

BOOK REVIEW

The Inland Seas: Towards an Ecohistory of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. By T. BEKKER-NIELSEN AND R. GERTWAGEN, eds. Göttingen: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2016. Pp. 419, 28 colour- and 59 b/w-figures, 17 tables. Paper, € 64.00. ISBN 978-3-515-11439-4.

The aim of this edited volume is to develop an ecohistory of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (including its 'appendices', the Sea of Marmara and the Sea of Azov). An ecohistory, by focusing on the relationship between humans and the environment must strive to reconstruct not only past environmental conditions, how people perceived these conditions to be, and changes over time, but also the very specific socio-cultural contexts in which the human-environment relationship occurred (17). The challenges in pursuing such an approach are numerous: the lack of adequate quantifiable data over time and the need to combine an array of primary material (documentary, archaeological, and zooarchaeological), which requires command of multiple research skills and/or reliance on an interdisciplinary research team are the most significant. The editors, being well aware of these 'daunting challenges' (18), stress that this book has no pretension to offer a set of complete answers, but constitutes a starting point. How the fifteen chapters by leading archaeologists, historians, and zooarchaeologists address the challenge of developing such ecohistory varies greatly.

Many of the contributions focus on classical antiquity and on the production, trade, and consumption of salted fish products, but the book treats also prehistory (Arturo Morales-Muñiz and Eufrosia Roselló-Izquierdo; Dimitra Mylona) and post-classical epochs. Several chapters are thematic (e.g. Ephraim Lytle on the legal status of the sea in antiquity), while others take a diachronic approach (e.g. Enrique García Vargas on tuna fisheries). Four chapters focus on a specific region and discuss the interaction between humans and marine environment over longer time-spans (e.g. Sabine Florence Fabijanec on fishing/fish trade in Medieval Dalmatia; Constantin Ardeleanu on the lower Danube plains). These regional surveys are the most successful in respect to the declared aim of the volume to focus on ecohistory because, by including also the medieval and modern periods in their treatment, they can count on statistical data and other documentary material. The

closing chapter by Ferdinando Boero, a zoologist, offers an assessment of the current impact humans are making on the ecosystem of the Mediterranean.

All contributions to this volume offer either valuable overviews of the state of the art (e.g., Robert Curtis; Tønnes Bekker-Nielsen) or methodological considerations on how to take the field forward (e.g., Dario Bernal-Casasola). Several chapters read as companion pieces, and therefore offer very valuable syntheses suitable for readers—scholars and students alike—not completely familiar with the topic, scholarship, and primary material. However, at times important scholarly debates or pieces of primary evidence are not mentioned, perhaps for the sake of chapter brevity. It would have been good to acknowledge the existence of such debates, since the chapters aim at providing the reader with up to date overviews of both available primary evidence and scholarship. For instance, Dario Bernal-Casasola's discussion seems to present as a fact the use, in Roman times, of systems of fixed nets similar to the modern *almadraba*,¹ whereas it is a bit surprising to find no mention, in Carmen Alfaro Giner's chapter on purple dye, of the evidence offered by the temple accounts of Delos, possibly showing overfishing of the molluscs in the 3rd century BCE.²

One cannot help also noticing that not all contributions truly attempt to engage in the writing of ecohistory, undoubtedly because of the available evidence: for antiquity, while abundant archaeological data exist, paleoenvironmental data and detailed information on the types of fisheries exploited over time are still patchy.

These criticisms are, however, relatively minor points in the light of the wealth of topics covered in this well-produced volume and of the important methodological point the book makes: to truly understand human history in the Mediterranean regions and how the environment (not just terrestrial, but aquatic too) shaped, and was shaped by, human actions, one needs to consider the full range of evidence and this can be achieved only by truly interdisciplinary studies. As noted by the editors, despite the wealth of studies on the Mediterranean (land) regions, not many attempts have been made at systematically integrating the results of various scientific studies in order to produce an ecohistory of the Mediterranean and Black Sea. This volume must be applauded for engaging seriously with this task and opening the way to future studies on the topic, while the editors deserve credit

¹ A. Marzano, *Harvesting the Sea. The Exploitation of Marine resources in the Roman Mediterranean*. Oxford 2013, 70-8 for an overview of the scholarly debate on this topic.

² See E. Lytle, "The Delian Purple and the *lex Portus Asiae*," *Phoenix* 61.3-4, 2007: 247-69.

for aptly bringing together chapters with so many different disciplinary perspectives.

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