as the Red Sea. Businessmen in Egyptian Alexandria may have given crucial backing. In any case, Zenobia aimed to have her son proclaimed emperor in Rome, by the Senate. She was not leading a revolt of independence from Rome, but was working within the imperial system to take it over. This is credible, say our authors, because of the instability of imperial succession in the 3rd century. Anyone with sufficient military support could become emperor, so why not Wahballath? This view counters the popular image of Zenobia as an anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist heroine fighting for independence from Rome. In the end, she did not succeed. How she ended her days is another matter of uncertainty.

Fifth and last, I was intrigued by the history of Palmyra after Zenobia and the reconquest of Aurelian. The city did not disappear, although it went into decline. Diocletian built a camp; Christianization advanced from the 4th century on; and Justinian restored the city walls. After the Muslim conquest, the Umayyads continued the settlement. The last spectacular construction was the castle on the nearby hilltop, built in 1230, later refurbished either by Fakhr ed-Din, a Druze emir from Lebanon in the late sixteenth-early seventeenth century, or by the Ottomans in the eighteenth century. Foreign visitors appeared from the mid-seventeenth century on. Indeed, the location of the ancient city had never vanished.

And today? From 2012, even before IS/Daesh captured Palmyra, looting and pillaging devastated the city and its region, like many places in Syria. Now the major buildings lie destroyed. What next? Despite the many difficulties not only of this latest war but of the past century, the authors end their book on a note of hope that the fortunes of Syria will take a turn for the better.

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Our world seems to be divided between those ancient historians and archaeologists who like to theorise in abstract terms about their work and others, of a practical bent, who are more intent on finding evidence about the past than on offering abstract analyses, which – to them – may seem of doubtful value. No doubt, this division reflects a genetic predisposition of the people involved and has no particular reflection on the value of ‘theorising’. Sub specie aeternitatis possibly it is the latter approach which is more valuable. The books reviewed here concern the
ancient world in the Near East, and it is ‘network’ theory, which is the subject of
the first.

It is evident that, even for the most practical archaeologist, a mental picture of
the periods of the remains, which he or she is studying, is essential for
comprehension of these objects or landscapes – and their context. New theories
about the interpretation of the physical world and its social or material aspects are
potentially useful because they may offer perceptions that enhance and develop our
knowledge about the past and improve that comprehension. While it is certainly
possible to accept the view of the editors expressed in the introduction that
relationships between entities are as important as – or indeed more important than
– their attributes, it is not evident to this writer that ‘network theory’ offers such
new perspectives capable of expanding our understanding. The individual papers
of the first book are of great interest in themselves but not as examples of a specific
theory at work. Of course, links – ‘or relationships’ – whether these show networks
of trade or people, can be extremely interesting and enlightening, but do we need
network theory to contemplate such links? The answer would be ‘yes’ if the theory
itself produced new insights, but what this writer retains from the papers included
in the book are not the abstractions about culture and exchange discussed in
BROEKART’s first article, but the links themselves, in his case the settlements and
trading diaspora involved in trade between India and the Mediterranean. Other
papers discuss a variety of links or networks whether these be religious (Zeus
Kasios: COLLAR), numismatic (southern Caucasus: FABIAN) or personal (Palmyra:
RAJA and SCHÖRLE; Lycos valley: DROSS-KRÜPE; Thebes: O’CONNELL and
RUFFINI).

No single person would be capable of offering useful comments on all of these,
and only a few individual contributions are mentioned below. A specialist in ancient
roads, such as this writer, may easily conceive that the method of construction and
even the location of a road are less ‘important’ than the relationships which it rep-
resents (but also less important than such questions as why it was built and who
used it), but he is not able to offer useful comments on all the networks discussed
here. However, one aspect of several papers that apply tools such as ‘least cost
paths’ that struck this reader was the incomplete nature of the evidence – which
may be chance finds of coins or inscriptions. In several cases data sets, while sub-
stantial in number (e.g. in the case of coin hoards), do not appear consistent enough
to permit major new insights or conclusions. The fact, for example, that Caucasian
Albania developed ‘a robust coinage community … in the absence of central travel
routes’, raises interesting questions but rather contradicts the value of a network
theory approach – unless Albania did in fact host an important route from the Ira-
nian plateau to the Black Sea.

SOMMER’s article on interpersonal networks discusses their importance for
the maintenance of Roman hegemony, but it also includes a valuable discussion of
the differences between nation-states and empires. He charts the move away from a
focus on constitutional aspects of the Roman Empire towards the study of the
cultural impact of Rome on the provinces and emphasises the exclusive bonds of
personal loyalty between individual local rulers and Roman military leaders
representing the empire, in particular Trajan. He is surely right to emphasise that authority is determined less by objective factors such as borders and laws than by interpersonal relationships.

GREGORATTI also addresses the question of imperial authority and control but in the context of the Parthian ‘empire’. Although his paper hardly addresses the issue of networks, he does present interesting case studies of different client kingdoms which explain how control was exercised from the centre. He emphasises the flexibility and high degree of local autonomy in the Parthian system of government.

BROUX discusses trade networks in the eastern desert of Egypt. He presents a fascinating picture of how trade operated between army camps situated on the main highways between the Red Sea and the Nile valley, based on a collection of letters from Didymoi. Once again, this example serves to illustrate the point that the chance survival of information about this aspect of the ancient world can offer extremely interesting details concerning trade links but not general lessons concerning the organisation and financing of trade networks.

One excellent feature of ‘Sinews of Empire’ is the high quality of the use of the English language in all articles, which may of course reflect in part the hard work of the editors. This is not always true of the contributions in the second book discussed here which concerns Palmyra, although in one case the editor is the same. Nevertheless, there is much of interest that is well-written.

This second book includes many articles on various aspects of Palmyra, presented at a conference in December 2012. It is not possible in the space available to discuss more than a few of the sixteen papers, which range from the Palmyrene colony in Rome (TERPSTRA) to finds of western-related objects in China (ZUCHOWSKA) and from the old Babylonian period (HESSE) to the Roman. The introduction informs us that the papers were prepared in the context of a project at the University of Bergen which examined the questions of the reasons for Palmyra’s success and how this was achieved.

The papers concern many different aspects, but the essential lessons drawn from the project by the editors are summarised by the cover illustration, which – while a little difficult to decipher – shows a man holding the reins of a camel and also touching a sailing ship. The editors see this as a portrayal of Palmyra’s role as traders both across the desert and in the Indian Ocean. But, as they say, the network of Palmyrene traders was much wider and is evidence of a geographical mobility which existed despite the rivalry of Rome and Parthia and which made possible the creation of a remarkable fusion of cultures at Palmyra itself. The trading diaspora of Palmyra is a fascinating subject for those interested in trade or networks. Evidently, Palmyra’s wealth and its apparent domination of trade between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean in the first to third centuries reflected its position between the Euphrates valley and the great cities of formerly Seleucid Syria. But, as GAWLIKOWSKI states in his article entitled ‘Trade across frontiers’, the preferred route for travellers coming from the Persian Gulf was not the arduous trek across the desert to Palmyra but the routes crossing the Euphrates further north.
at Zeugma, whether these followed the Euphrates valley or north along the Tigris, before cutting across north-west via Nisibis.

It would be very interesting to know to what extent the trade networks of Palmyra, essentially north-west to south-east, replaced this earlier west-east route from Antioch to the Tigris via Zeugma (or Hierapolis), Edessa and Nisibis — and which was probably also the route followed by Maes Titianus, the trader mentioned by Ptolemy, who went to the border of China. The mosaics of Zeugma, dated to the second and third centuries AD, constitute evidence of a continuation of the importance of this more northerly route, but the route concerned may have carried trade over the Iranian plateau and not down the Tigris to the ports of the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, Palmyra’s merchants, whose international success is demonstrated by their colonies in India and Rome, were perhaps always specifically interested in trade with ports in the Indian sub-continent.

A comparison with the early modern world on a small scale might be the merchant communities of traders based in northern Greece, whether the Pindus or Pelion, who gained the wealth to construct fine stone villages and packhorse roads and bridges by acting as intermediaries for trade throughout the Balkans during the nineteenth century. Palmyra’s success was of course on another scale, creating not only enormous public buildings but also a whole style of sculpture. Possibly their wealth came from trading throughout the Mediterranean and the Near East and not just from the caravans along the road to Ana and the Gulf. Palmyra was in fact ‘off the road’ compared with some Silk Road itineraries mentioned in the written sources, as the paper by Zuchowska indicates. This trade was always indirect involving various intermediaries, but the import of silk transported south via an alternative from Sinkiang across the Himalayan passes to what is now Pakistan and its ports on the Indian Ocean may have been an important source of Palmyran wealth. Much remains to be elucidated here.

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