Reviews Comptes rendus

Deborah Howard. *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100–1500*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000. Pp. xv, 283.

Well-produced, with many attractive and generally well-selected pictures of Venetian and Islamic architecture, this large-format book presents a less than convincing demonstration of the connections between them.

That Venetian buildings were influenced by the city's trade with the Muslim world is clear to any educated visitor who looks at the cresting of the roof line of the Palace of the Doges; John Ruskin analysed the similarities of the two traditions a century-and-a-half ago. Deborah Howard attempts to go beyond him, to explain the links more precisely. In the absence of documentary evidence, she is too often forced to argue from the appearance of Venetian palaces — and, to a lesser extent, churches — that they must have been built to specifications laid down in oral or lost written agreements that drew on Islamic models. Too many “may haves” and “must have beens” leave her reader questioning her arguments, particularly because she has decided actively to ignore the influences of northern European architecture on the island city. She tells us that the origins of the Venetian Gothic style have been linked to mid-thirteenth-century French influences, but she does not explain why she chose simply to put this influence out of mind.

Because she posits oral modes of transmission, Howard rightly presumes that the Venetians emulated, rather than imitated, their eastern models, but the added distance thereby inserted between model and derivative makes it equally easy to postulate the oral transmission of “Gothic” norms from the north. To convince her reader she would have needed to underline the distinctions between Venetian and northern architecture or to show how Gothic and Islamic influences were combined.

It is true that the Venetian palace that served as the center of the city's administration is totally unlike the forbidding and easily defended Palazzo Vecchio of Florence, and that its colonnaded ground level is in some ways similar to Mamluk palaces in Egypt, but there are also similarities to porticos at Ravenna and

to northern monastic cloisters. That Howard does not even consider this or make an effort to explain why neither of these could have served as a model leaves the reader wondering. She could easily have made the space to do so: substantial portions of her presentation are longer than they need to be, and some are quite beside the point, however interesting they may be.

Far too many of the written sources Howard does draw on date from the very end of the period she covers, and a large number come from the sixteenth century. They also tend more to elucidate Venetian relationships with their eastern trading partners than to show transmission of aesthetic or architectural norms. Thus, for a reader who wishes better to understand the many ways in which Venetians responded to and dealt with their Mamluk and Persian trading partners, the text of this book may be very useful.

Howard's use of written evidence is at times problematic. The short letter of Benedetto Sanudo which she includes as an appendix is unconvincingly dated: it was almost certainly produced after 1490 (and thus by and for another generation of Sanudos). Twice she mentions a "Venetian woman" who died in China in 1342; this woman was likely the daughter of a merchant and his Chinese or central Asian Nestorian concubine, and thus only notionally a Venetian. Howard notes elsewhere the semi-cloistered non-public lives of wives and daughters in the city, which would have prevented long-distance travel.

Although she discusses the long-term overseas sojourns of Venetian merchants, who thereby acquired a knowledge of Islamic culture, often as mediated by a dragoman, Howard seems unaware of the example of Niccolò Conti, a Venetian merchant who converted to Islam (under duress, he said). He himself served as a dragoman for a time, returning to Italy in 1441, when he appealed to the pope for absolution and told his story to Poggio Bracciolini. Far more than any of the examples Howard presents, he embodied the often deep engagement with the other culture that she sees as essential to the process of cultural transmission. One wonders how many other similarly useful examples from this and earlier times might be found in the archives. These might well effectively reinforce the demonstration Howard attempts here.

The efforts of Marin Sanuto "Torsello" in 1321 to persuade the pope to undertake another crusade and to aim at the capture of Alexandria are mentioned several times, as is the papal prohibition of trade with the Mamluks from 1322 to 1344. At no point, however, does Howard consider to what extent this Venetian influenced a policy that had such disastrous economic consequences for his city. Sanuto seems a clear example of the tensions between Christian identity and mercantile goals always present in his city's policies, but his work is only described, not analysed.

Quotations from Italo Calvino and Shakespeare may be appropriate means of enhancing the appreciation of works of art, but they do not add substantially to Howard's effort to explicate the sources of Venetian architecture. Likewise, the claim that intertextual references governed "each choice of window opening" in a Venetian palace tells us rather less than it should. A number of photographs are

included that are less than useful; pictures of watermelons in Damascus and modern multi-faith visitors to the Tomb of the Virgin could readily have been replaced by more useful illustrations of things mentioned in the text but not shown (like Titian's "Presentation of the Virgin").

One cannot doubt the role Islamic examples played in shaping the Venetian cityscape. That this book adds little to one's understanding of how they did so may merely reflect the impossibility of the project, but it is less convincing because it provides no solid sense that a full investigation of the printed and archival evidence of eastern contacts was undertaken. Nevertheless, the author succeeds in providing a number of intriguing presentations of the life of a mercantile community situated at the border between two very different cultures.

A. G. ARTHUR, *Brock University*

James M. Stayer. *Martin Luther, German Saviour: German Evangelical Theological Factions and the Interpretation of Luther, 1917–1933*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000. Pp. xv, 177.

This is an unusual book — a historian's venture into historical theology — and for this reason a daring one. It tempts one to alter Dr. Johnson's comment: it *is* done very well, *and* you are surprised to see it done at all.

James M. Stayer, Professor of History in Queen's University in Ontario, is the English-speaking world's leading authority on sixteenth-century Anabaptism. In this excellent book, he turns his learning and skills to a twentieth-century subject: Luther studies in Germany between the two world wars. Stayer seeks to expose the shapes of, and the reasons for, the post-1918 shift of Reformation studies from history to theology, from the Reformation to Luther, and from liberalism to radical post-modernism. He maps the movement that held sway over Reformation studies until the 1960s and aims (too modestly) to explain to English-speakers why it happened at all.

Stayer follows three stories at three distinct levels. The stories are those of the "Luther Renaissance" of Karl Holl (1866–1926) and his school, represented by Emanuel Hirsch (1888–1972) and Erich Vogelsang (1904–1944); the Dialectical Theology represented by Karl Barth (1886–1968) and Friedrich Gogarten (1887–1967); and the "confessional Lutheranism" represented by Werner Elert (1885–1954) and Paul Althaus (1888–1966) at Erlangen. All of the scholars who set the agenda for Reformation studies in Germany, and to some extent abroad as well, are either on this list or associated with those named here.

On the level of theology, the post-war movement's three streams show common tendencies in theology, scholarship, and politics. First, differences aside, they participated in the massive shift away from a historical-anthropological to a systematic-theological approach to religion. In Protestant theology, as in all other fields, the crisis of liberal thought had begun well before 1914. In this story, its