Review of Venice, Cita Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo. E

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spanned the years 1567 to 1603 and illustrate how Rome continued to use the sale of offices to fund ever-rising curial expenses well after Trent and how families continued to participate as buyers, pursuing investment opportunities to pad their patrimonial futures.

All things considered, we find in these documents complexity that humanizes the story of the attempt to implement the reform legislation of the Council of Trent. The practical changes required by that legislation created between 1545 and 1563 were dramatic and affected society from almost every perspective: economic, religious, political, familial, parochial, institutional, and personal. Those rules dictated profound changes that we must assume required many generations to take hold. The natural tendency to read laws such as these with their tough rules and heavy penalties as indicative of a society cowed—if not cowering—in fear must be rejected. These documents show us that public reaction to the new rules was to appeal—and with high frequency—for exemption from the rules. The goals of the Council of Trent were only slowly realized, if at all, even in that place we consider most Roman among early modern lands.


Reviewed by: Brian Maxson, East Tennessee State University

This fascinating new book, Venice, Cità Excelentissima, contains a series of translated excerpts from the diaries of the Venetian patrician Marin Sanudo (1466–1536). Sanudo wrote his vast diaries between 1496 and 1533. As early as Sanudo’s own lifetime, historians used the richness and variety of these diaries as an unparalleled evidentiary source for early modern Venice. The depth of the diaries derives from Sanudo’s personal access to government records and, perhaps even more, his attention to detail and the wide range of topics that he deemed worthy of record. The importance of the diaries prompted a group of Italian editors to publish them in their entirety between 1879 and 1903, a project that eventually spanned fifty-eight volumes. Even after its publication, however, the sheer size of the work, combined with Sanudo’s use of the Venetian dialect and often technical vocabulary, limited the accessibility of modern readers to the diaries. Toward the end of broadening Sanudo’s potential audience, Patricia H. Labalme, Laura Sanguinetti White, and Linda L. Carroll have prepared a large collection of excerpts from the diaries that spans both the topical and temporal range of the original text. The editors have arranged the book around nine topical chapters, each concluded with a series of black and white photographs to illustrate key points. The excerpts and illustrations provide a vivid panorama of Venice in the early sixteenth century. Labalme, White, and Carroll have produced an outstanding and engaging resource for specialists and students alike.

The first chapter presents diary excerpts that pertain to Sanudo himself and his thoughts on his diary. Chapter 2 offers accounts of domestic politics in Venice, including several fascinating passages regarding internal political rituals. Chapter 3, on crime and punishment, casts a broad net to include crimes ranging from electoral fraud to domestic disputes. Chapter 4 focuses on Venetian relations with other European powers. As a student of diplomacy, I found Sanudo’s description of a discussion between members of the Venetian government and the ambassador of the Ottoman Empire in this chapter particularly striking. After climbing the bell tower, the two parties turned to a discussion of potential methods that a hostile army could use to overcome the water that separated Venice from the
mainland. As they talked, the participants presumably enjoyed the “collation of malmsey wine and confections” that Sanudo claims they had brought up the bell tower with them (215). This anecdote and numerous others throughout the volume illustrate the level of detail and description that Sanudo packed into his pages. Chapter 5 provides several interesting glimpses into the financial structure of the city, complete with passages regarding bank failures and shipwrecks.

The remaining four chapters continue this broad coverage. Chapter 6 examines a range of social groups and issues in Venice, including celebrations, processions, disasters, and the different groups that lived in Renaissance Venice, the range of which attest to the diversity of the sixteenth-century city. Chapter 7 examines the religious life of Venice, including descriptions of miracles, responses to natural disasters, and convents, amongst other issues. Chapter 8 incorporates passages on written and visual culture. This chapter contains a particularly striking passage regarding a now lost painting of Doge Andrea Gritti by Titian. Sanudo described a political interpretation of the painting circulating in late 1531. According to Sanudo, the rumor circulating around Venice after the painting’s unveiling was that the saints featured were arguing about who could claim credit for the election of the doge. As the volume editors point out, this anecdote provides one of the numerous examples for which the diaries provide a “unique record” for historians (458). A chapter on theatrical productions, carnival in Venice, and celebrations rounds out the volume.

This book provides a tremendous resource for researchers, teachers, and the general public. For researchers, this collection provides a panorama of Sanudo’s massive diaries without forcing them to sift through the volumes of Sanudo’s Italian prose. The editors provide clear footnotes to point out literary allusions, explain assumptions on which Sanudo based statements, and lead researchers to further passages and outside sources on topics. The book will prove equally beneficial for instructors. The manageable size of the excerpts combined with the topical structure of the book will make it a perfect complement to any number of lectures in a period or more specialized course, ranging from popular culture to politics. The richness of even the shortest passages in the book will enable instructors to have lively discussions with students without overloading them. For the general public, the quality of the passage selection and the lively translation of *Città Excelentissima* provides a living and breathing early modern Venice for all readers to enjoy.


Reviewed by: Elizabeth S. Cohen, York University, Toronto, Canada

Ottavia Niccoli, an imaginative Italian scholar working at the intersection of social and cultural history, offers an erudite and wide-ranging essay on reconciliation in the early modern world. *Perdonare* here embraces, beyond a legally formal sense of “pardon,” an intricate web of political, social, and religious dynamics. With conflicts and their resolution as ever-fresh concerns, many historians have looked to institutions, especially a long-emergent state, to locate remedies for violence and disorder. For Niccoli, codified law and judicial enforcement are only part of the picture. Arguing from an anthropological perspective, she expands legal historian Mario Sbriccoli’s idea of “negotiated justice” to show that, even toward the end of the seventeenth century, not only did older informal mechanisms for settlement persist, but new variants appeared. Niccoli’s vision highlights social processes in which the “ideas, practices, and rituals” of her subtitle interact with evolving institutions—church as well as government—in myriad particular situations. Early modern societies’