



Introducing the Digital Platform *Sylloge Inscriptionum Religionis Africae Romanae* (SIRAR)

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SIRAR is the acronym for an open-access platform, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Religionis Africae Romanae*, designed to host a catalog of polytheistic religious inscriptions in Neo-Punic, Greek, and Latin from Roman Africa (146 BCE – 429 CE).¹ Through this digital tool, we intend to facilitate access, exploration and critical analysis of a sylloge of significant epigraphic data via an intuitive interface.

This article presents the aims, structure, and analytical potential of SIRAR. Beyond its instrumental role as an epigraphic repository, SIRAR aspires to serve as a critical tool for rethinking the role of metahuman agents in shaping the religious landscapes of Roman Africa. The study of divine onomastics makes it possible not only to reconstruct the cultic preferences of dedicants, but also to identify mechanisms of local appropriation, resemanticization, and ritual innovation. Thus, SIRAR is not merely a data collection system, but rather a platform that provides interpretive criteria to interrogate, reorganize, and better understand the dynamics of construction, transmission, and transformation of the sacred in one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse regions of the Roman Empire.

1. Introduction

The origins of SIRAR can be traced back to 2018, with the launch of the four-year research project *Lived Ancient Religion in North Africa* (LARNA), directed by Valentino Gasparini at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (2018-2022). Funded by the Talent Attraction Program of the Autonomous Community of Madrid (grant no. 2017-T1/HUM-5709), the project developed in close collaboration with the Instituto de Historiografía “Julio Caro Baroja” (UC3M, then directed by Jaime Alvar Ezquerra), the Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Cartagine (Tunis/Sassari, with Attilio Mastino serving as president at the time), and the

¹ <https://humanidadesdigitales.uc3m.es/s/nuevo-sirar/page/home>.

Université Jean Jaurès (Toulouse, where Corinne Bonnet was holding the position of Professor of Greek History).

LARNA was conceived with the aim of applying the theoretical and methodological framework of the *Lived Ancient Religion* paradigm – developed in Erfurt (Germany) between 2012 and 2017 under the supervision of Jörg Rüpke² – to the study of religious practices in Roman Africa. This paradigm represents a methodological shift away from traditional models that view religion in the Graeco-Roman world primarily as a set of routinized, institutionalized public rituals shaped by elite ideologies (the so-called *polis*- or *civitas*-religion). Instead, it emphasizes the role of individuals as active agents, capable of creative and context-specific religious innovation. In line with this perspective, LARNA explored Roman Africa not simply as a passive recipient of imperial religious forms, but as a dynamic arena where small-scale actors – often operating outside formal institutional structures – engaged with religion as a flexible resource. These agents responded to emerging social and personal dilemmas, generated embodied religious experiences, and communicated them through diverse narrative and material strategies. LARNA thus aimed to reconstruct the plural, emotionally charged, and materially grounded landscape of religious practices in Roman Africa from the bottom up.³

It is evident, however, that such an ambitious objective could not be achieved without the most comprehensive survey of the rich polytheistic epigraphic evidence of North Africa. Thus, in the early stages of LARNA, a thorough compilation of religious epigraphy from Roman Africa was undertaken, drawing from a corpus of over 60,000 inscriptions.

Two years later, in 2020, the project experienced significant momentum: following the lifting of the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the decision was made to meticulously organize and classify all the material collected in previous years into an Excel database.

With the necessary funding and the invaluable support of the Humanities Library team at Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, the third phase of the project was made possible: the development of an online platform, based on an application programming interface (API) provided by Omeka S, that hosts the database and functions as a search engine for various fields relevant to the study of Roman religious inscriptions. At the time of writing this text (August 2025), SIRAR collects 5,752 georeferenced inscriptions and includes several tools that enable searches across multiple fields inherent to this type of epigraphy. Among these, particular attention has been given to the search and analysis of divine onomastics, owing to the meticulous methodological work carried out in synergy with the team of the EPIDI project (*Epítetos Divinos. Experiencia religiosa y relaciones de poder en Hispania*), directed by Jaime Alvar Ezquerro at the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid.⁴

In SIRAR, we bring together under the generic umbrella term “religious epigraphy” a highly heterogeneous set of epigraphic evidence such as inscriptions that invoke a deity, attest to the performance of a specific rite (*donum*, *epula*, *votum*, etc.), mention the celebration of a religious festival (*Parentalia*, *sacra Lupercalia*, etc.), or refer to a specific place or object of worship (*ara*, *templum*, etc.). Funerary epigraphy has not been systematically included. However, in line with the LAR spirit of the project, we have included funerary inscriptions that

² The principal outcomes of the LAR project are: Rüpke (2011); Albrecht *et al.* (2018); Gasparini *et al.* (2020).

³ The principal outcomes of the LARNA project are: Gasparini (2020), (2021), (2024); Gasparini & Mas-tino (2021); Gasparini, Alvar Ezquerro & Bonnet (2025); Fernández Portaencasa & Gasparini (forthcoming).

⁴ The theoretical and methodological results of the EPIDI project, along with the classification of divine onomastics developed within its framework, have been published in Alvar Ezquerro *et al.* (2024).

invoke deities other than the traditional *Manes* (e.g., *dii inferi*, *dii superi*, Proserpina, etc.), since these may reflect personal religious experiences distinct from institutionalized funerary practices which tend to replicate pre-established patterns. For the same reason, we have also included funerary inscriptions that mention specific features of the monument housing the text (*ara lapidea quadrata*, *tumulus*, etc.), refer to the deceased's beliefs about the afterlife (*caelum*, *campi Elysii*, *Stygia*, etc.), or allude to rituals performed within the context of funerary cults (*laudationes*, *thura*, etc.).

In addition, we considered it relevant to include honorific inscriptions in the database that mention priestly offices (*antistes*, ἱερεὺς, *sacerdos*, etc.), religious magistracies (*augur*, *flamen*, *pontifex*, etc.), and cultic associations or institutions (*cultores*, *sodales*, etc.) active in the provinces of Roman Africa. Although such references typically appear in honorific monuments with little to no religious value in themselves, they nevertheless provide significant information regarding the polytheistic cults practiced in the region under study. We have not included references to religious magistracies that appear exclusively within the context of imperial titlature (such as *Pontifex Maximus*).

Finally, we have also included in our catalog references to both the *domus divina* and the *numen* of the emperors. The latter generally appears associated with the formula *devotus numini maiestatique*. Scholars have debated the meaning of this expression, which seems to lie halfway between genuine devotion to the emperor – as part of what we use to label as “imperial cult” – and mere formalism, abstract and devoid of real religious significance.⁵ In truth, it is not possible to determine with certainty whether these references to the *numina* of emperors were accompanied by any form of religious practice, or whether they merely reflect an entrenched commemorative formula. It is precisely this ambiguity that justifies the inclusion of such texts in the database.

All the reasons outlined regarding the inclusion or exclusion of specific types of inscriptions justify the deliberate choice of the term *sylloge* rather than *corpus* for SIRAR. This terminological decision reflects a methodological stance: unlike a *corpus*, which traditionally aspires to exhaustive and definitive completeness, a *sylloge* conveys the idea of a curated and purposeful selection, one guided by interpretive criteria that are historically and analytically grounded.

2. Search Interface and Functionality in SIRAR

SIRAR has been designed to facilitate various modes of search through interaction with the tabs located at the top of the website. Given the specific nature of this project, priority has been given to enabling immediate searches for theonyms and divine onomastic attributes, through which users can access the inscriptions in which they appear. Nevertheless, SIRAR also functions as a conventional epigraphic search engine.

This functionality is located under the tab titled “Inscriptions”, where the complete catalog of inscriptions is displayed in ascending order according to the number assigned to each entry. Entries include all the textual details of the inscriptions, the related bibliography, their geolocation and also a photograph of the *tituli* (if available). Users can carry out searches directly from the individual inscription records, through the hyperlinks associated with fields such as theonyms, onomastic attributes, locations, or even dedicants and individuals involved. For instance, if we open the record for inscription number 1500 and click on the

⁵ See a recent *status quaestionis* in Villaret (2019), 84–92.

theonym Saturnus, the link will take us to the deity's record, along with all inscriptions associated with him. Likewise, clicking on the location (*Thibilis* – Sellaoua Announa) where the piece was found will direct the user to the corresponding locality record, which contains all inscriptions linked to that site. Similarly, clicking on the name of the dedicant (Marcus Vipsanius Martialis) will lead to the record containing the information available about this individual, along with the list of inscriptions in which he has been identified.

The search types available include original-text queries in Neo-Punic, Greek, or Latin, which can be conducted either without taking into account orthographic errors or punctuation marks – such as parentheses, brackets, or dashes – or with those elements considered, particularly when attempting to locate a specific inscription. It is important to emphasize, however, that in order to obtain accurate results, the search text must always be enclosed in quotation marks. For example, entering *Apollini Augusto* without quotation marks will yield 1,495 results, corresponding to inscriptions containing the terms *Apollini* and *Augusto* either in connection or separately. In contrast, entering the same search within quotation marks (“*Apollini Augusto*”) will return only 16 results, corresponding to inscriptions in which the theonym *Apollo* in the dative is directly followed by the epithet *Augustus*.

The section titled “Theonyms” presents an exhaustive list of the theonyms identified in North Africa, arranged in alphabetical order. This interface not only provides a quick visual overview of the theonyms, but also functions as a search tool, since each name is directly linked to the inscriptions in which it appears. From this section, to perform a specific search for inscriptions containing, for example, the theonym *Apollo*, the user simply needs to click on the corresponding link, which will redirect them to the list of texts in which this deity is mentioned. This tool greatly simplifies the identification and retrieval of specific inscriptions based on theonyms.

The same principle applies to searches conducted via the “Onomastic Attributes” section. This section stands out as one of the most innovative and functional components of our database, as it presents a comprehensive identification and classification of all divine epithets attested in religious inscriptions from North Africa, based on the taxonomy developed within the EPIDI project (see *supra* n. 4). This taxonomy is a thematic classification grounded in the diverse meanings that epithets acquire within their specific social and religious contexts. It represents an *etic* intellectual exercise – since ancient agents were not necessarily aware of the underlying motivations behind the selection of a particular epithet –, but it nonetheless serves as a valuable tool for approaching the specific intentions and choices of the worshippers themselves.

For this reason, some divine epithets may appear more than once. For instance, *Augusta* may be classified as a “power-related” epithet when it derives from imperial titulature, or as an “anthroponymic” epithet when referring to a specific woman of the imperial *domus*. Similarly, *Caelestis* may appear as an “intangible topographic” epithet – linked to the sky as an atmospheric or metaphysical space – or as a “multi-theonymic” epithet involving the use of the theonym of the goddess *Caelestis*. As a result, users conducting searches based on onomastic attributes should take into account the classification criteria we have adopted, in order to understand the typology of the selected epithet. To view the identification of the category assigned to each epithet, simply click on a specific epithet and refer to the field labelled “Onomastic attribute category”.

The “Locations” section allows users to search for inscriptions based on the localities (identified by both their ancient and modern names) where the epigraphic material was dis-

covered.⁶ This section is structured on two levels: the first level presents the five African provinces of the High Empire, following the administrative division established under Septimius Severus. The second level breaks down each province into its constituent localities, identified by their ancient name (when known) and current toponym. By clicking on any of these localities, users can access detailed information about the district/delegation, prefecture/province, and country in which it is located, along with its geographical coordinates, historical name, the Roman province to which it belonged, the type of settlement (urban or extra-urban) it represented in antiquity, and a map displaying its precise geolocation. Each locality also provides an inventory of the religious inscriptions associated with it. This approach allows for a fluid integration of geographical data and epigraphic content, facilitating the exploration and analysis of religious inscriptions within the specific geographical context of each site.

To conduct searches based directly on the geolocation of inscriptions, users will find a dedicated tool in the “Maps” tab. This section displays, with precise or approximate accuracy, all inscriptions whose geolocation is known, along with their associated localities. The map features two types of drop-shaped markers: one (in red) linked to the record of each locality, and another (in green) connected to each individual inscription entry in the database that could be geolocated. To illustrate this: if we zoom in on the area of *Mons Balcaranensis* near Carthage, where 302 entries have been recorded, 301 correspond to religious inscriptions originating from that location, while the remaining red one refers to the record of the site itself, *Mons Balcaranensis* – Djebel Bou-Korneïn. This cartographic interface not only facilitates the visualization of the spatial distribution of inscriptions and localities, but also provides a graphical representation of the number of inscriptions associated with each specific site.

Additionally, the “Maps” tab has been developed as a tool for conducting specific searches and visualizing the spatial distribution of the inscriptions resulting from those queries. To do so, users must write the desired text in the “Search” field (there is no need to start the search by pressing Enter). For example, if we enter *Apollini Augusto*, the map will display 16 entries corresponding to cases in which the god Apollo appears in the dative case accompanied by the epithet *Augustus*. If we just type *Minervae*, the map will return 81 results showing the locations where this word appears.

The “Analysis” tab includes a link to this very article and a second link to the article (see *supra* n. 4) discussing the taxonomy used for the various categories of onomastic attributes, accompanied by the color version of its table (in the printed version of the article, the table was published in black and white). In the future, this section may include all open-access texts that could assist users in navigating the platform and interpreting its results.

In the following “Bibliography” tab, users will have access to the bibliography used in the reading of the inscriptions, presented in both abbreviated and full formats.

Finally, the “Contact” tab includes both scientific and technical contact information, allowing users to get in touch in case they detect mistakes, suggest corrections to existing inscriptions, or wish to submit updates or newly discovered inscription texts.

⁶ The identification and precise geolocation of many inscriptions has proven to be a complex task, due to the scarcity of reliable data regarding the find contexts of numerous pieces. In most cases, location criteria were based on coordinates provided by databases such as Trismegistos or Pleiades, although additional tools like Mapcarta and Google Earth were also employed for this purpose. Unfortunately, in some instances, pinpointing the exact location of discovery proved impossible, due to factors such as the inaccuracy of existing coordinates or the use of toponyms established during the French colonial period, which have since been altered or replaced in the postcolonial era.

3. Preliminary Macro-Statistical Insights from the SIRAR Dataset

We now present a series of preliminary statistical findings derived from the analysis of the SIRAR database. These results are organized into three main sections: 1) statistics related to theonyms, 2) statistics concerning other onomastic attributes, and 3) a brief examination of the interrelation between the two, explored through a network analysis.

3.1. Statistics on Theonyms

A total of 441 distinct names referring to metahuman entities have been identified in the religious epigraphy of Roman Africa. While all of these are catalogued under the “Theonyms” tab in SIRAR, it is crucial to note that not all of them correspond strictly to deities. The list encompasses a wider spectrum of entities, including daemonic figures (e.g., *Ιἄω*, *Βῆκαχυχ*), virtues (e.g., Concordia, Pax), mythological entities (e.g., Pegasus, Chimera, Satyri), deified historical individuals (e.g., Iuba, Livia, Iulia Domna), corporate or institutional agents (e.g., the *Legio III Augusta*), and even sacralized places (e.g., *Ammaedara* or *Agger*). This inclusive categorization reflects the diverse range of powers, agents, and symbolic forces invoked in the epigraphic record, and highlights the conceptual fluidity and complexity surrounding the polytheistic notion of the “divine” in ancient North African religious practice.

Quantitatively, out of the 441 recorded names, 244 appear only once, accounting for 55% of the total. An additional 63 names are attested twice, and 35 occur three times. In percentage terms, this means that approximately three quarters of theonyms (70%) attested in the epigraphic record are mentioned fewer than three times. At first glance, such variability might suggest a remarkable degree of religious creativity or onomastic freedom among North African devotees in the construction and adaptation of the divine throughout the Roman period. This impression is further reinforced by the high number of daemonic names (over 100) extracted from Latin and Greek *defixiones*, which significantly contribute to the overall diversity. However, this interpretation could be misleading. A closer analysis reveals that the 35 most frequently attested theonyms account for 80% of all inscriptions, whereas those names appearing only once are confined to just 5% of the total epigraphic corpus. This distribution indicates that, while there was sufficient room for individual innovation, the majority of divine invocations occurred within a relatively stable and normative religious framework.

From a quantitative standpoint, the data clearly demonstrate a predominance of cults dedicated to deities bearing Roman names and invoked in Latin, although local and hybrid forms of worship remain well attested (fig. 1). The most frequently attested deity in the epigraphic record of Roman Africa is Saturn, with a total of 875 occurrences, accounting for 17.8% of all religious inscriptions in which a metahuman entity is invoked. At a considerably lower frequency, 412 attestations refer to various *numina*, typically evoking the divine qualities of specific emperors or members of the *domus Augusta*. *Genii* of various kinds (including those associated with places, institutions, individuals, and even other deities) are called upon in 290 inscriptions, followed by Jupiter with 265 mentions, and Mercury with 193. The Neo-Punic theonym *bēl ḥmn* appears 184 times, while Victoria is attested in 126 inscriptions, the *domus* (generally as *Augusta*) in 113, and Ceres – occasionally in its plural form *Cereres* – in 108. Below the threshold of 100 attestations, we find dedications to Roman deities such as Juno (98), Minerva (91), Fortuna (87), Liber (83), Mars (78), Aesculapius (76), Hercules (73), Neptunus (64), or Pluto (62). Alongside these, a notable number of dedications are directed to deities that are either specific to or particularly common within the North African socio-cultural and religious milieu, including Caelestis (96), the local god Bacax (58), and *bēl* (53). The numerical prominence of Bacax derives largely from the epigraphic assemblage

left by the magistrates of *Thibilis* in the Ghar Djemaa cave (Algeria), where they regularly participated in rituals dedicated to this local deity⁷

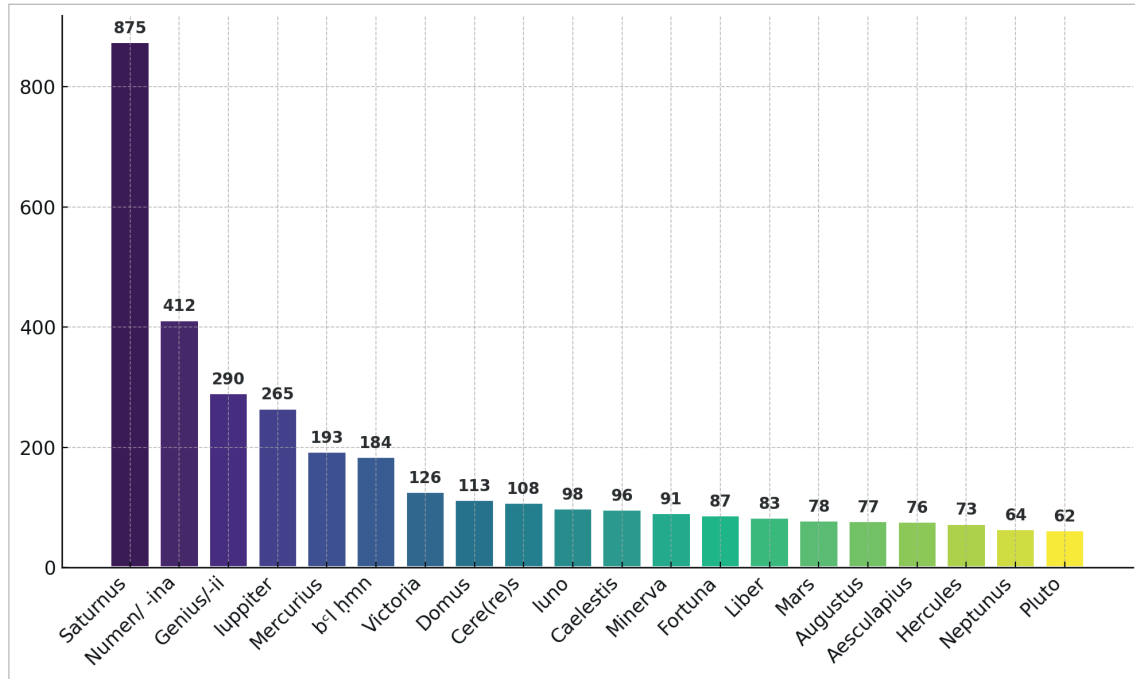


Fig. 1. The 20 most common deities mentioned in religious inscriptions from North Africa.

The epigraphic record preserves relatively few pre-Roman deities, with only 30 individual instances identified. This figure is strikingly low when compared to other regions of the Western Roman Empire, such as northwestern Hispania, where more than one hundred indigenous theonyms have been recorded. Among the local North African deities, the following stand out: Abbadiris, Aulisua, Auzius, Bacax, Balamon, Baliddir, Bonchor, Fudina, Iemsal, Iesdan, Ifrus, Iocolon, Macurgun, Macurtam, Maragzu, Masiddica, Masiden, Mathamodes, Matilam, Middon, Midmanim, Montmanius, Suggan, Thililua, Vacurtum, Vanammon, Varsis, Varsissima, Vihinam. Moreover, most of these cultic expressions exhibit a narrow geographical distribution, and the vast majority are attested only once, with very few exceptions. Among the latter, in addition to Bacax the case of Baliddir stands out: he is called upon in five dedications distributed across different areas of *Numidia*, including *Sigus*, *Guelaat Bou Sbaa*, and *Saddar* – Aïn El Bey (SIRAR 608-612).

The number of Neo-Punic religious inscriptions amounts to a total of 311. Almost all of them come from the late Republican *tophet* of El Hofra or the space dedicated to Baal Hammon in Maktar (*Mactaris*) during the Roman imperial period, although they have also been located in other cities such as Carthage, Mididi, Bagat, or *Thubursicu Bure*. The Punic deity most frequently attested is *b-el hmn* (Baal Hammon), whose theonym appears 184 times. This is followed by *b-el* (Baal), with 53 mentions, and *tnt* (Tanit), which is attested in a total of 24 occasions, almost always accompanying *b-el hmn* or *b-el*. The remaining Punic deities, such as *šdrp* (Shadrappa), *el* (El), *elym* (Elym), *štrt* (Astarte), *dgn* (Dagon), *htr myskr* (Hatar of Mus-

⁷ Cf. Gasparini (2024).

cara), or *mlk^cštrt* (Milkashtart), *mylkt ʾrṣ* (Mistress of the Earth), or *q^cysr* (Caesar), only appear mentioned in one or two stelae throughout North Africa.

As for the Greek inscriptions, a total of 173 theonyms have been recorded. However, the majority derive from the extensive lists of daemons preserved in curse tablets. In fact, 102 Greek theonyms appear only once, accounting for 61% of the total. The most frequently attested Greek deity is Ἀπόλλων, with 28 inscriptions, all originating from his sanctuary at Cyrene. He is followed by Σέραπις, invoked 12 times, and Ζεύς, with nine occurrences. Other entities contributing to this diverse onomastic repertoire include the daemon Ἀβρασάξ (eight mentions); Ἄρτεμις, Ἡρακλῆς, and the daemon Σεμεσειλαμ (each with seven attestations); Ἑρμῆς, Ἰάω, and Σαβαώθ (each appearing six times).

Epigraphic bilingualism was far from common in North Africa: only about 50 cases have been recorded out of a corpus of nearly 5,800 inscriptions. In the case of Latin–Greek texts, the majority are concentrated in *defixiones* from Carthage and *Hadrumetum*, where both linguistic registers are employed. Greek sometimes takes precedence for obscure curse formulas or for the invocation of Ἰάω, likely to enhance the ritual’s perceived effectiveness. The remaining examples come from *Leptis Magna* or Cyrene, and are generally imperial dedications with identical content in both languages (e.g., SIRAR 5612 and 5696), or cases where Greek appears in specific parts of the text as a marker of the dedicator’s dual cultural affiliation – such as SIRAR 2886, a *Leptis Magna* inscription invoking the *Genius* of the colony in Latin, but headed by a Greek text declaring *Leptis Magna* a “friend of Rome” (φιλισερωμη). As for Latin-Neo-Punic, twelve inscriptions have been identified. Most present the same content in both languages (e.g., SIRAR 2356, 2361, 2362), but in some cases the dual register serves to project the dedicator’s personal identity. A notable example is SIRAR 2090, in which the dedicant addresses the “Lord Baal” (*ḥdn lb^cl*) in Neo-Punic, but records his cognomen, *Crescens*, in Latin, thus signalling full integration into the civic and legal structures of the Roman world while maintaining his Punic religious and cultural affiliation.

3.2. Statistics on the Onomastic Attributes

The analysis of onomastic attributes reveals a striking statistical parallel with the patterns observed in the theonymic record. On the one hand, the creative construction and adaptation of divine nomenclature emerges even more prominently: of the 609 identified epithets, 401 appear only once, representing 65% of the total. An additional 62 epithets occur twice, and 32 appear three times. In total, this means that 81% of divine epithets are attested no more than three times. Yet, as with theonyms, usage is far from evenly distributed. Just 35 epithets dominate the landscape, appearing in 78% of inscriptions, while one-offs account for a mere 7.6% of the corpus. These data clearly underscore the prevalence of a normative and standardized pattern in most divine invocations. And yet, those 401 singular creations – each preserved in only one inscription – remind us that, within the bounds of tradition, there was still ample room for individual creativity and invention.

Most divine epicleses are expressed through a single onomastic attribute. In some cases, however, they take the form of syntactic constructions that produce extended onomastic sequences, whose full meaning becomes apparent only when the phrase is read in its entirety – for example, *inconpressa oculis, conservatrix civium et civitatis*, and *e fulmine natus* (SIRAR 5128, 4580 and 1092 respectively). Within the Greek cultural, socio-religious, and linguistic milieu of Cyrenaica, the most complex and original constructions are found. Notable examples include Συνσείσας πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμένην (“shaker of the whole inhabited

earth”) (SIRAR 5730), Παντοκράτωρ τῶν ὑπεράνω θεῶν (“almighty of the supreme gods”) (SIRAR 5730), and Πρωτόγονος τῆς Γῆς (“firstborn of the earth”) (SIRAR 5708).

By far the most frequently used epithet in the epigraphic record is *Augustus/-il/-al/-ae*, which – when functioning as an adjective – appears in 1685 inscriptions (fig. 2).⁸ The next most common epithet, *Deus/-al/-il/-ae*, is attested in 597 inscriptions, followed by *Augustus/-il/-al/-ae* in anthroponymic use (204 instances). Within the 100–200 range are *ⁱdn* (Adon, 201 occurrences) and *Optimus* and *Maximus* – titles regularly associated with the Capitoline Jupiter – recorded 167 and 165 times, respectively. *Imperator/-es*, frequently accompanying a *numen*, occurs in 128 inscriptions; *Divina*, generally linked to imperial dedications, in 118; and the “power-related” *Dominus/-al/-il/-ae* in 116. The only “toponymic” epithet to exceed 100 attestations is *Balcaranensis*, documented in 104 inscriptions. Below the threshold of 100, we find other recurrent epithets such as *Sanctus/-al/-i* (92), *Pater* (82), *Divus/-al/-il/-ae* (78), *Invictus/-a* (60), *Regina* (48), *Caesar* (40), Θεός (37), *Magnus/-a* (37), *Redux* (29), and *Patrius* (27).

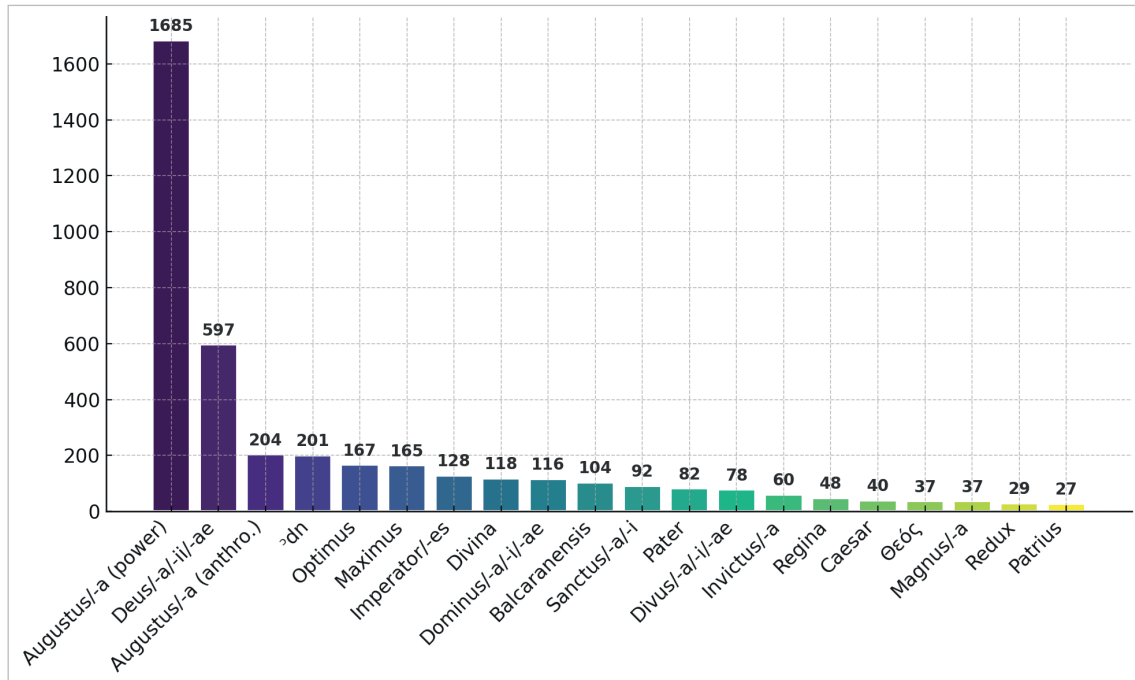


Fig. 2. The 20 most common onomastic attributes mentioned in religious inscriptions from North Africa.

As with the theonyms, the distribution of onomastic attributes in the sylloge distinctly favors Latin, with 462 occurrences, compared to 116 in Greek and only 24 in Neo-Punic. What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that the Neo-Punic epithet *ⁱdn* ranks fourth among the most frequently attested divine epithets in North Africa. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that *ⁱdn* is routinely paired, in a ritual and formulaic manner, with the theonyms *bᶜl ḥmn* or *bᶜl*, which – as previously discussed – are the most commonly invoked deities in Neo-Punic inscriptions. In other inscriptions in the same language, the epithet *pn*

⁸ It is important to clarify the qualitative distinction we have established between *Augustus/-al/-il/-ae* as an adjective – and therefore as an epithet derived from a title of power – and *Augustus/-al/-il/-ae* as a genitive complement of a proper name, and thus an anthroponymic epithet referring to a specific individual. In the latter case, we have recorded a total of 204 occurrences. It is also important to note that in this study, we are applying a one-to-one correspondence between epithets and the inscriptions in which they appear. This means that if a specific epithet is repeated within a single inscription, we count it only once in our quantification.

bcl (“Face of Baal”), almost invariably associated with the theonym Tanit, holds the second position with 21 attestations, while *rbt* (“Lady”), also frequently linked to Tanit, ranks third, with 13 mentions. Aside from *ʿdr* (“Strong”), which appears four times, the remaining 20 Neo-Punic epithets are each attested only once, two or three times. Thus, while the Neo-Punic epigraphic record does leave some room for creative expression, the overall picture suggests a predominantly institutionalized and formulaic mode of religious language.

The opposite trend is observed in the socio-religious context of Cyrenaica. Among the 116 recorded epithets, 94 (that is, 81%) are unique occurrences. However, it is noteworthy that the 10 most frequently attested epithets account for 48.5% of the inscriptions, while the remaining 51.5% occur three times or fewer. At first glance, this distribution suggests that the religious landscape of Cyrenaica afforded greater scope for innovation and individual creativity. Nonetheless, this apparent diversity is partly influenced by the substantial variability of onomastic attributes assigned to daemons in the *defixiones*. The most frequently used epithet is Θεός/-ά/-οί, appearing 45 times, followed by Μέγας (17 attestations) and Κτίστης (13). Other epithets with fewer than ten occurrences in different inscriptions include Ζεύς (9), ἥλιος (8), Σύνναοί (7) and Νεκυδαίμων (7). Taken together, the use of onomastic attributes in Greek inscriptions appears to reflect a more fluid, diverse, and individually articulated religious expression, in marked contrast to the greater formalization and standardization evident in Latin and Neo-Punic epigraphy.

If we turn to the statistical analysis of the categories of onomastic attributes (fig. 3), the greatest degree of variability is found in epithets of an “environmental > toponymic” nature, with 107 cases recorded that clearly refer to specific locations. Due to the situational and context-dependent character of this onomastic category, a significant degree of creativity and individualization is observable: in fact, 85 of these toponymic epithets are attested only once.

Following this, particular attention must be given to onomastic attributes pertaining to the divine sphere, especially those of a “qualitative > inherent” type, through which devotees sought to articulate elements of the constitutive identity of the gods – either by referring to their essence or substance (*inherent > substantial*: e.g., *Deus/-al-iil-ae* (597), *Divina* (118), *Sanctus/-al-i* (92) or *Divus/-al-il-ae* (78) or to their potentiality, that is, epithets that highlight the deity’s inherent power in a contingent or context-specific way (*inherent > potential*: e.g., *pn bcl* (21), Κτίστης (13), Νεκυδαίμων (7). The latter subcategory contains 63 designations, most of them *hapax legomena*, especially in Greek *defixiones*.

The next category, which displays a noteworthy degree of variability, comprises “qualitative > relational” attributes, intended to articulate various forms of relationships among deities. Of particular interest are the epithets that establish “hierarchical” relationships between gods. This subcategory includes 37 different types, such as *Optimus* (167 occurrences), *Maximus/-a* (165), *Magnus/-al-i* (37), Μέγας (17), the superlative *Sanctissimus/-il-al-ae* (21), or *ceteri* (19) – a term strategically employed to relegate unnamed deities to the category of “the rest”, in contrast to those explicitly invoked. In addition, another major subcategory of “relational” attributes is the “theonymic” type, used in 40 distinct forms, in which multiple theonyms are juxtaposed or concatenated to emphasize composite or complex divine identities (commonly referred to as “multi-theonymic” constructions). Notable examples include *Genius* (13 occurrences), *Caelestis* (11), *Sol* (13) or *Numen* (11).

Surprisingly, the next category to exhibit a remarkable degree of diversity stems from the human sphere, specifically from epithets classified under the “onomastic” type, comprising 35 anthroponymic attributes. The most frequently occurring are those associated

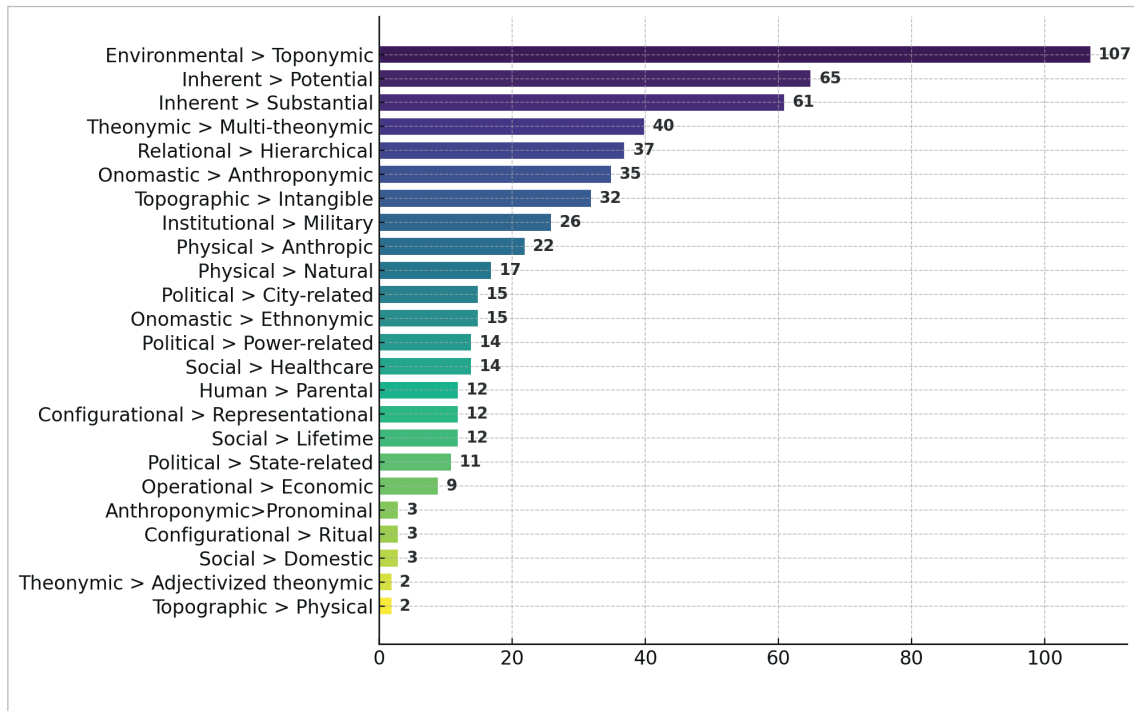


Fig. 3. Variety of epithet types represented within each category of onomastic attributes.

with *Augustus/-il/-al/-ae* (ca. 200 instances), referring to specific individuals and reflecting the use of the imperial *cognomen* as part of personal nomenclature. However, the vast majority of these anthroponymic epithets appear only once or twice in the corpus. Aesculapius, Caelestis, Genius, Juno, Mercurius, Pollux, Saturnus, Silvanus, and Venus receive the epithets of *Bellen-sis* (1), *Cassiana* (2), *Extricatianus* (1), *Graniana* (1), *Meddensis* (4), *Pegasianus* (2), *Privatensis* (1), *Repentinus* (1), *Silvius* (1), *Sittiana* (2), *Sobarensis* (5) and *Ulpus* (1).⁹

At the next statistical tier, we find 32 distinct epithets referring to the “topographical > intangible” sphere. This category includes conceptual designations associated with the celestial or chthonic realms, such as *Superi* (11 occurrences), *Caelestis/-es* (10), *Altissimus* (5), and *Inferi* (2). Notably, 25 out of 32 of these “intangible” epithets are each attested only once, underscoring the high degree of variability and symbolic nuance within this relatively small yet meaningful category.

Following this, 26 epithets are associated with the “military” sphere, including examples such as *Invictus/-a* (58 occurrences), *Redux* (29), *Victor/-ix* (15), *Centuria* (4), and *Legio* (4). Within this category, 18 epithets are documented only once, highlighting a pattern of limited yet symbolically charged invocations linked to military valor, protection, and institutional affiliations.

Continuing the analysis, we identify 22 distinct types of “topographical > physical > anthropic” epithets, which denote human-defined spaces such as *colonia* (19 occurrences), *municipium* (9), *vicus* (9), *civitas* (7), and *campestris* (4).

At the lower end of the spectrum, the remaining categories each contain fewer than 20 different epithets. Nonetheless, within this subset, particular attention must be given to the “power-related” epithets – adjectives reflecting the transference of political and so-

⁹ See Gasparini (2020); (2025).

cial titles into the divine sphere.¹⁰ Among these, the epithet *Augustus/-al/-il/-ae* stands out as the most frequently attested, appearing in almost 1700 inscriptions, as previously noted (fig. 4). Consequently, despite their relative lack of variability in comparison to toponymic, inherent, or relational epithets, power-related epithets emerge as the most recurrent category among North African worshippers. In addition to *Augustus*, 13 other epithets – for a total of 382 occurrences – can be classified as “power-related”: *⁴dn* (201), *Dominus/-al/-il/-ae* (116), *Regina* (48), *rbt* (13), *Rex* (3), *Κύριος* (2), *⁴wgsṭs* (2), *rzn* (1), *rznt* (1), *mlk* (1), βασιλῖον (1), *Princeps* (1), *Decanus* (1).

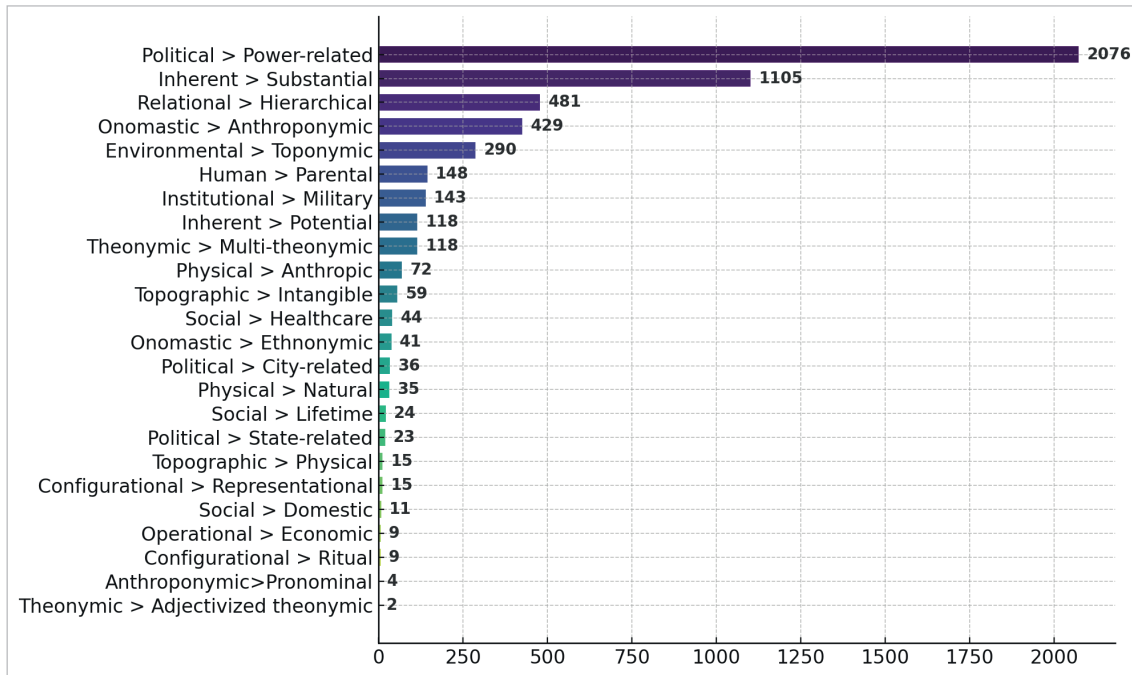


Fig. 4. Recurrence of epithets in inscriptions associated with each onomastic category.

3.3. Network Analysis

This final section applies network analysis to examine the interrelationships between theonyms and onomastic attributes within a two-mode network, in which the two distinct types of nodes represent the deities (theonyms) and their associated onomastic attributes. Edges indicate the connections between these nodes, while their thickness reflects the frequency with which these connections occur.

The analysis focuses exclusively on the twenty most frequently attested deities in Latin inscriptions – Saturnus, Numen, Domus, Genius, Ceres/-es, Iuppiter, Mercurius, Iuno, Caelestis, Minerva, Victoria, Fortuna, Liber, Mars, Aesculapius, Hercules, Neptunus, Pluto, Bacax, and Venus, together with their associated epithets.

The first point to highlight is that, of the 461 Latin epithets documented, 319 are connected to these twenty theonyms. As shown in Figure 5, all theonyms are linked to the power-related epithet *Augustus/-a*, which emerges as the predominant attribute for nearly all of them (with the thickness of the lines indicating the strength of each connection). The results of the calculations performed on the weighted degree centrality further confirm the overwhelming dominance of *Augustus*, with a score of 17.25, followed by *Augusta* (4.3) and *Deus* (2.94).

¹⁰ Alvar Ezquerro and López-Gómez (2024).

This pattern underscores the exceptional scale of the “Augustalization” of the gods in Roman North Africa. The only deities which present the strongest association with a different epithet are *Iuppiter* (*Optimus Maximus*), *Iuno* (*Regina*), and invocations to the *Domus* (*Divina*).

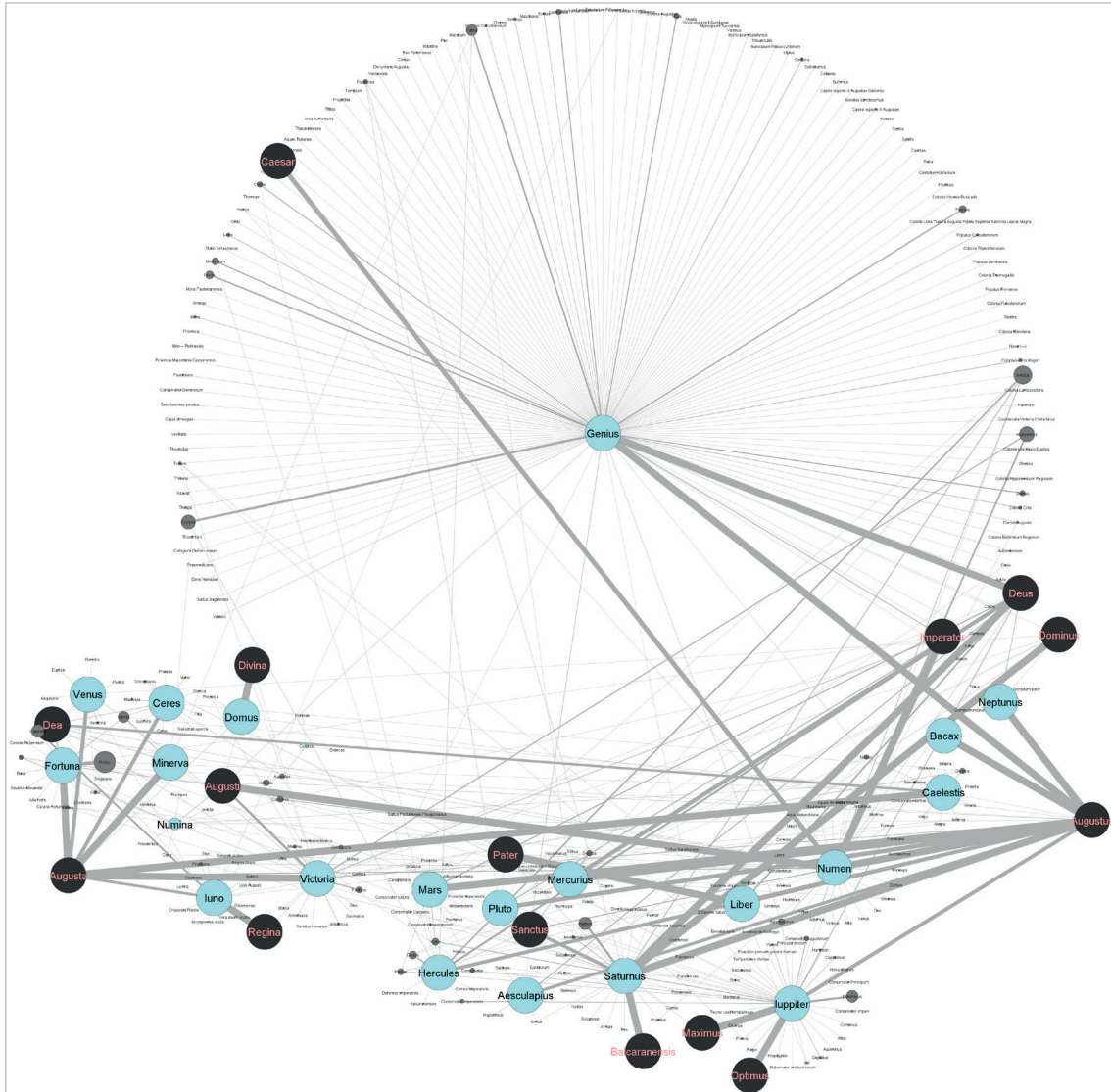


Fig. 5. Network analysis of the interrelationships between the 20 most attested theonyms and their onomastic attributes

Alongside *Augustus/-a*, other power-related epithets register high degree centrality: *Caesar*, *Imperator/-es* – closely tied to the divine concept of *Numen* – and *Dominus/-a*, associated with several deities in the graph (Neptunus, Pluto, Saturnus, Mars, Aesculapius, Genius), but especially with Saturnus, who is often addressed with this title. *Pater* is distinctive for its direct association with *Liber*, though it is also occasionally linked to Saturnus, Pluto, and Mars. Likewise, *Balcaranensis* stands out, owing to more than 300 inscriptions dedicated to Saturnus *Balcaranensis* at the sanctuary of *Mons Balcaranensis* (Djebel Bou-Korneïn).

Beyond these, 198 epithets register a degree centrality of just 0.015, indicating a single connection to a deity, while another 40 score 0.030, reflecting two connections. The graph reveals that nearly a hundred of these low-connectivity attributes are associated with *Genius*,

invoked, as we noted previously, as the protective spirit of places, institutions, individuals, or other gods.

In addition, the graph also brings to light situational or locally specific epithets tied to particular cultic contexts, often associated with deities other than *Genius*. Taking Mars as an example (Fig. 6): an inscription from Bu Njem links him to a local divine figure named *Canapphar*, whose name is transformed into an epithet of Mars within that text (SIRAR 2402). In another case, Mars receives the rare, erudite epithet *Gradivus* – “the one who marches out,” attested in Livy (1.20.4) – in a dedication by a *praeses* in *Lambaesis* (SIRAR 705). Particularly interesting is the epithet *Iratus*, bestowed in an inscription carved into the lower corners of an arch in *Thigibba Bure*, threatening with the wrath of Mars anyone who dared to urinate on the monument (SIRAR 3491).

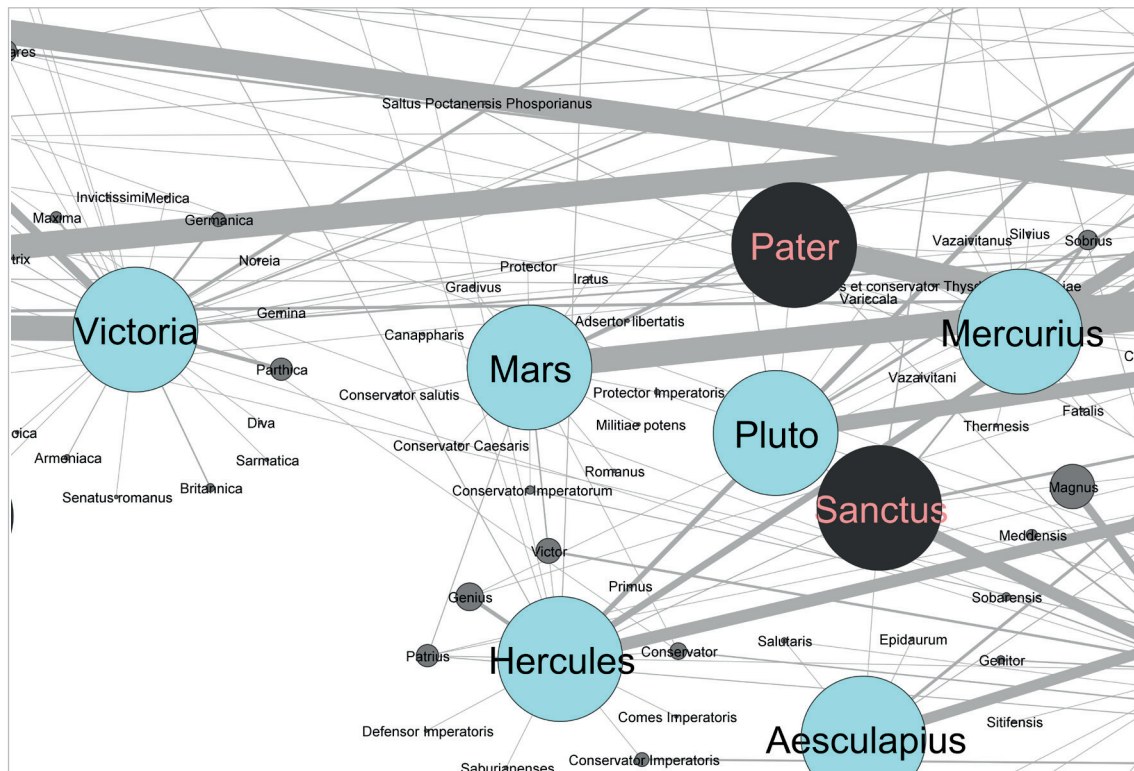


Fig. 6. Epithets connected with the theonym Mars.

Goddesses likewise bear many situational epithets. Focusing, for example, on Ceres and Juno (Fig. 7), we observe that these often derive from appellatives chosen by individual worshippers to identify the specific geographical realms in which the goddesses were believed to operate or from which they were thought to originate. For instance, the *sacerdos* Marcus Lartidius (SIRAR 5060) and Titus Livius Crescens of *Cuicul* (SIRAR 0656) invoked Ceres as *Graeca*, likely appealing to a form of the goddess closely related to the Greek Demeter. Conversely, Iulia Victoria of *Madaurus* and Nonnia Primitiva of *Mactaris* referred to her as *Punica* or *Maurusia* (SIRAR 4874, 4758), underscoring an Africanized form rooted in local cultural identities. Particularly unusual is the epithet *Lucifera*, more commonly associated with Luna or Diana, but here applied to Ceres in a singular inscription from *Leptis Magna*, commissioned by Quintus Iulius Iustus in honor of his wife (SIRAR 2875). Even more distinctive is the epithet *Prataria*, seemingly derived from *pratum* (“meadow”), which

appears only once, in a dedication from *Thugga*, perhaps evoking a connection between the goddess and a specific natural landscape (SIRAR 3621).

In the cult of Juno, epigraphic evidence reveals appellatives that underscore her hierarchical status within the Roman divine constellation, notably *Magna Regina* and *Regina Deorum* (SIRAR 5128), both of which highlight her role as queen of the gods. Equally noteworthy are epithets that reflect the role of *Iuno* as female *genius* for women like Salustia Luperca (SIRAR 3276) or Crepereia Plarilia (SIRAR 3756).

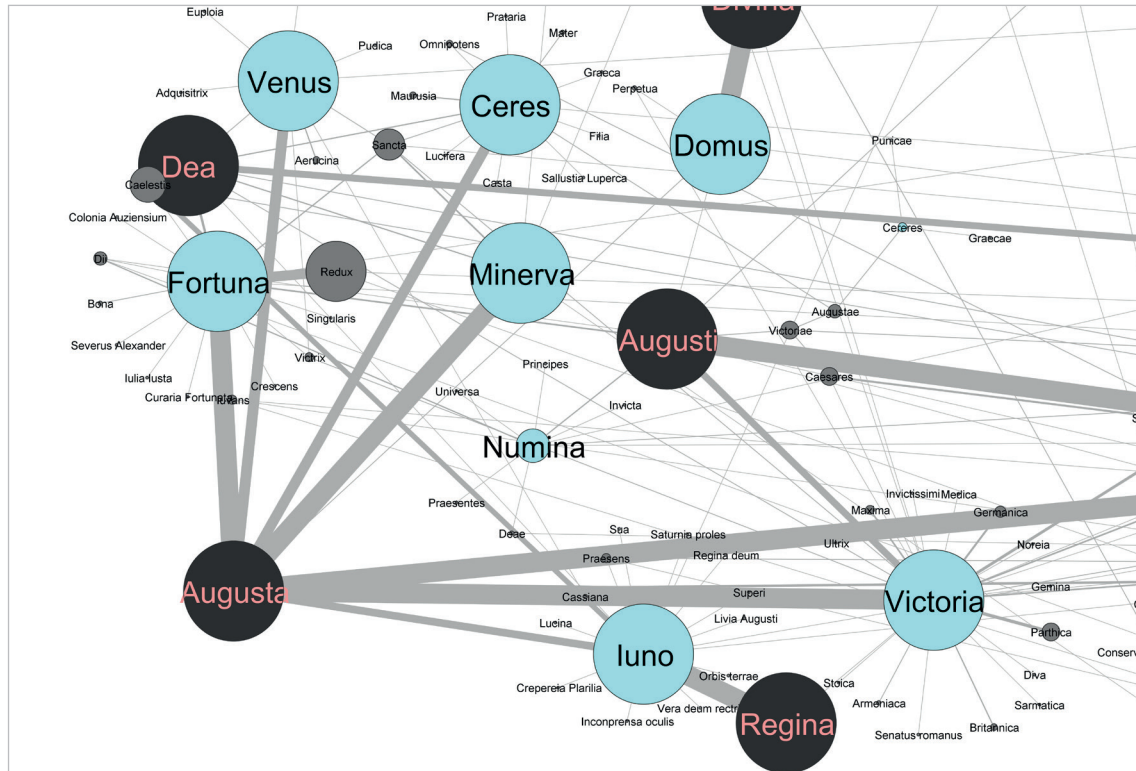


Fig. 7. Epithets connected with the theonyms Ceres and Juno.

The potential for exploring the creativity involved in the creation and assignment of onomastic attributes to North African theonyms – and in examining their interrelationships through network analysis – is vast. This, however, is a topic that will be addressed in a future study.

4. Conclusions

The *Sylloge Inscriptionum Religionis Africae Romanae* (SIRAR) represents a pioneering contribution to the study of religious epigraphy in the Roman world, offering not only a digital repository of nearly 5,800 inscriptions, but also a sophisticated analytical tool that enables users to explore divine onomastics in unprecedented detail. By bridging technological innovation with methodological rigor, SIRAR stands as a powerful demonstration of how digital humanities can transform our understanding of ancient religious practices, particularly within the complex and culturally pluralistic context of Roman Africa.

From a methodological standpoint, SIRAR exemplifies the principles of the *Lived Ancient Religion* (LAR) approach, privileging individual agency, emotional investment, and material strategies of religious communication, and thus further reinforcing the commitment to

reconstructing the diversity of lived religious experiences, rather than merely institutionalized norms. The statistical analysis of theonyms and onomastic attributes provides striking evidence of both normativity and creativity within religious language. On the one hand, the overwhelming dominance of certain theonyms – particularly Saturn and Jupiter – and epithets such as *Augustus* and *Deus* underscores a strong tendency toward standardization, especially in Latin inscriptions. On the other hand, the remarkable proliferation of unique epithets (244 theonyms and 401 onomastic attributes are attested only once) reveals substantial room for individual innovation, especially in localized or ritual-specific contexts.

A particularly compelling insight emerges from the geolinguistic contrasts explored in the database. While Latin inscriptions tend to favor normativity and epigraphic formalism, and the Neo-Punic corpus – although numerically limited and formulaic – reflects deeply embedded ritual traditions centered around Baal Hammon and Tanit, the Greek inscriptions present the most fluid and inventive use of divine epithets, often with extended syntagms or complex theological constructs, particularly within the realm of daemonic invocations. This comparative lens enhances our understanding of how religious expression varied not only across time and space, but also along linguistic and cultural lines.

The categorical classification of epithets, developed in collaboration with the EPIDI project, represents another major achievement of SIRAR. By organizing epithets according to semantic domains, the platform offers a powerful tool for analyzing the ideological, performative, and political dimensions of divine naming. The fact that 60% of all epithets fall into either the “power-related” or “inherent > substantial” categories points to a widespread desire to define divine authority and essence in normative terms, while the presence of highly idiosyncratic or local epithets testifies to ongoing negotiations of divine identity by individuals and communities.

The network analysis further refines our understanding of the interplay between theonyms and epithets. The case study presented for the 20 most common theonyms in Latin reveal patterns of overlap, specialization, and contextual adaptation. The epithet *Augustus* functions as a trans-cultic label of political-religious prestige in the Latin corpus, while others like *Deus* and *Sanctus* reveal themselves as a formulaic yet central invocation of divine lordship. At the same time, the data bring to light a remarkable creativity in the formulation of original onomastic attributes, often shaped by context-specific invocations arising from political, local, military, or personal circumstances.

Ultimately, SIRAR does more than provide access to inscriptions. It offers a dynamic space for inquiry into the religious grammar of the Roman Empire. Its emphasis on divine naming practices, linked to their epigraphic, linguistic, and geographical contexts, allows scholars to interrogate the very categories through which the divine was constructed, invoked, and experienced. In doing so, SIRAR not only reinforces the potential of epigraphy as a source for religious history, but also exemplifies how digital tools can deepen and nuance our interpretations of ancient ritual and belief.

As the platform continues to grow and incorporate new materials, we may expect even richer insights into the religious landscapes of North Africa. Future integrations – such as open-access studies, enhanced mapping functionalities, or even user-submitted updates – promise to sustain SIRAR as a collaborative and evolving project at the intersection of epigraphy, digital humanities, and the history of religion.

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Riassunto / *Abstract*

Abstract. This article presents the aims, structure, and analytical potential of SIRAR (*Sylloge Inscriptionum Religionis Africae Romanae*), an open-access digital platform designed to catalog and analyze religious inscriptions from Roman Africa. Drawing on a corpus of nearly 5,800 inscriptions, the article explores divine onomastics – both theonyms and epithets – through quantitative, qualitative, and network-based methodologies. Particular attention is given to the interplay between normativity and creativity in the construction of divine names, and to the linguistic and cultural diversity of religious expressions across Neo-Punic, Greek, and Latin contexts. The study reveals polytheistic patterns of divine naming practices, their geographic and ritual distribution, and the socio-religious significance of metahuman agents in the epigraphic landscape of North African Roman provinces.

Keywords: Digital epigraphic platforms; Divine onomastics; Religious epigraphy; Roman Africa; Theonyms and epithets

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