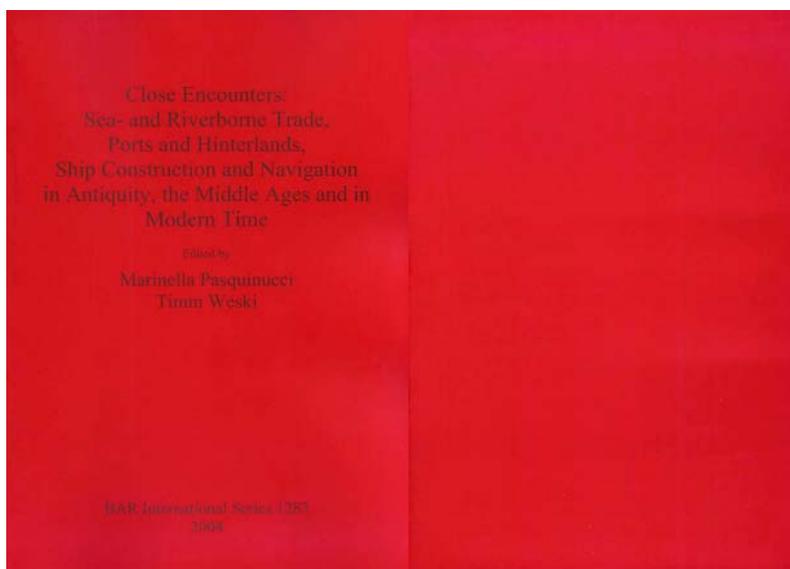


Pasquinucci, M. & T. Weski. Eds. 2004. Close encounters: sea- and riverborne trade, ports and hinterlands, ship construction and navigation in antiquity, the middle ages and in modern times. – Oxford, Archaeopress (British Archaeological Reports International Series 1283)

Book review by R. de Leeuwe



The long title is the best summary anyone could possibly give on this book: a collection of papers presented at the 6th annual meeting of the European Association of Archaeology in Lisbon in 2000. The editors obviously tried to satisfy every author who contributed to this edition of the BAR-series by including their subject in the title. The result is a title which is impossible to memorize and a subject which is difficult to comprehend other than that it might have something to do with water.

In their short introduction, the editors express their aims of studying the links between all the aspects of maritime life mentioned in the title, by collecting them in one volume. To no avail. Most papers remain solitary subjects and reveal only a small part of some greater whole. If a common line of questioning or an overview would have been stated in the introduction, it would have made links between the individual papers more understandable and coherent. As it is, a reader who has not attended the conference has got to put in some extra effort and draw up his or her own conclusions. Still, the subjects are interesting in themselves. Twelve out of the total of eighteen papers deal with maritime trade in the Roman period. The researchers each seem to approach the subject in a different manner. The common goal is probably to gain insight in the trading routes and commercial links of the Mediterranean Sea and adjacent European river systems.

Many authors use pottery assemblages to provide an answer: *amphorae*, *terra sigillata* or coarse pottery is distributed from all corners of the empire, mainly by water. Besides pottery, other material remains found in harbour excavations, *villae*, shipwrecks, regional surveys, burial sites and coastal sites are examined. By studying these finds a picture emerges of trade and exchange on a large trans-European scale which changes over the centuries as the Roman Republic transforms into an empire and later on into the medieval period. Ships are the common way to transport large amounts of goods or heavy loads such as stones over long distances. After reading paper number twelve it finally seems like a good idea to present the papers bound together in a book after all. So far the book's title might have been 'maritime trade in the Roman period'.

With the start of paper number 13 the subject changes somewhat. Here, eastern England in the Middle Saxon period is examined. The author reconstructs inland trading routes along the coast by looking at sites with a great number of coin finds. These seem to be significant for reconstructing the early medieval period economics. This paper in this particular context would serve best as a comparison between the medieval and the Roman period approaches and presents yet another way to reconstruct maritime or coastal trading connections.

The last five papers seem to belong to another conference session altogether. Rightfully published, they are a nice addition to the somewhat dryer material dealt with before. Paper 14 to 17 show a range of aspects of maritime life on board ships sailing the Atlantic Ocean in the 16th and 17th centuries. The use of centuries old navigational equipment is explained, along with an assessment of daily life on board based on a wreck find in the Azores. Another trading route reconstruction is pursued by examining whale-oil casks¹ from a wreck found in

¹ A cask is a barrel or vessel used for storing and transporting goods.

Red Bay. Paper 17 deals with waterfront archaeology in Newfoundland as an example of a coastal site frequently visited by fishermen from all over the Atlantic.

The book ends with an interesting account of an early 19th century Italian wreck that could be identified in the archives as coming from the Ottoman Empire. The old texts combined with the archaeological finds reveal an adventurous mariners life.

In conclusion, this collection of papers is useful as a book of reference, especially if one is interested in maritime trade, transportation, coastal sites and pottery distribution in the Roman period. Other aims claimed in the introduction by the editors are hardly an issue, as the subject range is wide and the inter-connection is only on a broad archaeological scale.

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