

for those unfamiliar with the Spanish landscape and useful historiographic introductions for those unfamiliar with its scholarship. The *communis opinio* and *communis ratio* are both readily grasped from the volume's regionally grounded studies.

For those steeped in the peasant archaeology of other parts of the empire, it is nonetheless disorientating. While most chapters cite a contemporary archaeological-theoretical apparatus, the peasant studies bibliography is that of the 1970s: the more recent work that has called into question the autochthonous, subsistence peasant — including the work of Barcelona-based Susana Narotsky — is absent. As a consequence, one is left with some jarring moments, where archaeological data fail to align with an interpretive apparatus determined to find the Wolfian indigenous agriculturalist. Disorienting, too, is the disjuncture between highly specialised studies — e.g. on tooth-wear patterns for domesticates, or wear analysis on ceramics — but without the more basic reporting — e.g. clear NISP numbers for individual species, functional analysis of the full range of ceramics — that are both discipline standards and potentially critical support of the authors' arguments.

Above all, though, one misses the peasants. The reliance on field survey to 'find' the peasants — which are the pre-arranged subject of inquiry — results in field-survey data pressed into uncomfortable service. Scatters or artifact densities are used as proxies for land tenure, dependency relationships or indications of colonial hegemonies. The excavated data that would actually reveal these relationships more clearly — more robust ceramics analysis, and the totally absent archaeobotanical evidence — is unavailable, but there is very little discussion of the limits of spatial data to supply these gaps. Whether artifact scatters actually represent peasant dwelling is never asked. There is, in short, a tendency to rely on new theory and technology in lieu of rigorous data, or a critical interrogation of what heuristic weight the extant data will bear. This is most clear when reading the more robust early medieval chapters: each, in their own way, approaches their subject from this critical perspective, asking what the material detritus tells us — and cannot tell us — about early medieval rural lives. Both of these chapters draw on a more people-centred theoretical apparatus, emphasising relationships and risk. But above all, both can draw on several decades of excavated data, including the all-important botanical and faunal data, which the Romanists still lack.

These last two chapters are a fascinating reminder of what periodisation does to our historical gaze. Without the overburden of a villa-centred, imperial historiography, it is possible to ask fundamental questions about how peasants lived. Inside that historiography, peasant lives are too readily shorthanded by their *a priori* embodiment as a subject people.

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NICHOLE SHELDRIK, *BUILDING THE COUNTRYSIDE: RURAL ARCHITECTURE AND SETTLEMENT IN TRIPOLITANIA DURING THE ROMAN AND LATE ANTIQUE PERIODS* (Society for Libyan Studies open access monographs 2). London: Society for Libyan Studies, 2021. Pp. xiv + 205, illus. ISBN 9781900971775. £40.00.

This is a revised version of a DPhil thesis prepared at the University of Oxford under the supervision of Professor Andrew Wilson. The book's main aim is to offer the first synthesis of Roman and late antique rural architecture and settlement in ancient Tripolitania (modern Libya), an area still ravaged by civil war. It forms part of the EAMENA (Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa) project, a joint research initiative devoted to applying several remote sensing technologies to record available data from archaeological sites and landscapes which are under threat.

Despite the publication of some previous monographs on the archaeology of the Roman period in this region of North Africa — the best known being D. J. Mattingly's *Tripolitania* (1995) — our current knowledge about rural landscapes and living conditions in most parts of Roman Tripolitania is still scanty. In an attempt to fill these gaps, Nichole Sheldrick's book is based on a

compilation of data about some 2,400 rural settlements, drawn from legacy data from several field survey projects including ULVS (UNESCO Libyan Valleys Surveys) or the *Prospection des vallées du Nord de la Lybie* project, as well as data obtained through her own remote survey performed by the use of Google Earth and Bing Maps satellite images. The presentation of all this up-to-date information represents one of the main achievements of this book. However, the analyses to be found in the book are greatly limited, as S. honestly admits at several points, by the sampling problems generated by the diversity in the provenance of the data and by the fact that it proved impossible for the author to carry out fieldwork. Perhaps the most important of these sampling problems is the impossibility of determining specific occupation chronologies for a large majority of the recorded settlements. This is not only due to the lack of stratigraphic excavations but also to the different methods used for documenting surface finds and the different criteria used to assign chronological ranges for the sites recorded in previous survey projects.

However, S.'s efforts to integrate all this information within a single GIS have great merit, since many of the sites discovered in previous survey projects were published at a time before GPS devices became widespread. This has enabled her to generate a remarkable collection of maps with which to illustrate large parts of the book.

The unsystematic character of the data leaves the analysis of the architecture of the rural settlements as the central focus of the book. This is reflected in the structure of the study's three main chapters. The first (ch. 4) focuses on military architecture, synthesising a wealth of information — especially from work by French and Italian colleagues — which, despite offering very little new information, serves as an excellent state-of-the-art discussion that will be especially valuable to an English-speaking audience.

Ch. 5 is devoted to different types of unfortified rural settlements. One of the main strengths of the book relates to the typological proposal established by S. In contrast to the traditional application of the term *villa*, an archaeological concept that is problematic because of its architectural imprecision and the economic connotations with which it is normally associated, the book applies a classification based on three categories: 1) single farmyard buildings; 2) courtyard buildings, distinguished by the presence of continuous ranges of rooms on two or more sides defining a courtyard; and 3) open complexes, formed by compounds of several yards grouped irregularly. This classification allows S. to articulate her discussion not only in terms of a strict building typology but also in economic terms related to the agrarian function of the different facilities associated with each category. While courtyard buildings are associated with evidence for luxury decorations and surplus-processing features such as olive-oil or wine presses, farmyards seem to be associated with a mixed agrarian model characterised by a small-scale capacity for agricultural production and the management of just a small number of domestic animals, probably performed by single peasant household units.

Ch. 6 focuses on fortified buildings. Based on the morphological criteria applied by S., all the sites are classified according to three main categories: 1) tower-like buildings; 2) fortified courtyard compounds; and 3) doubled or irregular fortified compounds. Besides discussion of the distribution of luxury equipment and surplus-processing features in these settlements, the main emphasis of the chapter is on the explanation of the several types of defensive fortifications of these. Even when the low resolution of Google satellite images makes it difficult to classify certain sites discovered by S. in her remote sensing survey, the detailed study of the building techniques recorded in these complexes is made possible thanks to the use of legacy data, especially the photographic files from the ULVS archive. The systematisation and analysis of these architectural elements can be considered one of the main achievements of the book.

More problematic is the discussion of the structure of rural settlement, the second main concern of the book. A particularly problematic point is the segregation of discussion of settlement patterns between the different architectural categories covered in each chapter. This segregation is partly justified by the belief that most of the unfortified buildings correspond to the Early Imperial period, while most of the fortified buildings can be dated to Late Antiquity. Given the impossibility of establishing reliable chronologies for most of the settlements, however, it would have been useful to have a comprehensive analysis of all the settlement types discussed in the book.

Despite these problems, it would be unfair not to acknowledge this work's notable contribution to our understanding of the rural world in this region of the Roman empire. Given the challenges she faced, the fact that S. decided to focus her research effort on the study of the rural settlements of Tripolitania, most of them humble and with obvious threats to their preservation, is a source of inspiration for all of us who believe in the imperative need to increase our knowledge of ancient

peasant communities. Books like this one remind us that it is better to hobble along main roads than to wander through back streets.

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R. BRUCE HITCHNER (ED.), *A COMPANION TO NORTH AFRICA IN ANTIQUITY* (Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World). Hoboken, Wiley Blackwell: 2022. Pp. xxviii + 464, illus. ISBN: 9781444350012. €189.00.

This *Companion* is a book of outstanding scientific quality and an important contribution to research on North Africa. It provides an overview of two millennia across a culturally diverse zone spanning ‘from the ancient Syrtes in modern West Libya to the Atlantic in Morocco, as well as the Sahara Desert’. It will be indispensable to English-speaking students and scholars for future research on ancient North Africa. The companion’s diachronic structure is reflected by the chronological order of the contributions, offering deep insights into *longue durée* developments in this unique geographical region.

The book is presented in twenty-four chapters divided into four parts. Part I (‘Setting the Stage’) provides overviews of the historiography of ancient North Africa (Bruce Hitchner), the archaeology of the region (David Stone) and the complex relationships between climate, land-use and human interaction (Philippe Leveau).

Part II (‘Africa in the First Millennium BCE’) covers ‘Libyan culture and society’ (Joan Sanmartí), the Garamentes (David Mattingly), ‘Punic Carthage’ (Iván Fumandó Ortega) and ‘Africa under the Roman Republic’ (Matthew Hobson). This is one of the highlights of the book, easily combining detailed case studies with large-scale overviews of cultural phenomena, history and society.

The third and largest part of the book is dedicated to ‘The Roman Period’, spanning a wide chronological range from 164 B.C.E. to the Vandal capture of Carthage in 439 C.E. As is traditional in the field, urbanism and architecture figure prominently (in studies by Andrew Dufton and Elisabeth Fentress and Niccolò Mugnai), based on the rich archaeological evidence and quantity of cities in the modern countries of Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and Algeria. Economic history is also especially visible here, with chapters on the ceramic evidence (Michelle Bonifay) and rural settlement and land use (Marianne De Vos); Jesper Carlsen also shows how the Roman provincial administration encouraged landowners to increase revenues (142–51). Patrice Faure’s chapter on the Roman Army usefully advises ‘not to overestimate the economic impact of the troops’ (165–6). Two chapters covering the important metropolis of Carthage (Iván Fumandó Ortega for the Punic and Ralf Bockmann for the Roman period) provide a very useful pairing to understand urban development in the ‘muse of Africa’ (Apuleius, *Flor.* 20, 4). Other important insights are provided on social relations (Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira and Andy Merrills) and literature (Stéphanie Guédon on prose and Helen Kauffmann on Late Latin poetry). Religion is another recurring theme, reflecting the rich archaeological evidence (temples, inscriptions, steles, etc.) from all over North Africa. Even a relatively small town like Thugga in modern Tunisia had ‘10 temple complexes and two small shrines’ (191). Excellent chapters on ‘Transforming Religion under the Roman Empire’ (Matthew McCarthy) and ‘Christian North Africa in Antiquity’ (Anna Leone) provide guidance in understanding religion as a dynamic factor in Pre-Roman and Imperial North Africa, as well as in Late Antiquity.

Part IV covers the period between 439 and 711 C.E., with chapters on the Vandals (Jonathan P. Conant), the Byzantine period (Andy Merills) and the Arab Conquests (Corisande Fenwick), as well as a study of coinage (Cécile Morrison). All four contributions explore the important question of continuity and change in these dynamic eras. They also highlight the great prosperity and continuity of cities, economy, and culture until the seventh century C.E., arguing against the old view of ‘colonial-era scholars’ (10) of decline and decay following the Vandal conquest.

‘Cultural identity’ is the most obvious through-thread, figuring in nearly all contributions. There is prominent discussion of acculturation models like ‘Romanization’ (mentioned eleven times in the