CSSH Note

Michael Herzfeld, *A Place in History: Social and Monumental Time in a Cretan Town,* Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1991. Fans of Michael Herzfeld's previous works—*Ours Once More, The Poetics of Manhood, Anthropology Through the Looking Glass*—will also find much to admire in this latest effort. Readers unfamiliar with Herzfeld's earlier contributions will gain from his insights on politics (in the multilayered Foucauldian sense), identity formation, and the conflicted terrain of historical preservation. Herzfeld has long been a vocal participant in the cross-disciplinary conversation about how social constuction shapes action, and vice versa. In *A Place in History*, he is characteristically inventive in excavating and naming operative power relations.

The book details battles in a war over the preservation of the old Venetian port town of Rethemnos, on the Greek island of Crete. As a site for historical reconstruction, Rethemnos is thickly stratified with Venetian, Turkish, and Greek legacies. Herzfeld introduces the case with the distinction, more of emphasis than of polarity, between "social" and "monumental" conceptions of time. *Social time* involves everyday currencies of communication and *monumental time* is history officially enacted on sites chosen for their national significance, here including the façades and other details of houses in the old section of the city. Herzfeld asserts that Rethemniot controversy is fueled by differing conceptual priorities among citizens and government bureaucrats, with some seeking to fulfill the requirements of *social* time while others advocate remaking the town's identity in a *monumental* image. As Herzfeld puts it, at stake is "the future of the past." This imagined future entails a complex of issues: the collective face that Rethemnos will show to the world in decades to come, the problem of how small urban settlements can draw in the revenue needed to survive and prosper in the late twentieth century, the apposite boundaries of state power and coercion, and finally, the extent to which individual citizens may mediate their own prospects. The "choice of pasts is negotiated in a shifting present" as citizens and governmental officials battle throughout the 1970s and 1980s over Rethemnos's civic identity: as a precious historical resource? As a location where private homeowners are allowed free reign to develop their properties as they see fit? Herzfeld traces the fabulae of struggle on this small planet. The book is rich with historical, ethnographic and cultural details, and Herzfeld gamely gives the right amount of background information to help a multidisciplinary audience make sense of the case's idiosyncratic moments. *A Place in History* affords a window seat, right in the center of things, to watch the fascinating—and timely—process of quarreling over the past.

—Janet Hart

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