

**RECHERCHES ARCHÉOLOGIQUES TUNISO-FRANÇAISES À ROUGGA, I. LE FORUM ET SES ABORDS (FOUILLES 1971–1974).** Edited by Maurice Euzennat and Hédi Slim. *Archaeology of the Maghreb, 2. Archaeopress, Oxford, 2020. ISBN 978-1-78969-825-1 (paperback) / 978-1-78969-826-8 (open access e-Pdf), pp. 518, 214 figs., 54 tables. Price: £85.00 (paperback).*

This second volume in the newly launched ‘Archaeology of the Maghreb’ series is dedicated to the results of the excavations at Rougga, located 12 km south-east of El Jem/Thysdrus (Byzacena, Tunisia). The history of the archaeological research at this site is a long and complex one. Excavated under the auspices of the Institut National du Patrimoine (INP) during four seasons in 1971–74, the ancient remains have been the subject of some papers and preliminary reports, to which one should add the monograph *Rougga III* on the Byzantine gold coins (Guéry et al. 1982). An account of the excavations, however, has remained overdue for some 50 years. The aim of this book is to partly fill this gap by reuniting manuscripts written at various stages between 1974 and 2010 by a range of scholars, many of which, including the original editors, have since passed away. The work of the editorial team (Elyssa Jerray, Michel Bonifay, and Victoria Leitch) was therefore both brave and praiseworthy. Publishing the results of archaeological work undertaken by other researchers after such a long time is a challenging task and a number of issues had to be taken into account in the process. As indicated in the foreword, the chapters of the book correspond to the drafts written by the respective authors at the time; these have been reproduced without any modifications apart from the layout of the text, tables, and images. The preface by Fathi Bejaoui (xv–xvi) and the postface by Pierre Gros (435–38) contain useful annotations, which readers are encouraged to look at before engaging with the book contents.

The volume is divided into three parts: an introduction to the site and research context (3–44); an account of the stratigraphic excavations and the recovered ceramic finds (45–156); and an architectural study of the town’s civic district (157–434). The first part is authored by Maurice Euzennat, Hédi Slim, and Pol Troussat; it provides an overview of the site’s geographic and topographic setting, the ancient sources mentioning it, and a history of the research from the first brief description of the ruins by Thomas Shaw in 1738 to the French-Tunisian excavations of the 1970s. With regard to the ancient name of Rougga, there is a general consensus that this should be identified with the *Bararus municipium* mentioned in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*. Unfortunately, no epigraphic evidence was discovered at the site to confirm this, but the distance of the ruins from Thysdrus fits quite nicely with the information provided by the *Tabula*.

The second part of the book describes the stratigraphy and discoveries from the test-pits and trenches excavated in the forum area. The main text by Roger Guéry is supplemented by contributions by Michel Bonifay, Claudio Capelli, Danièle Foy, Georges Souville, and Lucy Vallauri. After a brief outline of the excavations, the results from six *sondages* are presented in a synthetic form within tables describing the features of each layer and the associated materials (51–75). As acknowledged by the excavators, the chronological information is often generic but it is of use nevertheless to complement the data obtained from the architectural analysis of the remains. For

example, nine layers were documented in *Sondage I*, situated along the south end of the forum portico. Layer 5 corresponds to the Byzantine-era reoccupation of the area, as confirmed by the coin finds (see also the beautiful photograph of the trench on the book cover); the foundation level of the piazza is visible in layer 9, which is cautiously dated between the Flavian period and Hadrian's reign. Overall, the levels that are better documented by ceramic finds are those predating the construction of the forum and those of the Late Antique transformations, while the majority of second- and third-century AD pottery was found residual in later layers. A selection of the pottery is catalogued in the second part of the chapter (76–156) and includes a wide range of types: black-glazed ware; Eastern, Italic, South Gaulish, and African sigillata; coarse and cooking ware; Italic, Punic, and African amphorae; Roman and Late Antique lamps; and Islamic-period pottery. The text is complemented by well-illustrated plates: the drawings are reproduced at a good scale and their style is consistent throughout. While it is undeniable that research on North African pottery has progressed considerably in recent years (see, for instance, Cau et al. 2011 and the conference proceedings *LRCW: Late Roman Coarse Wares, Cooking Wares and Amphorae in the Mediterranean, 1–5*), there is still plenty of useful information that can be drawn from this catalogue as it stands.

The third part – by far the longest of the book – is dedicated to the architectural study of Rougga's monumental district. This was written by Gilbert Hallier with a small additional contribution by Jean-Marie Lassère. Throughout these pages, one can find a wealth of high-quality illustrations: plans, sections, elevations, drawings and reconstructions, all bearing witness to Hallier's well-recognizable style. This graphic documentation alone is of invaluable importance. With regard to the text, one must point out that it is dense with long analytic passages, descriptions, reconstruction hypotheses, observations and footnotes, to an extent that unfortunately does not make it easily accessible to all readers. Overall, it represents an extended version of some of the author's earlier contributions, which were presented in a more concise format in a series of papers (see below; additionally, a study of the arch on the *cardo maximus* is found in Guéry and Hallier 1998). Those readers who are not familiar with Rougga's urbanism and architecture would probably find such accounts more suitable, before they can start dealing with the detailed contents of these pages.

Section A (157–227) discusses the underground cisterns that have raised the interest of travellers and scholars since the eighteenth century, to become a characteristic landmark of Rougga (see also Hallier 1987). Interesting remarks are made on the discrepancies between the intended design and how the *chantier* was carried out, which resulted in an irregular shape and spacing of the pillars supporting the vaults. Quarry marks and other inscriptions on the pillars' stone blocks are reproduced in plates and tables – the exact significance of these symbols and their use, however, are still a matter of debate. As to the chronology of the cisterns, regrettably there is little evidence that can be of use. The author suggests a date within the first half of the first century AD, which would predate the construction of the nearby forum, but there is no stratigraphic connection between the cisterns and the piazza, and this proposed chronology rests mainly on architectural comparanda.

The construction and development of the forum and its annexes are the subject of sections B–E (228–434), which draw upon and expand the preliminary accounts published in Guéry 1984 and

Hallier 1984. The first phase of the forum corresponds to a piazza surrounded by a portico on three sides and provided with a long, rectangular building on the west side, which is likely to be interpreted as a civic basilica. The date of this foundation is uncertain, but the author is inclined to suggest the Flavian period on the basis of his architectural remarks and some (scanty) evidence from the stratigraphy identified in the excavations. The portico features a stylobate in *opus caementicium* with square stone blocks underneath the plinths of the columns. The colonnade is of the Corinthian order; 12 bases of white marble (perhaps Proconnesian) are preserved along with fragments of monolithic shafts and capitals. The shafts are made of a grey stone that is tentatively associated with the *granito del foro* quarried from Mons Claudianus, but this remains hypothetical. As a matter of fact, one wonders whether high-profile patronage was indeed present at Rougga that could afford the purchase of such an expensive, imperially owned and controlled type of stone (Russell 2013, 185–98). Local euergetism by the family of the Gordians, as briefly suggested by Euzennat and Slim in the introduction, is only conjectural. The design of the columns has interesting characteristics. The mouldings and height of the bases were allowed to vary, while the capitals seem to follow the so-called ‘cross-section rule’, which demands that their height should equal the axial width of the abacus. However, the proportion between the height of the shaft and the total height of the column does not agree with the 5:6 ratio that is commonly used for the imperial-period Corinthian order (Wilson Jones 1989). Hallier’s attempt to date this colonnade to the Flavian era raises some questions. Judging from the graphic documentation available, the stylistic features of the Corinthian capitals seem consistent with those of the ‘Romano-Carthaginian’ architectural ornament that was widespread in North Africa especially from the mid-second century AD onwards (Pensabene 1986, 364–87). One may therefore ask whether these marble columns should not be rather understood as a replacement of the original, Flavian-era (?) portico, which might have been made of local stone.

The forum witnessed a major phase of transformations when the basilica was obliterated and two temples were erected in that spot. Only a small portion of Temple B was excavated, while more information is available on Temple A, which can be restored as a pseudo-peripteral edifice *sine postico*. Overall, both buildings followed the layout of the Romano-Italic temple on podium. Once again, stratigraphic data are very scarce and the temples’ proposed dating relies on architectural considerations. A number of moulded marble blocks belonging to the entablature (cornices and parts of pediments) were discovered during the excavations. These were dated to c. AD 125–40 on stylistic grounds (Gros 1978) – a chronology that is still acceptable today. The cult of the two temples is unknown due to the absence of any epigraphic evidence. Hallier cautiously suggests an imperial cult for Temple A, but this is speculative. Indeed, while multiple temples along one of the forum sides occur frequently in North Africa, their identification is often problematic. The three temples in the forum of Sufetula are conventionally considered a tripartite Capitolium only on the basis of their prominent position, but no proof has been found yet to confirm this. Similar considerations apply to the three temples on the north-west side of the Old Forum at Lepcis Magna; only the one in the middle can be securely attributed to the cult of Roma and Augustus, while the identification of the other two as a Temple of Liber Pater-Shadrappa and Temple of Hercules-Milk’Ashtart is still being debated.

Overall, the book provides an important collection of accounts on the investigations at Rougga that fits well with current archaeological research in Tunisia and elsewhere in North Africa. It was impossible to overcome the issues of the original work in this volume, and indeed this would have been beyond the editors' task. The chronology of some buildings and the stratigraphic data are probably open to future reassessment, which could hopefully lead to the resuming of archaeological excavations at Rougga. Nevertheless, the publication of this report offers a range of material that is of use to both local and cross-regional studies, with particular regard to urbanism, architecture, and material culture. Complications in coordinating the work of many scholars over long spans of time, as well as editorial and publishing difficulties related to this type of collective volumes, are the main reasons why far too many excavation reports have remained unpublished to date, and this is particularly true for North Africa. It is therefore encouraging to see a good attempt to fill some of these deficiencies, making a wealth of data eventually available to the scientific community. The series 'Archaeology of the Maghreb' has the potential to become an excellent venue for publication, its dissemination being boosted by the double, print and open-access format of its titles. Given that traditional book series such as the supplements of the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* are going to be discontinued shortly, scholars who wish to publish monographs and reports of their work in North Africa may find a suitable new home here.

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