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ATTI E MEMORIE DELL'ATENEIO VENETO

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RENAISSANCE VENICE AS THE PILGRIMS' RITUAL THEATRE*

Scholars have long been aware of the fundamental presence of foreign city dwellers in Venice, mostly reunited in communities rooted in the local society and economy¹. Short-term visitors, however, had their relevance too, European pilgrims in particular. From the Crusades to the mid-1500s, they stopped in Venice on their way from the North to the East, possibly by the hundred (thousand?) every year. Once in the city, they had to wait, sometime for long periods, the good Spring weather to navigate the Mediterranean, they had the opportunity to visit the city and attend Venetians activities, and therefore their travel-ogues contain rich and surprising details about the Venetian urban life.

Historiography is very rich in the field, but has been focusing mostly on the pilgrims' touristic accomodation or their reception of Venetian

* Thanks to Ken Greenberg for the revision and comments. Translations of some sources are mine.

¹ A brief and essential bibliography: GIORGIO FEDALTO, *Stranieri a Venezia e a Padova*, in *Storia della cultura veneta*, 3, *Dal primo Quattrocento al Concilio di Trento*, I, Vicenza, Neri Pozza, 1980, pp. 499-535; LUCA MOLÀ, *La comunità dei lucchesi a Venezia: Immigrazione e industria della seta nel tardo Medioevo*, Venezia, Ivsla, 1994; MASSIMO COSTANTINI, *Le strutture dell'ospitalità*, in *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, 5, *Il Rinascimento. Società ed economia*, a cura di Alberto Tenenti e Ugo Tucci, Roma, Enciclopedia Treccani, 1996, pp. 881-911; *I greci a Venezia*, a cura di Maria Francesca Tiepolo ed Eurigio Tonetti, Venezia, Ivsla, 2002; PAULA CLARKE, *The Identity of the Expatriate. Florentines in Venice in the Late Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries*, in *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence*, edited by William J. Connell, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, pp. 384-408; *Gli armeni e Venezia: dagli Sceriman a Mechitar*, a cura di Boghos Levon Zekiyani e Aldo Ferrari, Venezia, Ivsla, 2004; LUCIA NADIN, *Migrazioni e integrazione: il caso degli albanesi a Venezia (1479-1552)*, Roma, Bulzoni, 2008; MAARTJE VAN GELDER, *Trading Places: The Netherlandish Merchants in Early Modern Venice*, Boston-Leiden, Brill, 2009; ANDREA ZANNINI, *Venezia città aperta: gli stranieri e la Serenissima, 14-18 sec.*, Venezia, Marcianum Press, 2009; REINHOLD C. MUELLER, *Immigrazione e cittadinanza nella Venezia medievale*, Roma, Viella, 2010; *La Chiesa di San Bartolomeo e la comunità tedesca a Venezia*, Venezia, Marcianum Press, 2013; ERMANNO ORLANDO, *Migrazioni mediterranee. Migranti, minoranze e matrimoni a Venezia nel basso medioevo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2014; PHILIPPE BRAUNSTEIN, *Les Allemands à Venise (1380-1520)*, Roma, École française de Rome, 2016; ERSIE C. BURKE, *The Greeks of Venice, 1498-1600: Immigration, Settlement, and Integration*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2016.

stories and myths². The article will focus instead only on their reading of the Venetian civic and sacred rituality. Pilgrims were struck by the intense religiosity of the Venetians, their religious rites, buildings and relics. The city churches were defined as «triumphant» by Denis Possot, for instance. Felix Fabri recalled the «magna multitudo» of bodies and relics of saints in the city and praised the «gran numero delle chiese e [...] pompa del culto divino»³. For Pietro Casola the Venetians were «molto solliciti circa el culto divino in tute le sue giesie», their parishes being much more «ornate» than the Milanese. Michele da Figline mentioned

² MARY MARGARET NEWETT, *Introduction*, in *Canon Pietro Casola's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In the Year 1494*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1907, pp. 1-113; ROSAMUND J. MITCHELL, *The Spring Voyage: the Jerusalem Pilgrimage in 1458*, London, John Murray, 1964; ANGELA CARACCILO ARICÒ, *Venezia al di là del mito*, «Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi», 2 (1982), pp. 187-204; UGO TUCCI, *I servizi marittimi veneziani per il pellegrinaggio in Terrasanta nel Medioevo*, «Studi veneziani», ns, IX (1985) pp. 42-66; ÉLIZABETH CROUZET-PAVAN, *Récits, images et mythes: Venise dans l'iter hierosolomytain (XIV^e-XV^e siècles)*, «Mélanges dell'école française de Rome», 96 (1984), 1, pp. 467-535; ELIYAHU ASHTOR, *Venezia e il pellegrinaggio in Terrasanta nel basso Medioevo*, «Archivio Storico Italiano», CXLIII (1985), pp. 197-223; FRANCO CARDINI, *Venezia e Veneziani in alcune memorie di pellegrini fiorentini in Terrasanta (secoli XIV-XV)*, in ID., *Gerusalemme d'oro, di rame, di luce: pellegrini, crociati, sognatori d'Oriente fra XI e XV secolo*, Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1991, pp. 122-153; SUSANNE RÖHL, *Venise, étape vers la terre sainte*, in *Le voyage: de l'aventure à l'écriture: autres Italies*, Poitiers, Licorne, 1995, pp. 93-107; ANDREAS DENKE, *Venedig als Station und Erlebnis auf den Reisen der Jerusalemepilger im späten Mittelalter*, Hennecke, 2001; ID., *Venedig als Station und Erlebnis auf den Reisen der Jerusalemepilger im ausgehenden Mittelalter*, in *Pilgerwege. Zur Geschichte und Spiritualität des Reisens*, Baden, Evangelischer Presseverband für Baden, 2003, pp. 69-100; DEBORAH HOWARD, *Venice & the East. The Impact of the Islamic World on Venetian Architecture, 1100-1500*, London, Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 189-215; IAIN FENLON, *Strangers in Paradise: Dutchmen in Venice in 1525*, in ID., *Music and Culture in Late Renaissance Italy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 24-43; ROBERT C. DAVIS-GARRY R. MARVIN, *Venice, the Tourist Maze. A Cultural Critique of the World's Most Touristed City*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004, pp. 11-29; GRITJE HARTMANN, *Venedig als durchgangsstation für Europäische pilger und reisende*, in *Venezia incrocio di culture: percezioni di viaggiatori europei e non europei a confronto*, a cura di Klaus Herbers e Felicitas Schmieder, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2008, pp. 4-20; ELIZABETH ROSS, *Picturing Experience in the Early Printed Book. Breydenbach's Peregrinatio from Venice to Jerusalem*, University Park, Penn State University Press, 2014, pp. 60-69; SANTE GRACIOTTI, *La Dalmazia e l'Adriatico dei pellegrini veneziani in Terrasanta (secoli 14-16): studio e testi*, Lido di Venezia-Roma, La Musa Talia-Società dalmata di storia patria, 2014; LAURA GRAZIA DI STEFANO, *How to be a Time Traveller: Exploring Venice with a Fifteenth-Century Pilgrimage Guide*, in *Making the Medieval Relevant. How Medieval Studies Contribute to Improving our Understanding of the Present*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 171-189.

³ DENNIS POSSOT, *Le voyage de la Terre Sainte composé par maître Denis Possot et achevé par messire Charles Philippe, seigneur de Champarmoy et de Grandchamp. 1532*, edité par Charles Scherfer, Paris, Ernest Leroux Éd., 1890, p. 74; FÉLIX FABRI DA ULMA, *Venezia nel MCDLXXXVIII*, Venezia, Tip. dell'Ancona, 1881, p. 56.

the incredible display of ex-votos in the Church of the Miracoli, representing «navi, galee, uomini, capi, quori, mani, corpi, petti, poppe, piedi et undici calici et altri grandi presenti di diverse cose». And Breydenbach recalled the «sempre lodati costumi del popolo antico» of Venice, their rites, ceremonies and liturgy «che la fama racconta di loro»⁴.

Indeed, churches and objects made appear Venice as the «truth door to the Levant»⁵. Moreover, pilgrims attended local ceremonial events and tours that would include relevant places such as St. Mark, the Ducal Palace, the Arsenal and others⁶. Visitors were helped by a variety of local people, including sort of «piazza-guides» called *tolomazi* who, under the supervision of the office of the *Cattaver*, had the duty to pilot the foreigners around and support them both from the practical point of view and the site-viewing⁷. But «gentlemen» and «merchants» were apparently very active as well, according to Arnold Von Harff⁸. Patricians of good education, in particular, had a couple of good reasons to act as guides. First, not a small number of travelers going East were of high quality – even kings, dukes or archbishops (who saw their coats of arm hung in the Ducal Palace)⁹. Second, meeting

⁴ *Viaggio a Gerusalemme* di Pietro Casola, a cura di Anna Paoletti, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 2001, pp. 94-95; *Da Figline a Gerusalemme: viaggio del prete Michele in Egitto e in Terrasanta, 1489-1490*, a cura di Marina Montesano Michele, Roma, Viella, 2010, pp. 51-52; BERNHARD VON BREYDENBACH, *Peregrinationes: un viaggiatore del Quattrocento a Gerusalemme e in Egitto*, Roma-Manziana, Roma nel Rinascimento-Vecchiarelli, 1999, p. 24.

⁵ CARDINI, *Venezia*, p. 132.

⁶ HARTMANN, *Venedig*, p. 12.

⁷ Works by Newett, Mitchell, Tucci and Davis-Marvin quoted in footnote 2.

⁸ *The pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff, knight, ... he accomplished in the years 1496 to 1499*, London, Hakluyt Society, 1946, pp. 52, 55, 63, 65, 71. See also PERO TAFUR, *Andanças e viajes por diversas partes del mundo avidos*, a cura di Giuseppe Bellini, Roma, Bulzoni, 1986, p. 200; *The itineraries of William Wey, fellows of Eton College. To Jerusalem. A.D. 1458 and A.D. 1462...*, London, J.B. Nichols and Sons, 1857, p. 121; *Voyages de Georges Lengherand... 1485-1486*, Mons, Masquillier et Dequesne, 1861, pp. 42, 46, 85.

⁹ NEWETT, *Introduction*, pp. 31-36, 46-48 and *passim*; On a very relevant visit in 1508 see ROSAMUND J. MITCHELL, *Archbishop Blackader in Venice*, «Bollettino dell'Istituto di Storia della Società e dello Stato Veneziano», I (1959), pp. 169-178. On the foreign coats of arms at the Ducal Palace see *Voyage à Jerusalem de Philippe de Voisin, seigneur de Montant*, éditeur Philippe Tamizey de Laroque, Auch, Société historique de Gascogne, 1883; *The pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, pp. 55, 207-208; *Le récit des voyages et pèlerinages de Jean de Tournai, 1488-1489*, éditeurs Béatrice Dansette et Marie-Adélaïde Nielen, Paris, Cnrs Éditions, 2017, p. 100; Dietrich von Schachten in *Deutsche Pilgerreisen nach dem Heiligen Lande*, herausgegeben und erläutert von Reinhold Röhrich und Heinrich Meisner, Berlin, Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1880, p. 174. See also CROUZET-PAVAN, *Récits*, p. 533.

important visitors was a good chance to explain complex stories and meanings about Venetian objects or rituals, as we will see. Venetians could not miss the chance to give these prestigious pilgrims their own interpretations of the local myth because the elites «justify their existence and order their actions in terms of collections of stories, ceremonies, insignia, formalities, and appurtenances they have inherited or... invented»¹⁰. So said, we will see that foreigners sometimes heard confusing stories from the Venetians, and perhaps misunderstood them.

Pilgrims were not just simply brought around the city. They were also welcomed in private and public dinners, nuptial parties or banquets hosted by the Doge¹¹, and the most important civic rituals, such as the processions in St. Mark (as discussed below). The familiarity of the pilgrims in Venetian life reached such a point that they were mocked by the local population. On Fat Thursday of 1531, for instance, a live spectacle called *momaria* represented a group of actors masked as pilgrims, whom the devil offered a woman – presumably of bad habits – as sexual temptation (the pilgrims resisted at first, but then they got naked and started dancing with her)¹².

Because of the pilgrims' intense participation to Venetian life, their descriptions of civic rituals such as dogal ceremonies, city processions, the famous Wedding of the Sea and others, are important sources that can help us understand the local ritual theater from a non-Venetian perspective. They provide a different angle compared to Venetian sources, as foreign observers mostly had no previous knowledge of the civic religion of the *Repubblica Serenissima*. They even offer interesting insights on practical aspects of the celebrations, as well as on the images the Venetians projected about themselves.

¹⁰ CLIFFORD GEERTZ, *Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power*, in ID., *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, New York, Basic Books, p. 124.

¹¹ Frescobaldi in LIONARDO FRESCOBALDI-SIMONE SIGOLI, *Viaggi in Terrasanta* (1384), a cura di Cesare Angelini, Firenze, Felice le Monnier, 1944, pp. 44, 167; MARIN SANUDO IL GIOVANE, *I diarii*, a cura di Rinaldo Fulin, Federico Stefani, Guglielmo Berchet, Nicolò Barozzi, Marco Allegri (58 vols., Venezia, Stab. Visentini cav. Federico, 1879-1902), XXIV, cols. 347-348, 25.6.1517.

¹² SANUDO, *I diarii*, LIV, col. 296, 16.2.1531. About the *momaria*, the Venetian form of the late-medieval spectacle called *mummers*, see SUSANNE TICHY, “*Et vene la momaria...*”. *Studien zur Venezianischen Festkultur der Renaissance*, München, Scaneg Verlag, 1997.

Dogal Rites

Needless to say, the Doges and their sacred appeal were mentioned very often by pilgrims, in particular when performing their public appearances with their cortege. A few Doges struck the foreigners because of their charisma. Agostino Barbarigo and Andrea Gritti, for instance, were described by Jean de Tournai and Denis Possot as «fort beau» characters, thanks in part to their long and very white beards¹³. Barbarigo, in particular, showed his charisma in his solemn entrance and presence in St. Mark during the 1494 *Corpus Domini*, as Pietro Casola is telling us:

cessoron tuti li strepiti de campane e de ogni altra cosa... Uno grande silentio se tene... Et uno solo a me pariva governasse ogni cosa, el quale senza resistenza era da ogni homo obedito. E de questo pigliai grande admiratione, perché non vidi mai tanta obedientia a tali spettacoli¹⁴.

The capacity of the Doge to «govern all things» and represent the sacrality of the Venetian Republic was well symbolized by the richly decorated dogal hat. It was used in the coronation and the ritual exits from the Ducal Palace, and was exposed with the treasure of St. Mark during Easter and the Ascension, as a sort of sacred relic. The hat attracted the attention of foreigners for its splendor and value. Pierre Barbatre judged the ducal hat as the «main and most rich» object of the treasure while some pilgrims estimated its value up to one million ducats¹⁵.

Another component of the Dogal ritual life described extensively by pilgrims were the «triumphalia insignia» which accompanied the duke when he walked outside the Palace - banners, chair, pillow, sword, round baldachin, white candle, and silver trumpets. To mention a few examples of travelers' comments, in May 1485 Roberto da Sanseverino

¹³ *Le récit des voyages*, p. 98; POSSOT, *Le voyage*, p. 81.

¹⁴ *Viaggio a Gerusalemme*, p. 103. On Barbarigo see also *The Story of Sir Konrad Grunemberg's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1486*, a cura di Kristiaan Aерcke, Moncalieri, Centro universitario di ricerche sul viaggio in Italia, 2005, p. 47.

¹⁵ *Le voyage de Pierre Barbatre à Jérusalem en 1480*, éditeurs Pierre Turcos-Chala et Nöll Pinzuti, «Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France», Années 1972-1973, Paris, Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1974, p. 100; *Voyages de Georges Lengherand*, pp. 44-45; POSSOT, *Le voyage*, p. 93. On the *cornio* see RODOLFO GALLO, *Il tesoro di San Marco e la sua storia*, Venezia-Roma, Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale-Leo S. Olschki, 1967, pp. 193-198.

noted that the trumpets bear the Doge's personal and family coats of arms (but the ones he saw were still those of Pasquale Malipiero, who died in 1462); William Wey wrote that the white wax big candle was awarded to the Doge by the Pope «because neither in France nor in England nor in any other kingdoms were found men to champion our Faith but only in Venice»; Jean de Tournai compared the golden baldachin carried on the head of the Doge to the baldachin above the *Corpus Domini* in French processions¹⁶: the supreme head of the *Serenissima* was therefore seen as in direct contact with God.

In general, pilgrims learned that the «triumphalia insignia» derived from a famous Venetian story, the story of the Peace of Venice in 1177 and of Pope Alexander III giving the Doge the *imperium* on the Adriatic Sea in 1177¹⁷. At least since 1435, Venetians told the legend to the Spanish Tafur, the English William Wey, the German von Harff, the French Lengherand and possibly many others. Some even noticed that the «histories» of 1177 were depicted inside the Ducal Palace: in fact, the 14th century paintings were a fundamental touristic attraction and a sign of their relevance for the local civic culture¹⁸. Among the various steps of the Venetian tour, particularly mentioned by visitors was the function at the Church of the *Carità* on Easter eve: the function celebrated the fact that, according to the narrative of the Peace of 1177, Alexander had been hiding there for a while, choosing Venice as a place of security and peace¹⁹.

¹⁶ *Viaggio in Terra Santa fatto e descritto per Roberto da Sanseverino*, a cura di Gioacchino Maruffi, Bologna, presso Romagnoli Dall'Acqua, 1888, pp. 18-19; *Itineraries of William Wey*, p. 121; *Le récit des voyages*, p. 97.

¹⁷ EDWARD MUIR, *Il rituale civico a Venezia nel Rinascimento*, Roma, Il Veltro, 1984, pp. 123-134; MATTEO CASINI, *I gesti del principe. La festa politica a Firenze e Venezia in età rinascimentale*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1996, pp. 170-171, 320; GABRIELE KÖSTER, *24 luglio 1177: la Pace di Venezia e la guerra delle interpretazioni*, in *Venezia: i giorni della storia*, a cura di Uwe Israel, Roma, Viella, 2011, pp. 56-68, 83-84.

¹⁸ SANTO BRASCA, *Viaggio in terrasanta, 1480, con l'itinerario di Gabriele Capodilista, 1458*, a cura di Anna Laura Momigliano Lepschy, Milano, Longanesi, 1966, pp. 48-49; *Viaggio a Gerusalemme*, p. 85; *Le récit des voyages*, p. 97; KÖSTER, *24 luglio*, pp. 83-84.

¹⁹ TAFUR, *Andanças*, pp. 200-203; *Itineraries of William Wey*, pp. 120-121; *Le récit des voyages*, pp. 98-99; *The pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, pp. 396-397, 402; *Viaggio a Gerusalemme*, p. 93; *Voyages de Georges Lengherand*, pp. 46-47; *Le voyage de Pierre Barbatre*, p. 104; *Le voyage de la sainte cité de Hierusalem* (1480), éditeurs Henri Crodier et Charles Schefer, in *Recueil de voyages et documents pour servir à l'histoire de la géographie*, II, Paris, Ernest Leroux, 1882, p. 20. See also Crouzet-Pavan, *Récits*, pp. 519-524.

The majesty of the *dux* was also represented by his magnificent ship, the «Bucentaur». Felix Fabri described it as a «tabernacle», a sacred tool, but then added a Renaissance touch saying that, according to him, the name derived from «Bucephalus», Alexander the Great's horse²⁰. Sir Guylford defined the dogal ship as an «Archa Triumphali». In 1496, Von Harff was told that the sculpture of the maiden in front of it, with a naked sword, was a symbol of the «virginity» of the Venetian government, «never taken by force»²¹. We find here a recall of the myth of the original independence of Venice, as Venetians thought the city was born in a situation of total freedom and she was never conquered: a growing myth in the 1400s²².

Because of his walks, his baldachin, his hat, and his ship, the Doge appeared through the pilgrims' eyes as the expression of the full mix of religiosity and politics so typical of the «Most Serene» Republic of Venice. And this peculiar situation could be emphasized during the funeral of the Venetian *dux* as well. In 1462, William Wey observed the rich obsequies of Doge Pasquale Malipiero, dressed in gold and accompanied by the main confraternities, the city clergy and canons of St. Mark²³. But pilgrims showed curiosity for the 'secular' aspects of the Venetian festivals too. Wey, for instance, described the pageant for the proclamation of Malipiero's successor, Cristoforo Moro, as spectacles were held, gifts were brought by the ambassadors, and ancient rites were still performed: Wey tells us that the new Doge was approached by the sailors of the Arsenal – very important protagonists of the public rituals – asking him «Bona vestra nostra sunt». The Doge, while responding that he was aware of that, gave them 100 ducats instead. Thanks to Wey we learn, therefore, that the old, medieval practice of

²⁰ FÉLIX FABRI, *Les errances de Frère Félix, pèlerin en Terre sainte, en Arabie et en Égypte (1480-1483)*, 1, *Premier et deuxième traités*, introduction générale et édition critique par Jean Meyers, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2000, p. 127; *Id.*, *Venezia*, pp. 88-89. On Fabri see now GIULIO ORAZIO BRAVI, *Il viaggio del frate domenicano Felix Fabri da Ulm a Venezia e da Venezia a Ulm (1483-1484)*, Bergamo, Tecnograph, 2015.

²¹ *The Pylgrimage of Sir Richard Guylforde to the Holy Land, A.D. 1506*, London, Camden society, 1851, p. 8; *The pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, p. 59. See also *Voyages de Georges Lengherand*, p. 79; *Le récit des voyages*, p. 98.

²² MATTEO CASINI, *Note sul linguaggio politico veneziano del Rinascimento*, in *Politica e cultura nelle Repubbliche italiane dal Medioevo all'età moderna*. Firenze - Genova - Lucca - Siena - Venezia, Roma, Istituto Storico Italiano Età moderna e contemporanea, pp. 311 ss.

²³ *Itineraries of William Wey*, p. 118.

the ritual robbery of the property of the new Doge – that the government had disciplined in 1329 and 1355 by modifying the *promissio domini Ducis* – had survived into the 1400s, but in a different form²⁴.

Another example of a pilgrim witnessing secular dogal rites was Von Harff, attending the *Zuoba Grassa* (Shrove Tuesday) in 1496, also of ancient medieval origins. He described (but with a few mistakes) the strange rites which the Doge presided at the Ducal Palace: the guilds cutting the head of an ox and of twelve pigs, and the destruction of little castles made of wood. Von Harff was told that these two rites were held because of the Venetian victory over the Patriarch of Aquileia in the 1100s, as a moment of collective memory of an early success of Venice into the mainland²⁵.

In conclusion, pilgrims and foreigners were very much engaged in describing and comprehending the Dogal ceremonies in their religious and secular aspects. They were part, therefore, of the theatre of magnificence, sacredness and imperialism of the Venetian sovereignty that the head of the Republic represented so well with his rituals and ‘objects’.

The Ascension

The same could be said for pilgrims involved in the most important Spring religious moment, the famous *Sensa* - the Ascension period. They often attended the celebrations waiting to sail to the Holy Land, and this moment was fundamental as a «perpetual indulgency» was granted in St. Mark²⁶.

The Ascension was, as well known, the occasion of rich and complex rituals by the Venetians, that the Spanish Pero Tafur correctly described as «papal and imperial» at the same time²⁷. The first ritual occurred on the eve of the *Sensa*, when the treasure of St. Mark, the

²⁴ *Itineraries of William Wey*, pp. 118-119; CASINI, *I gesti*, pp. 169-170.

²⁵ *The pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, pp. 63-64; MARIN SANUDO, *De origine, situ et magistratibus Urbis Venetae ovvero la città di Venetia (1493-1530)*, a cura di Anna Caracciolo Aricò, Venezia, Centro di Studi Medievali e Rinascimentali “E.A. Cicogna”, 2011, p. 55. On the origins of the *Zuoba Grassa* check now MATTEO CASINI, *Feste a San Polo nel lungo Rinascimento*, in *San Polo tra devozione, arte e feste popolari*, a cura di Dorit Raines e Gabriele Martino, Roma, Viella, forthcoming (2021).

²⁶ FRANCESCO SANSOVINO, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare*, Venetia, Stefano Curti, 1663, p. 500. See, for instance, Roberto da Sanseverino receiving the indulgence with the Doge in May 1485: *Viaggio in Terra Santa*, p. 17. See also TAFUR, *Andanças*, p. 196.

²⁷ *Ivi*, pp. 195, 198.

dogal hat and the «blood of Christ» (also kept in St. Mark) were exposed inside the Basilica, particularly to women, as we will see²⁸. The foreign visitors assisted to the ritual and were told about the blood, that Sanudo describes as «miraculous blood from a crucifix»²⁹. The story of its origins could have different versions. The Florentine Sigoli, for instance, learned in the late 1300s that the bleeding had been provoked by a Jewish mob attacking a crucifix in Beirut. One century after, other pilgrims heard instead that the crucifix was hit in Constantinople by a Venetian «baretero» (caps' manufacturer), furious because of gambling³⁰. Even the Venetian historiography remains uncertain about the origins of the blood in St. Mark, between Beirut and Constantinople³¹.

The Ascension Day was opened by the great spectacle of thousands of people in a water cortege accompanying the Bucentaur. The sea was «disappearing» because of so many boats, according to Tafur. Santo Brasca wrote that the «boats of citizens and well-dressed ladies... [were] a great and magnificent sight», and Felix Fabri noted that the noise of the ships around the Bucentaur was so remarkable «quod mare videtur moveri»³².

The Bucentaur ended to the entrance of the lagoon at St. Nicolò del Lido. Here «thousands of people in gondolas» assisted to the celebrated rite of the Doge marrying the Sea by throwing a golden ring into the Adriatic³³. In general, pilgrims understood this rite as symbol of the Venetian dominium on the «sea world»³⁴. Tafur, though – aware of the ceremony's imperial implications – was given an expla-

²⁸ SANUDO, *De origine*, pp. 152, 171.

²⁹ Ivi, pp. 45, 50, 152.

³⁰ *Testimone a Gerusalemme: il pellegrinaggio di un fiorentino del Trecento* (Simone Sigoli), a cura di Alessandro Bedini, Roma, Città nuova, 1999, p. 110; BRASCA, *Viaggio*, p. 48; *Voyages de Georges Lengherand*, p. 43; POSSOT, *Le voyage*, p. 90.

³¹ See for instance SANSOVINO, *Venetia*, p. 102; BIANCA TAMASSIA MAZZAROTTO, *Le feste veneziane. I giochi popolari, le cerimonie religiose e di governo illustrate da Gabriel Bella*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1961, pp. 160-161, 177n. Sanudo also talks about another «real blood» of Christ conserved in Venice, coming from Constantinople and kept at the Frari (SANUDO, *De origine*, pp. 45, 152; GALLO, *Il tesoro*, pp. 12, 41, 44, 273, tav. 15).

³² TAFUR, *Andanças*, p. 199; BRASCA, *Viaggio*, p. 49; FABRI, *Les errances*, p. 127.

³³ *Da Figline a Gerusalemme*, p. 49.

³⁴ *Wilhelm Tzeweers: Itinerarius terre sancta*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz in Kommission, 2004, p. 84; *Le récit des voyages*, p. 99; CASINI, *I gesti*, p. 170.

nation emphasizing the propitiatory value of the *Sensa*, the Wedding being

una cirimonia antigua, que desposan á la mar con la tierra; esto por aplacar su furia, que ellos sobre la mar están fundados é en la mar traen quanto tienen³⁵.

While observing the Wedding, the foreign visitors were attracted by one detail, the golden ring launched in the Adriatic. This was normally a copy of the ring given by Pope Alexander III to the Doge in 1177, to marry the sea *in signum veri perpetuique domini*³⁶. By the witnessing of Salimbene the Adam in the 1200s, fishermen could try to recover the precious object from the waters, and gain possession of it³⁷. During the Renaissance, Fabri noticed that if a foreigner rescued the ring, he was allowed to remain in Venice for an entire year without legal restrictions. Jacques le Saige reported instead that «poor people» were rushing in disorder to find the ring, even trying to drown the best swimmers «for envy». So, the value of the ring had been reduced to 2-3 ducats only, to avoid the fight³⁸.

In 1488, Tournai was told that it was not a copy of the papal ring, but of the ring that St. Mark gave the Venetians «when he left the city». This statement is not clear, as by the Venetian tradition the rings left by St. Mark were two: one given to the Doge in the 1300s, according to the legend of a fisher saved by the Saint in the lagoon during a tempest (this ring was kept in the St. Mark's treasury at least since 1336). And a second donated by the Saint to the Dolfin family after the *inventio* of his body in 1094, and later gifted to the School of St. Mark³⁹. The French pilgrim Tournai, though, referred to another, less known tradition. Apparently, at a certain point, the Republic had banned «foreigners» from Venice, and St. Mark had appeared claim-

³⁵ TAFUR, *Andanças*, p. 199.

³⁶ MUIR, *Il rituale*, p. 101.

³⁷ SALIMBENE DE ADAM, *Cronica*, a cura di Giuseppe Scalia, Bari, Laterza, 1966, pp. 822-823.

³⁸ FABRI, *Les errances*, p. 127; *Voyage de Jacques le Saige, de Douai à Rome, Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, Venise, Jérusalem et autres saints lieux*, nouvelle édition, publiée par H.-R. Duthilloeul, Douai, A. d'Aubers, 1851, pp. 53-54.

³⁹ SANUDO, *De origine*, p. 154; SANSOVINO, *Venetia*, pp. 265, 460, 501, 515; GALLO, *Il tesoro*, pp. 44, 101-102, 291; MUIR, *Il rituale*, pp. 99-102.

ing that – as a «stranger» himself – he was leaving with them. On that occasion, he left a golden ring as well, which also remained inside the Basilica and was used to make copies for the Wedding⁴⁰. Once again, we see how different traditions could be reported to foreigners, a sign of a certain cultural confusion among the Venetians who were anxious to show the excellence of their community in all possible ways.

To go back to the *Sensa* rituals, the Wedding was followed by a couple of dogal banquets, one of which was reserved to pilgrims as well as the *arsenalotti* who had a particular duty, carrying the Bucentaur between the St. Mark basin and the Lido⁴¹. Luxurious dishes and basins of all sort were presented at the tables, and after dinner the pilgrims received sweets and wines from the Doge⁴².

Spectacles were performed as well. During the *Sensa* banquet of 1435, Pero Tafur assisted to an early 15th century theatrical performance at «Carnestollendas» (Carnival):

yo vi por Carnestollendas fazer una fiesta en el palacio mayor del Duçe, que fizieron momos, é venían dos galeas por la mer, é fingieron que la una traya al Emperador, é venien con él treynta cavalleros vestidos de brocados, é en la otra un maestre de Ródas vestido de vellud negro: é rescibienlos las damas, todas vestidas de brocado é muy ricos firmalles⁴³.

The wealth of the Venetians was emphasized here, as well as the international power of Venice acknowledged by an (oriental?) sovereign and the Knights Hospitaller. This «momos» was not an isolated episode, as the theatrical tradition at the *Sensa* dinner continued later. Le Saige mentioned 24 men and 4 dancers in mask; Torkington talked about «mumos» with acrobats, dancers, and actors «Disgysyd in women clothes» and accompanied by a consistent number of musicians; and Sanudo reported a «Comedy of Love» performed by the famous actor Cherea in the *Sensa* of 1525⁴⁴. Social and spectacular ele-

⁴⁰ *Le récit des voyages*, p. 99. Also Fabri heard about St. Mark leaving Venice in 1012, because of the doge Pietro Gradenigo: FABRI, *Venezia*, pp. 58-59.

⁴¹ RICHARD TORKINGTON, *The Oldest Diarie of Englysshe Travel* (1517), edited by William J. Loftie, London, Field & Tuer, 1884, pp. 12-13; *Voyage de Jacques le Saige*, pp. 52-53.

⁴² TORKINGTON, *The Oldest*, pp. 12-13.

⁴³ TAFUR, *Andanças*, p. 167.

⁴⁴ *Voyage de Jacques le Saige*, p. 53; TORKINGTON, *The Oldest*, pp. 12-13; *Die Jerusalemfabrt*

ments were thus added to the political and religious meanings of the Ascension rites.

Civic Processions

The same richness of details provided by foreigners can be found in their depictions of the processions held in various parts of the city. During the procession in San Vio on June 16th, 1489, Figline described the «uno ponte di legname in su galee et fuste per potere meglio passare», built to let the Doge, his cortege and the people cross the Grand Canal. Sir Guylforde confirmed in 1506 that the Doge reached the church «upon a brygge layde[n] and made of Galyes» (the same in the future will be done during the famous festival of the Redeptor)⁴⁵.

Needless, to say, the pilgrims' attention was mostly attracted by the magnificent, long and crowded (thousands of people) processions in Saint Mark⁴⁶. An anonymous French pilgrim wrote in 1480 that the St. Mark procession displayed «the whole triumph and wealth of Venice [...] and there were all the processions of the City at highest estate»⁴⁷. A few years later, Georges Lengherand described the rites of the Holy Week as events at the heart of Venetian religiosity. These included the exhibition of the relics and treasure in St. Mark, the dogal triumphs and vests, the visit of the Seignury to San Zaccaria, and other moments. He also noted the participation of European and Italian ambassadors in detail⁴⁸. Even a non-pilgrim, the French ambassador Philippe de Comynes, was struck by the Palm Sunday Procession in 1495, a particularly solemn occasion because of the new

des Heinrich von Zedlitz (1493), «Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins», Bd. 17 (1894), p. 106; Sanudo, *I diarii*, XXXVIII, 347, 25.5.1525. On the later tradition of plays during dogal banquets see JONATHAN SHIFF, *Venetian State Theater and the Games of Siena, 1595-1605: The Grimani Banquet Plays*, New York, The Edwin Mellen Press, pp. 6 ss. On von Zeidlitz see SIGISMUND FREIHERR VON ZEDLITZ, *Die Pilgerreise des Heinrich von Zedlitz nach Jerusalem 1493*, Freiburg, Bergstadtverlag Wilhelm Gottlieb Korn, 2010.

⁴⁵ *Da Figline a Gerusalemme*, p. 14; *The Pylgrymage of Sir Richard Guylforde*, p. 7. See also SANUDO, *De origine*, pp. 53, 56.

⁴⁶ CASINI, *I gesti*, pp. 149-168.

⁴⁷ ÉLISABETH CROUZET-PAVAN, «*Sopra le acque salse*». *Espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise à la fin du Moyen Age*, Roma, École Française de Rome-Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1992, pp. 936-937.

⁴⁸ *Voyages de Georges Lengherand*, pp. 39-47.

international league between Venice, Rome, the Emperor, Spain and Milan. The procession was featured by spectacular acts such as the «blankets of brocade» and golden cloths hanging on the façade of St. Mark, the great number of «mysteries and figures» in the cortege, and the offer of luxury velvet crimson robes to some ambassadors by the Seigneurie⁴⁹.

Roughly in the same period, Pietro Casola reported the mentioned, silent atmosphere of the *Corpus Christi* in St. Mark. Felix Fabri also noted «maturitatem dominorum de Senatu, et honestissimum eorum vestium», adding that «nullum collegium, nullum monasterium, nulla fraternitas comparuit absque aliquo singulari spectaculo»⁵⁰. The 1506 *Corpus Domini* was, according to the English Richard Guylforde,

the most solempne procession that ever I ssawe. There went Pagentis of the olde lawe and the newe, joynynge togyther the fygures of the blessyd sacrament in suche noubre and soo apte and conuenyent for that feeste yet it wold make any man joyous to se it. [...] The forme and maner therof excedyd all othee that euer I sawe so moche that I can not wryte it.

Moreover, Guylforde was glad that the pilgrims could attend the procession in person, and with «greate honoure»: in fact, they were put in a notable position, near the Doge and «byfore all the lordes and other estate»⁵¹. Also the Venetian chronicler Marin Sanudo noticed that pilgrims were actively involved in the St. Mark's processions. They were ordered to attend, given candles – which they could keep after the ceremony, to their satisfaction – and placed in central positions inside the cortege. Sometimes they were even paired to Venetian patricians⁵². On the Ascension Day as well, or during the visit of foreign

⁴⁹ PHILIPPE DE COMMYNES, *Mémoires*, III (1484-1498), Paris, Société d'Édition «Les Belles Lettres», 1965, pp. 131-132. On the 1495 procession see MARIN SANUDO, *La spedizione di Carlo VIII in Italia*, a cura di Rinaldo Fulin, Venezia, Tip. del commercio di M. Visentini, 1883, pp. 299-301.

⁵⁰ FABRI, *Les errances*, p. 136.

⁵¹ *The Pylgrymage of Sir Richard Guylforde*, pp. 8-9.

⁵² SANUDO, *I diarii*, XXV, col. 437, 3.6.1518; XXVII, col. 404, 23.6.1519; XXVIII, col. 586, 7.6.1520. See also *Le récit des voyages*, p. 99; TORRINGTON, *The Oldest*, pp. 13-14; CROUZET-PAVAN, *Récits*, p. 533; DAVIS-MARVIN, *Venice*, p. 22.

lords, a few pilgrims were invited to sit near the Doge on the Bucen-taur, «estrangeros ò onbres de onor», Tafur wrote⁵³.

The St. Mark processions and other festivals had therefore an «integrative and inclusionary nature»⁵⁴, and so pilgrims could acknowledge well their magnificence and sacred charisma. But they observed interesting details too. About the main confraternities called *Scuole Grandi*, for instance, great protagonists of the civic rituals, Pietro Casola noted that twelve patricians for each Scuola marched as a group separate from the other brothers, and with their own «togas», not the standard white confraternal gown. This might show a desire of the nobles to distinguish themselves from other social classes, in particular from the emerging *cittadini originari*, who received the direction of the Scuole from the government and became protagonists of public shows in the 1400s. One of the very first witnessing of the *cittadini* in public shows, in fact, is by a visitor, the Spanish Pero Tafur. He recounted that the mentioned *momaria* at the Ducal Palace in 1435 was not held by nobles, but by «gente mediana de la cibdat, é non de los mejores nin más ricos»⁵⁵.

More in general, pilgrims were amazed by the secular values of the Venetian processions, in particular the extreme pageantry of religious people. Pietro Casola noticed the abundance in the dress of the friars, unusually bearing big and beautiful pearls, and added a note about the wealth of Venice, as «quasi ogni cittadino almanco tiene una gondola, la qual [...] è de maiore spexa che non serebbe a tenere uno caval». The German patrician Konrad Grünemberg described the rich processional vestements of monks and priests and retained not just the Venetians, but the Italians in general being «very generous» with the «religious houses and the churches». Figline said of the *Corpus Christi* procession that «non v'era in essa molto ordine, ma richeze assai».

⁵³ *Andanças*, p. 199; *Le récit des voyages*, p. 110; *Die Jerusalemfabrt des Heinrich von Zedlitz*, p. 106; BRONISLAW BILIŃSKI, *Venezia nelle peregrinazioni polacche del '500 e lo "Sposalizio del mare" di Giovanni Siemuszowski (1565)*, in *Italia, Venezia e Polonia tra umanesimo e Rinascimento*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolinskich Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1967, p. 252.

⁵⁴ DAVIS-MARVIN, *Venice*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ *Viaggio a Gerusalemme*, pp. 102, 107-108; TAFUR, *Andanças*, p. 210. On the ritual behavior of the *cittadini originari* and their complex relationship with the patriciate see MATTEO CASINI, *Cittadini and Celebration in the Renaissance*, «Studi Veneziani», LXXIII (2016), pp. 389-412.

Felix Fabri referred about «tantum aurum, tantum argentum, lapides pretiosos, vestes pretiosas, quod non potest aestimari»⁵⁶.

That exhibit of pageantry could bring criticism, in fact. Fabri himself talked about the «multitudinis confusibilis, compression, cursus et importunitas». And, after reporting a water «rich procession» of the Dominicans along the Grand Canal, he concluded:

Inter ista divina solemnia quanta ibi videantur vanitates, et mulierum imtemperata ornamenta et seclarium rerum dissolutionis, et religiosorum ac clericorum evagationis, perpendat ille, qui tanta multitudinis confluum considerat. Si sanctissimo et divinissimo sacramento honor acceptus est tam saeculariter exhibitus, Deus, qui omnia novit, scit⁵⁷.

Even Paulus Walther from Guggingen blamed the laughter and blasphemy in the procession, while Denis Possot judged as odd the saltimbanks performing in the procession in honor of St. Mark, on April 25th⁵⁸. It is clear that, beyond the Venetian intense public religiosity, the main processions were a notable chance to display wealth and other secular things, and this was not always appreciated by foreign observers on their way to a high spiritual journey.

Children and Women

Apart from doges, nobles, religious people and members of the Scuole, pilgrims reported that young people had a crucial role in Venetian civic rituals. For instance, Torkington talked about children acting as acrobats during the banquet of the Sensa; W. Wey mentioned «boys dressed as angels... carried on high poles» during the celebrations in honor of the Doge Cristoforo Moro⁵⁹. Most important, Casola and other visitors described «little boys» and «very little boys» during the major St. Mark processions, proceeding in particular with the Scuole Grandi. They were masked as angels or «little spirits» and

⁵⁶ *Viaggio a Gerusalemme*, pp. 98, 107; *The Story of Sir Konrad*, p. 47; *Da Figline a Gerusalemme*, p. 53; FABRI, *Les errances*, p. 136.

⁵⁷ Ivi, pp. 136-137.

⁵⁸ FRATRIS PAULI WALTHERI GUGLINGENSIS, *Itinerarium in Terram Sanctam*, Tübingen, Litterarischer Verein in Stuttgart, 1892, p. 59; POSSOT, *Le voyage*, pp. 92-93.

⁵⁹ TORKINGTON, *The Oldest*, pp. 13-14; *Itineraries of William Wey*, p. 119.

dressed in gold and precious stones. While some of them were singing, others were scattering «smellying» flowers or rose petals from gold and silver bowls. This was done around the square and inside the Basilica, in front of the *Corpus Christi*, the Doge and ambassadors⁶⁰. Even Marin Sanudo reported about children-angels in processions, and in 1511, a year of crisis, noted that there were «no angels»⁶¹. In Venice as elsewhere, the function of the children-angels, representing the more pristine part of the society, was essential in bringing a sense of religious purity and innocence to the public scene⁶². But it could also recall – as in the 16th century's ceremonial welcomes of the kings of France – the transformation of the city in a «new Jerusalem»⁶³.

Even the presence of women was under observation by pilgrims and foreigners, especially in the passage between the 14-1500s, when women augmented their presence in civic rituals⁶⁴. Very interesting comments are emerging from the travelogues. For instance, about the notorious twelve gold crowns kept in the St. Mark treasury, once «wore by 12 women, called queens, during certain yearly festivals» (the festival of the *Marie*)⁶⁵, Leo Rozmital said that they could be worn in public by noblewomen. Moreover, we already noticed the ladies attired in brocades and rich jewelry in the 1435 spectacle at the Ducal Palace⁶⁶. About more peripheral situations, instead, Le Saige referred

⁶⁰ *Viaggio a Gerusalemme*, pp. 105-106; *Le récit des voyages*, pp. 7, 10; *The Story of Sir Konrad*, p. 47; *Voyage à Jerusalem de Philippe de Voisin*, p. 20; *Le voyage de Pierre Barbatre*, p. 105; *The Pilgrimage of Sir Richard Guylforde*, pp. 7-9; *Die Jerusalemfabrt des Heinrich von Zedlitz*, pp. 102-103; Schachten in *Deutsche Pilgerreisen*, p. 175.

⁶¹ SANUDO, *I diarii*, XX, col. 275, 7.6.1515; XII, col. 243, 19.6.1511.

⁶² See OTTAVIA NICCOLI, *Compagnie di bambini nell'Italia del Rinascimento*, «Rivista Storica Italiana», CI (1989), pp. 346-374; *Infanzie. Funzioni di un gruppo liminale dal mondo classico all'Eta' moderna*, a cura di Ead., Firenze, Ponte alle Grazie, 1993.

⁶³ NEIL MURPHY, *Building a New Jerusalem in Renaissance France: Ceremonial Entries and the Transformation of the Urban Fabric, 1460-1600*, in *Cityscapes in History: Creating the Urban Experience*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2014, p. 189. On Venice see LIONELLO PUPPI, *Verso Gerusalemme. Immagini e temi di urbanistica e di architettura simboliche tra il XIV e il XVIII secolo*, Roma-Reggio Calabria, Casa del Libro, 1982.

⁶⁴ CASINI, *I gesti*, pp. 296-298.

⁶⁵ DE COMMYNES, *Mémoires*, p. 210; GALLO, *Il tesoro*, pp. 199-201. About the abandonment of the festival of the *Marie* at the end of the 1300s see Casini, *I gesti*, pp. 155-157.

⁶⁶ *The travels of Leo of Rozmital through Germany, Flanders, England, France, Spain, Portugal and Italy, 1465-1467*, edited by Malcom Letts, Cambridge, Hakluyt Society at the University Press, 1957, p. 154; TAFUR, *Andanças*, p. 167. See also *Voyage de Jacques le Saige*, pp. 52, 55; FABRI, *Venezia*, pp. 82-83; *The Pilgrimage of Sir Richard Guylforde*, p. 7.

that women had in custody the relic of the saint in Santa Marta and carried it in procession with nice chants and «beautiful torches of white wax»: a spectacle that made the pilgrims cry with joy⁶⁷.

Women could also stage private parties in luxury clothing at the Ducal Palace⁶⁸, but they attracted the most attention in public rituals. According to the famous Jacopo Bellini's procession, women of the high classes could assist to the *Corpus Christi* procession only from the windows of St. Mark square. A secular visitor, Konrad Grünemberg, confirmed that he «did not see marching any rich women or girls», but just «burghers' wives, women and girls [...] watching from their windows, their faces unveiled» (and he learned it was the only moment in the year in which that unveiling was possible). Grünemberg was then literally shocked by the wonderful appearance of those women, by their hair, brows, eyes, lips, teeth (!), necks; and concluded: «these women lured every man»⁶⁹.

This over-gendered appreciation in a time of ritual female exclusion from the public sphere goes in parallel with the critiques on the women's behavior when they could freely display their apparel. We already quoted Fabri on the «mulierum intemperata ornamenta et secularium rerum dissolutionis». In another chapter of his travellings he added: «le matrone veneziane si mostrano con tanto sfarzo e con tanto gusto abbigliate, che non le crederesti già donne di cristiani, ma sì matrone trojane, anzi ancelle di Elena e Venere». Also, women were seen acting freely in the huge celebrations for the Dominican chapter in late 1487:

Le venete dame, lasciati i mariti vi giunsero cotanto leggiadre in arnese che avresti creduto Venere colle ancelle discesa dal monte a lei diletto, e con esse[re] loro mandata [sic] da Satanasso a tentarci; né stavano soltanto in chiesa, ma scorrevano tutto il monastero su e giù pei dormitorii, le celle degli ospiti, e quelle dei frati entrando, e niun adito più appartato restò inaccessibile alla molta loro curiosità⁷⁰.

«Devilish» creatures, apparently. But more insights might come

⁶⁷ *Voyage de Jacques le Saige*, p. 59.

⁶⁸ FABRI, *Les errances*, pp. 130-131.

⁶⁹ *The Story of Sir Konrad*, pp. 48-49 (interesting the fact of women being defined as «burgher»); *Le récit des voyages*, p. 107.

⁷⁰ FABRI, *Les errances*, pp. 136-137; ID., *Venezia*, pp. 89, 93-94.

from the night of the Ascension eve, during the exposition of the treasury of St. Mark and blood of Christ in the Basilica, when women had a particularly active role as the exposition was reserved to them in the 1400s⁷¹. Jean de Tournai is giving us intriguing details. He first learned that the eve of the *Sensa* was one of the three occasions on which noble women could fully show themselves in public; then, he found out surprising events happening on the occasion. At first, the female servants and «meschines» went early into the Basilica bringing tapestries and chairs to reserve seats for their mistresses. Then the mistresses would arrive, creating a notable confusion because of their servants' cries and their difficulty walking because of their very high shoes, the famous Venetian tall clogs called «pianele», «chopines», «galoches» or «patins» (popular among pilgrims indeed)⁷². But even the chairs inside St. Mark were very high, and the reason was that, as told to de Tournai, «Venetians do not take into consideration short women» (!!). Finally, the women would start «shouting» and «making disorder» at the entrance of the Doge into the church, and eventually Jean de Tournai judged the gentlewomen's behavior hilarious and a little annoying; a behavior certainly not in tune with a true religious ceremony⁷³.

On the Ascension day the scene was different apparently, as no woman was present at the customary mess at the monastery of St. Nicolò after the Wedding of the Sea⁷⁴. But the feminine display would continue during the Fair of the *Sensa*, a time when pilgrims experienced a «triumph» watching the «really gorgeous [...] bourgeois» dames⁷⁵. Philippe de Voisin talked about «women recently married» carrying in public extremely valuable precious stones as well as «habillementz

⁷¹ Sanudo wrote in May 1499 that the doors of the Basilica were guarded to allow inside women only. This fact was confirmed by pilgrims such as Pierre Barbatre, and was still alive in 1581 (SANUDO, *I diarii*, I, col. 959, 19.5.1499; 966, 23.5.1499; *Le voyage de Pierre Barbatre*, pp. 100-101; SANOVINO, *Venetia*, pp. 102, 500; GALLO, *Il tesoro*, p. 58).

⁷² See for instance *Viaggio a Gerusalemme*, pp. 100-101; *The pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, pp. 64-65; *Voyages de Georges Lengherand*, p. 47; *Le voyage de Pierre Barbatre*, p. 101. See also ANDREA VIANELLO, *Ladies or Courtesans? Reading the Venetian Chopine and Renaissance Women*, in *Shoes: A History from Sandals to Sneakers*, edited by Giorgio Riello and Peter McNeil, Oxford, Berg Publishers, 2006, pp. 3-29.

⁷³ *Le récit des voyages*, pp. 95-97.

⁷⁴ «in illa multitudine non est mulier aliqua»: FABRI, *Les errances*, p. 128.

⁷⁵ *Le voyage de Pierre Barbatre*, pp. 100-101; *Voyages de Georges Lengherand*, pp. 47, 80.

descouverts, mountrant toutes les espaulles»⁷⁶. Le Saige noted in 1519 two «merchant women» showing a half-naked breast and added that only in festive occasions could noble women be encountered outside their homes: «tout au long de l'année elles sont en une chambre haulte et leurs filles aussy, mesmes ne vont point à l'église sinon lesdites hault jours». This was caused by the jealousy of their husbands, apparently⁷⁷. We know that in Venice even the girls to marry had a very protected appearance and were hiding their faces in public spaces: the chronicler Ugo Caleffini complained in 1475 that in Ferrara the un-married girls used to walk «dreto a le matre coperte per la tera a modo de Vinesia», a fashion judged a «vituperosa cossa»⁷⁸.

Beyond a few civic rituals, the Venetian women also displayed their wealth on other occasions, as did the young nuns of the monastery of the Virgins who carried abundant «colours» on their faces, according to Von Harff⁷⁹. This behavior by the patrician women was obviously judged as excessive by foreigners such as Wilhelm Tzewers⁸⁰. And the women's anxiety for exhibition was well sum up by Casola, not without sarcasm:

esse done veneziane se forzano quando pono in publico, precipue le belle, de monstrare el pecto dico le mamelle e le spalle, in tanto che, più volte vendole, me sono maravigliato che li panni non ghe siano cascati dal dosso. Quelle che posseno et anche quelle che non possano, de veste sono molto pompose et hano de grande zoiie, perle in frixiti in capo al collo, portano de molte anelle in dito, de grandi balassi, robini et diamanti.

Casola then added that «quelle che non possano ... molte ne pigliavano a ficto»⁸¹.

So, pilgrims had a sort of fascination for women - especially noble women – displaying their extraordinary clothing and behavior on rare ritual occasions, and showing up indeed as «a full-blown spectacle»

⁷⁶ *Voyage à Jerusalem de Philippe de Voisin*, pp. 17-18; *The travels of Leo of Rozmital*, p. 154.

⁷⁷ *Voyage de Jacques le Saige*, pp. 51-52.

⁷⁸ Quoted in COSTANTINO CORVISIERI, *Il trionfo romano di Eleonora d'Aragona*, «Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria», I (1877), p. 485n.

⁷⁹ *The pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, pp. 64-65.

⁸⁰ *Wilhelm Tzewers*, pp. 84, 86.

⁸¹ *Viaggio a Gerusalemme*, pp. 100-101.

intended to «reassert the preeminence of female space» in churches and other relevant spaces such as St. Mark⁸². The show of excessive wealth and parts of their bodies was allowed in a few moments of freedom in a society in which elite women had to maintain a customary restrained appearance, even though recent historiography has acknowledged a less rigid picture of what was possible for them in public⁸³. But what matters here is that their appearance was considered lascivious and inappropriate by foreigners from the North, who did not refrain themselves from criticizing the processional behavior of women and other social categories and underlying the excessive secular content of Venetian public rituals.

Conclusion

With their descriptions providing a view and details different from Venetian sources, the pilgrims' narrative of ceremonies may be used to better understand the peculiar Venetian urban rituality at least in two directions: first, to understand the religious and spectacular majesty of the political and social 'body' of the city that was presented to, and perceived by, foreigner visitors. Second, to reveal developments and changes of the ritual life of the 'Most Serene' Republic.

Indeed, the wealth, emotion and intensity of the public 'theatre' of Venice astonished some pilgrims. An anonymous French visitor, for instance, read those celebrations as a formidable show of «the magnificence and nobility of the city». Wilhelm Tzewers said that «non maiorem in mundo persumo pompam quam cora Venetis». Santo Brasca – observing the 1480 greetings of the captain general Antonio Loredan, defender of the cities of Scutari and Lepanto – compared the greeting to «one of those triumphs offered to Roman emperors in the antiquity». Tafur was delighted by the fact that in the Ascension

⁸² ROBERT C. DAVIS, *The Geography of Gender in the Renaissance*, in *Gender and society in Renaissance Italy*, edited by Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, New York and London, Longman, 1998, p. 36. See also CROUZET-PAVAN, *Récits*, p. 527; ROSS, *Picturing Experience*, p. 61.

⁸³ EDWARD MUIR, *In Some Neighbours We Trust: On the Exclusion of Women from the Public in Renaissance Italy*, in *Florence and Beyond. Culture, Society and Politics in Renaissance Italy. Essays in Honour of John M. Najemy*, edited by David S. Peterson with Daniel E. Bornstein, Toronto, Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2008, pp. 271-289; ANNE JACOBSON SCHUTTE, *Society and the Sexes in the Venetian Republic*, in *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400-1797*, edited by Eric Dursteler, Leiden, Brill, 2014, pp. 355-361.

days the Venetians showed «todos sus thesoros, así el tesoro de Sant Marco como por las calles á las puertas de las casas muchas joyas»⁸⁴.

Such enthusiasm for the beauty and wealth of the city might induce us to conclude that the pilgrims played an active part in the Venetian celebratory theatre and were therefore in tune with the various myths of the Republic. However, travelers went much beyond that, as we have seen. They experienced a «blend of sacred and secular tourism» and had a realistic, concrete spirit that Angela Caracciolo Aricò had foreseen a long time ago⁸⁵. This had several consequences: first, if the Venetians aimed to present to foreigners the city at her best, the outsiders' narrative shows that myths and stories could live in different (sometime odd) versions among the locals, even the well-educated members of the patriciate. We have to keep in mind that before Gasparo Contarini the myth of the Republic was not entirely and precisely codified⁸⁶.

Second, pilgrims reported about problems occurring during ceremonies, problems creating difficult situations. We have mentioned the problem with the ring of the Sensa. Moreover, famous is the Michele da Figline's definition of Caterina Corner as «mala contenta» during her ceremonial welcome into Venice. Lengherand described the «grand pain» the Venetians suffered when they could not accomplish the Wedding of the Sea because of bad weather. And Casola outlined the desperation of some women to appear in public, when faced with the burden of renting their festive clothes and jewelry⁸⁷.

Third, pilgrims could become critics at times. Driven by their religious observance, they disapproved the secular aspects of the Venetian celebrations and particularly the behavior of women. And some of them even went beyond that, criticizing the local society. That was particularly the case of French travelers. They identified the Venetian patricians not as real nobles but as «merchants», for instance. Philippe de Voisin wrote of the Venetian «gentlemen» having a

⁸⁴ *Voyage de la sainte cité*, pp. 14, 23; *Wilhelm Tzewers*, p. 86; BRASCA, *Viaggio*, p. 50; TAFUR, *Andanças*, p. 198.

⁸⁵ DAVIS-MARVIN, *Venice*, p. 19; CARACCILO ARICÒ, *Venezia al di là del mito*.

⁸⁶ CASINI, *Note*, pp. 310 ss.

⁸⁷ *Da Figline a Gerusalemme*, p. 50; *Voyages de Georges Lengherand*, p. 79; *Viaggio a Gerusalemme*, p. 101.

problem as «each one mix himself with merchandise». Barbatre and Le Saige defined the noblewomen as «bourgeois» and «wives of merchants». The same Les Saige noticed that the high-classes women had to stay always at home and therefore «ne voit on que les pources par les rues»⁸⁸.

So, in the end, if the pilgrims' brought their 'sacred eyes' to scrutinize the Venetian civic theatre, those eyes could actually turn realistic, daring to unveil and contrast the local attempts to construct an idealized urban social image. Instead of helping to build the myth, they helped deconstructing it, putting in light cracks in the Venetian political culture, social body, ritual system and gender discourse.

ABSTRACT

Dalle Crociate alla metà del Cinquecento numerosi pellegrini e altri visitatori europei si sono dovuti fermare a Venezia, talvolta per lunghi periodi, sulla strada per l'Oriente. Hanno quindi avuto occasione di osservare e descrivere la vita quotidiana di Venezia, ed in particolare alcune delle più importanti cerimonie religiose e civili della Repubblica, quali il *Corpus Domini* e la *Sensa*. La narrativa dei "foresti" – qui analizzata con fonti molto più numerose e in direzioni diverse che nella passata storiografia – ha un carattere unico e quindi prezioso per studiare i riti festivi e la mentalità pubblica della Venezia del Rinascimento, permettendo nuove e diverse ipotesi sia sulla peculiare ritualità civica e cultura politica della Serenissima, sia sui loro riflessi su società e gender.

From the Crusades to the mid-1500s, many European pilgrims and other visitors had to stop in Venice on their way to the Levant, sometime for long periods. So they could observe and describe the Venetian everyday life, in particular some of the most important religious and civic ceremonies of the Republic, such as the *Corpus Domini* or the *Sensa*. The narrative of the "foresti" (the "strangers") is analyzed here with much more sources and in different directions than the previous historiography, and has a unique and precious charac-

⁸⁸ *Voyage à Jerusalem de Philippe de Voisin*, p. 18; *Le voyage de Pierre Barbatre*, p. 100; *Voyage de Jacques le Saige*, pp. 51-52. See also Grünemberg talking about «burghers' wives, women and girls» watching the procession in St. Mark (*The Story of Sir Konrad*, pp. 48-49).

ter to study the festive rites and public mentality of Renaissance Venice. That narrative, therefore, allows new and diverse hypothesis on the peculiar civic rituality and political culture of the *Serenissima* as well as on their reflexes on society and gender.