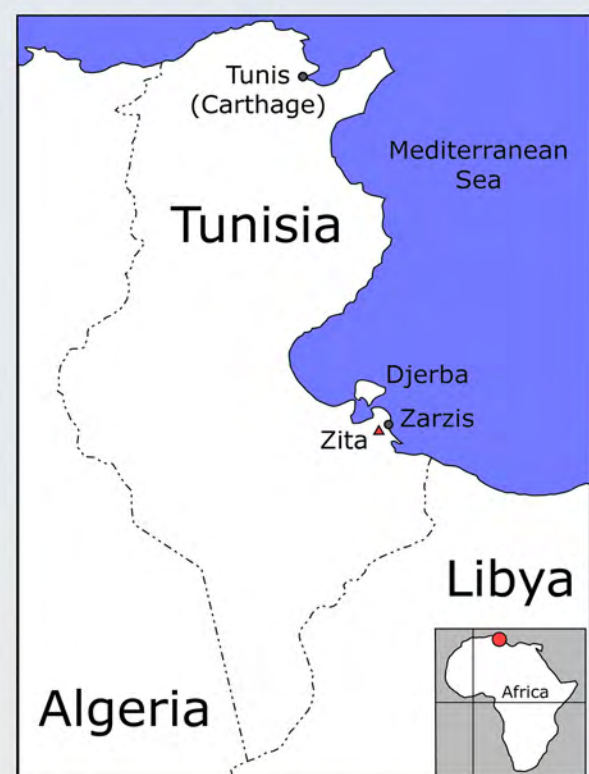
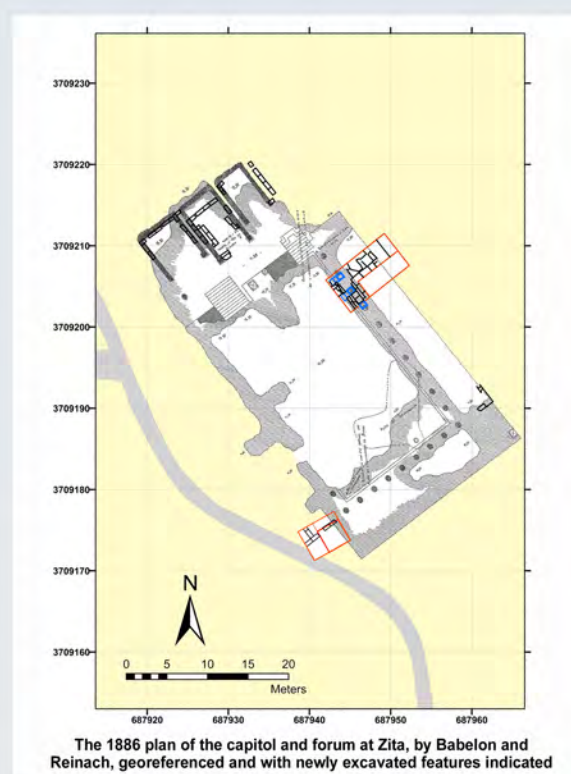


Two seasons in the Roman and Neo-Punic settlement of Zita (Zyan), southern Tunisia

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Zita is located in the south of Tunisia, just inland of modern Zarzis and south of Djerba, which features in the Odyssey as the *Island of the Lotus-Eaters*.



The temple at Zita, which was constructed or expanded by Emperor Claudius around 50 CE, has three sanctuaries (*cellae*), which is unusual for temples in the region.

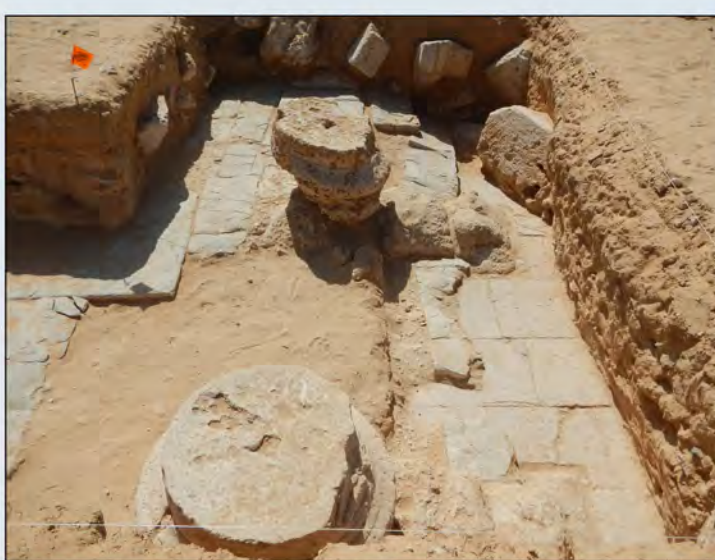
Introduction:

After Carthage (modern Tunis) was destroyed by Scipio Aemilianus (Africanus Minor) in 146 BCE, the Punic settlements that it controlled were occupied by the Romans. Exporting wine, olive oil, *garum* (a sauce made of fermented small fish), and purple dye (harvested from *Bolinus brandaris* and *Hexaplex trunculus* shell-fish), the eastern Maghreb continued to flourish. Many of the ancient monuments in modern Tunisia date to the centuries following the Roman conquest, until the center of power shifted to the Tripolitanian Region, in modern Libya, during the second half of the second century CE.

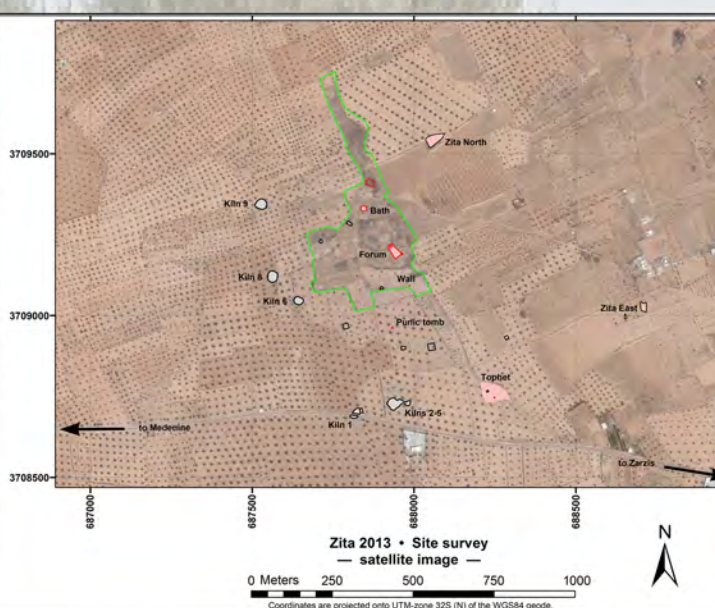
The city of Zita, near Zarzis, may have been founded during this period, but was more likely built on an existing settlement as the earliest ceramic evidence on the surface indicates activity at the site from the fifth century BCE onward. Zita is a toponymic Punic name meaning "Olive City" known from inscriptions and one historical source. The landscape today is still one of intensive olive tree exploitation, an activity that began in 200 BCE at the latest as demonstrated by the large number of charred olive pits that were recovered from archaeological contexts. After its abandonment by the beginning of the fourth century CE, the surrounding olive orchards encroached on the site and regular plowing obscured most of the ancient remains.

The site (now locally referred to as *Hanšir Ziān*) was first investigated in the 1880s by the French scholars Ernest Babelon and Théodore Reinach. They uncovered the Roman forum, a Claudian inscription, as well as 43 marble statue fragments which were all moved to the Louvre in Paris. The ruins were left as marginal horticultural land until increased farming and dramatic looting prompted the Tunisian Ministry of Culture to preserve the mound as a cultural heritage site.

Granted a permit to conduct scientific research there, the Zita Project in the Archaeology, Anthropology, and Ethnography of Southern Tunisia is working to identify, investigate and conserve the Roman imperial structures, the Punic sanctuary (*tophet*)—from the surface of which more than 600 votive stelae were recovered—as well as the ceramic kilns, metallurgical features, and additional other sites and structures, both on the mound and in its hinterland.



Although previously excavated and recently disturbed by looters, excavations in the forum yielded important additional information about the site.



Surrounded by olive orchards, the site of Zita preserves its administrative and religious city center, a *tophet* and expansive industrial areas to the south and west.



Apart from several hundred *stelae* that were moved from the surface to the local museum, the *tophet* at Zita appeared remarkably well-preserved.

Recent investigations:

During two excavation campaigns we performed a detailed surface survey and uncovered part of the Roman capitol and forum (previously published in 1886), as well as the *tophet* (a Punic child sacrifice or burial precinct). In August 2014 we also excavated an area where large amounts of debris of metal working were deposited in previously abandoned structures.

Nine ceramic kilns and two metallurgical precincts are still visible on the surface of the site today, 1700 years after the abandonment of the city in the fourth century CE. Slag and other metallurgical production debris covers at least 10% of the abandoned urban area. Excavations of one industrial precinct contained upwards of 24-28 kg. of slag and crucible debris per cubic meter. Preliminary *in situ* pXRF analysis of excavated soils revealed heavy metal contamination, which is likely the result of industrial metal working, with elevated levels of lead, arsenic, cadmium, copper, iron, silver, tin and zinc.

Excavations in the *tophet* indicate that the area remained sacred throughout the Roman era, with iconography and Latinized inscriptions to ancient Semitic deities gathered from the surface, while a small number of Neo-Punic inscriptions, iconography and ostraca were recovered in archaeological context from the *tophet* and domestic structures. In addition, a large Punic-style stela was found just outside the Roman forum. About twenty intact urns were excavated in the *tophet*; these were sealed and stored for future analysis.

References:

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Acknowledgements:

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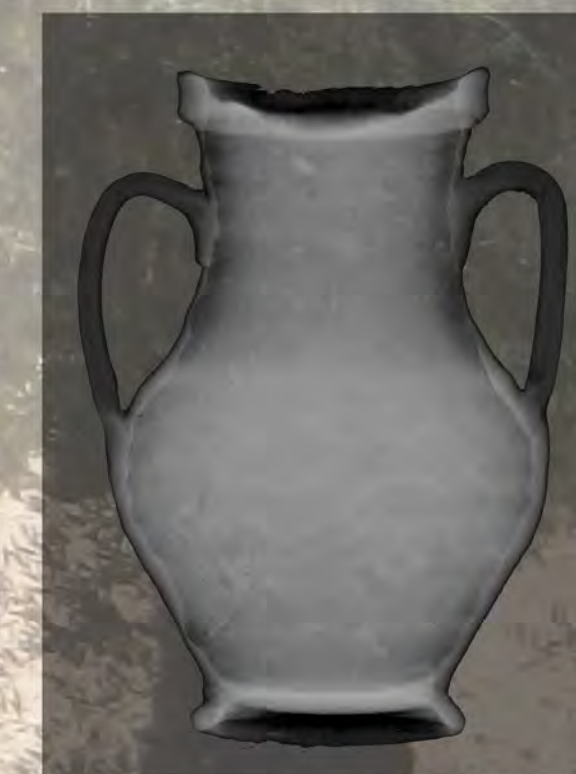
A complete African Red Slip bowl excavated in the *tophet*, dating from the first-fourth centuries CE and possibly made in or relatively near to Zita.



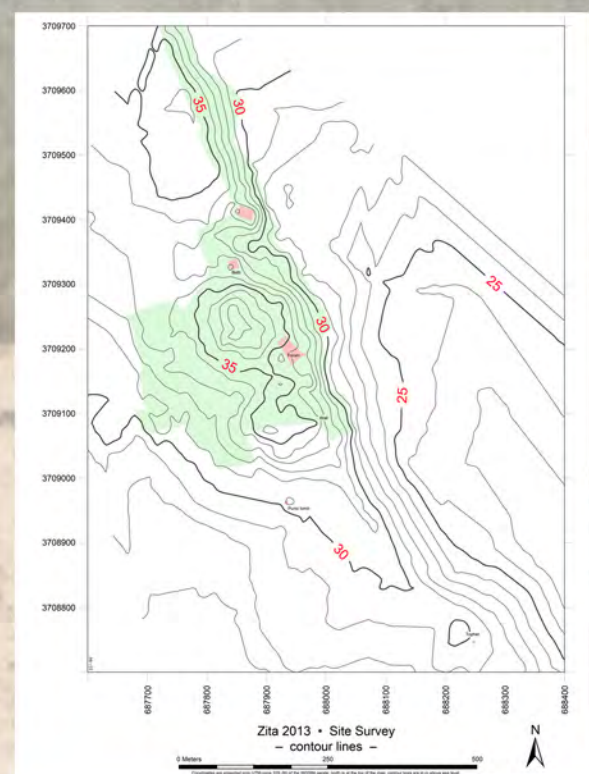
A fragment of a mould-made ceramic lamp excavated in the industrial area just south of the forum, dated to the third century CE and likely made in or near Zita.



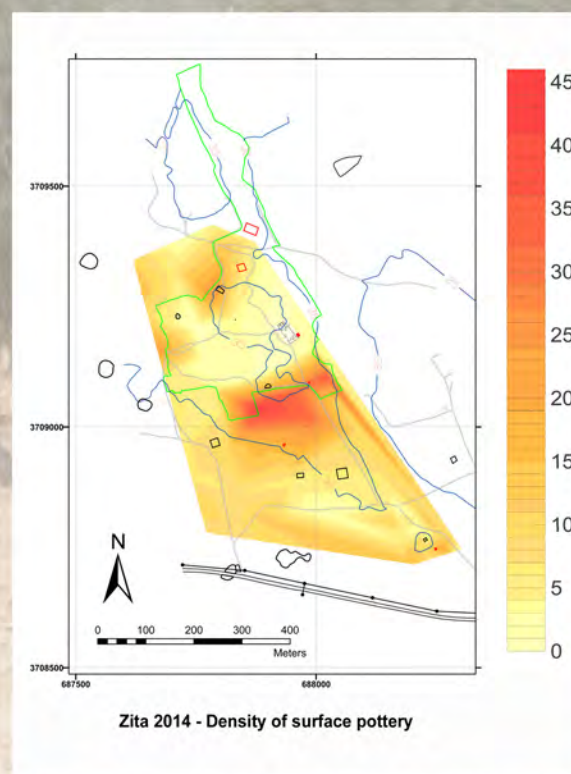
A ceramic sherd with a substantial Neo-Punic text preserved, but not yet fully interpreted, excavated in a dump in the industrial area south of the forum.



An X-ray image of an urn excavated in the *tophet*, showing evidence for the presence of bones, but not for their species or perimortal circumstances.



The center of the site was built on a limestone ridge with no agricultural value, but providing the inhabitants with both a view of the environs and a breeze.



Our systematic surface survey yielded many pot sherds dating from between 500 BCE and 300 CE, mostly found in the area just south of the center of town.