
Berbers in Antiquity

In defining Berbers as indigenous North Africans we have begged the question of their origins. It is thus worthwhile to summarize briefly the archaeological evidence for North African prehistory. This is not an easy task: prehistorians disagree on it, and the evidence is complex – although there is little doubt that the reality was more complex still.

The earliest type of *Homo sapiens* in the Maghreb is a North African equivalent of the Cro-Magnons in Europe. It was earlier thought that this type, known as 'Mekta-Afalou', had split off from the Cro-Magnons, moving from Asia into North Africa while the Cro-Magnons moved into Europe. This has recently been disputed and an indigenous development from the Neanderthals proposed. However, an indigenous development remains to be proven, as there are no intermediate types known from North Africa.¹

Capsian Stone Industries

Around 7,000BC the eastern Maghreb saw the development of a new stone industry, known as 'Capsian' from the site at which it was first studied, El Mekta near Gafsa, ancient Capsa, in southern Tunisia. Capsian tools – generally beautifully retouched microliths – were associated with the presence of large quantities of ash and snail shells, which suggest that snails were the principal source of protein, and were probably consumed boiled. Several sites have also produced small anthropomorphic sculptures, both in stone

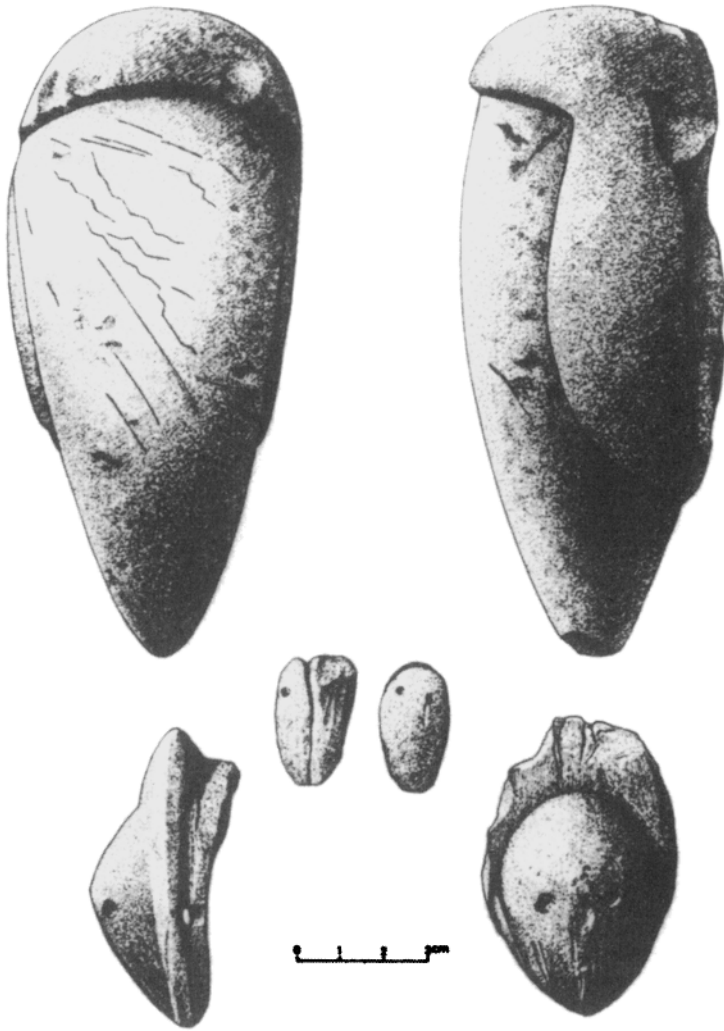


Plate 1.1 Anthropomorphic stone figures from El Mekta
(From R. Horn and C. Rüger, *Die Numider: Reiter und Könige nördlich der Sahara*, Bonn, 1979)

(El Mekta) and in coarsely fired clay (Afalou in Algeria), while decorated ostrich shell beads are also characteristic.² Again, there are no immediate local predecessors of this type of site, and a diffusion from the eastern Mediterranean has been proposed. It has been suggested by the prehistorian Gabriel Camps that we can see in the new types associated with the Capsian a sort of proto-Berber population which would have migrated to the Maghreb during this period.³ However, skeletal material shows that many of the people associated with these sites belong to the original 'Mekta' type, and thus it is hard to postulate an entirely new group of people. The physical variability of the skeletons associated with Capsian sites suggests that we are not dealing with a single immigration, but with a series of small groups. In general, however, the individuals were tall (1.74m on average) and long-headed, with high foreheads: Camps' characterization of them as 'proto-Mediterraneans' is loose but effective.

The Neolithic in the Maghreb

The transition to the neolithic is anything but clear-cut. It is certain that it occurred much earlier in the south. Radiocarbon dates of around 7,000BC from the southern Sahara and the Sahel, in such areas as the Tassili and the Hoggar, show a remarkable contemporaneity with those in the Eastern Sahara as far as the Nile. It has recently been suggested that the wet period which began after 7,000BC made this area inhabitable for the first time in several millennia, and allowed it to be occupied by food-producing people. Alternatively, the drying out of certain areas encouraged the domestication of cattle. There is increasing evidence to suggest that this domestication was in no way linked to the Near Eastern neolithic, and indeed that the introduction of food production in the Nile Valley took place from the west rather than from the east. In the lower Nile Valley itself there are no neolithic sites before around 4,000BC – possibly because no technology was available to deal with the river's floods.⁴ Pottery seems to have been produced in the southern Sahara as early as the middle of the seventh millennium, and may even be the predecessor of pottery production in the Near East.⁵

The Sudanese-Saharan neolithic seems to have had little connection with the north, however. In the Tell, the cultivable area

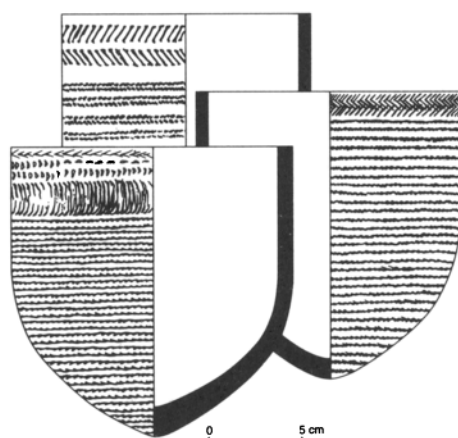


Figure 1.1 Neolithic pottery from Hassi Mouilah
 (From G. Camps, *Aux origines de la Berbérie: monuments et rites funéraires protohistoriques*, Paris, 1961)

between the Sahara and the Mediterranean, the transition was much more gradual and piecemeal, and seems to have begun at more or less the same time as in the lower Nile – although one cave site in Cyrenaica has a much earlier date.⁶ Much of the Maghreb appears to have been rather conservative. In eastern Algeria, particularly in mountainous areas, we find neolithic sites which retain many elements of the epi-palaeolithic Capsian tradition. Skeletons who still strongly resemble the Mekta type are found in seasonally occupied rock shelters. Pottery was used and animals herded, but the tool industries show little development from the Capsian.⁷ One of the problems, of course, is that the division between epi-palaeolithic and neolithic is not as neat as was once assumed. Just as some groups integrated the use of pottery and domestic animals into what was essentially a palaeolithic lifestyle, so many apparently epi-palaeolithic groups may have been carrying out some cultivation or intensive gathering of wild grains, as the polished sickles of the Capsian seem to show. The physical anthropology of the neolithic is equally weak on clear divisions between techniques and peoples: what little we know seems to show that the population of the Maghreb was composite, including various racial elements.

The Spread of Berber Language

In an interesting model for the spread of the Indo-European languages across Europe, Colin Renfrew has proposed their diffusion by the steady progress of neolithic agriculture. The geometric increase in the productivity of the land allowed a population growth which gradually expanded westwards, displacing or absorbing the mesolithic populations.⁸ Curiously, he retains the older model of immigration from a heartland for Semitic speakers who, he suggests, moved outwards from the Arabian peninsula around the third millennium BC, ultimately outnumbering and absorbing earlier language groups such as Sumerian. However, if we examine a map of the Afro-Asiatic languages – the eastern Semitic group, Kushitic, Egyptian and Berber – both the centrality of the Nile Valley and the difficulty of positing the Arabian peninsula as a ‘heartland’ become evident. There has never been any suggestion that the Nile Valley was populated from the Arabian peninsula, nor of any major shift in its population. It seems intellectually more satisfying to suggest that the advent of the neolithic in the lower Nile Valley and the delta area caused a major rise in

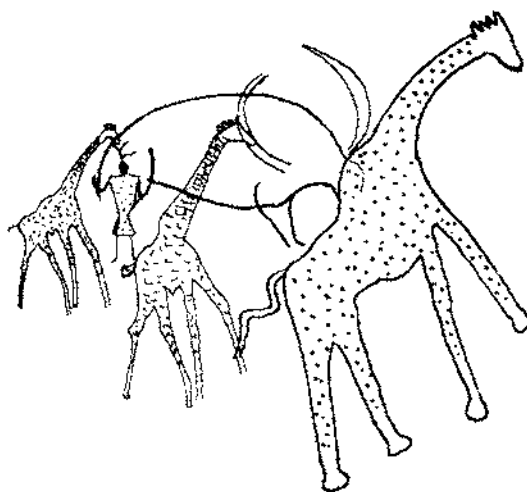


Figure 1.2 *Domesticating the giraffe*
(From A. Muzzolini, *L'Art rupestre préhistorique des Massifs Centraux sahariens*, Oxford, 1986)

its population density, and a consequent spin-off to the east and north-west of groups of people who carried the new techniques, and a related language, with them. This would explain the presence of these groups in the Arabian peninsula as well as in North Africa.⁹ The climatic conditions during this period would have made the movement outward from the Nile a far less forbidding enterprise than it would be today.¹⁰

This suggestion cannot, at the moment, be more than speculative. Archaeological evidence for a consistent movement of people is lacking, while, unlike the Indo-European languages, the Afro-Asiatic family as a whole has received little study.¹¹ Only the most rudimentary comparative studies exist, and thus any diagram of the relationships between them is impossible. The one statement we can make is that the Berber languages are all remarkably similar, which suggests that their spread across North Africa was relatively uniform and did not occur over a great period of time. The break between them and old Egyptian (related to modern Coptic) could be explained by the physical barrier of the eastern desert, which became more and more impassable as the Sahara dried out. Again, this would suggest that the separation of the two had taken place *before* the definitive drying out of the Sahara between 2,500 and 2,000BC.¹²

Mediterranean Connections

The Nile, however, was certainly not the only point of reference for North Africa. From the fourth millennium onwards one can begin to see contacts with the Mediterranean islands and with the Iberian peninsula: obsidian from Lipari appears in northern Tunisia, while shell-decorated pottery and, at the beginning of the bronze age, bell beakers similar to Iberian types are found in northern Morocco. In the high Atlas numerous engravings of Iberian daggers and halberds attest that contacts continued throughout the bronze age.¹³ There is no evidence for major immigration from these areas, but again the continuous arrival of small groups is probable. Dolmens in northern Tunisia and eastern Algeria recall Maltese prototypes, while late bronze age chamber tombs on Cap Bon have clearly Sicilian origins. This is the last 'archaeological' moment in which the Berbers – or the Berber language – could have arrived: Camps sporadically holds

the view that the earliest Berbers migrated from the eastern Mediterranean during the bronze age, along with the chamber tombs, the dolmens and pottery styles acquired in Sicily.¹⁴ This, again, is hard to prove, as we cannot find 'proto-Berbers' anywhere else.

The North African tell at the beginning of the second millennium thus presents a picture not very different from the rest of the western Mediterranean: farmers with a strong pastoral element in their economy and fairly elaborate cemeteries. There is, however, little evidence for the production and working of metal: no bronze

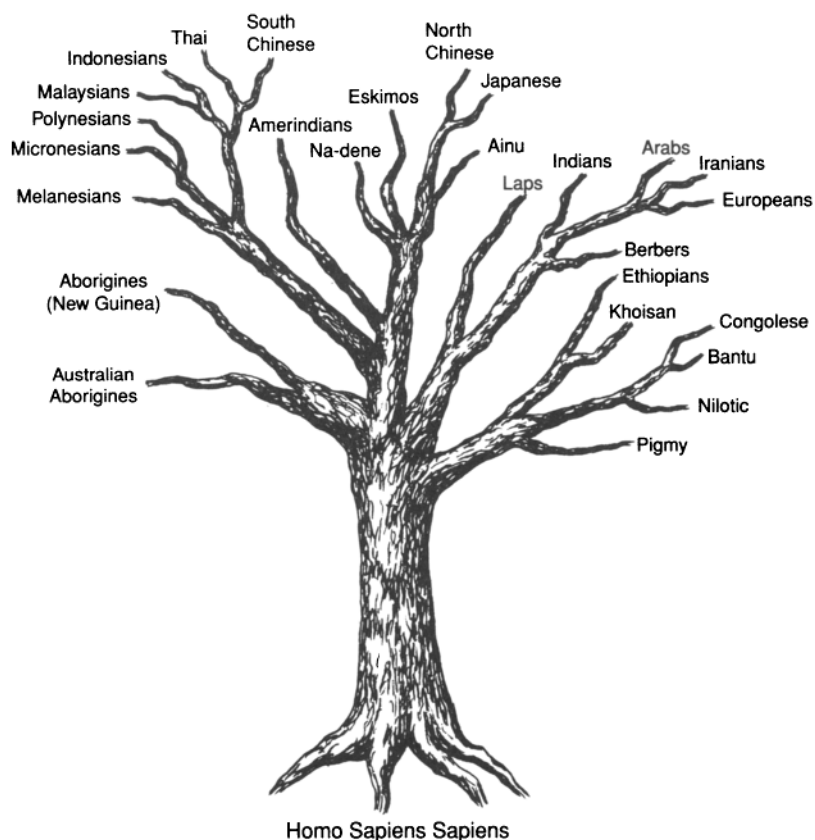
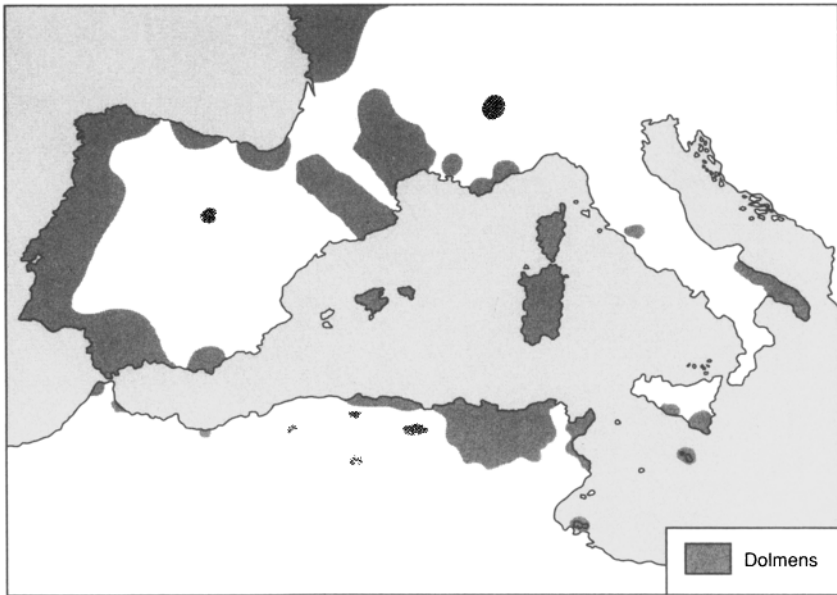


Figure 1.3 Tree of world populations, showing the relationship between the language and genetic groups
(From L. Cavalli-Sforza, P. Menozzi and A. Piazza, *History and Geography of Human Genes*, Princeton, N.J., 1994)



Map 1.1 The distribution of dolmens in the Mediterranean
 (From G. Camps, *Aux origines de la Berbérie: monuments et rites funéraires protohistoriques*, Paris, 1961)

weapons have been found in eastern Algeria or Tunisia. While we assume that by this time Berber languages were established throughout North Africa, there is no good evidence of exactly how this took place. Our only certainty is that the population by the second millennium was extremely heterogeneous, with a range of Mediterranean types mixed with some descendants of the original, possibly indigenous, 'Mekta' type.

The Sahara and the Garamantes

The really original aspect of the North African prehistoric cultures is evident not on the Mediterranean coast but in the Sahara, in the highlands of Tibesti and Tassili, the Hoggar and west to the Atlantic coast. In these areas, and to a lesser extent in Kabylia and the Saharan Atlas, are found numerous elaborate rock carvings and paintings. From these we can deduce much, not only about the

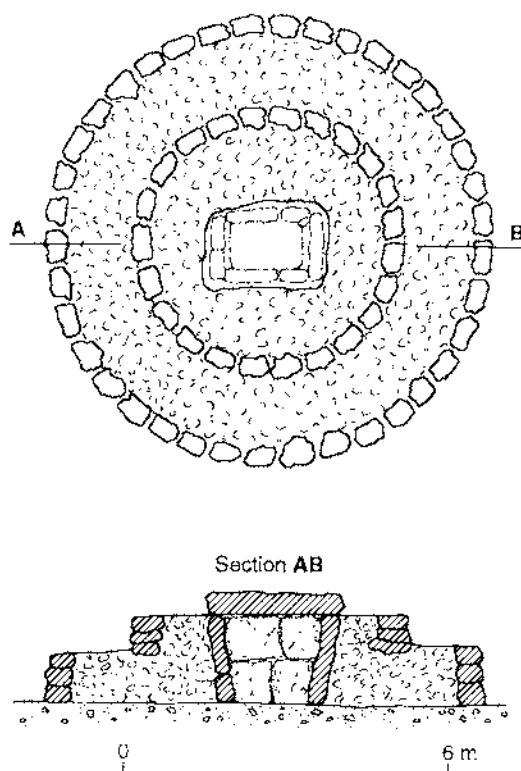


Figure 1.4 Dolmen from Sigus, Algeria
 (From G. Camps, *Aux origines de la Berbérie: monuments et rites funéraires protohistoriques*, Paris, 1961)

economy of the people which produced them, but also about their social organization.¹⁵ At the beginning of the neolithic period the climate of this area was radically different from modern conditions. Although it certainly did not resemble a tropical jungle, it was much wetter than in historic times. The chain of depressions running across the southern Sahara was filled with shallow lakes, while the highlands were forested. A neolithic civilization combining fishing with stock raising grew up here whose connections are far closer to the Sudan than to the Capsian to the north. The people were negroid, as both their rare skeletons and the splendid frescos they painted on the cliffs of the Tassili range

demonstrate. Their economy was largely pastoral, and many of the frescos show large herds of cattle. At some time, perhaps around the end of the second millennium, frescos begin to show elongated white men with characteristic long hair and pointed beards. Some confirmation of this racial shift comes from physical anthropology, although the skeletons seem to show closer resemblance to groups from the upper Nile Valley than to contemporary material from the Maghreb.¹⁶

By the middle of the second millennium the frescos show men using horses to pull light war chariots, armed with spears and wearing kilts similar to those of the Egyptians. The chariots could be drawn by as many as four horses, but two were more common:

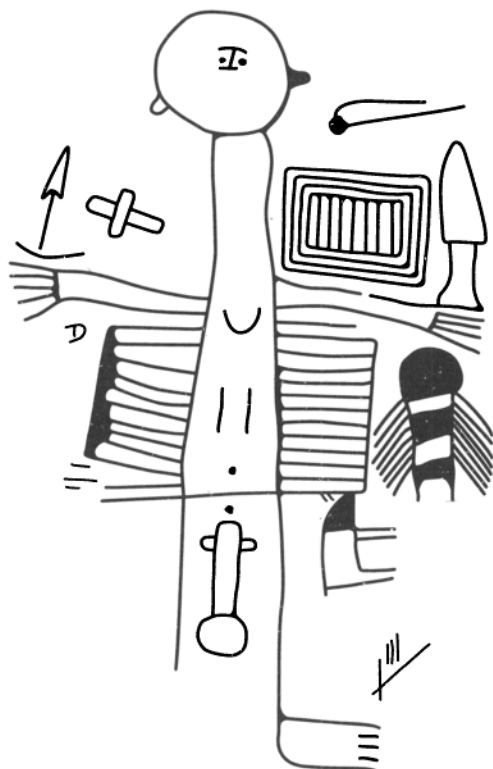


Figure 1.5 Bronze Age engraving of a warrior from the High Atlas
(From G. Camps, *Encyclopédie berbère*, vol. x, Paris, 1991)

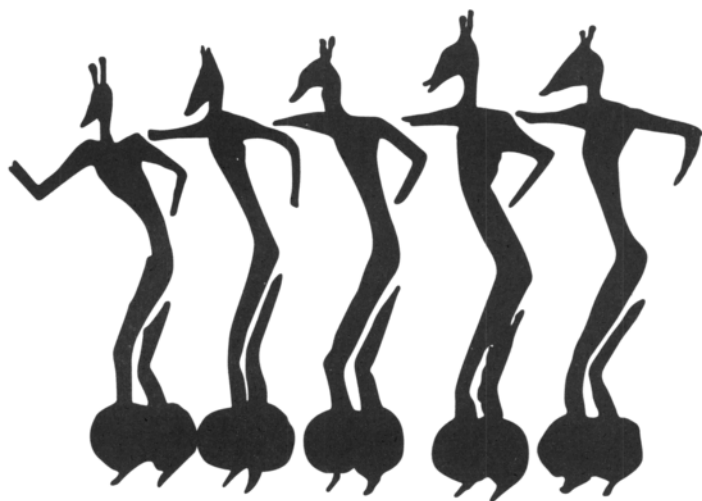


Figure 1.6 Jackal-headed dancers from the Tibesti
(From J. Leclant and P. Huard, 'La culture des chasseurs du Nil et du Sahara', *Mémoires du Centre des Recherches Anthropologiques, Préhistorique et Ethnographiques*, 29, 1980)

these are generally depicted in a 'flying' gallop. As Camps points out, the chariots were almost certainly aimed at enhancing the prestige of their users rather than for transporting goods.¹⁷ Recently, A. Smith has suggested that the frescos themselves represent a hermetic, priestly discourse aimed at perpetuating the social hierarchy.¹⁸ Masked, shaman-like figures are common, although some scenes certainly represent the ordinary life of the group. For the first time women are shown on relatively equal terms with men, while in a well-known engraving a man is shown happily playing with a child.¹⁹

What appears to have taken place is that the domestication of the horse gave the Mediterranean groups in North Africa infinitely greater mobility than they had had before. They were thus able to exploit the now arid steppe areas of the Sahara for an increasingly nomadic pastoralism. Both the new technology and their more stratified society enabled them to subjugate the existing black population, whose flourishing civilization had since around 2,500BC been put under ever-increasing stress by the drying out of the Sahara.

There seems to be little doubt that we are dealing here with a warrior aristocracy which had gained ascendancy over the black groups of the Sahara: this is the first instance of a pattern which has been repeated until the present day. The equation of the new group with the modern Tuareg is facile, and effectively



*Figure 1.7 Hunters on an engraving from Tassili n'Ajjer
(From G. Camps, Encyclopédie berbère, vol. vi, Paris, 1989)*

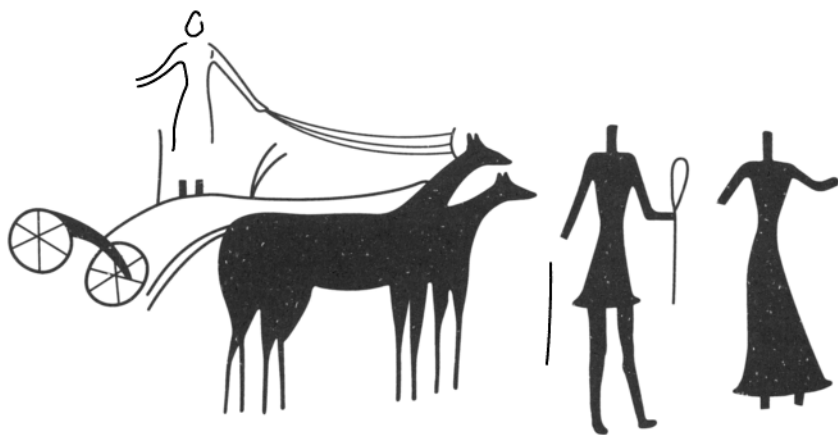


Figure 1.8 Chariot from the Wadi Zigza
 (From A. Muzzolini, *L'Art rupestre préhistorique des Massifs Centraux sahariens*, Oxford, 1986)

unprovable, but there is no doubt that their hierarchic structure, with a warrior caste which probably exploited black cultivators, was similar.

Evidence from the Tassili frescos receives striking confirmation from paintings in Egyptian tombs of the thirteenth century, which show 'Libyans' – 'Libu' and 'Mashwash' – wearing kilts and ostrich feather head-dresses, their hair falling in elaborate locks as far as their shoulders, their beards short and pointed and their faces covered with tattoos or, more likely, ritual scars (plate 1.2). These would have been the northern equivalent of the groups in Tassili; they apparently had trading contact with the Egyptians, eventually settling in the far-western areas of the delta. In 1,220BC and again in 1,180 they invaded the delta, and the extraordinary figures of 9,300 and 28,000 Libyans are recorded as having been killed on these two occasions. Their political centralization is indicated by the references to a chief, or king, and there are also some references to towns.²⁰

It is with part of this group, the Garamantes of the Fezzan in the Libyan desert mentioned by Herodotus, that the Saharan Berbers first came to the notice of the ancient world. The historian tells us that they are 'an exceedingly populous nation . . . The Garamantes go in four-horse chariots hunting the cave-dwelling Aethiopians.'²¹ The Garamantes are also the first protohistoric peoples of the

Maghreb whose settlement sites are known archaeologically. The valleys of the Fezzan are extremely rich in archaeological sites: Caputo counted 59,686 tombs in the 1950s,²² while villages and towns of all dates are numerous. Excavations at the plateau of Zinchecra between 1965 and 1973 revealed a small hut settlement dating from as early as 1,000BC. Dry stone gave way to mud brick somewhere around the middle of the millennium, when the site covered as much as 8 ha, defended by a wall across the neck of the plateau. It continued to grow, moving to the slopes outside the defended settlement, and the latest houses appear to be built in stone. At the end of the first millennium BC Zinchecra seems to have been replaced by the large site at Garama/Germa in the valley bottom.²³

Palaeobotanical evidence shows that both breadwheat and barley were cultivated near the site, while seeds of marsh species seem to suggest that the valley was far wetter than it appears today – a conclusion which is supported by the presence of breadwheat alongside the more resistant barley. Sheep were apparently kept on



Plate 1.2 Libyans on an Egyptian tomb: note the 'dreadlocks' and tattoos

(From O. Bates, The Eastern Libyans, London, 1914)

the site. The village was thus a mixed farming community, without a visible hierarchy within the settlement itself – indeed, we have no evidence that the farming population was not, in fact, black. Physical anthropology of the later tombs shows a mix of racial types, with some ‘negroid’ and some ‘Mediterranean’ people.²⁴ The warrior aristocracy is archaeologically invisible in the early period, although by the second century AD the presence of ‘villas’ and of large, well-built tombs at Germa shows a fairly pronounced hierarchy. The development of Germa as a central place probably also reflects the centralization of power in the society, and references in Roman authors to the ‘king’ of the Garamantes underline this point.²⁵

Punic North Africa and the Berber Kingdoms

If the principal contacts of the Garamantes were probably Egyptian, the foundation of Carthage by the Phoenicians at the end of the ninth century BC made a far more lasting cultural impact on the inhabitants of the northern Maghreb. Initially at least, Carthage did not aspire to a land empire, but her influence over northern Tunisia cannot be underestimated, and smaller ports along the coast as far as Lixus in Morocco provided a capillary contact with the peoples of the interior.

The earliest settlement at Carthage was restrained by a treaty with the ‘Libyans’ (as non-Punic Africans were called) from expanding her territory beyond the small strip of land on which the city is sited.²⁶ Her livelihood depended on her trade rather than on her territorial empire. Even Cap Bon, the large peninsula to the south of the city, was not occupied by Carthage until the fifth century, when large towers seem to have replaced earlier Libyan sites, and the town of Kerkouane was founded on the south coast.²⁷ By the time of Agathocles’ invasion in 310BC, Carthage controlled much of northern Tunisia, and there is talk of rich estates and of large numbers of slaves,²⁸ while during the third century a fully fledged empire was established, controlling much of Tunisia and eastern Algeria.

The effect of this activity on the African populations can hardly be underestimated. What we seem to see, quite apart from the growing political control and domination by Carthage, is a process of emulation and competition which slowly transformed

Berber society even outside the zone of Punic control. The first aspect of this transformation was apparently political. As early as the end of the fourth century we begin to hear of Libyan 'kings', such as Aelymas, with whom the Sicilian Greek general Agathocles treated.²⁹ It is logical that the reaction to the growing territorial consolidation of Carthage should have been the formation of larger territorial entities by the Berbers. As such kingdoms emerged throughout the Mediterranean in the Hellenistic age the Berbers followed suit. We perceive this transformation first in the new name applied to them by the Carthaginians: outside the territory controlled by Carthage, peopled by 'Libyphoenicians', were the 'Numidians'. By the end of the third century BC the Numidians were divided into three kingdoms: the Massyli, the Masaesyli and the Mauri. The history of these kingdoms is particularly interesting in that this was one of the rare times that development in the Maghreb took place without significant political interference from elsewhere.

In around 220BC the area of modern Morocco was peopled by the 'Mauri', and ruled by a somewhat shadowy king called Baga. By far the largest of the three kingdoms was that of the Masaesyli, covering roughly the northern half of modern Algeria. This was ruled by Syphax from two capital cities, Siga, near Oran in western Algeria, and Cirta, modern Constantine, in eastern Algeria. The kingdom of the Massyli, ruled by Gaia, the father of Masinissa, is generally held to have been south of Constantine, but there is some evidence that it extended along a line of salt lakes and oases all the way to the Tunisian coast at Gabes, and from there down to the Lesser Syrtis: as we shall see, the Massyli clearly had some contacts with the Greek world, and possibly directly with Alexandria. Indeed, a curious series of coins dating from around 241 bears in Greek the legend 'Libyans': we may see here the remains of Aelymas' kingdom, which could have been absorbed into that of Masinissa at a later date.³⁰

Syphax and Masinissa

In the course of the second Punic war both Syphax and Masinissa played important roles, and the Numidians were clearly regarded both by the Romans and the Carthaginians as people requiring careful handling. Syphax disposed of a vast cavalry and, inspired



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Figure 1.9 Masinissa

(From R. Horn and C. Rüger, Die Numider: Reiter und Könige nördlich der Sahara, Bonn, 1979)

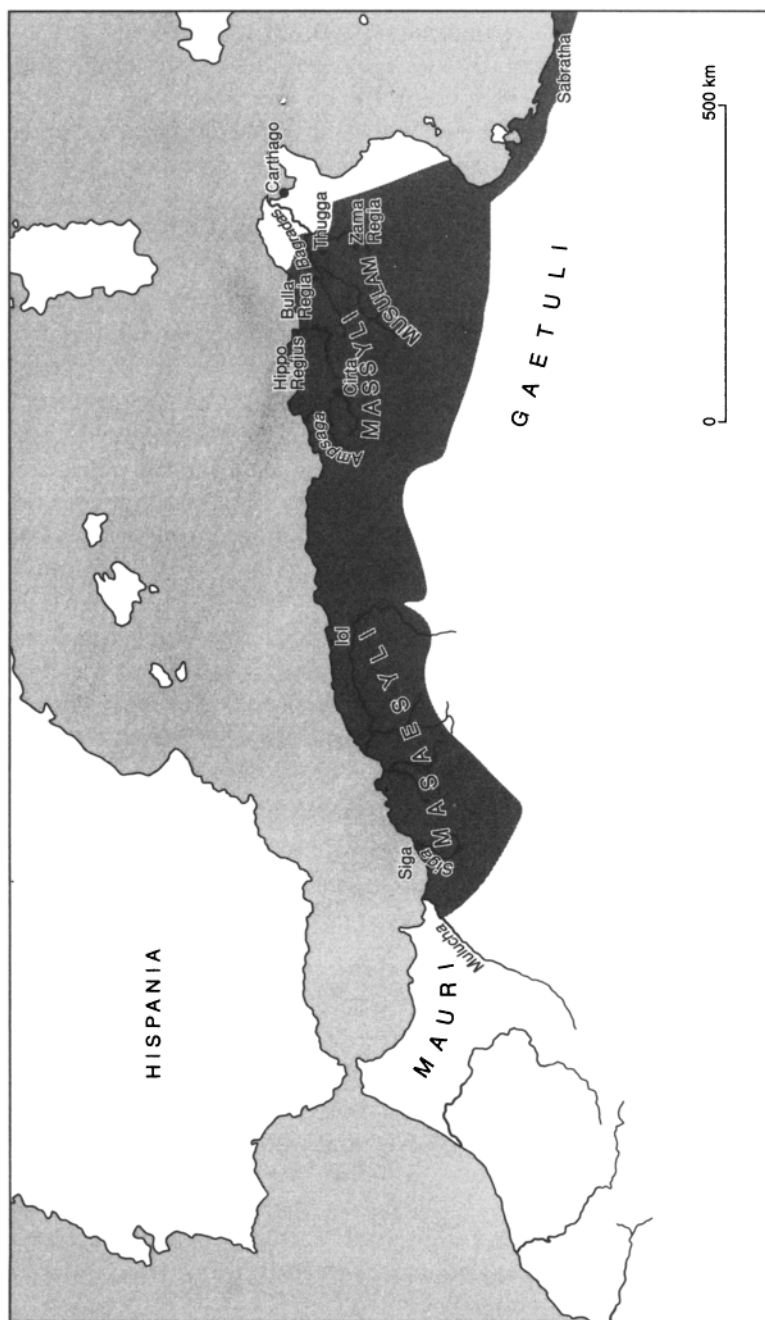
by the Roman example, created infantry units which he used with success against the Carthaginians. Masinissa, too, learned his military technique with the Romans, with whom he campaigned in his youth in Spain. Although both were nominally allies of the Romans, they were permanently at war with each other: Masinissa tended to be on the losing side, although he managed again and again to escape when defeated and to raise a new army. On one occasion he retired as far as the Lesser Syrtis, making contact with the Garamantes.

The major shift in balance was caused by the alliance of Syphax with the Carthaginians after his marriage to Sophonisba, daughter of the Punic general Hasdrubal. She persuaded her husband to go over to her father's side: from this point on, the contest between the Numidian kings became a sideshow to the Roman-Carthaginian struggle. Masinissa, with Roman help, was eventually victorious and, once Syphax was taken prisoner by the Romans, Masinissa managed to annex at least the eastern half of the kingdom of the Masaesyli. From that time the names of these kingdoms became subsumed under the general heading of Numidia. Masinissa, who reigned for the next sixty years, and his successors became known as the kings of the Numidians rather than of the smaller sub-groupings of Massyli and Masaesyli.³¹

It is interesting that both of these kings were treated, by the Romans as well as the Carthaginians, with all the honour due to Hellenistic monarchs. Syphax was awarded the curule chair and other ornaments of a Roman triumph at the same time as the Ptolemys in acknowledgement of their status as friendly, or client, kings.³² After his victory, Masinissa received the same insignia, as well as a golden patera, an ivory sceptre, the purple cloak of a Roman military commander and equestrian arms. This was not simply condescension: Masinissa was also recognized as one of their own by other Hellenistic rulers. Statues were erected to him at Delos by the Rhodians and Athenians, as well as by Nicomedes of Bithynia.³³ He was a hero on a large scale: like many subsequent Berber leaders, Masinissa charmed his biographers. Dashing, athletic, crafty and passionate in his youth, in his old age he acquired more regal attributes. As an established king, he carefully cultivated the image of the perfect Hellenistic monarch through his coinage and the participation of at least one of his sons in the Panathenaic games. The language of the court remained Punic, however, as did religious practices. Indeed, the extent of community between the Carthaginians and the Numidians is underlined by Livy, in whose account Sophonisba falls at the feet of the victorious Masinissa and pleads with him that she should not fall into Roman hands saying, 'I should have preferred to trust the word of a Numidian, born in Africa like myself, to that of a foreigner' (Livy, xxx, xii, 15).

Royal Tombs

This Numidian fusion of the dominant cultures of the Mediterranean is best demonstrated by a series of tombs built by the Numidian kings and some of the nobles. The earliest of these is the Medracen, just north of the Aures mountains (plate 1.2). Although sited in the centre of a vast cemetery whose tumuli are similar to all the protohistoric tombs of the area, the cultural context of the Medracen is very different indeed. It has recently been suggested that the giant tumulus in well-cut ashlar masonry, with its sixty attached Doric columns and Egyptian 'throat' cornice, referred directly to the tomb of Alexander at Alexandria and was, indeed, probably created by craftsmen from the Greek east.³⁴ Radiocarbon dates it to the third century, although in that it is generally held to



Map 1.2 North Africa at the end of Masinissa's reign
 (From G. Camps, *Aux origines de la Berbérie, Masinissa ou les débuts de l'histoire, Algiers, 1961*)

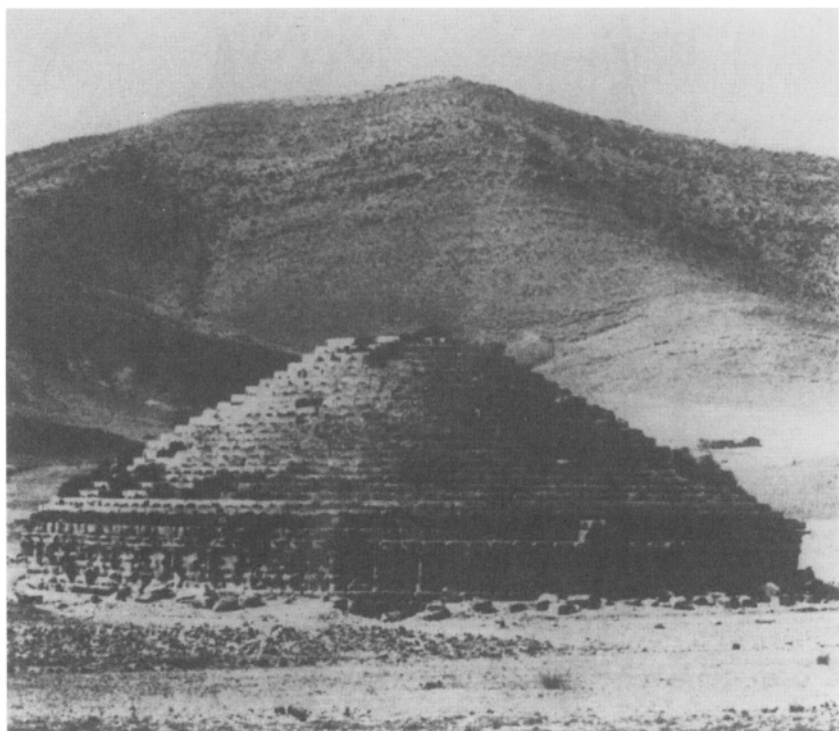


Plate 1.3 The Medracen

(From R. Horn and C. Rüger, Die Numider: Reiter und Könige nördlich der Sahara, Bonn, 1979)

have been built for Masinissa, it is systematically down-dated by half a century. Whether it is the tomb of Masinissa or, more probably, that of his father Gaia, its siting in the southern part of their kingdom is interesting, demonstrating a control over manpower and resources – over 29 tonnes of lead was used in the construction of the tomb – which the standard account of semi-savage Numidians hardly takes into account.

Equally striking is a series of tower tombs, of which the best known is that built for Syphax at Siga, and possibly used by his son Vermina after Syphax's death in Italy. This combines Hellenistic elements into a complex of three storeys, topped by a convex pyramid. Similar tombs were built for Masinissa's grandson Micipsa at the Souma a el Kroub, and for nobles at Thugga,

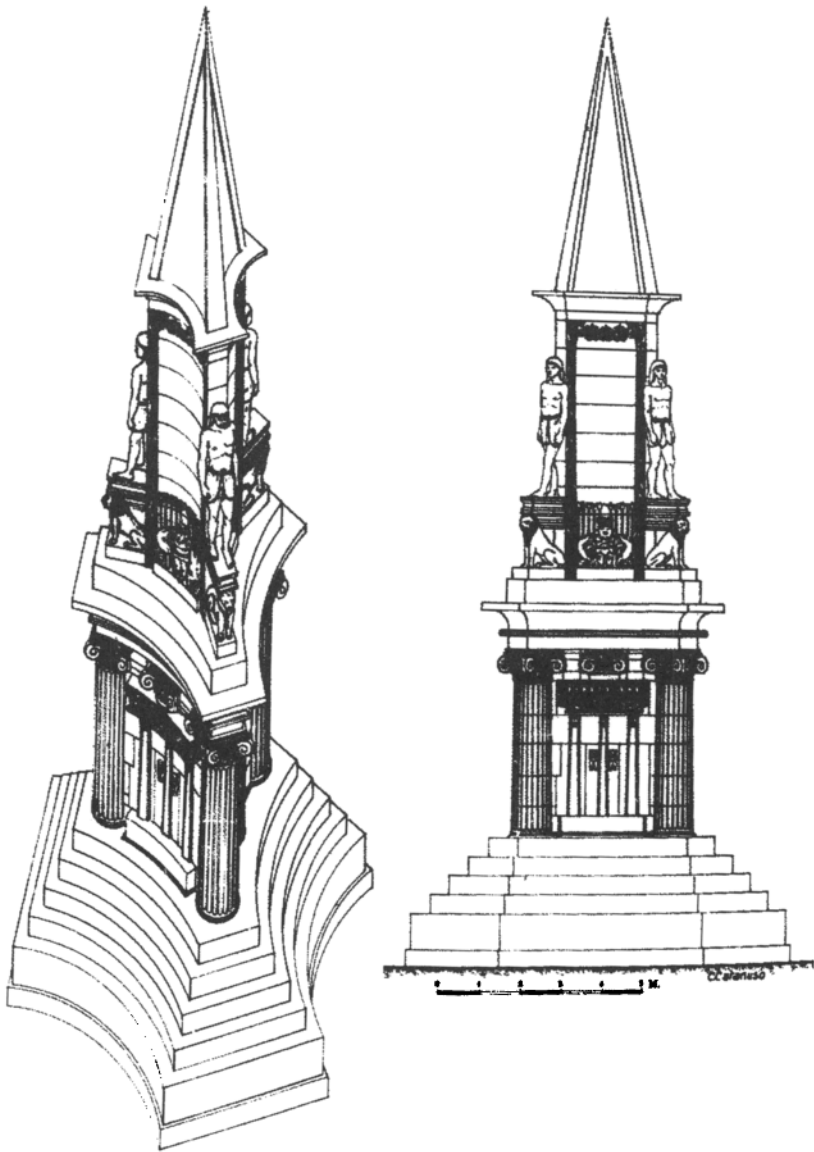


Figure 1.10 Tower tomb from Sabratha (after Rakob)
 (From R. Horn and C. Rüger, *Die Numider: Reiter und Könige nördlich der Sahara*, Bonn, 1979)

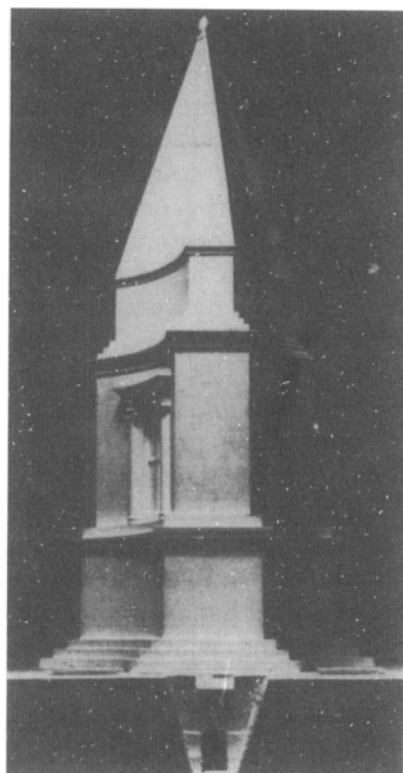


Plate 1.4 Model of the tomb of Syphax at Siga (reconstruction F. Rakob)
 (From R. Horn and C. Rüger, *Die Numider: Reiter und Könige nördlich der Sahara*, Bonn, 1979)

Sabratha and on the island of Djerba.³⁵ Tower tombs of the same type are found as far south as the Fezzan in the first century AD.³⁶ These tombs display an evident iconographic unity: although the prototype was probably the Greek heröon, or hero's monument, the tower tombs seem to have become one of the major symbols of nobility within the Numidian and Libyan heartlands. Just as Masinissa (or his father Gaia) used the massive symbolism of Alexander for his own purposes, so the tower tomb of Syphax was emulated by the kings and nobles right across North Africa, from Siga to the Fezzan, over a period of 200 years.

North Africa under the Numidian Kings

Although at the top of the hierarchy there seems to have been a creative use of Mediterranean cultures, we have far less evidence for what was going on in the countryside. Besides their royal families, what did these kingdoms consist of? Archaeology tells us little, although new evidence is beginning to emerge for a series of villages scattered over the arable land of the Tell.³⁷ These were hut settlements, generally defended by a wall across the neck of a spur. Evidently most of the population lived in these: when Masinissa began his attempt to regain his father's kingdom Numidians 'flocked to him from the fields and the villages'.³⁸ Further south, in the predesert, the economy was probably pastoral, and there are few traces of settlement before the first century BC.³⁹

Some sites were larger and can be properly classified as cities. Of these, those in Mauretania are the best known archaeologically. At Volubilis in the interior are found imposing city walls and an apparently orthogonal plan.⁴⁰ Banasa shows a succession of buildings in *tabiya*, or mud walling, which date from the third century BC or earlier, as well as a flourishing pottery industry,⁴¹ while Tamuda (Tetouan) again has an orthogonal plan, at least from the middle of the second century BC. Of Siga, the western capital of Syphax, however, we know little beyond the royal tomb.⁴²

In Southern Numidia, the territory of the Massyli, is found the site of Ichoukane which, while apparently more primitive than the Moroccan examples, is none the less large (at least 20 ha) and well fortified, with a double enceinte of dry stone, and clearly visible roads. Surface finds of black glaze ware testify to its occupation in the third or second century.⁴³ Cirta was apparently occupied by Punic-style houses with olive presses,⁴⁴ and continued to play the role of capital city. Four other cities – Thimida, Bulla, Hippo and Zama – are qualified as 'Regia', although only the last was a capital. Theveste (modern Tebessa) is identified with the 'Hecatompylos' which is said to have given up 3,000 hostages in the middle of the third century BC.⁴⁵

In general, however, in spite of a multitude of toponyms, the evidence suggests that the Numidian landscape continued to be one of villages, practising mixed farming and paying tribute in kind. This tribute was probably collected in royal granaries, for which we have evidence in a later period in various places –

Mactar, Thala, Capsa, Suthul and Calama. The surplus produced was sufficient for Masinissa to export grain to the Romans in Greece and to gain fame as the man who developed wheat cultivation in North Africa. Inside the former Punic territories Masinissa held vast estates, although their absence outside these areas suggests that the individual ownership of land was influenced by Punic practice.⁴⁶ Outside this area tribute probably remained the principal mode of appropriation of wealth. There is, however, little or no evidence for the growth of institutions other than tribute linking the villages with the monarchs.

The situation was thus in many ways comparable to that of Ptolemaic Egypt: a large number of small farming communities ruled by a bi-cultural, bi-lingual court. The bulk of the cities were coastal, and their main market language was probably Punic – indeed, it is clear that Punic was the language of the countryside around Hippo Regius as late as the time of St Augustine. Under the superficial structure of the Numidian state, however, tribal social structures probably remained strong. This is an obvious instance of Gellner's model of social relationships in agrarian societies: while the elite was able to communicate with the neighbouring elites, their cultural differentiation from the peasants was strongly marked, and their connections with them based on kinship rather than on state structures.⁴⁷

Tribes and the State

From the second Punic War onward we begin to hear of indigenous tribes inside Numidia as historical entities: the elder Pliny states that some 463 of these gave allegiance to Rome.⁴⁸ That not all of these are listed by Pliny is perhaps lucky; there are enough difficulties in any attempt to discover the location, size or structure of the tribes that we do know. It is probable that the Berbers in the classical period were organized in agnatic kinship groups, in Gellner's term, 'segmentary patrilineal peoples', characteristic of tribal society.⁴⁹ Villages might be composed of such extended family groups, sub-divided into clans. But the tendency of clans within a village to feud with each other inhibits the formation of very large units, and makes it difficult for the society to transcend the level of organization of the village itself. It is this split between the indigenous, agnatic structures of the villages and the king –

Hellenistic monarch rather than tribal leader – which may have impeded the development of a state with highly articulated administrative structure. This disjunction is common in tribal societies and flourishes in the literature on the Berbers: thus Montagne contrasts two antithetical types: the ‘egalitarian’ tribal republics, on the one hand, and the autocratic tyranny of the caids, on the other.⁵⁰ There is no evident progression from the relatively anarchic tribal structures to the Hellenistic state: nor, indeed, is there any reason to expect it. From what we have seen, the development of the Hellenistic monarchies in North Africa between the fourth and first centuries BC occurred in emulation of the major polities and was in no way a spontaneous occurrence.

Much modern theory has centred on the tendency for the neighbours of emerging states to emulate the new models they provide, and to take measures to resist the growth of their military power.⁵¹ Berber tribal society from the seventh century onwards was peripheral to two such states, Carthage and, subsequently, Rome. The military resources which these were able to command found a counterweight in the development of the Numidian cavalry (not surprisingly the first thing we hear about in ancient authors), a cavalry which could then be used by the paramount tribal leaders to coerce their own people and raid their neighbours. By the time of Masinissa this cavalry was the primary resource of the state. According to Strabo: ‘The kings are much occupied with the breeding of horses, thus 100,000 foals in a year have been counted with a census.’⁵² Horses were ridden bareback and bridless, and the Numidian mercenaries were being used as Roman auxiliaries by the second century BC. Livy leaves a splendid description of an early second-century troop of 800 Numidian horse: ‘horses and men were tiny and gaunt; the riders unequipped and unarmed, except that they carried javelins with them; the horses without bridles, their very motion being the ugly gait of animals running with stiff necks and outstretched heads’.⁵³ These cavalry units were extra-tribal, and provided an important link between the emerging state and its people.

Dreaming in Tombs: the Cult of the Dead

The political disjunction between the Hellenistic kings and their tribes may also be traced on a religious level: alongside a pro-

foundly rooted cult of the god Baal Hammon, adopted as much, perhaps, from Egypt as from the Carthaginians (the Punic goddess Tanit is singularly absent), there were probably a vast number of local gods and lesser spirits who do not even form part of the same pantheon, still less a coherent belief structure. On another level, however, this apparent disjunction found a resolution in the occupation by the kings of a role in communication with the supernatural. This is a classic feature of the Asiatic, tributary state and is evident in the case of the Numidian kings, who seem to have taken over the important cult of the dead. This cult was one of the distinguishing characteristics of Berbers in antiquity. Their dead were certainly connected with the fertility of the soil and probably exercised some control over the future. Thus Pomponius Mela says that 'The Augilae consider the spirits of their ancestors gods, they swear by these and consult them as oracles, and, having made their requests, treat the dreams of those who sleep in their tombs as responses.' As Camps has shown, provision of chambers for this practice is a standard trait of Berber tombs, from prehistory onwards.⁵⁴

More elaborate shrines are sometimes found. In the extraordinary sanctuary of Slonta in the highlands of Cyrenaica the walls were covered with an intricate jumble of carvings showing numerous people in attitudes of worship, as well as snakes, lizards, horses' heads and, towards the centre of the room, an altar topped by the representation of four pigs.⁵⁵ Behind the altar a small, possibly natural, niche was decorated with disembodied heads. A bench, probably for sleeping, ran along one wall, while a separate chamber may also have been used for the same purpose. Both chambers were originally roofed. Outside are small stone altars pierced with basins, of a type normally associated with funerary cults. The funerary elements are mixed with fairly clear references to fertility – enlarged sexual members, for instance. This complicated iconography and the provision of space for sleepers to dream – the practice is called incubation – suggest that the sanctuary was used for communication with the dead and also suggests the role of the spirits in ensuring human fertility.

Now, if both funerary chapels, such as Slonta, and ancestral tombs were regarded as fundamental links to the supernatural, it is not surprising that tombs are the major monuments left by the Berber kings. Although the form is Hellenistic, their massive size suggests that the dead kings occupied a role as super-ancestors,

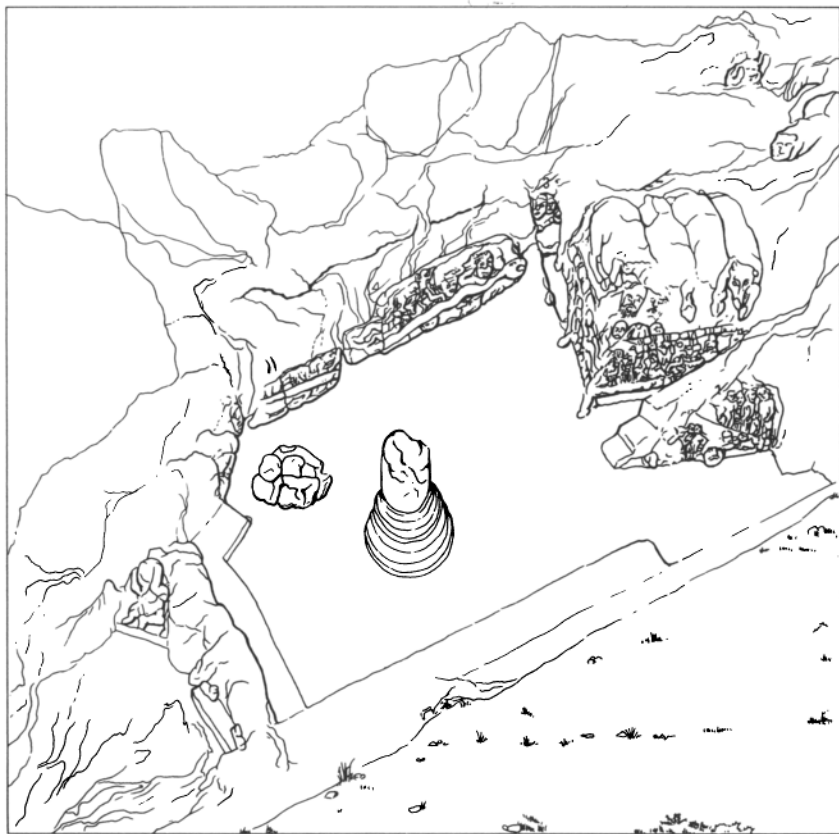


Figure 1.11 *The sanctuary at Slonta*
 (From M. Luni, 'Il santuario rupestre libyco delle immagini a Slonta
 (Cirenaica)', *Cirene e i Libyi*, 12, 415–18)

monopolizing communication with the spirits and acting as intermediaries in the vital connection between spirits and fertility. While we have no evidence that the monarchs were deified in life, after death they were certainly sanctified: Micipsa's tombstone refers to him as the 'living of the living', and to Masinissa as 'among the gods', while a Roman-period stele was erected to king Juba, promoted to a deity in death. It is in this quality that they had a 'right' to tribute, a right which could if necessary be enforced by the use of arms.⁵⁶

The Development of Indigenous Civil Institutions

Although the initial development of the monarchy appears to us as a qualitative leap, under pressure from neighbouring polities, there is some evidence of a subsequent move towards the use of specifically Berber cultural forms and institutions. This is clearest in the large number of inscriptions in the Libyan alphabet which were produced from at least the fourth century BC. The inscriptions use a simplified Semitic alphabet, highly symmetrical and orthogonal. As in Punic, vowels are not transcribed. It is an ideal epigraphic alphabet, but ill-adapted to cursive texts. The rare official texts tended to be written, like Punic, from right to left, while funerary inscriptions are generally inscribed in columns, read from either the bottom or the top. The use of this script was extremely widespread, stretching from the Fezzan to the Canary islands: a form of it survives today among the Tuareg under the name of Tifinagh, and its use is being revived in Kabylia. Although long texts are rare, and the bulk of the inscriptions are funerary, one long bilingual Punic/Libyan inscription does exist, and this is well

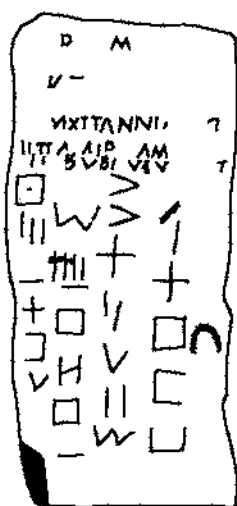


Figure 1.12 Bilingual Latin/Libyan inscription from Morocco
(From L. Galand, *Langue et littérature berbère (vingt-cinq ans d'études)*, Paris, 1979)

≡(←)	≡ m	o
◻ ◯		b
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┐┌ <	┐┐^	g(ğ)
┐	┐┐	d
h m		g
○		r
—	—	z
⊂	⊂*	
⋈	⋈ ⋈	š
⊖ ⊗ ⋈	∞*	q
┐	┐	s
⊃ ≡	ψ	!
⋈ ⋈	⋈ α(p)	f
÷	÷	q
≤ ≤	↑↑	k
	< =	l
┐	┐	m
—	—	n
≈		w
⋈ ⋈	~ ~	y

Figure 1.13 The Libyan alphabet

worth examining for the evidence it gives us for the development of Numidian institutions. The text comes from Thugga, modern Dougga in Tunisia, which by the middle of the second century had been subtracted from the control of Carthage, either by Masinissa or by Micipsa. The translation given by the editors⁵⁷ is as follows:

- 1 The citizens of Thugga have built this temple to the king (GLD) Masinissa, son of the king Gaia, son of the sufete Zilasan, in the year ten of Micipsa.
- 2 The year of the GLD Safot, son of the GLD Afsan. The leaders of 100 being Sanak, son of Banai, [son of Sanak] and Safot, son of Ganam, son of Tanakwa.
- 3 The MSSKWI being Magon, son of Iaristan, son of Sadylan; the GZBI being Magon, son of Safot, leader of 100, son of the GLD Abdesmun.
- 4 The GLDGIML being Zumar, son of Masnaf, son of Abdesmun; the Prefect in charge of construction being Maqelo, son of the king Asyan, son of the king Magon.
- 5 In charge of this work: Asyan, son of Ankikan, son of Patas, and Aris, son of Safot, son of Sanak.
- 6 The builders are: Hanno, son of Iatonbaal, son of Hannibaal, and Niptasan, son of Safot.

It is immediately obvious that while most, but not all, of the personal names are Punic, the titles are not: this is our first glimpse of the development of institutions not directly derived from Punic practice. The most obvious of these is the title GLD. Now GLD can only be translated as ruler – in fact, it is a direct cognate of the modern Berber term *Aguellid*, or paramount tribal chief. The position of GLD seems to be hereditary, as almost all GLDs have fathers with that title. But the large numbers of holders of this post within what seems to be a period of about three generations suggests that it is not a permanent job, while the fact that most of these are not apparently related has suggested to most commentators that the position is similar to that of an eponymous magistrate, possibly annual, and corresponding to the Punic *sufete* (although the Punic text does not translate the word in this way). Now, it seems more than coincidental that almost all the holders of the temporary post should be descended from other such holders. It seems possible to suggest that those eligible for the position GLD at Thugga were the heads of their families, and that the

position rotated through the principal families of the town. This would be clearly related to the modern Berber practice of rotating chieftainships.

We have no way of guessing the functions of the other officials, but it seems fair to say that the city institutions were relatively complex, and had existed at least since the reign of Masinissa. That they were of indigenous origin is suggested by the fact that the Punic text refrains from translating them, and simply transliterates the Libyan words. The Thugga bilingual and associated texts, then, are evidence for a certain indigenous development of civic institutions. Unfortunately, Thugga is unique. There are no similar inscriptions from other towns: what evidence we have suggests that most of the Numidian towns were governed by *sufetes*. Higher administration was carried out by members of the king's families, rather than by agents of coherent administrative structures.

Written Language

What the Thugga bilingual does show, however, is that the Libyan language and script were gradually coming into their own as official forms of expression. In the tenth year of Micipsa's reign (138BC) there was obviously a literate component of the urban population which expressed itself in Berber and not in Punic. How far the use of the Libyan alphabet spread into the countryside is evident from the distribution of its inscriptions: many are found in the wilder areas along the Tunisian–Algerian border, and the vast majority come from rural rather than from urban contexts. The practice of inscribing texts was probably picked up from their neighbours: as Benabou has pointed out, Libyan inscriptions are normally found in areas where either Punic or Roman epigraphy is also present, and it appears to have developed concurrently with the use of these in funerary contexts.⁵⁸ Various elements of Punic iconography – solar discs, palms, pinecones and so on – are also borrowed. There is, however, a strong possibility that in an earlier period the texts were painted, rather than inscribed, and have not survived. Certainly they were spread to the Sahara at a very early date, and often accompany the frescos showing chariots.⁵⁹ The use of the Libyan alphabet and language appears assertive and sym-

bolic rather than functional, a characteristic which it retains to the present day in the use of Tifinagh for love-letters. Outside the main centres of power, it was used for the tombstones of the tribal leaders. The kings, however, expressed themselves in Punic, as we know from Micipsa's tombstone.

In the years which followed the establishment of Masinissa's kingdom there is thus some evidence for the integration of indigenous forms into what started out as a Hellenistic monarchy with a highly Punicized culture. Like all Berber states since, it was essentially bilingual and bicultural and put this duality to good use. Far from the ephemeral entities described by many modern authors, the African states were relatively solid: Masinissa ruled for over sixty years, Micipsa for thirty, and it would have been surprising if their kingdoms had not developed in the meantime. But if this development did exist it was cut short by the events of the end of the century, when the actions of Masinissa's grandson Jugurtha gave the Romans the occasion to annex a large part of Masinissa's old kingdom.

Jugurtha

The history of the next hundred years is one in which the events in Africa became ever more entwined with the politics of the Roman state. By the middle of the first century AD the whole of North Africa was absorbed into the empire. This did not take place without a struggle, however.

The Jugurthine war was in many ways a paradigm for future wars: in it we can see most of the essential characteristics of Berber military resistance. Like Syphax and Masinissa, Jugurtha combined the military skills learned while fighting with the Roman troops with the classically Numidian use of cavalry and guerrilla tactics.

The political geography of North Africa at the end of Micipsa's reign was essentially quadripartite. In 146, at the end of the third Punic war, Rome had annexed Carthage's territories, creating the province of *Africa* and leaving to Masinissa much of the land he had appropriated in the intervening period, as well as his own Numidian kingdom. To the west, in Mauretania, was found the kingdom of Bocchus, while in a long band along the pre-desert

lived the Gaetulians. Although it is often proposed that this group of tribes were exclusively nomadic pastoralists, there is in fact no solid evidence for this; indeed, Strabo refers to scattered habitations in the territory of the Gaetulians, while '*oppida Gaetulorum*' are found in the *Bellum Africum*.⁶⁰ Their principal characteristic seems instead to have been that they lay outside the two great kingdoms of Numidia and Mauretania, and resisted any attempts to tax or control them. They occupied an intermediate zone between the Numidians and the Garamantes, and may at this period have been developing into a coalition, in emulation of their northern neighbours. They certainly considered themselves distinct from the Numidians: as late as the second century AD Apulcius could stress the structural opposition between the two, referring to himself as 'half Numidian, half Gaetulan', and comparing himself to Cyrus who was 'half Mede and half Persian'.⁶¹

In 118BC Micipsa, son of Masinissa, bequeathed his kingdom to his two legitimate sons, Hiempsal and Adherbal, and, on the recommendation of Scipio Aemilianus, to Jugurtha, illegitimate son of his younger brother. Jugurtha followed in his grandfather's footsteps – he had charmed Scipio at the battle of Numantia with his courage and skill – but unlike Masinissa he did not get away with it, and Sallust represents him as more scurrilous than crafty.

After his father's death, Jugurtha promptly killed one cousin and attacked the other in Cirta, the capital. During the capture of the city a number of Roman merchants were killed. The whole episode violated agreements with Rome, and despite Jugurtha's attempts to bribe members of the Senate to accept his *fait accompli*, war was declared in 111BC. The main Roman aim seems to have been the restoration of order: no 'imperialist' ambitions are obvious, but an armed struggle between the various Numidian factions was clearly inconvenient to the orderly progress of Roman trade.

After some initial successes Jugurtha was forced to flee to the Gaetuli, where he raised an army and made contact with the Mauretanian king, his father-in-law, Bocchus. The capture by Marius of his treasury, and by Metellus of most of his kingdom, left Jugurtha without any Numidian troops, but he continued to carry out a certain amount of guerrilla warfare. It was the treachery of king Bocchus, who handed Jugurtha to the Romans, which brought the war to an end, rather than any defeat in battle.⁶²

Throughout the war the Romans pursued a policy of plunder and terrorism, burning fields, villages and towns and massacring the civilian population.⁶³ In 107BC Marius burned the town of Capsa, which had surrendered, massacred its male inhabitants and sold the rest into slavery. He did this because the place was 'convenient for Jugurtha', and its people 'changeable, untrustworthy, and not to be coerced by fear or by favour'. It cannot be supposed that this treatment endeared Rome to the Numidians.

Towards Annexation: Kings, Tribal Leaders and Romans

Between the capture of Jugurtha and Caesar's African war the Roman presence outside their province became increasingly felt. To the small groups of merchants found in Numidian cities outside the province were added groups of veterans in the Medjerda valley. The kingship, which had passed from Jugurtha to his weakminded brother Gauda, to Gauda's son Hiempsal II, and then to his son Juba (plate 1.5), seems still to have been relatively stable and prosperous. The first suggestion that Numidia should become the property of the Romans, made in 50BC, was a piece of fairly transparent opportunism and not immediately successful. But the alliance of Juba I with the faction of Pompey proved to be decisive for the end of his kingdom: Juba was defeated by Caesar at Thapsus in 46BC and his territory divided. The area around Cirta as far as the sea was given to the mercenary Sittius, who had defeated the remainder of the Numidian army, while the rest of Numidia was joined to the old province of Africa. When Bocchus II, the Mauretanian king, willed his kingdom to Octavian in 33BC most of North Africa fell into Roman hands.

The Clients: Juba II and Cleopatra Selene

This was not, however, the end of the Berber kingdoms. Mauretania was treated less as a province than as a convenient place to settle colonies and give land to deserving veterans. In 25BC it was given to Juba II, a son of Juba I who had been brought up in Rome by Augustus and married off to Cleopatra Selene, daughter of Cleopatra and Mark Anthony. His kingdom contrasts

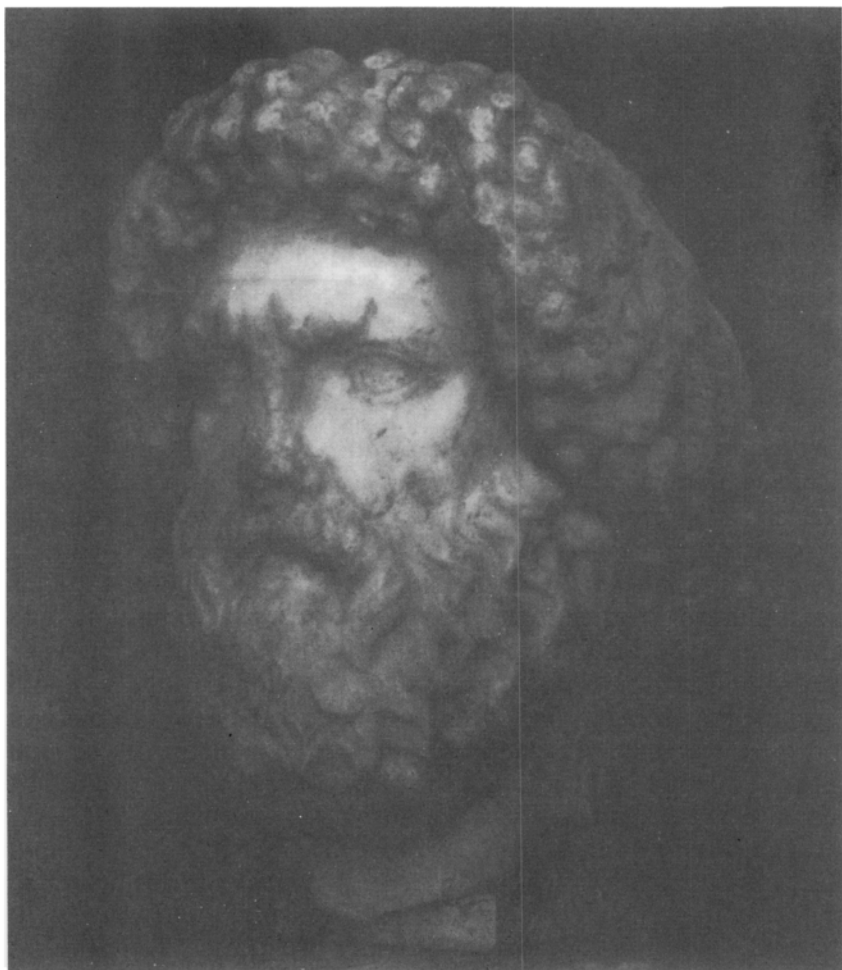


Plate 1.5 Juba I

(From R. Horn and C. Rüger, Die Numider: Reiter und Könige nördlich der Sahara, Bonn, 1979)

in many ways with that of his ancestors, although certain similarities remain. The most obvious of these is its conscious Hellenism – not surprising when even Augustus was modelling himself on Alexander. Indeed, this was a Hellenism filtered through Rome. Like Augustus, Juba constructed a royal tomb for himself which referred to that of Alexander. This is the so-called '*tombeau de la*

Chrétienne just outside Tipasa, to the east of his capital at Iol. It is bigger, if less well constructed, than the earlier Medracen. Other Hellenistic references, such as the cult of Isis, were even more specific, and may be traced to the formidable Cleopatra – who was, after all, a Ptolemy, and a descendant of one of Alexander's generals. Statues were erected to Juba and his son Ptolemy in a gymnasium at Athens.⁶⁴ His new capital at Iol Caesarea was decorated with Italian marble and laid out according to the latest ideas in Roman town planning.⁶⁵ Juba also seems to have attempted to establish an entirely alien economic system at Caesarea: over half of the inscriptions of this period refer to Greek slaves or, at least, slaves with what their patrons thought were Greek names.⁶⁶ As we have little or no evidence for the widespread use of slaves elsewhere in North Africa, and as in Caesarea itself the practice did not survive, it is tempting to think that slaves served less in an economic context than as a form of status symbol – although we may doubt Juba's ability to raise sufficient tribute from the Mauretanians to keep himself in Roman style. The initial influx of slaves must be due in part to Caesarea's ambitions as a Mediterranean capital: their subsequent disappearance may only be explained by the fact that slavery was ill-adapted to the tribal economic structures of Caesarea's territory.

With Juba we thus have a classic example of an artificial monarchy: imposed by Rome on an area which his family had never governed, his kingdom lacks any reference to its indigenous culture. There is no trace of the integration of Berber, Punic and Hellenistic which we can see in the monarchies of Masinissa and Micipsa: indeed, one searches in vain at Caesarea for traces of

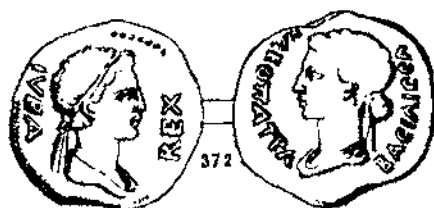


Figure 1.14 Juba II, with his wife Cleopatra Selene
(From J. Mazard, *Corpus Nummorum Numidiae Mauretaniaeque*, Paris, 1955)

anything particularly African. Juba II is one of the most noteworthy examples of the complete co-option of an African aristocrat into the Roman structure. He is hardly the last.

There is some evidence that this monarchy did not go down well with its subjects: between AD3 and 6 the Gaetulians and a tribe known as the Musulamians, from the region of Theveste, engaged in a rebellion which was put down jointly by Juba II and a Roman general. Cassius Dio records the reasons for the revolt as the anger of the Gaetulians at Juba II for submitting to the Romans, and their refusal to do likewise.⁶⁷ As we have seen, the Gaetulians consistently opposed the Numidian kings, and refused to be taxed by them.

Tacfarinas and the Musulamian Revolt

A direct consequence of this revolt was the stationing of a Roman legion at Ammaedara, in the territory of the Musulamians, and the construction in AD14 of a road linking it to the coast. Scarcely was the new road finished when the next revolt broke out, and it is hard not to see a connection between the two. The winter camp was established in tribal territory, and there is some evidence that the Romans had begun to survey and parcel out the tribal land. Indeed, the rebels insistently demanded a 'seat' and a land grant – not the action of nomads, but of a group which feared the appropriation of its territory.

The revolt of the Musulamians comes into better focus than that of the Gaetulians. Tacfarinas, the rebel leader, was a deserter from a Numidian auxiliary force, who gathered around himself a group of men and trained them in Roman military tactics. So successful was this that he became the chief of the Musulamians and started a general rising against Rome in AD17. They were joined by the Gaetulians, along with some 'Mauri' and the Cinithians from the coast near Gigthis.⁶⁸ Thus for the second time in fifteen years the entire southern border of North Africa was in revolt. The story of the uprising is familiar: Tacfarinas, consistently defeated in battle, always managed to escape and adopt guerrilla tactics while raising a new army among the tribes. He was painted in far less sympathetic terms than earlier rebels by Tacitus, for as he was not of royal blood he was obviously a bandit and his offers to treat were considered presumption. But by AD24 it was complained in Rome that fully three triumphs had been celebrated over



Figure 1.15 *Ptolemy of Mauretania*
(From J. Mazard, *Corpus Nummorum Numidiaie Mauretaniaeque*, Paris, 1955)

Tacfarinas, who continued to pillage Africa undisturbed. Several things had worked in his favour, principally the arrival on the Mauretanian throne of Juba II's son Ptolemy. Weak-chinned and incompetent, Ptolemy managed to annoy the Mauretanians into joining the revolt. The rebellion thus became general, as even the king of the Garamantes started actively supporting Tacfarinas. Although it was widespread it proved ephemeral: a decisive victory by the Roman general Dolabella and the destruction of Tacfarinas and the greater part of his army in eastern Mauretania brought to an end the last serious attempt to maintain at least some of North Africa free of Roman control. But this rebellion is significant in that it shows the extraordinary unity both of purpose and of communications between the various groups of indigenous North Africa: it is as if all of Gaul had risen at once against the Romans. Again, we can see the potential for unified organization which periodically emerged during the Roman period.

With the murder of Ptolemy in AD40 the emperor Caligula eliminated the last Berber kingdom in Africa. The revolt which this inspired in Mauretania was echoed by the Musulamians in southern Numidia: this was the last tribal revolt recorded in Numidia for two centuries, although sporadic disturbances probably continued throughout the first century.

The Eclipse of the Berber Kingdoms

The history of the last three centuries before Christ thus shows fairly clearly that the Numidian and Mauretanian kingdoms were states in every sense of the word: they were not 'supertribes', to use

Montagne's term, nor were they the temporary agglomerations of charismatic chiefs. Partially, of course, this was the result of the standard Roman practice of meddling in the affairs of its client kingdoms, but the fact that the Numidian state was controlled by a single dynasty throughout this period says much for the essentially stable relationship between the dynasty and its subjects, a relationship which may have contained a significant proportion of religious awe. The major element of instability was, however, characteristically Berber: it was the lack of any natural succession or clear principle of primogeniture. Thus Masinissa's kingdom, on Scipio's advice, was divided between his sons Micipsa, Gulussa and Mastanabal (although Micipsa was probably paramount⁶⁹). Micipsa disastrously left his to Jugurtha, Hiempsal and Adherbal. Gauda left his to Mastanabal and Hiempsal II, and so on.⁷⁰ As we shall see, problems continued to arise from this lack of a concept of primogeniture. On the other hand, there has been no trace of the disunity which is generally held to derive from the instability of Berber segmentary social structure.

A second element of disruption is visible in those tribes, such as the Gaetulians, who refused to pay tribute to the kings. This is another Berber theme: both Montagne and Gellner speak of the *Makhzan* tribes of Morocco as 'the inner circle who extracted taxes, as opposed to the middle circle who had taxes extracted from them, and the outer circle, in the *bilād al-sība*, or uncontrolled lands, who refused to allow taxes to be extracted from them.'⁷¹ The adjective *Regiani*, which is applied to the tribes Suburbures and Musuni, could be suggested to have the same meaning as *Makhzan*: royal, or of the government. It is perhaps significant that the tribute-paying tribes, like the royal estates, were found in areas which were cultivated early on, and it is likely that tribute was easier to collect from cultivators than from pastoralists, as the tributary relationship between cultivated land and the king was clearer to settled agriculturalists than to tribes such as the Gaetulians which were largely (though not entirely) nomadic.

What is perhaps most striking about the last five centuries before Roman rule is the speed of the transformation of African society. The rapid formation of states, the development of urban structures and of a written language all testify to the ability of the African populations to adapt to and exploit new situations. It is less clear how far these transformations affected the basic nuclei of

society: the family and the clan, or their beliefs. We know, for instance, that some groups remained polygamous throughout the Roman period.⁷² In the same way, a belief in the powers of the spirits of the ancestors was not eclipsed by the introduction of new gods – Hammon, or Tanit – but existed in parallel with them. It is this same duality, or readiness to adopt new cultural forms while retaining the old on a more intimate level, which characterizes the period of Roman colonization.