

Saracens and Their World in Boiardo and Ariosto is organized into an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter introduces the question of how Islam was perceived in Renaissance Italy; chapters 2 and 3 are dedicated to Boiardo, while 4 and 5 focus on Ariosto. Chapter 5 addresses in greater depth the final duel between Rodomonte and Ruggiero that vividly showcases the centrality of knightly *cortesía* and honor (and their opposite, betrayal) in a crucial moment of Ariosto's poem. Pavlova's book also offers two useful appendixes that meticulously survey the Saracen characters in the *Innamoramento* and the *Furioso*. This accomplished study is a valuable resource for scholars of Renaissance Italy, of the relationship between Islam and Western Christendom, of chivalric literature of the medieval and early modern periods, and of Italian literature and history more broadly.

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Venetian Inscriptions: Vernacular Writing for Public Display in Medieval and Renaissance Venice. Ronnie Ferguson.

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In this impressive volume Ferguson focuses on one discrete subset of *scrittura esposta* (writings for public display), as Armando Petrucci, a key figure in the study of writing and epigraphy in Italy described them: inscriptions in the Venetian vernacular ca. 1300–1530. As one of the leading vernaculars of the peninsula—vying with Tuscan until the sixteenth century *questione della lingua* definitively found in favor of the latter as the dominant vernacular (3)—used in one of its most populous cities, this is an important collection and informs a valuable word list assembled in the appendix (389–407).

The book is predominantly made up of a detailed Corpus Inscription (CI 65–382), broadly following the model set by the classical Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (CIL). Ferguson has rigorously compiled each of the 109 entries to include a photograph of the inscription, transcriptions and a translation into English, a date (or range), discussion of where the item is located (or now preserved if it has been moved), and a detailed discussion of its formal characteristics, including typographic style and language use. This is preceded by two chapters that provide some analysis and context, with a primary focus on methodologies applied to organize them, as well as attention for the linguistic peculiarities detected across the corpus. Ferguson suggests the vernacular was used more commonly in Venice than other Italian centers during the same period (6) and considers why it was privileged for texts that were inscribed almost always on walls of the buildings facing towards public spaces. Lay confraternities stand out here (50–51), as almost half the corpus can be related to the *scuole* and thus

may have adopted a language that was more accessible to the socially mixed constituencies of these groups. Here, Petrucci's concept of *visibile parlare* (visible speech acts) is helpful, in that the adoption of the vernacular over the less accessible Latin (favored by many official, ecclesiastical, and funerary monuments across the peninsula) helps focus attention on the visibility and audience of these permanent declarations in stone.

While primarily a reference work, the corpus and helpful index by "present location" (387–88) reveals that most inscriptions were intended for public locations: on external walls of buildings, including churches and confraternities, on squares, streets, by bridges, and along canals. This is taken somewhat for granted, and a little more attention (photographic and textual) might have been given to context, as all too often we are presented with the inscriptions divorced from the sculptural low-relief or painting, and the doorway or other feature to which the writing was attached. There are no images that show any wider context, with all of them cropped closely around the object under discussion. In many such cases the text and object work together, so that focusing on the text alone provides only part of the speech act that we are witnessing, as with the 1516 dedicatory inscription of the gondoliers of Giudecca that is shown without the statue of the Madonna it is associated with. The confident assertion of the presence of a group of German shoemakers at a place in Calle de le Botteghe is on display in their finely inscribed low-relief panel of the Annunciation, of around 1383 (CI 42), although perhaps a view of the street setting above the height of a door frame might have illustrated this further.

Besides marking the meeting places of often minor lay associations, these inscriptions record the charitable donation of properties such as alms houses, and frequently provide a prompt to viewers to offer up a prayer to donors and patron saints. There are some exceptional examples, where the public display of the written word seems to be taken to an extreme; the full text of a papal indulgence of 1362 (CI 30) at the ducal palace is readily explained by the importance of the privilege associated with the now lost chapel of Saint Nicholas. The full-text inscription of Angelo Piatini's 1340 will, on a wall in Murano (CI 8; now Museo del Vetro), suggests not only that the testator wanted to make public his significant charitable donations to three beneficiaries but also wanted to ensure that these were observed. More prosaic short text inscriptions establish the minimum width of a street (CI 103–04), the extent that a jettied overhang might extend into a street (102), or the ownership of houses in a neighborhood association (CI 71–72).

As these examples suggest, the corpus stands as a remarkable achievement, a resource that assembles a range of testimonies that will be of interest to specialists from various disciplines; those that take the time to peruse the detailed corpus descriptions will undoubtedly be rewarded by this rich body of evidence now rigorously presented.

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