SHOPS AND WORKSHOPS
SHOPPING, EATING, AND DRINKING AT DURA-EUROPOS: 
RECONSTRUCTING CONTEXTS

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Abstract

The site of Dura-Europos, excavated in the 1920s and 30s but never completely published, has long been of archaeological interest for its exceptional preservation. This article questions the original identifications of the excavators of houses and shops, explores what can be learned about commercial buildings at the site from the re-contextualisation of artefacts, and examines how this information can add to our understanding of life at Dura.

INTRODUCTION: THE SITE OF DURA-EUROPOS

Dura-Europos lies on the middle Euphrates River in eastern Syria. A Hellenistic foundation, the city was controlled by the Parthians from ca. 113 B.C. until A.D. 165, save an apparently brief Roman occupation under Trajan ca. A.D. 115–17, of which a triumphal arch outside the city is one of the only traces.1 The city was taken again by Rome in A.D. 165, and is usually thought to have been completely abandoned after its capture by the Sassanians in about A.D. 256.2

Dura was rediscovered in 1920; wall paintings uncovered at the site roused immediate interest among archaeologists and the public alike. After some initial investigations,3 the site was excavated for two seasons by F. Cumont for the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres.4 A further 10 seasons of excavation began in 1928, conducted by a joint expedition of Yale University and the Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres under

1 Baur and Rostovtzeff (1929) 6–7; Baur, Rostovtzeff and Bellinger (1932) 17; Baur, Rostovtzeff and Bellinger (1933) 55–68.
2 Amm. Marc. XXIV. 1, 5; James (1985).
3 Breasted (1924).
4 Cumont (1926).

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