

Circumstances of the Fourth-Century AD Reforms in North Africa

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Abstract:

If the period preceding the fourth century AD was known for development and revival for the Roman Empire, then specifically starting from the third century it was the opposite, as it witnessed a storm that shook the throne of the entire empire. The starting point was the military chaos after the death of Emperor Alexander Severus in 235 AD, in which the army played a major role, during which it was in control and interfered in the affairs of power, in a struggle for control without regard for the consequences of this situation on the empire. It was natural that this crisis would affect the provinces of the empire, including the province of Africa. It too witnessed disturbances that began with the revolution of 238 AD and the spread of revolutions here and there. From the economic side, we find that the region experienced monetary inflation and agricultural, industrial and commercial deterioration, except for the products on which Rome depended heavily. As for the administrative side, we find that the African province had two types of provinces, imperial and senatorial, and four different systems of provinces. This created a social stratification that rejected reality and began to declare that rejection and resistance by establishing itself with its local culture and religions, and if necessary, even militarily by participating in rebel movements. It became clear that the conditions of the third century, with all their calamities and devastation, had to be rectified within the framework of what is known as the reforms of the fourth century AD.

Keywords: Second Imperial Period, Military Anarchy, Diocletian, Constantine, Africa

1. Introduction:

There is no doubt that the fourth century AD is a crucial stage in the history of the Roman Empire in general and North Africa in particular, as it witnessed profound transformations that affect numerous aspects: political, administrative, military, and economic... in response to the general situation that had deteriorated since the third century AD. In this context, the reforms of emperors such as Diocletian, Constantine, and those who came after them emerged.

In this study, we attempt to understand the circumstances surrounding these reforms that the empire underwent during the fourth century AD, from which North Africa was not far. This allows us to understand the mechanisms of political and administrative adaptation adopted by the Roman state during the second imperial era.

2.The Political Situation::

2.2. Military Chaos:

Roman rule witnessed a difficult period, which researchers have termed "military chaos," because the army was responsible for it during the period extending from the death of Emperor Alexander in 235 AD to the accession of Diocletian to the throne in 284 AD (Sheniti, 1984, pp. 25-26). During this period, more than twenty-six emperors succeeded one another, most of them died before ascending the throne, which negatively impacted the stability of the African province (Al-Huwairi, 1995, p. 80).

The crisis took on many forms: **political**, with a system based since 238 AD on the will and power of the army, which appointed and deposed emperors; **economic**, with the decline of the currency, unstability and rising of prices, and arbitrary confiscations of crops; and **social**, with the dominance of an idle aristocracy that exploited its slaves. And even for small and medium-sized landowners as well (Qaddash, 1993, pp. 221-223), as this crisis affected the labor force in rural and urban areas (Andre and Oyewe, 1986, p. 536), and in the cities the dissolution of the municipal system increased in light of this weakness, as it was losing its population, so men no longer sought sworn government positions. = Popular assemblies no longer

met, and municipal life lost its importance despite efforts to maintain an organization that guaranteed tax revenues (Qaddash, 1993, pp. 221-222), amidst a harmonious social life within groups that formed social classes with varying powers. (Albertini, 1950, p. 340)

Events accelerated, and Rome witnessed a series of disturbances in Africa known as the consequences of the Crisis of the Third Century, during which military chaos prevailed and spread to Africa, sparking the outbreak of revolutions in Africa in general and Caesarea in particular. These disturbances went back to the reign of Maximinus (235-238 AD), whose rule was based on advancing the exploitation of Africa to the maximum extent possible. (Bénabou, 1976, p. 214-222)

The disturbances of 238 AD, according to inscriptions, were the key to a wide range of revolutions, including one recorded in 239 AD, which stems from negotiations between the Procratitor Aurelius Victor and the representative of the Bogota, and another went back to 241 AD, among other revolutions. (Bénabou, 1976, p. 214-222)

2.2. The Cessation of the Senate's Activity:

The system established by Emperor Augustus to govern the empire ceased between 235 AD and 284 AD. The final nail in the coffin of this council was the abolition of its authority, which had been responsible for formulating the country's policy as a body that granted the emperor the powers with which he ruled. (Lepelley, 1979, p. 52)

Absolute military rule granted emperors civil and religious rights that enabled them to enact laws without consulting the Senate; Even consultations were restricted to a narrow group of senior jurists and legislators who surrounded the emperor, forming the Imperial Council. This council had the sole right to enact legislation (Al-Nasiri, 1991, pp. 347-388).

2.3. The weakness of decentralized authority:

The fourth century AD revealed multiple manifestations of the weakness of central authority in the African provinces, perhaps the most prominent of it was the revolution of 235 AD. Herodian mentions that he causes of which go back in Thysdru ,three years after Maximus's accession, the Carthaginian tax council attempted to collect taxes, which was described as cruel and violent in its performance. These exorbitant taxes were dictated

by circumstances, as Africans were forced to pay them, and even the wealthy, including the Romans, were not exempt. This led to an alliance between the wealthy and the peasants, who attacked Roman farms (Al-Nasiri, 1991, p. 347). Herodian also mentions that Numidia was subjected to plunder by the Moors in surprise raids (Hérodien, VII, 5).

Thus, it can be said that North Africa, despite its economic importance, was the scene of intertwined political crises in the third century, which constituted the direct impetus for these major reforms at the beginning of the fourth century.

3. The Economic Situation:

The third century AD was considered one of the most turbulent periods in the history of North Africa, with the crisis of the third century clearly affecting the situation.

3.1. Agriculture:

Latin and Greek writers mentioned that African soil products are remarkable by the fertility of African soil, especially since its abundant crops feed the population of Rome for eight months of the year. (Lacroix, 1863, p. 415-432)

Since the region was not isolated from the events of the third century, as we noted earlier, the deterioration was greatly reflected in African agriculture. This was due to the chaos prevailing in the Roman Empire, which caused the region to experience unprecedented drought in large areas of arable land. Farms, buildings, and warehouses were destroyed, making it difficult for agricultural landowners to reclaim what had been destroyed due to lack of money. (Al-Huwairi, 1995, p. 16). In addition to this, poor climatic conditions and the labor shortage caused by peasants fleeing the land due to their poor conditions. Even slaves fled, because of the lack of security, resulting in an agricultural production crisis (Rémondon, 1970, p. 109).

However, the strange and astonishing thing is that this enormous agricultural wealth persisted despite widespread factors of devastation: crushing taxes and the insatiable greed of the rulers and their officials, in addition to external troubles and sometimes internal revolutions. The greatest burden was the annual tax allocated to supply Rome with grain, in addition to exceptional taxes and exorbitant expenses imposed on

landowners, extortion by the rulers, and corruption among the judges. Lacroix, 1863, p. 415)

3.2. Monetary Inflation:

The most important feature of the economic prosperity during the first and second centuries was the stability of the currency's value and purchasing power. Augustus limited it to three units: the aureus, the denarius, and the sesterce (Sheniti, 1984, p. 16). However, we noticed a clear decline in the value of precious currency during the third century. This was due to the conditions experienced by the empire, which negatively impacted the value of the circulating currency, forcing the emperors to reduce its value (Al-Huwairi, 1995, p. 15). The Emperor Caracalla introduced a monetary amendment by reducing the weight of the aureus and he decided to use a new silver coin called Antoninianus (Worth, 2003, p. 156). However, the decline in the value of the currency did not stop, and in return, the percentage of metals that composed it decreased, especially since the mines' production decreased because they were as the percentage of silver reached 5%, 1% during the reign of Emperor Gallian and 1% (Rémondon, 1970, p. 110). Copper coins covered with a thin layer of silver did not exceed purchasing power (Al-Hawiri, 1995, p. 16). They decreased in exchange for rising prices (Sheniti, 1984, p. 17). All these led to what is known today as monetary inflation. The empire resorted to excessive minting of coins from a low-value metal, which led to the collapse (devaluation) of the currency and the spread of inflation. This situation directly affected internal trade and exchanges, as money lost a significant part of its function as a medium of exchange, increasing the difficulty of commercial transactions in the provinces, including North Africa. (Jones, 1964, p. 22)

The devaluation of the currency and the resulting inflation seriously affected trade, and cash payments were increasingly replaced by payments in kind. In Africa, the export of wheat and oil to Rome remained the most important, but the provinces also produced pottery, especially red African pottery, which was widely exported throughout the Mediterranean. (Jones, 1964, p. 22-23)

The entire empire suffered a crisis during the second half of the third century AD after completely losing control of its military forces, engaging in a series of coups against the emperors, and being harassed by enemies abroad. At the same time, internal conditions worsened, with people being

devastated. It was necessary to put an end to this and combat the ruptures that had befallen it. This is evident in the reforms of Emperor Diocletian.

3.3. Trade:

The trade sector is considered the lifeblood of the economy. For this reason, the early emperors worked hard to provide trade with the means of movement and growth, so that extended transportation routes and worked to maintain them. However, the state of war at that time spread an atmosphere of instability and insecurity (Sheniti, 1984, pp. 39-40), and weakened trade relations. Consequently, trade, which had previously been of a local nature, became mostly regional or local. Furthermore, under pressure from increased government administration expenditures and increased military expenditures, which were now depleting a large portion of revenues for armaments and paying army salaries, the state was forced to increase taxes, which led to the exhaustion of merchants (Zanati, 1966, p. 38). In addition, there was a lack of interest in roads, which led to their poor maintenance and difficulty in using them, which reduced their effectiveness in transportation and disrupted commercial activity through them. The Mediterranean routes were no longer crowded with ships and commercial fleets, after they became a den for pirates, and even the land routes were unsafe and not free of bandits.

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3.4. Industry:

In North Africa, industry ,during the third century AD, was one of the main pillars of economic life. However, it was linked to the agricultural sector. The region was known for its extensive production of red pottery, which represented the most prominent local industries. Industrial activity was also linked to the production of oils and wine through presses distributed throughout the agricultural areas, demonstrating the overlap between agricultural and industrial activity. In addition, small workshops were found for weaving and metalwork. (Jones, 1964, p. 22-23)

4. The Administrative Situation:

4.1. Division of the Provinces:

The Romans divided the provinces in Africa into smaller administrative units under two types of regions: one military and the other civil. In this division, the Romans took into account the extent of Roman influence in each region and the extent to which the population was subject to this influence. There were civil provinces due to the stability of security, while the provinces newly occupied by the Romans required more military authority than administrative organization. This policy began to be implemented from the beginning of the imperial era. (Majid, 2008, pp. 32-33)

At the beginning in 27 BC, Emperor Augustus divided the Roman provinces into two parts, according to Strabo. He chose for himself some of them, which he called imperial provinces, and the other, which he presented to the people, was administered on his behalf by the Senate. Thus, there were two types of provinces:

A_ Provinces subordinated to the Senate:

Strabo describes it as an area that was easily and peacefully governed (Strabo, no date, p. 253). Charles Picard, Ch. G., Picard, also mentions that it was a quieter and more Romanized area, and therefore was chosen by members of the Senate (Picard, 1959, p. 8). This is what we mentioned above. Its affairs were overseen and administered by a proconsul, a member of the Senate holding the rank of consul (Julian, 1969). This type of province only enjoyed judicial authority, while supreme power remained in the hands of the emperor and the management of financial affairs in the hands of the emperor's governors. In this regard, we find, for example, that the proconsulship was the responsibility of the Senate (Majid, 2008, pp. 32-33).

B- Imperial Provinces:

Strabon stated that the reason the emperor retained the provinces was that they were unsafe (Strabon, 1963, p. 25). They required military protection, and were ultimately subject to the emperor's direct authority, often administered by senators who had previously held consular posts or commissions, depending on the importance of the province or the military garrison stationed there. (Janin, 1986, p. 324).

Administration was characterized by decentralization, as administrative authority in Africa was not concentrated in a specific city under the command of a single Roman official. Instead, a policy was followed that relied on dividing the region into administrative units independent from each other in authority, linking these provinces directly to the central administration in Rome.

It is clear that dividing the country on this basis enabled its rulers to control it and facilitate the various taxation operations and the eradication of agricultural products and their export to Rome. Furthermore, they could focus their efforts on subduing the national elements rebelling against the Roman presence, while simultaneously thwarting any ambitious rulers from rebelling against the authorities. (Sheniti, 1984, p. 76).

C- Organization of the states:

Before the arrival of the Roman occupation in North Africa, it was divided into four political divisions, including present-day Tunisia, which had been under Carthaginian influence since around 814 BC, and three kingdoms:

The first kingdom was the Massilian Kingdom, whose borders extended from Ras Bou Qaraoun (Majid, 2008) in the west to the Carthaginian border in the east. The most prominent prince of this kingdom was Massinissa (Camps (G), Massinissa). The second kingdom was the Massesilian Kingdom, whose lands extended from the Moulouya River to the city of Carthage. Its most famous prince was Syphax. These two kingdoms were located in Numidian lands, meaning that the Kingdom of Numidia was divided into two kingdoms: the western Numidia (Masaesyale) and the eastern Numidia (Massilia). The third kingdom was Mauritania, which extended from the Moulouya River in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. (Décret, F et Fantar, M., 1981, p. 72-73). This was the Roman occupation of the region. Later, during the imperial era (the first three centuries), we find that it comprised four provinces:

1- Proconsular Africa:

After the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC, it became a Roman province, which bore the name of Old Africa after the conquest of Numidia, which itself bore the name New Africa. After a period, Numidia was

annexed to Old Africa (Boissier, 1901, p. 92). Its administration was entrusted to the proconsul, who resided in Carthage, and therefore it was called the proconsulate. Its expanse extended from Cyrene to the Wadi Massaga (L'ampsaga), thus encompassing a vast area, and it bore the name of both northwestern Libya, Tunisia, and Constantine, Algeria (Mommson, 1889, p. 259). As we have noted elsewhere, it was a province under the Senate because it was considered one of the most deeply rooted and stable provinces in terms of Roman influence (Safar, 1959, p. 314). However, it is noteworthy that the Proconsular province, into which both Carthage and Numidia were merged, was not final. Numidia was separated from Carthage. The date of this separation is subject to disagreement among historians, with some placing it between 193 and 208 AD (Pflaum, 1997, p. 259).

2. Numidia:

It is bordered to the west by the Muluya Valley, then the group of valleys that place Djemila in Numidia and Setif (Gsell), in Mauretania Caesarea. To the south, Numidia extends to the east and south of the plains of the Hadna. It was under the rule of the commander of the Third Augustan Legion since Emperor Caligula separated the command of this legion from the authorized proconsul (Propraetor) in 37 AD. Despite the subordination to the proconsulate until 204 AD, the date of Numidia's separation from the proconsulate, according to some historians, the authority of the authorized judge became complete and no one but the emperor was accountable to him. His duties extended beyond commanding the army to administration and the judiciary. After Numidia's separation from the proconsulate during the reign of Septimius Severus, the financial administration was also withdrawn from the treasurer of the proconsular province and assigned to an imperial agent. As for the legate, it is likely that he retained civil and military powers until 260 AD and perhaps until the reign of Aurelian (270-275 AD), since from this era the civil administration became in the hands of the praetor. (Harsh, 1992, pp. 192-195).

3. Caesarean Mauretania

After the assassination of King Ptolemy (Julian, 1969, p. 200), son of King Juba II, ruler of Mauretania, by Emperor Caligula, Mauretania was annexed to Roman territory and divided into two provinces. The first was named Mauretania Caesariensis (Pro), and the second was named

Mauretania Tingitana (Tingitana). This was in 42 AD by Emperor Claudius. (Julian, 1969, p. 200)

It was named Caesarea after the capital of Juba II, after he changed its name from IoL to Caesarea, as Strabon (1963, p. 25) points out. It lies between Numidia and the Wadi Melusha, which separates it from Mauretania Tingitana (Décret, F et Fantar, M., 1981, p. 191-192). It was administered by the Emperor's Procurator (Procurator Augusti), who was chosen from the equestrian class and resided in Caesarea, combining civil and military authority. His name was changed from Procurator to Prases (Cat, 1891, p. 235-236).

4.Tingitan Mauritania

Tingitan Mauritania is named after its capital, Tangier. This province extends from the west of the Mloucha Valley to the Atlantic Ocean (L'Ancien). However, some historians believe that the city of Volubilis was the seat of the emperor's regular representative, who governed this province. The additional army placed at his disposal was smaller in number than the army of the governor of the Tsarist province, so he had to call on the armies of other provinces if danger threatened him (Julian, 1969, p. 201). In many cases, exceptional circumstances resulting from unrest required the unification of the two provinces, the Tsarist and the Tingitan, under the authority of a single commander, who was granted the authority to act in the emperor's name to confront the unrest caused by the Moorish tribes. (Sheniti, 1999, p. 78)

Fourth :The Social Situation

The crisis of the third century took on other social dimensions that deepened the gap between the empire's inhabitants, generating a silent class war between two conflicting fronts in different directions, driven by the hands of emperors aspiring to seize the throne, unaware of the dangers of doing so.

1- The Roman aristocracy

It is headed by the Senate and composed of the wealthy, civil servants, and urban bourgeoisie, including merchants and craftsmen, which received a severe blow at the hands of Emperor Caracalla when he issued his decree known as the Constitution Antoniniana, issued in 212 AD,

granting citizenship rights to all freemen of the empire who were in the status of foreigners (Perégrini). This law equalized the different classes politically, and thus amounted to a reduction of the privileged upper classes. During the Crisis of the Third Century, it took a stance against the status quo, which had led to the succession to the imperial throne, and against the methods used to address the deteriorating conditions that harmed the interests of members of this economic class and excluded them from the arena of politics and the high responsibilities held by those of lower nobility and honor (Sheniti, 1984 p. 22- 34), their numbers began to decline and their influence to shrink.

This is due to the fact that many of the emperors who came to the throne killed their political opponents among the members of the Senate and replaced them with less competent and capable members of the Senate. They also sometimes confiscated the property of some of them. During those circumstances, their loyalty to the Roman government diminished (Al-Huwairi, 1995, p. 18). I am not saying that this class disappeared, but it continued on the path of dissolution and deterioration without stopping. In general, this class lived in the past. (Rostovtzeff, no date, p. 566).

2- The Common Class

Its foundation was the peasants and common people who represented the broad base of the empire's population and the active labor force in the countryside in particular. This class had little luck in civilized life (Sheniti, 1984, p. 34). It collapsed under the weight of economic disasters on the one hand and under the burden of exorbitant demands imposed on it on the other. It is noteworthy that many small free peasants preferred to give up their lands to large agricultural landowners in order to escape the tax burden after their deteriorated situation because of the Crisis of the Third Century. They became serfs, and every serf who owned a plot of land that he cultivated was required to pledge to pay rent in cash, in kind, or for services. (Al-Huwairi, 1995, p. 19)

The duties of this class included supporting the cities through their own toil and labor. Members of the upper class enjoyed the wealth of the poor in the countryside and the city. As a result of this class and social differentiation, feelings of hostility and envy toward the upper class arose among the oppressed (Sheniti, 1984, pp. 34-35), especially during the period of military chaos, when the army of every pretender and emperor was in

need of money, food, clothing, weapons, and other things. None of them had the time or desire to pursue a legitimate path. The policy of all emperors, with a few exceptions that did not last long, was based on forced conscription, forced donations of money and food, and forced labor. Furthermore, the behavior of soldiers, officers, and employees was exploited. Soldiers exceeded all limits, as evidenced by the complaints submitted by the inhabitants of a village in Asia to the emperor Philip (244-249 AD), begged him to redress the soldiers' transgressions, and this injustice could be generalized to all other states. The soldiers' thefts were not all due to greed, but the poverty of the states and the poor system of supply and transport of soldiers often forced them to commit brutality just to save their lives. The upper class in the cities, which was responsible for those living in the areas of those cities, did everything in its power to protect what remained of its wealth, and oppressed the lower class, which was exposed to persecution and plunder at the hands of every human being. In addition to that, there were many epidemics that were often due to the disruption of the general system of life, poverty, malnutrition, and so on (Rostovtzeff, no date, p. 566). Also, strange phenomena appeared among the people, such as abortion and selling children at birth into slavery (Bashari, 2006-2007, p. 240). A decrease in the population was also noted, as Courtois (ch.) indicates a decline of three million after it was four million. During the imperial era (27-284 AD), (Courtois, 1955, p. 104), under seemingly endless circumstances, people fled their homes.

Maximizing matters, Roman laws established a class system that made Africans the weakest link. In Roman law, a person is anyone who is eligible to acquire rights and bear obligations. To establish legal personality, three elements must be present: freedom, Roman citizenship, and the status of head of household. Thus, a person must be independent in his or her rights and not subject to the authority of others. Therefore, according to Roman law, people are divided into citizens and non-citizens. Roman citizens enjoy full legal capacity, while non-citizens are divided into Latins and foreigners, most of whom are native Africans. (Zenati, 1966, p. 79)

On this basis, at the beginning of the Roman occupation, the people of Africa were outside the Roman legal framework for individuals, which harmed their material and moral interests. It became clear that these laws were based on social class and involves clear racism (Sheniti, 1984, p. 172),

as wealth is considered a prerequisite for moving from a lower to a higher status (Gascou, 1972, p. 42).

Even after the issuance of the Edict of Caracalla in 212 AD, by which all free people in the Roman Empire became Roman citizens, although some saw it as a humanitarian gift, others denounced it because it added a tax burden to people's lives from which they were exempt, and it did not end the discrimination between Roman citizens and foreigners (Tsaadit, 1990, pp. 66-67).

Thus, we note that African society was not spared from the effects of military chaos during the second half of the third century, and how the situation worsened and became increasingly exploitative, with a social revolution becoming rare. Through this, Africans attempted to find some respite and used it as a form of rejection of the Roman presence.

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