



## ‘Fossils’ of political institutions. Rome and Tripolitanian marginal areas during Late Antiquity

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“Ogni conquista poneva a Roma un nuovo problema:  
ma era problema di compromesso e di convivenza,  
non di soppressione e di distruzione”  
Mazzarino (2001), 125

It is widely recognised by several scholars that the settlement of Ghirza provides us with crucial evidence in the understanding of the socio-economic and cultural dynamics between the native populations and the Roman central government, especially in marginal and frontier areas. In addition to the first systematic analysis and publication by Olwen Brogan and David Smith, the archaeological evidence and the material culture of this town have shed light on some of the distinctive features of social exchanges in semi-desert areas, primarily during Late Antiquity<sup>1</sup>. The characteristics of the local culture have already been carefully highlighted by experts of architectural decoration and via the analysis of the artistic and archaeological contexts. This paper, therefore, will draw attention to those archaeological elements that allows us to identify the political institutions of Ghirza, a *civitas* of the pre-desert. The term *civitas* should not be attributed to a specific legal statute that the Romans granted to the community. The settlement was clearly outside the ‘direct’ political and administrative control of the Roman state. On the contrary, *civitas* is a technical legal term for any community (i.e. confederations of tribes, urban communities), that represented a legal entity recognised *per se*. The concept and its value are clear in Pomponius, when he refers to *territorium* and *civitas* in a technical sense of public law sense, without intending any specific Roman legal statute:

<sup>1</sup> Literature is substantial especially from the Italian colonial period in Libya onwards. See Fantoli (1927), 43-51; Romanelli (1930), 53-75; Corò (1934), 51; Bauer (1935), 61-78; Vergara-Caffarelli (1960), 866-869; Zimmer (1981), 3-10; Brogan, Smith (1984). Further evidence also emerged after the Italian mission in the semi-desert area under the direction of Luisa Musso: Fontana, Munzi, Ricci (1996), 67-72; Fontana (1997), 149-162. Recent contributions are by Munzi, Felici, Cirelli, Schingo, Zocchi (2010), 725-748; Mattingly (2011), 246-268; Bentivogli (2015), 2139-2154; Di Vita (2015), 1-38.

‘territory’ (*territorium*) is the totality of the fields within the boundaries of any community (*civitas*) and some people say that this is derived from the fact that the magistrates of the place concerned have the right within its boundaries of terrifying, that is suppressing<sup>2</sup>.

On the basis of this premise, this contribution focuses more on the political and administrative peculiarities of the settlement than on any stylistic and iconographic elements derived from the analysis of the archaeological evidence.

A comparison with literary sources, visual culture, and archaeological data can be fundamental in reconstructing certain aspects of the town’s administrative history. At a methodological level, this analysis follows in the footsteps of two eminent historians, Santo Mazzarino and Yves Modéran, who have made a significant impact in the study of Roman institutions and cultural exchanges in the Roman empire. Within this framework, this paper intends to highlight the peculiarities of the territorial contexts, while analysing the arrangements of the central government in controlling the movement of tribes in marginal areas via a policy of indirect control. This analysis thus challenges the traditional view of Roman borders as being nothing more than linear boundaries or buffer zones. The structure of the *limes Tripolitanus* was highly complex and rather than establishing a fixed line, it mainly resembled more a patchwork of lands of different legal status<sup>3</sup>.

### 1. Legal statutes of lands in Tripolitania, a premise

The legal status of the land can be identified mainly in the areas close to the cities along the coast and in the provincial hinterland of Tripolitania. The reconstruction has been developed by means of a synopsis between archaeological and topographical data, as well as by collating the *Itinerarium Antonini*, with the evidence of inscriptions and the literary sources. The *Itinerarium Antonini* lists the toponyms of several *villae* included in the relevant private estates, whose archaeological remains have been identified along the Tripolitanian coastline<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, the evidence of inscriptions, together with literary and legal sources has made it possible to identify not only the legal status of the cities, but also the specific areas that the tribes held and controlled<sup>5</sup>. During the 3rd and 4th century, after a process of assimilation of Roman statutes that lasted more than two centuries, it is noteworthy that the legal status of the main Tripolitanian cities appears fixed. By the last decades of the 2nd century, the *municipia* of Sabratha and Oea had become *coloniae*. The special legal status of their territories allowed these cities to lease their lands directly, as well as to levy various minor taxes and tolls, the revenue of which created benefits especially among the local ruling classes. Moreover, Leptis Magna enjoyed the statute of *colonia iuris Italici*<sup>6</sup>. Between 202 and 205, Septimius

<sup>2</sup> Pomp. *l. sing. ench.*: D. 50.16.239.8: ‘*Territorium*’ est universitas agrorum intra fines cuiusque civitatis: quod ab eo dictum quidam aiunt, quod magistratus eius loci intra eos fines terrendi, id est summovendi ius habent. (Watson 1998). The legal characters of *civitates* are also in Paul. *l. 1 ad ed.*: D. 2.1.20; Aurel. Arc. Char. *l. sing. de mun. civ.*: D. 50.4.18.25; Ulp. *l. 3 de cens.*: D. 50.15.4.2. Useful comparisons on the characteristics of *civitates* in eastern provinces are in Hatzopoulos (1993), 151-171; Hatzopoulos (1996), 79-82.

<sup>3</sup> On these aspects see Cordovana (2012), 458-494.

<sup>4</sup> See esp. *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti et Hierosolymitanum*, G. Parthey, M. Pinder (Hrsg.), Berlin 1848, 18-29; Kolendo (1986), 149-161; Lewicki, Kotula (1986), 255-271; Mattingly (1989), 135-153, esp. p. 143 ff.; Musso (1997), 203-208; Di Vita (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Imperial domains and lands of tribes were mainly located in the Tripolitanian hinterland: Desanges (1962) *passim*. Lassère (1977), 313-338, 352; Jacques (1992), 123-139; Modéran (2003), *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> Oea: *IRT* 230, 183-185. Sabratha was granted the statute of *colonia* probably at some stage during the Antonine period: *IRT* 117-125, 128, 130 and, especially, *IRT* 23 (175-180). Leptis Magna: Paul., *l. II, de cens.*: D. 50.15.8.11.

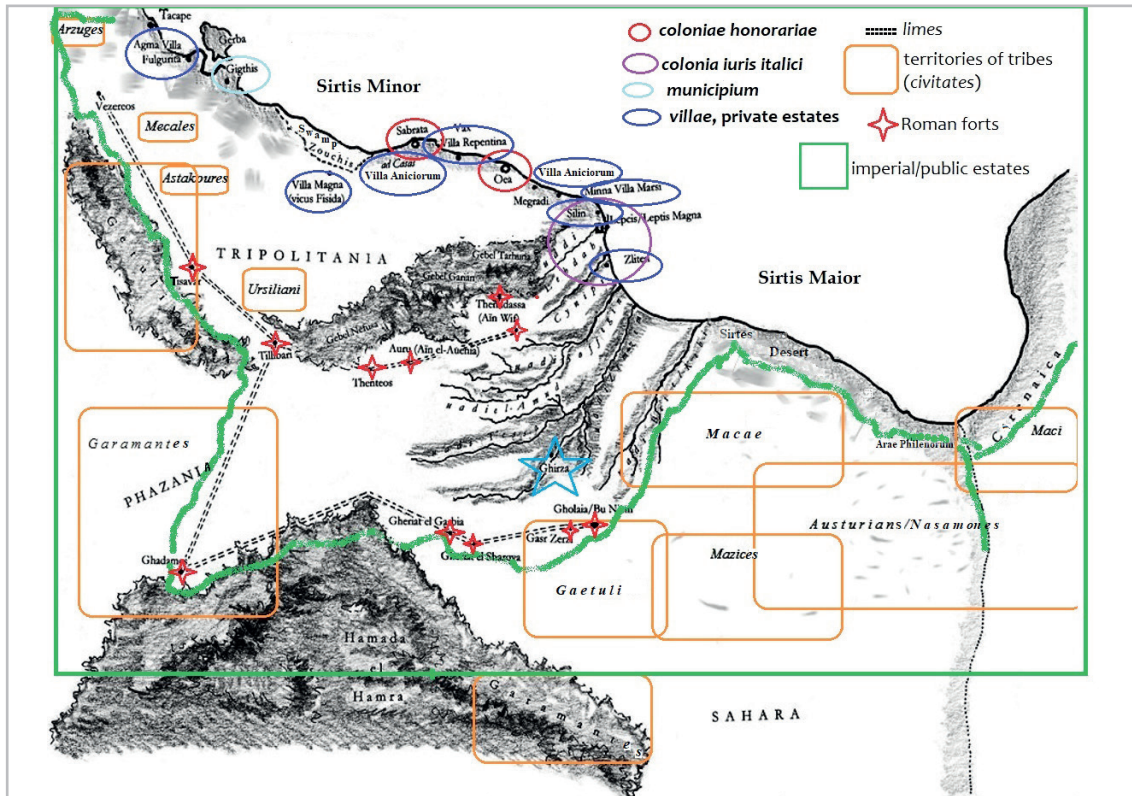


Fig. 1. *Territoria* of cities and tribes in Roman Tripolitania 3rd-4th c. AD

Severus granted the city this status, a privileged condition that assimilated the city's territory entirely to the Italian land through complete exemption of tax<sup>7</sup>. The measure mainly concerned private property, the ownership of which could be interpreted in the same way as that which already fell under the Italian title of *proprietas ex iure Quiritium*. This was the only full ownership of land in Italy and remained distinct from the more limited and controlled rights of *possessio* in the provincial areas<sup>8</sup>. In addition to the legal status of the *municipia* and *coloniae*, the imperial domains and territories of tribes mainly encompassed the internal provincial areas. Usually, imperial and public lands were leased under land tenure contracts by local urban aristocracies, which were involved in the agrarian exploitation. Taxation on these lands especially affected peasants (*coloni*) and direct incomes were paid to the imperial treasury.

The inland *civitates*, that is to say, the tribes and small settlements inhabiting the semi-desert areas, also possessed territories that could be contiguous to or even encompassed within imperial public domains, private estates, and territories of cities<sup>9</sup>. What was relevant for a *civitas*, therefore, was precisely the *territorium* officially allotted to the community in the aftermath of conquest. (Fig.1) This was not only the case of some communities in Spain mentioned by Iulius Frontinus, but was also a common phenomenon in all the provinces of the Empire:

<sup>7</sup> The chronology of the grant has been examined by Dupuis (1996), 57-65 (205 AD); Cordovana (2007), 267-278, (202-203 AD). About the *ius Italicum*, see especially: Mazzarino (1980), 188-213; Cataudella (1987), 117-132; Malavolta (1995); Lopez Paz (1999), 289-294; Campbell (2000), 334-335.

<sup>8</sup> See Grelle (1963); Luzzatto (1984), 205-241.

<sup>9</sup> This is especially evident in Ag. Urb., *de contr. agr.* 16-22 Thu=84-85 La. See also Pomp. *l. sing. ench.*: D. 50.16.239.8; Paul. *l. pr. ad edic.*: D. 2.1.20.

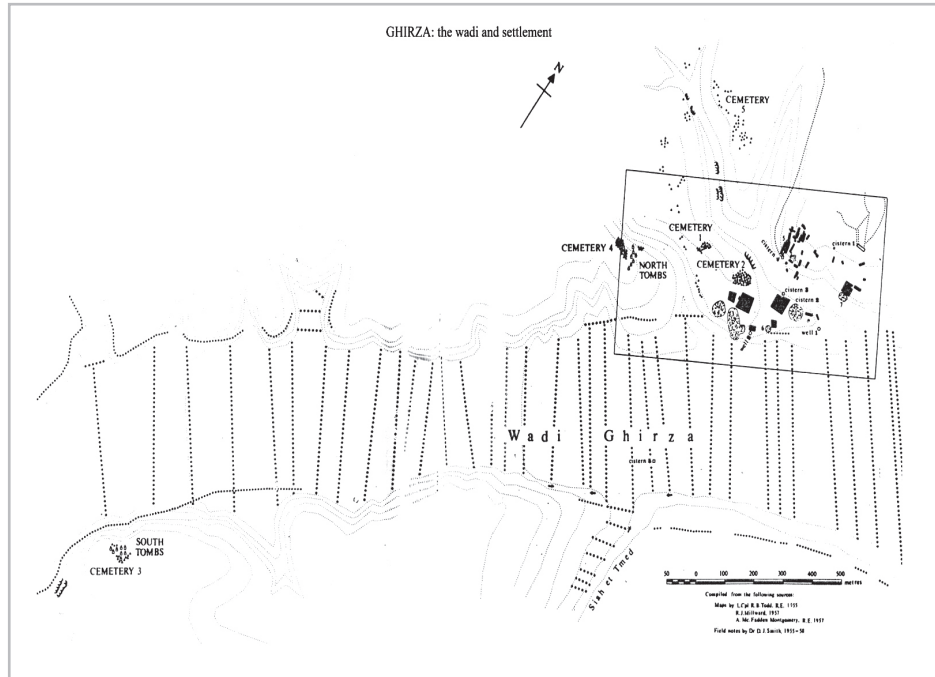


Fig. 2. The wadi and the settlement of Ghirza (from Brogan, Smith 1984, p. 40).

Land has been contained in a survey whose entire area has been allocated to a community (*civitas*), as for example, in Lusitania in the case of the people of Salmantica (Salamanca), or in Hispania Citerior in the case of the people of Palencia. Moreover, in some provinces land subject to tax has been defined for communities on the basis of its entire area. (Campbell 2000)<sup>10</sup>.

Consequently, whether the communities were autonomous or under direct administration, the central government often recognised these *civitates* as legal entities in their own right. Various rights and privileges could be determined on the basis of the loyalty of each group. A paradigmatic example was the *munus possessionis*. This privilege allowed the *civitates* under Roman administration to enforce the payment of a certain amount of corn every year from the private lands within their *territoria*. A norm of Aurelius Arcadius Charisius in the Digest clearly mentions this right:

Furthermore, some communities have the right to demand that those who hold properties in their territory provide each year a certain quantity of corn according to the extent of their land; this kind of contribution is a *munus* of a property. (Watson 1998)<sup>11</sup>.

But which magistracies were specifically responsible for the administration and government of the *civitates*? And within this legal and economic framework, how did their administrative status differ from that of the *coloniae* and *municipia*?

<sup>10</sup> Iulius Frontinus, *de agr. qual.* 1-2 Thu=1-6 La: *Ager est mensura comprehensus, cuius modus universus civitatis est adsignatus, sicut in Lusitania Salmaticensibus aut Hispania citeriore Palantinis et in conpluribus provinciis tributarium solum per universitatem populis est definitum.*

<sup>11</sup> Aurel. Arc. Char. *l. sing. de mun. civ.*: D. 50.4.18.25. *Praeterea habent quaedam civitates praerogativam, ut hi, qui in territorio earum possident, certum quid frumenti pro mensura agri per singulos annos praebeant: quod genus collationis munus possessionis est.*



## 2. Ghirza a semi-desert *civitas*

The settlement of Ghirza counts among the *civitates* of the semi-desert areas and forms part of the *limes Tripolitanus*. The site is well known, particularly the southern and northern necropolis along the banks of the wadi Ghirza, the monuments of which are renowned. (Fig.2)

The toponym Ghirza was apparently linked to the sanctuary of the god Gurzil. The name first appears in Arab sources. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn al Bakri observed that a sanctuary of Gurzil was located at Ghirza, and that it had been named after the god<sup>12</sup>. One would therefore be tempted to associate the Building 32, which was investigated by Olwen Brogan and David Smith with the main sanctuary dedicated to the cult of Gurzil in this semi-desert area. Although this association is plausible, no definitive identification can be made until the Libyan inscriptions on the altars, which were part of the temple furnishings, are fully understood<sup>13</sup>.

The earliest sources from the late antique period tell us very little about the cult of Gurzil. The main evidence can be found in Corippus, particularly certain passages of his *Iohannides* which specify key details. The *Iohannides* is an epic poem celebrating the Byzantine general Iohannes Troglita who fought against the Moors between 546 and 548. The importance of the poem lies in the fact that it is a very valuable source for the history of North Africa after the Vandal domination and during the Byzantine reconquest. Providing what appears to be an eyewitness account, Corippus' general insights are crucial for understanding social fabric and cultural characteristics of the North African hinterland of that time. In his words:

Fierce Ierna was the tribe's leader and the priest of Gurzil. The people say that the god's father was horned Ammon and that his mother was a wild heifer<sup>14</sup>.

Based on this evidence, the leader of this community clearly had both religious and political powers. In another passage, Corippus also specifies that the idol of the Libyan god was made of wood. Before starting any combat, the Laguatans used to release a bull (a kind of war machine allegedly), which they pretended was the god Gurzil unleashed against the enemies:

Then suddenly, by some magical craft a bull was sent out from the centre of the Moorish line, a bull which Ierna, priest and mighty leader of the tribes' chieftains, had devised to represent the divine presence of Ammonian Gurzil and to be a first omen for his own men. It raged between the two armies with its tall horns, unsure of where it might penetrate the enemy line<sup>15</sup>.

In addition to the above-mentioned literary evidence in Corippus, together with the plausible identification of the Building 32 with a sanctuary, further archaeological data of the ancient Libyan cult of Gurzil have been found. On the tomb 'G' from the southern necropolis at Ghirza a beautiful stone relief may well recall this ancestral religious ritual. On the architrave of this mausoleum a couple of lions are visible. The animals hold an ox-head that might be identified with the idol of the god Gurzil, in front of which sacrifices

<sup>12</sup> Mac Guckin de Slane (1913), 31-32. See also Camps (1999), 3258-3259.

<sup>13</sup> Brogan, Smith (1984), 81-92, 250-251.

<sup>14</sup> Cor., *iohan.* II, 109-111: *Ierna ferox his ductor erat, Gurzilque sacerdos. Huic, referunt gentes, pater est quod corniger Ammon, Bucula torua parens.* See Shea (1998), 84.

<sup>15</sup> Cor., *iohan.* V, 22-6: *Cum magica subito taurus dimittitur arte Maurorum e medio, taurus, quem Ierna sacerdos, atque idem gentis rectorum maximus auctor finxerat, Ammonii signantem numine Gurzil omina prima suis. Celsis tunc cornibus ille inter utrosque furit, dubius qua rumperet hostes.* See also Cor., *iohan.* II, 404-409.



Fig. 3. Ghirza, Mausoleum South 'G' (Museum of Tripoli).



Fig. 4. Ghirza, Mausolea North 'A', 'B', and 'C'.

usually took place. (Fig. 3) This is, of course, a hypothesis requiring further analysis and more extensive comparisons, and so falls outside the parameters of this study.

### 3. Rome, local chiefs and the sacred political landscape

Whatever the ancient characteristics of the cult might be, in Corippus' words there is no doubt that the leader of the Moorish tribal confederation wielded the political and religious





Fig. 5. Ghirza, relief of the 'chieftain' from the Mausoleum North 'B'  
(Museum of Leptis Magna) = (Brogan, Smith 1984, Pl. 63a)

powers associated with the priesthood of Gurzil. Is it possible, therefore, to provide a better definition of these powers? Above all, what kind of indirect management by the Roman central government could be detected in marginal tribal areas? Is it possible to distinguish the legal and institutional basis in which the local office was rooted?

In an attempt to answer these questions, we need to examine the reliefs adorning two mausolea in the northern necropolis of Ghirza. In effect all the funerary monuments here have been carefully studied, so that the carved bas-reliefs included in the architectural structures are very well known. In particular the friezes on the arches of tombs 'B' and 'C' have received a great deal of scholarly attention. (Fig. 4) Among the various hunting and farming scenes, Olwen Brogan identified the figure of a 'chieftain' seated in the centre of two ceremonial scenes. Honours and gifts are offered to him in both reliefs<sup>16</sup>. The older and less accurate relief of the two comes from mausoleum 'B'. (Fig. 5) The architectural style and decoration of this monumental tomb date to the first half of the 4th century. More precisely, the inscription *in situ* could also help in better dating the monument. The text mentions a certain amount of ...*milia folles* for the construction costs. Apparently, the mint of Carthage only coined *folles* during a limited period. It seems that Maximian began the issue during the expedition against the Moorish in 296/297, although minting stopped quite soon after Alexander's revolt in 311<sup>17</sup>. These chronological parameters can, therefore, be useful in refining the dating of the mausoleum at Ghirza. The ceremonial scene on the main frieze depicts four figures, all facing the right, but they are not equally represented in the foreground. There is no sense of proportion, no perception of depth, and no coherent position in space. Except for the individual on the left, who stands in centre ground, the other figures are in the foreground on the frame; their feet and the legs of the chair are discernible on the frame at the base of the scene. Certain objects and details shown in the relief are also noteworthy. The figure on the left wears a garment and apparently a tall cap; he holds an object that could perhaps be a cup or a basket. The next figure carries a sort of sceptre and wears a long robe and a cloak. Olwen Brogan also distinguished curly hair and a conical cap that are no longer visible, due to the

<sup>16</sup> Brogan, Smith (1984), 137, 153.

<sup>17</sup> See especially Grierson-Mays (1992), 60-61.



Fig. 6. Ghirza, relief of the 'chieftain' from the Mausoleum North 'C' (Museum of Istanbul) = (Brogan, Smith 1984, Pl. 78).

poor state of the stone. The seated figure wears a robe with thick folds descending from a sort of diadem and presumably holds a scroll or sceptre.

The same kind of ceremony is repeated on the frieze of mausoleum 'C', although the figure on the right is articulated differently and faces towards left. (Fig. 6) Nevertheless, the relief shows a more accurate execution of details and better-quality of sculptures. All the figures are in foreground; they wear rich garments, tunics, and turbans of various shapes, and are holding and offering different objects. On the left, the smaller figure holds a cup; the next figure bears a wand or a sceptre and wears an elaborate hat. They approach the central personage who, richly dressed and seated on a *sella curulis*, is holding a cup and maybe a *volumen* or a sceptre. His head is apparently adorned by a diadem with cheekpieces. The figure on the right is holding a closed vessel (a *situla* for sacrifice?) together with a bow and an arrow case. According to its inscription, erected in memory of a couple, the parents of the customers, who paid for the monument and whose names certainly are not Roman, the mausoleum costed 45.600 *follis singulares*<sup>18</sup>. It might be plausible to assume that the building was constructed by relatives of the same family group as the "B" mausoleum. Perhaps they were members of two younger generations in the peaceful period before 363. The reliefs undeniably reflect a flourishing environment of Saharan agrarian activities and trade in the socio-economic life of the community. After that year, turbulence and raids against Tripolitan cities began. This was a period of instability for the tribal confederation, to which the Austurians belonged<sup>19</sup>.

There is no doubt that both these scenes represent some public ceremony to honour those who were chiefs in the community of Ghirza at that time. Some scholars have compared these images with the beautiful description in a passage of Procopius. They have also been com-

<sup>18</sup> IRT 898 = CIL VIII, 22660: *M(archius) Chullam [et] Varnychsi/n pater et ma[te]r Marchi / Nimmire et [M]accurasa/n qui eis [[hec(!)]] memoriam feceru[nt] d[iscuss]imus rati[oc]inio ad / ea eroca[tu]m(!) est sum(p)/tos merc[e]dibus in n[um]mo \ (denariorum) foll[es] singula/res numero quadragi[nta] quinque [milia] sesce[ntos] [[p]]r(a) et[[er c]][[i]][[b]][[aria] op[e] [[ra]] [[nt]ibus felic[iter] legant et] / visitent fili(i) et n[ep] [[ot]] [[es] / [.* Marchius Chullam and Varnychsin, father and mother of the Marchii Nimmira and [?]M]accurasan, who had this memorial built for them. We paid out in reckoning for these things, in coin on salaries a total of forty-five thousand six hundred folles, in addition to the food for the workmen. May their sons and grandsons visit it happily. (Reynolds, Ward-Perkins). The word *singulares* is also mentioned in one of the documents included among the 'Tablettes Albertini', the date of which is 5<sup>th</sup> April 493 AD.

<sup>19</sup> See also Amm. Marc. XXVIII, 6, 2, about Austurians' raids.



pared with the statement of Servius Honoratus in his comment about the *Aeneid*. In Servius' words the wand is a remarkable sign of power for magistrates: "the *praefecti* of the Moorish people, when they assume the office receive and bear the wand"<sup>20</sup>. Apparently, Olwen Brogan was not entirely convinced by this linking of the reliefs and the literary evidence. However, Yves Modéran argued quite persuasively for a more in-depth analysis and claimed that these images represent a prominent special magistrate who ruled the *civitas* of Ghirza. Combining the evidence of both Servius and Procopius, Modéran's opinion was that a *praefectus gentis* governed the community of Ghirza, like the *praefecti* of other tribes/*civitates* in the African provinces. Nevertheless, the office appeared to the scholar "une réelle anomalie du Bas-Empire", because the *praefectus gentis* did not have *imperium*, which meant that he was not a true magistrate<sup>21</sup>. Modéran basically followed the opinion of Claude Lepelley, according to whom, this anomalous office belonged to a "fonctionnaire délégué, dépourvue du caractère de magistrat"<sup>22</sup>.

A closer evaluation of the evidence, though, can help to better define this office and may reveal that this anomaly is only apparent. Procopius and Servius state that local rulers of the semi-desert areas in North Africa seemingly held proper offices. In his account of the events during 533, Procopius reports important details:

For all those who ruled over the Moors in Mauretania and Numidia and Byzacium sent envoys to Belisarius saying that they were slaves of the emperor and promised to fight with him. There were some also who even furnished their children as hostages and requested that the symbols of office be sent them from him according to the ancient custom. For it was a law among the Moors that no one should be a ruler over them, even if he was hostile to the Romans, until the emperor of the Romans should give him the tokens of the office. And though they had already received them from the Vandals, they did not consider that the Vandals held the office securely. Now these symbols are a staff of silver covered with gold, and a silver cap, not covering the whole head, but like a crown and held in place on all sides by bands of silver, a kind of white cloak gathered by a golden brooch on the right shoulder in the form of a Thessalian cape, and a white tunic with embroidery, and a gilded boot<sup>23</sup>.

This passage provides us with a glimpse of the North African hinterland during the Byzantine reconquest in the sixth century AD. Nevertheless, many literary sources suggest that the same kind of objects were usually given to foreign kings by the Roman government from

<sup>20</sup> Serv., *ad Aen.* IV, 242: *Tum virgam capit id est caduceus (...) virga vero insigne potestatis est, nam ideo ea et magistratus utuntur. (...) Praefecti gentium Maurorum cum fiunt virgam accipiunt et gestant.* At that time, he (Mercury) took the wand that is caduceus (...). To speak the truth the wand is mark of power, and therefore magistrates make use of it. (...) The *praefecti* of Moorish people when they assume the office receive and bear the wand.

<sup>21</sup> Modéran (2003), 486 ff.; see also Felici, Munzi, Tantillo (2006), 621, 623 ff.

<sup>22</sup> Lepelley (2001), 315.

<sup>23</sup> Proc., *de b. vand.* I, 25.3-8: ὅσοι γὰρ ἔν τε Μαυριτανίᾳ καὶ Νουμιδίᾳ καὶ Βυζακίῳ Μαυρουσίῳ ἦρχον, πρέσβεις ὡς Βελισάριον πέμπσαντες δοῦλοί τε βασιλέως ἔφασκον εἶναι καὶ ζυμμαχήσειν ὑπέσχοντο. εἰσὶ δὲ οἱ καὶ τοὺς παῖδας ἐν ὁμήρων παρείχοντο λόγῳ, τὰ τε ζύμβολασι παρ' αὐτοῦ στέλλεσθαι τῆς ἀρχῆς κατὰ δὴ τὸν παλαιὸν νόμον ἐδέοντο. νόμος γὰρ ἦν Μαυρουσίῳ ἄρχειν μηδένα, κἂν Ῥωμαίοις πολέμιος ᾗ, πρὶν ἂν αὐτῷ τὰ γνωρίσματα τῆς ἀρχῆς ὁ Ῥωμαίων βασιλεὺς δοίη. ἅπερ ἤδη πρὸς Βανδύλων λαβόντες οὐκ ᾤοντο ἐν βεβαίῳ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔχειν. ἔστι δὲ τὰ ζύμβολα ταῦτα ράβδος τε ἀργυρᾶ κατακεχρυσωμένη καὶ πῖλος ἀργυροῦς οὐχ ὄλην τὴν κεφαλὴν σκέπων, ἀλλ' ὡσπερ στεφάνη τελαμῶσιν ἀργυροῖς πανταχόθεν ἀνεχόμενος, καὶ τριβώνιον τι λευκὸν, ἐς χρυσοῦν περόνην κατὰ τὸν τριβώνιον τι λευκὸν, ἐς χρυσοῦν περόνην κατὰ τὸν δεξιὸν ὦμον ἐν χλαμύδος σχήματι Θετταλῆς ζυνίων, χιτῶν τε λευκὸς, ποικίλιματα ἔχων, καὶ ἀρβύλη ἐπίχρυσος. (Dewing 1916, rist. 1990).

the Republican age onwards<sup>24</sup>. These gifts were part of a formal recognition of sovereignty in bilateral diplomatic relations between different kingdoms, on a supposedly equal footing. In North Africa, however, the specific setting and context highlight the political dynamics of that frontier environment, which was strongly characterised by the attitude of the local tribes towards the central government and by the representation they might have of the ‘central State’ and its laws. The fluid character of those marginal areas was deeply marked, indeed, by the choice of tribes to “stay out of the way” of the two opponents (i.e. Vandals and Romano-Byzantines), waiting for “the outcome of the war”<sup>25</sup>. The ritual described by Procopius, however, does not really imply any direct administration of the tribal areas involved. Continuity of cultural contacts characterised the strong ties between the Romans and Moorish communities. Indeed, young hostages and children of chiefs, for example, living among the Romans and receiving a Roman education, plausibly made a substantial contribution to shaping local cultures differently, without denying their native traditions, cultural identity, and ethnic self-consciousness. However, it would be misleading to encapsulate these characteristics in the idea of an abstract cultural hybridity, as if they were absorbing a different power system in shaping alternative political landscapes, especially in marginal areas. For the Moorish tribes this new experience was, on the contrary, deeply enriched by elements rooted in the historical past of Roman institutions. The insignia of power made the content and meaning of an ancestral office more visible. This office was the one that best suited the local socio-political context in a tribal confederation.

#### 4. *Praefecti gentium* and the management of marginal areas

Fundamental questions emerge from the narrative of Procopius. How ancient is this ceremony and how far back can this political administrative institution thus be traced? Was it a genuine Roman office, or an anomalous legal position without *imperium*?

Based wholly on the evidence of Ghirza’s reliefs, Modéran dated the office to the 4th century AD, in other words, to the period of official contacts between central government and local tribes which were lawfully recognized as political entities, that is to say, *civitates* in their *territoria* and part of the *limes*-system. However, the magistracy in question must have been much older. Scholars identified the chieftain of Ghirza either as a *praefectus gentis*, or as a *princeps gentis*, but doubted that he would have had the power of a real magistrate endowed with *imperium*. *Praefecti gentium* are mentioned in North African inscriptions from the 1st century AD until the Vandal period. It is reasonable to suppose that the office was of republican origin<sup>26</sup>. Military *praefecti gentium* were Roman citizens of equestrian rank at the head of local communities,

<sup>24</sup> Several examples are mentioned in: Dion Hal., *ant.*, V, 35.1 (Porsenna); Liv. XXVII, 4.8, (Syphax, 210 B.C.); Liv. XXX, 15.11, XXXI, 11.11, and App., *pun.* 32, (Massinissa, 203/200 B.C.); Sall., *Iug.* 65.2, (Gauda, 108 B.C.); Liv. XLII, 14.10 and Diod. XXIX, 34, (Eumenes II 172 B.C.); Polyb. XXXII, 1.3, (Ariarathes V, 160 B.C.); Plut., *Sull.* 22.3, 23.2 (Archelaos of Kappadokia); Val. Max. V, 7 (ext.2), (Ariobarzane II, 62 B.C.). The same *ornamenta* (i.e. *sella curulis*, sceptre, and golden dyadem) also are on coins of the imperial age: see Schäfer (1989), 60 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Proc., *de b. vand.* I, 25.9: Βελισάριος δὲ ταῦτά τε αὐτοῖς ἔπεμψε καὶ χρήμασι πολλοῖς αὐτῶν ἕκαστον ἐδωρήσατο. οὐ μέντοι αὐτῷ ἐς ζυμμαχίαν ἀφίκοντο, οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ Βανδίλοις ἐπαμύνειν ἐτόλμησαν, ἀλλ’ ἐκποδῶν ἀμφοτέρους στάντες ἐκαραδόκουν ὅπη ποτὲ ἢ τοῦ πολέμου τύχη ἐκβήσεται. ὧδε μὲν Ῥωμαίοις τὰ πράγματα εἶχε. And Belisarius sent these things to them, and presented each one of them with much money. However, they did not come to fight along with him, nor, on the other hand, did they dare give their support to the Vandals, but standing out of the way of both contestants, they waited to see what would be the outcome of the war. Thus, then, matters stood with the Romans.

<sup>26</sup> In addition to the literature quoted in n. 21, see also Kotula (1965), 347-365; Leveau (1973), 153-192; Lepelley (1974), 285-295; Christol (2005), 11-23; Weiss (2006), 101-116.

especially tribes, in the provinces during the late Republic and early Empire. Later, from the 2nd century AD onwards, these magistrates were chosen by the central government from among the local aristocracies and tribal leaders, as their names often appear to be of local origin. They were always Roman citizens, as they held a proper Roman magistracy and represented the central government through the direct administration of tribes. Nevertheless, communities of tribes could be *adtributae*, annexed to and dependent on the administration of major cities in the same territorial area<sup>27</sup>. Cesare Letta asserts that the *praefecti gentium* were always Roman citizens and so acted in the role of magistrates who represented the central government. Scrutinising the inscriptions from the western provinces in Europe and North Africa, Letta also observed that the *principes gentium*, on the contrary, did not necessarily have Roman citizenship<sup>28</sup>. In many cases, they did not distinguish themselves as Roman citizens and remained *peregrini*. Therefore, the granting of Roman citizenship to the *principes* of the Baquati, for example, was a very exceptional and noteworthy honour for the nobles of that tribe in Mauretania<sup>29</sup>.

*Praefecti* and *principes gentium*, therefore, should not be confused and their roles should not be overlapped, because they are clearly distinguished in the sources, especially during Late Antiquity. Ammianus and Augustine imply this distinction between the two different roles. When referring to Firmus' revolt in Mauretania in 373, Ammianus reports that Theodosius (father of the Emperor) put Bells, *princeps* of the Mazices, and Fericius, *praefectus gentis*, to death. They had supported the usurper Firmus and, obviously from the Roman point of view, had committed high treason<sup>30</sup>. To prevent similar episodes in the future, Theodosius was extremely careful to choose "prefects of tried fidelity in charge of the peoples through whose country he was marching"<sup>31</sup>.

Augustine is even more precise. In one of his *letters* to Hesychius, he refers to populations and territories involved in the *limes*-system (*qui pacati Romanis finibus adhaerent*), the structure of which mirrored the socio-political organization and nature of Roman control in marginal areas during the early 5th century. Clearly, the frontier areas were by no means politically and legally uniform. Augustine states that there were communities which, on the one hand, had their own kings and, on the other, groups which were directly ruled by Roman prefects<sup>32</sup>. Direct administration and indirect political control are the two basic coexisting elements which affected the frontier dynamics in the areas of the *limes*.

We should not, therefore, imagine the North African frontier in spatial terms, meaning tribes and population groups 'inside' and 'outside' the *limes*. It often happened, indeed, that those different parcels and territorial areas could interlock deeply within the provincial territory itself. This is a crucial point that must be reaffirmed. The management of marginal and frontier areas consisted of the interplay between directly administered areas and indirect control by the Roman central government along the *limes*-system. *Praefecti* and *principes gentium* are precisely the unmistakable signs of this double and dovetailed presence, one at

<sup>27</sup> The phenomenon is well known in various provinces. On the topic see Laffi (1966), esp. 74-95.

<sup>28</sup> Letta (2002), 2093-2110.

<sup>29</sup> *IAM* II, 94. The inscription has been the object of several studies. Comments and previous literature are in Purpura (2012), 625-641.

<sup>30</sup> *Amm.* XXIX, 5, 21 and 24.

<sup>31</sup> *Amm.* XXIX, 5, 35: *gentibus per quas transibat dux consultissimus apposuit fidei compertae praefectos*. (Engl. transl. J.C. Rolfe, London, Loeb 1972).

<sup>32</sup> *August.*, *epist.* 199, 12: *Pauci tamen anni sunt, ex quo quidam eorum rarissimi atque paucissimi, qui pacati Romanis finibus adhaerent, ita ut non habeant reges suos, sed super eos praefecti a Romano constituentur imperio, et illi et ipsi eorum praefecti Christiani esse coeperunt.*



the administrative, institutional level, the other at the political level. Cesare Letta rightly noted that there is no evidence of *praefecti* outside the provincial territory<sup>33</sup>. Nonetheless, the scholar compares Procopius' and Servius' accounts of the symbols of power given to the *praefecti Maurorum*. He thinks that Procopius is mainly referring to the Roman magistrates, the *praefecti*, who led local tribes<sup>34</sup>. It should be noted, however, that Procopius does not actually describe the investiture of the Roman magistrates, the *praefecti*. Indeed, the equivalent term in the Greek translation - ἑπαρχοί - would have been specified, along with the precise mention of the office, rank, and *imperium*. On the contrary, Procopius defines attributes and symbols of a proper sovereign power – ἀρχή – characterised by *symmachia* towards the Romans (ξυμμαχήσειν ὑπέσχοντο, τά τε ξύμβολασφίσι παρ' αὐτοῦ στέλλεσθαι τῆς ἀρχῆς). This description, therefore, appears more appropriate and fits especially in the case of *principes gentium* and *reges*<sup>35</sup>. The overlapping of roles and confusion of prerogatives between the *praefecti* and the *principes gentium/reges* may persist, if we maintain the representation of the Roman frontier in terms of areas 'inside' and 'outside' the province. On the contrary, if we think rather of contiguous territories, where we observe a direct administration or, vice versa, an indirect political control through local chiefs, the different offices acquire more coherent roles and functions in the framework of the frontier. *Principes gentium* and *reges*, who were most likely the chiefs of Ghirza, were not lower-ranking magistrates without *imperium*. In this context and in this particular case, the lack of *imperium* becomes an extraneous issue. They were allies and comrades, tribal chiefs, ethnic leaders who, above all, made the indirect power of Rome and its political authority in marginal areas tangible.

The geo-political fragmentation of the North African hinterland was ancient and went back well beyond Roman times. At the time of Diodorus, the distinction between δυνάσται and βασιλεῖς, as rulers of the different tribal groups, was very precise<sup>36</sup>. Throughout the centuries, however, intense contacts with Roman legal culture modified some internal structures among the tribes. Those indigenous chiefs, together with the leadership of different tribes, began to seek legal legitimacy. During Late Antiquity, politics led to fundamental transformations in the geography of the *limes*-system. The organization of the tribes was mainly based on the individual supremacy of the chiefs, who were able to unify and maintain consensus among different groups. However, the consolidation of personal power necessarily needed a legal and institutional basis. The legal and political structure of the Roman imperial State could provide that institutional basis by becoming a source of legal legitimacy.

##### 5. Political and institutional 'fossils'

Archaic and ancestral institutions were part and parcel of Rome's political past, and worked in terms of an institutional reservoir of legal heritage, to be drawn on as needed. The most suitable political organization for the tribes, those communities that were alien to the structure of city-states, could be found in the archaic Italic law rooted in the monarchical era. It can, therefore, be inferred that the office at Ghirza was in effect a political-institutional 'fossil', whose roots can be specifically traced back to the transition between the monarchy and the early Republic.

<sup>33</sup> Letta (2002), 2107.

<sup>34</sup> See Letta (2002), 2105. Likewise, see Camps (1984), 183-218 and Lepelley (2001), 310.

<sup>35</sup> A comparative insight is in Fanning (2011), who especially considers *reges/reguli/principes* in contexts of tribes in Europe and North Africa.

<sup>36</sup> Diod. III, 49, 2-5. On this passage see Cordovana (2015), 111-113.

Historically, fossilised political structures and institutional powers belonging to earlier, archaic, and 'pre-historic' phases, seems to be characterised by a strong sense of symbolism<sup>37</sup>. In addition to Servius' aforementioned passage, other testimonies support this claim. With regard to the symbols of power, in fact, it would be difficult to reject Apuleius' speech, when he specifies that:

These items, a bag and a staff, were for Diogenes and Antisthenes the equivalent of a king's diadem, of a general's cloak, of a pontiff's bonnet, of an augur's crook<sup>38</sup>.

Undoubtedly on both of the 'chieftains' scenes, the objects depicted – *sella curulis* and scroll (?), wands and sceptres, diadem and tunic, as well as arrows and bow – can thus be easily identified as the symbols of power of a ruler and high magistrate, while the cups and vessels presumably represent the ritual objects pertaining to the religious leader of the *civitas*. In order to identify the nature, prerogatives, and origin of this office, a comparison with other bas-reliefs bearing representations of similar subjects would be useful.

The closest thematic and iconographic links are to be found in some Etruscan-Italic reliefs dating to the second half of the 6th century BC. Identical tools and signs of power are depicted on some slabs found in funerary contexts in central Italy. A funerary cippus from Chiusi and a terracotta relief from Velletri represent the best level of correlation<sup>39</sup>. On the frieze from Velletri six figures sit on chairs; two standing figures approach the seated group from the left. (Fig. 7) One of them carries a bow and an arrow; the other person gestures as if he was talking. The persons belonging to the seated group wear chitons; the first and the fourth figure hold a sceptre; the second and the sixth (partially missing) carry a *lituus*. A similar scene can be seen on the cippus from Chiusi. Five figures sit on *sellae curules*, but three standing figures are also depicted between them. The first seated pair holds a wand and a *lituus* respectively. (Fig. 8).

Santo Mazzarino focused on these Etruscan funerary reliefs and clarified roles and positions of power for all the portrayed figures. Contrary to the opinion of other scholars, who thought of an assembly of gods, he provided strong evidence that the series of seated figures represented a meeting of magistrates<sup>40</sup>. According to Mazzarino, these reliefs are tangible figurative evidence of the fundamental political and institutional transformation that was changing many city-states in central Italy at the end of the 6th century BC. Through keen insight and exegesis, he highlighted the precise historical context during which new institutional functions transformed the political landscape of the Etruscan-Latin cities. He clarified the ways in which a crucial institutional change took place in the transition from the monarchical age to the republican state. Although the historical tradition attributes an abrupt and traumatic end to the monarchy in Rome after the kingdom of Tarquinius Superbus, the Italian historian persuasively described how the transition was gradual and uneven in space and time. From a personal/individual political system (i.e. 'monarchy'), the change manifested

<sup>37</sup> See especially the evaluation of Torelli (2006), 408.

<sup>38</sup> Apul., *apol.* 22, 7: *verum tamen hoc Diogeni et Antistheni pera et baculum, quod regibus diadema, quod imperatoribus paludamentum, quod pontificibus galerum, quod lituus auguribus.*

<sup>39</sup> The terracotta relief from Velletri is now stored in the National Museum of Naples. See Andrén (1939), pl. 128, no. 450, 449. The cippus from Chiusi is preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Palermo. See Gabrici (1928), Tav. V, b; Paribeni (1938), Tav. XIX, no. 1-2.

<sup>40</sup> See Andrén (1939), 412-413; Åkerström (1954), 213-214; Torelli (1997), 89, 94-95. The symbolic value of the *sella curulis* and *fascies*, together with the iconographic evidence, are studied in Schäfer (1989): see esp. 24-40, 50-69.



Fig. 7. Velletri, terracotta relief with a gathering of magistrates 550-525 ca. BC (National Museum of Naples).  
Andr n (1939), pl. 128, no. 450, 449.



Fig. 8. Chiusi, cippus with magistrates, 550-525 ca. BC (Archaeological Museum of Palermo).  
From G brici (1928), Tav. V, b; Paribeni (1938), Tav. XIX, no. 1-2.

itself in terms of a new ‘collegiate’ magistracy in the scheme of a consular *res publica*. The prevailing idea was that of an indivisible *imperium* between two consuls, whose power, however, was mutually limited by the *intercessio*. Mazzarino realised that this was not only applicable to Rome, since the reliefs of both Velletri and Chiusi clearly show the figurative representation of this new shared political atmosphere and the institutional creation of a collegiate system of power in central Italy. In his opinion, the relief of Velletri is the first document that can be linked to the existence of a collegiate office in a republican city-state in the second half of the 6th century BC. Mazzarino’s analysis, however, proceeds by considering the special case of Veius. A *rex* held a permanent non-collegiate magistracy and ruled the city during the archaic period. At the beginning of the 5th century, however, the city experienced a government led by collegiate offices, but under the Roman military threat it reverted to a monarchy at the end of the same century. From these facts Mazzarino assumes two fundamental considerations. On the one hand, the transition in Rome from a permanent individual office to a temporary collegiate magistracy was not an isolated case. On the other, the Etruscan reliefs depict a hierarchy of magistrates bearing sceptres and *litui*, and therefore reproduce a real-life scene<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Mazzarino (2001), 75-76. See also Heurgon (1957), 63-97.



Moreover, his thesis was corroborated by coeval written sources, as he compared archaeological evidence with inscriptions mentioning specific offices<sup>42</sup>. Thus, it emerged that the phenomenon did not induce a uniform, sudden, and immediate change. On the contrary, a gradual process of political and institutional transformation took place in different ways in the city-states of the Etruscan-Italic *koiné*<sup>43</sup>. In the government of some cities, Mazzarino was able to distinguish magistracies that were not yet collegiate and of fixed duration. At a very early stage, the institutional structure of Veio and Chiusi appears more conservative. These cities, on the one hand, were characterised by permanent offices, such as *purθne* and *purθ-zilaθ* that perhaps resembled *rex/princeps* and *pritanis*, respectively in a Latin and Greek environment. On the other hand, Tarquinia, Orvieto, Vulci, and Velletri, for example, developed new forms of political leadership based on power sharing among temporary offices<sup>44</sup>. Although it is not yet possible to specify a precise equivalence between all Latin and Etruscan offices and their specific functional and legal prerogatives, the similarity between *lauχumo* and *augur / sacerdos* is almost certain. Analogous considerations can be drawn about the parallel functions of the Roman *praetor* and *aedilis* with respect to the *zilaθ* and *maru* at the head of the Etruscan league. These offices, moreover, are also evident in the very first inscriptions from Caere, dated to the end of the 6th century BC.<sup>45</sup>

The recognition of cooperative collegiality prevailed over the time in the city-states and, eventually, the new 'consular' magistracy became the norm. Mazzarino's conclusions can be enumerated as follows.

First, the subject of the reliefs is not about a divine gathering, but an assembly of magistrates.

Second, there is specific hierarchy between the 'sceptre' bearing magistrates, the lower-ranking officers carrying the *lituus*, and the standing figures.

Third, this type of representation combined with the coeval inscriptions is a remarkable sign that the idea of 'collegiate' offices was cropping up in many cities of central Italy and was prevailing over the older monarchical institution based on personal and permanent power. This was a gradual phenomenon and did not represent a sudden and generalised transformation in the constitutional structure of the Etruscan-Latin cities.

A different problem arises, on the contrary, when it comes to verifying whether in Rome itself there was a sudden and abrupt transition from the monarchy to the republican constitution, as the ancient sources allegedly suggest<sup>46</sup>. Mazzarino identifies a transitional form of magistracy characterised by a collegiate but unequal *imperium*: the dictatorship<sup>47</sup>. In some Latin cities, such as Aricia, Nomentum, and Lanuvium this office was ordinary and annual. The *dictator*, indeed, could appoint a *magister equitum*, a subordinate colleague. In the institutional transition from monarchy to Republic, this peculiar magistracy (not comparable to the extraordinary, absolute, and very short-lived one of the republican age) could have represented a plausible form of transition towards the consulship.

<sup>42</sup> Mazzarino (2001), 67-165.

<sup>43</sup> Legal, religious, and cultural aspects of this institutional change are also highlighted in Fiori (2019), 411-525.

<sup>44</sup> Discussion and primary evidence in Mazzarino (2001) pp. 87-97, 104-112; Cappelletti (2016), 85-99.

<sup>45</sup> ET Cr. 4,4 (= H. Rix (Hrsg.), *Etruskische Texte*, I-II, Tübingen 1991); ETP 22 (= *Etruscan Texts Project*). See especially Heurgon (1957), 75-86; Cappelletti (2016), 96 and further literature in notes; Briquel (2019), 247-273.

<sup>46</sup> Liv. I, 29-30, 49-50; Strabo V, 2.2; Fl. I, 7.11, 9.1-3; Eutr. I, 8-11.

<sup>47</sup> Mazzarino (2001), 91 refers to 'collegialità diseguale'.

Basically, the political framework of the city-states of central Italy shows a high level of variability in the last decades of the Archaic Age. Together with the development of institutions characterised by a collegiate power in multiple offices, a *rex*, a *lucumon*, a *pritanis*, a *dictator* (whatever his name might be) was the expression of a persistent political tradition that was still linked to monarchical principles in a good number of Latin, Etruscan, and Graeco-Italic cities. These rulers carried out the tasks of individual offices which, with a certain degree of hybridity, could differ in terms of permanent or temporary duration, depending on the cities' choices. The symbolic value and ideological significance of the insignia of power, common to both kings and high magistrates in central Italy, were probably first fixed during that delicate passage of institutional coexistence and became part of a legal and political heritage the tradition of which did not decay over the centuries. Indeed, later, thanks to this original 'flexibility' of use in hybrid situations, they could be exported to foreign contexts where political and diplomatic relations required it. The sceptre, crown, *sella curulis*, *lituus*, arms and various furnishings became signs of political and religious power, whatever the office they belonged to, be it collegiate or individual, temporary, or permanent.

In this general framework a pivotal principle emerges. Although the Roman government developed a certain hierarchy among local communities, by ruling provinces and marginal areas, it never imposed random political structures. The political and institutional system of *municipia* and *coloniae* never became a generalised legal scheme. The collegiate, temporary, and separate offices (such as, *duoviri*, *quattuorviri*, *aediles* etc.) of the city-states with Roman status functioned in juxtaposition to the individual and personal rule of the magistrates of as many non-Roman communities. The power of these magistrates, therefore, could be permanent or temporary, elective or not, depending on the local traditions of different *civitates*. The historical consequences of these administrative institutions are decisive, especially in the provinces during the imperial period. The granting of the status of *municipium* and *colonia* implied the constitutional adoption of collegiate offices that were usually represented by *duumviri* in association with the local *curia*. This political structure, it is known, resembled the Roman Republican consulship and senate. However, these statutes were never generalised and were never granted indiscriminately. Loyal *civitates* and *oppida* could become *municipia* and *coloniae* only if on a socio-cultural level, as well as on a political one, they were 'ready' to receive institutions based on collegial magistracies. This was often the case with *civitates*, whose previous political and administrative experience was mainly that of autonomous city-states. In contrast, the socio-cultural features and institutional structures of *civitates* of other kingdoms and tribes could diverge markedly from the city-state model. These communities were still accustomed to the individual, cumulative, political, military, and religious power of a *rex*, a *lucumon*, a *rex-augur*, an ethnic chief. For this second category of *civitates*, the roughly equivalent offices of *rex* and *princeps gentis* were politically more suitable and based on individual and usually permanent power. Otherwise, on the part of the central government, it would have been a very ruinous and dangerous policy to impose exogenous and unfamiliar offices on local communities.

In addition to the remark of Ammianus and the inscriptions mentioning several *principes gentium* in the North African provinces, two inscriptions document 'kings' at the head of certain tribes. The texts are from Lambaesis and Gightis and date from the middle of the 3rd and 4th century AD respectively. Between 253 and 260, the *legatus Augusti pro praetore* in Numidia celebrated his successful campaign against four kings of the *Bavares*, against the tribe of the *Quinquegentanei*, as well as the *famosissimus dux* of the *Fraxinenses*. All these tribes, allied in a common action and attacking in multiple waves, devastated the territories

of Milev, the provincial borders between Numidia and Mauretania, and even the Roman provinces themselves.

To the Best and the Greatest Jupiter and to the other immortal gods and goddesses. Caius Macrinus Decianus highly regarded man, military governor of the two Augusti in the provinces of Numidia and Noricus (dedicated this altar) because the Bavares were killed and expelled after that their four kings gathered together and invaded for the first time the region of Milev, for the second time the border between Mauretania and Numidia, for the third time the people of Quinquegentanei, who devastated Mauretania Caesarensis and similarly the people of Fraxinenses, who devastated the province of Numidia, after that their very famous leader was captured<sup>48</sup>.

Another valid piece of evidence dating to the reign of Constantius II and Julian comes from an inscription from Gighthis, in the first line of which (if the integration of the line is correct) a 'king' at the head of the Austurians was mentioned. Presumably, at that time Ghirza was the main religious settlement of that confederation of tribes, who were particularly devoted to the cult of Gurzil. The stone celebrates the victory of the *comes* Titus Archontius Nilus against their *rex* (?).

After the defeat of the Austurians' king, who was promoter of every force/violence in this region and certainly first and alone, the senate and people of the *municipium* of Gighthis gladly erected (this dedication) in honour of Titus Archontius Nilus most excellent man, protector (*praeses*) and count (*comes*) of province Tripolitania.<sup>49</sup>

In conclusion, it seems clear that the political position of the 'chieftains' honoured in the mausolea of Ghirza was an autonomous one, situated at the head of a confederation, but it derived from and was embedded in the network of diplomatic relations of a territorial State along its borderlands. In the *limes*-system of Late Antiquity these chiefs were not Roman magistrates, but *principes/reges*, legitimately recognised by both the Romano-Byzantine administration and the local semi-desert communities. Their direct power over the *civitates* was part of the indirect political control and management of the *limes* areas, the stability of which proved highly fluctuating and volatile during the 4th and 5th centuries. It was the dawn of what, in a few decades, would transform those political arrangements into the territories of the Romano-Berber kingdoms, after the final fragmentation of the Western Roman Empire.

<sup>48</sup> CIL VIII, 2615=ILS 1194 (altar from Lambaesis, 253-256 AD): *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / ceterisq(ue) di(i)s deabusq(ue) immortalib(us) / C(aius) Macrinus Decianus v(ir) c(larissimus) legat(us) / Augg(ustorum) pr(o)pr(aetore) prov(inciarum) Numidiae et No(rici) Bavaribus qui adunatis IIII / regibus in prov(inciam) Numidiam in(ru)perant primum in regione / Millevitana iterato in confi(nio) Mauretaniae et Numidiae tertio Quinquegentaneis / gentilibus Mauretaniae Caesariensis item gentilibus Fraxinensibus qui provinciam / Numidiam vastabant capto famosissimo duce eorum / caesis fugatisque.*

<sup>49</sup> CIL VIII, 11031=ILTun, 14 (Gighthis, 350-363 AD): *[devicto] / rege Au(sturianorum) omnis] / vigor[is in hac re]lgione [auctori] / primo vel solo / T(it) Archontio Nilo / v(iro) p(erfectissimo) p(raesidi) et comiti / p(rovinciae) T(ripolitanae) ordo popul[us]q(ue) / mu(nicipii) Gighthisi[m] / patrono grat[an]l[ter] conlocavit.* See also CIL VIII, 22766, 22767. About the text and the identification between Austurians and Laguatan see Mattingly (1983), 96-108; Modéran (2003), 123 ff., 227-249; Felici, Munzi, Tantillo (2006), 596-599.



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'Fossils' of political institutions. Rome and Tripolitanian marginal areas during Late Antiquity

Weiss A. (2006), Das Amt des *praefectus gentis* in den kaiserzeitlichen nordafrikanischen Provinzen, *Antiquités Africaines* 42, 101-116.

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## Riassunto / *Abstract*

*Abstrac:* This paper examines some political-institutional, cultural, and religious dynamics in the border areas of Roman Tripolitania. The site of Ghirza, in particular, offers insights into the forms and content of intercultural exchange between the native groups and the Romano-Byzantines. The settlement was also crucial for the territorial political control of the Roman administration in those marginal areas. Some of the reliefs on the local mausolea show ceremonial scenes concerning the investiture of certain chiefs. Scholars have suggested that the depiction may refer to a Roman magistrate, such as *praefectus* or *princeps gentis*. This paper aims to better define the powers related to the tribal chief of Ghirza. It also attempts to distinguish the earliest legal-institutional basis on which this office may have been rooted. The Roman government in the borderlands acted as a guarantee of political legitimacy in the management of the confederations of tribes that gravitated on the Roman *limes*. In this sense, this research is supposed to identify the residual “fossils” of the Etruscan-Italic magistracies which in frontier contexts were much more suitable than the Roman magistracies for indirect political management.

*Riassunto:* Questo contributo esamina alcune dinamiche politico-istituzionali, culturali e religiose nelle aree di confine della Tripolitania romana. Il sito di Ghirza, in particolare, offre spunti sulle forme e i contenuti dello scambio interculturale tra i gruppi nativi e i Romano-Bizantini. L'insediamento era anche cruciale per il controllo politico e territoriale dell'amministrazione romana in quelle aree marginali. Alcuni dei rilievi sui mausolei locali mostrano scene cerimoniali riguardanti l'investitura di alcuni capi. Gli studiosi hanno suggerito che la raffigurazione possa riferirsi a un magistrato romano, in qualità di *praefectus* o *princeps gentis*. Questo studio mira a definire meglio i poteri relativi al capo tribale di Ghirza. Tenta di individuare le più antiche basi giuridico-istituzionali su cui questa carica poté essere stata radicata. Il governo romano nelle zone di frontiera fungeva da garanzia di legittimità politica nella gestione delle confederazioni di tribù che gravitavano sul *limes* romano. In questo senso, questa ricerca intende identificare i “fossili” residuali delle magistrature etrusco-italiche che in contesti di frontiera erano molto più adatte delle magistrature romane ad una gestione politica indiretta.

*Key words:* Roman marginal areas, Ghirza, *limes*, tribes' confederations, magistracies

*Parole-chiave:* aree marginali romane, Ghirza, *limes*, confederazioni di tribù, magistrature

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