

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

Meneghini's *I Fori Imperiali e Mercati di Traiano: Storia e descrizione dei monumenti alla luce degli studi e degli scavi recenti* (2009). It is likely that the current work, *Die Kaiserforen Roms*, is a shortened and translated version based on the aforementioned book. *Die Kaiserforen Roms* proceeds in chronological order. First there is a short history of the zone of the Imperial Fora before the Forum of Caesar was built. Then there is a chapter on the Forum of Caesar, followed by one chapter for each later forum: The Forum of Augustus, The Temple of Peace, the Forum of Nerva and the Forum of Trajan. Finally, there is a short discussion of the history of the Imperial Fora after antiquity.

The book is likely targeted to a wider audience than just scholars with an interest in ancient Rome. It does not have any notes or references to the works of other scholars. However, there is a thematic list of scholarly literature at the end of the book where a reader can find more information about, for example, the different fora. There is also a glossary and a list of emperors with the years of their reigns. These features indicate that the audience of this work is beyond the academic community.

As such, the text is exceptionally informative. It has many measurements, the stone materials are often listed in detail, and there are references to ancient literature. In particular, the discussion on the Forum of Caesar occasionally has detailed information about the excavations penetrating below the floor level of the forum. This data might be interesting for the specialist.

The work has many illustrations: photographs, drawings, plans, and maps. They ease reading and understanding the text, particularly if the reader is not familiar with the archaeology of the Imperial Fora. The book also contains artists' reconstructions, which bring the places alive with people and other features of daily life that are often absent in archaeological illustrations. Yet, the level of reliability of the reconstructions remains unclear to the reader. It is almost impossible to know which part is based on the illustrator's imagination and which part on the remaining archaeological evidence – especially if the Imperial Fora are not familiar to the reader.

*Die Kaiserforen Roms* is good book for someone who is unfamiliar with the archaeology and history of the Imperial Fora or who needs a quick recapitulation of them. However, for more advanced academic work, it is perhaps more fruitful to read the other publications of Meneghini, for example, the aforementioned *I Fori Imperiali e Mercati di Traiano*.

Samuli Simelius

*Venafrum città di Augusto: Tra coltura e cultura, topografia, archeologia e storia*. A cura di CECILIA RICCI. URBANA SPECIES: Vita di città nell'Italia e nell'Impero romano 3. Edizioni Quasar, Roma 2015. ISBN 978-88-7140-683-1. 191 pp. EUR 15.

Venafrum era una città importante nel triangolo tra Lazio, Campania e Samnium. Nell'età classica appartenne certamente alla I regio augustea, e nella coscienza comune credo alla Campania; nella tarda antichità faceva parte della provincia Samnium. Il volume qui annunciato si basa sulle comunicazioni lette durante un incontro tenutosi nel 2014 a Castello Pandone. Il suo contenuto è vario, come anche la qualità dei singoli contributi. Interessanti sono quelli che si occupano dei materiali archeologici, per es. Jacobelli sulle pitture della *domus* di via Carmine 10, scoperte nei recenti scavi negli anni '80 (ma manca un accenno sulla cronologia del III stile cui appartengono i frammenti del-