

over to more basic forms of occupation, attested by party-walls, hearths and post-holes, while a cemetery was installed across the southern wing, associated with a small church erected alongside the villa complex in the sixth century. It is tempting to regard this as an example of the 'villa to village' transition, the modalities of which are still far from clear, but which would have taken place somewhat earlier in most regions of Gaul, though in a similar period in northern Italy and Spain. Séviac was eventually abandoned, but several other villa sites in the region feature Romanesque churches, without any evidence of intervening continuity (whether fiscal or residential) between the two.

Only data from more sites, sharper ceramic typologies and wider understanding of settlement patterns will help to further our understanding of the fate of the Aquitainian villa. But the heyday of these residences is much more vividly apparent from this volume, handsomely produced on a lavish scale in keeping with its subject, with generous use of illustrations, many in colour. It is regrettable that no space was found for a convenient listing of the numerous figures, and the internal logic of the text would have been helped by a more transparent hierarchy of headings within sections, but the quality of presentation is otherwise exemplary. This book was badly needed, and although hoped-for advances in the regional archaeological record may modify some of its conclusions, it sets the study of the élite residences of Aquitaine on a new footing, and is sure to take its place as a standard work of reference for some considerable time to come.

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Rachel Barkay, *The Coinage of Nysa-Scythopolis (Beth-Shean)*, *Corpus Nummorum Palaestinensium V*. Jerusalem, 2003. 272 pp., 15 plates. ISBN 965 90558 0 3.

Haim Gitler and Matthew Ponting, *The Silver Coinage of Septimius Severus and his Family (193-211 AD). A Study of the Chemical Composition of the Roman and Eastern Issues*, *Glaux 16*. Milan, 2003. 157 pp., 17 plates. ISBN 88 87235 33 3.

Two books by Israeli numismatists appeared in 2003. The monograph by Rachel Barkay is devoted to the coinage of Nysa-Scythopolis, an important Greek urban centre of ancient Palestine. The full and updated catalogue presents all the coins of the city from the earlier Roman period (50s BCE) until the time of Gordian III (240/241 CE). This catalogue supersedes all earlier publications on the subject, including that by Augusto Spijkerman in 1978. Apart from the catalogue, the book also includes a discussion of the city's pantheon against the background of recent archaeological discoveries at the site of Beth Shean, and a survey of names and titles of Scythopolis. The chapter on denominations contains an interesting suggestion on the role of the die diameter in distinguishing between coins of different value. The book will be of help to any scholar dealing with the history of ancient Palestine in the Roman period.

The book by Haim Gitler and Matthew Ponting is largely about what its title says — the chemical composition of the Roman and Eastern silver issues of Septimius Severus. Most of it is for a specialist in the field of metallurgical analysis of coins. However, some of the book's conclusions may be of interest for a historian. Thus, according to the authors, their analysis suggests that an official empire-wide debasement took place in 194, when a bullion content of 46% of silver was fixed throughout the Empire (p. 46). This official standard was maintained even by what the authors call 'semi-official mints' that produced silver coins to answer a particular local need. On the numismatic level, the book shows that an analysis of the chemical composition can sometimes help in the clarification of controversial attributions; it demonstrates also that the mint of Laodicea in Syria continued to operate until at least 203, or possibly some time later. The authors explain

this prolongation of the minting activity (even after Severus had already left the region) by the need to pay the discharged local recruits.

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C. Augé and F. Duyrat (eds.), *Les monnayages syriens. Quel apport pour l'histoire du Proche-Orient hellénistique et romain? Actes de la table ronde de Damas, 10-12 Novembre 1999*. Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique 162 (Beyrouth: Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient), 2002. iv + 216 pp. French + 39 pp. Arabic. ISBN 2 912738 17 2.

This collection of articles by leading scholars is the first major publication built around the question of what numismatic evidence can contribute to our understanding of the history of the Levant in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The well-produced volume is divided between five articles on Hellenistic Syria (including the Nabataean kingdom) and seven on Rome's first Near Eastern *provincia* and its surrounding lands. The set of papers is topped by reflections on each period by O. Picard and M. Sartre respectively. Five indices, Arabic summaries and a paper on Umayyad coinage (included both in French and in Arabic) conclude the book, which is accompanied by a selection of maps, tables and illustrations of coins. The editors, C. Augé and F. Duyrat, have preserved the nature of the round-table discussions held at Damascus in 1999 from which the volume sprang: it does not pretend to be a comprehensive overview, and its contributors have not departed from a unanimous point of view.

The focus of the opening paper of the Hellenistic section, by A. Houghton, is on the coin production by the mints in the centre of the Seleucid kingdom. Taking into account the prominence given to the coastal area of northern Syria by the earliest rulers of the dynasty, the relative meagreness of the monetary production by Antioch throughout the third century BCE, especially when compared to that of the nearby mint at Laodicea, is surprising. The second paper is directed more to the south, where a small number of coastal cities in northern Phoenicia that were directly situated within the sphere of influence of Aradus started to manufacture their own autonomous coins in the third century BCE, leading to a strain in relations with the island stronghold. Around the middle of the second century Aradus regained control over the southern part of the *peraia*, and still dominated it in the first century BCE, by which time its territory will have been extended to include the sanctuary of Zeus Baetocaece in the Jebel Ansariyeh. F. Duyrat also concludes from her catalogue that the cities of the Aradian *peraia* shared a common religious culture, which was strongly connected with that of southern Phoenicia. Not surprisingly, two further papers in the Hellenistic section are also concerned with coastal areas. F. de Callatay notes how the active minting of tetradrachms on the Syrian coast from the end of the second century BCE is in sharp contrast with the decrease in production of these silvers elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. O. Callot deals with the numismatic finds from the site which had once been Ugarit: a hoard of Thracian-Macedonian coins dating from the Persian period seems to herald the resettling of Ras Shamra after ages of being deserted, but the scarcity of numismatic evidence until Late Antiquity confirms the picture of a very modest level of occupation throughout Hellenistic and Roman times. The Hellenistic section concludes with a presentation by B. Zouhdi of the collection of silver and bronze issues of the Nabataean kingdom in the National Museum of Damascus.

The second part of the volume opens with an investigation of the degree of Romanisation, in the sense of 'looking like coins from the mint of Rome' (115 n. 2), of Levantine coinage. A. Burnett throws further light on the special character of Syria, as evoked by other source materials, by arguing that its coinage lagged behind that of other regions in the Roman world in taking over imperial fashions and standards. In contrast to what happened elsewhere, the numismatic