

**“Coping with transition. Greek merchants and ship owners between Venice and England in the sixteenth century”.**

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This paper is concerned with the activities of some of the Greek Diaspora merchants and ship owners who were active in the Republic of Venice during the last quarter of the sixteenth century. It will focus particularly on the Greek merchants who traded directly with England in that period, and on their connections with the English and Italian merchants based in London and trading with the eastern Mediterranean. My final goal is to show how, in times when the Venetian state was no longer able to keep open the sea-route to the north of Europe, some private merchants, coming mostly from the Venetian dominions in Greece, fought to keep this trade in their hands against the increasing English involvement in Mediterranean trade.

The last quarter of the sixteenth century was a period of intense activity in the eastern Mediterranean. After the end of the war with the Turks, the Venetian state found it rather difficult to rebuild its commercial maritime strength, particularly because of the pre-existing crisis in its shipbuilding industry. Throughout the second half of the sixteenth century, concerns on the issue of defence, paired with the problems of forest-management in the territories of the Republic, had pushed the Senate towards a policy that privileged the needs of military ship-building against the needs of private mercantile shipping.<sup>1</sup> Because of these, and other circumstances, it has been estimated that the Venetian commercial fleet halved between 1560 and 1600.<sup>2</sup> In such a crisis, substantial chances for commercial gain opened up for private merchants ready to provide ships and capital to employ on the trade routes of the eastern Mediterranean, and on the sea route to the north of Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> M.KNAPTON, *Lo stato veneziano fra la battaglia di Lepanto e la guerra di Candia*, in *Venezia e la difesa del Levante. Da Lepanto a Candia, 1570-1670*, Venezia, 1986, pp.233-241.

<sup>2</sup> D.SELLA, *Crisis and Transformation in Venetian Trade*, in *Crisis and Change in the Venetian Economy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, B.PULLAN ed., London, 1968, pp.88-105, p.92.

Whilst in earlier periods the Venetian government had always tried to define policies for its eastern dominions before the crisis struck, after 1571 all the decisions were taken on a 'reactive' basis, as if a real project was lacking for the territories. If in the past the dominant attitude of the Venetian government in regard to its Eastern dominions had been an extreme attention to commercial and trade issues,<sup>3</sup> after the fall of Cyprus the issue of defence engulfed every other consideration, and all other issues went neglected. The Greek subjects, on the other hand, were always extremely proactive, constantly finding ways to cope with the incoming crisis, but their requests nearly always ended up being dismissed by the Senate, even when they had the support of other Venetian governmental agencies like the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia* or the *Provveditori* of the Islands.

For these Greek merchants active in the Venetian dominions, war therefore acted as a creator of new opportunities, and the northern demand for the goods that were produced in the Ionian islands and in Crete, put them in a very privileged position to take advantage of the new opportunities afforded by the crisis of their overlord. Most of the merchandise which was coveted in the north – wine and currants – came in fact from the Venetian Greek dependencies, places where these merchants could fully employ the strength of their personal and family networks to overcome the disruptions and problems of the trade. By the beginning of the seventeenth century their impetus had substantially weakened, trade was expanding faster than they could cope with, and this, paired with the capillary establishment of English merchants and ships in the area, served to price these operators out of the market.

The main protagonists of this paper are Diaspora Greeks, settled between the Ionian island of Zante and Venice itself. That there were merchant-ship owners amongst the Greeks established in the Venetian Republic is not a novelty in itself, what I hope to highlight in the following pages is how wide their range of trades were, and how crucial a role they played connecting the north and south of Europe in the transitional period between the onset of the maritime crisis of Venice, and the beginning of the English dominance of these trades at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

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<sup>3</sup> D.A.ZAKYTHINOS, *L'attitude de Venise face au déclin et à la chute de Constantinople*, in A.G.BECK, M.MANOUSACAS, A.PERTUSI eds., *Venezia centro di mediazione tra Oriente ed Occidente (secoli XV-XVI). Aspetti e problemi*, vol.i, Firenze, 1977, pp.61-75.

Talking about diasporas there is always the risk to come out with just a list of individuals who have risen to prominence,<sup>4</sup> but as much as I will be mostly concerned with just a few families of Greek merchants-entrepreneurs, I would like it to be clear that behind them there were many more, and that the history of the commercial activities of the Greek community in Venice is a field which still has incredible riches to offer.<sup>5</sup>

Studying the economic activities of these individuals, we find them to be an excellent example of the transition from the pre-capitalist merchant, who simply negotiated local surpluses of agricultural goods, to the merchant-entrepreneur who was involved in the reorganization of the whole production leading to its commercialisation. As we will have occasion to see in the next pages, other factors make them a particularly worthy subject of investigation. On the one hand their involvement in the provision of shipping services for third parties, allows us to antedate such activities amongst Greek ship owners from the eighteenth to the late sixteenth century, on the other hand their patterns of diversification of reinvestment, both in the commercial and in the production sector, provide us with evidence that points towards a reassessment of their economic role throughout the Venetian state, both in the *Stato da Mar*, and in the Italian mainland.

The definition of entrepreneur that I favour in this paper, because it fits perfectly the activities of the merchants object of my investigation, defines the “entrepreneur [as] someone who specialises in taking judgemental decisions about the coordination of scarce resources”.<sup>6</sup> This well describes the situation in which they operated; if we define judgemental decisions as decisions for which no obvious correct procedure exists, this fits very well also with the nature of the economic transition in which they operated.

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<sup>4</sup> R.CLOGG ed., *The Greek Diaspora in the Twentieth Century*, London-New York, 1999, p.2.

<sup>5</sup> I would particularly like to highlight here the forthcoming work of Ersie Burke on the Greek community in Venice, I also wish to thank her deeply for the time she dedicated to my questions, and for the generosity with which she discussed her own work in progress. This paper owes a lot to these talks. I also wish here to acknowledge the useful critical comments made on this text by Maria-Christina Chatziioannou, and the generous help provided by Mary Coulton.

<sup>6</sup> M.CASSON, *Entrepreneurship and business culture*, in J.BROWN and M.B.ROSE eds., *Entrepreneurship, networks and modern business*, Manchester, 1993, pp.30-54, p.31.

The subject of the nature and the definition of ‘entrepreneur’ has stimulated a dauntingly large bibliography, particularly interesting on this issue have been the work of Schumpeter and of the so-called ‘Austrian school’ of economics. Schumpeter classic formulation of “entrepreneur” as an innovator is summarised in J.A.SCHUMPETER, *Economic Theory and Entrepreneurial History*, in *Essays on Entrepreneurs, Innovations, Business Cycles and the Evolution of Capitalism*, R.V.CLEMENCE ed., New Brunswick and London, 1989, pp.253-271. A useful synthetic and critical analysis of the various definitions of entrepreneur is in M.CASSON, *The Entrepreneur. An Economic Theory*, Oxford, 1982; see also P.KLEP, *Entrepreneurship and the Transformation of the Economy, an Introduction*, in P.KLEP and E.VAN CAUWENBERGHE eds., *Entrepreneurship and the Transformation of the Economy (10<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century). Essays in honour of Herman Van der Wee*, Leuven, 1994, pp.59-79.

Moreover, this definition stresses the importance of coordination rather than allocation, therefore emphasising the dynamic aspect of their business activities, something crucial to considerate when analysing periods of such fast and profound economic and social change.

### **The Greek Diaspora in Venice.**

The Republic of Venice, due to its close links with the Byzantine Empire, since its origins had a sizeable Greek community established in town, mostly taking care of the commerce between southern Europe and the areas under the Empire. The size of this community increased slowly but steadily after the events of the Crusade of 1204, when Venetian direct presence in the eastern Mediterranean increased dramatically. By the sixteenth century, as a consequence of the Ottoman steady advance in the territories of the eastern Mediterranean, the majority of Greeks who established themselves in Venice were either subjects of the Republic, or refugees who declared as their place of origin territories which were previously held by the Republic.<sup>7</sup> Only a minority seemed to have escaped from areas under direct Ottoman rule, or directly threatened by the Ottoman advance.<sup>8</sup> Classification is not so easy though. With the Ottoman advancing for such a long time, and therefore causing a constant movement of people into the Venetian held territories in Greece, it becomes extremely difficult – not to say impossible – to distinguish where exactly these people came from. It is possible to hypothesize that for several of them arriving as refugees to the Venetian territories in the Levant was just the first step towards a more drastic move to Italy/Venice/the West.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For example Lepanto lost in 1499, the territories of Modon and Coron lost in 1500, Monemvasia and Napoli di Romania lost in 1540, Cyprus lost in 1571.

<sup>8</sup> M.I.MANOUSSACAS, 'The History of the Greek Confraternity (1498-1953) and the Activity of the Greek Institute of Venice (1966-1982)', in *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook*, 5 (1989), pp.321-394, p.323; D.J.GEAKOPOLOS, *The Diaspora Greeks: the genesis of modern Greek national consciousness*, in N.P.DIAMANDOUROS ET ALIA eds., *Hellenism and the First Greek War of Liberation (1821-1830): Continuity and Change*, Thessaloniki, 1976, pp.59-77, p.60.

<sup>9</sup> F.THIRIET, *Sur les communautés grecque et albanaise à Venise*, in *Venezia centro di mediazione*, cit., vol.I, pp.217-231, the topic of the origin of the Greeks present in town is discussed especially at the pages 218-219. This is an issue touched by the majority of the authors which dealt with the Greek Diaspora to Venice, see B.G.SPIRIDONAKIS, *Essays on the Historical Geography of the Greek World in the Balkans during the Turkokratia*, Thessaloniki, 1977, pp.124-127; A.E.VACALOPOULOS, *The Greek Nation. The Cultural and Economic Background of Modern Greek Society*, New Brunswick, 1976, pp.45-6; IDEM, *The Flight of the Inhabitants of Greece to the Aegean Islands, Crete, and Morea during the Turkish Invasions (Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries)*, in A.E.LAIYOU-THOMADAKIS ed., *Charanis Studies. Essays in honour of Peter Charanis*, New Brunswick, 1980, pp.272-283; J.HARRIS, *Greek emigres in the West, 1400-1520*, Camberley, 1995, p.25; G.PLUMIDIS, 'Considerazioni sulla popolazione greca a Venezia nella seconda metà del '500', in *Studi Veneziani*, XIV (1972), pp.219-226.

What we can say is that the Greek presence in Venice was a mix of refugees and Venetian subjects of its dominions, and to distinguish between them is rather difficult. The Ionian islands were a favourite destination for refugees from mainland Greece. Their peculiar social structure, particularly of the islands of Zante and Cephalonia which were almost completely deserted when they entered into Venetian control, meant a complete absence of any feudal structure.<sup>10</sup> When, first Zante in 1485, and then Cephalonia in 1500, became part of Venice's dominions, the main concern of the Senate had been firstly to repopulate them and then to promote agriculture, especially grain production. Venice put a great deal of effort into repopulation through fiscal incentives, favouring the immigration of people from territories under Ottoman control – a large number came from the outposts of Modone and Corone which had just been lost by the Venetians to the Ottomans. To these immigrants the Republic granted the ownership of parcels of land, advantageous long-term fiscal incentives and commercial privileges.<sup>11</sup> A sizeable percentage of these settlers were *stradioti*, a light cavalry corps mostly composed of Morean Greeks,<sup>12</sup> which had been organized by the Venetians in their Levant territories during the Middle Ages. The Islands were also the destination of a small but steady stream of immigrants and refugees from the near territories under Ottoman control. All these factors created a very peculiar property situation, based on a large proportion of small landowners. A unique land structure – particularly in that area and in that period – on which the currants boom would later have quite dramatic consequences.<sup>13</sup>

Zante and Cephalonia also benefited from an extremely advantageous strategic position, which made them central to the routes between the western and eastern Mediterranean,

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<sup>10</sup> Only Corfu had some feudal jurisdiction, albeit of late creation, not being “properly divided into fiefs until it was added to the dominions of Charles of Anjou, King of Naples, in 1267”, in M.PRATT, *Britain's Greek Empire. Reflections on the history of the Ionian Islands from the fall of Byzantium*, London, 1978, p.3.

<sup>11</sup> On the repopulation of Zante and the issues around it see the second part of *Archivio di Stato di Venezia* (from now on ASV), *Miscellanea Codici*, serie ii diversi, n.42. “Storia antica e moderna del Zante, scritta già in latino da Monsignore Baldassar Maria Remondini Bassanese, vescovo del Zante, e di Cefalonia. Ed ora tradotta in italiano, e accresciuta di molte considerabili aggiunte da Niccolò Serra nobile Zacintio, Ricopiata l'anno 1793”. A brief summary of the history of the Ionian islands is in W.D.WRIGLEY, *The Diplomatic Significance of Ionian Neutrality, 1821-31*, New York, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> D.VLASSI, ‘La politica annonaria di Venezia a Cefalonia: il fondaco delle biade (sec. XVI-XVIII)’, in *Thesaurismata*, 25 (1995), pp.274-318, pp.274-275; M.I.MANOUSSACAS, ‘The History of the Greek Confraternity’, cit., p.323; also D.A.ZAKYTHINOS, *The Making of Modern Greece, from Byzantium to Independence*, Oxford, 1976, pp.116.

<sup>13</sup> On this issues, may I refer to M.FUSARO, *Uva passa. Una guerra commerciale tra Venezia e l'Inghilterra, 1540-1640*, Venezia, 1996.

for this reason commercial activity immediately thrived on the Islands.<sup>14</sup> Wine, oil and currants were their main products, and from the middle of the sixteenth until the end of the seventeenth century their economies were going to be completely dominated by currants. Their geographical position at the crossroads of the Mediterranean trade routes, which made them a favourite stop-over for ships, paired with the Venetian presence which had important cultural, economic and social consequences, made the Ionian islands extremely exposed to Western influence, and Ionians extremely active within the Venetian system and beyond, for example the Greek community in the commercial entrepôt of Leghorn also had a strong presence of people from Zante.<sup>15</sup>

The Greek community in Venice was the largest and longest lived in the West,<sup>16</sup> and the Greeks were the largest foreign community in town during the early modern period. At the end of the sixteenth century they were estimated with figures varying between 4,000 and 5,000 (in a population roughly estimated at around 150,000), the main problem of these estimates was of course the very fluctuating nature of part of the community. The presence of captains and sailors, and of people frequently moving between Venice and her dominions makes it very difficult to be precise about their numbers.<sup>17</sup> Particularly because of the important economic role they played in the trades with the eastern Mediterranean, the traditional area of Venetian economic expansion, the Venetian government welcomed Greeks. From 1271 special legislation favouring Greeks resident in Venice had been put in place by the Great Council, in 1513 the Council of Ten permitted a church of Greek rite to be built in town.<sup>18</sup> The community itself acquired a

<sup>14</sup> A.E.VACALOPOULOS, *The Greek Nation.*, cit., pp.270-290.

<sup>15</sup> D.A.ZAKYTHINOS, *The Making of Modern Greece*, cit., pp.107-9; L.FRATTARELLI FISCHER, *Alle radici di una identità composita. La 'nazione' greca a Livorno*, in *Le iconostasi di Livorno. Patrimonio iconografico post-bizantino*, G.PASSARELLI ed., Pisa, 2001, pp.49-61; D.A.ZAKYTHINOS, *The Making of Modern Greece*, cit., pp.120.

<sup>16</sup> G.FEDALTO, *Ricerche storiche sulla posizione giuridica ed ecclesiastica dei Greci a Venezia nei secoli XV e XVI*, Firenze, 1967; M.I.MANOUSSACAS, 'The History of the Greek Confraternity', cit.; IDEM, *Οι μεγάλες παροικίες της Ιταλίας (Βενετίας, Νεπόλης, Λιβόρνου, Τεργέστης) από την άλωση της Κωνσταντινουπόλης (1453) ως σίμψηρα*, in J.M.FOSSEY ed., *Proceeding of the First International Congress on the Hellenic Diaspora. From Antiquity to Modern Times*, vol.ii, *From 1453 to Modern Times*, Amsterdam, 1991, pp.1-12; B.IMHAUS, *Le minoranze orientali a Venezia, 1300-1510*, Roma, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> F.THIRIET, *Sur les communautés grecque et albanaise à Venise*, in *Venezia centro di mediazione*, cit., vol.I, pp.217-231, p.219; on this see also the figures in G.FEDALTO, *Le minoranze straniere a Venezia tra politica e legislazione*, in *Venezia centro di mediazione*, cit., pp.143-162, especially at the pages 147-9. The reference text on the demography of the Republic of Venice is still D.BELTRAMI, *Storia della popolazione di Venezia dalla fine del secolo XVI alla caduta della Repubblica*, Padova, 1954.

<sup>18</sup> G.FEDALTO, *Ricerche storiche*, cit., pp.16, 29.

juridical status as a confraternity in 1498,<sup>19</sup> by 1573 the beautiful church of St. George, focal centre of the Greek presence in town, was completed, thanks to the “Greek ship owners, captains and seamen who, on each voyage to Venice, made a more or less voluntary contribution to the treasury of the colony”.<sup>20</sup> The majority of Greeks lived in ten parishes within the *Castello* wards, with the greatest number concentrated in five parishes bordering or closest to the Arsenal.<sup>21</sup>

The Greek presence in Venice has been thoroughly studied in regard to the cultural impact that particularly the intellectual emigration from Byzantine territories had on the development of Humanism and Renaissance,<sup>22</sup> whilst its economic and social history has been neglected. Still, it was their crucial economic role that had made them welcome in the Republic, and merchants undoubtedly constituted the backbone of the Greek presence in Venice, immediately followed by skilled artisans – several of whom worked in the Arsenal (the state-owned shipbuilding factory) – and sailors.<sup>23</sup> Greek merchants acted in Venice especially as mediators and organizers of Balkan and Eastern Mediterranean trades. Apart from the cultural affinities with Venice, which certainly helped their settling, the main reason that persuaded the Greeks to remain in Venice, were the opportunities offered by Venice in her position as a ‘colonial power’ in the Greek world. This, paired with the collapse of the Byzantine Empire and the consequent establishment on its territories of the Ottoman Empire, had provided the Greeks with splendid opportunities to perform the role of economic middlemen, connecting their

<sup>19</sup> In Venice the Greeks maintained their culture and religious habits, and they remained a “diaspora as an ethnic collectivity which lacks a territorial base within a certain polity”, in J.A.ARMSTRONG, ‘Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas’, in *The American Political Science Review*, 70 (1976), pp.393-408, p.393.

<sup>20</sup> D.J.GEANAKOPOLOS, *The Diaspora Greeks*, cit., pp.59-77, p.62. On the building of the church see also M.I.MANOUSACAS, ‘The History of the Greek Confraternity’, cit., pp.322-326. On the financial contribution of sailors and captains to the treasury of the community see also A.E.VACALOPOULOS, *The Greek Nation.*, cit., pp.49-52; and K.PANAGHIOTOPOULOU, ‘Ελληνες ναυτικοί και πλοιοκτήτες από τα παλαιότερα οικονομικά βιβλία της Ελληνικής Αδελφότητας Βενετίας (1536-1576)’, in *Thesaurismata*, 11 (1974), pp.284-352.

<sup>21</sup> E.BURKE, “‘Your humble and devoted servants’: Greco-Venetian view of the Serenissima”, in *Street Noises, Civic Spaces and Urban Identities in Italian Renaissance Cities*, F.W.KENT ed., Monash Publications in History, 34 (2000), pp.10-16.

<sup>22</sup> D.J.GEANAKOPOLOS, *Constantinople and the West. Essays on the Late Byzantine (Palaeologan) and Italian Renaissances and the Byzantine and Roman Churches*, Madison, 1989. The situation of the Greeks in Venice and Padua is analysed particularly at the pages 27-37, where there is also a short useful bibliography on the subject. D.J.GEANAKOPOLOS, *Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1972; J.HARRIS, *Greek emigres*, cit.; A.E.VACALOPOULOS, *The Greek Nation.*, cit., pp.180-1. D.A.ZAKYTHINOS, *The Making of Modern Greece*, cit., pp.116-9.

<sup>23</sup> D.J.GEANAKOPOLOS, *The Diaspora Greeks*, cit., pp.59-77, p.61. Ersie Burke estimates merchants and shopkeepers as constituting 30 % of the community, “maritime jobs”, in which she includes captains and crews as 24 %, and artisans as 14 %. I wish to thank her for providing me with these informations. On the

places of origin with Western Europe, taking advantage of the Venetian trade structure and network. This allows us to apply also to the sixteenth century the comments written by Staianovich forty years ago on the role played by the Greek merchants during the eighteenth century:

the Greek merchants of the Mediterranean, [...] were constantly in contact with the underdeveloped areas of the eastern Mediterranean and economically well-developed area of the West, [therefore] developed new business habits and a new business outlook as a result of the dual nature of their business relations.<sup>24</sup>

For Ionian subjects of the Republic it was easy and more profitable to follow their business from Venice than from their Islands,<sup>25</sup> and this was particularly valid for those who were involved in long-distance trade. Being part of the Venetian network offered a certain level of protection, as the government was interested to keep alive the trade with the area, and not to let its dominions depopulate.<sup>26</sup> On top of this, being a Venetian subject guaranteed an individual to be part of a commercial system that, albeit in crisis, was still powerful and had a capillary presence in the Mediterranean, something that afforded good opportunities to people who were ready to take advantage of them. These Greek merchant-entrepreneurs, active under Venetian protection and sailing with the Venetian flag, had therefore all interests in keeping a good relation with their overlord, and although there were instances in which their economic interests diverged, in the long term the relationship between the Republic of Venice and their Greek subjects remained good. The Greeks present in Venice and in the dominions always behaved as ‘active’ subjects of the Republic, constantly engaged in lobbying, trying to influence the public policies of their host society to suit their own economic interests.<sup>27</sup>

As ‘subjects’ – hardly any Greek asked to become Venetian citizen in the sixteenth century –<sup>28</sup> the Greeks could take full advantage of the privileges and facilitations available to Venetian merchants in the eastern Mediterranean (consuls, tax rebates,

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Arsenal see R.C.DAVIS, *Shipbuilders of the Venetian Arsenal. Workers and Workplace in the pre-industrial City*, Baltimore and London, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> T.STOIANOVICH, ‘The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant’, in *Journal of Economic History*, XX (1960), pp.234-313, p.305.

<sup>25</sup> J.HARRIS, *Greek emigres*, cit., p.57. See also D.J.GEAKOPOLOS, *Greek Scholars in Venice.*, cit., p.54.

<sup>26</sup> A.E.VACALOPOULOS, *The Greek Nation*, cit., p.75.

<sup>27</sup> On the issues of Greeks trying to influence Venetian economic policy, at least for the eastern Mediterranean, may I refer to M.FUSARO, *Uva Passa*, cit., passim.

<sup>28</sup> I owe this information to Ersie Burke, who discusses this issue in her forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation. Venetian citizenship was of two kinds: *de intus* and *de intus et de extra*, the second one allowed to claim all the benefits of being a Venetian in all commercial endeavours. On citizenship see A.BELLAVITIS, “‘Per cittadini metterete...’”. La stratificazione della società veneziana cinquecentesca tra norma giuridica e riconoscimento sociale’, in *Quaderni Storici*, 89 (1995), pp.359-383; on the issue of citizenship for foreigners see G.FEDALTO, *Le minoranze straniere*, cit., vol.i, pp.143-162, p.151.

customs discount). Their role in maintaining open the trade with that area was well appreciated by Venetians. A classic case in which “because of the their special skills, dominant ethnic elites have often calculatingly assigned advantageous roles to mobilized diaspora members”.<sup>29</sup> These Greeks described themselves as ‘Venetians’, thereby acquiring invisibility to the historian. In reality they were ‘Venetian subjects’ not ‘Venetians’, this ambiguity was maintained on the one hand because it was probably not seen as such, but also because it carried substantial economic advantages. The Greek commercial network was strong and geographically spread, ethnically homogenous and with a very strong common religious affiliation, all these were factors that gave it a very strong internal cohesion which made it very effective in the handling of commercial activities over long distance trades. Its major strength was in their surviving Greek connections in the former Byzantine territories, in their existing commercial networks with the Balkan Jews – strengthened through the Jews active in Venice itself,<sup>30</sup> in their specific knowledge of the languages and usages of these areas. All these factors made them essential in this phase of western European capitalism in which some ethnic minorities – Jews, Greeks, Armenians – found themselves better equipped to provide economic services, thanks to their scattered geographical presence and to the strong bonds of mutual trusts that develop in such communities, which very well served to guarantee, amongst other things, effective contractual enforcement and a lowering of transaction costs.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Ionian islands and Crete.**

The economy of the Ionian islands had, from very early on, been dependant on foreign markets as an outlet for production. This was not a novelty for the Venetian eastern dominions: both Cyprus and Crete had produced massively for the export market, which also included Venice. And they both had been under the pressures of the market that

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<sup>29</sup> J.A.ARMSTRONG, ‘Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas’, cit., p.396.

<sup>30</sup> A.TENENTI, *Naufrages, Corsaires et Assurances Maritimes à Venise, 1592-1609*, Paris, 1959, p.14. The Zantiot Jew Moisé Copio was a crucial figure in these contacts.

<sup>31</sup> On this subject the bibliography is immense, a recent critical synthesis of the debate and the bibliography is in S.SUBRAHMANYAM ed., *Merchant Networks in the Early Modern World*, London, 1996.

tended to privilege other cultivations at the expenses of grain.<sup>32</sup> Crete from the fourteenth century produced sugar<sup>33</sup> and wine for the export market; the trade in ‘malmsley’ wine between Crete and England had even been at the centre of a short tariff war between the two countries during the late fifteenth century.<sup>34</sup> And it was only the great productivity of the lands of Cyprus that allowed it not only to produce for the export market – mainly cotton and oil – but also to be known as the ‘granary’ of the Republic.

From the economic perspective, Crete especially bears marked similarities with the one in the Ionian islands.<sup>35</sup> There too local merchants and ship owners tried to keep active the trade route to the north of Europe – that is to say to their export markets – and, as we will have occasion to see later on, in several cases their attempt went hand in hand with the activities of the Ionian merchants who are the main subject of this paper. Like Zante and Cephalonia, not only Crete had a large share of its agricultural output destined for export. And, like the Ionian islands, it enjoyed a strategically central place in the eastern Mediterranean: all the *mude* to Constantinople, Alessandria or Syria converged on the island.<sup>36</sup>

From the mid-sixteenth century, as the Turkish threat to her possession grew, Venice implemented in Crete a series of economic measures designed to improve the economic situation of the local population,<sup>37</sup> hoping to maintain them loyal to Venice. Seafaring benefited from these measures, with local ship owners enlarging the scope of their trades beyond the eastern Mediterranean and the routes to Venice.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> M.KNAPTON, *Tra Dominante e Dominio (1517-1630)*, in G.COZZI, M.KNAPTON, G.SCARABELLO, *La Repubblica di Venezia nell'età moderna*, 2 vols, Torino, 1986-1992, vol.2, pp.203-325, p.235.

<sup>33</sup> D.JACOBY, *La production du sucre en Crète vénitienne. L'échec d'une entreprise économique*, in *Ροδόνια: τιμή στον Μ.Ι.Μανούσακα*, Rethimno, 1994, pp.167-180; the Cretan sugar production had developed also thanks to the decline of the Syrian and Egyptian sugar production, on these see E.ASHTOR, *Levantine Sugar Industry in the Late Middle Ages: A Case of Technological Decline*, in A.L.UDOVITCH ed., *The Islamic Middle East, 700-1900: Studies in Economic and Social History*, Princeton, 1981, pp.91-132.

<sup>34</sup> M.FUSARO, *L'uva passa*, cit., p.13. On avoiding customs for foreigners exporting wines from Candia, more than a century afterwards see *Guildhall Library*, Ms 21317, vol.10, n.907 (6-4-1596).

<sup>35</sup> Unlike Zante and Cephalonia, marvellous documentary sources have survived for the history of Crete under Venice (1211-1669), see M.I.MANOUSSACAS, *L'isola di Creta sotto il dominio veneziano, problemi e ricerche*, in A.PERTUSI ed., *Venezia e il Levante fino al secolo XV*, vol.i, tomo 2, Firenze, 1973, pp.473-514.

<sup>36</sup> S.BORSARI, *Il dominio veneziano a Creta nel XIII secolo*, Napoli, 1963, p.68.

<sup>37</sup> C.MALTEZOU, *The historical and social context*, in D.HOLTON ed., *Literature and Society in Renaissance Crete*, Cambridge, 1991, pp.17-47, pp.29-30.

<sup>38</sup> C.MALTEZOU, *The historical and social context*, cit., pp.30-32.

The export of wine was crucial for the Cretan economy, but sugar and cotton were also extremely important.<sup>39</sup> Cretan wine was rather popular in England and Flanders, in addition to the previously mentioned tariff war, during the reign of Henry VIII wine exports to England had increased to such an extent that an English consul was appointed in Candia to take care of this specific trade.<sup>40</sup>

Already in the middle of the fifteenth century legislation had been implemented in Crete prohibiting the rental of foreign vessels to transport westward (England, Flanders, Hamburg and Danzig)<sup>41</sup> the wines of the Island, because the traffic had to be kept on 'Venetian' vessels.<sup>42</sup> This had some positive effect on local ship owners, a century later, these policies of strengthening the local shipyards and naval constructions helped the emergence of some ship owners of international stature, later on we will see some of them involved on these north European commercial routes alongside the Ionians. Unfortunately the problems of the Venetian merchant marine were structural and could not be solved by these legislative attempts, mostly concerned with offering some tax rebates for people willing to build galleons.<sup>43</sup> If the policy of mid-fifteenth century had met with some success, its later counterpart did not achieve the desired result. By that time the English were getting a tight grip on naval traffic in the area, and Venetians were no longer able to counteract it effectively.<sup>44</sup>

It can certainly be hypothesized that the presence of a buoyant export market can be considered an incentive for producers to own ships and become directly involved in the commercialisation of their goods, thereby reducing their reliance on third parties and buyers to transport their goods. Venice itself had taken up the commercialisation of the goods in the past, but by the second half of the sixteenth century, the impending crisis

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<sup>39</sup> D.JACOBY, *La production de sucre*, cit.,; see at pp.167-8, 174-5 how Venice had allowed the export of sugar on private ships since 1334 to help the local production. U.TUCCI, *Il commercio del vino nell'economia cretese*, in *Venezia e Creta. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Iraklion-Chianà, 30 settembre – 5 ottobre 1997)*, G.ORTALLI ed., Venezia, 1998, pp.183-206; IDEM, *Le commerce venitien du vin de Crete*, in K.FRIEDLAND ed., *Maritime food transport*, Köln, 1994, pp.199-211.

<sup>40</sup> C.MALTEZOU, *The historical and social context*, cit., pp.30.

<sup>41</sup> Michele Sumacchi in the early 1590s still exported Rethimo wines to Danzig, see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, busta (from now on b.) 7866 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.27r/v (11-2-1590).

<sup>42</sup> U.TUCCI, *Il commercio del vino*, cit., p.187. This legislation was reinforced in 1488, see ASV, *Senato Mar*, registro (from now on reg.)12, carte (from now on cc.) 156r-157v (18-11-1488).

<sup>43</sup> Interesting remarks on the Venetian attempts to increment the naval construction industry are in M.COSTANTINI, *I galeoni di Candia nella congiuntura marittima veneziana cinque-seicentesca*, in *Venezia e Creta.*, cit., pp.207-231; and in F.BAROUTSOS, 'Sovention per fabricar galeoni. O Βενετικός μερκαντιλισμος και οι αντανακλάσεις του στην Κρητική κοινωνία του υστέρου 16ου αιώνα', in *Thesaurismata*, 29 (1999), pp.187-223.

<sup>44</sup> U.TUCCI, *Il commercio del vino*, cit., pp.201-204; M.FUSARO, *Uva passa.*, cit., pp.13, 27-44.

of the Venetian merchant marine certainly acted, in Crete and in the Ionian islands, as a catalyst to encourage the locals to get involved in shipping.

The connection between these Greek merchants and England is extremely interesting to analyse also because of a common strategy that both these Greeks and the English seemed to share at this particular juncture. Both groups seemed to specialize in catering for the same sector of the consumer market – the lower middle – both in terms of production and of distribution. They also shared a strong interest in naval transport for third parties, the English at least in the Mediterranean, both in short and long distance haulage. The existence of these common objectives helped build and structure a relationship that was beneficial to both parties for a long time. Venice fulfilled the ungratifying role of ‘common enemy’, at least in terms of economic policy, and therefore it represented the perfect ‘cultural’ counterpart to the Anglo-Greek alliance. The convergence of English and Greek commercial interests – above and beyond the trade in currants – proved an insurmountable obstacle to the declining forces of the Republic. Beyond the everyday common goal of paying as little customs duties as possible, there were clear convergences of commercial and maritime interests between Greek and English merchants, and this proved untenable for Venice. Whilst it is important to make all the necessary qualifications concerning the quality and, especially the scale of the trade, it is striking to see how much both groups tended to concentrate not on luxury products but on middling ones, which were aimed at a large market. It is also interesting to note that in both countries it was the same social group that was engaged in the development of international trade.

### **Greek shipping, English shipping, Anglo-Greek shipping.**

Of greater significance in the development of the national movement was the emergence in the course of the eighteenth century of an entrepreneurial, widely dispersed and prosperous mercantile class, whose activities were as much based outside as within the Ottoman domains. Merchants of Greek origin or culture came to dominate imperial trade, exporting raw materials and importing western manufactures and colonial wares. Greek became the *lingua franca* of Balkan commerce. Greek mercantile *paroikies*, or communities, were established throughout the Mediterranean, the Balkans, central Europe and southern Russia and as far afield as India. At the same time Greek sea captains, based principally on the three ‘nautical’ islands of Hydra, Spetsai and Psara, were busy laying the foundations of what, in the twentieth century, was to become the largest merchant fleet in the world. The continental blockade imposed by the British during the

French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars afforded highly profitable opportunities to those prepared to risk running it.<sup>45</sup>

This is the traditional interpretation of the birth of ‘Greek shipping’, but all of this has its roots in the developments in the Ionian islands during the long sixteenth century and therefore needs to be antedated by two centuries, at least as far as the Greek territories under Venetian rule are concerned. This is extremely interesting because, although we have ample evidence of such activities on the part of the Greek entrepreneurial networks for the later period – mostly the eighteenth century – this Anglo-Venetian evidence allows us to antedate this phenomenon whilst, at the same time, to enrich the picture of Greeks economic activities in the previous two centuries.

The ancient maritime traditions of the Ionian islands are not a surprise, Cephalonia is recognized as the one of the cradles of Greek ship owners, and the Ionians activities in the Black Sea in the eighteenth and nineteenth century are considered fundamental in the development of Greek-owned shipping.<sup>46</sup> What is interesting for our purposes is that the Ionians’ involvement in shipping seems to be particularly strong in times of transition, when probably the inner cohesiveness of these ethnic diasporas is particularly effective in overcoming the disruption in long-distance trades. In the late sixteenth century economic transition, the Greeks acted as a bridge between the periods of Venetian and English-dominated traffic; in the last quarter of the nineteenth century “they covered the transitional period from sail to steam and from combined profession to specialization”<sup>47</sup>.

The roots of the Anglo-Greek alliance that was at the basis of the trade between England and Venice’s territories, are to be found in the web of contacts established with English merchants by the Greek traders who sent their ships to England in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Only private ships kept the sea-route to England open in the central part of the sixteenth century, after the state galleys abandoned their trips to the north in 1533.<sup>48</sup> And after the wave of bankruptcies of Italian merchants in 1570,<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> R.CLOGG, *A Concise History*, cit., pp.24-25.

<sup>46</sup> G.HARLAFTIS, *Greece Shipowners and Greece, 1945-1975. From Separate Development to Mutual Interdependence*, London, 1993, p.11; IDEM, *A History of Greek-owned Shipping. The making of an international tramp fleet, 1830 to the present day*, London-New York, 1996, p.3.

<sup>47</sup> G.HARLAFTIS, *A History of Greek-owned Shipping.*, cit., p.70.

<sup>48</sup> M.FUSARO, *Uva passa*, cit., pp.9-19.

<sup>49</sup> See G.D.RAMSAY, *The Undoing of the Italian Mercantile Colony in Sixteenth Century London*, in *Textile History and Economic History*, N.B.HARTE and K.G.POINTING eds., Manchester, 1973, pp.22-49.

very few Venetians remained in London. Two of them are particularly interesting for us: Placido Ragazzoni and Giovanni da Riviera. The Republic did not have a diplomatic representative in England at that time, and Placido Ragazzoni acted as consul after being elected representative by the remaining merchants.<sup>50</sup> After Placido's return to Venice in the early 1580s, the only remaining Venetian in London was Giovanni da Riviera, a native of Zante and an agent of the Seguro family.<sup>51</sup> Da Riviera informally inherited Placido Ragazzoni's position,<sup>52</sup> and he was the key man who helped build a lasting commercial alliance between his fellow-countrymen and the founding members of the Levant Company.<sup>53</sup> In 1591 he finally became consul. He had been judged against the Florentine Bartolomeo Corsini<sup>54</sup> and Da Riviera had been finally preferred because not only he was a subject of the Republic – as the regulations for consulship preferred – but also because of his efforts in keeping the trade alive.<sup>55</sup>

Giovanni da Riviera appears also to have acted as agent of the Sumacchi, and it was in this capacity that he was embroiled in London in a long controversy about the quality of a shipment of currants which reached London from Zante, on the galleon 'Patti', which he claimed had been damaged during the journey. The events of this controversy are extremely interesting, showing us the extreme confidence with which two 'Venetians/Greeks', Giovanni da Riviera and Zuanne Ghisi, were acting within the

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<sup>50</sup> The Senate had begrudgingly approved his election in 1561, stating that no elections should have been made without express license from the College: *Calendar State Papers Venetian* (from now on *CSPVe*), vol.vii (1558-1580), London, 1890, Appendix 6, p.662.

<sup>51</sup> We know that Da Riviera was agent of the Seguros from the defence memorial written by Ottaviano Volterra in occasion of his trial for smuggling in 1589 [see infra]: "Zuanne Darevera [...] per ritrovarse a Londra alle facende di essi Sicuri, per li quali teniva casa" in ASV, *Quarantia Criminale*, b.103, fascicolo (from now on fasc.) 73, cc.77v-80r.

<sup>52</sup> Da Riviera's actions came also to the attention of the Venetian ambassador in Paris in 1586 (Giovanni Dolfin), who kept on receiving requests of information about him and his role, which he duly reported to the *Collegio*, see *CSPVe*, vol.viii, (1581-1591), London, 1894, n.350, p.163.

<sup>53</sup> The links of Greek merchants in London with Italian, particularly Venetian, merchants still rather strong in the eighteenth century, can be therefore traced back to the last stages of the Venetian mercantile presence in London at the end of the sixteenth century. On the eighteenth century Greek presence in London see J.HARRIS, *Greek emigres*, cit., pp.74.

<sup>54</sup> Filippo was born in Florence in 1538 and came to London in 1559, and within ten years was the largest importer in England of European goods besides being a substantial exporter. In 1579 his younger brother Bartholomew joined him, and by 1584 the name of the business was Bartolomew Corsini & co. The brother operated a considerable import-export business out of their house in Gracechurch Street. Agents across Europe corresponded with them in the course of their business activity.

<sup>55</sup> The Savi had been impressed by Corsini's contacts in England: "huomo che saria atto a fare questo servitio, et per far li Negotij delli Capponi, et altri Mercanti principali della Piazza"; but at the end they choose "Zuanne Darevera [Da Riviera] del Zante, suddito della Serenità Vostra, il quale con tutto, che habbia havuto delle disgratie per occasion del fallimento delli Seguri dal Zante e pure tornato in esser, et ha fatto, et fa tuttavia delle faccende de Mercantie principali di questa Piazza", in ASV, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, Risposte*, reg.138, c.166v; another copy in *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, b.34 n.s., fasc.v, cc.n.n. (27-2-1591). The regulations for the election of consul had been published in 1586, see ASV, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, b.34 n.s., fasc.v, cc.n.n. (7-3-1586).

English legal system. After several notarial documents in which the two men contested the reciprocal accusation,<sup>56</sup> they agreed to an arbitrage sentence and, intriguingly, they choose two English wholesale merchants as arbiters.<sup>57</sup>

In the territories of the Republic of Venice, the English merchants preferred commercial partners who were indeed Greeks and Venetian *cittadini*. Extremely few Venetian patricians were involved in these trades, and a handful of other Italians and Ragusean complete the picture. To understand the English's mercantile web, and their behaviour in the Islands, it is therefore essential to understand their connection with the Greek network. Giacomo<sup>58</sup> and Placido Ragazzoni, Giovanni Da Riviera and Bartolomeo Corsini were the links between the English and the Ionians.<sup>59</sup> They were connected to a tight web of merchants who operated within the triangle: Venice - Zante and Cephalonia - London.

First among them were the powerful Greek family of the Seguro,<sup>60</sup> both merchants and ship owners. The family was divided between Venice and Zante, but some members had

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<sup>56</sup> The notary was Thomas Short. In the 1570s there were around 30 notaries active in the City of London. They played a strong role as intermediaries between Englishmen and foreigners thanks to their specialism in making international legal documents. Thomas Short and Paul Typoots are the two London notaries that appear in acts involving our Greek merchants, and several Venetians as well, unfortunately no notarial registers has been discovered for any English notary. C.W.BROOKS, R.H.HELMHOLZ and P.G.STEIN eds., *Notaries Public in England since the Reformation*, Norwich, 1991, pp.66-69, 28.

<sup>57</sup> For some mysterious reasons the papers of this English controversy are to be found in a miscellaneous *busta* in the Venetian archives: ASV, *Giudici del Forestier, Miscellanea*, b.3, fasc.2 and 8. On the *Giudici del Forestier*, a Venetian civil court of first instance with jurisdictions on foreigners, I am currently preparing an article.

<sup>58</sup> Giacomo Ragazzoni is a classic case of Venetian merchant-entrepreneur, extremely representative of a new kind of non-noble Venetian merchant, who managed to acquire a large fortune with an intelligent diversification of investments. Equally interested in landed investments in the Venetian *Terraferma* and in commercial enterprises all around Europe (still very young he set up a company with Giacomo Foscarini for trading between Venice and England), he was also active in the insurance business and in the Venetian financial market, on him see: L.PEZZOLO, *Sistema di valori e attività economica a Venezia, 1530-1630*, in S.CAVACIOCCHI ed., *L'impresa, l'industria, commercio, banca, secoli XIII-XVIII*, (Atti della XXII Settimana di Studi), Firenze, 1991, pp.981-987, pp.986-7.

<sup>59</sup> For an example of these connections see *Guildhall Library*, Ms 21317, vol.10, n.995 (23-7-1599) where Giovanni da Riviera received instructions about some deals with the Corsini in London so that they could repay back some credit they had with the Sumacchi. Such documents are scattered throughout the "Corsini papers" in the Guildhall Library in London.

<sup>60</sup> The Seguro family had been for a long time one of the most powerful of the island of Zante. Already in 1542 the *Rettore* at that time wrote of them "Sonno li primi in questo luoco, sonno conivuti in consanguinità con tutti li altri cittadini, hanno la mittà di questa Isola in sua mano", in ASV, *Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere di Rettori e altre cariche*, b.296 (Zante 1506-1749), fasc.i, cc.n.n. (25-8-1542). Some additional information on the Seguro family can also be gathered from E.R.RANGABÉS, *Livre d'or de la noblesse ionienne*, vol.3, Athens, 1927, pp.242-270; and L.K.ZOH, *Λέξικον ιστορικόν και λαογράφικόν Ζάκυνθου*, vol.2, Athens, 1963, pp.585-589 (on the Sumacchi family see the pp.603-4); it has to be noted that the genealogies presented in both texts are studded with mistakes and imprecisions,

some connections with Crete, mostly through marriages. Here the focus will be on the two brothers sons of Costantino: Agesilao acting from Zante and Marco moving between Zante and Venice. They used Venetian-built ships, but also bought and commissioned some to be built abroad.<sup>61</sup>

Buying ships abroad was a classic way in which Venetian and Greek merchants and ship owners responded to the crisis of shipbuilding in Venice. The ships were then naturalized, and could be used taking full advantage of the benefits that were in place for Venetian ships. It was, of course, a policy open to abuse and which certainly did not help to overcome the shipbuilding crisis. Still in 1627 legislation was being put into place to try to regulate these issues.<sup>62</sup>

Marco Seguro and his brother had been involved in the grain trade to Venice, and we also know that they had trade contacts with Genoa.<sup>63</sup> Marco had very close links with England, Thomas Sanders was a guest of Marco Seguro at Zante in 1584, and some of his party remained at the Island waiting for a passage back to England on one of his ships.<sup>64</sup> These reached England well into the late 1580s carrying currants and oil, for other merchants of Zante as well.<sup>65</sup> From the papers of the only currants smuggling trial that has survived,<sup>66</sup> Marco Seguro's image as a merchant and ship owner of international stature comes out strengthened. His ships appeared to have been regularly trading with England, and on this route he employed Englishmen as captains.<sup>67</sup> Even the

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particularly for the early period up to the end of the eighteenth century, therefore any information gathered from them needs to be thoroughly vetted through some other evidence.

<sup>61</sup> ASV, *Collegio, Risposte di dentro*, filza (from now on f.) 7, cc.n.n. (27-5-1581 and 29-7-1581). They had particularly close contact with Danzig, where they commissioned some large vessels (1200 *botti*) to be built for them.

<sup>62</sup> ASV, *Senato Mar*, f. 260, cc.n.n. (22-12-1627).

<sup>63</sup> See ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.6533 (Luca Gabrieli), cc.6v-7v (4-1-1586), and *ibidem*, cc.16v-17v (10-1-1586).

<sup>64</sup> They will then find an earlier passage on an English ship. See *The voyage made to Tripolis in Barbarie, in the yeere 1584, with a ship called the Iesus, wherein the adventures and distress of some Englishmen are truly reported, and other necessarie circumstances observed. Written by Thomas Sanders*, in HAKLUYT R., *The Principall Navigations. Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, D.DEERS-QUINN and R.A.SKELTON eds., Cambridge, 1965, pp.198-199.

<sup>65</sup> *Guildhall Library*, Ms. 22,274, n.1394 (8-3-1591). Not all their ventures were successful, for example in 1587 they would lose a cargo of currants in a shipwreck in Gibraltar ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.6534 (Luca e Giulio Gabrieli), cc.34r/v (6-2-1587).

<sup>66</sup> ASV, *Quarantia Criminale*, b.193, fasc.73. The smuggling trial was about a very complex deal between Greeks and English merchants that involved the delivery of currants – free of customs – in exchange for textiles. Several of these deals, forbidden by reiterated Venetian legislation, characterised the currants trade, few were discovered, and even less were prosecuted successfully. The trial is recounted in detail in M.FUSARO, *Uva Passa*, cit., pp.108-115.

<sup>67</sup> We know of a shipment of tin on the ship “Segura, patron Danes Carpenter”, from ASV, *Quarantia Criminale*, b.103, fasc.73, cc.37r/v. Trut and Daernes – agents of Baying and Holmden, hired the “nave Madonna di Schioppo, parcenevole Marco Sicuro, patron Danit Carpenter inglese” for another delivery of

ship he bought with Ottaviano Volterra specifically for the deal at the origin of the trial was crewed by Englishmen.<sup>68</sup> He certainly enjoyed an equal partnership with his English counterparts. In addition to his activities as a merchant-entrepreneur and ship owner, Marco Seguro was also active in other economic endeavours, he was particularly interested in a project for the development of new technical solutions for windmills, in which he reinvested some of his profits.<sup>69</sup>

After the death of Marco and Agesilao in the late 1580s, a nephew called Agesilao took over. At some point in the early 1590s he suffered bankruptcy, but quickly recovered. Although he never reached the international stature of his uncles, the breadth of his interests and of his reputation is exemplified by the fact that in 1618 he was nominated consul for the “merchants subjects to the Turk”, and in 1623 he became consul for the English as well, a charge he kept until 1650.<sup>70</sup> He lived a very long life and until the middle of the seventeenth century he played a large role in the economy of Zante.<sup>71</sup>

Another important Greek family was the Sumacchi, particularly Giorgio and his son Michele. They were also both merchants and ship owners. And they too divided their interests between the Ionian islands and Venice, trading also with Candia, whence they exported Muscat wines to England.<sup>72</sup> Giorgio was based in Zante, where he acted as an intermediary between Venetian, English and local merchants.<sup>73</sup> Michele was based in

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currants, in *ibidem*, 37v-39r. See also ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.6533 (Luca Gabrieli), cc.16v-17v (10-1-1586).

<sup>68</sup> “Havendo il quel tempo salariato un patron Inglese con alquanti Marinari, tenendoli in questa Città comprò con detto Volterra essa nave parignota per 3300 ducati...”, in ASV, *Quarantia Criminale*, b.103, fasc.73, c.9v. Volterra was in partnership with Marco and Zuanne Seguro for deals with England, see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7866 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.422v-424r (12-4-1590).

<sup>69</sup> The petition for implementing his new design for windmills on the Lido is in ASV, *Collegio, Risposte di dentro*, f.6, cc.n.n. (1578); on the technological changes of wind and water mills in Venice see M.PITTERI, ‘I mulini della Repubblica di Venezia’, in *Studi Veneziani*, n.s. XL (2000), pp.15-39.

<sup>70</sup> As consul for the Turkish see: ASV, *Collegio, Risposte di dentro*, f.15, cc.n.n. (23-6-1618) and ASV, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, b.44 n.s., fasc.vii, cc.n.n. (9-7-1618). As consul for the English see: ASV, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, b.23 n.s., fasc.iii, cc.n.n. (12-8-1623); and ASV, *Collegio, Risposte di dentro*, f.41, cc.n.n. (3-8-1650).

<sup>71</sup> He was mainly involved in trades between the Ionian islands and Venice, see ASV, *Avogaria di Comun, Civile*, b.152, fasc.48.

<sup>72</sup> Their ship ‘Salvagna’, was blocked in Muros (Galitia) fully loaded with muscat wines, in ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7867 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.657v-658v (19-5-1590). One of the insurers of the ship was the same Antonio Tizzone, a Venetian, that at the beginning of the seventeenth century was still exporting wines to England on Venetian ships, see ASV, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, Risposte*, b.140, cc.149r/v; ASV, *Senato Mar*, f.117, cc.n.n. (20-9-1592); W.BRULEZ and G.DEVOS, *Merchants Flamands à Venise*, 2 vols, Bruxelles-Rome, 1965-86, vol.i, n.1294, p.423 (23-5-1602).

<sup>73</sup> See for example ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.6529 (Luca e Giulio Gabrieli), cc.110v-111r (1-4-1583). They also rented Flemish ships jointly with the Seguro, see W.BRULEZ and G.DEVOS, *Merchants Flamands*, cit., vol.ii, n.3803, p.670 (12-11-1618); *ibidem*, n.3805, pp.671-2 (17-11-1618); *ibidem*, n.3808, pp.672-3

Venice and was the owner of several ships employed mostly on the northern routes, he also invested part of his earnings in landed property in the Venetian *Terraferma*.<sup>74</sup> Michele Sumacchi appears active in Venice from the late 1570s, to begin with as the agent of Bartolomeo Zanoli, a Venetian merchant active in Antwerp with strong connections with London.<sup>75</sup> In the early 1580s Michele stretched himself financially to build his fleet,<sup>76</sup> in 1583 he had to sell one quarter of his new ship, the ‘Sumacchia’ to Taddeo Moresini to gain some liquidity, two years afterwards in fact he was able to buy it back after a very successful trip to Constantinople.<sup>77</sup> A few years afterwards the roles were reversed and it was a Venetian patrician that was in debt with Michele Sumacchi. Interestingly Piero Alvise Barbaro repaid his debt by renting him, at a nominal sum, all his properties in the island of Zante, where Michele’s father – Giorgio – took care of their administration.<sup>78</sup>

When Acerbo Velutelli lost his monopoly on currant imports into England, it was the Sumacchi whom he accused of being behind the establishment of the New Impost in Venice.<sup>79</sup> And they were also frequently mentioned in the smuggling trial’s papers for their regular contacts with English merchants.<sup>80</sup>

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(22-11-1618). Michele was also extremely active in the insurance business, see A.TENENTI, *Naufraques, Corsairs*, cit., passim.

<sup>74</sup> Large properties in Portobuffolè, next to Treviso, appear at his name from the beginning of the 1580s, see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7647 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.99v-100r (2-7-1580). In 1594 he sold – for what looks like a ‘favourable’ price – these rather large properties to his sister Caterina, see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7882 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.1193v-1194v (5-8-1594). Michele also bought land and water mills in Friuli, see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, reg.7877 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.595v-597v (5-2-1593); from this deed it appears that he also own several houses in *Castello* area of Venice. For activities in Rovigo see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7861 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.84r/v (29-4-1588). For other activities in the *Terraferma*, see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7865 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.476r-478r (8-8-1589).

<sup>75</sup> ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.11886 (Gerolamo Savina), cc.201v-202v (27-1-1576).

<sup>76</sup> For one such contracts, in this case for a medium size ship (600 *botti*) see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7854 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.385v-386v, 386v-389v (5-2-1584).

<sup>77</sup> ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7854 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.421v-422v (15-3-1584) and (7-11-1585).

<sup>78</sup> ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7864 (Gerolamo Luran), cc. 169r-170v (15-3-1589).

<sup>79</sup> On Velutelli’s short lived monopoly, see M.FUSARO, *Uva passa*, cit., pp.19-22. Velutelli in a supplication to the Queen after the loss of his monopoly, would accuse the “Italian” merchants Nicolò de Gozzi Pange and Innocenzo Lucatelli to have colluded with the Sumacchi in pushing for new custom duties for foreigners in the Islands, see Public Record Office (from now on PRO), *State Papers* (from now on *SP*) 99, 1, c.16r (1583-4). Nicolò de Gozzi was in reality from Ragusa, and he was a leading merchant in England at the time, probably one of the wealthiest foreigners, along with Sir Oratio Pallavicino. See D.ABULAFIA, *Cittadino e “denizen”: mercanti mediterranei a Southampton e a Londra*, in M.DEL TREPPO ed., *Sistema di rapporti ed élites economiche in Europa (secoli XII-XVII)*, Napoli, 1994, pp.273-291, particularly pp.286-287.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Daelnes in his testimony mentioned a deal between the Sumacchi and Thomas Baxter for 200 *miara* of currants to be consigned in Venice, see ASV, *Quarantia Criminale*, b.103, fasc.73, cc.14v-17v. The original contract of that deal must be the one in ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7852 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.535r-536v (23-9-1583). All the details correspond to the description of it given by Daelnes in the testimony at the trial, Daelnes was acting for Holmden and Bayning. A contract like this one – where

Michele Sumacchi was active in the trade between Venice and Constantinople as well. There he appears as a leading importer – on his own ships – of luxury Venetian goods, especially textiles. In a letter to his agent in Constantinople, Sumacchi seems to be concerned more with the quality of the import goods, than with exporting particular goods. About the merchandize to buy for the return trip to Venice he says that he is unconcerned about the return cargo, whether it would be textiles or leather:

ò altra mercantia che sia buona per toccar i danari di qui [?], et del tutto mandar con primo passaggio acciochè il cavedal non stia morto; E tutto quello che farete sarà ben fatto, pregandola sempre à tuor mio robba che si puol, perchè sempre la buona robba si vende bene.<sup>81</sup>

Apart from the traditional comment about the necessity for a merchant-entrepreneur to keep capital active and never idle, what is interesting in the previous passage is the ‘old-fashioned’ stress on the quality of the merchandise as a guarantee of successful trading. This stress on quality, typical of Italian production, was to be proven wrong by the resounding successes of the cheaper products that the English were so successfully introducing in the Levant in the same period.

Michele’s adventure into large scale enterprise ended in 1595 with a massive bankruptcy, afterwards he disappears from the documentation and we later find his son engaged on a far smaller scale into trade and custom administration in Zante.

The Seguro and Sumacchi were frequently in partnership,<sup>82</sup> particularly in the English side of their businesses. They took care of shipment of goods not only from Venice and Zante, but also from Crete.<sup>83</sup> Both the English merchants dealing with Zante and the Florentine based in England and interested in traffic with the Republic of Venice openly acknowledged the prominent position that these two families had in the commerce of

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currants would have been brought to Venice in the name of a Greek subject, would have avoided the payment of the New Impost.

<sup>81</sup> These informations are taken from the papers with which the *Bailo* was ordering the confiscation of his goods in Constantinople, after Sumacchi had been declared bankrupt in 1595. These papers in the *Avogaria* are an extremely long list of inventories of merchandize, and some commercial correspondence of the same Sumacchi; see ASV, *Avogaria di Comun, Civile*, b.203 fasc.16., cc.n.n. (10-9-1595). On Michele Sumacchi’s bankruptcy see also ASV, *Notarile Atti* (Gio Andrea Catti), b.3366, cc.411r/v (23-10-1595).

<sup>82</sup> For example see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7851 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.300r/v (12-11-1583); or *ivi*, b.7864 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.200r-201v (21-4-1589); *ibidem*, cc.241r/v (27-6-1589).

<sup>83</sup> On their shipments from Crete see *Guildhall Library*, Ms 22274 passim.

the areas of the Mediterranean under Venetian control.<sup>84</sup> It can certainly be said that these Greeks, taking advantage of their own Diaspora commercial network, acted as an intermediate networks for the English penetration into Mediterranean trade, and this had very important consequences for the economic development of the whole of the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>85</sup> If currants from Zante and Cephalonia and wines from Crete were the dominant cargoes to London,<sup>86</sup> the favourite goods for the return journeys of these Greek ships from England were lead, tin, iron and kerseys.<sup>87</sup> Most of the time the cargoes were destined for Venice, but on some occasions the return journey involved a stop-over to unload in Leghorn or in the Kingdom of Naples.<sup>88</sup> But their interests were not confined to the direct traffic to and from Venice and her dominions. They also shipped to Ragusa, where they had contacts with the local leading merchant Nicolò de Gozzi.<sup>89</sup>

Both the Seguro and the Sumacchi families were serious players on the international stage. They were also the link that connected northern traders with the large Jewish commercial web. The English took advantage of the Jewish Mediterranean trade network extremely infrequently, and it can be said that the Greek network played a mediating role which is traditionally associated to the Jews. In their own business the Seguro and the Sumacchi traded in society with the Portuguese Jews based in Venice. Trading in association with English merchants was certainly financially convenient in those days, when the Anglo-Spanish hostilities were at their height, on the other hand it could also lead to some problems with the Spanish authorities, as the following episodes

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<sup>84</sup> For example see the letters of Orazio Rucellai and Alfonso Strozzi to the Corsini brothers in London on this subject, in *Guildhall Library*, Ms 21317, vol.1, n.114 and vol.3, n.239 (16-6-1581), and n.283 (16-2-1581); *Guildhall Library*, Ms 21317, vol.2, n.188 (21-8-1579).

<sup>85</sup> All these issues are dealt with at large in my article, 'Commercial networks of Cooperation in the Venetian Mediterranean: the English and the Greeks, a case study', which will be published as part of the proceedings of the International Workshop on 'Commercial Networks in the Early Modern World', held at the European University Institute in Florence in October 2001.

<sup>86</sup> For example see the bills of lading at Zante, on the ship 'Reniera e Sumacchia' in *Guildhall Library*, Ms 24482/1 vo.1 n.26 (27-3-1589), where Zorzi Sumacchi was lading currants to be consigned to Giacomo Ragazzoni in Margate.

<sup>87</sup> *Guildhall Library*, Ms 21317, vol.7, n.689 (9-6-1589), about the 'Reniera e Sumacchia' from Crete via Zante to London with wine, and with a cargo of tin on the way back. In *Guildhall Library*, Ms 21317, nvol.3, n.201 (3-10-1579), Michele Sumacchi orders a shipment of kerseys and tin to be delivered in London to his brother Zorzi, these goods will then be loaded on the English ship 'Giona' and are destined to Zante. Another shipment of tin of the Sumacchi brothers is in ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b. 6534, cc.464v-467r; but also in ibidem, bb. 6535 and 6536, passim (1588-9).

<sup>88</sup> For one of such journey see the bill of lading of the ship Santa Maria di Scoppo (patron David Carpenter) in *Guildhall Library*, Ms 24482/1 vol.1 n.8 (November 1584).

<sup>89</sup> *Guildhall Library*, Ms 21317, n.193 (14-8 and 22-8-1579).

amply demonstrate. In 1588 the ship ‘Sumacchia’ had been stopped in Palermo because local authorities believed it to be carrying merchandize belonging to English subjects, whilst instead it was carrying goods belonging to the Portuguese Jews Gerardo Malines and Garzia Pimentel.<sup>90</sup> The following year it was the turn of the ‘Segura’ to be stopped in Cadiz, suspected to carry English goods.<sup>91</sup> Another similar episode took place in 1592 when the ‘Sumacchia’ was itself thought to be English and captured by the Spanish, suspecting a secret deal between the Republic and England! This ended up being a complicated diplomatic case as on this occasion part of the cargo actually belonged to English merchants.<sup>92</sup>

Another ‘service’ area in which these Greek merchant-entrepreneurs were active was the insurance business. For merchants active in the Venetian mercantile system it was rather common to be active in the insurance business; the Greeks concentrated in insuring ships for trips to the eastern Mediterranean, which was also the trade route in which they were most active themselves.<sup>93</sup> Still, we have also documentary evidence of Greek merchants, in association with Venetian ones, insuring ships bound for London.<sup>94</sup> Being involved in the insurance business on the one hand constituted a diversification of investment, and on the other was an excellent way to keep in close touch with both the movements of the market and the situation of trade. Michele Sumacchi appears as an

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<sup>90</sup> On the ship there were also goods belonging to Flemish traders based in London, like Thomas Coteels, and this led to local authorities to believe that the ship was English and acting under a cover name, on this see W.BRULEZ and G.DEVOS, *Merchants Flamands*, cit., vol.i, n.195, p.69. This episode can be also followed in *CSPVe*, vol.viii (1581-1591), London, 1894, n.624, p.336; n.647, pp.347-8; n.664, p.357; n.676, p.362; n.769, p.409; n.774, p.412; n.821, pp.430-2; n.854, p.455.

On the relations between the Sumacchi and the Portuguese-Jews based in Venice, see F.RUSPIO, *La comunità portoghese a Venezia (1567-1618)*, tesi di laurea, Università di Venezia, 1998-99, pp.142-149. On the contacts between Michele Sumacchi the Ribeira family of Portuguese Jews, see also: ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7847 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.74r/v (20-5-1580) and *Ibidem*, b.7849 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.115v-166v (7-6-1582); their contacts are also mentioned in G.V.SCAMMELL, ‘Shipowning in the Economy and Politics of Early Modern England’, in *The Historical Journal*, xv (1972), pp.385-407, p.396. There he wrongly called Michele Sumacchi “nominal owner of the Santa Maria” in his line of interpretation by which English merchants kept the trade open in market otherwise closed to them, like the Spanish one.

<sup>91</sup> The ‘Segura’ was going from Crete to Lisbon, and probably afterwards to London. After being freed it remained in the harbour of Cadiz to avoid the English corsairs who were raiding the area, on this episode see *CSPVe*, vol.viii (1581-1591), London, 1894, n. 901, p.476; n.906, p.479; n.966, p.504.

<sup>92</sup> On this see *CSPVe*, vol.viii (1581-1591), London, 1894, n.85, p.40; n.101, p.46; n.125, pp.55-56; n.129, p.57; n.132, p.58 n.147, p.65; n.161, p.71; n.162, p.72; n.163, p.72. On the ship there were also goods belonging to Hamburg and Cologne merchants. On the episode see: *CSPVe*, vol.ix (1592-1603), London, 1897, passim.

<sup>93</sup> On insurance contracts that interest the eastern Mediterranean trade routes see D.C.GOFAS, Ασφαλιστήρια του 16ου αιώνος εκ του αρχείου του εν Βενετία, ελληνικού ινστιτούτου’, in *Thesaurismata*, 16 (1979), pp.54-88.

insurer active on several routes – from the Adriatic one to the Northern Europe – frequently in partnership with the same members of the English mercantile community in Venice, or with the Florentine mercantile elite, the same people with whom he was conducting business in England.<sup>95</sup> The problem with using insurance claims as a source for investigation is that they deal just about only with trips that failed, therefore they provide a misrepresentative sample of the state of the trade.

Several other merchants with comparably high profiles to the ones here examined appear in the Venetian documentation. Andrea della Vigna from Zante, or the Cubli and Samariari families – from Zante as well – are all classic cases of mercantile-entrepreneurial dynasties; active in Venice for several generations they were involved in international trade and they owned large estates both in Zante and in the Venetian mainland. Their commercial interests spanned from wine to wheat – about the latter they made a contract to supply the Venetian State in 1550 – and they were also involved in the salt industry of Zante, and they owned a small fleet of commercial vessels.<sup>96</sup> Other Ionian families appeared to trade internationally in those years, albeit on a smaller scale. Amongst them the Balsamo of Zante concentrated mainly on inter-Mediterranean trade, but they also sent their goods directly to Holland, albeit on Dutch ships.<sup>97</sup> The quite important role played by the Balsamo family in the history of Zante was not matched by the scope of their international presence. The Metaxà of Zante played an important role as well, they kept commercial contacts with the Flemish community in Venice and they were present at the international financial fairs.<sup>98</sup> A member of the

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<sup>94</sup> One of them, for a ship going to London in 1590 is quoted in G.STEFANI ed., *L'assicurazione a Venezia dalle origini alla fine della Serenissima*, Trieste, 1956, p.270.

<sup>95</sup> A.TENENTI, *Naufraiges, Corsaires*, cit., pp.61, 87-89 and passim.

<sup>96</sup> On Della Vigna's business as ship owner, slave merchant and landowner see his will in ASV, *Notarile Testamenti* (Agostino Pellestrina), b.768, n.41 (13-1-1545). On the activities of the Cubli and Samariari families see the forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation of Ersie Burke (*The Greek Neighbourhoods of Sixteenth Century Venice: Daily Life of a Foreign Community*, Monash University).

<sup>97</sup> See, for example: ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.11919 (Andrea Spinelli), cc.469v-470v (2-11-1598); *ivi*, reg.3386 (Gio Andrea Catti), cc.268v (5-7-1608); also *CSPVe*, vol.xii, (1610-1613), London, 1905, nn.111, p.73; n.115, p.78; n.132, p.91; n.153, p.101; n.171, p.112; n.186, p.121. They had frequent contacts with Flemish merchants, for some of whom they acted as procurators, see W.BRULEZ and G.DEVOS, *Merchants Flamands*, cit., vol.i, n.1421, p.461 (18-7-1603); vol.ii, n.2022, p.82 (5-5-1607); *ibidem*, n.3852, p.687 (11-2-1619) and n.4073, pp.760-761 (1-8-1620). And, interestingly, it is to Dutch merchants that some Venetians gave power of attorney to recuperate assets of the Balsamo in Amsterdam, see *ibidem*, n.3990, p.731 (17-8-1619). Another example of Greek goods on Dutch carriers is in PRO, *SP* 105, 147, cc.70r/v (18-12-1615).

<sup>98</sup> ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.3400 (Gio Andrea Catti), cc.140v-141r (23-7-1621), and passim. They shipped currants to the Netherlands on Flemish ships, see W.BRULEZ and G.DEVOS, *Merchants Flamands*, cit., vol.ii, n.2910 and 2920, pp.389, 393 (1 and 18-2-1613); *ibidem*, n.3442, p.558 (30-12-1616ns); and they

family in 1627 asked and obtained Sir Thomas Roe to help him set up a Greek press in Constantinople.<sup>99</sup> The Copio were probably the most important Jewish family of Zante. In the Islands they acted as brokers between ship owners and merchants,<sup>100</sup> and in Venice they arranged some of the major deals that involved consignments of goods in exchange for currants. The Copio, taking advantage of the Jewish mercantile networks in the Ottoman territories, were in a prime position to commercialise large consignments of goods in the Morea,<sup>101</sup> and to sustain this strategy they acquired large warehouses for the storage of goods in Zante.<sup>102</sup> The Nomicò kept a lower profile, and they never rose to the level of international traders or ship owners. They concentrated instead on increasing their landholdings in the Islands, where they were heavily involved in the salt-works and provided loans to the fiscal Chambers,<sup>103</sup> and they also invested heavily in Venice.<sup>104</sup>

The Corner family was involved in this web as well. This is particularly interesting because they were the only patrician Venetian family still actively involved in these trades. They had business contacts with the Lombardo<sup>105</sup> family of Candia and with the Sumacchi of Zante. From the latter they bought part of a palace in San Moisè,<sup>106</sup> in exchange for a very large shipment of Candia wines to be delivered in England in the name of the Sumacchi. The contract that underlies this transaction is absolutely unique

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also bought Flemish ships for their trades, see ASV, *Collegio, Risposte di dentro*, f.17, c.351 (18-10-1626).

<sup>99</sup> “He had affluent merchant relations in his native Cephalonia and in London”, commented Roe upon him, see M.STRACHAN, *Sir Thomas Roe 1581-1644. A Life*, Salisbury, 1989, pp.172-175.

<sup>100</sup> See for example the bills of load in the Tomà-Cutrica diatribe, where the Copio always mediate for the hiring of English ships: ASV, *Avogaria di Comun, Civile*, b.152, fasc.91; and b.48, fasc.13. They also rented Flemish ships to trade with the Netherlands, see W.BRULEZ and G.DEVOS, *Merchants Flamands*, cit., vol.ii, n.2584, p.281 (7-4-1610); *ibidem*, n.2734, pp.332 (27-7-1611); *ibidem*, n.2763, p.343 (9-1-1612); *ibidem*, n.2772, p.345 (1-2-1612); *ibidem*, n.2840, p.366 (22-6-1612); *ibidem*, nn.2907 e 2908, p.388 (1-2-1613); *ibidem*, n.2924, p.394 (4-3-1613). They were also active in the insurance business, see A.TENENTI, *Naufrages, Corsaires*, cit., passim.

<sup>101</sup> ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.6531 (Luca e Giulio Gabrieli), cc.181r/v (28-5-1584).

<sup>102</sup> ASV, *Collegio, Risposte di dentro*, f.30, cc.n.n. (4-2-1639mv).

<sup>103</sup> ASV, *Collegio, Risposte di dentro*, f.30, cc.n.n. (17-10-1639).

<sup>104</sup> Eustachio Nomicò quondam Zuanne, son of a Zante merchant, transferred to Venice where he opened a “drogheria”. At his death he left a massive inheritance, properties in Venice, landholdings in the *Terraferma*, a staggering amount of bullion, and 30,000 ducats invested in his shop! His will is in ASV, *Notarile Testamenti*, b.770 (Giacomo Profettini), n.46 (15-12-1620), and added codicil in *ivi*, b.1242, (Giulio Ziliol), n.239 (9-3-1622).

<sup>105</sup> Thodorin Lombardo tried unsuccessfully to buy from them the feudal property of ‘Daphne’ in Candia, later sold to Antonio Dandolo quondam Francesco; see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, reg.7850 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.393v-394r (9-4-1582); *ivi*, reg.7867 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.636v-638r (3-11-1590); *ivi*, reg.7868 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.118v-119v (11-3-1591), cc.190v-195r (21-3-1591), cc.245v-146v (2-4-1591), cc.259v-260v (1-3-1591).

<sup>106</sup> On the site which is currently occupied by the hotel Bauer-Grünwald.

and presents serious problems of interpretation.<sup>107</sup> The sum involved was extremely high: 16,000 ducats for a *piano nobile* with warehouses was an enormous overestimation of the value for such a property,<sup>108</sup> and this leads us to believe that there was something else behind this transaction. The following year Michele Sumacchi and Hieronimo Corner decided not to complete the second part of the deal, which involved the shipment of the last 200 butts of wine to London, and Corner agreed to pay the remaining sum in cash within the next year.<sup>109</sup> This deal was not fulfilled either, from a note at the side of the original document we learn that in 1587 the widow of Hieronimo finally paid 2,500 ducats to Michele Sumacchi for the completion of the purchase.<sup>110</sup> Unfortunately we know no more about this contract, we can only hypothesize that Sumacchi at that moment was particularly short of cash and he had pressing contracts to fulfil in England, and in a moment of need getting rid of a prestigious property in Venice could have been a way of getting himself out of trouble. And the fact that the contract did not specify that the sale was being conducted to pay for an outstanding debt could be interpreted as an ingenious move not to make public his difficulties, thereby maintaining his reputation. What is less clear is why it could have been of interest for the Corner family to be involved in such an expensive purchase. The Corner exported mainly wines from Candia to England in their own ships, and occasionally they asked the Seguro to lend them pilots from their English crews.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> ASV, *Notarile Atti*, reg.7850 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.382v-384v (22-3-1582).

<sup>108</sup> Assuming the total sum of the deed of sale was 16,000 ducats, and the average rent revenue at the end of the sixteenth century being 4 per cent of the value of the building, we arrive at a rental sum of 600 ducats, an unjustifiable large sum for a single floor plus warehouses. To put this in perspective, the most expensive rent of the period 1582-1740 was paid by the papal *nuncio* for the yearly sum of 319 ducats, in L.MEGNA, 'Comportamenti abitativi del patriziato veneziano (1582-1740)', in *Studi Veneziani*, n.s. 22 (1991), pp.253-323, p.280. I take this occasion to thank warmly Jean-François Chauvard who provided me with information on rents.

<sup>109</sup> ASV, *Notarile Atti*, reg.7850 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.382v-384v (22-3-1582), this is added to the side of the original document under the date of 14-2-1583.

<sup>110</sup> Considering that all these writings are filed together, we can probably assume that the final cost of the purchase was 12,100 ducats, instead of 16,000. This is still an extremely high price, but more congruent to the estimated/supposed value of the building.

<sup>111</sup> Hieronimo Corner quondam Andrea hired "Ruberto Brachia quondam Thomaso Inglese per pilota della sua nave (patron Zuanne Nuffri) per il viaggio di Candia in Inghilterra e ritorno via Lisbona", in ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7850 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.394r/v, (23-4-1582). At the same time "Rizzardo Fisborn quondam Nicolò inglese" would go to Candia on the same ship, and there take command of the galleon 'Lombardo' to take it to England in *ibidem*, cc.395r/v (23-4-1582). Another contract by the owner of the "nave Segura nominata Santa Maria di Scoppo", Agesilao Seguro quondam Costantino and his crew - which was all English - allowed the two pilots above mentioned to temporarily leave the ship, see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.7849 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.77r/v (24-4-1582). The galleon 'Lombardo' was wrecked on the coast of Brittany on the way to England, see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.6529 (Luca e Giulio Gabrieli), cc.54r/v (29-1-1583).

### Conclusions.

This complex series of connected contracts shows a strong willingness in trying to keep the trade in Venetian hands as much as possible in the face of ever-mounting difficulties. That the Seguro and Sumacchi were employing English crews on their ships, adds further to the proof of the serious decadence of Venetian seamanship. That they were providing English pilots for other merchants proves the strength of their connection. And the fact that not only English ships were active in inter-Mediterranean trades, but that English crews were hired to man non-English ships, sheds some new light on the English activities in the Mediterranean.

Giacomo Ragazzoni when asked in 1584, alongside the other principal Venetian merchants, what was the situation of trade with England, replied that the recent increase in customs duty in England had killed the trade, making it unprofitable for foreigners to import goods to England. Therefore the direct trade had entirely stopped in the last few years. All the other Venetian merchants consulted on the same issues agreed with him.<sup>112</sup> But from the “Corsini papers” kept in the Guildhall archives a different picture emerges which supports the notarial documents found in Venice. Traffic diminished substantially, but was not interrupted, and Venetian and Greek ships kept on reaching the English shores. What would have been interesting to see, and unfortunately is not possible due to the loss of the Port Books for this period, is how much of the goods were imported under English names, and how much under those of foreigners. The brothers Placido and Giacomo Ragazzoni had long been involved in trade between the Islands and England, on Venetian and Greek ships,<sup>113</sup> and their trade continued throughout the 1580s and well into the 1590s. Bartolomeo Corsini and Giacomo Ragazzoni were in business together during those years,<sup>114</sup> frequently in conjunction with Paolo Labia, also from Venice. Their trades always involved either wines from Candia,<sup>115</sup> or currants from the Islands. In all cases there were Greeks involved: as

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<sup>112</sup> ASV, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, b.836b, fasc.ii, (3-11-1584) and (27-10-1584); the latter is signed by all the “parcenevoli di navi per Inghiltera”: “Hieronimo Corner quondam Andrea, Todorin Lombardo, Raphael Sumachi, Jacomo et Placido Ragazzoni, Domenego da Gagliano, Paolo Tabiò, Alvise Balanzer, Vincenzo Costantini, Piero Grataruol, Domenego et Piero Innocenti; Zuanne Muscorno, Marin Tressa, Zeb.no [sic] Balbianij”. For a comparative overview of custom duties paid in England, and the debate on the traffic, see M.FUSARO, *Uva passa*, cit., pp.27-44.

<sup>113</sup> On the Ragazzoni using Greek ships to collect currants from the Islands and the Morea, see ASV, *Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere di Rettori ed altre cariche*, b.297, fasc.ii, n.64 (16-12-1574).

<sup>114</sup> *Guildhall Library*, Ms. 22274, n.439 (9-3-1582) and passim throughout the file.

<sup>115</sup> See for example: *Guildhall Library*, Ms. 22274, n.947 (12-4-1582) Paolo Labia in Venice to Bartolomeo Corsini in London, for 200 barrels of superior quality muscat wine from Candia on the ship

brokers, ship owners, or captains. Da Riviera appeared as representative of the Seguri, for whom he was agent.<sup>116</sup> And frequently Giacomo Ragazzoni rented ships from the Seguri.<sup>117</sup> English merchants were also involved: William Garway and others were amongst the insurers of a ship coming from Zante.<sup>118</sup> Even the Flemish make an early appearance in a contract about a cargo of currants and rice.<sup>119</sup> All the above mentioned also took advantage of the grain shortage of the 1590s.<sup>120</sup>

The portrait that emerges from even such limited sources, is still very clear. The Venetian sources confirm what we see from the Guildhall documents. There was a small group of Greek merchants fully involved in international trade both as merchants and as ship owners. They enjoyed fruitful business contacts with Venetian merchants and throughout the Mediterranean basin, but they were also very active in the trade with England, where they were able to send their ships both earlier and for a longer period of time than previously thought. Their trading was characterized by an extreme flexibility in their choice of carriers and by an interesting mix of ship owners and crews.<sup>121</sup> English merchants themselves were using and insuring Greek ships, and dealing with them on an equal basis. Their alliance with the English newcomers was instrumental in the English successful commercial penetration of the Mediterranean. The Republic was kept in the dark about those trades; its battle to keep the trade in Venetian hands was lost before it had begun.

But Anglo-Greek shipping contracts were not limited to the long-distance routes of international trade. For English merchants living in the Islands it was fairly common to buy small ships for inter-island trade in company with Greek merchants. This kind of joint property was beneficial to everyone involved. For the English it avoided the need

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of Costantin di Michiel Episcopopolo. The quality was deemed to be so good that Labia wanted them sold separately from the other wines loaded on the same ship, and made arrangements accordingly. Paolo Labia appears also in *ibidem*, nn. 468, 687, 948, 963, 979, 1050 and 1061.

<sup>116</sup> See for example *Guildhall Library*, Ms. 22274, n. 456 (10-3-1582), contract involving also Paolo Labia. In this case payment was to be done with letter of exchange, an infrequent occurrence for Greek merchants.

<sup>117</sup> See for example: *Guildhall Library*, Ms. 22274, n.104, (10-3-1590).

<sup>118</sup> There are a few insurance contracts among the “Corsini papers”, mostly dealing with Leghorn and Naples, only one with Zante for the ship ‘Santa Maria di Scoppo’ [belonging to the Seguro family]: the contract was for a total of £1,450, and the insurers were 30 in total amongst which William Garway and Thomas Cordell of the Levant Company, see *Guildhall Library*, Ms. 22281 (20-2-1582).

<sup>119</sup> *Guildhall Library*, Ms. 22274, n.1068 (29-2-1589)

<sup>120</sup> *Guildhall Library*, Ms. 22274, n.1195, (31-8-1590).

<sup>121</sup> For contracts that confirm this interpretation, see ASV, *Notarile Atti*, reg.11920 (Andrea Spinelli), cc.42r/v (16-1-1599); *ibidem*, reg.3371 (Gio Andrea Catti), c.121v, (29-3-1600); *ibidem*, reg.11923 (Andrea Spinelli), cc.73v-74r (28-1-1602); *ibidem*, reg.11925 (Andrea Spinelli), cc.569r/v (11-8-1604); *ibidem*, reg.7868 (Gerolamo Luran), cc.351v-352v (17-5-1591).

to rent boats for small short-distance transports;<sup>122</sup> it was also an easy way to increase one's income to have a small ship to rent out; finally Greeks as co-owners were also convenient as cover to avoid the payment of duties.<sup>123</sup> For the Greeks it meant having a larger cash-flow and certainty of employment. For the Venetian authorities all these trades fell under the category of 'smuggling', and they left scant documentary traces. The most frequent use of these small boats – especially *fregate* – was in fact to move goods from the Islands to the Morea where they were then loaded onto English ships, thereby avoiding the payment of custom duties.<sup>124</sup> These forms of trades were crucial for all parties involved, being the backbone of local small-scale trading, and in them the northerners played a crucial role.<sup>125</sup>

The major Greek Diaspora merchants based in Venice and in the Ionian islands took advantage of the English presence to enlarge the scope of their trades, and to strengthen their own trading and shipping webs thanks to the general increase in trade. From the documents that have been analysed it also appears how the smaller merchants had much to gain from the presence of foreign merchants, as this allowed them to move their goods to Venice, and therefore to increase their chances of income, taking advantage of the presence of foreign ships that they could use as carriers.

The necessity to keep open the direct trade route between northern Europe and the Islands had been the reason for some Greek merchant-entrepreneurs and ship owners to make their debut on the international stage, where they had stepped in to counteract the disappearance of Venetian ships from these routes. Although this ended up being a short-term episode, roughly lasting for the second half of the sixteenth century, it is extremely interesting because it shows an early example of the entrepreneurial spirit that characterized Greek Diaspora merchants living in Venice and the *Dominio da Mar*, and

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<sup>122</sup> In the contract between Simon Waite and the brothers Procopio and Antonio Vergotis, there was a special clause that allowed Waite to use the ship for his own businesses, simply by paying personally the crew. For all other business the gain was to be divided in half. See *General Public Records of the State, Archives of the District of Cephalonia*, (from now on *ΓAK-ANK*), *Notarial Archive*, b.74a (Pietro Sarlo), vol.i, c.68r (10-1-1633).

<sup>123</sup> *ΓAK-ANK, Notarial Archive*, b.91 (Rafael Pignatore), vol.i, c.35v (25-2-1636), I wish to thank Stamatoula Zapandi for bringing this contract to my attention. See also ASV, *Notarile Atti*, b.8449 (Alberto Mastaleo), cc.141r/v (21-9-1640).

<sup>124</sup> See for example ASV, *Senato Mar*, reg.97, cc.144r, 177r (1639). The *Rettore* of Cephalonia started a trial against two *fregate* that brought currants to the English ship 'Leon dorato', avoiding the payment of customs.

<sup>125</sup> M.KNAPTON, *Tra Dominante e Dominio*, cit., p.369.

their awareness of the opportunities afforded by the crisis of the Venetian mercantile fleet and by the arrival of new commercial players in the area.