

BOOK REVIEW

Origins of the Colonnaded Streets in the Cities of the Roman East. By ROSS BURNS. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xvi + 409. Hardback, \$140.00. ISBN 978-0-19-878454-8.

This handsome volume is a thorough and enlightening study of the most visible and conspicuous element of Roman antiquity in the eastern Mediterranean. It deftly traces the colonnaded street from its origins to the end of the reign of Hadrian (AD 138), with a summary of developments later in the second century AD. The volume is enhanced by over 100 photographs and plans—many of the latter newly created by the author—and a table of 50 sites where such streets are known in the Roman East. The author has wisely limited his discussion to Asia and Africa, not including Europe.

An important feature of the volume is a solid summary of the evidence for the streets beyond the physical remains themselves, including Greco-Roman literature and visual representations such as the Madaba Map (10–12).

Few people can visit the eastern Mediterranean today without being impressed by the ubiquitous colonnaded streets. Although many have been reerected in modern times, they remain the dominant feature of so many Roman cities, from the Aegean coast of Turkey to interior Anatolia and the Levant. Yet the origin of such a dramatic phenomenon remains a complex and even obscure issue, and one of the real assets of this book is the skillful presentation of its title topic: just how this genre came into existence.

The volume is divided into three broad sections, which are a careful integration of both the geographical and chronological evidence. By nature much of the book is catalogic, but this provides a solid repertory of the sites where streets exist today, where they are presumed because of archaeological excavations, or are recorded in literary or other sources.

The first section (25–88) examines the origins of the architectural genre. This remains a complex issue, and Greek, Roman, Persian, and Egyptian antecedents have all been suggested. The author has worked his way through these claims—not always mutually exclusive—and has given particular emphasis to

the importance of Greek-inspired axial planning as a virtual template that made the colonnaded street possible, since, needless to say, a necessary component of such an architectural element is axiality. Although the possible sources are diverse, there seems to be a definite pathway from the colonnades of Pharaonic Egypt through Alexandria and its axiality (as well as other localities in Hellenistic Egypt) and into the Levant and beyond, with Cilicia—where some of the earliest known colonnaded streets occur—as perhaps a generative region from which the genre spread through Anatolia (188–95). There certainly are other precedents, possibly including the Greek stoa and its step-child the Roman porticus (52–8). All in all, the author has described with clarity the complex and diverse antecedents that made the colonnaded street possible.

The second portion of the work is devoted to the actual development of the genre (91–199), from the earliest literary evidence (Vitruvius and Nikolaos of Damascus, the latter preserved by Josephus) through the end of the first century AD. One issue is that the two authors cited above predate any extant streets, but this is obviously due to the deficiency of the physical evidence.

This section of the work has valuable discussions of engineering issues—such complex constructions required innovative techniques—and an intriguing examination of how cities were imagined by the Roman elite and others as they evolved from local market towns to Roman administrative centers, a process that encouraged the development of the streets as a visible element of Roman power. Central to this process is the building program of Herod the Great (117–37), whose architectural efforts spread far and wide—from the Levant to the traditional Greek world and even perhaps to Italy—and who was a catalyst for the cross-fertilization that produced the colonnaded street. This section also includes a discussion of 30 sites that represent the genre in its earliest stages; it is here that the numerous photographs and plans prove their utility.

The final section is devoted to the second century AD, when the colonnaded street, after its tentative origins in the previous century, reached its maturity (232–72). This is the era of the great photogenic streets, such as at Palmyra and Jerash. By the end of the reign of Hadrian (AD 138), most major cities in the eastern Mediterranean had their streets, although some new ones were built under the Antonines and Severans (in the latter case especially in North Africa). To be sure, the street thereafter continued as an architectural device, and even spread to the west, with examples as far afield as Rome, Iberia and even Britain, but by this time their construction was no longer a central part of imperial ideology. Yet

vestiges of such streets survive today in the urban plans of many cities of Asia Minor and the Levant, even if the columns are no longer standing.

There is little one can quarrel with in this book. Enhanced by its many photographs and plans, and a 60-page bibliography, this remarkable book is eminently readable and will remain the definitive treatment of its topic for some time to come.

DUANE W. ROLLER

The Ohio State University, dwroller@gmail.com