



Vrbes Extinctae: Archaeologies of Abandoned Classical Towns

By *Andrea Augenti*

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Core tourist sites for the classical world are the ruins of those many and scattered examples of 'lost' and abandoned towns - from Pompeii to Timgad to Ephesus and Petra. Usually studied for their peaks and growth, rarely are their ends explored in detail, to consider the processes of loss and also to trace their 'afterlives', when they were often robbed for materials even if still hosting remnant populations. This volume breaks new ground by examining the phenomenon of urban loss and abandonment from Roman to medieval times across the former Roman Empire. Through a series of case studies two main aspects are examined: firstly, the sequences and chronologies of loss of sites, roles, structures, people, identity; and secondly the methodologies of study of these sites - from early discoveries and exploitation of such sites to current archaeological and scientific approaches (notably excavation, urban survey, georadar and geophysics) to studying these crucial centres and their fates. How can we determine the causes of urban failure - whether economic, military, environmental, political or even religious? How drawn out was the process of urban decay and abandonment? What were the natures of the afterlives of these sites which archaeology is beginning to trace? How far does scrutiny of these 'extinct' sites help in discussion of archaeological trajectories of sites that persisted? The fourteen core chapters in this collection consider specific examples and case studies of such 'lost' classical cities from across the many Roman provinces in order to address these questions. Bringing together an array of archaeological and historical voices to share views on and findings from excavations and surveys of 'failed' towns, this volume offers much to scholars of Roman, late antique and early medieval and medieval archaeology and history.

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Review

'In sum, a well-produced and thought-provoking volume; I particularly liked the neat solution used to integrate the colour plates, reproduced separately, into their respective articles using black and white thumbnail images in the text.' *Antiquity* 'This volume joins an extensive and still-growing body of literature on classical and Late Antique urbanism, as well as considerations of "decline and fall" within the later Roman empire. It breaks significant new ground by combining these two areas of research within a single volume and by developing and maintaining a strong theme of new ideas related to the challenges and potential of archaeological research focused on the development, abandonment, and later activities of former urban centers. ... a must-buy...' *American Journal of Archaeology* 'Il volume [...] rappresenta un contributo prezioso... I risultati delle ricerche e le nuove conoscenze portate alla luce in questo volume, con le figure di alta qualità, rappresentano un apprezzabile passo avanti...' ['This volume represents an important contribution... The results of this research and the new knowledge brought to light in this volume, with high quality images, represent a great stride forward...'] *Hortus Artium Medievalium (HAM)* 'This valuable book lets the archaeology 'talk' far more in showing the changes, losses and transformations to a variety of late Roman cities and in revealing their medieval successors.' *Medieval Archaeology* '... breaks significant new ground ... by developing and maintaining a strong theme of new ideas related to the challenges and potential of archaeological research focused on the development, abandonment, and later activities of former urban centers. The included case studies offer something for specialists and students of nearly every region of classical and Late Antique archaeology ... it is a must-buy for academic libraries ... The volume offers much for students and scholars within classics, ancient history, and archaeology, and it is hoped that it will also attract readers from specialized areas beyond the Roman period.' *American Journal of Archaeology* 'Vrbes Extinctae should be quickly picked up by late-antiquists and medievalists interested in the economic causes and effects of decline, the tension between urban praise in texts and dismal physical realities, and anyone looking for a hearty buffet of details about the given places.' *Early Medieval Europe* 'It is archaeology's privilege to be the discipline best equipped to address the temporal dimension of changing urban forms in the deep past. These papers illustrate the complexity of that change and in doing so challenge 'traditional' meta-narratives of decline and fall. Any scholar interested in classical urbanism, the late Roman Empire, and/or the study of the transition from late antique to medieval periods will want to spend time with this volume.'

Urban Studies

About the Author

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