



REVIEWS OF BOOKS

NICCOLÒ MUGNAI (Ed.), **Tripolitania in the Roman Empire and Beyond** (British Institute for Libyan & Northern African Studies Open Access Monograph 4). London: The British Institute for Libyan and Northern African Studies, 2024. Pp. xiii + 221; illus., maps, plans. ISBN 9781915808103 (pbk): £40.00 (£30.00 to BILNAS members).

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Tripolitania in the Roman Empire and Beyond, edited by Niccolò Mugnai, represents a significant contribution to the archaeology and history of Roman North Africa, addressing innovative scholarship on the region of Tripolitania and its evolution from the late republican and Roman periods into the early Islamic era. Drawing together contributions by international experts on different topics, this volume contains a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary set of studies that collectively reshape our understanding of this region beyond its famous monumental centres along the coastline. Moreover, the monograph is a very welcome addition to the latest English-language compendia on North Africa, which cover various geographical areas and eras and also draw on a range of different genres (e.g. D. J. Mattingly, *Between Sahara and Sea* (2023) or R. Bruce Hitchner (ed.), *A Companion to North Africa in Antiquity* (2022)), although the predominant focus is still, almost unavoidably in North Africa, on urban research and Roman architecture.

The volume's 221 pages encompass a plurality of thematic and methodological perspectives, organised into separate but interconnected chapters. It opens with an introduction by Mugnai that situates Tripolitania within wider Mediterranean contexts and frames the methodological approaches adopted by the contributors across the volume and the general ideas of the editor. Subsequently each topic is given its own chapter, basically written by one or more authors. The subsequent chapters explore phenomena like urbanism, e.g. chapters on Sabratha (Sergio Aiosa) and Lepcis Magna (Niccolò Mugnai), décor categories like mosaics (Will Wootton), rural settlement patterns related to funerary landscapes (Julia Nikolaus and Nichole Sheldrick), military frontiers (Michael Mackensen, Florian Schimmer), religious landscapes and material evidence for cults (Sebastian Schmid), and cultural interactions within Tripolitania in the Jabal Nafusa region (Isabella Welsby Sjöström) as well as neighbouring regions such as the Island of Djerba (Virgine Prevost), where numerous excavation projects have yielded many significant insights and also shedding new light on Tripolitania in recent years (e.g. S. Ritter & S. Ben Tahar (eds.), *Studies on the Urban history of Meninx (Djerba) = Archäologische Forschungen* 43 (2022)). The volume concludes with a synthesis and outlook for future research by David J. Mattingly, highlighting unanswered questions and starting points for further investigations in research and an Arabic summary by Ahmed M. A. Buzaian and Muna H. Haroun Abdelhamed.

From the reviewer's point of view, some important points and particular strengths of the book should be emphasised. One of the book's principal strengths lies in its interdisciplinarity and interconnectivity of topics. The contributors engage with a wide range of source materials — urban plans and structures, mosaics, funerary landscapes, military

camps, facilities and installations, and religious artifacts — thereby transcending narrow, site-specific studies to emphasise broader regional processes in a *longue durée* perspective. In total, this allows for a more holistic view of Tripolitania's social, economic and cultural dynamics throughout antiquity. The balanced focus on both elite-dominated urban centres and peripheral rural landscapes fills, together with Mattingly's recent monograph, a long-standing notable gap in relation to both the Tripolitania region and the historiography of Roman Africa, which has often privileged monumental cities like Lepcis Magna at the expense of hinterland settlements and non-urban populations. Contributions to the volume also successfully bridge different chronological phases and power political shifts, tracing continuities and transformations from the apex of Roman urban development into Late Antiquity and the early Islamic period. Essays such as those on the *limes Tripolitanus* regarding military camps (Mackensen) and logistics (Schimmer) as well as soldier identity (Schmid) reveal how provincial frontiers were lived and experienced by people, offering valuable insights into the interplay between military, social, economic and cultural spheres. Moreover, the inclusion of detailed maps, photographs and plans enhances the accessibility of the archaeological evidence, benefiting both specialists and student readers. Open-access digital publication further democratises access to this scholarship, which is very much appreciated and welcomed.

The volume does have certain limitations, but these are clearly not the fault of the editor. While its interdisciplinary reach is an asset, the integration among chapters at times remains uneven. Certain contributions lean heavily toward descriptive presentation of archaeological data, with relatively limited theoretical engagement with broader questions of identity, colonial and cultural interaction and economic networks. Readers seeking more sustained dialogue between specific case studies and larger interpretive frameworks — such as comparative provincial studies across the Roman Empire — might find these connections underdeveloped. From the perspective of North African studies, however, it is essential first to take a long-term view of Tripolitania, which this volume does with great success.

Further, although the editor's introduction and the concluding outlook by Mattingly gesture toward future prospects, the volume would have benefited from more explicit engagement with current debates in Roman provincial studies. For example, discussions on cultural hybridity, post-colonial readings of material culture, macro-/microregionalism, localism, or mobility and exchange networks could have provided richer contextualisation for some of the site-specific studies. Nevertheless, it should again be stressed that these contributions now enable supra-regional comparisons to be made, thereby integrating Tripolitania more closely into the overall picture of the Mediterranean region.

Overall, *Tripolitania in the Roman Empire and Beyond* represents a highly appreciated and necessary academic resource that effectively brings Tripolitania's archaeological record to the forefront of Roman provincial studies and regional studies in North Africa at the same time. Its interdisciplinary approach, combined with open-access distribution, makes it a valuable reference for researchers, educators and students. While future study could deepen the theoretical debate and comparative perspectives, this volume provides an important foundation for ongoing research on the complex and dynamic role of North Africa within the Roman Empire and beyond.

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