

## Editor's introduction

By Anna Leone

*Libyan Studies* has undergone some major changes recently: it is now produced by Cambridge University Press and can be viewed online. This policy of modernisation has been a positive move and readers can now access the articles more easily, from any location. For the first time, we have also decided to add this Editor's introduction, to highlight the themes, significance and potential impact of the research published here.

This issue contains a series of papers, methodological and historical, which address various topics such as preservation, recording techniques, legacy data, historical and archaeological analysis, textual and linguistic studies and bibliographical essays. There are a number of common threads between them and overall themes that are the focus of much recent scholarship.

Forts and fortifications and how we define these terms are the focus of a number of the articles. For instance, the toponyms *qasr* and *quṣūr* and their development after the Arab conquest (see Jesus Lorenzo Jimenez for their use in toponyms) are extensively discussed. The presence of forts is also discussed from an archaeological perspective, from the third century and the Byzantine period, reflecting one of the major gaps in modern studies of North Africa. The last comprehensive study looking at fortifications and forts in North Africa was published by Denys Pringle in 1981 and, since then, there has been little work on the historical importance and geographical location of forts across the different regions of North Africa. Some recent articles have presented the typology of these forts (see, for instance, Mattingly et al. 2013) and, within this context, various papers offer some new insights, historical and political, into the development of fortifications, primarily in Libya.

Trade and exchange, difficult to follow after the seventh century, are also a significant element for understanding forts and fortifications, and have been addressed here at a regional level in both Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in Munzi et al. and Saad et al. These two papers are based on data collected during fieldwork and, in the case of Cyrenaica (Saad et al.), the work is based on remote sensing and GIS. The combination of the use of the GIS and remote sensing with data collected in the field is also the subject of the paper on Carthage

(Sycamore and Buchanan). The work presented focuses on another important theme, the problems and issues of dealing with legacy data, especially relevant in the current political situation, where many areas are inaccessible and the use of archives and the reanalysis of old data using new methodologies is starting to produce exciting results.

Conservation is also a key topic in the present political situation in Libya. The work done in the necropoleis of Cyrene is very important in this respect as conflict has brought about destruction, looting and damage to several sites, and Cyrene has been hit by these activities on several occasions and remains a target. The paper by Al Raeid et al., again using GIS, highlights how remote sensing can be employed to monitor and protect, not only the landscape in a wider sense, but also individual sites. The methodology applied in this article could serve as a model for future work in Libya and elsewhere, in particular where a complex political situation and conflicts put important sites at risk.

The subject of protection is another common theme in this issue, with the focus on the protection (long neglected) of Islamic architecture and archaeology. In the colonial period, between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, large destruction occurred targeting the later phases of occupation, while Christian religious buildings or Roman structures were considered of greater interest. In recent years, tombs of saints (marabouts) have been the subjects of destruction too, proving that the need for detailed work on the later phases of occupation of the North African territories is now a priority. This is not limited exclusively to archaeological sites, but also to pottery and literary and linguistic traditions. For instance, Mondin's paper focuses on Late Antique pottery production circulating in Egypt, improving our understanding of the transformation of North Africa and Mediterranean trade in Late Antiquity.

Moving to a linguistic theme, a bibliographical essay (Benkato and Pereira) offers a detailed perspective on the work done on the Arabic dialects and the Berber language spoken in Libya. This research is the first gathering together of all the publications on the various linguistic aspects of the Libyan language and is organised thematically. The paper by Jesus Lorenzo Jimenez, too, focuses on linguistics

and toponyms in the territory of Al Bayda in Cyrenaica and their geographical distribution after the Arab conquest. The analysis identifies the geographical distribution of different toponyms (in

particular, *qasr*, *s̄ira*, *qarya*). The linguistic analysis is integrated with archaeological and historical data and provides new elements to understand the Arab expansion in the region.

---

## References

- Mattingly, D., Sterry, M., and Leitch, V. 2013. Fortified farms and defended villages of late Roman and Late Antique Africa. *Antiquité Tardive* 21: 167–88.
- Pringle, D. 1981. *The Defence of Byzantine Africa from Justinian to the Arab Conquest: An Account of the Military History and Archaeology of the African Provinces in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries*, 2 vols. BAR International Series 99. Archaeopress, Oxford.