

A late-Roman urban population in a cemetery of Vandalic date at Carthage

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is first to add a cemetery of Vandalic date at Carthage¹ to the growing repertory of late or post-Roman city cemeteries, and to suggest that this cemetery conforms to a larger pattern of orderly urban burial grounds.² Since the simple and utilitarian burial practices represented at the Theodosian Wall cemetery at Carthage are similar to the enigmatic burial *koine* that characterizes many cemeteries in late antiquity, its second purpose is to consider which if any of the burial practices in this cemetery distinguish it from the larger pattern. In other words, it seeks to wrestle with the difficulties of interpreting certain common practices as something specific and significant to a securely-dated cemetery in the relatively well-known urban context of late-Roman and Vandal Carthage. However, the issues of interpretation raised here must remain open and the conclusions remain provisional pending a complete analysis of the site.³

The date and context of the cemetery⁴

The cemetery lies just outside the Theodosian city wall of Carthage, c.200 m W of the N gate on the *kardo maximus*. It was first discovered by the Italian team in 1973-77 during the International Campaign to Save Carthage: burials ranging from the Punic period to the early 7th c. A.D. were found in a long narrow trench (taglio IIIA) which lay on the line of *kardo* 6W, both inside and outside the city wall.⁵ From 1987-89 the Kelsey Museum of the University of Michigan investigated the latest phases of the cemetery by opening trenches on both sides of the Italian excavation, adjacent to the robber trench for the Theodosian Wall, on the outside (fig.1).⁶

- 1 For brief notices on the excavations of 1987-89 by the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology of the University of Michigan, see M. B. Garrison and S. T. Stevens, "Le cimetière du Mur de Théodose," in A. Ennabli (ed.), *Pour sauver Carthage* (UNESCO/INAA 1992), M. B. Garrison, "A Late Roman/ Early Byzantine Cemetery at Carthage," *Arch.News* 15 (1990) 23-29 and "University of Michigan Excavations. Report of the 1987 and 1988 seasons," *CEDAC Carthage* 10 (June 1989) 15-19. Some of the finds from the excavation are now on display in the Musée de Carthage: see J. Richerson and S. T. Stevens, "From monastery to museum in Carthage," *Museum News* (July/Aug. 1994) 27; S. T. Stevens and J. Richerson, "Between Caesar and Mohammed," *Minerva* (Jan/Feb. 1994) 33.
- 2 On the importance of city cemeteries see R. Jones, "Burial customs of Rome and the provinces," in J. Wachter (ed.) *The Roman world* 2 (London 1987) 820-26.
- 3 The final report by M. B. Garrison with the present author is in active preparation for the *JRA supplementary series*. The present article was first presented at a symposium, "Carthage reexplored", held at the Cincinnati Art Museum in 1990. It is not intended to be a substitute for the final report, and is subject to modification.
- 4 The present summary owes a great debt to my colleague M. B. Garrison who has written the stratigraphic chapter for the final report.
- 5 C. Panella in A. Carandini *et al.*, "Gli scavi italiani a Cartagine. Rapporto preliminare delle campagne 1973-1977," *QAL* 13 (1982) 36-47 and L. Anselmino, "Le secteur nord-ouest de la ville," in *Pour sauver Carthage* (supra n.1) 127.
- 6 This project is one of three cemetery excavations undertaken by the University of Michigan at Carthage: the others are a 7th-c. cemetery outside the circus but inside the city wall, see J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *The Circus and a Byzantine cemetery at Carthage* (Ann Arbor 1988); and a Vandal and Byzantine cemetery church in the southern outskirts of the city, see S. T. Stevens, *Bir el Knissia at Carthage. A rediscovered cemetery church. Report no. 1* (JRA Suppl. 7, 1993).