

CULT PLACES IN NORTH AFRICA

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The study of sacred areas in North Africa turns out to be complex for several reasons. The most obvious is related to the state of art, on the one hand because of the lack of archaeological evidence, and on the other hand in the field due to the progressive urbanization of places. A systematic and comparative study of the elements found in the Punic African world and in the Eastern Levant can lead to an understanding of the religious models common to this culture.

Keywords: Northern Africa; open-air areas; places of cult; sanctuaries; rituals

1. A LOOK TO THE DISCOVERY OF NORTH AFRICAN TEMPLES THROUGH PREVIOUS STUDIES

Archaeological studies provide favourable perspectives for the research of cultural identities and exchanges in the development of Mediterranean civilizations, highlighting the contributions that a single culture can transmit to others.

In particular, among all possible investigations, that of places of cult provides results that can be used in many interpretative fields, from the religious and social, to the architectural and urban planning, closely linked to the definition of cultural identity. This operation makes it possible to expand the study of the North African religious buildings of the Punic period.¹

An organic collection of the variety of Templar buildings from the Punic period in North Africa is not currently formalized, moreover, although some data exist on individual buildings, there is not a complete and updated description of the distribution of Punic cult buildings, let alone a typological subdivision.

A first attempt to catalog sacred buildings, limited to Tunisia, was carried out in 1898 by R. Cagnat and P. Gauckler.² The work aimed to gather and describe some temples known at that time, thirty sanctuaries dedicated to known divinities, one hundred and three epigraphically attested sanctuaries, forty-seven anonymous sanctuaries and sixteen places of cult were registered in the work.

Much richer in information is the publication of M. Leglay³ which consists of a monographic work concerning all the sacred buildings, dedicated to the worship of Saturn and, among them, it is possible to identify even the oldest ones dedicated to Baal, a divinity assimilated to the Roman god Saturn.

Prof. M. Fantar⁴ published an entire volume dedicated to the cults and buildings of Kerkouane. In this work, he wanted to provide a general overview of the Punic temples of Africa and their possible link with Phoenicia and Cyprus.

¹ In the current state of research, there are no attestations of sacred buildings in North Africa before the 6th century BC (main temple of Kerkouane).

² Cagnat - Gauckler 1898.

³ Leglay 1966.

⁴ Fantar 1986.

V. Brouquier-Reddé,⁵ produced a careful analysis of religious buildings of the pre-classical and classical period of Tripolitania. Subsequently, in the early 1990s of the last century, he participated in a Franco-Moroccan mission, under the direction of E. El Khayari cataloguing and restudying the sacred monuments.⁶ The first work, as already mentioned, concerned Libya; a more complex and articulated operation concerned Morocco,⁷ where the investigations led to the creation of a broad comparative grid of the Moroccan area.

In parallel, in Tunisia, a research group of the CNRS⁸ directed by F. Baratte, conducted a study with the unifying theme of Tunisia's religious phenomena in a world at first exclusively pagan, then in the Christian context.

However, publications reporting studies on specific types of sacred buildings should not be ignored, even with the aid of comparisons with similar structures in the entire Mediterranean area.

Among these, it is very interesting the study by P. Pensabene,⁹ focused on the analysis of the Saturn temple in Dugga,¹⁰ trying to trace the origins of its planimetry and to identify both comparisons within North Africa and possible connections with the Phoenician East.

Several studies on Punic buildings have been conducted by A. Lézine with a chapter dedicated to the *architecture punique*¹¹ and the *distila prostila* chapel and, for some structures, his work is the only existing source of information. An important contribution is also reported in his article *Résistance à l'hellénisme de l'architecture religieuse de Carthage*,¹² in which he proposes to find the originality of Punic sacred architecture in some buildings in Tunisia. Although it is difficult to orient oneself in this widespread prospect of information, it was possible, in his study, to identify, through extensive bibliographic research, about seventy sacred buildings of the Punic and Roman times, connected to a Punic religiosity, mixed with autochthonous and Roman components.

In fact, many Roman temples in North Africa constitute the testimony of the permanence of "African paganism" and the veneration of Punic deities, even after Romanization, and this makes the chronological period of investigation very broad, ranging from the 4th century BC until the 2nd/3rd century AD.

⁵ Brouquier-Reddé 1992.

⁶ As part of the project "*Monuments religieux du Maroc antique* (AR MAEE, coopération franco-marocaine CNRS-INSAP, 1995-2006)".

⁷ From their four-year work this volume has been published: Baratte - Brouquier-Reddé - Rocca éd. 2018.

⁸ The team gathered under the direction of François Baratte (Université Paris Cité - Sorbonne); it is also composed by R. Hanoune (Université de Lille III), by M. Fixot and M. Griesheimer (Aix-Marseille Université), by J. Scheid (Collège de France), by J.-Cl. Golvin (Université Bordeaux Montaigne, Unité Mixte de Recherche pluridisciplinaire Ausonius) and by V. Brouquier-Reddé (CNRS - l'École Normale Supérieure Ulm). The project called "Cultes et sanctuaires de Tunisie" and developed between 2001 and 2008, was conducted with the teams from the sites of Djebel Oust, Sidi Jdidi, Dugga, Oudhna and Bulla Regia.

⁹ Pensabene 1989.

¹⁰ Recently reanalyzed in the works: Aounallah *et al.* 2020 and Aounallah - Brouquier-Reddé - Chabot 2022.

¹¹ Lézine 1960.

¹² Lézine 1959.

2. THE TYPOLOGY OF PUNIC AND PUNIC-ROMAN AFRICAN TEMPLES

Among these numerous sacred factories, some predominant typologies, to which most of the buildings identified on the North African territory may belong, can be distinguished quite clearly (fig. 1). These are temples with a large courtyard, with interior arrangements of different types, referred to in scientific literature as “courtyard temples” and sacred arcaded areas with one or more cells in the rear defined as “African or Roman-African temples”.¹³

The presence of the predominant element consisting of the court and that of votive *stelae* makes these two types similar and perhaps as an evolution of the same common sacral idea, as we will see later. In addition to these, it is possible to distinguish some temples with multiple settings defined as “juxtaposed” or “tripartite” or “axial”, which are especially characteristic of the Moroccan and Tunisian area. The plan of the buildings is quite particular: the cells, juxtaposed on the bottom, recall the constant element of most of the Punic buildings also in other typologies, such as in El-Kenissia, Thinissut, and the later examples of Dugga and Gigthis; but the peculiarity is the horizontal arrangement and the offset and lateral access through a sort of corridor, elements known in Punic architecture, as testified by the temple of Ras ed-Derek, in Sala (fig. 4:E) and Banasa, but with a typology that is not very widespread and whose origins are difficult to identify (fig. 1, green colour).¹⁴

Returning to the most well-known courtyard temples, a peculiar characteristic that determines their architectural study is the difficulty of identification through the structures on the ground; in fact for many of these buildings, their identification is possible only by the presence of dedicatory *stelae*, fixed in the ground or often reused in the walls of later sacred buildings, or by fragments of structures on which Roman buildings are superimposed, as in Thuburbo Majus where the temple apparently placed on a sanctuary of Saturn of simple type.

These identification difficulties also make it complex to be able to chronologically define the structural evolutions that characterize these sacred buildings, since we cannot reason about the formal motivations that lead to modify these same buildings. However, we can recognize a certain evolution that starts from the simplest form of North African cult building represented by a sacred area dedicated to the deposition of *stelae*, sometimes circumscribed by a *temenos*. Examples of this typology are found mainly in Tunisia and Algeria, to name a few, at Bou Kournein, Djebel Djelloud, Tubernuc, Ain Tounga, Ain Nechma, Guelma, and Rusicade (fig. 1, yellow color). Despite the structural similarity, however, we must not confuse this type of buildings with those called Tophet, from which they differ not only in religious significance, but also in the absence of cinerary urns, votive inscriptions and, to a lesser extent, in the shape and iconography of the *stelae*.¹⁵ At a later time these buildings are circumscribed by *temenos* and correlated by sacred structures

¹³ Carton 1897; 1908; Merlin 1910; Bénabou 1976, 331-375.

¹⁴ To deepen about this typology, see: Susanna 2009, parr. Banasa, Sala, Ras ed Derek. Probably this typology must also be attributed to the temple D of Volubilis in phase IV, an evolution with 4 juxtaposed cells of two twin temples, formed by a cell preceded by a rectangular pronaos from the Mauretan period in *temenos*. Cfr. Brouquier-Reddé - Ichkhakh - El Khayari 2018.

¹⁵ On the subject, see: D’Andrea 2014, 197-199; 2017, 10.

essential for worship, such as altars, podiums and banquettes. One of the buildings that most characterize and exemplify this type of evolution, is the temple of Thinissut at Bir Bou Regba, about 1 km north-north-east of the Siagu ruins, that rises on a small hill overlooking the wadi El-Faouara (fig. 2). It is a complex building consisting of two wings that form a right angle, which in turn are composed of numerous distinct parts, seven in total, four of which with one or more *aedicules* inside. This structural peculiarity is due to an evolutionary process developed in about three centuries. In fact, numerous publications have been devoted to this sacred building¹⁶ precisely to recover its architectural development with the aim, not only to study its specific structure, but to provide an evolutionary model of the so-called “court” temples. A last study, carried out in chronological order, was that of M. Sebāi and H. Dridi¹⁷ who reinterpreted the five evolutionary phases of the temple on the basis of previous research.

M. Sebāi,¹⁸ largely taking up what was indicated by A. Lézine,¹⁹ identified a first phase dating back to the Punic period (early 2nd century BC) during which an approximately rectangular and symmetrical sanctuary was built, consisting of a colonnade courtyard and of a shrine placed on its longitudinal axis. In the second phase, (mid-2nd century BC) the area in the enclosure is reduced, erecting two new *aedicules* to house the deities who previously resided in the first *aedicule*. This latter seems to be abandoned, as well as the part of the courtyard excluded from the new enclosure. The third phase (1st century BC - beginning of the 1st century AD), is characterized by the addition of more elements, as well as by two small chapels leaning against the large *aedicule*. During the fourth phase, an additional space is added on the north-west side. Finally, in the fifth phase, the cistern is built on the southern side. It seems evident that, despite the great upheavals affecting the sacred area, especially on the west and south sides, there is a will to preserve the cult in both its form and sacredness.

The statues of Baal/Saturn and Tanit/*Caelestis* found near the second phase chapels are kept and handle in all subsequent phases, even during the Roman domination and despite the inclusion of further divinities in the same worship area, indeed additional statues are added to guarantee their protection (like the lion-headed statues). The spaces reserved for depositions remain unchanged, demonstrating the immutability even in the form of the rite. This type of temple is among the most attested in North Africa and is the one that has spread in all the different areas, from Tunisia to Morocco, prefiguring itself as a prototype of the so-called “African Temples”.

The transition from the open-air sanctuary to the temple characterized by courtyards with porch and cells along the back, would seem to have taken place from the end of the 1st century BC and assumes a well-defined shape during the II and III centuries, when real Templar structures are erected inside the court. In fact, these centuries witness the reduction to provinces of the various areas of Northern Africa. This leads to a phenomenon of great urbanization and monumentalization of African centres, in which there is also a frequent

¹⁶ Merlin 1910; Leglay 1966, 99; Bullo - Rossignoli 1996.

¹⁷ Sebāi - Dridi 2008.

¹⁸ Sebāi - Dridi 2008, 115-116.

¹⁹ Lézine 1959, 257-259.

reconstruction of the most ancient Punic sanctuaries, by local benefactors. This event can be understood as a program of the local ruling classes to express their adherence to the Roman state and socio-economic conditions, also through traditional religion and in respect of pre-existing local beliefs.²⁰

3. THE EASTERN ROOTS OF PUNIC SACRED ARCHITECTURE IN AFRICA

In this cultural context, the most exemplary testimony of the so-called “African type” temples are: the temple of Saturn (Dugga), the temple of Saturn (Thuburbo Majus), the Temple of Apollo (Bulla Regia), Temple of Baal/Horus (Carthage), Anonymous Temple (Debel Oust), Temple of Baal and Tanit Caelestis (Thuburbo Majus), Temple of Saturn (Haidra), Temple of Saturn (Hippona), Temple of Saturn (Thimgad), Temple of three cells (Thamusida) (fig. 1, red colour). The final change in Roman times is the erection of a real temple inside the *temenos* (fig. 1, purple colour), which according to A. Lézine²¹ would thus constitute the final stage of the constant evolution of a Phoenician tabernacle, that can be schematized as follows: from the simple wooden tabernacle, in the central area of the court, the evolution has led to a *naos* (the best example of which is the Temple of Mercury at Gightis) (fig. 4:G), the cell deepens more and more until it resembles a small Roman temple (fig. 3).

Although it is possible to identify some distinctive characteristics common among all these buildings, it is not possible to easily identify a unique architectural archetype and a single specific deity to whom the cult is dedicated. The presence of characteristic and recurring common elements rather reflects a great variety in the combination of these elements, in the plans, in the orientations and in the decorative elements. Archaeological evidence also provides conflicting data on the evolutionary possibility of cult form. There are evidences of a transition from worship in open-air areas to African -type temples that often come to juxtapose, as is the case of Dugga²² (fig. 4:F), and that would suggest a *continuum* between the two forms. In the Punic period a large court occupied only the southern part of the space of the succeeding sanctuary, inside it perhaps there must have been an altar for a *betylus* or a cult statue, around it was placed votive offerings formed by *stelae* and urns containing ashes of burnt animals and coal. The planimetric element of the great court persists even in the construction phase of the Roman period; however, three cells are created on the rear side, protruding from the perimeter of the temple, a central cell accessible by steps, with a central banquet and a niche on the back.

However, there are also other evidences that allow to believe that the two ritual practices seem to coexist. In Thuburbo Majus, the classical Roman temple dedicated to Saturn on a high *podium* with staircase and a *pronaos* with four columns in front of the cell, seems to have coexisted with a simplified, open-air sanctuary of Saturn. It is possible to assume that the two sanctuaries were frequented by different groups living in the same city.²³

²⁰ Pensabene 1989, 251.

²¹ Lézine 1960, 25, taking up an idea of Constans 1916, 106.

²² Pensabene 1989; Saint-Amans 2004; Aounallah - Brouquier-Reddé 2020.

²³ D'Andrea 2017, 10-11.

This presence of common elements is also not attributable to a single divinity. The most attested God is Baal Hammon, also considering his Roman transposition into Saturn, often associated with the *paredra Tanit/Caelestis*. However, a specific connection cannot be encountered between the structure of the sacred buildings and a divinity venerated; for example in El Kenissia, Volubilis and Cirta, a sanctuary is superimposed on a cult area with *stelae* and urns, but this was not consecrated to Baal/Saturn, as happens widely, but in the El Kenissia site, Jupiter Ammon, at Volubilis Aulisua²⁴ (a local god of fertility) (fig. 4:L) and at Cirta Ball Addir seem to be attested.

Authors such as A. Lézine and M. Bénabou wanted to credit this aspect to a “Semitic” origin of architecture. Two scholars, on the other hand, take the opposite view: M. Sebaï,²⁵ who dedicated an entire paper to this issue and B. D’Andrea,²⁶ with his descriptive treatment of the transformation of worship places dedicated to Baal and then to Saturn.

One of the most relevant comparisons offered by A. Lézine for his theory of Semitic origin, is that of the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem²⁷ organized planimetrically with a sequence of *vestibule - cella - Sancta Sanctorum*. This organization mirrors that of the Iron Age temples in Syria-Palestine, over all those of Tell Ta’ynat²⁸ and Tell Ain Dara.²⁹ In Africa, a category that is not well represented but commonly diffused, is that of tripartite temples (fig. 1, white color), exemplified in the Temple of Sidi Bou Said (fig. 4:H), which allowed A. Lézine to put forward this hypothesis.³⁰

On the basis of all these data, A. Lézine is led to believe that the temple of Sidi Bou Said is nothing more than a faithful reproduction in miniature of a temple of Apollo in Carthage, that reproduced the model of the mother country, or, in alternative,³¹ could represent the reproduction of the prototype temple of Eshmoun of which Appiano³² speaks. However, despite the difficulties encountered by various scholars in dating tripartite structures, no building of this type, found archaeologically, can be referred to before the 1st century BC, thus allowing to exclude an oriental derivation, but rather to affirm an influence connected to the Roman world.

M. Fantar³³ also supports the “Semitic” origin of the axiality and tripartition that characterize the main temple of Kerkouane (fig. 4:I), referring to the temple in Jerusalem. The sanctuary, located in the centre of the city, dates to the 4th and 3rd centuries BC and has a peculiar aspect: it has a longitudinal development, articulated with a vestibule with two columns at the entrance that gives access to a sequence of two courtyards, inside which are found religious out-post (altars, betyls and votive deposits, including the little known one of

²⁴ Brouquier-Reddé 1994.

²⁵ Sebaï 2010.

²⁶ D’Andrea 2017, 10.

²⁷ The passage from the Bible, Kings 6:2-36, reports the dimensions of the Solomonian temple; the fact that it was built by Phoenician workers makes it the most representative Phoenician temple.

²⁸ Manning *et al.* 2020.

²⁹ Monson 2011.

³⁰ Lézine 1959, 251-253.

³¹ Lézine 1959, 251.

³² Appiano, *Lyb.* 130.

³³ Fantar 2018, 259.

large round pebbles), around these there are service areas³⁴ and other chapels and sacrificial areas. Recent investigations have identified the presence of further rooms to the south-west area of the sanctuary, equipped with altars of different types. All these characteristics allow us to frame the sanctuary in a typology of sacred building with multiple cult structures within a *temenos*.

4. FINAL REMARKS

The characteristic of longitudinal and axial development that unites many North African sanctuaries, seems to be quite widespread and is part of numerous buildings including those belonging to the so-called African type.³⁵

It seems clear that the so-called “African-type temples” could not have had a direct “Semitic” origin,³⁶ if only because of their chronological distance, but that they, nevertheless, preserve their religious significance in the presence of cultic elements. Their peculiarity, in the Mediterranean panorama, must not be underestimated and must necessarily require more interpretative attention.

What has emerged from the studies conducted so far, leads us to focus on the analysis of the building’s structural aspects, completely neglecting the religious point of view. In fact, sacred architecture must not follow stereotyped models, but contain references to ritual needs. This is especially true in a culture, such as the Phoenician-Punic one, which implements processes of accommodation and negotiation with other cultures with which he comes into contact.

Even if may seem a simplistic scheme, what emerges from the elementary reduction of the sacred structures of the so-called “court type” and “African type” (from the simplest to the Romanized form), can be expressed according to the following characteristics:

- development in an open area;
- presence of *temenos*;
- presence of various cultual out-post (from the simplest such as *stelae*, to the most complex such as shrines or cells or temples);
- presence of water.

The characteristic of being open-air places, in most of the extra-urban cases,³⁷ seems to reflect, in all respects, a Near Eastern reality that already manifests itself starting from the end of the Ancient Bronze Age in the significant site of Byblos where, enclosed within a *temenos*, there are three votive chapels *in antis* (Temple en L, perhaps dedicated to a Baal poliad of the city) (fig. 4:A). In the central one a *stelae* was placed in front of the southern wall, inserted in a sort of podium leaning against the back wall, while a second *stelae* and a

³⁴ Including an *atelier* of votive terracotta statuettes, which was set up after the invasion of Agatocles.

³⁵ Access to the porticoed courtyard, the altar and access to the cell/chapel/temple would constitute the backbone of the sanctuary.

³⁶ To be understood with a geographical, rather than, an ethnic sense.

³⁷ 62% of the African cases examined belong to this characteristic.

stone basin were located in the south-western corner of the cell itself, furthermore, two betyls were found in the forecourt.³⁸

In the subsequent Middle Bronze Age temple, known as the Temple of Obelisks, the presence of obelisks and *stelae* enclosed by a *temenos* will remain a fundamental feature of the new temple dedicated to the male god Reshef/Raşap.³⁹

The raising of *stelae* or *baetylus* is a characteristic practice of pre-classical Levantine sacred areas, widely documented in Syria and Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Ages, handed down over the centuries even in the Persian and Hellenistic-Roman periods up to the Nabataean Age.⁴⁰ Also in the Middle Bronze Age, comparisons relevant to this feature are known at the Gezer site,⁴¹ where 10 monolith *steles* and a quadrangular basin are kept in a high place.

Going back to analysing the physical and material delimitation of the space dedicated to the divinity, it can be said that this demarcation is a usual practice in the Mediterranean areas and in the Near East,⁴² since the end of the 3rd millennium BC, but even more, in the 1st millennium BC when sacred places are progressively enclosed in walls as in the case of the temple of Baal in Ugarit (fig. 4:B) of the Middle Bronze/Late Bronze Age. A decentralized monumental access on the west side, leads into *temenos* with raised pavement, in the centre of which, in line with the entrance to the temple, there is a quadrangular altar, on which bloody sacrifices could be developed.⁴³

In the Near Eastern area, the final evolution of this category of sacred buildings, manifests itself at the beginning of the Roman Age, in the form of sacred places in which simple cultural installations are situated, by representing the evolution of local architectural models such as: monumental altars, shrines and the so-called “column monuments” in analogy with the sanctuaries of Hason Sfire and Hason Sulaiman (fig. 4:D).⁴⁴

Another important feature is the presence of water inside or near the sacred buildings; in fact, in Syria and Palestine as early as the Ancient Bronze Age, water constituted an important representation of the strength of divinity.⁴⁵ Many sanctuaries raised around springs and place with water as a fundamental element, even in Persian and classical times.

The sites mentioned may constitute an evolutionary model of local rooting, as attested in Syria and in the Phoenician territory. Indeed, the rise of places of worship in isolated and rural areas is a phenomenon that continues to be attested even in the 7th - 6th century BC, and also in the Persian age. In fact, in this period the custom of inserting sacred structures in an open space persists to protect a certain natural cult object (such as sources or rocks)⁴⁶ or a certain landscape element;⁴⁷ as in the sites of Amrit (fig. 4:C), sanctuary of the 6th - 5th

³⁸ Dunand 1950, 895.

³⁹ Sala 2008, 65.

⁴⁰ For further information on the theme of the *stelae*, see: Nigro 1996, 217-218, 225 and for their diffusion in the pre-Classical period: Nicolle 2005, 177-179.

⁴¹ Dever 2014, 17-18.

⁴² Margueron 1991, 1237.

⁴³ Callot 2011, 55.

⁴⁴ Ahmad 2015, 20.

⁴⁵ To learn more about the importance of water in Syrian cults, see: Ahmad 2015, 8-9.

⁴⁶ On cave cults widespread in the North African area, see: Susanna 2007.

⁴⁷ Ahmad 2015, 20.

century BC composed of a square pool surrounded by porches with a small *naos* in the centre. This constitutes an architectural example that is closest to our North African sanctuaries, and of Bostan Esh Sheikh (sanctuary of the *Ydll* spring), where various sacred features stood on a high podium surrounded by systems of environments, pools and canals, connected to a therapeutic cult.

There are many sanctuaries that have preparations for conveying and collecting this element not related to this category but connected by the indispensable presence of the water element. In northern Africa, out of about 70 temples investigated, 24%⁴⁸ has natural water reserves or collection preparations available because it is an indispensable element in specific rituals, not necessarily dedicated to the exclusive supply of a healthy deity. This may reflect the ancient Near Eastern tendency to execute liturgical and ritual actions in honor of the divinity in which the liquids had a central function, in the form of purifying ablutions or sacred libations. The practice of these rites appears to be documented by the presence of cultural installations specifically intended for carrying out these activities, such as circular or rectangular basins located in the courtyards of temples and often interpreted as places of ablution,⁴⁹ as in the case of Byblos or Gezer.

Although comparisons with the Near Eastern world of the Iron Age are not exactly fitting, from a structural point of view, except for Amrit, a common root in the Near Eastern religion, that forms the basis of sacred architecture in North Africa, cannot be excluded. It should not be neglected that, unfortunately, there are not many examples in the Phoenician territory of sacred workshops from the Iron Age and this can lead to more complex comparisons and reasoning, which transcend common schemes.

The Punic temples of North Africa are, therefore, characterized by a variable form based on local contingencies (physical spaces, the taste of local *élites*, the need for the substrate, building materials available), but as mentioned, by respecting for characteristics unique and preserved over the centuries.

It is evident, given the multitude and variety of planimetric solutions, that what matters most is the presence of features suitable for carrying out ritual activities such as bloody sacrifices and libations, well known in the Semitic practices of Levant and Syria.

Another fundamental aspect had to be the protection and isolation of these structures from the common sight, through a sacred enclosure; also the criterion of axiality probably had to preserve this finality, as a form of progressive approach to divinity, which could be carried out gradually or for clerical classes.

However, the presence of a large court let us suppose the possibility of approaching (perhaps only on some special occasions, in the Near East, for example, processions are attested) of the devotees in order to carry out rites and depositions, a common practice also in the Near East.

The presence of the porches in Amrit has been attributed to the ritual practice connected to a specific path that the worshipper had to carry out and to the carrying out of the

⁴⁸ Note that most of the excavations carried out on sacred buildings in the North African area are not totally exhaustive because they are carried out at the beginning of the centuries, most of the time not by specialized archaeologists. The lack of water could, therefore, also have been due to the omission of the indication in the excavation report or in the monument description.

⁴⁹ Sala 2008, 71-72.

incubatio;⁵⁰ it cannot be excluded that the repeated presence of porticos in the architecture of northern Africa is to be connected to one of these ritual practices that make the presence of this architectural element indispensable.

Finally, how not to be influenced by the direct model of comparison offered by the Syrian and Levantine territories in which, in the Classical period, we witness the evolutionary process that characterizes some sacred places with a large *temenos* that housed one or more religious buildings, as in the case of sanctuaries by Hason Sfire and Hason Sulaiman. This process recalls in each aspect the evolution that has also taken place in northern Africa, in the passage between open-air areas with simple preparations up to the creation of the so-called “African-type temples”.

The causes of the structural changes that have taken place over time are probably due to the influences that the substrate assimilated over time and their needs. The fact that in Morocco the progressions of the so-called “African type” temple and a greater diffusion of the juxtaposed type temple are scarcely attested, can support this hypothesis. In fact, it can be thought that this phenomenon could have depended on the different sphere of influence to which it is subjected the region that falls within the limited economic system of the “circle of the strait” and the distance from the Carthaginian model, first, and from the power of Rome later, which only succeeded in making it a Tingitan province in 42 AD.⁵¹

The analysis carried out leads us to think that there is not necessarily a single archetypal and progressive architectural form, but an evolutionary adaptation derived from local needs, which must respect some oriental structural characteristics, considered fundamental for the performance of certain ritual practices.

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⁵⁰ Oggiano 2012, 205.

⁵¹ Susanna 2021, 7-20, 401-411.

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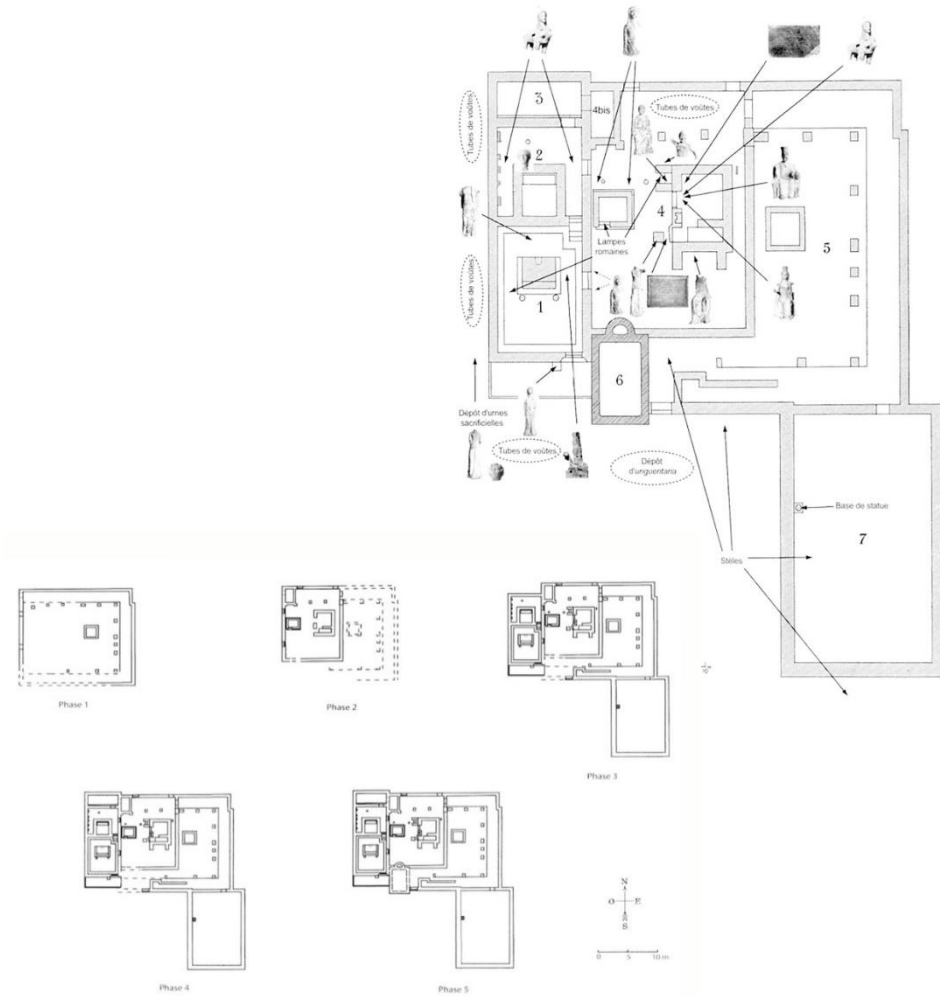


Fig. 2 - The sanctuary of Thinissut and on the right a reconstruction of the evolutionary phases (after Sebaï - Dridi 2008, figs. 2, 4).

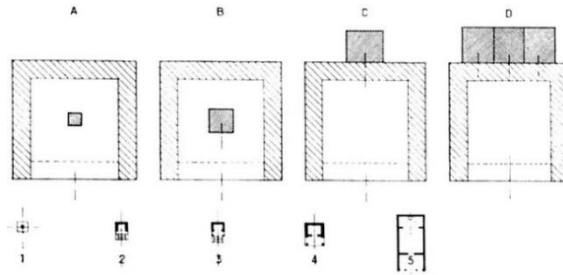


Fig. 3 - Evolution of the “court temples” in Northern Africa (Lézine 1959, fig. 4).

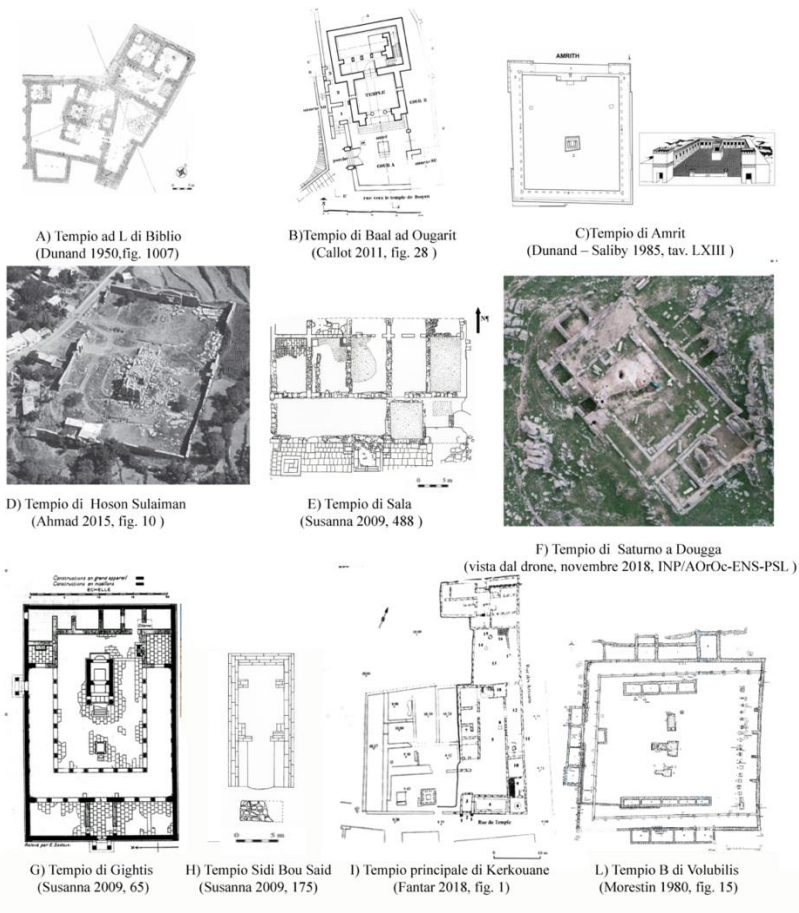


Fig. 4 - Templar architecture models in the Near East and North Africa (author’s elaboration).