

**Publication Data:**

Pedani, Maria Pia, 'Mamluk Lions and Venetian Lions 1260-1261', *EJOS*, VII (2004), No. 21, 1-17.

ISSN 0928-6802

© Copyright 2004 Maria Pia Pedani

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.*

# MAMLUK LIONS AND VENETIAN LIONS

1260-1261

MARIA PIA PEDANI

## 1. *The Venetian winged lion*

In 1261 the Latin Empire of Constantinople came to an end and a new Byzantine Empire was created in its place. Venetians, who had had a large share of power until then, were sent away from the city, while the Genoese took advantage of this new situation and concentrated international trade in their own hands. Venetians had to look for other markets and so they more frequently sent their ships to Egypt. They already knew this country. The relic of the Evangelist, patron saint of the city, had come from Alexandria, stolen in 828 by two merchants, Bono from Malamocco and Rustico from Torcello. These men's enterprise had a political meaning. It happened just one year after the synod of Mantua recognized the superiority of the patriarch of Aquileia over that of Grado who shared his influence over the Venetian lagoon. To consider St. Mark the patron saint in place of the Byzantine St. Theodore was to emphasize the importance of Rialto as well as to diminish previous Byzantine influence.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1260s, another similar revolution took place in Venice. The commercial axis changed abruptly, at least for a certain period, and Venetians had to fill the Rialto market with goods coming no longer from Constantinople but from other places. New fashions appeared also in the field of art: for instance, Venetian mosaic was influenced by Islamic works in Cairo and Damascus under the great Mamluk sultan Baybars. Venetian administrative structure and the nature of the state were renewed. The way in which the head of the *Comune Veneciarum* was elected changed. The incomes which formed his apanage were separated from the public treasury and his chancellery from

---

<sup>1</sup> S. Tramontin, "Origini e sviluppi della leggenda marciana", in F. Tonon (ed.), *Le origini della chiesa di Venezia*, Venezia 1987, pp. 167-186; H. Zug Tucci, "Negociare in omnibus partibus per terram et per aquam: il mercante veneziano", in  *Mercati e mercanti nell'Alto Medioevo: l'area euroasiatica e l'area mediterranea*, Spoleto 1993, pp. 51-79.

that of the state. In official documents the word “dux” more often gave place to the formula “dux et consiliarii” (doge and counsellors), while laws issued by the Great Council did not make reference to the person of the doge but to the “dominio duci et consiliariis”, as if these two entities were a unique element. A new office was created: the *cancellier grande* became the head of bureaucracy in 1268, in a moment of vacancy in the dukedom, while the ducal chancellors, now called *inferiori* from the location of their offices, could no longer interfere in public affairs. The archives were re-organized, as new series of chancellery registers still witness. Moreover, in the same year, 1268, the slow evolution of the *concio* reached its final step: this popular assembly, so important in ancient days, lost its powers in favour of a group of families, the future patriciate. At the same time the new doge, Lorenzo Tiepolo, bare-footed before the altar of St. Mark, swore to respect the rules in the ducal *promissione*, before receiving the insignia of his charge.<sup>2</sup>

However, this was not all. In the same period the winged lion was chosen as the symbol of the city-state. St. Mark had always been associated with the lion, as were the other Evangelists with the calf (St. Luke), the eagle (St. John) and the angel (St. Matthew), but the Venetians had not yet assumed this animal as their own symbol. The lion was already represented in St. Mark’s mosaics, but there it only stood in the place of the saint. In 1261 for the first time, the winged animal, probably *in moleca* - that is to say, coming out from the waves - made its appearance on a ducal seal. Two lead measure for cereals, made in 1262 (**Figure 1**) and 1263, show a winged lion passant, with a nimbus, looking straight ahead, its tail a overturned S, a shut overturned book between the forepaws. The first lion clearly *in moleca* is on the seal of Nicolò Querini, in a document issued when he was *bailo* in St. John of Acre (1263-64). All these lions are very different from the winged creatures used as the symbol of the Evangelist, such as that over the gate of St. Alipio in St. Mark’s basilica.

In the same period, many lions stood on the coat of arms of kings and noblemen as a symbol of power in Western heraldry. They might be rampant or passant or could show whole face and both eyes, but none was winged or came out of the waves. Additionally, the symbol of the Venetian state does not always follow the rules of Western heraldry: for instance it arbitrarily faces either left or right. Finally, in Venice different flags used the same gold lion but on different fields: blue was the colour of the state, while red belonged to

---

<sup>2</sup> G. Maranini, *La costituzione di Venezia*, vol. 1, *Dalle origini alla serrata del Maggior Consiglio*, Firenze 1927, pp. 177, 191, 203; A. Da Mosto, *L’Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, vol. 1, Roma 1937, pp. 1, 16; M. Pozza, “La cancelleria”, in G. Cracco - G. Ortalli (eds.), *Storia di Venezia. Dalle origini alla caduta della Serenissima*, vol. II. *L’Età del Comune*, Roma 1995, 349-369; M.P. Pedani, “*Veneta auctoritate notarius*” *Storia del notariato veneziano (1514-1797)*, Milano 1996, pp. 21-22.

the fleet; white and purple were also often used, together with the other two in ceremonies and processions.<sup>3</sup>

All this happened within a very short period of time, in the seven years from 1261 to 1268, but there has been no hypothesis about the links which surely existed among them. And above all, why did Venetians choose the lion as symbol of their state just that time? No document to explain this fact has yet been discovered and, so, it is impossible to give a sure answer to this question. However one may note some interesting connections.

## 2. Egyptian lions and Saracenic heraldry

In the same period a lion walking (passant) existed on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, and it was on the coat of arms of the Mamluk sultan of Egypt, al-Malik al-Zāhir Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Şāliḥī al-Bunduqdārī, who reigned from 1260 to 1277. According to the rules of Mamluk armoury he had taken this insignia before ascending to the throne, just at the beginning of his military and political career. One must not draw conclusions about the name al-Bunduqdārī and that of the city of Venice, called in Arabic *al-Bunduqiyya*. According to all scholars this *nisba* hints only to the profession of his master, a *bunduqdār* (slinger, that is, armed with a slingshot), since fire-arms did not yet exist.<sup>4</sup>

Baybars' coat of arms was "per fess gules and bendy sinister or and sable, in chief a lion passant argent", (**Figure 2**) that is to say the lower half of the shield was divided into red, gold and black stripes, with a red lion on a silver background in the upper half. However many objects of Baybars's reign have only the red lion on the silver field. It was not an *arme parlante*, that is to say it did not make reference to the name of his owner. In ancient Turkish, Mongolian and Uyghur *bars* means tiger, while in Ottoman the Persian word *pars* is used for panther, pard and even leopard. Then, Baybars means "chief/prince tiger", and we may note that the animal used by Baybars has no

<sup>3</sup> M. Rosada, "Sigillum Sancti Marci". *Bolle e sigilli di Venezia*, in *Il sigillo nella storia e nella cultura*, Roma 1985, pp. 109-148; G. Aldrighetti - M. De Biasi, *Il gonfalone di San Marco. Analisi storico-araldica dello stemma, gonfalone, sigillo e bandiera della Città di Venezia*, Venezia 1998, pp. 22-23, 146-147; A. Rizzi, *I leoni di San Marco. Il simbolo della Repubblica Veneta nella scultura e nella pittura*, Venezia 2001, I, pp. 18-20, 33.

<sup>4</sup> L.A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry*, Oxford 1933, pp. 106-110. Venice was called al-Bunduqiyya from *Bunduqī* (derived from the Greek for 'Venetian' - Benetikòs). Parenthetically, at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century a *bunduqī* cloth was a very coarse one. M. Nallino, "Venezia in antichi scrittori arabi", *Annali della Facoltà di lingue e letterature straniere di Ca' Foscari*, 2 (1963), pp. 111-120; C.E. Bosworth, "Some Historical Gleanings from the Section on Symbolic Actions in Qalqaşandī's Şubḥ al-a'şā", *Arabica*, 10/2 (1963), 148-153; M.P. Pedani, *Bahrī Mamlūk - Venetian Commercial Agreements*, in H. Celāl Güzel - C. Cem Oğuz - O. Karatay (eds.), *The Turks*, Ankara 2002, II, pp. 298-305.

mane; it is a feline which is conventionally called lion. But Mamluk heraldry refused the canting coats. If this had been the case, some writer of the period, al-Maqrīzī, for instance, would have surely noted it. Moreover, a real lion with a mane was used by the sultan's son, al-Malik al-Sa'īd Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad Baraka Ḥaḡān, who ascended to throne after his father's death (1277-1280).<sup>5</sup> Both sovereigns coined golden coins (*dinārs*) with felines, the first without a mane and the second with it. (Figure 3)

Scholars still do not still know if heraldry appeared in an Islamic society or in a Christian one. It made its appearance in the period of the Crusades. In Europe it is still used, but in the East it was forgotten soon after the end of the Mamluk period. Scholars who support the European thesis remember Geoffrey, Count of Anjou, who used a coat of arms in 1127 when he was knighted by his father-in-law Henry I of England in a ceremony described by John of Tours, a monk at Marmoutier, in his work *Historia Goffredi Plantageneti*. They also look to the Bayeux Tapestry made about 1077, where shields seem to bear heraldic insignia. On looking at the scene represented on this tapestry, those who are in favour of the Islamic thesis say: but if the shields were really used to point out to the name of their bearer why did William the Conqueror take away his helmet to be recognized? These scholars also look to the Armenian architects who built Bab al-Naṣr, one of the great gates of Cairo, in 1087 and embellished it with coats of arms.<sup>6</sup>

In the Mamluk armoury only three animals were used. The first was the lion, always passant, usually with one forepaw raised, the right when it was walking to the right, the left if it was going the other way. The tail was folded over the back and it was often playing with another animal, with a ball, or it was shown with a human figure. It represented the idea of strength and power. Then there was the eagle (or falcon) with one or two heads. It never appeared with other animals but might be used on some inanimate item - a sword, a cup, or a napkin. Finally, the horse passant was considered only the bearer of the parade saddle which, from a heraldic point of view, was the meaningful element. In the Mamluk armoury, signs of office were also used - the sword, the bow, the napkin, the table, the polo-sticks, the pen box - referring to armour bearers, bowmen, masters of robes, testers, polo masters and secretaries. The fesse was used by dispatch-riders. There were also more enigmatic coat of arms, such as the trousers (or horns) of nobility, in Arabic *sarawil al-futuwwa*, but no consensus has been achieved as to just what they represent. Then there were the bend, the rosette, bars (multiple fesses), and the crescent (if considered a horseshoe, then the symbol of the master of the stable). The fleur-de-lys existed in the Mamluk armoury where it was called *faransisiyya*, which means Frankish or French, but it differed from that used by

<sup>5</sup> Meyer, *Saracenic Heraldry*, pp. 7, 102.

<sup>6</sup> W. Leaf - S. Purcell, *Heraldic Symbols. Islamic Insignia and Western Heraldry*, London 1986, pp. 41-66.

the kings of France.<sup>7</sup> Finally, there were several different *tamghas* – emblems used by the Mongols to recognize the cattle and the property of a family or of a person – geometrical signs resembling the marks medieval European merchants used for parcels and boxes.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the origin of heraldry lies in the *tamghas*. In a world which did not know a fixed border, signed on the soil, there was the necessity of marking properties, of creating a “portable border” to point out clearly to whom something belonged, wherever it might be found.<sup>9</sup>

The display of the coat of arms was not restricted to one shape, as in Western heraldry where every shield had its special meaning. In Egypt a person might use different field shapes to decorate one building. The most common were the circle or roundel resembling the round shield carried by soldiers, and other shapes like the pentagon, oval, and four or six petalled rosettes.

In European heraldry there were two metals (or/gold and argent/silver), four main tinctures (gules/red, azur/blue, sable/black, vert/green) three minor ones (purpure/purple, carnation/skin-colour, self-colour/the colour of the material on which the blazon was placed) and two furs (ermine and vair), all with individual symbolic meanings. In the Mamluk armoury there was no difference between metals and tinctures. However, there was wide variation in colouring the blazons, especially if they were carved on stones or made in metal. The colours were: white (which became argent on metal), yellow (gold on metal and glass), gules/red, vert/green, azure/blue, sable/black, brown and self-colour. As usual all colours might appear in a range of shades, but in Mamluk heraldry sometimes two different shades of the same colour could be used on the same shield, while in Europe a device of this kind was impossible.<sup>10</sup>

### *3. Lions in Arabic documents addressed to Western rulers*

The first written documents issued by an Islamic ruler and addressed to the lord of Venice date to the last period of the Ayyubid dynasty (1171-1250).

---

<sup>7</sup> The fleur-de-lys is formed by three petals tied by an horizontal bar; the right petal is turned towards right, the left towards left while the middle one looks like a lance. In the Mamluk heraldry the three petals are clearly separated, and sometimes only one stem comes out from the lower part of the bar. On the contrary the French fleur-de-lys has the three petals strictly tied together by the bar, with no room left among them near the bar. The Islamic way of drawing the fleur-de-lys resembles a schematic representation of a bow (with a nocked arrow), as those often used by ancient Turks and other nomadic populations in the Middle Ages.

<sup>8</sup> Meyer, *Saracenic Heraldry*, pp. 4-26; M. Meinecke, “Zur Mamlukischen Heraldik”, *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo*, 28/2 (1972), pp. 213-287.

<sup>9</sup> M.P. Pedani, *Dalla frontiera al confine*, Roma 2002, pp. 89-90.

<sup>10</sup> Meyer, *Saracenic Heraldry*, pp. 27-29.

The oldest exist only in Latin translation and for this reason it is almost impossible to imagine the Arabic words used in the originals. However, among the titles given to the Doge that of “lion” made its appearance. Sultan al-ʿĀdil, the son of Saladin called him “leo fortis, dux prudens, miles militum, prudens comesstabilis, spata legis Christianorum, maior totius gentis latine, capitaneus totius exercitus Christianorum, cui Deus vitam augeat...”<sup>11</sup> In the same period the same ruler addressed the consuls of Pisa as *luyūt al-naṣrānīyya* (“lions of Christendom”).<sup>12</sup> This title was clearly used also for other Christians. However, for the Venetian lord this connection was maintained also in a general *amān* issued by al-ʿĀdil II in 1238.<sup>13</sup> Even the following Egyptian rulers, the *baḥrī* Mamluks (1250-ca. 1390), called the Doge “lion”. In contrast, the *burġī* (ca. 1382-1517) no longer used the name of the animal.<sup>14</sup> The secretary al-Qalqašandī, writing in 1411, did not quote contemporary documents with the association lion-doge; however, he remembered the work *Tatqīf al-Taʿrīf bi-l-muṣṭalaḥ al-šarīf* by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Miṣrī, who finished it in 1347-48, where two notes were made by the *qādī*, Nāṣir al-Dīn (about 1330s’); here the Doge was called “the immense and terrible lion”<sup>15</sup> In the Arabic text the two words that mean lion are *al-ḡaḍanfar* and *al-ḍirġām*.<sup>16</sup>

In the same years no lord in Italy - the ruler of Genoa, the marquis of Monferrato, or the kings of Naples - was called lion by an Islamic chancellery. However, there is a document addressed to a captain of Genoese galleys in Cyprus (late 14<sup>th</sup>-early 15<sup>th</sup> century), where it is written *al-asad al-bāsil* (brave

<sup>11</sup> G.L.F. Tafel - G.M. Thomas (ed. by), *Urkunden zur Älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedik*, Wien 1856, p. 185 n. 243; L. de Mas Latrie, *Traité de paix et de commerce et documents divers concernant les relations des chrétiens avec les arabes de l’Afrique septentrionale au Moyen Age. Introduction historique; Documents; Supplément*, III, Paris 1872, p. 71: 19 *šaʿbān*, [22] marzo [1206]. It would be interesting to know which of the several Arabic words used for lion was used in the original document. Al-Damīrī quotes many Arabic words that meant this animal; Ibn Ḥālaway speaks of 500 among adjectives and nouns, while the philologist Qāsin ibn Ġaʿfar adds other thirty words; cfr. Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Damīrī (808)[1405-1406], *Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān al-Kubrā*, Tehran 1415 [1994-1995], I, p. 6; Maḥmūd Ġasem al-Darwīš (ed.), al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad ibn Ḥālawayh, *Asmāʿ al-asad* [370 A.H. / 980-981 A.D.], Beirut 1409 [1988-1989], p. 8; H. Kindermann, “al-Asad”, in *Encyclopédie de l’Islam*, Leiden-Paris 1960, I, 702-704.

<sup>12</sup> M. Amari, *I diplomati arabi del R. Archivio fiorentino*, Firenze 1863, p. 69. *Luyūt* pl./ *layt* sing.

<sup>13</sup> Mas Latrie, *Traité de paix*, p. 73: “...magnus et altissimus, lo lion et lo pro [*sic*], Jacobus Teupolo, capitaneus militum et capitaneus de lege Christianorum, adiuvator filiorum baptismi, Deus ei adiungat vitam suam...”.

<sup>14</sup> Amari, *I diplomati arabi*, pp. 4-30.

<sup>15</sup> Amari, *I diplomati arabi*, pp. 15 (doc. III), 23 (doc. III); in the Arabic text: *al-ḍirġām al-ḡaḍanfar al-ḥatīr* e *al-bāsil al-ḍirġām*.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. also Amari, *Deʿ titoli*, 20 doc. XV, 30 doc. XV: to the Doge Francesco Dandolo (1329-1339): *al-ḍirġām al-ḡaḍanfar al-ḥatīr... Ifransk Dāmdulū... al-bāsil al-ḍirġām*. The two words were often associated; the first meant a large person; cfr. Ibn Ḥālawayh, *Asmāʿ al-asad*, p. 9; Ġalīl ʿAṭīyya (ed.), ʿAbd al-Mālik ibn Qarīb al-Aṣmaʿī, *Kitāb al-wuḥūš* [216 A.H. / 831-832 A.D.], Beirut 1989, pp. 63, 67.

lion).<sup>17</sup> These animals then apparently disappear from Islamic letters sent to Europe until 1489 when the sultan Qāyṭbāy called Lorenzo il Magnifico *al-ḍirgām al-bāṭil al-bāsil* (*al-bāṭil*, “false”, a common mistake - we do not know whether intended or not - in the place of *al-baṭal*, “brave”).<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. About coins, seals and books

In 1284, when the lion was already used as the symbol of the Venetian state, the first ducat was coined. In the same period other golden coins circulated in the Levant: the florin, with the fleur-de-lys of Florence, and two *dinārs* with the lion, that of Baybars and that of his son Baraka. The Venetian government wanted a coin to compete with the florin. “Melior ut est florenus” is written on the decision of the Great Council of 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1284 which established its creation. However, the ducat maintained the old images, with the kneeling doge receiving the insignia from the Evangelist on the *recto* and Christ in throne on the *verso*. This iconography had a Byzantine origin, already present on the ducal seals and on some previous coins like, for instance, the silver *grosso* (also called *matapan* or even *ducat*) first coined by Enrico Dandolo (1192-1205). In 1284 the Doge, the six ducal counsellors and the three heads of the Quarantia were charged by the Great Council to decide on the iconography (“et fiat cum illa stampa que videbitur domino duci et consiliariis et capitibus de quadraginta et cum illis melioramentis que eis videbuntur”). The golden ducat was coined until the end of the Republic, in 1797, always with the same iconography.<sup>19</sup>

A question immediately comes to mind: why did the ducat have old images and not the lion, since this symbol was already in use? The first Venetian coin with a lion dates back to 1329 – the silver *soldino* of Francesco Dandolo (1329-1339), worth one-third of a *matapan*. (Figure 4) On the *verso* there is a lion rampant, with a nimbus, holding with the forepaws the insignia with the flag waving towards the heraldic left. It differs from the other Venetian lions, which usually are neither rampant nor passant, show the whole face and both eyes.

Under Ranieri Zeno (1252-1268), the ducal seal (*bolla*) was slightly changed. Like the previous ones, it showed St. Mark in the act of giving the insignia of Venice to the Doge, implying that the Evangelist was the real ruler of the state and the Doge only his standard bearer, delegated to exercise power

<sup>17</sup> Amari, *I diplomati arabi*, pp. 15 (doc. II), 22 (doc. II). The word was used, above all, for a brave man; cfr. al-Damīrī, *Ḥayāt*, II, p. 310.

<sup>18</sup> Amari, *I diplomati arabi*, p. 181, n. XXXIX.

<sup>19</sup> N. Papadopoli, *Le monete di Venezia descritte e illustrate*, Venezia 1893-1919, I, pp. 67, 82-83, 123-126, 158-159, tavv. V nn. 1 e 6, VIII n. 2, IX n. 14; Aldrighetti - De Biasi, *Il gonfalone*, pp. 21, 130-131, 156-157.



in his name. In 1261 the so-called fourth type of *bolla* appeared, which lasted until 1457. It looked more or less like the previous ones, but with important changes. Now the saint wore the mitre and held the open Gospel, while the flag showed a small lion in the place of the previously-used cross.<sup>20</sup> (Figure 5)

Besides ducal *bolle*, another official seal existed in Venice - the *sigillum sancti Marci* used by the Signoria, the various offices and the members of the administration, which gave authenticity to the documents issued in the name of the state. Stamped on paper or wax, it showed the lion coming out of the waves. The only known lion passant in this kind of seal belonged to the secretary of the Council of Ten, Andrea de' Franceschi, in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the *sigillum Sancti Marci*, the book, always closed, was sometimes replaced by the coat of arms of the person who used it and a *legenda* might be added. For documents issued in the name of the Signoria a lead *bolla* was also used which had a lion *in moleca* on the *recto* and on the *verso* the *legenda Dominium Venetiarum*.<sup>21</sup> (Figure 6)

Another question, often asked, is: why are the books of St. Mark's lions sometimes open and sometimes closed? The oldest always show the book closed, an iconography widely used in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The first known lion with an open book is dated 1349, but from the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards this typology was the most frequent. The *legenda* usually said "Pax tibi Marce evangelista meus", but sometimes there was another motto, usually referring to the idea of justice. (Figure 7) As in the *sigillum sancti Marci*, the closed book was sometimes replaced by the coat of arms of the Venetian noble - a *bailo*, *provveditore*, *podestà*, or head of a council or office - who used it. It is often said that the closed book means war and the open one means peace, but there is no evidence for this. In the Arsenal of Venice all the stone lions have an open book and the same at Corfu and Nauplion. In other places it may be different. A curious legend referring to the book is known in Valstagna, a small city in the Veneto: the inhabitants of the place had been so faithful to Venice in the terrible period of the league of Cambrai that the central government abolished their public debt and gave them permission to have a stone lion with a closed book in their city.<sup>22</sup>

## 5. Some questions and some (possible) answers

Many questions have been raised in this paper. Why did the lion appear as the symbol of Venice in 1261? Why was the same iconography not used in the ducat? Why does the lion sometimes have an open book and sometimes

<sup>20</sup> Rosada, "Sigillum Sancti Marci", p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Rosada, "Sigillum Sancti Marci", pp. 142-148.

<sup>22</sup> Rizzi, *I leoni di San Marco*, I, pp. 36-44.

not? What are the links between the iconography of the ducal *bolla* and that of the *sigillum sancti Marci*?

The starting point lies in this last question. From 1261 onwards the Evangelist appeared as ruler and sovereign on the Doge's seals. He had an open book in his hand, the Doge stood as the standard-bearer, and the state was represented by a symbol on the flag, i.e. the lion, which had a closed book, as did all those from this period through the first half of the following century. In this iconography it is easy to imagine that the open book, which the saint holds in his hand, might be sovereign power directly from God.

In medieval Europe the Bishop of Rome gave the imperial power, derived from God, to the Emperor who gave part of his power to kings. The Pope derived his legitimation from St. Peter, first of the apostles, and for this reason the Pope was also a patriarch. The Venetians, however, considered their patriarch that of Grado whose seat had traditionally been founded by St. Mark himself. They did not consider themselves subject to the sovereign power of the Emperor, and in the same way they did not accept *ius commune*, the law of that empire, but created a legislation of their own. They claimed imperial rights for the city of Venice, as, for instance, that of creating notaries.

In the *bolla* the Doge appears as the person who holds the state and this last was represented by the lion with the closed book. The Doge and the state were not the same, as they had been until that time. In 1261-68 they became two separate entities from an administrative point of view: the treasury, the chancellors, the rights and even the archives of the one were divided from the treasury, the chancellors, the rights and the archives of the other. In this logic the closed book might be the sovereign power given by the Evangelist to the state who had the task of administering it.

Starting with this view one can imagine that the sovereign power of making coins belonged not to the state but to the Evangelist himself, as the true ruler of the state, and for this reason the figure of St. Mark, and not the lion, was stamped on the ducat.

A further evolution in iconography took place in the first half of the following century. Coins with the lion made their appearance. St. Mark was no longer represented as a human being but as a lion. The animal was no longer only a symbol but, from this moment onwards, the Evangelist himself: "San Marco in figura di leone" as Venetians said. On the silver *soldino* coined by Francesco Dandolo the lion has also the nimbus of holiness. The progressive identification of the Evangelist with the state had been completed. Now the symbolic animal appears on the coins, since the ruler's power belonged to it, and for the same reason it holds an open book, representing the justice administered by the ruler. The closed book was still used, but only by the Signoria, by the officials, by those who silently administered that sovereign power. The relation between the old lion with the closed book and the new Evangelist-lion was the same as that on the ducal *bolle* between the image on the flag and the figure of the saint holding the open book.

These are only some of the possible answers to the previous questions, but others remain: what were the links between St. Mark's lion and Baybars? Why did Venetians choose this symbolic animal in 1261? Was it by chance - or not - that Venetians chose the lion as the symbol of their city when in Egypt another lion was carved in stone on public buildings and put on objects belonging to the ruler? Several answers may be given to these questions and there is no documentary proof to support one hypothesis or the other, but one of the possible explanations may be the most elusive, impossible to believe, and even the most fascinating.

In 1260 Baybars became Sultan. His coat of arms had a red lion passant on a silver field. He had taken it many years previously, when young, at the beginning of his career. When he held the sovereign power his insignia became that of the Mamluk sultanate.

In 1261 St. Mark's lion, known as the symbol of the Evangelist for many centuries, abruptly became the symbol of the Venetian state. In the same year of 1261, Venetians were forced to leave Constantinople and the Byzantine market, and at that time there was no hope of recovery. They had to look for other places where they could trade if they wanted to keep their city alive. The choice was almost forced. The Mamluks ruled a growing empire, the intersection of many caravan and Mediterranean and Indian shipping routes. It was a question of survival. In that year in Egypt a gules lion passant argent was the symbol of the state. The new Venetian insignia had a golden lion on it and the Venetian navy flag had a red field. A ship which entered the harbour of Alexandria bearing this image had great chance of being welcomed.

As we have said we cannot know if the contemporary use of the same symbol of power in Venice and in Egypt was a coincidence or not. Other lions were used on coats of arms in Europe in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century: this animal had entered Western heraldry at least a hundred years earlier and there was apparently a general trend to use it to represent the idea of strength and power. When Venice joined this trend, it coincided with the symbol of a new Muslim state on the other side of the Mediterranean. However, Venetian lions did not have the usual Western heraldic shape: they were winged, while the others – both European and Mamluk – were not.

There may have existed a relationship between the insignia used in Venice and Egypt and may not have, but if Venice really used the lion in order to be welcomed in a new, desired, and absolutely necessary market, this may well have been the most successful marketing adventure in history.



FIGURE 1: VENETIAN LION ON A LEAD MEASURE FOR CEREALS (1262)

MARIA PIA PEDANI



FIGURE 2: BAYBARS' COAT OF ARMS

MAMLUK LIONS AND VENETIAN LIONS 1260-1261



FIGURE 3A: BAYBARS' DĪNAR (1260-1277)



FIGURE 3B: BARAKA'S DĪNAR (1277-1280)

MARIA PIA PEDANI



FIGURE 4: FRANCESCO DANDOLO'S *SOLDINO* (1329)



FIGURE 5A: *BOLLA* OF DOGE MICHELE STENO (1409)



FIGURE 5B: DRAWING OF A *BOLLA* (4° TYPE, 1261-1457)



MARIA PIA PEDANI



FIGURE 6: BRASS SEAL «SIGILLUM SANCTI MARCI»



FIGURE 7A: JACOBELLO DEL FIORE, LION OF ST. MARK (1415). THE LEGENDA IS: «LĪNQŪITUR HĪC ODĪUM METUS OMNĪS REBUS ET ARDOR / PLECTĪTUR HĪCQUE SCELUS LĪBRATUM CUSPĪDE VERĪ» (HERE HATE, JEALOUSY AND PASSION ARE LEFT ASIDE. HERE THE CRĪME, WEIGHTED ON THE NEEDLE OF TRUTH, IS PUNISHED)



FIGURE 7B: LION OF ST. MARK, GOLDEN WOOD, (15TH CENTURY)