Leptis Magna nell'età di Augusto

- ***Leptis Magna*: the enclave of the Augustan imperial cult between Punic roots and new cultural influences in the spirit of concord**

Some inscriptions from public buildings and places of worship in *Leptis Magna* – one of the three cities, along with *Sabratha* and *Oea*, in the ancient *emporia* region – attest to the early manifestations of the imperial cult from the very first years of the 1st century A.D. These tributes were dedicated both to Augustus during his lifetime and to his successor, Tiberius[1]. The reasons behind this phenomenon lie in a series of factors that emerged from the interaction between Roman and Punic cultures. The latter was particularly open to assimilation and transformation, actively incorporating elements of its own distinct identity into local urban planning and architecture. This juxtaposition of cultural influences fostered a form of loyalty toward Augustus, Tiberius, and Livia, as seen, for example, in the local magistrates, the *sufetes,* who bore Punic names – clear expressions of their cultural origins within a *civitas sufetalis* that had not yet fully embraced Roman identity. These magistrates skillfully mediated between traditions, adopting the administrative and religious structures of the empire while integrating them into the city's political, linguistic, artistic, urban and architectural localism[2]. Recognized as a *civitas libera* under Augustus, *Leptis Magna* retained its sufetal government even after being promoted to *municipium* under Vespasian, abandoning it only when it became a colony under Trajan[3].

If no evidence of *flamines* exists for the Augustan and

Tiberian period in Carthage, in *Lepcis Magna* the *flaminatus* is attested as early as 8 B.C. in two dedications from the city's *macellum* – one in Latin (from the main facade on the southwest side of the enclosure wall)[4] and the other one in Neo-Punic (from inside the market, near the eastern *tholos*)[5]. The Latin dedication honors Augustus, son of the deified Caesar, as well as the proconsul and patron *M. Licinius M(arci) f(ilius) Crassus Frugi,* while also mentioning the city's authorities – the *sufetes* and the *flamines Augusti.* The dedicant, *Annobal Himilchonis Tapapi f(ilius) Rufus*[6], a *sufes* and thus a representative of the *civitas libera* government of *Leptis*, held a prominent role within the Roman religious system as a *flamen.* At the same time, he also bore the religious title of *praefectus sacrorum.* This latter position has been interpreted in different ways: some scholars see it as a continuation of a Punic religious office, the *addir 'azarim,* within a local culture still deeply rooted in its traditions but engaged in dialogue with Roman authorities[7]. Others, however, argue that the title of *praefectus sacrorum* was created in the Augustan period and was of Latin and Roman origin, a priesthood that only gained prominence in specific African contexts, such as *Leptis*,and in *Baetica*[8]*. Annobal Rufus* is also mentioned in a dedication to Augustus, inscribed on an architrave block of the *Leptis* theater, framed within a *tabella ansata*, and dated to A.D. 1-2. In addition to his roles as *sufes, flamen* and *praefectus sacrorum*, he is celebrated for his civic virtues as *Lepcis* benefactor*, ornator patriae* and *amator concordiae*. Below the Latin text, two lines in Neo-Punic appear (Fig. 6)[9]. The same inscription is found twice more within the theater – at the eastern exit[10] of the orchestra and at the eastern entrance[11].

Leptis Magna represents an enclave where the imperial cult took root in Africa from the very beginning of the principate. The evidence of the *flaminatus* held by members of the local aristocracy must be understood within a broader context, one

that highlights the city's strong connection to the Julio-Claudian dynasty from its earliest figures, Augustus and Tiberius. To fully grasp this dynamic, it is necessary to consider additional elements that contribute to what has been aptly described as the «pouvoir des images» from which emerge the «images du pouvoir impérial»[12].

In this regard, the text of the Neo-Punic inscription from *Lepcis,* originally placed on the architrave of the Temple of Rome and Augustus[13], has proven to be highly important. It refers to a statuary group consisting of ten representations of the Julio-Claudians, dating back to the Tiberian era (between 23 and 31 A.D.). The main focus is on the enthroned statues of the dea Roma, Augustus, Tiberius and Livia, a group symbolizing the reigning emperor Tiberius positioned between his adoptive father, his biological mother, and, above all, the dea Roma, the inspirer and protector of the emperors' actions[14].

For *Leptis,* and more generally for North Africa and other provinces, an idea that had already gained traction in the nineties remains valid: that a variety of sources must be considered in defining the manifestations of the imperial cult. In this sense, the written word of epigraphic text is not the sole medium that delineates places of worship and the cult itself. Regarding monumental statuary as a source, the question arose as to whether it served only celebratory purposes or also had a cultic function. In this case of the statuary of *Leptis*, it was evident that the Temple of Rome and Augustus, with its gallery of imperial portraits, served both purposes. Meanwhile, for imperial statues placed in open spaces, it was noted that: «…il culto è implicito nell'evidente funzione celebrativa che hanno le statue data la loro posizione nei fori e le loro dimensioni molto al di sopra di quelle naturali e allusive dunque alla natura divina degli imperatori, anche se l'eventuale svolgimento di cerimonie cultuali doveva associarsi ad altari all'aperto e non alle

singole statue»[15]. We believe it is necessary to reflect on an element often taken for granted regarding dedications to Augustus during his lifetime, which emphasize his descent from a god – the *divus Iulius.* Through this connection, the emperor himself is enveloped in a superhuman aura, oscillating in his life and actions on the boundary between the human and the divine as he moves inevitably toward apotheosis. From *Leptis* come the dedication of 2 B.C. by the *Fulvii Lepcitani* to Emperor Caesar Augustus, described as *conservator*, son of the *divus*[16]. These same *Fulvii Lepcitani* were also responsible for a dedication in 3 B.C. to Gaius Caesar, Augustus' grandson and designated successor[17]. A later dedication (9-10 A.D.) was made by *L. Caninius L. f. Gallus XVvir sacris faciundis proconsul* and *patronus* to Augustus,son of *divus Caesar*[18]. In the final years of Augustus' life, his *numen*[19] appears in an inscription from *Leptis Magna* related to the *chalcidicum* built by *Iddibal Himilis f(ilius) Caphada Aemilius*

SEE NOW:

A. Mastino, P. Ruggeri (eds), *The beginnings of the "imperial cult" in Carthage and Leeptis Magna between Augustus and Tiberius: two African capitals compared,* in Augustus *and the Roman* Religio: a *Time of Respect for Traditions and Changes. Studies in honorem et Sacram memoriam Santiago Montero Herrero,* Edited by Sabino Perez-Yébenez, Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2026, pp. 178-212

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[1] Schwob Blonce 2024, 392; Lefebvre 2018, 151.

[2] Here, the Italian translation of the English term *localism* is used as the title of a paragraph in J. Crawley Quinn's article, 59.

[3] *IRTrip.*353. Mastino, Zucca 2004, 1995-2023.

[4] *IRTrip.*, 319 = *AE* 1951, 205 = *AE* 1998, 1513 = Horster

2001, 418 = Saastamoinen 2010, no. 6 = EDCS-06000317, 9 – 8 a. C.: *[Imp(erator) Caesar Divi f(ilius) Augustus] co(n)s(ul) XI imp(erator) XIIII trib(unicia) pot(estate) XV pont(ifex) m[axi]mus // M(arco) Licinio M(arci) f(ilio) Crasso Frugi co(n)s(ule) augure proco(n)s(ule) patrono flaminib(us) August(i) Caesaris Iddib[a]le Arinis f(ilio) [Pil]one(?) [et – A]nnobalis [f(ilio) –]ON[– su]fetib(us) M[uttun Annonis f(ilio) –] // Annobal «Himilcho» f(ilius) Tapapius Rufus sufes flamen praefectus sacrorum de sua pequ[nia] faciun[dum coe]ravit idem[que] de[d]icavit.* See also Crawley Quinn 2010, 65 no. 1a.

[5] Amadasi Guzzo, Levi della Vida 1987, no. 21 (= *IPT* 21).

[6] Bassignano 1974, 25 e 30 the author, regarding the onomastics of *Tapapius Rufus*, offers various possible interpretations derived from the inscriptions: 1) *Annobal Himilchonis f. Tapapius Rufus* (*IRTrip.* 319), 2) *Annobal Himilchonis Tapapi f. Rufus* (*IRTrip.* 322-323), 3) *Annobal Rufus Himilchonis Tapapi f.* (*IRTrip.* 321). Here, based on the examination of *IRTrip.* 321-323 it is considered that *Annobal Rufus* accompanied by the patronymic *Himilcho Tapapius* is the correct form.

[7] Rives 200, 425-436, especially 434.

[8] Perea Yébenes 1998, 1441- 1456.

[9] *IRTrip.*, 321 = *AE* 1938, 3 = *AE* 1941, 105 = *AE* 1948, 6b = *AE* 1998, 1513 = *AE* 2014, 9 = *AE* 2014, 1477 = Saastamoinen 2010, no. 8 = EDCS-6000319, (1-2 d.C.): *Imp(eratore) Caesare divi f(ilio) Aug(usto) pont(ifice) max(imo) tr(ibunicia) pot(estate) XXIV co(n)s(ule) XIII patre patr(iae) / Annobal Rufus ornator patriae amator concordiae / flamen sufes praef(ectus) sacr(orum) Himilchonis Tapapi f(ilius) d(e) s(ua) p(ecunia) fac(iendum) coer(avit) / idemq(ue) dedicavit // ḥnbᶜl myšql ʾrṣ mḥb dᶜt htmt zbḥ špṭ ʾdr / ᶜzrm bn ḥmlkt ṭbḥpy rʾps btʾrm btm pᶜl wʾyqdš.*

See also Crawley Quinn 2010, 65-66 no. 2a which hypothesizes, regarding the position of the inscription in relation to the theater, that it is «over external entrance? »

[10] *IRTrip.*, 322 = *AE* 1998, 1513 = *AE* 2014, 9 = *AE* 2014, 1477 = Saastamoinen 2010, no. 9 = EDCS-6000320, (1-2 A.D.): *Imp(eratore) Caesare divi f(ilio) Aug(usto) pont(ifice) max(imo) tr(ibunicia) pot(estate) XXIV / co(n)s(ule) XIII patre patriae / Annobal ornator patriae amator concordiae / flamen sufes praef(ectus) sacr(orum) Himilchonis Tapapi f(ilius) Rufus / d(e) s(ua) p(ecunia) fac(iendum) coer(avit) idem(que) dedicavit.*

[11] *IRTrip.*, 323 = *AE* 1998, 1513 = *AE* 2014, 9 = *AE* 2014, 1477 = Saastamoinen 2010, no. 10 = EDCS-6000321, (1-2 A.D.): *Imp(eratore) Caesare divi f(ilio) Aug(usto) pont(ifice) max(imo) tr(ibunicia) pot(estate) XXIV / co(n)s(ule) XIII patre patriae / Annobal ornator patriae amator concordiae flamen / sufes praef(ectus) sacr(orum) Himilchonis Tapapi [f(ilius)] Rufu[s] d(e) s(ua) p(ecunia) f(aciendum) coer(avit) idemq(ue) dedicavit.*

[12] Hurlet 2000, 297-364.

[13] *IRTrip*, 28; *IPT*, 53-57.

[14] Hurlet 2000, 305-306. For the dea Romasee *supra* “The panel portraying the dea Roma”. The male and female members of the dynasty: Augustus, Tiberius, Germanicus, and Drusus Minor; Livia, Agrippina the Elder, Antonia Minor, Vipsania Agrippina, and Livilla.

[15] Pensabene 1994,153-168, especially 154.

[16] *IRTrip.*, 320 = EDCS-6000318, (2 B.C.): *Imp(eratori) Caesari divi f(ilio) Aug(usto) / pont(ifici) max(imo) co(n)s(uli) desig(nato) XIII / tribunicia po[t]estate XXI / Fulvii Lepc[itani c]ons[er]vatori*.

[17] *IRTrip.*, 328 = EDCS-6000326, (3 a.C): *C(aio) [Cae]s[a]ri Augusti f(ilio) co(n)s(uli) / [d]es[ig(nato) p]ont(ifici) princi[pi iu]ventutis / Fulvii Lepc[i]t[a]n[i d(onum) d(ederunt)].*

[18] *AE* 2008, 1617 = EDCS-51500072, (9-10 A.D.): *[Imp(eratore) Caesare divi f(ilio) Aug(usto) pont(ifice) max(imo) imp(eratore) XIX trib(unicia) pot(estate) XXXII co(n)s(ule) XIII patre patriae] // [L(ucius) Caninius L(uci) f(ilius) Gallus X]Vv(ir) [sacris f]aciu[ndis co(n)s(ul) proco(n)s(ul) patronus dedicavit].*

[19] See *supra* § 3.