

of the concept of the 'círculo', making the point that it is quite irrelevant to the history of Cadiz itself. The article is distinguished by its elegant maps. These are, in fact, the only maps in the book, if we except two small maps in the introduction. Their lack is particularly felt in the next two chapters, by Antonio Torremocha Silva and Erwan Le Balch, on fortifications in the area of the Straits, which treat defensive networks, towers, and site-lines without a single illustration, neither a map nor a plan nor a photograph, which is problematic for anyone who might actually be interested in the reality of fortifications and defensive structures as opposed to the documents that show their existence at some point.

The third section, 'Reconnaître et Représenter' (183–301), is the longest. It begins with a chapter by the late Enrique Gozalbes Cravioto on the Straits as a bridge or a border that contains a list of all the military crossings from Hannibal to the Arab conquest of Hispania by Tāriq b. Ziyād, who gave his name to Gibraltar. All the crossings but one, that is: that for the Vandals – among the most significant – is missing from the list. Granted that the work is posthumous, surely the editors might have picked this up? This is followed by a dense piece by Michel Christol on the political conflicts after the death of Commodus, the relationships between the governor of Tingitana and the city of Italica, and the role of the provincial procurators in the Severan period. Next comes a study of the image of Gibraltar at the time of the first Almohad caliph, 'Abd al-Mu'min, by Mehdi Ghouirgate. Presented as a little Eden, this small city was given exaggerated importance in line with the construction of the fortifications which would then form the foundations for those of the Marinids and the British. This Almohad emphasis on the Straits is then taken up by Erwan Le Balch and Christophe Picard, who deal with the maritime representation of caliphal power in the various fortifications and investment in the infrastructure of the ports on both sides of the Straits. Again, maps and figures would have helped: Saltès, Tarifa or Marsā Mūsā, for example, are nowhere found on a map. The final article in this section is a long and charming piece by Gwladys Bernard, Patrice Cressier, and María Antonia Martínez Núñez on an inscribed Roman statue base from Baetica, transformed into a decorated basin in the eleventh century and then transported to Salé where it was further transformed into an elaborately carved epitaph for the Marinid sultan Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf. Properly illustrated, it is an object-biography in the best sense, and gives us an historically nuanced picture of traffic across the Straits.

Patrice Le Roux writes a conclusion that brings us back to the politics of the recent past, where the British hold on Gibraltar is defined as 'colonialist' (Napoleon might have seen it differently) and Ceuta is not mentioned. The Straits is a 'geographical expression' without precise contours or real consistency that came together ethnically, culturally, or militarily at certain moments in its history, but that is about it. Even under the great umbrella of the Roman Empire the two sides were more separate than ever: recent excavations in Algiers have shown that by the second century AD any commerce with Hispania was in steep decline, as each region established its own trade networks with Rome (Quevedo 2020). The evidence from the excavations at Thamusida, too, firmly contradicts the idea of the subalternity of Tingitana to Cadiz (Papi 2018). Its liminality does not unite the region any more than Cadiz did, and Le Roux struggles to find unity, either in the Straits or in the conference. I have very much the same problem.

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THE BIR MESSAOUDA BASILICA: PILGRIMAGE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF AN URBAN LANDSCAPE IN SIXTH CENTURY AD CARTHAGE

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The Bir Messaouda Basilica is one of the most important excavated churches in Late Roman, Vandal and Byzantine Carthage and the largest known ecclesiastical complex in the *intra muros* area at the city. It comprises, eventually in the later sixth century, a large,

five-aisled basilica with a long, transecting transept on the site of an earlier basilica (from the early sixth century), a baptistery and a crypt, but apparently no atrium. Miles and Greenslade's important final excavation report documents excavations carried out between

1997 and 2004 by a team from the University of Cambridge that revealed not only late antique layers but also, in the robber trenches, earlier Roman and Punic material. Thematic reports are on the expected categories of finds – glass, mosaics, pottery, etc. – and are varied in terms of the proportions of factual information, interpretation and the conclusions that the state of the material can allow the contributors to come to.

The book proceeds much as one might expect – context, the main levels, specialist reports on finds, conclusion. Chapter 1 deals with the site of the basilica in its Carthaginian context, followed by: 2. Punic and Roman levels of the site; 3. Bir Messaouda in the early to mid-sixth century; 4. Bir Messaouda in the late sixth century; 5. The baptistery and crypt; 6. The later history of the basilica; 7. Sixth-century mosaics at Bir Messaouda; 8. The plaster finds; 9. The glass; 10. The pottery; 11. The coins; 12. The metal finds; 13. Ceramics; 14. The stone finds; 15. Conclusions; Appendix on the Maritime Forum.

Chapter 1 contains a good conspectus of the contexts for the site and the excavations. It deals with developments and continuities in the area, and in the city more widely, during late antiquity and gives a subtle reading of the Vandal period. Perhaps the traditional presentation of Vandal-period destruction (10–14) could have been omitted, or the present understanding could have been tackled first, as it is increasingly widely known that the traditional picture is not supported by the archaeology.

After a brief assessment of the Punic and early Roman levels in Chapter 2, the main focus of the volume is developed in Chapters 3–5. Here the evolution of a large, rectangular, colonnaded hall in the early sixth century (possibly built under Gelimer, or early on in the reign of Justinian) – which was not unquestionably a church and theoretically could be a ‘guild’ or audience hall (62) – and then the later church complex, including a baptistery and probably a crypt housed in an earlier cistern, is traced. The initial hall was changed in the mid-sixth century to become a church (post holes in the nave suggesting chancel screens); the insula around the church was levelled off. A third phase was developed in the later sixth century, when a new east–west basilica was built across the existing north–south structure.

A theme returned to a few times over the course of the volume is, naturally enough, the cultural influences on aspects of the building. Miles and Greenslade suggest that it was ‘an unmistakably North African building’ given the use of *opus africanum* and the multiple side aisles despite the links to the east in terms of cruciform basilicas (99). The purpose of the building in its earliest stage is also an issue for discussion. The baptistery was not constructed with the original rectangular hall. That may suggest to some that the hall might not have had an ecclesiastical function, but Miles and Greenslade point out that the basilica of Dermech I also did not have a baptistery for the first hundred years of its existence.

The relatively thin evidence for the history of the site after the end of the basilica, except for substantial robbing activities, is dealt with in Chapter 6. There may have been domestic occupation of the crypt after the mid-seventh century (122) when a grey mortar floor was laid down.

In his thorough conclusion (Chapter 15), Miles addresses cultural and political influences, potential shifts in the centre of gravity in the urban area, ecclesiastical politics and the relationship between the Carthaginian structures and Byzantine churches. He argues that this area of the city became important in the sixth century as demonstrated by Bir Messaouda and other Christian structures.

The Appendix on the search for the ‘Maritime Forum’ at Carthage does fit a little oddly with the rest of the volume, hence its semi-detached position in the book, but it is a clear, balanced assessment of the evidence, its likely whereabouts (perhaps between *decumanus* I south, *decumanus* III south, *cardo* XVI east and *cardo* XIII east) and, necessarily briefly,

an assessment of its possible extent given the size of other African fora.

The specialist reports vary in the ways in which they engage with wider questions on space, movement, decoration and religious ritual, often making balanced, cautious suggestions from ephemeral evidence. For instance, there is a whole set of interesting hypotheses in Jane Chick’s essay on the mosaics (Chapter 7) concerning decoration and its use in indicating directions. For Chick, some mosaics were practical while some were an ‘integral part of the whole spiritual experience’. Chevrons, decorating the south aisle that was closest to the baptistery, are hypothesized as a way of indicating the baptismal waters (147). Dolphins and wading birds, which are close by, also seem to refer to that aspect of Christian ritual. In the north transepts’ aisles closest to the crypt and routes of circulation into the transept, non-wading birds are suggested to refer to the souls of the faithful. Chick emphasizes the cobbled-together nature of the late sixth-century structure, which does not have an atrium, with the baptistery and crypt tucked into its ‘armpits’ and with lots of reused materials and walls.

Other reports have less to work with. The fragmentary nature of the wall decoration/plaster does not allow Claudia Goodbrand (Chapter 8) to give much sense of the decorative schemes or the dates of the various fragments. However, the fact that there are no close parallels from surviving plasterwork elsewhere does allow her to observe that the plaster workshops were therefore local. The glass remains (Sylvia Fünfschilling, Chapter 9) too were difficult to interpret as very few contexts have more than one piece of glass and often older pieces are mixed in with later (so either preserved material or intruding debris); only the assemblage from the crypt allows for more detailed analysis on a circumscribed area of the complex. The coins (Stefan Krmnicek, Chapter 11) are presented clearly but with limited discussion. The other metal finds, discussed in a very short essay (Ralf Bockmann, Chapter 12: 257–62), commonly suffer from a bad state of preservation – a lot of objects could not be identified (261–62). Only material that was not reusable was left behind (260).

In contrast there is copious ceramic evidence (Claudia Goodbrand, Chapter 10), but even with this category of evidence the history of the site after the building’s destruction has meant that at best only one sherd per vessel has been discovered (193) and most of the material comes from levelling layers (195). The fragments themselves demonstrate that production was largely local, but the imports came from a range of production sites in the eastern Mediterranean. The chronological distribution was largely equal across time, with a peak in the Roman period and a trough in the Vandal period. Goodbrand suggests that these fluctuations were likely to be due to the length of time of each period, rather than for economic reasons.

The building materials are dealt with in two separate chapters (Philip Mills, Chapter 13 on ceramic materials; Ben Croxford, Chapter 14 on the stone finds). Both have a sensible presentation of the data, but Chapter 13 has very limited discussion. The ceramic building materials were most noteworthy for a high number (compared with other sites) of animal footprints (286). With the stone building materials, the state of preservation of the site means it was really problematic to do much more than discuss and analyse specific architectural features. The analysis of existing material on the site might not be representative of what was originally there, but Croxford was able to point to stone recycling being a particular feature of the use of stone in Bir Messouada. This recycling occurred at both the beginning and the end of the church’s life span. At the beginning, material was sourced from other buildings and sites, particularly as levelling material, and then at the end of the life span a lot of material from the church was robbed for reuse on other sites. That robbing naturally has consequences for

the understanding of where the material brought into the site came from – it proved very hard to identify material as coming from any particular building (318) and thus, although Croxford does not make this point explicitly, we cannot use the material recovered from Bir Messouada to tell us about the fates of other constructions in the city. One of the conclusions from the fragments of the stonework that Croxford does refer to is the large range of stones employed which produced a ‘forest’ of columns in black and white and pink and yellow (324). This chapter, along with the one on the mosaics (Chapter 7) and the discussion around the archaeological phases (especially Chapters 3–5), is able to convey to the reader a very good sense of how the church would have been experienced by late antique visitors to the site.

There are only occasional proofreading errors (perhaps disproportionately in the introduction), but in a work of almost

400 pages slips inevitably occur. The volume is well illustrated with figures and colour plates. I felt the lack of a detailed, clearly labelled, full-page city plan showing all of the major monuments, *cardines* and *decumani* mentioned in the text and had to consult several plans to orientate myself on occasion in order to properly examine the relationship between different structures; but that is an omission not unique to this volume.

The *Bir Messaouda Basilica* is an important contribution to our knowledge of the late antique archaeology of a key Christian site in one of the most important cities in the Mediterranean basin. The editors and contributors are to be praised for producing a clear and thoughtful account of the structure and its contents.

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