



The Municipalization in Roman Africa: towards an update

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A two-year project entitled “Municipal promotions in Africa Proconsularis and Numidia between Caesar and Gallienus: Institutions, Society, Economy”¹ involves a heterogeneous research group including historians, epigraphists, archaeologists, geographers and jurists, divided in five operative units (OUs) based at Universities of Sassari (UNISS), Cagliari (UNICA), Verona (UNIVR), Campobasso (UNIMOL) and Catania (UNICT), under the supervision of Professors Antonio Ibba as P.I. and Antonio Maria Corda as substitute P.I.² It aims to investigate the dynamics of Roman municipalization in the large part of North Africa between the Gulf of Sirte (Lybia) and Argelia (Algeria), which was initially assigned by Caesar to the colonia *Cirta Sittianorum cognomine, Africa Nova* and *Africa Vetus*, reunited then by Augustus in the province of *Africa Proconsularis* and divided again by Septimius Severus or Gallienus in *Numidia* in the West, *Proconsularis* in the East³. In this large area, according to a preliminary survey on the abundant historical documentation, an intense romanization led to the establishment of 177 *coloniae* and *municipia*, founded ex novo or on previous settlements of Phoenician, Punic-Amazigh and Numidian origin⁴. More precisely, the municipalization began not before Caesar’s dictatorship (46 BCE)⁵ and continued until Gallienus (268 CE), after which were established only generic *civitates* of Roman law⁶. During this period, numerous centres benefited from promotions, becoming mostly *coloniae civium Romanorum* and Latin *municipia*⁷. However, this phenomenon in North Africa has not yet been addressed as a whole, despite the ongoing lively debate on similar topics for other areas of the empire⁸.

¹ It’s a project PRIN 2022-2024 (cod. 2022NY99ZP), funded by the European Union, Next Generation EU.

² For the composition and the tasks of OUs see below.

³ Dupuis (2017).

⁴ E.g. Blonce (2017); Bridoux (2020); Ardeleanu (2021). On the indigenous traces often left in local institutions and languages see Belkahia, Di Vita-Évrard (1995); Wilson (2012); Guirguis, Ibba (2017); Manfredi (2003); McCarty (2017); Ibba (2023a). In general, on Romanization of Africa, Lassère (2015).

⁵ For the only exception, i.e. the Gracchan *colonia Iunonia* of ephemeral duration, see Mastino (2018).

⁶ Lepelley (1994); Lepelley (1996); Ibba (2018).

⁷ A quick overview based on the works of Gascou (see note 11) and on the indexes of *L’Année Épigraphique* shows 25 promotions in Numidia, 151 in *Proconsularis* (83 in the *regio Karthaginis*, 26 in *Hipponiensis*, 32 in *Hadrumetina* and 10 in *Tripolitania*).

⁸ In general, on the institutional aspects of the Roman cities see Langhammer (1973); Jacques, Scheid

The first study on the birth and functioning of cities and communities in Roman Africa was the pioneering Thomas R.S. Broughton's monograph, edited in 1929: it contains a review of the municipal development of the province, considered as a parameter to evaluate the degree of Romanization achieved⁹.

Later, within a decade of each other, Friedrich Vittinghoff and Leo Teutsch wrote about colonial deductions before Tiberius¹⁰.

Several times Jacques Gascou gave a fundamental contribution to the analysis of promotions between Claudius and Gallienus, emphasizing above all the institutional aspects of these changes¹¹. Other noteworthy works, published at the beginning of the 80s, are the detailed notes of Jehan Desanges to Pliny's description of Africa and Numidia, in the fifth book of his *Naturalis Historia*, and the very short but rich introduction by Claude Lepelley in a volume dedicated to the cities of the Lower Empire with the mention of their previous statutes¹².

More recently, further but partial studies have focused on the analysis of some aspects, areas, or periods, examining, for example, the initiatives of individual emperors or the effects of urban reconfiguration due to promotion in a specific region or city¹³. The still lack of a comprehensive work on the matter and the necessary examination of old and new material require an updating and motivate this project.

In any case, scholars have so far achieved notable results in the way of historical evolution of the phenomenon, quickly retraced below in its main phases¹⁴.

The turning point in municipal promotions occurred in the Caesarean age, although this generally agreed upon chronology has been as of late questioned because of information from Pliny¹⁵. Caesar, and subsequently to a lesser extent Octavian, took up Gaius Gracchus' project of deducing colonies of Roman citizens into which to transfer proletarians and thousands of veterans who fled civil wars, starting with the refoundation of Carthage, conceived rather as an act of ideological and political meaning¹⁶. They both granted the rank of *colonia* or *municipium*, of Roman or Latin law¹⁷, to urban communities located within fertile areas with great economic potential, in strategically important regions or even on the Mediterranean-

(1992); Lamberti (1993); García Fernández (2001); Aounallah (2013); Eck (2016a); Eck (2016b); Fantar, Zucca 2017; Aounallah (2020b); Eck (2020); Mentxaka (2016); Mentxaka (2017). Other food for thought comes from Jacques (1984) on the ideological and political mechanisms affecting Roman communities during the 1st-3rd centuries CE and Lassère (1977) on the social groups in the Cesaro-Augustan deductions.

⁹ Broughton (1929), in part. 176-224 (chapter IV).

¹⁰ Vittinghoff (1952); Teutsch (1962).

¹¹ Gascou (1972); Gascou (1982a); Gascou (1982b); Gascou (2004-2005).

¹² Desanges (1980); Lepelley (1981).

¹³ Dupuis (1992a); Ibba (2020a); Dupuis (2006) for Trajan and Hadrian; Dupuis (1996) and Bertolazzi (2020) for Septimius Severus; Farre (2019) for Severus Alexander. See also Bullo (2002) on the age prior to Vespasian; Alexandropoulos (2007) on the numismatic evidence. Some information about local statutes can also be found in Mandouze's prosopographical repertoire (1982), which however testifies that titles such as *colonia*, *municipium*, *civitas*, *vicus*, *pagus* had by now become part of African toponymy.

¹⁴ Cf. Ibba (2012), 31-81.

¹⁵ Plin. *n.h.* 5.22-30, 41-42. According to this rereading of Sisani (2023), Pliny would have used sources from the Triumviral-Augustan age. On the Plinian passage also Ibba (2017).

¹⁶ Cf. Gsell (1928), 173-174; Vittinghoff (1952), 81-82; Romanelli (1959), 139-140, 190; Teutsch (1962), 101-106; van Nerom (1969), 767-776; Fishwick, Shaw (1977), 372-374; Lassère (1977), 163-165, 204-211; Le Glay (1985), 235-248; Fishwick (1994), 58-64; Fishwick (1995), 235-245; Gros, Torelli (1988), 284-288; Gros (1990), 547-573; Rakob (2000); Mokni (2008); Hurllet, Müller (2017); Bockmann (2022).

¹⁷ On *municipia latina* and *coloniae latinae* in Africa see Sherwin-White (1973); Chastagnol (1987); Chastagnol (1990); Jacques, Scheid (1992), 297-305; Lamberti (1993); Chastagnol (1994); Le Roux (1998); García Fernández (2001); Le Roux (2017); Ibba (2023b) for further reflections.

an coast, such as Algeria, on condition that they had aligned in their favour or that they had proven to be sufficiently Romanized¹⁸.

Over time the establishment of a *municipium* or a colony always remained a privilege, given exclusively by the emperor but upon request of the local *nobilitas*, who sent special embassies to Rome¹⁹.

For more than fifty years this program was interrupted due to the insurrections of the tribes – like that of Tacfarinas in the Tiberian age – who controlled the southern regions and felt penalized by the reorganization of the territory and the redistribution of lands. Exceptionally, Claudius decided to reward the Mauretanian centres (corresponding largely to the foundations by Octavian) that had not joined the local rebellions with the granting of the status of *municipium* or *colonia*²⁰.

The municipalization resumed under Vespasian until the Late Empire, taking on different features at a regional level or in relation to the political situation and the program of each emperor²¹. Vespasian, probably Domitian, Nerva and Trajan were driven by the need to re-integrate the war veterans and to control the territory left uncovered by the army, which was moved further south, with the consequent birth of the first *collegia iuvenum*, i.e. paramilitary detachments made up of young people²². In this period new colonies were in fact established near the border or on lands recently taken from the indigenous people, that is, in the southern part of Tunisia, either in Algeria, in the region located very close to the border between Numidia and Mauritania (Sétif highlands), or in the southern part of Numidia, north and south of Aurès massif.

Later, Hadrian abandoned the actual deduction of colonies, replacing or accompanying them with the establishment of veterans in small, fortified villages (*castella*), for example *Cillium* and *Thala*²³. After his journey to the African provinces in 128 A.D.²⁴, he also intensified the granting of “honorary” colonial and municipal status to cities that demonstrated that they possessed the minimum characteristics required by Romanization, often acquired through the pursuit of commercial relationships with Rome and other Italic cities²⁵.

¹⁸ Teutsch (1962), 65-77, 106-120, 128-129, 160-217; Lassère (1977), 144-232; Ibba, Mastino, Zucca (2012), 36-40, 42; Aounallah (2013); Ibba (2020a); Gozalbes García, Ibba (2024), 334-339: there were 29 colonies (*Tingi, Zilil, Babba, Banasa, Cartennae, Gunugu, Zuchabar, Aquae Calidae, Rusguniae, Rusazus, Igilgili, Tubusuctu, Saldae*, all in Mauretania, *Cirta* in Numidia, *Thabraca, Thuburnica, Simitthus, Sicca Veneria, Assuras, Thub---*), *Hippo Diarrhytus, Clupea, Curubis, Carpis, Neapolis, Maxula, Uthina, Thurburbo Minus* and Carthage in the north of modern Tunisia) and 5 *municipia* (*Uzalis, Hippo Regius, Hadrumetum*, maybe *Mustis* and *Utica*, even in Tunisia). Not sure the *municipium* of *Zama Regia* and the *colonia* of *Thysdrus*.

¹⁹ De Visscher (1958), 288-289; Jacques, Scheid (1992), 297; Ortiz de Urbina (2004), 1433-1444, for African inscriptions which address the emperor as *conditor* of *colonia* or *municipium* (e.g. *CIL*, VIII, 27568 from *Sicca Veneria*, *CIL*, VIII, 17841 from *Thamugadi*, *AE*, 2004, 1677 from *Limisa*, mentioning Augustus, Trajan, Septimius Severus and Caracalla respectively).

²⁰ Gascou (1981a), 227-231; Gascou (1982a), 146-152; Hamdoune (1994), 81-87; Ibba (2009), 281; Ibba, Mastino, Zucca (2012), 50. Claudius also deduces the colonies of *Lixus* and probably *Tingi* in *Tingitana*, *Caesarea* and *Oppidum Novum* in *Caesariensis*; he founded the *municipia* of *Volubilis* and probably *Sala* and *Rusaddir* in *Tingitana*, *Rusuccuru*, *Arsennaria* and perhaps *Portus Magnus* and *Tipasa* in *Caesariensis*.

²¹ Kotula (1967); Gascou (1982a), 159-166. See also Romanelli (1959), 274-275; Casagrande (2006), 1828-1829, 1835; Ibba, Mastino, Zucca (2012), 52, 55-58.

²² Picard (1957), 87-88; Jacques (1980), 224-230; Jacques, Scheid (1992), 430-431.

²³ Lepelley (1979), 132-134; Beschtaouch (1981), 118-122; Gascou (1983); Jacques (1991), 600-606; Cataudella (1994), 325-326; Rebuffat (1993); Aounallah (2010).

²⁴ Guédon (2006), 690-699.

²⁵ Aulus Gellius (16.13.2-9) underlines the confusion existing in the Roman world between the two administrative systems. It should therefore be specified that “honorary” colonies, *peregrinae* or Roman commu-

During the reign of Antonines the phenomenon slowed down and then started again in the time of Septimius Severus very often thanks to the good relations that the rich African senators and knights had with him and his powerful praetorian prefect, Plautian, who originated from Lepcis Magna²⁶. To this city, Utica and Carthage, he gave the *ius italicum* and to five *municipia* of *Proconsularis* (*Aulodes*, *Matara*, *Thysdrus*, *Thiburisicum Bure* and *Thugga*) he recognized the *libertas*²⁷, a greater administrative and perhaps fiscal autonomy²⁸.

The foundation of *coloniae* and *municipia* continued slowly after 212, although gradually limited to *Africa Proconsularis* and without the promulgation of *Constitutio Antoniniana* leading to the automatic diffusion of Roman statutes in urban communities²⁹.

On a legal level, probably starting from Claudius and especially under Vespasian and Hadrian, the spread of Latin law determined the transformation of the *civitates peregrinae* only into Latin *municipia*, which could then access the highest rank of *coloniae civium Romanorum*, while neither *municipia civium Romanorum* nor *coloniae Latinae* were established again³⁰.

As regard the administrative organization, the *municipia* were governed by a college of *quattuorviri*, replaced in the autonomous ones by that of eponyms *duoviri iure dicundo* and *duoviri aedilicia potestate*, like in the more prestigious colonies. In many centres we also find the *quaestores* (in charge of managing the civic fund) and the *praefecti iure dicundo*, who represented the highest local magistrates in the villages belonging to the community. The *ordo decurionum*, or the local senate, in office for five years, included a variable number of members depending on the importance of the city, while the population was distributed in *curiae*, i.e. electoral districts (10 or 11), with internal subdivisions that were not very clear. Roman citizenship was granted only to those who had assumed the office of magistrate or who simply, under Hadrian, had become members of the *ordo decurionum*, but the prestige and power deriving from it had positive repercussions on the entire community because those who had received it conveyed the diffusion of Roman habits and customs, promoting a Romanization from below without completely erasing Punic-Numidian culture³¹.

The transformation of the cities was not only institutional but also architectural. Public and private spaces were organized on models of Italic origin, which visibly demonstrated adherence to the Roman world. Preconditions and/or consequences of municipal promotion were, for example, the construction of the *capitolium*, the forum and the buildings annexed, baths, monumental fountains and aqueducts, *domus* compliant with Italic canons, temples,

nities promoted to a higher rank, are different from “deducted” colonies, founded *ex nihilo* with veterans and proletarians. Cf. Langhammer (1973), 12-15; Sherwin-White (1973), 351-352; Le Roux (1992), 192, 198-200; Jacques, Scheid (1992), 296, 305-311; Chastagnol (1994).

²⁶ Grosso (1968); Euzennat (1977), 537-538; Euzennat (1979-1980), 134; Euzennat (1990), 578-579; Benseddik (1992), 432-434; Christol (1994).

²⁷ On the concept of *libertas*, identified by some with fiscal immunity, by others with autonomy administrative, by others also with “moral” values (connected e.g. to prestige) in addition to the other categories, cf. Desanges (1980), 303; Jacques (1991), 588-589, 593-595, 598-599; Beschtaouch (2002), 1205, 1208; Christol (2005), 162-163; Belkahlia-Karoui (2014), 205-210, 214-234, 240-241; Christol, Mokni (2017), pp. 22-23; Aounallah (2020a).

²⁸ Plin. *n.h.* 5.22, 24-25, 30, 41, cf. Teutsch (1962), 79-95; Vittinghoff (1966), 230-233; Lepelley (1997); Jacques (1991), 583-599; Peyras (1998); Aounallah (2022).

²⁹ Gasco (1982b), 310-318; Jacques, Scheid (1992), 370-371; Lepelley (1994), 288-299; Le Roux (2002).

³⁰ On the hierarchy thus defined see Kotula (1962); Fishwick (1964); Duncan-Jones (1968); Fishwick (1981); Jacques, Scheid (1992), 249-250; Fishwick (2002), 188-209; Briand-Ponsart, Hugoniot (2005), 132-137; Ibba (2012), 57.

³¹ Cf. Barron (2020).

honorary arches, theatres and amphitheatres where performances, competitions and games offered by the notables took place³², the erection of statues dedicated to the emperor and his family³³, the celebration of Rome through symbolic representations such as the Capitoline she-wolf³⁴.

The huge financial resources available to them - so much so that the expression “African gigantism” is used³⁵ - derived from the profits obtained from the marketing of agricultural products intended for export. Sometimes this race for primacy in the province failed, so from the beginning of the 3rd century the emperor ordered the institution pro tempore of *curatores rei publicae*³⁶. This happened, for example, in *Furnos Minus* not long after its promotion to municipal rank by Caracalla to remedy a public bankruptcy³⁷.

From these assumptions and in the light of new findings, the project proposes to provide an update theoretical and historical framework of municipal promotions in *Africa Proconsularis* and *Numidia* and draw a whole and more detailed chronological map of the phenomenon.

It will lead to the creation of a corpus of all the available archaeological, epigraphic, literary and numismatic documentation and the review of previous reconstructions and interpretations according to the most recent historiographical perspectives. In particular, the existence of a unitary project of municipalization by the individual emperors or, alternatively, the occasional nature of municipal promotions will be verified by contextualizing the various attestations and observing any changes over time.

It will also be ascertained whether there was an adhesion to administrative models developed in other regions of the empire, *leges municipales* issued by the central government or other institutional structure³⁸. In this regard, the famous definition of *municipia* by Aulus Gellius also needs a reconsideration³⁹.

Special attention will be paid to the global impact that the change in civic status had on the administrative structure, the socio-economic life, the urban spaces of each community and the territory to which it belongs, qualifying and quantifying the amount of resources directly or indirectly invested in the promotion and the type of privileges connected to it. It will also be essential to trace the ideological, political, and economic reasons which led local communities to request the bestowal of a Roman or Latin chart to the emperor, and to understand why local elites sponsored it and in exchange for what benefits. It seems, in fact, that the recognition of Roman citizenship for a few of them, the political prestige (also in the *concilium provinciae*) or the granting of economic benefits (e.g. *immunitas* or *libertas*) are not enough to justify the use of huge resources such as the expenses for sending embassies to

³² For the various infrastructures i.e. Barton (1982); Février (1982b), 342-345, 365-368; Jouffroy (1986); Thébert (1986); Ben Baaziz (1987); Dupuis (1992b); Kallala (1992); Ilhmen Ammar (1994); Bullo (2002); Bomgardner (2002); Thébert (2003); Casagrande (2008); Ghaddhab (2008); Maurin (2008); Bel Faïda (2009); about Lepcis Magna in Augustan age see. Kreikenbom (2011).

³³ Dupuis (1992b), 244-247; Gilhaus (2015); Hellström (2020).

³⁴ Dulière (1974), vol. I, 138-139, 216-223; Picard (1987).

³⁵ Gros, Torelli (1988), 290. See also Février (1982a), 61-62, 65; Lepelley (1979), 82-83; Février (1982b), 361-365; Thébert (1983), 100; Gros, Torelli (1988), 289-299; Pensabene (1991).

³⁶ Gasco (1979), 388-392; Jacques (1982), 68-71; Jacques (1984), 221-258. On curators in general Burton (1979); Camodeca (1980).

³⁷ Epigraphic attestations of Severan age are in *CIL*, VIII, 25808b and 25808c.

³⁸ E.g. Mentxaka (2016); Eck (2016a); Eck (2016b); Le Roux (2017); Mentxaka (2017); Eck (2020); Ibba (2023b).

³⁹ Gell. *n.a.* 16, 13, 6 and 8-9.

Rome⁴⁰. Considering their family and economic relationships at the local, regional, provincial, and supra-provincial level will perhaps help in this operation. A new prosopographical repertoire including all the individuals directly or indirectly involved in the municipalization process will then be produced, laying the foundations for a comprehensive study of the provincial aristocracy as the backbone of provincial societies⁴¹.

At the same time, other factors like the possible influence of emulation or rivalry between neighbouring communities should not be underestimated. The negative effects of municipalization which emerge from literary and epigraphic documentation like the arising of administrative or financial problems and the consequent intervention of *curatores rei publicae* or ordinary and extraordinary assignments (e.g. *legations*) will be also analysed.

Within these general guidelines more complex issues concerning not only Africa, such as the municipal programs of Caesar and Augustus, the prosperity of the Antonine age, the so-called “crisis of the third century”, the relations between Romans and Peregrines, the role of the military in local African elites, may be explored.

Throughout the research it will be appropriate to encourage discussion on the subject concerning also other regions of the Roman empire and stimulate interest on it within a broader context of the study of ancient Mediterranean cities.

In view of these goals, the starting point is to collect all the evidence attesting the long period of municipalization in the selected context. The available documentation consists of literary, epigraphic, numismatic, and archaeological sources. Therefore, it is addressed with a multidisciplinary approach from a predominantly historical perspective.

The literary data (e.g. from Pliny the Elder), already analysed in detail by Gasco, Desanges and Lepelley⁴², will be discussed critically and compared to the information drawn from the analysis of other kind of sources.

Hundreds of epigraphic texts, which represent the bulk of the documentation, will be extracted from traditional repertoires (*CIL*, *ILAFr*, *ILAlg*, *ILTun*, *IRT*, *AE*), monographs, volumes and journals pertaining this field of research and then carefully examined to highlight the elements directly or indirectly relevant to the purpose of this project⁴³. When necessary, a new critical edition of these documents will be produced, otherwise a summary of previous critical editions will be provided after verifying their correctness.

The documents to consider include all the texts attesting status and titles of each community and mentioning magistracies, priesthood (*augur* and *pontifex* above all)⁴⁴ and/or other signals of a municipal promotion, such as official businesses, events, dedications of statues and public buildings, donations of *sportulae*, *epula*, *gymnasia* and *ludi* promised by the promoters and beneficiaries of municipalization who held local offices or aspired to them. Genealogical research will be carried out at local, regional and provincial levels for members and families of the elites; their relationships with indigenous communities, which funerary inscriptions often document, will also be considered. To identify the notable figures mentioned in the epigraphic documents and analyse the development of municipal careers and the transmis-

⁴⁰ Cf. Poinssot (1962); Jacques (1984); Jacques, Scheid (1992); *Hommage à Claude Lepelley* (2022).

⁴¹ Cf. Jones (1984); Jacques, Scheid (1992); partially Ceccoli (2009); Hamdoune (2017).

⁴² See above.

⁴³ E.g. Aounallah (2001) and Fantar, Zucca (2017) on the communities of Cape Bon falling within the territory of Carthage; Gilhaus (2020).

⁴⁴ These two priesthoods are attested only in Roman communities; see Dupuis (2002).

sion of public offices, it will be made use of prosopographical catalogues, both general ones concerning the whole territory of the empire and ones dedicated only to North Africa⁴⁵.

The examination of inscriptions will also allow to illustrate the administrative functioning of African communities, working with actual data and comparing them with those regarding other regions of the Roman world. In this work the epigraphists will take advantage of the material recorded on open access databases, such as *EDH*, *EDCS*, *PETRAE*, *RUS AFRICUM*, *VIA NUMIDICA*, *IRT* and, partially, *EDR*⁴⁶.

In addition, it is planned to realize autopsies of the most important inscribed monuments, at least in the archaeological areas and museums of both Tunisia under the patronage of the Institut National du Patrimoine de Tunis⁴⁷. The direct examination will focus precisely on the epigraphic and numismatic sources that are particularly relevant to the project or that are at in danger of disappearing owing to natural causes or carelessness. To facilitate their study and allow for their preservation over time, Digital Surface 3D models of the documents examined will be elaborated through the Agisoft Metashape Pro software, which uses an automatic vector photogrammetry of the “Structure from motion” type⁴⁸. From these it will also be possible to obtain two-dimensional drawings to be used for publications or display panels for exhibitions or archaeological parks.

If there are no clear markers of municipal promotion in the documentation, it is worth dwelling on the period immediately before and after this event since traces of it could be found in the local political and socio-economic organization (e.g. the diffusion of Latin law seems to have frequently preceded the bestowal of Roman citizenship). In these cases, the joint presence of geographers and Roman law specialists in the research group will respectively help to evaluate the influence of territories on the development of urban communities and to better understand juridical and administrative problems connected to changes in civic status.

The numismatic sources have merged into a recent catalogue of African coins⁴⁹, but additions or different readings may be derived from the examination of new discoveries thanks also to collaboration between expert scholars from the Universities of Sassari and Grenada.

Archaeological bibliography will be also useful for the study of African cities, their monuments and technical aspects relating to the building programs⁵⁰, the reorganization of territories and the costs of work services⁵¹. Already existing general or specific works can provide a fundamental contribution to the analysis of ancient topography thanks to the mediation of the

⁴⁵ E.g. Bassignano (1974); Gascou (1981b); Mandouze (1982); Gascou (1987); Jacques (1981); Jacques (1982); Corbier (1982); Le Glay (1982); Dupuis (2002); Belkahia-Karoui (2009); Ibba, Mastino (2014); Ibba (2020b); Ibba (2022).

⁴⁶ <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/> (*EDH*); <https://db.edcs.eu/epigr/hinweise/hinweis-it.html> (*EDCS*); <https://www.eagle-network.eu/eagle-project/collections/petrae/> (*PETRAE*); <http://rusafricum.org/> (*RUS AFRICUM*); http://www.bigalke-schmiedekunst.de/images/shop/meilensteine_an_der_via_numidica.htm (*VIA NUMIDICA*); <http://inslib.kcl.ac.uk/irt2009/> (*IRT*); <http://www.edr-edr.it/default/index.php> (*EDR*).

⁴⁷ The geo-political situation at present does not allow to do the same in Algeria and Libya, where however local researchers are willing to collaborate and provide necessary information.

⁴⁸ It is a technology perfectly in line with the DNSH declaration (art. 17 Reg. UE 2020/2024).

⁴⁹ Alexandropoulos (2007) update of Grant (1946).

⁵⁰ Cf. Jouffroy (1986); Wesch-Klein (1990); Horster (2001); Saastamoinen (2010); *Centres de pouvoir et organisation de l'espace* (2014), on the monumental apparatus of colonies and *municipia* analysed through the epigraphic evidence, but without admitting a direct relationship between its creation and changes in civic status; Scheduling (2019) and Ardeleanu (2021) on the organization of the urban or rural space of the communities belonging to the *dioecesis Karthaginis* and Numidia.

⁵¹ Cf. Duncan Jones (1974); Domingo Magaña (2017); Mattingly (2023).

archaeologists and geographers of the ancient world participating in the research group⁵². The flourishing of building sites is, for example, an important indicator of the economic impact which municipal promotions had on local communities, as it is connected to the increase in honorary *summae*, the creation of new charitable foundations or the evergetism of candidates for public offices⁵³. Along with the new reading of the sector bibliography, archaeological surveys in African sites would be desirable. In this regard, the support of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, the École française de Rome, the Association of the Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Cartagine and the Institut National du Patrimoine de Tunis, which have already shown interest in the project, is accompanied by the possibility of referring as well as the rich photographic documentation preserved in Centro di documentazione e ricerca sull'archeologia dell'Africa settentrionale "Antonino Di Vita" (Macerata), Centre Ausonius (Bordeaux), Centro di Studi Interdisciplinari sulle Province Romane in Dipartimento di Storia of Sassari University, Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

To optimize the work, each of the five operating units was assigned to investigate a group of cities belonging to homogeneous geographical areas through the typology of sources described above.

More in detail, the operative unit of UNISS (Sassari), composed by five members, A. Ibba, A. Teatini, M. Sechi, R. Ortu and S. Fusco, will examine municipal promotions in the *dioecesis Karthaginis* including 81 Roman cities established between 46 BCE and 268 CE, of which at least 13 (*Karthago*, *Utica*, *Thuburbo Maius*, *Vallis*, *Bisica Lucana*, *Thignica*, *Numlulis*, *Thibursicum Bure*, *Thugga*, *Uchi Maius*, *Furnos Maius*, *Giufi* and *Furnos Minus*) can be adopted as case studies thanks to enough documentation. The University of Sassari, which will also have the task of coordinating the work of the other units, has continuously been operating in this area since 1994 through archaeological-epigraphic investigations in the sites of *Neapolis*, *Thignica*, *Numlulis*, *Uchi Maius*⁵⁴.

In addition to the management of the project's web page, the research in the Punic districts (RS) of the *Campi Magni* and *Thusca* with 12 of the 40 centres dated back between the time of Caesar and the third century (*Sicca Veneria*, *Mustis*, *Thabraca*, *Thuburnica*, *Simitthus*, *Bulla Regia*, *Althiburos*, *Limisa*, *Zama Regia*, *Mactaris*, *Sufetula*, *Cillium*) will be entrusted to UNICA (Cagliari), with its two members, A.M. Corda and P. Floris, already active in Tunisia with archaeological and epigraphical projects on the sites of *Uthina* and *Zama Regia*.

The only component (R. Bertolazzi) of OU-UNIVR (Verona), author of past few studies on the relationship between Septimius Severus and the cities of the empire, will investigate the seven communities of *Lepcis Magna*, *Sabratha*, *Gigthis*, *Thaenae*, *Acholla*, *Thysdrus*, *Hadrumentum*, included in the Tetrarchic provinces of Tripolitania and Byzacena along with 35 other centres characterized by deep connections to the Punic and Amazigh cultures and by a great economic-urban development between the reign of Augustus and the Severan age.

The unit of UNIMOL (Campobasso), including C. Ricci and F.M. Ciliberto, will instead study at least 9 *municipia* and *coloniae* (*Cuicul*, *Cirta*, *Rusicade*, *Milev*, *Thibilis*, *Hippo Regius*, *Calama*, *Thubursicu Numidarum*, *Madauros*) documented in the area corresponding to the Diocletianic provinces of *Numidia-Cirtensis* and part of *dioecesis Hipponiensis*, which during

⁵² E.g. Bullo (2002); Thébert (2003); Eingartner (2005); Montali (2016); Bonacasa, Aiosa (2017); Lamare (2019); Scheduling (2019); Ardeleanu (2021).

⁵³ E.g. Duncan-Jones (1974); Garnsey (1971); Jacques (1975); Hopkins (1980); Beschouch (1999); Il capitolo delle entrate nelle finanze municipali in Occidente ed in Oriente (1999); Briand-Ponsart (2020).

⁵⁴ Cf. Mastino (2002), among the many publications that resulted from it.

the early and middle empires shared conspicuous socio-economic features and had intense contacts between neighbouring *Mauretania Sitifensis*.

At last, the vast but not very urbanised territory between *Numidia Militiana* and the region around Lake *Tritonis*, as well as the western part of *Byzacena*, with eight certain centres (*Lambaesis*, *Thamugadi*, *Diana Veteranorum*, *Verecunda*, *Mascula*, *Theveste*, *Ammaedara*, *Thala*, *Thelepte*) will be analysed by the unit of UNICT (M. Albana, C. Soraci, F. Arcaria are its three components), which already known economic and military issues characterizing this area.

Thanks to the high number of sites investigated, this research aims to supply a better understanding of the phenomenon of municipalization and become a point of reference for scholars interested not only in the history of Roman Africa, but also in the spreading of Roman institutional culture in the Mediterranean, the functioning of local institutions and most of all the relationship between local communities and imperial power.

The composition of the research group will be progressively integrated with the recruitment of research fellows (scholarships or research grants)⁵⁵ and possibly with the involvement of other specialists/advisors for any specific issue that may arise. Anyway, the members of these five operative units will work using their own skills and different perspectives, but in a mood of close and mutual collaboration. Habitual discussion between them will be fundamental to solve problems that will naturally overcome the single areas of investigation (e.g. questions about relationships between elites from different regions, common imperial policies, or pre-Roman background). The partnership will be facilitated by the creation of a single database where sources, images (including 3D models of inscribed monuments), bibliography and scientific results will be collected and, after an appropriate verification, uploaded in the Zenodo and Zotero portals, making them available to the entire scientific community. This datasheet may be enriched or modified by each contributor, providing a useful working tool to all scholars interested in Roman institutions. The same contents with real-time updates of the data will be also uploaded on OpenAIRE platforms such as Zenodo – managed by CERN – and Zotero to make it available to the entire scientific community. Furthermore, a web page and a social page will be created to share provisional results, which will be also published exclusively in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

To take stock of the progress of their work and to debate, compare and exchange ideas, the various units in collaboration with the foreign institutes that support the project⁵⁶ will organize in Italian, Tunisian and Algerian universities recurring seminars and workshop – both in presence and online – in which their members and external researchers invited will be able to participate. Both OUs and single researchers will take part in national/international conferences and seminars dedicated to the study of Roman North Africa (e.g. the XXII edition of *L'Africa Romana*, the *Colloqui Borghesi* in Bertinoro, the *SEMPAM* and *IAC* conferences). Proceedings, annual reports, and studies on specific topics presented or not at these events will consequently be published in national and international peer-reviewed scientific journals, such as *CaSteR*, *Epigraphica*, *Antiquités Africaines*, *Mefra*, and *Diritto @ storia*. A final conference, called by P.I. and broadcasted also in streaming will be held at the close of the project to illustrate overall conclusions. The researchers of the OUs, the partners who have supported the project, and all the scholars interested in the subject are invited to interview.

⁵⁵ The first research grant has been funded by the University of Molise (UNIMOL) and has been awarded to L. Rainone.

⁵⁶ See above.

The final results of the project, the general catalogue of the sites examined, and the proceeding of each workshop will be published under the Creative Commons CC-BY-SA license and made available on the institutional repositories of the universities to which the OUs belong.

Due to its structure and its purposes, the project will have a great scientific, technological, and social impact.

It will provide an important contribution to the study of ancient Mediterranean cities, as well as elements for comparison to scholars interested in Roman institutions, society and economics related not necessarily to Africa but also to other parts of the empire.

The creation of a digital data collection capable of hosting and making available various materials (texts, images, maps, digital models) through innovative research engines will require the use of Digital Humanities tools, while the realization of 3D models of inscriptions will experience the application of new technologies to epigraphic studies, paving the way for the development of software that could be used in other fields of knowledge and for the enhancement of cultural heritage.

Through the web page dedicated to this project and the Zenodo and Zotero portals, it will be possible to keep the scientific community constantly updated on the progress of the investigations, receive suggestions, and establish new collaborative relationships. All the potential users, i.e. both Italian and foreign researchers, established scholars, doctoral students, postgraduates, undergraduates in history, epigraphy, numismatics, archaeology, Roman law, will be able to consult the contents and access the resources of high quality free of charge.

To effectively reach all strata of society, a complex cultural operation around the project will be implemented with the involvement of local cultural associations and educational institutions of all levels according to the dissemination systems of the modern disciplines of public history and public archaeology.

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Riassunto / *Abstract*

Abstract. This paper announces the launch of a research project of high scientific impact in the main field of humanities, which aims to shed new light on the process of Roman municipalization in an extended part of North Africa through the study of a rich dossier of historical sources thanks to the cooperation of scholars of different backgrounds.

Keywords. Roman history, Latin epigraphy, local communities, Roman public law, ancient society, ancient topography.

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

Lucia Rainone, The Municipalization in Roman Africa: towards an update, *CaSteR* 9 (2024), DOI: 10.13125/caster/6282, <http://ojs.unica.it/index.php/caster/>

