

Ermanno Orlando, ed. *Strade, traffici, viabilità in area veneta: Viaggio negli statuti comunali*. Quaderni del Corpus Statutario Delle Venezie 5. Rome: Viella S.r.l., 2010. 186 pp. index. € 26. ISBN: 978-88-8334-496-1.

by **James S. Grubb**

The study of roads, traffic, and road systems has grown steadily in the past decades, in Italy but also throughout Europe. Perhaps this is the product of a neo-Braudellian concern with larger systems and deep structures; perhaps it has been stimulated by the massive interregional flows of peoples that characterize Europe today. Either way, it has come to be a recognizable sub-field, replete with dedicated conferences and multi-authored books. English-speaking scholars have not played much role in the enterprise, in large part because it requires long hours in local archives and access to printed editions that are often ancient and difficult to locate. But it is well worth the attention of non-practitioners and aspiring practitioners; and the uninitiated would do well to begin with this slim but rewarding volume.

This newest addition to the excellent Gherardo Ortalli-directed series on the statutes of the Veneto addresses the region's roads and communication routes through examination of local law codes. Because all the major cities and many of the larger towns issued legislation, editor Ermanno Orlando can draw provisions on systems of mobility from a rich body of sources, some twenty-eight printed editions. In a long essay built from those statutes and from an equally rich secondary literature – the bibliography alone is worth the purchase price – Orlando has thoughtfully synthesized the many issues that these statutes address: roads within towns compared with communication lines within the countryside and between jurisdictions; infrastructure such as bridges and embankments; taxes and tolls; the issue of who was to build, maintain, inspect and police roads; and implications for defense and security.

The body of the text consists of summaries in Italian of the specific provisions dealing with roads and traffic, laced with generous quotations in the original Latin. The result is therefore somewhat macaronic, but entirely legible. Purists might object that summation and translation make this volume of less than full scholarly value; the counter-argument would be that printing the full texts of each statute would have vastly swollen the project, indeed, would have

prevented the presentation of this range of texts in a single volume. To be honest, many of these statutes are straightforward and boilerplate, easily (and accurately) reduced to a few lines. Where the language is distinctive and/or technical, Orlando provides the original Latin phrasing. And he provides sufficient bibliographic indicators that future scholars could easily track down the originals. Some of his other decisions – to use but one set of statutes for each city, even when there are multiples; to look at centers in the Venetian lagoon, but not Venice itself – may also be questioned, but are entirely defensible.

Still, the presentation of legal texts in a mixture of translation, abridgement, and brief quotation is sufficiently novel in a scholarly series to draw a defense from the series editor. Ortalli acknowledges that the format is “decidedly unusual” (5). He justifies Orlando's choices not in terms of sheer pragmatism, as one might expect, but in terms of audience. This volume, he declares, is intended not only for scholars, but for those who operate in the present and are not necessarily specialists in the past. However much the transport map has been radically altered by rail lines, superhighways, and airline routes, the fundamental road system of the present has been fundamentally shaped by that of the Middle Ages; and medieval statutes in turn shaped normative systems well into the eighteenth century and beyond. But the “utility” (6) of these laws for the present? Maybe. I am not so sure that modern road engineers and planners are much helped by knowing that Cerea forbade the throwing of manure, mud, or other filth onto the village's streets (103). But I find it telling that an attempt is made to assert the necessity of at least a summary of the past for the managers of the present: the traditional attitude that historical scholarship has innate value is no longer accepted by the larger community. I can only agree with Ortalli that if we cannot justify the importance of the past for the present, we will find it increasingly difficult to maintain our positions.

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