The town fell to local tribes around 285 and was never retaken by Rome because of its remoteness and indefensibility on the south-western border of the Roman Empire. It continued to be inhabited for at least another 700 years, first as a Latinised Christian community, then as an early Islamic settlement. In the late 8th century it became the seat of Idris ibn Abdallah, the founder of the Idrisid dynasty and the state of Morocco. By the 11th century Volubilis had been abandoned after the seat of power was relocated to Fes. Much of the local population was transferred to the new town of Moulay Idriss Zerhoun, about 5 km (3.1 mi) from Volubilis.

The ruins remained substantially intact until they were devastated by an earthquake in the mid-18th century and subsequently looted by Moroccan rulers seeking stone for building Meknes. It was not until the latter part of the 19th century that the site was definitively identified as that of the ancient city of Volubilis. During and after the period of French rule over Morocco, about half of the site was excavated, revealing many fine mosaics, and some of the more prominent public buildings and high-status houses were restored or reconstructed. Today it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, listed for being "an exceptionally well preserved example of a large Roman colonial town on the fringes of the Empire".