

**MUGNAI, NICCOLO; NIKOLAUS, JULIA; RAY, NICHOLAS. DE AFRICA ROMAQUE: MERGING CULTURES ACROSS NORTH AFRICA. LEICESTER: THE SOCIETY FOR LIBYAN STUDIES, 2016.**

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**keywords**

Romanization. North Africa; Niccolo Mugnai; Julia Nikolaus; Nicholas Ray.

The intention of the present review is to reflect about the Roman domination in the North of Africa during the Roman empire as well as to try to understand how the different existing social groups reacted to the invasion. For this purpose, I will be reviewing *De Africa Romanque: Merging Cultures Across North Africa*. This work brings to light the debate about forms, very little studied, of the Roman interaction with the local population, a subject recently revisited by different researchers.

According to what we can observe, *De Africa Romanque*, by Niccolo Mugnai, Julia Nikolaus and Nicholas Ray, derives from the recent perspectives of the romanization concept, according to which, even though various organized societies existed, there has been very little research about the survival of local cultures.

The researchers examined deeply the various issues concerning the local traditions and the way of their survival, their alteration and revival under Roman domination, and they traced the role of the pre-Roman heritage in this long process, understanding the local needs in the fields of architecture, urbanism, art, economy and agriculture.

For this purpose, Mugnai organized the book with a general introduction, five thematic chapters and a conclusion. In these thematic chapters, the author inserts 3 to 5 articles, by 18 different authors. Each author writes a text, mentioning at the end his bibliography, to enlighten the understanding of the chapter, thus creating the tools for further research and a thorough proof of his own arguments.

**The North of Africa before Rome: indigenous traditions and their legacy** is the title of the first chapter. It contains three articles examining the local

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contributions to the development of the north-African societies, before they were found by the Romans.

The first article questions the approach of the classical texts, reinforced during the colonial era, according to which the “indigenous” people were passive receivers of the settlers’ traditions, Phoenicians, Greeks or even Romans, and offers new information for a re-evaluation. The author stresses also that, since the first cities became successful Roman cities, with monumental architecture and mosaics, there shouldn’t be any further soil drillings.

The second article deals with the evidence of commerce routes between settlements in East Sahara to the valley of Nile, as well as to the Mediterranean, during the Bronze Era. It examines the long-distance travels and the routes that were, or not, used for these travels. This text brings the recent years discoveries, which should guide the researchers in their investigation about the connections of the Sub-Saharan Africa with the Mediterranean Coast.

The third article of this chapter brings information about the three hundred graves of the first millennium B.C., as well as the debate about the creation of a proto-state in the north of Africa. The article proposes also a model of study giving a key for the understanding of the complexity of the emerging society in north Africa in that period.

**Planning, development and transformation of the urban landscape in north Africa** is the subject of the second chapter. It is also structured in three articles with information about the architectonic and urban transformation of the cities. It shows the influence of the local population during the Hellenistic, Roman and Late Antiquity periods.

The first article deals with the researches of the *Opus Quadratum* and the *Opus Africanum*, discussing the architectural techniques of the North of Africa between the second century B.C. and the beginning of the Imperial period. It studies the way the traditions, Hellenistic and Roman, influenced the previous ones, like, for example, the one of the Phoenicians.

The second article studies the layout and the urban organization of the city of Dionisias, a Hellenistic city in the province of Fayum. The author studies this Greek octagonal city showing that it contains Egyptian traditions, thus proving the native influence on the settler’s culture.

The last article of this chapter informs about the residential and public areas in Cirene during the Late Antiquity. It evaluates the evolution and transformation of the city between the Imperial period and the Late Antiquity, showing the change of public spaces into residential ones, using for this analysis the

*Agora and the Gymnasium*, between the second half of the III A.C. century and the seventh century.

The third chapter, titled **Perception and Representation of the Power, of Ethnic Cultural Identities**, explores the perception we can have through the old texts and other sources and shows how the north of Africa was conceived by the Romans, and their interaction with the Berbers. It also discusses the Christian and non-Christian identity with the Roman legacy.

The first article of this chapter deals with the literary and archeological evidences, especially the distribution of coins and the ceramic, demonstrating this way the Roman imperialism in the North Africa, in Cartago, between 146 B.C. and 46 A.C.

The second article approaches Cornelius Balbus's triumph, through the text of Pliny the Elder, in order to understand the Roman geographic conception. It proves that there was a confusion about the representation of the conquered regions and populations, most of it trying only to show the importance and the dimension of the Roman conquest.

The last article deals with the religious and ethnic identity in Tipasa during the Late Antiquity, through studies of saints' biographies.

The fourth chapter, titled **Economies of the North of Africa: production, technology and commerce**, approaches the importance of the local production and the way it has been minimized by the Roman settler, whose importance of production was exalted.

The first article of this chapter talks about the olive oil production of Dionisias and shows the technological changes occurred after the Roman conquest, according to new archeological researches. It shows the existence of an Egyptian traditional material for culture and its continuation with new devices imported by the Romans.

The second article analyses the amphoras' workshops of Zitha, in the Tunisian Tripolitania, and, through its production, he identifies this kind of amphoras in all the Mediterranean area.

The third article deals with the construction material imported in the North of Africa, such as bricks and stones, and the role of the return cargo, like the ballasts of a boat. This material for construction and edification in general helps understanding its need for the construction of Roman buildings like those in the capital.

The last chapter is titled **creating a lasting impression: Architectonic and decorative motives**, and deals with the local population identity perceived in the art and architecture and the mutual influence between Romans and local population.

The first article presents the individual by analyzing the graveyards of Cirene. He detects a great change in the funerary practice, when he examines the busts and figures of funerary goddesses. It shows that even in the figures of Roman style there is a lasting influence of the centenary regional funerary practice.

The second article targets the architectonic variations and the stone sculpted decorations, in order to examine the decorative styles, especially the representations of agriculture. This way, the author shows that there is a very clear division between the local elite and the people, due to the location of the mausoleum. It is easy to see the links with the ancestral culture which persist through the preferential style used.

The third article deals with the architectonic decoration of the Lounge and its Punic and Hellenistic legacy in the Tingitan Roman Mauritania. The article presents the results of a research in the Lounge and informs about the pre-Roman legacy in the architectonic elements, like Egyptian cornices and Greek Ionic capitals. The author stresses the existence of a mixture of official art or other creations of architectonic elements, which are not found elsewhere.

The fourth article gives information about the return to Hellenistic traditions in architecture and decoration after the III A.C. century, due to the Roman decline, through documental analysis of various capitals in the whole North of Africa.

The last article tries to understand the functions and use of the imperial statues in the urban milieu, once they had been modified; it also analyses the relation between the cult for the emperor and the modification of the public spaces during the IV A.C. century.

The conclusion of the book shows that, for a long time, the process of romanization used studies with the imperialistic logic, and this book opens new ways for research with the intent to further develop our knowledge of the North of Africa.

My intent in this review is also to further develop the interest of the reader about the studies of the North of Africa. According to R. Bruce Hitchner "if there is a common denominator to all the works, it is your disposition in challenging the conventional knowledge (...) The North of Africa was not isolated; its history shows that the cultures of the Mediterranean and the Middle East were joint to the native in order to produce a distinct cultural space, multifaceted and complex, a historical model of commitment which persists unaltered to our days" (Hitchner, 2016: 254.