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Inventing Past Narratives
Venice and the Adriatic Space (13th–15th Centuries)

edited by
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INVENTING PAST NARRATIVES, VENICE AND THE ADRIATIC SPACE (13th–15th CENTURIES)

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Inventing Past Narratives

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Ilaria Molteni & Valeria Russo

During the Middle Ages, new past narratives emerged, but several of these narratives are not based on the archaeological rediscovery of a lost history. On the contrary, in many cases that impression of a unique, grandiose, and ancient past is partly the result of accurate dissimulation.

Yet, it would not be exact to consider the myth of Venice as a fiction or, somehow, as a fabricated invention – an apocryphal creation that does not include any historical component. Instead, the myth of Venice has been generated through an intricate operation of composing unconnected pieces, through a process of attributing new meanings to previously unconnected pieces of different histories or objects from other pasts. The result is a patchwork that, through the *longue durée*, has been articulated around both new and ancient stories, local and foreign myths, reconstructed or rediscovered objects and narratives.

In order to investigate more precisely the trajectories of the Venetian past narratives, this volume intends to determine which are the different strategies, objectives, and resources that have been exploited in the framework of this invention. For this purpose, five contributions are collected in this volume, aiming at analyzing different case studies through an interdisciplinary perspective, in which philology, art history, historiography and literary history converge.

Our methodological introduction (pp. 13–46) has the ambition of identifying the different components, subjects, and objects implicated in the invention of the Venetian past narratives. This essay highlights how the origins of several "narrative hubs" were created between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, during the period of expansion and consolidation of the power of the *Serenissima* in the Mediterranean. At that moment, these stories were an instrument of power, but also a misleading kaleidoscope, which allowed Venetian history to be projected into an ancient or recent past as glorious as the present. On the contrary, at the end of the thirteenth and throughout the fourteenth century, Venice experiences a period of geopolitical crisis: these past narratives, whose reuse is put under the seal of the continuity, then became an instrument of obfuscation on a critical present.

Through a relevant case-study, Francesca Gambino's contribution (pp. 48–63) is aimed at examining the elaboration of the myth of Charlemagne in Venice within the medieval chronicles. This essay allows to recognize the strategy of manipulation of the past that has been put into practice by Venetian historiographers, whose goal is to link the legendary invasion of the Lagoon to the present conflicts of Venice. Gambino demonstrates that such Venetian chronicles' goal was to stage a successful opposition to a stranger enemy, thus suggesting that a past victory against the Francs could be confirmed by a present triumph.

Giuseppina Brunetti's essay (pp. 78–87) analyzes the way in which Dante's death is to be considered as one of the past narratives invented and attributed to the biography of the great poet. This research allows in fact to reconsider Dante's diplomatic activity in Venice, by examining the political relationship between Ravenna and Venice during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, i.e., during to the salt wars between these two Italian powers.

The Venetian past has also been celebrated by exploiting the Arthurian legend. Niccolò Gensini's article (pp. 64–77) precisely recognizes that the manipulation of a fictional past, as it is represented in the *Prophecies de Merlin*, serves the cause of the Venetian identity. Merlin's prophecies describing the "Good Seamen" designate the Venetians for the medieval reader who left a marginal commentary on the manuscript of the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Str. App. 29. Venice's identity then appears as encompassed within a wider and "international" past, allowing its hegemonic maritime role to be collectively celebrated; besides, the prophecy attributes a providential – and divine – legitimation to all Venetian commercial and political revendications.

Such dynamics, involving the manipulation of the past, can also be analyzed through a leap forward: that is the aim of the contribution of Ivan Foletti, Ruben Campini, and Annalisa Moraschi (pp. 88–103). This article highlights how, with the emergence of modern nationalism, fourteenth-century Venetian painting has been interpreted and judged by the twentieth-century art history through a nation-building strategic prism. The political antagonism between the Kingdom of Italy and the Russian Empire then becomes to be incarnated by the theoretical opposition between the art historians Adolfo Venturi and Nikodim Kondakov on the topic of Giotto's role in history.

In conclusion, by the late Middle Ages Venice becomes the main stage of a national and international myth: while enhancing its historical role in the past, the city demonstrates the legitimacy of its role in the present. In light of such phenomenon, this volume will try to demonstrate that Venetian past narratives bring together heterogeneous materials to achieve a common result: that of celebrating Venice's triumph and erasing its weaknesses and defeats.

Framing Venetian Past Narratives

An Epistemological Introduction

Ilaria Molteni & Valeria Russo

In the fifteenth century, Venice is permeated and defined by its own self-developed mythological past, providing the image of an imperishable and eternal city, of timeless greatness and of perpetual power. Venetian history as it reaches the fifteenth century – and remains intact from that century to the present day – is actually the fruit of a long construction that, developed through the multiple mechanisms of an elaborate self-fiction, generates a complex network of past narratives aiming at justifying, legitimising and reinforcing present geopolitical order.

The Venetian "myth" was constructed from an intricate pattern of different past narratives. Some pieces of this historical *tableau* were fabricated from scratch and, by being continuously updated and manipulated over the course of time, they acquired new functions and meanings. Among the best examples of this narrative mechanism are the "Evangelistic Myth" and the Peace of Venice (1177): the former represents a fictional rediscovery, the latter an historical event occurring in the recent past. Other elements are drawn from casts or emulations of ancient materials which, playing on temporalities, emphasize the continuity between past and present. All these narratives are characterized by considerable plasticity, which allows artists and authors to adapt them to different contexts and to adjust them for different purposes. But how do these past narratives move and change along the way from conception to representation?

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Representations of Venetian myths result from the involvement of many different actors intervening in urban spaces and civic history, as well as in material culture. The invention of the past, thus, encompasses: the Venetian arena, both urban and extra-urban; historical and mythological time; a varied group of actors, including doges, merchants, Venetian citizens, chroniclers, and artists, who collaborate with each other; and, in addition, the objects of such artistic-literary production, i.e. the numerous media that Venice exploits to tell its story, such as imported artefacts, locally produced artefacts, relics, *spolia*, or forgeries. These elements, far from providing independent or contradictory stories, interact with each other. Such interactions create the macro-mechanisms at work in the construction of an official story, always new and yet authoritative, often re-invented and constantly re-conceived.

This introductory essay intends to identify these macro-mechanisms and describe how they operate. It will analyze their trajectories over three centuries (twelfth–fourteenth c.), following the timeline dictated by three breakpoints resulting from those historical events that transformed the role of Venice in the Mediterranean space: 1204 (the Fourth Crusade); 1291 (the Fall of Acre); 1381 (the War of Chioggia). Each of these events had huge repercussions both on the municipal organization of the city and on its relations with the other hegemonic powers in the Mediterranean Sea (above all with Genoa and Constantinople, two cities that challenged Venice both culturally and militarily).

The phenomena that will be studied cover four different disciplinary fields: literature, historiography, art history, and urban and political history. These domains will be taken into consideration equally and simultaneously. The framework that will be provided is therefore not intended to be exhaustive of all the dynamics which have led to the construction of the "immortal myth" of Venice – from its foundation to the fourteenth century – it will propose instead a wide-ranging analysis of contingent and converging phenomena, which, through different moments and media, have affected the visual, material, and literary culture of the Venetian urban landscape. These will be the favored paths used to grasp the genesis, structures, and scope of the discourse of historical construction implemented in Venice from the thirteenth century to the end of the fourteenth century.

The end of the twelfth century: Under the banner of continuity

During the twelfth century, the foundations for all the most important narratives of Venice's past were laid on a textual, material, visual, and ceremonial level. Different practices and discourses of *longue durée* were established: in representing the city's main historical events (such as the birth of the Commune, the Fourth Crusade or the loss of the Latin Empire), these discourses aimed at outlining that the order of *La Serenissima* was not subverted but, on the contrary, was amplified. This is the result of a common search for continuity, which fosters all the main revisitations of the Venetian past, both on historical and artistic levels.

This dynamic interpretation of the past was already at work during the twelfth century, while the birth of the communal structure involved political and social orders. Within this new institutional framework, the search for continuity touches some major fields that are capital to the redefinition of the Venetian cultural physiognomy and identity: the monumental complex of San Marco, its hagiographic narrative tradition, its historiographical production, its ceremonies, and its industry.

The Venetian communal system, dating back to the middle of the twelfth century, deeply differs from other Italian *comuni*: in particular, it is characterized by a structural inclusiveness, which is the consequence of political and symbolic centralization. Once more, this

process took place under the banner of continuity: avoiding fractures and replacements, new institutional groups of civil servants started flanking the doge, who represented the most long-lived Venetian power figure[1]. In this new legal and political structure, the office of the doge was incorporated, as was the cult of St Mark; the role of Rialto as the political, economic, and social centre of the city was amplified, and the importance of the nucleus constituted by the Doge's Basilica and the Doge's Palace, which emerged as pivotal places of the city's identity as early as the ninth century, was cemented[2].

From around 1160, in fact, the monumentalising of this urban setting was amplified by the creation of the *piazza* in front of the Basilica and the Ducal Palace, which, during the ruling of Sebastiano Ziani, was flanked by the new Municipal Palace [Fig. 1]. This "conservative" attitude also affected the Basilica, which was not altered either in its layout or in its interior decoration. An immense reliquary built in the ninth century to enshrine the body of St Mark, the building underwent rebuilding campaigns in the tenth and again in the eleventh century, during which, however, the original architectural forms were respected, and linked to Jerusalemite and Constantinopolitan models, which were of great importance for the embedment of the theme of the "Freedom of Venice", an independent political and religious reality, a holy city and the "heir" to Constantinople[3].

1   Edward Wallace Muir, "Idee, riti, simboli del potere", in *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, vol. II: *L'età del Comune*, Giorgio Cracco, Gherardo Ortalli eds, Rome 1995, pp. 739–760.
2   Andrea Castagnetti, "Il primo Comune", *ibidem*, pp. 81–130.
3   Michela Agazzi, "Questioni marciane: architettura e scultura", in *San Marco: la basilica di Venezia. Arte, storia, conservazione*, Ettore Vio ed., Venice 2019, vol. I, pp. 91–110.

In the mid-century, the Basilica was decorated with two mosaic cycles on which the hagiographic "Myth of Venice" is based: they depict the translation of St Mark's relics from Alexandria to Venice by two ingenious merchants in 828 [Fig. 2]. These mosaics inaugurated a long series of monumental representations dedicated to St Mark and implemented a strategy based on the elaboration of new episodes, with the aim of highlighting aspects that played into Venetian political and jurisdictional requirements, providing a figurative and authoritative counterpart to a long tradition of legal and historiographical writings[4]. In this period, certain narrative practices were thus established that, unaltered but on the contrary, reinforced by the changing institutional and political order, would be widely exploited in the following centuries.

A comparison of the twelfth century texts with those written following the conquest of Constantinople in 1204 reveals the thematic contiguity with earlier Venetian hagiographic traditions dedicated to other saints[5]. The invention of a hagiographic past and a new sacred geography staged by the *translatio* of the twelfth century, in fact, appears as an effective instrument to pursue refined strategies of commercial expansion and colonial ambitions, linked to the interests and civic role of different social classes, no longer only to figures associated with the Ducal office. The acquisition of the relics of St Nicholas, for example, occurs in the context of a bitter commercial dispute with Bari and, not by chance, is narrated

2/Martyrium of St Mark,
San Marco, Venice,
12th century

as the result of the initiative of Venetian sailors who, *en route* for the crusading expedition of 1099, guided by the hand of God, set sail for Myra where they found the holy remains of Nicholas, which had escaped the attention of the Bari and Byzantine people[6]. This invention of the relics of the patron saint of sailors justified attempts to monopolize maritime trade in the Adriatic and provided a suitable patron for the powerful merchant families.

Like Nicholas, Theodore, George, and Isidore, saints of Byzantine origin served to protect Venetian plans for commercial and colonial hegemony[7]. From Constantinople came another important holy body, that of St Stephen, stolen this time no longer by ingenious sailors, but by a monk from the abbey of St George who, following divine will, managed to load the relics onto a ship and transport them to Venice. Here, the text of the translation tells us, a *schola* in honor of the saint was established through the interest of the most important lay families[8]. As Giorgio Cracco observes:

"The twelfth-century translations present, as a whole, a very significant scenario: Byzantium losing, and deserving to lose, relics one by one; Venice acquiring, and deserving to acquire, the same relics. Byzantium seeing the sanctity, the very foundation of its greatness emigrates towards the West, remaining sad, desolate, weeping; and Venice inheriting the same sanctity, as the pledge and sap of its now irrepressible greatness, giving vent to all its joy and exultation. What counted, in short, was Venice, in its undisputed unity of ordinary people and the Greats, of clergy and monks, 'represented' (no longer merely dominated) by the Doge, who by now possessed all the divine signs relevant to being recognised by all, in East and West, as the new Byzantium[9]."

The continuity with what would later be effectively implemented following the Fourth Crusade is thus evident: the "imperial" Venetian myth emerges from these accounts with great clarity.

Subjects, symbols, objects

All the most important Venetian mythographic narratives – destined to be very successful from the late thirteenth century onwards – also find their earliest stages of elaboration and circulation in the twelfth century. This is the case, for example, of Antenor and Attila who offer, as *pars costruens* the one and *destruens* the other, historical foundation myths of the Lagoon city. The two appear in fact already in historiographical texts dating back to this period and to which the thirteenth and fourteenth-century tradition would later refer to develop the themes of the Trojan genealogy of the Venetians and the *duplicatio* between the "first" and the "second Venice", the former founded inland, the latter in the Lagoon[10].

4   Thomas Dale, "Inventing a Sacred Past. Pictorial Narratives of St. Mark the Evangelist in Aquileia and Venice, ca. 1000–1300", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XLVIII (1994), pp. 53–104; Mara Mason, "I primi mosaici della basilica e l''elaborazione della leggenda marciana: considerazioni sullo stile e l''iconografia", in *San Marco* (n. 3), pp. 226–247.
5   David M. Perry, *Sacred Plunder: Venice and the Aftermath of the Fourth Crusade*, Penn State University Park 2015, p. 137.
6   Agostino Pertusi, "La contesa per le reliquie di s. Nicola tra Bari, Venezia e Genova", *Quaderni Medievali*, V (1978), pp. 6–56.
7   Michele Tomasi, "Prima, dopo, attorno alla cappella: il culto di Sant'Isidoro a Venezia", in *La cappella di Sant'Isidoro*, Venezia 2008 (= *Quaderni della Procuratoria di San Marco*, III [2008]), pp. 15–23; Stefania Gerevini, "Art as Politics in the Baptistery and Chapel of Sant'Isidoro at San Marco, Venice", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, LXXIV (2020), pp. 243–268.
8   Giorgio Cracco, "I testi agiografici: religione e politica nella Venezia del Mille", in *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, vol. I: *Origini – Età ducale*, Lellia Cracco Ruggini ed., Rome 1991, pp. 923–956. The text is found in Flaminio Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae antiquis monumentis illustratae,* VIII, Venice 1749, pp. 96–110; *S. Giorgio Maggiore,* III, *Documenti 1160–1199 e notizie di documenti*, Luigi Lanfranchi ed., Venice 1968, no. 144, pp. 504–505 (partial edition).
9   Cracco, "I testi agiografici" (n. 8), p. 954.
10 Antonio Carile, "Aspetti della cronachistica veneziana nei secoli XIII e XIV", in *La storiografia veneziana fino al secolo XVI. Aspetti e problemi*, Agostino Pertusi ed., Florence 1970, pp. 75–126; Élisabeth Crouzet Pavan, *Venise: une invention de la ville (XIIIe–XVe siècle)*, Paris 1997, pp. 223–248.

The legend of the Trojan foundation of Venice is fabricated by the same collective imagination that was dominant throughout the West during the late Middle Ages. The aim is to enhance the ancient history of cities without an ancient past, building a retroactive rivalry with Roman mythology. In the case of Venice in particular, the Trojan foundation is one of the instruments used to construct an "imperial" identity, but also a weapon within the conflict juxtaposing Venice with the other cities in Veneto[11].

The arrival of Antenor in Veneto after the post-war diaspora, however, is already discussed in Titus Livius, according to whom the Trojans landed at Pago, or Castello:

> *"Antenorem cum multitudine Henetum* [...] *primum egressi sunt locum, Troja vocatur, Pagoque inde Trojano nomen est: gens universa Veneti appellati"* (Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe condita*, i, 1).

A restatement of the foundation of Venice (not of the Veneto) by Antenor is taken up in the tenth–eleventh century by John Deacon in *Istoria Veneticorum* (iii, 39, ed. Berto 1999, p. 150), according to whom Castello corresponds to the location of San Pietro di Castello on the island of Olivolo.

A second tradition, on the other hand, seems to emerge and rival the first from the twelfth century onwards, and narrates how some Trojan exiles settled in the Lagoon territories, founding the "first Venice"; Antenor only later arrived on the Venetian shores and, finding them already inhabited, moved to the mainland to found what was to become the city of Padua.

The two traditions blend together both in Venetian chronicles and in the international sphere, i.e., within historiographical literature circulating in thirteenth-century Veneto. It is therefore complex to distinguish cases in which one text uses the other as its sole and direct source, since the dissemination of this legend takes place simultaneously within local chronicles in Latin as well as in widespread historiographical works in *langue d'oïl*. Thus, the *Chronicon Altinate* names the Trojan Antenor as the founder of Aquileia. In Martin da Canal's *Estoires de Venise* the author refers to the legend of Aquileia's foundation by Antenor, further adding that all the cities between the Adda and Pannonia are Trojan foundations[12], an element that is reflected in the geography of local traditions within which the legend is received and takes root. Finally, in the *Marci Chronica*[13], we are informed that Venice is founded by the Trojans before Rome.

The flexibility of the legend becomes clear by comparing two texts, ancestors of a tradition spreading both in the south and in the north of the Alps for at least two centuries: in the *Histoire Ancienne,* on the one hand, Antenor finds Venice already inhabited but is proclaimed king of it[14]; in the *Historia destructionis Troiae* by Guido delle Colonne, Antenor is simply mentioned as the founder of the city: *"Et Veneciarum urbem inhabitauerit ille Troyanus Anthenor"*[15].

It seems evident, in any case, that the manner in which the texts appropriate the legend of the Trojan foundation from the twelfth and especially during the thirteenth century does not alter its semantics. The Lagoon *must be* traced back to the noble Trojan lineage[16], and this either through an anonymous group of Trojans, or through a hero also known as the founder of other Venetian cities, who can on this occasion be represented as the founder of the "first Venice".

The circulation and production of books on ancient history in the city during the fourteenth century should also be read in the wake of the interest in the city's Trojan origins. It's a multilinguistic phenomenon including the production of manuscripts of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César,* codex of Trojan histories in Italian including translations

and original sections[17], as well as two luxuriously illuminated codices of Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* (Madrid, BNE, cod. 17805; Cologny, BM, cod. 178) [**Figs 3–4**]. Hugo Buchthal has investigated the complex visual culture that gave rise to the editorial project of the Madrid codex, in which the compositions of an authoritative late antique illuminated manuscript, the *Vienna Genesis*, are used as a model to depict the events of the Trojan War; stylistically, on the other hand, the miniatures of the Madrid codex parallel the most up-to-date artistic production of the time[18]. The twofold position of this object as an imitation of a late antique artefact and an avant-garde product of Venetian artistic culture connects past and present, thus confirming the authenticity and authority of the city's ancient roots.

Through the Attila episode, too, Venetian chronicle tradition set out to reaffirm this model of glorification. While the Trojan diaspora leads to the foundation of the "first Venice", the invasion of the hordes of the Huns under the leadership of the *flagellum Dei* urge the first Venetians to move to the lagoon, where they build the "second Venice". The destruction of Aquileia, *antiqua Venecia*, is first attributed to Attila instead of the Longobards in the *Origo civitatum Italie seu Venetiarum*, also known as *Chronicon Altinate*[19]. The advantages of this rewriting of history, which also requires a backdating of the historical event, are several: firstly, that of shifting the discourse onto the plane of the clash between Christians and pagans, i.e., of Christian Venetians fleeing pagan hordes; moreover, that of proving the second Venice inherited all jurisdictions, especially ecclesiastical ones, from Antiquity, that is, from the past of the much older city of Aquileia. The "new" Venetians (who founded Heraclea, the political capital of the second Venice, Grado, and the other eleven islands of the Lagoon) were no longer just a migrant population condemned to an inexorable exodus, but the protagonists of a true palingenesis.

11 Mario De Biasi, "Leggenda e storia nelle origini di Venezia", *Ateneo veneto,* XXIII (1985), pp. 77–101.

12 Ilaria Molteni, ''Libri troiani e invenzioni mitografiche nel Trecento veneziano",*Troianalexandrina*, XXII (2024), forthcoming.

13 See Daniela Bellantone, *La cronaca di Marco. Linee storiografiche e culturali a Venezia nel XIII secolo*, PhD thesis (Università degli Studi di Messina, supervised by Paola de Capua), Messina 2018, p. 239.

14 *Histoire Ancienne*, V, 587, §3–5, Simon Gaunt, Hannah Morcos, Maria Teresa Rachetta *et al* eds, London 2020: "*Quant Anthenor fu venus a terre, tuit cil qui la estoient s'en esjoirent mout, et neporquant si ot mainte larme ploree por ce qu'il lor resovenoit de lor amis et de la noble cité qu'il avoit perdue. Tant parlerent ensemble qu'Anthenor demora avec aus, et le firent roi et segnor, quar moult estoit sages et mout durement l'amoient. Adonc fu la cités faite et creue, et si l'apelerent Anthenoride por Anthenor, et Anthenorides en orent a non li peuple, mais puis ot un roi qui ot a non Henetus, por le cui non la cités ot a non Enethia, et cil qui aprés vindrent le non li changerent, et Venethiam l'apelerent*". Available online: https://tvof.ac.uk/textviewer/?p1=Fr20125/interpretive/paragraph/587 [last accessed 10/08/2023].

15 Guido De Columnis, *Historia destructionis Troiae*, Nathaniel E. Griffin ed., Cambridge, MA 1936, p. 12.

16 Antonio Carile, "Aspetti della cronachistica" (n. 10), pp. 75–126; see Nicola Carotenuto's article on Serban Marin, *Il mito delle origini: la cronachistica veneziana e la mitologia politica della città lagunare nel Medio Evo* (Ariccia 2017): "Note di lettura in margine a *Il mito delle origini* di Serban Marin", *Archivio Storico Italiano*, CLXXVI (2018), pp. 525–536; see sp. pp. 530–531: "The Trojan myth serves to elevate Venice to the rank of the other Venetian cities, which could also rest their *mythopoiesis* on a Roman past, to justify its imperial ambition, to build its image as a free people founded by nobles, as opposed to other realities, such as Rome; furthermore, such a Trojan myth made it possible to neutralize the cultural supremacy of Verona and Padua, incorporating Antenor and Madonna Verona into such a legend, not to mention that the use of such a myth is placed in the European *Weltanschauung* as a justification of royal power (as recalled in the *Giustinian Chronicle*)".

17 Matteo Cambi, "Codice, immagine e paratesto nel MS. Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, It. VI 81 (5795*)",Carte Romanze*, VII/2 (2019), pp. 347–374; Maria T. Rachetta, "Sull'*Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*: le origini della versione abbreviata; il codice Wien ÖNB cod. 2576. Per la storia di una tradizione",*Francigena*, V (2019), pp. 27–58; see also Matteo Cambi, *L'Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César in Italia: manoscritti, tradizioni testuali e volgarizzamenti*, Pisa 2020, pp. 133–166.

18 Hugo Buchthal, *Historia Troiana. Studies in the History of Mediaeval Secular Illustration*, London/Leiden 1971.

19 Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity: The Venetian Sense of the Past*, New Haven 1997.

3 / Guido delle Colonne, *Historia destructionis Troiae*, Trojan council / BNE (Madrid), cod. 17085, f. 121r

4 / Guido delle Colonne, *Historia destructionis Troiae*, King Priam in council / BB (Cologny), cod. 78, f. 18v

The legend was reworked several times during the thirteenth century. The narrative skeleton of the Hunnic invasion is preserved intact from one chronicle to the next, as can be seen by comparing the incipit of the episode as it appears in the *Origo,* the *Marci Chronica* and Martin da Canal's *Estoires*:

Marco[20]

Post igitur passionem beatissimi Marci Evangeliste et multorum alliorum sanctorum, verum fuit, quia subito apud paganos rumor intonuit, quod tota provincia lumbardorum conversa esset ad legem fidei cristiane. Et tunc quidam nomine Attillus, ferrus ut bestia, cum quingentibus militibus equitibus et innumerosa moltitudine peditum versus partes Ytalie se direxit, provinciam ipsam consternacioni subiciens et gladiis feralibus devotos habitatores exponens adeo ut, qui ante faciem eius effugere poterant, ad marinas insulas et litora repedarent.

Altinate[21]

Transactis autem multorum annorum temporibus ab incarnacione domini nostri Iesu Christi surrexit ab illa australi plaga impius paganus nomine Atila, sevissimus, cum magno exercitu; venit et intravit in illam antiquam Veneciam, Deo sibi contrario, et cepit destruere cunctas Venecie civitates et depredare omnes. veniens Aquilegiam, circumdedit in giro cum quingentis militibus bellatorum hominum; quam comprehendentes, estruxerunt eam usque ad solum.

Estoires[22]

Celui paien estoit apelés Attile; celui Atille vint en Itaire encontre les crestiens, et avec lui cinc cent mil homes, et prist premierement une noble cité que l'en apele Aulee et la mist a destrucion: et sachés que cele Aulee fu estoree premierement por li Troians. Et quant Atille fu en saisine de Aulee, il s'en ala avant et mist a destrucion totes les viles que firent li Troians en seche terre jusque a Millan. Et par cele destrucion s'enfuïrent la nobilité des homes et des femes de celes viles enver la mer et troverent desor la marine monciaus de terre et firent desor ciaus monciaus de terre maintes beles viles.

It is significant that the episode of Attila's invasion, conceived and incorporated into the Venetian past narrative from the *Chronicon Altinate* onwards, not only took root in the chronicles of the thirteenth century, but also provided the subject of a separate work at the end of the fourteenth century: the *Atile en prose*[23]. The interest for the legend in the late fourteenth century testifies to the need to insist on the strengths that Venice displayed from the fifth century onwards: its assertion of independence, its capacity for reinvention and rebirth, but also the role of "Guardian of Christianity" the city claimed to exercise.

Similarly, twelfth-century administrative practices and doge rituals already involve the use of objects that will acquire new meanings in the late Middle Ages, becoming the so-called *trionfi:* symbols of the Republic's trading privileges and maritime dominance[24].

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20 *Marco*, I, 27, f. 36v–37r, transcribed by Daniela Bellantone, in *La cronaca di Marco* (n. 13), p. 119.
21 *Chron. Alt.* III, 9, 16–24, Roberto Cessi ed., Venice 1933, p. 154.
22 *Estoires* I, 3, § 2–5, Alberto Limentani ed., Florence 1972, p. 6.
23 Andrea Beretta, "Sviluppi plurilingui dell'*Atile en prose*. Prolegomeni ad un'edizione", *Francigena*, III (2017), pp. 137–172.
24 Muir, "Idee, riti, simboli del potere" (n. 1), pp. 745–748.

Some public ceremonies also participate in this semantic shift, such as the Blessing of the Waters, a twelfth-century ritual commemorating the first Venetian expedition to Dalmatia led by Doge Orseolo (1000), which, by the fourteenth century, is incorporated into the new triumphal pomp[25].

With the implementation of a vast commercial and political network sealed by the management of key territories on the Adriatic shores, optimal conditions were created for the import of artworks through diplomatic channels, trade, and marriage alliances. This phenomenon, mainly explored in relation to the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade, is in fact well documented as early as the twelfth century. The establishment of the treasure of San Marco's, the highest material expression of accumulation of precious objects in Venice, most likely dates back to before 1204[26]. Similarly, the use of *spolia* and foreign materials in the decoration of churches, another aspect of Venetian material culture extensively studied as a result of the Fourth Crusade, is also well attested as early as in the twelfth century: several churches in the Lagoon, in fact, already display ancient *spolia* or reused materials coming from the Eastern Mediterranean[27].

Venice 1204: an Empire made of paper and stone

In fact, several recent works highlight the existence of continuity in the way Venice invents and displays its own history, before and after the communal regime, before and after the Fourth Crusade. The significance of this *longue durée* phenomenon is to be assessed on the background of actual changes attested by historical data; first and foremost, the capture of Constantinople in 1204[28].

Scholars mainly focused on the change of equilibria in the relationship between Venice and Byzantium, as emerges from the extensive use in the Lagoon of imported materials, *spolia*, architectural forms, luxury objects and relics from the Byzantine area[29]. Still to be pursued, however, is research comparing the results of these studies with those arising from others that have focused on the outcome of the experiment of Latin domination on Venetian economic, political and social structures, showing a negative impact[30].

The actual, historically attested failure suffered by Venice outside the Lagoon becomes within Venice the opportunity to stage its own success. The recourse to the material and symbolic legacy of Constantinople in the elaboration of urban projects, artistic practices, and literary culture, must be interpreted as a response to the discrepancy between the social-economic reality and the staging of a successful city.

In fact, according to the partition agreements made with the Crusaders and recorded in the *partitio Romaniae*, the Venetians were entitled to three-eighths of the entire imperial territory and an equal area in the city of Constantinople [**Fig. 5**][31]. Only the latter, however, would be respected; and as the attempt to conquer the whole empire would never be completed, Venice would make do with a few commercially strategic territories, the most important being the island of Crete[32]. Thus, the title of Governor of "a quarter and a half of the empire of Romania" reflects the imperial dreams of Venice but not the real situation, since the Venetians only possessed a quarter and a half of the empire on paper. In the Constantinopolitan concession district, on the other hand, they immediately undertook to establish a more solid and centralized administration, entrusting the reins to the *Podestà*, a new role instituted precisely in 1204[33]. In fact, the title of *dominus quarte partis et dimidie imperii romani dominator* was originally attributed to Marino Zen, the first Venetian *Podestà* in Constantinople, and only later Doge Pietro Ziani makes it his own (1205–1229)[34]. As David Jacoby has shown, the office of *Podestà* appears particularly

Constantinople and its Venetian quarter, 1082–1261 (conjectural reconstruction)

important, showing the high value of the Venetian quarter in Constantinople in the politics and administration of the *Serenissima*[35]. Chosen from among members of the most prominent families of the city's elite and assisted by a council composed of members of the most influential families of Venetians living in Constantinople, the *Podestà* was solicited for all the most important matters, from the resolution of internal problems to

25 See Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting in the age of Carpaccio*, New Haven 1988.

26 Stefania Gerevini, "The Grotto of the Virgin in San Marco: Artistic Reuse and Cultural Identity in Medieval Venice", *Gesta*, LIII (2014), pp. 197–220.

27 Armin F. Bergmeier, "The Production of *Ex Novo* Spolia and the Creation of History in Thirteenth-Century Venice", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, LXII (2020), pp. 126–157; Karen Mathews, "Speaking Antiquity. Ancient Spolia as a Visual *Koine* in the Medieval Mediterranean (12th to 15th Century)", in *Spoliation as Translation. Medieval Worlds in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Ivana Jevtic, Ingela Nilsson eds, Brno/Turnhout 2021 (= *Convivium*, Supplementum II [2021]), pp. 38–59; Marilyn Perry, "Saint Mark's Trophies: Legend, Superstition and Archaeology in Renaissance Venice", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XL (1977), pp. 27–49.

28 Donald M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*, Cambridge 1988; Giorgio Ravegnani, *Bisanzio e Venezia*, Bologna 2006.

29 Maria Georgopoulu, "Late Medieval Crete and Venice: an Appropriation of Byzantine Heritage", *The Art Bulletin*, LXXVII (1995), pp. 379–496; Holger A. Klein, "Refashioning Byzantium in Venice, ca. 1200–1400", in *San Marco, Byzantium, and the Myths of Venice*, Henry Maguire, Robert S. Nelson eds, Washington, D.C. 2010, pp. 193–225; Bergmeier, "The Production" (n. 27).

30 Maria M. Ferraccioli, Gianfranco Giraudo, "Venezia, Costantinopoli e l'idea dell'Impero cristiano", *Bizantinistica*, XV (2013), pp. 189–197; David Jacoby, "Venetian Settlers in Latin Constantinople (1204–1261): Rich or Poor?", in *Byzantium, Latin Romania and the Mediterranean*, David Jacoby ed., Aldershot 2001, pp. 181–204.

31 Antonio Carile, "Partitio terrarum Imperii Romanie", *Studi veneziani*, VII (1965), pp. 125–306.

32 Albrecht Berger, "Il quadro storico", in *I tondi di Venezia and Dumbarton Oaks*, Albrecht Berger, Lorenzo Lazzarini, Niccolo Zorzi eds, Rome 2019, pp. 23–34; Antonio Carile, *Per una storia dell''impero latino di Costantinopoli: 1204–1261*, Bologna 1978.

33 On the Venetian district, see David Jacoby, "The Venetian Quarter of Constantinople from 1082 to 1261: Topographical Considerations", in *Novum millennium. Studies on Byzantine History and Culture Dedicated to Paul Speck*, Claudia Sode, Sarolta Takacs eds, Aldershot 2001, pp. 153–170.

34 Serban Marin, "*Dominus quartae partis et dimidiae totius Imperii Romaniae*. The Fourth Crusade and the Dogal Title in the Venetian Chronicles's Representation", *Quaderni della Casa Romena di Venezia*, III (2004), pp. 119–150.

35 David Jacoby, "The Venetian Government and Administration in Latin Constantinople, 1204–1261: A State Within a State", in *Quarta Crociata. Venezia-Bisanzio-Impero latino*, Gherardo Ortalli, Giorgio Ravegnani, Peter Schreiner eds, Venice 2005, pp. 19–80.

the management of diplomatic and political relations, and once this assignment ended, important possibilities for a political career in the Lagoon opened up for him.

The introduction of new imperial titles to emphasize a not entirely acquired dominion[36], as well as the institution of new prestigious political offices for the aristocracy, therefore, only had effective consequences on the ruling class of Venice, without a real positive consequence on economy and commerce, a crucial concern for the Venetian population. Indeed, as Louise Robbert has observed, numerous sources, from travellers' accounts to real estate and notarial documents, point to a demographic and commercial decline in Constantinople from the second quarter of the thirteenth century onwards[37]. Although Venice continued to support the city economically by sending fleets and officers, trade between the two centres weakened greatly in the final decades of Latin rule, ultimately contributing to the unfavorable outcome of the city's experiment in controlling economic and trade policies.

Missing, lost, and hidden representations

The negative economic results experienced during the Latin domination of Constantinople and, later, the definitive loss of the capital in 1261, must be linked to an evident phenomenon of a lack of representations of this domination in literary and artistic discourses produced during the period 1204–1261, a silence that needs to be investigated. In the Lagoon chronicles of the first half of the century, in fact, accounts of the events connected with the Fourth Crusade are rare and meagre: only Martin da Canal's *Estoires de Venise*, written in 1267 provides a complete Venetian account of the crusade[38]. The circulation of relics shows a similar situation: Doge Andrea Dandolo's *Chronica Extensa*, a late (and perhaps not entirely reliable) source is an earlier text informing us about the division of relics plundered in 1204, which, he says, earned the Venetians important booty[39]. In general, we have no early sources supporting accounts of the looting of Constantinople and the transfer of relics to Venice, although this was highly probable. Moreover, even the celebration of the acquisition of these prestigious relics and their use in the promotion of Venice's image, seem to come only later, in the 1260s, at the initiative of Doge Ranieri Zeno[40]. Zeno was also responsible for the elaboration of a new official ceremony that included elements derived from the imperial rite. The city's greatest monumental decoration projects – the embellishment of San Marco's façades and the building of its atrium – also seem to have begun during these years[41].

As David Perry states, therefore, in 1261, with the fall of Latin Constantinople, new possibilities opened up for Venice to increase the city's imperial stature[42]. Indeed, as far as past narratives are concerned, the need to construct an historical framework to vindicate Venice's position in the Mediterranean seems to grow rapidly as it becomes clear that the dream of a Mediterranean domination is destined to fade away.

Decorating with *spolia*

The Venetian case differs markedly from the practices in vogue in the maritime cities of Genoa and Pisa, where during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries an abundant number of *spolia* were pillaged from different areas of the Mediterranean arena and used to build triumphalist narratives[43]. In Venice, instead, the main aim of the public programmes put in place from 1261 onwards, was to provide the city's history with an unprecedented temporal depth. Recently, scholars have challenged the triumphalist interpretation that

has long prevailed in studies of San Marco's decoration. Set into the façades of the basilica well after the events of 1204, at a time when Latin domination over Constantinople had already come to an end, *spolia* and other important materials from the Byzantine area cannot in fact be considered as war trophies and symbols of military dominance, but as tokens of a revisionist view, aimed at the search for an alternative history[44].

This "revisionist" strategy is based on three elements that variously interact: 1. the creation of complex, stratified and, at first sight, eclectic monumental scenarios; 2. the elaboration of retrospective narratives aimed at celebrating the origin of certain reused materials; 3. the use of archaic and deceptive stylistic idioms. This is not a unitary and monolithic strategy but rather a conscious display of many different sculptural elements on a same façade in order to increase their historical referentiality through juxtaposition and accumulation.

The combination of these elements in the construction of a temporal illusion is particularly evident on the south façade of San Marco, which during the thirteenth century acquired great importance in the urban scene [**Fig. 6**]. Immediately adjacent to the Doge's Palace, it was this façade that first appeared to travellers arriving in Venice by sea when they landed on the Piazzetta. The latter, enlarged according to a resolution voted for by

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36 On the use of these titles, see Marin, "*Dominus quartae partis et dimidiae*" (n. 34).

37 Louise Buenger Robbert, "Rialto Businessmen and Constantinople, 1204–61", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, XLIX (1995), pp. 43–58.

38 Donald M. Nicol, "La quarta Crociata", in *Storia di Venezia* (n. 1), pp. 155–182; Thomas F. Madden, "The Venetian Version of the Fourth Crusade: Memory and the Conquest of Constantinople in Medieval Venice", *Speculum*, LXXXVII (2012), pp. 311–344.

39 Perry, *Sacred plunder* (n. 5), p. 31.; Klein, "Refashioning Byzantium (n. 29), p. 217.

40 Fabio Barry, "*Disiecta membra*: Ranieri Zeno, the Imitation of Constantinople, the *Spolia* Style, and Justice at San Marco", in *San Marco, Byzantium* (n. 29), pp. 7–62.

41 *The Atrium of San Marco in Venice. The Genesis and Medieval Reality of the Genesis Mosaics*, Martin Büchsel, Herbert L. Kessler, Rebecca Müller eds, Frankfurt 2014.

42 Perry, *Sacred plunder* (n. 5), p. 164.

43 Rebecca Müller, *Sic hostes Ianua frangit: Spolien und Trophäen im mittelalterlichen Genua*, Weimar 2002; Karen Mathews, "Decorating with Things. Spolia as Material Culture in the Italian Maritime Republics, 1100–1300", in *Copy-Paste. The Reuse of Material and Visual Culture in Architecture*, Richard Buser, Francine Giese eds, Zurich 2015 (= *bfo-Journal*, I [2015]), pp. 3–13.

44 Bergmeier, "The production" (n. 27), pp. 151–156.

the Maggior Consiglio in 1283, is bordered by twin columns installed around 1268 and surmounted by two statues, a bronze lion and a marble St Theodore, recorded in sources from 1293 and 1329 respectively [**Fig. 7**][45]. Both are totally or partially made from ancient pieces, whose identification as spoils of the Fourth Crusade is not certain. The layout of the small square imitates the imperial *fora* of Constantinople, in an attempt to appropriate the Roman heritage that characterizes the urban setting of the Byzantine capital[46].

In front of the façade are two large pillars, the so-called "Acritan pillars" [**Fig. 8**]. Despite their name, they come from the Church of St Polyeuctus, an imperial foundation located in the Venetian district in Constantinople and methodically pillaged in order to reuse its precious sculptures in the major churches of Venice between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries[47]. The legend according to which the pillars came from the Genoese fortress of Acre, plundered by the Venetians after the war of San Saba (1255–1270), only appears in Venetian historiography from the fiftheenth century onwards: a triumphalist interpretation of these *spolia* at the time of their installation in the thirteenth century has therefore to be excluded[48].

The façade, on the other hand, is exceptionally rich, both for its chromatic and material qualities: the wall is covered with slabs of veined marble, reliefs decorated with lozenge motifs, racemes and animals, the famous group of tetrarchs on the south-west corner and, below, a bench decorated with a frieze composed of animals. This pastiche of elements related to Outremer, Byzantine, and late antique traditions prompted Otto Demus to label the façade as a "trophy wall", a display of trophies celebrating the victory over Constantinople[49].

Antique styles and simulated antiquity?

Recent research has actually described a more complex situation. Between citations of contemporary scenarios and the staging of legacies of late antique traditions, an effect of tension between past and present is produced, in order to legitimize topical claims and concerns and invent a past worthy of these claims.

Part of the reliefs would seem to be only apparently of late antique or mid-Byzantine origin. Iconographic and technical details, in fact, betray an execution by Venetian crafts-men during the late thirteenth or even fourteenth century[50]. These examples account for the wide range of possibilities for interaction with the legacy of the past, from the use of *spolia*, to the updating of objects, and the reference to archaic styles. The doge tombs of the mid-century exemplify all these practices. While for the tomb of Jacopo Tiepolo (d. 1249), an actual ancient sarcophagus was used and reworked, the reliefs of the tombs of Marino Morosini (d. 1253) and Ranieri Zeno (d. 1268) seem to be *ex novo* products, despite their late antique appearance [Fig. 9][51].

New questions thus arise regarding the reasons leading to create sculptural settings of late antique allure, whether real or presumed. For the group of tetrarchs, for example, interpretations surpassing the triumphalist rhetoric have been suggested, considering it a material and visual indication of the importance of the treasure guarded behind the wall of which the four figures stand guard[52]. However, the pervasive recourse to archais-ing stylistic language inevitably transcends simple synchronic comparisons but calls into to question the values of historicity. The display of *spolia* to visualize the city's origins is not unusual in Italian *comuni* drawing upon their Roman and classical heritage. In Venice,

45 Guido Tigler, "Intorno alle colonne di Piazza San Marco", in *Atti. Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Classe di Scienze Morali, Lettere ed Arti*, CLVIII (2000), pp. 1–46; Luigi Sperti, "Reimpiego di scultura antica a Venezia: proposte e ipotesi recenti", in *I tondi di Venezia* (n. 32), pp. 161–188.

46 Juergen Schulz, "Urbanism in Medieval Venice", in *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, Julia Emlen, Anthony Molho, Kurt Raaflaub eds, Stuttgart 1991, pp. 438–441; Robert Nelson, "The History of Legends and the Legends of History: The Pilastri Acritani in Venice", in *San Marco, Byzantium* (n. 29), pp. 63–90, sp. pp. 78–79.

47 Claudia Barsanti, Myriam Pilutti Namer, "Da Costantinopoli a Venezia: nuove spoglie della chiesa di S. Polieucto", *Nea Rhome*, VI (2009), pp. 133–156.

48 Nelson, "The History of Legends" (n. 46); Barry, "Disiecta membra" (n. 40), p. 52.

49 Otto Demus, *The Church of San Marco in Venice: History, Architecture, Sculpture*, Washington, D.C. 1960, pp. 113–116.

50 Henry Maguire, "The South Façade of the Treasury of San Marco", in *San Marco* (n. 3), pp. 122–129.

51 Debra Pincus, *The Tombs of the Doges of Venice*, Cambridge 2000; Bergmeier, "The production" (n. 27), pp. 131–136.

52 Sperti, "Reimpiego di scultura" (n. 45), p. 173. On the Tetrachs: "L'′enigma dei Tetrarchi", Ennio Concina, Irene Favaretto, Peter Schreiner eds, Venice 2013 (= *Quaderni della procuratoria di San Marco* VIII).

however, Oriental, late antique, and Middle Byzantine models are chosen[53]. Bergmeier showed that the case of Venice is not isolated, but on the contrary participates in a *koine* widely shared in the Eastern Mediterranean, in areas where the *Serenissima* maintains close and frequent commercial contacts such as Trebizond, Anatolia, the Caucasus and Egypt[54]. The sophisticated strategy through which Venice claims an ancient and venerable pedigree is clearly designed to adapt to its nature of a cosmopolitan city, populated by a wide range of communities. Widely shared, this *koine* plays a part in the invention of a historical-cultural identity that, referring back to the Eastern Roman Empire, evokes the notion of *Romanitas* in a particular connotation[55], breaking away from the myths on which the foundational legends of the rival port cities of Pisa and Genoa are based and is tailored to the city's geopolitical ambitions[56].

In Venice, in fact, the appropriation of late antique and Byzantine heritage takes on specific features that are shaped by the two great themes that guide the civic mythographic constructions: the dominion over the sea and the city's role in Christianity. In the case of the south façade, for example, it has been observed how the visual effect produced by the assemblage of apparently heteroclite elements can be considered as an imitation of the façade of the Grand Palace of Constantinople facing the sea[57]. The comparison and the attempt to present itself as the legitimate heir to Constantinople thus passes not only through the appropriation of its most prized *spolia* but also through the imitation of its most iconic urban settings: the Imperial Palace but also the Hippodrome and the Golden Gate, two essential scenic backdrops in imperial ceremonies. Both are quoted on San Marco's main façade [**Fig. 10**]: through the placement of the large bronze quadriga from the Hippodrome on the top of the façade and of six large reliefs on the pendentives separating the church's main portals[58]. Three of these reliefs are of Byzantine origin: St Demetrius, Archangel Gabriel and Hercules; whereas the others, St George, Virgin, and another Hercules, are Venetian imitations. Establishing thematic pairs, the reliefs stage a fictitious line of historical continuity certifying the city's ancient roots[59].

Venetian trajectories: from the ancient world to the Holy Land

The city's Classical and Christian antique origins are complemented on the façade by the foundational myth celebrated in the mosaics that once decorated the lunettes above the portals: executed around 1260, they narrated the story of the *translatio* of St Mark's body from Alexandria to Venice, thus reaffirming Venice's prominent position in the history of Christianity[60].

The façade as a whole is thus presented as a concentration of elements that, drawing on various geographical and cultural horizons and employing different techniques, iconographies, and styles, succeeds in *visualising* the image of Venice both in its historical and geographical coordinates[61]. Effective examples to illustrate this practice are San Marco's portal of St Alipio and the chair of St Peter preserved in the Cathedral of San Pietro in Castello [Figs 11–12]. The former presents an architectural and sculptural mix of elements derived from the Egyptian Fatimid tradition and others whose origin, symptomatically, is debated between scholars who consider them pieces of Byzantine origin and others who consider them thirteenth-century Venetian imitations[62]. This ensemble seals the link between St Mark's life in Egypt and the antiquity of the basilica preserving the saint's body.

11/ Porta di Sant'Alipio, San Marco, Venice, 13th century

12/ The "Chair of St Peter", San Pietro in Castello, Venice, 13th century

53 Armin Bergmeier, "Antiquarian Displays of *Spolia* and Roman Identity. San Marco, Merbaka, and the Seljuk Caravanserais", in *Spoliation as translation* (n. 27), pp. 76–97.
54 On the interplay with Egyptian and Byzantine traditions, see Herbert L. Kessler, Serena Romano, "A Hub of Art. In, Out, and Around Venice. 1177–1499", *Convivium*, VII/1 (2020), pp. 1–54, sp. pp. 20–26.
55 Bergmeier, "Antiquarian Displays" (n. 53), pp. 85–88.
56 On this topic, see Debra Pincus, "Venice and the Two Romes: Byzantium and Rome as a Double Heritage in Venetian Cultural Politics", *Artibus et Historiae*, XXVI (1992), pp. 101–114.
57 Maguire, "The South Façade" (n. 50).
58 Michael Jacoff, "Fashioning a Façade: The Construction of Venetian Identity on the Exterior of San Marco", in *San Marco, Byzantium* (n. 29), pp. 113–150.
59 This chronological palimpsest effect is described by Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity* (n. 19), pp. 21–23.
60 Jacoff, "Fashioning a façade" (n. 58).
61 Elizabeth Rodini, "Mapping Narrative at the Church of San Marco: A Study in Visual Storying", *Word and Image*, XIV (1998), pp. 387–396.
62 Thomas Dale, "Cultural Hybridity in Medieval Venice: Reinventing the East at San Marco after the Fourth Crusade", in *San Marco, Byzantium* (n. 29), pp. 151–191.

13 / Zen chapel, western side of
the vault, mosaics with the Life of
St Mark, San Marco, atrium, Venice,
13th century

14 / Relief of Nativity and the
Flight to Egypt, San Marco,
Zen Chapel, Venice, 13th century

15 / "Virgin Aniketos", relief icon,
San Marco, Zen Chapel, Venice,
13th century

16 / Genesis dome, San Marco,
atrium, Venice, 13th century

St Peter's chair exemplifies a similar strategy – made in the thirteenth century using a slab with Koranic inscriptions, it refers to Antioch, the place of St Peter's preaching, and it is typologically linked to two venerable late antique objects: the Petrine chair preserved in the Vatican and St Mark's chair kept in Venice[63]. The reference to prestigious objects and traditions, combined with carefully selected geographical references, aims to legitimize both Venice's colonial vocation and its importance in Christianity.

The intersection between narratives of the past and spatial trajectories is further developed in the atrium, a place promoting the image of Venice as a holy city. As the main embarkation point for pilgrims bound for the Holy Land, in fact, from the fourteenth century onwards the city gradually became the first holy place visited by pilgrims on their journey to the East[64]. In this gradual affirmation of Venice as a place of pilgrimage in its own right, the spatial and chronological discourse that takes shape through the decoration of the atrium certainly plays a leading role. The narrative begins in today's Zen Chapel, at the time Porta da Mar, a ceremonial entrance for foreign officials and dignitaries [Fig. 13]. From here it proceeds anti-clockwise along the atrium, concluding with the Porta dei Fiori, the embarkation point for travellers on their way to the Holy Land. The decoration of the atrium stages three narrative motifs in thematic connection with each other: the stories of the Virgin and St Mark in the Porta da Mar and the cycle of the Old Testament – Creation, Noah, Abraham, Joseph and Moses – on the atrium domes[65]. The Porta da Mar is the main connector between these narrative programmes. Two reliefs on the walls are dedicated to the Virgin[66]: the first, depicting the Flight to Egypt and the Nativity, recalls the Old Testament stories of Joseph; whereas the second, the *Aniketos* Icon, opposite it, is considered a relic [Figs 14–15]. According to a narrative attested since the fifteenth century, it was carved on the stone from which Moses made water gush forth. This narrative prefigures the episode of Moses actually depicted at the end of the Old Testament cycle of the domes[67]. While the depictions dedicated to the Virgin allude to the Old Testament theme of the atrium, the story of St Mark's missions to Italy and Egypt on the barrel vault connects the programme of the domes to that of the façade mosaics. In this way, enveloped in the story of the Evangelist's journey and that of the *translatio* of the relics, the times of sacred history are linked to those of the Venetian past[68]. This connection explains some unusual choices in the Old Testament cycle, such as the insistence on Egypt, with no less than three domes dedicated to Joseph, or the enrichment of the theme of the Genesis cycle with numerous iconographic allusions to Venetian history [Fig. 16][69]. References to the mercantile reality and to the overseas possessions of

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63 Staale Sinding-Larsen, "St. Peter's Chair in Venice", in *Art, the Ape of Nature: Studies in Honor of H. W. Janson*, Moshe Barash, Lucy Freeman Sandler eds, New York 1981, pp. 35–50; Deborah Howard, *Venice & the East: The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture 1100–1500*, New Haven 2000, p. 104.

64 Michele Bacci, "A Power of Relative Importance: San Marco and the Holy Icons", *Convivium*, II/1 (2015), pp. 126–147.

65 *The Atrium of San Marco* (n. 41).

66 On the dedication of the space to the Virgin, see Thomas Dale, "Epiphany at San Marco: The Sculptural Program of the Porta da Mar in the Dugento", in *San Marco* (n. 3), pp. 38–55; for a refutation of Dale's thesis on the Porta's sculptural program, see Ludovico Geymonat, Lorenzo Lazzarini, "A Nativity Cycle for the Choir Screen of San Marco, Venice", *Convivium*, VII/1 (2020), pp. 81–112.

67 Henry Maguire, "The Aniketos Icon and the Display of Relics in the Decoration of San Marco", in *San Marco, Byzantium* (n. 29), pp. 91–111.

68 Thomas Dale, "Pictorial Narratives of the Holy Land and the Myth of Venice in the Atrium of San Marco", in *The Atrium of San Marco* (n. 41), pp. 247–269.

69 On this dome, see Karin Krause, "Venedigs Sitz im Paradies. Zur Schöpfungskuppel in der Vorhalle von San Marco", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz,* XLVIII (2004), pp. 9–54; on the Genesis cycle and its models, see Herbert L. Kessler, "The Cotton Genesis in situ: An Early Christian Manuscript Cycle on the Walls of a Thirteenth--Century Venetian Church", in *The Antique Memory and the Middle Ages*, Ivan Foletti, Zuzana Frantová eds, Rome 2015, pp. 11–28.

Venice are also present in the other domes and build a spatial representation tailored to the city's commercial and cosmopolitan identity[70].

As Thomas Dale has noted, the intersection of the spatial and geographical references with the historical and biblical themes displayed in the mosaics, shows interesting analogies with the literary genre of itineraries to the Holy Land, very much in vogue at this time[71]. As in these texts, in fact, a sequence of *topoi* and *loci sancti* is marked out in the mosaics of the domes, thus transforming the place where the body of St Mark is kept into an ideal Holy Land.

Marin Sanudo and Paolino Veneto: new Venetian "vocations"

The amount of Venetian chronicles that have been conserved shows that a prolific tradition existed from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century: such chronicles, telling the story of Venice from its origins, were independent works, but yet similar in their content and in the use of Latin.[72] Only after the defeats that Venice suffered during the fourteenth century, authors often began using the Venetian vernacular for their works[73], and they purposefully provided their chronicles with new literary characters and topics, aimed at revealing the Venetian "vocations": the new political and commercial objectives that Venice avouched from the end of the thirteenth century. The decisive renewal for this tradition began in 1291; the apex of this codification is represented by the *Chronica per extensum descripta* of Andrea Dandolo (1306–1354)[74]. The first phenomenon to be mentioned, in order of time, is the application of the narrative structure proper to the universal history style. This is characteristic of the *Marci Chronica Universalis* (1292)[75]: the anonymous author declares in the *Prologue* that his objective is to *compile* in Latin a series of French sources, in order to preserve the history of the origins of Venice ("*de his que ad hedificacionem Veneciarum pertinent* [...] *compilavi*", *Marco*, 31v)[76]. The author thus proposed the history of Venice in Latin, an idiom perceived as universal, in order to celebrate the importance of the role of Venice in universal history, within the framework of a universal chronicle.

On the basis of these new characters, two other works contribute to the renewal of the genre under the pressure of contingencies: those of Marin Sanudo and Paolino Minorita. The *Liber Secretorum Fidelium Crucis* of Marin Sanudo il Vecchio (called Torsello, ca 1270–1334) is a compilation with a marked political-geographical objective. Written by the early 1320s, this work supports the Venetian "vocation" of the New Crusade, the one that should have taken place after the fall of Acre in 1291, as well as of the Crusader States of the East. Marin Sanudo projects the future success of Venice in the enterprises to come, revealing the reality of a contemporary collapse linked to the fall of the eastern domains. As has been noted by Irene Reginato, however, what is most relevant in Sanudo's strategy is the disappearance of the "*iato cronologico*"[77], between the past era of conquests and the present phase of defeats. This disparity is erased by the juxtaposition between Sanudo's *Liber* and the Villehardouin's *Conqueste de Constantinople* in some manuscripts. The consequence is that the two works "*appaiono come due* volets *della medesima operazione propagandistica, entrambi strumenti per promuovere un sogno cristiano che per Sanudo è sempre e* in primis *un sogno veneziano*"[78]. The strategy of discovering the past and updating the present by using Villehardouin's texts is also revealed by the fact that Sanudo had several copies of the *Liber* and at least two luxury copies of the *Conqueste* made and illustrated by the same *atelier* [**Fig. 17**][79].

This hypothesis makes it possible to extend the relationship between the *Liber* and the *Conqueste* to an iconographic level. Sanudo chose a very precise range of models to

70 Howard, *Venice & the East* (n. 63), pp. 65–93.

71 Dale, "Pictorial Narratives" (n. 68).

72 Antonio Carile, "Chronica Gradensia nella storiografia veneziana", in *Antichità Altoadriatiche. XVII Grado nella storia e nell'arte*, Trieste 1980, pp. 111–138, sp. pp. 112–113.

73 Bellantone, *La cronaca di Marco* (n. 13), p. 218. See Carile, "Aspetti della cronachistica" (n. 10), pp. 90–91; Giorgio Ortalli, "I cronisti e la determinazione di Venezia", in *Storia di Venezia* (n. 1), pp. 761–782.

74 The *A volgare* is a chronicle of Venice from its origins to 1361, probably written to meet the needs of the wider local public intrigued by the success of Andrea Dandolo's *Extensa*, derived from the translation into Venetian vernacular of a parallel but richer *A latina*; the Pseudo-Enrico Dandolo, *Cronica di Venexia*, was written after 1360 (see *Cronica di Venexia detta di Enrico Dandolo. Origini–1362*, Roberto Pesce ed., Venice 2010).

75 As the presentation of the work and the author in the prologue indicates; see Bellantone, *La cronaca di Marco* (n. 13), p. 233.

76 *Ibidem*, pp. 60–61. The most recognizable French source is the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*.

77 *Ibidem*, p. 73.

78 *Ibidem*, p. 71.

79 Irene Reginato, "Marino Sanudo Torsello e la Conqueste de Constantinople di Geoffroy de Villehardouin", in *La prosa medievale: produzione e circolazione*, Massimiliano Gaggero, Filippo Pilati eds, Rome 2020, pp. 59–74.

17 / Geoffroy de Villehardouin, *Conqueste de Constantinople*, copy made for Marin Sanudo / BL (Oxford), Laud. Misc. 587

emulate for his text: he is indeed inspired by the "crusade miniature" – encompassed by some copies of the *Histoire d'Outremer* and of the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César* produced in Acri, as well as by a manuscript of the *Descriptio Terrae Sanctae*[80].

A complementary phenomenon is witnessed in the work of Paolino Minorita[81]. The *Chronologia magna* (or *Compendium*), completed between 1321 and 1323, combines the two series of materials: on the one hand, we find the traditional topics of the universal chronicle, combining mythology and the main historical events; on the other hand, it contains geographical descriptions accompanied by cartographic representations. The images become a scriptural mirror: this association makes the *Compendium* one of the *ante-litteram* witnesses of the "cronache per immagini"[82]. Moreover, the growing interest for geography, shown by the proliferation of cartography, results from the growing need to divulge the topography of the Holy Land, in view of a forthcoming and promised crusade. In this sense, it provides an illustration, in a colonialist vein, of both the ancient overseas dominions and the potential new maritime conquests.

The phenomenon is not isolated: the cartographic representations that Paolino wanted for his *Chronologia magna* [**Fig. 18**] are also found in the *Liber* of Marin Sanudo il Vecchio (which he had examined in Avignon in 1321). Moreover, one of the oldest manuscripts of the *Compendium* – Bibl. Naz. Marciana, ms. lat. Z. 399 (1610) – must have been executed in the same Venetian atelier that decorated the manuscripts of Sanudo's *Liber* (Brussels, Bibl. Royale, 9404–9405 and 9437–9438)[83].

Relics on stage

The theft of relics in Constantinople led to the creation of new narratives within the representation of Venice as a sacred place. A sign of these relics is given by a missive transmitted from Ranieri Zeno to the Venetian ambassadors in Rome 1265: the doge asked them, together with a delegation of Dominicans and Franciscans, to report the pope a miracle that had occurred over thirty years earlier, when three relics remained
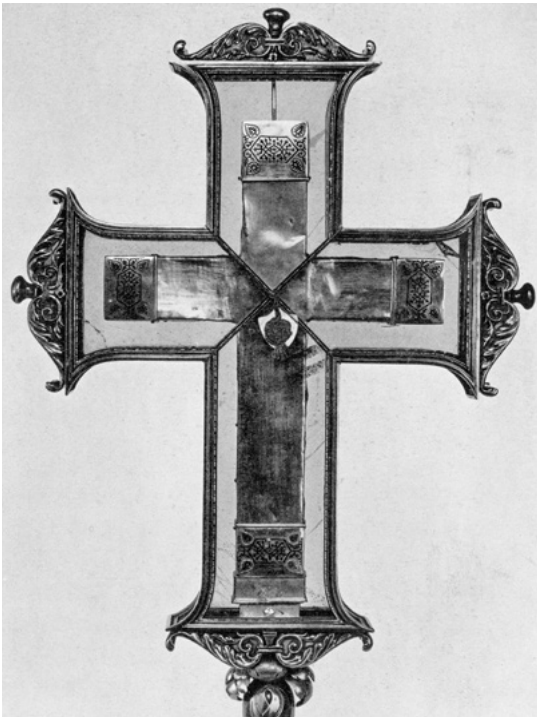
18/ Pietro Vesconte, Map of the Holy Land, from Marin Sanudo Torsello, *Liber secretorum fidelium Crucis* / BL (London), Add. 27376, ff. 187v–188r

19/ Staurotheke of Empress Irene Ducas, 12ᵗʰ–16ᵗʰ century / San Marco Treasury (Venice)

intact during a fire that devastated the treasure of San Marco in 1231[84]. These were three relics of the highest order: a fragment of the True Cross, the Blood of Christ and a part of the Skull of St John the Baptist [Fig. 19]. Relying on the narrative linking the True Cross to the Emperor Constantine, the doge claimed that the Holy Blood and the Skull of the Baptist were also taken to Jerusalem by Constantine's mother, Helena[85]. In addition to claiming the imperial ranking of the relics, the doge raised another important theme for Venice's collective identity: that Divine Providence would ensure the success of Venice[86]. According to Zeno, in fact, the sacred remains came to Venice by the will of Christ, who wished them to be preserved in the Lagoon together with those of Mark. Zeno's letter provides no information on the origin of the relics; only within Andrea Dandolo's chronicle are they explicitly linked to the spoil of the Fourth Crusade, where he affirms that these relics are part of the lot sent from Constantinople to Venice by Enrico Dandolo after 1204 and he adds the arm of St George, a new piece to the list[87].

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80 Giordana Mariani Canova, "Il *Liber secretorum fidelium Crucis* nella storia della miniatura veneziana", in *Da Venezia alla Terrasanta: il restauro del Liber secretorum fidelium Crucis di Marin Sanudo (Ricc. 27) della Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze*, Giovanna Lazzi ed., Padua 2013, pp. 69–82.

81 On Paolino Veneto, see Walther Holtzmann, *Brückstücke aus der Weltchronik des Minoriten Paulinus von Venedig*, Rome 1927; Alberto Ghinato, *Paolino da Venezia O. F. M. vescovo di Pozzuoli*, Rome 1951.

82 Emanuele Fontana, '"Paolino da Venezia, vescovo di Pozzuoli"', in *Dizionazio biografico degli Italiani*, vol. LXXXI, Rome 2014, available online: http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paolino-da-venezia-vescovo-di pozzuoli_(Dizionario-Biografico) [last accessed on 1/08/2023].

83 Francesca Cecchini, "Paolino Veneto", in *Enciclopedia dell'arte medievale*, vol. IX, Rome 1998, pp. 150–152.

84 Debra Pincus, "Christian Relics and the Body Politics: A Thirteenth-Century Relief Plaque in the Church of San Marco", in *Interpretazioni veneziane: studi di storia dell'arte in onore di Michelangelo Muraro*, David Rosand ed., Venice 1984, pp. 39–57; Karin Krause, "Immagine-reliquia: da Bisanzio all'Occidente", in *Mandylion. Intorno al Sacro Volto da Bisanzio a Genova*, Anna R. Calderoni Masetti, Colette Dufour Bozzo, Gerhard Wolf eds, Milan 2004, pp. 209–235.

85 As Krause, "Immagine-reliquia" (n. 84), p. 216, n. 72 notes, this information is not found in earlier sources and should therefore be considered a Venetian invention.

86 Pincus, "Christian relics" (n. 84) highlights the connections with the theme of the *praedestinatio*, which found its way into the mosaics of the Zen chapel in these very years.

87 Krause, "Immagine-reliquia" (n. 84), p. 216, n. 72.

The propagandistic use of these relics, described in the oldest inventories of the treasure of San Marco, dating back to 1283 and 1325[88], and coming from the imperial collection of St Mary of Pharos in Constantinople[89], is certified by their representation in a famous relief located in the corridor connecting the Ducal Palace to the Basilica [**Fig. 20**][90]. The location of the relief and the function of the corridor in which it is affixed clarify the link of these relics to the figure of the doge, their role in the representation of power and, more precisely, in giving this power an aura of sacredness with an imperial root[91]. As early as 1267, Martin da Canal informs us that reliquaries of the Holy Blood and the True Cross were exposed on the high altar during the Holy Week. Renato Polacco observed that, during the Easter liturgy, the aisle was used for the Friday procession: here the doge, as an imperial vicar, had a leading role in the representation of the discovery of the empty tomb in San Marco[92]. The processions and the relief thus amplify the importance of the relics: they provide tangible proof of the veracity of the events staged in the Basilica and evoke the role of Venice as the custodian of these sacred objects.

New episodes for the life of St Mark

The narratives on the holy body of St Mark also underwent an important update at the time of the loss of Constantinople. The guidelines for these changes respond to the need to adapt the *pre-* and *post-mortem* narrative of the saint to the new historical identity of Venice.

These adjustments are manifested by the mosaics executed in the south transept, narrating the miracle of the Apparition of the body of St Mark during the consecration of the new Basilica. According to the tale, propagated by Doge Zeno, the exact location of the sacred body in the Basilica, kept secret for a long time, had been forgotten; the Venetians, after long prayers led by the doge and the patriarch, witnessed the miraculous apparition of the body in a column. As Dale notes, this tale effectively transforms the original *inventio* into a *miracolo di stato*, whose protagonist is the entire community of Venice[93]. A public feast was promptly instituted to celebrate the *apparitio*, which makes the *columna apparitionis sancti Marci* in the church the place where the dedication of Venice to St Mark is commemorated, as well as the focal point of an annual triumphal procession[94].

In addition, the cycle dedicated to the life of the saint that adorns the vault of the Porta da Mar contributes to the rewriting of St Mark's hagiography. The vault shows, for the first time in Venetian iconography, the episode of the *praedestinatio*: St Mark receives a divine message informing him that his destiny will be inextricably linked to the city of Venice. These mosaics emulate the narrative structure of the Journey from Egypt to the Promised Land: as in the Old Testament, the Venetians can be considered "a holy nation"[95].

Other dynamics of appropriation and invention of the past are aimed at generating an apocryphal but enhancing historical filiation. Venice uses it with the aim of supplanting and surpassing Constantinople, conferring on itself a political investiture granted by Divine Providence, as shown by the various rites and ceremonials promoted by Doge Zeno.

Venetian rituals: the building of a commercial and a Christian role

The reconstruction of the past also includes the narration of rituals and festivities: this is demonstrated by their representation in Martin da Canal's *Estoires*, a chronicle composed in the Lagoon. Written in Old French[96], this text exploits the international idiom to disseminate and consign to imperishable memory the history of Venice up to 1275[97]. Martin da Canal contains the first known representation of the popular Venetian feast

Festa delle Marie. The *Estoires* describe in detail the different stages of this rite, according to which twelve maidens, chosen from among the poorest in the city, richly clothed by the wealthiest families, were prepared for marriage; civil and religious ceremonies followed, until the last day when a procession of boats along the Grand Canal, in honor of the twelve "Marys", ended with a banquet held at the Doge's Palace[98].

In da Canal this story does not fulfil a commemorative function but builds the celebration of the *ville* by encompassing all the constituent motifs of the Venetian myth established during this century. The *Festa delle Marie*, in fact, synthesizes the following elements: the municipal solidarity, established through the direct relationship between the aristocracy and the *povera zente*[99], all of them equal citizens of Venice; the generosity

20 / Marble bas-relief showing reliquaries in the passageway connecting Ducal palace to San Marco, end of the 13th century

88 *Il Tesoro di San Marco, II. Il Tesoro e il Museo*, Hans Hahnloser ed., Florence 1971, cat. n. 24; 25; 26; 34. See also Klein, "Refashioning Byzantium" (n. 29), pp. 212–215.

89 Michele Bacci, "Relics of the Pharos Chapel: a View from the Latin West", in *Eastern Christian Relics*, Alexei Lidov ed., Moscow 2003, pp. 234–246.

90 *Sacred Plunder* (n. 5), pp. 164–168.

91 On the use of the corridor see Staale Sinding-Larsen, "Christ in the Council Hall. Studies in the Religious Iconography of the Venetian Republic", *Acta ad Archaeologian et Artium Historiam Pertinentia*, V (1974), pp. 211–213.

92 Renato Polacco, "Proposte per una chiarificazione sul significato e sulla funzione del 'bassorilievo delle reliquie' dell'andito Foscari in San Marco a Venezia", in *Hadriatica: attorno a Venezia e al Medioevo tra arti, storia e storiografia. Scritti in onore di Wladimiro Dorigo*, Ennio Concina, Giordana Trovabene, Michela Agazzi eds, Padua 2002, pp. 133–137.

93 Thomas Dale, "Reliquie sante e *praedestinatio*: Venezia come popolo santo nel programma marciano del Duecento", in *Storia dell'arte marciana. Sculture, tesoro, arazzi* (Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Venezia, 11–14 ottobre 1994), Renato Polacco ed., Venice 1997, vol. II, pp. 146–156.

94 Klein, "Refashioning Byzantium" (n. 29), pp. 221–224.

95 Dale, "Reliquie sante" (n. 93).

96 Fabio Zinelli, "Il francese di Martin da Canal", in *Francofonie medievali. Lingue e letterature gallo-romanze fuori di Francia (sec. XII–XV)*, Anna M. Babbi, Chiara Concina eds, Verona 2016, pp. 1–66.

97 Alfredo Stussi, "La lingua", in *Storia di Venezia*, II (n. 1).

98 This ceremony was instituted, according to the *Marci Chronica*, after the defeat of the Istrian pirate Gaiolo in 944; see *Marci Chronica*, II, 64 (Bellantone, *La cronaca di Marco* [n. 13], pp. 53, 141–143).

99 See Élisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *Venise triomphante: les horizons d'un mythe*, Paris 1999, p. 41.

21/ The pope gifting a sword to the doge, from the *Istoria di Alessandro III*, second half of the 14th century / Biblioteca del Museo Correr (Venice), Correr I 383 (1497)

– a municipal version of the courtly *largesse* – shown by the richest towards the poor, which signifies exceptional economic success; the balanced competition between the temporal power and the Church, because the rite takes place under the dual aegis of the figure of the doge and the name of the Virgin; the dominion over the sea, which is symbolically and physically illustrated by the procession of boats that appears to cover all the waters of the Lagoon, so as to evoke the wide range of Venetian trade in the Mediterranean[100].

Such a ritual also inaugurates a new tradition of "internal" propagandistic discourse: the *Festa* demonstrates the greatness of Venice to the Venetians, creates cohesion among citizens, and adherence to a wide range of collective values. Yet, from the moment that the *mise en scène* is *mise en récit*, its enunciative function is no longer addressed only to the "inside-Venice", but to the "outside'" The foreign public must learn of the city's prodigious triumph, as the paragraph that concludes the representation of the ceremony in the *Estoires* demonstrates:

> "Mes, se la fussiés, signors, bien peussiés veoir l'eive tote coverte de barches chargees de homes et de femes que vont aprés: sachés que nus ne vos poroit conter la sume. Et es palés as fenestres, et entrevoies de sor la rive, que d'une part que d'autre, est si grant plante de dames et de damoiselles, que de tant com la vile tient, n'est se dames et de damoiselles, si richement aparillees com l'en poroit miaus apariller dames et damoiselles. A tei joie et a tel feste s'en vont jusque a l'autre chef de la vile, et puis s'en retornent en lor contrees: el monsignor li Dus, a tote sa compagnie, s'en retorne en son palés, et trove les tables aparillees, et manive aveuc tos ciaus que sont alés aveuc lui en sa maistre nef[101]".

The *Festa delle Marie* offers, like other rites, a diegetic opportunity to remind readers that the foundations of Venetian history are as extraordinary as they are ancient, attested by the antiquity of the ritual.

Venetian maritime dominance seems to be cyclically confirmed both through new rituals, such as the *Sposalizio del mar*, and through the narration of historical episodes, such as the Peace of Venice in 1177. The first is an ancient ceremony: the doge embarks once a year, on Ascension Day, and he throws a golden ring into the lagoon. This gesture represents the profound union between the city and the water on which it stands and that, at the same time, dominates. From the thirteenth century[102], following the conquests

of the Fourth Crusade, Venice renews and reinforces this rite, and does so by taking the episode of the Peace of Venice as its starting point. According to the legend, the conflict opposing Pope Alexander III and Frederick Barbarossa ended with the victory of the Pontiff in 1177, proclaimed into territory – and under the authority – of the Venetians. In exchange for this diplomatic commitment, the pope recognized the dominion of Venice over the Adriatic Sea[103], and gave the doge seven objects (the "triumphs"), including the ring that would be used in the staging of the ritual[104].

The Peace of Venice is an episode manufactured between the end of the war of Ferrara (1308–1309) and the beginning of the war against the Scaligeris, a period during which anti-Venetian sentiments, nourished by a suspicion of anti-clericalism, had to be disavowed. Also, this episode confirms the maritime dominion of Venice: the "donation of the triumphs" legitimized it, as did the Church of Rome, which granted a privilege to the city. The historical event and the rite merged together, providing one with the *raison d'être* for the other: the ring thrown into the sea by the doge on the occasion of the *sposalizio* recalls (and evokes) the ring with which Alexander III sanctioned the donation. Between blessing and marriage[105], the practice of political power, legitimized by spiritual power, sacralized and confirmed commercial privileges. As we will see, in 1317, Bonincontro de' Bovi – notary of the ducal chancellery – made this episode the focus of an entire historiographical text [Fig. 21][106].

Saints' tales in time of crisis: Simeon, Isidore, and John the Baptist

As early as the first decades of the fourteenth century and up until the second half of the century, a process of recovering forgotten saints began, linked to the numerous problems that the *Serenissima* encountered in dominating the Mediterranean arena. In this context, the possession and celebration of certain holy bodies are used as weighty arguments in the shaping of historically based claims to disputed territories.

Among these, the region of Dalmatia is crucial, both because of the importance of the port of Zara and because of the numerous revolts against the *Serenissima* that took place in this area from the eleventh century[107]. In the second decade of the fourteenth century, in order to regain and maintain control of the port, Venice operated here on several levels, from diplomacy to cultural and artistic policy. The greater degree of autonomy granted to Zara's citizens in the treaty of 1313 was in fact counterbalanced by the renewed interest in the relics of St Simeon, attested in Zara by the end of the thirteenth century[108]. Within a few years, a new monumental tomb was erected in Venice for St Simeon, whose effigy, not surprisingly, echoes the characteristics of the Saint's tomb in Zara. In Venice,

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100 Crouzet-Pavan, *Venise triomphante* (n. 99), p. 48.

101 *Les Estoires de Venise* (n. 22), II, p. 248.

102 See Crouzet-Pavan, *Venise triomphante* (n. 99), pp. 86–88.

103 *Ibidem*, pp. 84–86; Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, Princeton 1981, pp. 103–134.

104 David Perry, "The Material Culture of Medieval Venetian Identity", in *Mediterranean Identities in the Premodern Era: Entrepôts, Islands, Empires*, Kathryn Reyerson, John Watkins eds, Aldershot 2014, pp. 15–34, p. 26: "Collectively known as the *trionfi*, each of these objects embodied a specific virtue in the myth and came to represent a particular facet of Venetian governance, stature, or piety. Civic rituals that celebrated these facets employed the same objects. [...] These regal symbols exalted the doge and defined him as trans-cultural Christian imperial figure. Gift-giving in thanks for services rendered made this claim of exalted status possible".

105 Crouzet-Pavan, *Venise triomphante* (n. 99), p. 87.

106 Marino Zabbia, *I notai e la cronachistica cittadina italiana nel Trecento*, Rome 1999, pp. 199–200.

107 Bariša Krekić, "Venezia e l'Adriatico", in *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, vol. III: *La formazione dello stato patrizio*, Girolamo Arnaldi, Giorgio Cracco, Alberto Tenenti eds, Rome 1997, pp. 51–85.

108 Michele Tomasi, *Le arche dei santi: scultura, religione e politica nel Trecento Veneto*, Rome 2012, corpus 21, 22.

however, the tomb is accompanied by three epigraphs which state that in 1204 the relics were transferred from Constantinople to Venice, where they were then kept until the new tomb was erected [**Fig. 22**][109].

A similar case of "rediscovery" and display of a holy body through the collaboration of textual and visual means occurred a few years later with the relics of St Isidore, this time under the patronage of Dandolo himself, who, around 1350, erected a chapel in honor of the saint in San Marco [**Fig. 23**][110]. The geopolitical scenario of control and conflict is similar to that attested by the cult of St Simeon. Isidore comes from the island of Chios, rich in resources and strategic for maritime traffic in the eastern Aegean: Venice had tried in vain to take it over on several occasions, but in 1346, just as the chapel was being built, it was conquered by the Genoese[111]. Having fallen into oblivion, the cult of Isidore was restored in the 1340s. In these years the saint reappears in the calendars of San Marco's liturgical manuscripts and his *passio*, followed by *translatio* and *inventio*, are included by Andrea Dandolo in his *Extensa*[112]. The story is transposed into the mosaics decorating the vaults of the chapel housing the saint's tomb, where a continuous visual narration is supported by long inscriptions claiming strong documentary value[113]. This representation is emblematic for its specific characteristics: it reduces the episodes of Isidore's biography to a minimum, it shows purely maritime setting, it offers numerous references to the life and the *translatio* of St Mark[114]. This range of elements ensures that the hagiographic narrative is indirectly centred on Venice, in line with the objective of challenging the legitimacy of Genoese authority over Chios and – by extension – in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Recent studies have shown that the use of the hagiographic past to reinforce and legitimize Venetian ambitions on the chessboard of the Eastern Mediterranean is also a major theme in the decoration of the new baptistery commissioned by Andrea Dandolo. Pincus and Gerevini have highlighted how the mosaics stage the sacred past in a way that also responds to some current concerns, from the affirmation of Ducal authority to the claim of Venice's hegemonic role in the Eastern Mediterranean at a time of crisis caused by the negative repercussions of the devastating conflict with Genoa[115].

The decorative programmes of the Tomb of St Simeon, the Chapel of St Isidore and the baptistery demonstrate how the recovery of the Venetian hagiographic past is a concrete

instrument of conviction and homologation, and of how its staging is skillfully orchestrated by the political authorities of the time to stem the decay of the role of Venice in the Adriatic and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Andrea Dandolo and the liturgical furnishings of San Marco's Basilica

This is also evident in the first artistic endeavor patronized by Dandolo once he was elected doge. He focused on the area of the high altar of St Marco's, updating its precious decoration: the *Pala d'oro*[116]. Under the patronage of Dandolo, the *Pala* is furnished with a new framing system, producing an effect of material opulence and visual rhythm [**Fig. 24**][117]. Two epigraphs are affixed to its lower edge, together constructing a filiation which places

109 Ana Munk, "The Queen and her Shrine: An Art Historical Twist on Historical Evidence Concerning the Hungarian Queen Elizabeth, nee Kotromanić, Donor of the Saint Simeon Shrine", *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, X (2004), pp. 253–262; Tomasi, *Le arche dei santi* (n. 108), corpus 16.

110 *La cappella di Sant'Isidoro* (n. 7); Rudolf Dellermann, "La cappella di Sant'Isidoro. I mosaici della *Traslatio sancti Isidori*: intenzione e ricezione politica", in *Arte, storia, restauri della basilica di San Marco a Venezia* (= *Quaderni della Procuratoria di San Marco*, XV [2021]), pp. 35–44.

111 Michel Balard, "La lotta contro Genova", in *Storia di Venezia* (n. 107), pp. 87–127; Antonio Musarra, *Il Grifo e il Leone. Genova e Venezia in lotta per il Mediterraneo*, Rome 2020, pp. 220–245.

112 Tomasi, "Prima, dopo, attorno" (n. 7), p. 17.

113 On the interaction between different media in the chapel, see Rudolf Dellerman, "L'arredo e le sculture della cappella. Un linguaggio antico veneziano per l'arca di Sant'Isidoro", in *La cappella di Sant'Isidoro* (n. 7), pp. 35–47; Stefania Gerevini, "Inscribing History, (Over)Writing Politics: Word and Image in the Chapel of Sant'Isidoro at San Marco, Venice", in *Sacred Scripture / Sacred Space: The Interlacing of Real Places and Conceptual Spaces in Medieval Art and Architecture*, Tobias Frese, Wilfried Keil, Kristina Krüger eds, Berlin 2018, pp. 323–350.

114 Gerevini, "Art as Politics" (n. 7).

115 Debra Pincus, "Geografia e politica nel battistero di San Marco: la cupola degli Apostoli", in *San Marco: aspetti storici e agiografici*, Antonio Niero ed., Venice 1996, pp. 459–473; Debra Pincus, "Venice and Its Doge in the Grand Design: Andrea Dandolo and the Fourteenth-Century Mosaics of the Baptistery", in *San Marco, Byzantium* (n. 29), pp. 245–273; Gerevini, "Art as Politics" (n. 7).

116 The most comprehensive study is Hans Hahnloser, Renato Polacco, *La Pala d'Oro*, Venice 1994.

117 On the visual effect produced by the framing system see Stefania Gerevini, "Dynamic Splendor: the Metalwork Altarpieces of Medieval Venetia", *Convivium*, IX/2 (2022), pp. 102–123, sp. pp. 106–108; on polymateric and chromatic values of Venetian luxury objects cf. Stefania Gerevini, "The Bern Diptych: Venetian Rock Crystal between Craft, Trade, and Aesthetics", in *Seeking Transparency: Rock Crystals Across the Medieval Mediterranean*, Cynthia Hahn, Avinoam Shalem eds, Berlin 2020, pp. 183–196.

22 / Marco Romano, Tomb of St Simeon, Church of San Simeone profeta, Venice, 1318

23 / Chapel of Sant'Isidoro, San Marco, Venice, around 1350

24 / Detail of the *Pala d'oro*, San Marco, Venice, 12th–14th century

Dandolo in the long-standing doge tradition: Dandolo is cited together with and, thus, compared to Ordelaffo Falier, who commissioned the first altarpiece in 1105, and to Pietro Ziani, responsible for a renovating campaign in 1209. These epigraphs make the altarpiece a multimedia object capable of supporting sophisticated narrative strategies of the past: the manipulations through which the *Pala* passed in 1345 ensure that the historical dimension and provenance of the elements, recalled by the epigraphs, are emphasized as much as its modifications, which are instead based on up-to-date goldsmithing techniques and formal languages with strong Venetian connotations[118].

Together with the renovation campaign of the *Pala d'oro*, Dandolo promote the painting of the *Pala feriale* by Paolo Veneziano [Fig. 25]. This object is organized in two registers composed of seven panels each: while the upper one depicts the *Deesis* accompanied by the four most famous saints in Venice, the lower one narrates the scenes of the life, martyrdom and *translatio* of St Mark in the Lagoon. At the beginning of the fifth decade of the fourteenth century, both goldsmithing techniques and the language of Paolo Veneziano were important channels for exporting the image of Venice abroad. From 1325 onwards, the city became a particularly important centre in the field of goldsmithing, and precious stones set with techniques similar to those of the *Pala d'oro* are found in various regions of Italy and Europe, from Zagreb to Conques[119]. Similarly, the work of Paolo Veneziano also has a wide radius of influence that touches both coasts of the Adriatic, from Bologna to Istria, then along Dalmatia and as far as Raab[120]. The Pala, therefore, is to be perceived as an historical object, but simultaneously, it becomes a symbol of the supremacy of Venice on the international scene, and a leading testimony of the sectors on which the success of *Made in Venice* abroad is based[121].

From a practical point of view, however, the renovation and extension work is designed to meet liturgical requirements: through a complex system of pulleys, the *Pala feriale* folded back on itself and was raised to make the *Pala d'oro* visible on feast days. Belting noted in this sense a dualism between appearance and function: if the *Pala feriale* appears at first glance similar to a Byzantine iconostasis, its function, instead, is comparable to that of the Tuscan-style polyptychs[122]. The tension between the Byzantine traditions playing with spaces and the functionality of the objects typical of the Western liturgy is a characteristic trait of the new direction imparted by Dandolo's commissions in San Marco[123].

25 / Paolo Veneziano, Pala feriale,
Procuratoria di San Marco, San Marco,
Venice, 1342–1345

26 / Epistolary cover, 10th century /
Bibliotheca Nazionale Marciana
(Venice), Lat. I, 101

At the time when he was procurator of the Basilica, in fact, Dandolo commissioned three liturgical books destined for the high altar, where, until 1797, they would be used for the celebration of mass on major feast days[124]. The series includes an epistolary, a lectionary and a sacramentary. All three volumes are illuminated by artists employing a style of Paduan-Bolognese ascendancy very much in vogue in contemporary book illustration in northern Italy[125]. The bindings, instead, employ precious covers from older manuscripts of Constantinopolitan workmanship and dating back to the ninth and tenth centuries [**Fig. 26**], while the cover of the sacramentary appears to be an imitation of the luxury Byzantine bindings produced in Venice in the thirteenth century.

The process of manufacturing objects from ancient pieces assembled within new structures, updated with new functions, has a long tradition in Venice. Nevertheless, in the case of Dandolo's commissions, the main focus seems to be the Venetian identity

118 Marco Collareta, "Le oreficerie: un'introduzione", in *Il Trecento adriatico. Paolo Veneziano e la pittura tra Oriente e Occidente*, exhibition catalogue (Rimini, 2002), Francesca Flores d'Arcais, Giovanni Gentili eds, Milan 2002, pp. 93–95; Manlio L. Mezzacasa, *Divine Splendour. Relics, Reliquaries and Liturgical Vessels in Venice ca. 1300–1475*, Padua 2019.

119 Michele Tomasi, "Produzione e commercio nelle arti suntuarie a Venezia, 1250–1400", in *Fatto in Italia. Dal Medioevo al Made in Italy*, Alessandra Guerrini ed., Milan 2016, pp. 41–54.

120 Francesca Flores D'Arcais, "Paolo Veneziano e la pittura del Trecento adriatico", in *Il Trecento adriatico* (n. 118), pp. 19–31.

121 On the huge influence area of the Pala see Collareta, "Le oreficerie" (n. 118); on the circulation of Venetian luxury objects abroad see *Typical Venice? The Art of Commodities. 13th–16th Centuries*, Philippe Cordez, Ella Beaucamp eds, Turnhout 2020.

122 Hans Belting, "Bisanzio a Venezia non è Bisanzio a Bisanzio", in *Il Trecento adriatico* (n. 118), pp. 71–79; *Idem*, "Dandolo's Dreams: Venetian State Art and Byzantium", in *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557): Perspectives on Late Byzantine Art and Culture*, exhibition catalogue (New York, MET, 2004), Sarah T. Brooks ed., New York 2006, pp. 138–153.

123 For an overview on Dandolo's patronage, see Debra Pincus, "Hard Times and Ducal Radiance: Andrea Dandolo and the Construction of the Ruler in Fourteenth-Century Venice", in *Venice Reconsidered. The History and Civilization of an Italian City-State 1297–1797*, John J. Martin, Dennis Romano eds, Baltimore 2000, pp. 89–136.

124 The manuscripts are actually preserved in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana: the Evangeliary Lat. I. 100; the Epistolary Lat. I. 101 and the Missal Lat. III. 111.

125 Renée Katzenstein, *Three Liturgical Manuscripts from San Marco: Art and Patronage in Mid-Trecento Venice*, PhD thesis (Harvard University, 1987) Cambridge 1987; Susy Marcon, "I codici della liturgia di San Marco", in *Musica e liturgia a San Marco*, Giulio Cattin ed., Venice 1990, pp. 248–257; Klein, "Refashioning Byzantium" (n. 29), pp. 200–204; Helena K. Szepé, "Doge Andra Dandolo and Manuscript Illumination", in *Miniatura. Lo sguardo e la parola. Studi in onore di Giordana Mariani Canova*, Federica Toniolo, Gennaro Toscano eds, Milan 2012, pp. 158–162.

resulting from the aggregation between antiquity and modernity[126]. Adapted to Western standards, incorporated into artefacts that showcase avant-garde artistic techniques and visual languages, the late antique and Byzantine heritage serve – as Belting observes – to revendicate the primacy of Venice in the Mediterranean space, whose power is legitimized by its continuity:

> "The new Greekness indicates continuity of the Venetian presence overseas through an act of assimilation that expresses identity always to be claimed anew and by quite unusual means"[127].

Historical painting and the myth of Venice

In the fourteenth century, history painting became an important channel for disseminating past narratives embodying the myth of Venice to selected audiences who were allowed access to places of high symbolic status.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century, new narratives were added to the favorite one dedicated to St Mark. Around 1325, coinciding with the construction of the new Comune palace at the Rialto, a loggia for the use of merchants was built and decorated with stories of the defeat of the Carolingians in their attempt to invade the Lagoon[128]. In Venetian mythography, this legend leads to the establishment of the Duchy of Venice at Rialto. As Patricia Fortini Brown observes, the intention was to give the paintings the value of a visual testimony, a guarantee of the veracity of a cornerstone of Venetian civic mythography. For this reason, when ordering the destruction of the old loggia in 1459, the senate commissioned copies of the paintings, to repeat the cycle on the walls of the new loggia[129]. A few years earlier, in 1319, the government ordered the decoration of the Church of St Nicolò, a building of great civil and cultic importance, reserved for the liturgical needs of the doge and the nobility, who also ratified contracts on official occasions here[130]. The chosen theme is the Peace of Venice of 1177: "*pingendo in ea Hystoriam Pape quando fuit veneciis cum domino Imperatore et alia que videbuntur*"[131]. The cycle in the Church of St Nicolò is the oldest figurative transposition of the legend of the Peace between Alexander III and the Emperor Frederick I. Others followed during the fourteenth century, such as the fresco cycle in the Great Council Hall, decorated from 1365 onwards[132]. The already mentioned *Hystoria* of Bonincontro de' Bovi[133], commissioned by the government, is probably the textual source for the fresco cycle[134].

On the basis of Bonincontro's text and the images painted in St Nicolò, the seven objects used in official processions, the so-calleds *trionfi*, are for the first time brought together in the sylloge of an historical occasion – the pope's gifts to the doge – and endowed with precise symbolic values[135]. In reality, these objects had been in use in Venice for centuries and only in the fourteenth century did they acquire the status of symbols linked to a specific episode in history[136]. The white candle, for instance, used since the twelfth century by the doge as a penitential object, became a symbol of the faith of the Venetians. The sword, an attribute of the Dux since the ninth century, gradually lost its role as an insignia linked to the title of representative of the Constantinopolitan provinces and became instead an effigy of dogal justice. The significance of the umbrella, on the other hand, first mentioned by Martin da Canal in his chronicle, comes to signal in the *Hystoria* the equalisation of the rank of doge with that of pope and emperor.

On the walls of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio in the Doge's Palace a complicated programme of frescoes was planned: the story of the peace of 1177 was combined with two other thematic nuclei, a large depiction of the Coronation of the Virgin in the presence of the heavenly congregation accompanied by the Annunciation, and a gallery of portraits
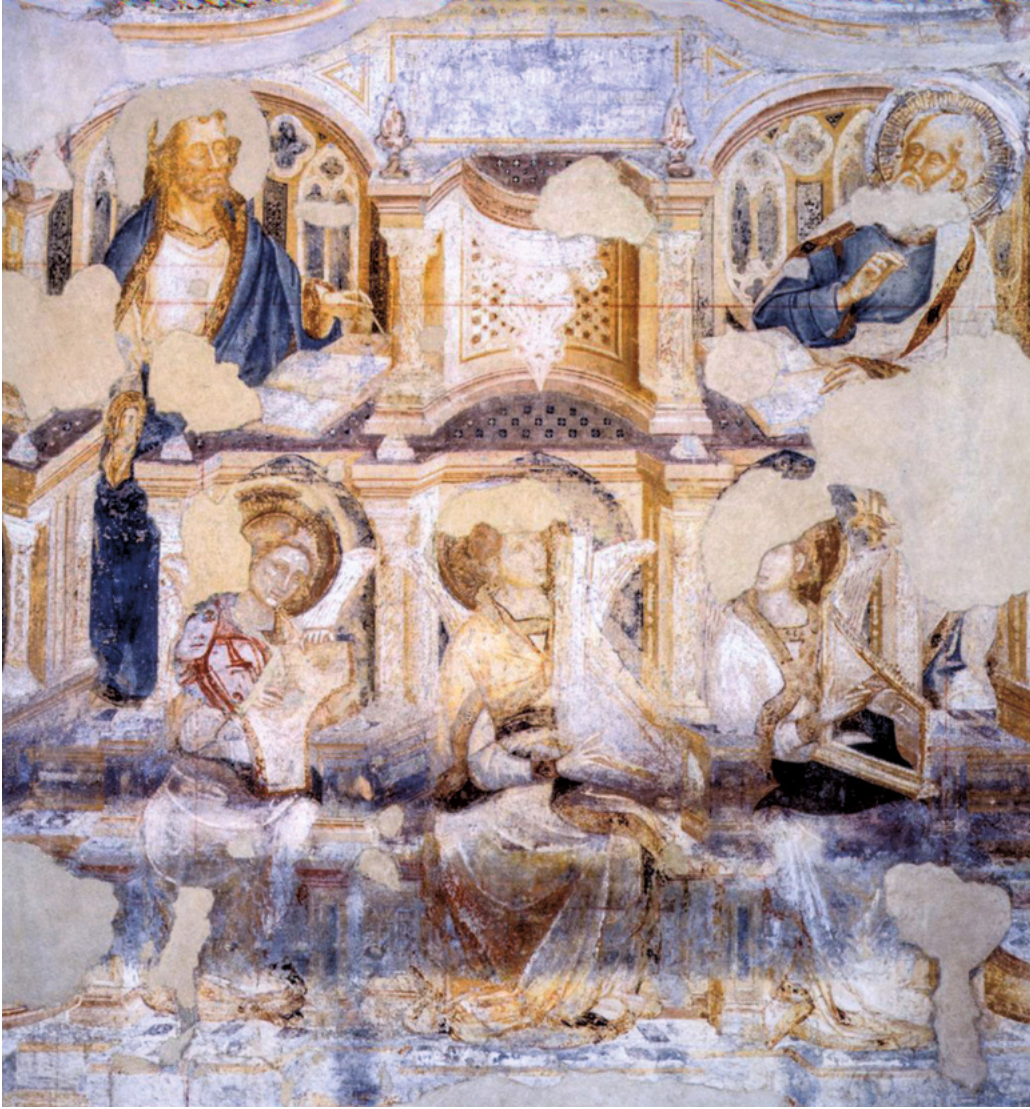
27 / Guariento di Arpo, *Paradiso* (detail), Sala del maggior Consiglio, Doge Palace, Venice, 1365–1368

of doges. The frescoes were commissioned to the Paduan painter Guariento, who already realized elaborate narrative cycles for the lords of Carrara and the main mendicant orders in Padua. Of the cycle of frescoes, "restored" several times during the fifteenth and sixteenth century, and then almost completely destroyed in a fire in 1577, only a fragment of Guariento's *Paradise* is preserved [Fig. 27]. Despite this, it is still possible to grasp the

126 For the functioning of the two altarpieces as foci of the religious and civic rituals, see Gerevini, "Dynamic Splendor" (n. 117).

127 Belting, "Bisanzio a Venezia" (n. 122), p. 72: "*Così la nuova grecità indicava la continuità della presenza veneziana d'oltremare tramite un atto di assimilazione, che esprime un'identità sempre incerta e sempre da rivendicare di nuovo e con mezzi del tutto insoliti*".

128 Roberto Cessi, Annibale Alberti, *Rialto: l'isola, il ponte, il mercato*, Bologna 1934, p. 38.

129 Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting* (n. 25), p. 268; *Eadem, Venice and Antiquity* (n. 19), p. 51.

130 Sinding-Larsen, "Christ in the Council Hall" (n. 91), p. 209.

131 Zuleika Murat, *Guariento: pittore di corte, maestro del naturale*, Milan 2016, pp. 194–196.

132 Crouzet-Pavan, *Venise triomphante* (n. 99), p. 85.

133 A translation of Benincontro's text in Venetian is copied into the manuscript 1497 of the Museo Correr (ff. 25v–30r), on which the two authors of the present contribution will present a historical-artistic and literary study essay.

134 Marin Sanduo, *Le vite dei Dogi*, Giovanni Monticolo ed., Città di Castello 1900. See also Girolamo Arnaldi, "Bonincontro de'Bovi" in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. XIII (1971), available online: https://www.treccani. it/enciclopedia/bonincontro-dei-bovi_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ [last accessed on 1/10/2023].

135 Muir, *Civic Ritual* (n. 103), pp. 103–118; David Perry, "1308 and 1177: The Papacy and the Crusades in Medieval Venetian Myth and Memory", in *The Papacy and the Crusades,* Michel Balard ed., Farnham 2011, pp. 117–130.

136 Muir, "Idee, riti, simboli del potere" (n. 1), pp. 739–760.

discourse of historical promotion of the image of Venice entrusted to the paintings. As has been observed, the depiction of the enormous Paradise on the east wall is a perfect idealisation of the earthly collegium formed by the Great Council members meeting in the Hall. The Annunciation on the fresco's borders, then, more accurately depicted the scene in Venetian terms, alluding to the legend of the city's foundation on the very day of the Annunciation in 421. In visual continuity with the reference to the Birth of Venice, the *Peace of Venice* and the gallery of portraits of the doges continued the staging of the city's historical events. While the former vindicates the Republic's role on the international arena, the latter is built on strategic choices that, avoiding a simple chronology, favor only a few doges, each of whom is accompanied by his family coat of arms and a long inscription summarising his public activities[137].

By associating historical painting and portrait galleries, the programme of the Council Hall is not isolated but participates in a tradition taking root during the same years in the most important Venetian courts. This thematic affinity, coupled with the choice of painter, does not seem a coincidence, especially since Scaliger and Carrarese courts occupied the territories towards which the *Serenissima* was oriented in order to prepare for its territorial expansion in the mainland[138].

The iconographical programme of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio finds parallels in contemporary court painting but at the same time differs from it in its more pronounced civic tone: while in Padua and Verona the repertoire of ancient or Old Testament history was chosen to legitimize and represent the values of the ruling class, in Venice it was decided to repeat the staging of an episode of civic history that had already been the subject of a ritual commemoration and was fixed in the collective identity.

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137 Murat, *Guariento* (n. 131), pp. 84–86.
138 Gian Maria Varanini, "Venezia e l'entroterra (1300 circa – 1420)", in *Storia di Venezia* (n. 107), pp. 159–236.