



The Global City: On the Streets of Renaissance Lisbon

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Awarded an Honorable Mention by The Eleanor Tufts Award. The Award Committee called the book a "transformative scholarly contribution."

Recently identified by the editors as the Rua Nova dos Mercadores, the principal commercial and financial street in Renaissance Lisbon, two sixteenth-century paintings, acquired by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1866, form the starting point for this portrait of a global city in the early modern period. Focusing on unpublished objects, and incorporating newly discovered documents and inventories that allow novel interpretations of the Rua Nova and the goods for sale on it, these essays offer a compelling and original study of a metropolis whose reach once spanned four continents.

The Rua Nova views painted by an anonymous Flemish artist portray an everyday scene on a recognizable street, with a diverse global population. This thoroughfare was the meeting point of all kinds of people, from rich to poor, slave to knight, indigenous Portuguese to Jews and diasporic black Africans.

The volume highlights the unique status of Lisbon as an entrepôt for curiosities, luxury goods and wild animals. As the Portuguese trading empire of the fifteenth and sixteenth century expanded sea-routes and networks from West Africa to India and the Far East, non-European cargoes were brought back to Renaissance Lisbon. Many rarities were earmarked for the Portuguese court, but simultaneously exclusive items were readily available for sale on the Rua Nova, the Lisbon equivalent of Bond Street or Fifth Avenue. Specialized shops offered West African and Ceylonese ivories, raffia and Asian textiles, rock crystals, Ming porcelain, Chinese and Ryukyuan lacquerware, jewelry, precious stones, naturalia and exotic animal byproducts. Lisbon was also a hub of distribution for overseas goods to other courts and cities in Europe. The cross-cultural and artistic influences between Lisbon and Portuguese Africa and Asia at this date will be reassessed.

Lisbon was imagined as the head of empire or caput mundi, while the River Tagus became the aquatic gateway to a globally connected world. Lisbon evolved into a dynamic Atlantic port city, excelling in shipbuilding, cartography and the manufacture of naval instruments. The historian Damião de Góis bragged of the "Tagus reigning over the world". Lisbon's fame depended on its river, an aquatic avenue that competed with the Rua Nova, providing a means of interaction, trade and communication along Lisbon's coastline. Even for the cosmopolitan Góis, who traveled extensively for the Portuguese crown, Lisbon's chaotic docks were worth describing. Of all the European cities he experienced, only Lisbon and her rival Seville could be "rightfully called Ladies and Queens of the Sea". Góis contended that they had opened up the early modern world through circumnavigation.

Lisbon was destroyed in a devastating earthquake and tsunami in November 1755. These paintings are the only large-scale vistas of Rua Nova dos Mercadores to have survived, and together with the new objects and archival sources offer a fresh and original insight into Renaissance Lisbon and its material culture.

REVIEWS

"This handsomely illustrated book offers a tantalising view of a vanished city that in its day, according to do Góis, 'reigned over the world.'"

Apollo

The Global City, far more than a catalogue of beautiful things, expertly explores the contradictions between power and accumulation, commerce and art, that complicated the imperial project."

World Of Interiors

"A deeply important addition to its genre."

Arts of Asia March/April 2016

"[The Global City] brings the forgotten importance and contribution of a great European city to fresh attention."

The Art Newspaper, April 2016

"This is modern historical inquiry at its best: clear, precise, forthcoming about problems of evidence, and relentlessly focused on its central questions...[The Global City] restores Lisbon to its rightful place as one of the most important centres in the history of the modern world."

Times Literary Supplement 12 February 2016

Cultural history at its most original and sustaining."

Literary Review

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