Journal of Roman Archaeology 35 (2022), 372–380
doi:10.1017/S1047759422000149

Becoming medieval: cities on the Iberian peninsula and in North Africa

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PANZRAM, S., and L. CALLEGARIN, eds. 2018. *Entre* civitas *y* madīna. *El mundo de las ciudades en la Península Ibérica y en el norte de África (siglos IV-IX)*. Pp. XVI + 393. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez. ISBN 978-84-9096-216-9.

This volume of collected essays, while highlighting archaeological evidence, brings a variety of perspectives and disciplines to bear on the questions of if, when, why, and how the cities of Late Antiquity were transformed into early medieval ones. Its purpose is to engage scholars in conversation in a way that reflects the shared histories of the Iberian peninsula and North Africa in Late Antiquity, through the late 7th and early 8th-c. Arab conquests, and into the medieval period. Whether deliberately or not, that conversation does not occur in this volume. Rather, each scholar considers to a greater or lesser degree the viability of historian Hugh Kennedy's 1985 model of gradual urban transformation in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.[1]

Sabine Panzram (1–12) introduces the richness of *Entre* Civitas *y* Madīna by recognizing the seminal role of Kennedy's argument that the Islamic City in Roman and Byzantine areas emerged not from an abrupt Islamization of the population but as a result of gradual socio-economic change. This model is not, perhaps, the most obvious choice, but it is the glue that holds the volume together. It would otherwise fall into two distinct parts with little interconnection. Nevertheless, interpreting the evidence of the cities of Late Antiquity in the western Mediterranean from the 4th to the 9th c. in the light of early medieval cities in Syria and the Middle East is refreshing, and it is especially productive for the Iberian peninsula. In the second chapter, Hugh Kennedy (13–20) updates his 1985 article with insights drawn from recent excavations and urges medievalists to consider demand-side economics in understanding why different cities and towns had different outcomes.

The fine historical chapter by Javier Arce on the 4th–6th-c. Christianization of cities in Hispania (23–31) represents a traditional perspective, in which archaeology plays a supportive role and the urban change is quite narrowly focused. Medieval archaeologist Sonia Gutiérrez Lloret's bibliographical survey and method-critical chapter "Von der *civitas* zur *madīna*" (33–47) both explains and challenges traditional approaches to urbanism. She argues that North Africanists lag behind archaeologists on the Iberian peninsula because of persistent colonialist and Euro-centric perspectives, and Classical biases reflected in the longstanding focus on the transformation of the ancient city. Indeed, the three thematic chapters in the North African part of the book, Anna Leone's "Urban décor and public spaces" (275–83), Lennart Gilhaus's "Statuen und Stadtkultur im spätantiken Nordafrika" (285–302), and Esther Sánchez Medina's "Ciudades, obispos y exilio" (303–16) seem to prove her point. Each article has its own merits, but with their collective

[1] Kennedy 1985.

focus on monumental urban forms and elite individuals in Late Antiquity, some traditional perspectives and biases persist.

By contrast, Gutiérrez Lloret suggests that archaeologists working on the Iberian peninsula are on a more productive path of diachronic urban studies, having excavated outside of ancient city centers and cracked the ceramic code of the 8th c. with the help of C^{14} dating. Some of Gutiérrez Lloret's colleagues certainly do take the long view of urban change, but others explore familiar topics within traditional chronological and disciplinary limits that also carry implicit biases. Francisco José Moreno Martín's chapter (153–71) critiques the scholarly narrative of a neo-Visigothic period extending into the last quarter of the 9th c. in Oviedo, which impedes an understanding of the early Christian monuments in Toledo. Jaime Vizcaíno Sánchez's contribution (75–103) focuses on the 5th-c. reorganization of Carthago Spartaria (Cartagena) around trade, highlighted by the construction of a monumental sigma market on the Augustan theater. These chapters have their own compelling stories to tell, but they do not extend into the 7th–9th centuries, for which archaeological evidence is lost or still undiscovered.

After the general perspectives on the Iberian side of *Entre* Civitas *y* Madīna are syntheses of archaeological work over the last two decades at a variety of cities. Darió Bernal Casasola (105–17) surveys the transformation of five coastal cities, chiefly in the 6th and 7th c. on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar: Septem (Ceuta) and Tamuda in North Africa, and Gades (Cádiz), Baelo Claudia, and Carteia in Spain. All thrived in the Late Roman period on the production and shipping of salted fish products, but in the 6th c. either suffered from or adapted to its loss. The Arab conquest had strikingly different outcomes in these cities. Gades, which had contracted in Late Antiquity, was partly reconstituted in the early medieval period; Carteia thrived in Late Antiquity but was abandoned in 8th c.; only Septem was continuously occupied from Late Antiquity into the 8th c. Bernal Casasola makes the same notable observation as Vizcaíno Sanchez at Cartagena: that the influence of the Christian church on the urban form of these trading cities in Late Antiquity was muted, except perhaps at Ceuta.

Two subsequent chapters tackle head-on the challenge of the volume's title by focusing on the crucial 8th–early 9th c. in the large ancient cities of Mérida and Córdoba. These cities, like Sevilla, Toledo and probably Zaragoza, retained some administrative importance in the early Umayyad period and part of their Late Antique form, albeit functionally transformed. To this list can be added Tolmo de Minateda, a Roman town in southeastern Spain, and Reccopolis, a Visigothic foundation in the southern part of the Meseta Central, which were inhabited into the 9th c. before being abandoned or destroyed in the 10th.[2]

Miguel Alba Calzado (51–74) traces the urban form of Roman Augusta Emerita (Mérida) through sequential transformations; the most consequential of these occurs in the 8th c., because it effectively counters the traditional narrative of the city's destruction in the aftermath of the Arab invasion. Evidence of the city's continuity includes the formation of a continuous defensive corridor inside the old city walls (67, fig. 8). On this open space new free-standing elite houses, dated 788–822, were built on a distinctive plan of river stone masonry and reused ancient blocks. The Umayyad government center was built on the main northeast–southwest street in the center of the old town, on and adjacent

[2] See Gutiérrez Lloret in this volume 33–36; Hennig and McCormick 2019.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759422000149 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to the podium of the former Temple of Diana. The diversity of Mérida's population in this period is attested by separate Christian, Jewish, and Muslim cemeteries outside the city and at the Mozarabic Basilica of Santa Lucia del Trampal and, probably, the church of Santa Eulalia on Mérida's northern outskirts, which continued to function through the 8th c. This state of affairs was short-lived. Decades of conflict with Córdoba in the early 9th c. depopulated the city and devastated its agricultural lands; the Roman gate was destroyed, and the city walls were gradually dismantled. The Alcazaba, erected in 835 on the Guadiana riverfront, for a while ensured control over the bridge. In plan and function it was a *ribāṭ*, like those on the North African coast of roughly the same date, which included a watch tower with a small garrison mosque and a large cistern that employed Visigothic pilasters taken from the city's Christian churches, perhaps despoiled for the first time. When the bridge was cut in 868 after the brutal suppression of a local uprising, it brought a definitive end to the old city, which was replaced by a new center of power at Badajoz, located further west on the Guadiana River.

María Teresa Casal García's chapter on Córdoba (119–32), after a brief survey of evidence in the old city center in the Umayyad period, concentrates on the results of excavations at Šaqunda, Córdoba's first suburb (*rabaḍ*), which lay closest to the center of power on the south bank of the Guadalquivir River. A new establishment in 750, Šaqunda was razed in retaliation for an uprising in 818, and building was prohibited on the site. The site lay undisturbed under layers of river gravel and silt, which preserved a snapshot of daily life and provided a rich source of clues to urban development and material culture after the Arab conquest. The suburb was laid out on a north–south, east–west grid of streets that led to paved open-air markets. It included mostly residential buildings with areas for storage, artisanal activity, and small-scale farming. Among locally made, wheel-thrown ceramics, most are of Late Antique type and decoration; the few new "Islamic" forms are decorated in the "inherited" style. Also present were multi-use cooking pots and basins, a plate for making bread (*ṭabaq*), and a portable stove (*tannūr*). All are indicative of a continuous ceramic tradition. Absent are serving dishes and glazed ceramics attested at Córdoba later in the 9th c. and *qādūs* (water-wheel buckets), which are associated with an overlying caliphal-period quadrangular pool and agrarian area. Faunal remains of domestic animals are similar to those from other contemporary sites: sheep/goat remains predominate, followed by cow and an abundance of fowl. In keeping with the Islamic prohibition, pig bones were absent. Wild foods were rare, probably because of the urban setting.[3] The coins found at Šaqunda reflect a pattern of distribution typical of other 8th- and early 9th-c. sites. Most were in the latest series of *fulūs*, a copper coin no longer minted by the second third of the 9th c.; only four were the silver dirhams that were the rule until the mid-11th c.

Noteworthy in Šaqunda's layout were the communal commercial spaces, or open-air markets, to which both major and minor roads led. As Patrice Cressier points out (329) in the concluding essay, the *sūq* was a seminal element of medieval cities in Morocco. Šaqunda was neither a city nor an independent town, but a new residential suburb of the government center at Córdoba; nevertheless, its features and layout may offer clues to how some early medieval towns and villages looked and functioned, with commercial,

[3] See Bernal Casasola, this volume, 116, on the faunal assemblage from Traducta (Algeciras).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759422000149 Published online by Cambridge University Press

storage, industrial, and farming enterprises woven into their residential and communal fabrics.

Three thematic chapters follow Casal García's, including Moreno Martin's, mentioned above. Ruth Pliego Vázquez and Tawfiq Ibrahim's survey of mints (135–51) in Late Antiquity through the Arab conquest traces how a succession of rulers promoted and controlled cities through their mints. The pattern on the Iberian Peninsula is radically different from that in North Africa, where, following Roman practice, Carthage remained the sole mint in Late Antiquity. For the first two decades after the conquest, however, Umayyad issues in both areas reflect the same strategy of adding a lower value *fals* to the existing coinage system, even using Latin and bilingual (Latin and Arabic) inscriptions.

Christoph Eger (173–87) looks to cemeteries as measures of the Islamization of urban landscapes. The Muslim cemetery at Plaza del Castillo in Pamplona is a model of its kind; its south–north aligned burials of single individuals in simple pits are arranged in uneven rows without intercutting, and individuals, uniformly without grave goods, lie on their right side with head at the south, face to the southwest. The map of Islamic-period Córdoba includes 58 Muslim, 11 Christian, and two Jewish cemeteries. The 8th- to mid-9th-c. peri-urban Muslim cemeteries were located on arterial roads by the city gates. Layers of burials resulted from their continued use through the end of the Islamic period. Later Muslim cemeteries, often associated with and named for mosques, were located further from the city on the new road network and spread horizontally to accommodate more burials. The post-conquest Christians of Córdoba, a majority population in the 8th c. and still numerous in the 9th, were probably buried in the old graveyards of martyrial basilicas like the Triconch of Cercadilla; privileged individuals were buried in new cloisters in the more distant suburbs, like the necropolis at the Old Military Hospital. At Segóbriga, the 200-plus burials in a 5th–7th-c. cemetery (186, Abb. 7) are typical of Christian cemeteries of the Iberian peninsula. West–east aligned burials in pits or cists sealed with flagstones were arranged in rough lines and rows, and individuals, sometimes more than one in a grave, were in extended supine position, head toward the west. Finds included nails, probably from the remains of wooden coffins, and grave goods, especially jewelry. Among these graves, and sometimes partially overlying them without a significant overburden, were 24 southwest–northeast oriented single graves. In these, 12 individuals were buried on their right side. Eger interprets them as Muslim converts buried by their Christian families. This appealing hypothesis, although unverifiable without C^{14} dating, DNA testing, and good comparanda, suggests a more complex and pragmatic picture of cemeteries and burial practice in a transitional period than the current model of rigid segregation.

Cumulatively, the chapters in this first part of the volume illustrate how effectively pottery, coins, and faunal and human remains in stratigraphic context can reveal the transitional character of the 8th and early 9th c., and how quickly they can reflect the arrival of newcomers to the Iberian peninsula and even trace their influence on the resident population. It is worth reiterating that more visible monuments and trappings of public life are comparatively slow to reflect change in the absence of archaeological evidence to phase and date them. Finally, for all the appreciation of Kennedy's model, the authors still fall back on the idea of the Islamic city or the Islamization of cities in the immediate aftermath of the Arab conquest. This seems counterproductive for a period when Arabo-Berber garrisons and secular-leaning Umayyad officials were a minority population whose primary

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759422000149 Published online by Cambridge University Press

concerns were security and administration; at least a century passed before the function and shape of the cities of Al-Andalus reflected an Islamic ideology. Just as North Africanists have concluded that in Late Antiquity concepts such as the Christian city and Christianization overemphasize the role of religious identity in urban life, the same is probably true of the earliest medieval settlements.[4]

Gutiérrez Lloret's introduction to the first part of the book seems almost to have been inspired by François Baratte's chapter introducing the second, North African, part (191–201). He acknowledges the problematic background of North African archaeology, which may have caused past archaeologists to ignore or destroy evidence of post-Arab conquest cities, and regrets that the ceramic typology of the post-conquest period is still in its infancy. Baratte also suggests that North Africanists have been in the background of the Mediterranean-wide debate about continuity or rupture of cities in the immediate post-conquest period because of a poverty of evidence, which makes North Africa different from other areas around the Mediterranean, like Syria. While true, pleading a kind of North African exceptionalism risks isolating the area in a way it never was historically. The subsequent focus of the chapter is a discussion, rich in evidence and bibliography, of the continuity of cities in North Africa, although they changed in form in the 5th–7th c. to reflect shifting socio-political realities.

The "new perspectives" mentioned in the subtitle of Baratte's chapter are two. First is a welcome emphasis on latest Late Antiquity, which considers the possibility that the Byzantine 7th c. was, depending on a city's size, location, and function, more complicated than a slow descent into oblivion. Baratte looks to the ceramic record, which suggests a mix of old and new production and trading patterns. On the one hand is John Hayes's demonstration that African Red Slip Form 109 continued in use into the 690s, as did certain amphoras; on the other is Michel Bonifay's suggestion that the development of local and regional pottery at Nabeul, Hammamet, and Sidi Jdidi from the mid-7th through early 8th c. signals the unravelling of Mediterranean-wide trade networks. The second new perspective is diachronic exploration of cities in North Africa through excavations undertaken by teams of archaeologists and historians, including ancient and medieval specialists, at Volubilis in Morocco and Tubernuc in Tunisia. Nevertheless, in the absence of solid archaeological evidence of continuity, Baratte inclines toward the rupture of ancient cities in the 8th–early 9th c. Even at Sbeïtla, where Arab occupation is attested, it cannot be dated by pottery to before the 9th c.

Medievalist Corisande Fenwick provides the other general perspective (203–19). She defines the two traditional approaches to urbanism in early medieval North Africa. On the one hand are Classical archaeologists concerned with "the Fate of the Classical City" (i.e., which cities survived the Arab conquest and to what extent), and on the other are medievalists who seek "the Origins of the Islamic City" (i.e., to identify Islamic spaces and monuments by studying the new caliphal cities of Tunis and Kairouan, and the Aghlabid and Fatimid palatial towns, al-ʿAbbāsiyya, Raqqāda, Mahdiyya and Ṣabra al-Manṣūriyya). For her part, Fenwick attempts to bridge the divide between these two approaches by focusing on cities and towns inherited by the Arabs.

[4] Merrills and Miles 2010, 204–27; Leone 2013, 235–43.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759422000149 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The large number, variety, and history of old cities and towns in North Africa guarantees that tracing their abandonment, devolution, or evolution in the early medieval period is complicated. Perhaps the best that can be done currently, given the limited number of scientifically excavated and studied sites, is to categorize them. In the first category are places that continued to function after the Arab conquest: Volubilis, Sufetula (Sbeïtla), Ammaedara (Haïdra), Belalis (Henchir al-Faouar), Leptis Magna (Lebda), Zama Regia (Jama), and Althiburos (Henchir Medeina). Among inherited features that stayed in use were churches (Sbeïtla), and water and street systems; new features were an 8th-c. fort on the outskirts of Belalis and baths associated with the Muslim garrison at Volubilis. In the second category is the city of Sitifis (Sétif), which contracted in the 7th and 8th c. but expanded in the 9th–10th c. The third category includes the towns of Uchi Maius (Henchir Douamis) and Chimtou (Simitthus), which were fragmented or possibly abandoned in the 8th c. Many other towns probably shared their fate, given that noticeably fewer towns are attested in the 9th-c. urban network of Ifrīqiya than before the conquest (though Fenwick notes that the old cities Utica, Meninx, and Iol Caesarea had already been abandoned, for a variety of reasons, between the 5th and the early 7th c.). In a category all its own was the Byzantine capital of Carthage, which was destroyed by the Arabs in 698 and replaced by the new port city of Tunis (ca. 705), a decidedly punitive treatment not commonly meted out by the invaders.

By contrast, the archaeological history of the large inherited cities is quite poorly understood, though Hadrumetum/Justinianopolis (Sousse), Tacapae (Sfax), Capsa (Gafsa), Vaga (Béja), Tubunae (Tobna), and Theveste (Tébessa) thrived in the medieval period and beyond. Fenwick attributes the continuity of these large cities into the earliest medieval period to the features they shared: a strategic location on inland or coastal roads, fortifications, administrative infrastructure, and Muslim garrisons. Conspicuously missing from this list are harbors for naval and merchant ships (Sousse, Sfax) and inland emporia (Gafsa, Béja, Tobna, and Tébessa), which was surely the reason why some roads continued in use and others did not.

The argument that the economies of the earliest medieval cities were driven by local Arab administrations and military garrisons is convincing from a bird's eye view. On the ground, however, the people responsible for these institutions must have operated within the majority native population and were to some extent dependent on it, especially in the commercial realm. Perhaps archaeologists are too attached to cities and public buildings to look for, or even recognize, evidence of communal economic life in the form of open-air markets, or *sūq*-s, on which all city dwellers (and others) depended. The existence of these institutions is already attested in the 8th c. at Šaqunda and later in Tingitana.[5]

Three case studies follow Fenwick's chapter. Elsa Rocca and Fathi Béjaoui's contribution (223–39) is a comparative study of Ammaedara and Theveste, two old cities in the southwestern corner of Africa Proconsularis, the histories of which diverged markedly by the medieval period. Thanks to the careful excavation and study of Haïdra, the site is particularly informative about the earliest medieval period, while Tébessa is all but mute. The ancient civic center of Ammaedara was abandoned by the end of the 7th c., but its population moved into two areas: in and around the citadel, and over a Roman necropolis at the northeast edge of the ancient suburbium on both sides of the old Decumanus Maximus

[5] See Cressier, this volume, 324–25.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759422000149 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(the road to Carthage). In the first (better understood) area, basilicas 3, 5, and 7 were used for residential purposes. Located inside the citadel were a probably 9th–10th-c. mosque, housing in basilica 3, and housing in basilica 7, in an area of artisanal production. South of the *wadi*, medieval housing occupied both sides of the old Cardo Maximus (the road to Thelepte). Nearby, just to the east of the road, an olive press and kiln were installed in the cemetery of basilica 8. Residential and artisanal activity is also attested just north of the citadel, including a bread oven perhaps dating to the 8th c. Medieval housing, also associated with artisanal production, occupied one of Haïdra's two Byzantine "monuments à auges," a type of building characteristic of Late Antique and early medieval cities from North Africa to the Middle East and probably intended for the public distribution of goods.[6]

Although Ammaedara lost its administrative function, and with it both population and status, artisanal and industrial enterprises in the vicinity of residential areas on the old eastern and southern roads attest to commercial settlement in the early medieval period, whether we call it a denucleated town or an agglomeration of villages. By contrast, Tébessa was one of the large inherited cities that thrived in the medieval period and beyond, though we have little archaeological evidence for its earliest medieval phase. Rocca and Béjaoui conclude that as a Numidian city oriented to the west as well as to Carthage, Theveste may have fulfilled the administrative needs of Ifrīqiya's rulers.

Elizabeth Fentress's contribution on Jerba (241–52) attests to the power of diachronic regional survey to unsettle and complicate traditional models of urbanism in Late Antiquity and beyond. Also commendable is its focus on the 7th–9th-c. transition and the interpretation of limited archaeological evidence in light of the wider Mediterranean. From the 660s through the 9th c., coastal cities on the island probably suffered from the Arab raids on coastal Byzacena, and their populations appear to have settled in productive areas inland, in agglomerated villages protected from aggressive mainland tribes by two Byzantine fortlets at Tāla and Ġardāya. The deurbanization of Meninx by the early 7th c. and the strictly local ceramic record – common ware jars and pitchers in whitish fabric in the 8th and 9th c. and small globular amphoras – attest to Jerba's increasing withdrawal from surviving commercial Mediterranean networks. More telling of the disruptions the Arab conquest unleashed is a new settlement pattern in the southeastern part of the island. By the 9th c., an abundance of sites occupied previously unsettled areas. These were not villages, but groups of up to six or seven small individual houses. They were probably inhabited by newcomers to the island, perhaps Ibadi groups and mainland Berbers; a leader of one of these groups had his seat at Ġardāya. In short, where the Vandal and Byzantine conquests of the island left little mark, the disruptions of the Arab conquest were transformational. Jerba is a powerful reminder that becoming medieval in North Africa took radically different and unpredictable forms.

Ridha Ghaddhab (253–71) surveys city and town centers in the Byzantine period that included ceramic production and olive presses in abandoned buildings. He notes that these were new enterprises rather than inherited ones transplanted from suburban areas and concludes that they are a phenomenon of Byzantine political geography. That is, once flourishing cities and towns lost their administrative function in the Byzantine period,

[6] Baratte et al. Forthcoming (the proceedings of a 2015 conference in Paris, not yet available as of this writing).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759422000149 Published online by Cambridge University Press

they devolved into little more than villages. Indeed, such cities and towns do seem to have been reduced in population and area. In most cases, however, we do not know, or even ask, where the population of these towns went, nor do we even consider how the new artisanal and industrial enterprises highlighted by Ghaddhab might have been incorporated into new settlements or relegated to their outskirts. The light of the ancient city has perhaps blinded us to the possibility of poly- or denucleated "towns," which could take a number of forms depending on the circumstances.

Patrice Cressier concludes the volume (317–30) with a discussion of the genesis of Islamic towns in the western Maghreb, a vast territory which was mostly unromanized, unurbanized, and unchristianized, and where the scholarly debate about the continuity or rupture of ancient cities is largely moot. He notes that what constituted an Islamic city is unknown beyond the word *madīna*, and he is skeptical that all the features medieval Arab sources say *madīna*-s included – that is, religious, institutional, juridical, and economic structures – were regularly combined in one place. He outlines three characteristics of urban genesis in the western Maghreb. First is his concept of the tribal city, which emphasizes the role of indigenous people in the formation of cities that may have already taken root in the Maghreb in the pre-Islamic period. Second are *sūq*-s, which he sees as later urban manifestations of pre-existing inter-tribal markets for local goods and produce that were the *raison-d'être* of Islamic cities and towns rather than a product of them. Third are irrigation systems for intensive agricultural production, whether associated with cities or not. These water systems are often interpreted as urban projects, intended both to provide water to city dwellers and to transform the countryside that cities controlled and exploited. On the contrary, Cressier argues, they were essential to the intensive agricultural production that was the formative economic motor of urban development.

Cressier's chapter is a counterpoint to Fenwick's statement (204) that Islamic cities in the western Maghreb cannot be easily compared to those in highly urbanized Ifrīqiya; in essence, the Islamic cities in Morocco are not comparable because almost none are inherited. Behind this is a common and inflexible perception of urbanism, whether ancient or medieval, as a large, fully articulated entity that is nucleated and monumental in form and administrative in function. Nearly everyone working on urban transformations in the eastern Maghreb has the same basic perception, which makes it difficult to envision population centers of a different size, sort, and origin. This may be one of the most important obstacles to bridging the persistent gap between Late Antique and early medieval cities in North Africa. Cressier ends his chapter by noting that any progress in understanding medieval urbanism, a patrimony that is fast disappearing, will come from archaeological projects in unpopulated areas and rescue excavations in modern urban centers, a path that colleagues on the Iberian peninsula have taken to good effect.

As a counterpoint to Cressier and from the perspective of the eastern Maghreb, I offer this more optimistic conclusion. *Entre* Civitas *y* Madīna is the second of three recent collections devoted to the transformation of landscapes and culture between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages.[7] The strength of the first, the product of the 2012 Dumbarton Oaks symposium "Rome re-imagined: Byzantine and early Islamic North Africa 500–800," is a multidisciplinary exploration of the life and culture of Byzantine Africa. Its weakness from the current perspective is that few papers are concerned with the Arab conquest and its

[7] The others are: Stevens and Conant 2016; Bockmann et al. 2019.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759422000149 Published online by Cambridge University Press

immediate aftermath. *Entre* Civitas *y* Madīna emphasizes the archaeology of cities in Late Antiquity, and it gives serious attention to the transitional 8th and early 9th c. on the Iberian peninsula. The pairing with the North Africa papers is uncomfortable in that the North Africanists do not appear to pay much attention to the Iberian peninsula. *Africa-Ifrīkiya,* the proceedings of a 2013 conference in Rome, includes 17 papers accessibly published in English and French. Among its most encouraging features are six chapters by Tunisian specialists, who are the natural explorers and guardians of this rich and multilayered patrimony. In a kind of response to *Entre* Civitas *y* Madīna, Bockmann et al. have done their best to turn away from what might be called the "urban bias." The greatest strength of the book is its tight focus on the 7th–early 9th-c. transition in the eastern Maghreb (here, Tunisia and western Libya) seen through a wide variety of specialized disciplines that employ textual, geographic, material, and archaeological evidence, ancient and medieval. In their infancy and not yet represented here are studies of ancient DNA, stable isotope, and other scientific analyses that will provide extraordinary new data and new perspectives. The papers in the volume, in short, are a mosaic of the period – still fragmentary and lacking in detail but with an emerging overall pattern. Taken together, the three collections mark the distance already travelled along the road to discovering and understanding the complexity of the earliest medieval period, particular to the Maghreb's topography, history, and culture, but integrated into the fabric of the Mediterranean and beyond.

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Journal of Roman Archaeology 35 (2022), 380–387
doi:10.1017/S1047759421000660

Seeking salvation at Byllis in the 6th century

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MUÇAJ, S., J.-P. SODINI, P. CHEVALIER, and M.-P. RAYNAUD. 2019. *Byllis. Présentation du site, fortifications, basiliques A, C et D*. Athens: École française d'Athènes. Pp. 533, 624 color and black-and-white figs. ISBN 978-2-86958-322-1.