David Rosand. *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. Pp. x, 188.

Myths of Venice originated as the Bettie Allison Rand Lectures in Art History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1999. However, in another sense the book began much earlier, for it represents the results of a lifetime of research by one of the most distinguished authorities on Venetian art history. And although the book's approach is traditionally art-historical, it offers much to all who are interested in Venetian cultural and political history.

Rosand's subject is the self-representation of the Venetian Republic through visual imagery. For many in the early modern era, Venice came to represent the ideal republic, and Rosand takes as his theme "the visualization of political ideal and the reciprocal effect of such imaging on that ideal" (p. 1). In the introduction, Rosand observes that he is interested in explicating how the figure of Venice (*Venetia figurata*) came to encompass, through what he calls "iconographic slippage" (p. 5), a whole series of allusions and meanings that personified the ideal Venetian state. The succeeding chapters then explicate the four primary themes by which the Venetian Republic figured itself.

The first two themes are likely to be the most familiar to readers. In Chapter One, entitled "Miraculous Birth," Rosand explores the special role that the Virgin Mary played in the Venetian imagination. He argues that although the Virgin enjoyed a privileged place in other polities, including Florence and Siena, Venice "subtly but aggressively appropriated the image of the Virgin for its own self-representation" (p. 13). This association gained strength and resonance in part because the Venetians dated the foundation of the city from 25 March 421, the feast of the Annunciation. Rosand examines how the image of the Virgin blended with those of both Justice and Venice itself to such an extent that the English traveler Thomas Coryat misread Paolo Veronese's *Apotheosis of Venice* as the crowning of the Virgin. As the author remarks, "such misprision might not have displeased the patrician authors of this Venetian iconography" (p. 46).

The theme of peace comes to the fore in the second chapter, an examination of Saint Mark and the fulfillment of his Venetian predestination. In a particularly subtle reading, Rosand traces the evolution of Mark in leonine form from militant to pacifist, an evolution paralleling Venice's own demotion from first-rank to second-rank power status. In addition, he demonstrates how both the *cittadino* patrons of the *scuola grande* of San Marco and the cobblers' guild participated in the Marcian legends, and in so doing affirmed their place in Venetian society.

Like the figure of Venice itself, Rosand's book gathers allusive momentum, as each succeeding chapter enriches the reader's understanding of images elucidated in previous ones. Thus in Chapter Three, "The Wisdom of Solomon," Rosand returns to the figures of Justice and the Virgin but now illustrates how they blend together to help formulate themes of Solomonic and Divine Wisdom in which the Republic participates. The chapter culminates with Rosand's reiteration of a reading of Titian's *Presentation of the Virgin* that he most fully presented in his

1982 volume, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*. He accounts for the work's *retardataire* style by placing it within "the extended life of an older Venetian pictorial tradition" (p. 116).

The final chapter adds a "Venereal dimension," for here Rosand demonstrates how the blending of the image of Venus into that of *Venetia* (an association facilitated by their mutual births from the foam of the sea) is part of a larger "appropriation of the Olympian deities" (p. 119). In Veronese's *Apotheosis*, which, following Wolfgang Wolters, Rosand argues ought more properly to be understood as a *Pax Veneta*, all these themes come together with yet a further dimension added. Now *Venetia* has also become Juno, "the Queen of Olympus as she is the Virgin Queen of Heaven" (p. 150).

In the Introduction, Rosand eschews an approach that is not strictly art-historical, arguing that it is not the role of the art historian to debunk the myths of Venice. But debunking the myths is no longer a task that historians set for themselves. Instead, they too, like their counterparts in art and music history, have become interested in how the Venetians articulated their ideals in many media. And so, at this stage in scholarship, with the myth's visual elaboration so masterfully explicated, it is legitimate to ask what still remains to be done. Several possibilities come to mind. First, despite a good start by, among others, Bronwen Wilson, attention needs to be focused on understanding the gender implications of Venice's figuring itself as female. Second, although Rosand has made a beginning here with his discussion of the cobblers' association with Mark, scholars still ought to explore if and how the *popolo* (through the guilds, the *scuole piccole*, and neighborhood associations such as the Nicolotti) participated in this mythic exposition. Certainly one component of the myth whose visual elaboration has not yet been fully elaborated concerns the much-touted harmony of social classes. Finally, the approach with the richest possibilities is to turn the equation around to invite consideration of how the myths of Venice became instruments of action, that is, how myths became part of political, legal, and social processes. Stanley Chojnacki has made a start in this direction by showing how patricians invoked elements of the myth in marriage disputes (see his "Valori patrizi nel tribunale patriarcale: Girolamo da Mula e Marietta Soranzo," in *Matrimoni in dubbio: Unioni controverse e nozze clandestine in Italia dal XIV al XVIII secolo*, ed. Silvana Seidel Menchi and Diego Quaglioni [Bologna, 2001], pp. 199–245).

In the meantime, scholars across the disciplines, as well as the wider reading public, can be grateful to David Rosand for so elegantly laying out how the Venetian elites expressed in visual form their highest ideals and aspirations.

DENNIS ROMANO, *Syracuse University*