

Chiltern U3a Archaeology – Tunisia (Part 1) Carthage*, Dougga* and the Bardo Museum

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[Via Zoom] Good morning everyone ...

Before I start sharing the screen, may I check if any of you have been there.

[A01] This opportunity to talk about Tunisia made me look into hundreds of photos I took with my early foray into digital cameras, nearly 15 years ago, in 2007. It was also quite a challenge to sort them out for this meeting as I had not done any editing or labelling of those photos.

Fortunately, I still have the daily programme schedule of Jules Verne's "Hannibal and Carthage" Tour that gave me a head start. We were in a medium sized group with one guide for the whole tour.

There are some amazing archaeological sites in Tunisia and three* of them are UNESCO World Heritage sites. I will cover the sites in two sessions.

Today, I will cover **Carthage*, Dougga* and the Bardo Museum**. On another occasion, I will cover Thuburbo Mais, El Jem*, Sufetula and the Mosque.

1 Carthage

A05 This is the Google Map view of Carthage that we saw around the museum and the cisterns.

Tunisia is a haven to see Roman remains. Romans faced a humiliating defeat against Carthageneans the first time they tried to conquer it. You may have heard of a formidable Carthagenean military leader Hannibal. In their second attempt, the Romans were victorious and they flattened Carthage in 146 BC. Nearly hundred years later, Carthage was reinstated as capital by Julius Ceasar.

A06 A close-up of the area around the museum. There is very little left of Roman buildings – as it was virtually flattened again. The city was annihilated by Umayyad Arab forces after the Battle of Carthage to prevent it from being reconquered by the Byzantine Empire. There is just one building called Acropolis.

A07 It was formerly a French cathedral – Cathedral of St Louis - but now a concert hall. It was built on the site of a Punic temple of Asclepius (God of medicine).

You can see broken bits of various columns spread out over the whole site.

A08 This is an example of a flattened area.

A09 If you go to the far end, you can get a view of the remains of Punic structures. **A10a, A10b.**

A11, A13, A14 There is very little left on the site now ... there is a model in the museum which you will see later.

A15, A16 There are remains of a few sculptures here and there.

A17 Bits of columns and capitals laid out along the boundary lines of each area. Carthage Museum is on the far right.

A18 – A21 There were lots of assorted sections of various columns on display in many parts of the site.

A22 This is the entrance to the museum. This was formerly a seminary for Carmelite priests linked to the Cathedral.

A24 My first look at a mosaic was by the gate. Then there were a few more. **A25 / A26**

A27 A tomb

A28 Some funerary statues

A29 This sculpture shows Silenus and Maenad. He is leaning on a wine sack. Maenad who is a female worshipper of Bacchus, is dressed sparingly. He is squeezing the wine sack. Romans copied such items from the Greeks.

A30 Beautiful life-like relief of Victory

A31 Life-sized sculpture of a woman on top of a sarcophagus... there was one of a man as well next to it - thought to be that of a priest and priestess. It is from fourth century BC. It is

Greek in style. The birds' wings protectively wrapped around her lower body suggests Egyptian influence.

A32 Another beautiful sculpture of a lady with a basket of grapes ...I like the drape in her outfit.

A33a

A33b

A34, 35, 26 These pictures and models give an idea of what Carthage may have looked like under Roman Occupation.

We leave the museum to see ...

A37 The Cisterns of Malga on Byrsa Hill: Water was supplied from a natural spring at Zaghouan over a rather long distance of 130 Km via aqueducts.

A38 It was distributed into 24 cisterns, running parallel to each other over an area 94 m long and 12 m wide. They are brick-built barrel-vaulted tunnels. It is an amazing structure.

A39, A40 From medieval times, however, they were used as dwellings and barns.

We now move on to the next town:

2a Dougga

B01a This is the Google Map view of Dougga that is about 75 miles SE of Tunis. It is situated on the summit of a hill about 570 m above sea level, and it was a capital of a Libyco-Punic state. It has been there for 600 years before the Romans arrived. As a small town, it was prosperous under the Romans and Byzantine rule but declined in the Islamic period.

It is supposed to be the best preserved example of an Afro-Roman town. It is spread over 160 acres.

We will be looking at the usual suspects in a Roman Town ... a theatre, the Capitol, Forum, Market, a house etc.

B01b This is a good map from the Rough Guide showing what is where. Unlike in a typical Roman Town, the streets are not laid out in a perpendicular fashion.

B02 The Theatre was built in AD 168/169. The stage was very wide.

B03, B04 It could accommodate 3,500 people. The population was 5,000. Ample leg room.

B05 Nowadays, the theatre is used for performing French Classics during the Dougga Festival.

I believe that most of the rocks used are 'nummulitic limestone rock' - easy to work with and durable. [See footnotes]

B06 From the Theatre we head towards the Capitol and Forum.

B07 This Temple of Augustan Piety was built during the reign of Hadrian. Only a small part of it survives.

B08 The Capitol is a Roman temple completed around AD 167. Parts of it are well preserved.

B09 There are 11 steps. The Corinthian columns are 8 m high and the pediment is in good condition. **B10** It is symbolising Antonius Pius's elevation to godhood. The emperor is being carried by an eagle.

B11, B12 It is dedicated to Rome's protective triad – Jupiter the Best and Greatest, Juno the Queen and Minerva the August.

B13 You can see parts of various structures such as these in many areas of the site.

B14, B15 This flat area is The Forum next to the Capitol.

B16 You can get another view of Augustan Piety that we saw earlier

B17 As we move on, we see what is left of the Temple of Mercury just a few steps and parts of several columns.

B18, B19 This is the spectacular view that the residents of a house called Der El Acheb would have had of the Capital perched up on a hill.

B20, B21 The Market

B22 -27 The next few are some general shots that I took as we moved from one area to another ...

B28 You can see in the distance, in the outer edge of the city, Temple of Roman goddess Juno Caelestis.

B29 Apparently it is in a large crescent. The temple was dedicated to the Roman goddess Juno who is associated with the Punic goddess Tanit.

B30 – B33 A few more mosaics and part of a house

B34 Some budding archaeologists sketching out items of interest.

B35 Some more pieces

B36 – 38 This is the temple of Tellus (Earth), Tellus was a Roman goddess protecting agriculture.

B39 – 45 We then weave in and out of various areas until we get to a very amusing section - public lavatory

B46 It is close to a house called Trifolium.

B47 You can see a little crowd gathering around it.

B48 This is it ... with a channel for running water. It is the most well preserved Roman toilet that I have ever seen.

B49 Some of the men in our group kindly posed for me you can imagine it must have been an interesting meeting place for men in those days.

B50, B51 We press on and climb up some slopes till we get to a large house called **Maison de Trifolium**.

B52 Maison du Trifolium is the largest house excavated at the site.

B53 The rooms on the ground floor are around a large courtyard located 5 m below the street level.

B54 You can see the garden area.

We now move on to the third section Indoors in

3. The Bardo Museum:

C01 , C02 The museum is situated in a mid-19th century palace in Tunis.

We saw just a few notable items and a vast number of fantastic mosaics. It is believed to have the largest collection of Roman Mosaics in the world covering a wide range of subjects.

C03 Negroid Grinning Mask VII-VI century B.C ... a disc enclosed by the lunar crescent. Punic mask to exorcise evil spirits.

Grinning terracotta mask, VI C B.C. Decorations on the forehead and cheek.

C04, C05 Sorry about the reflection of light on this picture. This is an effigy of the god Baal-Hammon, principle God of Carthaginians, made of terracotta. It was made in 146 BC and it indicates that people were worshipping Punic god long after Carthage was destroyed. There is a crown of feathers and he is seated on a throne. There seem to be a kid standing on each side. This is another shot of it.

C05 Stele of the Tophet of Carthage, third century BC. Not easy to see but you can perhaps see some traces of the outline showing a priest carrying a child about to be offered in sacrifice. During our tour we did pass a cemetery for children, and the guide told us that child sacrifices were common in early years.

C07 There were lots of little items on display but we moved on. Note the two kids on either side of the lady in the item at bottom left.

C08, C09 – C12 We didn't have enough time to make a note of each item I photographed

C13 A marble head of a colossal statue of Jupiter sitting down. [III century AD]

C14 You can see the grandeur of the museum building housing the precious exhibits.

C15 The collection of Mosaics are displayed on the floors and walls. They take up more than 50% of the space. Apparently North African mosaics exhibit more vibrant colours than the Italian ones. The themes of mosaics cover a wide range – mythological events, famous figures and daily activities.

I have managed to label some key ones.

He was our guide during the whole tour.

C16 Some animals and a man

C17 Bread and Butter

C18 Creatures under water

C19 Looks like two suitors for a lady

C20 Mix of animals and fruits

C21 Cartoon style ... pre-Omicron?

C22 Animals fighting

C23 I really like this ...almost like a carpet with very fine slender branches of plants. Three characters in the centre ... almost biblical. A small hunting scene hung below it.

C24, C25 I took a couple of photos with my foot on the mosaic floors to give you an idea of the size of some of the mosaic pieces. I hasten to add that we were allowed to walk over those.

C26 Displays by a staircase

C27, C28 You can imagine the size of the mosaics in proportion to the people standing near them.

C29 -C35 You will need a few days visit if you want to absorb all of the mosaic exhibits ..

The sizes of some of the mosaics were bewildering.

There were some sculptures as well in some rooms.

C36 Hunting scene

C38 – C40 These are some mosaics from pavement of dining rooms. Lots of consumables.

C41 A sitting poet.

C42 Considered to be rather unique and as the crown jewel of the museum, is that of the **Roman poet Virgil** writing VIII verse of his epic 'Aeneid' while inspired by two muses. It was discovered in a house in Sousse (Hadrumetum). The one on the right is the muse of tragedy, Melpomene, with a mask in her hand, and the other is the muse of history, Clio.

C43 Diana the Huntress shooting a gazelle. There is a gladiator on the left of her. Around her are a number of animals of the amphitheatre.

C44 Venus crowned by two female centaurs.

C45 Ulysses resisting the temptations of Sirens 260 AD. He is looking away from the sirens. Apparently the four sailors have stuffed their ears so that they are not tempted by the sirens. One of the sirens is playing a double flute and another a lyre. This mosaic is from Dougga.

C46 The child Dionysus is in the safe company of old Silenus, a Maenad and a Satyr. He is chastising the attacking pirates and turns them into dolphins.

C47, C48 Lively portrayal of a rural estate, with farmers in the field and some others hunting. The detail at the bottom left is interesting ... a trap to lure the birds. Reminds me of the Borstal duck decoy. I understand that St James Park in London also had such decoys.

... and finally

C49 A mosaic representing the **seven days of the week** and the signs of the zodiac.

I imagine you folks are now saturated with countless mosaics and a little taste of Tunisian archaeological sites. Links to the full text and the slides will be on U3a website, Archaeology section. You can see the mosaics at leisure.

Time permitting you can make comments or ask questions....

Thank you.

Notes on construction Materials:

The building stone of the Roman city of Dougga (Tunisia): Provenance, petrophysical characterisation and durability:

Nummilitic limestones have been extensively used as building rocks in the Mediterranean basin since the first constructions made by humans. 'The current study shows that Dougga building rocks have a very high resistance against ice crystallization and acid attack. The low porosity of the limestone, its pore size distribution and its fabric can be considered as key factors for the durability of this rock'. ...according to a research paper.

