
This is a significant volume for anyone interested in original, recent work not only on the industrial history of Venice and its mainland territory in the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries, but also on the economic history of early-modern cities more generally. The nine essays (plus an introduction by Paola Lanaro and a conclusion by Maurice Aymard) are all by Italian academic scholars and result from a series of workshops at the University of Venice at Ca' Foscari. They are sophisticated, well edited, and excellently translated into English. The general themes explored are well stated in the introduction. All of the essays argue against traditional assumptions about the economic decline of Venice following its loss of dominance of Mediterranean trade in the late sixteenth century through the opening of new sea routes to the Orient and the entry of English and Dutch shipping. Instead this marked the beginning of a significant phase of proto-industrial activity. Other factors often associated with economic decline are addressed: the relationship of guilds to new products, techniques, and entrepreneurial activity, the degree of openness of the work force, and the relationship between the capital city and its mainland territory. What emerges is a new and stimulating assessment of Venice's adaptation to the realities and trends of the fifteenth-to-eighteenth-century European economy.

Four of the essays are devoted to Venice itself, although others partly concern the capital. Andrea Mozzato addresses the sixteenth century rise, and then late-seventeenth century decline, of the Venetian wool cloth industry that reached its height around 1600, employing nearly 20 per cent of the urban population. Capital was provided by noble merchants, raw materials were plentifully available by sea, foreign workers not associated with the guilds were accommodated, and the type of cloth produced adjusted to the market, particularly with lighter Dutch-style fabrics for the Levant trade. Marcello Della Valentina discusses the Venetian silk industry. The weaving of luxury silk cloth, including patterned weaving sometimes laced with gold thread, and velvet, persisted more successfully than wool, although here again products
came to imitate the style of French silk production at Lyons. Profits were supported by the large-scale employment of women in the silk industry, an unsuspected development that affected several industries. Francesca Trivellato traces the history of Murano (and Venetian) glass. Here guilds were pliable to technical innovations borrowed from English, French and Bohemian glass making. Venice never equaled the French expertise in making mirrors, but an important Venetian specialty was glass bead production in demand for European colonial expansion, and this sector also employed many women.

Walter Panciera addresses issues of relative industrial decline in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Wool output declined to shift partly to towns on the mainland, which produced cheaper cloth, but silk continued along with other industries: ship building, soap making, book printing; even a cotton cloth firm appeared in 1748.

Five essays are devoted mainly to the Venetian mainland—the territories of Bergamo, Brescia, Padua, Treviso, Verona, and Vicenza among others that have been largely ignored by economic history. The Venetian Republic did not closely control its subject cities, whose economies were quite varied and developed independently with some local integration. Edoardo Demo surveys the textile industry on the mainland, which was densely populated and where manufacturers employed a putting-out system. Wool involved both imported and local wool and was important around Bergamo and Verona. Export was toward Germany, the south of Italy, and the Levant. There was considerable development of silk. In the mid-sixteenth century Vicenza produced 100,000-200,000 pounds of raw reeled silk annually. Silk throwing, sometimes using water-powered machines was more restricted, and silk weaving was only significant at Vicenza in the eighteenth century. After textile production, the most widespread industry in Venice and its mainland cities was probably the clothing trades, represented here in the essay of Carlo Marco Belfanti by hosiery manufacture. Women hand needle-knit wool stockings, a specialty of Padua, where some 2,500 women were said to have been employed in this way in the eighteenth century. However, the Venetian Republic welcomed the English stocking frame of William Lee (1589) that was well adapted to the mechanical spinning of silk stockings. In 1683 the Republic established a guild in Venice for silk frame-knitters, and in the early eighteenth century the capital was producing some 46,000 pairs of silk stock-
Ceramics were another important industry discussed by Giovanni Favero. Apparently Venetian pottery of the early Renaissance was of poor quality and the guild was weak; better pottery was imported from Spain (Majolica, initially from the island of Majorca, was imitated and long remained a locally produced staple for a growing middle class consumer market). The Republic followed a vacillating trade policy, often industry-specific, of free trade, protection, and the granting of monopolies to favored entrepreneurs. Aristocratic taste wanted Delft blue-and-white pottery, which was imitated and locally produced, and eventually Chinese-style porcelain and even English-style earthenware. Some of the manufacturers of these specialties, often on the mainland, were granted privileges. To conclude the discussion of industry on the mainland, Luca Mocarelli surveys the western zone of Venetian Lombardy with its wool and silk production, paper mills around Salò on Lake Garda, iron founding at Bergamo and Brescia, and the increasing economic integration of this region. Francesco Vianello surveys a similar process of economic integration in the eastern zone of Vicenza, Padua and Treviso.

In short, these essays contain much that is new and interesting about the economy of Venice and its mainland territory during the late Renaissance and Early Modern periods. As Maurice Aymard concludes: “[Venice] suddenly draws nearer to us, more alive, less exceptional, but also more European, without, however, ceasing to surprise us.”


To those unfamiliar with the Lutheran funeral work, a book devoted to the biographies that were an important part of these publications might seem rather morbid. That is certainly not the case with Cornelia Moore’s study. Instead, her book is a lively overview of a major genre of early modern German literature. It is all the more welcome because it is the first major study of German funeral biographies in English.