



Gordian III and North Africa*

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While researching for a book on Gordian III (r. 238-244), I soon realised that one could not investigate the policies of this emperor without analysing his relationship with North Africa. His dynasty was created in this region, where some significant events characterising his rule also took place. The circumstances which brought Gordian III to power and the main traits of his regime are quite well-known. Between February and March 238, the inhabitants of Thysdrus manifested their discontent with the autocratic and predatory rule of Maximinus Thrax by awarding the purple to the then proconsul of Africa, a senator of eastern origin named Marcus Antonius Gordianus Sempronianus Africanus (Gordian I)¹. Gordianus immediately made his son of the same name (Gordian II) co-ruler. Still, their usurpation was short-lived, for the legate of Numidia (or perhaps the governor of Mauretania Caesariensis) Capelianus and the *legio III Augusta* remained loyal to Maximinus². After only 21 days since the beginning of the insurrection, the forces led by Capelianus defeated and killed Gordian II near Carthage, forcing Gordian I to commit suicide³. Maximinus Thrax was killed by his soldiers in Aquileia not long afterwards (in either April or May), and the two Augusti whom the senate had in the meanwhile appointed, Pupienus and Balbinus, were assassinated by the praetorians shortly after that (most likely in July)⁴. Since there were no other pretenders to

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¹ Hdn. VII, 5, 2 - 6, 2; *SHA Max.* 14, 2-5 and *Gord.* 7-9; *Aur. Vict. Caes.* 26, 1-2; *Eutr.* IX, 2, 1; *Zos.* I, 14, 1; *Zonar.* XII, 16.

² Herodian (VII, 9, 1) affirms that Capelianus was a man of senatorial rank who governed Numidia, whereas the *Historia Augusta* (*Max.* 19, 1 and *Gord.* 15, 1) maintains that he ruled over the Moors. On Capelianus in general, cf. *PIR*² C 404; Thomasson (1996), 184-185 no. 63; Gerhardt, Hartmann (2008), 1154 no. Num. 1; Hächler (2019), 335-337 no. 66.

³ Hdn. VII, 9, 1-9; *SHA Max.* 19, 1-3 and *Gord.* 15, 1-3.

⁴ Deaths of Maximinus and Maximus: Hdn. VIII, 5, 1-9; *SHA Max.* 23, 1-6; *Zos.* I, 1, 15; *Zonar.* XII, 16. Assassination of Pupienus and Balbinus: Hdn. VIII 8, 1-7; *SHA Max.-Balb.* 14, 5-6 and 15, 4, *Gord.* 22, 5; *Eutr.*

the throne, the praetorians decided to bestow the purple on the 14-year-old son of Gordian I's daughter, who became Marcus Antonius Gordianus Augustus (Gordian III)⁵. Given his young age, the new emperor ruled under the guardianship of his *concilium*, whose members strived to present his administration as fair, considerate, and respectful of traditions to overcome the instability into which the empire had plunged⁶.

Notwithstanding, the situation in Africa demonstrates that restoring harmony was not easy. The *legio III Augusta* was disbanded, and its forces were redeployed in other regions of the empire, no doubt because of their involvement in the deposition of Gordian I and Gordian II⁷. This decision appears to have ushered in a period of instability along the African *limes*, which eventually forced Valerianus and Gallienus to recreate this unit⁸. What is more, both the *Historia Augusta* and Zosimus briefly narrate that a certain Sabinianus was proclaimed emperor in Africa in 240, specifying that his rebellion lasted a few days or weeks before being crushed⁹. Although the reasons behind Sabinianus' coup are not mentioned, the impression is that discontent was brewing. Scholars have thus hypothesised that Gordian III and his advisors did too little to reverse the policies of Maximinus or perhaps excluded some influential individuals from key positions¹⁰.

Whatever the truth, it seems unlikely that the administration of Gordian III neglected North Africa or, even worse, assumed a punitive attitude towards its inhabitants following Sabinianus' revolt. Admittedly, both the family of the Gordians and most of the regime's top officials were from the eastern part of the Mediterranean (though we know of several Africans who attained prestigious posts in this period)¹¹. Yet the Africans created the Gordian dynasty

IX, 2, 2; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 27, 6; *Epit. de Caes.* 26, 2; Zos. I, 16, 2; Zonar. XII, 17.

⁵ Hdn. VIII, 8, 8; SHA *Gord.* 22, 5-6 and *Max.-Balb.* 14, 7; Eutr. IX, 2, 2.; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 26, 2; Zos. I, 16, 1. For an overview of the events of 238, cf. Romanelli (1959), 448-458; Lorient (1975), 688-724; Christol (1997), 89-90; Drinkwater (2005), 31-33; Huttner (2008), 169-179; Haegemans (2010), 138-211; Herrmann (2013), 31-71, as well as Strasser (2016) with specific reference to the numerous issues affecting the chronology of this period.

⁶ On the reign of Gordian III in general, cf. Lorient (1975), 724-777; Christol (1997), 89-99; Gehrke (1997); Drinkwater (2005), 33-36; Huttner (2008), 179-188; Herrmann (2013).

⁷ On this event, cf. Le Bohec (1989a), 451-453, 459. Cf. also Romanelli (1959), 459-460; Lorient (1975), 747; Kuhoff (2004), 1657-1658; Drinkwater (2005), 34; Huttner (2008), 180; Bertolazzi (2019), 361-362; Lefebvre (2020). The fate of Capelianus, who disappears from the record after the deaths of the first two Gordians, remains unknown.

⁸ Inscriptions dating to this period inform us that the *legio III Augusta* was reconstituted (*CIL* VIII, 2482 = 17976, 2634; *AE* 1946, 39). Cf. Lefebvre (2020), 340-342. An inscription dating to 253 mentions soldiers who had returned from Raetia (*CIL* VIII, 2482 = 17976).

⁹ SHA *Gord.* 23, 4 narrates that Sabinianus started the revolt (*inita est factio in Africa contra Gordianum tertium duce Sabiniano*). On the other hand, Zos. I, 17, 1 notes that the Carthaginians made Sabinianus emperor since they were dissatisfied with Gordian III's rule (Καρχηδόνιοι τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως εὐνοίας ἀλλοτριωθέντες Σαβιανὸν εἰς βασιλείαν παράγουσι). Scholars usually consider Sabinianus (*PIR*² S 18) a proconsul of Africa (Romanelli [1959], 458; Birley [1970], 87-88; Gerhardt, Hartmann [2008], 1090-1091 no. Afr. 2; Huttner [2008], 184; Potter [2014], 126; Paschoud [2018], 257-258; *contra* Thomasson [1996], 90; Polley [2007], 156-157). Birley (1970) identifies him with the senator M. Triarius Rufinus Asinius Sabinianus (*PIR*² A 1251), who was proconsul of Asia between 238 and 240.

¹⁰ Lorient (1975), 735; Potter (2014), 226.

¹¹ On the origin of the family, cf. Birley (1966); Lorient (1975), 694-695; Jones (2002); Birley (2005), 338-341; Chausson (2014), 150-151. Among the people who held positions of note and presumably tutored Gordian III, the following are especially worth mentioning: the jurist and *amicus* M. Gnaeus Licinius Rufinus from Thyatira (*PIR*² L 236; cf. also Millar [1999]; Hächler [2019], 478-480 no. 170); the prefect of the Watch Cn. Domitius Philippus from Telmessus (*PIR*² D 157; cf. also Sablayrolles [1996], 506-511); the prefect of the Watch and then vice-prefect of the Guard Valerius Valens, who was probably from Thessalonica (*PIR*² V 214);

in the first place. One might suppose that Gordian III did his best to maintain a good relationship with the north African provinces and that African communities were generally well disposed towards his regime.

This paper focuses on these issues, exploring how Gordian III's decisions impacted western North Africa and how locals reacted to his rule. To do so, I will examine *a*) Gordian III's military policies (most importantly the consequences of the disbandment of the *III Augusta*), *b*) his acts concerning civilian administration (public works and municipal promotions), and *c*) the honorary monuments with which local communities paid homage to the emperor and his family (dedications of public statues and dedications *pro salute* on buildings and altars). I intend to show that the administration of Gordian III was particularly active in North Africa, and that the Africans hailed with enthusiasm its efforts to show discontinuity with the rule of Maximinus Thrax.

1. *The dissolution of the legio III Augusta and its impact on the north African limes*

Our sources do not explicitly say that Gordian III disbanded the *III Augusta*, but the name of this unit was erased in inscriptions dating up to Maximinus Thrax's rule¹². Moreover, an inscription from Lambaesis (Numidia), where the *III Augusta* had been stationed since the time of Hadrian, records that a vexillation of soldiers from Mauretania Caesariensis (*vexillatio militum Maurorum Caesariensium Gordianorum*) erected a statue of Gordian III¹³. The most convincing explanation for these events is that Gordian III discharged the legion, condemned it to the *damnatio memoriae*, and sent a detachment of Mauretanian troops to occupy its headquarters.

As noted above, it is not difficult to interpret these measures as a punishment for the involvement of the *III Augusta* in the deaths of Gordian I and Gordian II. Yet Gordian III could have also imitated Septimius Severus, who had discharged the praetorian Guard for killing Pertinax, of whom he had claimed to be the political heir¹⁴. Furthermore, Gordian III could have cashiered the *III Augusta* for its role in the persecution of those who had supported the rebellion. Both Herodian and the *HA* recount that Capelianus sacked Carthage and put to death all its prominent men; he then inflicted the same punishment on other cities where the emblems of Maximinus had been destroyed, turning farms and villages over to his soldiers to

the prefect of the City Flavius Julius Latronianus from Xanthus (*PIR*² F 297; cf. also Hächler [2019], 429-430 no. 127); the prefects of the Guard (and brothers) Julius Priscus (*PIR*² I 488) and Julius Philippus (the future emperor Philip the Arab: *PIR*² I 461), who hailed from an Arabian town which later became Philippopolis (cf. the discussion in Körner [2002]). Last but not least, the prefect of the Guard and father-in-law of the emperor C. Furius Sabinus Aquila Timesitheus certainly originated from the Greek-speaking part of the empire, but his hometown is unknown (*PIR*² F 581; cf. also Gnoli [2000]). As for the Africans, the senator L. Domitius Gallicanus Papinianus, who held a notable number of governorships (Germania Inferior, Hispania Citerior and Dalmatia), was probably from Vina (*PIR*² D 148; cf. also Hächler [2019], 400-402 no. 109); the legate of Numidia Cosinius Marcianus seems to have belonged to a family from Cuicul (*PIR*² C 1537; cf. also Hächler [2019], 394-395 no. 105); C. Attius Alcimius Felicianus, who came from an unspecified town in Africa Proconsularis, was head of the *ratio privata*, then vice-prefect of the Watch, prefect of the Grain Supply and, finally, vice-prefect of the Guard (*PIR*² A 1349; cf. also Sablayrolles [1996], 524-525 no. 49); M. Attius Cornelianus from Uchi Maius was prefect of the Guard, though it is uncertain whether he held this position under Gordian III or Philip the Arab (*PIR*² A 1353; cf. also Ibba [2006], 199-206; Gerhardt, Hartmann [2008], 1072 no. PPO 7).

¹² E.g. *CIL* VIII, 2467 = 17955; *IRT* 1057 (reign of Severus Alexander); *AE* 1972, 677 = *IRT* 1059 (reign of Maximinus Thrax). Cf. Lefebvre (2020).

¹³ *CIL* VIII, 2716.

¹⁴ Cass. Dio LXXV (LXXIV), 1-2.

plunder and burn¹⁵. Some years ago, S. Messina doubted the truthfulness of this information, attributing it to the stark bias of literary sources towards Maximinus Thrax¹⁶. As Messina argued, Maximinus' administration could have hardly afforded a loss of revenues and supplies by letting his troops ravage the affluent agricultural regions of Africa Vetus and Byzacena. It seems complicated, however, to pass over an inscription from Theveste mentioning an individual captured by Capelianus and assassinated "on account of his love for Rome" (*pro amore Romano*)¹⁷. This evidence unequivocally indicates that Capelianus conducted some repression, and to carry out this he must have resorted to the soldiers under his command. Therefore, there are good reasons to think that the regime of Gordian III disbanded the *III Augusta* not only to avenge the deaths of both Gordian I and Gordian II, but also to appease the communities which had endured Capelianus' retaliations.

That said, the disappearance of the legion must have somehow affected the defence system of Roman Africa. Some 40 years before Gordian III's accession, Septimius Severus had significantly strengthened the empire's southern borders, pushing them further south towards the desert. As a result, vexillations of the *III Augusta* were tasked with building and garrisoning several forts and fortlets on the fringes of the Sahara, the best examples of which are documented in Numidia and Tripolitania¹⁸. According to the traditional view, the scarcity of troops caused by the disbandment of the legion forced Gordian III to redesign the organisation of the north African *limes*, abandoning the offensive strategy inaugurated by Severus in favour of a defensive one¹⁹. Others have instead argued (albeit cursory) that the regime tried to preserve the existing situation²⁰. To get as clear a picture as possible, I think it is worthwhile to re-examine the whole question.

In Tripolitania (Map 1), the disbandment of the legion affected a 700 km-long chain of forts and fortlets running parallel to the Mediterranean coast about 100 km inland. Under the Severans, inscriptions attest to the presence of legionary vexillations in sites located all over this line of defence: Vezereos (Bir Rhezene), Tisavar (Ksar Rhilane), Myd(- -) (Gheriat el-Garbia), Gasr Zerzi and Gholaia (Bu Njem)²¹. A vexillation was also present in Cydamus (Ghadames), an advanced oasis fort (or fortlet: its dimension is unknown) built in the heart of Fezzan and located ca. 460 km southwest of Oea²². Given the paucity and uneven distribution of our documentation, assessing the impact of the disbandment of the *III Augusta* on this complex defence system remains impossible. However, we know almost for sure that this event caused the abandonment of Cydamus, for the last inscription recording the presence of soldiers in this site dates to the reign of Severus Alexander²³. More to the north, a fragment

¹⁵ Hdn. VII, 9, 8-11; SHA *Max.* 19, 3-4.

¹⁶ Messina (2006).

¹⁷ *CIL* VIII, 2170 = *ILAlg* I, 3598. Cf. also Mastino (2020), who examines two third-century metrical epitaphs from Thignica (*AE* 1907, 200 = *CIL* VIII, 25916 = *ILTun* 1315 = Benzina Ben Abdallah [1986], 68 no. 178 = *AE* 2008, 1678 and *CIL* VIII, 25925 = *ILTun* 1316 = Benzina Ben Abdallah [1986], 68 no. 179 = Cugusi, Sblendorio Cugusi [2014], 77 no. 34, attesting to a young man killed in a *bellica clades*), suggesting that they may refer to individuals who "heroically" died while fighting Capelianus' troops.

¹⁸ Cf. Fentress (1979), 114-117; Le Bohec (1989a), 393-394; Mattingly (1995), 129-133; Guédon (2018) 111-123; Bertolazzi (2019).

¹⁹ Carcopino (1925); Townsend (1935), 113-114; Lorient (1975), 745-753; Le Bohec (1989a), 456.

²⁰ Fentress (1979), 117-118.

²¹ Cf. the list in Mattingly (1995), 136-138. On the *limes Tripolitanus* in general, cf. also Krimi (2004); Troussat (2004); Lenoir (2011), 363-367, 372-374; Guédon (2018), 108-114.

²² *IRT* 909 attests to the establishment of the post, on which cf. in general Mattingly (1995), 154-155; Guédon (2018), 119-122.

²³ A vexillation of the *III Augusta* carried out some building works under Severus Alexander (*CIL* VIII, 1 =



Map 1.

of an inscribed lintel found in the fort of Myd(- - -), which guarded an oasis settlement located ca. 280 km south of Oea²⁴, provides some information on what happened during the first period of Gordian III's reign. This monument was first published in the *IRT*, and then republished by X. Lorient²⁵, who proposed the following reading:

[*Imp(eratori) Caes(ari) M(arco) Ant(onio) Gordian]o Pio Fe[lic(i) Aug(usto)*
 [*sub - - - leg(ato) Au]g(usti) pr(o) p[r(aetore), c(larissimo) v(iro)]*,
 [*milit(es) - - -]G(- - -) Gordian[ae]*
 [- - -] *vetusta[te di]=*
 5 [*lapsu(m) item - - -]m bell(o) dissi[patum]*
 [*et viam ? quae - - -]ATSA col(oniam) Lep[cim]*
 [*ducit ? - - -]O restituer[unt]*,
 [*imp(eratore) d(omino) n(ostro) Gordiano et Avi]ola c[o](n)s(ulibus), cur[an]te*
 - - - - -.

10990 = *IRT* 908). His name was later erased, but that of the *III Augusta* was spared (cf. *AE* 1960, 264 = *IRT* 1109, also from Cydamus), which suggests that the military occupation of this site had ended by the beginning of Gordian III's reign.

²⁴ Several scholars surveyed the ruins of the fort throughout the second half of the past century: Goodchild (1954), 70-66; Welsby (1983); Mattingly (1995), 148-152; Mattingly (1996), 98-105. Cf. also Lenoir (2011), 161-164. As of late, the *Institut für Vor- und Frühgeschichtliche Archäologie und Provinzialrömische Archäologie* of the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich run two excavation campaigns in this site between 2009 and 2010, resulting in the publication of numerous reports and studies, the full list of which can be found at: https://www.vfp-archaeologie.uni-muenchen.de/forschung/provinzial/gheriat/gheriat_en/index.html. A fragmentary dedication to Septimius Severus, Caracalla and Geta (*AE* 1967, 539) records the establishment of the fort, while a dedication to Julia Mamaea (*AE* 2010, 1786) attests to its name. During the reign of Severus Alexander, the soldiers of the *III Augusta* built a watchtower (*burgus*) circa one km northeast of the fort (*CIL* VIII, 3 = *IRT* 895); cf. also Mattingly (1985), 67-70; Guédon (2018), 113 and *passim*. It is possible that Myd(- - -) and the Tripolitanian *castra Madensia* recorded in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (*Occ.* XXXI, 30) are the same place, as hypothesised by Mackensen (2016), 101.

²⁵ *IRT* 896 = Lorient (1971) = *AE* 1973, 573.

The inscription dates to 239 and relates that the soldiers of an unknown unit bearing the title *Gordiana* restored an unknown facility damaged by war events (*bello dissipatum*)²⁶. No other sources attest to this *bellum*, but its timing suggests that it had something to do with the departure of the soldiers of the *III Augusta*. Lorient observes that the weakening of the garrisons along the *limes* probably encouraged the populations living in the Libyan Fezzan to make incursions into Tripolitania²⁷. Yet the use of the word *bellum* rather than *incursus*, *incursio* or *incursatio* (all of which are documented in this region) hints at military operations on a somewhat large scale, such as a prolonged siege or an expedition to reconquer the oasis and its fort after these had fallen into enemy hands²⁸. To be sure, giving up Myd(- - -) would have entailed serious strategic problems. Myd(- - -) was, in fact, the largest fort in the eastern section of the Tripolitanian *limes*. It could house ca. 800 troops (2.4 ha), thereby being considerably bigger than the fort of Gholaiia (1.29 ha, corresponding to ca. 400 troops) with the small outpost of Gasr Zerzi (0.01 ha), which were both situated ca. 150 km further east and also hosted vexillations of the *III Augusta*²⁹.

Moreover, Myd(- - -) guarded an oasis situated some 250 km from the sea. Thus, the remarkable dimensions of the fort and its location could have provided any hostile power with a well-fortified and well-supplied base to control the caravan routes connecting the Fezzan to Tripolitania or to launch raids against the agricultural areas along the coast³⁰. It is consequently difficult to imagine that Myd(- - -) could be left undefended. It is worth noting, in this regard, that the lacunous expression [- - -]G(- - -) *Gordian[ae]* in the inscription reported above suggests that the reparation works were carried out by the soldiers of the *cohors I Syrorum Sagittariorum*, which under the Severans had provided a garrison for the fortlet of Auru (Ain el-Auenia), situated in the central section of the Tripolitanian *limes*, some 150 km northwest of Myd(- - -)³¹. Considering that a prefect commanded this unit in the first century and a tribune in the third, its strength might have increased from about 480 (*cohors quinge-*

²⁶ Lorient restored the final part of l. five as [*aquaeductu*]m bell(o) diss[*ipatum*], but the lacuna [- - -]m before bell(o) is too large to support this reconstruction. Also, no traces of aqueducts have been found during the recent surveys and excavations, which have determined that an underground, double-chamber cistern with a capacity of about 240,000 litres provided water to the garrison (Mackensen [2016], 94 and references there).

²⁷ Lorient (1971), 344 and (1975), 747.

²⁸ The expression *incursiones barbarorum* appears in an inscription recording the construction of a *centenarium* (most probably a fortified grain-house, cf. Munzi, Schirru, Tantillo [2014]) near Thenteos (ca. 140 km northwest of Myd(- - -)) during the reign of Philip the Arab (*AE* 1950, 128 = *AE* 1951, 149 = *AE* 1991, 1621 = *IRT* 880). *Nimia incursatio barbarorum*, *incursio barbarorum seu gentilium* and *hostilis incursio* are documented in Lepcis Magna and Thenadassa during the fourth century (*IRT* 565, 570, 871; on the raids occurred in this period, cf. the synopsis in Mattingly [1995], 293-299). For an overview of the meaning of *bellum* in inscriptions, cf. *Diz. Ep.* s.v. Bellum [De Ruggiero] vol. I, 989-991.

²⁹ On Gholaiia, cf. Rebuffat (1989), 157; Mattingly (1995), 152-154; Lenoir (2011), 152-160. On Gasr Zerzi, Mattingly (1995), 137, 168-169. According to Campbell (2009), 28, most auxiliary forts range between 1.2 and 2.5 ha. On the dimensions of Myd(- - -), cf. Mattingly (1985), 135-137; Mackensen (2016), 86-87.

³⁰ No military events are recorded in Tripolitania after Septimius Severus' campaign in the Fezzan (*SHA Sev.* 18, 3; *Aur. Vict. Caes.* 20, 19; cf. Philostr. *VS* II, 20). However, "barbarian raids" are documented under Philip the Arab (cf. ft. 28 above as well as *infra*). In 263, Gallienus ordered the construction of a new fort in Talalati *opportuno loco* (*AE* 1895, 17 = *AE* 1902, 46 = *CIL* VIII, 22765 = *ILTun* 3), which suggests that some turbulences had affected the *limes*.

³¹ Mattingly (1985), 70-74, proposing to supplement line three as [*milit(es) cohortis I Syrorum sa*]g(ittariorum) *Gordian[ae]*, a suggestion accepted by Le Bohec (1987) and (1989b), 88-90. *AE* 1962, 304 = *AE* 1992, 1761 attests to the presence of this unit in Auru. According to Mattingly (1995), 141, its main base might have been the nearby Thenteos.

naria) to 800 soldiers (*cohors milliaria*)³². This stratagem could obviate the scarcity of soldiers in Tripolitania following the disbandment of the *III Augusta*, providing enough troops to keep Myd(- -) garrisoned.

Although no other movements of troops are documented in Tripolitania under Gordian III, it is worthwhile to note that milestones dating to 239 and attesting to the name of the emperor in the nominative case were placed on the road between Tentheos (Zintan) and Mizda, two forts of unknown dimensions which guarded the central section of the *limes*³³. Another milestone with a similar text is documented on the road connecting these posts to Lepcis Magna³⁴. The lacunous expression [- -] *ATSA col(oniam) Lep[cim]* in the inscription from Myd(- -) suggests that the *cohors I Syrorum Sagittariorum* restored some sections of this road³⁵, the strategic importance of which can be appreciated when considering that a vexillation of the *III Augusta* is attested in the fortlet of Thenadassa (0.16 ha), halfway between Tentheos and Lepcis³⁶. The fact that the name of the legion was erased indicates that this building continued to be occupied. What is more, not long after Gordian III's death, Philip the Arab ordered the creation of a new subdivision of the *limes* in Gasr Duib near Tentheos (*limes Tentheitanus*)³⁷. Under the same emperor but in the opposite direction, a detachment called *vexillatio Golensis* was stationed in Gholai³⁸. Although verifying the origin of this unit is impossible, it is noteworthy that the *cohors Macedonica* which garrisoned the nearby Cyrenaica under Septimius Severus became the *cohors Macedonica equitata* under Gordian III³⁹. This circumstance could indicate that the regime reinforced this cohort to help the Tripolitanian units patrol this province's south-eastern areas. Moreover, as regards the western section of the Tripolitanian frontier, the *cohors II Flavia Afrorum* appears to have remained in the fort of Tillibari (1.95 ha, located ca. 150 km northwest of Tentheos, near modern Remada), which this unit had restored under Septimius Severus and where it stayed until late antiquity⁴⁰. Some brick stamps bearing the name of the *cohors II Flavia Afrorum* from the fortlet of Tisavar (0.09 ha) might indicate that a detachment of this unit replaced the legionary vexillation documented here, the name of which was erased⁴¹. Finally, the name of *III Augusta* appears erased in the westernmost post along the *limes Tripolitanus*, the fortlet of Vezereos (0.32 ha)⁴², which suggests that the administration maintained some presence here as well.

³² *AE* 1961, 358 = *AE* 1967, 145 (prefect); *AE* 1892, 13 (tribune). Cf. Le Bohec (1989b), 90; Mattingly (1995), 140-141.

³³ *IRT* 942, 947, 939b.

³⁴ *IRT* 937.

³⁵ According to Marmouri (2016), 194-195, the fact that these milestones were placed near fords or mountain passes indicates that the administration restored stretches of road which were at risk of collapse.

³⁶ *IRT* 868. Cf. Mattingly (1995), 162, who calls the fortlet Ain Wif II to distinguish it from an earlier and bigger (0.5 ha) fortified camp established during the second century (Ain Wif I).

³⁷ *AE* 1950, 128 = *AE* 1951, 149 = *AE* 1991, 1621 = *IRT* 880. A fourth-century inscription from Myd(- -) mentioning the *limes Tentheitanus* (*IRT* 1122) suggests that this subdivision of the *limes* stretched as far as this fort. Cf. Haensch, Mackensen (2011).

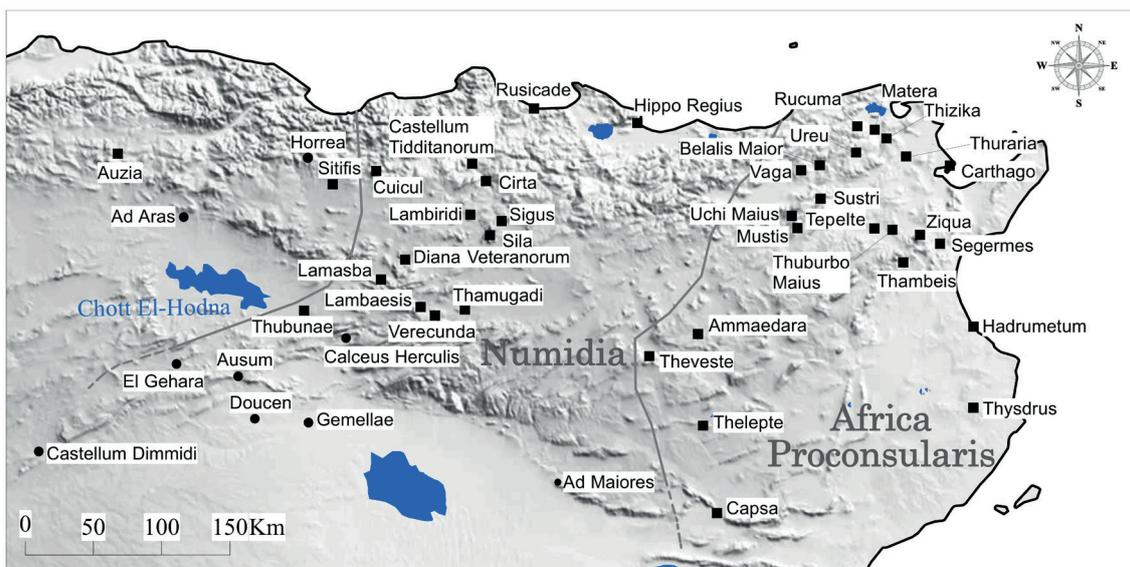
³⁸ *AE* 1985, 849 = *AE* 1992, 1758 = *AE* 1993, 1709 = *IRT* 1053.

³⁹ *AE* 1969/70, 636, 637.

⁴⁰ *AE* 1975, 870. The *Notitia Dignitatum* (*Occ.* XXV, 33) mentions a *praepositus limitis Secundaeforum in castris Tillibanensibus*. Cf. Le Bohec (1989b), 67-69; Mattingly (1995), 140, 145-148; Lenoir (2011), 165-167. *AE* 1909, 104 = *IL Afr* 9 = *ILTun* 1 = *AE* 1986, 704 relates that, at the same time, the cohort and some auxiliary units (*numeri collati*) established a *praesidium* in Si Aioun (30 km south of Tillibari).

⁴¹ Le Bohec (1989b), 70, noting, however, that the stamps cannot be dated to a precise period. Cf. also Lenoir (2011), 171-173.

⁴² *AE* 1909, 151 = *AE* 1922, 53 = *IL Afr* 26 = *AE* 1928, 22 = *ILTun* 56. On Vezereos, cf. Mattingly (1995),



Map 2.

As for Numidia (Map 2), the dissolution of the *III Augusta* is the likely reason for the abandonment of Castellum Dimmidi (Messaâd), a Severan fort of 0.5 ha which hosted a legionary vexillation⁴³. Its position was somewhat isolated: an oasis located ca. 350 km southwest of Lambaesis, which made Castellum Dimmidi the southernmost outpost in Numidia. Like in Tripolitania, the administration of Gordian III reorganised the actual *limes*, which a century before had been established on the southern side of the Saharan Atlas, primarily thanks to the construction of the forts of Ad Maiores (1.4 ha, 5 km south of modern Negrine) under Trajan and Gemellae (2.85 ha, 5 km southwest of M'Lili) under Hadrian⁴⁴. Fortification works dating to Gordian III's reign are documented in Doucen, an oasis located 40 km west of Gemellae⁴⁵. Here, in 1923, J. Carcopino examined four fragments of inscribed lintels from this site, three of which were already recorded in the *CIL* and one more recently discovered⁴⁶. All four inscriptions open with Gordian III's name in the nominative case and his titlature dating to 242 (*trib. pot. V, cos. II*) and end by mentioning works carried out under the supervision of the legate Julius Antiochus (*per T. Iulium Antiochum leg. Aug. pr. pr.*). As for the middle sections, Carcopino made the most of the few surviving letters in each fragment, proposing the following restorations: a) [*ad pacem pro*]la[t]ae pro[*vinciae tuendam castra posuit*]; b) [*opus limitis et fossae praet*]entae [- - - instituit]; c) [*summa ae*]quitatae (!) s[ua] pro[*vinciae et gentium fines direx*]it; d) [*defectores et rebelles vir*]tute sua o[mn]n[es] domuit]. As noted by Y. Le Bohec, these restorations contain more fiction than epigraphy⁴⁷. There

135; Lenoir (2011), 174-175.

⁴³ The names of Maximinus Thrax and his son Maximus documented in this site incurred the *damnatio memoriae* (AE 1948, 209 = AE 1950, 120 = AE 1950, 186; AE 1940, 153 = AE 1948, 210 = AE 1949, 13), whereas the name of the *III Augusta* was left intact. No inscriptions set up after Maximinus' reign have been found in this site. Cf. Picard (1947); Fentress (1979), 87-88 no. 12; Le Bohec (1989a), 435-437; Lenoir (2011), 223-228; Guédon (2018), *passim*.

⁴⁴ For an overview of the Numidian *limes* and its fortifications, cf. Le Bohec (1989a), 405-448; Lenoir (2011), 369-374. On Ad Maiores, cf. also Laporte, Dupuis (2009).

⁴⁵ Carcopino (1925), 31-34; Baradez (1949), 116, 123; Fentress (1979), 85 no. 5; Le Bohec (1989a), 455-456.

⁴⁶ *CIL* VIII, 8779a (= AE 1923, 98), 8779b = 17989 (= AE 1923, 95), 17988 (= AE 1923, 97); AE 1923, 96.

⁴⁷ Le Bohec (1989a), 456.

is little doubt, however, that the four lintels were placed above the gate of a fort or a fortlet (its dimensions are unknown)⁴⁸ and that the inscriptions contained one or more references to imperial virtues. One of these could be *providentia* (fragments *a* and *c*), the foresight and care of the emperor toward the empire⁴⁹. Another one is undoubtedly *virtus*, the emperor's prowess in war (fragment *d*)⁵⁰. These details suggest that, like in south-eastern Tripolitania, some *bellum* took place, after which the imperial administration decided to erect a new fort or radically refurbish an existing one.

That the discharge of the *legio III Augusta* and the abandonment of Castellum Dimmidi did not significantly alter the defensive system of southern Numidia appears evident also when one examines the dedications to Gordian III erected in this region by military units. The *ala Flavia*, which seems to have been transferred from Mauretania Caesariensis to Numidia during the reign of Septimius Severus, put up a statue of the emperor in Thubunae (Barika), 90 km north of Doucen⁵¹. Ca. 40 km west of this site, the *ala I Pannoniorum* erected another statue of Gordian III in the fort of Gemellae, which guarded the *municipium* of the same name and where this unit had had its headquarters since at least the previous century⁵². Furthermore, 90 km northwest of Doucen, the *numerus Palmyrenorum Sagittariorum*, also present in southern Numidia since the second century, placed a third statue of Gordian III in El Gehara (or El Ghara)⁵³. Although the headquarters of the *numerus Palmyrenorum Sagittariorum* were in Calceus Herculis (El Kantara), some detachments garrisoned Castellum Dimmidi together with a vexillation of the *III Augusta* under the Severans⁵⁴. Since another vexillation of the *III Augusta* seems to have been present in El Gehara along with a detachment of the *ala I Pannoniorum* (most likely under the Severans)⁵⁵, it seems plausible that the *numerus Palmyrenorum* or a detachment of this unit replaced the vacated legionaries. As is the case with Myd(- -) in Tripolitania, El Gehara's position was strategically relevant: located on the road leading from Thubunae to Castellum Dimmidi, it guarded a vicus of about 12 ha, which explains the fort's dimension of ca. 1 ha⁵⁶. Finally, Carcopino found a fragment bearing the name of Gordian III ca. 30 km northwest of Doucen and 45 km east of El Gehara in

⁴⁸ Cf. Fentress (1979), 85 no. 5. The lacuna [- -] *quitatae* in fragment *c* might be a reference to a *cohors aequitata*, as observed by Le Bohec (1989a), 456.

⁴⁹ As suggested by Le Bohec (1989a), 456. On the concept of imperial *providentia* in the third century, cf. Manders (2012), 163-165.

⁵⁰ *Virtus* is, in fact, a military quality and as such frequently appears on Gordian's coins (*RIC* 6, 12, 39, 44, 56, 60, 71, 79, 205, 229, 273, 281, 293, reporting the legend *VIRTUS AVG* and representing a personification of *Virtus* with spear and shield; *RIC* 259, reporting the legend *VIRTUS AVG* and depicting Gordian III advancing with spear and shield; *RIC* 95, 110, 116, 120, 309, attesting to the legend *VIRTUTI AVG* and representing Hercules; *RIC* 326, 327, reporting the legend *VIRTUS AVGVSTI* and depicting Gordian in military dress while facing a personification of *Virtus* or riding an horse). On the meaning of *Virtus* on third century imperial coins, cf. in general Manders (2012), 169-178.

⁵¹ *AE* 1992, 1858. On the *ala Flavia*, cf. Le Bohec (1989b), 28-33.

⁵² *AE* 1950, 62. On this unit, cf. Le Bohec (1989b), 33-48; on the camp, Lenoir (2011), 212-216.

⁵³ *CIL* VIII, 18026 = *AE* 1992, 1856.

⁵⁴ Cf. Le Bohec (1989b), 120-125.

⁵⁵ Although there is no record of a vexillation stationed here, several inscriptions attest to the presence of legionaries: *CIL* VIII, 18025 (= *AE* 1888, 1 = *AE* 1992, 1855, which also records the presence of a *decurio* of the *ala*), 18027, 18028.

⁵⁶ Carcopino (1925), 45-47; Fentress (1979), 87 no. 10; Le Bohec (1989a), 435-436; Laporte (2004), 458-466; Guédon (2018), 111-112.

Ausum (Bir Sadouri), another fort of I.I ha⁵⁷. An undated third-century inscription relates that this fort hosted a vexillation of an unknown unit⁵⁸.

Lastly, we can turn our attention to Mauretania Caesariensis and Mauretania Tingitana (Map 3). Here there are good reasons to believe that the dissolution of the *III Augusta* had no direct effects on the garrisons. Septimius Severus moved the empire's borders southwards also in Mauretania Caesariensis, where he ordered the construction of a new chain of forts guarded by auxiliary units and connected by a road (*nova praetentura*)⁵⁹. Interestingly, several dedications for the safety of Gordian III are documented in the military settlements in this region: in Columnata (Ain Tekira), a tribune of the *cohors II Sardorum* set up an altar to Mithra for the safety of the emperor⁶⁰; in the fort of Cohors Breucorum (Henchir Suik), we find two votive altars for the well-being of Gordian III and his wife Sabinia Tranquillina⁶¹; in Pomaria (Tlemcen), an officer (most probably a prefect) of the *ala exploratorum Pomariensium Gordiana* and procurator of the emperor placed an altar to a local deity⁶².

As regards Mauretania Tingitana, a few decades ago several scholars hypothesised that the procurator M. Ulpius Victor, who was in charge of this province between 239 and 241, faced some invasions or insurrections. This reconstruction rested on two pieces of evidence: *a*) Victor sported the title *procurator pro legato*, which might indicate that the emperor had entrusted him with the command of legionary detachments taken from the garrison of Hispania Citerior⁶³; *b*) two altars which Victor dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus relate that he renewed the peace treaty with the Baquates, a population living in the far south or east of Mauretania Tingitana⁶⁴. It is now clear, however, that *procuratores pro legati* appear in ordinary situations in both Mauretania Tingitana and other regions of the empire between the first and third centuries CE, which makes it unlikely that Ulpius Victor held extraordinary commands over legionary vexillations⁶⁵.

We can close this section with a few considerations. The legion *III Augusta* was, in all likelihood, disbanded not only because of its involvement in the demise of Gordian I and Gordian II but also because of its role in the fierce repression of their supporters. The disappearance of this unit caused the definitive abandonment of the outposts of Cydamus in Tripolitania and Castellum Dimmidi in Numidia. Given the exceptionally isolated position of the first and the small dimensions of the second, it is hard to believe that these losses entailed severe

⁵⁷ Carcopino (1924), 319. On the fort, cf. Carcopino (1925), 41-44; Fentress (1979), 85-86 no. 6; Le Bohec (1989a), 456; Lenoir (2011), 217-219.

⁵⁸ *AE* 1926, 146. *CIL* VIII, 8780 = 18016 documents works of improvement under Philip the Arab. Cf. Le Bohec (1989a), 456.

⁵⁹ *CIL* VIII, 22602 = 22603 = 22604 (= *AE* 1892, 116 = *AE* 1893, 105), 22611. On the *nova praetentura*, cf. the discussion in Benseddik (1999); Mastino (1999), 387-397; Salama (2005); Ibba (2009), 191-192; Laporte (2011), 122-125; Lenoir (2011), 367-369; Bertolazzi (2020), 186-187.

⁶⁰ *CIL* VIII, 21523. On the epigraphic evidence attesting to this cohort in Mauretania, cf. the detailed analysis by Ruij (2004).

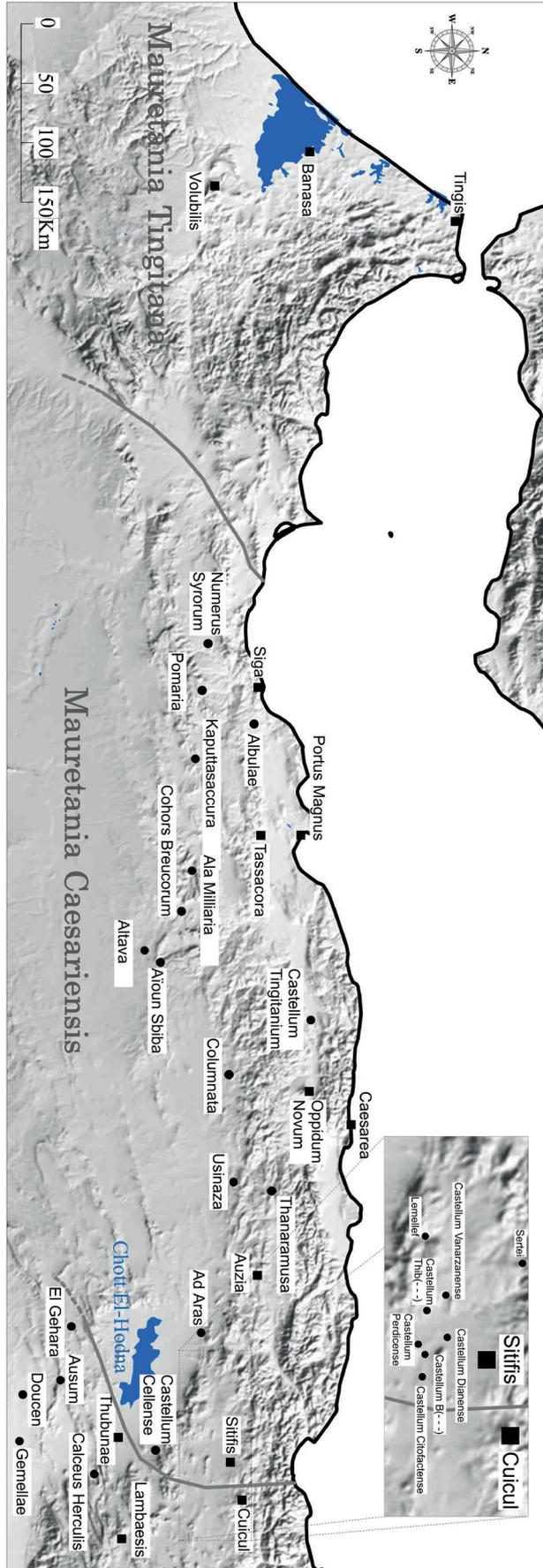
⁶¹ *CIL* VIII, 21559, 21560. On the site, cf. Lenoir (2011), 244-245).

⁶² *CIL* VIII, 9907.

⁶³ Cagnat (1912), 255-256; Romanelli (1959), 461; Pflaum (1960), 842; Rachet (1972), 228-229; Lorient (1975), 753; Rhorfi (2004), 555. On Ulpius Victor (*PIR*² V 870), cf. also Christol, Magioncalda (1989), 17-18, 31 no. 26, 103-104, 151-152 no. 19; Thomasson (1996), 237-238 no. 33; Körner (2002), 370-371 no. P 26; Gerhardt, Hartmann (2008), 1141 no. Maur. Ting. 1.

⁶⁴ *AE* 1952, 42 = *AE* 1953, 77 = *AE* 1957, 201 = *IAM* II (2), 357 = *AE* 1987, 1090a = *AE* 1987, 1094 = *IAM* Suppl. 357 and *AE* 1952, 43 = *IAM* II (2), 358 = *IAM* Suppl. 358. On the relationship between Romans and Baquates, cf. the overview in Brahma (2007) with further bibliography.

⁶⁵ Faoro (2017).



Map 3.

consequences, such as a change from an offensive to a defensive strategy. The disappearance of the legionary vexillations stationed in the main chains of forts guarding the southern borders of Numidia and Tripolitania was more problematic, for this circumstance seems to have encouraged some unspecified enemies to overstep the traditional bounds. Some auxiliary units (or parts of them) were consequently redeployed (an unknown unit in Doucen, the *numerus Palmyrenorum* in El Gehara and the *cohors I Syrorum* in Myd[- -]) to ensure that these strategic points continued to be garrisoned. While the Numidian *limes* was strengthened with the construction (or restoration) of the posts of Ausum and Doucen, it was impossible to spare troops to guard the legionary fortress of Lambaesis, now empty. The solution to this problem was to form a detachment with troops from Mauretania Caesariensis (the *vexillatio militum Maurorum Caesariensium Gordianorum*) since this province and the neighbouring Mauretania Tingitana were in a situation of peace.

2. Gordian III and the African communities

If the decision of Gordian III and his advisers to discharge the *legio III Augusta* was a sign of discontinuity with the past, a remarkable continuity characterised their policies concerning local communities. This circumstance becomes evident not only when one examines a series of public works which the regime either encouraged or directly promoted, but also when we consider its activity in the field of municipal promotions.

As regards the first point, the case of several *castella* located in the region between the Nervian colony of Sitifis and the Chott el Hodna lake, near the border between Numidia and Mauretania Caesariensis, is particularly illuminating. Between the end of the second century and the beginning of the third, the expansion of the boundaries of these provinces towards the Sahara made a vast amount of land suitable for agricultural use. Starting from the reign of Septimius Severus, one can notice a proliferation of settlements in these regions, where many colonists working on imperial estates resided⁶⁶. By Severus Alexander's time, many of these settlements had become large enough to be called *castella*, towns of relatively small size endowed with a certain degree of administrative autonomy and protected by walls⁶⁷. Following Alexander's permission (*infatigabili indulgentia domini nostri*), the governor Licinius Hierocles saw to it that Castellum B(- - -) (Bir Haddada), Castellum Thib(- - -) (Aïn Melloul), Castellum Citofactense (Kherbet Aïn Soltane) and Castellum Perdicense (Kherbet Fraïm) were adequately populated and fortified (*auctis viribus et moenibus*)⁶⁸. Moreover, Severus Alexander himself ordered the construction of walls (*muros*) around Castellum Dianense (Gellal, Sidi

⁶⁶ On this topic, cf. Bénabou (1976), 182-183; Kehoe (1988), 202-214; Stone (2008); Dossey (2010), 111-114; Bertolazzi (2020), 191-194.

⁶⁷ On the meaning of the word *castellum* in Roman Africa, cf. now the discussion in Baroni (2020). *CIL* VIII, 8812 from Equizetum (Ouled Agla) reports that the administration of Severus Alexander distributed lands to the colonists of Castellum Turrense, whereas *AE* 1907, 5 from Bled Bachir ben Yaya, douar Malah-Djiadja, recounts that it set up new boundary markers between Castellum Gurolense and Castellum Medianum Matidianum Alexandrianum Tiliruense.

⁶⁸ *CIL* VIII, 8729, 20486; *AE* 1917/18, 68 and *AE* 1966, 593-594, both dating to 227. Several scholars (Rachet [1972], 226-228; Loriot [1975], 751; Bénabou [1976], 186-194; Gutsfeld [1989], 124; Laurence, Esmonde-Cleary, Sears [2011], 159-160) connect these works to the insurrection of a *desperatissima turba et factio* which Hierocles crushed in the region of Auzia (*AE* 1966, 597). Others maintain that the establishment of *castella* was rather the consequence of a prolonged period of peace and growth, stressing that the events documented near Auzia are unlikely to have affected the region around Sitifis (Romanelli [1959], 463; Février [1981] and [1982]; Rebuffat [1986], 353-354; Christol [1994]). It is nonetheless possible that urban growth and security concerns coexisted, as argued by Horster (2001), 161.

Messaoud el Hamdi) and in the *pagus* of Sertei (Kherbet Gidra)⁶⁹. Inscriptions do not attest to works like these under Maximinus Thrax, which suggests that his administration had little interest in this matter. On the other hand, the regime of Gordian III resumed the policies of Severus Alexander, for at least four towns improved their defences under this emperor: Castellum Cellense (Kherbet Zerga), Castellum Thib(- - -), Lemellef (Belimour) and Castellum Vanarzanense (Ksar Tir). An inscribed lintel from Castellum Cellense says that the colonists erected new walls (*murus constitutus a solo a colonis*) and dedicated them to the emperor⁷⁰. The inscriptions from Castellum Thib(- - -), Castellum Vanarzanense, and Lemellef are somewhat more elaborated, though their texts are pretty much alike: thanks to “the benevolence of the new era” of Gordian III (*indulgentia novi saeculi imperatoris Caesaris Marci Antoni Gordiani Invicti Pii Felicis Augusti*) and to the atmosphere of peace reigning in the region (*fiducia pacis hortante*), enlargement works were carried out (*quod antehac ... angusto spatio cinctum muro continebatur ... ad faciem maioris loci prolatum est*) and new inhabitants settled (*reparatis et fotis viribus*)⁷¹. The expression *indulgentia novi saeculi* not only recalls Severus Alexander’s *indulgentia*, but also emphasises the difference between the alleged despotism of Maximinus Thrax and the liberality of Gordian III.

Remarkably, Gordian III’s intention to express discontinuity with the policies of Maximinus also appears in two constitutions issued in 238 and 241⁷². They both concern injustices perpetrated by imperial procurators, which Maximinus had tolerated in order to increase tax revenues⁷³. In the first constitution, Gordian III says that he would not abide procurators who had recourse to informants to enforce their claims, calling this stratagem “foreign to the spirit of my time” (*sectae temporum meorum alienum*). In the second one, the emperor affirms that he stigmatised the payment of bribes to imperial officials in exchange for protection, saying that this was against “the moral principles of my time” (*disciplina temporum meorum*). We can thus interpret the *indulgentia novi saeculi* as a reference to a new course of government, the spirit of which was to show more consideration for the empire’s citizenry and more attention to its needs⁷⁴. Furthermore, it does not seem to be a coincidence that the inscriptions from Castellum Thib(- - -), Castellum Vanarzanense, and Lemellef mention the governorship of Faltonius Restitutus (Faltonio Restitutiano, viro egregio, praeside), one of Gordian III’s most loyal collaborators. Scholars usually identify him with the *praeses Mauretaniae* who suppressed the revolt of Sabinianus in 240⁷⁵, possibly by putting the Mauretanian vexillation stationed in Lambaesis into action. It was likely under his impulse that, in this year, Mauretania Caesariensis erected a statue of the emperor in Rome, declaring itself *devota*

⁶⁹ *CIL* VIII, 8701 dating to 234 (cf. Horster [2001], 436-437 no. XXXVI 3) and *CIL* VIII, 8828 = 20630 = *AE* 1971, 533 = *AE* 1973, 651 dating more or less to the same period (cf. Horster [2001], 437-438 no. XXXVI 4), respectively.

⁷⁰ *CIL* VIII, 8777.

⁷¹ *CIL* VIII, 20487 (= *AE* 1893, 103), 20602; *AE* 1903, 94. On the meaning of *indulgentia* in inscriptions, cf. the discussion in Pietanza (2010), 32-43 with further references.

⁷² *Cod. Iust.* I, 11, 2, 1 and 2, 17, 2, respectively.

⁷³ *Hdn.* VII, 4, 2.

⁷⁴ Cf. the detailed analysis of *Cod. Iust.* X, 11, 2, 1 and its reflection on the fiscal policies of Gordian III in Spagnuolo Vigorita (1978), esp. 80-107. On Gordian’s policies concerning the administration of the empire, cf. the synthesis in Lorient (1975), 729-732 and Mecella (2017), 202-207 on Gordian III’s intention to stress the difference between his policies and Maximinus Thrax’s.

⁷⁵ *SHA Gord.* 23, 4. On Faltonius Restitutus (*PIR*^c F 109), cf. Pflaum (1960), 828-830 no. 322; Lorient (1972); Sablayrolles (1996), 512-514 no. 36; Thomasson (1996), 217-218 no. 41; Körner (2002), 377-378 no. P 37; Magioncalda (2005); Gerhardt, Hartmann (2008), 1083 no. *Aeg.* 8, 1138 no. *Maur. Caes.* 3; Potter (2014), 226.

*numini maiestatique eius*⁷⁶. Later, in 244, we find Faltonius Restitutinaus holding the post of prefect of the Watch⁷⁷. Given Faltonius Restitutus' devotion to the regime of Gordian III, one may plausibly assume that he was one of the best interpreters of its policies.

There seems to be discontinuity with Maximinus Thrax's policies also in the case of constructions directly undertaken by Gordian III. In Volubilis, the emperor rebuilt from ground level an edifice endowed with baths (*domus cum balineo*)⁷⁸. This structure is, in all probability, a *praetorium*, the place where the governor resided during his periodic visits to the city⁷⁹. Considering that the maintenance of these buildings seems to have usually been entrusted to local communities, we can deduce that Gordian III benefitted Volubilis by taking care of works which would otherwise have burdened the city's finances⁸⁰. Other acts of euergetism by Gordian III are documented elsewhere in the empire: he renovated a public space (perhaps a *macellum*) in Histria (Moesia Inferior)⁸¹, completed the renovation of the theatre of Teanum Sidicinum, which had begun under Septimius Severus⁸², either built ex novo or restored an unknown building in Iulium Carnicum⁸³, and provided funds for the organisation of a gladiatorial spectacle in Bergomum⁸⁴. The inscriptions which record these last two acts attribute these initiatives to the emperor's *liberalitas* and *indulgentia*. Inscriptions attest to a different language when describing the only act of this kind documented under Maximinus Thrax. A text from Cosa says that Maximinus and his son Maximus ordered (*iusserunt*) the renovation of several buildings which were falling into ruin, specifying that the city had to carry out the works with its own money (*pecunia publica*)⁸⁵. The verb *iubeo* is uncommon in this context, since it usually appears in inscriptions attesting to emperors who ordered their legates or procurators to restore roads or military facilities⁸⁶. Gordian III's renovation of a public building in Volubilis suggests that the imperial regime had resumed the traditional euergetic policies towards local communities. In this regard, it is worth noting that the *res publica* of Volubilis had shown singular attachment to Severus Alexander, to whom it dedicated a statue

⁷⁶ CIL VI, 1090.

⁷⁷ CIL VI, 266 = AE 1980, 37 = AE 2007, 206.

⁷⁸ ILAfr 614 = ILM 74 = IAM II (2), 404. Cf. also Rambaldi (2009), 157 no. 46. According to Rambaldi, the Gordian mentioned in the inscription (*imperator Caesar M. Antonius Gordianus Pius Felix Invictus Augustus*) should be identified with Gordian I. This is extremely unlikely, for the official name of Gordian I included the *cognomina Africanus* and *Sempronianus* (cf. Kienast, Eck, Heil [2017], 180). What is more, Gordian I would have appeared together with his son and co-emperor Gordian II.

⁷⁹ Romanelli (1959), 464; Akerraz (1987), 447-450; Thébert (2003), 279-280. On the *praetoria* as residences of governors, cf. Alessio (2006). Notably, the word *domus* is used to refer to the edifices where governors resided in an imperial constitution dating to 362 (*Cod. Theod.* XV, 1, 8: *praetoria iudicum et domos iudiciarias*).

⁸⁰ During the reign of Caracalla, an unknown governor of Sardinia restored a *praetorium* with baths by using the *pecunia publica* of the *civitas Forotranensium* (AE 1992, 892 = AE 2005, 688). Cf. Zucca (1992), esp. 618-619.

⁸¹ AE 1955, 259 = AE 1958, 188 = AE 1960, 345 = AE 1964, 277 = IScMI, 168. Cf. also Rambaldi (2009), 261 no. 284.

⁸² AE 2005, 374. Cf. also Bertolazzi (2020), 48-49.

⁸³ Mainardis (2021).

⁸⁴ CIL V, 5124. Cf. also Gregori (1989), 37-38 no. 18; Vavassori (1994), 151-152 no. 15. Bomgardner (2000), 127-128 proposes to identify the amphitheatre of Thysdrus with an *amphitheatrum Gordianum*, which Gordian III allegedly donated to the city in recognition of its role in the insurrection led by Gordian I and Gordian II. The hypothesis is attractive, but would need some epigraphic evidence to be confirmed; cf. Carlsen (1994), 146; Rambaldi (2009), 149 no. 27 with further references.

⁸⁵ AE 1982, 325. Cf. also Horster (2001), 317-319 no. VII 1,2.

⁸⁶ Horster (2001), 75.

when he was appointed Caesar by Elagabalus and then another when he became emperor⁸⁷. Rewarding Volubilis may have been another way to emphasise continuity with the last of the Severans.

We can see the administration of Gordian III at work also on the roads of Africa Proconsularis, Numidia and Mauretania Caesariensis, as documented by a sizeable number of milestones. Only a few of them attest to road restorations, whereas the rest only report the emperor's name in nominative, dative or ablative cases. The following list describes their distribution in each of these provinces:

- Africa Proconsularis: a good number of milestones were set up in 240 along the critical road connecting Carthage to Lambaesis via Ammaedara and Theveste⁸⁸. Maximinus Thrax ordered restoration works along this route in 237: numerous milestones dating to this year relate that Maximinus and his son Maximus “restored the road from Carthage to the border of the province of Numidia, which had been in a state of ruin and disrepair owing to long-lasting carelessness” (*viam a Karthagine usque ad fines Numidiae provinciae longa incuria corruptam atque dilapsam restituerunt*)⁸⁹. The milestones of Gordian III do not provide such an abundance of details, reporting only the verb *restituit* after the emperor's name. According to some, new reparations would have been unnecessary after only three years since Maximinus and Maximus' intervention, so that *restituit* would be mere propaganda with no reference to actual restorations⁹⁰. Others hypothesise that the road was damaged during Capelianus' march towards Carthage in 238⁹¹. Another possibility is that Gordian III completed the works undertaken under Maximinus and Maximus, removing their milestones or simply erasing their names. As for the other roads, a milestone found in the environs of Vaga and likely belonging to the route Carthage-Hippo Regius reports the emperor's name in the nominative case, but the final section of the text is lost⁹². It might indicate that the imperial administration undertook some restoration works on this road. The fact that the *res publica* of Hippo Regius set up a milestone with a dedication to Gordian III corroborates this hypothesis⁹³. Finally, as seen in the previous section, the administration restored some stretches of roads connecting Lepcis Magna to the Tripolitanian *limes*, an initiative which presumably served military purposes.
- Numidia: in 239, milestones of Gordian III replaced those of Maximinus on the Numidian section of the Carthage-Lambaesis road (from Theveste onwards), though in this case the milestones of both emperors attest to their names in the dative case⁹⁴. More to the south, the emperor set up new milestones (*miliaria commeantibus resti-*

⁸⁷ *IAM* II (2), 399 = *IAM* Suppl. 399 and *AE* 1936, 42 = *IAM* II (2), 401 = *IAM* Suppl. 401, respectively.

⁸⁸ *CIL* VIII, 22008, 22019 (= *ILAfr* 664c), 22026 (= *ILTun* 1732), 22033 (= *ILAfr* 664i = *ILTun* 1732), 22037 (= *ILTun* 1732), 22043 (= *ILTun* 1732), 22046 (= *ILTun* 1732); *BCTH* 1927, 242; *AE* 2015, 1824. On the history of this road in general, cf. De Vos Raaijmakers (2019), 339-345 and references there.

⁸⁹ *CIL* VIII, 10047, 10073 = 22031 (= *ILTun* 1732), 10075 = 22056 (= *ILTun* 1732), 10083 = 22073, 22009, 22020 (= *ILTun* 1732), 22030 (= *ILTun* 1732 = *AE* 2015, 1823), 22123; *BCTH* 1907, ccxxi; *ILAfr* 664z5, 664h; *AE* 2015, 1822; *AE* 2012, 1896.

⁹⁰ Rathmann (2003), 132.

⁹¹ Marmouri (2016), 194.

⁹² Chaouali (2016), 88-90 (= *AE* 2016, 1897), who attributes the milestone to the road Carthage-Hippo Regius, noting, however, that little is known about this route.

⁹³ *ILAlg* I, 3881. Cf. also Lavergne (2005).

⁹⁴ Maximinus Thrax: *CIL* VIII, 10203, 10214 as well as *AE* 1981, 897, all of which seem to have been set up by the city of Thamugadi. Gordian III: *CIL* VIII, 10204.

tuit) on the road connecting Diana Veteranorum in central Numidia to Tubunae and the agricultural region around the Chott el Hodna lake via Lamasba⁹⁵. Since Maximinus Thrax had placed his milestones on this road after defacing those of Severus Alexander⁹⁶, the impression is that the administration of Gordian III was primarily concerned with replacing Maximinus' milestones with new ones also in this region. Lastly, several milestones from the road between Cirta and the port city of Rusicade inform us that, in 239, Gordian III restored the road along with its bridges, which had fallen into disrepair (*viam imbribus et vetustate conlapsam cum pontibus restituit*)⁹⁷. This route must be the *via nova Rusicadensis* which the *res publica* of Cirta and the *possessores territorii Cirtensium* had built under Hadrian⁹⁸. The maintenance of this infrastructure was likely problematic, for it crossed the western section of the *Alpes Numidicae*⁹⁹. Milestones of Elagabalus and Severus Alexander inform us that these emperors had undertaken similar works on this road¹⁰⁰, suggesting that Gordian III carried on with their renovation programs.

- Mauretania Caesariensis: while a milestone mentioning Gordian III's name in the nominative case is documented on the coastal road running west of Caesarea¹⁰¹, a conspicuous group of monuments bearing the emperor's name in the dative case was set up along the Severan *praetentura* guarding the southern border of the province¹⁰². Maximinus Thrax and his son had also placed new milestones here (*miliaria nova posuerunt*)¹⁰³, no doubt to promote their regime among the numerous garrisons guarding the Mauretanian *limes*. It appears quite evident that the administration of Gordian III wanted to eradicate their memory also from this region.

Replacing the milestones of Maximinus Thrax on several strategic roads of Africa Proconsularis, Numidia and Mauretania Caesariensis corroborates the impression that the regime concerned itself with cultivating its popularity in North Africa. Interestingly, this policy is also documented in other regions of the empire. New milestones of Gordian III reporting the verb *restituit* replaced those of Maximinus and Maximus advertising road works on a number of routes running along the Danube and crossing Asia Minor¹⁰⁴. The *damnatio memoriae*

⁹⁵ *CIL* VIII, 10385, 10387 = 22429. Other milestones from this road attesting to the emperor's name only are *BCTH* 1901, 448 no. 2 and *BCTH* 1902, 507 no. 2, 515. On the road network of this region, cf. Guédon (2019).

⁹⁶ Severus Alexander: *CIL* VIII, 22439, 22458, both of which with the emperor's name erased. Maximinus Thrax: *BCTH* 1902, 506 no. 1, 517 no. 28; *BCTH* 1904, 158 no. 32; *BCTH* 1932/33, 279 no. 2.

⁹⁷ *CIL* VIII, 10298 = 22364, 22371, 22372.

⁹⁸ *CIL* VIII, 10296, 10322, 22370. Cf. also *CIL* VIII, 22370 recording the placement of milestones by Cirta.

⁹⁹ On the history of this road, cf. Christol (2012); De Vos Raaijmakers (2019), 345-354.

¹⁰⁰ *CIL* VIII, 10304, 10308, 10309.

¹⁰¹ *CIL* VIII, 10452. Cf. also *BCTH* 1934/35, 334 in the dative case.

¹⁰² *CIL* VIII, 10437; *AE* 1912, 175; *BCTH* 1936/37, 310 no. 11; *BCTH* 1938/40, 340b; *AE* 1956, 127a; *AE* 1973, 653.

¹⁰³ *CIL* VIII, 22619; *AE* 1957, 278. Cf. also *CIL* VIII, 22597, 22600, 22605; *AE* 1935, 42.

¹⁰⁴ On the Danubian provinces, cf. for instance *CIL* III, 11327 (Gordian III) and *CIL* III, 11341, 11342 (Maximian and Maximus) from Brigetio in Pannonia Superior; *AE* 1993, 1375 = *IScM* VI (2), 614 (Gordian III) and *CIL* III, 14462 = *IScM* I, 321 (Maximinus and Maximus) from Tomis in Moesia Inferior. Cf. also Bartels (2014) for a comprehensive analysis of the milestones of both Maximinus and Gordian III from these regions. As for Asia Minor, significant examples are French (2012a), 168-169 no. 101B (Gordian III) and *MAMA* VIII, 7 = French (2012a), 168 no. 101A (Maximinus and Maximus) from Lystra in Galatia; French (2012b), 126-127

affecting Maximinus and Maximus' African milestones was consequently part of a broader initiative: on the one hand, Gordian III removed their names from roads of strategic and propagandistic relevance; on the other, he completed road renovations which his predecessors had undertaken. At the same time, restoration works took place in other areas where roads were in need of repairs, as the milestones placed on the *via Rusicadensis* illustrate.

Besides undertaking public works, Gordian III also granted municipal promotions. The diffusion of Roman customs and political institutions in western North Africa made significant progress between the first and second centuries CE. While establishing colonies of veterans, the emperors transformed more and more *civitates* of peregrine status into *municipia* of Latin law, and then promoted *municipia* to the rank of colonies. These phenomena peaked during the reign of Septimius Severus, who created at least three *coloniae* (Auzia, Avitina, Vaga) and nine *municipia* (Aulodes, Avedda, Limisa, Sululos, Thibursicum Bure, Thignica, Thugga, Thysdrus, and an unidentified *municipium Septim[ium] - -*] near Henchir Deb-bik in Africa Proconsularis); then the number of promotions started to decrease: Caracalla created four new *municipia* (Abbir Maius, Furnos Minus, Lamasba, Muzuc), while Severus Alexander a colony (Uchi Maius) and a *municipium* (Giufi)¹⁰⁵. Under Gordian III, Rucuma (Henchir Rekoub or Rokkob), a small centre located ca. 70 km northwest of Carthage, became the *municipium Antonium Gordianum Rucuma*¹⁰⁶. Although no sources attest to the existence of Rucuma before Gordian III's reign, it is easy to presume that this community was a *civitas* which obtained the promotion to municipal status from the emperor. Curiously enough, Thizika, a neighbouring centre which had become a *municipium* under Hadrian, erected a statue of Gordian III's wife, Sabinia Tranquillina¹⁰⁷. This event could indicate that its inhabitants sought the emperor's favour (or perhaps that of the praetorian prefect Timesitheus, Tranquillina's father) to maintain primacy over Rucuma by becoming a *colonia*¹⁰⁸. Considering that Gordian III granted the *municipium* of Viminacium in Moesia Superior the status of colony in 239¹⁰⁹, it is attractive to think that he did the same with Thizika, which became a colony at some point during the third century¹¹⁰.

no. 79D, 129-130 no. 80B, 133-134 no. 84 (Gordian III) and French (2012b), 137-138 no. 85D and *AE* 2016, 1745 (Maximinus and Maximus) from Hierapolis in Cappadocia.

¹⁰⁵ For an overview of these promotions, cf. Lassère (1977), 293-466; Gascou (1982a) (with updates in Gascou [2003] and [2004-2005]), as well as Bertolazzi (2020), 175-187 with specific reference to the promotions of Septimius Severus.

¹⁰⁶ *AE* 1931, 62 = *ILTun* 1197, documenting that the *municipium* honoured the divinised Carus with a statue. For an overview of the site of Rucuma and its history, cf. Peyras (1980), who suggests that Gordian III could have rewarded this community for having supported Gordian I and Gordian II or maybe on account of its convenient position on the route connecting the port city of Hippo Diarrhytus to the agricultural region around the river Bagradas.

¹⁰⁷ *AE* 1911, 9 = *IL Afr* 432.

¹⁰⁸ The *civitas* of Thugga awarded the powerful prefect of the Guard Fulvius Plautianus and his daughter Plautilla (Caracalla's wife) two statues before acquiring municipal status in 205 (*AE* 1914, 178 = *IL Afr* 564 and *AE* 1914, 177 = *IL Afr* 565). Cf. Bertolazzi (2020), 185.

¹⁰⁹ Starting from this year, Viminacium began to mint coins advertising its new status (Pick [1898], 31-37 nos. 70-93). Cf. Townsend (1934), 121; Dušanić (1961), 153; Kos (1992), 211-212; Spasić-Djurić (2002), 152-153.

¹¹⁰ *AE* 1952, 41, attesting to a dedication to the *Tutela coloniae Thizikae* by a local priest. The content of this text and the elements forming the name of the dedicator (*T. Pinarius L. fil. Geminus Papiria*) suggest that the monument was set up between the 240s and the 250s. Cf. Gascou (1982b), 278, noting that the promotion of Thizika to the rank of colony happened after 241, i.e. when Gordian III married Sabinia Tranquillina. Another possible promotion by Gordian III could be either Lemellef, which, as seen above, Faltonius Restitutus enlarged and endowed with walls, or, perhaps, the neighbouring Thamascani. One of these two centres was, in

To sum up, there are reasonable indications that the regime of Gordian III did its best to present itself as the continuator of the policies of the Severan emperors. We thus find the emperor active in the fields of public constructions and municipal promotions, showing goodwill towards local communities of both considerable size (Volubilis) and modest dimensions (Rucuma and the Mauretanian *castella*). At the same time, there was an effort to show discontinuity with the unpopular policies of Maximinus Thrax, whose memory the new administration carefully removed from strategic places such as public roads.

3. Honours paid to the emperor and his family

Besides public works and municipal promotions, inscriptions record a considerable number of dedications with which both communities and individuals gave honour to Gordian III. Most of these texts attest to rather conventional tributes, such as the placement of monuments for the emperor's well-being, the erection of statues representing him or his wife, and dedications of public buildings. Nevertheless, if we look closer at this evidence, the inscriptions' language or construction type seems sometimes to betray a sincere devotion to Gordian III. Therefore, I believe these types of honours paid to the emperor are worth examining individually.

As regards the dedication of public buildings, the following cities seem particularly worth mentioning:

- Sustris: between 239 and 240, the citizenry (*populus Sustritanus*) rebuilt the capitol thanks to a fund-raising (*ex aere collato*), and dedicated it to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, Juno Regina and to the Augustan Fortune (*Fortuna Augusta*) for the safety of the emperor¹¹¹. The inscription also specifies that the people inaugurated this new building by organising a banquet on the day of the emperor's birthday (*die natali domini nostri ... epulatus est*)¹¹², so that they could celebrate both joyful events (*ob utramque laetitiam epulatus est*).
- Uchi Maius: in 241, one (or perhaps two) citizens dedicated an arch to Gordian III and Sabinia Tranquillina (whom Gordian married in this year) and decorated it with statues¹¹³. Another fragmentary inscription reports that, at an unspecified time, the *colonia* dedicated a temple to what seems to be the personification of an imperial virtue (possibly the *Libertas Augusta* or the *Pietas Augusta*) for the well-being of the emperor¹¹⁴. The city proudly styles itself *colonia Alexandriana*, a title it could now sport without fear, for Pupienus and Balbinus had lifted the *damnatio memoriae* imposed by Maximinus Thrax on Severus Alexander's name in 238¹¹⁵. Alexander promoted Uchi Maius to colonial status. In gratitude, the council honoured him with an arch, celebrating his *indulgentia* and triumphantly affirming that the monument was an *ae-*

fact, a *municipium* during the last years of Philip the Arab's reign (*CIL* VIII, 8809; cf. Gascou [1982b], 254-256).

¹¹¹ *CIL* VIII, 25935. In the emperor's titulature, *trib. pot.* without numerals is followed by the abbreviation *cos.* It seems then probable that the inscription was set up between Gordian III's first and second consulates (239 and 240, respectively; cf. Kienast, Eck, Heil [2017], 187).

¹¹² On 20 January. Thanks to the Chronograph of 354 (*CIL* I² p. 256 = *Inscr. It.* XIII [2], 42) and to the *Fasti* compiled by Polemius Silvius (*CIL* I² p. 257 = *Inscr. It.* XIII [2], 43), we know that Gordian III was born thirteen days before the Kalends of February. Cf. Kienast, Eck, Heil (2017), 187.

¹¹³ *CIL* VIII, 26264 = Ibba (2006), 162-165 no. 50.

¹¹⁴ *CIL* VIII, 26246 = Ibba (2006), 77-80 no. 14.

¹¹⁵ Kienast, Eck, Heil (2017), 172.

*ternum testimonium reciperatae libertatis*¹¹⁶. We could thus interpret the building of a temple for the well-being of Gordian III as an act of homage towards an emperor whom the inhabitants of Uchi Maius considered Alexander's worthy successor.

- Thambeis: an inscribed architrave relates that this Hadrianic *municipium* built new baths called *thermae Gordianae*, which the citizens dedicated to Gordian III and Sabina Tranquillina on 17 December 243¹¹⁷. Honours like this are not frequently recorded in North Africa: *thermae Antoniniana* are documented in Siga (Mauretania Caesariensis), whereas *thermae Alexandrianae* were built in Capsa (Africa Proconsularis)¹¹⁸; also, an inscription from Lambaesis records the existence of a *balineum* dedicated to Septimius Severus and the members of his family¹¹⁹.
- Thuraria (Chaouat): an inscription found near this city says that a *duumvir* and *flamen perpetuus* doubled the amount of his *summa honoraria* to build a temple to the imperial Victories (*templum Victiarum*); then he dedicated this building to Gordian III by calling him *felicissimus* and *fortissimus*, also stressing his blood ties to Gordian I and Gordian II via his mother (*divi M. Antoni Gordiani nepotis, divi M. Antoni Gordiani sororis filius*)¹²⁰. Furthermore, he endowed the building with three acrolithic statues of Gordian III's victories (*una cum statuīs Victiarum tribus achoritis [!] Augusti nostri*). Each of these statues might have celebrated a specific event like the suppression of Sabinianus' revolt in 240 or the campaigns against Goths and Persians between 242 and 243¹²¹. The lacunous state of the inscription makes it difficult to assign it to a particular period. Still, it is noteworthy that two aediles from Ziqua (Zaghouan) erected a statue of Mars Augustus as *protector* of Gordian III in 239¹²². Asking the god of war to assist the emperor could indicate that his army had already campaigned before the uprising of Sabinianus. Strikingly, Gordian III was already *imp. III* by 240¹²³, and, during his reign, the only conflict documented before 240 is the abovementioned *bellum* recorded by the 239 inscription from the Tripolitanian fort of Myd(- - -)¹²⁴. It is then attractive to think that the regime and some local communities celebrated this event as one of the emperor's military achievements¹²⁵.

¹¹⁶ *CIL* VIII, 26262 = Ibba (2006), 23-24, 147-153 no. 44 = *AE* 2006, 1688. On the meaning of *libertas* in African cities, cf. Belkahia-Karoui (2014); Aounallah (2020). The full name of Uchi as a colony was *colonia Mariana Augusta Alexandriana Uchitanorum Maiorum*: *CIL* VIII, 15450 (= Ibba [2006], 166-169 no. 52), 15454 = 26270 (= Ibba [2006], 199-202 no. 69), 15455 (= Ibba [2006], 210-211 no. 74); *AE* 2000, 1729 (= Ibba [2006], 195-197 no. 67); *AE* 2012, 1884, 1886. On the promotion, cf. Gasco (1982b), 273-274; Ruggeri (1997), 152-153; Sanna (1997); Mastino (1999), 373; Khanoussi, Ruggeri (2002), 2338-2356; Ibba (2006), 23-24. On Alexander and the cities of Africa Proconsularis in general, cf. Farre (2019).

¹¹⁷ *AE* 2013, 1774.

¹¹⁸ *AE* 1934, 80 and *AE* 2010, 1789, respectively. An inscription from Thugga mentions an *atrium thermar[um Anton]inianarum* (*AE* 1904, 121 = *IL Afr* 573 = *AE* 1925, 31 = *ILTun* 1500), but some scholars prefer to read *thermar[um Lic]inianarum*. Cf. Rambaldi (2009), 148-149 no. 26.

¹¹⁹ *CIL* VIII, 2706.

¹²⁰ *CIL* VIII, 25371 = *AE* 1895, 71.

¹²¹ On these events, cf. Loriot (1975), 756-774. Cf. also Huttner (2008), 185-187; Bartels (2014), 232-233; Brandt, Peter (2017) with specific reference to the Balkan conflict, and Kettenhofen (1982), 19-37; Edwell (2008), 167-172; Huttner (2008), 186-189; Claes, Tavernier (2018) on the Persian expedition.

¹²² *CIL* VIII, 895 = 12425.

¹²³ Kienast, Eck, Heil (2017), 188.

¹²⁴ Cf. section 1 above.

¹²⁵ According to Loriot (1981), 133, Gordian III's second acclamation might refer to an expedition against the Persians which the emperor undertook in 239. However, the evidence supporting this hypothesis (a script preserved in a 16th century-codex of the *Lex Romana Wisigothica* now lost and a group of imperial coins depict-

- Mustis: a local magistrate dedicated an arch to Gordian III, which he had promised to realise with his *summa honoraria*¹²⁶.

Concerning the placement of public statues, a type of honour with which local communities and military units would affirm their loyalty to the rulers¹²⁷, we know of at least 28 inscribed statue bases with dedications to Gordian III and Sabinia Tranquillina: 12 in Africa Proconsularis, 15 in Numidia (including a statue of the divinised Gordian III), and one in Mauretania Caesariensis. The following table illustrates their distribution, also including the dedicators, the unofficial titles attributed to Gordian III in addition to the standard imperial titulatures and, whenever possible, the date of their placement:

Africa Proconsularis				
Place	Dedicator	Unofficial Titles	Date	Reference
GORDIAN III				
Thuburbo Maius	<i>colonia Iulia Aurelia Commoda Thuburbo Maius</i>	<i>divi M. Antoni Gordiani nepos, divi Antoni Gordiani sororis filius, fortissimus, felicissimus</i>	238	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 848 = <i>ILPBardo</i> 356
Lepcis Magna	<i>Lepcitani</i>		239-241	<i>IRT</i> 454
Hippo Regius	<i>res publica</i>		241-244	Marec (1954), 380-381 no. 12
Thysdrus		<i>nepos divi M. Antoni Gordiani, sororis filius divi M. Antoni Gordiani iunioris, fortissimus et super omnes retro principes indulgentissimus</i>	242	<i>AE</i> 1942/43, 40 = <i>ILTun</i> 110
Hadrumetum	<i>colonia Concordia Ulpia Hadrumetina</i>	<i>divi Antoni Gordiani nepos, divi Antoni Gordiani sororis filius</i>	238-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 11138 = <i>ILMS</i> 1
Lepcis Magna			238-244	<i>IRT</i> 455
Segermes	<i>decuriones</i>	<i>magnus, invictus, divi Antoni Gordiani nepoti, divi Antoni Gordiani sororis filio</i>	238-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 907 = 11169 = Ladjimi Sebäi (1995), 728-729 no. 7
TRANQUILLINA				
Ammaedara			241-244	<i>AE</i> 1999, 1792
Belalis Maior			241-244	<i>AE</i> 1978, 843
Segermes	<i>decuriones</i>		241-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 23065 = Ladjimi Sebäi (1995), 729 no. 8
Tepelte	<i>civitas Tepeltensis</i>		241-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 12250
Thizika	<i>municipium Aelium Thizika</i>		241-244	<i>AE</i> 1911, 9 = <i>IL Afr</i> 432

ing the *adventus* of the emperor) is far from being conclusive. Cf. the discussion in Bland (2017) and Brandt (2020).

¹²⁶ *CIL* VIII, 1577 = 15572.

¹²⁷ Højte (2005), 143-166. On North Africa in particular, cf. also Dawson (2020) and Hellström (2020).

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Numidia				
Place	Dedicator	Unofficial Titles	Date	Reference
GORDIAN III				
Castellum Tidditanorum	<i>res publica</i>	<i>invictus</i>	239	<i>AE</i> 1969/70, 693
Thamugadi	<i>res publica</i>	<i>divi Gordiani nepos et divi Gordiani sororis filius</i>	240	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 2365 = 17878
Verecunda	<i>res publica</i>	<i>divi Gordiani nepos et divi Gordiani sororis filius</i>	240	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 4218
Cuicul	<i>res publica</i>	<i>invictus, nepos divorum Gordianorum</i>	241	<i>ILAlg</i> II (3), 7829
Cuicul	<i>res publica</i>	<i>invictus, nepos divorum Gordianorum</i>	241	<i>ILAlg</i> II (3), 7830
Diana Veteranorum		<i>invictus</i>	241	<i>AE</i> 1993, 1772
Sila		<i>invictus</i>	241	<i>AE</i> 1969/70, 701 = <i>ILAlg</i> II (2), 6872
Cuicul	<i>res publica</i>	<i>invictus, nepos divorum Gordianorum</i>	243	<i>AE</i> 1911, 117 = <i>ILAlg</i> II (3), 7831
Barika	<i>ala I Flavia Gordiana</i>		238-244	<i>AE</i> 1992, 1858
Gemellae	<i>ala equitum Pannoniorum Gordiana</i>	<i>invictus</i>	238-244	<i>AE</i> 1950, 62
Lambaesis	<i>vexillatio militum Maurorum</i>	<i>invictus</i>	238-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 2716
Lambiridi		<i>invictus, nepos divorum Gordianorum</i>	238-244	<i>AE</i> 1969/70, 708
Cuicul	<i>decuriones</i>	<i>divus</i>	244	<i>ILAlg</i> II (3), 7833
TRANQUILLINA				
Cuicul		<i>invictus</i> (Gordian)	241-244	<i>ILAlg</i> II (3), 7832
Sigus	<i>res publica</i>	<i>invictus</i> (Gordian)	242	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 5701 = <i>ILAlg</i> II (2), 6513
Mauretania Caesariensis				
Place	Dedicator	Unofficial Titles	Date	Reference
TRANQUILLINA				
Portus Magnus		<i>invictus</i> (Gordian)	241-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 9758

Finally, the epigraphic record attests to numerous altars dedicated to the well-being (*pro salute*) of Gordian III and Sabinia Tranquillina. This type of homage, which is very well documented during the second century and the first half of the third, implied that the safety of the ruler would guarantee the security of the empire and its inhabitants¹²⁸. It has been noted that these monuments are widespread in rural areas and underpopulated regions along the fron-

¹²⁸ Le Bohec (1989a), 563-566; Castillo, Sánchez-Ostiz (2000); Moralee (2004), 17-29; Vitelli Casella (2017), 38-39.

tiers, no doubt on account of the ease with which they could be realised¹²⁹. It is no surprise to find them in significant numbers in the agricultural and military areas of both Numidia and the two Mauretaniae. The following tables summarise the information they provide:

Africa Proconsularis						
Place	Dedicator	Honorand	Unofficial Titles	Deity	Date	Reference
Thelepte	<i>gens Musuniorum Regianorum</i>	Gordian, Tranquillina			241-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 23195 = <i>AE</i> 1903, 239 = <i>ILTun</i> 315
Numidia						
Place	Dedicator	Honorand	Unofficial Titles	Deity	Date	Reference
Lambaesis	<i>Cosinius Marcianus, leg. Aug. pr. pr.</i>	Gordian		<i>Deus Mercurius</i>	238-244	<i>AE</i> 1967, 563
Mauretania Caesariensis						
Place	Dedicator	Honorand	Unofficial Titles	Deity	Date	Reference
Columnata	<i>Aurelius [- -] sius, tribunus cohortis Sardonorum</i>	Gordian		<i>Deus Solis Invictus Mithra</i>	238-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 21523
Castellum B(- - -)	<i>kastellani B(- - -)</i>	Gordian, Tranquillina	<i>invictus, sanctissimus</i>	<i>Iuppiter Optimus Maximus ceterique dii deaeque</i>	241-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 8710
Horrea		Gordian, Tranquillina	<i>invictus, sanctissimus</i>		241-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 8411
Numerus Syrorum	<i>Catelius Rufinus, procurator eorum</i>	Gordian, Tranquillina			241-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 9963 = 21798
Satafis		Gordian, Tranquillina	<i>invictus, sanctissimus</i>	<i>Iuppiter Optimus Maximus ceterique dii deaeque</i>	241-244	<i>AE</i> 2015, 1854
Thanaramusa		Gordian, Tranquillina	<i>invictus, sanctissimus</i>	<i>Iuppiter Optimus Maximus ceterique dii deaeque</i>	241-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 9233
Aïoun Sbiba	<i>Livianus, procurator</i>	Gordian		<i>Dii Immortales</i>	242-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 21557

¹²⁹ Erkelenz (2003), 287-288.

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Mauretania Caesariensis						
Place	Dedicator	Honorand	Unofficial Titles	Deity	Date	Reference
Castellum Cellense	<i>coloni eius</i>	Gordian	<i>invictus</i>		243	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 8777
Cohors Breucorum		Gordian, Tranquillina	<i>invictus</i>	<i>Iuppiter Optimus Maximus, Iuno Regina</i>	244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 21559
Mauretania Tingitana						
Place	Dedicator	Honorand	Unofficial Titles	Deity	Date	Reference
Tingis	<i>res publica</i>	Gordian			238-244	<i>CIL</i> VIII, 21818 = <i>IAM</i> II (1), 68 = <i>ILM</i> 26 = <i>IAM</i> Suppl. 68
Volubilis	<i>M. Ulpius Victor, vir egregius, procurator eius pro legato</i>	Gordian		<i>Iuppiter Optimus Maximus ceterique dii deaeque immortales</i>	239-241	<i>AE</i> 1952, 42 = <i>AE</i> 1953, 77 = <i>AE</i> 1957, 201 = <i>AE</i> 1987, 1090a = <i>AE</i> 1987, 1094 = <i>IAM</i> II (2), 357 = <i>IAM</i> Suppl. 357
Volubilis	<i>[- -] procurator eius pro legato</i>	Gordian, Tranquillina		<i>Iuppiter Optimus Maximus ceterique dii deaeque immortales</i>	241-244	<i>AE</i> 1952, 43 = <i>IAM</i> II (2), 358 = <i>IAM</i> Suppl. 358.

The most striking aspect regarding the evidence collected in these tables is probably the contrast between the concision characterising the dedications commissioned by imperial officials and the propensity of local communities and military units to attribute unofficial titles to the emperor. The first thing worth stressing is that town councils and civic bodies frequently honoured Gordian III as *nepos divorum Gordianorum* or *divi Marci Antoni Gordiani sororis filius, divi Marci Antoni Gordiani nepos*. The senate officially deified Gordian I and Gordian II soon after their deaths¹³⁰, but Gordian III's relation to them is rarely recorded in dedications set up outside North Africa¹³¹. This information appears as a part of the emperor's name also on several milestones placed by the imperial administration in Africa Proconsularis and Mauretania¹³². It seems then reasonable to infer that the regime was aware of the popularity enjoyed by the first two Gordians among the Africans. The preservation of their memory

¹³⁰ Kienast, Eck, Heil (2017), 180, 183. The formula *nepos divorum Gordianorum* is engraved on milestones with dedications to Pupienus, Balbinus and Gordian Caesar set up by the *res publica* of Sitifis (*CIL* VIII, 10342, 10365; *AE* 1912, 158; *AE* 1993, 1778).

¹³¹ Cf. the list of titulatures sported by Gordian III in Peachin (1990), 159-197. Interestingly, the *res publica* of Cuicul dedicated milestones to the *nepos Gordianorum Augustorum nostrorum duorum* without reporting Gordian III's name (*CIL* VIII, 22399).

¹³² *CIL* VIII, 10079 = 22061, 22008, 22026 (= *ILTun* 1732), 22033 (= *IL Afr* 664i = *ILTun* 1732), 22037 (= *ILTun* 1732), 22043 (= *ILTun* 1732), 22046 (= *ILTun* 1732); *BCTH* 1927, 242; *BCTH* 1928/29, 677; *AE* 1973, 653; *AE* 2015, 1824; *AE* 2016, 1897.

might have accordingly been encouraged in the knowledge that local communities would value the dynastic continuity which Gordian III represented.

The dedications of both statues and altars *pro salute* attest to other unofficial titles: *felicissimus*, *fortissimus*, *invictus*, *magnus*, *sanctissimus* and *indulgentissimus*. Although these are all documented under previous emperors¹³³, one can notice that their geographical distribution is not homogeneous. Titles exalting the virtuousness of the emperor (*felicissimus*, *fortissimus*, *indulgentissimus* and *magnus*) are recorded in Africa Proconsularis. References to his military skills (*invictus*) are definitely more common in Numidia and Mauretania Caesariensis, where the military presence was stronger¹³⁴. Moreover, in Mauretania Caesariensis, there are at least four communities (Castellum B[- - -], Horrea, Satafis and Thanaramusa) putting up altars *pro salute* to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and the other gods where Gordian III is referred to as *invictus* and *sanctissimus*. It seems therefore probable that the formulas used in these dedications reflect decisions made at the provincial level, perhaps following some dialogue between the provincial *concilia* and the imperial administration¹³⁵. Notably, with the only exception of *invictus*, none of the unofficial titles mentioned so far seems to have been used to honour Maximinus Thrax and his son¹³⁶. This detail suggests that local communities were generally more inclined to honour Gordian III than his predecessor, and that the honours to be paid to the emperor were object of discussions among them. It is of course possible that some communities were more active than others in expressing their appreciation for the ruler. Thysdrus, where the revolt against the autocratic policies of Maximinus Thrax had started, was the only city which used the pompous formula *super omnes retro principes indulgentissimus* in this period.

To conclude, the dedications to Gordian III and Sabinia Tranquillina examined in this section reveal that the regime enjoyed considerable popularity in western North Africa. This is particularly evident in the urbanised regions of northeastern Africa Proconsularis and central Numidia, as well as in the rural areas of eastern Mauretania Caesariensis. The fact that the Gordian dynasty was created in North Africa certainly played a role. Furthermore, the frequent exaltation of Gordian III's virtues suggests that local communities looked favourably at the change of policies promoted by his regime.

Conclusions

Although Gordian III was a teenage emperor surrounded by people of Eastern descent, western North Africa appears to have occupied considerable space in his ruling agenda. Since the Africans had particularly resented the rule of Maximinus Thrax, Gordian III and his advisers seem to have worked hard to show discontinuity with Maximinus' style of government. The regime did its best to emphasise its benevolent character towards local communities (the *indulgentia novi saeculi*) while simultaneously emphasising its connection to Gordian I and Gordian II and removing the memory of Maximinus' rule from public roads and military

¹³³ Cf. the synopsis in Bönisch-Meyer (2022), 432-527.

¹³⁴ Gordian III is also called *restitutor orbis* in the inscriptions from Castellum Thib(- - -) and Castellum Vanarzanense already mentioned (cf. ft. 71 above).

¹³⁵ As noted in the previous section, the *provincia Mauretania Caesariensis* erected a statue of Gordian III in Rome in 240 (cf. ft. 76 above). On the dialogue between Mauretanian communities and imperial administration, cf. also Stone (2008), esp. 2165-2169.

¹³⁶ Maximinus appears as *invictus* in a group of milestones set up by the colony of Thamugadi: *CIL* VIII, 10203, 10214, 10215, 22334; *BCTH* 1951/52, 227 no. 2, 228 no. 3, 232 no. 11; *AE* 1981, 897. Lepcis Magna honoured him as *conservator orbis* (*IRT* 452), whereas the dedication of an *horologium* in Zarai (Numidia) generically alludes to the *florentissimum saeculum* of him and his son (*CIL* VIII, 4515).

camps. Moreover, it resumed the traditional policies concerning euergetism and municipal promotions, which had marked the reigns of the Severan emperors and Severus Alexander in particular. There are also grounds for believing that the necessity of strengthening the popularity of Gordian III in North Africa was one of the reasons behind the disbandment of the *legio III Augusta*. This unit had not only put down the rebellion of two emperors acclaimed by the locals, Gordian I and Gordian II, but had also played a key role in persecuting those who had recognised them as legitimate rulers. However, cashiering the only legion stationed in western north Africa caused some problems. By taking advantage of the weakening of the frontier garrisons, some enemies whose identity is lamentably unknown seem to have tried to assert their control over some oases, the possession of which would have made the southern areas of Numidia and Tripolitania unstable. The regime promptly reacted, affirming its authority over the traditional borders by ensuring that the most important forts were garrisoned. Several auxiliary units already present in Africa were redeployed (and probably strengthened) to fill the gaps, whereas some reserve troops were transferred from Mauretania Caesariensis and stationed in the former legionary fortress of Lambaesis. Overall, the administration of Gordian III appears to have succeeded in communicating an impression of both firmness and liberality. This circumstance is reflected in the construction of buildings dedicated to the emperor's victories or virtues, as well as in the numerous honorary dedications wherein military units, local communities and single individuals called the emperor *invictus, felicissimus, fortissimus, indulgentissimus* and *sanctissimus*. Also, Gordian III often appears as *nepos divorum Gordianorum* in the dedications of public monuments, which indicates that locals identified him as the continuator of the policies of the first two Gordians. This situation makes it difficult to think that the revolt led by Sabinianus resulted from widespread discontent. On the contrary, it suggests that one of the reasons why the usurpation did not gain favour was the lack of support by the local population.

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Riassunto / *Abstract*

Riassunto: Com'è noto, la dinastia dei Gordiani è nata in Africa con la proclamazione di Gordiano I e Gordiano II da parte degli abitanti di Thysdrus nel 238. I problemi militari causati dallo scioglimento della *legio III Augusta* e la rivolta di Sabiniano a Cartagine nel 240 sembrano però indicare che i rapporti tra Gordiano III (r. 238-244) e le province dell'Africa nordoccidentale non furono sempre felici. Nonostante ciò, l'esame della documentazione epigrafica relativa a questo periodo sembra dimostrare che il regime di Gordiano III fece del suo meglio per garantire la sicurezza delle frontiere e coltivare la propria popolarità in queste regioni, enfatizzando la continuità con le politiche di Alessandro Severo e la discontinuità con quelle di Massimino il Trace. Appare dunque probabile che uno dei motivi per cui la rivolta di Sabiniano ebbe vita breve fu la mancanza di un deciso appoggio da parte delle popolazione locale, che in generale identificarono Gordiano III come un buon imperatore.

Abstract: As is well known, the Gordian dynasty was born in Africa when the inhabitants of Thysdrus proclaimed Gordian I and Gordian II emperors in 238. Still, the military issues which followed the disbandment of the *legio III Augusta* and the revolt led by Sabinianus in Carthage in 240 seem to indicate that the relationship between Gordian III (r. 238-244) and the provinces of north-western Africa was not always good. Despite this, the epigraphic documentation concerning this period bespeaks that the regime of Gordian III did its best to ensure security along the borders and cultivate its popularity among the African people. On the one hand, it advertised continuity with the policies of Severus Alexander, whereas, on the other, it showed discontinuity with those of Maximinus Thrax. It is then probable that one of the reasons the revolt of Sabinianus was short-lived was the lack of support among the local population, who generally identified Gordian III as a good ruler.

Parole chiave: Gordiano III; legione *III Augusta*; limes; monumenti onorari; miliari; Severo Alessandro; Massimino il Trace; iscrizioni edilizie.

Keywords: Gordian III; legion *III Augusta*; limes; honorary monuments; milestones; Severus Alexander; Maximinus Thrax; building inscriptions

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