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The cultural development of the city of Cirta during the era of the Numidian kingdom

التطور الحضاري في مدينة كرطا خلال عهد مملكة نوميديا

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Abstract

This research paper aims to study the history of the city of Cirta, which evolved from a human settlement during prehistoric times to an important city in historical eras, opinions about its origin diverged. While some specialists tried to trace its origins to Phoenician roots for several reasons, others, based on archaeological remains, have concluded that this site is very ancient, dating back long before the arrival of the Phoenicians. King Massinissa made the city of Cirta the capital of his Kingdom after ascending the throne. It became a major international market that supplied Italy, Greece, and the Orient with significant quantities of wood, ivory, and grains. The city also experienced great cultural development and became a centre of civilisation, attracting writers and intellectuals. The city remained strong and advanced under the reign of the King's successors until it fell under Roman control in 46 B.C.

Keywords: Cirta; Numidia; Kings; Massinissa.

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية الى دراسة تاريخ مدينة كرطا التي تطورت من محطة استقرار بشري في فترة ما قبل التاريخ الى مدينة هامة في العصور التاريخية. تضاربت الأراء حول أصلها، ففي الوقت الذي حاول فيه بعض المتخصصين إيجاد لها أصول فينيقية لعدة اعتبارات، توصل البعض الأخر من خلال البقايا الأثرية الى أن هذا الموقع قديم جدا يعود لفترة ما قبل وصول الفينيقيين بزمن طويل. اتخذ الملك ماسينيسا مدينة كرطا بعد توليه العرش عاصمةً لمملكته، وكانت بمثابة سوق دولي كبير يمول إيطاليا وبلاد الإغريق والمشرق بكميات معتبرة من الخشب، العاج والحبوب كما عرفت تطورا وازدهارا ثقافيا كبيرا، وأصبحت مركز اشعاع حضاري يستقطب أدباء ومثقفين كبار. ظلت المدينة قوية ومتطورة في عهد خلفاء الملك، الى أن سقطت تحت السيطرة الرومانية عام 46 ق.م.

كلمات مفتاحية: كرطا؛ نوميديا؛ ملوك؛ ماسينيسا.

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1. Introduction

Cirta is the name of a Numidian city located in eastern Algeria, known today as Constantine. It was the capital of the Numidian Kingdom for more than two centuries and a centre of its cultural influence. From there, the Numidian Kings managed the affairs of their kingdom. Today, it is classified as one of the important historical cities in Algeria, reflecting the local Numidian civilisation in its various aspects. Cirta has attracted the attention of many researchers and archaeologists since the late 19th and early 20th centuries, as they sought to uncover the secrets and treasures of this ancient city. However, while sources agree on the significant role the city played during the reign of the Numidian kings, they differ regarding the origin of its name and its founder. This raises the following questions : What is the origin of the name Cirta ? Who founded it? And what were the developments it experienced during the reign of the Numidian kings?

This study aims to shed light on the city of Cirta and uncover the origin of its name, its foundation, and its development during the reign of the Numidian Kings. It relies on the descriptive method to trace events through what is mentioned in ancient historical sources and modern studies, as well as on the analytical method to analyse and scrutinise the information provided in these sources.

2. Origin of the name

Opinions regarding the origin of the name "Cirta" and its founders have varied, leading to multiple hypotheses and disagreements on the subject. On one hand, proponents of the Greek legend suggest that the name "Cirta" is derived from the name of King Juba I's[1] mother, "Tsebius Cirt," who was married to the mythical hero Hercules. According to this legend, the city was named after his mother and became his capital (Ferhati, 2007, p. 263). On the other hand, Professor Ghanem argues that this hypothesis is merely fanciful and mythical, asserting that Cirta existed long before the reign of King Juba I (Ghanem, 2008, p. 68).

Some support the theory of a Phoenician origin for the name of the city, which they believe means "settlement" in their view. They argue that the name "Cirta" is related to the Phoenician term "Qart", which was used to refer to Carthage near Tunis and Cartagena (Carthagène)[2] in Spain. Thus, they suggest that Cirta was a Phoenician settlement based on its name and the Punic-style artifacts discovered there (Cheniti, 2003, p. 34).

However, despite the evidence presented by proponents of the Phoenician origin theory for the name Cirta, this theory also faces difficulties. One primary challenge is the discrepancy between the word "KRTN," inscribed in Neo -Punic[3] script on a Numidian coin found in the city (see Figure 1), which

closely resembles in proununcіation to some Numidian royal names such as MSNSN[4] (Massinissa), MKWSN[5] (Micipsa) and GLSN (Gulussa) and the term "Qart-Hadast" used by the Phoenicians to mean "new city."

The second challenge in associating the city's origin with the Phoenicians lies in the fact that Phoenician research consistently shows that they focused on establishing settlements along the coast to serve as waypoints or trading centres in the Mediterranean. Cirta, being an inland city far from the coast, does not fit this pattern. Moreover, even during the later phase of Carthage's history, after the 5th century BC, historical sources do not provide evidence of Carthaginian establishment of Cirta. Professor Aggoun argues that the Phoenicians did not establish cities on the northern African coasts but only occupied them for a period, after which Massinissa restored them to the Numidian kingdom (Aggoun, 2008, p. 42). Some ancient sources (TiteLive, 1954, pp. XLII, 23), indicate that Massinissa reclaimed fifty cities from Carthage. Similarly, Gabriel Camps notes that there were ancient cities in North Africa before Massinissa's time, which were of local origin, including Thugga, Theveste (Tébessa), and Cirta (Camps, (S.D), p. 314)

Regarding the Punic inscriptions discovered in the sanctuary of El - Hofra, located on a hill southwest of Cirta, it is known that the Numidians used Punic writing in addition to their local Libyc script (Chabot, 1940, p. III). Punic writing appeared alongside Libyc inscriptions on many commemorative and funerary monuments, as evidenced by the bilingual inscription from the city of Thugga (see Figure 2). It was used on coins and inscribed on most votive texts. Although Cirta was a centre of Punic civilisation influence[6] it was never under Carthaginian control or affiliated with Carthage at any point in its history. Instead, it served as the capital of the Numidian Kingdom (Camps, 1987, pp. 111-112).

Professor Mehentel strongly criticised the theory proposed by André Berthier, supported by René Charlier, which considers Cirta as a Phoenician settlement and suggests that the city of Kef was the Numidian capital. Both Berthier and Charlier based their theory on the claim that both cities were referred to as Cirta during the Roman occupation and that the historian Plinus mentioned both cities under this name. Professor Mehentel argues that this theory lacks reliable material evidence and is characterised by ambiguity and contradiction (Mehentel D. , 2011, pp. 215-218).

If we return to the findings of recent archaeological research conducted in the Constantine area, they indicate that Cirta dates back to prehistoric times, based on the discovered artefacts. It was originally a human settlement site due to its favourable conditions, such as running water, natural shelters, and protection against invaders and wild animals. Over time, as Professor Cheniti

suggests, the site developed and the inhabitants built their homes near caves, and the settlement evolved from a village into a city (Cheniti, 2003, p. 45).

Professor Mehentel believes that the ancient name of Cirta is of local origin and means "the rock" or "the abandoned cave," which aligns with its topography. The rock was the initial nucleus for the city's establishment, and the abandoned cave played a role. Cirta contains many caves and grottoes that still exist today (Mehentel, 2008- 2009, p. 41).

Based on the above and the historical context of the region, we lean towards the idea of a local origin for the city of Cirta. Thus, the theory of a Phoenician origin for the name and the establishment of this ancient city is considered outdated and no longer valid.

3. The development of the city of Cirta during the reign of the Numidian Kings

Cirta was a site of human settlement since prehistoric times, as indicated by the remains of Acheulean, Mousterian, Iberomaurusian, and Capsian industries that were uncovered in Constantine and some nearby locations, such as the plateau of Mansourah, the site of Jebel el Wahch, the caves of Mouflons and bears, the plateau of Sidi M'cid, and other archaeological sites. However, it seems that the Neolithic period is more significant in terms of human settlement and the emergence of some cultural landmarks, such as dwellings and megalithic tombs. Bazina graves (see Figure 3), Dolmens, and Tumulus represented these primitive tombs. This period is also characterised by the appearance of pottery, which was discovered in the Tiddis region (see Figure 4) near Constantine (Bertrandy, 1994, p. 3)." Enter here the method and tools used in the same approved format (Times New Roman, Size 12, Interline 1); In this section, the author of the article clearly explains how to choose the sample, determining the variables and how to measure them, the method of collecting the data and describes how to summarize the data (average, percentage, ...), in addition to the statistical tools used in data analysis, testing hypotheses and determining the statistical significance. Sometimes it may be necessary to mention the programs used in the calculation; in case the author uses an already published method in other research, reference can only be made to that method in footnote without re-describing it again, and if there are modifications in the method, this must be explained and justified.

3.1. Cirta during the reign of Massinissa (148-202 BC)

The earliest accounts we have about the Kingdom of Numidia, in general, come from the Greek historian Polybius (Polybe, 2003, pp. XXXVI, 16) and the Latin historian Titus Livius (TiteLive, 1954, pp. XXV, 48), which date back to the late 3rd century BC, during the outbreak of the Second Punic

War. At that time, Numidia was divided into two parts: Eastern Numidia or the 'Massyli', ruled by Gaia[7], and Western Numidia or the 'Masaesyli', ruled by Syphax (Strabon, 2014, pp. II, 5,33).

As for Cirta , historians had conflicting opinions about it, whilst Gsell believed that it was previously part of the lands of the Masaesyli (Gsell, 1927, p. 176), based on the text of Titus Livius which points out that Cirta was the capital of the Masaesyli Kingdom (TiteLive, 1954, pp. XXX, 12), Camps on the other hand, believes that Syphax annexed it during the Second Punic War because all information prior to 205 BC indicates that Syphax's interest was limited to his Kingdom and the situation in Spain, therefore his appearance in the regions of the Kingdom of the Massyli occured later , As a result Camps concludes that Siga is the genuine capital of the Massyli, whereas Cirta was taken by Syphax as the second capital of his Kingdom after annexing it to the Massyli region. (Camps, 1961, p. 169).

After King Massinissa reclaimed the throne of his father, Gaia, and unified both Eastern and Western Numidia, he made Cirta his capital (see Figure 5). It appears that this city was secured with walls topped by watchtowers, as shown on one of the coins dated to the 3rd century BC, which indicates that the city had two gates in a semicircular shape, topped by a crenellated wall. Between the semicircular gates and the wall, there is a decorative garland strip (see Figure 6).

During the reign of King Massinissa, the city of Cirta served as a major international market, supplying Italy, Greece, and the East with significant quantities of timber, ivory, and grain. The amount of wheat he sent to the Greek armies in 189 BC amounted to two hundred thousands Bushells of wheat, equivalent to 17,508 hectoliters, in addition to two hundred horsemen and ten elephants (TiteLive, 1954, pp. XXXII, 27,2).

Culturally, Cirta was open to neighbouring cultures during Massinissa's reign. His three sons—Mkwsn, Gulussen, and Mastanabal—were fluent in Punic and Greek, alongside the local Libyc language. This period indicates a trilingual coexistence (Libyc-Punic-Greek) in at least some circles, as evidenced by votive inscriptions discovered in El-Hofra Sanctuary in Cirta (Cheniti, 2003, p. 162).

Some ancient sources also mention the presence of a Greek community in Cirta during Massinissa's time. His royal court was filled with Greek writers and musicians. In the Temple of the god Baal Hammon at the El -Hofra site, inscriptions were found in Greek alongside Punic and Neo-Punic texts, most of which date back to Massinissa's reign. Information from these inscriptions indicates that the Greeks who made these dedications had lived in Cirta for a long time and assimilated with its inhabitants. They were so influenced by the Punic language and deities that the Greek god Cronos was referred to in two

inscriptions as the Punic god Baal Hammon (Berthier, 1955, p. 167) (see Figure 7).

3.2. Cirta during the reign of Mkwsn (148-118 BC)

During the reign of Mkwsn, Cirta experienced significant development and became even more influenced by Greek civilisation than before. There was a notable fusion between Hellenistic and local Libyc cultures, particularly in funerary architecture, as seen in the Mausoleum of Madghacen in the Batna region and the Mausoleum of Tipasa (Cheniti, 2003, p. 51).

Mkwsn also followed his father Massinissa's policy in his relations with the Romans, committing to providing military units, elephants, and equipment for the Roman Republic's army (Camps, 1987, p. 236). Cirta became an important commercial centre for collecting wheat harvests (Ghanem, 2008, p. 193). The Italian community within the city grew more active. By 113 BC, there were enough Italian merchants in Cirta to ensure protection for Adherbal upon his entry into the city and to participate actively in its defence. The massacre of Italian merchants by Jugurtha was the real reason for Rome declaring war against him and considering him an enemy of the Roman people (Salluste, 2012, pp. XXI,2)."

3.3.Cirta during the reign of Jugurtha (118-105 BC)

Following the death of Mkwsn in 118 BCE, his three successors—Jugurtha, Hiempsal, and Adherbal—continued to reside in Cirta, despite dividing the administration of the Kingdom’s affairs. However, the fate of the city changed drastically after Jugurtha murdered Adherbal (Cheniti, 2003, p. 52) and attacked Cirta, where he massacred the Italian community. This prompted Rome to intervene to curb Jugurtha's growing ambitions, leading to a long war between the two sides that lasted from 112 to 105 BC (Bertrandy, 1994, p. 4).

In one of his letters to Emperor Marcus Aurelius, Fronto referred to the defeats Rome suffered in its war against Jugurtha (Mehentel D. , 2011, p. 219). During the conflict, Cirta was subjected to multiple sieges, with the city switching hands between the warring parties. The Roman general Metellus captured it in 108 BC, using it as a winter camp for his armies. However, Jugurtha retook the city in 106 BCE during General Marius' campaign toward the Mulucha River (Moulouya). The city remained under Jugurtha's control until 105 BC, when the Roman commander Sylla, an aide to Marius, managed to capture Jugurtha through a conspiracy with Bocchus, King of Mauretania (Salluste, 2012, pp. LXXXI,2).

According to Salluste, Cirta was well-secured and surrounded by walls that were difficult to breach. During his attack on the city, Jugurtha had to employ various siege and assault techniques (Salluste, 2012, pp. LXXXI,2).

However, despite his efforts, the Romans eventually succeeded in executing their plan aimed at weakening the Kingdom of Numidia and shape its fate according to their ambitions and interests in the region (Ghanem, 2008, p. 114).

Following the war, Cirta became even more open to Italian influence, with a growing number of Roman trade representatives settling in the city, far more than before the conflict. The Romans installed a weak-willed figure, Guda, Jugurtha's brother, on the Numidian throne (Cheniti, 2003, p. 54), ensuring that their interests would be maintained.

3.4. Cirta during the reign of Juba I (60-46 BC)

There was a significant silence regarding the fate of Cirta and the rest of the Numidian Kingdom until the middle of te first century BC, when political conflict erupted in Rome between two rival parties: the Populares, led by Julius Caesar, and the aristocratic party (Mehentel D. , 2011) loyal to the Roman Senate, led by Pompey. This conflict quickly spread to North Africa in 47 BC, involving the Numidian and Mauretanian Kings. King Juba I of Eastern Numidia and King Masinissa II of Western Numidia sided with Pompey's faction, while Julius Caesar succeeded in winning the support of the Mauretanian kings, Bogud and his brother Bocchus II, whom he considered friends and allies of Rome (Decret (F), 1981, p. 151).

It seems that Juba I preferred residing in Zama (in present-day Tunisia) rather than Cirta, which served as the seat of Massinissa II. As a result of the African war, Julius Caesar granted Cirta to the Italian mercenary Sittius and his group as a reward for their support in the war against Juba I, who chose to commit suicide rather than fall into the hands of his enemies. Thus, Cirta entered the era of Roman occupation (Cheniti, 2003, p. 55).

4. Conclusion

Through this research paper, we have reached several conclusions:

- ✓ Modern studies and archaeological research, including findings of tombs and pottery, suggest that the city of Cirta has local Libyc origins. It has been a site of human settlement since prehistoric times and developed into a significant city in historical periods.
- ✓ During the Numidian era, King Massinissa, after reclaiming his father Gaia's throne and uniting Eastern and Western Numidia, made Cirta his capital. The city achieved a high level of development, particularly in commerce, where it served as a major international market, exporting vast quantities of grain, timber, and ivory to neighbouring Mediterranean countries.
- ✓ Culturally, Cirta was open to neighbouring civilisations, particularly Greek and Latin influences. There was significant interaction between

these cultures, with a blend of Greek and Latin traditions. King Massinissa's court was filled with Greek scholars and musicians, and in return, many of these figures adopted local Numidian language and beliefs. This cultural exchange fostered a unique fusion between the Hellenistic and local Numidian elements in the city.

- ✓ The political, economic, and cultural development of Cirta continued under the successors of King Massinissa. The alliances and trade relations with the Roman Republic remained strong, leading to an increase in Italian community activity in Cirta. The interaction between Hellenistic and local Numidian cultures, particularly in funerary architecture, also flourished during this period.
- ✓ Numidia's economic growth attracted increasing Roman ambitions in the region. Gradually, the Romans began to interfere in its internal affairs, culminating in the fall of Cirta in 46 BC after Julius Caesar's victory over King Juba I in the Battle of Thapsus.

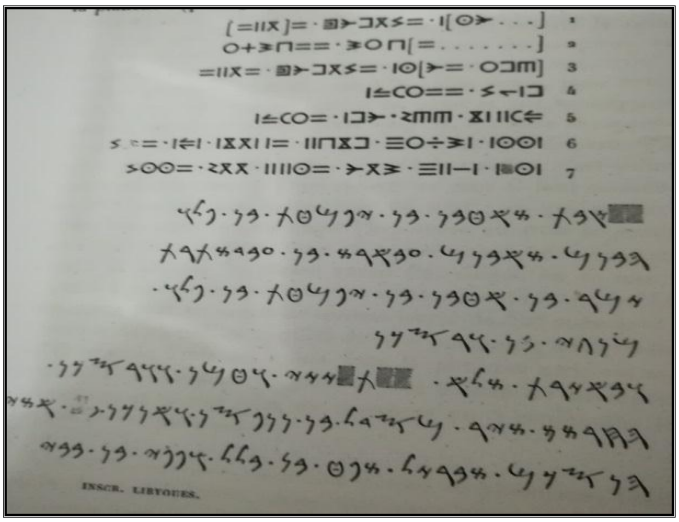
Appendices:

Figure (1) : An image of a crowned woman's head including a neo- Punic inscription containing the name KRTN



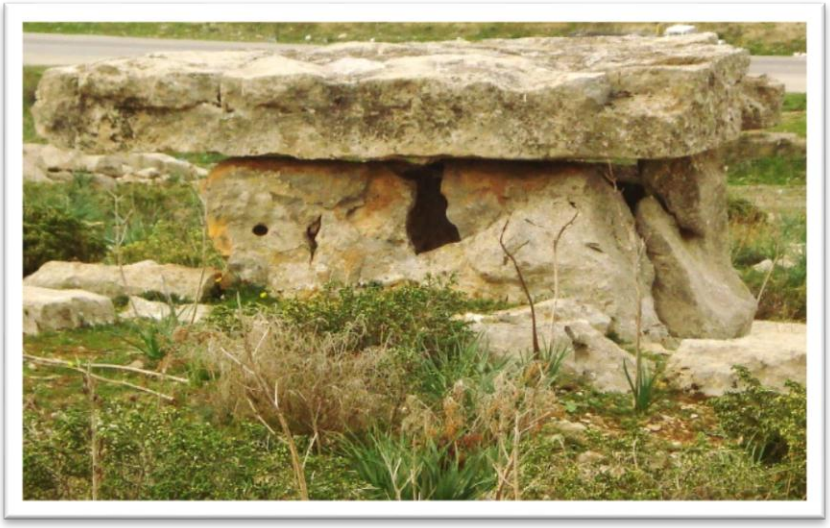
Source: (Ghanem, 2008, p. 63)

Figure (2) : Bilingual inscription (Libyc-Punic)



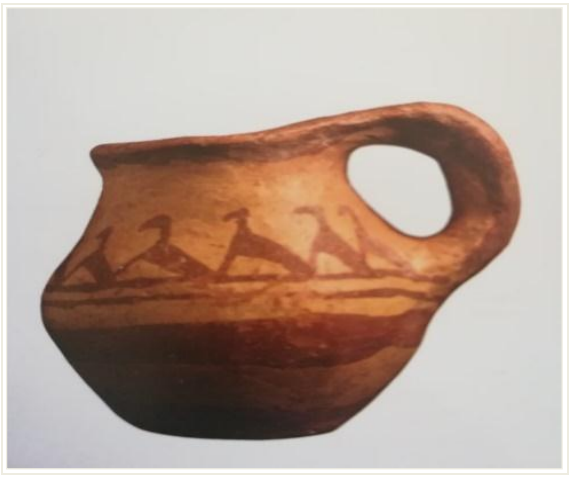
Source: (Chabot, 1940, p. 3)

Figure (3) : A dolmen-type burial ground discovered in the Bounouara region (Constantine).



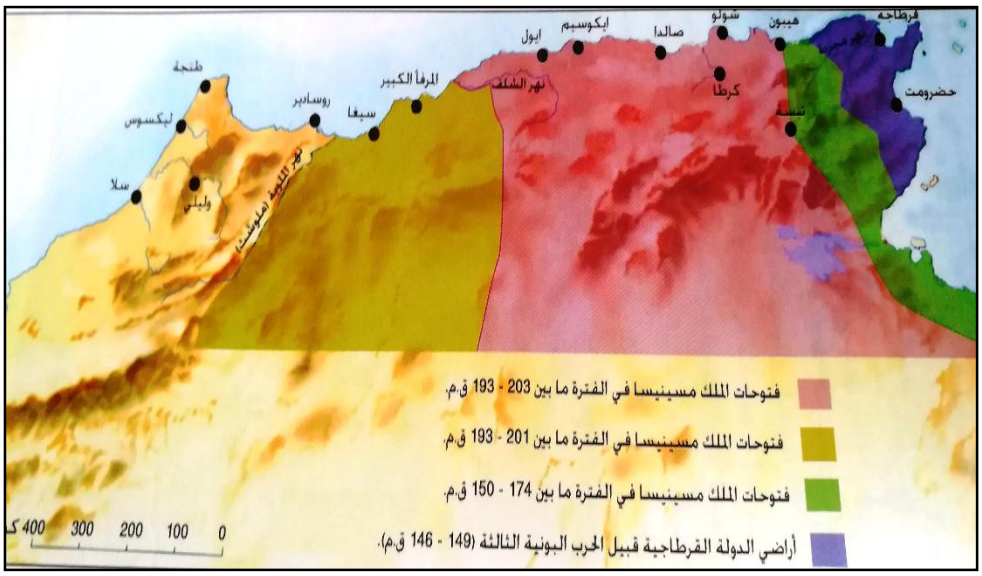
Source :www.numidiaantiqua.over-bloc.com

Figure (4): Represents a vessel found in one of the tombs of Tiddis (third and second centuries BC)



Source: (Lancel, 2014, p. 34)

Figure (5): The borders of the Numidian Kingdom during the reign of King Massinissa



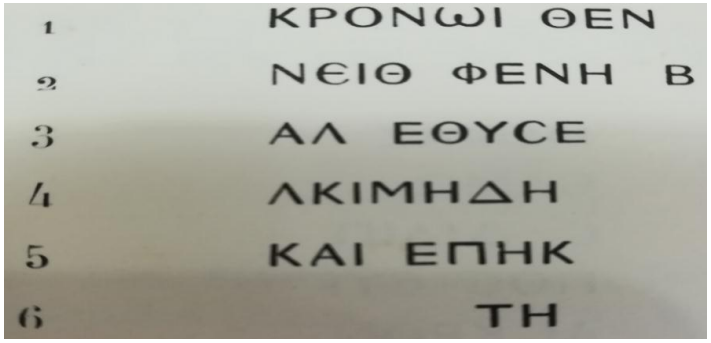
Source: (Cheniti (. , 2013, p. 185)

Figure (6): A bronze coin showing the secured gates of Cirta (3rd century BC)



Source: (Ferroukhi, 2009, p. 33)

Figure (7): A Greek inscription indicating the merging of the Numidian god Baal Hammon with the Greek god Cronos in the city of Cirta.



Source: (Berthier, 1955, pp. 168,169, N°3, Gr, pl. XXVIII, C))

[1]. Juba I, the son of Hiempsal II, assumed the throne after the death of his father in 60 BC. He followed the same policy as Masinissa and Jugurtha in preserving the political entity of Numidia, which prompted him to stand against Caesar, who had expansionist intentions in North Africa. He committed suicide in 46 BC after his defeat in the Battle of Thapsus against Caesar. For more see:

Cesar, (1939), Guerre Civile, text etabli et traduit par Pierre Fabre, éd. Belles lettres, Paris, t. 1, II, 25.4 ; Ferroukhi (M), (2009), Nos ancêtres les rois numides, ed. Dalimen, p. 57-59.

[2]. An important city established by the Carthaginian leader Hasdrubel (brother of Hannibal) in Spain after the First Punic War to compensate for what the Carthaginians lost during this war. It is rich in silver mines and has an excellent commercial location. It became the area of influence of the Carthaginians in Spain. For more information, see: Sarhan Abou Bakr, (2013), Al-Hurub Al-Bouniya Bayna Roma wa Qartaj (264-146 Q.C.M) Asbabha - Ahdathha - Nataijha wa Mawqif Al-Mamalik Al-Ahliya Al-Maghribiya Minha, Majallat Al-Dirasat Al-Afrikiyya, Al-Majallad 3, p. 107

[3]. The Néo- Punic script is the script that replaced the official old Punic script in Carthage and all of its settlements in the western Mediterranean. Starting from the fall of Carthage in 146 BC. For more information,see :Ghanem Mohamed -Seghir, (2012), Nussous Bouniya Libiyya Mukhtara min Tarikh Al-Jazair Al-Qadim, Dar Al-Houda, Ain Mellila, Algérie ,p.44

[4]. (MSNSN) or Massinissa, was born in 238 BC. His father was called Gaya, the king of Eastern Numidia. As for his mother, we do not know anything about her except that she was a priestess and helped her son in ruling, as he used to consult her and take her advice on some matters of the kingdom. Accompanying him in his wars, Massinissa trained in horse riding and hunting from a young age and learned fencing and javelin throwing, which helped him later become a brilliant military leader who always achieved victories over his enemies. He died at the age of ninety. For more information, see: Polybe, (2003), *Histoire*, texte établi et traduit par Denis Roussel, 2° tirage, éd. Gallimard, Paris, XXXVI, 16, 1; Tite-Live, (1954), Histoire romaine, trad. Gaston Baillet, éd. les belles lettres, Paris, XXV, 48 ; Kadra-Hadjadji (Houaria), (2014), Massinissa le grand africain, éd. Casbah, Alger, p.49-54.

[5]. Mkwsen or Micipsa, his name was mentioned in one of the inscriptions of the sanctuary of El Hofra and in the second double Thugga inscription. He is one of the sons of Massinissa. He was born in 198 BC. He succeeded to power after his father's death in 148 BC alongside his brothers Hiempsal and Gulusn. The first took over the judiciary and the second commanded the armies. While he took over the administration, after the death of his two brothers, he took sole power and ruled for a period of thirty years characterised by peace and stability with his Roman and Mauritanian neighbors. He died in 118 BC at an advanced age. For more information, see: Hareche Mohamed El- Hadi, (2001), Dirassat wa Nusus fi Tarikh Al-Jazair wa Bilad Al-Maghrib fi Al-'Asr Al-Qadim, Dar Houma lil Tiba'a wa Al-Nashr wa Al-Tawzi', Algérie, p. 237-239.

[6]. Camps points out that the Punic civilisation was not 100 Carthaginian, but rather a mixture of Eastern civilisational influences and local civilisational influences and therefore the Libyc contributed a great deal to this civilisation. This explains the ease and breadth of its spread, especially in the Numidian cities, see: Camps (G), (1979), "Les Numides et la civilisation punique", *Ant- Afr*, t. 14, p. 44.

[7]. Gaya, the son of Zelalsen and Masinissa's father, assumed the throne of Eastern Numidia around 220 BC. He made an alliance with Carthage during the Second Punic War and sent his son Masinissa at the head of an army to Spain. He died in 206 BC. For more information, see: Tite-Live, XXIV, 49,1-4 ; Ferroukhi (Mahfoud), op.cit, pp. 34,35.

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