

Proposal for the 3rd MMHN Conference

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The Mediterranean Miracle: Shipwrecks, Pirates, and Divine Intervention in Sixteenth-Century Venice

Venetian myth and official histories long recognized the sacred relationship between Venice and the sea, linking the miraculous conception of Christ with the legendary birth of Venice on the Feast of the Annunciation, 25 March 421. Scholars have examined various aspects of Venetian environmental history and the role of the lagoon in the formation of Venetian identity and culture. There has not been the same systematic study, however, of the relationship between Venice and the Mediterranean world. Only recently have historians begun to examine the sacred geography of the Venetian maritime empire and the Mediterranean. In this paper, I will discuss sixteenth-century Venetian miracle stories as unique and underutilized sources for the study of Mediterranean maritime history and the formation of cultural and religious identity.

As members of a maritime power, Venetian citizens and subjects traveled along the commercial networks of the Mediterranean. With the inherent dangers of travel by sea, some Venetians inevitably found themselves in life-threatening situations. It was during these intense moments of crisis that imperiled mariners petitioned for divine aid. In the midst of a terrible storm or surrounded by corsairs, to whom did Venetians turn in the middle of the Mediterranean sea? Surviving miracle accounts record that recipients of divine intervention often petitioned the numerous Marian shrines in Venice and the Venetian mainland. For this paper I will examine the miracles recorded at the miraculous shrine in Treviso, a Venetian mainland territory, in the 1530s. The paper will explore how and why the shrine was a favorite for those plying the Mediterranean and examine the stories as a reflection of the Venetian relationship with the sea at a time when Venetian hegemony in the Mediterranean was being challenged from both East and West.

The miraculous stories cover a wide array of maritime topics ranging from the liberation of Christian slaves to the dangers of trade along the Adriatic coast. The firsthand accounts reveal information about the structure of ships and shipbuilding in the sixteenth century, life aboard a maritime vessel, and the dangers of life at sea, including storms, shipwrecks, and pirate attacks. Read as historical documents, the stories provide information about Venetian merchant activity, military preparedness in light of increased tension with the Ottoman Empire, and news circulating in Venetian territories regarding the dangers and opportunities of the Mediterranean. As testimonies of divine favor, the miracle stories indicate the cultural and religious struggle to claim the sea, an object that defies such demarcations.

CV

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Education:

1999: Ph. D., University of Virginia
1995: M. A., University of Virginia
1992: B. A., University of Rhode Island; summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa

Employment:

2006- Associate Professor, Oklahoma State University
2000-2006: Assistant Professor, Oklahoma State University
1999-2000: Lecturer, University of Rhode Island
1998-1999: Course Instructor, University of Virginia

Books:

Mediating the Miraculous: Local Religion, the Virgin Mary, and the Renaissance Venetian World (In Progress)

Civic Christianity in Renaissance Italy: The Hospital of Treviso, 1400-1530
(Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007)

Articles and Book Chapters:

"The Portrait of an Aspiring Student: Reconstructing the Social Networks of Italian Renaissance Scholars." In *Ritratti: La dimensione individuale nella storia (secoli XV-XX)*, Eds. Silvana Seidel Menchi and Robert A. Pierce, 3-20. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2009.

"The Ink and the Worms: The Nature of Miracles in the Sixteenth-Century Trevigiano." *Quaderni di storia religiosa* 14 (2007): 139-57.

"Power of Perception: Venice, the Early Reformation, and the Diarii of Marino Sanuto (1518-33)." *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte/Archive for Reformation History* 96 (2005): 6-32.