

sfruttato a fini economici, quello che vorrebbe il viaggiatore nato a due passi dalla ex cattedrale di San Marco di Curzola, o a quello – più recente – che lo vorrebbe originario di Sebenico.

Corredano il volume un elenco dei documenti, codici, oggetti cartografici non poliani, un dettagliato censimento dei codici del *Devisement dou monde*, una vastissima bibliografia e un indice dei nomi di persona. Quest'opera, dunque, associando in modo efficace rigore critico e capacità divulgativa, presenta un panorama completo dello stato attuale delle ricerche su Marco Polo e il suo libro. L'equilibrio tra approccio scientifico e felice esposizione mantenuto in tutti i saggi la rende infatti accessibile e allettante, utile per il pubblico degli studiosi, piacevole per gli appassionati di storia, stimolante per la prosecuzione della ricerca.

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ERMANNORLANDO, *Le crociate di carta. L'Oriente di Marin Sanudo Torsello, veneziano*, Venezia, Marcianum Press, 2024, pp. 188; ERMANNORLANDO, *Le Venezie di Marco Polo. Storia di un mercante e delle sue città*, Bologna, Il Mulino («Intersezioni», 605), 2023, pp. 340.

This review is perhaps eccentric, dealing as it does with two monographs published a short while ago, whose purpose is primarily to divulge good historical research rather than present new material and fresh insights to prevalently academic readers. Neither is a mere compendium, however. Both aim to pose questions germane to scholarly inquiry and to furnish answers suitably complex in content but 'readable' in form – flow of subject matter, appropriate explanation of general context, clear prose, practical subdivision into chapters and sections, indexing of people and places, etc. Illustrations are fewish and primarily functional, though quite a lot are also decorative. Footnotes are likewise few and generally relate to quotations from historical sources, which are inserted in the text in modern Italian, while a select bibliography is found in thematically organized lists. Perusal of these lists and also of Orlando's texts themselves reveals his thorough familiarity with research and debate relevant to the issues he discusses.

Given these characteristics, a review of the two books with brief critical appraisal of their contents is a worthwhile exercise, not least because they can prove useful to «Archivio Veneto's» readers, in particular those who are not specialists in late medieval Venice. But first a few more general comments seem appropriate. Orlando's overall publications profile is unusual. It bristles with distinguished scholarly work – authorship of monographs and essays and editorial involvement in various forms, from editing unpublished sources to the creation and processing of multi-author volumes – but also includes a number of books written for a broader audience, published by the likes of Il Mulino and Viella. Similar blending of choices is rare among Venetian late medievalists (exceptions include Gherardo Ortalli and Giorgio Ravegnani –

the latter more a Byzantinist, though), but also on a much broader scale among Italian academic historians, and in the background there is surely the short circuit between career advancement and writing for a broader audience. The latter is at best no help to the former, and the relatively few scholars who practise it seemingly tend to consider their ambitions as required, or perhaps secondary.

But is that short circuit justified? The quantity and complexity of work involved in 'divulging' to a high standard is comparable to the skills and commitment required for more 'orthodox' scholarly research and writing; the second sort of enterprise indeed overlaps with the first in various ways. Moreover, practitioners of the second can make the best exponents of the first, for the same reason that good scholars can and should make good university teachers (though they don't always). Of course non-academic authors of history books for a broader audience are a far from uniform category, but their lack of a serious research profile does generally penalize the profundity of their writing to some extent – whilst other common features of their work can instead show the way to academics intending to address the same audience, as for example in the more generous use of illustrations usefully married to the text. A final thought: with academic research now being called on to serve wider fruition, which for Italian universities is the so-called «terza missione», professional historians might and should be more active in presenting an adequately sophisticated awareness of the past to a broader readership, especially considering the current extent of general disinterest and ignorance of history and also the ample circulation of manipulated narratives.

Now back to Orlando's two books, both constructed in close relation to the life and writings of Venetians whose lives spanned the decades either side of 1300. The text crucial for *Le crociate di carta. L'Oriente di Marin Sanudo Torsello, Veneziano* is the «Liber secretorum fidelium crucis» written by the namesake of the diarist of two centuries later – a text still awaiting a satisfactory modern edition to replace the 1611 version. Orlando's seven chapters set it in multiple contexts, starting with: the Sanudo family of those years, a component of the Venetian establishment but also very much at home in the seas and towns of the Levant. Then the fall of Acre, the last crusader stronghold, in 1291, which greatly troubled western Christian consciences, especially clerical, and raised expectations of a crusade – though these collapsed in 1314, while Venice, little affected by such fervour, had redirected its maritime trading to other markets. Orlando then addresses the theme of 'paper crusades', i.e. the literary genre mingling remorse and critical analysis of previous crusading failure with appeals for action and practical proposals variously military and logistical, political and financial. Though predating the loss of Acre, this genre flourished most intensely in the decades immediately following it.

Marin Sanudo Torsello's text circulated from 1321 onwards but developed greatly over time. Begun in 1306, it was repeatedly modified and enlarged as its author presented it to a series of prestigious dedicatees (popes, rulers

and the like). In the three books of its final version it is a particularly mature example of the 'paper crusade' genre. Much more than a treatise, it also presents features associated with travel books, merchant manuals, pilot books and handbooks of geography, history and economics; for example it stretches to include ambitious and highly costly war plans against Mameluke Egypt. The text is enlivened by the imprint of the author's own personal knowledge and experience, as well as by the insertion of nine maps, plans, etc. created by the Genoese mapmaker Pietro Vesconte. Imbued with characteristic Venetian practicality, it assigns Venice a key part in the execution of its proposals.

Orlando then develops discussion around two connected issues: what was Venice's take on the East and on the Crusades? His answers stress the importance of context and contingencies in modifying Venetian attitudes to potential allies and enemies, both Christian and not, and also Sanudo's belief – mirroring that of Venetians in general – of the centrality of Venice's objectives and function in Latin Christendom's dealings with the East. This translated overall into much more indifference and ambiguity over crusading than active participation in it, as well as precocious awareness of the threat posed by the Turks – something Sanudo himself perceived and reacted to, including in his own dealings with European princes.

Though partly similar in subject matter to *Le crociate di carta...*, and again closely related to a single Venetian and his writing, Orlando's *Le Venezie di Marco Polo...* is a significantly larger book and has a wider sweep, both geographically and thematically. Its 24 short chapters are spread over four main sections: «Origini e prospettive», «Partenze e intersezioni», «Viaggi e cambiamenti», «Ritorni e congedi»; the maps included before the bibliography and index are an absolutely essential complement to the text. The premiss elucidates what the book's title implies: this is not yet another monograph on Polo and his *Milione* (though the introduction summarizes scholarship on that score), but rather an exploration of the context of what he did and what his Venetianness signified to that end. In spatial terms this exploration ranges from Venice itself to the various 'other Venices' – distant ports and emporia essential for long distance trade – frequented and partly shaped by Venetians. In a non-material sense, it examines Venetian mercantile mentality and culture, developed to a very high level of competence but also of confidence, and so open to the experience of discovery and novelty.

Orlando's first section sets the stage with preliminary information on key matters: Marco Polo and his family; the rise of Mongol power in Asia, and Christian Europe's initial reaction to it; the fourth Crusade; a survey of Venice in the mid and later thirteenth century – as trading power, communal polity, urban structure; lastly, the pillars of its maritime commerce – Venice as staple port, its merchant shipping, mercantile mentality.

The second section delineates the 'other Venices', in other words Venetian trading settlements sited at key points of contact with the commercial routes of the Asian world, frequented by the Polo and others. Orlando emphasizes how Mongol power over so much of Asia opened the way, between about

mid-thirteenth and early to mid-fourteenth century, to a sort of precocious, temporary globalization, with major implications for trading by Europeans, especially Venetians – Marco Polo's father and uncle being pioneers in this sense from 1260 onwards. These settlements were typically urban enclaves with some degree of autonomy from local rulers, and with Venetian government naming officials and, more importantly, negotiating trading rights; equally typical of their experience were alternate fortunes in terms of stability, prosperity and duration. The cases examined are – in the Black Sea area – Sudak in Crimea, nearby Tana (on the Don river delta) and Trebizond; then Tabriz in modern Iran, Laiazzo in modern Turkey, Acre in modern Israel and of course Constantinople.

The third section starts with the last third of the thirteenth century, when Marco Polo, his father and uncle were in Asia. Orlando first discusses developments in the Mediterranean: the collapse of the Latin Empire and then Venice's rapprochement with Byzantium, its rivalry and war with Genoa. He next reviews matters more strictly Venetian, stretching into the first half of the fourteenth century: social and political tensions in the city and the creation of a consolidated patrician regime through the *serrata* of the Great Council. The section closes with matters marrying technology and merchant shipping: mapmaking and the introduction of galley convoys.

In the final section of the book Orlando focuses on what Marco Polo came back to on his return from Asia in 1295: war between Venice and Genoa (here a parenthesis airs scholars' doubts and hypotheses about the rather obscure circumstances of the writing of the *Milione*); Venice's near symbiosis with the sea in a 'post-Polo' age, when policy-making for maritime matters was the mainspring of the Senate's expanding function among the councils of state; in that same age, the paradigm shift from merchants' fascination with Asian trade terminals to the prevalence of routes and markets more southwards (Alexandria) and westwards; Marco Polo and his family from 1295 to his death in 1324.

Orlando's premiss (p. 10) tells readers that this book mingles biography, diary, history of Venice and history of the Mediterranean in a counterpoint, weaving Polo and his travels into the texture of the volume's real main characters – merchants, Venetian civilization, the sea. A comment in keeping with this musical metaphor: the work as a whole is perhaps a bit reminiscent of some Mahler symphonies, with its twists and turns, its reprise of the themes – music of a sort that, for a pedantic listener, may raise occasional doubts on the sequence of the single parts or the proportion between them, but no uncertainty about the quality of the whole.

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