

## TRADE

H. PARKINS, C. SMITH (edd.): *Trade, Traders and the Ancient City*. Pp. xiv + 268. figs. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Cased. ISBN: 0-415-16517-2.

In just eleven papers this volume covers an impressive range, both chronologically and contextually. 'Ancient' means the whole of the Greco-Roman world, with Amelie Kuhrt's piece on Old Assyrian merchants demonstrating from the outset that even this is not enough; and although trade and traders provide the central theme, the book is as much about the ancient economy as about trade itself. This applies not only to Helen Parkins's introductory paper and John Davies's closing, summative statement, both of which are naturally concerned with placing the contributions within the wider picture, but also, in terms of general awareness and frequent explicit reference, to the individual contributors. There is no dodging of the major issues, even if Keith Hopkins's 'academic battleground' has become (in Davies's word) more 'gentlemanly'. Hopkins and Finley, of course, are everywhere present in spirit, as are Hasebroek and Polanyi a little further in the background. Primitivists and modernists (and others) are still in the field, but shedding labels: models are still being offered, but the case studies that form three-quarters of the volume are now used as shared building blocks rather than brickbats. Some of the papers (most obviously Gocha Tsetskhladze's survey of Black Sea trade in the archaic and classical periods, Michael Whitby's study of the Athenian grain trade in the fourth century, and Ray Laurence's reassessment of the cost of land transport) involve a return to earlier controversies. Others (most strikingly, Kuhrt's paper, but also Richard Alston's analysis of trade patterns in Roman Egypt and Mark Humphries's linkage of trader activities with the spread of new religions) provide introductions to new and exciting areas of study.

In all this, in spite of its prominence in the title, the ancient city becomes somewhat ghostly and undefined: Athens, of course, figures prominently (in Whitby's paper, for example, and more generally Tsetskhladze's), but for the Romanists (Laurence, Jeremy Paterson, and Christopher Smith) it is Roman Italy and, in Paterson's case the Roman Empire rather than Rome which serves as the reference point. Alston in Egypt deals with villages as well as cities; and in the impressive flow-diagrams illustrating Davies's proposed overall model the dominating centre is the state (*polis*, *synteleia*, tribe, deme) rather than the city as such, and the secondary focus the *agora*, a term of convenience for a 'place of exchange', which is as much a concept as a single physical locality. As the editors acknowledge, the city is 'one part of the economic structure of the ancient world', and an illustration of the fact that 'the exchange of goods is inseparable from social and political factors'.

The main additional dimension to the debates in recent years has of course been the increasing body of archaeological material, and a number of the papers in the volume are archaeologically based. While there can be no doubt that the impact of archaeology has been generally positive, most obviously by providing detail which complements the textual evidence and refines and questions its conclusions, it would be fair to say that there are problems of interpretation and methodology which need to be recognized and which, at the moment, tend to complicate many of the issues rather than resolve them. Examples of this include Smith's reminder that the distribution of a particular artefact may indicate a travelling craftsman rather than trade, and Tsetskhladze's similar warning regarding what may be the evidence of tribute or gift exchange by Black Sea colonies. That there are still advances to be made from text-

based approaches is clear from (for example) Kuhrt's study of the relationship between Ashur and Kanesh, which operated over a distance of some 1200 km and (as she says) would not have been detectable from the material remains, and from Alston's use of papyrological evidence—though, interestingly, as he acknowledges, the techniques of evaluating such evidence (and in particular the place-name data) are not dissimilar from those required for archaeological distribution maps.

'[My] aim (says Tsjetskhladze) . . . has been to pose as many questions as possible, in order to show how far we are from satisfactorily answering them and how diverse the interpretation of the evidence. It is time, once again, to rethink our views of trade in the ancient world'. One could hardly have a better defining quotation for the collection as a whole. It is, after all, precisely by such complications and challenges that a discipline is enlivened and carried forward, and the editors are to be congratulated, both on identifying so timely a theme and on assembling and coordinating so stimulating a collection of papers.

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### AN UNQUIET GRAVE

W. CAVANAGH, C. MEE: *A Private Place: Death in Prehistoric Greece*. (Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 125.) Pp. xiv + 258, maps, figs. Jonsered: Paul Aström, 1998. Paper. ISBN: 91-7081-178-4.

The aim of this book is twofold: first, to provide a detailed overview of burial customs in prehistoric Greece, and second, to chart the growth of social complexity and its expression in mortuary ritual. The study covers the southern Aegean from the Palaeolithic to the end of the Bronze Age, although the focus is clearly on the Mycenaean period. The book is therefore both a reference tool and an attempt at interpretation, and is divided accordingly into two parts.

The first part presents the evidence by period and by tomb type in a systematic fashion. Each chapter is accompanied by a useful catalogue of sites with bibliographical references, while good distribution maps, as well as plans of several cemeteries and individual tombs, are given at the end of the book. However, in the chapters on the Mycenaean period, the organization of the material becomes rather cumbersome: the tomb architecture, the burial offerings, and the mortuary rites are discussed separately, and each one by grave type. The result is a thorough, but fragmented picture, where regional variation as well as differences between and within communities become obscured. Furthermore, it appears that a systematic statistical analysis has been undertaken only for a small part of this large body of data, namely for some of the larger chamber tomb cemeteries in the Argolid and Attica (the results of these analyses have already appeared in a series of articles by the same authors). In this way, and despite the thorough collection of the data, the analysis perpetuates the bias against small sites and peripheral areas. A quick examination of the catalogues of sites reveals some gaps, e.g. the chamber tomb in Velestino in Thessaly, the MH (or LHI?) cremation in pit 301 in Argos (sector d), the tombs in Troizen, and the new chamber tomb in Rhodes.

The section on ritual and performance in the second part aims 'to further our understanding of how ritual operated at given periods and how it came to change through time' (pp. 106–7). There are some very interesting insights into various aspects of the mortuary rites, but it is questionable whether the discussion succeeds in