



EDITED BY
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VENICE AND THE VENETO DURING THE RENAISSANCE

THE LEGACY OF BENJAMIN KOHL



Reti Medievali E-Book

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Renaissance: the Legacy of Benjamin Kohl**

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**Firenze University Press
2014**

Legitimizing Venetian Expansion: Patricians and Secretaries in the Fifteenth Century

by Monique O'Connell

1. Introduction

There has been a great deal of scholarly attention paid to the political commitments of Florentine humanists and the intersection between practical politics and the development of ideologies, but in recent years Venetian humanists have not received the same level of attention. As Margaret King, Vittore Branca, and Franco Gaeta have convincingly shown, Venetian patrician humanists used their intellectual skills to protect and defend the interests of the Venetian ruling class¹. Élite Venetians used the humanist intellectual practices imported from Florence in the fifteenth century to defend their aristocratic political and social order in classical terms, praising the virtues of the patriciate as well as the excellence of Venetian institutions. King also established that there was considerable overlap between political engagement and humanist learning among patrician humanists, pointing out that forty-five percent of lay patrician humanists had political careers of exceptional importance². These Venetian patrician humanists and politicians served in Venetian councils, as governors in Venice's expanding Terraferma and maritime states, and as ambassadors on behalf of Venice. King's observations hold true when one narrows the focus from the praise of Venice in general to the particular work of promoting and defending Venice's expansionist foreign policy on land and sea in the fifteenth century. Across the course of a century, a core group of Venetian patricians combined their political activity and humanist learning to support policies that championed and justified Venetian territorial expansion. The central members of this core group: Francesco Barbaro (1394-1454), Paolo Morosini (1406-1484), Bernardo Giustinian (1408-1489), and Bernardo Bembo (1433-1519) are all well-known to scholars for their many orations, letters, treatises, and histories that not only glorified the Venetian past but provided justifications, both implicit and explicit, for Venetian expansion in the present³.

¹ King, Branca, Gaeta.

² King, 282.

³ In addition to King's profiles of these patrician humanists, see Casini, 2005, 366-373.

But Venetian patricians were not the only group that actively participated in the acquisition and intellectual defense of Venice's growing empire. While scholars have pointed to the central role non-patrician secretaries played in the running of the Venetian government, they have not generally acknowledged the important role these secretaries played in advancing Venetian interests abroad and particularly their role in legitimating Venice's expanding territorial state. During the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, secretaries both assisted patrician ambassadors and represented the Venetian republic themselves. Several of these secretaries also produced influential and important writings about Venice and its domains. Lorenzo De Monacis (c. 1351-1428), Nicolò Sagundino (c. 1402-1464), and Antonio Vinciguerra (c. 1446-1502) all had successful careers in the Ducal Chancellery and collaborated with the Venetian patricians of the core group in order to produce a narrative of Venetian expansion that flattered the Republic while furthering the interests of patricians who favored expansion.

2. Patricians, Secretaries, and an expanding state

Venetian government structures were put to the test in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, when a combination of circumstances led to the Republic's territorial expansion in both mainland and maritime realms. In the forty years between 1380 and 1420, Venice more than doubled its territory and population, taking cities on the Italian mainland, re-acquiring territories lost to Hungary in 1358 along the Dalmatian coastline, and taking cities in the Peloponnese and some Ionian islands as well⁴. After this first rush of growth, the Venetian state continued to expand when the opportunity presented itself or when the logic of self-defense or economic interest made it desirable. On the Italian side of the Adriatic, Venice reached south to Ravenna in 1441 and to Cervia in 1463 and west to Crema in 1449; in the east, Venice added Egina in 1451, Malvasia in 1464, Cyprus in 1473, Veglia in 1480, and Zante in 1482. By the late fifteenth century, Venetian territory stretched from the Lombard plain to the Peloponnese and beyond, to the islands of Crete and Cyprus. This territorial expansion, which was accomplished through conquest, purchase, inheritance, and diplomacy, created a need for new ideological justifications. Michael Knapton, John Law, James Grubb, and Alfredo Viggiano have investigated the arguments Venice presented in the mainland context, showing how Venice relied on a combination of judicial opinions, diplomatic work, and humanist orations to present its rule on the mainland as legitimate, just, and orderly⁵.

⁴ Cozzi and Knapton, 1:3-34.

⁵ Knapton, 144-147; Grubb, 1988; Law; Viggiano, 3-50. There is comparatively little recent work on Venetian justifications of their maritime conquests.

The growing territorial state not only required justifications, it also required administrators and governmental structures⁶. Venetian government ran along two parallel tracks: the activities of patrician councils were supported by the work of secretaries and notaries in the ducal chancellery. Scholars of the chancellery Andrea Zannini, Giuseppe Trebbi, Marco Pozza, Matteo Casini, and Mary Neff have outlined the many responsibilities these functionaries performed: registering, organizing and archiving governmental documents, including laws and election results; following and assisting in the work of the principal Venetian councils and magistracies; and representing Venice abroad as part of a patrician ambassador's entourage or, more rarely, alone⁷. The Venetian chancellery stood out from its counterparts in Florence and Milan for the relatively low number of secretaries with humanist training⁸. Venice's earliest humanist circle surrounding doge Andrea Dandolo had a number of prominent secretaries, including Raffaino Caresini (1319-1390), Benintendi de' Ravagnani (1317-1365), and Paolo de Bernardo (d. 1393), but by the fifteenth century, as King has argued, Venetian patricians dominated Venice's humanist culture⁹.

Loyalty to Venice was as important a criteria for advancement as a secretary as was humanist learning. Marco Aurelio (c. 1430-c.1478) spent several years as the Venetian representative in Corfu and then Rome before becoming secretary to the Council of Ten in 1477¹⁰. Aurelio appeared as the main character in the brief treatise "On the Duties of Scribes," by Marcantonio Sabellico (1436-1506); in this work, Aurelio outlined the requirements for a secretarial career, pointing to the importance of loyalty and stating that "Daily we see the learned men of our order going forth with dignity on important legations to great princes and powerful kings — [an achievement] not to be expected from an ignorant man, who would lack both the learning and prudence [required]"¹¹. Fifteenth-century secretarial humanists moved between positions in the Venetian chancellery and service outside the city, making it essential that the Venetian government could depend on their dedication as well as their diplomatic skills. Febo Capella (c. 1420-1482), who eventually became Grand Chancellor, began as a notary in Cattaro; his progress through positions in the Venetian chancellery was punctuated by numerous diplomatic missions undertaken both as a secretary and as a sole representative¹². Capella's diplomatic work brought him into close contact with important Venetian patricians: he served with Francesco Barbaro on an

⁶ Viggiano; Varanini, Zannini, 1996.

⁷ Zannini, 1993 and 1996; Casini, 1991; Trebbi, Pozza, Neff.

⁸ King, 90; see Trebbi for a sustained comparison with Florence.

⁹ King, 291, includes only eight secretaries in her core group. For the fourteenth century secretaries, see the profiles by Kohl, 2013a and 2013b.

¹⁰ King, 315-16; Neff, 359-60.

¹¹ Cited in King, 76-77.

¹² King, 77, 348-49; Neff, 399-400.

embassy to the Visconti of Milan in 1444, with Francesco Contarini (1421-1460) to Siena in 1455, and with Lodovico Foscarini (1409-1478) at the Council of Mantua in 1459.

Febo Capella's overlapping work with circles of Venetian patricians was not unusual, and there is some evidence of interdependence between patricians and secretaries as each group climbed their respective career ladders. Francesco Barbaro, for instance, wrote numerous letters to Capella on political matters, asking him about events and soliciting his opinion, and Lodovico Foscarini did the same with Marco Aurelio¹³. While there is evidence that Venetian patricians asked for advice and favors from secretaries, relying in particular on their access to the doge and experience of inner councils, it is also clear that secretarial careers, particularly at the higher levels of the chancellery, were dependent on patrician patronage and favor¹⁴. The connections between patricians and elite secretaries in the fifteenth century were remarkable because in several cases they were not based on shared Venetian ancestry. In the first part of the fifteenth century, several immigrants, or sons of recent immigrants, rose to prominent positions in the chancellery, among them Marco Aurelio and Nicolò Sagundino, both of whom came from families with origins on Negroponte (Euboea)¹⁵. Over the course of the fifteenth century, offices in the chancellery began to be reserved for *cittadini originarii*, or original citizens: a law in 1419 ruled that secretaries and notaries who accompanied Venetian representatives outside of Venice had to be citizens, either by birth or by privilege¹⁶. In 1478 and 1484, laws limiting positions in the Ducal Chancellery to original citizens went into effect, as part of what James Grubb, Matteo Casini, and Anna Bellavitis have shown was a gradual effort to define membership in this group of élite citizens¹⁷. By the mid sixteenth century, this *serrata* (closing) of the citizen class was well underway, but in the early and mid fifteenth century, prominent secretaries came from a variety of backgrounds, unified only by their loyalty and service to the Venetian state.

In their diplomatic work as well as in Venetian councils, secretaries were perfectly positioned to understand Venice's growing need to justify its expanding territorial claims and to provide responses to Venice's increasingly strident foreign critics. In the fifteenth century, a shared commitment to humanist ideals as well as professional and personal connections drew a small group of elite secretaries and politically active patricians together as they worked to provide such a defense. Lorenzo de Monacis, Nicolò Sagundino, and Antonio Vinciguerra each had significant connections with multiple Venetian patricians who were themselves active in Venetian expansion and each produced important writings that promoted Venetian interests. Venetian

¹³ King, 78-79; for Barbaro's letters to Capella, see Barbaro, 2: n. 241, 243, 332, 339.

¹⁴ Neff.

¹⁵ King, 290-6.

¹⁶ Zannini, 1993, 39.

¹⁷ Neff, 12-16; Grubb, 2000; Bellavitis, 65-88, Casini, 1992.

secretaries such as Ravagnani and Caresini had, of course, authored influential histories of Venice before the fifteenth century, so De Monacis, Sagundino, and Vinciguerra were not innovators in this sense. But all three of these men were profoundly influenced by the humanist movement, which shaped the tone and type of texts they offered in Venice's defense. Furthermore, their careers together span the fifteenth century and mark three distinct stages in the development of Venice's empire and the accompanying narratives of justification: a phase of constructing both structures of administration and explanations of expansion (De Monacis), a period at mid-century when plans for an anti-Turkish crusade dominated Venetian and Italian political thinking (Sagundino), and a renewed moment of aggressive territorial expansion in the later fifteenth century (Vinciguerra).

3. *De Monacis and the Construction of Venice's Empire*

Lorenzo de Monacis, a notary and secretary in the Venetian chancery, brought together the new humanist learning making its way to Venice and a direct personal experience of Venetian practices of expansion and imperial rule¹⁸. De Monacis's career involved him in the Republic's diplomacy of territorial expansion; in 1386-87 he traveled to Hungary as part of an embassy to intervene in the succession crisis there, accompanying Pantaleone Barbo (d. 1398), a senior politician and experienced diplomat¹⁹. De Monacis was able to report back to Venice that the negotiations had gone smoothly; he also composed a poem defending the Hungarian queens Mary and Elizabeth from charges that they had treacherously killed Charles II of Naples²⁰. In November 1388 De Monacis was elected Grand Chancellor of Crete, one of the most important notarial positions in Venice's maritime state; between his election and investiture in the office he oversaw the treaty by which Maria d'Enghien, the heiress of Argos and Nauplion, sold these cities to Venice for 500 ducats²¹. He returned to Hungary twice more on diplomatic missions, in 1389 and 1390; on the first of these trips he and Barbo were robbed of all their possessions, and the Maggior Consiglio gave him sixty gold ducats in compensation for the loss²². De Monacis had just taken up his post on Crete when he was sent to France on a diplomatic mission in 1395 to resolve a commercial dispute, where he was joined by another experienced patrician diplomat, Giovanni Alberto²³.

¹⁸ On De Monacis, see Ravegnani, Poppi, 1967, and Poppi 1972-73.

¹⁹ Borsari.

²⁰ De Monacis's *Relazione* is given in Italian in Romanin, 3:312-314 and in Latin in Ljubić, 4:237-238. For the poem, see Poppi, 1967, 169-172.

²¹ Poppi, 1967, 171.

²² Poppi, 1967, 172.

²³ Poppi, 1967, 175; for Alberto's ambassadorial career, see Kohl et al, nos. 59809, 71593, 71601, 71623, 71632, 71655.

He then returned to Crete, where he worked with the Venetian patricians sent out as short term administrators, including Zaccaria Trevisan (c. 1370-1414), Egidio Morosini (d. 1417), and the future doge Tommaso Mocenigo (1343-1423), all of whom played central roles in Venice's politics of expansion in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century²⁴. On Crete De Monacis was also in contact with a wide circle of learned clergymen and Greek and Latin scholars there and he maintained contact with humanist circles in Italy, as a 1415 letter from Venice's most famous humanist and politician, Francesco Barbaro, demonstrates²⁵.

De Monacis was thus immersed in both the burgeoning humanist movement and in the practical side of empire building, through personal experience and through association. Between 1421 and 1428, he composed a laudatory history of Venice, *De gestis, moribus et nobilitate civitatis Venetiarum*, narrating Venetian history from its founding to 1354 and cloaking what were already Venetian ideas in classical garb²⁶. He commented more directly on contemporary events in two orations, the first produced for doge Tommaso Mocenigo on the millennial anniversary of Venice's founding in 421 and the second dedicated to Doge Francesco Foscari as he embarked on a war with the Visconti of Milan in 1425²⁷. In both *De gestis* and the orations, De Monacis pursued a parallel between Venice and Rome, arguing that while Rome had been corrupted by power and luxury, Venice had remained free since its beginning and was charged with the divine mission of defending liberty. In his 1425 oration to Foscari, he characterized the war against Visconti as waged "not for the expansion of domain, not for a greed for glory, but for the health of Italy and our patria"²⁸.

In De Monacis's treatment of Adriatic history, Venice's struggle against tyranny in general was transformed into a specific responsibility to defend the freedom of the seas against pirates for the good of all. In his 1421 *Oration*, he said that in the early years of the city's existence, Venice liberally and generously offered its help to its neighbors, Istria and Dalmatia, in combating the pirates that infested the waters of the Adriatic "for the sake of the communities which surrounded the sea"²⁹. De Monacis' claims about Venice's role as a defender against pirates were articulated in terms of Venetian history, but the rationale could be used to justify their present acquisitions as well as

²⁴ Poppi, 1967, 176-77; on Trevisan, see King, 436-37 and Girgensohn, 2: 983-97; on Mocenigo see Girgensohn, 2: 880-92.

²⁵ Pertusi, 1965, 163-71; Panagiotakes; Barbaro, 2: n. 1.

²⁶ De Monacis's work, entitled "De gestis, moribus et nobilitate civitatis Venetiarum," is also known as *Chronicon de rebus Veneti*, the title given it by its eighteenth-century editor, Flaminio Corner. For his source material see Poppi, 1967, 161-6; Pertusi, 1965, 173-205; more generally, see Gaeta, 16-25; Pertusi, 1970, 277-89.

²⁷ The first oration is edited in Poppi, 1972-73; the second partially in Pertusi, 1970, 285-6.

²⁸ Pertusi, 1970, 286.

²⁹ Poppi, 1972-73, 493-4.

their past glories. He also specifically rejected self-serving motivations for Venetian expansion, asking in his oration to Foscari: “What cause impelled our Republic to accept Thessalonica, freely offered by the powerless Greeks, if not the general benefit of the Christian sea against the Turkish incursions and to defend the domain against [their] cruelties?”³⁰. In this case, the city is cast not only as a defender of liberty in general, but as a defender of the Christian realm against the Turks, making the Adriatic a Christian sea, and Venetian expansion in Greece part of a larger Crusade for the good of all Christendom. De Monacis concluded his Oration by declaring that the Winged Lion of St. Mark now struck terror in the hearts of bad men, while good men saw it as a sign of public safety and liberty, praising the divine labor that had brought Venetian empire to the Adriatic Sea³¹.

De Monacis’s history and his orations articulated all of the elements that would be repeated over and over again in Venice’s self-defense: protecting liberty on behalf of grateful neighbors, who freely submitted themselves to Venetian power in return for order and safety. Throughout his career, De Monacis produced a variety of texts that defended Venice’s reputation and interests: diplomatic reports, poetry, a humanist history, and Latin orations. His work provided Venice with much needed ideological legitimacy during the first phase of their rapid expansion onto the Italian mainland and into Dalmatia. His history of Venice was particularly influential; Marcantonio Sabellico (1436-1506) would draw on it heavily in his history of Venice, published in 1487³².

4. *Nicolò Sagundino and the Politics of Crusade*

While De Monacis was born in Venice and served in the maritime state, Nicolò Sagundino was a subject of that maritime state who immigrated to Venice. Sagundino was born in Negroponte and was working in Venetian Thessalonica when the city was captured by the Ottomans in 1430³³. He and his family were held prisoner for a year before they were freed, when he returned to Negroponte and entered Venetian service in the chancellery there, travelling to Italy as an official interpreter to the council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-39). He was appointed apostolic secretary by Pope Eugenius IV, but after Eugenius’s 1447 death he returned to Negroponte, likely serving in the Venetian chancellery there. When the news of Constantinople’s conquest by the Ottomans reached Venice in late June 1453, the Senate sent word to Negroponte that Sagundino, “a loyal and learned person, experienced in the

³⁰ Pertusi, 1970, 286.

³¹ Poppi, 1972-3, 494.

³² Gaeta, 65-75; for Sabellico’s sources, see Bersi.

³³ Mastrodemetres, 243-48; King, 81-90 and 427-30; Meserve, 106; Philippides, 6-16.

Turkish court,” should join the Republic’s ambassador Bartolomeo Marcello on his mission to make peace with Mehmed II (1432-1481)³⁴. The two traveled to Constantinople in October 1454; a Venetian-Ottoman peace treaty was signed in April 1454, and Sagundino was back in Venice by the winter of that same year.

Almost immediately upon his return from Constantinople, the Venetian Senate sent Sagundino on a sort of lecture tour—he visited Pope Nicolas V (1397-1455) and then King Alfonso of Naples (1396-1458), delivering a public oration that was then expanded and circulated in Italy³⁵. Sagundino’s oration included a detailed description of the Ottoman sultan, Mehmed II, as well as an analysis of Turkish military strength and an account of the death of Constantine IX Palaiologos (1404-1453), the last Byzantine emperor. According to Sagundino, Mehmed II was a formidable foe – intelligent, driven, and commander of a strong, well organized realm and military system. Sagundino portrayed Mehmed as inspired by classical culture, saying that “he has particularly chosen to emulate Alexander of Macedon and Gaius Caesar, whose deeds he has arranged to be translated into his own language.... He is determined to challenge their fame and he seems to be ardently inspired by their glory and praises”³⁶. But Sagundino also emphasized that Mehmed was “inflamed against Christians” and determined to win the reputation of an Alexander or a Caesar through conquering Italy: “Everything is being prepared [by Mehmed] to assault Italy, ... to this end he directs and aspires all of his thoughts, to this he bends all of his decisions”³⁷. Sagundino’s oration thus worked on two levels, as both a warning of a coming danger and as a call to coordinated Christian action against the Ottoman threat.

The Venetian Senate clearly found Sagundino an effective advocate, as it sent him on a second mission to Naples and Rome in 1455, where he remained until 1458. Sagundino’s mere presence was a sort of living testimony of the need to protect Venetian Greece from Ottoman power. At the court of Naples, Sagundino came into contact with Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (1405-1464, pope from 1458), then cardinal of Siena and soon to become Pope Pius II³⁸. Piccolomini asked Sagundino to compose a history and description of the Ottoman empire, *De Origine et de gestis Turcorum liber* (1456), which became a popular text and circulated widely in manuscript and in an edition printed in Poland in the 1470s³⁹. This was the first western history of the Ottomans, but as Margaret Meserve has observed, the history was “curiously uninformed by

³⁴ Pertusi, 1976, 2: 28.

³⁵ Pertusi, 1976, 2: 126-141, includes the Latin oration and an Italian translation, see Philippides, 9-14, for circulation and a partial English translation.

³⁶ Translated in Philippides, 11.

³⁷ Pertusi, 2: 132.

³⁸ Meserve, 106; Philippides, 15-17.

³⁹ The work is available in Latin and an English translation in Philippides, 55-87; see Meserve, 106n177, for circulation.

his direct knowledge of contemporary Ottoman society,” instead recycling ethnographic descriptions from classical literature⁴⁰. Sagundino’s history was part of a new wave of literary and political interest in the Ottomans; while there had been isolated voices warning of danger to the West before the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, that city’s fall unleashed a wave of humanist interest in crusading. James Hankins has identified 400 literary compositions by at least fifty different humanists produced in the period between 1453 and 1481⁴¹. Further scholarship by Meserve and Nancy Bisaha has shown the ambiguities and inconsistencies in the humanists’ views on the Ottomans: while Bisaha outlines the ways that humanists developed ideas of a ‘civilized’ West versus a ‘barbarous’ East; Meserve distinguishes humanists’ histories of Ottomans from writings on other Muslim states — Mamluks, Timurids, and ‘Saracen’ Arabs, who appear as ‘good’ Islamic empires in contrast with the barbarous, cruel, and illegitimate Ottomans⁴².

There were several Venetian patrician humanists who shared Sagundino’s interests in the Ottomans and who contributed to this body of work, notably Lauro Querini (1420-1479), Paolo Morosini, Lodovico Foscarini, and Bernardo Giustinian. Sagundino was tied to other members of the Venetian patriciate through more direct patronage relationships, as his letters demonstrate⁴³. Sagundino had tutored Fantino Coppo in philosophy when he served as Venetian governor on Negroponte, and wrote to Coppo from Naples when his mission dragged on, asking to be recalled. Sagundino was also a frequent correspondent of Domenico Morosini (1417-1509), a member of the innermost political circles in Venice. Sagundino turned to these patrons for help when he was struck by tragedy after his return to Venice. Having been named chancellor of Crete in 1458, Sagundino and his large family finally began their voyage to his post in 1460; the ship was still in Venetian waters when it sank. Sagundino lost his pregnant wife, two sons, a daughter, and all of his possessions, including his library. Sagundino’s patrons, including Morosini and Zaccaria Trevisan the Younger, arranged for him to give up the Cretan chancellorship and remain in Venice with his surviving family. Sagundino was again named ducal chancellor and went on several other missions, to Modon, Constantinople again, and Trebizond before his 1464 death.

Sagundino’s work on behalf of Venice came at a difficult transition for the Republic. After the rapid expansion of the early fifteenth century, Venice had fought long and expensive wars on the Italian mainland with the Visconti of Milan; at the same time, their traditional rivals in the eastern Mediterranean, the Genoese, had been replaced with the Ottomans, who were much more dangerous and whose power was rapidly growing. While De Monacis had cast Venice as the defender of Christianity against the Turkish threat in the 1420s, by

⁴⁰ Meserve, 75.

⁴¹ Hankins, 117.

⁴² Bisaha, Meserve.

mid-century it was rapidly becoming clear that Venice could not defend against Ottoman power alone. Sagundino's diplomatic work, his humanist orations, and his history of the Ottomans were calculated to frighten other Italian powers into joining Venice in opposing Ottoman expansion. Venice was reluctant to break off lucrative trading relationships in Constantinople without secure Western allies; Pius II spent much of his papacy working for an anti-Ottoman crusade, but the effort fell apart when he died at Ancona in 1464, where the fleet was gathering. Venice fought a long and bruising war against the Ottomans from 1463-1479; the final peace treaty to that conflict was negotiated by another secretary from Venice's Greek possessions, Giovanni Dario (1414-1494)⁴⁴. Like Sagundino, Dario became known as an expert in Ottoman affairs and represented Venetian interests in Ottoman Constantinople numerous times in the 1470s and 1480s.

5. *Antonio Vinciguerra and Renewed Venetian Expansion*

Like Sagundino and Dario, Antonio Vinciguerra became a secretary renowned for his diplomatic skill. Vinciguerra was a ducal notary and from 1499 secretary to the Council of Ten; known for his satirical poetry, he also represented Venice on a number of important diplomatic missions⁴⁵. His diplomatic work connected him to several important Venetian patricians who advocated for Venetian expansion: Vinciguerra accompanied Bernardo Bembo to Castile in 1468-69 and to Florence in 1475-76; he accompanied the future doge Andrea Vendramin (1393-1478) and Ludovico Foscarini to Rome in 1470-71, and he was a correspondent of Paolo Morosini. Vinciguerra was directly involved in Venetian expansion himself on his missions to the Adriatic island of Veglia in 1480-81 and in 1488-89. By the late fifteenth century, Veglia (Krk) was one of the only territories on the eastern Adriatic coast not directly subject to Venetian rule, and after the Ottoman conquest of most of Albania in 1479, Venice wanted to consolidate its hold over territories in the northern Adriatic. Venice saw its opportunity when word spread that the rule of the count of Veglia Giovanni Frangipane (Ivan Frankopan, d. 1486) was causing severe discontent among the island's inhabitants⁴⁶. The news of turmoil on the island had also reached Matthias Corvinus, King of Hungary, who dispatched troops to Segna, on the coast near Veglia. Count Frangipane sent his wife and children to Venice to request help; Venice sent part of its fleet, commanded by Giacomo Venier, Simon Guoro and Domenico Malipiero, famous for the diaries attributed to him⁴⁷. Vinciguerra was sent to Segna, to try and convince the

⁴³ Mastrodemetres, 129-168; King, 429.

⁴⁴ Neff, 416-418.

⁴⁵ Beffa; King, 79-81 and 443-44.

⁴⁶ In addition to Vinciguerra's account, discussed below, the acquisition of Veglia is narrated in Navagero, col. 1163-1164; and Romanin, 4: 445-446.

⁴⁷ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, or ASVe, Senato Mar, reg. 11, f. 57v, 22 January 1480.

Hungarian captain Maier Blas to stop his invasion, but by the time he arrived the Hungarians were already besieging castles on Veglia. Once he had arrived, Vinciguerra discovered that the inhabitants of the island hated Frangipane so much that they were helping the Hungarian invasion; Vinciguerra convinced Frangipane to step down and go to Venice, and soon thereafter the Hungarian enterprise collapsed and Maier Blas and his troops withdrew. After the Venetian fleet sailed, Vinciguerra was left as the sole Venetian representative on the island, and he served as the island's governor from 1480-1481, an almost unprecedented instance of a non-patrician holding a top office in territorial government.

Vinciguerra's actions on Veglia are related in great detail in his *Relazione*, an account of what happened on the island as well as a document designed to prove the legitimacy of Venetian rule on Veglia⁴⁸. In his account of these events, Vinciguerra included a resignation speech from Frangipane, in which he told the gathered crowd: "My brothers, I am a son and servant of the illustrious Signoria of Venice, and our illustrious ancestors had this state from [them]; knowing that my forces are not enough to defend against the danger of this [Hungarian] army.... and in the presence of you all I renounce this domain to the illustrious Signoria in the person of the *provveditore*, dictating that you are all now subjects and vassals of San Marco"⁴⁹. It is clear that Frangipane did accept Venetian help and leave the island for Venice, but if he did renounce his future rights over the island in such unambiguous terms, once in Venice he changed his mind. Frangipane rejected the Venetian offer of a 1000 ducat annual pension and a 4000 ducat dowry for his daughter and fled to the Hungarian court, where he launched a series of accusations that Venice had stolen his territory.

In this contested context, Vinciguerra's *Relazione* proved an essential document legitimizing Venetian rights over the island. In addition to his narration of events during the hostilities, he also included a brief history of the island, citing physical and documentary evidence to show that the island had been a tributary of Venice since at least the thirteenth century and that the current count's jurisdiction derived from Venetian privileges granted to his ancestors, and a long catalogue of the count's tyrannical and oppressive acts towards his subjects. After Frangipane's 1486 death, Vinciguerra further strengthened Venice's claim to legitimate possession of the island by producing the count's will, which left Veglia to Venice if the count died without male heirs⁵⁰. Vinciguerra claimed to have found the will in the chancellery of Veglia in 1481, but explained the five year delay in handing over the document by citing safety concerns, saying that he wanted to wait until after Frangipane's death to reveal it. Vinciguerra defended Venetian interests on Veglia both

⁴⁸ Ljubić, 1876, I: 29-101.

⁴⁹ Ljubić, 1876, I:56.

⁵⁰ Ljubić, 1876, I: 98-101.

through his actions and through his writings, presenting in his *Relazione* three arguments for legitimate Venetian rule: ancient jurisdiction and rights, defense of the inhabitants against tyrannical rule, and legal inheritance from the last count.

Vinciguerra went on to hold several key positions during the war of Ferrara (1482-84) and he defended Venetian interests abroad in a different way during his mission to Bologna in 1495-99. By 1498, Venice's aggressive territorial aggrandizement in Ferrara and its inaction in the face of the 1494 French invasion had won it many enemies in Italy. In 1498, the Florentines were particularly angry over the Venetians' support for Pisa's revolt against Florentine rule. The Florentines expressed their anger diplomatically but also in popular culture. In July of 1498, Vinciguerra sent three linked sonnets home from Bologna; the poems were read aloud in the Senate and recorded by the diarist Marino Sanudo (1466-1536)⁵¹. The first poem, composed in Florence, mocked Venetian ambitions in Pisa and in Puglia. Vinciguerra had used his poetic talents to write a second poem, using the same structure and rhyme words to defend the justice of the Venetian cause.

Throughout his career, and particularly in the matter of Veglia, Vinciguerra showed himself to be absolutely trustworthy and loyal to Venice. The importance of this loyalty to non-patrician careers can be seen by the contrasting experience of Francesco Negri (1452-1523), the Venetian-born son of a recent Dalmatian immigrant, Giorgio Cernoevich⁵². Negri received a doctorate in law from Padua in 1476 and then became a priest; he received a minor benefice at San Giovanni Decollato and was hoping to be named bishop of Veglia when his Venetian career was derailed by suspicions of disloyalty. According to Negri's own autobiography, his paternal grandmother was a Frangipane, a relationship which would have made him a second cousin to the deposed count of Veglia Giovanni Frangipane⁵³. After Frangipane fled Venice, Negri tried to pass a gift and poem intended for Frangipane to the emperor's representative in Venice; this sparked suspicions in Venice that Negri was aiming for the bishopric in Veglia so that he could help his cousin regain lordship of the island⁵⁴. Negri was briefly imprisoned in 1483 and left Venice after his release, spending the subsequent phases of his career searching for suitable employment in Padua, Rome, and elsewhere. Among his many writings was a detailed and extensive account praising the Venetian aristocracy, *De moderanda venetorum aristocratia*⁵⁵. The work was written after Negri's time in prison and was dedicated first to doge Agostino Barbarigo (1419-1501), whom Negri credited with his release from prison, and then to

⁵¹ Sanudo, I: 1020, discussed in Richardson, 122.

⁵² Mercati, 2: 24-109; King, 413-15.

⁵³ Mercati, 2, 29-31.

⁵⁴ Mercati, 2, 49-51.

⁵⁵ Mercati, 2: 24 and Appendix, 40-53, reconstructs the complicated manuscript tradition of this work.

doge Leonardo Loredan (1436-1521). Despite the work's fulsome praise of Venice and its patriciate, Negri could not overcome the stain of disloyalty and never gained another position or patron in Venice.

6. Conclusion

The three Venetian secretaries highlighted here – Lorenzo de Monacis, Nicolò Sagundino, and Antonio Vinciguerra – are not representative of a larger group. There were certainly elements in the life and work of each man that had parallels in the experience of other secretaries. Both Sagundino and De Monacis held important positions in *stato da mar* chancelleries, as did Filippo da Rimini in Corfu and Febo Capella in Cattaro. All three served as independent diplomatic representatives of Venice, not simply as assistants to Venetian patrician ambassadors, as did Marco Aurelio and Giovanni Dario. But when seen in comparison with the larger secretarial order, all of these men stand out as unusual in the level of professional success they achieved as well as the trust placed in their skill and loyalty by the Venetian state. The elite secretaries, including Capella, Aurelio, and Dario, all shared humanist training and interests with Venetian patricians, and their success can be attributed to a combination of intellectual community and patrician patronage as well as to proven loyalty to the Venetian state. As Negri's example demonstrated, that loyalty was an essential component to professional advancement; neither humanist learning nor patrician patronage could overcome suspicion of divided loyalties.

A larger and much more difficult to answer question is that of these humanist secretaries' motivations in defending the Venetian patrician state that employed them but into which they could never be fully integrated. On the one hand, their work on behalf of Venetian interests might be seen as simply professionalism or as an attempt to improve career prospects. The three men's diplomatic work in particular could be seen in this light; like most diplomats, they were given assignments with particular parameters, and for all three men the successful completion of those missions led to career advancement. On the other hand, their more literary works, and in particular De Monacis's history of Venice, are harder to understand in a purely professional framework. De Monacis was not commissioned to write the work, nor was it widely circulated before his death, making it more likely to be a genuine expression of his intellectual commitment to Venetian interests and goals. In all three cases, the secretaries shared humanist and social connections with Venetian patricians who advocated or were active in Venice's expanding empire, making their efforts part of a larger community who worked on Venice's behalf. The writings can also be seen as tangible proof of that essential component of a secretarial career, loyalty to the Venetian state.

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Abstract

This essay examines the intersection of patrician humanist careers with the humanist trained secretaries who staffed the Venetian chancery in the fifteenth century. There was a small group of both patrician and non-patrician humanist authors who used their diplomatic and rhetorical skills to defend Venice's increasingly aggressive policies of territorial expansion. Three secretaries in particular — Lorenzo de Monacis, Nicolò Sagundino, and Antonio Vinciguerra — made significant contributions to the justification and defense of Venetian foreign policy. Each of them had multiple connections with Venetian patricians who supported these policies, and taken together their careers span the fifteenth century and mark three distinct stages in the development of Venice's empire and the accompanying narratives of justification. Their career trajectories also demonstrate the importance of demonstrable loyalty to Venice and its interests for high-level secretarial careers.

Keywords

Middle Ages; 14th-15th century; Venice; politics; institutions; culture; Terraferma; Venetian empire; patricians; secretaries

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