

Book Review

LIBIA – ITALIA. UN'ARCHEOLOGIA CONDIVISA

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Following a colloquium held in Rome in 2019 on the work of the Italian archaeological missions in Libya, an exhibition was organized subsequently at the Red Castle of Tripoli (September–December 2021) with the aim of highlighting ongoing research and partnerships between Libya and Italy. The event was co-sponsored by the Italian Embassy in Tripoli and the Libyan Department of Antiquities (DoA), and it led to the production of this bilingual, Italian-Arabic volume. Taking the form of a historiographic chronicle of archaeological research, this publication will be of interest to anyone working on Libya's history, archaeology, culture and politics. Inclusion of a full Arabic translation of the Italian essays – rather than just summaries of these texts – is a particularly welcome choice that will make the volume accessible to a broader readership in Libya and other Arabic-speaking countries.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section (21–43) traces a short history of the development of Libya's archaeology from the Italian colonial period to the present day. The second section (45–130) collects essays on the activities and results of current archaeological missions and restoration projects, while the third section (131–84) features a series of biographies of notable Italian and Libyan archaeologists, describing their work and legacy. In the book there are numerous out-of-text illustrations ('dossier fotografico'); these are a useful visual complement to the essays, although in some cases their quality could have been improved and perhaps the use of in-text references to images, instead of general references at the beginning of each essay, would have been more user-friendly. These minor critiques, however, do not affect the quality of the volume, which represents a valuable source of information that can be used fruitfully as a small encyclopaedia of Libyan-Italian archaeology.

The connections between propaganda and archaeology in Libya under Italian colonialism, and the challenges at the time of the formation of the United Kingdom of Libya, are commented on by L. Musso, O. Menozzi and M. Di Giovanni (23–31) – for a comprehensive assessment of these topics, readers can refer to Munzi 2001; 2004; Troilo 2021, 77–127, 180–244. Extensive restorations of the excavated monuments were a leitmotif of Italian colonial archaeology and served to suit political agendas (Balice 2010); the lack of scientific methodologies of excavation caused a significant loss of data, but at least this 'spettacularizzazione' of ancient ruins had the merit of preserving part of Libya's heritage. After the end of colonial rule, the transition to new approaches to archaeological research was not always straightforward. The case of Renato Bartoccini's opposition to the activity of British archaeologists (34) is a case in point; this is a well-chosen

example that shows how such views were detached from the reality of the time – indeed, it was thanks to the support of important figures such as Mortimer Wheeler, John Bryan Ward-Perkins and Richard Goodchild that the Italian archaeologists could continue their work in Libya. In the long term this laid the ground for new collaborations between Libya and Italy, as well as other countries, and for the development and reorganization of the DoA, as outlined by M.A. Rizzo, M.A. Turjman and K.M. al-Hadar (37–43).

In the second section of the book, the activities of 19 archaeological missions are described by their respective directors, and a short bibliography with the main scientific outputs of each mission is included (185–90). Readers will appreciate the variety of the research undertaken, both geographically and chronologically: from fieldwork in the Libyan Sahara to investigate prehistoric sites and rock art by the University of Rome La Sapienza (S. di Lernia, 47–49), to the architectural surveys of caravan cities by the Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura e Storia del Mediterraneo (K. Abdelhadi, 55–57) and of the Islamic buildings of Ghadames and Tripoli by the University of Chieti – Pescara 'G. D'Annunzio' (L. Micara, 59–61). With regard to Classical sites, those who approach Libyan archaeology for the first time will realize the importance of cities such as Cyrene and the ongoing efforts of archaeologists to preserve its heritage (see O. Mei, 63–70; Menozzi *et al.*, 71–74; S. Ensoli, 85–87).

Another major strand of research concerns the study and publication of monuments that were excavated during the colonial and post-colonial period, especially at Lepcis Magna and Sabratha, as demonstrated by the work of the Universities of Macerata, Palermo and Catania (see M.A. Rizzo, 93–105; E.C. Portale, 107–9; F. Tomasello, 111–12). Architectural and archaeological studies of many of these edifices have appeared in recent years in the series *Monografie di Archeologia Libica*, in particular through the initiative of the late Antonino Di Vita and his collaborators; other monuments, such as the Temple of Magna Mater, the Temple of Serapis and the Severan Tetrastyle at Lepcis Magna, are awaiting final publication. The delay in publishing the results of excavations was one of the main shortcomings of past archaeology in Libya, and it is therefore appreciated that priority is given to making these data accessible today. This delay does not concern only Italian archaeology, however; for instance, it is thanks to the painstaking work of scholars such as Philip Kenrick and the late Joyce Reynolds that the research of the British archaeological missions was eventually published in a more exhaustive form (see Kenrick 1986; Ward-Perkins 1993; Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 2003).

Much work is still in progress, such as restoration projects, archaeological field surveys and the reorganization of archives and museum storerooms by the University of Roma Tre and the Foundation MedA – Mediterraneo Antico (L. Musso, 121–27); for a more detailed account of these activities, readers should look in particular at recent contributions in *Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia*, *Libya Antiqua* and *Libyan Studies*. Among the numerous ongoing projects, it is worth mentioning the research of the University of Messina at Lepcis Magna, which is investigating the long history of a private building in *insula* 11 of *Regio* IV, from the Punic to the Byzantine period (E. Tramontana, 117–19). This research has the potential to address a major *desideratum* and provide data to improve our limited understanding of domestic architecture at Lepcis Magna, together with the excavations that were carried out in the 1990s in a town house adjacent to the theatre under the sponsorship of the former Society for Libyan Studies – now the British Institute for Libyan and Northern African Studies (see especially Walda *et al.* 1997). It is to be hoped that the final results of both projects will soon be made available to the scholarly community.

Finally, in the third section are collected 20 biographies. Along with the ‘usual suspects’ such as Lidiano Bacchielli (143–44), Antonino Di Vita (147–49), Mario Luni (159–60) and Sandro Stucchi (177–79) among other famous Italian scholars, readers will find an account of the lives and achievements of numerous Libyan archaeologists. This is a well-deserved tribute to the work of Libyan colleagues who contributed substantially to the archaeology of their country and to the establishment of partnerships with international teams. One should mention, for example, the involvement of Fadel Allah Abdel Salam (133–34) and Abdel Hamid Abdel Sayed (135–38) in the field research and processing of data that were collected in the volume *Christian Monuments of Cyrenaica* (Ward-Perkins and Goodchild 2003). The passionate work of Ibrahim Kamuka (157–58) for the preservation and restoration of monuments at Sabratha deserves a particular acknowledgement, as is further attested by his special friendship with Di Vita (see Madeo 2013, 101–4). Similarly, the role that Omar Salah al-Mahjub (161–63) played at the time of the discovery and excavation of the villa of Silin stands as a testimony of his devotion to Libyan archaeology.

Today Libya is attempting to find a way out of the unrest that has followed the Arab Spring of 2011, while also having to deal with tragedies such as that caused by the floods in Cyrenaica in September 2023, both in terms of the loss of human lives and the damage to the country’s heritage. Various essays in this

volume highlight actions that have been taken to combat threats to archaeological sites, and looting and trafficking of antiquities in recent years; on this matter, see also the papers collected in the themed section on ‘Libyan Antiquities at Risk’ in *Libyan Studies* 48 (2017). At the same time, building capacity and training a new generation of Libyan archaeologists are regarded as a priority. Numerous international teams have focused their attention on these issues in partnership with Libyan colleagues, as one can see from the reports published in *Libya Antiqua* n.s. 12 (2019) and *Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia* 21–22 (2018–19). The constant engagement of Libyan archaeologists in monitoring, recording and studying their heritage deserves special praise, bearing in mind the challenges they have to face on a daily basis (for a brief overview of some of these field activities, see Bennett 2021). Their passion and encouragement to resume field-work projects in Libya in collaboration with Italian and other international missions are heart-warming. There is reason to be optimistic about the future.

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