

*Origins of the Colonnaded Streets in the Cities of the Roman East.* By ROSS BURNS. 238mm. Pp xvi + 409, 114 b&w figs, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017. ISBN 9780198784548. £100 (hbk).

In this book, R Burns sets out to assess the development of colonnaded thoroughfares across the eastern Roman world. His study supplements the work undertaken some twenty years ago by Bejor (1999), attempting to expand the research and theoretical framework, to understand what might have triggered this process and its spread across the East. The volume is divided into three parts (A-C): architectural traditions (chapters 1–4); evolution of the colonnaded axis (chapters 5–8); monumentalism and the new building programme (chapters 9–12). The text is nicely illustrated with plans, photographs and drawings.

After an overview of the persistence of Hellenistic urban traditions (chapter 1), the discussion engages with Alexandria of Egypt (chapter 2) and its influence on the urbanism and architecture of other sites – a role that most scholars assign to this city, despite the fragmentary archaeological evidence. Chapter 3 examines the Greek and Roman precedents of the imperial-period colonnaded street: the *stoa*, the *porticus* and enclosed *quadriporticus*, and the *via tecta*. Attention is paid to the development of the Campus Martius in Rome to assess whether this might have served as a model for the eastern cities; the answer is fundamentally negative. Perhaps it would have been good to look also at Republican-period evidence from other sites in Latium, such as the *via tecta* of the Sanctuary of Hercules at Tivoli. An outline of the technical and legal means employed in Roman urban planning concludes this section (chapter 4).

In his analysis of provincial cities under the early Empire (chapter 5), Burns comments upon some North African centres. Cyrene and Ptolemais are two relevant case studies in the Greek-influenced region of Cyrenaica; the discussion of their evolving urban layout, however, would have benefitted from engagement with recent Italian and Polish scholarship. Chapter 6 highlights the role of client kingdoms in the transmission and reinterpretation of architectural models, styles and ideas, especially in the Augustan era. The architecture of Petra is carefully illustrated, before turning to one of the most influential figures of the period: Herod the Great. Among the king's numerous building projects, Burns offers a clear synthesis of the construction phases of Antioch's monumental street (cf Fig. 6.07), acknowledging also the difficulty of interpretation of the extant evidence. Chapters 7 and 8 examine the evolution of cityscapes in Syria, Asia Minor and North Africa throughout the first century AD: Gerasa, Ephesus, Pergamon and Aphrodisias are some examples. Damascus probably yields evidence of a cross-city axis, but among the architectural parallels of Augustan date that the author mentions for the city's eastern gate, the 'Capitolium' of Sufetula is not pertinent, being an Antonine-period building.

The embellishment of the eastern cities with colonnaded axes reached a peak in the second century AD. Chapter 9 is concerned with imperial patronage, especially under Hadrian, the supply of prestigious building materials and the diffusion of standardised architectural styles across the Mediterranean. A large part of the discussion in chapter 10 focuses on Palmyra. Despite the striking monumentality of the city's streets, Burns is right in pointing out that this was hardly the outcome

of an organic, predetermined plan. The evolution of these building processes in the East under the Antonines and Severans is assessed in chapter 11, while chapter 12 argues that the phenomenon of providing cities with monumental colonnades occurred very rarely in the West.

Apart from some criticisms raised above, this book is a valuable contribution to the study of the urban and architectural layout of the eastern Roman cities. The origins of the colonnaded streets remain difficult to appreciate, probably because the identification of a specific architectural model is impossible. It is therefore correct to describe the eastern world as a 'melting pot' of urban, cultural, architectural and decorative traditions, and recent scholarship is showing that similar observations apply to other regions of the Roman world (such as North Africa). That said, more work needs to be done. While the focus of this book is on the plan and topographic features of the colonnaded streets, it would be important to engage in more detail with the ancient viewers' perception of these grandiose architectures. Hopefully the author and other scholars will go down this research avenue soon.

BEJOR, G 1999. *Vie colonnate: paesaggi urbani del mondo antico*, Rivista di Archeologia Suppl 22, G Bretschneider, Rome

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