

**Economies of the Edge**  
**Frontier Zone Processes at Regional, Imperial, and Global Scales**  
**(300 BCE – 300 CE)**  
19<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> September 2019

Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> September

**Introduction**

13:00 – 13:30

**Political Power and Economies I**

13:30 – 15:00

Chair: Eli Weaverdyck

Mark Altaweel (University College London)

**Revolutionizing a World: From Small States to Universalism in the Pre-Islamic Near East**

Historians have often considered the period from the mid- to late first millennium BCE and through the early first millennium CE as an Axial Age or period of increased ‘globalization.’ While it is true *transformative* social changes occurred during this time, in the Near East there were also key drivers that shaped some of these changes. In particular, movement and population migration across wide areas began to reconfigure settlement structures and systems that shaped how and where people lived. Societies began to develop new social constructs that accommodated population change. For the Near East, the process that emerged could be better termed as ‘universalism,’ as it allowed social groups to forge new economic, political, religious, and other social identities that allowed new and larger states to emerge. The process of movement can be measured using settlement surveys. At the urban scale, cities began to display new physical and social structures in which populations integrated more closely. The creation of larger and cohesive states played a key role in redefining the Near East, while it also led to unprecedented economic growth but also likely greater social and economic inequality. Effects on the economy included not only central regions within larger states but peripheral regions began to incorporate aspects of universalism that made distant regions socially cohesive even after the fall of large states. Changes to the economy helped incentivise the emergence and continuity of large states that became the norm in the Near East from the first millennium BCE.

K. Rajan (Pondicherry University)

**Emergence of Empires and Economies: Experiencing Early Historic South India**

The emergence of political organizations such as Cheras, Cholas, Pandyas and Satyaputas in the southernmost part of India as quoted in Asokan edicts is not due to the consolidation of political power by a particular clan-based society, rather, it is the control of natural resources and optimum utilization of these resources in a commercially exploitable manner through adaptation of required technology. The technologies adopted in the field of iron, steel, gemstone, textile, pearl, glass, boat building and many other such industries transformed the consumption level of the society. The well-laid trade routes moved the material from production centers to consumption centers through internal trade networks. The available material and inscriptional evidence in the West, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asian countries clearly indicates the existence of well-established international ports of call both on the

Malabar coast and Coromandel coast. The occurrences of high-tin bronze and semi-precious stones such as carnelian and agate collected from the Iron Age megalithic monuments before the advent of the Early Historic period suggest that the internal trade interactions were created well before the sixth century BCE. The discovery of more than a thousand archaeological sites in Tamil Nadu and the recent excavations conducted at Thandikudi, Porunthal, Kodumanal, Kiladi, Alagankulam and Pattanam clearly point to the existence of terrestrial and transoceanic trade. The transformation of writing system from graffiti to Brahmi and the occurrences of Prakrit-Brahmi, Tamil-Brahmi and Prakrit-Brahmi with Sri Lankan affinity, PMC, NBP, TGP, Torpedo jar, Amphorae jar, terra sigillata, rouletted ware, Indo-Pacific beads, pre-Roman, Roman coins and personal names of North Indian origin, trader names, trade guilds and many Jain beds with Brahmi inscriptions sponsored by traders clearly suggest their cultural and commercial amalgamation. The radiometric dates obtained for the inscribed potsherds from Anuradhapura, Tissamaharama, Porunthal and Kodumanal clearly indicate that the integration of the trade happened around sixth century BCE and the maritime trade integrated the entire ocean rim countries extending from the African coast to Southeast Asian coast. The favourable commercial atmosphere, growth of economy and socio-political system supported with Buddhist-Jain philosophy paved a way for the emergence of empires around the third century BCE in south India.

## Coffee break

15:00 – 15:45

## Political Power and Economies II

15:45 – 18:00

Chair: Kathrin Leese-Messing

Maxim Korolkov (Heidelberg University)

### **The Southern Contact Zone, Empire Building, and Economic Change in the Eastern Zhou, Qin, and Han Eras (ca. 500 BCE – 300 CE)**

Discussions about frontier zones with regard to ancient China and its involvement in the Eurasian world tend to focus on the northwestern and northern borders of the ancient Chinese empires. Excavated textual material from the Qianling County archive (modern Liye) suggests, however, that a *longue durée* perspective on the "Chinese" polities' engagement in the south is a particularly promising approach to understanding Chinese empires, economic change, and state building and interaction with the societies at and beyond the frontiers. The paper will therefore focus on the long-distance exchange connections along the southern frontier of the late Warring States Zhou world and the Qin and Han empires. It will pay special attention to the basins of the great Hunan rivers to the south of the Middle Yangzi as a zone of interaction, cultural synthesis, and economic change.

Anthony Barbieri-Low (University of California at Santa Barbara)

### **Egyptian and Chinese Client-State Empires in the Levant and Central Asia**

This paper is a comparative-historical exploration of the client-state empires established in Central Asia by the Han Dynasty of China (202 BCE – 220 CE) and in the Levant by the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (1549 – 1292 BCE) of the New Kingdom of Egypt. Each dynasty originally conquered far-flung territories to serve as a military buffer, but these possessions also helped secure conduits for tributary import of luxury goods (jade from Hetian, cedar from Lebanon) as well as gift and trade export of other products and metropolitan culture in general. In both cases, the most distant territories were controlled

through a system of client states, rather than through colonization or direct military occupation. Marriage alliances, diplomatic correspondence, and tribute missions were a key part of maintaining this system. When the client-state system eventually collapsed in both areas, this had diverse effects on the flow of luxury goods and other products in both directions.

Shailendra Bhandare (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)

**Money in Liminal Times: Coin Circulation at the End of the Indo-Greek Kingdom**

The very last of the Indo-Greek Kings ruled in a small corner of the Punjab around the beginning of the Common Era. In recent times, a lot of new numismatic evidence has been made available to reconstruct the processes that led to the final demise of this kingdom. The paper will present an overview of these discoveries and discuss how the evidence has helped us to understand this period, which is characterised by complex political shifts and interfaces involving a multiplicity of rulers and dynasties. It will further problematize the discussion by bringing attention to some interesting details and features which previous scholarship has missed.

Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> September

**Nodes: Ports and Border Markets I**

9:00 – 10:30

Chair: Milinda Hoo

Miguel John Versluys (Leiden University)

**Network Power? Object Flows and Innovation in Hellenistic Eurasia**

From around 300 BCE onwards, Eurasia seems to witness an unprecedented intensification of connectivity, and the Hellenistic period is indeed pivotal in terms of expanded geographies and heightened cultural interconnectedness. With that come dramatic changes as well as enduring innovations in all domains of society.

In my lecture I will investigate the relation between this increasing connectivity and innovation, and thereby focus on objects and the changes objects are able to bring about, from the economy to their impact on social imaginaries.

Through the intensification of connectivity characterising the period, Hellenistic Eurasia was transformed into a 'global network' stretching from the Atlantic in the West to India and China in the East. The real globetrotters of this network were objects. I will analyse and compare two localities from this Hellenistic network that stand out in terms of innovation, Alexandria and Samosata, and investigate why they were so successful in this respect. It will show that the strategic position of these localities in the global network plays an important role with explaining their innovative potential. We often tend to put imperial power at the heart of our explanatory models for the Hellenistic world; but what about the power of the network and its flows of objects?

Sören Stark (ISAW, New York University)

**Between Desert and Oasis: Border Markets and their Role in Economic Networks in Southwestern Central Asia**

Broad macro-regional discussions of economic phenomena and trends in pre-modern Central Asia occasionally tend to oversimplify micro-regional realities on the ground. This paper offers, therefore, a decidedly micro-regional perspective on economic networks across southwestern Central Asia, focusing on the Bukhara oasis between Choresmia, the lower and middle Syr-Darya, Samarkand and Nakhshab, and the middle Amu-Darya. As I hope to show, it was often in the border zones of the oasis where commercial hot-spots and even specialized production centers developed. These border markets and associated production centers not only connected Bukhara (and other river oases) with neighboring micro-regions, but they also served as nodes within wider trans-regional economic networks spanning across Central Asia and beyond.

## **Coffee break**

10:30 – 11:15

## **Nodes: Ports and Border Markets II**

11:15 – 12:45

Chair: Lara Fabian

Stefan Hauser (University of Konstanz)

### **The Arsacid Center of Trade: Charax Spasinou, Capital of Mesene**

The city of Charax Spasinou was a major trading center of the Arsacid Empire. Located near the head of the Persian Gulf, it was the primary port of entry for sea-borne goods from India destined for the imperial court at Ctesiphon, the Elymais and for places further afield such as Palmyra and the Mediterranean. Originally founded by Alexander the Great, the time of its greatest prosperity was from the late second century BCE through to the third century CE. Its extensive ruins were identified in 1965, but until 2016 it had never been subjected to archaeological exploration. This lecture summarizes the work carried out by the current Charax Spasinou Project. It will show that much of the ancient city is in fact still extant, with considerable potential for future investigation of long-distance trade in antiquity and of the political history of the wider region.

Steven E. Sidebotham (University of Delaware) and Marianne Bergmann (University of Göttingen)

### **Sculptural Finds as a Reflection of the Cosmopolitan Life at Berenike: A Ptolemaic-Roman Port on the Red Sea Coast of Egypt**

Study of the sculpture (relief and in the round, made of stone, bronze, terracotta, faience and wood) documented from excavations at the Ptolemaic-Roman (third century BCE – mid-sixth century CE) emporium of Berenike on Egypt's Red Sea coast between 1994 and 2019 is one method for examining the religious beliefs and customs of the city's inhabitants.

While most of the sculptural finds from Berenike reflect traditional Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Roman proclivities, other examples are more "exotic" and document the presence of those living at the port who originated from South Asia, Arabia, including South Arabia, and the Kingdom of Meroë, a Kushite polity in what is today Sudan, which ruled from the fourth century BCE to the fourth century CE.

Examination of the sculptural artifacts offers supplementary data about the cosmopolitan nature of the port's inhabitants. That some of the "exotic" statuary is made from local stone suggests that those

“foreigners” living at Berenike made them or, in at least one case, had them made on the spot by others based on descriptions or drawings they supplied.

Our study complements the analysis of other types of finds documented from our excavations, such as ceramics, botanical and faunal remains, textiles, and numismatic and epigraphic evidence (including inscriptions on stone, wood, plaster, on ostraca and papyri), that also provide evidence for the diversity of religions, ethnicities and languages among Berenike’s inhabitants especially during the five and a half centuries of the Common Era.

## **Lunch break**

12:45 – 14:00

### **Links: People in Motion I**

14:00 – 15:30

Chair: Sitta von Reden

Paul Kosmin (Harvard University)

#### **Trading Values: The Southern Sea as Merchant Space**

This paper will explore how the opening of Indian Ocean trade to Ptolemaic Egypt generated a moral landscape distinctively different to that of the Mediterranean coastlands. In three modes I will discuss how a littoral world of traders was constituted and culturally processed. First, I will argue that Hellenistic ethnographies (Agatharchides, in particular) constructed – out of the several shores of the Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean – a circumscribed, unitary space appropriate for, not conquest, but economic exploitation. Second, how the practice of transoceanic trade, and the social knowledge that derived from this practice, generated and circulated narratives of “first crossings”; these accounts privileged, not kings or conquerors, but merchants engaged in inter-cultural encounters. Third, I will use epigraphic documentation, particularly the graffiti from Hoq cave, Socotra, to suggest the emergence of a common, cosmopolitan, transoceanic trading identity within the wider Indian Ocean space.

Federico de Romanis (Tor Vergata University of Rome)

#### ***Translata Pecunia*: The Use of Roman Coins on the Other Side of the Indian Ocean**

It has often been repeated that Roman coinage was exported to India in response to Nero’s monetary reform (which undervalued the earlier Julio-Claudian aurei and denarii) and was considered just bullion on the subcontinent. Literary, epigraphical, and archaeological evidence suggests a more nuanced picture. Roman coins began to be exported to India earlier than Nero’s reform and most of the time were not melted down to reuse the gold or silver. Some were used as pendants and were likely credited with auspicious virtues, as their terracotta imitations suggest, but most functioned as currency across a large swath of the subcontinent. In Nahapāna’s kingdom (parts of modern Maharashtra and Gujarat) sometime between 40 and 70 CE, Roman coins were given an official value in terms of local coins. At about the same time at Barygaza (Bharuch, Nahapāna’s main transoceanic emporium), Western merchants could exchange their aurei and denarii for local coinage at some profit, which shows that the value assigned to the Roman coinage did not exactly correspond to the value of its metallic content. At Nagarjunakonda (Andhra Pradesh), capitals in aurei were lent to guilds in order to generate revenue for religious institutions. The preference for Roman coins (and especially

for Roman gold coins) explains why some Indian kings specifically recorded their donations of these coins, either as charity to the most prestigious institutions or as a sacrificial fee for the most important sacrifices.

## **Coffee break**

15:30 – 16:15

## **Links: People in Motion II**

16:15 – 17:00

Chair: Razieh Taasob

Eivind Heldaas Seland (University of Bergen)

### **Water, Climate and Connectivity in the Roman-Period Syrian Desert**

The dynamic balance between environmental and human agency has been at the heart of any discussion of Eurasian long-distance connectivity since Huntington's *The Pulse of Asia* (1907). To what extent were routes created by explorers, traders and empires, and to what extent were they determined by topography and climate? In my paper I address this question on the basis of a model of water availability in the Syrian Desert. In arid zones water availability is to a large degree determined by topography, which has changed but little in historical times. Drawing on twentieth-century maps and satellite imagery, 1708 wells, springs, and reservoirs in the Syrian Desert were mounted in a GIS. Even if not necessarily accurately reflecting ancient water availability, the data provide a good basis for comparison between archaeological structures, water sources, modern and historically attested routes, and theoretical cost paths.

## **Disciplinary Round Tables**

17:00 – 18:00

Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> September

## **Centers and Peripheries**

9:30 – 11:00

Chair: Mamta Dwivedi

Andrew Bauer (Stanford University)

### **(Re)placing the 'Hinterland': Perspectives on Empire and Indian Ocean Trade from the Early Historic Interior Deccan**

This paper takes as a point of departure an understanding of 'hinterlands' or 'frontiers' as relational constructs that are generated through both material and imaginative modes of spatial production that simultaneously create 'non-hinterland' and 'non-frontier' places. In this paper I will assess some of the practices—such as textile production, mining activities, and exchange relationships—that produced places of the Southern Deccan region as expansive sources of trade goods while also creating coastal ports as concentrated centers of exotic materials and objects during the Early Historic Period. Although historical sources suggest that some parts of the interior Deccan were imagined as desolate and sparsely inhabited locations—"vast places with no proper roads at all"—from which coastal trading ports acquired goods, I will critique the notion that the interior Deccan was mere periphery or

hinterland to a widening zone of coastal commerce that was centered around port towns, offering instead an analysis centered on interior places.

Luca M. Olivieri (ISMEO Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan)

### **Double-Crop Pocket Zones and Empires: The Case of Swat**

Double-crop pocket zones remain important agro-economic resource pools in South Asia today. In ancient times, the potential surplus of food resources produced in these zones made them strategically crucial for empires, regardless of their geographical marginality. From an archaeological perspective, one of the best-studied double-crop zones of the Hindukush piedmont is the Swat valley. Analysis of the Swat valley and its resources in the framework of macro-regional political entities sheds light on economic and strategic relationships between high valleys and plains, and the interdependence of centers and peripheries. In this context, the foundation of early urban centers in Swat can possibly be understood as the formalisation of centers of control for the collection of food resources and maybe even taxes, functioning in some respect as colonies supporting the life and economy of the major urban trade centers on the Gandharan/Indus plain from 300 BCE to 300 CE.

### **Coffee break**

11:00 – 11:30

### **Inter-imperial Exchange I**

11:30 – 12:30

Chair: Razieh Taasob

Marek Olbrycht (University of Rzeszów)

### **The Parthian Empire and the Long-Distance Trade in the Caspian Basin**

In antiquity the basin of the Caspian Sea commanded a key position in political and commercial affairs between Western Asia, Central Asia, and Europe. It was a region impacted by diverse civilizations, a setting for the mutual encounter of many state entities and tribes. Caucasian, Anatolian, and, in a sense, Roman political and economic influences reached it from the west; Parthian Iranian influences came from the south; and from the north and northeast it was impacted by the powerful peoples of the steppes and partially also by the inhabitants of the forest zone of modern Russia. Trade routes connecting the Roman-dominated Mediterranean, Parthian Iran, Han China, and the peoples of Sarmatia met and crossed in the Caspian Basin. A period of intensive long-distance trading started in the second century BCE and continued until the beginning of the third century CE. The basin of the Caspian Sea lay at the very center of the great Asian system of mountains, and many rivers—the Volga and the Ural in Sarmatia, the Kyros-Araxes in Caucasia, the Amu Darya-Uzboi from the Bactrian and Trans-Caspian plains, and the rivers of northern Iran—drained their waters into the Caspian. The great waterways and the mountain passes were factors favouring the establishment and thriving of long-distance trade routes. In my article I am going to focus on the international trade in the vast region of the Caspian Basin, between Parthian Iran, the Lower Volga and South Ural regions, Caucasia, Chorasmia, and the Amu Darya Basin.

### **Lunch break**

12:30 – 14:00

## **Inter-imperial Exchange II**

14:00 – 15:30

Chair: Lauren Morris

Joe Cribb (British Museum)

### **The Sino-Kharoshthi Coinage of Khotan: Cultural and Political Links between Gandhara and Xinjiang, First to Second Century CE**

The Sino-Kharoshthi coinage of ancient Khotan provides the earliest tangible evidence of the connections between the Indian cultures of northwest South Asia and the Chinese dominated city states of Xinjiang. Since their discovery in the 1870s, various attempts have been made to date and understand this coinage. Dates from the second century BCE to the third century CE have been proposed for the series, but the links between these coins and those issued in Gandhara and Bactria in the first to second century CE provide firm evidence for their dating. The flow of cultural, political and religious ideas from Gandhara into Xinjiang is well attested by later Kharoshthi and Brahmi documents and Buddhist monuments and art found at the city sites of Xinjiang. The denomination system and designs of the coins show an attempt to integrate the coinage systems of the Kushan and Han dynasties in a place where contemporary histories show political and military interactions between these states. The finds of Kushan coins at Khotan also illustrate these texts in a tangible way.

Armin Selbitschka (Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich)

### **Versus the Silk Trade Myth: The Movement of Luxury Goods in China and Chinese Central Asia (Third Century BCE to Third Century CE)**

The vast majority of traditional accounts of the so-called early Silk Road(s) claim that Chinese imperial governments, in particular that of the Western Han dynasty (206 BCE – 9 CE), not only had an active hand but a vested interest in silk trade. Basing my analysis on archaeological sources rather than received literature, I will show that the movement of silk and other luxury goods of the time such as lacquerware and gold ornaments changed hands mainly through different channels. For instance, various kinds of silk cloths were largely redistributed by pastoralist groups located north and northwest of the Chinese Central Plain (*zhongyuan* 中原). In contrast to smaller and politically somewhat insignificant polities in the Central Asian Tarim Basin in modern-day Xinjiang, different nomadic people were powerful enough to extort incredible amounts of textiles and foodstuff from the courts of the Western and Eastern Han (23 – 220 CE) dynasties. On the one hand, the former were used to establish and maintain internal hierarchies; on the other hand, they were traded and/or bartered with people in the Tarim Basin and Western Asia. I will also explore the channels through which gold ornaments from the northern steppes found their way into the hands of Han Chinese nobles. Initial research on this issue indicates that contacts with the mighty pastoralists carried tremendous weight for members of the early imperial courts, even though contemporaneous Chinese transmitted sources are nothing but dismissive of these so-called “barbarians.”

## **Discussion and Volume Planning**

15:30 – 16:00