

**LEPTIMINUS (LAMTA). REPORT No. 4**  
**The East Cemetery**  
**Fascicule 1**

INSTITUT NATIONAL DU PATRIMOINE, TUNIS  
UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA, WINNIPEG

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**LEPTIMINUS (LAMTA)**  
**REPORT No. 4**  
**The East Cemetery:**  
**stratigraphy, ceramics, non-ceramic finds**  
**and bio-archaeological studies**

edited by  
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*with contributions by*

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**Fascicule 1**  
**Overview, chronology and synthesis;**  
**Ceramics**

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## 19. Catalogue of graves

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*L. Stirling, A. Keenleyside & J. P. Moore*

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Fig. A. Urban growth in Lamta is spreading over the eastern suburbs of ancient Leptiminus, where there was a mixture of wealthy housing, cemeteries, and pottery production. Excavation in 1992 at Site 200 uncovered tombs which are part of the overall East Cemetery. Photograph taken on October 18, 2020 at 12:30, courtesy of Mohammed Amine Sayadi, Hedi Chouchane, and Anis Kilani.



Fig. B. View of Site 304, looking southeast. The vaulting of the Small Vaulted Room shows well in the foreground. Underground activity at the site included *hypogea* (arrows), deep vertical shafts (white boxes) and catacomb tunnels. Credits and photo information as for fig. A.

## Acknowledgements

As we complete this volume in the fall of 2020, the year of the 30th anniversary of the commencement of the overall Leptiminius Archaeological Project, it is humbling to reflect on the long duration of this international partnership and the enduring support it has received from institutions both within and beyond Tunisia. The first discoveries at the East Cemetery (S304) came in 1999-2000, followed by the joint Tunisian-Canadian project that ran from 2004 to 2009. Here we offer our gratitude to the many institutions and individuals who have done so much to promote archaeological research at the East Cemetery across the decade 1999-2009.

Naturally, permission from the Tunisian Institut National du Patrimoine (INP) is the first *sine qua non* of international cooperation. We are grateful to its successive directors, Bou Baker Ben Frej, Mohammed Béji Ben Mami and Fethi Bejaoui, for their support of research in Lamta and of the international project. We were pleased that the INP renewed the *Accord Cadre* with the University of Manitoba in 2004 to allow this work to proceed in partnership. We thank successive Directors of Research at INP, the late Hedi Slim, Fethi Bejaoui and Nabil Kallala, for their strong endorsement of the project. Throughout the field seasons and study seasons, backing from the INP in the form of personnel, equipment, practical aid and other expertise was invaluable.

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## Acknowledgements

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**2004:** Frej Alaya, Lotfi Belhouchet, Nejib Ben Lazreg, Tahar Ben Lazreg, Houria Bougarech, Haïfa Bouhel, Mohammed Naceur Bousrih, James Cook, Diana Good, Anwar Jammousi, Taha Khechine, Anne Keenleyside, Ibtissem Khessiba, Paul King, Jennifer Moore, Lea Stirling.

**2005:** Ines Bargou, Samia Bel Hadj Sghaïer, Olfa Ben Aïcha, Imed Ben Jerbania, Nejib Ben Lazreg, Tahar Ben Lazreg, Houria Bougarech, Mohammed Naceur Bousrih, Lawrence Conyers, James Cook, John Dore, Diana Good, Jody Gordon, Salwa Hdhili, Anne Keenleyside, Mary Malainey, Drew Marshall, Jennifer Moore, Elisabeth Pamberg, Sana Riahi, Ryan Ricciardi, Ari Saastamoinen, Laurie Shead, Susan Stevens, Lea Stirling, Garth Sutton.

**2006:** Najoua Ayed, Hamed Bchir, Olfa Ben Aïcha, Nejib Ben Lazreg, Tahar Ben Lazreg, Mohammed Naceur Bousrih, Brandi Bowling, Benjamin Cloutier, James Cook, Daniel Coslett, John Dore, Dana Falk, Hekma Ghadbani, Diana Good, Nabil Hamzaoui, Claire Heckel, Madeline Holder, Anne Keenleyside, Jenny Krieger, Michael MacKinnon, Philippe Marival, Drew Marshall, Wafa Messaouidi, Lobna Nouri, Jennifer Moore, Hasna M'Saddek, Rebecca Neri, Andrei Opaiț, Elisabeth Pamberg, Riadh Smari, Susan Stevens, Lea Stirling.

**2007 (study season):** Nejib Ben Lazreg, Tahar Ben Lazreg, Mohammed Naceur Bousrih, John Dore, Jane Heinrichs, Anne Keenleyside, Jenny Krieger, Jennifer Moore, Drew Marshall, Hasna M'Saddek, Elisabeth Pamberg, Allison Sterrett-Krause, Lea Stirling.

**2008 (study season):** Olfa Ben Aïcha, Nejib Ben Lazreg, Mohammed Naceur Bousrih, Rached Hamdi, Jane Heinrichs, Angela Kalinowski, Rhiannon Krol, Victoria Leitch, Jennifer Moore, Elisabeth Pamberg, Susan Stevens, Lea Stirling.

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Like fieldwork, a site publication relies on teamwork, being strengthened by the contributions of many. The contributors to this volume have all been unstinting with their expertise and patient with follow-up questions. John Humphrey, founding editor of the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* and champion of archaeological publication, has been indefatigable not only in editing and perfecting complicated chapters, but also in pursuing quality and keeping our focus on the final goal. Laura Humphrey at *JRA* provides support and assistance behind the scenes. We thank our co-director Susan Stevens for expert advice in and out of the field and for her outstanding intellectual generosity. David Stone, Mark Lawall, James Cook, Kate Dougherty and Paolo Visonà have consulted on many aspects of publication and interpretation.

October 24, 2020

N. Ben Lazreg, L. M. Stirling, and J. P. Moore

*A word of thanks from Stirling and Moore*

The experience of conducting fieldwork at Leptiminus has been an honour, a pleasure, a stimulating journey, and personally rewarding. We have been especially grateful for the opportunity to work with and to learn from Nejib Ben Lazreg, whose deep knowledge of the region and whose integrity and humanity have made this project possible.

# The Leptiminus Archaeological Project and the East Cemetery: introduction

Lea Stirling, Nejib Ben Lazreg, and Jennifer P. Moore

Located on the E coast of Tunisia, the ancient town of Leptiminus began as a Punic foundation around 500 B.C., reaching its largest extent in the 2nd-3rd c. A.D. before dwindling in size down to c.700. The town covered an area of c.1.5 km<sup>2</sup>. Its amenities included a jetty, two aqueducts, three baths and an amphitheatre. Although not many substantial structural remains are visible today on the site, it is important for archaeologists because the site of the city is a protected heritage zone where little modern construction has occurred. Covered largely by olive groves, thus far the ancient layers beneath have seldom been disturbed by deep ploughing or construction. This has facilitated an unusual degree of access to an entire Roman town and its hinterland.

## The Leptiminus Archaeological Project

The Leptiminus Archaeological Project (LAP) began in 1990 as a joint project between the Institut National de Patrimoine (INP) and the University of Michigan, co-directed by the late H. Slim and N. Ben Lazreg (INP) and by J. H. Humphrey and D. J. Mattingly (both then of the University of Michigan). In 1995, the permit moved to the University of Manitoba, with Ben Lazreg, L. M. Stirling (University of Manitoba) and D. Stone (University of Michigan) co-directing work in the field. In 2006, S., T. Stevens (Randolph College) joined the team to co-direct with Ben Lazreg excavations in a Christian burial sector. Study seasons and continued sondages by the Project continued until 2009. J. P. Moore (Trent University) was a co-director of the field school and head ceramicist for work at the “pagan” sector of the East Cemetery. Ben Lazreg, the INP Conservateur du site et du musée de Lamta, has conducted further excavations as well.<sup>1</sup>

Over nearly two decades, the Project conducted a field survey, excavations and other archaeological research, with results primarily published in the Supplementary Series of the *Journal of Roman Archaeology* (*Leptiminus* Reports 1-3). The Project investigated late-antique industrial installations at the public East Baths that were built in the 3rd c. and later re-used for ceramic production (S1), several cemeteries (S10, S200, S250, S304), a pottery workshop active in the 1st-3rd c. (S290), and another site related to pottery production (S270), with results published in *Leptiminus* Reports nos. 1 and 2.<sup>2</sup> The field survey across the urban site and its rural penumbra (*Leptiminus* Report no. 3) demonstrated the success of field survey methods applied to the dense finds of an urban site. Systematic study of surface finds permitted evaluation of the city’s growth over time, its economic rôle as a “producer city”, and its connection to imperial, provincial and extra-provincial economies. Overall, the holistic framework of exploration, combining field survey with excavation and a wide range of specialist studies, means that each individual component has been enriched by the broader context into which information can be set.

The renewal of the Project in 2004 marked a new phase that saw greater participation by Tunisian colleagues at INP (Lotfi Belhouchet, Imed Ben Jerbania, Tahar Ben Lazreg, Taha Kechine)

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- 1 These excavations include several houses with mosaic floors. A house with a mosaic of Venus was found in the eastern suburbs (S250; see *Leptiminus* 2, 259-358; *Leptiminus* 3, 599-602). In the city centre, Ben Lazreg excavated a house with Roman-era geometric mosaics (S333, S334; *Leptiminus* 3, 626) and a house with mosaics of the late 4th or early 5th c. showing the Birth of Helen and the Dioscuri and a marine thiasos (S334; *Leptiminus* 3, 626-27; mosaics to be published in a forthcoming volume of this series). Nearby was a bath building S332 with a floor mosaic showing a hunt.
  - 2 For a guide to publications of sites excavated by the Leptiminus Archaeological Project, see *Leptiminus* 3, 23. The Project uses the term “site”, abbreviated with the prefix S, to refer to “one of the many smaller foci of human activity which we encountered on the surface of the town and in its immediate hinterland” (*Leptiminus* 3, 59). Note also a recent study of Punic tombs at the site: Ben Younes and Sghaier 2018.

and the University of Tunis (Zakia Ben Hadj Naceur-Loum). Students from the Institut des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines at Sousse, the Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines at Kairouan, and the Institut Supérieur des Métiers et des Arts du Patrimoine at Tunis participated in the excavations.<sup>3</sup> Other Tunisian researchers, including the late Jihen Nacef, visited the site to look at the finds and contribute their expertise. As a result, the current volume showcases Tunisian expertise for the chapters on the Christian mosaics (Ben Lazreg), coins (Ben Hadj Naceur-Loum), small finds (Ben Aïcha), and statuettes (Hsini-Hamdi).

#### The East Cemetery and S304

On the eastern periphery of the town, the zone today known as Jebel Lahmar saw mixed use that included pottery workshops, well-to-do housing, and cemeteries, sometimes sequentially at the same location. The East Cemetery is the broad term we have applied to several adjacent excavation sites that produced graves, all falling within an area of c.80 x 80 m (see figs. 1.1 and 1.2 for plans of the area made in 2004 and 2008 and figs. 1.3-1.5 for aerial photographs made on October 18, 2020 at 12.30 pm).<sup>4</sup> In 1992, the Project had excavated part of the cemetery at S200, uncovering some 70 skeletons, walled compounds, cupula grave-markers, and a mausoleum (see the area marked “fouilles de 1992” in fig. 1.1).<sup>5</sup> The results from S200 are planned for presentation in a future volume, but one distinctive feature of that sector of the cemetery is the presence of several graves with a minimum of three individuals (including adults and older children) buried together. In 1999, at S302 the Project excavated 5 grave structures that had been exposed in road construction (see “tombe” on fig. 1.1) and these too are treated in the present volume.

The designation S304 refers to a cemetery zone first investigated in 1999-2000 by Ben Lazreg and Mohammed Bousrih and then excavated by the joint project in 2004-6 with Stirling as co-director and S. T. Stevens as co-director in 2006 and subsequently for a *sondage* in 2009 (fig. 1.3).<sup>6</sup> S304 comprises two parts: a “pagan” sector and a Christian zone (see fig. 2.1 below).<sup>7</sup> The “pagan” sector has tombs at ground level, walled compounds and *hypogea* (fig. 1.4). Its main period of activity was c.A.D. 175-250, which we refer to throughout this volume as the “core” period. In the Christian

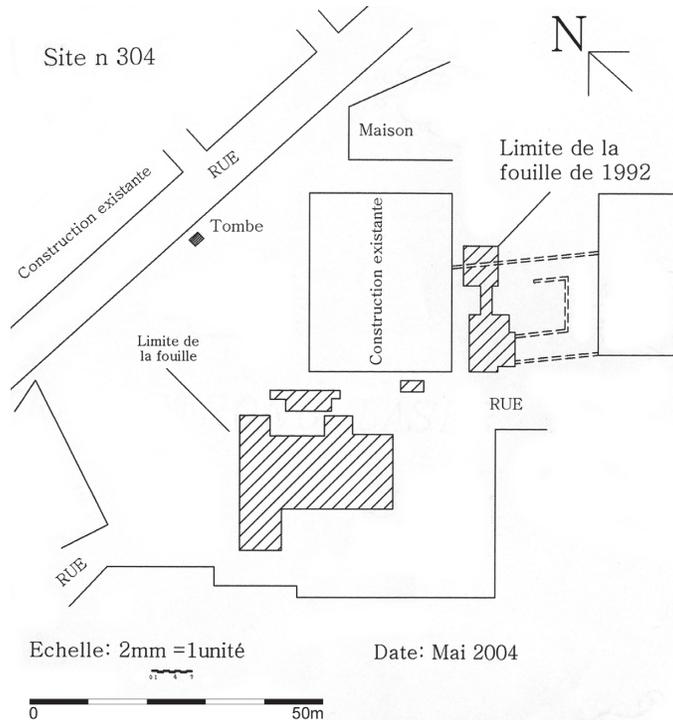


Fig. 1.1. Schematic plan of the East Cemetery, showing the trench boundaries of S304 in 2004 (hatched area at centre), S302 (“tombe”) and S200 (“fouilles de 1992”) (T. Ben Lazreg).

<sup>3</sup> See the Acknowledgements for the participants in each season.

<sup>4</sup> We are grateful to Mohammed Amine Sayadi, Hedi Chouchane and Anis Kilani for permission to use the photographs here. For a video produced by Radio Monastir (in Arabic), see <https://www.facebook.com/radiomonastir.fm/videos/1182308838837079/>

<sup>5</sup> For brief summaries of results at S200, see *Leptiminius* 2, 409-19; *Leptiminius* 3, 590-91.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Lazreg 2002; Ben Lazreg *et al.* 2006.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of the term “pagan” sector, see pp. 17 and 87-89 below.

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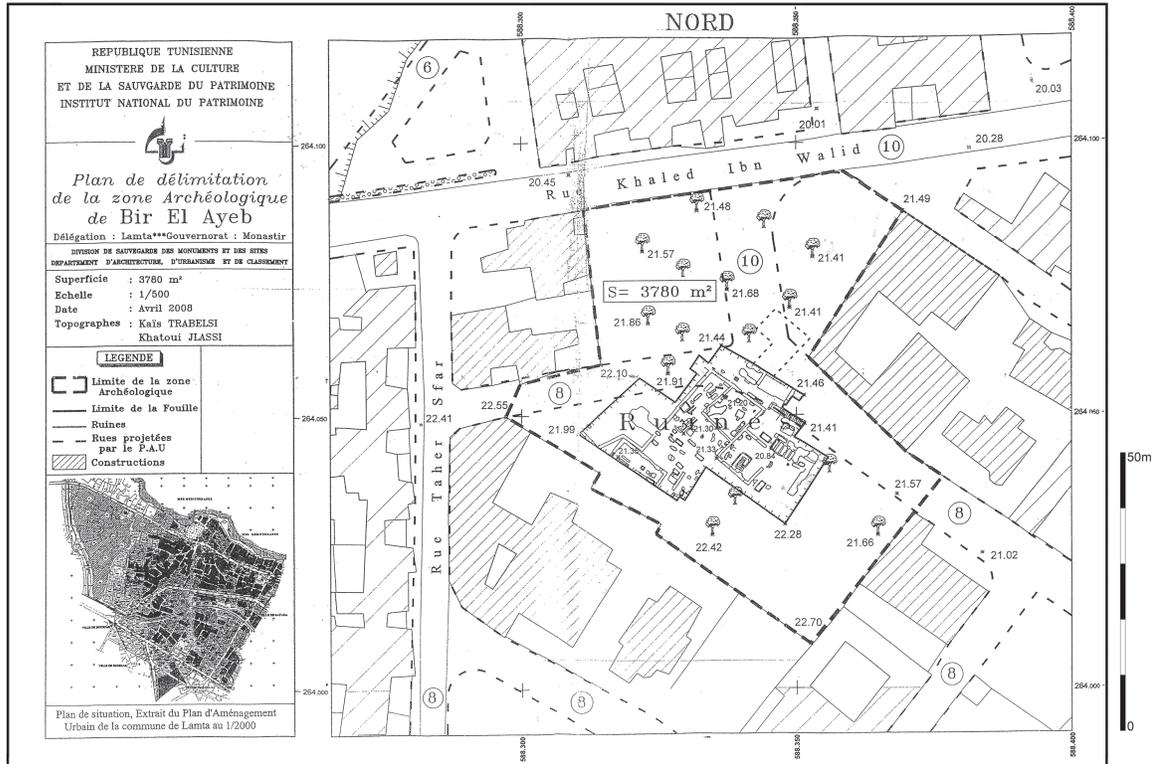


Fig. 1.2. Plan of the excavated area and surrounding buildings in 2008.

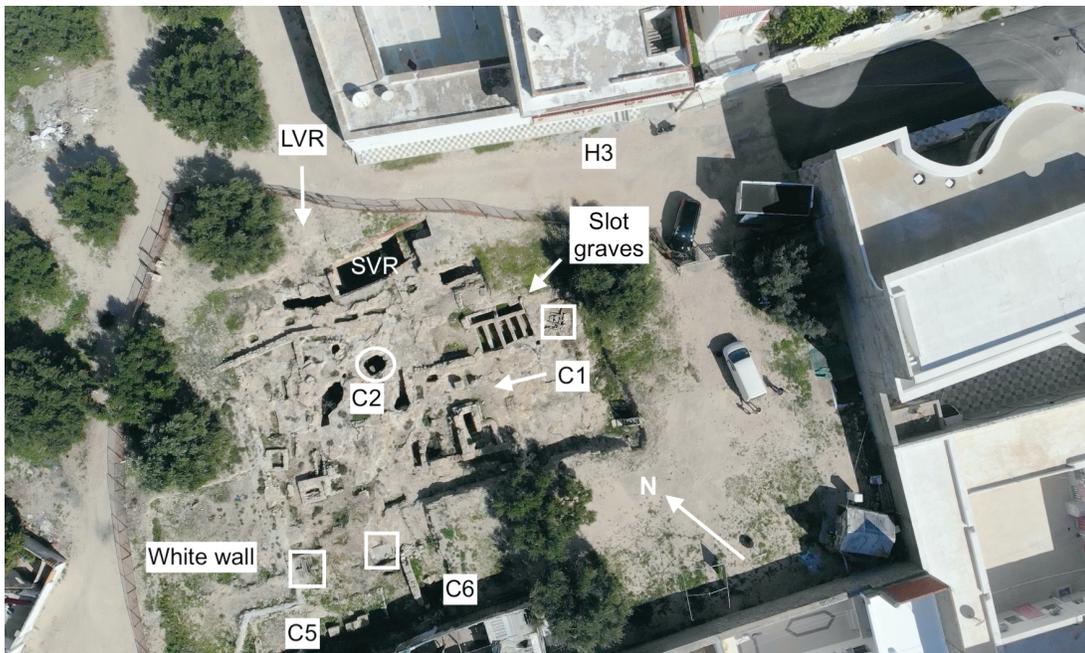


Fig. 1.3. Aerial view of S304 taken in 2020. Walls of burial compounds (C1, C2, C5, C6) still show clearly, as does the excavation for the Small Vaulted Room. The Large Vaulted Room, now refilled, was located north of it. White boxes indicate deep shafts. The white circle shows a wider deep shaft that cut *Hypogeum 2*. Photo taken on October 18, 2020 at 12.30 pm, published courtesy of Mohammed Amine Sayadi, Hedi Chouchane and Anis Kilani.



Fig. 1.4. View of "pagan" sector at S304. The White Wall, compound walls, stepped tombs for cremations (arrows) and cuttings into bedrock for graves are all visible. White boxes indicate deep shafts and the white circle shows a wider shaft that cut *Hypogeum 2*. Photo taken on October 18, 2020 at 12.30 pm, published courtesy of Mohammed Amine Sayadi, Hedi Chouchane and Anis Kilani.



Fig. 1.5. Aerial view of S304 showing the Small Vaulted Room, the stairs leading down to it, the slot graves, and the entrances to *Hypogea 1* and *2*. Photo taken on 18 October 2020 at 12.30 pm, published courtesy of Mohammed Amine Sayadi, Hedi Chouchane and Anis Kilan).

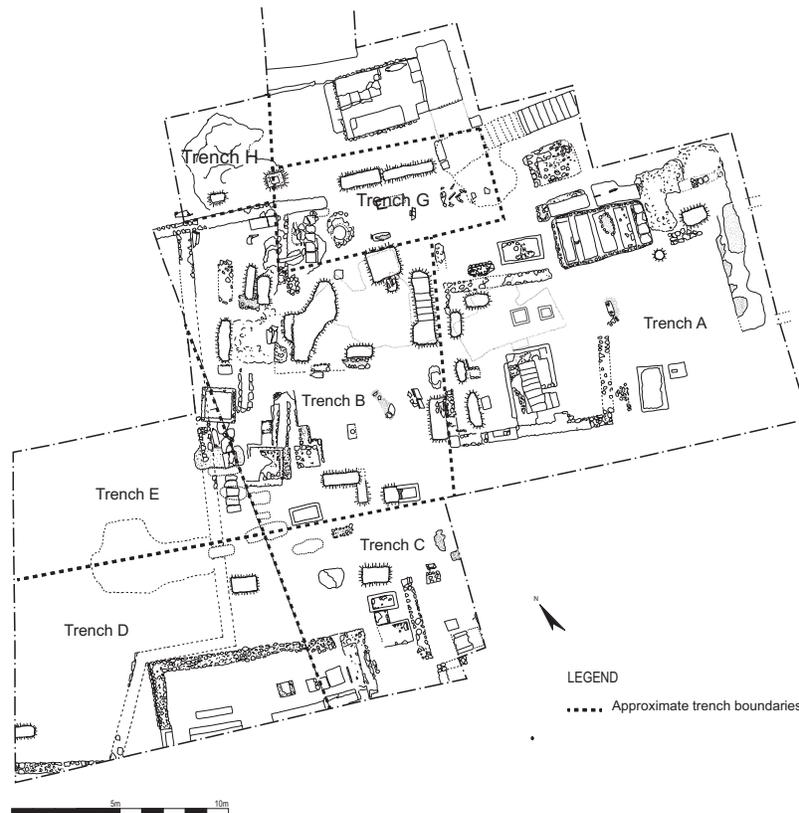


Fig. 1.6. Plan of S304 with trenches A-E, G, and H marked on it. The border for A and B was not firmly defined. Trench A included *Hypogeum* 1. Trench B included *Hypogeum* 2. Ancient and modern structures partially determined boundaries of excavation.

sector, stairs led down to a vestibule from which a small vaulted room and a large vaulted room could be entered (figs. 1.4-1.5). The floors of the vestibule and both vaulted rooms had mosaic markers for graves set into the floors. There were also entries into a network of rock-hewn catacombs which for safety reasons have not yet been explored. Use of the Christian sector evidently began in the 4th c.

#### Contents and layout of this volume

Although we had hoped to present all the discoveries at S304 together, it proved expedient to publish a first volume mainly focussed on the “pagan” sector, supplemented by Ben Lazreg’s important presentation of the mosaic floors of the Christian sector. A second volume by him and Stevens will recount the excavation of the Christian sector and the finds and provide an overall discussion of the Christian sector and its tombs. Since the two sectors are integrally linked by their location and excavation history, the dividing line between them (and their publications) is not always clear. For instance, work in 2004 included the excavation of late dumping layers full of coins of the 4th-5th c. at the top of staircase 1086 leading down to the vestibule and the small vaulted room in the Christian sector (see fig. 1.5, staircase). These layers are evidently related to the spoliation of those rooms. They are presented in the present volume because they overlay a compound of the “core period”.<sup>8</sup> Excavation in 2006 focussed on the Christian sector below but also included some remaining ground-level tombs in Compound 2 (trench G), presented here (fig. 1.6). Likewise,

<sup>8</sup> See p. 74 below.

four graves flanking the N wall of Compound 2 excavated in 2006 (trenches G and H) relate to the “pagan” sector. Finds from the late layers of débris that filled *Hypogea* 1 and 2, excavated in 1999-2000, were processed by the joint project in 2004-5 and are presented here, as they pertain to the final abandonment of the cemetery.

As mentioned, in the present volume Ben Lazreg presents the tomb (Christian) mosaics from the vestibule and the small and large vaulted rooms, fleshing out his earlier preliminary reports.<sup>9</sup> The subsequent volume on the Christian sector by him and Stevens will provide a full account of the 2006 excavations and the 2009 sondage. That volume will include the ceramics from the fills of those rooms, the skeletons, the coins, and certain other finds. Two chapters presented in this volume encompass finds from both the “pagan” and the Christian sectors: the glass (Sterrett-Krause) and the small finds (Ben Aïcha). This is because those particular specialists had studied their materials as a single collection. Clearly, further study of the Christian sector will allow Ben Lazreg and Stevens to shed light on their context and integrate them into an overall interpretation.

### **An holistic approach to an ancient cemetery**

The present volume presents and synthesizes studies of stratigraphy, architectural features, ceramics, works of art, other artifacts, human bones and environmental evidence from the East Cemetery. Being well aware of the human effort and expense of such an undertaking and the non-replicability (destructiveness) of the excavation process itself, and in an effort to respect the ancient individuals whose graves we are studying, we have sought to derive insights into the ancient lived experience from as many types of finds, angles, and methods as possible.

The book opens with context and synthesis with three chapters aiming to tell the “story of the site” and its broad interpretation. First, Ben Lazreg and Stirling present the stratigraphy of the “pagan” sector, discussing the sequence of graves from the “core” period and later, as well as late layers of débris that derive from excavating into the limestone bedrock and a series of deep shafts (possibly for clay mining) (chapt. 2). Stirling and Moore then synthesize information from all categories of finds to discuss the practicalities of burying the deceased (chapt. 3) and the evidence for ritual during cremations, funerals, and commemorative visits (chapt. 4).

Nine chapters present different categories of artifacts. All present new material from excavated contexts (of value in itself) but they also contextualize the material within the previous results from Leptiminus and other sites and explore broader social questions which may arise from it.

J. P. Moore’s chapter on ceramics not only presents the ceramics found at the “pagan” sector of S304 but also summarizes the current state of information about different pottery genres at Leptiminus, compiling information from all the previously published results. V. Leitch and C. Capelli bring further archaeometric insights to the cookwares from Dhahret Slama, including those from S304. A. Sterrett-Krause presents the first glass report from Leptiminus, covering the “pagan” and Christian sectors of S304, as well as a little glass found in the field survey. M. Bates publishes a mediaeval glass weight. O. Ben Aïcha’s study of 181 small finds, again from both sectors, usefully adds to the rather small corpus of literature on small finds from N African sites; it is followed by some remarks by Stirling. O. Hsini-Hamdi presents careful iconographic and contextual detail on 5 excavated statuettes of Venus; while many terracotta statuettes have been reported in children’s graves in *Byzacena*, most have entered museums with little information about the circumstances of their discovery. Z. Ben Hadj Naceur-Loum studies coins from the “pagan” sector of the cemetery.<sup>10</sup> Evidence for Roman-era textiles, which has been little studied on N African sites, is here treated by J. P. Wild and Stirling based on data from S304; they also compile N African comparanda.

<sup>9</sup> Ben Lazreg 2002; Ben Lazreg *et al.* 2006.

<sup>10</sup> For previous coin reports, see *Leptiminus* 1, 264-66; *Leptiminus* 2, 460-64.

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Tantalizing fragments of stone inscriptions mostly found in late destruction levels, which are studied by Moore, display elements of typical funerary formulas.<sup>11</sup>

Ben Lazreg next presents the exceptional tomb mosaics from the Christian sector, bringing together evidence from his initial rescue work in 1999 with the finds from 2006 so as to present all the mosaics in a single study.

The third section of this volume is devoted to bioarchaeological evidence, starting out with the human remains that were the *raison d'être* of the cemetery. Drawing on data preserved in the skeletal remains, A. Keenleyside investigates lived experience through the lenses of demography, health, diet and injuries among the individuals buried at S304 and S200, comparing them to other published N African sites too. T. D. Price carried out isotopic proveniencing on molars from 15 skeletons from a range of grave types at S304 and two other town cemeteries, the results proving to be strikingly homogenous from one individual to the next.

In our research design for S304, we were especially interested in evidence for food offerings or dining at the cemetery. To this purpose, the ceramic and glass studies are complemented by three analyses of ecofacts. M. MacKinnon studies animal remains from grave fills and other layers at the cemetery. Although the data-set is not large, he uses it to launch a theoretical discussion of ways by which to identify animal-related ritual within graves. During excavation, the team took soil samples from all graves, both cremation and inhumation. Ph. Marinval conducted flotation at the site in 2006 and delivered a preliminary report in 2009. Regrettably, we have fallen out of contact with him since 2014, but we present here his 2009 preliminary report on archaeobotany, in which grave numbers have been added and contextual information corrected when necessary. An appendix by S. Jezik provides the results from the cremations at S302 that were excavated in 1999. There are still too few archaeobotanical reports from N African sites of the High Empire.<sup>12</sup>

Last comes a catalogue of the 107 graves from the “pagan” sector of S304 and S302, assembled by Stirling, Keenleyside and Moore. Here readers will find the full information on chronology, grave structures, fill layers, associated finds and skeletal data, arranged sequentially by grave number. It is our hope that scholars will use this fine-grained data to pose further questions and identify comparisons.

### Epilogue

Even if the preparation and publication of this volume has not been as swift in execution as we had intended and hoped, the longer period of gestation has brought some benefits. We hope that the broad-ranging contents and integrated analysis will be of value to other scholars working on similar material both in N Africa and elsewhere. Although many cemeteries of the High Empire were excavated in the 19th or early 20th c., publications tended to focus on inscriptions, the larger grave monuments and notable individual finds. Few cemeteries of this period have been published with a high degree of detail and synthesis. Indeed, some of the material from cemeteries across N Africa is broadly synthesized here for the first time. The study presented here of Christian mosaics from an excavated and documented environment, along with the planned volume on the excavations in those underground rooms, are also adding much to the picture. What is emerging from our approach is a multi-faceted picture of townsfolk who were very much tied into both their own region and its trends and into the broader empire yet who developed their own ways of responding to death. It is a matter of satisfaction for us that much of the information presented here pertains to the lives and rituals of relatively ordinary inhabitants of a Roman N African town.

<sup>11</sup> Fragments of stone inscriptions found in the Christian sector will be presented in a future volume.

<sup>12</sup> In addition, some residue testing was conducted by M. Malainey and T. Figol. While their report could not, unfortunately, be published here, key findings are mentioned in specific chapters where relevant.