

*Trade, Commerce, and the State in the Roman World* (Oxford Studies on the Roman Economy). Edited by ANDREW WILSON and ALAN BOWMAN. 242mm. Pp xxii + 656, 94 b&w figs, 14 tabs. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018. ISBN 9780198790662. £110 (hbk).

In the scholarly debate, the Roman economy and trade have been approached from two opposite standpoints: one which sees them as relatively modest in scale if compared to agriculture, while the opposite view highlights their substantial impact in the context of a pre-modern society. The Oxford Roman Economy Project has marked a renewed interest in the economic aspects of production, trade, handicraft and retail sale under the Roman Empire. This volume, like others published in the same series, stems out from a conference organised as part of this project. Bringing together the work of leading scholars in this discipline, the book looks at the circulation of commodities and how their movement was regulated across the Roman world.

Part 1 engages with the State and its management of finances and trade. Bowman (chapter 2) challenges the view of the Roman economy as a ‘low-tax’ one, arguing for an average 20 per cent rate of civic taxation – a figure that is suggested by textual evidence from Egypt, which was probably not too dissimilar from that of other territories under Rome’s rule. By examining the available literary evidence of transaction costs over the Mediterranean, Lo Cascio (chapter 4) recognises the importance of the establishment of a single political entity (the Roman State) to promote an integration of the economy over such a broad geographical framework.

Parts 2 and 3 collect a range of papers respectively on trade within and beyond the frontiers of Empire. The movement of stone for building purposes is analysed by Russell (chapter 8). Alongside the diffusion of prestigious ornamental stones for imperial constructions, an important sector of the stone quarrying, supply and trade was represented by the more localised demand, as shown by case studies in Narbonensis, central Lugdunensis and south-east Britain. A synthetic overview of the trade of raw and manufactured glass is offered by Foy (chapter 9), while Fulford (chapter 10) reviews the approaches to the study of Gallo-Roman sigillata in Britain and its circulation patterns. Stressing the importance of the North African pottery as an economic indicator, Bonifay (chapter 11) provides an up-to-date account of African Red Slip (ARS) ware, amphorae and their contents, pointing out the main routes of distribution across the Mediterranean. Drawing from the results of recent archaeological research at Thamusida, a military *vicus* in Mauretania Tingitana (Morocco), Papi (chapter 14) reconstructs an economic system for this remote Roman province that contradicts the traditional model of the ‘Circle of the Straits’, arguing convincingly for a much stronger connection with the broader Mediterranean networks.

Moving beyond the borders of the Roman Empire, Graf (chapter 15) reviews the extent of trade between Syria and China via the so-called ‘Silk Road’, whose existence has been questioned by some scholars. Surely seaborne commerce had a primary role, especially from the second century AD, but overland movements of silk are attested in the preceding, and probably later, eras; this would therefore indicate there is no need for a paradigm shift. The amount of recently published data on settlements in the Fazzan desert of Libya has provided a wealth of new information on the

trans-Saharan trade in antiquity, which is summarised here by Wilson (chapter 19). Exchanges between Rome and the Garamantes are now attested archaeologically, and it seems that the trade of goods was at its peak during the second century AD, although it fluctuated over time due to unrest along the Libyan military frontier.

It is praiseworthy that the book engages with both historical and archaeological sources, the latter being understandably more emphasised in the papers collected in parts 2 and 3. As it often happens with works of this kind, the volume was a long time in the making, but its publication is of fundamental importance for the progress of scholarship and for keeping the debate on the Roman economy going. In all these papers there is plenty of useful materials for scholars of the ancient world, such as historians, economic historians and archaeologists; students, particularly those at postgraduate level, will also benefit largely from this book. This is one of those titles which will be a key resource for universities and specialised libraries, and without doubt it will feature in the core reading lists of courses of ancient history and archaeology.

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