

# Razprave

# Monique O'Connell

## Individuals, Families, and the State in Early Modern Empires: the case of the Venetian *Stato da Mar*

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**O'CONNELL, Monique**, PhD., Associate Professor, Wake Forest University, Department of History, USA NC 27106 Winston- Salem, 1834 Wake Forest Road, oconneme@wfu.edu.

**Individuals, Families, and the State in Early Modern Empires: the case of the Venetian *Stato da Mar***

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This article takes a Carpaccio painting as an entry point to the functioning of the Venetian maritime state in the late medieval and early modern period and offers an introduction to the historiographical issues surrounding Venice's Renaissance empire. The article demonstrates how ties of kinship and clientage were used to construct and maintain Venetian governance in its maritime territories. While earlier historiography conceptualized these territories within a colonialist or a nationalist framework, this article contends that empire is a useful framework of analysis for Venice, looking at how the Venetian case fits within definitions of early modern empires.

**Key words:** Venice, Empire, Family, Administration, Networks

Author's Abstract

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**O'CONNELL, Monique**, dr., izr. profesorica, Wake Forest University, Department of History, USA NC 27106 Winston- Salem, 1834 Wake Forest Road, oconneme@wfu.edu.

**Posamezniki, družine in država v imperijih zgodnjega novega veka. Primer beneškega *Stato da Mar***

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Pričujoča razprava o delovanju beneške pomorske države v poznem srednjem veku in v začetku novega veka, ki je za svoje izhodišče uporabila sliko Vittoreja Carpaccia, predstavlja uvod v obravnavo historiografskih vprašanj, povezanih z beneškim novoveškim imperijem. Tekst razkriva, kako so beneški rektorji (upravitelji) v pomorskem delu beneškega imperija pri vzpostavljanju in vzdrževanju oblasti uporabljali sorodstvene vezi in koncept klientaže (pokroviteljstva). Medtem ko je starejše zgodovinske obravnavale ta ozemlja v konceptualnem kontekstu kolonializma ali pa v kontekstu nacionalizma, pričujoča razprava zagovarja tezo, da je za Benetke bolj ustrezen kontekst imperija, in poskuša ugotoviti, v kolikšni meri primer Beneške republike ustreza definicijam imperijev v zgodnjem novem veku.

**Ključne besede:** Benetke, imperij, družina, upravljanje, omrežja

Avtorski izvleček

In 1517, the Renaissance artist Vittore Carpaccio completed a painting entitled *Entry of the Venetian podestà Sebastiano Contarini into Capodistria* (Koper). Carpaccio is most famous for painting scenes of Venice itself- the narrative cycles of the life of *St. Ursula* and the *Miracles of the True Cross*, depicting Renaissance Venice's cityscape and the collective civic rituals that enlivened it and that provided the state with legitimating narratives.<sup>1</sup> The *Entry* also focuses on a ritual, at first glance a much more individual moment than those seen in the Venetian cycles: a Venetian rector, or governor, during the ceremonies of his entry to the Venetian ruled city.<sup>2</sup> The rector, Sebastiano Contarini, in his gold robe and chain of office, is about to enter the Cathedral of Koper (it. Capodistria). The viewer stands at the door of the city's cathedral, where the bishop and his entourage would likely have been standing. The subject of the painting offers an entry point to the functioning of the Venetian maritime state in the late medieval and early modern period, while the more recent history of its travels offer an introduction to the historiographical issues surrounding Venice's Renaissance empire.

The figure at the center of the image, Sebastiano Contarini, dressed in his gold robes and chain of office, was one of a whole cadre of Venetian patricians elected in Venice for two year terms and sent to govern the various cities and towns subject to Venetian rule. Over the course of the fifteenth century, Venice had built on its series of trading posts and ports in the Adriatic and the Aegean and extended its direct rule over cities in both the Italian mainland and in Dalmatia and the Peloponnese. In these cities, Venetian patricians like Contarini were at the center of a three-way negotiation between the Venetian state and its imperial subjects. These men stood at the intersection of state policy and quotidian rule; Venetian councils determined the state's approach to religious difference, to economic development, and to military preparedness; Venetian governors negotiated with the diverse residents of the *stato da mar*, oversaw the sale and shipment of wheat, wine, cheese, and other com-

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was delivered as a talk at the University of Ljubljana on May 25, 2012, and has been only slightly modified. An earlier version of the second part of the talk was given at the Renaissance Society of America conference in Montreal, 3 May 2011 and the paper was discussed at the workshop, "Trade, Colonies and Intercultural Contacts in the Venetian World, 1400–1797," Venice International University/Centro Tedesco, Venice, 27–28 May 2011. Thanks to all of the participants and audience members for their helpful comments and feedback.

See Fortini Brown, *Venetian Narrative Painting*, p. 163–191 on other ritual moments of entry or leave-taking in Carpaccio's work.

<sup>2</sup> For scholarship on the painting and further bibliography, see the catalog entry by Elisabetta Francescutti in *Histria*, p. 128–32.



*Figure 1: Vittore Carpaccio, Entry of the Venetian podestà Sebastiano Contarini into Capodistria (Koper), 1517.*

modities, chased smugglers, and organized local militias and defense works. The success or failure of imperial policy in practice depended on the ability of these officials, mediators between center and periphery, to advance Venetian interests during their term of office.

To the left of Contarini in the painting is a group of black robed men; among them was likely the Venetian treasurer of Koper, also a patrician elected in Venice for a two year term.<sup>3</sup> The rest of the group is likely composed of prominent citizens of Koper, local elites. The connections between Venetian and local elites, here depicted standing together as single group, were essential to the functioning of Venetian empire. As a group, Venetian patrician officeholders like Contarini built wide-ranging networks of kinship and clientage while abroad, forming both temporary and more permanent alliances with residents of Venice's maritime domains.<sup>4</sup> But while the ideal was for Venetian patrician governors and their local councilors to negotiate and collaborate with one another, in fact there was an impenetrable (if invisible) divide between the rulers and ruled, between central and local interests.

Sebastiano Contarini was part of one of the largest Venetian patrician families, with representatives in every branch of government. The particular way that officeholding worked for certain families to create a network that ran from Venice outward to its mainland and maritime domains can be seen more clearly in an example from a smaller clan, the Tron family of Venice. There were two main branches of this family active in politics in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (see figure 2). Of the twenty-five male members of the Tron represented here, seventeen held at least one office in the maritime state.<sup>5</sup> For example, Donato di Marco Tron served as duke of Crete (1383) and bailo of Negroponte (Euboea) (1386) as well as holding a number of important ambassadorships. Donato's sons and grandsons also held multiple maritime offices. The significance of this pattern is not that certain families had a lock on office-holding. But by returning family members to the same locations repeatedly, the clan as a whole developed more permanent connections with residents of the territory. These officeholders could draw on the collective wisdom and connections accumulated by fathers, brothers, uncles, and cousins who had previously served in the territory, allowing them to better penetrate the local networks of affiliation.

Many Venetian territorial officials then served on Venetian councils upon their return, where they proposed legislation touching on the communities they had governed, sat on Venetian courts, heard judicial appeals from those territories, and supported petitions for special favors, called *grazie*. To return to the example of the Tron family, several members, including Michele, Luca, and Paolo, either proposed legislation or supported a *grazie* petition from abroad when they

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<sup>3</sup> Fantino di Pietro Marcello was elected to the post June 24, 1515, and Giovanni di Alvise Sagredo was elected as his replacement on February 8, 1517, *Rulers of Venice*, nos. 43951 and 43952.

<sup>4</sup> I reconstruct many of these networks in my recent book *Men of Empire*; see also Schmitt, *Venezianische Albanien*, pp. 367–97; Mueller, “Venetian commercial enterprise,” pp. 82–3, and idem, “Pubblico e privato.”

<sup>5</sup> For what follows on the Tron family, see O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, pp. 70–73, 92, 94–5, 136.

Tron Family of Venice

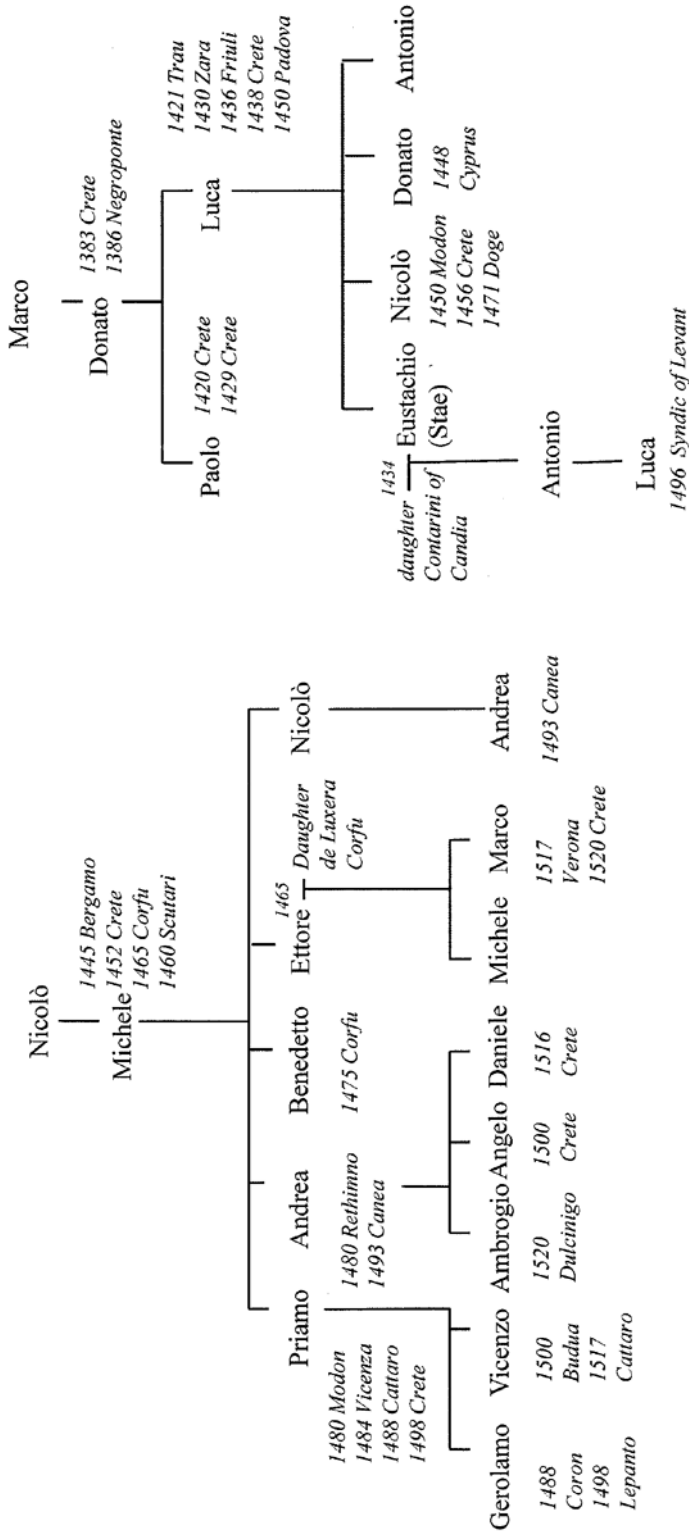


Figure 2: Tron Family of Venice.

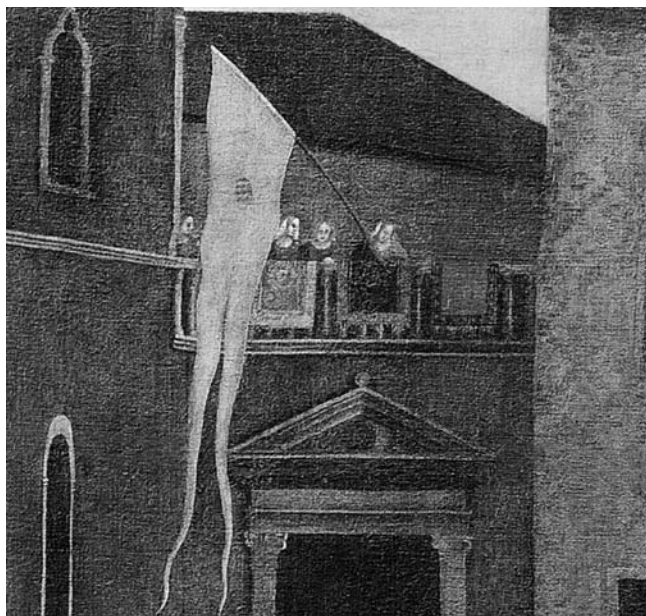


Figure 3: Vittore Carpaccio, *Entry of the Venetian podestà Sebastiano Contarini into Capodistria (Koper)*, 1517, detail: *Women on the balcony of Rector's palace in Koper*.

returned to Venice. After his return from Crete, for instance, Luca was also a ducal counselor several times and proposed acts benefiting specific residents of Crete; as an *avogador*, or state prosecutor, he presented cases pertaining to residents of the island. Luca's brother Paolo served on the commission sent to Crete to settle feudatories' outstanding debts (1420) and then returned to Crete as captain (1429). On his return, he played the role of local expert for the Venetian state. In 1454, in the wake of an uprising planned by a group of Greek nobles led by Sifi Vlastos, the *Dieci* convened a special committee to examine the problem, and Paolo Tron was among those elected. In fact, the commission was comprised of a number of former officials on Crete, including the former duke Bernardo Balbi (1450), two former captains, Bernardo Bragadin (1450) and Nicolò Bon (1448), and Marco Venier, two time rector in the Cretan city of Sitia (Setia) (1423, 1427) and treasurer in Candia (Heraklion) (1444). These men brought direct personal knowledge of local conditions to the government's deliberations, enabling the *Dieci* to craft a response appropriate to the situation. So the influence of these imperial officials was a two way process: while in office abroad they channeled and negotiated the Venetian state's demands to subject territories, and in Venetian councils on their return they acted as experts and advocates for subjects at the center.

In his painting, Carpaccio included a group of women in the background, looking at the ritual from a balcony. The presence of these women can be used to highlight the importance of marriage alliances in connecting Venetian and local elites. Marriages between Venetian patrician and elite families in subject territories offered benefits to both sides. Brides from subject populations brought cash and landed estates as

dowries to their Venetian husbands as well as connections into local society. For the elites who married sons or daughters into the Venetian patriciate, the marriage could serve as a gateway to the benefits and privileges distributed by the Venetian state. The Tron family again provides an excellent example of this pattern. Michele di Nicolò Tron was bailo in Corfu (1465), and during his term of office, his son, Ettore, married into the Corfiote baronial family of the de Luxera (1465); Ettore's son Michele inherited the barony and the family was involved in Corfiote political life through the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup> In the other branch of the Tron family, Luca arrived on Crete in 1439 already connected to Cretan society through marriage, as his son Eustachio (Stae) had married Antonio Contarini of Candia's daughter in 1434.<sup>7</sup>

Individual and family specialization in maritime offices brought benefits both to the Venetian state and to the individuals and families involved. The Venetian state was able to rely on office-holders' local expertise, administrative skills, and institutional knowledge of the territories where they served. Individuals and families, by returning repeatedly to the same territories, were able to build up networks of association and connection as well as local knowledge. These individual associations, however, were a double edged sword for Venice's administration of its empire. They increased Venice's imperial reach but at the same time conflicted with the republican ideal of a non-partisan and impartial territorial governor, as each governor entered office with a seething mass of the demands, obligations, and connections already in place. Venice's republican form of government created an unusual degree of tension between public and private in the governance of its empire. Venice was ruled not by a king but by councils; its ruling elite's loyalty was aimed not to a monarch or to a dynasty, but to the city itself and to the collective body of patricians and institutions that governed it. This ideology made the operation of these private networks of connections and influence problematic, to say the least. In the fifteenth century, legislation regularly forbade rectors from coming into close contact with their subjects or stepping outside their public role as a Venetian representative; governors just as regularly associated with those over whom they ruled.<sup>8</sup> While the informal, personal connections that bound Venetian individuals and families to residents of the *stato da mar* smoothed the workings of the Venetian state's more impersonal institutions such as the judicial system and the application process for favors and privileges it also created a whole new set of difficulties. A well connected governor advanced the interests of those tied to him, but many subjects experienced the connections between rector and local elites as damaging to their own interests.

In Carpaccio's painting, there are a pair of men in the background of the image, both separate from the main group and clearly unhappy. In fact, subjects excluded from this privileged elite associated with the flow of favors and benefits that came from the Venetian state often viewed these connections not as a lubricant that made the gears of government grind, but as "suffocating collusions" that exploited the rest of the

<sup>6</sup> Karapidakis, *Cives Fidelis*, pp. 185 and 281; *AvC, Cronaca*, reg. 107, f. 322r; *AvC, Balla d'Oro*, reg. 164, f. 295r; Barbaro, *Nozze*, f. 411v.

<sup>7</sup> Barbaro, *Nozze*, f. 122r, with an incorrect date of 1490.

<sup>8</sup> O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, pp. 56–57.



population even more effectively. There were deep resentments and bitter grievances against Venetian representatives, and in the early sixteenth century, Venice's traditional mechanisms of compromise and negotiation frayed and snapped in the maritime state in the wake of economic and political crisis. There were two popular uprisings in the first decades of the sixteenth century; the urban uprising at Lesina (Hvar) from 1510–1514, and the rural revolt on western Crete, from 1523–1529, both show the limits of the state's coercive power and a system based on negotiation with a few.<sup>9</sup>

The content of Carpaccio's painting offers a key to interpret the way the Venetian maritime state worked in practice. But a consideration of the painting's more recent adventures is also instructive for the way it illuminates the larger historiographical issues at stake. The *Entry* hung for centuries in the Municipal Council Hall in Koper, but while the painting itself did not move, the territory on which it sat passed from Venetian control to the Austrians, and then to the emerging nation state of Italy. In June 1940, at the outset of World War II, the Italian state shipped the *Entry*, together with a number of other artworks from threatened regions, to Friuli for safekeeping.<sup>10</sup> Some of these artworks returned to their original homes in 1943, but several crates of artworks from Istria, including the *Entry*, remained in Friuli until 1948, when they were transferred first to the Museo Nazionale Romano and then, in 1972, to the Museo di Palazzo Venezia.<sup>11</sup> In 2002, the art historian and then Italian sub-minister of Culture (Sottosegretario di Stato per i Beni e le Attività Culturali) Vittorio Sgarbi allowed the crates to be opened and announced that the works would be publically exhibited for the first time in over half a century. The paintings, many of which were badly damaged, were meticulously restored and shown in the city of Trieste, on the border of Slovenia.<sup>12</sup>

The recent history of this painting highlights the way this region's past continues to be culturally contested and the way medieval and early modern history intersects with contemporary claims of national identity and political rights. The national boundaries that now divide what was once a unified space have had a strong effect on the historiography of Venice's rule outside of the lagoon. For the majority of the twentieth century, the different regions—Italian, Greek, and Yugoslav and then Croatian—were parceled out to scholars working within their own national historical traditions. For Greek historians working in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the history of the “Venetocrazia,” or the Greek speaking lands under Latin rule, was tied up with emerging notions of Greek nation-hood and territorial and cultural unity.<sup>13</sup> Along the eastern Adriatic, the nineteenth and

<sup>9</sup> O'Connell, *Men of Empire*, pp. 140–60.

<sup>10</sup> The history of the paintings is given in outline by Paolo Casadio and Francesca Castellani, “Per Introdurre,” *Histria*, p. 29–30.

<sup>11</sup> Before the paintings were reintroduced to public view, there was scholarly pressure to do so: see, for instance, Mueller, “Aspects of Venetian Sovereignty,” p. 35; and Morelli, “Cima disperso.” Sgarbi gives his view of the political significance of the artworks in “Arte dell'Istria.”

<sup>12</sup> The catalog of the show, *Histria*, documents the works' history and the restoration efforts; for an account of the show's opening, see Bertelli, “I capolavori veneti,” p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> See the essays of Papadia-Lala, Karapidakis, and Kitromilides in *Italia-Grecia*.

early twentieth centuries saw two competing visions of Dalmatian history, one emphasizing connections with Italy and one placing the region in a Slavic context. Under Yugoslavian rule, it was the latter that dominated, along with an emphasis on Marxist lines of historical analysis.<sup>14</sup> Italian language scholarship in the first part of the twentieth century was conditioned by the rise of fascism and renewed imperial claims to what Mussolini termed “Mare Nostra,” and the history of Venetian territorial domination in Dalmatia and the Aegean played an important role in the articulation of renewed Italian claims to domination in the Adriatic.<sup>15</sup>

In the second half of the twentieth century, struggles over colonization and economic exploitation became the primary lens of analysis for the Venetian maritime state. One of the most synthetic works on the region, Thiriet’s 1954 study *La Romanie Vénitienne au Moyen Age*, focused on the way Venice benefited from its overseas colonies in the Greek-speaking parts of the empire. Meanwhile, Venice’s terraferma cities were considered as part of Italian state building, examples of what scholars have variously termed as “regional states”, “composite states”, or relations between center and periphery.<sup>16</sup> All of this has left scholars with, in the words of Dennis Romano and John Martin in the introduction to *Venice Reconsidered*, “no consensus about how to characterize Venice’s rule over both the terraferma and the *stato da mar*.”<sup>17</sup> The problem is highlighted as one follows the careers of Venetian administrators like Michele di Nicolò Tron. It seems improbable that the same official was part of a regional state when he served in Bergamo in the Italian terraferma, part of a Renaissance republic in councils at home, and part of a colonial administration when he served in Scutari (Skadar) and in Corfu in the maritime state. Looking more comparatively at the way Venetian administration worked throughout its dominions, it becomes clear that there are significant similarities between terraferma and maritime states, with the exception of Crete.

In much of the scholarship, particularly in Thiriet’s work, Crete is seen as the model of Venetian rule overseas. In fact, Crete was an exception, in large part because it was a colonial society. Unlike its practice in Dalmatia and Corfu, Venice sent colonists to the island who established deep military, cultural, and economic roots there; this state sponsored colonization was augmented by individual migration. The descendants of these settlers, the Veneto-Cretan patriciate, intermarried with the indigenous population while at the same time retaining ties to Venetian society.<sup>18</sup> In terms of administration, the presence of a colonial settler elite with one foot on Crete and the other in Venice influenced the Venetian officials’ inter-

<sup>14</sup> Ivetić, “Dalmazia e Slavi,” pp. 125–143.

<sup>15</sup> A number of important studies of the Venetian maritime state were produced in this period, including works by Gino Damerini, Bruno Dudan, Eugenio Bacchion, and Roberto Cessi. For discussion and complete bibliography, see Paladini, “Storia di Venezia” pp. 253–298; idem, “Velleità e capitolazioni,” pp. 147–172; Ivetić, “Dalmazia e Slavi,” 125–144; Longo, *L’Istituto nazionale fascista*.

<sup>16</sup> Viggiano, *Governanti*; Grubb, *Firstborn*; Muir, *Mad Blood*; Law, “Verona”; Knapton, “Istituzioni centrali”; idem, “Tribunali Veneziani.”

<sup>17</sup> Romano and Martin, “Reconsidering Venice,” p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> McKee, *Uncommon Dominion*.

actions with the island's inhabitants, as they could rely on a much more stable, dense and deeply rooted network of connections to create extra-institutional ties between island and metropole. Elsewhere, notably in Dalmatia, one is faced with the difficulty of a so called colonial administration without colonists. In the eastern Adriatic, as was the case in many of the Venetian mainland holdings, the Venetian government did not replace but ruled through local elites. Nevertheless, Venetian rule-particularly in Greece but also to a degree in Dalmatia-has been conceptualized within a framework of "colonial regimes." M.I. Finley's 1976 critique of the "semantics of colonial terminology" in general, and of Freddy Thiriet's label of 'colonial' for Venetian Romania in particular, has not been widely taken up in the scholarship.<sup>19</sup> In fact, as several scholars have noted, the term colonization, particularly in a pre 19<sup>th</sup> century context, has not received the same critical debate that the term empire has, leading to a state of affairs that led Jürgen Osterhammel, in his *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* to declare that "colonization is thus a phenomenon of colossal vagueness."<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, discussions among theorists of empire have produced numerous historically inflected definitions of empire that share a number of characteristics.<sup>21</sup> One of the best characterizations of early modern empires is Karen Barkey's hub and spoke model, which offers the following definition of empire:

"A large composite and differentiated polity linked to a central power by a variety of direct and indirect relations, where the center exercises political control through hierarchical and quasi-monopolistic relations over groups ethnically different from itself. These relations are, however, regularly subject to negotiations over the degree of autonomy of intermediaries in return for military and fiscal compliance. The central state negotiates and maintains more or less distinct compacts between itself and the various segments of this polity. Last, but not least, one can say that most of the different segments of the polity remain largely unconnected among themselves."<sup>22</sup>

Three elements in this definition seem to be particularly appropriate for Venice's empire. First is its institutional structure. There was a permanent separation between Venice and its subject territories-and Venice did structure its relationships with its subject cities individually and separately, making compacts called privileges or concessions with each individual city that submitted to Venetian rule. Second is the emphasis on negotiation or bargaining between center and periphery. Venetian political structure was based on negotiation, contestation, collaboration and accommodation. This negotiation occurred on both an individual and institutional level, between rulers and ruled and between central and peripheral forms of control. The bargaining that took place between state and society, or between elites that directed state action and local political actors, was clearly asymmetrical, with the

<sup>19</sup> Finlay, "Colonies – an attempt," pp. 167–88.

<sup>20</sup> Osterhammel, *Colonialism*, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Doyle, *Empires*, pp. 12–19; Eisenstadt, *Political Systems*, pp. 10–29; Abernethy, *Dynamics*, pp. 18–22; Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, pp. 9–15; Motyl, *Imperial Ends*, pp. 4–5; Reynolds, "Empires: A Problem," pp. 151–165.

<sup>22</sup> Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, p. 9.

balance of power firmly on the side of the state and its military force. The state's coercive abilities, however, were tempered by geographical reach. One of the reasons historians of a number of early modern empires—from the Spanish Americas to the Ottoman-Chinese frontier—have found the idea of negotiation a useful way to approach the dynamics of dominance in early modern empires is that it allows a discussion of the reach of empire's influence without overstating the degree of dominion states actually exercised over the territories they claimed to rule.<sup>23</sup>

The third element that seems appropriate for the Venetian case is the way of thinking about imperial space that comes out of this definition of empire. On maps, land based empires in particular tend to color the whole area an undifferentiated red or blue, implying a continuity and uniformity of governance that one simply doesn't see in early modern empires. Instead, Barkey's hub and spoke model, or Lauren Benton's description of early imperial power as "control that was exercised mainly over narrow bands, or corridors, of territory and over enclaves of various sizes and situations,"<sup>24</sup> fits Venetian territory much better. Venetian power was centered in the cities and towns and faded as one moved into the countryside, and this fragmented geography and political differentiation led to a fragile and often interrupted institutional control over territories.

So Venice arguably fits the definition of an empire; why is empire rather than colony or colonialism a useful framework of analysis for the Venetian maritime state? Firstly, the framework of empire would help to overcome what remains a remarkably wide gulf in the scholarship between the Venetian *stato da mar* and *terraferma* realms—and Istria, on the archival as well as physical border between the two realms, often is lost in the gap.<sup>25</sup> Scholarly interest in the Venetian mainland state has resulted in a substantial number of high-quality monographs on the individual cities of the *terraferma*, and while many of these works do place their individual cases in a larger framework, that framework is most frequently Italian. Work on the mainland state thus reflects the important insights into the dynamics of territorial consolidation and state formation in north-central Italy put forth by Giorgio Chittolini and others.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Chittolini highlights the central role ties of kinship, faction, patronage, and clientage played in shaping political strategies and institutions, offering a model for thinking about power dynamics in the maritime state as well. But one of the effects of the historiographical division between *terraferma*

<sup>23</sup> Bushnell, "Gates, patterns, and peripheries," p. 17; Radding, *Landscapes of Power*, 162–95; Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 83–93; Perdue, *China Marches West*, 555–58.

<sup>24</sup> Benton, "Legal Spaces," 700.

<sup>25</sup> Recent works on the *terraferma* and the maritime states have not followed the steps taken toward comparison of the two realms in Angelo Ventura's, Gaetano Cozzi's, and Michael Knapton's works. Ventura includes discussion of struggles between Dalmatian elites and popular factions in *Nobiltà e popolo*; Cozzi compares the legal regimes of maritime and mainland administrations in "La politica del diritto," and Cozzi and Knapton give equal weight to the maritime and mainland dominions in *La Repubblica di Venezia*, although their purpose there is not explicitly comparative.

<sup>26</sup> Chittolini's approach is spelled out concisely in "The 'Private,' the 'Public,'" pp. 34–61; see also "The Italian City State," pp. 589–602.

and maritime realms is that historians of the *stato da mar* have not given a great deal of attention to the scholarship on the building of the so-called Renaissance or regional state or the influence of negotiation, contestation, and accommodation between local and central magistracies. As Egidio Ivetić has demonstrated, from the 1920s to the 1960s, the history of Venice itself was increasingly studied by a “cosmopolitan community of specialists,” while the history of the *stato da mar* was left to Croatian and Greek scholars as part of their national history.<sup>27</sup> Thus, while the history of Vicenza or of Padua fits neatly within a Venetian or an Italian context, the history of Zadar becomes part of the history of Croatia, or the history of Crete is seen as part of Greek history. Using an imperial framework to think about Venetian domains would help scholars reunite the pieces in this fragmented scholarly geography of empire.

Secondly, an imperial frame would spark discussion about a fundamental question for all empires—what were the costs and benefits for both rulers and for subjects? One of the reasons “colonies/colonialism” has retained resonance in the scholarship is the term’s focus on economic exploitation via trade monopolies, extraction of natural resources, and tribute or taxes, which certainly characterizes Venetian policies in the maritime state.<sup>28</sup> However, the Venetian exploitation of resources was not limited to the *stato da mar*-Venetian policy in the terraferma was also aimed at extracting resources, and again it seems improbable that Venetian state was acting as a colonial power when it imposed a monopoly on saltworks in Dalmatia but acting as a regional or Renaissance state when it imposed a monopoly on forest resources in Brescia. As empires are also “effective mechanisms for channeling resources” to an imperial center,<sup>29</sup> using an imperial rather than a colonial framework of analysis would allow us to retain a focus on economic exploitation without imposing a conceptual division between colonial maritime and regional or composite mainland states.

Thirdly, the framework of empire allows us to place Venetian structures of government and practices of rule into a larger comparative context; and in the larger historiographical picture, the empire has been back for quite some time.<sup>30</sup> Contemporary concerns about globalization and US power overseas have driven a number of trade publications likening the US to ancient Rome, in both a positive and negative sense.<sup>31</sup> Thus the question of Venetian empire fits into a larger public conversation about how to judge empires, and historians of empires ancient and modern have been struggling over how to interpret the costs and benefits of

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<sup>27</sup> Ivetić, “Dalmazia e Slavi,” 125–143.

<sup>28</sup> Osterhammel, *Colonialism*, p. 11; for Venice as a colonial state, see Arbel, “Colonie d’Oltremare,”; Ashtor, “Venetian Supremacy,” and the articles collected in *Coloniser au moyen âge* and *Le partage du monde*; Georgopoulou, *Venice’s Mediterranean Colonies*.

<sup>29</sup> Moytl, *Imperial Ends*, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Ghosh, “Another Set.”

<sup>31</sup> There are a wide range of such books; among those that pursue sustained comparisons between the US and ancient Rome are Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire*; Mann, *Incoherent Empire*; Madden, *Empires of Trust*; Murphy, *Are We Rome?*; Smil, *Why America Is Not*; Meier, *Among Empires*.

empires past.<sup>32</sup> There is a wide range of views on this very large question; two recent authors, Timothy Parsons and Niall Ferguson, mark the opposite ends of this analytic spectrum. Ferguson's 2003 book *Empire*, didactically subtitled in the US edition *The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power*, emphasized the positive qualities and contributions of empire in general, and the British empire in particular. He points to the spread of British economic hegemony in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as leading to what he sees as the ultimately beneficial imposition of Western norms of law, order, and governance around the world.<sup>33</sup> Timothy Parsons' 2010 book *Rule of Empire: Those who Built Them, Those who Endured Them, and Why They Always Fall*, directly contradicts this rosy view of empire. A historian of 20<sup>th</sup> century Africa, Parsons focuses on the subjects of empire, and tells a story of coercion, oppression, and resource extraction by looking at seven historical examples that range from Roman Britain to France under the Nazis. Speaking very generally, one can see a similar range of judgments on Venice's empire-at the one end are assessments like Roberto Cessi's statement in *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia* that "the renewed Venetian effort in Dalmatia was inspired by a high and noble ideal-tranquility, neutrality, and peace."<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the Dalmatian historian Lujo Vojnović viewed the Venetian takeover of Dalmatia as an "infamous advance," and called Venice's legal justifications for its acquisitions "fraudulent, illegal, void."<sup>35</sup>

Looking at Venice in this wider comparative context points to some obvious differences between Venice and other iterations of empire. Firstly, the size and reach of Venice's empire certainly cannot-and could not-compete with the Spanish, Portuguese, British, Dutch, or English empires of the early modern world. But if one includes not only Venetian control of land next to the sea but the waterways themselves, the effective reach of Venetian empire becomes much larger. Secondly, theorists of empire Doyle, Abernethy, and Barkey all describe empires as systems of interaction and networks of power, making empire into a process rather than a static object to be measured.<sup>36</sup> In this version of an empire, then, size doesn't really matter.

Next comes the question of diversity. Spanish, Portuguese, British, Dutch, and English empires all ruled over subjects whom the imperialists defined as ethnically, religiously, or culturally different from themselves. Venetian subjects certainly were diverse, in that they had different languages, laws, and religious traditions, but this sort of diversity is hard to compare with the perceived racial and ethnic differences present in later empires like the Spanish in the Americas or the Portuguese in Africa and India. The use of "colonial" does address the ethnic

<sup>32</sup> In addition to Parsons, *Rule of Empire*, see Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World*; Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty*; Barkey, *Empire of Difference*; Darwin, *After Tamerlane*.

<sup>33</sup> Ferguson, *Empire*, p. xxiv.

<sup>34</sup> Cessi, *Repubblica di Venezia*, 355–6. See also Dudan, *Dominio Veneziano*, 49–55; and Praga, *Dalmatia*, 139.

<sup>35</sup> Vojnović, *Histoire*, v. 1, p. 481. A more appropriate example would come from the Serbo-Croatian historiography on Dalmatia; for an Italian language discussion of that historiography, see Ivetić, "Storiografie nazionali," pp. 116–123.

<sup>36</sup> Abernethy, *Dynamics*, p. 18–21; Doyle, *Empires*, 12–19; Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, 9–15.

diversity of the maritime state, with all of the attendant assumptions about colonizers' supposed cultural superiority and permanent separation from the colonized that entails. The Venetian state certainly participated in the creation of these categories of difference and in the maintenance of boundaries between different ethnic and religious groups, something that Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper propose as a fundamental characteristic of empires. They write that the nation-state "proclaims the commonality of its people... while the empire state declares the non-equivalence of multiple populations."<sup>37</sup> They continue on to state that "the nation-state tends to homogenize those within its borders and exclude those who do not belong, while the empire reaches outward and draws, usually coercively, peoples whose difference is made explicit under its rule." In the Venetian case, one of the fundamental distinctions the state drew was between Venetian and non-Venetian, categories that could apply equally to subjects from the mainland or maritime territories.

A third particularity about Venetian empire is the problem of description. Venetians themselves rarely described their state as an "empire," raising the question: is it possible to have an empire that does not formally acknowledge itself as such? In order to answer, we must look at the changing historical meaning of the Latin *imperium*, which according to Anthony Pagden had two senses in the early modern period—one the narrower Roman term for rule or authority, (sometimes translated in English as sovereignty), and a second sense which "could also be used to express the pattern of political relationships which held together groups of people in 'an extended system,' ... the terms of whose association were not permanently established."<sup>38</sup> In many of the instances where the word *imperium* is applied to Venice, the first, narrower sense, having *imperium*, or aiming for *imperium*, is more common than the second. Venetian legislators consistently used dominion (*dominio*) territory, (*territorio*) or state (*stato*) to describe their overseas holdings.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, the only authors who openly described Venice as an empire in the fifteenth century were non-Venetian humanists writing for Venetian patrons, the Pier-Paolo Vergerio the Elder (ca. 1370–1444), from Koper, at the beginning of the century, and the Roman Marc'Antonio Sabellico near the end of it.<sup>40</sup> In his treatise *De Republica Veneta* (c. 1402), Vergerio wrote, "The Venetians now possess a wide empire of land and sea, and neither the public or private citizens are greedy for more, but will protect the parts they have."<sup>41</sup> Marc'Antonio Sabellico's 1487 history of Venice, *Rerum venetarum ab urbe condita*, replayed the history of Venice as recounted in its chronicle tradition in a humanist key. Although the Venetian Senate had not commissioned Sabellico to write a history of the city, his account of Venice, modeled on the Roman histories of Livy, proved popular both with the

<sup>37</sup> Burbank and Cooper, *Empires*, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Tenenti, "Senso dello Stato," pp. 314–317.

<sup>40</sup> There are large bibliographies on both Vergerio and Sabellico. For introductions and further scholarship on both writers, see Gaeta, "Storiografia," pp. 7–11 and 65–75. For Vergerio, see also Robey, "P.P. Vergerio." For Sabellico, see Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography*, 59–86 and Cozzi, "Cultura politica," pp. 221–2.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Robey and Law, eds, "The Venetian Myth," 43.

Venetian government and with the public. In his history, Sabellico described Venice as an empire not only comparable to Rome, but superior to it. He wrote:

Who can deny the great and glorious deeds of certain nations that have at some point attained imperial status-at the forefront of whom are the Romans? Before the magnificence and scope of their foreign conquests, we should perhaps yield, but, in the inviolability of its laws, the impartiality of its justice, the integrity and sanctity of its constitution, Venice shall not be inferior, but indeed far superior.<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, Venetian authors did not follow these open assertions of Venice as an empire, preferring to approach the question more obliquely.

A final benefit to using empire as a frame of analysis for the Venetian state is the bridge it offers to an emerging body of scholarship that is reconceptualizing the relationship between individual, family and state in the formation of early modern empires. In the version of Venice's empire described above, one of the most important mechanisms for the construction and maintenance of imperial ties are individual and family connections. Several other recent studies focused on two other Mediterranean powers-early modern Spain and the Ottoman empire-have identified family, kinship and household as essential building blocks of these expanding empires. In the Spanish context, Yuan-Gen Liang's recent book on the Fernandez de Cordoba has shown the way Spain's expanding empire relied on its officials to spread its rule and the powerful role individual governors played in constructing imperial governance and spreading imperial values in the newly conquered territories not only in the New World but closer to home in Granada, Oran, and Navarre.<sup>43</sup> Turning to the other side of the Mediterranean, Jane Hathaway examines the formation of a single household, the Qazdaglis, in Ottoman Egypt to tell a story of the emergence of an empire-wide military and administrative culture based on households.<sup>44</sup> While the definition of a household in the Ottoman context encompassed more than just kinship but included a variety of patron-client ties, the process by which Qazdaglis formed strategic alliances through marriages, commercial partnerships, and palace patronage is broadly comparable to the processes by which the Fernandez de Cordoba in Spain-or, perhaps, the Tron in Venice-built their networks of intertwined imperial and individual power. These studies revise and challenge the assumptions of an older generation of scholarship, which saw kinship and the state as diametrically opposed. Now, a growing body of work sees kinship as constitutive of the early modern state in general, and of empires in particular.<sup>45</sup> In conclusion, it might be time for an 'imperial turn' in Venetian history; not with the attitude of triumphalism that characterized earlier generations of scholarship, but with the aim of integrating Venice into other imperial stories from the medieval and early modern world.

<sup>42</sup> Cited and translated in Chambers and Pullan, *Venice*, p. 359.

<sup>43</sup> Liang, *Family and Empire*.

<sup>44</sup> Hathaway, *Politics of Households*.

<sup>45</sup> Sabeian and Teucher, "Kinship in Europe," p. 2-3, point out that the new stress in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries on family coherence were closely connected to processes of state formation.



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## POVZETEK

Posamezniki, družine in država v imperijih zgodnjega novega veka. Primer beneškega *Stata da Mar*

Monique O'Connell

Pričujoča razprava o delovanju beneške pomorske države v poznem srednjem veku in v začetku novega veka, ki je za svoje izhodišče uporabila sliko Vittoreja Carpaccia, predstavlja uvod v obravnavo historiografskih vprašanj, povezanih z beneškim novoveškim imperijem. Beneški patriciji, ki so bili za dobo dveh let poslani kot rektorji (upravitelji) v različna mesta in kraje pod beneško oblastjo, so bili v središču tristranskih pogajanj med beneško državo in njenimi podaniki. Uspešnost ali neuspešnost beneške imperialne politike sta bili dejansko odvisni od sposobnosti teh uradnikov, ki so delovali kot posredniki med centrom in periferijo, da v času svojega službovanja uveljavijo interese beneške države. Članek razkriva, kako so rektorji s pomočjo sorodstvenih vezi in klientaže (sistem pokroviteljstva) vzpostavljali in vzdrževali lokalna omrežja oblasti, ki so prinašala korist tako njim samim kot tudi beneški oblasti na njenih pomorskih ozemljih. Toda medtem ko je rektor z dobrimi zvezami uveljavljal interese tistih, ki so bili vezani na njega, pa so tisti podaniki, ki so bili izključeni iz privilegirane elite, to elito povezovali s pretokom uslug in ugodnosti, ki jih je nudila beneška država. Zaradi tega omenjenih zvez pogosto niso razumeli kot maziva, zaradi katerega se je vladno kolesje gladko vrtelo, ampak so jih imeli za »dušečo zaroto,« ki naj bi po njihovem še učinkoviteje izkoriščala preostalo prebivalstvo. Članek nadalje razmišlja o presečišču zgodovine srednjega in zgodnjega novega veka s sodobnimi zahtevami po narodnostni identiteti in političnih pravicah. Medtem ko je starejše zgodovinopisje obravnavalo beneška prekomorska ozemlja v konceptualnem kontekstu kolonializma ali pa v kontekstu nacionalizma, pričujoča razprava zagovarja tezo, da je za Benetke bolj ustrezen koncept imperija, in skuša ugotoviti, v kolikšni meri primer Beneške republike ustreza definicijam imperijev v zgodnjem novem veku. Na osnovi modela središčnega imperija sociologinja Karen Barkey raziskava ugotavlja, da beneška institucionalna struktura, nagnjenost k pogajanju in barantanju in pa njeno imperialno območje ustrezajo najnovejšim zgodovinskim in sociološkim definicijam imperija. Med beneškim in drugimi imperiji pa je tudi nekaj očitnih razlik. Beneško pojmovanje etnične in rasne raznolikosti ni bilo enako onemu v kasnejših imperijih. Prav tako se velikost in moč beneškega imperija zagotovo ne moreta (in se nista mogla) kosati s španskim, portugalskim, britanskim, nizozemskim ali angleškim imperijem zgodnjega novega veka. Tudi Benečani sami so zelo redko prepoznavali svojo državo kot imperij. Kljub temu študija kaže, da bi koncept imperija lahko pomagal premostiti še vedno izjemno širok prepad med strokovnimi razpravami o beneškima *Statu da mar* in *Terrafermi* in pa tistimi o Istri, ki je fizično in po beneški organizaciji arhivskega gradiva na meji med obema svetovoma, često pa se v vrzeli med njima kar izgubi. Prav tako bi za preučevanje beneških vprašanj ta imperialni kontekst omogočil strokovnjakom, da bi Benetke lahko obravnavali v širšem primerjalnem okviru, in bi spodbudil razpravo o enem izmed najbolj temeljnih vprašanj, ki se nanašajo na prav vse imperije: za kakšno ceno in s kakšnimi ugodnostmi so se v njih znašli na eni strani oblastniki in na drugi podaniki? Nazadnje pa je prednost imperialnega koncepta za analizo beneške države v mostu, ki ga ta koncept ponuja nastajajočim znanstvenim študijam, ki na novo konceptualizirajo odnos med posameznikom, družino in državo v obdobju oblikovanja imperijev v zgodnjem novem veku.