

Doctoral Dissertation

**A Model to Decode Venetian Senate Deliberations:
Pregadi “Talk” on Albanian Territories (1392–1402)**

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To my parents

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Introduction

This is my husband's favorite joke:

Q: Why did the Russian walk from Minsk to Pinsk?

A: Because it's the same, but different.

When I began this project, I had to make peace with the fact that I would face thousands of records that seemed “the same.” Coming from a mountain at the edge of the Andes, I was subject to little prejudice in tackling a chapter of history which deals with the written record of encounters between fourteenth-century Venice and its somewhat-subjugated territory in the northern Albanian highlands. This record was delineated in a governmental language through which Venice's ruling class contended with describing and responding to an Albanian “other.” Several years of research proved that the Russian of the joke and myself were not in the same situation. What had seemed to be slight differences in record-keeping were in fact more different than they were the same. The recorded entries which cover a decade in the proceedings of the Venetian Senate turned out to be a treasure trove of short, clear-cut narratives produced from collective resolution, but codified with a refined and systematic know-how. My original interest —the relationship between Albania and Venice— needed to be changed. The initial pursuit became secondary to explication of a hitherto-unknown tool for understanding Senate records. My study evolved into the presentation of a model to illuminate some of the guidelines used by scribes to encode Senate discussions. Therefore, scholars from varying fields who rely on Senate discussions as their source material would be able to quickly recognize and adequately contextualize the entry type under analysis. Seemingly minor questions — Why were entries formulated in the manner they were? Who was the talking voice behind Venetian deliberations?— led to the realization that both questions were dependent on each other. Consequently, my enterprise would need to incorporate the texts as much as the men behind them.

Those men, the *pregadi*, saw themselves as invited to rule Venice. They met regularly to discuss and, *deo gratias*, resolve incoming needs from their growing mercantile domains. They formed the *Consiglio dei pregadi* —which literally means Council of the Invited Ones— and during the decade covered by this study, they saw their power grow along with the city's.¹ Due to its relatively small number of members,² the Council (or Senate, as it was re-named during the Renaissance period) maintained the faculty of gathering on short notice to vote on state matters. Given the number of places Venice controlled, decisions pertained to all territories, big and small, whose

¹ The *Consiglio dei Pregadi* (Latin: *Consilium Rogatorum*) was commonly called Senate from the mid-fifteenth century onwards due to the influence of the humanist movement. For stylistic reasons, “the Council” and “Senate” will be used interchangeably. This will also apply to *pregadi* and senators as members of the office. Whenever I mention any of the other Venetian councils, I will refer to them to with their full name: Council of Ten, Great Council, Council of Forty, etc.

² During the period under study, the Council elected approximately 120 members. For comparison, the Great Council consisted of more than 1,000 members.

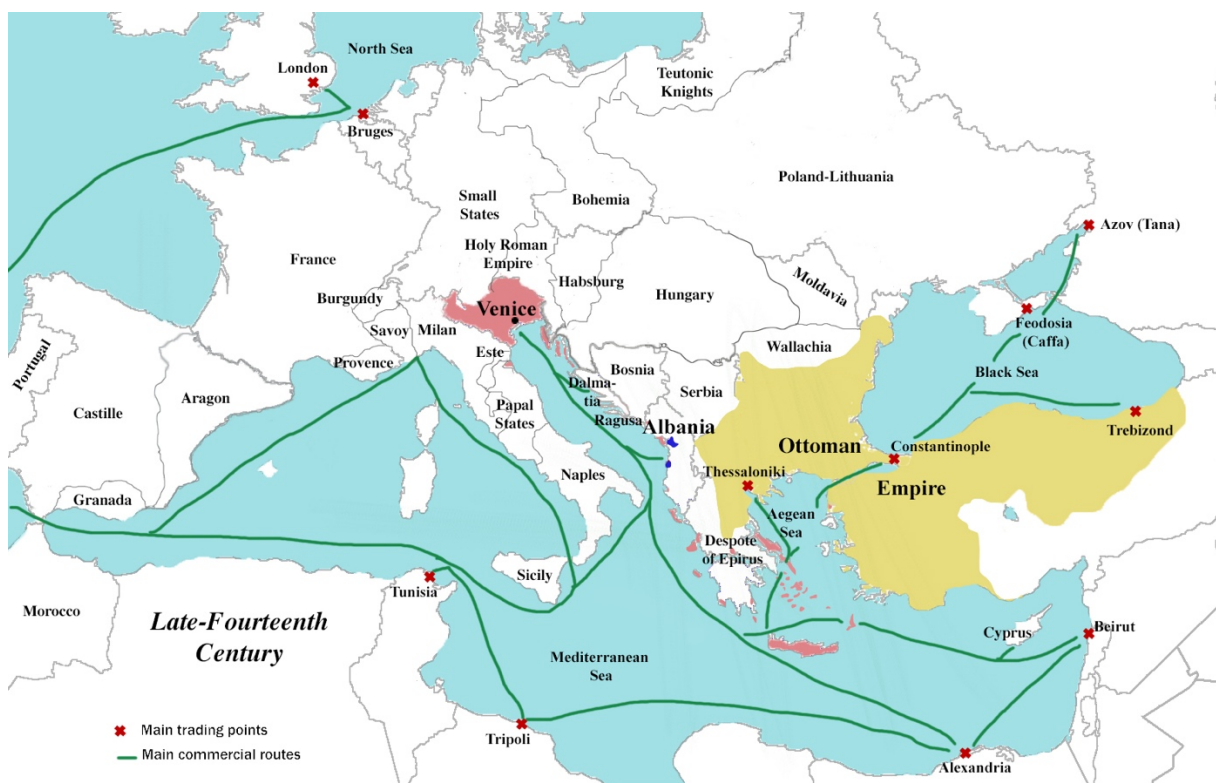
control Venice gained at one point or another. And since Venice was, after all, a mercantile emporium, discussions could be also overtaken by the logistics of itinerary, loading and unloading merchandise, and decisions to increase or waive tax duties on goods on board of merchant galleys visiting the main trading posts of Constantinople, Cairo, Beirut, Alexandria, Flanders or London. Odd situations merchants faced in the kingdoms of Cyprus, Hungary, France, Aragon, Granada and others, or by encounters with pirates at sea, also depended on the *pregadi*'s pronouncement in order to be resolved. And not only that: more frequent correspondence from cities in Italy demanded that they, also, mediated conflicts and requests coming from Genoa, Bologna, Florence, Ferrara or Rome.

The topics discussed in each of the Council's meetings are preserved in the volumes of the Senate's *Deliberazioni* in the state archive of Venice. Taken as a whole, the *Deliberazioni* are a thrilling, endless imprint of international crisis and intrigue. They are, however, the edited version of meetings which happened behind closed doors and to which there are no other witnesses or traces. The "talk" of the title, and generally that of this study, is figurative speech. Thousands of pages reproducing discussions and the votes they received have survived, but even assuming that they preserve more or less accurately the order in which interventions were delivered more than half a millennium ago, what escaped the written word has been lost. What intentions undercut a literal statement, what knowing smiles were exchanged at common references, what oblique attempts to tear off political legitimacy were made — these are now lost. However, those records are the product of many discussions and verbal interactions, and in that sense part of the *pregadi*'s talk of politics. Salient moments of this figurative "talk" of state matters surfaced in texts outside the ducal palace, too. Antonio Morosini, a contemporary and keen witness of the events covered by the study, echoed some of the Council's discussions and penned them down as entries in his diary. There he stood, out of the way of the *pregadi* but close enough in their milieu to offer a quasi-insider's perspective into the relevance and endurance of certain events. It goes beyond the scope of this dissertation to offer an in-depth study of Morosini's work. Yet his judgment of what seemed worth recording is part of what bears relevance to understand the attention or neglect that accompanied decisive Council pronouncements, and for that reason my study briefly incorporates his view of the decade I analyze. By proposing a model of analysis that also accounts for an entry's importance in relation to Morosini's role as curator, I hope to offer a wider overview of the pages from the Council's discussions.

No effort has yet been attempted to produce a systematic study on the inner textual conventions that rule the *Deliberazioni*. This lack of studies on recorded entries *as texts* should not come as a surprise. Given their vast amount, presenting an inclusive account of all Council records has, unfortunately but understandably, not been a matter that scholarship has pursued. Instead, the records have been used fragmentarily to study discrete areas or topics. It is only a matter of time

before the Council's (artificial) dedication to any given area is addressed by new theoretical approaches or data-processing models and tools, which may show how all those decisions and places were interconnected; and not only in terms of goods and people, but also in regards to recording practices which point to how contemporaries related them to their society and their state. Without aiming at completeness, my study puts a bid into that direction.

By the last decade of the fourteenth century, Venice had extended its power quite far from the lagoon. In one fashion or another, cities ranging from Crete and Negroponte in the Aegean Sea to Azov in today's south-western Russia, and all along the Eastern coast of Adriatic, were populated by Venetian merchants, and administered or partially ruled by Venice.



Map 1. Venice's commercial emporium, the Ottoman Empire, and Albania in the late fourteenth century. Adapted from: "Repubblica di Venezia" by -kayac- at Italian Wikipedia, distributed under a CC license.

My study hopes to uncover the high points of the political day-to-day of the *pregadi*, whose world was made out of the contact with many and far-reaching regions. Within the model I propose, each recorded entry is taken to be a "linguistic act." The model accounts for the vast majority of all recorded entries between 1392 and 1402, but I concentrate on the three entry types that codified the most important matters of state. Consequently, according to the central hypothesis of this study, the scribal conventions that were responsible for the drafting of the *Deliberazioni* have the potential to reveal those high points, given that the *pregadi*'s talk became embedded in the Council's record-

keeping practices. The Albanian territories of Durrës, Lezhë, Shkodra, and Drisht (which I will refer to as Albania, for brevity³) will be a testing subject for this hypothesis. I will examine recording practices against the upheavals of seizing, quarreling over and defending Venice's status there. These Albanian lands were among that larger Venetian sphere of influence and power.⁴ Depending on a number of contingency situations, they could offer momentary ship assistance and advantages in supplying food and other goods, but they could also confront Venice with political and military hurdles that demanded resolution. Either way, Albania could become the center of the state agenda for the day, even if this lasted but a day or two at a time.

But why choose Albania for identifying and testing recording conventions pointing to state priorities? What place did Albanian lands inhabit in the discussions of Venice's most formidable Council? What priority, weight or effect? The model I propose can be a tool for scholars of Venice who study any other geographical area or subject matter during this period, but I perceive Albania as the ideal testing subject: for Venetians, Albania gained relevance in 1392 due to the fact that continual Ottoman presence in the region had become a distressing reality. Albania became an area of political hostility short (for the most part) of open warfare, yet its importance did not match the rank of territories such as Constantinople, Crete or Cyprus. Albania turned out to be the springboard for my study, for it allows me to describe consistencies and changes in record-keeping without "stealing the show." In this way, I could glean how news and embassies about Albania became codified in the *Deliberazioni* from the *pregadi*'s "talk" of politics, and thus answer several questions: Would it be possible to discover whether developments in Albania had the import of a crucial state affair for the *pregadi*? Were the wording and structure of entries pointing to such developments employed systematically? Do the edited Council discussions offer clues about how information reached the *pregadi* and was later presented, debated or reacted to? Aside from the model itself, another aim of this study will be to show that these are interrelated questions and that there is, in fact, something new to be learned from the dry words of those state documents.

Venice and Albania had a shared history dating back into the high Middle Ages, but only since the spring of 1392 did strategic decisions resulting from changes in international politics mark the beginning of Venice's unreserved disposition to control Albania more closely. From then on, the constant presence of the Ottomans was the background against which the silhouette of these Albanian cities was drawn. Ten years on, in the summer of 1402, the army of Bayezid I, the feared Ottoman

³ In the Middle Ages, Albania did not constitute a political unit. Shkodra and Drisht were part of the Zeta region, a historical name for an area in today's north Albania and southern Montenegro. Lezhë, and Durrës were located south of Zeta, in today's central Albania. By "Albania" or "Albanian" I actually mean the territories or people in and around the cities mentioned above. The cases where only "Albania" appears are solely due to stylistic reasons. For a more detailed discussion on the "Albanian space," see: Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien (1392-1479)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2001), 47.

⁴ In later periods, the most widely-used name was *Albania Veneta*, although Venetian domination fluctuated considerably.

Sultan, was crushed by Timur Bey, the Mongol conqueror, which threw Bayezid's empire into total and utter disarray. A few weeks after this news was received in Venice, Gian Galeazzo Visconti died, and his imperialistic ambition ceased to be a threat to the free communes of northern Italy. The news brought an unexpected twist to ongoing developments in Venetian politics. My study ends with these two events because contemporaries perceived them as turning points in Venice's history. More importantly, the resonance of those two pieces of news had consequences for recording practices as well: after 1402, Venice's expansion into the mainland was reflected in the exponential increase of secret deliberations, thus highlighting a new set of the *signoria*'s ambition which needs to be analyzed in their own terms.

Having Albania as focus has an added advantage. The decade between 1392 and 1402, positioned after the war of Chioggia but before Venice's expansion into mainland Italy, has been neglected by scholarship. I decided to center on this period because these years have been overpowered by the resonance of Genoa's defeat, and scholars have tended to jump ahead to the Renaissance period, when the *terraferma* was being incorporated to Venice in a race also run by other Italian states.⁵ However, during this decade, the Council's attentiveness to Albanian cities swung back and forth, partially due to changes in the state's priorities. By examining entries about Albania, I hope to bring to the fore those changes in terms of the state's most pressing issues.

This analysis will be carried through six chapters. The first describes the methodology and theoretical approach that are fundamental to the study, together with the model I propose to categorize Senate records. In the second chapter, I describe a number of cultural "languages" which the *pregadi* inhabited and which prevailed in the broader experiences of patrician politics and society, including the Council. The third chapter provides a general context on the Venetian way of administering territories overseas, the configuration of Albanian cities, and the Albanian protagonists. The fourth and fifth chapters closely examine the structure of entries used to codify distinct sets of important incoming news and out-going responses and instructions. This, I hope, will illustrate ways of "talking politics" that go beyond the seemingly formulaic codes of expression of recorded entries. The sixth chapter will function as an epilogue: I will offer a brief analysis of the events which Morosini selected to describe this decade in his *Diary* in relation to the highest points of Senate discussions.

Using state documents as fossilized records of Senate talk may help to problematize the production of meaning in politics and build a bridge between research areas traditionally kept apart: the history of the *stato da mar*, Venice's social and cultural history, record-keeping practices in state

⁵ See for example: Frederic Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Robert Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1980). This also applies to some of the latest publications about Venice: Sandra Toffolo, *Describing the City, Describing the State: Representations of Venice and the Venetian Terraferma in the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Georg Christ and Franz-Julius Morche, eds., *Cultures of Empire: Rethinking Venetian Rule, 1400–1700: Essays in Honour of Benjamin Arbel* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

organs, and theories of intellectual history and political thought. It is also an attempt to empathize with those who are buried under the masks of anonymity and state devotion. In posterity, Venetians are often overshadowed by their posts and the offices to which they belonged, if not their family lineage and class. But the *pregadi* were not lifeless figures. Quite the opposite, they were people of flesh and blood with a particular take in Venice's priorities and their own, if limited, share in the state's voice.

A Survey of the Scholarship

No studies have yet examined the recording practices employed in the *Deliberazioni* in any systematic way.⁶ However, interpretative traditions of the language of politics used in Venice during the late Middle Ages are rich and varied. From among the many different scholarly traditions, three main topics have weighed into the study of Venice's political language at the turn of the fourteenth century: those of the "myth of Venice," the humanist movement, and the historiographical tradition of chronicles and political diaries. Generally speaking, Albanian studies have remained separated from those traditions.

a) *The Myth of Venice*

Edward Muir concisely defined what modern scholars call the "myth of Venice" as "Venice's historical reputation for beauty, religiosity, liberty, peacefulness, and republicanism."⁷ The myth is rooted in Venice's political stability and shaped the stories that Venetians told themselves about themselves. It is as inextricably linked to Venice as the canals are connected to one another. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was consolidated in Italy and abroad in the pen of Venice's celebrated historians: Lorenzo de Monacis, Bernardo Giustiniani, Antonio Sabellico, and all the others to whom the state commissioned histories as long as they praised the city.⁸ From Frederic Lane's *Venice, a Maritime Republic to Renaissance Venice* (the collective publication edited by John Hale), many of the works that are still reference points for historians today were written in

⁶ In a recent study, Johann Petitjean examined aspects of the relation between recording practices and diplomacy. Although his study pertains to a later period, he analyzed the role of news when the tasks of diplomats and chancelleries became almost inseparable, see: Johann Petitjean, *L'intelligence des choses: Une histoire de l'information entre Italie et Méditerranée, XVIe-XVIIe siècles* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2013), 19.

⁷ Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 21.

⁸ Emanuela Sgambati, "Mito e antimito di Venezia nella cronachistica del Quattrocento," in *Mito e antimito di Venezia nel bacino adriatico: secoli XV - XIX*, ed. Sante Graciotti (Rome: Il Calamo, 2001), 228–29. See also: Gene Veronesi, "Collateral Promoters of the Venetian Myth: Veronese Chronicles in the Age of Venetian Hegemony" (PhD Diss., Ohio, University of Akron, 2015). For a survey of formulations of the myth during the Middle Ages, including those by Henry of Rimini, Benzo d' Alessandria, Lorenzo de Monaci, Pier Paolo Vergerio, and Gasparo Contarini, see: David Robey and John Law, "The Venetian Myth and the «de Republica Veneta» of Pier Paolo Vergerio," *Rinascimento* 15 (1975): 3–56; Gina Fasoli, "Nascita di un mito," in *Scritti di storia medievale*, ed. Gina Fasoli and Francesca Bocchi (Bologna: La Fotocromo Emiliana, 1974), 445–72; David Robey, "P. P. Vergerio the Elder: Republicanism and Civic Values in the Work of an Early Humanist," *Past & Present* 58 (1973): 3–37.

the decades between 1950 and 1980 —“the golden age of Venetian historiography”⁹— and understanding the implications of the myth also comes with a need to examine the role it played in those works.¹⁰

Venetian history is a story told by a myth. This can be easily corroborated by only a cursory glance at the numerous histories of Venetian architecture, language, politics, churches, poets, troubadours, foreigners, love, merchants, theater, historiographies, maps, art —and even souvenirs. Sorting out the historiography of Venice is particularly difficult because it has suffered a loss of clarity by people writing about the myth more than the history, and later writers based their research on earlier myth-making. The myth-making has affected all sorts of writings: political and philosophical treatises, histories, novels, operas, poems, etc. It operates by transforming weaknesses into virtues in all realms of politics. The figure of the doge, an example among many, illustrates this point. Compared to other European rulers, doges were considerably older when they were elected as heads of state. Antonio Venier was 52 years old when he was elected doge in 1382, and a 69-year-old Michele Steno succeeded him in 1400. Claudio Rendina wrote that the doge was not seldom a sick, vanished, old man who would arrive on a stretcher, fall asleep during hearings or bite a handkerchief from the pain of stone.¹¹ In the language of the myth, arriving on a stretcher made him the *primus inter pares*, if he fell asleep he was a champion of serenity, and to bite his handkerchief showed he was the embodiment of aplomb. Awareness of the myth’s pervasiveness is crucial because the myth has the potential to enfold and silence the *pregadi*’s talk whose understanding this research is pursuing. This talk, which involves disagreement and conflicting opinions, was long purposefully dissociated from Venice’s official life because, for centuries, the myth succeeded enormously in maintaining a stereotypical depiction whereby the *pregadi* formed a unified body.

In the “myth” branch of Venice’s political language, the theme of patriotic humanism, closely connected to the form of Venice’s constitution, came to be an essential component in the general narrative of Venice’s superiority and uniqueness. In the 1970s, Agostino Pertusi was one of the first to provide an open examination of the myth, tracing the earliest sources that led to its establishment

⁹ James Grubb, “When Myths Lose Power: Four Decades of Venetian Historiography,” *The Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986): 86.

¹⁰ The opening line of Lane’s influential monography, which has informed and inspired several generations of *venezianofili* until this day, reads: “Venice stands out as a symbol of beauty, of wise government, and of communally controlled capitalism”: Frederic Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 1. In *Renaissance Venice*, edited by John Hale (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), the contributions by Alberto Tenenti and Myron Gilmore are developed on the basis of their awareness of sixteenth century idealization of Venice into the myth: Alberto Tenenti, “The Sense of Space and Time in the Venetian World of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. John Hale (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 17–46; Myron Gilmore, “Myth and Reality in Venetian Political Theory,” in *Renaissance Venice*, ed. John Hale (London: Faber, 1973), 431–44.

¹¹ Claudio Rendina, *I dogi: storia e segreti; dalle 120 biografie dei serenissimi di Venezia rivive un millennio di retroscena e intrighi della Repubblica del Leone* (Rome: Newton & Compton, 2003), 14.

into Italian and European psyche.¹² Gina Fasoli, Felix Gilbert, David Robey, John Law and others also launched a questioning of the origins of the theme of patriotic humanism and the form of Venice's constitution, for these were seen as some of its foundational elements.¹³

Awareness of the power of the myth intensified since the work of Pertusi and Fasoli, and in the 1980s, Donald Queller denounced the romanticizing flaws in the works of Gino Luzzatto, Roberto Cessi, Gina Fasoli, William Bouwsma, and others (he accused them of having their senses smothered by the myth),¹⁴ in an "avowedly one-sided book" that attacked the image of patricians as especially patriotic, wise and self-sacrificing.¹⁵ Queller showed that the intertwining of individual, family, class and state was part of the myth and, as such, a fundamental part of patricians' ideal (yet unattainable) view of themselves. Similarly, he showed how nobles' genuine support for a norm did not mean they would not act in crass infringement of it. He highlighted that perseverance of irregularities, despite constant enactment of new laws, was overtly acknowledged by Venetians, who made fun of themselves by admitting that *una leze veneziana dura una settimana*.¹⁶

Around the time of Queller's publication, James Grubb produced a comprehensive and shrewd essay on the evolution of the myth in historiography in the light of the most influential analytical models of the nineteenth and twentieth century. He sedulously looked not only at famous scholars, but also at those who have been forgotten (probably rightly so) — those writing with undertones from Fascism, Catholic paternalism, etc. He argued that the myth was never a static model and, century after century, it gave Venice symbolisms and meanings that became commonplaces, but that sometimes were adjusted to fit the intellectual themes of the researcher's historical moment; in his words, "Venice remains exemplary: as metaphor in current crises, as analogy for programs from across the political spectrum, as arena for extraneous academic debates."¹⁷

¹² Agostino Pertusi, "Gli inizi della storiografia umanistica nel Quattrocento," in *La storiografia veneziana fino al secolo xvi: Aspetti e problemi*, ed. Agostino Pertusi (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1970), 269–332.

¹³ Gina Fasoli asserted that the image of Venice's mixed constitution was probably medieval, reaching a mature form before the first half of the fourteenth century: Fasoli, "Nascita di un mito," 478. In his study of the Medieval formulations of ideal government, James Blythe assigns to Felix Gilbert the honor of producing one of the most important studies of the Renaissance concept of a Venetian mixed constitution. In Blythe's words, Gilbert argued that even if Venice was considered to be a remarkable city, it was only in the early fifteenth century that Venetian and Florentine humanists such as Francesco Barbaro (1390–1454) and Pier Paolo Vergerio the Elder (1370–1444/45) "began to attribute Venice's unique prosperity and stability to the perfection of its governmental institutions," see: James Blythe, *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 279. David Robey and John Law, on the other hand, traced back the description of Venice as mixed constitution a century earlier, to around 1300: Robey and Law, "The Venetian Myth," 3.

¹⁴ Donald E. Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate: Reality versus Myth* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1986), 23–27.

¹⁵ He considered his book necessary because in the Venice of the myth, the dilatancy, irresolution and showing of patricians in positions of power was portrayed as foresight, wisdom and tact: Queller, ix.

¹⁶ Queller, 50, 247. Besta gives a slightly different version of the same self-mocking maxim: "Parte venetiana no dura una settimana": Enrico Besta, *Il senato veneziano: origine, costituzione, attribuzioni e riti* (Venice: A spese della Società, 1899), 237.

¹⁷ Grubb, "When Myths Lose Power," 49.

This is as true today as it was 30 years ago. For current research on Venice, the myth is now an inherent part of any study on its history, culture, art, politics or language. Going further, some scholars are not embarrassed to accept that, due partly to the myth, the history of the city can be better understood in the realm of the symbolic: Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, for example, wrote about the relationship between Venice and the sea as a relationship that begot many interconnected realities.¹⁸ Fernand Braudel had a similar idea of Venice, whose “unreal character creates its repeated enchantment and myths, as if it were part of a world partly seen and partly dreamed up.”¹⁹

The myth cannot be brushed away. Its role cannot be underestimated and dismissed. Certainly, no scholar today would use the myth’s ideology to describe the engagement of patricians in the governing role they were called to fulfill, or in the refinement of their civic ideals. In consequence, the *pregadi*’s role in Venice’s government should neither be idealized nor derided. Although there is a breach between what Venetians wanted to say and believe about themselves, and how, at times, precisely the contrary was practiced, it is undeniable that no Venetian of the elite was totally stranger to feelings of civic duty.

b) The Humanistic Outlook

Shortly after 1402, when the Ottomans fell momentarily out of sight and Venice’s power was reassured, the absorption of cities in the mainland —Padua, Vicenza, Verona, and Feltre— brought about fundamental changes to Venice. In cultural terms, it put patricians in contact with broader intellectual centers. During the decades that followed, the expansion made patricians the vehicles by which humanism and humanist rhetoric, the most prominent cultural movement of this period, came to Venice. As scholars have pointed out, the link between the *studia humanitatis* and power was not of a purely intellectual nature.²⁰ Muir notes that in the late fifteenth century, the political language of the republic was almost interchangeable with the language used to ideally describe the greatness, beauty, stability and liberty embedded in Venice’s political system.²¹ Humanism became the

¹⁸ Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *Venice Triumphant: The Horizons of a Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), xii. She stressed that the topography of the city adds to this, because it reminds its visitor that as long as it stays afloat, there will be something fluid, equivocal and evasive, about Venice: Crouzet-Pavan, “Toward an Ecological Understanding of the Myth of Venice,” in *Venice Reconsidered*, ed. John Jeffries Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 39–64. See also: Deborah Howard, *Venice and the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100-1500* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Quoted in: Sgambati, “Mito e antimito di Venezia nella cronachistica del Quattrocento,” 223.

²⁰ For how the movement gave legitimacy to the myth of the original *libertas* of the republic, see: Alfredo Viggiano, *Governanti e governati: legittimità del potere ed esercizio dell’autorità sovrana nello Stato veneto della prima età moderna* (Treviso: Edizioni Canova, 1993), 22–23. A remarkable study is Monique O’Connell’s reconstruction of the ties between the patriariate and humanists like Lorenzo de Monacis, Nicolò Sagundino and Antonio Vinciguerra: Monique O’Connell, “Legitimizing Venetian Expansion: Patricians and Secretaries in the Fifteenth Century,” in *Venice and the Veneto during the Renaissance*, ed. Michael Knapton, John Easton Law, and Alison Andrews Smith (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 71–86.

²¹ Muir’s starting point for this is Bernardo Giustiniani’s highly influential *De origine urbis Venetiarum rebusque ab ipsa gestis historia*, published in 1492: Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, 25.

unequivocal language of politics and gained such prestige that it blurred the ways patricians expressed themselves politically before the movement came into existence. Similar to the loss of clarity produced by the myth of Venice, humanism taken too far compromised the understanding of Senate proceedings by imposing its idiosyncratic view on the composition of political texts.

For example, Coluccio Salutati, a prominent humanist, summarized all speeches delivered in the *Consulte e Pratiche*, an advisory council for the Florentine city council. In a recent collaborative publication, John Padgett, Katalin Prajda, Benjamin Rohr and Jonathan Schoots studied the *Consulte e Pratiche* protocols and determined that Salutati's humanistic affinities did not influence the manner in which he recorded the speeches.²² However, the humanistic credentials of men such as Salutati might have played a role in how scholars viewed the Council's *Deliberazioni*. Monique O'Connell pointed out that, while scholars have paid a great deal of attention to the intersection of "practical politics and the development of ideologies" in Florence, Venetian humanists have not received the same attention.²³ Moreover, she adds, the emphasis on Venetian patricians has also obscured the role of secretaries in legitimizing Venice's territorial expansion.²⁴

Aside from the comparison of senators' opinions in Venice and Florence, the scholarship that described Venetian politics and Venetian public discourse through the language of humanism is part of a headstrong tradition. Writing in the 1950s, Hans Baron described the intellectual climate of the years around 1400 as those of a struggle between two worlds of ideas that Milan and Padua embodied: "unifying despotism and city-state freedom."²⁵ Baron's position was overcome long ago by virtue of unconvincing evidence,²⁶ but the view that there was a humanist presence in politics prevailed long after his theses were refuted.²⁷ Agostino Pertusi, who wrote about Venice's cultural environment from the point of view of the awareness of classical antiquity, did not have a high opinion of Venetians at the turn of the fourteenth century. He neglected them because, according to him, they had no cultural interests and lived in a cultural environment with limited possibilities.²⁸ In like manner, Vittore

²² John Padgett et al., "Political Discussion and Debate in Narrative Time: The Florentine *Consulte e Pratiche*, 1376–1378," *Poetics* 78 (2020): 2.

²³ O'Connell, "Legitimizing Venetian Expansion," 71.

²⁴ O'Connell, 72.

²⁵ Hans Baron, *Humanistic and Political Literature in Florence and Venice at the Beginning of the Quattrocento: Studies in Criticism and Chronology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 5.

²⁶ For a refutation of Baron's view based on the cynicism of humanists in manipulating the symbols of republicanism, see: James Hankins, "The Baron Thesis after Forty Years: Some Recent Studies on Leonardo Bruni," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 309–38.

²⁷ Similarly, a tendency to offer descriptions of Venice's history in the light of Florence's political and intellectual developments has not disappeared entirely from scholarship. The controversy surrounding the composition date of Pier Paolo Vergerio the Elder's fragmentary work *De Republica Veneta* is an example of that. Vergerio was an important humanist, but he lived in Venice only for brief periods. According to Blythe, *De Republica Veneta* was written between 1398 and 1403; Blythe, *Ideal Government*, 283–84. Contrarily, Robey and Law, venturing that Vergerio wrote about Venice only after his visit to Florence in 1400 (connected as he was with the intellectual circles of Florence and Padua), date the work's composition between 1400 and 1403; Robey and Law, "The Venetian Myth," 29.

²⁸ Agostino Pertusi, "L'umanesimo greco della fine del secolo XIV agli inizi del secolo XVI," in *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 3/1 (Venezia: Neri Pozza, 1980), 180. Giovanni di Conversino echoed in his *Dragmalogia* of 1404 a

Branca's influential research on Italian literature handed down a legacy by which all accessible texts, including those of minor importance, could be examined as part of the broader history of humanism.²⁹

Margaret King, and more recently Patrick Baker and Clémence Revest, have highlighted that in humanists' self-conception, they saw themselves mostly as rhetoricians in love with the eloquence and beauty of classical, i.e. Ciceronian Latin, paying little attention to political theories.³⁰ For that reason, humanists' stylistic longings stand at odds with the plain and unadorned Latin of the Venetian secretaries of the Collegio. Pastore Stocchi, for one, argued that abstract civic ideals were never imposed above the needs of the republic, and no administrative office or diplomatic mission invoked them. For this view, ideals such as those appearing in humanist treatises were, in short, irrelevant.³¹ But looking back at the historiographical traditions, what seems to surface is that the repute of the movement obscured the presence of "non-humanist" texts to the extent that some scholars only cursorily looked at the late fourteenth century, neglecting it for its "lack" of poetry and philosophy.³²

Even though during the following decades humanism undoubtedly became an intellectual paradigm as much as a social phenomenon, as Clémence Revest has pointed out,³³ in Venice by the turn of the century it was still an unarticulated movement, or rather, not really a "movement" in sight, but moments of a learned community in process.³⁴ Therefore, it would be a disservice to contextualize the language of the *Deliberazioni* within the language of humanistic texts. The conventions to record the Council deliberations were by no means an unsophisticated aspect of official politics, but a language that needs to be understood in its own terms.

commonplace opinion about Venetian elites: in Venice, the poets are either not known or despised; worse: at home they'd feed dogs rather than a philosopher or a scholar, quoted in: Angela Caracciolo Aricò, "Venezia al di là del mito negli scrittori tra Quattro e Cinquecento," in *Mito e antimito di Venezia nel bacino adriatico: secoli XV - XIX*, ed. Sante Graciotti (Rome: Il Calamo, 2001), 311. On Pertusi's view on the beginnings of the humanist movement, see: Pertusi, "Gli inizi della storiografia umanistica nel Quattrocento."

²⁹ Vittore Branca and Konrad Krautter, *Lauro Quirini umanista: studi e testi* (Florence: Olschki, 1977), 21. For Branca's works on Venetian humanism, see: Vittore Branca, ed., *Umanesimo europeo e umanesimo veneziano* (Florence: Sansoni, 1963); Vittore Branca, "L'umanesimo veneziano alla fine del Quattrocento: Ermolao Barbaro e il suo circolo," in *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 3 (Vincenza: Neri Pozza, 1980), 123–75.

³⁰ Patrick Baker, *Italian Renaissance Humanism in the Mirror* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Clémence Revest, "Les discours de Gasparino Barzizza et la diffusion du style cicéronien dans la première moitié du XVe siècle. Premiers aperçus," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 128 (2017): 47–72.

³¹ Manlio Pastore Stocchi, "Scuola e cultura umanistica fra due secoli," in *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 3/1 (Vincenza: Neri Pozza, 1980), 110.

³² For example: Armando Balduino, "Le esperienze della poesia volgare," in *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 3/1 (Vincenza: Neri Pozza, 1980), 304; Eugenio Garin, "Cultura filosofica toscana e veneta nel Quattrocento," in *Umanesimo europeo e umanesimo veneziano*, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence: Sansoni, 1963), 20.

³³ Clémence Revest, "The Birth of the Humanist Movement at the Turn of the Fifteenth Century," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 68, no. 3 (2013): 423–56.

³⁴ This was also noted by Benjamin Kohl, who listed the ways in which the word "humanism" was propagated and promoted by humanists from Venice. He showed that the usage of the word does not go back beyond the 1410s: Kohl, "The Changing Concept," 203–9, quoted in: Clémence Revest, "The Birth of the Humanist Movement at the Turn of the Fifteenth Century," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 68, no. 3 (2013): 446.

c) *Chronicles, Histories and Diaries*

Where some scholars, looking in retrospect, have seen a desire for broader channels of expression as consequence of the rapidly asserting humanist culture, other scholars have gone another way. That is, they have asserted how the diaries written in the vernacular were a natural expression of a characteristically Venetian manifestation of the city's political language. The authors of Venetian chronicles and diaries looked to state documents to find information. Today's historians use those documents to examine the credibility and accuracy of past historical writings. More studies, though, are needed on how the political discussions and documents drafted by Venetian patricians holding office relate to the works by these other patricians — the chroniclers — whose view of the present was wider, and their means to express it more personal.

In a way, the insistence on the prominence of humanism as intellectual phenomenon impacted the field of Venetian chronicles and political diaries. Andrea Nanetti, following Antonio Carile, asserted that the great success of Enrico Dandolo's chronicle played a decisive role in shaping the genre during the decades that followed.³⁵ By 1360, a crucial change had taken place in that chronicles written in vernacular languages began to circulate, but these had limited diffusion.³⁶ For a long time, the type of historical reflection appearing at the turn of the 1400s did not receive the attention it deserved. During this period, the vernacular became a legitimate (but limited) vehicle of the historiographical production and so it differed from the laudatory historiography written in Latin.³⁷ The last decade of the fourteenth century lies in a grey zone within scholarship, because after the chronicles of Andrea Dandolo (1306–1354) and Rafaino Caresini (1314–1390), the humanist movement which developed in the following decades is considered the next intellectual landmark of prominence. In this way, debates touched upon the languages of historiography as either following or opposing the humanist view, but were little interested in scooping out anything else.

Chronicles were used as sources and object of reflection by Renaissance scholars already. Francesco Sansovino, for example, carried out intense research in the libraries of Venetian patricians and consulted a remarkable number of chronicles for his *Venetia, città nobilissima, et singolare* of 1581. They were perceived to be part of Venice's cultural, as much as political history. The abundance of source material did not pass unnoticed for nineteenth and twentieth-century researchers, who used them even though, for the most part, they were not organized in any systematic way and in fact lay

³⁵ Andrea Nanetti, "Per uno studio dell'opera storiografica," in *Il Codice Morosini: il mondo visto da Venezia (1094-1433)*, ed. Andrea Nanetti, vol. 4 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2010), 1733.

³⁶ Nanetti, 1737.

³⁷ Silvana Collodo, "Temi e caratteri della cronachistica veneziana in volgare del tre-quattrocento," *Studi veneziani* 9 (1967): 128–29. For history-writing on the early modern period, see: Helmut Zedelmaier, "«Im Griff der Geschichte»: zur Historiographieggeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit," *Historisches Jahrbuch*, no. 112 (1992): 436–56; Claudia Bastia, Maria Bolognani, and Fulvio Pezzarossa, eds., *La memoria e la città: Scritture storiche tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna* (Bologna: Il nove, 1992).

in anarchy in Venetian, Parisian and Viennese libraries. Auguste Prost, Giovanni Monticolo, Henry Simonsfeld, Freddy Thiriet and others were among the first who brought them into some sort of thematic organization and highlighted their importance not only for the understanding of Venice, but also for other parts of Europe.³⁸ Despite the chaos, chronicles and diaries (particularly Marino Sanudo's *Diarii*) were fundamental source material in the comprehensive monographs by Lane, Gaetano Cozzi, Robert Finlay, Robert Queller, and many others.³⁹ Antonio Carile, one of the great scholars of Venice's chronicle tradition, surveyed about two hundred manuscripts —containing mostly unpublished material— and worked out a grouping criterium for the over one thousand manuscripts containing Venetian chronicles.⁴⁰ Since then, scholarship on Venetian chronicles, histories and diaries has grown exponentially.⁴¹

The *Diary* of Antonio Morosini is the earliest example of a new model of historical writing, different from the chronicles in the traditional sense, but has not received the same attention as later exponents of the genre. In her study of Venetian political dairies, Neerfeld says little about him —

³⁸ Among the first attempts to systematize the study of Venetian chronicles, were: Auguste Prost, "Les chroniques vénitiennes," *Revue des questions historiques*, no. 31 (1882): 512–55; Auguste Prost, "Répertoire des chroniques vénitiennes," *Revue des questions historiques*, no. 34 (1883): 199–224; Giovanni Monticolo, *Cronache veneziane antichissime* (Rome: Forzani e C. Tipografi del Senato, 1890); Henry Simonsfeld, *Andreas Dandolo und seine Geschichtswerke* (Munich: T. Ackermann, 1876); Freddy Thiriet, "Les chroniques vénitiennes de la Marcienne et leur importance pour l'histoire de la Romanie Gréco-vénitienne," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 66, no. 1 (1954): 241–292; Samuele Romanin, *Storia documentata di Venezia*, 10 vols. (Venice: Naratovich, 1853). Raymond-Joseph Loenertz, who belonged to the Dominican order, used Venetian sources for the study of Latin States in Greece and the Venetian lordship in the Aegean: Raymond Joseph Loenertz, *Les Ghisi: Dynastes vénitiens dans l'Archipel, 1207-1390* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1975). For German-Venetian relations: Henry Simonsfeld, *Der Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venedig und die Deutsch-Venetianischen Handelsbeziehungen* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1887). For the use of Venetian sources with regard to the history of France: Henri Hauser, "Études critiques sur les sources narratives de l'histoire de France au XVIe siècle: III, De quelques sources de l'histoire des premières guerres d'Italie," *Revue d'Histoire Moderne & Contemporaine* 6, no. 5 (1904): 325–39; Germain Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Chronique d'Antonio Morosini: extraits relatifs à l'histoire de France* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1898).

³⁹ Some of such main contributions are classics in Venetian studies: Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic*; Robert Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1980); Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate*; Gaetano Cozzi, *Stato, società e giustizia nella Repubblica veneta (sec. XV-XVIII)*, 2 vols. (Rome: Jouvence, 2002); Gaetano Cozzi and Michael Knapton, *La Repubblica di Venezia nell'età moderna: dalla guerra di Chioggia al 1517* (Turin: UTET, 1986). See also: Alvise Zorzi, *La Repubblica del Leone: storia di Venezia* (Venice: Rusconi, 1979); Gerhard Rösch, *Venedig: Geschichte einer Seerepublik* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000).

⁴⁰ Antonio Carile, *La cronachistica veneziana (secoli XIII - XVI) di fronte alla spartizione della Romania nel 1204* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1969).

⁴¹ See: Felix Gilbert, "Biondo, Sabellico, and the Beginnings of Venetian Official Historiography," in *Florilegium Historiale: Essays Presented to Wallace K. Ferguson*, ed. John Gordon Rowe and W. H. Stockdale (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 275–93; Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Gino Benzoni, "Scritti storico-politici," in *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, ed. Alberto Tenenti and Ugo Tucci, vol. 4 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1996), 757–88; Sgambati, "Mito e antimito di Venezia nella cronachistica del Quattrocento"; Christiane Neerfeld, "*Historia per forma di diaria*": la cronachistica veneziana contemporanea a cavallo tra il Quattro e il Cinquecento (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2006); James Grubb, *Family Memoirs from Venice (15th - 17th Centuries)* (Rome: Viella, 2009); Dorit Raines, "The Private Political Archives of the Venetian Patriciate – Storing, Retrieving and Recordkeeping in the Fifteenth-Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 32, no. 1 (2011): 135–46; Serban Marin, "The State of Editing of the Venetian Chronicles. Around Some Recent Editions," *Revista Archivelor*, no. 110 (2013): 317–22; Angelo Mazzocco, "Humanistic Historiography in Venice: The Case of Biondo Flavio and Pietro Bembo," in *A New Sense of the Past. The Scholarship of Biondo Flavio (1392-1463)*, ed. Angelo Mazzocco and Marc Laureys (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2016), 89–104.

the entries of his *Diary* are hardly mentioned, although Neerfeld calls his writing the “precursori” of other diaries⁴²— but as precursor he positioned himself as an unassailable part of the genre. In 2010, the codex received a study long overdue: Andrea Nanetti published the first comprehensive study of the history of the manuscript, reception of the text, narrative sources available to Morosini, notes on Venetian codicology, paleography, and linguistic features, together with a comprehensive index.⁴³

In terms of its significance for the political world of Venice, Georg Christ recognized Morosini as a source for the change of perception of news, which were shifting from an economic to a broader “public” interest.⁴⁴ Morosini defies the common observation that between Venetian historiography and the ruling body there was a relationship based on subordination (where the state paid their way to praise and the historiographical production complied⁴⁵). He was a still a “young” man by the turn of the century and in all probability built upon his contacts with high offices as member of one of Venice’s most prominent families to start describing history as he saw it. As the witness of the events covered by this study, his *Diary* lies in the middle ground of historicized politics, political discussions and handling of information and news. He is exceptional in that he reported the “talk,” feelings and worries of the elite through his role as curator of events. Studying Venice through his eyes and ears, through what he decided to report, gives one a point of reference, an insider’s look into the patricians’ reaction to the politics of the *pregadi*.

d) *Albania as a Field of Study*

Albania got attention by scholars during the humanist movement thanks to the *Historia de Vita et Gestis Scanderbegi* by Marin Barleti (c. 1450-1512/13). His work was inspired by the two Ottoman sieges he witnessed in Shkodra, his native city, before going to Venice to retire. The commentary of this work, written in the style of humanists, was hugely popular throughout Europe.⁴⁶ Besides (somewhat romanticized) travel accounts, it was not until the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth century when Albania got its own field of study. Beyond the scholarly potential of the

⁴² Neerfeld, *Historia per forma di diaria*, 25. The internal structure of Morosini’s *Diary* already resembles that of other political diaries. That is, according to a classification proposed by Carile, it consists of a period prior to the writer’s time (a chronicle) followed by a part where the writer is witness to the facts (a diary): Antonio Carile, “Note di cronachistica veneziana: Piero Giustinian e Nicolò Trevisan,” *Studi veneziani* 9 (1967): 108.

⁴³ Antonio Morosini, *Il Codice Morosini: il mondo visto da Venezia (1094-1433)*, ed. Andrea Nanetti, vol. 4 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 2010).

⁴⁴ Georg Christ, “A Newsletter in 1419? Antonio Morosini’s Chronicle in the Light of Commercial Correspondence between Venice and Alexandria,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 20, no. 1 (2005): 42.

⁴⁵ Undoubtedly, examples of this subordinate relationship abound. The *De gestis, moribus et nobilitate civitatis venetiarum* by Lorenzo de Monacis, written between 1421 and 1428, is but one example. For an in-depth discussion, see: Franco Gaeta, “Storiografia, coscienza nazionale e politica culturale nella Venezia del Rinascimento,” in *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 3 (Venezia: Neri Pozza, 1980), 16.

⁴⁶ Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*, 329–30; Oliver Jens Schmitt, *Skanderbeg: der neue Alexander auf dem Balkan* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2009).

subject matter, interest in Albania (and in the Balkans in general) partly rose as consequence of nineteenth-century power politics, once the Ottoman Empire retreated from the region and the Habsburg Empire set out to gain power and influence there.

For a long time, Albanology was a field haunted by the demons of nineteenth-century nationalism. Much of this is now in the past, but the Eastern Adriatic region still struggles to be incorporated in more general accounts of medieval Europe. Currents efforts by Serbian and Croatian historians, who publish articles and deliver papers in more accessible European languages, are slowly but steadily making the situation improve.⁴⁷

In the initial stages of the field, ethnographic and geographical descriptions became fairly common and milestone research work was published in the two issues of the *Illyrisch-albanische Forschungen* edited by Lajos Thallóczy, with contributions by a number of prominent Central and Eastern European historians.⁴⁸ One of the very first lines of research was the ethnic composition of Albanian cities, for which Konstantin Jireček and Milan von Šufflay attempted to provide an outline based on the interpretation of personal names contained in the documents they researched.⁴⁹ The question of Albanian “ethnicity” or “identity” continued to recur in both national and foreign historiographical traditions, and for some time it risked the prevalence of nationalism in historical research.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ See, for example, the source material made available by Croatian historians: Lovorka Čoralić, “Letters and Communications of the Rectors of Budva, Bar and Ulcinj as a Source for the Diplomatic and Political History of Venetian Albania in the Sixteenth Century,” *Etudes Balkaniques* 3 (2009): 89–108; Lovorka Čoralić and Damir Karbić, eds., *Epistolae et communicationes rectorum Antibarensium, Dulcinensium, Buduensium et Castris Novi* (Zagreb: HAZU, 2009). See also: Nada Zečević, *The Tocco of the Greek Realm: Nobility, Power and Migration in Latin Greece (14th–15th Centuries)* (Belgrade: Makart, 2014); Nada Zečević, “Contra Formam Suae Commissionis: Three Examples of Abuses by Venetian Officers in Albania Veneta (Early Fifteenth Century),” *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica*, no. 20 (2016): 73–84. It is true, however, that despite this work, some of the major contributions of, for example, Serbian historians, are published in their respective national languages, as Schmitt points out: Oliver Jens Schmitt, “Between Two Worlds or a World of Its Own? The Eastern Adriatic in the Fifteenth Century,” in *The Crusade in the Fifteenth Century. Converging and Competing Cultures*, ed. Norman Housley (London: Routledge, 2017), 169.

⁴⁸ Among them were Konstantin Jireček, Milan von Šufflay, Theodor Anton Ippen, Josef Ivanic, Imre Karácson, and Béla Péch. For ethnographic description in this vein, see also: Theodor Ippen, *Skutari und die nordalbanische Küstenebene* (Sarajevo: Daniel A. Kajon, 1907); Herbert Louis, *Albanien: eine Landeskunde vornehmlich auf Grund eigener Reisen* (Stuttgart: Engelhorn, 1927).

⁴⁹ Konstantin Jireček, *Die Romanen in den Städten Dalmatiens während des Mittelalters* (Vienna: Gerold, 1904); Milan von Šufflay, *Städte und Burgen Albaniens, hauptsächlich während des Mittelalters* (Vienna: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1924). See also: Pëllumb Xhufi, “La population des villes côtières albanaises du XII au XVe siècle,” *Studia albanica*, no. 19 (1982): 149–59; Giuseppe Valentini, “L’elemento vlah nella zona scutarina nel sec. XV,” in *Südosteuropa unter dem Halbmond: Untersuchungen über Geschichte und Kultur der südosteuropäischen Völker während der Türkenzeit*, ed. Peter Bartl and Horst Glassl (Munich: Trofenik, 1975), 269–274.

⁵⁰ For literature having “Albanian ethnicity” as central research problem, see: Hasan Kaleshi, “Das türkische Vordringen auf dem Balkan und die Islamisierung- Faktoren für die Erhaltung der ethnischen und nationalen Existenz des albanischen Volkes,” in *Südosteuropa unter dem Halbmond: Untersuchungen über Geschichte und Kultur der südosteuropäischen Völker während der Türkenzeit*, ed. Georg Stadtmüller (Munich: Trofenik, 1975), 125–38; Kasem Biçoku, “Les Régions ethniques albanaises au moyen âge et la propagation du nom national ‘Arber,’” *Acta Studia Albanica* 1, no. 2 (1992): 11–23; Ilijaz Rexha, “Shtrirja e vendbanimeve mesjetare mbi bazën e etnonimit Arban-Alban në Ballkan [The Extension of the Medieval Dwelling- Places on the Basis of the Ethnonym Arban- Alban in the Balkans],” *Studime Historike* 3–4 (2005): 7–30; Muhamet Qerimi and Muhamet Mala, “Paraqitja dhe shtrirja e etnonimit Arbër, Arbanon në Bizant [The presence and extension of the ethnonym Arbër, Arbanon in Byzantium],” *Studime Historike* 1–2 (2009): 7–26. A comment on earlier mention of ethnic groups in the Balkans can be found in: Peter Schreiner, “Ethische Invektiven in

Regarding the publication and research of Venetian-Albanian archival material, essential work was done in the nineteenth century by Jireček, Šufflay, Šime Ljubić, Lajos Thallóczy, Nicolae Iorga, Bartolomeo Cecchetti and other historians, who collected documents regarding medieval Albania. As mentioned, interest of Austro-Hungarian scholars in this region was developed partly as a consequence of contemporary political aspirations, i.e., a Habsburg Balkan policy which aimed at strengthening the Austrian presence in the Balkans. Giuseppe Valentini, a Jesuit priest who lived in Albania from 1922 until the outbreak of World War II, is rightly credited with the distinction of bolstering the field of Albanian studies. Once back in Italy, he spent decades compiling and editing *ad unguem* a remarkable amount of documents from the *Archivio di Stato* in Venice concerning administrative and diplomatic affairs in Albania. Valentini stated that he understood the area from Kotor to Durrës as “Albania.”⁵¹ But in practice, under his definition of “Albania” he included spaces being contested by Greeks (and which did not reflect fourteenth-century local contexts), thereby incorporating an unfortunate Albanian nationalistic undertone to his enterprise. Setting that aside, the value of the sources he collected is undeniable. His work was supported by the *Centro Internazionale di Studi Albanesi* of the University of Palermo with the collaboration of other institutions to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of Albania’s national hero, George Castriot, better known as Skanderbeg. Unique in its scope within the field of Albanology, the *Acta Albaniae Veneta* (AAV) was a monumental enterprise that grew to twenty-five volumes, from the fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth century.⁵² Containing thousands of entries, the AAV has been a gold mine for the studies of economic history, prosopography, and topography, as well as being a window to the life and customs of people in Albania and interactions between Venetians and locals. Since then, Alain Ducellier, Ivan Božić, Luan Malltezi, Bariša Krekić, Oliver Schmitt, and other historians worked extensively in the state archive, listing additional archival series and publishing materials for the study of medieval Albania.⁵³

der spätbyzantinischen Händlerwelt zum anonymen Poem im Marcianus gr. XI, 6 aus dem 3. oder 4. Jahrzehnt des 14. Jahrhunderts,” *Zbornik radova Vizantoloskog instituta* 2, no. 50 (2013): 763–778. For a discussion about the different ethnonyms used and applied to Albanians, see: Bardhyl Demiraj, ed., *Sprache und Kultur der Albaner: Zeitliche und räumliche Dimensionen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015).

⁵¹ Giuseppe Valentini, “Praefatio,” in *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, ed. Giuseppe Valentini, vol. 1 (Munich: Typis Josephi Tosini, 1967), ii.

⁵² Giuseppe Valentini, ed., *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, 25 vols. (Munich: Typis Josephi Tosini, 1967-1975).

⁵³ Alain Ducellier, *La Façade Maritime de l’Albanie au Moyen Âge: Durazzo et Valona du XIe au XVe siècle* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1981), XXXII–XXXIII; Bariša Krekić, “Albanians in the Adriatic Cities: Observations on Some Ragusan, Venetian and Dalmatian Sources for the History of the Albanians in the Late Middle Ages,” in *The Medieval Albanians*, ed. Charalambos Gasparis (Athens: Ethniko Hidryma Ereunon, 1998), 209–233; Alexander Rozman, “Sources Concerning the Conflict between Balsha and Venice (1396-1421),” in *The Medieval Albanians*, ed. Charalambos Gasparis (Athens: Ethniko Hidryma Ereunon, 1998), 261–70; Oliver Jens Schmitt, “Sources vénitiennes pour l’histoire des cités Albanaises au 15e siècle,” in *The Medieval Albanians*, ed. Charalambos Gasparis (Athens: Ethniko Hidryma Ereunon, 1998), 307–323; Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 18–21.

These scholars also touched upon cardinal aspects of Venetian Albania's political and historical evolution. To mention some examples, Šufflay insisted on the idea of a multi-layered Albanian cultural milieu, Ducellier wrote extensively about the cultural and political configuration of central and south Albania, Krekić and Sima Ćirković were interested in the presence of Albanians in other cities and the commercial contacts they maintained.⁵⁴ Schmitt unified these divergent perspectives in his work about *Albania Veneta*. He analyzed the mechanisms by which the Venetians managed to organize the heterogeneous Albanian province in political, administrative, demographical, and economic terms. In doing so, he abridged most of the literature written in Albanian, Serbian and Croatian, making it accessible in a wider spoken European language. Schmitt, together with Alexander Rozman, delivered important contributions to elucidate the historical sources for the study of the conflict between Venice and Albanian families.⁵⁵ More recently, Monique O'Connell studied Albania in relation to the Venetian way of administering its territories, that is to say, Venetian politics carried out on the basis of "negotiation, contestation, collaboration, and accommodation."⁵⁶ Etleva Lala and Edmond Malaj studied the relationship between Albanians and the religious authorities, while Lucia Nadin, Gherardo Ortalli, Pëllumb Xhufi, and other scholars collaborated in the book edited by Nadin which brought to light a precious source of legal tradition in north Albania.⁵⁷ Nadin has also described the century-long ties between Albania in Venice for the general public.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Milan von Šufflay, "Das mittelalterliche Albanien," in *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*, ed. Ludwig von Thallóczy, vol. 2 (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1916), 282–87. For a thorough discussion of Šufflay's views and his political motivations, see: Oliver Jens Schmitt, "'Die Monade des Balkans' - die Albaner im Mittelalter," in *Albanische Geschichte. Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung*, ed. Oliver Jens Schmitt and Eva Anne Frantz (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2009), 61–80. See also: Alain Ducellier, "Kotor as a Meeting Point for Albanian Emigrants in the 14th and 15th centuries?," in *Città e sistema Adriatico alla fine del Medioevo: Bilancio degli studi e prospettive di ricerca*, ed. Michele Pietro Ghezzi (Venice: Soc. Dalmata di Storia Patria, 1998), 121–140; Bariša Krekić, *Unequal Rivals: Essays on Relations between Dubrovnik and Venice in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 2007); Sima Ćirković, "Les Albanais à la lumière des sources historiques des Slaves du sud," in *Iliri i Albanci. Les Illyriens et les Albanais*, ed. Milutin Garašanin (Belgrade: Académie serbe des Sciences et des Arts, 1988), 341–359.

⁵⁵ Rozman, "Sources," 263; Schmitt, "Sources vénitiennes pour l'histoire des cités Albanaises au 15e siècle." See also: Giuseppe Gelcich, *La Zedda e la dinastia dei Balšidi. Studi storici documentati* (Split: Tip. Sociale Spalatina G. Laghi, 1899); Luan Malltezi, "Shkaqet e Luftës së Balshës III Kundër Republikës së Venedikut në 20 Vjetët e Para të shek. XV [The causes of the war of Balsha III against the republic of Venice in the first 20 years of the fifteenth century]," *Studime historike*, no. 2 (1980): 179–95; Injac Zamputi, "Autonomitë e qyteteve shqiptare të principatës së Balshajve dhe pasojat negative të pushtimit Venedikas-Fund i shek XIV-fillim i shek. XV [The autonomy of the Albanian cities of the Balsa principality and the negative consequences of the Venetian invasion - end of the 15th century]," *Studime historike*, no. 3 (1980): 169–87.

⁵⁶ Monique O'Connell, *Men of Empire: Power and Negotiation in Venice's Maritime State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 2.

⁵⁷ Etleva Lala, "Regnum Albaniae, the Papal Curia, and the Western Visions of a Borderline Nobility" (Phd Diss., Budapest, Central European University, 2008); Edmond Malaj, "Në gjurmë të monumenteve kishtarë brenda Shkodrës mesjetare [On the traces of ecclesiastical monuments inside of medieval Shkodra]," *Studime Historike* 1–2 (2016): 4–32; Lucia Nadin, ed., *Statuti di Scutari della prima metà del secolo XIV con le addizioni fino al 1469* (Rome: Viella, 2002). For a gender studies perspective in the code, see: Etleva Lala, "Women's Status in Medieval Albanian Laws," in *East Meets West: A Gendered View of Legal Tradition*, ed. Grete Jacobsen and Heide Wunder (Kiel: Solivagus, 2008).

⁵⁸ Lucia Nadin, *Venezia e Albania. Una storia di incontri e secolari legami* (Venice: Segretaria Regionale per la Cultura, 2013).

Although Albanian agricultural products had quite a modest presence on Venetian markets, the fourteenth century was nevertheless a “period of prosperity” for the Albanian economy in the production of grain, wine, oil and products of farming and fishing. In the last decades of the twentieth century, Albanian social and economic historians worked on expanding available knowledge on the subject, thus concentrating their attention on the economy of Albanian villages.⁵⁹

In Ducellier’s words, migration is one of the *tartes à la crème* of Mediterranean history. Constant migration of people had significance for the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that were involved in the process of developing city and class identities. In consequence, important research has been done on how local elites in cities along the Adriatic developed an analogous social division to that of Venice and how foreigners were incorporated (or marginalized) into Venetian social fabric. In the last few years, the topic of migration and human transfers across the Mediterranean has been rediscovered, and there has also been an increasing interest in the amount and structural reasons of Albanian migration in the late Middle Ages, and particularly towards Venice.⁶⁰

Venice was not interested in the “Italianization” of her subject cities. In other words, there was no such thing as a Venetian linguistic policy.⁶¹ Working in a different part of the Adriatic, Diego Dotto identified the fluctuation between Venetian, Dalmatian forms, forms of Slavic derivation, as well as Latinizing forms and real Latinisms in the archival material of (mainly) the Ragusan archive.⁶²

⁵⁹ Luan Malltezi, *Qytetet e bregdetit shqiptar gjatë sundimit venedikas, 1392-1478: aspekte të jetës së tyre [The Albanian coastal cities during the Venetian rule, 1392-1478: their characteristics]* (Tirana: Akademia e Shkencave e RPS të Shqipërisë, Instituti i Historisë, 1988); Ivan Božić, “Le système foncier en ‘Albanie vénitienne’ au XVe siècle,” *Bollettino dell’Istituto di storia della società e dello stato veneziano* 5–6 (1963): 65–140; Spiro Shkurti, *Der Mythos vom Wandervolk der Albaner: Landwirtschaft in den albanischen Gebieten (13. - 17. Jahrhundert)* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1997); Spiro Shkurti, “Recherches dans la vie économique de la ville Albanaise du Moyen Age,” *Acta Studia Albanica* 34 (2001): 119–146.

⁶⁰ Lucia Nadin, *Migrazioni e integrazione: Il caso degli Albanesi a Venezia (1479-1552)* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2008); Ermanno Orlando, *Migrazioni mediterranee: migranti, minoranze e matrimoni a Venezia nel basso medioevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2014); Brunehilde Imhaus, *Le minoranze orientali a Venezia: 1300 - 1510* (Rome: Il Veltrò, 1997); Alain Ducellier et al., *Les Chemins de l’exil: Bouleversements de l’Est européen et migrations vers l’Ouest à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: A. Colin, 1992); Paolo Petta, *Stradioti: Soldati albanesi in Italia (sec. XV - XIX)* (Lecce: Argo, 1996); P. F. Bellinello, “Aspetto storico-demografico e socio-economico degli Albanesi in Italia,” *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 40 (1986): 3–56; Lovorka Čoralić, “Od Ulcinja do Drača – Albanski Useljenici u Mlecima (14.-18. stoljeće) [From Ulcinj to Durrës – Albanian Immigrants in Venice (from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Century)],” *Zbornik Odsjeka za povijesne znanosti Zavoda za povijesne i društvene znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti* 29 (2011): 39–82.

⁶¹ Rembert Eufe, “Politica linguistica della Serenissima. Luca Tron, Antonio Condulmer, Marin Sanudo e il volgare nell’amministrazione veneziana a Creta,” *Philologie im Netz* 23 (2003): 15–43; Ljerka Šimunković, “La politica linguistica della Serenissima verso i possedimenti «di là da mar»: il caso della Dalmazia,” in *Mito e antimito di Venezia nel bacino adriatico: secoli XV - XIX*, ed. Sante Graciotti (Rome: Il Calamo, 2001), 100.

⁶² Diego Dotto, “*Scriptae*” venezianeggianti a Ragusa nel XIV secolo: edizione e commento di testi volgari dell’Archivio di Stato di Dubrovnik (Rome: Viella, 2008); Diego Dotto, “Testi e documenti medievali in volgare veneto o venezianeggianti dell’Archivio di Stato di Dubrovnik (Ragusa): recupero, catalogazione e nuova edizione commentata,” in *Eredità culturali dell’Adriatico. Archeologia, storia, lingua e letteratura*, ed. Silvana Collodo and Giovanni Luigi Fontana (Rome: Viella, 2008), 225–31. See also: Sima Ćirković, “Tradition Interchanged: Albanians in the Serbian, Serbs in the Albanian Late Medieval Texts,” in *The Medieval Albanians*, ed. Charalambos Gasparis (Athens: Ethniko Hidryma Ereunon, 1998), 195; Žarko Muljačić, “Conflitti linguistici a Dubrovnik (Ragusa) nel Medio Evo,” in *Das Dalmatische. Studien zu einer untergegangenen Sprache* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), 131–38; Žarko Muljačić, “Sui venezianismi nello

In the future, studies by Dotto and others may provide a starting point to scholars interested in the Albanian realm, even though the lack of “indigenous” sources for the Albanian space have thus far not allowed to reach any decisive conclusion concerning the linguistic reality of medieval Albanian territories.

More broadly, intellectual and cultural movements in Venice have often been studied in relation to the incorporation of the *terraferma* into Venice’s holdings, but intellectual and cultural connections with the *stato da mar* also have a long history in scholarly tradition. For the Greek-speaking territories, the emphasis has been placed in the interaction between Greek and Venetian elites, particularly when it comes to the teaching of ancient Greek and the transmission of manuscripts bearing works from classical antiquity.⁶³ While Istria, Dalmatia, and *Albania Veneta* are seen as having a more passive role, by receiving not only intellectual developments, but also Venetian communal institutions and social organization, Luka Špoljarić, Zdenka Janeković Römer and others have revealed instances where local innovation and adaptation also occurred.⁶⁴

Sources

The Council’s “Deliberazioni”

The *Deliberazioni*, the repository of Council resolutions, lie at the center of this investigation. The *Deliberazioni* are made out of two series: the *Misti* or miscellaneous deliberations, which contain the majority of decisions, and the *Secreti* or secret deliberations, which record issues deemed sensitive. A first secret series ran from 1335 until 1397. Later, starting in 1401, the *secreti* ran until 1630.

slavo balcanico occidentale: Aspetti storici - principi metodologici - compiti futuri,” in *Linguistica e dialettologia veneta*, ed. Gunter Holtus (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1987), 243–52.

⁶³ Pertusi, “L’umanesimo greco della fine del secolo XIV agli inizi del secolo XVI”; Chryssa Maltezou, “Byzantine ‘Consuetudines’ in Venetian Crete,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 49 (1995): 269–80; Benjamin Arbel, *Cyprus, the Franks and Venice, 13th-16th Centuries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Gino Benzoni, *L’eredità greca e l’ellenismo veneziano* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2002); Giorgio Ravegnani, *Bisanzio e Venezia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006); Anastasia Papadia-Lala, “L’interprete nel mondo greco-veneziano (XIV-XVIII sec). Lingua, comunicazione, politica,” in *I Greci durante la venetocrazia. Uomini, spazio, idee*, ed. Chryssa Maltezou (Venice: Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, 2009), 121–30; Charalambos Gasparis, “Terra o Mare? Greci e Veneziani nel nuovo contesto economico delle colonie (XIII-XIV sec.),” in *I Greci durante la venetocrazia. Uomini, spazio, idee*, ed. Chryssa Maltezou (Venice: Istituto Ellenico di Studi Bizantini e Postbizantini di Venezia, 2009), 39–51.

⁶⁴ See: Luka Špoljarić, “The First Dalmatian Humanists and the Classics: A Manuscript Perspective,” in *A Handbook to Classical Reception in Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. Zara Martirosova Torlone, Dana LaCourse Munteanu, and Dorota Dutsch (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 46–56; Zdenka Janeković Römer, “On the Influence of Byzantine Culture on Renaissance Dubrovnik and Dalmatia,” *Dubrovnik Annals* 11 (2007): 7–24; Zdenka Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom: The Nobility of Dubrovnik between the Middle Ages and Humanism* (Zagreb: Academia Scientiarum et Artium Croatica, 2015); Lovro Kunčević, “On Ragusan Libertas in the Late Middle Ages,” *Dubrovnik Annals* 14 (2010): 25–69. On the artistic realm, see: Valentina Živković, “Tota Depicta Picturis Grecis. The Style and Iconography of Religious Painting in Medieval Kotor (Montenegro),” *Il Capitale Culturale: Studies on the Value of Cultural Heritage*, no. 10 (2014): 65–89.

The archival practice of indexing Council discussions did not exist for the period under study. Through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Venetian ruling body acknowledged the need to have a system by which documents could be classified. Consequently, the ducal chancery appointed a special office, the *Segretario alle rubriche*, for the specific task of creating both general and alphabetic indexes.⁶⁵ In this way, the archives of the Council and other major offices were provided with listings and general headings divided by subject. These, important as they were, are unreliable from the number of inaccuracies with which they were compiled. Therefore, during the period covered by this study, Council deliberations have no separate collections for documents specifically regarding Albania or any other place by region.⁶⁶

In 2007, the *Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* began to publish the *Venezia – Senato: Deliberazioni miste* under the direction of Maria Francesca Tiepolo, Dieter Girgensohn, Gherardo Ortalli and Ermanno Orlando, in 22 volumes. These, unfortunately, cover only the years from 1293 until 1381. My investigation, however, was deemed possible thanks to the *Progetto Divenire*. This project, carried out and funded by Benjamin Kohl and the Hedgelawn Foundation, digitized relevant series from the most important Venetian state councils, including the Senate. The project digitized all Council deliberations from 1300 until 1500. Consequently, although the physical books can no longer be accessed in the Venetian archive, Senate records (and several other series) are freely accessible online through the project's website.⁶⁷

I examined a total of 4,871 individual entries, covering the following dates and registers:

a) *Deliberazioni, Misti*

- *Registri* 42⁶⁸ (January 4, 1392 – May 12, 1394): 875 entries
- *Registri* 43⁶⁹ (May 12, 1394 – May 29, 1397): 1154 entries
- *Registri* 44⁷⁰ (June 1, 1397 – February 27, 1400): 966 entries
- *Registri* 45⁷¹ (March 1, 1400 – February 27, 1402): 840 entries
- *Registri* 46⁷² (March 3, 1402 – December 30, 1402): 348 entries

b) *Deliberazioni, Secreti*

- *Registri* (e)⁷³ (March 8, 1392 – April 7, 1397): 367 entries

⁶⁵ Andrea Da Mosto, *L'Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Indice generale, storico, descrittivo ed analitico* (Rome: Biblioteca d'arte Editrice, 1940), 4; Filippo de Vivo, "Ordering the Archive in Early Modern Venice (1400–1650)," *Archival Science* 10, no. 3 (2010): 231–248.

⁶⁶ After 1440, the series was divided into "Terra" and "Mar," dealing respectively with the administrative matters of the mainland and overseas possessions. For a comprehensive list (although not always accurate) of all the documents issued by each Venetian office kept in the State Archive in Venice, see: Andrea Da Mosto, *L'Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Indice generale, storico, descrittivo ed analitico*, 2 vols. (Rome: Biblioteca d'arte Editrice, 1940). The online guide SiASVe (*Sistema informativo dell'Archivio di Stato di Venezia*: <http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/siasve/cgi-bin/pagina.pl>) follows Mosto's index, but it has also entries where information is inaccurate in relation to the actual archival holdings.

⁶⁷ <http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/divenire/collezioni.htm>

⁶⁸ <http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/divenire/ua.htm?idUa=72>

⁶⁹ <http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/divenire/ua.htm?idUa=73>

⁷⁰ <http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/divenire/ua.htm?idUa=74>

⁷¹ <http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/divenire/ua.htm?idUa=75>

⁷² <http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/divenire/ua.htm?idUa=76>

⁷³ <http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/divenire/ua.htm?idUa=101>

c) *Deliberazioni, Secreti*

- *Registri* 1⁷⁴ (April 10, 1401 – December 27, 1402): 321 entries

Valentini collected and edited in his *Acta Albaniae Veneta* virtually all Council deliberations which mention Durrës, Lezhë, Shkodra, and Drisht. I will refer to the *Deliberazioni* which appear in the AAV with both their numeration in the AAV and their page number in the archival series. For all other entries, the reference corresponds to the archival series.

Aside from the AAV, Council records have functioned as basis for a number of “regional” series pertaining to, for example, the history of Croatia, England, or France.⁷⁵ These collections were landmarks of nineteenth-century scholarship, but they should be used carefully. Such collections are misleading in that they present a continuity which did not exist in the actual records of the *pregadi*’s meetings. In the AAV, for example, one can follow the thread of a discussion while easily forgetting that several weeks may have elapsed between each one, and that its importance swung back and forth, influenced by the discussions of other, perhaps more pressing crises.

Antonio Morosini’s “Diario”

Antonio Morosini, a contemporary to the events covered by this study, set out to write a *Diary* of the events which he considered relevant for Venice’s history. I selected a small portion of his work (which corresponds to the ten year I analyze), in order to test the resonance of the *pregadi*’s discussions outside the ducal palace.

The historical and linguistic value of Morosini’s work is enormous, yet it remained obscure for centuries. Perhaps due to the neglect that this form of history writing suffered in the past, or maybe from simple bad luck, the *Diary* passed unnoticed in the world of letters until the *bibliofilo* Annibale degli Abati Olivieri gave Morosini’s autograph manuscript to Marco Foscarini in the eighteenth century. The latter showed a deep appreciation for the text but discovered it too late to include it in his work on Venetian literature. In the late nineteenth century, Léon Dorez and Germain Lefèvre-Pontalis were commissioned by the *Conseil de la Société de l’histoire de France* to pursue archival research for the study of Morosini’s text. Between 1898 and 1902, they published the extracts from the *Diary* concerning the history of France, and in the fourth volume of the series they produced the

⁷⁴ <http://www.archiviodistatovenezia.it/divenire/ua.htm?idUa=103>

⁷⁵ Rawdon Brown, *L’archivio di Venezia con riguardo speciale alla storia inglese* (Venice: G. Antonelli e L. Basadonna, 1865); Armand Baschet, *Les archives de Venise. Histoire de la chancellerie secrète : le sénat, le cabinet des ministres, le conseil des Dix et les inquisiteurs d’Etat dans leurs rapports avec la France* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1870); Šime Ljubić, *Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium*, vol. 4 (Zagreb: Academia Scientiarum et Artium Slavorum Meridionalium, 1874).

first comprehensive study of his life and œuvre.⁷⁶ This study continues to be a reference point for scholars.

As it stands today, the original manuscript is composed in one long section until the year of 1413/14, and a second section until 1433, shortly before Morosini's death. The first fifty pages of the first section are missing, but several folios were inserted as a way of introduction to the text. This prologue was likely composed by Foscarini himself.⁷⁷ Giuseppe Gallovich, archivist at Venice's *Archivio di Stato*, took up the titanic task of producing a copy of the manuscript in 1887/1888, which is now held in the Biblioteca Marciana.⁷⁸ At present, the manuscript for Morosini's text is kept in two bound volumes in the *Österreichische Nationalbibliothek* in Vienna.⁷⁹

Although the surviving copy of Morosini's *Diary* received attention from historians throughout the twentieth century, a partial first publication of the text—in three volumes accompanied by an English translation on facing pages—was carried out by Michele Pietro Ghezzi, John Melville-Jones, and Andrea Rizzi between 1999 and 2005.⁸⁰ This edition covered only a fraction of the entire *Diary*, until the year 1407. A complete critical edition of the text of Morosini's *Diary* was published by Nanetti in 2010 under the happily fitting title: *Il Codice Morosini: il mondo visto da Venezia (1094-1433)*, accompanied by the detailed apparatus mentioned previously. Currently, Morosini's work can be studied interactively online through *Engineering Historical Memory* (EHM), an ongoing research project run by Nanetti which seeks to bring primary sources to the digital age.⁸¹

Note on Names, Transcriptions and Dates

I render proper names following their Italian spelling, as standardized in the online database *Rulers of Venice*.⁸² For toponyms, I use the current English form even in cases where historical names are familiar to the Anglophone audience (for example, I use Nikopol instead of Nicopolis and Heraklion instead of Candia). The title of Venetian provincial administrators varied depending on the location they ruled over. I use the same term (governor) to refer to Venice's chief official regardless of location. The names of other offices are translated according to the closest English term which

⁷⁶ Germain Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Étude sur Morosini et son oeuvre. Annexes et tables*, ed. Germain Lefèvre-Pontalis and Léon Dorez, *Chronique d'Antonio Morosini: extraits relatifs à l'histoire de France 4* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1902).

⁷⁷ An English translation of Foscarini's introduction can be found in: Ghezzi, Melville-Jones, and Rizzi, *The Morosini Codex*, 1999, 1:xvii–xviii.

⁷⁸ Morosini, *Il Codice Morosini*, 2:xxxix.

⁷⁹ The manuscript entered their collection in 1801, and one may assume that it was bound in two volumes only after that: Ghezzi, Melville-Jones, and Rizzi, *The Morosini Codex*, 1:ix. For a detailed description of the codex, see: Morosini, *Il Codice Morosini*, 2:xxv–xxxvi.

⁸⁰ Antonio Morosini, *The Morosini Codex*, ed. Michele Pietro Ghezzi, John Melville-Jones, and Andrea Rizzi, 3 vols. (Padua: Unipress, 1999-2005).

⁸¹ <https://engineeringhistoricalmemory.com/MorosiniCodex.php>

⁸² <http://rulersofvenice.org>

describes the activity the post carried. In consequence, I use “governor” to refer to both the *baiulus* of Durrës and the *comes et capitaneus* of Shkodra, but I use “consul” for the *baiulus* of Cyprus.

I capitalize the offices held by members of *Consiglio dei pregadi* in order to distinguish them from posts elsewhere which shared the same name. Therefore, a Councilor refers to a member of the Council in Venice, while a councilor could have his post in Negroponte or Coron. The title of the Captain of the Gulf is capitalized in order to distinguish him from the captains of merchant galleys.

All transcriptions from the *Deliberazioni* are my own. In some cases, my reading differs from the text presented by Valentini in the AAV. I do not signal those differences; if a word startles the reader, he or she can easily access the original text online. The transcriptions were made to comply with historical (rather than philological) conventions. Although I did not preserve the capitalization or punctuation from the original documents, the text of the deliberations is not completely modernized. I did not correct apparent mistakes or standardized spelling. In this way, I tried to offer, even if in a limited form, some semblance of their linguistic richness.

Unless stated otherwise, all translations of the Council deliberations are mine. I use John Melville-Jones’ translation of Morosini’s *Diary*.

The Venetian calendar year began in March. I adapted all dates to modern usage.

Chapter 1. Talking and “Talk”

Anyone visiting Venice today sees that the seaside city, with its canals, narrow bridges and many public squares, is a showcase for sociability. This was as true in the late fourteenth century as it is today. Filippo de Vivo writes that Venetians of the Renaissance experienced their city by walking, watching people, talking, singing and passing along the latest news.⁸³ The *pregadi* inhabited this space and experienced it just like everyone else. As they walked to the ducal palace —the center of government affairs— the streets they walked were abuzz with colorful chatter.

Compared to other seats of power, a distinctive element of fourteenth-century Venice is that *talking* was fundamental to its official life. Patricians invested a great deal of their time and energy into it, both inside and outside state offices. Yet the documents produced by the Senate did not record the words uttered in Council proceedings, nor did they mirror street Venetian (they were kept in Latin, not in the Venetian vernacular). Therefore, in this study, the meaning of “talk” refers neither to that vivacious *talking* nor to the *Deliberazioni* as such. Rather, the *pregadi*’s talk may be understood as the content, tone, priorities, and value judgments that surfaced among the body of *pregadi* once a Council meeting was in full swing. Their talk implies debate and also a more informal type of communication, one that was not controlled by formulaic statements and routine, and which could contain logical as much as emotional content. It refers, in short, to the maneuverings that occurred behind the Senate’s closed doors and to which there is no longer access. Yet the Council books preserved at least two aspects of the *pregadi*’s talk: what they talked *about* and the legislative result of that activity, namely, the approval or not of the proposals presented to them.

Scholarship has concentrated on those two aspects because, at first glance, Senate records seem to obfuscate any other information. They are, truth be told, quite succinct in words and style. A truism in Venetian scholarship is that entries contain no indications regarding how discussion was handled because entries do not offer explicit notations or information about the tone of the debates. De Vivo and Maartje van Gelder explained that preserved official responses and decisions were worded with the specific intents of hiding discord and minimizing evidence of disagreement among patricians. The reason for this is that keeping records of opposing verbal interventions might give the impression of a fragmented ruling class —something to be avoided by any means possible. Purposefully, “secretaries were instructed to record only the final decisions in council meetings and

⁸³ Filippo de Vivo, “Walking in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Mobilizing the Early Modern City,” *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 19, no. 1 (2016): 116. For studies on informal communication on later periods, see also: Elizabeth Horodowich, “The Gossiping Tongue: Oral Networks, Public Life and Political Culture in Early Modern Venice,” *Renaissance Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 22–45; Alexander Cowan, “Gossip and Street Culture in Early Modern Venice,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 12, no. 3–4 (2008): 313–333; Alexander Cowan, “Seeing Is Believing: Urban Gossip and the Balcony in Early Modern Venice,” *Gender & History* 23, no. 3 (2011): 721–38.

not to refer to debates or signs of discord.”⁸⁴ But there is a caveat to this. Throughout the over 4,800 entries I examined, records of losing motions do show that there was irresolution and vacillation. Furthermore, during the decade covered by this study, entries preserved the names of those proposing both losing and winning motions, thus indirectly revealing differences in age and prestige among the opposing factions. Only after 1412, instead of noting all the motions with the names of their authors, secretaries omitted all names except for those who proposed the winning motion.⁸⁵ Such deliberate register of contending judgements now serves to document the competition of priorities and ways of reasoning which often surfaced in challenging situations.

Bringing attention to the *pregadi*'s “talk” enhances our understanding of Senate politics. As a body of government, the Council had an impressive capacity to handle decisions relating to political powers in Europe, the Levant, Byzantium or the Ottoman empire successfully. In the face of outsiders, those decisions were the result of a unanimous body, but the *Deliberazioni* functioned as the Council's private diary and, as a result, entries could bear containing the opinions and irresoluteness central to the *pregadi*'s day-to-day work. Additionally, the *Deliberazioni* were instrumental in preserving the Council's institutional memory: along with routine administrative decisions, these records allowed fourteenth-century Venetians to retrieve what the Council had considered to be important matters of state — the turning points of their city's history.

Theoretical Approach and Methodology

The “contextualism” of John Pocock and Quentin Skinner will guide the understanding of the realities contained within Council entries. “Talk” is, in fact, an adaptation of Pocock's conceptualization of “political language.” As a concept, “political language” allows us to identify “idioms, rhetorics, ways of talking about politics, distinguishable language games of which each may have its own vocabulary, rules, preconditions and implications, tone and style.”⁸⁶ At the core of Pocock's concept lies a distinction between “acts of speech, whether oral, scribal or typographical [*parole*], and the conditions or contexts in which these acts were performed [*langue*].”⁸⁷ Without

⁸⁴ Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 18; “Cœur de l'État, lieu de tension,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 68e année, no. 3 (2013): 715–18; Maartje van Gelder, “The People's Prince: Popular Politics in Early Modern Venice,” *The Journal of Modern History* 90, no. 2 (2018): 254–55.

⁸⁵ Enrico Besta, *Il senato veneziano: origine, costituzione, attribuzioni e riti* (Venice: A spese della Società, 1899), 192.

⁸⁶ J. G. A. Pocock, “The Concept of a Language and the Metier d'historien: Some Considerations on Practice,” in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 21.

⁸⁷ Pocock, 20. See also: J. G. A. Pocock, “The Reconstruction of Discourse: Towards the Historiography of Political Thought,” *Modern Language Notes* 96, no. 5 (1981): 959–80; J. G. A. Pocock, “Introduction: The State of the Art,” in *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge:

claiming that the *pregadi*'s talk is itself a full-fledged political language, I consider that their talk is nevertheless analogous to Pocock's concept because it is the sum of linguistic acts (*parole*) and a manner of discussing politics (*langue*).⁸⁸ The former was encoded in the documents preserved and handed down to us, and the latter was imbedded in Venice's social reality.

The above distinction is central to my analysis. I consider entries within the *Deliberazioni* to be linguistic actions, acts of communication, embodiments of a particular intention or intentions. By approaching Senate records in this way, I hope to address the question of what it meant for the outcome of discussions to be recorded with certain specific words and not others. Given that recorded deliberations are ultimately texts, the intention and meaning behind their drafting presupposes "the grasp both of what [those texts] were intended to mean, and how this meaning was intended to be taken."⁸⁹ Skinner proposed that understanding this connection equates to understanding the strategies that were voluntarily adopted to convey meaning, even if this was done "with deliberate obliqueness."⁹⁰

In consequence, I take Council entries to be *parole* in Pocock's sense. They constitute a discursive genre — codified through scribal practice — and they represent their own discrete register of political expression. But given that individual texts are not inherently self-sufficient in unlocking their own meaning, studying only the entries' content or the word forms which they employ is an inadequate methodology for reaching full understanding of the source material. For example, upon reading "noua" in the incipit of a Council entry, the reader may assume that this word refers directly to "news" roughly akin to our usage of the word. Even if we accept that an analogous meaning was available to fourteenth-century scribes, such analysis would lead to an incomplete understanding of the text, because it constitutes a misinterpretation of the primary function which the word fulfills.

To straighten out this lapse, one should look for the most reliable source of the text's meaning within the social reality to which it was originally grounded — its *langue*. According to Pocock and Skinner, a text should be placed in its surrounding context because all linguistic acts are "a response to more immediate circumstances," and we should in consequence study not the texts in themselves,

Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1–36. For discussions on his model, see: D. N DeLuna, ed., *The Political Imagination in History: Essays Concerning J.G.A. Pocock* (Baltimore: Owlworks, 2006).

⁸⁸ Pocock's model demands that the historian "employs detective procedures that enable him to frame and validate hypotheses asserting that such and such a language was being employed and was capable of being employed in such and such ways": Pocock, "Introduction: The State of the Art," 9. To prove that the historian found actual evidence of a distinct type of language, as opposed to "his own ingenuity in reading it into them," he provides a series of conditions: "a) [T]hat diverse authors employed the same idiom and performed diverse and even contrary utterances in it, (b) that the idiom recurs in texts and contexts varying from those in which it was at first detected, and (c) that authors expressed in words their consciousness that they were employing such an idiom and developed critical and second-order languages to comment on and regulate their employment of it": Pocock, 10.

⁸⁹ Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8 (1969): 48.

⁹⁰ Skinner, 32.

but rather ‘the *context* of other happenings which explains them’.⁹¹ Any plausible account of the *pregadi*’s talk (the Council’s deliberative event) demands that we consider the entries’ *langue*, which is constituted by cultural elements within Venetian society. Coming back to the example of “noua” above, it is not enough to attempt definition of the word according to contemporary meanings or even its placement within the entry. One must equally acknowledge that contextual realities are fundamental in uncovering what the word *does* within the text: the word describes information in the sphere of Venice’s most important organ of power, it signals an appraisal of the situation by members of the patrician class, and it marks a convention employed by a century-long record-keeping tradition. I will offer a more elaborate comment on these “languages” of Venetian society in the second chapter of this study. Such languages cannot be brushed aside because they provide the basis for the explanations which fourteenth-century secretaries, at least in principle, would have used to describe the entries they were instructed to write.

Pocock and Skinner’s theory of interpretation have enhanced our understanding of works by authors such as Machiavelli, Shakespeare and Thomas Hobbes.⁹² Senate records differ from those types of writing in that Council entries are neither works of literature nor works of philosophy, and in that an unidentified secretary wrote them. Empirical considerations of the Senate’s activities reveal that these entries had a “double nature”: their content originated from the delivered proposal by a specific individual in a Council meeting, yet a secretary was in charge of the entries’ final form and structure (senatorial scribal conventions had furnished him with guidelines on how to record them).⁹³ This double nature should not be seen as an impediment for analysis. The Council’s record-keeping guidelines have clout equal to a political writer’s authority over his or her own statements. Council records are like the texts Pocock and Skinner analyze: each responds to a political occurrence, are inscribed within a specific cultural context, and are worded to convey specific meaning. Understanding what entries were *intended to mean* when later retrieved by the Council is fundamental for avoiding the too-common danger which Skinner calls “writing historical nonsense.”⁹⁴

Such historical nonsense is found when a word is defined using an extemporaneous meaning which the word could not have possibly intended to convey, since that meaning did not exist at the time the word was written or spoken. Historical nonsense has taken other forms as well, such as when

⁹¹ Here Skinner is aided by Derek Crabtree and John Higham (emphasis added by Skinner): Skinner, 39. For those authors’ specific references see Skinner’s text.

⁹² J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1975); Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Quentin Skinner, *Forensic Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹³ More research is needed to determine the agency of scribes and secretaries in this process, particularly in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Scribes were not patricians, but belonged to the class which came second in status within Venetian society. For a study of secretaries and the chancery staff which accounts for their role as professional body (although for a much later period), see: Andrea Zannini, *Burocrazia e burocrati a Venezia in età moderna: i cittadini originari (secc. XVI-XVIII)* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 1993).

⁹⁴ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 31.

historians quote Council deliberations as something which Venice “said.” Since a city cannot talk, “Venice said” is a metaphorical device referring to an act of speech uttered by Venice’s ruling body. But this may be equally misleading. In some cases, what “Venice said” consists of sentences within an intervention by one or several speakers who never intended —and possibly not even dreamt— that their personal opinions would become part of a public or official reckoning. This sleight of hand leads easily to a more serious sort of nonsense: in some cases, historians build unifying historical narratives about Venice on the basis of such statements which never intended to fulfill the purpose historians assign to them.⁹⁵ I subscribe to Skinner’s explanation that the main cause of such nonsense is the practice of reproducing what texts *say* while disregarding what texts *do*:

To study simply what each classic writer says is unavoidably to run the perpetual danger of lapsing into various kinds of historical absurdity, and also to anatomize the various ways in which the results may in consequence be classified not as histories at all, but more appropriately as mythologies.⁹⁶

Adapting Skinner’s renowned expression, the purpose of my analysis is to elucidate “what secretaries were up to,” according to their linguistic actions (i.e., the entries’ formulation).⁹⁷ But how does one go about putting this into practice? What are the appropriate procedures for reaching understanding of the meaning Council entries intended to convey?

I acknowledge that these texts responded to their immediate circumstances, and this reflection guides how my study proceeds. Examining the *Deliberazioni* page by page highlights that the momentousness and importance which the Council assigned to an event did not depend on the date it occurred, but rather at the moment when news reached the ducal palace and was discussed by the *pregadi*. Similarly, I do not base the importance of any given entry by deriving it, in retrospective wisdom, from what came to happen. For that reason, this study’s description of decisions and debates favors an unrelenting chronology of the *pregadi*’s day by day, month by month, year by year. The developments that led to Venice’s rule of Albanian territories may acquire in this way a sort of impressionistic character: not as if seen in hindsight with the privileged knowledge of how things would end up, but as an unfolding challenge shaping, and shaped by, the communication between patricians in the Council and their responses to the world outside the lagoon. In consequence, the reader will notice my deliberate reluctance to establish a relationship between a given Council decision and the reconfiguration of politics which took place after subsequent events. The *pregadi* had an acute capacity for political insight but still could not forecast the future.

⁹⁵ Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 239.

⁹⁶ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 7.

⁹⁷ Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), xi.

My study’s methodology rests upon the link between the form of individual entries and the realm of Council activity, for function follows form. I will explain this through an example. The following entry —which was recorded on the same day and page as the first entry I analyze—, is otherwise unrelated to Albania. But given its “proximity,” I will use it as a point of illumination. It reads as follows:

That it should be granted to the nobleman Vittore Morosini, councilor in Crete, as written by our regimen there, that Vittore can spend 80 hyperperi in repairs to his house, in addition to the 25 hyperperi that he is allowed to spend according to his commission.⁹⁸

The “standard” entry above constitutes one of many among all recorded deliberations. As recorded, the style of the entry is simple, and it contains only one straightforward section: the Council received a petition and it was suggested that it be approved. We know what the entry *says*: Vittore Morosini’s house was in a bad state and the Venetian administration in Crete wrote to the Council requesting repair funds. But what is the entry *doing*? In the case above, secretaries (abiding by a specific template) arranged the information contained in an incoming letter to denote that a routine consultative activity had taken place. In this way, the “it should be granted” (“quod concedatur”) of the entry’s incipit signals that the request in question refers to an issue that the Collegio —the Council’s main policy-making cabinet— had already looked into, but whose approval was ultimately the Council’s prerogative (the granting of funds for overseas offices).

Scholars have generally singled out commissions, provisions, and (occasionally) elections to reflect on the kind of information contained within the *Deliberazioni*.⁹⁹ All other entries —such as the entry above— constitute a foggy “everything else” and neither their wording nor their structure have been analyzed systematically. The reason for such preference may derive from the fact that commissions and provisions are (for the most part) easily identifiable by the presence of a header or by capital letters on the left-hand side of the entry, while all other entries look virtually identical. Additionally, historians have long neglected the study of each Senate entry as a linguistics act in the Pocock-Skinner sense explained above, due to the tacit assumption that, since all entries are worded presenting the Council as a unified body, to look at one entry would reveal the conventions that rule the rest. Chapters four and five of this study will attempt to remedy this misunderstanding.

Quantitative data accompanies the analysis of recording conventions. The computation of entries will allow me to estimate the proportion of records dealing with Albania in relation to the total

⁹⁸ “Quod concedatur nobili viro ser Victori Mauroceno, consiliario nostro Crete, sicut scribit regimen nostrum Crete, quod pro reparatione domus habitationis, dicti ser Victor possit expendere yperperi octuaginta ultra illa yperperi XXV que potest expendere per formam sue commisionis” (October 7, 1392): *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 81v.

⁹⁹ For example: Cozzi and Knapton, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 214; Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic*, 258-9; Valentini “Apunti,” 246; Da Mosto, *L’Archivio di Stato*, 22; Claudia Salmi, “Il Segretario alle voci: un primo contributo sulle origini dell’incarico e la formazione dell’archivio,” in *Venice and the Veneto during the Renaissance. The Legacy of Benjamin Kohl*, ed. Michael Knapton, John Easton Law, and Alison Andrews Smith (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 51.

number of recorded interventions by the *pregadi* (each individual entry, regardless of length, counts as one).

From “Talk” to Entry

The sources describing the process by which Council activities became recorded entries are scarce. Enrico Besta’s 1899 *Il senato veneziano* is one of the most comprehensive surveys on the origin, constitution, powers and rites of the Senate to date; I rely on his study to summarize the process of codification of Council discussions. Later scholars such as Frederic Lane or Robert Finley used Besta’s text and his same sources (particularly the *Diary* of Marino Sanudo), but their descriptions of Senate activities focused on the Renaissance period.¹⁰⁰

The right to summon the Council belonged to the *signoria*.¹⁰¹ Convocations were called by either ordering that the bells of St. Mark square rang nine times or by sending around town criers to knock on each senator’s door. There were no pre-established meeting days, and the frequency of Senate sessions depended on the amount and seriousness of the business involved. Although first the doge was in charge of convocations, a certain number of sessions (varying throughout the year) was later set to be held weekly. Meetings took place all year long, with very short and scarce holiday periods.¹⁰² The Council delegated to the Collegio the right to group issues into an agenda to be discussed together. The Collegio was a cabinet composed by the *signoria* and the Experts (“savi”), who formed a body equivalent of committee members today. They were a small group of powerful patricians with varying degrees of seniority and prestige. Once the Collegio decided what would enter the agenda for the day, the Experts presented their proposals to all *pregadi*, who then approved or vetoed the proposed courses of action. According to Besta, once a Council meeting began, there were no silent members. Everyone could speak freely and the more active one was, the better for one’s reputation. However, when a member of the Collegio took the floor, all *pregadi* were asked to keep silent.¹⁰³ Individual initiatives to express one’s mind were constrained by the fact that the Experts had already examined and selected the options which they would present to the *pregadi*. This aided the Council’s capacity to limit discussion to a few alternatives, thus making coming to a conclusion

¹⁰⁰ Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic*; Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*. Some of Besta’s sources included Vittore Sandi’s *Principi di storia civile della Repubblica di Venezia: dalla sua fondazione all’anno di 1700* (Venice: S. Coletti, 1756), and the unpublished *De rebus ac forma republicae venetae* by Paolo Morosini and *Della perfezione della Repubblica veneziana* by Marco Foscarini. For a full account of the sources used by Besta, see: Besta, *Il senato veneziano*, 2-17.

¹⁰¹ The *signoria* was Venice’s supreme body of government. It consisted of ten men: the doge, six ducal Councilors (who formed the Minor Council), and the three Heads of the Council of Forty.

¹⁰² Besta, *Il senato veneziano*, 194–97.

¹⁰³ Strict regulations to ensure silence did not stop the *pregadi* from causing havoc, wondering around, wispering, interrupting or even insulting each other: Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate*, 240; Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic*, 254; Giuseppe Cappelletti, *Relazione storica sulle magistrature Venete* (Venice: Grimaldo, 1873), 48.

easier, be it consensus (“de parte”) or disapproval (“de non”). Despite this, individual *pregadi* had the right to have their opinions heard, even if these were against the Experts’ proposals. The “non sinceri” vote was the silent version of that right. This Venetian version of an abstention was a device for the *pregadi* to show that too little information had been provided and thus they wished for further enlightenment. It could also signify that the *pregadi* considered that a proposal by board members had been unconvincing or would prove unfeasible. If a majority of *pregadi* cast a “non sinceri” ballot, the speakers would rephrase their proposals according to the *pregadi*’s general sentiment. Besta, following Sanudo, attributes this spontaneity and vigor of discussions to the Venetian language, which freed proceedings from the vanity of adorned speech.¹⁰⁴ A proposal was passed if votes in favor surpassed votes by naysayers and abstentions combined; it was rejected or “capta de non” if the negative votes alone, without the abstentions, exceeded half of the votes.¹⁰⁵ Once a proposal was approved, it became a mandate with law-enforcing power. Sheets containing these newly approved decrees were collected and bound together with all the supporting documents that should be attached, if applicable. All proposals, including those which had been presented and not approved, were then transcribed into the corresponding registers (*misti* or *secreti*), with an indication of who had proposed them and the votes for or against, along with a count of abstentions. However, a vote tally is not always given; a cross or the word *capta* (“approved”) might show that a motion was passed. Council registers were meant to maintain the chronological order in which the motions were presented, except in the cases where, for reasons of better use of page space, short proposals were written at the bottom of pages containing earlier motions. Changes to the transcription of unapproved proposals were forbidden, under serious penalties.¹⁰⁶ In practice, one can observe that, particularly during busy periods, several decisions from (for example) June 28 are written down *after* decisions from July 3; these are then followed by decisions from (for example) July 10, only to encounter entries from an earlier date (such as July 5) once more on the next page. This may be explained by the time-lag between the day discussions took place and the moment when entries were written down. From the records I examined, this time lag does not exceed two weeks.

According to the process described above, each entry refers back to the occurrence of a decision-making event which was resolved by means of in-group discussion. The debate’s actual unfolding and tone cannot be guessed or accessed, yet its codification was carried out to serve two functions: to indicate the realm of Council activity the discussion had belonged to, and to summarize what had been the topic of discussion. In consequence, the realm of Council activity was codified in the entry’s incipit, while the topic was summarized in the body of the entry. Naturally, the

¹⁰⁴ Besta, *Il senato veneziano*, 219–220. For a full account of Council procedures, see: Besta, 214–38.

¹⁰⁵ Besta, 240–41.

¹⁰⁶ Besta, 255–56.

corresponding date, mark of approval or rejection (or the vote count), together with the names of the proponents, were common elements to all types of entries.

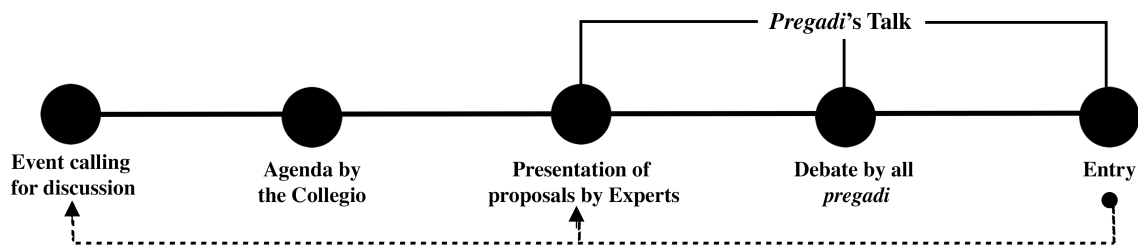


Chart 1. Codification process of the *Deliberazioni*

Each realm of Council activity had a distinct incipit so that the body’s priorities and attributions could be easily identifiable. Additionally, this practice allowed to differentiate between discussions caused by the same event (for example, the reception of a letter): while some letters demanded crucial decisions on foreign policy, other letters contained petitions or drifted into minutiae of expenses, requests, and appointments which the Collegio had “pre-approved.” On the other hand, entries pertaining to each realm of Council activity had a fairly standard template. Cases where secretaries did not follow that standard template reveal that the issue in question was, in fact, no ordinary matter.

Proposed Model

I propose the following classification model based on the relationship between an entry’s incipit and discrete realms of Council activity.¹⁰⁷ Below, I offer examples highlighting the potential that such a view on recorded entries can offer to scholars from a number of disciplines. I identified fourteen categories which account for more than 99.9% of the total 4,871 individual entries from the *Deliberazioni* between 1392 and 1402.¹⁰⁸ Yet this classification does not aim for definitiveness. Further research will enhance this classification model by incorporating sub-categories within each realm of Council activity. I list the set of words which formed the fixed elements of the entries’ incipit, and leave out words pointing to circumstantial information. Therefore, in the sources, the reader should expect to find incipits such as “cum heri fuerit supplicatum” more often than a merely

¹⁰⁷ For the period under study, I identified at least 13 different hands in charge of transcribing decisions into the *Deliberazioni*, yet the conventions of entries belonging to each realm of Council activity remained consistent.

¹⁰⁸ Out the total number of recorded entries, two entries (0,04%) fell outside any category: On September 10, 1396, a scribe copied a “litera credentie” (written in Venetian) in the register of secret deliberations: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 266-267. This is the sole occurrence of such letter written in the records for this period, and the scribe might have copied it there by mistake. Another entry (also written in Venetian), from November 16, 1400, is the only example whereby a Senate entry recorded the opinions of the “prouisoires comunis cum officialibus monete”: *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 39v-41v.

“cum fuerit supplicatum.” At times, scribes modified the word order slightly or used synonyms. Although “quod detur responsio” and “quod fiat responsio” were both used, I list the latter because it is the more common version of the two.

- 1) Routine consultations: short entries containing requests which the Council approved on a regular basis:
 - > Quod concedatur, quod fiat gratia, quod fiat privilegium: refer to granting of graces, appointments, promotions, pecuniary emoluments, etc.
 - > Quod terminus elongetur: extension of the deadline for returning officeholders to present their provisions, for captains to board the galleys, or for merchandise to be loaded onto merchant galleys.
- 2) Special consultations: containing a longer *prohemium*, they record in more detail the subject matter of extraordinary requests:
 - > Cum fuerit supplicatum (...).
 - > Quod secundum requisitionem (...).
 - > Quod complaceatur (...).
- 3) Commissions: identified by a header, these are statements of duties written for governors and other officials which were presented to the *pregadi* for approval:
 - > Nos [dux Venetiarum], dei gratia, commitimus tibi (...).
- 4) Provisions: recommendations or general observations that were presented to the Senate by those whose term in office had just expired. Provisions do not have a standard incipit, but are identifiable by a header on the left-hand side of the entry.
- 5) Missives: approval of the content of correspondence dealing with administrative affairs or issues of foreign policy. These letters could be sent to Venetian officials abroad or directly to foreign lords or communes. Unlike consultations, approving missives could involve a fair degree of discussion among senators:
 - > Quod fiat responsio (...).
 - > Quod respondeatur littera (...).
 - > Quod rescribatur (...).
- 6) Executive activity: the Council’s attributions were wide and varied. The incipit of entries resulting from the Council’s extensive capacity for decision-making reflects that multiplicity. Several elements further distinguish the Council’s executive competences from mere consultative capacities: the *prohemium* is longer than in entry types 1, 2, and 5, and this type of entry generally contains a decision section marked by “vadit pars.” In some cases, these

entries included a section of instructions or directives for Venice's officeholders abroad. In practice, these instructions functioned as a state pronouncement for them to follow. Some of the most regularly-recurring incipits are the following:

- > Cum/quia sit necessarium providere (...).
- > Quod bonum est (...).
- > Quia per infomationem quem habetur (...).
- > Cum/quia sicut scribit (...).
- > Cum sit totam mentem vigiliandum (...).
- > Cum sicut notum est (...).
- > Cum nobis sit data informatio (...).
- > Cum hoc facto requirit (...).
- > Cum manifeste cognoscatur (...).

7) Counter-proposals: Whenever more than one proposal was presented to the *pregadi*, the opposing bill or bills did not contain a *prohemium*, but only a section describing the alternative opinion:

- > Vult/volunt quod (...).

8) Adjournment: the Experts could decide to put an end to Council discussions if the *pregadi* deemed that the issue was particularly delicate, and they needed more time to address it properly, or if the discussion had continued for too long:

- > Quod supersedeatur /inducietur (...).
- > Quia hora sit tarda (...).

9) Trade and defense: Venetian ships carried out the state's most important activities: trade and defense (perhaps the invocation of Christ is a reflection of such importance). The Council had the last word in the size of each fleet, its route, armament, etc. Additionally, the Council was in charge of the public auction ("incantus") of merchant galleys by which Venetian merchants became the galleys' owners during the length of the voyage:

- > Quod in bona gratia (...).
- > Quod in nomine Yhesus Christi (...).
- > Incantus galea (...).

10) Legislative revision: modifications or recalling of previously-approved decisions:

- > Quod pridie captum fuit/fuerit (...).
- > Cum in [die] captum fuit (...).

- 11) Judiciary hearings: whenever a prominent officeholder was accused of wrongdoing, the state attorneys (a board of three magistrates) had the faculty of summoning the Council and present the charges in front of the *pregadi*, who then decided on the wrongdoer's punishment:
- > Quod istud consilium vocetur (...).
 - > Si videtur vobis per ea que dicta et lecta sunt (...).
- 12) Electoral activity: Venice's most important offices were elected in the Great Council. However, the Senate could propose the creation of a new post (which would be elected in the Great Council) or directly elect consuls, ambassadors, or minor officials. Additionally, the Council elected the Experts of the Collegio. In some cases, it was also in charge of the election of officials ("proba") such as captains, vice-captains, or patrons of a ship.
- > Quod eligatur (...).
 - > Cum terminus sapientium expiret (...).
 - > Facta fuit proba (...).
- 13) Ambassadorial activity: The Council was in charge of deciding all issues of foreign policy presented to the *signoria* by foreign ambassadors or messengers:
- > Cum comparauerit /fuerit ad presentiam nostram (...).
 - > Quia est hic (...).
 - > Quod respondeatur istis ambasiatoribus (...).
- 14) Crisis management: discussions following the reception of information deemed exceptional which required the Council's immediate resolution:
- > Quia propter noua/nouitates (...).

Although some scholars have intuitively recognized the similarities between entries belonging to the same category, no attempt had been made before to classify Council entries in a systematic manner.¹⁰⁹

This model intends to be a starting point leading to deeper investigation regarding the changes and evolution of Senate's recording conventions during historical periods when archival practices have been little-researched.

Also, having a clear entry-type model at hand may help sharpen knowledge within established research areas. For example, scholars interested in fourteenth-century Venetian state administration will be able use categories 1, 2, and 6 to better explain what range of issues were gradually taken

¹⁰⁹ For example, Schmitt proposed that the documents of the AAV could be divided into several thematic groups: 1) those concerning foreign policy, 2) decisions on the construction and upkeep of buildings, arsenals, rectors' residences, fortresses, churches and monasteries, 3) those arranging the delivery of weapons and ammunition, 4) those revealing the movement of soldiers, potentially informing the ethnic composition of the area, and 5) those illustrating the functioning of the colonial justice system: Schmitt, "Sources vénitiennes pour l'histoire des cités Albanaises au 15e siècle," 312.

from the Senate by the Collegio, or from the Great Council by the Senate. I observed during the first years I studied that category 11 appeared regularly, yet by 1400, this type of entry had become rare; historians interested in the evolution of judiciary functions within the state may more easily explain this change. Similarly, a systematic analysis of category 10 can potentially reveal patterns so far unnoticed relating to the Senate's legislative revision (tax adjustments, sumptuary regulations, and concessions to Jews and other marginalized groups come to mind as examples). Social historians may concentrate on categories 1 and 2 to study the extent to which *popolani*, foreigners, and overseas-subjects could "access" Senate decisions: for example, from 1399 onwards, graces (in the form of local posts) given to the people from Coron and Modon grew significantly and their wording underwent a change. A comprehensive analysis of the template of category 3 will allow comparative analysis of the kind of political behavior (both formal and informal) which the Council expected from officials and commissioners sent abroad. Similarly, a systematic analysis of the *prohemium* of category 6 will allow historians interested in any subjected territory to discover differences in formulation regarding the importance which the *pregadi* assigned to those territories. Categories 7 and 8 could lead cultural historians to discover why a number of seemingly unrelated issues became so controversial for the *pregadi* at any given time; I noticed this in passing. Issues concerning category 9 also underwent an evolution during this decade: a study dealing exclusively with these entries may point to the specific reasons why instructions to captains of galleys fluctuated so greatly in both length and amount of detail from year to year. Historians of early modern diplomatic negotiation may look at categories 3, 5, and 13 to draw correspondences with practices taking place centuries later. Philologists may be able to determine whether the progressive change from Latin to the Venetian vernacular in record keeping became more prominent in any particular realm of Council activity. These are a few examples that the classification I propose may facilitate.

Selection Criteria

The three types of entries that I scrutinize are those entries which codified the most important state matters (related to Council activity 6, 13, and 14). The *pregadi* were, after all, at the helm of Venice's most decisive political maneuvering. My primary aim is to discover the intention behind the scribes' linguistic acts, that is to say, whether or not scribes deliberately employed systematic recording conventions within those three realms to convey specific meaning. But given that the *pregadi* discussed numerous issues relating to the categories I analyze, I had to make a sacrifice: I analyze the scribes' way of codifying such a wide range of state matters, but I do not generally provide additional historical context for geographical areas or events unrelated to my test subject. Doing so would only distract the reader's attention away from my primary aim, and it would needlessly overlengthen this study.

The relevance which the Council assigned to Albania changed considerably between 1392 and 1402. This fluctuation of the Council's state of engagement makes Albanian cities an ideal subject of study. Chapter four analyzes N-entries ("Newsworthy"-entries), which resulted from crisis management. Proportionally to all recorded entries, crises were significantly less numerous. Therefore, I account for all entries mentioning those crises (in varying degrees of length), but favor Albania as the story's protagonist. Chapter five will analyze the other two entry types: R-entries (referring to responses to ambassadorial requests), and I-entries (which resulted from the Council's executive activity and refer to instructions which functioned as official pronouncements). Chapter five has a stronger focus on Albania, given that the number of entries resulting from the Council's executive pronouncements and ambassadorial responses go into the hundreds, and therefore I would have bored the reader with repetitive descriptions of the same recording practice unnecessarily.

When placed in the broader context of all other *Deliberazioni*, entries which show Venice making inroads into Albanian cities reveal codification patterns of the Council's secretive discussions. But setting limits to expenses, repair of roads, soldiers' salaries, moving troops, orders for galleys to stop there, incidental references to local lords, or granting permission to transport wine or grain were also part of Venice's discussions on Albania. As mentioned, I have excluded these entries because they do not reflect Venice's priorities. Not every single discussion about Albania was a crucial state affair.

The kind of analysis I propose has the potential to exemplify that recording conventions signified specific aspects of the *pregadi*'s discussions, and for that reason the analysis may also serve as a model which can be applied to any other issue.

Chapter 2. The Languages of the *Pregadi*: The Languages of Venice

While Venice's Great Council was the "socializing arena"¹¹⁰ of patricians, the Senate was the center of politics and Venice's chief deliberative assembly.¹¹¹ The Council had the last word on war, peace, military supplies, galley routes, taxes and loans —the most decisive issues of the state. It originally consisted of sixty members, elected annually. It was enlarged after 1324 by including the Council of Forty (a Supreme Court). Additionally, the Venetian government usually delegated the handling of certain political or economic affairs to special commissions. This custom led to the creation of a board ("Zonta") in 1363, whereby twenty *pregadi de Zonta* were added to the Council on temporary basis.¹¹² By the late fourteenth century, the Council sat approximately 120 full members. Every important official, ambassador and high naval commander had the right to sit in Council meetings: "everybody who was anybody politically had a place in the Senate."¹¹³ These *ex-officio* members, however, did not have the right to vote.

As ruling body, the Council can be taken to be both the aggregate of elected men who gathered in the Senate room of the ducal palace at regular times, and also a unitary actor by virtue of its decision-making process, where everything had to be approved by majority. The maneuvering which resulted from discussions *was* the Council's decision-making process. The *Deliberazioni* recorded this process; they employed recording conventions as much as they reflected governance aspects of the body politic that produced them. In other words, the *Deliberazioni* recorded Council proceedings and, by doing so, they also recorded the way in which senators replicated cultural realities of their environment outside the Senate. At least a partial understanding of recorded entries must lie in grasping the kind of society the *pregadi* belonged to.¹¹⁴

The set of cultural idioms and customs patricians inhabited was rich and complex, but I will focus on three fundamental aspects of Venetian society: Venice's rigid social classification, the intersection of politics and merchant activities, and Venice's record-keeping tradition.

Elitism and Privilege

During the twelfth century, Venice began to use the term *commune Venetiarum* to describe the city and to reflect on communal aspects that brought many a diverse people together. Yet the

¹¹⁰ Stanley Chojnacki, "Political Adulthood in Fifteenth-Century Venice," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (1986): 805.

¹¹¹ Besta, *Il senato veneziano*, 8; Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*.

¹¹² Da Mosto, *L'Archivio di Stato*, 34.

¹¹³ Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic*, 254.

¹¹⁴ As Skinner pointed out: "if it is true that an understanding of any idea requires an understanding of all the occasions and activities in which a given agent might have used the relevant form of words, it seems clear that at least a part of such understanding must lie in grasping what sort of society the given author was writing for and trying to persuade": Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 40.

notion of communal coexistence can be deceiving. Already then, wealth, family lineage, prestige, occupation and legal status served to mark the social differences that ultimately decided who could be part of Venice's ruling bodies.¹¹⁵ The contraction of the economy after the Black Death of the 1350s and the patricians' general reluctance to incorporate new families into their ruling class were other factors that had a negative impact on social mobility.¹¹⁶ By the end of the fourteenth century, Venice was a paradigmatic example of government composed by members of a hereditary nobility who successfully excluded non-aristocratic families from power.¹¹⁷ The homogeneity of the ruling class was also expressed through the singular use of the title *nobilis sir* in notarial and scribal documents, "a uniformity absent from governmental and notarial usage well into the 1380s."¹¹⁸

As a closed group, patricians excluded both rich and poor families from power and made theirs, and theirs alone, the helm of government. The *cittadini*, being right below patricians in the social scale, were selectively kept at bay.¹¹⁹ Even though they enjoyed trading privileges (of which the right to trade in the Levant was particularly advantageous), their high status meant little politically speaking.¹²⁰ They could only access minor offices of the commune, that is, jobs in the public administration and in the police and forces of order. The *popolo*, which formed the gross of Venice's population, was effectively invisible inside ducal palace politics. And patricians' stiffness was not only meant to fence out the *cittadini* and the *popolo*. Foreigners, too, were politically left out, even if they were, as Ermanno Orlando defined them, a structural presence in the city, an element as vital as

¹¹⁵ Dennis Romano, *Patricians and Popolani. The Social Foundations of the Venetian Renaissance State* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 27.

¹¹⁶ In 1381, thirty new families were accepted into the Great Council, but this was the product of the demographic emergency caused by the war with Genoa rather than an act of political conciliation. Since then, for at least 265 years (until the war against Crete in 1646), no new recruits were admitted into the ruling class: Brian Pullan, "The Significance of Venice," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 56, no. 2 (1974): 443.

¹¹⁷ In a posthumously-published study, Benjamin Kohl made the point that the 1297's *serrata* alone was enough to shape the future of Venice's aristocracy, changing little in the following centuries that followed: Benjamin Kohl and Reinhold Christopher Mueller, "The Serrata of the Greater Council of Venice, 1282-1323: The Documents," in *Venice and the Veneto during the Renaissance: The Legacy of Benjamin Kohl*, ed. Michael Knapton, John Easton Law, and Alison Andrews Smith (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 4. For the view that it was not one, but several *serrate* which shaped the Venetian elite see: Stanley Chojnacki, "La formazione della nobiltà dopo la Serrata," in *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, ed. Girolamo Arnaldi, Giorgio Cracco, and Alberto Tenenti, vol. 3, *Formazione dello stato patrizio* (Rome: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 1997), 641–725.

¹¹⁸ Stanley Chojnacki, "Social Identity in Renaissance Venice: The Second Serrata," *Renaissance Studies* 8, no. 4 (1994): 349.

¹¹⁹ For divergent views on Venice's social classification according to two —*nobiles* and *plebs*— or three —*zentilhomeni*, *cittadini*, and *populo menudo*— antagonistic groups, see: James Grubb, "Elite Citizens," in *Venice Reconsidered. The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State 1297-1797*, ed. John Jeffries Martin and Dennis Romano (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 339–40; Anna Bellavitis, *Identité, mariage, mobilité sociale: citoyennes et citoyens à Venise au XVIe siècle* (Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2001), 1–8.

¹²⁰ Grubb, "Elite Citizens," 350. In general, the status of citizens was a complex and nebulously defined issue until at least 1569 —after no less than a century and a half of laws and regulations: Grubb, 343–44. For a thorough study on citizenry, see: Anna Bellavitis, "'Per cittadini metterete...': La stratificazione della società veneziana cinquecentesca tra norma giuridica e riconoscimento sociale," *Quaderni storici* 30, no. 89 (2) (1995): 359–83.

water itself.¹²¹ This is particularly paradoxical if one considers that, during the fourteenth century, immigration policies caused a substantial increase in foreign population.¹²²

Scholars have pointed out how remarkable the endurance of a state order designed by the elite was. Maybe it was because of the large-scale social disruption caused by the Black Death, maybe it was because Venice happened to have a number of “existential enemies” (Hungary, Genoa or “the Turk”) and the ruling class could merge those conflicts with their interests and present patricians’ struggles, wants and fancies as essential to the republic’s survival.¹²³ Or perhaps it was due to the stabilizing influence of their public space’s narrowness, or from the myth, whose powerful ideal of community kept all social groups under control. Whatever the cause, Venice’s institutional fixedness and the fecklessness and apathy of the *popolo* towards revolt have been a source both of admiration and perplexity.¹²⁴ But this fixedness needs to be adjectivized. In the face of outsiders, the patrician elite was an airtight ruling class that oversaw the legislative process, controlled the administration, and carried out the judicial functions of the republic as a congruent body.¹²⁵ But from within, a certain degree of division and fragmentation also existed. The access to prestigious posts in the body politic was not a possibility that all nobles could take advantage of equally. To be at the service of the state was expensive, and some had the means to afford the costs derived from being appointed to an office (many important positions came with no salary), while others did not.

Patricians competed with one another to form elite groups within the elite. Jutta Sperling observed that this antagonism ensued regardless of the equality of rights that, in theory, all patricians shared: “the definition of the patriciate as egalitarian and homogeneous might have functioned as a regulatory ideal — as evidenced by sumptuary legislation, among others — despite the fact that it was

¹²¹ Orlando, *Migrazioni mediterranee*, 36. See also: Reinhold Mueller, *Immigrazione e cittadinanza nella Venezia medievale* (Rome: Viella, 2010); Luca Molà and Reinhold Christopher Mueller, “Essere straniero a Venezia nel tardo Medioevo: accoglienza e rifiuto nei privilegi di cittadinanza e nelle sentenze criminali,” in *Le migrazioni in Europa secc. XIII - XVIII*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Florence: Le Monnier, 1994), 839–51. For a recent overview on the literature regarding foreigners in Venice, see the contributions in: Tiziana Plebani, *Stranieri, Barbari, Migranti: il racconto della Storia per comprendere il presente* (Venice: Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, 2016).

¹²² During the *Trecento*, the government was pragmatic about adjusting citizenship requirements. To ensure the arrival of new male immigrants and their long-term stay, requirements for citizenship were loosened and the process of acquiring citizenship *de intus* was greatly simplified: Orlando, *Migrazioni mediterranee*, 42; Mueller, *Immigrazione e cittadinanza nella Venezia medievale*, 104–9.

¹²³ For example, in the period before the war against Genoa, a restricted group within the aristocracy successfully directed fiscal policies for Levantine trade towards their own interests: Roberto Cessi, “Introduzione storica,” in *La regolazione delle entrate e delle spese (sec. XIII-XIV)*, ed. Roberto Cessi, Pietro Bosmin, and Luigi Luzzatti (Padua: Draghi, 1925), 1–3.

¹²⁴ Maartje van Gelder has shown that, during the sixteenth century, the *popolo* was no longer submissive: commoners’ factions did not always accept passively the political games of patricians, and used noise, demonstrations, disorder and appropriation of civic rituals as means of political expression: van Gelder, “The People’s Prince,” 251. The bulk of scholarly studies which are fundamental to understand Venice’s reputation of stability say very little about the period before the Renaissance. Yet, van Gelder provides a concise but clear analysis of the traditions both supporting and challenging the view of Venice as a patrician-dominated society: van Gelder, 252–53.

¹²⁵ Da Mosto, *L’Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, 80. See also: Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 1980, 37–40.

inherently paradoxical.”¹²⁶ The paradox, observed by Alberto Tenenti, Sperling and many others, is that patricians insisted on an ideal image of equal status while constantly devising marks and mechanisms to display differences: “the [patriciate’s] true problem was to express contemporaneously and complementarily an egalitarian as well as hierarchical, horizontal as well as vertical system of power.”¹²⁷

The favored image of a complete identification of class and individual as being one and the same, sincere as it may have been in the minds of the many who held it as their ideal, conflicts with the number of laws that explicitly prohibited stand out too much, in politics as much as in society.¹²⁸ From strict supervision of the clothing worn by Venetian officials (certain colors were exclusive to specific positions, ranks, and appointments) to regulations on public dress code, no aspect of the complex Venetian social and political stratification was left unregulated.¹²⁹ In Venice, these laws generally came as a response to patricians’ behavior. This, for Chojnacki, is the “double nature” of patricians: they could shape legislation for their own benefit but, as part of their class, they had to be ready to accept the codes, norms, and overall strict discipline that was imposed upon them.¹³⁰

The Senate was a keystone in Venice’s state order; it did not escape the forces which favored privilege and exclusion. The process of forming elite groups within the elite is also visible in fourteenth-century government organization. The fragmentation of the main body of government into smaller groups happened throughout the *Trecento*, as Roberto Cessi showed almost a century ago.¹³¹ Following the ruinous state of public finances from a surfeit of war expenditures after the war against Genoa, the Great Council was paralyzed by internal discord and factionalism. To prevent a government shutdown, it had to delegate part of its authority to ad hoc councils. The Collegio was a result of this process: “it began as a small group of nobles appointed to supervise the doge and help

¹²⁶ Jutta Sperling, “The Paradox of Perfection: Reproducing the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 1 (1999): 5.

¹²⁷ Sperling, 5; Alberto Tenenti, “La rappresentazione del potere,” in *I dogi*, ed. Gino Benzoni (Milan: Banca Cattolica del Veneto, 1982), 79.

¹²⁸ Queller describes this very vividly: “in the quest for offices, Venetian nobles sought to call attention to themselves by whatever means they could. In 1314 the Great Council felt compelled to prohibit anyone, while awaiting his turn to draw for the golden balls, from sitting or standing upon the raised benches in the area from the ducal throne to the door that the nominators enter under penalty of 20 s. parvorum”: Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate*, 63.

¹²⁹ Isabella Campagnol, *Forbidden Fashions: Invisible Luxuries in Early Venetian Convents* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2014), 8. For the doge’s image, clothing and symbols, see: Matteo Casini, *I gesti del principe. La festa politica a Firenze e a Venezia in età rinascimentale* (Venice: Saggi Marsilio, 1996); Tenenti, “La rappresentazione del potere,” 73–106; Gina Fasoli, “Liturgia e cerimoniale ducale,” in *Venezia e il Levante fino al secolo XV*, ed. Agostino Pertusi, vol. 1 (Florence: Olschki, 1973), 261–95; Agostino Pertusi, “‘Quedam regalia insignia’: Ricerche sulle insegne del potere ducale a Venezia,” *Studi veneziani* 3 (1976): 3–123.

¹³⁰ Stanley Chojnacki, “Crime, Punishment, and the Trecento Venetian State,” in *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200–1500*, ed. Lauro Martines (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 192. This was not unique to Venice. As Orlando points out, in most communes of the late Middle Ages, social life was based on a multidimensional system of vertical power structures and horizontal relations where participation and solidarity could be negotiated. In Venice, this applied to patricians and citizens as much as to simple residents, foreigners, migrants and infidels: Orlando, *Migrazioni mediterranee*, 47–48.

¹³¹ Cessi, “Introduzione storica,” 1–3.

him govern Venice at the end of the twelfth century and evolved into one of the central organs of fourteenth century Venetian governance.”¹³²

Amidst this state of affairs, the board members of the Collegio became the state’s ultimate elite group.¹³³ The Collegio was formed by the *signoria* (the doge, his six Councilors and the three Heads of the Council of Forty), six Council Experts, and five Maritime Experts. Except for the doge, none of the members of the Collegio received a salary, which ensured they were wealthy and well-reputed elite members. Their work demanded that they met every day, except on holidays and Mondays. The time of meetings varied according to the season: towards ten in the morning during winter, and from half past eight to half past nine in the summer. They met again before each Council meeting, at around three or three-and-a-half in the afternoon, also depending on the season.¹³⁴ The Collegio had a special room, the “Sala del Collegio,” to guarantee that sessions remained secret and safe from intruder ears who may be wondering about in the palace halls. As one may expect, the sitting place of each member of the Collegio was assigned according to status: the gilded cushion seats by the back wall of the room were reserved for the doge, his Councilors, and the Heads of the Forty. On less comfortable side benches sat, to the right, the Council Experts and, to the left, the Maritime Experts (age was the distribution criterion of seats in each category of magistrates). The secretaries were further away, in the opposite corners of the room.¹³⁵ These differences in status were rigorously observed during Council meetings. If more than one proposal was presented to the *pregadi*, the order of intervention corresponded to the seniority and prestige of the officeholder: the doge came first, although proposals by him alone were rare. Next in dignity were those who held the title of procurator of Saint Mark, followed by the rest of Council Experts and Councilors. Next were the Heads of the Council of Forty, and the Maritime Experts came last.¹³⁶

The Collegio had the liberty to rule over relatively inconsequential matters privately, such as “construction of forts, small tax cases, rulings on commodities like oil and salt to be taxed, exemptions on import duties and wine taxes, notary expenses, and some appeals from judges and magistracies.”¹³⁷ The members of the Collegio did not have the right to vote in Council meetings, for their main activity, the one by which they became so important in Venice’s public life, was the preparation and study of the subjects to be dealt with in the Senate. No deliberation could take place unless they had approved it first.¹³⁸ The role of preparing the Council’s agenda mostly fell on the Experts. At times,

¹³² Benjamin Kohl and Monique O’Connell, “The Changing Function of the Collegio in the Governance of Trecento Venice,” in *Venice and the Veneto during the Renaissance. The Legacy of Benjamin Kohl*, ed. Michael Knapton, John Easton Law, and Alison Andrews Smith (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 36.

¹³³ Cappelletti, *Relazione storica sulle magistrature Venete*, 38–39.

¹³⁴ Besta, *Il senato veneziano*, 185–86.

¹³⁵ Besta, 186–87.

¹³⁶ Besta, 221.

¹³⁷ Kohl and O’Connell, “The Changing Function of the Collegio,” 45.

¹³⁸ Besta, *Il senato veneziano*, 183.

this political dynamic resulted in the Collegio framing issues in such a way that it became difficult for the Senate to disagree with the consensus the Experts had already formed.¹³⁹

The Maritime Experts (“Savi agli Ordini”) prepared legislation on trade, sea routes, the manning of the Venetian fleet, and all other issues related to maritime affairs. In theory, they were elected on September 29/30 and stayed in office for a year. In practice, many left office before their term was up and new Experts had then to be elected. For example, the 1399 election lists as many as nine Maritime Experts, elected between October, 1399, and May of the following year.¹⁴⁰ It was also common for elected Maritime Experts to refuse the post formally (such as in 1400, when ten patricians excused themselves¹⁴¹), or to never show up to fulfill their duties. Finlay wrote that, by the end of the fifteenth century, the office became a sort of training position for younger and less experienced patricians.¹⁴² From the records I observed, by 1392 the position already functioned as an internship for young and ambitious nobles but did not necessarily entail a great deal of power or prestige. Except for a few exceptions, no Maritime Expert was officially elected on two consecutive occasions between 1392 and 1402.

I compiled the Tables 1 and 2 (below) based on the Senate entries listing the Experts’ election. In the case of the Maritime Experts, the outcome of the election did not always correspond to the realities of the office. In many cases, the Maritime Experts listed as proposing a given motion do not match the names of those who appear as having been elected. More information on Venetian offices is available in the database *Rulers of Venice*, run by O’Connell. The database contains certain inconsistencies, but it is nevertheless a key tool for prosopographical research.¹⁴³ Although the database’s information is based on the registers of the *Segretario alle Voci*¹⁴⁴ (rather on who effectively held office), it illuminates the understanding of the *cursus honorum* of the nobility, the career paths nobles pursued, and the offices’ turnover.

¹³⁹ Stephen Ortega, *Negotiating Transcultural Relations in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Ottoman-Venetian Encounters*, *Transculturalisms, 1400-1700* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 52; de Vivo, *Information and Communication*, 38.

¹⁴⁰ *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 126v.

¹⁴¹ *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 35v.

¹⁴² Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 1980, 40.

¹⁴³ <http://rulersofvenice.org/searchForm>

¹⁴⁴ The records of the *Segretario alle Voci* are available online thanks to the collaborative work of Monique O’Connell, Benjamin Kohl, Andrea Mozzato, and Claudia Salmini, at: <https://rulersofvenice.org/>. As Mozzato explains, the notary in charge of writing down the election results was called “Segretario alle Voci” from the sixteenth century onwards. The registers were called *voci* “because the name of the candidate was proclaimed aloud (*stridate*) in the principal councils—the Maggior Consiglio, for the most part, but the Senate as well”: Andrea Mozzato, “Problems and Possibilities of Constructing a Research Database: The Venetian Case,” in *Rulers of Venice, 1332-1524: Governanti Di Venezia, 1332-1524: Interpretations, Methods, Database*, ed. Monique O’Connell (New York: ACLS Humanities E-Book, c2009), para 87. Accessible online at: <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heh.90021>.

Table 1. Elected Maritime Experts (1392-1402)											
	1392	1393	1394	1395	1396	1397	1398	1399	1400	1401	1402
Barbaro, Andrea							x				
Barbaro, Ermolao									x		
Bembo, Hector								x			
Bembo, Lorenzo		x									
Bondumier, Andrea						x					
Bragadin, Lorenzo							x				
Cappello, Benedetto	x	x									
Cappello, Nicolò			x								
Contareno, Andreas				x		x					
Contarini, Bartolomeo									x	x	
Contaruni, Antonio	x										
Dandolo Marco								x			
Dandolo, Paolo						x					
Dandolo, Pietro									x		
Dolfin, Nicolò			x								
Emo, Filippo				x							
Foscari, Francesco								x			
Foscolo, Andrea							x				
Francesco, Bembo			x								
Georgio, Johannes								x			
Ghisi, Andrea								x			
Giustinian, Bernardo											x
Griani, Donato										x	
Grissoni, Mosè									x		
Lambardo, Nicolò							x				
Loredan, Giorgio	x										
Lorendan, Nicolò				x							
Marcello, Vittore		x	x								
Michiel Tomasso								x			
Morosini, Andrea								x			
Morosini, Barbono										x	x
Morosini, Giovanni				x							
Morosini, Marco	x										
Mudazzo, Nicolò	x										
Nani, Bartolomeo		x									
Pisani, Bertuccio				x	x		x				
Pizzamano, Fantino										x	
Querini, Fantino					x	x					
Sanudo, Filippo		x									
Superantio, Francisco					x						
Tron, Luca									x		
Venier, Nicolò						x					
Venier, Pietro								x			
Venier, Santo									x		x
Viadro, Fantino								x			
Vitturi, Leonardo										x	
Zane, Domenico					x						
Zane, Paolo			x								
Zorzi, Alessandro					x						

Maritime Experts were not always motivated to pursue other political offices. Giovanni de Garzoni, who had been an active Maritime Expert in 1394, later followed an ecclesiastical career. In 1399, he (or a namesake) requested that the Council send letters of recommendation to the pope on

his behalf, which the *pregadi* approved.¹⁴⁵ In 1399, the Council granted a two-year lease of a pilgrim galley to Nicolò Lambardo, who had performed as Maritime Expert during the previous year.¹⁴⁶

The second group of Experts, the six Council Experts, were savvy members of Venetian politics who were elected from the body of *pregadi*. In Lane's words, the ten men who formed the *signoria* were, effectively, the government: they formulated proposals, summoned the Council, and oversaw the proper election of officials.¹⁴⁷ While this might have applied to later periods, a closer examination of Council proceeding between 1392 and 1402 reveals that this depiction of Venice's government is not entirely accurate to describe how high politics operated during this decade. The Council Experts, the most powerful members of the Collegio, handled crisis and, in many cases, had the last word on the most decisive and divisive matters of state. Their suggestions generally — although not always — prevailed (at times, younger and bolder Maritime Experts convinced the *pregadi* to agree with them, defying the Council Experts' conservatism).

The power of Council Experts was acknowledged and recognized by fellow *pregadi*, who would yield to the Experts' opinions to pursue personal goals, such as being nominated for an election or assigned to a particular post.¹⁴⁸ According to a commonplace of Venetian scholarship, all offices had a quick turnover to guarantee equal participation in the state administration. According to this principle, the election of Council Experts was held twice a year (on March 29/30 and on September 29/30) to ensure that all *pregadi* had equal share in preparing the Council's agenda — the Collegio's most important function. In theory, between 1392 and 1402, a total of 124 *pregadi* should have been elected for the position (on two occasions, the Council decided to elect eight, rather than six, Council Experts). In practice, according to the information I gathered from the Council's election of Experts, only 35 men (from 23 families) were Council Experts during these ten years. This represents 28% of the "ideal" total number of Experts. Table 2 shows that only 9% of Council Experts stayed in the post once (those marked with two stars were elected twice in the same year). On several occasions, the doge, Councilors, and Heads of the Forty proposed that Council Experts could not be elected for two successive periods. These motions were either voted down, or not followed in practice.¹⁴⁹

After Antonio Venier's passing in 1400, Benedetto Soranzo, Michele Steno, Pietro Corner, and Leonardo Dandolo (all long-serving Council Experts) were among several favorite candidates.¹⁵⁰ Steno resulted elected, and one may wonder whether he enjoyed more power as a former Council Expert, rather than as the largely symbolic head of the Venetian state.

¹⁴⁵ *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 90r.

¹⁴⁶ *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 83v.

¹⁴⁷ Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic*, 96–97.

¹⁴⁸ Besta, *Il senato veneziano*, 184.

¹⁴⁹ *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 135v, 157v – 158r; Reg. 44, f. 21v; Reg. 45, f. 67v.

¹⁵⁰ Rendina, *I dogi*, 222.

	Table 2. Elected Council Experts (1392-1402)										
	1392	1393	1394	1395	1396	1397	1398	1399	1400	1401	1402
Badoer, Albano					xx*	x					
Barbo, Giovanni						x	x				
Barbo, Pantaleone	x	x			x						
Bembo, Andrea					x						
Bembo, Giovanni				x							
Bembo, Leonardo					x	x				xx	
Contarini, Giusto							x	xx		xx	x
Contarini, Michele					x						
Corner, Pietro	xx	x	xx		x	x	x				xx
Dandolo, Leonardo	xx	xx	xx	x	xx	x	x	x	x		x
Darmer, Simone				x							
Emo, Pietro					x				x	x	x
Giustinian, Giovanni				x							
Lando, Fortino						x					
Lando, Vitale		x	x	x							
Loredan, Alvise											x
Loredan, Ludovico					x	x			x		x
Mauro, Antonius										x	
Miani, Giovanni				x							
Mocenigo, Giovanni							x	x	x		x
Mocenigo, Pietro	xx	xx	xx	x	x						
Mocenigo, Tommaso					x		x	x	x		x
Moro, Donato				x							x
Morosini, Alvise											xx
Morosini, Ludovico	x	x	x			x	xx	x	x		
Morosini, Paolo				x							
Pisani, Nicolò									x		
Querini, Ramberto						x	x	xx	xx	x	xx
Soranzo, Benedetto	xx	xx	xx	x	x		x	xx	x	xx	x
Steno, Michele		x		x	xx	x	x	xx	x		
Trevisan, Zaccaria									x		x
Zeno, Carlo							x			xx	x
Zeno, Marco				x	x						
Zorzi, Fantino				x							

In some cases, the Senate's power grew to the extent that it elected magistracies which should have been elected in the Great Council.¹⁵¹ Yet at the same time, the Collegio was taking over issues which were the Senate's prerogative. Among the reasons the Experts commonly adduced to take over Senate functions were the already tight schedule of the Senate,¹⁵² the Experts' capacity to resolve challenging developments more promptly,¹⁵³ or their higher likelihood of keeping issues confidential.¹⁵⁴

* Elected twice in the same year.

¹⁵¹ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 114r, 116r, 136r.

¹⁵² *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 20r, 138r.

¹⁵³ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 149v.

¹⁵⁴ *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 33v.

Despite this internal factionalism and elitism, the Venetian ruling class was not much worse than other ruling powers of the time. Even Donald Queller, who painstakingly described their abuses of power, mishandling of judicial authority, falsification of documents, counterfeiting and use of violence when they were in office, concedes that there was nothing particularly appalling about their administration: they “were neither villains nor heroes, but merely part of the everyday, but hardly humdrum, human tragicomedy.”¹⁵⁵

Sea Riches

If councils formed the state’s limbs, ships and galleys were the state’s blood and oxygen. Lacking arable lands, mineral wealth or any remarkable commodity, Venetians headed out to sea for as long as the city had existed. The elite’s reputation for being mercantile-minded and the assertion that “Venice exercised power for profit” are nothing new.¹⁵⁶ The ruling class’ preoccupation with the prosperity of their mercantile transactions has been acknowledged for centuries.¹⁵⁷ By controlling government, a restricted number of patricians also controlled state finances. Many aspects of the economy were regulated by the state, and it was the state which centralized wealth and authority. Over the fourteenth century, Venice perfected the basis for a successful model of investment and became the birthplace of that sort of capitalistic activity.¹⁵⁸ The strategy remained consistent: through monopolies of trade and rights of sovereignty, merchants secured the trade posts and maritime routes that allowed them to bring goods from their overseas possessions to the city.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate*, 247.

¹⁵⁶ Reinhold Mueller, “Aspects of Venetian Sovereignty in Medieval and Renaissance Dalmatia,” in *Quattrocento Adriatico, Fifteenth Century Art of the Adriatic Rim (Papers from a Colloquium, Florence, 1994)*, ed. Charles Dempsey (Baltimore: Nouva Alfa, 1996), 2.

¹⁵⁷ I will not attempt to offer a comprehensive overview of the fantastic amount of scholarly research on Venice’s mercantile activities; I will mention only a few examples. On merchandise, see: Jean-Claude Hocquet, *Le sel et la fortune de Venise*, 2 vols. (Lille: Publications de l’Université de Lille III, 1979); Reuven Amitai and Christoph Cluse, eds., *Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018); David Jacoby, “Cretan Cheese: A Neglected Aspect of Venetian Medieval Trade,” in *Medieval and Renaissance Venice. Studies in Honor of Donald E. Queller*, ed. Ellen Kittel and Thomas Madden (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 49–68. For a social perspective on merchants: Richard Mackenney, *Tradesmen and Traders: The World of the Guilds in Venice and Europe, c. 1250 - c. 1650* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1987); Paola Lanaro, *At the Centre of the Old World. Trade and Manufacturing in Venice and on the Venetian Mainland* (Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2006). On Venice’s financial market: Frederic Lane and Reinhold C. Mueller, *Money and Banking in Medieval and Renaissance Venice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Yadira González de Lara, “The Secret of Venetian Success: A Public-Order, Reputation-Based Institution,” *European Review of Economic History* 12, no. 3 (2008): 247–85. On state galleys: Frederic Lane, *Venetian Ships and Shipbuilders of the Renaissance* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992); Doris Stöckly, *Le système de l’incanto des Galées du marché à Venise (fin du XIIIe - milieu du XVe siècle)* (Lille: Publications de l’Université de Lille III, 1993).

¹⁵⁸ This is an opinion shared by Gino Luzzatto and others against Fernand Braudel (the latter claimed Genoa should be given the honor): Lars Börner and Battista Severgnini, “Genoa and Venice: Traders of Prosperity, Growth, and Death,” in *Union in Separation. Diasporic Groups and Identities in the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Georg Christ (Rome: Viella, 2015), 112; Gino Luzzatto, *Storia economica di Venezia dall XI al XVI secolo* (Venice: Centro Internazionale delle Arti e del Costume, 1961).

¹⁵⁹ Maria Fusaro, “Venetian Empire,” in *The Encyclopedia of Empire*, ed. Nigel Dalziel and John MacKenzie (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 4.

State finances relied on the galleys' safe journey to their destination, the smoothness of mercantile transactions once on land, and the galleys' successful return. Public coffers could run dry any given year if many ships were attacked by hostile powers, seized by pirates, or shipwrecked. Not all Council meetings were "interesting" enough to allured senators to attend at all times. But galleys were a state priority and it was expected that a majority of *pregadi* sat in Council meetings if that was the topic of discussion. An entry from 1393 mentions that 80 *pregadi* were required whenever an important decision was pending.¹⁶⁰ Yet, another entry from 1396, that number goes up to 85 *pregadi* if discussion pertained to the galleys.¹⁶¹

The rhythm of Council meetings between 1392 and 1402 settled into the pattern of auctioning, loading, and preparing the galleys' journeys. From January through August, Senate discussions involved arrangements to supply them with the necessary oarsmen, infantrymen, food provisions, ammunition, and merchandise. The Council was also in charge of ensuring that each ship sailed with the required crew: the patron, a sailing master, a sailing advisor, a priest, at least one notary, scribes, physicians, cooks, musicians and trumpeters, and the patron's personal servant. Oarsmen were also the ship's shoemakers, tailors, barbers, bakers, and general craftsmen.¹⁶² The captain of each merchant fleet must belong to a noble family and he was elected in the Council some weeks prior to the galleys' expected departure.

The Council's timeline to settle all this varied from year to year during this decade, allowing for a margin of up to five weeks. The season began with the auctioning of the Flanders galleys and the preparation of the commission for the Captain of the Gulf; both took place around mid-January, setting sail in early spring. In 1401 and 1402, three smaller ships were sent to Azov; the Council auctioned them in mid-spring. The Flanders galleys returned to Venice in early summer. Around mid-June, they were then auctioned for the journeys to the Byzantine empire, Alexandria and Beirut. These galleys left Venice between mid-August and mid-September. Ahead of their departure, Venice received an ever-increasing number of pilgrims, who travelled to Haifa, via Cyprus, on board the Beirut galleys. In 1395, there were so many pilgrims in Venice that the Council could not fulfill everyone's wish to travel to the holy land.¹⁶³ In the summer of 1397, the havoc pilgrims created on board the galleys had been apparently so uncontrollable that, next April, the Council forbade the transportation of any pilgrim who was not Venetian or a Venetian subject.¹⁶⁴ Pilgrims constituted a profitable business, and the Council allowed travels to Haifa again in 1399, on the condition that individual nobles be in charge of building or refurbishing galleys exclusively for that purpose.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 135v.

¹⁶¹ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 135v.

¹⁶² Alwyn Ruddock, "The Flanders Galleys," *History* 24, no. 96 (1940): 313.

¹⁶³ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 79r.

¹⁶⁴ *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 37v.

¹⁶⁵ *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 81v.

Galleys returned from the Byzantine empire, Alexandria and Beirut in October, and this marked the end of the sailing season.

The sea was more than a means to carry out mercantile business or invest wealth. The government's activities depended on the news and information which arrived from the ships in much the same manner as physical goods. This day-to-day task of collecting information kept the *pregadi* up-to-date, determined the agenda and fed discussions. Ships sailing through the Adriatic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea all came to Venice carrying letters containing information on international developments. It was not uncommon that, instead of taking those letters directly to the ducal palace, the ships' patrons and scribes took them to the bankers and moneychangers located at the Rialto, hoping to profit from the information.¹⁶⁶ The Council realized that this compromised state matters — several days could elapse between the ship's docking and the *signoria*'s learning of the latest news. In 1402, the Council imposed heavy fines on all scribes who did not go directly to the ducal palace upon descending from the ships.¹⁶⁷ Merchant letters sent from abroad have had a privileged place within scholarship, but their direct role in politics was evident only from the sixteenth century onwards, when they compromised the state's monopoly on information.¹⁶⁸ In cultural terms, even Venice's language owed some of its richness to the sea: the vernacular Venetian was a fascinating *pasticcio* of words and expressions from other parts of Italy and the Mediterranean, brought to Venice by seamen. Although there is an idealized element to it, ships were their own little microcosms and a reflection of cultural realities. Writing about a later period, Benjamin Arbel justifiably pointed out that “the cramped space and the limited accessibility to luxuries somehow mitigated the extent to which social hierarchies could be fully exposed.”¹⁶⁹

In early 1392, Antonio Bembo won the auction to become patron of a Flanders galley. He left Venice as scheduled, but about a month later he wrote to the Council making a plea for discharge: he had agonized bitterly during the entire journey, bedridden with sea sickness. The *pregadi* allowed him to remain in Bruges for some time and return to Venice by land.¹⁷⁰ Leaving aside the damage to his reputation, Antonio's sickness effectively made him ineligible for a career as patron. He later

¹⁶⁶ *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 51r.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁸ See: Mario Infelise, “From Merchant's Letters to Handwritten Political ‘Avvisi’: Notes on the Origins of Public Information,” in *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe, Vol. 3: Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400–1700*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 33–52; Ioanna Iordanou, “What News on the Rialto? The Trade of Information and Early Modern Venice's Centralized Intelligence Organization,” *Intelligence and National Security* 31, no. 3 (2016): 305–26; Giovanni Ciappelli and Valentina Nider, eds., *La invención de las noticias: las relaciones de sucesos entre la literatura y la información (siglos XVI-XVIII)* (Trento: Università degli studi di Trento, 2017).

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin Arbel, “Daily Life on Board Venetian Ships: The Evidence of Renaissance Travelogues and Diaries,” in *Rapporti mediterranei, pratiche documentarie, presenze veneziane: le reti economiche e culturali (XIV-XVI sec.)*, ed. Gherardo Ortalli and Alessio Sopracasa (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2017), 196. In Lane's opinion, Venice's social life developed against the egalitarian model of ship organization: Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic*, 47–49.

¹⁷⁰ *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 75r.

settled for political posts of little account. Antonio must have been aware that high politics was also intimately dependent on life on board galleys. Patricians pursuing political careers were required to navigate “seas,” both metaphorically and literally. They sailed through the *cursus honorum* which lead to the highest magistracies, and success in government posts depended on a “patrician’s ability to navigate the often serpentine paths of Venetian legislation and justice.”¹⁷¹ Beyond the realm of the allegorical, Venice’s most important political positions came with the implicit demand that one must be willing to leave for long voyages as ambassador, governor or captain. Personal success depended on one’s willingness (or ability) to spend lengthy periods at sea. Not all patricians had the fortune of bringing the overseas duties assigned to them to a good end. In 1397, the Council elected Giovanni Dandolo as ambassador to Sicily, but he died shortly after he arrived there.¹⁷²

The Captain of the Gulf, the supreme commander of the Venetian fleet, was a yearly office of great military and strategic importance. The Captain was entrusted to make decisions with limited information and be prepared to adjust his actions to the Senate’s frequent changing of plans. But the position, dangerous and demanding as it was, also carried enormous prestige. I compiled the table below according to information contained in Senate records (unfortunately, the records do not mention who held the office in 1395 and 1398). Saraceno Dandolo, Giovanni Miani, Tommaso Mocenigo, Benedetto Soranzo, Pietro Loredan, and Marino Caravello, men who held Venice’s most important political offices, all were Captains of the Gulf at some point between 1392 and 1402.

Captains	
Dandolo, Saraceno	1392
Miani, Giovanni	1393
Dandolo, Saraceno	1394
Mocenigo, Tommaso	1396
Soranzo, Benedetto	1397
Cappello, Giovanni	1399
Arimondo, Pietro	1400
Loredan, Pietro	1401
Caravello, Marino	1402

Table 3. Captains of the Gulf (1392-1402)

For the *pregadi*, the intertwining of politics, business, and sea voyages as part of official duties was a matter of fact. In 1394, the Council Expert Benedetto Soranzo requested (and received) an exemption of freight duties on two pieces of scarlet fabric he had sent to Constantinople: they had arrived ruined and, since they could not be sold, they may be sent back to Venice free of charge.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Monique O’Connell, *Men of Empire: Power and Negotiation in Venice’s Maritime State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 6.

¹⁷² *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 166r.

¹⁷³ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 17r.

Benedetto performed as ambassador to Ferrara, Florence and Bologna numerous times between 1393 and 1396.¹⁷⁴ He was then named Captain of the Gulf in 1397,¹⁷⁵ returning to his position as Council Expert before sailing once more as ambassador to the kings of France and Castille in 1400.¹⁷⁶ Nicolò Cappello, who was a salient Maritime Expert in 1394 and 1395, was not allowed to enter the Council room when the 1395 auctioning of the galleys to Byzantium began —he was contending to become a patron (which he achieved).¹⁷⁷ Such well-established reputation led him to become vice-captain of the Gulf in 1399.¹⁷⁸

The galleys' success in their errands at sea and their safe return to Venice were as vital to the state as it was to the *pregadi* individually. As part of the patrician elite, the *pregadi* invested their wealth in the state's mercantile activities. In consequence, the galleys' safety was a recurring and essential topic of Senate discussions, and it should not come as a surprise that the body of *pregadi* assigned to them the marks of importance reserved to the most important matters of state.

Past and Present

For Antonio Carile, in Venice there was a deep-seated commitment to the preservation of state records and this was a sign of the profound historical sensibility of the ruling class.¹⁷⁹ From the early eleventh century onwards, chronicles reflected and enhanced the historical sensibility of patricians.¹⁸⁰ Notaries, secretaries and high magistrates produced thousands (literally speaking) of the city's chronicles, which played a crucial role in the self-representation of Venice and its aristocracy. Venetians zealously kept the memory of their lineage because the individual's worth was often measured against his family's presence in city chronicles and in public records; those public records comprised both the history of Venice's government and the development of its ruling class as nearly

¹⁷⁴ *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 171, 242, 253, 268.

¹⁷⁵ *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 297.

¹⁷⁶ *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 25r.

¹⁷⁷ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 63r.

¹⁷⁸ *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 103r.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in: Patricia Fortini Brown, "The Self-Definition of the Venetian Republic," in *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, ed. Anthony Molho, Kurt Raaflaub, and Julia Emlen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1991), 515. On Venice's historical writing and the state, see: Neerfeld, *Historia per forma di diaria*, 200; Pertusi, "Gli inizi della storiografia umanistica nel Quattrocento"; Gilbert, "Biondo, Sabellico, and the Beginnings of Venetian Official Historiography"; Franco Gaeta, "Storiografia, coscienza nazionale e politica culturale nella Venezia del Rinascimento," in *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 3/1 (Vincenza: Neri Pozza, 1980), 1–91; Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), 23–33; Benzoni, "Scritti storico-politici"; Crouzet-Pavan, *Venice Triumphant*, 184–88.

¹⁸⁰ According to Patricia Fortini Brown, since the *Chronicon Venetum et Gradense* or *Chronicon Sagornini*, the earliest Venetian chronicle compiled by John the Deacon, Venetians' lack of a Roman past was transformed in their need to "invent a civic past": Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1.

one and the same.¹⁸¹ Extant historical sources, usually in the form of official documents, back up this view. They present a compelling portrait where the pride of individual nobles was dependent on the dignity of the class they were part of, and where their achievements stood in relation to the group to which they belonged.

This peculiar sensibility for recorded past also explains why most patrician families kept a chronicle of Venice in their homes: it was a way of placing the history of the city alongside the history of a family's public service record. According to Alfredo Viggiano, beyond the birth of an erudite and antiquarian taste, such widespread diffusion of the city's chronicles responded to the patricians need to anchor the historicity of their class in a mythical (or mystified) past.¹⁸² But chronicles played a crucial role in the self-representation of Venice, not less so because the authors were notaries, secretaries or high magistrates and, as Christiane Neerfeld's puts it, functional to a political ideology.¹⁸³

Together with chronicles, political documents abounded in patrician houses. These served the practical purpose of allowing patricians to prepare themselves for the administrative roles they were called to fulfill: patricians "were expected to serve in different offices for a short time (six months to two years), and shortly after their election were given a month of preparation in order to settle their affairs and study the pertinent public records."¹⁸⁴ Dorit Raines, who extensively researched the collections held in Venice's archives, concluded that the Venetian "archival revolution" seeking to organize the growth in documentary production began in the second half of the fifteenth century.¹⁸⁵ Raines explained that during the fifteenth century it became customary to borrow documents (or request a copy) which were open for public consultation, although one wonders if that practice did not exist earlier.

By the time patricians began their political careers, they were no strangers to the fact that administration, politics and record-keeping were one and the same. In Venice, politics was a personal, as much as a family affair. It is not difficult to imagine that young patricians were coached by other male family members in the duties posts carried. Depending on the position, the documents associated with these offices included letters, decisions and dispositions by government councils, extraditions, acts reflecting the special activities of the judiciary, copies of itineraries, reports, visits,

¹⁸¹ James Grubb, "Memory and Identity: Why Venetians Didn't Keep Ricordanze," *Renaissance Studies* 8, no. 4 (1994): 377.

¹⁸² Viggiano, *Governanti e governati*, 21.

¹⁸³ Neerfeld, *Historia per forma di diaria*, 18. An official endorsement of historiography happened only in the following century. According to Gilbert, the distinction of official historiographer can be given only to Andrea Navagero, who in 1516 was put in charge of the Biblioteca Marciana and commissioned to continue Sabellico's *Storia di Venezia*: Gilbert, "Biondo, Sabellico, and the Beginnings of Venetian Official Historiography," 280.

¹⁸⁴ Raines, "The Private Political Archives of the Venetian Patriciate – Storing, Retrieving and Recordkeeping in the Fifteenth-Eighteenth Centuries," 136.

¹⁸⁵ Raines, 136.

proclamations, commissions, and privileges, reports on the state of the lagoon, rivers and canals, rent and sales contracts, acts concerning the church; sales licenses and concessions; election results of magistrates and subordinate ministers, acts concerning the execution of works such as excavations, regulations and arrangements of rivers, staircases, buildings, perimeters, or mills, and a very long *et cetera*.¹⁸⁶ Although each office “spoke” on its own terms, such familiarity allowed patricians to maintain a fair degree of competence when they transferred from one office to another, which happened regularly. Sitting in the Council meant one was an experienced member of Venice’s political class, and thus familiar with the documents listed above. Through their work in the Council, the *pregadi* regularly handled communications,¹⁸⁷ international treaties, reports and requests sent regularly by legal authorities abroad (notaries, rectors, counts, captains, castellans, treasurers, etc.). They also had at their disposal the *relazioni* of Venetian ambassadors, whose insight was considered to be very astute and their remarks extraordinarily penetrating.¹⁸⁸ The *pregadi* were, in short, brought up into a tradition of documenting their family’s past and their city’s present.

Recently, the “archival turn” has brought attention to archives not as passive storage centers of government action and decisions, but as objects of study in themselves.¹⁸⁹ Filippo de Vivo has described the historical development of the Venetian state archive from this perspective, seeing the archive’s reorganization as a historical process and an occasion of social tension.¹⁹⁰ For example, he has shown that the process of producing indexes was a state need inextricably linked to particular conjunctures of Venetian politics.¹⁹¹ He also remarked that the state devoted a great deal of energy,

¹⁸⁶ Important contributions have highlighted that progressive perfectionism in record-keeping practices led to an excess of documentary material, which in some cases “clogged” medieval administration: Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, “Révolution documentaire et révolution scripturaire : le cas de l’Italie médiévale,” *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes* 153, no. 1 (1995): 177–85.

¹⁸⁷ Here, the term “communication” has a technical meaning. It refers “to the transfer of information from one governing council to another, a mechanism leading to the constitution of a continuous track of records in the government’s archive”: de Vivo, *Information and Communication*, 4.

¹⁸⁸ Ambassadors’ letters were, in fact, documents of the highest value and reputation even among their contemporaries. The first register expressly devoted to ambassadors’ instructions began “with a ‘Ricordança et informatione’ of February 15, 1384,” although the dispatches or *relazioni* as such started to be recorded only in 1395, see: Riccardo Fubini, “Diplomacy and Government in the Italian City-States of the Fifteenth Century (Florence and Venice),” in *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450-1800*, ed. Daniela Frigo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 39. The psychological insights of these reports and the advantage the Senate took from them are described in: Gino Benzoni, “Ritrarre con la penna, ossia gli ambasciatori veneti ritrattisti,” *Studi veneziani* 32 (1996): 29–48. And, more recently, in: Eric Dursteler, *In the Sultan’s Realm: Two Venetian Ambassadorial Reports on the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2018). Unfortunately, no *relazioni* have survived for the period under study, lost in one or several fires at the Ducal Palace. Together with them, all the relations of the Venetian ambassadors and governors of Albania were lost: Giuseppe Valentini, “Appunti sul regime degli stabilimenti veneti in Albania nel secolo XIV e XV,” *Studi veneziani* 8 (1966): 197.

¹⁸⁹ For examples on this approach, see the contributions in: Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *Archives & Information in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁹⁰ de Vivo, “Ordering the Archive”; Filippo de Vivo, “Cuore dello stato o luogo di tensione? Archivi, società e politica a Venezia tra Quattro e Seicento,” in *Archivi e archivisti in Italia tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. Andres Guidi and Alessandro Silvestri (Rome: Viella, 2015), 173–98; Filippo de Vivo, “Archives of Speech: Recording Diplomatic Negotiation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy,” *European History Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2016): 519–44.

¹⁹¹ de Vivo, “Ordering the Archive,” 233.

time, and resources in the long-term preservation of decisions on parchments wood- and leather-bound registers (instead of paper) to guarantee that previously-approved laws could be retrieved, avoiding in this way any inconsistency in legislation.¹⁹² However, his analysis falls outside the realm of the decade under study. The practice of producing indexes and other several practices he describes had not yet been adopted. Similarly, the creation of a separate secret chancery, in itself an important landmark in Venice's record-keeping, took place only after Venice's mainland expansion.

A lack of indexes does not mean that organs of power did not devise alternative scribal mechanisms to facilitate information retrieval. Praiseworthy in its findings and new approaches, the archival turn largely turned a blind eye to the fact that, long before the reorganization of the Venetian state archive, offices took on the task of producing records and passing on information in accordance with systematic, voluntarily-adopted textual conventions.

¹⁹² de Vivo, 236.

Chapter 3. Outline on Venice and Albania

Venetian politics in Albania were facilitated by the existence of what Oliver Schmitt has called a “Kommunikationsraum” in Southeastern Europe. Such communication space allowed constant flow of information as well as the exchange of people and goods. This space should not be understood literally as a spatially demarked area, but as a concept characterized by common socioeconomic and cultural patterns whose general conditions were ultimately determined by political structures.¹⁹³

By 1392, Venice’s political structures had overcome several setbacks. In the mid-fourteenth century, Venice had reached a peak of 120,000 inhabitants, but the Black Death of 1348 caused a “demographic catastrophe,” and for the rest of the century population ranged somewhere between 60,000 and 80,000 people.¹⁹⁴ In 1382, a new outbreak of the plague killed 19,000 people, decimating yet another generation.¹⁹⁵ However, by the 1390s, Venice had begun to show signs of recovery both from its dramatic population loss and from the costly war against Genoa. This demographic and financial recovery opened up the prospect of greater Venetian potency. This was felt within state organization: progressively Venice stopped being a commune and started viewing itself as *Dominium*, or, in vernacular, “Serenissima Signoria.”¹⁹⁶ Under the rule of Antonio Venier, who became doge in 1382, Venice achieved several military and political triumphs. A safe route through Venice’s holdings in Corfu (acquired in 1386), Coron, Modon, and Negroponte (since 1390) secured access to territories in the East. This expansion encompassed, among others, the Cyclades (1383) and Delos (1390), also in the Aegean.¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, after the Battle of Kosovo, the Ottomans secured control over Serbian principalities, which thus became (voluntarily or not) Ottoman vassals.¹⁹⁸ In early 1392, the Ottomans strengthened their position in the area by capturing the Sanjak of Üsküp (in modern-day Skopje). Both the Venetians and the Ottomans woke up the fact that the Albanian lands lay in an area granting strategic access to the Balkans. The Venetian expansion into Albania began against the backdrop of Ottoman presence and advances.

¹⁹³ Oliver Jens Schmitt, “Das venezianische Südosteuropa als Kommunikationsraum (ca. 1400-ca. 1600),” in *Balceni occidentali, Adriatico e Venezia fra XIII e XVIII secolo*, ed. Gherardo Ortalli and Oliver Jens Schmitt (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 78.

¹⁹⁴ Romano, *Patricians and Popolani*, 28, 154. For an assessment of the consequences of the plague in Venice, see the essays contained in: Comune di Venezia, Assessorato alla Cultura e alle Belle Arti, *Venezia e la peste: 1348-1797* (Venice: Marsilio, 1979).

¹⁹⁵ Lane, *Venice, a Maritime Republic*, 197.

¹⁹⁶ This change received an official sanction much later, on May 9, 1462. The Great Council then decreed that in the “*Promissio domini ducis*” (the oath of office sworn by the incoming doge of Venice) the sentence *Comune Veneciarum* should be completely eliminated and replaced with *Dominium Veneciarum*: Cozzi and Knapton, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 100.

¹⁹⁷ Cozzi and Knapton, 9; Fusaro, “Venetian Empire,” 3; Benjamin Arbel, “Venice’s Maritime Empire in the Early Modern Period,” in *A Companion to Venetian History: 1400-1797*, ed. Eric Dursteler (Brill: Leiden, 2013), 125–254.

¹⁹⁸ John Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans: A Critical Survey from the Late Twelfth Century to the Ottoman Conquest* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 409–11.

But what was the rationale behind this political expansion, which then set the basis for Venice’s “Kommunikationsraum”? This is a point of contention, still fertile ground for debate today. The debate relates directly to the definition of Venice’s power: was it a colonial empire or a different configuration of political organization? As Gherardo Ortalli pointed out, discussion during a 2006 conference arose from the repurposing of an old concept —commonwealth— although this repurposing had limited success.¹⁹⁹ Yet the question remained: how was “this modest, lagoon-based society able to keep control over an empire extraordinarily disproportionate in size to its head, its capital city”²⁰⁰? Stephan Sander-Faes rather compellingly employed the new conceptual approach of a “Venetian commonwealth” to explain how Venice secured its rule in Zadar by combining military power with the cultural and socially shared experiences of Venetians and the “Zadrani” elite.²⁰¹ In 2015 and 2017, Gherardo Ortalli, Oliver Schmitt, and Ermanno Orlando took up the concept once more and organized conferences with this conceptual approach as the central theme. The conference proceedings contain a wide range of answers to the question of whether Venice relied on direct hegemony, marked subordination, or something in-between to control the western and eastern Balkans.²⁰²

In 2020, Georg Christ and Franz-Julius Morche edited a volume to specifically investigate the nature of Venice’s dominance and how the Venetians conceptualized it. In a few well-chosen words, Christ and Morche summarized Venice’s “tricky balancing act” between local autonomy and central domination: “while bowing to the *dominante*, the [members of the Venetian realm] contributed to a common project by pursuing their own interests.”²⁰³ Christ’s and Morche’s fine introduction to the volume condenses the themes, extensive relevant literature, and current trends which seek to explain Venice’s maritime realm as either a confederation, commonwealth, colonial empire, or a “sui generis conglomerate of different entities.” While this debate is of great importance, I redirect the reader to the work of these authors because, ultimately, this discussion pertains more directly to those who examine the republic’s later expansion or long lifespan. Here, such discussion would obscure, rather than illuminate, the purpose of this study. I examine Venice’s involvement with Albanian cities from 1392 to 1402 as a means of describing the recording conventions which, within the Council’s

¹⁹⁹ Gherardo Ortalli, “The Genesis of a Unique Form of Statehood, between the Middle Ages and the Modern Age,” in *Il Commonwealth veneziano tra 1204 e la fine della Repubblica*, ed. Gherardo Ortalli, Oliver Jens Schmitt, and Ermanno Orlando (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2015), 3.

²⁰⁰ Ortalli, 4.

²⁰¹ Stephan Sander-Faes, *Urban Elites of Zadar: Dalmatia and the Venetian Commonwealth, 1540-1569* (Rome: Viella, 2013).

²⁰² Gherardo Ortalli, Oliver Jens Schmitt, and Ermanno Orlando, eds., *Il Commonwealth veneziano tra 1204 e la fine della Repubblica* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2015); Gherardo Ortalli, Oliver Jens Schmitt, and Ermanno Orlando, eds., *Comunità e società nel Commonwealth veneziano* (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2019).

²⁰³ Georg Christ and Franz-Julius Morche, “Introduction,” in *Cultures of Empire: Rethinking Venetian Rule, 1400–1700: Essays in Honour of Benjamin Arbel*, ed. Georg Christ and Franz-Julius Morche (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1.

Deliberazioni, flagged state matters of critical importance. It is not my primary intention to define the nature of such involvement.

Yet since it is obviously impossible to avoid the subject entirely, I consider it more useful to resort to a limited, but equally employable concept: polycentricity. This highly-adaptive heuristic model describes forms of organization characterized by the presence of “multiple centers of semi-autonomous decision making.”²⁰⁴ In this way, the “system” which Venice built abroad can be seen as an aggregation of power units to which Venice transferred its central authority. The hierarchy which Venice assigned to each power unit is visible through the number and reputation of officeholders deployed: while the Council sent only one patrician to Drisht (or even decided that not even this was needed), as many as five nobles (a governor, two councilors and one or two financial officers) were sent to Cyprus or Crete — Venice’s most important holdings.²⁰⁵ As concept, polycentricity acknowledges that any system of governance may have multiple decision-making centers, but does not require coordination among those centers to form the system.²⁰⁶ As O’Connell has shown, officeholders were the executors of the transfer of power from Venice to its maritime possessions, and I will rely on her work to illustrate Venice’s general mechanisms to secure control units in Albania.²⁰⁷ As shown below, several semi-autonomous decision-making agents coincided in the “Kommunikationsraum” between Albania and Venice. Such agents were fundamental to Venice’s power units overseas: local noble families exercised power by means of their alliances with Venice (or with the Ottomans), local communes retained a fair degree of autonomy in handling their administrative affairs, and Venetian officeholders used the agency given to them by Venice to secure Venice’s authority.

Power Units “alla veneziana”

Power relations between Venice and the overseas possessions were uneven: Venice was the ruler and the overseas possessions were the ruled. As Schmitt pointed out, one of Venice’s decisive strengths was its successful use of the language of justice, consensus and rule of law to describe its dominion. Sometimes, however, Albanian cities subverted this relationship by formulating similar claims to justify their demands, upturning Venice’s idealized image of itself for their own advantage.²⁰⁸ Every so often, other foreign powers entered this dynamic by proclaiming sovereignty

²⁰⁴ Keith Carlisle and Rebecca Gruby, “Polycentric Systems of Governance: A Theoretical Model for the Commons,” *Policy Studies Journal* 47, no. 4 (2019): 928.

²⁰⁵ Arbel, “Venice’s Maritime Empire,” 147.

²⁰⁶ Carlisle and Gruby, “Polycentric Systems of Governance,” 928.

²⁰⁷ O’Connell, *Men of Empire*.

²⁰⁸ Schmitt, “Kommunikationsraum,” 96.

and using Venice's same terminology of concord and just law, but exploiting their geographical proximity or other conjunctural advantages to give their claims a hostile undertone. On all sides, as Valentini observed, every expression of friendship and fidelity in economic or political matters was subject to prudent reservation, and for good reason. It is not surprising that Albanian communities preferred a powerful and wealthy (but distant) protector like Venice, rather than less powerful yet neighboring lords.²⁰⁹

In order to overcome the geographical distance, Venice relied on the polycentric nature of its dominion. Whenever Venice acquired control of a new territory, it created power units which functioned as semi-autonomous centers of decision-making. These power units comprised administrative and judicial functions, making them the centers of regional communication flow. Venetian "law" was a pragmatic business. Rather than relying on Roman jurisprudence, the non-written customary practices of Venice dictated legal practice, and this was a "primary vehicle of the 'Venetianization' of the colonial territories, especially in the *Stato da Mar*."²¹⁰ Delivering justice was "the centerpiece of Venetian self-presentation" and Venice's central prerogative overseas.²¹¹ In spite of that, local demands were not always met by these power units. In such cases, subjects addressed the *signoria* directly through ambassadors or through correspondence, bypassing local Venetian authorities.²¹² Generally, as Mueller points out, Venetian sovereignty "was exercised on a day-to-day basis to the direct profit of the imperial capital and its inhabitants."²¹³ But particularly in light of Ottoman advances, the acquisition of a new territory could be justified as politically or strategically necessary, even if it brought a negative balance to public coffers.

The power units' "efficient cause" (in the Aristotelian sense of the expression) was the mediating role of Venice's "men of empire," as defined by O'Connell. Naturally, officeholders were not the only men facilitating the administration of Venice's colonies: "Venetian maritime pre-eminence was built on the backs of the oarsmen who rowed its ships, the merchants who risked their capital, and the priest-notaries who documented the entire enterprise."²¹⁴ Even so, officeholders played a particularly crucial role because "Venetian policy walked a fine line between reserving power to itself, protecting its representatives' prerogatives, and keeping its subjects contented."²¹⁵ As O'Connell pointed out, it was up to each governor to determine the location of that line. The challenging nature of the governors' task can hardly be overstated. Viggiano explained that governors

²⁰⁹ Valentini, "Appunti," 264.

²¹⁰ Mueller, "Aspects of Venetian Sovereignty," 3–4.

²¹¹ O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 75.

²¹² Schmitt, "Kommunikationsraum," 93.

²¹³ Mueller, "Aspects of Venetian Sovereignty," 17.

²¹⁴ Dennis Romano, "Venetian Exceptionalism? Lay and Religious in Venetian Communal Governance," in *Churchmen and Urban Government in Late Medieval Italy, c. 1200 - 1450*, ed. Frances Andrews and Maria Agata Pincelli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 228.

²¹⁵ O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 58.

had a duty to convey that both Venice's rule and the Venetian sense of justice were "inexorable." Yet governors took extreme care not to cast the impression that Venice was encroaching on local traditions or, on the flip side on the coin, yielding to the pressure of local factions.²¹⁶

The posts of governors, castellans and similar offices usually lasted for two years. They were generally elected in the Great Council, although the Senate could also elect positions for places of relatively lesser importance (such as some Albanian cities during the decade under study). Upon their election, each official received a commission indicating the general measures he should put in place once he arrived to his assigned location. Commissions were flexible and allowed officers to act according to their judgment, so long as Venice's honor was protected.²¹⁷ As mentioned, O'Connell explained that the expectation that these officers would represent Venice's ideals whilst keeping subjects content was difficult to achieve in practice. Governors, castellans and commissioners did not always have the appropriate knowledge regarding the complexities of the place assigned to them. Therefore, they did not always make good decisions. Additionally, they sometimes lacked the financial and military resources to defend Venice's rule successfully.²¹⁸ In some cases, patrician families had close ties to specific locations overseas, and in such cases the job of the governor could be facilitated by virtue of his relatives' experience or his family connections. Already in the thirteenth century, prominent patrician families such as the Barbarigo, Priuli, Contarini, Gradenigo and Querini had strong ties with Durrës. In later periods, the Zorzi, Giustinian, Marcello, Morosini and Venier also developed close ties with Albanian cities, both politically and economically.²¹⁹

It is difficult to determine exactly how many offices were available for patricians overseas during this period, given that the registers from the *Segretario alle Voci*, who recorded the names of all the nobles appointed as officers, are lost for the period covering the years from 1388 to 1434. Based on Mozzato's analysis, O'Connell estimated that, between 1383 and 1387, there were 77 offices directly concerned with maritime territorial administration, and this number diminished to 71 offices in 1400.²²⁰ Mueller further specifies that approximately 30 posts "for governors, castellans and treasurers, existed down the Dalmatian coast and into Albania, not counting viscountships and vice-captaincies, all held by Venetian nobles."²²¹ Later on, upon the Venetian takeover of Albanian cities, the *signoria* set up consulates and sent ambassadors, but overall no more than a hundred men—

²¹⁶ Viggiano, *Governanti e governati*, 93.

²¹⁷ O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 57.

²¹⁸ O'Connell, 58.

²¹⁹ Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 369–380.

²²⁰ O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 41.

²²¹ Mueller, "Aspects of Venetian Sovereignty," 5.

including merchants, soldiers, and officers—dwelt in cities like Durrës, Lezhë or Shkodra, whereas in the countryside their influence hardly had any real impact.²²²

As the Venetian presence in these territories intensified, Venetians perceived local social dynamics and social institutions through the lenses of their own institutions and social divisions. The extent of the Venetian influence was not always subtle. For example, under Venetian rule, membership in the city councils throughout Istria and Dalmatia became an exclusive privilege of the nobility during the first half of the fourteenth century, in the same manner as the Venetian Council after the *serrata*.²²³ Coinage and monetary policies also followed Venetian guidelines. Symbolic displays of power, too, played an important role and Venetian power units overseas were decorated with the iconography of the lion of Saint Mark. In some cases, Venetian governors tried to glorify themselves, rather than the *signoria*, which Venice's ruling bodies opposed fervently.²²⁴

Venice and its nobles did not aim at controlling all affairs of overseas communes. Venice was aware that its approach to legal practice was somehow alien to the local elites of Dalmatian and Albanian cities, who organized the affairs of their communes along the lines of written local statutes, as it will be explained below. Under Venetian rule, cities were allowed to maintain their customs, festivities, etc. In this way, the communes retained a degree of self-administration and autonomy.

During the fourteenth century, the rule over many territories had competing claims. Maria Fusaro explained that “the Venetian government never confused effective possession with a legitimate title.”²²⁵ This was true for many territories, and in such cases there was a “delicate balance between different political powers, supported by various ethnic and religious groups, [which] required constant diplomatic attention and subtle negotiations with local potentates.”²²⁶

Negotiations to obtain rule over a given territory were generally carried out between the *signoria* and the city lord of the place in question, without involving the commune. In exchange of the right to rule, Venice could offer a yearly allowance or other benefits.²²⁷ Furthermore, beyond the formal act of acquisition, Venice recognized that securing the support of the local nobility was crucial to its rule. Attentions given to notable families in the form of Venetian citizenship was a regular practice. The grantees received the perpetual right of movement and operation in Venetian-controlled

²²² Oliver Jens Schmitt, “Le Commerce Vénitien dans l’Albanie vénitienne: Mécanismes et conjonctures d’un espace économique au XV siècle,” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 33, no. 2 (2003): 893.

²²³ Mueller, “Aspects of Venetian Sovereignty,” 3.

²²⁴ O’Connell, *Men of Empire*, 60–61.

²²⁵ Fusaro, “Venetian Empire,” 6.

²²⁶ Fusaro, 6.

²²⁷ O’Connell, *Men of Empire*, 2; Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 319; Monique O’Connell, “The Contractual Nature of the Venetian State,” in *Il Commonwealth veneziano tra 1204 e la fine della Repubblica*, ed. Gherardo Ortalli, Oliver Jens Schmitt, and Ermanno Orlando (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2015), 57–72.

territories and, in the case of the most powerful magnates, they were added to the Venetian nobility.²²⁸ By granting Venetian citizenship to members of prominent families (or the promise that they would be treated as Venetian citizens), they received protection from Venice, while Venice obtained political influence and their commitment to support Venice's interests.²²⁹ As Zečević pointed out, the granting of citizenship did not always work in Venice's favor: Venice recognized the political capital of powerful lords in its maritime domains in the Eastern Adriatic to stabilize the region, but these same lords "eventually challenged and disbalanced their domestic hierarchies because through these grants, the magnates were put at the same level of proximity to the Venetian authorities as were their local suzerains."²³⁰ Additionally, Venice could not control the local elites' affiliations, who took advantage of this fact to retain a certain degree of control over their sphere of influence.

Albanian Cities

From the rise of Epirus and the emergence of new Slav powers in the second half of the thirteenth century onwards, the situation of the Albanian territories was characterized by precarious political stability. Despite the attempts made by a number of political powers, there was nothing like a politically or culturally unified Albania; such an idea would only materialize in modern times.

In Alain Ducellier's analysis, the constant wars between the rulers of Epirus and the Slav lords that began around 1205, together with the harsh fiscal-policy of the Angevins, produced a considerable decline of the Albanian ports and led to the separation of the coastal cities, particularly Durrës, and the interior.²³¹ Durrës, which had been a Byzantine province, passed to Venice's hands after the fourth crusade, but control did not last long. The importance of the city had diminished in comparison to its former Byzantine preeminence, when it had been directly connected to Byzantium through the Via Egnatia. A coup de grâce was the earthquake in Durrës in March 1271, which left this city destroyed, abandoned and defenseless.²³² Durrës, however, continued to have a considerable naval and commercial significance for Greek, Venetian, Hungarian, and Ragusan foreign policy,

²²⁸ Nada Zečević, "Sub umbra protectione et fauore nostro: Urban Inclusion in the Eastern Adriatic through Venetian Concessions of Citizenship, Nobility and *salvus conductus* (14th-15th c.)," in *Ciutats mediterrànies: l'espai i el territori*, ed. Flocel Sabaté (Barcelona: Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2020), 172–73.

²²⁹ Spiros Asonitis, "Relations between the Venetian Regimen Corphoy and the Albanians of Epirus (14th-15th Centuries)," in *The Medieval Albanians*, ed. Charalambos Gasparis (Athens: Ethniko Hidryma Ereunon, 1998), 280. Non-noble subjects had also the possibility to request assistance if they had been driven out of their countries and sought refuge, which Venice usually granted: Valentini, "Appunti," 248.

²³⁰ Zečević, "Sub umbra protectione," 173.

²³¹ Alain Ducellier, "Albania, Serbia and Bulgaria," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History: 1198 - c. 1300*, ed. David Abulafia, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 794.

²³² Donald Nicol, *The Despotate of Epiros 1267-1479: A Contribution to the History of Greece in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 15. Ducellier, however, dates the earthquake to July 1267: Ducellier, *La façade maritime*, 294. See the description of the earthquake by George Pachymeres, a Byzantine historian, in: Robert Elsie, *Early Albania: A Reader of Historical Texts, 11th-17th Centuries* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2003), 12–13.

although it never regained the prestige it had enjoyed in Late Antiquity. According to Fine's calculations, the city underwent a total of thirty-two changes of lordship between 992 and 1392.²³³

The region of Zeta, north of Durrës, was the usual denomination since at least the twelfth century of an area corresponding to today's southern Montenegro and northern Albania.²³⁴ It owed its name ("Zenta" or "Genta" in Latin) to the Zeta River, which starts in the Nikšić field in today's Montenegro and confluences into the Morača River. The Upper Zeta laid in the mountains of Njeguši and extended up to the north-eastern side of the Shkodra Lake. The Lower Zeta encompassed the coastal area between Budva and the Monastery of St. Sergius along the Bojana River.²³⁵



Map 2. Central Balkans. Adapted from: "Central Balkans 1373-1395" by Panonian at English Wikipedia, under public domain.



Map 3. Albanian cities. Adapted from: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 65.

After the death of the Serbian King Stephen Dušan in 1355, his empire broke up and prominent Albanian lords fought for the control of cities while, in some cases, less prominent chieftains retained control of the countryside.²³⁶ The dismemberment of the Serbian Empire into local principalities also facilitated the Ottoman advance in the Balkans. In 1362, they had taken Erdine (Adrianopolis) and continued their advance into European territories. The Serbian King Vukašin Mrnjavčević and his brother, the despot Jovan Uglješa, in an attempt to stop the Ottoman campaign in the Balkans, faced them at the Maritsa river near the village of Chernomen (today's Ormenio in

²³³ Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans*, 384.

²³⁴ This region had been previously called "Διοκλεία" [Diocleia]: Konstantin Jireček, "Skutari und sein Gebiet im Mittelalter," in *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*, ed. Ludwig von Thallóczy, vol. 1 (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1916), 98.

²³⁵ Jireček, 98.

²³⁶ Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans*, 357–368.

Greece) in 1372, but the Serbian forces suffered a bitter defeat and the two brothers were killed. Thereafter, the onrush of the continuous Ottoman assaults became a regular occurrence.²³⁷

By the fourteenth century, Shkodra had become one of the most important cities of Lower Zeta. Although it never reached the political, economic, religious, and cultural prominence Durrës had enjoyed in the previous centuries, it was nevertheless the geographical and political center of the region.²³⁸ Its geographical location made it the “natural focal point” for the roads connecting the Upper Zeta, the coastal cities of Budva, Bar, Ulcinj, and Lezhë, and the southern routes running towards Durrës.²³⁹

The urban milieu in Albania followed the pattern of the majority of medieval cities and consisted of two main parts: the city proper, represented by the citadel and used for housing and the exercise of political and economic activities, and the countryside or “contrata,” consisting of arable land, forests, grassland, vineyards, etc., that were in the outskirts of the city. The countryside was not exclusively made of productive lands. That space was also destined to the deposit of rubbish and even to be the habitual place for thieves and wrongdoers. From the point of view of the Venetian senate decisions and official communications, the fields surrounding the city did not always have a defined spatial demarcation.

In Albanian territories, alliances were broken easily, and peace did not last long. Yet in spite of this volatile political situation, from at least the second half of the thirteenth century, Albanian cities and their surrounding villages had experienced a fair agricultural development. In the Balkans, this agricultural development did not bring wealth to rural populations in the European sense of the word. Rural wealth was circumscribed to the land farmers owned, which explains why the farming population’s need for coinage was almost non-existent.²⁴⁰ Yet agriculture became North Albania’s main economic activity. In Shkodra, for example, local landowners and producers profited from the city’s mountainous setting as they were able to sell their products to foreign merchants, who were eager to avoid the taxes collected in Durrës and other ports. In fact, from the thirteenth century

²³⁷ After this defeat, the Ottomans penetrated Macedonia and Albania, whereas the more famous Battle of Kosovo in 1389 only “legalized the establishment of the Ottoman domination in the Balkans and marked the beginning of the Ottoman–Hungarian rivalry over the area between the Balkans and Central Europe”: Dritan Egro, “The Place of Albanian Lands in the Balkan Geopolitics during the Ottoman Invasion (the 14th – 15th Centuries),” *Acta Studia Albanica* 1 (2005): 82. Research on the Ottoman incursions in the second half of the fourteenth century is extensive. For a preliminary survey, see: Halil İnalcık, “Ottoman Methods of Conquest,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 2 (1954): 103–29; Elizabeth Zachariadou, “Marginalia on the History of Epirus and Albania (1380–1418),” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 78 (1988): 195–210; Selami Pulaha, ed., *Lufta Shqiptaro-Turke ne shekullin XV: burime Osmane* [The Albanian-Turkish War in the fifteenth century: Ottoman Sources] (Tirana: Universiteti Shtetëror i Tiranës, Instituti i Historisë dhe i Gjuhësise, 1968).

²³⁸ Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 95.

²³⁹ Schmitt, 95.

²⁴⁰ Aleksandar Brzić, “Some Observations on the Role of Ducats in the Balkans in Late Medieval and Modern Times,” *Rural History* 17, no. 2 (2006): 123.

onwards, “the Albanian coast becomes a sieve where Venetian and Ragusan trade flourishes everywhere except in the traditional ports.”²⁴¹

Additionally, agriculture was an incentive for commercial exchanges. The spread and amount of trade it fueled was important for the region, but modest compared to trade in cities such as Dubrovnik or Venice.²⁴² The Zeta region was partly cut off from the coast and this limited accessibility (possible only by land and few waterways), was a hindrance to extensive exchanges of merchandise. The Shkodra lake, together with inland waterways, allowed fairly active communication networks between cities such as Shkodra, Šas, Dagnum, and Drisht, to name but the most important examples.²⁴³ However, the Çermenika, a thick forest, made the pass on the region’s southern side difficult.²⁴⁴ On the eastern side, the canyon of the Drin river was also hostile to traffic and forced navigation on steep slopes and deep river valleys.²⁴⁵ In consequence, the Drin, which was such an important medium for communication in the Balkans, was in this region so difficult to navigate that, instead of building up connection networks between coastal and inland areas, it was a dangerous obstacle.²⁴⁶

Along with trade from agricultural products, religious institutions had an enormous importance in north Albania. Both the notary’s office and the church were a *sine qua non* of the urban constituency. In northern Albania, even the smallest cities counted with a central notarial office, and religious buildings were ubiquitous in this area.²⁴⁷ In and around Shkodra, for instance, there were apparently so many churches, that a cat could have gone all the way from Shkodra north-westwards to Drisht just by jumping from one church roof to the next.²⁴⁸

Urban affairs in north Albania were regulated and legally sanctioned by the creation of communes with the right to administer themselves.²⁴⁹ From the twelfth century onwards, glossators and lawyers reawakened the teachings and beliefs of the classical Roman law and implemented them into administrative practices. These practices heavily influenced the city laws of Dalmatia and north

²⁴¹ Ducellier et al., *Les Chemins de l’exil*, 39.

²⁴² Shkurti insists on the fact that, in Albanian cities of the Middle Ages, viticulture was a “massive public activity” and the lands near cities were covered with vineyards, but he does not specify the comparative revenue created by this activity: Shkurti, “Recherches,” 136.

²⁴³ Jireček, “Skutari,” 101; Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 96.

²⁴⁴ Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 80.

²⁴⁵ Schmitt, 80.

²⁴⁶ Schmitt, 68.

²⁴⁷ Despite being subject to the Serbian kingdom, all the important cities in north Albania and the Adriatic coast — Kotor, Budva, Ulcinj, Drisht, Danje, and Lezhë — had Roman Catholic bishoprics: Marka Tomić Đurić, “The Isles of Great Silence: Monastic Life on Lake Scutari under the Patronage of the Balšićs,” *Balkanica* 43 (2012): 83–84. For the interplay of the different religious denominations in the Albanian space see: Milan von Šufflay, “Die Kirchenzustände im vortürkischen Albanien. Die orthodoxe Durchbruchzone im katholischen Damme,” in *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*, ed. Ludwig von Thallóczy, vol. 1 (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1916), 188–287; Schmitt, “Die Monade des Balkans.”

²⁴⁸ Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 99.

²⁴⁹ Luan Malltezi, “La ville et la campagne dans la société Albanaise des XIe - XVe siècles,” *Acta Studia Albanica* 2 (1990): 102.

Albania.²⁵⁰ Building upon these practices, Albanian cities developed their own legal tradition through the codification of city statutes on the basis of regulations and ancient local customs.²⁵¹ This codification process of local city laws allowed a form of local administration centered in the resolution of the affairs of the commune by means of a citizens' assembly.²⁵² Upon accepting Venice's rule, Albanian communes sent their statutes to the Council so that future governors could become acquainted with local customs and laws. The local city statute of Shkodra is the only surviving example of this kind of legal text in medieval Albania. There was virtually no trace of this statute until Lucia Nadin made the fortunate discovery of its only surviving manuscript, which had remained unnoticed in the library of the Museo Correr in Venice.²⁵³ Together with the integral text of the statute, the manuscript contains several additions from the years 1391 to 1469. A scribe called Marino Dulcichius copied the text from the original code and kept it among the documents of the Council of Ten in Venice.²⁵⁴ Although they have not survived, it is known that similar law books were written down in Durrës (1392) and Drisht (1397). The Serbian king was the nominal sovereign when these codes were first drawn,²⁵⁵ but in practice the communes had a high degree of autonomy and ruled themselves in almost every legal affair. The local city statutes were a constitutive part of the north Albanian tradition of customary law that structured social life and they held authority also in the period of Venetian rule.²⁵⁶

In short, the urban characteristics of Albanian cities hinged upon three main overlapping processes: the connections brought about by the increase of trade, the influence of religious institutions, and a confluence of Italian, Byzantine, Serbian and Albanian organizational forms.

²⁵⁰ Šufflay, *Städte und Burgen Albaniens*, 70.

²⁵¹ For scholarship on the consuetudinary law of the mountaineers, see: Shtjefen Gjecov, ed., *Kanuni i Leke Dukagjinit: The Code of Leke Dukagjini*, trans. Leonard Fox (New York: Gjonlekaj, 1989); Giuseppe Valentini, *La legge delle montagne albanesi: nelle relazioni della missione volante 1880-1932* (Florence: Olschki, 1969). For anthropological descriptions, see: Edith Durham, *High Albania* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000); Karl Kaser and Helmut Eberhart, eds., *Albanien: Stammesleben zwischen Tradition und Moderne* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1995). For other (sometimes highly idealized) descriptions of local traditions, see: Ippen, *Skutari und die nordalbanische Küstenebene*; Louis, *Albanien: eine Landeskunde vornehmlich auf Grund eigener Reisen*.

²⁵² Oliver Jens Schmitt, "Un monumento dell'Albania medievale," in *Statuti di Scutari, della prima metà del secolo XIV con le addizioni fino al 1469*, ed. Lucia Nadin (Rome: Viella, 2002), 30.

²⁵³ Lucia Nadin, "Il codice degli statuti e l'edizioni," in *Statuti di Scutari, della prima metà del secolo XIV con le addizioni fino al 1469*, ed. Lucia Nadin (Rome: Viella, 2002), 79.

²⁵⁴ Lucia Nadin, "Il testo Statutario," in *Statuti di Scutari, della prima metà del secolo XIV con le addizioni fino al 1469*, ed. Lucia Nadin (Rome: Viella, 2002), 50. Even though there is no date affixed to the manuscript, Nadin determined that it had been elaborated at some point between 1479 and the very first years of the sixteenth century.

²⁵⁵ According to Schmitt, the "Statuti di Scutari" dates back to the first decades of the fourteenth century, before Stephan Dušan was crowned emperor in 1346: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 113. See also: Ermal Baze, "Institutional and Governing Organization of the Municipality of Shkodra during the First Half of the XIV Century (According to 'The Statutes of Shkodra')," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5 (2014): 166.

²⁵⁶ Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 110. In Dalmatia such law books were also a principle for city life, see: Damir Karbić and Marija Karbić, *The Laws and Customs of Medieval Croatia and Slavonia: A Guide to the Extant Sources*, ed. Martyn Rady (London: UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 2013). Kotor, in today's Montenegro, had a similar statute establishing the set of norms in the administration of justice and public affairs: Miloš Milošević and Sima Ćirković, "On the Kotor Statute," in *Statuta Civitatis Cathari*, ed. Jelena Antović (Kotor: Državni arhiv Crne Gore, 2009), 513.

Albanian Protagonists

After the disintegration of the Serbian kingdom following the death of Stephan Dušan in 1355, Shkodra, Drisht, Lezhë, and other Albanian cities, were part of a conflict that unshackled decade-long inheritance wars. Three families — the Balšići, the Mataranga and the Thopia— disputed the region between the Lake of Shkodra and Durrës. The Mataranga became the less prominent of the three, and enmity arose between the Thopias and the Balšići.

The head of the Balša dynasty, Balša I, had three sons and one daughter. Stracimir Balšić was the eldest, but he took monastic vows and died in 1372. His brother George I Balšić was the most powerful of the three and ruled Zeta from 1362 until 1378. He declared war on Charles Thopia. Consequently, Thopia took him captive in 1364, only releasing him two years later, due to Ragusan mediation. After George Balšić died in 1378, the title passed onto his younger brother Balša Balšić, who did not enjoy the same respect from local lords that his brother had secured. In the meantime, their sister Vojislava Balšić married Charles Thopia around 1370. This fact did not improve family relations, and Balša Balšić also declared war on Thopia in order to conquer Durrës (previously, Durrës and Lezhë had been controlled by the Mataranga family). Balša Balšić was beheaded by the Ottomans, whom Thopia had called for support. After Balša Balšić died, his nephew George Stracimirović became lord of Zeta in 1385.²⁵⁷ He will be a main protagonist in several Council deliberations about Albania.

On the Thopias' side, Charles Thopia ruled most of modern central Albania from 1358 to 1388. Since 1362, he had been trying to materialize his claim to Durrës, which was in the official possession of Joanna of Naples, from the House of Anjou. He secured his official claim to Durrës in 1383, with Venetian tacit approval. Charles Thopia died in January, 1388. His son George Thopia succeeded him, and he is another key protagonist, at least during the first years of this study. George Thopia declared himself “princeps Albaniae,” although he was forced to make do with the title of Lord of Durrës, because the majority of his father's possessions had fallen into the hands of the Ottomans. In April, 1391, Pope Boniface IX reignited the rivalry between the Thopias and the Balšići. He declared that, due to George Thopia's intermingling with the antipope in Avignon, he (the pope) would prefer that George Stracimirović ruled Durrës instead of his Thopia namesake.²⁵⁸ The pope's interference had no effect, for it was the political events initiated by Venice in 1392 what marked the turning point for George Stracimirović's and George Thopia's possessions.

Lezhë, a port city located half-way between Durrës and Shkodra, was a strategic stop for merchant ships and (as Venice would realize) it was an important base for salt trade with Serbian

²⁵⁷ Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans*, 357–368.

²⁵⁸ Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 229.

territories.²⁵⁹ The Dukagjini, one of the most important feudal families in the area, took possession of Lezhë in 1387. Progon Dukagjini will also be a protagonist of the Venetian communication with Albanians during the period covered by this study.

The Thopias, the Balšići and the Dukagjini were only three among several prominent Albanian families. In the south, the Muzaka, Mataranga and Gropa families controlled the realm between Vlorë and Ohrid. In middle Albania, from Durrës to Lezhë, the most powerful families were the Thopia, Skura, Kastrioti, Arianiti, and Blinishti. In north Albania, control fell on the Balša, Dukagjini, Zacharia, Jonima and Spani.²⁶⁰ As Arbel points out, after Venice's control over Albania increased, "the territories directly controlled by these lords could hardly be considered 'Venetian.' Nevertheless, in some cases, especially when Ottoman pressure increased or when some of these dynasties died out, Venice could gain a foothold in their strongholds."²⁶¹ Unlike western nobility, Albanian noble families did not form a separate class with exclusive privileges, but their reputation and power placed them at the top of the Albanian social system.²⁶² After 1355, most of the Albanian "contrata" was controlled by these noble families, and in some cases they also presided the most important state offices in the city.

Albania's countryside was inhabited by villagers who worked the land and, intermittently, by nomadic groups who would normally dwell in the mountains. The scarcity of "indigenous" sources does not allow to describe in detail the linguistic complexity of the Albanian space or to reach any decisive conclusion about ethnic-linguistic identities. As a generic name applied to people in Venetian documents, "Albanenses" more often than not designates those living *around* and not *in* the cities.²⁶³ Scholarship sympathetic to nationalistic ideas assigned to the name "Albanenses" a univocal ethnic character, claiming that texts reflect ideas "which were at that time, as in our own, a substantial component of ethnic self-consciousness."²⁶⁴ Schmitt and others corrected this view and enhanced the possible meanings of the term.²⁶⁵ Yet Valentini's suggestion that the "Albanenses" of historical sources most likely refer to the people from the countryside holds true for the mentions of

²⁵⁹ Schmitt, 233.

²⁶⁰ Schmitt, 184.

²⁶¹ Arbel, "Venice's Maritime Empire," 140.

²⁶² Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 184.

²⁶³ As mentioned previously, (Introduction, n. 3), for stylistic purposes, I use the term "Albanian" to refer to any non-Venetian person living in the Albanian space, and rely on other details to illuminate the person's standing, affiliation, or economic activity.

²⁶⁴ Ćirković, "Tradition Interchanged," 195. For references to scholarship with nationalistic undertones, see: Introduction, no. 50.

²⁶⁵ For example, according to Schmitt, the name "Albanian" can be: 1) a mere appellation that refers to the origin; 2) the assignment of a person to the Albanian-speaking ethnic group in the Western Balkans; 3) the designation of a person who is not in possession of the citizenship of the Dalmatian and Albanian municipalities, and 4) a semi nomadic group: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 60. For an etymological discussion of the term, see: Xhevat Lloshi, "Albanian," in *Handbuch der Südosteuropa-Linguistik*, ed. Uwe Hinrichs and Uwe Büttner (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 272–99.

“Albanenses” within the Council deliberations I examine.²⁶⁶ The statute of Shkodra, which is a window into the variety of social and legal groups who inhabited the region, also supports a reading of the name “Albanian” as related to the lands outside the urban setting. In Shkodra, the commune took active care in protecting the fields from thieves and damages caused by animals, and for that purpose a “guardator” was supposed to watch over the vineyards and grazing pastures.²⁶⁷ If any damage occurred to the land, the guardian was considered responsible and thus he himself had to pay for the damages. Therefore, the statute contemplates that if a custodian of the grazing lands of the city encountered a “sclavo oy arbaneso voy scutarino” with sheep, cows or pigs, the guardian should take the man to a court of law, where the owner of the animals should pay a fine of 50 *perperi*.²⁶⁸ Instead of defining the culprit as a “Slav, Albanian, or person from Shkodra,” it is more reasonable to assume that the statute defined him as “farmer, mountaineer, or a citizen of Shkodra.”²⁶⁹

In contrast to the hinterland, the space inside the city walls of Durrës, Shkodra and other cities gathered nobles, people working in the public administration, soldiers, master craftsmen, wage-earners, servants, and people with a varied range of economic activity and way of life. The members of important families held the higher offices, as judges, notaries, chancellors, councilors, and prosecutors.²⁷⁰ Together with the city council, the central cathedral was a reserve of the urban patricians. In Shkodra, for example, the clergy could elect their own members and thus secure a rigid social composition.²⁷¹ No wonder, then, that across Albania numerous clergymen who did not belong to noble families were forced to emigrate to Dalmatia. There, they could secure employment and keep their relationship with their hometowns.²⁷² Citizens took part in the different organizational needs of the commune by occupying judicial positions of lesser rank. Although historical sources are silent about the composition of Albanian urban life, it is not difficult to suppose that people belonging to the bottom of the social divide took care of administrative trifles and service activities.

²⁶⁶ Valentini, “Appunti,” 235. Valentini also suggested that, while the population from cities such as Shkodra and Durrës spoke an Adriatic type of language of Latin origin, people in the immediate hinterland spoke Albanian: Valentini, “L’elemento vlah nella zona scutarina nel sec. XV,” 270. While this might have been the case, the lack of local sources makes it difficult to reach such straightforward conclusion. For the particularities of the Albanian-Romance variation spoken in Bar, Ulcinj, Shkodra and Drisht, see: Žarko Muljačić, “Sul dalmatico meridionale (o labeatico),” in *Das Dalmatische. Studien zu einer untergegangenen Sprache* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), 325–44.

²⁶⁷ Articles 81 to 84 of the Statute: Nadin, *Statuti di Scutari*, 111.

²⁶⁸ “Ordinemo che zaschadun guardator de li herbi sia tenuto fidelmente a guardar li herbi de la citade e se trovasse sclavo oy arbaneso voy scutarino cum piegare over cum vacche over cum porci (...) lo guardator sia tenuto de accusarlo a lo Comune per sacramento cum dui o tre de la guardia et lu patrone de li pecuri voy de li vacche oy de li porci chi paghi per pena perperi L” (Article 84): Nadin, 111.

²⁶⁹ This is the interpretation adopted by Pëllumb Xhufi, the Albanian translator of the statute. He understands these terms as: “një bujk [farmer], një malësor [highlander] ose një shkodran [Shkodran]”: Nadin, 193. See also: Grabiela Rojas Molina, “Space: A Proposal for the Interpretation of *Albanenses* in Shkodra’s Medieval City Statute,” *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU*, ed. Ildikó Csepregi and Kyra Lyublyanovics (Budapest: Central European University, 2020): 150–160.

²⁷⁰ Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 194–195.

²⁷¹ Schmitt, 136.

²⁷² Schmitt, 136.

As the end of the fourteenth century approached, the borders of Albanian cities increasingly blurred and Albanians moved around the region. This was due, firstly, to the modest but nonetheless significant amount of commercial and legal affairs that involved northern Albanian cities, southern Dalmatia, and eventually Venice. Secondly, the Ottoman campaigns in the Balkans triggered later on the forced migration of people who preferred to flee rather than to accept new lordship. The Albanian emigrants were not necessarily poor land workers or servants. Quite the contrary, they were people who at some point had enjoyed a life comfortable enough to have access to a particular occupation, technical skill, or wealth. Yet their situation at home did not guarantee that their status would be recognized elsewhere. For instance, in 1388 (probably influenced by the first Ottoman attacks), Albanians fled in masse to Ragusa, where they were seized and sold them as slaves.²⁷³ In later periods, probably attracted by the prospect of a bright future in the great capital, Albanians emigrated also to Venice. Although many male and female Albanians were employed as servants, they built a strong community there.²⁷⁴

To different degrees, both the nobility of the cities and the workers of the Albanian countryside were affected by Council decisions. Powerful families had the means to exchange their possessions for protection and monetary allowances from Venice. Less fortunate Albanians endured the area's political instability with little or no protection, but they too could react to Council decisions by rejecting Venetian rule or siding with the Ottomans, which did not pass unnoticed to the *pregadi*.

²⁷³ Ducellier et al., *Les Chemins de l'exil*, 119. See also: Krekić, "Albanians in the Adriatic Cities: Observations on Some Ragusan, Venetian and Dalmatian Sources for the History of the Albanians in the Late Middle Ages," 218.

²⁷⁴ Mueller, "Aspects of Venetian Sovereignty," 16. For specific studies about Albanians in Venice, see: Lucia Nadin, *Migrazioni e integrazione: Il caso degli Albanesi a Venezia (1479-1552)* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2008); Paolo Petta, *Stradioti: Soldati albanesi in Italia (sec. XV - XIX)* (Lecce: Argo, 1996); P. F. Bellinello, "Aspetto storico-demografico e socio-economico degli Albanesi in Italia," *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 40 (1986): 3–56; Lovorka Čoralić, "Od Ulcinja do Drača – Albanski Useljenici u Mlecima (14.-18. stoljeće) [From Ulcinj to Durrës – Albanian Immigrants in Venice (from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Century)]," *Zbornik Odsjeka za povijesne znanosti Zavoda za povijesne i društvene znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti* 29 (2011): 39–82.

Chapter 4. Newsworthiness

The Council's decision-making process was dependent on one main element: information. Venice's capacity to create and maintain intelligence networks was the fundamental basis for discussions that occupied its most important organ of power. But not only that: the Council's knowledge of the current status and security of trading routes, its success in maintaining control over overseas possessions and its preparedness to negotiate with other powers — all that depended on the ability to convey new information back and forth. In other words, intelligence received from outside was the primary impetus for Senate deliberation, the catalyst agent which made them “talk.” And this, in turn, was translated by the Council into the orders and instructions which left the ducal palace.

The entries recorded in the Council's books are a testament to the fact that the flow of incoming correspondence never ceased; it slowed during the winter months, but it never stopped completely. The Council demanded of Venetians abroad — as captains of galleys, governors, consuls, ambassadors, envoys, and even merchants — constant updates of the state of affairs in the places or commissions assigned to them. These men, in turn, sent letters to the Council containing requests of all types: petitions for repair funds, hiring new personnel, or buying properties to house Venetian administrative units; requests that *gratia* be given to locals in the form of minor positions, permission for absence from posts, news on local decisions those men had taken, etc. Foreign rulers also sent letters to Venice. They requested to be allowed on board Venice's galleys as pilgrims to the holy lands or other places, to transport of merchandise, etc. At the opening of each session, a secretary specifically selected for this purpose read aloud these letters, dispatches, notices, and supplications which had arrived since the last session. He began with the least important ones and, as the *pregadi* reached a more “peaceful and attentive state,” reserved the most important letters for the end. This could last for several hours.²⁷⁵

Typically, when a discussion took place following, for instance, a letter from a governor, and it was recorded in the *Misti*, the recorded deliberation's incipit contained this information: “As the governor writes to our dominium (...),” or a similar version thereof by which the source of the information was made explicit, both in terms of the person who was writing it and the place in question.²⁷⁶ If, however, the entry's intention was to emphasize the information itself in the sense of a “good-to-know” fact that came to the Council's knowledge, the entry's incipit was almost invariably

²⁷⁵ Besta, *Il senato veneziano*, 210–12. Besta, echoing Sanudo, noted that the doge, Councilors and Experts made their entry into the meeting room after all letters were read, but he does not specify if this was accustomed also before Sanudo's time.

²⁷⁶ “Cum sicut scribit nostro dominio (...),” “Quod ad supplicationem factam per (...),” “Quod concedatur [ei], sicut escribit (...),” “Cum per examinationem factam per (...),” “Sicut habetur per literas [eius] (...),” etc. This is a common feature of entries belonging to categories 1, 2, 5, and 6 of the proposed model.

worded as “per ea” or “per informationem quam habuimus,” or it simply delved into a straight description of the persons or territories for whom a decision was to be made.²⁷⁷

From that incessant flow of information, some pieces made a splash. Discussions caused by the reception of crucial information were codified into entries containing the words *noua* or *nouitates* in their incipit.²⁷⁸ This incipit belongs to the realm of Council activity referring to crisis management (category 14 of the model): entries headed with these expressions specifically called for decision-making (“talk”) from the *pregadi* and demanded immediate action from the body. This aspect was crucial. In many cases, the incipit referring to exceptionally delicate information, for which it was more convenient *not* to make a decision right away, contains words such as “ardua” or “ponderosa” to define the information.²⁷⁹ The Council’s recording conventions indicate that the use of *nouitates* and *noua* does not only refer to information newly received; each of these words convey a specific type of “assigned newsworthiness.” Primarily, I use *newsworthiness* as a means to classify events defined as crises. I understand entries which described these events (Newsworthy-entries: N-entries) with the specific connotation in mind of requiring urgent resolution: *newsworthiness* is a category for entries indicating events of salient importance and acknowledging a serious, long-lasting outcome were the matter not resolved immediately. In other words, N-entries describe urgent news for which a decision had to be taken as soon as possible. Although not properly N-entries, entries headed with *nouitates* refer to troublesome events with a “secondary degree” urgency. Reports of violence, for instance, recorded as *nouitates* (rather than merely violence), have *newsworthiness* attached. For the most part (although, as I will show, there are exceptions), the consequences of *nouitas* were more restrained to specific areas or events, and did not necessarily indicate that Venice’s status or its integrity was in jeopardy.

Noua and *nouitates* share some elements with the English usage of the word “news”: they denote “newly received or noteworthy information, especially about recent events.”²⁸⁰ Thus, scholars have for a long time recognized the impact of communication and news on Venice’s governing apparatus.²⁸¹ Research in this regard has focused on the Renaissance period onwards, examining the

²⁷⁷ In the *Secreti*, sensitive information was recorded in this way to emphasize the secrecy and circumspection which surrounded the information received.

²⁷⁸ I italicize these words to visually emphasize that they relate to the concept of *newsworthiness*, described below.

²⁷⁹ Generally, these words appear in the incipit of entries belonging to category 8.

²⁸⁰ “News.” OED Online. June 2020. Oxford University Press.

²⁸¹ De Vivo described the government’s quasi-impossible goal to control information during the early modern period: “In practice, secrecy was an obsession rather than a reality—arguably, it was an obsession because it was so difficult to preserve in reality”: de Vivo, *Information and Communication*, 4. For the influence of print on public opinion when access to information became forbidden knowledge: Filippo de Vivo, *Patrizi, informatori, barbieri. Politica e comunicazione a Venezia nella prima età moderna* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2012), 17. For the development of a state intelligentsia that controlled and commodified information: Ioanna Iordanou, “What News on the Rialto? The Trade of Information and Early Modern Venice’s Centralized Intelligence Organization,” *Intelligence and National Security* 31, no. 3 (2016): 305–26. For the means by which news travelled, that is, the merchant letters which also turned news into a “mercantile asset”: Mario Infelise, “From Merchant’s Letters to Handwritten Political ‘Avvisi’: Notes on the Origins of Public Information,” in

mechanisms by which the state tried to withhold information —sometimes successfully, sometimes not— and pointing to the abundance of information which, in later centuries, was denoted by *noua* and *nouitates*.²⁸² However, within the recorded entries examined in this study, these expressions had a technical meaning which differed considerably from the meaning they took on generations later.²⁸³ Secretaries of the Collegio —in charge of writing down the official version of Council discussions— reserved the expressions *noua* and *propter noua* to denote uniqueness, rather than abundance. In other words, within recording practices, *noua* and *propter noua* in the incipit were not intended to convey reception of information, but rather the presence of a crisis situation of paramount importance for the state.

Aside from the importance *noua* and *propter noua* conveyed, entries headed with these expressions stand apart because they lack mention of the information’s source. As mentioned above, this element was a constitutive part of entries which recorded the information influx from abroad. The reason for this omission may be due to the Council’s intention to keep the source confidential, or because the weight of the news itself made its mention redundant, or because the matter was *vox populi*. Whatever the case, given the stakes associated with the situations they describe, the fact that these entries lack that part of “standard” incoming information makes them worthy of closer examination. In the case of *nouitates* in the incipit, in many cases it is more fitting to understand it as “hardship,” “violence,” “attack,” “extortion” and so on, given that this expression refers to contentious quarrels, rather than to crises as such.²⁸⁴ While within the body of several types of entries (particularly those belonging to categories 3, 6, 9, and 13 of the model) one may find occasional mentions of *nouitas* or *noua*, the placement of these words at the beginning of the entry signals that the entry in question describes a development of exceptional gravity (*noua*) or of delicate and serious nature (*nouitates*). The *signoria* constantly received reports and letters important enough that they

Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe, Vol. 3: Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400– 1700, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 33–52.

²⁸² To date, the most comprehensive study of Venice’s intelligence as both sensitive information (primarily, though not exclusively, of military and political value) and a historical phenomenon is: Ioanna Iordanou, *Venice’s Secret Service: Organizing Intelligence in the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). However, the compelling findings of “intelligence studies” should not be used to explain recording practices in 1392. State intelligence was primarily carried out by the Council of Ten (not the Senate) more than 150 years after the period I examine: Iordanou’s study begins with an insightful anecdote from 1570.

²⁸³ Thus, I do not define the information which led to the codification of N-entries as a “proto-version” of Venice’s intelligence networks. The Senate records I analyze cannot be defined by that later configuration of the Venetian state organs because this would constitute what Skinner calls the “mythology of prolepsis.” Skinner explains this mythology (constituted by the asymmetry between any given action and the significance which a later observer assigns to it) through an example: “We might wish to say that with Petrarch’s ascent of Mount Ventoux the age of the Renaissance began. Now this might, in a romantic sort of way, be said to give a true account both of the significance of Petrarch’s action, and so of its interest for us. The point is, however, that no account under this description could ever be a true account of any action Petrarch intended, or hence of the meaning of his actual action. There could be no intention ‘to open the Renaissance,’ for to give such a description requires concepts which were only available at a later time”: Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 22–23.

²⁸⁴ See the *Lexicon Latinitas Hungariae* entry: “Novitas, novae res; *felfogatás*. Frak. Mát. lev. II. 57: auctores iniuriarum ... requirat, ut a faciendis novitatibus desistant.”

were discussed by the *pregadi*, but only a few entries contain this incipit: this indicates that these entries formed its own discrete category. The total number of interventions recorded in the Council's miscellaneous and secret deliberations between 1392 and 1402 is 4,871, yet only the 58 entries listed in the table below include the words *noua* or *nouitas* in the incipit, representing 1.2% of all recorded entries. This evidences their weightiness.

N-entries			
Date	Register	Incipit	Note
Apr. 30, 1392	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 42, f. 56v	Cum in casibus et novitatibus occurrentibus in partibus Istrie	
Sep. 6, 1392	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 42, f. 76v	Quia vigilandum est propter noua que habentur de quatuor galeas Cathelanorum qui inisse videntur intra Culphum	
Oct. 7, 1392	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 42, f. 81v	Cum propter noua que habentur, multis modis et vijs, de retentione domini Dulcignj	
July 21, 1393	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 42, f. 120r	Vult quod consideratis nouitatibus ad presens existentibus in Janue	Non Capta
July 28 1393	<i>Secreti</i> , Reg. (e), 171	Quod propter noua que sentiuntur de grauitate personae domini Marchionis Ferrara	
Sep. 7, 1393	<i>Secreti</i> , Reg. (e), 182	Quia rectores et consiliarius magnifici domini Marchionis, propter noua que nuper habuerunt	
Dec. 29, 1393	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 42, f. 143v	Quia ista violentia et nouitas comissa per homines de Rauenna	
Feb. 10, 1394	<i>Secreti</i> , Reg. (e), 189	Quia nouitates et discordie que ad presens sciunt in ciuitate Janue	Non Capta
March 19, 1394	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 42, f. 156v	Quia noua que habentur per reditum vicarij principatus a Baysito	
April 6, 1394	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 42, f. 158v	Cum propter noua Turchorum et alia que habentur	
May 26, 1394	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 7r	Cum sentiantur aliqua noua de duobus brigantinis	
June 4, 1394	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 7v	Cum propter noua que sonant in partibus Syrie	
Aug. 25, 1394	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 26v	Quia propter noua que habentur de partibus Romanie	
April 16, 1395	<i>Secreti</i> , Reg. (e), 229	Quia ista noua que habentur de partibus Ferrarie sunt satis ardua	
April 20, 1395	<i>Secreti</i> , Reg. (e), 232	Insuper quia propter noua felicia que habita sunt de victoria obtenta contra Azonne	
May 25, 1395	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 62r	Quod pro infinitis nouitatibus extorsionibus et violentijs [Cyrpus]	
July 23, 1395	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 73v	Cum propter noua habita de nouitatibus occursis in partibus Tane	
Aug. 3, 1395	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 76r	Quia consideratis nouis habitis de partibus Nigropontis de pessima intencione et dispositione quam Turchi habent	
Sep. 2, 1395	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 78v	Quia non est toleranda ista nouitas et uiolentias [Argos]	Non Capta
Dec. 23, 1395	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 96r	Quia propter nouitates Tane est necessarium uigilare	
Dec. 30, 1395	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 97v	Quia propter uiolencias dannas et nouitates que facte sunt et fiunt per Turchis	
July 13, 1396	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 140v	Quia propter noua que nuper habita fuerunt de partibus Tane	

Sep. 10, 1396	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 149v	Quia occasione istorum nouorum que habentur, de descensu istarum gentium ad partes Forouilij	
Oct. 28, 1396	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 158r	Quia noua ista que habentur de conflictu domini regis Hungarie	
Oct. 31, 1396	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 159r	Quia omni die et de hora in hora, nouum quod habitum fuit de conflictu domini regis Hungarie	
Nov. 28, 1396	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 160v	Quod propter noua que habentur de partibus Romanie et de factis Basiti et domini regis Hungarie	
Dec. 18, 1396	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 162r	Cum propter noua que sciuntur de partibus Hungarie, Romanie et Turchorum	
Dec. 18, 1396	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 162v	Quod propter noua que sonant undique	
Jan. 12, 1397	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 166v	Quia examinatis omnibus nouis et conditionibus partium Romanie	
April 3, 1397	<i>Secreti</i> , Reg. (e), 294	Quia considerandum est quantum ista guerra et nouitates que habuerunt principium, inter dominum ducem Mediolanij	
Sep. 22, 1397	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 20v	Cum consideratis nouis que habentur de ista galea et galeota piratorum	
Oct. 23, 1397	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 23r	Quod pro istis nouitatibus que resonant de gentibus que dicuntur Uclie discurre ad danum Istrie	
Jan. 12, 1398	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 29r	Cum propter nouitates que sonabant in partibus Istrie	
June 10, 1398	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 42v	Cum castellanus noster Cederici, propter nouitates Turchorum	
June 10, 1398	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 43v	Cum plerumque contingat haberj noua in Nigroponti	
June 10, 1398	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 44r	Cum propter nouitates que apparebant future in partibus Teruisane	
Sep. 27, 1398	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 66r	Cum propter noua que habita sunt de galeis octo armatis ad petitionem domini Regis Ladislai	
Oct. 19, 1398	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 67v	Quia propter noua que pridie habita fuerint de octo galeis armatis	
April 4, 1399	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 97v	Quia propter noua que nuper habita sunt de armata Turchorum	Non Capta
July 22, 1399	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 115v	Quia propter noua que habentur de spinariza	
Nov. 6, 1399	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 44, f. 128v	Quia consideratis nouis habitis de partibus Scutari et Driuasti	
March 18, 1400	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 7r	Cum propter nouitates que pro ut notum est omnibus occurrerunt in partibus Tane	
April 4, 1400	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 9v	Cum multis respectibus et casibus qui possunt occurrere et specialiter propter noua exitus galee et galeote de Liparj	
May 18, 1400	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 14v	Cum secundum occurrentia, mutande sint opinionones atque consilia, et consideratis nouis nuper receptis	Non Capta
June 22, 1400	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 20v	Insuper quia propter noua que anno preterito dicta fuerunt de galeis regis Ladislai	
Aug. 16, 1400	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 26r	Quia consideratis nouis que habentur de galea Liparj et alia galea piratorum	
Aug. 30, 1400	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 31r	Quia propter noua que habita sunt modo nuper de nouitatibus occursis in partibus Syrie	Non Capta
Oct. 12, 1400	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 37r	Cum scenciatur per noua que habentur de partibus Leuantis	Non Capta
Jan. 30, 1401	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 52v	Quia posset occurrisse propter nouitates factas per Zaniberlanum	
Feb. 22, 1401	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 58v	Vult quod considerato quod de die in diem expectamus habere noua	

April 15, 1401	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 69v	Quia nos expectamus sentire de die in diem a comite et capitaneo Scutari noua de eo quod fecerit	
Dec. 17, 1401	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 121v	Quia loca nostra Coroni et Mothoni et iam propter nouitates	
Jan. 28, 1402	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 134r	Quod scribatur serenissimo domino imperatori Constantinopoli, qui est in partibus Flandrie, quod per noua	
April 6, 1402	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 46, f. 12v	Quia ista uiolentia et nouitas comissa per dominos Rauene	
May 23, 1402	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 46, f. 21r	Cum propter guerras et nouitates que habentur tam a parte terre, quam maris	
Aug. 29, 1402	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 46, f. 39v	Quia propter noua que sentiuntur, nullo modo est desistendum prouidere sufficienter ad securitatem galearum	Non Capta
Aug. 29, 1402	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 46, f. 40r	Quia propter noua que sentiuntur de omni parte	
Sep. 22, 1402	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 46, f. 43v	Quia propter noua que habita sunt, de conflictu dato Baiseto et suo exercituy [sic] per Tamberlanum	

Table 4. N-entries between the acquisition of Durrës (1392) and Bayezid's capture (1402)

In order to accurately describe why and how these expressions were employed, I examined every book of recorded Council deliberations for the decade under study. If one takes entries about Albania (or about any other place, for that matter) out of the context of the rest of discussions, no patterns regarding the *language* of the records could be discerned. For that reason, an only partially-exclusive Albanian focus on *nouitas* and *noua* shows the implications their usage generally possessed and allows me to account for:

- 1) The significance of the use of *noua* to refer to an event;
- 2) Reasons for the increased or decreased use of *noua* and *nouitas* during specific periods of time, including the usage of alternative incipits to refer to challenging situations; and
- 3) The relationship between the records' flagging of what was newsworthy and the events taking place during the period under study.

Uneven Impact: N-entries and other *Nouitates* (1392-1394)

On October 7, 1392, just after Venice had begun to feel confidence with its hold on Durrës, a remarkable piece of news was brought to the *pregadi*'s attention by all Experts, together with two Councilors. Recorded as an N-entry, it was additionally pointed out that the news reached the Council through many sources:

News (*noua*) have been received, in many forms and ways, of the kidnapping of the lord of Ulcinj [George Stracimirović] and one of his brothers by Bayezid, and about the arrangements between the Turkish lord and those lords, presumably of putting Ulcinj, Shkodra and other

places belonging to them under the power and lordship of Bayezid in exchange of their liberation. It is, by all means, necessary to make provision for it.²⁸⁵

The Ottomans had been gaining power with each passing day (Pasha Yiğit Bey, the Ottoman general in the area, had organized the kidnapping). Senators expressed that if the above-named cities were to fall into Ottoman hands, ships entering and exiting the Adriatic would be subject to considerable damage and danger. More importantly, the Council must avoid the consequences of a possible pact between George Stracimirović and Bayezid.²⁸⁶ Therefore, the Captain of the Gulf, Saraceno Dandolo, was ordered to go immediately to Ulcinj. I will provide a more in-depth analysis of the instruction given to the Captain to approach Helena (Stracimirović's wife) in the next chapter. In short, he should inform himself fully regarding her plans, and with whatever reasons seemed most apt to him, ensure that she would not give away her lands.²⁸⁷

The only other instance where an N-entry appears in the records after Durrës' takeover dates back to the month before Stracimirović's kidnapping, on September 6. Both Council and Maritime Experts delivered the *noua* of four Catalan galleys spotted around Patras and Glarentza.²⁸⁸ Instructions were laid out for the Captain: He should inquire as quickly as possible as to the Catalans' desires, and he should inform relevant authorities of the galleys heading to Alexandria, as well as the governors of Coron and Modon and Corfu —even the ambassadors sent to Sicily— of everything he learned.²⁸⁹ Although the Catalan colony in Alexandria was small, it was the third commercial power in the Levant, after Venice and Genoa. Their presence in the ports of Tripoli and Beirut was constant, and acts of aggression involving them were not unknown.²⁹⁰ Trade with the Levant was hugely profitable; many *pregadi* were personally —monetarily— invested in the adventures of galleys which might cross paths with the Catalans. It was to the *pregadi*'s advantage to prevent any situation

²⁸⁵ “Cum propter noua que habentur, multis modis et vijs, de retentione domini Dulcignj et cuiusdam consanguinei sui facta per Baysit Turchum, et de conuentionibus factis jnter dominum Turchum et dictos dominos, videlicet de dando et ponendo Dulcignum et Scutarj ac alia loca sua sub potentia et dominio dicti Baysit, pro liberatione et relaxatione eorum. Omnino sit prouidendum super hoc”: AAV 455; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 81v.

²⁸⁶ In Valentini's view, if Venice could facilitate Stracimirović' release, this might become an opportunity to lay the foundations of common interest between him and Venice: Valentini, “Appunti,” 207.

²⁸⁷ “[I]n omni casu informet se plenarie de intentione et uoluntate dicte domine. Et cum predictis verbis et alijs oblationibus generalibus que dicto capitaneo videbuntur, procuret ut supra dictum est, taliter hortarj dictam dominam quod sit constans ad substinendum se et loca sua”: AAV 455; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 81v.

²⁸⁸ “Quia vigilandum est propter noua que habentur de quatuor galeas Cathelanorum qui inisse videntur intra Culphum Patrasij et Claerentie ad securitatem galearum nostrarum a mercato”: *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 76v.

²⁸⁹ “Vadit pars quod scribatur per istas galeas Alexandrie capitaneo nostro Culphy (...). Volumus et mandamus sibi qui in Corphoy debeat conuocare ad collegium baiulo et capitaneus nostrum galearum Alexandrie, castellanum nostrum Coroni et Mothoni ser Philippum Cornario, baiulo et capitaneus nostrum Corphoy, ambasiatores nostros ituros in Sicilia ac consulem iturum in Alexandria, quibus omnibus dicere debeat et declarare totum illud quod habebit et sentiet de dictis galeis”: *Ibidem*.

²⁹⁰ During the fourteenth century, Catalan textile industry grew and Catalan merchants became exporters of a number of locally-manufactured products and well as re-distributors of spices, sugar, cotton, etc., from the Levant: Ferrer, “Catalan Commerce in the Late Middle Ages,” 33. For the Catalan trade in the Levant and their reputation, see also: Pablo Cateura Bennasser, “Mundos mediterráneos: el reino de Mallorca y el sultanato mameluco (siglos XIII-XV),” *Espacio, tiempo y forma. Serie III, Historia medieval*, no. 13 (2000): 85–101.

compromising the security of their investment. From the Venetian point of view, pirates and other competitors at sea were a constant scourge which put at risk the security of the patrician elite's capital. Given the Catalans' bad reputation, an attack was not unlikely to occur and, as scholars have shown, Venice was not shy in using violence as a means of self-defense.²⁹¹ When instructions reached the Captain, it would be time for the galleys to return to Venice, loaded with money and goods. The possibility of conflict (and financial loss) was not hypothetical and the Council's orders to the Captain demonstrate this.

Similarly, the N-entry about Stracimirović's kidnapping conveys *newsworthiness* through a number of elements: mention of the many sources and ways by which the information was acquired, reckoning of Bayezid's power increase if the Council did not intervene, acknowledgement of direct consequences (harm to the Venetian galleys) were the matter not investigated, and the single-minded nature of instructions given to the Captain, their most important patrician at sea, including a specific strategy for him to achieve the Council's goal.

In contrast to these resolute instances of decision-making capability which are contained in N-entries, the records for July 21, 1393, evidence the effect of *nouitates* on the Council's decision-making process. On that day, George Stracimirović was mentioned again, this time as a free man. I will examine the instruction given to Giovanni Miani (the new Captain of the Gulf) regarding Stracimirović in relation to that day's *nouitates*.

According to the order in which they were recorded, the decisions for the day were as follows: The *pregadi* elected the copper and grain officials.²⁹² Then, due to heavy rain, merchants were allocated extra time to load their goods onto the galleys, while captains and *patrones* were requested to board two days later. The former governor of Koper was granted a delay to present his provisions to the Council.²⁹³ Next, the *aduocatores* proposed, to avoid any future mistakes and inconvenience between the governor of Negroponte and his councilors, that if any of them wanted to return to Venice, they need first receive express authorization from the *pregadi*.²⁹⁴ The motion was voted down,

²⁹¹ See Christ's survey on this topic's scholarship and his own analysis of the role of Venetian coast guards and Gulf galleys: Georg Christ, "The Venetian Coast Guards: Staple Policy, Seaborne Law Enforcement, and State Formation in the 14th Century," in *Merchants, Pirates, and Smugglers: Criminalization, Economics, and the Transformation of the Maritime World (1200-1600)*, ed. Thomas Heebøll-Holm, Philipp Höhn, and Gregor Rohmann (Frankfurt: Campus, 2019), 270–72.

²⁹² *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 118r. The "gethus rami" was the overseer of copper production, an industry heavily protected by the state: Ester Zille, "Il ghetto in un documento veneziano," *Archivio Veneto* 124 (1985): 104–5. The "Camera del frumento" or Grain Office was crucial in the management of state and private finances through handling of loans, dowry deposits, and so on: Reinhold Mueller, "La Camera del Frumento: un 'banco publico' veneziano e i gruzzoli dei signori di Terraferma," in *Actas del Colloquio Istituzioni, società e potere nella marca trevigiana e veronese (secoli XIII-XIV)*, ed. Gherardo Ortalli and Michael Knapton (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo, 1988), 321–59; Reinhold Mueller, *The Venetian Money Market: Banks, Panics, and the Public Debt, 1200-1500* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 359–63.

²⁹³ *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 118v.

²⁹⁴ "Quod pro honore nostri dominij, et ut vitentur similes errores et inconuenientie in futuris temporibus, his que occurrerunt inter baiulum et capitaneum Nigroponte et eius consiliarios": *Ibidem*.

with 40 in favor, 52 against and one abstention. Immediately below, however, there is a note indicating that “after some writings were read containing these recent quarrels (*nouitates*), this motion was again presented, and approved” with 58 votes in favor, 16 against and 7 abstentions.²⁹⁵ The note signals that the first intervention by the *aduocatores* failed to capture the gravity of the situation within Negroponte’s governing unit. When the documents were read aloud, what had happened between the governor and his councilors was not merely defined as “errores et inconuenientie,” but as *nouitates*. The stated reason which explains why the *pregadi* voted a second time, and approved the proposal, is that reference to the dispute’s greater seriousness.

Then, after repair funds for Treviso were granted, the Maritime Experts put forward the remaining discussions for the day. The first was about Stracimirović. The entry lacks an introductory part, beginning directly with the decision: the Captain should be informed about Stracimirović.²⁹⁶ The core of the matter is this: Stracimirović made a public precept by which none of his subjects was allowed to trade with the inhabitants of Lezhë, a castle otherwise “totally deprived of all useful commodities and access.”²⁹⁷ Stracimirović demanded that the castle be returned to him, to which the *pregadi* would hardly agree. However, the Experts’ intervention acknowledged that “it is appropriate and wise to know [how to] pretend [to agree] with everybody, because every arising dispute (*nouitas*) that follows will have unwelcome repercussions for Durrës.”²⁹⁸ Consequently, the *pregadi* ordered Miani to meet Stracimirović and convince him to withdraw the prohibition, but the final instruction to the Captain comes across as half-hearted: if he happens to be in Ulcinj, he should talk to Stracimirović only if it does not affect other matters entrusted to him. If he thinks the fleet may be in danger if he were to leave, then he should feel free to send a vice-captain in his place.²⁹⁹

Lastly, the final recorded discussion for that day involved divided opinions among the Maritime Experts. Upon receiving letters from the general consul of Cyprus and other Venetians there, Benedetto Cappello and Nicolò Mudazzo exposed the latest move (*nouitas*) made by the Genoese Antonio Guarco, *potestas* of Famagusta. Antonio had taken possession of 42 cases of sugar, which had been purchased by Bartholomeo of Lombardy from Eleanor of Aragon to send to Venice. Furthermore, since citizens and merchants in Famagusta were subject to many inconveniences

²⁹⁵ “Postea lectis aliquibus scripturis continentibus ipsas nouitates fuit iterum posita dicta pars et fuerunt de parte --- 58, de non --- 16, non sincerij --- 7”: *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 118v.

²⁹⁶ “Quod informetur capitaneus noster Culphy, qualiter dominus Georgius Strazimir de Dulcigno banniri et publicum preceptum fieri fecit”: AAV 506; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 119r.

²⁹⁷ “Quod nemo suorum subditorum, audeat mercarj, nec ire ad mercandum, cum habitantibus in loco et districtu castrj nostrj Lesij quod omnino est priuatio totius comodi utilitatis et auamenti”: *Ibidem*.

²⁹⁸ “Et etiam consideratis (...), quod bonum et sapiens est scire dissimulare cum omnibus, et quia omnis nouitas que sequeretur non posset nisi redundare in dannum ciuitatis nostre Durachij”: *Ibidem*.

²⁹⁹ “Inueniendo se in partibus Dulcigni, debeat sine incomodo agendorum sibi commissorum ire ad loquendum cum dicto domino Georgio,” and towards the end: “Verum in casu, quo videretur dicto capitaneo pro non sinistrando armate, de non eundo sed mittendo unum de supracomitis relinquantur in libertate sua eundi personaliter et mittendi pro se prout melius videbitur”: AAV 506; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 119r.

(*nouitates*) and extortion, the Experts proposed to send a messenger to Genoa.³⁰⁰ However, Marco Morosini opposed this: “considering the recent chaos (*nouitates*) in Genoa, [decisions] should be deferred and ceased upon until a more suitable time comes.”³⁰¹ It is likely that the events in question refer to last week’s political chaos in Genoa,³⁰² and although the chaos was of a major order, the *pregadi* did not agree with Morosini in that they should delay a complaint to Genoa’s doge — whoever he happened to be.

This day is remarkable in that, beginning with innocuous bills, it records not one but several reports of *nouitates* (real or hypothetical). In a single day, three decisions highlight three different approaches to events of this kind: first, insistence on the *nouitates* aspect of the dispute led to a reassessment of the decision taken. Second, sending information to the Captain was justified by the *nouitates* that could follow if nothing was done, but the instruction to him is more a proposal than a mandate. And third, opposing bills reveal the *pregadi*’s resolution that an ambassador should try and resolve the poor treatment Venetian merchants were receiving, even if there was a risk that the complaint may fall into deaf ears. In short, this day’s decisions illustrate the manner in which news of disputes and damages (*nouitas*) did not set off the immediate action that N-entries record, but rather guided the *pregadi* in the calibration of the procedural decision-making to respond to each difficulty.

The next N-entry in the records dates from July 28, 1393. Alberto d’Este, Marquis of Ferrara, was seriously ill, and the significance of this revelation moved the Council to instruct a commission and elect Michele Steno and Benedetto Soranzo as ambassadors that very same day.³⁰³ The elected ambassadors accepted the task, but Alberto died two days later and, even if they had left immediately, it was unlikely that the ambassadors would have had the chance to direct inquiries to him directly, as the Council had requested they do. In any case, the incipit indicates that this was an critical bit of news. And indeed, significant consequences followed from this event. After Alberto’s death, a conflict between Padua and Ferrara ensued, and secret deliberations about it occupied the Council for

³⁰⁰ “Cum nuper habuerimus per literas baiuli Cipri, et per aliquos nostros ciues, quos tangit quedam nouitas, facta per nobilem virum Antonium de Goarcho, potestatem et capitaneum Famaguste, in accipiendo et in intromittendo in debite cassas .XLII. pulueris zuchari, emptas per quondam Bartholomeum de Lombardis a Serenissima Domina Regina Helionor (...), ut cum nauibus mude Septembris proxime, possent conduci Venetias (...). Similiter etiam quod pluries nouitates et extorsiones quotidie inferrunt nostris merchatoris et ciuibus ad partes Famaguste (...). Vadit pars, quod mittatur unus noster nuntius ad illustrem dominum ducem comune Janue”: *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 119v – 120r.

³⁰¹ “Consideratis nouitatibus ad presens existentibus in Janue, quod differratur et supersedeatur pro nunc, donec erit tempores congruum et honestum”: *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 120r.

³⁰² In two days, Genoa had four doges: Antoniotto di Montaldo (who had been elected on June 13 as doge following the resignation of Antoniotto Adorno), stepped down unexpectedly after only a month in power, on July 15, in favor of Pietro Fregoso. But after only a few hours, Clemente Promontorio managed to get himself elected forcibly by the electoral college and deposed Fregoso. Promontorio had no better luck, though, for already on the next day (July 16), he was also forced to step down and cede his seat to Francesco Giustiniano di Garibaldi. Garibaldi’s reign was longer, but not by much: after 14 days, Montaldo came back to re-claim his title as doge.

³⁰³ “Quod propter noua que sentiuntur de grauitate personae domini Marchionis Ferrara (...) eligi debeant in hoc consilio duo ambaxatores que vadant presto Ferrariam”: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 171.

the remainder of the summer, until a Regency Council supported by Bologna, Florence, and Venice was put in place to assist Alberto's son, the 10-year old Niccolò III d'Este.

After this, it is not an N-entry, but other occurrences of *nouitates* that appear next in the records. They illuminate additional aspects about the manner in which this expression differs from the weight that N-entries carried. One, from December 29, 1393, refers to news of aggressions committed by men from Ravenna against Venetians along the coast of Marche. The Council condemned the attack. However, the decision which followed indicates that the action to seek compensation and to preserve Venice's honor would function as a guarantee *for the future*.³⁰⁴ Another, from February 10, 1394, also intended to provoke the Council to action, but as a cautionary tactic, in light of Venice's hypothetical involvement in what became the French domination of Genoa. First, a relatively young Marino Caravello (then a Councilor) proposed that two ambassadors should be sent to Genoa, since it was necessary to keep watch on those who could inflict damages on Venice.³⁰⁵ His proposal was not approved. Then, Bartolomeo Nani (Maritime Expert), intended to create a bigger impact which was subsequently recorded in this way:

Because of the recent discord that at present is known [to take place] in Genoa, it can end up in such way (...) that it will be not only displeasing, but could also be damaging and dangerous for our status, due to causes (...) known to all. [Therefore] it is necessary to investigate if we can find a method or way by which a reconciliation between them can be achieved (...). It is proposed, in order to enter into this business honorably, that two or three (...) of our nobles who have friendships in Genoa should, out of their own accord (...), write to their friends there (...) [asking] if they think that our embassy would be well received.³⁰⁶

Eight senators agreed with his plan, 75 vetoed it, and 11 remained silent. According to the record, it was logical for some members of the Council to be concerned about the developments happening in the territory of Venice's former arch-rival. Yet the vote count demonstrates that no case was convincingly presented by which Genoa's "bad news" would in fact be bad for Venice in any meaningful way.

The next N-entry was recorded about seven months after Alberto's death, on March 19, 1394. It relates Bayezid's intention to pursue the occupation of Athens and other Greek territories, which

³⁰⁴ "Quia ista violentia et nouitas comissa per homines de Rauenna (...) est tantum grauis et inhonesta ac cum tanto onere nostri comunis quantum esse posset. Et nisi prouideretur quod fieret emenda et satisfactione debita, et quia habet reseruare notrum honorem, induceret pessimas consequentias et magnos errores temporibus in futuris, et propterea sit necesse facere superinde sufficientem prouisionem": *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 143v – 144r.

³⁰⁵ *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 189.

³⁰⁶ "Quia nouitates et discordie, que ad presens sciunt in ciuitate Janue possent capere talem finem (...) quia necdum non esset nobis grata, sed esse posset damnosa et periculosa statui nostro, respectibus et causis omnis (...) notis, est vigilandum si inuenirj posset modus uel uia reconciliationis inter ipsas (...). Vadit pars, pro possendo honeste intrare in hoc negotium, quod duo uel tres (...) ex illis nostris nobilibus qui habent amiciciam in Janua, debeant pro parte sua (...) dare operam scribendi illis suis amicis deinde (...) si credunt quod ambasiata nostra (...) esset grata": *Ibidem*.

would compromise Venice's strategic holdings in the Aegean. These territories included Coron and Modon, "the right hand of our dominium."³⁰⁷ The entry recorded this concern as follows:

Given the news (*noua*) we have following the principatus' return from Bayezid of the latter's intention and disposition of attending to the Duchy of Athens, the Despot's holdings and some other lands in those parts, [the news] is highly suspicious and dangerous if it is as it is said to be, and it could lead to our damage and that of our places there. For that reason we must, first and foremost, watch out for the security of Negroponte, Neapoli, Coron and Modon and other [territories] under their jurisdiction (...). It is then proposed that, for now, the Collegio (...) should have the liberty (...) of manning a ship with all the things most needed to be sent there, for the provisioning, security and conservation of those places (...), together with every weapon needed (...) such as cannons, ordnance, catapults, and any other armament for their munition and defense.³⁰⁸

According to the entry, governors of Negroponte, Neapoli, Coron, and Modon were given liberty to spend as much as necessary on walls and repair of other strategic places. That there is no cap to the expenditure is telling in and of itself. In general, entries were expected to record how much money had been granted to any given governor or castellan as a means to secure accountability from all personnel. But in addressing situations of imminent danger such as this one, all that the entry records is that the least expense should come with the greatest advantage, guaranteeing that all places were properly guarded and would be defended for Venice's honor.³⁰⁹ Costly decisions providing war equipment and covering repair expenses indicate that the Council foresaw a potentially worse outcome (open confrontation with the Ottomans) for which it must make imperious provisions.

The next time the Council met, roughly a week later, this news still resonated. Information regarding Bayezid's recent moves were mentioned in relation to Albania. All Experts communicated to the rest of Council that letters had been received from the governor and the castellan of Durrës. They wrote that many soldiers had become sick but —the letters inform— even if the soldiers were healthy, they would not be enough to defend the castle, particularly "due to the news about the Turks recently obtained."³¹⁰ The Council agreed and ordered that thirty good crossbowmen should be sent immediately.

³⁰⁷ "Loca nostra Coronj et Mothonij que sunt manus dextra nostri dominij" (August 25, 1393): *Misti*, Reg. 42, 126r.

³⁰⁸ "Quia noua que habentur per reditum vicarij principatus a Baysito, de intentione et dispositioni sua in volendo attendere ad duchatum Athenarum, et ad loca dispoti, ac ad alias terras partium deinde, forent valde dubia et periculosa, si essent in forma qua dicitur, ac possent cedere ad damnum nostrum et locorum nostrorum que sunt in illis partibus, propter quod vigilandum est principaliter ad prouidendum de securitate ipsorum locorum nostrorum, et precipue Nigroponte, Neapolis Romanie, Coroni et Mothoni et aliorum locorum illis subiectorum (...). Vadit pars, quod pro nunc collegium (...) habeat libertatem (...) naulizandi unam nauim (...). cum illis rebus que videbuntur magis necessarie illuc mitti, pro fulcimento, securitate et conseruatione locorum predictorum (...) et omni illa arma (...) et similiter bombardas, balistas, sagutamenta [sic], et alias arma necessaria pro munitione et defensione eorum": *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 156v.

³⁰⁹ "Insuper quia loca nostra predicta egent multa reparatione (...). Vadit pars, quod detur ipsis rectoribus Nigroponti, Coroni et Mothoni ac Neapolis Romanie libertas faciendi reparari et fortificari loca eis commissa, incipiendo ab illis locis que erunt magis necessarij, et faciendo minorem et magis utilem expensam quam facere poterunt, ut in omni caso ipsa loca nostra sint bene custodita et possint defendi ad nostrum honorem": *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 157r.

³¹⁰ "Quia baiulus et capitaneus noster Durachij ac castellanus castris superioris scribunt quod multi ex ballistarijs nostris qui ibi sunt, infirmantur, et quando sani forent, non essent sufficientes ad custodiendum castrum predictum et castrum a

Two weeks after that, on April 6, 1394, another N-entry notes more developments: “Due to news (*propter noua*) of the Turks which were procured, and other [issues],” the Council decided it was imperative that Saraceno Dandolo (re-elected Captain of the Gulf) go to Corfu. This should be done as soon as he could, considering the distance between Venice and Greece, for the reassurance of Venice’s subjects in Negroponte, Neapoli, Coron, and Modon. It was also ordered that he should leave behind two galleys to guard the sea and head to Corfu together with all the galleys, galeotas, brigantines and other ships that he might find in his way, fighting pirates as he sailed there.³¹¹ On that same day, just as had happened with the earlier N-entry of March 19, Albania transpired in the Council’s day meeting. In both cases, closer attention was paid to Albania when a direct threat to Venice’s key possessions was discussed. This time, Marino Caravello (Councilor) proposed the Captain and vice-captain of the Gulf to go to Durrës and meet the governor, castellan and chamberlain. All five men should then look, in a judicious manner, for a place where it might be possible to dig a trench, carefully measure the distance from the sea to the cliff, and from the cliff to the port, determine the condition of the soil, see if the sea might rise up too high and, if such a trench could be dug at all, estimate how long would it take and how expensive it would be.³¹² The purpose, it seems, was to transform Durrës’ peninsula into an island, by sweeping the sand strips of the mud marsh and digging below the surface of the sea.³¹³ After all, Durrës was a likely target of an Ottoman raid. On the other hand, the Maritime Experts indicated that further provisions should be made for the Captain; this was also approved by the Council: he should entrust his vice-captain to look after the security of merchants and merchandise in Catania and Messina who, fearing pirates, did not dare leave those places.³¹⁴

marina, quod est ualde periculosum, propter illa que de nouo habentur de facto Turchorum” (March 27, 1394): AAV 532; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 157r.

³¹¹ “Cum propter noua Turchorum et alia que habentur, de locis et dominis qui sunt circa loca nostra Nigroponti, Neapoli, Coroni et Mothoni, sit prouidendum ad confortum et subuentionem ipsorum et fidelium nostrorum deinde, per illos modos que magis presto fierj possunt, considerata distantia existente inter nos et ipsos. Vadit pars, quod mandetur capitaneo nostro Culphy quod subito post exitum suum de Venetia, debeat dare ordinem quod primo pro assecudando Culphum nostrum due gallee ille, videlicet, que sibi videbuntur dicto capitaneo (...) et procurare de habendo in fortia sua galeas, galeotas, brigantinos, et alia nauigia, que poterunt reperire in isto suo itinere cuntia ad cursum, procedendo contra ipsa nauigia et cursarios, secundum forma sue commissionis, et reducere ad locum nostrum Corphoy”: *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 158v.

³¹² “Quod committatur capitaneo et supracomitis nostris Culphy ac baiulo et capitaneo Durachij, castellano, et camerario Durachij quod debeant examinare locum vbi dicitur posse fieri illam foueam (...). Et primo facere mensurarj quot passus opporret cauarj, videlicet, a mari de Leuante usque ad baltam, et a balta usque ad portum pallorum, et ab utraque parte, facere cauari per vnum passum subtus in marj, et videre ac tastare diligenter et subtiliter si terrenum est sablonum uel credegnum, et si mare est altius a parte palorum quam balta, et si potest cauarj et in quanto tempore, et cum quo numero cauorum, et de quantitate expensarum”: AAV 533; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 159r.

³¹³ Leonard Xhamani, “Milan von Sufflay e le città medievali dell’Albania,” in *Il viaggio adriatico. Aggiornamenti bibliografici sulla letteratura di viaggio in Albania e nelle terre dell’Adriatico*, ed. Giovanni Segà (Tirana: University of Tirana, 2010), 119.

³¹⁴ “Quod pro subuentione mercatorum nostrorum existentum in partibus Catania et Messine, qui non audent ponere se ad iter cum hauere suo ob timorem piratarum. Vadit pars, quod committatur vicecapitaneo qui remanebit in Culpho quod quando ei videbitur postquam licenciatus et expeditus erit a capitaneo Culphy, debeat cum sua galea et altera sibj tunc comissa ire ad leuandum dictos mercatores, cum suo habere”: *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 159r.

As recorded, these discussions' emphasis refers to the momentousness of the decision that needed to be taken. However, according to the entries that follow, too much delicate news could hinder the *pregadi*'s capacity to keep track of their own pronouncements. On the following day, it was necessary for them to reconvene and sort out the previous day's decisions. As it turned out, on the spur of the moment, the Captain had been instructed to promptly leave for Corfu *and* Durrës; the vice-captain was to accompany him to Durrës, yet the vice-captain was also meant to safeguard the merchants in Catania and Messina. As recorded, Vittore Marcello, a Maritime Expert, rightly noticed that "to do both things at the same time was hardly possible."³¹⁵ The *pregadi* pondered the matter once more, and it was decided that both men were to go to Durrës. After they performed the necessary examinations, the Captain would continue on his way to take care of Venice's possessions in the Aegean Sea.³¹⁶

These latter examples point to the general direction in which the Albanian territories were heading within Council discussions: the *pregadi* made strategic decisions about Albanian cities on days when N-entries grappled with Bayezid's more menacing power.

During the two years surveyed thus far, the incipit "due to news [*noua*] received or procured" is how N-entries characteristically begin. Without mentioning the information's source, it indicates the reception of critical information requiring immediate action and potentially lasting consequences. On the other hand, entries which begin by mentioning *nouitas* denote serious disputes which the Council's decision-making could not simply set aside. Although mentions of these aggressions or disputes were serious, they were not undertaken with the same sense of urgency. Records show that distinctions in usage between these two words were, for the most part, consistently employed. When an event such as Stracimirović's kidnapping is recorded with as much seriousness and gravity which the records could muster, its assigned *newsworthiness* is immediately identifiable. And when the possibility of *nouitates* for Durrës are mentioned only in passing — and amidst discussions of other, more pressing *nouitates* — it is not surprising that the Council's command to the Captain is rather nonchalant.

Alternative Formulations of N-Entries (1394-1395)

Considering that the Venetian calendar year began in March, the year 1394 had begun badly. Two N-entries, only three weeks apart, notified the Council of unwelcome Ottoman advances in Greece. These Ottoman territorial gains set alarms for military preparations in Venetian possessions.

³¹⁵ "[D]ue res uno eodem tempore ut est neccessarium fieri minime possunt" (March 20, 1394): AAV 534; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 159v.

³¹⁶ "Quod capitaneus et supracomiti (...) debeant reducirere et coadunarj se ad locum nostrum Durachij. Et ibj facta examinatione que continetur in illa parte, debeat capitaneus cum alia galea ire ad partes superiores": *Ibidem*.

During the following months, Bayezid's strengthened position would prove to be a challenge for Venice's desire to maintain trading privileges with the Ottomans while asserting naval superiority in the Adriatic.

But Bayezid's attacks did not change one fundamental issue: ahead of 1394's sailing season, the security of merchant galleys was a major concern. More often than not, the Council's decisions sought to ensure the smoothness and security of business transactions at sea. Whenever hazards loomed, the distinction between "heard" and "acquired" ("habentur") reports of danger is relevant, since the former case constitutes an alternative way to formulate *newsworthiness*. In that sense, the following example indicates that entries registered supplementary reasons for the gravity of a threat if the information was not entirely certain. On May 26, 1394 the Maritime Experts informed the Council that:

some news is heard of two brigantines who are on their way, and it seems that the masters [of the ships] apparently let out words that due to a galley burnt in Ortona, they are willing to come to the damage of the Venetians. And they chose this Feast of Ascension, when many ships from neighboring regions come to Venice and then leave filled with goods and earnings. It is then proposed, for their security and to cause terror among the corsairs, that two of our ships (...) may, and should, be sent (...) to prevent that any attacks or violence is done against anybody approaching or leaving Venice.³¹⁷

Without checking the veracity of the information, the Council was moved to action because there is mention of the specific form of peril and the means by which it might be avoided. This is a factor to keep in mind whenever instances of danger or alarm are "heard," for the *pregadi* were not always convinced. An entry from some days later mentioning news "*that sounds* in Syria" is an example of a failed attempt at justifying *newsworthiness*. In this case, two Maritime Experts made provisions for spices and other light goods to be sent to Venice with unarmed ships.³¹⁸ Despite the incipit, the entry did not record a salient cause that would justify the proposal, for the Council was not moved to make the concession. The proposal, therefore, was not approved.

Indeed, steadfast calls to action are an inherent part of N-entries. But what if there was disagreement among Council board members regarding the urgency of the undertaking? Records of losing proposals copied alongside the motion which won majority approval are a recurrent (and

³¹⁷ "Cum sentiantur aliqua noua de duobus brigantinis qui vadunt ad cursum et fertur quod capita ipsorum habuerunt utj his verbis, videlicet, quod occaxione galea combuste in Ortona, sunt dispostj ire ad damnum venetorum, et ellegerint tempus in isto festo ascensionis in quo multa nauigia circauicorum veniunt Venetias, et postea repatriant cum suis rebus et mercibus. Vadit pars, pro securitate predictorum et pro terrore dictorum cursariorum, quod duo ligna nostra (...) possint et debeant mittj (...) pro obuiano et custodendo de nouitas uel ulla violentia fiat alicui, tam veniendo Venetias quam recedendo": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 7r.

³¹⁸ "Cum propter noua que sonant in partibus Syrie et alijs locis soldano subiecto, sapiens res sit ellargare quod speties bochassinj et hauere subtile possint conducj Venetias cum nauigijs disarmatis" (June 4, 1394): *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 7v. As Lane explained, "armed (long) ships" (later the merchant galleys of the state) had the monopoly of the transport of spices and other light wares from the Levant to Venice. Every time exceptions were made, those "unarmed (round) ships" were obliged to pay freight to the galleys: Frederic Lane, "Venetian Shipping During the Commercial Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 38, no. 2 (1933): 220.

fascinating) aspect of Council records. Losing proposals entailed neither action nor accountability. One possible reason to explain why they were recorded relates to the fact that those instances of competing viewpoints signify added *newsworthiness* by virtue of the divisiveness which the issue in question created. Whenever “A” challenged the manner in which incoming information was presented by “B,” one can assume that the information received was of greater significance than what “B” had made it out to be. In the case of competing proposals, the relative *newsworthiness* assigned to a given situation can be determined by analyzing the manner in which the opposing entries were introduced. Regardless of the fact that one cannot establish how these entries might have echoed actual interventions in the Council, the vote count indicates the relative success of each.

With no further news about the Ottomans,³¹⁹ this is how an entry from later that year (October 22) conveyed the consequences of the patriarch of Aquileia’s death.³²⁰ The Council Experts brought the following proposition to the Senate, recorded in the book of secret deliberations:

Considering what was received from both the commune of Udine (...) and the commune of Cividale, no further delays should take place concerning their response and intention about the person they would prefer for the Patriarchate. Instead, we must endeavor that our messenger receives quickly our instructions and information regarding the person who would please us (...). It is proposed, that all our citizens who aspire to the Patriarchate should have their names written in the Major Curia before Saturday.³²¹

From the incipit and the action plan, one might believe that information about a new patriarch of Aquileia being chosen had importance, but that it was not critical. October 22, 1394 was Thursday; by Saturday, the candidates would have listed their names and the election might take place, presumably, a few days later. The messenger, then, should receive the Council’s orders quickly (“presto”), and not *as soon as possible* (“quam prestius esse potest”). The above bill, however, received the support of just 19 senators and was not approved. One Councilor proposed to stop all discussions until Sunday, when the *pregadi* would come back to cast their ballot. He received 20 votes in favor. A third option presented a contrast to the neutral formulation of the first intervention (“consideratis his que habentur”). That opposing intervention by three Councilors reads:

³¹⁹ In July 24, 1394, the Council received information about Bayezid being “occupied” with a possible attack by Timur, Emperor of the Tartars: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 194.

³²⁰ The patriarch of Aquileia ruled over the “Patria del Friuli,” one of the ecclesiastical states of the Holy Roman Empire. Ever since the capital of the patriarchate moved to Udine in 1238, Venice grew jealous of the patriarchate’s power over the Istrian territories of Koper and Rovinj. See: Gian Carlo Menis, *Storia del Friuli: dalle origini alla caduta dello stato patriarcale 1420 con cenni fino al XX secolo* (Udine: Società filologica friulana, 2002).

³²¹ “Quia consideratis his que habentur, tam a communitate Utini (...) quam per literas communitatis ciuitate Austrie, non est amplius differendum in attendendum respensionem et intencionem eorum, circha persona eis gratam et acceptam ad patriarchatum, sed est procurandum quod nuncius noster presto habeat nostrum mandatum et nostram informationem, de persona uel personis nobis gratis (...). Vadit pars, quod omnes illi ciues nostri qui anhelant et et attendunt ad ipsum patriarchatum, debeant facere se scribi ad curiam maiorem usque diem sabati”: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 198.

Given that any delay, notwithstanding how small, can be exceedingly dangerous and damaging to our intention, it should be written to Nicolò de Girardo that he must present himself in front of the pope.³²²

According to the above instruction, Nicolò should make clear to the pope that Venice had invested considerable resources in assuring the patriarchate's obedience to him and, in exchange, the pope should elect one of Venice's "original citizens" for the post.³²³ Forty-nine *pregadi* voted for the second, more stirring proposal. The Councilors' suggestion was elaborated upon by the doge and others. Their plan acknowledged that, as many were contending for the position, the Collegio should be allowed to spend as much money as it considered necessary to ensure that Venice secured the post and that the workings behind this plan remained secret.³²⁴ This plan received even more support (75 *pregadi*).

In the secret record quoted above, *newsworthiness* surfaces as a reaction to an unconvincing intervention — whatever "unconvincing" may have meant during the actual deliberation. While the first proposal's incipit was the standard formulation referring to pieces of information from incoming correspondence, the language of the second incipit departs from an analogous standard formulation. The second motion's stronger impact is attested to by the fact that a higher number of *pregadi* were convinced by it.³²⁵

In early 1395, Venice was actively engaged in the defense of Ferrara against Azzo d'Este.³²⁶ Records of these discussions, visits from ambassadors and war preparations were also kept in the books of the *Secreti*. Even though Azzo suffered a defeat in early 1395, he gathered an army of mercenaries to assault Ferrara once more. Venice, on the other hand, increased its forces by ordering an enlistment of new infantrymen. Both armies fought in the battle of Portomaggiore, which took place on April 16. Four days after the battle, it was noted that: "Due to the happy news received regarding the victory achieved against Azzo and his mercenaries, the [newly enlisted] foot soldiers are not necessary anymore."³²⁷ This is a salient entry, in that it records the sole occurrence between 1392 and 1402 wherein an N-entry expresses the Council's emotionally positive response ("noua felicia") to news received. Although the entry does not convey urgent need for action (strictly

³²² "Quia omnis mora quantumcumque parua, posset esse valde periculosa, et dannosa huic nostre intencionj": *Ibidem*.

³²³ "Scribi debeat (...) prouido uiro Nicolao de Girardo quod comparat de presenti coram apostolica sanctitate, supplicando (...) quod pro nostra consolatione qui ut notissium est, semper vigilauimus ad conseruationem illius ecclesie et patrie sub obedientia sanctitate sue, et cum maximis nostris laboribus et expensis, dignetur prouidere illi ecclesie et patrie uno originario ciue nostro qui sue placeat sanctitati": *Ibidem*.

³²⁴ "[Q]uia ut sentitur multi attendunt ad istum patriarchatum (...). Vadit pars, quod collegium (...) habeat libertatem, in caso quo possit haberi intentus noster, possendi spendere pro illo nostro qui promotus erit illa quantitate que utilis et neccesaria apparebit, ut res sit secreta": *Ibidem*.

³²⁵ Other board members presented their proposals to secure the post, but all strategies were of little use. The pope elected Antonio Caetani, member of a prominent Roman family, as patriarch of Aquilea on January 27, 1395.

³²⁶ "Quia ista noua que habentur de partibus Ferrarie sunt satis ardua, ita quod necessarium est ad facta illa totis spiritibus uigilare" (April 16, 1395): *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 229.

³²⁷ "Insuper quia propter noua felicia que habita sunt de victoria obtenta contra Azonne et rusticos rebelles, non est necessarium quod compleantur illi pedites que ordinati fuerunt" (April 20, 1395): *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 232.

speaking, extra soldiers enlisted can hardly be considered a threat), additional information —in the form of the Council’s reaction— was provided to make explicit the news’ positive impact.

During the summer, *nouitates* and *noua* seemed to always lurk around the corner: merchants were being extorted and harassed in Cyprus,³²⁸ rumors about a “union” in Greek territories of the Byzantine Empire circulated, which caused many merchants to refuse to deliver goods there³²⁹ and, once more, the security of the merchant fleet was at the top of the Council’s concerns (this time in relation to merchants going to Azov who might have been unable to reach their destination³³⁰). On August 3, 1395, Bayezid’s intention to attack Negroponte, Athens and other Venetian territories was again expressed urgently and resolutely.³³¹

Despite this, by autumn, the Council was confident that they could maintain a truce with the Ottomans. On November 5, a record makes this confidence implicit, via the decision to increase business enterprises in the Eastern Mediterranean:

With God’s grace, our city shall be in as good a state regarding merchandise and everything else as it could [possibly] be, and day by day this multiplies, increases and will continue to prosper from good to better, and as it is known to all, plenty of merchandise is being brought here, and similarly is taken out from here regularly. For that reason, it is necessary to make arrangements for the trip to Alexandria, and it is proposed to be expressly ordered to the heads of the arsenal to swiftly prepare four more galleys, aside from the three they already have (...).³³²

Venice’s hopes proved unfounded as soon as the following month, when the Ottomans showed increased signs of antagonism. The *pregadi* agreed that Venice could show its maritime strength to secure Constantinople from the Ottomans, as long as more galleys were sent. But on December 30, “violence, damages and havoc” newly inflicted on the Venetian fleet sailing through

³²⁸ “Quod pro infinitis nouitatibus extorsionibus et violentijs que quotidie fiunt mercantibus per Serenissimum Dominum Regem Cipri et eius officialibus in zucharis et alis bonis suis, contra omnem iusticiam et equitatem, elligatur (...) unus solemnus ambaxiator” (May 25, 1395): *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 62r.

³²⁹ “Quia est piuum et quam plurimum commendandum compati illis, quibus infortinua eueniunt (...). Et sicut notum est propter noua habita de partibus Romanie, multi mercatores recusant destinare mercationes suas cum presentibus galeis Romanie”: *Ibidem*.

³³⁰ “Cum propter noua habita de nouitatibus occursis in partibus Tane (...). Vadit pars quod mandetur capitaneo galleis [Romanie], quod prius quam transeat cochos, nec intret flumariam per quam potet iri ad portem Tane, debeat destinare admiratum summ, cum barcha galei, ad consulem Tane, ad presentiedum ab eo, de nouis et condicionis illarum partium, et si dicte galee possunt tunc ire Tanam ad fatiendum merchantiam”: *Ibidem*.

³³¹ This time, the strategy put forward was two-fold. First, governors should guarantee that there would be no shortage of grain in Negroponte, and second, that extra infantry was employed in the defense of the places in question: “Quia consideratis nouis habitis de partibus Nigropontis de pessima intencione et dispositione quam Turchi habent tam ad ciuitatem et insulam nostram predictam quam ad cuiuitatem Athenarum, et alia loca nostra in illis partibus constituta, est habenda prouiso principaliter ad duo, et primo ad prouidendum quod ciuitas ipsa Nigroponte non habeat necessitatem frumenti (...) et secundario, quod ibi sunt aliqui pedites pro defensione sua et subuentione aliorum locorum nostrorum (...)”: *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 76r.

³³² “Cum gratia Altissimi ciuitas nostra sit in tam bona condicione mercationum et omnium aliorum quantum plus esse posset, et quotidie multiplicat auget, et multiplicabit de bono in melius, et sicut omnibus est satis notum magna quantitas mercationum huc conducta est, et similiter conducetur decetero de tempore in tempus. Et propterea est de necessitate prouidere de galeis pro viaggio Alexandrie. Vadit pars, quod mandetur et sic expresse committatur patronis nostri arsenatus quod presto ponere debeant in canterio galeas quator ultra illas tres quas ad presens posuerunt (...)”: *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 92v.

Gallipoli, Argos, and Athens merited the election of the experienced Michele Contarini and Nicolò Vallaresso as ambassadors to reason with Bayezid.³³³

It is not coincidental that Bayezid's open provocation and the galleys' decreased safety were discussed the same day as the Council's remembrance for two Albanian ambassadors who came to Venice to offer Shkodra and Drisht on behalf of George Stracimirović.³³⁴ By this point, Venice was ready to consider Albania the stepping stone for incursions into the Balkans and into Europe.

Benjamin Arbel understandably wondered why Venice would decide to acquire Shkodra, "which could not be reached directly by sea-going vessels."³³⁵ It was self-evident that those Albanian territories posed little direct advantage for Venice, but they were defined as something the Ottomans should not possess and, in that sense, it was justifiable for the Council to consider the offering. This expansion "was to form a cordon" based on alliances with local Albanian lords,³³⁶ although Council members were probably aware that Albanian lands were a "patchwork of unstable possessions."³³⁷ Further details regarding the two-month discussion which followed Stracimirović's proposal will be analyzed in the next chapter. In short, plenty of controversy surrounded the offering: it needed to be considered against the peace agreement signed with Hungary in 1358, the recently elected embassy going to Bayezid, additional information from the Captain of the Gulf, and the general state of affairs in the Byzantine Empire.

The loss of confidence that the merchant fleet's increase could be done securely, as well as the accumulation of setbacks for Venice's possessions in Greek territories, added *newsworthiness* to information regarding the Ottoman attack to such an extent that political considerations necessarily followed. Securing control over the Zeta region offered no direct advantage for Venetian trade, but it was a decision that would oppose free Ottoman incursions into the Balkans, politically and strategically.

On one hand, this section contains considerations regarding the place of *newsworthiness* within news "heard," competing proposals, and emotional appraisal of the news. On the other hand, compared to the previous years, a change had occurred in that, by the end of 1395, most mentions of

³³³ "Quia propter uiolencias danna et nouitates que facte sunt et fiunt per Turchis, tam nostris nauigis euntibus et redeuntibus in partibus Galipolis quam etiam locis nostris Argos et Sithines (...), est omnino necessarium cum istis galeis mittere nostram solemnem ambassiatam ad dominum Basaitum. Vadit pars, quod eligantur in isto consilio duo nostri solemnes ambassiatores": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 97v. For the view that Venice's failure in handling security problems adequately facilitated Ottoman advance, see: Asonitis, "Relations between the Venetian Regimen Corphoy and the Albanians of Epirus (14th-15th Centuries)," 271.

³³⁴ Stracimirović had regained control of these territories only two months earlier, between September and October of 1395: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 237; Alain Ducellier, "Genesis and Failure of the Albanian State in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *L'Albanie entre Byzance et Venise: Xe - XVe siècles* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987), 10.

³³⁵ Benjamin Arbel, "Venice's Maritime Empire in the Early Modern Period," in *A Companion to Venetian History: 1400 - 1797*, ed. Eric Dursteler (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 138.

³³⁶ Schmitt, "Le Commerce Vénitien," 883.

³³⁷ Lovorka Čoralić, "Letters and Communications of the Rectors of Budva, Bar and Ulcinj as a Source for the Diplomatic and Political History of Venetian Albania in the Sixteenth Century," *Etudes Balkaniques* 3 (2009): 91.

noua and *nouitas* denote the Council's growing concern for one particular threat at sea: the Ottomans —neither the Catalans, nor pirates, nor corsairs, but Bayezid's ambition was the galleys' biggest peril. In that sense, it is relevant that the day's agenda continued to group together news of direct attacks inflicted to the Venetian fleet by the Ottomans and strategies to secure Albanian possessions. Finally, when the danger became imminent, the Zeta region was specifically defined as a cordon to curb Bayezid's growing power. Venice invested heavily in Albania's defense for political, not mercantile reasons.

The Ottoman Victory: A Change of Perspective (1396-1397)

The final days of 1395 marked a turning point in the Council's concerns over the security of sea routes. The following summer their worries remained unabated.³³⁸ Questions of where merchandise could be safely sent meant a need for more decision-making. In fact, 1396 saw a 24% increase in the number of decisions made, compared to the previous year. This increase is due to the movement of merchandise, modifications to shipping routes, increases to, or the waiving of, freight charge onboard the galleys, and so on.

Miscellaneous Deliberations

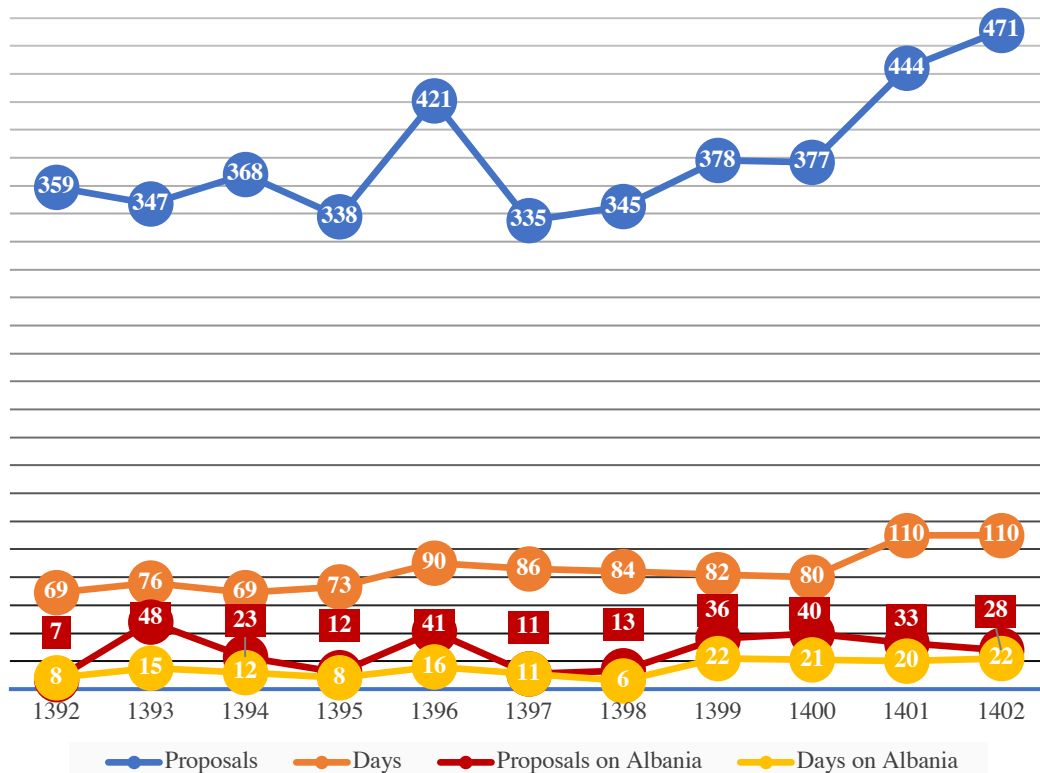


Chart 2. Number of entries and Council meeting days from the *Deliberazioni, Misti* (1392-1402)

³³⁸ For example, after receiving news about Azov, the Council modified the instructions previously given to the captain of the galleys going there to ensure that they would be safe (July 13, 1396): *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 140v.

On July 20, 1396, further intelligence about Bayezid's strength "which multiplies in Gallipoli, in terms of people and ships with whom he intends to inflict damage on Christians"³³⁹ functioned as a timely admonition. The crusader army, organized largely by Hungary and France, was on its way to Nikopol (in modern Bulgaria), assisted by the Venetian fleet under the command of Tommaso Mocenigo, Captain of the Gulf.³⁴⁰ Preliminary but newsworthy dispatches of piecemeal information about the encounter between European and Ottoman forces reached the Council on October 28:

Because the news we have about the conflict of the king of Hungary concerns all Christianity in general, but particularly affects our status like nothing else could, as anybody can reflect upon it (...). It is then proposed to elect at once two commissioners to go to those parts as result of these actions, and [to attend] to other issues which may be committed to them.³⁴¹

The "Battle of Nicopolis" (as it is commonly known) took place on September 25.³⁴² Four weeks was a surprisingly swift time frame for Venice to receive information from Nikopol. The day's meeting was devoted to this topic; only one other minor issue was discussed. Nothing was decided conclusively save an agreement that more information was needed, which the Council could receive through two commissioners sent there. On the following day, October 29, a record explicitly displayed one aspect of the Council's reaction to the news:

Given that businesses in Byzantium are on the terms in which they should reasonably be, due to the conflict of the king of Hungary, the Captain of the Gulf finds himself in great perplexity, because of doubts regarding [the fortune] of our galleys in the Black Sea, and [that of] the city of Constantinople, and for this reason, it is a sensible thing to give him, as soon as possible, aid and comment in such way that he hears again something from us regarding our intention, and has our mandate.³⁴³

³³⁹ "Quia propter illa que habentur modo ultimo de partibus Romania de potentia Basiti que multiplicat in partibus et loco Galipolis, tam de gentibus quam nauigijs, cum quibus magis vigilare videtur ad damnum Christianorum euntum et redeuntum": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 141v.

³⁴⁰ For a detailed account of Sigismund's preparations for the crusade, see: Attila Barany, "King Sigismund of Luxemburg and the preparations for the Hungarian crusading host of Nicopolis (1391-96)," in *Partir en croisade à la fin du Moyen Âge. Financement et logistique*, ed. Daniel Baloup and Manuel Sánchez Martínez (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2015), 153-78; Attila Barany, "King Sigismund and the passagium generale (1391-96)," in *Conferință internațională Sigismund de Luxemburg, Oradea, 6-9 Decembrie, 2007 / International conference Sigismund of Luxemburg. Ed. Florina Ciure and Alexandru Simon. Oradea, 2007.*, accessed July 31, 2020, https://www.academia.edu/6925097/King_Sigismund_and_the_passagium_generale_1391-96_.

³⁴¹ "Quia noua ista que habentur de conflictu domini regis Hungarie licet satis tangant generaliter totam Christianitatem tamen specialiter tangunt tantum quantum tangere possent statum nostrum, sicut quilibet potest considerare (...). Vadit pars, quod fieri debeant de presenti in hoc consilio duo nostri prouisoires solemnes, ad eundum uersus illas partes pro istis factis et alijs que eis committenda viderentur (...)": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 158r.

³⁴² Hungarian and German literature dated the battle on September 28, although nowadays September 25 is the commonly accepted date: László Veszprémy, "Some Remarks on Recent Hungarian Historiography of the Crusade of Nicopolis (1396)," in *The Crusades and the Military Orders. Expanding the Frontiers of Medieval Latin Christianity*, ed. Zsolt Hunyadi and József Laszlovszky (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 227.

³⁴³ "Quia existentibus negocijs Romanie in terminis in quibus rationabiliter esse debent, propter conflictum domini regis Hungarie, capitaneus noster Culphy se reperiet in magna perplexitate, tam propter dubium galearum nostrarum maris maioris, quam ciuitatem Constantinopolitanam propter quam causam sapiens res est, quam tam prestius esse potest, dare sibi subuentionem et linguam ita quod de nouo senciata a nobis aliquod de nostra intentione et habeat nostra mandata": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 158r. According to Setton, the news created a great deal of discord, and some *pregadi* "certainly regretted having allowed the state to assume an anti-Turkish stance by sending even four galleys to co-operate with Sigismund":

The *pregadi* must have been as perplexed as Mocenigo, the Captain, on hearing that a situation of such high uncertainty came as consequence of the crusade. More entries record attempts to establish the best means of establishing the Captain's exact location, how to collect information and report it back to Venice more readily, as well as the amount of money the Captain should receive in assistance.³⁴⁴ As mentioned, one day earlier, the Council had decided that there was an immediate need for Venetian presence in the Byzantine Empire, even though more news of the battle's outcome were expected to arrive.³⁴⁵ However, given the lack of certainty about it all, it should not be a surprise that the two commissioners elected the previous day to collect *in situ* information refused the appointment, alleging they were sick.³⁴⁶

The Council did not meet on October 30, but reconvened the following day. Experts had divided opinions about how to proceed. Two groups comprised of several Council and Maritime Experts presented differing proposals. According to the first group, it would be only useful for all Christendom to inform the pope about the news received; therefore, they proposed to write letters to him, as well as to the kings of France and England and the Holy Roman emperor lamenting the entire state of affairs but ensuring that Venice was not put under any obligation to offer more assistance.³⁴⁷ A divided Council voted against it, in two rounds. In the first, 45 were in favor and 50 against, subsequently only 42 were in favor, with a majority of 60 against. The intervention of the second group of Experts was recorded as saying that "day after day and hour after hour, news on the king's situation was arriving," and that it was nothing short of alarming: they were told it was dangerous for all Christianity and for Venice's status.³⁴⁸ Their proposition was that the election of two commissioners of two days earlier should be repeated, as Venice needed someone in place, in case of sudden developments.³⁴⁹ Twenty-five *pregadi* supported this bill and 72 were against it. Lack of resolution in the Council from uncertain information was nothing new. What is surprising is the *pregadi*'s decision to withhold this news to the heads of crusade forces.

About a month later, more (bad) news moved the Council to instruct the governors of Crete and Marino Caravello (governor of Coron and Modon) to swiftly arm and send two galleys towards

Kenneth Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1976), 358.

³⁴⁴ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 158v.

³⁴⁵ "[O]mni die plura habebunt et sentientur de istis factis": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 158v.

³⁴⁶ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 158v.

³⁴⁷ "Quia non potest esse aliud quam utile pro tota Christianitate reddere informatum specialiter dominum papam de istis nouis que habentur de conflictu domini regis Hungarie (...). Vadit pars, quod possint scribi litere ipsi domino pape, domino regi Francie et Anglie, ac domino imperatorj, significando eis casum et de illo condolendo pro bono Christianitatis (...), non obligando tamen nos ad rem aliquam que per fututa tempora posset esse obligatoria et preiudicatiua nobis et statui nostro": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 159r.

³⁴⁸ "Quia omni die et de hora in hora nouum quod habitum fuit de conflictu domini regis Hungarie sentitum est, et sentitur esse grauius et periculosus per tota Christianitate et per statu nostro": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 159r.

³⁴⁹ "[N]obis posset esse maxime opportunum, habere extra nostros prouisoires et personas sufficientes nostro nomine que amplia habeant libertatem ad possendum prouidere super multis casibus que possent occurrere": *Ibidem*.

Byzantium.³⁵⁰ Yet information about the outcome was sketchy. On December 16, the Council was still somewhat in the dark, and all Experts made a proposal to the rest of the *pregadi* for sending a spy to Hungary. Apparently, there was a rumor that Bayezid had entered Sigismund's kingdom. Somebody "discreet" should carefully and secretly investigate what news Hungarians possessed regarding Bayezid, but should also report back to Venice the machinations taking place in the kingdom, including the dispositions of prelates and barons.³⁵¹

Two days later, news arrived about Byzantium and the Ottomans and also —judging by what they heard from France, Genoa and Lombardy—, the Council decided that available tax revenues should be spent to secure a year's allotment of grain.³⁵² If nothing else, they needed to ensure the city's food supply. Furthermore, on that same day, the Council postponed the auction of licenses for the Flanders galleys "due to news (*propter noua*) heard everywhere, and in order to perform the auction with eyes wide open and more varied provisions."³⁵³ Information regarding the whereabouts of the Hungarian king arrived regularly in Venice.³⁵⁴ But on January 12, 1397, the Council still did not know where both the king or Bayezid were, and "after examining the news and state of the Byzantine Empire," the Council agreed that one of the most apt provisions they could make for the Gulf galleys would be sending them to Constantinople, with some hesitation surrounding the number of galleys sent to guard the Gulf proper. Proposals to deploy one, six, seven and eight galleys were presented. The Council settled for the latter option, with the possibility of arming more, according to the news received day by day.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁰ "Quod propter noua que habentur de partibus Romanie et de factis Basiti et domini regis Hungarie, scribatur (...) regimini nostro Crete, et litere mittantur ad manus castellanorum Coroni et Mothoni, ut illas sibi mittant quod recepto nostro mandato eligant duos sufficientes supracomitos et arment duas galeas quas ibi habent, quas prestissime quantum poterunt bene in puncto et in ordine, mittant uersus partes Romanie" (November 28, 1396): AAV 671; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 160v.

³⁵¹ "Quia est res sapiens habere plena et uera informatione de nouis Hungarie, et de his que dicuntur et referuntur de factis Basiti que uidetur intrasse dictum regnum. Vadit pars quod possit mitti una sufficiens et discreta persona et bene informata de condicionibus et baronibus dicti regni ad partes illas, que ire ostendat deinde per factis suis et studeat sentire et inuestigare caute et secrete omnia noua que habentur in dictis partibus ad illis personis que sibi uidebuntur tam de factis Basiti quam de tractatibus quos haberet in regno, et de dispositionibus prelatorum et baronum et totum illud quod habere et sentire poterat per quemcumque modum quanto prestius poterit, nobis studeat reportare ut sumus de omnibus informati": *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 274. On March 8, 1397, an entry indicates that Marino de Conti, who had been sent to hear the *nouitates* in Hungary, was there with "maximo incomodo" and therefore was allowed to return to Venice: *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 175r.

³⁵² "Cum propter noua que sciuntur de partibus Hungarie, Romanie et Turchorum, nec non attentis his que resonant de partibus Frantie, Janue et Lombardie, utile ymo necessarium sit prouidere quod in omni casu reperiamus nos bene fulcitos bladibus (...). Vadit pars quod de resto pecunie introitum [sic] (...) possit accipi pro emendo et fulciendo nos bladibus, prout necessarium fuerit et opportunum, et hoc duret anno usque ad unum annum proximum" (December 18, 1396): *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 162r.

³⁵³ "Quod propter noua que sonant undique, ac ut maturius et cum oculis magis appertis et plus deuersatis prouisionibus, possit poni et fieri incantus istarum galearum indutiatur et supersedeatur pro nunc": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 162v.

³⁵⁴ For example, on December 27, it was heard that "something" had happened to Sigismund's galley, and three Council Experts suggested that an envoy should go to Istria and find out if he was alive, but the proposal was not approved: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 276.

³⁵⁵ "Quia examinatis omnibus nouis et conditionibus partium Romanie, una de principalioribus et utilioribus prouisionibus que fieri per nos possit respectu etiam eorum que sentiuntur per viam terre de factis Basiti (...) est quod nos armemus presto galeas nostras, et quod illas mittamus ad partes Constantinopolis (...). Vadit pars, quod pro anno futuro, in bona

From the reports received at the end of October through the middle of January, all entries including *noua* or *nouitas* in the incipit refer, in one way or another, to an Ottoman victory. During this two-and-a-half month period, *newsworthiness* was recorded as a preface to decisions which showed Venice's insecurity regarding its standing. Records of *noua* are a comment on the Council's attempts to ensure fundamental guarantees (like grain for citizens, or the capacity to carry on with regular business) as the uncertainty of the conflict's outcome made those fundamental necessities (food, security of galleys) unsure.

As Venice had taken part in the battle only indirectly, and since the crusaders' fight was not Venice's fight, their defeat did not belong to Venice. The first visitors to arrive in Venice to exchange information about Sigismund's fortune, on January 26, 1397, were Hungarian ambassadors. The Council's words to them were that they felt sorrow for the king, but with only Venice's help he would not be able to face Bayezid successfully, particularly considering that the Ottomans were exultant after their victory.³⁵⁶ It comes as no surprise that, on that same day, the Council agreed that the foreseeable future would bring considerable expense. Therefore money from the commune should not be used for loans.³⁵⁷ Attempts to carry on more or less as before would have to adjust to a new reality.³⁵⁸

From October of 1396 to February, 1397, there are no discussions about Albania in the Council's deliberations. But when the frenzy for news was over, reducing expenses became a priority; Durrës and Shkodra suffered as a consequence. On February 4, the Council advised the nobles Iacopo Gradenigo (in charge of a contingent of soldiers), Francesco Dandolo (governor of Durrës) and Giovanni Cappello (governor of Shkodra) to make budget cuts. They should be notified that unless they had good reasons for keeping the contingent of soldiers employed, those soldiers should be dismissed. In this way, Venice would save most of the soldiers' salaries, as only a minor number of horsemen would continue to be employed.³⁵⁹ Four days later, the Experts also indicated that, since those horsemen were going to Durrës, and considering that Giovanni Cappello's salary as governor was high, a different governor should be elected for a lower salary, and Cappello given the liberty to return to Venice.³⁶⁰ A letter by Gradenigo was received in April stating that, given the *nouitates* heard,

gratia, deputentur et armentur ad custodiam Culphy et ad fatiendum facta nostra predicta, pro nunc, octo galee (...). Et si in processu temporis videretur expediens de armando plures galeas, istud fieri poterit secundum noua et casus qui de tempore in tempus, et de die in diem occurrent": AAV 676; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 166v-167r.

³⁵⁶ "[D]olemus immense (...) et videmus ac cognoscimus euidenter quod maxime in presenti, potentia dicti domini regis [Hungarie] et nostra, non esset sufficiens ad liberatione Christianitate ut tangit et prosecutionem infidelium predictorum, quos videmus esse propter suam victoriam maxime exaltatos": *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 280.

³⁵⁷ "Quod pro factis que habemus ad presens agere, in quibus multe expensas oportent fieri, possint accipi denarij qui sunt apud pouisores comunis, de quibus pridie captum fuit in hoc consilio quod ipsi prouisores deberent sic tenere et non emere de ipsis imprestita": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 168r.

³⁵⁸ For instance, on April 3, 1397, Gian Galeazzo Visconti was threatening Florence and Bologna, and Venice offered to act as intermediary in the conflict: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 294.

³⁵⁹ AAV 677; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 169v.

³⁶⁰ AAV 678; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 170r.

the three men had decided to keep the soldiers until the end of May, but after that only fifty horsemen for each place would continue to be employed, as suggested previously by the Council.³⁶¹

It is relevant that through most of 1397, entries do not express information about the Ottomans with the relative *newsworthiness* recorded prior to the crusade. On March 15, “according to what is heard (“per ea”) about the Turks,” the Council ordered that four more archers be hired for the defense of the Lezhë castle, spending as little as possible.³⁶²

The commission for Benedetto Soranzo (elected Captain of the Gulf) from April 7 instructed him that the Council was willing to agree to a maritime peace agreement with Bayezid, as long as the latter recognized Venice’s claim to its recently-acquired possessions, including Shkodra and Durrës.³⁶³

On April 29, a letter from the governors of Coron and Modon informed the Council of the Ottomans’ intrusion in Corinth. The record of the Council Experts’ intervention indicates only that Bayezid’s affairs were currently in good stead, and that it was unwise to go looking for more worry and expense. Venice should attend solely to its own possessions.³⁶⁴ Later, on May 5, two separate bills asked for the Council’s approval to seek new information. Both proposed to instruct the vice-captain of the Gulf to go to Negroponte, even as far as Chios if necessary, to collect letters and intelligence about the Ottomans and their state of affairs in the Byzantine Empire. However, they were both voted down, and by a large margin: 11 and 6 votes in favor, respectively, and 81 (without distinction) against.³⁶⁵

On September 22, 1397, the first N-entry since January 12, recorded the news that pirates were coming to savage the Gulf. As the pirates had already inflicted damages and in order to speed up the necessary arrangements, the Collegio was left in charge of sending a galeota to Modon, where it should be armed and prepared to chase them away.³⁶⁶

³⁶¹ AAV 682; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 182v.

³⁶² “Cum sit necessarium providere, secundum ea que sciuntur de factis Turcorum, de castro nostro Lesij (...). Vadit pars, quod per nostros pagatores armamenti solidentur ballistarij quatuor (...) faciendo illam minorem expensam quam facere poterunt”: AAV 679; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 176v.

³⁶³ “[Q]uia posset occurrere quod ipse Basitus uel sui facient requisitionem et mentionem de duobus, et primo de uolendo habere pacem etiam nobiscum in mari, et similiter sicut alias dixit, de non uolendo dare pacem locis per nos de nouo acquisitis pro ut sunt ciuitates Argos et Neapolis, Athenarum, Durachij, et Scutari, quia diceret quod forent sua”: AAV 683; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 299.

³⁶⁴ “Quia intromissio istius loci Corinthij, de quo castellanj nostri Coroni et Mothoni scripserunt nobis, posset esse valde damnosa pluribus respectibus, et specialiter tempore presenti, in quo videmus Baysitum Turchorum dominum, et facta sua multum prosperarj (...). Ita quod sapiens res est non ire querendo maiores labores necquem expensas illias quia habemus in illis partibus, sed attendere solum ad custodiam locorum nostrorum que nunc habemus”: *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 183v.

³⁶⁵ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 184v.

³⁶⁶ “Cum consideratis nouis que habentur de ista galea et galeota piratorum que venerunt ad damnificandum Culphum et intulerunt aliqua damna, utile ymo necesarium sit providere. Vadit pars, quod collegium (...) habeat libertatem armarj faciendi quanto prestius poterit galeotam, que debebat ire disarmata Mothoni, et ipsam ponj facere in puncto et in ordine ita quod vadat simul cum ista galea bona ad custodiam Culphi et prosequutionem dictorum piratorum”: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 20v.

One month later, on October 23, the Council withheld the decision to reduce expenses in Albania, likely due to the news from Istria. The entry records that the new governor of Shkodra, Maffeo Gradenigo, wrote to inform the Council that the armed people under his command had the intention of quitting after their term expired, which would leave the lands outside the city deserted and unprotected, and this should be avoided by ordering the people to remain in their positions.³⁶⁷ According to the entry, the contingent wanted to terminate their service due to the “news from Lombardy.” This is probably a *lapsus calami*. Another entry from the same day states that, “due to the new threats (*nouitates*) which are heard about the people called Uclie³⁶⁸ roaming about and intending to damage Istria, as writes our governor in Koper,” the Collegio was instructed to write to the dukes of Austria and other lords to ensure the security of Venice’s territories and subjects there.³⁶⁹

Giovanni Cappello returned from Shkodra to Venice and presented his provisions to the Council on October 30. In order to obtain tax revenues from Shkodra and Drisht, he suggested to make additional budget cuts by dispensing with Drisht’s governor. He justified this by saying that having two governors was a source of dispute among the two cities’ countrymen. Instead of Paolo Nani, the noble governor in Drisht, a commoner would be designated to guard the castle (*castellanus popularis*). In that way, both Shkodra and Drisht would be under the jurisdiction of one noble: Shkodra’s governor.³⁷⁰

While during the months of November and December of the previous year the Council met repeatedly to exchange news about Bayezid, the combined total of meeting days for November and December of 1397 is only three days. No other two-month period during the decade under study

³⁶⁷ “Quod respondeatur nobilij uiro ser Mafeo Gradonico, comiti et capitaneo Scutarj, (...) quia scribit quod gentes nostre armigere quas illic tenemus, consideratis nouis Lombardie, vellent postquam completa est firma sua cassarj, quod nullo modo pro presenti esset fiendum, quia si cassarentur omnino contracta illa remaneret deserta et consumpta”: AAV 694; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 22v.

³⁶⁸ This may refer to the Uskoks, active raiders and corsairs who became more active in the sixteenth century, under the command of Austrian officers: John Fine, *When Ethnicity Did Not Matter in the Balkan: A Study of Identity in Pre-Nationalist Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 215–16.

³⁶⁹ “Quod pro istis nouitatibus que resonant de gentibus que dicuntur Uclie discurre ad danum Istrie prout nobis scripsit potestas noster Justinopolis, collegium dominij consiliariorum, capitum et sapientes consilij, habeant libertatem scribendi dominis ducibus Austrie, et alijs dominis et mittendi nuntios (...), pro securitate et bono locorum et fidelium nostrorum Istrie”: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 23r. On January 12, 1398, given that those people had indeed caused damages to Venetian subjects in Istria, the Council had to grant 70 ducats to Koper’s governor to allow him to send additional messengers and collect news: “Cum propter nouitates que sonabant in partibus Istrie de gentibus que uoleban descendere, et descenderunt ad danna fidelium nostrorum Istrie, oportuit fierj certas expensas per potestatem et capitaneum nostrum Justinopolis, in mitendo nuntios seu ambaxiatores (...). Vadit pars, ut possit facere in sciendo de nouis (...) possit expendere ad sumam ducatorum LXX”: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 29r.

³⁷⁰ “Quia utile et necessarium est prouidere ad scansandum expensam magnam quam habemus in locis nostris Scutari et Driuasti, ut possimus facere de introytibus dictorum locorum, (...) ymo existente rectore in Driuasto, est causa tenendi continuo contractam illam in discordia, inter Scutarenos et Driuastinos, et utile sit prouidere quod fideles nostri illius contracte sint uniti et ab obedientiam unius solius rectoris. Vadit pars, quod decetero non fiat amplius potestas Driuasti, sed omnino reuocetur et loco dicti potestatis, fiat unus castellanus Driuasti popularis”: AAV 696; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 24r. Paolo Nani was absolved from his post and given permission to return to Venice on March 14, 1398: AAV 703; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 35v. Schmitt points out that the hostility between both cities not only increased, but that it probably led to the uprising of 1399: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 323–324.

records so few entries. Although the winter months were generally quieter than the summer period, this halt is indicative of Venice's slowdown in the movement of galleys, involvement in administrative matters of overseas possessions, and in mainland affairs. Furthermore, discussions taking place during those months involved the handling of expenditures and the approval of more funds to cover them.³⁷¹ Something similar can be said in relation to the entire year. The total number of decisions made in 1397 was the lowest of the period under study. The administration of Albanian cities was also described in terms of the costs they posed for Venice. Ahead of Sigismund's crusade, the Council's biggest concern was the security of merchant galleys. Once the news of the Ottomans' victory reached Venice, the Council met on fewer occasions, and the relative *newsworthiness* of incoming information also diminished. References to Ottoman advances were not expressed as alarming news, but as reports that made the Council steer clear from conflict and secure Venice's control over its own possessions.

Albania Rebels (1398-1400)

After the 1396 gubernatorial election of governors in Shkodra and Drisht following Venice's acquisition from George Stracimirović, the Council's direct involvement in Albanian affairs was of little consequence. Shkodra, Drisht, Durrës and Lezhë are mentioned in records as having complementary strategies for containment of hostile advances by Venice's enemies. Aside from that, decision-making on Albania was limited to responses provided to ambassadors arriving in Venice from those cities, to minor issues (such as approvals for repair walls, building funds for houses or cisterns, etc.), or to considerations regarding the expense Albanian cities cost Venice. Particularly after Bayezid's victory over the crusaders' army, Venice receded in order to protect itself. Albania came again to the foreground in late 1399, when it rebelled against Venice. This happened partially as a consequence of the Council's political retreat from world events which occurred in the interim, and for that reason, the interlude requires examination.

As if 1397 had not been distressing enough, the summer of 1398 brought additional difficulties. Kenneth Setton calls Council meetings during these months "sad occasions."³⁷² On June 10, 1398, three separate entries point to destabilizing events in key Venetian strongholds. First, a plague outbreak in Crete left the island defenseless, as many infantrymen died and many more were

³⁷¹ *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 25r; 29r.

³⁷² Kenneth Setton, "The Catalans and Florentines in Greece, 1380–1462," in *A History of the Crusades, Volume III: The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Kenneth Setton and Harry Hazard (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 261.

expected to die with each passing day.³⁷³ Second, it was heard that the Ottomans intended to resume hostilities (*nouitates*) around Kythira, so the castellan was commissioned to gather all inhabitants to safety, along with their goods and animal herds.³⁷⁴ Lastly, it was deemed essential to obtain news (*noua*) regarding Bayezid's ships, which had turned away from Negroponte and other islands. Arming a galley was necessary, but Venice was struggling with the reality that nobody from the island wanted to become an oarsman.³⁷⁵ Three days later, when the Council discussed provisions for the galleys going to the Byzantine Empire and Trabzon, it was deemed unsafe to stop in Coron and Modon, and not only because of the Ottomans. The additional enemy they faced — the plague — was unassailable, and thus it was decided that no galleys would sail there that year.³⁷⁶ Instead, Venice sought relief in market opportunities in the Levant.³⁷⁷ The galleys stationed in Crete, Coron, and Modon were expected to stay put while the outbreak lasted, and therefore Venice's armed galleys might be needed for the transfer of merchandise to and from other ports. Consequently, on July 28, when a Council Expert and a Head of the Council of Forty — in two separate motions — presented the news (“*habetur nouum*”) that three Catalan galleys had plundered boats in Durrës, the report still did not move the council to increase the number of galleys patrolling the Adriatic.³⁷⁸

From this point on, and for almost a year, the Council's deliberations do not record any N-entry, except for one: On September 27, news arrived that Ladislaus of Naples had armed eight galleys in Gayete and then entered the Ionian Sea on his way to Otranto. Since the Council did not know Ladislaus' intentions, the report was expressed as news requiring immediate action. The Council ordered the production and dispatch of copious letters informing merchant galley captains and the governors of Coron and Modon about Ladislaus. Furthermore, two ships, one on the coast of Istria and the other in Apulia, should patrol the sea. The vice-captain was given an additional command, to collect and report back all information he could uncover about Ladislaus' galleys.³⁷⁹

³⁷³ “Cum propter maximan pestem epidemie que regnauit presentialiter regnat in ciuitate nostra Candide et tota insula nostra Crete, multi et multi mortui sint inter quos multi sptendiarij nostrj peditum, mortui sunt. Et credum sit quod in futurum, durante dicta peste, ut videtur multi pluries dietim morientur”: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 42v.

³⁷⁴ “Cum castellanus noster Cederici, propter nouitates Turchorum et ea que dicuntur, ordinauerit ponere pro custodia et securitate dicti castrj, et toto illius insule et securitate habitantium in ipsa et suorum animalium et bonorum omnium”: *Ibidem*.

³⁷⁵ “Cum plerumque contingat haberj noua in Nigroponti de lignis Turchorum que ad ipsam insulam declinauerint uel ad partes insule circauicinas, unde expedit quod subito et velociter ipsa gallea Nigropontis armetur (...) et de presenti maxima sit difficultas in armando galeam predictam (...), multi se a ciuitate absentant, et ad alias se partes transferunt, unde ciuitas Nigropontis multum de marinarijs depopulata est (...)”: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 43v.

³⁷⁶ *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 44v-46r. On July 9, since no galleys were going to Trebzon, the consul was given permission to return to Venice: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 50r. The payment of freight charge was waived for all those sending merchandise to Negroponte or north from there: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 54r.

³⁷⁷ The Council commissioned an embassy with gifts to the Mamluk sultan on July 23, 1398: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 54v-56v.

³⁷⁸ AAV 708; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 53v.

³⁷⁹ “Cum propter noua que habita sunt de galeis octo armatis ad petitionem domini Regis Ladislai in partibus Gayete, cum quibus venturus est, ut dicitur intra Culphum nostrum, sit omnino prouidendum quantum fieri potet de securitate galearum nostrarum a mercato. Vadit pars, quod (...) scribatur castellanis nostris Conorij et Mothonij omnia ipsa noua in forma que illa habemus et similiter capitaneo galearum predictarum (...). Et ultra hoc ad cautelam armari debeant due sufficientes barche (...), una per Riperiam Sclauonie, altera per Riperiam Apulee (...). Ser Francisco Leono supracomitto

The provisions proved unnecessary. Information received on October 19 indicated that Ladislaus' galleys were unarmed.³⁸⁰

Also on October 19, an entry states that letters from the Byzantine Empire confirmed Bayezid's intention to attack Negroponte, since no peace agreement had yet been reached. According to the entry, the danger was real. Yet the reception of this report, worrisome as it might have been, was not recorded with the relative newsworthiness of *noua*, but as knowledge ("per illa") derived from letters received.³⁸¹ This was not an isolated case. After the summer of 1398, troublesome bits of information reached the Council on several occasions. But unlike as had been the custom in previous years, neither *noua* nor *nouitates* were used in the entries' incipit to describe bad news.

The *pregadi* learned that, once more, the Genoese governor of Famagusta had confiscated merchandise belonging to Venetian traders and citizens. It was an "aggravating and unpleasant" appropriation, given that as much as to 30,000 ducats were at risk of being lost.³⁸² In some places, pirate ships were preparing attacks against Venetian galleys.³⁸³ Subjects from the kings of Aragon and Sicily wronged many Venetian citizens with complete impunity.³⁸⁴ Residents of Monaco confiscated a ship belonging to Gasparino Morosini, a Venetian noble.³⁸⁵ Rumors "everywhere" pointed to Bayezid's imminent intention to attack Negroponte.³⁸⁶ When spring arrived, many pirate ships were continually roaming the sea looking for chances to appropriate Venetian merchandise.³⁸⁷ Venice's chief official in Athens, together with the commune, demanded Venice's presence in the city following "insults" from the Ottomans.³⁸⁸ Florence sent ambassadors to Venice to procure the

seu vicecapitaneo nostro Culphy, mandetur quod recepto presenti nostro mandato et habita informatione nouorum que sibi scribimus det operam in omni parte intra Culphum, de sciendo et informando se de omnibus nouis et motibus galearum predictarum": *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 66r.

³⁸⁰ "Quia propter noua que pridie habita fuerint de octo galeis armatis ad petitionem domini Regis Ladislai venturis ut dicebatur intra Culphum nostrum, (...) haberent noua clara et manifesta quod armata dicti Regis Ladislai foret disarmata": *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 67v.

³⁸¹ "Quia per illa que sciuntur et habentur per istas literas nuper receptas, de partibus Romanie, videtur, et ita est rei veritas, quod armata maritime Turchorum de mandato Baysiti domini sui, multum vigilat ad danna et destructionem insule nostre Nigropontis": *Ibidem*.

³⁸² "Quia intromissio et sequestracio mercationibus et bonorum nostrorum ciuium et mercatorum conuersantium in insula Cipri (...) est molesta et displicibilis nobis quantum esse posset" (November 7, 1398): *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 70r.

³⁸³ "Quia presentialiter sentitur quod in aliquibus locis armantur et armabuntur aliqua galee brigentum uel alia fusta ventura ut dicitur ad exercendum piraticam intra Culphum nostrum" (November 7, 1398): *Ibidem*.

³⁸⁴ "Quia multi nostri ciues damnificati fuerunt a subditis dominum regis Aragonum et dominum regis Sicilie in magnis quantitatibus pecuniarum" (December 10, 1398): *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 73r. In this case, a contending bill was presented but its incipit is identical to that of the winning proposal: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 73v.

³⁸⁵ "Cum per illos de Monaco, seu per dominum dicti loci, intromissa sit nauis ser Gasparinj Mauroceno, quam ipse videtur recusare velle restituere, quod vertitur in magnum damnum" (December 17, 1398): *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 78v.

³⁸⁶ "Cum per ea que undique diuulgantur et sentiuntur, spiritus et itentiones Baisiti Imperatoris Turchorum uidentur esse multum intente et uigilare ad danna nostre insule Nigropontis" (January 9, 1399): *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 81r.

³⁸⁷ "Cum propter diuulgationem que sit de aliquibus galeijs et fustis armatis et armandis, tam intra Culfum nostrum quam extra, et etiam propter aliqua fusta piratarum" (May 13, 1399): *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 100v. Three days later, the same concern was reiterated: "Quia sicut est notum, multa fusta armata piratarum cotidie discurrunt Culphum nostrum ad dannum et derobationem mercatorum et fidelium nostrorum" (May 16, 1399): *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 101v.

³⁸⁸ "Cum sicut habetur, tam per literas quam per relationem cuiusdem mittij potestatis et capitanei, ac comunitati nostre Sithines, ad nostram presentiam destinati dicta ciuitas propter insultos crebros Turchorum" (May 16, 1399): *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 102r.

liberation of the Despot of Ioannina, Esau de' Buondelmonti, who had been kidnapped by the Albanian lord John Zenevisi from Gjirokastër.³⁸⁹ It is surprising that the only entry worded to express the need, following the reception of news (*noua*), of arming galleys to defend Venice's possessions from Ottoman attacks, was the sole motion among this group left unapproved.³⁹⁰

In previous years (and later on), events of similar or even lesser consequence had been recorded in the Council books as N-entries. It is inexplicable why, from the summer of 1398 to the summer of 1399, none of these entries uses the words *noua* or *nouitates*, the marks of assigned *newsworthiness*. Furthermore, except in one instance, entries do not record opposing motions to any of the situations mentioned above. Although a Council Expert proposed a different course of action to address the attacks committed against Venice by the Aragonese and Sicilians, his motion's incipit is identical to that of the other, winning motion. Therefore, this time, the record of competing proposals does not highlight any "added" *newsworthiness* to the issue in question (as is the case for other competing entries I discuss in this chapter). Instead of *nouitates*, there are mentions of "intromissio," "sequestracio," "danna," "damnificatio," "derobatio" and "insultus." And rather than *noua*, information is referred to as "ea," "diuulgatio," "notum" or "relatio."

What does this adjustment in the language of records imply? As mentioned previously, Venice's state affairs depended on the reception of news and intelligence from abroad. As the government's most powerful body, the Council's activities were synonymous with the control of information —secretive or not— for which Venice was famous. In the records, *newsworthiness* is a mark of the relevant information which informed the Council's decisions and guided patricians' investment ventures. But what does its absence imply?

I propose that the answer to this question is related to the lasting repercussions of the Ottoman victory in Nikopol. In other words, reverberations from the event conditioned the appraisal of information both in the short and the medium term. In the previous section, I showed that not long after the outcome was known in Europe, a modification regarding the language used to describe the Ottomans' advances functions as a preliminary indication that the Council was acknowledging a new international power balance. Furthermore, a decrease in both the number of overall discussions and in rising concerns about Venice's fundamental necessities are additional indicators of a change in the Council's priorities. All of this is understandable, given that the crusaders' disastrous enterprise created a situation of uncertainty first, and one of shock later.

³⁸⁹ "Quia comparauerunt ad presentiam dominij duo ambaxiatores magnifice comunitatis Florentie, qui mittuntur et vadunt ad partes Corphoy, et ad partes in quibus captus est dominus despoti Exau, per quemdam Albanensem Johannem seuacastrora [sic]" (May 30, 1399): AAV 750; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 103r.

³⁹⁰ "Quia propter noua que nuper habita sunt de armata Turchorum, et de intentionem quam habent ad damnificandum loca nostra, nos debemus uigilare quod habeamus de galeijs ex cum quibus possimus sucturrere [sic] et subuenire ipsis locis nostris" (April 4, 1399): *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 97v. It received 34 votes in favor, 73 against and 8 abstentions.

I mention this now, rather than in the previous section, to consciously emphasize that, in the records, the adjustment of the language describing troublesome news did not occur immediately after the outcome was known to the Council. Therefore, those reactions taking place in the short term are only half the story in accounting for the impact of the Ottoman victory. That the defeat was “the greatest disaster ever suffered by Christian forces in the long history of the crusades”³⁹¹ is attested, from the Venetian side, by the fact that, almost three years after it happened, records are still worded to covertly convey a state of caution. Within the records’ “talk,” this state of caution is manifested by an otherwise inexplicable lack of *nouitas* and *nouitates*. Not assigning *newsworthiness* to incoming information suggests the Council’s reluctance to act swiftly and put resources toward the service of whatever was not an issue of survival. Scholars have highlighted that “memories of defeat and fear of ‘the Turks’ persisted throughout Western Europe for a long time.”³⁹² This “memory” is found in contemporary *topoi* of chronicles and other works of literary and artistic production. The evidence I provide here does not contradict this view, but instead enhances it, by showing that the Council’s executive language, a source rarely used for this purpose, also evidences that memory.

I consider that this long reflection regarding the implications of the records’ “lack of important news” is necessary to adequately contextualize the positioning of Albanian affairs within the Council’s priorities. The change in the language of records, which is visible until the summer of 1399, took place in parallel with a period of neglect in the administration of Albanian territories. In practice, controlling expenses, seeking additional business opportunities in the Levant, and securing existing possessions were the Council’s new priorities. The evolution of the administration of Albania is indicative of those goals’ delicate balance. In Albania’s case, concerns over expenditures overruled inclinations to control the area more closely. When, during 1397, Albanian affairs had barely been discussed in the Council, their lack of discussion became even more acute in 1398. When one looks at the number of days in which Albania was a part of the day’s discussions, the neglect is evident.³⁹³ In 1398, the Council met two days less than in the previous year, but Albania was on the day’s agenda on only six occasions (as opposed to 11 during 1397). That means that, in 1398, Albania was discussed during only 7% of the days when the Council met. This represents a considerable decrease

³⁹¹ Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, 1204-1571*, 1:342.

³⁹² Hilmi Kaçar and Jan Dumolyn, “The Battle of Nicopolis (1396), Burgundian Catastrophe and Ottoman Fait Divers,” *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* 91, no. 4 (2013): 905. For a more general view, Vaughan’s work is still relevant: Dorothy Vaughan, *Europe and the Turk. A Pattern of Alliances, 1350-1700* (Liverpool: AMS Press, 1954). Further discussion of the topic of “fear”: Bojana Vasiljevic, “Fear of the Turks: Monastic Discourse on the Ottoman Threat in 14th- and 15th-Century Serbian Territories” (MA Thesis, Budapest, Central European University, 2017). For the archival wealth of Zadar’s and Dubrovnik’s state archives and their potential to further enlighten the role of the Ottomans in the medieval Balkans: Emir Filipović, “Researching Early Ottoman History in the Balkans through Slavic, Latin and Italian Records in the Archives of Coastal Dalmatia,” in 2. *Uluslararası Osmanlı Coğrafyası Arşiv Kongresi [2nd International Archive Congress on Ottoman Lands]*, ed. Hatice Oruç, Mehmet Yıldırım, and Songül Kadioğlu (Ankara: Tapu ve Kadastro Genel Müdürlüğü, 2019), 269–78.

³⁹³ These figures correspond to the *Misti* deliberations: See Chart 2, p. 91. There are no surviving records of the *Secreti* from April of 1397 to April 1401.

from 1396, when it was discussed on 18% percent of the days the Council met. As I will argue, the rebellion partly followed as a consequence of inattention and attempts to reduce expenses. And, in turn, Albania's renewed weight during 1399 made it part of the day's agenda on 27% of Council meeting days — the highest proportion per year from 1392 to 1402.

Newsworthy entries started to reappear in the summer of 1399. On July 22, the Council Experts presented the news (*noua*) of a hostile ship which, after causing damage in Modon, was seen sailing towards the Levant. The Venetian fleet, particularly one ship going to Syria, would be endangered. Their departure was scheduled to take place in two days, but due to the news, it was postponed for a week, although that brought complications for trade in Beirut.³⁹⁴ When business resumed, so did attention paid to affairs in Albania.

On August 6, 1399, the *pregadi* revised a previous proposal from several months earlier, which had included the following decisions: On January 14, all Experts proposed to cut expenditures in the Lezhë castle. They pointed out that maintaining the castle cost over 300 ducats because the customs house there did not collect adequate taxes and the salt trade had diminished. Before — they said —, revenues exceeded expenses, but now it was entirely the opposite.³⁹⁵ In consequence, the governor of Durrës should announce the public auction of controlling rights to the customs house for a period of at least two years.³⁹⁶ It was also decided that 220 ducats per year for a noble rector was too great an expenditure and was no longer necessary. In his place, a commoner (Natale Sisto), head of the infantrymen, was sufficient to guard the castle. If a crime were committed, Durrës' governor (Pietro Michiel) could administer justice.³⁹⁷

In their intervention of August 6, the Experts communicated to the Council that those previous decisions were badly received by Michiel and other governors. Leasing the customs house in Lezhë would bankrupt Venice's more profitable income from the nearby St. Sergius' customs house, given that whoever acquired the lease would attempt to control them both.³⁹⁸ It was also acknowledged that

³⁹⁴ “Quia propter noua que habentur de spinariza que vadit ad cursum, que fuit in partibus Mothoni, et ibj intulit certa danna nostris, et deinde redicens, videtur inisse ad partes Leuantis, est omnino salubriter prouidendum de securitate nostrorum nauigiorum iturorum ad illas partes, et specialiter nauium Sirie (...). Vadit pars, quod terminus recessus earum, qui erant ad diem vigesimum quartum mensis presentis, prorogetur usque diem primum mensis augusti”: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 115v. Given that the galley departed later than expected, the Council granted it permission to remain in Beirut for a longer period: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 119r.

³⁹⁵ “Cum dominatio nostra habeat omni anno expensam de castro Alesij ducatorum tercentorum et ultra, que procedit, quia dohana dicti loci et sal solitus vendi in illo, non habeat iliam expeditionem quam solitus erat habere, ymo de illo, expeditur, in tam parua quantitate quod ubj introytus soliti erant esse multo maiores quam expensa, nunc est totum oppositum”: AAV 724; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 82r.

³⁹⁶ “Vadit pars, quod committatur baiulo et capitaneo nostro Durachij, quod debeat in bona gratia dare uocem et darj facere (...) quod intentio sua est affictare, et dare publico et ad publicum incantum, dohanam predictam, per duos annos plus offerenti”: *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁷ “Et ex nunc (...) non debeat amplius ibj fierj rector, sed mitti debeat ad custodiam dicti loci unus sufficiens homo noster Venetus (...), qui sit caput balistariorum deinde, (...) et similiter si aliquod delictum criminale occurreret, baiulo et capitaneus noster Durachij, debeat rationem et iustitiam ministrare”: *Ibidem*.

³⁹⁸ “[P]er illa que postea habita fuerunt a baiulo et capitaneo nostro Durachij, et etiam ab alijs nostris rectoribus deinde, incantus dicte dohane esset valde damnosus nostro comuni, ymo dicunt quod si ipsa dohana incantaretur, dici posset,

it would be useful to make provisions regarding Lezhë in a different way, owing to the fact that “it is not honest” to ask a commoner to collect and administer tax income. For that reason, a (noble) castellan should be chosen by the Council and given a yearly salary of 250 ducats (30 ducats more than what was previously offered).³⁹⁹ But finding a patrician willing to travel there was not an easy task. The entry records the names (from August to November) of twelve nobles who were nominated. All refused to accept. Five weeks later (September 19), the Council Experts proposed to elect a commissioner, a temporary post but with the same salary. To no avail.

Not having a noble in power meant that there was no effective transfer of authority from Venice to the commune, and no effective communication either. From the Venetian point of view, having a patrician in charge was always preferable.⁴⁰⁰ Commoners did not (and could not) participate in the Council’s decision-making process, and thus they were excluded from a share of the Council’s mechanisms to exercise power and control. To what extent Albanian city-dwellers and villagers were aware of the implications that the Venetian social divide might have for the *autoritas* of the commoners in charge remains a matter of speculation. However, in 1399, when two Albanian possessions were under the control of commoners,⁴⁰¹ it became evident that those *populares* in charge had limited means to channel authority effectively, because although they wrote to Venice, the Council did not send instructions to them, but to noble governors who were stationed elsewhere.⁴⁰²

On October 3, 1399, a letter from Nicolò Polani, Shkodra’s governor, sparked Council discussion. The governor wrote that the countryside had rebelled against Venice; only the cities of Drisht and Shkodra remained loyal.⁴⁰³ Two proposals were presented. The first, by all Council and

quod dohana Sancti Serci, que est multo maior et melior, et de qua nostrum comune recipit in triplo maiorem intratam destrueretur ex toto, quia illj qui accepissent dohanam Alexij conarentur tenere illam in contio”: AAV 761; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 119v.

³⁹⁹ “Verum quia est expediens providere per alium modum de dicto loco, et hoc propter introytus nostrj comunis qui ibj percipiuntur, quos non est honestum debere exigere et administrari, per castellanum ibj missum popularem, ordinetur quod fierj debeat eligi, pro eundo ad dictum locum, unus castellanus, (...) qui castellanus habeat de salario ducatos .ccl. in anno”: *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰⁰ “[D]ominatio nostra sit semper solita providere quod in locis et terris suis sint persone notabiles et sufficientes ad custodiam et gubernationij earum”: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 52v. That is not to say patricians were always law-abiding. Eustachio Grioni, elected governor of Drisht in 1401, was convicted on June 16, 1402, for breaking into the house of a local citizen in Drisht, Giorgio Varsio, and raping his wife Tania: AAV 964; *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 28r. See also: O’Connell, *Men of Empire*, 3; Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate*, 209.

⁴⁰¹ Two years earlier, on October 30, 1397, it had been decided that Drisht did not need a governor (*potestas*), but that a “castellanus popularis” was sufficient to guard the castle: AAV 696; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 24r.

⁴⁰² “Cum castellanus noster castrj Lexij scribat, quod (...), sed reddantur ausati nostri rectores Scutarj et Durachij” (July 22, 1399): AAV 759; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 116r. The noble Vittore Dolfin was finally elected commissioner to Lezhë on June 21, 1400: AAV 814; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 20v.

⁴⁰³ “Cum sicut scribit nostro dominio nobilis vir ser Nicolaus Polanj, comes et capitaneus Scutarj, tota contracta rebellavit nostro dominio, ita quod non remansit, nisi solummodo, ciuitas Scutarj et Driuasti obedientes nobis”: AAV 772, *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 127v. Together with austerity measures and neglect of the power units in Drisht and Lezhë, Venice’s failure to secure the favor of local lords through gifts was another aspect that facilitated the revolt: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 245. Fine, on the other hand, states that it was Venice’s trade monopoly which caused overtaxed villagers to become “disillusioned” with Venice’s policies and revolt: Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans*, 442. While this may have been the case, there is no evidence in Senate documents supporting this conclusion. In Gelcich’s view, local workers abandoned their posts, refusing to support Venice’s oppression: Gelcich, *La Zedda*, 208.

Maritime Experts, advised an immediate dispatch of twenty foreign crossbowmen to Shkodra, where Polani would decide how best to guard and defend both castles, together with the supply of money, gunpowder and cannons which Polani had requested, and an order to Gabriele Nadal (Michiel's successor as governor of Durrës) to assist Polani with the brigantine he had in his command, and with anything else Nadal should assist Polani.⁴⁰⁴ On the other hand, Pietro Guoro (Councilor) agreed that supplies had to be dispatched and that Nadal should assist Polani according to what the Experts described. But he disagreed with the Experts regarding the number of soldiers. Instead of twenty crossbowmen, one-hundred foreign infantrymen should travel there, with enough crossbowmen among them, under the command of four horse-masters. Moreover, the vice-captain of the Gulf, Andrea da Molin, together with other galleys coming into the Adriatic, should confer with Polani about the best way to go up the [Bojana] river until they reach an appropriate place to defend and appease the rebels.⁴⁰⁵ Naturally, more soldiers implied that more salaries had to be paid. The first proposal was approved with 48 votes, while the second received 25.

Voting in favor of the least expensive option meant that, by November, the rebellion had gone from bad to worse. Previous dispatches regarding local conditions, combined with the Council's greater involvement in the administration of Albanian cities, made Albania a recurring topic in the day's agenda. Aside from the news of a ship threatening the security of galleys sailing to the Levant, there had been no N-entries for over a year. But on November 6, Drisht was the sole topic of the day and newly received information about it was recorded as an N-entry:

Having considered the news (*noua*) received about Shkodra and Drisht, and other issues which the noble Nicolò Polani, governor and Captain of Shkodra, writes, it is useful, and furthermore necessary, to make provision for the control and custody of Drisht (...). It is proposed that one governor should be elected for Drisht and its countryside.⁴⁰⁶

In order to increase the post's appeal, the new *potestas* would not have to spend money taking his belongings and entourage all the way to Drisht. Instead, the commune of Drisht had to meet him

⁴⁰⁴ “[Q]uanto prestius fierj poterit, solidare debeant viginti bonos et sufficientes ballistarios forenses, pro mittendo Scutarum (...), comittendo comiti et capitaneo quod de illis disponat ad custodiam dictorum castrorum, prout cognouerit opus fore (...). Ac insuper prouideatur per dominium de mittendo prefato comiti Scutarj, denarios, puluerem, ac bombardis [sic], et alias res requisitas, prout videbitur expedire. Et similiter scribatur baiulo et capitaneo nostro Durachij, quod si ipsi comiti et capitaneo nostro Scutarj esset necessaria subuentio brigantinj, quem ibj habet, uel alterius rey [sic] quod ipse sibj debeat subuenire, pro conseruatione locorum”: *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰⁵ “[F]ierj debeat quanto prestius esse poterit centum pedites, sub quatuor comestabilibus bonis et sufficientibus forenses, inter quos sint quam plures ballistarij, (...) comittatur ser Andree de Molino, vicecapitaneo nostro Culphi, et alijs nostris galeis, que venirent intra Culphum, quod intelligendo se, cum comite et capitaneo nostro Scutarj, intrare debeat, intra dictam flumeriam, et ire sursum usque ad illum locum qui sibj videbitur, pro asecurando et reducendo contratam”: AAV 772; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 127v-128r.

⁴⁰⁶ “Quia consideratis nouis habitis de partibus Scutari et Driuasti, et alijs que nobis scripsit nobilis vir ser Nicolaus Polanj, comes et capitaneus Scutarj, vtile ymo neccessarium est prouidere ad regimen et custodiam ciuitatis nostre Driuasti, tam pro vtilitate nostri comunis, quam pro contentatione ciuium et fidelium nostrorum deinde. Vadit pars, quod in bona gratia eligi et fierj debeat, vnus potestas Driuasti et districtus”: AAV 774; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 128v.

in St. Sergius and arrange for his transportation from there onwards.⁴⁰⁷ The provision, however, had little effect. All candidates refused the position.⁴⁰⁸

Even though a Venetian commoner was in Drisht, he had been placed under the orders of Shkodra's governor. Council decisions show the limits of issues entrusted to commoners, even in situations where writing directly to them would have been considerably more expeditious. Rather than giving instructions to the castellan in Drisht, the Council involved the governor of Durrës, further south. And rather than entrusting the matter to a commoner, some *pregadi* even entertained the possibility of drawing in the naval fleet. In any case, without effective means to accomplish the Council's will and control the countryside, the rebellion in Drisht, Shkodra, and also Lezhë, continued for two years.

Despite the difficulties in Albania, other records from November reveal that the Council's affairs began to recover normalcy. From then on, Council decisions were again recorded as being consequence of information deemed *newsworthy*. On November 27, 1399, news precipitated a change in the number of crossbowmen onboard the Gulf galleys, not soon before their departure.⁴⁰⁹ On January 2, 1400, the Council was in a position to react to newly committed extortions against Venetian merchants by two emirs in Damascus.⁴¹⁰ And more importantly, trips to the Byzantine Empire and Azov —traditionally the Venetian trading enterprise par excellence—, resumed.⁴¹¹ After the hiatus following the Ottoman victory, world events taking place in 1400 brought to the Council's ears an increased number of *noua* and *nouitates*, to which the *pregadi* paid renewed attention.

News Heard and Expectation (1400-1401)

On March 18, 1400, Andreasio Giustinian, former Consul to Azov (and soon set to leave for the Genoese colonies around the Black Sea) explained to the *pregadi* that he should be given money to face the *nouitates* known to all: after Timur left everything in the area burned to ashes and devastated, neither he nor the merchants had any place to live; it was necessary that they be taken to

⁴⁰⁷ Item quia magna expensa sequeretur dicto potestati, si deberet conduci facer, suis expensis, res et arnesias suas a Sancto Serçio usque Driuastum, ordinetur quod comunitas Driuasti, per publicum teneatur conducere, seu conduci facere, omnes res tam comunis, quam dicti potestatis, a Sancto Serçio usque Driuastum: *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰⁸ The elected *potestas* to Drisht (Paolo Basilio) left Venice after March 9, 1400: AAV 796; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 2v.

⁴⁰⁹ “Cum ante recessum galearum nostrarum Culphi de Venetijs, propter noua que senciebantur, et propter facta Romanie, prouisum fuisset quod sicut galee nostre Culphi hoc debebant ballistarios XXV, ita habere debent, ballistarios triginta”: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 130r.

⁴¹⁰ “Cum consul nostre Damasci per suas literas, datas sexto mensis novenbris, nobis scripserit, quod inter alias nouitates et extorsiones sibi factas, quidam Lugerius Nadrager, et Stendar Milech lamira Damasci (...)”: *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 133v. For an account of this episode in the context of Levantine sugar trade, see: Mohamed Ouerfelli, *Le sucre: Production, commercialisation et usages dans la Méditerranée médiévale* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 332.

⁴¹¹ “Cum sit necessarium prouidere ad tenendum in culmine viagium Romanie et Tane ac maris maioris, quod nostri progenitores, inter omnia alia viagia quod que ciues nostri nauigant, cognouerunt esse utilissimum” (January 29, 1400): *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 140v.

a safe place.⁴¹² This is the first, not very encouraging, direct mention of an incursion by Timur into Venice's commercial domains.⁴¹³

In advance of the sailing season, the urgency of information recorded in N-entries was intended to ensure the security of Venice's merchant galleys.⁴¹⁴ Beyond that, the Council's receptiveness to *newsworthiness* again gave rise to dissent over Venice's priorities. On May 18, yet again there was disagreement in the Council as to the consequence of news. This time, it stemmed from the competition for importance in reports from Apulia and Coron and Modon. First, both sets of Experts explained that many merchants in Barletta, Trani, Bari, Molfetta, and other places in Apulia, had sent letters to the Council deploring Ladislaus' decision to delay payments, for up to four years, to which they were entitled. Such a delay would be disastrous for merchants. A first bill proposed sending the Captain of the Gulf to Trani, where he should inquire from Venice's consul there whether, in fact, it was Ladislaus who had approved these "litteras dilatorias." Moreover, if this were true and the Captain discovered that the governor of Trani was willing to enforce Ladislaus' order, he should protest by arguing that to do so was "against god, justice, and humanity."⁴¹⁵ But suddenly, a new development changed the minds of three board members.⁴¹⁶ The dissenters explained that, through letters from Coron and Modon, they had just received news (*noua*) concerning Bayezid's vast army and his "nefarious disposition" to attack Negroponte. Consequently, the Captain should not go to Apulia. He should instead head towards Modon to defend the area from the Ottomans.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹² "Cum propter nouitates que, pro ut notum est omnibus occurrerunt in partibus Tane, in tantum quod omnia loca illa ruinata erant et combusta per Tamberlanum, prouisum foret per accessum consulis nostri uiri nobilis ser Andreasij Justiniano tunc ituri ad imperatorem Gazarie, et darentur sibi aliqui denarij, (...) ut quia consul noster et mercatores nostri conuersantes in partibus illis non habentes ubi deberent habitare nec stare, possent habere reductum et stare cum securitate personarum et haueris eorum": *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 7r. This bill was proposed by Andreasio Giustiniano, but it is worded in this way due to the fact that the *Deliberazioni* did not record interventions using the first person singular.

⁴¹³ The *pregadi* first learnt about the disputes between Bayezid and Timur on July 24, 1394: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 194.

⁴¹⁴ On April 4, 1400, the Maritime Experts communicated news ("propter noua") about enemy galleys from Lipari and pirate ships presumably preparing attacks: *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 9v. On August 16, "consideratis nouis" that the galleys from Lipari and other pirate ships compromised the security of Venice's galleys to Alexandria and Beirut, their departure was postponed: *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 26r.

⁴¹⁵ "Quia per illa que scenciuntur per plures litteras mercatorum nostrorum partium Apulee, alique ymo plures ex terris Apulee sicut sunt Barletum, Trantum, Barj, Malfeta, et alique alie obtinuerunt a domino Rege Ladislao litteras dilatorias per quas ad duos, tres, uel quator annos cogi non possunt, a quoqua de debitis in quibus ipsis nostris mercatoribus uel alijs essent quolibet obligati, quod si seruaretur esset cum maximo danno mercatorum nostrorum (...). Vadit pars, quod committatur capitaneo nostro Culphi quod (...) ire quanto prestius poterit ad partes Tranj (...) et diligenter se plenarie informare si est uerum sicut informati sumus quod dicte littere suspensorie sint obtente ab ipso domino rege, et in qua forma, et per quatum tempus (...). Et in casu quo ita sit rei ueritas, debeat sentire si capitaneus qui est in Trano, pro domino comite Albrico est dispositus obseruare dictam moratorium uel non. (...) Si uero haberet ipse noster capitaneus, quod capitaneum Tranj velit seruare illas litteras suspensiuas, tunc (...) dicere debeat (...) tales suspensiones sint contra deum, contra iusticiam, et contra omnem humanitatem": *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 13v.

⁴¹⁶ Lorenzo Loredan (Councilor), Donato Moro (Council Expert), and Tommaso Michiel (Maritime Expert).

⁴¹⁷ "Cum secundum occurrentia, mutande sint opiniones atque consilia, et consideratis nouis nuper receptis per litteras castellanorum nostrorum Coronj et Mothonj de exiti armate Turchorum, et de magno apparatu, et praua dispositione Baisetj [sic], qui uidetur omnino dispositus cum tanto exercitu venire ad danna Nigroponte et aliorum locorum deinde, necessarium sit quod capitaneus Culphi non differat ullo modo, sed quam prestius esse potet, vadat ad assecurationem et deffensionem locorum nostrorum, vadit pars, quod pars nuper capta per quam madabatur capitaneo nostro Culphi quod iret in Apuleam (...) reuocetur, et committatur expresse (...) de eundo Mothonum (...) pro deffensione ipsorum locorum a Turchis": *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 14v.

Others did not want to hear any of it: Michele Steno and Ramberto Querini (veteran Council Experts) reiterated that the Captain had to go to Apulia first and, after finding a galley entrusted to him, apply himself to the security of the Adriatic.⁴¹⁸ Lastly, Andrea Morosini (Maritime Expert) proposed that the Captain should go to Modon, if he found the galley by the Istrian coast. But if he were to find the galley in Apulia, then he should continue on to Trani as the first bill ordered him.⁴¹⁹ The *pregadi*'s vote proceeded as follows: 17 supported the dissenters, 57 sided with Steno and Querini, and only 2 with Morosini. In the face of Ladislaus' provocations against merchants, defense maneuvers in Modon had to be put aside.

As the year progressed, information about "the Turks" continued to arrive, although without causing as much of a stir.⁴²⁰ In Albania, however, the Ottoman presence increased. On July 6, Michele Steno, together with Ludovico and Andrea Morosini, proposed to the Council that, considering ("per illa") the state of Shkodra and Drisht in light of continued Ottoman assaults, it was best if the governors of Shkodra and Durrës reached a peace agreement with Bayezid's commander in the area. The bill was not approved. This episode, together with many other proposals in July and August to send food supplies, munition or infantrymen, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Despite this, during the summer of 1400, records do not articulate that the *pregadi* feared substantial enemy hostilities. If anything, the opposite was true. On August 13, two Councilors proposed to fortify one of the city's ports. According to the record, this was only possible now that Venice was blessed with peace — as a way to make provisions against future ills.⁴²¹ Local tribulations notwithstanding,⁴²² the next N-entry to reach the Council describes the need to guarantee the security of merchandise in the Levant. On August 30, news (*noua*) about the turn of events (*nouitates*) in Syria led to discussions about the best course of action to take. In this case, the two bills put forward agreed

⁴¹⁸ "Volunt quod capitaneus Culfi debeat ire ad exequendum in Apulea, partem nunc capta in hoc consilio et postea dimissa galea zana, ad custodiam Culfi": *Ibidem*.

⁴¹⁹ "Vult quod in casu, quod dictus capitaneus Culfi inueniat galeam zanam in partibus Sclauonie, debeat ire dirrecte versus Mothonum (...), si uero necesarius erit, quod dictus capitaneus vadat ad inueniendum galeam zanam in partibus Apulee, dictus capitaneus debeat exequi forma partis per quam captum est, quod debeat ire ad illas comunitates Apulee": *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁰ "Quod pro expeditione brigantini seu galedelli quem ad nos misit baiulus et capitaneus noster Corphoy, cum nouis que habuerat de facto Turchorum, scribatur quod per ipsum galedellum recepimus literas suas noua predicta continentes, de quibus placet habere informationem" (June 22, 1400): AAV 817; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 20r. On August 19, Council Experts informed that Bayezid's son had sent an embassy to Crete to communicate to Venice that, were his father to die, he would initiate peace agreements: *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 27r.

⁴²¹ "Cum hec benedicta ciuitas, ad presens per dei gratiam, sit in statu pacifico et tranquilo, et in illo cum eius auxilio perseuerabit in longum, sed reductis ad memoriam preteritis, sit res sapiens et laude digna, non tantum ad presentia, sed ad futura etiam prouidere, quia habendo istos respectus et prouisiones, est dare causam et materiam uitandi multa mala et inconuenientias infinitas. Vadit pars, quod collegium (...) habet libertatem, pro fortificatione, et securitate portus nostri Sancti Nicolai de litore, per fututa tempora": *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 23v.

⁴²² The plague had reached the mainland: "Quia in domo potestatis nostri Mestre sint aliquas nouitas huiusmodi epidemie" (August 16, 1400): *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 26r.

about the *newsworthiness* of the events in question.⁴²³ The salient question was that of who should make a decision about the safety of the galleys' journey. The first (losing) motion proposed that the decision should be left in the hands of a council formed by the captain, patrons and merchants of each armada sent towards Beirut and Alexandria. The second motion recommended that the captain of the Beirut galleys should be in charge of the decision; only if he did not deem safe to go was he to summon a council with patrons and merchants.⁴²⁴

Due to cease of military actions from the Ottomans, on September 10, 1400 the Council discussed an opportunity to achieve what armies could not:

Because our predecessors were always watchful of maritime affairs, knowing that they cause our status to increase, mainly to keep our status safe, and chiefly to repel the insults of the infidel Turks, considering Bayezid's present situation, with his armada and his strength at sea, it is necessary to be vigilant, with all our minds and deeds, to repress and resist Bayezid's nefarious intentions, and make provisions so that what the power of armors could not consummate, is accomplished with cunning and shrewdness.⁴²⁵

Information on the issue must have arrived around that time. It was a confidential affair, so scribes allowed only a few scant details to surface. The matter might lead to Venice's "praise and fame" and Christendom's cessation from worries, but it was something to be entrusted to the Collegio alone, since it was necessary that few people knew about it.⁴²⁶ About a month later, however, a bill by the Councilor Pietro Guoro mentions "news heard" from the Levant, and since the news pertained to Bayezid directly, one wonders if the "negocium secretum" was in any way related to it.⁴²⁷ In any case, if Guoro was proved right, Venice would not need to worry about fighting Bayezid once more, for Timur and his more powerful army was already going to war against him.⁴²⁸

From the moment the news circulated, expectations grew. But winter approached, and the Council needed to make arrangements for the election of a new doge after Antonio Venier's death on

⁴²³ The first motion was recorded as: "Quia propter noua que habita sunt modo nuper de nouitatibus occursis in partibus Syrie," and the second: "Volunt quod (...) prouideatur propter noua habita nuperime de partibus Syrie, et de nouitatibus ibi occursis": *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 31r-31v.

⁴²⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁵ "Cum nostri progenitores, semper vigilauerint ad facta maritima, cognoscentes illa esse causam augmentationis status nostri, et maxime ad tenendum illum securum, et ad repugnandum presertim contra insultus infidelium Teucrorum [sic], et consideratis conditionibus in quibus ad presens se reperit Baysit cum armata sua, et quantum est potens in mari, necessarium sit vigilare totis spiritibus et conatibus ad opprimendum et resistendum prae intentioni Baysit predicti, et prouidere quod id quod vi armorum non potest fieri, fiat arte et sagacitate": AAV 840; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 33v.

⁴²⁶ "Et adhuc nouiter habeatur aliqua informatio, de hoc facto quod si sequeretur, ultra laudem et famam nostri dominij, et securitatem locorum et insularum nostrarum resultaret ad bonum et pacificum et quietem tocius Christianitatis. (...) Vadit pars, habita consideratione quod huiusmodi negocium requirit teneri secretum, et in quam minori numero personarum fieri potest, quod collegium (...) habeat libertatem, praticandi cum illa persona et personis que dicto collegio videbuntur factum predictum": *Ibidem*.

⁴²⁷ "Cum scenciatur per noua que habentur de partibus Leuantis, quod Tamberlanus et similiter Baysitus congregauerunt maximos exercitus" (October 12, 1400): *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 37r.

⁴²⁸ Timur's reported opinion of Bayezid was that, compared to him, Bayezid was nothing but a "pismire ant": Rhoads Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty: Tradition, Image and Practice in the Ottoman Imperial Household, 1400-1800* (London: Continuum, 2008), 58.

November 23, 1400.⁴²⁹ On December 3, the Council gave the order for the Captain to return to Venice.⁴³⁰ By January 14, 1401, the Council's spirit of inquiry could no longer be contained, and the *pregadi* agreed that the first ships sailing out of the lagoon must transport copious letters to Venice's personnel in Heraklion, ordering them to regularly send any information they heard about the state of affairs in Syria, Alexandria, and regarding Timur.⁴³¹ Practical considerations also depended on this. By then, Timur had taken Sivas from Bayezid, Aleppo from Nasir-ad-Din Faraj (the Mamluk sultan of Egypt), and was on his way to Damascus. Information was necessary to, for example, decide where to relocate the consuls in Damascus or Alexandria.⁴³²

Bayezid had presumably begun to gather forces to fight Timur, but Ottoman control in Albania had not waned, and the area was causing Venice more trouble than ever. After the countryside rebelled, none other than George Stracimirović was sabotaging Venice's rule there. On February 18, 1401, there was little in the agenda save the situation in Shkodra. The salt trade there was bringing in no tax revenue and Eustacchio Cauco, Shkodra's governor, sent one of his officers to Venice to explain the state of local affairs to the *pregadi*. With the information he provided, Michele Steno — the newly elected doge —, all Councilors, all Heads of the Council of Forty, and nearly all Experts, in two motions, presented fundamentally the same bill: Shkodra and Drisht were costing Venice a great deal of money; Stracimirović was misappropriating Venice's salt and, given that the officer assured the Council that Stracimirović was keen to recover Shkodra and Drisht, these cities should be returned to him.⁴³³ Ramberto Querini (Council Expert) opposed the majority of board members and moved the *pregadi* to agree with him. According to the record of his intervention, it was public “vox et fama” that Stracimirović applied himself to sabotaging Venice's rule of the city. The Council

⁴²⁹ “[O]ccupationes habitas propter electionem domini ducis, illi quorum sunt varij”: *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 44v.

⁴³⁰ “Quia capitaneus noster Culphi non habeat aliquos mandatum a nobis circa redditum suum, et non senciuntur noua per que sit necesse quod dictus capitaneus stet extra”: *Ibidem*.

⁴³¹ “Quia necessarium est prouidere per omnem modum de habendo et senciendo prestissime et de tempore in tempus noua de partibus Sirie et Alexandria. Vadit pars, quod per istas naves de proxime recesuras, per pluries manus literarum scribatur et mandetur regimini nostro Candide quod omnia noua que senciunt et senserint de tempore in tempus de conditionibus partium Alexandria et Sirie et progressibus Timerbey (...) debent nobis, per omnem viam et modum, quod celerius esse potent significare”: *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 49r.

⁴³² Paolo Zane, consul in Damascus, was allowed to stay in Famagusta, although without salary (January 27, 1401): *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 50r. The consul in Alexandria was given the option to go to Crete, without salary, or to return to Venice (January 30, 1401): *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 52v.

⁴³³ “[C]omes et capitaneus noster Scutarj (...) informauit nos, per literas suas de facto salis quem dominus Georgius Strazmir fecit vendere et conducere de loco ad locum contra formam pactorum (...). Vadit pars, quod comittatur comiti et capitaneo nostro Scutari quod (...) debeat perquirere et persentire ac perquiri et persentiri facere (...) si dictus dominus Georgius esset contentus et affectaret quod restitueremus sibi Scutarum et Driustum”: AAV 856; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 56v.

should not “close its eyes to his dishonesty.”⁴³⁴ And instead of relinquishing the cities, Caucio should send a reputable messenger to Stracimirović to make a formal complaint.⁴³⁵

Beginning in March, 1401, the *Deliberazioni* register a greater influx of correspondence and ambassadors from Este, Padua, Bologna, Florence, Ravenna and Rimini, all claiming indignation at either Gian Galeazzo Visconti’s imperialistic ambitions or each other’s complacency. These *nouitates* occupied an increasing share of the Council’s discussions. Similarly, the Council vowed that, for Venice, *nouitates* were now a daily occurrence — and not only because of the Ottomans. Officially at least, this was the *signoria*’s excuse for not lending 10,000 ducats to the lord of Segni (who needed the money for his sister’s dowry).⁴³⁶ In 1401, Council deliberations recorded in the *Misti* reached an all-time high of 444 discussions, an increase of a substantial 17% when compared with the previous year, and (remarkably) 33% higher than 1397’s 335 total discussions. The number of meeting days also escalated, from 80 in 1400 to 110 in 1401 (38% more). This meant that the *pregadi* spent a third of the year in Council meetings. It was a notable change from 1392, when the Council met roughly two-thirds of that time (on 69 days only).⁴³⁷ The number of days in which Albania was on the agenda remained constant from 1399 through 1401, although, proportionally they diminished in 1401 (the *pregadi* discussed Albania on 20 to 22 days; while this represents 27% in 1399, it only represents 18% by 1401). However, as I have shown, these entries no longer concerned inconsequential decisions made prior to the crusade, but rather delicate deliberations on how to defend Venice’s status there successfully.

News about Timur and Bayezid’s affair, Visconti’s advances and Stracimirović’s offences created expectations in the Council. Any crucial development might signify a change in Venice’s status. As regards Shkodra, the Council was apprehensive about whether countrymen would be able to adequately harvest their crops without soldiers’ protection — unless they sought assistance from the Ottoman side.⁴³⁸ In the Council’s pronouncements, the need for updated information was

⁴³⁴ “Quia satis patet, et sic est publica vox et fama, quod postquam habuimus loca Scutari et illarum partium in manibus nostris a domino Georgio Strazmir, ipse a certo tempore citra fecit multociens currere, caute locum ipsum nostrum Scutari cum danno loci et habitantium. Et (...) utile sit prouidere, et non claudere oculos ad tales et tantas inhonestates”: AAV 856; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 57r.

⁴³⁵ “[S]cribatur de presenti comiti et capitaneo nostro Scutari quod mittere debeat quandam sufficientem personam ad presentiam prefati domini Georgij, et sibi cum querela omnia denotare”: *Ibidem*. A few weeks later, Querino tried to go even further. He suggested that Stracimirović should be left out entirely, and that the Council should secretly reach a pact with the Ottoman commander. This proved to be too radical, given that the *pregadi* voted largely against it: 5 in favor, 69 against (March 4, 1401): AAV 863; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 60v.

⁴³⁶ “Veritas est, quod occurrentibus nobis et nostro comuni, a bono tempore citra multis magnis, et inusitatis expensis, quas expedit fecerimus et faciamus, et pro armando contra Turchos, et pro conseruando loca nostra ab eis, et propter multas alias nouitates que insurgunt quotidie”(April 8, 1401): *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 68v.

⁴³⁷ These figures do not include the records contained in the *Secreti*, on which I will comment separately in the next chapter.

⁴³⁸ “Quia nos expectamus sentire de die in diem a comite et capitaneo Scutari noua de eo quod fecerit cum domino Georgio Stracimiri, super facto protestationis (...). Est etiam habendus respectus ad illos pauperes fideles nostros qui si nunc appropinquante tempore messium bladorum suorum, de quibus expedit ut uiuant et quas sperant posse facere cum fauore

explicitly registered as crucial. On April 19 (Tuesday), all Experts proposed to delay the departure of the Gulf galleys until Sunday night, because of the need for updated news, which was expected to arrive at any moment. Not everyone agreed, and a tight majority of 41 *pregadi* voted against the 37 who supported the bill.⁴³⁹ They used incoming intelligence as a tool to attempt to persuade Emperor Manuel Palaiologos, who was in Paris, to defend his empire.⁴⁴⁰ Not letting their guard down, the Council's ears continued to be attentive to the whereabouts of rivals such as Ladislaus.⁴⁴¹

Finally, on July 21, 1401, news arrived about the havoc created by Timur in Syria, who had left Damascus devastated before marching towards Baghdad. Aside from a response given to ambassadors from Este,⁴⁴² this news occupied the day's meeting. Bartolomeo Contarini, Ermolao Barbaro, and Santo Venerio (Maritime Experts recently elected) reminded the *pregadi* that wisdom was the ability to identify when the time was appropriate to strengthen advantageous friendships. In this case, the moment was appropriate to "increase benevolence with the Sultan [Nasir]" and to obtain further advantages for Venice's merchants from him. This could be done easily, they proposed, through sending an emissary who would lament the damage done by Timur and rejoice in his departure from Syria.⁴⁴³ Giorgio Cappello, another Maritime Expert, also proposed to seek advantageous concessions for Venice, but disagreed with the others about a place called Tartus.⁴⁴⁴ The *pregadi* were not convinced. Twenty supported the three Experts, eight supported Cappello, 62 were against, and 14 remained silent.

In July and August, discussions in the Senate increased not only due to the war among Italian cities, but also because of the intentions of Rupert of the Palatinate, recently crowned king of Germany, to become part of the conflict by marching against Milan. Letters from Shkodra and Drisht continued to be read in the Council — those places lacked protection, since most of the soldiers there

gentium nostrarum viderent ipsas gentes recedere, cognoscerent se derelictos a nobis ex toto, et omni spe destitutos et per istum modum efficerentur de fidelibus infideles" (April 15, 1401): AAV 867; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 69v.

⁴³⁹ "Quia per istas nostras galeas Culphy sunt fienda multa magna et ardua ad que sine dubio prouideri non posset ad terminum sui recessus, qui debet esse cras de nocte, cum talia multum tangant statum nostrum, et fieret etiam cum maiori declaratione si haberentur aliqua noua, que rationabiliter de hora in hora expectantur. Vadit pars, (...) quod recessus earum galearum prorogetur usque ad diem dominicam proxime de nocte": *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 71v.

⁴⁴⁰ "Quia non posset esse aliud quam utile quod dominus Imperator Hemanuel sit informatus de istis nouis que habentur de partibus Romanie (...). Vadit pars, quod per proprium nuncium mitatur sibi copia nouorum predictorum" (May 6, 1401): *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 78r. See also: Donald Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 341–42.

⁴⁴¹ "[S]cribatur (...) Petro Lauredano vicecapitano Culphy quod debeat se reducere ad partes Corphoy (...) et ad persenciendum de nouis et motibus dictarum galearum [Regis Ladislai]" (June 23, 1401): *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 88v.

⁴⁴² *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 10r.

⁴⁴³ "Cum sapiens res sit quando tempus reperitur congruum et habile scire, nedum acquirere sed conseruare et ampliare amicitias et dilectiones in comodum et utilitatem ciuum suorum, et propter nouitates occursas in partibus Sirie, sit punctualiter tempus ampliandi beneuolentiam cum domino soldano et obtinendi ab eo de rebus comodis nostris mercatoribus quod potet fieri leuiter mittendo ad condolendum de dannis illatis per Tamberlanum, et ad congaudendum de recessu et expulsionem ipsius Tamberlani de Siria": *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 93v.

⁴⁴⁴ "Vult dictam partem, excepto capitulo faciente mentionem de scopulo Tortoxe (...). Sed exequatur in condolendo et congauendo, et procurando ea que sunt necessaria pro bono nostrorum mercatorum": *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 94r.

had died from the plague.⁴⁴⁵ With so many different issues at hand, the doge and some of the most experienced Council Experts intended to pass a bill granting more autonomy to the Collegio, but most *pregadi* opposed this.⁴⁴⁶ Yet more trustworthy and savvy patricians were needed to take care of all arising affairs in the Council. On December 17, a motion to respond to King Rupert was proposed by eight (not six) Council Experts.⁴⁴⁷ This increase in the number of Council Experts would be maintained through much of 1402.⁴⁴⁸

The Council had received continual information about Padua and Milan through Venice's secret networks.⁴⁴⁹ Information about other affairs was so abundant that it is simply referred to as "that" which "senciatur" or "diulgatur." News about Ladislaus, the conflict between Zadar and Split, Venice's renewed interest in acquiring Zadar and Corfu, pirate ships, Rupert's moves, Ferrara's claim to Pontecchio Polesine, or the plague in Coron and Modon — all were part of the Council's dealings with incoming news. The use of *nouitates* in the decision part of entries (rather than in the incipit) became more numerous as well.⁴⁵⁰ Ever since the Council had learned about the dispute between Bayezid and Timur, Venetians entertained the possibility that, as he was unable to engage in warfare on two different fronts, Bayezid might be rendered harmless to Venice. Yet, due to Bayezid's avoidance in confronting Timur directly, his grip on Albania did not diminish. The Council continued to measure Albanian cities against Ottoman power and amidst an increasingly more conflictive Italy.

During these two years, the *Deliberazioni* record fewer N-entries formulated with *propter noua* in entries' incipit. There is, however, greater attention paid to the disruptive power of *nouitates*, which were coming from all corners of the *pregadi*'s world. Amid this state of affairs, political developments ranked higher than the security of merchant galleys in the language to denote urgency. Albania continued to be measured against Ottoman power, but as world events gained importance, it retired from the realm of *newsworthiness*.

⁴⁴⁵ "Quia rectores nostri Scutari et Driuasti, ut lectum est, scribunt quod maiori parte ballistarios nostros ad illas partes missos epidimia defecisse, propter quod loca illa remanent incustodita, et non sine periculo" (August 4, 1401): AAV 893; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 94v.

⁴⁴⁶ "Cum consilium nostrum rogatorum, varijs et diuersis agendis cotidie occupetur pro factis terre, sicut est omnibus manifestum, et sit bonum non grauare istum consilium pro omni re" (August 23, 1401): *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 98r. The bill referred specifically to the election of captains for the troops in Treviso. Twenty-two *pregadi* voted in favor, 66 against, and 2 remained silent.

⁴⁴⁷ They were some of the most powerful men in the Council, that is to say, in Venetian politics: Ludovico Loredan, Pietro Emo, Benedetto Soranzo, Donato Moro, Carlo Zeno, Ramberto Querini, Leonardo Bembo, and Giusto Contarini: *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 44r.

⁴⁴⁸ "Et consideratis conditionibus mundi et varietatibus suis, omnibus satis notis, sit necessarium habere de his qui sint sufficientes et apti ad tantum factum. Vadit pars, quod eligantur octo sapientes consilij" (March 30, 1402): *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 11v.

⁴⁴⁹ "Cum senciatur per vias satis secretas" (September 20, 1401): *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 21r.

⁴⁵⁰ *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 110v, 112v, 114v, 119v, 121v. *Secreti*, Reg. 1, 21v, 22r, 24v, 25r, 28v, 30r, 31r, 39v, 41r, 43r.

Latest News: All Enemies Defeated (1402)

The changing conditions in their world took a toll on Venice's affairs. By January, 1402, it was obvious to the *pregadi* that they had miscalculated Bayezid's ambitions. On January 5, the Council admitted that Venice was in open war and that their sole hope was to recover some of their wealth, without which their galleys' business could not survive.⁴⁵¹ Also on that day, it was acknowledged that Durrës and all other Venetian possessions, in and beyond the Adriatic, were in danger.⁴⁵² The *pregadi* also feared that Bologna was under threat of falling into Visconti's hands.⁴⁵³ Soon after, due to incoming news, Councilors proposed once again writing to the Byzantine emperor, urging him to leave Flanders and return to Constantinople immediately.⁴⁵⁴ Given the state of the world, the *pregadi* considered that now more than ever, the Council must secure a reliable and constant source of *noua*. For this reason, on March 14, the Senators approved a motion for the Collegio to elect two men who would have the liberty to investigate all *noua* through any means at their disposal. Some money would be allocated for their inquiries, and they should relate to the dominium anything they deemed worthy.⁴⁵⁵

In May, the Council had to provide for more men to guard Shkodra, Drisht and Lezhë. The reason for this was that many had died as consequence of the plague. Since by this point the rebellion was under control, the additional bowmen were needed solely for guarding the castles there, as a precaution.⁴⁵⁶ Albania was now largely under control and soon after (May 20, 1402), the *pregadi* received long-awaited news. But this N-entry did not come without controversy. The first proposal, by two Maritime Experts, was recorded as follows:

⁴⁵¹ "Cum propter varias conditiones mundi, propter agenda maxima nos tangentia in partibus Romanie, Coronj et Mothonj, et in alijs diuersis partibus, dicere possimus quod existamus in guerra publica, nec alie fieri potet quam recuperare pecuniam, sine qua nihil facere poterimus": *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 122v.

⁴⁵² "Cum loca nostra omnia que sunt tam intra Culphum, sicut est ciuitas Duracina, quam etiam extra Culphum, propter insultus et nouitates Turchorum, tam maritimos quam terrestres, stent in magno dubio et in magno timore": AAV 926; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 129v.

⁴⁵³ "Quia per ea que diuersimodi senciuntur de factis Bonomie, illa ciuitas subiacet periculo manifesto, et nisi prouisio fieret, infalibiliter iret ad manus domini ducis Mediolani" (January 10, 1402): *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 48v.

⁴⁵⁴ "Quod scribatur serenissimo domino imperatori Constantinopoli, qui est in partibus Flandrie, quod per noua que nuper habuimus et sensimus de partibus Constantinopolis, cognoscemus omnino esse necessarium, pro conseruatione dicte ciuitatis et dicti imperij quod serenissima persona sua, quam prestius esse potet, reuertatur et se conferat ad partes Constantinopolis" (January 28, 1402): *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 134r.

⁴⁵⁵ "Quia facit satis pro factis nostris, specialiter presenti tempore, habere bonam et continuam informationem nouorum de omni parte. Vadit pars, quod collegium domini, consiliariorum, capitum et sapientum consilij habeat libertatem eligendi duos (...), quibus duobus dare debeant libertatem possendi sentire et investigare per illas vias et modos qui sue sapientie videbuntur, de habendo de tempore in tempus informationem de omnibus nouis quarumcunque partium, possendo etiam, si opus fuerit facere aliquam expensam secundum quod deliberabitur per dominium, pro habendo melius veritatem predictorum, et cum senserint et habuerint aliqua relatu digna, teneantur venire ad dominium et significare de tempore in tempus omnia que habebunt": *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 54v. The elected informants were Nicolò Mudazzo and Alvise Dolfìn. According to general limits to dispense money assigned to the Collegio, the amount was probably below 25 ducats: Besta, *Il senato veneziano*, 180.

⁴⁵⁶ "Quia propter epidemiam que vigit in partibus Scutarj, Driuasti, et Alexij, defecerint multi de ballistarijs deputatis ad custodiam dictorum locorum, in tantum quod de triginta de partibus occidentis qui erant in Scutaro, non remanserunt nisi quinque, et similiter etiam decesserunt in alijs duobus locis predictis, propterea cum necessario expediat prouidere de custodia dictorum locorum" (May 8, 1402): AAV 954; *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 17r.

Given the conditions of the times, and the state of the things which occur, provisions must be made. Through many letters and many ways it is heard that Timur's people entered the territories of the Turks, whence the Turks have only a trivial strength at sea and in their maritime possessions. And secondly, [given] that the Captain of the Gulf writes that the Gulf is free of pirates, it would be fitting to test if, from the Gulf galleys and other naval ships, of which there are currently ten, any damage can be done against the Turks, for the sake of Christianity, and our honor.⁴⁵⁷

They proposed Marino Caravello, who was then the Captain, to go to Coron and Modon, send letters to Crete, and ensure that Timur had in fact entered Bayezid's empire. Then, with six galleys, he should go secretly to Gallipoli. If he saw that the Ottomans galleys were not there, he was to inflict as much damage on Gallipoli as he could. If the Captain was not certain about Timur, then he should not go to Greece; he should go instead to the Ottomans' maritime possessions to harm them as much as possible, to create a state of utter terror.⁴⁵⁸ The final decision was reached after two rounds of voting: forty-one supported this, 70 opposed it, and 18 did not cast their ballot. Three days later, also as a consequence of the news, Councilors and Heads of the Council of Forty proposed a more reasonable provision: given the wars in land and at sea, grain officials should receive 30,000 pounds to buy grain enough to supply the city.⁴⁵⁹ One hundred and ten *pregadi* supported this; only five opposed.

Not everything was encouraging. Bologna's ambassadors had presented their pleas for help in front of the *signoria* several times a week, since the beginning of the year, yet Venice repeatedly claimed to lack the resources to assist them. On June 26, Ludovico Loredan and Ramberto Querini (Council Experts) expressed that things were going "from bad to worse" for the Bolognese; and if Visconti controlled northern Italy, Venice would exist only in anguish.⁴⁶⁰ Their proposal was not approved. The Battle of Casalecchio took place that same day. Bologna, aided by Florence, was easily defeated by Visconti's *condottieri*. The news reached Venice two days later. A bill by Ludovico Morosini stated that, since the news was obtained from only one source, and the outcome was unclear,

⁴⁵⁷ "Cum secundum conditiones temporum et qualitates occurrentium, sint faciende prouisiones, et per multas literas et vias sentiatur quod gentes Timerlei intrauerunt territoria Turchorum, propter quod Turchi non poterunt habere nimiam potentiam in mare, nec in locis maritimis, et secundum, quod capitaneus noster Culfi scribit, etiam Culfi est securum et sine piratis, ita quod de galeis nostris Culfi et alijs galeis nostris armatis que sunt ad presens numero decem, bonum est experiri si potet fieri aliquod bonj contra Turchos, in bonum Christianitatis, et honorem nostrum": *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 20v.

⁴⁵⁸ *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 20v-21r.

⁴⁵⁹ "Cum propter guerras et nouitates que habentur tam a parte terre quam maris, oporteat recuperare pecuniam in bona quantitate specialiter pro facto bladi. Vadit pars, quod (...) possint accipi librarum XXXm pro dando prouisoribus nostris bladi, pro emendo frumentum pro nostro comuni": *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 21r. The news also moved the Council to waive duties on merchandise which, due to the *nouitates*, had to be sent back to Venice from Syria and Egypt (May 27, 1402): *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 26v.

⁴⁶⁰ "Quia per illa que de die in diem et de hora in hora nos habemus et sentimus, facta Bonomie vadunt de malo in peuis (...) et nisi prouideatur prestissime, dubitandum est quod non vadat ad manos ducis Mediolani (...), nam non est dubium quod existente illa ciuitate in libertate et potestate sua, tota Romandiola, et similiter tota Marchia faceret illam viam (...), et nos et ciuitas nostra per consequens haberemus causam standi in maximis angustijs": *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 67v.

any discussion should be deferred until more could be learned.⁴⁶¹ The *pregadi* agreed, but not soon after, on the very same day, it seems they received additional reports. Earlier that day, a bill (not approved) suggested sending 4,000 infantrymen to Ceneda and Treviso. It was presented again later that day, and passed.⁴⁶² Soon after, Visconti sent ambassadors to Venice to propose an alliance. According to him, only Milan and Venice could guarantee peace in Italy.⁴⁶³ It was clear to the *pregadi* that Visconti was preparing an assault on Florence. This matter was of such vital importance to Venice, that after several days of unfruitful deliberation, it was agreed that discussion “should be suspended, so that all [*pregadi*] have the opportunity to think and deliberate in their minds what would be best.”⁴⁶⁴

In the meantime, the Council had to deal with news that Ladislaus’ galleys were in the Adriatic again. Thus, it was advantageous to send infantrymen to Corfu — there were rumors that local people would add in fighting Ladislaus.⁴⁶⁵ The Council only learnt about Ladislaus’ true purpose (to fight Sigismund for the control of Zadar) some days later. Past threats to Albania, on the other hand, were no longer a menace. Bayezid had summoned his Ottoman vassals from the area —Koja Zakarija, Dhimitër Jonima, and Gjon Kastrioti— as part of his forces to be sent against Timur, relinquishing in this way his grip on Albania.⁴⁶⁶ On August 17, the Council replied to letters sent by the governor of Durrës, dated less than three weeks earlier (July 29, 1402). The governor had informed them that he was twice able to repel Ottoman troops. Furthermore, he was able to capture the troop leaders to secure Venice’s dominion of the countryside there.⁴⁶⁷ An N-entry and other entries from the end of August once again displayed fears for the security of galleys sailing to Alexandria and Beirut: *noua* from Ladislaus, Syria and “everywhere” demanded that merchant galleys be accompanied by Gulf galleys, and armed with crossbowmen.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶¹ “Vult, quod quia istud nouum non habeat nisi per unam viam, et non bene certum de modo et forma eius, et non potet fallere quin hodie uel cras ad longius habeatur certitudo eius, vadit pars, ut habeatur veritas eius et possit procedi cum oculis apertis, quod istud factum inducietur”: *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 68r.

⁴⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶³ “Talis liga videtur [domino duci Mediolani] illa que possit dare pacem et quietem Italie” (July 29, 1402): *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 70r.

⁴⁶⁴ “Quod ista negocia, que sunt magni ponderosis, ardua et tangentia statum nostrum, valde inducietur pro nunc ut omnes habeant causam cogitandi, deliberandi in mentibus suis id quod melius fuerit”: *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 70v.

⁴⁶⁵ “[E]t maxime consideratis nouis que habentur de galeis Regis Ladislai, et intentione sua (...), et maxime considerati murmuratione quam facit populus dicte ciuitatis, quod vult garizatur de galeis et factis Regis Ladislai (...). Vadit pars, considerato quantum habere debemus carum dictum locum Corfoy, quod quam citius esse posset debeant stipendiarij et conduci ad nostrum stipendium” (July 30, 1402): AAV 970; *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 36r.

⁴⁶⁶ Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans*, 422.

⁴⁶⁷ “Quod respondeatur baiulo et capitaneo nostro Durachij, ad literas suas quas nobis misit, datas XXVIII Julij. Quod nos intelleximus ad plenum omnia que dictis suis literis nobis scripsit, et tam super modis et bonis prouisionibus, per ipsum seruatis contra exercitum Turchorum, duabus vicibus, quibus venerunt ad danna locorum sibi commissorum, et similiter artem quam seruauit, in habendo illos Faris et Balabam conductores et capita Turchorum in manibus suis, et similiter bonam prouisionem quam habuit in tota contracta de Scuria ad fidelitatem et obedientiam nostri dominij”: AAV 979; *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 38r.

⁴⁶⁸ (August 28-29, 1402): *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 39r-40r.

Irresolution and apprehension due to Visconti's attacks to free Italian communes soon vanished. He died suddenly on September 5 from a fever and emissaries from Florence, Este, Padua and Milan (who had stayed in Venice for over two months), left the city a few weeks later.⁴⁶⁹ On September 22, an N-entry by the Maritime Experts expressed the news the *pregadi* had been waiting for a long time, regarding the fate of Venice's other foe:

Due to the news obtained of the strike given to Bayezid and his army by Timur, occurred last July, it cannot be delayed any longer, at what point provision will be made that more galleys than at present are in Constantinople, and as soon as possible, particularly regarding Gallipoli, and the honor and preservation of our jurisdiction, and for other events that occur in those parts. And given that, at present, considering all the issues for which we need our galleys, we cannot send the number of galleys which would be needed. But if we cannot do as we would like, it is nevertheless praiseworthy to do as we can.⁴⁷⁰

The galleys were needed, among other things, to secure Crete, Negroponte, Coron and Modon. More importantly, they ordered the vice-consul in Constantinople to form a council with Bertuccio Diedo, Marco Grimani (captain of one of the galleys in Negroponte) and two vice-governors of Heraklion, to determine if Gallipoli could come into Venice's dominion.⁴⁷¹ The *pregadi* approved the motion.

On the next day, however, the impulse to do this lessened. The doge, along with Giovanni Mocenigo and Ramberto Querini, made it clear that the previous day's decision had not been a mature one. According to the entry, the issue was "presented at once" (due to the extreme nature of the news), without allowing time for other advice, information, or imagination.⁴⁷² Therefore, they proposed:

that the motion approved yesterday in this Council about Gallipoli should be entirely revoked. We should wait for a different time to guide us, it will be then possible to make better and sounder provisions, according to what might be appropriate.⁴⁷³

Bayezid and Timur had fought on July 10, 1402 in the Battle of Ankara. Timur's much more formidable forces defeated Bayezid's army without difficulties. He imprisoned Bayezid, throwing the empire into utter disarray and causing a civil war to break out. The sultan's sons would fight for

⁴⁶⁹ For details about the power struggle which ensued between Padua, Florence and Milan after Visconti's death, see: Dennis Romano, *The Likeness of Venice: A Life of Doge Francesco Foscari, 1373-1457* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 12–13.

⁴⁷⁰ "Quia propter noua que habita sunt de conflictu dato Baiseto et suo exercituy [sic] per Tamberlanum, de menses julij proximo preterito not sit ulterius differendum, quum prouideatur quod sint prestissime in Constantinopoli plures galee, quam ad presens sint, specialiter pro facto Galipolis, et honore et conseruatione iurisdictionum nostrarum, et pro alijs casibus qui possunt occurrere in dictis partibus, et licet ad presens consideratis alijs negocijs in quibus sunt nobis necessarie nostre galee, non possit mitti ille numeris galearum que esset forte necessarius. Tamen si non possumus facere sicut uellemus, bonum et laudabile est facere id quod possumus": *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 43v.

⁴⁷¹ *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 43v-44r.

⁴⁷² "Cum in rebus tangentibus notabiliter statum nostrum debeat haberi matura deliberatio et diligenter aduertere, in hijs que possint occurrere. Et herj in isto consilio captum fuerit de factis Galipolis sicut est omnibus notum, et quia res subito posita fuit, nec consilium habuit aliquam noticiam, necque imaginationem aliquam superinde": *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 44r.

⁴⁷³ "Vadit pars, quod pars capta heri in isto consilio, de facto Galipolis, reuocetur in totum, et expectetur aliud tempus quod docebit nos, et tunc poterit melius et salubrius ac maturius prouideri sicut fuerit opportunum": *Ibidem*.

the throne until 1413, when Mehmed I, victorious, restored the empire. Similarly, the death of Gian Galeazzo Visconti in 1402 brought respite to the northern Italian communes, including Venice. By the time the news of Bayezid's defeat reached Venice, revolts in Albania had been appeased, and the Ottoman threat in the region had also disappeared. Moreover, the Venetian administration there had successfully reinstated noble governors in Drisht, Shkodra, and Durrës.

Even though the number of discussions increased slightly in relation to the previous year, in 1402 the Council met on fewer days. By September, these turns of events brought unexpected resolution to Venice's biggest challenges and opened possibilities hardly imaginable a few weeks earlier. With peace in Italy, relative security at sea, and an Ottoman empire dissolved into chaos, the Council had steered Venice toward the position of a major Mediterranean power and prepared the way for Venice's expansion almost without noticing it. Behind closed doors, however, the Council returned to its normal rhythm. On the next election of Council Experts, on September 30, six Experts seemed enough to carry on with Venice's affairs.⁴⁷⁴

Concluding Remarks

One of the Council's chief priorities was the procuring of news. Given that *noua* and *nouitates* (the marks of *newsworthiness*) refer to what were perceived to be critical developments, critical news loomed large over everything else. When positioned in the entry's incipit, *noua* or *nouitates* function as a means of signaling that news describing varying kinds of crisis situations had been received. In consequence, this news called for a decision-making event ("talk") which could not be delayed. During this decade, all crisis situations demanding immediate resolution are described or defined in this way.

In most cases, N-entries proposing an expeditious and unhesitating course of action were approved. If this was not the case, I do not regard this to be an indication that the news itself was inconsequential. Instead, N-entries proposing courses of action which failed to get majority approval reveal that the body of *pregadi*, for reasons to which we do not have proper access, were not convinced by the board members' proposals. Regardless of the discussion outcome, i.e. the vote count, recording practices preserved in the incipit the weight assigned to news upon its reception.

I have not selected *noua* about Albania exclusively, discarding the rest, or vice-versa. By proceeding in this way, I have weighed the handling of Albanian possessions in relation to the different crisis that overcame the Council's executive functions. At first sight, decisions which were taken as consequence of urgent revelations might appear to be unrelated to one another. However,

⁴⁷⁴ *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 45r.

they all disclose the ruling class' priorities and the extent to which the *pregadi* were willing to compromise them.

During the first years examined, intelligence of critical events was used in the records largely within the context of merchant galley security, in reference to piracy, seized goods, hostile attacks or any other type of retribution. Later on, as conflicts escalated both at sea and in mainland Italy, it is possible to identify periods wherein the language of *newsworthiness* was employed for political developments, rather than to highlight perils to merchant galleys exclusively. Amidst this increasingly more fractured international power balance, information which was defined as *noua* or *nouitates* had the potential to change the course of discussions. Bits of news could emphasize disagreement over Venice's priorities amongst Council board members. Examples where the *pregadi*'s opinion changed upon hearing *noua* or *nouitates* display this.

Albanian affairs were, generally speaking, not at the top of Venice's list of priorities. But during pivotal political events in 1392, 1395-1396, 1399 and 1401, discussions about Albania were adorned with the language of *newsworthiness* because the region's significance was inextricably linked with that of Venice's main foe —the Ottomans. I have shown this by contextualizing decisions about Albania within the language employed in record-keeping, and within the context of other discussions.

Chapter 5. “What the *Signoria* Says”

In the previous chapter, I showed how recording conventions within the Council’s records denoted critical events. Entries containing this type of news (N-entries) are distinguishable by an incipit containing the words *noua* or *nouitates*, and a resolution section which might contain varying degrees of urgency and command. It was the outside world, so to speak, which made it into the Councils rooms and propelled the *pregadi* into “talk.”

Yet the receipt of news via correspondence was not the only means by which the *pregadi* might learn that Venice was confronted with a situation which could radically change its power. In the ducal palace, it was normal for the *pregadi* to receive ambassadors from afar whose presence would merit a response. Some of these emissaries sought to ratify pacts, requested the borrowing of galleys, or asked permission to transport merchandise across “Venice’s Gulf.” But they could also attempt to draw Venice into conflicts or issues which could conceivably be decisive for the state.

Similarly, the Council was not a passive recipient of letters containing reports, news and requests. All types of predicaments demanded that the Council arrive at relevant courses of action for captains and governors abroad (as shown in the previous chapter). Yet when a situation was of particular importance, the Council had to provide specific instructions of *what to say*, in a literal sense. In such cases of exceptional interest, the Council discussed and approved general lines of pronouncements and reasonings which patricians abroad were compelled to echo.

Both situations (ambassadors’ propositions and exchanges abroad) demanded a spoken utterance approved by the *pregadi*, regardless of whether the utterance was ultimately performed by the doge in Venice or by a commissioner abroad. To outsiders, these spoken utterances were the effective manifestation of the *signoria*’s sovereign authority, because those words could lead to decisive and far-reaching consequences for Venice. It is important to emphasize that *what the signoria says* is fundamentally different from the “talk” of the *pregadi*, which happened behind closed doors. Naturally, the former was a consequence of the latter. But the utterances heard by outsiders were not intended to reflect the discussion, irresolution or disagreement which may have taken place inside the Council room before the *signoria*’s words were spoken. To outsiders, they emanated from the authority of a unanimous body.

Within Senate records, entries which recorded *what the signoria says* were structured according to the situational context: was it meant to reach an ambassador who was in Venice, or a patrician abroad? In consonance with those two contexts, *what the signoria says* was codified in two types of entries: response-type entries to ambassadors (R-entries) and instruction-type entries to patricians (I-entries). By virtue of containing the record of an official pronouncement, both R- and I-entries stand apart from the majority of entries contained in the *Deliberazioni*: the *signoria* “spoke” solely to address state affairs of the highest order.

During this decade, the Council was Venice's most important organ of power, thus responses to ambassadors, by definition, record matters of international politics of interest for the state. But where is the dividing line between an easily resolvable request and an issue of paramount consequence (from the *pregadi's* point of view) for Venice? To answer this question, one must examine how such entries were recorded. Generally, R-entries do not contain details of what unfolded among the *pregadi* before responses were delivered (as I will show, however, there are exceptions). According to recording conventions denoting ambassadorial activity (category 13 of the model), the "normal" responses structured R-entries into two fundamental forms:

- 1) They begin with the incipit "it should be answered that," immediately followed by the content of the response that had to be given⁴⁷⁵; or
- 2) They begin with a *prohemium* briefly outlining the embassy's purpose or request; then, the decision ("it should be answered that"), followed by the content of the response. If the request contained several clauses or "capitula," each clause received a separate response within the same entry.⁴⁷⁶

R-entries do not address the interlocutor directly. This reflects the Council's day-to-day executive procedures: the *pregadi* had to agree to the content of the response before it could be delivered.⁴⁷⁷ Once the bill was approved, the doge acted as spokesman for the *pregadi's* carefully-worded response or responses (if there was an impediment to him delivering the answer, the task fell to the Expert of the week). He had no liberty, however, to speak freely. The doge had to abide by what had been approved and would be held accountable if he did not. If, in the process of passing on the Council's words, he received a new request from the ambassador which had not already been discussed in the Collegio or the Council, he was to limit himself to very general words which would not compromise the *signoria* in anything.⁴⁷⁸

According to their normal template, R-entries contain no strategy, no orders, no assessment of scenarios, and no imagining of possible outcomes. Minor instructions could be added after the content of the response, for example "let the Collegio meet the ambassadors," but these remarks are often inconsequential to the entry's official aspect and normal tone. Replies to foreign emissaries

⁴⁷⁵ "Quod respondeatur isti [ambasiatori, oratori, nuntio, cancellario] quod (...)."

⁴⁷⁶ For example: "Quod respondeatur ad istam partem ambasiate domini regis Aragonum cui non est data responsio (...), etc. Quod (...)": *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 156.

⁴⁷⁷ Entries which record responses sent in the form of letters deserve separate study. Aside from the obvious fact that they address somebody not physically present in Venice, they are different from R-entries as the act of response as such was not in question, as quite obviously, it had been approved. In terms of style, the letters address the requester directly, using the second person singular. These entries are fascinating in that they sometimes record the board members' disagreement over word choices and phrasing in painstaking detail. Moreover, for reasons unknown to me, discussion about responses sent in the forms of letters, during the period under study, is the only instance in which the vernacular Venetian appears in bills proposing a response.

⁴⁷⁸ Besta, *Il senato veneziano*, 188–89.

were worded within general lines of decorum, even in cases whereby the Council intended to raise complaints or show indignation. Robert Finlay commented sharply that the heads of Venetian politics “defined the limits of official toleration, and that there was a line for what was permissible in the political discourse.”⁴⁷⁹ Within R-entries, this was undoubtably so. But that is not to say that R-entries are an unfit source for uncovering the importance assigned to matters raised by emissaries, or for indicating discrepancies in opinions among the *pregadi*. Quite the opposite. Such elements do not surface in the reading of the final response, for its tone always upheld limits of decorum. Instead, importance was highlighted through the Council’s recording practices.

The issues which ambassadors presented could be critical, controversial or of no particular interest, because they presupposed neither salient gains nor apparent dangers for Venice. According to record-keeping practices, issues of little significance were written down following the normal template of R-entries (as above). Divisive issues creating debate among board members typically led those members to present contending proposals. Lastly, issues of great consequence, which could bring about critical developments for the state, contained in their incipits a mention of the emissary proposing the matter, after which there was a departure from the structure of the template above.

From 1392 to 1402, a total of 412 entries were produced as the result of foreign ambassadors requesting responses.

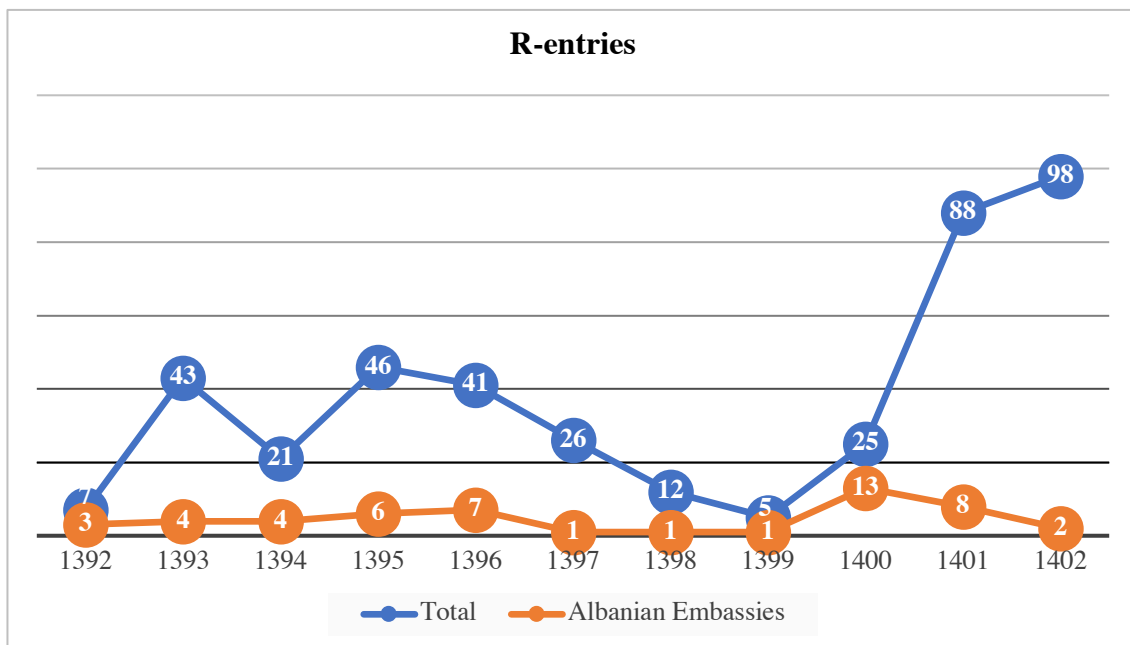


Chart 3. R-entries in extant records

⁴⁷⁹ Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 1980, 80.

The presence of Venetian power units in Albania was precarious during these years, and Durrës, Shkodra, Lezhë and Drisht sent embassies to Venice seeking resolution to local problems which might otherwise remain unresolved. Venice, on the other hand, relied on the comparative expediency of including paragraphs within the letters sent to the Captain of the Gulf or the governors in Albanian cities to resolve situations which came to the Council's ears. For that reason, what constitutes the second scenario demanding a discussion of *what the signoria says* is an expected verbal interaction taking place outside Venice. As mentioned above, sending an "instructed speech" to a Venetian abroad did not alter the fact that those words made up an official directive coming, ultimately, from the *signoria*. By writing down a version of the *signoria's* words, record-keeping practices signaled that a particular executive activity (category 6 of the model) was a state issue which had demanded authoritative pronouncement of Venice's most important organ of power. Similar to the content of the response of R-entries, these instructions upheld the general lines of decorum which were characteristic of Venice's political discourse. I will refrain from using the word "instruction" as a synonym of "mandate" in a general sense; instead, I will employ "instruction" with a specific connotation of it being a directive which constitutes a section within a longer proposal presented to the *pregadi*. I will refer to entries containing instructions as I-entries whenever the instruction constitutes a salient section within the proposal.

Through I-entries, board members presented proposed guidance of the verbal exchange between patricians abroad and a third party to the *pregadi*. A considerable number of entries contain the expectation that entrusted patricians would engage in negotiation and reasoning with foreign rulers. But did the Council assign the same degree of importance to all these interactions? Once more, record-keeping practices provide the response to this question. The structure of entries containing instructions is typically organized in various sections, although the quintessentially impromptu nature of the issue(s) they intended to resolve makes them hard to file into a single structure. Generally, they have a minimum of the following parts:

- a) *Prohemium*: an introduction which could take various forms: a summary of what was causing difficulties, but also an exhortation of why the matter was important, or what had been done regarding the matter up to that moment;
- b) Strategy: a proposal for a general course of action that the delegate should follow (where to go, who should accompany the delegate, etc.);
- c) Instruction: version of the speech which the delegate was meant to present to the third party (explicitly introduced by words such as "he should say that");
- d) Additional strategies: clear mark denoting the end of the instruction ("with these and similar words"), with further strategies or orders for the delegate, if necessary.

The instruction section contains the general speech the patrician should follow in his interaction with foreign rulers. The varying degrees of length and detail in these directives are a primary indicator of the matter's importance, i.e., how openly the Council's reasoning was meant to surface during the interaction, and how much was left to the patrician's talents and imagination. But the *prohemium*, along with the strategy, are equally key sections. While the *prohemium* served to define the urgency and state need assigned to the interaction, the strategy indicated whether the entrusted directive should be handled officially, or as a confidential affair. For this reason, distinction should be made between I-entries and commissions (category 3 of the model). Commissions were statements of duty written for elite and trustworthy members who were leaving on official missions abroad as commissioners, governors, captains and ambassadors. Commissions could contain, along with other details, a set of instructions. I-entries differ from commissions in one fundamental way: commissions lack *prohemium* and therefore do not include the proponents' justifications for them — commissions are the “product” of a discussion which took place at some point in the past and to which no direct reference is made.⁴⁸⁰ The form and style of commissions are also different: unlike I-entries, commissions are identifiable by the use of a heading, and they directly address the delegate in the second person singular. Drafting commissions sometimes created disagreement over the duties involved, but not about the fact that the commission, as such, should take place in an official capacity.

Like R-entries, instructions emanated from a decision-making event among the *pregadi* and were contingent on their approval. R- and I-entries are windows into the “talk” which constituted the Council's day-to-day deliberative process. If (and only if) a motion convinced the body of *pregadi*, the directive was then turned into a mandate with the force of law. In consequence, inasmuch as the *raison d'être* for these entries was to record the unfolding of the Council's executive activities according to the agenda of the day, they are also the product of a deliberate, conscious act of record-keeping. Recording conventions encoded Council discussions for future retrieval not only by noting who was the recipient of *what the signoria says*, but also by following parameters capturing the importance assigned to that interaction.

With such a large number of recorded R- and I-entries, it is beyond the scope of one doctoral dissertation to offer comprehensive comparison of the particulars of the responses provided by Venice to all the ambassadors and delegates who awaited responses and instructions. Even though neither R- nor I-entries were exclusive to Albania, this style of engagement with local lords and communes is particularly meaningful, because in the decade under study, Venetian control over Albanian cities was a work in progress. Whenever relevant, however, I will include examples and points of comparison with other embassies visiting the *signoria*. Albania's importance fluctuated considerably

⁴⁸⁰ Commissions could be drafted on the same day as the discussion which approved them, or as much as a few months later.

in the ten years under study, and concentrating on *what the signoria says* to Albanians in Venice and abroad will serve several purposes:

- 1) To identify those elements, preserved through the secretaries' record-keeping, which point to the varying degrees of importance assigned to ambassadorial requests.
- 2) To highlight how, within I-entries, codification practices could alternatively place the importance assigned to the mission either in the *prohemium*, strategy or instruction section of the entry.
- 3) To show how the Council's communication with Albanians evolved alongside Venice's power in the Albanian cities it intended to control.

First Responses to Durrës, Shkodra and Lezhë (1392-1394)

The *pregadi*'s realization that Ottoman forces had gained strength in areas formerly controlled by the Serbian Empire influenced the Council's assessment of the value of Albanian territories and the advantages those locations offered. To a lesser, though important, extent, other elements also affected the *pregadi*'s judgment. Such factors included the sustenance of merchant galley security, growing concerns over international politics and, naturally, the expectation of obtaining profit from Albanian lands.⁴⁸¹ The first stage of Venice's incursion into the area shows that different purposes were evident in the involvement in each of the Albanian cities Venice sought to control.

The entry signaling the decisive step in Venice's securing control of Durrës is an I-entry from the *Secreti* of March 8, 1392. A group of board members⁴⁸² brought the latest state of affairs in Durrës to the Council's consideration:

Durrës, to whose conservation we have kept watch for so long and with such pains and expenses, is now more than ever under the threat of passing to the hands of the infidel Turks unless something is planned immediately. If this came to happen, god forbid, how much would result in harm, and disgrace and defacement of all Christianity. And the mandate pertains specifically to our commune, under whose flag, until now, that city can be said to have been protected, and continues to be protected. Moreover, [passing to Ottoman hands] may be said and imputed to us as great sin, allowing so many Christians to become infidels, for it is us the ones who can oppose this trouble.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Disagreement of opinion over control in Albanian due to potential political conflicts or excessive expense was an inherent part of Council discussion: Valentini, "Appunti," 212. Gaetano Cozzi suggested that Venice's acceptance of the financial burden these cities posed is something which followed the logic of territorial conquest: Cozzi and Knapton, *La Repubblica di Venezia*, 195. While this might have been the case for the acquisition of Bar, Ulcinj and other Albanian cities after 1405, it did not apply to Durrës, Shkodra or Drisht during this decade.

⁴⁸² Iacopo Surian and Marino Ghisi (Heads of the Council of Forty), Pantaleone Barbo (Council Expert), and Pietro Guoro (Maritime Expert).

⁴⁸³ "Cum ciuitas Durachij ad cuius conseruationem tanto tempore uigilauimus cum tot laboribus et expensis subiaceat manifesto periculo perueniendi nunc magis quam nunquam ad manus infidelium Turchorum, nisi salubriter bene et presto prouideatur quod si occurreret, quod deus auertat, quantum cederet in damnum et dedecus totius Christianitatis et

This lengthy introduction highlights the plentiful resources that Venice had already invested in the safeguarding of Durrës. At the same time, the entry summarizes the moral justification, disingenuous or not, which gives reason to Venice's seizure of the castle in Durrës.⁴⁸⁴ After this introduction, a plan was proposed; the speakers delineate its strategy in this way:

It is proposed, to avoid [an Ottoman takeover] and for our own sake, to command the Captain of the Gulf [Saraceno Dandolo] that when he is there, he should become fully informed from the consul, citizens and friends there about George's [Thopia] situation, after which [the Captain] should meet him in person and, after doing the pertinent salutations (...), and with benevolent words, say:

—Here the instruction begins—

That God knows, and this is evident to His Lordship [Thopia], and should be evident from experience, that because the sincere affection and love which we have had, continue to have, and plan on having forever to his grandeur, his state and his city of Durrës, we have never ceased to have him in our minds, make provisions, advise him and do everything we know and can do for the conservation of his status, his city of Durrës and his honor, so that this city does not fall into the infidel hands of the Turks.⁴⁸⁵

(...) And [that] our dominium has been, and is, vigilant for the conservation of [the city], and certainly our intentions and most favorable desires to his city and his Lordship have been evident hence, as consequence of these actions, for we and His Lordship were pleased that the city was put under our custody, and strengthened with our expenditures, which until now have preserved the city and been an obstacle to the Turks' intentions. But considering his condition and the state of those places, and that the Turks will not cease to seek the dominion of the city by all means and ways (...) unless one sound remedy is put in place (...). We therefore beg His Lordship with the greatest pleas we can, for the sake of Christianity, his own and the city's, that he may consent that the castle of Durrës be secured and guarded with our expenses (...). And he may go back to live in the city with his family, holding the rule, governance, right of entry, delivers justice, and be in sum the lord that he is now, in conclusion that by doing this, it will be known by means of his good intention that he always declared and manifested to have regarding Christianity and specially our dominion.⁴⁸⁶

damnum, et incaricum praesertim nostri communis sub cuius uexillo, ciuitas illa hucusque dici potest fore protecta et protegi, immo ut uerius loquatur ascriberetur nobis in maximum peccatum, permittendo tot animas christianas effici infideles, nam sumus qui huic inconuenienti possumus obuiare": AAV 438; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 155.

⁴⁸⁴ As O'Connell pointed out, "Venice did not want to rely simply on a treaty to assure its control but acted to control public perceptions as well." For her, this is one example of Venice's acquisition of a territory through inheritance and voluntary submission, given that George's father (Charles Thopia) had signed pacts with Venice as well: O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 26.

⁴⁸⁵ "Vadit pars pro euitando hoc, et pro bono nostro, quod mandetur capitaneo nostro Culphi quod cum erit in partibus illis debeat primo se plenarie informare a consule, ciuibus, et amicis nostris deinde de conditionibus dicti domini et dicti loci, qua informatione habita debeat ire ad presentiam dicti domini cum nostris litteris credulitatis, cui facta salutatione (...) cum uerbis tantum amicabilem et beneuolis quantum poterit debeat exponere quod deus nouit, et suae magnificentiae patenter, et ab experto constare debet quod propter sinceram caritatem et dilectionem quam continuo gessimus et gerimus, ac perpetuo gerere intendimus suae magnitudini, statui suo, et ciuitati sue Durachij numquam cessauimus ymaginari [sic] prouidere et consulere sibi, ac facere omnia que sciimus et potuimus pro conseruatione status sui, et ciuitatis sue Durachij ad honorem suum, ne dicta ciuitas perueniat ad manus infidelium Turchorum": *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸⁶ "[E]rga nostrum dominium, et fuisse et esse uigilem et attentam ad conseruationem suam, et dicte ciuitatis suae, que quidem nostra et suae magnitudinis intentiones et optime uoluntates apparuerint hinc inde operis per effectum, nam nos, et sua magnificentia fuimus contenti quod turris illa custodiretur per nostros et staret fulcita nostris expensis, que uere usque nunc fuit conseruatio dictae ciuitatis et obstaculum intentioni Turchorum. Sed consideratis condicione suam et illarum partium, et quod Turchi non cessant procurare de habendo dominium dictae ciuitatis per omnem uiam, et modum (...) nisi apponatur unum solum salubre remedium (...). Et sic rogamus magnitudinem suam precibus amplioribus quibus

A considerable percentage of the speech's length goes into listing the arguments which the Captain should present to Thopia. However, the mention of Thopia's weakened state is so subtle that it passes almost unnoticed. The length and weight of the instruction section in this proposal shows that the speech carried the *signoria's* authoritative power. Furthermore, in this entry, the instruction section is connected to the entry's incipit, and it is the entry's introduction what marks the importance that the speakers assigned to this matter. In other words, there is no mention that this discussion came as a consequence of any specific letter or from any hearsay. Instead, it emphasizes the speakers' awareness of imminent threat to Durrës. Considering that Dandolo had previously been in Durrës, he was likely aware of Thopia's deteriorating health state; therefore, it was not necessary to refer in the entry to what Dandolo already knew. Thus, it is logical that the Captain should be reasonably enlightened as to the Council's proposals. According to the entry, it should be possible for the Captain to convince Thopia to surrender, because Venice would guarantee that his honor and nominal rule will be preserved with Thopia himself being secure inside the city. By taking control of the castle, Venice could maintain a vigilant eye on the Adriatic and safely capitalize on Durrës' salt.⁴⁸⁷

The end of the instruction to Dandolo is marked by: "with these words and reasons, and others that may seem appropriate to the Captain, he should procure to induce [Thopia] to accept and therefore to obtain our goal."⁴⁸⁸ The speakers concede that Thopia can be difficult and stubborn, in which case the Captain should promise him, and other citizens of Durrës, a yearly stipend of up to 500 ducats, or less, if possible.⁴⁸⁹ If, however, Thopia still does not agree to the terms offered, in spite of Dandolo exhausting all possible means of convincing him, the latter should not walk away. If he and the vice-captains accompanying him perceive that an Ottoman takeover is likely, then they must (however possible) seize the castle, arm it, and protect it under Thopia's name, though while sending him and his family away to the city.⁴⁹⁰

possumus, quo pro bono Christianitatis et conservatione sui et dictae ciuitatis, placeat et uelit assentire, quod castrum Durachij fulciatur et custodiatur per [faded] nostris expensis (...). Et se reducat ad habitandum in ciuitate cum familia sua, habendo regimen, et gubernationem, ac introitus, et faciat iustitiam, et sit dominus ut est ad presens, concludendo quod faciendo magnificentiam suam hoc, nunc cognoscetur per effectum bona intentio sua quam semper asseruit, et ostendit se habere erga Christianitatem, et specialiter ad nostrum dominium": *Ibidem*.

⁴⁸⁷ A later entry is explicit about this motivation: "Cum ut omnibus est manifestum, maior utilitas Durachij est sal" (January 27, 1393): AAV 474; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 95r.

⁴⁸⁸ "Et cum de his uerbis et rationibus, et alijs que dicto capitaneo apparebunt circa hoc procuret inducere dictum dominum ad praedicta pro obtinenda dicta nostra intentione": AAV 438; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 155.

⁴⁸⁹ "Verum si dicto capitaneo uideretur quod dictus dominus esset difficilis aut durus in condescendendo nostre intentioni predictae, uel etiam faceret aliquam excusationem circa hoc, tunc pro obtinenda dicta nostra intentione habeat libertatem dictus capitaneus noster prommittendi de prouisione annuali, inter dominum dicti loci et illos ciues deinde, ac alios, qui ei uidebuntur, usque ad summam ducatorum quingentorum et minus si cum paucioribus facere poterit ultra tamen alias prouisiones": *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹⁰ "Quando uero facta omni experientia possibili, dictus capitaneus non poterit obtinere nostram intentionem ullo dictorum modorum, et uideretur dicto capitaneo et supracomitibus qui cum dicto capitaneo se reperirent (...) quod dictus locus esset pro ueniendo ad manus Turcorum, debeat capitaneus per omnem modum et uiam que uideretur dicto capitaneo (...) quod dictum castrum sit in potestate nostra et perueniat ad manus et sub custodia nostra, fulciendo et faciendo custodiri ipsum et seruari ad nostrum mandatum, et exclamari custodias sub nomine et ad honorem dicti domini, dimittendo ipsum dominum habitari cum sua familia in ciuitate": *Ibidem*.

Although there was no disagreement over the instruction to Dandolo, four Experts opposed the latter course of action.⁴⁹¹ According to the second proposal, if Dandolo could not convince Thopia to accept the terms offered, the Captain should refrain from taking further action and instead concentrate on keeping his eyes and ears open: he should attempt to discover the particulars of Thopia's state of health, the city's state, the citizens' general spirit and, in sum, any information he can gather, which should then be immediately conveyed to the Council.⁴⁹² The first motion, drawing a clear line between the invested resources and the need to secure the castle at all costs —even without Thopia's approval— won with 38 votes in favor, while the second motion received 23 against. All sections within this entry point to the matter's importance. First, the *prohemium* states that the main cause for the discussion was the Council's work of interpreting the importance of Durrës —rather than a report from abroad. Second, the strategy emphasizes that, however possible, Dandolo should obtain the Council's goal. Lastly (and more importantly), the presence of the lengthy directive recording in careful detail *what the signoria says* served to highlight that the proposal contained an authoritative involvement of Venice's state power. The opposing proposal implied that some board members would have preferred a more cautious appropriation of the castle, but not that the whole affair should be put to question.

Moreover, the importance assigned to the castle's acquisition is also visible in relation to other discussions on that day. In the day's agenda there were nine other discussions, some of which were sensitive matters. The first was tax adjustment and, also, the need for galleys going to Flanders to take extra precautions, given that pirates had been spotted in Sicilian waters. A commission was also presented to Pantaleone Barbo (he had been elected Constantinople's ambassador following the death of John V Palaiologos, in order to congratulate John's son Manuel, the newly crowned emperor). The discussion on how to approach Thopia was no ordinary one. It was the only record registered in the secret deliberations for that day, and no other secret entry was recorded again for more than a month.

Overall, the plan from the first group of speakers did work. Pacts were made and, in attempting to form a cordon against the Ottomans, the Venetians took control of Durrës, not through violence or by formal removal of Thopia, but rather through appointing a Venetian castellan, Paolo da Canal, to guard the fortress.⁴⁹³ Thopia, in turn, decided to send an embassy with requests directly to Venice. On August 9, 1392, the Council received Thopia's demands in the light of Venice's takeover. His

⁴⁹¹ Leonardo Dandolo and Pietro Mocenigo (Council Experts) and Giorgio Loredan and Benedetto Cappello (Maritime Experts).

⁴⁹² “Quando uero facta omni experientia possibili per modos contentos in primo et secundo capitulis non posset dictus capitaneus obtinere nostram intentionem, debeat tunc, et omni uice qua se reperiet in partibus praedictis dare sibi operam de praesentiendo in quo termino stabit dictus dominus de persona, et de conditionibus suis, et dictae ciuitatis, ac ciuium deinde, et de omnibus nouis deinde que omnia debeat de tempore in tempus nobis uelociter notificare”: AAV 438; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 156.

⁴⁹³ AAV 445; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 54v.

ambassadors asked for ratification of pacts made between him and Saraceno Dandolo, the Captain; also, Thopia requested assistance in the acquisition of other lands and castles, a change to a different form of currency, the borrowing of money, the securing of safe return of Albanians from the countryside from Turkish territories, etc. The Council Experts agreed to each request in rote fashion. This was recorded in the condescendingly reassuring tone typical of R-entries: it is not that the Captain *may* (“faciat”) help him, but that, in fact, he and all future Captains will follow suit (“facient”). The wording of the content in each response is a repetition of Thopia’s request, the difference being that the responses begin with sentences such as “he should be certain that we love him, and will do what we can,” “it pleases us” or “we are favorably disposed to please him.”⁴⁹⁴ This entry strictly adheres to R-entries’ normal template. Moreover, no opposing part is presented to any of Thopia’s demands. But this should not be taken to mean that Thopia held a dominant position wherein Venice had no option but to agree to his terms. The reason for this instantaneous agreement was recorded immediately below the R-entry and constitutes the day’s last recorded entry. As suggested above, the *pregadi* were fully aware that Thopia was ill; this was explicitly stated once more on that day. Alongside the response that should be given to the ambassadors, the *pregadi* discussed the content of a letter sent by Dandolo about Thopia. The Captain’s letter contained one further request by Thopia which was not presented by his ambassadors:

Given that the lord of Durrës is seriously ill, as it is known, and according to what our Captain of the Gulf writes to us, he will be quite pleased if sweets and pastries are offered to him. It is proposed that 25 ducats can be spent in what seems appropriate to the dominium, for giving them to him as a present.⁴⁹⁵

In this case, communication between Venice and Durrës followed normal conventions only partially. The R-entry summarizing the ambassadors’ requests and the official response given to them created no visible controversy among the *pregadi*. But this lack of controversy is partially explained by a personal request to the Captain by Thopia, which was recorded immediately below the R-entry. This personal request was not included in the official response, but was handled as a separate order to the Captain, who was still in the city, in order to fulfill the Council’s command. Thopia’s death, therefore, did not come as a surprise. Roughly two months later, on November 7, the Council agreed

⁴⁹⁴ “Dominus Georgius debet esse certissimus quod nos amamus eum et (...) ita quod omnia que facere poterimus (...) faciemus semper,” “sumus contenti et placet nobis,” “dispositi ad beneplacita domini antedicti, sumus parati facere eis mutuarj dictos ducatos”: AAV 449; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 73r.

⁴⁹⁵ “Quia dominus Durachij, ut notum est, est grauiter infirmus de persona, et secundum quod nobis scribit capitaneus noster Culphy, habebit ualde gratum si presentabitur de çucharis et confectionibus. Vadit pars, quod in illis rebus que dominio videbuntur, possint spendi ducati vigintiquinque pro donando et presentando domino supradicto”: AAV, 450; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 73r. For an in-depth analysis of Venice’s practice of delivering such exquisite delicacies, see: Nada Zečević, “Diplomatic Deliciae: Venetian Gifts to the Lords of the Eastern Adriatic in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” in *Reform and Renewal in Medieval East and Central Europe: Politics, Law and Society*, ed. Suzana Miljan, Éva Halász, and Alexandru Simon (Cluj-Napoca – Zagreb – London: Romanian Academy – Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts – School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2019), 277–304.

to further donate 25 gold ducats to the commune of Durrës, since they themselves had taken on the expense involved in sending the Venetian consul in Durrës to the Senate to inform its members of the former lord's passing.⁴⁹⁶

From the Venetian point of view, securing Durrës' control was an important stepping stone to boosting salt trade and keeping that portion of the Adriatic coast safe for the transit of galleys. Consequently, on October 7, 1392, when the Council heard that George Stracimirović had been kidnapped by the Ottomans, swift measures were needed to safeguard Venice's desire to avoid a stronger Ottoman presence in the area. The news was presented by all Experts, along with two Councilors. As explained in the previous chapter, the entry's introduction is marked with the *propter noua* which was already the flag for an important matter, alongside remarks which stressed the gravity of the situation and the dangers that might follow.⁴⁹⁷ After the introduction section, the strategy was delineated as follows: the Captain must go to Ulcinj as swiftly as possible and somehow find an occasion to meet Stracimirović's wife Helena and talk to her.⁴⁹⁸

Stracimirović's lands were not in Venice's possession, and the Council needed to resort to unofficial means to obtain further reports. The strategy laid out by the Experts explains this: Dandolo should find a way to engage in conversation with Helena under false pretense, "as if he was proceeding out of his own accord, without Venice's knowledge." The instruction of what he should say to her was recorded as follows:

That with regard to the request of Her Ladyship, until now, due to many other businesses of our dominion, he could not come quicker to her presence, he yet made arrangements to send to her the nobleman Nicolò Belegno, then vice-captain, with whom she could discuss everything as much as with himself, whom he heard had died before he reached Venice, therefore their talk could not have any effect nor could our dominion have been informed about it. Because of that, and because he hears that her husband George Stracimirović and his brother were detained by Bayezid, and that they had agreed and made a pact with him of giving and putting their lands under the power and lordship of that Turk in exchange of their liberation, [is why] he came to her, to urge and persuade her that she should be firm and strong for the keeping and conservation of her lands so that they do not fall into the hands of the Turks. Because if they do, it would be the total destruction of her and her children's status. And besides that, he went to her to listen to what she would want to tell him and how she carries out to make demands on him, listening first to everything that she herself wants to say.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁶ This order was given on November 7, 1392, probably prior to the return of the people from Durrës who had accompanied the Consul to Venice: AAV 457; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 84r.

⁴⁹⁷ See Chapter 4, p. 77-78.

⁴⁹⁸ "Quod mandetur capitaneo nostro Culphy quod quantocius poterit debeat ire Dulcignum, et omnino det sibi operam de essendo in colloquio cum dicta domina": AAV 455; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 81v.

⁴⁹⁹ "[D]icat quod iuxta requisitionem magnificentie sue, licet usque tunc, fuerit pro multis alijs negotijs nostri dominij ualde impeditus, non potuit cicius ire ad presentiam suam, sed prouidit mittere ad eam virum nobilem ser Nicolaum Bellegno tunc vicecapitaneum cum quo ipsa poterat omnia conferre tamquam cum ipsomet, quem ipse sensit decessisse antequam applicuerit Venetias, itaque dictum colloquium non potuit habere aliquem effectum, nec de ipso nostrum dominium potuit informatum fuisse, propter quod et quia sensit virum suum dominum Georgium Strazimirj et quandam

As recorded, part of the plan presented by the speakers was that under no circumstance should Dandolo *start* by mentioning the news on which his mission was based to Helena. Rather, he should ease into it by relating how many businesses Venice needed to administer, many of them with matters of more importance than his being in Ulcinj. He should explain that his handling of those more important duties was the cause of his failure in responding to her requests for his presence. Only after that should he mention that he had heard about her husband's misfortunes with Bayezid. The Council wanted to know whether what they heard about a pact between them being in the making was true, but the Captain should be subtle about the way he sought the answer. The instruction then proceeded with a warning, but this was sympathetic in tone, given that Venice's non-official presence should be asserted without arousing antagonism from her.

Lastly, the speakers provided a final order to Dandolo: if Helena asks the Captain for assistance in supplying crossbowmen and sees that her territories are truly under the threat they are said to be, then whilst *pretending* to grant this of his own accord, he should offer to give her twenty, and up to thirty, of Venice's crossbowmen, but at her expense alone. If she does not ask for assistance, he should obviously not volunteer any. In any case, Dandolo's most important undertaking was to uncover her plans and inclination, and "with the afore mentioned words and other offerings that seem appropriate to him, he must procure that she holds on to her possessions and may adopt good and trustworthy hope in our authority."⁵⁰⁰ In this case, several stages of a strategy for the Captain came as consequence of the gravity of the news. The detailed instruction shows that, for the Council, it was in the state's interest to secure information.

A considerable number of instructions to resolve diplomatic impasses were preceded by an order to show the letters of credentials which the Council issued for its emissaries. As noted, that is not the case with this proposal. On occasions such as this, the staple strategy in making a tactful inquiry was that patricians abroad should act as if they were not fulfilling orders from Venice. This is particularly true for territories over which Venice had no direct control, but where patricians had private networks or connections. In these cases, the Council preferred not to be associated directly with the mission, and thus depended on those personal connections to acquire knowledge. A similar strategy as approaching Helena was, for example, related to a pair of nobles with connections in Genoa in the face of France's intervention.⁵⁰¹ Pietro Benedetto, a close friend of a Florentine

eius consanguineum retentos fuisse a Baysit Bey, et ipsos cum eodem conuenisse et pactum fecisse pro eorum liberatione, de dando et ponendo loca sua sub potentia et dominio ipsius Turchi, accessit ad eam ad hortandum et suadendum, quod sit constans et fortis ad manutenendum et conseruandum terras et loca sua, ne perueniant ad manus Turchorum, quia si peruenirent esset totalis destructio status sui et suorum filiorum. Et etiam iuit ad presentiam suam pro audiendo quid sibi uelit dicere, prout eum requiri fecit, audiendo prius omnia que ipsa dicere uolet": *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰⁰ "Et cum predictis verbis et alijs oblationibus generalibus que dicto capitaneo videbuntur, procuret ut supra dictum est, taliter hortari dictam dominam, quod sit constans ad substinendum se et loca sua ac habeat et capiat bonam et confidentem spem in nostro dominio.": *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰¹ See Chapter 4, p. 82.

ambassador, was also asked to obtain any information he could (this time concerning a league with Genoa), by waiting for the appropriate moment to approach the Florentine and converse with him as a friend.⁵⁰²

Secretaries marked the importance of the news about Stracimirović's kidnapping by means of the incipit to denote *newsworthiness*. But the instruction section also echoes that importance. Furthermore, in regards to the relationship between the incipit and the instruction section, this proposal bears a resemblance to other instructions given by the Council in periods of distress caused by the Ottomans. Two examples, from two years later, serve to illustrate this. On May 21, 1394, word spread that Bertucio Querini, a noble merchant, had just returned from Constantinople, and he was summoned to the Council.⁵⁰³ He described a situation of fear and confusion, since nobody knew what to expect from Bayezid's menacing presence. A motion was then presented to send galleys to Constantinople to elevate the morale of Venice's merchants there, and of Emperor Manuel Palaiologos himself.⁵⁰⁴ The speakers offered the following words to the emperor, which would be voiced by the consul or any other high-ranking delegate present in the city:

Bertucio informed us about the state of his affairs, from which we certainly feel no little discontent (...). For these reasons, we arranged to send two galleys to comfort [the emperor] and his people, and to persuade His Majesty, that for God's sake, and for the conservation of his standing, he should guard against absenting himself from his throne and his empire, because such absence will be the total and definitive destruction of his empire and the entire city, and without a doubt, it will be a gift for the Turk.⁵⁰⁵

The motion was not passed. The *pregadi* decided that further discussion should be suspended until they received additional information from galleys already on their way to Venice.⁵⁰⁶ Two months later, a group of four Experts — whose names, unfortunately, are faded — presented a renewed version of fundamentally the same I-entry. This time they expressed that, following Bertucio Querini's report, more intelligence regarding Bayezid was received.⁵⁰⁷ Their strategy was recorded as follows:

⁵⁰² “Quod detur libertas nobili uiro ser Petro Benedicto, cuius iste ambasiator Florentie est intimus amicus, quod captato tempore condecanti, intret secum in rationamento, et ostendendo semper loqui a se, et dicere ut amicus, dicat (...).” April 16, 1395: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 229.

⁵⁰³ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 5r.

⁵⁰⁴ “Quia per ea que habentur oretenus per virum nobilem ser Bertucium Quirino venientem de partibus Constantinopolis esset valde utile, tam pro conforto et contentatione domini imperatoris quam omnium mercatorum nostrorum qui sunt in partibus illis, quod de nostris galeis viderentur in illis partibus, sicut erit solitum fieri temporibus preteritis, quia res deinde propter malam dispositionem Basiti videntur esse in magna perplexitate”: *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 5v. The motion was presented by Giovanni Gradenigo (Head of the Council of Forty) and Bartolomeo Nani (Maritime Expert).

⁵⁰⁵ “Baiulo uero seu vicebaiulo et consulis scribatur qualiter per nobilem virum ser Bertucium Quirino redeuntem de partibus illis fuimus seriose et ad plenum informati de omnibus nouis deinde (...), et quod comparaueant coram ipso domino imperatore et dicant qualiter nos fuimus per eundem ser Bertucium plene informati (...) de quibus certe sensimus secum non parua displicentiam (...), ob quas causas nos moti sumus, et etiam pro bono et conseruatione imperij sui ad mittendum ad illas partes istas duas nostras galeas, pro consolatione sua, et conforto subditorum suorum, et ad persuadendum maiestati sue quod pro dei reuerentia, et pro conseruatione sui status, caueat sibi ab absentando se a sede sua et ab imperio suo, quia talis absentatio sua esset totalis et finalis destructio sui imperij et illius interite ciuitatis, nam proculdubio de presenti Turchus donaretus eidem”: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰⁶ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 6r.

⁵⁰⁷ “Quia ut habitum est per litteras vicebaiuli et consiliariorum nostrorum Constantinopolis”: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 194.

It is proposed to write to the consul that we are aware of Bertucio's report, and because of that, we order [the consul] that, finding an appropriate and suitable time, he should meet the emperor in person, and to him alone, if possible, offer our answer.⁵⁰⁸

The main difference from the proposal from two months earlier is expressed in the instruction section of the entry:

We feel no little discontent from what His Majesty describes to us through Bertucio, regarding the terms and conditions of his empire, and one may say that at present he is not in the favorable state which we would prefer, but considering everything, and especially that Bayezid's territories are presently bedeviled by the emperor of the Tartars, we do not think that His Serenity should have such doubts, and that due to any condition of the world, he should consider to be absent from his throne. For is it plain to us that such absence from his empire will be the final destruction of this empire and of that most famous city (...).⁵⁰⁹

As previously mentioned, I-entries follow a similar —although not identical— structure. They record a general course of action for the emissary (“go to Ulcinj,” “request an audience with the emperor”), and include an explanation which the emissary should present to the third party to justify the verbal exchange (Helena requests the Captain's presence, the emperor writes through Quirino). At the same time, the strategy includes general recommendations on how to approach the third party. An additional similarity surfaces among the entries quoted above, namely that the newly received information mentioned in the incipit is also repeated in the instruction part of the motion as negotiation tool for the emissary.⁵¹⁰ In both cases, the *pregadi* agreed that the Council's reasoning should be passed on (albeit in secret) to third parties. Both cases involved matters of importance for the state. For that reason, it is relevant that the recording conventions which penned down these “instructed speeches” established a relation between the *signoria*'s words and the entries' incipit, i.e., to the stated cause to justify the Council discussion.

Although the detailed strategy laid out for the Captain and the weight of the instruction to approach Helena were consequence of a looming threat, not all instructions regarding Stracimirović were deemed vital in the same way. This is exemplified in the I-entry of July 21, 1393, whereby the

⁵⁰⁸ “Vadit pars, quod scribatur ipsi nostro vicebaiulo et consule quod nos plene intelleximus ea que ipse ser Bertucius nobis retulit (...), et propterea volumus et mandamus (...) quod, captato tempore habili et condecanti, ipse noster vicebaiulus compareat ad presentiam ipsius domini imperatoris, et sibi soli, si poterit, responsum preueat parte nostra” (July 24, 1394): *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰⁹ “[Q]uod nos non parvam displicentiam sensimus de hiis, que nobis sua maiestas notificare voluit per ser Bertucium antedictum, scilicet de termino et conditionibus in quibus se reperit imperium suum (...), et licet ad presens non reperiat se in illo bono termino, in quo optaremus, tamen omnibus consideratis et precipue quomodo partes Basaiti molestantur ad presens ab imperatore Tartarorum, non videtur nobis quod serenitas sua habeat taliter dubitare, quod pro aliqua conditione mundi debeat cogitare de volendo se absentare a sede sua, nam manifeste cognoscimus quod talis sua absentatio ab imperio et sede sua esset finalis destructio imperii sui et illius famosissime civitatis (...)”: *Ibidem*.

⁵¹⁰ Further research on the emissary's possession of information as a tool for his negotiations and enquiries during this period is still needed, but Chiara Palazzo and Johann Petitjean have already described fascinating aspects of news transmission and power, see: Johann Petitjean, *L'intelligence des choses: Une histoire de l'information entre Italie et Méditerranée, XVIe-XVIIe siècles* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2013); Chiara Palazzo, “Nuove d'Europa e di Levante: Il network veneziano dell'informazione agli inizi dell'età moderna (1490-1520),” Diss. (Venice: Università Ca' Foscari, 2012).

Council discussed Stracimirović’s decision to ban his subjects from trading with the people of Lezhë, which in all likelihood was about to bring difficulties to the newly acquired Durrës.⁵¹¹ The Maritime Experts — who presented this motion— knew well what the goal should be: after one year making arrangements to dispatch personnel and resources, the control of Durrës was finally settled; any vexation to the governor and any source of disruption to the city’s salt revenue must be avoided.

In the previous chapter, I remarked that this discussion took place on a day when disruptive reports about Negroponte and Famagusta demanded that the issues affecting both locations were discussed in several rounds. However, Stracimirović’s actions could not be entirely disregarded. The entry’s incipit “let it be known to the Captain of the Gulf”⁵¹² serves to introduce the core of the matter, which Giovanni Miani (the Captain) was probably unaware of. Information on the ban came directly to the *pregadi* because Stracimirović’s demands did not come from any Venetian, but rather from a letter sent by Stracimirović himself. Consequently, Miani was likely in the dark about the matter. In this entry, there is neither a “*vadit pars*” marking a clear strategy nor any direct order for Miani to go to Ulcinj. Yet finding himself there whenever he may, he should endeavor to remove the ban. The dividing line between the *prohemium* and the instruction section is a statement indicating that “it is appropriate and wise to know [how to] act in front of everybody.”⁵¹³ This is the key reflection which justifies the rationale of the directive that follows. The Experts propose that when Miani meets Stracimirović, he should say:

that our dominion received his letters. And that we were nothing short of astonished at such complaint and request of his, because he surely must consider and know, such as it is the truth of the matter, that this castle was received and pulled out of the hands of his enemies and conducted and deposited in the hands of our dominion, in whose hands he should reckon that it is better and more secure than in the hands of lord George himself, and that being the case, with an even greater strengthening of his own status, because our vicinity entails the sustenance and strength of his position. Being in benevolent terms with us, all who may want to do any harm to him will have fear and tremor. And it would be the opposite if the place were in his hands, because he will be forced to surrender it to the Turk, and after that, the lord George [Stracimirović], together with his entire state, will be in Turkish hands. He would then be far from the favor and hope of any person who may be well disposed to the sustenance of his status.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹¹ “[O]mnis nouitas que sequeretur non posset nisi redundare in dannum ciuitatis nostre Durachij”: AAV 506; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 119r.

⁵¹² “Quod informetur capitaneus noster Culphy”: *Ibidem*.

⁵¹³ “[B]onum et sapiens est scire dissimulare cum omnibus”: *Ibidem*.

⁵¹⁴ “[Q]uod dominium nostrum recepit literas suas et quod nos compelimur ualde mirarj de talj querela et requisitione sua, quoniam ipse dominus Georgius bene debet considerare et cognoscere, ut est rei veritas, quod dictum castrum est acceptum et extractum de manibus sui inimici et deductum et positum in manibus nostri domini, in quibus manibus ipse debet reputare et tenere quod stat melius et securius, quam in manibus ipsius domini Georgij, et etiam cum maiori fortificatione status sui, quia nostra viciniantia est cum sustinimento et robore dicti sui status, et stante ipso in beniuolentia nobiscum, est pauor et tremor omnibus qui facere uellent sibi nouitatem. Et oppositum esset si dictus locus esset in suis manibus, quia cogeretur illum dare Turcho, et postea ipse dominus Georgius cum toto suo paesio esset in manibus dicti Turchi, et elargatus esset a fauore et spe cuiuslibet persone, que esset bene disposita ad sustentationem status sui”: *Ibidem*.

The Captain should gain Stracimirović's trust and cause him to "understand" that, for the latter's sake, not having the castle was actually good for *him*: attacking him is something any local rival could do, but attacking the flag of Venice is an entirely different matter. The following section in this entry makes this explicit: Miani should use these words to persuade Stracimirović to remain on Venice's good side and to remove the ban, but making it look as if it is Stracimirović's prerogative to do so.⁵¹⁵

In spite of the lengthy instruction, the orders contained in this I-entry are not consequential, and in the final section the issue comes across as half-hearted: the Captain may go in person to Ulcinj, or not. In consequence, the question arises as to why a more determined order to the Captain was not recorded. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *nouitates* that might overcome Durrës due to Stracimirović's ban had to "compete" in importance with the injustices which Venetian merchants were being subjected to in Famagusta. Although the Council considered it a matter of state importance that business in Durrës was not affected by Stracimirović's ban, the speech instructed to the Captain was not bestowed with the *signoria*'s gravity. The uncompromising order to the Captain corresponded with the comparatively lesser importance assigned this issue within the day's agenda.

On August 17, 1393, one year after Thopia's embassy to Venice, an ambassador came from Durrës. This time, he came in representation of the commune. The Maritime Experts were in charge of presenting the ambassador's requests to the *pregadi*. The Experts added clauses or slightly modified his petitions, which were mostly related to the local affairs of the commune. The Experts' discussion of seven of those petitions was recorded as a normal R-entry. For the last demand, however, several Maritime Experts presented opposing bills. These bills were not recorded as a response to the ambassador in the same manner as the other seven requests, but as entries containing an instruction section. The dissimilar type of entry used to record the Experts' interventions accounts for the importance assigned to a new challenge for Venice in its control of the city. The challenge demanded that the *signoria* addressed the people of Durrës through the Venetian governor. The first bill, by Marco Morosini and Benedetto Cappello, summarizes why the ambassador's last request was of particular importance:

When George Thopia was lord of the city, he sold illicitly certain properties and territories together with the people living in them to some Albanians.⁵¹⁶ By doing so, these Albanians own these people, who are from Durrës, Christians and good people,⁵¹⁷ as servants and slaves.

⁵¹⁵ "Cum his et alijs verbis que inducant ipsum dominum Georgium ad uolendum remanere in beniuolentia nostri domini et remouere ordinem et bannum ac preceptum factum per ipsum, concludendo et ostendendo hoc esse cum magna sua prerogatiua": *Ibidem*.

⁵¹⁶ Here, "Albanian" appears in relation to a quarrel in which legal rights, and not ethnic origin, were in dispute. This reference should not be taken to mean that the distinction between *Durachinij* and *Albanenses* was bound to refer to ethnicity. See Chapter 3, p. 70. People living in the Albanian space were of Greek, Latin, Slavic, and Albanian origin and they formed a community conscious of these differences: Ducellier, *La façade maritime*, 530.

⁵¹⁷ For the status of "boni homines" within the Albanian social division between nobles and "populares," see: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 107, 405.

For this reason, they are forced to go begging to Apulia and to other foreign lands, for the greatest detriment of Durrës, and because of the harshness of these Albanians, who want to treat these poor people in such a way, [the city] remains uninhabited.⁵¹⁸

According to the proposal by Morosini and Cappello, the governor of Durrës (Francesco Zorzi) had to summon these Albanians and convince them “with most effective reasons and arguments” that the “Durrachini” could not be made either servants or slaves under any circumstance because they were not servants or slaves by birth or class. The Albanians were clearly not about to forgo the lands Thopia gave them, but Zorzi should make them understand that divine law prohibits Christians to be sold as servant.⁵¹⁹ If he failed to convince the Albanians, Zorzi should then address Durrës’ citizens directly, telling them that:

Our intention is that whoever is not a servant, slave by birth or class, bought as slave or is a milling servant, and has lived in the lands donated by George [Thopia] or in [the lands] of other of these Albanians, he may be allowed, securely and with no impediments, to come and live in Durrës and other territories belonging to us.⁵²⁰

The strategy to approach the Albanians was concise (Zorzi should summon them). The instruction about what to say to them lacks the detail and precision of, for example, the instruction to Helena quoted earlier. Nevertheless, the core of the governor’s argument is clearly stated, and he should find a way to convey it to them. The entry’s emphasis on where to have the *signoria*’s voice heard lies in the public statement to the people from Durrës, not in the governor’s words to the Albanians. Although only four *pregadi* supported Morosini and Cappello, the record of all other contending proposals similarly made the instruction to the people from Durrës be longer and more structured than the instruction for the governor to say to the Albanians. According to the record of the second intervention, by Antonio Bragadin, the most crucial aspect of this whole affair was to secure that Venice’s subjects were not tortured. Therefore, if Zorzi failed to convince the Albanians to let the people go, Zorzi should publicly proclaim that all citizens and loyal subjects of Venice,

⁵¹⁸ “[D]ominus Georgius Tobia quondam dominus suus, tempore vite sue, alienauit indebite aliquas possessiones et loca aliquibus Albanensibus, dando et alienando dicta loca cum hominibus existentibus super eis, et etiam dando de dictis hominibus propter quod dicti Albanenses habent dictos homines, qui sunt Durachinij, chisticole, et boni homines esse seruos et sclauos, ob quam causam coguntur ire per partes Apulee, et alienas terras, mendicando, cum maximo danno ciuitatis nostre Durachij que propter duriciem aliquorum Albanensium uolentium sic tractare istos pauperes homines, remanet inhabitata”: AAV 510; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 123v.

⁵¹⁹ “Vadit pars, quod scribatur et mandetur baiulo et capitaneo nostro Durachij quod debeat ad se conuocare istos Albanenses, qui alienauerunt, et tenent extra Durachium et loca predicta, tales homines asserentes eos esse seruos et sclauos, ostendendo eis cum efficacissimis rationibus et verbis quod non sunt neque esse possunt serui nec sclauui, ullo modo, quia non sunt serui nec sclauui natione, et licet dominus Georgius, quondam dominus suus, eis donauerit territoria et loca que tenent, de quibus eis lis aliqua non mouetur, et ipsa territoria et loca eis dederit cum hominibus existentibus super eis, hoc tamen facere non potuit, quia lex diuina prohibet quod christiani natione uendi non possint pro seruis”: *Ibidem*.

⁵²⁰ “Quando uero eam obtinere non posset, tunc debeat dicere ciuibus dicte terre intencionem nostram, que est quod quicumque non esset seruus nec sclauus natione, nec seruus emptus, aut seruus macinature, licet stetisset super territorijs donatis quondam per dominum Georgium, uel aliter prefatis Albanensibus (...) possit et ualeat secure et sine aliquo impedimento uenire habitatum ciuitatem nostram Durachij, et alia loca nostra”: *Ibidem*.

Albanians and Durrsake⁵²¹ alike, who had been sold, estranged or expelled from Durrës may freely, securely and without retributions come back to live in Durrës or its vicinities.⁵²² Antonio Contarini presented yet another possible course of action. His intervention placed an added emphasis on the city itself, whose priority was to be repopulated. For Durrës' sake, "it is fair and pious to help those wretched people who go begging to foreign lands." Therefore, Zorzi should publicly proclaim that everybody, be it Durrsak or Albanian, had up to five years to come and live in Durrës with no impediments. During this time, they would not be subjected to prosecution, and while they solved their situation, the city would once again be filled with people.⁵²³ The proposals by Bragadin and Contarini underwent four rounds of voting. At the end, Contarini was victorious, with 41 votes in favor, 14 against and 19 abstentions.

Although this discussion was consequence of an ambassadorial request, the structure of the entry does not follow the template that would be otherwise expected. Instead of a response to the ambassadors, several bills emphasize that Venice's authority should disallow Thopia's past permissiveness. By including two instruction sections, the entry codified the importance assigned to two different acts of communication entrusted to the governor. In this sense, *what the signoria says* to the Albanians in the countryside was not decisive to the city's future. Even if they refused to comply with the governor, the Council gave Zorzi the power to address the city directly, and in this way the means to overrule them.

Ottoman incursions into Albanian territories during the spring and summer of 1393 signified that Bayezid's forces had strengthened their position. As far as the records are concerned, when Shkodra's bishop, acting as George Stracimirović's ambassador, arrived at Venice in February of 1394, no record in the *Deliberazioni* suggests that Venice was willing to engage in any form of open dispute with the Ottomans.

The entry documenting the bishop's presence is short. His request was presented to the *pregadi* but the record suggests that the matter was dismissed without discussion. Instead of offering an introduction, that is, any version of the "state-of-the-art" regarding Shkodra, the entry starts by

⁵²¹ A citizen of Durrës.

⁵²² "Vult partem per totum, saluo quod uult quod quando dictus noster baiulus, non posset nostram intencionem obtinere per modum predictum, quia sanctum est taliter prouidere, quod subditi nostri non tortizentur, debeat prefatus noster baiulus facere publice proclamari, quod omnes ciues et fideles nostri Durachinj et Albanenses, qui fuissent et essent uenditi, alienati in aliis, et expulsus de terra nostra Durachij (...) possint secure, libere, et sine aliquo impedimento uel nouitate, uenire ad ciuitatem nostram Durachij et alia loca nostra circumstantia Durachio": *Ibidem*.

⁵²³ "Vult partem sotiorum per totum, saluo quod uult quod quando dictus noster baiulus non posset per modum predictum nostram intencionem obtinere, quia iustum et pium est succurrere miseris et pauperibus et pro manifesto bono terre Durachij, ne ipsi cogantur ire cum suis filiis et familia per alienas terras mendicando, tunc debeat facere publice proclamari quod quicumque ciuis, subditus et fidelis, ciuitatis nostre Durachij, et aliorum locorum nostrorum, circumstantium Durachio, qui sit Durachinus, uel Albanensis (...) possit secure et sine aliquo impedimento accedere habitatum ciuitatem nostram Durachij et alia loca nostra deinde, usque quinque annos proximos, dando eis ad intelligendum quod infra spatium dictorum quinque annorum contra predictos, non fiet ius alicui ullo modo, nam per istum modum terra nostra Durachij predicta apopulabitur, et interim ista negocia poterunt aptari": AAV 510; *Misti*, Reg. 42, f. 124r.

pointing out that the issue the bishop brought for the Council's consideration was not discussed right away; in other words, the *prohemium* only mentions that he presented himself to the *signoria* many days before, offering to hand over Shkodra to the control of Venice. Moreover, the entry qualifies the Council's pronouncement by stating that a response had to be given because the Council "was willing to look into it according to what would be reasonable, and he was requiring a response."⁵²⁴ The "response" section, marked by "vadit pars," is in fact the result of an in-group discussion: Shkodra is not located by the sea, and it seemed to the *pregadi* that accepting the offer would become more of a burden than a benefit. What made it unattractive was not its location—this was only the polite, yet not entirely truthful excuse to say "no" to the bishop. The truth was that "at present, Shkodra is in the hands of the Turks, and no foray could be made without causing a scandal."⁵²⁵ The record made explicit the disparity between the reasons given to the *pregadi* and what should be said to the bishop: "more than with these, other words and reasons that seem appropriate to the dominium should be used to give a response to the bishop."⁵²⁶

Roughly three months later, on May 12, 1394, the brothers Progon and Tanush Dukagjini visited Venice. In 1393, they had signed pacts with Giovanni Miani (then Captain of the Gulf), surrendering the castle of Lezhë to Venice. In the brothers' case, they were not in a position to send ambassadors and came instead themselves. The introduction of the entry summarizes that, according to the pacts signed between them and Venice, the brothers were supposed to receive a third of the revenues generated by trade in the castle. They came to Venice for the purpose of requesting half the revenue, because the Ottomans had gained control of some of the villages that constituted the largest part of the brothers' income, and they were in desperate financial need.⁵²⁷ Such was their situation that they also asked for a 200 ducats' loan, which they proposed should be deducted from their part of the castle's income. As response, the Council Experts put forward that:

We regret to learn that the Turks, or any others, are inflicting damages in their holdings and revenues, because we do not only intend to treat them simply as friends, but as Christians, and therefore preserve them from all disturbances and insults coming from the Turks. That is why we intend to lend them the 200 ducats they request (...). But we cannot give them half the revenues of the castle, since this would be quite detrimental to our commune.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁴ "Cum iam multis diebus comparauerit ad praesentiam dominij Reuerendus Pater Dominus Episcopus Scutarenis tamquam ambasiator domini Dulcigni, offerens dare nobis nomine dicti domini locum Scutari et aliqua alia sua loca infra terram uolentibus nobis prouidere de eo secundum quod erit rationabile atque iustum ac requirens superinde nostram responsionem": AAV 530; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 189.

⁵²⁵ "[D]ictus locus Scutari presentialiter est in manibus Turcorum, ita quod male sine scandalo intromitti posset": *Ibidem*.

⁵²⁶ "[Q]uam pluribus alijs rationibus, quod cum istis et alijs utilibus et bonis uerbis et rationibus que dominio uidebuntur, fiat responsio ipsi domino Episcopo": *Ibidem*.

⁵²⁷ "Cum isti nobiles Duchayni qui hic sunt (...) supplicauerint nostro dominio, quod sicut secundum formam pactorum initorum per capitaneum nostrum Culphy inter nos et eos, ipsi debent habere tercium utilitatum et introituum dicti loci, solutis expensis limitatis in illis pactis, et nos duas, ita dignemur eis dare medietatem, et causa est quia Turchi astulerunt sibi aliquas villas de quibus percipiebant magnam utilitatem": AAV 542; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 4r.

⁵²⁸ "[Q]uod respondeatur eis quod nobis grauat si per Turchos uel alios senciunt danna aliqua in introitibus et locis suis, quia non solum eos quos habere et tractare intendimus in nostros amicos, sed quoslibet Christianos uellemus ab omnibus

Up to this point, this response follows the standard template of R-entries. If the *pregadi* denied something which was formulated as one request — instead of the several clauses — the entry recorded a concise reason for not granting it. In contrast to that, the final section of this R-entry reads:

Because the nobles themselves came here at great expense, and not without inconvenience to their own businesses, with the hope of obtaining their goal of securing half of the castle's revenues, so that they perceive our dominion's gracefulness, 50 ducats should be given to them as a present, so that they go back heartened to a greater degree.⁵²⁹

This remark highlights the fact that the brothers were associated with Venice in a way that foreign rulers were not. The entry's final section is a salient departure from the standard formulation to say "no" to unwanted solicitations by foreign rulers. In the latter case, entries contain only a very general reason to deny the request, followed by: "and because of that, we beg His Lordship to excuse us," or a similar version thereof.⁵³⁰ The difference in formulation to reply to this embassy and the token allowance granted to the brothers reflect their subordinated position in relation to Venice. Yet it also signifies the Council's intention to strengthen much-needed alliances between Venice and Albanian local lords without sacrificing revenues.

During these years, communication between the *signoria* and ambassadors from Durrës, Shkodra and Lezhë was recorded using the normal template of R-entries. If the Council judged that a serious difficulty might arise regarding a point presented by the emissaries, entries also recorded directives to the governor of those places. The Council's added source of concern is visible through a departure from R-entries' normal formulation. Unforeseeable events surrounding George Stracimirović, who controlled the Zeta region, demanded that the Council acted swiftly in ordering the Captain to talk to him or his wife. The *prohemium* of those I-entries contains information which defined the matter's importance. Mention of *noua* in the incipit (or that "acting would be convenient") relates to the matter's urgency (or lack of it). Entries containing instructions also included explicit indication of the official or informal nature of the interaction.

During this first stage, discussions about how to respond to Albanian lords and emissaries did not create a great deal of controversy. Fundamentally, the *pregadi* agreed that the Venetian

molestijs et Turchorum insultibus preseruari, et propterea volentes sibi in his que cum honore nostro possumus complacere, sumus parati prestare eis ducatos ducentos quos requirunt a nobis (...). Sed complacere sibi non possumus de medietate introituum quam cognoscimus euidenter quod esset cum manifesto danno nostri comunis": *Ibidem*.

⁵²⁹ "Verum quia ipsi nobiles venerunt huc cum magna expensa et non sine incomodo suo et agendorum suorum, sub spe obtinendi dictam suam intencionem de medietate introituum predictorum, et sciendi de gratia nostri dominij, donari sibi debeant ducati quinquaginta de pecunia nostri comunis, ut magis redeant consolati": *Ibidem*.

⁵³⁰ "Propterea placeat sue magnificentie habere nos excusatos." This is the general wording used to deny requests by ambassadors coming from: Aragon: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 156; the patriarch of Aquilea: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 156; the pope: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 288; Padua: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 289; Bologna: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 295, *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 5v; Shkodra: *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 48v; Segni: *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 68v; Florence: *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 13r; the duke of Burgundy: *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 107v; Split: *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 22v; Ludovicus de Mathafaris, on behalf of the Grand Duke of Bosnia: *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 46r; or the Roman Catholic Diocese of Imola: *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 51v.

acquisition of the castles in Durrës and Lezhë was justified by virtue of their defense and economic possibilities, while communication with Stracimirović aimed at keeping him on Venice's side.

New Threats: Many Responses (1395-1396)

Through March and April of 1395, a surge in the number of ambassadors visiting Venice is reflected in the increased number of R-entries in relation to previous years. While realizing that Bayezid was in quarrelsome terms with Timur, the *pregadi* negotiated with the Hungarian ambassadors on multiple occasions. After much back and forth, both parties finally set the terms of Venice's participation in the attack that Sigismund was planning against the Ottomans. Embassies from Austria, Burgundy and France also passed through Venice with their own pleas. Additionally, ambassadors from Este confided with the *signoria* repeatedly about the attacks Azzo was planning against Este. By the end of April, the Council was delighted that the long-lasting conflict between Ferrara and Este was finally resolved in favor of Niccolò III, Venice's protégé.

All this had taken place by spring, 1395. In June, strictly speaking, no reports required the Council's attention.⁵³¹ Between May 27 and July 2, the Council met only twice: on June 6, the Senators elected the *patroni* for merchant galleys. Two days later, the Council gathered to discuss what to respond to Progon, who was again in Venice. Since the Dukagjini brothers had visited the city the previous summer, one brother (Tanush) had died defending the castle from an Ottoman assault, while the other, Progon, married Voyasclava, George Thopia's sister. As recorded, in this R-entry's *prohemium* the Maritime Experts made memory of the visitor. They justified the Council's need to deliver a response due to Progon's lack of financial means to stay in Venice for an extended period:

A certain Progon Dukagjini is here; he is one of the two Albanian nobles from whom we acquired the castle of Lezhë. He extended to us some petitions on his and his wife's behalf, pleading for a response since he is here with great expense.⁵³²

Progon's petition contained ten clauses. Unlike the previous year, by this point Durrës had developed considerable administrative continuity. Venice's confidence in its control can be garnered from the way in which Progon's petitions were handled. Six of his requests involved the commune's

⁵³¹ In April 1395, the Council met six times and as many as 54 interventions took place — this number of entries is on the top 10% of any given month from 1392 to 1402. In May, they also met six times, for a total of 39 decisions. In contrast, June records two entries. Only November and December of 1397 were “more dormant” in terms of the number of days in which the Council was summoned.

⁵³² “Cum sit hic quidam Proganus Duchainus, qui est unus ex illis duobus nobilibus Albanie a quibus dominato nostra habuit castrum Lesi, et porexit supradicto ducali dominio, certa capitula pro parte sua et pro parte sue uxoris, sororis quondam domini Durachi, supplicans habere expeditionem et resposionem, ut possit redire ad propria, cum stet hic cum magna expensa”: AAV 582; Reg. 43, f. 71r.

financial state, Venice's accountability for the castle's revenues, and his intention to cultivate some fields belonging to the castle. For these issues, the Experts claimed to have no clear knowledge on the matters he was referring to, redirecting him to the governor there. In three separate demands, he asked for further financial assistance from Venice. These were politely dismissed. Only one point was agreed to: considering his weakened condition, he had requested to be spared from giving any money to the commune until he was in a position to enjoy the use of his goods. Venice agreed to free him from payments over the next two years.⁵³³ In their previous visit, Progon and his brother had received "consolation money" for having their expectations deflated by Venice, but that did not occur this time. The extent of Venice's generosity took a more restrained form: when the time came for him to return to Albania, a motion proposed by the Councilors did not only allow Progon to board one of the galleys for free — for this was a common courtesy —, but also proposed to cover his companions' expenses until the moment they all reached Durrës.⁵³⁴ Although this response indirectly points to the evolution of Venice's increased local power in Durrës, it is not fundamentally different from previous I- and R-entries in one respect: *what the signoria says* did not cause any disagreement among senators, or at least none which, in the Council's view, should be recorded.

Agreement about how to handle a request was not always the norm. I have stressed earlier that opposing motions are an indicator of contention among board members. On August 20, for example, ambassadors of Carlo Tocco, count of Cephalonia, and his wife Francesca Acciaiuoli, presented Tocco's request to become a Venetian citizen, together with an offer to hand over Corinth and Megara to Venice.⁵³⁵ The price set by Tocco was 40,000 ducats. All Council and Maritime Experts proposed, for the first request, that Tocco should be graciously treated as one of Venice's citizens.⁵³⁶ For the second proposal, the Experts pointed out that this was a considerable sum for cities which were presently at war — and in the undesirable vicinity to territories controlled by Esau de' Buondelmonti, despot of Epirus. With appropriate words, then, the *signoria* should reply that the commune was not interested in the ambassadors' proposal.⁵³⁷ The Experts' motion was approved

⁵³³ "Ad secundum capitulum per quod petit considerata debili sua condicione presenti, ordinare quod de pecunia quam debet dare nostro comuni, nulla molestia ei fiat, donec erit in terminis quod possit gaudere bonis suis, respondeatur quod prouidebimus per modum quod usque ad annos duos de ipsa pecunia nulla nouitas ei fiet": *Ibidem*.

⁵³⁴ "Quod pro omni bono respectu, concedatur viro nobili Progano Duchaini quod possit leuari super ista galea mudacia cum duobus famulis et leuibus arnesijs, et conduci Durachium libere, et sine aliquo nabulo, et quod fiant sibi et dictis suis famulis expense oris neccessarie usque Durachium, de pecunia nostri comunis": AAV 587; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 67r.

⁵³⁵ Carlo had also requested Genoese citizenship in 1385, receiving it at last in 1390: Nada Zečević, "The Genoese Citizenship of Carlo I Tocco of December 2, 1389," *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta* 41 (2004): 366. For an analysis of the Tocco family's power and personal and political relations, see: Zečević, *The Tocco of the Greek Realm: Nobility, Power and Migration in Latin Greece (14th-15th Centuries)*.

⁵³⁶ "Quod fiat responsio istis ambassiatoribus duche et duchisse Cefalonie (...), quod (...) dispositi sumus eum ducham habere, recipere et tractare cum locis suis, pro veneto et ciue nostro, ac amico nostri comunis": AAV 590; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 78r. As Zečević points out, the words "ciue nostro ac amico nostri comunis" do not usually go together, for they exclude one another in terms of citizenship status: Zečević, "Sub umbra protectione," no. 13.

⁵³⁷ "Consideratis terminis et conditionibus in quibus loca illa sunt, quia in guerra sunt, et considerato quod loca circumstantia sunt in manibus dispoti, et maxima quantitate pecunie, responderi debeat per dominium cum illis utilibus

without any record of opposition. But six days later, the Council Experts explained that, precisely when the doge was about to reply to the ambassadors, letters from the Venetian governors of Argos and Neapoli arrived at the palace. In these letters, the governors were accusing Tocco of being the main culprit in facilitating the Ottoman raids and robberies in Argos and Athens. The Experts conceded that it would be against Venice's honor to agree to Tocco's request for citizenship in the terms which had been previously approved, and therefore the reply to that petition should be suspended; to the second request, the same response should be given.⁵³⁸ Francesco Valier and Iacopo Surian (Councilors) opposed this. Their proposal to the *pregadi* about how to justify a delay in granting citizenship to Tocco left no room for ambiguity. The Councilors' bill recorded the response to the Count and Countess of Cephalonia in the following terms:

Before, we wanted to answer them regarding their lord's request of having him as one of our citizens, but we have been informed, through various ways, that they caused our plains of Argos to be raided and looted, and similarly in Athens, for [damages] of more than 30,000 ducats, which is to us as aggravating an affair as it could possibly be. Through this, we have understood that [his lord's] disposition does not correspond with his words, and because of this, we commissioned our governors in Coron and Modon, and our ambassador there, [the mandate] we consider to be most convenient [to preserve] our honor. Therefore, that we cannot give them any other response to that request unless we are first informed about what [our governors] did and obtained, according to our mandate.⁵³⁹

Thirty-three *pregadi* supported the Experts' proposal, while a majority of 44 sided with the Councilors. In the following week, this issue created contention once more, this time due to some board members' desire to retaliate, in order to defend Venice's name.⁵⁴⁰ This example highlights that recording opposing proposals served to capture the opinions of a divided Council. Here, the record

et dextris uerbis que videbuntur, lutanando se a facto, quia non faceret consideratis predictis modo aliquo pro nostro comuni": AAV 590; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 78r. Theodore I Palaiologos, despot of the Morea, had sieged the city in late 1394, following the death of the Duke of Athens Nerio I Acciaioli (Francesca's father). Carlo sought help from Evrenos Bey, the Ottoman governor of Thessaly, against Theodore: Machiel Kiel, "Corinth in the Ottoman Period (1458-1687 and 1715-1821)," *Shedet*, no. 3 (2016): 48; Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans*, 431.

⁵³⁸ "Quia ipsa hora qua serenissimus dominus dux dare volebat responsionem ambassiatoribus duce et duchisse Cefalonie, secundum quod captum fuerat in isto consilio, habite sunt litere a potestatibus nostris Argos et Neapolis per quas apparet quod ipse fuerit causa principalis prede commisse et robarie in planicie nostra Argos et etiam apud Sithines, propter quod apparuit dominio de suspendendo in dando sibi dictam responsionem, specialiter ad primam partem per quam requirebat aggregari in numero nostrorum ciuium, et esse nobis recommendatus, quia existente ita ueritate, ipsa responsio non reseruasset bene nostrum honorem. Vadit pars, quod remanente firma secunda parte de lutanando se ab acceptando loca Corinthij et Megare, secundum quod captum fuit": AAV 592; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 78r.

⁵³⁹ "Quod respondeatur istis ambassiatoribus duce et duchisse Cefalonie, ad istam partem, quod pridie volebamus sibi dare responsionem ad id quod a nobis requisierant de habendo dominum suum dominum ducham in nostrum ciuem et in nostrum recommendatum, sed informati fuimus per diuersas vias quod ipse curri fecerit et predari planiciem nostram Argos, et similiter locum nostrum Sithines, ad valorem ducatorum .xxxm. et ultra, que nobis molestissima sunt quantum esse possent, et per illa comprehendimus quod dispositio sua non sit secundum quod nobis dici facit, et propterea scripsimus et commisimus nostris castellanis Coroni et Mothoni, ac nostro ambassiatori qui deinde est, illud quod nobis apparuit esse expediens superinde pro nostro honore, ita quod non possemus sibi dare aliam responsionem ad illam partem nisi primo essemus informati ab eis de eo quod fecerunt et habuerunt, vigore nostrorum mandatorum predictorum": *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁰ AAV 595; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 78v.

of divided opinions also adhered to the regular structure of R-entries, thereby suggesting that (contentious as it was) the issue in itself was not perceived as critical for the state.

In contrast, the news that Bayezid had attacked the Venetian fleet in Gallipoli brought an entirely new level of controversy to the discussion about the control of territories in Albania. From December 30, 1395, through February 8, 1396, the Council met multiple times to decide what to respond to the ambassadors who had come to offer Shkodra and Drisht, which were now in Stracimirović's possession. Up to this point, responses and instructions towards Albanians had created only disagreements among board members, not an entire reassessment of the area's role to secure Venice's integrity. The irresolution prior to the final response to the ambassadors, extending over a period of six weeks, was a sign that the Council was coming to terms with a new, more dangerous phase of Ottoman hostilities. During this period, the conventions of I- and R-entries were dispensed with. Responses and interventions echo the apprehension, neglect, expectation and mistrust of Stracimirović's offer: this might have been the turning point of Venice's expansion into Albania and warrant that the Ottomans would be deprived of a strategic location. But was it worth the cost? It is unquestionable that the fundamental cause and theme of these entries is how and why to respond to his ambassadors. In a way, they are both R- and I-entries, but at the same time, neither.

The initial discussion over Stracimirović's proposal came, therefore, when the senators were in an agitated state. The Ottomans' widespread damage to Venetian ships demanded the election of two ambassadors, who should be immediately elected and sent there.⁵⁴¹ In that context, the intervention of four Maritime Experts⁵⁴² began as an R-entry. In their *prohemium*, they reminded the Council that Stracimirović's ambassadors had announced their presence some time before, bringing along a written version of the pacts proposed by their lord. Yet instead of a response, the entry contains a strategy section: as it would be a major setback if Shkodra and Drisht were to come under Ottoman control, the provision must be done wisely and maturely, so that the ambassadors would return with the belief that Venice would consider Stracimirović's proposal.⁵⁴³ Only after this, the entry recorded a description of the response the Council should give, employing its customary modulated etiquette:

We know the sincere affection that their Lord George has towards our status and honor (...), but for the purpose of the embassy, due to a certain fact and certain information that should be sent to us, we cannot give any concrete answer that pertains to him, and which would

⁵⁴¹ *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 97v.

⁵⁴² Nicolò Dolfìn, Nicolò Loredan, Leonardo Sanudo and Filippo Emo.

⁵⁴³ "Quia fuerunt hic iam bono tempore ambassiatores domini Georgij Stracimiri, offerentes velle suo nomine dare nobis ciuitatem Scutarj et Driuasti cum suis pertinencijs, sub certis pactis et condicionibus nobis in scriptis datis, qui ambassiatores petunt cum magna instantia expedicionem, et propterea bonum sit respectu quanti danni et male consequentie foret si dicta loca peruenirent ad manus Turchorum dare eis expedicionem et prouidere super dictis factis, ita sapienter et mature, quod cum commodo et honore nostro possimus facere facta nostra, et quod ipsi ambassiatores recedant et informant dominum suum per modum quod spem habeat quod attendamus ad factum": AAV 604; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 98r.

correspond to what is in our heart. But we will try to have this information as soon as possible, and once we make up our minds, we will declare it to him (...). In the meantime, if there is any other request by means of which we can help securing his possessions, we will honestly do our best to help him.⁵⁴⁴

The intervention does not end with the response, which would be normal. In fact, the tone changes so abruptly that there is a note indicating that the secretary stopped recording the Experts' intervention in the *Misti* and copied the rest of it in the *Secreti*.⁵⁴⁵ There, the Experts disclosed a crucial point:

It would be infinitely advantageous for us and our merchants if these cities were in our hands, but to this there is one obstacle, which may be easily overcome: to find a way to dexterously remove the clause in the peace agreement with Hungary⁵⁴⁶ by which we cannot interfere in Dalmatia, from the Kvarner Gulf up to the border with Durrës.⁵⁴⁷

The *signoria* should then instruct an ambassador to negotiate with Sigismund, given that “the king left the forces he was gathering to fight the Ottomans to go back to his kingdom and mourn the death of his wife [Mary], who had died while he was en route with his army.”⁵⁴⁸ According to the vote tally recorded for the day, over 100 *pregadi* were present, yet only two agreed with this.

Subsequently, Andrea Contarini, a Maritime Expert not included in the previous bill, presented his own motion. He was eager to secure signed pacts between Venice and the ambassadors, as long as they offered Venice advantageous conditions and did not demand payment of a stipend for Stracimirović. If that could be achieved, then the only remaining point of contention was the number of crossbowmen needed to guard Shkodra's and Drisht's fortresses, which the Collegio should determine. In the meantime, the Council should respond to the embassy according to his peers' proposal, mentioned above.⁵⁴⁹ This Expert's optimism convinced three senators.

⁵⁴⁴ Vadit pars, quod respondeatur dictis ambassiatoribus quod (...) nos videmus et cognoscimus manifeste sinceram affectionem quam habet dominus suus dominus Georgius ad honorem et statum nostrum (...). Sed descendendo ad effectum sue ambassiate, nos dicimus quod propter certum casum et certam informationem quam expedit nos habere, non possumus sibi dare illam determinatam responsionem quam ipse affectat et secundum quod esset cor nostrum. Sed prestante domino, procurabimus illam habere et presto quantum esse poterit, et postea determinate et deliberate sibi mentem nostram, manifestam fieri faciemus (...) et si per aliquem casum que de nouo superueniret, cognosceret quod possemus sibi in aliquo subuenire (...) non relinquemus eum in his, que honeste poterimus: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁵ “Nota quod residuum istius partis est in libro secreto rogatorum ad literam 120 in latere albo”: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁶ According to the treaty of Zadar of 1358, Venice surrendered all its Dalmatian possessions between the Kvarner Gulf and Durrës (including Zadar) to Hungary: Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans*, 341.

⁵⁴⁷ “[E]t ad istud sit unum obstaculum, quod leuiter remouebit, faciendo dextro modo et cum tempore facta nostra, videlicet, punctus pacis Hungarie per quem non possumus nos impedire in Dalmatia a Quarnario usque ad confines Durachij”: *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 246. The AAV 602 notes incorrectly that this entry corresponds to December 28, with a note saying that “textum in copiae pagellis a 436 ad 446, numeratione mendosa prius, dein emendata notatis, invenire non potuimus,” yet it is available online on the page just given.

⁵⁴⁸ “[O]rdinetur quod eligatur in hoc consilio, ad serenissimum dominum regem Hungarie, quo ut habetur est reuersus de exercitu in quo fuit contra Turchos pro condolendo de morte serenissime quondam domine regine que mortua est dum esset in uia, cum dictu exercitu (...) unus solemnissimus ambassiator”: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁴⁹ “Volebat quod posset concludi cum istis ambassiatoribus domini Georgij Stracimirj, qui hic sunt, cum illis melioribus pactis et condicionibus que poterunt obtinerj, non obligando nos de dando sibi aliquam prouisionem, et si poterit concludi cum eis per modum predictum, ex nunc fieri debeat illa quantitas ballistariorum que videbitur collegio sufficiens ad custodiam castris Scutarj et Driuasti (...). Et interim mitti debeat et prouideri de ambassiate etc. sicut in residuo partis sociorum in libro altero continetur”: AAV 604; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 98r.

Then, the Council Experts offered their opinion to the *pregadi*, recorded in the introduction section of the entry:

Given the terms and circumstances in which we find ourselves at present, and those which we will have to face and treat through our embassy to Bayezid (...), this is by no means an appropriate time to devote to George [Stracimirović]’s embassy.⁵⁵⁰

A response, they proposed, had to be given in these terms:

We see the good will and disposition of their lord towards our honor, which pleases us greatly, and we offer to do what we can in his honor, as the dear friend and citizen that he is. And we beg him not to be disappointed if we cannot attend to accept the places that he is now offering, given that we have a good reason for it.⁵⁵¹

They then repeated the words which were already given by the previous speakers: that Venice would help him if the case merited it, and they hoped he will hold on to his possessions. Slightly less than a third of all seated *pregadi* agreed with the Council Experts’ reasoning. This, it seems, was neither convincing as a course of action, nor as a response.

Next, the *prohemium* of the intervention by Biancho Barbo and Giorgio Loredan (Councilors) reworded the reasoning of the Council Experts and offered a way to contend with the ambassadors without compromising anything:

Because it is very advisable and wise to decide on matters that occur according to the conditions and variations of the times, and as it was pointed out, considering the condition of the places subjected to George Stracimirović which are being offered, many things have to be watched out for. Therefore, it is proposed to start the dealings with these ambassadors to accept those places, and act and deal about it according to what seems best and most secure, but without settling on anything, and come to the Council instead, with the acquired information so that it can be defined what seems best for the honor of our dominion.⁵⁵²

This proposal contains no clear answer to the ambassadors, yet it secured 48 votes and was approved. Given the back and forth of all the motions proposed on that day, the Councilors’ concise reasoning seemed to settle the matter momentarily. Two weeks later, however, on January 14, 1396, it was clear that not everyone had made up his mind. The Council Experts tried yet again to dissuade

⁵⁵⁰ “Quia respectu termini et condicionis in qua nos reperimus ad presens, et eorum que habemus facere et tractare per nostram ambassiatam cum Basayto (...) non esset modo tempus aptum ad attendendum ad ista facta Georgij Stracimirj”: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵¹ “Vadit pars, quod respondeatur suis ambassiatoribus qui hic sunt quod nos videmus bonam dispositionem et voluntatem domini sui ad nostros honores, de quo regratiamus sibi satis, et nos offerimus ad ea que possemus facere in honorem et statum suum, tamquam carissimi amici et ciuis nostri, rogantes quod non grauetur si non attendimus pro nunc ad acceptandum loca que nobis offert, quia bona causa nos inducit”: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵² “Quia multum commendabilis et sapiens res est, prouidere in rebus que occurrunt secundum condiciones et varietates temporum, et sicut notum est, considerata conditione partium et locorum subiectorum domino Georgio Stracimiri, qui se offert per suos ambassiatores nobis dare ciuitatem Scutarj et quedam alia loca sua, est superinde multis respectibus vigilandum. Vadit pars, quod in bona gratia incipiatur ad tractandum cum ipsis ambassiatoribus de accipiendo pro nostro dominio dictam ciuitatem et loca, et praticetur et tractetur super hoc sicut melius et securius videbitur, non concludendo ullo modo aliquid superinde, sed potius veniatur ad istud consilium cum eo quod habebitur, ut diffiniatur sicut melius videbitur pro bono et honore nostri domini”: AAV 605; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 98v.

the *pregadi* from taking action on the matter, and this new round of discussions was recorded in the secret deliberations:

It is a wise thing and a dignified recommendation that when there is doubt about the state of the world, to remain within its terms and not to watch out for or listen to dubious proposals, from which flares can then cause mistakes, divisions and scandals, just as it could be the case with the business that George Stracimirović's ambassadors are proposing.⁵⁵³

The entry records a response in the same fundamental terms that the Experts suggested two weeks earlier: that the Council views Stracimirović's good will towards Venice in offering those places, but that for now they had a good reason not to attend to this matter, etc. On the other hand, the four Maritime Experts who had suggested an attempt to modify the peace agreement with Hungary were likewise adamant about their plan and presented the same motion. The two proposals were pitted against one another. Indecisiveness was such that the voting was repeated five times and neither proposal was approved, for a majority of fifty *pregadi* did not cast their ballot.

Considering the disagreement among board members, three Council Experts (Michele Steno, Fantino Zorzi and Albano Badoer) presented a dramatically changed plan when they spoke again the following week, on January 21. In this case, they recommended responses and strategies whose aim were to halt negotiations momentarily, so that a bigger gain could be obtained in the end. The entry starts as an R-entry:

It should be answered to George Stracimirović's ambassadors (...) that we understand quite well the core of the pacts they are proposing and the conditions their lord would accept. But like we said to them, after our Captain of the Gulf came back from [meeting his lord], where he was with him in person, the Captain obtained from [Stracimirović] a much longer proposal, and much more than what was said to us before. We think it would be appropriate, if the ambassadors cannot negotiate anything else beyond what they already said to us, that at least one of them goes back to his lord and informs him regarding the reasons that we hear from our Captain (...).⁵⁵⁴

By telling this to the ambassadors, the Council would show that Venice had their own direct means to negotiate, putting the ambassadors in a position of uncertainty, as they did not have means to immediately check the veracity of the Council's claim. The entry, however, continues with a strategy section: while the ambassadors were busy solving the hurdle, the *pregadi* should use that

⁵⁵³ "Quia est res sapiens et recommendatione digna quando dubitatur de factis mundi, stare intra suos terminos et non uigilare, neque attendere ad res dubias, ex quibus exire possent aliquae scintille quae possent errores, diuisiones aut scandala generare, cuiusmodi esse possent negocia quae nobis proponuntur per ambassiatores domini Georgij Stracimiri": AAV 606; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 246.

⁵⁵⁴ "Quod respondeatur istis ambassiatoribus domini Georgij Stracimiri (...) quod nos plene intelleximus ea quae ipsi exposuerunt nobis, et similiter dederunt in scriptis, et ea ad quae finaliter ipsi dixerunt posse condescendere pro parte domini sui, et quia sicut eis diximus post suum recessum a dicto eorum domino, capitaneum nostrum Culphy fuit personaliter cum eo, et ab ipso habuit magis largam promissionem, et multum plus ante quam ipsi nobis dixerint, credimus esse bonum quod si aliud non habent, nec ad alia possunt condescendere quam ad ea quae dixerunt nobis, ipsi uel unus eorum reuertatur ad dominum suum et informet eum de uerbis quae habuimus ab ipso capitaneo Culphy (...)": AAV 608; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 247.

time to verify whether accepting Shkodra and Drisht would be perceived as a breach of Hungary's peace agreement. It was left to the Collegio to meet anybody whom they considered knowledgeable and could advise them about this matter, so that an uncompromised answer could be given.⁵⁵⁵ As recorded, the strategy soon became convoluted. It further involved an instruction to the Captain but relied on barely achievable synchronicity: while the Collegio learned more about the peace agreement, the Captain, when he reached either Shkodra or Drisht, would attempt to make contact with the two ambassadors whom Venice had sent to Bayezid. All three men should then try to find Stracimirović in Ulcinj (it was not sure that he would be there), and talk to him about what he had said to the Captain earlier, namely, that he was willing to give up his entire state and come to live in Venice.⁵⁵⁶ Only 14 *pregadi* agreed that the plan was feasible. On that same day, Michele Steno alone introduced a new proposal, akin to an I-entry. The *prohemium* mentions how praiseworthy it was to seek information about this entire issue, so that, before anything was said to the ambassadors, the Collegio may send somebody who was both loyal and understated in acquiring the clear information needed to reach a decision and deliver an honest response.⁵⁵⁷ Two *pregadi* agreed. Proposals presented earlier were once more subjected to vote. At the end, the “non sinceri” vote of the *pregadi* prevailed once more.

Finally, three weeks later, although without the full support of all senators, Michele Contarini (Council Expert) managed to secure approval to accept Shkodra and Drisht. On February 8, 1396, Contarini made it clear that taking over these cities was worth it, because no local lord would be able to maintain control over them; it was inevitable that they would wind up under Ottoman control.⁵⁵⁸ The Expert was assertive in stating that “in the name of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and Venice's patron Saint Mark, these places should be accepted under the terms mentioned below.”⁵⁵⁹ His address

⁵⁵⁵ “Et quia est res sapiens quod interim habeamus bonum consilium de isto facto, si intromittendo dicta loca contrafaceremus paci Hungarie, collegium domini, consiliariorum, capitum et sapientum consilij et ordinum, habeat libertatem mittendi pro illis personis que eis uidebuntur pro habendo consilium suum super dictis factis, ut postea illis ambassiatoribus aduenientibus uel alijs, possimus cum maiori claritate et meliori deliberatione procedere in facto praedicto”: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵⁶ “Et ex nunc etiam captum sit, quod committatur capitaneo nostro Culphy quando exhibit, quod quando erit in partibus praedictis Scutari uel Dulcigni (...) debeat cum duobus ambassiatoribus nostris qui uadunt ad Basitum, dare operam de loquendo et conferendo cum dicto dominum Georgio, si erit in illis partibus Dulcigni ut esse solet, et dicendo sibi illud quando alias retulit capitaneo nostro Culphi, scilicet de uolendo libere ponere totum dominium suum in manibus nostris, et de uolendo uenire ad habitandum cum sua familia ad ciuitatem nostram Venetias”: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵⁷ “Quia est res laudabilis postquam sumus in istis terminis, uelle habere talem declarationem et informationem super istis factis, quod animus omnium sit clarus et possit bene deliberare et terminare illud quod sit bonum et utile nostri dominij. Vadit pars, quod antequam fiat alia responsio istis ambassiatoribus domini Georgij super istis factis, collegium (...) mittere debeat pro illis personis a quibus uidebunt posse melius fidelius et lucidius informari, de factis predictis, qua informatione habita, postea cum meliore deliberatione et securitate fieri eis poterit illa finalis responsio, que isti consilio bona, honesta, et utilis apparebit”: AAV 609; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 247.

⁵⁵⁸ “Quia pro nobis et statu nostro, consideratis omnibus quae consideranda sunt in factis Scutari et istorum locorum, que nobis dare uult magnificus dominus Georgius Stracimiri, facit quod ipsa loca perueniant ad manus nostras et sub nostro dominio antequam uadant ad manus Turchorum, sicut infalibilter irent nisi illa acciperemus”: AAV 611; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 251.

⁵⁵⁹ “Vadit pars, quod in nomine Jesu Christi et gloriose Virginis Marie matris eius, ac beati Marci protectoris nostri, accipi et acceptari debeant loca ipsa nomine nostri dominij, cum pactis et conditionibus infrascriptis”: *Ibidem*.

contained five tenets. First, Stracimirović would become one of Venice’s nobles and be treated as such, even taking part in Council meetings.⁵⁶⁰ Second, the portion of Stracimirović’s territory he was keeping for himself must be recognized and respected, yet he also asked Venice’s permission to raise the flag of St. Mark there. According to the speaker, the latter request should be avoided, giving as an excuse that “it was better for [Stracimirović’s] honor to have his own flag be displayed, and not any other.”⁵⁶¹ In all likelihood, Venice wanted to avoid mingling in local disputes, but if Stracimirović’s ambassadors insisted on the point, the Council should grant it. Third, if any of Stracimirović’s subjects fled from his lands, Venice would not give the fugitive asylum or protection, and Stracimirović would do the same in regards to Venice’s fugitives.⁵⁶² However, Stracimirović should not expect from Venice a compromise to defend the land remaining in his possession, since “we are not used to making such promises.” Yet, Venice could try to mediate and restore peace and good will among disputing neighbors, if it came to that.⁵⁶³ The Council had foreseen a fourth point: Stracimirović demanded a yearly allowance of 1,000 ducats, which was to be passed on to his sons.⁵⁶⁴ The Collegio might try to offer a lesser amount, but Venice should be ready to pay the whole sum. Lastly, Stracimirović asked to be held unaccountable if his relatives kidnapped or offended a Venetian, which should also be granted.⁵⁶⁵ Forty-nine *pregadi* agreed to these terms, and even though there were dissenting voices, the Collegio moved on to approve, on March 21, the dispatch of three commissioners who should go to Shkodra and Drisht to examine the state of the lands.⁵⁶⁶ The pact with Stracimirović’s ambassadors was finalized and ratified on April 14, 1396.⁵⁶⁷

Earlier in 1396, the embassies sent to Bayezid and Timur had already hurt public coffers.⁵⁶⁸ But to safeguard the newly-acquired cities, new troops and personnel were sent and this also cost

⁵⁶⁰ “[N]obis placeat ipsum dominum Georgium cum omnibus suis heredibus tractare tamquam ciues nostros fideles, et facere nostros nobiles, ita quod quotiescumque uenient Venetias, possint uenire ad consilium sicuti alij nostri nobiles”: *Ibidem*. As Pullan explained, Balkan royalty accepted into the Venetian nobility was not really expected to take part in government affairs: Pullan, “The Significance of Venice,” 443. Moreover, the opportunity to participate in the Major Council “had no special effect, since the lords rarely took part in this body’s sessions, and the Major Council was losing its factual power to other instances of the Republic”:

⁵⁶¹ “[E]rit maior honor suus leuare insignam suam quam aliam, et istud ipse dominus deberet uelle pro honore domus sue”: AAV 611; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 251.

⁵⁶² “[N]os sumus contenti ei restitui et assignare facere omnes homines qui aufugerent de locis suis praedictis, ad illa loca que nobis dat (...). Faciendo et seruando similiter uersus nos de hijs qui aufugerent de ipsis locis nostris ad loca sua”: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶³ “[N]ostra dominatio numquam solita fuit facere tales promissiones, nec ipsas modo aliquo faceret (...). Et nihilominus si casus daret quod aliquis molestaret contratam suam, nos omni tempore, toto posse, dabimus operam et procurabimus de tractando pacem et concordium inter eos, ut possit regere et gubemare in pace et bona uoluntate contractam praedictam, procurando quod remaneant de hoc contenti”: AAV 611; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 252.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶⁵ “Ad ultimum capitulum, per quod petit quod si suus pater uel Dominus Georgius, uel Dominus Balsa Barbani sui accepissent aliquod uel offendissent alicui Veneto, quod propter dictam causam sibi nihil dici possit”: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶⁶ AAV 615; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 119v. See also: Valentini, “Appunti,” 208. The elected commissioners were Iacopo Gradenigo, Giovanni Cappello, and Giovanni da Canale.

⁵⁶⁷ AAV 628. This document is not part of the *Deliberazioni* series, therefore it is not accessible online. I did not have the opportunity to access it in person in the Venetian State archive since, as I was told, it could not be found.

⁵⁶⁸ “Quia necessarium est quod nostri ambassiatores qui ituri sunt ad Basitum, et similiter ambassiator consul iturus Tanam ad imperatorem Tartarorum, et similiter ambassiator et baiulus Trapesinde, portent secum dona secundum usum quod

money. In April, the *signoria* said to emissaries from Hungary and Este that the year had brought along “many and unexpected expense,” due to which Venice could not fulfill any more requests for financial assistance.⁵⁶⁹ In May, ambassadors from Zadar did not have better luck although, in this case, eight rounds of voting were needed to reach consensus among the *pregadi* before saying no.⁵⁷⁰ In the meantime, it had come to the Council’s attention that Shkodra could offer a business opportunity in salt trade, for which Venice should obtain sole monopoly.⁵⁷¹ In general, as it was put to the *pregadi* by Iacopo Gradenigo and Giovanni da Canale (who had returned from their mission as commissioners), the city could contribute to protect Christianity and safeguard the Adriatic and sea routes, yet the defense of Venice’s honor there should be pursued with as little money as possible.⁵⁷²

All the examples in the case above show that the Council was confronted with an especially momentous political development. The entries following the proposal of Stracimirović’s ambassadors reveal the extent of the debate which was needed to settle the issue: in the record of these particularly controversial discussions, entries intermingled sections that would otherwise correspond to the two different types of entries. By deviating from the normal template of R- and I-entries through deliberate record-keeping, the issue’s vital importance was made explicit. Assuming the control of these territories represented a fundamentally new phase of Venice’s international policy and may bring about costs that Venice was not prepared to assume. Although Shkodra and Drisht would not contribute to an increase of Venice’s mercantile empire, these cities might protect its political interests against the Ottomans and were deemed worthy for that purpose.

By early October 1396 (only a few weeks before learning the news about the crusade), the election of all members of the new power structures in Shkodra and Drisht was finalized. The process of establishing regular communication between Venice and its new acquisitions followed similar mechanisms to the ones which have already been described in relation to Lezhë. Without disregarding information on local developments, requests from local communes were to be redirected to the governors and local authorities there.

ambassiata predicti qui dadunt ad Basitum debeant portare dona ad valorem ducatorum Vm auri” (February 8, 1396): *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 105v.

⁵⁶⁹ “Veritas res est quod propter multa accidentia que nobis occurrerunt isto anno, insolita et inusitata, oportuit nos facere multam expensam et magnam ultra solitam” (April 11, 1396): *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 258.

⁵⁷⁰ (May 18, 1396): *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 262.

⁵⁷¹ “Item quia habetur informatio quod una de utilitatibus Scutarj est in emendo salem et illum vendendo, quod fieri non potest per alios quam per nos” (April 6, 1396): AAV 621; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 121v.

⁵⁷² “Cum intromissio locorum Durachij et Scutarj et aliorum locorum nostrorum Albanie facta sit per nostrum dominium pro conseruatione nominis Christiani, et consequenter pro ouiendo his que possent occurrere in Culpho nostro in dannum et displicentiam nostram non modicam. Et postquam dicta intromissio facta est sumus pur debitores pro honore nostro vigilare ad conseruationem locorum predictorum, cum quam minorj expensa fieri poterit” (August 11, 1396): AAV 639; *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 145v. For further discussion on the commissioners’ intervention (although quoted without the sentence “cum quam minorj expensa fieri poterit”), see: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 239.

Venice's Silence and Its Consequence (1397-1400)

The Ottoman victory against Sigismund's crusade broke the precarious equilibrium in the Mediterranean and brought a long-lasting period of caution to Venice. The Ottomans' military supremacy was confirmed, and no European ruler was keen to involve Venice in pursuit of yet another crusade against Bayezid. Venice took initiatives in securing its claim to its recent acquisitions, but the Council steered clear of open confrontation. Such was the case for much of Venice's maritime possessions, including Albania. The commission to Benedetto Soranzo, on his election as Captain of the Gulf, is a fine example of Venice's caution. The commission ordered him to protect Venice's rule in Durrës and Shkodra against Bayezid's claims of ownership,⁵⁷³ yet Venice's overall involvement in Albania decreased and the men who fulfilled roles of defense and administration were gradually withdrawn.

In spite of that, political development in Italy did not come to a standstill. In 1397, the Council watched uninvolved as Visconti's war against Florence and Bologna began. Although Venice claimed neutrality, it did not mean that the Council was completely detached from the fight. On April 3, developments in the conflict moved the *pregadi* to elect two ambassadors to serve as intermediaries between parties.⁵⁷⁴ On that same day, an ambassador from Francesco Gonzaga, lord of Mantua, also asked for assistance in repelling Visconti's attacks, but aid was not granted. Two days later, the doge and Councilors proposed to modify the tenure of the response given to Mantua's ambassador. This created an inordinate amount of "talk" among the *pregadi*, for the voting process is longer than the motion itself —the vote was called no less than 39 times!⁵⁷⁵ Unfortunately, it is not possible to examine how subsequent discussions about Visconti's war were recorded. The register (or registers) containing the secret deliberations between April, 1397, and March, 1401, are lost.⁵⁷⁶ This lacuna affects R-entries in particular as, proportionally, the *Secreti* contains a higher percentage of responses than the *Misti*.⁵⁷⁷ But not all was lost. Responses to Albanian embassies were recorded in the miscellaneous deliberations. Thus, evidence of those visits survived.

On July 5, 1397, the Council Experts communicated that ambassadors from Drisht had presented nine petitions, in written form, to the *signoria*. This entry faithfully abides by the template of R-entries, suggesting that the ambassadors' requests did not create any major controversy. The

⁵⁷³ (April 7, 1397): AAV 683; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 297.

⁵⁷⁴ *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 294.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁷⁶ While describing the gaps in the registers of the *Segretario alle Voci*, Mozzato points out that "the fires in the ducal palace (1479, 1483, and 1577) always provide a good answer when one speaks about missing documents, but it is not a sufficient explanation in this case": Mozzato, "Rulers of Venice, 1332-1524," para 100. Accessible online at: <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heh.90021>. He notes that the gaps in the registers "coincide with particularly delicate moments in the constitution of the republic," and something similar can be said about the missing registry of the *Secreti*, given that this period covers decisive moments of Visconti's war. Naturally, it is also possible that this secret register was lost in one of those fires.

⁵⁷⁷ Responses constitute 7,8% of entries in the *Misti* and 25,2% of entries in the *Secreti*.

issues raised therein involved only minor differences with the Venetian officials, to which it was suggested that the governor should take into account local statutes whenever he delivered justice, and likewise allow local notaries to handle their letters and wills.⁵⁷⁸ Perhaps the embassy's biggest accomplishment was the waiving of tithes on wine, grain and oil. The response to this was worded in paternalistic terms: the people from Drisht should consequently acknowledge that Venice treated their commune more kindly than former rulers.⁵⁷⁹

During the summer of 1397, the Ottomans repeated raids in Boeotia, Attica and Argos.⁵⁸⁰ Although it is not conclusive that they also occupied Athens during these months, Antonio Acciaioli —Nerio Acciaioli's illegitimate son and a suspected Ottoman ally— carried out attacks against Athens. On January 30, 1398, ambassadors from Athens came to Venice seeking assistance. In this R-entry, the Council Experts notified that, since local forces were unable to repel Antonio's attacks, the city was in danger of falling into enemy hands.⁵⁸¹ Similarly to the previous example about Drisht, decisions to grant the provisioning of salt, horses and infantrymen which the ambassadors were requesting was recorded along normal convention.

Testifying to additional Ottoman advances, on May 11, 1398, three Maritime Experts⁵⁸² informed the *pregadi* that ambassadors from Mrkša Žarković, lord of Vlorë, had come to offer this city (located by the coast, in what is today southern Albania) to Venice, in exchange for a reasonable allowance. Although this bill appears to begin as an R-entry, arguably it is not. The *prohemium* records that Žarković did not believe he could defend his lands against the Ottomans, and since a conquest by Bayezid would be detrimental for Venice and all of Christendom, Žarković desired to place Vlorë under Venice's rule. After examining all the documents, the Experts reckoned that an Ottoman takeover should be avoided. But the entry does not record a response to the ambassadors, which would be normal. Instead, a proposal is presented to the Council: one ambassador should be elected to go to Vlorë and inspect the state of the land.⁵⁸³ Contrarily, the following entry, containing the opposing bill by Francesco Soranzo, also a Maritime Expert, does record a response:

⁵⁷⁸ AAV 690; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 11r. For the Council's equivocal response about accepting the local statutes, see: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 408; O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 33.

⁵⁷⁹ "Respondeatur quod quando nos fecimus prouisionem quod darent nostro dominio decimam fructuum predictorum (...), benigne pertransire deliberauimus per modum predictum de quo grauarj non debent, quia in hoc tractantur valde mitius et benignius per nos, quam tractati fuerint temporibus preteritis": *Ibidem*. Even if this was the case, the decision from October 30 of removing Drisht's governor left the city under the jurisdiction of Shkodra's governor. This was aimed at reducing costs for the Venetian administration, but the decision was likely ill-received among Drisht's countrymen, which were already engaged in disputes with the people from Shkodra. See Chapter 4, p. 97.

⁵⁸⁰ Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans*, 431; Setton, "The Catalans and Florentines in Greece, 1380–1462," 261.

⁵⁸¹ "Cum fuerint ad presentiam dominj duo ambaxiatories communitatis Sithines, dicentes quod illa terra et illa comunitas quotidie molestatur a bastardo dominij Nerij et ab alijs, cum L uel LX equis, a quibus non possint se valere, propter quod perseuerante dicta prosecutione, illa ciuita erat ex toto destructa et desolata, et oportebit quod perueniat ad manus alienas": *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 33r.

⁵⁸² Antonio Contarini, Fantino Querini and Filippo Auriano.

⁵⁸³ "Cum nuper ad presentiam nostram comparuerint duo ambasiatores domini Mirse, domini Aualone, cum certis capitulis exponentes quod dictus dominus dispositus est dare loca Aualone in manibus dominationis libere, sperans quod nostrum

Our dominium estimates and considers their lord a true friend, and we will always wish that he finds himself with such strength that he can defend himself from the insults of the wicked Bayezid and remain in a peaceful state (...). For we do not doubt that with divine grace, he will be able to protect himself. But wanting to please their lord, we will command our Captain of the Gulf, who will leave Venice shortly, that he should obtain information about the conditions of the lands [Žarković] wants to give us, and once we have this information, we will make provision according to what seems necessary to us.⁵⁸⁴

The least compromising course of action proposed by Soranzo (which is described in the response section of the entry) won with 59 votes, with 17 opposition votes in support of the three Experts. The fact that one entry contains a reply and the other is a faux R-entry suggests that the request was deemed important and caused more than just a difference of opinion concerning the content of a reply. The majority of *pregadi* were unwilling to undertake the extra burden of defending lands not in Venice's possession. Despite that, to some it was nevertheless justifiable that Venice invested in an embassy and determined if defenses in Vlorë would deter Ottoman incursions into the Balkans. The importance of this request did not go away without a fight. This response was revisited in the following year, and a commissioner, instead of the Captain, was indeed sent to Vlorë.⁵⁸⁵

Regarding Lezhë, no communication was actively pursued by the Council. Progon Dukagjini did not visit Venice in 1398, but the *signoria* received written requests from him, which were discussed on September 27 of that year. Some of his requests demanded better accounting of the Lezhë castle's revenue and investment in the city's defense infrastructure. The Council redirected Dukagjini's concerns to the governor there.⁵⁸⁶ Emissaries from Durrës arrived at Venice around a month later, on October 24, to present ten demands from the commune, which received similar treatment. As per usual, the entry records the core of all "capitula" presented by the ambassadors, followed by the desired response to be given. Among other requests, they asked for better security over a road leading to the city, the possibility of selling salt locally at a set price, an increase of the

dominium prouidebit de vitu suo per modum quo habebit merito contentarj, et hoc facit quia non videt se potentem ad deffendendum se a Turcho, et considerans quod si dicta loca peruenirent ad manus Turchorum multum possent esse nociua et nobis et alijs Christicolis, deliberauit illa uellet nobis dare et supplicant dicti ambaxiatores, ut nobis placeat super hoc prouidere et eisdem nostrum prebere responsum. Quibus omnibus consideratis, et auditis ac examinatis capitulis predictis, bonum sit prouidere ut loca illa non perueniant ad manus Turchorum. Vadit pars, quod (...) elligatur unus noster ambaxator et provisor": AAV 705; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 39r.

⁵⁸⁴ "Vult quod respondeatur istis ambaxiatoribus dominj Aualone in hac forma, quod dominatio nostra diligit dominum suum tamquam suum verum amicum, quem tenet et reputat, et semper desideraremus quod reperiret se ita potentem, quod ab insultibus istius iniqui Baysit posset se defendere et remanere in eius statu pacifico et tranquilo (...) quia non dubitamus, quod mediante gratia divina bene poterit se tuerj, sed nos volentes complacere domino suo, commitemus capitaneo nostro Culphi de breui exituro de Venecijs ut debeat se informare de conditionibus locorum, que nobis dare uult, dominus suus, et habita a dicto nostro capitaneo informatione prouidebimus, prout nobis videbitur opus esse": *Ibidem*. The ambassadors returned on March 26, 1400, and this response was recorded again almost verbatim, without any opposing bill: AAV 802; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 6r.

⁵⁸⁵ More than two years after the first embassy, the commissioner determined that the city would require heavy investment in defense and, since no port could be built, on August 19, 1400, the Council replied to another emissary from Vlorë that they could not attend to this matter: AAV 833; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 26v. For Venice's view of Vlorë's disadvantaged location, see: Brendan Osswald, "L'Épire du treizième au quinzième siècle: autonomie et hétérogénéité d'une région balkanique" (PhD Diss., Toulouse, Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, 2011), 218.

⁵⁸⁶ AAV 717; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 64r.

commune funds, approval for the local notaries to issue last wills, etc. The responses indicate that all requests were redirected to the governor, either for him to resolve or to inform him of the Council's decisions in light of the emissaries' requests.⁵⁸⁷

The response given to one point raised by the embassy merits explanation. The ambassadors reported a dispute between two archdeacons (Martino, from a powerful Albanian family,⁵⁸⁸ and Nicolò). The ambassadors demanded that Archdeacon Martino be expelled by force "in the same way as he had entered by force."⁵⁸⁹ The recorded response reads that:

it should be said to [the ambassadors] that we will send this petition to our governor, and will order him to examine it, and if this is as they say, he may order such a remarkable citizen to be deposed and taken away from there, having everything restored to the archdeaconry, as long as [our governor] sees that this will end the dispute between them in the Roman curia. And if he sees that, because of this, slanders will arise between the citizens of Durrës and the hinterland, he should send [Martino] away, until we make a different provision.⁵⁹⁰

This passage is illustrative of an aspect of Venetian administration which has been a constant one in the Council's records of communication with Albania during these years. Being elected governor meant that one had been granted the power to speak on behalf of the *signoria* to deliver justice and resolve daily-life matters. At first, it seems that this issue was no ordinary trifle, for disputes in Durrës might arise as consequence of a poor handling of the situation. Thus it is reasonable to expect a record of the Council's enlightening of the governor about what to say to the problematic archdeacon. But that was not the case. Although the response section states that there will be an interaction between the governor and the archdeacon, the interaction is only described indirectly. In other words, the record does not contain the Council's official directive of the verbal exchange between the two men. This suggests that, for the Council, the episode did not merit a record of *what the signoria says*. No instruction section, then, was recorded.

Lack of recorded instructions also arose regarding the pronoiers who controlled the countryside and roads to the city, but probably due to a different reason.⁵⁹¹ This lack of directive in

⁵⁸⁷ AAV 721; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 68r-68v.

⁵⁸⁸ The Mataranga family. Although I do not necessarily suggest any ethnic reading from this passage, in Schmitt's view, the archdeacon was one of those ethnic Albanians of the urban milieu who emphasized their legal and socio-economic superiority over the ethnic Albanian rural population: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 59.

⁵⁸⁹ "Ad decimum et ultimum, in quo faciunt mentionem de certa differentia que est inter quendam Archidiaconum Martinum Albanensem, et Archidiaconum Nicolaum requirentes in conclusione, quod ille Archidiaconus Martinus expellatur per vim, sicut per vim intravit": AAV 721; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 68v.

⁵⁹⁰ "[F]iat responsio quod mittemus nostro rectori dictum capitulum, et mandabimus quod ipsum examinare debeat, et si ita erit ut dicunt, faciat deponi et sequestrari penes aliquem aliquem [sic] bonum virum deinde, omnes redditus et prouentus dicti Archidiaconatus, donec videbitur finis quem capiet differentia que inter ambos est in curia Romana (...), et si videret quod per ipsum posset inter ciues Durachij et intra terram, scandala exoriri, quod teneat modum de licentiando eum ita quod non stet ibi, donec aliter prouidebitur per nos: *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹¹ The pronoiers were a type of land administrators. According to Fine's definition, pronoias (a practice of Byzantine origin) "were grants of an income source (usually a landed estate) for service. The state retained title to the land, but the holder had the right to its income, generally collecting for himself from the peasants the taxes formerly owed to the state and thus reducing the income from taxes received by the state. In exchange for this income he owed service (usually

the form of a detailed “instructed speech” might be due to the fact that Venetian governors rarely, if ever, knew the local language and had to rely on interpreters to communicate. Schmitt acknowledges this reality and points out that it is, in fact, unclear as to what language patricians thought “Albanian” actually was, since the same word (“lingua”) is used to refer to any language spoken in the Balkans.⁵⁹² Unlike more prestigious embassies abroad, commissions for appointments in Albania did not include money for translators. If a governor requested funds from the Council for a translator, the Council usually granted the request, but the sourcing of an interpreter, if needed, typically fell to the governor himself.⁵⁹³ For the purpose of the Council’s record-keeping, in situations of crisis, surely no language barrier would hamper communication with powerful lords such as George Stracimirović, and therefore speeches of varying degrees of length and subtlety delivered to him were part of I-entries. But instructions of *what the signoria says* to Albanians outside the city was something left largely unrecorded. The pronoirs were experienced in fighting the Ottomans, because powerful Albanian lords recruited them for this purpose with gifts and stipends. The Ottomans understood the pronoirs’ valuable role in controlling the countryside (and thereby most of the cities’ food supply). In consequence, the Ottomans, too, tried to gain their alliance. Lack of instruction may be a sign that governors’ ventures to communicate with pronoirs was of little consequence for the state; or, perhaps, that due to a language or cultural barrier, board members did not know how to phrase these exchanges aptly. The record of interventions which mention pronoirs noted only that governors should be accompanied by local citizens and merchants to uncover the likelihood that pronoirs would accept gifts from them and agree to side with Venice, and did not provide any other direct instruction.⁵⁹⁴

After Lezhë’s governor was deemed a superfluous expense and the city became subordinated to Durrës (in January of 1399), no word was sent to Shkodra or Drisht either. For townspeople, a depopulated or hostile countryside meant that their city would be deprived of basic necessities and food supplies. Yet, the Council did not enlighten governors about how to strengthen alliances with the Albanian lords and villagers living around those cities. Recorded examples of engagement

military) to the state”: Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans*, 330. For a discussion of the “pronoia” in Albanian villages, see: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 170.

⁵⁹² Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 403. According to Schmitt, Serbian was probably spoken in northern Zeta, while Albanian may have predominated in the area below the Bojana river.

⁵⁹³ On January 9, 1399, Nicoló Polani urgently requested an interpreter in order to solve the requests of locals coming to his presence: AAV 723; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 82v.

⁵⁹⁴ This was explicitly discussed on March 9, 1400: “Verum quia est necessarium prouidere de proniarijs nostris quos habemus in partibus Scutarj et Driuasti, qui per tempora elapsa soliti erant habere prouisiones et dona a dominis suis et modo a nobis nihil habent, et sicut habetur, dicti proniarij sunt multum apti et experti contra Turchos, sed considerantes quod nullum premium habent, non curant equitare nec se exercere in factis nostris, ordinetur quod (...) scribatur comiti et capitaneo Scutarj et committatur potestati nostro Driuasti quod (...) cum illis bonis hominibus, et mercatoribus deinde debeant diligenter examinare conditiones dictorum proniariorum, et quot sunt numero, et quid videretur sibi, de dando cuiilibet dictorum proniariorum annuatim (...) ad procurandum et fatiendum nostrum honorem”: AAV 796; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 2v.

concerning villagers hint at growing tensions between the countryside and the Venetian administration, but do not detail any directives to establish communication. On March 16, 1399, the Council decided that all Albanian villagers enlisted in Venetian defense forces should be fired.⁵⁹⁵ On May 6, it was ordered that due to financial concerns, the recently-elected governor of Durrës (Gabriele Nadal) should release all but 25 horse-masters.⁵⁹⁶ As shown previously, the crusaders' defeat brought about neglect in Albania in various forms. Withdrawal of patrician governors, cutbacks in defense, an administrative policy centered on austerity, and the lack of guidelines for communicating with locals (in both the city and the countryside) were all significant factors which facilitated the countryside's rebellion against Venice.

After 1400, when news about the rebellion was received, the Council was forced to break its silence towards Albania. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the *pregadi* were willing to send a primary dispatch of infantrymen from Italy, even if this meant unwelcome spending. Yet in Shkodra, Drisht and Durrës the order to governors remained the same: to guarantee adequate appeasement of the population, no Albanians could be enlisted in Venice's ranks.⁵⁹⁷ As the year progressed, it became apparent that rebellion was not the only problem. Renewed Ottoman attacks brought increasing difficulties to these cities. The commune of Shkodra decided not to wait, and so ambassadors were dispatched to Venice.

The presence of the ambassadors caused a great deal of discussion in the Council, as evidenced by Senate entries. For this reason, it was the summer of 1400 in which the largest number of R-entries pertaining to Albanian emissaries were recorded from 1392 to 1402. The Council was unprepared to provide a response to the ambassadors. The issue was settled only a month after their arrival. On July 6, 1400, Michele Steno, Ludovico Morosini (Council Experts) and Andrea Morosini (Maritime Expert) put forward a proposal. The *prohemium* records the speakers' digest of the situation:

According to what is evident through [reports] from Durrës and Shkodra, as of lately, those cities, and particularly Shkodra and Drisht, can barely be maintained under our control due to repeated Ottoman attacks, because the Ottomans never ceased to torment them and seized food supplies from outside [the cities], who, having no other means of obtaining provisions, which could hardly be done, will soon be forced to surrender to the Ottomans, posing a big expense for our dominium. Because of this, it would be better to determine whether the governors of Shkodra and Durrës could reach an agreement with Yiğit Bey, [Bayezid's] commander in the area.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁵ AAV 732; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 92v. A similar order was given to Paolo Basilio, the new governor of Drisht, on March 18, 1400: AAV 797; Delib., *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 3v.

⁵⁹⁶ AAV 745; *Misti*, Reg. 44, f. 100r.

⁵⁹⁷ AAV 805, *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 8r; AAV 806, *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 10r. For the exact number of cavalry, infantry and crossbowmen deployed in each city, see: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 247.

⁵⁹⁸ "Quia secundum quod clare videri et considerari potest per illa que habentur de partibus Scutari et Durachij, in processu temporis ciuitates ille, et presertim ciuitas Scutari et ciuitas Driuasti, male conseruari possent sub nostro dominio, propter continuas molestias Turchorum, quia numquam cessabunt a stimulando eas et auferendo sibi victualia ab extra, propter quod non valentes eis subuenire de victualibus, quod difficiliter fieret, erit necesse quod se submittant Turchis predictis,

After the *prohemium*, the governors' strategy, as put forth by the Experts, was to rely on letters or messengers to investigate the possibility of initiating such a treaty with Yiğit Bey. This strategy was complemented with the typical phrasing used in Senate records in similar situations: the governors should be careful not to show that this was an order from the Council, but to act in the name of each particular Albanian commune (Shkodra, Drisht, Durrës and Lezhë).⁵⁹⁹ The instruction section is not worded in the usual "they should say that" manner, but it nevertheless describes the core demands the governors should present in reasonable detail: Yiğit Bey should leave the people from these territories in peace, thus allowing villagers to collect crops, enjoy the use of their lands, and guarantee the free and safe transit for merchants. In return, the communes would pay an annual fee of 2,000 ducats. Once more, the speakers reminded the governors that this negotiation should be kept secret, and arrangements done carefully so that it was not apparent that orders were coming from the *signoria*.⁶⁰⁰

The surprising element about this entry, which attests to the potential danger this issue posed for the state, is its departure from the chief recording convention of R-entries. This discussion had been triggered by the ambassadors' arrival. But the mention of the ambassadors' presence was recorded neither in the incipit (signifying that their presence was the cause of the discussion, which would be expected), nor in the decision section in the form of "it should be answered to them that" (to signal that the purpose of the deliberation was to provide an answer). Instead, the entry proceeds as an I-entry, reserving the most important part of the entry to record the proposed alliance with the Ottomans. The reference to the ambassadors' arrival and the Council's short response to them comes only at the end of the entry. According to the Experts, the *signoria* should tell them that the ambassadors will receive the help they sought, remain under the protection of Venice and, essentially, that by Christ's grace, Venice guarantees they can live and work in peace, as they did in bygone times.⁶⁰¹

cum magno onere nostri dominij. Et propterea sit melius videre et videri facere si esset modus quod rectores nostri Durachij et Scutarj possint se concordare cum Sayno Turcho, qui est capitaneus dictarum partium": AAV 821; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 21v.

⁵⁹⁹ "Vadit pars, quod committatur [receptoris nostris Durachij et Scutarj] quod super ista parte et nostra intentione, debeant insimul uel per literas uel per nuncios confere et videre si possent habere aliquem modum de fatiando tractari cum dicto Sayno, uel alio habente libertatem ad hoc nomine comunitatum nostrarum predictarum, Durachij et Scutari ac Driuasti et Lexij, non ostendendo modo aliquo quod istud fiat per nos seu nostro nomine": *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰⁰ "[Q]uod ipse dimittere debeat dictas comunitates cum subditis et comunitatinis earum et territorijs omnibus de extra in pace, (...) promittendo ipsos omnes, fructus, redditus et territoria gaudere, ita quod sint in bona pace cum eo, et quod camini sint liberi et aperti, ita quod mercatores et mercationes possint ire et redire libere et secure. Et si habebunt modum possendi facere istud concordium, et istam compositionem, sumus contenti quod ipsi possint promittere nomine dictorum comunium, usque ad quantitatem ducatorum duorum millium de introytibus deinde, quam melius poterunt, omni anno. (...) Reducendo eis ad memoriam quod ista habeant secreta apud eos, et caute ac dextre faciant, non ostendendo ullo modo fieri ab eis neque nostro nomine, neque de nostro mandato, sed per ciues suprascriptos": *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰¹ "Istis autem oratoribus Scutari qui hic sunt dicatur, quod nos prouidimus per modum quod subuentionem habebunt prefatam de victualibus, ita quod se poterunt conseruare ad nostrum honorem, de alijs autem rebus prouidebimus per modum quod cum gratia Yhesu Christi, speramus poterunt uiuere in pace et quiete, et laborare ac laborari facere, et usufructuare territoria sua, sicut fecerunt temporibus retroactis": *Ibidem*.

Although the *pregadi* devoted the day to this (no other deliberation took place on that day), Bartolomeo Contarini (Maritime Expert) proposed that this whole affair should be discussed in a subsequent meeting.⁶⁰² Contarini received majority support and the session was, therefore, adjourned. On the recess day, Contarini, together with Ludovico Loredan (Council Expert) prepared his intervention and, on October 8, it was the sole topic of discussion. The *prohemium* of Contarini and Loredan's bill does mention in the incipit the cause for the discussion (the governors' reports and the ambassadors' presence), but instead of proposing a response to them, it lists the type of assistance (in grain, money, crossbowmen and horses) which should be given —and as soon as possible.⁶⁰³ This, again, is a departure from normal recording practices. After six rounds of voting, the *pregadi*'s "talk" reached a stalemate. Nothing was approved.

The next time the Council met, on July 13, 1400, several board members presented proposals to send as few as 40 crossbowmen to as many as 130 cavalymen. Contarini and Loredan presented their motion twice, Giovanni Navagero (Head of the Council of Forty) once, Andrea Morosini and Tommaso Michiel (Maritime Experts) three times, and Iacopo Surian and Pietro Guoro (Councilors) twice. A motion by Morosini and Michiel received the support of 40 *pregadi* and was approved: discussion on this should be suspended.⁶⁰⁴ Ramberto Querini (Council expert) also proposed two motions. First, he suggested to send a messenger to George Stracimirović offering to give him back his former lands (nine *pregadi* were in favor).⁶⁰⁵ Then, after no agreement was reached regarding the number of soldiers, the *prohemium* of Querini's second intervention recorded that, if no assistance was granted to Shkodra and Drisht, these cities would perish and go to Ottoman hands. Since this was an affront to god, sixty crossbowmen should be placed in the land (not above in the castle) so that they could more easily repel any attack; only three senators supported this.⁶⁰⁶ Lastly, Ludovico Dolfin, Pietro Cauco (Councilors) and Andrea Morosini (Maritime Expert), pointed out that Eustacchio Cauco (Shkodra's new governor) had already arrived at his post. It was then a matter of days before Nicolò Polani, his predecessor, would arrive to Venice. The Council would thus be able to hear details

⁶⁰² "Vult quod istud factum inducietur ad alium consilium": *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰³ "Quia rectores nostri Scutari et Driuasti et similiter oratores dictarum comunitatum, supplicat cum magna instantia et reuerentia quod dignemur eis subuenire et prouidere de locis illis, ita quod possint conseruari ad nostrum honorem (...). Vadit pars, (...) quod ultra subuentiones (...) de blado et pecunia ac alijs rebus prouideatur quod quanto prestius esse poterit, fieri debeant lancee centum equestres (...) cum illi soldo et forma qui videbitur collegio": AAV 823; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 22r. The systematic destruction of the Shkodra fields was so extreme, not to mention the hunger which followed, that the population soon began to emigrate: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 338.

⁶⁰⁴ AAV 825; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 22r-22v.

⁶⁰⁵ "Volebat, quod mitteretur unus notarius ad dominum Georgium Stracimiri ad volendum sibi restituere loca sua": AAV 825; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 22r.

⁶⁰⁶ "Quia esset magnum onus nostri dominij, quod ciuitates Scutari et Driuasti, et alia loca que habentur in dictis partibus, propter subuentionem non datam eis per nos, perirent et irent ad manus infidelium, esset res etiam deo displicibilis quantum esse posset. (...) Vadit pars, quod quanto prestius esse poterit, apud gentes illas equestres que sunt in Scutari, mitti etiam debeant lancee XL. (...) [V]erum ex nunc ordinetur ut melius possint dicte gentes et alie que sunt deinde procurare nostrum honorem et dannum inimicorum quod decetero omnes ipse gentes stare debeant infra terram et non super castrum": AAV 825; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 22v.

of the situation from Polani's own mouth, because Eustacchio's letters had not mentioned any worrisome developments.⁶⁰⁷ However, the Council should inform the ambassadors that 2,000 *staria* of grain (a dry measure of weight) would be sent to Shkodra, so the city would suffer no shortage of food.⁶⁰⁸ A majority of 49 *pregadi* agreed to this. The ambassadors were dispatched, and the matter was set aside momentarily.

Twenty days later, on August 3, Polani's description of the situation was taken into account but only in part. Ramberto Querini proposed sending 40 crossbowmen, who should guard the land, not only the castle above it, as he had before proposed. Ludovico Loredan, on the other hand, related that, according to Polani, not even the 100 crossbowmen he wanted to send would be ample.⁶⁰⁹ Consequently, at least 40 crossbowmen should guard the castle, with 20 additional cavalrymen keeping to the land below it.⁶¹⁰ Querini's motion won, but final arrangements were ultimately decided by the Collegio, on August 13.⁶¹¹ All of the entries listed above, following the arrival of Shkodra's ambassadors in July, point to irresolution among the *pregadi*. Furthermore, they show once again that in situations wherein board members believed that delivering a response might critically compromise Venice's resources or its integrity, the R-entry did not adhere to the normal template of recording conventions.

Two months after this, on October 7, a different tactic to save Shkodra presented itself, in the form of a new proposition from a clergyman from Shkodra. Although the entry is structured in the form of a regular R-entry, its *prohemium* is much longer than the introduction section of any R-entry recorded from 1392 up to this point (1400). This may be due to the fact that the priest's proposition contained many conditions and contingencies, and thus merited a fair amount of detail in the entry, briefly:

A Franciscan master Nicolò from Shkodra came to the presence of our dominium, saying that (...) a certain Albanian lord named Koja,⁶¹² who is an Ottoman vassal, controls most of the roads used by the Ottomans to come down to Shkodra and Drisht and inflict damages there, and Koja became an Ottoman ally unwillingly, for he did so to safeguard his lands and his people (...). Now, [Koja] is willing to be part of our dominium, and in doing so he expects to

⁶⁰⁷ "Cum intimatum fuerit dominio per nobilem virum ser Heustachium Caucho, ipsum applicuisse Scutarum, propter quod est rationabile suum precessorem ser Nicolaum Polani hic debere existere de die in diem, non fit etiam mentio in literis dicti ser Heustachij de tanta extremitate dictorum locorum quanta scripta fuit. Vadit pars, quod pro omni bono respectu differi debeat de faciendo istas gentes usque ad aduentum dicti ser Nicolai qui super omnibus veniet informatus": *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰⁸ "Ambaxiatoribus autem qui hic sunt (...) dicatur quod nos prouidimus de mittendo ad partes suas staria MM frumenti, ne loca inopiam patiantur": AAV 825; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 23r.

⁶⁰⁹ "Quia per informationem que habetur a ser Nicolao Polani qui venit a regimine Scutarij et etiam ab alijs, illa quantitas gentis equestris que fieri volebat pro mittendo ad dictas partes scilicet usque ad lanceas centum non esset sufficiens ad conseruationem strate": AAV 828; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 25v.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁶¹¹ AAV 830; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 25v.

⁶¹² See "Koja Zacharia" in Robert Elsie, *A Biographical Dictionary of Albanian History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). For the role which the Catholic church played in establishing pro-Venetian rule in Zeta, see: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 572.

attract another lord called Dhimitër Jonima, who is Koja's vassal and also a powerful lord, with [his] people and roads, in the following way: [Koja] is offering to gather an army of as many as a thousand people [together with Jonima], which would be fought in combat by our people, so that many of them will be taken captive or killed, and after this, with their territories and roads, they will be placed under the protection of our dominium.⁶¹³

The lords were willing to suffer casualties in this "battle," possibly in order to deceive the Ottomans about who was attacking, thus making them believe that this combat was initiated by Venice. More details were then recorded about the priest's plan and what would be fair to offer to the Albanians in compensation, but the Experts' general opinion was that these lords' backing was indispensable if Venice were to maintain control over the countryside.⁶¹⁴ The response section is also lengthy but, in short, it states that the Council should reply that, "having plentiful confidence in [the priest's] words and wisdom," he should meet the governor of Shkodra (whom the Council would update about this situation) and then initiate arrangements with Koja.⁶¹⁵ Only five days later, though, Pietro Guoro (Councilor) disclosed to the *pregadi* the news that Timur and Bayezid were gathering armies to fight each other. Guoro also pointed out that intelligence had been received indicating that Koja left Albania and was already on his way to join Bayezid, and so the matter should be put aside.⁶¹⁶ A majority of *pregadi* disagreed with Cauco (30 in favor, 37 against), hoping the plan would stand. But given that Bayezid had indeed already summoned Koja, the negotiation was stopped in its tracks.⁶¹⁷

Although there are no I-entries during this period, the structure of Albanian R-entries covered in this section reveals a considerable change in Venice's attentiveness to Albania. After the Ottomans' victory in Nikopol, silence followed. Adherence to the normal template of R-entries and approval of responses which did not record disagreement both show that the issues raised by Albanian ambassadors did not cause Council members to perceive that Albania was at the center of state

⁶¹³ "Cum comparauerit ad presentiam dominj magister Nicolaus de Scutaro ordinis minorum, dicens quod (...) cuiusdam domini Albanensis, qui nominatur Coia, et est subiectus Turcho, ac habet maiorem partem passuum per quos Turchi descendunt et veniunt ad danna nostra partium nostrarum Scutarij et Driuastij ac aliarum partium deinde, male libenter adhesit dicto Turcho, sed istud fecit pro saluatione sua et locorum suorum ac subditorum eius, (...) et esset contentus adherere nostro dominio, et hoc faciendo sperat reducere alium dominum, qui dicitur Dimitrius Jonima suum attinentem in illis partibus etiam potentem et gentibus et passibus in hunc modum, qui se offert procurare et tenere modum quod una bona quantitas, et dicit ad numerum fortasse mille confligentur a nostris, cum suis et suis artibus, ita quod in magna parte erunt capti et mortui, quo facto postea cum locis suis et passibus suis, se reducet et stabit sub protectione nostra et in nostra beniuolentia": AAV 846; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 36r. It is also possible, as in Schmitt's opinion, that Koja's sole purpose was to stay out of Bayezid's war against Timur: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 248.

⁶¹⁴ "Quibus consideratis, consideratoque etiam quod cum magna expensa, quam facimus et facturi sumus in illis partibus, non possemus sine auxilio istius domini implere nostram intentionem scilicet conseruare contratam": *Ibidem*.

⁶¹⁵ "Vadit pars, quod respondeatur eidem quod dantes satis largam fidem verbis suis, et in sapientia sua maxime confidentes (...), sumus contenti quod (...) sit cum rectore nostro Scutarij quem reddemus prouisum de omnibus que nobis dixit (...), et postea se conferat ad dominum Coyam suprascriptum": *Ibidem*.

⁶¹⁶ "[E]tiam quia sentitur quod dominus Coia Albanensis ad quem frater Nicolaus de Scutaro secundum quod pridie captum fuit debet ire, non est in partibus deinde, sed iuit ad Turchum, bonum est supersedere et suspendere viam suam": AAV 847; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 37r.

⁶¹⁷ Gelcich, *La Zedda*, 211.

priorities. After Stracimirović's thorny offering of Shkodra to Venice in December, 1395, several years went by before another Albanian embassy likewise caused similarly fierce debate. By July of 1400, Albanians decided to break Venice's silence. Having suffered through the countryside's rebellion, the people of Shkodra could endure no more of the Ottoman assaults which had left them on the edge of famine. The commune sent ambassadors to Venice to seek relief. Senate records of responses to them show the board members' conflicting points of view. More importantly, they reveal a delicate state matter: the *signoria* faced the dilemma of choosing between pacts with the Ottomans or with Albanian lords. The revelation that Bayezid and Timur would fight each other in battle altered the Council's calculations and any decision about potential pacts had to wait. Venice became more confident about its control over Albanian territories, but the hope that Bayezid was no longer a threat proved to be premature.

Venice's Say in a Changing World (1401-1402)

Almost two years after the countryside's rebellion, Albanian cities began to resume communication with Venice, which was recorded without the previous year's signs of alarm. In the remaining two years covered in this study, Lezhë was the only city which sent no more embassies to Venice. Progon Dukagjini, who had repeatedly asked for financial assistance from Venice, relinquished his share of the Lezhë castle's income by selling it to Giovanni Barbo. On April 18, 1401, Barbo received the Council's approval to hire his own accountant for the handling of the castle's finances.⁶¹⁸

On February 18, 1401, the Council received the previously mentioned urgent message reporting that George Stracimirović had been misappropriating Shkodra's salt. The *pregadi* voted that Shkodra's governor should make a formal complaint to him.⁶¹⁹ Ambassadors from Stracimirović arrived three months later, on May 19, 1401. The *prohemium* of this R-entry summarizes the opinion of the seven Experts⁶²⁰ who proposed the motion:

The lord George Stracimirović sent his embassy to the presence of our dominium and, with very humble and deferent words, he is pleading innocent. But [his words] contain little truth, particularly about the issue regarding our salt, because it cannot be denied that his men illicitly took possession of Shkodra's salt, transported it to Ulcinj, and sold it there; also, if truth can be obtained, he will be found guilty of the damages and incursions carried out by Ottoman in Shkodra. He is also denying the [accusation] that he refused to answer our governor's letters,

⁶¹⁸ AAV 866; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 67v. After this, the Barbo family went on to form a "dynasty" in Lezhë, whereby the family controlled an important part of the local economy: Schmitt, *Das venezianische Albanien*, 371–73.

⁶¹⁹ See Chapter 4, p. 110.

⁶²⁰ Benedetto Soranzo, Giovanni Mocenigo, Pietro Pisani and Zaccaria Trevisan (Council Experts) and Bartolomeo Loredan, Ermolao Barbaro and Santo Venerio (Maritime Experts).

and instead he says that he always answered them, which is not true. For these reasons, a response to the ambassadors should be given in a way that it preserves our honor.⁶²¹

According to the Experts, Stracimirović only had one option, to pay Venice back for what had been stolen to a degree that Venice would consider it a sufficient compensation.⁶²² A majority of 60 *pregadi* agreed with the Experts, but the issue did not disappear without controversy. The Experts (except for Santo Venerio) went one step further. Three months earlier, these Experts had attempted to convince the *pregadi* that these lands should be returned to Stracimirović.⁶²³ Now, that idea was presented again. To accomplish it, their proposition was recorded following the Council's usual wording: the governor should pretend that he was acting of his own accord and uncover whether Stracimirović was willing to take them back.⁶²⁴ But once more, the *pregadi* refused to approve this (51 opposed, 21 were in favor, and 2 remained silent).

On August 4, 1401, Maritime Experts presented a request from a priest from Drisht, who had arrived as the commune's ambassador. The previous year, Venice had sent a patrician governor to Drisht. As a result, the Council could now redirect the ambassador's demands to the governor there, as was the Experts' general suggestion.⁶²⁵ A few days after the arrival of this first embassy, Pietro Spano, also from Drisht, approached the *signoria* to ask Venice to settle the dispute between the people from Drisht and Shkodra. When Stracimirović was lord, he gave away lands belonging to Spano's father to a man called Jonima from Shkodra. This was not an isolated case. Stracimirović also gave away lands owned by "Drivastini" to people from Shkodra; those transfers had been ill-received in Drisht. In response, Giorgio Cappello and Ermolao Barbaro (Maritime Experts) proposed that Stracimirović had done this while he enjoyed complete authority over these lands. Therefore, Venice had no right to change that ruling.⁶²⁶ In October that year, an embassy from Durrës arrived,

⁶²¹ "Cum magnificus dominus Georgius Stracimiri miserit suam ambassiatam ad presentiam domini, per quam cum verbis valde humilibus et reuerentibus se excusat (...), que tamen in se modicam continent veritatem, maxime de facto salis nostri, quia negare non potest quod depredatus non fuerit per suos conductus Dulcignum, et ibi venditus ita etiam si posset haberi bene veritas inueniretur culpabilis de dannis et incursionibus factis per Turchos, in patria Scutari (...). Negat etiam illam partem que sibi dicta fuit, quod nunquam voluit respondere literis rectoris nostri, ymo dicit semper respondisse et hoc non est verum, propter quam causam est danda oratoribus responsio que conseruare habeat nostrum honorem": AAV 875; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 80v.

⁶²² "Et propterea credimus esse bonum et debitum quod ipse teneat talem modum, et faciat nobis talem emendam et satisfactionem de predictis quod ipse satisfiat [sic] bene debito, et honori suo, et quod nos habeamus causam remanendi bene contenti": AAV 875; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 81r.

⁶²³ See Chapter 4, p. 110.

⁶²⁴ "Et propterea volumus et mandamus [capitano Scutari], quod ostendendo facere a se solo et sine nostra licentia uel mandato, det operam per illas cautas et dexteras vias quas bene sciet reperire, ad sciendum de mente et intentione [Georgio Stracimiri] et si ad istud attendit, et si ilia loca vellet rehabere": AAV 876; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 81r.

⁶²⁵ AAV 892; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 95r.

⁶²⁶ "Vadit pars, quod similiter respondeatur et dicatur isti Petro Spano videlicet quod sicut ipse et alij fideles nostris deinde sciunt dominus Georgius Stracimiri, qui erat dominus suus et dictorum locorum, ac de ipsis et territorijs et possessionibus suis poterat disponere, ut sibi placebat tempore sui domini, accepit et dedit possessiones illas et territoria predicta, dicto Scutarensi, et propterea non videtur nobis quod possimus aliquam prouisionem superinde facere, cum hoc factum non fuerit tempore nostri domini, sed tempore quo dominus Georgius dominabatur dictis locis" (August 18, 1401): AAV 899; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 99r. For more details about this border dispute, see: Božić, "Le système foncier en 'Albanie vénitienne' au XVe siècle," 97.

as usual, to request Venice's final decision in the commune's affairs, which the Maritime Experts presented to the *pregadi*.⁶²⁷ The ambassadors were concerned that the Ottomans (or any other hostile party) would resume attacks against the city, yet the Experts were confident that any danger would be successfully handled by Durrës's governor.⁶²⁸ Stracimirović sent yet another embassy to Venice denying that he had committed any wrongdoing. On November 17, all the Council and Maritime Experts agreed on a response: that the *signoria* was certain that Venice's governors wrote the truth about the matter and it was pointless for Stracimirović to keep denying it. However, since it was the principle of Venice to seek love and affection from its friends, "and given that the ambassadors affirmed that Stracimirović heartily loved Venice," the solution was self-evident: once Stracimirović repaid the cost of salt stolen by his subjects, he would again obtain the 1,000 ducat allowance which Venice had agreed to give him.⁶²⁹ On March 3, 1402, the Council decided that 1,500 ducats was sufficient retribution. This amount would be deducted from Stracimirović's allowance.⁶³⁰ The ambassadors agreed, and arrangements for their departure were made that same day.⁶³¹ Each of these entries followed the normal template of R-entries and did not record opposing motions.

During these years, affairs at sea kept the Captain of the Gulf busy, and the Council sent instructions to him regularly, but none were related to Albanian cities or lords. Uncertainty at sea also led the Council to offer regular instructions to governors in Coron, Modon and other Greek territories regarding *what the signoria says*. Entries recording decisions on Albania sent to governors through correspondence contained only orders and strategies for them, no instructions.

As shown previously, 1401 was a year of expectation for Venice. The news that Timur was going to war against the Ottomans created excitement, but their optimism was premature. As late as January 5, 1402, the Council still believed that there was danger enough for Venice's maritime possessions, including Durrës, to be attacked by Bayezid's forces.⁶³²

⁶²⁷ (October 31, 1401): AAV 915; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 116v-118r.

⁶²⁸ "Et in casu quo exercitus Turchorum uel alicuius alterius persone, in magno numero esset venturus ad danna ciuitatis et territorij ac fidelium nostrorum Durachij, quod subito cum sciuerit de aduentu et apparatu dicti exercitus Turchorum, uel subditorum Turchorum uel alicuius alterius, debeat notificare et reddere prouisum baiulum et capitaneum nostrum Durachij": AAV 915; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 117r.

⁶²⁹ "Quod respondeatur ambasiatoribus domini Georgij Stracimirj Dulcignj etc. Ad excusationem et denegationem quas faciunt de sale derobato per subditos ipsius domini Georgij secundum protestationem, (...) [quod] sumus etiam certissimi quod nostri rectores et preteriti et presentes scripserunt et informauerunt nos de ueritate, ita quod in talibus non est fatiendum aliquod dubium, nec acceptanda aliqua excusatio. Sed nos sequentes vestigia nostrorum progenitorum qui semper fuerunt benignj et nil aliud quesierunt ab amicis circaicinis suis nisi amorem et dilectionem (...), et audiendo quantum ipsi ambasiatores affirmant quod sua magnificentia cordialiter diligit nos et honorem nostrum, (...) quod emendam et satisfactionem salis nostri derobati per suos subditos, (...) inueniet non paratos obseruare et adimplere circa factum sue prouisionis mille ducatorum annuatim secundum quod promissimus et continetur in forma pactorum": AAV 919; *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 119v.

⁶³⁰ "Vadit pars, quod dicatur et respondeatur eisdem quod (...) sumus contenti quod ipse dominus suus (...) saluere et emendare nobis debeat solum (...) summam ducatorum Mv.^c defalcandam de sua prouisione": AAV 937; *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 1r.

⁶³¹ AAV 938; *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 2v.

⁶³² See Chapter 4, p. 114.

In March, 1401, ambassadors from every Italian city involved in Visconti's war began arriving at the ducal palace to present their pleas. These were not Venice's sole visitors. In 1401, ambassadors sent by the Duke William of Austria, the newly elected King Rupert of Germany, the deposed Wenceslaus, Ladislaus of Naples, and emissaries from Zadar (whose control some *pregadi* longed to recover⁶³³), Pag and Split all came to Venice. Entries following these visits were recorded in the book of secret deliberations. More often than not, heated discussion preceded the delivery of a response, for several proposals were typically presented to the *pregadi*.

In many cases, the issues these embassies presented were considered of such great consequence to Venice's future that discussion about *what the signoria says* (or "should" say) was suspended altogether. For example, on October 14, 1401, after several rounds of voting, they still could not decide how to reply to Rupert's ambassadors (because the king had just arrived at Italy). Consequentially, Ramberto Querini reminded the *pregadi* that "night was the mother of advice," and therefore they should suspend discussion and instead rely on nocturnal reflection to reach sound opinion.⁶³⁴

Foreign ambassadors came and went from Venice's ducal palace regularly. R-entries, by definition, recorded affairs relating to foreign policy in the form of pacts, trade concessions, special favors, etc. By 1402, the *signoria* continued to receive emissaries from neighboring communes requesting, for example, the waiver of custom duties, a grant of space for freight in merchant galleys, or the courtesy of transporting them as pilgrims to the holy land. Venice's decisive trade expansion into north Africa, and as far as the Red Sea, attracted visitors from those lands, who brought with them leopards and other "exotic" gifts.⁶³⁵ By 1402, *what the signoria says* had become central to the Council's proceedings. A total of seven R-entries was recorded in 1392, but ten years later that number had increased more than thirteen times. A more astonishing increase is shown in the number of R-entries containing strictly confidential issues. These entries, recorded in the secret *Deliberazioni*, reveal that Venice's status was linked to international politics as never before. Thus, it is remarkable that within ten years alone, R-entries in the *secreti* grew 24 times more plentiful. These deliberations concerned emissaries of foreign rulers presenting issues of crucial political machinations for Venice's rule. Albanian communes were not among them.

⁶³³ *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 41r-42r.

⁶³⁴ "Quia ista negocia sunt ardua et ponderosa, et requirunt bonam deliberationem, que captari potet ex nocturnis cogitationibus, cum nox sit consilij mater. Vadit pars, quod ista responsio suspendatur" (October 14, 1401): *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 26r.

⁶³⁵ "Cum dominus Jacobus Prestozane dominus Indie sancti thome nobis miserit aliqua exenia, inter que sint quator leopardi satis pulcrim" (June 21, 1402): *Misti*, Reg. 46, f. 28v. See also: Matteo Salvatore, "The Ethiopian Age of Exploration: Prester John's Discovery of Europe, 1306-1458," *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (2010): 605-6.

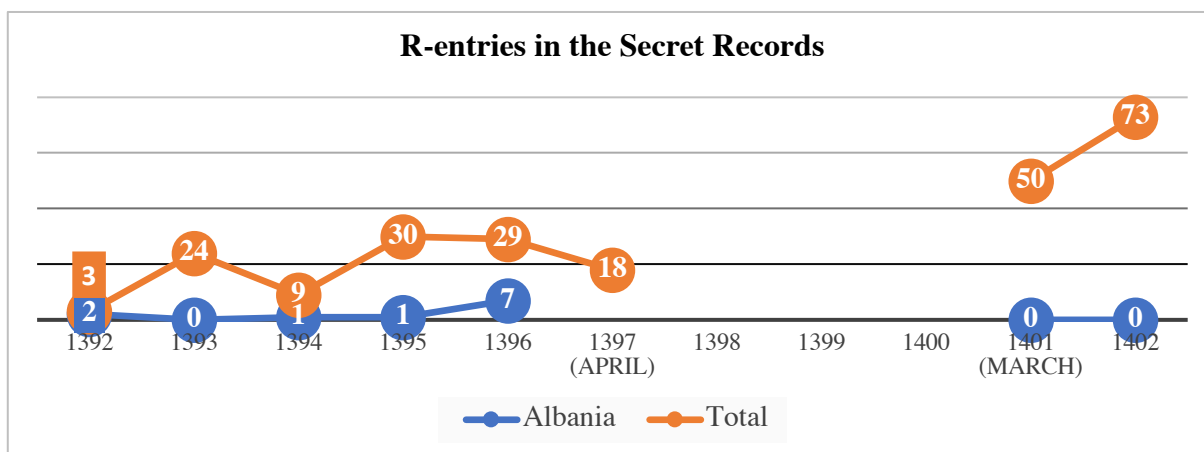


Chart 4. R-entries in the *Secreti*

Rupert, whose ambassadors had appeared in front of the *signoria* almost daily, failed in his attempts to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the pope and also in defeating Visconti. He returned to Germany, penniless, in April, 1402.⁶³⁶ Bologna's ambassadors requested help from Venice on a near-daily basis. This reply from June 1, 1402, (in response to a letter from Giovanni Bentivoglio, Bologna's lord) summarizes the reasons the Council generally cited in response to ambassadors from Italian communes requesting armed forces from Venice:

It should be replied to him that we love him dearly, but the truth is that our city is maintained chiefly through sea men, citizens, and soldiers who accompany and row our galleys, vessels and other ships, and if we lack these men, our city will perish, because we live solely from the labor and practice of sailing the sea.⁶³⁷

Other board members rejected this approach and were in favor of sending infantrymen to support Bologna and Florence. Week after week, the debate continued, but ultimately the first approach prevailed.

With Visconti's attacks intensifying and the Venetians still in the dark about Bayezid's fortune, ambassadors from Ladislaus suddenly arrived in Venice. On August 3, 1402, a group of Experts presented the ambassadors' requests, which were recorded in the normal template of R-entries.⁶³⁸ The ambassadors came with two primary proposals. First, an alliance; according to the Experts, it should be said that "due to many reasonable and honest causes, we do not see that we

⁶³⁶ The Council regretted that he had no money to return, but it nevertheless denied him the 12,000 ducat loan he was requesting (April 13, 1402): *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 55v.

⁶³⁷ "Vadit pars, quod respondeatur eidem quod (...) cordialiter amamus (...), sed veritas est quod ciuitas nostra principaliter conseruatur cum hominibus et ciuibus nostris marinarij et ballistarijs qui vandunt et conducunt galeas, naues et alia nauigia nostra, et deficientibus illis cito ciuitas nostras deficeret, quia vivimus solummodo de misterio et exercitio nauigandi": *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 64r.

⁶³⁸ Ludovico Loredan, Ludovico Morosini, Giovanni Mocenigo, Ramberto Querini and Zaccaria Trevisan (Council Experts), and Leonardo Vitturi and Bartolomeo Contarini (Maritime Experts).

should take part in it.”⁶³⁹ Second, the ambassadors, having the king’s authority, offered a proposal about Corfu. To this, the Experts proposed:

It should be replied that we would be pleased to hear what they have to say about the king’s intention, as long as [the ambassadors] have the king’s mandate about [Corfu] in a complete and appropriate way.⁶⁴⁰

The Experts suggested the Collegio meet the ambassadors to obtain more details, and then present the acquired information to the *pregadi*. There were no opposing bills. From the way the entry was recorded, there was no visible controversy in the Council about the response proposed by the Experts: the *pregadi* wished to avoid involvement in yet another war, but they were keen on hearing more about Corfu. Five days later, all Council and Maritime Experts provided details about the encounter with the ambassadors:

When the ambassadors of King Ladislaus heard the answer we gave them according to what had been decided in this Council, they replied that they intended to have a declaration from us, for if [the king] went to war against the lands and people from Dalmatia and the kingdom of Hungary, which were wrongfully occupied [by Sigismund], as he intended to do, [the ambassadors wanted to know] if we would oppose him or rather provide help, and they mentioned again the alliance they wanted to have with us.⁶⁴¹

Three different suggestions were put forward by board members. Although they all agreed that Venice should steer clear from conflict with Sigismund, there was disagreement about the tone of the response and how to phrase the “no” to the declaration the ambassadors wanted. The three suggestions could be summarized as follows: Donato Moro, Ludovico Morosini and Giovanni Mocenigo (Council Experts) proposed that the *signoria*’s previous response should satisfy the ambassadors, and they should not expect any other declaration.⁶⁴² They received 75 votes in favor. A response by Ramberto Querini (Council Expert) and Leonardo Vitturi (Maritime Expert) suggested that the king should be content with the *signoria*’s previous response, for no other declaration could be given without damage to Venice and its people.⁶⁴³ Thirty-five *pregadi* agreed with them. Lastly, Bartolomeo Contarini and Barbono Morosini (Council Experts) proposed to say that, after thoughtful consideration, it did not seem to the Council that, to this request, something different could be replied

⁶³⁹ “[P]ropter plures rationabiles et honestas causas, non videtur nobis de attendendo ad ligam predictam”: AAV 973; *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 71r.

⁶⁴⁰ “Respondeatur quod (...) sumus contenti, in casu quo mandatum suum, quod habere dicunt super dictis factis, sit in plena et expediendi forma, audire illa que dicere voluerint de intentione dicti domini regis”: *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴¹ “Cum oratores domini Regis Ladislai, audita responsione pridie eis data secundum quod deliberatum fuerat in isto consilio, habuerunt dicere et replicare (...) tamen libenter vellet habere declarationem a nobis, si guerrizante eodem terras Dalmatie, et Dalmatinos et similiter regnum Hungarie, que sibi indebite occupantur, sicut erat dispositus facere, nostra dominatio se impediret de dictis factis uel daret eis aliquam subuentionem uel fauorem tangendo et faciendo iterum mentionem de facto lige, quam requisiiuit uelle habere nobiscum etc.”: AAV 974; *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 71r.

⁶⁴² “[Quod] nostram responsionem consideramus debere satis sufficere dicto domino suo, quia ita inueniet per nos fieri per effectum, nec aliam declarationem debet a nobis uelle”: *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 71r.

⁶⁴³ “[Q]uod dominus rex per responsionem quam pridie eis dedimus (...) satis sufficere sibi debet, quia aliam declarationem sine maximo preiudicio et danno nostro ac nostrorum sibi in presenti facere non possemus”: *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 71v.

to the king, besides what the *signoria* had previously said to him. Three *pregadi* supported this last suggestion.⁶⁴⁴

Two days after this, on August 10, the *pregadi* heard about the Collegio's negotiation regarding Corfu. Board members presented two proposals for the *pregadi* to decide on the matter. The first, by five Council Experts,⁶⁴⁵ reads that:

When the negotiators met King Ladislaus' ambassadors, according to the commission made for them by the dominium, the [negotiators] offered the sum of 20,000 ducats to the king in exchange for Corfu, but by no means [the ambassadors] were willing to agree, saying that under no circumstance they could accept less than 30,000 ducats. It poses no advantage to our status to leave this issue half-done, and allow that it goes without agreement. It is proposed that the Collegio should have the liberty to agree with the ambassadors' request of 30,000 ducats.⁶⁴⁶

This discussion came as consequence of the embassy's proposal, but the ruling about the *signoria*'s final pronouncement was not recorded as a "normal" R-entry. Instead of recording the content of a response to the ambassadors, the decision section proposes what should be done, not said. A second proposal, by Leonardo Vitturi, Bartolomeo Contarini and Barbono Morosini (Maritime Experts) contains the reason why this issue might bring difficulties for Venice. This second entry proceeded as follows:

Given that it is blatantly known that King Ladislaus intends to have enough money in order to carry out his intentions against the kingdom of Hungary and the Dalmatians, and how much could result in our own damage if [Ladislaus] has Dalmatia in his hands, is [something] evident to all. And thus, from our side, after we show our favorable disposition regarding the pact about Corfu in a sufficient manner, we then excuse ourselves on reasonable grounds, [and] considering this, it is wise not to make this the opportunity for him to achieve his goal with our money. It is proposed, that after [the ambassadors] say that they do not have the liberty to [accept] less than 30,000 ducats, so that the king sees our disposition, we are pleased that if, within four months, a lawful person comes with enough authority [to accept] the 20,000 ducats we promised for the island, he will find our dominium firm in our promise to pay 20,000 ducats.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁴ "[Q]uod multis consideratis non videtur nobis debere isti tali petitioni aliter respondere, nisi quod ipse dominus rex de responsione pridie eis facta": *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴⁵ Pietro Corner, Ludovico Loredan, Ludovico Morosini, Giovanni Mocenigo and Zaccaria Trevisan.

⁶⁴⁶ "Cum tractatores deputati istis oratoribus domini Regis Ladislau, secundum commissionem sibi factam per dominium fuerint cum eis, et ad partem ad partem [sic] condescenderint ad summam ducatorum XX millia dandorum dicto domino regi pro insula Corphoy, ad quam sive de qua nullo modo voluerunt esse contenti, dicendo et affirmando quod nullo modo possunt condescendere ad minorem summam quam XXX millia ducatorum, et nullo modo faciat pro statu nostro relinquere istud factum imperfectum, et permittere quod recedant sine concordio. Vadit pars, quod collegium (...) habeat libertatem condescendendi cum eis usque ad dictam summam XXX millia ducatorum": *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 71v.

⁶⁴⁷ "Cum clare cognoscatur quod serenissimus dominus Rex Ladislaus procuret habere pecuniam ad sufficientiam cum qua possit exequi facta sua contra regnum Hungarie et Dalmatinos, et quantum possit cedere ad damnum nostrum si haberet Dalmatiam in manibus suis omnibus satis patet, ita quod postquam pro parte nostra ostensa est satis nostra bona dispositio in conventionione fienda de dicta insula Corphoy, et sumus rationabiliter excusati, sapiens res est consideratis predictis non esse causa, quod possit pervenire ad intentionem suam cum nostra pecunia. Vadit pars, postquam (...) dicunt non habere libertatem nisi de XXX millia ducatis, adhuc ut dictus dominus rex videat bonam voluntatem nostram, sumus contenti et placet nobis, quod si infra quatuor menses proxime futuros venerit persona legitima cum sufficienti mandato

Eighty-six *pregadi* supported the Council Experts in surrendering to the embassy's terms, while nineteen sided with the three Maritime Experts; thirteen did not cast their ballot. In 1386, Venice had convinced the people from Corfu to submit to Venice, and this had marked the beginning of a phase of Venice's expansion.⁶⁴⁸ In 1401, Venice purchased military control of the island from Ladislaus, but Venice still lacked formal sovereignty. Formal acquisition was in the state's utmost interest. Therefore, it is no surprise that these entries did not follow the normal template in recording ambassadorial responses of little consequence. The formal pact of acquisition was signed in only six days, on August 16, 1402. Within weeks of signing the pact, the Council learned that both Visconti and Bayezid were no longer threats. Therefore, Venice found itself in full possession of an island which, located at the entrance of the Adriatic, was of paramount importance for both defense and mercantile reasons. What more could Venice ask for?

Concluding Remarks

Within the Council's records, *what the signoria says* was Venice's official voice, delivered and enforced with the approval of the body of *pregadi*. In the Senate, some affairs of foreign policy could have a dramatic impact on Venice's dominion. Likewise, discussions on how to proceed in light of those affairs sometimes spanned considerable periods, and inside the Council's inner circle there could be confrontations of opinion and strategy. Secretaries recorded acts of speech as coming from the *signoria* in order to signify that the entry contained matters of such state importance. Entries containing *what the signoria says* were consistently organized following conventions associated with the type of utterance that they involved: direct responses to ambassadors in Venice (R-entries) and instructed responses to patricians to address lords abroad (I-entries).

Not all embassies arriving at Venice presented issues which compromised state power. Unremarkable requests were recorded following a standard template. Whenever issues created controversy among board members, the records preserved those divergent opinions, generally to a standard template. Yet if an ambassadorial request confronted Venice with a critical decision, recording practices marked its importance by pointing out the emissaries' presence, but otherwise departed from the standard template. Recording practices *could have* erased all traces of disagreement among board members and recorded all responses to foreign ambassadors according to the same entry structure. The fact that such was not the case implies a purposeful desire to codify and preserve the

et libertate circa quantitatem XX millia ducatorum promissorum pro predicta insula, inveniet nostrum dominium perseverare in promissione quam fecimus de dictis XX millia ducatorum": *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 72r.

⁶⁴⁸ O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, 23.

importance the Council had assigned to a given response, upon the Council's hearing of it from ambassadors.

The varying structure of entries which allowed to record degrees of importance was not a commentary on the place (in relation to its "peripheric" or "central" location), but referred to the importance of the proposal as such. Consequently, I have analyzed recorded responses to Albanian embassies according to the manner in which they were recorded. Although Albania was not a major political actor, entries reveal that in 1396 and 1400, embassies from Albanian cities posed critical decisions for the state. For the most part, I have eschewed commentaries about the tone of Venice's response to Albanian demands because in its responses Venice abided by the tone of political decorum, not by record-keeping practices.

Within I-entries, lengthy speeches containing *what the signoria says* likewise signified state matters of consequence and they were not recorded lightly. These instructions were sent to Venetian emissaries through correspondence and thus resolve such difficult issue more quickly. Given that events taking place in Albania became less important in the eyes of the Council after 1396, sending detailed instructions to personnel stationed in Albania or traveling there was not a priority for the *signoria*.

Official recording practices are consistently employed within Senate records, and I focused my attention on Albania because the political upheaval in Albanian cities from 1392 until 1402 is fertile ground to illustrate the Council's record-keeping practices alongside the historical evolution of Venice's control of those territories. While doing so, I also examined responses and instructions relating to issues involving the kings of France, England, Aragon and Hungary, the communes of Bologna, Ravenna, Florence, Ferrara, Padua and Milan, powerful lords in Bosnia, Serbia and Cairo, and smaller cities in Dalmatia and Istria, among others. On the basis of the recording conventions I have uncovered, further research will be able to describe other highlights of ambassadorial activity and "instructed speeches" to which the *pregadi* assigned particular importance.

Chapter 6. Antonio Morosini, the Witness

This chapter is an epilogue in which I wish to express that Senate records had a resonance which ventured beyond the closed and secretive rooms in which the *pregadi* met. Antonio Morosini (c. 1365–1433) or, according to the dialectal form he employed, Antonio Morexin,⁶⁴⁹ was a contemporary to the developments described in the previous chapters. Although he was not part of Venice’s state administration, he belonged to one of Venice’s most important patrician families and indirectly witnessed the significance that Council discussions posed for the Venice he knew. As consequence, he created his own interpretation of the “talk” of the *pregadi*. Which is to say that, although he narrated some of same events which the *pregadi* considered of utmost importance, he described them through use of his own emotions, judgment and literary craft. This chapter does not intend to provide an answer to the question of which specific sources he employed to describe the period from 1392 to 1402, but rather it highlights that the conventions described in my previous chapters were recognized for their intrinsic importance by the records’ contemporaries.

I wish to emphasize that Morosini’s *Diary* has not received the same attention as later exponents of the genre. This is due, in part, to the fact that the manuscript passed unnoticed for nearly four centuries. In the eighteenth century, scholars began to acknowledge the *Diary*’s enormous value, although the manuscript remained difficult to access. Such hindrance is now in the past. Nanetti’s publication of the critical edition of the entire text will allow scholars to address, in detail, some of the questions I raise in this final chapter.⁶⁵⁰ Although I emphasize Morosini’s role as a contemporary curator of events, rather than as author, I hope future research will examine whether the “talk” of the *pregadi* surfaced alongside Morosini’s own voice in later sections of his *Diary* as much as it surfaces in the section I will present.

Given the number of homophonic names among the Venetians, the events of Morosini’s life can only remain hypothetical. Presumably, he was born around 1365 or 1368, and “an” Antonio Morosini entered the Great Council on December 4, 1388, suggesting that he was then between twenty-three and twenty-five years old.⁶⁵¹ As Nanetti indicates, Marco Foscarini, who can be credited with bringing Morosini’s text out of the shadows, is also the main source of the biographical information attributable to Morosini with fair certainty. While a resolution of the Council of Ten attests to Morosini’s (unwelcome) activity as a historian, a passage in the *Diary* reveals that Morosini, the author of the work in question, was still an active writer in 1433, the year of his death. He was

⁶⁴⁹ “E dapuo in lo dito dy x predito [July 10, 1433], noto fazo mi Ant° Morexin fo de miser Marcho aver vezudo moite letere” (fol. 604 A.), quoted in: Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Étude sur Morosini*, 105.

⁶⁵⁰ Nanetti, *Il Codice Morosini: il mondo visto da Venezia (1094-1433)*, 4 vols.

⁶⁵¹ Lefèvre-Pontalis, 120.

the son of Marco Morosini, and had two nephews (Benedetto and Lorenzo, sons of Giusto Morosini) and a sister, married to Francesco Corner.⁶⁵²

At the turn of the fourteenth century, there was demand for a new form of historiography. Historical writing during this period has been described as looking at the chronicles of Dandolo and Rafaino Caresini for role models. In this sense, they are said to disregard stylistic considerations and instead use a language which mirrored the seriousness of the high offices their authors held.⁶⁵³ But for Morosini, a historically-minded patrician absorbed in Venice's political developments, those chronicles lost significance. The "old" form of history writing had been partly motivated, as Gaeta suggests, by the need to train the government and administrative staff in a convenient manner to the increasingly demanding tasks that it was called upon to carry out.⁶⁵⁴ Morosini gradually left behind those chronicles' role models and began to describe Venice in his own words. Nanetti located Morosini's transition from a chronicle-style narrative to that of later Venetian diaries in the last pages of Michele Steno's *dogado*; in those pages, Morosini announced news via differing sources, departing in this way from the linear succession of events which was typical of chronicles.⁶⁵⁵ Such re-invention of the form resulted in providing new ways to record the present and to give coherence to the never-ending reports and news that flooded the ducal palace. The increasing complexity of power relations with other Italian states, the rest of Europe, and the Middle East gave content to those news and reports, yet also to personal feelings whose historicity men like Morosini felt worthy of preservation.

As it stands today, the original manuscript is composed in one long section, transcribed in a continuous stream, from the beginning of the work until 1413/14. After 1414, and until the last pages (the last entry is dated July 10, 1433), a second section is composed of a series of successive writings. This second section does not seem to come from one period of transcription, but the result of multiple stages of writing stretched out over a considerably longer period, at more or less lengthy intervals.⁶⁵⁶ The differences between these two parts have been explained by hypothesizing that "the manuscript is a copy, what might be called a back-up copy, of an original which has now been lost."⁶⁵⁷ This theory is supported by a decision of the Council of Ten in 1418, which ordered Morosini to hand over for inspection his "duos libros quos nominat cronicas."⁶⁵⁸ Shortly thereafter, the Ten commanded that:

⁶⁵² Nanetti, "Per uno studio," 1729. The absence of autobiographical specifications is a common feature of Venetian chroniclers, yet Nanetti reconstructs more details on the Morosini family associated with our author: Nanetti, 1730–32.

⁶⁵³ Gaeta, "Storiografia, coscienza nazionale e politica culturale," 6.

⁶⁵⁴ Gaeta, 26.

⁶⁵⁵ Nanetti, 1728.

⁶⁵⁶ Lefèvre-Pontalis, 29–30; Michele Pietro Ghezzi, John Melville-Jones, and Andrea Rizzi, eds., *The Morosini Codex: Marino Falier to Antonio Venier (1354 - 1400)*, vol. 2 (Padua: Unipress, 2000), viii; Nanetti, "Per uno studio," 1723–34.

⁶⁵⁷ Ghezzi, Melville-Jones, and Rizzi, *The Morosini Codex*, 2: viii. They add: "If he was copying his own work, this may explain why it was thought that he was working on more than one chronicle." Nanetti agreed with this, for he asserts that it is likely that Morosini made a safety copy of his manuscript before delivering it to the Ten: Nanetti, "Per uno studio," 1726.

⁶⁵⁸ *Misti* 52, 184r, quoted in: Michele Pietro Ghezzi, John Melville-Jones, and Andrea Rizzi, eds., *The Morosini Codex: To the Death of Andrea Dandolo (1354)*, vol. 1 (Padua: Unipress, 1999), xix.

“some of the pages of the books of Messer Antonio Morosini in which there are noted certain matters causing scandal are to be burned.”⁶⁵⁹

As many chroniclers before him, Morosini relied on the abundance of Venetian chronicles to compose his own. He referred to his writing as “questa cronica,” “questo libro,” “questa scrittura,” and “questa scrittura over cronicha de Veniexia.”⁶⁶⁰ Scholars are hesitant to call Morosini’s work a “chronicle” or a “history,” and “diary” seemed more fitting. Written in Venetian instead of Latin, it was also different from the humanist historiography of the Renaissance.⁶⁶¹ Morosini gave a voice to those who, like himself, wrote the history of their city in the language spoken in the streets, freed from the constraints of official settings.

Morosini’s writings were not official in a strict sense. There are no indications that they were commissioned by the state (he was, as mentioned above, subject to the condemnation of the powerful Council of Ten), nor were they written in the official language of administration or deputed to play a role in Venice’s self-representation — as was later the case with official historiography. But they were not private writings either. Morosini “talked” in his diary with his own voice, but this voice was an expression of attentiveness to the republic’s ups and downs in a city where anything could become a state affair. Explanations of what exactly motivated Morosini to write his *Diary* in the way he did remain conjectural.⁶⁶² But what can be said is that the *Diary* was not strictly his own work. One can interpret his pursuit as the desire to put forward a public good, speaking with an individualized voice but ultimately embedded in tradition and in the political and social world of patricians to which he belonged. As such, it is a work that speaks for the role of the outside world into the lives of the patrician elite and their city.

Morosini was well aware of the work of his predecessors and this makes the extent of his role as curator even more salient. According to Lefèvre-Pontalis, Morosini drew, for the most part, on the works by Nicolò Trevisan and Rafaino Caresini before taking matters into his own hands, in the following way⁶⁶³:

⁶⁵⁹ “Alique de cartis librorum ser Antonii Mauroceno in quibus notata sunt aliqua inducentia scandalum comburantur” (*Misti*, reg. 52, 187r), quoted in: Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Étude sur Morosini*, 120. A full transcription of the decision can be found in: Nanetti, “Per uno studio,” 1725–26. The reference to those two books is explained by Melville-Jones in the following way: “The original motion was probably inspired by a *denunzia* which had been made, most probably anonymously, by an enemy of Morosini or a disgruntled servant, who had seen two piles of paper lying on a table, and had not realised that one manuscript was being copied from another”: Ghezzi, Melville-Jones, and Rizzi, *The Morosini Codex*, 1999, 1:xx. From the surviving manuscript, it is impossible to tell which pages were destroyed.

⁶⁶⁰ Nanetti, *Il Codice Morosini: il mondo visto da Venezia (1094-1433)*, 2: xi.

⁶⁶¹ For this division of medieval and Renaissance see: Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*, xv. He is, however, almost completely silent with respect to Morosini.

⁶⁶² According to Neerfeld, the authors of political diaries wrote, perhaps, because they had an interest in their present, which was considered extraordinary (p. 116), they might have wanted to record events with a sort of antiquarian interest (p. 128), or were simply interested in performing an activity that would provide them with an income, reputation among their contemporaries, or glory post mortem (p. 120-121): Neerfeld, *Historia per forma di diaria*.

⁶⁶³ Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Étude sur Morosini*, 145–167.

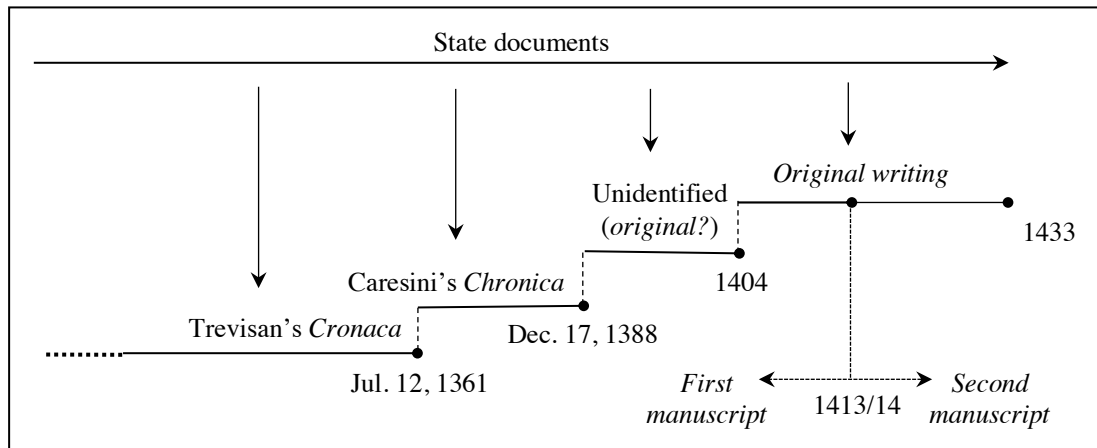


Chart 5. Composition of Morosini's *Diary* according to Lefèvre-Pontalis

For the period between 1388 and 1404, Lefèvre-Pontalis established no direct correlation between any known source and Morosini's text. Lefèvre-Pontalis wondered if the text for this period was already Morosini's original work, but other scholars have offered answers to this question. In 1999, Melville-Jones and his team added the chronicles of Andrea Dandolo, Lorenzo de' Monacis, and Martino da Canale to the repertoire of Morosini's sources.⁶⁶⁴ This team later specified that, between 1354 and 1400, Morosini probably drew on "the unpublished chronicle (doubtfully) attributed to Enrico Dandolo (...) and the Latin chronicle composed by Rafaino Caresini."⁶⁶⁵ Neerfeld indicated that, for the period before 1390, Morosini probably used the texts of Caresini and Trevisan, but concluded that most of the *Diary* had been compiled from the perspective of a contemporary.⁶⁶⁶ More recently, Nanetti asserted that some passages in Morosini's text suggest that his work was composed with the help of less extensive chronicles relating to specific events.⁶⁶⁷

Questions regarding Morosini's reliance on one or several chronicles to describe the years between 1392 and 1402 do not alter the fact that those (partly) unidentified sources also echoed the *pregadi's* discussions. If the men who composed these chronicles were secretaries who enjoyed unlimited access to Council records, Morosini's appropriation of their work might have been one of the ways in which the *pregadi's* topics of discussions was disseminated outside the ducal palace. In his role as curator (regardless of what specific source he used), Morosini included in his *Diary* events which are not solely a (hypothetical) repetition of other authors' work, but also a reflection on how he perceived the events affecting *his* Venice, populated, most likely, by other patricians (as merchants, members of Venice's councils, ambassadors, etc.) rather than by chancery staff.

⁶⁶⁴ *The Morosini Codex*, 1:x.

⁶⁶⁵ *The Morosini Codex*, 2:VII.

⁶⁶⁶ Neerfeld, *Historia per forma di diaria*, 24–25.

⁶⁶⁷ Nanetti, "Per uno studio," 1724.

Although it is not possible to establish the exact point at which Morosini sat down to write this section of his diary, these episodes were, relatively speaking, close to him: he might have written them a few years after they occurred, rather than decades later. For example, Nanetti showed that the events from 1400 to 1402 were composed, in all likelihood, after 1404.⁶⁶⁸ Morosini reflected back to those events whose impact affected *his* generation directly, not that of his predecessors.

Morosini described Venice's history from 1392 to 1402 in fifteen events.⁶⁶⁹ For stylistic purposes, I will describe these events as belonging to Morosini, although, as pointed out, the authorship as such might not have been entirely his own. Lefèvre-Pontalis lamented that Italian politics were, for the most, omitted from the *Diary*: the restoration of the Carrara dynasty in 1390, the elevation of Milan to the rank of duchy in 1395, and France's transfer of its domination of Genoa to the hands of Visconti in 1396, were all met with "intentional" silence on Morosini's side.⁶⁷⁰ But it is possible that Morosini preferred to listen to Venice's own voices before any other. Among these voices, the talk of the *pregadi* carried a heavy weight on his role as curator, for Morosini appropriated the *pregadi*'s "talk" as his own. In Morosini's case, to refer to a form of "talk" that was unassailably his is more than a metaphor. His sentences are "'elocutionary' rather than 'syntactical,' and that if they are thought of as recorded speech rather than written prose they are easier to understand."⁶⁷¹ In a literal sense, the way he talked in the *Diary* might have echoed the verbal exchanges of patricians in meetings of the Senate and Collegio, given that for Venetians these spaces represented a capital source of information. Neerfeld writes that the volume of diaries was dependent on the authors' associations with these political bodies and the quantity of news received, but she describes the information collected by those organs as an enormous and chaotic mass lacking any theoretical order, forcing the diarists to organize their annotations to follow a linear course of events.⁶⁷² While this may apply to some cases, on the basis of the conventions I have presented, Neerfeld's description that information and news within state records was lacking any theoretical order is not entirely accurate.

The table below makes plain the tight correspondence between Morosini's selection of events and Senate conventions denoting controversial state matters. I do not intend to suggest that Morosini—or his source(s)—relied solely on information contained in *Deliberazioni*, or that he was entirely original in relying on these records as a starting point to formulate the episodes he describes. I would however like to emphasize the correlation between the two, as more research is needed to establish the patterns in Morosini's echoing of the *pregadi*'s talk of the most critical matters of state. The dates

⁶⁶⁸ Nanetti, 1724.

⁶⁶⁹ *The Morosini Codex*, 2:193–210; *The Morosini Codex*, 3:2–9.

⁶⁷⁰ Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Étude sur Morosini*, 169.

⁶⁷¹ Ghezzi, Melville-Jones, and Rizzi, *The Morosini Codex*, 1:xvi.

⁶⁷² Neerfeld, *Historia per forma di diaria*, 173.

I provide on the left-hand side follow Morosini's text, although some of them are inaccurate (as it will be specified later):

	Date	Event in the <i>Diario</i>	Senate discussion
1	1393-1394	Acquisition of Durrës, Lezhë and Drisht and Shkodra	Multiple R-entries: <i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 98r; <i>Secreti</i> , Reg. (e), 246
2	1396	Christian crusade against Bayezid	N-entry: <i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 158r
3	Sep. 24, 1395	Timur's attack on Azov	N-entry: <i>Misti</i> , Reg. 43, f. 73v
4	1397	Visconti's war against Francesco Gonzaga, Marquess of Mantua, and Venice's assistance to Gonzaga	Vote called 39 times: <i>Secreti</i> , Reg. (e), 294
5	1397-1398	Enmity between Visconti and Florence, resulting in multiple embassies sent to Venice by Florence, Bologna and Padua	N-entry: <i>Secreti</i> , Reg. (e), 294 – <i>Missing register</i>
6	"Not long afterward"	Florence's negotiations with the new German emperor and potential involvement of Venice	Multiple R-entries (Aug. 1401): <i>Secreti</i> , Reg. 1, f. 12v
7	1400	Rupert's arrival at Venice requesting financial assistance	Multiple R-entries (Apr. 1402): <i>Secreti</i> , Reg. 1, f. 55r-v
8	Nov. 24, 1400	Death of Doge Antonio Venier	<i>Indirectly: Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 44v
9	Apr. 1401	Timur's raids against Christians	N-entry: <i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 52v
10	Dec. 1, 1400	Election of Michele Steno as doge	<i>Indirectly: Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 44v
11	1401	Timur's raids in Syria	"Propter nouitates": <i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 93v
12	1401	"Miraculous" arrival of galleys to Modon following a storm in Santorini (Thira)	<i>Misti</i> , Reg. 45, f. 46r-47v
13	Oct. 1402	Death of Visconti	<i>Missing page in register</i>
14	1402	Battle between Timur and Bayezid	N-entry: <i>Misti</i> , Reg. 46, f. 43v
15	1402	Sighting of a comet in the sky	<i>Unmentioned</i>

Table 5. Correspondence between Morosini's *Diary* and Senate records

Of the fifteen events Morosini introduced in his *Diario* for the period of 1392 to 1402, only the mention of the celestial portent (no. 15) is not reflected in Senate documents. In other words, 93.3% of the events he selected also appear in entries within the *Deliberazioni*. I presume that Gian Galeazzo Visconti's death (no. 13) was introduced as an entry in the *Deliberazioni*, but I did not have the opportunity to confirm this given that the corresponding page is missing from the record.⁶⁷³ It

⁶⁷³ Visconti's death should have been mentioned in the *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 72v-73r, but both pages are missing from the *Divenire*'s reproduction of the register. In the Archivio de Stato in Venice, I was denied access to the physical book.

should also be mentioned that, although the election of Michele Steno following Antonio Venier's passing (no. 8 and 10) is alluded to in the *Misti*, this episode was not the subject of a recorded entry per se. Aside from these four events, Morosini's text contains the same discussions which, in my described model, point to crucial matters discussed by the *pregadi*. The plain correspondence of the same specific inclusions in both sources may be explained by two possibilities: first, supposing that a fourteenth-century patrician was reasonably familiar with Senate recording conventions, he would easily have been able to identify those scribal marks pointing to "inordinate" talk among the *pregadi*. Or second, it may be explained by reiterating that the *pregadi*'s discussions were the most important of all. In other words, they were matters of such consequence that the Senate possessed the last word over affairs that contemporaries recognized as the most important. Either way, more detailed in-depth research is needed to actualize the correspondences between Morosini's text and state records for the subsequent pages of the *Diary*.

After recounting Venice's acquisition of Argos and Nafplio in 1388 (which corresponds to the last section Morosini borrowed from Caresini⁶⁷⁴), Morosini relates the incorporation of the four Albanian cities into Venice's dominion, which I reproduce in full⁶⁷⁵:

Afterwards in the time of this doge the city of Venice subjugated Durazzo, and sent the noble Misier Francesco Zorzi there as bailiff, and there we captured a castle on the land called Alessio, and the Venetians did this because the Turks were at that time very powerful, and they feared that these places would come into their hands, and further in 1394 Misier Giorgio Strazimier who was lord of the city of Scutari and was being so greatly molested by the Turks that he could not hold that city - this Misier Giorgio sent his ambassadors to Venice asking if it would please Venice to receive it and have dominion over that city, asking the Signoria for certain benefices. And so it was decided by the Council of Elders to accept the dominion of that place in order that it should not fall into the hands of the Turks, and it was decided to give the said Misier Giorgio for every year 1,000 ducats of gold during his lifetime, and that we would give him another castle on the land called Drivasto.⁶⁷⁶

In Council records, an I-entry from the *Secreti* of March 8, 1392, signaled Venice's resoluteness in securing control of Durrës.⁶⁷⁷ This entry emphasizes the speakers' awareness of the

⁶⁷⁴ Lefèvre-Pontalis, *Étude sur Morosini*, 168–69.

⁶⁷⁵ I take all transcriptions of Morosini's text from the published collaborative work by Michele Pietro Ghezzi, John Melville-Jones, and Andrea Rizzi. All translations belong to Melville-Jones. Their edition presented the original Venetian text with its translation in facing pages. The even page numbers of references correspond to the Venetian text and odd numbers to his translation.

⁶⁷⁶ "Apriso in lo tempo del dito misier lo doxie la citade de Veniexia suzugava Durazo, e là fo mandado per bailo el nobel homo misier Franzescho Ziorzi e là avesemo uno chastelo fra tera, el qual à nome Alesio, e questo fexe i Veniciani perché i Turchi iera in quel tempo molto posenti, dubitandose che i diti luogi non pervegnise in le suo mane, e anchora in MMCCCLXXXIII siando misier Ziorzi Strazimier signor de la citade de Schutari e vignando quello molto molestado dai Turchi per muodo che lo non poteva tegnir quela tera, el dito misier Ziorzi mandà suo anbasadori in Veniexia, digandosi a quela i piaxeava a tuorla e aver el dominio de quela tera, domandando lu a questa Signoria certi beneficii, de che el fo prexo per lo chonseio di Pregadi de tuor el dominio de quel dito luogo aziò che 'l non prevegnise in le man di Turchi, e fo preso de dar al dito misier Ziorzi per hogni ano duchati M d'oro in vita soa, e a nui darde uno altro chastelo infra tera clamado Drievasto": *The Morosini Codex*, 2:192-193.

⁶⁷⁷ AAV 438; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 155.

imminent threat to Durrës. It contains the longest instruction section among all I-entries about Albania which I analyzed. The presence of such a preeminent instruction section indicates that this entry contains an authoritative pronouncement from the *signoria* with the power of law. Morosini was not especially interested in the Albanian lords or Albanian possessions, but rather in the events which fed patricians' discussions or symbolically denoted their city's changes. For this reason, Venice's acquisition of Albania, at least within the context of his narration, acquires a greater significance than if it had just been copied from Caresini's text, and in that sense it seems closer to the importance which the *pregadi* assigned to the acquisition of Albanian lands. Although the dating of all the annexations is inaccurate (Durrës and Lezhë were taken over by Venice in August 1392, and Shkodra and Drisht in April 1396), they present a continuum with the theme of the acquisition of new territories. Moreover, it allows Morosini to introduce the same rationale offered in the Council in 1396, after several weeks of fierce debate: assuming control over those Albanian lands was worthy, because it guaranteed that they would not fall into Ottoman hands.⁶⁷⁸

Immediately after the passage above, Morosini relates the development and outcome of the crusade in Nikopol. Considering the shock and long-lasting repercussions this news caused to the *pregadi* (and how devastating the defeat proved to be for Sigismund), it is surprising that Morosini's account reserves the worse part to the French: "it happened that the French were defeated, and a great number of them were captured and many killed."⁶⁷⁹ Regarding Sigismund, he says that:

when the news came to the king of Hungary, who was well informed of this news by those who had escaped from the battle, he at once set about going voluntarily with his people, but then the aforesaid king of Hungary rode with some of his barons towards the Danube because he had learned that the galleys of the Venetians and the Genoese and the emperor were to be found there, (...) and came to the plain of Slavonia which is towards Zara, and disembarked and there found a means of reaching Hungary, and many of his Hungarian subjects came there to accompany him. And this king was very content with the good treatment that the captain [Misier Tommaso Mocenigo] had shown him and his retinue.⁶⁸⁰

Even if Morosini's version of the crusade obscures from the reader the horrors of such spectacular defeat, other moments of his narration help us understand the extent of devastation that "bad" news could mean for Venetians. In this sense, while the incipit "given the news of the disaster occurred in Azov (Tana)" reveals that a crisis had reached the Council's ears (no. 3),⁶⁸¹ the Council's

⁶⁷⁸ AAV 611; *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 251.

⁶⁷⁹ "Adevene che i diti Franzeschi fo roti, e prexonde una gran quantitate de loro, e apreso molti de fo morti": *The Morosini Codex*, 2: 196-197.

⁶⁸⁰ "Che vignando le novele al re d'Ongaria, e' qual bem sope la dita novela per alguni de quei schanpadi che fo in la bataia, {i qual schanpava} subita mente el se mose ad andar volentiera con la soa zente, ma el dito misier lo re d'Ongaria chavalchà chon alguni di suo baroni verso la Donoia per aver sentimento che le galie di Veniciani e Zenovexi e l'inperador se trovava eser là, (...) e vene al pian de Sclavania, la qual iera verso Ziara, e desmontà in tera e atrovà eser de là el paso in Ongaria, e siando vegnudo là molta de la soa zente d'Ongaria per aconpagnarlo, ma lo dito re molto se trovà chontento del bom portamento [de misier Tomado Mozenigo] lo qual li aveva fato el dito chapetanio chontra de lui e de la soa brigade": *The Morosini Codex*, 2:196-197.

⁶⁸¹ "Cum propter noua habita de nouitatibus occursis in partibus Tane": *Misti*, Reg. 43, f. 73v.

priority was to secure information on the extent of the damage to galleys. In contrast, Morosini adds a more personal note, perhaps because this event directly impacted his circle. He emphasizes the nefarious economic consequences this event had for patricians, and thus this devastation acquires a different tone in his narration:

Timur Lenk (...) descended on Tana, where our merchant galleys were at the time, and laid it waste, on account of which the Venetians received a defeat which caused them very great damage, and after this the greater part died from the cold and their hardships, so when our galleys reached Venice they were received with great distress, because on account of that defeat many families of Venice were ruined.⁶⁸²

Other passages regarding episodes which correspond to N-entries or divisive R-entries from the *Deliberazioni* equally show Morosini's personal interpretation of the events in question. Although he reported the same events, Morosini's "talk" did not shy away from making known how much somebody was admired, respected, barely tolerated or outright loathed. For example, the news that Visconti was preparing an attack of Mantua (no. 4) was met with intense debate among the *pregadi*.⁶⁸³ But this same episode takes in the *Diary* the form of an event with a positive outcome: Venice's intervention secured a peace agreement between Visconti and Gonzaga, and "when this peace had been made, our captain came to Venice with all the galleys with great joy."⁶⁸⁴ In another example, the *Deliberazioni* codified Visconti's ambition to march against Florence, Bologna and Padua (no. 5) as an event that required Venice's urgent intervention. Although later secret deliberations on this matter are lost, we learn from Morosini that, thanks to Venice's mediation, a peace agreement was reached, but "it was a dog of a peace, because not a year passed before it was broken, as will be related later."⁶⁸⁵

It is important to point out that the dating of events no. 6 through no. 10 does not follow a linear succession. According to Morosini's narration, King Rupert arrived to Venice before Venier's death, when in fact Rupert was crowned king on Germany six months after Steno had been elected doge. In any case, when Morosini narrates Florence's intention to oppose Visconti's increasing forces (no. 6), he makes sure to point out that the idea of involving Rupert belonged to "that wicked devil of Padua against the state of the duke of Milan."⁶⁸⁶ Morosini also offers the reader the reaction of the Florentine ambassadors upon hearing the response delivered by the *signoria*, which a reader could not guess from the *Deliberazioni* alone:

⁶⁸² "Tanberlam (...) vene zoxo e robà la Tana, e a quel tenpo se alrovà eser là le nostre galie da marchado, de che i Veniciani de rezevè una rota la qual fo de notabelisimo dano, e apreso de questo la plu parte morise da fredo e da dexaxio, de che azionte le nostre galie a Veniexia fo rezevude chom gran pianti, per chaxiom che molte fameie de Veniexia per quela rota fo desfate": *The Morosini Codex*, 2:198-199.

⁶⁸³ *Secreti*, Reg. (e), 294.

⁶⁸⁴ "[D]e che fata la dita paxie el nostro chapetanio dito vene a Veniexia chon tute le galie chon granda alegrezza": *The Morosini Codex*, 2:202-203.

⁶⁸⁵ "[E] fo paxie chanina che' l non pasà uno ano che là i fo rota, chomo per adriedo se traterà": *The Morosini Codex*, 2:204-205.

⁶⁸⁶ "[Q]uel mal solferelo de Padoa chontra el stado de ducha de Milam": *The Morosini Codex*, 2:204-205.

Now the Florentines, having seen and learned that the emperor was not able to achieve his intention, sent their embassy to Venice to propose to the Signoria that they make a league with the emperor and with them, and with the ruler of Padua. The dogal Signoria decided together with its Council not to entangle itself in these matters, and dismissed the embassy to go at its pleasure, and when the Florentines saw this they remained very cold.⁶⁸⁷

This embassy took place in August 1401, not at some point between 1399 and 1400 (as Morosini's text would suggest). After the *pregadi* declined the proposition, the record of the *signoria*'s response reads that: "it should be answered that we give them a response whereby we considered it righteous and reasonable, and therefore it does not seem to us that we have anything else to say regarding this matter."⁶⁸⁸ No wonder the Florentines were unsatisfied.

Another example of Morosini's personal version of *newsworthy* events arises from reports of the havoc created by Timur in Syria (no. 11). While, in Council records, Timur's extensive destruction was formulated as a chance to increase advantage for Venice's merchants in Syria,⁶⁸⁹ Morosini's version is considerably more sympathetic to the locals. Moreover, he adds information which could not be gleaned from the pages of the *Deliberazioni*, such as the quality of local silk, the "beautiful goods" manufactured there, or Damascus' former splendor:

In his time, and in the same year, the aforementioned emperor of the Zagatai called by name Timur Lenk, who had plundered Tana, as we have related a little earlier, then came to Syria with all his forces, more than could be counted, and plundered it and laid it waste. Entering Damascus, and going into the other towns, he plundered and set fires there and burned everything and consumed it, removing a great part of the population which was to be found there, by which I mean the men who were silk weavers, and those who produced other beautiful work which was made in that place, and a great part of them died in that ruin of the city, with all their houses burned and destroyed, so that no one who had seen it previously and then saw it ruined in this way could do anything but weep.⁶⁹⁰

The next event (no. 12) in Morosini's text offers relief from the great distress he had just described: as six galleys returning from Beirut were resting in Thira (an island in the Aegean Sea), a terrible storm arose during the night. Since the ships "could not depart from the harbour, they all placed their anchors in the water, putting their trust in God until the storm ended."⁶⁹¹ Although news

⁶⁸⁷ "Hor abiando vezudo e sapudo i Fiorentini che 'l dito inperador non podeva hotegnir soa intinciom, mandà soa anbasada in Veniexia digando a la Signoria de far liga con lo dito inperador e chon loro e con quel de Padoa, de che la dogai Signoria determenà conmeso el so chonseio de non sende inpaziar de questi fati e, lecenca' la dita anbasada, andese al so piaxier, e vezudo i Fiorentini questo i romaxe molto fredì": *The Morosini Codex*, 2:206-207.

⁶⁸⁸ "Respondeatur quod (...), responsium dedimus per illum modum qui nobis appareuit iustus et rationabilis, ita quod superinde non videtur nobis quod aliquod dicere habeamus" (August 23, 1401): *Secreti*, Reg. 1, f. 12v.

⁶⁸⁹ See p. 112.

⁶⁹⁰ "Nel tempo del qual pur nel dito milieximo per lo antidito inperador di Zagatai per nome clamado Tanberlam, el qual robà la Tana chomo davanti averno mo pertratado, e da puo' vene in le parte de Soria chon tuta so zente, la qual iera innumerabele, e quela robà e consumà e intrando in Damascho over intro i borghi quello el robà e fichà fuoco dentro e tuto arse e consumase, menando via una gran parte di puovoli che in quela iera, digo di i omeni di mestieri de pani de seda e de altri beli lavor che se feva in quello luogo, e gran parte de morì de la dita ruina apreso de tute le caxe bruxiade e roinate che per muodo che nonn è persona che avese vezudo quela avanti questo chaxo che veziandola da puo' chusì desfata che non li vegnise a lagremar": *The Morosini Codex*, 3:3.

⁶⁹¹ "[L]e dite galie non se poté levar del dito porto ma mese tuti i suo' ferì in l'aqua per star a la speranza de Dio infin a che al declinar de la fortuna": *The Morosini Codex*, 3:4-5.

of the storm was not formulated as an N-entry, on January 13, 1401, the *pregadi* devoted a great deal of time discussing the best way to recover the merchandise, resulting in six opposing motions put forward that day.⁶⁹² Morosini justifies the inclusion of the episode by saying: “for this reason no one ever heard it reported that such a great misfortune resulted in such a small amount of damage.”⁶⁹³ As suggested previously, such inclusion may also have been motivated by the impact that the news had had on Morosini’s circle; given that as many as six galleys were potentially in danger, the event might have become memorable among Venetians because many considered themselves lucky to have escaped a prospect of financial ruin.

Next, Morosini moves on to describe Visconti’s death (no. 13). As mentioned, this must have been received with great relief in Venice, but the page (presumably) containing the entry with the news is missing from the register. Morosini writes:

In 1402, in the month of October, the previously mentioned Duke of Milan, being in a flourishing and verdant state, because he was the uncontested lord of all Lombardy, and also of the greater part of Tuscany, and had gained possession in that year of the signoria of Bologna, and was at the highest point of success that he had ever reached, paid the debt of human nature, and was freed from this present life. And in relation to his death, one can say what said by the Evangelist, who said, *percutiam pastorem et disperdentur oves*, which means ‘I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad’ [*Matthew XXVI, 31; Mark XIV, 27*].⁶⁹⁴

Morosini describes the fate of Venice’s other foe immediately after (no. 14), which corresponds to the last N-entry I analyzed. According to Council records, the exhilaration produced by this news moved the *pregadi* to approve an aggressive plan to attack Gallipoli. Although this decision was revoked on the following day, Morosini describes the feeling which the *pregadi* might have also experienced. Morosini first narrates Timur’s entrance in Turkey and Bayezid’s gathering of his Greek and Turkish forces, after which he concludes:

This event, the destruction of Bayazid the Turk, was a most wonderful piece of news throughout the Christian world, and this was because he had gained so much power that he was persecuting the whole of Christianity, both at sea and on land.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹² *Misti*, Reg. 45, f. 46r-47v.

⁶⁹³ “[P]er la qual chosa mai non fo aldido dir che de tanta desgracia avegnirne in sì piziol dano”: *The Morosini Codex*, 3:4-5.

⁶⁹⁴ “In MCCCCII, del mese d’otubrio, per lo antidito ducha de Milam, siando quello in florido e verde stado per chaxiom che de tuta Lonbardia quello iera libera mente signor e anchora de la mazior parte de Toschana, abiando abudo in quel ano la signoria de Bologna e siando in mazior cholmo che mai el fase, pagando el debito de la humana natura, da la prexente vita el fo asolto, per la qual morte de lui se può dir quel dito del Vanzielio che dixè *Perchuciam pastores et dispergentur hoves*, chomo è a dir questo: *Se io perchuterò el pastor, desperderase le piegore*”: *The Morosini Codex*, 3:4-7.

⁶⁹⁵ “De che la predita nuova, zoè la destrucion del dito turcho dito Baixeto, fo a tuta christantade una perfetissima novela e questo per chaxion che ’l dito aveva prexo tanta posanza che tuta cristantade la proseguiva per mar e per tera”: *The Morosini Codex*, 3:8-9.

Immediately after telling the tale of the joy caused by Bayezid's defeat, Morosini emphasizes that celestial and worldly events were attuned in Venice's favor (no. 15). Making such connection functions as a sort of "natural" conclusion, for it signals a turning point in Venice's history:

And it should be known that in this year of 1402 there appeared in the west a sign in the night which is called a comet, which appeared from the 22nd hour until the 3rd hour of the night, and this was the most marvellous sign in the world, and this apparition lasted for the space of a month, every day from that hour, and many sages and astrologers met together, and they decided that this sign appeared as an indication of the destruction of these two dominions, namely that of the Duke of Milan and that of Bayazid the Turk.⁶⁹⁶

The small sample of the *Diario* I have presented shows that, viewed side by side, both Senate deliberations and Morosini's *Diary* bespeak the concerns of the elite and disclose the means by which they evaluated the relevance of current events. Those two types of sources are different in many respects: official records were mostly kept in Latin, while Morosini best understood and wrote in vernacular; one is the direct result of state administration, while the other had a more distinctly personal outlook; one could be seen as dull and repetitive, while the other left an open door for the author's emotions and self-expression. To some extent, this makes them opposites, but on another level they are not so different. The news that made it to the *Diary* and Senate discussions came from letters, reports, opinions and the word of mouth that rushed out of ships and roamed the streets of Venice.

Paradoxically, the complacency of the official Latin prose of authors like Pier Paolo Vergerio, De Monacis, or Sabellico did not age well. In contrast, the attentiveness and simplicity of Morosini's style proved to retain the vigor and freshness that can best grant access to the individual and collective social experience. Morosini did not describe the timeless power structure of the republic, but quotidian reactions to the gloom and horror of war, victories, defeats, death, suffering and joy which were closer to the lived experience of an author and his circle. Morosini is the first example showing that vernacular diaries were something new. They expressed the experience of patricians who were not literary writers, but who had a consuming interest in politics without having a notable political career. They were men who merged the appreciation for the tradition handed down to them to their concern for the present, for what they saw and heard, or for whatever had importance in their circles — things which may not have been as important to them personally as they were for the image of the city they wanted to project. An elaborate, comparative analysis between Morosini's text and Senate

⁶⁹⁶ "Ed è da saver che in lo dito ano de MCCCCII l'aparse in Ponente uno segno de note, el qual se clama chometa, el qual aparse de le hore XXII fin a le hore tre de note e iera questo el plui meraviglioso segno del mondo e questa apariciom durà per spatio d'uno mexe, hogno dì da l'ora dita, e molti savi s'atrovà eser insenbre a astrologi e zudegà che questo segno aparse per la destrucion de queste do signorie, zoè per quela del ducha ce Milam e quela del Baixeto turcho": *The Morosini Codex*, 3:8-9.

records will be able to offer further examples of the extent to which both visions complemented or opposed each other.

Conclusions

I developed this study to offer a more accurate understanding of the meaning, function and patterns of the *Deliberazioni* —the records of the Venetian Senate’s meetings. While surveying all existing recorded entries from 1392 to 1402, I realized that Senate scribal practices had produced a system for classifying the deliberative day-to-day of the *pregadi*. Entries within the *Deliberazioni* were arranged carefully, to comply with conventions which have mysteriously remained unexplained in scholarship. Thus far, descriptions of Senate records partially classified entries into commissions, provisions, elections, and “everything else.” Such view of recorded entries might have come as the consequence of the tacit assumption that headers served as the scribes’ primary classification mechanism. The model I proposed instead suggests that scribes consistently used the entries’ incipit as classification criterion. According to patterns I identified in the entries’ incipit, I proposed fourteen distinct realms of Council activity. More than 99.9% of the total of 4,871 extant individual entries can be placed into one of those categories.

I approached the *Deliberazioni* as a collection of scribal linguistic acts, rather than as sources which merely describe historical processes or events. I borrowed this methodology from the contextual approach developed by John Pocock and Quentin Skinner, which allowed me to display connections between the entries’ formulations and the *pregadi*’s role. As the model indicates, the main connection I established relates to the link between the incipit of each entry and the realm of Council activity to which the decision-making event (“talk”) belonged. Since these records were encoded on the basis of formal conventions as much as they were the result of a deliberative process, Pocock and Skinner’s approach further guided me in understanding of how the elite’s social world related to the Council’s priorities and competition between its members. The *pregadi*’s discussions were inscribed inherently in a group dynamic that was complex and multi-layered; their codification additionally offers clues to superimposed elements of social status, age, economic interests, and conservatism, all of which were constitutive elements of the patrician class. In this sense, the scribes’ deliberate recording of competing views among the *pregadi* regarding critical developments allowed me to add nuance to the commonly-held assumption that state records erased all evidence of disagreement among the members of Venice’s most important body of power.

In order to test the model and show that entries were encoded employing consistent recording conventions, Albania was my protagonist but I also analyzed entries pertaining to a number of geographically distant locations with which the *pregadi* were in contact. I have risked over-emphasizing the conventions I had set out to describe, yet I hope to have succeeded in conveying that the patterns behind an entry’s formulation did not depend on location. Therefore, historians interested in pursuing comparative analysis can do so knowing that a breach on the convention is not a comment on the locale per se, but a specific appraisal of the situation from the *pregadi*’s point of view. On the

other hand, studies devoted to historical developments over larger spans of time will need to take into consideration changes in recording practices to accurately describe such processes.

Out of the fourteen categories I proposed to describe Council activities, I concentrated on the three types whereby the *pregadi*'s competing opinions and Venice's challenges surfaced more strikingly. First, I showed that entries containing "propter noua" and "propter nouitates" in their incipit (N-entries) referred to incoming correspondence or information denoting crises. From the incessant flow of incoming information, only 1.2% of all recorded entries pointed to such crises and their management which, in this realm of Council activity, I defined as *newsworthiness*. The handling of information and news is a recurrent topic on scholarship about Venice, but such studies have concentrated on the fifteenth century onwards. During the decade I analyzed (sandwiched as it is between the War of Chioggia and Venice's expansion into the mainland), state priorities fluctuated considerably. These changes allowed me to demonstrate the technical meaning of incipits headed with "noua" and "nouitates": these words did not refer to the constant influx of information that made possible the *pregadi*'s discussions, but rather to the specific crises alluded to above. What sort of information was deemed *newsworthy* changed through the decade, thus revealing an adjustment in Venice's priorities: while up to 1395 the security of merchant galleys was the *pregadi*'s primary concern, after that year the Council started increasing its attention on international politics, including the Ottomans' growing power and their subsequent slaughter by Timur Bey in 1402.

Secondly, I looked at entries which recorded a version of the *signoria*'s words directed to "outsiders." These official pronouncements were codified in a twofold manner according to two situations: as responses (R-entries) following proposals and petitions from ambassadors, and as instructions (I-entries) whenever a development abroad demanded an official directive by the *signoria*. Each of these two versions of "what the *signoria* says" involved distinct recording conventions. Given that my study focused on recording practices signaling matters of state importance, I applied this criterium also to R- and I-entries. R-entries followed a standard template whenever an issue presented to the *signoria* was deemed straightforward. If the proposition caused controversy or disagreement among the body of *pregadi*, scribes (for the most part) followed the standard template, but preserved those opposing motions to record the memory of the disagreement. Lastly, if ambassadors presented issues deemed critical to the state, the formulation of those R-entries was either turned on its head or incorporated sections (such as executive decisions or instructions) which flouted the template entirely. I-entries, on the other hand, are part of the Council's executive capacities. Instructions functioned as official directives which emissaries must follow. The presence of a lengthy instruction section is in itself a mark that the issue in question was deemed so important that it had necessitated an official pronouncement.

In 1392, Albania gained importance in the eyes of the *pregadi*, but this significance did not overshadow the recording conventions I wished to highlight. In consequence, Albania became an ideal case study. Keeping in mind the recording conventions I had uncovered, it became possible to return to one of the questions I had set up to answer: how important was Albania for the *pregadi* during this decade? On specific days from 1392, 1395-1396, 1399 and 1401, the Council discussed information concerning Albania that was deemed crucial to the state. The Council made immediate arrangements to solve these crises, including entrusting them to the Council's more trustworthy men and allowing expenditures towards their resolution. On the other hand, in 1396 and 1400, ambassadors from Albanian cities confronted the Council with taxing proposals and decisions, but embassies from Albanian cities were otherwise redirected to the Venetian power units in Albania. Similarly, aside from some I-entries in 1392 and 1393, the *pregadi* did not consider that developments in Albanian territories merited further official pronouncements, for the Council relied instead on Venetian governors there. By focusing on specific examples of how entries recorded the *pregadi*'s handling of contingencies in Albania, I have shown that the Council's record-keeping system allowed the persistence of an overarching language of power: power based on institutional memory and the ability to retrieve not only information on earlier legislative and executive decisions, but also the importance the Council had assigned to particular moments of decision-making —not every Council discussion pertained to decisive matters of state.

For *terraferma* scholars, cities in Albania are negligible locations, and for historians of the *stato da mar* it is not always a priority to stop to reflect on the development of Venetian historical writings or the textual expressions of patricians' political idiosyncrasy. But Albanian cities also allowed me to show that these were interconnected realities: my study began in 1392, when the Council's secret records assigned special importance to Albania, likely due to the strengthening of Ottoman presence in the area. Antonio Morosini, a young but attentive contemporary to these events, also pointed to Venice's acquisition of Albanian lands as the mark of a new phase in Venice's history —a phase which began under the shadow of Bayezid's power. Similarly, the *pregadi* were exhilarant when, in 1402, both Bayezid's and Gian Galeazzo Visconti's ambitions came to an abrupt halt. Morosini assigned a celestial character to this sudden turn of events: he narrated that a comet had appeared in the sky after Bayezid and Visconti had been defeated, and it was "the most marvelous sign in the world." By describing the fate of Venice's greater enemies in this way, he conveyed that Venice had entered a new epoch. It was, after all, a new century.

Additionally, the ways in which Venice's elite experienced politics shaped, and was shaped by, a heartfelt awareness of historical change. Morosini, who belonged to a prominent patrician family, was a witness to that change. In his (likely) borrowing of passages from other chroniclers, he made them his own. By emphasizing his role as curator, I was able to show that Morosini echoed the

same high points of the *pregadi*'s talk which the recording conventions I uncovered also marked as crucial. Inasmuch as Senate entries codified political discussion, they also became a source for patricians like him to appraise and describe their present. In this transitional period, the attentiveness and simplicity of Morosini's style worked to retain the vigor and freshness that can best grant access to the individual experience of his class. While the myth of Venice and the official historiography written in Latin was, for the most part, a story of stability and coherence, the voices from Morosini and the *pregadi* at the end of the decade tell a story of adjustment and change.

Entries in Council books amount to thousands and while, during the fourteenth century, these records were not accompanied by indexes, the manner in which entries were structured facilitated information retrieval. Although I concentrated on three entry types, I noticed that the systematic study of any entry type will reveal that each section within an entry has its own set of conventions. I did not reflect on all sections within the entries I analyzed. For example, I studied R-entries from the point of view of matters of state importance and described the recording conventions that systematically marked that importance. But for example, a scholar interested in how the *pregadi* regarded messengers and ambassadors could instead concentrate in the *prohemium* of R-entries. I observed that this section equally employs "standard" and "alternative" forms in a systematic way. It will then become evident to this scholar that those alternative formulations point to "concealed" meanings signaling a wide range of the *pregadi*'s appraisal of their visitor: from a welcoming stance, to apprehension, apathy, or even weariness.

The Council's parameters to record discussions were sophisticated, well-established and consistent. At least a dozen scribes, one after the other, transcribed Council records during the decade I analyzed, and yet conventions remained consistent. These conventions did not suddenly appear in 1392, and in all likelihood, they did not disappear in 1402. More research is needed to analyze the process by which entries became standardized into such consistent formulation, the changes and continuities in the entries' language and structure, and the agency of secretaries during the early stages of this process.

The sources for this study were drafted in a political and social context, and dynamics from that context became embedded in the codification of state affairs. Pocock and Skinner's contextual approach which, to the extent of my knowledge, has never been applied to this source material, has allowed me to show aspects of the Council's secretive discussions which would have remained obscure otherwise. I hope this study's findings and approach will serve as starting point for other researchers to reappraise the textual production of Venice's state organs.

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