

*Celebrazione e autocritica: La Serenissima e la ricerca dell'identità veneziana nel tardo Cinquecento.* Benjamin Paul, ed.

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Editor Benjamin Paul begins his introduction with a survey of events in Venice in the latter half of the sixteenth century. The landmarks are familiar and mostly dismal. But out of this, he concludes, came two responses: an almost defiant celebration of Venice's identity and greatness, and widespread self-criticism that led to significant reformulation of that identity and the forms that expressed it. The essays in this volume are elaborations of papers presented in a 2006 conference dedicated to those themes. Taken together they are consciously revisionist, directed against a long-time historiography that assumed Venetian stagnation and increasing irrelevance.

Of celebration there is a great deal here; of self-criticism, not so much. The latter, in fact, was not fundamental. A few *cittadini* grumbled at the inequities of the patrician-dominated social order (Anna Bellavitis), but their complaints were voiced only in manuscript. Antonio Da Ponte might have been at the center of debates over the proper training and purpose of architects (Martin Gaier), but controversies within the arts had been around for years. Deborah Howard demonstrates the infighting that accompanied the “megalomaniac” (107) project to build the fortress city of Palmanova, and accompanying problems with money, materials, site, and labor, but these are commonplaces — see Alvise Dardani's dispatches from the wars of Cambrai — and do not criticize the system itself. Two *bozzetti* for ducal votive paintings are rather different from the final works, indicating that initial exaltations of the subject were toned down in favor of more collective exaltations of the state (Paul), but the two episodes do not constitute any great challenge to a collectivist mentality. Official historian Antonio Morosini did break with preceding historical models, deeming them inadequate and out of date (Dorit Raines); but historiography had long been evolving, and Morosini's was not an especially radical alteration — he certainly did not strike at traditional triumphalism. Giorgio Tagliaferro's study of a Domenico Tintoretto votive painting in the room of the *avogadori* would have us see a rethinking of the myth of Venice, but the iconography is unexceptional. (Am I the only one who found it odd that the painting's title is repeatedly stated as including “*ritratti di due avogadori e un notaio,*” but the actual painting features three *avogadori* — and there were three *avogadori* — with a kneeling notary alongside?)

But the real point is that the Venice that emerges from all of these essays is a lively, creative, and dynamic society. So, for example, growing Eucharistic cults led to the great festival of Corpus Domini, the rebuilding or redecorating of churches, the boosting of expressions for lay piety — eventually, all seventy parishes hosted confraternities of the Santissimo Sacramento — but also the crowding out of other local cults (Claudio Bernardi). Celebration of the victory of Lepanto brought new liturgical forms and new cults (especially that of Santa Giustina, on whose day the battle was won), and promoted confraternities of the rosary (Iain Fenlon). The crises of the 1570s brought forth new artists, new themes (or old themes reworked), new styles, and new commissions (rebuilding of the ducal palace, the Redentore); and these were accompanied by debates on the training of artists and the organization of the profession (David Rosand). Patriarch Giovanni Tiepolo promoted and wrote hagiography, especially of homegrown saints (Deborah Walberg). And even the *soazoni* — elaborate wooden entablatures cladding arches and upper nave — in the modest church of S. Nicolò are worthy of note; as Thomas Worthen demonstrates, these were not only characteristic of many other parishes, but betokened the implementation of Catholic reform, new attention to parishes, and spreading of the confraternities of the Santissimo Sacramento.

Two small notes of thanks are due. First is to the Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani, host of the conference and sponsor of this edition; already a leading patron of research, the Centro is ramping up its publication series. The second is gratitude for the life and work of contributor David Rosand, who died on 8 August 2014: a great human and a great scholar.

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