

The Resistance of Juba I to Roman Expansion in North Africa (49–46 BC)

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Abstract

This study examines the resistance of Juba I of Numidia to Roman expansion in North Africa during the final phase of the Roman Republic's civil war between 49 and 46 BC. Following earlier Numidian resistance represented most notably by Jugurtha, Juba I emerged as an important regional actor who sought to protect Numidian political autonomy and territorial interests. His alliance with the Pompeian faction placed Numidia in direct confrontation with Julius Caesar and transformed North Africa into a decisive theatre of the Roman civil conflict. The study investigates Juba I's position toward the Roman civil war, the political and military development of his confrontation with Caesar, the involvement of secondary regional actors, and the consequences of Numidia's defeat for the wider Maghreb. It adopts a descriptive and analytical historical approach based on a critical examination of primary sources and relevant scholarly literature. The available evidence is contextualized and assessed to identify the political, military, and social dimensions of the conflict and to explain its principal causes and consequences. The findings indicate that Juba I possessed substantial military capabilities and played a central role in the initial resistance to Caesarian intervention in Africa. Nevertheless, changing regional alliances—particularly the cooperation between Caesar and Bocchus II of Mauretania—placed Numidia under pressure on multiple fronts and contributed to the eventual collapse of Juba's position. His defeat following the Battle of Thapsus in 46 BC marked a decisive transformation in the political order of North Africa. Rome annexed a substantial part of Numidian territory as the province of Africa Nova, while other territories were redistributed among Caesar's regional allies. The study concludes that Juba I's resistance represented a major episode in the defence of Numidian sovereignty and facilitated the subsequent consolidation of Roman power across the Maghreb.

Keywords: Juba I; Julius Caesar; Numidia; Roman expansion; Bocchus II; Roman civil war; North Africa.

Introduction:

After the Romans suppressed the revolt of Prince Jugurtha in 105 BCE—which ultimately altered the political landscape of the ancient Maghreb through Roman expansion over parts of the Kingdom of Numidia, while the Mauretanian King Bocchus I expanded into its western territory—Roman ambitions to occupy the Maghreb became increasingly evident. However, domestic instability resulting from social conflict, alongside external wars (such as the outbreak of war in Gaul shortly after the Jugurthine War), temporarily delayed these ambitions.

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This study aims to highlight the conditions that prevailed in the Maghreb following the Jugurthine War, the environment in which King Juba I emerged, the internal strife that plagued Rome, and the rise of prominent leadership figures vying for power at the end of the Republican era. Prominent among these figures was Julius Caesar, who harbored expansionist intentions in the region and engaged in warfare across multiple fronts, most notably on African soil against the Numidian prince, Juba I.

To investigate this topic, it was essential to rely on a range of primary sources, chief among them the African War (*Bellum Africum*), attributed to Julius Caesar or one of his commanders. This work provides crucial information regarding the progression of the African campaign, as well as highly valuable details concerning the geography of the region, the tribes inhabiting it—particularly the Numidians and their characteristics—and their principal cities. The study also draws upon the Civil Wars by the Roman historian Appian, who documented the period extending from the reforms of the Gracchi brothers in 133 BCE through the Battle of Actium to the inception of the Principate under Augustus. Appian addresses a critical phase of Roman history characterized by factional strife among commanders (Marius and Sulla, Caesar and Pompey, up to Caesar's assassination), devoting the second part of his work to the Roman civil war and Caesar's conflict against Pompey and his ally, Juba I. Additionally, other primary sources were utilized, including Dion Cassius's *Roman History* and Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*.

Alongside these primary sources, specialized secondary literature was indispensable, such as Dr. Mohamed El Saghir Ghanem's works, *The Numidian Kingdom and Punic Civilization* and *Articles and Views on the Ancient History of Algeria* (Vol. 1), which address the origins of the Numidian Kingdom, key stages in its history, the reign of King Juba I, his struggle against Caesar, and the political ramifications for Numidia. Furthermore, Stéphane Gsell's foundational work, *Histoire ancienne de l'Afrique du Nord* (Vol. 5), provided significant insights into the nature of the conflict from its inception to its conclusion, alongside details on major cities and tribal populations. Additionally, Dr. Mohamed El Hedi Harch's *Political and Economic Development in Numidia* offered an analytical examination of the conflict and its ultimate outcomes.

Through this research, it becomes evident that the Numidian king was keenly aware of Julius Caesar's expansionist policies, recognizing that Caesar would not stop until he annexed the entire Kingdom of Numidia as a preliminary step toward dominating North Africa as a whole. Consequently, King Juba I chose to ally himself with Pompey, having secured promises regarding the sovereignty of his realm, assurances against territorial encroachment, and the right to mint Numidian coinage bearing his name. By aligning with Pompey, the Maghreb became a primary target for Caesar, representing the final obstacle in his expansionist project.

From this context arises the central research problem regarding the nature of the conflict between Caesar and Juba I, which spanned from 49 BCE to 44 BCE. This problem gives rise to the following sub-questions:

- What were the underlying causes of this conflict?
- What were the key stages of the confrontation between Caesar and the Numidian prince?
- What were the ultimate consequences of this conflict?

This article aims to shed light on the figure of Juba I, focusing on the underlying causes and key phases of his conflict against the Romans, before ultimately examining the political and territorial ramifications

of this confrontation on the Kingdom of Numidia. To address this topic, the study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach. This method involves collecting and synthesizing historical data to provide a critical analysis of the key aspects concerning the nature of the conflict, its chronological evolution, and its eventual historical outcomes.

1. Early Life and Upbringing:

Scant information has survived regarding the life of King Juba I prior to his war against Julius Caesar, as well as the specific circumstances surrounding his accession to power in Numidia ⁽¹⁾

Juba I was the eldest son of Hiempsal II. He ascended the throne around 60 BC as a young man, having already actively participated in political affairs as a prince and undertaken several diplomatic missions. This is evidenced by his having caught the attention of the famous Roman orator Cicero* while fulfilling one of these diplomatic assignments in Rome between 64 and 63 BC. Thus, by the time he ascended the throne, he was well-versed and trained in statecraft ⁽²⁾.

Juba I was raised in a royal palace during his father's reign ⁽³⁾. According to certain historical accounts, he was keen on maintaining a dignified appearance and paid meticulous attention to his attire. He remained deeply devoted to the customs and traditions of his native land, rejecting Greek and Roman influences while showing a strong inclination toward military affairs. Immediately upon ascending the throne, he launched military campaigns against rebellious tribes and invaded the territory of Leptis, which was allied with the Romans ⁽⁴⁾. Aspiring to be a sovereign monarch over Numidia, he selected his royal guard from Spanish and Gallic mercenaries⁽⁵⁾.

2. His Stance on the Roman Civil War:

⁽¹⁾- Djamel Masrahi, Numidian Resistance to Roman Occupation in Southeastern Algeria: The Aurès and Saharan Marches Revolt as a Model, Master's Thesis in Ancient History, Faculty of Human Sciences, Department of History, University of Constantine, 2009, p. 81.

[*] Cicero (106–43 BC): Cicero is considered one of the most prominent orators in Roman history, which enabled him to author fifty-eight (58) speeches, seven (7) works, and approximately twenty (20) books on philosophy. It is worth noting that Cicero was familiar with the works of Herodotus, and his writings contain valuable insights into Phoenician and Carthaginian history, as well as references to the Jugurthine War. For further details, see: Abdelmalek Salatnia, Historical Sources and Texts and Their Importance in Researching Phoenician and Ancient Maghrebi History: Views and Studies in Ancient History and Archaeology, Kounouz Al-Hikma Publishing, Algeria, 2011, p. 219.

⁽²⁾- Mohamed El-Hadi Hareche, Studies and Texts in the History of Algeria and the Maghreb in Ancient Times, Dar Houma, Algeria, 2013, p. 214.

⁽³⁾- Djamel Masrahi, op. cit., p. 81.

⁽⁴⁾- Mohamed El-Hadi Hareche, op. cit., p. 214.

⁽⁵⁾- Mahfoud Kaddache, Algeria in Ancient Times, translated by Saleh Abbad, Office des Publications Universitaires (OPU), Algeria, 1993, p. 108.

Between 49 and 45 BC, Rome witnessed a civil war⁽¹⁾ between Gaius Julius Caesar⁽²⁾ and Pompey. The theater of events spanned across the entire Roman Empire⁽³⁾, as Roman provinces were divided between the two rivals: Hispania and Africa⁽⁴⁾ fell under the share of Gnaeus Pompeius, who represented the aristocratic faction (Optimates), while Caesar represented the popular faction (Populares)⁽⁵⁾.

Caesar succeeded in taking control of Italy and subsequently seized Hispania before crossing the Adriatic Sea to defeat Pompey himself. Furthermore, he had to prevent his enemies from starving Rome which was now firmly in his grasp by moving swiftly to wrest from them the provinces that supplied the capital with grain, chief among them being Sicily, Africa, and Sardinia. To accomplish this mission, he commissioned the commander Curio to wrest Sicily and Africa from his adversaries, the Pompeian faction⁽⁶⁾.

After Caesar managed to take control of Italy⁽⁷⁾, Attius Varus fled to Africa at the head of Roman forces. In Africa, he recruited military legions, declared Pompey's authority there, and proclaimed himself as his lieutenant. He allied with the Numidian King Juba I⁽⁸⁾, alongside the adherence of Cato and Metellus Scipio. Together, they gathered a large army⁽⁹⁾ and prepared to defend Africa. Faced with these developments, Caesar sent Curio to subjugate Varus and Juba. Although Curio lacked military brilliance unlike his political acumen he achieved some victories in Africa⁽¹⁰⁾, forcing Varus to fortify himself in Utica and besieging him there. This siege was only broken when King Juba I arrived at the head of Numidian forces, forcing Curio to lift the siege, retreat, and fortify himself in his camp near Castra Cornelia. However, Juba managed to outwit him and lure him to a location of his own choosing to be the battlefield. Curio and his soldiers were surprised to find themselves surrounded by countless Numidians and two thousand (2,000) Spanish and Gallic cavalymen who were part of Juba's army. Nothing remained for Curio and his army except defense, but Juba managed to annihilate everyone who remained in the camp to the last man. As for the rest, they fled and threw themselves onto the merchant ships anchored at the port, which could not withstand their numbers, and only a small number survived to reach Sicily in July 49 BC⁽¹¹⁾.

When news of this reached Pompey and his supporters in the Roman Senate, King Juba I was granted the title "Friend and Ally of the Roman People," while Caesar was branded as "the Arch-Enemy."⁽¹²⁾ Here, one must wonder about the reasons behind Juba I's siding with the Pompeians.

To answer this question, according to Dr. Mohamed Seghir Ghanem, we can believe that King Juba I, and behind him many Numidians, had realized from the very first moment of the outbreak of the civil war in Rome the extent of the expansionist ambitions of the Popular Party led by Caesar. Therefore,

⁽¹⁾- Ibrahim Rizkallah Ayoub, Roman History, 1st ed., Global Book Company, Lebanon, 1996, p. 231.

⁽²⁾- Appian, Civil Wars, Book II, 1, translated by Combes-Dounous, Paris, 1808.

⁽³⁾- Ibrahim Rizkallah Ayoub, op. cit., p. 231.

⁽⁴⁾- Appian, Loc. cit., Book II, 18.

⁽⁵⁾- Mohamed El-Saghir Ghanem, The Kingdom of Numidia and Punic Civilization, Dar El-Hoda, Ain M'lila, Algeria, 2006, p. 96.

⁽⁶⁾- Stephane Gsell, Ancient History of North Africa, translated by Mohamed Tazi Saoud, vol. 5, Publications of the Academy of the Kingdom of Morocco, Rabat, 2007, p. 10.

⁽⁷⁾- Mohamed El Hadi Harch, Political and Economic Evolution in Numidia, Dar Houma, Algiers, 2013, p. 79.

⁽⁸⁾- Appian, Loc.cit., (II-44).

⁽⁹⁾-Plutarque, Vies et Oeuvres morales (Caius Julius César), (III-51), trad. (notamment) D. Ricard, Paris, 1844.

⁽¹⁰⁾- Ibrahim Noshi, History of the Romans, vol. 2, Anglo-Egyptian Library, Cairo, 2010, p. 620.

⁽¹¹⁾- Mohamed El Hadi Harch, Evolution, previous reference, p. 80.

⁽¹²⁾- Mohamed Seghir Ghanem, previous reference, p. 96.

they voluntarily chose to defend the Numidian kingdom by supporting Pompey's faction, who were defending the goals of the Senate, which was mostly composed of aristocrats.

For their part, and in order to secure King Juba I and the Numidians on their side, Pompey's supporters proceeded to make certain promises to Juba I to be fulfilled upon their victory over Caesar and his partisans, including:

A. Handing over the Roman province of North Africa to Juba I.

B. Assisting Juba I in minting a special coinage bearing the king's portrait on one side and the symbol of an African deity, perhaps Baal Hammon, on the other.

C. Drawing the attention of King Juba I and reminding him of the dangers threatening his kingdom in the event of the victory of Caesar and his partisans in the war, and what the fate of the Numidian kingdom would be⁽¹⁾.

3.His War Against Caesar:

About a year after the battle between Curio and Juba I, and far from Africa, Pompey was defeated at the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC. Following his assassination, many of his supporters fled to Africa,⁽²⁾ where they worked to gather forces and organize their armies, which reached about thirty-five thousand (35,000) combatants, including twenty thousand (20,000) cavalrymen, in addition to javelin throwers and archers. King Juba I also joined them with his forces consisting of twenty thousand (20,000) Numidian infantry, other cavalry units, and sixty (60) elephants.⁽³⁾

As for Caesar, he gathered his forces, estimated at ten infantry legions and four thousand (4,000) cavalrymen, and sailed from Lilybaeum at the head of six (6) infantry legions, seven (7) cavalry cohorts numbering approximately two thousand six hundred (2,600) horsemen, and only a small force of light infantry. This was due to his lack of a fleet capable of transporting all his forces.⁽⁴⁾

Caesar landed in the suburbs of Hadrumetum in October 47 BC⁽⁵⁾ at the head of only three thousand (3,000) infantry and one hundred and fifty (150) cavalrymen, due to the scattering of his ships at sea and the difficulty of transport. He remained near the port awaiting the arrival of his other forces.⁽⁶⁾

Historical writings indicate that the governor of Clupea had alerted commander Scipio to the arrival of Caesar's fleet in the region. Consequently, three Numidian cohorts attacked him, forcing Caesar to set sail and head south until he reached the city of Leptis Minor, where the inhabitants welcomed him. There, military reinforcements reached him, and he encamped near Ruspina (modern Ras Dimas, Tunisia). His adversaries did not give him respite; Titus Labienus and Marcus Petreius attacked him from the east, followed by attacks from Juba I and Scipio from the north and west.⁽⁷⁾ Caesar was thus repulsed, but he managed to evade their attacks and headed toward the city of Ruspina, which welcomed

⁽¹⁾- Mohamed Seghir Ghanem, previous reference, p. 96.

⁽²⁾- Mohamed El Hadi Harch, *Evolution*, previous reference, pp. 80–81.

⁽³⁾- Appian, *Civil Wars*, II-96.

⁽⁴⁾- Hassina Zeghibib, *The Civil War in Rome and Its Impact on the Maghreb (88–31 BC)* (Master's thesis in Ancient History, Faculty of Humanities, History Department, University of Algiers 2, 2012), 90.

⁽⁵⁾- Julius Caesar, *African War (47–46 BC)*, chap. III, trans. Mohamed El Hadi Harch (Algiers: Dar Houma, 2014).

⁽⁶⁾- Caesar, *African War*, book VI-3, based on the slightly revised translation by M. Nisard (1865).

⁽⁷⁾- Mohamed Seghir Ghanem, previous reference, p. 98.

Caesar and opened its gates to him.⁽¹⁾ He fortified himself there and then subdued Leptis Minor, which would bolster his position thanks to its port through which he would receive necessary supplies.

Under these circumstances, Labienus attacked at the head of ten thousand (10,000) fighters, mostly Numidians. Although Caesar managed to repel them, his situation deteriorated and grew complicated with the arrival of Scipio at the head of a Numidian force.⁽²⁾ Consequently, Caesar retreated and settled at a place called "Aggar," encamping there about thirty (30) kilometers southeast of Uzita, where the enemy camp was located.⁽³⁾

Facing these conditions, Caesar resorted—true to Roman custom—to intrigue, treason, and the policy of "divide and rule." He began searching for an ally in Africa and found what he was looking for in the King of Mauretania, King Bocchus II. Caesar worked to win him over by:

Promising him, in the event of victory, the partition of the Kingdom of Numidia and handing over the western part of the kingdom to him.

Alerting him that if the Pompeians and their ally Juba I were victorious, the Kingdom of Mauretania would be in danger.

Caesar did not stop there; he also contacted the Italian mercenary Sittius*, who commanded a group of mercenaries, promising him that upon victory over his enemies, he would hand over a part of the Kingdom of Numidia for him and his soldiers to settle in. Thus, all conditions converged for Caesar to achieve victory in Africa.⁽⁴⁾ King Juba I was declared "an enemy of the Roman people," at the same time King Bocchus was declared "a friend and ally of the Roman people."⁽⁵⁾

It was agreed between Caesar, Bocchus, and the mercenary Sittius that as soon as Juba I left his capital to go to the rescue of Scipio's forces and allies, they would attack his kingdom from the rear.⁽⁶⁾ Caesar also contacted the Getulian tribes and incited them to attack Juba's kingdom from the south.⁽⁷⁾

Amidst these events, King Juba I left the capital of his kingdom at the head of forces heading toward the camp of his allies. Consequently, both Bocchus and Sittius attacked him upon learning of King Juba I's departure from his capital and besieged the city of "Cirta," an important city for King Juba I. Simultaneously, the Getulian tribes attacked the southern borders of his kingdom. When this news reached King Juba, he hurried back to rescue his kingdom,⁽⁸⁾ forcing him to divide his forces across three fronts. This was precisely what Caesar wanted. The second batch of Roman forces arrived, consisting of two legions, eight hundred (800) cavalrymen, and one thousand (1,000) archers. Meanwhile, King Juba relinquished command of the defense of the kingdom to the commander Sabura and headed toward Scipio's camp. As for Caesar and his followers, their morale rose and their confidence in victory increased upon learning of the small forces Juba had brought with him on one hand, and the

⁽¹⁾– Cassius Dio, Roman History, book XLII-4, trans. E. Gros (Paris, 1850).

⁽²⁾– Mohamed El Hadi Harch, Evolution, previous reference, p. 82.

⁽³⁾– Fatiha Ferhati, Numidia: From the Reign of King Gaia to the Beginning of Roman Occupation (213–46 BC) (Editions ANEP, 2007), 181.

* _ Publius Sittius was a Roman mercenary who supported Caesar in Africa. After Caesar's victory over the armies of Pompey's supporters and their ally Juba I, Caesar handed him a part of the kingdom of Masinissa II as a reward for his assistance. He was killed by Arabion, the son of the latter, in 44 BC upon his return from Spain, and the lands of his father were recovered. For further details, see: Julius Caesar, previous reference, p. 33.

⁽⁴⁾– Mohamed Seghir Ghanem, Articles and Opinions on the History of Ancient Algeria, vol. 1 (Ain M'lila, Algeria: Dar El Hoda, 2010), 193.

⁽⁵⁾– Mohamed El Hadi Harch, Evolution, previous reference, p. 81.

⁽⁶⁾– Mohamed Seghir Ghanem, The Kingdom, previous reference, p. 99.

⁽⁷⁾ _ Mohamed El Hadi Harch, Evolution, previous reference, p. 83; Caesar, African War, I-25.

⁽⁸⁾– Caesar, African War, I-25.

arrival of the final batch of reinforcements—estimated at about four thousand (4,000) infantry, four hundred (400) cavalymen, and one thousand (1,000) archers—on the other. At that point, Caesar grew bold and proceeded to besiege Thapsus, forcing Scipio to leave his position to rescue the city.⁽¹⁾

Scipio attacked Caesar's forces without accounting for Caesar's troops and the reinforcements that had reached him. The outcome of that adventure favored Caesar,⁽²⁾ who overran Scipio's forces in a swift attack and forced his troops to retreat. As for Juba I, upon learning of Scipio's defeat, he did not participate in the attack and fled the battlefield. Following the Battle of Thapsus in 46 BC, most Numidian cities opened their gates to Caesar after his victory over his adversaries and surrendered without resistance, while Pompey's supporters scattered between fugitives, suicides, and prisoners.⁽³⁾

4. The End of Juba I:

As for Juba I, who fled the battlefield heading toward his kingdom's capital, the city of Zama, its gates were shut in his face. Consequently, facing defeat⁽⁴⁾ and losing all hope of survival, he decided to die an honorable death by asking one of his attendants to kill him.⁽⁵⁾

5. Numidia After the War of Juba I:

Following the death of Prince Juba I by suicide, it also marked the end of the Numidian polity. Julius Caesar proceeded to transform the eastern part of Numidia into a new Roman province known as Africa Nova, placing Sallust at its head with the rank of proconsul. Caesar exempted the inhabitants of Zama Regia from taxes as a result of their shutting the city's gates in the face of Juba I.

Furthermore, Caesar granted Bocchus II, King of Mauretania, the lands of western Numidia in return for his alliance with the Romans, thus expanding his kingdom eastward to the outskirts of Cirta.⁽⁶⁾ Caesar then secured the borders of the new African province by granting the northwestern part of the Numidian kingdom to the mercenary Sittius and his followers. The latter proceeded to expand and establish agricultural colonies—all of which were merely a precursor to the large-scale phase of settlement.⁽⁷⁾

Conclusion:

Based on the outcomes of previous studies regarding the resistance of King Juba I, it becomes evident that this topic continuously warrants further research and critical analysis. This is due to ongoing historical ambiguities surrounding the nature and underlying motives of Roman policy toward the Kingdom of Numidia. Furthermore, the political and military conditions of the Numidian Kingdom from the defeat of Jugurtha up to the ascension of King Juba I remain veiled in obscurity. The defeat of Prince Jugurtha significantly consolidated the Roman presence in the Ancient Maghreb, paving the way for Rome to expand its political, economic, and strategic influence across the region. Within this context, Roman interference in Numidia's internal affairs escalated, exploiting the existing political fractures within the ruling dynasty and the kingdom at large. Consequently, this led to a gradual

⁽¹⁾– Mohamed El Hadi Harch, *Evolution*, previous reference, pp. 83–84.

⁽²⁾– Mohamed Seghir Ghanem, *The Kingdom*, previous reference, p. 99.

⁽³⁾– Mohamed El Hadi Harch, *Evolution*, previous reference, pp. 84–87.

⁽⁴⁾– Mohamed Seghir Ghanem, *The Kingdom*, previous reference, p. 99.

⁽⁵⁾– Julius Caesar, *African War*, XCIV.

⁽⁶⁾– Mohamed El Hadi Harch, *Evolution*, previous reference, p. 101.

⁽⁷⁾– Hammadouche Boulkhras, *Julius Caesar's Expansionist Policy and Its Repercussions on Numidia (49–44 BC)* (Master's thesis in Ancient History, University of Algiers 2, 2014), 95.

deterioration of relations with King Juba I. Moreover, the Roman leadership employed a array of political and legal rationales to justify its military intervention, laying the groundwork for an escalating confrontation that ultimately culminated in the outbreak of war against Juba I. Re-examining this conflict thus offers a deeper understanding of the nature of Roman expansion in North Africa and highlights the dimensions of Numidian resistance against the Roman expansionist agenda.

The key findings of this study can be synthesized as follows:

Julius Caesar's Rise to Power: The ascension of Julius Caesar in Rome played a pivotal role in shaping Roman expansionist policy at the expense of neighboring nations, with African territories standing as a primary objective and strategic ambition for Caesar.

Strategic Realignment During the Roman Civil War: Amid the civil war that engulfed Rome, the Numidian ruler recognized that the kingdom's strategic interests lay in opposing Caesar and his faction. Consequently, Juba I aligned with Pompey's camp, having secured promises regarding the future sovereignty of his kingdom and the right to mint his own Numidian coinage.

The Aftermath of Juba I's Demise: Following the death of King Juba I, Numidian lands were fully exposed to Roman domination. Caesar annexed the eastern portion of Numidia, converting it into a Roman province, while granting the remaining territories to his ally, Bocchus II, and assigning land grants to the mercenary Sittius. This ultimately opened the floodgates for widespread Roman colonization and economic exploitation throughout Numidia.

Declarations

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