

Utica's urban centre from Augustus to the Antonines

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Since 2010, a team from the Tunisian Institut National du Patrimoine and the University of Oxford¹ has been investigating Utica's monumental centre, located at the tip of the promontory on which the city is built (fig. 1). The range and scale of architectural elements littering this area were remarked upon by most antiquarian investigators of the site. Nathan Davis, working at the site in 1858, noted that, despite the fact that it "had been ransacked for building materials", this part of the city was covered with "marble and granite shafts, capitals, and cornices, of every order, size, and dimension".² Alfred Daux even observed that local residents referred to the largest building of the zone as the "Dar Es Sultan" (Palace of the Sultan), such was its magnificence.³ Aerial photographs commissioned by A. Lézine in the 1950s (fig. 2) show the area at the head of the promontory almost completely robbed out during and immediately after the Second World War, giving it a rather desolate aspect.

The new excavations have, however, provided sufficient evidence for us to present what seems to be a coherent sequence for the monumental centre, one that began in the Augustan period or slightly earlier, with a radical redevelopment under Hadrian continuing into the Antonine period, even if aspects of our reconstruction remain highly hypothetical. We will summarize previous scholarly interpretations of the monumental core before outlining how recent work has identified a new monument to the north, shed further light on the nature and extent of the earliest forum, and provided a firmer identification and phasing for the two largest buildings occupying the bulk of this area, a new sanctuary complex here tentatively identified as a Traianeum, and a basilica, also of the 2nd c. A.D. As the central area was transformed, public spaces were converted and new monuments constructed on a case-by-case basis, often disregarding earlier structures or alignments and increasingly looking toward the expanding city to the south. One of the most important cities in N Africa, Utica's monumental development was closely interwoven with imperial policy and responded, at least in part, to a desire to keep up with building activity at its more famous neighbour, Carthage.

Excavations in the 20th c. and A. Lézine's early forum

Antiquarian interest at Utica was relatively modest, the results of early expeditions frequently being presented in the shadow of Carthage. While important finds were made, such as the uncovering of the basilica (see below) by the Italian count Camillo Borgia in

* *Frequently cited works:*

Lézine 1968 = A. Lézine, *Carthage-Utique. Études d'architecture et d'urbanisme* (Paris).

Lézine 1970 = A. Lézine, *Utique* (Tunis).

1 The project as a whole is directed by Imed Ben Jerbania, Elizabeth Fentress, Faouzi Ghozi, Josephine Quinn and Andrew Wilson.

2 N. Davis, *Carthage and her remains* (London 1861) 510.

3 A. Daux, *Recherches sur l'origine et l'emplacement des emporia phéniciens dans le Zeugis et le Byzacium* (Paris 1869) 260-62; Lézine 1968, 90-91.