

Rezension zu:

Monika Rekowska, *In Pursuit of Ancient Cyrenaica...Two Hundred Years of Exploration Set Against the History of Archaeology in Europe (1706-1911)* (Oxford 2016).

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Monika Rekowska's new book, *In Pursuit of Ancient Cyrenaica* (Oxford, England: Archaeopress), substantially analyses the eastern coastal region of Libya, focusing on its history of archaeology over two centuries. The 273-page monograph offers a considerable variety of research materials, including accounts, site descriptions, drawings, maps and photos. In particular, Rekowska's book forms a detailed report on research, travels and digs performed by European antiquarians and scholars who visited the region between the 18th century and the early 20th century.

The short *Introduction* (pages 1–2) clarifies the chronological range of Rekowska's monograph, covering the period between the first journey in Cyrenaica (1706) and the Italian conquest of Libya (1911), which started a new era for local archaeology thanks to Italian scholars' research. Early 20th century Italian foreign missions already have been examined elsewhere¹.

Four chapters comprise the main body of this monograph. The first is a general introduction on the history of European archaeology (3–10), which forms the book's historical framework and helps the reader understand the evolution of archaeological discipline in terms of methodology and scientific approach. The section outlines only selected topics, considering the extent of the subject².

The second chapter, *Travellers in Cyrenaica* (11–49), is a valuable look at early work in the region. Following a short introduction on the spread of antiquarian trips in Libya and their impact on local archaeology, Rekowska provides a detailed list of 19 travellers who came across the Libyan region. This section, organised chronologically, offers biographical information on the travellers and their activity in Cyrenaica (e.g. documenting archaeological sites, sketching or photographing ancient buildings, drawing maps). Starting from Dominique Girard (1668, 1775), the list ends with the Italian Federico Halbherr (1857–1930), who “ends the early stage in the exploration of Cyrenaica, when travellers were succeeded by archaeologists” (49)³.

The most substantial part of this book is the third chapter, *The Topography of Ancient Sites* (50–187). The author offers a good analysis for each of the 22 sites of Cyrenaica, providing information on local archaeology, travellers' accounts and the most recent archaeological excavations. A beneficial scheme (Table 135, p. 182) shows all visits of travellers among the sites. A final discussion on the itineraries closes out the chapter.

‘*Transferring*’ *Cyrenaica to Europe* (188–238), the fourth chapter, is a well-documented section on the development of antiquities collections formed by finds from Cyrenaica. The author explains how interest in Cyrenaica's archaeology, encouraged by travellers' accounts and antiquarian studies, provoked a high demand

¹ LA ROSA 1986; PETRICIOLI 1990.

² DYSON 2006; DÍAZ-ANDREU 2007.

³ MAURINA AND SORGE 2010. A recent exhibition, held at Rovereto, was dedicated to Halbherr's activity as a pioneer of Italian archaeology.

for antiquities from Libya. Early studies on inscriptions (199–204) and ancient art (204–212) played a crucial role in developing the collections process. Collectors mostly appreciated sculptures (213–224), vases (224–230) and terracotta statues and figurines (230–233), which antiquarians already had collected in southern Italy and Sicily. Substantial finds from Cyrenaica fuelled European collections such as the ones in Louvre (Paris) and British Museum (London).

The list of references (244–273) is rich, multilingual and well-organised, providing a wide range of publications on the subject, including antiquarian studies, travel accounts, archaeological reports and recent essays on the history of archaeology.

Moreover, high-resolution illustrations represent a remarkable strength of this work. The set of 152 pictures incorporates photographs of sites, drawings (e.g. sketches, maps, assemblages of finds), aerial photographs, and black and white pictures taken by archaeologists and travellers. More importantly, pictures are useful in identifying lost monuments or comprehending how buildings have been ruined over the centuries.

However, if the substantial documentary and photographic setup and the detailed reports on sites and travellers are certainly worthy, the lack of an index is unfortunately an evident deficit in this publication (even if the only one). The index would have been really beneficial, enabling the reader to quickly trace people, places and significant terms.

Rekowska's work is not only a collection of detailed reports on sites and antiquities, but it also addresses significant research themes on the history of archaeology. It helps one to understand the impact of European travellers and scholars on local archaeology, the evolution of the archaeological discipline from the 19th to the early 20th centuries in northern Africa, the relationships between foreign researchers and local authorities, the safeguarding of antiquities, and last but not least the development of state collections and museums.

In conclusion, *In Pursuit of Ancient Cyrenaica* is undoubtedly a valuable work. The book, which sheds new light on the history of archaeology in Cyrenaica, has remarkable points of strength such as the substantial collection of high-quality figures, detailed descriptions of sites and combined use of different sources (drawings, maps, sketches, etc.). Matching old landscapes with present photos certainly is useful in understanding how much remains preserved among ancient monuments and sites. On top of that, invaluable sets of data contribute to simplifying any potential safeguarding of antiquities. This is crucially significant, considering how Libyan antiquities are in danger due to the current political instability and war.

References

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