I moderni Numidi: Numidia, Numidians, and modern Italian imperialism

Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, 2025, **00**, 1–13
https://doi.org/10.1093/bics/qbaf013
Advance access publication 9 June 2025
Article

I moderni Numidi: Numidia, Numidians, and modern Italian imperialism*

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ABSTRACT

During the years of Italy's empire in Africa, the Punic Wars were a frequent point of reference in imperial propaganda. However, since Carthage was viewed as a city foreign to Africa, Italian ideologues of empire required an ancient enemy of Rome that was indigenous to Africa to serve as a classical counterpart for African resistance to modern Italian imperialism. This is where the Jugurthine War came in. This essay looks at two key moments of Italian receptions of the Jugurthine War: one in a Latin poem from towards the beginning of Italy's imperial endeavours in Africa and another from when the Italian Empire was at its height, under Fascism. The essay ends by considering how a Latin author who was half-Numidian—Apuleius—was used as a model of acculturation to offset the idea that Numidia and Numidians were always the enemies of Rome.

KEYWORDS: Numidia, Neo-Latin, Italian imperialism, Fascism, Libya

1. I MODERNI NUMIDI

During the years of modern Italy's imperial endeavours in Africa, which began with the Italian state's engagement with the East African port of Assab in 1882, and which ended in 1947 with the Paris Peace Treaties (or later, if one considers the intermediary administration in Somalia, 1950–60), ancient Rome's relationship with Africa offered well-noted points of reference for imperial Italy's self-imagining. Although Carthage and the Punic Wars were more prominent references in Italian imperialism's classicizing repertoire, Numidia retained a striking presence within the horizon of imperial Italy's historical imaginary.

This is perhaps surprising. After all, the area of Africa which was known by the Greeks and Romans as Numidia was never, for the most part, included among Italy's North African colonies. Such a consideration did not prevent Carthage from being a frequent point of reference for Italy's classicizing imperial ideology. Although the ruins of Carthage were only within the borders of Italy's empire for a few months during the Second World War, between the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, the Punic Wars exerted a strong influence in how Italy historically positioned its imperialism in Africa—not only North, but East as well. Yet, as Carthage was not a city indigenous to North Africa, Carthaginians were more amenable to being shaped into the image of imperial Italy's European, also imperial, enemies. Thus, we have several references to Italy's British enemies

* Thank you to Thomas Biggs and Mathilde Cazeaux for putting this issue together and for their very helpful feedback on a draft version. Sincere thanks also to the anonymous reviewers.

during the Second World War being referred to as *i moderni Cartaginesi*, including in a 1940 booklet by that name published by the *Istituto di Studi Romani* (*ISR*).[1] Associations with Carthage took on a different tone after the Fascist racial laws of the late 1930s, when identifications with the Punic city accrued antisemitic layers.[2] On the other hand, Numidians could be made to resemble indigenous resistance to Italian imperialism in North Africa. If the British Empire could be portrayed as *i moderni Cartaginesi*, then African resistance could be characterized as *i moderni Numidi*.

My consideration of the place of ancient Numidia in the imaginary of modern, imperial Italy falls into three parts. As the Punic Wars were such a major feature in imperial Italy's classical imaginary, I will leave aside representations of Numidia as it relates to Rome's wars against Carthage in the discourse of modern Italy's empire. This means, for example, circumventing receptions of the romance between Massinissa and Sophonisba in two major Italian films from the early decades of the twentieth century: *Cabiria* (1914) and *Scipione* l'Africano (1937). Instead—and in order to demonstrate the resonance of Numidia for Italian imperialism beyond North Africa—I begin with a late nineteenth-century Latin poem about the Numidian king Jugurtha, against whom Rome fought a difficult war at the end of the second century BCE. This poem was composed by Giovanni Pascoli in the context of Italy's attempts to carve out colonies from Ethiopian territory. I then set Pascoli within the context of Italy's later forays into colonialism in Africa, when attention shifted from the east of the continent to the north—to the then-Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, which make up part of what is now Libya. I will then think about how the suppression of the Senussi rebellion in Libya in the 1910s and 1920s was conceptualized as a restaging of Rome's conflicts with Jugurtha. Finally, after considering how Numidia was figured into conceptualizations of the suppression of African resistance, I turn to how the famously half-Numidian, half-Gaetulian Apuleius was used to conceptualize a model for African assimilation into the Roman Empire—be it that of antiquity or that of modern Italy. In sum, Numidia represented, for modern Italian imperialism, an African indigeneity that Carthage could not.

2. DURUS ERAS SED DURIOR ROMA EST

Ἡράκλεις … ὡς ψυχρὸν ὑμῶν τὸ βαλανεῖον[3]

'By Hercules, how cold your baths are, Rome!' These are the words that Plutarch (*Mar.* 12.3) puts into the mouth of the Numidian king Jugurtha, as he is lowered into the dark dungeon of the Tullianum following Marius' triumph in 104 BCE. Sallust gives us a terrifying description of the prison. It is a hole sunk about twelve feet into the ground, a filthy, dark, and stinking pit (*Cat.* 55.3–5). Perhaps mercifully, according to Plutarch, as Jugurtha was led in chains through the city of Rome and displayed to its inhabitants before descending into this tomb for the living, the Numidian seems to have lost his mind. Sallust himself, author of the monographic history on the war against Jugurtha, remains silent over the king's fate,[4] but in Plutarch's narrative, the reader cannot but feel a deep sympathy for the defeated king—his tunic torn from his body, his earrings snatched from his ears, a deluded smile still playing in his lips.

It is perhaps the profound melodrama of Jugurtha's fall, his dramatic betrayal at the hands of the Mauritanian king Bocchus, and the mysterious circumstances surrounding his death that drew the Italian poet Giovanni Pascoli to write a poem—*Iugurtha*—of 131 lines of Latin hexameter about him at the close of the nineteenth century.[5] Pascoli has been described as 'the last of the humanists' and a 'poet of contradictions',[6] a politician as well as a classical scholar. He began his political

[1] On the trope of Britain as the modern Carthage in the Fascist Italian imaginary, see Cagnetta 1979: 89–95. See Bonnet 2005: 146–7 on England as Carthage, beyond the Italian imperial context.
[2] Cagnetta 1979: 90–91.
[3] Translations are my own throughout unless otherwise specified.
[4] See Levene 1992 on the incompleteness of Sallust's history as deliberate.
[5] First published as Pascoli 1897. For the text and commentary, see Traina 1990. There is a second edition (1999).
[6] Vitrioli 1914; Traina 1961.

trajectory as an anarchist, before turning to parliamentary socialism, ending life as a staunch advocate of imperialism, a complex identity that was mirrored in his literary output. As a scholar, Pascoli taught classical Greek and Latin at several schools and was a professor at the universities of Bologna, Messina, and Pisa, before returning to Bologna to take Giosuè Carducci's chair as professor of Italian literature.[7] He wrote some 300 pages of Latin verse, which have been compared to Horace's poetry, to which he was especially drawn.[8]

Pascoli's choice to write poetry in Latin and on classical themes represented part of his wider poetic motivation to rebel against death. For this 'scrittore in una lingua morta' (a writer in a dead language),[9] to keep a dead language alive and to revive figures from antiquity represented a significant aspect of a poetics of memory. The fate of Jugurtha offered Pascoli rich material for the expression of such a poetics, as well as an opportunity to flex his historical and philological muscles and to imagine events never explicitly narrated in the classical source material.

Iugurtha was submitted to the 1897 Certamen Hoeufftianum, a prestigious Latin verse composition prize established by Dutch the neo-Latin poet Jacob Hendrik Hoeufft in 1844. Pascoli sent in his *Iugurtha* alongside another one of his compositions, the *Reditus Augusti*. Pascoli had bet his sister Maria that the *Reditus* would win, and he was proven right, adding to his previous four victories (he would go on to win a further eight times). *Iugurtha* received *magna laus* and was published in Amsterdam that same year. In some respects, *Iugurtha* shares a common theme with some of Pascoli's earlier Latin compositions: death. Here, perhaps, we recall the characterization of Latin as 'una lingua morta' ('a dead language'). In 1893, Pascoli wrote two poems on this theme for the wedding of Teresa Martini, daughter of Ferdinando Martini, Minister of Public Education and a friend of Pascoli. One of these poems was about the body of a second-century Roman woman called Crepereia Tryphaena exhumed in 1899, perhaps a surprising subject for wedding poetry. She was around 18 years old and soon to be married. Tragically, she was interred with the gifts for a wedding that never took place.[10] The other poem composed for Martini's wedding, *Gallus moriens*, is based on the Capitoline Museums' 'Dying Gaul', of which Pascoli had a copy, and shares in *Crepereia Tryphaena*'s bathos. Like the Jugurtha of Pascoli's poem, the dying Gaul imagines his homeland as he succumbs to the wounds immortalized by the statue. Similarly, the Gaul who dies at the end of 1892's *Gladiatores* shares the same bathetic fate as the Gaul of *Gallus moriens*, and Jugurtha.

After a dedication to Maria in which Pascoli speaks of poetry's ability to shine an invigorating light on matters, to reveal the bones underneath living flesh, and to cut through opacity, *Iugurtha* begins with the words that Plutarch ascribes to Jugurtha, as he is banished into the subterranean darkness of the Tullianum: *'Hercule, quam frigent' dixit 'tua balnea, Roma!'*[11] Jugurtha loses his strength as he is lowered down into the darkness of the prison—*sensit iners mediis deorsum demissus in umbris* ('he felt unfeeling, lowered into the midst of the darkness')—contrasting him with Horace's Regulus, who criticises those who become weak—*qui lora restrictis lacertis* |*sensit iners* ('he felt the binds unfeeling, his limbs tied up', *Ode.* 3.5.35–36)—when bound in captivity, or who fear in the face of death. After a series of victories against Carthage, Marcus Attilius Regulus, consul during the First Punic War was defeated by the Spartan commander Xanthippus, who was in the service of Rome's Punic nemesis, and taken captive by his Punic enemies. Regulus was famously sent by the Carthaginians to Rome, in order to negotiate for a prisoner exchange. He swore to return to Carthage, should his negotiations be unsuccessful. His steadfast devotion to his country forced him not only to keep his word, but even to advise against such an exchange, since it was against Roman interests. Regulus returned to Carthage to be tortured to death—Cicero tells us that he was starved and deprived of sleep, his eyelids sliced off, and Appian, that he was locked in a cage of spikes.[12] Pascoli's echoing of Regulus contrasts the Roman commander's horrific fate at the hands of the Carthaginians with Jugurtha's

[7] Carducci was also a proponent of colonialism and of the rhetoric of the 'Fourth Shore' of Italy as North Africa. See Segrè 1974: 17–19; Ricci 2005: 47.
[8] Mahoney 2010. *Cf.* Sensini 2018 on Ovid in Pascoli's poetry.
[9] Pascoli 1952: 245.
[10] On the poem, see Laes 2019.
[11] Procacci 1915: 268; Gärtner 2022: 104; Faller 2022: 118.
[12] Cic. *Off.* 3.99–100; *Fin.* 5.82; *Pis.* 43; App. *Lib.* 11–15; see also Liv. *Per.* 18.7.

at the hands of the Romans, not only juxtaposing Regulus' stoic acceptance of his fate with Jugurtha's fear, but also implicitly tying Jugurtha's death into the history of Rome's conflicts with Carthage.[13] Here, rather than a Roman dying in African captivity, we have an African languishing in a Roman dungeon. Yet, despite his degraded state, Jugurtha retains his regal status in Pascoli's poem. Although Jugurtha is mentioned by name in the first line of the dedication to Pascoli's sister (*Desine, qui valeam clausum narrare Iugurtham* - 'cease, so that I can tell you about the death of Jugurtha'), he goes unnamed until the nineteenth line of the poem itself. Instead, he is referred to as a king (10), reinforcing the bathos of this terrible circumstances.

In the filthy darkness of the Tullianum, the memory of the sounds of Marius' triumph echoed in the silence of the dungeon. Jugurtha's torn ears in agony from having his jewellery snatched from them, a moment drawn from Plutarch, and his arms torn by the chains that encumber him (17–18), the betrayals and defeats that he had suffered came back to his mind, and his old angers flared up again (20).[14] The captive king remembers the venal Mauritanian (*venalis Maurusius*, 21), Bocchus, who handed Jugurtha over to Sulla, a cruel irony given Jugurtha's earlier diagnosis of Rome as an *urbs venalis*—a city for sale, if it could find a buyer (Sall. *Iug.* 35).[15] He fulminates against *Gaetula fides* (22), and that of the *Quirites*, a transference and reemergence of the famous *Punica fides*, after the destruction of Carthage, recalling the words of Marius (23; Sall. *Iug.* 85) and the subterfuge (*subdola*) of Sulla (*cf.* Sulla as *callidus*; Sall. *Iug.* 95.3). After nursing his resentment against the Romans who had brought him to this living death, the realization of his terrible fate dawns upon him, shut up in this shameful tomb, destined to become a living corpse (31–32). Jugurtha is wracked by his *dira fames* (55), a terrible hunger with which Celaeno the harpy curses Aeneas' Trojans (*Aen.* 3.256)—the future Romans—once more troubling the distinction between Jugurtha and Romans.

A tiredness comes over him, as Jugurtha imagines himself as a new Hannibal. Pascoli once more anchors his Numidian in the context of the Punic Wars:

Quin caesis iterum Gaetulo litore turmis,
protinus aeriis existit ab Alpibus alter
Hannibal atque urbem ferro populatur et igni. (70–73)

Yes, again after the troop had been slaughtered on the Gaetulian shore,
Immediately a new Hannibal arises from the sky-high Alps,
And ravages the city with fire and with sword.

Not only does Pascoli draw Jugurtha into proximity with Hannibal, but also with Carthage's founding queen as she appears in the *Aeneid*. As Dido is about to take her own life, she prays for an avenger (*ultor*) to rise from her bones:

exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor
qui face Dardanios ferroque sequare colonos (Aen. 4.625–626).

May an avenger rise from my bones
To pursue with fire and sword the Dardanian colonists

The appearance in Pascoli's play of Hannibal's *ferrum* and *ignis/faces* is a clear allusion to Dido's future avenger.[16] Moreover, Gärtner suggests that we see Jugurtha as an *alter Hannibal* and an

[13] Gärtner 2022: 108 also draws a comparison with Regulus, although not with reference to *sensit iners*.
[14] NB. The rarity of *flammescunt*—see Traina 1990: 62, n. 20.
[15] See Parker 2004 for the trope of venality in Sallust's history of the Jugurthine War.
[16] *Cf.* Lucan's Caesar's words on Hannibal: *Phars.* 1.303–07. See Faller 2022: 133.

echo of Hannibal as Dido's *ultor*, and points to Pascoli's *existit* (72) as the counterpart to Virgil's *exoriare*. Gärtner also highlights another carceral context to the reception of these lines from Book Four of the *Aeneid*, beyond Jugurtha's incarceration in the Tullianum. In Pease's commentary to Book Four, he notes, for line 625, that the Florentine Filippo Strozzi, imprisoned for rebelling against the Medici, scrawled this line on the wall of his cell in his own blood, shortly before taking his own life in 1538.[17] Pascoli's Jugurtha, then, is not the only person to have Dido's hopes in mind, as he sits in his desperate incarceration.

Jugurtha, in his state of exhausted despair, imagines that his native African landscape appears before him—the wide canopies of palm trees, the sound of bells hanging around the necks of camels, the gurgling of a spring flowing through reeds (100–104). Alas, towards the end of the poem, the illusion breaks, but not before a Roman slave, an executioner, descends into Jugurtha's dungeon, to check on the prisoner.

> *'ten mihi sex vixisse dies?'*[18] *ita servus, et angit:*
> *'durus eras,' inquit 'sed durior, Hercule, Roma est'* (130–131)
>
> 'So you're still alive after six days', says the slave, and strangles him:
> 'you were hard', he says, 'but, by Hercules, Rome is harder'

This is the take-home message of the poem: Rome will mercilessly and cruelly squeeze the life out of any who might resist it. We feel Jugurtha's pain all the more for Pascoli so eloquently conjuring up for us Jugurtha's thoughts, his resentment, his despair. Pascoli chooses the tradition of Jugurtha being strangled, which is perhaps the Livian tradition (*Per.* 67) or inspired by the strangulation of the Catilinarian conspirators, also in the Tullianum, as narrated by Sallust (*Cat.* 55).[19] Having Jugurtha endure 6 days of living death before having the life squeezed out of him by an enslaved person is undoubtedly a more powerful ending to the poem than having the Numidian drift off into death. Such an ending offers, at the same time, a neat ring composition of direct speech including exclamations to Hercules and references to Rome. The poem's conclusion also stands as a more potent lesson in the fact that, no matter how strong resistance to Rome may be, Rome will always be stronger.

If Pascoli was simply a poet in a dead language, or an academic secluded in an ivory tower, his 1896 poem on Jugurtha could possibly be regarded as a quaint, neo-Latin exercise in antiquarian curiosity. However, Pascoli was neither simply a poet, nor simply an academic, but was a leading figure of Italian national culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Granted that his poem on Jugurtha was far from being his only composition in Latin, it nevertheless represents an interest in Numidia, beyond the part it played in the Punic Wars. It is also a foreshadowing of how Italy's imperial mission in North Africa was characterized as not only a restaging of the Punic Wars, but also of the war against Jugurtha. In a different context, for Pascoli, Jugurtha is a personification of Africa. In his commentary on Horace's *Ode* 2.1 in his *Lyra: ad uso delle scuole classiche*, published 2 years prior to his Jugurtha poem, Pascoli adds a note to line 28's reference to the *inferiae Iugurthae*, suggesting that *è qui nominato il felino Numida a personificare l'Africa*, that Jugurtha—a 'Numidian cat' because of his elusiveness—is named in this line to personify Africa. Jugurtha, for Pascoli then, is more than a Numidian king defeated by Rome.[20] But Pascoli's poem also shows how a genuine sympathy for the captive Numidian king betrays a profound ambivalence surrounding the reception of Numidia in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Italian imperial discourse.

[17] Gärtner 2022: 112; Pease 1935: 494.
[18] *ten* is an element of the deliberately archaizing Latin used by Pascoli. See Gärtner 2022: 104 n. 3.
[19] See Faller 2022 on Cato's reference to Jugurtha being strangled in Lucan 9.599–600.
[20] Procacci 1915: 278; Pascoli 1895: 199.

3. GIOVANNI PASCOLI: THE POET OF ROMAN REBIRTH?

1911 saw the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Italian unification, as well as the inauguration of the Vittoriano in Rome, the huge edifice which looms over the Piazza Venezia and the Roman Forum, construction of which was begun in 1885. Pascoli himself officiated at the inauguration of the monument in 1911. In celebration of the anniversary, an exhibition on Rome's provinces was staged in the Terme Diocleziano. Predictably, and obviously, Rome's African provinces were included.[21]

More fundamentally, 1911 also saw Italy embark upon a new chapter of its imperial endeavour in Africa, after the failures of the First Italo-Ethiopian War and the humiliating defeat at the hands of Ethiopian forces at the Battle of Adwa in 1896—the year of the completion of Pascoli's *Iugurtha*. In 1911, Italy invaded the Ottoman province of Tripolitania, now part of Libya. The classicizing propaganda, drawing on archaeological material to establish a myth of a Roman return, deployed in support of this campaign has been the subject of much scholarship.[22]

Pascoli played an important part in this propagandistic effort. In 1911 he delivered a speech in honour of Italian soldiers wounded during the invasion campaign. This speech, delivered at the theatre in Barga and known as 'La grande proletaria si è mossa' or 'L'ora di Barga', is rich in classical detail. Over and again, the notion that Italian troops in Tripolitania were recovering the footsteps of their ancestors, the Romans, is emphasized. Everywhere that the colonial troop goes in Tripolitania, 'there, too, is Rome' (*anche la e Roma*). I will not dwell on this speech—it has been the subject of much scholarship on Italian colonial uses of ancient Rome, and neither Numidia, nor Jugurtha show up in its heavily classical rhetoric.[23] I draw attention to it for a simple reason: that Pascoli's imperial politics were closely intertwined with his classicism, and that his classicism should be read with an eye to his imperialist and nationalist agenda, emerging into its full expression in his 1911 speech at Barga.

Yet, I suggest, we see a germination of this classicizing imperialism in his *Iugurtha*. The problem is that there is not a triumphalist, imperialist narrative to which Pascoli can attach episodes and figures from classical antiquity. It was the nascent empire of the young nation of Italy that had been defeated, like Jugurtha, at Dogali, in Ethiopia, in 1887, and later, at Adwa in 1896. Pascoli, perhaps, can convey the bathos of Jugurtha's end so evocatively because his defeat is identified with Italy's. And indeed it was identified with Italy's situation in 1896. In 1935, as Fascist Italy launched its invasion of Ethiopia, the literary scholar Zely Fara wrote, in *I poemetti latini di Giovanni Pascoli* that

> Pascoli wrote the poem [*Iugurtha*] a year after the defeat of Adwa and after the peace at all costs of October 1896: in that land of Africa, after the Roman eagles had arrived victorious, the tricolour had been lowered in the shame of defeat; but the Libyan fields awaited the armies of 1911 who would tell the world once again: *Roma durior est*.[24]

Stefan Faller rightly pushes back against this direct identification, pointing to the fact that planning for the poem began in 1894—or even earlier—in short, before the disaster at Adwa.[25] If Adwa does exert any influence on the poem, it is in the fact that, though war may have formal winners, it rarely has moral ones. However, Pascoli's poem is still written in the shadow of the earlier defeat at Dogali and, in any case, the fact that the *Iugurtha* was later read by Fara in the context of Adwa, and the fact that Pascoli later became so invested in Italy's imperial mission in Africa suggests that Fara's connection is not to be dismissed out of hand on the basis of anachronism. Instead, we might view the *Iugurtha* as a moment in the germination of Pascoli's classicizing imperialism, a later stage of

[21] See *Catalogo della Mostra Archeologica nelle Terme Diocleziano* 1911: 142.
[22] See, for example, Munzi 2001.
[23] For example, Tomasello 2004; Segrè 1974: 21–23; Baranello 2011. On Pascoli's classicizing imperialism more generally, see Agbamu 2024: 53–107.
[24] Fara 1935: 12, *cit.* Faller 2022: 139 n. 27; see also Traina 1990: 14.
[25] Faller 2022: 138–42.

development being evident his 1901 Latin poem *Coloni Africi*, and reaching its fullest expression with his 1911 Barga speech.

It is also, perhaps, because of these ambiguous identifications that distinctions between Romans and Jugurtha are at times so blurred—Regulus' words in Horace's poem echoed in Pascoli's description of Jugurtha; the venality of Rome transferred to Bocchus; the *dira fames* of Jugurtha and Aeneas' Trojans, or *Punica fides* transferred to Rome's Gaetulian allies and to Romans themselves. *Iugurtha* encourages us to view Roman history from the perspective of the defeated enemies of Rome.

Yet by 1911, the situation had changed. Italy's new Roman Empire was ascendant, the footsteps of Roman legionaries were being recovered in the sands of the Libyan coastline, the 'Fourth Shore' (*Quarta Sponda*) of Italy, and Italy was announcing its birthright to Rome's former African provinces. There was no longer any need to imagine Roman history in Africa from the perspective of the defeated Jugurtha. Now Italy could confidently cast itself as the new Rome, and position indigenous resistance in Africa as ancient Rome's African enemies.

4. OMAR AL-MUKHTAR: THE MODERN JUGURTHA

Soon after Italy had invaded the north African regions of Tripolitania, and then Cyrenaica, which together make up the northern parts of Libya, the Italian authorities made an agreement with the Senussi Order, a religious-political group which had a particularly strong following in Cyrenaica. The Acroma Accords of 1913 more or less saw the Italian colonial regime and the Senussiya leave each other to their own affairs.[26] With the outbreak of the First World War, and Italy's entry into the conflict in 1915, the attention of the state was directed away from Libya, and so further agreements were made in 1917 to secure the cooperation of the Senussiya. However, after the First World War, and the institution of the Fascist regime in Italy after 1922, the Italian government's appetite for compromise with the Senussi Order dissipated. In 1923, Italian colonial authorities, led by Rodolfo Graziani, who came to become known as 'the Butcher of the Fezzan' for his crimes in the south of Libya, attacked the Senussi Order. The long-fought campaign against the Senussi Order was brought to a close in 1931 with the capture and execution of its leader in Cyrenaica, Omar al-Mukhtar, nicknamed the Lion of the Desert.[27]

The nomadism of the Senussiya was portrayed as a major threat in Italian propaganda during and following the suppression of the Order. Graziani himself wrote a series of essays, collected in a volume called *Cirenaica Pacificata* (1932), in which he positioned the nomadic Senussiya within a tradition of empires' epochal struggle to contain the nomad threat.[28] One such strategy to control Libyan nomadism employed by the Italians was the herding of two-thirds of the civilian population in Cyrenaica into concentration camps.[29] Ancient Rome had also interfered with the nomadic practices in North Africa. The 17–24 CE revolt of Tacfarinas, a Numidian and former Roman auxiliary, was likely related to dissatisfaction towards the client king of Numidia, Juba II (Dio 55.28), as well as the stationing of the III Augusta legion and the construction of a new military road in Numidia. The inclusion among the demands of Tacfarinas' rebels for *sedes* and *concessio agrorum* (Tac. *Ann.* 3.73) make it clear that Roman encroachment on tribal lands was one of the factors contributing to Tacfarinas' revolt.[30] Tacitus' characterization of Tacfarinas' troops as 'a band of robbers, ready for plunder and rape' (*Ann.* 2.52) resonates with Graziani's characterization of nomads as 'a swarm of locusts', as 'anarchic', 'intolerant of any bonds, stubborn, ignorant', and 'a real danger', throughout the history of the colonization of Africa.[31] Indeed, anxieties around nomadism in North Africa were a longstanding feature of Roman historiography, anxieties inherited by empires that posed

[26] Ahmida 2009: 104–40.
[27] A joint American and Libyan-produced film based on Omar al-Mukhtar, called *Lion of the Desert* was released in 1981 but was banned in Italy and only shown in 2009 on pay-per-view TV.
[28] For example, Graziani 1932: 120.
[29] Ahmida 2005: 42.
[30] Fentress 1979: 65; Vanacker 2015.
[31] Graziani 1932: 119–20; 123.

themselves, in various ways, as Romes' heirs in the region.[32] Naturally, Tacfarinas' revolt featured in numerous Italian publications about the ancient history of North Africa, during the 1930s and early 1940s. It represents a key event in the history of Libya in the 1937 *Guida d'Italia del Touring Club Italiano: Líbia*, as well as a 1940 pamphlet published by the *ISR* on *Africa Romana e Tunisia Italiana*, in which the revolt is held up as evidence that, in Africa, rebellions rather than wars proved to be a greater challenge for Rome.[33]

However, it was Jugurtha, rather than Tacfarinas, whose conflicts with Rome provided Italian imperialism with a more obvious model through which to position the Senussi Order historically. Italy was not the first modern European imperial power to represent North African resistance as the heirs of Jugurtha. In the 1830s, Abd el-Kadr, an Algerian resistance leader against the French, was also represented as a modern-day Jugurtha. 'Let France remember well', wrote the French military commander Marshal Bugeaud, 'that the Arabs are still the Numidians who fought the Romans 2000 years ago, that their enmity is moreover increased by all the hatred that inspires in them the difference of religion'.[34] In the wake of the suppression of el-Kadr's resistance, a 14-year-old Arthur Rimbaud wrote a Latin poem on Jugurtha in 1869, pre-empting Pascoli by almost three decades. In this poem, el-Kadr is cast as a reborn Jugurtha.[35] Such comparisons between French colonial militarism in North Africa and Roman imperialism in the region continued to have currency into the twentieth century. In 1910, the poet Charles Péguy, whose politics were an uneasy synthesis of nationalism and socialism, and who died in the First World War, gave an oration to French officers about to set out for North Africa. In this speech, he championed the hybrid French identity, heir to Breton, Roman, Greek, and even Numidian forebears.

> Young man, pure-hearted man, you who in a secular house reintroduced the ancient glory, the first glory, the glory of war; [...] you who, awakening your old Breton blood, and your old Mediterranean blood, and your old blood of Dutch patience, restore to us ancient valour through the heroisms of the Mauritanian wars; you will be Latin, Roman, French, you who, from all these bloods, make French blood and French heroism; Roman heir to the Numidian wars, French heir to the Jugurthine wars; artillery heir to the ancient artillery, the Roman ballista; horseman heir to the ancient cavalry, to the ancient Numidians; artilleryman heir to the Balearic slingers; colonial heir to the Roman colonies; and to the other Greek colonies; founder, heir to the Latin founders [...] [36]

Successors to both Alexander and Caesar, Péguy's depiction of French colonial troops as a cross-section of ancient North African history allowed him to stake French historical claims to North Africa from almost every angle, from Greek colonialization to Louis IX's failed crusades. The Numidians occupy especial prominence in this image. Although French reference to Algerian resistance as Numidian perhaps makes more geographical sense than Italian characterizations of Libyan resistance as heir to Jugurtha, this did not deter one particular Italian colonial governor and military man.

In a 1935 volume on *Africa Romana*, published by the *ISR* and based on the proceedings of a 1935 conference on Scipio Africanus, Domenico Siciliani wrote a contribution on the Jugurthine War. Siciliani was not an ancient historian but a military commander who had fought in the invasion of Libya (1911–12) as well as the First World War, serving also as the governor of Cyrenaica in 1929–31, and who would also go on to take part in the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935–36. The military significance of the Jugurthine War for modern Italy's colonial endeavours in Africa had been noted some 3 years prior to the *Africa Romana* volume. In 1932, a new Italian translation of Sallust's history of the conflict had been issued as part of the *Biblioteca degli Scrittori Militari d'Italia*, edited by Alberto Baldini. The preface to the volume was written by Pietro Badoglio, the Italian general

[32] Shaw 1982.
[33] Bertarelli 1937: 65; *Istituto di Studi Romani* 1940/1941: 6.
[34] Ideville 1881–1882: 2:85, *cit.* Rousselot 2022: 215.
[35] See Alexandropoulos 2012 for French colonial and anticolonial receptions of Jugurtha, particularly the Berber poet Jean Amrouche's 1943: 46 essay *l'Éternel Jugurtha*, in which the Numidian is taken as a symbol of Berber identity. See p. 20 for Rimbaud.
[36] Adapted from Péguy 1910: 255, *cit.* Rousselot 2022: 231; Péguy 1916: 499.

who served as governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica from 1929–33, and who, during the invasion of Ethiopia, captured Addis Ababa in 1936. In his preface, with his eye to military utility, Badoglio refers to the *Bellum Iugurthinum* as the 'the best, to [his] mind, of Sallust's writing that remains to us, because it is full of military teachings which have, in some aspects, the character of the present day'.[37]

What are the sorts of military lessons to be learnt from the Jugurthine War for the context of modern Italian imperialism? For this, we turn to Siciliani's chapter in *Africa Romana*. Sergio Brillante has shown how the contributions to the volume were reviewed by Renzo Uberto Montini, an *ISR* scholar, both for academic content and ideological compatibility with the regime-aligned institute. For example, Montini asked Arnaldo Momigliano, who penned a contribution on 'I regni indigeni dell'Africa romana', to de-emphasize the Hellenistic character of Numidian culture, since it elevated Numidian kingdoms too highly.[38] Similarly, Montini found Siciliani's initial characterization of the state of the Roman Republic during the Jugurthine War to be too pessimistic: he took issue with the war against Jugurtha being positioned in relation to the fall of the Roman Republic; and questioned the idea that Jugurtha was only defeated thanks to the treachery of Bocchus. Siciliani took some of Montini's points on board but, the practical, military man that he was, contested the suggestion that he reframe the treachery underlying Jugurtha's defeat. In a colonial war, Siciliani argued in his response, the leader of anticolonial resistance has to be eliminated by any means necessary.[39] In this way, the treacherous defeat of Jugurtha was made to justify the ignominious execution of al-Mukhtar.

The use of the ancient past to impart lessons for Italian colonialism in Libya is an aspect of Siciliani's chapter made explicit in its final section 'Conclusioni e considerazioni'. Siciliani begins this section by explicitly asking whether comparisons could be made between the Jugurthine War and the various African campaigns of the last century, and whether lessons could be drawn from it.[40] He limits his discussion to the campaigns in Libya, in which Italian colonial troops found themselves in the same situation as the Roman legions 2000 years earlier. Siciliani contrasts the rigid formations of the Roman legions and the modern Italian military, with the flexibility of ancient Numidian and modern Arab fighters, the descendant, 'albeit indirect' (*sia pure indiretti*) of Jugurtha's warriors. The Arabs of today have replaced the arrow and the javelin of their indirect forebears with a rifle but maintain the mobility and elusiveness of their Numidian ancestors. They know their territory well, in stark contrast with the ignorance of the Italian troops during the 1911–12 invasion—a situation '*non troppo dissimile da quella nella quale debbono essersi trovati le legioni di Metello e Mario*' ('not too dissimilar from the one in which the legions of Metellus and Marius must have found themselves'). Luckily for the Italian troops of the present, they were able to exploit means of carrying out warfare not available to the Romans: aerial reconnaissance; the long range of weapons which mitigated against the advantages afforded to the enemy by their scattered organization. Italian discipline soon overcame the fear of the unknown, and Libyan ambush was counteracted by flexibility and manoeuvre. In response, the Arabs avoided confrontation by any means.[41]

In the winter of 1914–15, Italian troops withdrew to the coast of Libya. Siciliani compares this with Jugurtha's harrying of Roman troops in their winter quarters, even as late as after Marius' capture of the river Muluccha (Sall. *Iug.* 92–94). Where the Romans were unable to operate too far away from their bases and supply lines, the modern Italians bested the Arab resistance by creating flexible fighting units able to operate in depth. One manifestation of this capability was the 1914 campaign in the Fezzan, the desert region of southern Libya. Initially, the supply lines were too easy for the Arab guerrillas to disrupt, says Siciliani, whom we recall had direct experience of campaigning in Libya. However, lessons were learnt under the tutelage of General Badoglio (the author of the preface of the 1932 translation of the *Bellum Iugurthinum*). Badoglio's campaign culminated in

[37] Badoglio, in Sallustio 1932: v.
[38] Brillante 2023a: 163. See also Brillante 2023b.
[39] Brillante 2023a: 170–71.
[40] Siciliani 1935: 78.
[41] Siciliani 1935: 78–79.

the ultimate occupation of the Fezzan and Kufra, the heartland of the Senussi Order, in 1930 and 1931, thus bringing an end to the resistance of the Senussiya. 'As in the Numidian war', writes Siciliani, 'the end was marked by the capture of the leader [Omar al-Mukhtar].'

The Jugurthine War teaches the Italian colonial troops of Libya, Siciliani goes on to expound, to keep a close eye on logistics, especially of water. This is especially vital in light of the distances that the Romans of 112–106 BCE marched towards Thala and Capsa, and the Italians of 1914 and 1930–31 as they penetrated into the Fezzan and Kufra. The greatest lesson, for Romans and Italians alike, is the importance of the identification and elimination of leaders of resistance:

> In Africa, populations without a respected and powerful leader are not able to offer more than uncertain and disconnected resistance, destined to succumb to planned and systematic aggression of our action. It is therefore necessary to clearly identify the leader and the centre of the resistance, to attack and destroy it right away, without worrying too much whether the periphery of the resistance remains alive and effective.[42]

This was a lesson learnt well by Julius Caesar during his campaigns in Africa during the civil war against Pompey, and accounts for his swift conquest in 46 BCE of what would become Africa Nova.[43] This was also a lesson learnt by the Italians during the years between 1911, when the first Italian troops disembarked upon Italy's 'Fourth Shore', and 1932, when Graziani could refer to the centre of Arab resistance as *Cirenaica pacificata*.

In 1913, the Ottomans had been forced out of Libya—the resistance now faced by the Italians was that of the Arab population. The First World War distracted the Italian colonial authorities, which gave the Senusssiya time to organize under the proud old man—the *fiero vecchio*—Omar al-Mukhtar. He was captured in 1931 partly as a result of the fact that the patrol that ended up arresting him had met him a few years previously. In short, Siciliani ends his article, it is of paramount importance for colonising forces to identify and eliminate the leader of resistance. The Jugurthine War teaches the modern Italian Empire that 'it is the organization, not the mass [of resistance], that needs to be feared since the indigenous mass have, in its weight and in the discordant variety of its tendencies, the germs of its own disintegration'.[44] Jugurtha and Omar al-Mukhtar represented the organising principle of resistance to Roman and Italian imperialism—once these centres of gravity were removed, resistance fell apart.

Between 1896, then, the year of the Italian defeat at Adwa, in Ethiopia, and 1935, 4 years after the execution of Omar al-Mukhtar and the year that Italy would launch its renewed attempt to conquer Ethiopia, the figure of Jugurtha had been transformed. Where, in Pascoli's *Iugurtha*, the Numidian rebel is the sympathetic, defeated king, whose pain and despair are felt by the reader—the Italian in the wake of Adwa—for the hard, military logic of Siciliani in 1935, Jugurtha represents a clear lesson in the importance of crushing anticolonial resistance by going after its leader.[45] The parallels that are drawn between the Numidian resistance to Rome and the Senussi resistance to Italy are made painfully obvious. We can imagine the executioner who slipped the noose over al-Mukhtar's head whispering in his ear, *'durus eras, sed durior, Hercule, Italia est'* ('you were hard, but by Hercules, Italy is harder').

5. APULEIUS AS A MODEL OF ASSIMILATION AND ACCULTURATION

Yet Italian imperial recourse to ancient Numidia was not simply in order to provide historical illustration for current conflict; there was more to Numidia than the Jugurthine War. The distinctly hybrid character of Numidian culture also offered material to promote ideas of the acculturation and

[42] Siciliani 1935: 81.
[43] Siciliani 1935: 82.
[44] Siciliani 1935: 82.
[45] Again, note Faller 2022 who refutes the Adwa connection of the poem and also suggests that the poem is not so much about sympathy but about the poetic analysis of a situation.

assimilation of indigenous peoples into imperial cultures. Although, as we have seen, Montini took exception to the perceived elevation of Numidia as a Hellenistic culture, in the same *Africa Romana* volume as Siciliani's essay on the Jugurthine War, Emanuele Ciaceri, in his contribution on 'La Conquista Romana dell'Africa', referred to Juba II as a *noto letterato del suo tempo ed amante delle arti e del teatro* ('noted scholar of his time and lover of the arts and of the theatre'). Ciaceri notes the gradual and organic nature of Romanization in Africa, pointing to both the persistence of local religions and also the enduring use of Phoenician letters on African coinage, into the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, save for Latin legends around representations of the emperors—no different, says Ciaceri, to the Latin used for the names of Numidian kings on coins prior to 46 BCE.[46]

In the same volume, the Latinist Francesco Arnaldi wrote an article on Apuleius. Since at least 1912, when Felice Ramorino wrote a paper on Apuleius and Synesius of Cyrene, Apuleius had been used as evidence of African Latinity and thus modern Italy's claims to North Africa.[47] Into the Fascist period, Vincenzo Ussani used Apuleius to make a similar point, alongside the likes of Fronto, Florus, and Saint Augustine.[48] Arnaldi explicitly sets his contribution within the context of Italian imperialism in Africa, beginning with a reference to Antonio Muñoz's four monumental marble maps of the Roman Empire, which were placed on the wall of the Basilica of Maxentius in the Roman Forum, in 1935. In 1936, a fifth map was added, showing Fascist Italy's empire which now included Ethiopia.[49] For Arnaldi, 'the history of Latin literature is the history of empire'. This is where Apuleius comes in. To understand Apuleius' half-Numidian, half-Gaetulian origins (*Apol.* 24),[50] Arnaldi directs us to Sallust's *Bellum Iugurthinum* in which Numidia is still a territory to be conquered. Arnaldi also refers to the *Museo dell'Impero*, in which Roman Africa is reconstructed with the help of plaster models, photographs, and the imagination.[51] Apuleius' words are looked upon, by Arnaldi, as to breath life back into the ruins of Timgad, Dougga, Sabratha, and Leptis Magna, as if he is taken as a guide to Roman Africa by this modern Italian philologist.[52]

The imperialistic stakes in reading Apuleius are made explicit at the end of Arnaldi's chapter. With the Vandal and then the Arab invasions of Africa, the traces of Roman Africa were destroyed: the libraries, the forums, the temples, and so on. However, the ideas of Roman Africa lived on.

> If the ruins are still there to testify, among the sands and the palms, to the power and glory of Rome, to help us reconstruct the aspects of Africa that were his [Apuleius'], the spirits of great Africans tremble in our anxieties, in our prayers, and remind us that, from Ostia to Thagaste [the birthplace of Augustine], from Mauretania to Cyrenaica, a Mediterranean, Latin, Fascist civilisation must rise, which knows how to recreate the forms that reassure, the architectures that protect and exalt, to repeat with unchanged faith and with unchanged harmony, words that purify and console. The Roman and Catholic Italy of Benito Mussolini is worthy of repeating the miracle of Empire.[53]

Apuleius, then, is a cipher for a Latin Africa, a Latin Africa than can be revived under the sign of the Fasces. To put this notion into its historical context: Libya has been pacified, the Senussiya, the ideological descendants of Jugurtha's Numidians, subdued; Mussolini's Italy stands on the precipice of invading Ethiopia; and upon the completion of the invasion, Mussolini will announce the refoundation of empire, in a speech that was to be translated into Latin,[54] the language for which Arnaldi celebrates Apuleius. If the Italy of Fascism is a Latin one, then Apuleius represents an important link in the chain linking the ancient Roman Empire in Africa with Mussolini's modern one.

[46] Ciaceri 1935: 47.
[47] Brillante 2023a: 78–79.
[48] Ussani 1931.
[49] Arnaldi 1935: 177. On the marble maps, see Muñoz 1935: 206–08; Bottai 1936.
[50] See Shaw 2014: 531.
[51] The *Museo dell'Impero* was opened in 1927 and was based on the collections of the 1911 exhibition at the Terme Diocleziano. See Giglio 1927 for the catalogue; see also Strong 1939.
[52] Arnaldi 1935: 180.
[53] Arnaldi 1935: 188.
[54] Lamers 2017.

6. CONCLUSION

In 1896, Italian imperialism's future in Africa seemed uncertain. This was the year of the embarrassing defeat at Adwa, which followed on from an earlier defeat in Dogali in 1887, also in East Africa. In this context, Jugurtha offered Giovanni Pascoli a dramatic historical model of defeat. Although Jugurtha is an African, and we might imagine a more natural model for representing the African enemies of modern Italy, I have suggested that Italy's imperial aporia at this time made him a suitable cipher for the mediation of Italian colonial anxieties. We see him as an inverted Regulus, a victim of the venality which he had tried to exploit, and an altogether deeply sympathetic.

By 1935, Italy's fortunes had changed. Italy had its Libyan colonies and had crushed, first Ottoman, then Arab resistance. Now Jugurtha could become the defeated, indigenous resistance leader, and was transposed onto the figure of Omar al-Mukhtar. Italy, flushed with victory in Libya and on the brink of invading Ethiopia, now saw itself as a truly imperial power. This meant having to confront the problem of how to assimilate those whom it had conquered. For this, especially relevant in the African context, the half-Numidian, half-Gaetulian Apuleius was a fitting model.

However, the new Roman Empire of Fascism was to be short-lived. Just some 7 years after Mussolini had declared that Italy finally had its empire, it had lost it again. During the Second World War, in Libya, the Senussiya were active in the Allied war efforts against Italy. It was from Libya that the Allies launched their invasion of Italy, which contributed to the fall of Mussolini. We can imagine, perhaps, when Mussolini was strung upside down, after his capture and extrajudicial execution, the Senussiya seeing it as a response to the 1931 execution of Omar al-Mukhtar. And if al-Mukhtar was a modern-day Jugurtha, the shadow of that ancient Numidian is cast over the death of Mussolini. As the antifascist partisans hoisted up the cadaver of the dead Fascist dictator for the crowds to see, I imagine the ghost of Jugurtha taunting Mussolini with the words, *durus eras sed durior sum*—you were tough, but I was tougher.

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