

## Book Review

**ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION AND URBAN HISTORY IN MAURETANIA TINGITANA.** By Niccolò Mugnai. *Mediterranean Archaeology Studies 1, Edizioni Quasar, Rome, 2018. ISBN 978-88-7140-853-8, pp. 412, 93 figures, 43 plates, 23 plans, 7 tables. Price: €40. doi:10.1017/lis.2019.1*

The province of Mauretania Tingitana rarely features in discussions of Roman imperial architecture. Volubilis has received cursory attention but by and large the territory has been considered a backwater in architectural terms, a sort of warm and sunny Britain. Emerging from his PhD thesis at Leicester and based on fieldwork in Morocco between 2011 and 2014, Mugnai's study seeks to change this, providing a thorough analysis of the diverse and vibrant architectural decoration of the region. His broader aim here is to consider the development of this decoration through the lens of four sites: Volubilis, Banasa, Sala and Lixus. A contextual approach puts this evidence into its proper architectural and urban setting and examines trends between the late Mauretanian period and Late Antiquity, or the mid first century BC to the sixth century AD, though most of what is examined dates to the first to third centuries AD. What the varied range of materials gathered here shows is a blending of pre-Roman traditions, including the Punic and the Hellenistic, with pan-Mediterranean Roman models, alongside a fair degree of local flair; connections to Rome but also neighbouring provinces are on display, as well as a certain flexibility of interpretation and willingness to experiment with the decorative canon.

The volume is divided into seven analytical chapters (from 2–8) considering previous architectural studies of the region, the province's history, the four case study sites, and a final discussion drawing all of the case studies together and examining them in comparison to other areas of the Roman world; these are then followed by four catalogue chapters (from 9–13), divided by site. The catalogue around which Mugnai constructs his typology comprises capitals and bases, since, as he puts it, 'these are the most diagnostic architectural elements' (27); other elements were recorded and are discussed but not catalogued. It might have been nice to hear more about other architectural ornament but this is already a substantial contribution and a limit had to be drawn somewhere.

Chapters 2 and 3 set the background for the rest of the study. The second provides a thorough and clear assessment of the history of the Mauretania Tingitana from the era of the Phoenician colonies through to the Vandal period. The first offers a summary of archaeological work in Morocco from 1721 – when Windus and Boyde first recorded the remains of Volubilis – to the present day. Mugnai neatly analyses the positive but also negative outcomes of this work, notably the general lack of stratigraphic excavation prior the middle of the 20th century and the patchy publication record; all of these issues make dating many of the structures examined in this volume difficult. General ignorance or neglect of the richness of the Roman architecture of the region is also flagged up. It is quite extraordinary, as he notes, that there are roughly 500 unpublished capitals from Volubilis, when one

considers that major studies of early Roman architecture at Lepcis Magna and at Caesarea have drawn on far smaller datasets.

Mugnai's first case study is Volubilis (Chapter 4), where he focuses on four areas: the forum; the Capitolium; the Arch of Caracalla and the *decumanus* portico; and the Palace of Gordian. The first of these, the forum and its surrounding structures, acquired its final form in the Severan period and so the bulk of its architecture dates to then. A single Punic-Hellenistic Ionic capital and six pseudo-Corinthian capitals of the first century AD offer some insight into the earlier phases of the complex. The richest remaining architecture comes from the basilica, which is generally thought to be Severan. Ten capitals from this building are documented in the catalogue here. These comprise schematic versions of the Romano-Carthaginian type that is common across North Africa, but in one case Mugnai notes specifically Volubilitan features (rhomboids under the corners of the abacus) that are unique to the site and appear in other buildings. It is on the observation of such tiny details that Mugnai's key thesis is based. In the Capitolium, dedicated in AD 217, he notes similarly distinctive motifs. The capitals of the portico of the Capitolium shows a remarkable range of additional features, which are neither Punic nor Hellenistic, since they find no parallels elsewhere, but are rather what Mugnai calls 'a specific characteristic – a factory mark – of the products executed by the local stonemasons' (91). These 'factory marks', however, show a degree of independence, a topic that is returned to later in the chapter. Multiple groups of sculptors worked alongside each other on most of the major building projects and engaged both to greater and lesser extent with official Roman models. Pre-Roman techniques, such as the handling of acanthus leaves, persisted but were not slavishly replicated.

Some of these same observations can be applied to Banasa (Chapter 5). Here, the striking pseudo-lotus capitals from the Temple with Seven Cellae show yet again a local architectural mode of display that 'had nothing to do with the official art of the Empire' (116). Egyptianizing influences are in fact found throughout Banasa, some of which presumably entered local traditions in the pre-Roman period. But Mugnai is also able to identify Volubilitan styles, attesting to a regional traffic in both products but also probably craftspeople. Strikingly Egyptian in style is also the gorge cornice of Temple A at Sala (Chapter 6), an element that is widely attested across North Africa from the first century BC and into the Augustan period. Pseudo-lotus capitals are found here too. Stonemasons at the site also had access to imported stones, including Kozak Dağ granite and Prokonnesian marble from Asia Minor; more imports have been identified here than anywhere else in the provinces. Furthermore, against the varied architectural character of most buildings in the province, the Capitolium at Sala stands out as relatively homogenous, its capitals largely following the Romano-Carthaginian form. Sala appears in many ways more outward-looking than the other centres. However, external and Volubilitan influences come together in the mixed capitals of the arch with three bays, on which at

least two ateliers must have worked. Mugnai's final case study, Lixus (Chapter 7), provides much more limited evidence and no Corinthian capitals, though imported marbles are again attested.

In his discussion chapter (8), Mugnai characterises architectural ornament in Mauretania Tingitana as falling into three categories: influenced by pre-Roman traditions; Roman 'official-style' art (a slightly awkward term that could have been examined more); and local-style decoration. Overlap between these categories is clearly stressed, however. Very little survives of pre-Roman architecture, in practice. There is a sense here of 'eclecticism', a term Mugnai is prepared to use both for the architecture and society of the region. Some useful broader points come out of Mugnai's discussion. On the marble trade, the evidence from the province shows that certain coastal centres, notably Sala, were able to engage in the wider Mediterranean decorative stone trade; but little or none of this material entered the interior, a pattern attested, though rarely so starkly, elsewhere. Instead of importing architectural forms, Volubilis developed its own, large-scale and vibrant carving scene. These carvers, and their colleagues in other centres, modified and in some case schematised the more widespread Romano-Carthaginian style but they also developed wholly innovative designs, many based on what Mugnai calls reworked Hellenistic models. Some of the most widely

accepted design principles, for the Corinthian order, were simply not applied in these designs. Volubilis was a hub of this activity, especially from the second century AD, but carvers in the other cities of the region would seem to have been singing from the same hymn sheet. A final important point made by Mugnai concerns patronage: the commissioners who paid for the buildings he examines were evidently happy with the eclectic result of their efforts; groups of carvers had a remarkable degree of freedom and homogeneity was rarely achieved or apparently desired within a single building.

Mugnai's study, therefore, sheds crucial new light not just on the architecture of this neglected province but also provides vital datasets for discussions of local and regional identity, provincial engagement with metropolitan models, architectural patronage, stone-carving and building site practices, and the development of regional architectural and economic connections. The volume itself, the first in this new series, is beautifully put together; the English is flawless and it is well illustrated throughout. For it to appear in this state just two years after it was submitted as a PhD thesis is remarkable. This book will be a key resource for anyone working on Mauretania Tingitana and indeed Roman architectural ornament in the provinces more generally.

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