

Susanne Froehlich, *Stadttor und Stadteingang. Zur Alltags- und Kulturgeschichte der Stadt in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, (Studien zur Alten Geschichte – 32), Verlag Antike, Göttingen 2022, 463 pp. + 38 ill. + 2 maps; ISBN 978-3-949189-18-0

The main gate within the city walls is usually seen as a symbol of the city, standing out from its surroundings by virtue of its size and architecture. The main gate was a point where rulers and other distinguished visitors would enter the city proper, important roads would connect the town with the outside world and the city's defenders would put up defence against invaders. Nonetheless, the city's main gate could also perform a plethora of other functions, many of which escape our attention: an attempt to catalogue the main gate's functions in the Roman and ancient world was made by Susanne Froehlich in her recently published habilitation thesis. The full title of her work underscores which functions of the urban main gate she has made the subject of her research: the author is not only interested in the utilitarian purposes of this structure but also in its impact on various aspects of urban life. Even though the latter aspect remains underemphasised in the scholarly discourse, the author makes evident that it was no less important than the primary purpose for which the gate was built.

The book opens with an in-depth introduction ("Einleitung," pp. 1–26), in which the author defines the terms she uses, presents the research method applied and characterises the types of sources used. The remainder of the work is divided into five parts, these in turn dividing into chapters. Almost all of these parts, due to the issues analysed therein, constitute closed wholes. In the first of these ("Das Stadttor in den Kulturen des Mittelmeerraums," pp. 27–103), the author examines selected examples concerning the role of the main city gate in the Roman, Near Eastern and Greek worlds. Despite palpable similarities between these regions of the ancient world, diverse traditions specific to each of these regions or cultural milieus translated into visible differences in the perception of the function and place of the city's main gate.

In the second part ("Kontrollmodälitäten am Stadteingang," pp. 105–214), the author comprehensively discusses the issues concerning the policing functions of the main gate in the Roman world, where, especially during the imperial period, issues of public security constituted a prominent element in the propaganda of the emperors, who styled themselves as the sole guarantors of the city's safety. Their concern to provide their subjects with a sense of security was evidenced by the slogan *pax et securitas*, readily and frequently broadcast in their propaganda: the author devotes an entire chapter to discuss its meaning and cultural connotations (pp. 107–122). Subsequent chapters address the role of the main gate as a physical guarantor of the city's security, a collection point for tolls and duties, and a focal point in local economic life. Particularly noteworthy is the

chapter that examines the main gate as a collection point for tolls and duties. Since the Roman state initially did not have extensive fiscal administration structures similar to those operating in the modern world, the Roman authorities relied on gates as toll barriers, controlling and channelling the flow of goods and people, thus enabling the collection of duties and taxes and mitigating the absence of specialised tax collection installations. In her extensive discussion of the roles played by a city's main gate, the author also devotes much space to the personnel permanently manning the gates and the various types of officials for whom the gate was their place of service or work. The data she has collected leaves no doubt that, next to the forum, the main gate in every city of the Roman world was one of its busiest and most vibrant places.

The third part ("Verkehrs- und Kommunikationswege am Stadteingang," pp. 215–280), discusses how traffic was managed and restricted within Roman cities, including the capital of the empire itself. Thanks to these measures, the central public areas of the cities were not congested with transported goods, which were diverted either through peripheral streets or carried entirely beyond the walls. The author focuses much of her attention on demonstrating the role of the main gate as an urban landmark for both the inhabitants and the visitors. In her view, the gate was also a key element of the local communication system: because of its strategic location, the gate stood for a place of public announcements, a site where information and hearsay were exchanged.


The fourth part of the book ("Die Semantik des Stadtors," pp. 281–383) is concerned with the religious and symbolic functions of the main gate. The walls not only separated the city from the surrounding space but also marked its *pomerium*, i.e., its sacred boundaries. In a symbolic sense, the gate also separated the world of the living from the world of the dead, whose graves were located along the roads leading into the city. As such, the gates were also the sites of religious practices. The examples cited by the author confirm that these practices were quite common throughout the Roman empire (although with some local variations): they were especially popular in the eastern provinces, where the cults of deities associated with the main gate sometimes had a very long tradition. The evidence for cults of deities associated with the city gates also comes from Rome itself. The main gate also played a crucial role in all kinds of political events, such as visits by emperors or noble dignitaries, and all solemn city processions.

The fact that the main gate was seen as a symbol of the city to which it led is demonstrated not only by its functions but also by its size, architecture and decorative elements. Through the architecture and adornments of the main gate, the city expressed its power and declared its loyal stance towards Roman authority by placing images of emperors on display. Participation in the construction or repair of the gate offered self-promotion opportunities for the representatives of the local elite, who would place their names on the gate to broadcast their service to the city. In her reflections, the author also draws attention to the role of the gate in the works of Roman authors.

The final section of the work ("Bilanz und Ausblick," pp. 385–402), offers summative conclusions on the place and function of the main city gate in the Roman world. Worth noting is the author's concise comparison of the role of this gate in the Roman and subsequent historical periods, in which the main gate played similar and equally vital roles (cf. pp. 395–401). Most significantly, however, the author observes that the phenomena she describes were not universal, their shape and occurrence often determined by local practices and traditions.

The richness of the work, its clear structure and manner of narration, as well as the very topic taken up by the author, make the work worthy of being recommended to the general reader. It is not a detailed treatise on the architectural remains of the gates of specific cities or archaeological report but rather a commendable historical-anthropological survey of the role and various functions played by one of the most characteristic buildings of most cities in the Roman world. The historical testimonies cited by the author clearly demonstrate that the main gate often performed a more significant role in the quotidian lives of citizens rather than the buildings that adorned the local forum.

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