

J. E. H. SPAUL

I.A.M. 2,250 = AE 1967, 655 AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF  
COLONIA BABBA

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## I.A.M. 2,250 = AE 1967,655 AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF COLONIA BABBA

### Part I. Where was Colonia Iulia Babba Campestris?

Only one of the many "Inscriptions Antiques du Maroc, tome 2, inscriptions latines" mentions the colony of Babba, a town whose location has been and still is the subject of controversy. No. 250 is therefore the only epigraphic pointer which we have to help in bringing this controversy to an end. But before examining the inscription, it is appropriate to review the historical and literary pointers and the previous attempts to locate Babba.

It is generally accepted that Colonia Iulia Babba Campestris was one of the three colonies established by Octavian in western Mauretania (Mauretania Tingitana) for men discharged after the Battle of Actium. The original reference to Babba Campestris occurs in the Elder Pliny's Natural History, 5, 1, 5. Pliny has already mentioned one of the three colonies, Colonia Iulia Zilil Constantia, and after describing Lixus, he continues:

"Ab Lixo XL millia passuum in mediterraneo altera Augusti colonia est Babba, Iulia Campestris appellata, et tertia Banasa XXXV millia passuum Valentia cognominata: ab ea XXXV millia passuum Volubile oppidum tantumden a mari utroque distans."

This seems simple; forty miles inland from Lixus is another Augustan colony, Babba, called Iulia Campestris, and a third, 35 miles further, Banasa, with the surname Valentia; from there, a further 35 miles, is Volubilis, a town which is equidistant from both the seas, the Atlantic and Mediterranean.

In fact Banasa is nearer 75 miles from Volubilis and 40 from Lixus according to the *Itinerarium Omnium Provinciarum*. This list of stopping-places on the Imperial roads and fairly accurate distances between the locations, describes two roads in Mauretania Tingitana, a coastal road from Sala through Thamusida, Banasa, Frigidis, Lixus, Tabernae, Zilil to Ad Mercuri where it joins the other road, an inland road from Volubilis, through Aquae Dacicae, Gilda, Vopisciana, Tremulis, Oppidum Novum and Ad Novas, to Tingis. The *Itinerarium* does not give a direct distance from Banasa to Volubilis but the inland road which passes east of Banasa has about another 75 miles before it reaches Volubilis. Babba, however, is not mentioned on either of the two roads of the *Itinerarium*, though Babba or Baba is listed by Ptolemy and Ravennas as a town in the south central area.

Some of the various locations suggested for Babba before 1967 were recorded by René Rebuffat in an article "Les erreurs de Pline et la position de Babba Iulia Campestris" published in "Antiquités Africaines", 1, 1967, 31-57. With additions and my personal comments, (letters refer to locations on the accompanying map) the authorities and their suggested locations are (cfr. p.193):

(A) Charles Tissot, who visited Morocco in 1877, in trying to reconcile the details given by Pliny, thought that Babba should lie somewhere to the North-East of Banasa, though this was off the line of the inland road. He was not able to find it, but suggested it might be at Es-Serif, a location somewhere in the upper valley of the Oued Loukkos. Mommsen followed Tissot, as did

(B) Hermann Dessau. Discussing Babba in RE II, 2, 2653 he wrote:

"Die genaue Lage noch unbekannt s. Tissot (Mémoires présentées à l'Académie des Inscriptions IX, 1, 302)"

and he added

"Dieser Stadt gehören wohl Münzen des Claudius, Nero und Galba, auf welchem die prägende Stadt mit den Buchstaben C C I B (Colonia Campestris Iulia Babba) bezeichnet ist, Muller, Numismatique de l'ancienne Afrique III, 179ff vgl. IV. 80."

This additional piece of information was to mislead scholars for many years.

(C) Réne Cagnat was provided by Henry de La Martinière with information about Moulay Abdes Slam near Djebel Alam and although this site is even further north of Banasa and north-east of Lixus, thought it might be Babba. On p. 278 of "L'Armée Romaine et l'Occupation de l'Afrique du Nord", discussing the inland road, he wrote:

"vers la montagne sainte de Moula-Abd-es-Selam, où se placerait la colonie militaire de Claude, Babba."

adding in a note:

"Tissot identifie cette colonie avec le point appelé actuellement Es-Serif. Mais M. de la Martinière affirme, d'après des renseignements dignes de foi, qu'il n'y a pas des ruines à Es-Serif, tandisqu'il en existe sur la montagne de Moulay-Abd-es-Selam."

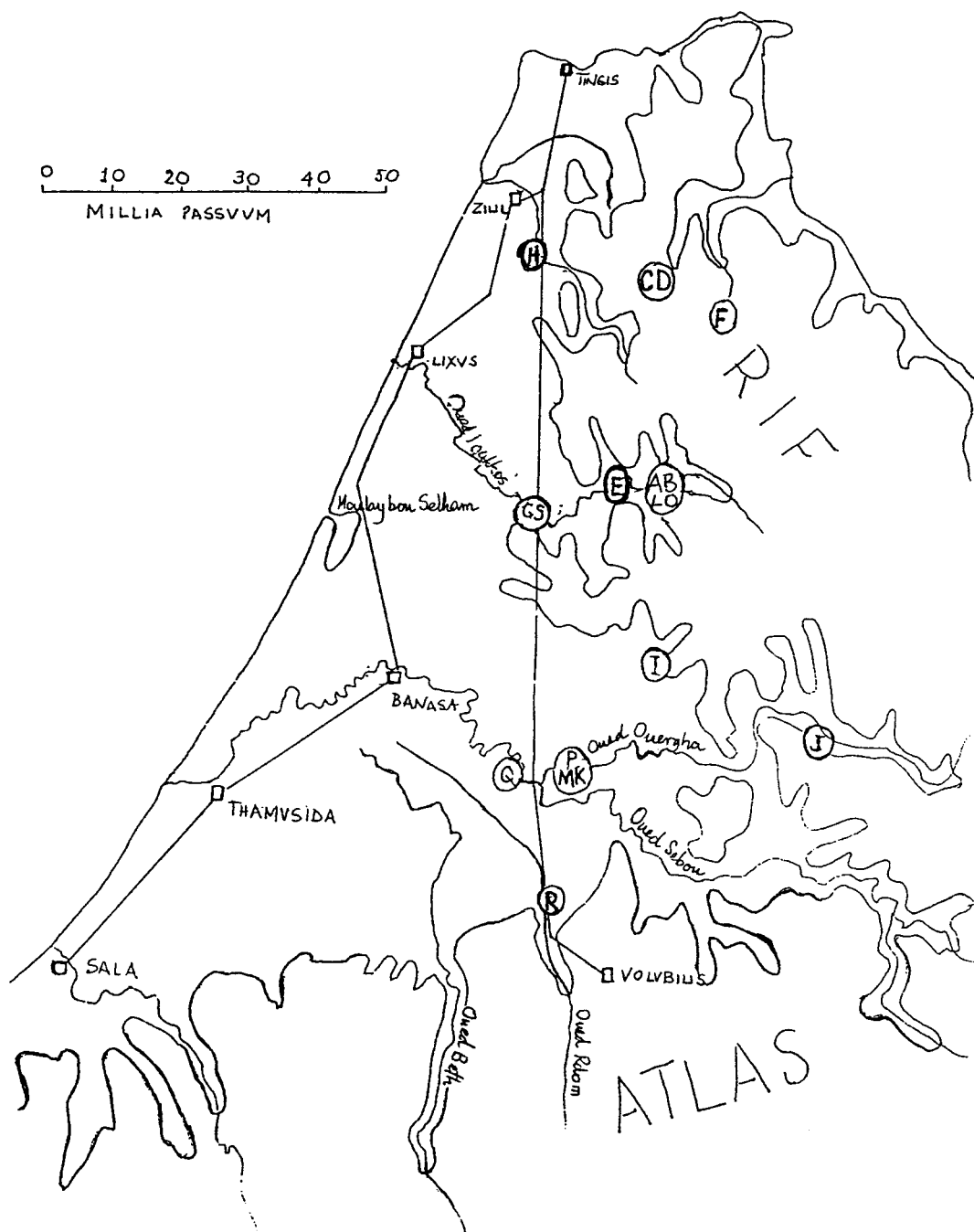
This view was followed by Jean Mesnage in "Romanisation de l'Afrique; Tunisie, Algérie, Maroc", published in Paris in 1913.

(D) Karl Miller in his 1916 edition of "Itineraria Romana" published in Stuttgart, proposed to identify Babba with

"Moulay, Mula oder Beni Tende am Guarga (Nebenfluss des Subur) wo Leo Afr. noch alte Mauern, Gräber und Zisternen kennt".

This description is usually taken to refer to Fes-el-Bali, an ancient town on the Oued Ouerga, a tributary of the Oued Sebou, which is well to the east of Banasa, but on his map Miller places Babba firmly on the Djebel Alam.

(E) Louis Chatelain, the first Inspecteur des Antiquités du Maroc, faced with the choice of two sites preferred Tissot's view to the others but suggested Rirha des Rhouna was a more likely place than Es-Serif, partly because the coins supposed to originate in Babba showed a three-arched bridge with a parapet - hence Babba had to be where a three-arched bridge was possible - and partly because another place called Rirha, on the Oued Beth, had proved to be a Roman site.



(F) This idea was accepted by Jérôme Carcopino, who, however, managed to transform it into a nonsense. He wrote in 1943 in "Le Maroc Antique" (10th Edition, Paris (1947), on page 251)

"Babba Campestris, l'ancienne colonie d'Auguste, fondée vraisemblablement dans le plaine de Rirha sur l'Oued-Beht à 40 milles (60 km.) à l'Est-Nord-Est de Lixus, suivant les indications approximativement exactes de Pline l'Ancien".

Unfortunately, the Oued Beth is a southern tributary of the Oued Sebou, and Rirha is about 90 m.p. south of Lixus. To make matters worse, his map on page 253 shows Babba at the source of the Rio Martin. Meanwhile

(G) Louis Chatelain had changed his mind. In "Le Maroc des Romains (Paris 1944) he proposed (p. 111) a new thesis. El Ksar el Kebir could have a three-arched bridge over the Oued Loukkos, and this site was generally accepted as Oppidum Novum on the inland road of the Antonine Itinerary. The name might indicate that it replaced Babba. The distances are not exactly as Pliny gave them, but if one allows for detours to avoid marshes, they could be made to fit.

(H) Miguel Tarradell of the Antiquities Service of the Spanish Zone, preferred to have Babba within his area, and suggested Suiar, a suggestion which has the merit of having been a town in the First Century and an army camp in the Third. But it is too far from Banasa for serious consideration.

(I) Raymond Thouvenot, Chatelain's successor as Inspecteur, accepted the identification proposed by Cagnat as is shown on the map (p. xiii) in "Valentia Banasa" (Paris, 1941). He amended this slightly a little later (BCTH 1946-49, 48) to the nearby town of Ouezzane, and later still

(J) favoured Fes-el-Bali, perhaps persuaded by Miller's identification. But these conjectures based on coin evidence, foundered when Jean Mazard proved in "Les monnaies coloniales supposées de Babba et Banasa" (Revue Africaine 99, 1955, 55-68) that C.C.I.B. referred to Buthrotum in Epirus and not to Babba in Tingitana.

(K) Ignorant of the work done at Thamusida in 1954, I suggested in my 1957 unpublished research thesis (University of Durham) that Pliny had transposed Babba and Banasa, and that Babba and Baba were identical. Searching for a possible site in the Ouergha valley, I picked on Ferme Biarnay for Babba, since walls, pottery and a road system had been reported there. If it was Babba, it would be a convenient stop when travellers from Caesariensis came down to the plain of the Sebou.

(L) Leo Teutsche ("Das römische Stadtwesen in Nord Afrika", Berlin, 1962), discussed the location of the Roman colonies in North Afrika and devoted pages 211-13 to the problem of Babba without arriving at any definite conclusion. He noted Pliny's data, the inscription from Thamusida and the suggestions of scholars, and dismissing the coin evidence, thought possibly Tissot's answer to the problem was best, since conditions had prevented him from visting Es Serif in 1878.

In the same year, Maurice Euzennat, Thouvenot's successor, seemed to have taken a defeatist attitude in "Les Voies Romaines du Maroc dans l'Itineraire Antonin" published in *Mélanges à Albert Grenier*, 1962, 609 n.3. Since Babba had not been found,

"On peut se demander si elle a survécu aux troubles qui agitèrent la province à la fin du IIe s."

(M) René Rebuffat, in the 1967 article in *Antiquités Africaines* 1, already referred to, rejected the evidence of IAM 2, 250 decisively:

"Quant au texte de l'inscription, il n'impose absolument pas d'identifier avec Babba la ville où on l'a decouvert" (p. 50)

and

"Mais rien prouve que cette inscription ait érigée à Babba et la perte de la fin du texte permet de multiples suppositions" (p. 51)

in support of which he referred to IAM 2, 311. This inscription from Sala appeared to refer to a decurion of Volubilis, and as such was negative evidence for location; a re-reading of line 6 by Jean Boube reported in *BAM* 12, 83-98 shows, however, that decurions of Volubilis joined with the council of Sala in erecting the monument to a five-year-old boy, who, one assumes, lived and died at Sala.

Rebuffat summarised the situation as (1) Babba is not found on the inland road of the Antonine Itinerary; (2) it was certainly to the east of that road; (3) it was west of the Rif mountains; (4) it ought to have been easily accessible from the zone held by Rome at that time. From somewhat different cogitations than mine, he came to the same result. He felt that Ferme Biarnay was a likely site for Babba, and this view was so persuasive that thirteen years later, Edmond Frézouls in "Rome et la Maurétanie Tingitane; un constat d'echec", *Antiquités Africaines* 16, 1980, 89 n. 3 repeated this identification.

(N) Maurice Euzennat was a little more positive in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Classical Sites* (1976, 133) than in his earlier work. Discussing the problem, he suggested that Babba should be between the Oued Sebou and the Oued Loukkos,

"perhaps on the lower reaches of the Ouerrha, although none of the Roman settlements hitherto found in the area is large enough to be called a colony".

The cartographers listed Babba in square 2F, which covers the area Casablanca-Fez-Lixus, but carefully failed to place it anywhere. Not so

(O) another American scholar, John W. Eadie, who had no inhibitions about the position of Babba. On the map which he published in his article "Civitates and Clients: Roman Frontier Policy in Pannonia and Mauretania Tingitana" (*The Frontier: Comparative Studies* ed. Miller & Stiffen, University of Oklahoma Press, 1977, 57-79) he boldly placed Babba near Tissot's suggested position.

(P) Nicola Mackie discussed the question of "Augustan Colonies in Mauretania" in *Historia* 32, 1983, 332-58. She was principally concerned with corruptions in Strabo's text but she does provide a historical appreciation of the placing of Augustan colonies.

"Octavian's choice of Zilil as a site was deliberate. The colony was planted where it was not because the site was conveniently empty of inhabitants, and therefore readily available for the accommodation of veterans. Octavian went to the trouble of displacing the indigenous population from the site and surrounding region, in order to make room for the colony. Fertile land was not overplentiful in Mauretania, and the choice of site was additionally restricted if the colony was to be placed close to the coast of Spain" (p. 348).

Since Babba was another of the same group of colonies, one would expect to find similar considerations playing their part in determining the position of the veteran colony. On the map (p. 334) Babba is shown with a question mark in approximately the position of Ferme Biarnay; this suggests that she accepted Rebuffat's identification with reservations, for in her discussion she pointed out that

"Zilil in particular, but Babba and Banasa also, were planted at sites which were easily reached from the ports of Southern Spain."

This statement can not be in accordance with a colony so far inland as Ferme Biarnay.

(Q) Jean Boube in "A propos de Babba Iulia Campestris", BAM 15, 1983-4, 131-8, reported on the reality of Ferme Biarnay and showed it to be a farm or a watch-tower. He thought Babba might be at Souk-el-Djemaa el Ahouafat on the Oued Sebou above Banasa, where an abundance of Roman bricks, tiles and pottery have been found as well as the foot of a life-size bronze horse.

(R) René Rebuffat in his article "L'Implantation Militaire Romaine en Maurétanie Tingitane", L'Africa Romana 4, 1986, 31-78, proposed, since Ferme Biarnay had been shown to be impossible, to locate Babba at Sidi Said where the Oued Rdom enters the plain.

(S) More recently Maurice Euzennat has returned to the problem and offered (*Antiquités Africaines* 25, 1989, 95-109 and "La frontière Romaine d'Afrique", CRAI 1990, 569ff.) another solution. He accepted that the distances which Pliny gave are generally correct and he interpreted the "inaccurate position" of the Sebou as being connected with Banasa. Measuring backwards from Banasa and Volubilis he concludes that the distances were measured from Zilil rather than Lixus and thus Ksar-el-Kebir at 40 m.p. from Zilil, could be Babba, marking a string of Augustan colonies to link Volubilis with Tingis.

The idea of a string of Augustan colonies to safeguard the road to an important urban centre is pleasing but unsatisfactory. Modern town-planners might come up with such a strategic concept, but the tenor of the Augustan period seems to indicate an ad hoc approach. Such felicitous results would not have been planned.

With this plethora of suggestions, it seems odd to propose yet another. But it is quite clear that no-one has yet found any location which satisfies the conditions and carries any weight. A fresh consideration of the epigraphic, literary and historical material suggests a simple solution.





Among the few inscriptions recovered from Thamusida is a rose-pink marble plaque of which pieces were found in 1953 in Room 8 of the Riverside Baths. Now placed on the wall of the Museum in Rabat and recorded as I.A.M. 2, no. 250 it lacks both top and bottom, as the tracing alongside from a photograph in I.A.M. shows. The shape of the stone is highly significant. In the absence of any preconceived ideas it would be accepted immediately that this plaque was put up in the colony of Babba. The editor of I.A.M. seemed to hold this opinion but was reluctant to assert it. Instead he referred enquirers into the significance of this stone to the writings of Rebuffat (see M above).

Because it has been asserted so many times that Babba is east of Banasa, it is usually thought that ---ilo wished to be buried at Thamusida because he was a veteran of the Ala Gemelliana. But this inscription is neither a tombstone, not a memorial to a deceased magistrate of a distant town and member of a cavalry unit which used to garrison the area. It clearly commemorates the activity of an ex-magistrate of Babba; if such activity did not take place in connection with the bath-house of the town named it would suggest a deliberate attempt to deceive later generations.

Unfortunately, the inscription is missing the first words and possibly the last line, but it is clear that it is not a tombstone. The find-spot alone is enough to show that it is not traceable to a necropolis. Equally clearly it is not a dedication either religious or civil. It ought to be a declaration of thanks to a Roman citizen, whose claims to be remembered are, that he was an ex-decurion of the Ala Gemelliana, that he was a member of the council of the colony of Babba, and that he had done something for the city, possibly an adornment of the baths.

Whatever the reason for this slab of rose-pink marble, an expensive import to an alluvial site, the fact is that this inscription should have been found at Colonia Iulia Babba Campestris. It is not enough to say that Babba was somewhere else, or to say that it cannot be found at Babba because it was found at Thamusida. It may be argued that towns do not have two names, or that two towns in one province do not have the same name, but examples of both are easily found. In this particular case it may well be that the military camp was called Thamusida while the civilian settlement was called Babba. But the real question is whether the identification proposed is contrary to the literary evidence.

Part II. If Babba is located at Thamusida, was Pliny wrong?

The basic literary evidence has been referred to above. What is really significant is that Pliny did NOT mention Thamusida, and the Antonine Itinerary did NOT mention Babba. The evidence of Ptolemy and Ravennas can be largely disregarded since they are not basically concerned with topography. The data of the Itinerary and Pliny can be reconciled. Why did Pliny not mention Thamusida, an existing Punic settlement? Because it was renamed Colonia Babba in the First Century. Why did the Itinerary not mention Babba? Because the inhabitants or the army unit in residence in the Third Century preferred the older name, Thamusida.

The historical view is one which does not seem to have been considered in earlier discussions of this problem, except by Nicola Mackie. It is accepted that Augustus founded three colonies for veterans - Zilil, Babba, Banasa - in Tingitana before giving it and Caesariensis to a client king in 25 BC in exchange for Numidia. The first and last of the three colonies are now known from excavated evidence to have pre-Roman origins. This makes sense. Veterans require a town; not for them, the savage, uncultivated, unblemished countryside of the pioneers. Strabo in *Geographia* 3, 1, 8 wrote:

"It is from Belon that people generally take ship for the passage across to Tingis in Maurusia, ..... There used to be a city of Zelis also, a neighbour of Tingis, but the Romans transplanted it to the opposite coast of Iberia, taking along some of the inhabitants of Tingis; and they also sent some of their own people thither as colonists and named the city Iulia Iozia"

If it happened to Zilil, it could also have happened to Banasa and Babba, though Strabo does not say so. In short, Colonia Babba should have usurped the place of, or been grafted onto, an existing Punic settlement. As Maurice Euzennat pointed out in "Classical Sites", extensive surveys have failed to find any trace of a settlement large enough to be a "colonia" in the area of the Loukkos, Sebou and Ouergha. Equally negative results have accrued from the work of the 'Mission archéologique du Sebou' who claim (C.R.A.I. Nov-Dec 1986, 637) to have identified some 300 sites in the Volubilis area and the upper reaches of the Oued Beth and Oued Rdom, but who have failed to find any traces within the zone bounded by the coast, Moulay-bou-Selham, Banasa, Rirha, and Thamusida. This is not really surprising because until 1927 it was subject to extensive flooding from the rivers Sebou, Beth and Rdom.

Punic settlements are usually on the coast. It must therefore follow that the coast in Punic times was not the coast that we recognise today. Banasa which has levels dating from Punic times, and which was the centre of a flourishing ceramic industry according to Armand Luquet ("La céramique préromaine de Banasa", B.A.M. 5, 1964, 117-144, was a river-port if not a sea-port. Zilil was a town of Punic origin on the hill above a lagoon with easy

access to the sea, and along the coast existed many other settlements, one of which should have been renamed Babba.

Thamusida is now well-known thanks to three volumes of reports by Rebuffat and others - Thamusida I, Paris, 1965, II 1970, III 1977, - of excavations of the area near the shrine of Sidi Ali ben Ahmed. The site has produced evidence of settlement in Punic times and a subsequent Roman occupation consisting of a military camp of 2ha30, enough for a milliary ala, or an ala and a cohort, and a much larger civilian area with a quayside, warehouses, baths - in which IAM 2, 250 was found - and so on, the whole surrounded by a wall and towers. The most important area, however, the forum, has not yet been found and excavated. Its discovery and excavation should end this controversy.

The identification of Sidi Ali ben Ahmed with Thamusida is not disputed. The distances given by the Itinerary and the epigraphic identification of Sala and Banasa make it clear that this site is at the correct intervals for Thamusida. It is possible that Pliny's data also applies? First, one should note that Pliny's 35 m.p. for Babba-Banasa is very close to the Itinerary's 32 m.p. for Thamusida-Banasa, but Pliny's 40 m.p. for Lixus-Babba is not comparable to the Itinerary's 72 m.p. for Thamusida-Lixus. What must be remembered is that the compiler of the Itinerarium was using information supplied by soldiers who had marched the distances along the routes; it would be surprising if his figures were wildly inaccurate. Pliny, however, is collating information given by other writers some of whom may have left out an essential fact - like, Babba is south of the mouth of the Subur. To account for Pliny's figures it is only necessary to imagine that his sources have told him that Babba is 10 m.p. from the mouth of the Subur, and the latter is halfway between the mouth of the Lixus and the mouth of the Sala, that is 50 m.p. from each. Hence concludes Pliny, Babba is 40 m.p. from Lixus and inland. Had he added 10 to 50, it is probable that this problem would not exist!

Adopting the Euzennat 'working backwards' technique, one finds that if the four places are thought of as a chain based on three facts only, namely, that Lixus to Babba is 40 m.p. - it should have been 60 - Babba to Banasa is 35 m.p., as it is, and Babba to Volubilis is 70 m.p., there is one place which is 35 m.p. from Banasa and 70 m.p. from Volubilis. Is it a coincidence that the crow-flight distance between Volubilis and Thamusida-Babba is 65 m.p.?

Pliny also wrote 'in mediterraneo'. If this phrase means "inland", it implies that Babba cannot be on the sea coast. Perhaps Pliny meant "further away from the Great Sea" or just "southwards"; perhaps the phrase 'in mediterraneo' is meant to apply to a chain of four places, Lixus, Babba, Banasa and Volubilis. If Pliny meant 'inland' to apply to all four places, or by his phrase meant "southwards", or "further away", Babba might be on the outer coast, or on an inner coast, or on a river. This raises another difficulty; the quays of Thamusida are now washed by the water of the Sebou which Pliny does not mention in connection with Babba, though he does in connection with Banasa. Surely he should have

mentioned this fact if it applied to Thamusida as well as Banasa. There is a further difficulty; the present mouth of the Sebou is about 70 m.p. from Lixus; according to Pliny it was 50 m.p. This too, is understandable, for rivers do change their courses and sometimes their mouths. The inference which I draw is, that when Pliny was writing, Thamusida-Babba was not a river-port but in direct communication with the sea; that the Sebou flowed into a salt-water area nearer to Banasa. In its middle reaches above Banasa, the Sebou has damaged, if not destroyed, Roman sites through its habits of flooding and changing course and the consequent erosive action; but it has not eroded the quays of Thamusida, nor does it appear to have damaged any Roman site between Banasa and Thamusida. Maybe there were no Roman occupation sites between Banasa and the sea.

Furthermore, the north-western coast of Morocco is not the same now as it was even in Tissot's time; on his map he shows a lagoon at the foot of the hill on which Colonia Zilil stands. This lagoon is now arable land. Was this a hapax, or is it part of a regular sequence? Tissot's map also shows large marshes west and east of the present course of the Sebou. A 1941 War Office map shows lagoons between Tangier and Arzila, and also north of Port Lyautey - now Kenitra - as well as extensive areas of marsh around the lower reaches of the Rio Mharhar and Oued Djarroub, the Oued Loukkos, the Oued Sebou, and the Oued Beth.

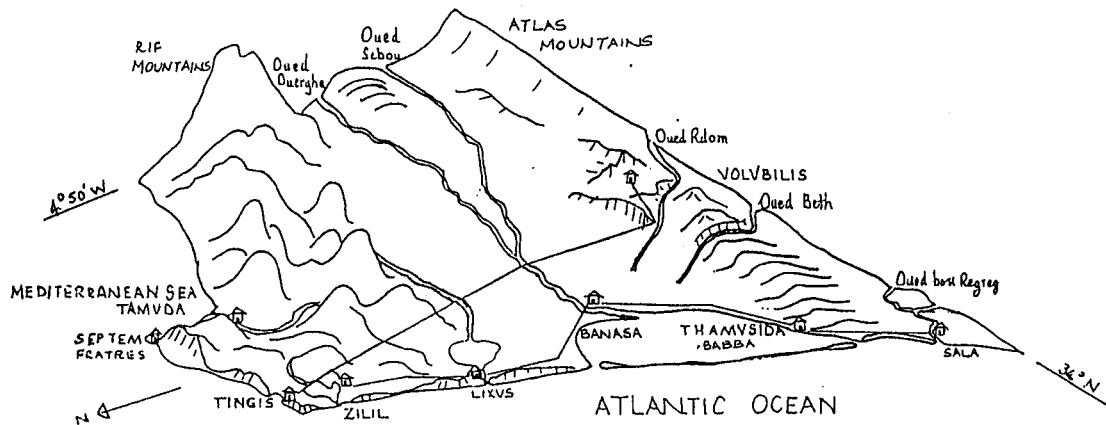
One can envisage a scenario, in which, two millennia ago, the area behind a fringe of islands was being filled with alluvial deposits from rivers which rose in the Rif and the Atlas. The Rio Mharhar, a small river, was unable to fill its lagoon before 1877. The salt-pans of the lower valley of the Oued Loukkos, a much larger river, fill the space where by common consent a lagoon lay. Moulay bou Selham 30 km. further down the coast, is still a water filled area and a site of special scientific interest, but then, there is no longer a sizeable river bringing lots of silt into it. The Oued Sebou, the second longest river of North Africa would have filled the southern and central sections of its probable lagoon very easily. Euzennat referred in his latest article, to Pliny's inaccuracy over the mouth of the Sebou and related it to the influence of Banasa. Perhaps he was more acute than he knew. A lagoon filling the area between Banasa and the present coast-line, stretching from Moulay bou Selham in the north to the beach of Mehdiya in the south, would explain why the most earnest endeavours of hard-working teams of experienced archaeologists have failed to find any significant Roman remains from this area.

To return to Ptolemy, who centred a "Merchant' Gulf" about 10 m.p. south of the mouth of the River Subur. (Suburis fluvii ostia 6 20'W 34 20'N; Emporicus sinus 6 20'W 34 10'N.). There is no way in which any sailor would have described the present coastline between Lixus and Sala as a gulf, but sailors of the first centuries BC and AD must have seen this feature for Ptolemy to have recorded it. Geomorphologists, however, I believe, refuse to accept that the outer coast did not exist in Roman times; accordingly we must assume that an extent of sea water existed behind the present coastline. I take Ptolemy to witness that a lagoon such as still exists and existed elsewhere along the coast, existed here to provide

Thamusida with immediate access to the sea, admittedly through a narrow channel. For Ptolemy and for Pliny, Thamusida-Babba was not on the "magnificus et navigabilis" Subur but on a lagoon or "gulf". For Pliny, as for me, the Punic town of Thamusida was chosen by Augustus as the site of a settlement for veterans and by him was named Colonia Iulia Babba Campestris.

Andover

J.E.H.Spaul



SCHEMATIC BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF NORTHERN MOROCCO AS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN c. A.D. 40