

VENICE, THE CENTRE OF EAST-WEST CONTACT DURING THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

(Problems and views presented at the Second International Conference
on Venetian History and Culture, Venice, 3-6 October, 1973)

The Second International Conference on the History and Culture of Venice was held on the Venetian island of S. Giorgio Maggiore between the third and the sixth of October, five years after the first in this series of academic encounters (cf. *Balkan Studies*, Vol. IX, 1968, pp. 229-234). The theme adopted for examination and discussion on this occasion was the rôle of the Venetian Republic and her possessions as a point of political, cultural, economic and social contact between the Western and Eastern worlds during two critical centuries in European history, the fifteenth and the sixteenth (Renaissance - Reformation - Counter-Reformation).

Once again, the heavy organizational burden of the conference was borne by the *Fondazione G. Cini*, whose unique contributions to culture have justly won it wide renown. It was represented in particular by Prof. Agostino Pertusi, of the Catholic University of Milan, who is current director of the *Istituto «Venezia e l'Oriente»* and the *Istituto della Società e dello Stato Veneziano*, both of which are Centres of the Fondazione involved in areas related to the conference theme; an eminent byzantinologist and hellenist, he matched his extensive experience in this field with unflagging energy. This time, however, the preparations and the actual working sessions of the conference were carried out with the close co-operation of the two foreign-administered centres in Venice: the German Centre for Venetian Studies (*Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani*), under the direction of its president Herr H.-G. Beck, Professor of the University of Munich, and the Greek Institute for Byzantine and Post-byzantine Studies (*Ἑλληνικὸ Ἰνστιτοῦτο Βυζαντινῶν καὶ Μεταβυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν*), which is directed by Prof. M. I. Manoussakas, of the University of Thessaloniki.

The joint participation of these three specialist foundations in the organization of the *Convegno* was a key factor in giving the topics that engaged those taking part a multi-faceted character, thus ensuring the success of this international symposium. A preliminary meeting of nearly all participants who were to present personal or joint papers (*relazioni - correlazioni*) was held on the 2nd October at the Greek Institute, in order to successfully co-ordinate the many and varied workings of this somewhat distinctive round-table conference.

The inaugural session, which took place on the morning of October the 3rd, was devoted to the problems of Venetian policy in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean. Alberto Tenenti, of the *École des Hautes Études* of Paris, underlined the mature realism of Venetian policy, the general pragmatism of the *Serenissima* in the Mediterranean, as it is presented by contemporary historiography (*Nuove dimensioni della presenza veneziana nel Mediterraneo*). The association of Venice with the great geographical discoveries in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans was dealt with in the joint papers of Charles Verlinden, of the Belgian Academy at Rome, and Vitorino Magalhaes Godinho, Professor of the University of Lisbon. Of these, the former provided a report of the geographical researches of several distinguished explorers, with special reference to the activities of Da Mosto, Cabot et al., while the latter discussed the rôle of Venetian trade in linking the Atlantic with the Indian Ocean, and sought echoes of this rôle in the literary creations of such Portuguese writers as Gil Vicente etc.

Professor Dionysius Zakythinos, of the Academy of Athens, analysed Venetian policy towards the important events enacted in Eastern Europe after the first Turkish conquests in the Balkans (*L'atteggiamento di Venezia di fronte al declino e alla caduta di Costantinopoli*).

Using published fifteenth-century Venetian sources (mainly the Thiriet collections) he investigated the relations of St. Mark's Republic with the last of the Palaeologi and the dependence of Venetian policy in the Levant upon the main questions of *Terra Ferma* and the other serious political, economic and commercial problems of the Serenissima.

In his part of a joint paper, Erich Schilbach, of the University of Munich, essayed a somewhat more realistic review of Venetian strategy in the face of Ottoman expansion in the Eastern Mediterranean; drawing his arguments from data on Venetian expenditure in *Terra Ferma* and her Greek colonies, he maintained that Venice followed a consistently opportunist policy against the Sultan as a result of under-rating the significant military potential of her Levantine trading posts while at the same time over-estimating her Italian and European problems in comparison with the danger from the East. The other part of the joint paper was presented by Halil Inalcık, Professor of the University of Ankara, who filled in the Ottoman side of the same picture: he pointed out that the spread of Turkish domination brought with it several advantages to Venice and the people of the Balkans, especially the Greeks; Venetian trade profited from the ensuing demographic development, particularly of the greater urban centres (Constantinople, Thessaloniki, Proussa), and from the diversion that Turkish military activity in the Persian Gulf caused the Portuguese; furthermore, the Venetian withdrawal from the harbours of the East enabled the Greeks to expand their trading operations to an extent that they soon dominated the established markets of the region; and he also related these considerations to the Greek *rayas*' hostility towards the Western (Venetian and, in general, Catholic) feudalism that had been exploiting Greek lands until then.

The afternoon session was devoted to Venice as a source of information about Turkey and the Turks during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Prof. Hans-J. Kissling, of the University of Munich, outlined the question as a whole in his panoramic introduction (*Venezia come centro di informazioni sui Turchi*); highlighting the importance of espionage and the information services (*Nachrichtendienste*) to the exercise of a State's foreign policy, he determined the rôle played by Venice in gathering information of every kind about the Ottoman Empire, and related it to the geographic and geopolitical position of the Serenissima. Prof. J. K. Hassiotis, of the University of Thessaloniki, confined the subject of his joint paper to the use made by other European states, particularly Spain, of Venetian territory as a channel for transmitting information about the Ottomans; he investigated the methods used by Spanish ambassadors to Venice, identified the principal types who carried out espionage in Venetian and Turkish-held territories, and gave evidence of the remunerations involved, the reliability of information so gathered and the consequences of this activity on Spanish-Venetian- and Turkish-Venetian relations. In the other part of the joint paper Robert Mantran, Professor at the University of Aix-en-Provence, analysed the reasons why Venice developed into a centre and source of information about the Ottoman world, chiefly in the fifteenth century; referring to the value of related documents preserved in the Venetian State Archives, he noted the importance of Venetian diplomatic representatives in the Levant in unearthing items of political, commercial and other news, and underlined the contributions advanced by different spokesmen, particularly the dragomen and the so-called «Giovani della lingua».

The morning of the second day was devoted to two problems: the activity of foreigners in the capital of St. Mark, and the forms that Venetian propaganda took in Europe. Fr. Giorgio Fedalto, Professor of the University of Padua, gave concrete evidence to reveal the position of foreign minorities in Venice (*Le minoranze straniere a Venezia tra politica e legislazione*). Starting as early as the fourteenth century, he examined the first Venetian links with

both East and West, from the remotest countries of the Far East to the most Western on the shores of the Atlantic, and found within those bonds the initial factors that led to the influx of foreigners into the city of the canals. Particular attention was paid to the rôle of the Greek colony in Venice, to the concessions granted by the Venetian administration to foreign emigrés, to the special social and religious problems faced by the minorities and their attitude towards the Venetians themselves. The problems of the Venetian Jewish minority in particular, its demographic development and its relations with the other foreign minorities, principally the Greek and German, were systematically dealt with by David Jacoby, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. A similar portrait of the Greek colony, with reference also to the Albanian, was given by Prof. Freddy Thiriet, of the University of Strasbourg. The economic activity of the Greeks in Venetian- and Turkish- dominated areas, the rôle they played in contacts between these regions and the Venetian capital, and their contribution to the intellectual movements in general (editions, etc.) in the city of St. Mark were all set out in clear lines. Philippe Braunstein, of the École Pratique des Hautes Études of Paris, concerned himself particularly with the involvement of the German minority, examining its relations with the Venetian authorities, its economic enterprise and the contribution of its members to the overall printing and publishing activity of Venice.

Prof. Leopold Kretzenbacher, of the University of Munich, continued with a thorough account of the image that the Venetian Republic projected throughout Europe. For the purposes of his paper he singled out the medium of folklore as a particular example of how every available means of propaganda was used to fashion this image (*Forme di rappresentazione e folklore veneziano come mezzo di propaganda della Repubblica di Venezia nell' entroterra europeo*).

The rôle of Venice in the international trade movements of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the subject of the afternoon session of the 4th of October. Prof. Hermann Kellenbenz, of the University of Nuremberg, introduced the topic with a general conspectus of the scope of Venetian commercial activity in Eastern and Western markets (*Venezia come centro internazionale per l'espansione del commercio nei secoli XV e XVI*). Stressing the dominant rôle of the Portuguese trade routes, he showed that the presence of Venice in the commercial centres of the Iberian peninsula was limited in comparison with that of the Genoese; he documented the activities of foreign merchants (German, Dutch etc.) in Venice and the Eastern Mediterranean, and matched them with the involvement of Armenians, Jews (mostly *maranos*) and other Levantine peoples in the development of the old Balkan and Mediterranean markets. Eliyahu Ashtor, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, used little-known Arab sources and other Eastern testimonies to reveal the trading operations of the Venetians, the Genoese and the Catalans in the harbours of the Middle East; in vivid colours he emphasized that indications of Venetian supremacy in the Eastern Mediterranean should not be sought after as early as the fourteenth century, when new geographical discoveries were being made and the Venetians were conducting a steady withdrawal from the Levant.

Light was shed on the close relations between humanist and merchant in Venice in the paper of Ugo Tucci (*Il patrizio veneziano mercante e umanista*). Opening the morning session of the 5th of October, the lecturer remarked on the fact that, almost without exception, the distinguished humanists of the Republic had passed through the rich experience of a commercial career, mainly in the East but also in the West, before they devoted themselves to Letters. In Venetian society, the transition — whether temporary or permanent — from the situation in which the amassing of wealth was obligatory to the inclination towards collecting Greek and Latin manuscripts, ancient coins etc., was an easy and well-trodden road; those

who took it did so out of a desire to couple the rank of patrician with the honourable status of a *maecenas*. Prof. Gr. Kassimatis, of the Academy of Athens, followed this up with an original 'vision' of the Venetian merchant-patrician, examining the figure from novel points of view and in comparison with the general development of human societies in every age; The Venetian *patriziato* was thus seen not in the isolation of a single place at a brief moment in time, but set in context amongst the factors that contributed to his diversity, in his appropriate place within the broad historical tableau of cultural, political and economic developments. Moving from the general type to a representative Venetian patrician and *maecenas*, Vittore Branca, Professor of the University of Padua and general secretary of the Fondazione Cini, described the activities of the fifteenth-century Venetian humanist Lauro Querini, who was a friend and colleague of Cardinal Bessarion and of Apostolis, as well as of other noted collectors of Greek manuscripts.

Venice as the centre of the traffic in manuscripts, particularly Greek, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was the subject of the next series of *relazioni* and *correlazioni*. The contribution of Venice in this domain was evaluated in comparison with the general fifteenth-century Italian humanist movement by Nigel Wilson, of Lincoln College, Oxford (*Il mercato dei manoscritti a Venezia*). Without neglecting the importance that the manuscripts channelled through Venice had for the humanist and Renaissance circles in Italy and Europe, he affirmed the pre-eminence in this rôle of other humanist centres, especially Rome. Prof. Jean Irigoin, of the Sorbonne, outlined the activities of the foreign embassies in Venice, particularly those of France and Spain, in collecting Greek manuscripts to endow the royal libraries of the West; he continued with an account of the part played in these activities by certain Greek purveyors of codices (such as Antonios Eparchos), making reference to remunerations received and other relevant details. These two papers were supplemented by Fr. Paul Canart, of the Vatican Apostolic Library, who produced new data bearing on the rôle of Greek codicographers and codex-vendors (especially Eparchos and Ioannes Nathanaël) in relation to the trade, the copying and the general turnover of Greek manuscripts.

The afternoon session was taken up with philological and linguistic questions involving Venice and the Venetian-occupied East. Linos Politis, Emeritus Professor of the University of Thessaloniki, concerned himself with the contribution of Greek printerries in Venice to the dissemination of works of early modern Greek literature (*Venezia come centro della stampa e della diffusione della prima letteratura neoellenica*); he sought out and identified the first such works printed in Venice, gave details of their editors and proof-readers, and emphasized the importance of these editions to the intellectual cultivation and enlightenment of the enslaved Greek nation. Signorina Enrica Follieri, of the University of Rome, directed her attention to the publishing activity of the earliest Greek presses in Rome during the first half of the sixteenth century, concentrating in particular on the efforts of Zacharias Kalliergis and Demetrius Zenos to print Greek liturgical books at them. The influence of Greek editions from Venice on the rising spirit of philhellenism throughout Western Europe, as also on nationalist sentiment in enslaved Greece between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries was investigated by Leandros Vranoussis, Director of the Centre for Research in Medieval and Modern Hellenism of the Academy of Athens; he placed particular emphasis on the contribution of these editions to the development of intellectual pursuits amongst the Greeks, to the distribution of Greek works written in the popular language, and generally to the creation of the conditions necessary to prepare Greece for nationhood.

Regular reference is made to the 'lingua franca' as one of the linguistic phenomena associated with the residence of Latins in the Levant. Certain factors may be regarded as elemental to the investigation of its formative influences, and the definition of its character

in relation to these factors constituted the subject of the following series of papers (*Il contributo del veneziano e del greco alla lingua franca*). Manlio Cortelazzo, Professor of the University of Padua, first presented the sources that are basic to the study of this linguistic problem, and then proceeded to show how the dialects of Genoa and Venice, the Greek and Arabic languages and other less significant factors all had an influence on the formulation of the vocabulary and even the structure of this extraordinary 'language'. The particular effect that commercial life had on the tongue was the theme of the enquiry of Alfredo Stussi, also of the University of Padua, who isolated the elements that had an impact on the special linguistic form used in sources related to Venetian trade, a form that could be called the 'trade language'. Finally, Louis Coutelle, of the University of Aix-en-Provence, discussed the problem of the mixt frankish dialect that was current in the Greek possessions, and then gave a systematic treatment of «Grechesco», the 'literary' language in which certain odd poems were written during the sixteenth century in Venice. Emphasizing the importance of Greek topics to the problems discussed at conferences on Venetian history, he proposed that Greek be adopted as one of the official languages at these conferences.

The morning session of the last day of the conference opened with the paper by the German Prof. Lorenz Hein, who delivered an exhaustive account of the Venetian church's position during the upheavals of the Reformation, and of its relations with reformationist circles in Central Europe (*Le idee di riforma religiosa dell' Occidente e la loro influenza sui circoli religiosi veneziani*). Gaetano Cozzi, Professor of the University of Venice, concerned himself with an analysis of the problems of canon law (particularly relating to marriage) which were confronted in one way or another by the Council of Trent. Prof. Franco Gaeta, of the University of Rome, referred to the reports (*Relazioni*) of Venetian ambassadors to Central Europe, seeking evidence of Venice's official attitude towards the Reformation; basing himself on these sources, he showed that Venetian interest in the changing religious situation remained comparatively low until 1530, when it rose to a significant extent with the Augsburg Confession, but was always subordinated to the politico-economic repercussions of the changes. Vittorio Peri, of the Vatican Apostolic Library, presented a systematic study of Venetian resistance to Papal pressure—exercised in particular through the Apostolic nuncio Finocchetti—in relation to the comparatively tolerant policy the Republic maintained towards the general religious and dogmatic freedom of the Serenissima's Greek subjects during the second half of the sixteenth century; the main part of his paper was devoted to the developments that took place after the Council of Trent, chiefly in relation to the Greeks living in the city of Venice.

Prof. Otto Demus, of the University of Vienna, completed the morning session of the last day of the conference with a progress report on restoration of the mosaics in the Basilica of St. Mark, and an account of problems that had arisen in connection with the same monument in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (*Problemi sui restauri dei mosaici di San Marco nel 1400 e nel 1500*). Subsequent speakers dealt with similar matters: Antonio Rusconi, «Proto» of the Basilica of St. Mark, Giovanni Mariacher, of the directorate of Fine Arts of the Community of Venice, and Rodolfo Pallucchini, of the University of Padua.

The final session was devoted to Venetian art. The main speaker was Manolis Chatzidakis, Supervisor of Byzantine Antiquities in Athens. He systematically examined the relationship of Venetian painting to the Cretan tradition and the developments that led to the fusion of the two different artistic trends (*La pittura dei Madonneri (o veneto-cretese) e la sua destinazione*). Problems of a similar nature were also examined by Sergio Bettini, of the University of Padua, who reviewed these contacts as they evolved during the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries within the general Mediterranean area bounded by the Iberian Peninsula, Dalmatia and the Levant.

The conference happily coincided with ten interesting book fairs organized in Venice between the 2nd September and the 7th October. The city of the canals was declared *Città del Libro* for the duration of these exhibitions, and visitors were shown the most characteristic and significant examples of five centuries of tradition in the publishing arts. Amongst the displays organized were exhibitions of Greek, Armenian and Hebrew editions, musical libretti and various scores, early editions or first editions (*incunabula, editiones principes*), sketch plans, designs and guides to Venice, almanacs, and many more.

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