



CONVIVIUM

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval
Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean
Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova



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**Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval
Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean**

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VII/1

A Hub of Art. In, Out, and Around Venice, 1177–1499

edited by **Herbert L. Kessler & Serena Romano**
with the collaboration of **Karolina Foletti**

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In Memory of Xenia Muratova



Xenia Muratova. Fotografiert von Valentino Pace

Xenia Muratova – unvergesslich

Xenia kannte ich seit den späten 1970er Jahren durch viele Begegnungen in Rom und Heidelberg. Ich bewunderte ihr Wissen und ihre Passion für das Universum der mittelalterlichen Bilderwelt und seiner Symbolik. Dass sie auch eine genaue Kennerin gotischer Architektur und Skulptur war, wurde mir erst mit dem Erscheinen ihrer *Mastera francuzskoj gotiki* 1988 klar, ein Werk, dessen Rezeption in Westeuropa durch die Sprachbarriere eingeschränkt war. Trotz meiner geringen Russischkenntnisse konnte ich erkennen, dass hier ein Meisterwerk vorlag, das alle heiß diskutierten Fragen zur gotischen Kunst, auch deren Theorie und Soziologie unter einem universalen Gesichtspunkt in klarer Ordnung anpackte. Umso erstaunter war ich, als ich las, dass diese so aktuell scheinende Untersuchung schon 1971 und in Moskau geschrieben wurde.

Jedes Gespräch mit ihr war eine Entdeckungsreise, zumeist in die Mirabilien mittelalterlicher Bestiarien, ihrer antiken Traditionen und ihrer Allegorien, Auslegungen und auch Kuriositäten. Ich spürte schon als junger Kunsthistoriker, wie sich Xenias ungeheures enzyklopädisches Wissen mit einer großen Neugier auf die Entstehungsumstände mittelalterlicher Kunst und mit der Frage nach dem mittelalterlichen Künstler verband, ein Gebiet, das mich besonders beschäftigte. Ihr Entzücken über ein Detail, ihr Humor, der nicht mehr brauchte als einen kurzen Blick des Einverständnisses, und die tiefe in vielen Sprachen modulierende Stimme bleiben unvergesslich. Man spürte ihren Willen, ihre Beharrlichkeit, ein kunsthistorisches Ziel über viele Stationen zu erreichen, die sich im Rückblick als ein konsequenter Lebensweg zusammenfügen. Wie ihr Onkel Pavel Muratov, dessen Andenken und Erforschung sie sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten widmete, schlug sie mit ihren Forschungen wissenschaftliche Brücken zwischen Russland, Italien, Frankreich und England. Dabei entstand ein staunenswert vielfältiges wissenschaftliches Oeuvre – eine Fülle von Abhandlungen, aber auch umfangreiche Handbücher zur europäischen Kunst des Hochmittelalters; eine Lebensleistung, die sie als eine der bedeutenden Persönlichkeiten der kunsthistorischen Mediävistik erscheinen lässt. Eine *grande dame* und ein wunderbarer, liebenswerter Mensch war sie sowieso.





A Hub of Art In, Out, and Around Venice, 1177–1499

Herbert L. Kessler & Serena Romano

Even before newspaper headlines in November 2019 flashed pictures of Venice being threatened by the second worst flooding in nearly 150 years, and the Covid-19 pandemic shuttered the bustling tourist destination, the two of us had decided to organize a volume of *Convivium* devoted to medieval art in the city. An ambitious call for papers was intended to focus attention on Venice as a historiographical case-study and, even more, as a “system” in which art played a significant role during the period from the peace brokered by Doge Sebastian Ziani between the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and Pope Alexander III until the Turkish defeat of the Venetian fleet. In this introduction, we sketch a few of the possible approaches, including some that the essays in this issue touch and others that lead in new directions. The task is difficult and the results are but preliminary and incomplete; but we hope that they are useful for furthering what Hans Belting wrote several years ago: “*una tale varietà di significati e di funzioni da meritare un nuovo sforzo interdisciplinare*”¹.

1 Hans Belting, “Bisanzio a Venezia non è Bisanzio a Bisanzio”, in *Il Trecento adriatico. Paolo Veneziano e la pittura tra Oriente e Occidente*, exhibition catalogue (Rimini, Castel Sismondo, 19 August – 29 December 2002), Francesca Flores d’Arcais, Giovanni Gentili eds, Milan 2002, pp. 71–79; sp. p. 71. See also: Robert S. Nelson, “Byzantine Art in the Italian Renaissance”, in *Heaven & Earth. Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections*, Anastasia Drandaki, Demetra Papanikola-Bakirtzi, Anastasis Tourta eds, exhibition catalogue (Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art, 6 October 2013 – 2 March 2014), Athens 2013, pp. 327–335.

Although Venice has long been recognized as a major center of artistic production, its works have been staged largely in terms of competing traditions, with Constantinople during the Middle Ages, and with Florence and Rome at the start of the early modern period. Indeed, in his 1550 *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori*, Giorgio Vasari had already constructed late medieval Venice as a foil for highlighting Tuscany's achievements, alleging that Venetian patrons and artists were wedded to local traditions and, for that reason, reluctant to embrace the innovations that had revolutionized Florentine art. He cited Antonio Veneziano, who allegedly was so crushed by his hometown's conservatism that he returned to work in Tuscany where he had been trained by Giotto's student Taddeo Gaddi². Vasari may have had in mind a painting such as Gentile Bellini's tabernacle door, painted in 1474 to protect the reliquary of the True Cross that Basilios Bessarion, who had been educated in Constantinople but had moved to Italy a few years before the Ottomans captured the city in 1453, had donated to the city's Scuola della Carità [Fig. 1]. Bellini portrayed the great Byzantine humanist in profile on a starkly spaceless surface that foregrounds the flat reliquary (itself still preserved in the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice), fixing the recently-deceased Cardinal's attention as it also does that of two members of the confraternity and, in turn, the viewer's as well³. There is little of Alberti's perspectival window in this highly-colored essentially two-dimensional painting, but much that confirms Bessarion's own authoritative and often-quoted pronouncement that "*Venetia quasi alterum Byzantium*".

Any notion that Venice is simply a surrogate for Constantinople has been considerably complicated in recent historiography, however, such as the subtle analyses by Sergio Bettini in his "*saggio introduttivo*" to the 1974 exhibition, *Venezia e Bisanzio*⁴, or Otto Demus' summary essays in each of the two volumes of his *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice* which highlight the "anarchy" of sources and Venice's penchant for sumptuousness and narrative drama⁵. During the fourteenth century, the artistic culture was particularly heterogeneous⁶. Nevertheless, a notion persists that Venetian art can serve as a place-holder for a Byzantine tradition that is, itself, imagined to be monolithic and inert. While this volume does challenge the persistent notion that Venetian art can be substituted for the largely destroyed eastern heritage, it does not deny Constantinople's profound and continuous influence. Rather, this issue of *Convivium* sets out to differentiate the two great maritime centers from one another and to highlight the ways in which Venice assimilated not only Byzantine forms but also others to forge a unique artistic identity. In so doing, *A Hub of Art: In, Out, and Around Venice, 1177–1499* embraces the current art-historical preoccupation with a global culture that flourished especially in medieval port cities. Indeed, by the end of the medieval period, Venice was the most important Mediterranean harbor; Deborah Howard has noted, "the Venetians were major players in three of the most effective agencies of east-west cultural transmission – trade, diplomacy, and pilgrimage"⁷.

The city's history and politics are too long and complex to sum up here. Let us recall that 1143, the same year as the restitution of the Roman commune, was already a moment

2 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, Rosanna Bettarini, Paola Barocchi eds, Florence 1966–1984, vol. 1, p. 666; Marjorie Och, "Venice and the Perfection of the Arts", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Giorgio Vasari*, David Cast ed., Aldershot 2014, pp. 169–193.

3 *Bellini and the East*, exhibition catalogue (London, National Gallery, 2005), Caroline Campbell, Alan Chong eds, London 2005, pp. 38–44; Holger A. Klein, "Introduction", in *La stauroteca di Bessarione fra Costantinopoli e Venezia*, Holger A. Klein, Valeria Poletto, Peter Schreiner eds, Venice 2017, pp. 3–39; Caroline Campbell, "Almost Another Byzantium: Gentile Bellini and the Bessarion Reliquary", *ibidem*, pp. 331–350; Rosella Lauber, "New Contributions on the Reception of Bessarion's Stauroteca: An Altar in the Meeting Hall of the Scuola della Carità", in *Padua and Venice: Transcultural Exchange in the Early Modern Age*, Brigid Blass-Simmen, Stefan Weppelmann eds, Berlin 2017, pp. 62–77.



1/ Gentile Bellini, Cardinal Bessarion and Two Members of the Scuola della Carità in prayer with the Bessarion Reliquary, egg tempera on panel / The National Gallery, London

- 4 Sergio Bettini, "Saggio introduttivo", in *Venezia e Bisanzio*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, Palazzo Ducale, 8 June – 30 September 1974), Venice 1974, pp. 17–88.
- 5 Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice*, Chicago 1984, vol. 1, pp. 278–295 and vol. 2, pp. 192–222. See also: *Medioevo mediterraneo: l'Occidente, Bisanzio e l'Islam*, Acts of an international congress (Parma, 21 – 25 September 2004), Arturo C. Quintavalle ed., Milan 2007.
- 6 Nonetheless, Francesca Flores d'Arcais, "Tradizione e innovazione nella pittura veneziana del Trecento: Paolo e attorno a Paolo", *Hortus artium medievalium*, II (1996), pp. 19–26, sp. p. 19: "Venezia è, come è ben noto, una sorta di provincia 'bizantina' già fin dalle sue prime manifestazioni pittoriche [...] [e] nei decenni a cavallo tra la fine del XIII e gli inizi del XIV secolo [...] Venezia, almeno nel campo pittorico, è e continua ad essere una 'provincia' bizantina".
- 7 Deborah Howard, "Venice as Gateway to the Holy Land: Pilgrims as Agents of Transmission", in *Architecture and Pilgrimage, 1000–1500. Southern Europe and Beyond*, Paul Davies, Deborah Howard, Wendy Pullan eds, Farnham 2013, pp. 87–110, sp. p. 87.

of great dynamism for the Republic (and of consequent social contrasts), when the creation of the *Consilium Sapientium* tried to limit the doge's power. Although the situation fluctuated over time, only Genoa was perhaps comparable to the Venetian nobility's permeability. Nine families claiming ancient pedigrees (Orseolo, Morosini, Dandolo, etc.) relied on the classes beneath them that were vying in commerce with Byzantium and the East⁸; but, from the end of the thirteenth century, those in control decided to tighten up the social structure which led gradually to a crisis of power and the slow extinguishing of the hope ignited by the conquest of Constantinople in 1204 that, as Şerban Marin put it, the doge would be "*signore della quarta parte e mezzo del mondo*"⁹. Delineated this way, the purview of this issue of *Convivium* is geographically and chronologically enormous and, in our opinion, opens up a promising approach for comprehending Venice's role at the center of commercial networks and, specifically, for analyzing the relationship of artistic production in terms of the materials and techniques it employed.

Imitatio Constantinopoleos

By the time the Veneto had extricated itself from Constantinople's direct control during the course of the twelfth century, craftsmen already had many different Byzantine traditions to draw on. These included the impressive mosaic decorations in Ravenna only 140 kilometers south of the lagoon and in Poreč, half that distance across the Adriatic, which, as Simone Piazza emphasizes in this issue, were influential throughout the region. Indeed, a specific reference to the originating tradition was certainly intended when twelfth-century mosaicists quoted the vault of San Vitale in the diaconicon at Torcello and when they patterned the Reception of the Relics of St Mark in San Marco after Ravenna's famous Justinian panel¹⁰. Moreover, distinct local variations on the Byzantine artistic idiom had long-since emerged in the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt and north Africa, and Rome before and again after the catastrophic disruption of art brought about by the seventh- and eighth-century Islamic conquests and then by iconoclasm in the capital and areas under Byzantine control (726–843). Furthermore, even as "Byzantine" art emerged in Venice during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, it was also evolving elsewhere in Italy, most notably in Lombardy, Puglia, and Norman Sicily. Nearer Venice than the capital itself, western parts of the Byzantine empire were also sources. The closest surviving parallel for Adam and Eve kneeling beneath the empty throne in the late eleventh-century Last Judgment in Torcello, for instance, is the Panagia Chalkeon in Thessaloniki¹¹. The seven scenes depicted on the frame of Bessarion's reliquary suggest that Greek painters were at work in the city as late as the fourteenth century¹².

During the Crusader Period, Venetian practitioners also encountered Byzantine painters in the Holy Land, Sinai, and Cyprus, working alongside other western craftsmen to develop a distinctive "crusader art" that molded a general Byzantine idiom to Latin practices and tastes¹³. And while the mosaic depicting the Incredulity of St Thomas in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem from the 1160s may not be by a "Zan" from the Veneto as Lucy-Ann Hunt once suggested and Jaroslav Folda repeated with confidence¹⁴, it does bear a striking resemblance to its counterpart in San Marco and, even more, to the depiction of the episode on the diptych of Andrew III manufactured in Venice more than a century later [Fig. 2]¹⁵. Both preserve the ancient motif found on pilgrims' ampullae of Christ pulling the Apostle's hand toward his chest wound, as well as the large Ravennate martyr, Saint Fosca on a column in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem suggests the active presence of a person from the northern Adriatic among pilgrims to the same sacred site¹⁶.

Egypt, with which Venice was in continuous intercourse, was particularly important in Venetian art, in part because it was the place of origin of Saint Mark's relics, but mostly because of commercial connections¹⁷. Even though the date when the seventh/eighth-century ivory chair traditionally associated with Grado arrived in the Veneto cannot be ascertained, the chair is of Egyptian manufacture and features Ananias, Mark's disciple and the first Bishop of Alexandria¹⁸. Egypt seems also to have been the place of origin (and perhaps also the source) of the fifth-century Genesis that served as a model for the thirteenth-century mosaics in San Marco's atrium (British Library, Cotton MS B. VI), transmitting such identifiable landmarks as the pyramids onto the walls of the basilica¹⁹.

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- 8 Giorgio Cracco, *Società e stato nel medioevo veneziano*, Florence 1967, remains fundamental.
- 9 Serban Marin, "Dominus quartae partis et dimidia totius Imperii Romaniae. The Fourth Crusade and the Dogal Title in the Venetian Chronicles's Representation", *Quaderni della Casa Romena di Venezia*, III (2004), pp. 119–150. At the same time, the ambitious attempt to expand Venice's territorial domination contained the seeds of disillusionment and crisis; for a sceptical point of view on the economic results of the conquest of Constantinople, see Louise Buenger Robbert, "Rialto Businessmen and Constantinople, 1204–1261", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XLIX (1995), pp. 43–58. Relevant to the discussion of the relationship between Venice and Constantinople is Maria Georgopoulou, "Late Medieval Crete and Venice: An Appropriation of Byzantine Heritage", *Art Bulletin*, LXXVII (1995), pp. 479–496.
- 10 Clementina Rizzardi, "La basilica di Santa Maria Assunta di Torcello fra Ravenna e Bisanzio: note sui mosaici dell'abside destra", in *Florilegium atrium: scritti in memoria di Renato Polacco*, Giordana Trovabene ed., Padua 2006, pp. 153–160; Henry Maguire, "The Political Content of the Atrium Mosaics", in *Das Atrium von San Marco in Venedig. Die Genese der Genesismosaiken und ihre mittelalterliche Wirklichkeit / The Atrium of San Marco in Venice. The Genesis of the Genesis Mosaics and Their Medieval Reality*, Martin Büchsel, Herbert L. Kessler, Rebecca Müller eds, Berlin 2014, pp. 271–279.
- 11 Beat Brenk, *Tradition und Neuerung in der christlichen Kunst des ersten Jahrtausends. Studien zur Geschichte des Weltgerichtsbildes*, Vienna 1966, pp. 83–84; Catherine Jolivet-Levy, "Prime rappresentazioni del Giudizio universale nella Cappadocia Bizantina (x secolo)", in *Alfa e omega. Il Giudizio Universale tra Oriente e Occidente*, Valentino Pace ed., Milan 2006, pp. 47–53; Karen R. Mathews, *Conflict, Commerce, and an Aesthetic of Appropriation in the Italian Maritime Cities, 1000–1150*, Leiden/Boston 2018, pp. 72–109.
- 12 Caroline Campbell, "The Bellini, Bessarion and Byzantium", in *Bellini and the East* (n. 3), pp. 36–65, sp. p. 38.
- 13 See the pioneering work of Hugo Buchthal, *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Oxford 1957, pp. 48–51, 95–97; Kurt Weitzmann, "Icon Painting in the Crusader Kingdom", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XX (1966), pp. 51–83 (reprinted in *idem, Studies in the Arts at Sinai*, Princeton 1982, pp. 325–357).
- 14 Lucy-Ann Hunt, "Art and Colonialism: The Mosaics of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (1169) and the Problem of 'Crusader' Art", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XLV (1991), pp. 69–85; Jaroslav Folda, *The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land, 1098–1187*, Cambridge 1995, p. 353; *idem, Crusader Art: The Art of the Crusaders in the Holy Land 1099–1291*, Aldershot 2008, p. 51; Michele Bacci, *The Mystic Cave. A History of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem*, Brno/Rome 2017, pp. 149–50.
- 15 An enormous work – each valve measures 44 × 38 cm and is 4.6 cm thick – inlaid with jasper, porphyry, cameos, rubies, emeralds, and rock crystals that cover and magnify the painted narratives and portraits of saints. Hans R. Hahnloser, Suzanne Brugger-Koch, *Corpus der Hartsteinschliffe des 12.–15. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1985; Hans R. Hahnloser, "Scola et artes cristellariorum de veneciis 1284–1319. Opus venetum ad filum", in *Venezia e l'Europa*, Acts of the XVIII international congress of the History of Art, (Venice, 12–18 September 1955), Lionello Venturi ed., Venice 1956, pp. 157–165; Dieter Blume, "Hausaltar des Königs Andreas III. von Ungarn", in *Elisabeth von Thüringen: eine Europäische Heilige*, Dieter Blume, Mattias Werner eds, Petersberg 2007, pp. 308–312; Michele Bacci, "Icons of Narratives: Greek-Venetian Artistic Interchange, Thirteenth–Fifteenth Centuries", in *The Receptions of Hellenism in Early Modern Europe. 15th–17th Centuries*, Natasha Constantinidou, Han Lammers eds, Leiden/Boston 2020, pp. 173–188.
- 16 Gustav Kühnel, *Wall Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem*, Berlin 1988, pp. 102–105.
- 17 Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, "Throne-Reliquary (the *Sedia di San Marco*)", in *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice (held in various places)*, exhibition catalogue, Milan 1986, pp. 98–105; Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East. The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100–1500*, New Haven, CT 2000; Thomas Dale, "Pictorial Narratives of the Holy Land and the Myth of Venice in the Atrium of San Marco", in *Atrium* (n. 10), pp. 247–269. Geniza documents suggest that Jewish merchants may have played a role in the exchange of art; see: Anna Contadini, "'Sharing a Taste?' Material Culture and Intellectual Curiosity around the Mediterranean, from the Eleventh to the Sixteenth Century", in *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World*, Anna Contadini, Claire Norton eds, Farnham 2013, pp. 23–61.
- 18 Judging from such details as the shape of the sandal and the arcade and tower in the background, Pietro Lombardo may have based his 1478 relief on the portal of the scuola dei Calegheri on the ivory relief.
- 19 Kurt Weitzmann, Herbert L. Kessler, *The Cotton Genesis*, Princeton 1986; Herbert L. Kessler, "Memory and Models: The Interplay of Patterns and Practice in the Mosaics of San Marco in Venice", in *Medioevo: Immagine e memoria*, Acts of and international congress (23–28 September 2008, Parma), Arturo C. Quintavalle ed., Milan 2009, pp. 463–475; *idem*, "Thirteenth-Century Venetian Revisions of the Cotton Genesis Cycle", in *Atrium* (n. 10), pp. 75–94; *idem*, "The Cotton Genesis in situ: An Early Christian Manuscript Cycle on the Walls of a Thirteenth-Century Venetian Church", in *The Antique Memory and the Middle Ages*, Ivan Foletti ed., Rome 2015, pp. 11–28; *idem*, "Conclusion: La Genèse Cotton est morte", in *Les stratégies de la narration dans la peinture médiévale*, Marcello Angehen ed., Turnhout 2020, pp. 373–402.