

Stefan Ardeleanu, **Numidia Romana? Die Auswirkungen der römischen Präsenz in Numidien (2. Jh. v. Chr. – 1. Jh. n. Chr.)**. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut. Archäologische Forschungen, volume 38. Publisher Dr. Ludwig Reichert, Wiesbaden, 2021. 628 pages, 192 black-and-white illustrations, 44 colour illustrations, 36 plates.

The study of ancient North Africa has been often characterized by the alternation of strong positions in the literature. This is shown by the debate on the radically opposed – but equally partial and inadequate – approaches that are linked to the use of paradigms such as ›Romanization‹ and ›resistance‹ (the bibliography on the subject is vast, but see for example the synthesis in D. J. Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity. Experiencing the Roman Empire* [Princeton 2011] 43–72). In recent years, scholars have started paying more attention to phenomena of encounters between cultures and the resulting interconnections from a socio-economic, historical, political, urban, architectural, and artistic standpoint (cf. the essays collected in N. Mugnai / J. Nikolaus / N. Ray [eds.], *De Africa Romaque. Merging Cultures across North Africa* [London 2016]). Within this strand of scholarship, one should include the critical reassessment of the so-called ›Numidian Royal Architecture‹ proposed by Josephine Quinn (in: J. R. W. Prag / J. C. Quinn [eds.], *The Hellenistic West. Rethinking the Ancient Mediterranean* [Cambridge 2013] 179–215). Drawing upon these studies, the extreme complexity, richness, contrasts, and plurality of cultures that defined North Africa's territories can now offer an opportunity to reflect on the ancient world more broadly.

The present book by Stefan Ardeleanu – an updated and reworked version of his dissertation submitted to Berlin's Humboldt University in 2015 – fits well within this renewed academic debate, as it attempts to move beyond fixed and narrow-minded interpretative categories. This is clearly stated in the second chapter (pp. 7–20), where the author presents a critical analy-

sis of the theoretical models and terminology that have been applied to the study of North Africa so far, e.g., Romanization, Hellenization, Punicization, acculturation, autochtonology. These have proven to be insufficient, if not inaccurate altogether, for an up-to-date archaeological assessment of Numidia in the period of transition that brought this region into Rome's sphere of influence, and for this reason the author has chosen not to employ them in his study. In contrast, Ardeleanu focuses on themes of micro-identities and regionalism that allow him to adopt a more flexible approach to the topic, thus leading him to outline a general picture that is not tainted by polarizing positions. This emphasis on micro-realities within a broader framework recalls in various ways what Paul Scheding has proposed recently in his assessment of micro-regional urbanism in the area of Carthage's *pertica* during the later imperial age (*Urbaner Ballungsraum im römischen Nordafrika* [Wiesbaden 2019]).

Even just a quick glance at this imposing volume of more than six-hundred pages is sufficient to appreciate the importance and thoroughness of Ardeleanu's work. Without doubt, this is a long-awaited synthesis that sheds new light on ancient Numidia and will represent a fundamental starting point for any new study on this region. The book is provided with two substantial summaries in English and French (the latter will be essential for a Francophone readership in modern North African countries). The archaeological analysis carried out by the author at various sites in Tunisia and Algeria is complemented by an exhaustive bibliography and by the study of materials held in archival collections, which are of crucial importance for a correct understanding of the archaeological and architectural remains, especially when their original layout is no longer recognizable because of modern restorations. The graphic apparatus of the book is of high quality, being provided with numerous photographs accompanying the text, in addition to maps and plans reproduced either within the text or in a set of thirty-six plates at the end of the volume. The index features a list of sites and museums across North African and other countries, although it would have been desirable to include more detailed information, such as references to individual buildings within these sites, personal names, lists of inscriptions, and a selection of the main topics of relevance to guide readers. On the other hand, the synthetic tables (pp. 469–495) are very useful, as they list the ceramic finds that were recovered from past and more recent excavations at the principal sites under exam (Bulla Regia, Simithus, Hippo Regius, Thugga, Mactar, Zama Regia, Althiburos, Cirta, and Tiddis), together with a chronological subdivision of the identified phases.

The discussion of this whole set of evidence, which serves to assess the evolution of Numidia from the second century B. C. to the end of the first century AD in the third chapter, is divided into six thematic sections: (1) territorial development of the individual regions (pp. 21–66), (2) dwellings and workshops (pp. 67–148),

(3) sacred buildings and cults (pp. 149–257), (4) tombs and cemeteries (pp. 258–317), (5) economy and trade (pp. 318–397), and (6) settlements in pre-Roman and early Roman Numidia (pp. 398–444). Each section offers an exhaustive, interdisciplinary examination that draws upon a range of different data: archaeological stratigraphy, the results of field surveys, the study of pottery and other elements of material culture, architectural and decorative analyses, the assessment of historical sources and epigraphic evidence. It is precisely thanks to the study of such heterogeneous information that one can look at Numidia from different perspectives, which are therefore incompatible with the use of strictly defined models. According to the overall, more nuanced picture of Numidia presented by the author, all of this points to the occurrence of complex phenomena characterizing the socio-cultural, economic, urban, and architectural environment of this region, which cannot be reduced to the use of a single paradigm. The question ›Numidia Romana?‹ was probably meant to remain unanswered from the start.

Other reviews of this book have highlighted the general subjects discussed and the importance of Ardeleanu's work for the reconstruction of Numidia's historical and economic dynamics (cf. A. Ibba, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2021.11.37), so the remaining space here will be used to point out more specific aspects of this study from an architectural viewpoint. A substantial part of the discussion is dedicated to the assessment of Numidia's architecture and urbanism, which the author uses to draw broader conclusions about socio-political matters. Among the numerous sites and buildings considered, the case study of Thugga's forum area is of particular interest (pp. 223–242). This features a critical re-examination of previous research, especially the excavations carried out as part of a German-Tunisian project (M. Khanoussi / V. M. Strocka [eds.], *Thugga I. Grundlagen und Berichte* [Mayence 2002]) and a subsequent architectural survey undertaken by a French-Tunisian team (S. Aounallah / J.-C. Golvin [eds.], *Dougga. Études d'architecture religieuse II* [Bordeaux 2016]). Ardeleanu's observations are the result of his autoptic analyses at this site and the reassessment of archaeological and archival data, which suggest a major revision of earlier hypotheses on the development of Thugga's forum.

For instance, the author argues that the Monument or Temple of Massinissa in the so-called ›Numidian agora‹ (later the Roman forum) remained in place without any significant alterations until the end of the second century A. D., which would have created an overlap between the old cult of the Numidian kings and the Roman imperial cult. A reconstruction of this building as a victory monument such as the one at Simitthus is questioned, suggesting that it might have rather been a temple in antis looking over the Khaled valley underneath. Furthermore, a pre-Roman date for a sacred edifice on the west side of this area is rejected and existence of an honorary arch of Tiberius in the piazza is called

into question, to mention just a few of the author's alternative proposals.

There is undoubtedly plenty of material to stir up debate in the years to come. One must acknowledge that many of the arguments raised by Ardeleanu are convincing, although occasionally some inaccuracies and oddities occur in these pages. For example, it is not clear what the author means when he refers to the upper level of the Temple of Massinissa (p. 228) – a point that is made even more obscure by the absence of any reconstructive drawing of the building's hypothetical elevation. At the same time, while many photographs are included, there is only one general plan of the forum separate from the text (plate 20 b), so readers must look at the more detailed plans of edifices published by Aounallah and Golvin. Some choices of terminology are questionable: For instance, the inscription mentioning Massinissa (RIL II) is referred to as a »plaque« (p. 225), while this is a stone block (height 33 cm; width 68 cm; depth 25 cm) that would have been inserted into the building's masonry; more puzzlingly, the term »abacus« seems to be used to refer to an entire Ionic capital, or even to the diameter of the shaft at its bottom (pp. 226–228 and note 2163).

Perplexities around some remarks that the author advances about elements of architectural decoration can be found elsewhere in the text, such as in the section on the Forum Temple at Hippo Regius (pp. 193–196). A Corinthian column capital and a pilaster capital (figs. 64–65) are attributed to this edifice and a date in the Julio-Claudian period is proposed. This is unlikely, however. The pilaster capital shows the typical decorative features of the Late Flavian metropolitan productions, which, to our knowledge, make their appearance in North Africa during the second century A. D., while the carving characteristics of the column capital point to a date in the Severan period. Comparanda such as the capitals of the Temple of Apollo Sosianus in Rome and the Temple of Roma and Augustus at Ostia (p. 196, note 1959) are not pertinent.

Obviously, these small critiques do not diminish the value of the book. Occasional slips or questionable assertions are to be expected when such an impressive wealth of data is taken into consideration, and when the analysed material is so heterogeneous in character. They should rather be seen as an opportunity to propose alternative explanations in the future and to keep the scholarly discussion going.

The importance of this study of ancient Numidia can therefore be appreciated from many angles. Firstly, it represents a solid discussion of the evidence that is not biased by stereotypes or paradigms, unlike a substantial part of past (and even recent) literature on North Africa. The author's deconstruction of traditional narratives emerges clearly throughout the book – one case in point being his rejection of the existence of different cults and social practices between the two communities of the ›civitas‹ and ›pagus‹ at Thugga, which have been subjects of academic debate for a long

time. Moreover, the time frame under review is one that needed a thorough archaeological reassessment, being of crucial relevance to understand the region's later developments during North Africa's economic and urban boom of the second and third centuries A. D. It is thanks to this renewed approach that more details start to emerge about the local societies and culture over this period.

The picture of Numidia that is presented in this book is not a simplistic one, as it focuses on many different as-

pects that can be related to as many realities within this territory. Taking into account all of these microcosms is a necessary step to achieve a better understanding of societies in North Africa and beyond. One should thus be grateful to Ardeleanu for setting a new course in the study of Numidia's history and archaeology, which will hopefully be applied to other contexts of the ancient world.

Oxford

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