Sabato | Saturday   5.3.2016
Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Palazzo Franchetti, Sala del Porto

Presidente / Chair: Thomas Kühtreiber, Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, Krems

9.30
Damascene Ware in Venice and Beyond: A Study of Commodities in Context
Elizabeth Rodini, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore

10.15
Processes of Appropriation – South German Table Clocks as Venetian Commodities
Susanne Thürigen, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

11.00 Pausa caffè / Coffee break

11.30
Venetian Silk Cloth: Agency, Effects and Meaning
Evelyn Korsch, Universität Erfurt

12.15
The Cuoridoro’s Trophies: Venetian Leather Shields
Julia Saviello, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

Organizzazione | Organisation
Philippe Cordez (Gruppo di ricerca “Oggetti premoderni” / Research Group “Premodern Objects” / Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Elitenetzwerk Bayern)
Romedio Schmitz-Esser (Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani / Deutsches Studienzentrum in Venedig)

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TYPICAL VENICE?
LE MERCI VENEZIANE,
13TH-16TH CENTURIES
Cos’è la merce ‘veneziana’? Nel Medioevo e nella Prima Età Moderna la città di Venezia ha vissuto più di ogni altra del commercio di beni mobili. Fiorente era anche la produzione particolarmente intensiva di oggetti di pregio in vetro, cristallo, tessuti, metallo, smalto, cuoio o ceramica, caratterizzata dalla ricchezza delle forme e dalla complessità dei processi produttivi. Oggi questi oggetti sono disseminati nelle collezioni di tutto il mondo, ma proprio a Venezia sono poco presenti. In alcuni casi spesso è persino difficile distinguere se veramente sono stati fabbricati a Venezia o piuttosto nell’area bizantina, islamica o magari europea. Tema del convegno sarà il modo in cui, attraverso le sue merci di ogni genere, Venezia ha concepito ed esportato un’identità propria.

What are “Venetian” commodities? More than any other medieval or early modern city, Venice lived off of the trade of portable goods. In addition to trading foreign imports, the city also engaged in intense local production, manufacturing high quality glass, crystal, cloth, metal, enamel, leather, and ceramic objects, characterized by their exceedingly rich forms and complex production processes. Today, these objects are scattered in collections throughout the world, but little remains in Venice itself. In individual instances, it is often difficult to tell whether the objects in question were actually made in Venice or if they originated in Byzantine, Islamic, or other European contexts. This conference focuses on the question of how Venice designed and exported its own identity through all kinds of its goods.
Typical Venice? Venetian Commodities, 13th-16th Centuries

Report on the Conference
Venice, Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani, 3rd-5th March 2016

The question what makes ‘Venetian’ commodities ‘Venetian’ brought together a wide range of scholars from different fields of research at the Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani in Venice. Taking place from March 3rd to March 5th 2016, the international conference ‘Typical Venice? Venetian Commodities, 13th -16th Centuries’ not only aimed at discussing the term of ‘commodity’ itself, but also its specific relation to Venice, which more than any other city is identified with the inset of commercial trade in the middle ages and early modern age. Co-organized by Philippe Cordez (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich) and Romedio Schmitz-Esser (Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani), ‘Typical Venice?’ also marked the midterm event of the LMU-based research group ‘Premodern Objects. An Archaeology of Experience’ (Elitenetwork of Bavaria). Commodities, perceived as “things in a certain situation”\(^1\) rather than as a fixed object-category were explored in terms of their fabrication, exchange, distribution and consumption in and outside of Venice.

The various ways in which certain objects are connected to sites of production were discussed in the opening remarks of the two organizers: Linking an enamelled glass beaker with the motive of a camel pertaining to a large group of fragments from the 13th-14th century found throughout Europe with the iconography of the mosaics in Saint Mark’s, PHILIPPE CORDEZ shed light on how the long-distance venetian trade with Egypt and the Levant was materialized in specific commodities. The significance of ‘branding’ in premodern commerce was explored in ROMEDIO SCHMITZ-ESSER’S introduction: In order to associate their own products with Murano and the lagoon, Tirolese artisans deliberately applied the term ‘Venetian’ to the white glass made in the alpine ‘Glashütten’ in the 16th century.

The first conference panel began with STEFANIA GEREVINI’S talk on Venetian rock crystal artefacts in the 13th and 14th century. After giving a short introduction on the sourcing, also the manufacturing of and trading withthis translucent material was explained: Objects made of rock-crystal did not only serve as investment, but also as export goods with highly symbolic value. Due to their innovative carving skills and the lagoon’s commercial network Venetian artisans were able to respond to the wide demand for translucent liturgical objects in this period.

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Access to maritime trade routes were equally important when it comes to the circulation of enamelled glass in the early middle ages: In her re-examination of a group of enamelled glass fragments found in London, TANJA TOLAR demonstrated how eastern techniques were adapted to the western consumer market in Venice. Glass beakers, bowls and bottles ‘made in Venice’ were mostly exchanged for raw material such as silver and tin, since archaeological evidence for glass fragments of this kind in the lagoon itself is scarce.

Material evidence is not lacking concerning Venetian goldsmith’s art – but still some of the most significant works of the trecento and quattrocento have been neglected in scholarship so far. This was made clear in MANLIO LEO MEZZACASA’S talk, in which he took a closer look at three liturgical objects in Rimini, Chieti and Giovinazzo. These examples do not only highlight the artistic skills of the Venetian goldsmiths at that time, but also reveal their ability to compete in the international market without losing their specific ‘venezianità’.

What can be considered as specific ‘Venetian’ in terms of ivories and artefacts made of bone was a question asked by BENEDETTA CHIESI. Reconstructing a stylistic coherent group of works from the 14th century that strongly differs from the successful Parisian products of the time, she showed how the exact localization of workshops proves to be quite complex: a critical point of discussion is the dialogue between the ivories and object groups in other media of the Veneto and Lombard area.

The collaborations across artistic media and between different crafts was one key aspect of NATHANIEL SILVER’S talk on Venetian panel painting. Throughout the trecento the Serenissima supplied cities such as Bologna, Pavia and Florence with altarpieces for church decoration. By adding sophisticated sculptural work, elaborate frame designs and carved ‘ornamento’, the woodcarvers contributed to the high esteem of the Venetian panels in the 14th century. That the organization and cooperation of the gilds seemed to be essential to the development of exceptional craftsmanship and high quality standards in Venice was one conclusion of the first conference day.

Apart from the division of the crafts and the specialisation of manufacture in Venice, also the city’s intellectual climate encouraged the production of ‘key-commodities’ in the 15th-17th centuries. In his keynote lecture titled ‘The City of Innovation: Renaissance Venice and the Creation of New Objects for a Global Market’, LUCA MOLÀ addressed the Venetian openness to technological innovations and the responsiveness to changing consumer tastes. Besides diverse commercial and political strategies employed by artisans, merchants and also government agencies, the introduction of copyright and patent-right in the second half of the 15th century serve other early examples for the city’s effort to protect industrial discoveries and
intellectual property. Foreign attempts to copy devices or steal the strictly kept industrial secrets of the Serenissima also shed light on the status of certain products: The Venetian dyed scarlet cloth, the famous white soap of the Vendramin family or special caskets made in Venice for ottoman high officials turned into international ‘trademarks’ in the mercantilist society of that time. The complex organization of the city’s gilds not only led to the creation of world-class export products such as mirrors but also to the invention of ‘symbol pieces’ – for example a whole writing desk made from glass.

Innovations and identity were also questions touched by LUCAS BURKART in his talk on glass ‘à la façon de Venise’ on the following day. What effects did the practice of glass making have on the Venetian society? In order to rethink glass as commodity, term and Venice-related object category, a shift from Michael Baxandall’s theory of the ‘period eye’ to the notion of ‘period senses’ was proposed, taking into account also the tactile experience and practical expertise of glass making.

The matter of physical access and sensual experience was also tackled in the following presentation by LEAH R. CLARK on the Venetian objects in the Este/Aragonese collections. The individual knowledge on the value of things was important to estimate the paintings, ceramics, gems, Chinese porcelain, counterfeit porcelain and damascene ware brought from the Serenissima to Ferrara. These objects not only functioned as ‘diplomatic agents’ in cross-cultural relations: the classification and integration of ‘Venetian’ products and foreign material in local collections also reveal how a Venetian origin was constructed in the ducal inventories in Ferrara.

The exportation of Venetian products across the Adriatic was the main focus of the next talk. Outlining the economic relations between the Venetian world and the Romanian princedoms in the 16th century, CRISTIAN LUCA demonstrated how raw material and agricultural-pastoral products were exported from Romania, while manufactured articles and luxury ware were imported from Venice and Murano. Reacting to the explicit demand by the elites and upper middle class clients from Romania, a diverse range of commodities were shipped to Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania, including also ‘minor Venetian wares’ such as medical and cosmetic products. One of the products sought out especially by the high officials of the Romanian administration was Venetian paper.

Understood as a semi-luxury commodity and as a conceptual category, ‘Venedigisch Papier’ played a prominent role in late medieval and early modern Austria and southern Germany, as pointed out by MEGAN WILLIAMS in her talk. Its fine white surface and smooth finish was
prized among scholars, chancelleries, ministers, diplomats and merchants. Albrecht Dürer
purchased and explicitly used the famed blue paper of Venice (carta azzurra), even if equally-
left fine paper was available in Nuremberg. Paper not only served as a writing support or
communications medium, but also as highly semiotic and representational commodity, whose
commerce was essential for the Venetian authorities. Remaining focused on paper, the next
conference talk by DARIO M. ZORZA examined the Venetian book industry of the 16th
century: In order to convey a sense of trust and reliability in Venetian products and to guarantee
long term relationships with customers, the printing and publishing business were strictly
regulated concerning material and quality standards.

Valued for their textual, design and material qualities (such as whiteness, homogeneity,
thickness, opacity and absorption), restrictive guidelines about materials and printing practices
regulated the production of books in Venice.

Turning away from paper and books towards textiles and fabrics, the closing talk of this section
offered fascinating insights into the politics of Venetian textile trade with Dalmatia. Providing
hitherto unknown and fascinating material, SILVIJA BANIĆ focused on three different silk
types from the 16th century: While the pile-on-pile crimson velvets, the ‘archetype’ of a
luxurious Venetian fabric, were reserved for senators and members of the Republic, the
crimson-coloured silks and patterned damasks were also sent to high-ranking officials in
Dalmatian regions. These transactions can also be seen as political act: The wearing of Venetian
toga and vesta by rectors in Split and Zadar also implemented Venetian state-iconography in
cities under Venetian dominion at that time.

Apart from being an extravagant and exclusive raw material, sugar also played an essential part
in the Serenissima’s festival culture. After explaining how Asian and Egyptian agricultural
techniques were adopted to enhance the cultivation of this ‘soft-commodity’ in the venetian
territories of Crete and Cyprus, ANNA MARIE FISKER illustrated how the city’s wealth and
splendour was showcased through elaborate sugar sculptures and banquet decoration in the 16th
century.

Taking as her starting point the problematic category and terminology of the so-called Veneto-
Saracenic ware of the 16th century, ELIZABETH RODINI discussed this object category
regarding consumption, sumptuary laws and mercantile practices in Venice. The question of
the ‘Venetian origin’ remains vague, since damascene metalwork was often cast in the lagoon
and then decorated in eastern workshops. Furthermore, the successful venetian appropriation of
ottoman motives and decoration undermines the notion of ‘imitation’, raising the issue of imitation as artistic strategy instead.

Processes of appropriation also were a key aspect in SUSANNE THÜRIGEN’S talk on South-German clocks as ‘Venetian’ commodities: In the 16th century the workshop of Jakob Marquardt in Augsburg produced drum-shaped clock-cases with mauresque-décor for both the german and the Italian markets. Their ornamentation, inspired by Venetian embroidery pattern-books, not only testifies to the creative translation of styles from the textile medium into in the goldsmith art, but also to the circulation of skills between important artistic centres of that time: The Levant, Venice and Augsburg.

Turning back to the topic of ‘product placement’ in Venetian festival culture, EVELYN KORSCH traced the ways in which certain textiles were connected to the allegorical figure of Venetia. The myth and self-presentation of the Serenissima’s unique beauty, splendour and wealth through trade was not only achieved through attributes and certain textiles in visual media, but also through the display of brocade, damask, satin and velvet fabrics in diplomatic encounters and court ceremonies.

In a similar way also the Venetian leather shields of the 16th century can be considered objects of prestige and representation. This was laid out by JULIA SAVIELLO in the closing presentation of the conference. Gilded and decorated in the pseudo ottoman style, these shields were not only exported as commodities to other Italian cities and even to Constantinople, but also served for local use: As ‘trophies’ of the Serenissima’s global connections and trade network, they were carried during processions and showcased in the highly esteemed stately armouries. What these leather shields reflect is the Venetian approach to the ottoman empire in artistic terms and in military actions: Their particular ornament and display mirror the ambivalent relationship between Venice and Constantinople, being one of peaceful diplomacy and commercial profit at the same time.

The conference provided a platform to reassess past debates and the current state of the field in the study of objects and their specific relation to Venice. In order to understand how ‘typically Venetian commodities’ were envisioned, handled and collected in different parts of the world, the regional focus was expanded also beyond the Serenissima’s territories and the Mediterranean. During the lively discussions a number of questions arose: Why were some commodities at times more successful than others? What led to the emergence and to the disappearance of certain object groups from the market? How did the Venetians so creatively adjust their products to the specific demands of sacral and profane customers? One important
outcome was to realize that the term ‘commodity’ itself might prove insufficient for the whole phenomenon and rather the ‘venetian strategies’ of commodification must be taken into account: How the city’s identity was carefully fabricated not only in terms of static architecture and visual media, but especially by exporting the very idea of ‘Venetianness’ in the form of commodities throughout the world.

Ultimately, the conference took a twofold approach to ‘Venetian commodities’: on the one hand, a wide range of case studies and material evidence was presented to analyse the physical and stylistic features of diverse object groups. On the other hand, certain artefacts were discussed with particular respect to concepts and methodologies, turning away from materially and geographically confined categories towards a perception based on sensual experience and their significance for the venetian society. To create a closer connection between both conceptions might be a useful point of departure for future research and case studies in other cities. A publication of the proceedings is planned.

Ella Beaucamp

Programme

Thursday 3th

10.00-10.30 Introduction

Of Venetian Camels and Commodities
Philippe Cordez, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

Venetian Glass Production in the Alps
Romedio Schmitz-Esser, Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani

Chair: Jan Keupp, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster

10.30
Commodities “Made in Venice”: The Case of Rock Crystal
Stefania Gerevini, Università Commerciale Luigi Bocconi, Milano

11.15
Re-Examination of Enamelled Glass Fragments From London – Venetian Ticket to Economic Success?
Tanja Tolar, University of London

12.45-15.00 Lunch break

Chair: Petra Schaefer, Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani

15.00
Sull’esportazione di oreficeria sacra veneziana di tardo Trecento e Quattrocento
Manlio Leo Mezzacasa, Università degli Studi di Padova
15.45
I manufatti “veneziani” in avorio e osso tra XIV e XV secolo. Problemi di riconoscimento e localizzazione
Benedetta Chiesi, Firenze

16.30
“In magna ars de talibus tabulis et figuris.” Panel Painting as Venetian Commodity
Nathaniel Silver, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston

Keynote
18.00
The City of Innovation: Renaissance Venice and the Creation of New Objects for a Global Market
Luca Molà, Istituto Universitario Europeo, Firenze

Friday 4th

Chair: Julia Oswald, Northwestern University / Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

9.30
Glass “à la façon de Venise” – How Does a Material Shape Social Identity?
Lucas Burkart, Universität Basel

10.15
The View from Ferrara: “Venetian” Objects in Este/Aragonese Collections
Leah R. Clark, The Open University

11.00 Coffee break

11.30
Esportazioni e merci veneziane nei Principati Romeni del sec. XVI
Cristian Luca, Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica di Venezia / Università del Danubio Meridionale di Galati.

12.15-14.00 Lunch break

Chair: Joanna Olchawa, Universität Osnabrück

14.00
“Venedigisch Papier” as Concept and Coveted Commodity in the Late Medieval and Early Modern “World of Paper”
Megan K. Williams, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

14.45
Crafting the “Venetian Quality”: The Book Industry in Sixteenth-Century Venice
Dario Michele Zorza, Victoria and Albert Museum / Royal College of Art, London

15.30
Silks of the Serenissima. Three Case Studies on 16th Century Venetian Textiles in Dalmatia
Silvija Banić, University of Zagreb

16.15 Coffee break

Chair: Susanne Thürigen, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München

16.45
Sugar – A Venetian Soft Commodity  
Anna Marie Fisker, Aalborg Universitet

Saturday 5th

Chair: Thomas Kühtreiber, Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, Krems

9.30  
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Elizabeth Rodi, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore

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