Patricia H. Labalme and Laura Sanguineti White, eds. Linda L. Carroll, trans. *Venice, Cità Excelentissima: Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo.*

Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. xlii + 598 pp. index. illus. map. bibl. $50. ISBN: 978–0–8018–8765–9.

Nearly forty years ago, this reviewer first encountered the *Diaries* of Marin Sanudo (the *veneziano* form of his name; Marino Sanuto in Italian) in the afternoon pallor of the inner room of the Biblioteca Marciana's *sala riservata.* A half-dozen volumes were stacked up next to one of the American students, who read by the dim light of a dusty lamp with a frayed cord to reconstruct the dogal politics of the first decades of the sixteenth century; another fifty-two were arrayed behind his head. Sanudo had recorded virtually everything that happened in Venice between 1496 and 1533: "Everything I saw and heard I noted down" (7). Every few days he recorded briefer or longer entries, replete with details and nearly without syntax. These fantastic sentences he crafted with passion, for he loved Venice, as he put it, with a *sviscerato amor* (7) — a love that felt like his entrails were being ripped out of his body, a punishment inflicted on many of the condemned men whose shrieks ricocheted through the city centers of sixteenth-century Europe. So much, that much, did Sanudo love Venice.

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Now, five centuries later, other lovers of Venice have made available selections from Sanudo's *Diaries* in this thick and sumptuous volume, an epitome 1/58 of the original. It is the product of an editorial venture that spanned twelve years, headed up by the late Patricia H. Labalme, the beneficent patroness of all things Venetian, and Laura Sanguineti White, as editors, and Linda L. Carroll as translator. The single manuscript of the Sanudo diaries, an autograph, survived intact, despite vicissitudes during the Austrian occupation, until the Italian edition was undertaken between 1879 and 1903 under the leadership of Rinaldo Fulin. Although the Fulin team produced a superb edition, since slips do occur, Labalme and White checked their selected excerpts against the original manuscript, and in some cases corrected details from archival documents.

The resulting book is a monument to Venice, the *Cità Excelentissima*; to Sanudo, the tireless scribe; and to the scholars of Venice over three generations — that of Labalme's mentors Gilbert, Myron Gilmore, Werner Jaeger, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Vittore Branca; of Labalme herself, who fell prey to the magic of Venice in the years after World War II as Europe shook off that nightmare; and of the new influx of researchers from the late 1960s, a handful of whom came to Venice while their fellows in their multitudes stampeded to Florence. The volume is dedicated to the memory of Felix Gilbert (1905–91), master historian of many times and places, Venice among them.

The selections from the fifty-eight volumes were chosen through a collaborative process that email communication greatly facilitated. Among others, Venetianists well-known to readers of this journal contributed to the enterprise: Patricia Fortini Brown, Stanley Chojnacki, Robert Finlay, Rona Goffen, Paul Grendler, James Grubb, Edward Muir, Dennis Romano, and Guido Ruggiero, with Brown selecting the splendid illustrations. Whereas Sanudo had jumbled together in a single unit reports of ambassadorial visits, the executions of criminals, or the celebration of a feast, Labalme and White have clustered exemplary accounts under nine thematic headings: those pertaining to Sanudo himself, and to government, crime and justice, foreign affairs, economic structures, society, religion, humanism and the arts, and "Theater in Venice, Venice as Theater." This ordering is a vast improvement on Sanudo's, whose work in itself challenges the preference for chronology as a principle of organization. It blessedly brings into coherence the multiplicity of Sanudo's vision, rich in color and detail, but baffling in its disordered abundance.

Of the more than 100 selections, a few passages may be noted to hint at the range and freshness of Sanudo's pen. On 10 May 1526, the Feast of the Ascension, Sanudo noted that the "most Serene Doge" went "to marry the sea," "dressed in gold and with a mantle of white-gold damask," conveyed in the "new Bucintoro," the doge's special gondola, "larger than the other . . . and . . . a most beautiful piece of work": "They have barely finished gilding it; indeed, they were still working on it yesterday. It is very beautiful with lots of gold, which cost six hundred ducats or more" (83).

On 24 August 1509 "eight patricians dressed in scarlet" escorted the Turkish ambassador into the Collegio: "He made his entrance . . . dressed in a gold tunic,

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flanked by [two] university laureates. Behind him, one of his attendants brought a dried head stuffed with straw on top of a pole, which is said to be that of a captain of the Egyptian ruler, the Sophi subjugated by the sultan, that is by his army, which the ambassador brings to the Signoria as a token of [their] victory" (205).

On 26 March 1511, an earthquake struck Venice: "The chimneys were swaying, the walls bursting open, the bell towers tottering, things high were tumbling down, and the water in the canals — even the Grand Canal — was boiling as if it had a fire under it." The Senators "had barely entered the [Senate] chamber" when the room began to shake: "each man headed down the wooden staircase as best he could, with such haste and in such a crush that many, carried along by the crowd, reached the bottom without their feet ever having touched a step of the stair" (373).

Sanudo is Carpacciesque (with a touch of Bosch): his canvas is broad and multifocal, his eye is all on the details. Fittingly, he wrote in *veneziano*, his maternal tongue, a language (no mere dialect) whose profuse vocabulary, more than the humanist Latin in which he wrote other works, allowed him to paint his figures in such exquisite detail. His choice may have disadvantaged him. Twice while he was working on the *Diarii*, other men won the coveted position of Public Historian; although the first, Andrea Navagero, as Sanudo bitterly and often remarked, received 3,000 ducats in salary and never wrote a word (36); and the second, Pietro Bembo, was given permission to utilize Sanudo's work, for which Sanudo, bypassed and humiliated, was awarded a token 150 ducats per year (37).

This tragedy was of Attic proportions: for the humanist histories of Venice turned out by the public historians are remarkable in their vacuity; and the vivid, vigorous jottings of Sanudo live on. Perhaps here we can identify Sanudo's genius. Philosophically, he belonged to the new age, the age that was coming, and the humanists to an age that was winding down. They occupied themselves with words, not things, to borrow the distinction made by the educator Comenius; but Sanudo, like Bacon and Galileo, a century before them, with things, not words.

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