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之文政七年五月

Memory, History, and Autobiography in Early Modern Towns in East and West

Edited by Vanessa Harding and Kōichi Watanabe

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and Autobiography
in Early Modern
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	vii
Preface	ix
Kōichi Watanabe, translated by Machi Sasai	
Introduction	1
Vanessa Harding	
Part I: Autobiography	
Chapter One	17
Dwellers and Their Self-Awareness in the Metropolis of Edo	
Reiji Iwabuchi, translated by Hisashi Kuboyama	
Chapter Two	33
Civic Consciousness, Urban Experiences and Personal Identities	
in Urban France from the Ancien Régime to the Revolution	
François-Joseph Ruggiu	
Chapter Three	51
The Intelligentsia's Perception of Itself and Society in Eighteenth-	
and Nineteenth-Century Seoul: Case Studies of Park Je Ga	
and Sim No Soong	
Hyun Young Kim, translated by Sung Hee Kim	
Part II: Memory	
Chapter Four	77
The Self, Family and the Social Group in the Memory of Early	
Modern Japanese Towns	
Kōichi Watanabe, translated by Hisashi Kuboyama	

Chapter Five	95
Constructing the Self and Constructing the Civic in Provincial Urban England, c. 1660-1800 Rosemary Sweet	
Chapter Six	109
Memory, History, and the Individual in the Civic Context: Early Modern London Vanessa Harding	
Chapter Seven.....	121
Transcending the Self, Constructing a Collective Memory: The Birth of a Civic Consciousness in Early Modern Venice Dorit Raines	
Contributors.....	135

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 4-1

The treasure storehouse and the monument.

Fig. 4-2

The special box for *shuinjō*.

Fig. 7-1

Rafain Caresini, *Cronaca*, written between 1383-1386, Saint Mark's National Library, Venice, Cod. Marc. It. VII, 770 (=7795).

Fig. 7-2

The first page of the *Diarii* by Marin Sanudo (1466-1536), Saint Mark's National Library, Venice, Cod. Marc. It. VII, 228 (=9215).

Fig. 7-3

Cronica Veneciana e Cronica Foscara, chronicle written at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Saint Mark's National Library, Venice, Cod. Marc. It. VII, 2773.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRANSCENDING THE SELF, CONSTRUCTING A COLLECTIVE MEMORY: THE BIRTH OF A CIVIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN EARLY MODERN VENICE

DORIT RAINES

Retracing multilayer-memory elaboration means in early modern Venice, linking two distinct phenomena: locating the existing geometries of power with their principal actors, and at the same time analysing the written products left behind in family and State archives: unofficial and official ones, or better still, the passage from a set of different voices into the emergence of a unique leading one.

This essay will focus on the ways Venetian society shaped its own historical narration using recollection and oblivion in order to convey its ideals. It will moreover identify the principal actors involved in the production of memories and highlight the turning points in these collective narrations, when the recollection process is subject to suppression or when other types of remembrance begin to emerge and sometimes challenge the official version.

A thousand years of memories can result in an unbearable burden. More so, if the community's origin is made up of a number of distinct immigrant groups, each with its own version. If we assume that memory is one of the principal parameters that shape any community's civic identity, then mapping the entire gamut of 'memory products' that Venice generated in its millenary existence—from chronicles to individual diaries, to family histories and down to official historiography—may enable us to trace the different steps individual memories underwent in order to form family ones, that in turn were elaborated into the narration of the collective self. Unlike other medieval European societies where the learned ecclesiastic circle (sometimes in court service) had mainly been the chief

narrator of events, Venetian society enjoyed a high literacy rate due to its mercantile character. This led in turn to a more diffused habit of putting into writing past and present experiences. Yet, in a society where the family was the basic social unit and the individual had the right to exist socially and politically only through his family, individual memories could not have been accepted as ways of telling the history of the city, but they could have been used as examples of proper civic conduct. The Venetian élite in fact blocked any other voice other than its own and produced as of the fifteenth century two different genres: 1. the official history as a continuity of the chronicles which followed the chain of important events, completely disregarding individuals as historical actors unless they had given their lives in the service of Venice; 2. a variety of products, generated by individuals and families who used their histories and memories in order to convey the Republican ideals and create civic consciousness in the Venetian citizens.

Yet, in order to understand early modern Venetian narration and the reasons for the triumph of the collective memory type, rather than the expression of individual or family, one has inevitably to start in the middle ages, when the burgeoning chronicle structure shaped and conditioned for centuries the *leitmotiv* of Venetian story and history. Our knowledge of Venetian medieval chronicle-writing technique is only partial. We can, however, distinguish between two types: the rulers' version (*annales maiores*), in our case a chronicle written by the court chaplain, Deacon John, which narrates the history of Venice from its origins through the reign of Doge Pietro II Orseolo (991-1009),¹ and later chronicles which narrate the events of a single community or ethnic group (*annales minores*)² like those of Grado, Aquileia and Altino, all written between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.³ None of these chronicles is concerned with a sort of civic *Bildung* as a guide for developing civic consciousness. The rulers' version was more concerned with establishing the Doges' and Venice's claim to power, while lightly touching upon the ideal of liberty and freedom that will be excessively underlined later through the narration of the way Venetians fled Attila the Hun in the fifth century and established their own rule on the lagoon islands. The later version followed Carolingian practices and was more a preparatory work for a future compilation: it usually contained a series of lists of rulers, popes, Roman emperors, patriarchs, along with some passages probably copied from other sources.⁴

The Venetian Commune period, which began in 1143, and saw the establishment of the Great Council in 1172, saw the first attempt to proceed to a sort of a unified narration of events.⁵ The great novelty is the

attempt to narrate Venetian history through the Doge's figure as *eikon-imago*, in a sort of a collective *res gestae* of the rulers. It is a homogeneous narration that divides the history into separate units defined by the Doges' reigning periods. Yet, it does not relate to the person of the Doge as an individual or as a heroic figure but as an exemplification of virtues that the author wished to underline.⁶ A century later appeared the first narration dedicated to the city and its inhabitants, written between 1267 and 1275 by a citizen, Martino da Canal, ignoring the ruling élite's point of view and simply concentrating on events, accompanying them with his own commentary.⁷ This narrative type which provided mature consideration of the city's history, based less on official sources than other ones, was destined to remain the only contemporary attempt to experiment with a more individual narration. Indeed, the confusing political events of the first half of the fourteenth century, resulting in a rebellion against the ruling élite in 1310 and then in 1355 in an attempt to topple the government by the Doge himself, had led to a closing of the ranks and to a rather odd situation where the families' power, the backbone of the political structure, was judged incompatible with the principle of collegial rule, established in 1297 with the Closing of the Great Council, the sovereign political organ.

When the ruler of Venice, Doge Andrea Dandolo, wrote his *Chronica extensa* between 1343 and 1352, he discarded all chronicles written before his time as being biased or the opinion of a person or of an ethnic group.⁸ The Doge had a far more ambitious programme in mind: he wished to create a unifying version out of different narrations in circulation. In doing so, he wished to consign to oblivion the immigrant origins of the lagoon society and the persistent divisions between ethnic communities.⁹ The 'phantoms of remembrance,' as Patrick J. Geary called the 'relics by which the past continued to live into the present,'¹⁰ were already haunting Venetian society. Collective memory, as well as collective oblivion, became instrumental in the ever-going conscious effort to (re)shape reality to Venice's identity aggregation purposes. Dandolo's urgent dilemma was what should be consigned to the wastebin of history and what should be highlighted and praised. The selection process he undertook was based on the assumption that only official records could witness 'the truth.' He therefore discarded all other helpful sources that could have shed light on city life or that could complete the Venetian historical narration he wished to present.¹¹

Perhaps as a reaction to Dandolo's effort to set a unique linear version based on the Doge's figure as a leading theme, the élite families could not renounce their own narration and role in Venetian history. Contrary to

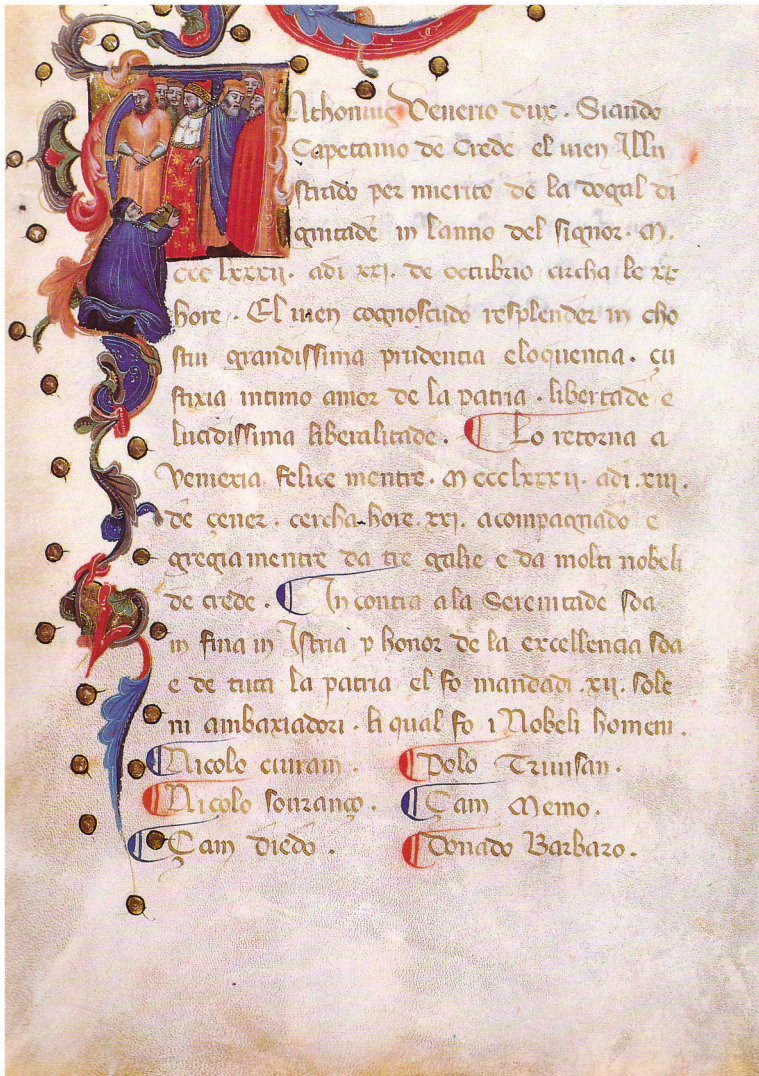


Fig. 7-1 Rafain Caresini, Cronaca, written between 1383-1386, Saint Mark's National Library, Venice, Cod. Marc. It. VII, 770 (=7795). Any reproduction is prohibited.

Florentine families and their individual diary tradition,¹² Venetian families chose to collectively narrate the history of Venice through their memories. They produced small narrative portraits of each family, a sort of heraldic chronicle, added to the end of a quick-reference chronicle. The novelty lay in their structure: a sort of 'database' made of easily removable, small informative units, an easy target for textual manipulation. The structure of each family's portrait, made up of taxonomic categories, turned in fact into an experimental ground: it could have been manipulated by omitting, adding or changing a category without damaging the basic textual structure.¹³ In fact, the outcome of the constant data elaboration reveals the way in which the Venetian patriciate constantly manipulated different ethnic historical narrations in order to create a unified version of the formation of Venetian society. It eliminated completely the immigrant nature of primitive Venetian society, claiming for a select group of families social and political pre-eminence by ancestral right.

The tension between these two challenging approaches to historical narration, on the one hand, an official impersonal version based on chancellery records and on the other, the collective family underlining their specific privileged status, had in a sense laid the foundations for the emergence of a new genre. Based more on merchant letters, gossip, discussions and official records, the fifteenth-century chronicle was an immediate success. The thirteenth-century chronicle by Martin da Canal was perhaps ahead of its time: his personal commentaries were seen as an attack on a fragile system that had not yet reached the political maturity fifteenth-century Republican Venice could now boast about. The ideologically-structured chronology was relegated in this new genre to the mythological part regarding the origins of Venice and the identity of its people, while the more modern part sketched a vivid and sometimes colourful image of the triumphant city-state and empire that Venice had come to be, thanks to the progressive conquest of the mainland area from Udine to Brescia. This vast territory and the additional areas of Istria, Dalmatia, and Greece, also under Venetian hegemony, constituted a haven for the circulation of information, a useful commodity for merchants and rulers. The new genre of chronicle then was heavily conditioned by the circulation rhythm and quantity of information and by the awareness that Venice was no longer a small lagoon island, but the capital of a vast empire.

The creation of the Secret Chancery in 1402 coincided with the mainland conquest and the need to keep secret records apart from other sections. From that point on, only chancery employees and a few others would have daily access to the Senate and the Council of Ten's records.

This decision certainly limited chroniclers wishing to accurately narrate the history of Venice.¹⁴

The Humanist taste for writing, for keeping track of the past, the growing civic consciousness, all of these brought about a fervent chronicle activity. People started keeping diaries, adding as a historical part an elaboration of a copied chronicle or chronicles, following the medieval practice of *chronico more*; those who succeeded them re-edited the diary part, maintaining the shape of the Doges' lives as a main framework, and made it more compact by eliminating irrelevant facts and rendering the text more elaborate. Doge Andrea Dandolo's huge work was not pursued in this way. It lacked the raw material—State records as dispatches, ambassadors' reports and government's decrees, among others.

Hundreds of chronicles were written in the course of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century. The Venetian empire, slave of a mythological past, turned now to the present in order to discuss its extraordinary achievement in conquering a huge territory. If until now it had to 'manage' past narration through the chronicles, it sought to control from this moment the narration of the present day through diaries mostly kept by members of the ruling élite. Some of the authors remained anonymous, others signed their names, but astonishing as it may sound, the writers rarely included in their narration any personal testimony. They may have commented sometimes harshly on different situations, but rarely told their own story. This can be seen, for example, in the case of the chronicle of Giorgio Dolfin (1396-1458), which covers Venetian history from its origins to 1458, or that of Antonio Morosini (1368-after 1433), which covers the years 1094-1433,¹⁵ or the case of one of the best known diarists of the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Venetian patrician Marin Sanudo il Giovane (1466-1536), whose fifty-eight volumes of meticulous gathering and copying of records, letters, decrees, lists of magistrates over a period of thirty-seven years (1496-1533), is even today a keystone for historical investigation.¹⁶ Likewise, the patrician merchant Girolamo Priuli (1476-1547), author of other diaries largely based on contemporary merchant letters, had a strong tendency to heavily criticise his fellow citizens for their poor management during the war of the League of Cambrai when Venice was bitterly defeated in 1509 and lost almost all of its mainland territory.¹⁷

But an empire could not have continued without an authorized version of facts in order to justify its power and territorial conquests (as Doge Dandolo had done). Faced with the Florentine humanist outpouring of State historiographical production by chancellors Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, and Bartolommeo della Scala,¹⁸ the Venetian authorities, in

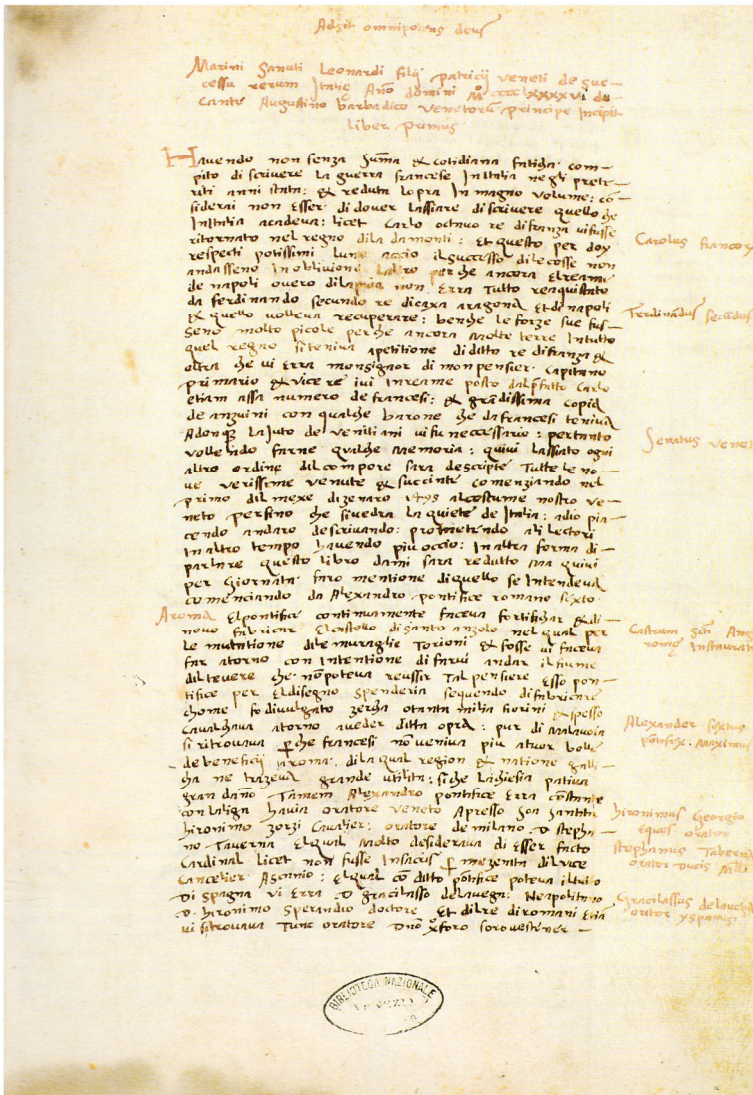


Fig. 7-2 The first page of the Diarii by Marin Sanudo (1466-1536), Saint Mark's National Library, Venice, Cod. Marc. It. VII, 228 (=9215). Any reproduction is prohibited.

need of rhetoric and explanation, sought the services of the renowned humanist Flavio Biondo. As he was unavailable, they turned to Marcantonio Sabellico, the first public historiographer, who published in 1487 *Decades rerum Venetarum*.¹⁹ From that point on it became clear that the official historiography would mainly deal with diplomacy and international relations—in fact all appointed historiographers were either statesmen or diplomats, while the *Lives of the Doges* chronicles still continued to be copied in the course of the sixteenth century, although with less vigour. Some diaries were still kept, such as that of Francesco Molin, written at the end of the sixteenth century, but the popularity of the genre soon began to wane.²⁰

The dialectic established between official historiography and unofficial chronicle-writing diminished even more the role of individuals in the process of history telling. It was the city of Venice, intended both as the lagoon island and as the Republic-empire, which became the main actor in a growing web of international relations. It was as if Venice represented a synthesis of all patricians and élite families in the name of republican equality. The praise of magistrates who ruled the mainland cities, printed in small booklets from 1490, was tolerated as long as they complied with the rule that the magistrate had to serve as an example of the just rule of Venice. Commemorative orations for Doges (but also for known intellectuals), as well as panegyrics and eulogies written in their praise when they were in office or after their death, also had to set an example more than to sketch a real portrait.²¹ All became subservient to the highest goal: service to the State. The notion of ‘empire’ became synonymous with that of the triumphant city, ‘republic’ with its renowned form of government. The myth of Venice reached its height in the mid-sixteenth century: Europe celebrated the myth and tried to understand the basic principles of a political system enjoying such longevity. Venice itself came to believe deeply in its own myth: it further eliminated any hint of dissent and at the same time set out to reinvent its origins claiming the city had been founded by the rich and noble families fleeing from Attila the Hun.

The aftermath of the Cyprus war with the cession of the island to the Turks in 1573 was seen in Venice as the failure of an incompetent ruling class. The Venetian patriciate received a heavy blow to its reputation and dissent grew more and more apparent. Venice had lost one of its major sources of wealth but it also witnessed a diminishing importance in the European theatre both politically and economically. The debate within the ruling élite grew bitter. One channel to challenge the official narration by public historiographers was the constitution of a group of intellectuals

around the figure of the patrician Gianfrancesco Loredan, head of the *Incogniti* ('Unknowns') Academy founded in 1630. The idea was to mock the existing literary and historical genres, mixing real with invented information (as did Ferrante Pallavicino) or to write an alternative version to the official one (such as the works of Girolamo Brusoni). Yet, the Academy's members never dared to write an alternative history of Venice.²²

Simultaneously, the growing awareness among the ruling élite of its noble status and the decrees promulgated in 1506 and 1526 which had led to careful control of noble births and marriages, enhanced the conviction of the patrician families of their exclusive role in Venetian history. From the end of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century the triumph of the patrician family as a crucial element within Venetian life was more than evident. Books narrating the history of families written by genealogists, histories of families told through the lives of their members in manuscript form and even a pictorial history of the Grimani family, depicting all the achievements of its members, were on display to all visitors to the family library: all these testify to the fact that the concept of family came forcefully to the foreground and challenged the monopoly that Venice—the city—had over public narration.²³

As the Venetian political system was slowly becoming weaker and unable to respond to basic requirements such as finding an adequate number of members of the ruling élite to fill offices, and as families began to sense they could no longer draw benefits from a disintegrating system, the narration of the events under discussion came to a halt. Indeed, the last official historiographer, Pietro Garzoni, elected in 1692, was not succeeded by another colleague after his death in 1735.²⁴ As other historiographical genres appeared, more analytical and retrospective in character, people turned again to diary writing: a pharmacist, a patrician, a scholar, a lawyer, each with his own approach, making daily annotations of everyday life in the city or a thematic treatment of the last fifty years of Venice.²⁵ Yet, even these genres cannot be considered an expression of personal or intimate memories. In the course of the eighteenth century two famous individuals dared to write their own personal stories: the adventurer and author Giacomo Casanova, and the playwright Carlo Gozzi.²⁶ The self was considered in Venice to be a private and intimate sphere. One could entrust one's feelings to private letters but as far as identity was concerned, it was inevitably linked to Venice, both in the geographical and political sense.

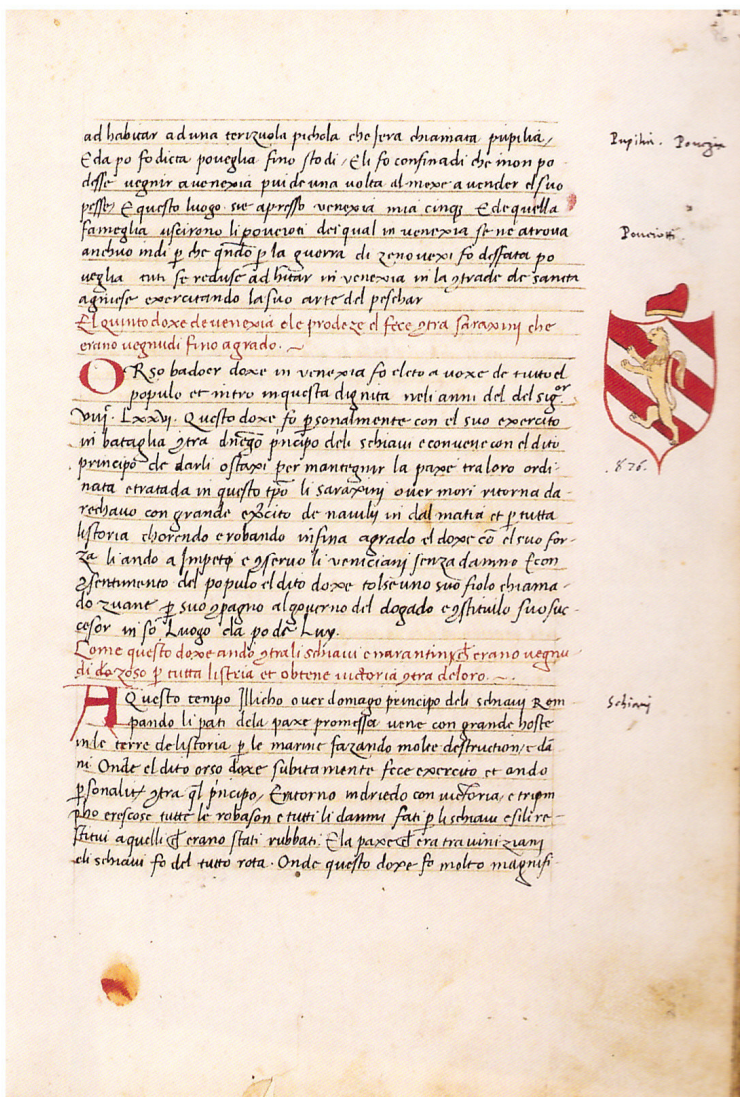


Fig. 7-3 Cronica Veneciana e Cronica Foscara, chronicle written at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Saint Mark's National Library, Venice, Cod. Marc. It. VII, 2773. Any reproduction is prohibited.

If until now I have merely concentrated on the description of the complex process that led to the formation of a collective memory and consequently also to a collective narration of the history of Venice in the early modern period, I think it is time to try and understand why an urban community of merchants which usually develops an individual entrepreneurial spirit, which endeavours to have the maximum of liberty in order to act, and is characterized by what is called a ‘bourgeois’ ethos, wholly concerned about incrementing or maintaining possessions and wealth, and behaving in a respectable manner, comes to be a closed community where collectivity and the city—the geographical location—become the emblem of society and its government. As much as it is difficult to grasp, especially after a confrontation with other Italian city-states where individuality and the self were cherished and praised (for example, the Florentine humanist Leon Battista Alberti’s *Life* written in the second half of the fifteenth century is a typical celebration of the self),²⁷ Venice deplored any form of individual excess and regarded it as destructive to the harmonious climate it sought to establish. Furthermore, Venetian legislation regarding the governing élite clearly indicated that the individual patrician juridically depended on his parents for his political and social privileged status. Patricians were expected to subdue every personal interest first to that of the State and then to that of the family. Even marriage was governed by familial, not personal, choice; individual careers were decided on the family’s interests and financial means.²⁸

It seems that medieval and renaissance inclinations toward a more comprehensive definition of the self,²⁹ did not undermine the tenacious Venetian conviction that a rigid social order and the sacrifice of the self for community’s sake were the only guarantee against social and political upheavals. Collective memory and its narration had to follow that logic. Eliminating throughout the ages all possible hints of borderline situations, usually created by ‘misplaced’ ambitions, and conversely exalting virtuous conduct through the examples of the lives of the Doges, led in the end to the waning of a wide spectrum of voices, not necessarily antagonistic to the Venetian formulation of social order, but alternative to mainstream thinking. The collective and harmony-driven component strongly embedded in the logic of the Venetian community was revealed to be much stronger than the individual inclinations or expectations of its members. ‘Self’ in Venice had quite some difficulty in emerging, heavily subdued by the hierarchical structure the Republic had maintained for centuries.

Notes

¹ G. Fasoli, "I Fondamenti della Storiografia Veneziana," in *La Storiografia Veneziana Fino al Secolo XVI. Aspetti e Problemi*, ed. A. Pertusi (Firenze, 1970), p. 13; Giovanni Diacono, *Istoria Veneticorum*, ed. L. A. Berto (Bologna, 1999).

² On these two types: M. McCormick, *Les Annales du Haut Moyen Âge* (Turnhout, 1975), pp. 16-17.

³ For the *Cronica de Singulis Patriarchis Nove Aquileie*, written in the first half of the eleventh century, and the *Chronicon Altinate* (dated between 1081 and 1204), see *Cronache Veneziane Antichissime*, ed. G. Monticolo, vol. 1 (Roma, 1890), p. xiii; Fasoli, "I Fondamenti," p. 13; A. Carile-G. Fedalto, *Le Origini di Venezia* (Bologna, 1978), p. 44; *Origo Civitatum Italiae seu Venetiarum*, ed. R. Cessi, *Fonti per la Storia d'Italia*, vol. 73 (Roma, 1933). For the *Chronicon Gradense*, a fragment of the *Chronicon Altinate*, written between 1237 and 1249, see *Cronache Veneziane Antichissime*, p. xiv.

⁴ Fasoli, "I Fondamenti," p. 13; R. Cessi, *Le Origini del Ducato Veneziano* (Napoli, 1951), p. 79; McCormick, *Les Annales*, pp. 15-16.

⁵ On the *Annales Veneti*, written after 1220, see H. V. Sauerland, "Annales Veneti Saec. XII," *Nuovo Archivio Veneto* 7 (1894), pp. 5-8; G. Monticolo, "Gli Annali Veneti del Secolo XII nel cod. 8 della Raccolta del Barone von Salis Presso la Biblioteca Civica di Metz," *Archivio della R. Società Romana di Storia Patria* 17 (1894), pp. 237-245. On the *Annales Venetici Breves*, written at the beginning of the thirteenth century, see *Annales Venetici Breves*, ed. H. Simonsfeld, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, vol. 14 (1883), pp. 69-71; A. Carile, *Aspetti della Cronachistica Veneziana nei Secoli XIII e XIV*, in *La Storiografia Veneziana*, p. 76.

⁶ See the *Historia Ducum Veneticorum*, written around 1230, in *Historia Ducum Veneticorum*, ed. H. Simonsfeld, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*, vol. 14 (1883), pp. 72-88. Cf. G. Cracco, *Il Pensiero Storico di Fronte ai Problemi del Comune Veneziano*, in *La Storiografia Veneziana*, p. 46; C. Beremond and J. Le Goff, *L'Exemplum* (Turnhout, 1982).

⁷ G. Fasoli, "La 'Cronique des Veneciens' di Martino da Canal," in *Studi Medievali*, 3rd ser., 2:1 (1961), pp. 42-74.

⁸ On the different versions: A. Carile, *La Cronachistica Veneziana (Secoli XIII-XVI) di Fronte alla Spartizione della Romania nel 1204* (Firenze, 1969); D. Raines, "Alle Origini dell'Archivio Politico del Patriziato: La Cronaca 'di Consultazione' Veneziana nei secoli XIV-XV," *Archivio Veneto* 150 (1998), pp. 5-57.

⁹ Dandolo in referring to the first Doge's election, speaks of 'many people' who lived on the lagoon islands, without explaining their different ethnic origins. *Andreae Danduli Chronaca Extensa*, ed. E. Pastorello, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. 12, pt. 1, 2nd ed. (1939), pp. 105-106.

¹⁰ P. J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, 1994), p. 7.

¹¹ M. Pozza, "La Cancelleria," in *Storia di Venezia III: La Formazione dello Stato Patrizio*, ed. G. Arnaldi, G. Cracco and A. Tenenti (Roma, 1997), pp. 365-387.

¹² See C. Klapisch-Zuber, *La Maison et le Nom. Stratégies et Rituels dans l'Italie de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1990), pp. 19-36.

¹³ The first chronicle, edited between 1355 and 1357 by an anonymous author, is now in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana (BNM), Cod. Marc. Lat. X, 36a (= 3326). The other chronicle, edited by Pietro Giustinian in 1357 is in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), Cod. Lat. 5877 (autograph of Pietro Giustinian). See A. Carile, "Note di Cronachistica Veneziana: Piero Giustinian e Nicolò Trevisan," *Studi Veneziani* 9 (1967), pp. 103-126; Raines, "Alle Origini," pp. 24-26; R. Cessi and F. Bennato, eds., *Venetiarum Historia Vulgo Petro Iustiniano Iustiniani Filio Adiudicata* (Venezia, 1964), pp. xvii-xviii; D. Raines, "Social Debate and Harmful Publication: The Family Chronicles of the Venetian Patriciate (Eleventh-Eighteenth Centuries)," in *Scripta Volant, Verba Manent. Schriftkulturen in Europa Zwischen 1500 und 1900. Les Cultures de l'Écrit en Europe entre 1500 et 1900*, ed. A. Messerli and R. Chartier (Basel, 2007), pp. 281-311.

¹⁴ G. Trebbi, "La Cancelleria Veneta nei Secoli XVI e XVII," *Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi* 14 (1980), pp. 65-125.

¹⁵ G. Dolfin, *Cronicha dela Nobil Città de Venetia et dela sua Provintia et Destretto (Origini-1458)*, ed. A. Caracciolo Aricò, 2 vols (Venezia, 2007-2009); *Il Codice Morosini: Il Mondo Visto da Venezia (1094-1433)*, ed. A. Nanetti, vols. 1-4 (Spoleto, 2010).

¹⁶ G. Cozzi, "Marin Sanudo Il Giovane, Dalla Cronaca alla Storia," in *Ambiente Veneziano, Ambiente Veneto*, ed. G. Cozzi (Venezia, 1997), pp. 87-108; A. Caracciolo Aricò, "Marin Sanudo il Giovane: Le Opere e lo Stile," *Studi Veneziani*, n. s. 55 (2008), pp. 351-390.

¹⁷ *I Diarii di Girolamo Priuli: aa. 1494-1512*, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 2nd ser., vol. 24, pt. 3 (1912-1941).

¹⁸ D. J. Wilcox, *The Development of Florentine Humanist Historiography in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), pp. 1-31, especially pp. 2-7.

¹⁹ G. Cozzi, "Cultura Politica e Religione nella 'Publica Storiografia' Veneziana del '500," *Bollettino dell'Istituto di Storia della Società e dello Stato Veneziano*, vols. 5-6 (1963-1964), pp. 215-294.

²⁰ S. Maggio, *Francesco da Molino Patrizio Veneziano del '500 e il Suo Compendio*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Trieste, 2008.

²¹ D. Raines, *L'invention du Mythe Aristocratique. L'image de Soi du Patriciat Vénitien au Temps de la Sérénissime* (Venezia, 2006), vol. 1, pp. 181-236.

²² M. Miato, *L'accademia degli Incogniti di Giovan Francesco Loredan, Venezia (1630-1661)* (Firenze, 1998).

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