

Introduction

Editor's Introduction

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As academics and researchers bravely struggled on for another year with the additional burdens foisted on them by the Covid pandemic, the Society for Libyan Studies nevertheless has started to see some real benefits from the new ways of learning, studying and diffusing research brought about by this world-wide crisis. The explosion in online learning and lectures that are available to wider audiences, and a much-increased use of various types of social media have surely all contributed to a boost in submissions to *Libyan Studies* and from a wider field than ever – we have contributions from scholars from Libya, Tunisia, Sudan, the UK, France, Italy and Malta, all writing for us about North African and Mediterranean cultures.

The obituaries in this issue mark the lives of three remarkable men, all very closely associated with the Society in different ways, and it is with much sadness that the Society records their lives here. Tony Allan, who was a professor of geography specialised in water resources in Libya, for which he received multiple awards over his lifetime, was in fact one of the founding members of the Society. Anthony Thwaite, a celebrated poet, worked as the assistant professor of English at the University of Libya in Benghazi, and became interested in the archaeology of the area. I had the pleasure of working with him on the pottery at the Society's excavations at Euesperides and he also served on Council – he leaves us a rich legacy of poems related to his time in Libya. Mohammed Ibrahim Khalifa al-Mashai was a prominent archaeologist from Libya's southern region of Fazzan, he re-established a museum at Jarma and supported David Mattingly's work on the Fazzan Project.

Part one starts with two very strong papers with insights from the Stone Age. Nick Barton and his team report on their project in southern Tunisia looking at *Homo Sapiens* in the Middle Stone Age: they have produced the first secure dating for MSA in this region and have demonstrated the longevity and resilience of these people living on the edges of the Sahara. Emanuele Cancellieri moves us to south-western Libya, using lithic evidence, and looks at the effect of ecological conditions on population movement and adaptation. Catherine Dobias-Lalou, Hamid Alshareef and François Chevrollier bring to light four inscriptions recently discovered in Cyrenaica: three funerary inscriptions and a boundary stele inscription that provides a vital clue for tracing the Roman *limes* in the central part of the Djebel Akhdar. Hamden Ben Romdhane and Samir Aounallah provide us with a detailed commentary on a new votive inscription to Saturn cryptensis found on a stele near Oudhna, and thus new perspectives on this cult. Héla Mekki explains the use of new technologies (remote sensing and QGIS software) to reveal new sites and monuments in the mountain range between Tunisia and Libya. Importantly, the project also developed a management and conservation plan to protect this unique heritage, demonstrating the exciting

possibilities for future research, above all in difficult terrains. Niccolò Mugnai takes us to magisterial Lepcis Magna in a highly original, and visually rich, paper that views the sites from the perspective of the visitors in antiquity and follows the development of this urban space and its architectural influences over time. Mohamed-Abri Nsiri's paper studies the onomastics of the African episcopate in the Byzantine period and its development, questioning the reasons and influences behind certain trends. Then Mohamed Ellefi's study *Pax et Bellum* examines the relationship between the Moors of Western Tripolitania and the Vandals. Moving to the early Islamic period, Aurélien Montel offers a much-needed study on Tripoli, demonstrating the intellectual, commercial and political prominence of the city using an original prosopographical study combined with commercial and political history. Marthe Achtnich, whose fieldwork was partly funded by a Society grant, presents a paper to explain migrant journeys in contemporary Libya. She argues that it is not a simple question of a journey from A to B, and that interdisciplinary approaches are needed for better describing the migrants' full experiences.

Finally, despite all the current global crises and difficulties in North Africa, there has been some fieldwork recently, and this year we are happy to publish five fieldwork reports in Part two. Our first report by Ammar Awad Mohamed Abdalla looks at the evidence of contacts between the Meroitic cultural area and the Kushite state, and the Gezira, in Sudan. It is a very useful synthesis of previous evidence, coupled with new data collected in the field that change our understanding of communities and their interactions. The author has also written on the Cambridge University Press's Cambridge Core blog, if you are interested in hearing more about this region.

Maxine Anastasi, Claudio Capelli, Timmy Gambin and Jean-Christophe Sourisseau take us to Malta and the Xlendi Bay shipwreck – using scientific analysis they studied the archaic pottery to help trace the commercial route of the ship and reveal evidence of cultural contacts through the copying of ceramic forms across large geographical spaces. A rural Christian church in Tunisia is the subject of Mourad Chetoui's fieldwork report, identified recently. Its fixed ambons are an unusual feature for this area. Al Twati Boshah takes us to Libya and provides important data on excavations at ancient Balagrae, in Cyrenaica, that uncovered parts of a building with a mosaic floor, from the late second to early third century AD. The result of this work was that developers relocated the proposed new mosque away from the archaeological remains and the site will be protected, a move that was supported by the local community – an encouraging sign for the future of historical remains. Also from Libya, further encouraging signs for the protection and conservation of Libya's cultural heritage are reported by Adel Othman El Mayer. He outlines efforts to restore and protect a series of mosaic floors in Cyrene, but also highlights the lack of resources available to them.

Our book reviews begin with a critique by Niccolò Mugnai of the ambitious, and much anticipated, publication *Rougga I*, which

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covers the 1971–74 Tunisian-French excavations, edited by Maurice Euzennat and Hédi Slim. Mohamed-Arbi Nsiri takes us through David Voprada's *Quodvultdeus*, revealing the meaning of this bishop's sermons. Anna Leone looks at Oliva Menozzi's report on the *Archaeological Mission of Chieti University*, a welcome set of new date, well-illustrated and including sections in Arabic. Andy Merrills reviews *The Archaeology of Imperial Landscapes* edited by Bleda During and Tesse Stek, that is important for its treatment of rural and peripheral landscapes and a new way of looking at the archaeology of empire. Finally, Saul Kelly offers his views on *Flying Over Zerzura*, by Roberto Chiarvetto et al., covering the Italian story about the hunt for Zerzura, a mythical rainwater oasis in the Gilf Kebir, in the 1930s.

From next year, *Libyan Studies* will see the exciting introduction of Guest Editors, whose role will be to focus on a new section devoted to specialised disciplines or geographical areas. The journal is also transitioning to Open Access (with two Open Access articles in this issue), in line with global moves to make funded research more widely available, but at the same time we will continue to support our independent researchers.

For readers interested in the wider Society, its grants, events and other publications, I invite you to look at our website and in particular our re-vamped Annual Review, instigated by our new Director, Dr Corisande Fenwick, which has a very comprehensive summary of the work of the Society, its collaborations with the other British International Research Institutes, and its vision for the future.