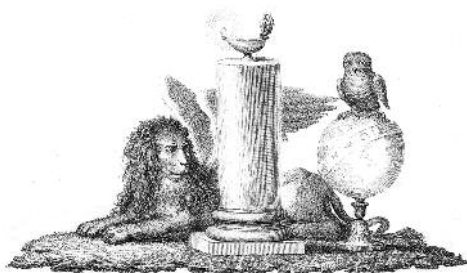


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ATTI E MEMORIE DELL'ATENEIO VENETO

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VENICE
AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE SEVENTEENTH
AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

After the Battle of Lepanto (October 1571), which destroyed the Turks' reputation of being invincible but was of no major military or political consequence in the Mediterranean, Venice refused to be drawn into any further warfare that might compromise it being able to resume trading. During the seventeenth century it continued this peaceful behaviour, dictated by a lack of resources and men on its limited territory. The normal course of commercial affairs was restored between the two neighbours who considered themselves to be inescapable partners. In his *Discorsi politici* ('Political discussions' 1599), the diplomat Paolo Paruta observed that the wars produced, at best, short-term territorial gains but that they swallowed up riches. He put forward the argument that Venice's power allowed its active 'neutral attitude', so useful in the diplomatic negotiations to which the Republic put its ambassadors, resources and unparalleled information to use in Europe. In 1593 the 'Serenissima', which did not neglect its defence, built the fortress of Palmanova on its Eastern frontier of the Friuli not so much to protect itself from the Turks but from the ambitions of the Habsburg Emperor of Vienna upon Adriatic sea.

The last armed conflicts...

Nevertheless, Venice fought two more gruelling Turkish wars in the seventeenth century. The first lasted twenty-five years (1645-1669) and, despite repeated naval successes, the 'Signoria' resigned itself to giving up Candia (Crete) but retained the right to maintain garrisons in two strong places so that the island might continue to be a stop-off, for supplies on the maritime routes of the East. The Turks had successfully pursued their tenacious policy of dismantling the *stato da mar*, edified four centuries before to the detriment of the Byzantine Empire, which had been destroyed by the Latin crusades in 1204. But they were now incapable of victory against the Habsburgs and in 1664 near Graz they suffered a se-

vere blow that Venice used to loosen Turkey's hold on it, reinforce its presence in Dalmatia and Albania and increase its control over the Adriatic Sea.

A continental war in the Morea

In November 1676 Ahmed Köprülü, the great vizier who had remained in power for seventeen years and who had directed the Ottoman expansion towards the North, against Austria and Poland, passed away. His successor Kara Mustafâ resumed a policy of exploiting the Venetians, and the ambassador (called 'bailo') had to borrow from the English in 1678 in order to satisfy his needs. On 12 September 1683 the Ottoman offensive against Vienna failed, the population of Venice made a show of their happiness and the government was invited by Pope Innocent XI, the Emperor and King of Poland who had effectively saved its Austrian neighbour, to enter an anti-Turkish coalition. On 5 March 1684 the Holy League, officially the *Societas offensivi et defensivi belli* directed exclusively against the Ottoman Empire was formed: the treaty forbade all separate peace and established that all conquered territory would be restored to its previous masters. The conquests made in the Aegean islands, Crete, Negroponte (island of Euboea) and Cyprus would go back to Venice, whose fleet would support Austro-Polish territorial forces. For the first time, the Republic was not being imposed a war by the Ottomans, it was opening the hostilities itself. The operations took place both on land, with the support of Dalmatia towards Bosnia, and on sea, towards the Morea and the archipelago. But the first part of the plan frustrated the ambitions of the Empire since Bosnia, which had been integrated into the Hungarian kingdom, would have to return to the Habsburgs, while on 20 August 1684 Ragusa abandoned Turkish sovereignty in favour of the Empire's protection. Francesco Morosini, the challenged defender of Candia during the preceding war was appointed captain general. On 20 July the fleet came to shore in Santa Maura (Lefkada), which had been Venetian from 1502 to 1573, took back the island and thus covered its bases at the opening of the Adriatic. The Swedish Count Königsmarck took on the Venetian command of the land troupes composed of Italians, Greeks and Germans. The war properly began in 1685 and the Turk's domination in Morea quickly crumbled. The Turks who were also losing Pest in Hungary, feared Russian intervention and were attacked on bor-

ders that were too long and hard to defend, offered Venice peace and Venice refused.

In vanquished Morea, the situation was not easy: the troupes were faced with the summer heat, the plague and unpaid wages. Morosini turned towards Athens, nevertheless. On 20 September his army arrived before the town and the fleet entered Piraeus, on 23 September the town surrendered and a week later Acropolis or the Parthenon, which had been turned into a Turkish powder keg, was seriously damaged by the artillery and the explosion of powder. The plague that claimed Königsmarck's life was ravaging the army, which was threatened by a counter-attack from the Turks. On 9 April 1688, Athens had to be evacuated and the troupes carried off the lions, which to this day adorn the triumphant entrance of the Arsenal.

In November 1687, Sultan Mehmed IV (1648-1687) was overthrown. On 3 April Morosini was elected doge. Negotiations had begun in Vienna in February. Venice adopted a superior tone but its troupes were no longer successful. In the Autumn the Orthodox bishops of the Balkans invoked the help of Russia against the Catholic powers, and Austrian penetration in Bosnia gave rise to disagreements over the delimitation of the border in Dalmatia. The Ottomans won back central Greece. The doge Morosini once more donned his uniform of captain general, embarked on 24 May 1693, disembarked in Nauplia in July and died on 7 January 1694. On 8 February 1697, the Russian tsar joined the alliance against the Turks. The Venetian fleet confirmed its superiority over the Turkish navy by winning a whole series of naval encounters. The maritime powers (England, United Provinces) offered their mediation on 22 July and the Turks agreed. The negotiations ended in Karlowitz/Karlovci (Vojvodina) in January 1699. Venice abandoned Lepanto, kept the Morea, obtained Santa Maura and enlarged its territories in Dalmatia.

In 1716 the Turks took up arms once more and reoccupied the Morea without difficulty. At the peace treaty in Passarowitz near Belgrade (1718), the Venetians who had remained faithful to their policy of not giving up on navigation and active maritime commerce, managed to keep four bases on the Ionian coast in Albania and Epirus. Since their defeat in Lepanto and during all of the seventeenth century, the Turks had consistently proved themselves to be weaker on sea, where the Venetians, with the power of their fleet, remained the masters. On land, however, on the outskirts of their own territories, the Ottoman armies, who recruited in

a very vast empire, had the offensive upper-hand. Venice knew this and retaining control of the sea remained its primary concern. It had *points d'appui* evenly distributed along the coast, forming valuable stop-offs for navigation.

Commemorative Monuments

During the never-ending war in Candia, a patriotic fervour that would leave its mark on art had swept over Venice. Foremost in the city's artistic programme was triumphant sculpture celebrating heroic personalities on the church façades. Already in 1524 Vincenzo Cappello, the first to benefit from this honour, had been represented sporting his sea captain armour, on the façade of the Church of Santa Maria Formosa. In the Seventeenth century, many façades were laden with the self-celebration of particular family destinies. The greatest masterpiece of sculpted façades was executed by Giuseppe Sardi for a project financed by Antonio Barbaro, the sea captain who had excelled during the war in Candia and left 30,000 ducats to adorn his parish church with a new façade, for which he drew the entire project. Created by the sculptor of Flemish origin Giusto Le Court, the life-size statue of the captain dressed in great pomp, coiffed in a truncated-cone shaped hat due to his grade and equipped with commanding baton was positioned, by the architect, proudly mounted on a sarcophagus. Statues of Virtues form a crown of glory above the tympanum, while atlantes in the form of bearded and moustachioed half-naked giants represent Turk captives holding back drapes. On the lower levels of the composition, a sequence of six carved in relief traces the career and feats in battle of the valiant officer.

In his will, another sea captain, also a hero of the war in Candia, Alvise II Mocenigo expressed the wish that 'the memory of he who served the Serenissima Republic be a stimulant for posterity'. His military successes and virtues would be remembered in a monument-mausoleum erected in 1657 in San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti. When it was suggested that Francesco Morosini be honoured in the same way on the façade of San Vidal, the Senate objected that it had already built inside the ducal palace a sumptuous monument and triumphant arc to the glory of the deceased doge.

The church of Santa Maria della Salute was constructed from 1631 to 1687. Initially the church was planned in response to the Senate's wishes

as it implored the Virgin Mary to put an end to the terrible plague epidemic that was destroying the city in 1630, but gradually as the works progressed, at the time of the Turkish wars, the iconography slid from the plague to the Turkish danger. A statue of the Virgin Mary, *maris stella*, holding the commanding baton of the sea captains and standing on a slip of moon, was heaved up to the top of the lantern of the huge cupola and was identified with Venus, born queen of the seas.

Le Court also sculpted the royal mausoleum, supported by four giant Turk captives, to the glory of the doge Giovanni Pesaro. The mausoleum was built by the architect Longhena in the nave of the Franciscan basilica (Santa Maria Gloriosa also named: *I Frari*) between 1665 and 1669 to exalt the endeavours of the doge in coming to the rescue of besieged Candia, the capital of a 'kingdom' (*regno di Candia*), to which the Republic owed its place among the European crowns and its role as a bastion of Christianity against Turkish Islam. The last monument of this kind was built by Andrea Tirali in the basilica of Saints John and Paul, the Venetian Pantheon, between 1705 and 1708 to the glory of the doges Bertucci and Silvestro Valier in order to exalt the victories of the Dardanelles and the lion of Saint Mark's fight against the Muslim dragon. Music and painting also contributed to the celebration of this patriotic fervour. Thus Antonio Vivaldi composed the oratory *Judit triumphans* for the women's choir of the hospital of Pietà and Giovanni Battista Piazzetta painted a *Judith and Holofernes* – in both cases the obvious metaphor illustrated the struggle of Venice, beautiful and fragile young woman, severing the throat of a giant identified with the Turks.

... to pacified relations

Venice had to overcome a number of prejudices rooted in the secular Venetian–Turk conflict and the faith the patriciate placed in the perfection of its republican and aristocratic constitution, as opposed to the despotic government of a cruel sultan, who held unlimited power and was master of the property and the lives of his subjects, who were reduced to slaves without dignity, forced to carry out his every whim. On 20 May 1733 a perpetual peace between the two former antagonists was signed, prolonging the treaty of 1718 – fruit of both the 'glorious efforts of our fathers', who had succeeded in restoring peace, and the wisdom of the Venetian government, whose representative, the bailo Angelo Emo, had negotiated patiently. This eternal peace was not unanimously accepted

by the Senate, who feared for the solidity of the Austrian alliance and who knew from experience that the duration of a treaty is dependant on the more powerful of the two partners, the Ottoman despot having a certain propensity for violence and for breaking his undertakings. Austria went to war in Bosnia in the 1730s, and then its own war of Succession, which would modify the balance in South-East Europe: the Austro-Turkish hostilities set off an unexpected consequence in aiding Muscovite expansion towards the Balkan peninsula. This worried Venice considerably brought about conflicting feelings. While some feared the reinforced influence of the Russians would create religious tensions within the orthodox populations of the *Stato da mar*, others expected a weakening of the Ottomans and the reinforcement of the Empire of Venice in Greece.

The view of a diplomat

The bailo Francesco Foscari appointed on 24 August 1756, arrived in his embassy in Constantinople in October 1757. His mission coincided with the first years of the sultanate of Mustafa III, and the viziership of Koca Mehmed paşa, known as *Ra ip* (= *le Sage*, 1756–1763), who kept his country out of the European conflicts (War of Seven Years), led a prudent policy towards the provincial revolts, undertook institutional, judiciary, property and tax reforms, modernised the naval forces and endeavoured to eliminate the governors of the most violent provinces. He instituted the public library of Constantinople, which allowed Turkish culture to shine and was praised in Ignace Mouradja d'Ohsson's *Tableau général de l'empire othoman* ('General Picture of the Ottoman Empire', Paris 1787) and by the studies of *Letteratura turchesca* ('Turkish Litterature') of the abbot Giambattista Toderini (Venice, 1787), who listed 2,000 hand-written volumes, including many Greek, Latin, Syrian volumes and ones originating from Jerusalem.

According to Paolo Preto, the dispatches of Foscari – a Venetian patrician and experienced diplomat, capable of looking at the Turkish realities with a certain detachment – contributed to consolidating Venice's 'more serene image, devoid of prejudices towards the religion of Mahomet, its practices, its institutions, cleared from numerous deformations and legends'. The bailo, who took note of the circulation of European gazettes – the sultan, being keen for news and demanding to be informed of everything happening in Christendoms – cumulated the roles of diplo-

mat and guardian of Venice's interests and those of its people. He also exercised a civil and criminal jurisdiction over his compatriots and saw that Venice's commerce and currency were protected. Moreover, he had a role as an informer, scrutinizing everything to do with the maritime border, describing in minute detail the Ottoman naval forces or the development of the *guerre de course* and the operations of the pirates, of Dulcigno and Perasto on the Ottoman side and Zante, on the Venetian side. Piracy employed numerous starving poor people whose only activity consisted in the smuggling and plunder that had infested the Mediterranean.

On perusing these dispatches addressed to the Venetian Senate, one also discovers what today would be deemed generalised corruption, but derived in fact from a culture of donations. Gifts were offered to the Sultan's entourage, even to the seraglio's cooks who prepared the meals of the janissaries, especially those of the voivode of Galata, where the Venetian colony lived, fine clothes were given to obtain the renewal of patents – the *reis-effendi*, who oversaw all public affairs was particularly pampered, receiving six garments, wax, sugar and 'galant offerings' (dispatch 6). The first vizier brought together all the ambassadors – the bailo who had lost his first position came after the other representatives of the crowns of France and England – to inform them as to the arrangements of their families and their nationals: foreigners were not allowed to move within the walls of the city without being accompanied by a janissary; ambassadors could not welcome any subject of the sultan in their homes, unless it was to deal with business; the 'Franks', that is to say those of Latin origin, had to close their taverns and any other kind of *ridotto* (theatre or playhouse); all the foreigners, Greeks, Armenians, Jews and other nations staying in the metropolis had to wear clothes of a certain colour (edict of December 1757, dispatch 9).

The Venetian government liked to flaunt its force by showing the ambassadors and foreign leaders around the arsenal, in order to dissuade them from declaring war against such a powerful Republic. The Turks did the same and Foscarini recounted in detail what today would be considered a successful espionage mission. On 4 January 1758, the Captain Pasha returned from Izmir to prepare the arsenal for a general examination at which the sultan would be present. The latter spent some time on the worksite of two first-rank ships, he then inspected the other ships, caravels, galleys and other boats, he entered the storehouses and depots to view the supply material for shipping. The bailo, knowing that the

‘state of the marine and the arsenals ought to be looked upon with the greatest attention’ consigned all observations to his dispatch, in which he detailed ‘the number, quantity, tonnage and armament of each war ship, the workshops of the arsenal, the calibre of the artillery’. He counted 24 war ships, two caravels and a large *tartane* boat with 32 canons. He noted the condition of all the ships: ten were very good, seven others were new. All were docked, except the *tartane* which was at sea chasing corsairs. Fifteen other galleys were also deployed: eight in Constantinople, two in Negroponte, two in Smyrna, two in Mytilene, one in Rhodes. The storehouses, which they managed to enter furtively were richly stocked with artillery, metallurgical products, timber for the construction of large ships, raw hemp, threads of hemp and other apparatus, not all of which were of good quality. The bailo went on to describe, without indulgence, the naval officers, ‘not numerous, totally devoid of knowledge (*teorie*) in directing ships at sea, only the Pasha Captain possessed good knowledge, but in times of war, one had resorted to sailors from the islands and the Asian shores, as well as those from the *caïque* vessels from the straits, practical people hardened to tiredness by the assiduous exercise of maritime operations (dispatch 11).

The bailo in his two monthly dispatches also analysed the situation within the empire. Thus he announced to the Senate that in April 1758, couriers had arrived at the Ottoman Porte and described

the deplorable famine and desolation of almost all the provinces of Asia, without a means of remediating being known. The populations were reduced to extreme poverty by the continual distortions of the government [...] and we see now the effects produced by the violence of need: some 12 000 people are gathered around Erzerum and Konia in the centre of Anatolia, to plunder its routes and its commerce, their number is rising from day to day and the movement has come to look like a sedition. The government has sought to hide the news from the capital’s population, who suffers from the same afflictions. Order has been given to Anatolia’s *bailorbei* to gather together a militia of sure men and to disperse the uprising by force, punishments and terror (dispatch 17).

On 1 July, the number of insurgents had risen to 20,000 in three provinces, they had taken control of the small town of Sivas, but the militia kept them away from the rich silver mines of the province of Erzerum. The *beilerbei* received order to accelerate the recruitment of militia (dis-

patch 21) and finally dispersed the insurgent groups. The tensions that threatened to shatter the empire appeared elsewhere, an insurrection broke out in Tartary, from which food provisions in the form of wheat reached the capital. There could have been 40,000 rebels encouraged to uprising by the Tartars of Don (dispatch 26, 2 October 1758), but the Ottoman Porte preferred to use diplomacy and prudence as the Tartar people were guarding a border threatened by the Muscovy of Catherine the Great (dispatch 27).

The bailo couldn't help himself from showing some degree of condescension, spurred by the Venetian government's feeling of superiority, for instance when he noted the Ottoman authority's irresponsibility or the greed of its senior civil servants. On 2 August 1758, several ships loaded with grains of rice had arrived simultaneously, pushed into the Dardanelles by a strong wind from the Midi, the plague had been detected on a soldier who had embarked on the ship *Picello* – swiftly transported to the hospital of the Franks in Pera, he had died after several days. But the Turks took no account of the plague, or the precautions taken by other nations, partly because of the suspicion that loot could be hidden. The bailo noted the 'great custom's officer' hesitations had been swept aside by gifts: the Turk authorised the *Picello's* chief to return to sea and head for Salonica where a load of cotton destined for Venice awaited it (dispatch 22). The dispatch urged the Serenissima to keep on its guard.

Foscari thus denounced the natural avidity of the Turks, their avarice, thefts, collusion in front of tribunals, lure of gain – a cause of many ills in the government – and barbaric constitution – which affected merchant business and policies – as well as the proliferation of leaders in the provinces and the ministries that exploited the people, and the passions dominating the seraglio. These were established stereotypes. But, he also went on to write, that the frequent mutations affecting the government were not just the result of the seraglio's mood swings; the substitution of governors in the provinces aimed to appoint righteous men who were little inclined to violent exploitation. In Venice too the magistrates frequently changed, none stayed in office for more than two years. In the Ottoman empire, the ambassador concluded that the absolute power of the sultan was purely a formality in many regions.

The Turks, commercial partners

The signing of the peace treaty with the Ottoman empire in 1573 had encouraged the erstwhile adversaries to resume relations. The war had spared the traditional commercial networks, even if the loss of Cyprus unsettled the balance in the Eastern Mediterranean, at a time when the ports and markets of the East were tempting new arrivals – the French, English and Dutch – who would soon reduce Venice to the rank of regional power. The Venetian ruling class was convinced of the necessity of rapidly renewing commercial relations with the Ottoman empire on a monopolistic basis and as a privileged relationship with the closest partner, being its neighbour. Commerce was to resume in a setting that was close to Venice: the Adriatic, the port of Spalato (today: Split in Croatia) was chosen as a port of entry for the routes leading to Istanbul. It would thus become the outlet for all the Balkan hinterland and Venice would recover an important part of its international traffics. The project was not well received by the competition, in particular Ancona and the Pontifical state on the one side, and Ragusa on the other. Venice, which was reviving the antagonism with Rome and the papacy, held a serious advantage as it was still a very active industrial centre to which the maritime commerce offered primary materials and opportunities for its products and workshops. The new maritime route was threatened by Uskok pirates supported by Austria, whose defence policy of the catholic faith incited war against the Muslims. The Venetians, on the other hand, followed their new strategy of economic penetration in the Balkans and diplomatic action in Istanbul, which could gain support from the networks constituted by Venetian interpreters, Bosnian Muslim merchants, corrupt Ottoman civil servants, and be reinforced by Sephardic emigrants from Iberian countries, dispersed in Venice and the Ottoman empire. The success of the new commercial route forced Venice to emancipate itself completely from the protection of the Holy League, to consider its old allies as its veritable enemies in the Gulf and its Ottoman neighbours as privileged partners, unique in allowing the Republic to recover its place in the traffics.

The new view of historiography

Historiography has long been dominated by the preconceived idea of the Ottoman empire's decline. This idea fuelled the image of an em-

pire weakened in the middle of the Eighteenth century by political and financial abuses, inflation, the plague, food shortage, unemployment, bandits and corruption, and the abuses of provincial nobility, while a mechanism of centrifugal tensions developed. The decadence is supposed to have begun upon the death of Suleyman, whose Sultanate on the other hand marked the apogee of the empire. Yet Fernand Braudel already refuted this *topos*: 'the so-called decadence is deceptive. Turkey remained an immense force.' In fact, for Western and Central-European historians, since the Ottoman empire was marginalised in relation to a global economy that was now centred upon the Atlantic and North-West Europe, it could only lose its powerfulness in relation to the technical and military support of Western monarchies – these conditions created a relative weakening of the empire. The same analysis was also applied to Venice: economic and political decadence and military weakness faced with the foreign powers, forming the much taken for granted 'decline of Venice', which is supposed to have unavoidably lead to the fall of the fossilised Republic in 1797, but these preconceived ideas are resistant. After the peace in Karlovci, it is true that the empire faced an economic crisis, both institutional and social, the dissolution of power, the degradation of the central government, the failure of reforms, military defeats and internal conflicts, and was subjected to a process of foreign, Western and Russian penetration.

According to Benjamin Braude, historiography has underestimated the importance of the Muslim Turks in commerce and exaggerated the role of the Armenians, Greeks and influential Jews in several sectors of commerce and craftsmanship. Yet the Turks, on the whole, held a pre-eminent place in the economy of the Empire. Braude sees this failure to realise the role of the Turks as an effect of the attitude of both European historians – who look more readily at their Western neighbour than at the rest of the world, projecting on the Modern era the same difficulties as those of the Ottoman world of the Nineteenth century – and travellers who, not knowing the language, depended on Christian, Jewish or Armenian interpreters who distorted their versions and exaggerated their own importance.

Conclusion: Ottoman despotism measured in the age of Enlightenment

As soon as he learnt of his appointment as bailo of Constantinople (1680), Giambattista Donà – who came from a family that had shown

its independent spirit, at the beginning of the century, at the time of the Doge Leonardo and the Interdict – swiftly learnt a little Turkish with an Armenian priest. During his stay close the Seraglio, he perfected his knowledge of the language and cumulated scientific information and notes on its literature. Four years after his return to Venice, he published a treaty called *Della Letteratura de' Turchi* ('On the Literature of the Turks') in which he offered a panorama of Turkish culture, which showed that this 'barbaric' nation could express all the traits of an autonomous civilization. Donà was perceptive in adding that the rejection of printing not favoured the diffusion of this culture beyond literary circles. His treaty made something of an impact in Venice, then in Europe and contributed to rectifying a number of negative judgements about the Turks, their culture, their society. It prepared the way for a new approach, that of the Enlightenment. We are fortunate to dispose of the aforementioned treaty by Toderini, *Letteratura turchesca*, written a century later, which took position against the assimilation of the Ottoman government to the absolute despotism and analysed the problem of power and law in the empire. It was important not to resort to false arguments that only served to condemn the sultan's government, or to the inexistence private property which would be the most obvious sign of despotism. The sultan having the right of life or death over his subjects could confiscate their goods at all time – this alone was supposed to show that the private property of goods was a fiction. Besides, the same sources maintained that the peasants were little interested in cultivating the land and city dwellers were indifferent to constructing and living in beautiful homes since nobody disposed of a family heritage. The turkologist Toderini was not oblivious to the physical elimination of the brothers and parents when the sultan succeeded, a trait of Barbaric despotism, but he opposed the power of the *ulema* and the *mufti*, as well as the theocratic character of the Turkish legislation, which, based on the Koran, fixed the right of war, legalised property and contracts, presided on the administration of justice and forbade usury. Religion prevented the powers from violating the laws and rights of the nation since it would also mean violating divine laws and the *mufti* would be authorised to dispose of the sultan. However, this close relationship between power and religion had consequences: from childhood the subjects learnt absolute obedience of the sultan, assimilated to reli-

religious duty, just as war had a sacred character. Toderini knew that religion had the power to legitimise all the decisions of the sultan, that, the Turks exercised the right of conquest, like all other people do, over the Greeks but that under the control of the Turks, the Greeks never ceased to have religious and civil liberties, that the malversation of the government agents were strictly punished and that the empire could boast of having an administrative stability unheard of elsewhere. The *Nuovo giornale letterario d'Italia* ('New Literary Journal of Italy') in its commentary of this book asked which civilised nation did not claim the right of the strongest in order to govern its subjects. Toderini's praiseworthy effort in judging the Ottoman despotism fitted with the Enlightenment, which had succeeded in turning absolute power in Western Europe into enlightened despotism. It bears witness to the fact that, in the space of less than a century, opinion in Venice had shifted from a hostile attitude of patriotic exultation of its heroes to a more measured judgement that integrated the Turks into a Mediterranean culture.

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ABSTRACT

Venezia e l'Impero ottomano, separate da una lunga frontiera marittima, si sono contrapposte in sei guerre navali e terrestri, concluse quasi sempre a vantaggio dei Turchi, che avevano il vantaggio di combattere appoggiati al loro vasto impero continentale. Eppure Venezia ha continuato a intrattenere relazioni commerciali pacifiche con il suo temibile vicino e a cercare di svilupparle, creando nuovi collegamenti marittimi, come lo scalo di Spalato. La Repubblica si teneva informata della situazione sociale, economica e militare dell'Impero grazie ai dispacci del bailo, il suo ambasciatore a Istanbul, e insieme identificava nel suo vicino un fattore di equilibrio a fronte delle aspirazioni delle potenze europee (in particolare l'Impero asburgico e la giovane potenza russa). I bails a Costantinopoli hanno contribuito, inoltre, a modificare l'immagine del Turco, barbaro e crudele, facendo conoscere la cultura e la letteratura di quel paese, che l'opinione pubblica illuminata ha iniziato a integrare nella cultura mediterranea.

The last conflicts between Venice and the Ottoman Empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries opened the way for Venetian neutrality. The latter was reinforced by the maritime power of the Republic and by a re-examination of the situation in the East of the Mediterranean where Venice sought to re-establish its commercial positioning and was worried about the intrusion of new powers such as Russia, which protected the Orthodox populations. Venice and its ambassadors, who were attentive to the situation within the Empire and its naval power, revealed to Europe the existence of a Turkish culture rooted in Islam, a despotism tempered by religious tolerance towards Christian populations (the Greeks), as well as a corruption of power that fed widespread discontent and could prove to be dangerous. Recent historiography abandons former anti-Ottoman prejudices and attempts to gauge the originality of a different culture.