TIMOTHY POWER, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate, AD 500–1000* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2012). Pp. 384. $34.50 cloth.

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Timothy Power's *Red Sea* is an engaging monograph in the tradition of the Annales School. Beyond its primary focus on the flow of the "India trade" through the Sea during the late antique and early Islamic eras, the study forwards a tight cluster of arguments concerning the ebb and flow of trade and a provocative two-pronged thesis arguing for the existence of a World System by the 10th century that in turn facilitates a mercantile rationale for sociopolitical transformations within the empires huddled around the Red Sea.

The study is well documented and systematically presented. Power composes a highly approachable and authoritative narrative by drawing upon a barrage of excavation reports, geological surveys, ceramic and pottery studies, and the writings of a host of Roman, Byzantine, and Arab authors. The analysis is predicated upon a series of site studies of the major ports and cities along the Sea and a few others, such as the ports of Aden and al-Shihr, which were major hubs for Red Sea trade, though they lie beyond its geographical boundaries. In each microstudy, Power summarizes the site's historical origins, enumerates the excavations carried out at that location, and provides a succinct discussion of the pottery and ceramics found there. This provides him with an opportunity to critically sift through inconsistencies in the material evidence and narrative sources as well as in the assessments of modern scholars. An appendix-like Gazetteer of Sites conveniently lists all the major locations addressed and provides tailored bibliographies for each.

Over the course of the study, the history of these sites—or trade networks—is consistently integrated into the historiography of the empires that claimed them. Power accomplishes this quite skillfully, often demonstrating the fiscal, political, and mercantile considerations that prompted change, whether it be the expansion or abandonment of these sites. Of particular significance are his discussions of the expansion of Darb Zubayda in the Hijaz (pp. 120–24) and the return of the "India trade" to Egypt by the late 9th century (Chap. 4). Scattered throughout the study, one also finds useful discussions of the Blemmes/Beja (esp. pp. 135–43) and developments in Islamic Egypt (pp. 91, 96–101, 208–209, 211). Most significant in that regard is Power's discussion of the Yemeni factions within ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAs' army and the possibility of Arabs sailing directly across the Red Sea to Aswan during the conquest, though that premise is hampered by a misdating of *Futuh al-Bahnasa* by several centuries. The mining of gold, silver, copper, and emeralds, along with trade in aromatics and slaves, figures prominently throughout the book. Silk and textiles are also discussed, though not to the same extent. In general, the discussion of the various mining ventures around the Sea and how they influenced the expanding slave trade under Islamic rule is well thought out and documented (pp. 132, 137–38, 150, 160–62).

With regard to the "India trade," Power argues that after a 3rd-century hiatus, it resumed in the mid-4th century, persisting until the early 6th century when it effectively ceased—long before the rise of Islam. Consequently, this decline in trade freed up manpower for the Arab conquests and later allowed for regional development of sorts in the form of a mining boom in the Hijaz and Yemen. By the early 9th century, Power argues, Arab mining ventures declined sharply on the eastern shores of the Sea as richer Nubian territories became accessible, and by the end of that century the southern Red Sea trade resumed; thus, China, India, the two halves of the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean came to share a common economic bond. Significantly, Power dates the return of the India trade to nearly a century before the Fatimids

conquered Egypt. Hence, the trade boom usually attributed to that dynasty is said to have had its origins under the Tulunids and Ikhshidites.

The volume draws upon several historiographical and theoretical models, but the results on that front are somewhat uneven, though consistently thought provoking. Chapter 3's utility of the "long" 8th century (685–830) is certainly the most effective discussion. It is well structured and persuasive, arguing for a fundamental shift in Red Sea trade and the expansion of mining operations at several locations in the Hijaz and Yemen at that juncture. The attempt to expand the parameters of Late Antiquity to include not just the Red Sea, but India and perhaps China as well (pp. 53–59), remains tentative and requires a more thorough discussion. Certainly, at least some of the religious and economic evidence marshaled in support of that thesis is open to interpretation.

The thesis arguing for the existence of a World System by the 10th century will also require a close reading (pp. 21, 38–39, 146, 189–222). There are two issues at play here: one is the scholarly literature pressed to that end, and another is the manner in which the study addresses the historiography of the premodern World System. While Power certainly demonstrates a solid understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of the World System model, there is an unfortunate lack of integration of Janet Abu Lughod's work. Time and again, *Red Sea* reaches conclusions that either reinforce or substantively add to those of Abu Lughod's *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) (along with her later publications on that topic).

The second issue also relates to the historiography of the World System, though, ultimately, the degree to which it is problematic will be in the eye of the beholder. The study does not provide a working definition of what it defines or envisions as the World System, taking for granted the multiplicity of challenges faced when applying that theoretical model to interpret the premodern world, and the diversity of academic approaches employed and conclusions reached in pursuit of that goal. Demonstrably, scholars who have interpreted premodern history through the lens of a World System framework, such as A. G. Frank and J. O. Voll, are far from uniform in their conception of the system or when it developed. Fundamental to these issues are older questions, such as whether mere trade—irrespective of power relations, the volume of traded goods, or the nature of the commodities exchanged—constitutes a World System. Such questions have long been divisive among academics, and will continue to influence how any particular scholar will assess this aspect of *Red Sea*. Still, I do not wish to downplay or devalue the utility of the World System framework in this study, some aspects of which the author readily identifies as tentative (e.g., p. 199). The framework does provide a big picture rationale for the rise of the Arabs as a regional power in the 7th century, the mining boom of the 8th century, and subsequent developments under the Fatimids. It also forces scholars to think beyond regional boundaries and sociopolitical factors in accounting for historical developments.

Red Sea is certainly worthy of high praise. It is an important contribution that will be welcomed by any scholar interested in the history of commerce, mining, and slavery, as well as that of any of the empires that surround the sea. It is an engaging work in regard to both its methodology and conclusions.

MEGAN H. REID, *Law and Piety in Medieval Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Pp. 264. $99.00 cloth, $79.00 e-book.

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