

CORNELIS VAN TILBURG: *Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire*. Routledge, Abingdon – New York 2007. ISBN 0-415-40999-3. XXI, 237 pp. GBP 55.

The title of the book instantly evokes curiosity. As the author notes, our image of a Roman road involves a lonely rider on a donkey making his way in peace and tranquillity. Indeed, was there congestion in antiquity and if so, what did the Romans do to overcome it? How a big of a problem was it considered to be? Why and when was there congestion? For a reader interested in roads and mobility in the Roman world these issues come across as very important and a wider audience all-too familiar with the congestion of today might be curious to know if the Romans waited patiently in their carts for hours for a traffic jam to clear.

Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire does give answers to these questions. There was congestion but it was temporary and frequent in a few places rather than widespread and constant. It becomes clear that congestion is a problem that transcends time, as it relates to the relative amount of traffic and the carrying capacity of roads. The most congested places naturally were cities and city gates in particular.

Although the book does give answers it does not give an easily perceivable picture of traffic in the Roman Empire. Especially the first two chapters are frequently confusing. For instance, on p. 91 it is claimed that the Servian wall was built "by the Gauls" after sacking Rome in the 4th century BC. The topics in the book are not well connected but presented separately which makes the reader wonder what purpose they are meant to serve. E.g., the introduction of the army structure (p. 63–5) and the presentation of different gate forms (from p. 90) are not followed by a thorough discussion beyond a few lines on how they brought about and affected congestion. It would have been interesting indeed to compare how the Roman army might have had a different impact on traffic depending on different arrangements for travel and rest. After introducing the various gate forms the discussion could have contained an extensive comparison of their effects on traffic flow and their relative susceptibility to congestion. Furthermore, a discussion of the possible traffic arrangements when a gate allowed only one cart to pass at a time would have been interesting: were there fixed turns for traffic from different directions to proceed, did flexible alternating traffic take place or was strictly one way traffic flow only allowed? Now the reader is left with assumptions about differences between types of gate-ways without a discussion of their implications (p. 104).

Furthermore, in *Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire*, recreational travel, travel for healing and pilgrimage are mentioned (p. 47–8) but not bound to a wider context of people moved by ideologies and ideas rather than material needs. In addition, when talking about mobility it cannot be overstressed how fundamentally different travelling was in the ancient world, the pace of travelling having been revolutionized only in very recent times. A piece of news or a novelty could only spread as fast as a human being (aided by animals) could move. These two important aspects of traffic would have deserved a discussion of their own.

From the cities taken under discussion by van Tilburg, I am most familiar with the situation in Pompeii and thus most competent to evaluate his interpretation and presentation of that material. The discussion on traffic and congestion in Pompeii is not without problems. Van Tilburg seems to suggest that wheeled traffic moved through the Marine Gate (p. 94) although the slope along which the passage runs is too steep for carts and it lacks rut marks

as evidence for wheeled traffic. The sources van Tilburg draws on are for the most part outdated and conventional: Mau from 1899 is referred to instead of new research on Pompeian roads such as the recent works by Tsujimura (1990, Ruts in Pompeii, the traffic system in the Roman city. *Opuscula Pompeiana* 1) and Poehler (2001–6, on-line papers at http://www.pompeiana.org/Research/Streets_Research/Streets_Research.htm) that have added greatly to our knowledge of the traffic pattern within the city. This again reflects a problem that prevails throughout the book: its arbitrariness. Occasionally discussion is abundant and up-to-date, occasionally sparse, outdated and disconnected.

Maps should play an essential part in *Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire*, since most of the phenomena that pertain to traffic and congestion are important because of their relationship to the layout of the city. Unfortunately, however, the maps are often too general to be of much help and they occasionally lack an accompanying legend. For instance, one wonders which of the symbols signify which features mentioned in the caption of the map of Cologne (p. 43). In fact the issue of maps and their existence and use in antiquity, and more precisely their notorious absence, would have been a very interesting topic to add to the discussion of traffic and congestion since route choices greatly affect these matters. Ancient travellers did not plan their trip and foresee possible points of congestion with the aid of topographical maps in the same way we do. Even when the Peutinger map is mentioned (p. 48) there is no discussion of the use, purposes and commonness of maps in antiquity, nor on their projection and the perception of distances between places.

All in all we must acknowledge that van Tilburg has certainly taken up a challenging task, to describe traffic and congestion in the Roman Empire. He deals well with time, describing traffic within a time span of some 1000 years. When it comes to the spatial distribution of the evidence, he refreshingly brings cities in northern Gallia and Germania into discussion. In this way he also brings his personal familiarity with the region to enrich the debate. On the other hand he largely omits the Near East and North Africa although there ancient roads are especially well-preserved. Laudably, van Tilburg uses a variety of material from archaeological evidence to written sources and considers traffic from the point of view of the individual as well as society: those experiencing congestion, those in charge of roads, written laws indicating how things were – in theory – supposed to be running.

The parts I found most interesting were the sections where van Tilburg hypothesises and asks "what if?" (he calls them "rough estimations"). Playing with figures and numbers and proposing consequences for them brings about a scale and gives a better understanding of abstract issues, such as the scale of loads needed to be brought in for city maintenance (p. 74) or the magnitude of *cursus publicus* (p. 61–2) taking place in the Roman roads. The best part of the book, as a unit of its own and technically the best written part, is the end of chapter 3. Furthermore the entire chapter 4 brings refreshing aspects to the topics dwelled on before by other scholars, such as Chevallier (1972, *Les voies romaines*), Casson (1974, *Travel in the Ancient World*) and more recently Adams and Laurence (eds., 2001, *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*) and Morriss (2005, *Roads, Archaeology and Architecture*). Van Tilburg succeeds here in bringing something new to the discourse. For instance, he interestingly proposes that city infrastructure and supply were arranged only to meet the current need and beyond that authorities had no incentive for added efficiency. That is, if needed supplies could be taken in, even with great difficulty, there was no desire from the official side to improve the infrastructure. Complaints of individuals whose time was spent in

traffic jams were not heard. Van Tilburg introduces the idea of a circuit route circling the city following the *pomerium* borders ("a missed change: the *pomerium* as circular road", p. 160–167) as a solution for many traffic jams but presents several reasons why such roads were not build and notes that "circular roads were still an exception in early modern times" (p. 166).

All in all the book serves best as an introduction to traffic and congestion in the ancient world – evoking thoughts and inviting students to find out more. The summaries of chapters and their sections are valuable in presenting the main points. Several traffic-related terms are explained in chapter 1 and thus the book serves as a good handbook for concepts that are rarely explained elsewhere. In sum, the chapters work better alone as individual units; reading *Traffic and Congestion in the Roman Empire* from cover to cover, one observes that it contains a lot of repetition.

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Art and Inscriptions in the Ancient World. Edited by ZAHRA NEWBY – RUTH LEADER-NEWBY. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007. ISBN 0-521-86851-3. XVII, 303 pp. GBP 65.

Images, things and text are common combinations in many ancient contexts such as buildings, burials, brick stamps, and pottery and many other material objects also feature writing as part of the whole. Traditionally, these two, the material and the text, are divided among different experts; the linguist studies the text and the archaeologist or the art historian the object or image. More rarely, the two are studied together, as integral parts of the same object, monument or building. The volume edited by Zahra Newby and Ruth Leader-Newby is an attempt to examine texts, images and objects together in order to see whether the whole is bigger than just the sum of its parts.

The volume consists of three parts. The first deals with juxtapositions of texts and images on document reliefs, ash chests, wall paintings and as part of a sculptural collection in a building. The second part combines images and texts as labels on pottery, reliefs and mosaics. The third section discusses statues and associated texts. The authors of the ten chapters are archaeologists, art historians and historians. The case studies come from various periods ranging from archaic Greek pottery to Late Antique mosaics and covering the extent of the entire Roman Empire.

In the first part, Alastair Blanshard discusses an Attic inscribed memorial relief erected in 403 BC to honor the loyalty of Samos towards Athens during the Peloponnesian war. The relief shows Athena (representing Athens, naturally) and Hera (representing Samos) shaking hands. It is noted that the image can be regarded as ambiguous – the deities, particularly Hera, could be interpreted in many ways, but the text clarifies the connections. The harmonious monument is in contradiction to the poor state Samos actually was in relation to Athens and it was perhaps more intended to be viewed by Athenians as a reminder of their past greatness and the possibilities of the new era. The content of the text is less harmonious, showing the Athenians' inability to fulfil the promises of friendship. Glenys Davies writes about Roman ash chests and the inscriptions on them, particularly about the identity of the deceased and others mentioned in the text. The connection between the two is often ambiguous and hard (if not impossible) to understand; e.g., why was a scene depicting