

present

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The **WORLD** of the **PERIPLUS MARIS ERYTHRAEI**

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ABSTRACT

The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* is an anonymous, Greek-language guide to trade and navigation in the Indian Ocean in the first century CE. It outlines how to sail, what to buy, what to sell, and how to relate to local rulers, from Egypt in the west to the Malay Peninsula in the East.

The *Periplus* is justly famous for being an eyewitness account of early Indian Ocean trade, and has been subject to numerous studies. Its extensive influence on scholarship has, however, also been criticised, as it remains the work of a single person with limited knowledge and cultural bias, and arguably this might have led scholars to overemphasise so-called western or Roman participation in early Indian Ocean trade.

How did people, places and objects of the past interact in order to constitute networks? How can such networks be traced beneath the superficial narratives of the textual sources and the isolated points of the archaeological distribution maps we work with? These questions go to the heart of the methodological challenges archaeologists and historians struggle with when trying to address dynamic, but long finished processes from static data sources.

In this lecture, I employ methodologies and software from Network Analysis to map, visualize and measure interconnectedness in the *Periplus Maris Erythraei*. Many of the

connections emerging from the analysis are not explicitly mentioned in the text, but by connecting not only ports with ports, but also products with ports that export and import them, a different impression of Indian Ocean trade from that conventionally gathered from the *Periplus* arises. From an empirical point of view it allows us to ask questions about the relationship between coastal cabotage and transoceanic shipping, to identify regional trading circuits, and to identify unexpected centres of long-distance exchange. From a methodological point of view, it shows a possible way to combine textual and artefactual data in order to reconstruct social associations.

BIOGRAPHY

Eivind Heldaas Seland (born 1975) works at the University of Bergen, Norway, as principal investigator at the project *Networks in the Roman Near East* (2013-2016). Seland specializes in ancient history and global history, with emphasis on the Near East and the Indian Ocean in the pre-Islamic period. His research interest is in the interaction between commercial, political and ideological institutions in early complex societies.

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