

Davide Scruzzi. *Eine Stadt denkt sich die Welt: Wahrnehmung geographischer Räume und Globalisierung in Venedig von 1490 bis um 1600.*

Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2010. ix + 349 pp. index. illus. map. bibl. \$69.80. ISBN: 978-3-05-004665-5.

This is a hybrid book of interdisciplinary character. Of interest to Venetianists for its discussion of intellectual history, it is important to historians of geography and cartography, while it delves also in the realm of sociological theory. The title suggests the complexity: *A City Considers the World: Perception of Geographic Space and Globalization in Venice from 1490 to 1600.*

Originating as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Zurich (2008), its inspiration came, the author admits, from the mounting financial crises in 2005, suggesting the end of globalization as understood until then, and furthered by what seemed a shift to deglobalization by 2007. His goal, accordingly, is to explicate the beginnings of the concept of globalization itself. Within a range of possible approaches, he sees Venice as an ideal focus for a revealing case-study.

His starting point is “space.” In chapter 2, “Foundations,” he surveys the considerable theoretical literature about the various ways space has been understood by our day. Turning to the historical evolution of the concept, he understandably accepts the idea that the sixteenth century was “the germinal phase” of an (admittedly Eurocentric) process of globalization that extended from the fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth century. In a dramatic context of innovations (the heliocentric theory, calendar reform), the evolution of what he calls “mental maps” (*kognitive Karten*) became the central thread of dynamic change. Hence the important expansion not only of geographic knowledge but also of cartographic science. The explorations and the conquests in the New World fed Europe new geographic (and cultural) knowledge that was slowly absorbed. The recurrent publication of Ptolemy’s *Geography* prompted updatings, while collateral fascination with distant places went back to antique fables, and the myths of Prester John’s kingdom, through the Crusades and missionary projects.

With its widely spread colonial empire and far-flung international trade, as against its new hinterland on the Terraferma, Venice was particularly suited to absorb information and to assimilate new thinking about distances. Venice, moreover, was a center of extensive documents and writing, and above all was the powerhouse of book-printing and -selling. It participated in producing maps and especially the all-important image of the globe, so important for synthesizing ideas of space. Such factors coalesced under the aegis of the Venetian state, used to dealing with space and to organizing reaches over distances.

Scruzzi devotes chapters 3 to 6 to intensive scrutiny of what he calls “phases” of his time-span: 1490–1518, “Discovery of the Discoveries”; 1519–47, “The Discovery of Relevance”; 1548–84, “Geography as Cultural Object”; and 1584–1600, “Continuing Intensification.” The scope of his investigation is daunting. There are documentary sources, so rich in Venice (and with eventual stress on important private archives). There are numerous published books, most of

them printed in Venice, ranging from scholarly discourses on geography through handbooks for merchants and sailors to travel books increasingly aimed at a broad leadership. There are important developments in cartography, from functional portolans through magnificent and imaginative atlases, to the production of maps and globes more as decorative than practical objects. Throughout, Scruzzi also demonstrates the impacts on Venice's mentality and its economic interests made by the discoveries, by consequent changes in the spice trade, by the power of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the Portuguese and Spanish overseas empires, as channeled through both conflicts and diplomacy. He stresses the Venetian balance between nearby (the Terraferma) and distant space (the New World). The detail is staggering, and can only be hinted at here.

Scruzzi's organizational strategy inevitably generates repetition, as shown by chapter 8, "Venice and a New World: Attempt at a Synthesis," but new materials or perspectives are still added. In a brief concluding chapter, Scruzzi reviews his results, showing how processes in the sixteenth century foreshadowed Venice's loss of initiative and power in the next. He admits that there is more work to be done on his theme, and regrets that he has not gone beyond the thought-world of the educated to probe the awareness of "simple people" about geographical space. He points out that the intense scrutiny he has given Venice could also be applied productively to such cities as Florence, Genoa, Madrid, Lisbon, and Antwerp. And he drops some tart thoughts about an emerging new phase of spatial perception in a media age of radio, television, and the internet.

Scruzzi's voluminous bibliography (283–343) alone is illuminating. Happily, too, his writing style is unusually direct and clear.

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