

Africa 500-1000. Introduction

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We tend to perceive and emphasize the transition from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages, especially in North Africa, through ruptures and changes. This collection of papers highlights, alongside the major changes and transformations that affected the entire Mediterranean region, longer-term processes and developments in North Africa between AD 500 and 1000. In this time frame, the region is shaped by the Vandal, Byzantine and Arab conquests, religious tensions, urban, rural and economic changes, which finally resulted in the integration of the Maghreb into the Islamic world. This introduction will attempt to place the individual contributions in larger contexts and to identify current desiderata in research

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Late antique North Africa¹ has been the subject of a steadily increasing amount of research in recent decades.² The Vandal realm has now been relatively well covered, whereas the Byzantine and Early Arabian periods have only received comparably little attention in recent years and appear to be a “forgotten transition”.³ At the same time, research focused on the core regions of Africa Proconsularis and Byzacena. Whereas regions such as Cyrenaica and Tripolitania have been in the focus of research since the second half of the 20th century, other parts of the late antique Maghreb, especially the Mauritanian provinces, have been studied much less in recent decades. In the period between AD 500 and 1000, three phases

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- 1 Ancient geographical terminology allotted what we nowadays define as North Africa or Mediterranean Africa in a Western and an Eastern part: *Libye* (Λιβύη)/Libya and Egypt. The roughly 1,000 kilometers of desert separating the tiny coastal belt of Tripolitania from the Cyrenaica marked a frontier line in between these zones. During the Punic Wars (264-146 BCE), the Latin term *Africa* appeared in Roman politics and literature, referring to the province established after 146 BCE. Africa Proconsularis roughly comprised the territory of present-day Tunisia, the northeast of Algeria, and the coast of western Libya (Tripolitania) along the Gulf of Sirte. Furthermore, the Roman organization west of the Proconsularis comprised Numidia and the Mauretanian provinces. The Arabs basically continued using these divisions. While the concept of the Maghreb (al-Maghrib al-Kabir) embraced the Atlas Mountains and the coastal plains of modern Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya (continuing the ancient concept of separating Egypt from the western regions), Ifriqiya referred to modern Tunisia and eastern Algeria as well as Tripolitania. Thus, Ifriqiya basically comprised the territories of the former Roman province of Africa.
- 2 See now ed. Hitchner, *North Africa in Antiquity*.
- 3 Stevens and Conant, Introduction, 9.

of conquest took place that shaped the political, cultural, and social structures and societies in North Africa in different but lasting ways. Of the Vandal, Byzantine and Arab conquests, the latter probably had the most far-reaching influence with the spread of Islam and the integration of the region into the Arab world. In this collection, we would like to draw attention to what we believe are still desiderata for North African history and archaeology between AD 500 and 1000.

The essays in this collection were originally presented at the conference *Africa 500-1000. New Perspectives for historical and archaeological research*, 14-16 November 2018 in Tübingen. This interdisciplinary collection adapts a *longue durée* perspective on main transitions and transformations, such as external and internal characteristics and connections of North Africa to the Mediterranean and trans-Saharan world. This introduction is intended to set the individual contributions of the volume in their respective broader historical and archaeological frameworks. One focus of this publication is the period of transition from Byzantine Africa to early Islamic Ifrīqiya during the 7th and 8th centuries. Two recent conference publications dealt exclusively with this period.⁴

As Jonathan P. Conant demonstrated, late Roman and earliest medieval written sources reflect two perspectives: theological and military conflicts, religious changes and confessional controversy left their mark from the late Roman period to the Islamic age. Apart from the major conquests, continuous uprisings and conflicts between the Vandals, Byzantines, Berber tribal coalitions, the provincial population, and Arab ghazis shaped late antique North Africa. Archaeological data appears vital for writing a satisfactory history of late Byzantine and Early Islamic North Africa.⁵ Recent research shows continuity concerning urban and social life. Not every urban or rural site was simply abandoned. What we see is a complex and multilayered process of transition.⁶ The increasing need for security among urban and rural residents culminated in the construction of fortifications throughout North Africa beginning in the 6th century.⁷ In addition to the Byzantine fortresses and later the Arab *ribāts*, fortified farms and homesteads, as well as fortified settlements, which are summarized under the umbrella term *qsur*, were increasingly built in the hinterland. This process of fortification continued in some regions until the Arab period.⁸

Geographical Overview

North of the African deserts, three areas (apart from Egypt with the Nile), had a regular supply of water and therefore could support settled populations as well as produce enough crops, barley, oil, and other products for export: Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and North-West Africa

4 One conference held at Dumbarton Oaks in 2012 had a specific historical approach. *North Africa under Byzantium and Early Islam* by Susan T. Stevens and Conathan P. Conant was published in 2016. The conference held in Rome in 2013, organized by Anna Leone, Ralf Bockmann and Philipp von Rummel, had a distinctive archaeological approach. *Africa – Ifrīqiya. Continuity and Change in North Africa from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic Age* was published 2020.

5 Conant, *Forgotten transition*, 11; detailed in Fenwick, *Early Islamic North Africa*.

6 Wickham, *Africa – Ifrīqiya conclusions*, 317.

7 Merrills, *Byzantine Period*, 400-401.

8 Mattingly *et al.*, *Fortified Farms*, 167-188; Stevens and Conant, *Introduction*, 9.

north of the Atlas Mountains.⁹ Sallust and other authors provided the legend of the *Philaeni* brothers from Carthage, creating a border by literary means. According to Sallust, when Carthage and the Greek cities in the Pentapolis tried to agree on a border in Libya, two pairs of athletes set out from Carthage and Cyrene on the same day, each pair running towards the other city. When the runners met, the Carthaginian pair had covered more ground. Accused of cheating by the Greeks, the Carthaginians swore solemnly that they had followed all rules and eventually consented to be buried alive at the meeting point. This sacrifice was meant to underline their rightful claim. Thereafter, the territory between that spot and Carthage would become part of the Carthaginian domain. The border was marked by two pillars labeled the “Altars of the Philaeni”, Φιλαίωνων Βωμοί.¹⁰

The spot described by Sallust was approximately halfway between modern Ra's Lanuf and El Agheila. In 1937, the Italian colonial government erected a modern *Arae Philaenorum* some 30 kilometers from this place at the Libyan Coastal Highway (Via Balbia) to commemorate the Roman past of the new Libyan colony. In 1973, the revolutionary leader Muammar al Gaddafi, who considered the landmark a sign of the Italian domination of Libya, ordered the arch to be destroyed to stress the unity of modern Libya, which today again is separated into Western Tripolitania and Eastern Cyrenaica.¹¹

The tiny coastal belt of Tripolitania is separated from Cyrenaica by about 1,000 kilometers of desert, but from its ancient centers Oea (Tripoli), Sabratha and Leptis Magna to the Gulf of Gabès, a traveler had to manage only 300 kilometers of waterless areas. A wide coastal plain, the Gefara, stretches just west of Leptis to the mainland opposite Meninx (Djerba). The frontier at the *Arae Philaenorum* described above marks off the areas we will deal with, the large region of northwestern Africa that includes Tripolitania, the Roman provinces of Africa Proconsularis, and the two kingdoms Mauretaniae and Numidia.

The Arab concept of the Maghreb (al-Maghrib al-Kabir) embraces the Atlas Mountains and the coastal plains of modern Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. The Atlas Mountain range comprises four general regions: the Middle Atlas, High Atlas and Anti-Atlas in modern-day Morocco; the Saharan Atlas in Algeria, marking the northern edge of the great desert; the Tell Atlas in Algeria and Tunisia; and finally, the Aurès Mountains.¹² From the Mediterranean Sea to the Sahara, the cultivated land in Roman times stretched on average 300 kilometers deep. The 2,600 kilometers of watered plains that ran from the Atlantic Ocean to the *Arae Philaenorum* became one of the most important agricultural landscapes of the Roman Empire. Modern Morocco (Mauretania Tingitana with its capital Tingis/Tanger), northern Algeria (Mauretania Caesariensis with its capital Caesarea; later, under Septimius Severus, Numidia became a province of its own) and Tunisia (Africa Proconsularis) share a Roman past with parts of Europe and the Middle East.¹³

9 Polybius, *Histories* 3, 39, 2; 10, 40, 7, ed. and trans. Paton, vol. 2, 90-91; Sallust, *De bello Iugurthino* 19, 3, ed. and trans. Rolfe, 176; cf. Huß, Pentapolis, 523; cf. Steinacher, When not in Rome, 440-442.

10 Sallust, *De bello Iugurthino* 79, ed. and trans. Rolfe, 298-300: *Carthaginienses in eo loco Philaenis fratribus aras consecravere* [...]; cf. Lancel, *Carthage*, 92-94; Paul, *Historical Commentary*, 198-200.

11 Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity*, 54-58; the background of Italian colonial archaeology in Libya: Altekamp, Italian colonial archaeology, 55-72; Munzi, Italian archaeology; Abitino, Le are dei Fileni.

12 See Toral in this collection.

13 Hobson, *North African Boom*, 29-32; Shaw, *Environment and Society*; Lepelley and Lancel, *Africa*, 182-206, cf. the maps 189 and 191; Huß, *Afrika 1. Begriffsgeschichte*, 3. Römische Provinz; Alföldi, *Geschichte*, 43-44; Bouchenaki, *Numidie*, 75-79; Fentress, *Numidia and the Roman Army*, 6-17.



Figure 1: Map of North Africa between AD 500 and 1000 (© Philipp Margreiter)

Colonial and post-Colonial Research Fields and Problems

Research on the named areas is overshadowed by several problematic backgrounds: one of the complicating factors is the colonial past of Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. In these countries, as well as in France, 19th- and 20th-century political issues were often projected back into antiquity by scholars. Anticolonial circles asserted a low level of “Romanization” and advocated a strong local Berber identity. French as well as Italian intellectuals, however, tended to create a master narrative using the Roman past of North Africa to claim it as a part of ancient Europe. Both French and Italians in North Africa presented themselves as the direct and natural successors of the Romans.¹⁴

The “otherness” of North Africa (in terms of the Arabs and Berbers, with their Islamic culture and tribal and nomadic societies) was countered by the conscious association of the colonizer with the Roman presence. It was comforting for the French and Italian armies on campaign in the remote desert and mountain margins to find traces of the earlier penetration of the Roman legions into the same spaces.¹⁵

Roughly speaking, the Arab history of the regions was pictured as a decline, while the Roman past appeared as a period of prosperous and rightful rule that had now been re-established by the French colonial masters.¹⁶

14 Fenfress, *Romanizing the Berbers*; Mattingly, *Being Roman*; Mattingly, *Africa: A landscape of opportunity*; MacMullen, *Romanization*, 30-50; Key and Terrenato, *Italy and the West*; overview on ‘Romanization’ in Africa: Lepelley, *L’Afrique*; discussion of research between 1975 and 1995: Mattingly and Hitchner, *Roman Africa*; Steinacher, *When not in Rome*, 442-445.

15 Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity*, 55; cf. Fenwick, *North Africa (history of archaeology)*, 512-513. After 1830 (French) archaeological research was part of an imperialist discourse justifying colonization by stressing the “otherness” of Africans. See the contribution of Bonnie Effros in this collection. Cf. Fenwick, *Archaeology and the search*; Lorcin, *Rome and France in Africa*.

16 Cf. Mattingly, *Vulgar and weak “Romanization”*.

Another problematic issue is the certain tendency to study the macro-region of North Africa as a singular unity. Upcoming investigations should aim to create a regional perspective. In his recently-published study on Numidia in the early Roman period, Stefan Ardeleanu highlighted the heterogeneity of the evidence within the region. Previous research with its holistic approaches did not cover these nuances.¹⁷

The different regions are immensely varied in their set-ups. Africa Proconsularis was one of the most highly urbanized regions in the Imperium Romanum, while Numidia and Tripolitania had, in addition to urban agglomerations, large rural hinterland areas. Early intensive surveys and non-stratigraphic excavations in the French and Italian colonial era produced an enormous number of archaeological sites but also the loss of large amounts of information. In contrast to the focus on the pre-Roman to Byzantine periods, the archaeology of the early Islamic period has attracted more attention in the last fifteen years.¹⁸

The concept of a “Romanized” belt of cities at the sea and tough resistance by local Berber tribes (labeled *Mauri* by the Romans) had become generally accepted since René Cagnat’s (1852-1937) study on the Roman occupation first published in 1892.¹⁹ In 1976, the French scholar Marcel Bénabou published his book *La Résistance africaine à la romanisation* and provided a concept of indigenous cultural endurance. It became “the most sophisticated exponent of the resistance thesis”.²⁰ In Bénabou’s view, Africans had their own religious beliefs, and maintained their Punic or Libyan/African languages and personal names. Romano-Africans demonstrated their “Africanness”. The controversies surrounding Bénabou’s early post-colonial ideas have been intense.²¹

Bonnie Effros’ contribution to this collection, *A New Age of Saint Augustine? Antoine-Adolphe Dupuch, François Bourgade, and the Christians of North Africa (1838-1858)*, illustrates the background of early archaeological activity at the beginning of the colonial age in North Africa. Antoine-Louis-Adolphe Dupuch (1800-1856) served as the first Bishop of Algiers in the newly conquered French colony. His contemporary François Bourgade (1806-1866), who served as a priest in both Algiers and Tunis, was a French missionary and philosopher. Both men were convinced that physical evidence of the late antique Christian past might lay a powerful historical foundation for religiosity in French North Africa. Arriving in the 1830s, Dupuch and Bourgade labored under significantly different circumstances in North Africa from those enjoyed by their successors Charles Martial Allemand Lavignerie

17 Ardeleanu, *Numidia Romana?*.

18 Leone *et al.*, *Africa – Ifriqiya Introduction*, 1; Greenhalgh, *Colonial Destruction*; Effros, *Incidental Archaeologists*.

19 Cagnat, *L’armée romaine d’Afrique*.

20 Mattingly, *From one Colonialism to another*, 58-59.

21 Bénabou, *La résistance africaine*. Critical comments on Bénabou’s thesis: Leveau, *La situation coloniale de l’Afrique romaine*; Fentress, *Numidia and the Roman Army* and Whittaker, *Land and Labour in North Africa* (variation of resistance comparable to other provinces of the Empire); responses: Bénabou, *Les Romains ont-ils conquis l’Afrique?* and Bénabou, *L’Afrique et la culture romaine* as well as Bénabou, *Tacfarinas*. Thébert, *Romanisation et déromanisation en Afrique* criticized Bénabou’s focus on ethnic groups and pleaded for an analysis of social formation in North Africa. Fentress, *Romanizing the Berbers*, 4: “This strictly Marxist approach left culture out of the picture, thereby oversimplifying it.” Elizabeth Fentress follows Thébert’s recommendations and develops an outline of the social preconditions for the “Romanization”, avoiding a simple opposition between the Numidian/Berber peoples and the Punic/later Roman settlers to provide a basis for an analysis including cultural patterns.

(1825-1892), the archbishop of Carthage and Algiers, and the White Father Paul-Albert Delattre (d. 1932). During military conflicts, these men were seeking to convert local Muslims, as well as mediating between Muslim and French military authorities. They also embarked on a quest for Christian remains, actions that transpired during brutal colonial repression of the indigenous population. These ancient monuments and artifacts became the mainstay of a colonialist narrative of the rebirth of Christianity in the lands made famous nearly one and a half millennia earlier by Saint Augustine of Hippo.

North Africa between Vandal and Arab Rule

As mentioned earlier, the Vandal period (AD 429-534) has been scrutinized in recent decades in several monographs, congress publications, essays, and exhibition catalogues.²² The subsequent Byzantine conquests have also been extensively studied through numerous publications on the political, military, and cultural history of the Justinianic age, including Procopius of Caesarea as the most important author of the 6th century. Research on post-Justinianic North Africa is comparatively poor. Since Charles Diehl's *L'Afrique Byzantine* of 1896, no overall monographic study of Byzantine North Africa (AD 534-698/709) has been published, which thus represents one of the major desiderata of contemporary North African studies. The period of the exarchate of Africa has received little attention in recent years, due to the limited source base and the lack of basic archaeological research.

Andrew Merrills' *A Subaltern's view of Early Byzantine Africa? Reading Corippus as History* analyses a major source shedding light on the early Byzantine occupation of North Africa (c.533-551). Corippus' *Iohannis* is the last classical epic poem to be written in Latin. The poem has conventionally been viewed as an uncritical celebration of the imperial occupation, thanks to its classicizing imagery and the panegyric aspects of its celebration of recent military successes.²³ Andrew Merrills argues that this celebration was tempered with a more critical re-telling of the first fifteen years of the Byzantine occupation. This is presented in a metadiegetic flashback, in the voice of an African officer in the imperial army of occupation. Merrills suggests that the catalogue of disasters presented here – internecine warfare, social upheaval and plague – reflects the ambivalent attitude of contemporary Africans to the occupation itself.

Merrills' contribution touches on another desideratum, the post-Roman Berber regna in the 5th and 6th centuries, for which Procopius and Corippus are our only sources. Christian Courtois labeled them as "royaume berbères".²⁴ English scholars refer to them as "desert kingdoms".²⁵ These dominions were structurally heterogeneous entities that emerged at different times on the periphery of the Vandal Empire and were organized in post-Roman structures.²⁶ The study of the Berbers is also linked to the study of non-sedentary, nomadic or pastoralist population groups in North Africa. Nomads and pastoralists play a far greater

22 Steinacher, *Vandalen*; Merrills and Miles, *Vandals*; Modéran and Perrin, *Vandales*; Roberto, *Il secolo dei Vandali*; Castritius, *Die Vandalen*; Vössing, *Vandalen*; Conant, *Staying Roman*; cf. now the precise overview from Conant, *Vandals*, 75-90.

23 Merrills, *Byzantine Period*, 402.

24 Courtois, *Vandales*, 325-352.

25 Brett and Fentress, *Berbers*, 77-79.

26 Steinacher, *Vandalen*, 259-267; Faure, *The Army*, 168; Merrills, *Mauri*; Syrbe, *Civitates Nordafrika*, 61-62.

role in the North African political and economic system than previously assumed. Historical as well as ethnological studies showed that these economical systems often functioned only as a complement to a complex state and sedentary population, since a permanent exchange of trade goods between mobile and settled populations is necessary.²⁷ Also drift routes guaranteed by the state for seasonal migrations were in the interest of both parties. During the Roman imperial period, the empire established the *praefectus gentis*, who guaranteed drift paths and grazing grounds to nomads, but also levied taxes and recruited auxiliary troops on behalf of the state.²⁸ This complex interaction could be jeopardized by any change of rule, such as the Vandal or Byzantine conquest, and endanger the livelihood of the nomads and pastoralists. Against this background, the military conflicts with the Berbers in the 6th-8th centuries must be reconsidered in current and future research.²⁹

In the 580s, the military and civilian administration of Africa finally merged, and Constantinople established the Exarchate of Carthage, which existed until the end of Byzantine rule. Under Emperor Maurice (582-602), the African exarchate encompassed nearly the territories that had formed Justinian's prefecture of the year 533.³⁰ After Egypt had been conquered by Arab armies in 641, they advanced into Cyrenaica a few years later and shortly afterwards into Byzacena. In 647, the Byzantine exarch Gregory tried to make himself emperor and moved his capital to Sufetula (Sbeitla) fighting the Arabs. It was not until around 670 that the Arabs became active again. Their commanders had founded Kairouan as an Islamic military camp in the Sahel, as the coasts were successfully defended by the Byzantines and the mountainous regions by the Berbers, sometimes even together. Carthage fell to the Arabs in 695.³¹ The charismatic Berber princess Kahena and her warriors from the Aurès put up fierce resistance but were defeated by the Umayyad Uqba ibn Nafi'. Even though the Arab conquest (AD 647-709) has been brought to the fore by the work of Walter Kaegi and has received focused attention in recent years, the transition from Byzantine to Arab rule remains an under-researched topic. The lack of Roman sources complicates the historical narrative of the late 6th and 7th centuries in many ways. Arabic sources that report on this period in turn date from much later centuries, which makes a closer critical examination of them no less important.

Cityscapes and Housing in Transition

North Africa's cityscapes have been a well-studied subject in recent decades and showed a long-term transformation from the classical Roman city to the early medieval Arab towns.³² The classical urban elements and public spaces began to change in the late 4th and beginning of the 5th century.³³ The religious impact on urban organization began in this century and ended in the 6th/7th century AD. In this period, the fora already lost or were in the process

27 Barth, *Nomads*, 9-10.

28 Steinacher, *Vandalen*, 265; Weiß, *praefectus gentis*, 101-116.

29 Steinacher, *Vandalen*, 260-262; Syrbe, *Nomaden Nordafrika*; Faure, *The Army*, 162-163.

30 Merrills, *Byzantine Period*, 392-394.

31 Merrills, *Byzantine Period*, 399-402.

32 For a broad overview of the transformation of late antique and early medieval urbanism in the West, see Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 591-692, on Africa in particular 635-644.

33 Dufton, *Fentress, African Urbanism*, 177.

of losing their original function. In contrast to the urban change, North Africa shows extensive economic prosperity within these cities in the 5th century. Church building took on monumental proportions in the 5th and 6th centuries in the North African provinces.³⁴ Thus, the decline of “classical” urban elements did not necessarily affect the prosperity of cities and their inhabitants. Production areas moved into the former public buildings of the forum, baths or theatres, while the trend towards the growth of rural settlements can be observed in the surrounding areas of the cities.³⁵ The transformation of urban life started in North Africa even before the Vandals. Private architecture was continuously used as before and survived, while theaters and amphitheatres were gradually abandoned. Public baths were variously repaired, but some also vacated. Pagan temples were closed in 398-399 by imperial decree and became areas for new occupation or simply provided building material. A new feature during the Vandal era is urban burials in abandoned areas and buildings.³⁶

The Byzantine conquest seems to have had a direct impact on urban architecture in the 6th century. City laws aimed at reorganizing public and private space. Public areas in particular were reclaimed by the state. Fortified complexes are recorded all over the North African provinces as a result of extensive building programs (e.g., Dougga, Haidra, Timgad, Tébessa). The Byzantine fortifications were the most prominent features of the cityscapes and often built over former public buildings and areas, like fora, baths or theaters that had already lost their original function.³⁷

Furthermore, the fortification of rural areas can also be observed. In addition to state or communal buildings, the rural population began to erect defensive and refuge buildings as well. The imitation of military *quadriburgi* and *centenaria* by the civilian population is documented in Tripolitania.³⁸ A regional study of Byzantine fortifications in the Dougga region, which examines military fortifications, city walls and rural defensive and refuge structures, as well as the subsequent use of these in the Arab period, is currently being conducted by Philipp Margreiter as part of his dissertation at the University of Erlangen and Mainz. Despite Denys Pringle’s monograph on the Byzantine fortifications of North Africa, there is still no comprehensive study on the transformation of these buildings until the *ribāts* in Arab time.³⁹

Since the late Roman period, the larger urban centers had begun to show signs of deurbanization and reduction. It is unclear whether the reduction of the towns by the Byzantine city walls also corresponds to the actually inhabited settlement area of the 6th century. Cities such as Leptis Magna or Sabratha diminished significantly and were finally abandoned in the late 7th or early 8th century.⁴⁰ From the mid-sixth century onwards, urban housing in general became simpler. The transformation of the Mediterranean from a zone of connection to

34 Merrills, *Byzantine Period*, 402-404.

35 Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 636-638.

36 Witschel, *Krise, Rezession, Stagnation*, 285-306; Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 635-638; Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, 281-284.

37 Pringle, *Defence of Byzantine Africa*; Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 638.

38 Mattingly *et al.*, *Fortified farms*, 187-188.

39 Most recently Anna Leone gave a brief overview of the development of Arab *ribāts* from Byzantine forts. She also emphasized that a systematic discussion was sometimes lacking (Leone, *Land, forts, harbours*, 288-289).

40 Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, 284-286; Fenwick, *Africa to Ifriqiya*, 29-30; Fenwick, *Classical cities Ifriqiya*, 139-140; Leone, *Land, forts, harbours*, 283-288.

a frontier is clearly seen in the great port cities of Islamic North Africa, such as Tripoli, Tunis and Sousse, which had large, fortified harbor facilities for warships. At this time the North African coast was probably subject to increased Byzantine attacks. This might explain the reduction in number and size of coastal cities. This phenomenon can, however, be observed in Syria and Palestine as well.⁴¹

Most of the former Roman city centers were used as industrial or agrarian production complexes in the early Middle Ages, a process that had already started in the late Byzantine period. Corisande Fenwick showed the urban diversity in Islamic North Africa. After the conquest of Carthage by the Arabs in 698, the city ceded its rank as provincial capital to Kairouan and Tunis. This loss of importance was accompanied by a radical reduction in the size of the city. Few rural communities settled in the former metropolis during the early Middle Ages and settlement probably ceased completely in the 9th or 10th century. In Sbeitla (Sufetula), continuous urban settlement can be traced until the 9th century, but the town was divided into a series of fortified complexes around three fortlets in the south, the forum, an anonymous temple, and the amphitheater in the north of the urban area. The new Islamic urban centers were characterized by a mosque, central marketplaces, or the governor's residence.⁴² Ancient towns like Hadrumetum (Sousse), Sicca Veneria (El Kef), Vaga (Béja) or Oea (Tripoli) have remained important urban centers in the region until today. Because of the continuous settlement and modern buildings, these sites are nearly unstudied archaeologically. Data concerning medieval urban developments mostly derives from less important and smaller sites.⁴³

Religions in Transition

Christianity remained a major religion in North Africa, and churches dominated the urban landscape for centuries.⁴⁴ Over time some churches were transformed into production areas, markets, and some eventually into mosques. The new Arabic settlers were seemingly placed in separated quarters, as in Volubilis, Tlemcen and Tahert, where we can identify changes in housing, eating and consumption practices in the 8th century.⁴⁵ Architectural manifestations of Islamization are a main issue of archaeological research. In her contribution *Islamizing Berber Lifestyles*, Elizabeth Fentress demonstrates how Arabic house types in medieval North Africa can be traced back to settlers from the Arabian Peninsula. The spread of Islam in North Africa probably took place in several phases over centuries. Fentress attempts to capture a material aspect of Islamization among Berbers in residential architecture and dietary practices. Like "Romanization", "Islamization" came about by emulation, particularly among the

41 Fenwick, *Classical cities Ifriqiya*, 142; Leone, *Land, forts, harbours*, 282-283; Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion*, 261-266.

42 Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, 286-287; Fenwick, *Africa to Ifriqiya*, 15-16, 20-26; Conant, *Forgotten transition*, 15-16; Fenwick, *Classical cities Ifriqiya*, 142-149.

43 Witschel, *Krise, Rezession, Stagnation*, 285-306; Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 639-644; von Rummel, *Transformation*, 107; Fenwick, *Classical cities Ifriqiya*, 138-139; Fenwick, *Arab Conquest*, 426-430.

44 Cf. generally Shaw, *Sacred Violence*; Fenwick, *Arab Conquest*, 433-434.

45 Fenwick, *Africa to Ifriqiya*, 27-28.

élites, by a slow change of the general habitus, with very different starting points for the Arabic and the Berber communities. Arab settlers and warriors conveyed Islam to newly-founded or organized cities such as Tunis, Kairouan, or Tripoli. During the 7th and 8th centuries, many Berber communities converted to Islam.

In the first centuries of Islamic rule, a considerable part of the population remained Christian and spoke Latin.⁴⁶ African saints such as Cyprian, Felicitas or Perpetua were worshiped in different places around Europe.⁴⁷ As late as the 10th century, forty-seven bishoprics existed in Ifriqiya. The papal chancellery in Rome corresponded with African bishops up until the 11th century.⁴⁸ Christian communities in formerly Roman cities largely turned to Islam during the 9th and 10th centuries, as did the inhabitants of the steppe and desert zones. The process of Arabization was much faster than Islamization.⁴⁹ Archaeologically, we can comprehend this process partly through the construction of mosques and the decline of Christian ecclesiastical buildings.⁵⁰

We can only partly describe Jewish life in North Africa. Archaeological and epigraphic remains at various sites provide evidence of Jewish communities during Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. A cemetery containing several catacombs dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries at Gamarth near Carthage has been known since the 19th century, as well as the synagogue of Naro (Hammam-Lif) and roughly a dozen other Jewish houses of worship.⁵¹ Augustine mentions Jewish communities at Utica, Simittra, Thusurus, and Oea.⁵² Justinian's government started to restrict religious life and among other things forbade the construction of synagogues. In 632 the Prefect of Africa enforced the baptism of members of the Jewish community. We know of hostilities between Jewish communities, the Heraclian dynasty and local Catholic clergy.⁵³ Ibn Khaldun stated that the Jarawa and seven other Berber tribes were Judaized.⁵⁴ Al-Kahina, the religious and military leader of resistance to the Muslim conquest of the Maghreb, was repeatedly identified as a Jewish princess. Modern research questioned this, as well as the existence of Jewish Berber groups in general.⁵⁵ All in all, Jewish communities acted together with the Christian majority, maybe also in fighting the Arab invaders.

46 Leisten, *Afrika*, 225-226; Lancel, *Tunisie*, 188-195 (Latin inscriptions after the 7th century); Lewicki, *Une langue romane oubliée*, 428-430; Seston, *Sur les derniers temps*; Talbi, *Ifriqiya*.

47 Conant, *Europe and the African Cult of Saints*; Wickham, *Framing the early Middle Ages*, 726-728.

48 Conant, *Staying Roman*, 362-370; Handley, *End of African Christianity*, 291-310; Courtois, *Grégoire VII*, 96-122, 193-226.; Hettinger, *Beziehungen des Papsttums*.

49 Leone *et al.*, *Africa – Ifriqiya Introduction*, 3.

50 Comparative studies on the Arab conquest and Islamization of North Africa and its citizens have appeared in recent years: Aillet *et al.*, *Islamisation et arabisation*; Brett, *Conversion Berbers*; Fenwick, *Early Islamic North Africa*, 130-140.

51 Hirschberg, *History of the Jews in North Africa*, vol. 1: 21, 23; cemetery at Gamarth: 50; Taieb-Carlen, *Jews of North Africa*, 4-22.

52 Harkins, *Nuancing Augustine's Hermeneutical Jew*.

53 Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion*, 84-91 and notes 54-55, 292-293; Chouraqui, *Between east and west*; Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*; Gubbay and Levy, *The Sephardim*; Rachmuth, *Juden in Nordafrika*.

54 Kitāb al-'Ibar 6, 107, ed. Šabbūh 1, 208-209. Cf. Hirschberg, *Problem of the Judaized Berbers*, 317, note 8 translates the passage “wakadhaliha rubbamd kdnd ba'du ha'ula'i al-Berber ddnubidin al-Yahuzdiya” as “and so it may be that some of those Berbers professed Judaism”.

55 Hirschberg, *Problem of the Judaized Berbers*, 313-340, at 339: “Of all the known movements of conversion to Judaism and incidents of Judaizing, those connected with the Berbers and Sudanese in Africa are the least authenticated. Whatever has been written on them is extremely questionable.”

The Rural Landscape in Transition

In contrast to the extensively excavated urban sites, only a handful of rural sites have been well studied.⁵⁶ Another major challenge is to distinguish between urban and rural sites in Late Antiquity and early medieval North Africa. In less urbanized regions of Tripolitania, southern Byzacena, Numidia or Mauretania, archaeologists can clearly differentiate between urban and rural landscapes, whereas in more densely urbanized regions (e. g. the hinterland of Africa Proconsularis), this distinction proves much more difficult. Furthermore, the territories of urban settlements bordered on private or imperial estates, tribal lands, or confederations of smaller settlements.⁵⁷

The difference between a city and its surrounding territory was not dependent on size or production centers, but rather on legal status as well as a concentration of administrative, economic, cultural, and religious features. Cities provided markets and agricultural centers. Ancient and medieval North Africa has been studied through several important surveys that broadly examined both urban and rural regions. Beginning in the French colonial period, large-scale documentation by the military formed the basis of the *Atlas archéologique de l'Algérie* and the *Atlas archéologique de la Tunisie*, targeted regional surveys in the 20th and 21st centuries documenting the pre-Roman, Roman and Islamic sites. In Libya, the UNESCO Survey and its successor projects have investigated the coastal hinterland and the Saharan region. In Tunisia, surveys focused primarily on the northern half of the country, both in the coastal and inland regions.⁵⁸

Surveys around Carthage,⁵⁹ in the Segermes Valley⁶⁰ and the region around Dougga⁶¹ show that the inhabited space inside the urban settlements was reduced from the 4th century onwards, while the number of rural sites remained stable and peaked in the 5th and 6th centuries, followed by a fast decline in the 7th century. Philipp von Rummel suggests that while the cityscapes changed quickly, agricultural production remained stable, as shown by the large numbers of rural farm sites. Furthermore, von Rummel pointed out that this picture could be distorted by the dependence on fine ware for dating. Other regions like Byzacena, the coastal region of Tripolitania, or the region of Kasserine (Cillium) in North Africa were subject to different processes.⁶² Some regions were abandoned in the 5th, 6th or 7th centuries; others were populated until the Arab conquest or beyond.⁶³

56 For an overview on field surveys in North Africa, see Leone, *Rural landscapes*, 135-151.

57 von Rummel, *Transformation*, 108; de Vos Raaijmakers and Attoui, *Rus Africum I-IV*; De Vos Raaijmakers, *Rural Settlement*, 205.

58 For a summary of archaeological surveys in North Africa and their methodological challenges and possibilities, see Stone, *Comparative Survey*, 132-143.

59 Green, *Atlas archéologique Tunisie*; Green, *Carthage Survey*; Green, *Canadian Carthage Survey*; Green, *Carthaginian Countryside*.

60 Dietz *et al.*, *Africa Proconsularis*.

61 De Vos Raaijmakers and Attoui, *Rus Africum I*.

62 Von Rummel, *Transformation*; Hitchner, *Kasserine Survey 1982-1986*; Hitchner, *Kasserine Survey 1987*.

63 Leone, *Rural landscapes*, 151-154, 156; von Rummel, *Transformation*, 109-110; Fenwick, *Arab Conquest*, 431-432.

Fortified farms and villages have been perceived by researchers as a characteristic of rural settlement patterns in late antique North Africa that distinguishes these regions from others in the Roman Empire.⁶⁴ The emergence of fortified rural landscapes can be attributed to several causes: increasing insecurity in the provinces due to raids and depredations by nomadic tribal groups; troop reductions leading to the replacement of regular units by a militarized rural population; the display of status and influence within rural societies; as a symptom of an increase in violence (real or latent) within the Roman provinces; and as a general side effect of the decline of the state's monopoly on defense and violence along the southern frontiers.⁶⁵

Looking at the *longue durée* perspective of these constructions, it is noticeable that fortified rural settlements are the norm rather than the exception in North Africa already between the 1st century BC and the 1st century AD. Only the Roman imperial period and the accompanying *Pax Romana* constitute a break in this practice.⁶⁶ Fortifications and intramural fortresses were again a defining feature in early medieval cities. The Byzantine fortresses were repurposed for Arab garrisons. Some fortified sites were newly erected. The Arabs based their defensive system on the Byzantine one, adapted it and built new forms. Early medieval Ifriqiya was an intensely militarized landscape. Most major towns were garrisoned by Arab troops. By the end of the 8th century, *ribāts*, a new type of fortification, were constructed along the Tunisian coastline.⁶⁷

Integration into the Islamic World

In the 7th century, the Byzantine Empire was gripped by a crisis in which it was no longer able to effectively control some of its provinces. To understand the Arab conquest, one has to consider these backgrounds.⁶⁸ This slow process of recurrent invasions and conquests over a period of 50 years can be observed at various levels: urban topography, buildings, economy and trade, and social structures.⁶⁹ Again, a new military elite had taken over – a common occurrence in North African history.⁷⁰

However, the attempt at a fast integration of the former Roman provinces into the caliphate failed. In 739-743 Berber confederacies rebelled against taxation under the Umayyad dynasty. During the first decades of Abbāsīd rule, regional dynasties such as the Rustamids in 761 or the Idrīsids in 789 established separate states. In the 9th century, the Aghlabids

64 Goodchild, *Roman Tripolitania*, 161-178; Goodchild, *Limes*, 65-76; Chavarria and Lewit, *Late antique countryside*, 23-24; Christie, *Landscapes of change*, 15-20; Sarantis, *Fortifications Africa*, 303-310.

65 Mattingly *et al.*, *Fortified farms*, 168. For a detailed discussion of the Berbers on the southern frontier of Byzantine North Africa, see Fentress and Wilson, *Saharan Berber diaspora*.

66 Mattingly *et al.*, *Fortified farms*, 168-169; Hitchner, *Kasserine Survey 1982-1986*; Hitchner, *Kasserine Survey 1987*; Mattingly and Hitchner, *Roman Africa*, 189-196.

67 Fenwick, *Africa to Ifriqiya*, 26, 32; von Rummel *Transformation*, 113-114.

68 Walter Kaegi's works represent the latest research on the Arab conquest of North Africa. See, among others, Kaegi, *Muslim Expansion* and Kaegi, *Islamic conquest*.

69 Leone *et al.*, *Africa – Ifriqiya Introduction*, 2-3.

70 Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 21-22; Bosworth, *Islamic Dynasties*, 25-32; Savage, *Gateway*.

took control over Ifriqiya and Tripolitania.⁷¹ Religion was used to justify the rule of an Islamic elite over the multi-confessional and multi-ethnic communities. That changed in the 10th and 11th centuries when Islam became majoritarian.⁷²

Isabel Toral's contribution *The Umayyad Dynasty and the Western Maghreb. A Transregional Perspective* deals with the integration of the Maghreb into the Umayyad Empire between AD 700 and 1000. In the process, North Africa moved from its initially peripheral position within the Islamic world under the Umayyads and Fatimids to a self-centered political landscape toward the end of the first millennium. Still, Islamic North Africa poses a variety of problems for modern historical and archaeological scholars. At the same time, the region is well suited to studying Arabic empire building, as well as Islamization. Finally, changes in urban, economic, and cultural structures in the Maghreb can be described in more detail than in Mesopotamia or Syria.

Economic Changes

Early on, archaeology revealed the economic links of North Africa within the ancient Mediterranean world. After a last economic boom in the region, exports slowly began to decline from the 5th century onwards. After the Byzantine conquest, African amphorae started to become rare in the Mediterranean. Exports of African red slip ware (ARS) to Constantinople and the Aegean remained strong until the 6th and 7th centuries. African red slip ware also continued to reach the major urban metropolises of the East, such as Alexandria, Antioch, Beirut, and Caesarea. In turn, eastern amphorae reached North Africa until the 7th century. In the Western Mediterranean, African red slip ware can be recorded in urban centers, as well as military posts, until the 6th and 7th, and in some cases even the 8th century. The widespread use of the ARS thus shows that North Africa was an important economic center in the Mediterranean region even after the Arab conquest, and that it continued to have connections to the most important cities. Written sources report on the trade of clothing and textiles in North Africa. A particularly long connection seems to have existed between North Africa, Sicily, and Italy, even at a time when all other trans-Mediterranean contacts broke off. However, the main methodological problem in the study of trade contacts lies in dating the ceramic evidence in medieval layers. The Dougga Survey of Mariette de Vos showed the end of classic fine ware dating methods and the gradual substitution by local production types.⁷³ Further regional and local pottery studies were able to shed more light on the extent and chronology of Africa's economic decline at the end of Antiquity.⁷⁴ The numismatic evidence presents a different picture with a supra-regional connection to various Mediterranean currencies. A sharp decline in the African economy cannot be detected in the Late Byzantine period. The 7th century clearly shows an increase in gold issues, a high level of internal monetization and a continued exchange with the West until at least 700.⁷⁵

71 Fenwick, *Africa to Ifriqiya*, 33.

72 Fenwick, *Early Islamic North Africa*, 2.

73 Fenwick, *Early Islamic North Africa*, 1-4; de Vos, *Terra, acqua, olio*, 38-46, 56, 71.

74 Reynolds, *From Vandal Africa*, 129-158, 168-170; Conant, *Forgotten transition*, 11-13; Leone, *Cultural transitions*, 265; Leone, *Land, forts, harbours*, 290; Bonifay, *Economy*.

75 Morrisson, *African economy*, 198; Merrills, *Byzantine Period*, 395-398; Morrisson, *Coinage in Africa*.

The economic and cultural integration of Ifrīqiya into the Abbāsīd Empire, and the Islamic world has received increasing attention in recent decades. Between the Arab conquest and the end of Aghlabid rule, we observe a shift in trade patterns in Ifrīqiya. Trade routes, markets and agricultural areas developed in response to the changing political regimes and economic relations.⁷⁶

The changing trade patterns between the 9th and the 11th century can be related to Ifrīqiya's more intensive connection to the rest of the Abbāsīd Empire and the social and economic reorientation of North Africa away from a Roman north-south focus and towards a more east-west orientation. Antonia Bosanquet's article *Maritime Trade from 3rd/9th-century Ifrīqiya: Insights from Legal Sources* deals with literary sources, especially legal texts on maritime trade in North Africa from the 9th century onwards. In connection with trade, *ribāts* emerged along the coastline and significant coastal settlements emerged from these fortified complexes during the 10th century, which played a major role as a stopover between *al-Andalus* and the Middle East.

Sicily – A Look Over the Edge

In several contributions to this volume and to the original conference, Sicily, as the closest Mediterranean island, proved to be an important comparative example for many long-term processes of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages that took place in North Africa between AD 500 and 1000. Long before Sicily became part of the Islamic world, trade and exchange contacts existed between Byzantines and Muslims on the island. The urban, rural, economic, or social changes between AD 500 and 1000 were strongly influenced by North Africa.⁷⁷ First raids from Carthage started in 652, followed by a long series of conflicts from 827 to 902 in which the island was conquered step by step by Aghlabids and Fatimids. The exact circumstances of the 9th-century conquest and the extent of local Byzantine resistance are still largely unknown.⁷⁸ As in North Africa, new urban centers such as Balarm (Palermo) emerged under Islamic rule.⁷⁹

Latin- and Greek-speaking Christians dispersed to the west and east of the island, as did a sizable Jewish population. Several waves of migration from North Africa brought Sunni and Shiite Arabs as well as Berbers to the island.⁸⁰ Under the Kalbids, who constituted the Emiral dynasty in 948, Sicily even experienced a period of stability and economic prosperity. Palermo developed as one of the largest and richest cities of the Mediterranean at the time.⁸¹

Research shows that even late antique inland Sicily was connected to a broader Mediterranean network and exchange system. African tableware (ARS) and amphorae were widely scattered in the hinterland. During the 8th and 9th centuries, these exchanges declined, and

76 Fenwick, *Arab Conquest*, 431-433.

77 Davis-Secord, *Sicily*, 6-11, 72-73.

78 Granara, *Muslim Sicily*, 4, 9-10; Molinari, *Sicily*, 335-336.

79 Granara, *Muslim Sicily*, 12.

80 Comparative studies on the transformation and Islamization of Sicily in the Middle Ages have appeared in the last years: Aillet *et al.*, *Islamisation et arabisation*; Arcifa *et al.*, *Dynamiques l'islamisation*; Cressier and Nef, *Fatimides*.

81 Granara, *Muslim Sicily*, 25-26, 34; Molinari, *Sicily*, 349-350. For a detailed overview of the history of the island between Constantinople and Rome in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Islamic world in the early Middle Ages, see Davis-Secord, *Sicily*.

local production methods and ceramic forms emerged. Syracuse continued to be linked to the eastern Mediterranean. The ceramic repertoire of the 10th century resembles contemporary Tunisian tableware. Palermo, together with Fustat and Kairouan, formed one of the great centers of the Fatimid Empire's commercial networks.⁸²

Rural settlement in the Byzantine and Islamic periods, on the other hand, is much better studied in Sicily. A series of surveys and a small number of systematic excavations allow insight into the transformation of the Sicilian rural landscape. Between the 3rd and the 5th centuries, we can trace a process of "monumentalization" of villas, a sign of the wealth of the owners, and of the reorganization of the agrarian system. From the 4th or 5th to the 8th century, some villas were still reoccupied. Other were reused in different ways for burials, as new housing estates, for technical or agricultural activities or as places of worship.⁸³ The Byzantine period is known in the eastern half of the island in the 8th and 9th centuries due to ceramic evidence. The Sicilian countryside was, compared to other Mediterranean regions, economically extremely vibrant until the 7th century. The settlement landscape was dominated by smaller villages. The 8th century, on the other hand, produced few material indicators. Following Arab attacks, Byzantine fortresses appeared. However, the rural population does not seem to have retreated to these fortified centers in this period.⁸⁴

The two regions Africa and Sicily underwent similar transformation processes between AD 500 and 1000 under different conditions, which affected the landscape, the economy, and the multi-ethnic and multi-religious population. The highlighting of this transformation in Africa/Ifriqiya and also in Sicily/Şiqilliya will have to be considered in future historical and archaeological research.

Summary

Most of the archaeological research in North Africa focuses on long-term processes and structural changes. The developments in urban and rural areas, such as the increasing reduction of urban area and the increase in rural settlement and economic goods, began as early as the 4th century and continued into the Arab era. The economic prosperity of the Vandal kingdom is evident in the export of important goods to the western, but also to the eastern Mediterranean, through the African amphorae and the African red slip ware. Similarly, trans-regional fine tableware remained widespread in North Africa until the beginning of the Early Byzantine period. During the late 6th and 7th centuries, the distribution within North Africa but also in the Mediterranean region diminished. The return to local and regional tableware makes it difficult to date it to the early Islamic period.⁸⁵

While Vandal rule left few material traces, we see architectural restructuring in many cities in the Byzantine period, mainly in the fortification of the city centers and the construction of *castra* and city walls. During the 6th and 7th centuries, some urban centers, some of which had existed since pre-Roman times, were abandoned, while others still exist today as modern metropolises. Settlement centers disintegrated into smaller clusters or nuclei that made up only a fraction of the imperial city area. New Arab foundations such as Kairouan or

82 Molinari, *Fortified settlements*, 337; Molinari, *Sicily*, 349-350.

83 Castroraro Barba, *Sicily before Muslims*, 145, 170-177.

84 Molinari, *Fortified settlements*, 338-339; Molinari, *Sicily*, 342.

85 Witschel, *Krise, Rezession, Stagnation*, 285-306; Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, 635-638; Leone, *Changing Townscapes*, 281-284.

Tunis set new accents in urban development for the Arab and Muslim population. In addition to these long-term developments in Late Antiquity, new processes in settlement, religious and consumption archaeology can be observed from the beginning of Arab rule on.⁸⁶

Recent research shows that the Islamic conquest in the first centuries hardly interfered with urban life and Arab immigration was concentrated in the Kairouan area. Only a new military elite had come to power. Thus, today's Tunisia became the heartland of Arab Ifrīqiya, as it had previously been that of Vandal and Byzantine Africa. The *wali*, the Arab governor, succeeded the Byzantine exarch. This Arab office comprised similar competences in military and administrative matters. After 800, the economic potential of Ifrīqiya grew again, perhaps even exceeding that of Late Antiquity. The emergence of new cultural realities, now oriented towards Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo rather than Rome or Constantinople, was a long and gradual process.

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86 Fenwick, *Africa to Ifrīqiya*, 27-28.

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