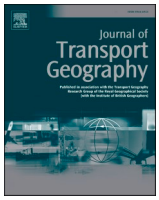
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Book review

Les vaisseaux du désert et des steppes: les camélidés dans l'Antiquité (*Camelus dromedarius* et *Camelus bactrianus*), The vessels of the desert and the steppes: camelids in Antiquity (*Camelus dromedarius* and *Camelus bactrianus*) by Damien Agut-Labordère and Bérangère Redon (Eds.). 2020. Lyon: MOM Éditions, 292 pp. £17.68/€19.99 (eBook). ISBN: 9782356681768.

In the pandemic, we notice better that mobility is fundamental to economic and social activities, and to move from a point to another the humanity needs transport systems; today, these transport systems are complex, being composed by infrastructures, modes and terminals. But things were not always so complex, having a beginning as in any other field. The book reviewed here takes the reader to the beginning of the field of transport, respectively, to the family of camelids, animals used for transport since ancient times, firstly and carefully described by Aristotle. Although there are scientific articles or book chapters that study the role of camelids in human activity, this book is one of the few dedicated entirely to them.

It may seem surprising that a book with a historical profile may be of interest to transport geographers, but these animals deserve to be studied more closely, given their impact on the development of transport and trade, without which today's world would certainly have looked different. Even today, the role of camelids in transport is important both locally and through the caravans that cross the deserts, or through camel trekking, a popular tourism activity. The idea of reviewing this book came after reading an article on the similar role of the container: if "the container has a major role in globalization" (Guerrero and Rodrigue 2014), it can be stated that camelids also played an important role at least at the beginning of shaping the field of transport.

"The role played by the dromedary, like the camel, in increasing connectivity within the ancient worlds is illustrated by the fact that each of these two animals is associated with a long ancient travel route." (p. 13). Thus, the image of the dromedary is linked to the "Incense Route" which unites southern Arabia with the Middle East and Mesopotamia; the image of the camel is linked to the immense "Silk Road" which crosses Asia and Europe for thousands of kilometers, in the desert sectors of Central Asia camel having a central role in the transport of goods and people. Without "their role closer to that of the high seas, thus justifying their Arabic nickname 'desert ship' (*safīnat as-Saḥrâ*'), (…) the great arid deserts of the old continent would have remained empty of people; (…) The Sahara today is not an Australian desert, without wells, without place names and without nomads" (p. 15).

The purpose of this book is "to erase or, at the very least, to level the time of reading this volume the academic barriers that separate the different disciplines present here" (p. 18). The public to which this work is addressed is not mentioned, so we can interpret that it is about researchers and students: "Thanks to the variety and richness of the articles it contains, this volume will not only be a collection of useful research data but also a source of inspiration for the future of ancient camel studies." (p. 19). The goal of providing inspiration can be considered fulfilled, and the scientific contribution is valid; the book is also useful for specialists in fields other than history, or for the general public, because it contains interesting information, such as zoology, historical, and geographical clarifications.

Having originated two scientific meetings in 2016 (Lyon) and 2017 (Nanterre), the book consists of 17 articles of varying sizes (between 5 and 36 pages each), written in English and French, mostly realized by historians, except the last two articles, written by a zootechnician, a biochemist, and an anthropologist. The initial intention, according to the editors, was only the historical study of dromedaries (a species introduced to North Africa in the first millennium BC), but then it proved necessary to extend the study in time and space to the Bactrian camel in Central Asia, the first domesticated species in the family of camelids (4th millennium BC). The book therefore does not include the recent introduction of camelids on other continents or as pets nowadays, aspects that could be the subject of another book.

Although it is an edited book, with many articles and many authors, the book gives the impression of a unitary study. Thus, after a useful introductory article, it follows an overview of the history of the Bactrian camel as early as the 4th millennium BC in Central Asia and on the Iranian plateau; the historical route is then traced to the Mesopotamian plain and the city of Sumer at the end of the 3rd millennium BC and in the cuneiform documentation of the 2nd and 1st millennium BC. Also are studied the presence of camelids in biblical sources and in the wildlife remains, the first mentions of the dromedary in the written documentation of the Egyptian deserts, the breeding of the dromedaries by "Desert Arabs"; other articles contain archaeozoological analyzes of the roads leading from the Nile Valley to the Red Sea, the iconography offered by the Roman-era terracotta figurines, an epigraphic and archaeological documentation from the east coast of Arabia, a portrait of camel breeding methods and uses in the Middle East during Late Antiquity. At the end of the book are two useful articles for those interested in the current situation of the Bactrian camel: the breeding of this animal fundamental to the local pastoral economy is subject to political and economic difficulties.

The text is easy to read, the existence of images (contemporary photographs of camelids, images with ancient representations, maps) facilitating the reading; one problem that needs to be pointed out is that most of the maps in the book, some very useful to geographers, have an almost illegible text, which practically makes them difficult to read. Despite these observations, the book's contribution to the scientific literature in this field is important, making it a good and useful read for anyone who wants to know more about the fundamental role of camelids in the beginnings of trade and transport.

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CamaraGabriel Camară[*]

Department of Geography, Faculty of Geography and Geology, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, Bd. Carol I, 20A, 700506 Iași, Romania

[*] Corresponding author.
E-mail address: gabriel_camara@yahoo.fr.