

The Archaeological Museum of Sousse

Sousse, in Tunisian vernacular “Soussa,” is a toponym of Arabic origin whose meaning remains obscure. Its ancient name, having obvious Semitic tones, is Hadrumetum. Formerly capital of the Roman province of Byzacena,¹ Sousse is today the capital of the Tunisian Sahel, better known as “the Pearl of the Sahel.” From the origins up to the present, human occupation there has never been interrupted, which resulted in the quasi total disappearance of its ancient remains. It is undoubtedly in Sousse, more than anywhere else in Tunisia, that preventive archeology debuted through the efforts of the Sousse Archaeological Society founded in 1902. The new constructions and major projects were always pretexts to start systematic excavations; the destruction caused by the World War II bombings had only stimulated this activity.

The most beautiful archaeological objects saved then recovered are displayed in the new museum found in the basement of the court of the Kasbah, a monument completed in the 9th century (1 photo). Inaugurated in June 2012, it covers an area of about 2,000 m² and contains collections that are mainly from the ancient Hadrumetum². These collections allow, not without difficulty, to shed light on certain aspects of its ancient history, from its origins to the Arab-Muslim conquest. Two juxtaposed small rooms are dedicated to this purpose: the tophet room, displaying a funerary and votive material dating from the late 7th century BC to the early 2nd century AD, and the Early Christian hall where are essentially exposed funeral mosaics from the catacombs. Moreover, in a large room that almost merges with the museum, beautiful mosaics are exhibited together with some sculptures and other objects ... that shed light on the daily life of Andrumetines and some other neighboring cities.

The origins of Hadrumetum: the tophet

Together with Carthage and Utica, Hadrumetum was one of the oldest cities of ancient Africa. Ancient sources consider it a Phoenician foundation, which is, according to the Roman historian Sallust³, older than Carthage. Simple Maritime and Commercial relay at the beginning, it had become one of the largest cities in Africa when Rome destroyed Carthage in 146 BC. We know that Hadrumetum sided with Rome and had thus become a free city and friend of the Roman people. This freedom allowed it to manage its own affairs according to its own customs and traditions, and placed it outside the power (potestas) of the provincial governor. The Manifestation of this freedom could be seen in the survival, up until the end of the first century BC, of local religious practices including, in particular, the worship of Baal-Hammon, to which the most loyal of the Andrumetine society did not hesitate to offer one of their children, the first born in general⁴ in holocaust. These sacrifices were undertaken in an open-air sanctuary called the tophet.

¹ Province of Roman Africa created around 295 following the fragmentation of the great province of proconsular Africa.

²There are also items from neighboring sites like Lamta, ancient Lepti Minor, El -Jem, ancient Thysdrus.

³ *Guerre de Jugurtha*, 19.1.

⁴ Tertullian, Apology , 9: "They publicly sacrificed children in Africa to Saturn up to the proconsulate of Tiberius, who attached the priests themselves to votive crosses in the trees of their temple that protected them with their shadow from these hideous crimes; witness the soldiers of our country, who executed the order of the

The excavations that were conducted there were supervised by P. Cintas⁵, confirm this activity undertaken at the end of the 7th century BC (2 sacrifice scenes, Bardo). The results of these excavations are exhibited in one of the rooms of the museum where we find steles and ceramics, including funeral urns (3-6 Photos). The history of this monument is illustrated by a large panel displaying a vertical stratigraphy demonstrating an uninterrupted sacrificial activity during 8 centuries approximately, a life greater than that of the Tophet of Carthage (7 Stratigraphy). The purpose of the monument such as the principle of burial is the same as in the tophet of Carthage. It is a six-floor cemetery where were placed urns containing the charred remains of children and animals sacrificed for the most famous divine couple of Punic Africa, Baal- Hammon and Tanit. The procedure is well known: an urn full of bones and various objects placed in a circular alveolus of about thirty centimeters in diameter delimited by stones and topped with a pebble, a stele or a cipo. When all the sacrificial area is entirely filled with urns, and when there is no more room to accommodate one more, they proceed with backfilling the whole with packed earth separating thus the old saturated level with the newly prepared area for future sacrifices. During the eight centuries of activity, this operation had been conducted six times.

Methodically excavated by P. Cintas, the tophet of Sousse helps answer the question that still causes too long or, even, today, useless discussions about these firstborn who were burnt as offerings to Baal-Hammon: were they dead or alive at the sacrificial ceremony? Excavations have revealed a major shift from the late 1st century BC which corresponds to the fifth level of our stratigraphy: the remains of cremated children have disappeared and we only find now animal remains. This practice was perpetrated until the early 2nd century AD, when the sanctuary had finally stopped working. However, in the course of the middle of the first century BC, between 49 and 46, Africa, especially the Tunisian Sahel, was the scene of a civil war that ended with the victory of the Caesarean party over that of Pompey. Having sided with Pompey, Hadrumetum was struck with a heavy fine, the largest when compared with the ones imposed on other punished African cities⁶. The outcome of this war probably explains the radical change in the cultural practices of the Andrumetines. Indeed, what they could do, thanks to the regime of freedom, is now prohibited because they are no longer free. Caesar or rather his heir, Octavian, subtly put an end to the regime of freedom of the city without degrading the latter to a lower rank but by transforming it into a municipality. Thus, the old free city had become a Roman town, a Julian municipality now subject to the power of Rome and its governor. This abandonment also meant the giving up of sacrifices, in clear compliance with the Roman law, which implies that some of the children previously dedicated to Baal-Hammon were alive⁷. Stopping the activity of the Tophet in the early 2nd century BC coincides with the promotion of the city to the rank of a

proconsul. However, today, these sacrilegious practices continue in secret. We find a detailed description of the scene in Diodore de Sicile, 20.14 : "There was a bronze statue representing Kronos , hands extended and tilted towards the ground, so that the child was placed there and would fall rolled into a pit filled with fire ... It also seems that the old Greek myth, according to which Kronos devoured his own children, is explained by the custom of the Carthaginians."

⁵ P. Cintas, Le sanctuaire punique de Sousse, *Revue Africaine*, 1947, p. 1-80.

⁶ 8 million sesterces in total: three million to **Andrumetines** and five million to the Romans who lived there. For comparison, the neighboring city Thysdrus, today, El Jem, had to pay only a quantity of wheat because it was poor (Pseudo-César, *The War in Africa*, 97).

⁷ S. Aounallah, Le statut d'*Hadrumetum* à la fin de la république et sous le Haut-empire », *Africa* 23, 2013, p. 93-102.

Roman colony by Trajan between 97 and 118⁸. Presumably, as in Carthage, a Saturn temple more in line with Roman habits replaced the tophet.

By transforming Hadrumetum into a colony, Trajan made of it a management center of the imperial domains, which the texts call the regio Hadrumetina. The person responsible for the management of these domains, the procurator, resided there together with the staff assisting him. It is understood that, consequently, the official art was particularly diffused in it. Both events were undoubtedly celebrated by Andrumetines who had to erect portraits and statues of Trajan and his inner circle in the different public spaces of the city.

The imperial portraits

The museum contains one of the portraits of Trajan of which only the head remains. The head has massive proportions that relate, according to specialists, to several types of the aging emperor. Some think it is a posthumous portrait erected by local authorities to thank the founder of the colony⁹ (8 photo). It should also be attributed to the time of Trajan a triumphal procession made of gray marble of which only the lower part representing a life-size horse remains, the driver of a chariot and a captive in excessive proportions seated and chained (9 photo). On the rounded side of the chariot is carved a Triton unfolding to the back one of its fish tails. The hands hold marine motifs, a conch and a rudder; they all probably constitute a reference to the god Neptune, the genius of Hadrumetum. Found near the Great Mosque of Sousse in 1898, on the forum or close to it, this element was meant to decorate a triumphal arch erected in honor of Emperor Trajan (98-117), most likely on the occasion of his victory over the Dacians in 102 or over the Parthians in 116. This dating is also suggested by the gown worn by the triumphant victor, which is characteristic of the late 1st and early 2nd century¹⁰.

If the attribution of a bust to Emperor Hadrian is not disputed (Photo 10), we find it difficult to identify a worn out female portrait found during the dredging of the harbor in 1898. Some attribute it to Marciane or Matidia, sister and niece of Trajan¹¹; others, like A. Carandini¹², attribute it to Sabine, Hadrian's wife. The kinship between these women and the similarity of their portraits, particularly as regards the details of hairstyle¹³, make their identification difficult. However, we should probably opt for Sabine (11 photo) whose images were widely disseminated in Africa¹⁴. This portrait is also a reproduction of a Carthaginian workshop which spread widely representations of the imperial couple after Hadrian's African trip in 128. This dissemination shows the Carthaginians and Africans' in general gratitude of the bounties granted by this Emperor during his African tour¹⁵. The

⁸ CIL VI, 1687 : *colonia concordia Ulpia Traiana Augusta Frugifera Hadrumetina*.

⁹ Louis Foucher, *Hadrumetun*, Paris 1964, p. 148-149, pl. X, a,b ; Nathalie de Chaisemartin, *Les sculptures romaines de Sousse et des sites environnants*, École Française de Rome, 102, 1987, p. 32-33, n° 25.

¹⁰ L. Foucher, *Hadrumetum*, 1964, p. 146-149, pl. IXa ; N. de Chaisemartin, *Les sculptures romaines de Sousse et des sites environnants*, École Française de Rome, 102, 1987, p. 49-51, n° 43.

¹¹ In particular, L. Foucher, *Hadrumetum*, 1964, p. 149.

¹² A. Carandini, *Vibia Sabina*, 1969, p. 138-142.

¹³ Sabine is the daughter of Matidia who is herself the daughter of Marciane.

¹⁴ N. de Chaisemartin, *Les sculptures romaines de Sousse et des sites environnants*, École Française de Rome, 102, 1987, p. 37, n° 29.

¹⁵ *Vie d'Hadrien*, 20.4-5 et 22.14.

imperial family is still represented by a portrait attributed to Fulvia Plautilla (12 photo), wife of Emperor Caracalla (211-217), whose physical characteristics can be seen on monetary emission from the early 3rd century¹⁶.

Divine statues

The sacred area of Baal was the most important sanctuary in Hadrumetum before the Romans arrived. We know the popularity of this cult in Africa, particularly in localities where Carthaginian influences are felt. This cult was replaced by that of Saturn/Kronos who inherited the popularity of Baal in Roman Africa¹⁷. A temple of Saturn had thus to be erected in Hadrumetum most likely in place of the old Tophet. A life-size marble statue (13 photo) shows him as an old man (senex) standing, resting on the right leg, with a naked body, except for the head and shoulders. According to experts, the technique of execution allows to date this statue back to the Antonine period, probably during the reign of Commodus (180-192)¹⁸.

The cult of Apollo was probably introduced by the Greco-Roman community strongly present in Hadrumetum since the fall of Carthage in 146 BC. A statue represents Apollo standing, resting on the right leg, the left knee forward. The slightly marked musculature indicates he was raising his arm. We can easily identify him carrying a zither of which only the tip above the left leg remains (Photo 14). The draped Apollo of Sousse could be a replica of the statue of Apollo Sosianus in Rome which is the work of the famous Greek sculptor Timarchides; it dates probably back to the Antonine or Hadrianic era (117-161)¹⁹. This life-size statue most probably decorated a temple which hosted a statuette of Diana/Artemis (Photo 15), her twin sister, represented, like her brother, the right leg slightly bent back, the left leg put forward. The attributes of the huntress goddess are evoked by a sitting dog that looks at her, a quiver behind the right shoulder and boots that rise up to mid-calf the top edge of which contains a hunted animal. By her position, Diane appears on alert, ready to hunt prey²⁰.

Other sculptures

Among the statuettes, we can mention that of a black child found during the excavations of a dwelling attributed to the second century. It is a child standing leaning on the left leg and hugging a dove recognizable through the three tufts of feathers from its tail (Photo 16 ???). The eyes are inlaid with white marble in the center. Specialists believe that the child with the bird has funerary origins. The fact that he puts tenons on his back, suggests that he was leaning on a small column belonging to a monument. This sculpture is an intermediate model between the idealization of the head and grotesque ugliness: the exaggeration is

¹⁶ L. Foucher, *Hadrumetum*, 1964, p. 257 ; N. de Chaisemartin, *Les sculptures romaines de Sousse et des sites environnants*, École Française de Rome, 102, 1987, p. 37-39, n° 30.

¹⁷ For more information on Saturne in Roman Africa, see M. Leglay, *Saturne Africain*, 1966 (2 vol.).

¹⁸ N. de Chaisemartin, *Les sculptures romaines de Sousse et des sites environnants*, École Française de Rome, 102, 1987, p. 18-20, n° 7.

¹⁹ L. Foucher, *Hadrumetum*, 1964, p. 150 ; N. de Chaisemartin, *Les sculptures romaines de Sousse et des sites environnants*, École Française de Rome, 102, 1987, p. 15-16, n° 1.

²⁰ L. Foucher, *Hadrumetum*, 1964, p. 152 ; N. de Chaisemartin, *Les sculptures romaines de Sousse et des sites environnants*, École Française de Rome, 102, 1987, p. 27, n° 17.

evoked by the proportions of the body, small arms and big belly, and the sinuous attitude treated with great mannerism. The diffusion of this type of representation dates back to the principality of Hadrian (117-138)²¹.

Hunting Cupid is represented by an obese child sitting on a rock (Photo 17). The head, upper limbs and wings are missing (Photo). The bow and quiver with the cover are placed on the rock. This statuette dating from the Severan period (early third century) was supposed to decorate a fountain²².

The mosaics

Figurative and polychrome mosaics have emerged in Africa since the 2nd century, particularly in Carthage and Utica, but also in other port cities. It is believed that an important workshop existed in the city of Acholla, today Botria, situated near Sousse. Rich Andrumetines loved to decorate their mansions with mosaics²³; they had a preference for the theme of water and for water deities. There are also common themes, such as those related to peasant life and the representation of the seasons. The art of mosaic has been enriched starting from the beginning of the 3rd century after the appearance of hunting societies which disseminated mosaics that served their propaganda. Starting from that date, evergetism has increasingly turned towards the organization of parties and shows rather than the construction of public buildings. There is no reason to believe that these mosaics contain a considerable number of clichés; apart from, perhaps, the mosaics inspired from the Greco-Roman mythology and Nilotic themes, these mosaics deliver valuable information on the monuments of the city, especially those related to shows, as well as to, social, cultural, economic and everyday life.

The mosaics with mythological themes

Mythological scenes, usually inspired by Hellenistic paintings, are numerous. The most common are seascapes that represent either Oceanus, god of the sea, or Neptunus, master of sea water and fresh water and spirit of the place (genius loci). These representations are undoubtedly the result of a choice of Andrumetine ship owners wishing to honor the gods who protected their trade. The figures of Ocean are generally invariable: often represented by an isolated head decorating the pool of a Roman house from the mid-2nd century. The background is decorated with the head of Ocean (Photo 18); the hair, letting out crab legs, and beard washed by the waves, are dyed in different marine colors, with a predominantly green colour as in Neptune (below). Around the head, an aquatic fauna representing scorpion fish, torpedo, bream, eel, crab, sea urchin, squid, octopus and cuttlefish. The walls, now restored, were decorated with two dolphins, some rocks and a boat²⁴.

²¹ L. Foucher, *Hadrumetum*, 1964, p. 170-171 ; N. de Chaisemartin, *Les sculptures romaines de Sousse et des sites environnants*, École Française de Rome, 102, 1987, p. 47-49, n° 42.

²² L. Foucher *Hadrumetum*, 1964, p. 259, pl. XXXIIa; Nathalie de Chaisemartin, *Les sculptures romaines de Sousse et des sites environnants*, École Française de Rome, 102, 1987, p. 20, n° 8.

²³ In a house of Acholla , all rooms were paved with mosaics , approximately 1175 m2. Cf. S. Gozlan , The house of triumph Acholla

²⁴ L. Foucher, *Inventaire des mosaïques (feuille n° 57 de l'Atlas Archéologique, Sousse)*, Tunis 1960, p. 17-18, n° 57.041, pl. VIIIa.

Ocean is represented on a beautiful mosaic that decorated the floor of a bedroom of a Roman house of the 2nd century²⁵. As expected in such a context, the owner ordered a seduction scene, alternating resistance and consent, followed in a regular and detailed way by a discreet Ocean, as he is shown wearing a mask placed at the intersections of eight medallions on which are drawn the scenes in question. As usual, the hair of the god is disordered, but the beard in two points, is better treated. Depending on the scene he was looking at, the mask is smiling, cheerful, sad, indifferent or mocking. Each medallion represents a Satyr to conquer a Bacchante: left to right and top to bottom, the first four medallions represent resistance scenes: the exhibitionist and enterprising Satyr tries to sit a Bacchante on his lap, pull her to him with force and undress her in the same way. The last four scenes reveal a much less aggressive environment: two scenes of dancing, the Bacchante sitting on Satyr's knees and finally, an invitation scene where the Bacchante, back and buttocks released, invites the Satyr to follow her to a conclusion. The periphery of the mosaic made of half medallions is occupied by animals: two chickens, partridges, a greasy half reclining Silenus, a panther playing with a rhyton, a hare eating a bunch of grapes, two peacocks quarreling in front of a kantharos, a duck, a gazelle grazing, and finally a horned Pan with goat²⁶ feet leaning over a crook (pedum) (Photo 19).

Satyr and Bacchante naturally accompany Dionysus/Bacchus, also very honored in Hadrumetum²⁷. Bacchus appears on a panel that decorates the left side of the living room of a Roman house of the 3rd century (Photo 20). In a frame with corners trimmed with craters letting out vine shoots that trap the bacchoi pickers, ducks, thrushes and partridges. One can say that this is one of the most beautiful mosaics in the world celebrating his Indian triumph²⁸. Young and beardless, sitting on a two-wheeled chariot, he straightens the bust as a sign of victory. Wearing a long-sleeved gown, he holds in his right hand a long spear. At his side, slightly above, stands a naked Victory with wings wide open holding a palm with pointed leaves. In the middle of the mosaic, a pretty bacchante is striking on a tambourine with crab legs. Preceded by a Satyr, four tigresses delicately pull the chariot. Another Satyr closes the procession. Below, we find a panther drinking from a kantharos in front of which there is a lion ridden by a child Dionysus.

One of the most beautiful mosaics of the museum, found in a Roman house from the early 3rd century (21 photo)²⁹, represents the triumph of Neptune/Poseidon.³⁰ Completely naked, the spirit of the city of Hadrumetum (genius loci) is standing on a chariot drawn by two galloping sea horses (seahorses).³¹ The muscular body is highlighted through shading,

²⁵ L. Foucher, *Inventaire des mosaïques (feuille n° 57 de l'Atlas Archéologique, Sousse)*, Tunis 1960, p. 99-101, n° 57.220, pl. Lb.

²⁶ It is an allusion for its first hybrid representations in half-man half-goat.

²⁷ L. Foucher, *Inventaire des mosaïques (feuille n° 57 de l'Atlas Archéologique, Sousse)*, Tunis 1960, p. 47-48, n° 57.099, pl. XXIII.

²⁸ As the only god born of a mortal, Semele, mistress of Zeus, he must convince the gods of Olympus, starting with the conquest of India.

²⁹ L. Foucher, *Inventaire des mosaïques (feuille n° 57 de l'Atlas Archéologique, Sousse)*, Tunis 1960, p. 5, n° 57.012, pl. Ilc. The largest mosaic that was ever discovered representing the triumph of Neptune was discovered in the house of Sorothus in Sousse and extends over a surface of 137 m².

³⁰ Originally master of vivid fresh water; the sea is also his undisputed area where he reigns as a true Zeus. When he comes out, he recalls the descent of Zeus from the summit of the Olympus and the sea monsters celebrate this by leaving their hideouts.

³¹ According to an Arcadian legend, Poseidon would have escaped from Kronos by the substitution of a foal (Pausanias, 8.8.2).

Neptune holds the reins in the left hand, the trident and the three-point spear in the right hand³². The dolphin swimming between the legs of sea horses could refer to the dolphin which found Amphitrite (Latin Salacia) who refused to give herself to Neptune by hiding. This beautiful mosaic evokes perhaps the god in search of a future wife. But a link with the domestication of the overflow of the lake Albin and the annual celebration called Neptunalia of 23 July is quite possible. The predominance of green in this mosaic is perhaps reminiscent of green wood arbors built by the Romans during the Neptunalia celebration to protect themselves from the heat.³³

Among the sea gods in vogue in Hadrumetum, we naturally find Venus Marine/Aphrodite Anadyomene, that is to say, "came out of the waves" (Photo 22). Found in a Roman house from the late 3rd century,³⁴ the mosaic represents it in a shell, its birthplace, a reference to its marine nature.³⁵ Less complete today than the day it was discovered, the mosaic includes cupids riding a dolphin each; below, four boats each mounted by two fishermen using nets and lines.

Mosaics related to the economic life.

The few testimonies we have on the economy of Hadrumetum emphasize the importance of fisheries and livestock farming. Maritime trade, the main source of wealth of ship owners of Hadrumetum, is evoked by some sailboats (23 ship Photo). We know from other sources, literary and epigraphic, that Hadrumetum had an important port which housed, as in Ostia, a place of corporations. We know one of the offices of this place, that of the naviculars of Sufetula, an inland city of Tunisia, and the economic activity of which is undoubtedly related to the oil trade. The mosaics having a nilotic theme suggest a relation with the port of Alexandria. On one of them, where a confusing mix of local scenes and imaginary scenes reigns, we see pygmies fighting a hippopotamus; incomplete today, the mosaic also showed a battle between pygmies and cranes on the one hand and against a crocodile on the other (Photo 24).

The mosaics massively but in a concrete way evoke fishing scenes: in addition to net fishing, they also fished with the harpoon, the keepnet, the hawk or the line (Photo 25). A real "board of Natural History"³⁶ that was found in the catacomb of Hermes, where she paved the floor of a burial chamber, highlights all the species of fish and shellfish of the Mediterranean interrupted by the four scenes of local fisheries mentioned above (26 photo). On other mosaics, often placed at the entrance of the houses, we find one or several fish, sometimes some fish getting out of a basket (27-28-29 Photo). In fact, they attributed to fish a prophylactic value.

The ship owners of Hadrumetum, made rich by maritime trade, sought to obtain another source of revenue based on a more regular income from land. Understandably, rural

³² Poseidon est aussi le dieu de la pêche en mer, particulièrement celle du thon.

³³ Varron, *De lingua Latina*, 6. 19.

³⁴ L. Foucher, *Inventaire des mosaïques (feuille n° 57 de l'Atlas Archéologique, Sousse)*, Tunis 1960, p. 72-73, n° 57.179, pl. XXXVb,c.

³⁵ This image illustrates the birth of Venus: he was born in a shell of the sea froth (according to Théogante d'Hésiode). **The shell is one of his favourite attributes and we often see it associated with the dolphin.**

³⁶ The expression is quoted from L. Foucher, *Inventaire des mosaïques (feuille n° 57 de l'Atlas Archéologique, Sousse)*, Tunis 1960, p. 91, n° 57.204, pl. XLVI.

life is punctuated by the four seasons which constitute a common theme of the mosaic production. A beautiful mosaic of Thysdrus, today el-Jem, related the essential aspects of these seasons. The year begins with spring and ends winter. Each season is represented by a male portrait placed on the left and followed by the names of the corresponding month (30 Photo). Each month is characterized by a small scene depicting a religious feast or agricultural work.

Two products dominate the local economy: cereals and olive trees; yet the vine, though frequent on the mosaics, was not prominent. For work in the fields, they preferred bulls and oxen, the donkey and the mule. The most developed breeding was probably that of small cattle, sheep, goats and farmyard animals (chickens, roosters, geese, ducks) that we often find represented in the reception areas with fruits in the form of *xenia* (Photo 31-32), presents offered to guests.

However, the most intelligent rich, and because of the water problem in this part of the country, they did not opt for the cereal and olive cultivation, but for the noble breeding which is related to horses coveted in circuses and hunting. A good example of this activity is evoked by the stud of Sorothus on a mosaic decorating one of the rooms of his house³⁷ in Hadrumetum. The Museum of Sousse only contains a piece of this mosaic which was seriously damaged during the 1943 bombing. The landscape represents a rugged steppe with a tower in the middle, various animals and horses: four circles include each two race horses facing on both sides a palm tree; the two remaining medallions represent horses called Amor and Dominator, Adorandus and Crinitus (33 photo). Another mosaic (34 photo³⁸) shows a scene of four horses the front legs of which are protected by bandages and the heads crowned of a palm of victory. The grooms who are holding them wear costumes in the colors of their clubs: green (Amator), red (Aura), blue (Pupillus) and white (Cupido).

Mosaics representing amphitheatrical shows

From the 3rd century, the newly elected judges increasingly offered on the occasion of taking up their posts games and shows. We know one of these notables, Quintus Maximus Caelius (Photo 35), who paid on the occasion of the three honours he had in Hadrumetum, scenic theater games (*ludi*), a chariot race in the circus (*circuses*) and a gladiatorial combat in the amphitheater (*munus gladiatorum*)³⁹. The most popular show, because too expensive to organize, was hunting in the amphitheater: it was necessary to buy the animals and pay those who will kill them. A number of these animals is on a beautiful mosaic representing Ganymede abducted by the Jovian eagle and surrounded by eight animals: from the top to the left, a tigress, a horse, a deer in flight, a bear, an antelope, a panther, a lion and an antelope (36 photo)

A mosaic of Smirat, near Sousse, tells with precision this type of fighting (37-38 photo). Discovered in private baths, it represents four hunters (Spittara, Bullarius, Hillarius)

³⁷ This rich farmer owned a large house in the city center where we found more than fifteen mosaics, including, in particular, the triumph of Neptune and it is today found in the Bardo Museum, which decorated the *oecus*, and whose surface **area is about 140 m²**, making it one of the largest mosaics of the world.

³⁸ L. Foucher, *Inventaire des mosaïques (feuille n° 57 de l'Atlas Archéologique, Sousse)*, Tunis 1960, p. 58-59, n° 57.120, pl. XXVII, XXX, XXXI

³⁹ ILAfr . No. 58 : A Caelius Quintus Maximus, aedile , omen, duumvir because he , during his magistracy, presented game shows and races and he himself also offered a gladiatorial show; moreover, he has given at the same time to the city 11,000 sesterces so that the interests of that capital will be (be given) to all, every four years ... (translated from Latin) .

and Mamertinus) fighting four leopards (Victor, Crispinus, Romanus and Luxurius). The protagonists are flanked by two gods, Dionysus, tamer of wild beasts, and Diana, the huntress, and the notable who paid for the show, Magerius. In the middle, we find a herald carrying money bags. On both sides of the latter, we find a Latin inscription.

On the left, the Herald, spokesman of the professional hunters employed by a club or a hunting society, that of Telegeni, addresses the notables present, " the Herald said: My lords, in order for the Telegeni to get the price of your favor, give them 500 deniers per Leopard;" On the right, the crowd address one of the notables called Magerius and ask him to pay the hunters: "we acclaim: following your example, let the others in the future learn the munus; let the previous ones hear it! From whom (did we have) a comparable? When (did we have) a comparable? Following the example of the Quaestors, you will give the munus! At your expense, you will give the munus today." Magerius donated (crowd reacts): That is wealth! That is power! Yes, that's it! It is already night! By your favours, they are dismissed with the bags." The number registered on the bags indicates that Magerius doubled the reward and offered 1000 deniers for each of the hunters.

Actually, this kind of show opposing professional hunters to wild beasts did not animate all amphitheatrical appointments. Often, second-rate hunters were invited to kill far less dangerous animals, as shown in the so-called mosaic of the house of Ostriches (39 photo). On this mosaic, T-shaped, we can see four armed fighters, including one holding a cloth (mappa), which serves to give the signal, and twenty animals in motion: five antelopes, four ostriches, five deer, two addax, two horses and one Oryx. Beneath their feet, we can see swords with rectangular and curved blades. This detail suggests a killing by close combat. It is worth mentioning that among these animals, only the deer can be dangerous when cornered. This show was obviously more laborious than dangerous. It also happens that the show is limited to a fight between animals: a bear against a bull, a wild boar against a horse (wild?) (Photo 40). The explanation of this phenomenon resides probably in the high price of wild beasts set by law.⁴⁰

Mosaics having a cultural nature

A strong and rich Greco-Roman community had lived in Hadrumetum since 146 BC; it undoubtedly helped to spread their lifestyle and taste for scenic plays inspired by Greek and Latin poets. It is worth noting that one of the most beautiful mosaics in the world about this topic is found today in the Bardo Museum (Photo 41 ???) and comes from a Roman house in Sousse; it is the mosaic of Virgil surrounded by two Muses produced in all likelihood in the first half of the 3rd century. Two other mosaics evoke plays. The first, a comedy scene involving three actors (42 photo): on the right, a slave undergoing punishment and begging his master (?) who, with outstretched right arm, was preparing to hit him; on the left, a messenger wearing a mask intervenes to stop the punishment. It is thought that this mosaic is inspired from Plautus' *Asinaire* (254/184 BC), acts 2.4, 56-57, which portrays Leonidas preparing to strike Lebanon and the merchant trying to stop him.

A beautiful mosaic (43 photo) represents, inside a medallion, a poet sitting, leaning on a safe inside of which a tragic mask is put. He holds in his left hand a roller (volumen) and

⁴⁰ According to the edict of Diocletian in 30: 125 000 to 150 000 deniers for a lion, 100 000 to 120 000 for a lioness , 70 000 to 100 000 for a leopard, 2 000 to 6 000 for a bear. See Chr. Hugoniot, *The shows of Roman Africa*, ANRT, 1, p. 430. For comparison, the construction of the theater Calama (in Algeria) cost 100,000 deniers.

a reed in his right hand. At his feet, there is a case containing twelve rollers. The poet is looking at an actor holding a mask.

The Muses are frequently associated with the art of music, especially in representations related to Apollo the Citharede. From the same house where the head of Ocean was discovered (above) comes this representation of Apollo and the nine Muses ⁴¹(44 photo⁴²). Inside a frame in braids, we find a large twisted circle, and on the corner pieces, four different vases from which escape plants of the four seasons: flowers, corn, grapes and olives. In the large circle, we find a central medallion displaying Apollo and Calliope, the eldest of the Muses, surrounded by eight other medallions representing the eight other Muses. From left to right and from above: Terpsichore, Muse of lyric poetry and dance, holding the lyre, Clio, muse of history, holding the tablets, Thalia, muse of comedy with a pedum mask, Euterpe, muse of music, holding two flutes, Polyhymnia, Muse of mime and rhetoric, Erato, Muse of marriage song, and its zither, Urania, muse of astrology, and Melpomene, muse of tragedy holding a tragic mask. In the center, Apollo naked to the waist, stands near the Delphic tripod, his left arm resting on the crossbar of a lyre. Calliope, Muse of epic poetry, is sitting, her left hand resting on a lyre, and her right hand holding a plectrum. The birds around them symbolize the musical victory of the muses over the Pierides, the nine daughters of Pieros and Evippe that Apollo would have transformed into jackdaws as punishment for daring to challenge the Muses in a singing contest. Ovid tells us these details ⁴³..

We may also add to the theme of music a mosaic showing Orpheus charming the animals. Only the central square the corners of which are filled by a horse, a bull and a panther (45 photo) is left. The circle is divided into several medallions: the first is decorated with an ivy leaf, heart-shaped, the second with birds (woodpecker, parrots, ibis, ducks); finally, near Orpheus, mammals who were listening to the lyre: a tiger, a wild boar, a zebu, a panther and a deer. Orpheus, near a tree, stands in the centre of a hexagon medallion. From the scene, only the tree is left, the bottom of the garment, the torso with the belt and part of the lyre.

Some aspects of everyday life: superstitions.

Among the images that may be relevant to this topic, many come either from graves or they are placed at the entrance of a house or a room. These are mainly preventive images erected against the envious (*invidus* in Latin). A beautiful mosaic from the suburbs of Sousse, in the center of which we find the goddess Victory (Nike in Greek) winged and sitting at a table (46 photo). On the right, the goddess Minerva (Athena) helmeted, legs crossed and leaning on a spear; a shield at her feet. On the left, stood a man with a marked musculature and half naked. We think he is Poseidon despite the absence of the trident. The scene evokes a famous episode: Athena and Poseidon disputing the possession of Athens and Attica. The votes of the gods decided in favor of Athena and it is to her that Victory turns to

⁴¹ The legend tells that Calliope, "on the beautiful way", had two sons of Apollo, one of whom is the famous Orpheus.

⁴² L. Foucher, *Inventaire des mosaïques (feuille n° 57 de l'Atlas Archéologique, Sousse)*, Tunis 1960, p. 19-20, n° 57.042, Pl. VIIIb,c et VIIb.

⁴³ Ovide, *Métamorphoses*, 5662-678: "While they seek to talk and brazenly tender hands, shrieking, they realize that feathers are coming out of their nails, and that their arms also are covered with feathers; one sees a rigid beak growing on the face of his wife and birds of a new type heading for the forests."

announce that. Above, a doorstep inscription throws a challenge to the envious person by apostrophizing him⁴⁴: *Livid Envious, you claimed that it was impossible to build this magnificent building; well! Look at this work that has come to a good end.*

A beautiful mosaic found in the warm room (tepidarium) in the thermal baths of a Roman villa in Sousse could be considered as having a protective and preventive value. This is the famous Medusa (Photo 47), whose spiky hair of snakes, its eyes revealed its fascinating look that goes in to be able to petrify the evil spirits ... ring as a warning against the evil eye, especially against the envious. Another mosaic which represents an eye (48 photo) was surrounded by a Latin inscription (passed away today) says: *invidiosibus quod videtis* (what you see is the work of the envious person).

The goal of these representations is the neutralization of Malin to which are opposed not only texts, but also images of abundance and symbols of fertility: Dionysian paradise, roses, baskets filled with fruits, fish, different fruits with seeds such as grenades and zucchini, corn or millet stalks represented by groups of 4, alluding to the seasons, often adorn the pavements. Fish and other animals, like the beautiful peacock (Photo 49), various birds and fowl, were also prophylactic symbols having a beneficial value. Fertility is generally represented by male organs. We discover it on a mosaic in Moknine, near Sousse, in the form of an ejaculating fish-shaped phallus together with female organs drawing two triangles. The phrase *O CHARI* would mean: o delight (Photo 50)!

Society and Christianity

When Caesar won the war against the supporters of Pompey in 46 BC, he distributed penalties and rewards to African cities according to their attitudes during the war. We know that Hadrumetum was reserved the heaviest fine: three million sesterces for the Andrumetines and 5 million for the conventus. The Andrumetines are free citizens of Hadrumetum in conformity with the old agreements. The conventus is a group of Roman citizens related to the world of business but they were mere residents without specific civil rights. When a few years later, Hadrumetum became a Roman municipality, the Andrumetines overwhelmingly received the Roman citizenship, which is added to theirs, and members of conventus became citizens of Hadrumetum. The duality had no longer a justification.

The few testimonies we have on this amalgamated society almost exclusively come from funerary inscriptions that tell us about the legal status of the deceased. Some specimens are exhibited in the hall adjacent to the space of the tophet: the epitaph of Lunia Optata (51 photo), a Roman citizen, who died at the age of about 60 years, erected by her freed slave Lunia Peregrina and the epitaph of Lucius Mevius Petronianus (Photo 52), also a Roman citizen. This last epitaph, having an obvious pagan character, comes from a tomb built in one of the catacombs of the city, that of the Good Shepherd. The epitaph shows that these underground cemeteries carved into the rock were not, at least initially, reserved for Christians. It was only later that these spaces became exclusively reserved for Christians where they could honor their dead.

The testimonies on Hadrumetin Christianity go back to the 3rd century. Tertullian reports that a Christian martyr was handed over in 212 to a panther in the amphitheater.

⁴⁴ *CIL VIII, 23131 : Invide livide titula (=titulos) tanta quem (=quae) adseverabas fieri non posse, perfecti sunt d(ominis) n(ostris) (DDNNS) ; minime ne contemnas.*

But it was not until the end of the 3rd century that the Christian community developed⁴⁵. Archaeological searches have uncovered several catacombs the largest of which are those of Hermes, the good shepherd and Severus. The first was called so because a certain Hermes built a mosaic on the grave of his wife and son that reads on both sides of a cruciform anchor surrounded by a dolphin,⁴⁶ *Hermes coniugi et fil(io-iis) dulcissimis*: Hermès (had it built) for his dearest wife and son (or sons) (53 photo). The catacomb of the Good Shepherd is identified as the name is found on a gray marble slab engraved with the image of the shepherd bringing the lost sheep (54 photo). The third is named after the epitaph of Severus, which is one of the most beautiful epitaphs of the museum by the quality of the engraving and by praise addressed to the deceased by her husband (55 photo):

*Haec fuit Eusebia fratres rara castissima coniux
 quae mereuit mecum vitam coniugii ut tempora monstrant
 annis decem sexs mensibus octo et viginti diebus
 huius ut confiteor vitam deus ipse probavit
 innocua vere coniunx exempli rarissimi sexus
 oro successus ego tabularius huiusque maritus
 eius semper meminisse fratres vestris precibusque.*

The translation reads as follows: Brothers! This was Eusebia, a rare and very chaste wife who deserved to live in marriage with me, as shown by the dates: sixteen years, eight months and twenty days. Her life, I confess, God himself has clearly blessed. An absolutely innocent Wife, a very rare example for her sex. Brothers ! I pray you, I Successus, tabularius and her husband, to always remember her, especially in your prayers.

This praise in irregular hexameters is addressed to brothers, that is to say to the members of the community whose graves are grouped in this catacomb. Successus lists the moral qualities of his wife Eusebia. He was tabularius, that is to say, responsible for keeping the books of accounts, a position which is probably related to the management of imperial domains under the regio hadrumetina.

Epitaphs of this kind reminiscent of the pagan world are actually very rare in the catacombs. The majority of texts are related to the Christian world. Their epitaphs often in mosaics are written in short terms and lacking in details. These include the epitaph of the young Renata who lived only one year, two months and 28 days (56 photo) or the epitaph richly decorated of Pascasius (Photo 57), who died at the age of 65 years approximately. The decoration is classic and also complies with the beliefs: Latin or Greek crosses with the sign of the chrismon on a crown, ornamented with two Greek letters alpha and omega (58 photo) sometimes with a representation of abundance that often shows the crater from which emerge vine shoots. The best illustration of this theme is found on the Theodule's mosaic representing a vase from which escape the trunk of date palm tree and vine foliage with turns occupying the entire field (59 photo). On branches, we find partridges, peacocks, ducks and pheasants. At the top of the palm tree, in Greek font, the name of the owner or the mosaicist, Theodule (Teodoulou).

⁴⁵ A.-F. Leynaud, *Les catacombes africaines. Sousse-Hadrumète*, 2^e éd. Alger 1962. Voir aussi L. Foucher, *Hadrumetum*, 1964, p. 146-149, pl. IXa ; N. de Chaisemartin, *Les sculptures romaines de Sousse et des sites environnants*, École Française de Rome, 102, 1987, p. 347-363.

⁴⁶ The ancient perceived the dolphin as the savior and friend of Man.

One of the finest testimonies on Christianity in the region is illustrated by the famous baptismal font of Bekalta, ancient Thapsus (Photo 60).⁴⁷ Richly decorated with stone and glass tiles, it is adorned at the bottom with a jeweled cross and flanked by the alpha and the omega. Above, ran birds (many of which are raptors) between the shells at the bottom of the alveolus. On the top edge, we find the inscription reproducing the greeting of the angels to the shepherds (Luke 2:14): [Gloria in excelsis Deo] ET IN TERRA PAX (h) OMINIBVS BONE / BOLVM [tatis t] AVDAMVS T [e]: glory to God in the highest heavens and peace on earth to men of good will. We praise you (God).

⁴⁷ F. Barrate, F. Béjaoui, N. Duval, S. Berraho, I. Gui, H. Jacquet, *Basiliques chrétiennes d'Afrique du Nord. II-Monuments de la Tunisie*, éd. Ausonius, Bordeaux 2014, p. 227-228.