

Luca Mola — *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Pp. xix, 457.

This book is an important contribution in an area which, as the author points out, is frequently neglected, as historians have tended to concentrate on Venice's commerce rather than its manufacturing. Recently, however, Luca Mola set out to rectify this situation, first with a book on the Lucchese contribution to Venice's silk cloth manufacture in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and now with a more general treatment of the subject.

This second work is not principally a survey of the development of silk manufacturing in Venice. Rather, Mola is concerned with the wider issue of Venice's response to the changes occurring in the sixteenth century, when Italy's economic supremacy in Europe was being challenged by the rising powers of Atlantic and northern Europe. Frequently, as Mola points out, it is argued that Italians failed to respond to growing competition and that this became a major factor in Italy's economic decline. Italians were, it is asserted, inherently conservative, clinging to outmoded methods rather than seeking new approaches more suited to a changing world. In the manufacturing sector, much of the blame for this conservatism is given to the guilds, which are seen as pursuing narrow, traditional interests hostile to change.

Justly critical of this rather facile explanation of Italy's economic decline in the early modern period, Mola has set out to demonstrate, through the example of the silk industry, that Italians were, in fact, very responsive to the challenges facing them. Not only were merchants and artisans sensitive to competition and to new opportunities; government agencies as well were prepared to encourage innovation. Mola illustrates how rapidly artisans and entrepreneurs in the silk guild adopted new techniques, experimenting, for example, with new and cheaper dyes. They were quick to join the general trend towards lighter and cheaper fabrics, including those made from low-quality silks or even those using cheaper substances such as cotton, flax, or wool together with silk. All these innovations occurred initially despite government and guild regulations to the contrary. Yet they were eventually enacted into law, not least because the Venetian ruling class judged proposed innovations on the pragmatic grounds of what would increase production, sales, employment, and government revenue. If, on one hand, the government tried to protect consumers from fraud and to maintain Venice's reputation for high-quality cloth, on the other it allowed manufacturers considerable freedom to produce new and cheaper fabrics, especially for export. In the end, Mola argues, a whole gamut of products was created, ranging from luxury cloths made only from the best materials to less expensive blends, thereby enabling the Venetian industry to take advantage of all sectors of the market. Moreover, Mola points out that the Venetian government positively encouraged innovation by introducing a system similar to patents, whereby inventors were guaranteed the initial profits from the application of their ideas.

In proving his point that sixteenth-century Italians were innovative and flexible in the face of challenges, Mola provides a vast amount of information on the silk industry of the period. However, there remain a few perplexing questions. One pertains to the degree and nature of the competition facing Venetian manufacturers. While Mola

devotes considerable attention to the expansion of the silk industry from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, he does so principally from the perspective of the government's efforts to stimulate the industry. The reader is therefore left without a clear idea of what all this meant in terms of production and competition.

This question might have been clarified by a closer consideration of the market for silk cloth in the sixteenth century. Mola suggests that demand was increasing through an application of silk to more varied uses. However, he does not take into account the demographic and economic shifts of the period, which probably increased the market for silk cloth and extended it to a wider section of the population. Considerations along these lines might have provided more convincing explanations for the expansion in silk cloth production and for the move towards cheaper products than the vague concept of changing consumer tastes, which Mola uses repeatedly.

The other perplexing question is that of the Venetian government's policy towards the silk industry and the effects this may have had on it. Mola demonstrates how concerned the Venetian government was to maintain a healthy industry, which would provide maximum employment and contribute to commerce and government revenue. However, he is equally aware that the dependence of Venice's economy on trade meant that it could not adopt a fully protectionist policy. In fact, as he points out, during the sixteenth century Venice was fighting an ultimately losing battle to preserve its position as an international commercial centre: hence, in part, the government's decision to permit continued export of raw and spun silk, even though these were supplying rival industries elsewhere. Another reason behind this policy was concern for government revenue, much of which came from duties on trade. Indeed, on occasion, what Mola interprets in part as an effort to injure competing industries by increasing taxes on such exports proves, on examination of the legislation, to have been motivated purely by fiscal concerns (pp. 246–249). Finally, Venetian patricians were anxious to provide employment for their population, in the interests of internal peace as well as a flourishing state. This, however, could lead to decisions contrary to the interests of Venice's silk cloth producers. For example, silk spinners in Venice were allowed to work for foreign merchants and to export their products; from the mid-sixteenth century, towns in the mainland territories were permitted to produce silk cloth. Although this manufacture was initially limited to varieties little produced in Venice, eventually the government turned a blind eye to the manufacture of cloth competing directly with that of the capital. If this disproves the idea that Venice consistently exploited its mainland territories for its own benefit, it raises the question of whether the priorities of the city's ruling class did not, in the end, harm its own industry.

All of this leaves open the fundamental question raised by Mola's work: to what degree the Venetian silk industry actually maintained its position in the international market in the sixteenth century. While Mola presents an image of a vigorous and flexible industry, there are hints that it was experiencing serious difficulties in certain sectors and that some contemporaries (like some modern historians) felt that it was entering a decline. The apparently growing emphasis on lighter fabrics and eventually on haberdashery raises, for example, the question of whether Venetian

manufacturers were not losing out in the sphere of luxury products and turning instead to supplying a lower level of the market. Some consideration of this issue is necessary for general conclusions regarding the ultimate success of the industry and, to a degree, of the Venetian economy as a whole.

Mola's work thus leaves some broad questions open. Understandably, he ends with a hope that further research will elucidate the areas that remain obscure. Meanwhile, his detailed account of developments in the Venetian silk industry during the sixteenth century has laid an indispensable basis for such further discussion. It has also, one hopes, laid to rest the idea that Italian conservatism brought about the country's economic decline.

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Peter N. Moogk — *La Nouvelle-France. The Making of French Canada — A Cultural History*, East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2000, 340 p.

Cette étude se présente comme un bilan plutôt que comme une recherche originale, d'où une certaine impression de déjà lu. Elle s'adresse d'abord et avant tout à un public anglophone qui ne connaît rien du Québec contemporain et de ses origines. En fait, Peter Moogk semble s'être donné pour « mission » d'expliquer aux Canadiens anglais et aux Américains qui sont ces « irréductibles » francophones et leurs préoccupations nationalistes. Et comment mieux les présenter qu'en esquissant un portrait du conservatisme culturel des Canadiens (faudrait-il dire des Québécois) francophones car, bien qu'il s'intéresse aux Acadiens tout au cours de son livre, sa conclusion ne porte que sur les Québécois!

Dans son premier chapitre, Moogk entraîne ses lecteurs dans la nacelle de Cyrano de Bergerac, histoire de survoler les espaces géographiques de la Nouvelle-France! Dans son second chapitre, l'auteur nous propose un portrait des relations entre Français et Amérindiens. Le troisième chapitre aborde la question de la justice quoique tout y passe depuis la religion et l'art de la guerre pour en arriver à l'application des lois. Le chapitre 4, probablement le mieux structuré, expose les difficultés que rencontrent les autorités à recruter des colons. Le chapitre suivant est en quelque sorte la suite du précédent; l'auteur y discute principalement des soldats et des engagés et explique les raisons du retour en France, après avoir intercalé quelques paragraphes sur les insultes et les injures. Le chapitre 6 présente les structures sociales alors que le suivant continue dans cette voie en traitant des liens entre les divers groupes sociaux. Bien que le chapitre 8 touche principalement à la famille, il porte sur diverses thématiques dont certaines ont été abordées précédemment. Son chapitre 9 examine la question religieuse alors qu'il a préalablement identifié la religion comme l'un des fondements de la culture (p. 62). Sa conclusion porte sur le Québec moderne. Cette nomenclature appelle un commentaire : l'ouvrage aurait profité d'un travail d'édition afin de resserrer les chapitres et d'éviter les débordements et certaines répétitions.