

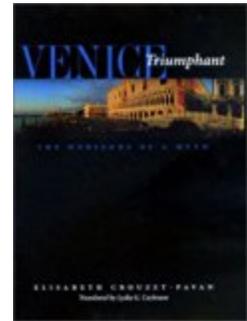
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan. *Venice Triumphant: Horizons of a Myth*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. xxi + 386 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-6958-7.

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Among its urban equals, perhaps no other city in Renaissance Italy has evoked a steadier flow of scholarly literature than Venice. Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan's *Venice Triumphant: The Horizons of a Myth*, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane, does more than merely add to the abundant number of monographs dedicated to this city. At its core, this book centers on space that created and transformed Venice across time, with a primary focus on the medieval and Renaissance periods, in order to "explain Venice on the basis of the places where it became Venice" (p. xi).

Beginning with the Roman colonization of the lagoon and the first traces of Venice's blueprint, the first chapter of *Venice Triumphant* discusses the struggle between man and nature and the complexity in taming an unruly environment composed of marshlands and subject to frequent flooding. With the centuries-long construction and consistent urban expansion, Crouzet-Pavan posits that the manipulation of physical space was a defining and unique factor for Venice. More so than in any other Italian city of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the government and aristocrats of Venice projected their quest for power and prestige into the proliferation of monuments, churches, and so on, as symbolic gestures or representations. Architecture was, therefore, a medium through which Venetians could transcribe their material exploits into physical glory and immortality.

In chapters 2 and 3, the author then examines commercial and mainland expansion respectively. With the decline of maritime exploits came the gradual domination of the land adjacent to Venice. Here, Crouzet-Pavan asserts that the connection between Venice and the mainland had been intimate long before the slowdown of maritime trade (p. 102). Its relative geographical isolation (indeed because of it) the outward expansion of Venice was necessitated if it were to survive and flourish. The importance here lies in understanding the interconnectivity of the city.

The author's discussion then proceeds with the investigation of space in Venice itself by examining, as merely two examples, the Rialto and the great market. In the final chapter, the author resuscitates the people of Venice by examining "the ways in which they lived together and constituted an urban community" (p. 230).

Venice Triumphant: Horizons of a Myth is intended for a wider audience than "specialists in the field," and it indeed proves a valuable resource for the general reader with a strong interest in Venetian history. Providing an ideological springboard from which topics can be further investigated, detailed endnotes, and a rich bibliography, this book is also especially useful for students, historians, and other researchers interested in considering Venice under a fresh perspective.

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