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**Romanization in the Far West: Local Practices in Western Mauritania
(2nd c. BCE – 2nd c. CE)**

Introduction

Cultural processes in the Straits of Gibraltar have always been dynamic, and still are. Romanization is no exception, but few attempts have been made to understand this process from the global perspective of the Punic territories of the Western Mediterranean. Understanding this problematic interaction in the area we are dealing with in this paper, the Straits of Gibraltar, requires us to move beyond contemporary North-South and East-West boundaries – determined by African-European boundaries to a certain extent – and to consider both shores together, assessing not only the similarities in the relationships they make, but also the differences.

An array of significant practices at the level of the local ground are analysed in this paper in relation to the role of Rome in the Straits – and especially in Western Mauritania – and to the process traditionally known as Romanization. The term Mauritania will be used here in its old toponymic meaning; that is the country whose boundaries were similar to those - *grasso modo* - of the Kingdom of Morocco nowadays. The period considered in this paper ranges, broadly speaking, from the second century BCE to the first century CE. As stated in the aims of the session, we want to challenge traditional approaches to the way Romanization has been conceptualised and explore the way different, multilayered, identities were expressed in different contexts.

A short summary of the economic situation is provided at the beginning of this paper, concentrating on fishing activities, and stressing the correspondences between and the integration of both shores in the context of productive and commercial activities. In the second and third sections, particular expressions of identity from two Mauritanian cities, Lixus and Volubilis, are discussed, and comparisons are made with phenomena from the rural areas.

The Fisheries of the Straits

The end of the Second Punic War (218-202 BCE) imposed Roman hegemony on the Western Mediterranean. Cádiz collaborated with Rome, enhancing its presence in the Mediterranean and thriving due to its increasing commercial links with the Eastern Mediterranean and with the regions along the shores of the Ocean, to both north and south. Their amphorae, cooking pots, coins and inscriptions suggest that Old Western Punic cities did not alter their economic traditions, which were apparently accepted by Rome. In

Lixus, on the south slope, important urban changes are recorded. From the second century BCE large houses, which may have had two stories, were laid out on man-made terraces. They had courtyards, water facilities and storerooms (fig. 1)¹. At the same time, the monumental part of the town on the top of the hill, including the sanctuaries and public storerooms, was rebuilt, and some burials in *hypogea*.

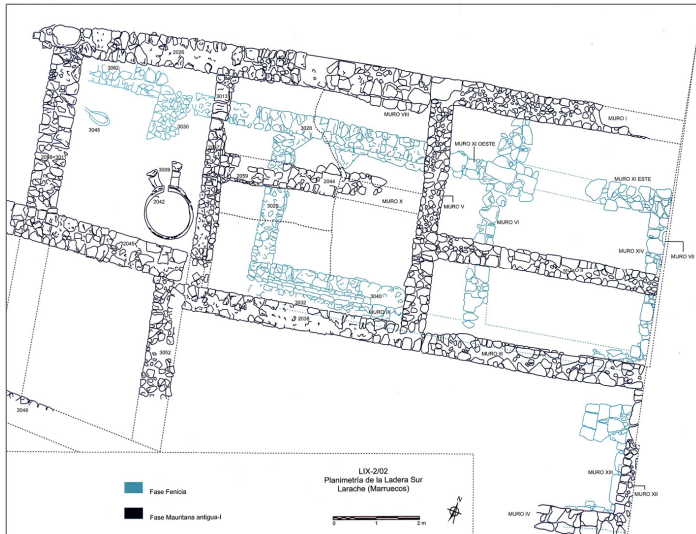


Fig. 1 – Layout of Hellenistic houses on the south slope of Lixus (After ARANEGUI 2005, fig. 34bis).

Concurrently, trends in exchange relations changed. The Straits were an economically integrated area from the third to first centuries BCE, through which long-distance exchange routes channelled products toward the Eastern Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean. In the context of Lixus we can take this point further; the following aspects deserve particular attention. First, a spectacular increase in the number of amphorae of both local and foreign origin is recorded. They represent more than 20% of the recovered ceramics.

The locally produced amphorae stand out in these figures (figs. 2, 3 and 4). We understand 'locally produced' amphora as those coming either from the south of Spain or the north of Morocco, because of the close economic integration of the two shores (see above). The ones from overseas are mainly from Italy, though some of them are from Eastern Mediterranean. This pattern increases from the first century BCE onwards: it seems that amphorae are now much more varied than they were in precedent times, as show by the statistics². Then, ceramic data from these levels can be compared with that from Cádiz³ and Cirta (Constantine)⁴. Products from Italy increased during the first century BCE, although they were never the best represented. They seem to be carried in cargoes along the Northern coast of Africa together with Greek products, namely Rhodian amphorae and the so-called Megarian bowls made in workshops in Delos, and luxurious bronze objects⁵ which may be related

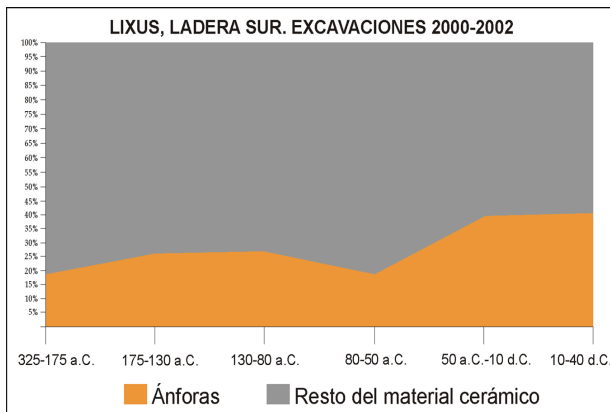


Fig. 2 – Figures of amphorae recorded in the excavations on the south slope of Lixus (orange colour) in relation to the rest of the ceramics (grey colour) (After ARANEGUI 2005, fig. 25).

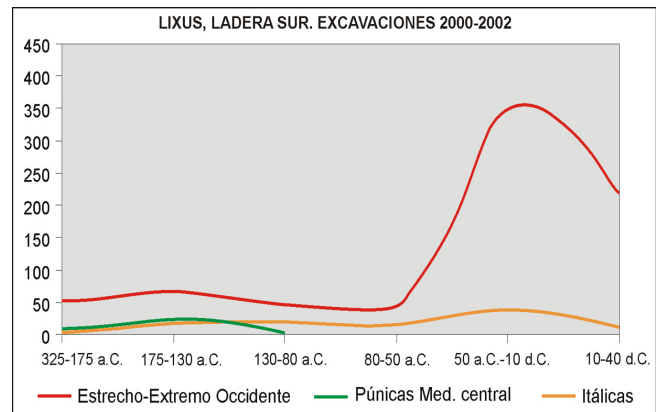


Fig. 3 – Time line recording the origin of amphorae from the south slope of Lixus (After ARANEGUI 2005, fig. 27).

¹ ARANEGUI 2001.
² ARANEGUI ET AL. 2005, 133; see also ARANEGUI 2007.
³ NIVEAU DE VILLEDARY 2003.
⁴ AOULAD TAHER 2004-2005.
⁵ PICCOT-BOUBE 1960; see also BOUBE-PICCOT 1969, 382-383, and 1975, 65-107.

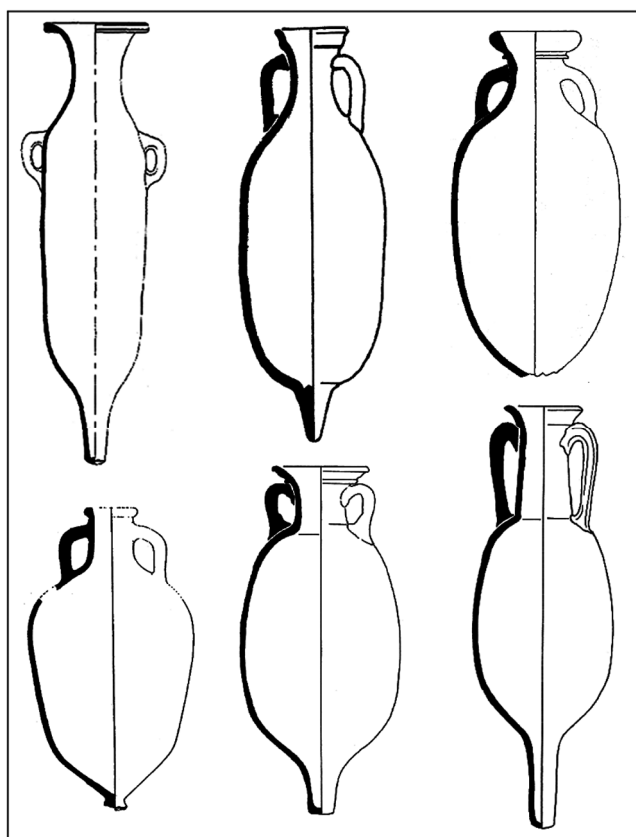


Fig. 4 – The most common locally produced amphorae in the area of the Straits of Gibraltar. Top from left to right: Ramon 7.4.3.3.; Haltern 70; Sala 1/LC 67. Bottom from left to right: ovoid type and two types of Dr. 7/11 (no scale provided with original figure, After ARANEGUI 2005, fig. p. 134).

to particular expressions of power. The Mahdia shipwreck is a fine example of these movements . Finally, storerooms with dozens of amphorae in houses located on the south slope demonstrate commercial entrepreneurship, in the form of retail trade, during the second and first centuries BCE⁶. It seems that Roman presence propelled economic growth, mostly related to the lucrative fishing activity traditionally characteristic of the area. Numbers of local salted fish amphorae increase in the Straits, reaching a peak during the first century BCE and the first century CE, and they also begin to be found across a larger area, such as on the shores of Portugal. These economic activities in the Straits⁷ are certainly related to Rome's interest in expansion toward the Atlantic Ocean, and they are also likely to be strategies to integrate the merchant elites who were in charge of transporting goods across the Mediterranean since the late Punic period.

On this matter, it is worth recalling that Rome had been present on the ground since 206 BCE in the area of Cádiz and there is in fact an interesting reference to the activities of marines from “Gades” in the expeditions of Polybius (146 BCE)⁸, who helped to sail toward the North African coasts and in the military campaigns of Q. Servilius (139 BCE) and I. Brutus (138/136 BCE) on the North West coast of the Iberian Peninsula and the cape of *Finis Terrae*.

The claimed changes are not the only example of economic development in Western north Africa, because urban layouts change in some Numidian cities during this period as well⁹.

Between City and Countryside: Funerary Tumuli

There are limits to assessing the expression of identity on the basis of an analysis of economic and productive activities. In order to better elucidate what Romanization was like in this area and how we should conceptualise the complex processes of becoming Roman, we have to pay attention to cultural and political expressions as well.

Several general points need to be made about the level of political and cultural homogeneity between the shores of the Straits. From a political point of view, homogeneity is not so evident between the two areas. In the North of Africa unstable Hellenistic kingdoms are well-known from historical sources¹⁰. These kingdoms followed Eastern traditions as well as aristocratic models from the Italian peninsula. The

⁶ ARANEGUI et al. 2004.

⁷ ARANEGUI et al. (forthcoming).

⁸ Pliny *Nat.* V, 9-10; MEDAS 2000.

⁹ COLTELLONI-TRANNOY 2005; see also KALLALA et al. 2008.

¹⁰ DESANGES 1984-1985.

overall point is that they were in contact with Rome one way or another, as their kings, including *Massinissa*, *Jugurtha*, *Bocchus*, and *Juba*, were either in alliance with Rome or against her.

Socially speaking the scenario was much more complex because the two shores of the Straits could be labelled a mosaic of people. Literary sources relate an array of names: Tartessians, Iberians, Turdetanians, Gaetuli, Libyans, Libyan-Phoenicians, Lixitans, Ethiopians, Numidians, Maures¹¹ and, of course, Iberian, Punic, Libyan, Greek and Latin writings are recorded¹². This long list of ethnic names and writing systems has interest beyond the concrete identification of the place each may have occupied and beyond the specification of relationships between people and material culture. The point we want to stress is the Hellenistic shape of this world before the annexation of the ancient kingdom of Mauritania¹³ to become the province of Tingitana. The plurality of the Hasmonean or Herodian traditions may be seen as an array of local responses related to changes in imaginary references and identities.

Coltelloni-Trannoy has pointed out that Western Mauritania adopts the model of the Eastern Mediterranean kingdoms: there is not any single capital but several cities with royal residences in order to better get in touch with tribal groups and to establish particular relationships with each one of them.

The archaeological presence of these tribe-based groups becomes apparent in tumuli of late chronology (most likely from the third to first centuries BCE) which are a particular burial practice of the north of Africa, from Algeria (Le Médracen, La Tombeau de la Chrétienne)¹⁴ to Morocco (Mzora, Sidi Slimane);¹⁵ tumuli of such a late period have not yet been found in the Iberian Peninsula.

The tumuli show the presence of tribal chiefs exerting control over resources and communication routes in a given zone. These groups may have been in touch with the kingdom administrators in order to supply products. The fact that they display conspicuous architectural elements in their tombs, megaliths surrounding the tumulus of Mzora or six big white cedar beams in the roof of the chamber of the tumulus of Sidi Slimane -made out of the wood that was channelled toward Greece to manufacture expensive and widely-renowned tables for symposia according to Pliny¹⁶- may be expression of such a power. This power is likely to be related to the above-mentioned economic activities and movements of goods following the Roman presence. However that may be, we have to consider, as we move to the next section, that at the same time power is also being exercised in the cities in relation to the display of new identities.

The Stelae of Volubilis: Movements of People or Invented Traditions?

The socio-political transformations recorded in the ancient Phoenician city of Lixus and the contemporary presence of tribe-based groups in the countryside find an interesting point of comparison in other cities. We are going to focus here on the case of the city of Volubilis. We would like to briefly explore some ideas related to the (re)definition of identities during Hellenistic times in the above mentioned city, which we will take up as a key note in our goal to address postcolonial issues in this session. The outstanding Roman remains from Volubilis are dated to the first and second centuries CE and later. By contrast, the pre-Roman city is not yet very well known. In fact, the earliest evidence of occupation seems to be dated to the end of the second century or the beginning of the first century BCE.

An interesting set of material, with no parallel as yet in Morocco, relates to distinctive ritual practices in the so-called Temple B¹⁷. Although excavations have been carried out since 1915 - and hence there are problems relating phases, materials and constructions- the following components can be isolated:

- Up to 903 small stelae carved out of blocks of local limestone have been found. The homogeneity and repetition of these representations deserves attention: 95% represent male and female

¹¹ ROGET 1924.

¹² HAUSSLER 2002.

¹³ FISHWICK 1971.

¹⁴ RAKOB 1983.

¹⁵ TARRADELL 1952; BOKBOT 2003; GOZALBES CRAVIOTO 2006.

¹⁶ *Nat.* XIII, 29.

¹⁷ MORESTIN 1980; BROUQUIER-REDDÉ *ET AL.* 1998; ICHKHAKH 2006.

individuals, whereas the rest of them show couples and groups of three people. They are represented as performing diverse activities (dancing?) and they seem to be holding objects: among those which can be identified are containers, sticks, baskets, spears and shields (?) (fig. 5). Neither the Tanit sign nor any writing system have been identified on any *stelae*.

- A set of urns containing incinerated -and crushed- bones of small animals (most likely rodents and birds).

The chronology and context of these objects are the crux of the matter. They do not seem to be directly related to any building with any degree of certainty. Interestingly, some pieces of evidence show that they are prior to the first constructions of the so-called Temple B. For instance, there are urns in layers with materials dated to the second half of the first century BCE, although they might be a little bit older according to the kind of materials, namely amphorae Dr. 7/11. Some *stelae* were reused in the walls of the first buildings on the site, dated to the first century CE, and others are reused in walls dated to the second century CE. It seems that the *stelae* were no longer being offered from that century onwards.

In summary, the evidence suggests that the *stelae* should not be dated earlier than the first century BCE, and that by the second century CE they were no longer being deposited. They may be solely a phenomenon of the second half of the first century BCE. Two points should be stressed:

- This is a unique case in Morocco to date, and it is one of the largest collections of *stelae* in North Africa, only outnumbered at Carthage and at El Hofra in Constantine¹⁸.

- Offering a *stela* is not common in the Straits of Gibraltar. There are only a handful of isolated cases Lixus (1 or 2), Tamuda (1) and Banasa¹⁹ to date. Therefore we suggest that offering a *stela* indicates a practice with external links, apparently from the Carthaginian area.

Leaving aside the untenable thesis of the correspondence between indigenous North African people and Carthaginians that Morestin suggested in his publication²⁰, one explanation for this phenomenon may be that the *stelae* are connected to the practices of people of Carthaginian origin, to the point that one could label this area a *tophet*²¹. However, we do not want to simply track down the origin of the *stelae* but rather clarify their significance in Volubilis. Here they are relevant, because of their singularity and date, to an investigation of the display of identities in the general framework of the process known as Romanization.

Our first point is that the ritual actions connected to the (former) Temple B seem to be public performances, or at least they are not held in private domestic areas of the city. At the same time, however,



Fig. 5 – *Stelae* from the Temple B of Volubilis (After MORESTIN 1980, pl. 7, n° 97; pl. 6, n° 75; pl. 1, n°6 and pl. 44, n° 660).

¹⁸ BERTHIER AND CHARLIER 1955.

¹⁹ BEHEL 1997.

²⁰ MORESTIN 1980.

²¹ BROUQUIER-REDDÉ ET AL. 2006.

they are located in an area outside the walls of the city. Moreover, this pattern has not been found to date in other well-known cities in Morocco like Lixus. Thus we would suggest a special connection between these rituals and Volubilis: people going to the sanctuary to worship are either going outside, if they come from the inside of the city, or approaching the city but never going into it, if they come from the outside.

Our second point is a relational one. We stress the fact that this is a practice peculiar to this city. In other words, the *stelae* clearly express a specific way of being Volubilitan in relation to the local area, and to other Mauritanian cities. These unique practices are likely to be connected to political goals at a time when elites from Volubilis were taking a vital role in political decisions in the area, namely the coordination of the territory under the Mauritanian kingdom.

It is likely that political relations with the kingdoms of Bogud (80 BCE) or Boccus II (49/33 BCE) were at stake here. We maintain that people performing these rituals were carrying out distinctive practices as a way of reinventing their identity and expressing a traditional origin for themselves. Thus the *origo* of a group of people in the context of the new developments in the area is invented. In this context we have to bring up the hegemonic interests of the independent Mauritanian kingdom which not only had important links with the Eastern Mediterranean but also with the Roman interests in their way of extracting resources and surplus from the countryside.

These practices denote a creation of membership rituals in Volubilis which were relevant over a couple of centuries, from the first century BCE to the first century CE. It is difficult not to relate these to so-called Romanization, which is under discussion in this session. They may have looked like traditional practices, with a taste of former Punic ways of doing things and further references to the new Roman socioeconomic developments.

Interestingly, the deposition of these stelae and the cinerary urns was somewhat forgotten -maybe consciously deleted? - in the second century CE, when Temple B was constructed and most of the stelae were reused in the walls. The layout of the new building followed particular designs – three corridors around a courtyard, seventeen altars, rooms - with architectural references in other Algerian and Tunisian buildings. Furthermore, the temple was constructed at a time when canonical Roman architecture was also being built in Volubilis, like the forum in the second century and the capitol and the basilica in the third century CE.

This area of the city showed evidence of worship and ritual practices - first, those related to the stelae and the urns, and second, those related to Temple B - that should be seen as different discourses and representations, and the area shows several ways of performing ritual in Roman Volubilis. So, rather than being the display of counter-Roman identities or North African indigenous worship (to *African Saturn*, not attested in Morocco), we are dealing with specific ways of being Volubilitan.

Summing up: New Perspectives

Romanization in Western Mauritania cannot be reduced to an array of social, economic or administrative changes. However, neither should they be forgotten in our analysis, for they are significant for the assessment of the broad global context of Roman hegemony in the Straits. In this paper we have explored the way Roman presence and hegemony are embedded in different situations in the economic and political realm, and in relation to the cities and the countryside. On the one hand, the economic elites served Rome by enhancing the circulation of products and foodstuffs mostly fishing products – from the Atlantic to the metropolis, and beyond, from the late third century BCE.

On the other hand, the situation was socially much more complex and nuanced than a simple adherence to Roman ways of life. We have focused on the way identities were displayed and materialized on three levels: life in cities as the realm of the Mauritanian kingdom over rural people, a specific political management of the territory in relation to the Iberian Peninsula, where there were no Hellenistic *kingdoms*. Romanization in Western Mauritania cannot be reduced to an array of social, economic or administrative changes. However, neither should they be forgotten in our analysis, for they are significant for the

assessment of the broad global context of Roman hegemony in the Straits. In this paper we have explored the way Roman presence and hegemony are embedded in different situations in the economic and political realm, and in relation to the cities and the countryside. On the one hand, the economic elites served Rome by enhancing the circulation of products and foodstuffs – mostly fishing products – from the Atlantic to the metropolis, and beyond, from the late third century BCE. On the other hand, the situation was socially much more complex and nuanced than a simple adherence to Roman ways of life. We have focused on the way identities were displayed and materialized on three levels:

1. Life in cities. As the realm of the Mauritanian kingdom over countryside people, which is a specific political management of the territory in relation to the Iberian Peninsula, where there were not Hellenistic *kingdoms*.
2. The countryside and the control over resources by groups, who materialized their presence in burial mounds.
3. A specific case study of Temple B at Volubilis, where an invented tradition may have played a relevant role in new ways of being Volubilitan in order to become Roman.

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