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Structures and sequences: physical remains from the Beirut souks

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THORPE, R. 2019. *The Insula of the House of the Fountains, Beirut*. Berytus Archaeological Studies 57–58 (2017–2018); Archaeology of the Beirut Souks 3, AUB and ACRE Excavations in Beirut 1994–1996. Beirut: American University of Beirut. Pp. 367, figs 264. ISSN 0067-6105.

The Beirut Souks project undoubtedly represents an immense achievement, not only in archaeological terms, but perhaps more importantly as a coming together in common cause of disparate interests: governmental, curatorial, commercial, and academic,[1] in the

[1] Ministry of Culture of the Lebanese Republic, Lebanese Department of Antiquities, Solidere - The Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District,

aftermath of the Lebanese civil war of 1975–1990. The fieldwork reported on took place between 1994 and 1996 and covered an area of some 15,000 square meters of complex stratigraphy extending from the 5th c. BCE up to the 8th c. CE. There were only limited later deposits as the area was open land from at least the mid 7th c. CE until the construction of The Souks started in 1861. Within that timeframe the development of the Insula of the House of the Fountains stretches from the late 3rd c. BCE to the middle of the 6th c. CE.

A cornucopia of data

The report, to someone used to British norms, is somewhat strangely structured, incorporating an Introduction that not only sets out the scope of the volume and the aims and objectives of the excavations, but also includes at some length the recording systems and principles adopted, with examples of context record and drawing sheets based on the Museum of London recording system.[2] This reflects both the avowed project objective of training Lebanese archaeologists from the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese University and, possibly, the novelty at the time of such approaches in Lebanese archaeology.

The second Chapter is entitled "Synthesis" and seeks to provide a sequential and chronological framework for the detailed descriptions offered in Chapter 3, which are discussed below. Key to this understanding is a land-use diagram (Fig. 17, opposite p. 40) that presents changes through time. The major chronological divisions, termed "Stages of Development," establish for the reader the basic sequence of structures, with the land-use diagram also demonstrating the varied use of the area investigated, which includes not only buildings and associated features such as roads, but also significant open areas, notably in the southern part of the site, and episodes of quarrying. The diagrammatic presentation of the data is expanded in Figure 19, where Ceramic Periods with their "suggested dating" are introduced alongside sub-divisions of the Stages of Development based on "actions of construction, use and disuse as articulated though episodes of room/building construction, use, refurbishing (use) and disuse." On one level, this is entirely conventional and unremarkable in terms of conventional stratigraphic analysis, but given the extent and complexity of the site, its clear presentation is crucial for any reader not intimately associated with the project if they are to have any realistic hope of navigating and understanding the wealth of detail that follows. The dating framework, while based on the ceramics and, obviously, taking account of the stratigraphic sequences, also benefits from the previously published reports on the glass and coins, along with data from the lamps assemblage.[3]

While the presence of Ptolemaic (Stage of Development 1) activity at the site is recognized, it is only in the Early Seleucid Period (Stage of Development 2: 200–150 BCE) that structural evidence is recorded. On the eastern side of the site, Building 3, which remains in use into the 4th c. CE, albeit significantly altered, serves to illustrate the challenges faced during the excavations and subsequent analysis phase. That said, from

The American University of Beirut, and the Lebanese University. See Perring 2002 for the background to the Souks Project.

2 MoLAS 1994.

3 Ceramics: research by Dr Paul Reynolds; Glass: Jennings 2004–2005; Coins: Butcher 2001–2002; Lamps: research by Rima Mikati.

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Stage of Development 5a (30 BCE–25 CE) much of the area that is later part of the House of the Fountains is occupied by Building 4, elements of which (Units [= ranges of rooms] 4.1, 4.2, and 4.4) remain in use through to the late 6th c. or early 7th c. CE (Fig. 17 and Fig. 255, p. 335). The main element of Building 4, Unit 4.3, replaces part of Building 3, Unit 2 around 30 BCE, but then co-exists with and develops alongside Building 3 until both are replaced by the House of the Fountains (Building 6), other than in the area occupied by Units 4.1. 4.2, and 4.4.

In the period ca. 125–139 CE, the area of a late 1st-c. CE quarry, which had been open space, Open Area 4, located to the south of Buildings 3 and 4, was developed, with the insertion of a group of shops and tenements (Building 5) fronting onto a colonnaded street. These structures remained in use through to the beginning of the 7th c. CE. In the north-eastern and central parts of the insula, around the middle of the 4th c. CE, the House of the Fountains (Building 6) replaced substantial parts of Building 4 and infilled open space to the north of Building 5; these developments might have been necessitated by destruction associated with the aftermath of an earthquake in 348/349 CE. By ca. 375 CE, Building 6 had expanded to the east to occupy the bulk of the northern two-thirds of the insula, leaving only Units 4.1, 4.2, and 4.4 as recognizable elements of the pre-Building 6 layout.

The detailed development sequences recognized within the insula, room remodeling and amalgamation and division, allow Thorpe the opportunity to explore the use of and access to social space. To this end he makes good use of "permeability maps," although, in places, tracing the mapped access through the building on the associated plans can be challenging. What is clear is that the 4th-c. CE developments of the House of the Fountains were calculated to demonstrate the prestige and status of the owner through the aggrandization of reception rooms, such as Rooms 6.1.14–16 with the addition of an apse to 6.1.14 (Fig. 67, p. 94), and through, Thorpe suggests, making those rooms "more exclusive and less accessible" (99). The process of aggrandization was continued in the early 5th c. CE with the installation of a mosaic floor and marble fountain bearing a Chi-Rho epigram in Room 6.1.17; the fountain replaced one installed a mere 10–20 years previously, and by ca. 420 CE the main residential unit was equipped with no fewer than four fountains (107–8). A century later, the embellishments continued with the laying of marble *opus sectile* and mosaic floors and the insertion of a probable semicircular marble dining table into the apse of Room 6.1.14. Elements of Building 5 were also enhanced in parallel with the developments in the main residence, with the insertion of mosaics in some rooms. Meanwhile, in the 5th c. CE, Room 6.1.21 of the House of the Fountains had probably been rented out as a taberna. The Insula of the House of the Fountains appears to have been spared significant damage during the earthquake of 551 CE that devastated other parts of the city. That said, the insula did see a reduction in occupation and the dismantling of parts of the complex, presumably for reuse elsewhere. From ca. 600 CE (Stage of Development 11) onwards, the area is believed to have been open space and mulberry plantations through to the development of the Souks from 1861 CE.

The bulk of the rest of the volume, 235 pages in total, forms Chapter 3, "The sequence." This section is remarkably detailed and well-illustrated, incorporating 160 plates and figures, including some limited, but effective use of color, for both photographs and drawings. While having access to the level of detail provided would be of use to anyone wishing to reassess the data and discussion offered in the volume, it is hard to see why print presentation of such detail is considered appropriate in a volume published in

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2019, when it presumably could have been made available digitally, if an appropriate platform were available?

Challenges and questions

The answer to the above question may lie in the fact that the post-excavation process to date has taken some 20 years and at its inception hard copy may have been seen as the only viable option. It is perhaps telling that the excavations concluded in the year that, in the United Kingdom, the Archaeology Data Service was established,[4] and long-term digital archaeological archiving could rightly have been seen as an interesting idea, but one for the future.

What the hard-copy publication of Chapter 3 places in stark focus is the lack of information on the philosophy behind and the objectives underpinning the approach adopted to the publication of the project. In simple terms, the volume under consideration and the others published to date make important datasets available to the archaeological community and the wider world. However, we are presented, at least when this volume is considered alone, with a lack of context for the work of the Souks project that devalues the volume for readers not intimately familiar with the history and archaeology of Beirut. A fundamental problem is a lack of locational information – there are no maps or plans locating the site within either the modern city or its various predecessors. The excavations are shown on a Google Earth aerial photograph on which two major modern streets are named, but they are not located in relation to known elements of the Roman or earlier city. While it is possible that access to mapping of the city was a sensitive issue early in the project,[5] by the time of publication, access to online mapping and/or further Google Earth images presumably would have been possible. Greater use of such resources would have allowed plotting of key elements from the urban landscapes of the different periods recorded relative to the location of the excavations, and informed understanding of their context. It is clear that there are considerable data available to inform such presentations, derived from work undertaken in the 20th c.[6] and from the Souks project and other 21st-c. work,[7] and that enough is known about Roman Berytus, from its conquest by Pompey in 64 BCE, through its elevation to a *colonia* in 15 BCE[8] and its development into one of the greatest Roman-period cities in the eastern Mediterranean, for this volume to have included a useful graphic overview of Roman-period Beirut.[9] Looking beyond the Roman/Early Byzantine period, it also appears that the project has contributed not only to a better understanding of the earlier phases reported on in the volume, but also to a wider understanding of the later urban landscape.[10] Indeed, given the wider international involvement in the archaeology of Beirut at the time of the Souks excavations and

4 See https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/about/.

5 But see fig. 2 in Butcher and Thorpe 1997, which seeks to present such data, albeit at a tiny scale.

6 Lauffray 1944–1945; Mouterde and Lauffray 1952.

7 In addition to the Anglo-Lebanese excavations reported in the present volume and in Butcher and Thorpe 1997 (Site BEY 045); Seeden and Thorpe 1998, other international teams were operating in the city at the same time.

8 Millar 1993, 279.

9 Perring et al. 2003, fig. 2 provides a schematic overview of "ancient Beirut."

10 Seeden and Thorpe 1998.

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before,[11] even the provision of mapping showing the extent of archaeological work would have provided useful context.

Obvious errors are few but, given the level of detail presented in Chapter 3, possibly difficult to recognize. However, on Figure 121 (Chapter 2), "Amphora inserted through from later Building 1 Unit 3 in SoD 5a1" presumably ought to read "… from later Building 4 Unit 3 …" as, by Stage of Development 5a1, Building 1 had been superseded by Building 2 and subsequently Building 4 Unit 3. Given the complexity of the data presented, and despite the potential difficulties of error recognition alluded to, the seemingly limited number of copy-editing issues should be seen as evidence of a report carefully prepared and thoroughly checked.

As will be clear from what is said above, I would have preferred to see better and more extensive mapping to provide context for the data and discussion presented. The other major omission is any indication of how the series of reports will develop. The Bibliography refers to an "in prep." volume on the pottery by Paul Reynolds, but will there be further volumes or reports on the material culture, animal bone, and environmental material from the House of the Fountains (and the other sites investigated by the Anglo-Lebanese team)? Equally, will the work cited on the lamps from the site be published, and are the data that underpin existing publications, such as that on the ceramic building material,[12] or the mosaics,[13] going to be presented as part of an expanding series of volumes? Perhaps most importantly, will there be a volume that draws together and integrates the understanding that is embedded in what are best seen as topic-specific fascicules published to date, those that are still to come, and the various other publications that have flowed from the Anglo-Lebanese team's work?

The project deserves such a publication, and given the quality of the data recovered and of the subsequent research, it is clear that the frequent use of data from Pompeii in comparative discussion is entirely appropriate. Full publication of the Anglo-Lebanese work, and hopefully that of other teams, should mean that the resulting understanding of the multi-period and complex data from Beirut will place the House of the Fountains and other data from Beirut at the core of discussions of Mediterranean urbanism for decades to come.

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11 See, for example: Curvers and Stuart 2007; also Makarem 1997.

12 Mills 2013.

13 Sheehan 1997–1998.

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A very small, short-lived hippodrome ("hippo-stadium") and its re-use: a conjugal labour of love

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OSTRASZ, A. A. 2020, with contributions by I. KEHRBERG-OSTRASZ. *The Hippodrome of Gerasa. A Provincial Roman Circus*. Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology. Pp. xviii + 480, 261 color and black-and-white figs. ISBN 978-1-78491-813-2.

This is an unusual publication. Chiefly it aims to make available a hitherto-unpublished and avowedly unfinished manuscript (as is plain from its marginal working notes, ellipses, and unwritten sections), along with the unpublished original drawings and sketches produced by Antoni Ostrasz over the course of the 11 years (1986 to October 1996) which he spent excavating the hippodrome of Gerasa (Jarash in Jordan) and restoring or consolidating many of its walls (fig. 1); but it also, for the convenience of the reader, reproduces a good many articles and reports already published in other outlets, along with their illustrations. The book also acts as a posthumous tribute or homage to her husband by his archaeologist-collaborator Ina Kehrberg-Ostrasz (listed as both editor and contributor), sadly widowed following his premature death in October 1996.[1]

[1] Antoni was justifiably proud of his achievement: his first paragraph challenges my remark of 1986 (Humphrey 1986, 4) that "no single circus can be completely excavated during the working lifetime of one professional archaeologist if the excavation is going to be conducted according to standards that are currently acceptable," for this is what he claims to have done by working for "11 months a year for almost 11 years," admittedly in the smallest circus on record (the circus at Carthage, for example, is almost twice the size, including in the depth of its seating). In reality,

