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Palladio's Venice: Architecture and Society in a Renaissance Republic (review)

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(Review)

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The Renaissance Society of America is pleased to announce that Tracy E. Cooper's *Palladio's Venice: Architecture and Society in a Renaissance Republic* was awarded the Phyllis Goodhart Gordan Book Prize for 2005–2006. Eugene J. Johnson's review follows.

Tracy E. Cooper. *Palladio's Venice: Architecture and Society in a Renaissance Republic*.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005. xii + 392 pp. index. append. illus. tbls. chron. bibl. \$65. ISBN: 0–300–10582–7.

Graced with splendid, full-page color plates, Tracy Cooper's *Palladio's Venice* offers a bountiful tour of the painting and sculpture of Venice in the later sixteenth century, along with the architecture Andrea Palladio designed for that city between ca. 1550 and his death in 1580.

Although Palladio's churches of San Giorgio Maggiore and Il Redentore, rising along the broad Giudecca Canal, are among the most memorable landmarks of Venice, there has never before been a comprehensive study of Palladio's Venetian activities. The point of Cooper's text is not just Palladio's architecture, however, but also his patrons — their roles in the intellectual, political, and artistic life of Venice, and the effect these people had on the buildings he designed. Her obvious models are two superb studies of art in Renaissance Venice: Deborah Howard's *Jacopo Sansovino: Architecture and Patronage in Renaissance Venice* (1975), and Patricia Fortini Brown's *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (1988). Like these predecessors, Cooper has a complex story to tell, and many years of painstaking research went into her volume.

After a general introduction to Venice in the later sixteenth century and a discussion of the books Palladio published there, Cooper organizes her study according to types of patrons: patriarchs of the Church, religious communities, the state, and charitable institutions. Some of the buildings, such as the convent of the Celestia or the Scuola dei Mercanti at the Madonna dell'Orto, are considerably less well known than San Giorgio or Il Redentore.

Palladio's patrons formed a rather coherent group in the Venetian aristocracy. Interrelated through marriage (Cooper's diagram of their relationships looks like a wiring diagram for a B-52) and drawn together by similar intellectual, political, and religious attitudes, the supporters of Palladio held particularly powerful positions in the Venetian state during the dogate of Alvise Mocenigo (1570–77), when Palladio was commissioned to design an important room in the Ducal Palace as well as Il Redentore. From two aristocratic patriarchs of the Church, Palladio received his first major Venetian commissions, the façades of the cathedrals San Pietro in Castello in 1558, and San Francesco della Vigna ca. 1563. Cooper argues that Palladio's acceptance by these patrician ecclesiastics, as well as his close relationship to the noble Daniele Barbaro, patriarch-elect of Aquileia — for whose translation of Vitruvius (1556) Palladio provided illustrations and advice — led to the acceptance of Palladio's newly rigorous brand of classical architecture in a city dominated by the more richly decorated, and less systematically proportioned,

classical buildings of Jacopo Sansovino. (Strangely, a very useful discussion of the relationship between Palladio and Barbaro, Louis Cellauro's "The Architectural Theory of Daniele Barbaro" [*Studi veneziani* 42 (2001), 43–56], does not appear in Cooper's extensive bibliography.) Cooper contends, with good reason, that Palladio formed a new kind of relationship between architect and aristocratic patron, one in which he was often an intellectual collaborator rather than a craftsman for hire.

In the best chapter in the book, on Il Redentore, Cooper skillfully weaves together themes of history, patronage, politics, architectural analysis, and decorative programs to create a vivid portrait of one of Palladio's greatest designs. San Giorgio Maggiore, the subject of Cooper's dissertation, comes off less well, with too little analysis of a subtle and complex structure. Cooper's discussion of the meaning and historical importance of the inscriptions on the façade of San Francesco della Vigna is compelling. Here we find architect and patron — Palladio and the Patriarch of Aquileia, Giovanni Grimani — collaborating in a most fruitful way.

Sadly, the book is not well written. Yale University Press, which went to the effort and expense of producing a handsome volume, did not provide the copy-editing the author deserves. Surely, simple problems could have been fixed — a typical example being a sentence about sculptures by Girolamo Campagna that begins: "Trained in Verona by a pupil of Sansovino, the fluid and sinuous style of the figures drew upon" (253). Infelicity of language, unfortunately, makes it something of a chore to read this book, which in many ways deepens our understanding of one of the world's major architects.

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Arne Karsten. *Bernini: Der Schöpfer des barocken Rom: Leben und Werk.*

Munich: C. H. Beck, 2006. 272 pp. index. illus. map. chron. bibl. €24.90. ISBN: 3-406-54085-6.

Believe it or not, Arne Karsten's *Bernini: Der Schöpfer des barocken Rom* provides the first biography of the artist ever written in German. One of Karsten's main concerns is thus to introduce Bernini to a general audience, whose attention the Roman Baroque has largely escaped, due, for the most part, to the influential disdain held by the Protestant Jacob Burckhardt for the luscious splendour, pomp, and corruption at the papal courts. Yet rather than mitigating Burckhardt's verdict, Karsten fully embraces it, minus the former's moralistic overtones. He situates Bernini in the midst of the wasp's nest of vanities and power struggles at the papal court, not as a passive player but rather as a protagonist who knew full well how to operate the system, flatter patrons, and ruthlessly eliminate rivals. Karsten is thus less interested in the evolution of the artist's formal accomplishments than in his negotiation of his social circumstances: indeed, he does not even discuss all of