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Section: Book review

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## Review of: Barbara Sassi. 2017. “DYRRACHIUM III. Storia e archeologia di una città portuale tra Oriente e Occidente”

Barbara Sassi. 2017. *DYRRACHIUM III. Storia e archeologia di una città portuale tra Oriente e Occidente*, Bari: Edipuglia.

A recent volume by Barbara Sassi, dedicated to the urban archeology of the ancient city of Durrës, allows us to discuss two themes again: urban archeology of course and the Ionian Adriatic area, which clearly represent the traditional interests of Groma.

The volume is dedicated to Sara Santoro, director of the Italian Archeology Mission in Durrës, who died prematurely. The project, begun when she was a professor at the University of Parma, is currently an Archeology Mission of the University of Chieti-Pescara coordinated by Sonia Antonelli. The first presentation of this book to the public, curated by Giuliano Volpe, was held on April 21, 2017 at the Archeological Museum of Durrës in the presence of the Italian ambassador Alberto Cutillo, the director of the Italian Institute Adriana Frisenna, the museum director Afrim Hoti, who shared the coordination of the research project on Durrës with Sara Santoro, the directors of other Italian archeological missions in Albania and many other Albanian and Italian colleagues.

The author of the monograph, Barbara Sassi, was a close collaborator of Sara Santoro for many years on many research studies, such as for example those in Pompeii, and is part of the team of researchers who have been working for years on the Durrës Project. The volume is part of a series, the ‘Biblioteca Archeologica’ of Edipuglia, directed by Giuliano Volpe who is also the author of a great preface, where there is his personal memorial of Sara Santoro and some considerations on the methodological and innovative aspects of her research. We have also come to find out that the volume by Afrim Hoti dedicated to emergency archeology in Durrës between 2001 and 2007 (Dyrachium III) will be published as part of the same series.

After the preface, an introduction by the author focuses on some methodological aspects and takes on the problem of the recent debate on the concept of “romanization” and what was a city in the Roman world. After that there is a chapter dedicated to the history of studies done here, which also includes a selection of graphic depictions of Durrës from old maps to the new archeological cartography. Next there is a general chapter of historic overview, one on the topography of the city in Greek and Roman times, the archeological map with the data sheets of various sites and lastly the conclusion.

The chapter of historic overview is based on an exhaustive analysis of ancient written sources about the city called Epidamnos-Dyrrachium-Dyrrachion. The different distribution of the information available to us brings with it the need to look deeper into the Roman era rather than the Greek one. The

Greek phase began with the foundation of the colony of Epidamnos in antiquity (627-625 BC), ran through the crisis of the 5th century BC and then up to the Hellenistic city (4th-3rd century BC). The second phase began with the Roman intervention in 229 AD, and ran up to the Illyrian and Macedonian Wars, and into the establishing of the province of Macedonia in 146 AD, the Roman Civil Wars and finally to the administrative reorganization in late antiquity.

The main chapter is dedicated to the reconstruction of the evolution of the ancient urban landscape and begins with a geographic overview of the entire lagoon and coastal area. This is a more geological description than geographical which is not very linked to the historic interpretation and general geography. There is, however, an interesting paragraph on the earthquakes that over time had an effect on the history of the city.

From these considerations we move to a closer look at ancient navigation in the Adriatic Sea with a particular focus on the routes involving the port of Durrës.

Thus, archeological data relevant to the Greek city are presented with particular attention paid to the dislocation of the archaic sanctuaries of Epidamnos, to the recognition of the Greek port with the lighthouse, to the reconstruction of the Hellenistic city walls, to the necropolises, to the cults and to commercial trading. In regards to the port, it has been hypothesized that it is an even older emporion called Dyrrachion separate from the colony of Epidamnos (pp. 65-66). This interpretation would resolve the problem of the double name passed on in the ancient historiographic sources.

The study of the Roman city is preceded by some considerations on the process of romanization. It ranges, therefore, from the analysis of the nearby lands to the distribution of the population, also in relation to the traffic along the Via Egnatia. After that, there is an accurate reconstruction of the Roman urban layout. Next are the paragraphs dedicated to the port and commercial trading and to the necropolises. There are no paragraphs on the urban evolution during the medieval era.

The archeological map has been updated to 2009 and is a significant update when compared to the risk map of 2004, by Sara Santoro and Alberto Monti, and the following contribution of synthesis by Eduard Shei in 2007 (see the Bibliography). The data sheets present the first part which provides the topographical location and the description of the geomorphological context, the latter however is rather reduced to a rather generic indication on the geographic characteristics. The second part of the sheet is more descriptive with the typology of the excavation, dating, description of the site, the altitude and the circumstances of the find. Every sheet includes a noteworthy bibliography. On the archeological map, different colors and symbols are used to differentiate the phases and typologies of the site. When possible, real extensions and locations of remains are depicted. When available, the sheet is enriched by an appropriate cartography apparatus, drawings and photographs.

The concluding chapter has, lastly, some considerations on the urban aspects of the ancient city and on the Map of Archeological Potential.

Overall, the volume is quite significant because it focuses on the urban archeology of an important Albanian city which is constantly and continuously changing, dominated by the construction of buildings which is still ongoing and at times rather violent. This history, therefore, is important both in terms of knowledge of this ancient city and as a useful instrument in attempting to govern this change. The method used is in line with the times and the choices made for the review of the archeological maps are balanced. Compatible with the available data, there is also an attempt to reconstruct the ancient soil surfaces with particular reference to the change of the coastline. Some original interpretive hypotheses, such as the one regarding the double name of the port and of the Greek colony, are of great interest. Furthermore, the study conducted by Barbara Sassi deserves great recognition for encouraging a specific line of study in urban archeology on the centers which continue to be inhabited, which one would hope can continue with success not only in Durrës but also all over Albania. Also

piggybacking on this great example, we hope that this type of study will continue to move forward, in a multidisciplinary way and with attention paid to the governing of the rapid changes of the current urban landscape, paying tribute to the commendable intuition of Sara Santoro.