

The Impact of Rivers on Ancient Economies – An Introduction

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The increased interest in the mutual constitution of socio-cultural and physical spaces has led to watercourses becoming more prominent as a formative factor of cultural systems.¹ Landscapes shaped by rivers provide characteristics and specific conditions, which have a great impact on the economic life of people living in fluvial contexts. On the one hand, rivers are interregional connecting arteries, for example by offering suitable ways of distributing cargos (rivers as connecting links). On the other hand, they also mark borders by separating the areas on either side of their banks and might obstruct the crossing at low or high water (rivers as barriers²). Both qualities make them elements of a ‘geography of power’ in empires such as the Roman.³ On a regional level, the different conditions of a river – i.e. seasonal (flooding, low water, icing, etc.) and long-term effects (changing river courses, sedimentation etc.) but also altering possibilities of exploitation – force people to live in close relationship with the watercourse. Rivers are an important natural resource and provide specific chances for economic activities. The concentration on the distribution of commodities via rivers has long been of particular interest to archaeological research on rivers.⁴ The silting up of rivers was a constant cause of concern in many cities.⁵ There is therefore a constant interaction between the economic habits of a society and the river landscapes, which offer different possibilities for economic lifestyles. The river is appropriated by people, but at the same time it constitutes their experiences.

With seven contributions our panel aimed to describe rivers as dynamic factors of ancient communities and their economies. Especially geo-archaeological research has led to a better understanding of the complex effects of rivers on social communities. Significant geomorphic changes of river-landscapes have been proven at many sites.⁶ H. Brückner demonstrated this in his lecture about the Maiandros river. Further case studies from both the Black Sea and the Mediterranean focused on various functions of rivers. The role of rivers as transport routes within long-distance trade links depends strongly on the economic habits of the societies living along the river, as discussed in S. Huy’s article on the Don. Taking the same example as a starting point, B. Weissova explores the methodological challenges of reconstructing overland- and river-routes by GIS based analysis. The contributions of S. Paltineri, F. Wiel-Marin, M. Robino and P. Pasięka focus on the impact of rivers on economic development in Etruria from the Archaic to the Classical periods and in the Roman Empire. The long-term change of the settlement pattern due to the fluvial connection of the coast with the hinterland is illustrated in the paper by A. Sebastiani on the Ombrone valley. Using the Danube as an example, Ch. Rummel examined the risks and opportunities resulting from anthropo-

genic changes in river landscapes. A. Dan's contribution concentrated on the discovery and exploitation of food from rivers.

These different approaches to the role of rivers as economic factors touch on questions of the development of settlement structures, infrastructural interventions such as the canalisation of river courses or the construction of harbours, but also on the use of resources and possibilities for connectivity. The panel's diverse contributions thus show a broad and complex panorama of the economic power that rivers can unfold in their region.

Presentations Given in Panel 2.2 (23 May 2018)

- Sabine Huy, *The Economy of the Don River Communities. Driven by the River or by Land Routes?*
- Helmut Brückner, *Life Cycles of Islands and Harbours. The Case Study of the Maiandros River and the City of Miletos*
- Silvia Paltineri – Mirella T. A. Robino – Federica Wiel-Marin, *Flüsse als Wirtschaftsfaktor. Der Handel zwischen Etruskern, Griechen und Venetern im 6. und 5. Jh. v. Chr.*
- Christoph Rummel, *Taming Nature. Riverine Connectivity in the Middle Danube Region*
- Paul Pasiëka, *Südetrurien und seine Flüsse. Beobachtungen zur wirtschaftlichen und infrastrukturellen Erschließung in der römischen Kaiserzeit*
- Alessandro Sebastiani, *The River Ombrone Valley: Connecting Economies during the Roman Period*
- Anca Dan, *Milesian Landscape Transfer: the Salted Fish, from Egypt to the Black Sea*

Notes

¹ Tvedt 2005–2016.

² Marzolff 1994.

³ Purcell 2012; cp. also Campbell 2012.

⁴ cf., for example: Ljubičev et al. 2012, 162–163.

⁵ Kirbihler 2018.

⁶ cf., among others, Fushöller 1991 (Medjerda/Tunisia); Bintliff 1991 (Menderes and Dümrek/Troia); Müllenhoff 2005; Brückner et al. 2006 (Maiandros valley); Giaime et al. 2016 (Kuban-Bosphorus).

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