

Eivind Heldaas Seland

Ships of the Desert and Ships of the Sea

Palmyra in the World Trade
of the First Three Centuries CE

PHILIPPIKA

Altertumswissenschaftliche Abhandlungen

Contributions to the Study of Ancient World Cultures 101

Harrassowitz Verlag

PHILIPPIKA

Altertumswissenschaftliche Abhandlungen
Contributions to the Study
of Ancient World Cultures

Herausgegeben von / Edited by
Joachim Hengstl, Elizabeth Irwin,
Andrea Jördens, Torsten Mattern,
Robert Rollinger, Kai Ruffing, Orell Witthuhn

101

2016

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Eivind Heldaas Seland

Ships of the Desert and Ships of the Sea

Palmyra in the World Trade
of the First Three Centuries CE

2016

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Bis Band 60: Philippika. Marburger altertumskundliche Abhandlungen.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen
Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet
über <http://dnb.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet
at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

For further information about our publishing program consult our
website <http://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

© Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden 2016
This work, including all of its parts, is protected by copyright.
Any use beyond the limits of copyright law without the permission
of the publisher is forbidden and subject to penalty. This applies
particularly to reproductions, translations, microfilms and storage
and processing in electronic systems.
Printed on permanent/durable paper.
Printing and binding: Hubert & Co., Göttingen
Printed in Germany
ISSN 1613-5628
ISBN 978-3-447-10704-4
e-ISBN PDF 978-3-447-19575-1

To the inhabitants of Tadmur, Syria, with thanks for your hospitality and friendliness
during my visits in more peaceful times.

Contents

List of figures	IX
List of maps	XI
List of tables	XI
Preface	XIII
The caravan city	1
Previous scholarship	1
Sources	4
Theoretical approach: Networks, organisations and institutions	6
City, territory, and hinterland	9
Palmyra and Rome	12
Palmyra and Ctesiphon	13
Population and identity	14
Territory and hinterland: The Syrian Desert	15
Subsistence in the Syrian Desert	19
The city and the steppe.....	21
The bride of the desert	25
Palmyra in the ancient world exchange	27
Commodities	27
Archaeological evidence of trade.....	29
The tax law as evidence of long-distance trade	30
The <i>Periplus</i> and the trade of Palmyra.....	31
Places	34
Middle and Southern Mesopotamia	35
Palmyrene activities in the Persian Gulf and India	38
Southern Arabia and the Gulf of Aden	40
The Palmyrenes in Egypt and the Red Sea	41
The Palmyrenes in Rome	43
Routes and rythm	45
From Palmyra to Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf	45
From Palmyra to the Mediterranean and the Red Sea	52
In the Mediterranean	55
From the Indian Ocean to Egypt and Mesopotamia	55
From the Red Sea to the Mediterranean.....	57
Schedule of Palmyrene trade.....	59
Organisation and practicalities	63
The caravan	63
Animals	65
Security	68
Practicalities	70
Merchants and caravan leaders	71

VIII

Development of Palmyrene long-distance trade	75
Origins	75
Building networks	77
Forming ties	78
Trade	79
Religion/ideology	79
Civic life	81
Diplomacy and foreign service	82
Identities	83
Networks and the key to Palmyrene success	83
The end of Palmyrene trade	85
Ships of the desert and ships of the sea	89
Concordance of epigraphic texts	91
Abbreviations	93
Bibliography	95
General index	107
Index of sources	111

List of figures

- Fig. 1: Traditional goats'-hair tent, west of Palmyra 2004. Photo courtesy of Jørgen Christian Meyer ©.
- Fig. 2: Palmyrene officer with his camel, third century CE monumental base (Palmyra Museum 2093/7431). Photo courtesy of Jørgen Christian Meyer ©.
- Fig. 3: Milking the goats, Jebel Abyat north of Palmyra 2007. Photo courtesy of Nils Anfinset ©.
- Fig. 4: Western end of the Collonaded Street, Palmyra, towards the medieval Qaalat Ibn Maan 2008. Every console probably supported a bronze statue. Photo courtesy of Jørgen Christian Meyer ©.
- Fig. 5: Mosaic from Deir al-Adas, Syria. Displayed in the theatre in Bosra until the start of the Syrian civil war. Photo courtesy of Jørgen Christian Meyer ©.
- Fig. 6: *Kelek* on the Tigris, relief from Niniveh, seventh century BCE. After Place, Victor (1867). *Ninive et l'Assyrie*, vol. 3, Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1867, pl. 43. Photo © Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.
- Fig. 7: *Kelek* on the Tigris, nineteenth century. After Place, Victor (1867). *Ninive et l'Assyrie*, vol. 3, Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, pl. 44a. Photo © Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.
- Fig. 8: Detail from Rennel, James (1831), Map accompanying *Treatise on the Comparative Geography of Western Asia*. London: Rivington. Public domain.
- Fig. 9: Boat being towed upstreams on the lower Euphrates, Early 20th century. After Naval Intelligence Division. (1944). *Iraq and the Persian Gulf* [London]: Naval Intelligence Division, facing p. 558. Public domain.
- Fig. 10: Annual cycle of Palmyrene trade. © Eivind Heldaas Seland.
- Fig. 11: Relief from Petra, Jordan. Photo © Eivind Heldaas Seland.
- Fig. 12: Grafitto from Dura Europos, reproduced from Rostovtzeff, M. (1932). *Caravan Cities*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 212. Public domain.
- Fig. 13: Caravan near Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, 1918. Photo American Colony/US Library of Congress. Public domain.
- Fig. 14: Monumental base showing Palmyrene nobleman with a ship on his left side and a camel (only legs and rein preserved) on the left. Palmyra museum A24/1226 Photos courtesy of Jørgen Christian Meyer ©.

List of maps

- Map 1: Syria and Mesopotamia in the Roman Period.
Map 2: The archaeological site of Palmyra (© K. Schnädelbach).
Map 3: Drainage in the Syrian Desert. After Wirth, 1971, pp. 63–64.
Map 4: Palmyrene inscriptions in the Syrian Desert.
Map 5: Syrian Desert and surrounding regions.
Map 6: Modern period Bedouin pastures, Palmyrene and Safaitic inscriptions. Pastures after Raswan, 1930; Wirth, 1971.
Map 7: Hydrological features between Palmyra and Hit. Data compiled by Jørgen Christian Meyer and Eivind Heldaas Seland.
Map 8: Palmyrene inscriptions in the eastern Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.
Map 9: Proposed routes between Palmyra and Hit.

All maps except map 2 by Eivind Heldaas Seland ©. Basemaps except map 2 © ESRI 2014/2015.

List of tables

- Table 1: Timetable of premodern Indian Ocean navigation.
Table 2: Activities commemorated in Palmyrene inscriptions abroad.

