

GHERARDO ORTALLI / OLIVER JENS SCHMITT
BALCANI OCCIDENTALI, ADRIATICO E VENEZIA FRA
XIII E XVIII SECOLO / DER WESTLICHE BALKAN, DER
ADRIARAUM UND VENEDIG (13.–18. JAHRHUNDERT)

ÖSTERREICHISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN
PHILOSOPHISCH-HISTORISCHE KLASSE
ISTITUTO VENETO DI SCIENZE, LETTERE ED ARTI

Schriften der Balkan-Kommission
50

HERAUSGEGEBEN
VON
MICHAEL METZELTIN

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Gherardo Ortalli e/und Oliver Jens Schmitt

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Vorbemerkung

Der folgende Band vereinigt die Beiträge der Tagung „Balceni occidentali, Adriatico e Venezia fra XIII e XVIII secolo/Der westliche Balkan, der Adriaraum und Venedig, 13.–18. Jahrhundert“, die vom Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, der Balkan-Kommission der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, dem Dipartimento di studi storici der Universität Ca’Foscari in Venedig, dem Institut für osteuropäische Geschichte der Universität Wien sowie dem Österreichischen Ost- und Südosteuropa-Institut vom 25. bis 29. September 2006 in Wien und Venedig veranstaltet worden ist. Die Herausgeber danken Armina Galijaš und besonders Eva Frantz (Wien) für die umsichtige Vorbereitung der Manuskripte zum Druck.

Venedig und Wien, im April 2008

Gherardo Ortalli

Oliver Jens Schmitt

GHERARDO ORTALLI

Beyond the coast – Venice and the Western Balkans: the origins of a long relationship

It falls to me to be the first speaker at our conference so in agreement with the Wissenschaftlicher Ausschuss, I would like to sketch quickly the aims and the scholarly framework underlying the planning of the meeting. You will remember that over the years the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti has organized (always in collaboration with other cultural institutions) a series of meetings dedicated to the study of the relationship between Venice and various foreign territories or communities. These have included Crete, Genoa, the Levant, the Ionian Islands, the Armenians and Byzantium (the priority perspective in this latter case being that of art history). The proceedings of all these meetings have been published.¹ It was therefore natural to focus the attention also on the eastern coast of the Adriatic and on its hinterland, in other words the part of the Balkans which has always had extremely close relations with Venice. Actually, the initial intention was that the area of study should comprise the entire Balkan Peninsula, but given its extent and the complexity of the problems that need to be tackled it was decided to adopt a gradual approach and to explore the theme on two separate occasions. This conference on the western Balkans will therefore be followed by a second, dedicated to the Eastern Balkans. But I will return to the subjects we shall be dealing with today. As on previous occasions, the Istituto Veneto wished to undertake the journey to today's conference with particularly highly qualified travelling companions, also with the intention of developing existing contacts between individual scholars and cultural institutions. Hence the link with our Austrian partners. There were two rea-

¹ Venezia e Creta. Ed. Gherardo ORTALLI. Venice 1988; Genova, Venezia, il Levante nei secoli XII–XIV. Eds. IDEM/Dino PUNCUH. Genoa, Venice 2001; Gli Armeni e Venezia. Dagli Sceriman a Mechitar: il momento culminante di una consuetudine millenaria. Eds. Boghos LEVON ZEKIYAN/A. FERRARI. Venice 2004; Venezia e Bisanzio. Aspetti della cultura artistica bizantina da Ravenna a Venezia (V–XIV secolo). Venice 2005; Venezia e le isole Ionie. Eds. Chryssa MALTEZOU/Gherardo ORTALLI. Venice 2005.

sons for this choice. The first was the internationally acknowledged excellence of their research in the area in question. Then we wished to consolidate still further the already established connection between our Academy (the Istituto Veneto) and the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften.

In dealing with the main events (from 1200 to the end of the 18th century) of the region that today includes the eastern Adriatic coast, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Serbia and Croatia, we want to identify and explore the features of an integrated Adriatic system, one of its centres being Venice. Underlying the choice of approach were specific considerations of historiographic nature. There is no need to go exhaustively into the importance of the Adriatic Sea as a linking agent between the various territorial entities adjoining the Adriatic Sea. It goes without saying, too, that Venice performed an important connecting role linking the various coasts of the Adriatic and the worlds that gravitated around them; relations between the maritime area and the hinterland were often difficult but nevertheless fundamental. And in relation to the mainland “continental” areas, it is worth remembering that the Venice Lagoon is the northernmost point not only of the Adriatic Sea but of the entire Mediterranean. In centuries when the great transport routes were waterways (seas, rivers), geographical location offered a huge potential that could be turned to considerable real advantage by places that managed to develop appropriate economic and institutional structures. Once Venice had achieved adequate advances in this direction it began to claim a role as an ideal point of interchange between the Adriatic and the countries of Central Europe. Its apparently marginal position – at one extremity of the Adriatic system – became one of centrality with the change of perspective implied by the growth in relations between the Adriatic area and the much bigger economic and political system of continental Europe. In the historical period that concerns us (from the 13th century) this process was already completed and Venice had taken to presenting itself as a great power at an international level. What I want to do now is quickly to summarize how this came about. My contribution will therefore be a sort of prehistory, a prologue to our programme, whose aims include an attempt to remedy a certain oversight of historiography on the Balkans, where analysis of the role played by great states and empires in South-East Europe has somewhat forgotten the role performed by Venice.

The commendable exceptions to this neglect certainly exist² but they almost always occur in the work of Venetian history specialists. Then again

² More recent works include for example Jorjo TADIĆ, *Venezia e la costa orientale dell'Adriatico fino al secolo XV*, in: *Venezia e il Levante fino al secolo XV*. Vol. 1: Storia, diritto,

venezianisti too are often guilty of working from a distorted view point. The risk is that scholars tend to divide Venetian history into sections or slices and to lose sight of the global dimension. Thus it often happens that a scholar researching the Venetian presence on the mainland will pay insufficient attention to what is happening at the same time in the *Dominio da Mar* and vice versa; or that the expert on Venetian penetration into Dalmatia or Trentino will not take into account contemporary developments in Crete or Cyprus. Of course, this is one of the consequences of scholarly specialization, in itself undoubtedly positive; and there is no denying that historiography on Venice enjoys good health. Nevertheless, I repeat, failure to apply a global approach implies serious risk: events involving Venice in Padua or Friuli can be fully understood in the light of Venice's actions, at the same time, in Cyprus or Constantinople or Albania, or on the markets of London, Tunis and Flanders.³ Perceptions of the role of Venice in the various sectors (and here we are concerned with the Balkans) are also conditioned by the problem of relations between different historiographical traditions. In our case difficulties arise (the consideration is not a banal one) because of language barriers and limited opportunities for meetings. This is one of the reasons why we made a point of inviting scholars from the various countries involved to take part in this conference: not for reasons of "cultural diplomacy" but as an expression of our commitment to facilitating and increasing reciprocal contributions. Venice wishes to present itself as a useful point of interchange, as indeed it also was in the past.

economia. Ed. Agostino PERTUSI. Firenze 1973, 687–704; Ruža ČUK, Srbija i Venecija u XIII i XIV veku. Beograd 1986; Bogumil HRABAK, Venecija i bosanska država, *Istraživanja*, 12 (1989), 407–505; Lujo MARGETIĆ, Iz ranije hrvatske povijesti. Odrabrane Studije. Split 1997; Tomislav RAUKAR, Hrvatsko srednjovjekovlje. Prostor, ljudi, ideje. Zagreb 1997; Croatia in the Early Middle Ages: a Cultural Survey. Ed. Ivan SUPIČIĆ. London, Zagreb 1999; Oliver J. SCHMITT, Das venezianische Albanien (1392–1479). Munich 2001; Povijest Hrvata. Vol. 1: Srednji vijek. Ed. Franjo ŠANJEK. Zagreb 2003; Bariša KREKIĆ, Unequal rivals: Essays on Relations between Dubrovnik and Venice in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries. Zagreb, Dubrovnik 2007. The history of the Balkans in general requires separate consideration and here we should mention at least the extremely high level of the most recent Greek historiographical production; cf. in general Italia – Grecia: temi e storiografie a confronto. Eds. Chryssa A. MALTEZOU/Gherardo ORTALLI. Venice 2001.

³ In my opinion the writings of Roberto Cessi and Gaetano Cozzi remain exemplary because of their clear perception of the global nature of the problems and of the close interconnections between the events. Despite the many differences in their basic approach (and in character), the two greatest Venetian historians of the last century may usefully be associated here.

CONTINUITY IN VENETIAN HISTORY

After these introductory remarks, I wish now to trace the process by which Venice came to perform a function that was crucial for the entire Adriatic area and which had enormously important consequences for the history of the Balkans. But before I do, let me make a couple more comments about methods. I am thinking especially of what I would define as the “canon of continuity”. In many ways a peculiar feature of the history of Venice is its capacity to move through time tendentially without abrupt surges or catastrophic changes. It is curious how the image one has of the history of Venice changes, depending on whether one’s perspective is, as it was, close to or from a distance. With a close range analysis of events, what we see is a series of dramatic situations or moments: serious internal disputes; the deposition or killing of doges; catastrophic military defeats; successes that open the way to especially favourable conditions; economic crises and moments of splendour and success, and so on. In short, the historical process we see is often dramatically uneven, with extraordinary highs and lows; not very different from what we find in many other historical contexts.

However, if we stand back from individual events and observe the overall development of Venetian history in general, the jagged outlines dissolve into an extraordinarily linear consistency of a kind that is found hardly anywhere else. In short, when it comes to giving a concise account, the life of the Venetian *respublica* seems to be an almost uninterrupted flow. And I think this sort of optical illusion is the fruit, on the one hand, of the unusual ability of Venetian society to absorb changes and transform them into growth, and on the other of its aversion to radical alterations.⁴ Let me explain with a few simple examples: for over a thousand years and despite the huge changes seen over that time, the Venetian state was always headed by a Doge; and when the last, Ludovico Manin, laid down the insignia of power in 1797 so that they could be burnt before the Tree of Liberty in St. Mark’s Square (in the style of the French Revolution), he also handed over the Doge’s *cornio*, the ceremonial cap that originated with the *skiádion*, worn centuries earlier by high Byzantine dignitaries such as the *protospatharios*, or perhaps with the imperial *kamelavkion*, in use at Constantinople from the

⁴ I already insisted on the stable nature of the basic tendencies in Gherardo ORTALLI, *Il mercante e lo Stato: strutture della Venezia altomedievale*, in: *Mercati e mercanti nell’alto medioevo. L’area euroasiatica e l’area mediterranea*. Spoleto 1993, 85–135, 88–91; IDEM, *Venezia nel secolo di Federico II. Modelli statuali e politica mediterranea*, *Atti dell’Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti – Classe di scienze morali, lettere ed arti* 157 (1998/1999), 409–447, 413–414.

beginning of the 9th century.⁵ And the end of the *respublica* was decreed by the Great Council, the *Maggior Consiglio* that had governed the state without interruption since the 12th century. And the governing class of Venice was formed by the families that conformed to requisites decided at the end of the 13th century, combining into an oligarchic structure that operated until the end. And the fundamental law of the *respublica* was that of the Statute commissioned by Jacopo Tiepolo in 1242.⁶ And, to turn to money, the coin symbolizing the State at the fall of the republic was the *zecchino*, which was exactly the same in terms of weight, quality and appearance as the *ducato*, which itself had been struck for the first time in 1284–1285, over half a millennium before.⁷

To enumerate such details might seem like retailing folklore or curious facts, but I think they provide clear evidence of the Venetian suspicion of brusque change and of a deeply felt commitment in defence of continuity which, though it adapted constantly and often extremely rapidly to changing times, was the pre-eminent sign of the soundness of the State and of the guarantees assured to the citizenry. Exactly this sort of “canon of continuity” ensures that the best comprehension of Venetian history comes not only (as we said earlier) when the overall picture of Venetian interests is kept in mind but also when a long-term perspective is applied. And this is also true in our case, for the relationship between Venice and the Balkans. So if we wish to understand the events of the centuries we are more concerned with, it is necessary first to examine how Venice arrived in those centuries, how it created the foundations that were then destined to remain as a constant aspect of the Venetian approach.

VENICE’S “DEBUT” ON THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

From what date should we start the search for the conditions that gave rise to the events that characterize Venice’s “imperial” period? What were the antecedents that led to Venice being indisputably able, from the 13th century,

⁵ Agostino PERTUSI, *Quedam regalia insignia. Ricerche sulle insegne del potere ducale a Venezia durante il Medioevo*, *Studi veneziani* 7 (1965), 3–123, 83.

⁶ As regards Venetian political and institutional structures see Giorgio ZORDAN, *L’ordinamento giuridico veneziano*. Padua 2005².

⁷ Frederic C. LANE, *Venice: a Maritime Republic*. Baltimore, London 1973, 148–149, 327; IDEM, Reinhold C. MUELLER, *Money and Banking in Medieval and Renaissance Venice*. Vol. 1: *Coins and Moneys of Account*. Baltimore. London 1985, 280–285, 336, 472; Alan STAHL, *Zecca: The Mint of Venice in the Middle Ages*. Baltimore, New York 2000, 212–217.

to perform a front rank role amongst the great powers of the time? I would not hesitate to date the beginning of the period in question at around the turn of the millennium. During the 10th century Venice was still formally a province of the Byzantine Empire.⁸ This subject status brought advantages rather than limitations or dangers and Venice had managed to maintain it for centuries without difficulty. As Byzantium's capacity to intervene in Italy and the northern Adriatic gradually diminished during the 8th, 9th and 10th centuries and Venice was growing stronger, it was much better to be the furthest outpost of an ever more distant empire than to be subject to a nearby and powerful lord. The point was clearly made when Charlemagne's Frankish troops entered the lagoon and it was reiterated when Otto II moved against Venice and the issue was only settled by what contemporaries considered a miracle: the unexpected death of the young emperor. The ancient and increasingly theoretical subjection to Constantinople not only provided formal protection from other, far more burdensome subjugations, but from an economic and cultural point of view it meant being able to keep its well-established membership of the Byzantine "commonwealth", an extraordinarily rich system that was far ahead of the underdeveloped Europe of the time.⁹

⁸ The traditional interpretations, according to which Venice enjoyed full autonomy or even real independence from the 9th or as early as the 8th century, now appear unsustainable. In this connection I would mention the nevertheless fundamental studies of Roberto Cessi; a good example would be Roberto CESSI, *Venezia ducale*. Vol. 1: *Duca e popolo*. Venice 1963. The final setting aside of the traditional interpretations was due above all to the work of Byzantinists such as Agostino Pertusi, André Guillou and Antonio Carile. For a well-balanced summary of the duration of ties between Venice and Byzantium cf. Giorgio RAVEGNANI, *Bisanzio e Venezia*. Bologna 1966, 47–49. And, in particolare 67–74 for the complexity of the relationships and the difficulty of confining them within rigid frameworks.

⁹ Gherardo ORTALLI, *Venezia dalle origini a Pietro II Orseolo*, in: Paolo DELOGU/André GUILLOU/Gherardo ORTALLI, *Longobardi e Bizantini*. Turin 1980, 369–370, 389–391. The chrysobull granted to the Venetians by Basil II and Constantine VIII in 992 is as much evidence of the advantages guaranteed by the connection with Byzantium as of the considerable degree of autonomy achieved by Venice: Ralph-Johannes LILIE, *Handel und Politik zwischen dem byzantinischen Reich und den italienischen Kommunen Venedig, Pisa und Genua in der Epoche der Komnenen und der Angeloi (1081–1204)*. Amsterdam 1984, 1–8, 326–327; Marco POZZA/Giorgio RAVEGNANI, *I trattati con Bisanzio 992–1198*. Venice 1993, 16–25. The privilege may have been connected with Basil II's need to consolidate his positions behind the enemy for the campaign against the Bulgars launched in 991. Something similar may have underlain the suggested link with Jovan Vladimir, the ruler of Duklja, cf. Georgije OSTROGORSKY, *Geschichte des byzantinischen Staates*. Munich 1963, 255.

But as the first millennium closed, so things changed. The gradual growth of its independence enabled Venice to play her cards from a position of strength. The Latin “Byzantineness” of Venice was starting to develop differently from the great Greek “Byzantineness” of the capital Constantinople. And now we come to the year 1000 and the naval campaign led by Doge Pietro Orseolo II along the Dalmatian coast. Poreč, Pula, Osor, Zadar, Trogir, Krk, Rab, Split, Korčula mark the stages in what Venetian chroniclers recorded as a triumphal progress. In actual fact the campaign emphatically did not result in Venice taking control of these Dalmatian centres, but its equally undeniable success allowed Orseolo to assume the title of Doge of the Venetians and the Dalmatians, *dux Veneticorum et Dalmaticorum*, a tangible sign of the new role Venice was now able to play in the international theatre.¹⁰

We must however examine more closely the terms in which Orseolo’s action related to the extremely complex international context. For the most part, the events are interpreted from a strictly local perspective, as an expression of Venetian expansionism or as a response to the urgings of Dalmatian communities who no longer felt protected by Constantinople. This indeed is the line taken not only by Venetian historians, including the leading specialist in mediaeval Venetian affairs of the last century, Roberto Cessi, but also the most famous and reliable of historians of the non-Italian school, such as Frederic C. Lane or Donald M. Nicol.¹¹ In fact, however, a much more convincing interpretation would seem to emerge if we examine the events in the light of what was happening in the Balkans. The turbulence and piracy that were upsetting Venetian maritime interests really could not be divorced from the situation of the Byzantine Empire and of the interior of the Balkans. From Constantinople Basil II, who was in the process of restoring long-forgotten prestige to the empire, had also to deal with the challenge of another prominent personality, Samuel, the Czar of the Bulgars, who represented the real threat to revived Byzantine power in the Balkans. And the danger of the Bulgars absorbed energies that could not therefore be

¹⁰ Nada KLAIĆ, *Povijest Hrvata u ranom srednjem vijeku*. Zagreb 1971, 326–329; Lujo MARGETIĆ, *Le cause della spedizione veneziana in Dalmazia nel 1000*, in: *IDEM, Histrica et Adriatica. Raccolta di saggi storico-giuridici e storici*. Trieste 1983, 218–254; Gherardo ORTALLI, *Pietro II Orseolo. “Dux Veneticorum et Dalmaticorum”*, in: *Venezia e la Dalmazia. Anno Mille. Secoli di vicende comuni*. Treviso 2002, 13–27.

¹¹ See for example CESSI, *Venezia ducale*. Vol. 1, 369–372; LANE, *Venice: a Maritime Republic*, 26–27; DONALD M. NICOL, *Byzantium and Venice: a Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*. Cambridge 1988, 42–44: “The Doge’s triumphal progress down the Adriatic had nothing to do with the Byzantine Emperor’s strategy.”