

## Burials, Migration and Identity in the Ancient Sahara and Beyond

This ground-breaking volume explores a series of interrelated key themes in Saharan archaeology and history. Migration and identity formation can both be approached from the perspective of funerary archaeology, using the combined evidence of burial structures, specific rites and funerary material culture, and integrated methods of skeletal analysis including morphometrics, palaeopathology and isotopes. Burial traditions from various parts of the Sahara are compared and contrasted with those of the Nile Valley, the Maghrib and West Africa. Several chapters deal with the related evidence of human migration derived from linguistic study. The volume presents the state of the field of funerary archaeology in the Sahara and its neighbouring regions and sets the agenda for future research on mobility, migration and identity. It will be a seminal reference point for Mediterranean and African archaeologists, historians and anthropologists as well as archaeologists interested in burial and migration more broadly.

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Edited by M. C. Gatto , D. J. Mattingly , N. Ray , M. Sterry

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# Burials, Migration and Identity in the Ancient Sahara and Beyond

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Frontmatter

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## Preface

When I was working on my PhD thesis on the Roman province of Tripolitania (north-west Libya) in the early 1980s, I became intrigued by a desert people who inhabited Fazzan, the area of the Central Sahara to the south of Tripolitania. This was my first introduction to the Garamantes. They were regularly mentioned in the ancient Greek and Roman sources, though seldom in complimentary terms – for the most part being depicted as nomadic and uncouth barbarians.<sup>1</sup> However, some pioneering archaeological work in the 1930s and then again in the 1960s–1970s had revealed their physical traces to be considerably more sophisticated than would be assumed on the basis of the literary stereotypes.<sup>2</sup>

This volume arises out of my subsequent direct engagement across twenty years now with the archaeology of Fazzan. In 1996, I was given the chance to renew field research in what were effectively the Garamantian heartlands. Following an initial scoping visit that year, I directed the Fazzan Project across six years, carrying out excavations and survey around the capital of the Garamantes at Garama (Old Jarma), with an emphasis on tracing evidence for their settlements, but also mapping other archaeological features including cemeteries and irrigation systems.<sup>3</sup> A notable result of this work was the clear demonstration of the sophisticated and substantial network of oasis farming settlements that lay at the heart of the Garamantian territory. Rather than being ‘nomadic barbarians’, the Garamantes now appear to have been predominantly sedentary oasis farmers, living in substantial permanent and complex settlements of mud-brick buildings. That is not to say that the Garamantes did not also incorporate pastoral elements, as will be further discussed in Chapter 1, but simply to highlight the unexpected density and sophistication of sedentary oasis settlements.

<sup>1</sup> See in particular, Mattingly 2003, 79–81; 2011, 34–37 on the concept of ‘progressive barbarisation’ imposed by ancient authors as a factor of distance from the Mediterranean.

<sup>2</sup> Ayoub 1967; Daniels 1968; 1970; 1971; 1989; Fontana 1995; Pace *et al.* 1951.

<sup>3</sup> There were five seasons of fieldwork (1997–2001) and a finds study season (2002). The results are now fully published as Mattingly 2003; 2007; 2010; 2013a. Funding for the Fazzan Project came primarily from the Society for Libyan Studies, the Leverhulme Trust, the British Academy and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

There is strong evidence to identify the top level of their settlement hierarchy as ‘urban’ in character and their overall society as an early Saharan state.<sup>4</sup>

My work on the Garamantes has subsequently evolved through a series of further projects. Between 2007 and 2011, I directed the Desert Migrations Project, with a particular focus on Garamantian burials and funerary traditions.<sup>5</sup> The increasing availability of high resolution satellite imagery opened a new avenue of research in 2011, the Peopling the Desert project, which extended research on the Garamantes to another of the major oasis bands in Fazzan, the Murzuq depression.<sup>6</sup> The Trans-SAHARA Project (2011–2017) marks a further evolution of this body of work, seeking to place the Garamantes in their Saharan context and to address the wider implications of the results obtained in the earlier work.<sup>7</sup> One of the major obstacles hindering understanding of the Sahara through history is that the study of the desert and the neighbouring zones of North Africa, the Nile Valley, Sudan and West Africa has tended to be compartmentalised into chronologically or regionally specific investigations. Broader synthesis across the vast Trans-Saharan zone is lacking. The term ‘Trans-Sahara’ should be understood in the context of this book as referring to the connected spaces of the Sahara and its eastern, northern and southern peripheries. The Sahara has often been likened to a great sea and no sea can be understood without reference to its adjacent shore-lands. The idea of Trans-Saharan perspectives on historical developments thus shares much in common with recent studies of the Mediterranean, which have stressed the importance of connectivity and supra-regional influences.<sup>8</sup>

The work of the Trans-SAHARA project was organised around a series of four work groups, each one supported by early career post-doctoral research associates and each dealing with a discrete group of themes: trade; migration, burial practice and identity; mobile technologies; urbanisation and state formation. As a key element of the work programme, a workshop

<sup>4</sup> Mattingly 2013a, 530–34; Mattingly and Sterry 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Five planned seasons of fieldwork were completed by 2011, but the scheduled study season could not take place in 2012 because of the Libyan civil war. Interim reports have been published in *Libyan Studies* from 2007 to 2011, Mattingly *et al.* 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2011. Funding for the Desert Migrations Project came primarily from the Society for Libyan Studies.

<sup>6</sup> Sterry and Mattingly 2011; 2013; Sterry *et al.* 2012. The Peopling the Desert Project was funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

<sup>7</sup> The Trans-SAHARA project was funded by the European Research Council (grant no. 269418).

<sup>8</sup> Abulafia 2011; Broodbank 2013; Horden and Purcell 2000. See Lichtenberger 2016 for the explicit comparison of Mediterranean and Sahara.

was held at Leicester for each of the work groups, to which international scholars working on neighbouring areas of the Trans-Saharan zone were invited. From the outset, these workshops were conceived as offering a chance to engage a group of leading experts in the field in a high-level debate about the implications of the new information on the Garamantes for studies of the wider Trans-Saharan world. Papers were commissioned for an intended series of agenda-setting volumes on Trans-Saharan archaeology and pre-circulated so that the workshop sessions focused entirely on discussion of their content.<sup>9</sup>

This volume, the second in a projected series of four, thus presents some of the key work of the Trans-SAHARA team and an international pool of collaborators on the themes of burials and human migration, along with the implications of these topics for representations of identity in Saharan societies. The recent systematic work on Garamantian burial practices has demonstrated considerable variation and social diversity and provides a central case study on which much discussion is built.<sup>10</sup> However, it is the wider comparisons and contrasts with other areas of the Trans-Saharan zone that serve to contextualise these data. It must be emphasised at the outset that the archaeological datasets from this region are meagre compared to Europe, for example, and a certain caution needs to be advised about the generation of detailed statistical analyses. The analyses presented here are thus more qualitative than quantitative, but hopefully provide pointers to the future direction of study of funerary archaeology.

As we are asking our readers to often step outside their core areas of knowledge and expertise to engage with material from other parts of the Trans-Saharan zone, place names and their mapping have exercised us all. Systems of transliteration and spelling of place names across the Trans-Saharan region vary enormously and the same site can be presented in several distinct ways. We have tried to impose a measure of consistency in the transliteration of names, following the practice I adopted for the *Archaeology of Fazzan* series. However, for ease of recognition some

<sup>9</sup> Special thanks are due to the Trans-SAHARA team: the research associates who helped organise the conference, Dr Nick Ray and Dr Martin Sterry, Dr Maria Gatto who has led the editorial team, Dr Aurélie Cuénod who translated the original French version of Chapter 10 and Dr Victoria Leitch who has been both a member of the team and the publications manager for the Society for Libyan Studies. Many maps were reworked to a consistent style by Martin Sterry and numerous other figures redrawn by Dr Mike Hawkes. We are also grateful to two anonymous Cambridge University Press referees whose comments helped us strengthen the structure and argument of the volume. Michael Sharp at Cambridge University Press gave us particularly helpful guidance.

<sup>10</sup> Mattingly *et al.* 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; 2011.

exceptions have been allowed for sites whose canonical spelling is so well established in the literature. We trust that the maps provided will prove helpful with the identification of places named in the text, but hope that readers will share our sense of being on a journey of discovery as they read the following contributions.

David J. Mattingly

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