

BOOK REVIEW

The Indian Ocean Trade in Antiquity: Political, Cultural and Economic Impacts. Edited by MATTHEW ADAM COBB. London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019. Pp. xiii + 237. Hardback, \$140.00. ISBN: 978-1-138-73826-3

Building upon a research panel held in Dublin in June 2016, this volume has the aim of facilitating “interdisciplinary exchanges among scholars working in a range of fields and who utilise various methodological approaches” (1). Given the increasing volume of archaeological and written evidence currently being unearthed in the Indian Ocean, the book’s release is especially timely.

The book’s timeframe spans from 300 BCE to 700 CE: this chronological choice enables a *longue durée* perspective on the Indian Ocean trade. While the contributions in the volume use a variety of methodological approaches, they all utilize the concept of globalization in the context of Antiquity. The chapters are divided into three parts— the development of trade networks and geographical knowledge in the Indian Ocean; the impact of the movement of goods and ideas on cultural and economic developments; and the impact of the Indian Ocean trade on Greco-Roman novels.

Part 1 is opened by Cobb, whose chapter analyzes the changes that occurred after Augustus carried out the annexation of Egypt, removing the Ptolemaic dynasty from power. This analysis explores the causes of those changes, as well as highlighting the elements of continuity between the phases of the Ptolemaic dynasty and the reign of Augustus.

The following chapter is by Leonardo Gregoratti, who discusses the marginalization of Parthian history in the context of the scholarship on Indian Ocean trade (although the role of Parthian trade has become more recognized over the past three decades). He highlights a severe bias in Western sources on Parthian history, which predominantly consist of Western writers describing “Eastern barbarians.” Gregoratti then outlines various Chinese sources which, in contrast to Western sources, discuss Parthian trade networks in the Indian Ocean in far more depth.

Following Gregoratti's chapter is Himanshu Prabha Ray's ethnographic study. She focuses on the archaeological sites at Kanheri, where there are 109 rock-cut caves with Buddhist decorations. Ray discusses how a ritual economy was created at Kanheri through the cultural and religious anchorage provided by early Buddhist monastic centres, which was vital to the development of political and economic structures in the area. (The concept of a ritual economy stands in contrast to traditional approaches to economic history, which trace a linear progression from simple to complex economic organizations.)

Federico De Romanis then presents a very detailed analysis of some paragraphs of the *Periplus* of the Red Sea. Through careful textual analysis, he convincingly demonstrates that the *Periplus* is a patchwork text pieced together by an individual in possession of extensive knowledge of the Red Sea's maritime routes. However, De Romanis also shows that the same author sometimes needed to resort to second-hand accounts of the places described in the text: thus, the chapter concludes with the observation that the reliability of the *Periplus*' geographical description of Western India ought to be considered inconsistent, at best.

Part 2 of *The Indian Ocean Trade in Antiquity* starts with Raoul McLaughlin's disappointing chapter on the economic significance of Eastern trade in the ancient world. He states his piece "explains the Eastern Commercial Revenue Model, an evidence-based scheme for the Roman economy as presented in [his 3 monographs]" (117). If this is so, clearly this writing is not original work, and one might wonder whether it is necessary to reiterate an explanation that, according to the author himself, has been already discussed in three monographs. Moreover, McLaughlin uses much of the chapter to polemize against the anonymous reviewers who expressed concerns regarding his previous publications, rather than making his point.

Pierre Schneider's chapter is next and analyzes the consumption of Indian pearls in the Roman market. He argues that even trade in so-called luxury items, such as pearls, had an impact on many clusters of Roman population—not only the rich elites. Lastly, Frederick Asher writes on the presence of Indian traders outside Indian territories, an often-overlooked subject.

Fiona Mitchell's chapter in Part 3 explores Indian cultural influences on Greek creation myths. She focuses on one particular element: the myth of the egg being the progenitor of the Universe. This exists in both Greek and Indian mythology, suggesting some kind of cultural contact. However, due to the scant evidence available on the origins of such texts, Mitchell notes that it is difficult to reconstruct the process through which this narrative may have been disseminated.

A chapter by Juan Pablo Sánchez Hernández follows, analysing the impact of the Indian Ocean trade on the ancient novel by looking at a number of ancient novels: Petronius' *Satyrica*, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*, Xenophon's *Ephesiaca*, and Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*. The conclusion that Sánchez Hernández draws from this analysis is that "in order to enhance the interest and plausibility of their stories, ancient novelists blended literary account of the marvels and riches of India and Ethiopia with the more recent mercantile information that derived from frequent trade contacts with these lands during the Roman period" (201).

Marco Palone closes Part 3. He uses Greek novels about India as a proxy to understand the nature of the contact between India and the Hellenistic Kingdoms. Palone also looks at similarities between Indian *kathās* (i.e. novels) and Greek novels, of which there are many, particularly in terms of plot and style.

The Indian Ocean Trade in Antiquity ends with a concluding chapter by Cobb, which summarises the main arguments of the volume. Cobb also notes that this book incorporates multiple perspectives, rather than having a purely economic focus—in contrast to the majority of works on the Indian Ocean trade. This extremely interesting book engages with a great number of different historical issues, as well as applying different approaches to a complex economic phenomenon that brought about several non-economic implications.

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