

Francesca Bocchi, *Per antiche strade. Caratteristiche e aspetti delle città medievali*, Viella, Rome, 2013, pp. 523.

Professor Bocchi presents a comparative study of medieval towns. As is natural for an Italian medievalist, she starts out from Italian towns, which she then compares with those in other countries. Correctly, she observes that Italian towns do not fit into a single pattern, for each cultural region of Italy has its own urban history. To reveal the features common to several towns, she takes a thematic rather than regional or chronological approach.

The first chapter discusses the legacy of the Italian towns of Antiquity, seeking to identify the new features that these towns took on during the Middle Ages. Drawing on characteristic examples from the various medieval periods, Professor Bocchi gives us an overview of Italian urban history up to the ideal settlement of the Renaissance. We must note, however, that comparison with the Hellenistic and Roman towns of the Near East would have allowed her to ascertain with precision the survival of ancient town plans, as we have learned from Jean Sauvaget's studies of Syrian towns (Latakia, Aleppo, Damascus). The ideal Renaissance town originated in Italy and was imitated in such places as France and Scandinavia, where Hamina, in Finland, is the best example of an octagonal town plan.

The author rightly emphasizes that towns often were not homogeneous but complex. Most towns of a certain size were divided into quarters, usually all of them quite similar. In some towns, quarters could differ from one another for various reasons, and this was reflected in the town plan. Palermo, with its Arabic past, is an excellent case in point. Outside Italy, the episcopal quarter, with its own legal status, often formed a counterpart to the burghesses' town; prime examples are Salisbury in England and Trier and Münster in Germany. Some towns were multi-ethnic. Bologna's residences of students of foreign nationalities were akin to trading towns' establishments of foreign merchants. Again, Sicily and South Italy provide good examples, and one could

add towns like Worms and Speyer, which until the Crusades had important Jewish colonies that enjoyed a measure of autonomy.

Obviously, quarters were also socially different, as the examples of Cagliari and Carpi demonstrate, and frequently the administrative institutions were concentrated in one part of the town, thus creating a quarter of power. The author concludes chapter one with a discussion of three topics: place names and their significance as topographical sources, rivers in towns and their role as delimitations between the centre and the periphery (Rome, Paris, London, Florence and Warsaw are classical examples), and the role of green spaces in towns. Unlike other early medieval towns in Europe, Palermo had several gardens, part of the Arabic cultural legacy, reminiscent of Damascus in the 12th century. During the Late Middle Ages, gardens became more common, often owing to the demographic contraction caused by the Black Death, but the fashion was already underway in the 13th century, as one can see in Naples.

In chapter two the author examines infrastructures. She begins by examining towns founded in the Central Middle Ages for the purpose of defending the territory and consolidating the ruler's dominion over it: *bastides* in southern France, *borghi franchi* in Italy, but the phenomenon also marked the German eastward expansion into the Slavonic regions. There were also trading towns, founded to concentrate the trade of the countryside or to attract foreign merchants; in both cases, fiscal advantages were to be had. After presenting these three main types of new town, the author turns to various elements of urban topography: walls, gates, harbours, squares, public and papal palaces, urban castles and donations for the common weal, and, finally, cathedrals and urban churches and their construction; in this context, she underlines the continuity in the religious (pagan, Christian, Islamic) use of certain buildings, as seen in Damascus, Seville, Cordoba and Palermo. The systematic treatment of the different elements enables Professor Bocchi to identify features common to several towns, independently of space and time.

Chapter three deals with public services: rivers and navigable canals (with the construction of water-mills), sewage, water supply, hospitals, cemeteries, places of entertainment (in many towns, theatres and circuses were inherited from Antiquity). Again, the author's systematic approach brings to light lines of evolution common to several towns. Chapter four investigates the modernization of historic towns, including the different forms of intervention by the authorities; in Italy, these measures mainly date from the 13th and early 14th centuries. Thus we find the adoption of rules for the construction of buildings, urbanistic interventions (minimum width of streets in Vicenza ca. 1200, with the demolition of porticoes and external staircases that obstructed the thoroughfare), measures to embellish the town, and, perhaps, more important, the enactment of hygienic measures, the keeping of streets in good repair, and, finally, the cost of these measures. The case of Pistoia is especially interesting because the surviving documents permit detailed study of the construction of the second circle of walls in the mid-12th century. Again, the author's systematic treatment proves rewarding.

Chapter five gives us a look at urban daily life – to begin with, life in the streets. The visit of a ruler was an important event but finding accommodation for the illustrious guest and his retinue could be difficult. Dark streets could facilitate crime, and a well-disposed urban government would try to limit prostitution – or simply to make it less visible. From about 1400, the poor were no longer supposed to be seen; they were to be kept in hospitals, at least in northern Italy, a practice which in the following centuries spread to most European countries. Religious and other feasts largely took place in the streets, so urban governments often used these occasions to celebrate their relations with the town. Further, power and wealth were publicly displayed, as the cases of Venice and Bologna demonstrate. However, I am not convinced that the late medieval sumptuary laws were intended to discipline the various social strata, as Otto Gerhard Oexle asserted (see pp. 404-406). More recent research by Edmund Kizik has shown that the sumptuary

laws should probably be seen instead as measures of economic policy. Residential towers were characteristic of the magnates of the 12th century, especially in Italy, but also as far north as Trier in Germany. The author interprets the halt to their construction and orders for their demolition in the late 13th century and first half of the 14th century as steps meant to deprive the urban magnates of their great status symbol. Yet, one wonders whether such towers were still necessary to guarantee the family's security. Further, might not the urban government's orders have been intended to limit conspicuous consumption and thus be read as an economic policy measure?

The delimitation of public and private space plays an important, often neglected role. Especially the construction of porticoes, frequent in Bologna, could cause disputes between house-owners and the public authorities. However, the steps or flight of stairs leading from the street to the house's entrance were tolerated.

Statutes regulating the activities of the building trades in Parma and Florence have come down to us. Especially in Florence, the labour market in this sector was quite free and differed significantly from the very strict rules preventing outside craftsmen from working in towns, as was the case in northern Germany.

In her conclusion, Professor Bocchi underlines the influence of Antiquity on medieval urban development, obviously greater in Italy and southern Europe than elsewhere. Throughout the Middle Ages the Roman legacy was always present in Italy; only with the Renaissance did it spread to the non-Roman parts of Europe, becoming one of the essential characteristics of European civilization.

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