

lowing Napoleon's expedition aimed at explaining every aspect of Egypt: the reliefs gathered also contain a large number of depictions of ships.

This richly illustrated catalogue is informative in many ways: it explains the difficulties in studying the sources and how that information can be turned into models of real ships; it also gives an insight into the history of archaeology and generally makes good reading.

Christa Steinby

EIVIND HELDAAS SELAND: *Ships of the Desert and Ships of the Sea: Palmyra in the World Trade of the First Three Centuries CE*. Philippika 101. Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2016. ISBN 978-3-447-10704-4. VIII, 112 pp. EUR 42.

Palmyra is known as a caravan city that owed its wealth to its successful long-distance trade. However, while many aspects of the cultural and social life of Palmyra have inspired research in recent years, the city's commercial actions have not been given much consideration. Eivind Heldaas Seland aims to amend this with his book *Ships of the Desert and Ships of the Sea: Palmyra in the World Trade of the First Three Centuries CE*. The book is associated with the Palmyrena projects (City hinterland and caravan trade between Orient and Occident, 2009–2013; Mechanisms of cross-cultural interaction: Networks in the Roman Near East, 2013–2016), in which the writer assisted, and which included three seasons of archaeological survey in the surroundings of Palmyra in 2008–2011.

Two questions serve as a starting point for the study: Why did Palmyra become prominent in long-distance commerce although there was no specific factor that could have explained its success? How did the people of Palmyra use their opportunities in order to make this happen? The book is divided into five chapters that purport to answer these questions.

The first chapter, "The caravan city" (pp. 1–7), introduces the reader to previous research, the sources, and the theoretical approach. The second chapter, "City, territory and hinterland" (pp. 9–25), describes the circumstances that influenced the city's development, including its history, territory, populace and their identity as well as their relationship to other nations. The third chapter, "Palmyra in the ancient world exchange" (pp. 27–61), outlines a picture of Palmyrene commerce by discussing the commodities, routes and yearly rhythm of the city's commercial transactions. The chapter fascinatingly conveys the nature of ancient long-distance trade: it was a vast entirety with many different matters to be taken into consideration. In many ways it resembled a jigsaw puzzle in which all the little pieces had to be fitted together to get it all functioning. As the title suggests, chapter four, "Organization and practicalities" (pp. 63–74), deals with practical issues of the caravan trade. It discusses the participants of commercial expeditions with their duties and tasks, as well as pack animals, security issues and daily routines on a journey through the desert. The final chapter, "Development of Palmyrene long-distance trade" (pp. 75–88), clarifies the reasons for the creation of Palmyrene long-distance trade and describes its development and expansion. Special attention is given to the different ways in which Palmyrenes were active outside their own town and how they formed networks that helped them in increasing their prominence. The chapter also describes the end of Palmyrene trade. A short summary ("Ships of the

desert and ships of the sea”, pp. 89–90) completes the book. The text is accompanied by useful pictures, maps and tables.

The argument of Seland, and an answer to his questions, is that several factors set convenient preconditions for Palmyra’s trading activity. While the Euphrates valley had been a traditional passageway for travellers, during the time of Palmyra’s early commercial enterprises it had become a route to be avoided due to the various principalities that arose in the area with the collapse of the Seleucid Empire. All of them levied taxes and the conditions were somewhat unstable, which made the desert crossing tempting. The topography of the route used by the Palmyrenes was well suited for travelling and there was enough water available for the caravans. Because the Palmyrenes shared their environment with the nomads, they had the necessary pack animals at their disposal. In addition, weather conditions all along the route favoured the use of the route through the Syrian desert. However, these preconditions themselves would not have been enough if the Palmyrenes had not been able to use them to their advantage. Their ability to create networks was crucial to their success, and although they had a unique Palmyrene identity, they also knew perfectly well how to blend in with other societies.

Not much direct evidence concerning Palmyrene commerce has survived. Relevant literary mentions are very scarce. Some inscriptions are associated with trade, but they leave many questions open. Archaeological data is not very helpful either, for Palmyra was mostly a transit point for goods destined for other markets; besides, many of the products were consumable and thus have left no traces in the archaeological record. Therefore, the use of indirect evidence has been a necessity. One body of evidence that Seland utilizes is ethnographic and later historical data. He justifies its comparative use well and his theories sound very plausible. However, a certain element of cautiousness is always to be maintained and the lack of direct evidence inevitably leaves some doubt lingering in the air, which is not a bad thing because it both leaves the door open for further research and inspires it.

To sum up, it was enjoyable to read this book. It offers an interesting peek into Palmyrene trade and helps to perceive the essence of ancient global trade with all its practicalities, difficulties, and advantages in a wider sense. This book can be recommended to everyone interested in Palmyra, ancient commerce, and the complex networks between ancient nations. It is certainly of interest for specialists, but due to its pleasant style I also find it suitable for more inexperienced readers interested in the subject.

*Kirsi Simpanen*

ROBERTO MENEGHINI: *Die Kaiserforen Roms*. Aus dem Ital. von DAGMAR PENNA MIESEL. Philipp von Zabern in Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 2015. ISBN 978-3-8053-4852-2. 112 S., 82 farb. u. 54 s/w Abb. EUR 29.95.

Roberto Meneghini’s *Die Kaiserforen Roms* is translated from Italian to German by Dagmar Penna Miesel. It remains unclear whether it is a translation of an Italian book or an independent work containing new information or interpretations that have not been published before in Meneghini’s long scholarly career with the Imperial Fora. *Die Kaiserforen Roms* seems to have much in common with