

## THE VENETIAN DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

Few Renaissance Venetians saw the New World with their own eyes. As the print capital of early modern Europe, however, Venice developed a unique relationship with the Americas. Venetian editors, mapmakers, translators, writers, and cosmographers represented the New World at times as a place that the city's mariners had discovered before the Spanish, a world linked to Marco Polo's China, or another version of Venice, especially in the case of Tenochtitlan. Elizabeth Horodowich explores these various and distinctive modes of imagining the New World, including Venetian rhetorics of "firstness," similitude, othering, comparison, and simultaneity generated through forms of textual and visual pastiche that linked the wider world to the Venetian lagoon. These wide-ranging stances allowed Venetians to argue for their different but equivalent participation in the Age of Encounters. Whereas historians have traditionally focused on the Spanish conquest and colonization of the New World, and the Dutch and English mapping of it, they have ignored the wide circulation of Venetian Americana. Horodowich demonstrates how with their printed texts and maps, Venetian newsmongers embraced a fertile tension between the distant and the close. In doing so, they played a crucial yet heretofore unrecognized role in the invention of America.

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THE VENETIAN  
DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

GEOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION AND  
PRINT CULTURE IN THE AGE OF  
ENCOUNTERS

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*to Peggy and Ron*

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When we write about history, we always write autobiographies. Sometimes the connections between writing about the past and writing about ourselves are clearer than at other times, but in the case of this book, I have always known that when I was thinking about Venice and the Americas, I was considering my own experiences as a person from the New World in the Old. When I was a graduate student, I spent many summers with an extended family in a *capanna* or beach hut on the Lido, the littoral island that separates the Venetian lagoon from the Adriatic. In their company, I was surely a bit of a curiosity as one of the only foreigners in sight (or at least in earshot) on a beach otherwise crowded with locals. I was eager to learn Venetian and to continue to practice Italian, so with our feet in the sand, we made endless talk, small and large, on topics ranging from the temperature of the water that day to what had looked good at the market that morning. Since we did not always have a lot in common, our conversation often drifted toward America. What was it like? How expensive was it to live there? What was I doing in Italy, and didn't my family miss me at home? No one in the beach hut had ever been to the United States, but it quickly became apparent that despite this fact, many not only had strong opinions about America but also seemed eager to assert a masterful knowledge of it. Over the years, I heard a series of regular refrains: that America had little history or culture, that it was rich, that family values were often lacking, and most importantly, that the food was terrible. As an American surrounded by these Venetians, I was often left feeling defensive. Of course, America could be horrible, but like any other country, it could also be great. But more significantly, over the years, a stronger reaction took hold: a growing fascination with the way that Venetians imaginatively represented the United States in their mind's eye. How could so many people who had never been to America have such an assured and confident knowledge of what life there was like? And did early modern Venetians, who had also not gone to the New World in any notable numbers, also claim to possess such a knowledge? As my research slowly but surely revealed, they did.

This book was born in these conversations that took place more than twenty years ago. I am eternally grateful to this family for embracing me as one of their own, and have many others to thank who, over the past several decades, have

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