

Reading in "Motives of the Greco-Libyan Conflict on the Coast of the Serts" Nasamones as a Model

The large coast of Syrtis (Syrtis Major) is part of the ancient continent of Libya, frequently mentioned in the sources of Greek, Roman, and Byzantine as a coastal area characterized by a difficult desert climate and scarce water. Multiple tribes lived in it, having to fight for their survival in conflict with the nature of its harsh and dry habitat. This harsh environment obligated them to adopt a pattern of semi-nomadic life, with their homeland situated amid the tensions and conflicts of the major powers at the time, namely the Greeks and Carthaginians. This conflict became a reason for these tribes to engage, proving their existence and their right to their homeland. The reason for choosing this topic is due to the lack of studies that have dealt with it in Arabic. Additionally, there is a shortage of ancient Libyan writings through which we can investigate the credibility of what is mentioned in literary sources of Greek and Latin. The importance of this study lies in the fact that it deals partially with the history of ancient Libya and its inhabitants in the classical era, an aspect that has not been given its due attention in studies. Furthermore, it addresses the Libyan conflict with the Greeks in the Syrtis region, exploring its causes and consequences on the region and its inhabitants. This study will be based on three elements, which are as follows: First: The geographical and demographic nature of the Sirte coast region. Second: The causes of the Greek-Libyan conflict in the Sirte coast region.

Keywords: Libyans, Nasamones, Greek, Syrtis

Introduction

The large coast of Syrtis (Syrtis Major) formed part of the ancient continent of Libya, frequently mentioned in Greek, Roman, and Byzantine sources as a coastal area characterized by a difficult desert climate and scarce water. Multiple tribes lived in it, having to fight for their survival in conflict with the harsh and dry nature of their habitat, which obliged them to adopt a pattern of semi-nomadic life. Their homeland was situated amid the tensions and conflicts of the major powers at the time, namely the Greeks and Carthaginians. This conflict became the reason for these tribes to engage in the struggle to prove their existence and their right to their homeland.

Before delving into the study of the Greek conflict in the Syrtis region, we must address the geography of the region and its tribal ethnicities.

The Geographical and Demographic Nature of the Sirte Coast Region

The Syrtis coast extends for a length of 300 nautical miles, increasing from the city of Benghazi in the east to the city of Misrata in the west, with a width of 100 nautical miles starting from land towards the north to the line of 32 degrees. It

is surrounded by land from three sides: east, south, and west. In addition, it twists and penetrates by land in the form of a semicircle and is located on the shore of the Gulf (1), called the Gulf of Sirte (2). This area was known in the Greek and Roman eras as Syrti (Σύρτις 3). Its famous bay is also known by several names, including the bay of Psylli (Ψυλλικός) after one of the tribes living on its coast (4), and the Great Bay of Syrtis (Σύρτις μεγάλη_Syrtis Major (5), distinguished from the small bay of Syrtis (Σύρτις ἡ μικρά_Syrtis Minor (6).

Regarding the origin and meaning of the word "Certis" (Σύρτις), it is believed to have Greek origins. Herodotus mentioned the word "Sortis" (συρτός) (later adding "Sortedus"), which refers to "a mass of sand and rock" formed along coasts due to currents and other water movements. This term can be compared to the Greek verb "σύρω" (sūrō), meaning to pull, suggesting the influence of wind and waves on the quicksand in these bays (7). In other contexts, the words "sortis" (Σύρτεως) or "sorts" (Σύρτιος) are believed to evolve into "Certis" (Σύρτις) due to the navigational challenges posed by these bays because of their sandy beaches (8).

Procopius of Caesarea offers an alternate explanation. He describes the challenges of sailing in the Gulf of Syrtis, stating, "When a ship is propelled by wind or waves and enters the gap behind the crescent, it becomes impossible to return. From that moment, it appears as if it is being pulled (Suresthai), illustrating the fate of the ships" (9).

A third perspective suggests an Arabic origin, deriving from the root "Sart" which means sand dunes and swallowing (10).

The coasts of Syrtis are predominantly characterized by low sandy stretches. In many places, long chains of sand dunes follow these coasts. Adjacent to these dunes are rectangular basins extending along the coast, characterized by extremely saline soil inundated with saltwater for most months of the year (13). These basins are referred to as "sabkhas", with the largest being the swamp of Tawerga, described by Strabo as located after Ras Κεφαλαε and draining into the bay (14).

Historical records indicate the establishment of numerous cities and ports along the Syrtis coast, beginning eastward from the Gulf of Syrtis. Starting from a promontory called Borion (ορείον) (15), we encounter the fortress of Utomala (Αυτομαλα) and the shrine of the Vilani brothers (Φιλανίων βρωμοί) (16). Subsequently, there's a village named Vilnius Φιλαινου (17), followed by the port of Caracas (Χαραζς) (18). Claudii Ptolemaei mentioned a city adjacent to this port named Farax (Φαραξ) (19). Further landmarks include the Tower of Euphrantas (Ευφραντας πύργος), identified by Strabo as the boundary between Carthaginian lands and the territory of Cyrenaica (20), and the Tower of Euphrentas near a village called Sakazama (ακαζαμας) (21). This is followed by the port of Ασπις, believed to be the port of Boerat Al-Hassoun (22). Strabo considers it the best port on the coast of Syrtis (23). The list continues with Lake and the village of Makomaka Μακομακα (24), culminating with the port of Kefalai (Κεφαλαι) (25).

Climate and Vegetation

While the coasts of Cyrenaica and the Tripolitania region typically experience a Mediterranean climate — mild summers and rainfall in winters (26) — the Syrtis coast region stands as an exception. The influence of the Mediterranean climate diminishes considerably within the Gulf of Syrtis due to the desert's proximity to

the sea, rendering it largely unaffected by maritime influences (27). Consequently, average rainfall along the coast usually varies between 100 to 400 mm (28). Classical writers, including Strabo, characterized the Syrtis region as predominantly sandy with a dry and arid climate, marked by scarcity of water (29). Sallust described it as a barren desert plain, emphasizing its central position between Cyrenaica and Carthage and noting the absence of the Ogbel River (30). Annaeus Lucanus highlighted the area between Leptis Magna and Cyrene as particularly arid (31), while Ammianus Marcellinus underscored its dryness (32).

Regarding vegetation in the Syrtis coast, historical sources depict it as relatively sparse and dominated by desert plants, including drought-resistant annuals that bloom and turn green upon rainfall (33)(34). While most areas are more suited for grazing than agriculture, ancient sources like Herodotus and Pliny mention specific plants native to the region. For instance, Herodotus referenced the Silphium (Σιλφίον) plant, noting its range from the island of Platia (Πλάτης) to the eastern Gulf of Syrtis (Σύρτιος) (35). Pliny mentioned the lotus plant (λωτος), citing its prime species around the Sirte coast (36).

From our examination of Syrtis' physical geography, it's evident that the environment was challenging, characterized by a harsh desert climate. However, this didn't deter ancient Libyans from inhabiting the region. Notably, it housed significant ethnic groups, including the Nasamones and Macae tribes, pivotal to the region's history (37).

Tribal Ethnicities in the Syrtis Region during the Greek Era

Historian Herodotus is often credited as the first to document Libyan tribes (38). However, earlier mentions by Hecataeus of Miletus (39) exist. Yet, the sparse information provided by Hecataeus regarding the Libyan tribes, especially in terms of their locations or the accuracy of their names, renders Herodotus' account vital for understanding the demographics of the Syrtis region from the 5th century BC to the 2nd century AD (40). By the 1st century BC, both Greek and Latin sources enumerated tribes in the region (41), spotlighting major groups like the Nasamones, Psylli, and Macae. By the 2nd century AD, Claudii Ptolemaei presented a more detailed demographic structure, introducing tribes not previously documented by earlier writers (42). For clarity, we'll review the primary composition of the Libyan tribes in the Syrtis region geographically, from east to west, highlighting their significance and relationships with other tribes mentioned subsequently.

Acrauceles Tribe

The Acrauceles tribe was first mentioned by Pliny the Elder in the 1st century AD. Pliny located their homeland at the eastern edge of the Syrtis bay, preceding the Nasamones tribe (43). While little else is known about this tribe, by the 2nd century AD, Claudius Ptolemaeus referred to them as Αραραυκηλες, placing their homeland east of the Barketai region, with Βαρκιται referring to the Parque region

(44). In the 3rd century, Herodien placed them further east, between Cyrene and Darnis (45). Bazama M. suggested that the tribe's name translates to "bird's head" or "bird's beak" (46). Dio Chrysostom provided a supporting anecdote, noting that Libyans in the Sirte region adorned their heads with bird feathers (47), a custom tracing back to ancient Libyan practices (48).

Nasamones Tribe

The Nasamones tribe was the predominant ethnic group along the eastern Syrtis coast. Herodotus initially mentioned them, noting their location west of the Auschisae tribe. This aligns with Scylax's later account placing them in the eastern part of the Great Gulf of Sirte, southwest of Cyrenaica (49). By the 2nd century BC, Strabo located them behind the Great Bay of Syrtis, extending to the temples of the Villani brothers (50). Their territory encompassed areas like Awjila, Gallo, and Ajkhara, with Herodotus noting their migration to Augila for date harvesting (51). Fantoli interpreted "Nasamones" as "servants of the god Amun," breaking it down into two parts: (Νᾶσ) and (ἀμῶνις) (52). However, Bazama M. disputed this, suggesting that "Nas" refers to worshipers, not slaves, aligning with Herodotus's account (53). Pliny the Elder provided an alternate name for them, "Mesammones," referencing their sandy homeland (54). Bazama M. countered this, arguing that Pliny's interpretation was erroneous, emphasizing the prevalent worship of the god Amun among the Libyan tribes (55). Pinpointing the exact boundaries of their homeland remains challenging. Historically, they seemed to traverse a vast territory. While Pompobius Mela treated the inhabitants of the Augila oasis as a distinct tribe, it served as a significant center for the Nasamones, especially for semi-nomadic members harvesting dates, a detail corroborated by Herodotus and Claudius Ptolemaeus in the 2nd century AD (56).

Psylli Tribe

The Psylli tribe, also referred to as Seli, inhabited the area west of the Nasamones. Its earliest mention dates back to the 6th century BC by Hecataeus of Miletus, who labeled the Great Bay of Syrtis as the Gulf of Psylli (Ψυλλικὸς κόλπος). Herodotus also acknowledged this, noting the Psylli tribe's proximity to the Nasamones on the Gulf of Syrtis. In a blend of fact and fiction, Herodotus described a novel event where the Psylli tribe vanished due to south winds (57). Strabo, in the latter half of the 1st century BC, placed them on the Sirte coast after the Nasamones, while Pliny the Elder associated them with the Garamantes tribe's southern region, mentioning a notable grave along the Sirte coast (58). However, Claudius Ptolemaeus placed them near Cyrene, a deviation from other accounts (66). The Peutinger Table map from the 3rd century AD identifies them as Seli on the Syrtis coast (59).

1 *Tautamei Tribe*

2
3 This tribe is cited in later Roman sources, situated between the Nasamones
4 and Makai on the Sirte coast. D. Mattingly suggests it might have been a
5 Nasamones or Makai branch (60).

6
7 *Elaeones (Olive Groves) Tribe*

8
9 First referenced by Claudius Ptolemaeus, their homeland was linked with the
10 Makai or Cinyphii tribes (61). Little else is known, leading to speculations. O.
11 Bates posited they might be a part of the Psylli, whereas D. Mattingly believed
12 they might have been under the Makai or one of its sub-tribes (62).

13
14 *Cissipades Tribe*

15
16 Pliny the Elder introduced this tribe, situating them at the entrance of the
17 West Bay of the Greater Gulf of Sirte, with specific measurements. However,
18 Claudius Ptolemaeus identified a tribe named Samamiki in their presumed
19 homeland in the 2nd century AD, indicating a possible Makai branch (63).

20
21 *Cinyphii Tribe*

22
23 Silius Italicus, in his epic "Punica," first mentions this tribe, indicating their
24 residence near the Knippes River (Κιννυς). They might have been part of
25 Hannibal's army, potentially identified by Polybius as Μακοίων, signifying a
26 connection to the broader Makai tribe. Yet, Claudius Ptolemaeus differentiated
27 them in the 2nd century AD, placing them on the Syrtis coast, following the
28 Samamiki tribe (64).

29
30 *Makai Tribe*

31
32 The Makai tribe stands as one of the prominent Libyan tribes that settled
33 along the western coast of Syrtis. Variations in its name appear across historical
34 sources. Herodotus and Scylax referenced them as Makai, while Polybius
35 mentioned them as Μακοίων. Pliny the Elder provided two variations: Makai and
36 Macae (65). Herodotus placed their homeland to the west of the Nasamones tribe,
37 noting the presence of the Κιννυς River in their territory. Conversely, Scylax
38 depicted the Makai tribe sharing the Gulf of Sirte coast with the Nasamones,
39 positioning them at the bay's forefront. Strabo, in the 2nd century BC, introduced
40 some ambiguity by associating the Makai tribe with the Gaetuli and Asbystae
41 tribes, indicating confusion or shifts in tribal territories along the Sirte coast (66).
42 By the 1st century AD, the Makai tribe had expanded their influence into the Sawf
43 al-Jin and Wadi Zamzam regions (67).

44 Scylax's text hints at the Makai's pastoralist tendencies, as they moved inland
45 during summers. This observation aligns with Claudius Ptolemaeus's accounts,
46 which identified two distinct Makai locations: one coastal, termed as Makai

Sertien, and the other inland near Mount Girgiri, close to the Cinyps headwaters. This suggests the Makai's association with both mountainous, pre-desert regions and the coast (68). Mattingly D.'s geographical analyses further indicate that "Makai" likely denoted a tribal confederation or a significant tribal federation rather than a singular tribe. This interpretation is bolstered by the names of tribes Claudius Ptolemaeus mentioned at the western Syrtis entrance, implying similar interpretations for both the Makai and Nasamones (69).

Concluding Remarks

Upon examining the ethnic and tribal dynamics of the Syrtis region, it becomes evident that clarity in ancient writers' descriptions of Libyan tribes evolved over time. Herodotus's accounts from the 5th century BC provide foundational insights into major tribal names. However, by the 2nd century AD, with the Roman settlement in North Africa and the subsequent integration of knowledge about the region, Claudius Ptolemaeus offers a more detailed and structured account of the Libyan tribes along the Syrtis coast. This heightened detail suggests that Ptolemaeus might have captured the core or dominant tribes' internal dynamics, such as the Nasamones and Makai.

The Causes of the Greek-Libyan Conflict in the Sirte Coast Region

The conflict in Libya traces back to 631 BC with the arrival of Greek immigrants from the island of Thira (Θηρα) in Greece. At the urging of the Oracle of Delphi, they established the city of Cyrene. Leading this group of immigrants was a man initially named Aristotle, who later became known as Battus in 639 BC. He instituted a hereditary rule in Cyrene, with subsequent rulers of the Battiad dynasty alternating between the names Battus and Arcesilaus (70). Researchers note that relations between the Libyans and the Greeks, during the reigns of Battus and Arcesilaus, were generally peaceful. However, hostilities arose in the early sixth century BC with the rule of Battus II. The expansion of Cyrene brought in more Greek settlers, facilitated by the Oracle of Delphi, leading these colonists to claim significant territories belonging to the Asbystae tribe (71).

The Asbystae tribe likely felt aggrieved by this encroachment. Recognizing the challenge posed by the growing Greek presence in Cyrene, their king, Adicran, sought assistance from the Egyptian King Apries. While many researchers view Adicran's appeal as a standard diplomatic move, given the historical ties between Egypt and Libya—especially after the establishment of the twenty-second Egyptian dynasty by many Libyans—it's also plausible that Apries had his own strategic reasons for aiding the Libyans against the Greeks of Cyrene (72).

Herodotus documented a decisive battle in 570 BC between the armies of Apries and Cyrene near the Thestis spring (Θεστιη). Apries' forces suffered a defeat, with Herodotus attributing this loss to the Egyptians' unfamiliarity with Greek combat tactics. François Chameau, however, posits that the Egyptian army's

1 inability to counter the well-equipped Greek infantry was the primary reason for
2 their defeat (73).

3 With the establishment of other Greek cities in the region, tensions escalated
4 as the Greeks sought further territorial control. Semi-nomadic Libyan tribes likely
5 felt the brunt of this expansion, particularly as the Greeks attempted to restrict their
6 movements and even claimed their traditional grazing lands (74). This raises a
7 pertinent question: If the conflict in the Cyrenaica region centered on land use,
8 what precipitated the hostilities between the Greeks and the Libyan tribes in the
9 Syrtis area, which seemingly lacked such resource-driven motivations? Unraveling
10 the underlying reasons for this hostility remains a complex endeavor.

11 12 *Reasons for hostility between Libyans in the region of the Serts and the Greeks*

13
14 Some sources indicate that Libyans in the Syrtis region, represented by its
15 major tribes, Nasamones and Makai, have fought a struggle against Greek in the
16 territory of Cyrenaica (109), and we must record here that the Greek influence in
17 the region, did not exceed in the monarchical era and the beginning of the
18 republican city of Euesperides so that it did not exceed the coast of Syrtis , and
19 there is no source evidence to prove that Greek has proven their presence on it,
20 and the text of Herodotus, which spoke to us about the Libyan tribes in the Syrtis
21 region, narrated it in a sequential context and without reference to any Greek
22 presence that supports this (75), and thus we can say that the boundaries of the
23 Cyrenaica region, which were determined by the sources, were loose and
24 unrealistic, and if we agree that the Greek did not have influence over the Syrtis
25 region. And that these tribes did not submit to them, so what are the real reasons
26 behind the outbreak of the Libyan conflict in this region ? The answer to this
27 question will be through the examination and criticism of the sources that talked
28 about this region so that the researcher comes out with many of the causes that
29 were behind this conflict, which are as follows:

30 31 *The desert geographical nature of the Syrtis region and its impact on its inhabitants*

32
33 Classical sources concur in their descriptions of the Syrtis region's nature and
34 climate. It is depicted as a hostile desert area, characterized by scorching heat and
35 frequent Genoese winds that bring devastating environmental plagues, particularly
36 desert locusts. Inhabitants find themselves surrounded by sand, with minimal
37 access to water. The region is notorious for its venomous snakes and perilous sea
38 bay, where ships often run aground and sink (76).

39 This challenging environment undoubtedly shaped the lifestyle of its
40 inhabitants. Tribes adapted their ways of life to this harsh reality. Classical texts
41 provide glimpses into their lifestyles: they dwelled in portable leather tents and
42 huts known as "Mbala", with few luxuries. Their daily sustenance primarily relied
43 on herds, which were central to their existence. For instance, Herodotus noted that
44 the Nasamones would retreat to the oasis of Augila during summers to harvest
45 dates, leaving their herds by the coast. Similarly, Scylax reported that the Makai

tribe would retreat to mountainous regions with their herds during the summer to access water and would also collect locusts as a food source (77).

Some tribes also exploited the sea for sustenance. They would take advantage of the dawn tide to gather fish from the shoreline. Additionally, they would plunder ships stranded in the Gulf of Syrtis, leading to their portrayal in sources as pirates. Beyond coastal life, tribes like the Nasamones ventured into the desert. They would send exploratory expeditions deep into African interiors for trade, particularly given their control over northern desert trade routes. Their retreat to the Augila oasis further facilitated this trade (78).

Environmental challenges, such as droughts and sandstorms, often disrupted their lives. Herodotus recounted the decline of the Psylli tribe in the 5th century BC due to water sources drying up after a prolonged southerly wind. This led to internal migrations and eventual territorial annexation by the Nasamones. Silius Italicus vividly described the devastating sandstorms, noting their catastrophic effects on local water sources and as precursors to locust invasions (79).

Wars also drove migrations. For instance, conflicts between tribes like the Psylli and Nasamones in the 1st century BC led to displacements. While the exact causes remain debated—whether over pastures or power dynamics—tribes like the Bassoli were eventually displaced from their coastal habitats. Despite these adversities, many tribes thrived in the Syrtis region, with Pliny the Elder noting their significant presence north of the Garamantes and south of Cyrenaica (80).

As a conclude, the challenging desert environment deeply influenced the character of these tribes. While some neighboring tribes embraced Hellenistic influences, others, particularly in the Syrtis region, viewed Greeks as foreign entities, resistant to their culture, way of life, and geography. This likely contributed to their relative isolation from Greek influence.

Alliance of Tribes in the Syrtis Region against the Greeks

D.J. Mattingly, in his *Berber Encyclopedia*, mentions that the tribal union of the Laguatan, and its collection *Ilaguas*, was a system recognized by tribes during the late Roman era. However, this perspective is contradicted by historical evidence, which affirms that tribal alliances have long been a prevalent political strategy among Libyan tribes (133). Herodotus recounted the tale of King Adicran of the Asbystae tribe forming an alliance with King Ibris of Egypt against the Greeks of Cyrene (81).

Supporting J. Desanges' assertion that the issues of Cyrenaica's eastern borders during the Ptolemaic era were instigated by the Marmaridae tribe—a probable confederation of tribes from the border region—we can draw parallels with the Syrtis tribes. Notably, the eastern and western poles: Nasamones and Makai. These tribes would unite against common adversaries, with historical accounts offering two notable instances. First, the destruction of the Spartan colony led by Dorieus, where the Makai tribe collaborated with Carthage to dismantle the colony. Second, the conflict initiated by the Greeks of Cyrene against the Nasamones and Makai tribes in the Syrtis region (82).

1 *Libyan Attacks on the City of Euesperides*

2
3 Euesperides, known as Εὐεσπερίδες or Hespera Ἑσπερίς, is the westernmost
4 Greek city situated in the Cyrenaica region. Researchers suggest that its
5 establishment likely traces back to the early sixth century BC, possibly founded by
6 the Greeks of Cyrene or Tawgarh. Its earliest mention comes from Herodotus in
7 the context of the Persian campaign against the city of Parki. Various literary
8 sources and inscriptions indicate that the city faced repeated assaults from Libyan
9 tribes. Most notably, the Nasamones tribe appears to have spearheaded a tribal
10 coalition targeting Euesperides. Additionally, two other tribes, the Auschisae and
11 Marmaridae, are believed to have allied with the Nasamones against the city (83).

12 Laronde, A., elucidates the armed confrontations between Euseperides and
13 these tribes, noting, "Euesperides directly bordered the Nasamones and Makai
14 tribes to the south. To the east, near the terrain's first elevated ridges, namely the
15 heights of Al-Rajma and Al-Abyar, resided the Auschisae tribe. Both tribes
16 inhabited areas bordering the desert, where agriculture was feasible primarily near
17 water sources or regions prone to rainfall or flooding. Such areas were
18 indispensable for sustenance, both for farmers and herders." (84) This geographical
19 constraint likely fueled continuous conflicts between the nomadic Libyan tribes
20 and Euesperides' inhabitants, primarily over land and access to water sources.
21 Laronde further posits that these relentless disputes culminated in the siege of
22 Euesperides by the Libyan tribes (85).

23
24 *Piracy of Stranded Ships in the Waters of the Gulf of Syrtis*

25
26 Numerous sources concur that ships navigating the waters of the Great Bay of
27 Syrtis frequently found themselves stranded within it. Apollonius of Rhodes
28 vividly depicted this in his epic *Argonautica*: "The fierce northern winds seized
29 them midway, propelling them towards the Libyan Sea for nine nights and many
30 days, until they ventured deep into Syrtis, a point of no return for ships. The bay's
31 shallow waters offered no escape." Similarly, Annaeus Lucanus in his epic
32 *Pharsalia* remarked, "The shallows of the sea bear witness to the proximity of
33 Syrtis." (86)

34 Strabo elucidates the maritime perils of the Great Syrtis, stating, "The
35 challenge with both the Big and Small Syrtis is that, in numerous locations, the
36 seabed remains shallow. During tidal periods, many ships collide with these
37 shallows, often getting stranded. Few ships emerge unscathed. Hence, sailors are
38 cautious to steer clear of the coast, lest unpredictable winds drag them into these
39 perilous bays." He further reflects on human nature, observing, "Humans'
40 propensity for risk often compels them to venture perilously close to the shore."
41 (87)

42 It appears that the Syrtis tribes, notably the Nasamones, closely monitored
43 ships traversing the Great Syrtis region. Silius Italicus provides insight into their
44 tactics, noting, "They emerged from the sea, unafraid to assail stranded ships,
45 plundering their treasures from the depths." He also mentions, "The inhabitants of
46 Syrtis have vanquished numerous vessels." Additionally, he references, "Himpsal,

a renowned Nasamone, who dared to pillage not just the treacherous waters of Syrtis but also the wreckage of ships." (88) The fate of these pillaged ships is grim; as described by both Silius Italicus and Annaeus Lucanus, they would be allowed to sink deep into the bay.(89)

Smuggling of Silphium from Cyrenaica and Carthaginian Wine to Carthage

It appears that the Libyans in the Syrtis region, possibly the Nasamones in particular, engaged in smuggling as a significant part of their economic activities. The eastern desert trade route, believed to originate from the Augila oasis and likely serving as the tribal center of the Nasamones, fell within their operational domain. Strabo informs us that "the Libyans of the Syrtis region engaged in the illicit trade of the plant 'silphium,' a commodity monopolized by authorities from the Battiad dynasty in Cyrenaica to the Ptolemies and subsequently to the Romans." According to Strabo, the port of Kharax (Χαράχ) on the Syrtis coast was the nexus for this smuggling, facilitating the exchange of silphium for Carthaginian wine. (90)

Theophrastus notes, "The plant was found across a vast expanse of Libya, reportedly spanning more than four thousand furlongs. However, its concentration was highest near Syrtis, beginning from the islands of Euesperides." This observation is echoed by Pliny the Elder, who mentions, "In reputable Greek literature, it's noted that silphium first appeared near the gardens of the Hesperides. The Hesperides were located near the Greater Syrtis, following a sudden downpour." (91)

The presence of the silphium plant within Nasamones' territory, coupled with their understanding of its medicinal and commercial value, spurred competition with the Greeks in its procurement and trade. The Nasamones traded this valuable commodity for Carthaginian wine, renowned for its superior quality. Interestingly, the Libyans seemed to produce their wine from indigenous resources like lotus and dates. (92) This trade dynamic likely contributed to the tensions between the Libyans and the Greeks.

The Greeks' Hidden Ambitions to Control the Desert Trade Route

Did the Greeks in Cyrenaica harbor ambitions to dominate the desert trade route, which Herodotus delineated in his fourth book (181-185) as stretching from Thebes in Egypt to the Pillars of Hercules? First and foremost, it's crucial to underscore the evidence of Libyans engaging in trade since ancient times. During the classical era, Herodotus mentioned Carthaginian trade with inhabitants of Libya residing beyond the Pillars of Hercules. While Herodotus might have exaggerated, his accounts hint at commercial ties connecting the Libyans. Athenaeus later recounted a tale of a Carthaginian merchant named Magu (Μάγων) journeying alongside Garamantes traders towards Germa.(93)

Regarding the commercial activities of Libyan tribes in the Syrtis region, numerous indicators point to their involvement. The Nasamones tribe, for instance, undertook seasonal migrations to the Augila oasis, a pivotal trade hub on the desert

route. Herodotus also narrated a story in his second book about five young Nasamones embarking on an expedition deep into Africa, presumably in search of desert trade commodities. Scylax corroborated that the Makai tribe ventured inland during summers. Their objectives likely encompassed seeking water sources and trading their local produce with inland settlements connected to the Garamantes' trade routes. Originating from the western bank of the Gulf of Syrtis, particularly the Cephalae Promontorium to the Cinyps region, the Makai tribe held a significant position. (94)

A pertinent query arises: What commodities did the Libyan tribes monopolize for trade that compelled the Greeks to vie for regional dominance? Textual evidence points to African goods such as gold, predator skins, salt, ostrich eggs, feathers, and animal by-products like wool and dates. The Nasamones tribe, for instance, undertook extensive journeys to the Augila oasis to procure these goods. (95) P. Romanelli noted that Cyrene received sulfur from the Gulf of Syrtis region, suggesting Libyan involvement in its trade. Furthermore, the mention of precious stones is noteworthy. Not only did the Garamantes trade these stones, but the Nasamones tribe also engaged in their commerce. Pliny the Elder remarked that the Nasamones revered these stones as celestial, seeking them especially during full moons due to their reflective properties. This description aligns with Gaius Julius Solinus's account of a "red stone with deceptive black veins" named after the Nasamones tribe that dealt in it. (97)

In conclusion, the Syrtis region's significance to the Greeks and subsequently the Romans becomes evident. Their endeavors to control and subjugate its indigenous tribes were driven by economic and strategic imperatives

History of the Military Clashes between Greeks and Libyan Tribes on the Syrtis Coast

When discussing the inception of the conflict between the Greeks and Libyan tribes in the Syrtis region, it's essential to note that Greek influence was absent in this area during the monarchical and early republican periods. Nevertheless, literary sources confirm military confrontations between the Greeks and Libyan tribes in the region. The earliest reference to this dates back to 514 BC, during the reign of Battus IV, the seventh ruler of the Batiad dynasty in Cyrenaica. Herodotus provides this account, detailing the endeavors of a Spartan adventurer named Dorieus (Greek: Δωριεύς) to establish a Greek colony far westward, specifically along the banks of the Cinyps River. (98)

Herodotus narrates the colony's foundation, stating, "After the death of Anaxandrides, King of Sparta, the Lacedaemonians, adhering to their traditions, appointed his eldest son, Cleomenes (Κλεομένης), as his successor. This decision angered his brother Dorieus, leading him to depart Sparta with a faction of supporters. Without consulting the Oracle at Delphi about a suitable location, Dorieus sailed from Thera towards Libya." Jones A. notes that Dorieus briefly halted in Apollonia but found no support from Battus IV, who likely adopted a neutral stance to avert potential conflicts. (99)

However, Dorieus's venture garnered the backing of a wealthy exile named Philippus ben Botakides (Φίλιππος ὁ βουτακίδης), who funded a trireme for Kinops and Dorieus's group. They aimed to settle at Cinyps in "the finest part of Libya." Although Herodotus doesn't detail the colony's establishment, it appears that Dorieus's attempts to expand it encroached upon the lands of the local Meccan tribe, prompting them to seek aid from Carthage and potentially neighboring Libyan tribes. (100)

Carthage's involvement stemmed from its unwillingness to tolerate an expanding Greek presence encroaching upon its sphere of influence, coupled with concerns over its desert trade routes spanning from Tripolitania to Garama. Consequently, this nascent Greek colony faced destruction in 512 BC, a mere two years post its inception, at the hands of a Makai-Carthaginian alliance. This incident marked the initial war between the western Libyans and the Greeks. Moreover, the demise of the Kinbes colony had far-reaching implications, notably obstructing Greek aspirations to establish footholds on the western coast, especially around Cinyps. Furthermore, Carthage asserted its dominance over the eastern coastal region, designating it as its sphere of influence. (101)

Carthage fortified its claims with two treaties. Though these treaties were with the Romans, they solidified Carthage's rights to the region, thwarting external ambitions. This sentiment was echoed by Polybius in the second century BC, who remarked, "At present, the Carthaginians dominate the entirety of Libya stretching toward the Mediterranean, from Philaenus's altars on the vast coast of Syrtis to the Pillars of Hercules." Concurrently, the establishment of the Tripolitania cities and Carthage's alliance with regional Libyan tribal leaders culminated in the involvement of Libyans in Carthage's campaign on Sicily in 480 BC, commanded by Himilkar. (102)

Desertification, Drought in the Syrtis Region, and the Cyclical Increase in Nasamones Attacks on the City of Euesperides

Herodotus's writings shed light on the severe droughts afflicting the Syrtis region, which may have compelled certain tribes to migrate in search of water and sustenance for their livestock. Herodotus mentioned that the Basili tribe (Ψύλλοι), residing west of the Nasamones tribe along the Syrtis coast, faced extinction due to a drying southerly wind that depleted their water reservoirs. Following a collective decision, they ventured southward, only to be overwhelmed by sandstorms, allowing the Nasamones to annex their territory. However, Pliny the Elder, in the first century, near Garamantes north of Lake Lycomedis, provided a different perspective on the Psylli tribe's displacement. He asserted that while many Psylli were indeed displaced by the encroaching Nasamones, some survived due to their absence during the territorial takeover. (103)

Droughts plagued the Syrtis region, compelling inhabitants, including the Nasamones, Al-Basili, and others, to temporarily abandon their settlements in search of sustenance. This phenomenon was corroborated by Scylax concerning the Makai tribe's retreat to mountainous terrains during summers and by Pliny the Elder regarding the water-scarce conditions faced by the Amantis tribe on Certis's

western coast. Boville Robin Hallett aptly encapsulated these events, stating, "During insufficient pastures and dried-up wells, tribes affected by drought often resort to seasonal migrations. These migrations can exacerbate tensions with neighboring tribes, leading to conflicts."

A pertinent question arises: Did the Nasamones, known for their sizable population, migrate eastward in pursuit of water and resources, thereby clashing with the city of Euesperides? There's substantial evidence suggesting that the Greeks were cognizant of the Syrtis region's challenges. This is evident from the actions of Arcesilaus IV, who, during his reign, facilitated the migration of settlers from various Greek regions, subsequently overseeing the city of Euesperides's reconstruction. The city's strategic location provided a sanctuary, safeguarding against potential threats. While some scholars argue that Arcesilaus IV's intentions were focused on the flourishing city of Barca, which had expanded its influence significantly, others contend that his primary objective was to bolster Euesperides's defenses against relentless Nasamones attacks. This perspective finds support in Pausanias's writings, wherein he noted that the Euesperitae, or the inhabitants of Euesperides, faced recurrent assaults from their neighboring tribes, prompting their appeals for Greek reinforcements. (109)

The Conflict between the Nasamones and the City of Euesperides in 414 BC

Thucydides documented that in 414 BC, the city of Euesperides was under siege by the Libyans. He wrote, "While the commander of the Spartan fleet (Γύλιππος) and his heavy infantry were en route to Syracuse in Sicily in 415 BC to relieve its siege by Athenian forces, they were shipwrecked off the Libyan coast near Cyrene. Welcomed by the Cyrenians, they were provided with guides and boats, and subsequently engaged and defeated the Libyans besieging Euesperides." (110)

Pausanias provided another account, suggesting that the relief of Euesperides wasn't solely due to the arrival of Gleippos and his Spartan forces, as described by Thucydides. The city had already been defended by the Messenians, who had been ousted from Naupactus by the Spartans. Some Messenians had migrated to Sicily and Rhēgion, while others had joined the Euesperides defense, led by their commander, Komon. (111)

Historians generally concur that the assailants from Libya targeting Euesperides were likely the Nasamones. However, it's plausible that the Nasamones had garnered support from other Libyan tribes for this assault. The Aveskhis tribe, with its maritime connection to Euesperides, might have played a part in this aggression. Pausanias's text suggests that the siege was protracted, compelling the city's inhabitants to seek aid from any available Greeks. (112)

While the exact toll on Euesperides due to the Libyan siege remains unclear, Pausanias indicates that the defending Messenians remained steadfast in their defense. Despite their desire to return to Naupactus, they were unable to do so until after the Battle of Leuctra in 371 BC. This battle, where the Thebans, led by the Taygetis, defeated the Spartans, prompted the Messenians to rally their forces from Sicily and Euesperides. Undoubtedly, these reinforcements bolstered the

city's defenses against further Libyan incursions. Yet, given subsequent events, it appears Euesperides continued to face challenges from Libyan attacks. (113)

Greek Military Campaigns Against Libyans in the Syrtis Region Between 330 and 308 BC

The escalating attacks by Libyan tribes in the Syrtis region, particularly on Euesperides, compelled the Greeks to shift from a defensive stance to launching proactive offensives. The Greeks transitioned to a strategy of conducting naval campaigns targeting the Libyan tribes, specifically the Nasamones and Makai, in their native territories. (114) This change in Greek military strategy towards the Libyan tribes in Syrtis raises questions: Were these strikes aimed at both disciplining the aggressive tribes and securing a foothold along the Syrtis coast?

An inscription unearthed by G. Oliverio in the western section of the Apollo campus in 1933 details a naval military campaign led by five strategoi (military commanders) against the combined forces of the Nasamones and Makai, dated between 330 and 325 BC. (115) While the discovery of the dedication inscription in Cyrene suggests that the naval expedition originated from Cyrene, it remains uncertain whether other Greek city-states participated or if mercenaries from mainland Greece were involved. Furthermore, it's unclear if Cyrene spearheaded the campaign. Given that both targeted tribes were pastoral, it's probable that the spoils derived from these engagements were primarily tangible goods.

Evidence suggests that Greek naval offensives against the Libyan tribes persisted. Another inscription indicates a dedication to the god Apollo by military leaders. Some scholars speculate that this inscription, which might be from the period between 330 and 325 BC, is linked to the Thebron War in the region. While Oliverio G. supports this connection, Laronde, A. disputes it. (116)

The Conflict Between Libyans and Greeks in the Ptolemaic Period

In 322 BC, Ptolemy I arrived in the region of Cyrenaica, making it a vassal state of the Ptolemaic Kingdom in Egypt. Ptolemy I established a constitution for the city of Cyrene that organized its political and legal framework. This constitution, comprising fifteen articles, is particularly notable for its first article, which delineated the boundaries of Cyrenaica. The text reads: "[Citizens are: men born to a father and mother from Cyrene and also citizens born to Libyan mothers and Greek fathers from the population within the area extending from Catabathmus east to Automalax west.]" (117).

A. Laronde asserts that the western boundary of Cyrenaica, ending at Automalax, was established prior to Ophellas' campaign against Carthage. Laronde points out that Diodorus Siculus does not record any conflict between Ophellas and the Makai or Nasamones. Given the nature of the terrain and the tribes, it would have been impractical for Ophellas to engage these tribes with a heavily equipped force. Instead, any potential clashes would have involved more agile units. This aligns with the dedication of an inscription by five military

1 commanders celebrating a naval victory over the Nasamones and Makai,
2 suggesting that the border demarcation occurred between 330-325 BC (118).

3 Historical sources do not provide insight into the stance of the Libyan tribes
4 in the Syrtis region during Ophellas' campaign in 308 BC. This absence of
5 information leads to speculation. It's plausible that these tribes, familiar with the
6 challenging geography of the Syrtis coast, chose to evade direct confrontation,
7 allowing the hostile environment to deter Ophellas. This interpretation finds
8 support in Diodorus Siculus' account of Ophellas' challenges in the region: "He
9 found himself in a land devoid of water, teeming with deadly creatures. His army
10 faced shortages not only of water but also of provisions, endangering its very
11 existence." (119). Diodorus further describes the perilous encounters with
12 venomous desert creatures, some of which were camouflaged to resemble the
13 terrain, leading to fatal bites (120).

14 Alternatively, the tribes might have monitored Ophellas' massive procession,
15 which Diodorus detailed as comprising "over ten thousand infantry, six hundred
16 cavalry, one hundred chariots, and more than three hundred supply carts.
17 Accompanying them were an additional ten thousand non-combatants, many of
18 whom brought along family members and possessions." (121).

19
20 *The Official Demarcation of the Border Between the Provinces of Cyrenaica and*
21 *Carthage at the End of the Fourth Century*
22

23 The historian Sallust recounted the story of the border demarcation between
24 Cyrenaica and Carthage. There is a consensus among researchers that this event
25 took place at the end of the fourth century BC. Sallust wrote, "After the destruction
26 of the armies and fleets of the two warring parties," and in their mutual
27 apprehension of a potential intervention by a third party targeting either the victor
28 or the defeated, they decided to establish a truce. Representatives from both cities
29 embarked on a journey on a specified day, and the point where they converged
30 marked the boundary between the two regions. According to Sallust, Carthage
31 dispatched two brothers named Felini as their envoys, while Cyrene's
32 representatives also set out, though some speculate they might have been from the
33 city of Euesperides (122).

34 From the narrative, it appears that the Carthaginian envoys traveled swiftly,
35 whereas the Cyrene envoys moved at a slower pace. Sallust attributed this
36 difference either to Cyrene's envoys' deliberate lethargy or an unforeseen incident.
37 He elaborated that strong winds in the plains of eastern Syrtis could whip up sand
38 with such intensity that it would obscure vision and impede progress. Fearing
39 defeat in this diplomatic race, the Cyrene envoys accused the Carthaginians of
40 deceit. Presented with two grim choices by the Carthaginians—to either proceed to
41 their destination or be buried alive where they stood—the Cyrene envoys chose
42 the latter. This grave act marked the official border, and Carthage erected a mound
43 named after the Villani brothers' temple to commemorate the event (123).

44 However, despite the political demarcation, evidence of a tangible Greek
45 presence on the Syrtis coast remains elusive. The lives of the Libyan tribes in
46 Syrtis seemed largely unaffected. The tribes persisted in their daily activities,

herding, and quest for resources. Moreover, piracy and smuggling operations targeting stranded ships persisted. Conversely, Carthage endeavored to solidify its political relations with the coastal Libyan tribes, courting their leaders and integrating many Libyans into its military ranks since the fifth century BC. Diodorus Siculus noted, "In 406 BC, Hannibal and Hamilcar recruited soldiers not only from Libya and Phoenicia but also sought assistance from various nations, monarchs, and allies. Their forces included soldiers from Mauritania, Numidia, and select individuals from Cyrenaica" (124).

Conclusion

From our examination of the resistance of the Libyan tribes in the Syrtis region against Greek and Roman influences, several conclusions emerge:

1. The sources affirm that despite the challenging and arid nature of the Syrtis region, ancient civilizations settled both along its coast and inland. These sources provide a chronological account of ethnic populations in this region. Notably, tribes like the Nasamones and Makai maintained their presence from the fifth century BC to the first century AD. Defining the exact territorial influence of each tribe remains challenging due to their extensive movements across the region.
2. Ancient writers' understanding of the specific sites and names of the Libyan tribes became clearer around the beginning of the first century BC. While Herodotus provided a basic outline of major tribes in the mid-fifth century BC, by the second century AD, after the Romans settled in North Africa, Claudius Ptolemaeus offered intricate details about tribes like the Nasamones, Makai, and even the Marmaridae.
3. Multiple factors fueled the conflict between the Greeks and the Libyan tribes in the Syrtis region. Natural challenges, such as droughts, water scarcity, and locust invasions, played a role. Additionally, these tribes had grievances against the Greeks, stemming from territorial disputes and the Greeks' appropriation of fertile lands. Notably, nomadic tribes like the Nasamones, who roamed in search of resources, frequently clashed with Greek settlers.
4. The smuggling of Silphium and piracy of stranded ships were significant catalysts for conflict between the Greeks and Libyans. The Greeks likely sought control over the desert trade routes, which transported valuable commodities like salt, gold, animal products, and precious stones. The trade routes, including the one passing through the Augila oasis—central to the Nasamones—further exacerbated tensions between the two groups.
5. Our understanding of the chronological progression of conflicts between the Greeks and Libyans in the Syrtis region remains fragmented. While Greek literary sources and inscriptions from Cyrenaica provide limited insights, the absence of Libyan documents complicates verification. However, it's evident from available records that Libyan tribes frequently

targeted the Greek stronghold of Eosperides in southwestern Cyrenaica. Despite Cyrene's military prowess, it often found itself vulnerable to these recurrent assaults, prompting it to seek aid from a stranded Spartan fleet to fend off sieges by tribes like the Nasamones and their allies

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