

**Sabine Panzram, Laurent Callegarin (ed.), *Entre civitas y madina: El mundo de las ciudades en la península ibérica y en el norte de África (siglos IV-IX)*. Collection de la Casa de Velázquez 167. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2018. Pp. 394. ISBN 9788490962169.**

**Reviewed by Javier Martínez Jiménez, Churchill College/ University of Cambridge (Jmj50@cam.ac.uk)**

[Preview](#)

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This volume, edited by Sabine Panzram and Laurent Callegarin, is the publication derived from the VI Toletum Network workshop, held in 2015. This research network, centred at the University of Hamburg has held similar annual meetings focused on various aspects of Roman and late antique Hispania, three of which were already published together in 2017.<sup>1</sup> The book is presented as a commemoration and a reassessment of Hugh Kennedy's seminal work, "From polis to medina" thirty years after its publication,<sup>2</sup> bringing together a number of authors from Spain, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, and Tunisia who discuss cities in Iberian peninsula and North Africa between the fourth and eighth centuries. In many aspects, the book feels like an updated version of a book edited by Lauro Olmo in 2008, which dealt with the city in the Visigothic period, albeit with wider territorial scope and fewer Iberian case studies.<sup>3</sup> In fact, four authors (Jaime Vizcaino, Sonia Gutiérrez, Darío Bernal, and Miguel Alba) overlap in both volumes. The book is divided into three sections. The first section is introductory, containing a prologue and introduction by the editors, two useful colour maps indicating the location of the sites mentioned across the texts, and Hugh Kennedy's own essay. This is followed by a part on Spain and a part on North Africa, each subdivided into a theoretical section, a compilation of case-studies, and three concluding papers dealing with transversal topics. A final essay by Patrice Cressier serves as the conclusion to the volume.

The introduction by Sabine Panzram introduces the world of Roman cities in Iberia and North Africa, underlining their role as nodes structuring a territory, although presenting a visually-recognisable definition of a "city", which could be problematic. It also introduces a summary on the historiography and evolving methodologies linked to the archaeology of Roman cities, culminating with the latest developments in urban and commercial archaeology. The chapter naturally concludes with an overall comparison between both regions and the importance of Kennedy's work. Hugh Kennedy's paper is a short reflection, which adds nothing new to the debate but serves as a starting point for the volume. Kennedy presents his own work, showing how recent archaeological work keeps supporting, largely, his original thesis (p. 17). The essay also adds a few paragraphs on the role of state-led urban economics and cities as generating demand (and not just supplies), an idea he has developed since the original "From polis to Madina" was published.

The section on the Iberian Peninsula is opened by two very different chapters. Javier Arce's paper (in Spanish) is clearly focused on the question of the origins of urban Christianity, presenting a long-established (but still clearly and well-argued) linear development, with a fourth-to-fifth century phase of suburban *martyria* shrines and a fifth (but mostly sixth) century relocation of the main churches inside the city walls. The arguments presented equating the end of civic paganism with the decline of municipal, non-ecclesiastical elites are, perhaps, too heavily dependent on Liebeschuetz's theses. Sonia Gutiérrez presents a completely different theoretical piece, summarising the last twenty years of research, referring largely but not exclusively to her work at El Tolmo. In this chapter Gutiérrez is expanding the synthesis Panzram presented in her introduction, and the main processes of transformation that characterise cities in this period.

Four case studies follow. Miguel Alba presents, as always, a fine article outlining the evolution of the spaces of power within the city of Mérida from its foundation to its demise in the ninth century. The paper pays attention to local and imperial Roman elites, the Visigothic church and the "foreign" Ummayad administrative elites, and while it builds mostly on his own previous work,<sup>4</sup> it is expanded with the results of recent excavations. Jaime Vizcaino's piece focuses only on the fifth century, and how the promotion to provincial capital resulted in a short phase of urban renewal in Cartagena, including a brilliant analysis of the transformation of the theatre into an open area, parallel to similar developments in the Eastern Empire.

The chapter by Darío Bernal presents (in Spanish) the evolution of the cities on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar, and while it discusses the evolution over the late antique centuries, the only noticeable difference with his 2008 *Recópolis* paper is the introduction of the results of his fieldwork in Tamuda. Similarly, M<sup>a</sup> Teresa García analyses the formation of a new Ummayyad suburb outside Córdoba, describing in detail its urbanism (mostly translating a previous Spanish publication into English)<sup>5</sup> and material culture.

The next subsection on Hispania has three chapters. In the first one, Ruth Pliego and Tawfiq Ibrahim present in a very novel way the role cities had as administrative centres based on numismatic and sigillographic evidence. They convincingly prove that while successive late antique polities had different attitudes different towards cities, it is possible also to identify important regional and local patterns across Iberia and North Africa. Francisco Moreno's chapter the most ground-breaking piece in the volume, because even if it focuses only on the sixth and ninth centuries, he cautiously-yet-accurately dismantles many general assumptions on the perceived "Visigothicness" of the Asturian kingdom and the fictitious (reconstructed) urbanism of Toledo based on known Asturian parallels. The last paper in this section is by Christoph Eger, who presents the different stages of urban Islamisation as can be inferred from the development of burial practices, looking at various examples from across the Peninsula.

The section on North Africa is opened by a chapter by François Baratte, who underlines how much work is still to be done on North African urban archaeology: not only from a practical perspective of methodology, but also from the theoretical and interpretative side of things. The different historical benchmarks and chronological indicators are now clearly identifiable, but the processes that link them are still blurry. A very similar proposal is put forward by Corisande Fenwick, who analyses how the different polities have clear impacts on the perceived and excavated townscapes. The very close link between administrative relevance and urban continuity is, furthermore, comparable between old Roman cities and new Islamic foundations. The last case-study chapter is by Elsa Rocca and Fathi Béjaoui, who focus on two particular well-studied cities from inland Byzacena (Haïdra and Tébassa) to further develop the importance of regionalisation in urban evolution from the late Roman into the Islamic period. The next one is Jerba, by Elizabeth Fentress, who re-examines her own published fieldwork on the island. This is followed by a study by Ridha Ghadhab, who presents a catalogue of oil and pottery workshops inside cities of late antique date, concluding that there was no process of relocation of suburban activities, but rather an increasing visibility of activities which already existed in the Roman period. These are followed by three last chapters on broader topics. Anna Leone summarises in the next chapter, very briefly, her previous work on monumental construction and marble recycling, without adding much new.<sup>6</sup> Lennart Gilhaus, discusses and catalogues the last statues of Roman North Africa, while, lastly, Esther Sánchez tries to discuss the nature of urban power during the Vandal conquest, and how the interaction between bishops and the monarchy reflects this rather than religious opposition.

To conclude, this volume presents a wide range of archaeological material from an impressive collection of sites, which are framed by topical and theoretical discussions which highlight the current state of studies on late antique urbanism. It also shows how it is increasingly possible to discuss the transition from a late/post-Roman world to the Islamic period, including some *very* good papers (esp. Vizcaíno, Pliego & Ibrahim, Moreno, Rocca & Béjaoui). The book has, nevertheless, some problems: even if the book is presented as a reassessment of Hugh Kennedy's 1985 paper, very few chapters address the original publication directly, even if the rupture/continuity debate is acknowledged as a main historiographic problem. Similarly, very few chapters actually focus on the evolution of cities during the *longue durée* (either from a theoretical or a practical perspective), and there is little interaction amongst them, which makes the whole volume less coherent. More worryingly, some of the contributions are not as innovative as they might have been and largely reiterate previously-presented work. Lastly, there is a lack of discussion on Portuguese material – sadly the usual forgotten corner of the Iberian Peninsula. But, overall, the editors are to be congratulated for their initiative in promoting and organising these collaborative workshops. The publications will make comparative studies easier and, hopefully, will continue to highlight the relevance of Iberian material in early Medieval studies.

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### Notes:

[1.](#) See [BMCR 2019.11.25](#).

[2.](#) Kennedy, Hugh. 1985. "From polis to medina", *Past & Present*, 106: 3-27.

[3.](#) Olmo Enciso, Lauro (ed.). 2008. *Recópolis y la ciudad en la época visigoda*. Alcalá de Henares.

[4.](#) e.g., his co-authored paper in the 2008 *Recópolis* publication.

[5.](#) Casal García, María Teresa. 2008. "Características generales del urbanismo cordobés de la primera etapa emiral: el arrabal de Saqunda" *Anales de Arqueología Cordobesa* 1: 109-34.

[6.](#) cf. Leone, Anna. 2007. *Changing Townscapes in North Africa from Late Antiquity to the Arab Conquest*. Bari.

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