

Venice in Byzantium: Migrating Art along the Venetian Routes in the Mediterranean (11th-15th Centuries)

Constantinople, the end of the 11th century: crowds of merchants, artisans, laborers, ordinary people pass by the winding alleyways running steep towards the shores of the Golden Horn. The faces of the people and the languages they speak reveal a multiethnic scene. Christian and non-Christian, French, German, and – above all – Italian communities (Venetians, Amalfitans, Pisans, and later Genoese) have ended up organizing on the Bosphorus their headquarters, neighborhoods where the merchants could be provided with all the facilities they needed. Besides trading, diplomatic and military activities, the cohabitation of all these people with each other and with the Greek environment nurture a fertile cultural – and certainly artistic – exchange.

A few years earlier, one among those nations has officially received the special privilege of being able to organize their neighborhood autonomously: the Venetians¹. Although they have been actively carrying out business throughout the Mediterranean since at least the 9th century, the Venetians' presence in the Byzantine territories increased significantly from the 11th century onward. Up to the point that, around 1082, emperor Alexios I Komnenos signed a *chrysobull* – a document issued by the imperial Byzantine chancellery – which consisted of a privilege by which the emperor officially allowed them to settle in a specified area of the capital, furnished with houses, churches, commercial premises, and docks. The historical phase was crucial: the Venetians had been formerly subject to the empire, but, by that time, they were shaping their autonomous city-state: they were building the premises of the »myth« of the city². Switching the perspective to their activity in the East, in the following pages I will en-

deavor to shed some light on the role of the Venetians in that cultural exchange, by outlining spaces, materials, contexts, people and protagonists of their activity in various places of the Mediterranean, between Constantinople and Venice³. Archival documents will serve as the main research tool. Even published documents can be re-read in a new perspective, and contribute to a better understanding of a peculiar aspect of the Mediterranean culture, and illuminate on various kinds of artifacts and the modes of their circulation – often a »migration« proper, connecting far removed shores of the Mediterranean. In Alexios Komnenos' *chrysobull*⁴, the donation of a quarter of the city is complemented by other decisions in favor of the churches officiated by the Venetians, placed in that neighborhood, such as the license for a furnace, or a monetary grant to be distributed to the churches at the doge's discretion; the doge himself is honored with the title of *protosevastos* (i. e. »first augustus«), and the patriarch of Grado with that of *ypertimos* (»most honored«). This was of course a convenient move, not only in terms of prestige, but also from an economic standpoint, since the possession of Byzantine titles brought about relevant financial benefits⁵; the Venetians were also granted full trade and customs freedom in a number in a number of ports and cities throughout the empire, along with the possession, in those places, of more churches, buildings and plots of lands with their revenues⁶. As a reward, Venice would provide the Byzantine emperor with support and logistics in case of a war. This treatise will be renewed several times, in the following centuries, up until the last days of the empire. Its rewritings and updates, from time to time, show the gradual growth of the economic power of Venice.

1 This research is part of a wider, still on-going, project, started thanks to a Research Fellowship at Ca' Foscari University, Venice (Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, 2014-2015), on »Venice in Byzantium: Patronage, Production and Circulation of Art Works in the Venetian »Quarters« of the Outremer, Before and After the Fourth Crusade« (tutors Proff. Michela Agazzi and Stefano Riccioni). The goal of this research is to outline the features of the artistic production, the modes of the circulation of art works and artists, the issues of patronage and trade of luxury goods, in the Venetian neighborhoods of the Byzantine cities of the Mediterranean. The chronological span of the research includes the whole period from the earliest testimonies (dating to the 9th c.) to the Ottoman conquest of the city.

2 Maguire/Nelson, San Marco.

3 Scholarly literature (specifically historical) on the political, economic and cultural relationships between the two shores of the Mediterranean in the last phase of the Middle Ages is huge. Among the most recent and focused contributions to the field: Arbel/Hamilton/Jacoby, *Latins and Greeks*. – Arbel, *Intercultural*

Contacts. – Coulon et al., *Chemins*. – Ortalli, *Venise et Constantinople* 417-429. – Balard, *Les Latins en Orient*. – Coulon/Picard/Valérien, *Espaces*. – Harris/Holmes/Russell, *Byzantines, Latins and Turks*. – Lymberopoulou, *Mediterranean*. – In particular on the Serenissima and the Levant, along with the single essays included in the volumes cited, the following remain essential: Thiriet, *Romanie vénitienne*. – Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*. – Ravegnani, *Bisanzio e Venezia*.

4 Pozza/Ravegnani, *I trattati* 27-45. – The majority of the historians hold the traditional dating to 1082 as the most plausible: Pozza/Ravegnani, *I trattati* 35-36. – Madden, *Chrysobull* 23-41. – Jacoby, *Chrysobull* 199-204. – Angold, *Venetian Chronicles* 59-94. – Others have dated the chart either to 1084: Martin, *Chrysobull* 19-23, or to 1092: Frankopan, *Byzantine Trade* 135-160.

5 Oikonomides, *Les listes*. – On the aristocratic status of the Venetians in Constantinople, see Falkenhausen, *Venezia e Bisanzio* 821-832.

6 For a full text of the *chrysobull*, see Pozza/Ravegnani, *I trattati* 27-45.

Another document, dating to 1107, was notarized in Rialto, but it refers specifically to one of the churches of the Venetian neighborhood of Constantinople. Ordelaffo Falier »per grazia di Dio dux della Venezia e protosevastòs imperiale« donates to Giovanni Gradenigo, patriarch of Grado, the church of S. Akindynos (which the Byzantine emperor had entrusted to him through the first chrysobull) situated in the »imperial city of Constantinople«⁷. The doge's donation to the patriarch includes all the church's properties, such as buildings, furniture, furnaces, *ergasteria* (workshops), and even weights and units of measurements. Apart from the usual formulas, here, uncommonly enough, the church is said to have been donated »cum toto suo thesauro, et paliis, et libris« (»along with the entirety of its treasury, liturgical vestments and books«)⁸. It would be interesting to find out more details about the nature of St Akindynos' supply. In particular, as art historians, we are curious about the appearance of these artifacts adorning the Venetian churches of the Levant, and we would like to know whether they were imported from the homeland or, on the contrary, liturgical implements were produced *in situ*, conforming with local tradition and taste; finally, who were the commissioners and who made the works circulate from one place to another. If it is certainly true – as A. Laiou has stressed – that towards the late Middle Ages the artistic production would become a part of the »currency of exchange« in trade transactions (esp. among the Venetians), her assertion that, at least in the 13th century »The substitution of the Venetian for the Byzantine dominance in the Byzantine Empire is paralleled by the substitution of Venetian-made objects for Byzantine ones«⁹ should be more closely verified.

This is a wide-reaching research topic indeed, which has been mainly dealt with, up until now, only as far as specific geographical and historical contexts are concerned, which enjoy a larger amount of references in the documents¹⁰. Testimonies are scanty, and so are artifacts surely pertaining to that milieu, and documents are ambiguous and sometimes inconsistent. Therefore, in order to tackle this problem, it is necessary to follow different paths, cross-checking diverse types of data: documentary research, analysis of specific case-studies (works, patrons, producers, intermediaries), comparative study of preserved artifacts. I wish to hereby present some of the possible results of the archival research and of the study of ancient testimonies, the first prerequisite to any further consideration.

7 The document is recorded in Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae* 66-71. – See also Tafel/Thomas, *Urkunden* 67-74 no. 32: »nos quidem Ordelafus Faletro gratia Dei Venetie Dux et Imperialis Protosevastos [...] ab hodie in antea damus, et concedimus vobis quidem domno Johani Gradonico Venerabili Gradensi Patriarchae et vestris successoribus in perpetuum videlicet Ecclesiam Beati Akindani cum omni suo territorio et beneficio positam in regali urbe Constantinopoli quae est antiquitas de jure et possessione nostri palatii, secundum Imperialis crisovoli confirmationem«.

8 »Hanc [...] ecclesiam cum toto suo thesauro, et paliis, et libris et cum omnibus suis habentibus et pertinentibus ab intus et foris quas nunc habet et in antea aliquo modo habitura est cum suis argasteriis universis, et cum suo mankipio, et furno, et cum omnibus stateris et rubis, et ponderibus, et cum cunctis metris tam

It will be also necessary to look »beyond« the borders of the Venetian quarter of Constantinople, and consider the Venetian bases in the other Byzantine port cities, and the different kinds of relationships interlaced there. This is inevitable, since, even focusing on the Constantinopolitan quarter, we would come across countless reference to other cities, islands, minor ports, that depended upon the Serenissima, while constellating the Medieval Mediterranean, which, back then, was a real meeting point of diverse cultures, possibly much more than it is today.

Architecture and urbanism: the »quarters« of Venice

The first problem to face is one of terminology. Using the word »quarter« when speaking of Venice, might sound inappropriate, since, as it is well known, the city on the lagoon, unlike the ones structured according to the Roman camp plan, is rather organized into *sestieri*: six irregularly-shaped sectors, reflecting the peculiar shape of the settlement. We shall, instead, more suitably use the term »quarter« when referring to the many cities and villages beyond the lagoon, where the Venetians fix the hubs of their trading activities: Constantinople, Ragusa, Thessalonica, Trebizond, Acre, and countless smaller seaports along the coasts of the Adriatic, the major and minor islands of the Mediterranean, of the Middle East and of the Black Sea. Their most substantial base was of course, and from the very beginning, Constantinople – itself one of the major ports of the Mediterranean¹¹. Although it does not front »physically« onto the latter, the Golden Horn offers a natural harbor to the city, a landing that provides, through the Marmara Sea and the Bosphorus, a strategic connection to both the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, the East and the West, until today. Along with foreign ambassadors, western travellers and merchants had their »pied-à-terre« here, too. All things considered, this area, teeming with commerce, fishing, but also agriculture, must have appeared, in many respects, similar to modern Istanbul's Eminönü, a lively neighborhood which lies in the same area and whose existence is still based on trade and workmanship.

In the 1082 chrysobull some churches and specific sites are named, but the precise borders of the area granted to the Venetians are not stated explicitly¹², whereas in the later

ad oleum quam ad vinum, et cum omnibus nostris tabernis quae in praedicta urbe sub nostra potestate esse videntur«: Corner, *Ecclesiae Venetae* 66-71. – Tafel/Thomas, *Urkunden* 68.

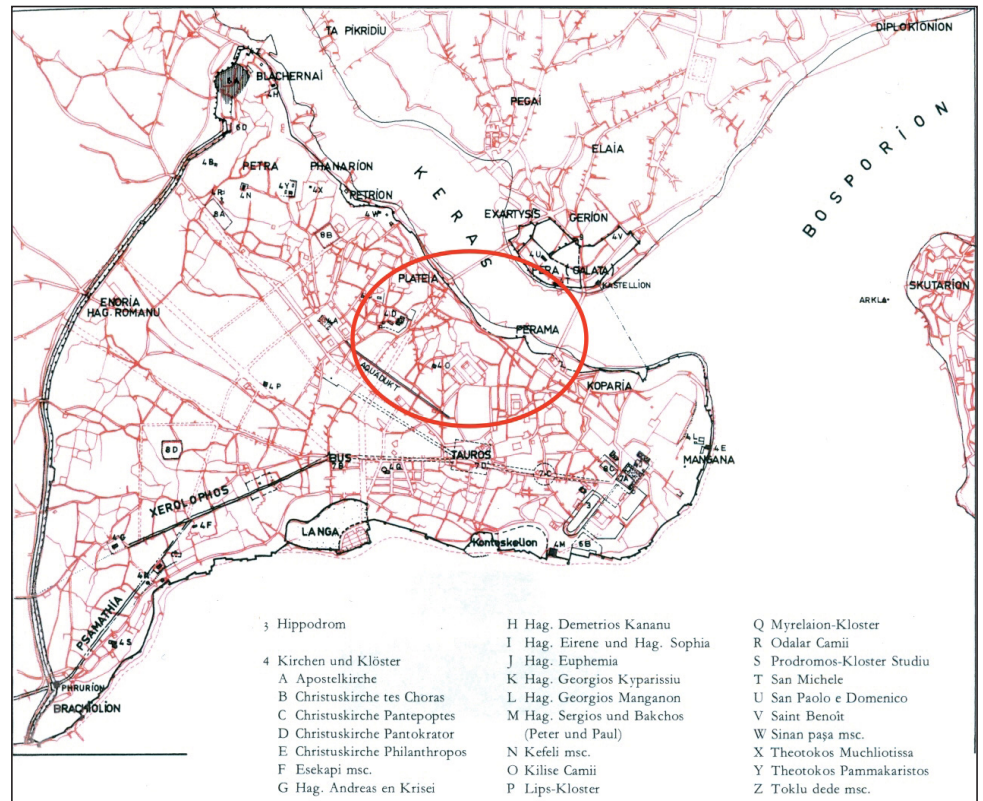
9 Laiou, *Centre of Trade* 11-26.

10 Esp. for Crete: Georgopoulou, *Colonies*. – With a focus on mural painting and icons: Bacci, *Hybrids* 73-106.

11 On this problem see: Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer*. – Magdalino, *Maritime Neighborhoods* 209-226.

12 Martin, *Chrysobull* 22-23 has hypothesized that the donation simply acknowledged the property of a number of individual buildings, rather than referring to a homogeneous, enclosed area.

Fig. 1 Map of Constantinople (13th-15th c.): the circled area corresponds to the position of the Venetian quarter. – (After Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon*).



treatise signed by the doge's emissaries and the emperor Manuel Komnenos in 1148, the extension of the neighborhood (now even larger than sixty years earlier) is declared accurately¹³. Both documents are well known to the scholars who carried out extensive research on the appearance of the Venetian quarter of Constantinople in the Byzantine times (E. Concina, Ch. Maltezou, A. Ağır, D. Jacoby, to name only a few of them)¹⁴. Thanks to these documents and many more (be they contemporary or later), and thanks to some hints that the Ottoman arrangement of this part of the city might provide us with – and despite the inevitable lack of archaeological excavations in an intensively constructed area – it is possible to get a general idea of the local topography (fig. 1). According to the documents, all preserved in the Archivio di Stato in Venice, the quarter was situated in the area of the *embolus*, that is of the portico, called Perama, and stretched from the *porta Ebraica* to the *porta Vigla* along the Sea Walls of the city¹⁵; there were residential and commercial premises, warehouses and *fondachi*, with their annexes, which were opened on the porticoes themselves; up to four *scalae*, i.e.

wharves, were available along the coast of the Golden Horn; moreover, four churches are explicitly mentioned: *S. Marco de embulo venetorum*, *S. Akindynos*, *S. Mary* and *S. Nicholas de embulo*.

It is important to recall the contents of the chrysobull, because (despite the fact that the attitude of the Byzantines towards the Venetians will be fluctuating) it will be always confirmed in later documents regulating the relationships between the Venetians of the East and the Byzantine government, up until the collapse of the latter. Indeed, it seems that the renewal of the economic privileges and of the estates concessions to the Venetians, became a device to gain the support of the Serenissima in the most difficult junctures for the empire¹⁶.

Notwithstanding the scarce archaeological evidence¹⁷, we may benefit from a few rare pieces of graphic evidence, which can support the documents testimony, at least as far as one of the aforementioned buildings is concerned. In fact, in some copies of the map of Constantinople accompanying the *Liber insularum archipelagi* by Cristoforo Buondelmonti

13 Pozza/Ravegnani, *I trattati* 67-75.

14 The urban shape and the architecture of the Venetian quarter of Constantinople has been the target of several studies. A selection of them follows: Magdalino, *Constantinople médiévale* 78-90, and, with a focus on the ports: Magdalino, *Maritime Neighborhoods* 209-226. – With a more specific approach: Janin, *La géographie* 571-573. – Maltezou, *Quartiere veneziano* 30-61. – Berger, *Ufergegend* 149-165. – Jacoby, *Venetian Quarter* 154-159. – Concina, *Quartiere veneziano* 157-170. – Jacoby, *Houses* 269-282. – Ağır, *Istanbul*.

15 »Ad haec donat eis et ergasteria que sunt in embolo Peramatis cum solaris suis, que habent introitum et exitum in embolum, que procedunt ab Ebraica usque ad Viglan, queque habitantur et que non habitantur, et in quibus Venetici per-

manent et Greci sicut ergasteriis, et maritimas illi scalas que in predicto spatio terminantur« see Pozza/Ravegnani, *I trattati* 39. – Indirect references can be found in administrative documents of Venetian monasteries which held properties in the Levante, see below.

16 For a synthesis, concerning the period between the 11th and the 12th c.: Ravegnani, *Il commercio veneziano* 55-74. – For an edition of the texts: Pozza/Ravegnani, *I trattati*. – Pozza/Ravegnani, *I trattati* 1265-1285. – See also a thorough overview in: Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*. – Ravegnani, *Bisanzio e Venezia*.

17 Some scholars have attempted to identify some of the Venetian buildings in Ottoman structures, such as the Balkapanı Han (although Concina, *Quartiere veneziano* 163-164, has rejected this interpretation).



Fig. 2 Venice, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, ms. Donà dalle Rose 15, fol. 37r, Cristoforo Buondelmonti, *Liber insularum Archipelagi*, map of Constantinople. – (After Barsanti, *Costantinopoli e l'Egeo*).

(a work composed in the 15th century, of which several handwritten and illustrated copies have survived) in the area corresponding to the Venetian quarter, a rather large basilica with its bell-tower stands out. In two copies of the *Liber* (Biblioteca Civica di Padova, ms. CM 289, and Venice, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, fondo Donà dalle Rose, ms. 15 – which is slightly later), the drawing is complemented by the caption »Sanctus Marcus« (fig. 2). This must be therefore the church of *S. Marco de embulo venetorum*¹⁸.

From the legal and administrative standpoint, the Venetian churches of Constantinople (as well as of the whole Levant)

fell under the jurisdiction of churches and monasteries of the lagoon. Therefore, it is reasonable to collect pieces of news out of the documentary heritage of those institutions¹⁹. All the material concerning the ecclesiastical establishments of the Outremer – including religious governance, trials, relationships with locals, is meticulously registered in the folders preserved in the Archivio di Stato. The archival collection related to »S. Giorgio Maggiore« is the richest in this respect, since this important Venetian monastery enjoyed a well-structured estate in the East. Only in the capital, the two major churches depended from the abbot of S. Giorgio: S. Akindynos and

18 As Barsanti, *Costantinopoli e l'Egeo* 83-254 has recalled. I refer to this article for an in-depth analysis of the maps of Constantinople and the Aegean islands included in the manuscripts of Buondelmonti's *Liber*.

19 Relevant collections are: Archivio di Stato di Venezia (henceforth ASVe), S. Nicolò di Lido, Pergamene, b. 2; ASVe, S. Giorgio Maggiore, b. 126; ASVe,

Procuratori di S. Marco *de supra*. Chiesa. Atti, b. 135. They include mainly documents dating back to the 13th c. – During my 2014-2015 Fellowship in Venice I had the opportunity to check *de visu* the documents cited from this point onwards.

S. Marco, along with a number of houses and plots of lands, covering an area which, already in the 13th century, reached out to the Blachernae quarter. The matters concerning the church of Santa Maria are more complicated to reconstruct at a documentary level, since this establishment depended upon the monastery of SS. Felice e Fortunato in Ammiana²⁰: the latter was abolished in 1472, and it has later disappeared; its archive has been partly lost, partly was merged in the vast collection »Procuratori di S. Marco de Supra«. The church of S. Nicholas was related to the one, with the same name, situated in Lido²¹, and can be traced in the relevant collection of the Archivio di Stato di Venezia. The reading of these charts, however, provides only an echo of the life in the Venetian establishments of Constantinople: amidst mere information on their estates (useful to reconstruct the urban appearance) they are not generous about their vessels and decoration. Thus, we must extend our study to other sites, and collect examples – although far from the capital – which show an analogous status. Before we delve into the reading of documents, which speak about the objects used in these churches, we shall look at two artifacts, which have been preserved until today, and serve as »documents« themselves.

Bronze doors

As we have seen, not only precious objects (naturally subject to dispersion), but also the buildings where they were used and kept, have been irretrievably lost, making it even more difficult any art historical analysis on them. On the other hand, very few preserved artifacts can be reasonably lead back to the milieu of the Venetian quarters of the Outremer. Nevertheless, one category of monumental art works – although placed, from the very beginning, in a western context – provide a privileged viewpoint onto the mechanisms of patronage and artistic production taking place in Byzantium, and allow us to enter this problem – literally – from the main door. A group of bronze doors, commissioned by western donors and for Italian buildings between the second half of the 11th and the first decades of the 12th century, were realized in Constantinople, after Byzantine models and by eastern artists²². Two of them are in S. Marco in Venice. Their history is still largely to be reconstructed, but the study of these gates will provide many interesting responses, even

on different aspects of the artistic interrelations experienced in Constantinople.

Giving access to the side aisle of the church of S. Marco, the so-called Porta di S. Clemente (fig. 3) consists of a wooden inner structure covered with twenty-eight bronze panels on its front side²³. All of the panels are decorated with the *agemina* (damascene) technique. Except the four bottom panels, which display decorative motifs derived from oriental textiles, and two of those on the top row, displaying two patriarchal crosses, all the panels depict the standing figures of Christ, the Virgin and Saints, under arches, with Greek inscriptions to identify each of them. The projecting frames, quite uniquely, have received an *agemina* decoration, too, with lozenges and small foliate crosses. Due to its technique and style, this door is unanimously believed to come – like the others of the same group – from Constantinople. However, we do not know, exactly, the circumstances of its arrival in Italy. Some scholars have supposed that it had been presented to the doge by the emperor Alexios I himself²⁴. The 1082 imperial chart had imposed to every Amalfitan owning a workshop in Constantinople or elsewhere within the empire²⁵ to pay a yearly tax to the church of S. Marco in Venice; the hypothesis seems therefore plausible, and intriguing, that this bronze door may have been sent to Venice by the Amalfitans, in order to pay their debt, as A. Paribeni suggested²⁶.

Also in the atrium of the doge's basilica, a second, larger, door (fig. 4) reveals the same origin as the one just described²⁷. The door closes the central entrance to the nave and consists of forty-eight rectangular panels, framed by mountings and railings; the junctions in between the mountings are hidden behind spiral mullions, and ten lion-heads hold large rings at mid-height; the ensemble is fastened to a wooden supporting structure by means of nails.

This assembly technique, the material (an alloy of copper, zinc, lead and tin, whose result is a kind of brass, golden-yellowish in color, called *auricalcum*), and the decoration technique (the inlay of silver – and sometimes enamels – called *agemina*), which contributes to the overall gleaming effect of these doors, are common to all of the other bronze doors of the group. The iconographic program of the decoration, however, is peculiar. The panels of the upper row are decorated with applied foliate crosses; those of the lower row host applied floral decorations, arranged in a star-shaped fashion; the remaining thirty-six panels display standing figures, each identified through a Latin inscription. Although the panels are

20 Robbert, Rialto Businessmen 43-58, in part. 49. – Orlando, Ad profectum patriae 31-32.

21 Orlando, Ad profectum patriae 33.

22 Eight of these artifacts are preserved more or less in their original setting in churches of the following Italian cities: Amalfi (Cathedral), Montecassino, Rome (S. Paul's Outside the Walls), Monte Sant'Angelo (Sanctuary of S. Michael), Atrani (S. Salvatore de Birecto), Salerno (Cathedral); two of them in Venice (S. Mark's). One more is now lost, but was attested in Pisa (Cathedral). General reference on these artifacts: Matthiae, Le porte bronze. – English Frazer, Church Doors 145-162. – Salomi, Le porte. – Iacobini, Le porte bronzee 15-54.

23 Measurements: 3.02 m × 1.62 m. Forlati/Forlati/Federici, Le porte. – English Frazer, Church Doors 152. – Polacco, Porte ageminate e clatrate 285-286.

24 Forlati/Forlati/Federici, Le porte 14.

25 On the trading activities of the Amalfitans in Byzantium and in the Eastern Mediterranean see Falkenhausen, Il commercio 19-38. – Jacoby, Commercio 89-128.

26 Paribeni, Porte ageminate 302-303.

27 Measurements: 4.51 m × 2.75 m. Forlati/Forlati/Federici, Le porte. – English Frazer, Church Doors 145-162. – Paribeni, Porte ageminate 303-305. – Vio, Le porte 283-300. – Polacco, Porte ageminate 295-297. – I have presented part of the following remarks on this door on the occasion of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine studies, Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016.



Fig. 3 Venice, S. Marco, Atrium, Porta di S. Clemente. – (© Sapienza Università del Roma, Centro di Documentazione di Storia dell'Arte Bizantina, fondo Portae Byzantinae Italiae, photo by F. Allievi).

now probably not in their original arrangement, their overall iconography consists of an enlarged *deesis*: Christ and the Virgin, on top, are accompanied by John the Baptist and two Archangels, six Prophets holding scrolls (which are inscribed in Greek), the twelve Apostles, and other saints, whose cult was particularly widespread in the Venetian area – it is to be remarked, however, that they are portrayed according to eastern iconographies.

Notwithstanding some doubts that have been raised in the past, concerning the provenance of the gate, both the technique and the iconography, along with the style, speak a decidedly Byzantine language, just like the door of S. Clemente, although less lavishly adorned than the older one.

On the central door, one of the panels differs from the others, in that it shows a second smaller figure, in *prosky-*

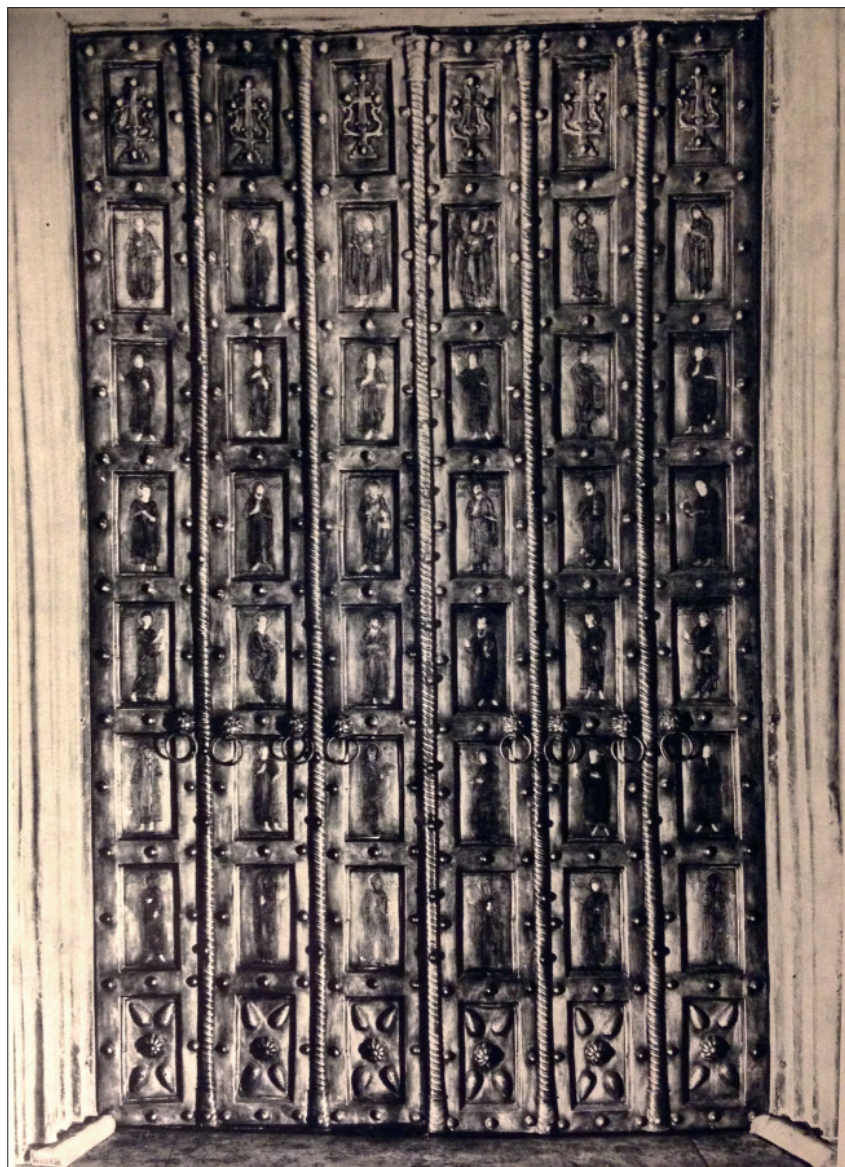
nesis before the titular saint of the basilica, S. Mark (**fig. 5**). The red-colored inscription above, lets us know the figure's identity and status as a patron of this artifact: »Leo da Molino Hoc Opus Fieri iussit«.

Who was Leo da Molino? Some authors have referred to him as »well known in the history of Venice«²⁸, despite the fact that the primary sources explicitly mentioning him are no longer directly verifiable. It is likely, indeed, that he is the Leo referred to as »bone memorie« (that is »passed away«) in a dedicatory inscription where he was praised as the founder of the (now destroyed) monastery of S. Daniele in Venice, copied by the 19th century scholar Emanuele Antonio Cicogna²⁹. Other pieces of information seem to me less certain, such as his alleged appointment as *Procuratore* in 1112: in fact, this is a piece of news that cannot be traced before the 16th century,

28 Forlati/Forlati/Federici, Le porte 14.

29 Cicogna, Delle iscrizioni 311 and fig. opposite. – See Paribeni, Porte ageminate 302-305.

Fig. 4 Venice, S. Marco, Atrium, central door. – (After Forlati/Forlati/Federici, *Le porte*).



when it was recorded by the genealogists³⁰. From the historical point of view, the office of *procurator* is only attested from the middle of the 12th century onwards – that is, slightly later. Nonetheless, this date has been often assumed as the year of production of the bronze door itself, which is something that I would rather be more cautious about.

Some indirect, but contemporary information, can be found in the archival documents. In the files preserved in the State Archives of Venice, a number of citations and subscriptions *do* record members of the da Molino family³¹. Da Molino was to become a widely ramified clan of the Venetian aristocracy, but up until the 11th and 12th centuries, the list of recurring names within their ranks is limited enough to allow us to suppose that our Leo was part of the same clan,

who had its headquarters in Venice, in the neighborhood of S. Stae, and who owned salt mines in the area of nearby Chioggia.

Some of the documents support the possibility that Leo was actually capable to provide a privileged channel to the supply of precious artifacts in Constantinople, if needed, on behalf of the doge himself. A number of parchments provide plenty of information on the activities the da Molino performed, in a remarkably wide portion of the Mediterranean basin: these charts were notarized not only in Rialto, but also in Constantinople, in the Holy Land, in Greece, and in all the Venetian seaports of the Levant. They concern a great deal of diverse issues, including the transportation service of goods such as food and textiles.

30 M. Barbaro, *Arbori de' Patritii Veneti*, ASVe (Miscell. Codici) s. v. Molin.

31 Such as a number of charts preserved in the »S. Giorgio Maggiore« archival collection, as well as in the Archive of the family da Molin in S. Zaccaria (transcribed in ASVe, L. Lanfranchi [ed.], *Codice Diplomatico Veneziano* (secc. XI-

XIII), Venezia 1940-1984). I am grateful to Prof. Elisabetta Molteni of Ca' Foscari University for drawing my attention on these documents. – See also Ferluga, *Veneziani* 693-722.



Fig. 5 Venice, S. Marco, Atrium, central door, detail: S. Mark and the donor, Leo da Molino. – (After Forlati/Forlati/Federici, *Le porte*).

To begin with, it is worth recalling the donation made by the doge Ordelafo Falier, who granted the jurisdiction of the church of S. Akindynos in Constantinople to Giovanni Gradengo, patriarch of Grado, in 1107. Among the subscribers of this well-known document, the name of a Gosmiro da Molino appears. We may wonder whether this Gosmiro is the same as – or a descendant of – another Gosmiro da Molino, who, around 1073, had taken part in several agreements and insurance pacts with Venetian traders: out of these documents, we learn that he was a *naclerus*, i.e. owner of two ships, which used to sail through the Mediterranean sea³². Later on – around the mid-12th century – a man named »Fulcus da Molino« and a certain »Fantino da Molino de confinio

Sancti Eustadii« were reportedly still performing the same business. The da Molino clan, therefore, must have enjoyed a remarkable economic prosperity, thanks to profitable activities both on the mainland (the management of the salt mines, as mentioned above), and on the sea, in the capacity of ship owners. Moreover, some members of the family must have resided permanently on the shores of the Golden Horn, although – to my knowledge – the earliest explicit mention dates only to 1168, when a payment receipt compiled in Acre mentions a Pietro da Molino »presbytero Sancti Marci nostri Emboli de Constantinopoli«³³, a priest who officiated in one of the four major churches of the Venetian quarter on the Bosphorus: S. Mark's.

Once we have outlined, although briefly, the family roots and the international environment in which Leo may have lived, there remains to be clarified the juncture in which our bronze door was produced. It is therefore necessary to take a step backwards, and recall the complex architectural and decoration context within which this donation can be situated.

As it is well known, the doge Domenico Contarini (1043-1071) had encouraged the reconstruction of S. Mark's basilica, according to the tradition, in 1063. The overall project was based on the model of the church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople, and the foundations were laid of the building that we still can see today. The construction continued under Contarini's immediate successors, Domenico Selvo and Vitale Falier, until the end of the century. In those decades, Venice was going through a crucial phase in its relationships with the empire: the treaties signed with Alexios I Komnenos widely testify to that. Furthermore, in the very same years, the rebuilding of many outstanding religious foundations in Italy and in Europe was being commenced. I wish to recall at least two major cases: the cathedral of Pisa (one of the rival powers of Venice) and the abbey of Montecassino. Pisa – O. Demus had already noticed the coincidence³⁴ – was reconstructed starting from the same year 1063³⁵; the new Montecassino was consecrated by the abbot Desiderius in 1071³⁶, the year of Contarini's death, and the year that another inscription, now lost but once visible in the atrium, declared to be that of the completion of S. Marco³⁷. Along with such coincidence, which is certainly evocative, but nothing more than symbolic, another coincidence strikes us as particularly important: both Pisa and Montecassino received Byzantine bronze inlaid doors on the occasion of their reconstruction³⁸. The oldest door preserved in S. Marco (porta di S. Clemente) arrived in Venice in those years, perhaps in keeping with a »fashion«, fostered by the facility of supply, and perhaps through the mediation of the Amalfitans. In 1071 the construction of S. Mark was far from being completed. On the contrary, amidst fires and earthquakes, it was still on going in the first decades of the

32 ASVe, Codice Diplomatico Veneziano 190.

33 ASVe, S. Giorgio Maggiore (Proc. 516). – Lanfranchi, S. Giorgio Maggiore 60 no. 320.

34 Demus, San Marco 71-72.

35 Mitterauer/Morrissey, Pisa 205-218.

36 Bloch, Monte Cassino I, 40-71.

37 Demus, San Marco 72-73.

38 Moretti, *Cum valde placuissent* 159-180.

12th century, when the atrium was being shaped³⁹. We do not know for sure whether the door of S. Clemente had been initially intended to close the main entrance to the church (as E. Vio believes⁴⁰); this may have been later enlarged, and the first door moved to the side. Once the larger central gate had been built, the time had arrived to obtain new precious shutters, and at this point Leo da Molino came into action: his family, as we have seen from the documents, enjoyed direct contacts in Constantinople; and they could also easily provide logistics (being in the position to use their private ships for the sea transportation). It remains to clarify the details of the relationship between Leo and the doge – in the context of the construction of his private chapel (which was now being made into the state church). I believe that another documentary source may shed some light on this, although it is, once again, an indirect testimony: in 1110 a »Johannem da Molinum presbiterum et nostri palatii notarium«⁴¹ writes in Rialto the well-known document, through which the doge Ordelafo Falier allows the bishopric of Malamocco to be moved to Chioggia, due to the progressive sinking of the island in the lagoon. Johannes may have provided the link.

Now, the name of Leo da Molino appears explicitly only on the epigraphic evidence; the archival sources can help us reconstruct the constellation of the members of his family; we shall thus use a little of imagination, but if the doge's notary was a relative of Leo, the latter could have presented himself, as it were, as the right man in the right place at the right time: due to his contacts in Constantinople, he could easily offer his wealth and position, in order to carry out such an important donation to the church in his hometown, a donation which would confirm his social status in front of the population of Venice.

Liturgical vessels, textiles and books

More detailed documents on the liturgical implements and furniture of churches are much later in date. In the »S. Nicolò di Lido« archival collection, among parchment sheets now almost worn out, a document is preserved, notarized in Constantinople in 1231. It records the conclusion of a credit, worth 95 *hyperperi*, between Giovanni, bishop of Rhaidestos, and Stefano, former prior of the church of S. Nicolò *Embuli Venetorum* in Constantinople, for the purchase of sacred

vessels in Constantinople, *de quibus yperperis* – Giovanni writes – »comparavimus pro utilitate et negociis nostre capelle bacilia duo argenti, anpolletas duas argenti, et terribulum unum argenti adque examita duo, de quibus examitis fecimus duo indumenta id est dalmaticam unam et strictam unam«⁴². (two silver bowls, two small silver ampoules, a silver incense burner, and two finely woven textiles, which have been used to produce liturgical vestments: a *dalmatica* and a tight tunic). The episcopal church of Rhaidestos must have been short of silver vessels for liturgical use⁴³, and the bishop has provided to its completion.

Unfortunately, the list is extremely concise and does not indulge in the artistic quality proper, and not even in the description of the listed objects. However, it is particularly interesting that, seemingly, such objects have been purchased – most likely in Constantinople⁴⁴ – as ready-made pieces, and were not produced on purpose.

We do not know whether the artisans who produced that silverware were Byzantines or Westerners. The composition of such workshops in Byzantium, in that historical period, is not an easy one to visualize. The reason lies not only in the paucity of the information we can gather, but above all in their, as it were, »mixed« character, since masters and craftsmen of diverse provenance and ethnic background worked side by side in those workshops⁴⁵. I would rather dismiss, however, the idea that Giovanni of Rhaidestos had had the pieces imported from his homeland, based on a historical reason: luxury ware export from Venice towards Byzantium will significantly increase only later, beginning in the second half of the 14th century, when Byzantine local production will decline due to the political and economic crisis⁴⁶. In that later period – as A. Ballian has stressed – liturgical vessels (even those used in Greek churches) will be produced by silversmiths in the Venetian colonies: several of them are attested in Üsküdar, Dubrovnik and Candia, and Constantinople must have been equipped with a certain number of them, too⁴⁷.

The island of Negroponte (Euboea), too, is a key hub for Venetian trade in the Mediterranean already under the Komnenian dynasty⁴⁸. After the Fourth Crusade and the partition of the territories conquered by the Latins, a large portion of the island falls under Venetian rule. As a consequence of this event, some relevant changes in the urban asset are carried out; first of all, the fortification of the city, which occupied a crucial position by the Euripos strait. We may get an idea

39 Demus, San Marco 100-105.

40 See Vio, Le porte 283.

41 ASVe, Codice Diplomatico Veneziano 463. – On this and other documents of the same kind preserved in the ASVe, see Bevilacqua, Tra Oriente 83-91.

42 ASVe, S. Nicolò di Lido, Pergamene, b. 2 (1231, December, V indiction, Constantinople). – The whole text is published in Morozzo della Rocca/Lombardo, Documenti 195-196 no. 658. – On the episode recalled here, see also Robbert, Rialto Businessmen 54. – Orlando, Ad profectum patriae 147 no. 45.

43 Collareta, Arredi 303-328, in part. 313-315 (on the function of liturgical implements and their technique). – Geary, Oggetti liturgici 275-290. – Although limited to the Romanesque period, see also Cat. Cologne 1985, vols. I and III for western and Byzantine Middle Ages respectively. – See now also Cordez, Trésor.

44 Rhaidestos (today's Tekirdağ, Eastern Thrace, Tekirdağ prov./TR) lies very close to the Byzantine capital. – See Külzer, Ostthrakien 607-613 s.v. Rhaidestos.

45 Bacci, Greek Painters 164-168.

46 From the standpoint of the economic history: Laiou, Centre of Trade 17-18 has recalled that the painters' guilds will introduce in their charters special provisions for objects specifically produced for the Levant.

47 Ballian, Liturgical Implements 117-124. – As a useful reference, as regards some specific cases, see Hetherington, Enamels.

48 On the history of Negroponte (today Euboea/GR) in the Byzantine and Venetian period, including both historical and archaeological remarks: Koder, Negroponte. – More recently see: Kontogiannis, Euripos-Negroponte-Eğriboz 29-56.



Fig. 6 Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, 16.d.288. – (After V. M. Coronelli, *Memorie istoriografiche della Morea e Negroponte* [Venezia 1686] pl. 39).

of the appearance of the fortification itself and of the new remarkable development of the city within, after some engravings realized in the following centuries, which suggest how the skyline of the Venetian citadel should not have been too different from the Ottoman one, that these images depict (fig. 6). Inside the city walls, along with the palace of the *bailo* (governor), the most outstanding buildings must have been the two churches of Santa Maria and S. Marco, the latter facing a piazza, or crossroads, equipped with a loggia⁴⁹. In compliance with the obligations following its being a dependency of the monastery of S. Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, the prior of the church was supposed to sign a *promissione* (a legal agreement). We are fortunate enough to be able to read one of these documents, dating to 1270, which contains a list of all the vessels and furniture belonging to the relevant building. According to this agreement, the prior Benedetto will take care for five years of all the assets of the church of S. Marco in Negroponte, including all the supplies used for the daily offices of the monastery; he pledges he will not give away any of them, and he will maintain them all. A detailed list follows, which includes a number of objects⁵⁰. The parchment on which this document is written is badly preserved, and the whole text (which is, as far as we know, unpublished)

can be reconstructed through a comparison with a later document from 1274 (in this case, too, only a summary of the text has been published)⁵¹. In the list, silverware come first, and include: a cross (whether a processional or an altar cross is not specified⁵²), a chalice and a censer (*turribulum*). Textiles come next, and the function for each of them is stated at the same time: altar cloths are distinguished between those that are placed daily on the altar as a protection and those for the Eucharist services; a cushion (*culcita*), a cloth and two linens *pro mortuis*; various vestments, each one for a different liturgical usage, are carefully listed, too. Books are numbered next: liturgical books to be used in the church are divided into categories (missals, manuals, psalters, passionaries, sequentiaries, *istoriales*, epistolaries and evangelistaries), and their format (one or more volumes) is specified along with their liturgical purpose (either liturgy of the night or of the day).

The church of S. Marco in Negroponte has disappeared, replaced with a mosque after the Ottoman conquest in 1470⁵³. A few years earlier, when it was still a Venetian domain, the chaplain of the regiment settled in the Greek island, Paolo Pasqualigo, writes to the abbot of S. Giorgio Maggiore, reporting to him about the recovery of a number of objects, which had been in the possession of the church of S. Marco⁵⁴. The long letter – written in Venetian – which he sends to his superiors is dated to 1454. Pasqualigo scrupulously updates the abbot about the situation of the monastery's rented out properties. Above all, the chaplain demonstrates to be really caring of the decorum of the church, even from the artistic point of view: he has promptly commissioned a beautiful crucifix with S. Mary and S. John («Quanto alla giexia vostra ho fatto 1° bellissimo crucifixo con S. Maria e S. Zuane che basteria fina in la giexia de miser S. Marcho»). But there is a particularly difficult task that, more than the rest, is monopolizing his efforts: he is searching and trying to recover a number of objects owned by the monastery, that – he found out – had been alienated or pawned. He has already managed to recover some of them; and he will try to do the same with the ones still missing, but, to this purpose, an official mandate from the abbot will be needed as soon as possible. On the other hand, the law is undoubtedly a favorable one to him and will facilitate his decisions: he says, in fact, that there is a law that states that whatever belongs to the church cannot be pawned, thus, he is determined to have

49 Koder, *Negroponte 90-92*. – Specifically on the church of S. Marco: Pozza, *Le chiese 611-626*, in part. 614-615. – Borsari, *San Marco 27-34*. – Jacoby, *La consolidation 151-189*.

50 ASVe, San Giorgio Maggiore, b. 126, no. 38: «[...] Bonis vero usualibus dictae ecclesiae quae sunt: Crux una argentea, Calix argenteus unus, Turribulum argenteum unum, Panni pro altare duo, Culcita una, Pannum unum et linteamina duo pro mortuis, Paramentum unum cum Casubla una alba et unum aliud Paramentum sine Casubla, Cappa una. toalie due de altare et alii Panni qui sunt cottidie in altare, Missalle unum, Breviarium unum divisum in duobus voluminibus, Antiphonaria de nocte duo, et tres de die, Manuale unum, Psalteria tria, Passionarium unum, Sequentiarium unum, Breviarium unum et Missalle unum ambo in uno volumine, Epistularium et Evangelistarium, Istoriale unum de littera breventana, fora una de casubla una de panno, Dalmatica una et tunicella una de examito viride [...]» (1270, 10 gennaio, indizione XIII, Venezia). –

Abstract in: Orlando, *Ad profectum patriae 164-165* no. 82. – On the church in Negroponte depending from S. Giorgio Maggiore see also Koumanoudè, *Oi Bevediktivoi*.

51 ASVe, San Giorgio Maggiore, b. 126, n. 41. – Marco Bollani, abbot of S. Giorgio Maggiore, commissions Benedict, prior of S. Marco in Negroponte, the collection of a payment from John from Bologna for the church of S. Giorgio in Thebes, and to perform all the duties concerning S. Marco in Negroponte. – Cf. Orlando, *Ad profectum patriae 165* no. 83.

52 On the different typologies: Collareta, *Arredi 313-315* and Geary, *Oggetti liturgici 275-290*.

53 Koder, *Negroponte*. – Kontogiannis, *Euripos-Negroponte-Egriboz 29-56*.

54 ASVe, San Giorgio Maggiore, b. 126 s. n. – Cf. Orlando, *Ad profectum patriae 113-114*. 188 no. 132. – Koumanoudè, *Oi Bevediktivoi 146-147*.

the priest who has taken away the objects excommunicated: »una leze in mio favor che dize che chosse de giexia non se puol impegnar. [...] volio far far 1^a scumenegazion, azo i possa invegnir in quelle cosse che son state usurpade«. He has already found a good number of vessels, and provides a list, with some remarks on the state of preservation of some of them (thus offering us some rare descriptive information): a cross covered with silver, a retable depicting Our Lady (also partly silver-gilt), a silver-gilt incense burner with a missing leg, a small incense bowl (*navicella*) without its lid, a silver paten; he has recovered a missal book that had been pawned. Pasqualigo will try his best to have them returned to the church. Among the objects he has managed to recover, he can list some books and various textiles, which he has repaired. Furthermore, he has bought new implements, including altar cloths, and has received a chalice worth 8 ounces from the local archbishop. He believes, however, that part of these vessels and books are not necessary any more in Negroponte, and offers the abbot to have them shipped to Venice. Pasqualigo spends more words to describe all the improvement he made to the furniture of the church, the attention he pays to the adequacy of lightening, and reports on the urgent repairs needed for the attic and the windows of the house where he is accommodated. Moreover, he has carried out all this at his own expenses, and complains about the scarcity of offerings from the locals: »non vedo alchun che metesse 1° soldo per adornar la vostra giexia«⁵⁵. Paolo Pasqualigo claims – as it is obvious – money from his superior, in order to conclude the procedure, and to cover the expenses for new objects to be made.

The document thus provides us with a »cross-section« of the daily business of a cleric, who has been charged with administration responsibilities in the colony, and seeks to show himself worthy of the task. Indeed, during the troubled years preceding the fall of Constantinople in the hands of the Ottomans, there may have been a loosening of control over the treasures and belongings of the Latin churches of all the Levant; this document may attest a tentative effort to remedy to the loss.

Icons (and some relics)

Our virtual itinerary ends with the travels of a work from Constantinople to Italy, thanks to a Venetian noblewoman residing in Constantinople. Her story, that late-medieval and early-modern authors passed down to us, took place between Venice and Byzantium at the turn of the 14th century, and involves also a third city: Florence⁵⁶. In the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo of the latter city, a micromosaic diptych is preserved, which displays scenes of the twelve major Feasts of the Byzantine liturgy (*Dodekaorton*). The diptych was originally kept in the Treasury of the Baptistery S. Giovanni in the same city (fig. 7-8). The artifact consists of two small wooden boards (c. 27 cm × 17.7 cm each), whose surface is covered with minute mosaic tesserae, composing scenes of the Life of Christ, distributed into twelve rectangular frames, six on each panel: from the Nativity to the Resurrection of Lazarus on the left, and from the Entry in Jerusalem to the Dormition of the Virgin. Each of the two panels of this tiny »calendar« is enclosed in a silver-gilt frame, decorated with repoussé and enamels. The figures, emerging from a golden background, have Greek captions and their style and composition display the typical features of the Palaiologan painting. The diptych is well known in the scholarly literature, that has included it among the masterpieces of Constantinopolitan production of the early 14th century⁵⁷. It was part of one of the many »collections« of art works gathered in the late Byzantine period, which »migrated« across the sea from Constantinople to Venice, and to the other cities of the Italian peninsula⁵⁸.

On the history of the precious diptych, however, we can benefit from little and fragmentary information: we know that it was donated to the Florentine Baptistery in 1394, along with a group of relics of »Saints of the Eastern Church«. This piece of news is derived from early modern sources, the earliest one being Antonino Pierozzi's *Chronicon*, written some sixty years after the date of the donation. The Florentine priest mentions briefly the displacement of saints' relics from Venice to Florence, by will of a noblewoman »olim uxore cuiusdam florentini qui fuerat cubicularius imperatoris constantinopolitani«; in reward, she had received from the Guild of the Merchants (Arte dei Mercatanti) an annual remuneration of 60 florins⁵⁹. The same episode is later recorded by Ferdinando Leopoldo Del Migliore (1684), who

55 ASVe, San Giorgio Maggiore, b. 126 s. n. (1454, 19 May, Negroponte).

56 I touched upon this topic in my paper delivered at the VIII Congresso Nazionale dell'Associazione Italiana di Studi Bizantini, Ravenna 22-25 settembre 2015 (L. Bevilacqua, *Veneziani a Costantinopoli. Qualche considerazione sulla circolazione di opere d'arte nel Mediterraneo nel XIV secolo*). – See also Teruzzi, *Byzantium and Florentia*.

57 On this art work and its art-historical contextualization see: Becherucci/Brunetti, *Il Museo Il* 279-281. – Cat. Venice 1974, no. 92. – Furlan, *Le icone* 81-82 no. 30. – Demus, *Mosaikikonen*. – Effenberger, *Images* 209-214. – Cat. New York 2004, 219-220 no. 29 (A. Effenberger). – Cat. London 2008-2009, 437 no. 227 (M. Bacci). – Mosaic icons, their technique, typologies and chronology have been recently discussed further in: Pedone, *L'icona di Cristo* 95-132. – Pe-

done, *Ergomouzaika* 623-634. – Moretti, *I colori*: 997-1011 (all of them include updated bibliography).

58 On this topic, see Iacobini, *Bisanzio e le città italiane*.

59 »Anno autem Domini MCCCXCIII fuerunt allate Florentiam quedam reliquie sanctorum et largite arti mercatorum ac collocate in oratorio sancti Iohannis Baptisti. [...] A quadam etiam nobili matrona olim uxore cuiusdam florentini: qui fuerat cubicularius imperatoris constantinopolitani, fuerunt ex Venetiis Florentiam adducte multe reliquie diversorum sanctorum in diversis locellis quarumdam tabularum collocate. Et inter eas erat ibi de osse colli beati Ioh. Bap. et maxilla sinistra cum parte dentis [...]. Et consules artis mercatorum consignantur per dicte matrone ob retributiones tanti muneris annuatim in vita sua LX. floren. quo observatus ei fuit«: Pierozzi, *Chronicon* f. CXXI. – On the works of the latter, see: Cinelli, *Antonino Pierozzi*.



Fig. 7 Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, micromosaic icon with scenes of the Dodekaorton, left panel. – (After Cat. New York 2004).

adds the following details: her spouse was allegedly a chamberlain of John Kantakouzenos, and received the relics from the emperor himself, who had removed them from the Palace when he was overthrown⁶⁰. The most accurate testimony we can benefit from, however, is Anton Francesco Gori. The latter has gathered a number of relevant material, not only about the relics, but also concerning the micromosaic diptych, which is the subject of an entire chapter of the third volume of his *Thesaurus veterum diptychorum* (1754)⁶¹. Along with an attentive iconographical description, the author offers a visual reproduction of the artifact, split into two plates

(fig. 9), and he states that he has verified the information on this event in the archives of the Arte di Calimala, a task that nobody had undertaken before; his research was rewarding, since he managed to find out the – long forgotten – name of the Venetian lady: Nicoletta Gioni, *generis splendore ac pietate ornatissima*, the wife of a Venetian aristocrat, who had served as *koubikoularios* during the reign of John VI, and whose name is not known. Towards the end of her life, Nicoletta moved to Florence, and brought with her not only the relics, but also the precious icons⁶². Once in Florence, she signed a contract with the delegates of the Arte di Calimala,

60 »[...] queste vi pervennero, testifica il medesimo Santo, da una nobil matrona, c'era stata moglie d'un Fiorentino cameriere di Giovanni Cantacuzeno Imperator di Costantinopoli, il quale si fe' lecito levarle della camera imperiale, quando da Giovanni Paleologo suo genero fu cacciato dall'Imperio, e costretto a rendersi monaco. A costei fin che la visse, l'Arte dei Mercatanti assegnò provvisione di 60. fiorini l'anno«: Del Migliore, Firenze 104.

61 Gori, *Thesaurus* 325-345. – On the Byzantine works included in Gori's treatise (although with a specific focus on the ivory diptychs) see Visconti, *Ella sogna dittici* 221-270.

62 Gori, *Thesaurus* 327. – The inventories of the Opera di S. Giovanni are preserved in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze; the research on relevant documents concerning the possessions of the Baptistry of Florence, administered by the Arte di Calimala, is still on going, and the results presented here are necessarily partial.

Fig. 8 Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, micromosaic icon with scenes of the Dodekaorton, right panel. – (After Cat. New York 2004).



according to which she would be granted 51 florins per year over her donation – and it seems that she actually received the money until the end of her life, occurred in 1409.

Thus, the icon was part of a small treasury of precious objects, which included «capsae» where the aforementioned relics used to be stored. These caskets have been lost (whereas the relics, still preserved in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo di Firenze, are displayed in gothic reliquaries), making it impossible, once again, to visualize these pieces of – possibly Byzantine – jewelry⁶³.

Who was then Madonna Nicoletta «de Grionibus»? In which way had she received the relics, and why did she decide to leave them to the Florentine Baptistery? According to the outcomes of some archival research that I have carried out, the Grioni family belonged to the Venetian aristocracy since

the late 13th century, but finding any specific news on its components is hard, both in Venice and in the East. The family trees put together by M. Barbaro⁶⁴ provide little information, other than the fact that part of the family is attested in Candia at the end of the Middle Ages. In the collections of the State Archives of Venice, however, the Grioni are mentioned in a number of documents dating to the 13th and 14th centuries, concerning their properties in several neighborhoods of Venice, in particular in the *confinium* of S. Stae⁶⁵. Among the components of the clan, in the 14th century the name of Franceschino Grioni stands out: he is the author of a short epic devoted to S. Eustace (S. Stae in Venetian), whose cult was particularly common amongst the merchants. We are indebted to the meticulous studies of the modern editors of this literary work, since they luckily managed to single out

63 Menna, *Bisanzio e l'ambiente 111-158*, and the PhD thesis by M. Teruzzi, mentioned above (note 56).

64 M. Barbaro, *Arbori de' Patritii Veneti*, ASVe (Miscell. Codici) s. v. Grioni.

65 The family name is mentioned several times in the tables included in Dorigo, *Venezia romanica*.



Fig. 9 Florence, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, micromosaic icon with scenes of the Dodekaorton, right panel. – (After Gori, Thesaurus).

the names of several members of the clan, from the lagoon to the coasts of Syria⁶⁶. Seemingly, any further reference to this family is lacking, at least until the 17th century, when a Palazzo Grioni is built, not far from S. Stae, on the area of the destroyed church of S. Boldo⁶⁷.

Let us look back at medieval Venice. Remarkably, Venetian archival documents dating to between the 13th and the 14th centuries, concerning the property of a number of buildings situated mainly in the area of S. Stae and S. Giacomo dall'Orto, mention several individuals whose family name is »Grilioni«. More importantly, these names appear in documents notarized in Greece (in Plathanea), in Rhaidestos by the Marmara Sea, and in Constantinople itself, already in the second half of the 12th century: Marcus, Petrus, Benedic-

tus Grilioni subscribe administrative documents on several occasions⁶⁸. I have already had the opportunity to suggest that »Grilioni« and »Griioni« may be nothing but different spelling of the same family name⁶⁹. If this hypothesis is correct, we can confirm that Nicoletta's family was indeed active in the Byzantine capital, and its members had established themselves there long before. It is also likely that they resided in the quarter the Venetians possessed and that we have described above⁷⁰.

A »mystery« also concerns the identity of Nicoletta's spouse, not only as far as his name and »nationality« are concerned, but also as regards his role at the Constantinopolitan court. He was recorded as a *koubikoularios* of John VI Kantakouzenos: this qualification seems anachronistic after mid-11th century, when it is abandoned in Byzantium⁷¹. It is possible that early modern authors used this word either as a translation of a different rank's name, which might have sounded similar to the western chroniclers' ear; or that they did not mean to mention a specific existing rank, but only a very high one, in general terms, without any correspondence with the actual hierarchies. It is worth recalling, however, that non-Greeks (and Venetians were no exception) were commonly conferred Byzantine titles⁷². Of course, this does not help much in the identification of the man, which in the past has been even confused with that of Pietro Torrigiani da Signa, the donor of the famous relics and manuscripts of the Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala in Siena⁷³. Pietro had allegedly acquired the latter objects in Venice, which makes the story even more complicated⁷⁴. This event, however, does not have to do with the story of the donation of the relics to the Baptistery of Florence, despite many similarities and overlap of contexts, and although a number of details still await to be clarified.

Nevertheless, the Florentine diptych and relics stay as irreplaceable testimonies of the »liquid« interrelations amongst the western communities settled in Byzantium in the 14th century. The circulation of art works – and even their displacement from one community to another – is a tangible evidence to these interrelations. In this specific case, the purchase of art works and relics carried out by the Arte di Calimala in order to enrich the Baptistery of Florence they were in charge of, and having looked for them in the milieu of the Byzantine production (through, as it were, a contact-person) dovetails the contemporary appreciation of Greek culture in Florence, where, in 1361, the first University teaching position in Greek

66 Badas, Introduzione LI-LII. – Cf. Monteverdi, La legenda 7.

67 Bassi, Tracce 30-34 no. 2. – On general aspects of urbanism in 14th century Venice see also Agazzi, Edilizia 139-156.

68 ASVe, Codice Diplomatico Veneziano vol. 1151-1154, 44 no. 2098 (Rhaidestos 1151); vol. 1165-1169, 155 no. 2670 (Constantinople 1168); vol. 1193-1194, 44 no. 4108 (Plathanea 1193); vol. 1193-1194, 59 no. 4115 (Rialto 1193: Benedictus Griliuni acts as intermediary for some business in Constantinople).

69 Bevilacqua, Veneziani.

70 See above, note 14.

71 Oikonomides, Les listes 301. – Also Cutler, Loot 245-246 has highlighted the inconsistency.

72 Falkenhausen, Venezia e Bisanzio 821-832.

73 »Altro insigne Reliquiario è quello, ove si conserva una Reliquia di S. Simeone Stilita, donata nel 1394 ai Consoli da Madonna Niccoletta di Mess. Antonio Griioni di Venezia, vedova di Piero Torrigiani«. – Lumachi, Memorie storiche 47; the same in Follini/Rastrelli, Firenze 85; and once again Cocchi, Antichi Reliquiari 51 (»Nel 1394 i consoli dell'Arte dei Mercatanti ottennero varie insigni reliquie da Madonna Niccoletta, vedova di Mes. Piero Torrigiani fiorentino e figlia di Mes. Antonio Griioni nobile veneziano. Tali reliquie le aveva ereditate dal marito, dal quale erano state tolte all'imperatore di Costantinopoli Giovanni VI Cantacuzeno«). – On these reliquaries see Cat. Siena 2006-2007.

74 Nelson, Italian Appreciation 215-216.

had been established⁷⁵, as well as the interest in exploring and studying the Eastern Mediterranean, demonstrated by Florentine and Tuscan travellers in the Outremer⁷⁶.

In these pages we offered a wide-reaching overview of a problem, of which we have chosen only a few case-studies – thus excluding necessarily other major hubs such as Morea, Crete, Cyprus, as well as the easternmost and south-

ern shores of the Mediterranean. I believe, however, that stories such as those of Leo da Molino, Paolo Pasqualigo, and Nicoletta Grioni can suggest possible »scenes« to better explain the dynamics of the migration of art works along the Mediterranean routes of the Middle Ages, and the irreplaceable role of Venice and its colonies as intermediaries in this multiple-way dissemination.

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⁷⁵ See Maisano/Rollo, Manuele Crisolora.

⁷⁶ Barsanti, Costantinopoli e l'Egeo 83-253.

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