

## BOOK REVIEW

*Trade in the Ancient Sahara and Beyond*. Edited by D. J. MATTINGLY, V. LEITCH, C. N. DUCKWORTH, A. CUÉNOD, M. STERRY and F. COLE. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. xviii + 449. Hardback, \$120.00. ISBN: 978-1-107-19699-5.

This volume examines both an understudied topic and understudied region. It examines the Rome-Sahara trade, local Garamantian trade and the early evidence for Trans-Saharan trade. The contents mainly present some of the findings of the Trans –SAHARA project and are more tightly connected than many edited volumes. This book provides an excellent argument that the Sahara was an important locus for trade and production in and of itself, not merely important as a place to traverse in search of trade on the other side.

The Garamantes play an important role throughout, and are (as expected) highlighted in Mattingly's introductory chapter. Whether or not Romans traded with Sub-Saharan Africa, the Garamantes traded with both. Instead of the romantic notions of the long-distance trek, this book focuses on much higher volumes of short-distance regional trade, particularly noted in Scheele's contribution (Chapter 2) and Wilson's (Chapter 7). Scheele (Chapter 2) argues for an almost symbiotic relationship between nomadic pastoralists and oasis-dwellers, partially on the grounds that sedentary pastoralism was virtually impossible in the Sahara.

Turning to discussions of routes, Haour (Chapter 3) examines the likely routes from the Fazzan to Lake Chad and the likelihood of passing through the Kawar oases, Cissé (Chapter 4) unpacks trade between the Sahara and Mali and Horton, Crowther and Boivin (Chapter 5) compare short-range trade on the Indian Ocean with that of camel-laden trade of the Sahara. This last is a fascinating thesis, though a bit unbalanced in its presentation of the comparisons. Returning to the classical period, Nixon (Chapter 6) thoroughly examines the (sparse) evidence for an early trans-Sahara trade in gold, while Wilson (Chapter 7) looks to Saharan production and *probable* export (dates, livestock, mineral resources).

The second section turns from transport to trade and production in organic materials. While livestock almost certainly played some role in Saharan trade, it is

undetectable. Accordingly, the three chapters here look to a more easily detected good—textiles. Mattingly and Cole (Chapter 8) survey the literary evidence of the second millennium CE before turning to Garamantian fabrics, Jørgensen (Chapter 9) examines Egyptian cloth that may have had a Saharan origin and Guédon (Chapter 10), in looking at textile exports to Roman North Africa, particularly in the Roman army, opens the possibility of their acquisition by land rather than by sea.

The third section shifts to trade and production in inorganic materials, chiefly glass, copper/brass and ceramics. At this stage, the large-scale connections drawn are tentative or speculative, but interesting and compelling nonetheless. The book's editors introduce the section and present the varying ceramic finds of the archaeological projects on the Garamantes, revealing a high proportion of imported handmade wares as well as copper/brass finds, which tentatively appear to be foreign in origin, but many reworked. Bonifay (Chapter 12) puzzles over the apparently high quantity of Mediterranean amphorae in the Fazzan and the degree to which local productions replaced imports, noting how the *limes* zone seems to have a more traditionally Mediterranean consumption.

Leone (Chapter 13) focuses on fine pottery ware, noting distinctions in use between the urban and rural Byzacena, and (less conclusively) between the Roman and Garamantian sphere. Magnavita (Chapter 14) holds forth on the chemical analysis of foreign goods found in West Africa. Here, glass beads appear to be predominantly plant ash soda-lime beads originating in the Near East (roughly according with Dussubieux below (417-9)) while northern brass appears to have been routed through Marendet at the edge of the South-central Sahara/Sahel before making its way to West Africa; her further examination also reveals more substantive trade. Dussubieux (Chapter 15) follows up this study with an analysis suggesting a gradual shift from an east-west trade in Near Eastern or Indian Ocean-origin glass to a north-south trade in Mediterranean-origin glass, with possible local production or reworking. A short conclusion (Chapter 16) suggests that even if trade was minimal, there were nevertheless connections between Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa and that the Garamantes played a dominant role as intermediaries, though the absence of evidence from further west in the Sahara precludes eliminating the Ahaggars as relevant.

I have unfairly paid short shrift to the above contributions, each detailed in findings and cautiously speculative in ramifications. I did not, however, note a clear ratio between imported and locally made pottery to get a sense of scale of the ceramic trade. Throughout, there was a strong sense of small-scale trade by peddlers

or pastoralists. This is a valuable observation: once travel is definitely happening and the cost becomes a “sunk” cost, the profitability of beads and fineware do not have to be justified against the cost of the entire travel.

This also raises my one big question for the book. What rule of thumb determines whether a given good arrives as a result of trade from (or through) the Sahara or accompanying travel or migration from the Sahara? In some cases, we have good illustrations of the quantity (such as amphorae, see 290-2, 352-4) but others, like textiles, might be seen in the context of the Roman army (see 260-1), where the trade might be incidental to the travel. Similar explanations can be had for many of the small goods.

Too often, the classical scholar sees the southern border of Rome’s empire as the edge of habitation, and this book ably dispels this assumption. The book’s expense is balanced by vivid color illustrations and many detailed and excellent maps. This is presented (xvi) as the first of four volumes on the ancient Sahara, and I look forward to seeing the next contribution soon.

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