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## Pulcherrima Spolia in the Architecture and Urban Space at Tripoli

### Summary

The examples studied testify an ample and significant use of Roman spolia during the first Ottoman domination of Tripoli. In this period a variety of causes led to the improvement of the urban image of the city. The study focuses less on the re-use of spolia as construction material inside the main Muslim buildings (mosques) and more on the re-use of spolia for the specific urban purpose of preserving and immortalizing the Roman urban matrix. Particularly significant is the case of the Tetrapylon of Marcus Aurelius of the Roman Tripoli (Oea), and its 'quotation': the cross-roads of Arba' Arsat, known as the Four Columns of the Arab and then Ottoman Tarabulus. The second is an evident reproduction of the form and urban function of a Roman model. Its genesis may have preceded Turkish rule, but its symbolic value was certainly consolidated during the first Ottoman domination.

Keywords: Re-use; spolia; Tripoli; urban matrix; Roman model.

Die im Beitrag vorgestellten Beispiele belegen eine intensive Verwendung römischer Spolien zur Zeit der frühosmanischen Herrschaft über Tripolis. Während dieser Epoche kam es aus den unterschiedlichsten Gründen zu einer Weiterentwicklung des Stadtbildes. Der Beitrag befasst sich weniger mit der Verwendung von Spolien als Baumaterial in den wichtigsten islamischen Bauten (Moscheen) als vielmehr mit dem Einsatz von Spolien zum Zweck der Bewahrung und dauerhaften Sichtbarmachung der auf die römische Zeit zurückgehenden Stadtstrukturen. Ein besonders aufschlussreiches Beispiel ist das Tetrapylon des Marc Aurel im römischen Tripolis (Oea) und dessen architektonisches/städtebauliches „Zitat“ in Gestalt der Kreuzung von Arba' Arsat, die im arabischen und osmanischen Tarabulus als die „Vier Säulen“ bezeichnet wurde – offensichtlich ein formales und funktionales Abbild des römischen Vorbildes. Auch wenn die Anlage auf die Zeit vor der türkischen Herrschaft zurückgeht, gewann sie in frühosmanischer Zeit deutlich an Symbolkraft.

Keywords: Wiederverwendung; Spolien; Tripolis; Stadtstruktur; römisches Vorbild.

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## I Introduction

The present paper has been inspired by two observations made by professor Altekamp relating to the re-use of Roman *spolia* in Tripoli (Ṭarābulus, Libya). The first one regards recognizing the potential of Tripoli as a place where the material reality of the Roman city has been consumed almost totally, so that “single instances of visibility” of ancient remains (like capitals) are probably “conscious” references to the past. The second highlights a specific matter that concerns the whole of the Eastern Maghreb, asking “whether later, e.g. Ottoman instances of spoliation still create references to a Roman past or maybe to an early Muslim past, when Roman objects were despoiled and reused in a conspicuous and exemplary way (Great Mosque of Kairouan (Qairawān)); thus an imitation of an older practice of Muslim context”.

The following will attempt to give some answers to those questions, summarizing in:

1. Do the cases of re-use at Tripoli – where the Roman remains have practically disappeared – suggest a precise meaning?
2. Do the forms of re-use adopted by the Ottomans recall the Roman past and/or the kind of re-use developed by the first Muslims?

## 2 Preliminary remarks

The re-employment of ancient monuments and classical fragments is a highly diffused phenomenon that spans an extensive chronological period and a wide geographic area and is determined primarily by practical advantage. However, this paper only examines examples of ‘conscious’ re-use where a relationship of admiration, interest and continuity with Roman antiquity either directly or by means of Christianity/Early Islam continues to exist.

Re-employment develops where abandoned remains provide continuity of use, architectural models, resilient, pre-worked construction material plus a varied and wonderfully ornamental lexicon easy to utilize.

This means that in the specific case of Tripoli, the following must first be considered: the vitality, importance, strength and continuity of Roman Oea and the nearest Roman sites (e.g. Leptis Magna) after the fall of the Roman Empire. Subsequently, consideration also has to be given to the role played by: invasions, the Eastern Byzantine Empire and Christian communities linked to the Roman Church or other Eastern Churches. The latter, above all, fulfilled the important function of intermediary between the Ro-

man past and the first Arabic invaders, maintaining pre-existing towns, individual buildings, construction technologies and figurative traditions (continuity/discontinuity). An important example in Tripolitania is the church built by the Emperor Justinian (483–565) inside the Basilica Severiana at Leptis Magna. Only the southern apse of the Roman Basilica was reutilized in this church devoted to Theotokos.

### 3 Historical notes

In 642–643 ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ conquered Libya (Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, Fezzan), already occupied by the Byzantines. The final conquest occurred in 666–667.

Arabs, and before them the Byzantines, found a network of towns especially along the coast, the result of Greek, Punic and Roman civilization. In Cyrenaica: Apollonian, Cyrene, Tolemaide, Barca, Teuchira, Berenice; in Tripolitania: Leptis Magna, Oea, Sabratha. Nevertheless, these towns had lost part of their richness and prosperity as a result of an earthquake in 365, attacks by Vandals and invasions by warriors from closer regions during the 5th century.

During the Byzantine period the coastal towns recovered their prestige as fortresses, but they were overtaken by the hinterland as important commercial centers.

Oea in Tripolitania and Barca in Cyrenaica were the main towns along the coast where the Arab invaders settled. Ultimately, they lived together with the local Christian population.

Coexistence with the Christian communities is testified by the presence in Leptis and Oea/Ṭarābulus (and perhaps in Sabratha) of bishop's sees during the first half of the 9th century. The cemetery at an-Ngila, south Tripoli, provides evidence of the existence of a Christian community until 1021 in Tripoli or thereabouts. Moreover, Abū Ubayd al-Bakrī (1028–1094) in his description of North Africa in 1068 refers to the coexistence of Muslim and Christian communities (linked both to the Church of Rome and Coptic Egypt). Al-Bakrī, who wrote before the terrible invasion of desert Arab tribes, gives information on the fertility of the Leptis hinterland and the presence of monuments and ruins.

Around 1050, the Maghreb was invaded by the cruel hordes of the Banū Hilāl and Bani Sulaym tribes, who were nomad warriors armed by the Fatimid Caliph of Egypt. Many historians identify the Hilalian invasion as the cause of the break with the ancient world, a connection that had survived during the first Muslim period.

The Arab geographer al-Idrīsī, writing a century after al-Bakrī, confirms the disruption provoked by these attacks. He makes no mention of Christian communities and

describes a poorer urban economy. He refers to Lebdah (Labda, Leptis) only as a fortress and place of rest along the road between Mahdia (Mahdiya) and Alexandria.

In 1146 the Normans conquered Tripoli but after twenty years the Almohads (al-Muwaḥḥidūn), who came from Andalusia, replaced them. From the mid-14th to 15th century the Hafsids (al-Ḥafṣiyyūn) of Tunis controlled Libya but the main towns were initially self-governed, founding their economy on corsair wars.

To stop these attacks in 1510 Tripoli was annexed to the Crown of Castile by Ferdinand de Aragón, twenty years later Carlo V entrusted Tripoli to the Knights of Malta. This conquest led to the destruction of the town and the reconstruction of the Castle, both to the detriment of the city wall that had conserved many Roman spoils.

In 1551 Tripoli became steadily Turkish. During the long Ottoman period the harbor towns of Mediterranean Africa didn't undergo extensive transformation. From the end of the 17th century to 1835, with the permission of the Ottomans the Qaramānlī, a self-governing dynasty, ruled Tripoli (particularly Yūsuf Pasha, 1795–1832) lived in the Castle, repaired the city walls and built an aqueduct for the Qaramānlī's Mosque and Madrasa.

#### 4 Reports on the main Roman antiquities: the first descriptions of the Arch of Marcus Aurelius and the spoliation of Leptis Magna

Sheikh al-ʿAbdarī coming from Valencia, leaving Mogador, Morocco in December 1289 for Mecca, was one of the first to describe the four-sides Arch of Marcus Aurelius. The Arch, the heart of Roman Oea, was positioned at the crossroads of the *cardo* and the northern *decumanus*. The monument, which he characterized as a *qubbah*, aroused his admiration for antiquity. In this period another structure existed on the roof of this monument.

The Sheikh also gave some information regarding the ruins of Leptis Magna, already abandoned in his time. After these brief notes, silence fell on Leptis for about four centuries. Its inhabitants had moved west to present-day Homs.

In 1307 at-Tijānī, a learned Tunisian, left Tunis and on reaching Tripoli described the Arch of Marcus Aurelius as follows:

un edificio antico, meraviglioso, a foggia di cupola (*qubbah*), di marmo scolpito adeguato alla grandezza e alla sontuosità dell'edificio; cento uomini non sarebbero capaci di portare un solo blocco. L'edificio sorge quadrato; giungendo al tetto, si fa ottagonò con precisione mirabile e solidità che stupisce. È ornato di molte belle figure scolpite nella pietra. Ora vi hanno costruito sopra

un santuario in cui si compie la preghiera e mi fu detto che ciò si fece perché un capo aveva tentato di abbatterlo e prenderne i marmi. Su alcuni blocchi del fronte nord sono scritte righe in carattere romano e Abū 'l-Barakāt figlio del dotto Abū Muḥammad Ibn Abī 'd-Dunyā mi ha riferito che suo padre Abū Muḥammad cercava sempre qualcuno che sapesse tradurre l'iscrizione; infine trovò un Cristiano ...<sup>1</sup>

The existence of this particular construction was confirmed two centuries later by the Frenchman Nicolas de Nicolay at Tripoli in August 1551, a few days after the Turkish conquest. The monument even appears in two views of Tripoli dated 1559 and 1567 (Fig. 1). At-Tijānī also documents the “pleasant anomaly” in the Arab Tarābulus of the presence of a different urban network composed of wide level and orthogonal roads, probably coinciding with Roman roads (Rossi). The same observation is found in a later report written by a Miss Tully, in Tarābulus between 1783 and 1793, indicating the existence of remains of paved roads – presumably of Roman origin – coexisting with the dusty roads of the Turkish town.<sup>2</sup>

In *Descrizione dell’Africa* (Venezia, 1550) the Arab geographer al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Wazzān, known as Leone Africano, documented the renewal of construction activity in Tripoli; this activity involved re-using large quantities of material from Leptis. In this *Descrizione* the admiration of the author for the wonderful columns of the Great Mosque of Kairouan is also expressed.

The building material probably came from Oea itself or the nearest villas by the sea, a large part being used to produce mortar. Moreover, to the south of Leptis, the quarries of Ras al-Hannan (Rās al-ḥanān) produced a wonderful white-grey travertine as described in *Histoire chronologique du royaume de Tripoli de Barbarie* by Girard from Digne, a surgeon residing in Tripoli from 1670–1676.

The extensive use of the Leptis ruins as a quarry for marble to be exported to Europe (and elsewhere) has been amply documented since the end of 17th century, when the Frenchman Claude Lemaire was consul (1683, 1707–1708). A specific article of the French-Turkish Treaty of 1693 regulated this trade. Shafts and slabs of cipolin, pavonazzetto, breccia, ancient green, porphyry, many of them coming from the Severian Forum, were re-employed in churches, cathedrals, palaces and museums in France, Malta, Constantinople, Venice and later in England. For example, in 1816–1817 Captain W. H. Smyth arrived in England with 37 columns, slabs, sculptures and inscriptions received as a gift from the Pasha of Tripoli Yūsuf Qaramānī for the King of England.

1 Rossi 1968, 78–79.

2 Cabasi 1979.

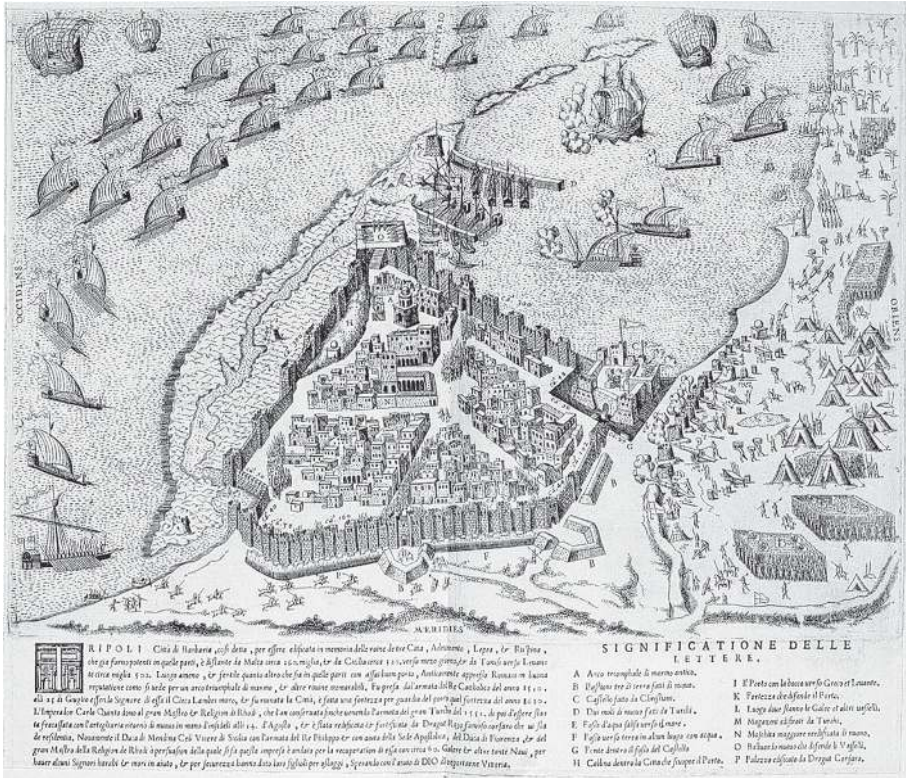


Fig. 1 Tripoli città di Barbaria, copper engraving around 1570.

5 The Muslims: town and mosque architecture (starting points)

*The town: acquisition from other urban cultures.* The Arab sedentary world had its own urban tradition, although heterogeneous and difficult to classify. After the invasions, this urban culture met and absorbed the features of the different urban cultures linked to specific zones.

In North Africa it is important to consider the urban pre-existence of the Greek, Roman and Byzantine cultures (Libya, Syria, etc.), of the Berber culture (Morocco, Algeria) and of Pharaonic, Alexandrine-Ptolemaic and Coptic culture (Egypt).

More specifically, Roman-Byzantine continuity is found in Oea-Tripoli (Ṭarābulus), Cirta-Costantine (Qusanṭīna, Algeria), Icosium-Algier (al-Jazā'ir) and Pomaria-Agadir (Akādīr). Other towns such as Taparura-Sfax (Sifākis) and Hadrumetum-Sousse (Sūsa) were patterned after pre-existing structures of doubtful provenance, preserving an orthogonal structure. The same 'chessboard' shape is also found at Kairouan and in other

‘transferred’ towns, such as Carthage-Tunis (Tūnis, Tunisia), Hippo-Annaba (‘Annāna, Algeria), Salé-Salā (Morocco).

In describing this kind of urban structure the term ‘Hellenistic-Mediterranean town’ is often used, the first word referring to the hippodamian scheme (pre-existing or assumed as a model) and the second word defining (albeit imprecisely) a remote cultural substratum that also includes the experiences of both local populations and invaders.

*Mosque: the invention of a new architecture.* In the Western world the outlook on re-use in early Christendom swings between the historiographical patterns of continuity (Krautheimer) and breaking with the Roman past (Deichmann).

According to Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann, the transformation of the pagan temple in early-Christian architecture involved a total changing of the holy space. Christians destroyed the shape and meaning of the sacred pagan space – demolition of the temple was only the macroscopic aspect of this revolution. The entire symbolical space of the Christian church became of utmost importance, sacrificing single parts or components: “Für die feinen Unterteilungen der antiken Bauteile, für ihr abgewogenes Verhältnis zueinander, ihre ornamentale Struktur ist in der frühchristlichen Architektur kein Platz mehr. Die Bauglieder haben als Ganzes nur noch strukturelle Funktion. Die Struktur ist nicht mehr ornamentalisiert. Das Oberflächenornament verunklärt eher die Struktur. Daher war diesen Gliedern selbst keine Entwicklung mehr beschieden.”<sup>3</sup> In this new kind of space, the individual element becomes replaceable but can also bear a specific meaning due to its figurative characteristics (sculptures, color, dimension).

Are these points of view applied to the Muslim world and, in particular, to the problem of the re-use of Roman *spolia* in its major building: the mosque?

To answer this question it is indispensable to understand the architecture of the mosque, a place for prayer.

Basically, the mosque has to satisfy three needs: it has to indicate the direction of Mecca (*qibla*), provide a clean kneeling space and offer a place for ablution.

Firstly, existing spaces and buildings were re-used. The Great Mosque of Omayyad (7th–8th century) in Damascus, built in the sanctuary of Jupiter Damascene, which already served as St. John the Baptist’s Cathedral, is one of the most famous examples of this custom, another being St. Sofia in Constantinople, many centuries later.

There are three main types of mosques: Arab, Persian and Ottoman. The main mosque is called the Cathedral Mosque or Congregational Mosque (Great Mosque and Mosque of Friday). It also functions as a school, place of justice, meeting and business place and a reception area for pilgrims, etc., which is why it is called a ‘Muslim forum’. The architecture always assumes an expandable horizontal shape.

3 Deichmann 1940, 117–118.

The Arab mosque consists of an arcade court with a hypostyle hall. The elementary framework is made up of a rectangular enclosure, a portico with two or more naves parallel to the *qibla* wall (where the *mihrab* [niche] is to be found), a fountain in the courtyard (*ṣaḥn*) and a place for ablution. The reference model is not clear but it could be the house of the Prophet at Medina.

The Persian mosque-madrasa is a mosque with four *iwān* (balls) (11th century). Mausoleums, monumental tombs and schools are added to this religious place. The courtyard with its *iwān* assumes a pivotal role. The dome, already adopted in some mosques, strengthens the axis of the *mihrab*.

Under the Seljuks the dome covers the principal space and probably recalls the vault of heaven. The funerary-mosque (mausoleum + mosque + other annexes) also originated in this period.

The Ottoman mosque (15th–16th century) divides the prayer hall from the courtyard, interrupting their continuity. The prayer hall becomes the central body of the mosque with its inner space often covered by a dome.

*The Libyan mosque.* Libya, a border zone prone to invasion, was neither able to create its own artistic school nor to take advantage of the two neighboring schools: Syrian-Egyptian (Egypt) and Maghreb (North West Africa). In Libya, qualified workers didn't exist and that prevented the diffusion and growth of an Ottoman architecture. Nevertheless, in this general framework, it is important to underline that in Libya an original kind of mosque, different from the Arab, Persian or Ottoman, emerged and spread.

The Libyan mosque has a quadrilateral plan, composed of modular squares repeated in various rows. Each square has a cubic volume defined by four columns or pillars, arches and a dome (Fig. 2). This particular shape was probably influenced by the presence of mausoleums, *martyria* and monuments already in existence before the Arab invasion and dedicated to Christian saints and martyrs. The phenomenon later became known as 'maraboutism' and spread widely during the 12th century and onward. The simple structure of the Libyan mosque persisted even under the Ottomans.

*The re-use of Roman spolia in Libyan mosques.* The question nevertheless remains whether a specific link emerges between the characteristic planimetric of the Libyan mosque and the re-use of individual Roman elements inside?

Is it possible that the repetitiveness of modular structure, together with a simple and poor technology, influenced a specific kind of re-use?

These factors probably centered on the re-use of shafts of columns (more shafts than capitals). The list of shafts and other fragments re-used in the courtyards and prayer halls of the mosques is extensive. However, it is difficult to estimate quality and quantity with precision because of the transformation, destruction and reconstruction of the buildings over the centuries.



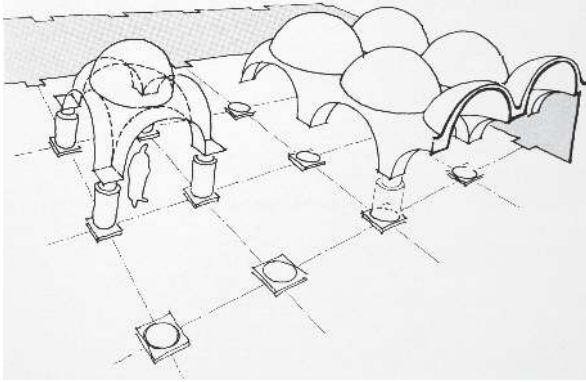


Fig. 2 The characteristic architecture of the Libyan mosque.



Fig. 3 Jāmi' of Sidi Darghūt Pasha, reused granite column.

These architectural elements maintained their structural function but it is very hard to say whether the Muslims utilized them because of their specific color or their stonework, or if they used single architectural components to repeat or re-invent a Roman model, in particular the 'classical order'. Near Tripoli, two mosques (at-Tājūrā' and al-Khums) seem to confirm the appreciation of both the quality of the material and of the Roman (classical) architectural order.

In 1561 Sidī Darghūt, the Pasha of Tripoli (the governor of Ottoman Libya appointed by the Turkish sultan between 1553–1565), utilized the 'small dome mosque' (or Libyan type), which was usually adopted for a district mosque (*masjid*), to construct a *jāmi'* (or Friday mosque) dedicated to himself. This monument evidences an unusual T-shaped prayer hall, probably the result of an extension/adjustment to a former chapel of the Knights of Malta. After being restored in the 1920s, the mosque was damaged in the Second World War and then extensively repaired. During this second effort many

(re-used?) granite shafts were substituted with concrete and the *miḥrab* and the *minbar* (*pulpit*) were also reconstructed (Fig. 3–4). The architectural history of Jāmi‘ an-Nāqa (also known as She-Camel), the most important mosque in Tripoli, is particularly significant being probably the oldest in Tripoli, even though the present structure dates back to 1610. Safar Dey (Şafar Dāy), a very rich Turk appointed Governor of Regency, rebuilt the previous Fatimid mosque (perhaps Jāmi‘ al-ā‘zam) which had been destroyed by the Spaniards. Like Darghūt, Şafar chose the ‘small dome mosque’ type instead of the Arab type (used in Kairouan, Sfax, Sousse, Cordoba, etc.) or the Ottoman type.

A large courtyard, with porches covered by cross vaults along the four sides, precedes the prayer hall. This *ṣaḥn* probably coincides with the oldest mosque (Arab type), as demonstrated by the existence of a *miḥrab*. The prayer hall consists of forty-nine modules (about 2.60 x 2.60 m) of which forty-two are covered with domes. In the courtyard and the prayer hall there are many re-used columns (without bases). The majority of those utilized in the 17th century reconstruction are of granite, and two are in fluted marble (final section of Doric columns). The shafts appear very ‘stocky’ and on average about 2 m high. The granite ones were probably cut from originals about 7.45 m in height and could have come from the same set. The prayer hall and the *ṣaḥn* also exhibit dozens of Ionic and Corinthian capitals all skillfully crafted. These beautiful capitals and fluted shafts seem to be placed in key positions because of their superior quality, however the spatial *ratio* between the components is not clear (Fig. 5, 6a–b).

Other mosques in Tripoli use Roman columns: Masjid Sarayā al-Ḥamrā’ (inside the Castle), Masjid of Sheikh al-Mahtan (o Mabtan), Jāmi‘ Sīdī Sālīm al-Mashāt, Sīdī Maḥmūd, Masjid Zāwya ‘Aṭīya, Masjid Ibn Ṭabīb, Masjid Ibn Şuwān, Jāmi‘ ad-Durūj (Fig. 7), Jāmi‘ al-Kharūba, Jāmi‘ b. Sulaymān.

This admiration for Roman *spolia* seems to occur in two later important mosques built on the Libyan plan – Jāmi‘ Aḥmad Pāsha al-Qaramānlī (1735–1737) and Jāmi‘ Mustafa Bey Gurgi (1833–1834). In the first, Roman and Islamic spoils appear in the space of ablution, however both mosques employed new architectural components in the prayer hall, probably to showcase the wealth of the founders. Nevertheless, these two later mosques (like the Jāmi‘ an-Nāqa) were built facing Mecca without changing the original Roman urban structure. For this reason, their plans appear ‘rotated’ in relation to this particular urban texture.

Furthermore, three buildings in Cyrenaica testify to the persistent re-employment of classical *spolia* during the 19th century – the Zawāya sanūsīya (Sanussi religious schools), built at al-Marj (1818), at Zāwya al-Ḥamāma (1834) and at Lamluda (Lamlūda)(1850).

An interesting case of re-use appears in the mosque of ‘Alī al-Farjānī at Sūq al-Khamīs outside Tripoli. Here, in addition to capitals re-employed in the prayer hall

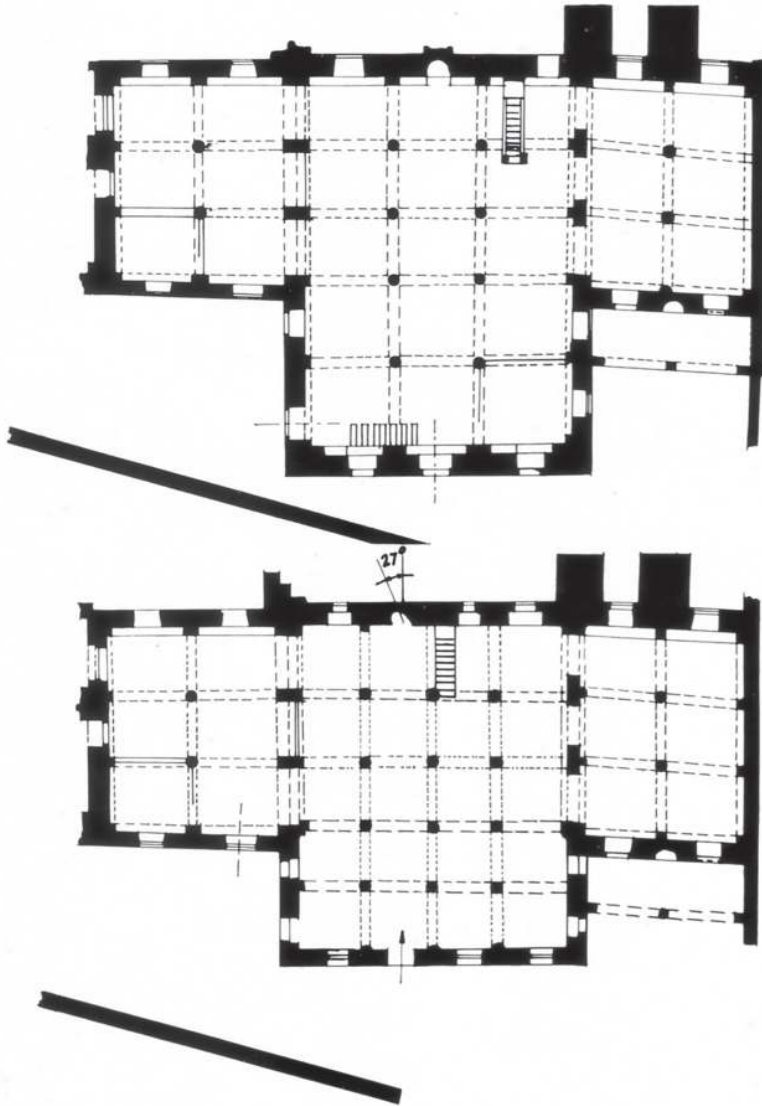


Fig. 4 Jāmi' of Sīdī Darghūt Pasha, floor plan, first phase and after reconstruction.

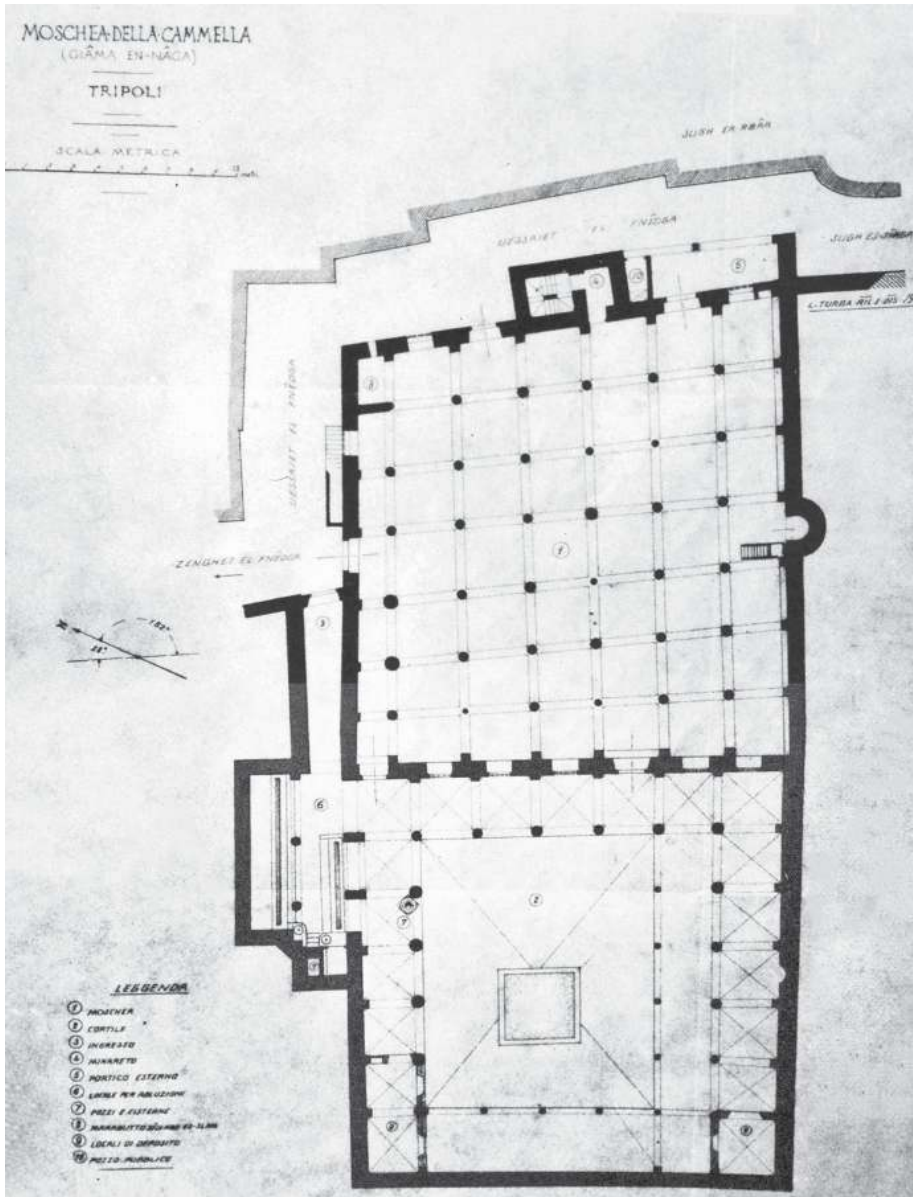


Fig. 5 Jāmi' an-Nāqa, floor plan of the courtyard and the prayer hall.



a



b

Fig. 6 Jāmi' an-Nāqa, pictures of the courtyard and the prayer hall.



Fig. 7 Jāmi' ad-Durūj, reused column and capital in the prayer hall covered with a green coat paint.

and in the room for ablution, the architrave and doorjamb at the entrance to the prayer hall are made of monolithic blocks from a Roman building (as in many examples in Tunisia, i.e. Kairouan).

Other interesting examples of re-use of Roman *spolia* exist in inner Libya. More specifically, in the district of Jabal Nafūsa (Tripolitania) they are present: 1) at Tmizda (Tamizda), Mezghura (Mazghūra): the mosque at Mezghura, 800–899 (perhaps a Rustamide foundation but rebuilt); the Umm at-Ṭabūl mosque (probably built on the ruins of a church); the Abū Zakarīya' at-Tūkītī mosque, to the north of Wifat (Wifāt), 800–899; the Kanisiya mosque (Masjid Kanīsa); the Mashhad Taghliṣ mosque (Masjid Taghlīs); the Būqar or Abū Kār mosque; the Damriyya mosque; 2) at Jadu (Jādū): the Khirbat al-Ḥāra mosque; the Shu'bat Mīrī mosque; 3) at Forsatta (Fursata): the Taghlīs mosque (Ottoman); 4) at Ibughturin (Bughtūra: the Taghlīs mosque; 5) at Nalut (Nālūt): the Tin Adrar (Tindarār) mosque.

Further south, at Ghadāmis, *spolia* coming from a late-Roman mausoleum called al-Aṣnām (the idols) were re-employed in many Islamic monuments starting with the dual Great Mosques of this small Arab-Berber town.

Significant examples include the Mosque of Mūrād Aghā at Tājūrā' (1553–1556) and the Mausoleum of Sheikh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥamūda b. Jaḥā (1670–1680).

## 6 Mosque of Murad Agha (Mūrād Aghā) at Tājūrā' (1553–1556)

Tājūrā' is about 16 km east of Tripoli. In the spring of 1309, at-Tijānī described this place as a large and populous village with a castle and an old city wall. This village existed from Roman times when many villas were built near the sea (e.g. the villa called 'gara delle Nereide'). In 1532 Mūrād Aghā, a Turkish naval officer, probably born in Ragusa, was the sovereign of Tājūrā'. In 1551, together with the privateer Darghūt, he conquered Tripoli from the Knights of Malta. After two years spent in Tripoli as governor, Mūrād was replaced by Darghūt and returned to Tājūrā'. At this point he probably decided to build a fortress in Tājūrā', but was compelled to turn this project into a mosque. According to tradition, Murad built the mosque utilizing Christian slaves but the architect probably came from the Maghreb. Furthermore, tradition maintains that the columns used in the prayer hall came from Leptis Magna, more precisely from a ship that had sunk along the beach of Tājūrā' while bringing that material to Europe. This may be true or it may only serve to stress the importance of the mosque. In addition, many ruined imperial villas existing along the coast of Tājūrā' provided readily available *spolia*.

The mosque has a rectangular perimeter (about 40 x 32 m), and in contrast to a plain exterior its interior space is characterized by forty-eight columns, without bases, supporting pointed horseshoe-shaped arches (Fig. 8a–b). Only the plain and fluted shafts are Roman *spolia* and their stones are pink and red breccia, cipolin, black granite and limestone. The capitals are formed by a triple abacus capable of adapting to the superior diameter of the shaft. Here, instead of the small domes found in the Libyan type barrel vaults were used as coverage. Moreover, the central nave doesn't exceed the others in width as evidenced in the Tunisian model.

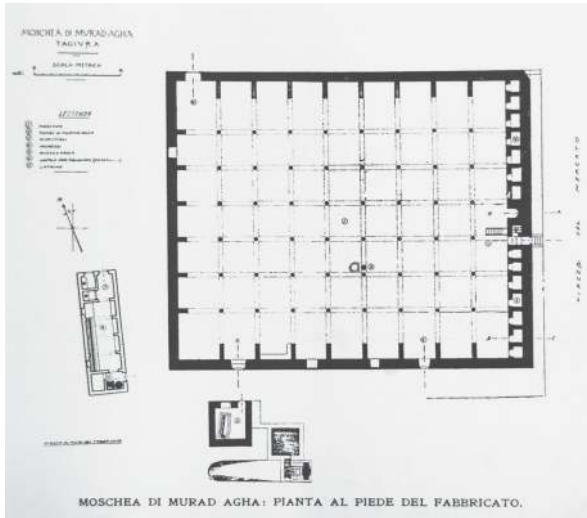
### 7 Mausoleum of Sheikh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥamūda b. Jaḥā (1670–1680)

The Mausoleum, adjoining the mosque and *zāwiya* of the same name, was built in 1670–1680 at Al-Khums (al-khums), a small village in the Tripoli region about 120 km east of Tripoli and 2 km west of Leptis Magna. The village was founded as a Sanjaka (Sanjaq) during the Turkish domination.

The Mausoleum was built for the burial of Sheikh Aḥmad b. Jaḥā, a leading teacher of the Koran and the Ḥadīth, who was the son of another venerated saint named Muḥammad b. Jaḥā and a pupil of Sheikh ‘Abd al-Salām al-Asmar from Zlīṭan.

The way in which Roman *spolia* were used here caught the attention of the late professor Cuneo, who described and commented as follows:

The simple exterior volume of the building, made as usual of a cubic basis, an octagonal drum and a slightly pointed spherical dome, can hardly announce the far more elaborated articulation of the inner space. The main space of the mausoleum is that of a dome burial chamber with the green-clothed coffin of the saint on one side. But (with a device found also in an analogous dome tomb in the mosque of Sheikh ‘Alī al-Farjānī at Sūq al-Khamīs), the square domed hall is flanked by a lateral extension (here covered by a couple of groined vaults), which has an exterior entrance and leads into the prayer hall, thus allowing an afflux of the faithful to the mosque bypassing the burial area proper. Despite the lack of a perfect bi-axial symmetry caused by this lateral corridor, which makes the whole space a rectangle, the chamber keeps its classical unity thanks to the application of the same motif of blind arcades along all four sides and the use of six pilasters projecting from the side walls and four angular ones at the corners. The ten vertical elements, all of them in limestone blocks enriched with fluted surfaces and cubic Corinthian capitals, exhibit their common origin: a disused ancient monument. Those elements re-create, in a sev-



a



b

Fig. 8 Mosque of Mūrād Aghā at Tājūrā: (a) Plan of prayer hall, (b) interior of prayer hall.

enteenth century Islamic monument, a well controlled rhythmic sequence of wall arcades, successfully matching a provincial Roman and a provincial Ottoman style, which constitutes the main quality and the most elegant feature of the whole building. The only free standing support, a granite column set at the connection between the room and the corridor, adds to this ensemble an impression of structural lightness and spatial dynamism. This monument



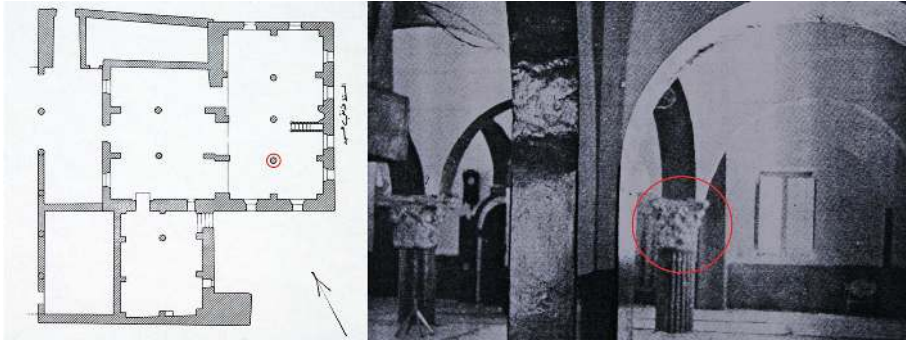


Fig. 9 Mausoleum and mosque of Sheikh Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin Ḥamūda bin Jahā at Al-Khums. Left: Floor plan, with a Corinthian Roman capital reused in the prayer hall of the mosque (circled in red). Right: Corinthian Roman capital reused in the prayer hall of the mosque.

seems to testify that the architect's attitude was not very different from that of the Classical school of Ottoman architecture derived from Sinan's experience and well known to modern criticism. The architect did not hesitate to take creative advantage of the artistic languages and spatial principles of the Hellenistic-Roman, Early Byzantine.<sup>4</sup>

This interpretation requires two additional remarks:

Firstly, the re-use of *spolia* in the mausoleum is different to that used in the former prayer hall of the mosque (Libyan type). In the latter, short shafts made from sections of higher shafts are surmounted by impressive large capitals, also *spolia*. These columns support small domes without following the classical spatial code (Fig. 9).

Secondly, the re-invented classical space in the mausoleum could suggest the influence of western architectural culture, *in primis* Venetian or Italian Renaissance, also by means of the work of Sinan.

## 8 The cross-roads of Arba<sup>ʿ</sup> ʿArṣāt

The type of re-employment of Roman antiquity which refers to an entire model and its urban function is exemplified in the case of the Tetraylon of Marcus Aurelius of the Roman Tripoli (Oea), and its evident and perfect 'quotation': the cross-roads of Arba<sup>ʿ</sup> ʿArṣāt, known as the Four Columns of the Arab and then Ottoman Ṭarābulus (Fig. 10).

The four-sides Arch of Marcus Aurelius (Fig. 11–12), the heart of the ancient town, placed to the North of the crossroads of the *cardo* and the *decumanus*, becomes, for the

4 Paolo Cuneo, unpublished notes, March 1995.

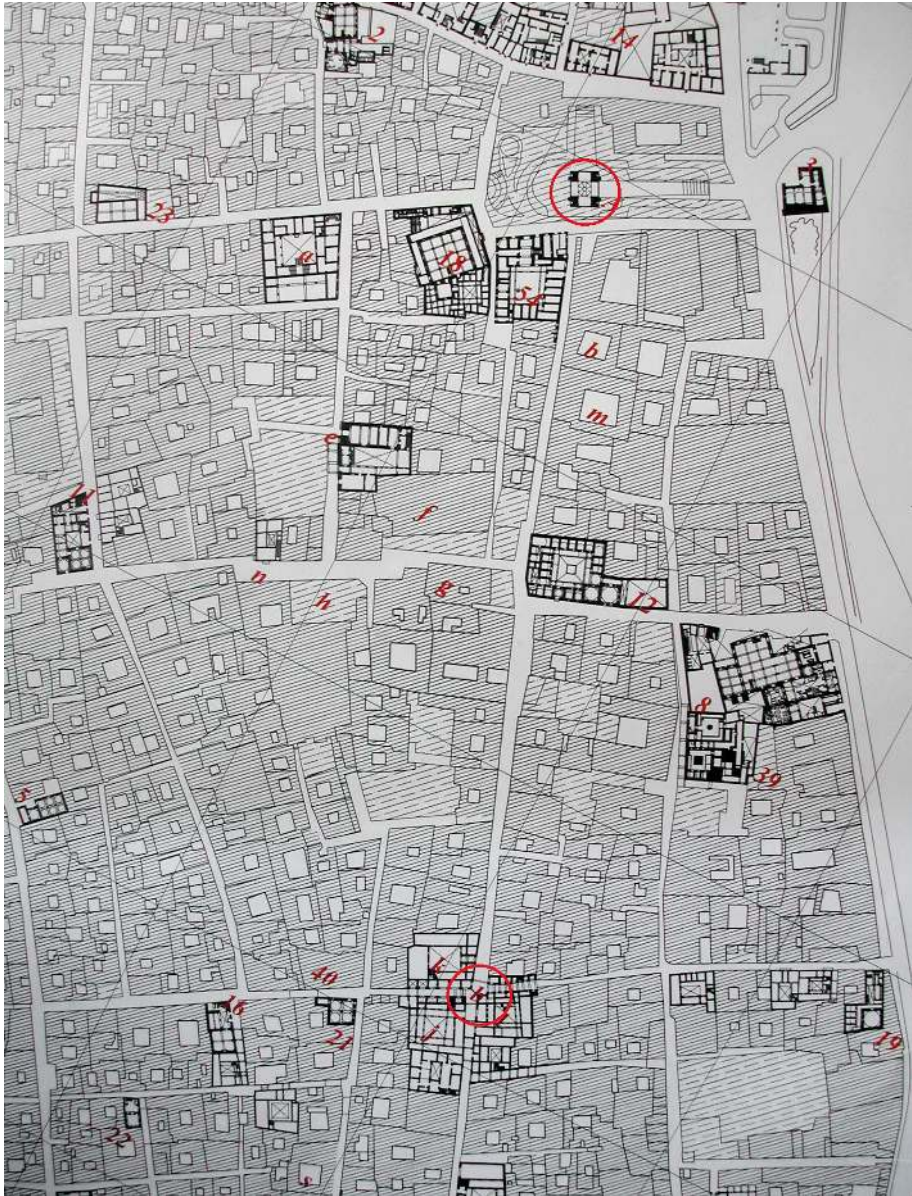


Fig. 10 Detail of the map of Medina. Circled in red the Tetraylon of Marcus Aurelius and the cross-roads of Arba' 'Arşät situated along the Sciara Arba'a Arsat and Sciara Jama al-druj.

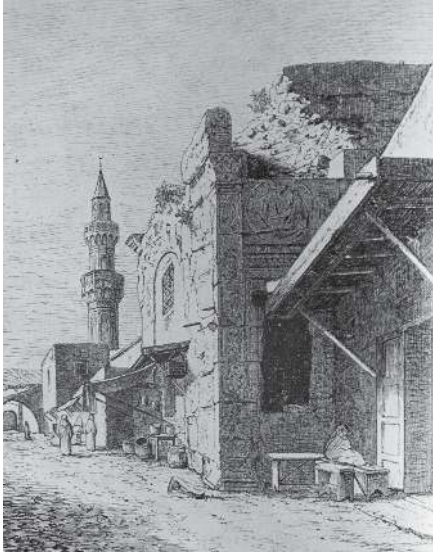


Fig. 11 Drawing of the Tetrapylon of Marcus Aurelius in 1873.



Fig. 12 Tetrapylon of Marcus Aurelius after the Italian restoration ended in 1918.

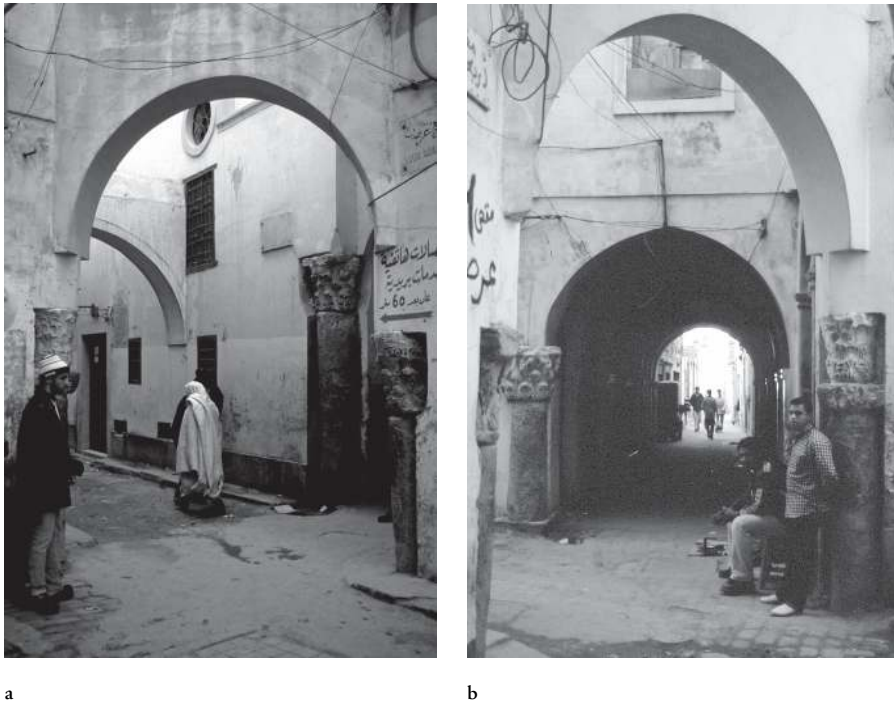


Fig. 13 Shafts and drums of columns with Corinthian capitals on the corner of the urban junction of Arba' Arṣāt.

*claritas* of which it is the bearer, the figurative model of the urban junction of Arba' Arṣāt.

This junction is situated further south along the Sciara Arba'a Arsat (Arba' Arṣāt) and Sciara Jama al-druj (Jāmi' ad-Druj) (*cardo*?) and forms the crossroad with the second *decumanus* of Roman Oea. Shafts and drums of columns with Corinthian capitals and a system of archivolts and covered walkways, identify this new 'four-sides arch' (Fig. 13a–b).

Its genesis may have preceded Turkish dominion but it certainly consolidated its symbolic value as an urban center during the first Ottoman domination. In this period the Muslim built-up area strengthened its trade with the hinterland to the west and south of the *Medīna*, as evidenced in part by the houses of the Qaramānli dynasty (where Yūsif Pāsha died in 1838), of Jusef Gurgi (Yūsif Qurjī, a rich merchant of Tarābulus) and of Mohsen (Fig. 14–15).

Professor Ludovico Micara questions the common opinion that Sciara Arba'a Arsat and Sciara Jama el-Druj coincide with the Roman *cardo* (Fig. 16–17). This road is neither

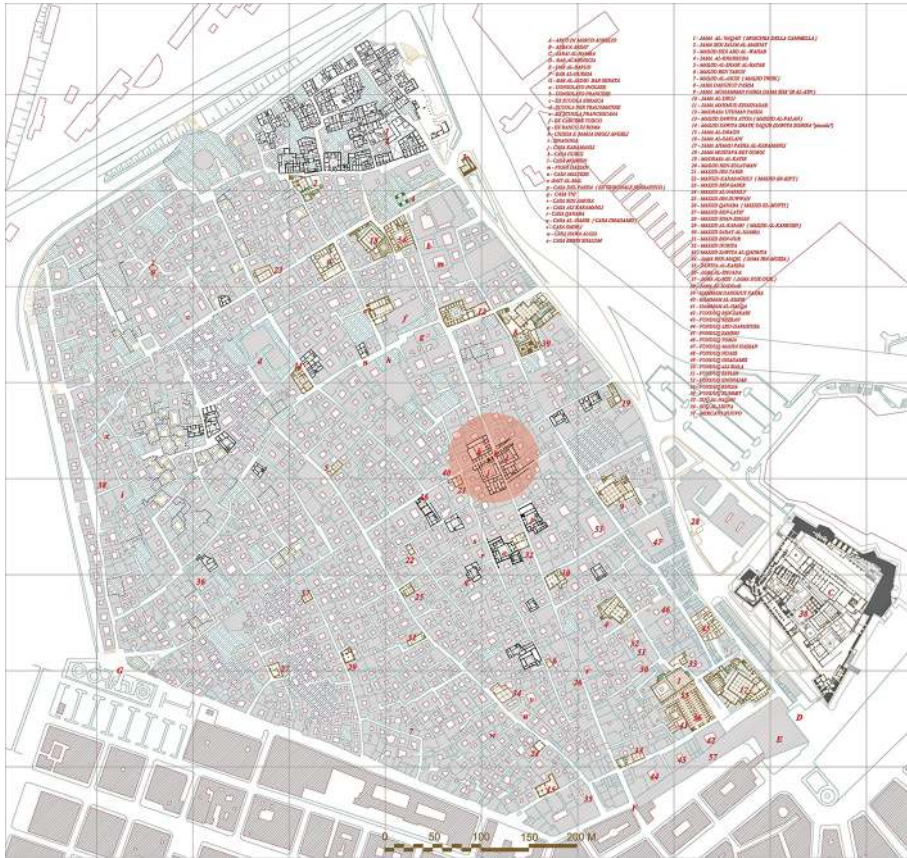


Fig. 14 Plan of Tripoli's Medina: houses of the Qaramānli dynasty, Yūsif Qurjī and Mohsen (marked by a circle).

orthogonal at the *decumanus* nor at the other roads that it crosses; in fact these follow the direction of *decumanus*. Micara believes that *Sciara Arba' a Arsat* and *Sciara Jama el-Druj* developed subsequent to the occlusion of the Roman *cardo* after the Spanish occupation and disruption (Fig. 18). Therefore, its origin was Ottoman at the time of Pasha Darghūt. Leone Africano testified in his *Descrizione* that Darghūt rebuilt *Ṭarābulus* using many *spolia* coming from *Leptis Magna* (as did his contemporary and political competitor *Mūrād in Ṭājūrā'*).

In the case of Tripoli, the toponymic identification also forges a strong link between re-employed fragments and resumption of an urban model. *Arba' ʿArṣāt* in fact signifies Four Columns, *ʿarṣāt* (sg. *ʿarīṣa*) being a local term for columns (in Arabic *ʿumūd*, sg. *ʿimād*). This toponym, therefore, binds the place to its town. *Ṭarābulus* was characterized, in the Ottoman age as well, by a detached political and cultural autonomy. The

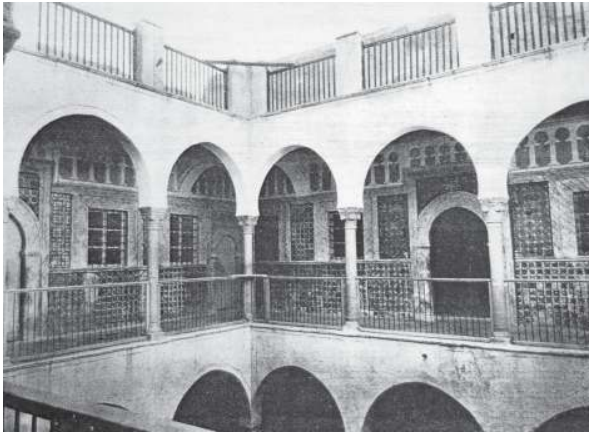


Fig. 15 Courtyard of Qaramanlı's houses situated on Arba<sup>6</sup> 'Arşât.

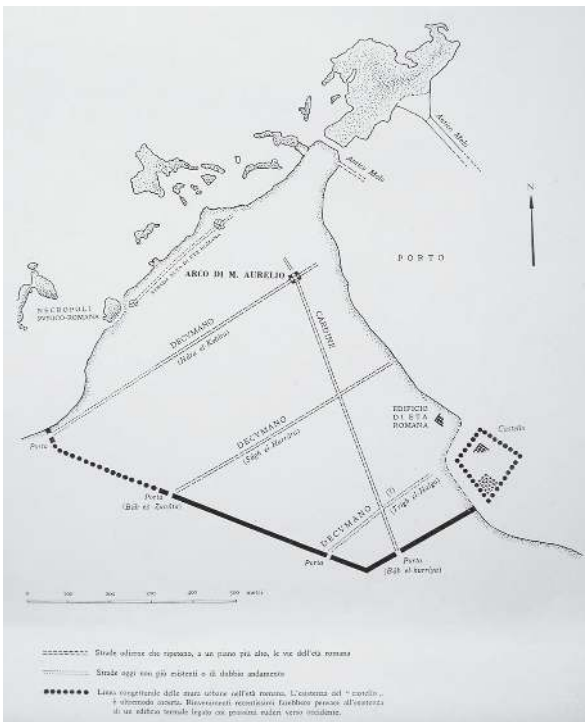


Fig. 16 Lay-out of the main roads of Roman Tripoli.



Fig. 17 Sketch of Tripoli in the 18th century.

toponym, difficult to date, constitutes confirmation of the importance and the fascination of the monument to which it refers.

Arba' Arsat (Arba' 'Arṣāt) enters into a dialogue with its Roman model. Together they strengthen the *cardo* (Roman or Ottoman) that links the Arch of Marcus Aurelius and the ancient port to the Bab al-Ḥurriya, which is the arrival point of the track coming from the south. Together they reproduce the relationship between the two four-sided arches of Traianus and Severus along the so-called Triumphal Road to Leptis Magna.

The role of the Triumphal Road is even further emphasized by the concentration of Roman *spolia* along this main road, especially at the corners (Fig. 19). This phenomenon distinguishes Tripoli from other Muslim towns, giving the old center the specific character of a 'Mediterranean' *medina* with a preserved (and later emulated) Roman urban chessboard-shape, with its courtyard houses and roads. The Jāmi' Aḥmad Pāsha al-Qaramānlī (1735–1737) and Jāmi' Muṣṭafā Bey Qurjī (1833–1834) confirm that the Ottomans did not wish to cancel out the Roman urban texture.

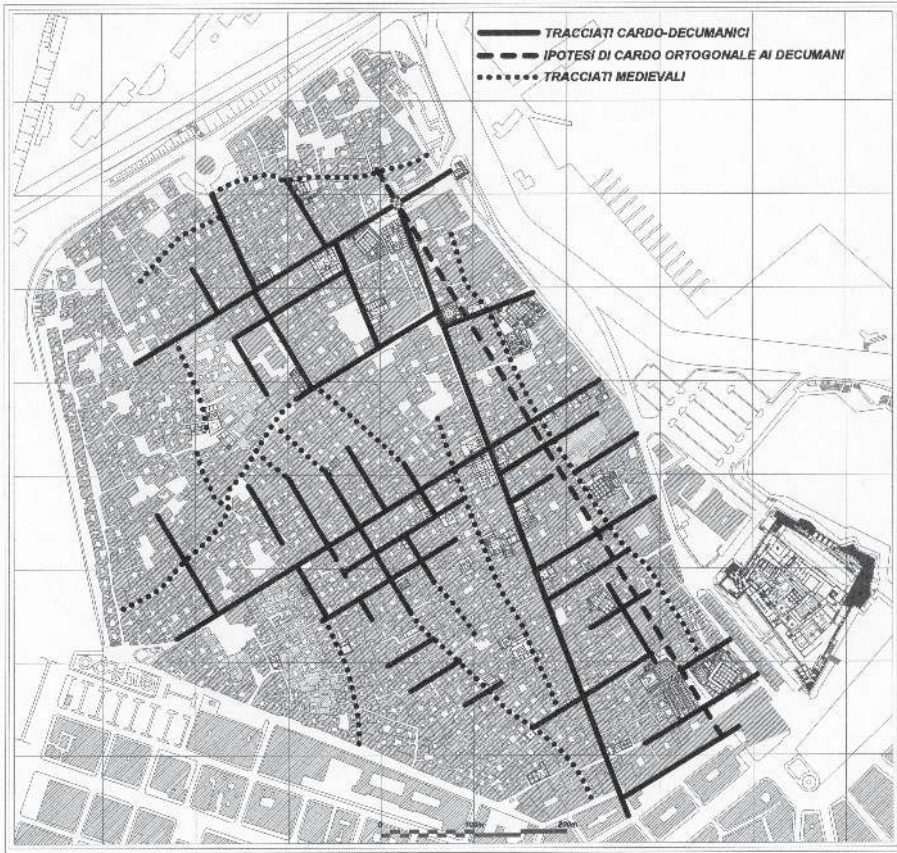


Fig. 18 The Roman and Ottoman roads of Tripoli in Prof. Micara's version of the origin of the Roman *cardo*.

## 9 Conclusion

Summing up, after the fall of the Roman Empire and before the rise of the Ottoman Empire, three main situations characterized Tripoli: its lack of a strong political or economic role, its position as a border town and its weak economy and low quality of life. This meant that *spolia* were essentially used for convenience (i. e. shafts, capitals, pieces used inside the city wall, for docks and to prepare mortar). A significant example dating back to the Ottomans no longer exists.

With the rise of the Ottomans, Tripoli was subjected to repeated destruction and reconstruction, which makes it difficult to evaluate the continuity of the Ancient world throughout the Ottoman Empire. It also suffered from a lack of local schools and local qualified workers.



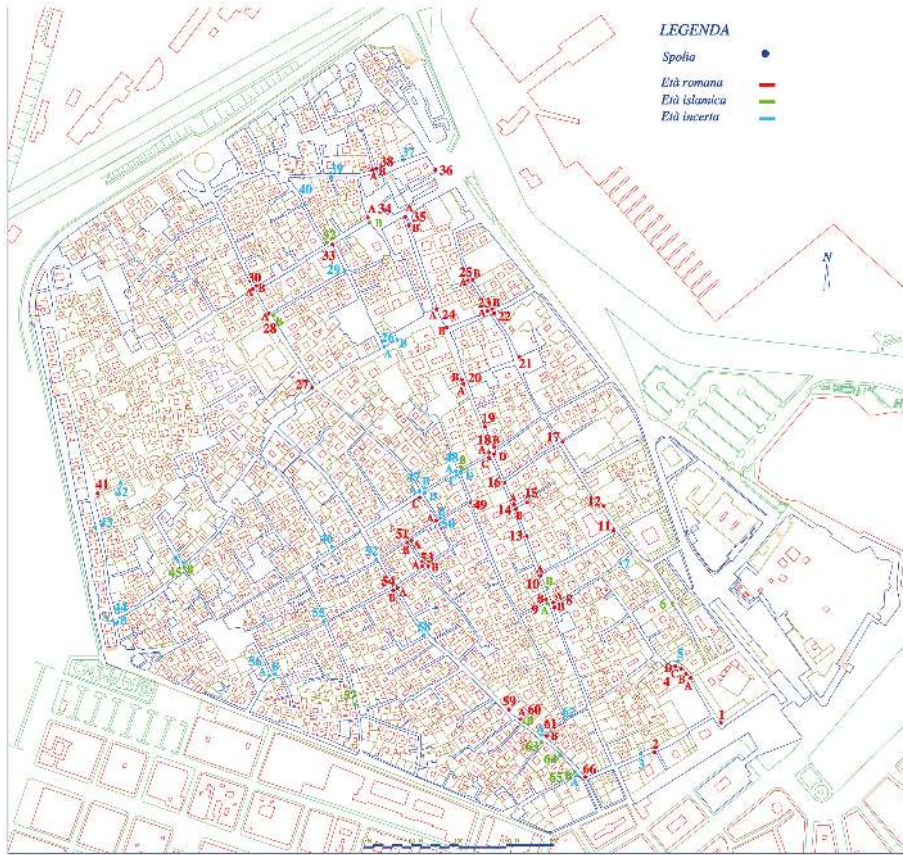


Fig. 19 Map of Tripoli indicating the presence of *spolia*.

The Libyan small-domed mosque, with its modular and repetitive space and absence of a larger central nave to underline the axis of *mirhāb*, is linked to an extensive re-use of Roman shafts (with and without capitals). These shafts were ‘recycled’ primarily for their structural function, but were also appreciated for their strength, quality of stone and superior workmanship.

The examples analyzed above testify to a significant use of Roman *spolia* during the first Ottoman domination. In this period the urban image of Tarābulus was improved for various reasons, including: the influence of the cultural core of the Ottoman Empire, the interest and fascination of western countries in the classical ruins (starting with Roman marble, see Leptis Magna), the aspirations of Darghūt and Mūrād following the autonomy of the Qaramānli. It was probably in this context that Roman Oea was ‘re-discovered’. However, it was less a matter of using *spolia* as construction material inside the main Muslim buildings (mosques), and more a matter of using *spolia* for the specific urban purpose of preserving and immortalizing the Roman urban matrix.

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1 © Universitätsbibliothek Salzburg, Graphiksammlung, G 151 III. 2 Messina 1972, 33 fig. 3. 3 Messina 1972, plate 24. 4 Messina 1972, 107 fig. 24. 5 Messina 1972, plate 26. 6 (a) and (b) Messina 1972, plate 27. 7 Photo: L. Micara, approx. 2005. 8 (a) Bartoccini 1924, 340 (b) Bartoccini 1924, 344. 9 El-Ballush 1984, 204; El-Ballush 1984, 207. 10 Ciranna and Marino 2005, 6–7, pl.

4. 11 Aurigemma 1970, pl. 48. 12 Di Vita 1983, 70, fig. 1. 13 (a) Ciranna 2005, 59, fig. 8. (b) Ciranna and Marino 2005, 14, fig. 21. 14 Ciranna and Marino 2005, 6–7, pl. 4. 15 Romanelli 1923/24, p. 194, fig. 1. 16 Aurigemma 1970, p. 9. 17 Cabasi 1979, p. 40. 18 Micara 2005, p. 47, fig. 4. 19 Elaborated by B. Pinna Caboni and L. Micara.

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