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Review of *Venice's Mediterranean Colonies: Architecture and Urbanism*, by Maria Georgopoulou

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each letter; these also contain much valuable information and some are keyed to the indexes at the back.

The backmatter, however, is frustrating to use and not always consistent in its organization. There are six sections, the first being an index to the addressees, along with the date of each letter, its number in the present book, and a Fondation Le Corbusier reference number. It is followed by “Notices sur les destinataires,” listing relevant biographical data about each addressee and several others. As already mentioned, other biographies appear as footnotes at the end of letters. For example, Ozenfant’s biographical note appears at the end of a letter Corbu sent to his parents, but because footnotes are not consistently indexed there is no way of finding it.

Next is an index of names cited in the letters; included are buildings and projects designed by Le Corbusier, which is very useful. But inconsistencies continue; Corbu’s mother, for example, is indexed only under her maiden name, Perret, whereas in the other indexes she is listed under Jeanneret. The fourth section comprises the list of illustrations, including twenty-two color plates of letters and pages from his sketchbooks. A sixteen-page biographical chart follows, which cites events in Le Corbusier’s life, including his architecture, painting, and writings. Finally, at the end of the book, where indexes are normally found, there is a rather chauvinistic bibliography—by which I mean that books not published in French are excluded.¹ Despite problems associated with the six sections of end material, this is an excellent book that anyone wishing to know and understand better Le Corbusier should read.

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Note

1. I seem to be the unique exception, but then my name is incorrectly written, my thirty-two-volume *Le Corbusier Archive* is credited to Electa, Milan, rather than Garland Publishing, New York, and my *Le Corbusier’s Formative Years* is given an incorrect publication date.

Cities and Suburbs

Maria Georgopoulou

Venice’s Mediterranean Colonies: Architecture and Urbanism

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, xv + 383 pp., 136 illus. \$80, ISBN 0-521-78235-X

Colonization takes various forms. Some historians trace the distinctive modern Western version—namely, the military subjugation of states or regions followed by economic exploitation by the victors—to the Italian maritime powers of the thirteenth century and their treatment of lands seized or purchased from the Byzantine Empire, which was broken up in 1204.¹ Crete, first acquired by Venice from the Crusader commander Boniface of Monferrat, makes the case. Although Venetian colonists had to battle Cretan Greeks, rival Genoese, and, after 1261, resurgent Byzantines, by the fifteenth century they had made Crete “the granary of the[ir] empire,” an abundant exporter of its own agricultural products and a central market for wares from elsewhere.² Georgopoulou focuses on the period before this success, roughly the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which was much more contentious and uncertain. Her objective is to analyze the buildings of the initial phase of Venetian dominance from the perspective of postcolonial history and theory. Comparable studies mentioned in her notes include six books on French and British colonies in the modern era (270 n. 17), but nothing on the medieval period. David Friedman’s *Florentine New Towns* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1988) is not in her bibliography, perhaps justifiably as the new towns were not colonies in quite the sense defined above. Still, Friedman’s methods, including his empiricism and sustained analyses of architectural design and style, provide a model that any architectural historian might emulate to good effect.

Georgopoulou’s approach rests to some extent on the more abstract for-

mulations of postcolonial critique. Homi Bhabha, Michel de Certeau, and Edward Said appear in the endnotes to her first chapter, which vacillates between dogmatic pronouncements of a kind that might be extrapolated from such authorities and bewildering expressions of doubt. Thus the emphatic “I argue that the medieval heritage of polyvalent, multiethnic cities like Candia [Crete’s Byzantine and later Venetian capital] as exploited . . . by Venetian colonists offers us a glimpse into the workings of the first systematic colonialist effort of the early modern period” (10) is followed some pages later by the “crucial question”: “Can we speak of colonialism in the thirteenth century?” (19), which is never explicitly resolved.

The appeal to theory might be a virtue if the objective were to make Crete a test case, a source of monumental evidence against which to try the results that theories predict. But Crete cannot be so used, because its monumental evidence has disappeared. Claims that “[as] in any colonial city, the architectural metamorphosis of Candia [under the Venetians] . . . made a strong hegemonic statement in favor of the rulers” (10) cannot be substantiated because there are no buildings with which to prove the point. Of 136 illustrations in this book, fewer than thirteen (less than 10 percent) show recognizably Byzantine structures, and they are in other cities (Chania and Chalkis). The original Venetian successors or adaptations of these buildings are gone as well; what survives is from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The dust jacket of the book tells the story, displaying a bright color photograph of the imposing sixteenth-century loggia that stands in place of “one of the primary monuments [that] linked [Candia] with Venice” (84), a structure whose appearance is unknown but that is optimistically assumed to have represented the hegemonic style of 1325.

Optimism, energy, hard work, and enthusiasm for Crete are among the many ingratiating qualities that come through the author’s text. I would like to

believe her thesis, but cannot. There are too many gaps and contradictions. One simply cannot argue that “for the Venetians, Byzantine architectural style signaled not the patrons but rather the antiquity of a structure” (131) when “we do not possess enough material to know with certainty what [characteristic architectural features] demarcated in the eyes of the medieval inhabitants and visitors of the cities” (23).

To an architectural historian, disregard for the discipline’s basic tools is a vexation throughout the book. The author appears to be more comfortable with paintings and written documents than with buildings, which she is not inclined to scrutinize very closely. Her descriptions rarely match the accompanying ground plans and views, and they are sometimes egregiously inaccurate, as when two walls meeting at a right angle are identified as the “north” and “south” walls of St. Mary of the Crusaders (148 and figs. 101, 102). One mention of “crochet capitals” could be a typo, but they are cited more than once as putative signs of Gothic style (124, 161). Venetian Gothic is not distinguished from any other form of Gothic; conversely, anything smacking of Gothic is “Venetian,” including Mendicant churches. The basilica is said to have been perceived as “foreign” and therefore Venetian (131), even though Candia’s Byzantine cathedral was basilican (113), as were the other Greek churches whose form can be seen or inferred from what survives.

“Urbanism,” the other category in the book’s subtitle, should have been a more productive line of inquiry. Georgopoulou has assembled a trove of maps and cityscapes going back to the fifteenth century that preserve evidence of open spaces and enclosures, routes of approach and passage, density of construction, and discrepancies of scale. But here we are failed by the publisher, as what must be large and finely detailed images, photographed in libraries from Athens to Zurich, are reproduced on a scale so small that almost nothing the author points to can be seen. Whoever

laid out this book apparently did not read it, for the photographs do not work in tandem with the words. The volume’s frustratingly mechanical design is unworthy of the author’s strenuous research.

There are other editorial defects in this relatively expensive book. All the cities studied have been renamed at least once: Candia is also Arabic Chandax and modern Herakleion; Canea is Chania; Negroponte (in Greece) is Chalkis; and so on. The author tends to prefer the Venetian names but the photograph captions use the modern ones, leaving the reader to puzzle out what is where. The illustrations harbor more confusion, as many, but not all, of the maps of Candia put south at the top (for example, figs. 10, 11, 13–16). This reader lost her bearings repeatedly and had to backtrack to pick up the argument’s trail.

Despite such lapses, *Venice’s Mediterranean Colonies* manages to conjure a vivid mental image of Venetian Crete and something like affection for its ragtag remains. Georgopoulou’s later, archive-based chapters are the most engaging. If one comes away from them with a clearer sense of the suburbs of Candia than of the center, or of subaltern populations (Greeks and Jews) than of their Venetian colonizers, it seems appropriate, for the photographs do show that Venetian hegemony never achieved clear and lasting articulation. Much of what survives seems to have a vernacular quality that invites casual, even thoughtless reuse for community (figs. 82, 83) or commercial (figs. 64, 65, 116, 117) purposes. Perhaps a different theoretical paradigm than that of hegemony and its resistance would show why.

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Notes

1. Georgopoulou, 276 n. 23, cites the literature.
2. Freddy Thiriet, *La Romanie vénitienne au moyen âge* (Paris, 1959), 413–26.

Carolyn S. Loeb

Entrepreneurial Vernacular: Developers’ Subdivisions in the 1920s

Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, xvi + 273 pp., 46 b/w illus. \$45, ISBN 0-8018-6618-9

The ambiguous nature of the word “builder” is one of the subjects Carolyn S. Loeb addresses in her exploration of the single-family subdivision. By the 1920s, she argues, changes in building practices had caused the realtor-developer to take on the mantle of the builder, a shift that is reflected in the appearance of the subdivisions. For evidence, Loeb examines three developer-built suburbs and sets them against nationwide trends in the housing industry. *Entrepreneurial Vernacular* describes the result: suburbs influenced by planning ideals but driven by the need of the developer to protect his investment.

While there have been many attempts to understand the phenomenon of the American suburb, Loeb’s is unusual in that it treats lesser-known, common suburbs. Shying away from famous designers and developers, she examines instead the more run-of-the-mill subdivisions of Ford Homes and Brightmoor, both in Michigan, and Westwood Highlands in California. Because these subdivisions are poorly documented, she uses the buildings themselves to aid her understanding of developers’ motives, industry changes, and dissemination of the wisdom of housing professionals.

The Dearborn Realty & Construction Company developed Ford Homes, a tract of 250 houses for middle managers near Henry Ford’s tractor plant in Dearborn, in 1919–21. Although the architect Albert Wood had some progressive ideas about community planning—he published a booklet on the subject in 1918—only his house designs appear in this subdivision. Wood produced six basic designs, varied the order of their placement on the street, and for even more diversity allowed purchasers to select the exterior cladding and the color of the