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Changing Funerary Landscapes in Late Antiquity: Mausolea in North Africa

Julia Nikolaus

Abstract

This paper considers the changes in elite burial monuments during Late Antiquity in North Africa using archaeological evidence, inscriptions, and literary sources where relevant. It highlights the complex nature of funerary behaviour by primarily focusing on late antique mausolea in Tripolitania (Libya) to explore how these prestigious funerary monuments were used by the local elite to proclaim power and status during a time when power shifted from the centralised Roman authority to local rulers in the 4th and 5th c. The paper also pays attention to mausolea in Tunisia and Algeria, particularly in the light of the rise of Christianity, and how changes in religious beliefs may have influenced the mausolea culture in this region.

Introduction

Mausolea were an integral part of the funerary landscape in late antique North Africa, built by the prosperous elite to serve as the final resting place for themselves and their families. They were significant social markers that commemorated the deceased and their families while also conveying subtle religious and political ideas that were deeply engrained in local society and culture. Tower and temple mausolea,¹ larger drum mausolea,² and large tumuli³ were already a familiar mode of burial in the pre-Roman period. Notably, one of the major differences between the pre-Roman and Roman period monuments is the dramatic rise in their numbers. In Tripolitania only three pre-Roman tower mausolea are known,⁴ but by the end of the 3rd c., over 230 mausolea were constructed.⁵ In neighbouring Tunisia, we know of at least 7 pre-Roman mausolea, but their number rose to over 340 in the same time span.⁶ This picture appears to change again from the late 3rd c. onwards, when the overall number of newly constructed mausolea began to dwindle. In some areas of North Africa, however, new and lavish forms of monumental tombs were constructed. By focusing on the mausolea of Tripolitania (modern-day Libya), this article will examine how the changing economic, social, and political circumstances in Late Antiquity shaped the way in which the elite chose to commemorate themselves and their family through their funerary monuments. Furthermore, the influence of Christianity on mausolea construction in Tunisia and Algeria during Late Antiquity will be considered in the latter part of this paper (Fig. 1).

[Figure 1]

It is important to point out from the outset that the nature of the evidence for late antique mausolea is problematic. We still know comparatively little about the mausolea of the 4th to 6th c.⁷ Mausolea frequently lie on the periphery of ancient cities and settlements, outside the protected

¹ Pre-Roman temple and tower mausolea can be found in Cyrenaican, Tripolitanian, and Numidian territories. See for instance Bentivogli (2007-2008); Di Vita (1976); Ferchiou (2009); Gsell (1901); Moore (2007); Poinssot and Salomonson (1959); Quinn (2013); Rakob (1979); Stucchi (1987).

² Large drum mausolea include, for instance, Medracen see Camps (1973) or the 'Royal Mausoleum' see Coarelli and Thébert (1988), both in Algeria.

³ For examples in Tunisia, see Ferchiou (1987). For Algeria or Cyrenaica, see Stucchi (1987) or Colvin (1991) 26-27.

⁴ See Di Vita (2010) for the two mausolea at Sabratha (Mausoleum A and Mausoleum B), see Ferchiou (2009) for Henchir Būrgū on Jerba.

⁵ For mausolea in Tripolitania see, for instance, Brogan and Smith (1984); Fontana (1997); Nikolaus (2017).

⁶ Moore (2007) 75; see also Bentivogli (2007-2008) and Ferchiou (1995) for a detailed study of mausolea in Tunisia.

⁷ Ferchiou (1995) 135-136, for instance, lamented the lack of knowledge about 4th to 5th c. mausolea in Tunisia.

areas and are, as a result, more vulnerable to destruction through development and looting. Especially in densely settled areas the evidence for mausolea may have long disappeared. A further problem arises in that many excavations focus on the Punic and the Early to mid-Imperial Roman period, and it is only recently that the interest in the late antique period has increased. New excavations are beginning to shed some light on the existence of mausolea in Late Antiquity. For instance, at Bulla Regia the foundations of at least one mausoleum dated to the 6th c. were recently discovered.⁸ Another major problem is the lack of comprehensive dating materials through excavation and thorough architectural studies. Consequently, many mausolea have only vague dates attached to them, and the lack of excavation gives us little idea of the ritual that may have been conducted there, how long the monument may have been in use, or if it was reused later. For this reason, rather broad date ranges are given for many mausolea discussed in this piece. A further difficulty lies in the fact that it is often impossible to distinguish between Christian or pagan monuments, particularly if inscriptions or iconography are absent. Despite these limitations we can start to make some observations about the continuity and change of mausolea in the different regions of North Africa during the late antique period.

Late Antique Mausolea at the Periphery – Ghirza and Beyond

Marchius Fydell and Flavia Thesylgum,
father and mother of Marchius Metusan
who had this memorial made for them,
and have reckoned that there was spent on this,
in coin [· ? ·] thousand folles,
and in addition the food for the workmen.
May my sons and grandsons read (this)
in good fortune and build others like it.⁹

At some point in the early 4th c., Marchius Fydell and Flavia Thesylgum commissioned their arcaded temple mausoleum as their final resting place in the northern cemetery of Ghirza in the Tripolitanian pre-desert.¹⁰ The inscription expressed the hope for their sons and grandsons to 'build others like this', a wish that came true as the nomenclature and style of inscription on the neighbouring mausoleum (North C) suggest.¹¹ Over the next 100 years, an additional 4 arcaded temple mausolea were constructed in the northern necropolis and by the 5th c., there were at least 14 monumental tombs in the cemeteries of Ghirza, 7 in the North Cemetery, and 7 in the South Cemetery.¹² Together, they represent the largest concentration of mausolea in the pre-desert.

Ghirza is located a considerable distance away from the big coastal cities of Lepcis Magna, Sabratha, and Oea, deep in the pre-desert of Tripolitania on the west bank of the Wadi Zemzem, ca. 250 km south-east of Oea (modern-day Tripoli). The settlement consisted of about 40 buildings, including several substantial fortified structures and a temple. Archaeological evidence shows that Ghirza reached its hey-day in the late 3rd and 4th c., which corresponds to the construction of the majority of mausolea.¹³ The size of the settlement and the presence of a substantial temple and the two monumental cemeteries suggests that Ghirza was probably an important centre for trade and

⁸ Chaouali, Fenwick and Booms (2018) 194-195.

⁹ IRT2009, 900, for Latin and translation see <http://inslib.kcl.ac.uk/irt2009/IRT900.html>.

¹⁰ Ghirza North B. Throughout this article, I follow the labelling established by Brogan and Smith (1984).

¹¹ IRT2009, 898: "Marchius Chullam and Varnychsin, father and mother of the Marchii Nimmira and [?M]accurasan, who had this memorial built for them. We paid out in reckoning for these things, in coin on salaries a total of 45,600 folles, in addition to the food for the workmen. May their sons and grandsons visit it happily". For Latin and translation see <http://inslib.kcl.ac.uk/irt2009/IRT898.html>.

¹² The southern cemetery is located approximately 2 km to the south of Ghirza and the northern cemetery is only a short distance to the south of Ghirza.

¹³ Brogan and Smith (1984) 40-92; Mattingly (2011) 248.

security for the region.¹⁴ The pre-desert region, in which Ghriza is situated, is defined by a large limestone and basalt plateau intersected by wadi channels (ancient riverbeds). Vegetation is sparse due to hot summers, cold winters, and little rainfall. From the later 1st c. A.D. onwards settlement increased dramatically, including farmsteads and larger courtyard farms,¹⁵ with fortified farms (gsur) starting to appear in the 3rd c.¹⁶ Farms and settlements were established along certain wadis with some of them becoming very densely settled.¹⁷ Intense water management techniques, including irrigation walls and cisterns, were employed to make agriculture a possible and fruitful venture.¹⁸ Notably, by far the largest number of mausolea in Tripolitania were located in the pre-desert, amounting to at least 103 in total, which can be linked to large farms and gsur situated nearby. The pattern of settlement suggests that the region was divided into independent farms and estates that held a considerable amount of land, which was owned by the local elite.¹⁹

By the time Marchius Fydell and Flavia Thesylgum commissioned their final resting place, mausolea were not an unusual sight in the pre-desert and, indeed, across Tripolitania. What was new was the architectural form they had chosen: the temple mausoleum. Before the mid-3rd c. tower mausolea were favoured, an architectural type that developed out of wider North African ancestral traditions of Punic tower tombs. During the Roman period, the tower mausoleum developed into the tall obelisk mausoleum, so-called because it was crowned by a long and slender pyramidal roof. This architectural type is unique to Tripolitania, and typically consisted of two or three superimposed storeys that could reach up to a height of 18 m above the subterranean burial chamber. Pilasters, engaged columns, and mouldings served as architectural decoration, while friezes displayed animals, human figures, rosettes, vegetal scrolls, and portrait busts in relief and in some cases, portrait statues.²⁰

Thus, in the mid-3rd c. the temple mausoleum constituted a completely new trend in the pre-desert. This type of monument increased in popularity across North Africa at some point during the late 2nd and 3rd c., although the architectural forms that developed differ across the region.²¹ Two types of temple mausoleum were popular in the Tripolitania pre-desert: the peripteral and the arcaded temple tomb. The peripteral temple tomb reassembles the classical Doric temple, featuring free-standing columns that run along the sides of the central chamber. The burial chamber is located below the central chamber. A flight of stairs leads up to the podium and the false door that decorates the central chamber. The roof is flat without a pediment. This tomb-type can be found at Gasr Banat in the Wadi Nfed (Fig. 2C),²² at Ghriza (North A) (Fig. 2A),²³ and possibly in the Wadi Sofeggin, called

¹⁴ Barker *et al.* (1996) 144-149; Mattingly (1995) 162-167; Mattingly (2011) 249.

¹⁵ Barker *et al.* (1996), Sheldrick (forthcoming 2021).

¹⁶ Mattingly with Flower (1996) 168.

¹⁷ Sheldrick (forthcoming 2021).

¹⁸ Barker *et al.* (1996) 5-13.

¹⁹ Barker *et al.* (1996) 178; Nikolaus (2017).

²⁰ Brogan and Smith (1984); Mattingly (1995); Nikolaus (2016) 205-206.

²¹ They became popular across the Roman Empire from the 1st c. A.D. onwards, especially in the western provinces. In Palmyra, the number of temple mausolea rose dramatically from the 2nd c., where they were chosen over the traditional tower mausolea; see von Hesberg (1992) 187-188; Toynbee (1971) 130-132. Moore has noted that while in the eastern provinces temple mausolea eventually replaced tower mausolea, in Africa Proconsularis, tower and temple mausolea existed contemporaneously, and they survive in approximately equal numbers; Moore (2007) 84.

²² Banat: Bauer (1935) 72-73; Brogan and Smith (1984) 264-272; Mattingly (1996) 263; Di Vita (1964) 89. Gasr Banat is dated to the mid-3rd c., based on its architectural decoration and the lettering of the inscription Brogan and Smith (1984) 264-265. For the inscription, see IRT2009, 891: To Aurellius Nazmur their father and [· ? ·] their mother, the Aurellii Maior and Magnus and Arcadius, sons, [· ? ·] had this made for their most dutiful [parents]. See <http://inslib.kcl.ac.uk/irt2009/IRT891.html> for Latin and translation.

²³ The dating of North A is difficult, but the architectural decoration and the lettering of the inscription suggest that it was built no earlier than the mid-3rd c. Ghriza North A: Brogan and Smith (1984) 121-133; Mattingly (1996) 120; Smith (1985); Kenrick (2009) 190; Nikolaus (2017).

Kaser Banat.²⁴ North A at Ghirza was the first monumental tomb in the northern cemetery and the names on the inscription highlight the Libyan heritage of the family.²⁵ The mausoleum is decorated with relief sculpture displaying the portrait of two females, a lion hunting a herbivore, two men sacrificing a bull, a cauldron, two birds drinking out of a beaker, and a mask. Roof ornaments such as palmettes and scrolls topped the monument.

The most innovative architectural type of mausoleum that developed in Late Antiquity in the pre-desert is the arcaded temple mausoleum, which is unique to North Africa.²⁶ These structures consist of a central pier that is frequently decorated with a false door in relief. The pier is placed on top of a podium and is surrounded by a colonnade that supports monolithic arch heads. The arches were, in fact, arcuate lintels, with the cut-out arch reducing their weight. They were excellent supports for the above frieze, and could, themselves, be decorated. In an aesthetic sense, the cut-out arches gave the structure a much lighter and higher appearance. This type of arch head alone was not an innovation, for it was already known from windows or tower mausolea. Thus, this type of arch may have simply been the easiest and most economical way for the builders to construct the tombs.²⁷ The arch heads (decorated with figurative, floral, and geometric reliefs) are directly on top of the columns on which the highly decorated friezes are placed. Like in the case of the peripteral temple tomb, the roof is flat and crowned with roof ornaments. The burial chamber is located underneath the podium. This type of mausoleum was particularly popular at Ghirza, where 8 out of 12 were of this type (Fig. 1A). Other examples can be found at Bir Nesma in the Wadi Sofeggin (Fig. 2B), in the Wadi Khanafes (Fig. 2D), in the Wadi Umm el-Agerem, and in the oasis settlement of Ghadames in the true desert. Although the mausolea in the pre-desert area are poorly dated, the evidence suggests that temple mausolea replaced tower mausolea by the 4th c. It is, therefore, the more striking that no examples of peripteral and arcaded temple mausolea are known beyond the borders of Tripolitania. Instead, in neighbouring Africa Proconsularis, the tetrastyle mausoleum was favoured. They were commissioned contemporarily at approximately equal numbers to tower mausolea but, interestingly, do not appear to date beyond the 3rd c.²⁸

[Figure 2]

The design of the temple mausoleum was ideal to facilitate the worship of the ancestors buried within.²⁹ The cult of the dead and the veneration of ancestors were a deeply engrained aspect of North African culture and are invariably linked to the developments in mausolea architecture and decoration.³⁰ The ancestral cult was already a long-standing tradition by the time North Africa was integrated into the Roman Empire, as tomb furniture such as offering tables or libation bowls found at pre-Roman burials show.³¹ The importance of the ancestors did not cease during the Roman period but developed even more clearly into a cult where the deceased reached near-divine status.³² The use of offering tables continued, and it is not unusual to find them deliberately placed next to a

²⁴ Kasr Banat: Al-Khadduri (1997) 220-223; Mattingly (1996) 280. This very large structure (8.66 m x 4.74 m) was, most likely, also surrounded by columns, very similarly to Kasr Banat or Ghirza North A.

²⁵ IRT2009, 899: Of M(archius) Nasif and M(archia) Mathlich, mother; the Marchii Nimira and Fydel, their sons, had this built for their dear parents. See <http://inslib.kcl.ac.uk/irt2009/IRT899.html> for Latin and translation.

²⁶ Similar examples of this type are located in Turkey, such as the tomb of Mylasa or the mausoleum at Kimar and Brad in Syria, though they lack the decorated monolithic arch heads; see von Hesberg (1992) 150-151.

²⁷ Brogan and Smith (1984) 209.

²⁸ Moore (2007) 85.

²⁹ Moore notes that in Tunisia in at least 13 cases there remains uncertainty if the structure is a temple or a mausoleum: Moore (2007) 92.

³⁰ Mattingly (1996; 2003; 2007a); Stone and Stirling (2007), 22-23.

³¹ See, for instance, Camps (1961); Hitchner (1995); Mattingly (2003); (2007a); (2007b).

³² Two insightful poems were inscribed on the tower mausoleum of the Flavii family at Kasserine, in modern day Tunisia, built around A.D. 150. The mausoleum is referred to as a 'temple', and the poems highlight the importance of the structure as a sacred monument in which the ancestors were housed permanently. For the poems and their interpretation see Thomas (2007) and Pillinger (2013).

mausoleum.³³ Many mausolea show evidence of libation channels that lead into the tombs.³⁴ Ritual practices are displayed on figural reliefs that decorate the mausolea at Ghirza, such as figures holding offering bowls, or the depiction of animal sacrifice.³⁵ Further evidence comes from an inscription found near Ghirza North A which mentions a large feast that took place to honour the dead. It refers to the festival of the *parentalia*, for which 51 bulls and 38 goats were killed.³⁶ It is doubtful that the *parentalia* was the same festival that was held on the Italian peninsula, particularly because these were usually conducted by close family members in smaller groups.³⁷ However, if we believe the inscription from Ghirza, an enormous amount of meat would have been processed, amounting up to 8,670 kg of bull meat, and 950 kg of goat meat.³⁸ Such a vast amount suggests that several thousand people could have taken part in commemorating the dead at a certain time in the year; certainly far more than the whole community normally living at Ghirza.³⁹ Even if the numbers of slaughtered animals were inflated to enhance the importance and wealth of the family, it still marks the *parentalia* out as one of the major events of the region, perhaps bringing together the immediate and more extended clans, who may have lived further away. As Mattingly points out, “the scale of the sacrifice matches the impressive funerary architecture and iconography produced to honour and appease those ancestors”.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, we have little archaeological evidence about the ritual that may have accompanied the feasts and where they were held at Ghirza in Late Antiquity. There is no evidence of *mensa* or dedicated banqueting spaces where funerary feasts may have been held. Such funerary couches are evident in late antique cemeteries across North Africa as, for instance, at Tipasa or at Sabratha.⁴¹ However, two semi-submerged structures in the cemeteries of Ghirza, one in the South and one in the North, are very different from the mausolea. They consist of two small, interconnected chambers. The back room was a funerary chamber, while the room at the front featured a bench along the back wall. They do not bear any figural or architectural decorations. Mattingly suggests that they may be linked to the ancestral cult, where visitors of the tombs could spend time in these ‘funerary chapels’ in close proximity to the dead.⁴²

A further clue that rituals were performed at the pre-desert mausolea comes from the iconography on the mausolea and from the temple at Ghirza. The temple was the largest in the pre-desert and was in use from the 2nd c. onwards. It was continuously enlarged and altered up to the 6th c., when it was eventually destroyed by a fire. It is unknown to whom this temple was dedicated.⁴³ Offering tables very similar in style to those in the cemeteries of Ghirza were found inside the temple, together with 26 altars of which some resemble buildings that recall the architecture of the mausolea.⁴⁴ Interestingly, a relief sculpture from the mausoleum South F depicts a row of heads lined

³³ Nikolaus (2017).

³⁴ Some mausolea at Ghirza have steps leading up to the central pillar and false door. A libation channel is located below the false door, indicating some ritual that was associated with the cult of the dead, see Brogan and Smith (1984).

³⁵ Scenes of bull sacrifice come from Ghirza North A and the Wadi al-Binaya while a relief from Ghirza South F may depict the impending sacrifice of a goat.

³⁶ Brogan and Smith (1984) 262.

³⁷ Mattingly (2011) 265.

³⁸ Fontana (1997) 185.

³⁹ Mattingly (2011) 265.

⁴⁰ Mattingly (2011) 265-267; see also Diggle and Goodyear (1970); Mattingly (1983).

⁴¹ Duval (1995). For Tipasa, see Ardeleanu (2018); for Sabratha, see Di Vita (1980-81); (1990); Rizzo (2015).

⁴² Mattingly (2011) 263-265. Rooms associated with large burials are known from across North Africa, see for instance Camps (1986).

⁴³ It has been previously suggested that the temple was dedicated to the god Gurzil. Bull heads and masks on the mausolea of Ghirza may refer to Gurzil, who was the son of the desert god Ammon and a cow. However, Gurzil is only mentioned in Corippus (*Ioh* 5.22-26), and it is not clear how widespread this cult was. Bulls may refer to the ram-horned Ammon himself, who was very popular in Tripolitania and who shared many attributes with Baal-Hammon; see Brouquier-Reddé (1992) 255-265; Le Glay (1966) 107-152; Mattingly (1995) 168; Riedlberger (2010) 301.

⁴⁴ Brogan and Smith 1984; Mattingly and Sterry (2010).

up on a shelf. A person is holding a bowl in one hand, and a goat is tied up behind him. This scene may depict offerings being held in the temple, but may also refer to offerings being made to the ancestors who were represented by the heads on the shelf above (Fig. 3A). Sculpted stone heads reminiscent of the ones on the relief were discovered at both the temple and the cemeteries, where they functioned as headstones (Fig. 3B). Although we cannot yet reconstruct the rituals that surrounded the cult of the dead at the mausolea at Ghirza in Late Antiquity, it appears that there was a close connection between the ritual that was celebrated in the temple and the ritual that was held at the mausolea, further suggesting that the latter had a religious function as well as serving as memorials and markers of status at least up until the 5th c., when the last of the arcaded mausolea were built.

[Figure 3]

Changing Power Relations and Changing Burial Monuments in Late Roman Africa

During the economic prosperity of the Antonine and Severan ages, one of the main drivers for the 'mausoleum culture' in North Africa was that more people were able to accumulate the necessary wealth that enabled them to spend large sums of surplus money on building their own elaborate burial monuments.⁴⁵ Although North Africa in general fared better during the Third Century Crisis than much of the empire, by the 4th c. this situation had changed.⁴⁶ Wealth (and power) was restricted to fewer people than before, and considerably less money was poured into public buildings. Instead, the remaining prosperous families poured their wealth into private houses elaborated with rich mosaics that decorated large representative rooms.⁴⁷ The 4th c. saw a series of tribal upheavals across North Africa, including raids and full-scale wars that, together with a series of earthquakes, affected the political, social, and economic stability of the region. This instability and decline in the numbers of wealthy elite with considerable disposable income inevitably influenced the number of mausolea that were constructed in Late Antiquity.

Shifting Power Relations: Lepcis Magna and Ghirza

In Tripolitania it is remarkable that, at the same time as building activities on temple mausolea in the pre-desert of Tripolitania flourished in Late Antiquity, the construction of mausolea at the prosperous coastal city of Lepcis Magna started to dwindle rapidly. At least 19 mausolea built during the Early and mid-Imperial period once stood in the vicinity of the city and its hinterlands, but archaeological evidence suggest that they ceased to be constructed by the mid- to late 3rd c.⁴⁸ A survey conducted in the hinterlands of Lepcis Magna (between Ras el Mergheb and Ras el Hammam) recorded 11 mausolea in total, which were dated between the 1st and 3rd c. A.D.⁴⁹ The decline of mausolea corresponds to the slow reduction of agricultural settlement during the late 3rd c., followed by a period of 'declining stability' in the 4th c.⁵⁰ Production, export, and import continued to exist, showing that the agricultural and productive systems were still in place, although not as prosperous as in the periods before.⁵¹ A more pronounced decline is presented around the area of Silin west of Lepcis Magna, where settlements reduce by approximately 50% from the mid-3rd c. However, a new villa and some new fortified farms were constructed in that area despite many other farms and villas being abandoned.⁵²

⁴⁵ Moore (2007) 102.

⁴⁶ Dossey (2010) 16-17.

⁴⁷ Brett and Fentress (1996) 70-71; Dossey (2010) 18.

⁴⁸ Fontana (2001) noted that, on the basis of the little dating evidence we have for the mausolea at the coast, the majority seem to have been built in the 1st to the mid-3rd c. Nikolaus (2017) 46-47; Munzi *et al.* (2016).

⁴⁹ Munzi *et al.* (2016) 84-93.

⁵⁰ Munzi *et al.* (2016); see also Dossey (2010).

⁵¹ Munzi *et al.* (2016).

⁵² Munzi *et al.* (2004) 21-26.

In Lepcis Magna itself, there was a major decline in urban investment after the reign of Septimius Severus. The epigraphy of the 1st and 2nd c. attests a flurry of constructions or restorations of buildings. However, for the period from Caracalla to Diocletian, there is not a single dated inscription mentioning building activities;⁵³ this does not mean that building activities completely stopped as the lack of inscriptions may also indicate a change in the epigraphic habit. Also, there is evidence that buildings were still maintained or extended.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the number of sculpture workshops dwindled to the extent that 1st and 2nd c. portrait sculptures were frequently re-worked to create new portraits.⁵⁵ The once rich and powerful city of Lepcis Magna never fully recovered from the struggles of the late 3rd c. The 4th c. was defined by further political, economic, and natural upheaval which led to Lepcis Magna, and Tripolitania as a whole, dropping sharply in importance within the Roman imperial administration. By the late 4th c., the reduced military resources were no longer under the control of the governor of the province but rather other local officials. The raids of the Austuriani in the second half of the 4th c., together with the earthquakes that struck the city and the dwindling influence of the local elites in the imperial administration, contributed to the fact that Tripolitania was slowly reduced to a provincial backwater.⁵⁶

The decline of mausolea at the coast corresponds to the decrease of settlement and wealth in that region. The financial outlay of building a mausoleum perhaps became too costly for some of the elite families, as income started to dwindle. As the population of Lepcis Magna declined, the elite may have chosen to retreat to their country estates. That some of the already existing monumental tombs may have been used up until the 6th c. is exemplified by a tower mausoleum in the Wadi al-Farni in the hinterlands of Lepcis Magna. The monumental structure marked an underground hypogeum, which was used up until the 6th c.⁵⁷ Little is known about the earliest churches of Lepcis Magna, but evidence from the 5th c. Byzantine church suggests that burials took place here.⁵⁸ Further evidence that funerary customs changed at the coastal cities in Late Antiquity comes from a painted feasting chamber above a hypogeum at Sabratha. The early 4th c. hypogeum at Sidret el-Balik at the outskirts of Sabratha had a funerary chapel built on top of the burial chamber. The chapel was furnished with 4 large sigma couches, tables and a well, providing a space for the family to gather and hold feasts in honour of the dead. The walls were decorated with frescos that depicted hunting on horseback, birds amongst vegetation, several houses, probably representing a town, wild animals amongst scrolls and vegetation, and small, winged figures cutting grapes amongst birds.⁵⁹ This is an indication that funerary rituals may have become more private at the coastal cities, and were reserved for the immediate members of the family.

Why is it that the pre-desert region thrived during the 3rd and 4th c. and continued to build elaborate mausolea, while funerary monuments at the coastal cities of Tripolitania ceased to be built? Merrills has pointed out that studies of Early Medieval Europe show that “elaborate funerary practices appear especially frequently in periods of social and political upheaval, when new elites sought to establish their authority through material, liturgical, ritual and metaphysical channels”.⁶⁰ This appears to be the case in the Tripolitanian pre-desert. The diminishing Roman authority in Tripolitania rewarded the pre-desert elite with growing authority over their territory. The withdrawal of the troops from the forts of Bu Njem and Gheriat in the second half of the 3rd c. left this region more exposed to threats from the south. As a result, some of the regional power was handed back to the local leaders who, at least until the end of the 3rd c., maintained a close relationship with Rome via treaty.⁶¹ The growing instabilities of the 4th and 5th c. led prominent families to grow increasingly more loyal to

⁵³ Tantillo (2010) 13-14.

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Goodchild (1965) on the ‘unfinished’ baths at Lepcis Magna.

⁵⁵ Bianchi (2005); Caputo and Traversari (1976) 14-16.

⁵⁶ Kenrick (2009) 6; Mattingly (1983); Mattingly (1995) 176-177; Sears (2007) 70-78; Sears (2011) 130.

⁵⁷ Matoug (1998); Musso *et al.* (1998); for cemeteries at Lepcis Magna, see Fontana (1996).

⁵⁸ Ward-Perkins and Goodchild (1953); Kenrick (2009) 101.

⁵⁹ Di Vita (1980-81); (1990) 352-355; Rizzo (2015).

⁶⁰ Merrills (2018a) 385.

⁶¹ Mattingly (1995) 176, 186.

the new federations of the interior and thus slowly turn away from the Roman Empire. Ghirza was probably one of the major centres for trade and administration and a key location for the safekeeping of the region. Consequently, the elite's power progressively strengthened, fuelled by Rome's loss of imperial authority over the Libyan pre-desert.⁶²

This power shift is vividly reflected in the iconography of the late antique mausolea of the pre-desert. Displays of martial scenes, men garbed in military dress and ceremonial scenes appear on mausolea at Ghirza, at Nesma in the Wadi Sofeggin, and in the Wadi al-Binya, reflecting the increasing power of the elite in the region. Such iconography is rare elsewhere on North African mausolea in general and did not appear before the late 3rd / early 4th c. on the pre-desert mausolea. The imagery indicates that the local elite executed judicial power over the region, controlled the main centres of trade, and safeguarded the Roman former frontier zone.⁶³ Scenes of combat and gift-giving underline their new status, and draws attention to the responsibility of the elite family to keep their communities safe. The mausoleum of Marchius Fydel and Flavia Thesylgum (North B) is particularly striking of its display of power and prosperity. Amongst scenes in relief depicting agricultural imagery and hunting, showcasing the prosperity of the region (and the elite status of the family no less), are scenes that are clearly linked to the authority of the elite. Marchius Fydel is depicted seated on the cross-legged chair holding a cup or small staff. The seated figure is disproportionately large, indicating that this is indeed a portrait of the owner of the tomb. In front of him are a group of people wearing a variety of costumes and headdresses, perhaps indicating the different regions or tribes from which they came. In their hands, they are holding a variety of objects, presumably gifts that are being presented to the deceased. To the right of this scene, a person is being punished or executed by two figures. Another combat scene shows an armed man with carefully curled hair holding a spear. He is overpowering a nude figure with much longer, straight hair, most likely showing the distinction between the civilised people of Ghirza, and the uncivilised 'other'. This emerging iconography of military and judicial power vividly sets the family apart from the iconography that was displayed on earlier mausolea from the region, which primarily focused on portrait sculptures of the deceased and the family as well as symbolic sculpture.⁶⁴

The imagery of North C is remarkably similar to North B including agricultural scenes, hunting, execution or punishment, the presentation of gifts to the deceased, and the arrival of a caravan. The deceased is depicted seated on a cross-legged chair surrounded by figures that are presenting vessels, a long staff, and a quiver to him (Fig. 4A). A second scene shows the deceased standing up and facing outwards. His distinct curly hair and beard are still just about visible. To the right and left of him are two smaller figures raising their arms above their heads in the pose of prayer, adoration, or mourning. To the right stands another tall figure with a long tunic wearing a conical cap. To the left of this scene, a group of horsemen are approaching in full gallop. On another relief a captured man has his arms bound behind his back and is held by two men. The man to the left is holding the victim's head with one hand while swinging a weapon with the other. The person to the right holds on to the victim's head and right upper arm (Fig. 4B).⁶⁵ The symbolism chosen on these scenes is particularly interesting in the context of the changing power relations between the Roman Empire and the local groupings of the interior of North Africa. The execution scenes suggest that they had the status of magistrates which gave them judicial power. This is further underlined by the folding chair the deceased was portrayed sitting on, perhaps a *sella*, an insigne that embodied magisterial power.⁶⁶ In this context, what had previously been identified as a quiver could indeed be interpreted as *fasces*, an insigne which consisted of bundles of reeds tied together to demonstrate magisterial or religious power.⁶⁷ The sceptre, which both seated figures on North B and C held, are a further symbol of the Roman

⁶² Mattingly (1995) 205ff; Fontana (1997) 150; Merrills (2004) 3.

⁶³ Nikolaus (2017).

⁶⁴ Nikolaus (2017).

⁶⁵ A very similar scene has also been found in the Wadi al-Binaya, now in the museum at Bani Ualid.

⁶⁶ Fontana (1997) 156; Schäfer (1989) 19.

⁶⁷ Schäfer (1989) 196.

magistrate.⁶⁸ These symbols were depicted on coins, and were probably well known in the hinterlands of Tripolitania. The continued existence of mausolea in the pre-desert of Tripolitania was closely bound to regional, social, economic, and political circumstances. They were integral to the religious beliefs of the populations and the iconography, and inscriptions show that the veneration of the dead was an important part of ritual life. However, the mausolea also had another purpose, they were the ideal canvas to express the growing prosperity and power of the elite, visual evidence of their control over the region at a time when the Roman empire was in decline.

[Figure 4]

Monuments of Power at the Periphery: the Late Antique Mausolea of Ghadames

At least 7 arcaded temple mausolea can be found at the very periphery of the Roman Empire at the Asnam cemetery of Ghadames in Tripolitania, an oasis situated approximately 450 km south of Oea in the Saharan Desert.⁶⁹ Pliny refers to the Oasis town as Cydamus,⁷⁰ and its importance (most likely in the caravan trade) is highlighted during the triumph of Balbus in Rome in 19 B.C. when Cydamus was displayed amongst the most valuable achievements of his military campaign.⁷¹ The elites of Ghadames probably entered a client relationship with Rome from this point onwards.⁷² In the early 3rd c., a garrison was installed that remained until at least A.D. 235.⁷³ The oasis probably returned to its autonomous status after the withdrawal of the garrison at some point in the mid-3rd c., but it maintained close trade links with Rome and later the Byzantine Empire.⁷⁴

The architectural style of the Ghadames mausolea is very similar to the ones at Ghirza, which allows the tentative dating of the monuments to the 3rd – 5th c.⁷⁵ An obelisk mausoleum may have also been present at Ghadames, suggested by a curious stela that depicts a tomb with a tree growing out of the top of the roof. Today, all mausolea are completely stripped of their stone facings, and consequently many of the decorative elements are now lost (Fig. 5). Numerous structural elements, such as columns and arch heads, were reused in the Islamic town and bear testimony to the once richly decorated monuments. Furthermore, various figural stone reliefs and funerary inscriptions have been recorded. The funerary inscriptions were written in Latin or Latino-Punic and bore Latin and Libyan names such as Rosauarugarage and Macarcum Varivara (from the Latin inscriptions), and Julianus (from a neo-Punic inscription).⁷⁶

[Figure 5: Ghadames Asnam cemetery]

In total, 14 stone reliefs are known from Ghadames.⁷⁷ Stylistically, these sculptures are very similar to the funerary art of the Tripolitanian pre-desert, which suggests that they were part of the decoration that adorned the arcaded temple tombs. The overall themes include agricultural activities, hunting on horseback, hunting with dogs, and ceremonial scenes reminiscent of the iconography at Ghirza; however, many of the figures wear local costume and the hair is arranged in thick braids gathered high on the head, with the ends hanging down to the shoulder in a long, thick ponytail. Some

⁶⁸ Salmonson (1956) 96; Schäfer (1989) 184-190.

⁶⁹ Brogan and Smith (1984) 212; Largeau (1881); Mattingly and Sterry (2010) 76; Rebuffat (1975) 498-99; Richardson (1848).

⁷⁰ Pliny, *NH* 5.26-5.37.

⁷¹ Merrills (2016).

⁷² Mattingly and Sterry (2010) 18.

⁷³ Legio III Augusta is mentioned on inscriptions found at Ghadames: IRT2009, 907, 908; Mattingly (1995).

⁷⁴ Mattingly and Sterry (2010) 18.

⁷⁵ Mattingly and Sterry (2010) 76. One of the major differences between the Ghirza and Ghadames mausolea is that the Ghadames mausolea were built with a rubble core and were faced with ashlar, masonry, or plaster, while the Ghirza monuments were solid ashlar constructions.

⁷⁶ IRT2009, 912; IRT2009, 911; Mattingly and Sterry (2010) 111.

⁷⁷ Nikolaus (2017).

of the reliefs that survive draw attention to the elevated status of the deceased. For instance, a figure is displayed holding a palm leaf above an arch decorated with a zig-zag pattern, in which a seated person is holding a staff.⁷⁸ The person sitting in the centre, most likely the deceased, clearly had some social significance. Another relief shows the procession of three people holding small objects such as cups and flasks. A cup is offered to a fourth person who appears to be facing outwards and is slightly larger than the rest of the group (Fig. 6). Unfortunately, the stone is broken off here and only part of this larger figure is showing. It is striking, however, that some of the overall composition recalls the ceremonial scene on the Ghirza reliefs, where cups, vessels, and gifts were presented to the deceased.

[Figure 6: Ghadames relief]

Although the evidence from Ghadames is not as rich as that from Ghirza, it is clear that the late antique mausolea at the Asnam cemetery were more than just markers of wealth of the local elite. The difference of dress and hairstyle at Ghadames and Ghirza show that the imagery was not randomly chosen out of a pattern book, but was designed to send clear, customised messages to the local community. Ghadames, like Ghirza, was an important centre of trade, and was probably one of the main centres of power in the region. These large and impressive mausolea functioned as powerful markers at the very periphery of the Roman Empire not only to the local people, but also to the transhumant population that was involved in the caravan trade. In Late Antiquity, they sent a clear message of the power held by the local elite who now ruled over the region after the retreat of the Roman army.

Within the wider context of North Africa, Tripolitania is somewhat an exception in that its social and political upheaval had already begun in the late 3rd and 4th c., while other areas of North Africa were still prosperous. Christianity did not take hold in the remote pre-desert and desert regions until the Byzantine era, while elsewhere the new religion gradually had a much larger impact. The rich figural relief decorations are distinctly Tripolitanian, while in the rest of North Africa mausolea were less vividly decorated. Although fewer in number, mausolea were still built at the coast and in the countryside including mausolea near the 4th c. fortified farm of Kasr el-Kaoua in Algeria and the large tower mausoleum 'La Ghorfa' in Wadi Selama in Algeria, which was built in the 4th or 5th c.⁷⁹

The Emergence of a New Elite in Late Antiquity: the Djedar Mausolea

In north-central Algeria on the western edge of the Sersou Plateau are the Djedar mausolea, comprising 13 monuments divided into two groups. These large, high-status funerary structures date from the 5th to the 7th c.⁸⁰ The three earliest structures from the 5th c. are grouped together on the Djebel Lakhdar, while the later mausolea are located a few km to the south of the first group. These monuments are located near the old Roman frontier at a point that connected the High Plateau in the south to the Tell and the Ouarsenis mountains in the north.⁸¹ As in the pre-desert of Tripolitania, the number of settlements in this region was high, although perhaps the major difference was that Christianity was well established in the area.⁸² Chi-Rho monograms, floral rosettes, and paired birds in relief are found on the mausolea.⁸³ Other decorations include well-established elite iconography, such as the hunting on horseback of lions and ostriches, similar to those on the mausolea of Ghirza, underlining the high status of the elite family buried here.⁸⁴ Partial inscriptions that survive on the three earliest mausolea are in Latin, and the words *duc(i)* and *ecrecius(s)* may refer to Roman military

⁷⁸ A drawing of this relief by Duveyrier (1864) survives but the original stone is now lost.

⁷⁹ Laporte (2009a) 503; La Ghorfa: Laporte (1980); (2009b).

⁸⁰ Laporte (2005) 360; Merrills (2018a) 382.

⁸¹ Kadra (1983); Laporte (2005); Rushworth (1999); (2004); Merrills (2018a).

⁸² Cadenat (1957); Février (1996).

⁸³ Kadra (1983) 198-207; Laporte (2005) 349.

⁸⁴ Brett and Fentress (1996) 77-79.

rank.⁸⁵ The phrase *dis minibus sacrum* suggests some connection to Roman imperial culture under the local rulers.⁸⁶

The architecture of the mausolea represents a striking mix of past traditions stretching back to the Mauritanian and Numidian kingdoms of the 3rd to 1st c. B.C., Saharan traditions (including bazinas with flanking chapels), as well as local mausolea structures.⁸⁷ For instance, the base of Djedar A is formed of a large rectangular masonry plinth (about 35 m wide and approximately 2 m high) topped by a tumulus, which may have reached a total height of 17 m (Fig. 7). Small rooms, or ‘chapels’ were added to the eastern side of the monuments, indicating that ancestral worship still played an important part in this region. Merrills rightly points out that the architecture of the Djedar may be “a part of a continuum of different types of funerary constructions that stretch from the desert to the heart of the old Roman province, and which seems to have become particularly prominent in Late Antiquity”.⁸⁸ We do not know who built the Djedar, or what exactly the cultural impulses behind those mausolea were, but they represent the emergence of a new elite in the hinterlands of Algeria that used large mausolea structures to help establish and express their power over the region.⁸⁹ The collapse of Roman authority in the region in the 5th c. brought with it the formation of sub-Roman successor states, apparently ruled by new elites bearing Berber names.⁹⁰ Similar to Ghirza, this region was previously at the periphery of the Roman Empire and the decreasing authority of Roman rule caused a considerable increase in power and wealth of local rulers. The size of the mausolea reflects the power and status of the ruling family, and the iconography of the stone reliefs together with the inscriptions echoes the complex identity of the society and the local rulers. They represent a fascinating mix of local customs and ritual traditions married with past architectural traditions. The community held Christian beliefs, but the existence of ‘chapels’ indicates that the ‘cult of the dead’ was still very much alive when the Djedars were constructed.

[Figure 7 Djeddar A]

The continued relevance to the community of these structures and the interred is further underlined by the relief decorations that appear to have been added after the construction of the monument had been completed. Some parts of the monument, however, appear to have been prepared for decoration but were never worked. These funerary monuments, similar to the examples at Ghirza, were much more than the resting place of the local elite; they represented a place for ritual and ancestral worship for the local community, a tradition that outlasted the end of the Roman Empire. What both Ghirza and the Djedars represent is a sense of continuity in a time when the political and social world was changing drastically. Both cemeteries represent ‘dynasties’ of local rulers who wanted to enforce and emphasise their power over the region. Not only did they have the means and manpower available to build these monuments, but their rule also lasted over several generations as the mausolea very vividly demonstrate. In Late Antiquity, mausolea were increasingly becoming monuments of power, used by local rulers and their families to enforce, and emphasise, their legitimate rule over the region.

It is important to keep in mind that the Ghirza and Ghadames mausolea were built earlier than the Djedars and, indeed, historical events are very different in both regions. While the pre-desert and

⁸⁵ Laporte (2005) 352-354.

⁸⁶ Merrills (2018a) 383.

⁸⁷ Rushworth (1999) 93; on pre-Roman burial monuments, see Camps (1986); Fentress (1979); Rakob (1979). See Fentress and Wilson (2016) for connections to the Royal Cemetery in Germa in Fezzan and Kadra (1983) for parallels in Algeria; on Saharan burials in general, see Gatto *et al.* (2019).

⁸⁸ Merrills (2018a) 385. A similar ‘merging’ of longstanding burial traditions and contemporary features can be observed at the mausoleum at Blad Guitoun. This octagonal structure was over 9 m high and stood on a hill dominating the surrounding landscape, Gsell (1898); Laporte (2013).

⁸⁹ See also Merrills (2018b), Fentress and Wilson (2016), and Rushworth (1999); (2004) on the emergence and identity of these new Moorish leaders.

⁹⁰ Merrills (2018a) 356.

desert region of Tripolitania did not seem to be affected by the Vandal conquest, Algeria was under Vandal rule during the mid-5th c. until 546, when King Gelimer surrendered to Byzantine forces. Furthermore, the uprising of Moorish tribes caused continuous fighting even after the Byzantine conquest. However, the mausolea from Djedar, Ghadames, and Ghirza are remarkable because they are all located in marginal locations and represent family groups, perhaps even dynasties, of local ruler elites who established and continued their rule over their territories for generations. It is significant that they were located at the fringes of the Roman Empire, in areas that were losing, or had lost, their foothold in these marginal zones. They were placed at strategic positions near important centres of trade and transhumant activity and were seen by a wide variety of people, who would have interpreted them in different ways. The architecture of the Djedar monuments, for example, reflects the fluidity of these transitional zones, drawing on both Saharan and local traditions.

The Impact of Christianity on the Monumental Funerary Landscape of North Africa

Power relations, power shifts, and changes in economic circumstances represent part of the reason why the mausolea landscape has changed in Late Antiquity. Another factor that has influenced a change in burial practice across North Africa is the rise of Christianity. In the last section of this paper, I will briefly explore what impact this change in religious beliefs and practices had on mausolea in particular. I will focus on what is now modern-day Tunisia and Algeria, as Christianity had very little impact in the pre-desert region of Tripolitania.⁹¹ In fact, it is notable that Christian symbols are completely lacking on the mausolea at Ghirza as well as on other mausolea of Tripolitania. Only two churches are known in the pre-desert: Souk el Oti in the Wadi Burza, dating to the 5th c., and Chafagi Amer in the Wadi Sofeggin. Christian symbols are also known from a gasr in the Sofeggin basin, near Chafagi Amer.⁹² These communities appear to have remained rather small and isolated with paganism continuing until at least the 6th c.⁹³ However, in other regions of North Africa, the slow emergence of Christianity had a substantial impact on burial traditions from about the 4th c. onwards.

Already by the beginning of the 3rd c. Tertullian, a member of the clergy of the Christian church at Carthage, voices his reservations towards Christians participating in funerary rites, offerings, or banquets held at tombs.⁹⁴

So on that account, since both kinds of idol stand on the same footing (dead men and gods are one and the same thing) we abstain from both kinds of idolatry. Temples or tombs, we abominate both equally, we know neither sort of altar; we adore sort of image, we pay no sacrifice, we pay no funeral rite. No, we do not eat of what is offered in sacrificial or funeral rite, because, 'we cannot eat of the Lords supper and the supper of demons'.⁹⁵

The fact that Tertullian mentions temples and tombs in one sentence is rather telling within the North African context, particularly in relation to the emerging trend of the temple mausoleum. He rejects Roman gods together with dead men and the worship of cult images as 'false religion'.⁹⁶ He does not imply that this custom is one that Christians no longer followed; rather, he indicates that this is a custom that should be abandoned.⁹⁷ Despite reservations of the clergy, the practice of honouring the

⁹¹ Conant (2012) 267-268; Mattingly (1995) 212-213; for ancient authors, see Cor. *Ioh.* 2.109-11; 3.81-85; 5.494-502; 6.145-90; 8.300-17; The temple at Ghirza went up in flames around A.D. 550, which marks the end of the pagan cult, Brogan and Smith (1984) 85, 232.

⁹² A possible Christian building inscription comes from Gasr Gasia *IRT2009*, 894a: Lauratianus[and· ? ··] established the foundations with his sons and grandsons [· ? ··] ?fortune (case unknown) [· ? ··] increases with God favouring (?us).

⁹³ Mattingly (1995) 214.

⁹⁴ Rebillard (2009) 143; Rebillard (2012) 9-10.

⁹⁵ Tertullian, *De Spectaculis* 13.3-4.

⁹⁶ Sroumsa (2008) 176; see also Tertullian, *De idolatria*.

⁹⁷ Rebillard (2009) 143.

dead by visiting the tombs, providing offerings, and holding banquets at the gravesite remained very much alive up until the time of Augustine in the 4th c. In the *Confessions*, Augustine refers to his mother Monica, who wanted to take offerings of food and wine to the shrine of a martyr at Milan, 'as had been her custom in Africa'. She was forbidden to enter the shrine under Bishop Ambrose's new law, and Augustine himself seems surprised at how readily his mother gave up this custom.⁹⁸ Monica probably not only visited the tombs of martyrs, but also of family members,⁹⁹ and while Augustine seems to be rather opposed to the tradition of holding banquets for martyrs, he did tolerate meals at the tombs of ordinary people. The cult of the martyrs and the already existing cult of the dead were closely related, and martyrdom was an essential aspect of Christian identity in North Africa, but differing in the fact that the martyr's cult was practiced by the whole church community, and not only by the family.¹⁰⁰

Amongst Christians in the 4th c., burial in or around cemetery churches and basilicas became more and more popular. Inhumations in and around churches signal a cultural shift from the focus on individual or family memorials, such as mausolea, to Christian communal burials.¹⁰¹ Burials were organized according to membership within the local church, rather than around the family unit.¹⁰² As a result, collective identity as part of the church community became more (or as) important as individual ties based on kinship, rank, or office. Members of the community were interred below the surface of the church pavement. Aboveground burial markers included stone slabs or mosaic pavements decorated with inscriptions and Christian symbols. Interestingly, the mosaics and markers in many churches such as at Kelibia in Tunisia and Setif in Algeria are fairly homogeneous. At the cemetery church of Bie el Knissia at Carthage, the individuals chose from the standard repertoire of iconography, formulae, and nomenclature.¹⁰³ This ensured that the identity of the individual was preserved while, at the same time, he or she fitted in with the existing community.¹⁰⁴ Hierarchical arrangements within the burials still existed and could be determined by the material in which the covering, such as mosaics, were constructed.¹⁰⁵ Most important was the location of the burial: burial spaces in privileged positions in close proximity to saints secured salvation and proclaimed a personal relation with the saint which could signify status; up until the mid-5th c., these spaces were often reserved for the clergy.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, as Yasin points out, "while the grave of a martyr may have been the place where heaven and earth met, it was also the place where people met", creating a relationship between the living audience and the interred.¹⁰⁷ Over time, for some elite families of Christian faith, annexed funerary chapels may have been preferred to the mausoleum, such as at Tabarka or at Damous el Krita where whole family groups are buried.¹⁰⁸

Despite the change in burial customs, some mausolea were clearly built by people of Christian faith. St. Salsa at Tipasa in Algeria was first interred in a mausoleum in the early 4th c. The mausoleum stood in a dominant position, visible from the sea.¹⁰⁹ At some point after A.D. 371/372, she was moved into a small basilica, inevitably shifting the main ritual focus to the church.¹¹⁰ A second Christian

⁹⁸ August. *Conf.* 6.2.2.

⁹⁹ Rebillard (2009) 147.

¹⁰⁰ Decret (2009) 95.

¹⁰¹ Yasin (2005).

¹⁰² Yasin (2005), 433, 442.

¹⁰³ Stevens (2008).

¹⁰⁴ Yasin (2005) 444.

¹⁰⁵ Yasin (2005).

¹⁰⁶ See Brown (1981) and Duval (1988) on the eschatological advantage of burials near saints; Stevens (2009) for Bir el Knissia. At Tipasa, in the church of St. Salsa burials near the apse were staggered on top of each other. This location became so desirable that earlier Christian burials were disturbed to create new ones, see Ardeleanu (2018) for further references.

¹⁰⁷ Yasin (2005) 433; see also Ardeleanu (2018).

¹⁰⁸ Duval (1986); Frevier (1996).

¹⁰⁹ Frevier (1996) 923.

¹¹⁰ Ardeleanu (2018) 489-490; Gsell (1893) 18-19.

mausoleum may have stood in the same cemetery bearing the inscription *ichthys*.¹¹¹ In Tunisia, at Furnos Minus, approximately 40 km south-west of Carthage, the mausoleum of Blossius was built in the 4th or 5th c. The entire floor of the mausoleum was decorated with a mosaic depicting Daniel and the lion showcasing Blossius' Christian beliefs. The burial chamber had room for 6 adult and 2 child burials, and perhaps a ninth burial under the 'Daniel' mosaic.¹¹² There is no clear evidence that this tomb was a *memoria* for martyrs.¹¹³ Other members of the Blossii family were buried nearby in mosaic-covered tombs, which were probably part of a basilica.¹¹⁴ An octagonal mausoleum was constructed in the 5th c. at Blad Guitoun in Algeria, 3.5 km east of Thénia.¹¹⁵ Intricate decorations reminiscent of wood carvings adorned the monument, including a false door.¹¹⁶ Fragments of the decorated sarcophagus found inside, as well as decorations on the outside of the tomb, including a chalice flanked by two fish, indicate that the commissioner of the tomb was of Christian faith. That the 'cult of the dead' was still active is suggested by the large platform that was constructed at the eastern side of the monument. Gsell mentions the archaeological remains of a large church that stood near the monument, probably built in the 5th or 6th c., but we know nothing about the relationship between the church and the mausoleum. At Bulla Regia, a recently excavated mausoleum, which was perhaps a converted cistern, was probably constructed in the 6th c. This mausoleum held 4 burials.¹¹⁷

The above indicates that one reason for the drop in numbers of mausolea across North Africa is a change in attitude towards death and commemoration among the elite, motivated by Christian religion and liturgy.¹¹⁸ The focus shifted from demonstrating the status and importance of the individual family by building a large funerary monument, to displaying their position within the existing church community. Despite this shift, the longevity of a number of mausolea across North Africa is remarkable. Mausolea were still cared for, repaired and visited, and some were re-used in Late Antiquity. The large cemetery at Puppēt in Tunisia was in use up until the 5th c.¹¹⁹ Overall, 29 mausolea were recorded at this site and the majority were surrounded by an enclosure wall. The long life of some of these monuments is well demonstrated by mausoleum 19, built after the reign of Trajan and continuously used and visited up until the 5th c., as evident through burial remains and pottery sherds.¹²⁰ The anonymous mausoleum at Blad Guitoun equally appears to have a long chronology from the 1st c. up to the 5th c. Repairs took place on the building at the end of the 4th or early 5th c. Some of the pits containing mid- to late 5th c. pottery could also indicate that the tomb was robbed, perhaps at the end of its use.¹²¹ At Taksebt, an elaborate circular mausoleum was built at some point in the 3rd or 4th c. The structure integrated a much earlier mausoleum that may have been destroyed by an earthquake.¹²² A slightly different story is being told at the Yasmina cemetery at Carthage, where a 2nd c. mausoleum and the elaborate three-storey stucco monument of M. Bibius Tertullus were reused in the 5th c. Here, the individuals were of apparently lower status than the original owners. Burial activity at this cemetery ceased by the early 4th c., but new inhumation burials appeared a century later. The graves were cut into the still-standing mausolea, which likely served as collective markers for this community.¹²³

Conclusions

¹¹¹ Ardeleanu (2018) 493; Albertini and Leschi (1932).

¹¹² Kalinowski (2017) 117

¹¹³ Duval and Cintas (1978); on the mosaic, see Kalinowski (2017).

¹¹⁴ Duval and Cintas (1978).

¹¹⁵ Laporte (2013) 101. See Gsell (1898) for a 4th c. date.

¹¹⁶ Gsell (1898).

¹¹⁷ Chaouali, Fenwick, Booms (2018) 194-196.

¹¹⁸ Ferchiou (1995) 135-137.

¹¹⁹ Ben Abed and Grisheimer (2001) 562.

¹²⁰ Ben Abed and Grisheimer (2001).

¹²¹ Ferchiou (1986).

¹²² Euzennat and Hallier (1992) 241.

¹²³ Stevens (2008) 99-100; see also Norman and Haeckl (1993).

It is difficult to assess the processes that caused the decline of mausolea, not least because of the small amount of systematic work that has been undertaken on late antique mausolea and the subsequent lack of precise dating. It is important to stress that regional differences and preferences are prevalent in North Africa, and changes are closely bound to local traditions, religious beliefs, as well as political and economic circumstances. However, the evidence we have suggests that the monumental funerary landscape across North Africa changed noticeably during Late Antiquity, and the popularity of the mausoleum as the family memorial and final resting place appears to decrease. Some mausolea were still built in the 4th c. but the rise of Christianity and the associated communal burial churches and cemeteries may eventually have replaced the need to build such an expensive memorial amongst many of the Christian communities. The difficult economic circumstances of some regions in late antique North Africa were also likely to have contributed to the decline in mausolea numbers, because building one simply could no longer be afforded. Yet, particularly at the fringes of the Roman Empire, they still provided the ideal canvas for the ruling elite to demonstrate and re-enforce authority over their regions during the complex shift in power relations that took place. New and innovative architectural styles were chosen that included elements of Roman and pre-Roman forms, resulting in a funerary monument that clearly reflected local circumstances as well as wider social and political dynamics of the region.

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Abbreviations

IRT2009 = Bodard, G. and Roueché, C. (2009) *Enhanced electronic reissue of: Reynolds J. M. and Ward-Perkins, J. B. 1952. Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*. Available at: <http://inslib.kcl.ac.uk/irt2009/> [Last accessed: 14/10/20]

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List of Illustrations

Fig. 1. Map showing places and mausolea mentioned in the article.

Fig. 2A. Temple mausolea in the northern cemetery of Ghirza, North A, B, and C from left to right (Image: Philip Kenrick); Fig. 2B. Bir Nesma arcaded temple mausoleum (Image: ULVS Collection, Society for Libyan Studies Archive); Fig. 2C. temple mausoleum Gasr Banat (Image: ULVS Collection, Society for Libyan Studies Archive); Fig. 2D. Wadi Khanafes arcaded temple mausoleum (Image: ULVS Collection, Society for Libyan Studies Archive).

Fig. 3A. Relief from Ghirza (South F) showing possible ritual related to ancestral cult (Drawing: Author); Fig. 3B. Headstone from Ghirza cemeteries associated with minor tombs (Image: Brogan Collection, Society for Libyan Studies Archive)

Fig. 4A. Power related iconography from Ghirza (North C), a bearded figure seated on a chair receiving gifts (Drawing: Author); Fig. 4B. Ghirza North C, two men holding a third person between them, the left is about to strike the person in the middle with a long object (Image: Brogan Collection, Society for Libyan Studies Archive).

Fig. 5. The Asnam cemetery of Ghadames with the remains of the arcaded temple tombs (Image: Author).

Fig. 6. Relief from Ghadames, a group of people proceeding towards a tall figure on the right (Image: Author).

Fig. 7. Djeddar A in the djebel Lakthar (Image: Mus52, Creative Commons Licence).