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Mapping narrative at the church of San Marco: a study in visual storying¹

ELIZABETH RODINI

Storying is most frequently understood as a verbal construction. Even in the case of visual interpretation and analysis, narrative priority generally falls upon the verbal 'pre-text', or the storyline that permits recognition of an image's subject and certain particularities of its presentation.² This circumstance is something of an investigative trap, the challenge being that of freeing pictorial narrative from its verbal roots. For if we want to discuss the narrative manipulations of any image, we must do so in a language that inherently favors words. If we want to explore the story that a picture presents, we must employ the medium of speech.³ We need to 'tell' the tale that, fundamentally, we want others to 'see', and in so doing it becomes especially difficult for seeing to control the narrative sphere. The struggle is one of method as well: how can we present a visual narrative for what it literally appears to be, without subjecting vision to the particular demands and values that mark the territory of words?⁴

Bearing such complications in mind, I open this study of visual storying with the telling of a tale. This tactic pushes some of the principal tensions inherent in the exploration of pictorial narrative to the fore by seeming to offer a verbal story as the guiding model for investigation. But while the contents of the story are central to my task, its narrative form, as a sequence of words, is not. My objective in separating image from pre-text (even at risk of placing the verbal before the visual) is to avoid reducing imagery to the subordinate role of illustration, and to suggest instead how pictures might 'show', rather than 'tell', their own tale. More immediately, I want to offer the possibility of a visual model, one lodged in the spatial, orientational language of picturing and more specifically of mapping, in making sense of several mosaic cycles at the church of San Marco in Venice. Ultimately, such an investigation not only provides a productive way of looking at visual storying, but offers the potential for understanding such stories differently.

The narrative in question is one that falls into the genre of *furta sacra*, or holy theft.⁵ It tells of the acquisition and transportation of St Mark's relics by two Venetian merchants, an event that propelled Venice to power and is often held to be a sort of local foundation myth.⁶ This is how medieval chroniclers recounted the tale:⁷ In the year

828, a Venetian trading ship was blown off course and landed in the Arab port city of Alexandria. There, two merchants by the names of Tribunus and Rusticus disembarked and became acquainted with the Greek guardians of St Mark's shrine.⁸ Hearing of a Muslim plan to strip the shrine in order to build a palace and encouraged by the Greeks, the merchants decided to rescue Mark and bring his remains to Venice. In an act of trickery common to such tales, the Venetians replaced Mark's body with a decoy clad in his saintly vestments. On board their ship, they deceived the Muslim customs guards by covering the relics with pork. Mark demonstrated his approval of the theft by saving the Venetian vessel from near disaster on a rocky estuary and by fighting off a threatening clan of demons. As they neared home, Tribunus and Rusticus began to fear that their visit to the forbidden territory of the infidel would bring them punishment. They presented Mark's relics as a gift of appeasement to the doge, and were honored with a sizable reward and an elaborate procession to welcome the saint.

An important cult quickly formed around the body of Mark, who became the city's patron and the primary focus of its devotions. From a historical perspective, the claim to St Mark's relics proved decisive, providing the key event in an ongoing struggle between Venice and the neighboring city of Aquileia for ecclesiastical and political dominance.⁹ In the seventh and eighth centuries, Venice was little more than a small fishing village, with minimal economic power and even less status. Aquileia, by contrast, claimed patriarchal rights and linked these directly to St Mark, based on his fabled journey to the city and his presumed establishment of a church there at the behest of St Peter. Venice, founded several centuries after Mark's visit to the region, could boast of no such history. Instead, it sought authority in its control over the island of Grado, Aquileia's local rival in the struggle for the patriarch. But claims to one of the most important of apostolic relics, the bones of St Mark, shifted the debate among Venice and its neighbors dramatically. Following the theft of these relics in 828, Venice was able to speak of itself in terms of divine authority and destiny, and to cite Mark's presence in the city as material evidence of that role.¹⁰ With this success, Venice launched itself in a new direction. The

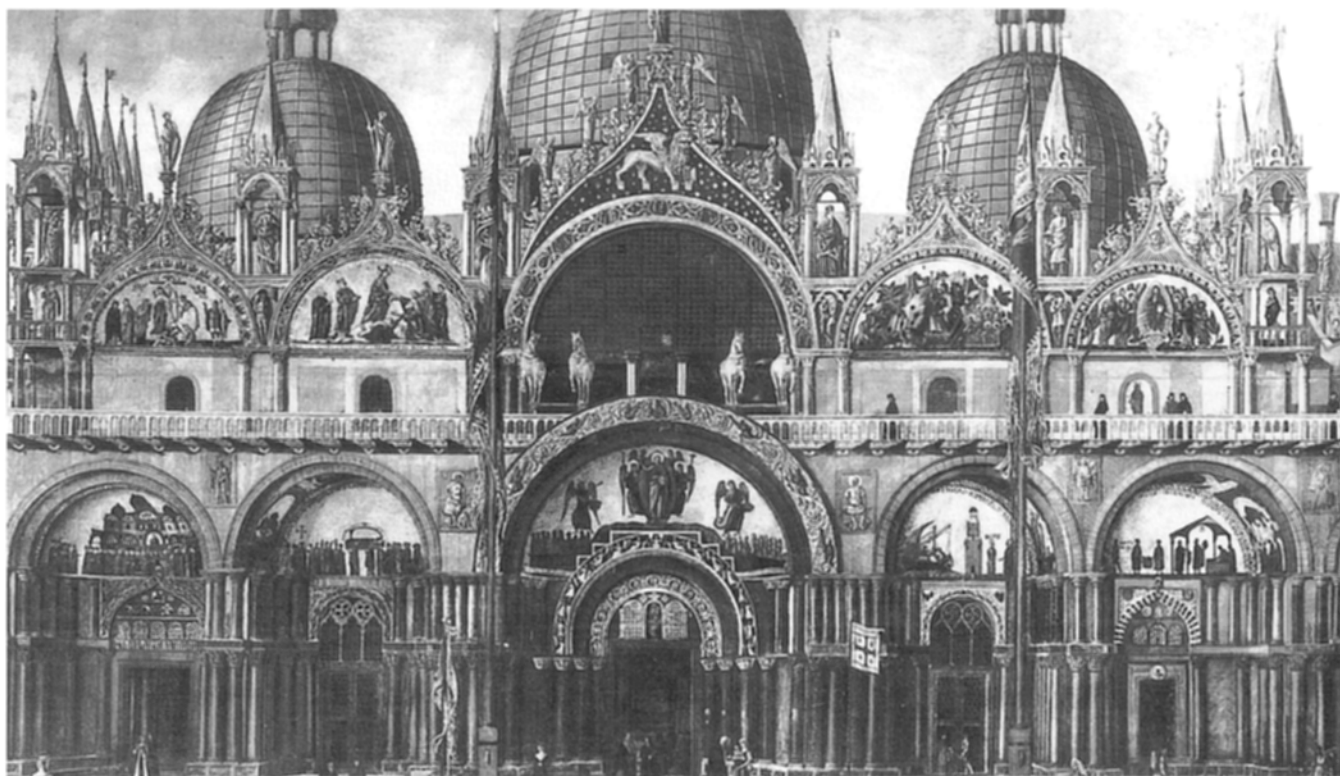


Figure 1. Gentile Bellini, *Procession in Piazza San Marco*, detail of the facade of San Marco, 1496, oil on canvas, Venice, Accademia Galleries. Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, New York.

confidence that came with possessing Mark's body was essential to the subsequent eastward expansion of the Venetian state, in terms of territorial ambition, economic strength, and military potential. More important perhaps is the sense of beginnings that the Alexandrian theft provided. Venice, with neither a Roman nor a prestigious Christian history, lacked a great tale of origins.¹¹ The story of St Mark's bones, though not at the roots of Venetian existence, provided a venerable sort of pseudo-foundation myth, a story to which the community could point as evidence of a noble past and a divinely sanctioned future. Its grounding in acts of theft, material relocation, and the bridging of great distances sets up a thematic thread to which we will return.

The tale of Mark's translation was certainly familiar to residents of medieval Venice, and was known primarily through oral traditions that included official liturgical commemorations and the less accessible but readily imagined sharing of local lore. It was also visually present at the eleventh-century basilica of San Marco, the third structure built to serve as monumental reliquary for the saint's remains. Not only did the basilica, as martyrrium, stand as an architecturally notable reminder of Mark's presence in Venice; it also framed several prominent representations of the legendary translation myth. These included mosaic cycles over the portals of the facade

(figures 1 and 2) and in the Chapel of San Clemente (figures 3–6), enamelwork on the Pala d'Oro or 'golden altarpiece' of the high altar, and a painted panel by Paolo Veneziano that covered the Pala d'Oro according to the demands of liturgical protocol.¹² All of these were important locations (the Chapel of San Clemente, adjacent to the high altar, housed the throne of the doge¹³), and it is noteworthy that each one was prominently marked by images of Mark's translation.

The two mosaic cycles will occupy my attention in these pages. They are of particular interest to a study of visual narrative for several reasons. One is that the mosaics of the facade, which crowned the lunettes of the basilica's four subsidiary portals, formed what was likely the most prominently and publicly positioned narrative cycle in Venice when they were completed in the mid-thirteenth century, and can thus be considered central to any discussion of pictorial storytelling in this period. Another is that mosaics, like large-scale painted cycles, set up a relationship between image and viewer that is markedly different from that between written text and reader, pushing a reevaluation of how visual (as opposed to verbal) narratives are engaged. Spread along an expanse of wall or across a vault, mural art places a unique set of burdens on viewers as interactors.¹⁴ The process of looking at such cycles is highly physical, often requiring necks to crane and bodies

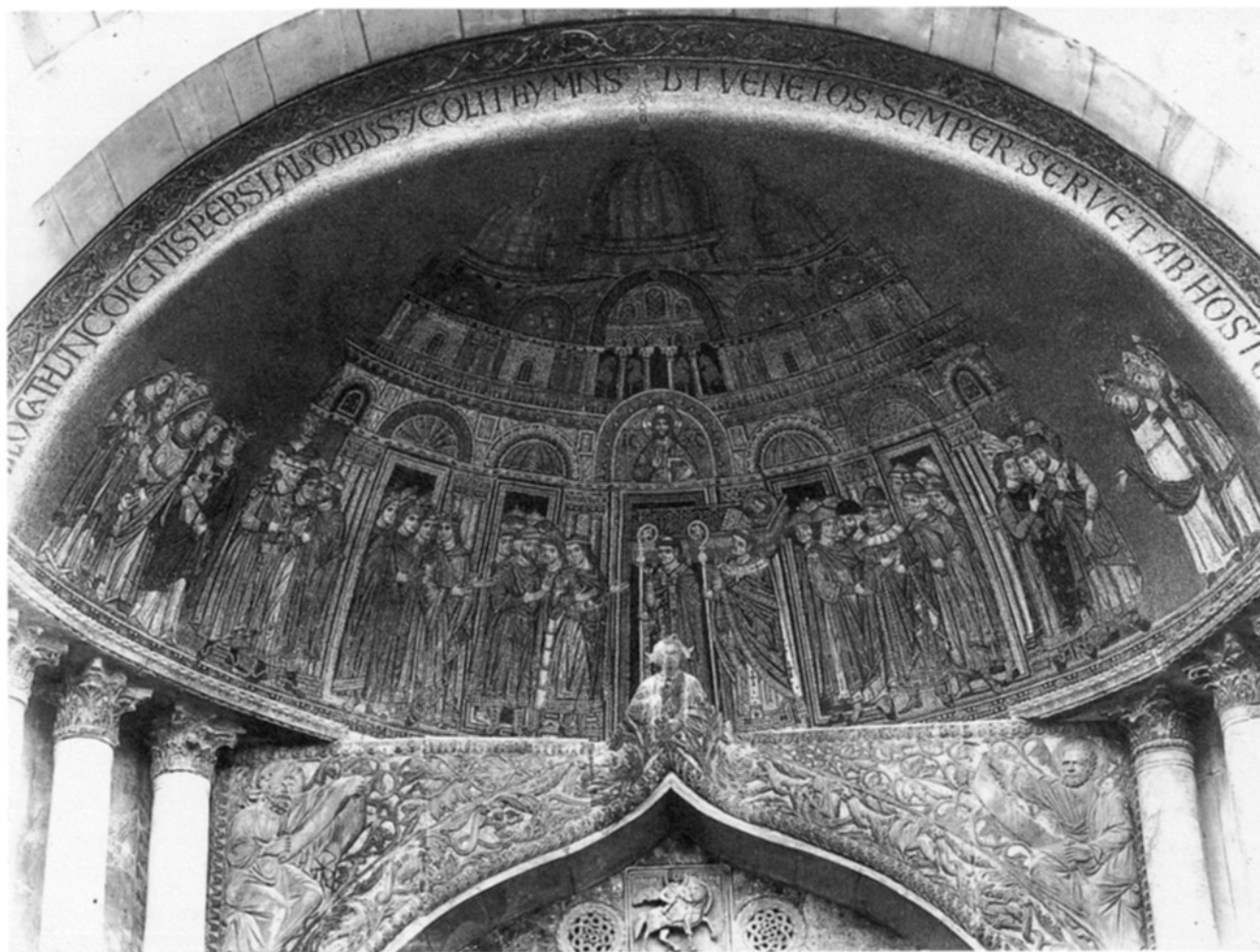


Figure 2. *Deposition of St Mark's Relics*, Porta di Sant'Alipio mosaics, San Marco. Photo: Osvaldo Böhm, Venice.

to twist in pursuit of the unfolding story. Such circumstances force an awareness of space and orientation upon viewers that smaller, close-up presentations do not. In the case of the San Marco mosaics, space is also a dynamic storying device and one with significant narrative consequences. As we will consider it here, spatiality is the representational fulcrum around which these images of the translation meaningfully unfold.

The facade cycle, as pictorial frontispiece to the church and narrative reminder of its role as St Mark's reliquary, is a suitable place to open this investigation (figure 1).¹⁵ Fabricated in the mid-thirteenth century, this program can be considered a part of the same decorative campaign that studded the exterior of the basilica with booty following the Venetian-led Crusade of 1204 against Constantinople.¹⁶ This juxtapositioning was not, as we shall see, merely fortuitous: the centering of a famous legend of relic translation within the frame of a church encrusted with appropriated riches had particular reson-

ance in Venice, and came to play a significant emblematic role for the city.¹⁷ Unfortunately, little of this mosaic cycle survives: save for the portal on the far left (figure 2), it comes down to us only through the careful brush of Gentile Bellini, who detailed the western facade of the basilica in his painting of 1496 showing a *Procession in Piazza San Marco*.¹⁸ The vibrancy of Bellini's representation complements the remarks of Martin da Canal, a thirteenth-century Venetian chronicler who offered the facade cycle as confirmation that the translation had in fact taken place. 'And if any of you wishes to verify that things were as I have recounted them to you,' da Canal wrote soon after the completion of the cycle, 'come to see the beautiful church of *monsignor* St Mark in Venice and look right at the front of it, for this entire story is written here just as I have told it.'¹⁹ For da Canal, narrative pictures served as visual analogs to the testimonial authority of verbal storytelling.²⁰

This verbal-visual comparison, particularly through its

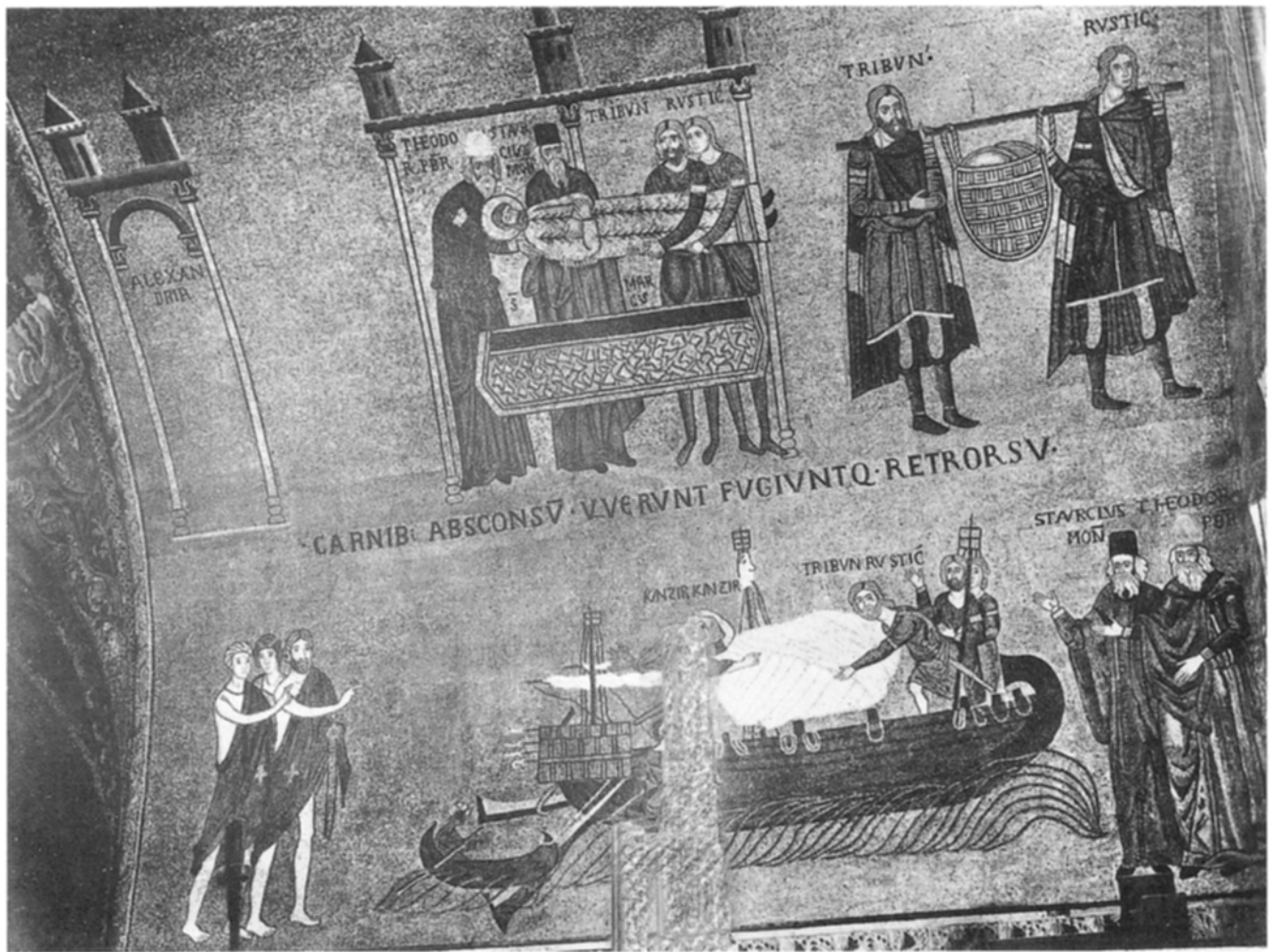


Figure 3. Scenes from story of St Mark's translation, Chapel of San Clemente mosaics, eastern half of vault. Photo: Osvaldo Böhm, Venice.

use of the verb to write (*escrire*), is an especially provocative one because the arrangement of the San Marco cycle so immediately defies the textual expectations of Western readers. Rather than unfolding from left to right, this cycle arranges the episodes of Mark's translation in the opposite direction.²¹ Beginning at the far right-hand or southern portal, we see the opening moments of this now familiar narrative. Here, Tribunus and Rusticus remove Mark's body from its Egyptian shrine and carry it off in a basket. In the next lunette to the left we find the two merchants setting sail from Alexandria, unmistakable for its renowned *pharos* or lighthouse. Across the central portal, Mark's relics are welcomed to Venice in a formal procession. Finally, in the surviving Porta di Sant'Alipio on the far left (figure 2), they are placed to rest at an anachronistically rendered San Marco.²²

Verbal models fail to contain other elements of the cycle's pictorial scheme, including the necessarily performative nature of viewing the original mosaics, which were

strung out across the facade and demanded a physically engaged audience. Related to such interaction was the phenomenon of detachment: it would have been possible for viewers to follow the translation narrative from beginning to end but it was not necessary to do so (one might approach the church from the front/west or left/north), and the linear trajectory of narrative as defined by storyline was not, therefore, absolute. Even for those who pursued the story according to its temporal sequence, punctuation entered the narrative viewing in the form of decoratively carved sculpture, columns in exotic marbles, and the mosaic image of Last Judgment that crowned the central portal. As a consequence of its positioning and presentation, the facade cycle was only loosely bound to the familiar trajectories (beginning to end) of verbal storytelling. Emerging from its location and the physical demands placed upon viewers was a narrative grounded in space, orientation, and the literal navigation among its various episodes.



Figure 4. *St Mark Saving Ship*, Chapel of San Clemente mosaics, detail of western half of vault. Photo: Courtesy of the Photographic Archives of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Several details serve as cues to the spatial language that shapes this narrative. One is the attention to geographic place so evident in the precise architectural markers — lighthouse and basilica — that serve to identify location. The famed Alexandrian *pharos* was one of the seven wonders of the world, and Venetians may have hoped to put the church of San Marco in a similar category. In the closing episode of the cycle, to the far left (figure 2), a ninth-century legend is set before a thirteenth-century facade, datable by the crusader booty (including colorful stones and gilded horses) it displays. This pictorial gesture, with its topographical accuracy and overriding interest in depicting a familiar locale, works to situate narrative *place* (rather than time) at the center of the translation legend.²³ Details of costume underscore this theme: turbaned figures in Alexandria offset the local crowd (including several tonsured priests and the doge in his characteristic cap) that welcomes St Mark to Venice.²⁴ A ship, its riggings being readied for departure, reminds us of the great distance separating the two loci of this narrative. This vessel, if we allow ourselves to imagine some spatial continuity, will soon push off to the left, away from the famed *pharos* and toward the void — architecturally figured as the basilica's portal — that separates Alexandria and Venice.²⁵ As viewers of the facade cycle, we must enter into that voyage, breaking the action of the story to move, quite literally, to its next venue. In this way, we play through the journey of Mark's relics, the distance they traveled, and the displacement they underwent, acting out 'translation' (in its literal sense of movement across)²⁶ through the progression of our bodies.

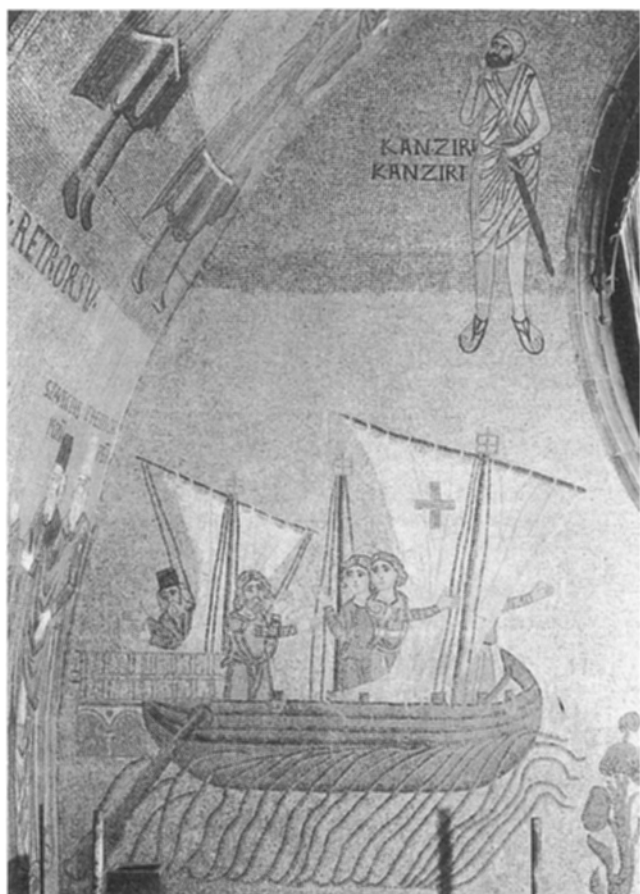
Ultimately, as we shift our frame of reference from a position outside Bellini's image to one before the facade of the church and the mosaics of the thirteenth century, we can recognize the ordering of this cycle to be rooted in a language of orientation and space. The central portal, that void we must travel in our effort to pursue the story



Figure 5. *Reception of St Mark's Relics in Venice*, Chapel of San Clemente mosaics, detail of western half of vault. Photo: Courtesy of the Photographic Archives of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

(and the path) of Mark's relics, serves to underscore position as definitive to the translation legend. To the portal's right we find Alexandria, in the east, and to its left, Venice, in the west. As set into the facade of San Marco, this legend is presented as one about distances and their spanning. Its chronological unfolding is less essential, for no matter how the legend is pursued (right to left, left to right, or in any other manner), it always operates around a spatially determinant axis: east is always separated from west.

Before commenting on the narrative implications of this ordering, it is pertinent to observe that a similar spatial logic controls the twelfth-century mosaic rendering of the translation legend in the vault of the Chapel of San Clemente, adjacent to the basilica's high altar. Here the story is not presented in a linear fashion. Though the eastern half of the vault retains the predictable, narratively sequential ordering of episodes from left to right and top to bottom (figure 3), this schema does not hold in the remainder of the chapel. Those episodes that I label 4, 5, 6, and 7 according to their place in the verbal narrative (figure 7) force our eye, by their non-sequential positioning, to jump around the chapel if we wish to follow the chronological progression of Mark's story (they correspond respectively to figures 6a, 4, 6b, and 5).²⁷ This arrangement seems to break the narrative flow, but it does so to another, spatially motivated end. For like the mosaics of the facade, one of the principal visual strategies in this cycle is the facing off of east against west. On one side of the vault we find all of the episodes of the translation that are set in Alexandria, from the removal of Mark's body to the inspection of the Venetian ship preparing for departure (figure 3). This eastern setting is underscored by the exotic headgear of several Egyptians, the customs guards made to voice the conspicuously foreign word for pork



(a)

Figure 6a. *Departure from Alexandria*, Chapel of San Clemente mosaics, detail of southern wall. Photo: Courtesy of the Photographic Archives of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

(‘KANZIR KANZIR’) as they are deceived in their search for contraband, and most directly by the architectural marker in the upper left-hand corner of the wall that proclaims the setting to be ‘ALEXANDRIA’. Across the vault lies Venice, signaled again by the costumed figures representing the doge and local clergy (figure 5). Above them, the scene of Mark saving the Venetian ship from destruction upon a rocky shoal is set in the generically labeled ‘ESTUARIE’ (figure 4). Originally this episode bore the more precise marker of the Strofadi islands (‘STROALIA’),²⁸ which were located in the Ionian Sea in an area largely under Venetian control, so that in this case the division between east and west is perhaps less literal than it is conceptual, in the sense of Venice and its domains being offset from the ‘other’ territory of the infidel.

Most remarkable in the case of the chapel mosaics is the extent to which narrative ‘east’ and ‘west’ were actualized instead by means of their positioning. The



(b)

Figure 6b. *Arrival in Venice*, Chapel of San Clemente mosaics, detail of southern wall. Photo: Courtesy of the Photographic Archives of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

eastern scenes, those set in Alexandria, are all placed on the eastern half of the vault, a position recognizable to medieval viewers who knew from the location of the nearby altar which way was east on the compass. Likewise, the ‘western’ episodes or those set in the domain of Venice are in fact to the west, facing off against the images of Alexandria (figure 7).²⁹ Particularly compelling is the way the two halves of the vault are tied together on the southern wall of the chapel (figures 6a and 6b). Here we see the Venetian ship, twice represented as it begins and ends its westward journey: Tribunus and Rusticus depart with their precious cargo from the (actual, pictorial, and referenced) east, and arrive in the west. Between these two locales lies a site of passage, and the journey of their vessel is signaled by its sails, now filled and now lowered. The final transference of the relics is implied by the open gesture of the merchants, who reach across the corner of the chapel to offer their gift to the doge and his entourage.³⁰ As in the case of the facade cycle, these various

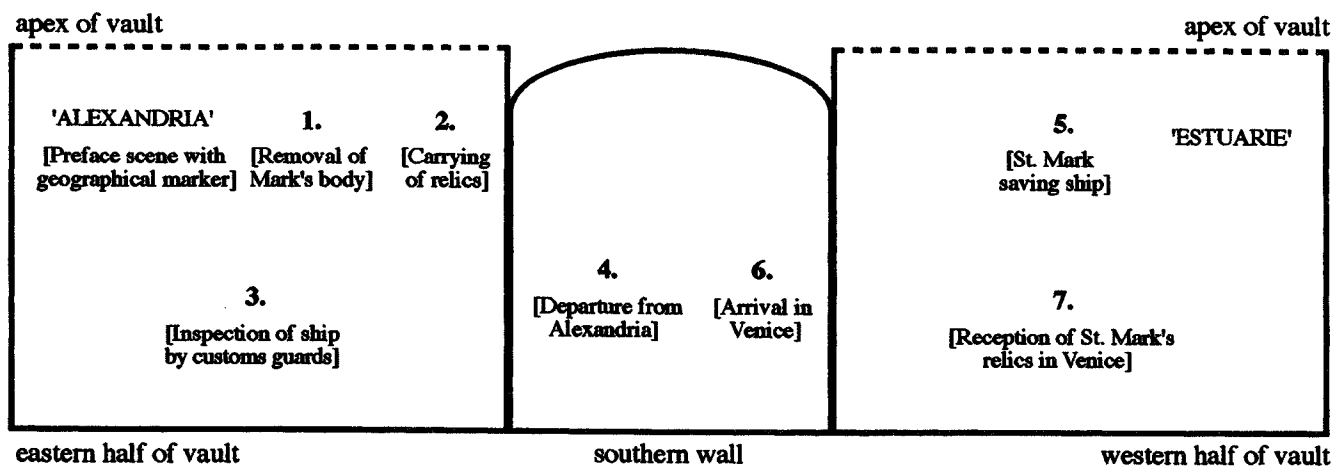


Figure 7. Arrangement of narrative episodes in the Chapel of San Clemente mosaics; splayed view looking south. Diagram: author.

suggestions of movement are critical in activating the pictorial narrative, allowing this to become first and foremost the story of a journey from east to west.

This theme is present but not highlighted in verbal renditions of the translation legend, which emphasize instead the miraculous nature of the event, its sanctioning by St Mark, and the resulting understanding that Venice too was blessed. The above viewings of the San Marco mosaics illustrate how a material or situational construct can control the pictorial presentation of narrative apart from pre-texts and storylines. The language of space is especially powerful in the arena of the visual, and particularly in the case of extensive, mural-scale images. In the two translation cycles, spatiality fabricates a narrative that operates in a unique, pictorially driven fashion. Indeed, the visual sensibilities guiding these images might easily be allied with the strategies of mapping, wherein place, distance, orientation, and alignment are guiding representational concerns.³¹ That Venice became, in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance, a principal center of cartographic production and consumption is a suggestive addendum to our viewing of the San Marco mosaics.³² Seeing them as 'mapped narratives' casts both the images themselves and the story they present in a different light.³³

In one sense, the mosaics at the Chapel of San Clemente function quite literally as a map. Thomas Dale notes that the scene of the reception (figure 5), located 'at the juncture of the Cappella San Clemente, the south transept, and the ducal palace . . .,' denotes the place where Mark's relics were originally deposited by Doge Giustiniano Particiaco in the ninth century.³⁴ A Venetian addendum to the myth of translation tells of the loss of the relics in 1094, during the building of the third (and present-day) church, through a collective forgetting of their place of burial. After three days of intense communal prayer, the relics revealed themselves from within the southeast pier

of the crossing. Two thirteenth-century mosaics installed to commemorate this moment of apparition present schematic but legible renderings of San Marco's interior elevation, one as an east-west cross-section and the other, in which the pier opens to expose Mark's relics, as a cut from north to south. In a revealing positional dialogue, this figured pier lies directly across the south transept from the actual 'pilastro del miracolo'.³⁵ For viewers familiar with the space of San Marco, the play between these two mosaics and their divergent but parallel representations of the basilica's elevation conjures up a roughly sketched diagram of the placement of the pier, and hence of the relics of St Mark. In its topographical role as index to the original site of deposition, the twelfth-century San Clemente image (figure 5) is a precursor to these other, orientational mosaics. Within the constructs of space and position that order the surrounding cycle, this episode serves as a map to the location of Mark's relics.

Orientation and arrangement have more subtle roles to play at San Marco as well. Here, the language of mapping adds profound and otherwise unrealized layers of significance to the story of Mark's translation. It allows the themes of space, place, distance, and its crossing to emerge as critical to the value of this legend. Analyses of the narrative as it has been told and written do not address such motifs, despite the story's universally recognized role as a founding moment in Venetian history and self-fashioning. Attention to the spatial arrangement of the cycles at San Marco, on the other hand, reveals the centrality of the translation legend to a discourse of self and otherness that set Venice up as an authorized player in the eastern reaches of the Mediterranean. Venetian identity, from this perspective, was tightly and even essentially bound to the city's relationship with distant, Levantine lands.

More precisely, the myth of Venetian foundation as it

is presented in the story of translation was tied up with the ability to move material goods from one place to another and, as the geographical schema of these pictorial cycles suggests, most often from east to west. St Mark's bones can properly be regarded as part of that tradition, the first and most famous reward of many relic dealings,³⁶ *furtæ sacrae*, and trading excursions at which Venice excelled and which came in time to define it. Venice was and still is a place assembled of materials transported from other places. Geographic circumstance forced the Venetians to import virtually everything, including the most basic materials of which the city was built: not just timber and stone but even the land itself, which had to be wrested from the sea.³⁷ In this context, a myth about material relocation came to hold particular significance.³⁸ The story of St Mark was important in Venice not only for the sense of origins and legitimacy it provided, but for the fact that it gave a prestigious nod of approval to the practice of appropriation, placing such activity at the root of Venetian existence. The mosaic depictions of the translation render this otherwise muted discourse apparent by prioritizing the westward journey of the merchant's stolen relic as a narratively privileged theme.

Located on the front of the city's principal religious center and the martyrdom of its patron saint, the facade cycle situates east-to-west appropriation at the very heart of Venetian self-imaging and identity. It might even be seen as a *clef de lecture* (or, preferably, *clef de voir*) for the facade, reminding audiences that the decorative shell of San Marco was made up of eastern booty taken in a sacredly sanctioned struggle. Here the legendary quadriga of bronze horses, the richly carved bas-reliefs, the diverse sculptural groupings, and the forest of exotic marble columns clustered around the portals are decorative equivalents of the relic of St Mark housed within the church: as spoils from the Crusade of 1204 against Constantinople, they stand as material testimony to Venetian ambitions and accomplishments overseas (figures 1 and 2).³⁹ Even the fabric of the translation cycle, in richly colored, gold-backed mosaic, speaks of a Levantine debt, since this was an art refined in the circles of eastern Christendom and brought to Venice by Byzantine craftsmen.⁴⁰ Viewed as part of this whole, the architectural frame that originally punctuated the viewing of these mosaics emerges less as a distraction to the smooth progression of narrative unfolding than as a monumental affirmation of the story it encases. As artifacts translated from the Levant and imbued with the memory of distant territories, the fragments that ornament San Marco's facade stand as a conceptual and materially enacted map of Venetian interests in the eastern Mediterranean. The spatial story they present is uniquely visual, a non-narrative by most standards and yet one that would have been highly suggestive of east-west thematics for a thirteenth-

century Venetian audience.⁴¹ Because San Marco lay at the very heart of Venetian life, the notion that appropriation was a legitimate, even sanctified practice was easily extendable to the city as a whole.

It is from an examination of the uniquely visual strategies of the San Marco mosaic cycles — strategies I have allied with the diagrammatic language of the map — that this understanding of the translation myth emerges. From the perspective afforded by these images, the legend of Mark's bones is not an easy account of relic theft; it emerges instead as a narrative in which space, and more specifically the western ability to control space, confirms Venetian authority in the eastern Mediterranean. This politicized, even orientaling story is one that the words of Mark's legend do not tell, and that previous art historical accounts have likewise left uncovered. For the binding of 'story' to 'words' too often discounts the seen as an active narrative component, one that can shape not only the superficial appearance of a tale but its root values as well. The pictorial language of space encloses narratives that verbal decipherings often leave behind. And so one task for students of the visual is to embed our own tellings in looking, such that visualizing enriches vocalizing and, it is to be hoped, the other way around.

NOTES

- 1 — Earlier versions of this paper were delivered at the International Congress of Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan and the New College Conference on Medieval-Renaissance Studies in Sarasota, Florida. I am indebted to the Hermon Dunlap Smith Center at the Newberry Library in Chicago for support in my research on mapping and the visual arts, to Rob Rush and the Epstein Archive of the University of Chicago, to the anonymous reviewers for this journal, and to Linda Seidel for her always thoughtful guidance.
- 2 — This is the approach guiding such noteworthy studies of narrative in Italian art as Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, *The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431–1600* (Chicago, 1990) and Lew Andrews, *Story and Space in Renaissance Art: The Rebirth of Continuous Narrative* (Cambridge, UK, 1996). Both of these scholars take written or oral plots as their narrative baseline, reading interpretative significance into variations on or deviations from these verbally ordered starting points. See the interesting remarks on such readings in James Elkins, 'On the impossibility of stories: the anti-narrative and non-narrative impulse in modern painting', *Word & Image*, 7 (1991), pp. 348–64. Other important contributions to the study of narrative in Italian art turn to structures of verbal storying (in particular the chronicle and the humanist history) as guides to understanding the visual; see Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the Age of Carpaccio* (New Haven, 1989) and Jack M. Greenstein, *Mantegna and Painting as Historical Narrative* (Chicago, 1992). For some insightful 'viewings' of visual storying that break away from verbal models, see Richard Brilliant, *Visual Narratives: Storytelling in Etruscan and Roman Art* (Ithaca, 1984).
- 3 — On the implications of such mediations for the study of the visual, see the 'Introduction: Language and explanation' in Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven, 1985), pp. 1–11.
- 4 — A parallel line of questioning in narrative theory has asked about the relationship between description and narration in the visual arts. Among the most significant investigations of this problem are Svetlana

Alpers, 'Describe or narrate? A problem in realistic representation', *New Literary History*, 8 (1976), pp. 15–41; Louis Marin, 'Toward a theory of reading in the visual arts: Poussin's *The Arcadian Shepherds*', in *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, eds. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton, 1980), pp. 293–324; and Wendy Steiner, 'Pictorial narrativity', ch. 1 in her *Pictures of Romance: Form against Context in Painting and Literature* (Chicago, 1988), pp. 7–42. This theme also underlies much of the discussion in Christopher S. Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape* (Chicago, 1993). A seminal study of the relationship between description and narration in written texts is Gérard Genette, 'Boundaries of narrative', trans. and reprinted in *New Literary History*, 8 (1976), pp. 1–13.

5 – Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, revised edn. (Princeton, 1990); see in particular pp. 88–94.

6 – Giuseppe Pavanello, 'San Marco nella leggenda e nella storia', *Rivista della città di Venezia*, 6 (1928), pp. 293–324, and Silvio Tramontin, 'Realtà e leggenda nei racconti marciiani veneti', *Studi veneziani*, 12 (1970), pp. 35–58.

7 – On the history of this myth, see Nelson McCleary, 'Note storiche ed archeologiche sul testo della «Translatio Sancti Marci»', *Memorie storiche forgiuliesi*, 27–29 (1931–3), pp. 223–64.

8 – In some versions of the tale, Tribunus is called Bonus, but I favor Tribunus because this is how he is labeled in the mosaics I will be considering. Stanley Chojnacki noted for me the spectrum of Venetian society that would have fallen under the labels of 'Tribunus' and 'Rusticus'.

9 – This struggle is traced in detail in Thomas E. A. Dale, 'Inventing a sacred past: pictorial narratives of St Mark the Evangelist in Aquileia and Venice, ca. 1000–1300', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 48 (1994), pp. 53–104.

10 – The desire to institutionalize Mark's ultimate arrival in Venice as sacred destiny prompted a later addition to the myth of translation known as the *praedestinatio*, in which Mark is said to have camped on the future site of Venice and to have dreamed that his bones would eventually and finally come to rest there. This scene is figured into the thirteenth-century mosaic cycle of his life in the vault of the Zen Chapel at San Marco.

11 – The absence of such a myth had a critical impact on Venetian self-fashioning up through the Renaissance. For extensive discussions of this circumstance, see Patricia Fortini Brown, 'Renovatio or Conciliatio? How Renaissances happened in Venice', in *Languages and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford, 1995), pp. 127–54, and *Venice and Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past* (New Haven, 1996).

12 – N. di Carpegna, 'La "Coperta" della Pala d'Oro di Paolo Veneziano', *Bollettino d'arte*, 36 (1951), pp. 55–66.

13 – Otto Demus, *The Church of San Marco in Venice: History, Architecture, Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1969), pp. 47–8, and Staale Sinding-Larsen, *Christ in the Council Hall: Studies in the Religious Iconography of the Venetian Republic, Acta ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia*, 5 (Rome, 1974), pp. 204–5.

14 – Randolph Starn traces out some of the effects that such presentations have on the process of viewing in 'Seeing culture in a room for a Renaissance prince', in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 205–32. In a related vein, see Robert S. Nelson, 'The discourse of icons, then and now', *Art History*, 12 (1989), pp. 144–57.

15 – Otto Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco in Venice* (Chicago, 1984), vol. 2, pp. 187 and 192–206, calls the portal cycle a 'title page' for the church of San Marco. Tom Cummins pointed out to me the linguistic link between the title page, the portal, and the triumphal arch in sixteenth-century Spain, when all three were termed *portada*. In Italian, *frontespizio* could indicate a similar range of forms; see the *Vocabulario degli Accademici della Crusca*, 5th edn. (Florence, 1889), vol. 6, pp. 547–8. I have found no such term in the Venetian dialect, but the visual

association that often gave an architectural form to title pages in early books printed in Venice is analogous.

16 – This event as it impacted San Marco is considered in Demus, *Church of San Marco*, pp. 120–3, and Michael Jacoff, *The Horses of San Marco and the Quadriga of the Lord* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 1–11.

17 – This theme is explored in both my thesis, 'Translatio Sancti Marci: displaying the Levant in late medieval and early Renaissance Venice' (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1995) and in my article, forthcoming in *Art History*, on the intricacies of visual narrative in Gentile Bellini's *Procession in Piazza San Marco*.

18 – Demus, *Mosaics*, vol. 1, pp. 193–4, is somewhat cautious about Bellini's reliability, but for the purposes of my discussion here, which focuses more on general arrangements than specific details, this painted rendering can be taken as authentic.

19 – 'Et se aucun vodra savoir la verité tot ensi con je le vos ai conté, veigne veoir la bele yglise de monsignor saint Marc en Venise et regarde tres devant la bele yglise, que est escrit tote ceste estoire tot ensi con je la vos ai contee' (my translation); see Martin da Canal, *Les Estoires de Venise: Cronaca veneziana in lingua francese dalle origini al 1275*, ed. Alberto Limentani (Florence, 1972), p. 20.

20 – The theme of pictures serving as witnesses is explored in a Venetian context in Brown, *Narrative Painting*.

21 – Jacoff, p. 44, notes that the right-to-left (or south-to-north) arrangement was the 'logical narrative direction' for those approaching Piazza San Marco from the lagoon, as most official visitors to the city did. Dale, p. 90, points out that this orientation also replays the path traveled by the relics upon their arrival in Venice in 828.

22 – Dale, p. 92, proposes that this is an image not of the original deposition of the relics, but of the eleventh-century *collocatio* that followed a period in which the relics were temporarily lost. A layering of historical allusions, including a possible reference to the election of Doge Lorenzo Tiepolo in 1268 (see note 24), is in keeping with the fluid temporality of the image, and with a contemporary notion of time and history that sought symbolic value in the pattern of unfolding events.

23 – The word-image debate has often crystallized around the territories of time and space, and though I do not directly address it in these pages, my interest in the 'spatiality of narrative' is certainly a related concern. Particularly valuable to me has been W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1986).

24 – The ninth-century doge was Giustiniano Particiaco (d. 828), though Otto Demus identifies the mosaic figure as his contemporary stand-in Lorenzo Tiepolo (1268–75), elected just as the facade cycle was being completed; see *The Mosaic Decoration of San Marco, Venice*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler (Chicago, 1988), p. 186.

25 – Demus speculates that images of the ship being saved from disaster while sailing and of its arrival in Venice were included on the inner faces of the central two lunettes, which are hidden from view in Bellini's painting; *Mosaics*, vol. 1, pp. 200–1.

26 – The roots of this word lie with the Latin *trans-*, across, and *-ferre*, bear or carry (past participle *latum*). The Venetian cognate of this composite verb is *traslatar*.

27 – Special thanks to Charlie Rudin for assistance in making this diagram.

28 – According to Demus, *Mosaics*, vol. 1, pp. 67–8, the label was changed from its original form in the 1870s. Overall, the condition of these images is quite poor, but Demus's meticulous archaeological investigation, pp. 65–70, does not suggest any significant alterations to the basic narrative program of the cycle.

29 – I have restricted my discussion to representations of St Mark's translation, but it is interesting to note that a similar spatial logic is at work in both the Chapel of San Pietro and the Zen Chapel, where mosaic cycles depict episodes from Mark's life and martyrdom. In general, the cycles' overarching pictorial structures divide east from

west. In the case of the San Pietro Chapel, with the exception of the two closing episodes that are set apart on the north wall, geographic and pictorial directions are aligned as they are at the Chapel of San Clemente: east is matched with east and west with west. At the Zen Chapel, pictorial east references geographic west; nevertheless, a general and consistently applied schema of cardinal orientation shapes the cycle.

30 – Dale, p. 70, comments on the play between the activated corner and the stasis of the reception scene (figure 5). In the context of my study, this dynamic works to suggest that Venice, emblemized by a motionless group of dignitaries, was the place where the wanderings of Mark and his relics finally and definitively came to an end.

31 – In an interesting exploration of several eleventh-century Japanese screens, Nelson Goodman suggests the possibility of a geographical model for unwraveling the mystery of their narrative arrangement; his dismissal of such an approach seems based on a too literal understanding of what the language of mapping has to offer studies of the visual arts. See ‘Twisted tales; or, story, study, and symphony’, in *On Narrative*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago, 1980), p. 110.

32 – For a good overview of this topic, see Juergen Schulz, ‘Jacopo de’ Barbari’s view of Venice: map making, city views, and moralized geography before the year 1500’, *Art Bulletin*, 60 (1978), pp. 425–74.

33 – The relationship between maps and the traditional media of art historical inquiry has been a productive area of research in recent years. Increasingly, mapping is understood more as a way of organizing vision than as a documentary mode of representation. For a diverse collection of essays relating the study of mapping to the visual arts, see David Woodward, ed., *Art and Cartography: Six Historical Essays* (Chicago, 1987), and *Word & Image*, 4 (1988), a volume dedicated to maps and mapping.

34 – Dale, p. 71.

35 – I am indebted to Dale, pp. 71–3 and 85–6, for his analysis of the *apparitio* mosaics and his investigation of their relationship to the miraculous pier; he reproduces these mosaics as figures 40 and 41.

36 – For one account of the extensive relic trade that was centered in Venice, see Paul Hetherington, ‘A purchase of Byzantine relics and reliquaries in fourteenth-century Venice’, *Arte Veneta*, 37 (1983), pp. 9–30.

37 – This circumstance was underscored by the fourteenth-century Tuscan pilgrim and travel chronicler Fra Niccolò da Poggibonsi, who wrote of the Venetians that ‘they buy and bring in from far away everything needed for living’ (‘ogni cosa da vivere fanno venire di fuori da lungi per danari’) (my translation); see his *Libro d’oltramare*, ed. Alberto Bacchi della Lega (Bologna, 1881), vol. 1, p. 6. The theme of recuperating land from the sea was a frequent one in Venetian chronicles; see Antonio Carile, ‘Aspetti della cronachistica veneziana nei secoli XIII e XIV’, in *La Storiografia veneziana fino al secolo XVI: Aspetti e problemi*, ed. Agostino Pertusi (Florence, 1970), p. 90.

38 – A fascinating, multicultural study of the symbolic power of distances and their spanning, as well as the connection to the relocation of material goods, is found in Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses’ Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance* (Princeton, 1988).

39 – See note 16.

40 – On the Levantine origins of Venetian mosaic work, see Demus, *Mosaic Decoration*, pp. 5–6. The role of ‘cultural appropriation’ as an extension to the practice of material translation and as its own form of control poses some interesting thematic reversals, since the dominance of an eastern artistic mode might be equally well understood as a form of western submission.

41 – And for later audiences as well. The history of this facade as booty was remembered, for example, in a famous guide to Venice in which the stones of the facade were characterized as *pietre pellegrine* or ‘migrant stones’; Francesco Sansovino and Giovanni Stringa, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare* (Venice, 1604), p. 8v. In his discussion of the facade of San Marco, the nineteenth-century critic John Ruskin wrote that the ‘practice [of building with imported fragments] which began in the affections of a fugitive nation, was prolonged in the pride of a conquering one; and besides the memorials of departed happiness, were elevated the trophies of returning victory. The ship of war brought home more marble in triumph than the merchant vessel in speculation; and the front of St Mark’s became rather a shrine at which to dedicate the splendour of miscellaneous spoil, than the organized expression of any fixed architectural law or religious emotion.’ See *The Stones of Venice*, ed. J. G. Links (New York, 1960), p. 153.