

Moussa, F. K. 2007. Book Review of David L. Stone and Lea M. Stirling (eds). 2007. *Mortuary Landscapes Of North Africa*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. ISBN 978-0-8020-9083-6, pp. xii + 249, 43 figures, 3 tables, index. Price: £48.00. In *Libyan Studies* 38, pp. 157-159.

[P157] This volume comprises a collection of papers arising out of a colloquium in San Diego in 2001, organised by the Archaeological Institute of America, entitled ‘Mortuary Traditions of North Africa’. It is the first book to consider North African ancient mortuary practices in a landscape context, from the late prehistoric (c. 700 BC) to the Byzantine period (c. AD 700).

Chapter one, cowritten by the volume editors David Stone and Lea Stirling, introduces the independent developments of landscape and cemetery archaeology in North Africa since the colonial era. Although, as the authors suitably note, ‘The placement of cemeteries is one of the most conspicuous human acts’ (p. 12), landscape and cemetery archaeology in North Africa have not usually been studied together. Similarly, despite 3,000 years of successive colonisations from Europe and the East in North Africa, research arising out of North Africa has rarely been used to inform knowledge on Eastern and Mediterranean civilisations. Through this volume, the authors hope to address these issues.

Stone and Stirling’s synthesis of the volume contributions identifies five emergent themes: ‘landscapes of change’ through influences from the East (Phoenicians, Greeks and Egyptians), incorporation into the Roman Empire, and the spread of Christianity; ‘landscapes of continuity’ through the permanence of indigenous (Berber) funerary practices; ‘landscapes of identity’ arising out of the negotiations between change and continuity; ‘landscapes of community’ where the layout of cemeteries delineate and memorialise communities both within and between divergent cultural groups; and ‘landscapes of the sacred’, shaped through acts associated with remembering and consulting the dead. In Chapter two, Habib Ben Younes makes a comparative analysis between the form and decoration of pre-Roman rock-cut tombs known as haouanet, ‘Phoenicio-Punic’ shaft-tombs found mainly in the coastal regions (including Carthage), and ‘Punic’ shaft-tombs found broadly in the Sahel region of central eastern Tunisia. Drawing largely from his previous work, the author suggests more similarities can be observed between Punic shaft-tombs and haouanet. Since a considerable geographical distance separates these tomb types, such similarities, according to the author, cannot have arisen out of direct reciprocal influences, but rather from a common Libyan origin. Questions concerning the processes of intercultural exchange between different communities in North Africa, and the extent of local non-Phoenician influences during this period, for Ben Younes, however remain unresolved.

David Stone, in Chapter three, observes how much previous scholarship on rock-cut haouanet has been preoccupied with funerary style and decoration in relation to other areas of the Mediterranean, such as prehistoric Sicily, Etruria and Minoan Crete. He suggests an interdisciplinary view of the conspicuous placement of haouanet in the context of the territorial expansion of Carthage and Numidian States reveals a correlation with the rise of indigenous ‘corporate descent groups’. Through a case-study of two painted haouanet cemeteries, Stone attempts to demonstrate how dominant decorative elements should not simply be understood as the passive adoption of Punic or Etruscan iconographic grammars. Instead, through embodying prevalent concerns with power, violence and aspirations to wealth and prestige during this period of transition, the tomb paintings, for Stone, represent a reinterpretation of the use and meaning of already established Punic and Mediterranean motifs.

In Chapter four, Jennifer Moore gives a preliminary survey of tower and temple mausolea in Africa Proconsularis from pre-Roman examples of the third to second centuries BC to a cohesive ‘mausoleum culture’ in the second to third centuries AD. She concludes that, while mausolea may occupy highly visible and accessible locations in the landscape, the content and positioning of epitaphs and lack of evidence for ritual use, suggest they were not necessarily centres of community or ritual. Instead, they emerge as displays of the wealth and status of their owners, perhaps even as boundary or territory markers. The development of the ‘mausoleum culture’ then is better understood

as the continuation of a pre-Roman elitist tradition into a period of increased prosperity, and not, as was formerly maintained, belonging to individuals who actively sought 'Romanisation'.

[158] In Chapter five, Lea Stirling surveys the emergence of barrel-shaped cupula at Roman cemeteries in North Africa during the second and third centuries AD. These burial markers, which encase or cover the deceased, have previously been compared, to determine their foreign or indigenous origins, often with cupulae known in Spain, Italy and Sicily. Rejecting these approaches as unsatisfactory explanations for understanding their form, Stirling considers the function of the cupula in the context of the transition from cremation to inhumation during this period, and their visual role in the landscape. The author notes an interesting relationship between markers used for in situ cremations, such as cippi, and the cupula as a similar form of marker adapted (e.g. lengthened) to also cover inhumations. This suggestion is particularly convincing when 'hybrid' tomb markers, combining elements of both cippi and cupula, are taken into account.

David Mattingly, in Chapter six, introduces the diverse repertoire of Garamantian burial practices in the Fazzan region of the Libyan Sahara from 500 BC to AD 500. Burial typologies range from simple cairns to mud-brick pyramid or obelisk tombs through to ashlar masonry structures resembling mausolea, while burial furniture include stelae and offering tables. Burials are distributed in the landscape as part of earlier lower density burial 'zones' or later nucleated escarpment cemeteries and monumental cemeteries. Although imported objects associated with the consumption of food and drink are present in tombs, the remainder of the assemblages and the methods of interment, reflect Saharan traditions. Mattingly asserts that, while traditions from other populations have clearly been assimilated, Garamantian culture itself probably formed in the Fazzan region. In this context, echoes of Garamantian funerary traditions in some of Roman Africa may be viewed as typically African traits.

In Chapter seven, Anna Leone provides an analysis of the distribution and typology of isolated urban burials (not including those found in the precincts of urban churches) at several North African urban centres from the fourth to seventh centuries AD. While these isolated burials often appear random, Leone's chronological survey suggests that trends can be identified at various urban centres from late antiquity into the Vandal and Byzantine periods. Tombs usually cluster around abandoned buildings, close to churches, or – less frequently – close to domestic dwellings. These shifts reflect changing needs in the use of space, sometimes accompanying the planned deconstruction and reordering of particular urban zones.

In the final chapter, Michael MacKinnon surveys previous studies of human remains from Punic, Roman, Vandal and Byzantine contexts in the pre-Saharan region from Cyrenaica (eastern Libya) to Mauretania (eastern Algeria). Consolidating relatively meagre data from the unsystematic excavations in the late nineteenth century through to more substantial recent treatments of skeletal remains, MacKinnon makes – as far as is possible – some general observations. Interesting patterns emerge particularly concerning orientation of burials, sex ratios and pathological conditions, while inconsistencies in age distribution provide an interesting exception. Children and infants appear under-represented at Punic cemeteries, suggesting that infants may have been buried elsewhere such as the so-called 'Tophet' cemeteries. Elucidating how, from new methods of analysis, we may glean information about diet, demographics and pathology, MacKinnon makes a convincing case for the role of human osteology in 'peopling' the mortuary landscapes of North Africa.

As perhaps the most significant volume on North African mortuary practices since Pol Trousset's volume in 1995, this book should make essential reading for anyone interested in ancient North Africa and the Mediterranean and mortuary archaeology. Not ignoring the ongoing difficulties with access to sites and collections in some areas, Tunisian sites are notably dominant in this volume, perhaps at the expense of including other significant Libyan, Egyptian, Algerian, Moroccan, even Mauritanian, mortuary landscapes. Furthermore, the collection sometimes struggles to sustain a landscape focus. Nevertheless, recognition of the diverse relationships between indigenous and migrant populations with the North African landscapes, particularly through their mortuary habits, is what supports the emergent core theme of this book; that is, the integrity of indigenous culture in North Africa through this period. Viewing burials as potential boundary and territory markers emerges as a keystone in tying together the dominant themes of local identity, colonial expansion and the mortuary landscape. In doing so, however, the volume is perhaps also hampered with a historical materialist bias. Therefore, while some contributors clearly identify active African traditions, others

replace the traditional view of the indigenous populations as overly passive, with a view of them as overly materialistic and reactive. My question is this: [159] what of the creative and spiritual faculties humans typically employ for dealing with death? Whatever your theoretical persuasion this book is clearly ground-breaking. Not just because it integrates mortuary and landscape approaches, but because it makes significant new contributions to the ongoing discourse on identity and acculturation in North African antiquity.

#### References

Trousset, P. (ed.) 1995. *L'Afrique du nord antique et médiévale: monuments funéraires, institutions autochtones*. Actes du VIe colloque international sur l'histoire et l'archéologie de l'Afrique du nord, Paris.

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