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# How to be a Time Traveller: Exploring Venice with a Fifteenth-Century Pilgrimage Guide

**Abstract:** In 1462, an English pilgrim called William Wey visited Venice as the first stage of his itinerary to the Holy Land and defined the city as “the most holy place” for its exceptional architecture and closeness to God. In the present day, millions of tourists every year can potentially experience the same environment as William Wey did in the fifteenth century. This chapter investigates how a fifteenth-century pilgrimage guide may still be used as a unique means to explore a popular destination such as Venice. Indeed, medieval pilgrimage guides offer, on the one hand, unusual itineraries of the most visited medieval places and on the other, the possibility of a new understanding of the symbolic and religious perception of important historical buildings that are still well preserved. Both tourists and civic authorities stand to benefit from understanding how our medieval predecessors understood the urban environment we have inherited from them. Religious symbolism and its deep connection with relics, churches and places of worship typical of medieval experience has declined rapidly over the centuries and it is often absent from our perception and cultural understanding of our surroundings.

This research uses the case study of a medieval pilgrimage-guide to Venice to demonstrate the relevance of such texts as modern travel and civic planning sources. Field research was undertaken based on the reconstruction of a pilgrimage itinerary in present-day Venice according to the indications provided by William Wey in his guide. This chapter analyses the results of this reconstruction and argues that not only can the medieval itinerary be rediscovered, but it serves as an eye-opening experience that allows visitors and residents to see the city with new perspectives, perspectives that mean, amongst other features, that we understand our own moment to be fleeting and laden with its own ideological approach to viewing the buildings.

**Keywords:** travel, Venice, tourism, pilgrimage, architecture, symbolism, itinerary, travel narrative, religious celebration, doge

## Introduction

The way people travel around the world has changed significantly since the Middle Ages, not only because of the ease with which it is possible to travel long distances in a few hours but also because people’s attitudes towards the experience of travel

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have changed. Travel has become mostly a leisure or business activity rather than a spiritual or political necessity and (with the exception of places such as Mecca or Rome) the majority of contemporary travellers no longer are cognisant of any deep connection with destinations familiar to medieval travellers. Yet, it remains possible for modern tourists to regain an historical insight into the places they visit and to appreciate how medieval travellers would have experienced the same environments. The use of fifteenth-century travel guides, such as that written for Venice by the English pilgrim William Wey in 1462, may be helpful to retrieve the symbolic and spiritual connection with places as they were understood by medieval travellers.<sup>1</sup> This would allow visitors to explore well-known places from a new point of view.

Among the many locations visited during the Middle Ages, Venice is particularly suitable for this type of assessment because, although some of the most important buildings have been renovated with new artistic styles, the city's urbanism remains practically unchanged since the medieval period, offering the visitor opportunities for a 'realistic' recreation of the experience of a medieval traveller. Every year, millions of tourists walk the same path that William Wey did in 1462.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the spiritual context within which the medieval men and women journeyed to the Holy Land is not a prominent characteristic of current tourism and the strictly symbolic and religious perception of important historical buildings that was typical of medieval travellers and their culture is generally absent for contemporary visitors to historic locations. At the time of William Wey, people travelled principally for political or diplomatic missions, for religious reasons, or for trade. The idea of wandering for tourism was still far from being acceptable for medieval men and women, especially for those in search for redemption. It was considered inappropriate for ecclesiastics to travel for pleasure, exploration, and the enjoyment of new vistas.<sup>3</sup> That being said, the dissemination of travel narratives was not alone a means of advising those who might follow the pilgrim trail; it also took place in order to entertain those unable to make such journeys.

A crucial feature of the medieval experience of an urban landscape was the fact that symbolism provided a shared international means of communication during the period, especially in regard to a popular understanding of Christian sacred art and rituals for travellers far from their countries. Nowadays, symbolism no longer has the same relevance and impact that it had in the Middle Ages. Visitors to modern cities are more culturally diverse and a shared religion is far from being the

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<sup>1</sup> For a similar approach with regard to England and Rome, see Ian MORTIMER, *The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England. A Handbook for Visitors to the Fourteenth Century*, London 2012; Debra J. BIRCH, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages. Continuity and Change*, Rochester 2000.

<sup>2</sup> In 2012, Venice welcomed more than twenty-five million tourists, see Claire COLOMB / Johannes NOVY, *Protest and Resistance in the Tourist City*, New York 2017, p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> See Christian K. ZACHER, *Curiosity and Pilgrimage. The Literature of Discovery in Fourteenth-Century England*, London 1976.

only reason why someone would visit a sacred place. Thus, the symbolic reading of the architecture around the contemporary traveller is largely under-appreciated. Yet, some knowledge of the meaning for the medieval mind of the surviving art can still be valuable for modern tourists because, as Mircea ELIADE has stated, “the symbol, the myth and the image are of the very substance of the spiritual life, [. . .] they may become disguised, mutilated or degraded but never extirpated”.<sup>4</sup> A part of that medieval spirituality and religious reading of Venice’s architecture can still be retrieved with the help of late medieval narratives reporting not only the pilgrim’s daily experiences but also their perception of the city. One author who assigned to Venice an original symbolic role in his pilgrimage narrative was William Wey.

William Wey was an English pilgrim who travelled to the Holy Land twice, in 1458 and 1462. An account of his travels survives in what is now Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 565. During both his journeys William passed through Venice, although only the account relating to the 1462 pilgrimage includes a description of his Venetian stay. This itinerary, written in 1462, offers one of the most complete descriptions of Venice during the peak period of pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Using this account alongside six other similar texts and field research, this chapter will point towards the value of this material in providing a neglected perspective on a modern appreciation of the cities we have inherited from our medieval forebears.<sup>5</sup>

## Venice, a City for Pilgrimage

Understanding the pilgrim’s experience in medieval Venice is meaningful to contextualize with a spiritual framework the extent of changes experienced by the city. In fact, while the architectural change is often evident and understood as a natural response to a busy urban environment, religious and spiritual changes, such as an increase in the city’s significance for pilgrims is of relevance too. Medieval Venice is known for the extent of its mercantile trade network across Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Little scholarly attention has been paid to the fact that Venice, being one of the

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<sup>4</sup> Mircea ELIADE, *Images and Symbols. Studies in Religious Symbolism*, Princeton / NJ 1961, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Francis DAVEY, *The Itineraries of William Wey*, Oxford 2010; cf. most recently on Wey: Prina ARAD, *Pilgrimage, Cartography, and Devotion: William Wey’s Map of the Holy Land*, in: *Viator* 43(1) (2012), pp. 301–322. The other itineraries considered in this chapter are Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Peregrinationes. Un viaggiatore del quattrocento a Gerusalemme e in Egitto*, ed. Gabriella BARTOLINI / Giulio CAPORALI, Rome 1999; *Viaggio in Terrasanta di Santo Brasca, 1480 con l’itinerario di Gabriele Capodilista, 1458*, ed. Anna Laura MOMIGLIANO LEPSCHY, Milan 1966; Mary Margaret NEWETT, *Canon Pietro Casola’s Pilgrimage to Jerusalem in the Year 1494*, Manchester 1907; Felix Fabri, *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti peregrinationem*, 3 vols., ed. Konrad Dietrich HASSLER (Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 2–4), Stuttgart 1843–1849.

biggest European cities of the later medieval period, increased the promotion of its religious value and sacred architecture in connection with the pilgrimage phenomenon.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, the enormous increase in pilgrim visitors in the later fifteenth century contributed to the city's need to affirm its religious identity within the pilgrimage route. Indeed, from the thirteenth century, Venice was not only the main administrator of sea-transportation to the Holy Land but the city's leaders also promoted its religious locations through organized city itineraries aimed at the entertainment of pilgrim visitors in advance of their embarkation for Jerusalem.

Traces of these itineraries survive in some fifteenth-century pilgrimage accounts, demonstrating that pilgrims considered Venice an additional place in which to gain indulgences and visit relics during their journey to Palestine. Venice was to all intents and purposes a fascinating merchant city and religious destination and its attractions became even more relevant during the fifteenth century. With its many parishes and different traditions, the itinerary followed by pilgrims in Venice during the late fifteenth century was not much different from that generally undertaken by modern tourists when they visit historic churches and buildings positioned strategically in the different *sestieri* (there are six of these zones in Venice: San Polo, San Marco, Cannaregio, Dorsoduro, Castello, Santa Croce, and Giudecca). For example, the German pilgrim Felix Fabri, who visited Venice in 1480, thought that Venice was “the most beautiful city ever seen in and out of the Christian world”.<sup>7</sup> In his narrative, the ‘*Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae*’, Fabri listed twelve main reasons why Venice was worth a visit and his list retains its relevance for a modern audience. According to Fabri, Venice was worth a visit for the history of its foundation; for its inhabitants; for its unique and longstanding form of government; for its Christianity; for its relics; for its precious treasures; for the possibility of finding everything one might need; for its income and trade; for its entertainment; because of its wise senators who had granted to the city long-lasting peace and stability; for the fact that princes and prestigious religious figures went there often; and because the city has gained privileges and graces.<sup>8</sup> Although some of these reasons may be considered old-fashioned, the draw of Venice's history, its inhabitants, and its ‘entertainment’ are still high among the reasons why tourists visit the lagoon today.

A modern visitor will also be drawn by the possibility of experiencing luxury hotels, Italian cuisine, Murano glass, the Biennale exhibition, and the celebrations for the Carnival. These attractions may hide from modern tourists a symbolic

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<sup>6</sup> In this regard see Deborah HOWARD, *Venice & the East. The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100–1500*, London 2000, pp. 189–215 (“The Pilgrim City”), and Élisabeth CROUZET-PAVAN, *Récits, images et mythes. Venise dans l’iter hierosolomytain (XIV<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, in: *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps modernes* 96(1) (1984), pp. 489–535.

<sup>7</sup> Domenico ZASSO, *Venezia nel MCDLXXXVIII. Descrizione Di Felice Fabri Da Ulma*, Venice 1881, pp. 21–22.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

understanding of the city and its architecture on historic and religious levels. Yet it is possible to retrieve a strong connection with the medieval past by using medieval travel guides to help tourists understand their destination through the eyes of fifteenth-century travellers. In order to do this, a close reading of the medieval travel guides has to be undertaken, with a sensitivity to the motivations of the authors. Medieval travellers, especially pilgrims, typically organized their itinerary to accomplish their religious duties (such as the collection of indulgences or a visit to certain relics or monastic houses). Venetian guides, called *tholomagi*, were appointed by the government to assist pilgrims with their movements around the city. It is likely these guides suggested to pilgrims a ‘standard’ itinerary of the city that was adjusted according to the pilgrims’ wishes to visit certain churches or relics. There is evidence that Franciscans in Venice had a vital role in helping pilgrims with their itinerary both in Venice and the Holy Land. While it is clear that the order promoted pilgrimage to Jerusalem through specific guides or booklets the same has not been established for Venice.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, there is often an element of tourism in at least a part of the itineraries they describe in the texts studied here. This arises from the fact that these visits focussed on the best-known attractions of Venice, such as the doge’s palace, the island of Murano, and the Arsenal.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike merchants and members of the nobility, pilgrims did not always express their political and military interests openly. Because of the religious nature of pilgrimage, they were cautious in expressing a type of curiosity that might be judged inappropriate to their religious status.<sup>11</sup> For this reason descriptions of places considered today as tourist attractions, such as the doge’s palace or the Arsenal, appear in the background of their narratives and are observed through a devotional filter. For instance, William Wey described the Arsenal, heart of the military power of Venice, as “a large area where they build galleys to defend our Faith”.<sup>12</sup> Bernhard von Breydenbach

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**9** See Michele CAMPOPIANO, Islam, Jews and Eastern Christianity in Late Medieval Pilgrims’ Guidebooks: Some Examples from the Franciscan Convent of Mount Sion, in: Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean 24(1) (2012), pp. 75–89.

**10** Visiting the doge’s palace was, however, a privilege that was reserved to a certain category of pilgrims, who often received an invitation from the doge himself; the visit was then probably accompanied by a dinner with the doge in person. For an example, see the narrative of Roberto Sanseverino, who travelled in 1458 (the same year as William Wey): Roberto da SANSEVERINO, Viaggio in Terra Santa, ed. Gioacchino MARUFFI, Bologna 1888.

**11** A broader discussion on the evolution of pilgrimage into religious tourism is available in Luigi TOMASI, Homo Viator. From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism via the Journey, in: William H. SWATOS / Luigi TOMASI (eds.), From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism. The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety (Religion in the Age of Transformation), Westport / CT 2002, pp. 2–24. For a general introduction to pilgrimage: Hilda F. M. PRESCOTT, Jerusalem Journey. Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the Fifteenth Century, London 1954, and Nicole CHAREYRON, Pilgrims to Jerusalem in the Middle Ages, New York 2005.

**12** DAVEY (note 5), p. 118.

depicted the doge as a saint on earth representative of the virtues and graces of a “holy city”.<sup>13</sup> In the minds of medieval pilgrims, politics and consequently military organization, were strictly connected to religion. Indeed, according to Breydenbach the successful political organization of Venice was the result of the city’s deep devotion to God.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, what appears as a present-day tourist’s itinerary of the best known Venetian sights was, in the fifteenth century, part of an extended religious pathway admiring the piety and commitment of Venice towards Christianity.

A list of the churches visited by pilgrims in the fifteenth century (Table 1) shows the possible itinerary undertaken by the pilgrims while in Venice. From the middle of the fifteenth century, pilgrims seem to have visited roughly the same locations. Some of the differences in their itineraries might be attributed to various reasons, including the cultural background of the pilgrim, the public availability of an increasing number of relics during the later years of the fifteenth century, the pilgrim’s knowledge of the city, the weather conditions, and, most likely, their personal wealth. This last factor is probably the most important to consider. Going on pilgrimage was not only dangerous but very expensive and Venetians, as the main providers of overseas passage, took advantage of their privileged position to transform religious devotion into a business.

To facilitate the entertainment of pilgrims in the city, Venetians organized guided tours, events, and celebrations like the traditional *Sposalizio del Mare* (“Marriage of the Sea”) or the procession of Corpus Christi.<sup>15</sup> Pilgrims were not, however, allowed to wander alone around Venice. There was a risk of getting lost or ending up in some of the off-limits zones of the city (it is likely, for example, that pilgrims were authorized to visit only the de-militarized areas of the Arsenal such as the production warehouses or the galley-sheds as Breydenbach, Casola, and Wey themselves indicate in their narratives).<sup>16</sup>

Public rituals encapsulated the façade that Venice exhibited to the world. They reflected the Venetian aspiration that their great city be remembered by its visitors as a unique symbol of medieval Christianity. The pilgrims’ first encounter with the grandiosity of Venice was probably experienced during the doge’s entrance through the canals of the lagoon, which took place with great pomp aboard the *Bucintoro*, a special ornate galley used for public celebrations. Ascension Day was the first public appearance of the doge during the period of the spring voyage and the first occasion for pilgrims to see him in person. The celebration ritual during Ascension Day – the ‘Marriage of the Sea’ – was a public remembrance of Venice’s naval power during the Dalmatian conquest.

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<sup>13</sup> Bernhard von Breydenbach (note 5), pp. 24–25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> About this topic see Edward MUIR, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, Princeton / NJ 1981.

<sup>16</sup> DAVEY (note 5), p. 118; NEWETT (note 5), pp. 139–140; Bernhard von Breydenbach (note 5), p. 23.

It is uncertain when the ‘Marriage of the Sea’ became part of the rituals of Ascension Day. The first public celebration enacted aboard the *Bucintoro* occurred only in 1311 when the Senate approved the construction of a *navilium ducentorum hominum*.<sup>17</sup> Brunetti argued that the known civic ritual of the later Middle Ages

**Table 1:** List of the Venetian churches visited or mentioned by fifteenth-century pilgrims.

<b>William Wey 1458</b>	<b>Roberto Sanseverino 1458</b>	<b>Felix Fabri 1480</b>
1. San Marco	1. San Marco	1. San Marco
2. San Geremia	2. Santi Apostoli	2. San Gregorio
3. San Giovanni di Rialto	3. San Nicola	3. San Piero Martire
4. San Giovanni in Bragora		4. San Domenico
5. San Salvatore		5. San Giovanni e Paolo
6. Santa Maria Formosa		6. San Nicola
7. San Silvestro		7. Santa Maria delle Grazie
8. San Girolamo		8. Santa Maria dei Miracoli
9. San Pietro Castello		9. San Pietro di Castello
10. S. Elena		10. San Zaccaria
11. S. Zaccaria		11. San Giovanni (monastery)
12. S. Daniele		12. San Rocco
13. S. Lorenzo		13. San Bartolomeo
14. S. Giuliano		14. Santa Maria della Misericordia
15. S. Canciano		15. Santa Maria Formosa
16. Santi Gervasio e Protasio (San Trovaso)		16. San Antonio
17. S. Nicolò		17. San Geremia
18. S. Basilio		18. Santissima Trinità
19. S. Giorgio		19. Santo Stefano
20. S. Aponal		20. San Canziano
21. S. Servolo		21. Santa Maria del Carmine
22. S. Maria e Donato		22. Santa Marta
23. San Domenico		
24. San Francesco della Vigna		
25. Santi Cosma e Damiano		
26. San Lio		
27. San Clemente		
28. San Marcuola		
29. San Cipriano		
30. San Secondo		

<sup>17</sup> It is believed that *Bucintoro* was a distortion of the word *ducentorum*. In fact, the ship was able to carry about two hundred men aboard, see Giustina Renier MICHIEL, *Origine delle feste veneziane*, vol. 1, Venice 1852, p. 193.

Table 1 (continued)

<b>Santo Brasca 1480</b>	<b>Bernhard von Breydenbach 1483</b>	<b>Pietro Casola 1494</b>
1. San Marco	1. San Marco	1. San Marco
2. Santi Giovanni e Paolo	2. San Giorgio	2. Sant' Elena
3. San Francesco	3. Sant' Elena	3. San Antonio
4. San Bartolomeo	4. San Nicola	4. San Cristoforo
5. San Francesco la Vigna	5. Crociferi (Santa Maria Assunta)	5. San Giorgio
6. San Antonio	6. Santa Marina	6. San Andrea
7. San Salvatore	7. Santa Lucia	7. San Francesco della Vigna
8. Sant' Elena	8. San Zaccaria	8. Santa Maria dei Servi
9. San Blasio		9. Monastero della Carità
10. San Canziano		10. Santa Maria del Carmine (monastery)
11. Crociferi (Santa Maria Assunta)		11. San Salvatore
12. San Daniele		12. San Nicola
		13. Santa Madonna dell'Orto
		14. San Giorgio in Alga
		15. San Zaccaria
		16. San Pietro di Castello
		17. Santi Apostoli

merged with a former and much simpler religious celebration known as *benedictio maris*, possibly carried out at the time of the Dalmatian conquest in the year 1000.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the ritual of the *desponsatio* was included in the custom much later and attributed to the visit of Pope Alexander III to Venice in the twelfth century.<sup>19</sup> Over time, what was originally a religious benediction before an official departure of the Venetian galleys from the Arsenal gradually disappeared in favour of a much more mundane display of authority. In fact, the celebration for the *Sensa* (Ascension), which lasted between one and two weeks before and after the final parade of the *Bucintoro* through the canals of the lagoon, started with the organization of the *Fiera della Sensa* (“Sensa fair”) considered an additional occasion for pilgrims to experience Venetian culture. Indeed, the *Sensa* fair was a major occasion for pilgrims to find souvenirs, do shopping, and discover sophisticated products specific to Venice, such as manuscripts and (later in the fifteenth century) early printed books, all in the same place. On the occasion of the fair, merchants and artists from and outside Venice gathered in St Mark’s square. Stalls were mounted all over the piazza to

<sup>18</sup> Mario BRUNETTI, Sposalizio del Mare, in: Enciclopedia Italiana, vol. 32 (1936), pp. 416–417.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

display a countless number of objects (such as paintings, books, Murano glass, carved wood, ornaments, spices, etc.) and it seems the fair was so popular that it attracted more than 100,000 people annually.<sup>20</sup>

Although the fair was a major attraction and undoubtedly contributed to the re-making of the city as an exotic and fascinating place in the eyes of the newly-arrived visitors, the focus of the celebration was not the fair itself but the parade of the Doge aboard the *Bucintoro* and its symbolic religious and political significance. On the eve of the Ascension Day, the *Bucintoro* was moved out of the Arsenal in order to be admired by people before the official parade.<sup>21</sup> Fabri described the vessel as, “a great ship fashioned like a tabernacle, painted, covered with gilding and shrouded with silken hangings”.<sup>22</sup> Before the parade, a religious procession accompanying the doge to the *Bucintoro* did not fail to remind pilgrims of the sacredness of that moment.

The ceremony is described as full of pomp and so noisy that Fabri stated that it “seems to shake the very sea,” with all the city’s bells ringing, trumpets, cannons, and over five thousand vessels celebrating the passage of the doge from the Arsenal to the church of St Nicholas on the Lido.<sup>23</sup> The final stage of the celebration was the *Sposalizio*. The doge, as a propitiatory rite to inaugurate a new naval season, threw a ring towards the sea as a symbol of the annual ‘marriage’. CROUZET-PAVAN, in her study of the myths of Venice, argued this moment represented for pilgrims a symbol of the ‘maritime adventure’ they were embarking upon.<sup>24</sup> Although CROUZET-PAVAN’s hypothesis may be plausible within a context of celebration, none of the pilgrims who left an account of his stay in Venice during the fifteenth century discussed the *Bucintoro* as a symbol of the upcoming maritime journey. On the contrary, with the exception of Felix Fabri, descriptions of Ascension Day are generally very brief. For example, Santo Brasca, who travelled to the Holy Land in 1480, described his participation in the *Sensa* as: “I went to see the marriage of waters beyond the walls where the doge was in the *Bucintoro* with many other citizens’ boats and beautifully adorned women. It was certainly something great and magnificent to see.”<sup>25</sup>

This celebration was perceived differently from pilgrim to pilgrim. For instance, William Wey preferred to highlight the background linked to the symbolism of the

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**20** A recent study by Evelyn WELCH offers a wider perspective in relation to Italian medieval fairs and investigates the changes in the *Sensa* fair over the centuries, see Evelyn S. WELCH, *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Cultures in Italy 1400–1600*, Yale 2005, pp. 166–184.

**21** *L’Omnibus raccolta di letture popolari di storia, letteratura belle arti, curiosità*, vol. 1, Venice 1854, p. 173.

**22** Aubrey STEWART, *The Book of the Wanderings of Brother Felix Fabri*, vol. 1 (The Library of the Palestine Pilgrims’ Text Society), London 1896, p. 98.

**23** For the description of the feast see *ibid.*, pp. 98–99.

**24** CROUZET-PAVAN (note 6), p. 532.

**25** *Preterea andai a vedere sposare el mare fuora de le castelle ove gli era il duce nel Bucintoro con tante barche de cittadini et done ornatissime, che certo era grandissima magnificentia a vedere*; see Santo Brasca (note 5), p. 49.

'Marriage of the Sea' by narrating how the events involving Pope Alexander and the Doge Sebastiano Ziani led to the recognition of Venice as the city-symbol of the Christian faith instead of describing the ceremony itself in detail as Fabri did.<sup>26</sup> What emerges from all these accounts is the intention of Venice to mark herself as a unique spot on the pilgrimage route, one that offered pilgrims a type of spirituality that was very different from the one they would experience in Jerusalem. That spirituality revolved around the figure of the doge as the legitimate representative of the Christian faith on Earth. The doge was perceived, in fact, as one of the closest emissaries of God on Earth. Therefore, everything organized by him and the city's holy government was the result of this sanctity and the highest expression of his Christian faith.

Bernhard von Breydenbach affirms there were no right words to praise the glory, piety, and sanctity of the doge, who in his eyes was a prince surrounded by the wise members of the Senate and a most judicious person to enact the saintly laws of Venice.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, except for a few 'lucky' pilgrims who met the doge personally in his palace, the city's ruler remained, for the majority of visitors, a sort of symbolic figure who represented the start and the end of the Venetian stay before the journey to the Holy Land.

Venice's religious significance had always been of central importance to the Republic since the *translatio* of St Mark's body in 828. It developed in a completely different way from that of Jerusalem, being focussed on three main points: the figure of the doge, the civic celebrations, and the display of wealth as a sign of the city's sovereignty and as a symbol of the divine providence. In this regard, the early modern French Humanist Guillaume Postel stated that Venice was an eternal city blessed by the divine and this *perennitas* was shown in Venice's use of gold and in the art and glass symbols of the city's wealth.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, Postel described Venice as a "perfect government, most sacred *regalitas* and true Jerusalem".<sup>29</sup> Postel's sixteenth-century view brilliantly summarized what Venice aspired to be not only within the pilgrimage route but also within Christianity itself. Indeed, despite its role the city did not aspire to be another Jerusalem through *mimesis* or devotion but, to the contrary, it wished to be considered the 'true' Jerusalem because of its unicity, geographical position, government,

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<sup>26</sup> William Wey dedicates an entire paragraph to explaining the origins of the 'Marriage of the Sea' through the legend of Pope Alexander III and Emperor Frederick, see DAVEY (note 5), pp. 120–122, and the Latin version of the text in *The Itineraries of William Wey*, Fellow of Eton College, to Jerusalem, A. D. 1458 and A. D. 1462; and to Saint James of Compostella, A. D. 1456. From the original manuscript in the Bodleian library, ed. Bulkeley BANDINEL / George WILLIAMS, London 1861, pp. 87–88.

<sup>27</sup> Bernhard von Breydenbach (note 5), pp. 24–25.

<sup>28</sup> Marion L. KUNTZ, *Guillaume Postel e l'idea di Venezia come la magistratura più perfetta*, in: Marion L. KUNTZ (ed.), *Postello, Venezia e il suo mondo*, Florence 1988, pp. 163–178, here p. 175.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

and wealth, all of which had been obtained by divine will.<sup>30</sup> The inner religious devotion spread in the city since its foundation found its definitive dimension in the course of the fifteenth century. Venice's peculiar role as counterpart of Jerusalem and key provider of maritime services to the Holy Land widely contributed to making the city an important religious attraction in its own right. From a certain point of view, Venice had to respond to the pilgrims' need to be welcomed and guided though their journey. This came through the organization of city tours. When organized privately for small groups of pilgrims, these were likely to have been expensive. This price may not have included additional expenses such as alms and indulgence costs.

Modern tourists can be considered more fortunate than those who visited Venice during the Middle Ages: most of the Venetian churches are now free to enter (an exception to this are the churches of the Circuito Chorus, that is the Basilica di Santa Maria dei Frari, Chiesa di Santa Maria Formosa, Chiesa di San Polo, etc.). Felix Fabri reached some of the churches listed in Table 1 by navigating the canals, probably accompanied by a Venetian guide; Pietro Casola also stated clearly that he, and his companion, paid a fee to visit the Venetian churches.<sup>31</sup> Differences in religious itineraries are likely due to the individual pilgrims' requests and their willingness to spend extra money on alms and indulgences in more or less complicated itineraries. The next section will consider some of these differences in more detail.

## Venice as Seen in William Wey's Narration

In considering which of the available itineraries offers the most in terms of reappraising our view of present-day tours of Venice, Wey's stands out. Although those of Santo Brasca, Felix Fabri, and Pietro Casola appear as three of the most complete tours in terms of the number of churches visited, their visits were tailored specifically for their personal needs and included stopovers at monastic houses that no longer exist and meetings with certain religious contacts that are not relevant to any modern route. For instance, Felix Fabri states more than once that he went to certain churches to meet some confrères he already knew in Venice, possibly from previous travels.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Roberto Sanseverino's route is not sufficiently complex because its length is very limited and his travel is known to have been politically-oriented. Bernhard von Breydenbach's narration, on the other hand, suggests an itinerary determined by the prestige of the relics held by Venice's

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<sup>30</sup> Sante GRACIOTTI, Venezia nell'utopia mitico-religiosa tra Cinque e Seicento (nei dintorni Jacopo Brocardo), in: Sante GRACIOTTI (ed.), Mito e antimito di Venezia nel bacino adriatico: secoli XV–XIX (Media et Orientalis Europa 1), Venice 2001, pp. 149–167, here p. 157.

<sup>31</sup> ZASSO (note 7), pp. 17–18; NEWETT (note 5), p. 135.

<sup>32</sup> ZASSO (note 7), pp. 14–18.

churches. While of great value in that it highlights Venice's religious relevance, an itinerary based on it might be problematic for a modern visitor due to possible restrictions on the accessibility of the relics today. Most of those Bernhard listed are either no longer available or difficult to see because they are kept out of public view (that is, inside the altar or in specific reliquaries).<sup>33</sup>

Although it is not clear whether William Wey personally undertook the route suggested in his account, the order in which the churches are listed and their location in the city indicates an actual pilgrimage itinerary which included a large number of the churches throughout the territory of Venice. It has to be noted that the description and history of the list of churches provided by Wey is slightly inaccurate. It appears mis-remembered, as if the pilgrim received oral information about the city's sights and then reported this information at a later date when writing up his account.

William divides the churches of Venice according to two criteria. On the one hand, he mentions seven churches which he believed to be founded by St Magnus. On the other hand, he mentions those churches possessing notable relics. The list of churches founded by St Magnus, however, contains several mistakes. For example, the number of churches founded by the saint was eight and not seven as Wey suggested. Nor does the list provided by Wey correspond to the actual churches founded by St Magnus himself. Specifically, the churches of St Giacomo di Rialto and St Silvestro are listed by Wey among those founded by St Magnus but these have been confused with the church of St Zaccaria and the church of Santi Apostoli. The separation of those seven churches from the general list may suggest Wey attributed a special significance to them yet the confusion in their names suggests a misunderstanding or error of memory.

Despite these caveats, William demonstrates an emotional investment in his description of Venice that sheds light on a symbolic interpretation of Venetian religious architecture that has been lost today. Before investigating of how Wey's itinerary is relevant, it is necessary to be as clear as possible about the background of the author and his purpose in creating the text.

Everything that is known about Willelmus Wey (or William Wey) can be found in the studies made by Bulkeley BANDINEL for the Roxburghe edition of his work in 1857 and from the more recent work of Francis DAVEY.<sup>34</sup> With the exception of his confirmed fellowship at Exeter College, Oxford, from 1430 until 1442, and at Eton College, from 1441 to 1467,<sup>35</sup> all other personal information about Wey's life remains

<sup>33</sup> Bernhard von Breydenbach (note 5), pp. 18–20.

<sup>34</sup> See above, notes 5 and 26.

<sup>35</sup> See DAVEY (note 5), p. 10, and William Wey (note 26), pp. i–ii. This edition is mainly known as 'Roxburghe'. The presence of William Wey at Exeter College is confirmed by a register of 1429, while his Eton fellowship is recorded in a register of 1447, see 'Socii Collegii Regal. Etonensis' in: Thomas HARWOOD, *Alumni Etonenses. Or, a Catalogue of the Provosts & Fellows of Eton College & King's College, Cambridge, from the Foundation in 1443 to the Year 1797: With an Account of Their*

either unknown or contradictory. DAVEY provides possible dates for his birth (1407 in Devon) and death (30 November 1476) that are not, however, accompanied by any documentary proof, except a mention in the register of Exeter College. Furthermore, DAVEY suggests that Wey died in his seventieth year, while in the Roxburghe edition it seems that at the same age the author was *consecratus ad modum peregrinorum*, for his last pilgrimage in 1462.<sup>36</sup>

Licences granted by King Henry VI and Pope Pius II allowed William to travel to the Holy Land in 1458 and 1462 despite his collegial duties.<sup>37</sup> In both versions of his pilgrimage William started his voyage from Venice. In the first account Wey depicts Venice only briefly giving the impression he considered the city exclusively in terms of his port of departure. Conversely, the second account is more detailed and Venice itself acquires a more overtly religious character.<sup>38</sup> There is little information about Venice in the first pilgrimage account. Here he stressed the logistical information about the journey, such as the changing of money and the expenses and necessary provisions for the sea-voyage. The account of 1462 seems to be written from a different perspective. Venice has not lost the characteristics of the mercantile city described by Wey in 1458 but four years after his first Venetian encounter, the maritime republic appears in a new, 'sacred' light. Indeed, Venice is described as an important religious stage within the itinerary to the Holy Land.

The map below (Figure 1) shows those churches (probably) visited by Wey in Venice during his stay in 1462.<sup>39</sup> It is likely that a tour of all these churches took up to one month to complete in the Middle Ages due to the fact that part of Venice was marshy and the different parts of the city were not as well connected as they are today. Indeed, the current distance between the church of San Girolamo and the church of St Elena is about three miles and can be covered by walking for about an hour. In the fifteenth century, the connection between these two opposite sides of the city might not have been as effective as it is today. This may have lengthened the travel time considerably. Furthermore, visits to religious institutions were a spiritual investment for pilgrims for the purposes of collecting indulgences, praying, offering alms, and meeting members of the religious houses and churches. Therefore, it is

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Lives & Preferments, Collected from Original Mss. and Authentic Biographical Works, Birmingham 1797, pp. 51–52, and C. William BOASE, Register of the Rectors, Fellows, and Other Members of the Foundation of Exeter College, Oxford. With a History of the College and Illustrative Documents, Oxford 1894, pp. lxx–lxxi, 36.

**36** See William Wey (note 26), p. v.

**37** For the King's licence see Eton College Archives, Eton College Register 1457–1536, fol. 18r (46); for the papal licence see 'Lateran Regesta, Vol. DLXXX, f. 244' in the Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland, vol. 12: 1458–1471, ed. Jessie Alfred TWEMLOW, London 1933, pp. 160–163.

**38** See DAVEY (note 5), pp. 22–29.

**39** Fig. 1 follows the subdivision of the itinerary into four sub-categories indicating the churches as mentioned in his account. Some of these churches (orange icons) no longer exist.

- St. Marks' Basilica
- Churches founded by St. Magnus according W. Wey
- Churches with notable relics
- Demolished Churches

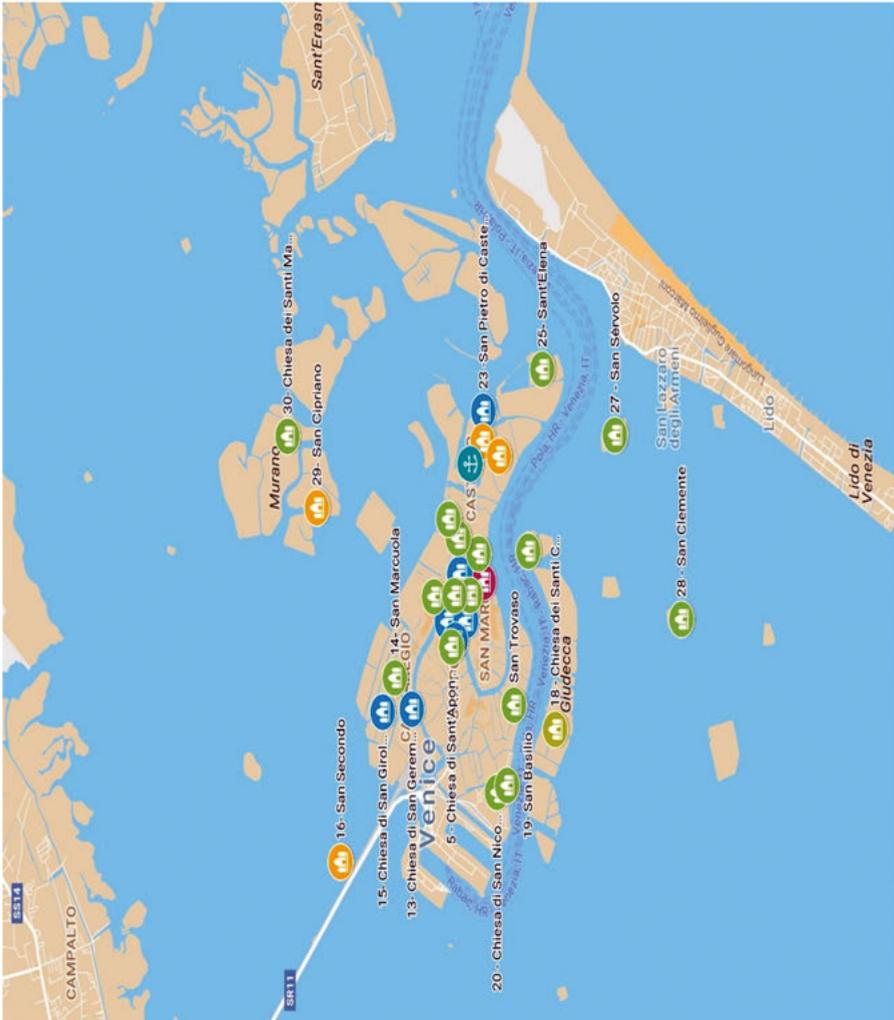


Figure 1: Churches listed by William Wey in 1462.

likely that a tour of the Venetian churches would not have been conducted as rapidly as it would be today; it probably only involved one to three institutions per day.<sup>40</sup>

The first nine churches mentioned by Wey establish the practicality of his suggestions for visitors to the present-day Venetian territory (Figure 2). Following the order to be found in Wey, the itinerary starts from the church of St Mark (1) continues to the church of San Geremia (2), before returning to the *sestiere* of St Mark to visit the churches listed from number 3 to 7. The last two churches on the list, San Girolamo (8) and San Pietro di Castello (9), are situated at two opposite sides of Venice and needed to be visited separately because of their distance.

The completion of the itinerary takes five days. The route is not a continuous one, nor practical for the modern tourist because Wey listed the churches not according to their proximity but following a different criterion. For example, while the churches numbered eight and two in Figure 2 would be visited on the same day if distance were the only consideration, Wey placed them in a different order. Indeed, from the perspective of medieval religious men, an itinerary of this type would have expressed a deeper religious connection with the Bible. St Mark's basilica, a masterpiece of Byzantine artistic expression in Italy, was perceived by Wey as the fulcrum of the city's piety. It was a sacred place linked directly to God, a place where it was possible to receive full remission of sins and admire an emblematic connection of Venice with the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>41</sup> Walking inside St Mark's with his eyes on the sparkling and domed golden roof, Wey describes the Basilica as a representation of Jerusalem in Venice: "[. . .] and the high altar was of silver and gold as the Church of St Mark's was built as the Christian temple in Jerusalem."<sup>42</sup>

Undeniably, St Mark's basilica is one of the best Italian examples of the visual expression of Christian symbolism, having in its structure all the characteristics of a sacred divine epiphany. The golden mosaics covering the basilica's roof illustrate episodes from the Revelation of St John the Divine, which might have inspired Wey to symbolically connect Venice to John's verses.<sup>43</sup> One of the basilica's vaults shows the seven churches of Asia in a mosaic. The following text introduces the scene: "Order to observe gradually the things I announce rightly" (*Quae refero recte gradibus servare jubete*). This phrase appears above the painting of the angels holding in their hands the seven churches of Asia and it introduces the archway of the Last Judgement as it is described in Revelation. By separating seven churches from the rest of the Venetian itinerary Wey created a parallel between these Venetian churches

<sup>40</sup> Felix Fabri claimed he had visited two institutions in one day, see ZASSO (note 7), p. 18

<sup>41</sup> See Xavier BARRAL I ALTET, *Contro l'arte romanica? Saggio su un passato reinventato*, Milan 2009, p. 202.

<sup>42</sup> William Wey (note 26), p. 84: "[. . .] et summum altare erat de argento deaurato, et ecclesia sancti Marci edificata ad modum templi Christianorum in Jerusalem.

<sup>43</sup> William Wey (note 26), p. 84, already used the numerology of John to describe the main altar of St Mark's basilica.



Figure 2: William Wey's itinerary.

and the seven churches of Asia, possibly inspired by the images seen in the basilica. The possibility arises that Wey consciously adjusted the number of churches founded by St Magnus from eight to seven to establish a greater sense of their sacredness.

The churches of St Magnus share certain peculiarities with the ones described by John. The churches of Asia were not merely religious buildings but they had a similar significance for the community as the seven – in reality eight – churches of Venice had for Venetians. The legend of St Magnus states he was guided by God, the Apostles, and the Holy Virgin to complete the construction of the churches, just as Christ instructed John of Patmos to found the seven churches of Asia.<sup>44</sup> Secondly, as with those listed in the Book of Revelation, the Venetian churches had specific virtues that made them relevant in the eyes of the pilgrim. For example, the church of Santa Maria Formosa was important for its sanctity as miracles happened there often and the doge of Venice visited it to redeem the sins of the citizens. The church of San Pietro di Castello, at that time the cathedral of Venice, held the throne of the apostle Peter.<sup>45</sup> It is unclear if Wey deliberately sought to create a parallel between the symbolic association of the Venetian churches and those listed in the Book of Revelation or a Venetian guide made the claim that the churches of St Magnus were as sacred as the famous biblical ones, thereby misleading pilgrims in order to promote the sacredness of Venice.

Wey's decision to highlight the connection of Venice with Scripture, however, does not necessarily mean the actual route followed by medieval pilgrims reflected the order given in his text. Rather he was stressing that a symbolic appreciation of a small part of the pilgrim's path may add to the creation of a religious experience in Venice. Something similar occurred in Wey's explanation of the 'Marriage of the Sea'. It can be regarded as the author's peculiar way of highlighting the sacredness of Venice for his readers. In fact, although Wey's route does not reflect the actual itinerary of the churches of St Magnus, his interpretation of the mosaics in St Mark's and their possible connection with the other churches in Venice offers an interesting perspective on the impact that Venetian architecture had on medieval travellers, revealing a precious key to understanding the city's symbolism from a medieval standpoint.

After completing the itinerary according to the order indicated by William Wey, one clear conclusion can be reached, which is that from the perspective of a modern tourist a simple correspondence between the medieval text and a new itinerary would not be practical and would be very time consuming. The churches are too far

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<sup>44</sup> For more information about the history of St Magnus see Gianbattista MERLO, *Vita di san Magno vescovo di Oderzo poi di Eraclea patrono della città di Venezia e specialmente della parrocchia del SS. Salvatore*, Venice 1860; Revelation 1:11.

<sup>45</sup> To the eyes of the pilgrim, this might appear particularly striking given that one of the churches of Asia, Pergamum, was said to be located on the 'seat of Satan', see DAVEY (note 5), p. 122; Clyde E. FANT / Mitchell G. REDDISH, *Lost Treasures of the Bible. Understanding the Bible Through Archaeological Artifacts in World Museums*, Cambridge 2008, pp. 390–391.

apart and the route excludes most of the relevant Venetian religious architecture. The reintegration of a 'St Magnus itinerary' in a broader Venetian exploration, however, which includes all the remaining churches mentioned by Wey (and the other fifteenth-century pilgrims) would conform in a practical way to the manner in which, historically, Venetians organized their local religious tours (Table 2).

A visit plan based on the specific zones or linked to a particular event would be more practical in terms of time and coherence. The churches situated in the *sestiere* of San Marco and those near Rialto were certainly the most visited and best known by pilgrims, however, the presence of specific relics held by churches outside the tourist zone was probably the principal reason to organize tours in decentralized *sestieri* of Venice such as Castello, Cannaregio, or Dorsoduro.

In zones such as that of Cannaregio, which in the medieval period was mostly frequented by residents and was in some parts marshy, it was possible to visit churches holding relics considered of interest, such as the body of St Magnus or the bones of Saints Sergio and Bacco.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, during organized visits to the Arsenal, pilgrims seized the opportunity to visit those religious institutions distant from the city centre such as the Basilica of St Pietro di Castello, situated on the little island of San Pietro di Castello, or the monastery of San Domenico. Such a route is feasible for the modern tourist, who would find it much easier and less time consuming to discover the medieval pilgrims' path according to the division by *sestieri* (Table 2). This would give the tourist an opportunity to insert in their itineraries other significant medieval locations such as the Arsenal in the *sestiere* of Castello, the doge's palace, the Marciana Library, and the Fondaco dei Tedeschi in the *sestiere* of St Mark's. Moreover, each summer Venice still celebrates the *Sensa* with a (mundane) remembrance of the medieval 'Marriage of the Sea' in front of the Church of St Nicolò al Lido. Although the doge, symbolic icon of this celebration, is no longer centre stage (replaced by the mayor in the current celebration), it would be an excellent initiative to accompany this festivity with additional tours to rediscover the paths travelled in what once was considered a 'city for pilgrims', especially for those tourists interested in learning more about the symbolic and religious sides of Venice.

## Conclusions

Venice can still tell us much about the medieval period and about the pilgrimage experience in particular. With the exception of a few institutions such as the monastery of San Domenico and the churches of San Daniele, San Secondo, and San Cipriano the itinerary followed by fifteenth-century pilgrims before their journey to the Holy Land is

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<sup>46</sup> For more information about the churches of Venice see Flaminio CORNARO, *Notizie storiche delle Chiese e Monasteri di Venezia e di Torcello*, Padua 1758.

**Table 2:** Venice itinerary divided into *sestieri* (the churches in bold no longer exist).

<b>Cannareggio</b>	<b>San Polo</b>	<b>San Marco</b>	<b>Dorsoduro</b>	<b>Castello</b>	<b>Murano</b>	<b>Other Venetian Islands</b>	<b>Outside Venice</b>
San Geremia	Sant'Aponal	Basilica di San Marco	San Nicolò	San Pietro di Castello	Santi Martiri	San Giorgio Maggiore	<b>San Secondo</b>
San Girolamo	San Giacomo di Rialto	Santa Maria Formosa	San Basilio	San Zaccaria	<b>San Cipriano</b>	Santi Cosma e Damiano	
San Marcuola	San Silvestro	San Salvador	San Trovaso	San Francesco della Vigna		(Giudecca Island)	
		San Lio		San Lorenzo		San Servolo	
		San Canciano		Sant'Elena		San Clemente	
		Santi Apostoli		<b>San Domenico</b>			
		San Giovanni in Bragora		<b>San Daniele</b>			
		San Giulian					

still viable and probably easier to complete than five centuries ago. Echoes from a medieval golden age resound everywhere in Venice. But are present-day tourists able to hear them without support and promotion by the Venetian authorities?

One outcome of this study is that it highlights the way in which the experience of being in Venice has changed since the Middle Ages. This is not because most of the churches and historic buildings have been physically replaced, but rather because what made this city a key destination during the medieval period has been completely forgotten by current civic institutions. In the fifteenth century, Venetian citizens were the heartbeat of the lagoon. The promotion of the city's history and its military, political, and religious unity by its inhabitants headed by the significant figure of the doge created a powerful 'myth' of Venice and a religious symbolism, which survives in countless medieval records. Fifteenth-century travel guides allow us to discover not only that it is still possible to wander as a medieval pilgrim in Venice but highlights that the medieval sense of the spiritual significance of the buildings has been lost. Indeed, although the greater part of the aforementioned churches are open to the general public, Venetians no longer welcome visitors themselves and/or involve them in discovering the history and medieval relevance of these institutions. Personal interactions have been replaced by information posters, posters that inform tourists about 'history' but not 'mentality'.

These changes have played a part in the 'disappearance' of Venetian natives and residents from the lagoon, which is a well-known problem for Venice's administration.<sup>47</sup> Alarming data suggests the likely emergence of a new ghost city by 2030 that will see Venice resemble a theme park rather than the city described by William Wey as the "most holy place".<sup>48</sup> The thriving past of a multicultural, vibrant Venice attracts millions of tourists every year. A religious, symbolic understanding of the medieval city, adapted to the necessities of modern tourists, can still be discovered thanks to the material available in the medieval itinerary. Promoted by a collaboration between Venetian residents, Venice's institutions, and academia, this material can serve as a reminder of how radically our reading of the environment has changed with respect to the medieval past and this, in turn, could inform new tours and new content for tourists to engage with. Nevertheless, without the support of the local political and cultural institutions in the promotion of the historical understanding of the city and its medieval connections the gradual loss of this symbolic memory is inevitable.

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<sup>47</sup> The rise in living costs has forced Venetians to move to other locations such as nearby Mestre. On the vanishing of Venetian residents see Cathy NEWMAN, *Vanishing Venice*, in: *National Geographic* (August 2009), online: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2009/08/venice/> (last accessed 15/05/2019), and Roberto BIANCHIN, *Venezia nel 2030: una città vuota niente abitanti ma solo turisti*, in: *La Repubblica* (25 August 2006), online: <http://www.repubblica.it/2006/08/sezioni/cronaca/2030-veneziahvuota/2030-veneziahvuota/2030-veneziahvuota.html> (last accessed 15/05/2019).

<sup>48</sup> DAVEY (note 5), p. 120.