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the capital of the greatest and most enduring empire history has known” (p.xviii).

Peter Keegan
Macquarie University


This book is a welcome addition to the growing corpus of scholarship on Rome’s interaction with ancient India, especially on the topic of trade, and forms part of the Duckworth Debates in Archaeology series. Tomber sets out to provide an updated account of Indo-Roman trade using archaeological discoveries and developments in modern scholarship over the past 60 years. In doing so she provides an accessible summary of the more complex account of Indo-Roman trade which has been building in scholarship during that period. More specifically, Tomber spells out the aim of her book on page 17 as a re-evaluation of Indo-Roman trade by asking questions such as “What goods were exchanged and what others travelled alongside?”; “Who controlled the trade?”; “Where did the traders live?”; “What routes were followed and how do artefacts inform these routes?” While Tomber’s primary method is the use of pottery, especially amphorae, she also uses a range of other sources such as coins and texts, especially the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (hereafter PME) which was written sometime in the Julio-Claudian period. Pottery is clearly the author’s specialty and this allows expert insights into the complexity of pottery as a source for understanding some of the complexities of Indo-Roman Trade.

The term Indo-Roman trade is used synonymously with Indian Ocean Trade in this book, which is problematic, because they are different phenomena. The book’s focus is, more accurately, Indo-Roman trade in the context of Indian Ocean Trade, including the Red Sea trade. It investigates Rome’s trade with India using evidence from the Red Sea, east Africa, south Arabia, the Persian Gulf and, of course, India from the first century BC to the seventh century AD. One of the useful contributions of the book is an emphasis on evidence from all of these areas to provide a more complex account of Indo-Roman trade. Older studies tended to emphasise evidence of a Roman nature
and were keen to identify the evidence as Roman, but this book makes another valuable contribution by re-evaluating the evidence to demonstrate that all of these areas contributed actively to Rome’s trade with India.

Chapter 2 is an updated review of all categories of evidence for Roman trade with India from Augustus to the seventh century including text, coins, archaeology and maps. A welcome inclusion in this chapter is a summary of the non-Roman sources from all of the areas which formed an integral part of Roman trade with India, including south Arabian, Mesopotamian and Indian pottery and textual sources such as Tamil poetry. The use of a much wider range of sources throughout the book is an important part of the challenge to earlier scholarly focuses on the classical evidence, although the PME and Ptolemy’s Geography form the essential element in attempts to identify the myriad number of ports and trading sites from the Red Sea to the east coast of India. There is also a useful update on coin finds and their significance, especially in India, with a consideration of Roman types together with those of an Aksumite, south Arabian, Mesopotamian (Persian) and Indian origin. The pottery is treated in considerable detail on pp. 38-54, and as with the coins this section considers evidence of a Roman nature together with that manufactured in India, east Africa, Mesopotamia and south Arabia and found at the various Indian Ocean and Red Sea sites. The treatment of the evidence in this way is an important element in building a picture of Rome’s trade with India which is more complex and regionally vibrant than older studies suggest.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the Red Sea trade. First Tomber (T) identifies the Red Sea ports referred to by Ptolemy, namely Clyisma, Myos Hormos, Philoteras, Leukos Limen, Nechesia and Berenike. An updated description of the archaeological evidence from each of these sites is useful, especially because of very recent excavations and surveys at sites such as Myos Hormos and Berenike. Sites not mentioned by Ptolemy such as Aila and Leuke Kome are also considered. As is the case throughout, the re-evaluation of archaeological evidence is undertaken to provide greater emphasis on material of an Indian, east African, south Arabian and Mesopotamian origin. The presence of Indian graffiti and pottery at various Red Sea port sites from the first to the third centuries AD, for example, suggests that Indians themselves were more active in the Red Sea ports and trade than the older works allow. The evidence also suggests that this continued well into the late Roman period. A very useful table is appended to the chapter which shows the various types of imported materials found at four of the best understood Red Sea ports, their likely origins and the period in which they are thought to have been traded.
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Chapter 4 investigates the various trading ports and available archaeological evidence from them in east Africa, south Arabia and the Persian Gulf. The focus in this chapter is again on pottery and the PME. The importance of Aksum in east Africa and its port of Adulis in the southern Red Sea is emphasised to demonstrate the kingdom’s strong influence on Red Sea trade in the late Roman period. Consideration of east Africa extends as far south as the Azanian coastline of Tanzania, where the PME locates Rhapta as the most southerly market of Azania. It then turns to south Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Clearly, the most important export from south Arabia was incense, some of it making its way overland through the Arabian peninsula to Petra and Mediterranean ports such as Gaza. Incense was also traded to Egypt, India and east Africa, where the Himyarites, one of the dominant kingdoms of south Arabia, exercised power before the emergence of Aksum in the fourth century. Like the Aksumites, the Himyarites are represented as middlemen for the Romans in the sixth century. The most important ports considered in south Arabia are Qana and Moscha Limen on the coasts of modern Yemen and Oman. It describes Qana as returning a rich assemblage of Roman, east African, Mesopotamian and Indian material. Indeed, Qana and Moscha Limen demonstrate strong ties with Mesopotamia based on the presence of Torpedo jars and glazed ware, which were previously underestimated in the archaeological record or incorrectly identified as Roman.

The complex nature of Indo-Roman trade is reflected further in the discussion of the Persian Gulf. Omana, a site mentioned in the PME, is likely to be the modern site of Ed-dur which has undergone extensive excavation and returned some of the most interesting Roman finds in the region of the Indian Ocean. The main period of activity here was from the mid-first century BC to the early second century AD, and among the finds are 227 Roman glass vessels dating to 25 BC-75 AD. It is suggested that these items, and eastern sigillata found throughout the Gulf, came overland through sites such as Palmyra, while Roman fine wares came to the Gulf from the Red Sea via south Arabian ports such as Qana. There is good evidence from the Gulf sites generally for trade with India, and the PME names Omana as a place of exchange with the Indian port of Barygaza.

Chapter 5 is a relatively long chapter which focuses entirely on the evidence from India. This is a particularly useful chapter as it provides an up-to-date and relatively detailed description and analysis of the non-Indian (especially Roman) material found in India. It divides India into six zones, including Sri Lanka (Taprobane), which is a helpful way of approaching a large and diverse area of trade in its own right. India has often been approached in
monolithic terms when considered in the context of its relations with other empires such as the Roman, but there was considerable diversity in political and economic organisation throughout the subcontinent from the first century BC to the seventh century AD.

The north-west, which includes Taxila (Pakistan) and Bagram (Afghanistan), had been connected to the Mediterranean and Iranian worlds much earlier than the south due to overland trade, and demonstrates considerable cultural diversity in its archaeology as a result. So too Gujarat and the Konkan coast, which contained the ancient ports of Barbarikon and Barygaza, which are both mentioned in the PME and other classical texts such as Ptolemy. The state of the archaeology at both sites is not good, but what has been discovered suggests a close connection with the Persian Gulf. In the northeast, Tamluk (Gange of the PME) is the most important site, but little of a Roman nature has been found there.

The most important regions providing evidence of Indo-Roman trade are the Deccan and Tamilakam in central and southern India. The Deccan is the second densest area in terms of Roman coin hoards, most of them dating to the second century AD. At Kolhapur an extraordinary group of metal sculptures of figures such as Poseidon represents an especially striking find of a Roman nature. Based on the pottery evidence, especially 63 amphorae sherds from Nevasa, it seems that the main Roman import to central and southern India was Campanian wine.

Tamilakam, which comprises much of modern Kerala, has provided the most significant evidence in India for Indo-Roman trade. T focuses on the port of Arikamedu which has been extensively excavated, most famously by Mortimer Wheeler in 1945, and from as early as the eighteenth century. T’s summary of the finds from Arikamedu and the extent to which the site has dominated perceptions of Indo-Roman trade, especially since Wheeler’s involvement, is very useful. Further to the extensive finds at Arikamedu in Tamilakam, she discusses a number of other sites, including Karur and Madurai, where more than 4,500 Roman bronze coins have been found. T argues strongly that the site of Pattanam is the previously unidentified ancient port of Muziris, the most important port in Kerala according to Pliny and references in the PME. The identification of Muziris would be an important development in our understanding of Indo-Roman trade, and it has been done partly on the basis of T’s own work. Finally, Sri Lanka (Taprobane) is considered, partly on the basis of Ptolemy’s description of it and the non-Indian finds there which suggest that it was connected by trade to Ethiopia, the Red Sea and especially the Persian Gulf.
Chapter 6 brings together the observations of the earlier chapters to provide a broader synthesis. Overall, new evidence and more sophisticated analysis enhance and challenge older ideas about Indo-Roman trade. It demonstrates that we now have more detail and a more precise chronology of this trade, and that it was a complex and organic phenomenon over seven centuries. In this chapter there are some interesting broader observations about the trade such as "The Campanian wine amphora is the single most common type throughout the Indian Ocean" (p.156), suggesting that wine was Rome’s main export to India and the Indian Ocean more broadly. It also draws conclusions about evidence from some sites in terms of known political developments. For example, the sizeable quantities of Roman and Mesopotamian ceramics found at Opone (Somalia) are used to suggest that the site was a safe meeting point for exchange between Rome and Sasanian Persia, which were essentially at war with another from the third to the seventh centuries. A key, overall conclusion on p.160 is that there was "active input of Romans, Arabs, Persians, Africans and Indians" into Rome’s trade with India.

While there is much to admire about this book, there are some broader conclusions, especially in chapter 6, which are problematic. The analysis on pp.168-171 regarding the effect of Christianity on the Red Sea trade is the most obvious. It explains what is perceived from the archaeology as a "more visible unity" around the Red Sea from the fourth to the seventh centuries as resulting from the increased importance of Christianity and the growing economic power of the Christian church. The problem here is that the "church" was in truth a myriad of churches bitterly opposed to each other, and unity remained illusory: Donatism in North Africa and Monophysitism in Egypt and Syria provide significant examples. Interpretations of a political and religious nature are clearly the most difficult and controversial to make on the basis of archaeological evidence, and Tomber is not alone in doing so. But overall this is a book which undergraduate students, postgraduate students and academics can readily use as a clear, balanced and insightful introduction to a growing topic area in the study of the ancient Roman world.

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