and the *fons Thignicensis*: The works commissioned by the knight *P. Valerius Victor Numisianus Sallustianus*, of the Papiria tribe, by his father and his mother for the Temple of the Waters of Aïn Tounga in Tunisia, *24° Annual Meeting of the EAA in Barcelona 2018 (8 settembre 2018)*, Session: *Lived Ancient Religion in North Africa*. I would like to thank my friend Samir Aounallah for the precious collaboration.

¹ P. Ruggeri, *La dedica dell'aedes Neptuni nel municipio di Thignica: nuova edizione*, in Corda et al. (2018), 338-342; *Il tempio di Nettuno a Thignica e la colonizzazione di Thugga e Thubursicum Bure sotto Gallieno*, presentation scheduled in “L’Africa Romana”, XXI Convegno Internazionale di studi, «L’epigrafia del Nord Africa: Novità, riletture, nuove sintesi», Tunis 6-9 december 2018 by S. Ganga, P. Ruggeri University of Sassari); in the same conference: *Le nuove scoperte epigrafiche a Thignica, Aïn Tounga* by S. Aounallah (INP-Tunis), A. M. Corda (University of Cagliari), A. Ibba and A. Teatini (University of Sassari).

² Arnaldi (2010), 1664 n. 834.



Fig. 1. The *aedes Neptuni* at *Thignica* (ph. Salvatore Ganga).

region, Tunisia)³. It is precisely to Hadrian that the plan of the great Carthaginian aqueduct is to be attributed. This impressive work channelled water from Zaghouan to the cisterns of El Malga and to the baths inaugurated in the first year of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus⁴: El-Bekri in c. 1068 knew of the origin of the aqueduct in the mountains of Zaghouan (56 km as the crow flies) and was able to state that the work took forty years, hence starting from the era of Hadrian⁵. Arriving in a moment of great drought in Africa, it was Hadrian, in 128 AD, who planned the great aqueduct that was to give Carthage its new name: *Hadrianopolis*⁶. The aqueduct was built above all to supply the great seaside baths, commonly known as “*Thermes d’Antonin*”, of which the commemorative plaque remains.

The Temple of Neptune in *Thignica* is on the eastern foot of the hill of Aïn Tounga, a few hundred metres from the Sanctuary of Saturn, on the south-western border of the *municipium* (fig. 1): the topographic appearance is fundamental for our theme, that will lead us to that part of the territory of Carthage that lies beyond the *Fossa Regia*. The *aedes dei Neptuni* was located at the natural springs of the *aqua Thignicensis* (from which, according to Beschouch, derives the modern Aïn Tounga)⁷ and was composed of a square cell with a barrel-vault roof, which was partially cut from the rock. It also featured a columned gallery on three sides, with a niche in the centre to house a statue and pools to collect the spring water. In the background there is ever the theme of the relationship of inland Africa with the cult of Neptune called *undarum*

³ *Henchir Hnich (région du Krib, Tunisie), la découverte de la lex Hadriana de agris rudibus et trois autres inscriptions*, presentation scheduled in *L’Africa Romana*, XXI Convegno Internazionale di studi, «L’epigrafia del Nord Africa: Novità, riletture, nuove sintesi», Tunis 6-9 december 2018 by H. Gonzáles Bordas (University of Alcalá de Henares) and A. Chérif (INP – Tunis).

⁴ Aounallah, Mastino, Ganga, (2018 in press).

⁵ De Slane (1965) [ed.], 91.

⁶ *HA, Hadr.* 20, 4-5.

⁷ *AE* 2010, 1807.

dominus Nereidumque pater at Dougga⁸, with springs, spas, aqueducts and the contemporary veneration of the Nymphs, in association with, or even with the assimilation of other *Numina*. In our case, particular attention must be paid to the connections between Neptune and the imperial cult, the euergetic nature of some of the dedications, the adoption of the cult for the God of Waters by the supreme magistrates of the colonies and municipia, as well as by priests connected with the municipium's aristocracy and by members of the army.

Partially excavated fifteen years ago by Habib Ben Hassen of the *Agence de Mise en Valeur du Patrimoine et de Promotion Culturelle de la Tunisie*, the complex has been summarily published in the volume *Thignica (Ain Tounga), son histoire et ses monuments*, with numerous inaccuracies in terms of the epigraphic text⁹. The research carried out in 2017 and over these last few weeks, coordinated by Samir Aounallah and myself (along with Lamia Abid, Ali Cherif, Maria Bastiana Cocco, Antonio M. Corda, Claudio Farre, Piergiorgio Floris, Antonio Ibba, Salvatore Ganga, Alberto Gavini, Paola Ruggeri, Alessandro Teatini), has led to the revision of the large dedication inscription and the importance of the monument, that presents only slight similarities with the Temple of the Waters of Zaghuan at the origins of the Aqueduct of Carthage in the era of Antoninus Pius, but with a plan that is wholly conditioned by the profile of the nearby hill. The total measurements are about 40 x 20m, with a large square temple that was not envisaged in the original project (*[ampli]ata pecunia aedem [dei Nept]uni*): the cell was barrel-vaulted, and not perfectly in line with the plan of the large monument. It was cut out of the rock of the hill and was 5.2m (18 Roman feet) wide, with a semi-circular niche at the bottom. Just downhill from this was the wide triple columned gallery, that was 3.4 m (12 Roman feet) wide, and closed by an *opus incertum* wall, with remains of canalisation. The pavement was partially restored in the late period, and there was another niche in the sub-structure of the portico that was to house a female statue, which according to H. Ben Hassen, was a mermaid (fig. 2). The intercolumniation is 2.2m, apparently with a total of 12 columns at the front, and five in the side arms. The approximate height was 5m including capitals. The frieze and remains of the capitals are currently being studied and the Eastern facade of the monument has not been excavated. Several rectangular basins have survived for the gathering and filtering of the waters. The central basin was 28.5 m (10 feet) x 10m (3.5 feet) (fig. 3, 4). The activity of the dedicator was that of gathering the water from the springs on the side of the hill, like *Lambaesis: collectis fontibus et / [scatu]riginibus aedem Neptuni / [a] solo fecit*¹⁰.

The large inscription that was recently studied in "Epigraphica"¹¹ was inscribed on three large blocks of damaged limestone, with a width of 2.45 (8 feet), and a height of 49 cm (1.5 feet). The dedication to *Neptuno Augusto* was carried out in 265 AD on the occasion of the

⁸ CIL VIII 26491 = 26492 = *ILTun* 1398 = *CLE* 2036 = Dougga 133.

⁹ Ben Hassen (2006), 76-90; *AE* 2006, 1762.

¹⁰ CIL VIII 2653 = Saastamoinen (2010), 157.

¹¹ Ben Hassen (2006), 85 = *AE* 2006, 1762 = *AE* 2007, 1680 = *AE* 2010, 1807. See P. Ruggeri, La dedica dell'*aedes Neptuni*, in Corda et al. (2018), 338-342: *Neptuno Augusto sacrum / pro salute [[Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) P(ubli) Licini Gallieni Pii Fel(icis) Aug(usti) p(ontificis) m(aximi), Dacici max(imi) Germ[an]ici max(imi), Persici max(imi) trib(unicia) pot(estate) XIII]] / [[Imp(eratoris) XII co(n)s(ulis) VI p(atris) p(atriciae) proco(n)s(ulis) et Corneliae Saloninae Aug(ustae) coniugis Aug(usti) n(ostri) totiusque domus divinae eorum]] (vacat) / P(ublius) Valerius L(uci) fil(ius) Pap(iria) Victor Numisianus Sallustianus eq(ues) R(omanus) aedilic(ius) Iiviral(icius) XIpr(imus) fl(amen) perp(etuus) opus fontis [Thignicensis] quod Valerius Tertullianus pater eius / 5 ob summam flam(onii) perpetui sui itemq(ue) Caeciliae Faustinae matris suae flaminicae p(erpetuae) ex HS LIII mil(ibus) n(ummum) facturum se promi[serat supra legitima]m taxationem podium tantummodo eiu[s] / extruxerat quodq(ue) idem Numisianus ob honorem flamonii sui perp(etui) ex HS XXX mil(ibus) n(ummum) experitu[r]um se pollicitus [erat, ampli]ata pecunia aedem [dei Nept]uni VM.*

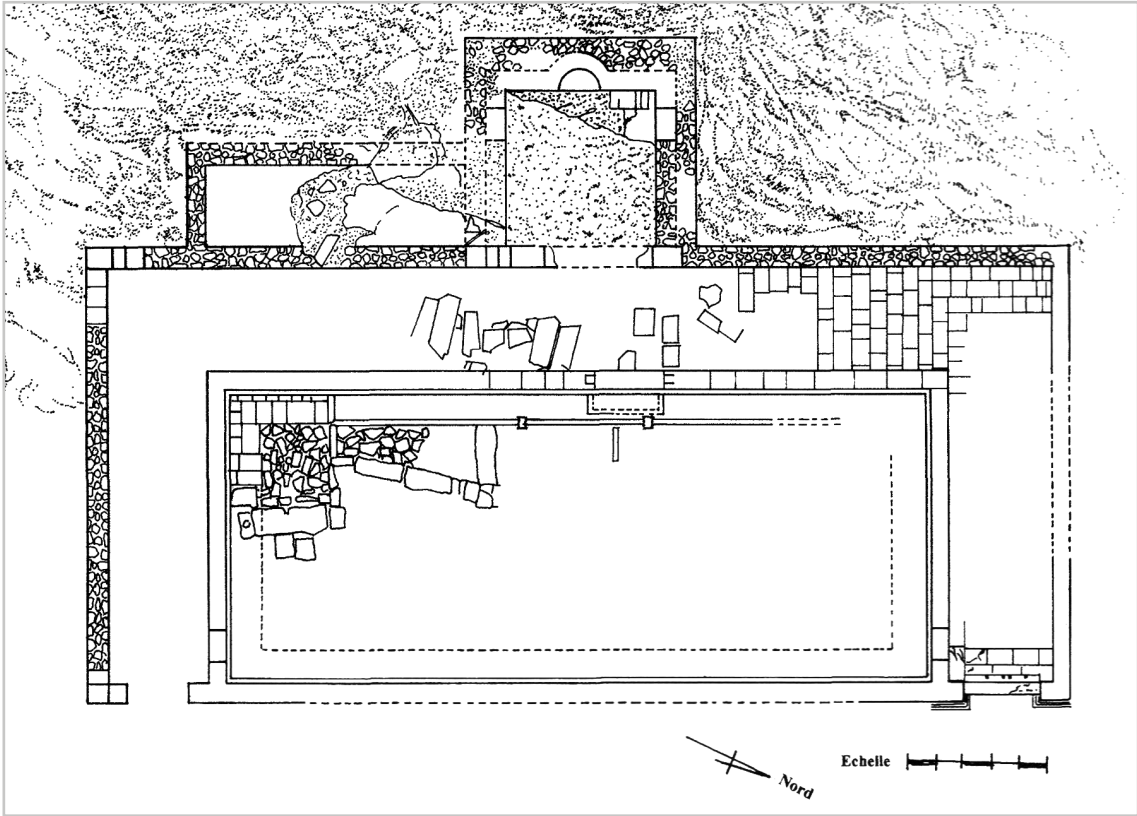


Fig. 2. *Thignica*, Temple of waters; Ben Hassen (2006), 83, fig. 46.



Fig. 3. *Fons Thignicensis* and the *aedes dei Neptuni* (ph. P. Ruggeri).



Fig. 4. *Fons Thignicensis* and the *aedes dei Neptuni* (ph. P. Ruggeri).

works at *fons Thignicensis pro salute* of Gallienus in his 13th *potestas tribunicia* and Cornelia Salonina. A very important testimony to the municipium's euergetism, the document directly links the cult of Neptune the protector of springs to the Imperial cult in the ancient territory of the colony of Carthage. The person making the dedication, an important figure of the aristocracy of the municipium founded by Septimius Severus, was the knight *P. Valerius Victor Numisianus Sallustianus fl(amen) perp(etuus)*, who used the *summae honorariae flamonii sui* (more than 54,000 sestertii) saved by his father *flamen Valerius Tertullianus* and mother *Cecilia Faustina fl(laminica) p(erpetua)*, for a change to the original project and a further *ampliatio pecuniae* with respect to the 30,000 sestertii that he had originally promised, with the construction of the temple to the god Neptune behind the gallery, slightly higher than the pools. The interpretation provided by H. Ben Hassen is erroneous from many points of view, as he imagined a *podium aeneum* and did not read *aedes [dei Nept]uni*, which is clear in the 3D reproduction and in the facsimile we now avail of (fig. 5, 6, 7).

Sadok Ben Baaziz in volume XIV (1996) of "Africa" has studied other Temples of Neptune in Africa, and almost all are from the 2nd century¹²: the closest analogies are with *Pheradi Maius*, with its cell, basins and porticos; *Thubursicu Numidarum*, and Aïn Drin at *Lambaesis*¹³. However, epigraphy testifies to the presence of at least 13 temples, in: *Leptis Magna*, *Thugga*

¹² Ben Baaziz (1996), 103-111.

¹³ See also Ben Baaziz (1985), 425-436.



Fig. 5. The big inscription of the *aedes dei Neptuni* at *Thignica* (ph. S. Ganga).

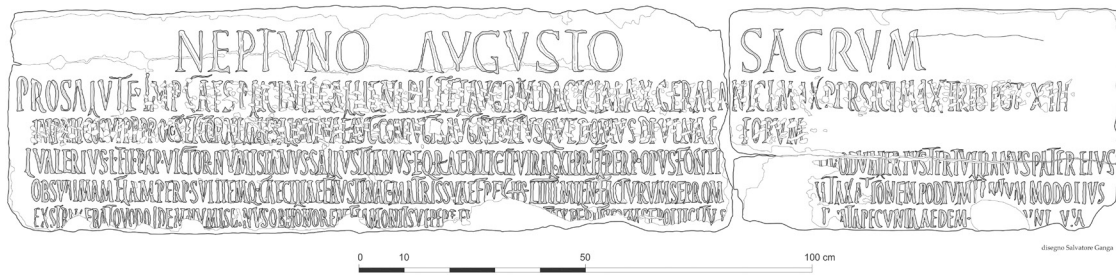


Fig. 6. *Saturnus Augustus* at *Thignica* (Ain Tounga). Inscription (draw. S. Ganga).



Fig. 7. *Thignica*, Salvatore Ganga and Tarek Hammami (ph. A. Mastino).



Fig. 8. *CIL VIII 26491-26492 = ILTun, 1398 = CLE 2036 = Dougga 133, Thugga* (ph. L. Maurin).

(fig. 8, 9), *Mactaris*¹⁴, *Aquae Thibilitanae*, Sidi el Bahloul, *Calama*, Carthage, *Zama Minor*, *Chullu*, *Thamugadi*, Khemissa¹⁵, and Aïn el Aouad on the Aurès¹⁶. Furthermore, there are more than 15 statues of Neptune, generally in upright position. This is a god that in reality acted as a synthesis of “plusieurs divinités ou génies préromains locaux des sources”.

In the reuse an epigraphic fragment was found that testified to successive euergetic interventions by the corporation of the *fullones*¹⁷.

Large lists of epigraphic references to the cult of Neptune in Africa have been published¹⁸: we know of *sacerdotes*, *flamines*, *cultores*, *templa*, *aedes*, *aediculae*, *arae*, *curiae*, for Neptune Augustus, *redux Augustus*, *dominus et deus*, in a Greek dedication by Thapsus (Ras Dimas, in Tunisia) *karpodôtes*, in the sense of *karpofôros* and *Frugifer*, merged with the *genius* of the nearby *Colonia Concordia Ulpia Traiana Frugifera Hadrumetina*¹⁹. It is the same god *Frugifer* on the coins of the Emperor from Hadrumetum, Clodius Albinus, dedicated *Saeculo Frugifero*, that connect Neptune to the agricultural cult and to the fertility of the land. Neptune is repre-

¹⁴ Picard (1974), 9-33.

¹⁵ Herrmann *et al.* (2012), 1337-1342.

¹⁶ *AE* 1976, 715, cfr. Morizot (1974-1975), 73-75.

¹⁷ *AE* 2006, 1763.

¹⁸ Petitmengin (1967), 196-205.

¹⁹ *AE* 1987, 1016; Beschaouch (1985), 419-424



Fig. 9. Neptune ad Dougga (A. Mastino).

sented in the bas-reliefs with a trident and a stick, around which is wrapped a snake, as for Aesculapius, with reference to the therapeutic value of the spa waters: so at Aïn el Hamedna, close to Hr. Bou Saadoun, south of *Althiburos*: “le serpent est enroulé autour d’un baton que tient le dieu Neptune represente nu debout de face”; the text of the votive altar is: *Neptuno Aug(usto) s(acrum) L(ucius) Apronius Processus mag(ister) suo(!) i(ussu) d(ei) p(ecunia) p(osuit)* (fig. 10)²⁰. In reality one could also think of the myth of the serpent Python, protecting the escape of Leto the mother of Apollo and Artemis. Of great interest is the attribute of *Neptunus cremens*, from the Imperial *Latifundia* of the region of Thala, at Ain Hedia (Henchir El Roumia), which refers to the patronage of the god over vegetation: *deus Crem[e]nti deo / Ne[ptun]o. Aedem / su[is su]m(p)tibus / fe[ceru]nt instan[te], [---Tè]rtio (?), mag(istro)*, in a dedication recently presented by Ridha Kaabia²¹. This underlines the abilities of the god with reference to the patronage of the products of the land. At Thapsus, instead, the god was associated with grasslands without trees, and at Thala with vegetation in general, with an extension of the attribute *Frugifer*, without the chthonic characteristics of the cult of Ceres or Saturn, but with a direct link to water: “Neptune est donc le patron de la croissance et de la poussée de la végétation”. This is an unique case in the epicleses of the god, who “s’introduit dans la logique du rapport entre l’eau douce, en l’occurrence l’eau de source, comme l’indique le lieu de la découverte, et l’activité agricole. C’est donc par l’irrigation que Neptune dispose d’un pouvoir fécondant toute espèce végétale et participant à la floraison des produits de la terre. Il rejoint dans ce contexte Jupiter et Caelestis qui procurent de la pluie”²².

²⁰ *AE* 1987, 1017, Aloui Naddari (2008), 947 fig. 5.

²¹ Kaabia (2008), 295 n. 25.

²² Kaabia (2008), 295; see Cadotte (2007), 307-310.



Fig. 10. Ain el-Hamedna, Hr. Bou Saadoun, Votive altar *Neptuno Aug(usto) s(acrum) L(ucius) Apronius Processus mag(ister) suo(!) i(ussu) d(ei) p(ecunia) p(osuit)*; AE 1987, 1017.

Neptune, confused with Poseidon, was associated with, or even assimilated with, Baal Hammon, Saturn, Triton, Poseidon, *Frugifer*, agricultural Mars, Serapis (for example at Carthage), Silvanus, Apollo (for example at Calama), Liber Pater, Mercury (in common with the Caduceus), Vulcan, Concordia as at Dougga, Ceres with a torch, and other *Numina*. He is often flanked by the Sphinxes, the Nymphs, the Sirens, the *Nereides*, the Tritons and the *Genius loci* as at Timgad: in colonies, *municipia*, *pagi*²³, *civitates*, with more than 50 localities: *Leptis Magna*, *Sabratha*, *Thysdrus*, *Thapsus*, *Capsa*, *Thala*, *Althiburos*, Tleta-Djouanna, *Sufetula*, *Saltus Massipianus*, *Mactaris*, *Pheradi Maius*, *Zama*, Ksar Mdoudja, *Tituli*, *Theveste*²⁴, Henchir Bou Chekifa, *Masculula*, *Thamugadi*, *Calceus Herculis*, *Lambaesis*, *Zarai*, *Madauros*, *Hippo Regius*, *Calama*, *Aquae Thibilitanae*, *Sigus*, *Cirta*, *Chullu*, *Cuicul*; as well as *Thelepte*, *Verrona*, *Ammaedara*, *Rusicade*, *Mopthi*, *Sitifis*, *Saldae*. This was mainly in the inland areas of the African provinces, that were almost desert, far from the coast, but in the vicinity of springs, oases or rivers. The geographical extension highlights the particular importance that the cult of Neptune had in the peripheral (inland) territory of the colony of Carthage, in particular beyond the *Fossa Regia*. The most important piece of evidence is precisely this temple close to the spring of the municipium of *Thignica* in the era of Gallienus, the emperor who promoted the nearby towns of *Thubursicum Bure* and *Thugga* to the status of colony. More specifically, at Dougga the *ex forma* promotion, hence with a new cadastral delimitation (the arrival of new settlers was improbable) is dated to between 261 and 265, as has recently been demonstrated by Louis Maurin and Samir Aounallah²⁵, who have reconstructed dedication carried out [*pro salute*] of Gallienus in the 13th *potestas tribunicia* and of Salonina (names we believe were

²³ See the *page(n)ses* of Thigillava in Numidia (*ILAlg.* II,3 7611).

²⁴ Benseddik (2012), 23-35.

²⁵ Maurin, Aounallah (2017), 583-611.

erased following the *damnatio memoriae*), by a *cur(ator) reipubl(icae)*, to exalt the imperial *indulgentia*, [ob] *benivolentiam dignationis ac liberalita[tem] Imp(eratoris) Aug(usti) col(oniam) deducen[ti]s ex forma*. The theme and the reasons for the African deductions (institutional promotions) following Caracalla's *de civitate* edict have already been discussed by Antonio Ibba and Michel Christol, starting from the dedication of the Arch of *Uchi Maius* under Severus Alexander: *sub eius nomine auspicioqu[e] deducta*²⁶. The association of the emperors with Neptune August is to be found in at Dougga in at least two of the four dedications on record, some of which certainly came from the fourth chapel of Sanctuary B, which was attributed to Neptune, perhaps in the era of Hadrian²⁷, where reference is made to the [temp] *la Concordiae Frugiferi Liberi Patris Neptuni ... cum marmoribus et statu[s] et ornamentis*, all of which are divinities of fertility particularly appreciated in Byzacena, but less so in Zeugitana. These divinities are invoked by [M(arcus) Gabiniu]s Quir(in) Bassus flam(en) Aug(usti) perp(etuus) patron[us pagi et civitatis] and by [A(ulus) Gabinius Arn(ensi) Datus patronus pagi et civitatis flamen(?)] divi Titi aedilis augur c(oloniae) I(uliae) K(arthaginis)²⁸.

Of similar interest is another inscription from Dougga, more specifically from Caracalla's Temple of Victory, which is still connected with the organisation of the imperial cult of *Neptuno / Aug(usto)*²⁹. This association with the imperial cult in the era of Severus is also present at *Thubursicum Bure*, the modern-day Theboursouk, later one of Gallienus' colonies, close to a rich spring: *Neptuno Aug(usto) sac(rum) / pro salute Imp(eratorum) Caesarum L(uci) S[ep]timi S[everi]---*³⁰. Three epigraphic dedications to Neptune come from Carthage, the capital of Africa Proconsularis, the first of which appears to be of a particularly early date, as it dates to the reign of Augustus, who ordered its placement in his last years: [N]eptun[o] / [Imp(erator) C]aesar divi [f]ilius Aug(ustus) / [po]nt[ifex] maxim[us] / trib[unicia] pot[estate] / [de st]ipe quam p[ro]pulo p[ro]stulante] / f[er]i i[ussit] K[alendis] Ia[n]uariis³¹. Neptune is associated with Serapis once: *Sarapidi / Neptuno / Aug(usto) sac(rum) / P[ubli] Aurelii / Pasinici / cum suis / s[ua] p[ro]p[er]unia f[ecit] d[ecreto] d[ecurionum]*³². The later document was Christian, a *carmen*³³. A dedication to *Vulcanus, Ne[ptunus]*³⁴ comes from Tunisi.

Also of great significance is the dedication to *Neptuno Aug(usto)* of *Pagus Suttuensis* at *Uchi Maius*, placed close to the source of the supply for the local aqueduct ("Dans la source dite Aïn-Zroug, au dessus de l'Henchir ech-Chelt, qui est alimentée par ses eaux") : *Neptuno / Aug(usto) / sac(rum)*³⁵.

²⁶ UM 2 44; A. Ibba in Ibba, Mastino, Zucca (2012); Christol (2004), 13-42.

²⁷ Mabrouk (2015), 478-482; M(aurin) (2016), 517.

²⁸ The others inscriptions of Dougga: *CIL VIII, 26491 = 26492 = ILTun 1398 = CLE 2036 = Dougga 133 = ILS 3293 (p. 181) = EDCS-25601198: Neptuno Aug(usto) sac(rum) / C(aius) H[el]vius Suavis et Calsia Faustina coniunx eius / votum solverunt / Helvius haec voto suscepit munera divi / constituique larem sedibus in patr[i]s / haec eadem coniunx mecum Faustina loca[vit] / undarum domino Nereidumque patri* (separated inscriptions, Cadotte (2007) 313); *AE 1997, 1662 e EDCS 160 (Manfred Clauss); EDCS-ID: EDCS-51800002: Neptuno Aug(usto) sac(rum) / [---]*.

²⁹ *AE 1997, 1662 = Dougga, 60 = AE 2005, 1686. Kallala (1997), 169.*

³⁰ *CIL VIII 1425 (p. 1473).*

³¹ Saastamoinen (2010), 15 = *AE 1951, 71.*

³² *CIL VIII 1002 = 12462 = ILTun 876 = ILS 4390 = SIRIS 770 = RICIS 2, 703/102.*

³³ *EChrAfr 3, 168 = EDCS-14300135: Quam melior Neptune tuo sors ista tridente est / post pelagus dulces hic tibi dantur aquae.*

³⁴ *CIL VIII 25362, ILPBardo 432.*

³⁵ *CIL VIII, 26417 = ILTun 1374; A. Gavini, A. Mastino, R. Zucca, Novae inscriptiones latinae urbium Numidiae orientalis, L'Africa Romana XIX, Roma 2012, 481-484.*

It is hence precisely in the territory of Carthage that emerge the characteristics of that which Alain Cadotte in 2002 (in Phoenix) and in 2007 in the volume on *La romanisation des dieux*³⁶ called the *Neptune Africain* (fig. 11): product of the Roman *interpretatio* of a god that had deep Libyan roots documented by contact with the Libyan water genius. But these roots were also Punic, as is documented by numerous geographical³⁷, literary and epigraphic sources (we may note those that were bilingual, Latin-Punic in Leptis Magna)³⁸, that refer to the Phoenician god *‘El qōnē ‘areš*, in the sense of “owner of the land”, perhaps a Poseidon that was originally Libyan³⁹. However, we cannot not imagine a close local relationship with the great sanctuary of Saturn-Baal Hammon, which has yielded almost 300 steles (that will be described in an upcoming publication of ours) (fig. 12), with constant confusion with the Libyan Poseidon, who was already associated by Herotodus (IV 180 and 188) with Lake Triton (Chott el Djerid), behind the mythical Syrtes. From Byzacena and in particular from the territory of *Ammaedara* (Tleta-Djouama) comes the dedication *Neptuno Saturno sacrum* following the fulfilment of a vow. This dedication rightly would lead us to think of outright assimilation⁴⁰. Along similar lines is the dedication of *Thala* (Aïn Maja), that carries out *dom(ino) et deo Neptuno et dis deabus* etc., referring to the African *dominus* par excellence, Saturn, the heir of the Phoenician/Punic Baal Hammon⁴¹. Besides Byzacena, Jules Toutain already underlined the importance of Neptune, the god of running water and of springs in the areas far from the coast⁴²: we may think of the springs of the Temple of *Lambaesis*, of the nymphs of *Pheradi Maius*⁴³ and of Ksar Mduja, *civitas A[---]*⁴⁴, of the pool of *Tituli*⁴⁵, at the baths of Aïn el Hmadna⁴⁶ and *Sitifis*⁴⁷; at the springs at *Pagus Suttuensis*, Hr Bou Chelifa, *Zarai*, *Madauros*, *Thubursicu Bure*, and *Cirta*. Hence, according to Cadotte “ces différents indices montrent bien la nature différente de ce Neptune, dont la popularité dépassait de beaucoup celle du Neptune marin”⁴⁸; and this was the case, even if the Neptune of Dougga, father of the Nereids, was also *undarum dominus* (*Dougga* 133), the lord of the waves and of the rough sea. According to Cadotte, this is an aspect which is not well known in the Italic religion, and almost completely absent in the rest of the Empire, one that was enriched in Africa by way of its blending with more ancient local traditions linked to the cult of the genius that protected the springs.

Yet in numerous African mosaics, many of which are well known, one notes the prevalence of a form of classicism more closely linked to Greek mythology, that of Neptune as God of the Sea, associated in triumph with Amphitrite and *Cirta* (fig. 13)⁴⁹, with the Nymphs, the

³⁶ Cadotte (2002), 330-347 ; Cadotte (2007), 307-310.

³⁷ That the cult of Neptune the god of the sea was particularly developed in the Carthage of the 2nd century BC is witnessed by the use of the Carthaginian priests to go to offer sacrifices on the islands called *Arae Neptuniae* south of Carales (*ibi Afri et Romani foedus inierunt et fines imperii sui illic esse voluerunt*, Serv., ad *Aen.* 1, 108; Plin. NH 5, 7, 42), see Mastino (1990), 15-48; Mastino (2017), 15-67.

³⁸ *IRTrip* 306.

³⁹ *IpunTrip*. 18. On the Semitic god ‘l qn ‘rš as “El creator of the earth” see Ribichini (2004), 1557-1564.

⁴⁰ *AE* 1900, 124. *Contra*: Le Glay (1966), 237.

⁴¹ *CIL* VIII 23343.

⁴² Toutain (1905), 378; Cadotte (2007), 319-321; Hamdoune (2010), 245-257.

⁴³ *ILTun*. 246.

⁴⁴ *CIL* VIII 23653.

⁴⁵ *ILTun* 99.

⁴⁶ *AE* 1987, 1017.

⁴⁷ *CIL* VIII 10936.

⁴⁸ Cadotte (2007), 320.

⁴⁹ Baratte (1978): Neira Jiménez (2008), 2133.

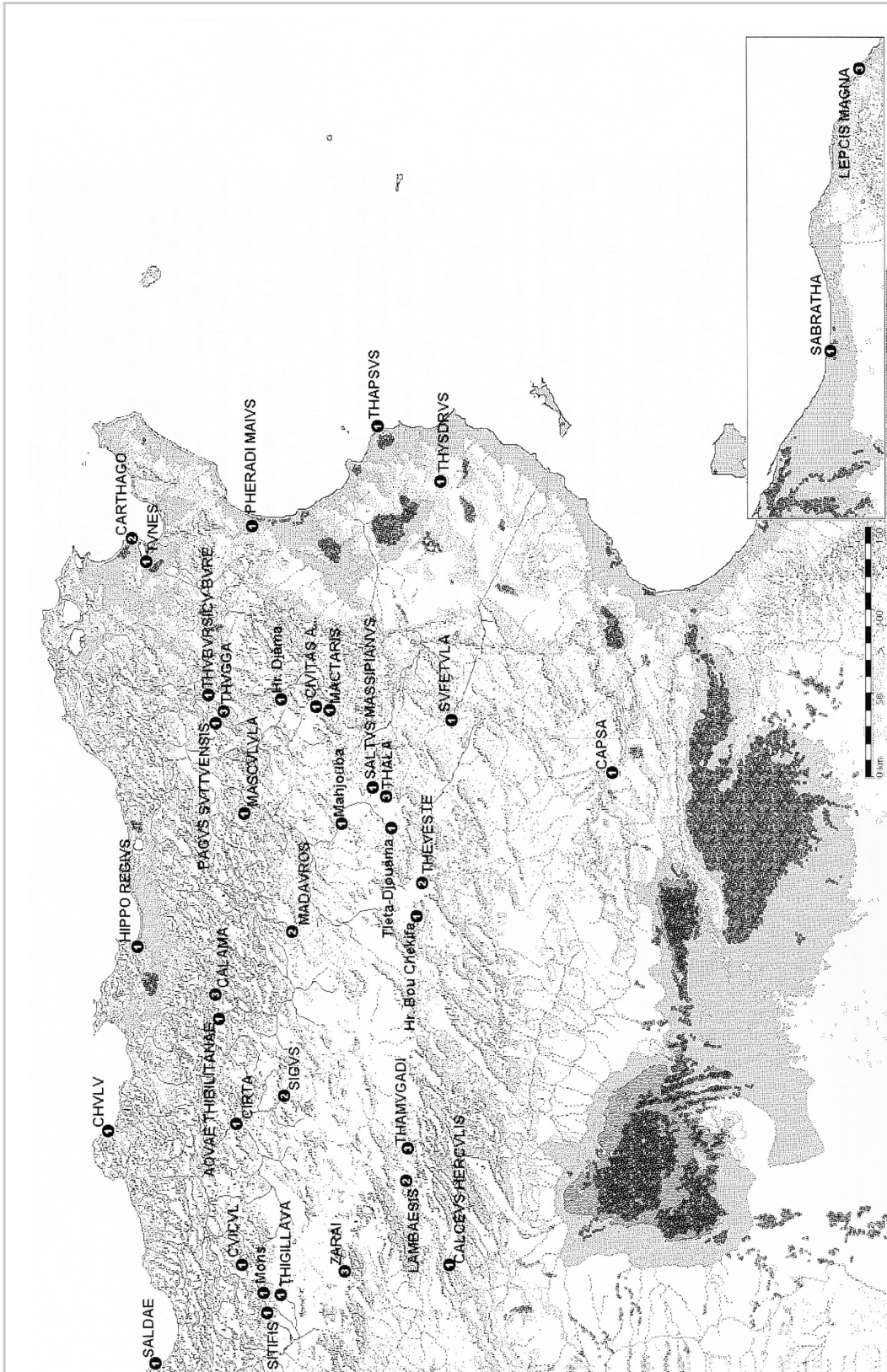


Fig. 1.1. The cult of Neprune in Africa; Cadotte (2007), 308-309, carte 14.



Fig. 12: *CIL VIII*, 14993; ph. INP Tunis-AMVPPC.

Tritons, but also with the Seasons, as has been observed by such a great scholar as the sorely missed José Maria Blázquez Martínez⁵⁰. The most famous cases are that of the House of Neptune's Triumph in *Acholla* in the third quarter of the 2nd c.⁵¹ and that of La Chebba (to the south of *Hadrumentum*), which portrays Neptune with a head surrounded by rays, flanked by Triton and Nereid, in the mid-2nd c. AD, ever with Herodotus' remembrance of Lake Triton⁵². Hence, along the coasts, but also in the inland areas of the African provinces, the iconography is more inclined towards the classic model of a marine Neptune, as for example in the Villa of the *Laberii* and in the villa of the composite capitals at *Uthina* (end of the 2nd c. AD), with Nereids, sea monsters or dolphins⁵³. In the Oued Blibane villa at *Hadrumentum* at the end of the 2nd c. (fig. 14) and at the *Sorothus* villa, Neptune appears with three sirens,

⁵⁰ See Blázquez Martínez (2015), 419, with punctual references to the work of Dunbabin (1978).

⁵¹ Gozlan (1992); Redaelli (2012); Gozlan (1974), 59, 1974, 99-111, figs. 32-47, pl. III; Gozlan (1990), 85, fig. 80.

⁵² Blanchard Lemee, Ennaifer, Slim (1995), 172 fig. 121.

⁵³ Fantar (1968), 105-112.



Fig. 13. Constantine, Triomphe of Neptune and Amphitrites, *L'Africa Romana* XVII, 2132. Ph. M. Luz Neira Jiménez.

tritons and Nereids⁵⁴. Other examples come from the Villa of Neptune at *Thuburbo Maius* (end of the 3rd c.), from *Thamugadi* (second half of the 3rd c.) and from *Hippo Regius*⁵⁵. Neptune is often presented as triumphant on a chariot drawn by horses, as in Sousse. The documentation that provides the greatest depth and is of most interest is hence that of the inscriptions and the bas-reliefs that express different subtleties and represent the multi-faced nature of a god that the Africans venerated above all for his connection with the capacity to protect the springs, to irrigate the fields and make them fertile, and to supply the spa baths. Precisely at Dougga, the inscription that commemorates the *[a]quam con[ductam e fonte M]occol[itano]* in the era of Commodus, according to Azedine Beschaouch, had an extraordinary response that continues to the present day, with the folk traditions of the mysterious festival of Lella Moccola⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ Neira Jiménez (2012).

⁵⁵ Boulinguez, Napoli (2008), 707-732.

⁵⁶ *CIL* VIII 1480 = 26534 = *ILTun* 1408 = Dougga 36 = Saastamoinen (2010), 288 = *AE* 2000, 1725 = 1726. A. Beschaouch, CRAI, 2000, 1173-1181.



Fig. 14. Neptune standing on a chariot pulled by two sea horses, Archaeological Museum, Sousse [ph. Asram, via Wikimedia Commons].

The project aims to summarize the variegated practices of the cult of Neptune in North Africa attested by around one hundred inscriptions and mosaics. The recent study of the *fons Thignicensis* demonstrates the development of the imperial cult during the reign of Gallienus, who bestowed the neighboring centers of *Thubursicum Bure* and *Thugga* with the status of colonies *ex forma*. The temple of the god Neptune of *Thignica* is located on the hill near the natural springs of Ain Tounga and consists of a square cella partially excavated in the rock and a colonnaded gallery provided with a niche containing a statue of Nereid (fig. 15) and with tanks to collect spring water. The paper will discuss the topic of the relationship of the cult of Neptune *undarum dominus Nereidumque pater* with North African springs, baths, aqueducts and the contemporary veneration of the Nymphs, but also of others deities. Particular attention will be consecrated to the relationship between Neptune and the imperial cult, to the euergetic character of some dedications, to the adoption of the god by the supreme magistrates of colonies and municipalities as well as by soldiers.



Fig. 15. Temple of waters. Central niche. Ben Hassen (2006), 83, fig. 47.

Bibliography

- Aloui Naddari S. (2008), Ceres et cerealiculture a travers le secteur meridional du Haut Tell tunisien, in *Le ricchezze dell'Africa. Risorse, produzioni, scambi*, Atti del XVII convegno di studio L'Africa Romana (Sevilla, 14-17 dicembre 2006), González J., Ruggeri P., Vismara C., Zucca R. [eds], Roma : Carocci, 935-950.
- Aounallah S., Mastino A., Ganga S. (2018 in press), *[E]x permissu [et indulgentia] Optimi maximique principis*: Cartagine tra il 159 e il 162 (con appendice nel 389): grandi lavori alle Terme a mare di Antonino Pio, Marco Aurelio, Lucio Vero, in Atti del Convegno "L'iscrizione nascosta", Colloqui Borghesi, Bertinoro, 9 giugno 2017.
- Arnaldi A. (2018), Osservazioni sul flaminato dei Divi nelle province Africane, in *I luoghi e le forme dei mestieri e della produzione nelle province africane*, Atti del XVIII convegno di studio L'Africa Romana, Milanese M., Ruggeri P., Vismara C. [eds], Roma: Carocci, 1645-1666.
- Baratte F. (1978), *Catalogue des mosaïques romaines et paléochrétiennes du Musée du Louvre*, Paris : Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux.
- Ben Baaziz S. (1985), Neptune, dieu guerisseur. L'homme mediterraneen et la mer, *Actes du IIIème Congrès de l'Association Internationale d'Etude des Cultures de la Méditerranée Occidentale*, Jerba avril 1981, AIECM, Tunisi : INP, 425-436.
- Ben Baaziz S. (1996), Les temples de Neptune en Afrique romaine, *Africa*, XIV, 103-111.
- Ben Hassen H. (2006), Thignica (*Ain Tounga*), son histoire et ses monument, Ortacesus : Nuove Grafiche Puddu.
- Benseddik N. (2012), Un autel à Neptune dans la region de Theueste (Tébessa, Algérie), *Visions de l'Occident romain*. Hommage à Yann Le Bohec, textes réunis par Bernadette Cabouret, Agnès Gros Lambert et Catherine Wolff, Paris : De Boccard, 23-35.
- Beschaouch A. (1985), Poseidon en Barbarie, L'homme méditerranéen et la mer, *Actes du IIIème Congrès de l'Association Internationale d'Etude des Cultures de la Méditerranée Occidentale*, Jerba avril 1981, Tunis : INP, 419-424.
- Beschaouch A. (2000), Épigraphie et ethnographie. D'une fête populaire de Dougga, en Tunisie, à la dédicace de l'aqueduc de Thugga, en Afrique romaine, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1173-1181.
- Blanchard Lemee M., Ennaifer M., Slim L. (1995), *Sols de L'Afrique romaine, en Mosaïques de Tunisie*, Paris.
- Blázquez Martínez J. M. (2015), Mitos y leyendas homéricas en mosaicos de Hispania y del Norte de Africa, *L'Africa Romana XX*, Roma : Carocci, 413-428.
- Boulinguez C., Napoli J. (2008), Hippone, port de l'annone: la contribution de l'iconographie, in *Le ricchezze dell'Africa. Risorse, produzioni, scambi*, Atti del XVII convegno di studio L'Africa Romana (Sevilla, 14-17 dicembre 2006), González J., Ruggeri P., Vismara C., Zucca R. [eds], Roma : Carocci, 703-732.
- Cadotte A: (2002), Neptune africain, *Phoenix. Journal of the Classical Association of Canada*, 56, 330-347.
- Cadotte A. (2007), *La romanisation des dieux, l'interpetatio romana en Afrique du Nord sous le Haut-Empire*, Leiden : Brill.
- Christol M. (2004), De la liberté recouvrée d'Uchi Maius à la liberté de Dougga, *Revue de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes*, 1, LXXVIII, 13-42.
- Corda A.M., Ganga S., Gavini A., Ibba A., Ruggeri P. (2018), Thignica 2017: novità epigrafiche dalla Tunisia, *Epigraphica*, LXXX, 338-342.
- de Slane M. G. (1965), *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale par Abou-Obeid-El-Bekri*; traduite par Mac Guckin de Slane, reprint Paris : Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient Adrien-Maisonneuve, [Ed. Revue et Corrigeé, Algier 1911].
- Dougga, fragments d'histoire*. Choix d'inscriptions latines éditées, traduites et commentées, Khanoussi M., Maurin [eds], Bordeaux-Tunis : Ausonius (Paris : de Boccard), 2000.

- Dunbabin K.M.D. (1978), *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa*, Oxford.
- EChrAfr 3, Monceaux P. (1906), Enquête sur l'épigraphie chrétienne d'Afrique, Inscriptions métriques, *Revue Archéologique*, 7, 1906, 177-192, 260-279, 461-475, *Revue Archéologique* 8, 1906, 126-142, 297-310.
- Fantar M. H. (1968), A propos de Neptune sur une mosaïque d'époque romaine découverte à Oudna, *Studi Magrebini*, 2, 105-112.
- Gozlan S. (1974), Les pavements en mosaïques de la Maison de Neptune à Acholla-Botria (Tunisie), *Monuments et mémoires de la Fondation Eugène Piot*, tome 59, 1974, 71-135.
- Gozlan (1990), *Xenia: quelques problèmes d'identification*, en Balmelle C., Ben Abed - Ben Khader A., Ben Osman W. *et al.*, Recherches franco-tunisiennes sur la mosaïque de l'Afrique antique I. Xenia. Rome : École Française de Rome, 1990 (= Publications de l'École française de Rome, 125).
- Gozlan S. (1992), *La maison du triomphe de Neptune à Acholla (Boitra-Tunisie)*, 1, Rome 1992 (=CEFR, 160).
- Hamdoune Ch. (2010), Neptune et Mars dans la région des steppes tunisiennes, en Béjaoui F. (éd.), *Actes du 6^e colloque international sur l'histoire des steppes tunisiennes, Sbeitla 2008*, Tunis, 245-257.
- Herrmann J.H. Jr., Attanasio D., Tykot R.H., van den Hoek A. (2012), Aspects of the Trade in White and Gray Architectural Marbles in Algeria, in *Trasformazione dei paesaggi del potere nell'Africa settentrionale fino alla fine del mondo antico*, Atti del XIX convegno di studio L'Africa Romana (Sassari, 16-19 dicembre 2010), Cocco M. B., Gavini A., Ibba A. [eds], Roma : Carocci, 1331-1342.
- Ibba A., Mastino A., Zucca R. (2012), Communautés urbaines en Afrique méditerranéenne à l'époque romaine, in A. Ibba, *Ex oppidis et mapalibus, Studi sulle città e le campagne dell'Africa romana*, Ortacesus : Sandhi, 2012, 137-151.
- ILPBardo, Benzina Ben Abdallah Z. (1986), *Catalogue des Inscriptions Latines Païennes du musée du Bardo*, Rom 1986 (=CEFR 92).
- Kaabia R. (2008), *Epitheta deorum* et richesse agricole en Afrique, *L'Africa Romana XVII*, 291-306.
- Kallala N. (1997), *Nouveaux témoignages épigraphiques sur la vie religieuse à Thugga à l'époque romaine*, in *Dougga (Thugga) Etudes épigraphiques*, Paris, 169.
- Le Glay M. (1966), *Saturne africain. Histoire*, Paris : de Boccard (=BEFAR 205).
- Mabrouk J. (2015), Le statut des terrains des temples construits par les Thuggenses, *L'Africa Romana XX*, Roma : Carocci, 467-482.
- Mastino A. (1990), Le Sirti negli scrittori di età augustea, in *L'Africa dans l'Occident romain (Ier siècle av.J.-C.-IVe siècle ap. J.-C.)*. *Actes du colloque organisé par l'École Française de Rome sous le patronage de l'Institut National d'Archéologie et d'Art de Tunis (Rome, 3-5 décembre 1987)*, Roma, 15-48.
- Mastino A. (2017), Cornus e il *Bellum Sardum* di *Hampscora* e *Hostus*, storia o mito? Processo a Tito Livio, in *Il processo di romanizzazione della provincia Sardinia et Corsica*, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Cuglieri, 26-28 marzo 2015, a cura di S. De Vincenzo, Ch. Blasetti Fantuzzi (Analysis Archaeologica. An international Journal of western mediterranean Archaeology), Monograph Series n. 1), Roma : Quasar, 15-67.
- M(aurin) L. (2016), Les édifices cultuels à l'est du forum. Le sanctuaire B et le théâtre cultuel, les temples C et A, *Dougga, Etudes d'architecture religieuse*, 2, *Le sanctuaires du forum, du centre de l'agglomération et de la Grande rue courbe*, sous la direction de S. Aounallah et J.-Cl. Golvin, Bordeaux, 517.
- Maurin L., Aounallah S. (2017), Dougga: le portique de Gallien et la fondation de la colonie (261/265), *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome, Antiquité*, 129, 2, 583-611.
- Morizot P. (1974-1975), Le Génie Auguste de Tfilzi. Nouveaux témoignages de la présence romaine dans l'Aurès, *BCTH*, Afrique du Nord, 10B, 1974-75, 73-75.
- Neira Jiménez M. L. (2008), Acerca de algunas representaciones de esclavos en mosaicos romanos, in *Le ricchezze dell'Africa. Risorse, produzioni, scambi*, Atti del XVII convegno di studio L'Africa Romana (Sevilla, 14-17 dicembre 2006), González J., Ruggeri P., Vismara C., Zucca R. [eds], Roma : Carocci, 2125-2137.

- Neira Jiménez M.L. (2012), Transformación de los paisajes de poder en los mosaicos romanos, in *Trasformazione dei paesaggi del potere nell'Africa settentrionale fino alla fine del mondo antico*, Atti del XIX convegno di studio L'Africa Romana (Sassari, 16-19 dicembre 2010), Cocco M. B., Gavini A., Ibba A. [eds], Roma : Carocci, 783-806.
- Petitmengin P. (1967), Inscriptions de la région de Milev, *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome, Antiquité*, 79-1, 165-205.
- Picard G. Ch. (1974), Les fouilles de Mactar (Tunisie) 1970-1973, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 118, 9-33.
- Redaelli S. (2012), Rappresentazioni di xenia nei mosaici romani della Byzacena, in *Trasformazione dei paesaggi del potere nell'Africa settentrionale fino alla fine del mondo antico*, Atti del XIX convegno di studio L'Africa Romana (Sassari, 16-19 dicembre 2010), Cocco M. B., Gavini A., Ibba A. [eds], Roma : Carocci, 2549-2565.
- Ribichini S. (2004), Il dio El a Leptis Magna. Note comparative, in *Ai confini dell'Impero: contatti, scambi, conflitti*, Atti del XV convegno di studi L'Africa Romana (Tozeur, 11-15 dicembre 2002), Khanoussi M., Ruggeri P., Vismara C. [eds], Roma : Carocci, 1557-1564.
- RICIS 2, L. Bricault (2011), RICIS supplément II, *Bibliotheca Isiaca* 2, 273-307
- Saastamoinen A. (2010), *The phraseology and structure of Latin building inscriptions in Roman north Africa*, Helsinki : Societas Scientiarum Fennica. The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters (=Commentationes humanarum litterarum; 127).
- SIRIS, Vidman L. (1969), *Sylloge inscriptionum religionis Isiacaе et Sarapiacaе*, Berlin.
- Toutain J. (1905), *Les cultes païens de l'Empire romain*, vol. I, 1905, Paris, 378.

Riassunto / *Abstract*

Abstract: The mosaics in North Africa, even those found far from the coasts and in the desert areas, show constantly the usual image of Neptune as sea god. The sculptures and inscriptions, on the other hand, bear witness to a different line, the one derived from the Roman *interpretatio* of a god who had deep Libyan roots, documented by the contact with the Libyan genius of the waters, but also by the Numid and Punic ones: from this derives the connection with the protecting deities of the springs, of the irrigated waters, of the vegetation, able to protect the territories from drought. It is particularly significant the case studied in this paper about *Thignica* (Ain Tounga in Tunisia, *Africa Proconsularis*, in the territory of the Roman colony of Carthage). The project is coordinated by Samir Aounallah and Attilio Mastino.

Riassunto: Di fronte ai mosaici che restituiscono costantemente nel Nord Africa, anche lontano dalle coste e nelle aree desertiche, l'immagine consueta di Nettuno dio marino, le sculture e le iscrizioni testimoniano un filone differente, quello frutto dell'*interpretatio* romana di un dio che aveva profonde radici libiche documentate dal contatto con il genio libico delle acque, ma anche numide e puniche, con una connessione con le divinità protettrici delle sorgenti, delle acque irrigue, della vegetazione, capaci di proteggere i territori dalla siccità. Particolarmente significativo è il caso studiato in questa sede di *Thignica* (Ain Tounga in Tunisia, Africa Proconsolare, nel territorio della colonia romana di Cartagine). Progetto coordinato da Samir Aounallah e Attilio Mastino.

Keywords: Neptunus, Africa, Numidia, Religion, Thignica.

Parole chiave: Neptunus, Africa, Numidia, Religione, Thignica.

Come citare questo articolo / *How to cite this paper*

Attilio Mastino, Neptunus Africanus: a Note, CaSteR 3 (2018), DOI: 10.13125/caster/3457, <http://ojs.unica.it/index.php/caster/>