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The Waters of Rome

For many in the twenty-first century, the connection between cities and water has been lost. Railroads had replaced much of the travel and transportation by water in the nineteenth century and left urban waterfronts to languish from neglect. Owing to the increased urgency regarding changes to hydrologic cycles due to climate shifts there is renewed interest in water, how it relates to urban spaces, and the ways we use it. These eight articles form a special section of volume 118 of the *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée* dedicated to water and water control in Roman history. They explore the relationship between Rome and her river, from the distress of floods to the ingenuity of floating mills and iron bridges. For many modern First World people, understanding the historical role of water in a city requires a leap from our own experiences of centralized water management and land-based transportation. It takes this kind of research to remind us of the vital role of water in cities throughout history.

Carlo Travaglini introduces the eight articles with a reminder that the Tiber River has been essential to the city of Rome throughout its history. Over time it has formed part of the imagination of the urban residents and is often given visual representation. The Tiber was of critical strategic importance to the Papal States and international markets for the transport of goods to and from the city. Due to recurrent floods from the late medieval period through the 1800s, the residents of Rome had to imagine new solutions. This led to an eventual grand transformation of their relationship to the river with the

construction of walls along the shore. The articles pick up on these themes in rough chronological order.

It is one thing to harness the energy of the river, but what happens during a flood? The Tiber has a long history of floods, which Anna Esposito explores in an essay focusing on the period from the late fifteenth century into the sixteenth century. She uses poems, letters, diplomatic dispatches, and diaries to present the response to recurrent floods in the city. The floods were disruptive enough that some local imaginations blamed them on the presence of a malevolent serpent in the waters. Alternatively, a flood was God's judgement on the city, particularly on unsavory papal activities.

Silvia Enzi picks up the story from 1500 to 1700 in a study of how floods were represented in library sources. She chronicles an increasingly systemized approach to the river and its behaviors. Records were kept of peak levels and heavy rains. An analytic connection was made between snow melt and heavy rains in the mountains up-river and subsequent floods in the city. When the river flooded, the drainage and sewage systems within the city would back up to add to the debris, rubbish, mud, and damage left behind. It was understood that the river flow had been obstructed by the bridges and an increase in the number of mills in the river. These first two articles lay a foundation for what is to come.

The third article elaborates on the issue of backed-up sewage, refuse, debris, and the damage caused by the floods. The Tiber flooded with regularity from 1530 to

1750 and caused trauma and distress, especially in the low-lying neighborhoods. The blocked sewage system and drains left water sitting for long periods in parts of the city, which contributed to disease and death. Laura Megna's essay explores the role of the Presidenza delle Strade in the efforts to clean up the city after floods and to devise methods to prevent further backups. Edicts and decrees attempted to change people's behavior and make the city cleaner. Artisans and businesses were taxed to pay for clean-up of streets. Overall, the article explains the increased level of administration required to manage the city and the damage left by floods. At times, though, this article wandered and could have benefited from further organization.

The industry of transporting wood into the city is explored in Francesco Colzi's well-organized article, which offers a welcome change from descriptions of flooded neighborhoods. In this article we see how vital the river was to daily life in the city. Wood was essential for life in Rome in the 1700s. People used it in all sorts of industries, in construction, and as fuel for the necessities of life. Colzi taps into a wealth of records on river travel and the commerce in wood in archives primarily from the Presidenza della Ripe, the municipal administrator for river traffic. This article looks at the amount of wood transported, the location of city markets and their regulation, and legislation that controlled most aspects of the production of wood.

Maria Segarra Lagunes also focuses on the impact of the river on the daily life of Romans in her study of the mills that both lined the shores and floated in the river. The floating wooden mills were understood to be essential, as they brought food basics into the city. Yet they were also obstacles that increased the threat of floods. Frequently, Lagunes notes, the mills were given as concessions by the Camera Apostolica to churches to manage, repair, and operate. The siting of the mill was cru-

cial, especially in relationship to the bridges. Laura Giustini adds more information about the mills in her essay, which is based on Napoleonic records from 1810 and tax assessment records from 1824. A detailed description is provided for how a floating mill actually worked and the differences between the design and construction of the two types of mills.

The use of GIS (Geographical Information System) for historical research is examined by Keti Lelo and Francesco Palazzo, who describe in detail a methodology to plot the flood of 1870 with records on flood levels from across the city. They also rely on climate data, especially rainfall records. GIS maps of the city permit them to assess the damage to structures and loss of goods. One outcome of this flood was the formation of a city commission to study the issue and make recommendations to limit future floods.

Simonetta Ciranna focuses on some such recommendations in the volume's final essay. She tells the story of an engineer, Andrea Busiri Vici (1818-1911), and his proposals to deal with urban floods. One of the more fantastical schemes was to build balconies and bridges across the city that essentially would have raised the ground level of the city above the flood peaks. In a way, in flood times Rome would become like Venice, going about its business just above a city filled with water. Ciranna illuminates some of the nineteenth-century technological advances and how they ultimately changed the relationship between river and city.

While some of the articles show more organizational strength than others, all make good use of archival materials that range from the diaries of people who described the floods to the accounts of municipal officials who grappled with the regular problems of everyday urban economics. Taken together these eight articles shed light on the long and dynamic relationship between the city of Rome and the Tiber River.

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