

ASPECTS OF MARITIME COMMERCE IN
ANCIENT ROME

CANDY (P.), MATAIX FERRÁNDIZ (E.) (edd.) *Roman Law and Maritime Commerce*. Pp. x+204, figs, ills, maps. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. Cased, £85. ISBN: 978-1-4744-7814-4.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X23001725

This volume provides a detailed discussion of Roman law with regards to maritime commerce. The contributions cover a range of topics within this broader theme. The chapters are organised in an easily intelligible and constructive manner, following on well from and building upon one another, all contributing to the wider aim of outlining a more inclusive and interdisciplinary approach to understanding both Roman law and maritime commerce.

Chapter 1 serves as an effective and concise introduction by the editors to the rest of the volume. The research gaps and issues that the volume seeks to address are clearly set out. Recent developments in maritime archaeology are specifically emphasised as resources that are yet to be fully engaged with across the wider discipline (p. 5). It is good to see archaeological evidence so prominently highlighted in a volume that is not explicitly archaeological in scope. Furthermore, the desire to take a more interdisciplinary approach to the topics is stated from the outset (p. 1). Both Roman law and maritime commerce are broad topics that can easily be self-contained without engaging with scholarship beyond the immediate subject matter. As such, the explicit aim of bridging this gap, with an interdisciplinary approach, is good to see at the forefront of such a volume. The interdisciplinary aim is something that is well achieved throughout, with each chapter considering both legal and maritime scholarship of the Roman world as well as textual and archaeological sources.

In Chapter 2 G. Cifani discusses the origins of Roman maritime trade. The tendency to view Rome as indifferent to maritime matters prior to the Punic Wars is highlighted (p. 11). Cifani offers a convincing refutation of this idea, citing the ancient sources as clear evidence for the acknowledgement that Rome was an important maritime centre long before it clashed with Carthage. Throughout the chapter, a broad interconnected approach is taken, where Rome is never considered in isolation. Particularly for the early history of Rome, this is essential, and viewing archaic Rome within wider Mediterranean trends of maritime commerce is an effective means of better understanding the origins and development of the complex system of maritime commerce that developed across the Empire. Importantly, the idea of safety in Roman maritime commerce is also discussed. This is something that can often be overlooked in favour of economic considerations of maritime commerce, but was a key concern in antiquity, and one that is frequently discussed and emphasised throughout the volume. This chapter provides important context for the rest of the volume, which further develops the key concepts effectively introduced here.

Chapter 3 by P. Campbell is one of the more technical contributions, but an engaging one. A key focus within this chapter is addressing the complexity of maritime movement. Maritime movement is often neglected when compared to terrestrial movement, though both were dependent on one another, and they require different approaches to understand and model (p. 25). Campbell is critical of the ability of models to capture fully the reality of ancient sailing (p. 26). This is a valid and important point, but not one that should be used to move away from modelling maritime mobility altogether, as models should be

useful representations of reality, not reality itself. The complex and dynamic nature of maritime travel is well expressed (pp. 27–8), and the idea of ‘contingent movement’ is something that could be effectively incorporated into future models of maritime movement. This chapter is an important contribution to Roman maritime commerce, especially for those seeking to model ancient maritime movement.

In Chapter 4 A. Tarwacka takes a more legal approach than the previous chapters, bringing together the two key themes of the volume. The chapter offers a stimulating discussion of legal approaches to piracy in the Roman world, with a helpful discussion of how these approaches changed over time (p. 45). The concept of safety is discussed in a legal context, and the development of legal protections, however practically enforceable, highlights again the importance of this in Roman maritime commerce.

Chapter 5 focuses on the importance of personal connections in maintaining the complex long-distance network of exchange that was Roman maritime commerce. A. Marzano considers a different scale to previous chapters, through a focus on individuals more than broad trends. This proves effective, particularly in combination with the broader scales elsewhere in the volume. Marzano’s argument for the importance of ‘personal infrastructure’ is compelling, and one that should, as the author states, be considered alongside the physical and the legal infrastructure of Roman maritime commerce (p. 70). The discussion of the importance of information in maritime commerce and especially of the case of the Arretine potter, Sestius (p. 66), clearly highlights this network of organisational and personal connections, which allowed individuals to understand where profits could be made. The chapter effectively underlines the importance of personal connections and information in Roman maritime commerce and offers a compelling case for some level of economic rationalism within the Roman economy.

The complex nature of imperial oil distribution is the focus of Mataix Ferrándiz in Chapter 6. This contribution expands upon the distinctions between state and private exchange that are briefly mentioned in Chapter 5. A core point is the argument for the intertwined and inter-dependent nature of both state and private maritime commerce. Mataix Ferrándiz is convincing in highlighting that, while there may have been many private individuals involved at every stage of oil production and distribution in Baetica (pp. 78–9), state oversight can be seen at every stage. Importantly, this distribution, like much of Roman maritime commerce, changed significantly over time. Mataix Ferrándiz argues that the state (through the *ratio*) acted in a relatively limited capacity to protect private trade in earlier periods, but later developed to favour something resembling direct state control following the Severan reforms. This is convincing and offers a helpful alternative to the outdated primitivist/modernist debates.

In Chapter 7 G. Purpura analyses the documentation of bulk shipping. There is a move away from emphasising the complex nature of Roman maritime commerce compared to previous chapters, with considerable discussion of cabotage and ‘improvised itinerant trade’ as components of Roman maritime commerce (pp. 110–12). Purpura does not suggest that such forms of exchange would have been hugely significant, but it has long been argued that opportunistic trading is unlikely to represent anything more than a limited overall proportion of goods exchanged overseas. Nevertheless, this is generally a convincing contribution. In particular, the discussion of sampling jars/sacks (pp. 112–14) facilitating less coordinated and direct trade, albeit on a small scale, is interesting and novel. The point that there exists a significant quantity of detailed documentation for Roman maritime shipping is also one that is well made and important (pp. 109–10). There is a tendency to assume that most of these exchanges were conducted orally with no record, hence the traditional focus on a few relatively well-known documents, such as Diocletian’s infamous price

edict. The engagement with this less well studied evidence is compelling and represents an important contribution.

In Chapter 8 another specific and detailed case study is presented by É. Jakab, in this instance, the loans associated with the Sulpicii. As Jakab notes, there is nothing explicit stating that these loans were for maritime ventures, but Jakab is convincing in arguing that many of the loans must have been related to maritime commerce in some way. The discussion highlights several aspects of Roman maritime law, in particular the fact that ‘transmarine’ loans had higher interest rates (p. 140). This demonstrates the heightened risk associated with maritime commerce, clearly reflected in Roman law. The chapter is an excellent discussion of the complicated and intertwined nature of maritime and terrestrial commerce. Even when looking at the legal process for loans, the line between maritime and terrestrial commerce is often difficult to discern. This represents not only an interesting case study, but also an effective example of how to approach these complicated topics.

The complex nature of Roman commercial loans is further addressed in Chapter 9, with a detailed discussion of a specific transaction, by Candy. It is made clear through an investigation of the transaction between Menelaos and Primus that the role of individuals in commercial enterprises could be varied and may often be difficult to interpret. Candy offers an effective overview of previous hypotheses regarding the different agents’ roles in this transaction and is convincing in contending that Menelaos was a shipowner and merchant, while Primus was a general lender, but one with interests in trade (p. 179). This chapter offers an important example of how Roman maritime commerce manifested itself in practice and shines a light on the complex interconnected network of individuals with various roles and interests, something that is often only considered in the abstract.

The final chapter by R. Fiori offers a particularly in-depth discussion of Roman law. A key point is the fact that direct correlations between modern and ancient legal practices are unhelpful (p. 187). Whatever aspect of Roman law is being analysed, the important point is made that even Roman jurists struggled at times with disentangling the terminology. As such, modern scholars should be wary of treating Roman law as absolute or clear-cut. Indeed, the law changed over time, so, as Fiori argues, a multitude of sources and interdisciplinary approaches are necessary for any true understanding of Roman law.

Overall, the volume represents an important resource for any scholar investigating Roman law, maritime exchange or the ancient economy more broadly. Even with the diverse range of contributions, the volume works well as a cohesive whole, and each chapter clearly contributes towards a common goal of bringing a more interdisciplinary approach to these topics. The importance of maritime commerce in the Roman world and the complexity of understanding it is emphasised effectively throughout, and convincing and important developments in specific cases are argued for. The volume is somewhat light on the scholarship of quantitative and computational approaches to understanding maritime commerce and mobility, with the exception of Chapter 3, which discusses some of the more prominent current works. However, this does not detract from the values of the volume as a whole. Indeed, the volume represents a particularly useful resource for scholars engaged in and already familiar with the scholarship of modelling maritime commerce computationally. The book achieves its stated goals effectively and represents an important and impressive contribution to the scholarship of multiple fields within classical studies.

University of Edinburgh

ANDREW McLEAN
amclean6787@protonmail.com