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Review

Maritime Archaeology and Ancient Trade in the Mediterranean

Edited by Damian Robinson and Andrew Wilson
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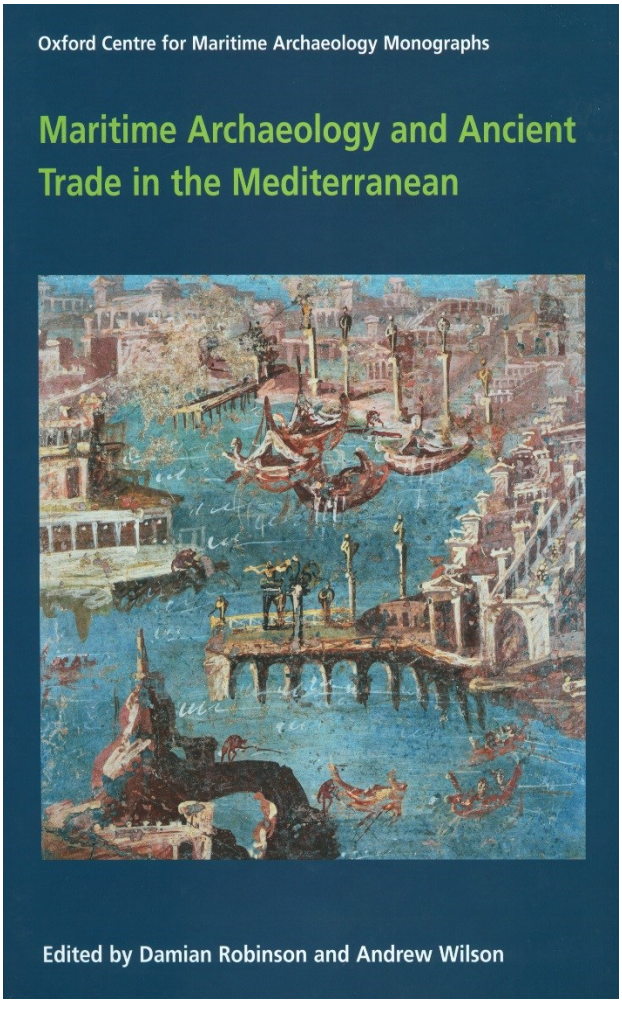
Reviewed by JAEI Staff

The present volume is the sixth installation in The Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology's monograph series and is the combined result of a Classical Archaeology Research Seminar held at the University of Oxford and a subsequent symposium held at the University of Carlos III in Madrid, both in 2008. Including the introduction, the book consists of thirteen papers contributed by a diverse group of researchers. As the editors describe on p.1, "The volume focuses on the maritime dimension of the trading economy of the ancient Mediterranean, using the evidence from shipwrecks, harbor archaeology, and the distribution of traded goods on terrestrial sites to explore the development and modalities of maritime trade in antiquity."



While the title and such introductory statements suggest a broad temporal range, the majority of the papers focus on the Roman Republic and Roman Empire, bracketed by small inclusions of the Hellenistic and Byzantine periods. Egypt and Egyptian interconnections, notably those regarding Alexandria, feature prominently in half of the papers. This is due in large part to the Madrid symposium's direct link to the travelling exhibition "Egypt's Sunken Treasures."

The book begins with an introductory overview of "Maritime Archaeology and the Ancient Economy" by Damian Robinson and Andrew Wilson. In the first paper, David Fabre presents "The Shipwrecks of Heraclion-Thonis: a preliminary study," which summarizes the materials and techniques thus far detected in the wrecks, the majority of which are Egyptian and of Late Period date, a topic recently featured in *JAEI*.[1] He also presents, briefly, aspects of anchors, moorage, ballast, the size of the ships, and how cargo was stowed aboard them.

Next, Andrew Wilson seeks to explain the "Hellenistic and Roman peak in Mediterranean

trading activity" by analyzing the occurrences of shipwrecks from the Bronze Age to 1500 CE as represented by Parker's *Ancient Shipwrecks in the Mediterranean and the Roman Provinces* (1992). To do so, he examines the impact of changes in maritime technology (hull construction, bilge pumps, etc.), the design and maintenance of harbors, and trade patterns.

Pascal Arnaud's "Ancient Sailing-Routes and Trade Patterns: The Impact of Human Factors" critically examines the interrelations between ancient sailing techniques (coasting; crossing open sea; nocturnal voyages; winter sailing), trading practices (e.g., treaties regulating international trade, types of trading center, regulatory laws, taxation, loans), and related matters. These changed over time during the Classical through Late Roman periods and had an impact on the occurrence of coastal "tramping" (i.e. sailing a ship from one port to the next, selling and buying per the local markets, rather than running a fixed route with predetermined cargo).

Candace Rice, in "Ceramic Assemblages and Ports," analyzes two types of pottery assemblages–amphorae and fineware– from several sites, notably Berenice, Ostia, and Carthage. These assemblages highlight the interconnected nature of the region during the Roman period and reveal "different economic logic" between the two types, although an explanation for this logic remains evasive.

In "Constructing Port Hierarchies: Harbours of the Central Tyrrhenian Coast," Katia Schörle develops a theoretical approach for discussing the economic roles of ancient harbors. This is size-based (acknowledging the problem of estimating size in some cases) and includes not only such well-known harbors as Portus but also smaller ones, even those associated with villas.

Roman pozzolanic (maritime) concrete is the focus of the sixth paper, by John Peter Oleseon, Christopher Brandon, and Robert L. Hohlfelder. The authors present a history of the technology reflected in both archaeological and literary sources. They report preliminary results of experiments to replicate a submerged structure using pozzolanic concrete and other period technology, and explore the importance of Sebastos, an artificial harbor built by Herod using such materials.

The seventh paper, Franck Goddio's "Heracleion-Thonis and Alexandria, Two Ancient Egyptian Emporia," describes what is now understood about the major topographic features of the ports at these sites. In addition to the findings from modern surveys (including via satellite imagery), textual evidence is taken into account, and traffic patterns are hypothesized. Goddio highlights the considerable differences between these two ancient harbors.

Ben Russell's contribution surveys a number of shipwrecks (or likely shipwrecks) associated with cargoes of marble and other building stone, ranging in date roughly from to 100 CE to 800 CE, with most dating to the first through third centuries CE. These cargoes are analyzed for their composition and the size of the vessel and to reveal patterns of trade.

The wine trade is the focus of Karen Heslin's examination of a relatively small number of wrecks of Roman-era boats known as dolia ships, named after the kind of large pottery container (*dolium*) they carried. These appear to have been associated with the shipyard at Minturnae where they were produced during a roughly 150-year span starting in the late second or early first century BCE. Heslin examines the handling of the dolia (each holding 2,000–3,000 liters), the cargo (including amphorae), and other aspects of these ships.

Victoria Leitch begins her paper by examining the production of Roman African cooking wares, created at both inland and coastal sites in what is now Tunisia and western Libya. She then goes on to analyze the distribution of this practical form of pottery throughout the Mediterranean, including inland sites.

Theodore Papaioannou employs different ceramic evidence for his analysis of Mediterranean trade patterns of Late Antiquity. Amphorae from western Asia Minor provide clues for trade routes in the Aegean, as well as the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Nile, Red Sea, and across the European continent to the British Isles.

More local interconnections are the focus of Robert Hohlfelder's "Marine Connectivity in Late Antique Lycia: A Tale of Two Cities, Aperlae and Andriake," the last paper in the volume. The former city had no harbor and was reliant upon its coastal connection to nearby Andriake, which proved to be vital for Aperlae's trade in purple dye derived from the *Murex trunculus* (sic; *Hexaplex trunculus*) of its waters.

The index could be improved by greater depth. Further, the inclusion of abstracts preceding each paper would have improved the reader's ability to track and focus on the content most meaningful to him or her.

For scholars interested in Egypt and these periods, maritime trade or Mediterranean interconnections as a whole, the volume is an important contribution, as it contains new data, discoveries, and syntheses. This book should especially be found on the shelves of those interested in ancient maritime-based Graeco-Roman trade.

Note

[1] David Fabre and Franck Goddio, "Research Report: Thonis-Heracleion, Emporion of Egypt, Recent Discoveries and Research Perspectives: The Shipwrecks," *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 5.1 (2013): 68-75.