

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Le iscrizioni in antico volgare delle confraternite laiche veneziane: edizione e commento* by Ronnie Ferguson

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lies in literary and filmic adaptations. Above all, it will be welcomed by everyone with a taste for authoritative, well-produced editions that simply ooze quality. This is a work that would grace any bookshelf.

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

ALAN MORRIS

Le iscrizioni in antico volgare delle confraternite laiche veneziane: edizione e commento. Ed. by RONNIE FERGUSON. (Anecdota Veneta: Studi di Storia Culturale e Religiosa Veneziana) Venice: Marcianum Press. 2015. 134 pp. €19. ISBN 978-88-6512-425-3.

Ronnie Ferguson's book takes the reader on a fascinating journey into the history of Venice and the characteristics of its language. This work admirably combines erudition with detailed information that is accessible to the general reader. We can enjoy reading it from cover to cover, consult it as a work of reference, or take it with us as an indefatigable companion on our wanderings in Venice.

The volume presents an edition of inscriptions from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (the oldest one going back to 1311) still surviving in Venice and the isles of its Lagoon. In a previous volume (*Saggi di lingua e cultura veneta* (Padua: CLEUP, 2013)) the author provided a critical edition of the inscriptions emanating from governmental institutions. This second volume of Venetian inscriptions is even more impressive in its treatment of various issues of historical and linguistic relevance, discussed and illustrated by the author in the full and detailed introduction (pp. 11–32). The inscriptions presented here are ordered by major and minor 'Schools' ('Scuole grandi e menude'), mainly religious confraternities, but also guilds linked to trades and commercial activities, such as shoemakers or masons. The introduction provides detailed, but never redundant, information about the Scuole in their historical context, and their *mariegole* (statutes, which included a register of the members of a confraternity and the rules that they adopted).

Each inscription comes with a photograph and a 'file card', where relevant information is systematically presented: historical and linguistic aspects, form, material composition, graphic presentation (gothic or roman characters), and a precise and useful 'address' of its location. In all, twenty-three inscriptions are described and analysed. They are in general carved on marble or stone and attached to the walls of houses and churches, so that they could—and still can—be seen and read by passers-by. One is embroidered on the gonfalon of the Scuola di Santa Fosca on the island of Torcello (Fig. 21). A couple of inscriptions are carved in relief (Figs 2 and 23), with particularly elegant gothic characters.

In the introduction Ferguson highlights the conclusions that can be drawn from these texts. The inscriptions show that the Venetian language was widely used in various social contexts, at a time when in other regions Latin was still the official language, in particular in formal documents or carved inscriptions. Moreover, the inscriptions are in general highly informative, and provide clear evidence of the attention and respect that were paid to the citizens and their opinion in the Venetian

Republic. Many inscriptions give precise information regarding the names of all the persons directly or indirectly responsible, by a formal decision or a donation, for the acquisition, restoration, or construction of public buildings connected to the Scuole. Others describe events and their consequences; there is a particularly impressive account of the terrible earthquake of 1348 and subsequent plague, reported in the inscription in the cloister of Santa Maria de la Carità (Fig. 9). The use of inscriptions to inform citizens also tells us that a certain percentage of the Venetian population was literate.

It is impossible to do justice to the extraordinary interest of this volume and the pleasure it gives the reader. The wealth of information provided is always clear, pertinent, and absorbing, while the bibliographical references are extensive and well integrated. Any textual addition or expansion of abbreviations is duly accounted for in the commentary to each inscription, which also contains fascinating historical data, information about the nature of the associations that promoted the inscriptions, and concise but very important linguistic notes. These are summarized and commented upon in the introduction, which also includes valuable general information (pp. 21–32).

As the author himself points out, this kind of text has the advantage of being free from various cultural influences that can affect paper texts and make them less reliable as linguistic evidence. The language of the inscriptions is addressed to a well-defined readership, namely Venetian citizens, and therefore belongs to a consistent linguistic register. For example, these linguistic data tell us that the phenomena which still distinguish Venetian from Paduan, in particular, were already well rooted and established in the fourteenth century. Today, for example, the infinitive ending *-âr* characterizes Venetian as opposed to Paduan *-àre* (Ven. *cantâr* 'to sing' ~ Pad. *cantare*), and nouns from Latin *-ARIUM*, *-ARIA* are in *-èr* (masc.), *-èra* (fem.) in Venetian but *-àro*, *-àra* in Paduan (Ven. *caleghèr*, *caleghèra* ~ Pad. *calegaro*, *calegara* 'cobbler'). The evolution of stressed middle lax vowels (open *e*, *o*) into diphthongs (*je*, *wo*) and back into simple vowels has a very convoluted history, further confirmed by the variants attested in these texts.

The above is but a very sketchy account of the wealth of extremely interesting and scrupulously researched information offered by this book. It will delight not only specialists but any interested reader.

UNIVERSITY OF PADUA

PAOLA BENINCÀ

Italian Renaissance Humanism in the Mirror. By PATRICK BAKER. (Ideas in Context) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2015. ix+335 pp. £77. ISBN 978-1-107-11186-8

The aim of Patrick Baker's book is to explore the ways in which fifteenth-century Italian humanists defined what we now call 'humanism', by analysing six Renaissance collective biographical accounts (such as *Lives of Illustrious Men*) found in Gianozzo Manetti, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, Biondo Flavio, and Bartolomeo