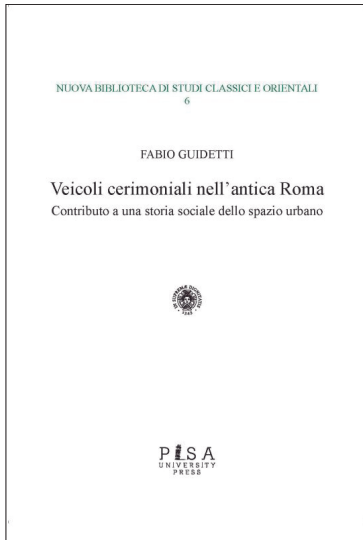


## VEICOLI CERIMONIALI NELL'ANTICA ROMA




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GUIDETTI, FABIO (2023). *Veicoli cerimoniali nell'antica Roma. Contributo a una storia sociale dello spazio urbano*. Pisa: Pisa University Press. 370 pp., 22,00 € [ISBN 9788833397030].

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JACOB A. LATHAM  
University of Tennessee  
spqr@utk.edu

UP THROUGH THE LATE ANTIQUITY, travel in Rome was overwhelmingly on foot. Goods might be transported by animal powered carts, but even the rich and powerful had to make use of foot power, whether they walked on their own feet or were carried in litters or sedan chairs by those who did. As Fabio Guidetti makes clear in this tightly argued volume, to be granted the right to travel by carriage in the city of Rome was an exceptional privilege. More specifically, Guidetti carefully weighs the evidence for *carpenta* and *pilenta* (ceremonial vehicles for matrons) in the Republic wheeled traffic more broadly in the late Republic and early Empire, before taking on *tensae*, the vehicles by which the gods traveled to the circus in the *pompa circensis*, and other vehicles that served in the procession to the racing arena. Aiming to contribute to a social history of urban space, the particular merit of this work is its thorough and

convincing unraveling of particularly knotty textual evidence and its finely grained analysis of iconographic sources.

The book opens with a relatively short chapter on the earliest attestations of vehicular privileges for Roman matrons. Livy backdates the use of *carpenta* (two-wheeled vehicles with arched canopies, drawn by two animals, typically mules or donkeys) by Roman matrons to the earliest days of Rome, in stories in which *carpenta* symbolized authority, stories which Guidetti carefully parses. However, as Guidetti convincingly argues, the privilege of *carpenta* for daily use and *pilenta* (presumably larger four-wheeled vehicles) for festivals really emerged by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, when the practice determined lexical choices of Livius Andronicus as he translated Homeric terms for carriage for a Roman Latin audience. And so, only by the last quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, had this privilege emerged for Roman women, a privilege with a number of variants of its origin story (from Livy, Verrius Flaccus, Diodorus Siculus, Plutarch, all writing long after its abrogation), stories which Guidetti neatly disentangles – a particular strength of this work.

In the second chapter, Guidetti details at some length the abrogation of the *lex Oppia*, a law issued in 215 BCE, though no direct report survives, that eliminated the right of Roman matrons to *carpenta* for daily travel, though the use of *pilenta* at religious festivals remained as the *pax deorum* was paramount. This law first comes to light during a debate over its repeal in 195 BCE, when Roman matrons besieged the entrances to the Forum to plead their case to incoming senators – ultimately successfully. As Guidetti argues, the law was less concerned with public display or raising funds for the Punic war and more concerned to control matrons, who notably were managing family assets while their husbands were at war. As part of this analysis, Guidetti analyzes in some detail the injunction not to use the vehicles within one mile of the city boundary, which Guidetti argues meant the city gates, not the *pomerium* which become a juridical entity later. A discussion of Livy as a writer of history concludes the chapter – which interests many, but may not be as relevant to those interested specifically in ceremonial vehicles.

Chapter three turns to a broader investigation of urban traffic in the late Republic and early Empire, tackling sources, like Roman comedy as well as especially the *tabula Heracleensis*. Early Roman comedy and other literary sources confirm what the earliest evidence for ceremonial vehicles had already suggested – such vehicles were a privilege and a key component of aristocratic distinction and thus a target for comedic humor. Indeed, the competition for such honors could be intense with some families taking it a bit too far at times. With the *tabula Heracleensis* (a bronze with laws on urban traffic in Rome that Guidetti places in the mid-80s BCE), we enter a different sphere of thinking about urban traffic and a different set of evidence, namely documentary. Concerns

about privilege and luxury give way to concerns about congestion and flow: vehicular traffic within the city and one mile of its border (same terms as the *lex Oppia* discussed at length in the previous chapter) was limited, only construction vehicles were allowed during the day – with the notable exception of ceremonial occasions like the triumph and the *pompa circensis* (discussed in the next chapter). The conceptualization of urban limits and the development of traffic regulations is again discussed in detail not only in the context of the laws on the *tabula Heracleensis*, but also in relation to literary texts like Juvenal’s third satire as well as in the works of Galen, texts which witness the continued existence of traffic regulations into the early Empire. The chapter concludes with a look at Artemidorus’ dream manual and other 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE sources, ending with a section on the initial appearance of personal and ceremonial vehicles in visual culture with an incisive examination of the early iconography of imagery that will become more common in the late empire as the personal use of vehicles in Rome becomes a more common means of self-representation.

The book concludes with a massive chapter on the sacred vehicles of the *pompa circensis* (*tensa*, *carpentum*, and elephant cart), Rome’s most characteristic religious procession (and certainly the most often performed). The chapter opens with an analysis of the *tensa*, the sacred vehicle that carried the *exuviae deorum* to the racing venue where they would be installed in the *pulvinar*. Beginning with Festus’ abbreviation of Verrius Flaccus, the earliest description of a *tensa*, a vehicle to transport the *exuviae* of the gods to the circus made with silver and ivory, the sources are in agreement that the *tensae* exclusively carried *exuviae*, despite Servius’ 4<sup>th</sup> century CE contention that the *tensae* transported images of the gods. In support of this argument, Guidetti offers a compelling reading of the only two passages which situate a *tensa* outside the *pompa circensis*: a passage in Titinius (the earliest mention of a *tensa*) was really a rhetorical device to impugn Roman matrons who overstepped the bounds of excess, making their *carpenta* (mule drawn carriages) opulent like the *tensae* of the gods; and Pacatus in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE who likewise likened the *carruca* of certain arrogant emperors to a *tensa*.

But what are *exuviae*? Guidetti, following Versnel, argues that *exuviae* were *struppi*, semi-aniconic “puppets” or fetishes made from branches and decorated with clothing and jewelry that were displayed at *lectisternia*. A quite reasonable interpretation, but an indisputable one. If *exuviae* were *struppi*, why duplicate and differentiate the terms? In any case, the *tensae* and their *exuviae* were hedged about by various religious sanctions – rules for those accompanying the vehicle and concerns about the secrecy-sanctity of the *exuviae*. Here Guidetti is particularly good at explaining an incident in 220 BCE when a boy actor rode in the *tensa* of Jupiter *Optimus Maximus* holding the *exuviae*, a seemingly welcome performance at the time that was

later recognized as sacrilege after the disaster at Cannae. As shown on early imperial coinage, and even on the republican coinage of one Rubrius, though the strict profile of his coins seems to have distorted the triangular shape of the pediment, *tensae* were like silver plated temples on wheels.<sup>1</sup>

*Tensae* for the gods in the *pompa circensis* continued in use during the empire, when many newly made imperial gods (*divi*) would be awarded them. In fact, Julius Caesar was the first to have been granted a *tensa* (as well as a *ferculum*, a litter, to carry a statue), among many other honors, whose tangled history Guidetti adroitly unravels, even if that history remains complicated and disputed (for example, when and why did a chariot replace a *ferculum*, if it did?). After Caesar, other emperors received *tensae*, like Augustus. In addition, Augustus and then other select emperors were granted a large cart drawn by elephants, usually four, to bear their statues in procession. Female members of the imperial house were also honored: with *carpenta* but also their own elephant carts, though drawn by two elephants. Marciana even received what seems to be a *tensa* drawn by mules instead of a quadriga of elephants, as Guidetti argues, though it could equally be a mistake by the die maker, depicting a *tensa* where a *carpentum* should have been. Here, Guidetti once again demonstrates keen attention to iconographic detail, offering concise and precise visual analyses of numismatic imagery, including a medallion depicting a *tensa* for the goddess Roma on the 900<sup>th</sup> birthday of the city, the last extant coin-image of a *tensa*, though *tensae* will appear in other media, like lamps and eventually sarcophagi, but not until Late Antiquity, when the use of personal vehicles changes dramatically.

In the end, readers will appreciate the close and careful readings of text and image. The book under review is very successful working up close, carefully parsing rhetoric and iconography, and will prove a great benefit to those working on urban movement and public self-representation.

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1. See also Latham, 2020.