OpenLearn

Exploring a Romano-African city:
Thugga

About this free course

This free course provides a sample of Level 3 study in Arts and Humanities:

http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/find/arts-and-humanities.

This version of the content may include video, images and interactive content that may not be optimised for your device.

You can experience this free course as it was originally designed on OpenLearn, the home of free learning from The Open University -

www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/history/social-economic-history/exploring-romano-african-city-thugga/content-section-0.

There you'll also be able to track your progress via your activity record, which you can use to demonstrate your learning.

The Open University Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA

Copyright © 2016 The Open University

Intellectual property

Contents

Introduction

This course focuses on a detailed investigation into the archaelogy and history of a Roman North African city. You will watch the video sequence 'Exploring Thugga' and undertake activities identifying Roman and indigenous elements in the city. You then investigate Roman and indigenous cultural elements in the archaeology of Africa; here you will watch two brief video sequences on mosaics, continue your study of the 'Exploring Thugga' video, and view 'Culture and identity in the houses of the Roman élite'.

This OpenLearn course provides a sample of Level 3 study in Arts and Humanities.

Learning Outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

- practise identification of 'indigenous' identity and culture
- practise identification of 'Roman' identity and culture
- study the development of Romano-African culture.

1 Thugga

The ancient city of Thugga is often known by its modern name, Dougga. In this course we will be using the ancient name, Thugga. We are going to start by watching a video sequence, taking occasional notes: it should form about an hour of study time. The next section follows on from the video and introduces further evidence from Thugga.

As you watch, think about how the city compares with other cities you have encountered. Look out for how the buildings and streets are arranged, for buildings such as temples or arches, for architectural decoration and also the language of the inscriptions. Also look out for things that seem different. You will find it useful to refer to the plan of Thugga (Plate 1a and 1b) as you watch the video. Use the pause button and jot down some notes: the first activity is a detailed examination of the buildings in the city. Now watch the first video sequence, 'Exploring Thugga'.

Please click to view Plate 1a: Plan of Thugga. (Adapted from Poinssot, C. (1983) Les Ruines de Dougga, Tunis, Ministere des Affaires Culturelles, Institut National d'Archeologie et d'Arts) (PDF, 1 page, 1MB)

Please click to view Plate 1b: Plan of Thugga continued. (PDF, 1 page, 1MB)

Exploring Thugga (part 1, 8 minutes)

> Video content is not available in this format.
> Exploring Thugga - Part One

Exploring Thugga (part 2, 8 minutes)

> Video content is not available in this format.
> Exploring Thugga - Part Two

Exploring Thugga (part 3, 8 minutes)

> Video content is not available in this format.
> Exploring Thugga - Part Three

2 Investigating Roman and indigenous cultural elements in the archaeology of Africa

2.1 Looking in detail at Thugga

In this section you will be looking in more detail at the city of Thugga and working with the video and further evidence. This study of a city will then broaden out to consider other forms of material and visual evidence from different parts of Africa; you will also watch more video sequences. This section focuses upon one aspect of Romano-African culture: the interplay between Roman culture and indigenous African culture. This theme is one of a range of 'binary oppositions' which may be set up as a vehicle for investigating this part of the Roman empire. Other approaches could take the opposition of 'soldier' and 'civilian', or 'emperor' and 'subject', or 'pastoralist' and 'agriculturalist', or 'desert' and 'sown' areas, using these as avenues of approach to the study of Africa. Here you will be investigating a meeting of cultures: African and Roman. African culture has left none of its own literature, and its achievements have not been as highly valued as other cultures, such as the Greek culture, in the subsequent centuries. Because of this your study will start with material remains and monuments.

The first task is to try to tease out what can be seen as African characteristics in Roman Africa. To do this you will now be working in more detail on the city of Thugga. Thugga lies near the eastern boundaries of Numidia, which was an independent kingdom until 46 BC when it was annexed and became part of the Roman provinces of Africa and Numidia. The kingdom had urban centres such as Thugga, Bulla Regia and Simitthus, and was open to influences from the wider Mediterranean world. There was also a developed culture which had been exposed to Hellenistic influences. A good example of this is the Punic royal funerary monument at Thugga, which combines Punic and Hellenistic features (see Figures 1 and 2). When Numidia became a part of the Roman empire, we might assume that Roman cultural influence would have become more pronounced and that perhaps a Roman identity might begin to emerge. But how might this be identified, and what kinds of things should we look for? Is it possible to see a distinct Roman culture and identity which might be compared and contrasted with a Numidian, or more generally an African, culture and identity?

Figure 1 Tomb of Ateban, son of Ypmatat (Punic mausoleum), early second century BC, Thugga. (Photo: P. Perkins)

Figure 2 The Punic mausoleum in Thugga before reconstruction in 1908–10. The reconstruction (as seen in Figure 1) was based on drawings made before partial demolition in 1842. DAI neg. no. 55.1314. (Photo: Mosdoni/German Archaeological Institute, Rome)

Activity 1

Using your knowledge of parts of the Roman world, and what you have seen in the 'Exploring Thugga' video, in the following list of features mark those which you think can be described as Roman in inspiration and which African or at least non-Roman. Also write a few words giving reasons for your choice. In some cases you may come to the opinion that some elements are both Roman and African; if so mark both boxes. You may like to watch 'Exploring Thugga' again to help you answer the questions, pausing the video at suitable points.

Exploring Thugga (part 1, 8 minutes)

Video content is not available in this format.
Exploring Thugga - Part One

Exploring Thugga (part 2, 8 minutes)

Video content is not available in this format.
Exploring Thugga - Part Two

Exploring Thugga (part 3, 8 minutes)

Video content is not available in this format.

Exploring Thugga - Part Three

Feature	Roman?	African?	Reason
City walls			
Street plan			
Temple of Mercury			
Temple of Augustan Piety			
Capitol			
Forum			
Theatre			
Political organisation			
Arch of Alexander Severus			
Temple of Caelestis			
Temple of Saturn			
Saturn the god			
Circus			
Baths			
Construction techniques			
People			
Language			

To answer the questions thoroughly would require detailed definitions of what was African and what was Roman, but even with such definitions the questions would not be easy to answer definitively and there is some subjectivity involved in the identifications. My answers (below) may differ slightly from yours. If they do, have a look at the reasons you and I have given and see if they explain why our opinions differ.

Feature	Roman?	African?	Reason
City walls	✗	✓	These don't surround the whole Roman city and they pre-date most of it, so they are African, even if their construction is not very different to Roman walls.
Street plan	✗	✓	The street plan is not like a regular Roman city grid as, for example, in Aosta or parts of Pompeii.
Temple of Mercury	✓	✓	The god is Roman but the building doesn't look much like a typical Roman temple.

Temple of Augustan Piety	✓	✓	The temple is to a Roman imperial cult, even if the building doesn't look like a typical Roman temple.
Capitol	✓	✗	It is typical of Roman cities, e.g. Pompeii or Ostia, and mimics the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline hill in Rome, even if it has a different relationship to the forum.
Forum	✓	✗	It is the typical centre of a Roman city, an open square with columns around it.
Theatre	✓	✗	The theatre is Roman in style, similar to those at Pompeii, Ostia and elsewhere.
Political organisation	✓	✓	The city seems to be divided into a *pagus* and a *tivitas*: these are both Roman terms (and so it is a Roman element) but it is not typical of a Roman city where the *ordo* of decurions was the governing body (and so it may be African).
Arch of Alexander Severus	✓	✗	The arch is a typical Roman monument to commemorate a triumph or other honour.
Temple of Caelestis	✓	✓	The goddess is not originally Roman and the whole building doesn't look much like a typical Roman temple enclosure; nevertheless the actual temple has a podium and columns much like a Roman temple.
Temple of Saturn	✓	✓	The form of the temple is not like a typical Roman temple so perhaps it is African, even though there was a Roman Saturn.
Saturn the god	✓	✓	He (and his name) is originally Roman, but he took over the attributes of the pre-Roman god Baal in Africa, so he can be called African.
Circus	✓	✗	This is Roman because it repeats the form of the Circus Maximus race-track in Rome and other chariot race-tracks elsewhere.
Baths	✓	✗	The baths are similar to bath buildings in Rome and elsewhere.
Construction techniques	✗	✓	Most of the walls are not built in typical Roman styles of masonry.
People	✓	✓	They have both Roman and non-Roman names.
Language	✓	✗	Latin seems to be the language used in inscriptions, but we don't know what was spoken in everyday conversations.

The point of this activity is to make you focus upon what can be conceived of as Roman and to think about whether or not some of the things you have met so far in Africa are familiar because you have already encountered similar things in Rome or elsewhere in the empire. Some of the cases above are fairly clear cut. Something like a capitol is obviously typical of Roman cities. Its precise form may vary (indeed, at Thugga the temple is set side-on rather than end-on to the forum), but the configuration of a high temple with steps up the front and classical columns supporting a pediment with a *cella* behind dominating a forum fits the typical Roman model, as at Ostia or Pompeii. And we can get this far even

before reading the dedication to the Capitoline Triad in the inscription above the door. Similar means can be used to suggest that the forum, theatre, circus, baths, and arch display features that we can recognise as distinctively Roman.

Other features, such as the temples of Saturn or Mercury, are harder to define as Roman: they may well use the same kinds of architecture but the ground plan is different, being like a rectangular courtyard or peristyle with three chambers set across a short end (see Plate 2). This is unlike the typical Roman temple: a building in an enclosure on a high podium with steps up the front and columns and a pediment on the facade. This style of temple has only ever been found in Africa, Mauretania and in the previously Punic Sardinia, and it does seem to be typical of African temples.

Please click to view Plate 2: Plan of the temple of Saturn, Thugga. (Adapted from Poinssot, C. (1983) Les Ruines de Dougga, Tunis, Ministere des Affaires Culturelles, Institut National d'Archelogie et d'Arts) (PDF, 1 page, 0.4 MB).

We can see that the construction techniques are different; they employ a style known as *opus Africanum* (literally 'African work') that is characteristic of North Africa with origins that pre-date the Roman conquest. With this construction technique the wall is built incorporating vertical blocks of squared stones (orthostats), and the spaces between are filled with smaller blocks. Buildings you have seen elsewhere are built using different masonry techniques: brick-faced concrete (common in Ostia), small diamonds (common in Pompeii), small blocks of stone or larger squared blocks, for example.

We can also observe that the political organisation and some of the names of the people are different to those you may have encountered (see Figure 3). We can begin to suspect that these differences may be related to something we might be able to identify as an African cultural identity and cultural expression, which we might contrast with a Roman identity and culture.

Figure 3 Inscription from the temple of Mercury naming the donors, Q. Pacuvius Saturus F.L. and Nahania Victoria, mid second century AD, Thugga. (Photo: P. Perkins)

If, then, we can perceive different influences that we may call African and Roman (we must remember these terms are a shorthand for complex cultures that are not monolithic or clearly defined), we may also consider what may have happened when these two 'cultures' met in Africa following the political conquest of the region.

2.2 Modelling cultural interaction

To study this mixing of cultures in a systematic way I would like to propose four models of cultural interaction which might provide a framework for scenarios of what could have happened when the Roman met the African. First, it is worth briefly explaining what is meant by 'model' here. 'Model' is used to mean an explanation of a process of change. Once a model has been suggested, it can be held up for examination. If it is found not to fit the evidence or to explain observations, it may be discarded; if it does fit the evidence, it may help to build an understanding of the past. The theoretical models proposed here suggest what might have happened when two cultures – African and Roman – interacted. From our observed and contextualised evidence we can construct models exploring various ways that evidence may be interpreted. These models can then be used to reassess the evidence and so help both to frame questions about that evidence and to assess the appropriateness of the interpretation.

So in the case of Africa we can construct models of what might have been the result of the interaction of African and Roman cultural forms:

1. African meeting Roman leads to Roman dominance and an end of African traits: this may be called **assimilation**.
2. African meeting Roman leads to African traits continuing to dominate and Roman traits failing to become established, which amounts to **rejection**.
3. African meeting Roman leads to African persistence and no evidence of Roman traits dominating, in effect a **separation** of cultures.
4. African meeting Roman leads to Afro-Roman cultural mixing, which may be termed **fusion**.

These four models are gross simplifications, but I would like to comment upon each in turn and suggest some areas in the cultural, historical and archaeological record where we might hope to find indications of one or other of the models being fulfilled. The rest of the course will introduce some new forms of evidence, and you will be invited to consider how they compare to each of the models.

2.2.1 Model 1: African + Roman = Roman dominance and end of African traits (assimilation)

This model proposes that following the Roman conquest Roman culture is introduced and dominates the previous African culture, which gradually dies out. In other words, the culture of the people of Africa was assimilated to Roman culture. In this model an African would in effect become a Roman and be so similar to a Roman that we might as well dispense with the term African and call everyone Roman. In this scenario we might imagine the importation of Roman political systems, religion, building types, city forms, art, language, social organisation, etc. We should be able to see 'things Roman' appearing in Africa and 'things African' disappearing.

2.2.2 Model 2: African + Roman= African traits continue to dominate and Roman traits fail to become established (rejection)

This model is more or less the opposite of the first, and the political domination of Rome has little or no effect upon the African people and their culture. Here we might expect to find evidence for politico-military control but little or no evidence for Roman culture or the

acceptance of a Roman identity. This is perhaps the model we might expect to encounter in frontier zones at the limits of the Roman empire. It might also prevail in a scenario where a traditional society chose to reinforce its own traditions by explicitly rejecting 'things Roman' and consciously promoting its own cultural identity as a counter to Roman influence.

2.2.3 Model 3: African + Roman = African persistence and no evidence of Roman traits dominating (separation)

This scenario sees African culture surviving following the Roman conquest, and where Roman culture is visible it does not replace preexisting practice. Here we might imagine a *laissez-faire* attitude on the part of the Roman state, allowing the conquered people to carry on in their previous ways and the African people not needing to, or wanting to, adopt Roman customs, practices, forms of representation and cultural identity. In this model we might expect to find Roman and African traits remaining separate but co-existing (peacefully or otherwise) without significant alteration.

2.2.4 Model 4: African + Roman = Afro-Roman cultural mixing (fusion)

This model proposes that the combination of a Roman conquest and an African context led to the creation of a new and vital mixture, a cultural fusion of African and Roman traits. In this scenario we might expect to find cultural elements which may be originally Roman but are reworked in the African context to produce something new and different. Perhaps we need a new term for the result – something like Afro-Roman or Romano-African culture. In the previous activity the temples of Saturn, Mercury and Caelestis were all marked as having both Roman and African characteristics, both in the deities worshipped and in the form of the temples, suggesting that there has been a mixing of cultures. This combining of deities is known as syncretism.

We will now move on to consider a set of studies from Africa. Each will use different forms of evidence to demonstrate that our theoretical approach may be applied in a variety of circumstances. In each of these you should be thinking about which of the four models outlined above seems to fit the evidence best.

2.3 The building of Thugga

So far we have been considering aspects of Thugga without taking into account the chronology of the site and its monuments. The following table lists the public buildings and monuments of Thugga which are securely dated by inscriptions and gives the date (as near as possible) of construction along with an assessment of how African or Roman they are.

Date (AD)	Building	Roman?	African?	Reason
late Tiberius (14–37)	Temple of Caesar	✓	✗	Imperial cult

36–7	Forum and square in front of the temple to the emperor	✓	✗	Forum is typically Roman
36–7	Shrine of Saturn	✓	✓	Saturn is Roman and Punic god
36–7	Arch	✓	✗	Typically Roman monument
30s	Temple and statues	?	?	No details
30s	Temple of Ceres (square plus stone columns)	✓	✓	Ceres is Roman and Punic goddess
30s	Temple of Concordia	✓	✗	Concordia is Roman goddess
Caligula? (37–41)	Arch	✓	✗	Typically Roman monument
Claudius (41–54)	Small shrine of Jupiter	✓	✗	Jupiter is Roman god
48	Statue of Augustus	✓	✗	Augustus was Roman
54	Market	✓	✗	Typically Roman building
54	Small temple	?	?	No details
Hadrian (117–38)	Two temples of Concordia	✓	✗	Concordia is Roman goddess
Hadrian (117–38)	Temple of Fortuna	✓	✗	Fortuna is Roman goddess
Hadrian? (117–38)	Small apsidal temple to Augustan Piety	✓	✓	Augustan Piety is a Roman cult but temple is not Roman style
Antoninus Pius (138–61)	Portico round forum	✓	✗	Forum is typically Roman
Antoninus Pius (138–61)	Temple of Minerva	✓	✗	Minerva is Roman goddess
Marcus Aurelius (161–80)	Capitol	✓	✗	Capitol is typically Roman
Marcus Aurelius (161–80)	Theatre	✓	✗	Theatre is typically Roman
Marcus Aurelius (161–80)	Substantial temple	?	?	No details
Commodus (180–92)	Square and portico by forum	✓	✗	Forum is typically Roman
Commodus (180–92)	Temple of Mercury by capitol	✓	✓	Temple is African style and god is Roman
Commodus (180–92)	Shrine	?	?	No details

mid 180s	Aqueduct attached to southern baths	✓	✗	Aqueduct is typically Roman
Septimius Severus (193–211)	Large temple of Saturn	✓	✓	Temple is African style and god is Roman and African
Septimius Severus (193–211)	Arch to emperors	✓	✗	Typically Roman monument
Caracalla (211–17)	Temple	?	?	No details
Alexander Severus (222–35)	Circus or race-track	✓	✗	Typically Roman building
Alexander Severus (222–35)	Temple of Caelestis (semi-circular)	✓	✓	Temple is Roman and African style and goddess is African
Alexander Severus (222–35)	Triumphal arch to emperor for *libertas* or tax privileges	✓	✗	Typically Roman monument
Alexander Severus (222–35)	Temple	?	?	No details
Alexander Severus (222–35)	Temple of Fortuna	✓	✗	Fortuna is Roman goddess
Gallienus (261–8?)	Licinian baths	✓	✗	Baths are typically Roman and copy the ground plan of baths in Rome
mid third century	Temple of Tellus	✓	✓	Temple is African style and goddess is African and Roman
264	Portico	?	?	No details
Diocletian (284–305)	Temple of Genius Patriae	✓	✗	Cult is typically Roman
Diocletian (284–305)	Portico of temple of Mater Deum	✓	✗	Cult is typically Roman

Some of these buildings have survived and been excavated, while others have not. You have seen some of them in the video sequence 'Exploring Thugga'. The construction of these public and religious buildings is itself one aspect of the Romanisation of the pre-Roman city of Thugga, and we must also remember that the practice of commemorating the dedication of a building with an inscription is itself a very Roman tradition. Therefore, we should perhaps expect this collection of evidence to favour more Roman aspects of the cultural milieu.

Plate 3 illustrates when the main periods of building activity took place. The impression given by the graph is of a high degree of activity in the first half of the first century AD, which drops off rapidly and then rises to a second peak in the second half of the second century before gradually reducing again. This observed pattern roughly corresponds with the broader pattern of building dedications derived from North Africa as a whole (Jacques, 1989, pp. 242–3), although the peak in the first half of the first century is more pronounced

at Thugga. This suggests that the pattern at Thugga is not exceptional but part of a wider pattern of development common to Africa, although not necessarily other parts of the empire where similar evidence has been gathered (Duncan-Jones, 1990, pp. 57–67).

Please click to view Plate 3: Graph of building activity in Africa. (PDF, 1 page, 0.1 MB).

An attractive possibility in interpreting this evidence is to see the pattern as a first wave of Romanising building dedications in the early first century, establishing a Roman character for the city, and then later a second peak of building dedications as the city flourishes in the later second century along with the rest of Africa. Does this suggestion hold up? We can investigate further by considering two factors: the types of building dedicated and the identity and status of the person(s) who were the dedicants (see Plate 4) (Duncan-Jones, 1990, pp. 178–82).

Please click to view Plate 4: Statue of an unknown patron of the city of Thugga wearing a toga and a mural crown, third century. Bardo Museum, Tunis. (PDF, 1 page, 1.8 MB).

If we look first at the buildings from the first half of the first century, we see that most of them were temples. The earliest is a 'temple of Caesar'; we know no more, but it was probably a temple dedicated to Julius Caesar or Augustus: a more Roman and politically laden monument would be hard to imagine. The following three monuments – the forum and square in front of the temple to the emperor, a shrine of Saturn, and an arch – were all dedicated by one Postumius Chius. We have little to go on, but his name does not rule out the possibility that he was a Roman citizen or a freedman. The forum and arch at least are clearly in the Roman urban tradition; the former is of major importance to city life and represents the formal creation of a Roman-style town centre. The third building, the shrine of Saturn, is slightly more ambivalent because Saturn was both a Punic and a Roman deity.

The next monument, a temple and statues, was restored by Licinius Tyrannus, who also built the temple of Ceres (a popular goddess introduced to Carthage in 396 BC), and his wife built the temple of Concordia (the goddess of Peace). Licinius Tyrannus was a freedman of Marcus Licinius Marcius, and the temple of Ceres was dedicated to the health of Marcus Licinius Rufus, his patron. The small shrine of Jupiter dedicated in the reign of Claudius bore an informative inscription. The shrine was built and jointly paid for by L. Iulius L.F. Crassus, a name suggesting that his family may have gained citizenship under Julius Caesar. Part of his career is listed, and he was military tribune in the Twenty-first Legion Rapacis, as well as a *duovir* and a *duovir quinquennalis* – the most senior civic position. He is also described as *patronus pagi*: that is, patron of the community of Roman citizens at Thugga. The shrine was also paid for by another citizen, C. Pomponius L.F. Restitutus. Thus we have a distinguished soldier and leader of the Roman community donating a shrine to the most important of Roman gods, Jupiter. So far all the donors seem to have been freedmen or Roman citizens, but in AD 48 one Iulius Venustus dedicated a statue of Augustus. Not an extraordinary act in itself, but we also know that Iulius Venustus was the son of one Thinoba, an office holder in the *civitas* of non-Roman citizens in Thugga. We do not know the hows and whys of this, but it clearly demonstrates a beginning of Africans performing typically Roman civic acts. It also demonstrates the adoption of a Roman form of name by Iulius Venustus, as opposed to the traditional African form of 'X son of Y', as on the Punic mausoleum. Despite these clearly Roman traits, we know from other inscriptions that the political organisation of the *civitas* survived, and it was governed by officials with the Punic title of *suffete* rather than the Roman magistrate.

In AD 54 we again encounter M. Licinius Rufus – this time donating the market – and he is described as *patronus pagi* and also as a cavalry commander in Syria. In the reign of

Hadrian (117–38) a pair of temples was dedicated to the deities Concordia and Frugifer and Liber Patus by the brothers M. and A. Gabinius. They are further described as sons of the manager of imperial estates around Thugga and also as *patronus pagi et civitatis*, meaning patrons of both the Roman citizen *pagus* and the 'indigenous' *civitas*. So by the second century we begin to see the same individuals playing a leading role in both the citizen and non-citizen communities. Later donations are by members of some of the families we have already encountered – the Licinii and the Gabini – but monuments are also dedicated by other families (particularly the Marcii) and individuals. The temple of Mercury by the capitol, which seems to have some elements of an African temple plan, was built in the reign of Commodus (180–92) by Q. Pacuvius Saturus and his wife Nahania Victoria, according to the will of their son M. Paccuvius Felix Victorianus (see Figure 3). Here we have a couple, one with an apparently Roman name and the other with a clearly non-Roman *praenomen*. This suggests the possibility of a marriage between citizens of whom one (at least) has an African name. By AD 205 in the reign of Septimius Severus the city of Thugga had received the status of a *municipium liberum*, which would have ended the division between the *pagus* and the *civitas* and so united the people of the city and given them the same civic and legal rights.

Activity 2

Which of the four models of cultural interaction do you think best fits the evidence you have encountered in Thugga? Write down your choice (or choices), and note down the evidence which supports your choice.

You may have found that one or more of the models fitted the evidence, or that some parts of the evidence fitted one model but others fitted a different model. Don't be surprised by this because our models are just that – models. They are not full-blown explanations or exhaustive interpretations. They are intended to be aids to interpretation, to stimulate thought, open possibilities and debates. I am not going to provide a detailed discussion here of how the evidence from Thugga fits the models. There is, though, more discussion later in this section when the models are reviewed in the light of the further evidence you are now going to look at.

2.4 African Red Slip ware

Between about 30 BC and AD 75 the most common type of ceramic tableware in the empire was *terra sigillata* (often known as Samian ware). This was a shiny red-surfaced ceramic which was first made in Arezzo in Tuscany, Italy and then widely imitated in many areas such as Campania, Rome, southern and eastern Gaul, and Asia Minor. The forms of this pottery were typically cups, bowls, plates and dishes. Beyond the areas where it was produced, the pottery was widely traded and it has been found on countless sites, including North African sites from the Atlantic to the Nile. In many of the areas where the *terra sigillata* was imitated by local potters, the original Italian prototypes were closely copied and there was little or no innovation in the shapes or forms of decoration. However, in the region of Carthage workshops were established before the middle of the first century AD which produced pottery that initially copied the shapes of the Italian wares, even though its colour and texture were slightly different (see Plate 5). Later a range of new shapes and forms were developed that broke free from the Italian originals and

began a tradition of tableware manufacture which continued until the latter part of the seventh century AD. No ancient name for this pottery has survived, but it is known to archaeologists as African Red Slip ware because of its distinctive bright orange glossy surface created by the application of a slip to the vessels. In the second century African Red Slip ware became the most common tableware in the Mediterranean area, and in most places replaced the Italian *terra sigillata* and its other imitators (see Plate 6). Although originally Italian in inspiration and function, the fine ware developed a range of original shapes and decoration, and new forms, particularly large shallow dishes, became common. How much this spread of African material culture was due to technological superiority, economic production, changes in eating practices or simply changes in fashion is still the subject of study.

Please click to view Plate 5: (a) Italian terra sigillata. (John, C. (1971) Arretine and Samian Pottery, London, British Museum Press: © British Museum) (b) African Red slip ware. (Hayes, J.W. (1997) Handbook of Mediterranean Roman Pottery, London, British Museum Press, p. 58; © British Museum) (PDF, 1 page, 0.9 MB)

Please click to view Plate 6: African Red Slip ware jugs, third century. Bardo Museum, Tunis. (Photo: Musee National du Bardo, Tunis), (PDF, 1 page, 1.8MB)

Activity 3

Consider which of our four models best fits the case of African Red Slip ware. Write down your choice (or choices), and note down the evidence which supports your choice in your Learning Journal.

Although you only have limited evidence to go on, this case study is more clear cut than the previous ones. It is discussed further when the models are reassessed.

2.5 African mosaics: things Roman and things African?

Between the second and the fifth centuries a thriving tradition of mosaic floor decoration developed in North Africa (see Figure 4). There is only limited evidence for the dating of African mosaics, but the earliest seem to be closely influenced by Italian interior design, particularly stucco wall plaster, wall painting and monochrome mosaic floors. We can investigate this by looking at examples from the early second and third centuries. Look now at Colour Plates 1–4 and watch the two brief video sequences, 'Mosaic from Acholla' and 'Mosaic from La Chebba'.

Figure 4 Excavation of a mosaic floor, Chott Meriem near Sousse, Tunisia. DAI neg. no.55.1314. (Photo: Sichtermann/German Archaeological Institute, Rome)

Please click to view Colour Plate 1: Mosaic from the 'Baths of Trajan', Acholla, AD 120–30. In the centre Dionysus is in a chariot pulled by two centaurs; in roundels to either side are personifications of Winter (right) and and Spring (left) supported by grotesque elements with animals and plants. Around these is a frieze of sea nymphs, sea animals and sea monsters. Around the edge are friezes of grotesque figures and plants similar to stucco and painted work in Rome and Campania. Bardo Museum, Tunis. (PDF, 1 page, 0.4 MB)

Please clickto view Colour Plate 2: Dionysus in a chariot pulled by two centaurs, detail of Colour Plate 1 (PDF, 1 page, 0.4 MB)

Please click to view Colour Plate 3: Personification of Winter; detail of Colour Plate 1. (PDF, 1 page, 0.5 MB).

Please clickto view Colour Plate 4: Personification of Spring, detail of Colour Plate 1. (PDF, 1 page, 0.5 MB).

Mosaic from Acholla (2.5 minutes)

Video content is not available in this format.
Mosaic from Acholla

Mosaic from La Chebba (2.5 minutes)

Video content is not available in this format.
Mosaic from La Chebba

Figure 5 Border with grotesque head from the 'Baths of Trajan', early second century AD, Acholla. Bardo Museum, Tunis. (Photo: P. Perkins)

As you have just heard on the video, these kinds of compositions (see Figure 5) are very similar to the details found in Italian interior decoration, for example in the buildings of Pompeii just before its destruction or in the *Domus Aurea*, the palace built by Nero in Rome (see Plate 7). So in this case the African mosaics seem to be reproducing motifs and styles of composition which were current in Italy at the time. Through the second and

third centuries African mosaics developed their own repertoire of motifs and styles, and the prevalent types of mosaics diverged from their Italian counterparts. So, for example, the mosaic in Colour Plate 5, with its use of colour and vegetal motifs in a geometric pattern, displays a set of characteristics not found elsewhere.

Please click to view Plate 7: View of the cryptoporticus with illusionistic candelabra and figures from the Domus Aurea (Golden House of Nero), Rome. (German Archaeological Institute, Rome, DAI 846497) (PDF, 1 page, 2.5 MB).

Please click to view Colour Plate 5: Mosaic from Thuburbo Maius with geometric plant motifs and a panel in the centre featuring a playwright reading a scroll in front of a plinth supporting Greek stage masks, late second century AD. Bardo Museum, Tunis. (Photo: Gilles Mermet) (PDF, 1 page, 1MB)

The mosaic may be showing new decorative styles but the central panel, which sits awkwardly slightly off-centre in the mosaic, shows a very traditional Hellenistic figure of a poet or playwright reading a scroll in front of theatre masks. Alongside the popularity of geometric patterning, a major development in African mosaics was the use of figured compositions on a white background – see, for example, the mosaic of Neptune and the four seasons in Colour Plate 6.

Please click to view Colour Plate 6: Neptune and the four seasons personified as female figures, from La Chebba, mid second century AD. Lower right: Spring with roses; upper right: Summer with wheat; upper left: Autumn with grapes; lower left: Winter with ducks and olives. Neptune in the centre is on a chariot pulled by sea monsters, half-horse and half-fish, with a Triton and a sea nymph in support. Bardo Museum, Tunis. (Photo: Bardo Museum) (PDF, 1 page, 0.5 MB)

A very popular theme in these mosaics is the illustration of hunting scenes, as for example the mosaic from El Djem in Colour Plate 7. Within its geometric border the mosaic may be divided into three sections forming a narrative of a hare hunt. At the top two horsemen and a hunter with a spear are moving through a wood. In the middle the hounds and their handler are approaching a hare hiding in a bush. In the lower part of the scene the horsemen and hounds are pursuing the hare. The overall composition is very different to the earlier mosaics. The mosaic has a narrative of the progress of the hunt. There is a vitality and sense of movement which is lacking in the earlier mosaics: the figures are not as meticulously moulded and less detail is seen in the drapery and plants, for example. The very schematic shadows are used to provide a ground level for the figures.

Please click to view Colour Plate 7: Hare hunt from El Djem, mid third century AD. Bardo Museum, Tunis. (Photo: Bardo Museum) (PDF, 1 page, 0.4 MB)

Please click to view Colour Plate 8: Chariot race in the circus from Gafsa, Tunisia, sixth century AD. Bardo Museum, Tunis. (Photo: Bardo Museum) (PDF, 1 page, 0.3 MB)

Another theme which became popular in African mosaics was the circus (see Plate 8). The circus had its origins in Rome at the Circus Maximus, but the popularity of the chariot races spread and in Africa they were particularly popular throughout the Roman period and even later into the Byzantine period (see Colour Plate 8). Even small towns such as Thugga had a circus. Elsewhere in the empire only the largest towns and provincial capitals had a circus. The mosaic in Plate 8 (and seen in the 'Exploring Thugga' video segment below) shows both the exterior and the interior of a circus. Three sides of the circus are shaded by an awning and empty rows of seats are shown on the fourth. Four chariots are shown, although there are eight starting gates on the right of the circus. The charioteer at the top right is carrying the palm of victory, as is the charioteer Eros from Thugga shown in the video. In the mosaic from Gafsa (Colour Plate 8) emphasis is placed upon the spectators as well as the circus action.

Please click to view Plate 8: Mosaic of a circus from Carthage, late second to early third century. Bardo Museum, Tunis. (Photo: Musee National de Bardo, Tunis) (PDF, 1 page, 2.9 MB)

The circus (1 minute)

Video content is not available in this format.
The circus

Activity 4

Consider which of our four models of cultural interaction best fits the evidence of the African mosaics sketched out here. Write down your choice (or choices), and note down the evidence which supports your choice in your Learning Journal.

The mosaics display a variety of influences, and it is possible to identify Roman and Hellenistic traits. Uniquely African traits are harder to identify, but this style of mosaic with coloured figures on a white ground can clearly be seen as developing in Africa and neighbouring areas; it can be contrasted with different styles which were common in Asia Minor, Italy, Gaul or Britain. The mosaics are discussed further below.

2.6 Houses at Carthage, Bulla Regia and Thugga

Your next activity is to watch a video on houses of the Roman élite. The video presents houses from different parts of the empire.

Houses of the Roman élite (part 1 (Intro); 2 minutes)

Video content is not available in this format.
Houses of the Roman élite - Part One (Intro)

Houses of the Roman élite (part 2 (Pompeii); 7.5 minutes)

Video content is not available in this format.
Houses of the Roman élite - Part Two (Pompeii)

Houses of the Roman élite (part 3 (Pompeii continued); 7.5 minutes)

Video content is not available in this format.
Houses of the Roman élite - Part Three (Pompeii continued)

Houses of the Roman élite (part 4 (Ephesus); 8.5 minutes)

Video content is not available in this format.
Houses of the Roman élite - Part Four (Ephesus)

Houses of the Roman élite (part 5 (Africa); 8 minutes)

Video content is not available in this format.
Houses of the Roman élite - Part Five (Africa)

Lisa Nevett has presented a wide-ranging investigation of houses in several parts of the empire and shown how they can provide evidence for expressions of culture and identity. Overall the video provides a broad context for the houses you have seen at Thugga and Bulla Regia. They can be seen as having connections with different aspects of the culture of the Roman empire. Some elements are shared, such as the use of the house as a location for display of status and access to Greek culture, or the use of courtyards and axial arrangements, or characteristic styles of decoration. From the evidence presented in the video we can consider the houses in a number of ways. Are the building materials and their decoration the same in all parts of the empire? Is the arrangement of rooms and their sizes and relationships to one another similar in these different places? Did similar parts of the houses have similar functions? Are there the possibilities for the same social interpretations of the houses in different areas? Can we contrast a 'Roman' house with an 'African' house? We can ask how much they are African or Roman or Afro-Roman.

Activity 5

Consider which of our four models of cultural interaction best fits the evidence from studying the houses in Africa and elsewhere. Write down your choice (or choices), and note down the evidence which supports your choice in your Learning Journal.