

Lukas Lemcke: *Imperial Transportation and Communication from the Third to the Late Fourth Century: The Golden Age of the *cursus publicus**. Brüssel: Éditions Latomus 2016 (Collection Latomus 353). 161 S. € 30.00. ISBN: 978-90-429-3356-9.

Histories of institutions are often magisterial in size. Other works on the *cursus publicus*, for example Hans-Georg Pflaum's 'essay' *Essai sur le cursus publicus sous le Haut-Empire romain* (1940) is 202 pages, while Anne Kolb's more recent *Transport und Nachrichtentransfer im Römischen Reich* (2000) is 380 pages. At 160 pages, Lukas Lemcke's slim volume is no less important a contribution to the history of the institution, and all the more so for focusing on the crucial period between the third and fourth centuries. Often brushed aside as a period of "decline", it is important to focus on this phase in detail, as a wealth of textual information – particularly from legal codes – dates from this period. Even the term *cursus publicus* is only first attested in the fourth century, this provides further justification for examining the period as an independent entity – analogous but not necessarily identical to its predecessor. By treating the period on its own merits, Lemcke avoids blanket narratives of decline, and by focusing on the narrow time frame of the third to late fourth centuries can examine in detail the innovations and modifications to the system which justify identifying the period as a "golden age".

Lemcke's main argument is that the imperial communications service was an important part of the imperial administration, and as such "was susceptible to broader constitutional and structural developments in the Roman Empire" (p. 12). The book therefore aims to contextualize the changes to the *cursus publicus* within the developments of the imperial administration in the third and fourth centuries, with particular attention paid to changes in the judicial functioning of the empire and the imperial court, the mobility of the imperial court, and changes in taxation and resource distribution. These changes, many of which were implemented by Diocletian, changed the burden placed on the imperial communications network, which was therefore transformed from the "*vehiculatio*" of Augustus to the "*cursus publicus*" of Late Antiquity. According to Lemcke, recent scholarship since 2000 has changed our understanding of these aspects of imperial administration, making the time ripe for a re-examination of the *cursus publicus* in the light of these new interpretative frameworks (pp. 16–17).

Remarkably, this book is an updated version of Lemcke's Master's thesis at the University of Waterloo. This is remarkable, since it is a rarity for a master's thesis to be published, and even more so since the thesis is available online via open-access. However, although much of the structure remains the same from thesis to book, corrections have been made to the content, and the resulting volume is a useful publication. Lemcke has also published articles on the Sagalassos inscription, and on transport requisitioning in the 1st century. His doctoral dissertation will be on "The Administrative Information Infrastructure of the Later Roman Empire from Constantine until Justinian", thus presumably the expansion of what in this book is treated in Chapter 5: "Outlook" (an addition not part of the original MA thesis).

The book is divided into five main chapters, each with clearly marked subdivisions. Chapter 1 (pp. 11–21) sets out the aims of the book as stated above, and provides a brief historical introduction to the earliest phase of the imperial communications system, the *vehiculatio*. Throughout the book, Lemcke is careful to distinguish between the terms *vehiculatio* and *cursus publicus*, as the latter term first appears in the third century, a change which Lemcke sees as significant given the other structural changes made to the system around that time.

Chapter 2 (pp. 23–44) focuses on the historical context of the third century, when changes took place to the imperial administration which precipitated the overhaul of the *vehiculatio*. The first addressed is the increasing mobility of the imperial court (continuing on from the second century). Itinerant courts complicated the flow of information and supply, but are also linked to the important second change to the judicial operations. The *Constitutio Antoniniana* of 212 extended Roman citizenship across the empire, including the right to appeal to the emperor on legal rulings. In short, this had the effect of centralizing the judicial process in the hands of the emperor, while at the same time the emperor was increasingly mobile. This, Lemcke argues, increased the use to which the *vehiculatio* was put, delivering rescripts to the court's location, but also increased the amount of supplies the court needed, since the travelling court would also need to include a large number of legal advisers. The third major change of the third century, resource distribution, Lemcke also in part attributes to the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in the form of increased taxation from newly-minted citizens and the need to transport and distribute the revenue, particularly for the mili-

tary operations that kept the emperor on the move in the first place. Lemcke finds limited evidence for the use of the *vehiculatio* for the transportation of goods prior to the third century, and so regards the incorporation of a bulk transport service as one of the main innovations of the new *cursus publicus*.

Having identified these three areas as significant stressors on the imperial communication service, Lemcke then traces the impact of changes in these areas made during the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine, in particular the division of the service in two, and the introduction of oxen carts for the new purpose-designated slow transport system, and the changes to the structure of the administration that multiplied the number of bureaucrats between whom information needed to flow, which resulted also in new personnel to manage it (the *vicarii*), and new types of permit. In this period the *cursus publicus* known to us from the Theodosian Code takes shape.

Chapter 3 (pp. 45–116) represents the main substance of the study, examining how the *cursus publicus* was run in the fourth century. The chapter is divided into seven subsections: infrastructure, vehicles, administration, financing, usage rights, issuing rights, and control. The chapter looks at infrastructure (the system of changing posts being at its maximum extent in the early fourth century, Lemcke argues), the vehicle fleet and its animals, usage rights and who had rights to issue permits (an issue in flux throughout the fourth to sixth centuries), and how the system was controlled and protected from misuse.

Lemcke's observation that oxen carts are not attested in the imperial communication service prior to the fourth century takes on significance for the structuring of the infrastructure as a whole. He argues that the slower pace of oxen reduced the hourly and daily distance travelled, and thus necessitated the density of changing stations and overnight stopping points evident in the Bordeaux Itinerary (p. 46). Lemcke also argues that the increased use of the terms *mansio* and *mutatio* to refer to the stops on the *cursus publicus* is reflective of "firmer organization" of the system, although he warns that the distinctions modern scholars read into the terms might not be accurate.

The following section deals with the vehicles, and animals, that comprised the "fleet" of the *cursus publicus*. The subdivision into the *cursus velox* and *cursus clavularis* has an impact here: for the latter, ox-carts were used for the

transport of goods and people. The *cursus velox* employed horses, mules, and donkeys, which could be ridden, used as pack animals, or as draft. Lemcke attempts to estimate the number of animals that might be kept at a station: using a combination of earlier source material (namely the Sagalassos inscription [SEG 26, 1392] of the first century AD) and comparative courtyard and stable size from archaeological excavations, he arrives at approximately 40 (pp. 59–60). This would roughly correspond to the maximum requisition allowance of one user (*senator* or *procurator*) and could account for the anxiety evident in the sources over the requisitioning of “supplementary” animals, which Lemcke argues would have been requisitioned directly from the local populace.

The next section addresses the administration of the *cursus publicus*. Although the basic offices (stations managed as a *munus* by chosen members of the curial class, designated *mancipes*) remained unchanged into the fourth century, the provincial administration took over selection of the candidates. *Mancipes* were expected to fund any shortfall from the *annona* from their own pockets, and the duty became increasingly unattractive. In the second half of the fourth century legislation was issued regarding the *mancipes* which Lemcke contextualizes within the broader campaign of anti-corruption legislation of Valentinian I (p. 65). In the last decades of the fourth century the *munus* of *manceps* could even be issued as a punishment.

The *cursus publicus* was financed through taxation: the fodder was partly provided by the *annona*, any shortfall had to be made up by the local municipality (whether in the personal person of the *manceps* or the inhabitants). Animals were provided by the municipality, either directly requisitioned from among their animals or the cost levied as tax.

The rights of users, types of user and usage, and the different issuers and their rights are one of the most complex to understand, as the terminology was non-standardized and the parameters of usage and issuing were in considerable flux during this period. Although Lemcke has presented the material with the users first and issuers second, I find it easier to conceptualize the other way around. Understanding the issuers and their remits sheds light on to whom and for what business they are likely to issue warrants in the first place. The discussion here is rather technical: the overall trend, however, indicates that with the proliferation of administrative offices throughout the provinces came a concentration of the power to create permits (ultimately resting in the hands of the praetorian prefects and the

magister officiorum, and other offices, e.g. *magistri militum*, vicars, *duces*, and governors, making do with a limited number of permits to distribute at their discretion. Lemcke argues that this had the beneficial effect of streamlining communications, making the *cursus publicus* more efficient (pp. 78 and 102).

The changing structure of the administration resulted in the creation of new permits out of the original *diplomata*. The main permit was known as an *evectio*, and the only other known permit is presumed to be the *tractoria*, which excluded access to horses and *birotae*. Other terms encountered (e.g. *angarialis* or *annonaria*) cannot apparently be linked with certainty to the *cursus publicus* (Lemcke promises us a future article on the subject). The second half of the fourth century witnessed an expansion of the number of people who could utilize the *cursus publicus*, and as a consequence, permissions and allowances were kept restricted (in the name of efficiency). As the imperial administration transformed into a three-tiered system (praetorian prefect – vicar – governor), privileges related to the *cursus publicus* also changed hierarchically, “by 401, all officials of the provincial administration, including vicars were prohibited from employing the *cursus publicus* themselves” (p. 82). Lemcke addresses bishops as an interesting subgroup: technically not members of the imperial/provincial administration but over the course of the fourth century taking on more official duties they are a liminal group. Lemcke thinks that the evidence suggests they were infrequent users of the service (despite Ammianus Marcellinus’ famous objections). Military users are also a special subgroup. In the chapter on issuing we learn that by the turn of the fifth century *magistri militum* had a large number of permits at their disposal (though no creation rights), the Theodosian Code sets limits on the requisitioning capacity of military officers. Soldiers and supplies could be transported using the *cursus publicus* but on the whole Lemcke is of the opinion that, like the bishops, they were not heavy users of the system.

One of the keystones of Lemcke’s argument throughout the book is that the incorporation of goods transport into the *cursus publicus* had considerable impact on its infrastructure and administration. Tax proceeds, military clothing, precious metals, and possibly even the *annona* (although Lemcke does not come down firmly on one side or the other of the debate) were transported via the *cursus publicus*.

The final section of Chapter 3 deals with control and policing of the *cursus publicus*. Lemcke sees authority derived from social class as an important factor in enforcing laws and preventing misconduct, with each level of administration, from the *mancipes* to the governors, susceptible in some way to either bribery or intimidation. At the highest level, the policing of the *cursus publicus* was under the separate jurisdiction of the *magister officiorum*, whereas the administration of the system belonged to the branch of the praetorian prefecture, a “conscious separation” possibly intended to combat corruption (p. 113).

Chapter 4 (pp. 117–122) is a brief summary and conclusion. Chapter 5, “Outlook” (pp. 123–134), looks forward to the fifth and sixth centuries, from the different perspectives of the western and eastern regions. Lemcke extends his reasoning: if the expansion and diversification of the *cursus publicus* in the third and fourth centuries were a response to the administrative complexity and geographical extent of the empire, then its truncation in the fifth and sixth centuries can be seen as a reasonable response to reduced geographic area (of the successor kingdoms in the West), or prioritization of resource allocation (especially in the East, under Leo and Justinian). One presumes that Chapter 5 offers a taste of what Lemcke’s doctoral thesis will investigate further.

The value of this book lies in its focus on Late Antiquity, and its efforts to situate the *cursus publicus* in the peculiar circumstances in the Tetrarchic period, emphasizing that the *cursus publicus* should be regarded as a somewhat different institution to its predecessor. Chapter 3 is especially useful for those who are not specialists in imperial administrative hierarchies or legal history as it sets out the material with clarity and confidence.

This volume rightly focuses on the Theodosian Code and other contemporary texts for its source material, and presents a clear picture of what these challenging sources tell us about the *cursus publicus*. A separate endeavor should look at the equally challenging archaeological remains and material culture to see how well it harmonizes with or diverges from the picture presented by the legal evidence. The archaeological remains are complicated and belie the easy typologies of e.g. E. W. Black (which focuses on Britain) on which Lemcke relies. Rather, the apparent uniformity of structures may be a result of circular reasoning; there may be as much flexibility in architectural forms as there is in terminology. Lemcke presents the archaeological evidence from the road station at Ambrussum rather poorly (pp.

51–53, figs 1–2): he implies that the ancillary buildings (baths, forge, sanctuary) are part of the “rebuilding” of the mid-fourth century. In fact, the archaeological evidence indicates that these buildings fell out of use in the mid-third century. The “*mutatio*” (Area A on fig. 1, p. 51) fell out of use in the first half of the fourth century. The rebuilding of the second half of the fourth century, far from being “ca. 400 m²” is limited to a single poorly-built building partially constructed over the sanctuary (Area G), which the excavators interpret as a dwelling for salvagers quarrying the abandoned site for reusable building stone, not as a road-station.¹ Thus the chosen example does not support the picture of a “golden age” of the *cursus publicus* Lemcke has built up from the written evidence in quite the way he might have hoped.

This is a useful volume for those interested in the history of travel in the ancient world, and the administration of the Late Roman empire. It offers a concise overview of operations of the imperial communications system, and its focus on the changes to the system in the third and fourth centuries in the light of recent research into the historical context makes an important contribution to the subject for the 21st century.

1 See J.-L. Fiches (ed.): Quatre puits de l'agglomération routière gallo-romaine d'Ambrussum (Villetelle, Hérault). Montpellier 2012 (Revue archéologique de Narbonnaise. Supplément 42), here 15–32; Y. Manniez/V. Mathieu/G. Depeyrot: La récente découverte d'une installation de l'Antiquité tardive sur le site d'Ambrussum (Villetelle, Hérault). 1 – Etude archéologique. In: Revue archéologique de Narbonnaise 31.1, 1998, 193–211.

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