

THE MYTH OF VENICE

The site of Venice

Marin Sanudo in Laus, urbis, Venetae

“This city, amidst the billowing waves of the sea, stands on the crest of a main, almost like a queen restraining its force.”

“It is then, a very big and beautiful city, excelling over all others.”

“It has been built more by divine than human will”

Doge Loredan, addressing the Venetian Senate 1509

“Its location is extraordinary: no other site in the world is like it, surrounded by sea ...and secure from land attack because not placed on the mainland, secure from sea attack because not placed in the open sea.”

In the 16th century the Venetian Senate referred to the lagoon as “the sacred walls of our fatherland”

Doge Francesco Dona (1545-53) “after Paradise, Venice was the best place in the universe.”

J.R. Hale “The lone sea wolf. Islanded in its lagoons, Venice was both part of and separate from the rest of Italy.”

Patricia Fortini Brown “The Otherness of Venetians”

The Virgin City

Patricia Fortini Brown “ Venetians saw the city’s protected position within the enclosure of the lagoon as a sign of her virginal and inviolate status.”

Edward Muir “The crowned Virgin came to personify an inviolate, transcendent Venice.”

Man made beauty and Urban landscape

Edward Muir outlines the Neoplatonic belief that “outward beauty was a sign of inner virtue... to Renaissance minds a stunning cityscape alone gave proof of a well arranged political and social order.”

Alberti “noble spaces lead man to noble deeds”

Visual Representations relevant to physical site

Jacopo Barbari, “Birdseye View of Venice”

Titian, The Ascension of the Virgin- Frari Church

Veronese: The Battle of Lepanto

Boniface, God the Father blessing the Piazza San Marco

The New Rome

Library
Mint
Gateway to the Arsenale
Sansovino- Statues on Giant's Staircase
Loggetta
Bordone Fisherman Giving the Ring to the Doge

Wealth and empire

Mars and Neptune
Juno Lavishing her gifts on Venice 1553-4
Allegory of the League of Cambrai- Palma il Giovane

Political perfection

Jacopo Sansovino "The city of Venice has in the course of time superseded all other republics by means of its marvellous government."

"..this government, for its constituted laws, its unity, and uncorrupted liberty, is a sun in the world, regulated with justice and wisdom."

Doge Loredan 1509 "there was never born nor never died a man in Venice... they (the nobles) enter our Senate and into our councils and they put aside private arguments and disagreements."

Marin Sanudo Praise of the City of Venice 1493
"And the order with which this holy Republic is governed is a wonder to behold; ...no discord among the patricians, but all work together to (the Republics) increase."

Lion of St Mark
Porta della Carta

Social Harmony

Bellini, Procession of the Relic of the True Cross
Bellini, Miracle at the Bridge of San Lorenzo
Carpaccio, Healing of the Possessed Man

The purpose or function of visual and written representations

Edward Muir, "Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice"

"The fundamental problem of the historians of Venice ...has been to separate appearance from reality, to uncover from the veneer of propaganda and mythology the actual social and political structure of the city."

"A large group of scholars including Federico Chabod (et al) find the events at the turn of the century, particularly the War of the League of Cambrai, to be the catalysts for a new exposition of the myth of Venice....In response to diplomatic failures, the Venetians retreated into the comfort of the myth."

Muir, Art and Pageantry in Renaissance Venice,

“Perhaps the most important attribute of political imagery in the arts was its persuasive power. Visual images cajoled belief by simplifying and distorting political issues, by ignoring objectionable facts”

Mary Hollingsworth, Patronage in Renaissance Italy

“At this time (1460’s-1480- loss of empire to the Turks) of major political upheaval, Venetian patricians developed a radically new style for the display of state power and prestige.”

Marin da Canal, Venetian chronicler, (200 Years before Sanudo)

We see writings and paintings with our eyes, so that when one sees a story painted ...he seems to be present...and since events live, thanks to paintings and oral accounts and writing...”

Sanudo

“For verification of such history... it was also painted in our Great Council Hall; which, if it had not been true, our good Venetians would never had had it painted.”

Priuli 1501 (on the discovery of the way around the Cape of Good Hope)

“And this news was held by the learned to be the worst news which the Venetian government could have had.”

The reality of the Myth

Benedetto Dei

“the city of Venice has undergone more revolutions and innovations and bloodshed than have the four most violent and warlike cities in Italy.”

“”your ballot secretaries falsified the laws and ordinances and gave office to their relatives and friends.”

Marin Sanudo 1486, Vite dei Dogi

“There arose in the city a cursed discord between the old and the new families...it was said that there had never been such hatred and arty division, and if it continued the city would be in a bad way.

Pope Pius 1463

“They wish to appear Christians before the world but in reality they never think of God, and except for the state, they hold nothing sacred, nothing holy.”

“he is already convinced that the destiny of Rome is his”

“A mad state cannot long stand.”

The Duke of Milan 1464

“You Venetians are wrong to disturb the pace of Italy...If you knew how everyone hates you your hair would stand on end...You are alone and all the world is against you.”