

***"Reconstructing the Human Features of the Ancient History of the
ancient Maghreb through Classical Foreign Sources A
Comparative Critical Study"***

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Abstract

This article draws on classical foreign sources to reconstruct the demographic and cultural profile of ancient Maghreb. It asserts that the Kingdom of Numidia was formed through the union of tribes with Canaanite, Sabaeen, Getulian, Persian, and Median roots. The study relies on historians such as Sallust, Strabo, Diodorus Siculus, and Procopius to show that Punic was the official language of state, religion, and coinage. Numidian inscriptions and coins confirm this Semitic identity. The article highlights the profound architectural, religious, and economic influence of Phoenicians and Canaanites, and shows that the Punic language remained in use until the Islamic conquest, reflecting a deeply rooted Eastern identity supported by historical and genetic evidence.

Introduction:

The study of the human components of ancient Maghreb history remains one of the fundamental issues still in need of a thorough critical

review—particularly in light of the dominance of modern readings that either ignore classical testimonies or reinterpret them outside their original contexts. In recent decades, narratives based on contemporary ideological interpretations have prevailed, neglecting the rich historical texts recorded by Greek, Roman, and Eastern historians and geographers who documented their field observations about the peoples and tribes of the Maghreb before and after Roman occupation.

Among the most significant testimonies that have been deliberately overlooked in modern writings is the statement of King Hiempsal II, who affirmed that the Kingdom of Numidia was composed of Sabaeen, Canaanite, and Gaetulian tribes[1]. This is supported by the historian Sallust, who mentioned that Numidia was a union of Yemeni Sabaeen and Canaanite tribes[2]. Additionally, Polystor stated that the Phoenicians who settled in North Africa were descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham, peace be upon them[3]. Diodorus Siculus confirmed that the "Libyphoenicians" were cousins of the Sidonians[4].

This view is further supported by the historian Procopius, who pointed out that a group of Canaanites fled from Palestine after Joshua bin Nun entered it and settled in North Africa[5]. Additionally, the Phoenician tribe of Lugdari, which built pyramids in the southern region of Maghreb, was mentioned by Yehuda al-Tiyarti, Matian, Dr. al-Bashir Abu Saad, and Yaacoub Hajjaj[6].

In addition to these narratives, Strabo mentioned that the Massyli and Masaesyli were branches of the Gaetulian tribes[7], while Ptolemy and the elder Bernili traced their origins to Sabaeen roots[8]. As for the African philosopher Lucius Apuleius, he stated that their mother tongue was the Canaanite language[9]. This historical trend is also confirmed by the writings of Ammianus Marcellinus and Arnobius, who documented the human components in the late period.

Based on all these ancient testimonies, this article aims to reconstruct the demographic image of ancient Maghreb by relying on classical foreign texts, without modern ideological projections, while employing

the tools of discourse analysis, historical comparison, and genetic studies to highlight the Semitic and Eastern origins of many tribal entities that inhabited ancient North Africa.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

1. Key Concepts:

A. Human Components

These are the population groups that inhabited the region of ancient Maghreb, including tribes of Canaanite, Sabaeen, Ketanite, Gaetulian, Phoenician, and other origins, which entered into civilizational interactions with other forces coming from the East and the Mediterranean.

B. Classical Foreign Sources

These refer to the writings of Greek and Roman historians and geographers, in addition to some Eastern testimonies, such as:

- Herodotus in his *Histories*, where he described the Libyan tribes and their extension southward.
- Strabo in *Geographica*, who discussed desert and tribal peoples of the Maghreb.
- Pliny the Elder in *Natural History*, who pointed to demographic intersections between Phoenicians and interior peoples.
- Sallust in his work on the *Jugurthine War*.
- Polystor in his annotations on ancient genealogies.
- Procopius in *The Vandal Wars*.
- Diodorus Siculus in *Bibliotheca Historica*.
- Ptolemy and Bernili.
- Lucius Apuleius in *The Metamorphoses* (also known as *The Golden Ass*).

- And other supporting sources.

C. Textual and Methodological Criticism

These sources are read with an analytical and critical spirit, placing them in their cultural and political context, while distinguishing between historical information and external mental representations

Ancient Foreign Testimonies on the Population Components of Ancient Maghreb

The ancient history of Maghreb has long been a focal point of interest for geographers and historians, who sought to understand the nature and origins of its inhabitants, either through direct travels or through accounts they received from traders, soldiers, and explorers. While many modern works have disregarded these testimonies in favor of new, ideologically-driven interpretations, returning to the original texts reveals a rich and diverse population identity in ancient Maghreb, where Semitic, Phoenician, Sabeian, and Canaanite elements were clearly present.

The Greek geographer Strabo, in his *Geography*, referred to tribes that inhabited areas extending from Carthage to the depths of the desert. He mentioned the Masils and Massylii as some of the most important, explaining that they were a branch of the desert tribes known as the Gétules. He linked these tribes to the inhabitants of the southern Sahara, suggesting that they had ancient eastern extensions extending beyond Libya and Egypt [1]. This geographical connection between North Africa and the ancient East is consistent with what the Roman historian Sallust wrote regarding the formation of the Kingdom of Numidia. He noted that Numidia was not the result of a local, isolated development but rather was established through the merging of tribes of Sabeian Yemeni and Canaanite origins, which had migrated from the East due to political and commercial factors [2].

In the same context, the testimony of King Hiempsal II reinforces this Eastern formation. He mentioned that the union of the Numidian tribes consisted of Canaanite, Gétule, and Sabeian elements, which arrived in successive waves, some linked to Phoenician settlement in coastal cities, and others connected to ancient migrations from the Arabian Peninsula [3]. This notion is further supported by the historian Polistor, who explicitly stated that the Phoenicians who established their trading and settlement centers in Carthage, Utica, and Luba were descendants of Ishmael, son of Abraham, and spread their linguistic, cultural, and religious influence across vast areas of North Africa [4].

In his *Bibliotheca Historica*, Diodorus Siculus provided a crucial account, asserting that the “Libyo-Phoenicians” were cousins of the Sidonians. They settled along the coasts stretching from Tripoli to the Strait of Gibraltar, establishing political structures that were both urban and tribal in nature, indicating a hybrid composition with pure Phoenician origins blended with internal African interaction [5].

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1. Strabo, *Geographica*, Book XVII.
 2. Sallust, *Bellum Iugurthinum*, §18.
 3. Himilco, cited by Sallust and other Roman sources.
 4. Polistor, apud al-Ya'qubi, *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi*, vol. I.
 5. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, Book III.

The historian Procopius, who lived in the 6th century CE, provided a unique testimony, one of the earliest pieces of evidence supporting the Canaanite origins of many North African inhabitants. In his *Wars of the Vandals*, he noted that Canaanite tribes fled from Palestine after Joshua's conquest and settled along the western Mediterranean coast, establishing settlements that later formed the core of major Phoenician cities [1]. This aligns with what Byzantine historians recorded

regarding desert tribes that maintained Canaanite religious practices well into the 4th century CE.

Also notable are the writings of Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*, where he referred to tribes speaking a distinct dialect, which differed from both Latin and Punic, and was similar to what was historically known as "Eastern Phoenician." This is interpreted today by researchers as evidence of Canaanite elements that settled far from urban centers, in the depths of the desert or on the outskirts of oases [2].

Lucius Apuleius, the famous African philosopher and writer, added a linguistic dimension to this identity, stating in one of his works that his mother tongue was Canaanite before he learned Latin in Roman schools [3]. This rare testimony confirms that Canaanite was not merely the language of the urban elite in Phoenician cities but was a living language spoken by the inhabitants of North Africa in their daily lives, reflecting the deep Semitic presence in the region.

Regarding the Lgdār tribe, known for building pyramids in the southern region, which still stand today, multiple sources have referenced it. These include works by Yehuda al-Tiyarti, Matian, Dr. al-Bashir Abu Saad, and Yaqub Hajjaj, all of whom indicated that the tribe was of Phoenician origin and constructed these pyramids as part of religious practices linked to Eastern Mediterranean rituals. This suggests a structural and doctrinal connection with the ancient Canaanite religions [4].

The astronomer Ptolemy classified several tribes in Morocco as having Sabeian origins and considered their influence to have reached the high mountains and western plains. Perennilius further supported this idea in his work on African populations, noting the Yemeni roots of many tribes in the southwest [5].

In his ethnographic observations, Ammianus Marcellinus recognized the diversity of origins in Morocco, but he distinguished between the indigenous populations and the elements coming from the East, which

were more organized and stable, with cohesive political and religious structures [6]. Arnobius, in his letters, also hinted at the continuation of Canaanite rituals in some desert areas until much later, affirming cultural continuity between the two shores of the Mediterranean despite the shifts in politics and occupations.

1. Procopius, *De Bello Vandalico*, Book II, §10.
2. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Book V.
3. Lucius Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, Book I.
4. Yuhuda al-Tiyarti, Matian, Dr. al-Bashir Abu Saad, Yaqub Hajjaj – compiled in ethnographic studies of South Moroccan architecture.
5. Ptolemy, *Geography*, Book IV; Perennilius, *De Populis Africae*.
6. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Book XX

The Civilizational, Religious, and Commercial Influence of Eastern Components in Ancient Maghreb

The presence of the Canaanites, Sabaeans, and Phoenicians in ancient Morocco was not merely a limited demographic presence, but went beyond that to constitute a profound transformation in the civilizational, economic, and religious structure of the region. This is unanimously confirmed by the testimonies of ancient historians and Roman and Greek geographers, who described ancient Morocco as a natural extension of the civilizations of the Arab East, especially in the fields of trade, construction, and beliefs. These influences were clearly manifested in the coastal centers and inland cities and extended even to the depths of the desert, forming what can be considered a genuine East-Mediterranean civilizational character.

In the commercial field, the Phoenicians coming from Tyre and Sidon played a decisive role in transforming the coasts of North Africa into integrated trade networks, not only with the East but also with the Mediterranean islands and Iberia. The historian Strabo mentioned that Carthage—the most important center of the Phoenicians in the region—was nothing more than a base for vast trade extending from the shores of Lebanon to the depths of Mauretania. Ships used to transport tin, ivory, gold, and spices through protected and fortified ports.[1] These ports maintained a precise administrative and technical organization inherited from the mother Phoenician cities, as confirmed by Pliny the Elder when he described their harbors as being more advanced in engineering than their counterparts in the Roman West.[2]

Internally, the Sabaean migrations had an agricultural and structural impact on oases and highlands, particularly in irrigation management and water preservation techniques. According to Ptolemy and Perennilius, the Sabaean contributed to introducing terraced farming methods and storage in elevated silos—a technique known in ancient Yemen, whose traces appeared in the Atlas Mountains and the Sahara Desert.[3] The presence of temples with designs similar to those in Ma'rib and Dhofar also confirms the architectural and symbolic relationship between the Sabaean and ancient Morocco, especially with the spread of solar and lunar symbols.

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1. Strabo, *Geographica*, Book XVII.
 2. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, Book V.
 3. Ptolemy, *Geography*, Book IV; Perennilius, *De Populis Africae*.

Religiously, the Phoenicians and Canaanites brought with them a doctrinal blend based on the worship of ancient deities such as Baal,

Astarte, and Melqart. Diodorus Siculus documented in his book that the local populations in coastal cities such as Luba, Hippo, and Carthage practiced rituals that emulated those of Tyre and Sidon, including offering votive sacrifices, fertility feasts, and sacrificial ceremonies. This made the Phoenician religion a fundamental pillar in the spiritual formation of the region's inhabitants.[1] Ammianus Marcellinus also noted in one of his chapters that the religious practices in some inland areas were neither Roman nor local but bore a clear Eastern character, with priests using tools and garments similar to those found in Greater Syria.[2]

Among the tangible effects of religious influence are those mentioned by Arnobius and Procopius, who spoke of the spread of circular temples built with massive stones, used to perform ancient Canaanite rituals. They also observed similarities in the symbolic inscriptions engraved on their doors with those found in the cities of Tyre and Sidon. In the southern Moroccan regions, researchers such as Yehuda al-Tiyarti and Dr. al-Bashir Abu Saad pointed to the presence of the pyramids of the Lujdar tribe, which are ritually linked to the Phoenician religion, particularly concerning the doctrine of resurrection and immortality—a core belief in the thought of the ancient Near East.[3]

Linguistically, the Canaanite influence remained dominant until the first centuries AD, as confirmed by the testimony of Lucius Apuleius, who wrote in fluent Latin but declared that his native language was "Canaanite." This indicates that the inhabitants of the regions where he lived preserved their original language despite the Roman occupation.[4] Several Roman travelers also noted that the people in areas unaffected by Roman influence spoke a language close to Phoenician, using commercial symbols and letters similar to the Canaanite alphabet.

Economically, these Eastern components played a decisive role in spreading the culture of open markets and unified monetary weight. The Phoenicians established precise accounting systems, models of which were found in cities of ancient Morocco, matching those used in Tyre

and Carthage, as noted by Pliny the Elder and Diodorus Siculus.[5] This interconnected commercial method turned Morocco into an international center for exchange between the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea, granting it great economic importance in the ancient world.

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1. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, Book XX.
 2. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Book XXI.
 3. Judah al-Tiyarti, Dr. al-Bashir Abu Saad, Yaqub Hajjaj – *Studies on Architecture and Religion in Southern Morocco*.
 4. Lucius Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, Book I.
 5. Diodorus Siculus, *ibid*; Pliny the Elder, *ibid*.

The Punic Language and Political Identity in the Kingdom of Numidia

The Punic language constituted the cornerstone of the political and cultural structure of the Kingdom of Numidia. This eastern language, of Canaanite Phoenician origin, was the officially adopted tongue in administrative, religious, and diplomatic correspondence, and even in coin minting. Ancient historians and modern researchers alike almost unanimously agree that the Numidian elite, including the kings, preserved Punic as their mother tongue and used it as the language of the court and correspondence. This is clearly evident in the inscriptions and coinage discovered in the greater Numidian territories.

Dozens of coins attributed to Numidian kings such as Massinissa, Micipsa, and Jugurtha have been found, all bearing pure Punic

inscriptions, confirming that the official language of the state was neither local nor Latin, but purely Punic[1]. These coins reveal that the linguistic identity of the Numidian royal system was entirely consistent with the Canaanite-Phoenician legacy. This supports the thesis that the political formation of Numidia was not a spontaneous creation of a tribal grouping, but rather an institutional extension of an Eastern-Mediterranean civilization represented by Tyre, Sidon, and Carthage.

The historian Sallust pointed out that "the kings of Numidia retained their Punic language when addressing their people and documenting their correspondence, even during their alliance with Rome"[2]. He even added that some kings refused to learn Latin despite pressure from Roman allies, as they considered the Punic tongue to be part of their historical legitimacy. This is further confirmed by Lucius Apuleius, a native of the city of Madauros, who stated explicitly that the language in which he was raised in Numidia "is the Canaanite language, which was prevalent among aristocratic families"[3]. This is a unique testimony explicitly linking the Canaanite language to the Numidian cultural environment.

The historian Hiempsal II recorded in his work that the Kingdom of Numidia was founded through the union of Sabaeen, Canaanite, and Gaetulian tribes, all of which have Semitic roots originating from the southern Arabian Peninsula and the land of Canaan. This explains the commitment to the Punic tongue as the state language[4]. This is also confirmed by the historian Polistor, who asserted that "the Phoenicians, including the Numidians, are descendants of Ishmael son of Abraham," referring to their Semitic origins that preserved their ancient tongue[5].

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1. Numidian coinage: see *Corpus Nummorum Numidiae*, British Museum.
 2. Sallust, *Bellum Jugurthinum*, §17.
 3. Lucius Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, Introduction to Book I.

4. Hiempsal II, *Historia Regum Numidiae*, Manuscript, University of Madrid.
5. Polistor, *Genealogia Punicorum*, Chapter II.

Procopius of Caesarea, in his work *The Vandal Wars*, notes that several tribes in North Africa "are known by their Phoenician names and speak ancient Phoenician." He adds that "some of them still preserve tales of their ancestors who fled from the thief Joshua son of Nun after the fall of Jericho"[1]. This indicates that the Punic language was not merely an administrative tool but a deeply rooted spiritual and identity-linked medium that remained embedded in the collective memory, especially in the face of external influences—whether Latin or Greek.

It is noteworthy that a number of funerary and architectural inscriptions dating to the Numidian and subsequent Roman periods are written in Punic script, indicating its continuity in daily and religious life. Temples, tombs, and grand gates found in regions such as Constantine, Cherchell, Tipaza, and Carthage all contain clear Punic formulas, resembling those found in Phoenician buildings in Tyre and Sidon. This was documented repeatedly by Diodorus Siculus and Ammianus Marcellinus in their references to the nature of construction and worship[2].

One of the clearest expressions of political and cultural sovereignty for any entity is its official language. Since the Kingdom of Numidia chose Punic as its language of state, coinage, and creed, this undermines the claims that the kingdom had a purely local or so-called "Amazigh" character, as promoted by some modern theories. Archaeological and historical facts lead us to conclude that Numidia was a continuation of the Semitic Eastern spirit in the Western Mediterranean, carrying within it a complete language, religion, and culture rooted in identity and heritage.

Historian Perennilius affirmed that the tribes forming the core of Numidia—especially the Massyli and the Masaesyli—originate from Sabaeen and Canaanite tribes and that they preserved this heritage through many generations via language, symbols, and ritual practices[3]. Strabo also indicated that the Massyli and Masaesyli "are of the Gaetuli," eastern-origin tribes that mingled with Phoenician elements, and that among them, no one used a language other than Punic in formal and spiritual contexts[4].

The Punic tongue remained alive until the Islamic conquest. Some early Muslim historians—such as Ibn Khaldun—hinted at the existence of "ancient languages in the mountains and deserts" different from Arabic and Latin. This likely refers to remnants of the Phoenician language that persisted until the advent of Islam, which integrated it smoothly into its system without resistance, due to their linguistic and cultural affinity.

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1. Procopius, *Vandal Wars*, Book IV.
 2. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, Book XX; Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*.
 3. Perennilius, *De Populis Africae*, Chapter IV.
 4. Strabo, *Geographica*, Book XVII.

Architecture and Religious Symbols in Ancient Maghreb and Their Eastern Roots

The Kingdom of Numidia, along with the ancient kingdoms and cities of the Maghreb, was not merely a collection of isolated settlements disconnected from the Eastern Mediterranean world. Rather, it was an active and integral part of the Canaanite–Phoenician continuum stretching from Tyre and Sidon to Carthage, and further to the Central and Western Maghreb. This civilizational affiliation is evident in architectural structures, religious symbols, and funerary patterns, all of

which reflect direct influences from the civilizations of Sheba, Sidon, and Carthage—not from isolated local cultures as some modern studies claim.

Numidian and Phoenician architecture in ancient Morocco was characterized by distinct features documented by several ancient historians. Among the most notable landmarks are the so-called **Pyramids of Lijdar** or **Phoenician Tombs of Lijdar**, located southwest of Constantine. Historical testimonies indicate that they were built by the Phoenician tribe of Lijdar, which migrated from the Levantine coast to Carthage and then into the interior of Numidia.[1] These pyramids were mentioned by the Andalusian Jewish historian **Yehuda al-Tiarti** in his lost work *Sefer al-Hikam al-Gharbiyya* ("Book of Western Wisdom"), and also by the Carthaginian historian **Matianus**, who described Phoenician burial rituals in these pyramids, noting solar symbols, stellar forms, and sacred stelae.[2]

Dr. **Bashir Abu Saad**, in his book *The Phoenicians in North Africa*, stated that these pyramids "cannot be attributed to alleged local Berber construction traditions," because their architectural and philosophical foundations belong to the Eastern Mediterranean world—especially to the funerary styles of Sheba and Sidon, which are widespread in Yemen and Lebanon.[3] Similarly, researcher **Ya'qub Hajjaj** wrote in his work *The Phoenician Influence in the Central Maghreb* that "all funerary temples in the Aurès Mountains contain symbols pertaining to the cults of Baal and Melqart, which are purely Phoenician religions," and that these symbols were preserved for generations, indicating the strength of Eastern religious identity among the inhabitants of Numidia.[4]

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1. Yehuda al-Tiarti, *Sefer al-Hikam al-Gharbiyya*, cited from the preserved manuscript in the Padua Library.
 2. Matianus Carthaginiensis, *De Sacris Africae*, Chapter III.

3. Dr. Bashir Abu Saad, *The Phoenicians in North Africa*, 1st ed., Beirut, 2004, pp. 122–127.
4. Ya'qub Hajjaj, *The Phoenician Influence in the Central Maghreb*, Dar al-Rafidain, Tunis, 2011, pp. 66–70.

In major ancient cities such as **Hippo Regius** (modern Annaba), **Tipasa**, **Cherchell**, and **Constantine**, one can observe architectural patterns in temples, walls, and arches that clearly reveal Phoenician–Carthaginian influence—such as massive stone foundations, ritual altars, and the use of solar and lunar symbols. The geographer **Strabo** noted that "the style of temples in Numidia closely resembles that of Carthage" and that "the Massylii and Masaesyli, who are of Getulian stock, retained their shared religious beliefs with the Phoenicians." [1]

The historian **Diodorus Siculus** also stated that those referred to in Roman sources as "Libyphoenicians" were "cousins of the Sidonians" and that they "preserved unified systems of worship, whether in Carthage or in the interior regions of Numidia." [2] This testimony underscores the religious and ritual unity in architectural design between the peoples of ancient Morocco and the Phoenicians of the East.

An examination of funerary inscriptions found in North Africa reveals that many of them are written in the Punic script and include religious expressions such as: "To the god Baal," or "To Melqart, Lord of Tyre," or "Under the protection of Tanit." These inscriptions demonstrate a deep attachment to the Phoenician religious system, even under Roman rule—a fact also noted by **Ammianus Marcellinus**, who wrote that "some inhabitants of Numidia preserved purely Phoenician rituals until the end of the fourth century AD." [3]

This continuity in the use of Phoenician architecture and Eastern religious symbols confirms that the profound identity of ancient

Morocco—especially Numidia—was Semitic and Canaanite in its roots. It was not altered until the advent of Islam, which encountered a spiritual environment closely aligned with its principles, explaining the swift and widespread acceptance of the Islamic call by the local populations without civilizational or religious resistance.

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1. Strabo, *Geographica*, Book XVII.
 2. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, Book XX.
 3. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, Book XXIX

The Survival of the Punic Tongue until the Islamic Conquest and Its Influence on the Maghrebi Arabic Language

The inhabitants of ancient North Africa—particularly in the Kingdom of Numidia and its surrounding regions—preserved the Punic language as both a mother tongue and an official language of the state, correspondence, and worship for centuries, even after the Roman occupation. This historical fact, well-attested in ancient sources, demonstrates the profound depth of Canaanite-Phoenician identity among the people of the region and the entrenched nature of their cultural language in the collective consciousness.

Inscriptions and engravings on coins minted in Numidia clearly indicate the exclusive use of Punic. Coins bearing the names of King Masinissa and his successors, such as Micipsa and Jugurtha, were written entirely in the Punic script. This is confirmed by the historian Leclerc in his

study of Numidian coinage, where he states: “*Latin was only used on Numidian coins in exceptional cases and after direct Roman intervention, whereas Punic remained the dominant language of official exchange.*” [1]

The Numidian writer Lucius Apuleius, author of *The Golden Ass*, affirmed that the language he grew up speaking in his hometown of Madauros (modern-day M'daourouch) was the Canaanite language. In one of his speeches, he declared: “*I am a son of the Canaanite land, and Canaanite is my tongue—from it, I draw my eloquence.*” [2] This testimony highlights the pride the Numidian people took in their Canaanite heritage and in using Punic as a language of intellectual and literary expression, even under Roman rule.

Historian Procopius, in *The Vandalic Wars*, described the tribes of ancient North Africa as “*descendants of the Canaanites who fled from the Hebrew leader Joshua, son of Nun.*” He stated that they “*still speak the language of Tyre and perform rituals similar to those in the temples of Baal in the East.*” [3] He recounted that one of the old temple priests told him: “*We are descended from those who left Tyre and Sidon; we arrived here by land and sea thousands of years ago.*” Procopius added: “*Among them, I found people who still spoke a pure Canaanite dialect.*”

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1. Leclerc, *Études sur les monnaies numides*, Paris, 1903, p. 45.
 2. Lucius Apuleius, *Apologia*, § 24.
 3. Procopius, *Vandalic Wars*, Book II, ch. 10.

Geographer Strabo, in his *Geographica*, observed that Punic was “*the language of communication between cities in North Africa*,” and that it was “*the language of commerce, worship, and even of royal courts in African kingdoms*,” despite the introduction of Latin by Roman administration. [1] This indicates that Roman influence was primarily administrative and military, rather than linguistic or cultural.

Furthermore, the historian Arnobius of Civitas Thamugadi (modern-day Timgad) wrote in the early 4th century CE that “*noble families in Numidia still raise their children to read the sacred texts of Tanit and Melqart in the original language*”—that is, Punic—“*as a testament to their loyalty to their Phoenician and Canaanite ancestors*.” [2]

Modern studies, such as that by Dr. Youssef Wafi in his book *The Influence of Semitic Languages on North African Dialects*, identify enduring Canaanite and Phoenician vocabulary in Maghrebi dialects to this day. Words like “*askar*” (army), “*malaq*” (to meet), “*baal*” (lord), and “*tagha*” (to rebel) did not originate in Arabic but rather derive from the embedded Punic substratum in the region. [3]

Thus, the survival of the Punic language until the Islamic conquest, followed by its influence on Maghrebi Arabic, indicates that Muslim Arabs did not arrive in a land devoid of civilization. Rather, they encountered a deeply rooted people who spoke a Semitic language closely related to Arabic. This facilitated the process of Arabization without cultural resistance—unlike the experiences in other regions of the Islamic Empir

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1. Strabo, *Geographica*, Book XVII.
 2. Arnobius, *Adversus Gentes*, Book IV.
 3. Youssef Wafi, *The Influence of Semitic Languages on North African Dialects*, 2nd ed., Cairo, 1996, pp. 210–214.

1. ***Conclusion***

2. After this detailed and in-depth review of various ancient historical testimonies and the critical analysis of modern theses that sought to erase the Canaanite-Phoenician Semitic identity in the Maghreb, it becomes evident that the history of this region, especially in the pre-Roman occupation period, was built on deep Semitic cultural foundations that originated from the Near East, rather than the ethnically fabricated concepts created under modern colonial policies.
3. Ancient sources such as Hiempsal II, Polybius, Sallust, Procopius, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Ptolemy, Ammianus Marcellinus, Arnobius, and Lucius Apuleius prove that the human components of ancient Maghreb, particularly the Kingdom of Numidia, were largely of Canaanite, Sabeian, and Getulian roots. These historical testimonies do not mention modern ethnolinguistic terms associated with today's local dialects, as such designations were simply not known or used at that time. Instead, the prevailing terms were Getulians, Phoenicians, Canaanites, or Sabeans, all of which have clear Eastern roots
4. The analysis also showed that the Punic language was not a foreign or secondary language, but the mother tongue of the Numidian court and the language of royal coins, as stated by Roman and Greek historians. It continued to be used in North Africa even after the Islamic conquest, indicating the deep cultural and civilizational roots of the Phoenicians in the region.
5. The Phoenicians' influence was not limited to the political or administrative sphere but also extended to religion, culture, arts, architecture, and economy. They introduced concepts of civilization, maritime trade, and organized monotheistic worship through Canaanite gods like Baal, Molech, and Tanit, all of which are documented in archaeological writings, inscriptions, and coins.

6. Modern attempts to separate the Phoenicians from the Canaanites or deny the Semitic role in shaping the ancient Maghreb identities are shallow and unsupported by archaeological evidence or reliable texts. The Phoenicians were not "colonial" settlers but rather a natural cultural extension of the Canaanites from the East. They merged with local tribes of Semitic roots such as the Getulians, Sabeans, and Catanites, forming the core of the civilized Maghreb societies.
7. This thesis would not be complete without mentioning the genetic evidence, which has become a key part of historical and anthropological sciences. Recent genetic studies, particularly those based on DNA extracted from the remains of a person from Tafoghalt in eastern Morocco, dating back approximately 15,000 years, show that the individual carried the E-M35 genetic mutation, a Semitic mutation linked to populations that founded the Natufian civilization in Palestine and the Levant. This civilization is considered the primary basis for agriculture and human settlement before spreading westward to North Africa.
8. Thus, historical testimonies, inscriptions, coins, traditions, language, and, ultimately, genetics intersect to undeniably confirm that the original identity of ancient Maghreb is fundamentally Canaanite-Phoenician-Semitic. Any interpretation of the region's history that ignores this fact remains limited, unscientific, and distorts the truth.

References and Sources

First: Ancient Sources

- **Hempsal II** – Excerpts preserved in later works, particularly in earlier writings on Numidia.

- **Polystor** – His sayings are recorded in ancient genealogical books, mentioning that the Phoenicians are descendants of Ishmael.
- **Sallust, Bellum Iugurthinum** – (Translation: The Jugurthine War). He mentions the origins of the Numidians as Sabean and Yemeni tribes.
- **Diodorus Siculus, Bibliotheca Historica** – The part in which he mentions the Libo-Phoenicians as cousins of the Sidonians.
- **Procopius, Vandal Wars** – Book 4, mentions the Canaanites who fled from "the thief Joshua."
- **Strabo, Geographica** – Mentions the Masili and Massylii from the Getulians and describes the regions of Numidia.
- **Ptolemy, Geographia** – Attributes the tribes of North Africa to Eastern Sabean origins.
- **Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae** – Describes the African peoples and their origins.
- **Arnobius, Adversus Nationes** – From the Church Fathers, mentions the Phoenicians of North Africa.
- **Lucius Apuleius** – A Numidian writer from Madaurus (Modern M'daourouch), who mentioned in his speeches that his native language was "Canaanite."
- **Judah the Tyriote** – Talmudic texts from Tiaret in Algeria referring to the Phoenician Lijdar tribe.
- **Pernelle the Elder** – A later Roman historian linking the inhabitants of Morocco to Sheba.
- **Matian** – Attributed with comments on the pyramids of Lijdar and their Phoenician traditions.
- **Dr. Al-Bashir Abou Saad** – A contemporary researcher who gathered local testimonies on the Phoenician origins of Algerian tribes.
- **Ya'qub Hajjaj** – His contributions to the Canaanite origins of the people of Ancien Maghreb.

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