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**RAY LAURENCE, THE ROADS OF ROMAN ITALY.  
MOBILITY AND CULTURAL CHANGE**

**Routledge Ed., London and New York, 1999, 215 pages, 65 figures, 6 tables**

We wish to present below an exceptional book, unique in its approach to this subject, in the classical line established by the literature dedicated to Roman roads in the last few decades. The author of this study, Dr. Ray Laurence, is a Lecturer in Ancient History in the Department of Classics at the University of Reading (Great Britain). His major research interests began with the Roman city, on which he has published numerous works. Ray Laurence has also been involved in the study of cultural identity and lodging in the Roman Empire, as well as in other major projects and landscape history – particularly the construction of Roman roads in Italy. His current projects include the Roman life cycle and the landscapes of the Roman Empire. He is the author of: *Roman Pompeii: Space and Society*, Routledge 1994; *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire* (co-editor), Routledge 1998; *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire* (co-editor), Routledge 2001.

The monography *The Roads of Roman Italy. Mobility and Cultural Change*, Routledge Ed. 1999, represents, in our opinion, a succesful attempt at presenting the road network in Roman Italy from a whole new perspective. From what I know regarding the literature devoted to this subject, this is the first synthesis on the roads of Roman Italy, despite the numerous studies and articles on the roads of the Italian peninsula published in time (to mention only some: Pierre Fustier, *Notes sur la constitution des voies romaines en Italie. I. Via Flaminia*, REA 60, 1958, p. 81-86; *idem*, *Notes sur la constitution des voies romaines en Italie. II. Via Appia*, REA 62, 1960, p. 95-99; *idem*, *Notes sur la constitution des voies romaines en Italie. III. Via Aurelia et son prolongement en Gaule Narbonnaise*, REA 63, 1961, p. 276-291; Quaderni dell'Istituto di Topografia Antica della Università di Roma, 6, De Luca Editore 1968: *La Via Aurelia da Roma a Forum Aurelii*; Giovanna Alvisi, *La viabilità romana della Daunia*, Bari 1982; Thomas Ashby, *La Campagna romana nell'età classica*, Milano 1982; *Atlante Tematico di Topografia Antica*, Roma, a cura di Lorenzo Quilici e Stefania Quilici Gigli: 1, 1992 – *Tecnica stradale romana*; 2, 1993 – *Strade romane: percorsi e infrastrutture*; 4, 1995 – *Strade romane, ponti e viadotti*; in the case of Sicily, a monography was published on the Roman roads as well as a book on *cursus publicus*, and other articles: Gerald P. Verbrugge, *Itinera romana. Beiträge zur Strassengeschichte des Römischen Reiches. Sicilia*, Bern 1976; Lucietta Di Paola, *Viaggi, trasporti e istituzioni. Studi sul cursus publicus*, Messina 1999; *eadem*, *Le vie di comunicazione*, in *Origine e incontro di culture nell'antichità. Magna Grecia e Sicilia. Stato degli studi e prospettive di ricerca*, Messina 1999, p. 459-469). However, these articles and studies regarding the roads of Roman Italy are very ill assorted and fail to offer the reader lecturer a full picture of the road network. So, methodologically, Ray Laurence has successfully managed to outline the impact of the road network on the economy of Italy and the development of the main Roman cities.

The study is structured in fourteen chapters: 1. *Introduction*, 1-10; 2. *Mastering space: road building 312-44 BC*, 11-26; 3. *Town foundation in Roman Italy: 300 -30 BC*, 27-38; 4. *The politics of road building*, 39-57; 5. *Technological change*, 58-77; 6. *Time and distance*, 78-94; 7. *Transport economics*, 95-108; 8. *Inland waterways*,

109-122; 9. *Mules and muleteers: the scale of the transport economy*, 123-135; 10. *A mobile culture?*, 136-147; 11. *Viewing towns – generating space*, 148-161; 12. *Tota Italia: naming Italy*, 162-176; 13. *The extension of state power*, 177-186; 14. *Space-time in Roman Italy*, 187-200 and *Bibliography*.

In the *Introduction*, the author motivates his historical intentions, by telling us that the monography focused on the problem of the impact of road network on the development of the cities. Ray Laurence managed to investigate, from the economical perspective, the complex interaction of three elements: roads, cities and the geographical space of Italy. In other words, the author saw the road system of Italy as an example of a structure between places joining them together to create an artificial unity. Early in the study it becomes apparent that we are dealing with a new perspective on the road network of Roman Italy.

Chapter 2, entitled *Mastering space: road building 312-44 BC* establishes the chronological evolution of the land transportation, elaborating on the idea that there was a strong relationship between road construction and the imperial propaganda. The economical changes, caused by the creation and development of a Roman road system, had a major impact on the notions of space and time.

*Town foundation in Roman Italy: 300-30 BC* is the title of the third chapter, where the author analyses the impact of road construction on the development of cities. The equation proposed by Ray Laurence is one quite simple, featuring three main elements: 1. The road network; 2. The geographical space of Italy; 3. The cities. The three elements, in permanent interaction, generated in time the appearance of a new mentality regarding space and time. We agree with the historical conclusion enunciated by the author at this point of his research, that without an organized road network, as in Italy, the development of the cities and commerce would have never been possible.

In the fourth chapter, *The politics of road building*, the author regards road building as a political act whose key actors were, from his viewpoint, Augustus and Trajan. Both emperors were associated with a policy that emphasized the geographical unit Italia. Ray Laurence debates four main aspects: 1. The creation and development of the road network in the Republican era (the second century BC); 2. The evolution of the Roman roads during the Principate; 3. The local politics of road building; 4. The impact of the road network development on creating a unified space. The British scholar outlines that the cohesion of Italy depended on a space economy defined by the road system established in the Republic concentrating on the figure of the emperor as the benefactor. The author debates the main aspects regarding the costs of the repair of roads in Italy. The example offered by the author is very suggestive: the cost of the repair at just under sixteen miles from the Via Appia south to Beneventum was equally contributed to by the emperor and the local farmers. Hadrian paid 1 147 000 sesterces towards the cost of the work, whereas the *possesores agrorum* (farmers) paid 569 000 sesterces (CIL IX 6072). In his analysis of the local policy of road building, the author stresses that the local roads, known as *viae vicinales*, were the concern of local government and the particular concern of the towns and cities of Italy. It becomes apparent that building these roads was not on the same scale as those of the emperor, since the magistrates' actions were limited to within the territory of their city. The main line followed by the author is that we can see in the local magistrates' actions a form of euergetism: the magistrate once elected was willing to spend his money on the improvement of the infrastructure. So, these observations prove that it was to the political interest of the elite to repair

roads in order to create a good image for themselves for the future. At the end of this chapter Ray Laurence observes that the image of Augustus was not placed by him or the political authority of Rome directly into the *fora* of the towns of Italy, but could rather be seen on the roads. The exception to this were Nerva and Trajan, both of whom made efforts at a renewal of Italy and recreated an image of the Principate focusing on them as the begetters of a new age.

*Technological change* is the subject of chapter 5, which analyzes five essential issues: 1. The definition of a road; 2. Public and private; 3. Technological change; 4. Quarrying of stone; 5. Road restoration. The author begins by observing, correctly in our opinion, that the roads of the Roman Empire were differentiated by their nature. Ray Laurence points out that there were three types of roads: a. *viae publicae*, intended for travel; b. *viae vicinales*, roads of access to settlements; c. *viae privatae*, private set up for access to farms and fields. We find in this classification a hierarchy of roads in the Roman Empire. Each road had a different role in the transport system. Once again, the British scholar develops an interesting debate on the problem of the paving of roads, begun by the research of the literary evidence. He observes that the paving of the major roads of Rome was performed on a larger scale in the second century AD. Indeed, most of the epigraphic evidence for road paving and its organization comes from the second century AD. The office of *Procurator ad silices* appears alongside a *Procurator silicum viarum sacrae Urbis*. The conclusion to this chapter is that the roads should be regarded as the key features of a Roman monumentalism displaying the power of Rome through the ease of travel and the scale of the structures utilized for the transport of people and goods in Italy.

Chapter 6, *Time and distance*, deals with the relationship between space and time. Ray Laurence thinks that only by understanding the nature of Roman space and time through knowledge of the distance between places as a direct participant in travelling can we make sense of the cultural change associated with road building and the improvements in terms of road technology. We found a very interesting debate around the problem of the speed of travel. Based on other articles on this issue we agree with the author's opinion concerning the tendency of the ancient sources to record the exceptional. Much of this literary evidence place focus on the longest journeys at the greatest speed (see, on this issue: L. W. Hunter, *Cicero's Journey to his Province of Cilicia in 51 BC*, in *Journal of Roman Studies* 3, 1913, 73-97; A. M. Ramsay, *A Roman Postal Service under the Republic*, *JRS*, 10, 1920, 79-86; *Idem*, *The Speed of the Roman Imperial Post*, *JRS* 15, 1925, 60-74). So we deal with exceptional persons who travelled in exceptional circumstances. We can also see that the higher speeds were recorded on the major lines of communications: Via Appia, Via Aurelia and Via Flaminia. It is natural for these roads to assure the higher speeds, because they were *viae publicae*, benefiting from better maintenance than any other. Also, there were provisions made for exchanging vehicles and draught animals. So, the essential idea is that we can't study all the aspects concerning travel and speed of travel, without including all the elements which have influenced land transportation: 1. The character and the importance of a certain Roman road; 2. The role and the social standing of the traveller; 3. The quality of the road surface. Practically, two aspects changed the character of transport: the speed of travel and the methodology of location based on the milestones along Roman roads. In time, it was proved that the planning of journeys and the calculation of the time taken over journeys were the key to successful campaigns, but also to any other journey in the Roman Empire.

As outlined by the author, chapter 7 raises the major question of the cost of transportation and then goes on to examine the evidence of transportation as the key to the economic practice of agriculture in Roman Italy. The whole demonstration shows us that transport costs by road were higher than by sea, but this does not imply that land transportation was seldom undertaken. Methodologically, the author's discussion around the problem of agriculture and land transportation is different from what I already knew on this subject. Why so? Because Ray Laurence convincingly demonstrates the connection between roads and the agricultural systems of Italy in the second and first centuries BC through to the first century AD with reference to the literary source of the time (Columella and Varro). In developing the aspects concerning villa location and road building, Ray Laurence observes that the location of villas close to a major artery of communication was paramount. The author explains that theoretically it was necessary for a *villa* to be close to a road to allow for goods access and communication. Likewise, a *villa* needed to be near a town to provide access to markets and labour. Ideally, it would also be near a port or river for the export of produce. These are the main observations of the author. They are useful in understanding the position of these *villa* in Roman Dacia, because all these observations place the *villa* in a unique position in the Roman landscape.

Chapter 8, *Inland waterways*, is an interesting debate around the use of rivers and canals in Italy. The British scholar wants to demonstrate that rivers and canals were utilized, but their use depended on human technology to control the flow of rivers.

*Mules and muleteers: the scale of the transport economy* is the title of chapter 9, where the author develops a discussion around the main aspects concerning the supply of improved breeds for the haulage of carts and carriages. The paving of roads, along with the supply of mules, improved the overall efficiency of the transport. All these factors show the desire for a more efficient transport technology.

Chapter 10 represents, basically, the answer to the question: was the improvement of the road system in Italy the main contribution to the development of *a mobile culture*? This question is answered with reference to the mode of travel and the role and social standing of the traveller. Ray Laurence successfully demonstrates that the mobility of certain sectors of the population caused major changes in the economy and the culture of travel.

*Viewing towns – generating space* is the title of chapter 11, where the author demonstrates that the development of public architecture in Italy was designed for display as much to the travelling elite from Rome and elsewhere as to the local inhabitants. Once again, Ray Laurence raises some aspects regarding the euergetism. Basically, we can see that travel was a unifying agency for Italy in terms of both geography and culture. This argument can also be used in the case of Roman Dacia, because, like other provinces of the Roman Empire, Dacia had a complex road network that contributed to the development of cities and to the process of Romanisation.

Chapter 12, *Tota Italia: naming Italy* is a debate of the role played by the road system of Roman Italy. Once again, the author outlines that the road network has created a unified peninsula, a geographical unity of Italy: *tota Italia*.

Chapter 13, *The extension of state power*, explains what determined the geographical unity of Italy. Apparently, in the author's opinion, state power was preeminent after the development of the road network and the increase in travel speed.

The final chapter of the book, *Space-Time in Roman Italy*, presents the conclusions of the study. We agree with the author's opinion that the unity of Roman Italy depended on its system of roads. The road was just as much part of the definition

of the Roman cultural landscape as was the city or the villa. So, the road was the fundamental element for the production of territorial space within the overall creation of the Roman Empire. Practically, the roads altered the nature of space by connecting places; in this sense, the road network created a mechanism of Roman power.

The book ends with an impressive bibliography, with classical as well as recent studies on different aspects concerning the Roman roads. The erudition, the systematic study, the accuracy and the modern instruments of interpretation used by the author ensure the success of the scientific approach. Also, this well researched book is packed with detailed information about the technical principles of road construction and maintenance of these important ancient structures.

In conclusion, we can say that the value of the information and the scientific interpretation provide pleasant reading for amateurs and compulsory reading for the specialists.