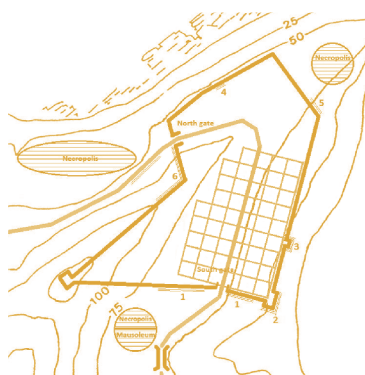


# Dellys, ancient Rusuccuru: traces and continuity of a Mediterranean city without remains in the heart of the Mons Ferratus of Caesarian Mauretania



**Abstract:** This article explores the significance and position of ancient Rusuccuru within the coastal settlement system of Caesarian Mauretania. The main issue lies in the lack of urban and suburban data reflecting the administration of the vast Mons Ferratus (Djurdjura) region. The study examines the correlation between two scales of the Roman city. The first pertains to the territory in its military, economic, geomorphological, and migratory aspects. The second concerns its legal status and urban topography – specifically, its mode of growth, morphological characteristics, and the persistence of its ancient land plots. The question posed is whether Rusuccuru (Dellys) functioned as a stronghold during the Roman Empire's conquest of Africa and whether, despite the scarcity of historical material, it exerted dominance over a group of *pagi* and a surrounding vast territory.

**Keywords:** Roman Africa, Caesarian Mauretania, city without remains, territorial influence, reference area, urban topography, traces and continuity, Rusuccuru

## INTRODUCTION

Historical centers that bear evidence of continuous occupation present the challenge of distinguishing between their ancient and medieval layers. Current conservation plans draw on few skills and disciplines necessary for such studies and often omit the issue of

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historic stratification across overlapping scales — the territory, town, aggregate, and building. Dellys, like other Mediterranean coastal settlements, has been marginalized in ancient and medieval history due to insufficient research on its role in the formation of ancient Africa and recognition of its urban archaeology and morphology. This historic town is located 106 km west of Béjaia (ancient Saldae) and 100 km east of Algiers (ancient Icosium) in the northwest corner of the Djurdjura Massif.

Built on a spur of the coastal massif, the earliest archaeological remains date back to the Phoenician-Punic period, when a port called Ascurum was established. Nicolas Carayon (2008: 185–186) mentions archaeological material from this period, including Carthaginian coins from the 3rd century BC and stelae from the 2nd or 1st century BC, some of which bear inscriptions and the sign of Tanit. The site was subsequently occupied by the Romans, Vandals, and Byzantines, followed by the Berber dynasties of the Zirids, Hammadites, Ziyānids, Hafsids, and Marinids. In the 16th century, during the Ottoman period, refugees from the second wave of the Reconquista were welcomed. The town's Kasbah, a fortified medieval core, boasts a unique architectural style that reflects its rich history.

Since 1845, Rusuccuru has undergone two major phases of transformations and expansions, including the creation of a colonial housing estate on the south side and the development of built-up areas since the 1980s. The port is comparable to Saldae or Icosium due to its geo-morphological features and favorable geographical conditions.

In her book *Incidental Archaeologists*, Bonnie Effros (2018) provides an exhaustive account of French colonial intervention in Algeria's archaeological monuments during the 19th century, highlighting the role of army officers in archaeological campaigns. She shows how, in the first decades after the capture of Algiers, Roman archaeology was used to help the new conquerors establish their identity. Despite their limited knowledge of Latin and classical history — meaning they were rarely involved in genuine archaeological exploration — the military often took part in the looting of monuments. Effros further notes that French colonial scholars displayed an unequal appreciation of ancient monuments, favoring those that affirmed their imperial greatness, such as Timgad and Djemila, sites that might suggest assimilation to the Roman civilization they claimed as their heritage (Effros 2018: 31). This preference came at the expense of urban monuments, which, in the absence of any protective legislation, were often sacrificed to make way for military garrisons. At the time, archaeological officers had complete discretion to preserve or demolish monuments.

Nabila Oulebsir (2004: 17–18) argues that colonial exploration policy between 1830 and 1930 focused on surveying ancient subsistence remains. French garrisons in historic centers destroyed, plundered, and reused ancient structures, leading to an almost total absence of archaeological material — a situation that misrepresents Rusuccuru's role in the region's ancient history.

According to Anna Mascarello (1976: 7), humans have been present in Dellys since prehistoric times, as evidenced by the

discovery of various flint tools, pottery sherds, whetstones, punches, axes, and other stone objects. One object, marked by two grooves running from end to end, may have been used for sharpening weapons or projectiles, or it may depict the hand of Tanit.

The earliest traces of antiquity date to the Phoenician-Punic period, when the port of Ascurum was established. Nicolas Carayon (2008: 185–186) documents archaeological artifacts from this period, including Carthaginian coins from the 3rd century BC and stelae from the 2nd or 1st century BC — one inscribed, and two marked with the symbol of Tanit. Among the observed remains was a 3 m × 1.5 m × 2 m tumulus, probably a *bazina* (Berber funerary monument). Dating is difficult due to the absence of funerary furniture, graves, or bones. While the exterior shape

was obscured by a heap of stones, the interior, accessible through an opening created by visitors, revealed a vaulted space with carved stone walls. The back wall contained two superimposed niches: one near the floor, probably for food storage, and the other for a votive lamp, traces of which were still visible (Mascarello 1976: 12) [Fig. 1:a, b].

Mascarello (1976: 10) concludes that these archaeological remains attest to an important ancient town. She also records numerous accidental finds, such as a jar broken apart on a building site after workers had attempted to remove it so they could resume work following months of delay, and an amphora filled with golden feldspar discovered at a water pipeline site in Oued-Oubey, which was quickly forgotten. These cases illustrate the absence of archaeological

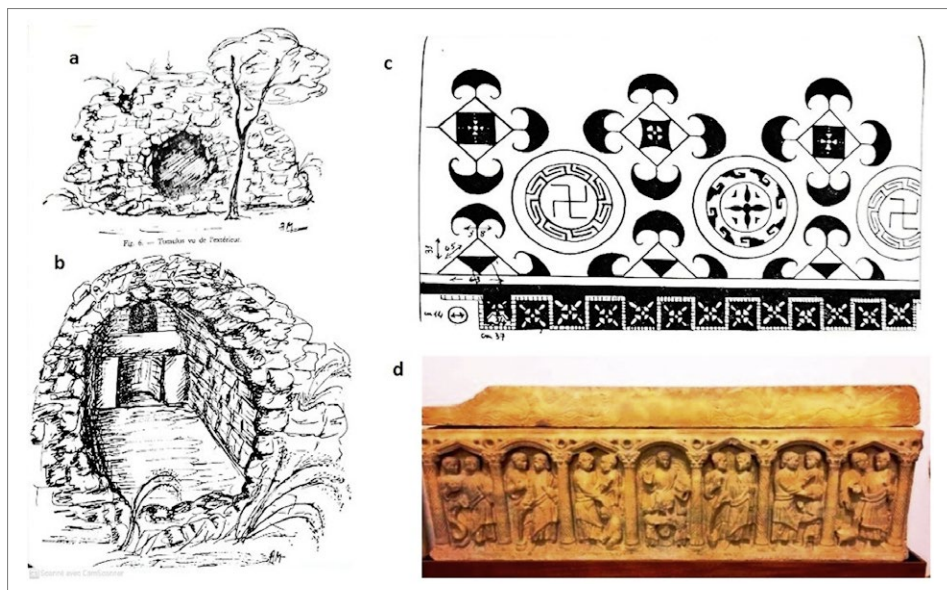


Fig. 1. a, b – tumulus (After Mascarello 1976: 13); c – mosaic of the Technical High School (After Mascarello 1976: 7); d – sarcophagus of the Seven Miracles of Christ (courtesy of the Museum of Antiquities of Algiers)

supervision in Dellys — a concern that Mascarello (1973: 9) expressed with urgency.

Stéphane Gsell (1911: 3, Sheet 6) observed the remains of numerous military and agricultural buildings, as well as villas, in the vicinity of Dellys, located along the main roads and in the fields. These bear witness to intense suburban activity and connections. Among the many archaeological artifacts he recorded are a stela symbolizing Tanit and a trove of coins belonging to Juba II and his son Ptolemy, found in a vase (Gsell 1911: 2–3; Sheet 6). Gsell (1911: 4, Sheet 6) also observed the reuse of ancient materials, including columns, capitals, and ashlar, in the old mosque and private residences in the Kasbah.

In the western extramural area of the gardens, he noted an unpublished epitaph and a diademed female head — possibly Venus— found in the foundations, as well as a votive stela with an eagle grasping a thunderbolt. Nearby, on the seafront, he identified thermal baths likely associated with several villas (Gsell 1911: 4, Sheet 6).

According to Mascarello (1976: 14–16), three mosaics forming the floor of a swimming pool were unearthed in 1959 during construction work in the courtyard of an arts and crafts school. Two were destroyed, but the third —measuring 7.5 m × 3 m— was mounted on a classroom wall. This mosaic featured geometric patterns, including swastikas, circles, tiles, and black pebbles on a yellow background. Mascarello explains that the swastika, common throughout the Mediterranean basin, symbolized the power of the sun [Fig. 1:c].

In 1857, a marble sarcophagus dating to the 4th century AD was uncovered during military work. This is undoubtedly the most significant artifact ever found in Dellys, containing a lead coffin with a skeleton inside. The front of the sarcophagus is adorned with scenes depicting the seven miracles of Christ, arranged in seven panels framed by columns. The lid's front features three dolphins (Visbecq 1926: 12) [Fig. 1:d].

Stéphane Gsell (1912: 1) reproduced Delamare's drawings (1850: Pl. 1) [Fig. 2], made during expeditions to ancient sites in Algeria between 1840 and 1845. While in Dellys —where the French army had established a garrison in the old town— Delamare sketched the remains of an ancient wall [Fig. 2:a], later demolished by the French army. He depicted several votive stones from the Roman period, three of which had crescent-shaped tops. The first stone depicts four women and a child in various poses [Fig. 2:b]; the second shows a woman accompanied by a child [Fig. 2:c]; the third shows a rider holding his horse by the bridle [Fig. 2:d]; the fourth, which is damaged, depicts the head of a child [Fig. 2:e]; the fifth is not stone but a rectangular wooden panel with a cross engraved in the center; and the sixth, made of stone, depicts a man in a toga holding offerings [Fig. 2:f].

Ancient settlements in Algeria and the wider Mediterranean —such as Marseilles, Cissi, and Saldæ— are often ranked lower archaeologically due to the absence of monumental remains. Due to limited archaeological data, simple assumptions equate the extent of Icosium, located on the coast of Caesarian Mau-

retania, with the Ottoman city (Cresti 1993: 13–14). Its territorial connections extended beyond the Mitidja plain to the Chélif plain, home to the ancient municipalities of Tigava and Castellum Tingitanum. Berbrugger suggests that communication with the hinterland relied on a long-standing network. Cissi and Rusazus, located near Rusuccuru, likewise yielded little ancient material despite being abandoned after the Roman period. These settlements—linked by land and sea routes as well as administrative ties—require a reinterpretation of their history using morphological and territorial analysis. The controversial location of Rusuccuru was definitively confirmed by the discovery of a milestone west of Dellys mentioning *Rusucuriani* at a distance of three miles (Fr-

ezouls and Hus 1954: 149). Previously, the site had been confused with Iomnium (modern Tigzirt) (Visbecq 1926: 9).

The lack of integrated archaeological and morphological data for the territory prevents a full understanding of Rusuccuru's role as an essential gateway and surveillance base for the Mons Ferratus, which resisted Roman colonization. This uncertainty raises questions about Rusuccuru's territorial extent and urban topography, and about its status within coastal settlements, the Mons Ferratus, and Roman Africa. The concepts of *status*, city, and the urban-rural connection refer to specific Roman administrative and legal categories. To follow the discussion in this article, it is necessary to define terms such as territoriality, expanded metropolis, *urbs*,

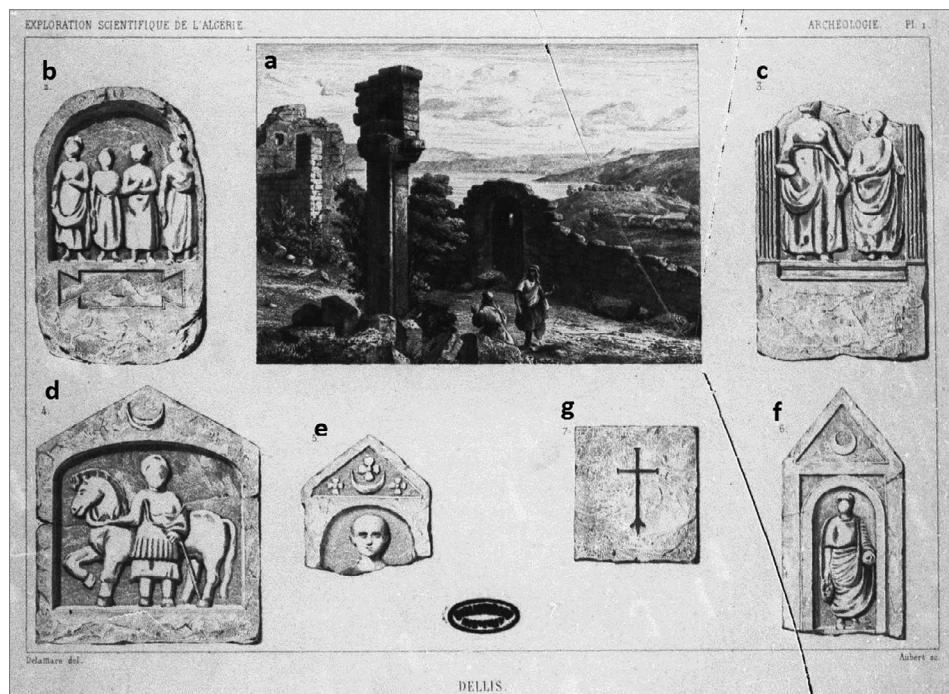


Fig. 2. a – Remains of the wall surrounding the Kasbah; b–f – votive stones (Delamare 1850: Pl. 1)



legislation, *municipium*, and colony. Ancient city territories (*fines urbium*) were often unevenly distributed, with some encompassing vast areas. These size disparities can be attributed to historical factors, the age of settlement, and the status accorded by Rome to subjugated communities (Leveau 1993: 467).

The relationship between subdivisions and their extra-urban extensions in Rusuccuru raises broader questions about a city's control over its hinterland, given that "the town/rural relationship is influenced by social and cultural changes" (Leveau 1983: 920–921). Rome consolidated its dominance through a network of towns, many founded by the local population. The phenomenon of "municipal anomalies in Roman Africa" distinguishes between two settlement categories: colonist-founded settlements and pre-existing indigenous settlements, as in the case of Rusuccuru (Benabou 1981: 253).

In Classical Latin, *status* means position, situation, or condition, and in this context it reflects the measure of a city's civic territory (Peyras 1995: 33). The Roman land surveyor (*gromaticus*) Siculus Flaccus classified cities as colonies, *municipia*, or prefectures (Leveau 1993: 464–465). Pliny the Elder defined a *civitas* as a foreign community, city, *municipium*, or colony, which could encompass both an urban area and an extensive territory (Leveau 1993: 465). Modern scholarship similarly defines *civitas* as comprising diverse territorial components (Leveau 1993: 463), including *vici* (boroughs), *pagi* (villages), *castella* (small fortified villages), farms, *fundi* (large estates), villas, and *praedia*. Rusuccuru's status and urban character should thus be understood more as a civic

community within a territory than as an autonomous urban center (Arnaud 2002: 39–40). It can be reduced to a religious, political, and judicial forum without necessarily constituting an urban community. Its territory was divided into numerous *pagi*, each with a central settlement and institutions, alongside *castella* or *vici* that also possessed institutions and, at times, their own territory. City hierarchy was determined more by the community's character and relationship with the central authority than by urban size or administrative importance (Arnaud 2002: 39–40).

Rusuccuru initially became a *municipium* in AD 40 and was elevated to a colony in the 3rd century. A *municipium* was a *peregrine* settlement with privileged status, empowered to administer its own laws and institutions. A *civitas* was a legal entity with magistrates, sovereign power (*libera potestas*), and jurisdiction over territories (*regiones*), land, and military zones, often anchored to a fortified urban core. According to Jean Peyras (1995: 36), "territory is what was created to cause terror in the enemy". The colony that succeeded the *municipium*, as in the case of Rusuccuru, was intended to control conquered territory. It incorporated Roman citizens and natives—including slaves, freedmen, and itinerants—into a unified urban, religious, and institutional framework, with confiscated land allocated to military veterans. The colony's territory should be understood within the *civitas-state* model (Hermon 2020: 45), and the concept of *deducere coloniam* should be analyzed in terms of periodic changes in the relationship between state and territory.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

To restore a place, it is first necessary to understand its earlier structure. Gianfranco Caniggia and Gian Luigi Maffei (2000: 131) point out that an interpretation of the built environment cannot be separated from their broader territorial context. In the case of Rusuccuru, it is important to determine whether it comprised a group of settlements, controlled a vast territory, formed part of a network of trade routes, or was merely a secondary military establishment along the sea route. This question engages typomorphological and historical-archaeological approaches to territory. To assess the importance of the Rusuccuru settlement in the structure of the Mons Ferratus territory and Roman Africa, we must examine construction at overlapping territorial, urban plot, and building scales, both diachronically and synchronically. These analyses concern:

- the territorial extent and anchoring of the settlement;
- the morphological structure of the ancient intramural settlement;
- analysis of the Kasbah's plot system and the memory of its layout, leading to a typological approach to the built structures.

To understand the extent and territorial anchoring of the Rusuccuru settlement, we will reconstruct the historical process of its territorial formation by examining the morphology of the landscape, the development of the network of routes and settlements, the territorial sea gates, the defensive system, and the origins of the settlement. This will allow us to evaluate Rusuccuru's role within the successive ter-

ritories of the coastal massif between the Nasavath and Addyma rivers, within the geographical and cultural reference area of Mons Ferratus, and in the broader context of Mauretania Caesariensis beyond the impassable mountains.

Ancient cities that have been reoccupied, such as Dellys, often lack the material evidence necessary to reconstruct their ancient and medieval history. Furthermore, the territorial and administrative extent of Dellys as a Roman *municipium* or colony depends on our understanding of its historical stratification and ancient urban morphology. A typological and historical-archaeological approach is therefore required to analyze the formation and transformation of cities, as well as the morphological structure of ancient settlements. The rich stratification of Dellys's historic core, together with the hypothesis that ancient layouts persisted in the medieval town—evidenced by the survival of the *cardo-decumanus* and the regular division of blocks and roads—suggests that ancient layouts endured here more than in other settlements in the same geographical and cultural area (Lower and Upper Kabylia). On this topic, Albert Lévy (2005: 36–38) notes that continuity between ancient and medieval towns is primarily expressed in the persistence of *cardo-decumanus* axes, plot and road layouts, or the reuse and transformation of certain ancient buildings (arenas, temples, etc.).

For his part, Gérard Chouquer (2012: 137–138) argues that analyses of ancient urban morphology were shaped to em-



phasize the regularity of Roman layouts, rendering anything deviating from this pattern invisible by describing it as *dé-forme*. In reality, however, many ancient settlements departed from the regular plan. To move beyond the boundaries of historical and archaeological studies, this research incorporates both morphology and morpho-history. It relies on aspects such as identifying notable alignments, delineating plot boundaries, characterizing dominant plot orientations, and recognizing orientation inclusions.

For the case study, we will employ Alain Borie and François Denieul's (1984: 8–13) method for the morphological analysis of traditional urban fabrics. Our approach to the parcel system will be a retrospective processual reading, aiming to trace potential matrix parcel networks or centuriations. To do this, we will examine the 1845 cadaster of the town of Dellys

within the limits of the medieval core. The issue of intramural settlement will be addressed by defining the boundaries of the small urban core and hypothesizing that the layout of small ancient blocks has persisted. New data on pre-Roman urban nuclei, or those created from scratch, calls into question the Vitruvian peristyle and villa models, favoring local or hybrid typologies instead. Research on Volubilis in Mauretania Tingitana (Rebuffat 2006: 564, 579, 603, 605) and Tiddis in Numidia (Mehentel and Touahri 2021: 384) raises questions about the specificity of studies on ancient African architecture and town planning. This is also evident in Mons Ferratus (the ruins of Rusuccuru, Iomnium, and Rusippisir), where architectural and constructional typological differences have been observed compared to ancient remains in other regions of the Roman Empire.

## TERRITORIAL SCALE: RUSUCCURU'S SCOPE AND ANCHORAGE

### RUSUCCURU IN THE PROCESS OF ANTHROPIC STRUCTURING OF THE MONS FERRATUS TERRITORY (DJURDJURA)

The Treaty of Rome in 201 BC resulted in the fall of Carthage and the vassalage of Massinissa, King of Numidia, to Rome. Mauretania and Numidia remained vassals until 33 BC, when Octavian made them a Roman domain. Pliny the Elder states that the Romans conquered Rusuccuru, an ancient city in Mauretania, and promoted it to *municipium* around AD 40. He notes "*Rusuccuru curum civitate honoratum a Claudio*" ("Rusuccuru, granted the status of municipality (*municipium*) by Claudius") in his list of towns in Mauritania. This change in status followed

Claudius' promotions, which, according to Pliny, involved the colonies of Lixus, Caesarea, Oppidum Novum, and the Roman municipalities of Volubilis and Rusuccuru (Plin., *HN* V.1).

Roman colonization led to the reoccupation of coastal areas in western Mons Ferratus, Mauretania, and Numidia. The establishment of towns and *centuriation* of valley areas aimed to rationally exploit Africa for the empire's growth. The research examines two cycles of territorial structuring in Africa, similar to those in central Italy. The first cycle took place before the 5th century BC, and the second from the 4th century BC to the 3rd century AD. By 146 BC, Mons Fer-

ratus had developed a network of routes and settlements that the Romans used to penetrate and exploit the territory. As Gianfranco Caniggia and Gian Luigi Maffei (2000: 146) observe: “when an already structured area is reappropriated, starting from the valley floor, the legacy of previous phases is not repeated but taken on in a new hierarchy, with a different potential for reciprocal connections.”

### HUMAN SETTLEMENT PREDATING ROMAN COLONIZATION

Mons Ferratus began its structuring through an initial cycle of four progressive phases. The first phase occurs spontaneously and naturally (Caniggia and Maffei 2000: 137) through the formation of paths along the main ridges [Fig. 3]. The first human occupation took place in the coastal and inland massifs, shaped by the territorial division imposed by the Addyma

valley. The coastal massif has a continuous ridge at altitudes of 500–800 m, while the inland massif has a ridge between 900 and 1100 m. The second phase corresponds to the formation of high promontory settlements on secondary ridges branching from the main ridges. The third phase of structuring involves the development of valley-bottom and coastal routes [see Fig. 3] leading to secondary ridges, where the strategic factor becomes irrelevant (Caniggia and Maffei 2000: 142–143).

The fourth phase involves the development of synthetic counter-crest routes and improper synthetic counter-crest routes, leading to the overall occupation of the territory, except for major river-crossed plains. Old boundaries were crossed by fords, creating routes linking major urban centers on opposite sides of the same mountain system [see Fig. 3]. Modern routes largely follow the same

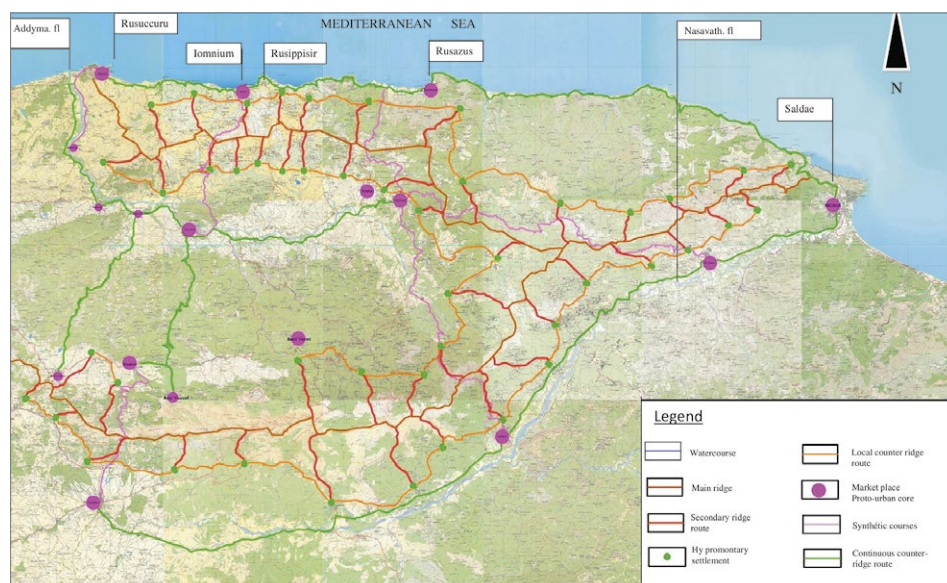


Fig. 3. Summary of the process of anthropic structuring of the Mons Ferratus area. Topographic map of Great Kabylia (Scale: 1/100000, map K. Bougdal)

lines as in antiquity. During this phase, urban centers emerged as primary markets radiating to several market places (Caniggia and Maffei 2000: 143–147).

In the second cycle of consolidation, previous structures were reinterpreted and integrated into a new framework. The first phase saw the emergence of valley-bottom routes connecting urban nucleuses, originating from synthetic routes and regarded as significant hubs. The second phase saw the reuse of proto-urban and urban nucleuses; in the third phase, continuous counter-crest routes were reused as high-level valley bottom routes; and in the fourth phase, local counter-crest routes and high promontory settlements were reintegrated. The Roman colonial expansion made use of the first and, partly, second cycle structures established before the 4th century BC along the North African coast. During this phase, the Romans developed a road network based on pre-existing valley and coastal routes, which were better suited to travel and territorial control. The example of Calabria and southern Italy, studied by the Italian typo-morphological school, is similar to that of Kabylia in geomorphological, historical, and cultural terms, and provides a good illustration of the nature of Mediterranean territorial occupation.

#### **NETWORK OF ROUTES INVOLVING RUSUCURU**

The significance of Roman coastal towns can be understood by examining their role in the period's road system, in rela-

tion to the morphological structure of the terrain. Once colonization was organized around Sitifis and Cuicul (Salama 1980: 102), the Romans proceeded to establish a road network to coordinate their territory and connect it to the coast. For the Mons Ferratus, the main routes to consider were: the coastal road between Saldæ and Rusuccuru; the road along the impassable borders to the south, with Auzia as its center; and the north–south access roads from the ports of Saldæ and Rusuccuru to the inland Sitifis–Auzia–Rapidum road, built under Emperor Hadrian in AD 122. Inland areas were dependent on coastal settlements, and although numerous routes linked coastal towns and inland areas, the only one traversing the northern coastal massif was the route to the Serbetes and Addyma valleys.

Beyond this route, the junction with the hinterland —dominated by the high massif of the Mons Ferratus— was established from the territorial gateway in the upper valley of the Serbetes (Isser) (Gsell 1911: 2, Sheet 6). Saldæ and Icosium were safe anchorages, with secure routes and no major natural morphological barriers, which may have placed Rusuccuru in a secondary role, but they were relatively distant from the arable lands of the Mons Ferratus hinterland. Under these conditions, the route mentioned by Claudius Ptolemaeus<sup>1</sup> around AD 150 —although its authority is disputed (Laporte 2003: 171–173)— is worth examining. Ptolemaeus describes a route connecting the

1 Claudius Ptolemaeus (AD 100–178) was a Greek mathematician, astronomer, and geographer. For Caesarian Mauritania, he records the names of places, rivers, and road routes in a complex manner, which Jean-Pierre Laporte (2003) attempts to elucidate.

lower Serbetes valley to Auzia (Sour-el-Ghozlane) via Castellum Auzienes (Ain-Bessam) [Fig. 4], reflecting the Auzia region's significance as a grain-producing region and exporter of wine to Rome. Oscar MacCarthy (1886: 350, 359), citing Ptolemaeus, also refers to other routes that crossed, bypassed, or otherwise involved the port of Rusuccuru *municipium* [see Fig. 4].

The first route linked Bida to Iomnium via Simitka (Abizar). A second road crossed the valley of the lower Serbetes (Bas Isser), passing through Vāsana (Bordj Menaïel), Phloriya (Aïn Faci), and Oppidium (Tizi Ouzou) before reaching Bida (Djema Saharidj). It would have connected Phloriya to Rusuccuru via the Addyma valley [see Fig. 4]. Transversal secondary routes that diversified access to the ports may have existed, even if they were considered dangerous and difficult to traverse. A typo-morphological analysis

of the territory supports their existence through the reuse in antiquity of the continuous ridge route along the Rusuccuru–Saldæ coastline and the Castellum–Tulei–Tubusuptu inland route, linking them transversally via the synthetic counter-ridges or secondary ridge routes (Iomnium–Bida, Rusazus–Bida, Rusuccuru–Tigissi) [see Fig. 4]. The idea that pre-existing internal routes were used for military columns is generally dismissed, but they were likely used by Roman travelers and merchants for trade with native tribes, who did not live under a regime of autarky (Bibesco 1865: 886).

As Rusuccuru and Saldæ were strongly anchored in strategic maritime and coastal routes, the Romans had every interest in maintaining nearby settlements such as Tubusuptu, Tigissi, and Bida — the furthest reaching settlement in the Quinquegentanei territory (Bibesco 1865: 885).

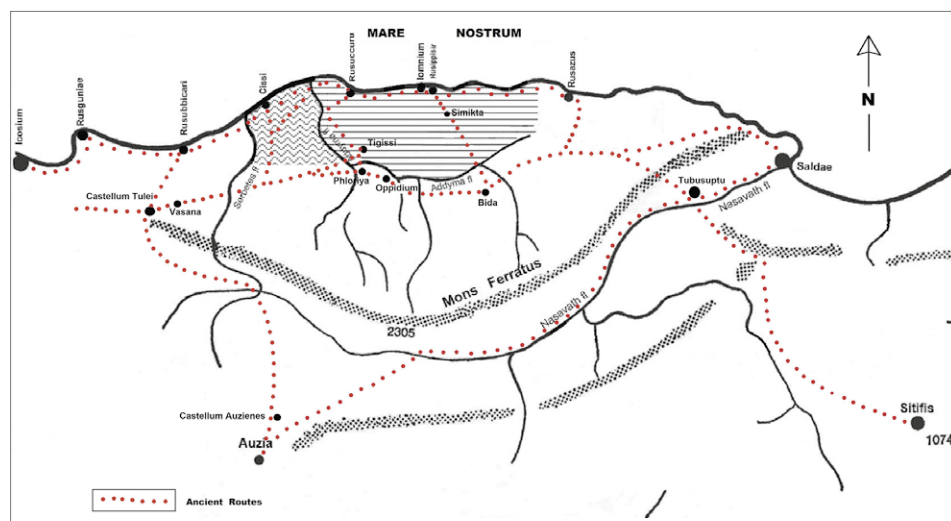


Fig. 4. The extent and territorial relations of Rusuccuru in Mons Ferratus, Mauretania Caesariensis, and Mauretania Sitifensis (Map after Encyclopédie berbère 26/2004)

### **A DEFENSIVE SYSTEM WITH TWO LINES: URBAN AND HIGH PROMONTORIES**

Analysis of the area has identified both natural and man-made morphological features. Rusuccuru played a significant role in shaping the Roman conquest strategy for the coastal strip, the Mons Ferratus, and Africa more broadly. As Kabylia was not highly productive, the Romans were interested mainly in its coastal region and its valleys providing access inland. To achieve this, it was necessary to secure the port centers and the roads (Dessommes 1964: 12). Rusucurru relied on urban fortifications and fortified posts along the main ridge of the coastal massif to defend itself against native tribes. Its status as a strong garrison in Caesarian Mauritania is attested by the *praesidium* of Boccus in the 1st century BC, when it minted its own coinage (Laporte 1995: 2257). A *praesidium* was an outpost outside a military camp, where a contingent of soldiers was stationed to secure the surrounding territory (D'Alembert and Diderot 1751: 258–259). The *praesidium* was thought to have been located at Askour, near Hippone, before being moved to the coast at Rusuccuru for reasons now unclear. Later, the Peutinger Map and the Antonine Itinerary locate the *praesidium* in the Atlas Mountains (Prévost 1858).

### **DIVISION OF THE MONS FERRATUS TERRITORY AND HYPOTHETICAL REPOPULATION OF THE COASTAL CHAIN**

When discussing a territory conquered by the Romans, one must examine the origin and composition of its population—whether stable or shifting—which leads to a different understanding of the colonial process and the manner in

which the territory was brought under control. The population's resistance until the death of Firmus and his brothers in the 3rd century AD prevented the Romans from claiming the Serbetes valley. Theodosius's suppression of the Quinquegentanei tribes' rebellion in AD 373 may have led Rome to relocate coastal tribes and confiscate their lands, which some believe were repopulated by people from Sitifian and Tunisian territories (Boulifa 1925: 12–13). This thesis is refuted by the fact that during the 4th century AD, King Nubel (Laporte 2012a: 5626–5629) ruled the Mons Ferratus with an iron fist (Bibesco 1865: 877). The colonization of the Quinquegentanei territory must be viewed in the context of the ancient world, in which the conquest of large territories could not be achieved without the power and cooperation of local elites.

This dynamic can be expressed in terms of “emptiness” and “fullness”: the emptiness being the elites' lack of interest in participating in the Roman project, and the fullness being the presence of strong political and social elites whose inclusion would have brought no additional prestige (Veisse 2005: 89). In other areas, control was maintained through a relentless struggle against the natives. The Romans ensured that Mons Ferratus could be circumvented only by sea or through the valleys of Addyma and Nasabath, keeping its population within natural limits but permitting trade and travel [see *Fig. 4*]. The Djurdjura region exhibits a clear territorial division, with high promontories in the south and medium-altitude promontories in the coastal strip, including the



Addyma valley. The coast shows few signs of Romanization, apart from a few settlements and military posts (Boulifa 1925: 13). Rusucurru and Saldæ were responsible for monitoring any movement along the coast.

**RUSUCCURU, BEYOND THE OPPIDUM:  
STATUS AND TERRITORIAL EXTENT AS  
MUNICIPIUM AND COLONY**

The Roman urban defense system, population origin, durability, and resistance to conquest are intertwined with the extent and status of conquered towns and territories. The ancient coastal city, which was repeatedly rebuilt, has left little evidence of its inhabitants or status. The town's status cannot be determined solely by the number of inscriptions, as these are not indicative of the continuity or extent of post-Roman occupation (Laporte 2013: 73–100). The colony's size is uncertain due to limited archaeological data, but it likely extended westwards to Oued Sebaou (ancient Addyma), possibly including the port settlement of Cissi municipium (Cap Djinet) (Laporte 1973: 28–30) [see Fig. 4]. To the east, the *pagi* of Iomnium (Tigzirt) and Rusippisir (Taksebt) (Gasco 2004: 264–266) were attached to Rusucurru, whose *civitas* was promoted from its foundation to a municipality under Roman law<sup>2</sup> [see Fig. 4]. “The hypothesis suggests a federation of the three localities around Rusuccuru, followed by a later separation” (Février 1996: 819). Iomnium and Rusippisir yielded the greatest number of inscriptions mentioning Rusuccuritan leaders.

They paid tribute to the Rusuccuritan *municipium* and were administered by its citizens [see Fig. 4]. The southern limits of the city are difficult to determine due to the scarcity of remains. It is unlikely that the area was densely occupied; in fact, it appears to have developed mainly through watchtowers that controlled the roads.

The coastal massif features defensive works and agricultural installations, including farms and wine or oil presses (Laporte 1983: 127–144), mistakenly believed to be Roman military positions. Rusuccuru was elevated to a Roman *deductio* colony in the 3rd century AD due to its extensive territory and strategic role in controlling Mons Ferratus. This promotion granted confiscated land to demobilized veterans to help Romanize the area. The legal promotions enacted by emperors from Trajan to Septimius Severus were political or military in nature (Gasco 1972: 13). Roman control over the coastal areas required the *deductio* of veterans to counterbalance the influence of the deeply rooted tribal territories.

The confederation of the Quinquegentanei and Bavarian tribes against Rome in AD 253 further strengthens this thesis (Laporte 2004: 4007–4009). The colony's boundaries aligned with major geomorphological features (mountainous relief, large rivers). Mons Ferratus was affected by the Romans' inability to penetrate the coastal massif, which remained under tribal control in the 3rd century. Moreover, the entire

2 Rusuccuru's status as a colony is attested in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* and in Antoninus' *Itinerarium*.



Mons Ferratus was enclosed between the Addyma valley and the Romanized plains to the south, with their strong garrisons (Laporte 2004: 4007–4009). The road linking the Nasavath and Addyma valleys, established in the 3rd century AD to divide and subdue the tribes, met with resistance and frequent incursions from the local population. Saldæ and Rusuccuru, strategically placed, were responsible for administering and maintaining order in the region, covering both the coastal massif and the Mediterranean shore. There is no evidence of military settlements beyond the Addyma *fluvium* in the central massif, where the tribes retained their autonomy throughout antiquity.

### A VITAL PORT LOCATION FOR ROMAN TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT AND EXPANSION

The convergence of routes and the longevity of its occupation placed Rusuccuru among the most prominent towns of the southern Mediterranean. For the entire hinterland—a vast area exploited for the empire's needs—it was essential to secure ports close to the main agricultural zones. Trade with Mons Ferratus included oil, dried figs,<sup>3</sup> livestock, wood, amphorae, and other goods. Rusuccuru, located at the mouth of the Addyma and Serbetes rivers, was chosen as the port for its strategic position and proximity to the main leading into the interior plains (Laporte 1995: 2256).

## URBAN SCALE: MORPHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF THE ANCIENT SETTLEMENT

### DOUBLE SETTLEMENT HYPOTHESIS

The data on the urban characteristics of Rusuccuru are limited, but its status, territorial extent, and strategic position suggest that it was a colony that may have included two settlements (Visbecq 1926: 13). One was fortified, within the limits of the medieval core, evidenced during the French occupation [Fig. 5] by fragments of walls, thermal baths, water reservoirs, and other habitation and burial sites. The other, *extra muros* along the Roman road, was located to the west on the Ladjenna plateau, between the sea and the Sidi-Sousan ridge, where its remains have been unearthed [see Fig. 5]. These include pools

on Faure Beach and a central stair tower, thought to be the remains of a fortified post [see Fig. 5]. Although there are virtually no traces of it, the urban area within the walls—covering an area of 20 hectares—offers more material for morphological analysis [Fig. 6].

A section of wall (Laporte 2012b: 115–124), similar in style to that at Volubilis, has been uncovered, suggesting the existence of a pre-Roman rampart. Rusuccuru appears to be one of the few fortifications (Laporte 2012b: 106) that apparently predate the reign of Ptolemy, son of Juba II (AD 23–40), and its annexation to Mauretania Caesariensis in

3 In his annals, Tacitus (about AD 58–120) reports that, as payment, the Romans gave legionaries a handful of salt and a handful of dried figs. The latter, with their high calorific value and long shelf life, were useful during military expeditions.

AD 42. Cross-checking the scarce historical evidence makes it possible to date the fortifications to 47 BC, during the reign of Bocchus, when the city was a stronghold resisting and repelling an attack by Pompey the Younger (Laporte 2012b: 114). The city seems to have retained its fortifications, for when it was attacked by Firmus in AD 370, Saint Augustine reports that the Donatist bishop had to open the gates to the conquerors (Laporte 1995: 2257).

#### **HYPOTHETICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ANCIENT FORTIFIED SETTLEMENT BASED ON THE HIPPODAMIAN MODEL**

The fortified settlement offers the possibility of morphological reconstruction, while the *extra muros* area, which served as a kitchen garden for the medieval city,

retains too few traces for such an exercise. Cadastral and archaeological data of minimal value do not reflect the grandeur attributed to it by historians (Laporte 1995: 2258). The only finds, uncovered accidentally during building works, do not allow the reconstruction of the urban topography (Mascarello 1970). Nevertheless, the minimal surviving elements can be used for a hypothetical reconstruction of the fortifications, an assessment of the settlement, and the tracing of old roads. The ancient town extended over an area of around 12 hectares (400 m × 300 m) within a total of 20 fortified hectares, though it is unknown whether the entire enclosed area was occupied, as indicated by the presence of three necropolises. The first necropolis, near the south gate [see Fig. 6], lay on a steep slope later lev-

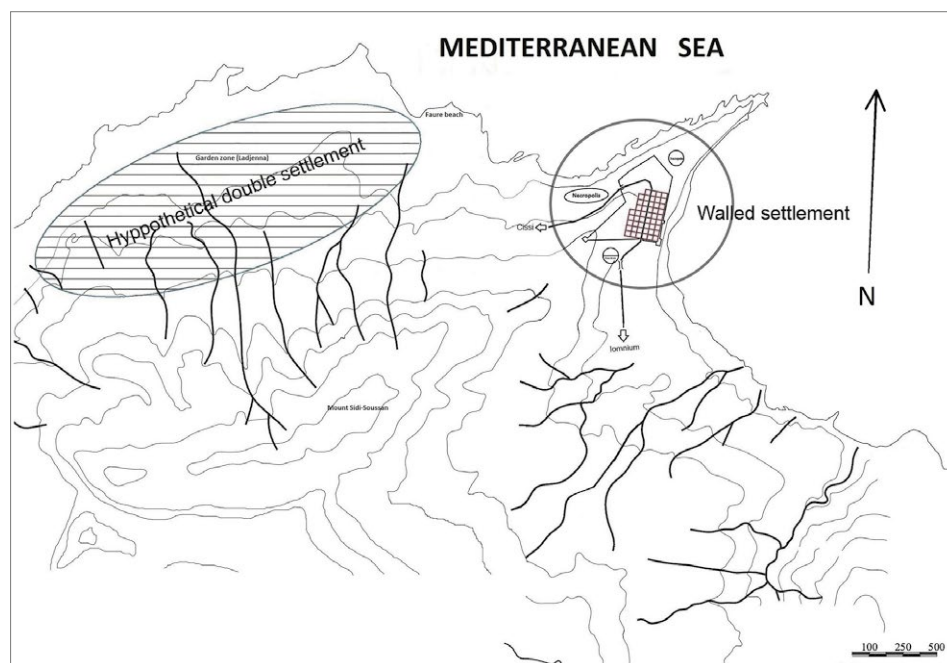


Fig. 5. Map of the urban area of Dellys showing Rusuccuru within the town and the hypothetical extramural location of Ladjenna (Map after Encyclopédie berbère 15/1995)

eled during the creation of the French settlement. This topographical feature, which extended to the shore, required the construction of a bridge outside the fortifications [see Fig. 6].

The second necropolis was located at the northwest gate, near a road exposed during construction works [see Fig. 6]. The third necropolis was located to the north, corresponding to the location of

the present cemetery [see Fig. 6]. Morphologically, this arrangement clearly follows the ancient practice of placing necropolises beyond the ramparts, separating the profane from the sacred. The enclosure—some sections of which are shown on the 1845 cadastral map—followed the southern boundary of the present Kasbah [Fig. 6:1]. At this point, corresponding to a natural break in the terrain, the

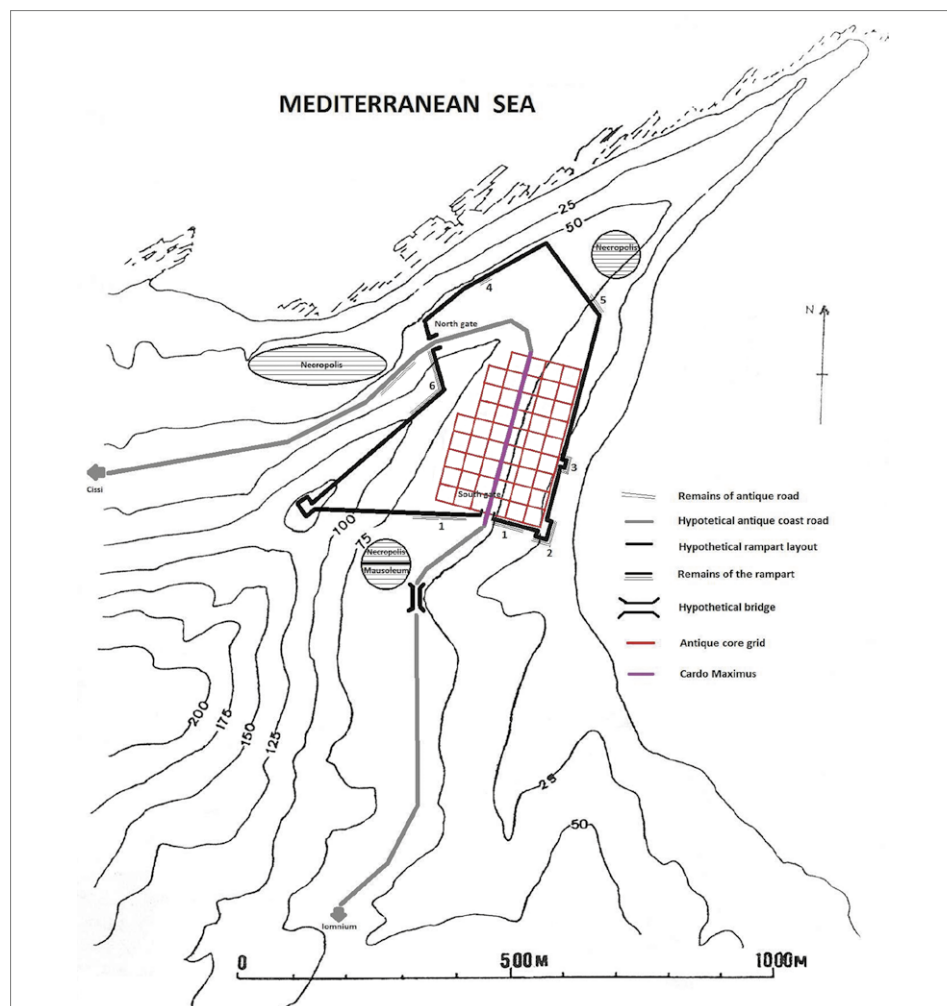


Fig. 6. Hypothetical reconstruction of the fortified settlement (Map after Encyclopédie berbère 15/1995)

remains (Laporte 1995: 2260) of the south gate were identified [see Fig. 6]. To the southeast, on a cliff 23 m high (Visbecq 1926: 9–15), the remains of a north–south fortification can be seen, and the same cadaster records a corner wall with two towers and a dozen ashlar steps [Fig. 6:2]. Further along, circular masonry with a lime-mortar render and the beginnings of a spiral staircase can be seen [Fig. 6:3].

On the west slope, substructures (Gsell 1911: 2–4), probably of the old rampart, were visible east of the French enclosure [Fig. 6:4]. To the northeast, above a modern harbor, an ancient masonry structure [Fig. 6:5] appears to connect to a similar structure on the opposite side of the ridge. Other angular traces identified along the ridge line run parallel to the French fortification [Fig. 6:6]. Given the site's configuration, the main road would likely have crossed the town from north to south, corresponding to the *Cardo*

*Maximus* (Bloch 1970: 1118) [see Fig. 6], suggesting a grid pattern (Laporte 1995: 2260). The hypothesis of a coastal route passing through the town is supported by the discovery, four kilometers northwest of the historic center, of a milestone from the 3rd century AD bearing the names Septimius Severus and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, and ending with *Rusucuriani III* (Visbecq 1926: 9–10). Numerous springs and an aqueduct from an underground reservoir upstream at Sidi-Soussan supplied the town. This water was used to feed thermal baths near the southwest ramparts.

#### URBAN TOPOGRAPHY OF THE KASBAH (MEDIEVAL HISTORIC CENTER) AND THE MEMORY OF THE AGRARIAN AND ANCIENT LAYOUTS

The analysis of the Kasbah's urban topography indicates that its current fabric retains traces of the ancient layout.

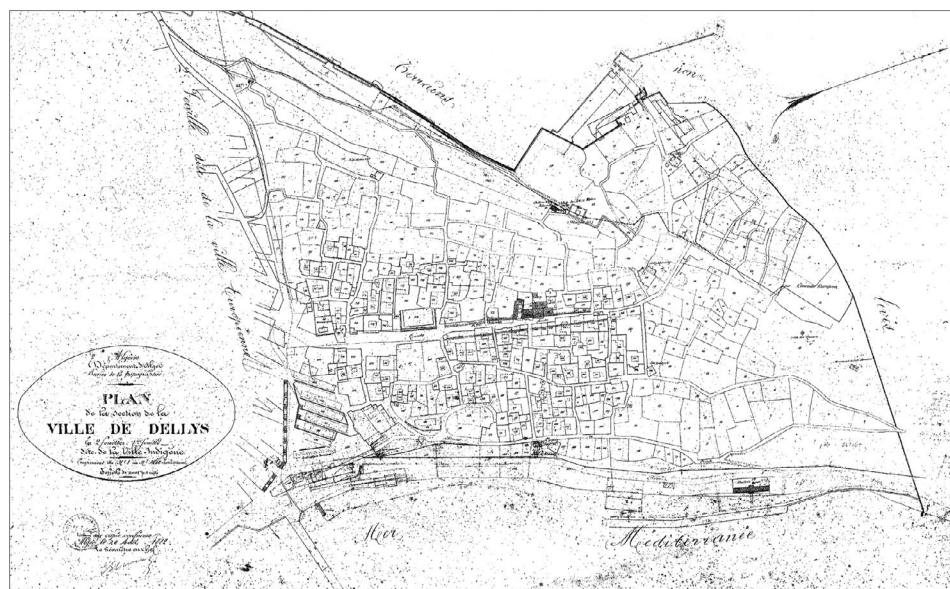


Fig. 7. Cadastral map of the town of Dellys, 1845 (French Military Engineering Services)

With its long-term occupation between Algiers and Béjaia, Dellys offers the richest historical stratification, combining prehistoric, Berber, Punic, Roman, Vandal, Byzantine layers, various medieval dynasties, and later Ottoman, Andalusian, and French phases. In the absence of permanent material evidence, the hypothesis of the survival of the ancient layout can be examined through urban morphology, archaeology, and historical sources. This involves superimposing the Roman centuriation on the original agricultural matrix and on the urban parcel and road networks recorded in the 1845 land cadaster [Fig. 7].

The method first requires revisiting the primary division into parcels, assumed to have been used for agricul-

tural purposes before gradually evolving into urban plots. Using the morphological analysis of traditional urban fabrics, major parcel boundaries on the 1845 cadastral map were identified [see Fig. 7], and their continuities were traced [Fig. 8]. This allowed for the reconstruction of larger plots and the recovery of the original agricultural structure. The first step was to survey all parcel boundaries in the urban fabric, except those adjacent to roads (Borie and Denieul 1984: 8). The resulting diagram reduces the parcel layout to a simplified linear representation [see Fig. 8].

The second step identified lines that align with the primary plot structure, highlighting the most evident continuities and suggesting others that may form

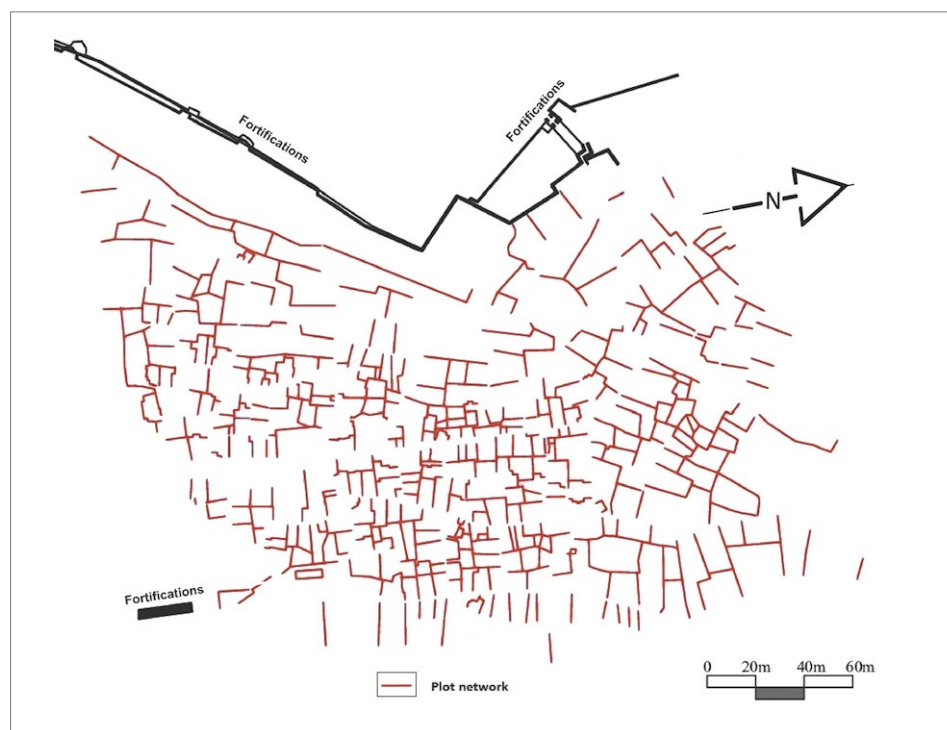


Fig. 8. Plan showing the boundaries of plots, except those bordering roads (K. Bougdal)



part of the same boundary. The resulting layout shows a network of plots at an intermediate stage of transformation [Fig. 9]. The study reveals both the orthogonality of lines and the morphological regularity of plots in built-up and undeveloped areas alike. The third step involved reconstructing large agricultural plots or family holdings, forming agricultural supermodules measuring 210 m × 190 m. Parcel subdivisions are nearly square or rectangular, and the main lines are relatively parallel and orthogonal [Fig. 10]. Overall, the layout shows no notable hierarchy: the two principal orientations—northwest, parallel to the

ridge, and southeast, perpendicular to the shore—are of similar importance. The shorter, segmented, and more widely spaced secondary lines are more common in the north–south direction [see Fig. 10].

This supports the conclusion that the layout of the plots followed the morphological structure of the relief and that the primary plots and subsequent subdivisions were conditioned by the oro-hydrographic system. Superimposing the agricultural grid on the Roman *actus* module<sup>4</sup> (approximately 35.5 m × 35.5 m<sup>5</sup>) reveals a correspondence and alternation of equidistant lines within an area defined by a module of seven by



Fig. 9. Continuity of plot boundary lines (Map K. Bougdal)

- 4 Delimitation, on the ground, of the plots of land of a Roman colony, divided into centuries.
- 5 Readings given as part of the fifth-year architecture workshop: Contribution to the Urban Project (CPU), Department of Architecture, University of Blida, during the academic year 2004–2005.



seven *actus*, skewed to the west by the ridgeline. This correspondence is most evident in the central and eastern parts of the urban layout, where some align perfectly with the grid [see Fig. 10]. Applying the same superimposition to the intermediate phase of plot structuring shows an even closer correspondence of lines in both north–south and east–west directions [see Fig. 9].

Finally, the hypothesis of persistence of the ancient layout is strengthened by superimposing the Roman urban centuriation on the 1845 cadastral road network. The study used the remains and hypothetical lines of the fortifications

—defining the southern and southeastern edges of the urban fabric— as well as the main route (*rue Arabe*) as reference points. The Kasbah's supermodule, which overlaps with the centuriation, is a significant indicator of ancient settlement. The Roman grid is still visible in the Sidi el-Boukhari district, which comprises four built-up areas extending from the main route [Fig. 11]. Many urban routes correspond to the grid. While persistence of the ancient layout is less clear in other areas, it is still visible in several sections of the road network, which more or less align with the grid and correspond with the block identified at Sidi el-Herfi

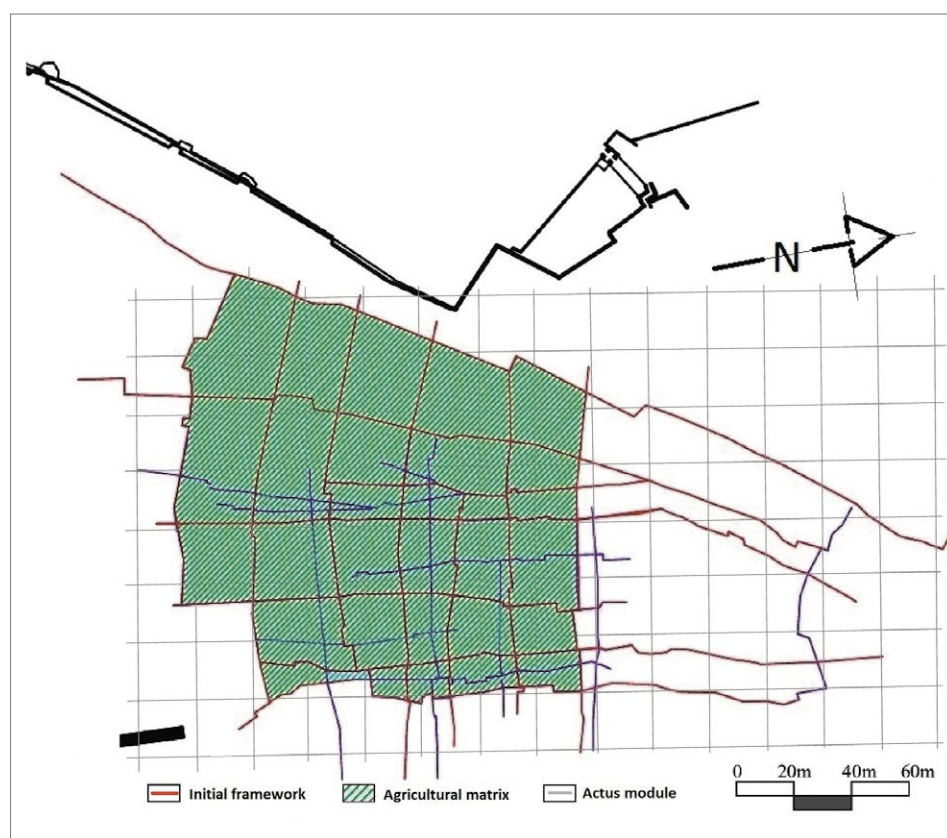


Fig. 10. Layout of agricultural modules and supermodule (Map K. Bougdal)

[see Fig. 11]. The superimposition applies to both built-up and uncultivated land upstream, between the primary route and the main ridgeline. Likewise, the re-

mains of ramparts in the Mizeb quarter [see Figs 6:1, 2; 11] correspond with the ancient grid along its southern and eastern boundaries.

## DISCUSSION

### FAVORABLE CONDITIONS FOR PERMANENT SETTLEMENT AND TAKING POSSESSION OF THE TERRITORY

The typo-morphological approach reveals the relationship between a city and its cultural area (Caniggia and Maffei 2000: 154–159), highlighting the environmental and human components in the construction phase. This phase is influenced by prior factors of occupational expan-

sion or recession. As the case of Dellys suggests, the process of structuring the territory refers back to the pathways and relationships between settlements in a wider geographical area, revealing the correlation between formational and transformational phenomena. These antecedents reverberate on smaller scales, affecting urban settlements, aggregates, and buildings.



Fig. 11. Remnants of the ancient grid in the urban fabric of the Kasbah (Map K. Bougdal)

Combining data on the territorial, settlement, and the urban scales of Rusucurru reveals that the organization of ancient physical space—including routes and settlements—was shaped by an earlier, overarching process of territorial structuring that extended beyond the local scale. Due to its strategic location, Rusucurru has always played a key role in the colonization and economic exploitation of the Quinquegentanei and African territories. Its proximity to the natural gateway to Addyma, coupled with its position on the edge of the main continuous ridge of the coastal chain, fostered both nomadism and subsequent permanent settlement.

“With regard to territorial anchorage, the Italian typo-morphological approach suggests that settlements and urban nuclei are typically a result of previous production and route structuring” (Caniggia and Maffei 2000: 131), which are linked to morphological structure of the relief.

The area has been utilized by Berber, Phoenician, and Roman populations since antiquity for trade, settlement, and territorial control. The alleged transplantation of tribes can be refuted, since the most important among them, the Isafenses, predate the Roman settlement and still exist today within the same boundaries and under the same names: Iflissen-Levhar and Iflissen-Oumelil. Today, there are no notable linguistic variations among the tribes of the Djurdjura (Mons Ferratus), but there are significant lexical differences compared to the tribes of the Sitifis region (today’s Chaouis), who are thought to have replaced the original inhabit-

ants of the Mons Ferratus coastal strip. It should also be noted that in antiquity there was no common Libyan language, as the process of Berber dialectization had already been observed by ancient authors.

The poet Corippus (6th century), who was born in Africa and may have been of African origin himself, notes that the Berber tribes spoke different languages (“*Varius...linguas*”) or even “*Latratus varios*”, meaning “various barking”. In the Christian era, Saint Hippolytus also reported that each tribe had its own language. Saint Augustine contradicts accounts suggesting that the same tribes spoke the same language. However, Stéphane Gsell (1913: 311) argues that the terms used by Augustine do not clarify whether he is referring to the Libyan language—which he would have known in its various dialects—or to a widespread dialect.

It is misleading to attribute the network of communication routes solely to Roman colonization, disregarding the contributions of Numidian, Moorish, Libyan, and prehistoric civilizations. Africa was far from being virgin territory at the time of the Roman conquest. The territory’s earlier structure should be reconsidered as part of a historical and transcultural continuum involving Greece and its impact on both Roman and Numidian civilizations. This is evidenced by the hybrid architectural legacy of Numidian funerary and residential buildings. With regard to land routes in the Quinquegentanei area, adapting them to the terrain raised, for the Romans, the issue of connecting the hinterland and the coast by secondary

routes that would help avoid long commercial journeys. In light of this cross-disciplinary approach, the evidence supports the view that earlier route structures were reused in accordance with a typo-morphological understanding of the landscape. In this case, the study calls into question the dismissal by some scholars of the roads mentioned by Claudius Ptolemaeus.

### **RUSUCCURU, A STRONGHOLD IN THE SURVEILLANCE STRATEGY AND DOMINANCE OF THE MONS FERRATUS TERRITORY**

Rusuccuru, when considered in relation to the territory's morphology and settlement hierarchy, met all the conditions necessary for managing a vast region and its urban settlements on the scale of western maritime Mons Ferratus. Its connections to major routes and strategic locations in the area gave it both elevated status and prestige. The importance of Rusuccuru within the Mons Ferratus territory can be explained primarily by the Romans' mountain strategy, in which the terrain played a crucial tactical role. According to Delphine Acolat (2007: 10), the Romans preferred to fight on plains rather than in mountains, favoring coastal routes such as those in the Pyrenees and the Alps. Mountainous terrain remained difficult to traverse until the second half of Augustus's reign (27 BC–AD 14), when major, secure roads were constructed.

To overcome imposing terrain, the Romans took the shortest routes and adopted a pincer strategy, closing off the mountain passes (Acolat 2007: 23). The approach accurately reflects the

situation in Mons Ferratus, where the coastal positions of Rusuccuru and Saldæ formed the basis for such strategies. Auzia occupied a similar position to the "iron curtain" south of the massif, while the Addyma and Nasabath valleys acted as western locks. In controlling the mountainous strip between the Mediterranean and the Addyma valley, a linear defensive system prevailed — securing key ridge points between Rusuccuru and Saldæ (Acolat 2007: 29–38). This contradicts the notion of Roman domination along the fringes of this defensive line, where the Isafenses tribe remained the most resistant to colonization throughout antiquity.

The earliest settlements were built on coastal promontories or elevated points in the plain (Mezzina, Uva, and Jurina 2008: 67–75). Two forms of human occupation of coastal areas can be distinguished: one originating from inland promontories, and the other from the sea, driven by external conquests that led to the creation or reoccupation of coastal settlements, as seen in Kabylia and Calabria. The coastal massif of Mons Ferratus was characterized by an independent tribal system that resisted the development of coastal and valley settlements — unlike the hinterlands of Caesarea (Cherchell) and Castellum Tingitanum (Cheliff), where a balance was achieved between tribes and Roman towns (Leveau 1975: 858). The aim of this research is not to compare the status of Rusuccuru with that of other Roman colonies such as Thamugadi and Cuicul. While the latter dominated vast grain-producing territories annexed to Rome, Rusuccuru must be considered

within a different geomorphological and strategic context, despite being integrated into the Mons Ferratus territory and lacking monumental urban planning. The Romans neither subjugated the population nor dominated the entire Mons Ferratus territory, which remained independent until the French conquest of 1857–1871. It is therefore essential to consider the role of the colony within its specific territorial context.

#### **RUSUCCURU'S INFLUENCE ON THE COASTAL TERRITORIAL REFERENCE AREA**

The permanence of ancient remains alone cannot prove that one town dominated over another or controlled a territory, particularly when historical evidence is lacking for urban sites that have been continuously occupied. Rusuccuru, a barred spur with significant defensive potential, sustained a permanent human presence in contrast to other coastal settlements in Mons Ferratus. Its exposure to a wide eastern horizon allowed it to repel threats from the sea. With its double harbor, it served as an essential port of call on the African coast in both ancient and medieval times. This military and economic position depended on its connection to the mouth of the Addyma, a rare coastal gateway to the hinterland. The proximity of this river, together with fertile soil and a hilly environment, offered potential for agricultural centuriation and the training of a Roman and local elite through the granting of estates. By contrast, the *pagi* were characterized by steep, rocky terrain unsuitable for farming or the establishment of *villae*.

#### **PERSISTENCE OF THE ANCIENT URBAN GRID IN THE 1845 PLOT OF THE KASBAH (MEDIEVAL HISTORIC CORE)**

In the absence of visible traces of ancient walls, and in light of past excavations and archaeological work, reconstructing the grid involves identifying a possible ancient pattern within the medieval plot structure, based on the remains of ancient fortifications and the hypothetical layout of the *cardo* and *decumanus*. This method follows the approaches of noted specialists such as Pierre Pinon (1983–1985), Jean-Pierre Guilhembe and Hélène Ménard (2005), and Pascale Ballet, Nadine Dieudonné-Glad, and Catherine Saliou (2008).

Given its small size, the town likely contained no large buildings. Its layout suggests an urban area bisected by a north–south coastal road, with cemeteries located outside the city gates. The relief and structure of the plots indicate a fortified core with military and administrative functions (Chaid-Saoudi 2008: 47). Despite the small intramural area, Rusuccuru's territorial influence appears to have extended two or three kilometers beyond the west gate, into a vast flat area (the “garden zone”) between the sea and the mountain. This area has never been excavated, although a few remains have come to light during construction work.

An analysis of the agricultural layout of Dellys's intramural core confirms the persistence of the ancient plan. The plot divisions display non-hierarchical primary and secondary orientations, indicating equivalent continuities in both directions. The arrangement of the plots and the current plot lines closely resem-



bles Roman centuriation, particularly in zones where its traces are clearly visible. This suggests a multi-plot structure within the *actus* module. According to Borie and Denieul (1984: 8), such grids are characteristic of Greek and Roman cities built from scratch, as well as areas dominated by courtyard houses.

Ballet, Dieudonné-Glad, and Saliou (2008: 164–166) note the variability in the persistence and obliteration of ancient layouts, lamenting the lack of case studies from North African provinces. Pinon observes that, although the persistence of urban grids has been accepted as a general rule, it is not consistently identifiable. Sometimes the pattern is obvious to the casual observer; at other times, it is discernible only to specialists examining plans, and even then it may appear as an abstract or theoretical construct (Pinon 1983–1985: 99). In his

view, the disparity of surviving remains prevents the reconstruction of a complete road network, except in rare cases of abandoned sites (Pinon 1983–1985).

Guilhembet and Ménard (2005: 6) argue that the abundance of archaeological data can paradoxically complicate the writing of ancient urban history. They emphasize the difficulty in conducting large-scale excavations in inhabited sites to uncover founding phases. They believe that “to understand the motivations and implications of an urban foundation or refoundation, we must consider this process at different scales”: the conception of territorial space; the relationship between city and territory; the limits of urbanized space; and the capacity of the built environment to adapt, transform, replace, and hybridize (Guilhembet and Ménard 2005: 12).

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PLOTS AND BUILDINGS: ROMAN-AFRICAN TYPOLOGICAL VARIANTS

Studies on the settlements dependent on Rusuccuru, with the exception of the basilicas of Iomnium and Rusippisir, have not examined the morphology and typology of plots and domestic buildings in depth. The first data on Rusuccuru's plots and road systems contrast with the luxurious Pompeian typologies mentioned in Vitruvian treatises. It has been established that modest housing, which accommodated the majority of the population, was unhealthy and uncomfortable and therefore attracted little attention from early writers (Rebuffat 2006). The Kasbah block reflect-

ing the layout of the ancient town—an *actus quadratum* measuring 35.5 m × 35.5 m— suggests either an ancient dwelling of the *insulae* type delimited by an *ambitus*, or a subdivision of the block comprising several domestic buildings, comparable in size to a courtyard house of the Kasbah.

The study proposes possible archaeological excavations and cross-references with the matrix cell variants of the Mons Ferratus promontories, favoring local peculiarities over Roman typologies (Guilhembet and Hanoune 2005: 81–85). The Roman model domi-



nated in Africa, except for settlements with indigenous substrates. Unlike in Rome, housing here was predominantly horizontal, with the exception of a few mansions. Aside from conforming to the pre-established plot structure, the composite population meant that the allottees were free to choose their own building models (Drici 2008: 675–677), allowing local and exogenous typologies to coexist. As Filippo Coarelli and Yvon Thébert (1988: 818) observe: “there is no such thing as African authenticity, but there is a real Numidian Africa, with its own specific features and its own capacity for openness, which it owes solely to itself. In other words, there are African authenticities, which follow one another chronologically or coexist geographically and socially”.

The areas around the Mons Ferratus promontory subsequently underwent a process of sedentarization and the emergence of proto-urban settlements. It is likely that the indigenous community integrated into Roman life contributed to the typological variety within colonial settlements. As at Volubilis, apart from locally influenced peristyle-type dwellings reflecting social or cultural aspirations, the basic dwelling can be identified in the following morphological variants (Rebuffat 2006):

- with communal areas (a central or lateral corridor, straight or offset) and a central or marginal meeting space, courtyard, or covered area;
- without communal areas, featuring an enfilade layout allowing passage from one room to another (linear or circular sequences);
- with an irregular structure;
- a basic single-cell dwelling, which could also serve as a shop.

Tiddis (*Castellum Tidditanorum*) in Numidia shares with Rusuccuru similar geomorphological features and a stratification spanning the prehistoric Numidian, Roman, and medieval periods. In its immediate stratigraphy, the majority of dwellings—two to four rooms without courtyards—were modest (Mehentel and Touahri 2021: 384). Only one house, apparently belonging to a Roman nobleman, had a courtyard, baths, an oil factory, ovens, and other features. This points to the predominance of common buildings over luxurious residences. Recent research on Thamusida and Volubilis (Morocco) (Février 1967: 121) increasingly challenges the notion that African urban civilization was fully assimilated into Roman models. The strength of the indigenous substrate at Tiddis and Cirta suggests that this may likewise have been the case in many coastal towns (Février 1967: 122).

The transformation of rural parcel structures in many outlying districts reveals ancient layouts (Rouleau 1988: 148–150). Advances in preventive archaeology and dynamic morphological research now make it possible to identify new diagnostic markers. The transmission of forms should be understood as the result of a process involving numerous networks and scales, rather than as a linear spatio-temporal sequence (Robert 2003: 115). Such research requires only the analysis of cartographic documents to reveal the ancient morphology in the present case study.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that Rusuccuru exerted influence over a large part of the Mons Ferratus' geographical and cultural sphere. Its strategic location elevated its status within the hierarchy of coastal cities and enabled it to control the warring Quinquegentanei tribes, paving the way for the colonization and exploitation of African territories. The sea and lowland routes linking the main regional settlements (Saldæ, Rusguniae, Auzia, and Sitifis) followed the valleys and ridge lines of the coastal massif, reflecting a pre-existing network of human-made routes and settlements. It is unlikely that the local tribes were entirely independent of Rome, and the synthetic routes established during the first and second cycles were probably integrated into their economic relations.

Morphological reconstruction of the settlement within the walls indicates that the urban area exceeded the

dependent *pagi* in size. Traces of occupation outside the walls suggest that Rusuccuru extended westwards to include a second, unfortified settlement or suburban area. Within the settlement, evidence of urban planning points to the persistence of grid patterns in agricultural and urban plots. However, traces of centuriation in some areas were later altered as a result of land consolidation. Analyses at different interpretative scales suggest the incorporation of African specificities. The acquisition of territory, urban organization, and both residential and monumental typologies call for a re-evaluation of earlier studies to better recognize the integrality of African colonial construction. The typo-morphological approach, combined with urban morphology, offers a useful framework for planning future interventions on sites with limited archaeological remains.

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**How to cite this article:** Bougdal, K. and Cherif, N. (2025). Dellys, ancient Rusuccuru: traces and continuity of a Mediterranean city without remains in the heart of the Mons Ferratus of Caesarian Mauretania. *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*, 34.1, 159–190. <https://doi.org/10.37343/uw.2083-537X.pam34.1.24>

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