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Marina Bonomelli (ed), *Quaderni di Sicurtà: Documents on the history of insurance*. Milan: Fondazione Mansutti and Mondadori Electa, 2011. 380 pp., historiographical introductory essays, illustrations, bibliography, indices: ISBN 978883708587, €70 (pbk)

I often tell students that the job of an historian isn't necessarily to remember streams of specific dates and details, but rather to know where to find them. With this in mind, I was delighted to get my hands on the new catalogue of the Milanese historical library *Fondazioni Mansutti*. Comprising more than 5,000 volumes related to the history of insurance (primarily in Italian, English, French and German), about 2,500 insurance policies, and further documents and artefacts, no greater multilingual collection of Early Modern sources exists on this important branch of commerce. Since the earliest insurances were marine insurances, maritime matters feature prominently in the collection.

The volume—part library guide, part reference work, but primarily a museum catalogue—provides details of the 470 earliest books in the unparalleled Mansutti collection. Items catalogued range from handwritten judicial decisions to eighteenth-century academic theses, alongside most of the important early treatises on the subject of insurance, as well as important volumes covering the evolution of maritime law and the Law Merchant; the history and theory of commerce, trade, and economics; and the development of probability, usury, and actuarial science. (The entire collection is catalogued in detail in the Italian pages of the Foundation's web site, [www.insurancehistory.org](http://www.insurancehistory.org).)

Illustrated in colour throughout, with each catalogued item depicted, *Quaderni di Sicurtà* offers a unique glimpse of the primary sources for a subject which remains largely neglected by current historians writing in English. An accompanying CD-ROM provides details, in Italian and English, of an additional 3,000+ modern books and periodicals in the Foundation's collection, the core of which was assembled by the Milanese insurance lawyer Francesco Mansutti, and donated to the organization that bears his name in 2004. He remains its chairman.

Entitled *Quaderni di Sicurtà* after medieval merchants' 'security registers', in which they recorded details of their insurance transactions, the catalogue includes a brief description of each of the 470 items. Some of these, such as the entry on the 1799 Act to incorporate the Boston Marine Insurance Company, include useful snippets of background information, in this case, a two-sentence description of the US shipping and insurance sector in the final decade of the eighteenth century. However, most entries comprise primarily a well-researched (if necessarily tightly potted) biography of the relevant author. These details are often much more comprehensive than the descriptions of the books themselves, however, which may leave the catalogue user unsure of the relevance of the volume to their particular interest.

This problem is a general shortcoming of the catalogue. It contains an index of personal and corporate names (such as engravers and illustrators) relevant to the books listed, another of publishers and printers, and a third, helpfully divided by country, of insurance companies and institutions mentioned in both the printed and electronic catalogues. However, since the collection includes entries ranging from a sixteenth-century translation of *Opera spiritual* by Thomas Kempis to the printed *Rules and Regulations of the Royal Navy Annuitant Society* (1823), it can be difficult to identify relevant entries. In the absence of a subject index or keyword classification, a scholar focussed on marine insurance, for example, is left little choice but to consult each entry to determine its relevance. That said, doing so is certain to reveal a wealth of Early Modern publications which may be of interest, and to yield what is undoubtedly the most comprehensive source of biographical information about those Early Modern authors who turned their attention to insurance and related topics.

The CD-ROM completes the catalogue with searchable PDF files providing bibliographical details of the modern collection of books and periodicals held by the Foundation (although the CD-ROM's auto-run feature crashes my Chrome browser; happily the individual PDF files are easily found on the CD-ROM without the disc's clunky interface). Like the volume's bibliography, this alphabetical electronic catalogue is a useful guide to published secondary sources, although no keywords or summaries are included. The Foundation web site includes a more powerful, Italian-language-only, collection-search function.

*Quaderni di Sicurtà* includes three short essays. The Prefect of Milan's historical library *Biblioteca Ambrosiana* sets the stage with some passing assertions about Early Modern attitudes to money and insurance. The second, a timeline listing 35 major events in the six-hundred-year development of insurance to 1943, is based on modern secondary sources. The third and longest, by the catalogue's editor Marina Bonomelli, Director of the Mansutti Foundation, presents an elegant discussion of private and collections and public libraries, and a description of the collection and the catalogue. The great disappointment is that no academic essay on the history of insurance is included in the catalogue, let alone one based on the volumes in the catalogue.

Maritime historians seeking information on Early Modern marine insurance, risk transfer, or seaborne trade and commerce are unlikely to find *Quaderni di Sicurtà* an invaluable resource. It doesn't proffer any concrete details lifted from the books catalogued (which isn't really its function), but nor does it work particularly well as a finding aid for such information, given the drawbacks described above. Thus, *Quaderni di Sicurtà* isn't a great help to a historian wanting to know where to find things. For that, stretch your Italian and visit the online catalogue. *Quaderni di Sicurtà* does identify very many of the earliest printed sources on insurance, allowing readers to search online for scanned versions which often exist in various e-repositories (including six complete works on the Foundation's website). It is a wonderfully rich book, delightful to peruse, beautiful to explore and consult, and reflective not only of the great intellectual energies which Early Modern writers devoted to the subject of insurance, but also of Francesco Mansutti's passion for their works, and Marina Bonomelli's for books and their authors.

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